

Congregational User Guide to the Youth Ministry Working Group Report

“As Unitarian Universalists, our call to the work of youth ministry rests on our spiritual commitment to build the world we dream about – a world in which our faith communities welcome people of all ages, cultures, and backgrounds to join hands in nourishing our spirits and healing our world.”

-Youth Ministry Working Group Report, Introduction



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
ASSOCIATION OF CONGREGATIONS

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Introduction

The Youth Ministry Working Group (YMWG) was created in 2008 by UUA President William Sinkford and given the following charge:

To recommend to the UUA Administration and UUA Board of Trustees a framework and strategic imagination for Unitarian Universalist youth ministry based on the findings of the Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth and the recommendations of the Summit on Youth Ministry.

The Youth Ministry Working Group presented its report to the UUA Administration and Board of Trustees in April of 2009. The Youth Ministry Working Group report offers a vision of vibrant, multicultural, multigenerational youth ministry in which all youth are welcomed, valued, and involved members of our congregations.

To facilitate the usefulness of the report, a series of user guides were developed for various stakeholders to help them implement the recommendations made by the Youth Ministry Working Group. This guide is designed for congregational use. It will lead you through the Working Group recommendations, address the role of congregational leadership (both professional and lay), offer reflection suggestions, and provide a guide for facilitating congregation-wide conversations.

Reading the Youth Ministry Working Group Report

The Report

We strongly encourage you to read the [Youth Ministry Working Group Report](#) in its entirety. It is twenty-one pages and available on UUA.org. While not every recommendation addresses congregations directly, all recommendations will have an impact on what services are made available to congregations to support them in this work. There are four sections of the report:

Section A addresses structure and scope. These recommendations speak most directly to congregations, asking for youth to be involved in the full-range of congregational life and for congregations to work to support youth in these endeavors. This section also asks congregations to better welcome and serve youth of diverse needs, abilities and identities, and offers some suggestions for doing this work. Also in *Section A* are a myriad of recommendations to the UUA staff and other organizations to create opportunities for youth leadership, service and faith development, as well as recommendations for supporting congregations in this work.

Section B is all about resources. This section will give you a sense of what changes to existing programs have been recommended and what new resources will be made available to you as they're developed. These include training programs, curricula, and more.

Section C will be of particular interest to religious professionals and seminarians as well as volunteers who work with youth. This section addresses grants, continuing education, training opportunities and support for ministers, religious educators and youth advisors. This section also includes recommendations for developing youth as religious leaders and the opportunities that should be made available to them.

Section D discusses accountability and assessment regarding the recommendations that have been set forth.

The Mosaic Project

As part of the larger Consultation process, the Mosaic Project examined the ministry needs of Youth and Young Adults of Color and how they were being met. The Mosaic Project Report shares these findings and makes recommendations for improving our ministries. This report goes hand-in-hand with the Working Group recommendations and we encourage you to [read the report](#) and consider the accompanying [discussion questions](#) when reflecting on and discussing the Working Group report. (Both can be accessed from www.uua.org/mosaic.)

Reflection Questions

As you go through the report, use these questions to help focus and guide your reflections and discussions. Before you begin, take a few moments to articulate your role in the congregation. What are your responsibilities? Do you maintain any programs? Do you plan events? Do you work with particular groups of people? In what ways do you currently interact with youth?

With those services, roles and relationships in mind, consider these questions:

- How does this recommendation affect the work I am currently doing? What may need to change?
- How feasible is this recommendation for me at this time?
- What impediments do I/we face?
- What immediate steps can I take?
- What are the long-term implications for my position?
- What assistance do I need?
- Who are the others that can work on this with me?

For recommendations not directed to congregations, but rather to other levels of the Association to provide to congregations, consider these questions:

- What might this mean for us?
- Would we be able to use this resource?
- What opportunities does this open up for us as a congregation?

Working with the YMWG Report in Your Congregation

Your Role

One of the conclusions articulated at the 2007 Summit on Youth Ministry and carried throughout the Working Group Report is that Youth Ministry is the responsibility of *all* Unitarian Universalists. As part of your congregation's leadership structure, whether professional or volunteer, you have an essential role in helping shape youth ministry within your congregation. This is not just a task for religious educators or youth advisors. Ministers, board members, congregation presidents, music directors, committee members and others in leadership have integral roles to play in bringing this vision to life.

