

**Regional Sub-Committees on Candidacy
Of the
Ministerial Fellowship Committee**

Unitarian Universalist Association

Policies and Procedures Manual

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1. Goals and Function of the Regional Sub-Committees on Candidacy

1.1 Goals of the Program

The primary goal in establishing the Regional Sub-Committees on Candidacy (RSCCs) of the Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC) was to improve the effectiveness of the credentialing process at its early stages. This was intended for the benefit of both those involved in evaluating aspirants as well as for the aspirants themselves. Specific goals were to:

- * Identify aspirants showing promise for the ministry who have significant deficiencies which should be addressed before their MFC interviews
- * Identify aspirants who are unsuited for ministry and discourage further preparation
- * Encourage realistic financial planning
- * Encourage diversity in candidates for the UU ministry
- * Improve coordination, clarity of roles, and communication among organizations and individuals involved in developing an ongoing ministry, viz., theological schools, mentors, congregations, internship sites, CPE placements, the Panel on Theological Education, the Ministries and Faith Development Staff Group (MFD), the MFC, the Ministerial Credentialing Office (MCO), and District Offices and other regional structures
- Meet ethical responsibilities to provide honest feedback to aspirants

1.2 General Responsibilities of the RSCCs

The primary function of the RSCCs is to make early decisions regarding candidacy status. This function includes providing honest feedback to aspirants who are judged suitable for the ministry as well as those who are not. A secondary function is to provide accurate information to aspirants in the credentialing process. This function includes coordinating the work of the organizations or individuals involved in this process. A further responsibility includes involvement in continuous process improvement and training.

The RSCC's responsibility, with respect to the aspirant's financial planning, is primarily to ensure the individual is aware of the financial consequences of theological education and related expenses. This includes awareness of the levels of compensation of various forms of ministry so the aspirant can make informed financial decisions and meaningful commitments to his or her financial responsibilities. The RSCC should review the aspirant's financial planning statement as a part of its overall evaluation.

1.3 Evaluative Function

The primary evaluative function of the RSCCs is to make early decisions regarding candidacy status based upon two decision options:

Candidacy **granted** and individual is encouraged to proceed:

Candidacy **postponed** with requirement of an additional interview with an RSCC no earlier than one year later to demonstrate that the aspirant has satisfactorily addressed contingencies identified during the prior RSCC interview. Candidacy could be granted or postponed again. The aspirant is encouraged to contact the Ministerial Credentialing Director who will consult with the UUMA to help identify a colleague for the purposes of mentoring and support.

1.4 Support Function

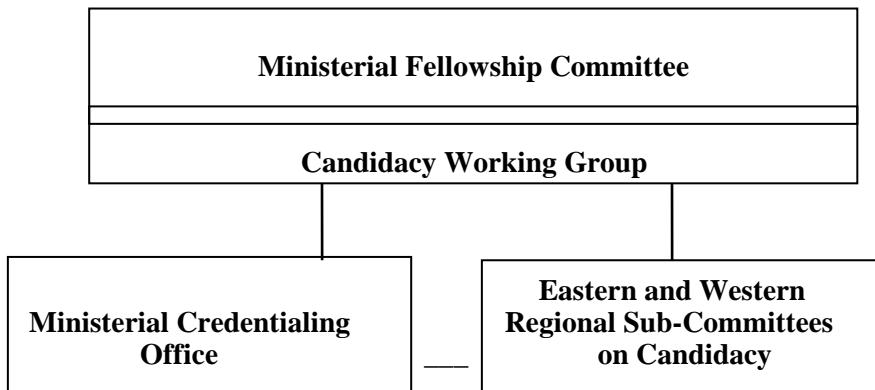
The primary support function of the RSCC is to provide information about the credentialing process, and to refer aspirants who have had their candidacy postponed to the Ministerial Credentialing Director who will consult with the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association for the purposes of mentoring.

1.5 Terms Used in this Manual

applicant	an individual who expresses interest in UU ministry
aspirant	an individual who has filed the necessary paperwork with an RSCC, enrolled in a seminary, (or possesses an M Div degree or an M. Div Equivalency)
student	an applicant or aspirant matriculated in a seminary or theological school, or engaged in a program of relevant coursework
transfer	an aspirant or candidate who is seeking to transfer standing from another denomination
candidate	a person who has successfully interviewed with an RSCC
committee	members of an RSCC
panel	RSCC members involved in the aspirant interview and evaluation process

2. Organizational Structure

2.1 Organizational Chart



2.2 Geographical Distribution

There are two Regional Sub-Committees on Candidacy. Aspirants are free to interview with either one.

