



Toward a Strategic Plan
for Wild Rose Sangha

December 2012

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CONTEXT

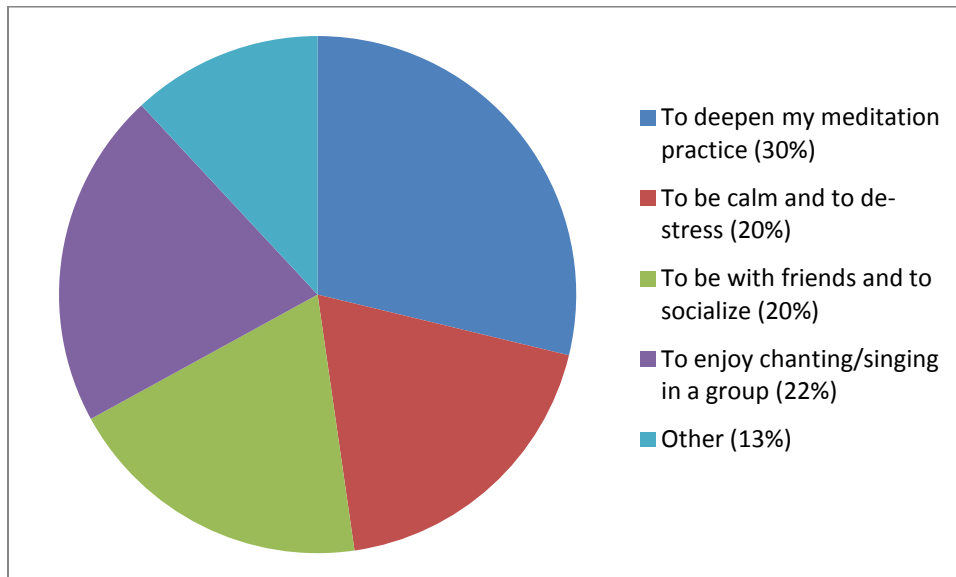
The Wild Rose Sangha is a community of meditators in Calgary who have been meeting in the Unitarian Church since 2006 (and was a smaller and more eclectic group for three years before then). The founder of the group, Tracey Pickup, was the primary decision-maker for the group until she left a year and a half ago to deepen her practice in a residential dharma centre. Because of a lack of governance structure and a strategic plan, there has been a lack of clarity of purpose of the group and decision-making structure. A facilitator and friend of the sangha, Tasha Bassingthwaighte, was asked to help move toward a strategic plan for the group. Sangha members and Tasha created a questionnaire for all sangha members, in addition to having a full day of dedicated to working together to create a mission statement and explore issues of governance. The questionnaire was anonymously completed by 22 sangha members, and the day of mindfulness was attended by 18 people on December 15th, 2012. The following is a report of the findings and decisions made by the group.

SURVEY RESULTS

The results are from the 22 surveys filled out between November 24th and December 11th, 2012.

The average LENGTH OF TIME IN THE SANGHA of the survey respondents was 2.76 years. The majority of these people (72%) generally attend every week.

