

**FRIENDS FOUNDATION FOR THE AGING GRANT PROPOSAL
from WOOLMAN HILL QUAKER RETREAT CENTER**

Date: March 2021

Amount Requested: \$30,000

Summary

Woolman Hill requests a grant of \$30,000 to help us increase the magic that happens across generations at our Quaker retreat center by supporting renovations that will enable aging and older adults to more fully participate in our programming and other in-person events. These major renovations to our main building include the addition of fully accessible ground floor accommodations, bathrooms, and sitting nooks, as well as increased privacy in bathrooms and bedrooms.

History, competence and diversity

Since its founding in 1954, Woolman Hill has been a beloved spiritual home and well-respected provider of programs and retreat space for the New England region and beyond.

Of current board members, just under half identify as female or gender non-conforming, just over half as male. All identify as white. Our board is actively recruiting People of Color. All but one board member are Quaker; the non-Quaker belongs to an evangelical congregation. Of four staff, all identify as white; two as female, one as male, and one as gender non-binary. Board and staff represent a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds.

(Please see below for diversity of those we serve.)

Motivation and Need, Expected Results, Compatibility with FFA Values

Woolman Hill is a Quaker retreat center, open to all, on a beautiful New England ridge-top. We create opportunities for people to connect with the Divine in themselves, in others, and in the natural world.

Woolman Hill provides simple, comfortable facilities for individual retreats and group gatherings. We offer programs which nurture spiritual growth and foster the values and practice of peace-making, simplicity, integrity, equality, social responsibility, and stewardship of the earth.

(Minute of Purpose, approved 2017)

Woolman Hill Retreat Center is experienced by Friends and many others as a spiritual sanctuary. It is often described as a grounding place—an island of calm in the midst of turbulent seas. From this seedbed many Friends have discovered and nurtured calls to ministry and long-lasting spiritual friendships. Each year Woolman Hill offers programs on a variety of topics such as “Say the Wrong Thing: Strategies for Racial Justice and Authentic Community,” Quaker parenting, eldering, ministry, worship, “Holy Conversations,” pastoral care, “Death: The Final Stage of Growth,” “Mindful Mortality,” clerking, photography, singing, journaling, Summer Solstice interfaith workshops and an annual year-end silent retreat.

New England Yearly Meeting youth groups (elementary, middle and high-school ages), Young Adult Friends, committees and staff regularly hold retreats at Woolman Hill, as do monthly meetings and

Connecticut Valley Quarterly Meeting. We have hosted groups such as Quaker Spring, the Challenging White Supremacy working group, Quakers Uniting in Publications, and the Climate Disobedience Center. In addition, we welcome other faith-based (including Jewish, Buddhist, and Sufi), non-profit, social and human service, and educational gatherings, family reunions, weddings, and personal retreats. Many of the groups we host are intergenerational; for example, a women's climate gathering designed by a woman in her 70s in conjunction with several younger women she was mentoring.

Paying close attention to the threads of emerging spiritual needs in the region, Woolman Hill frequently co-sponsors programs with New England Yearly Meeting. Recent examples are "Partners in Spirit," a mentoring retreat aimed at building relationships between older and young adult Friends; and two SAGE (Support Across Generations for Elders) workshops, which were designed to support meetings in learning how to better serve the needs of their older adult members. Woolman Hill has also partnered with NEYM and New York Yearly Meeting on a joint weekend consultation on eldering.

Woolman Hill has been central, along with NEYM staff, to the development and continuation of the nine-month Nurturing Faithfulness course. With each offering of the course, we have made pro-active efforts to include young adult Friends as well as People of Color, including being sure to include POC in the teaching component. Proactively reaching out to young adults has greatly increased cross-generational interactions and deepened the experience and energy of the course. We are currently in dialogue with Beacon Hill Friends House and with Ben Lomond Quaker Center (CA) about the possibility of adapting and expanding future Nurturing Faithfulness offerings.

In our current "Walking with the Bible" virtual program series, we have worked diligently with our co-sponsor Beacon Hill Friends House and with the series facilitator, Peter Blood-Patterson, to ensure that the guest presenters include BIPOC and that our honoraria and registration systems offer alternatives based on the differing financial means of presenters as well as participants. Of the nine guest presenters so far, six are BIPOC. We have also played close attention to ensuring that presenters represent a variety of ages, as we see diversity of generations greatly enhancing the quality and content of the programming.

