Ceremonies
BUILDING A DANCE TEAM

Session Length: 50 Minutes

Learning objectives:
- Understand the role of the Dance Team in the Lodge.
- Understand the role of Dance in Membership Retention.
- Understand the role of Dance in OA Promotion.
- Understand the role of Dance in Community Building.
- Understanding the Fundamental Requirements of Building a Dance Team.

Required Materials:
- Flipcharts if desired.
- Power Point presentation file if desired.
- Dance equipment, if available, for display.

TRAINER PREPARATION

Introduction: 5-7 Minutes
The trainer introduces himself and briefly explains his background in American Indian dance and culture. If possible, it is helpful for all participants to introduce themselves and current role or interest in dance.

SESSION NARRATIVE

Role of Dance in the Lodge: 10 Minutes
A lodge dance team can be a powerful demonstration of the themes of the Order of the Arrow and American Indian culture. This group is often one of the most visible and impressive displays of what the OA can offer the council the community. This is a rich subject and we can’t possibly cover all of the details or high points of a dance team and its functions within the time we have. Chapter and Lodge leaders are urged to seek out experts in the subjects they are interested in exploring.

Let’s set the context by going over the Mission and Purpose of the Order of the Arrow.

Mission of the Order of the Arrow:

The mission of the Order of the Arrow is to fulfill its purpose as an integral part of the Boy Scouts of America through positive youth leadership under the guidance of selected capable adults.

The Purpose of the Order of the Arrow:

As Scouting’s National Honor Society, our purpose is to:

- Recognize those who best exemplify the Scout Oath and Law in their daily lives and through that recognition cause others to conduct themselves in a way that warrants similar recognition.
• *Promote camping, responsible outdoor adventure, and environmental stewardship as essential components of every Scout’s experience, in the unit, year-round, and in summer camp.*

• *Develop leaders with the willingness, character, spirit and ability to advance the activities of their units, our Brotherhood, Scouting, and ultimately our nation.*

• *Crystallize the Scout habit of helpfulness into a life purpose of leadership in cheerful service to others.*

The role of the dance team clearly falls within our purpose. The Order of the Arrow has made American Indian culture a vibrant aspect of our heritage. Within this purpose, what does a dance team do within a lodge?

• Preserves and maintains camping traditions and spirit
• Initiates local American Indian relationships if not already established
• Preserves and maintains local American Indian relationships
• Leads Arrowmen and Scouters to a better understanding of American Indian culture

The role of the Lodge dance team is to provide an opportunity for those Arrowmen interested in American Indian culture to share their talents with other members of the Lodge, council, and community. This is normally done through craft and dance presentations.

**The Dance Team within the Lodge:**

**Trainer Tip:** Sections with lists can be done as a question and response segment. This is more effective if a marker board or easel is used to record responses and fill in blanks.

• The Dance Team should be a regular part of Lodge functions, with the chairman sitting as a member of the Lodge Executive Committee. During meetings, the chairman reports with the other committees.

• Dance Team members participate as regular members in the lodge and chapter program. They do not “dance and leave.”

• Offering basic instructional sessions at fellowships and other lodge training events.

• Encouraging everyone from the lodge to dance at section events such as Pow-Wow or competitions.

• Act as ambassadors and encouragers for all Arrowmen to understand the basics and enjoy the fun of dance.

**Membership Retention:**

The dance team can be a powerful motivator for the involvement of our Arrowmen. Think about it - the knowledge and craft, the movement, the physical expression, and in some cases, the competition. All of these aspects of dance can inspire and motivate an Arrowman to support the lodge and community at large. Let’s discuss a few of the ways the dance team can help membership retention.

• **Leadership:** The Dance Team provides leadership opportunities for youth serving as chairman. An additional adult adviser(s) will be needed to provide the proper coaching and support. The lodge dance team should also be a part of the Lodge Executive Committee.

• **Commitment:** Time commitment to the lodge and the dance team committee is important. Most dance teams meet at least once a month. There may also be performances during the
Ceremonies – Building a Dance Team

month. Be cautious not to over burden the team with too many performances as the Arrowmen balance this with the needs of their unit.

