



THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
EXTENSION



United States
Department of
Agriculture

National Institute
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Toolkit Resources:

Example Learning Circle Pre-Work Email

Attachments:

- Participant agenda

Thank you for registering for our Women for the Land Learning Circle! The purpose of this event is to connect you with fellow women farmers and agricultural service providers in your area. Our conversations will center on the climate-change-related stressors you may be observing on the land and what you can do about them, both on your farm and in your community.

We hope you will join for both days of this event (X and X) as the learning and networking opportunities will build in each other from week to week.

How to join the meeting in Zoom:

(COPY AND PASTE THEIR CONFIRMATION LINK from Zoom for each individual)

If you need assistance setting up Zoom, audio, or video on your device, please explore the Zoom Help Center (<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us>) or this YouTube Channel (https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL3zWtXzGVCax2lafuATCk_Mru8YLwRVxG) for advice, or reach out to me!

Expectations during the Learning Circle:

Attached is an agenda that outlines what to expect throughout the event. If you have access to a printer, you may want to print this out to have in front of you during the meeting, but that is optional.

Please plan to be seated at your computer during the Learning Circle.

Below is a set of Ground Rules for the ways we invite you to be in the virtual space with other participants: <https://www.ucar.edu/who-we-are/diversity-inclusion/community-resources/ground-rules-tools>

Introducing ourselves:



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By midnight X/XX, please reply to this email with a photo of yourself in your role in agriculture (or just a photo of yourself) along with the answers to the questions below. *I will share these with the group* before the event so we can all get to know each other a bit!

- 1) Who are you? (i.e. What is your name? Where are you from?)
- 2) What is your relationship to land? (i.e. What is your role in agriculture? How long have you been in that role? What drives you?)
- 3) What motivated you to join this Learning Circle?

Looking forward to getting to know you!



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Facilitation Tips: Setting Ground Rules

Adopting a set of ground rules can help all participants feel comfortable in a Learning Circle or discussion group. One approach is to start with a blank whiteboard and shared screen and use a brainstorm process to elicit suggested guidelines from the group. Another option, which can save some time, is to start with a set of possible ground rules and invite the group how they might like to modify or add to the list.

The table below offers some overarching “norms” that are important to establish for a successful Learning Circle/group, and some options for the wording for a ground rule or guideline.

Please note: This table offers multiple ways that a group can express the norms that it wants to follow. Pick and choose from those that you think make the most sense for your group. Depending on the group there may be additional considerations that need to be addressed and/or different ways to word a particular guideline for your group. This list is not exhaustive – other ideas may emerge that are relevant to establishing and maintaining a safe, non-judgmental learning environment for your group.

Norm	Sample guideline language.
Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We listen respectfully to each other. • We respect each view, opinion, and experience offered by any participant. • We assume a positive intent.
Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We share responsibility to make this circle/group work. • We show up on time and we come prepared to participate – this includes advance reading or viewing and completing any individual work assigned from the previous session. • We speak for ourselves, not as a representative of a group.
Confidentiality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What’s said in “the circle” stays in “the circle.” – or - • What’s said here stays here. What’s learned here leaves here.



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Reciprocity & equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We give everybody the opportunity to speak without interruption, except the facilitator who may interrupt to keep the conversation on track. • We allow time for silence and for more reserved voices. • Each person has an opportunity to contribute an idea/speak to a topic before anyone can contribute a second idea. • We may choose to pass if we are not ready to speak on a topic. • When we are confused, we use clarifying questions to obtain better understanding.
Technology & distractions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can choose to use the chat feature to share resources and add to the discussion as a whole. • We refrain from using the chat feature for crosstalk and side discussions. • We keep our attention in the circle by closing other computer programs and silencing our phone and turning off apps and notifications. • We understand that at some point any of us may experience a farm/family situation that could interrupt our participation.

If you opt to develop the ground rules from scratch, it can be helpful to begin by having the facilitator suggest a guideline. Then solicit ideas from the group, adding five or six more guidelines to the list. If suggestions emerge that do not appear conducive to the learning environment, gently challenge those ideas using clarifying questions.

You can post the guidelines in a common space (such as a google folder) that everyone can access. You may want to set aside a couple of minutes at the beginning of every session to remind the group about the ground rules. Depending on how well the group is functioning and how many sessions your Learning Circle will have, you may want to check in midway through the series to see if the group wants to modify the ground rules.

