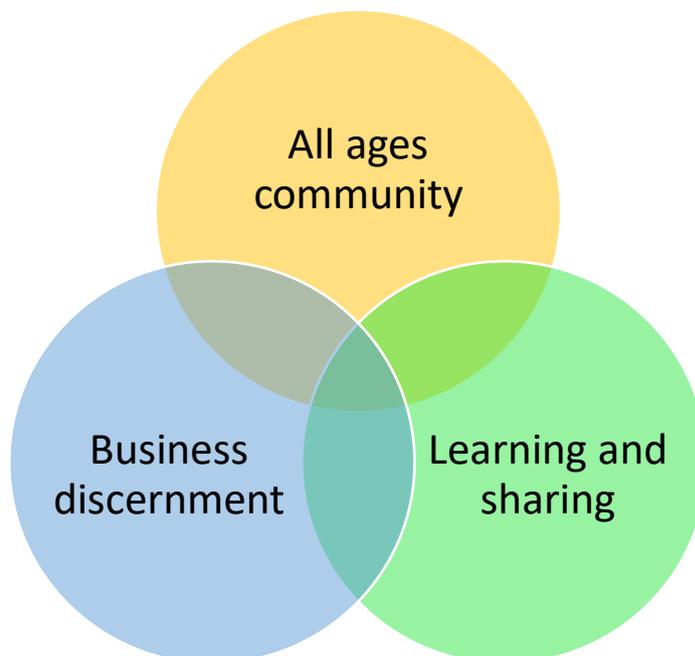


Right Holding of Yearly Meeting: considerations

Our **purpose** in holding our YM gathering has been identified as **All-ages Community; Learning; Business discernment**. We need to balance these three aspects.



Our thinking remains centred on 2 aspects,

Part 1: How and when we hold our YM gathering.

Part 2: How we can ground and streamline our business process.

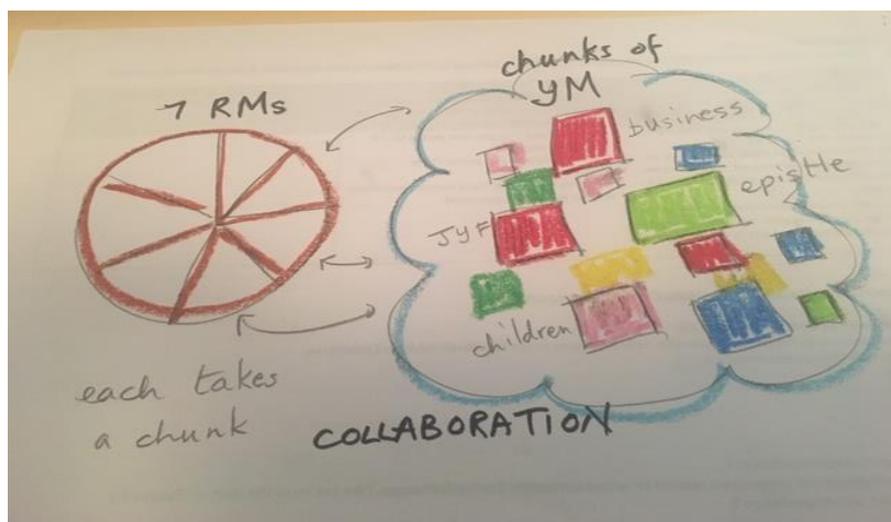
We have based our thinking on deep consultations with Friends, and we thank them for their careful contributions. All reports and workshops are on our webpage at

<https://www.quakersaustralia.info/RightHolding> . We continue to welcome feedback.

Part 1

How we hold our YM gathering

We recommend a collaborative organisation model, where one (or possibly more) RM takes the responsibility for organising the gathering, and other RMs, Meetings, and individual Friends take responsibility for discrete sections of the gathering. **We recommend** that the RM organising the YM gathering should identify as early as may be where they need support.



- We need to avoid burnout
- We need to give Friends opportunities to share their gifts
- We need to respond to the particular needs of the particular RM which is organising the YM gathering.

Equality of access to our YM gathering

We recommend that we continue to experiment with

- Options, including timetable arrangements so that we can keep costs down, without undermining the purposes of our YM gathering
- Online meetings, as appropriate, to include distant Friends.

