# **Meeting for Learning series:**

# **Building back better**

# **MEETING 1 PLAN**

# **Grounding and reflecting**

*A note on how to use these meeting plans:*

This plan is written for session facilitator(s) rather than for the whole group.

Facilitators are the people hosting and running the meeting. They do not need any expertise on the content. They will also take part in all meeting activities where possible.

This plan is intended as a guide to help you run useful sessions. If parts of the plan are not relevant to your group, then feel free to discard or change them! Do whatever works best for your group.

## Agenda outline

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Activity** | **Time** **(in minutes)** |
| Introduction | 1. Welcome and introduction
 | 10 |
| 1. Outline of the meetings for learning series
 | 5 |
| 1. Ground rules
 | 5 |
| 1. Why we’re here
 | 10 |
| Deeper exploration | 1. How has the pandemic impacted me?
 | 15 |
| 1. What have we learned during the pandemic?
 | 15 |
| 1. What do we want to change after the pandemic?
 | 20 |
| Closing | 1. Closing
 | 10 |

Total time: 90 minutes

**Timings**

We have suggested 90 minutes to be accessible to those who would like to run the group on Zoom. If you are meeting on Zoom, make sure to take a 5-10 minute break around halfway through the agenda.

If you are able to spend longer and would like to extend the meeting to e.g. 2 hours, we suggest adding 10 minutes to each of the activities ‘How has the pandemic impacted me?’, ‘What have we learned during the pandemic?’ and ‘What do we want to change after the pandemic?’.

## Materials needed if meeting online

* Take a look at our [Technology crib sheet](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FfB6hcHiRaXm3T_G56v1N9vrZbc7-VtKvf6QfjiRKao/edit?usp=sharing) for links to helpful guidance on running meetings online on Zoom.

## Materials needed if meeting in person

* Tea, coffee / refreshments (if you decide you want them)
* Flip chart paper (or large sheets of paper)
* Flip chart (or felt tip) pens

## Session plan

1. **Welcome and introduction (10 minutes)**

*If meeting in person you may want to offer people tea and coffee as they arrive. Make sure everyone has a comfortable place to sit. Chairs should be arranged in a single circle.*

At the start, thank everyone for coming, introduce yourself and tell everyone that you are going to have a few minutes of silence / worship and that you will explain more about the session afterwards.

After the shared silence / worship, welcome everyone and thank all those involved in organising the Meeting for Learning series. Outline the agenda for today (see agenda outline above). Explain that the aims of today are to reflect and ground ourselves before we start to think about how to build a better world after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Emphasise that no prior knowledge is necessary and that you want everyone to feel welcome, even if they don’t have experience of engaging with discussions like this.

1. **Outline of the Meeting for Learning series (5 minutes)**

Offer a brief description of the Meeting for Learning series:

The Meeting for Learning series will help everyone involved to reflect on the COVID-19 pandemic and the world we want to build. We will also explore how our faith can play a role in building it. At the end of the series, you should feel more empowered and supported to speak up about changes we need to make to build a peaceful world which is underpinned by principles of equality and justice.

The Meeting for Learning series will involve preparatory work at home, followed by group discussion and ‘homework’ after each meeting.

There are three meetings:

* Grounding and reflecting
* How might Quaker faith guide us?
* How can we put our faith into action?

Discussion questions will ask you to reflect on your own lived experience. In the process, we will find inspiration and strengthen community with others in our meeting.

We suggest structuring this series as three meetings for learning, using the handout and resources provided by Quakers in Britain. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant financial impact on Quakers in Britain and any donations you can make to support centrally managed work for Britain Yearly Meeting by Quakers in Britain will be most welcome. You can find out more about this in our blog on [Supporting Quaker work in difficult times](https://www.quaker.org.uk/blog/let-s-talk-about-money-supporting-quaker-work-in-difficult-times) and visit our [Giving](https://www.quaker.org.uk/giving) page.

1. **Ground rules (5 minutes)**

Before continuing, the group might want to consider some “ground rules” for interaction. Firstly, as people will be sharing reflections on their own experience, you might all wish to agree that you will keep what other people share confidential (unless they indicate otherwise).

It could also be helpful to note that the sessions will be based around discussion and there may be differences of opinion. Does the group want to commit to showing each other respect when differences arise? Similarly, does the group want to agree that this is a safe space for people to try out new ideas (no matter how developed they are) and make mistakes?

Ask everyone to reflect silently on whether they are talkative or hold back. Talkative people may want to hold back a little more than usual, or use their confidence to invite other people to speak. People who hold back should feel invited to say more. In this way, being part of the group can be a practice of self-awareness and consideration for one another.

After the silent reflection, ask the group if they agree to these principles of interaction. Is there anything else that they want to suggest?

1. **Why we’re here (10 minutes)**

Ask people to go round the circle and say their name and a few words about why they’ve come to the session. On Zoom this could work by asking each person to pass on to someone else in the group after they have spoken. *In person this could go round the circle.*

Anyone can pass if they wish. Ask them to keep their comments to 1 minute. (You could use the “wristwatch trick” to keep comments brief. See the Appendix.)

