

**CALLERLAB
PPC Initiative
Executive Summary
(Approved January 6, 2005)**

CALLERLAB was formed, in part, to bring stability and wide acceptance to the vocabulary of square dance calling. This goal was accomplished. Most dancers all over the world now know the program they are expected to know at the dances they attend. However, creation of dance "programs" seemed to create a strong desire between dancers and callers to progress through them. The "rush to plus" is widespread. At this time, when society seems to want instant accomplishment, square dancing has required a long training period

Change is uncomfortable for many people. Experienced dancers and callers tend to be reluctant to see their activity changed even to make recruiting new dancers easier. The PPC concludes that rigidity in the current MWSD population makes acceptance of change unlikely even if the change is "slow and deliberate" as directed in the current Program Policy. We do not believe that the existing clubs can accept enough program change to make an adequate difference in our recruitment of new dancers.

If there is to be change it must come through CALLERLAB. Ours is the only international organization with any chance of winning acceptance of a new approach. Bold experimentation is needed. We have, for example, seen positive results from the highly successful multi-cycle lesson plan. More experiments of this type are needed. Yet preservation of our heritage must remain a priority. We must get outside the box, yet remain on the table. How can this be done?

CALLERLAB was formed to assist in bringing order and stability to the various dance programs. Now, perhaps it is time to allow a little spice into the mixture. The Program Policy Committee urges that CALLERLAB develop an attitude that encourages experimentation with teaching and recruitment plans in local, or even regional, areas.

Does this mean back to chaos? Certainly not! It means we must find ways to experiment WITHOUT DISRUPTING the existing, successful segments of MWSD. We urge recognition - even encouragement - of local or regional variations in program length and/or teaching order.

Change will not be easy to sell. The full commitment of CALLERLAB leadership will be needed. MS will continue to be the first dance program for entry into the current club square dance activity. Program content will continue to be managed by the Program Committees. But alternative ways of experiencing MWSD must be tried and we must support experimentation.

The MS teaching order could be revised to teach the most important and commonly used calls early. The remainder of the MS Program, as desired in the local area program, could be added through workshop tips during regular club dances. We have accepted "Mini" Conventions, perhaps we can now accept "Mini" Mainstreams.

The PPC, in conjunction with the Program Committees, is already considering teaching order revisions. We ask for the enthusiastic concurrence of the BOG in continuing our consideration of experimental ways of offering MWSD. We feel there is a need to encourage these valuable experiments that can provide us with the input we need to help shape the future of MWSD.

**CALLERLAB
PPC Initiative
Point Paper
(Approved January 6, 2005)**

Historical perspective:

One of the reasons CALLERLAB was formed, was to provide an organization where the language of square dancing could be discussed, debated, and then organized into manageable lists and programs based around sets of calls or basics. It succeeded. Lists of calls were adopted to bring uniformity to the teaching of new dancers and the presentation of dances worldwide. It also created an environment where dancers could easily travel from one club to another or from one geographic area to another and dance knowing that they would not be faced with calls or applications they had not been taught. Precise definitions of the calls brought clarity to the dance experience. CALLERLAB programs were adopted and clubs were formed, all with the good and true purpose of promoting an activity, where calls used were uniform and stable and understood by all.

As the dancer and caller population aged, some of the original lists and programs have been changed and adapted. Most of the population of dancers who danced in the recreation, for more than two years, tended to learn additional calls on additional lists. This created so called "levels" (now known as "programs") in the system based around the size of the vocabulary or dictionary of terminology each dancer had memorized. Unfortunately, it has been observed that some dancers and callers at one program snubbed dancers from "lesser" programs. There were callers and clubs at the "higher" programs who began to push for many dancers to learn a larger vocabulary of movements creating the so-called "rush to plus."

Dancers wishing to enjoy the activity, on a more casual basis (smaller vocabulary/less frequent), were no longer always accommodated. The recreation moved from a situation where most dancers could successfully participate in dances held once or twice a month to where dancers had to become dedicated to square dancing more often in order to keep their skills up. It also placed a great deal of pressure on new dancers to learn this large number of calls very quickly.

The net result is that an extensive commitment of time is now required to acquire the necessary dance skills (vocabulary) to enter the activity with enough knowledge to succeed. This, at a time when the population is saying "no" to commitments of any kind. Still, in recognition of the original purpose of CALLERLAB, teaching order and teaching time remain requirements of the activity.

Recognition of the facts:

In many cases, change causes turmoil. This turmoil increases in intensity for both caller and dancer as the population of both ages. The older we get, the less we are comfortable with change. This has been reflected in the desire of the current population of Modern Western Square Dancers whose preference it is to dance only with new dancers who know and understand the same calls which are danced by the more experienced dancers. This has created a rigid system where only a very few, out of many possible new dancers, can learn fast enough to meet the expectations of the current club membership. This attitude is unlikely to change.

The first conclusion of the PPC is that there is enough rigidity in the current club membership preferences that any change in the vocabulary of square dancing would be rejected by a significant percentage of the current dancer population and that such proposed changes could seriously injure the already shaky future of MWSDing. The significance and reality of this statement are reflected in the current Program Policy that states that "Changes shall be slow and deliberate."