2.3 Implementation History

The Ministerial Fellowship Committee completed the initial appointment of all RSCC members in December 1999. In order for committee members to be indemnified by the Unitarian Universalist Association (fully covered by liability insurance) they must be named as officers of the UUA. (See Article X, Section 10.12 of UUA By-laws.) For this reason, the UUA Board of Trustees formally indemnifies RSCC members upon recommendation of Ministries and Faith Development staff and chair of the Ministerial Fellowship Committee.

2.4 Membership of RSCCs

Since the purpose of the Regional Sub-Committees on Candidacy is to make initial decisions regarding candidacy status, members of RSCCs will have early and official contact with persons preparing for

Unitarian Universalist ministerial fellowship. Each RSCC will be comprised of a minimum of ten members appointed by the UUA Board of Trustees in order to facilitate the meeting of two panels simultaneously. Five members shall be ministers in Final Fellowships. Five members shall be laypersons in good standing with Unitarian Universalist congregations.

The criteria for being appointed to an RSCC are consistent with the appointment process to the MFC – to assemble the most capable, well-balanced, effective committee possible. This goal is best served by narrowly defining categorical requirements to those relating to the number of lay and professional ministerial members. Whenever possible, RSCC makeup will strive for sensitivity and balance in matters of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, class, theology, disability, the size and style of the nominee’s home congregation, geography, ministerial category and other appropriate considerations.

Given this, there are nevertheless some important considerations of commitment, desirable attributes, and experience in potential RSCC members. Members of RSCCs should have a commitment to quality and diversity in ministry, two specific goals of the program. They must also be willing to honor the time, energy, and confidentiality required to perform their role. Members should acknowledge that service to Unitarian Universalist congregations and the ministry includes a willingness to discourage unsuitable candidates for the ministry. Finally, members must be willing to function as members of a team.

Some of the specifically desired attributes of RSCC members include discernment, the ability to speak the truth even when doing so is uncomfortable, an understanding of Unitarian Universalism in its institutional life, and respect for the ministerial fellowship process. In addition, members should be organized and capable of collaborative work. They must also be broadminded and energetic.

Useful prior experience for RSCC members might include past service on similar credentialing bodies, membership on ministerial relations committees, work in career assessment or counseling, teaching or advising in the context of theological education, and experience in conflict management.

Term of Membership

Appointments to RSCCs shall be for a period of two years, renewable for up to eight consecutive years.

At a minimum, roles that must be filled include:

Committee Chair – the individual responsible for calling meetings and ruling on points of order—this person will be approved by the UUA Committee on Committees

Scribe – the individual responsible for keeping required accurate records—this person will be appointed by each RSCC

Quorum

Five members shall constitute a quorum for the purposes of aspirant interviews and business decisions. At least five votes shall be required for advancement of an aspirant to candidate status. In the event that five members are not available for an interview session, RSCC members from another RSCC may be asked to substitute for the absent member. In addition, the Ministerial Credentialing Director may be available to serve on a panel as needed.

Workload Considerations

The several areas of committee responsibilities determine the major workload considerations for RSCCs. The following is a (non-exhaustive) list of specific tasks and responsibilities: attend training events needed for participation on the RSCC; commitment to a two-year term; commitment to ongoing anti-

racism, anti-oppression and multiculturalism training; availability as a resource for aspirants; reading packets of aspirants, conducting interviews and making candidacy decisions and writing follow-up letters to the aspirant/candidate after making candidacy decisions. Follow up or ongoing training for these considerations is subjective to budgetary resources.

RSCCs are encouraged to document current practices unique to their RSCC for training and orientation needs of new members.

Administration of the RSCCS

The administration of the RSCCs is performed by staff in the Ministerial Credentialing Office.

3. Responsibilities

3.1 MFC and MCO to RSCCs

The Ministerial Fellowship Committee has exclusive jurisdiction over ministerial fellowship and makes rules governing ministerial fellowship procedures. Based on its own resolution of February 1997, the Candidacy Working Group of the MFC established the Regional Sub-Committees on Candidacy to:

- * Help ensure excellence in professional Unitarian Universalist ministry
- * Provide an early opportunity for discernment in the fellowship process
- * Give RSCCs direction and evaluate their effectiveness

The Ministerial Credentialing Office (MCO) and its Director, also share responsibility for the work of the RSCCs. The responsibilities of the MCO and the MCO Director are to:

- * Serve as the point of communication with applicants and aspirants
- * Inform the appropriate RSCC of contacts by applicants and aspirants
- * Retain copies of the results of aspirant evaluations
- * Share information about aspirants with the MFC that is necessary for the MFC to know
- * Facilitate communication between the RSCCs and the MFC
- * Participate in the assessment of the effectiveness of RSCCs
- * Implement scheduled training sessions on the credentialing process as appropriate
- * Supervise the creation and use of evaluation instruments
- * Provide guidance in the support functions of the RSCCs
- * Keep apprised of the ongoing progress of aspirants through communication with RSCCs
- * Be responsible for fiscal accountability and management of the overall RSCC budget

3.2 RSCCs to MFC to the MCO and to the other RSCCs

Based on the MFC resolution of February 1997, the charge of the Regional Sub-Committees on Candidacy is to

- * Determine the candidacy status of aspirants
- * Give attention to aspirants' need for realistic financial planning
- * Review career assessment reports
- * Conduct interviews
- * Send results of evaluations, along with recommendations in the case of a candidacy postponed, to aspirants and the Ministerial Credentialing Office.
- * Conduct follow up interviews with aspirants whose candidacy was postponed

4 Ethical Principles and Guidelines in the Credentialing Process

4.1 Ethical Issues in the Credentialing Process

There are several issues of ethics and conduct which arise in the course of the credentialing process:

- * Confidentiality
- * Fairness and consistency in evaluation
- * Truth telling
- * Conduct during interviews
- * Discussion of aspirants within the committee
- * Discussion of aspirants outside the committee

The primary process characteristic that guarantees **fairness** in evaluation is *process consistency*. ‘Fairness’ in evaluation is not necessarily a matter of the evaluation being *easy* or *enjoyable*; rather, it is a matter of *evenhandedness*. It means that whether an evaluation is difficult or easy, enjoyable or stressful, the evaluation process is distributed and the evaluation criteria are applied *equally*. Each individual in the credentialing process must have an equal opportunity to succeed or fail, and to express his or her personal and theological viewpoints without fear of bias. ‘Fairness’ means that one set of standards will not be applied to one aspirant while another set of standards are applied to another. A useful way to ensure that an evaluation process is fair is to continually ask of the process questions such as *however good or bad the process is at this point, is it being applied consistently to all aspirants?*

Given that highly personal and idiosyncratic feelings and theologies are both expressed and heard in the RSCC process, the question arises about how to deal with the *subjectivity* of evaluation. It is natural to judge more highly an individual whose affective persona or whose individual theology more closely corresponds to one’s own. This level of subjectivity is unavoidable. Each RSCC member is making a judgment about an individual based on their own perception of suitability for ministry.

However, the 16 attributes and competencies used in the evaluation profile instrument are intended to reduce highly skewed judgments by providing a wide range of criteria by which each aspirant is judged. The evaluation instrument cannot eliminate subjectivity, but its design should help avoid evaluation of a candidate on only a small subset of attributes and competencies, which may be important to a particular RSCC evaluation team member – i.e., judging aspirants only on the basis of their administrative skills.

Applying the evaluation process fairly must also take into consideration different levels of experience and background of aspirants. Committee members must carefully reflect on the implications of an aspirant’s age or employment-based experience over another. The same is true with varying levels of education. A useful question is *how do these factors of experience or educational level contribute or impede the aspirant’s ability to perform successfully as a minister?*

Finally, aspirant evaluations must give measured and respectful consideration of an individual’s race, ethnic background, gender, sexual orientation, and prior religious affiliation. It should be understood and communicated to aspirants that among the explicit goals of the RSCC process are the desire to seek **greater** diversity within the UU ministry. Members of RSCCs must therefore be sensitive to a potential for issues of discrimination to arise from several standpoints. The ground they should seek is one in which neutrality and the need for diversity can both be accommodated.

Issues of **confidentiality** can largely be addressed by consideration of the question *who has need to know this information?* Clearly, all information about aspirants will be shared with the MCO and the MFC. The right of the RSCC to share all information about an individual with the MCO and the MFC must be made clear to all aspirants from the start. Areas of ambiguity arise in contemplating those beyond the RSCC, MCO, and MFC who may have either access to information about an aspirant, or a special interest in a particular aspirant. Useful *general* principles to guide issues of confidentiality are the

following. (a) Does a party or group have a valid right to information about an aspirant? and (b) is the aspirant informed that information about him or her will (or may) be shared with this party or group?

The biggest danger to confidentiality comes not from explicit or intentional discussions of an aspirant but from casual conversation passed on among individuals, their families, and other friends. The danger here is twofold. Not only is it easy for private information to be passed along to those who have no genuine right to it, it is also easy for private information to be modified or distorted as it is passed along.

