

THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION IN THE UK

Registered as: The Christian Meditation Trust (UK)
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The World Community
for Christian Meditation

SHARING STORIES

Please read this document in advance of starting the project. Please be aware that we also recognise that the size of your project will ultimately determine the extent of your report.

Travellers' Tales: Lessons for our Meditation Community

In recent years, there have been powerful new initiatives to extend meditation practice within the World Community: for example, meditation with children, meditation with prisoners and former addicts and online meditation groups. Mostly, this work has developed with little or no special funding. Now this UK legacy programme, and the generosity which has made funding available for it, has created a wonderful opportunity to tell our community of other ways in which the practice can be expanded. It is therefore especially important that as much value as possible is derived from projects for the benefit of all.

As part of your monitoring requirements, at the end of the project we would like you to let us know about your project so that we can learn more about how your project went. It will help us to learn what is effective in encouraging and furthering meditation, as well as providing stories to share with others in the community.

If you are reading this at the start of the project: -

Firstly, you may like to consider the following to help in evaluating the project later on.

- Using a critical friend to walk alongside you to provide challenge and support. John MacBeath of Cambridge University says "Perhaps the critical friend comes closest to what might be regarded as 'true friendship' - a successful marrying of unconditional support and unconditional critique." This person could ask such questions as "How's it going?" Or "What aspects surprised you and why". This may be done formally or informally and it would probably be helpful to write notes as the project proceeds. The critical friend may be a member of WCCM, but does not need to be. How you work with your critical friend would depend very much on the focus and structure of each project, but the minimum requirement would probably be:
 - 1 One meeting at the beginning of the project *to focus on the vision, expectations for the project, about participants, possible challenges, any concerns*
 - 2 One (or more) meeting(s) when the project is taking place, probably based on observation/involvement by the CF, eg attending project event/s, *to focus on questions about the project model, the reactions of participants, intended and unintended consequences of the project in practice*
 - 3 One meeting at, or after the end of the project *to focus on two main themes and how the project leader can best tell these stories: how far the project has 'worked' i.e. done what it was intended do (Could the project be replicated by others?); and secondly, what new insights and inspirations have come from the project for the meditation community?*

- Recording quotes from participants or colleagues and/or keeping a video diary along the way could be really helpful. **Please ensure you have permission of the people featured in photos, videos or audio recordings. In general, stories or quotations should not include participants' names.*

Secondly, you will want to record, at the end, how well did the project 'work'?

This section is about your experience of running the project and could be imagined as if you were telling someone else - who might want to run a similar project – how they might go about it. It would be great if you could include examples of what actually happened, or excerpts from what you or participants said. Obviously, this will be much easier if you have had the opportunity to keep some form of diary or notes during the course of the project. The topics you might want to address include:

- **Aims and objectives:** we are always expected to set these out when embarking on a project. On reflection, did they turn out to be appropriate? Did you have to modify them in any way as the project unfolded? Do you wish you had defined the objectives differently?
- **Unexpected barrier or challenges:** Did unanticipated practical or other problems mean you had to adapt the project plan before or during its life? How did this affect what you did? How did you overcome the challenges?
- **Unexpected bonuses:** Sometimes help can come from surprising quarters! Perhaps you found you had more participants than you had expected, or additional funding turned up. Or maybe in the course of the project good things happened which you had not expected. If so, what were they and what difference did this make to the project?
- **Support and advice:** leading a project is a demanding and sometimes lonely business, and it is great to have support and advice from those you trust – not just those who tell you how great you are! Hence the suggestions about engaging a 'critical friend'. What sort of support did you have during the project – from WCCM in the UK community, or from others in your area? What contribution did these supporters make? What kind of support proved most useful? What other form of support would you have found helpful?
- **Learning from experience:** Looking back over the project, how well do you think it went? Is there anything you would do differently?

In order to help evaluating the project, at this end of this paper we offer, in **The Appendix**, some examples of the sort of Questionnaire questions for people who participate in your project. These questions are just examples and you may want to devise your own as you will, of course, have your own ideas about evaluation.

Sharing Your Story

The story each project can tell will depend on its character, so the suggestions which follow are pointers which may need to be adapted to suit your project. In many cases the stories will come mainly from the project participants. Again, it will make the reporting task easier and more productive if you can capture the experience and judgements of participants in the course of the project itself, through conversations, diaries and other forms of recording. If you find it possible and appropriate to upload pictures, video or excerpts from video or audio diaries* that could prove an exciting way to tell, or illustrate, the stories. If you have used

structured questions (as in the Appendix) analysis of the responses can also feed into the report

Here, then, are some suggestions for organising the stories:

- **What were the participants' initial expectations of the project?** For example, was this their first experience of meditation? Was the project working with a selected group with specific characteristics?
- **How did the participants respond to the project experience?** Was this as you expected? Better? Disappointing? Diverse responses? What did they most appreciate? What was new and/or exciting?
- **Were there any events or indeed individuals that made a particular impact?** Can you describe these from the participants' perspective.
- **If your project lasted more than a month or so, what signs of growth/development were there?** Can you describe and evaluate these?
- **What do you see as the 'afterlife' of the project, its potential for lasting impact?** For example, did participants indicate how they were going to continue or develop their meditation experience once the project ended? What evidence was there that the practice was now embedded among the target group or context?
- **Are there outstanding highlights that you want to include?** This might be a longer individual story, or an account of a particular episode that represented a breakthrough or important development.
- **How would you hope the outcomes of this project might contribute to the life of WCCM, in the UK or more widely?**

If you are reading this at the end of the project, well done on completing your project supported by WCCM in the UK. We hope it has gone well and has helped people discover the life-transforming gift of meditation. It is now time to complete the evaluation process and we hope this will also be a useful opportunity for you to reflect on what worked well in your community and what challenges you faced.

Finally, when sharing your story with us, please remember to include the project number, your name and, where relevant, your group or organisation

Thank you for providing this feedback.

Please send your feedback to Gillian Bull Mott, email Gillian.BullMott@nearneighbours.org.uk.

APPENDIX

Sample Questionnaire items

1 About your participants:

Please tell us....

Your age	Under 30	<input type="checkbox"/>	Your gender	Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
	31 - 39	<input type="checkbox"/>		Male	<input type="checkbox"/>
	40 - 49	<input type="checkbox"/>		Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>
	50 - 59	<input type="checkbox"/>			
	60 - 69	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you	Lay	<input type="checkbox"/>
	70 or over	<input type="checkbox"/>		Ordained	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you belong to a denomination/church? Yes No

If yes: Please identify it here:.....

2 Questions for initial session: example

*Please tick **one** box on each line*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Meditation used to seem quite strange to me					
I've been looking for some form of meditation for some time					
I don't feel I know much about meditation					
I think meditation is much the same as mindfulness					
I'm not sure how I'll cope with being silent					
Meditation is only for really experienced Christians					
I hope this [course] will show me the value of meditation					

[Follow with space for comment e.g. Tell us what you knew about meditation before today]

3 Questions for final session: example

Please tick **one** box on each line

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
This has been a very inspiring experience					
Meditation has proved very different from what I expected					
I now have a much better understanding of the meditation tradition					
I have found the course very difficult					
I feel confident that I will be able to keep up daily meditation					
I think I could be a group leader					