The second conclusion of the PPC is that only within CALLERLAB is there the structure and focus necessary to not only make significant changes, but to also preserve the heritage of the Modern Western Square Dance experience. Program Committees are in control of their individual programs. Each Program Committee is to establish its own teaching order and length of teaching season, and then slowly adjust its program to fit as best it can. It is hoped that this process will ease fears of the current club populations and make it easier for them to recruit and retain some dancers as well as to encourage the activity as it exists today.

Nevertheless, Modern Western Square Dancing is declining in popularity. The average age of the dancer population is increasing. Recruitment, under the present system, is becoming more difficult. Clubs fold, dancers get slower, callers get older. There has been little success in recruiting sufficient new dancers in most areas to maintain a viable population of modern western square dancers. Yet the typical square dance club structure is far too cumbersome to allow overall experimentation without causing unacceptable discomfort among the current dancing population. Still, most agree and insist, "something must be done." There have been suggestions that the entire activity must be reinvented.

Proposition:

Bold experimentation is needed. For example, we have seen positive results from the highly successful multi-cycle lesson plan. More experiments of this type of "thinking outside the box" (looking at a situation from a very different perspective) are needed. Yet preservation of our heritage must remain a priority. We must "think outside the box," yet protect our heritage and history. How can this be done?

CALLERLAB was formed to assist in bringing order and stability to the various dance programs. Perhaps now it is time to allow a little spice into the mixture. The Program Policy Committee urges, in the strongest possible manner, that CALLERLAB develop an attitude that encourages experimentation with teaching and recruitment plans in local or even regional areas.

What does this mean? Back to chaos? Back to everybody doing his or her own thing?

Not at all. It does mean, perhaps, loosening the rigidity of insisting on having a teaching order that all teachers must follow. It means that local or regional needs might dictate that local regions need to experiment with a 20-call program, a 30-call program, or a 50-call program if that's all the time they have for recruiting and adequately instructing new dancers.

Does this mean there will be more "programs" again?

Yes and no. Full Mainstream will remain the program of entry into the current square dance club dance structure. It also means that dancers and clubs wishing to travel to other places and callers wishing to call in other areas are still required to learn the full Mainstream or Plus programs.

However, callers should be encouraged to experiment with other dance formats. As an example, start a local group and take two years to teach them 30 calls or organize a combination square dance, line dance, contra evening once a month, etc.

Callers, like dancers, are getting older, more set in their ways. Change, such as suggested above, is not going to be an easy sell. Without the full cooperation and encouragement of CALLERLAB and local dance leaders behind such experimentation, any such program is doomed. Development within CALLERLAB of the Sea-Bee's "Can Do" motto is not only advisable. It is necessary.

Our Program Policy states that, "The first dance program (currently Mainstream) is the entry program designed for dancers who first enter into modern western square dancing." This statement may need to be revised. It implies that anything less than Mainstream is not modern western square dancing.

CALLERLAB has recognized a need for "mini" conventions since the regular convention structure could not accommodate all the needs of the membership. The PPC has come to the conclusion that CALLERLAB must now recognize and encourage "mini-Mainstream" programs as well.

Note that this idea takes nothing away from any current CALLERLAB dance program. No calls are being cut, no calls added, no caller is required to change what he or she is doing. However CALLERLAB would be officially encouraging callers to experiment on a local level, and to develop local dance programs to fit the needs of his or her own community or population of dancers.

Some examples:

It has been discussed and suggested to the PPC that the MS teaching order be revised so that the teaching sequence brings the most useful calls to the fore. It may also bring the dancer popular calls to the fore. Such an action would enable a caller to identify a shorter "primary" list of calls that could form a minimum requirement for his dancers to learn first.

Where class time or dancer commitment is limited, CALLERLAB should encourage callers to teach the "primary" list in regular class sessions, as before, and to teach the balance of the MS program as workshops at regular dances over perhaps a year of time.

For many years, every club dance had one or more workshop tips. Perhaps it is time to reintroduce them. New dancers usually enjoy workshop-type tips at regular dances. Conclusion: start workshoping calls with your new dancers.

MS Teaching order:

The MS committee is already at work with teaching order revision on two fronts. First, a regular "program review" type look at the teaching order for regular MS clubs is always in order, and is now being addressed. The MS Committee has also taken on the task of trying to put together a completely revised teaching order based on the usefulness and popularity of calls. Such a teaching order would be useful for the programs suggested above, and for "mini-MS" requirements.

Conclusion:

Change is going to occur. CALLERLAB has the opportunity to try to focus and guide that change into productive channels rather than ignoring the uncertainties of the future and see our activity languish. The PPC acknowledges a need for active encouragement of experimentation by CALLERLAB members in program length and teaching order to meet local and regional needs as one possible solution. Successes in local programs will lead to adoption of successful techniques by others. Even failures can lead to new and different attempts.

The following is a list of the actions endorsed by the BOG. This is the "bottom line":

- 1) The Board would endorse experimentation with programs based on less than the full Mainstream list which would be directed at local area dancers only**
- 2) Different areas would, most likely, develop different exploratory programs, based on the needs, desires, and ability of the caller and group involved**
- 3) Groups would be asked to provide reports of the success (or failure) of the exploratory programs**
- 4) After a set period of time the information from the reports would be compiled, analyzed, and reported to the Board**
- 5) The Board would review the collected data and make a recommendation to the Membership.**

With the guidance and consent of the EC and the BOG, This committee will be looking at the Program Policy itself to determine if revisions there are advisable.