

# Triangle Insight Meditation Community

[www.triangleinsight.org](http://www.triangleinsight.org)

## Racial Affinity Group Guidelines

(12-13-15)

"Having admirable people as friends, companions, and colleagues is actually the whole of the holy life."

—The Buddha

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Along with Buddhist practitioners throughout the country, Triangle Insight feels called to address the continuing violence against People of Color, as well as the many more subtle expressions of racial injustice in our society. Growing out of this commitment, we are organizing Racial Affinity Groups.

Racial Affinity Groups, like Kalyana Mitta Groups, are small peer groups of spiritual friends who use the dharma, their practice, and mindful sharing to deepen connection with self and others, explore spiritual issues, and develop greater understanding and healing. Essential to both Kalyana Mitta and Racial Affinity groups is the development of safety, trust, and intimacy. This allows members to share openly and deeply, and the heart of the dharma is enriched in our practice, our daily lives, and the collective experience of the greater society.

### Intention of Racial Affinity Groups

The specific intention of Racial Affinity (RA) Groups is to deepen self-awareness around issues of race in small, racially homogeneous groups that integrate the dharma into members' personal and collective exploration. Development of this deepened self-awareness underlies wise action, and we're encouraged not to rush too quickly to problem-solve or "fix" anything, but rather, to take the time needed to do our own work. As stated by the Insight Meditation Community of Charlottesville, "The main focus of the groups will be on sharing personal experiences related to race within the context of a mindfulness practice." The model we'll use is a council, in which members come to share, listen, and learn.

The racial homogeneity of RA groups helps to create a safe container for this difficult work and can lead to greater understanding and interconnectedness for participants and the sangha as a whole. We encourage you to read the [Call to White Buddhists](#), which we hope will strengthen your understanding of this path.

### Participation in Triangle Insight or Another Sangha

Our Racial Affinity Groups are open to:

- Those who participate in the Triangle Insight Meditation Community.
- Committed Buddhist practitioners who attend another sangha.

Our Racial Affinity Groups are an outgrowth of our sangha and are integrated with our dharma talks, practice, and study. This integration helps deepen connection among group members and the sangha as a whole, and participation in Triangle Insight is a valuable part of this process.

Those who attend another sangha and join one of our Racial Affinity groups might find it beneficial to experience our teachers and sangha, and they're welcome to attend Triangle Insight on Wednesday evening as convenient.

### **Guidelines for Mindful Sharing**

Groups will follow Ruth King's [Guidelines for Cultural Affinity Groups](#). These guidelines offer wise understanding and support for the sharing and reflection groups need as they engage in this important and difficult work, and groups should consider reviewing them at the beginning of each meeting.

While RA groups can provide great support and inspiration, they often elicit uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. Commitment to a regular meditation practice, participation in a Buddhist sangha, and an ability to manage one's own feelings and one's reactions to others will help foster a positive group experience.

### **Group Size**

Each group should have approximately 4-7 members. If a group is larger than this, it is difficult to develop the intimacy needed for the work or have enough time for each member's deep sharing.

### **Time Commitment**

Groups should meet at least once per month and plan on meeting for at least one year. Groups generally meet for approximately two hours.

### **Forming a Racial Affinity Group**

An individual who is interested in forming a RA group is the group organizer. While this is a crucial role in the start-up of a group, it's a temporary role, functioning only until the group begins meeting.

1. The organizer can let others know of his/her intention and see if there is interest.
2. The organizer should let the KM Coordinator know about the group. An Advisor will be assigned to the group to consult with the organizer, as needed, and to work with the organizer and Coordinator to help recruit members.
3. Although the group organizer might specify details such as location of the group, the organizer isn't the group leader and doesn't decide on his or her own who can join the group.
4. While the group is being formed, if the organizer knows an individual who is interested in the group:
  - a. The individual should send a [KM-RA Questionnaire](#) to the KM Coordinator.
  - b. The individual and the organizer can decide together if the individual will join the group, letting the Advisor or Coordinator know of their intention.
5. If the KM Coordinator or Advisor refers someone to a group that has openings, that person can attend a couple of meetings to determine if the group is a good fit. The Coordinator or Advisor will check in with the individual to find out how it went and whether s/he is joining the group or would prefer another referral.

### **Joining a Racial Affinity Group**

1. If you are interested in being a group participant, you should submit a [KM-RA Questionnaire](#).
2. If you like, you can also talk to the organizer of a newly forming group or the contact person for an existing group.
3. After you submit the Questionnaire, the Coordinator and Advisors will work with you to try and find a group that's a good fit for you.
4. Once you decide which group you'd like to join, you can attend a couple of meetings to determine if you want to commit to group membership. If you don't join the group, you can contact the Coordinator to discuss this and request another referral.

### **Group Advisor**

1. As noted above, when a group is being formed, an Advisor will be assigned for consultation, as needed. If the group would like, the Advisor can meet with the group for one or two initial orientation sessions.
2. If issues, difficulties, or questions arise at any point, the group can ask the Advisor for consultation.

### **Group Administrator**

Each group needs a designated Administrator. This can be any member of the group, including the individual who organized the group. The Administrator will:

1. Help coordinate group logistics and communication.
2. Keep the KM Coordinator informed of the membership and any changes to the group.

If the Administrator for a group changes, the KM Coordinator should be given the new Administrator's name and contact information.

### **Other Group Decisions**

Each RA Group will need to make a number of decisions about structure and group expectations.

- Location
- Length and frequency of meetings
- Format of meetings
- Who the Group Administrator will be
- Whether to be a peer group or have designated or rotating facilitators

### **Resources**

Members of the sangha have found trainings offered by the [Racial Equity Institute](#) and [Dismantling Racism Works](#) to be powerful supports for this important work.

Additional information and links to other resources are on our [Racial Affinity Groups web page](#).

### **Kalyana Mitta Coordinating Team**

KM Coordinator: Sarah Tillis

Advisors: Tom Howlett, Tamara Share, Sarah Tillis

Liaison to the Teachers Group: Jeanne van Gemert