

Growing Younger

Engaging Youth for a Sustainable Future

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Too often when we hear the question, 'How can we bring in more young people?' we hear the answer, 'Use social media.' This session will challenge you to think beyond the boxes of Twitter and Facebook, into sustainable methods of youth engagement and empowerment within traditional dance communities. Join Abigail and Danielle, two 20-somethings with deep ties to traditional dance, in re-imagining the assumptions and strategies that will impact youth attendance and involvement at your dance series.

Participants accepted the definition of "youth" as referring to dancers less than 35 years old. After identifying resources in the community that could be used for recruiting young dancers, participants broke into small groups, each of which then discussed strategies for increasing participation in dancing within cohorts such as:

- Kids under 12
- High school students
- College students
- Young professionals

Suggestions that were made included:

- Connect with prominent mommy bloggers.
- Advertise at museums, libraries, and other places that have activities for young kids.
- Start evening dances earlier, so parents can come, and include a play area where kids can rest.
- Organize a dance night at a high school, church, or youth group. Build on existing programs.
- Advertise on bulletin boards in college residences.
- Get members of respected indie bands (trusted messengers) to come to, or play, for contras.
- Help college students establish a campus dance.
- Connect with young professionals through their gyms, etc.
- Have a dance hall as a pick up spot for Community Supported Agriculture.
- Welcome young people on organizing committees.
- Host gender-neutral dances to attract young queers.
- Create community understanding of what it means to help new dancers. Treat new dancers respectfully and, if they're confused, guide them subtly by, for instance, nods of the head.
- If you want to use social media to reach young people, get a young person to do so.
- Don't label/pigeonhole young people. Don't say: "Oh, I'm so glad you're here, young person."
- Try contra dance flash mobs.
- Make newcomers feel that they have succeeded, if not in the dancing, at least in making social contacts. Invite them to join the regulars at the pub or bagel shop after the dance, for instance.