

BETHESDA FRIENDS MEETING

Committee Resource Guide

Introduction

Bethesda Friends Meeting thanks you for your willingness to serve the Meeting. This document originally was created for committee clerks, but it has evolved into a resource guide for clerks and members of Bethesda Friends Meeting committees. We hope all those interested will benefit from understanding the Meeting better. If you have any suggestions for improving this document, please feel free to contact the meeting's co-clerks. Please see the current year's directory for contact information.

Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. Where or to whom can I go with questions that I may have?**
 - a. The BFM Directory is a useful resource, especially the inside cover and the first eleven pages.
 - b. *Faith & Practice* has many useful suggestions about different aspects of Quaker process. It is worth checking the relevant sections for your committee. *Faith & Practice* is available at the book table, in the library, and at the Yearly Meeting website www.bym-rsf.org under publications. The 1988 *Faith & Practice* is the current approved version, though the 2013 draft edition can be a helpful resource.
 - c. When in doubt, check first with members of your committee and then with the co-clerks of the Meeting.
 - d. Former clerks of your committee are also a great resource.

- 2. What is the role of a committee clerk?**
 - a. The role of the clerk at its essence is to make sure all insights are heard and to assist the committee in discerning a "sense of the Committee" about how to proceed.
 - b. It is not expected that the clerk is responsible for doing all the work of the committee, which is a shared responsibility.

- 3. How do committees go about selecting their clerk (or co-clerks)?**
 - a. BFM committees select their clerks in various ways, and such variation is fine if it works for the committee. We worry, however, that sometimes the process ends up being one in which someone agrees to serve because no one else "has time." This process of selection by default may not only put an unfair burden on one person, but it also misses the opportunity a committee has for discernment about what is needed and about the gifts of those on the committee.
 - b. Based on feedback that new committee members feel they do not yet know enough about the committee and its work, committees can choose their next clerk in June. However, some committees choose to wait until January to give new members an opportunity to participate in the selection of the clerk.
 - c. If the selection is made in June, a member rotating off the committee may serve as the facilitator. If the committee decides to wait until later, perhaps a new member could step in as a disinterested facilitator.
 - d. Two methods that have been successfully used are the following (remembering that

the Spirit moves in mysterious ways):

- i. Many committees have discerned a clerk by reflecting in silence on the needs and the role of the committee. Often from the silence a member will feel led to volunteer to be the clerk. The person volunteering may have some reservations, however, and the group can then address these. This method can take more than one session for way to open.
- ii. A second method has worked for other committees. A facilitator is selected (it might be the out-going clerk), who invites members of the committee to talk of what particular qualities they feel they would like in a clerk. Then after a period of silence, committee members name the person who came up for them in the silence. They can state, "I think this person will be a good clerk because..." If one name seems to come up a great deal, and if the reasons given seem strong, the facilitator can state a sense of the committee. If the person named cannot serve, they can say so and the committee can return to the process. If several names come up with strong recommendations, there can be further discussion. Then the facilitator voices the sense of the committee.

4. Does our committee need to select a co-clerk?

- a. Many committees do select co-clerks, although this is not always the case. Having co-clerks can be helpful in sharing the workload (e.g., alternating responsibilities or providing back up for one another at committee meetings).
- b. Sometimes committees will stagger the terms of co-clerks, as we do for the co-clerks of Meeting.

5. How is a committee meeting run?

- a. The clerk has an important role in setting the tone for committee meetings.
- b. Committee meetings that are conducted "in the manner of Friends" are often more spiritually rewarding than those that mimic our work lives. One suggestion is that committee members have an opportunity for their input as to how they want the meetings to go. For example, do members want a time for personal check-ins? The clerk wants every member of the committee to want to be there, so the more the committee members feel included in shaping how they work together, the better.
 - i. Participate in Meeting for Worship for the Conduct of Business and copy the basics to the extent possible.
 - ii. Take some time for worship, particularly at the beginning of a meeting. Close the meeting with worship, also, holding the work of the committee to the Light.
 - iii. Have an agenda available for each committee member to see, and solicit ideas for agenda items from committee members. Agendas can be sent electronically beforehand but be sure to check whether any members do not use email.
 - iv. Have someone take minutes. A committee member may volunteer to be the recording clerk or this can be a rotating assignment.
 - v. Time for check-ins may build relationships. This often is done near the beginning: "How are you?" "What's up?" This is because committees are a primary way that we care for one another.
 - vi. Seek to listen well both to the needs of the Meeting and to each other.

