

# “Community as Practice”

## *THE PLAN IN BRIEF*

### **FOLLOW-UP TO THE SHAMBHALA CONGRESS**

**Developed at the Extended Meeting of the Board of Shambhala International  
Boulder, 6-8 February 2004**

*Arising from unconditioned space, the blessings of the lineage and the wisdom of basic goodness that is always present, our intention is to –*

- *Manifest enlightened society*
- *Through a global unified mandala*
- *Based on a practical plan*
- *Achieved with community-wide participation*
- *To present to the Sakyong and the Shambhala Congress by Shambhala Day 2005*

## **1. Overview**

This plan, “Community as Practice”, is the follow-up to the Shambhala Congress. It proposes a one-year timetable of action, culminating in the next Shambhala Congress to be held on this theme just after Shambhala Day 2005.

The opening statement, displayed above, is the core aspiration, or statement of purpose, of everything in the plan.

The plan takes a step-by-step approach to a number of core topics in our community. Each of these will be the focus of community-based Working Groups. These groups will follow the model already set by The New Economic Model Working Group, which is working openly and transparently with people throughout the community and includes a broad-based “review group” for community feedback.

The plan is based on inclusive community engagement by Shambhalians at all local Shambhala Centres and groups.

Where there are clearly defined leadership teams in the mandala already handling specific topics, a number of specialist review groups will be established so that Shambhalians with special experience and skills can work closely with those leadership teams to contribute their advice.

## **2. Principal recommendations on follow-up from the Shambhala Congress**

On the last morning of the Shambhala Congress, representatives from all thirteen topic groups met together to discuss follow-up to the Congress. Their report stated:

*“We appreciate efficient time management, but not at the expense of process or vision... It is essential that the participatory process started with the Shambhala Congress continue on an on-going basis to ensure efficiency, transparency and accountability across all levels of our mandala. Based on the results of this Congress, considering both pragmatic and emotional levels, we feel that this is the only approach that will lead to re-building trust, harmony and well-being within our Shambhala so that we truly **have** a flower to turn outwards.”*

## **3. Consultation on the follow-up to the Congress**

A draft plan, based on the results of the Congress, was circulated to all leadership groups in the mandala for their advice and suggestions. The results of that advance consultation were discussed in detail at an extended meeting of the Board of Shambhala International and other leaders that took place in Boulder, 6-8 February 2004.

Based on the recommendations of that meeting, the plan was finalized by the President of Shambhala and presented to the community on Shambhala Day 2004.

## **4. Being inclusive and open**

It was clear from the Congress, and in all subsequent discussions, that the values of being inclusive and open are at the heart of what needs to guide this period of community reflection and renewal.

An effort has been made to infuse the plan with these values, not only as far as the goals are concerned, but also in the way we aim to reach them through community discussion and participation.

## **5. Community as Practice: Engagement by Shambhala Centres and Groups**

A major theme that emerged in the lead-up to the Shambhala Congress came to be known as: “Community as Practice”. Looking deeply into how we develop as a community cannot be left to a set of Working Groups alone. This needs to be a theme of reflection in all our centres and groups.

This plan strongly recommends that the leadership of each centre and group, during the coming year, convene a series of meetings, including a small number of full community meetings (or Town Hall meetings) to open up discussion on “Community as Practice and be able to receive the reports from the Working Groups in late 2004 within this context

## **6. Practice as Community**

It is vital that our mandala, as a spiritual community, recommit itself to the communal practice of meditation. The discipline of meditation is the foundation of everything we do, individually and collectively, on the path to enlightenment and the manifestation of enlightened society. During this period of community renewal, it is all the more significant, therefore, that we endeavour to engage in common practices together so that we can mix our minds together with space, with the mind of the lineage, the mind of the buddhas and the mind of the Rigdens.

## **7. Talking Circles**

At the Shambhala Congress, a spontaneous group formed to discuss issues associated with the Vajra Regent. It became known as Group 13. The group formed a talking circle where each person could share their contemplation of the situation with the Vajra Regent and how they had worked with it over these nearly fifteen years.

At the extended board meeting in February, it was noted that there are number of matters in our community that could benefit from enabling people to participate in talking circles. These create the open, compassionate and non-judgmental space in which people can speak about matters of deep concern. All centres are encouraged to consider this suggestion. Alice Haspray has most generously offered to be of (long-distance) assistance to any centre that wishes to discuss how best to do this and can direct people to useful websites that give detailed advice on how to conduct such circles.

## **8. Community Conference Calls**

In the months prior to the first Shambhala Congress the president hosted a series of conference calls, open to the entire community. Notes from each call were then posted on the Shambhala website. These seem to have been widely appreciated, and the aim now is to have such a community call-in more or less monthly. These would likely have a particular theme, but could also serve as a regular check in on how the follow-up is progressing.

## **9. Moving forward together: A step-by-step approach**

The reports from the topic groups at the Shambhala Congress (now posted on the Shambhala website) from the topic groups at the Shambhala Congress reflect the wide range of views and approaches that manifested during the four days.

This plan does not attempt to tackle every single issue that was raised at the Congress, at least not within the coming year. Instead, it focuses on a number of core issues. We can move on to other issues after we have accomplished the work set out in this plan. This more modest approach is also in line with the fact that we have extremely limited staff resources at this time, and will need to rely heavily on volunteers to accomplish most tasks.

## **10. Milestones between now and the next Shambhala Congress**

The following milestones take us from now to the next Congress to be held in the week following Shambhala Day 2005.

