

Introduction

A draft proposal for a New England Yearly Meeting Conflict Response Team was included in the Unity Agenda at 2024 Sessions. While general appreciation was shown, the proposal was withdrawn after questions were raised with suggestions for improvements. Instead, Friends at 2024 Sessions “provisionally approved the Permanent Board to refine and implement the proposal.”

After some delay, a new drafting group was formed and began work this fall. A revised proposal is now ready for your consideration (below). We acknowledge that many people throughout the yearly meeting have expressed concern with the delay. We believe that we as a yearly meeting are ready to live into this new experiment. The Nominating Committee is ready to begin working to fill this team as soon as the final charge is approved by Permanent Board.

Current drafting group: Alysia Parkes, Becky Jones, Rebecca Leuchak, Phil Veatch (Presiding clerk), Susan Davies (Permanent Board clerk), Janet Hough (M&C clerk)

With acknowledgment for the work of the original drafting group: Darcy Drayton, Melody Brazo, Carl Williams, Rebecca Leuchak, Susan Davies

Conflict Response Team of New England Yearly Meeting

From NEYM Annual Sessions Minute 2023:42 Faithfulness demands that we lean in, rather than avoid the hardship of facing conflict. This is an opportunity for healing, learning, deepening, and transformation of relationships. But it demands structure, support, and tender care that is lacking within our body at this time. We need to transform conflict at every level of our body. In particular, we hear that there is a call for a clear structure or path that supports a healthy response to conflicts when they arise outside the structure of the monthly meeting.

Purpose

The Conflict Response Team (the Team) is intended to supplement the policies and practices that already exist within NEYM. The work of the team is to support a healthy response to conflict and help Friends restore meaningful relationships through processes that value all parties and that reach shared understanding and goals. Friends may turn to the Team when other means have not resolved a conflict.

The Yearly Meeting as a whole has a concern for recognizing systemic issues that lie below a particular concern so that we may shift patterns and practices that repeatedly lead to conflict. When the Team observes what it understands to be repeating patterns of harm, injustice or oppression in the conflicts brought to their attention, it is the Team’s role both to respond to the particular situations and to bring the patterns to the attention of the clerk of Permanent Board, for the yearly meeting to discern how to address these patterns more broadly.

Procedures

- In situations of unresolved conflict, any individual Friend, the clerk of a monthly meeting or quarterly meeting, or representative of the Yearly Meeting may ask the Conflict Response Team for advice, counsel or direct engagement. The Yearly Meeting's Accompaniment Group may direct people to the Conflict Response Team and vice versa.
- In determining whether the Conflict Response Team is the appropriate body to assist with the conflict, the Team will consider what other conflict transformation pathways have been considered or used, including advice in Faith and Practice, the document [Pathways and Practices for Responding to Conflict](#), and the brief overview in [First Steps in Addressing Conflict](#).
- When engaging in direct assistance, the Team will consult with all parties understood to be involved in the conflict to establish that they are willing to take part in a process to address the conflict, with the hope of repairing relationships.
- The Team will ask all parties for background information about the situation to be addressed and will prayerfully consider what steps might be taken to bring all to a table of deep listening and respect.
- The number and manner of meetings will be determined based on the wisdom of the Team with the mutual agreement of the parties involved.
- In all they do, the Team should encourage and foster an atmosphere of trust, respect, and truthfulness so Friends can hear the words of others in an open-hearted way. The Team should attempt to establish a shared commitment to searching self-examination concerning one's part in the conflict and acknowledgement of personal accountability.
- It may be helpful to distinguish between conflicts arising from disagreements over policy and conflicts arising from behavior, and to notice what power imbalances may be present.
- As appropriate, all participants will affirm that confidentiality will be maintained by all involved. In cases where the conflict has been public, there may be a need to inform the larger body that steps have been taken to address the conflict. In such cases, the Team will work with all parties to determine what will be publicly shared and how..
- If conditions for working together are not possible, the Team will inform the original requesting person or body of this conclusion. The Team will report to the clerk of Permanent Board that a request has been made and considered, and that way was not open to proceed.
- If the Team and the parties involved find that a conflict is not currently resolvable, the Team may make recommendations for ongoing pastoral care for the parties, so that, if possible, all parties may remain connected to the Yearly Meeting or home meeting, consistent with advice on limits of pastoral care capabilities, in the Faith & Practice chapter on [Ministry & Counsel](#).
- The Team may recommend other actions, including referring the parties involved to outside services.
- In cases where a member of the Team is named as a party in a conflict, then that member will be asked to step aside from participation in considerations about that particular conflict.
- In general, two or three members of the Team will participate in the response to a particular conflict. The Team may invite other Friends to join in this work as needed, in support of particular situations or needs.

