Advices and Queries for Electronic Meetings

Electronic meetings represent an opportunity to accomplish faithful work without the burden of travel. Our concern for stewardship leads us to lower our carbon footprint. Electronic meetings can be a very useful alternative to driving for hours to meet. Electronic meetings also enable collaborations of national and international scope, which would otherwise be financially prohibitive. We encourage Friends to think of electronic meetings as an opportunity to expand our thinking about what is possible, rather than as a mere substitute for in-person meetings.

The Yearly Meeting offers online meeting software services in support of Yearly Meeting committees and programs via Zoom. If you are interested in conducting an electronic meeting, please contact the Yearly Meeting Events Coordinator (events@neym.org) or Office Manager (office@neym.org) **3 weeks in advance**.

If you would like to hold an electronic meeting to discuss business not directly related to the Yearly Meeting (monthly meeting or other business), Zoom offers free service for 40-minute sessions, or you may try using a no-cost service like Skype or Google Hangouts.

Before the Meeting

Queries:

- What is the work that this committee seeks to accomplish?
- Have we considered whether our work requires "decisions" or "discerning God's will"?
- Are we being mindful as we balance travel vs. technology? Are we being thoughtful about the choices we make when we consider the trade-offs?
- Will an electronic meeting adequately serve everyone who should or could participate?
  - Have we considered a combination of face to face and electronic meetings?
  - Does it make sense to have committee members who live near one another pair up to join the meeting?
  - Have we considered the reliability and accessibility of the Internet access of all of our participants?
- How many people can effectively participate in an electronic meeting?
  - Think about the agenda as it relates to the size of the gathering. Large groups are more productive in considering the work of smaller sub-committees. The same considerations that apply to in-person meeting agendas also apply to electronic meetings.
  - Designate someone to document action items, decisions & responsibilities.

- Have we coordinated our Zoom use with the Yearly Meeting Events Coordinator and/or Office Manager.
- Have we considered whether we want to record our meeting? Is this a practical option for our group? Would such a recording be of use? (Recording files are quite large and difficult to share.)
- Are we being conscientious in our preparation for our meeting?
- Are all members provided with the advance material, particularly those who are not well connected when relying on electronic communications?
- Are we being considerate and supportive of all Friends using the technology?

Advices:

- Review the Advices & Queries for Corporate Discernment in Faith and Practice (Chapter 3 of the *Interim Faith and Practice* available online at https://neym.org/fp-revision/interim-faith-and-practice)
- Recognizing that it may not always be possible, a group might want to meet together in person several times to get to know each other before relying on remote connections. Informal interactions can be important in coming to an understanding. A group held in love can move into deep and even difficult waters long-distance.
- If the work of your committee is very focused and time-sensitive, you may find that you are well served by only meeting electronically.
- As much information as possible should be distributed among members well in advance of a meeting. This includes the text of significant actions as well as any background information allowing everyone to consider the issues prior to the meeting and possibly to ask questions arising prior to the meeting. Be sure to identify documents with filename, date, page numbers, and version number as needed.
- One day before the meeting, re-send the link to Zoom.
- The day of the meeting, give yourself time to log in. First-time users will be prompted to download the Zoom application, which may take several minutes to download. We advise you to download the application well in advance of the meeting start time.
- Keep in mind the overall amount of difficulty that you are taking on in a meeting. If Zoom represents a challenge to the participants, then perhaps challenging topics can be delayed until the group is more comfortable with the format of an electronic meeting.
- It's useful to share the screen and edit notes or other documents while you are in the meeting. This helps with focus, and has the virtue of quickly surfacing different understandings, so that a greater clarity can be attained. (You could use Google Drive or another tool.)
- Be prepared for technical problems. It's likely that you will need to problem-solve on the fly. Be aware and considerate of electronic meeting vicissitudes.
- Here are some tips to prepare for a great online meeting experience:
  - Figure out what microphone, speaker, and webcam options are available on your computer. Practice ahead of time to make sure that your microphone is properly connected and that it is recognized by your computer. Also make sure that Go To Meeting is using your preferred audio output option (speakers or headphones). Try making calls with F/friends in advance of the committee meeting if you have never done so before. Zoom allows free use for 40-minute calls. Additional

instructions and guidance for using Zoom can be found here: https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206618765-Zoom-Video-Tutorials
- o If possible, log in from a computer that is in a private area, where there will be little to no background noise.
- o If calling in by phone, dial in from a landline instead of using a cell phone (or you can use a headset with microphone and speakers).
- o Individuals connected remotely are subject to external interruptions and distractions not shared by the others. Have a planned way of dealing with issues:
  - ▪ Know where the mute button on your phone or headset is located.
  - ▪ If you are in a noisy area, it will be best for you stay on mute until you are led to speak.
  - ▪ Call in on the phone if your sound goes out on the computer.
  - ▪ Turn off the video if your connectivity is weak.
  - ▪ If there is an echo, plug in headphones instead of relying on speakers.

During the Meeting

Queries:

- Are we paying due attention to worship and maintaining a worshipful tone in our meeting?
- Are all committee members participating? (There may be additional work for the clerk to keep everyone involved and make sure no one is disappearing into the background.)

Advices:

- Begin each meeting with some worship to gather and ground the group spiritually. Then, proceed with a round of quick check-ins. This can be an important step to retain the warmth and social connectedness of a face-to-face meeting. It is helpful to be clear about the expected length of the check-ins, so that they do not take up a disproportionate amount of your time together. If a visitor needs to join your meeting, be sure to invest the time in worship and check-ins as is your practice.
- Designate a clerk and a recorder if those roles aren't already clear.
- Discernment is just as possible in an electronic meeting, as long as a sense of prayerful worship is shared.
- Be aware that there is a pressure not to spend as much time in worship during an electronic meeting; it can feel like "dead air" when using remote connections. This takes a little getting used to, but with practice the group will feel more comfortable.
- Technologies are evolving and generally improving. Care needs to be taken that participants are not made to feel "less than" because of their equipment/hardware. If you have member who can only connect via phone, you may choose to hold the meeting entirely in a conference call format, so that one person is not excluded from the visual experience shared by the others.
- For smaller meetings, announce names of people present at beginning and as people join. When there are "phone only" users, be sure to identify yourself when speaking.

- Be careful to not allow the electronic format to impose artificial time constraints on your process. At the same time, be willing to reach a conclusion and determine a course of action in a timely manner.
- 90 minutes is a good guideline for the outer limit of a productive electronic meeting.

After the Meeting

Queries:

- How are we making notes and recordings available?
- How are we keeping track of action items and responsibilities?
- What tools (e.g. Doodle polls) are we using to schedule the next meeting?

Advices:

- Consider the value of a debrief, especially if it's the first electronic meeting for a group. It's useful to discuss the quality of the experience from a practical standpoint, and to be sure that action items and next steps are documented and agreed upon.
- Doodle.com allows meeting organizers to propose multiple dates and times, and for meeting attendees to mark their availability. This can reduce in-box clutter when arranging meeting times.