

Branch and COO Zoom Meetings

Jon Berridge, November 2024

The following is a summary of the recurring themes from the COO/Branch meetings between October 11th and October 17th. The summary is followed by notes from individual meetings.

1. **Membership Fees and Value Perception**

Discussions across multiple meetings emphasized the need to improve communication about the value of RSCDS membership. Proposals included tiered or sliding scale membership fees based on age, location, or income, as well as offering differentiated pricing for digital versus print magazine subscriptions. Concerns about membership retention and attracting new members were consistent themes, with suggestions like trial memberships and reduced fees for specific groups. In general, international branches felt the membership fee is very cheap, UK branches felt it was expensive.

2. **Fundraising and Financial Diversification**

The need for diversified income streams was highlighted in several meetings. Proposals included targeting major donors, exploring government grants and trusts, and implementing innovative fundraising strategies like "Give as You Live" and charity lotteries. The potential for events like ceilidhs to boost revenue and attract new members was also discussed. Cost-saving measures, such as transitioning to digital publications and modernizing IT systems, were considered.

3. **Improved Communication and Website Functionality**

Communication issues within RSCDS branches and between members and headquarters were a recurring concern. Suggestions included regular quarterly meetings between COO and branch admins, streamlined communication processes, and grouping branches geographically for better coordination. Multiple meetings also emphasized the need to overhaul the RSCDS website to improve navigation, resource accessibility, and overall user experience.

4. **Digital Transition and Environmental Impact**

Several meetings discussed transitioning from print to digital formats for RSCDS publications to reduce costs and enhance accessibility. Environmental benefits were noted, though challenges such as copyright and licensing were acknowledged.

5. **Event Management and Membership Engagement**

Suggestions for engaging members included virtual events, such as Zoom classes, and better promotion of events like the Spring Fling. A two-tiered dance system to encourage new dancers whilst providing a challenge for more experienced dancers, and family-oriented events were proposed to attract broader participation.

These recurring themes illustrate branch's interest in financial sustainability, modernization, and enhancing member engagement.

Notes from each meeting

Oct 11th, 9:30 am

1. **Addressing Disconnect and Financials:**
 - Concern about the disconnect between RSCDS branches and headquarters.
 - Discussions centred around financial issues and comparisons to similar organizations.
 - Challenges of participation and how formality may deter involvement were raised.
2. **Two-Tier Dance System:**
 - A proposal for two tiers of dances: one for younger/families and another for experienced dancers.
 - Support from multiple branches with suggestions to colour-code dances by difficulty and include more communities.
3. **Membership Challenges:**
 - Issues with membership value perception and challenges promoting RSCDS membership.
 - Ideas included offering discounts to specific groups (e.g., single dancers) and improving communication of benefits.
 - Most members would pay extra for printed magazine
4. **Improving Publicity and Income:**
 - Focus on increasing the visibility of the RSCDS through better use of the magazine and social media.
 - Suggestions included creating a digital version and a lighter version for non-members.
5. **Social Media Promotion:**
 - Importance of leveraging social media, with branches sharing their experiences.
 - RSCDS plans to offer social media support and run advertising trials based on successful models.
6. **Facebook Page and Branch Challenges:**
 - Emphasis on keeping branch Facebook pages updated, with help offered from 12CC
 - The challenge of international branches retaining members due to varying event appeal was highlighted.
7. **Teacher Engagement and Training:**
 - Review of teacher qualifications and how to better engage qualified teachers in RSCDS activities post-training.
 - Proposals for improved communication and support for teachers.
8. **Structural and Charity Issues:**
 - Discussion on conflicts of interest between local branches and the central organization, particularly regarding fundraising.
 - Suggestion to explore a "Give as You Live" program for generating donations through online purchases.

Next Steps:

- Creation of an impact report to be shared ahead of the AGM.
- Exploration of administrative support for branches to ease their workload.
- Review of RSCDS's organizational structure to address modern needs and conflicts of interest.
- Development of a strategy to communicate membership value and increase fundraising opportunities.

