

## **Chattahoochee Country Dancers Caller Evaluation and Promotion Process**

The CCD Caller Evaluation and Promotion Process is designed to help meet the expectations and ensure a quality dance experience for the Atlanta contra dance community and will be used to evaluate and provide feedback for callers who would like to be on the regular rotation of the CCD Friday night contra dance. Concepts from this process may also be used for the periodic review of callers already on the rotation and the selection of out of town callers.

Why does the CCD need a process to become a caller on a regular rotation? What makes CCD special, that it requires a formal application and review process when other dance communities do not?

*Overabundance of Callers:* Atlanta is blessed with a long tradition of fostering growth and leadership within the dance community. As a part of this, Atlanta has a generous number of experienced callers. This blessing of experience has translated into the dancers having high standards in their caller. Certainly if Atlanta had a deficit of callers the process would not be needed.

*Widely Divergent Crowds:* The CCD Friday night dance frequently experiences mixed crowds of different needs and expectations. It is not uncommon to have 20 people new to contra dancing in the same line as people who have been dancing 15 years or more. We also have a vocal minority of dance gypsies who provide expectations and pressure to create a challenging, high-energy, sophisticated urban dance environment.

*Size:* The Friday night dance regularly reaches 125-150 dancers or more. Dances of this size with widely divergent skill levels require a level of programming and dance floor management skills that a smaller dance does not.

*Current Process does not give feedback:* The current process is undefined and, upon a request to be on the regular rotation, gives the potential caller limited response as to why they are not approved.

With these reasons in mind, the CCD is implementing the Caller Evaluation and Promotion Process to continue to grow the Atlanta contra dance community and maintain the best dance experience possible.

### **Typical Caller Progression**

Over time callers, dancers, and musicians participate in numerous dances. This collected set of experiences provides a basis from which a person can draw to compare one dance experience against another. The CCD has been active in the Atlanta community for more than 25 years. As a result many Atlanta dancers have the benefit of many years of experience. For the purposes of this document and the caller evaluation process, dancers with 15 years or more experience in the Atlanta contra dance community will be considered CCD elders.

In addition to the CCD elders learning through experience, a caller also learns the trade over time. There are levels of craft that the caller achieves based upon her\his talents and experience. The following terms are introduced and defined as a base for discussion: (Note: The descriptions are general guidelines and are not hard and fast rules.)

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	<b>Entry Level</b>	<b>Apprentice</b>	<b>Rotation</b>	<b>Master</b>
<b>Regularly calls at</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tuesday open mic nights</li> <li>• Community dances</li> <li>• Workshops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-2 dances on a Friday night (occasional)</li> <li>• Tuesday open mic nights</li> <li>• Community dances</li> <li>• Local dances in the region (e.g., Athens, Chattanooga)</li> <li>• Workshops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Atlanta Friday dance</li> <li>• Dance weekends and festivals</li> <li>• Local dances in the region and beyond</li> <li>• Tuesday open mic nights</li> <li>• Community dances</li> <li>• Workshops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everywhere, is a master of the craft</li> </ul>
<b>Has been dancing a minimum of</b>	1 year	2 years	5 years	15 years
<b>Has been calling a minimum of</b>	0 years	1 year	3 years	15 years

The CCD supports the advancement of callers from their first time in front of a microphone (entry level) to the ranks of nationally respected callers (master). However, to ensure the quality of CCD’s regular Friday night dances, the CCD Steering Committee is most interested in the selection of individuals to call in the regular rotation.

The CCD intends to create a structure that will enable aspiring callers in the Atlanta area to receive constructive feedback on their demonstrated capabilities as a caller and the CCD to continue meeting the expectations of the Atlanta contra dance community. The structure has two basic components:

**Capability Assessment:** A set of generally recognized and agreed upon criteria used by the CCD to assess the capabilities and quality of callers wishing to be placed in the regular rotation of Atlanta’s Friday night dances.

**Selection Process:** The steps and actions the aspiring caller, the Atlanta dance community and the CCD Steering Committee will take to assess the caller and to promote qualified individuals to the Atlanta Friday night rotation.

The combination of these two components provides the basis for placing qualified callers on the rotation.

## **Capability Assessment**

Evaluating a caller's performance and capabilities is not a simple activity to be taken lightly. Each participant in a dance – the caller, other callers, musicians, sound crew, bystanders, and most importantly, the dancers – will have her\his own reaction to a particular dance or evening of dancing. A caller's performance is very subjective. The CCD Caller Assessment attempts to capture generally recognized criteria and document those agreed upon by the CCD Steering Committee. These criteria relate to both a caller's tangible skills and more intangible qualities.

The skills important for a caller to possess relate to interactions with dancers both on and off the caller's box. While "on the box" a caller must be able to manage the dance and the dance environment to maximize the enjoyment of the dancers. While "off the box" a caller must anticipate and be prepared for anything that might happen while on the box.

