

## Diversity and Accessibility Working Group

### Improving Diversity and Accessibility in Shambhala

#### Summary

These recommendations for improving diversity and accessibility in Shambhala are comprehensive and multifaceted, reflecting the varied diversity issues and needs of diverse members of our Mandala.

This document is presented as a basis for further discussion and action. In this regard, some recommendations may not be relevant or appropriate for all areas of the mandala.

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#### Background

“We had as our guest the well-known Tibetan Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche . . . and we asked him what he thought of the tradition of Shambhala. To our astonishment, he replied very quietly, that although he had never been there, he believed in its existence and could see it in his mirror when he went into a certain state . . .

“That evening in our study he produced a small metal mirror of the Chinese type. After looking into it intently for some time, he began to describe what he saw . . . The most singular thing about the inhabitants of the city was that they were of all faiths, races, and nations, and appeared to come from the four corners of the earth.”

----Account of James George, *Searching for Shambhala*

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“It is not important to determine whether Shambhala is fact or fiction. Instead we should appreciate and emulate the ideal of an enlightened society that it represents.”

----Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior*

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“The point of the Buddhist teachings is transformation. It is a new way of looking at things. We can’t say, ‘I would like to study Buddhism and learn something interesting; but in the end I would like to remain the same person.’ Like anthropologists who go to Tibet to learn about the exotic habits of the Tibetan people . . . we might like to remain clean and stay removed. But in the process of the buddhadharma we are going to get our hands dirty. We could simply try to understand the principles and theories of Buddhism—but when we actually *practice* Buddhism, we have to be willing to change.”

----Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, *Taming the Mind*

There is a view held by many in Shambhala that they are not understood, not appreciated, and that they cannot fully participate in all aspects of Shambhala society because of some marker of difference they possess, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, income, physical/perceptual ability, language, geographical location, social stratum, political, social or religious views, opinion or beliefs—and that this reality hinders them and others

from realizing their aspiration for a life that is a genuine expression of Shambhala warriorship.

That this situation exists is evidenced by responses to surveys of Practitioners, Center Directors and members of the Mandala Governing Council. It is strongly recommended that the results of these surveys be read in their entirety so that these recommendations can be fully appreciated.

The results of these surveys are located on the Shambhala Congress Online website, under Diversity and Accessibility. In addition to the multiple-choice items, particular attention should be given to open-ended questions. In this regard, after reaching the survey results, click the “View” button next to “Total Respondents,” then change the “Page Size” to “Show 250 Per Page” to view responses to the open-ended questions. This should be done for each item with a “View” button, or you can request these responses from the Working Group Chair.

While these recommendations are a distillation of the responses we received from 345 Practitioner Survey respondents, 28 Center Director Survey respondents, and 7 Mandala Governing Council Survey respondents, they are also based on the deliberations of 10 Working Group Meetings, 2 Review Group Meetings, countless emails and other consultations with many sangha members.

*Recommendations for Improving Diversity and Accessibility in Shambhala* is not presented as “the answer” to all of the diversity issues faced by the Shambhala community. Rather, **this document is presented as a basis for further discussion and action by a community committed to being of benefit to all beings.**

Our consultations led us to the conclusion that the key to improving diversity and accessibility in Shambhala is the study of the Shambhala Buddhist teachings and the practice of meditation coupled with ongoing engagement with diversity issues, diverse people and cultures, diverse political, social and religious views, opinions, beliefs and the integration of all these experiences in our study and practice.

We believe this approach will help us to better *understand* and *appreciate* ourselves and different people, cultures, views and beliefs. As we open to experiencing the diversity of the world, new ways of seeing, feeling, thinking and being emerge that will *enable us to skillfully benefit a broader spectrum of people*—within Shambhala and the larger society.

To facilitate this process, we have developed recommendations that would embed diversity and accessibility into all aspects of our society and organization. We feel that Shambhala can clearly express its commitment to diversity and accessibility and its stated aim to help all sentient beings by addressing these issues in a comprehensive way.

