

**Summary of Next Steps from the Clerking Structures and Practices Working Group
July 2019**

Approved at NEYM Sessions in August 2020

Last August at Sessions, Friends identified the concern that the leadership of our Yearly Meeting does not reflect the diversity of Friends in New England. In response, Permanent Board created a Working Group to investigate the barriers to service within the Yearly Meeting (see the charge of the Clerking Structures and Practices Working Group [here](#)).

Over the winter and spring, the Working Group conducted many interviews and gathered our observations and recommendations into a report, which was shared with and affirmed by Permanent Board in May. If you have not done so already, we recommend that you read the full report [here](#). In our report, we lifted up that significant changes are needed in structural, financial, and cultural areas and that in order for barriers to truly be eliminated, an integrated and long-term approach is essential. We identified that the bigness of the work that we expect from our volunteer leaders is a significant barrier to service. One of the key ways to address this “bigness challenge” is to prioritize the work that is most important and to be plain spoken about what we are prioritizing at a given time. In addition, we named that we need to make our pathways to leadership accessible and intentional. We identified ways that our current nominating practices can create or reinforce barriers to service. In response, the Nominating Committee has already begun incorporating our many of our recommendations into their practices and goals for the coming year which involve a much more robust emphasis on growing leadership through intentional training, mentoring, and creating more short-term and project based opportunities for service.

To those of you who have been following “big picture” conversations over the years, our recommendations will hardly come as a shock. In fact, looking back at the report made five years ago by Structural Review ([here](#)), you will see that the specificity of the recommendations before us now is possible because of the foundation that has already been laid. As these “big picture” conversations have continued across different groups and committees within the Yearly Meeting, we sense that there is momentum at this time to move forward with bold and necessary changes. Throughout the year, we have been struck by the enthusiasm and readiness to name what is no longer working, to adopt new practices, and to experiment together in order to move towards our vision. Although we are well aware that our recommendations are not a comprehensive “solution” to all the leadership challenges we face, **we sense that we are ready to move these recommendations forward to the appropriate parties for implementation.**

As the clerk of the Clerking Structures and Practices Working Group and in my new staff role as Quaker Practice & Leadership Facilitator (see my full job description [here](#)), I have been asked to serve as the thread-holder for these recommendations, carrying them forward to appropriate parties with sufficient context, coordinating communication between groups as needed, and maintaining the momentum by following up and gathering information for reports back to Permanent Board and to Sessions next year. In this way, I will help keep an “eye on the ball”.

In addition to approval of moving these recommendations forward for further refining and implementation, we ask Sessions to specifically minute the following:

1. **That the Yearly Meeting has an on-going commitment to diversity** as we strive to nurture everyone's gifts and create inclusive leadership pathways and opportunities that will foster a broad exchange of diverse ideas and perspectives. We commit to supporting the leadership development of all Friends, regardless of economic background, race, age, gender, sexuality, or disability.
2. That although carrying out these recommendations in full may take a number of years, a **progress report should be given to Sessions next August** with updates gathered by the Quaker Practice & Leadership Facilitator (Nia).
3. That the **overall responsibility** for responding to the concerns raised in the Working Group's report **rests with Permanent Board**, who will bring business items to the body as appropriate.
4. That, as possible **within budgetary constraints**, the Finance Committee, Treasurer, and Yearly Meeting Secretary shall **ensure funding for the recommendations** in FY2020 and incorporate these recommendations into planning for future budgets.
5. Because the wide breadth and unarticulated priorities of Ministry & Counsel's work was identified as a complex and long-term barrier to effective leadership within that committee, we ask that **Ministry & Counsel offer support to Permanent Board in creating a working group charged with exploring and naming how NEYM currently supports ministry and the spiritual life of Friends in New England**. This working group shall identify where support for ministry and spiritual life currently happens and where gaps exist; they shall also offer recommendations for structures and manageable leadership roles that would best serve the current needs of Friends.
6. We affirm Coordinating & Advisory's role in routinely examining how current structures contribute to the overall vitality and purpose of the Yearly Meeting and additionally their particular role in communicating structural questions, concerns, and suggestions to the body in their reports to Sessions. We ask that, during the triennial review of committee purposes and procedures, **Coordinating and Advisory** (who manage that process), **pay careful attention to how committee structures can best facilitate effectiveness in the work of NEYM**, in light of the concerns and recommendations from our report.

On its surface, these next steps may seem like they are about the far-away internal structures of the Yearly Meeting. Don't be fooled: these next steps are really about our shared, day-to-day work of building a healthy Society that is well-equipped to faithfully draw out and share the bounty of gifts with which God has blessed us. In the Permanent Board minutes, the original report from our working group was described as "a roadmap for culture change" within the Yearly Meeting. The next steps outlined above are the detailed driving directions which will allow us to navigate tricky turns ahead.

As we give some Friends serving in leadership roles specific directions, let us remember that we each play a role: We grow in our use of gifts not from the "top" down but within all of our practices and relationships which each other. We create space for more Friends to lead when we are continually open to

re-imagining structures and practices. As we affirm these next steps, let us all contribute to the leadership culture we yearn to see by honoring our priorities, noticing the contributions each Friend makes, giving honest and constructive feedback, responding creatively to perceived limitations, and experimenting boldly.

On behalf of the Clerking Structures and Practices Working Group,
Nia Thomas