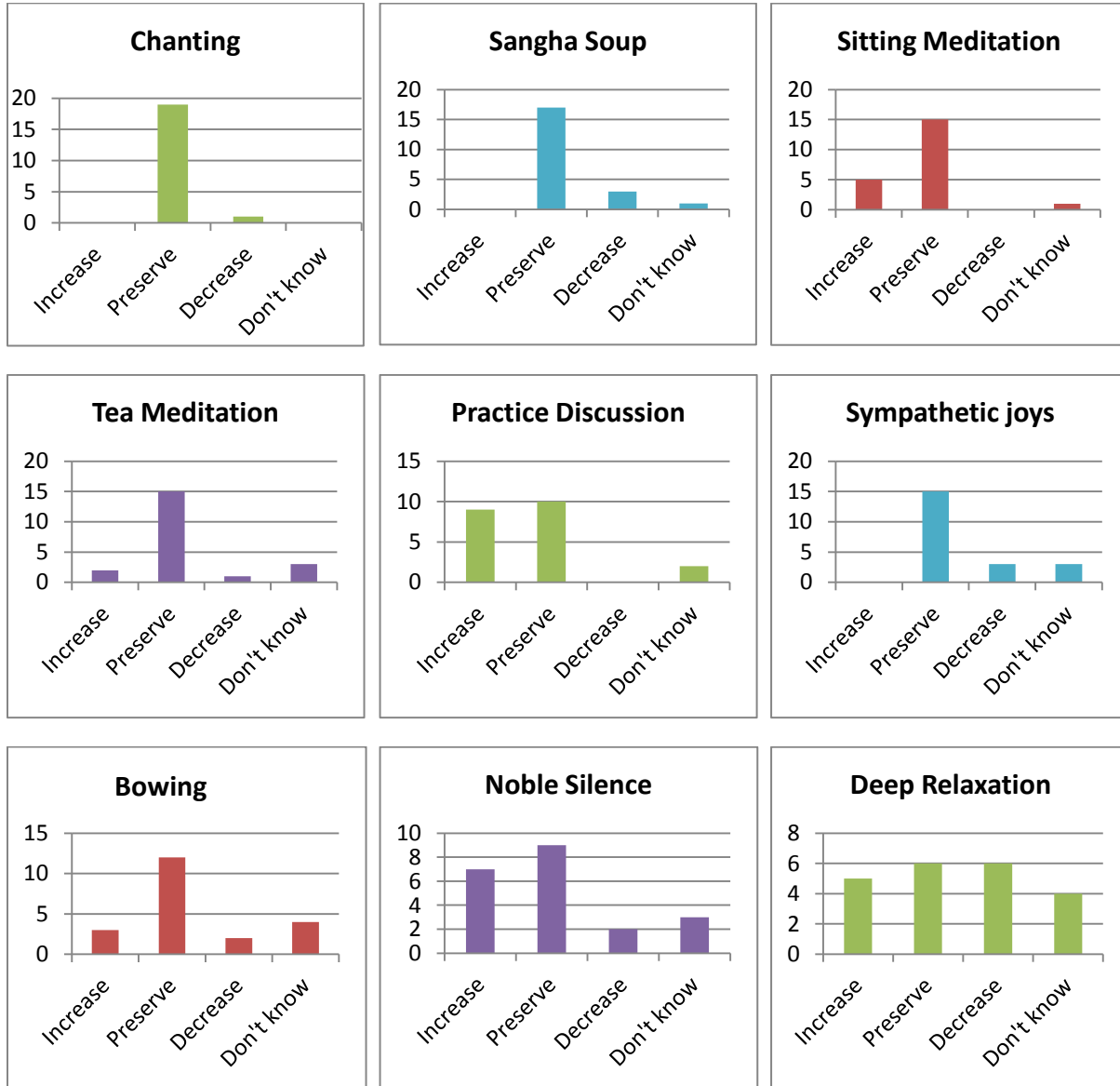
The REASONS FOR ATTENDING Wild Rose Sangha were ranked and the results are in the chart below. The most important reason for members to attend the sangha is to deepen their meditation practice. Noted in the “other” category was opportunity to practice with a sangha.

