

YFGM Nominations Process

Guide for YFGMers

Introduction

Nominations is a key part of Quaker tradition, and while much of it takes place behind closed doors, it is central to the life of any Meeting. Every other role within YFGM is appointed to following the process of nominations by Nominations Committee. As such, all of the work of YFGM depends on this being done well. While the key work of discernment is done by the Nominations Committee, the whole Meeting is responsible for nominations, and needs to support the committee in doing their work.

As a Quaker organisation, YFGM uses the Quaker nominations process to find people to fill volunteer roles within the Meeting. However, the fact that YFGM meets three weekends per year means that it must be done in a slightly different way to Local and Area Meetings.

This document is a guide for everyone in YFGM, and is written assuming no familiarity with the nominations process. However, it does assume some familiarity with basic Quaker concepts such as worship and discernment.

There are details not discussed in this document. This is not to keep any veil of secrecy on the work of the committee, but simply that those details aren't important to understanding the process and the place of the Meeting as a whole in it. Separate documents exist for committee members and for the convenor, and if you really want to read those, there's no reason you shouldn't be able to - talk to the Convenor of Nominations.

The Theory

It's difficult to summarise the whole idea of Quaker nominations, but here's a few theoretical principles to help you:

- The Quaker nominations process is about discerning, with spiritual guidance, who is *right* for a role, not who will be *best* at it. As such, we reach our decisions through discernment in a spirit of worship, meeting in silence, to be best aware of those leadings that will guide us to a right outcome.
- Service is a central element of Quaker faith, and having the opportunity to serve may be very important to Friends.
- The Nominations Committee produces *nominations* for roles; the Meeting as a whole determines whether or not to accept those nominations. Though people often describe the suggesting of a name to the committee as a nomination, that is *not* technically correct. It is just a *suggestion*.
- The Meeting as a whole is the appointing body, and a person is appointed when the Meeting accepts their nomination. The process of nomination assists a Meeting in filling a role, but the Meeting must still discern whether to accept that nomination.
- An exception to this may arise in the case of external bodies; sometimes another group requests that YFGM *nominate* a person to that body, and the person is formally appointed by them rather than by YFGM. In that case, Nominations Committee is still making a nomination, and YFGM is approving it as a nomination by the Meeting.

The Practice

Given those principles for how nominations is supposed to work, here's a practical description of how it actually happens.

Before YFGM

The convenor will prepare a list of nominations required, and ensure that this is disseminated as widely as possible. Hopefully, they will also receive some suggestions before the weekend.

They will also remind members of the committee about the rota, and ensure that everyone knows whether they are 'on duty' or not. Members of Nominations Committee not 'on duty' will generally still be attending YFGM, as the idea is that they use the time to maintain their connection with the community of the Meeting.

The convenor may also seek people to be co-opted onto the committee for the weekend, if there are too few 'on duty' members of the committee expected. This can be a great opportunity to learn about the nominations process. However, we won't usually invite volunteers, as it is a very sensitive role; we will usually approach individuals directly. If you're interested in being co-opted in future, let the convenor know, and they will bear you in mind if and when we need that support.

Members of the committee will also prepare themselves by reflecting on the roles for which nominations are sought, and on the practice and process of Quaker Nominations.

“Introduction to Nominations/Nominations Required” Session

On Saturday morning, there is a session to introduce the Nominations Committee, the Nominations process, and the roles that we are seeking nominations for. The convenor will handle most of the speaking in these sessions, and those on duty that weekend, if present, will be introduced and may contribute to the session in other ways. Sometimes the committee will give a more substantial session exploring nominations more fully.

The Suggestions Box

The first step in the process is where we ask everyone to be involved - writing names and roles on little slips and putting them in the nominations box. We encourage people to do that, rather than tell a member of Nominations in person, because that doesn't rely on anyone's memory. You are more than welcome to suggest yourself for any role.

You can put your own name on a suggestion slip along with the name you suggest, if you want to, so we can talk to you about your suggestion; try to be clear which name is the suggestion and which is yourself. You should never feel you have to do this.

We will also, from time to time throughout the weekend, remind everyone about the box and encourage them to make suggestions.

Reviewing Names

When Nominations meet, after the Nominations Required session, someone will have emptied the suggestions box, and brought the contents to the meeting. Members of the committee will make note of the names, and decide who will talk to each person mentioned. Usually, anyone not present at the YFGM will be contacted by the convenor, but it may sometimes make more sense for someone who knows them well to contact them, if there is such a person on the committee.

Where a person is suggested for more than one role, it is usually best if the same member of Nominations speaks to that person for all roles.

The committee will then set out, rejoin the community, and attempt to speak to those they need to (as explained in the next section). When next they meet, they will share the result of those conversations, and go over any new suggestions from the box, repeating this process until one or more roles are ready to be discerned.