Identifying the Need

At the heart of Woolman Hill's mission is the in-person programming and events. Older adult Friends make possible the transformation that happens when younger and older generations spend time together for both structured content and informal interactions at our site. What happens around the edges of overnight retreats (conversations over dishwashing or meal preparation, heart-to-heart sharing in pajamas around the woodstove or outside under the apple tree, evening talent shows that reveal hidden depths and generate joy-filled laughter...) are critical opportunities for older and younger to learn about each other's Quaker lives. These aspects of forming and reinforcing a sense of multi-age community and whole-person presence contribute to lasting spiritual friendships and to profound discernment of ministry and call. Time and again we have witnessed and experienced the amazing gifts that come from long-lived Friends sharing their lives and listening to ours. This kind of spiritual transformation is such a gift to the Religious Society of Friends. In fact, we would say these intergenerational interactions are essential.

Woolman Hill's physical facilities—the buildings, land, and their accessibility—are the indispensable component that makes the cross-generation magic possible here. During the pandemic, we have grown increasingly aware of and committed to the unique essence of Woolman Hill as an in-person gathering space, and the critical role the physical setting plays in the spiritual experiences of our guests. The land itself is an active participant in the events that occur on-site. We have repeatedly received feedback

about the cozy non-institutional character of our facility contributing in positive ways to the dynamic of a gathering – including from those assembled for an international Quaker organization’s board meeting in a very controversial period in its history.

While the 1800s farmhouse that serves as our main conference center is central to Woolman Hill’s charm, it also inhibits the use of Woolman Hill by many individual Quakers and groups. The building has many aspects that make navigating it with limited mobility next to impossible. Inter-generational groups also struggle with too few bathrooms, limited privacy and insufficient break-out spaces. At a recent program, an older participant using a walker wrestled with narrow doorways and inadequate ramps and had to weave her way through the kitchen to her bedroom and in and out of entryways with multiple steps and uneven thresholds. This Friend clearly valued self-sufficiency and repeatedly declined offers of assistance, but it was obvious that the conditions affected her participation.

We know of at least two monthly meetings and two wider Quaker organizations that have chosen not to hold their retreats at Woolman Hill because of the physical challenges of the facility. Other individuals and groups have expressed directly to us, or to those in their communities, that limited accessibility and lack of privacy preclude their participation in events at Woolman Hill. As the average age of the Quaker population we serve increases, and as their preference for lodging shifts away from the dorm-room style prevalent several decades ago, our main building’s limitations have been detrimental to participation in our programs and use of our retreat center.

Solution and Expected Outcomes

As part of a deeply discerned multi-year strategic plan, Woolman Hill is in the process of renovating the main building. We are completely redesigning the main entrance and foyer, as well as adding ground-floor bedrooms and bathrooms as part of a two-story addition. The result of the first floor improvements will be a fully accessible, unified, level area that provides a welcoming arrival space, small gathering and conversation nooks, along with sleeping quarters, all contiguous with the existing core area of sitting room, dining/meeting room and kitchen. The cost of these ground floor accessibility improvements is \$380,000. (The construction cost for the total building project is \$760,000.)

The vision for this project has been emerging for close to a decade, solidifying through the recent strategic planning. As we have been developing the renovation plans, we have received much positive feedback from individuals and meetings; many Friends feel that these improvements to our facilities are long overdue. All have also affirmed how these improvements will enable our services and ministries to reach more Friends through retreats and programs to nurture the Religious Society of Friends. Events at Woolman Hill provide critical opportunities for Friends to explore their individual and collective relationship to Quaker practice and faith. Central to these relationships is the ability for older adults to share the wealth of wisdom they have garnered and for younger generations to interact with that in meaningful, life-giving ways.

Given how integral our facilities are as a means to providing the full experience of multi-generation programming at Woolman Hill, we yearn to have our main building no longer present a barrier to participation by older adult Friends and those with limited mobility. Woolman Hill staff are deeply committed to bringing a personal touch to all of our interactions with guests, volunteers and board members. The welcome guests receive prior to and during their time on site sets the tone and often allows them to open more fully to the content of the programming that has drawn them in the first place. We want the *physical* reality to mirror the *spiritual* reality of our welcome.