Intangible qualities refer more to the "stage presence" and leadership of the caller. These are demonstrated through the manner in which the caller conducts her\himself in all aspects of the dance. Examples include positive attitude, warm self-confidence and leadership on and off the floor. The critical caller skills can typically be improved through reading, observing, learning and practicing. While improvements in the qualities important to a caller also require practice, they are more fundamental and may only be achieved through focus and experience over time.

The CCD Caller Capability Assessment Form (Appendix A) outlines the key criteria to be used in the evaluation process and provides a means for capturing and sharing an individual's assessment of a caller's performance.

## **Selection Process**

The selection process is a series of steps designed to clarify and ensure fairness in the way in which a caller is selected to be on the Atlanta Friday night rotation. Before a caller applies to be on the rotation, it is assumed that the applicant:

- Has been calling for at least 1 year
- Has been calling contra dances of various sizes, experience levels, and populations. The Atlanta rotation callers and CCD elders (dancers that have been active in the Atlanta contra dance community 15 or more years) should be familiar with some of the dance venues at which the applicant has called.
- Is familiar with the CCD Friday night contra dance characteristics
- Has been asking to call 'a couple of dances' from rotation callers at the Friday night dance for at least 6 months and has called occasional Friday night dances under the supervision and guidance one or more of current rotation callers.
- Takes advantage of callers in Atlanta and other locations to solicit feedback and other mentoring
- Consistently demonstrates the ability to meet or exceed the Caller Capability Assessment criteria

The steps in the process are outlined here with a description, the person(s) responsible for performing the step, the timing of the step and the expected outcome.

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**1. Obtain experience**

Responsible: Applicant  
Timing: As often as possible prior to applying and then ongoing thereafter  
Output\Results: Experience

Prior to applying the caller should make every attempt to ensure that she\he is prepared to meet the criteria set out in the Caller Capability Assessment criteria. As the caller is building her\his experience, the use of the Assessment form to capture feedback from other callers, dancers, musicians, etc. is encouraged.

**2. Complete and submit the CCD Rotation Caller Application**

Responsible: Applicant  
Timing: See below  
Output\Results: Completed CCD Rotation Caller Application

The application to be on the regular rotation is not to be taken lightly. If an application is accepted the applicant will be granted a trial session for an entire Friday night. After the applicant's trial session, if the CCD Steering Committee approves the caller, she\he is added to the Friday night rotation. If the trial session results in a deferral, the caller must wait a period of time indicated by the steering committee (usually 2 years) before submitting her\his next application. The waiting period of 2 years between Friday night trial sessions is designed to ensure adequate time and opportunity for growth and that the applicant is certain she\he is ready to take the caller's podium. Potential applicants are encouraged to have friends or colleagues use the CCD Caller Capability Assessment Form (Appendix A) several times prior to submitting an application.

The application encourages the caller to reflect upon what being a caller means to her\him and what is expected by the Atlanta dance community. The CCD Rotation Caller Application (See Appendix B) contains the following sections:

- Motivation: What motivates you to be a caller? Specifically a rotation caller in Atlanta?
- Contribution: In what ways do you contribute to the CCD community? How would your roles as caller impact this contribution?
- Experience: List your relevant calling experience, focusing on the last 6 months. Provide contacts if possible and appropriate detail to illustrate your experience.

The application will be evaluated by the CCD Steering Committee based primarily upon the experience a caller has accumulated. While the motivation and contribution questions are useful for the steering committee to get to know the caller, they are not intended for use in judging the caller, but to encourage the caller to consider her\his reasons for calling. There are no right or wrong answers here.

Application should only happen when the applicant is ready to be approved on the regular rotation, not as a spurious attempt to call an entire evening. The applicant is encouraged to ask rotation callers and CCD elders for advice and suggestions concerning the applicant's readiness.

### **3. Review and accept\decline application**

Responsible: CCD Steering Committee  
Timing: Monthly CCD Steering Committee meeting  
Output\Results: Accepted or declined application with rationale for decision

The steering committee will review the applicant's application and determine whether or not to accept the application. The steering committee may request more information or decline the application, providing feedback to the applicant on what needs to be done to have the application accepted. If the steering committee accepts the application, the applicant will be informed and the process will continue.

### **4. Schedule Friday night trial session**

Responsible: Applicant working with talent schedulers  
Timing: Within next quarter after application was accepted  
Output\Results: Applicant placed on Friday night schedule

The applicant will work with the person(s) responsible for coordinating the quarterly Friday night schedule to find a suitable date. The scheduler will notify the Steering Committee of the date so they can begin setting schedule for assessment discussions.

