

Reaching Out to Diverse Populations

There is no one way to develop and sustain outreach programs to diverse populations—although the Vidyadhara, Chogyam Trungpa’s approach is certainly exemplary. His openness to those who were different from him, his willingness to express the dharma in terms they could understand, and his commitment to making the teachings available to all are worthy of emulation. If you take “take a leap” in imagining ways to reach out to diverse populations, you might find the following suggestions helpful as you venture into this exciting new terrain.

1. Hold either a community or leadership council meeting to discuss your Center’s mission and how it relates to outreach to diverse populations.
2. Select a group that is underrepresented at the Center as the population on which to focus the Center’s outreach efforts.
3. Assess and develop the cultural competence of Center members to work with the population, in consultation with sangha members or persons in the greater community who belong to or are involved with the population.
4. Identify a service or program the Center can offer that would be affordable to members of the population.
5. Determine what service or program the Center can offer that would be affordable to members of the population and would be appropriate given the resources of your Center.
6. Distribute a description of the proposed outreach to Center leadership and members for feedback and approval.
7. Recruit sangha members with a connection to the population to help present and market the Center’s outreach initiative to the population and to help provide the outreach service.
8. Encourage sangha members to bring principles of openness, fearlessness and gentleness to their involvement in the outreach initiative and to look at and talk about their diversity experience.
9. Acknowledge outreach objectives that are/are not being met and consider other ways for the Center to benefit the population.
10. Share outreach experiences with The Dot, center directors, outreach coordinators and sangha members who are working to promote diversity and accessibility around the mandala.

In the end, your leadership will influence the steps your Center actually takes, as well as the amount of time that is needed to bring the outreach initiative to fruition. Without you, the guidance and support needed by Center members may be lacking. With direction and commitment, we will be well on our way to realizing enlightened society as envisioned by Chogyam Trungpa.