

Creating Our Future: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

On June 28, 2020, IAYT hosted its first Virtual Town Hall on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). For many months prior to the COVID-19 pandemic resulting in the cancellation of this year's SYTAR, work had been under way to offer a special Common Interest Community on DEI under the leadership of Matra (Raj) Majmundar, president of the IAYT board of directors. With sheltering in place, our virtual work became a platform for connection and engagement from Zoom classes to Google meetups. It became clear that we could offer a place for our membership to talk about what DEI means and why it is critical to fostering a pro-diversity mindset.

The work of yoga and our own self-study, *svadhyaya*, requires us to learn from the past. With clarity, IAYT must move forward to a more equitable future. The board has been considering what we really mean by diversity in IAYT. Its current working statement is the following:

IAYT values are those of inclusion, connection, belonging, and relationship with members of all yoga traditions, ages, races, ethnicities, faiths or secular orientations, abilities, gender identities, languages, and socioeconomic status. IAYT will continue to build upon the high standards already set for achieving more diversity within our membership. We invite all individuals who have an interest in yoga therapy to become a part of our community.

This statement was shared at the town hall with an intent to engage the community in meaningful dialogue on a framework for IAYT that encompasses the values of DEI. Member input on this working statement is both welcome and encouraged.

The DEI Steering Committee also shared the following definitions during the town hall.

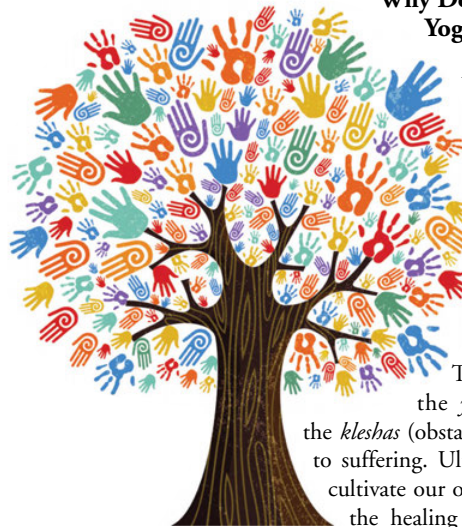
Diversity is the presence of differences that may include race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, language, ability, age, religious commitment, or political perspective. Diverse organizations include in deliberate and meaningful ways populations that have been—and remain—under-represented among practitioners in the field and marginalized in the broader society.

Equity promotes justice, impartiality, and fairness within the procedures, processes, and distribution of resources by institutions or systems. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities within society. We seek to dismantle systemic and institutionalized practices that are antithetical to the principles, applications, and practices of yoga.

Inclusion ensures that our diverse members actually feel and are welcome. Inclusion outcomes are met when we, our institutions, and our programs are truly inviting to all. Inclusion also involves the degree to which diverse individuals are able to participate fully in the decision-making processes and developmental opportunities within an organization or group.



Why Does DEI Matter in Yoga Therapy?



Yoga therapists are trained to practice the eight limbs of yoga. We seek to reflect in our thoughts, words, and actions the practices of *ahimsa* (nonharming) and *satya* (truth).

Through the work of the *yamas*, we uncover the *kleshas* (obstacles) that contribute to suffering. Ultimately, we seek to cultivate our outer world to reflect the healing sense of wholeness

that binds us together.

Yoga is built on the importance of dialogue and relationships, and IAYT is looking to its membership for engagement. This town hall asked the 117 registered participants to answer two questions:

1. What does diversity, equity, and inclusion within yoga therapy mean to you?
2. How do we create lasting, systemic change while we ourselves are part of that system?

After 30 minutes of breakout-room discussions supported by volunteer facilitators, we all joined together and reviewed summaries of these powerful conversations. When polled, 100% of participants said they wanted to engage more on these and many other questions about DEI. Suggestions for offering future town hall meetings quarterly were made. The IAYT DEI steering committee is immediately focusing on listening to our members in defining DEI in IAYT and actively creating future opportunities to continue these essential dialogues.

We offer our gratitude and thanks to the volunteers who supported this event. Facilitators were Abby Geyer, Marsha Banks-Harold, Marsha Danzig, Naima Lewis, Tzipporah Gerson-Miller, Tra Kirkpatrick, Tina Paul, and Danielle Atkinson, with special thanks to Michelle Bowles for technical support.

As members of IAYT, we invite you to share feedback and comments on the working diversity statement at diversity@iayt.org. **YTT**

In service,

The IAYT Steering Committee for DEI: Matra (Raj) Majmundar, president, IAYT board of directors; Amy Wheeler, immediate past board president; Marilyn Peppers-Citizen, IAYT membership manager; Danielle Atkinson, IAYT staff liaison; Vasanthi Srinivasan, IAYT member; and Priya Saini Verma, IAYT member

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