### **February 2004**

Draft plan posted on the Shambhala website. Overview given by the President in the Shambhala Day broadcast.

Expanded governing structure for the mandala – the Mandala Governing Council--created. This council will be responsible for coordinating follow-up to the Congress.

### **February – July 2004**

Working Groups asked to complete the first phase of their work, to be posted on the Shambhala website for the benefit of the entire community.

### **July 2004**

Meeting of the Mandala Governing Council and interested Directors of Shambhala Centres at Shambhala Mountain Center (provisionally 29 July – 1 August. This will serve as a “first review” meeting to discuss the first reports from the Working Groups and decide on any changes needed to the plan.

### **July-November 2004**

The Working Groups complete their reports to be posted on the Shambhala website.

### **December 2004/January 2005**

Meeting of the Mandala Governing Council to consider all the reports, feedback received from the community meetings and conference calls. The Mandala Governing Council will prepare final proposals to be presented to the Sakyong and the Shambhala Congress.

### **Week following Shambhala Day 2005**

The next Shambhala Congress will be held.

## **11. The Working Groups**

To do the detailed work of following up on the major topics of the Congress, eight Working Groups are being established.

One Working Group has already been established and is attempting to function in a way that can be used as a possible model for other Working Groups that need to be set up.

- **The New Economic Model Working Group** was established in October by the President so that its work could begin during and immediately following the Shambhala Congress in November. The minutes of its first meetings have been posted on the Shambhala website.

A further seven working groups will be established:

- **Mandala Structure and Governance**
- **Leadership and Succession Planning**
- **Membership Policy**
- **Community Care**
- **Communications** (*including support to the process of mandala-wide communication this year*)

- **Outreach**
- **Diversity and Accessibility**

### **Reporting to the community**

Each Working Group will be asked to keep notes of its meetings, written in a style that is accessible to anyone in the community who wants to follow the progress and discussions of these topics. These will be posted on the Shambhala website.

### **The Review Groups**

Each Working Group will set up its own “review group”, by open invitation to the entire community. The purpose of a review group is to provide a forum for those with a particular interest in the topic to give feedback and suggestions to the Working Group as its work unfolds.

## **12. Advising the leadership: The Specialist Review Groups**

There are other matters discussed at the Congress on which various leadership bodies or officers of the mandala are already working. The following groups will be established to work with and support the leadership who are already hold responsibility in these areas:

- **Practice and Education Review Group**
- **Environmental Policy Review Group**
- **Social Engagement Review Group**
- **Shambhala Conduct Review Group**
- **Congress Planning Review Group**

## **13. Forming the Working Groups and Review Groups**

The Working Groups will consist of approximately a dozen people each, drawn from across the mandala. Their members will include people who attended the Shambhala Congress and those recommended during the period of advance consultation among leadership groups prior to the February meeting of the Board of Shambhala International. Particular attention will be paid to people who have specific skills and experience in dealing with these particular issues.

The Chairs of the Working Groups will be appointed by the President. The Chairs will appoint the members of their respective working groups, based on the lists of names generated from all the recommendations made thus far.

Minority views will be included in the notes of the meetings. Final decision-making authority within the group will rest with the chair. Dissenting opinions will be recorded, if so requested.

The notes of the meetings of the Working Groups will be posted on the Shambhala website for the information of the entire community.

The outcome of each Working Group will be a set of recommendations to the Mandala Governing Council (see below). Final decision-making on the recommendations will rest with the Mandala Governing Council, chaired by the President.

The Specialist Review Groups (see point 12 above) will be appointed by the President or by the office-holder already working in each area at the centre of the mandala. The aim is ensure a broad range of points of view, background and special skills.

#### **14. Funding the follow-up**

There are extremely limited financial resources available to fund this work. Almost all the activities, such as participating in meetings, keeping notes and preparing reports will have to be done on a voluntary basis.

#### **15. The Mandala Governing Council**

At its February meeting in Boulder, the President and the Board of Shambhala International agreed to establish an expanded governing structure for the mandala for a one-year period. This will be known as **The Mandala Governing Council**. The Council will be responsible for coordinating mandala-wide follow-up to the Shambhala Congress in time to present detailed recommendations to the Sakyong and the Shambhala community before the next Shambhala Congress.

The Council will be the overall governing body of the mandala for that period. It will function under the authority of Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche and will be chaired by the President.

The Council will bring together in a unified decision-making structure the following:

- The **Board of Shambhala International**, which will manage the legal, financial and corporate responsibilities of Shambhala International, chaired by the President for this year.
- The chairs of the **Working Groups**, as well as the additional member responsible for coordinating and synthesizing their work
  
- Representatives of **major entities within the Shambhala mandala**, including the Council of Archaryas, the Council of the Makkyi Rabjam, the Council of Warriors, the Shambhala Trust, the Shambhala Youth Council, The Shambhala Art Council, Shambhala Europe, representatives of major urban centres and practice centres, and others agreed in consultation with the President.

As soon as the full membership of the Mandala Governing Council is established, following Shambhala Day 2004, their names will be published on the Shambhala website and the entire community notified through the Shambhala News Service.

The members of this large, inclusive body will serve for one-year. Based on the results of the Working Groups and the final proposals for structure and governance to be presented to the Sakyong and the Shambhala Congress at the end of this process, a future governing body, appropriate to the needs of our growing and diverse mandala will be established.