



## Abolitionist Futures - Guidance for Setting Up a Reading Group

We have put together this guide in response to requests for tips on running a reading and discussion group. These are the steps we have gone through a number of times now. Feel free to take what you find helpful and adapt as needed.

### 1. Who is the reading & discussion group for?

It's a good idea to think about who you would like to attend this group. Some groups might be geographic, while others are coming together around shared experiences. Thinking about who the group is for will help you to shape the following steps. In particular, we encourage you to think about what you hope to do after the reading group has finished, e.g. organise to stop a prison in your area, campaign on a local issue, integrate abolitionist ideas into existing organising work within your community, etc.

### 2. Find a date and schedule

Find a convenient start date/s. Creating a schedule that people can easily remember is often helpful e.g. the first Wednesday of every month, or every second Tuesday.

We schedule our online groups for 90minutes, as some of us find being in online meetings longer than that very challenging. Our in-person reading groups were scheduled for 2 hours and included breaks where we ate food together.

Your scheduling will depend on the type of group you want to bring together. Depending on who will be attending, you might find it easier to schedule it over the weekend, or in the evening.

It's good to give people at least four weeks notice to sign up but this also depends on where you are running the group, and who you are running the group for.

### 3. Find a venue/location/platform

When we ran these groups in person, we found rooms in various places, such as community centres, universities, student union buildings and youth group centres. Wherever you plan on running the sessions, please make sure that the [venue is accessible](#) and let people know the accessibility details in advance.

We use Zoom as an online platform as they allow for breakout rooms, which can be particularly helpful for groups of more than 15 people. We have researched and tested alternatives and Zoom meets our needs best. However many concerns have been raised

with Zoom around privacy issues, encryption and collaboration law enforcement agencies, so it is important to be aware of these issues.

#### **4. Organise a registration system**

We recommend using a booking system to know in advance who is planning on attending your reading group. This is to help you to communicate, ask people whether they have any access needs, update people in advance, and let people know what to expect. We used a platform called Evenbrite, but you can do your registration on Google forms, or Microsoft or other booking platforms, or simply email.

Having pre-registration lists also helps when sending out information following sessions, and asking people for feedback so you can improve on the reading groups if running them again.

#### **5. Design an advert**

Depending on whether the reading group you are running is part of an existing group, or if you are starting a new group, you might want to design an image to help advertise it. We used a platform called Canva (which is free) to make an image with a book behind our logo, and then changed the colour for each group we ran. You might not want to do this part, but it helps to have something visual for people who want to share your group on social media. Be careful about making sure any images or text is accessible. It's hard to get a lot of information on images, so you might just use a url shortener like Bit.ly and use it as a way to direct people to a website.

#### **6. Advertise your reading group**

Depending on your prospective group, you may want to consider advertising or publishing your reading group where you will attract prospective participants. We have put ours up on our website, twitter and Instagram accounts. We also shared the info with other groups we are connected with and asked them to put it on their newsletters etc. When you advertise your sessions, it is recommended that you have a registration system in place so people can register right away.

#### **7. Find facilitators**

Depending on your prospective group, you may want to find facilitators from the community of people you are creating the group with, e.g. queer facilitators if you are running queer Abolitionist Futures reading groups.

We recommend finding at least two facilitators in order to help with keeping the discussion going, and so that people don't feel they are in a teaching environment. Ideally smaller discussion groups run best, i.e. 15 people or less per group, whether online or in person. Ideally have a ratio of 1 facilitator to 8 participants.

#### **8. Creating a welcoming and inclusive space**

Consider how to best create a welcoming space that encourages collective learning, questioning and curiosity. Acknowledge that we are all learning to undo carceral logics and

coming to this work from varied personal experiences. There are more details about this in our facilitation guide.

## **9. Develop a session plan**

Work together to develop a session plan outline, including potential questions/topics you want to cover. We have made our session plan available here so you can see it, and the facilitation guide has suggested questions to cover.

In the session plan be sure to outline the timings (e.g. how much time for welcome and introductions, if and when there will be a break, time for a closing go-around etc.) and designate in advance who is responsible for what. E.g. You might have one facilitator who is keeping track of time, while the other facilitator is posing questions or guiding discussion. Even if you are an experienced facilitator, it is good to have a plan written down for other facilitators and also participants, as some participants may find a session plan in advance useful.

## **10. Facilitator induction**

We've found it helpful to hold a facilitator session before the first reading group to run through the session plan and see if anyone has questions in advance. This helps orientate everyone. Remember to remind the facilitators to brush up on the readings themselves!

## **11. Facilitating a session**

Check out our [facilitator guide](#) for more detailed notes on facilitating a session and what to consider.

## **12. Managing online reading groups**

For our larger online reading groups (i.e. groups of 15+ people), we began each session with all participants and then divided into smaller break-out sessions for the discussion of the readings. We also found it helpful to have one person dedicated to hosting the session online, moving people into break out rooms, sending time reminders and bringing everyone back. This person was not a facilitator, and was available for anyone who joined late, ended up out of the breakout rooms, etc.

We also sent out password protected login details shortly before each session, and also enabled the waiting room functions.

We recommend designating all your online facilitators in breakout rooms as 'hosts' of the call as well, in case they need to exit someone in a hurry. We have not had any cases of 'zoom bombing' but we would suggest thinking of strategies to manage this in advance.

## **13. Contact between sessions**

It's a good idea to keep contact with your participants between sessions. We emailed participants shortly after each session, to provide follow-up information such as links to

resources or other materials that may have come up during the session as well as details for the next session. We also sent an email reminder the day before each session.

You can programme some of these to send automatically, depending on what registration platform you are using.

#### **14. What to do at the end**

We first ran these reading and discussion groups in the lead up to a conference, to deepen people's understanding of abolition but also to build momentum for the conference. We also used it as an opportunity for people to get involved in organising the conference with us! Some of the groups that have run Abolitionist Futures reading and discussion groups have continued reading together, setting their own readings, others have started to focus on areas they want to organise around.

Whatever your group chooses to do, we would encourage you to take action and bring your abolitionist principles into practice. You could continue as an abolitionist discussion group, you could set more regional reading sessions e.g. Abolition and Northern Ireland, you could collaborate with people already organising in an overlapping area e.g. End Deportations.

There are loads of things you can do, and we would love to hear how it went for you and where you are going with it next!

For more information:  
[AbolitionistFutures.com](https://AbolitionistFutures.com)