We thank sangha members for inspiring and contributing to *Recommendations* and invite everyone to bring the light of dharma and meditation to discussions on diversity and accessibility issues, remembering that despite our tendency to want to deny or lay blame—

basic goodness is in the hearts of all of us. The challenge we face is to relate to these issues with open hearts.

#### DIVERSITY AND ACCESSIBILITY WORKING GROUP

The following persons participated in meetings of the Diversity and Accessibility Working Group, some with greater frequency than others and, in that way, have contributed to the development of these recommendations.

David Fraioli  
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Linda Watson  
Shawn Wheeler  
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## **Recommendations**

### **1. PROVIDE LEADERSHIP**

- We encourage the President and leaders at all levels of the Mandala to articulate at every possible setting that diversity and accessibility are priorities. Such leadership by the President, members of governing entities, center directors, acharyas, teachers and meditation instructors, guides and individual practitioners is central to our efforts to build a society in which we discover shared values and learn to understand and appreciate our differences. Without such leadership, indifference, misunderstanding, and our habitual cocoons regarding diversity and accessibility will hinder efforts to foster a genuinely inclusive society.
- We encourage the President to hire an organizational development consultant with expertise in diversity management to advise on implementation of recommendations contained in this report—as soon as this is financially feasible.
- We encourage the President to hire a Diversity and Accessibility Coordinator in the Office of the President to facilitate, coordinate and oversee diversity and accessibility initiatives—as soon as this is financially feasible.
- We encourage all governing boards to appoint a Diversity and Accessibility Coordinator to their group to coordinate and oversee diversity and accessibility initiatives of their entity.
- We encourage all members of governing bodies to serve as mentors to sangha members underrepresented in our community.

### **2. DEVELOP A DIVERSITY PLAN**

- We encourage the President to convene a Leadership Summit on Diversity and Accessibility for the purpose of developing a Statement of Commitment to Diversity and Accessibility as well as Diversity and Accessibility Goals and Action Plans for realizing a more diverse society with accessible facilities.
- We encourage the President to conduct a Census of Shambhala to determine the composition and needs of our society with respect to diversity and accessibility.

- We encourage the President to publish an annual report on the status of diversity and accessibility in Shambhala, including summaries and analyses of diversity and accessibility initiatives that have been undertaken and are planned.

### **3. MAKE FACILITIES ACCESSIBLE**

- We encourage the President to create a seat on the Mandala Governing Council for an Accessibility Coordinator and to select a physically or perceptually challenged person who has worked to promote accessibility to fill the position.
- We encourage the President to establish an Accessibility Board in the Office of the President consisting of Center directors and chaired by the Accessibility Coordinator to:
  - Develop Mandala-wide accessibility standards for Shambhala facilities that address these areas: Site location, parking, accessible routes, ground and floor surfaces, entrances, stairways, ramps, handrails, elevators, doors, hallways, program space, dining and sleeping areas, telephones, toilet and showers, facilities, signage, detectable warnings, alarms, assistive listening devices, environmental sensitivities, and website accessibility.
  - Conduct annual accessibility audits of Centers, certify Centers that are fully accessible and announce their certification throughout Shambhala.
  - Identify Centers where the removal of barriers to access is desired and readily achievable and provide such Centers with technical and financial assistance to make them accessible and useable by people with disabilities.
  - Develop a pamphlet, for distribution to all Centers that explains how to plan seminary, dathun, Shambhala Training weekends and assemblies to accommodate the needs of persons who are physically or perceptually challenged.
  - Coordinate forums to discuss the needs of aging sangha members for fully accessible facilities.
  - Identify people in the community who are physically or perceptually challenged and ask them for suggestions on ways that we can make facilities and programs accessible to them.
- We encourage the Office of Practice and Education to develop programs for people who are house bound, including correspondence programs, taped programs, and web broadcast programs.

