

Guide for Starting an Ecstatic Dance

This guide is written by Tyler Blank and Peter Weinstein. Tyler co-founded Ecstatic Dance Oakland, San Francisco, and Ecstatic Dance Retreat Hawaii. Peter co-founded Ecstatic Dance Corvallis, and Dance Immersion, and Tyler and Peter together founded Ecstatic Dance Fairfax in Marin, CA. All of these dances are now thriving community gatherings.

In addition to being Producers and Managers of Ecstatic Dances, Peter Tyler are also Ecstatic Dance DJs: Peter plays as Baron Von Spirit, and Tyler as Avani. They have each musically facilitated (DJ'd) hundreds of Ecstatic Dances, throughout California, the US, and around the World.

This guide is based on our experiences, what has worked and what needs improvement—with wisdom gathered from both our own experiences, as well as experiences of many other dance leaders around the world.

Many of the suggestions in this guide are presented as a series of questions for inquiry. It is simply a Guide. The steps are numbered, but your order may be different. Only you how to best serve your community.

1. ***Develop your Vision***

Make sure you understand why you are starting this and what you're your intentions are

- Create a vision statement or mission statement
 - For Example: "We Desire a Safe and Sacred Space for Freeform Movement, on a Weekly Basis, in an Wonderful and Expansive Environment."

Get to know Dance History and Modern Electronic Music

- Research the history of dance in modern and ancient times for your own knowledge and understanding of the movement you are co-Creating
- Read the Origin Story of Ecstatic Dance found on www.Edance.org/Origins
- What are the health benefits of dance? Why people dance, why you dance.
- Learn about the relationship between dance and electronic music. What distinguishes each of the dozens of different electronic and world music genres? What are their tempos? How do they make you feel and move? What do you like for dance, and not like, and why? This will also help you to be able to speak to DJs about the type of Music Journey your community desires.

Websites:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bass_music

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electronic_dance_music

<https://www.armadamusic.com/edm-electronic-dance-music>

2. *Get to Know Your Community*

Ecstatic Dance is all about community. To thrive, Ecstatic Dance needs an active, supportive, connected community that feels it is being served by the dance. Some of this community may come from other established conscious dances, while a lot of the community will develop organically.

Ecstatic Dance is similar in many ways to other conscious dance modalities, but it has some characteristics of its own. It's important to understand other local conscious dance practices and what they offer.

Ultimately, it will help greatly for the community to have a sense input to the dance. Be sure to take community preferences and needs into account at every step and whenever you make important decisions.

Attend all types of Conscious Dances in your Area

- A. What do you (and other people) enjoy about these dances & communities?
- B. What aspects of these dances & communities can be improved?
- C. What aspects of these dances do you see serving your vision of Ecstatic

Dance?

Start Dialoging and Networking with Community Members

- A. What demand is there for a new Ecstatic Dance?
- B. Is Ecstatic Dance known or will you have to educate most of the community

from scratch?

Start identifying community members who could be good allies, ambassadors, and even partners

- A. Who seems enthusiastic about a new Ecstatic Dance? Collect names and contact info.
- B. Who already has a leadership role among your target community? Cultivate those relationships.
- C. Are there good DJs locally who you think might be a good fit? If not, go to Conscious Dance Events, clubs, festivals, social media, and parties to find them.

3. Pick the Weekly day/time for your dance

Ecstatic Dance is both a practice and community web: consistency is key! If at all possible, holding dance once per week is preferable to once or twice per month. Note: Scheduling may be limited by venue availability (see Step 6). You may need to pick your second or third choice of Day/Time to get the best venue.

Keep in mind that you will need time for setup and breakdown for each dance. When setting your weekly event times, consider the implications for community members:

- How it fits in with meal times
- travel time required after work
- availability of public transportation
- ease of parking at different times

Guiding Questions:

- A. What days and times are under-represented in your Dance Community?
- B. Will it work better to pick a day/time that doesn't compete with any other dances, or is the regional population big enough where you can pick a day/time when there's already a dance? Note: It's common courtesy to reach out to other dances who may be affected by your dance. It's also good to have the good will and support of other established leaders.
- C. Will you have a warm up class before dance (Yoga/Contact Improv/etc)? That will affect your dance & rental timing.

