# **New economy reading group programme**

# **Introductory session plan**

*A note on how to use these session plans:*

This plan is written for session facilitator(s) rather than for the whole group.

Facilitators are the people hosting and running the meeting. They do not need any expertise whatsoever on economics. They will also take part in all meeting activities where possible.

This plan is intended as a guide to help you run useful sessions. If parts of the plan are not relevant to your group, then feel free to discard or change them! Do whatever works best for your group.

## Agenda outline

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Activity** | **Time (in minutes)** |
| Introduction | 1. Welcome and introduction | 3 |
| 1. *Optional:* Silence / worship |  |
| 1. Introduction to the session and housekeeping | 5 |
| 1. Outline of the reading group programme | 5 |
| 1. Ground rules | 5 |
| 1. Why we’re here | 20 |
| Deeper exploration | 1. World as it is / world as it should be | 40 |
| 1. Minute 23 (2011 Yearly Meeting) | 30 |
| 1. Knowledge and questions | 15 |
| Closing | 1. Closing | 10 |

Total time: 2 hours and 13 minutes

**Timings:**

*To reduce the total session time to 2 hours:* Take out or shorten activity no. 7 or 9

*For groups who can only meet for shorter sessions (less than 1 hour):* Use your judgement on how to compress the session plan. You could remove activities 7 and 8, shorten activity 10 and give out the accompanying sheet for activity 8 for participants to reflect on in their own time.

## Materials needed

Tea, coffee / refreshments (if you decide you want them)

6 Sheets of flip chart paper (or large sheets of paper)

4 Felt tip pens or flip chart pens

Minute handout sheet (see appendix)

Post-it notes

## Session plan

1. **Welcome and introduction (3 minutes – not including worship time)**

You may want to offer people tea and coffee as they arrive. Make sure everyone has a comfortable place to sit. Chairs should be arranged in a single circle.

At the start, thank everyone for coming, introduce yourself and tell everyone that you are going to have a few minutes of silence / worship and that you will explain more about the session afterwards.

1. **Silence / worship**
2. **Introduction to the session and housekeeping (5 minutes)**

Welcome everyone, and thank all those involved in organising the session. Outline the agenda for today (see agenda outline above). Explain that the aims of today are to launch the programme and establish how we’ll work together, to get to know each other better and to explore our interests and questions about the economic system.

Emphasise that no prior economic knowledge whatsoever is necessary and that you want everyone to feel welcome, even if they don’t have experience of discussing subjects like this. You can suggest that if anyone thinks they might have difficulty reading the booklets, because of their eye sight or literacy they can talk to you after the session to think of ways to work around this. Large print copies of the booklet are available from Friends House (email neweconomy@quaker.org.uk).

1. **Outline of the reading group programme (5 minutes)**

Offer a brief description of the new economy reading group programme:

*The reading groups will help everyone involved to reflect on our economic system: what’s wrong with it and what are the alternatives? At the end of the course, you should feel more able to have a say on economic matters and take action to build a fairer, more equal society. As a whole church, Quakers in Britain have made commitments in recent years to learn more about our economic system and how it could be transformed.*

*The programme will involve reading at home, followed by group discussion and activities in the sessions.*

*The sessions, after today, will each be focused on a different new economy booklet. The series of seven new economy booklets explore the following topics:*

* *Economic policy – what’s it for and how should we measure economic success?*
* *Good work and business structures that bring social benefit*
* *Creating a just, sustainable energy system*
* *How to reform banking and money creation*
* *A fair way to share the earth’s resources, like land, air and water*
* *The role of public services, markets and privatisation in the new economy*
* *Democracy in our economy*

*All these topics will be related back to Quaker testimony and particularly to the principles of equality and sustainability. Activities in the session plans will ask you to reflect on your own lived experience of these topics and what you feel about the alternatives offered in the booklets.*

*In the process, we will find inspiration and strengthen community with others in our meeting.*

*Groups will meet for eight sessions using the session plans and new economy booklets provided (for free) by Quaker Peace and Social Witness.*

1. **Ground rules (5 minutes)**

Before continuing, the group might want to consider some “ground rules” for interaction. Firstly, the sessions will be based around discussion and there may be differences of opinion. Suggest that the group commits to showing each other respect when differences arise.