Travel costs. **We note** it would be possible (once the venue is known) for the AYM Treasurer and Finance Committee to draw up average travel costs to attend from each RM. The subsequent travel subsidy to each RM could reflect actual costs and include carbon offsets. We note that early bookings for travel are cheaper and the subsidy could reflect costs of earlier bookings. **We recommend** that this should be considered by the AYM Treasurer and AYM Finance Committee, probably in collaboration with RM Treasurers.

Month in which we hold our YM gathering

We recommend that the month in which our YM gathering is held should be determined by the RM which is organising that YM gathering. We note that early notice to Friends is essential. We expect that the YM gathering could be held in January, July or possibly around Easter, to take advantage of national school holidays.

We note that as YM19 disassociated the financial year cycle from our YM cycle, this does not have implications for the month in which we hold our AGM, receive financial statements, approve our budget, etc.

All ages gatherings: our Community

We acknowledge that children, JYFs, and YFs, as well as adults, are an essential part of our YM gathering. We encourage children and JYFs to contribute to the YM gathering as they feel led. We encourage all to feel an integral part of our YM.

Right Holding of YM background paper November 2019

We encourage feedback – please send to choldingym@quakersaustralia.info

We encourage the Children's and JYF Coordinators as well as RMs to continue to plan additional family and JYF camps and other gatherings outside the YM cycle.

Learning opportunities: an important part of Community

Friendly School, Interest group meetings, and Share-&-Tells are our existing platforms for learning and sharing at YM gatherings. We affirm their importance to the experience of Community and to igniting and nurturing the passionate Concerns of Friends. We encourage YM Planning Committees to continue to find ample time for these in the YM timetable. We note that Interest groups are able to meet informally throughout the year, either online or face-to-face.

Our YM gathering is not a discrete event – it is part of our journey together as Friends throughout the year.

Part 2

How we can ground and streamline our business process

What happens now – with comments

AYM Committees, RMs, and some other groups write **annual reports** for *Documents in Advance* (DiA). These reports succinctly set out:

- The members and actions of the group
- (If required) the issues they have identified requiring discernment
- (If required), the group's recommendations or questions for YM discernment.

It is understood that some groups' reports are for transparent accounting and will rarely have issues/recommendations for YM discernment. (These reports have no 'Part B'.) Examples of these are reports from organisations associated with AYM but which do not require AYM decisions, e.g. QSA; Silver Wattle Quaker Centre; Friends' School; Friends' Fellowship of Healing; etc. These reports can be treated as an Interest group's report, and in practice many Friends are interested in discussing the reports from these associated organisations.

In some cases, a Part B does not contain recommendations requiring discernment (e.g. 'We hope all Friends will promote this actively'). Such reports will normally only need to be noted. These reports can be treated as an Interest group's report.

In some cases, a report without a Part B contains issues which do require discernment. An RM may identify these, give a response with their discernment, and it will then be considered at the YM gathering.



DiA is sent to RMs for discernment on 'Part B' matters.

We bring to the attention of RM Clerks that it would be possible for committee members to speak at RMs via Zoom or a similar software platform (if invited).



RM responses to these matters are collated by the AYM Secretary (and sent out to RM Clerks and Committee conveners prior to YM). The AYM Secretary also pulls out reports and RM responses for the chosen clerks of the Prep Sessions. She then ensures they are made available through the YM website, usually around 2 weeks prior to the YM gathering. Hard copies are available (on request from the Help Desk, and/or on a noticeboard) at the YM gathering.

We recommend that the availability of the RM responses on our YM website prior to our YM gathering is strongly promoted to Friends. These are and should be an integral part of our YM discernment.



Preparatory Sessions

Friends attending the Prep Session are expected to have read the DiA report and RM responses

Purpose of a Preparatory Session

1. Act as an information share
 - a. Committee report
 - b. RM responses.
2. Tease out the key issues and ideas (should be clear from the report). This needs to be carefully clerked, to ensure all voices are heard.

Then, either

1. Reach unity and draft a recommendation or recommendations (not a 'draft YM minute') for the full YM formal session's consideration and discernment.
2. (If unity is not found) Clarify the issues and put them into a format for the full YM formal session's consideration and discernment.

We note that Prep Sessions could be held as webinars, and preliminary discernment be done online after RM discernment and before the YM gathering.

We recommend that the definitions and guidelines for Preparatory Sessions should be revised in *DiA* and in the *Handbook*.



