



THE STATE  
*of* **ALASKA**  
STATE LEGISLATURE

**Rep. Lynn Gattis**

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*House Finance Committee*

Education Finance Subcommittee Chair

Administration Finance Subcommittee Chair

### **History of Yoga Alliance**

American yogis spent years debating whether there should be national standards for training yoga teachers that would apply across all yoga disciplines in the United States. Yet it wasn't until a Yoga Journal Conference in May 1997 that yogis from across the country finally turned talk into action and started developing non-binding guidelines for teachers and schools.

### **The Founding**

At a conference in San Francisco, California, hosted by Yoga Journal, yogis from a variety of lineages and traditions began to discuss the idea of developing standards for yoga teacher trainings. Some of those attendees began exchanging emails and phone calls, putting together a loosely affiliated group called the Yoga Dialogue, facilitated by Christopher Baxter and initially comprised of about two dozen people.

In the fall of 1997, group members dubbed themselves the Ad Hoc Yoga Alliance and later held its first in-person meeting at the Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. They delivered a presentation about standards, at an October 1998 Yoga Journal conference in Estes Park, Colorado, which included Nayaswami Gyandev McCord.

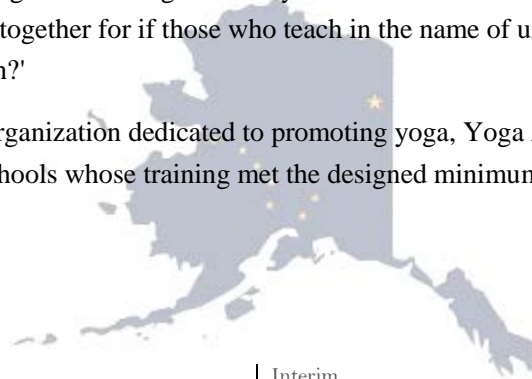
### **1999**

Some members of the Unity in Yoga board of directors attended that same conference and saw the presentation. After a January 1999 meeting between the two groups, Unity in Yoga offered to roll its 10-year-old charity, organized as a 501(c)(3), completely over to the Ad Hoc Yoga Alliance.

Yoga Alliance also established its first board of directors and elected their first president Rama Berch, who is now known as Swami Nirmalananda. Other original board members include McCord, Pat Hansen, Sharon Shanthi Behl, Swami Ramananda, Hair Kaur Khalsa, Gloria Goldberg, Martin Pincus and John Willey.

Rama Vernon, the founder and president of Unity in Yoga prior to Yoga Alliance, recalled in a 2009 letter, "I was sitting at my altar meditating and chanting. Suddenly I heard an inner voice and it said - it was like a command - 'Bring the teachers together for if those who teach in the name of union cannot come together in the spirit of that union, who can?'"

Now a full-fledged nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting yoga, Yoga Alliance developed a registry to recognize yoga teachers and schools whose training met the designed minimum Standards.



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**2004-2008**

Yoga Alliance officially set up its first office in Reading, Pennsylvania, which was the home of the organization's only salaried employee, where it stayed until 2004 before relocating to Clinton, Maryland, where the staff grew to seven members.

"Our significant growth, now serving 9,700 Registered Yoga Teachers (RYT®s) and 380 Registered Yoga Schools (RYS®s), necessitates we expand our space," wrote then-executive director Sandra VanOosten in an October 27 "Yoga Matters" newsletter, citing the Washington, D.C.-area's large, non-profit-experienced labor pool as a main factor in relocating.

**2006-2009**

"The office had four suites within the office and only two people could fit into each of the suites," recalled Meetings and Special Projects Manager Jackie Gray, who joined the organization in 2006 and is our longest-serving employee. "And our file room outgrew us... That file room started to grow from a corner, to the hallways; we could barely pass up and down the hall."

In 2006, a "good month" would include seven school applications and about 20 to 30 teacher applications, according to Gray. "After that, applications started doubling and tripling." It took four staffers to assess the daily work load before the company moved to its current address in Arlington, Virginia in 2009.

**2010-2014**

Those numbers began escalating in October 2010, with the advent of online teacher registrations. Yoga Alliance receives about 1,000 teacher and 75 school applications every month during these years. An eight-member board of directors and 30 team members managed Yoga Alliance along with six committees focused on compensation, conference, governance, member benefits, schools and studios, and standards.



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**Changes Beginning in 2012**

Recognizing the need for member programs and services that go beyond the scope of a 501(c)(3), Yoga Alliance in 2010 incorporated a separate 501(c)(6) organization to serve as an association for yoga teachers, schools and studios and later announced that current registrants would automatically become members of this new organization. Currently, the two organizations, Yoga Alliance and Yoga Alliance Registry, operate in partnership to support the yoga community.

After the board of directors appointed Richard Karpel as president in July 2012, the former executive director of the American Society of News Editors focused on reforming Yoga Alliance, starting with establishing core values of transparency, service, excellence and learning.

Karpel also oversaw the launch of the professional member association for yoga teachers and schools that provide members with education, representation, communications and member benefits. Karpel's vision for education and outreach includes a series of online workshops and tutorials and more.

Yoga Alliance serves members through the website, email newsletters and daily engagement through social media. Yoga Alliance launched its member benefits program in 2013 for yoga teachers and yoga schools that includes discounted rates for liability insurance. Additional member perks include discounts on training, education, yoga apparel, travel, legal services and electronics.

**2016 and Beyond**

Today, the mission of Yoga Alliance is to promote and support the integrity and diversity of the teaching of yoga. Read about our programs and latest accomplishments as well as our plans for the future in our new annual publication, the 2016 State of our Union.



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