1. **How has the pandemic impacted me (individually, family, community)? (15 minutes)**

Ask everyone to take some time for individual reflection on how they would complete the following sentences:

‘The pandemic has impacted me…’

‘The pandemic has impacted my family…’

‘The pandemic has impacted my community…’

Explain that everyone is welcome to reflect however works best for them. Some might find it helpful to journal or write down their thoughts. Others might like to visualise them. Let everyone know that the notes or diagrams they make are for them and don’t need to be shared with the group (unless they want to!).

After 10 minutes, ask if anyone would like to share anything they have been reflecting on. If no-one would like to share anything you can offer them 5 more minutes of reflection time. Alternatively, you can offer them an additional question to reflect on what has been difficult and what has been good in the last two years.

1. **What have I learned during the pandemic? (15 minutes)**

Now put everyone into groups of 3-4. On Zoom, you can use breakout rooms to do this. *In person, ask people to turn their chairs together with their neighbours to form a group.*

Ask people to share with one another what they have learned during the pandemic. Offer a prompt to think in particular about:

* how have you felt supported during the pandemic; and
* who hasn’t been supported during the pandemic.

Let everyone know you will be coming back together afterwards and that there will be an opportunity to feed back to the wider group if anyone would like to. Remind everyone that sharing what others have said should be done in a way that respects their privacy, e.g. don’t name who said what. Ask everyone to make sure that each person in their group gets a chance to speak.

After 10 minutes, bring everyone back together and ask if any groups would like to share any reflections. Limit the feedback to around 5 minutes.

1. **What do we want to change after the pandemic? (20 minutes)**

Put everyone into groups of 4-5. This can be via a new set of breakout rooms on Zoom. *In person, ask people to find a new set of people to form a larger group.*

Ask one person from each group to act as a scribe and grab 2 pieces of paper and a pen. *In person, give each group 2 blank pieces of flip chart or large paper and a flip chart pen or felt tip to write with*.

Ask the scribe for each group to draw a circle representing the planet on each page and put a title at the top of each page. One page should be titled ‘world as it is’ and the other ‘world as it should be’.

Groups have 15 minutes to discuss ‘the world as it is’ and their vision of ‘the world as it should be’. Ask them to jot down words on the sheets to capture their discussion.

The facilitator can join a group to take part in the discussion. After 10 minutes remind everyone that they need to fill in both sheets and that they have 5 minutes left. Announce when they have 2 minutes left to finish off their discussions. On Zoom, you can ‘broadcast’ reminders about timings to the breakout rooms.

After groups have come back together, invite 1 or 2 members from each group to feed back their sheet to the rest of the room. Ask them to limit their feedback to a minute.

As each group is feeding back, listen out for things that different groups have in common between their sheets. Point out 2 or 3 things to the whole group once everyone has given their feedback.

Note: This is an opportunity to gauge particular interest and passions in the group. Are people motivated by environmental concerns? Concerns for people? Building peace? Are they interested in social action? Are they already aware of the problems in our social order and have ideas for how things could be changed?

1. **Closing (10 minutes)**

Thank everyone for coming.

Announce who will be facilitating the next meeting (or arrange someone to facilitate if it hasn’t yet been arranged).

Remind everyone / confirm / arrange the date for the next meeting.

Remind everyone to take a look at the homework from this meeting and the preparatory materials for the next meeting before you come together again.

*Optional:* go round the circle and ask each person to say one word to capture how they are feeling at the end of the meeting.

*Optional:* Closing reading. Read something related to social change that inspires you.

Closing silence / worship.

## Appendix

### Facilitation Tips

***These tips have been adapted from www.localcircles.org***

Here’s what your group will expect you, as facilitator, to do.

* Bring to each session a clear idea of what the group is to do during that time, along with any materials needed, and guide the group through the planned activities.
* Protect the shared space of the group: create a welcoming atmosphere for everyone, while being willing to intervene if someone is acting in a way that creates difficulty for others.
* Help the group balance participation among members, encouraging participation from those who hold back, while making sure that those who speak easily do not dominate the group (see **Balancing Group Participation** below).
* Help members of the group move into active roles over time, eventually “retiring” yourself as the main facilitator (see **Developing Participant Ownership** below).

There are other important tasks needed to keep the group working well. You can add them to your responsibility description as facilitator, or they could be taken on by others who are also helping with organising the group.

* Create an accurate contact list for the group and make sure everyone has a copy.
* Send out links to the reading materials and meeting reminders.
* Track who is missing from group sessions and contact them where appropriate.
* Handle any logistics related to the meeting space.
* Coordinate refreshments, like tea and coffee, for the sessions.