Membership

The Conflict Response Team will consist of 4 or 5 people, who have gifts and skills in the work of conflict response, named by the NEYM Nominating Committee, and approved by the Yearly Meeting. There are no ex-officio members; however, people in leadership roles may be nominated as individuals. Terms of appointment will be for 3 years, with staggered membership. Members may be reappointed. Nominating Committee will discern a clerk in consultation with the Team, to be approved by the Yearly Meeting.

Additional qualities to be looked for in the Team's membership are listed below. The work may involve sensitive discussion and will need to be held with care that allows for open and honest responses, skillful empathy, and respect for confidentiality.

Supervision, guidance and support

The Conflict Response Team is under the care of the Permanent Board.

- The Team may seek insight or help from people within or outside of the Yearly Meeting with regard to particular conflicts. This may include the Permanent Board clerk, the Yearly Meeting Presiding Clerk, the clerk of the Accompaniment Group, the clerk of Ministry & Counsel, and/or the Yearly Meeting Secretary, except in the case where one or more of these individuals is a party in the conflict.
- The Presiding clerk, Yearly Meeting Secretary, and clerks of Permanent Board, Accompaniment and Ministry & Counsel may seek insight from the Team.
- Funding for the Conflict Response Team's work may come from a variety of sources.
 - Committee members' travel would come from a travel fund for committees.
 - If members of the Team were to see a need for themselves to get training or for outside professional advice or assistance and funds were not otherwise available, a request for funds could be made to the clerk of Permanent Board for consideration and possible approval.

Annual Self-Evaluation & Reporting

The Conflict Response Team will report annually to Permanent Board on the nature and progress of their work, including the number and general nature of instances the Team has been called upon. The primary purpose of the reporting is to share what the Team has learned and to make recommendations for ways the Yearly Meeting can corporately improve our skills in responding to conflict. The Team will work to balance both the importance of confidentiality and the benefits of transparency.

When the Team reports on their work to the Permanent Board, at least two team members should be available to provide a brief summary and to respond to questions.

When the Team observes common patterns in the conflicts it is called to address that it understands to be arising from the harm of systemic injustice or oppression, the Team will bring

these patterns and their insights concerning them to the attention of the clerk of Permanent Board, for the Yearly Meeting to discern how to address these patterns more broadly.

Continuation of Process or laying down the Conflict Response Team

The charge and process will be evaluated after five years of implementation, or earlier if requested by the Team or by Permanent Board. Recommendations for any modifications to the Conflict Response Team's charge and a new timeline based on the evaluation will be presented at Sessions for approval.

When it considers continuation of the Conflict Response Team, Permanent Board will review the annual self-assessments of the Team. The Team will invite evaluation from parties who have engaged with them in conflict response to reflect on their experiences, and if led to do so, communicate these to the clerk of Permanent Board or to someone they trust to speak for them.

Closing prayer

This work is intended to create a path for addressing conflict that all in our Yearly Meeting can access. In our community life, we recognize that we all carry, and at times uncomfortably express, the burdens of our humanness. May we live into a bold commitment to learn to love each other because we are the same and because we are different. May the Spirit draw us into a communion of love, hearing each other fully, and working to heal ourselves and each other—together under God's infinite and abiding care.

Qualities to be looked for in people for the Conflict Response Team

Derived from qualities lifted up in worship sharing at NEYM Annual Sessions 2023 [[Minute 2023-58](#)]

- Friends who have relevant training, experience, and skills in holding spaces for trauma-informed mediation, restorative justice, and transformation
- Friends who are comfortable with situations of conflict, who have come to understand and manage their own trauma enough to be able to see others' needs
- Friends who bring a degree of humility and selflessness, and who have the skill and grace to listen to, honor and respect the pain, the words, and experiences of others
- Friends with experience recognizing and setting healthy boundaries for all involved in situations that might be experienced as abusive
- Friends who can hold the dynamic of dual narratives - both of which may be true
- Friends who inhabit liminal spaces, and whose identities place them on the margins, such that they can see dynamics that those in the center cannot.
- Friends who are able to be present in a way that provides a level of safety and comfort in a difficult time
- Friends who understand the dynamics of power and privilege and how they impact situations of conflict
- Friends who understand how interpersonal conflicts reveal and are shaped by our values (what we believe, our identity, systems and cultural patterns) and who understand that the intersection of these values affects how we move through conflict

- Friends who are tuned in to somatic awareness—ways of wisdom that are not just intellectual but connected to the body's way of knowing
- Friends with recognized gifts of eldership and oversight
- Friends who are people of prayer