Here are some suggestions:

- It's best to start with one new dance at a time (and in one city).
- Sunday is the most popular morning for Dance. Saturday morning is second.
- Tues/Weds/Thurs are usually the best value for evening dances
- Fri/Sat are great nights if you can get them without paying too much (though dance can take on more of a "party vibe" on these nights)
- Sun/Mon nights are often more challenging for the community to attend, though venues often have space then and can be cheaper to rent.
- Weekday Mornings and Afternoons are difficult times for Ecstatic Dance as many people are working then.

4. *Start Developing Your Team*

Most successful dances have a team of support to help carry out the various duties and tasks to make it all happen. Some of these roles are paid, while some are done in exchange for free dance passes. You will have to Promote, Advertise, Market, Navigate Social Media, Decorate, Design, Negotiate, Hold Space, Hold Circles, Mediate, Move Gear, etc. etc...

- A. Decide if you will be the lead sole owner of the dance or if it will be an equal partnership among two or more people. Keep in mind that producing a dance takes perseverance and reliability as much as passion.
- B. List all of the specific roles, responsibilities, and tasks you will need to launch your dance and then run it weekly. To fulfill each one, consider:
 - i. How much time and effort will it take?
 - ii. How will you compensate? (pay, free dance entry, etc)
 - iii. Whom do you Trust to do this?
- C. Get the basic team members in place to proceed with planning and launch, and start organizing the weekly team you will need after launch.

5. ***Business and Money***

Know that starting an Ecstatic Dance may be a costly adventure. Even though this feels like a community, which it is, it is also a business proposition with required investments, weekly costs, and significant responsibilities. If making money is your primary reason for starting an Ecstatic Dance, please consider another line of work. Ecstatic Dance is a Passion. A Need. A Dream. You, your Partner(s), and your Community must come together to procure an amazing space to dance in, to decorate it, to entice DJs to play music, acquire equipment, spread the word, and to keep it going until enough people are attending to cover expenses.

In Oakland, Tyler & Donna each went \$10,000 in debt, all on credit cards, over the first 6 months while building attendance at Ecstatic Dance Oakland. They lived in their vehicles in order to pay the rent for the majestic ballroom there. After 6 months, it started paying for itself. After a year, it started paying back the loan. And now it provides meaningful employment, and the ability to rent an expensive ballroom in the San Francisco Bay Area.

If you do not already have experience launching and running a business, please do some research and learning about basic budgeting, accounting, management, and leadership. There are lots of good books and online resources on these topics. It's also a good idea to identify business mentors who can guide you along the way.

- A. What kind of business structure will you employ for your dance organization?
 - Sole Proprietor/Partnership/Community Owned/LLC/C Corp/Non-Profit
- B. What kind of liability insurance will you use? (Note: the need for this varies depending upon your country)
 - Event Insurance or Dance Teacher Insurance

Realize that you will be birthing a Community. This can be both a Rewarding Journey, and an Intense Responsibility. If it fails, it may cost you many thousands of dollars. If it succeeds, it can provide you with Meaningful Employment and a Dancing Community that is a loving, supportive Family.

Websites:

<https://www.brightonsbm.com/news/top-10-tips-successful-event-management/>

https://www.phly.com/productsfw/FWI_FitIndiv.aspx

6. Find the Dance Temple

When it comes to dance, the venue is of utmost importance. Even if you get everything else right, it's very difficult to build a dance in a space that doesn't offer the right container. Ultimately, it needs to feel like a sacred space to gather for dance & movement.

Here are some characteristics of space that we feel are critical:

- A. The space is large enough to grow into and hold the abundant dance you envision a year from now. Will it comfortably hold at least 100 dancers (or a lot more if you are in a big city)?
- B. Wood Floor comfortable for barefoot dancing (ideally "sprung floor" or well-worn wood, not sticky or laid down directly on top of concrete).
- C. Available every Week (ideally), 52 weeks a year. It's not good if you have to cancel your dance more than a few weeks per year.
- D. Easy access (to Public Transit, Parking, etc.)
- E. Affordable Rent (keeps costs down for Dancers, and allows DJ's & Facilitators to be paid for their time and energy)
- F. No sound level issues (if you can't turn up the music, it may not be worth it)

Here are some characteristics of space that are very important, but may not be critical for you:

- A. High Ceilings (adequate Head Space for the Energy)
- B. Big Windows (especially for Morning & Afternoon Dances)
- C. Has its own Epic Sound System (or availability for you to store your system on site). There are a few dances that cart in their own sound system each week.
- D. Has storage onsite storage for Altar Gear, décor, and any needed equipment

7. Find the right Musical Facilitators (DJ's)

DJing for Ecstatic Dance is different than DJing at a club, party, or festival. It involves creating a shamanic journey with a wide variety of music, across an intentional arc (warm-up, peaks of ecstasy, and settling into stillness).