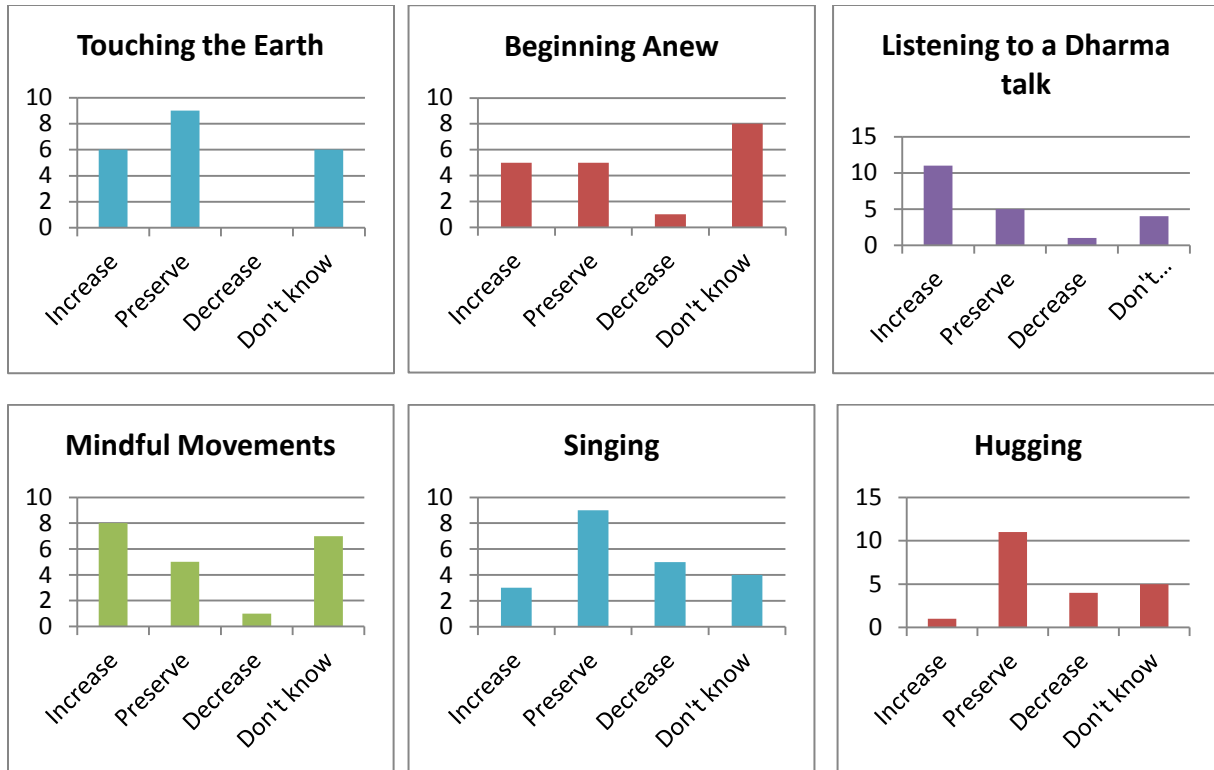


A series of tables can be found below describing whether Sangha members want to increase/add, preserve, or decrease/drop SPECIFIC PRACTICES. The y-axis refers to the number of respondents.

In general, the sangha members want to preserve the majority of practices, and not add or decrease the amount of time dedicated to them. There are a significant number of people interested in increasing the amount of practice discussion, noble silence, touching the earth, beginning anew, and mindful movements.

Due to an error of the survey writers, walking meditation was not included in this question.





The importance of the sangha practicing in the TRADITION OF THICH NHAT HANH was asked in the survey. With 10 as most important, and 1 as least important, the statistical data is as follows:

- Mean (the average number): 7.7
- Median (the number in the middle of the data set): 8
- Mode (the value that appears most often): 10
- Range (the range of numbers in the data set): 2 to 10

MISSION STATEMENT

A community cultivating compassion, awakening, and joy, practicing the mindfulness teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh.

See Appendix 4 for a description of the process for creating this statement.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The governance structure for Wild Rose Sangha was agreed to be of extreme importance for the long term happiness of the group. Also of importance are transparency and a system for communicating to the larger group. One idea to aid in transparency and communication is to have a (perhaps monthly) orientation session for new sangha members. This idea will be further explored in the future.

Because the process of creating a long term governance structure is long, it was decided to work toward implementing one by September 2013, giving the group eight months to create it. The process for creating this governance structure was left for future discussion due to time constraints.

As for a decision-making structure for the interim, it was decided that the logistical decision-making body will meet for half an hour on the first Monday of each month, replacing the dharma discussion for that week. Specifics of this meeting are as follows:

1. It is an open meeting for anyone who comes to sangha.
2. It will be facilitated by the same person facilitating the meditation portion of the gathering.
3. Sharing the merit will be recited before the meeting begins (so that those who choose not to attend will still be able to share their merit), while dedication of merit will be recited after the meeting (symbolizing that the meeting is part of our practice together).
4. An agenda will be created and times designated for each agenda item before the day of the meeting. This will be done by the facilitator.
5. If there are proposals being brought to the meeting, they will be given to the facilitator to distribute among sangha members prior to the meeting.
6. Minutes from the meeting will be taken and made accessible through the forum on the website and in print version at the weekly sangha gathering. This will be done by the secretary; who the secretary is will be determined in the January meeting.
7. During the March 2013 meeting, there will be a check-in process about how this format of decision-making is going.
8. Discussion and decisions are about logistics (i.e. the permanent and flexible roles as described in the next section), rather than practice.

This meeting will replace the Sangha Council.

The roles that need to be filled for the smooth functioning of the sangha were defined. These roles were divided into three different categories that I will call for the purposes of this report (1) permanent roles, (2) flexible roles, and (3) skilled roles¹. The table below lists the roles in each of these categories.

¹ I understand that all the roles take skill and none are actually permanent, yet decided it was easier to have this shorthand than not. Please substitute other terms if better ones are found.