6. What happens to the minutes? (How do I learn what has gone before?)

- a. Copies of the minutes are sent to each member of the committee to be sure they are accurate, and approved at the next meeting (or electronically).
- b. Copies of approved minutes are to be sent to the co-clerks of the Meeting and to the Archivist (see Meeting Directory for most recent contact information). Paper copies will be kept for several years; electronic copies will be kept indefinitely.
- c. Minutes for Pastoral Care, Ministry & Worship, and Nominating committees are confidential and are redacted to eliminate names before being given to the Archivist. They are kept in a locked file cabinet with restricted access.
- d. There are files in the BFM office for each of the committees. You are welcome to see past minutes of your committee. Beyond that, you don't need to keep personal copies for more than a year. Having minutes from the previous year is very helpful in developing the committee's annual report.
- e. Some committees send the previous year's minutes to new committee members.

7. What are the expectations for committee meeting attendance?

- a. The slate of proposed committee members is presented at the May Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business and approved in June. Their formal term begins in July, but they may come to a committee meeting before then.
- b. It is especially important that clerks and the existing members welcome new members to the committee any time after they have been nominated. At a new member's first time attending the committee, expectations should be expressed. One such expectation is that all committee members attend committee meetings.
- c. Be sure committee members know when and where the next meeting is. Make every effort to schedule committee meetings at times that facilitate maximum attendance. Note: all committees and when they meet are listed in the Directory.
- d. Of course, schedule conflicts do occur. Ask committee members who find they cannot attend to contact the clerk of the committee in advance.
- e. A conversation with the missing member is often helpful! Communicate to them how much their participation is valued.
- f. Still no show? Notify the Nominating Committee that the person is not participating. (See the Directory for the current clerks of Nominating Committee).
- g. You may want to arrange a time during the year when the committee has a meal together, or meets at someone's home rather than at Meeting, a nice way to create community among your committee.

8. When does my committee report to Meeting for Business? What should the reports contain?

- a. The calendar for committee reports is on page 2 of the BFM Directory and doesn't change much from year to year.
- b. The report is expected to contain your activities from the last year and the thinking that led to them. How is the committee doing? Are there any ways the Meeting as a whole can help you in your efforts? Is there anyone you want to thank publicly?
- c. Probably the best way to find out what ought to be in them is to look at previous ones. They are posted on the BFM website (www.bethesdafriends.org) under committees. They are also held in the committee file in the BFM office, or contact the archivist for

- an electronic copy.
- d. Please be sure to list the members of your committee! It may seem obvious now, but in a few years, the names begin to blur.
 - e. It can be helpful to discuss the annual report at your committee meeting two months in advance of when it is due, so members of the committee can share ideas about what ought be in it, and someone can volunteer to write a first draft. The committee reviews and approves the report prior to it being submitted to the Meeting.
 - f. It is very helpful to let the clerks of the Meeting know who will make the report at the coordinating gathering the week before Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business and to send an electronic copy to the recording clerk. Having the report ahead of the Meeting makes it much easier for the recording clerk to summarize it in the minutes. [NOTE: In 2020 we began the sending e-copies to everyone at BFM. This will continue in 2021,]
 - g. Try to keep the report under two pages. Some people simply read the report aloud; some give time for participants to read the handout and then speak from it, highlighting the main points. [NOTE: In 2021 we are considering new ways to present and accept reports.]