- **Passion**: Passion develops as understanding of American Indian culture grows. Teams should not modify American Indian crafts, but to emulate. Be a courteous scout and respect this culture.

- **Lifetime interest**: Many Arrowmen find the American Indian crafts and culture a lifelong “hobby,” and may find lifelong friendships on the Pow-Wow trail. It can also promote study and research skills which can improve skills used in school. By constant study and research, one can make this a most educational experience, which has led some Arrowmen into a vocation in Native American anthropology and study.

- **Adults and the Dance Team**: As in other aspects of the Order, the adult role is supportive. The advisers can help with craft and dance instruction, provide transportation to a performance, and provide guidance with respect to the American Indian culture. They need to be a learned resource to the team.

**Promoting the Order of the Arrow:**

Outside of lodge functions and membership retention, the dance team can promote the OA and Scouting. What are some ways the team can do this? (Solicit responses; debrief and ensure all primary methods are discussed.)

- **Performances at Lodge Functions**: Since your dance team is a committee of the lodge, you will be asked to perform at many of the lodge functions. Attend the entire event and show your support. Be a part of the lodge.

- **Performances for the District**: Your district may call on your dance team to perform for district camporees, cub day camps, etc. Be supportive of the district programs.

- **Performances for the Council**: One of the best public relations for the lodge is to have the dance team perform for council events. This exposes your team to a larger public arena, will generate good council/lodge relations, and promote your committee.

- **Performances for the unit**: Many dance teams are asked to perform for special occasions such as Eagle Courts of honor, Cub Scout Blue and Gold banquets, day camps, and WEBELOS Crossovers. What better way to promote the OA than to perform at the unit level? Cub Scouts will be excited and want to know more about Boy Scouting and the Order of the Arrow. They are your future members.

What are some other ways the dance team could be used to promote the Order of the Arrow and Scouting?

**Community Building:**

One of the most rewarding aspects of the dance team is the opportunity to go beyond Scouting and impact the community. Let’s discuss some ways that a dance team builds up the community.

- **Research**: Research can not only come for books, articles and videos, but there are many up-to-date resources on the internet. Use the internet to view videos of current Pow-Wows, visit other lodge dance teams and exchange knowledge at section conclaves. Relationships with local tribes, where possible, can not only provide invaluable information, but create ties for education resources.
• **Relations with local tribes**: This can be a challenging and rewarding experience. It is best to “know before you go” to a local tribe if they are acceptable to sharing their culture with scouts. Where the local tribe is receptive to a relationship, the opportunities for developing ties to the Lodge can provide reciprocating benefits. Lodges have performed service and manpower for Tribal projects, and have been blessed with educational opportunities. Ask advisers if they know of Tribal figures involved in Scouting for an introduction, and if possible get the advice of a Tribal Elder on how to learn more about the Tribe as a team.

• **Building bonds**: Friendships and camaraderie of members of the dance team can last a lifetime. Friendships with the American Indian community can build a better understanding of their culture and traditions and help eliminate the common misconceptions of American Indians as portrayed in Hollywood and media.

Starting the Team:

15 Minutes

*Trainer Tip*: If demonstration equipment and clothing is available, it is recommended that examples be used during this section.

We have discussed the impacts, functions and benefits of a dance team to the Lodge. Now it is time to look at the mechanics of actually getting a dance team started.

Starting a dance team from scratch is very similar to starting a Scout unit. The first step is to develop a set of “trained” adults and resources that can help teach and mentor the Scouts that join the dance team. The initial group of leaders will need to be able to teach fundamental crafts and must be able to sing the songs to teach the Scouts how to sing. These craft and singing resources can come from the initial group of adults or other groups who agree to work with the Arrowmen.

**Members:**

A dance team is clearly composed of dancers, but these are not the only members. Critical members of the dance team are the singers. Arrowmen interested in learning the songs used during the dance must also be recruited. It is recommended to find at least three (3) Scouts interested in learning the songs to start the “drum” (dance term that refers to the singers).

