

CALLERLAB Social Connections Committee Contest #1 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. We have organized the ideas into the following subject areas (click on section title to go directly to that subject):

1. **New Dancer Sessions**

Ideas that apply to sessions for new dancers, such as intro nights, party nights, demos, class nights, etc.

2. **Social Media**

Ideas for using social media or websites.

3. **Group/Club Interaction**

Ideas for strengthening the bonds between club members, both through interactions at dances and by using outside social activities.

4. **Dances**

Ideas for activities at square dances to foster sociability.

5. **Club Activities (Outreach)**

Things clubs can do to make themselves a more visible part of their surrounding community.

6. **Club Activities (non-dances)**

Activities clubs can sponsor to encourage their members to get together outside of dances.

7. **National Outreach**

Things we can do to raise the public profile of square dancing in general.

New Dancer Sessions

1. Bring a non-square dance friend to a new dancer dance session. If everyone brought just one person that would automatically double the size of the crowd. When we simply ask our friends to come to the next beginner session, they will always agree. Unfortunately some never make it. Why? We are asking them to come to an event that they know very little about, to do something they have never done, with a bunch of people they do not know. That is a lot of negative energy that can be avoided by bringing a friend. At that point they can be introduced to your friends and would feel more comfortable. I am convinced that the best advertising we can have is by personal invitation. The sponsoring club can provide door prize packets for new attendees with a thank you for attending note, a small magnet with the class schedule and contact information on it, and a candle to keep the flame of square dancing burning.
2. Every starting a new dancers class should have a dedicated Facebook page, Twitter, and Instagram accounts. Have a club member dedicated every week to post photos and news about what happened, what's coming up next week, plus any other misc news. This way our group can stay connected during the week and other dancers who are not members of our club/class can see how much fun everyone is having
3. Candy Lei (Google: Candy Lei)

- 1) For couples' new dancers - Prepare 6 candy leis each for a couple of new dancers. Set a special tip twice in the dance program. In the special tip, one of the new dancer couples wear three candy leis. When the tip is over, give the lei to the other 3 couples who danced together.
- 2) For single new dancers - Prepare 5 candy leis for each new dancer. New dancers wear candy leis and dance. When the dance is over, candy lei will be presented to the partner who danced with the new dancer. This candy lei gift will be given for 5 tips
- 3) Option (Door prize) - Prepare some candy leis that contain special wrapping paper candy. At the door prize, the dancers who are presented candy leis containing a special wrapping paper candy will win a heartfelt prize.
4. During our new dancer sessions, we teach for 7 weeks then hold a **potluck** before the eighth session. All club members and students bring their favorite dish to pass, and we have social time before the dance starts that night. When lessons start, the caller only calls the calls taught up to that date in a regular club dance setting. The students get to meet other club members and vice versa along with experiencing a "regular dance" experience. This also reinforces the student's confidence in the learning of the calls to date. We also do this at our graduation night with lots of positive comments from members and new dancers. We have had great success with members showing up to these potluck nights even though they rarely come to help at lessons. After meeting the new dancers, some additional members do come and help "angel" when they meet the new dancers, and connect with them.

Social Media

1. Every starting new dancer program and every club should have a dedicated Facebook page, Twitter and Instagram accounts. Have a club member dedicated every week to post photos and news about what happened, what's coming up next week, plus any other misc news. This way our group can stay connected during the week and other dancers who are not members of our club/class can see how much fun everyone is having
2. **Create a website for your group. Post pictures. Send messages. Talk about upcoming events. A website works much better for this than a facebook page. 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.

Group/Club Interaction

1. Square Dancers are the bricks of a square dance group. Social aspects are the mortar that hold everything together. One of the more important things is when dancers become good friends with at least one other dancer or couple in the group. If possible, friendships with several couples. Dancers will come to dance with their friends irrespective of their enjoyment of square dancing. The team aspect of dancing together as a team makes friends. New dancers friendships are usually based on common interests. The dancers should be encouraged to talk about their interests outside of square dancing. An easy way to start a conversation is to have everyone come to a dance in the costume of their favorite recreation other than square dancing.
2. In classes, work on the team aspects of square dancing. This will mean using correct timing in the delivery of the calls. Tell the dancers the correct number of steps each "basic" takes. You will see many of them counting their steps. Emphasize team success. The ability for all the square to finish the dance routine together. Cheer for your team (square) when you succeed. Square Dancers want to look good when they dance. Teach them how.. If you are an experienced dancer, teach other dancers what is good styling. Good styling goes hand in hand with good timing. Have a continuing

education attitude, Workshops may work well. Dancers want to do the dance routines right. Don't hesitate to walk through dance routines that may cause difficulties.