Permanent Roles	Flexible Roles	Skilled Roles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treasurer • Liaison (with Unitarian Church) • Website updater & maintainer • Email list updater • Phone contact • Minute taker • Official signers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitation scheduler • Librarian • Retreat planner (not including practice) • Soup cook • Tea server • People to set up • People to clean up • Inventory controller • Day of Mindfulness schedule creator (not including practice) • Facebook page maintainer? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chant master • Bell master • Facilitator • Planner of practice for Days of Mindfulness & retreats • “Black swan” caretaker

The skilled roles require a minimum of six months of attendance with Wild Rose Sangha and that the person has taken the Five Mindfulness Trainings. Two roles require more than this: the facilitator needs to have attended WRS for at least one year and have training from an experienced facilitator; the “black swan” caretaker needs to have attended WRS for at least one year and have conflict management or counseling training. The “black swan” caretaker is someone who helps to resolve conflict between sangha members and who approaches anyone who appears to be going through difficulties that are affecting their attendance in the sangha.

NEXT STEPS

The first meeting of the logistical decision-making body will be Monday, January 7th, 2013. At this meeting, Dale will facilitate and Sarah will take minutes. Tasha will send a proposal for a process for deciding on a long term governance structure. The two agenda items are:

1. Signing up for the permanent roles
2. Process to use for the long term governance structure

Possible topics for future meetings include the following:

- orientation session for new sangha members
- shared values
- annual retreat in 2013
- communication among and beyond people who are acting in the “skilled roles”
- regular practices of conflict management, such as Beginning Anew
- inclusion of families and children (this comes from survey comments)
- role of annual retreat in the inclusion/exclusion of sangha members (this comes from survey comments)

APPENDIX ONE: GROUP GUIDELINES

The following were the group guidelines agreed for the duration of the Day of Mindfulness on December 15th.

- Respect other opinions and people
- Cultivate a fresh mind open to possibilities
- Come back to the present moment and listen fully when distracted by thoughts or judgement
- Notice triggers and manage them before speaking
- Be aware of the space you take in speaking
- Permission for facilitator to interrupt with bell or to restate in nonviolent communication
- Be willing to forgive

APPENDIX TWO: QUESTIONS TO CONTEMPLATE FOR BEGINNING ANEW

The following were questions to contemplate for Beginning Anew practiced during the Day of Mindfulness on December 15th.

1. What do I need others to know before I can let go of the past and be present, trusting, and loving with this sangha?
2. What emotions have I felt in regards to conflict in the sangha?
3. What are some specific ways I have been unskillful with people in the sangha?
4. What needs am I trying to meet in the sangha?

