

Re: Proposed Language for 3.2.1

The Linkage Working Group submits the following to clarify our definition of linkage, as well as its importance in terms of board priority.

Current Version:

Accordingly, the Board has responsibility to:

1. Create and maintain linkage between the Board and its member congregations.

Replacement version:

Accordingly, the Board has responsibility to:

3.2.1 Create and maintain linkage between the Board and the Sources of Authority and Accountability defined in Policy 3.0.

a. Linkage shall mean

1. Formal, intentional dialogue with the Sources of Authority and Accountability for the purpose of understanding the Sources' values and the benefits the Association should produce
2. Connections with the Sources of Authority and Accountability that ensure the board governs accountably on their behalf.

b. No function shall have a higher priority.

c. In linking with any particular Source, the Board will listen to multiple voices.

d. The Board will collaborate with communities and organizations outside the Board in identifying the voices invited to speak on behalf of these Sources.

e. The Board will report on its linkage activities with these Sources, identifying not only the methodology but also the values discerned, and the impact of those values on Board actions.

RATIONALE

In the UUA Governance Process policies, Policy 3.2 contains the Board job description.

While the description lists ten responsibilities, it lacks guidance or directive for the unique status of linkage in securing the integrity of a Policy Governance system. The authority of the Board is earned and maintained through trusting, accountable relationships; linkage is how these relationships are sustained. Without linkage, the Board can't credibly claim ongoing authority to decide on behalf of the Association. With the central importance of linkage in mind, the UUA Board faces two challenges.

First, the Board as a whole struggled to engage in and complete its linkage work with member congregations in 2010. Second, the prospect of a smaller Board raises the specter of diminished relationships with the Board's Sources of Authority and Accountability at the very moment in our movement when higher collaboration is required. Because the Board cannot credibly act with authority in the absence of healthy linkage relationships, this policy defines linkage and establishes it as the primary priority of the Board. This policy does not resolve obstacles or resolve all challenges with regard to linkage, but it sets the intention that a way will be found.

Rationale for changes by section are as follows.

3.2.1 Create and maintain linkage between the Board and the Sources of Authority and Accountability defined in Policy 3.0.

The proposed version of 3.2.1 requires linkage with all Sources, not just member congregations.

a. Linkage shall mean

- 1. Formal, intentional dialogue with the Sources of Authority and Accountability for the purpose of understanding the Sources' values and the benefits the Association should produce*
- 2. Connections with the Sources of Authority and Accountability that ensure the board governs accountably on their behalf.*

This language clarifies for the Board and others the purpose of linkage – what it seeks to understand and why that understanding is important. The two sections recognize that linkage has two forms. Formal, intentional dialogue is critical to understanding values and desired outcomes, but it is only one aspect of linkage. The Board always must maintain ongoing, meaningful connections with Sources, even when not currently engaged with them in formal linkage dialogue.

b. No task shall have a higher priority.

The initial paragraph addresses this language and the desire to provide clarity on Board responsibilities.

c. In linking with any particular Source, the Board will listen to multiple voices.

This language seeks to clarify that no single group, organization, individual, or congregation will be allowed to speak for any particular Source.

d. The Board will collaborate with communities and organizations outside the Board in identifying the voices invited to speak on behalf of these Sources.

This language calls the Board to seek wide engagement in linkage. For example, what communities and organizations could help us link with the spirit of Beloved Community? What voices might they suggest?

e. The Board will report on its linkage activities with these Sources, identifying not only the methodology but also the values discerned, and the impact of those values on Board actions.

The Board is accountable for not only linkage events or connections, but how they were accomplished and how the results were used. Linkage is not a feel-good exercise with no impact.

Summary

This proposed 3.2.1 is intended to provide the detail necessary to ensure meaningful accountability. When the Board engages in annual self-monitoring of this policy, it will have to identify the ways it sought multiple voices, maintained connections with Sources, collaborated with others, and reported on its activities. Linkage is hard and hard tasks are easy to postpone. Clearly stating that no task has a higher priority will require the Board to annually address its responsibilities under Policy Governance and assess the breadth of work and tasks that tempt it.