

Appendix:

Friendly Use of Communication Technology

Technology can reduce the time, expense, and environmental impact of traveling in order to communicate. Emails, conference calls, and video connections can also aid people who have difficulties with mobility, hearing, or vision. We remain tender with each other during continuing changes in media and patient with the use of the devices themselves and their uneven rate of adoption. We also practice using the technology in advance, so that the equipment itself does not hinder our Friendly communication.

The focus of this appendix is on how Quaker groups use conference technology and email, not on individual use of electronic media.

Conference Technologies

Conference technologies may be used for several purposes, including committee meetings and consultations, worship-sharing, and clearness processes. Conference technologies have proven to be media through which Spirit can move and connect Friends. Not every Friends group has found conference calls suitable for discernment. The following suggestions have been found helpful:

For the Clerk:

- Arrange a time for the meeting in advance.
- Send the agenda, related materials, and contact instructions out several days ahead.
- As appropriate, arrange for minutes to be written and distributed.
- Encourage Friends to center themselves before joining the conference.
- Encourage Friends to begin by greeting one another. Then open with silent worship before turning to the meeting agenda.
- When the group is large or not familiar with each other, ask people to say their names each time they speak.
- Remind Friends to pause between comments.
- Keep track of who has spoken and invite those who have been quieter to speak.
- If a decision is being made, ask whether all are united in it. Give enough opportunity for any participant to voice hesitations or concerns.
- At any time necessary, ask for silence to re-center in the Spirit.
- Conclude the conversation within the agreed-upon time (typically no more than 90 minutes).
- Finish the time together with silent worship, or suggest that Friends continue in worship afterward.

For the Participants:

- If possible, enter into worship before joining the conference.
- Enter the conference on time with materials and agenda close at hand.
- If the clerk requests it, state your name each time you speak.
- Speak concisely.

- Leave pauses between speakers. Take care not to interrupt or talk over anyone.
- State when you become lost or confused. Ask for silence when needed.
- Remain in a location with good reception.
- Use a quiet space away from disruptions. Muting your equipment can screen out background noise.

Queries for Friends Using Conference Technologies

- Have we determined whether a conference technology is appropriate to the task at hand and the group involved? For this work, does the group need to hear each other, see each other, have access to shared documents, or be in the same room together?
- How do we accommodate Deaf and hard-of-hearing Friends? How do we accommodate blind and sight-impaired Friends?
- Do we conduct our conferences in a spirit of worship?
- How do we interpret a Friend's silence during a conference?
- Do we ask for clarification when we need it?

Email

Email, when used carefully and thoughtfully, can support good Quaker process in business and decision making. Quaker meetings and committees may use email extensively to disseminate information, minutes, and agendas, and to attend to logistics. Some committee work seems to lend itself to email communication. Email may not be suitable for deep listening and group discernment.

We attend to email messages as carefully as when speaking with someone face to face. Because an email can be sent quickly, caution is helpful. Choose words carefully; we cannot depend on tone of voice to shape our meaning. Take time to respond with care. If the matter is complicated or sensitive, let the reply season for a while. Always review everything before sending.

When agreeing to conduct business by email, we make a commitment to check messages regularly and we respond to messages in a timely manner to ensure others of our continuing engagement.

Email can work well when a group needs to gather information and a central person is collecting feedback. When many are in a discussion on a topic, the process takes special attentiveness. Participants treat the email conversation as they would a face-to-face conversation with Friends. Read all prior messages first, pay attention to where the discussion is going before responding, and consider carefully what—and when—to contribute.

When decisions are being made by email, someone acts as clerk, and the group follows the good order of Friends. If the conversation is moving too quickly or carelessly, if the conversation is splintering or losing focus, or if some people feel they are not being heard, the clerk ends the email conversation and suggests a face-to-face meeting.

Group Email Lists and Listservs

Listservs or email groups allow Friends to direct messages easily to a whole meeting or to an interest group. A listserv or email group for a whole meeting is a valuable tool for cultivating and nurturing community and allows Friends to share important announcements relevant to the meeting, such as agendas and reports for an upcoming meeting for business. To ensure beneficial use of these tools, it may be helpful for the meeting to establish guidelines, for example:

- Reminding Friends that emails are best written and read with respect, tolerance, and love.
- Asking that emails be directed to the whole group, not an individual.

- Distinguishing between announcements-only groups and ongoing discussion groups.
- Asking that Friends use informative subject lines. Indicate whether a message is of a secular nature—for example, when a Friend is advertising an apartment for rent.
- Advising that the group email list or listserv is not an opinion forum nor a means of resolving interpersonal conflicts.

Sometimes it may be necessary for a host to caution a Friend who uses the listserv or group email list inappropriately. This should be done privately, but a general reminder may be shared with the list. If after a reminder or two the Friend continues to make inappropriate posts, the meeting may wish to explore ways to preserve Friendly communication.

Queries for Friends Using Listservs and Group Email Lists

- Is use of the listserv or group email list appropriate to the task at hand and the group involved?
- How do we accommodate Friends who do not use electronic media?
- Is a clerk or facilitator needed for this email discussion?
- How do we interpret a Friend's unresponsiveness in an email exchange? Do we invite comment from those who haven't been heard from?
- Do we remember that there is that of God in every person who will ever read this message?