



EQUITY PLAN: 2023 - 2025
RACIAL EQUITY TEAM
CIRCLE YOGA COOPERATIVE

Through the end of 2025, Circle Yoga's Racial Equity Team will focus on eight key areas of work, which are summarized below. We anticipate that each area of work will be carried out by a subcommittee or smaller group, each including one or two Racial Equity Team members as well as additional staff, teacher, and student volunteers.

1) Vet foundational team documents with staff, teachers and board and finalize

The team will share drafts of the team charter, equity statement, a timeline of CYC's equity work so far, and our equity plan with board members, staff, and teachers to:

- Solicit feedback through surveys and small group discussion
- Discuss any suggested revisions as a team
- Edit and finalize each document

*→ **Feb. 2024 Update:** The team met with the CYC Board of Directors in November 2023 and with teachers and staff in December 2023 and January 2024 to gather feedback and answer questions. As part of the December meeting with teachers and staff, we also did some relationship-building work in small groups, since strengthening connections with each other is a key component of moving this work forward effectively. We have revised our foundational documents as a team and will begin sharing our work more publicly (with students, on the website, etc.).*

2) Create additional tools to support equity work at Circle Yoga, including:

- Definitions and Key Terms - The team will create a simple document defining some key terms and ideas related to the team's work—such as *equity, racism, inclusion, cultural appropriation*, etc.—to support effective conversation and understanding in our work.
- Equity Lens - An Equity Lens is a tool for use in processes like onboarding, hiring, and performance evaluations. It is a set of questions that are asked and answered to ensure that a given process reflects our equity-related values and minimizes the negative impact of bias.

3) Plan and facilitate equity-related book group discussions

The team will plan and facilitate book discussions with the goal of building relationships, educating, and engaging staff, teachers and students in conversation about race and other equity-related topics. We plan to facilitate at least four book discussions. The following books

were suggested by Racial Equity Team members, but we may substitute other titles or schedule additional book clubs:

- *The Body Is Not An Apology* — Sonya Renee Taylor
- *American Detox* — Kerri Kelly
- *The Trauma of Caste* — Thenmozhi Soundararajan
- *Pause, Rest, Be* — Octavia Raheem

→ **Feb. 2024 Update:** For our first book club event, Sonya Renee Taylor joined us in person at the studio to discuss *The Body Is Not An Apology* on September 24, 2023. Organized and facilitated by CYC Teacher and Board Member Matthew Lyons, the event drew nearly 50 people, who participated in person and online. Our next book club meeting is coming in June 2024.

4) Recognize and celebrate the roots and present-day relevance of yoga and mindfulness

Our goal is to create a studio environment where all members of the CYC community can become better stewards of the yoga and mindfulness practices we share and celebrate the rich history of these traditions. Because most of us in the Circle Yoga community have not been born into cultures rooted in yoga or mindfulness traditions, we have exploration and learning to do. As part of this work, the Racial Equity Team will explore various ways that cultural appropriation shows up in our practices, our teaching, and in the space we share. There is a growing body of research and thinking available on this topic, which we'll tap into to educate ourselves and then share with teachers, staff, and students in digestible and approachable ways.

Another important step we can take is to educate ourselves about the many objects at Circle Yoga that carry important cultural, spiritual, or historical significance. These “sacred objects” include statues of the Buddha and Hindu gods and goddesses, calligraphy from Thich Nhat Hanh and Plum Village, the mindfulness and tingsha bells, the aum symbol, etc. The team will:

- Document the origin and significance of objects related to yoga, Hinduism and Buddhism
- Add signage in studio spaces that offers context about what these objects represent and why they have been placed in the studio
- Educate our students about the significance of these objects—in studio announcements, emails to the community, etc.—so that they are seen and treated as more than decoration
- Add a page on the Circle Yoga website that educates visitors about the importance of recognizing and celebrating the roots of yoga and mindfulness, and includes photos and descriptions of some of the sacred objects at the studio

→ **Mar. 2024 Update:** The Sacred Objects Project is complete, and we expect to roll it out in the next few weeks. Thank you to Zeshan Mustafa, Annie Mahon, Kellie Finn and Joey Gottlieb for your contributions!

