

IMS's Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion – Our Work and Aspirations August 2016

Overview and Vision

Because racism has been woven into the social, political, legal and economic institutions of the US, it is a deeply rooted form of oppression in our society. IMS recognizes this, and also acknowledges our own institutional racism.

We are therefore committed to dismantling racism and embodying a diverse perspective in every part of our organization.

In 2007, we adopted our first diversity vision to guide our efforts. Today it reads:

In offering a spiritual refuge for awakening, IMS is committed to cultivating a community that reflects the diversity of our society and our world. We believe that all members benefit from diversity, as a wide range of human experiences and viewpoints broadens and enriches the understanding of all. We seek to promote the inclusion, equity and participation of people of diverse identities, including those of all races, genders, ethnicities, cultures, sexual orientations, gender identities, classes, religions, abilities and ages, that all may feel welcome, safe and respected within this community.

Our Work

IMS's diversity and inclusion work over the last decade has been Board-led. We have been guided by the framework for becoming an anti-racist multicultural institution¹. This continuum details the growth and analysis needed at each stage of an organization's journey to becoming truly inclusive.

In addition, we've been guided in our work by thoughtful and direct feedback from our community. We realize that as we proceed along the path toward greater diversity and inclusion, mistakes are inevitable. We are committed to learning from our missteps and initiating changes, both at the individual and institutional level, to prevent their reoccurrence.

IMS's early efforts focused on increasing individual and collective understanding of racism, white privilege, and how these manifest in us, our organization and our communities. We are now at the point in our journey where we are building greater competency and analyzing power structures, policies and cultural assumptions to better align them with our diversity vision.

We are humbled that it has taken us years to get to this point. This document summarizes our accomplishments and ongoing work, as well as the actions we are committed to undertaking going forward.

We knew from the beginning that to truly commit to this work, we needed to increase the number of people of color (POC) serving on and leading our Board of Directors. Currently, six of our 18 Board members identify as people of color, and four as LGBTIQ.

¹ "Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization," published by Crossroads Ministry: Adapted in 2007 by Joseph Barndt

Elevating the importance of diversity and inclusion, the Board formed a specific Diversity Committee in 2012, composed of Board and staff members. In 2012, the Board approved the Committee's first Diversity Action Plan, and by June 2015, IMS had completed 40 of its 50 actions, providing the foundation for developing our next strategy.

The current Diversity Action Plan focuses our efforts across three areas – deepening awareness, building competency, and removing barriers. The following highlights our ongoing work:

Deepening awareness – We are committed to cultivating an understanding of how all forms of oppression, especially racism, permeate our lives and organization.

1. IMS invested \$63,000 between 2012-2015 to fund diversity and inclusion workshops and trainings, led by internal and external consultants, and attended by Board members, teachers and staff. These were designed to build greater awareness of white privilege, microaggressions, internalized racial oppression, homophobia, gender identity and bias, as well as other prejudices, and how they manifest in our actions and speech.
2. IMS has actively recruited a POC presence on the Board, and our important Guiding Teacher Committee.
3. IMS's Board dedicates one hour at each of its day-long meetings, plus one full day each year to diversity discussions.
4. Staff members participate in monthly diversity and inclusion discussion groups, with external speakers and consultants brought in from time to time.
5. Staff members who attend external trainings share their insights and lessons learned with their colleagues.
6. A multitude of resources is made available to staff via the staff library and via the staff's computer network.
7. The Guiding Teachers provide a variety of resources and information on racism and gender issues to IMS's faculty – including the book *Waking Up White*, which was sent in 2016 to all core and visiting teachers and assistants.
8. The Diversity Committee conducts an annual one-day meeting, in addition to regular shorter meetings throughout the year, to explore new resources and further the diversity vision.
9. An article on diversity and inclusion is included in each issue of our internal e-bulletin and our e-publication *Sangha News*, sent to our wider community.

Building competency – Becoming skillful in welcoming and supporting all who come to IMS, as well as teaching a diverse and multicultural community of retreatants, are essential to our progress. We regularly:

- Engage in personal conversations with our POC and LGBTIQ retreatants, teachers and Board members, so the organization can learn from and deepen the capacity to respond to feedback.
- Distribute and review retreatants' post-course evaluations and diversity surveys.
- Conduct staff trainings, including role-playing, based on case studies on microaggressions, white privilege, and welcoming POC and transgender/queer retreatants and teachers to our centers.

Removing barriers – The third aspect involves transmuting what we've learned into action.

