

# Organizational Handbook of the Greater New Orleans Interfaith Climate Coalition

## I. Name

The name of our organization shall be the Greater New Orleans Interfaith Climate Coalition.

## II. About this Document

This organizational handbook sets forth the governing rules of our coalition and is intended to function as an operating manual for our work, covering topics such as membership, meetings, officers and teams. They should be changed as needed to fit the evolving needs of the coalition. This handbook extends but must not contradict our bylaws.

## III. Mission, Values & Methods

### Mission statement

*The Greater New Orleans Interfaith Climate Coalition acts as a catalyst to educate, empower, engage, and equip faith leaders and communities to meet our moral, ethical, and spiritual responsibility to establish climate justice and promote care of the Earth, and all that dwell here, through a faith and reason perspective for a healthy world.*

### First principles

Our coalition, the Greater New Orleans Interfaith Climate Coalition (GNOICC), begins with the conviction that we are drawn together by a reverence for the sacredness of Nature.

### Core values

We aim to

- **Realize** the hurt we create through our out-of-balance lifeways
- **Restore** just relationships with our humanity and the Earth
- **Rejuvenate** harmonious ways for us to live that honor the sacredness of Earth

We humans and other creatures are brothers and sisters who share the same planet. As a coalition, we ground our identity in our faith traditions and in our intuition. We are beings of imagination and hope, inextricably linked to all that dwell on Earth. There is an urgent need to understand the delicate web of life and uphold the intrinsic value of all life — humans and non-humans alike.

### Methods

We will only engage in nonviolent means in pursuing social change. We believe that the means that we use must reflect the values of compassion, cooperation, justice, respect and nonviolence that we seek to embody in a future sustainable world.

### Affirmative Action

We are committed to encouraging participation by all faith communities of our local area but in particular members of those groups which tend to be underrepresented in the dominant political and economic system: women, racial and ethnic minorities, the poor, and minorities of sexual orientation.

### Code of Conduct

We agree to participate in coalition activities and to engage one another with dignity and respect and in a manner that is consistent with our values.

## IV. Association

### Types of Association

1. Individuals of faith and conscience are welcome to get involved and participate in our coalition. These people may be referred to as volunteers, participants, friends, or even members, but we do not maintain a membership roll. We are not a membership organization as such.
2. Certain individuals may be authorized to represent institutions, organizations, or communities. These individuals may be recognized in the coalition upon completion of the designated affiliation form. These people may be referred to as ADVISORS.

See also our “Working Protocols” section, below, for developing relationships with other organizations.

### Qualifications for Association

The coalition is open to individuals and organizations who support our mission, values, and operational procedures (as designated in this handbook) and participate in coalition activities.

### Conflict Resolution

If there is a dispute regarding roles and responsibilities which participants are unable to resolve on their own, those involved may ask for a team to mediate their dispute. (See section on teams below.) All will work with the mediating team in good faith in seeking a resolution to their dispute.

### Revocation of Association

Participation in our coalition may be denied for the following reasons: failing to abide by our mission and/or values; disrupting the work of the coalition; engaging in activities that expose the coalition to duly warranted prosecution or jeopardize our legal status; or acting in a manner that egregiously harms the reputation of the coalition.

The consensus of the Board is required to revoke association.

## V. Structure and Organization

### Meetings Generally

Our coalition engages in different types of meetings depending on the actions to be considered and work to be accomplished. In addition to regular meetings of the General Assembly, the coalition also sponsors broader educational meetings and smaller team meetings as needed.

### Board and General Assembly

The General Assembly is a regular meeting open to all who are interested in learning more about GNOICC and steering the coalition in broad terms. General Assembly meetings are where important discussions about the direction of the Coalition take place. General Assembly meetings occur on a biweekly basis, but may happen more frequently if there is more activity to address.

The Board is a necessary legal entity for our corporate nonprofit status, governed by bylaws filed with the Louisiana Secretary of State. Members of the Board are designated by the initial bylaws and by election of the board itself thereafter. The Board appoints certain of its members as officers, including President, Secretary, and Treasurer, and others as needed. For complete rules regarding governance of the board, consult the bylaws.