3. 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.
4. 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.
5. Club members should be encouraged to participate in activities outside of the square dance. Pot luck suppers can be scheduled or going out to dinner before the dance. Dancers sometimes need to be encouraged to go out for snacks or even drinks after the dance. Afterparties in a club members home or even the dance hall can be scheduled occasionally. Utilize some of the other talents in the group. Play some games that can involve everyone. Be careful when you do. Don't do anything that will cause someone to become embarrassed. Attending sport events as a group or going to a theater production work well. Some groups may like to camp out. Put on a club picnic or a progressive dinner. Pick an activity and encourage members to attend.
6. Care about those who may become ill or have other reasons for missing a few dances. Keep them in contact with the group. Tell them what is happening. Tell them you miss them. Encourage them to come to the dance and just visit until they dance once again. If you can find someone who is willing, put out a monthly or quarterly newsletter. It doesn't have to be fancy, just informative and include as many club member's names in each newsletter as possible. Send get well cards if needed. Call your square dance friends and go out for coffee at times other than dance night. In this age of cell-phones, text them and tell them they are missed. Snap a picture of who was there and send it to them.
7. The following is an example of the social activities of one club:
 - 1) Members are encouraged to sit by/with and interact with visitors and new dancers at our dances.
 - 2) Encourage Angel support at your new dancer program.
 - 3) Have a Mentor program, where club members (who volunteer to do so) basically adopt a new couple. The Mentors are responsible for attending all classes and dancing with their mentees. Call them once a week, bring them to any "outside of the dance" club activities, and if they miss a class, the Mentors get together with them to catch them up, etc.
 - 4) Have a "Dinner Night Out" once a month at different restaurants in town.
 - 5) If one of your members performs or participates in a community activity, encourage the club to attend as a group; then go out to dinner after.
 - 6) Have a theme for every dance and support the theme with dress and decorations.
 - 7) Have a Club Picnics or Progressive Dinners once or more a year.
 - 8) When the home of a club member is available near an event, invite everyone to meet there for refreshments and fellowship before or afterwards.
 - 9) If your club is an active banner participant, encourage visitations to other clubs in the area.
 - 10) At the end of the dances, all members and visitors form a large circle, saying, "Thank You!"
 - 11) Zoom meetings can be held if a dance or event is canceled due to weather or other circumstances. Use the theme that had been chosen for that month's dance. Dress and share stories that have to do with that theme.

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 prizes. 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.

Club Activities (Outreach)

1. Public pancake breakfasts.
2. The two clubs I was instrumental in helping gain new members. One club was between two country towns, and they put on **Friday evening street dances**, alternating between the towns. 2-3 hours dancing included getting interested viewers a chance to join in, learn a few basics and dance. They also had floats in local parades. The second club put on **dances at the local VFW**, and participated in the city festival with a **float in the parade**. These events put Square Dancing in front of hundreds of spectators, and resulted in building club membership.

Club Activities (non-dances)

1. Camping
2. Club garage sale.
3. As always, the typical dancing in the swimming pool, in an elevator, at a restaurant, in the mall. Also, themes for dances such as halloween, christmas, new years, Elvis, 50/60's, big band, etc. **Progressive dinners, pot lucks before the dance, meeting at a restaurant before the dance.** Nothing new actually.
4. Social Activities for The Texas Reelers
 - 1) They sit by/with and interact with visitors and new dancers at our dances
 - 2) We have excellent Angel support at our classes.
 - 3) We also have a Mentor program, wherein Club Members (who volunteer to do so) basically adopt a new couple. The Mentors are responsible for attending all classes and dancing with their Newbies, call them once a week, bring them to any "outside of the dance" club activities, and if they miss a class, the Mentors get together with them to catch them up, etc.
 - 4) We have a **Dinner Night Out** once a month at different restaurants in town.