- Creating leadership
 - Our Guiding Teachers expanded the Guiding Teacher Committee to increase opportunities for newer and POC teachers.
 - They also revised the criteria for becoming a Guiding Teacher, making it possible for people who have less than 10 years' teaching experience at IMS to join the Committee.
- Reducing the financial burden

- Since 2013, we've provided \$213,000 in financial assistance to support regular and longer-term practice of POC retreatants at both the Retreat Center and Forest Refuge.
- Starting in 2016, we increased travel reimbursement for POC teaching trainees, reducing their financial burden.
- Since 2006, IMS has spent approximately \$4,000 each year on providing transportation between IMS and New York City for our People of Color Retreat participants.
- Diversity and inclusion is part of IMS's 40th anniversary appeal, with its focus of expanding access to *all*. We are raising funds so that retreatants and teachers of all identities, backgrounds and abilities feel a greater sense of welcome.
- Increasing awareness throughout our community
 - We're developing ongoing web and social media content that brings broader awareness to our diversity goals, and expresses our commitment to creating a more diverse and inclusive refuge.
 - We factor diversity into the recruitment of new staff, Board members and volunteers, as well as into the development of our teaching faculty.

The Next Stage of Our Work

Based on what we've learned to date and ongoing discussions, IMS's Board has approved the following additions to our current Diversity Action Plan.

Teachers – IMS believes it is vital that everyone who teaches at our centers 1) understands the importance of our diversity and inclusion work, and 2) actively develops greater awareness and the necessary skills to offer the teachings, so they align and resonate with the experiences of our POC and LGBTIQ community.

The Guiding Teachers, who are responsible for the quality and integrity of the teaching at IMS, are committed to leading by example and encouraging other teachers to undertake their own diversity and inclusion education, availing themselves of the resources provided.

The Guiding Teachers will work with the Executive Director and Diversity Committee to:

1. Communicate to all IMS teachers our commitment to diversity and inclusion, and encourage them to join us in our diversity work.
2. Increase the number of POC teachers, and the multicultural competence of white teachers, in order to provide a more welcoming, safe and inclusive environment for POC retreatants.
3. Provide training resources and opportunities for all IMS teachers in the areas of diversity and multicultural competence.
4. Develop materials for monastic teachers and teachers from outside the US that describe our diversity and inclusion work within the context of racism in the US, and its relationship to colonialism and global racism.
5. Establish expectations for all teachers regarding skillfulness in teaching and supporting a multicultural community of meditators. Educate and orient all IMS teachers to align with the values and missions of IMS's diversity initiatives.
6. Explore and develop a process that offers teachers feedback related to diversity issues that arise during their retreats and how to respond to concerns raised by retreatants or staff.
7. Change policies to make our retreats more accessible to all; for example, explore reserving a percentage of Retreat Center registrations and of Retreat Center and Forest Refuge lottery spaces for POC, until sometime prior to the retreat.
8. Encourage mentoring relationships between lead teachers and trainees and newer teachers, especially POC.

9. Publicize information about the Guiding Teacher role and the process to become an IMS Guiding Teacher, retreat teacher and teacher trainee.

Organizational management and leadership –To ensure that our organizational culture and systems align with our diversity vision, our management, staff and Board are committed to:

1. Establishing a relationship with a diversity consultant who can help us learn how racism is manifesting in our meetings and other workplace situations, and help us hold ourselves accountable.
2. Establishing relationships with our POC faculty who agree to be available to support POC teachers-in-training during a specific retreat, when there isn't another POC teacher on the team.
3. Developing resources for staff and teachers that make visible the contributions of POC leaders within the dharma community and society at large.
4. Developing resources for our retreatants about diversity and inclusion, including potential microaggressions that can arise during silent retreats.
5. Making our resources more accessible on our website by redesigning the diversity section; and providing a history and scope of our diversity and inclusion work.
6. Bringing core volunteers into our diversity trainings, and making resources available to them for their own development.
7. Soliciting funding for supplemental dana to support adding more POC assistants and trainees to teaching teams.
8. Sharing more frequent updates on our diversity and inclusion work through social media.
9. Incorporating regular updates related to Guiding Teacher meetings into Board minutes, and supporting the Guiding Teachers' commitment to asking for Board feedback about potential new Guiding Teachers.

Commitment Going Forward

Over these past nine years, IMS's Board and staff have developed an increased awareness of racism in the US, and have a greater multicultural competency at an individual level. While these have been essential steps, the next layer of the change process requires an honest analysis of power and privilege; recognition of the dominant white culture of our organization and the impact of this on POC; the courage to see the inherent tendency to resist change; and to examine what needs to change in order to realize the genuine diversity and inclusivity of an anti-racist organization.

IMS is committed to our mission of offering a spiritual refuge to *all*. While our diversity and inclusion work may be painful and challenging, we are not turning away from what is called for at this time.