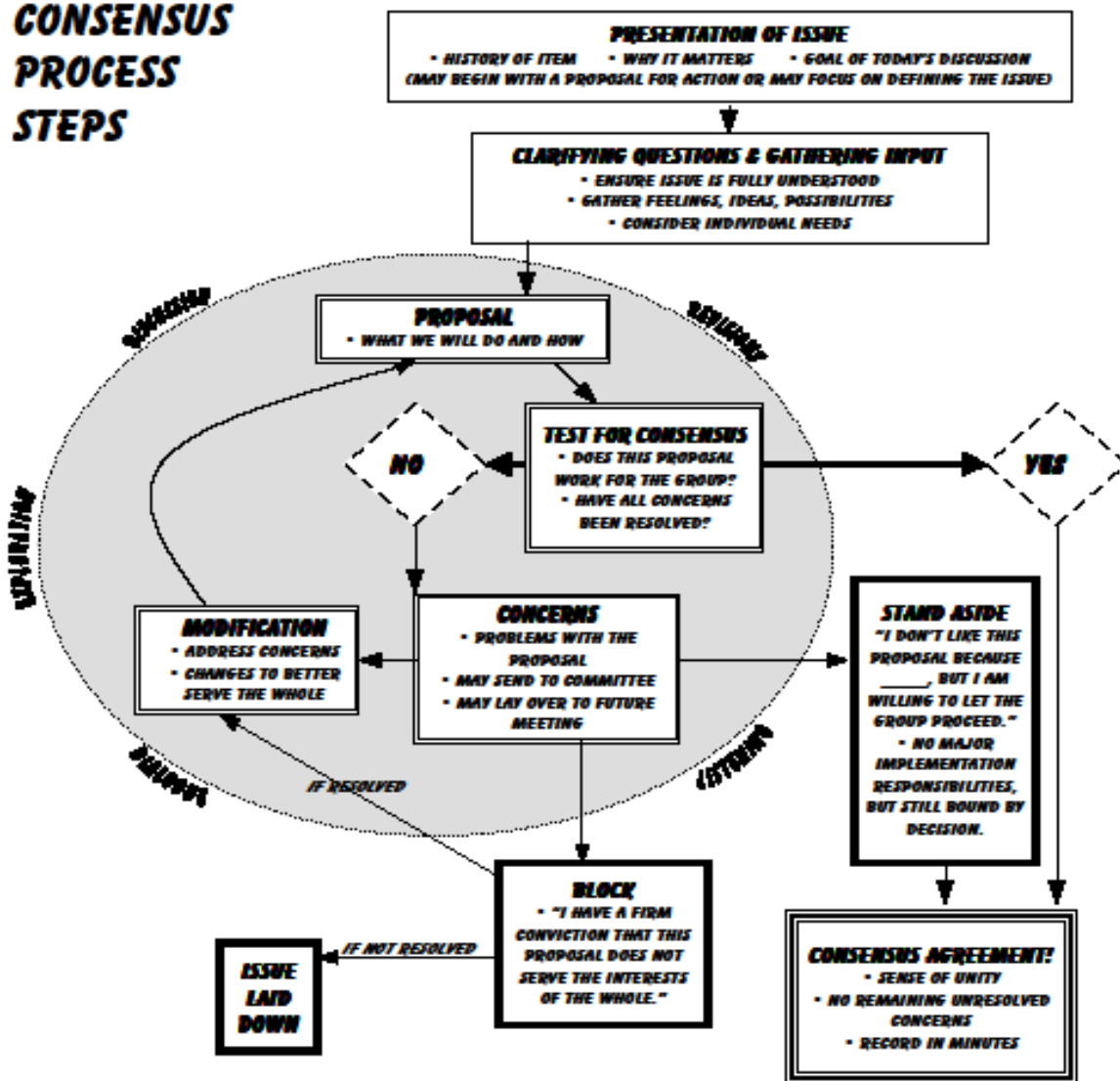
APPENDIX THREE: CONSENSUS DECISION- MAKING

“In a culture where we're taught that every person must struggle for themselves and we can't get ahead without stepping on others, consensus is a radical, community-building alternative. Consensus teaches that no one can get ahead by themselves: our success with the method depends utterly on our ability to work with others. Competition is no longer the root of experience; instead, we honor and integrate the diverse life surrounding us. Consensus is interdependence made visible.” -Tree Bressen

Tasha recommended that the group have consensus training if this is the method of decision making they will use in the future. She also emphasized the importance of delegating the creation of proposals to an *ad hoc* committee to make the process more efficient. The following page is a flow chart of the consensus model for the group to use. It is from trainer Tree Bressen, whose website has many resources regarding consensus for interested group members to read and learn further.

FLOW CHART

CONSENSUS PROCESS STEPS



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APPENDIX FOUR: MISSION STATEMENT CREATION PROCESS

The following list was compiled through identifying key words in the questionnaire. The group at the Day of Mindfulness then placed six dots on whichever words they felt were the most important for them to include in the mission statement. Below is the list of words and the number of dots each word received. The ones with five or more dots are highlighted.

A self-selected subgroup created a statement from the highest-rated words (i.e. those highlighted) which was brought back to the group, reworked and the group reached consensus about having the sentence as a mission statement.

- anxiety
- aspiration
- **awakening (5)**
- awareness (1)
- **benefit all beings (6)**
- bodhisatva's
- Buddha (2)
- Buddha-nature
- Buddhist/Buddhism
- Calgary
- caring for other beings and our environment (2)
- change from within
- civic and community involvement
- communication
- **community (7)**
- **compassion (6)**
- dharma
- encourage (1)
- environment
- fertile ground
- friends
- greed, hatred and ignorance
- happiness
- **interbeing (6)**
- interconnection
- **joy (6)**
- meditation
- **mindfulness (8)**
- non-reactive
- non-violence
- nourish
- our true nature (1)
- path (1)
- path of practice
- peace*
- Plum Village (1)
- practice (3)
- **refuge (6)**
- **sangha (8)**
- socially engaged Buddhism (1)
- sorrow
- suffering (1)
- **support (7)**
- teachings
- the way
- **Thich Nhat Hanh (7)**
- transformation (1)
- understanding (3)
- world
- Zen