Members of the Board are active participants of the General Assembly. The Board may meet separately but always strives to represent the General Assembly and the broader coalition.

### Teams and Team Meetings

Teams (or subcommittees) are established upon approval and authorization of the General Assembly, to work on specific tasks, and report back to the General Assembly. Each team will have a designated chairperson, or two co-chairs. Each Team can decide for itself how to define its membership and make decisions (see section on “Decision-Making” below); conflicts may be resolved by the General Assembly.

### Meeting Facilitation

General Assembly meetings shall be co-facilitated by the President and Secretary of the Board. The co-facilitators must be familiar with this handbook. The co-facilitators are responsible for developing the agenda based on input from teams, checking quorum, calling

the meeting to order, moving through the agenda, recognizing motions, moderating discussion, observing time limits, conducting consensus-seeking, and generally working to make the meeting both fair and pleasant for everyone. Facilitators should not be dogmatic and must strive to be impartial, limiting their own input on the matters under discussion and ensuring that everyone present has a chance to speak. Facilitators may recuse themselves from facilitating a discussion if they have a conflict of interest, feel too close to the subject matter, etc.

## VI. Decision-Making

### Quorum

A decision will not be adopted by the General Assembly unless a quorum is present. Since the General Assembly does not have a fixed membership, a quorum shall be established at any General Assembly meeting when at least half of the Board members and chairs for half the Teams are in attendance. Quorum is not a necessary factor for Team meetings, as Teams generally recommend policy to the General Assembly.

### Consensus

We are committed to using a consensus-seeking process at the General Assembly for decision-making. This means no up-and-down voting. When a decision must be made, or an action approved, we shall engage in the consensus-seeking described in Attachment 1 of this handbook. If consensus cannot be achieved, the coalition will not take collective action on the point in question. Teams may adopt alternative decision-making processes by consensus.

### Asynchronous Decision-Making

If a quorum is not met at a General Assembly meeting, or when time-sensitive matters arise, then decisions may take place via an asynchronous process. Consensus may be achieved via email or other electronic discussion. These decisions must demonstrate participation that meets the quorum requirements described above.

## VII. Roles

### Executive Roles

**President** – The coalition shall have one President. Generally, the President shall be responsible for staying informed of the activities of the coalition’s various participants and teams, and maintaining a familiarity with the coalition’s bylaws and this handbook.

**Secretary** - The Secretary announces upcoming meetings; receives notices from participants of intended agenda items and motions; takes notes, records motions, and prepares draft minutes of General Assembly meetings; maintains all official records of the coalition, including bylaws, rules of order, minutes, team reports, etc.; makes minutes available to members and teams in a timely manner; coordinates the coalition’s official

correspondence and is the signatory to certify acts of the coalition; and takes over facilitation duties if the President is unable to do so.

Treasurer - The Treasurer is entrusted with the custody of the coalition's funds (if any), spending only by authority of the Board; maintains the financial records of the coalition and the bookkeeping system to track the coalition's finances; receives and disburses funds in accordance with this handbook and relevant legal requirements; and keeps the General Assembly informed of the coalition's financial condition and affairs (including making the "Treasurer's Report" at meetings as needed).

#### Additional Positions and Duties

The General Assembly may create additional positions and teams as needed.

### VIII. Making Representations on Behalf of the Coalition

It is our practice to seek broad input to build consensus on statements, actions, and endorsements, when time allows. The preferred process of discernment begins with our Teams, which can bring proposals to the General Assembly, for ultimate approval by the Board. See Attachment 1 for a detailed description of the consensus process. This deliberative process is especially important when the coalition is asked to move in a new direction.

In some instances, it is desirable to move quickly. For this purpose, Board members and Team chairs and their designees are authorized to speak on behalf of the coalition and represent the coalition publicly, with the expectation that discretion and diligence will be exercised. This authorization includes issuing public statements (written or verbal) as well as endorsing organizations, events, and actions. Such statements and endorsements must be consistent with our mission and values and should be reported at the next General Assembly meeting and recorded by the Secretary.

### IX. Working Protocols

We actively seek to support, join, partner, and work collaboratively with others who uplift our core values, share our sense of reverence for Nature, and see the moral and spiritual dimensions of the climate crisis.