YM formal sessions

Friends expecting to speak at the formal session will normally have attended the Prep Session

Purpose of a YM formal session

Final discernment, either

- To accept or change the recommendation/s from the Prep Session.
- To reach a decision on matters referred from the Prep Session.
- (Rarely) to refer a particularly difficult issue back to RMs for discernment, to be determined at the next YM.



After the YM gathering, *Documents in Retrospect (DiR)*, including the Minutes of the formal sessions, is collated by the AYM Secretary and placed on our webpage. The Secretary also sends out a summary of actions to RM clerks and Committee conveners.

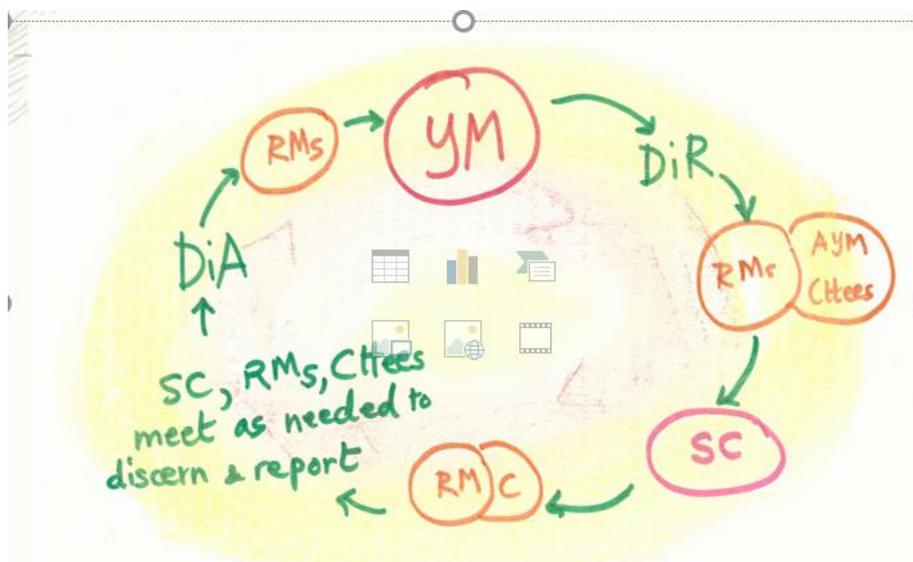
How can we ground our process and make it stronger?

- By ensuring that all Friends understand that our discernment process is grassroots up; that decisions are not made by a clique or hierarchy; that coming to business sessions with heart and mind prepared (e.g. by reading reports) and listening to others and for the Spirit is the basis of Quaker discernment
- By respecting that our discernment sessions are meetings for worship for business
- By sharing information as widely as possible, as a prerequisite for sound decision-making – this may include webinars held during the year as well as information placed on our website.

Disseminated business option

Additionally, we may choose to accept reports with no discernment items (no 'Part B') at other times of the year. For example, it would be possible to hear the report from the Friends' Fellowship of Healing (as an example) at a different month than that in which the YM gathering is to be held, and to hold discussions on this vibrant Concern online after the report, and/or at the YM gathering.

The suggested process would be Report → Secretary → RMs → Secretary → Standing Committee for formal acceptance if all RMs are in unity (and back for further discernment if unity has not been found.)



Spreading business matters across the year would

1. Avoid the 'hump' of discernment of *DiA* at one time
2. Require more activity on the part of RMs and Standing Committee (SC)
3. Enable more timely discernment for arising issues
4. Triage the YM agenda so that only matters requiring discernment are included.

We recommend that, if a disseminated business model is implemented, the AYM Secretary could develop a template *For discernment* agenda (a 'mini-*DiA*') to send to RMs.

Suggested cycle for SC and *For Discernment* in this model

1. Post YM – follow up from YM, ratify any decisions on which all RMs are in unity, etc. Prepare agenda for mini-*DiA* for next SC meeting
2. AGM and ratify any decisions on which all RMs are in unity, etc. Prepare agenda for mini-*DiA* for next SC meeting
3. Mid cycle meeting - ratify any decisions on which all RMs are in unity, etc. Prepare agenda for *DiA*
4. Pre YM – check *DiA* and decide YM agenda, ratifying any decisions on which all RMs are in unity, etc.

This requires a quarterly *For discernment* agenda to go out to all RMs. The first in this cycle follows YM and is a reminder of what follow-up RMs need to do (our Secretary does this now).

