

# RfP: Request for Assessment of Governance, Staff, and Volunteer Structures with a Process to Help Reimagine Our Largest Event

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## Project Description

“Have faith and the way will open.”  
-Quaker proverb

Friends General Conference (FGC), a religious association of sixteen Quaker Yearly Meetings (regional organizations) and over six hundred Quaker Monthly Meetings and Churches, seeks a consultant, team of consultants, or group of consultants **to lead a planning process that will assess our systems and culture in relationship to our governance, our volunteers, the reimagining of our largest event, and our program design/effectiveness.** This work will be done using our current mission, vision, programmatic priorities, as well as our commitment to becoming an anti-racist institution as the foundation for the assessment. The assessment will include consultation with a wide range of stakeholders that includes governance, volunteers, staff, association members, and program participants. **The assessment should lead to a fuller understanding of FGC’s current strengths and weaknesses leading to recommendations that are intended to deepen and expand our ability to serve our association members.**

In detail, this process should **provide specific recommendations** that 1.) Help us reimagine our governance and staff structures to improve organizational effectiveness while also creating positive and spiritually meaningful experiences for all those involved 2.) Help us make changes that attract and retain volunteers, 3.) Help us create a planning process for the redesign our largest event “The Gathering” in terms of its format and financing, 4.) Assist us with program evaluation (programs being all our services to constituents), and 5.) Help facilitate board level discussions about our finances, where organizational stress is rooted in committee members having different understandings of and experiences with money as well as different ideas about what it means to responsibly steward our financial resources. The findings and recommendations resulting from this assessment will be reviewed for possible adoption by FGC’s governance. We recognize this is an ambitious agenda. *The highest priority items are the first three mentioned. We are open to proposals that focus only on these three items, though proposals that include the full scope may be viewed more favorably depending on the contents and suggestions of the proposal.*

It is important to note that this planning process/assessment will take place as FGC transitions from the private to the public phase of a special fundraising campaign that will allow FGC to expand priority programming. **It is intended that this planning process/assessment will enable FGC to better implement the campaign goals by refining our hiring and implementation plans as a response to what we learn in this process.** We also hope that the recommendations proposed by this assessment may be useful to our regional association members (yearly meetings) who face similar challenges to FGC.

## **Background Information**

*Vision Statement: Friends General Conference, with Divine guidance, nurtures the spiritual vitality of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) by providing programs and services for Friends, meetings, and seekers. We envision a vital and growing Religious Society of Friends—a faith that deepens spiritually, welcomes newcomers, builds supportive and inclusive community, and provides loving service and witness in the world.*

*FGC uses the following query (a question used as spiritual prompt for reflection and discussion) in all committees to help shift our culture towards becoming an anti-racist organization:*

*“How does this decision support FGC in its goal to transform into an active anti-racist faith community?”*

FGC serves roughly 35,000 Quakers (Friends) in North America (Canada, Caribbean, Mexico and the United States). Friends General Conference was founded to hold a biannual (now yearly) conference where issues of importance to Friends could be explored. Over time, specific programs and services were created to help support the needs of Friends as discussed at the conferences. This makes our mission and vision very open ended and therefore challenging in terms of setting priorities.

FGC Quakers are generally theologically liberal and often Universalist. FGC, given its origin and theology, is not a traditional denominational body in that we do not exert authority over our membership. Rather, we are a service organization to our membership and membership in FGC is voluntary. In general, FGC seems well regarded by our membership though concerns about limited resources can sometimes create a relationship between FGC and its members that is perceived as simultaneously collaborative and competitive. With that said, and to demonstrate the general state of goodwill, our membership of regional (yearly meetings) and local (monthly meetings) congregations has expanded over the last decade.