5) Integrate equity analysis and learning more effectively in our teacher training

We will work to ensure that equity shows up as more of a continuous thread through the year-long Circle Yoga Teacher Training. In addition, we will develop a stronger support system for trainees after the program ends, particularly providing low-cost and no-cost learning opportunities. The team will:

- Work with Michelle Johnson, who will facilitate equity-related sessions for the CYTT in 2023-24, to ensure that her sessions, the *Skill in Action* book, and other equity-related training sessions are woven together in a way that trainees can build trust, build relationships with their fellow trainees, and build on their learning throughout the year
- Provide training and talking points for the lead CYTT trainers so they are ready to support and reinforce what trainees learn in equity sessions and through reading *Skill in Action*
- Create opportunities for continued learning, mentorship and peer support for CYTT graduates—and, most importantly, making this support accessible for all graduates (not just for trainees who have funds to invest in further training). This may include reintroducing regular community classes where trainees have the opportunity to practice teach, providing lead trainer mentoring for small groups, offering opportunities for CYTT graduates to assist in the upcoming 200HR trainings, etc.

→ **Feb. 2024 Update:** *Following are several updates on this area of work:*

- *Michelle Johnson has met with the trainees twice and has one more session still to come. We've already received feedback from trainees that working with Michelle has been incredibly meaningful and have made a difference in how the group communicates and in how they use/value the shared agreements that they created together at the beginning of the training year.*
- *We reintroduced the Free Community Class taught by graduates of the CYTT in Fall 2023. The class is offered weekly on Fridays at 4:30-5:15pm and will continue as long as we have graduates who are interested in teaching it.*
- *We introduced a new teaching assistant (TA) role for CYTT graduates this year, which gives them the opportunity to participate in CYTT sessions as an assistant, providing trainers with support on tech equipment, taking attendance and other training-related logistics. In return, the TAs benefit from continued learning and community-building through the program as well as mentoring with one of the CYTT lead trainers. We have five TAs participating in the 2023-24 program.*

6) Work toward more equitable strategies and processes in recruiting, hiring, onboarding, and supporting staff and teachers at CYC

The team will review current procedures and approaches in recruitment/hiring/developing staff and teachers, research best practices, and make recommendations to make these processes as equitable and transparent as possible. Some sample questions we may seek to answer are:

- When recruiting new staff and teachers, how do we do a better job of reaching beyond our usual suspects and known networks?
- How might we update our job postings, website, and interview protocols to communicate our commitment to equity, inclusion, and antiracism?

- How are new staff onboarded and integrated into organizational culture, norms, and expectations?

7) Document what we're doing on the Circle Yoga website

As we move through the years ahead, we will record the processes, progress, and challenges of the Racial Equity Team. We will document our equity work on the Circle Yoga website to offer models that other yoga studios and organizations like ours can draw from. We will also keep tabs on what people who are new to Circle Yoga are learning about our commitment to equity and look for opportunities to make more connections.

8) Provide support to staff and teachers in navigating equity-related situations

Because we are focused on equity and being a welcoming place for all, another important part of the work we do as a team is to practice and model how we want to be in relationship with each other. How do we address hurt or harm when it happens? How do we respond to each other when we disagree? Since our team was formed in November 2022, we have had numerous opportunities to serve as a sounding board or advisory team on equity-related situations that have arisen at the studio. So far, this has involved supporting or providing technical assistance to CYC teachers, staff and CYTT trainees. Because it's important to maintain privacy in these situations, we will not provide detailed updates on this part of the work. However, we will share broad learnings and/or commonalities we observe in reporting back to the studio community, at least on an annual basis.

9) Plan the next phase of the Racial Equity Team's work

By the end of 2025, we will create new goals for the team for 2026 and beyond.