Strategic Planning Activities: Charting Your Organization's Future

1. The 5-Year Club Exercise

Purpose: Get members thinking beyond the next dance or next dance season.

Ask the club:

Imagine it is five years from now and our club is thriving. What does it look like?

Have small groups describe:

- How many dancers are regularly attending?
- What ages and kinds of people are participating?
- What does a typical dance feel like?
- How are new dancers welcomed?
- What does the club do between dances?
- Who is doing the work?
- How are leadership responsibilities shared?
- What does the community say about the club?
- What makes people want to belong?

Then ask:

What would we have to start doing now to make that future possible?

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2. The "If We Started Today" Exercise

This is one of the most powerful exercises for challenging **"we've always done it this way."**

Tell the group:

Pretend our club does not exist. We have been asked to create a new square dance club in this community today.

Ask:

- Who would we want to attract?
- What would we offer them?

- When would we dance?
- How often?
- What would the first experience look like?
- How would we market it?
- What would we call it?
- What would we charge?
- How would we make newcomers feel welcome?
- What traditions would we intentionally include?
- What things would we *not* do?

Then reveal the important question:

Which of the things we just designed are different from what we're doing now—and why?

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3. Keep, Change, Stop, Start

Create four large areas on a wall or four pieces of paper.

KEEP

What are we doing that works extremely well?

CHANGE

What is good but needs updating?

STOP

What are we doing that no longer serves the club?

START

What aren't we doing that we should be?

Give everyone sticky notes and let them contribute individually before discussing as a group.

Important: Don't allow the discussion to become a defense of every existing practice.

The question isn't:

"Why do we do this?"

The question is:

"Is this helping us become the club we want to be?"

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4. The New Dancer Journey

Ask the club to imagine a person who has **never square danced before**.

Walk through the experience:

Sees our advertisement

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Looks at our website/social media

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Decides to investigate

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Contacts us

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Walks through the door

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Meets our members

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Takes the first lesson

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Attends the first dance

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Comes back a second time

↓

Finishes lessons

↓

Becomes a regular dancer

At every stage, ask:

What does this person experience?

Then:

What could cause them to leave?

And finally:

What could we do to make the next step easier?

This exercise is particularly good because clubs often focus on **getting people through the door** rather than what happens after they arrive.

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5. Who Are We Trying to Become?

Ask members to finish this sentence:

"Our club should be known as the place where people..."

Collect all the answers.

Examples might include:

- Make lifelong friends
- Have fun
- Get exercise
- Feel welcome
- Meet interesting people
- Learn something new
- Enjoy great dancing
- Bring their families
- Find a community
- Escape everyday stress

Then ask:

Does our current club experience consistently deliver what we say we want to be known for?

If not:

What needs to change?

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6. The Competition for People's Time

This activity helps clubs understand that they aren't competing only with other square dance clubs.

Give each group this question:

If someone has three free hours tonight, what could they do instead of coming to our club?

List everything:

- Stay home
- Watch television
- Exercise
- Go to a restaurant
- Go dancing
- Attend another social activity
- Spend time with family
- Go to a concert
- Play games
- Meet friends
- Work
- Go shopping
- Attend another club

Then ask:

Why should someone choose us?

Not:

"Why do *we* like square dancing?"

But:

"Why would someone who doesn't already dance choose us?"

That distinction can produce some very revealing conversations.

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7. What Are We Really Selling?

Put this statement on the board:

We don't sell square dance lessons. We sell an experience.

Ask members:

What are people actually looking for?

Possible answers:

- Friendship
- Belonging
- Fun
- Exercise
- Romance
- Adventure
- Social connection
- Something different
- A reason to get out of the house
- Community

Then ask:

How much of our club's energy is devoted to teaching dancing—and how much is devoted to creating the experience people actually want?

8. The "Why Would They Stay?" Exercise

Instead of asking only:

"How do we get new dancers?"

Ask:

"Why would a new dancer stay?"

Have members identify what would make someone return after:

Their first visit

Their third visit

Completing lessons

Six months later

One year later

Then ask:

Where are we strongest?

Where are we weakest?

What could we change?

This shifts the conversation from **recruitment** to **retention and belonging**.

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9. The Volunteer Future Exercise

Draw two columns:

TODAY

Who does the work?

What jobs exist?

How many people do most of the work?

How difficult is it to volunteer?

What happens when one of those people leaves?

THE FUTURE

What could be shared?

What could be simplified?

What could be eliminated?

What could be delegated?

What could be done differently?

What small jobs could involve more people?

Then ask:

Are we building a club that requires a few heroes—or one many people can contribute to?

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10. The "Tradition or Habit?" Exercise

This is particularly useful for clubs afraid that change means abandoning their identity.

For each longstanding practice, ask:

Is this a CORE VALUE?

Something that truly defines who we are?

Is this a TRADITION?

Something meaningful that we want to preserve?

Is this a HABIT?

Something we do primarily because we've always done it?

Is this a BARRIER?

Something that may actually make it harder for new people to participate?

Then ask:

What traditions should we protect—and what habits should we be willing to question?

11. The Ideal Club Member

Ask:

Imagine the perfect member joins our club tomorrow. What would we want them to experience during their first year?

Have groups describe the journey.

Then reverse it:

What would we have to change about ourselves to consistently create that experience?

This moves the conversation away from:

"What's wrong with new people?"

toward:

"What can we do differently?"

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12. The One Big Question

End the planning session with this question:

If we continue doing exactly what we're doing today, where will our club be in five years?

Don't answer immediately.

Let people think.

Then ask:

Is that where we want to go?

If the answer is no:

What needs to change first?

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13. From Ideas to Action

After completing the exercises, the club chooses **three priorities**.

For each priority, complete:

WHAT DO WE WANT TO CHANGE?

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

WHAT WOULD SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

WHAT IS THE FIRST STEP?

WHO WILL HELP?

WHEN WILL WE DO IT?

HOW WILL WE KNOW IF IT WORKED?

The Rule

Don't leave the meeting with 25 things to do.

Leave with **three things you are actually going to do.**

For more membership-building resources, go to squaredancerevival.org