

CALLERLAB Social Connections Committee Contest #1 Dances Ideas

In late 2021 the Social Connections Committee ran a contest to solicit ideas to promote social connections and bonding in the square dance activity. The responses often included many valuable thoughts and ideas covering a range of topics. The ideas have been grouped into the following subject areas: New Dancer Sessions, Social Media, Group/Club Interactions, Dances, Club Activities, and National Outreach. All the ideas are presented in an omnibus document which you can view at <https://knowledge.callerlab.org/ideas-from-social-connections-contest-1/>. Several of the larger sections of that document have been copied out into separate documents focused on specific subjects. This document presents the ideas that can be used at **Dances** to foster sociability and social bonding.

Dances

1. Start every dance with something special. End every dance with something special. It can be a special dance. It can be shaking everyone's hands. It can be anything. Something like Scatter Promenade for the last dance works well. If you can, provide an area where people can be comfortable when they take a break from dancing. This should be an area where they can talk without interrupting the dancing. If necessary have them exit the hall where the dancing is taking place. Find ways to mix people.
2. Mixers are good because almost everyone can do them. Anything danced in a big circle also works. Consider doing some simple line dances during breaks. There will be several subgroups that will form in any square dance group. Some dancers will move around several of these subsets. Don't worry about this. As long as they are mixing sets they are being part of the whole group.
3. Provide plain adhesive stickers at the registration desk and have everyone that attends the event write the name of their favorite dessert on their sticker and wear it like a badge. By the start of the third tip each dancer attempts to find as many dancers as they can that have the same or similar favorite dessert. There can be many ways to finish this idea like prizes for the most people with the same dessert, all those with a similar dessert square up the fourth tip etc.
4. We made one small change that made a world of difference for socializing. We traditionally had dancers sit around the periphery of the hall during breaks. Instead, we set up the chairs in a smaller oval shaped U near the side front of the hall. Dancers were sitting adjacent to each other and facing one another. It promoted more fun, laughter, and visiting with one another. The first night people were taken aback from breaking of the customary sitting, however they quickly appreciated the benefits of this small modification
5. For themed dances, when appropriate, encourage participants to dress up to match the theme. Everyone who dresses up gets one extra door prize ticket. Costumes are a good conversation starter!
6. For a Valentines Day Dance: Have club members bring in their wedding picture and set up on a table and number them. During the evening, have the club members guess whose wedding picture is whose. The club member who guesses the most number correct wins a free dance or some other prize.
7. Use a **card system** which tells you which square you are dancing in right from the very beginning. We find this increases social connections as they are dancing in a different square with different people every tip. For new dancers, it takes away the worry of how to find a square

to dance in. The cards decide where they are going so it takes this pressure away from them so they can just have fun.

8. We have three dance sessions every week, but only charge each dancer once for the whole week. This has encouraged our dancers to attend more than one session therefore greatly increasing social connections.
9. Additional ideas include the popular dancing in the swimming pool, in an elevator, at a restaurant, in the mall. Also, themes for dances such as Halloween, Christmas/Holidays, New Years, Elvis, 50/60's, Big Band, Men's Cake Bake etc.
10. May I introduce you an idea to make our routine dance meeting to be something looking forward to. Those clubs, where I make dance calls, hold birthday celebration for the birthmonth club members at the last meeting of the month. Request made by the birthmonth members will be the song for the Singing on the day. Also, they will receive corsage from the Caller. At the end of the meeting, we form a circle and they will be in the center of it. Other club members will sing "Happy Birthday" for each birthmonth member. At the end of the each song, some do Hi-touches and others do party tricks. It could make people feel brighter and create close communication.
11. Be sure to include a calendar with upcoming events. Then don't allow announcements to be made at the dance. You are not going to be able to implement all these suggestions. Pick out what suits your dance group. Don't insist on having officers. Having a committee works just as well. Don't insist on stealing banners. Focus everything on drawing the group of dancers together. Always keep it simple, keep it fun.
12. I used this at an after party one weekend. I picked a number of "groups" that had 8-10 "members" I could select in each one. For example, James Bond Characters, Disney/Harry Potter Characters, Batman Villains, Star Wars Bounty Hunters, Famous Politicians, Baseball Players, etc. I'd suggest sticking with general pop culture, but if you could work a different theme if you wanted. All the names were written out on index cards, randomized, and handed out to everyone as they came to the social. The goal was within a certain times frame, to figure out which group you were part of, find the other members of your group and gather in a section of the hall. If all the groups are the same "size" - say a group of 10, then the group knows when they have found everyone, and you can make a race of it. People enjoy friendly competition. Everyone has to ask who you are. They try to help you locate others. Not everyone knows the person/character they have so they need to ask, "who they are", etc. This was a 100+ person weekend and some people always dance/room/eat with the same folks this forced them to meet with some other attendees that they wouldn't normally seek out and opened up topics other than square dancing. Other than the lady who wasn't sure with getting the "Chewbacca" card, it went well. :)
13. On the Sunday morning or Saturday afternoon at a weekend dance festival, have a crazy T-shirt dance. Have everyone at the dance go around and check out everyone else's T-shirt. Each dancer votes by write-in ballot on any number of categories you decide, and prizes can be awarded. The more valuable your prizes are, the better your participation will be.
14. Something that I have done for quite a few dance weekends, but which could easily be done at a club event is a friendship card. Similar to the idea of a caller's century club book where callers sign the book after you have danced a tip with them, a handout approximately the size of an index card is given to each dancer. On these cards is printed a series of numbered questions along with a signature line each dancer is then given the task of finding a person that is able to answer the question on the card, dance a tip with that person, then sign their name to the card. An example of the questions would be "I am a retired Navy chief", "I was a square dance association president", "I've been dancing for 20 years". As the organizer of the event, I knew the people attending and some of the background information for the attendees. By making the questions more than superficial, each dancer had to get to know other dancers enough through questions and had to dance with almost all the people at the event. A deadline was set for Saturday at 8:30 PM for all cards to be turned in. By 9:30 a drawing was held, and first prize given was free admission to the following year's event. There may have been second and third