To fulfill our vision, FGC provides, through 18 staff and 200+ volunteers, a wide range of programs, events and services such as the Gathering mentioned above, the Spiritual Deepening program (religious education), our Ministry on Racism program (anti-racism work), youth ministries, information sharing across our membership (being a connector), an online Quaker bookshop, QuakerPress, and so much more. Friends General Conference is structured as a volunteer-led organization and is governed by Central Committee, presently composed of 100+ members, who meet once a year to approve the budget, make changes to the by-laws, and approve program changes. Decisions at the board level are made using Quaker process to arrive at unity, but not unanimous decisions. As might be expected, large scale change often requires broad and deep consultation grounded in community worship to arrive at unity. Central Committee members are also some of our most dedicated programmatic volunteers. Central Committee members are often appointees of our association members (yearly and monthly meetings) and some individuals are invited to Central Committee membership directly by FGC’s nominating committee. In between annual Central Committee meetings, the 30+ member Executive Committee takes up time sensitive issues usually meeting three or more times a year.

During the pandemic, FGC governance has conducted all meetings virtually and the experience of virtual governance and committee meetings is changing perceptions about how we might structure our work going forward.

As is true of many Christian lineage religious organizations, FGC's churches and meetings have started to experience declining attendance greatly exacerbated by the pandemic. Beyond the worrying impacts to local meetings and churches, declining participation also impacts FGC. Central Committee was 150+ members just seven years ago and we are now having great difficulty recruiting new governance/committee members. FGC uses standing committees to carry out its work (members have 3 year terms) and the declining number of committee members is calling into question our ability to deliver programs using our current model of volunteer-led/staff supported ministries. This issue is also manifesting across our member yearly and monthly meetings/churches. In terms of staffing, we are relatively stable with the Executive Director (General Secretary) having been in place for over ten years and several staff having been in place for five years or more. Staff stress, however, is very high due to consistently demanding workloads because of fewer volunteers, a program roster that exceeds current human resources, and the additional demands of the pandemic. Further, staff stress is sometimes exacerbated by our default practice of running most decisions through committees. Developing guidelines that might empower staff to take more of certain types of decisions might be beneficial to the organization. **Overall, restructuring our governance and staff structures, including how we attract, retain, utilize and support the ministry of volunteers is key to the future of our organization.**

Beyond governance reform and volunteer empowerment, FGC's largest event needs to be reimagined. As our name suggests, Friends General Conference was organized to hold a general conference (now called "The Gathering") which has occurred for more than 120 years. At its height in the 1990s, the event attracted almost 2,000 attendees per year. In recent years that attendance has fallen dramatically—especially among families with children and teens. During the pandemic, we have gone online attracting roughly 1,000 attendees in the years 2020 and 2021. Our constituency, going forward, now expects that there will be online and in-person elements to the Gathering. We have deep concerns about the future format, frequency and financial viability of the Gathering. As we reimagine our governance and volunteer structures, we must work simultaneously and synergistically to ensure our largest event thrives going forward. **We are seeking guidance on the structure of a planning process that will complement the overall assessment and can successfully help us reimagine our largest event.**

Beyond the issue of recruiting and retaining volunteers/committee members, FGC also has internal board conflict over its finances. Some governance members feel our expenses are too high for our level of income and worry that we will run down our reserves within the next five years or so. Other governance members feel that we have sufficient resources to continue with current programs and feel any programmatic layoffs are unnecessary and counterproductive. Adding to this tension, FGC governance has never agreed to a set of evaluative criteria for certain programs making it very difficult to agree on which programs are or are not succeeding. The need for a program is often seen as justification for program continuance even if there is no agreement as to the cost/benefit of the program itself or agreed measures of positive impact.

**Helping foster conversations about our finances that build a common vision while also helping us set out shared evaluative criteria and processes for program evaluation will help our organization become stronger.**

As we talk about changing the structure and format of several aspects of the organization, we are reminded of the saying “culture eats strategy for breakfast.” We recognize that there are strong cultural practices within the operations of Friends General Conference that will have to be addressed in order to see possible structural reforms succeed. Our hope is that this assessment and its recommendations will not only point us towards needed structural changes, but might also inform new practices that will lead to shifts in our culture. As a spiritual community, we believe in the transformative power of Spirit to work through groups of people to see change realized both within ourselves and our community.