9. Hospitality: when does my committee have it? What is expected? What is the process?

- a. The calendar for who has hospitality in what month also is on page 2 of the BFM Directory.
- b. It's helpful to put this on your committee's agenda the month before so you can get organized. The main thing is to be sure most members of the committee are available for potluck Sunday (usually the second Sunday of the month) and that two are available for each of the other Sundays.
- c. Instructions are in the BFM directory (pages 10 and 11), on the web site, and posted on the Library doors. In emergencies, contact the clerks of Fellowship & Hospitality.
- d. We need to avoid peanuts, peanut butter, tree nuts, and other common allergens. Listing the ingredients on potluck and coffee hour offerings is encouraged.
- e. Also, please let Fellowship & Hospitality know if any supplies are running low. Do not leave any food items in the Library except for coffee and tea. Take other food home, or store in the refrigerator on the BFM shelf or crisper.
- f. If there are not enough people willing and able to help with hospitality on your committee, contact Fellowship & Hospitality with your needs; they may have names of people who can help on a one-time basis. Ask for help!
- g. Finally, please remember to tell your committee members that they can request reimbursement for expenses.

10. What are the expectations regarding Coordinating Gatherings?

- a. Coordinating gatherings usually happen the week before Meeting for Business (see page 1 of the BFM directory for the dates of both). It is very valuable for **someone** from each committee to be there, if possible. Each committee is expected to designate a representative.
- b. Coordinating Gatherings are an important opportunity to share information, to learn about what is happening in other committees, and to strengthen our community. One

specific purpose is to develop the agenda for the Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business, but gathering together also supports the clerks of the Meeting and facilitates communication among the committees of the Meeting.

11. What are the expectations for participating in Meeting for Worship for the Conduct of Business?

- a. It is hoped that everyone in Bethesda Friends Meeting will participate in our business practice, which is a process of discernment of God's leading for the Meeting. Meeting for Business is part of the spiritual life of the Meeting and is a responsibility of membership.
- b. It is particularly important that each committee be represented at Business Meeting. Your committee may be asked to provide information, or to answer some question that will benefit the Meeting as a whole. It also is likely that your committee will learn something of value.

12. Coordination among committees: When do committees meet? Coordination with Nominating Committee.

- a. To find out when other committees meet, you can see the calendar in the monthly newsletters, check the calendar on the BFM website at www.bethesdafriends.org (see the committee descriptions on pages 6 to 9 in the BFM Directory). You can also contact the committee clerk(s) and ask them.
- b. Most committees do not meet in July and August, though to plan for the autumn it is certainly possible to call a meeting in the summer.
- c. Expect a member of the Nominating Committee to contact you at some point during the year to ask about any needs your committee may have. You may need a particular skill or strength for the work of the committee, or to let Nominating know that some members are not active for one reason or another.

13. How do I get something on the calendar?

- a. Currently, Ellen Harter is our scheduler. She is the point of contact with the Sidwell Friends Lower School for scheduling events at the school/Meeting. You need to check with her about the availability of the time and space you want and she needs to check with the school and get back to you. Many things are routine and anticipated (potlucks, Meetings for Worship, committee nights), but if you want to schedule a meeting at BFM, please check with Ellen at ellenharter@verizon.net or 301-320-8640 for room assignment.
- b. The newsletter editor, Jane Meleney Coe at bethesdafm@igc.org or 301-320-5083, needs to know of any event you want others to know about, whether on campus or not. If she receives it before the 13th of the month, it can go in the BFM newsletter for the following month; if you have an announcement about an event happening in the next 10 days, Jane needs to get it before Thursday, 6:30 p.m., for inclusion in the weekly bulletin.
- c. The first week of the month, Jane sends an email out with the draft calendar for the following month and asks that people send additions and corrections to her before the 13th. This is shared with Ellen Harter so as to confirm the space has been arranged.

14. If my committee has something we want to put in the newsletter, how do we do that?

- a. You send it to Jane (see above), as the newsletter editor, by the 13th of the month.
- b. Often she will send to committee clerks copies of something that appears annually so that the information may simply be updated.