### Balancing Group Participation

For a group of people who perhaps don’t know each other well, to grow into a group who trust each other in order to openly discuss and question social change, there needs to be space for each person to feel seen and heard over time. In structured sessions like those offered, this requires figuring out ways to keep conversations within the group focused and balanced. Here’s a short list of tools that a facilitator can use to help make that happen.

1. **Use a Wristwatch During Go-rounds**. In a “go-round” each person in the circle is given a turn to speak, though anyone may pass at any time. Be aware of a common phenomenon in go-rounds: individual sharings tend to get longer as the circle progresses. As a result, open-ended go-rounds can get quite lengthy.  A relevant tool here is to suggest a time limit for each person. Session plans will often include a go-round at the **Opening** of each session. You might allow each person about a minute to speak, realising that some people will go over. To avoid interrupting people with reminders about how much time has passed, the group can agree to **pass a wristwatch** that follows the speaker. For example, if I am the speaker, the person next to me holds the wristwatch and watches the time for me. When the allotted time is up, s/he quietly passes the watch to me, wordlessly letting me know that it’s time for me to wrap up my sharing. Then it becomes my turn to watch the time for the next speaker.
2. **“Two cents”**This can be used in a group with unbalanced participation, where it’s clear that one or two people are having trouble monitoring the level of their own participation. Here, you can playfully introduce the idea of “sharing your two cents (or pennies)” At the beginning of the session, everyone receives an equal number of pennies – say, twelve.  Each time someone speaks, they put two pennies into a pot in the center of the circle, to symbolise “putting in their two cents.”  People who tend to over-participate will find themselves thinking twice before deciding to spend their pennies, while those who tend to hold back will find themselves sitting with a little hoard of pennies, representing the value they haven’t yet shared with others. It’s good to be explicit at the start of the meeting about why you are introducing this exercise to the group, and to allow time at the end of the meeting for people to share about what they noticed and how they felt. It’s everyone’s job to create balanced participation in the group, not just the facilitator’s.
3. **Cut-off Summary.** Every facilitator is familiar with the scenario: your group has got into a discussion of a big topic, one person has been going on for some time about what s/he thinks, and you can feel other people in the room getting restless, like they’ve reached a point of saturation. What to do? *Don’t be shy about interrupting* – group members are counting on you to do just that. But interrupt with a purpose: “You’ve covered a lot of ground in what you’ve been saying, John. In order for us to have time to hear from a few other people, can you summarise *in one sentence* the most important point you want us to understand?” And then keep the speaker, with a light hand, to one single sentence. If they just can’t seem to do that, ask them to sit with their thoughts for a few minutes to clarify what they want to say.
4. **Linking Summary**. Another big topic, another long-winded speaker, another feeling that other members of the group are getting restless. Here’s another way to interrupt: “So John, one of the important things you’ve been talking about is \_\_\_\_\_\_.” Once you’ve made this statement, link it to a question for the rest of the group to consider, making it clear that it’s someone else’s turn to respond.
5. **Starting with the quieter group members**. If people have been dominating the discussion for a while, you can start a new exercise by simply saying, “Let’s hear first from someone who hasn’t spoken in a while.” This helps the over-participators bring their attention back to how much they’re talking, as well as making space for those who haven’t been speaking up.
6. **Small Group Work**. Asking people to complete exercises in pairs or in small groups is another way to make sure everyone gets a chance to speak, though the whole group doesn’t get the benefit of hearing each person.
7. **Evaluation** At the end of a meeting, you can ask participants to shade in a shape (e.g. a bottle or a star) to show how pleased they were with their level of participation. If they are completely pleased with their level of participation, they would shade in 100% of the shape and similarly, a 20% shaded shape would reflect unhappiness with their level of participation. Participants could then write a few sentences on their shape to reflect why they feel that way. Sharing these shapes collectively (e.g. by putting them all down on the floor in the middle of a circle) can give participants a chance to reflect on, and make amends, for their part in unbalanced participation.

### Developing participant ownership

Ideally, participants will keep coming back to each meeting in the Meeting for Learning series. After the Meeting for Learning series come to an end, if the group is working together well, the group could become a self-sustaining group that takes action together to build a better world – like the ‘Making a difference’ group highlighted in the handout for the final meeting.

Both regular attendance and the group’s longevity are more likely if the group members feel a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for the group. Here are some suggestions for how to cultivate this:

* Ask group members to take on logistical responsibilities. For example, you might ask someone to be in charge of sending reminder emails about the meetings, preparatory work and/or homework, someone to write up notes from the meetings, and, if you are meeting in person, another to be in charge of tea or other refreshments.
* Ask participants if they would like to facilitate portions of the meetings. Try to ensure that in every meeting, facilitators change or someone other than you (or your co-facilitator) facilitates at least one section.
* Invite participants to bring and read closing readings.
* Invite someone other than you (or your co-facilitator) to facilitate an evaluation at the end of each meeting.
* And of course, be on the lookout for participants who have interests and skills which would make them good project leaders or facilitators. Encourage these people to take on leadership in one-on-one conversations.