The renovations to the main conference center building will greatly improve Woolman Hill’s ability to welcome all Friends. We anticipate that the new space will inspire frequent and spirit-filled use for

years to come. The success of these improvements will be tested by the changes we see in the use of Woolman Hill by individual older adult Friends and others who have physical challenges, and by intergenerational and older age groups who were constrained by the current limited privacy, bathrooms and ground floor accommodations. Currently, seniors age 65 and above make up a significant percentage of Quaker meetings and thus of our current and potential program participants and guests. Once renovations are completed, we believe we will see a marked increase in senior participation, possibly by as much as 20-25%, as well as increased use by monthly meetings and other groups.

Long-Term Sustainability

Looking ahead, increased participation in our programs and use of our facility will also play a major role in long-term organizational and financial sustainability. In keeping with the board's commitment to guiding principles (see below) of sustainability and right relationship, accessibility and welcome, the improvements to our facility carry with them an underlying goal of increasing our ability to serve a wider population with a broader array of programs. In order to successfully maintain and expand our programming, Woolman Hill needs to increase staffing. The board also hopes to establish a Welcome Fund in the coming years. Such a Fund will allow us to offer programs and rental use at reduced rates for individuals and groups who would otherwise not be able to afford them. While our current sliding scale and scholarship options for attending programs are a step in that direction, the discounts are provided without a source of income to sustain them. We envision a Fund that will increase our ability to subsidize both individual and group use, as well as be fiscally responsible for Woolman Hill. In addition, the Fund will support experiments in programming such as alternative formats or content that addresses diversity, equity, and inclusion. These additional steps toward a Welcoming Future are in large part contingent on the physical facility meeting people's needs.

We are excited that preliminary construction has begun; we hope to have the project substantially completed by the middle of the summer. As circumstances allow given the pandemic, we very much look forward to welcoming Friends of all ages to events beginning in late summer.

We are profoundly grateful for Friends Foundation's openness to receiving this request. We hope that you'll find clearness to support our project, in light of how these improvements to our physical facility will make Woolman Hill experiences and programming more accessible and welcoming to older adult Friends throughout New England and beyond.

With abundant Light,



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Enclosed:

Strategic Plan Vision and Guiding Principles
Woolman Hill Board Minute of Support
Project Budget

WOOLMAN HILL STRATEGIC PLAN 2018-2021

VISION STATEMENT

Our vision is to provide a welcoming sanctuary where people come to be restored and inspired, and leave with the strength to act out of love, sowing seeds of peace that lead to a world transformed.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Sustainability and Right Relationship

- Commit to sustainability principles in assessing ongoing operations and new endeavors to ensure that they are in right relationship with our spiritual, financial, environmental and human resources.
- Commit to long-range planning to sustain our facilities and programming.

Accessibility and Welcome

- Commit to ensuring Woolman Hill is more easily accessible to those with limited mobility.
- Commit to increase Woolman Hill's financial accessibility and welcome to a wide range of people.

WOOLMAN HILL BOARD MINUTE OF SUPPORT (November 2020)

The Woolman Hill Board affirms that the proposed addition to our conference center is a key component of our multi-year strategic plan to grow and sustain our programming by increasing guest space and providing greater accessibility to those with limited mobility. This project is in line with our guiding principles of sustainability, right relationship, accessibility and welcome.

We are confident that improving and enlarging our facility is a crucial step toward manifesting our vision of "a welcoming sanctuary where people come to be restored and inspired and leave with the strength to act out of love, sowing seeds of peace that lead to a world transformed."

MAIN BUILDING GROUND FLOOR RENOVATIONS BUDGET

EXPENSES	
Ground floor portion of improvements	\$380,000
<i>Building renovation costs - total</i>	<i>\$760,000</i>

INCOME (portion for ground floor)	
Individual donations	\$240,000
Monthly meeting donations	\$70,000
Grant funding	\$70,000
Total budgeted income	\$380,000

We are thrilled to have raised all but \$83,000 of the ground floor portion of our project cost so far. These funds have come from past and present board members, individual donors, and three monthly meetings to date. We have also received grants from two other granting agencies. We are in the process of reaching out to other monthly meetings in NEYM, as well as the remaining modest list of Woolman Hill contributors.