Since it is important that open and frank discussions about the nature of ministry and the RSCC's perceptions of aspirants take place, it is equally important that this kind of discussion be protected. For the RSCCs to reach their goals effectively, there must be a balance between confidentiality and the sharing of information among aspirants, advisors, RSCC members, the MCO and the MFC. This presumes accountability and trust, with an understanding that all materials held by RSCCs would be shared with the aspirants. Routinely, the packet collected by the aspirant for the interview, the candidacy decision letter and perhaps any other recommendation made by the RSCC (i.e., recommendation of a CPE waiver, M. Div Equivalency, or waiver of the internship requirement) would be forwarded to the MFC, unless additional materials were appropriate and requested. No one outside the RSCC system should receive any sensitive information.

The principle of **truth telling** is easy enough to understand, but sometimes hard to apply, particularly when it competes with other desirable purposes or *goods*. One useful way to understand the principle of truth telling is derivative from Kant's Categorical Imperative – *act from an awareness of duty that could be the basis of a universal law*. Think of the implications of your answer. Could a moral attitude or *maxim* (e.g., my attitude towards telling the truth) govern not merely some particular action of mine, but the actions of all people at all times? Would a world in which some principle of action were applied universally be one in which we could live? In the case of truth telling – if no one told the truth, then no one would be believed, and the very fabric of trust which holds society together would disappear.

However, the principle of truth telling often competes with other ends that are good – including the desire to not offend or be insensitive to another's feelings and aspirations. In the case of the evaluation of a ministerial candidate, the need for honesty about strengths and weaknesses must win out over diplomacy or fear of conveying unwelcome judgments. The consequences down the road of not being completely honest and forthright are far too severe. However, honesty is never inconsistent with caring.

The remaining three areas pertaining to **conduct** during interviews and **discussions of aspirants** also largely have to do with good taste and sensitivity. While aspirant interviews are *evaluations*, they can and should be conducted in such a way that an individual is not humiliated or embarrassed. Members of RSCC evaluation teams must be able to distinguish between putting an aspirant under an appropriate level of pressure to follow a thread of concern or to seek explanation or justification for theological viewpoints expressed and behavior which really becomes a form of hazing or unnecessary pickiness. Much of the previous discussion relating to *subjectivity* applies here as well. The goal of interactive interviews should be *discovery* but not something, which leads to the need for *recovery*.

4.2 Points for Reflection

It is highly recommended that RSCCs remain attentive to ethical guidelines and criteria for ensuring fairness, consistency, confidentiality, conduct during interviews, and principles for discussion of aspirants. Ethical behavior is not a matter of simple conformity to established rules, but rather actions and behavior based on honest and heartfelt reflection on the issues at hand. Therefore, it will be most meaningful if RSCCs regularly go through a process of ethical reflection themselves. The following points for reflection are expressed as open-ended questions can be a guide to this process:

- * Am I aware of *personal* preferences or views, which might lead me to judge one aspirant higher or lower than another?

- * Can I discern when I am evaluating an aspirant on my value system rather than on the individual's attributes and competencies as these relate to performing a ministry?
- * Am I swayed by whether or not I happen to *like* an individual or find them physically appealing?
- * Are other members of the evaluation committee influencing my judgments?
- * Am I clear on what information about this aspirant is suitable for sharing?
- * Do I discuss stories about this aspirant's personal history or family background with other people?
- * Is there a shared sense of respect and appropriateness of questions by all members of the team?
- * In private discussions of aspirants by the evaluation team are aspirants joked about or ridiculed?
- * Have I evaluated aspirants with consideration to all 16 attributes and competencies?
- * In using the evaluation instrument, do I take time to ask myself: "Would the aspirant agree with my evaluation here or not?" And if not, what would be my explanation or reasons for the difference?
- * Does our RSCC periodically discuss these issues, explore cases by which to identify new issues of ethical concern, and develop procedures to address areas of weakness in the evaluation process?

5. The Credentialing Process Task Flow

5.1 Elements of the Credentialing Process

Once an applicant has come to a decision to pursue the UU ministerial fellowship, they should contact or the Ministerial Credentialing Office. The MCO will keep records on all applicants and aspirants. The applicant will then receive from the MCO information describing the credentialing process, including the materials to be provided to the RSCC before the aspirant's scheduled interview.

The applicant is to notify the MCO upon being accepted to an ATS approved theological school. The applicant moves to aspirant status upon receipt of all required documents. In the case of an applicant seeking transfer or plural standing the applicant may already possess an M Div. degree. The MCO can also help aspirants prepare and M. Div Equivalency.