Ask everyone to be aware of the balance of participation throughout different activities. Are they talkative or do they hold back? Talkative people may want to hold back a little more than usual, or use their confidence to invite other people to speak. People who hold back should feel invited to say more. In this way, being part of the group can be a practice of self-awareness and consideration for one another.

After the silent reflection, ask the group if they agree to these principles of interaction. Is there anything else that they want to suggest?

1. **Why we’re here (20 minutes)**

Ask participants to go round the circle and say their name and a few words about why they’ve come to the session. Anyone can pass if they wish. Ask them to keep their comments to 1 minute. (You could use the “wristwatch trick” to keep comments brief. See the appendix.)

1. **a. World as it is / world as it should be (30 minutes)**

Ask participants to split into 2 groups (approx. 3-6 people per group). Give each group 2 blank pieces of flip chart or large paper and a flip chart pen or felt tip to write with.

Ask participants to draw a circle representing the planet on each page and put a title at the top of each page. One page should be titled ‘world as it is’ and the other ‘world as it should be’.

Participants have 15 minutes to discuss ‘the world as it is’ and their vision of ‘the world as it should be’. Ask them to jot down words on the sheets to capture their discussion.

The facilitator can join a group to take part in the discussion. After 10 minutes remind everyone that they need to fill in both sheets and that they have 5 minutes left.

Announce when they have 1 minute left to finish off their discussions.

Once the 15 minutes is up, ask participants, staying in their groups, to take 1 minute to underline anything on their sheets which relates to economics.

After groups have done this, invite 1 or 2 members from each group to feedback their sheet to the rest of the room. Ask them to limit their feedback to 2 minutes.

As each group is feeding back, listen out for things that different groups have in common between their sheets. Point out 2 or 3 things to the whole group once everyone has given their feedback.

1. **b. Reflection (10 minutes)**

Now ask participants to find someone from a different group to form a pair.

In pairs, ask participants to reflect on that exercise, speaking for 2 minutes each. Was it easy or difficult? What struck you? Did anything surprise you?

After five minutes, get everyone’s attention. Ask if anyone would like to share any reflections that they discussed in their pairs with the whole group. Limit the feedback to around 5 minutes.

1. **a. Minute 23 (2011 Yearly meeting) (total time: 20 minutes)**

*This activity will give Friends a chance to explore the spiritual underpinnings of this project and their own motivation in taking part.*

Read out the extract from Minute 23 from 2011, in the sheet that accompanies this exercise (see appendix), or ask if anyone from the group would volunteer to read it out loud.

After the Minute has been read outloud, explain that the new economy project was a response, at least in part, to this Minute.

Ask the group to divide into 2 or 3 groups (groups of around 2-4 people, depending on total numbers).

Give each group a copy of the accompanying sheet. Ask them to take fifteen minutes discuss their response to the Minute in relation to these questions (also written on the sheet):

* What in the Minute speaks to them?
* Are there any parts which are confusing or that they disagree with?
* Which aspects of our economic system do they find most incompatible with their sense of Quaker testimony?

After ten minutes, tell the groups that they have five minutes left and to make sure everyone in the group gets a chance to speak.

1. **b. Whole group feedback (10 minutes)**

Reassemble the whole group in a circle. Ask what came out of people’s discussions. Try to encourage participation from as many people as possible.

Note: This is an opportunity to gauge particular interest and passions in the group. Are people motivated by environmental concerns? Economic concerns? Are they interested in social action? Are they already aware of the problems in our economic system and have ideas for how things could be changed?

1. **Knowledge and questions (15 minutes)**

*This activity is designed to recognise that many of us already have knowledge and ideas about how the economy could be transformed, but are looking for a place to explore, develop or realise these ideas.*

Ask people to pair up with a new person.

Explain that the group will take ten minutes to discuss one change they’d like to see in our economic system and write down one question that they have about our economic system.

Explain that the pairs should interview each other asking “what one change would you like to see in our economic system? What question do you have about our economy?” A change can take the form of a policy change, a change in culture or attitudes, or a change in the person’s own personal experience of the economy. The pairs should then write their partner’s change and their partner’s question onto separate post-it notes. Stick ‘changes’ to one part of the wall and questions to another part of the wall.