- 5) One of our members performs in the Senior Follies, and the club **always goes to one of the shows**; then we go out to dinner!
 - 6) The Texas Reelers have a theme for every dance, which they support with dress and decorations
 - 7) We have a **Club Picnic** every spring at a park
 - 8) When there is an event at the hall west of our home, we invite all members to meet here for refreshments and fellowship beforehand.
 - 9) The Texas Reelers are active banner participants, which encourages visitations to other clubs in the Metroplex. Our Texas Reelers' motto is "Keep Coming Back!" At the end of our dances, all members and visitors form a large circle, saying, "Thank You! Keep Coming Back!" The Texas Reelers held Zoom mtgs once a month during the pandemic, using the theme that had been chosen previously for that month's dance. We would dress and share stories that had to do with said theme. The North Texas Square & Round Dance Association just gave the Reelers an award for their innovative use of themes for their monthly zoom meetings.
5. How many of you have danced with others for years but really don't know anything about them. That is because at a dance we have a few minutes in between tips to basically say how are you as a pleasantry. Have **social get togethers** with the members outside of a dance to bond a friendship. Those connections continue and hold people closer in your club. We also invite the students to a **Christmas party** which helps keep them for a second semester. Another thing we do is most members purchase a tshirt with the club name on it. In the summer we **attend free concerts** in the park together and are walking billboards for the club. It's a plus plus. Social and free advertising.
 6. Pictures. Send messages. Talk about upcoming events. A website works much better for this than a facebook page. 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.
 7. Pre-pandemic our club would have soup nights in the winter and have salad nights in the summer and start earlier, so everyone could socialize together.
 8. Several years ago, our club, Space Trackers of Merritt Island, Florida, came up with an idea that provided a monthly social gathering for club members and visitors with the added side benefit of becoming a means of income for the club. As you are aware, most square dancers have a difficult time deciding which aspect of Square Dancing they enjoy more...the DANCING part or the EATING part. We decided to combine them and see what we could come up with. And that is how FRIENDSHIP DINNERS came to be. On the first Thursday of every month (Thursday being the night our club dances), the club provides a full meal for about thirty club members and visitors (anyone who shows up, really, but we average about thirty people each time). The attendees put a donation (usually \$5 per dancer, sometimes more, sometimes less) into the bucket to help defray the Club's expenses. We have several good cooks in our club, and they prepare the food beforehand and bring it to the club's place of dance to be set up buffet-style. We usually "theme" the food to whatever month it is...Mexican in May for Cinco de Mayo, Brats in October for Oktoberfest, Corned Beef and Cabbage in March for St. Patrick's Day, etc. We have also served Ham with Mac & Cheese, Pulled Pork sandwiches, Ham and Beans with CornBread, and Chicken Pot Pie to name a few. Our initial thought was to provide an opportunity for our club members (seasoned or brand new) to break bread together and get to know one another. They can come to the dance hall, sit down for a delicious home-cooked meal that is inexpensive (and they didn't have to prepare!) and get to know their fellow dancers. While our initial purpose was to provide a social opportunity for our club members, it quickly became a source of income for the Club as well. We have found that the donations our dancers happily place in the bucket more than cover the cost of the food...sometimes tripling our investment! Most of our dancers have expressed their wish that we get back to having our Friendship Dinners...we are currently dancing in a

location that will not allow us to bring "food to share." We will definitely reinstate this beloved tradition as soon as we can.

National Outreach

1. Do this on a worldwide basis & change the possible prize. CALLERLAB would need to strike a deal with Amazon to sell a White long or short sleeve T shirt using an Amazon generated CALLERLAB promo code (there are T shirts for under \$10 with Amazon Prime). Ask Amazon to track & match sales \$ with a donation to CALLERLAB Foundation at the end of the contest (to minimize CALLERLAB accounting). Ask ANYONE buying a T Shirt to hand write "I Love Square Dancing (date)" on the front. Then ask ANYONE they meet to sign their shirt (Like a kids cast for a broken bone). At the end of contest accept .jpg pictures of front & back of the shirts & a CALLERLAB Member note verifying they BELIEVE the count (don't have to count just believe). If it works, reasonable \$ for The Foundation. When the count is known, the BOG should designate a prize to the shirt owner related to the \$ successes (the bigger the prize the better the participation if there is a next time). Chair of the BOG should throw a dart at a picture of the shirt to choose a signee winner for an Amazon gift card (Kina requires the shirt owner to get contact info at signature). Takes a lot of HONESTY, but we know dancers & callers are ALL honest. AND maybe a few non dancers will know we even exist. Potentially a win/win for CALLERLAB & Amazon. Especially if done more than once. This is just a twist on what some clubs do with script to acquire \$ for their club. Wow what if Amazon would do something like script for sale of anything with the CALLERLAB promo ID. My moto is, there is NOTHING too difficult for someone ELSE to do. The same shirts can work at any dance for a special recognition or prize, since HOPEFULLY the number of signatures on each shirt will continually change, BUT a shirt wearer/owner needs to attend to show their shirt.