Aspirants may be eligible to receive a Program Assistance Grant, which is used to offset the cost of the career assessment. All aspirants, including those seeking transfer and/or dual standing are required to have a career assessment. The aspirant arranges to have his or her career assessment report sent directly to the MCO prior to being able to schedule an RSCC interview. The MCO works with transfers or those seeking dual fellowship to determine that aspirant's current standing with their prior denomination and to get a letter of reference from a ministerial colleague of the aspirant's current or former faith communion.

After having their RSCC interview scheduled, the aspirant gathers and sends the necessary interview documentation to the MCO no later than six weeks prior to the interview. The RSCC interviews the aspirant and either grants or postpones candidacy status. At the conclusion of the interview, the RSCC reports the results to both the aspirant and the MCO.

If the aspirant is granted candidacy status, he or she is cleared to proceed with plans towards ministerial fellowship and complete the remaining requirements in preparation for the MFC. If the aspirant has candidacy status postponed, the aspirant will be given a specific set of recommendations by the RSCC. The Ministerial Credentialing Director will work with the UUMA to find colleagues to offer support. All

recommendations must be fulfilled and completed before the aspirant may re-interview with the RSCC. A successful return interview is required for an aspirant to proceed towards ministerial fellowship.

6. Evaluation Function of the RSCC

6.1 The Evaluation Model

Evaluation of the aspirant is based on a set of 16 specific attributes and capabilities used to assess the potential for ministry of aspirants, and to identify areas for development.

1 Motivation and Genuineness of Purpose

Desire to pursue ministry motivated by concern for others as individuals, in congregations, and in the community, to provide spiritual guidance.

2 Personality Integration and Maturity

Has maturity, emotional stability to authentically and effectively minister to others.

3 Intellectual Capability

Has the capability to identify and discuss issues intelligently, and can articulate their historical context with knowledge and sensitivity.

4 Support Network

Maintains a strong colleague, denominational, and personal support system.

5 Self-Care and Spiritual Development

Knows the importance of self-care and spiritual development for ministry.

6 Theological Understanding

Well-grounded in denominational values and history; projects spiritual strength in exploring pain, suffering, injustice, and can relate them theologically; understands and can discuss other world religions and spiritual practices.

7 Awareness of Social and Ethical Issues

Identifies critical issues of social and ethical import appropriate for the attention, reflection, and response by congregations and individuals.

8 Respect for Confidentiality

Appropriately keeps confidence resulting from counseling and casual conversation.

9 Communication and Listening Skills

Interacts well with others in all manner of communication; possesses the ability to hear and reflect on the comments of others; excellent writing and oral presentation skills.

10 Empathy and Counseling Ability

Able to respond appropriately to the counseling needs of individuals and families in a congregation or community setting; understands counseling dynamics; can identify behavioral signs of dangerous or high-risk individuals

11 Social Skills

Provides a warm and welcoming presence; shows sound judgment in social situations; indicates through behavior respect for self and others

- 12 Leadership Potential**
Shows capability to grow a ministry through nurturing and fostering the ability of others; possesses vision and direction; holds the respect of colleagues, staff, church members, clients; has the ability to influence, inspire, enable, empower; shares leadership and resources; serves as appropriate role model for denominational values and principles.
- 13 Crisis Management**
Has ability to confront difficult issues with skill and insight; does not avoid difficult situations; invites discussion of perceptions and feelings in a way that is constructive and leads to resolution or mutual understanding; displays calming presence in times of crisis or need; knows available resources and supports.
- 14 Administrative and Financial Effectiveness**
Has the ability to oversee volunteer or paid staff; can responsibly and knowledgeably manage finances of ministry; understands the financial needs and operations of the church or other institutions, and responsibly manages personal finances.
- 15 Clarity of Roles and Boundaries**
Understands and maintains appropriate boundaries with staff and congregants; sensitive to dynamics of congregational life.
- 16 Commitment to Unitarian Universalist Institution and Principles**
Supports the principles and purposes of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

These elements may be represented in a conceptual model based on four broader dimensions.

Self-Reflective	Interactive
1. Motivation & Genuineness of Purpose 2. Personality Integration and Maturity 3. Intellectual Capability 4. Support Network 5. Self-Care and Spiritual Development	9. Communication and Listening Skills 10. Empathy and Counseling Ability 11. Social Skills
Normative	Directive
6. Theological Understanding 7. Awareness of Social and Ethical Issues 8. Respect for Confidentiality	12. Leadership Potential 13. Crisis Management 14. Administrative and Financial Effectiveness 15. Clarity of Roles and Boundaries 16. Commitment to UU Institution and Principles

- * **Self-Reflective** refers to those attributes which relate to the individual as a person
- * **Directive** refers to those attributes and competencies which relate to the individual in the role of an administrator and leader of an organization
- * **Normative** refers to the moral and ethical dimension of the individual's activities and role in the larger community
- * **Interactive** refers to the individual's social and communication skills

The purpose of the evaluation model and the set of 16 attributes and competencies is twofold. (1) It ensures *fairness* across aspirants. Everyone will be evaluated on the same basis and by the same criteria. (2) It ensures *thoroughness* of the criteria by which aspirants will be evaluated. The set of 16 attributes and competencies represent a reasonably complete range of factors under which the qualifications of potential ministers should be considered.