- We encourage the Mandala Governing Council and Centers to make Shambhala websites accessible to people who are blind, hard of hearing or deaf.
- We encourage Centers to provide alternative and augmentative modes of presenting the teachings (such as, amplification, signer translators, large font chant books).
- We encourage Centers to consult with persons who have expertise in the area of creating socio-technical environments that support people with sight, hearing and physical impairments (such as sangha member Stefan Carmien). (Article: [http://svconline.com/mag/avinstall\\_sound\\_silence/index.html](http://svconline.com/mag/avinstall_sound_silence/index.html); Profile: <http://l3d.cs.colorado.edu/~carmien>).

#### **4. PROMOTE LANGUAGE DIVERSITY**

- We encourage the Mandala Governing Council and Centers that are located in communities with multi-language populations to develop multi-language Shambhala websites with alternative texts/voice for people who are not proficient in English.
- We encourage the Mandala Governing Council to develop and distribute to Centers a directory of all translation committees as well as persons who are bilingual and who have language translation and interpretation skills [including Sign Language] and are qualified and available to teach and lead programs in another language and provide sign language interpretation when needed—including committees and persons in Asia, North America, Oceania, South America, as well as Europe.
- We encourage the Mandala Governing Council and Centers to give consideration to the nuances of geography, including seasons and time zones, when preparing program announcements for a Mandala wide-audience, and to promulgate awareness of the time needed to translate into other languages important announcements made by Shambhala International, especially those pertaining to practices to be done by the entire sangha.

#### **5. CREATE MULTICULTURAL INTERIOR ENVIRONMENTS**

- We encourage the Mandala leadership to develop a “Statement of Commitment to Diversity and Accessibility” and to translate it into all Mandala languages and to post it at the entrance to Center buildings.
- We encourage Centers to add warmth to interior spaces by making greater use of music, paintings, photographs, drawings, sculptures and artifacts that reflect the cultural heritage of people underrepresented in our community.
- We recommend that each Center establish an exhibit displaying portraits of those who Center members feel have exemplified [in significant ways] attributes of Shambhala warriorship. One example might be a “Wall of Warriors.” The exhibit might reflect geographical, racial and ethnic diversity as well as a gender balance.
- We encourage Centers to serve ethnic and regional foods at dathuns, seminars, assemblies, Shambhala Training levels, open house and other public programs.
- We encourage Centers to conspicuously display other language dharma books, announcements, magazines in Centers.

## **6. DIVERSIFY SHAMBHALA’S PUBLIC IMAGE**

- We encourage the Mandala Governing Council and Centers to place photographs showing diversity in Shambhala on their websites. The photos could show people of different races, nationalities, gender, age, physical or perceptual ability, and include families with children, but would not give a false impression of the actual diversity of the Mandala or a particular Center.
- We encourage the Mandala Governing Council to develop a diversity theme statement, for example: “A community where all people are welcomed regardless of background, views, opinions and beliefs” and conspicuously display it in Center facilities, on websites, in advertisements and publications.
- We encourage all Mandala entities, including Centers, to market/advertise programs to diverse audiences.
- We encourage *The Dot* and other news and information services to make a concerted effort to identify and publicize noteworthy activities in which Centers and sangha members are involved with groups underrepresented in our community.



- We encourage *The Dot* and other news and information services to publicize stories on the backgrounds, activities and attainments of sangha members underrepresented in our community.
- We encourage *The Dot* and other news and information services to publicize programs in communities and outlets where persons underrepresented in our community are most likely to be found.
- We encourage *The Dot* and other news and information services to include articles written in the French, German and Spanish language.