Further, as we reach the close of this section it’s important to reemphasize our board level commitment to becoming an anti-racist institution. As a majority white religion in North America, the white membership of FGC has had a history of being culturally and structurally unwelcoming, painfully so, for Quakers of color (while many Quakers of all races have been committed to abolition and civil rights—structural and cultural racism has persisted within our membership). As an institution, FGC has not lived up to our spiritual calling to be an egalitarian religious body. Recently, FGC conducted an assessment of structural racism within our organization and we made a commitment to move the organization culturally and structurally towards a better place. As mentioned earlier, we are actively guided by the query, *“How does this decision support FGC in its goal to transform into an anti-racist faith community?”* We are also a rapidly aging religious body. Our goal is to become a fully multi-racial, intergenerational and just spiritual community. **Whatever the recommendations are that come from this planning process, they must help FGC fulfill our spiritual commitment to uplift “that of God in everyone.”**

**Scope of Work, Deliverables and Timeline:**

We are flexible about the scope of work. In particular, we realize we have an ambitious list of items we wish to examine. Your proposal will be considered if the scope you propose to address includes governance, volunteers, and helping structure a process to reimagine of our largest event. However, we may view proposals that include the full scope of work more favorably depending on the proposals we receive. Further, we understand that you as the consultant may have a better idea of how to structure the work to reach the deliverables within the stated timeline and budget. With that said, our initial sharing of ideas will likely be helpful to your construction of a proposal.

- Possible tasks and/or services for which the consultant(s) will be responsible
  - Providing a process framework for the assessment
  - Conducting meetings/focus group sessions
  - Developing and discussing possible options/recommendations
- Possible tasks for which staff and volunteers will be responsible
  - Arranging of meetings/focus groups
  - Providing background information and documents to the consultant

- Conducting surveys of our constituents directed by the consulting firm
- Possible meetings that consultant(s) might participate in (final schedule to be negotiated)
  - A series of one-on-one meetings with the consultant might be beneficial with certain stakeholders. This can be established during contract negotiation and/or discovery.
  - One online meeting with Executive Committee (90 Minutes)
  - One online meeting with full staff (90 Minutes)
  - One online meeting with Administrative + Program team (60 Minutes)
  - One online meeting with Gathering staff + Long Range Conference Planning leadership (60 Minutes)
  - One online meeting with the Committee for Nurturing Ministries (30-60 Minutes)
  - One online meeting with Yearly Meeting leadership (association members) (90 minutes)
  - One online meeting with the Nominating Committee (30-60 Minutes)
  - One online meeting with the Institutional Assessment Implementation Committee (60 Minutes)
  - One or more online meetings with the staff evaluations working group (30-60 Minutes)
  - Online meetings as mutually agreed with the General Secretary (Executive Director) and Presiding Clerk (Board Chair) to help shepherd the project.
  - One in-person or online meeting with Central Committee to present recommendations (90-120 Minutes)
- Deliverables—Draft and final products (in order of priority)
  - Necessary
    - Recommendations for alternative volunteer, staff, and governance structures (including assisting certain committees restructure such as the Committee for Nurturing Ministries) that will grow and nourish our volunteer base, improve program delivery, ease the workload of staff, and assist with decision-making. Should include changes/process needed to implement the changes. The recommendations should also maintain our commitment to spiritually based decision-making that seeks Godly outcomes through communion with Spirit.
    - A process to help us reimagine the Gathering, currently our largest program.
    - A process that helps us refine how to use campaign money to hire additional staffing that supports our program priorities, supports our new governance and volunteers structures, and guides us on how to structure ourselves long-term once campaign money has exhausted itself in 3-5 years.
  - Optional, but still highly preferred
    - Help establish shared criteria for program evaluation, the sample evaluation of one program, and a roadmap for the conduct of future evaluations including resources and structures needed to carry out evaluations. Particular attention should be given to developing shared criteria for the creation and discontinuation of programs by governance.
    - Facilitate conversations that help foster a shared conception of what long-term financial stability might look like.