Go to Conscious Dances, Clubs, Parties, etc., and find DJ's who's music you love, and see if they are willing to play a wider variety of Tempos, Genres, & Emotions for an Ecstatic Dance Journey. Also, find Conscious Dance Class Facilitators (such as 5Rhythms) who want to learn to DJ.

- A. Learning how to mix music from one tempo to another, between genres, moods, intensity, or beatmatching to continue a vibe are important aspects of being an Ecstatic Dance DJ.
- B. There are many Ecstatic Dance sets available to listen to (for your DJ's to learn from) at: <https://soundcloud.com/official-ecstatic-dance>
- C. "DJ speak" includes talking about genres and tempos. For example: "Start out Ambient music, without any beats, for at least 5-15 minutes, and slowly introduce Spacious Downtempo (slow dreamy beats around 70bpm), building over 30 minutes to more playful and funky Midtempo (100bpm), slowly increasing the Intensity, with Glitch Hop, etc. as well as weaving in playful, sexy, and introspective songs, through the 110's, all the way up to House Music (120-128 bpm), and possibly even Trance (130's) or Drum & Bass (160's), before returning down to Midtempo (100bpm), Dubstep (70bpm), or Trap (80bpm), etc... going up and down the scale or tempos, with 2 to 4 tracks maximum in a row of the same feeling before moving to another on the Journey. Equal time should be given to instrumental tracks and vocal tracks. Pop music may be played, or Remixes, as long as they are conscious (not rude or lewd). Pop should be a very small portion of the Journey (1 or 2 tracks max), just enough to bring people together, a type of reminiscing, and celebratory vibration. Proper amount of time should also be dedicated to the Cooling Down portion of the Journey (15-30 minutes), ending as we began, eventually into Ambient Sounds, or a Sacred Drone.

8. Use a Great Sound System

A great sound system makes it easier for dancers to enter into transformational states of being while dancing.

High Quality Speakers are worth the money:

- Separate Bass Cabinets (Bass roots us to the Earth, and it's the Sub Woofers that provide the grounding force of these lower frequencies. It makes it possible to "feel" the music in our bodies. Otherwise, the music only hits us from the neck up.)
- The Mid / High Range Speakers (Tops) should be above head level, on a sturdy speaker stand, so that everyone can hear them clearly (not just the front row of dancers)

Options for speaker locations:

- 1) All up front – Concert Style
 - Pros: Good for big sound up front - quieter space in back
 - Cons: Can create a forward facing dancefloor - too quiet in back
- 2) Front and Back (& perhaps with sides) – Surround Sound
 - Pros: Being Immersed in Sound – Non directional Dancefloor
 - Cons: Sound waves can clash – Hard to find quiet space
- 3) Front and Sides – Bowl Style
 - Pros: Good sound front and back (though perhaps some echo)
 - Cons: Directional dancing - no quiet space

Surround Sound is the most preferred for dancers, but can create challenges if the levels are not right (backs should be a little bit lower volume), or if people are looking for quieter spaces.

9. Develop your Marketing Strategy

Use Word of Mouth

Most people come to Ecstatic Dance through friends who have already discovered it. So “word of mouth” is the best marketing tool. When you first start your dance, and are looking to build traction in the community, there are ways to encourage existing dancers to bring friends:

- Give dancers Entry Passes to share with their friends.
- Offer a special promotion, “Bring a First-time Friend for Free”. The idea is to get as many people as possible to try out the dance, knowing that you have little to lose by giving free entry to try it out and that some of them will become regular dancers. Note: Some don’t believe in “First Time Free” marketing, believing it is important for there to be an exchange in order for the experience to be valued
- Have existing dancers add their friends to your Facebook group and Facebook events

Make Your Dance Known

Another important strategy is to spread the word about Ecstatic Dance to draw people who might be interested but do not already have friends attending. The goal is to make people curious enough to follow-up and try out the dance. Use friendly language and graphics that stand out.