6.2 The Evaluation Process

The evaluation process has five major elements also described on the Credentialing Process Task Flow. These elements generally occur in five successive stages.

1. The MCO communicates with applicants/aspirants to describe the process.
2. The RSCC evaluates documentation provided by the MCO from the aspirant.
3. The RSCC conducts an aspirant interview.
4. The RSCC evaluates the aspirant using an instrument to determine candidacy status.
5. The RSCC reports the results of its evaluation to the aspirant and the MCO.

A. Aspirant Paperwork

- * **Initial Inquiry Form**
- * **Interview Form - UU Minister (RSCC-2)**
- * **Criminal Offense Disclosure (RSCC-3)**
- * **Essay on ministerial aspirations and relevant biography**
Describe who you are.
Discuss the ministry you would like to perform.
- * **Transfer/Plural Standing Form (MFC-7) (If applicable)**
- * **Letter of acceptance from a theological school (or transcript)**

B Interview Documentation

- * **Application for Candidate Status (RSCC-5)**
- * **Career Assessment Report**
- * **Financial Plan (RSCC-6)**
- * **Official transcripts**
- * **One-page essays from two of the following topics**
 - Why did you choose to prepare for UU ministry?
 - How do you hope to serve the UU movement?
 - What excites you about UU ministry?
 - What is your vision of your work two years after fellowship?
- * **CPE evaluations (if available)**
- * **Internship evaluation forms (if available)**
- * **Names and contact information of 4 references, including the minister of the aspirant's congregation, if possible**

The applicant is instructed to provide the MCO with completed Intention Forms, to establish an appropriate channel of communication with the UUA, and to inform the MCO of the theological school the individual is or will be attending. The MCO maintains these records for the aspirant.

Applicants for transfer or plural standing must complete the Transfer/Plural Standing Form .

Upon receipt of all required forms, the MCO will inform the applicant that he or she has moved to aspirant status.

* Evaluation of Aspirant Documentation

Prior to scheduling an interview with the RSCC, the aspirant provides the MCO with the career assessment. Members of the RSCC participating in the aspirant interview will review all documentation that is provided by the aspirant. RSCC members involved in the interview process should consider keeping anecdotal notes on each aspirant for consideration with use of the formal evaluation instrument after the aspirant interview. However, evaluators should avoid making firm judgments or conclusions about the aspirant prior to the interview.

If the aspirant's career assessment report or other documentation reveals a glaring concern or deficiency, this should be discussed by all members of the RSCC participating in the evaluation process and, in some cases, with the MCO Director. Career assessment reports can be subtle or at times elliptical. Therefore, it is necessary that they be read carefully. Issues raised in the career assessment report should be checked out with the author of the report. This may include how the aspirant reacts to his or her own career assessment report.

CPE reports can vary greatly, but will often identify concerns relating to how an individual interacts with others during situations of stress or ambiguity of role. It is important here to look for issues that are likely to carry over and impact professional ministry.

In the aspirant's essays, the committee should look for honest and open discussion of the individual's calling, their vision of ministry, the sense of passion with which they approach the ministry. Examining these essays should also give the committee a sense of the aspirant's writing and thinking skills. How well, how clearly can they articulate their theological views? Their passions? Finally, the essays should reflect specifics about what the aspirant has to offer the ministry, and how realistic their understanding is about what it will take to reach their goal.

Aspirants must complete the Financial Planning Sheet for Seminarians. The plan is not to be used for purposes of discerning candidacy status, but as an important discussion tool to ascertain the aspirant's understanding of the financial implications of preparing for ministry, as well as to assist with helping the aspirant avoid accumulating student debt. The aspirant will have been encouraged to read the Economic Realities of the Unitarian Universalist Ministry which is available on line.

The Interview

The aspirant interview preferably occurs early in the ministerial formation process. Therefore, it is important to both acknowledge this, but also use it as an opportunity to discern what background a person brings to their life as an aspirant. Once an individual enters seminary, their thinking and expressions are likely to be shaped largely by that immediate experience. The impact of an individual's prior background may reemerge only after work in a ministerial capacity has begun.

