

## **Governance and Structure Working Recommendation**

### **The Shambhala Congress**

#### **Summary**

The Congress takes place annually within the wider framework of the governance mandala. The purpose of the Congress is to provide an opportunity for all of the elements of the mandala to communicate together at one time. It is a process by which leadership and the broad membership of the mandala identify key issues, deliberate on them and propose recommendations for action. The Sakyong is present, as are the members of the President's Council and the Mandala Governing Council. Leadership and citizens from the various Shambhala Centers and mandala constituencies are also present. This provides a unique opportunity for dialogue, deliberation and engagement on issues that are important to the overall health of the Shambhala Mandala.

This is a set of recommendations for improving the Shambhala Congress.

## **Governance and Structure Working Group Recommendation**

### **The Shambhala Congress**

#### **Role of the Congress:**

The main role of the Congress is set out in the preceding summary statement. We also recommend that the Congress be designed as an experiential learning program for community leaders and citizens. Principled leadership should be modeled in the areas of issue identification, dialogue, deliberation and making recommendations, so that Congress participants hone the skills necessary to effectively engage their Shambhala Centers in governance and community building. This expands the capacity for the entire mandala to focus on relevant topics and take collective action to solve problems, care for one another, and accomplish goals.

#### **Cycle of the Congress:**

We recommend that the Congress be developed as an ongoing process, rather than a discreet event. Communication would begin long before the Congress event itself.

1. We recommend that templates for local pre-Congress community meetings be developed by a working group within the Mandala Governing Council and offered to Shambhala Centers, study groups and affiliates prior to the Congress event. With minor changes, this template can be duplicated from year to year. Depending on the size of the center, the meeting can be simple or more complex.
2. At the community meetings, current issues and themes are identified and discussed and a report is sent to the Congress design team. These issues are consolidated and incorporated into the design of the Congress event.
3. When the Congress is held, we recommend it begin with a report to delegates on how the preceding year's Congress report impacted specific decision making and the overall governance process throughout the mandala.
4. Immediately after the Congress, we recommend a new report be made and circulated to the broad community. The Mandala Governing Council incorporates this report into the strategic planning cycle, which then becomes the basis for action planning in Shambhala International and, where applicable, the local centers.

#### **Themes of the Congress:**

The issues and themes for the Congress are developed in the community reports and consolidated by the design team before the Congress. Additional themes can also be surfaced at the Congress itself.

By 2006, we recommend that an overall theme, or cluster of themes, be identified for each year's Congress. As an example, in Year 1 (2006) we recommend an emphasis on issues related to practice and study. The Congress could be centered on practice, curricula, meditation instruction, teaching, authorizations and related issues.

We recommend Year 2 (2007) focus on governance, leadership, decision making, regionalization and mandala communication.

We recommend that Year 3 (2008) focus on issues related to community, membership, diversity, outreach and related aspects of our Shambhala culture.

If such a thematic cycle is adopted, following Year 3 the Congress may be ready to return to the Year 1 themes.

This format would help provide a coherent framework for the related themes that will surface. It would also prevent the "Congress fatigue" that might arise from having the same conversations each year. Lastly it would attract a fresh group of citizens each year who have special interest and expertise in the current year's Congress topics.

### **Selection of Delegates:**

The Congress size can fluctuate, but should remain small enough that face-to-face communication among all elements of the mandala can be accomplished at the event itself. However, participation by citizens before, during and after the Congress can be enhanced with technology and the earlier-mentioned pre-Congress community meetings. Leaders of Shambhala Centers and groups should participate, if possible, as well as leaders from affiliate groups, such as the Shambhala Sun, Shambhala Institute, etc. Members at large should also participate as representatives from their centers or as individuals. An application process will ensure that there is no over-representation from one center or region.

We also recommend that participants be invited who have special interest or expertise in the subject areas that are the focus of the Congress. If the thematic cycle presented above is adopted, we recommend that participation be proportionally divided between leadership, members at large, and individuals with content interest or expertise.

### **Host Site:**

Every year after 2005, we recommend that the Congress location alternate between Halifax and one of the mandala's major Centers. For example, the Congress could take place in Boston or Berkeley (or even Europe) in 2006 and then back in Halifax in 2007. This allows everyone to stay in touch with the "center" as well as experience the hospitality and uniqueness of various centers throughout the mandala.

**Financial Considerations:**

The cost of the Congress itself will be kept to a minimum, however, travel and accommodations can be prohibitive for some Shambhala Centers. We recommend that a scholarship fund be developed to support those Centers who need financial assistance.

It would also be useful to explore a “pooling arrangement”, as is used in other international organizations, to divide the total costs of participation equally among all participants, or at least among all those attending as representatives. This arrangement would level out the disparities created by geographical distance.

**Implementation**

This report is drafted while the 2005 planning cycle has already begun. If this model is adopted, we suggest it be implemented for the 2006 Congress.