

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Spirit Rock: Lessons and Guiding Framework

Developed by Spirit Rock's Diversity Working Committee and unanimously approved by Spirit Rock's Board of Directors on March 16, 2016

PART I: Lessons

After decades of work around diversity at Spirit Rock, patterns of institutional racism persist. We have made important gains that have allowed many people of color and other practitioners from diverse backgrounds to view Spirit Rock as their spiritual home. However, it is critical for us to reflect on and understand what has not worked, on a systemic level. Turning towards this fully will allow us to be intentional about addressing our challenges in a meaningful way as we move forward, rather than gravitating towards quick fixes. We are committed to deepening our own learning and sharing these lessons with our entire community. We are also committed to taking initiative as proactive leaders and using these lessons as a foundation for the work that lies ahead.

1. **CENTRALITY:** Our equity work at Spirit Rock is not elective, but central to all leaders and bodies, and needs to be a shared responsibility throughout the organization. Equity, diversity and inclusion are integral aspects of our living dharma. Unless we institutionalize, embrace, and embody shared values around diversity, equity and inclusion in all aspects of our culture and our work, the default will be to perpetuate the patterns of institutionalized racism and other "isms" that are dominant in society. While the issues of institutionalized racism have surfaced most prominently in our teaching work, these issues must not be viewed as particular only to the teachers, but as a reflection of a broader institutional challenge.

2. **ACCOUNTABILITY:** Accountability is essential for our work to match our intentions. Our structures and practices have lacked accountability in the following areas:

- Our culture has been conflict-averse. In the interests of harmony, we have often avoided

difficult discussions. Harmony should not mean withholding criticisms or shying away from conflict. Rather, this breeds disharmony, particularly when unhealthy power dynamics are involved and people of color and other historically marginalized groups are mistreated.

- Spirit Rock has had a non-traditional governance structure, which has lacked consistent effectiveness and allowed informal power centers to operate without accountability. There has been a lack of clarity about where power, and thus accountability, reside. There is a need to
- bring structural transparency to our decision-making processes.
- As individuals, we have not held ourselves or each other accountable for developing, using, and taking leadership around a race/equity lens. Institutionally, we have not established processes or practices for holding each other accountable through this lens.

3. **POWER:** Power dynamics have operated in a way that has held a historic group of predominantly white leaders in power and made it difficult for people of color and others who have been historically marginalized to be full partners in our work. To transform this power structure imbalance requires that we be aware of formal and informal power structures, so that we can break down patterns of exclusion. We must also steer away from a pattern of prolonged processing, or the equally harmful pattern of non-reactive passive silence, that delays effective action and ultimately undermines our collective power. The governance structure has not clearly given appropriate positional power to a person or group; we must clarify the governance structure, empower leadership and hold leadership accountable.

4. **TEACHERS AS PART OF INSTITUTION:** Teacher issues are not teacher issues alone; they are institutional. The work of teachers is central to our collective work as an institution and community. It is important to ensure that the actions of teachers are consistent with our institutional commitments, accountable to our values, and governed by our Board.

5. **SPIRITUAL BYPASS:** While acknowledging our global connectedness, it is also important to acknowledge that there are different historical and current realities that impact the lives of people of color. Spiritual bypass is using the teachings to go around a problem or painful issue rather than going through the issue to understand how to solve it. Spiritual bypass can lead us to ignore or downplay differences that are important to see and appreciate. It is akin to a color

blind approach, which perpetuates racism by failing to acknowledge it, and devalues our differences based on culture, history, and lived experience. Spiritual bypass can also occur when we ask for forgiveness for harms done without reflection and dialogue needed to understand the impact of our actions and respond appropriately.

6. RACISM: It is important to name and understand patterns of racism and other forms of oppression in order to build equity in our community and institutions. This awareness includes understanding oppression as a system that operates within our institutions and is perpetuated by individual behaviors, both by commission and omission.