Motivation, therefore, is among the key attributes the RSCC panel should examine. Aspirants often enter seminary for personal reasons, or at a major life transition point. This is not a bad thing, but it may present an emotionally charged or even distorted context in which the aspirant's perceptions of his or her own suitability for ministry are formed. The panel wants to assess how an individual's age and life experience figure into their commitment to ministry. Has this person learned through their life experience? Do they see projects through to their completion? Is this person motivated by study, drawn to theological inquiry, but not to the work of the ministry? Is this a genuine calling, or a last ditch effort to find oneself? Does this person think ministry is all about them, or is there something bigger toward which they are being called? Does the aspirant know the difference?

Elements of character should also be examined. Are weaknesses of character areas in which the aspirant is growing or are these permanent features not likely to change? How warm and open is this person? How well does the person know himself or herself? How aware of strengths and

weaknesses? Does this person listen to feedback or are responses defensive? Does this person have passion? Express emotion? Handle stress with maturity? Does this person take responsibility for self-care? Are there any untreated substance abuse or unresolved psychological issues?

The panel will want to consider how well an aspirant relates to people, the community, and to issues of authority. What are the aspirant's interpersonal skills? How well does he or she listen? Is this the kind of person others flee from, or are drawn to? Does the individual present as a leader, as one who feels comfortable in guiding others about matters of the greatest significance in their lives? How does this individual relate to other authority? What is their response to criticism?

Finally, the panel must consider the ends of the aspirant spectrum. How does this individual deal with practical matters? Do they have administrative common sense? And is there congruence between their lifestyle and their religious understanding? Does the spiritual dimension in their life reflect familiarity with Unitarian Universalism? Does the person communicate hope?

For aspirants seeking transfer or plural standing, these considerations and questions should be adjusted appropriately. RSCCs may be asked to recommend to the MFC whether an M. Div Equivalency should be granted for those aspirants who bring prior relevant academic preparation.

Format and Schedule

It is recommended that the aspirant interview with the RSCC after completing the equivalent of a full year of study. Part-time aspirants may come to interview two years into their academic and ministerial formation. Transfers should come early in their transfer process. It is the responsibility of the aspirant to gather the information required and to submit it to the MCO to be part of their packet. The MCO sets the schedule of aspirant interview in consultation with each RSCC.

RSCCs may structure aspirant interviews in ways they feel are most suitable to their purpose.

- * 45 minutes interview and talking with the aspirants
- * 15 minutes discussion of the aspirant by the panel with the aspirant not present
- * 15 minutes discussion with the aspirant present
- * 15 minutes break and regroup

Roles of RSCC panel

The MCO will send each aspirant prior to the interview a letter of general advice. The letter will inform them with a brief biography of who the panel members are. It will recommend that the aspirant come dressed for a professional interview. It will recommend coming with a first question. It will describe the time frame and format of the interview.

The letter will inform the aspirant that a report of the results of the interview will be sent to the aspirant and to the MCO. It is thoughtful to remind the aspirant that he or she is invited, even encouraged, to bring a friend, family member or other support person along to the interview. This person does not participate in the interview.

In advance of the interview, the panel will assign one committee member to each aspirant. The Committee Contact Person will contact the aspirant before the interview to introduce themselves, the RSCC process, and answer any questions. The Committee Contact Person will attempt to contact all the references in a timely manner. At the interview, this person will also introduce the aspirant to the panel members.

This person will also start the interview with a first question that is provided by the aspirant, if the aspirant provides one. All committee members will be involved in all discussions of the aspirant, use of the evaluation instrument, and the process for arriving at consensus in an evaluation judgment.

The panel often assigns a committee member (“recorder”) to be responsible for taking careful notes during the evaluation of aspirants and subsequent discussion. These notes or recommendations will be useful in preparing the letter of results for the MCO and the aspirant, and for evaluating the credentialing process itself.

The recommendations including feedback are used by the RSCC “scribe” to complete the official letter by the end of each aspirant’s interview. The official letter with the recommendations will be sent to the aspirant by the MCO and a copy is kept in the MFC files.

Guidelines for Dialogue

The intention is that the aspirant interview be relaxed, reasonably informal, with opportunity for questions by the aspirant as well as by RSCC members.