Note: The CCD Friday night schedule is determined in 3 month increments (quarterly), 1 month prior to the beginning of that increment. For example, the fall schedule (October, November, December) is determined by the end of August.

### **5. Request assessors**

Responsible: Applicant and Steering Committee  
Timing: Once applicant's night on schedule has been determine  
Output\Results: Team of assessors willing to complete the CCD Caller Capability Assessment

An assessment team of five (5) individuals from the Atlanta dance community will be assembled to provide direct feedback to the CCD Steering Committee in assessing the applicant and making the most informed decision. The applicant will select two (2) members of the assessment team. The Steering Committee will select the other three (3). The assessment team must consist of at least one CCD elder and one rotation caller. Members of the CCD Steering Committee are eligible to serve on the assessment team. All five members of the assessment team must observe and evaluate the Friday night trial session and attend the CCD Steering Committee meeting to discuss the applicant's performance.

More input leads to a more effective process and a more informed decision by the steering committee. While only the five members of the assessment team are allowed to attend the closed

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steering committee meeting, the applicant is encouraged to collect assessments and feedback from as many people as possible during prior engagements and on the applicant's Friday night trial dance.

The completed assessment forms containing feedback on the applicant's calling should be given to someone on the assessment team and will be considered by the steering committee.

**6. Call Friday night trial session**

Responsible: Applicant  
Timing: Friday night as scheduled  
Output\Results: A fun evening of dancing enjoyed by all

The applicant will assume all standard caller responsibilities for a Friday night dance – programming, beginner's instruction, start\end the evening, start\end the break, and calling the dances for the entire evening. The 5 member assessor team is expected to be present. If one or more of the scheduled assessors cannot be present, the CCD Steering Committee members present should find a suitable replacement(s).

**7. Complete CCD Caller Capability Assessment form and provide input to steering committee**

Responsible: Assessor team members  
Timing: During the dance being assessed  
Output\Results: Completed CCD Caller Capability Assessment form

The caller capability assessment form captures comments on both the skills and the presence of the caller during the course of the evening. Assessors, both on the assessment team and other interested parties, should consider all sections and provide feedback on what the caller does well as well as the areas for improvement. They are also encouraged to be detailed and as specific as possible. This form is ultimately handed to the applicant for growth and learning.

**8. Approve\Defer caller for selection to Atlanta rotation**

Responsible: CCD Steering Committee  
Timing: Caller review meeting within 60 days of trial session  
Output\Results: Approval or deferral of rotation caller

The only people present at the meeting will be CCD Steering Committee members and the 5 members of the assessment team. The applicant will not be present.

Assessors will give an overview of their assessment of the applicant. Other assessments will also be shared. Experiences with dances other than the critiqued dance are discussed. If necessary, each quality is explored. Meeting the expectations in all the technical/mechanic skills of calling is required. If deficient in an intangible quality, a trend of growth may be acceptable.

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The applicant is not judged on the basis of one night's calling, but rather the generalized 'body of work' that the caller has amassed. The 'full night of calling' is meant to be representative of the applicant's current level of calling skill.

*Approval.* The applicant is deemed ready to call the Friday night dance at this time. They will be scheduled on the regular rotation at the next schedule cycle.

*Deferral.* The applicant is deemed not ready to call for the Friday night dance at this time. The applicant may apply again in 2 years. The timeframe may be adjusted as appropriate by Steering Committee based on factors contributing to decision to defer. If the applicant is deferred, the CCD Steering Committee will provide feedback to the applicant on specific improvement and suggestions on how to get the required experience.

**9. Provide feedback to applicant**

Responsible: Steering committee  
Timing: Following Approval\Deferral decision  
Output\Results: Constructive feedback that the caller can use to improve calling ability

Whether the applicant was approved or deferred, she\he is given a summary of the steering committee discussions and the basis for the decision. The CCD Caller Capability Assessment forms will be collected and given to the applicant to provide a list of the areas that need work, and specific tasks that may assist in improving those qualities. The applicant is told exactly why they are or are not ready at this time.

**Exceptions**

This process is geared towards new callers maturing from within the Atlanta contra dance community, yet the fundamental criteria remain the same regardless of where the caller learned her\his craft. In order to be fair to all individuals wishing to join the ranks of Atlanta rotation callers, all callers will be selected based on the criteria and process established here and approved by the CCD Steering Committee.

Appendix A:  
CCD Caller Capability  
Assessment Form

<b>CCD Caller Capability Assessment Form</b>		<b>Chattahoochee Country Dancers, Atlanta, GA</b>		
<b>Caller:</b>		<b>Assessor:</b>		
<b>Location:</b>		<b>Assessor's years in dance community as a ...</b>		
<b>Band:</b>	<b>Dancer</b>	<b>Caller</b>	<b>Musician</b>	<b>Other (List)</b>
<b>Date:</b>				

The CCD welcomes all comments on the callers for Atlanta dances. Based on your experience of the dance, please use this form as a template for providing your assessment of the caller. Indicate what the caller does well and where she/he needs improvement. Your feedback is greatly appreciated. Thank you!