Other examples of Ground Rules and Agreements include:

Working Agreements for Virtual Meetings - Farm Based Education
<https://www.farmbasededucation.org/calendar?amp%3Bqid=>



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Soul Fire Farm's Guidelines for Safer Space (<https://www.soulfirefarm.org/about/safer-space/>)

Ground Rules and Tools: Facilitating Production Discussions – UCANR
(<https://www.ucar.edu/who-we-are/diversity-inclusion/community-resources/ground-rules-tools>)

Additional Facilitation Resources:

Delia Clark, Confluence (<http://www.deliackonfluence.com/facilitation>)

Margaret Reil's guide to the Learning Circle Model
(<https://sites.google.com/site/onlinelearningcircles/Home/learning-circles-defined>)

Ellen Rowe and Mary Peabody, [UVM Extension, Strengthening Your Facilitation Skills](#)

Leading Groups Online: A Guide:
<http://www.leadinggroupsonline.org/ebooks/Leading%20Groups%20Online.pdf>

Tips for Hosting a Learning Circle: <https://s30428.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Tips-for-Hosting-a-Learning-Circle-UpdateFinal.pdf>



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Using Technology to Optimize Virtual Sessions: Tips for Facilitators & Participants

- Use a high-quality microphone if you have one.
- Have three to four staff play different roles: main facilitator, note taker, chat watcher, trouble-shooter, etc.
- Send instructions to participants ahead of time, or maybe host a pre-event run-through. Some tips to provide participants before Zoom meetings include:
 - Join the meeting at least five minutes before start time to make sure you can.
 - If possible, it's best to use a device that allows you to join through both video and audio (i.e. computer with webcam or smart phone).
 - If you don't have a computer with webcam or smart phone, you can also call in, but your ability to participate will be more limited.
 - If you have trouble with the video cutting out on your computer, you can call in by regular phone, then mute your audio and keep your video on in Zoom. That way you can watch and be seen, but you'll still be caught up to the conversation even when your video cuts out.
- It is best to use earphones and mute your microphone when you are not speaking. This keeps us all from hearing noises in your home and prevents echoing and audio feedback.
- There is a "raise your hand" function you can use to alert the speaker that you have something to say. The chat function also allows you to write down your questions or give input throughout the meeting. Occasionally the facilitator may ask you to write something into the chat.
- If you are using break-out rooms, assign a moderator for each to help participants get the most out of the experience.
- Manage your expectations for how much you will accomplish, noting that it will likely be less than you would in person.
- Use a poll to ask people to consent to use their photo if they sent one.
- Learn more at <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/213756303-Polling-for-meetings>.



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Virtual Adaptations for Hands-On Experiences

Description: In-person farm tours are a great way to provide nuanced information about growing practices and their impacts in a farmer-friendly manner. Virtual platforms can be utilized to conduct pre-recorded footage of a farm tour with the farmer joining live to provide commentary over the footage, or by using a livestream service to provide participants a direct glimpse into the inner workings of a farm, its practices, and the impacts those practices have had on the land.

Benefits:

- Farm tours are especially helpful when sharing information about specific on-farm practices, as they allow growers an opportunity to ask each other questions and showcase specific examples of how they adapted the practice for their context crop, scale, and geographic context.
- Research shows that delivering content via a trusted messenger supports behavior change, and farmers tend to trust each other a great deal so having a fellow farmer share their practices with peers is a powerful tool for supporting innovative practice adoption.
- In-person farm tours sometimes require setting up additional bathrooms or safety procedures on site, adding amplification, arranging transportation, and other logistics. Depending on the technological access of the farm and organizers, virtual farm tours can simplify the logistics of planning.

Virtual Engagement Resources from Others

Soul Fire Farm’s BIPOC-Led How to Videos, Gardening Projects and Online Learning Resources:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/18Wa3UJ3xHvMrsvRLy38qXyPsX5BWfj4NgVcqMolfZfA/edit>

Practical Farmers of Iowa: Virtual Field Days: How-to and Best Practices:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-KFHR0VvK2elyoZf-JhavK-kmd9Vm12LX>

Wallace Center started a Virtual COVID-19 response group and listserv, taking a new approach to virtual engagement, check them out here:

<https://www.wallacecenter.org/ournews/wallace-center-launches-fsln-covid-19-response-group/>