## 7. MAKE PROGRAMS AFFORDABLE

**We have the following recommendations toward making programs more affordable:**

- Encourage Nalanda Gate Heads to hold community forums where members can explore their experience with money and personal financial management.
- At local Centers, form benefactor groups that make modest contributions to assist sangha members in financial need to attend dathuns, seminary and assemblies.
- At local and retreat Centers, develop programs that include a wide range of prices, for example, free-book study groups, discussion groups, and other events in addition to larger and more costly teacher-led events.
- Explore the feasibility of getting institutions such as Ashoka Credit Union to establish dathun, seminary and assembly accounts into which sangha members can make monthly contributions.
- Explore the feasibility of getting institutions such as Ashoka Credit Union to make loans repayable on installment to members who demonstrate financial need to attend dathun, seminary and assemblies, perhaps by having a co-signer who is a member of the Center.
- Encourage members who plan to attend seminary and dathuns to establish accounts at institutions such as Ashoka Credit Union.
- Promote open communication about efforts to make programs affordable by publishing annually the total amount of financial assistance awarded by Centers, the amount of assistance as a percentage of income, and the number of persons receiving assistance.

- Promote significant reduction in programs costs for students whose travel to programs cause them undue financial difficulties.

## **8. DIVERSIFY GOVERNING BOARDS**

- We encourage all governing boards of entities in the Mandala to include sangha members from groups underrepresented in our society on their boards. If there are no such persons available in the sangha to join the board [especially for Centers in the United States that are located in cities that are populated predominately by people of African, South American and Asian ancestry], we recommend that Centers go outside their membership to find such persons to join their governing body. This should be done with all deliberate speed.
- We encourage all entities in the Mandala to make a concerted effort to hire persons from backgrounds underrepresented in the Mandala and to make every effort to retain those currently employed in paid service.

## **9. INTEGRATE DIVERSITY INTO PROGRAMS**

- We encourage the Office of Practice and Education to involve the Diversity and Accessibility Working Group in exploring ways to address/integrate diversity issues into Shambhala programs, for example the Shambhala School of Buddhist Studies; seminars; assemblies; and director, MI, guide training.
- We encourage the Office of Practice and Education to explore the possibilities for developing contemplative practices and exercises that help us to explore our experience of diversity and accessibility.
- We encourage the Office of Practice and Education to ensure that all directors of Shambhala Training and Warrior Assemblies have a basic understanding and sensitivity to the complexities and nuances of racial, ethnic, gender and sexual orientation issues and an ability to explain aspects of the verbal and visual iconography within Shambhala which people of color, woman, gay, lesbian and transgender people might find confusing or offensive.
- We encourage the Office of Practice and Education to direct Shambhala teachers to refrain from presenting their personal political or social views as the “the official position of Shambhala” or making program participants feel excluded or ostracized because of their views, opinions or beliefs.

- We encourage the local Centers to identify teachers and meditation instructors who are from groups underrepresented in our community and encourage them to take on more teaching roles in local Center and Mandala programs. Particular effort should be made to identify people of African, Latin American, and Asian ancestry; gay, lesbian and transgender people; and people who are physically or perceptually challenged.
- We encourage sangha members who are underrepresented in our community to support Mandala efforts to improve diversity and accessibility by assuming visible roles in Centers, including regularly participating in community forums, Open House and other public programs in roles where they can interact with program attendees and participants.

## **10. PROVIDE DIVERSITY TRAINING**

- We encourage the Mandala Governing Council to establish a Diversity Training Institute to help sangha members to:
  - Recognize and unlearn biases we have toward people of different races, gender, sexual orientation, age, class, language, religious, and physical/perceptual ability; persons with mental/psychological conditions as well as persons who have different political, social or religious views, opinions and beliefs.
  - Explore the content of cultural and group differences, with particular attention to power, resources, and our notions about what is “right and beautiful.”
  - Acknowledge and value our own cultural background and recognize the particular dynamics found within different cultural groups.
  - Encourage regular contact with people and groups that are different from us and the groups to which we belong.
  - Facilitate group discussions as well as coordinate and lead activities that aim to improve diversity and accessibility.
- We encourage all governing board members, Center directors, acharyas, diversity and accessibility coordinators and other leaders of entities and groups in the Mandala to participate in diversity training at the Shambhala Diversity Training Institute.