An appropriate early question might be open-ended but also focus on an area of familiarity to the aspirant. For example, “*Could you talk a bit about your plans for the upcoming year?*” If the aspirant goes on too long, it is appropriate for the chair to politely cut them off, saying, “*Thank you, you’ve said enough on that.*” Similarly, coaching by panel members during the interview is also appropriate. Panel members might offer remarks such as “*How is this interview going for you?*” Or “*How are you feeling right now?*” or “*You seem to be rambling; can you answer more succinctly?*”

It is useful to assign questions to panel members before hand, based on flags in the aspirant’s documentation or material. The panel should carefully pre-read all the materials and flag questions for the interview. The panel members should come prepared with questions. Aspirants are not expected to be finished products.

The interview should not be focused upon academic content.

Use of Evaluation Instruments

The evaluation instrument used in conjunction with the aspirant interview is intended to optimize the RSCCs ability to meet the overall goals of the RSCC program, in particular, to identify deficiencies of aspirants showing promise for the ministry and to identify aspirants clearly unsuited for professional ministry.

The instrument reflects the most critical attributes of the aspiring minister, and it has been designed to be straightforward and easy to use.

Guidelines for Evaluation Criteria

The 16 attributes and competencies, which constitute the evaluation model, to assess potential for ministry and identify areas for development are assessed on a continuum, with evaluators making judgments on a 5 point Likert-type scale. The scale is descriptive rather than quantitative.

There are three major reasons for this.

- (1) Descriptive categories give panel evaluators more meaningful terms by which to assess attributes and competencies that are often subtle or complex.
- (2) The use of the evaluation instrument is to obtain an evaluation of each aspirant individually, not in competition with other aspirants.
- (3) The evaluation represents judgments about 16 attributes and competencies, the significance of whose presence or absence in an individual is relative to one another.

	Not Well Displayed	Somewhat Displayed	Moderately Displayed	Strongly Displayed	Highly Displayed
1 Motivation and Genuineness of Purpose					
2 Personality Integration and Maturity					
3 Intellectual Capability					
4 Support Network					
5 Self-Care and Spiritual Development					
6 Theological Understanding					
7 Awareness of Social and Ethical Issues					
8 Respect for Confidentiality					
9 Communication and Listening Skills					
10 Empathy and Counseling Ability					
11 Social Skills					
12 Leadership Potential					
13 Crisis Management					
14 Administrative and Financial Effectiveness					
15 Clarity of Roles and Boundaries					
16 Commitment to UU Institution and Principles					

Each attribute or competency set may be judged as:

- * not well displayed or documented
- * somewhat displayed or documented
- * moderately displayed or documented
- * strongly displayed or documented
- * highly displayed or documented

Evaluators can place a check in the appropriate box for how they evaluate the aspirant with respect to each category. Arrangement of categories in a continuum allows rapid visual discernment of areas of strength or weakness for each aspirant.

Discussion of Results

Discussion of aspirant documentation, supporting material, and interviews should proceed in an orderly and consistent fashion. This assures fairness in the interview of aspirants as well as thoroughness in assessment of all 16 attributes and competencies. The process the RSCC panel uses to accomplish an orderly and consistent discussion of aspirants may take several forms.

1. Each panel member gives a brief first impression of the aspirant.
2. There is free discussion of the aspirant.
3. The panel conducts a straw vote on the aspirant
4. If there is disagreement on the straw vote, the panel conducts further discussion toward the goal of seeking consensus. The panel conducts another vote.

The panel iterates on this procedure aiming for consensus to be reached. It is important that a panel member take careful notes during discussion and evaluation of aspirants. These notes may be useful in the letter that is sent to the aspirant.

Reaching Consensus

Consensus represents a judgment reached by a group as a whole. It differs from a simple majority vote in one important sense. While majority vote results in a particular outcome, *consensus* represents a commitment by each member to that outcome. Votes do not presuppose any such agreement. With consensus, while each member may not agree with the outcome, they are willingness to invoke it. Consensus expresses the harmony of the evaluation panel, and should be sought wherever possible.

Reporting Results to MCO and Aspirant

A copy of the RSCC letter will be sent by the MCO on RSCC letterhead

Security of Files and Records

The UUA has charged the MFC with admitting and continuing in fellowship those persons who are qualified to serve as ministers in our association. This information is the property of the MFC rather than aspirants, and it shall be maintained with concern for the individual's privacy as well as for the integrity of the process that grants ministerial fellowship. An Aspirant's record is the total of all information about an aspirant in the possession of Ministries and Faith Development.

The record may include career assessment reports, CPE and internship evaluations, interview notes, correspondence, phone notes, and other pertinent records. Access to files and records is restricted to RSCC and MFC members and MCO staff, and other staff of Ministries and Faith Development.

Aspirant files and records should be kept under lock and key except during working hours. In the case of electronic files, restrictions will be in place to limit access to MCO staff and other designated members of MFD. Appropriate precautions must be taken while any files or records are in transit.