As the dance team grows, Scouts interested in supporting the dance team may be added to help manage the equipment used to put on dances.

**Attracting Members:**

Attracting Scouts interested in joining the dance team occurs at Lodge events - service weekends, fellowship weekends, annual banquets, chapter meetings; Scout shows, etc. The best way to attract Scouts is to put on some type of audio-visual show:

• Video of Pow-Wows or dances.

• Demonstration dances from dancers in the area.

**Choosing style of dance and clothing:**
Dance styles are the choice of the dancer, and all dance styles are encouraged to be represented within the team. More variety in dance styles is a big advantage when putting on shows, but not a requirement. Dance styles are not limited to any specific geographic region. There is a history to each dance, certain parts of the country are known for being historical “leaders” in different styles of dance.

As the Arrowmen begin thinking of what style they want to dance and the dance clothes they will need to make, provide samples of each style of dance and clothes - videos, photos, actual articles of clothing.

If at all possible, expert advice on a particular dance and clothing style should be sought before craft work begins. Scouts should NOT simply convert ceremonial clothes to dance clothes.

**Getting Started on Clothing:**

A key point to remember in building clothes is to let the Scouts know that building their dance clothes will be like gathering camping gear. Few of us start out with everything needed to go camping. Equipment is acquired and upgraded over time; the same is true for dance clothes - start simple, enhance and improve.

Each dance team should have a list of the basic set of clothing articles that are needed for each dance style. This list should also include “substitute” materials to show the Scouts what they need to build and where the materials will come from. For instance, a shortcut to the first set of moccasins is a pair of deck shoes with beadwork designs painted on the shoe. Determine what can be purchased locally and what to order. Cloth for shirts can be purchased from any cloth store and dowels for dance sticks can be purchased from local craft or hardware stores.

Feathers and beads may need to be ordered from a trading post. Be aware that local and national law may prohibit the possession of certain materials (e.g. certain types of feathers) by someone not registered with a Tribe. It is against the Order of the Arrow national policy to wear federally protected feathers by Scouts. There are also state game and wildlife laws that differ across state lines; some feathers and animal parts like deer hooves may be legal in one state but illegal in another state.

Design the clothes and then help each Scout plan the order in which they will make their clothes. It takes time to make the clothes—help the Arrowmen plan out what to purchase to minimize financial burdens. Balance getting enough to stay busy and working on clothes without buying too much up front.

Building clothes can be approached in the same manner as teaching outdoor skills to a new Scout. Schedule a series of craft sessions and even craft weekends to help the Arrowmen learn the skills and focus on building their clothes while building camaraderie. Treat each session as a chapter or lodge event, especially if conducted over a weekend.

**Resources:**

There are a number of resources available to the dance teams:

- Trading posts (Google “Indian Trading Post”)
- Videos
- CDs
- National Order of the Arrow Conference (American Indian Activities committee)
- Indian Summer
- Section Conclaves
- Regional Pow-Wows and seminars
Learning the Dances:

Learning the dance starts at dance team meetings using videos and/or other dancers that may be able to attend the meetings.

It is very important to learn how the Indians do the dance and all of the “actions” in each dance - when to start, when to stop, what to do on ‘honor beats’, etc.

The only way to become a good dancer is to go to Indian Pow-Wows (there is whole set of Pow-Wow etiquette not covered here). Pow-Wows are held throughout the country. Find a local event and try to get the Arrowmen to the Pow-Wow to watch first and dance when clothing is ready.

Advisers:

It’s relatively simple, but this is a key point that couldn’t be stressed enough. Adult advisers should seek training and prepare to teach just as they would teach the skills used in a Scout unit.

Conclusion: 10 Minutes

We’ve come near the end of the session, but we can’t really call it a conclusion. Rather, this is a beginning of a great adventure as you consider how you’re going to start and organize the team. With our remaining time let’s talk more specifics about dance styles, clothing, singing, the drum, and Pow-Wows. What questions do you have?

APPENDIX: RESOURCES & SOURCE MATERIALS

Order of the Arrow Handbook

American Indian Activities Committee - National Order of the Arrow Conference