

Common Ground Meditation Center Community Groups

Reflections for Prospective Facilitators (and Community Group Members?)

“Sangha is the society, or the community of virtuous ones, those who are practicing, who are using wisdom, who are contemplating the truth. When you take refuge in Sangha, you are no longer taking refuge in your personality or your individual abilities, but in something greater than that. Sangha is communal, where our personalities are no longer terribly important. Whether you’re a man or a woman, young or old, educated or uneducated, or whatever, these are no longer the important things in Sangha. The Sangha is those who practice, those who live in the right way, those who are contemplating truth and using wisdom.

When you take refuge in Sangha, it means that you are willing to give up personal qualities and demands and expectations as an individual person. You give these things up for the welfare of the Sangha, those who are practicing, moving toward the truth, realizing truth.” The Mind and the Way, Ajahn Sumedho, pp. 33-34.

From the Buddha on down to our teachers today, all have extolled the value of spiritual community and friendship in helping us develop, maintain and deepen our practice. Community Groups (sometimes referred to as Kalayana Mitta Groups) is the general name given to refer to a diverse collection of formal and informal practice opportunities sponsored by Common Ground Meditation Center. Community Groups are led by experienced community members who act as volunteer facilitators. These facilitators are supervised by Shelly Graf and Mark Nunberg. Shelly and Mark have developed guidelines for these groups and will provide on-going support and training for facilitators and group members. If you have any questions we encourage you to contact Shelly or Mark.

Shelly and Mark would like to hear from anyone interested in starting a community group. Group founders and facilitators are approved by Shelly and Mark. Founders and facilitators will be selected according to the length and depth of their practice and their skill with the particular theme of the practice group.

Group Options

There is a wide range of possibilities for community groups. Some may be as simple as people coming together to discuss their understanding and practice of the teachings. Some groups will share a topic such as mindful relationships, mindful grieving, study a particular book, or discuss the contents from Common Ground programs. Other groups will be organized around a shared interest, activity, or identity. Some groups may have a formal structure or expectations, while others will be rather informal. We trust that groups will arise organically as people come forward

to express their interests and needs.

Reflections for Shared Topic/Interest Groups:

The following reflections apply mainly to shared topic groups, or groups with a special emphasis or theme. Having clarity about the purpose, size and format of these special topic or interest groups will help avoid confusion. Each group is free to set its own criteria.

(1) Group Focus: What is the proposed group focus? A specific topic, a book, a shared interest or activity? Or will this be a general practice group? What will the group be called? How do you visualize this group supporting the group members' practice?

(2) Membership Criteria: Some groups have membership criteria to ensure that all members of the group share interest or experience. As a group evolves, these requirements may be amended based on the group experience or group decision.

(3) Group Structure and Format:

We recommend that at the outset there be an understanding or commitment between the group members and the facilitators regarding participation and behavior in the group. The role of the facilitators will depend upon the nature of the group.

(a) Size: Will there be a set minimum or maximum number of members, or will it be a drop-in group?

(b) Frequency of Meetings: How often will the group meet? One common choice is every other week, because it is frequent enough to develop intimacy without being overly burdensome.

(c) Location of Meetings: Where will the groups meet? (possibilities include: facilitators' homes only; rotating to all member homes; CG or a public place)

(d) Meeting Format: What is the main emphasis of the meeting-- is it social, formal study, meditation, personal sharing or a combination?

Should the members make a commitment to attend or will it be drop-in? If there is a commitment, for how long? When and how will you add new members if at all? (There are concerns about interrupting the intimacy that has developed between members in a committed group.)

How will each meeting be run and who will facilitate the meeting? **We strongly urge that most groups have at least two facilitators.** The facilitators are expected to take turns leading the meetings from one meeting to the next. We feel this accomplishes two desirable goals.

First, the facilitator not leading has a better chance to observe and reflect on the role of facilitating. The facilitators can discuss among themselves what seems to work and what doesn't work. Second, the members of the group won't be inclined to depend on an individual facilitator as much and can more freely contribute their ideas, questions and comments as an equal member of the group. Support and training for facilitators will be available through the Center.

If you are interested in starting a Community Group please feel free to contact Shelly or Mark with your questions or ideas:

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Appendix

Sample Group Format*

1. Opening sit (20-30 minutes)
2. Group go-round/check-in
3. Group discussion/personal sharing
4. Brief discussion of meeting process before closing
5. Closing sit, chant, or lovingkindness meditation

*This format is suggested by Spirit Rock Meditation Center, in the San Francisco Bay Area. Spirit Rock has supported community groups for decades. At Spirit Rock they are called Dharma Friends Groups. For more ideas and information about community groups, you may wish to visit their webpage on Community Groups at <https://www.spiritrock.org/kalyana-mitta-guidelines>