“The Conversation”

Possibly the most visible part of the nominations process is our duty to speak to everyone whose name has been suggested for a role, find out how they feel about it, and whether they would be willing and able to serve. This is important, as we do not nominate “subject to consent”, as that leaves the Meeting in uncertainty and applies too much pressure to the nominee.

At this stage the name has been *suggested*, not nominated. While this might seem like a minor technicality, it avoids misunderstandings with, for example, Friends who are experienced in other Quaker Meetings, but not in YFGM. Using the term ‘nominated’ with such Friends may give the impression that their name has already been discerned. This is because many Meetings discern before having a serious conversation with an individual, relying on a more casual, sometimes quite oblique chat before discernment. However, members of the committee may not always make this clear, especially given how busy we often are. In any case, you are being asked if you would be willing and able to serve if nominated, but your name has not gone through any discernment yet at this point. Please be sure with your answer, though, as we will take a *yes* as a *yes* and a *no* as a *no*.

You’ll generally be taken to one side for this conversation, and you can have as much privacy as you want for it. If you’d rather talk about it right where you are, then just reassure the member of Nominations Committee that you’re happy to talk where you are. If you change your mind about how much privacy you want, just let them know.

If you’d rather talk to another member of nominations committee, rather than the one who has approached you, please do let them know. We won’t take this as any insult, and won’t ask you to justify the request. You can ask for a specific member of the committee, or just for someone other than the person who approached you. If you’d rather not say this to that person, find another member of the committee and let them know; the convenor is usually the best person to speak to in such situations, but you can talk to anyone on the committee.

We’ll try not to make the conversation inconvenient for you, but remember that nominations is a very important part of YFGM, and we usually have a lot to do in a short time, so we may have to interrupt a conversation, or when you’re helping in the kitchen.

It is never the purpose of the conversation to persuade people to say yes. We want to encourage you and reassure you, certainly, so everyone can bring their best to the Meeting, and get as much out of it as possible. With very few exceptions, it is better to leave a role vacant than to have the wrong person in the role. If you feel pressured to say yes, then please be assured that this was not the intention.

Sometimes, there will be pressure to give an answer. Not usually when you’re first approached - we realise that you will need time to consider the question, may want to talk to people, read the role description, and so on. However, as the weekend wears on, it will become more important that

everyone has answered, yes or no. We'll try to let you know this as gently as possible, and give you whatever support you need to be able to come to a decision. Some roles are very significant commitments, so we don't want people to agree lightly, but nor do we want people to say 'no' too quickly either.

One last note: members of the committee will often be referring to a sheet of paper when talking to people. This is their record of suggested names and responses. Please do not try to 'sneak a peek' at it.

Threshing

Once a role is ready to have a nomination discerned, the committee will thresh the names for the role. Putting aside anyone who hasn't said 'yes', the committee goes through the names in turn, with the committee member who spoke to that person relating what they learned. Other members of the committee may share other information that they consider relevant. Opinions on the suitability of the person for the role are not appropriate at this point, save for things that absolutely make a person ineligible. It may transpire that more information is needed about that name, in which case the threshing will be set aside until someone can get that information, for example, by having another chat with the person. Discussion about the nature of the role and the current makeup of the committee in question (where applicable) can also take place at this stage.

Threshing is an open stage in which anyone can ask any question, with the convenor acting as a facilitator. The aim is to make sure that everything is discussed that needs to be, to reduce the chance of factual questions being discovered during discernment.

When the role has been fully threshed, the convenor will move the committee into discernment of that role.

Discernment

Once details have been threshed, the names will be considered in a process of worshipful discernment. Small group discernment is not quite the same as the whole Meeting gathering in a business session, due to the size of the group, but the major principles still apply. The meeting is one of worship, in gathered silence, with each person speaking as they feel moved to. The convenor fills the role of both clerk and elder, reading the sense of the meeting and ensuring right ordering. However, because of the smaller number of people, it is likely that each person may be called to speak more than once; similarly, the convenor cannot completely sit back from the process, and will often give ministry as well.

Ministry will most often touch upon such things as what a person will bring to a role, what the role may bring to them, how they will fit in with people they will be working with, and the future service a person may bring to YFGM, or the wider Society of Friends, including other roles whether or not they are currently under consideration. This might be their future potential for roles after that being discerned, or roles that it would be good for them to be available for in the near future, that appointment to this role would interfere with. It is important to remember the person behind the name, especially in terms of their abilities, aspirations and well-being.

When the convenor feels that there is a clear sense of the meeting, they will offer their reading of that sense to the committee. As in any business meeting, Friends indicate their acceptance of the name by saying "hope so"; the convenor is as fallible as anyone else, and may sometimes offer a name that the committee do not feel able to accept.

The convenor may also bring the discernment to a conclusion other than the choice of a name to take forward. The sense of the meeting may be that we need more information, more names, or clarification from a person whose name is under consideration, and the role will be tabled until we have what we need, at which point it will be threshed again, and a fresh discernment process begun.