PART II: Values and Principles

Shared values and principles are crucial for grounding us as a community in a shared understanding of our commitment related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

We are part of a diverse community and world. We recognize that diversity practice and dharma practice are not separate. We recognize and value both our global connectedness and our differences. In this context, we commit to being an institution and community that embodies:

- Diversity – acknowledging and valuing difference based on race, sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, age, class, wealth, education, background, opinions, experience, and other social and economic differences.
- Equity – creating a level playing field so that there is equal access for all.
- Inclusion – creating an environment that is inclusive and welcoming of people from diverse social groups, allowing us to awaken together.
- Cultural humility – recognizing that there is a great deal we do not know will enable us to learn, listen and hear a multiplicity of voices, with beginner's mind.

In our practice we will be grounded in the following values:

- Ongoing learning and reflection as a community and a sangha.
- Using conflict as a source of learning and growth.
- Courage to be truthful and to have difficult conversations, as a form of wise speech.

- Compassion to turn towards suffering caused by unconsciousness, rather than turning away from it, as part of our commitment to non-harming.
- Balanced transparency that both respects the confidentiality that protects tenderness and injury, and dispels the secrecy that shields unexamined and non-accountable power.
- Skillful action through the implementation of all factors of the Eightfold Path.
- Commitment to community well being, which will require some to give up personal power and privilege, as part of our understanding of interdependence.
- Accountability for practicing our equity values and principles and for understanding and addressing negative impacts.
- Clarity around roles and responsibilities, power, decision-making authority and accountability.
- Responsibility for impact as well as intent.

PART III: Goals

We envision the work around diversity, equity and inclusion to be an ongoing process that involves some immediate actions and changes as well as others that will unfold over a period of time. The following are our overarching goals for the process. These goals provide a big picture to give cohesion to our actions and place them in a context of institution-wide change.

Please note: the goals are grouped into eight organizational domains, and there is some overlap among goals in different domains that will be clarified in the subsequent action plan that supports the goals.

Organizational Values and Assumptions

1. Develop shared understanding and commit to living Spirit Rock's values and principles related to DEI within our dharma mission.

Programs and Services

2. Continue the development and evolution of practice for diverse communities from their entry and introduction to dharma practice, through their paths of deepening practice, into their involvements with multi-year programs, community leadership development and – crucially –

teacher training.

3. Proactively develop teachers of color and others from diverse backgrounds that reflect the multiplicity of experiences in our broader community.
4. Engage in healthy exchange with, and in support of local, diverse sanghas.
5. Develop and prioritize programs that appeal to and are welcoming of diverse communities, including programs created and led by diverse teachers.

Communication and Organizational Culture

6. Develop a culture of open communication where DEI conversations are ongoing, feedback is welcome, and conflict is appreciated as an opportunity for growth.
7. Learn and practice agreements and skills for multicultural communication and conflict resolution.
8. Develop and institutionalize a practice of ongoing discussion and inquiry regarding race, bias, and unconsciousness, among teachers, staff, board, and board committees.

Policies, Procedures and Governance

9. Develop an effective, transparent governance structure that supports accountable action and empowered leadership.
10. Acknowledge and transform informal power structures to increase accountability.
11. Require diverse and inclusive retreat teaching teams by establishing a time frame and protocol for multi-person teams to consistently diversify and include teachers of color.

Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

12. Develop mechanisms for feedback and accountability related to DEI goals for teachers, staff, board and board committees, and hold individuals and groups accountable for microaggressions, unconscious racism, and unintended impact at personal and interpersonal levels, as well as acknowledge, affirm, and appreciate successes and accomplishments towards DEI goals.
13. Regularly review progress on implementation of this DEI plan at Board of Directors and Board committee levels, to assure that we are achieving not just the letter but also the intent

and operational expression of our DEI goals.

14. Ensure the Diversity Working Committee provides ongoing direction for DEI efforts.

People Development and Training

15. Develop and meet goals for diversity of staff, teachers, board, and board committees, through strategies such as a more flexible work culture or satellite offices in urban areas.

16. Commit to ongoing learning and training for teachers, staff, board, and board committees related to DEI.

Community Engagement

17. Establish ongoing, open communication and engagement with diverse communities in our DEI commitment, values, learning, and activities, and foster exploration of broader community engagement.

Organizational Resources and Infrastructure

18. Develop annual budgets to fund implementation of DEI goals, particularly in support of teachers and practitioners of color.

19. Develop governance structures that support and further these DEI goals.

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