		<b>Skills</b>	<b>Considerations</b>	<b>Assessor's Comments</b>
<b>On the Box</b>	Teaching\ Walkthroughs	<input type="checkbox"/> Clear <input type="checkbox"/> Concise <input type="checkbox"/> Effective <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate for level of dancers <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate use of demos		
	Dance floor management	<input type="checkbox"/> Set-up\organization of formations <input type="checkbox"/> Hands 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Announcements <input type="checkbox"/> Start\End break		
	Calling mechanics	<input type="checkbox"/> In time with music <input type="checkbox"/> On the beat <input type="checkbox"/> Strong and clear instructions <input type="checkbox"/> Drops calls when appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> Emphasizes calls when appropriate		
	Familiarity of dances	<input type="checkbox"/> Dances work <input type="checkbox"/> Minimal use of cards		
	Reading the crowd	<input type="checkbox"/> Sense\Feel the dancers' <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy level</li> <li>• Excitement</li> <li>• Frustration</li> <li>• Boredom\disinterest</li> <li>• Confusion</li> </ul> <input type="checkbox"/> And adjust accordingly		
	Duration	<input type="checkbox"/> Keeps dance at appropriate length – not too long or too short <input type="checkbox"/> Break at appropriate time <input type="checkbox"/> End dance evening on time		
	Error Handling	<input type="checkbox"/> Adjust program as necessary. Increase\decrease complexity or energy requirement on the fly <input type="checkbox"/> Drop dance and move on <input type="checkbox"/> Midstream correction to get dancers re-oriented <input type="checkbox"/> Good natured <input type="checkbox"/> Accepts responsibility for problems and doesn't blame dancers or display frustration <input type="checkbox"/> Correct misspoken\ misunderstood call		
	Communication with musicians	<input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate tune or style for dances <input type="checkbox"/> Monitors tempo for dance <input type="checkbox"/> Synchronized on going out <input type="checkbox"/> Uses the music well		
	Communication with sound crew	<input type="checkbox"/> Volume <input type="checkbox"/> Dancer feedback		
	Communication with organizers	<input type="checkbox"/> Environment (e.g., lights, temperature) <input type="checkbox"/> Safety concerns		

<b>CCD Caller Capability Assessment Form</b>		<b>Chattahoochee Country Dancers, Atlanta, GA</b>		
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<b>Location:</b>		<b>Assessor's years in dance community as a ...</b>		
<b>Band:</b>	<b>Dancer</b>	<b>Caller</b>	<b>Musician</b>	<b>Other (List)</b>
<b>Date:</b>				

		<b>Skills</b>	<b>Considerations</b>	<b>Assessor's Comments</b>
<b>Off the Box</b>	Newcomer\ Beginner Lessons	<input type="checkbox"/> Welcoming and inclusive <input type="checkbox"/> Allayed fears <input type="checkbox"/> Covered basics <input type="checkbox"/> Good introduction to contra dancing <input type="checkbox"/> Prepared new dancers to dance!		
	Programming	<input type="checkbox"/> Evidence that dance evening is well planned <input type="checkbox"/> Dances appropriate for level of dancers <input type="checkbox"/> Dance mixture – types, figures, difficulty <input type="checkbox"/> Build complexity as experience and energy grow <input type="checkbox"/> Reduce complexity as dancers tire <input type="checkbox"/> Bracketed selections (easy\ medium\ hard) or other means of flexibly dealing with sudden changes		
<b>Presence and Leadership</b>	Stage presence	<input type="checkbox"/> Positive attitude <input type="checkbox"/> Controls anger and frustrations. Does not berate, belittle talk down to, verbally abuse or lecture dancers. <input type="checkbox"/> Exhibits warm confidence → knows what to do but openly admits mistakes <input type="checkbox"/> Maintains dancer's attention and respect <input type="checkbox"/> Inspires and encourages dancers		
	Sets "good" example on dance floor	<input type="checkbox"/> Gives weight <input type="checkbox"/> On time <input type="checkbox"/> Dances with newcomers <input type="checkbox"/> Listens to announcements		
	Contributes to community	<input type="checkbox"/> Understands and shares vision of CCD on and off the caller's box <input type="checkbox"/> Musician <input type="checkbox"/> Sound set-up <input type="checkbox"/> Opens\Closes <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteers and pitches in		

Additional Comments (Please use additional sheets if necessary.):

In order to make your input as constructive as possible, please be detailed and as specific.  
This form will be shared with the caller.

## Appendix B:

# CCD Rotation Caller Application