Make sure that the pair switch speakers after five minutes.

Once the walls have been filled with post-it notes give the group a chance to read what others have written.

You can tell the group that the exercise shows there is already a lot of knowledge and ideas present in the group and that the reading course will provide an opportunity to explore and develop those ideas and think about how to bring about change.

Tell the group that you will keep these questions and we will come back to them later in the programme to see if we have found answers to the questions.

*[facilitator to store or record the questions for a later session]*

1. **Closing (5 – 10 minutes)**

Thank everyone for coming.

Announce who will be facilitating the next session (or arrange someone to facilitate if it hasn’t yet been arranged).

Remind everyone / confirm / arrange the date for the next session.

Remind everyone to take or download a copy of the new economy booklet 1 ‘What’s the Economy for?’ before the next session. If you need to order more copies of the booklets, you can do so by emailing neweconomy@quaker.org.uk.

Invite group members to join the online discussion space, available at:

www.bit.ly/new-economy-discussion. Emphasise that it is not compulsory! The contact person can send the link to those people who are interested.

*Optional:* go round the circle and ask each participant to say one word to capture how they are feeling at the end of the session.

*Optional:* Closing reading. Read something related to economics and/or social change that inspires you.

Closing silence / worship.

## Appendix

### Facilitation Tips

***These tips have been adapted from www.localcircles.org***

Here’s what your group will expect you, as facilitator, to do.

* Bring to each session a clear idea of what the group is to do during that time, along with any materials needed, and guide the group through the planned activities.
* Protect the shared space of the group: create a welcoming atmosphere for everyone, while being willing to intervene if someone is acting in a way that creates difficulty for others.
* Help the group balance participation among members, encouraging participation from those who hold back, while making sure that those who speak easily do not dominate the group (see **Balancing Group Participation** below).
* Help members of the group move into active roles over time, eventually “retiring” yourself as the main facilitator (see **Developing Participant Ownership** below).

There are other important tasks needed to keep the group working well. You can add them to your responsibility description as facilitator, or they could be taken on by others who are also helping with organising the group.

* Create an accurate contact list for the group and make sure everyone has a copy.
* Send out links to the reading materials and meeting reminders.
* Track who is missing from group sessions and contact them where appropriate.
* Handle any logistics related to the meeting space.
* Coordinate refreshments, like tea and coffee, for the sessions.

### Balancing Group Participation

For a group of people who perhaps don’t know each other well, to grow into a group who trust each other in order to openly discuss and question economic matters, there needs to be space for each person to feel seen and heard over time. In structured sessions like those offered, this requires figuring out ways to keep conversations within the group focused and balanced. Here’s a short list of tools that a facilitator can use to help make that happen.