prices. This was especially useful at advanced level weekends where people tend to click up. It created new friendships and was something dancers look forward to year after year.

15. Buttons & Bows dance - Provide different color buttons and bows at the registration desk (many people have containers of a variety of buttons, so it was easy to get a supply of buttons for the dance). Small bows can be acquired inexpensively or made from ribbon. Use Velcro to attach it to their badge or they can stick it on their outfit (or can provide pins to dancers for them to pin the buttons and bows on). Dancers look for other dancers with the same color buttons and bows to form a square. There can be a specific tip designated for that. When I did this dance, I had two children at the registration desk that helped the dancers with their bows and buttons and both the children and adults were delighted. It was a very good mixer.
16. Share a Hobby dance – Provide name tag stickers at the registration desk where people can write in their hobby. They can attach the sticker to their badge or outfit. By the start of a certain tip, dancers try to find other dancers with the same hobby. In any event, it mixes the dancers and people are delighted to know that other people engage in the same hobby, thus enhancing more socialization and another bond.
17. Complete the Phrase/Call dance – Type up some phrases and cut them in half. Use stickers or Velcro to attach them to their badges. The dancers must then find the person that completes the phrase. For example, “Proud As” and “A Peacock”. This could also be done with square dance calls (ex: Relay/the Deucey).
18. Get to Know Bingo weekend – This is good for weekend festivals. When people register for the weekend, ask them for one interesting or fun fact that may not be widely known about themselves. (For example, I was a competitive Irish dancer.) Take those facts and put them on a Bingo format card/paper. Over the weekend, the dancers socialize and find the persons who each gave the fact to complete the bingo card. You can have prize(s) for the dancer that completes their card the quickest. You can have first, second and third prize.
19. When a Club celebrates their Valentine's Day Dance, I will cut up Valentine Cards into eight pieces like a puzzle. Four of the pieces will go into an envelope for women and four for men. On the back of the card, I will place the number 1 - 4 for the men and 1- 4 for the women. I will keep them separated until I find out how many squares that there will be the night of the dance. Then I will mix that many cards together and let the men draw out of one hat and the women out of another. When the time comes, I will have everyone pull out their piece of the puzzle and locate the seven people to put the card back together. After everyone is through locating their eight people, have them square up. Each person should know who makes up their square and who will be their partner. With a large group I would suggest that the drawing take place at the beginning of the dance and the tip take place after the break. I have used this for a number of years, and it was enjoyed by all. Great mixer.
20. Around the World Dance With large poster boards and poster paint we made several flags of various countries other than USA. Both sides were painted and they were hung them from the overhead light fixtures. Callers and cuers were asked to select music of different countries. With Sharpie markers, large stick-on badges were colored to match the flags. Four girl badges and four boy badges of each flag were made into sets. During the first dance we counted the number of squares. That number of sets were selected. Boy badges were placed in one bowl, girls in another. We went around the hall and handed out the badges from the bowls. For the third tip everyone was to go to their country and dance under their flag. Those who didn't get a badge made up their own square or filled in where someone had to sit out or leave. We gave out danglers of small plastic USA flag beads at the end of the dance.