- **Draft Timeline**
  - We recognize that our preferred timeline may not be possible for a variety of factors including the availability and potential start date of your firm. Therefore, we have included a draft preferred shorter timeline below and a longer timeline following it. Of course, a final timeline would be worked out through consultation and you should feel free to offer an alternative in your written proposal.
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- **Preferred Shorter Timeline**
  - Proposal submitted by June 15<sup>th</sup> with notifications within two weeks.
  - Discovery through committee meetings and additional background materials through August 12<sup>th</sup>.
  - Additional discovery with event and program participants through the FGC Gathering July 3<sup>rd</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>.
  - Initial recommendations by August 26<sup>th</sup> with 2 online presentations open to all Central Committee members
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> round draft recommendations presented to Executive Committee (24<sup>th</sup> of September)
  - Final recommendations to Central Committee (20<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> of October)
- **Longer Timeline**
  - Proposal submitted by June 15<sup>th</sup> with notifications within two weeks.
  - Discovery through committee meetings and additional background materials through September 30<sup>th</sup>.
  - Additional discovery with event and program participants through the FGC Gathering July 3<sup>rd</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>.
  - Initial recommendations to Central Committee in late October (20<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup>) with 2 online presentations open to all Central Committee members
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> round draft recommendations presented to Winter Executive Committee (End of January).
  - Final recommendations to a special called meeting of Central Committee (February)
- **Format for deliverables**
  - Written report and oral presentation with Q&A; report will be available for public posting on our website and distribution to our association members

## **RFP Response Submittal & Evaluation**

Your proposal should address the following:

- What are your areas of expertise and how do they relate to FGC's needs described in this RfP?
- How has your firm successfully helped other organizations with their anti-racism work?
- Have you completed any specialized training or certification related to our needs?
- How long have you been in the business?
- Please estimate your fees to meet the needs described in this RfP? What is included and what is not included?

- Should we anticipate additional charges for materials or supplies that might be needed?
- Do you anticipate travel and therefore travel costs?
- Describe your process.
- What does a typical session look like and can you use remote working tools to work with geographically dispersed stakeholders?
- How do you handle the privacy and confidentiality of your clients?
- What is your cancellation policy?
- What is your schedule and availability for project implementation?
- How long might a project of this nature usually take?
- Do you work alone or with a team?
- Who within the organization is your preferred point of contact and what is your relationship with this person?
- Can you provide us with two or more references?
- Share a short professional biography of each person who might be involved in this project and indicate their possible role in the project.

In addition to your answers in the proposal response requirements, preferential consideration will be given to:

- Consultants who bring knowledge of different governance and volunteer systems
- Consultants who have helped institutions achieve cultural and systemic change
- Consultants who have successfully worked with religious groups, grassroots organizations and/or associations
- Consultants who have diversity, equity and inclusion experience

People of color owned, GLBTQIA+ owned, women owned, and multi-racial teams are strongly encouraged to apply.

### **Submission Deadline, Authority & Funding**

Proposals are to be submitted by **Wednesday, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022 at 5pm.**

A called session of Executive Committee will be called soon afterwards to discuss proposals. Once a vendor is selected notifications will be sent.

**The budget for this project is between \$35,000-50,000.** Please name the cost of your proposal in your submission.

**Submissions can be sent to Susan Lee Barton**, FGC's Administrative Associate, at [susanleeb@fgcquaker.org](mailto:susanleeb@fgcquaker.org). She can also be reached at (215) 561-1700 x3008.

**Questions about this RfP can be directed to Barry Crossno**, General Secretary (Executive Director), at [barryc@fgcquaker.org](mailto:barryc@fgcquaker.org).