15. If my committee has something we want to put on the website, how do we do that?

- a. Some things go on the website at www.bethesdafriends.org because they have been presented at Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business, such as annual reports, or, like the Meeting's calendar and other events, they appeared in the newsletter.
- b. Would you like to have a form on the website so that people at BFM (or folks on your committee) can sign up for things? If so, please contact the webmaster (see the Directory for the current webmaster).
- c. An online, moderated "Discussion Forum" can also be set up. This feature can be placed on the public site or behind a login page so that you can offer online discussions on topics of your choice.
- d. If your committee would like to post some material in a secure setting, you can ask for a specific login section on the website.
- e. Contact the web master to find out what else your committee can do on our website.

16. Are there any guidelines about announcements at the rise of Meeting?

- a. We try to get most announcements in the weekly bulletin so that verbal announcements at the rise of Meeting are kept to a minimum. Please send them to Jane Coe at bethesdafm@igc.org by 6:30 p.m. on Thursday evenings.
- b. Most announcements about events should be for things happening within the next 10 days. If people are asked to read a book beforehand or sign up for something, that is different.
- c. Only one or two announcements per item is a good idea (not six weeks of "Please come to my event...").

17. How do I get reimbursed for expenditures?

- a. Obtain approval from your committee clerk, and ask them to send an email confirming your request to BFM's Assistant Treasurer before making an expenditure of over \$50. Committee clerks are responsible for tracking committee expenditures.
- b. Save receipts for expenditures of any amount. Auditors rely on them.
- c. Fill out an expense form, available in the Treasurer's pocket to your left as you enter the Meeting House and online (as a pdf) at <https://www.bethesdafriends.org/resources/Documents/expense-reimburse-form.pdf>
- d. Place the expense for and receipts in the Treasurer's pocket or mail them or scan and email them to the Ass't Treasurer (see Directory).
- e. BFM funds are accounted for by the Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer, who are supported by the Stewardship & Finance Committee, and overseen by two auditors.

18. Does my committee have a budget allocation? What is the budget process?

- a. BFM's fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30. In February, Stewardship & Finance (S&F) asks each committee clerk how much money your committee expects to spend in the following fiscal year and provides your committee with information about how

- much has been spent in the current fiscal year thus far. It is helpful if this is an item on your committee meeting's agenda in late January or early February. You can get more information from the clerks of S&F (see Directory).
- b. Please respond to S&F before their March meeting so they can bring the proposed budget to the April Meeting for Worship for Business. It lies over for a month and is approved in May.
 - c. Most committee budgets are relatively modest. While it is hoped that your committee will stay somewhat close to the budgeted amount, S&F can certainly be approached for an unexpected expense.
 - d. If you find your committee has a major unanticipated expenditure (more than \$500), please talk to the clerks of S&F to see if there is any problem with proceeding with the expenditure. Your committee and S&F may feel more comfortable bringing this decision to the Meeting as a whole.
 - e. The exceptions to "relatively modest" are Outreach & Communications (for publications), Peace & Social Justice (for separate line-item donations to outside organizations), Fellowship & Hospitality (for supplies and for staff assistance at potlucks), Child Care (for salaries), and Pastoral Care (for scholarships, etc.).

19. How long do clerks serve? How is committee membership and length of service determined?

- a. A clerk may serve for one year or two or more.
- b. Clerking is an opportunity for growth, although many are reluctant to serve in this role. Please encourage members of the committee to take on shared responsibilities so that the role of clerk is an opportunity and not a burden.
- c. If your committee uses co-clerks, it is a good idea to have their terms overlap so that lessons learned can more easily be passed from one clerk to the next.
- d. It is also a good idea, if possible, for the clerks to be in the middle, rather than the end, of their four-year service on a committee.
- e. Committee members are asked to serve for two-year terms, with the expectation that they will serve two two-year terms on a committee.
- f. You can easily see the year of appointment in the BFM Directory under committee memberships, pages 3 and 4.
- g. As noted above, it is expected that in mid-year the Nominating Committee will check with the clerk of each committee about the strengths and weaknesses of committee membership, who is rotating off, and how many and what kind of new members are needed. A committee clerk can help with the process by having committee membership as an item on the agenda for the September committee meeting. Who is planning to stay? Who is rotating off? (One could even invite a member of the Nominating Committee to come participate in the discussion). Report the results to the Nominating Committee as soon as possible.