- We encourage Centers to hold community forums to discuss diversity issues, and to invite speakers from backgrounds that are underrepresented in the Center to talk on the topic of diversity or accessibility. In addition we encourage all Centers to distribute and discuss Dan Hessey's treatise *Notes on Diversity and Accessibility*.
- We encourage the Centers to support efforts to develop dharma programs that are targeted to people who are underrepresented in the Shambhala community, including children; young adults; women; gay, lesbian and transgender people; Hispanics and Latinos; francophones; people of African or Asian ancestry and so forth.
- We encourage the Mandala Governing Council to establish a Mandala Exchange Program that provides Shambhala practitioners, teachers and leaders opportunities to: (a) work, study and practice at Centers in other countries; (b) explore the history, culture and ethnic diversity of other sangha communities as well as different political and social views and (c) build common values and understanding. We especially urge the use of this program to assist in the development of Shambhala Groups in Africa, Asia and Oceania and the exploration of cultures on those continents/islands.
- We encourage Centers and groups to designate each calendar month for the members to celebrate the culture and contributions of different people, including people of African, European, Asian and American ancestry, gays and lesbians, children, women, physically and perceptually challenged persons, as well as persons with psychological conditions. We encourage children and teenagers to participate in these festive Center celebrations.

## **11. ENGAGE IN DIVERSITY PRACTICE**

- We encourage Centers and individual sangha members to create liaisons, partnerships and collaborations with the institutions such as prisons, mental health centers, hospitals, senior citizen centers and schools as well as with racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious groups and organizations whose members and customers are persons underrepresented in our society. These should be authentic engagements that are completely community service oriented—aimed solely at understanding and helping these organizations accomplish *their* agendas.
- We encourage individual sangha members, as part of their deepening on the Shambhala Buddhist path, to engage genuinely with people unlike themselves so

as to better understand the experiences and needs of others, provided such actions do not involve forcing views on others, creating discord, or causing harm to others.

- We encourage sangha members who are underrepresented at their Centers to establish alliances and to network with individuals in other Centers and dharma groups who are from their background.
- We encourage Centers to invite groups whose members are underrepresented in Shambhala to participate in our programs [for example, Buddhist groups whose membership is predominately black, Latino, Asian, gay, lesbian and transgender].
- We encourage Centers and sangha members to patronize businesses, restaurants, cafés and stores that are owned by people underrepresented in our community.
- We encourage sangha members to attend cultural, social, athletic, religious, political and educational events that are sponsored by and attended predominately by people underrepresented in our community.
- We encourage sangha members to invite other sangha members underrepresented in our community to their homes and to social gatherings that they attend.

## **12. PROMOTE INTELLECTUAL AND POLITICAL DIVERSITY**

- We encourage members at all levels of the Mandala to adhere to the principles of openness and basic goodness in all communication, including discussions that take place in on-line forums and as part of programs as well as more informal settings. The issue here is not to suppress genuine debate and discussion on any aspect of life, but rather to conduct such exchanges with a view to opening up, rather than closing down, the open heart of Shambhala.

Our contemplative tradition must remain open to all: soldiers and pacifists, monarchists and anarchists, capitalists and socialists, republicans and democrats. No one should be excluded from the richness of our situation and no one should have grounds to feel they are excluded or ostracized on the basis of their views, opinions or beliefs.

## **13. ESTABLISH PROGRAMS FOR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN**

- We encourage Centers to offer meditation programs for families and children, such as Family Meditative Arts workshops held by Kerry Lee MacLean ([www.kerryleemaclean.com](http://www.kerryleemaclean.com)).
- We encourage Centers to encourage families to join our community.
- We encourage Centers to provide an area where young children can play under adult supervision, allowing their parents to participate in programs.
- We encourage Centers to identify sangha members who are available to provide supervision to young children and to establish a babysitting Rota for weekly sitting meditation sessions.
- We encourage Centers to involve children in Center activities such as program set-ups and take downs, preparing ikebana arrangements, program registration, and mailing parties, etc.
- We encourage Centers to hold “Children’s Day” celebrations.