Preparing agendas for discernment

We note that the AYM Secretary and Clerk work very hard to prepare agendas for SC. **We recommend** that their process should be simplified, so that

1. A burden is lifted from them

2. Deadlines for reports to SC are shortened, without impacting on the availability of reports for Friends' timely discernment.

Examples of ways to streamline the process of preparing SC agendas and (mini-)DiAs:

- Reports could be uploaded as received into Google Docs or a similar platform rather than the Secretary collating and paginating them into a single document as now. (This assumes that members of SC will use the website version or print their own documents from it.) This should remove a large burden from the Secretary.
- We suggest that 2 weeks before the discernment meeting should be long enough for Friends to read the reports and prepare their minds. This should mean that reports and their recommendations are more current.

This would simplify the workload on Committees. Currently, Committees must get their reports to the AYM Secretary by late October for RM discernment in December and SC discernment in January; and by late April for RM discernment in June and YM discernment in July. This 3-month lag time means that Committee reports are never current. It also means that AYM Committees often stop work in April after writing their report for YM.

Standing Committee meetings – when does SC need to meet? (3-5 times p.a.)

- Needs to meet in August to consider the AYM budget (must be approved by 30 September)
- Needs to meet within 5 months of end of financial year for AGM (i.e. October-February). There is no quorum specified in our Rules for an AGM. The AGM must: receive annual reports for the financial year and audited financial statements for the financial year just ended. The AGM also appoints officers (noting the appointments made by YM).
- Needs to meet to consider the State of the Society, timetabling of YM, and other administrative matters (these have been delegated to the Secretary and Presiding Clerk)
- Needs to meet to consider items brought forward by RMs or Committees.
- Needs to meet whenever an urgent matter arises.
 - **We note** that, in these days of online meetings, there is almost no need for the 'urgent decision-making process' outlined in the *Handbook*, in which the Clerk, Secretary, (usually) Treasurer and an RM Clerk meet to decide an urgent matter. A quorum of the normal members of Standing Committee can be held online as urgent matters arise. **We recommend** that the Standing Committee Review Committee and the Handbook Revision Committee review the need for the smaller 'urgent decision-making process', which is inherently hierarchical and therefore not in keeping with the spirit of our Quaker business discernment process.

We note that all meetings could be online. At this time SC prefers to meet face-to-face at least twice a year, (1) just before YM (2) mid-year, i.e. approx. 6 months before YM. We note it would be possible to open one online meeting of SC to other Friends, either as observers or as participants. We have no recommendations, considering that these matters should be discerned by SC.

Example A – YM in July

1. Online meeting in August to approve budget and any other matters
2. Face-to-face meeting in January (must be between October - February) to coincide with the AGM. (We consider it is preferable that the AGM should be face-to-face, although it could be opened for remote Friends to participate online.)
3. Online meeting in March - May as needed (e.g. to approve *Handbook* changes if all RMs in unity, *DiA* reports with no Part B, etc.)
4. Face-to-face meeting in July prior to YM.

Example B – YM in January

1. Face-to-face meeting in January prior to YM, coinciding with AGM
2. Online meeting in March - May as needed (could be an open webinar)
3. Online meeting in August to approve budget and any other matters (replaces face-to-face mid year meeting of SC)
4. Online meeting in October - November as needed.

Example C – YM in April (Easter)

1. Face-to-face meeting in January (October – February) to coincide with AGM, may include (2) below
2. Online meeting in February as needed (e.g. to approve Handbook changes if all RMs in unity, DiA reports with no Part B, etc.)
3. Face-to-face meeting in April prior to YM
4. Online meeting in August to approve budget and any other matters
5. Online meeting in July as needed (could be an open webinar).

Background on our financial year cycle (primarily affects AYM Clerk, Secretary, Treasurer)



1 October financial year starts, 30 September financial year ends.

Budget for the following year must be approved by August latest. This is done by SC.

Audited EOFY statements must be tabled at the AGM, which must be held within 5 months of end of financial year (i.e. October-February).

What this means for our reporting year:

- Because our annual reports must be tabled at our AGM, this means our reporting year is linked to our financial year.
- This means that annual reports from RMs will continue to be required for the year 1 October – 30 September.
- Annual reports from RMs should therefore be submitted to SC in January/February in time for the AGM.
- This may mean that the *State of the Society address* is given at the AGM and videoed or live streamed at that time, rather than at the YM gathering.