It also sometimes happens that, even when people are willing and able, the committee is unable to discern a name. Depending on the reasons, there are two main possibilities in handling this. We may fail to bring a name to the Meeting as a whole, and the role will be carried forward. Alternatively, we may bring more names than are required. For example, where a single name is required for a role, we may bring two names, and ask YFGM to make the final decision. Bringing two names for YFGM to choose between is something of a last resort. However, the Meeting as a whole has responsibility for appointments, the Nominations Committee helping them, but not doing the whole job.

Recusal

There are circumstances in which it is not appropriate for a particular member of the Nominations Committee to take part in some or all of the process. The most common is where a committee member's name is under consideration, though there are others. It is generally up to the judgement of an individual when to recuse themselves, though they must always recuse themselves from the discernment of a role for which their name is under consideration.

Sometimes the convenor will have to be recused. In this case, another member of the committee will stand in for the convenor for that one item, from the beginning of threshing. This ensures continuity through the consideration of that role. They will also present that item during Nominations Returns.

If recusals significantly bring down the number of people able to serve the committee in discernment, the convenor may co-opt one or more other Friends to join the committee for consideration of that specific role. If asked to assist in this way, please give it true consideration. It can be a very uplifting experience, and we hope you will gain from it as well as give by helping us.

Following Discernment

Where possible, those who are willing and able for a role will be informed as to whether their name is going forward or not, usually by the person who had the conversation with them. If time is short, priority will be given to letting people know that their name is *not* going forward. We know that this is sometimes a difficult thing to hear, and will try to answer questions, but we absolutely *cannot* give any guidance about specific reasons in any individual case, on general factors that may be relevant, many of which are mentioned in this document. You can always speak to the Convenor of Nominations if you want to know more, but we will not discuss the specifics of an individual case.

The convenor will also prepare a table of all the nominations going forward, to pass on to the clerks for the Nominations Returns session.

Nominations Returns

The nominations prepared by the committee are presented to the Meeting as a whole in the Nominations Returns session. In this session, the convenor will report the names nominated, in small groups, usually of 2-4 names, to the meeting, and those named will leave the room if they are

present. The meeting will then discern whether to accept the nominations, that decision will be recorded by the clerks, and those concerned will be invited to re-enter the room.

If there are questions regarding any nomination, the convenor will answer them while the people concerned are not in the room - or, as is often the case, refuse to answer them; often, they will simply confirm that yes, the committee did have that information while they were discerning.

When all nominations have been approved, or as may rarely happen, not approved, the clerks will read a nominations minute recording details of those released from roles, those appointed to roles, and their terms.

Nominations to Nominations

Nominations Committee does not nominate to their own committee; this would be considered inappropriate. However, we do serve the Meeting as a whole in their work to nominate people to Nominations Committee.

As such, we collect names for positions on Nominations Committee in the same way as for any other role. The conversation we have with the people suggested, however, is simpler. We still help them decide if they are willing and able, by explaining the role, pointing them to more information, and so on. However, we do not try to make any judgements as to what they will bring to the role, or what they will get out of it, and certainly do not report any such. We simply record whether or not they are willing and able.

Following the Nominations Returns session, there is a Nominations to Nominations session - unless there are no spaces open on Nominations Committee. The convenor of Nominations Committee will introduce the session, though it will be clerked by the clerks of YFGM. At the end of the introduction, they will report on names that have already been suggested, and whether those people are willing and able. Even those not willing and able are reported. Further suggestions are invited from the floor, and those suggested asked whether they are willing and able. Once it is apparent that all suggestions have been made, those who are willing and able leave the room, the clerks will move the meeting into discernment, and the meeting will discern which names to appoint. There is no stage equivalent to the threshing carried out by Nominations Committee, as this would not be practical with such a large group.

Important Rules

These are the most important rules for serving on nominations. We hope that knowing them will help you in interacting with the committee, and reassure you of the seriousness with which we take our role.

- **Confidentiality:** Everything nominations does is confidential, except for the returns. Everything mentioned in threshing and discernment is absolutely confidential. Who has been suggested is confidential. Whether people said yes or no is confidential (except in the case of nominations to nominations). So please don't ask about it.
- **Sensitivity:** It's not that unusual that someone may be emotional when we talk to them. This can occur in various situations, like when we let someone know their name is not going forward, or when they are explaining why they are not willing and able. We do our best to handle such situations with sensitivity. Quinty is around to help with spiritual questions, and overseers to help with pastoral matters, and you can ask to speak to them if you wish.

- **No is always an acceptable answer:** If someone says no, it is not appropriate to try and persuade them to change their mind. We may, on very rare occasions, offer them the opportunity to change their mind; the convenor should judge such instances. If you aren't sure, it is not our job to persuade you to say yes, but to help you work out what the right answer is for *you*. However, if a person says no without apparently considering the question, it can be worth making sure they have considered it. We know that sometimes people have very good reasons for saying 'no' out-of-hand, though, so feel free to be blunt with us.