Oct 14th 12 noon

Main Discussion Points:

- 1. Addressing Branch Disconnect:**
 - The meeting aimed to tackle the disconnection between RSCDS branches and initiate regular quarterly meetings to enhance communication and collaboration.
 - Participants raised issues related to branch management and shared their experiences, with Anne MacDonald representing Cheshire branch.
- 2. Membership Challenges and Communication:**
 - Declining membership was discussed, with a focus on innovative approaches to attract new members and clearly communicate the value of membership.
 - Proposals included creating two different communication streams: one tailored for experienced dancers and another for newcomers.
 - Suggestions to reduce the frequency of the "Dance Scottish Together" magazine to six issues per year and streamline communication through Instagram reels were also considered.
 - Bletcher too long – 15 mins, less banter.
- 3. Fundraising Strategies:**
 - The group agreed on focusing on major donors and gifts, exploring trust funds and government support for new projects rather than ongoing operations.
 - Simplified payment processes for donations were suggested, though this might not work for all branches.
 - Jon Berridge is tasked with developing a detailed fundraising proposal for the board.
- 4. Exploring New Membership Models:**
 - A tiered membership model, with lower contributions for younger people and higher for retirees, was proposed to encourage broader participation.
 - Ceilidhs were identified as effective entry points for new members, particularly in countries like Australia.
- 5. Digital Music Transition:**
 - The possibility of transitioning to digital music was discussed, which would improve accessibility and sustainability.
 - This proposal is currently under review by the board.
- 6. Improving Resource Accessibility:**
 - Participants highlighted the need for better-organized resources on the RSCDS website, including templates for marketing materials in different paper sizes.
 - The idea of involving members with professional expertise to help manage projects at a reduced cost was also raised.
- 7. Pricing and Membership Retention:**
 - The conversation touched on pricing strategies for membership and event fees, with larger branches potentially sponsoring specific RSCDS projects to support sustainability.
 - Colleen proposed using a nominal group technique to efficiently generate ideas for improving engagement.
 - Magazine an extra cost for those who want print.

Next Steps:

- Jon Berridge to prepare an impact report for the AGM, including comparative data from similar organizations.
- RSCDS to improve communication about the value of membership and support provided.
- Review of separate communication streams for experienced and new dancers.

- Improved accessibility and organization of online resources for branches.
- Templates for marketing materials to be designed for different regions (e.g., North America).
- Regular quarterly meetings to be scheduled for ongoing branch engagement.

Oct 14th 17:00

Main Discussion Points:

- 1. Communication and Efficiency Challenges:**
 - The meeting focused on communication issues within RSCDS branches and the need for greater efficiency in operations. RSCDS shared a financial analysis comparing costs and income sources with other arts and culture organizations, aiming to identify areas for improvement.
 - A smaller, more accessible website and clearer communication on membership value, especially for newcomers, were identified as priorities.
- 2. Fundraising and Financial Management:**
 - Challenges with regional fundraising, particularly outside the UK, were discussed, as well as potential tax issues for international donors.
 - RSCDS is exploring regional fundraising and a more effective financial strategy to secure new income streams and manage reserves better.
 - Teacher training funds and managing financial reserves within branches were also covered, with an emphasis on revising the charity's reserve policy.
- 3. Membership Engagement and Retention:**
 - The discussion highlighted the need to communicate non-monetary benefits of membership, with concerns about membership fees being a deterrent.
 - A tiered fee system was suggested, and branches explored strategies to retain members, such as requiring upfront payment for dance classes and encouraging newcomers to commit to membership after a trial period.
- 4. Digital Shift and Cost Reduction:**
 - The RSCDS discussed the potential for a shift from print to digital formats for their magazine and other publications, which could result in cost savings and environmental benefits.
 - Branches were encouraged to consider offering differentiated membership fees for digital versus print magazine options.
- 5. Event Management and Financial Structure:**
 - Financial challenges related to events such as Spring Fling were discussed, with suggestions for targeted fundraising to support these activities.
 - The need for improved budgeting and event planning to mitigate risks from inflation was emphasized.
- 6. Zoom Classes and Quarterly Meetings:**
 - The continuation of Zoom classes and quarterly meetings was proposed to maintain member engagement post-COVID.
 - RSCDS discussed the success of virtual events and considered ways to sustain these offerings for global membership.