1. **Use a Wristwatch During Go-rounds**. In a “go-round” each person in the circle is given a turn to speak, though anyone may pass at any time. Be aware of a common phenomenon in go-rounds: individual sharings tend to get longer as the circle progresses. As a result, open-ended go-rounds can get quite lengthy.  A relevant tool here is to suggest a time limit for each person. Session plans will often include a go-round at the **Opening** of each session. You might allow each person about a minute to speak, realising that some people will go over. To avoid interrupting people with reminders about how much time has passed, the group can agree to **pass a wristwatch** that follows the speaker. For example, if I am the speaker, the person next to me holds the wristwatch and watches the time for me. When the allotted time is up, s/he quietly passes the watch to me, wordlessly letting me know that it’s time for me to wrap up my sharing. Then it becomes my turn to watch the time for the next speaker.
2. **“Two cents”**This can be used in a group with unbalanced participation, where it’s clear that one or two people are having trouble monitoring the level of their own participation. Here, you can playfully introduce the idea of “sharing your two cents (or pennies)” At the beginning of the session, everyone receives an equal number of pennies – say, twelve.  Each time someone speaks, they put two pennies into a pot in the center of the circle, to symbolise “putting in their two cents.”  People who tend to over-participate will find themselves thinking twice before deciding to spend their pennies, while those who tend to hold back will find themselves sitting with a little hoard of pennies, representing the value they haven’t yet shared with others. It’s good to be explicit at the start of the meeting about why you are introducing this exercise to the group, and to allow time at the end of the meeting for people to share about what they noticed and how they felt. It’s everyone’s job to create balanced participation in the group, not just the facilitator’s.
3. **Cut-off Summary.** Every facilitator is familiar with the scenario: your group has got into a discussion of a big topic, one person has been going on for some time about what s/he thinks, and you can feel other people in the room getting restless, like they’ve reached a point of saturation. What to do? *Don’t be shy about interrupting* – group members are counting on you to do just that. But interrupt with a purpose: “You’ve covered a lot of ground in what you’ve been saying, John. In order for us to have time to hear from a few other people, can you summarise *in one sentence* the most important point you want us to understand?” And then keep the speaker, with a light hand, to one single sentence. If s/he just can’t seem to do that, ask her/him to sit with their thoughts for a few minutes to clarify what s/he wants to say.
4. **Linking Summary**. Another big topic, another long-winded speaker, another feeling that other members of the group are getting restless. Here’s another way to interrupt: “So John, one of the important things you’ve been talking about is \_\_\_\_\_\_.” Once you’ve made this statement, link it to a question for the rest of the group to consider, making it clear that it’s someone else’s turn to respond.
5. **Starting with the quieter group members**. If people have been dominating the discussion for a while, you can start a new exercise by simply saying, “Let’s hear first from someone who hasn’t spoken in a while.” This helps the over-participators bring their attention back to how much they’re talking, as well as making space for those who haven’t been speaking up.
6. **Small Group Work**. Asking people to complete exercises in pairs or in small groups is another way to make sure everyone gets a chance to speak, though the whole group doesn’t get the benefit of hearing each person.
7. **Evaluation** At the end of a meeting, you can ask participants to shade in a shape (e.g. a bottle or a star) to show how pleased they were with their level of participation. If they are completely pleased with their level of participation, they would shade in 100% of the shape and similarly, a 20% shaded shape would reflect unhappiness with their level of participation. Participants could then write a few sentences on their shape to reflect why they feel that way. Sharing these shapes collectively (e.g. by putting them all down on the floor in the middle of a circle) can give participants a chance to reflect on, and make amends, for their part in unbalanced participation.

### Developing participant ownership

Ideally, participants will keep coming back to the reading group sessions throughout the programme. After the programme comes to an end, if the group is working together well, the group could become a self-sustaining group that takes action together to build the new economy. Both regular attendance and the group’s longevity are more likely if the group members feel a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for the group. Here are some suggestions for how to cultivate this:

* Ask group members to take on logistical responsibilities. For example, you might ask someone to be in charge of sending reminder emails, someone to keep or write up the questions described in the first sessions, another person to email links to the booklets, and another to be in charge of tea or other refreshments.
* Ask participants if they would like to facilitate portions of the sessions. Try to ensure that in every session, facilitators change or someone other than you (or your co-facilitator) facilitates at least one section.
* Invite participants to bring and read closing readings.
* Invite someone other than you (or your co-facilitator) to facilitate an evaluation at the end of each session.
* And of course, be on the lookout for participants who have interests and skills which would make them good project leaders or facilitators. Encourage these people to take on leadership in one-on-one conversations.

## Sheet to accompany activity 8

## Extract from Minute 23, 2011 Yearly Meeting

“There are many small steps we can all take, as individuals and as meetings. But we also feel called to work on a larger scale. The global economic system is posited on continued expansion and growth, and in its pursuit of growth it is often unjust, violent and destructive. Several Friends have said 'we must move out of our comfort zone', and we have heard that rage and passion may also have a place in our responses.

We need to continue to learn more about how we are influenced and constrained by the economic system. We need to ask the question whether this system is so broken that we must urgently work with others of faith and good will to put in its place a different system in which our testimonies can flourish.

As individuals, and in our meetings, we must return to the place from which testimony comes, to open ourselves to the Spirit and to wait humbly in the light. Together, we can help one another to overcome our inertia.

We rededicate ourselves to a corporate discipline of waiting and opening to the leadings of the Spirit on the issues before us at this yearly meeting.”

**Questions for discussion:**

* What in this minute speaks to you?
* Are there any parts which are confusing or that you disagree with?
* Which aspects of our economic system do you find most incompatible with your sense of Quaker testimony?

***Instructions:*** *Discuss these questions for 15 minutes. Make sure everyone gets a chance to speak.*