Here are some key ways to spread the word and establish your brand locally:

- Print cards, flyers, and posters. Post them at other dances, local festivals, community boards, cafes, and yoga studios.
- Create a website with lots of information about Ecstatic Dance (in general) and your local dance (specifically). Get your website listed at Ecstatic Dance.org
- Create a Facebook page for your local dance. Use Facebook ads to get people to “like” your page.
- Create a Yelp page to attract attention
- Once you get going with enough attendance, contact local newspapers and bloggers. Explain the value of Ecstatic Dance and invite them to come check it out. It makes a great story!
- Use Facebook events to remind the community about the dances—this can be weekly or just for special events. Use Facebook ads to draw attention to the Facebook events.
- Print advertisements in alternative newspapers could work well in the right community

Build the Relationship

Once you have a community forming, it’s important to have a way to build and maintain communications. Facebook is good for some folks, but not everybody uses it regularly and some Facebook posts get quickly lost in that sea of over-information.

- Build an email list. Gather emails of everyone who attends dance, and incorporate a weekly or monthly email newsletter. Using a service like Mailchimp, you can easily provide community information and dance scheduling.

- Create a Facebook group for your local Ecstatic Dance tribe. Encourage everyone to use it to build and deepen the community. It's not only a great place to announce the dance each week, but have people post inspirations, requests/offers for support, and a place to find info on other community happenings.
- Use other social media channels to stay in touch with the community: Twitter, Instagram, Meetup, as so on.

Learn What Works for You

Marketing and promoting your dance are critical for success, but they could become an endless time sink. It's important to figure out what works for you in the particular community you serve. What gives you the best return on your investment of time and money? Try different approaches, and then focus on what works for you.

10. *Further Details*

Setting Up the Space

Keep in mind that this is not about a DJ performance and is not a festival. While the DJ is the shaman leading the journey, it's not about people paying attention to or facing the DJ. The room setup and lighting should not overtly direct attention to the DJ. Encourage people to dance in all directions.

Pre-Dance Classes

These classes help set the space, and prepare dancers mentally and physically to enter into the sacred journey of dance.

A. Contact Improv - Encourages touch and physical connection in the dance

B. Yoga - Promotes flexibility and internal harmony before the dance

C. Facilitated Dance Class - (Soul Motion®, Dancing Freedom®, 5 Rhythms®, or Blues/Swing/Tango/Fusion) A chance to say a few words about how we can dance with each other, and the universal energies involved in our practice.

Community Circles

Circles can be used to talk about the Guidelines of Ecstatic Dance

- No Talking on the dance floor

- Dance However You Wish (and encourage them to really go for it)

- Respect Each Other's Space (Hands at Heart in "Namaste" to thank someone, or to politely end a dance.)

A. **Opening Circle** - Sometimes gathered with the Volunteers before the movement class, to set intentions and give thanks. Other times this a circle can be offered after the movement class, before the dance starts, though if you are stating guidelines, you may want to do so at the "Mid Circle", as many dancers arrive after the start of the music.

B. **Mid ("Opening") Circle** - This is often called the "Opening Circle", as it can be the first Circle, though it usually starts after 20-30 minutes of gentle music "warm-up". This can be a great way to connect with dancers, and state the guidelines, and offer an invocation. It does create a noticeable "break" in the flow of the dance, which some enjoy, and others find it challenging. (Big Island Ecstatic Dance always has this as their Opening Circle)

C. **Closing Circle** - This circle gathers after the music, or after a live music "sound healing" after the DJ set. Classically (on Big Island), "Names" are spoken (of everyone in the circle), then "Shareback" occurs (People sharing their experience during the dance (not a time for world musings, or invocations, but actual experiences during the dance), and finally "Community Announcements".

This last one can really drag on if not kept brief. It is great to know more about what people are doing in the world, and helps build community, but has a real danger of becoming a sales pitch to end an otherwise Sacred Journey. "Final Moments" can involve an OM, Moments of Silence, Ringing of a Bell, Giving Thanks, Sounding, Clapping, etc.

Sound Healing

Live music and or singing can be a wonderful way to end the Ecstatic Dance Journey. This is usually ambient music. Singing Bowls, didgeridoo, chimes, piano, or harp are common instruments for "sound healing".

11. Ask for Guidance

Ecstatic Dance Producers in other cities

Become Friends with your Piers in other cities, and ask what works for them!

Avani Tyler Blank

Tyler is the Director of this Ecstatic Dance Community NonProfit & the Producer of Ecstatic Dance Oakland (Weds), San Francisco, Fairfax, and Ecstatic Dance Retreat. He has 10 years of Experience with Ecstatic Dance, and would love to offer suggestions.

Email: Tyler@EcstaticDance.org

12. Please keep us updated so the Webpage can be current.

Email: info@EcstaticDance.org

Blessings on your Journey!

Thank You for Helping People to Dance & Move Freely!!

With Love,

Avani Tyler Blank

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