Next Steps:

- Jon to summarize key points and share with all participants.
- Development of an impact report for the AGM explaining RSCDS finances and membership value.
- Organize quarterly Zoom calls with branch representatives.

- Explore occasional online classes for global members.
- Consider making the presentation video available to the broader RSCDS membership.
- Jon to discuss possibility of more detailed information on RSCDS investments with Treasurer
- Review of digital distribution of music and magazines to cut costs.

Oct 17th 12 noon

Key Discussions:

1. Financial Situation and Fund Diversification:

- The organization reviewed its financial status, comparing it to similar nonprofits.
- There is a need to diversify income streams and increase transparency about how membership fees are used.

2. Membership Fee Structure:

- The possibility of a sliding scale for membership fees based on age and location was discussed.
- There is a need to review the current fee structure to ensure value for all membership groups, including new and experienced members.
- Transparency in fee allocation was emphasized, and new initiatives to reduce costs were proposed.

3. Database and IT Systems:

- The team agreed on the need for more efficient, user-friendly database systems and updated computer systems to reduce maintenance costs and security risks.
- A larger working group will evaluate new database options, involving branch consultation.

4. RSCDS Magazine and Events:

- Costs of the RSCDS Dance magazine are under review, with options like reducing print subscriptions or making digital versions default.
- Event discussions focused on making AGMs more affordable, while the value of events like the Spring Fling for new dancers was acknowledged.

5. Property and Coates Crescent Sale:

- The team discussed selling Coates Crescent and investing in a new property to generate rental income and reduce office costs.
- A long-term plan is being developed to avoid short-term financial fixes.

6. Improving Communication and Restructuring:

- Regular communication between branches was emphasized, with suggestions to group branches geographically for better coordination.
- The need for a clearer, more structured communication process within the organization was also discussed.

Next Steps:

- Review fundraising strategies and options for sale of 12 CC
- Jon Berridge to share summary notes from group meetings with participants.
- Branches will be consulted on database options, and a working group will evaluate choices.
- Review of magazine costs and subscription options to reduce expenses.

Oct 17th 5pm

Key Discussions:

1. RSCDS Financial Performance:

- The financial performance of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society (RSCDS) was reviewed, with a focus on comparing it to other UK nonprofits.
- Mailing costs for print magazines, especially internationally, are high, leading to a discussion on shifting to digital solutions.

2. Membership Fees and Value:

- The team explored tiered or sliding scale membership fees, recognizing the challenges of increasing subscriptions.
- Discussions highlighted the importance of communicating the value of membership and tracking donations for tax purposes.

3. Fundraising Strategies:

- RSCDS plans to target major donors and explore government grants for new projects.
- The creation of a fundraising proposal to attract supporters was discussed.

4. Efficient Use of Examiners and Adjudicators:

- The need for more efficient management of examiners and adjudicators was addressed, including using volunteers for projects.
- Simplifying the website and database with off-the-shelf software was proposed.

5. Digital Publications and Environmental Impact:

- Digital publications were considered a more flexible and cost-effective solution compared to printed books and CDs. However, challenges with copyright and licensing were acknowledged.

6. Event and Fundraising Working Group:

- An Events Working Group is exploring new initiatives, including a pilot event for families and other revenue-generating events like Summer and Winter Schools.

7. Improving Communication and Website Functionality:

- The need for improved website user experience and better communication about membership benefits was discussed, including potential virtual events to increase member engagement.

Next Steps:

- Jon to explore restructuring membership fees for Gift Aid eligibility.
- RSCDS to establish informal branch admin meetings.
- Information about evening ticket availability for Summer School to be shared in meeting notes.
- RSCDS to continue analyzing comparable organizations and share findings with branches.