The GNOICC enthusiastically anticipates such relationships. The Mission and Affiliation Team will thoroughly review proposed relationships and make recommendations to the General Assembly. In rare cases where urgent action is required, the Board may choose to take a decision without such a review, however the preferred method is to review partnership proposals, with all their ramifications, for the best outcome.

Before joining, supporting, partnering, or collaborating, we must consider and discuss the benefits as well as the cost of time, resources, and potential conflicts of interest.

For strategic reasons, we may, with great caution, collaborate with entities whose values are not fully aligned with our own; in such cases, we must discuss thoroughly the rationale for pursuing the relationship. We will be transparent regarding the rationale for all affiliations.

The Secretary maintains a running list of formal affiliations which are also listed on the website.

**Questions for any arrangement:**

1. Which member(s) of the General Assembly will act as a liaison to the affiliate or partner organization, and how will that liaison report back to the General Assembly?
2. What are the responsibilities of the GNOICC to the relationship, including costs and legal liabilities? Will the liaison participate in meetings of the partner organization?
3. Will the organization or entity utilize our name or represent us in any way?

In adhering to any relationship may it be clear that bigotry, racism, misogyny, prejudice, or exploitation of any type will not be tolerated.

**X. Changes to Handbook**

Any participant in the Coalition may submit proposals to change this handbook in writing. Proposed changes to this handbook must be read at two consecutive General Assembly meetings before they are adopted or rejected.

## Attachment 1: Consensus-Seeking Process

A proposal may be presented for inclusion on the agenda of a General Assembly meeting, or it may grow naturally out of a meeting discussion. Either way, the proposal presenter provides a brief statement on the proposal, giving a written copy, if available, to the note taker. The facilitator determines if a quorum exists. If one does, the consensus-seeking process begins:

1. The presenter answers “clarifying questions” from members.
2. The facilitator checks for affirmations and concerns.
3. As needed, concerns may be listed by a scribe where all can see them.
4. The facilitator gets a feel for the group’s assessment of the proposal.
5. The group seeks to resolve those concerns deemed legitimate by incorporating them into the proposal. The presenter must agree to modifications before they can be made. The note taker reads back any modifications to be sure they are properly recorded.
6. The facilitator asks if there remain any unresolved concerns.

If there are no remaining concerns, the proposal is adopted with a plan for implementation. If concerns remain, go to the next level for resolution.

The facilitator asks those holding concerns if they are willing to allow the group to adopt the proposal without their approval with their unresolved concerns being listed with the plan for implementation:

- A. If those holding such concerns are agreeable, these “stand aside” concerns are recorded by the note taker and included in the minutes with the adopted proposal.
- B. If someone holding a concern is unwilling to stand aside, go to the next level for resolution.

The facilitator addresses the remaining concerns one at a time as follows:

1. The concern is restated.
2. Questions clarify the concern. What needs to be understood by the group? Is additional study needed?
3. Discussion focuses on the single concern.

The facilitator asks if all concerns are resolved:

- A. If yes, the proposal is adopted.
- B. If no, the facilitator asks for stand asides.
- C. If a concern remains and the person is unwilling to stand aside, go to the closing options.

If time is being kept, the timekeeper will notify the facilitator when three (3) minutes remain in the time allotted for the proposal. At this point, the presenter will decide on a closing option. Closing options are the prerogative of the proposal presenter:

- A. Send or return the proposal to a Team for further refinement and an attempt to resolve the legitimate concerns raised.
- B. Suggest the empowerment of an ad hoc Team made up of the representatives of the remaining concerns and advocates of the proposal to reach some fair resolution:
  - i. to act on behalf of the General Assembly if time is critical, or
  - ii. to return to a subsequent meeting with a recommendation for adoption.
- C. Request additional agenda time in the meeting to reach a resolution of any remaining concerns.
- D. Withdraw the proposal.

Points of Order: Any member may signal the facilitator if s/he:

- A. Believes a violation of this procedure has taken place (Point of process);
- B. Does not understand the procedure (Point of clarification); or
- C. Has knowledge of an item of information that is important to the discussion (Point of information).