

# Teacher Categories at IMS

## From the Guiding Teachers

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

As many of you already know, IMS is committed to offering retreats taught by experienced teachers who are able to communicate the Buddha's early teachings and, through their own understanding and practice, to guide students through an intensive retreat experience.

As Guiding Teachers (GTs), we have overall responsibility for implementing this. We guide the process of setting the annual Retreat Center and Forest Refuge schedules, including inviting lead teachers who are aligned with the core vision and mission of the organization. We are also responsible for upholding the ethical standards at IMS: the commitment to non-harming through a direct and meaningful relationship to the basic five precepts.

In fulfilling our job, we request that you, as a lead teacher, make sure that any potential Assistant or Trainee Teacher, or Movement Teacher, you are considering for your teaching team has the necessary prerequisites as outlined below.

If you are unsure whether a potential teaching team member has taught before at IMS, in the role you have in mind for them, including the type or length of retreat, please first check with Christine Marshall ([christinem@dharm.org](mailto:christinem@dharm.org)) or Nancy Burnett ([nancyb@dharm.org](mailto:nancyb@dharm.org)), before inviting them. They, in turn, may need to check with us for approval, and may ask you for any pertinent information regarding the potential invitee's history and qualifications, including the name of the teacher who is training them.

Assistant Teachers and Trainee Teachers who are part of an IMS teaching team should be guided by you, as the lead teacher, in how the retreat is offered, and be informed regarding IMS's vision, mission, and teacher ethical standards, and have a commitment to them. You should make it clear to potential Trainees and Assistants that they may find themselves functioning in different roles at different times and in different retreats. You should also emphasize that Spirit Rock and IMS may have different ways of holding teacher/trainee categories. It is important to bear in mind that CDL training does not automatically qualify potential Assistant or Trainee Teachers for retreat teaching. Whether or not a potential invitee has participated in CDL training, they are expected to be in, or have completed a retreat teacher training program, be in an apprenticeship relationship with a recognized teacher, or are otherwise being mentored and guided in an ongoing way.

We intend that the information below be used as a guideline for you as in making decisions about inviting teachers, assistants and trainees to join your team. As part of our initiative to increase opportunities for people of color (BIPOC) teachers to gain teaching experience at IMS, we appreciate that the interpretation and implementation of our guidelines will require delicacy and care, and in some cases affect BIPOC Assistant & Trainee Teachers differently from white Assistant & Trainee Teachers. Given the varied pathways by which BIPOCs may emerge into the teaching role, we may decide to assess a potential Assistant or Trainee Teacher's suitability for either of these roles – through references or through our own personal experience – even if they are not currently being mentored or participating in a teacher training program.

Teacher Categories

A **Lead Teacher** (LT) is responsible for the overall development and execution of the IMS retreat they hold. LTs are the main point of contact with IMS and its GTs, unless specific responsibilities have been delegated to other members of the teaching team.

### *Specific Duties*

- To serve as the interface with IMS in regard to the retreat as a whole. This includes development of the course title and description, and the daily retreat schedule. (Specific responsibilities, such as coordination with the office during the retreat may be delegated.)
- To determine the number of teaching team members and the structure of the team.
- To recruit other full teachers, teaching assistants and trainees, and any movement teachers to the team, as appropriate. (This should be done in accord with GT decision-making and process guidelines. The GTs should be consulted prior to inviting any teachers, assistants, trainees or mindful movement people who are new to IMS, or new to the role the lead teacher would like them to fill.)
- To orient team members to the retreat plan and their roles and relationships in offering it.
- To coordinate the development of the retreat theme and how it will be taught with other teaching team members. (This includes dharma talk topics and sequence, morning instructions, the number and types of practice meetings, etc.)
- As needed, to develop criteria for admission to the retreat, and support staff in making admission decisions regarding any “gray area” applicants.
- To direct and supervise assistant teachers and teacher trainees, as well as the mindful movement person.
- To mentor teaching assistants and trainees, as well as retreat support staff in their respective retreat roles.
- To coordinate morning teaching team meetings or similar.
- In cases of yogi emergencies, to lead team decision-making about whether yogis can stay on retreat and under what circumstances, or whether they should leave. (This responsibility is held in coordination with IMS administration and retreat support staff.)
- To coordinate teacher involvement in the closing dana talk.
- To determine the dana split at the end of the retreat. (This may be negotiated with other team members at the lead teacher’s discretion.)
- At the end of the retreat, to write or have written any screening information necessary for a yogi’s future participation.

To provide feedback to IMS about its support of the teachers and the retreat, and to invite any reciprocal feedback about the team’s ability to meet IMS’s expectations of teachers.

As needed, to support IMS in responding to any pertinent complaints about the conduct of the retreat.

To inform the GTs of any issues arising from the retreat which might require their consideration.

### *Qualifications*

- Demonstrates the skills, capacity, training and/or experience needed to hold the teacher role so that the GTs are confident that the retreat will meet IMS’s standards of communication and transmission of the Buddha Dharma.
- Is in alignment with IMS’s vision, mission, and teacher ethical guidelines.

- Is in alignment with the development of IMS's diversity, equity and inclusion goals.

**Senior Teachers** are invited by the Lead Teacher to co-teach the retreat. They also have the experience, skills and capacity to communicate the dharma, and are aligned with IMS's vision, mission and teacher ethical guidelines, as well as with the diversity development that IMS is committed to.

**Assistant Teachers** are considered to be on a trajectory to become retreat teachers, and are expected to be in, or have completed, some form of teacher training. This might consist of participation in a formal training program, or take the form of an apprenticeship model where a senior teacher has committed to their guidance in a sustained way. They should have sufficient experience and understanding to guide both new and experienced students through the kind of intensive meditative process that one would experience on a silent retreat.

Assistant Teachers would be invited by the lead teacher to offer interviews, guided meditations, instructions and group meetings throughout the retreat. At the lead teacher's discretion, they may also be invited to offer a Dharma talk.

**Trainee Teachers** are also in some type of formal training: either a formal Teacher Training Program or an apprenticeship with a senior teacher who has a sustained, ongoing commitment to their development towards possibly becoming a retreat teacher.

Trainees may be invited by a lead teacher to join a teaching team in an observing or learning role. They are not expected to carry a teaching load, but may be asked to offer sign up interviews, lead sittings, and possibly sit in on interviews or groups as part of their training process. During the retreat, they are supervised by the lead teacher; we expect Lead Teachers to meet with Trainee Teachers regularly throughout the retreat as part of the training process.

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With appreciation and gratitude for all that you bring to IMS,  
The Guiding Teachers – Guy Armstrong, Rebecca Bradshaw, Christina Feldman, Joseph Goldstein,  
Narayan Liebenson, Kamala Masters, Winnie Nazarko, Sharon Salzberg, Greg Scharf, DaRa Williams and  
Carol Wilson