October 22nd, 9:30 AM

Key Topics Discussed:

1. **Comparables Analysis & Operational Efficiency:**
 - RSCDS analyzed UK-based arts, culture, and heritage nonprofits to assess operational efficiency.
 - Highlighted lower spending on staff, overheads, and fundraising compared to comparables, signalling areas for potential improvement.
 - Questions arose about comparability, particularly regarding organizational structure and income levels.
2. **Project Structure and Communication:**
 - Emphasized the importance of understanding member needs, assigning clear roles, and fostering collaboration.
 - Agreed on the necessity of a structured approach and improved communication between departments and branches.
3. **Digital Transition & Events:**
 - Discussed transitioning the RSCDS magazine to a digital format and exploring software discounts for members.
 - Addressed the lack of phone booking for summer school tickets and proposed opening evening events to non-participants if space allows.
4. **Membership Engagement & Recruitment:**
 - Explored differential pricing for members vs. non-members at events to encourage membership.
 - Highlighted branch efforts in recruitment, including using social media for outreach and promoting the health benefits of Scottish country dancing.
5. **Financial Health & Fundraising:**
 - Discussed potential fundraising strategies, including Gift Aid eligibility for membership fees, major donor programs, and sponsorship.
 - Agreed on the importance of income diversification to address financial challenges.

Next Steps:

- **Finance & Fundraising:**
 - Jon to explore income diversification and fundraising strategies
 - Review membership fees for Gift Aid eligibility.
- **Communication & Meetings:**
 - Set up informal quarterly or biannual branch admin meetings.
 - Suggest forming a working group to discuss organizational structure with branch representatives.
- **Engagement & Awareness:**
 - Investigate having committee chairs give short presentations to enhance understanding and volunteer participation.
 - Share the financial presentation video link with branches for wider distribution.
- **Event Improvements:**
 - Include information on evening ticket availability for Summer School in meeting notes.
 - Address the lack of phone booking options for event tickets.

The meeting underscored the importance of operational efficiency, improved communication, and innovative engagement strategies to strengthen RSCDS and its membership base.

October 22nd 5pm

Key Topics Discussed:

- 1. Financial Performance:**
 - RSCDS financial performance compared to similar organizations highlighted the need for income generation.
 - A review of the reserves policy is underway, with scenarios such as summer school cancellation being considered.
- 2. Membership Value and Appeal:**
 - Concerns were raised about the perceived value of membership, particularly in the UK. Suggestions included improved communication of benefits, offering diverse membership packages, and hosting exclusive events for members.
 - Branch representatives shared challenges in retaining members, especially older ones, and emphasized the need to attract younger dancers in rural and smaller communities.
- 3. Challenges from Aging Population and Covid-19:**
 - Many branches reported decreased attendance and membership due to the aging demographic and Covid-19 impacts.
 - New strategies to attract younger participants, particularly in underserved areas, are being prioritized.
- 4. Improved Project Structure and Communication:**
 - Discussions emphasized the need for a detailed and customer-focused project approach. Clearer roles, responsibilities, and enhanced collaboration were deemed essential for success.
- 5. Engagement and Collaboration:**
 - The group supported holding regular meetings (quarterly or biannual) to foster engagement and share best practices.
 - Time zone-specific meetings and diverse participation were also recommended.
- 6. Administrative Updates:**
 - Payment deadlines and rule changes were discussed. Elizabeth noted that payments can now be made later in the year, and she provided updates on administrative matters.

Next Steps:

- **Income and Fundraising Initiatives:**
 - Jon to review income generation and cost-cutting options
 - Explore using the Jean Milligan Memorial Fund to hire a fundraiser.
- **Youth and Inclusivity Efforts:**
 - Jon will bring up gender-neutral language with the Youth Services Committee.
- **Engagement and Reporting:**
 - Jon will set up quarterly Zoom meetings for branch representatives and create an impact report to share with branches and members.
 - Branches will consider sharing video presentations and draft impact reports with interested members.
- **Data Collection:**
 - Jon will anonymize and collect branch data on pricing and engagement strategies.

This meeting reinforced the importance of collaboration, adapting to demographic shifts, and finding innovative ways to sustain and grow the RSCDS.