Professional Staff

There are some great ways for professional staff to begin to engage with these recommendations. One is to gather to discuss how these recommendations intersect with their job responsibilities, and then work with lay leadership within their congregations to develop and implement an action plan for youth ministry. Alternatively, professional staff and lay leaders may opt from the start to reflect together and collaborate in all areas. This will largely depend on the size and structure of your congregation. In either case, the support of ministers and religious educators, along with other professional staff, is essential to the success of these opportunities.

Volunteer Leadership

Likewise, committee and board members, worship associates, youth advisors, and other lay leaders should gather and assess how they can respond to the Youth Ministry Working Group Recommendations in light of their particular roles and responsibilities in the congregation.

The Larger Congregation

Following the opportunity for leaders to reflect together, facilitating a broader conversation, open to all those in the congregation, is a great next step. This conversation would ideally bring together people of all ages and backgrounds, from all areas of the congregation, including staff. It is especially important to intentionally reach out to and invite youth and parents into this conversation. Your youth group may have already begun having some of these conversations using the [YMWG Report User Guide for Youth](#). That guide encourages them to seek out the leadership within the congregation to initiate these conversations if they aren't already happening.

Using this conversation to develop an action plan for the congregation's youth ministry will create an accountable tool to help the congregation move forward into wider and more vibrant youth ministry. The process of developing a plan can begin during these first conversations. Helpful tips and process guidelines on holding a congregational conversation can be found in the section of this User Guide entitled *Guide for Congregational Conversations*. Also consider the reflection questions already mentioned under *Reading the Youth Ministry Working Group Report*.

Guide for Congregational Conversations

Before Your Conversation

This section will focus on some of the factors to be considered when planning and conducting a large conversation about these recommendations, as well as some reflection questions for determining where your congregation should begin with their efforts.

It is helpful to schedule the conversation far enough in advance that those interested in attending will have the opportunity to read through the recommendations and reflect themselves. Think about posing a question or two for thought in advance of the conversation. Be sure to keep communication open between key stakeholders such as the staff, the Board of Trustees, Religious Education Committee, etc. Work collaboratively with these groups to plan your conversation.

This conversation should be open to everyone, though you should make particular efforts to reach out to youth, their families, young adults who were youth in your congregation, members of committees, volunteers and others who may have particular feedback about how youth can be involved in the life of your congregation. If your congregation participated in the congregational conversations as part of the Consultation on Ministry to and with Youth, extend an invitation particularly to those who were part of that process.

When inviting youth, particularly, see if they've had a chance to look at the recommendations. Point them in the direction of the User Guide for Youth, which will point out particular recommendations and explain them in greater depth. You may find it beneficial to take a look at that guide, as well, though it is not a comprehensive explanation of the entirety of the report.

Preparing for and holding your Conversation

When you have everyone together, you'll want to talk about three things: the current state of your youth ministry, what excites people about the Working Group recommendations, and what your congregation can do. How you choose to run these conversations will depend on a number of factors. You may want to consider small group discussions with report-backs or one large

moderated conversation might work better for your size. In any case, make sure that everyone has an opportunity to give their opinion and that one group isn't dominating the conversation. Take into consideration different learning styles. Consider visual aids to accompany spoken instructions or important information – like vision statements – and an opportunity to provide feedback later for those who are not on-the-spot thinkers.

Current State of Youth Ministry

Ask people to consider what your congregation's youth ministry looks like, taking into consideration the vision cast by the Consultation, Summit and Youth Ministry Working Group, which envisions fully multigenerational, multicultural congregations in which there are multiple pathways for involvement in Unitarian Universalism..

What's currently working well? How and where are youth involved in the congregation as a whole? What are our potential areas for growth? You may need to prompt people to consider areas they might be overlooking: committee work and leadership positions, membership, participation in worship, etc. Following this, you should have a good picture of what your current youth ministry looks like and what your congregation feels could use some work.

The Youth Ministry Working Group Report

Once you have an idea of what your current youth ministry looks like, the conversation can turn to what people are most excited about in the report. It may be a particular resource or an opportunity to be made available. This should give you an idea of which recommendations there is energy behind in your congregation. These may be easily implemented or they may require significant work. In either case, you will get an idea of where your congregation would like to start and what topics they are passionate about, even if the recommendation isn't one you can directly implement.

What you can do

Starting with those recommendations that garnered excitement, begin to brainstorm together what your congregation can do moving forward. If membership for youth drew excitement, brainstorm about what would be necessary to make that happen. If youth participation in worship drew excitement, brainstorm what would be needed to get youth to worship and engage them (this could include youth on the worship planning team, more frequent youth Sundays, a change in youth group time, etc). If a paid youth advisor drew excitement, talk about how that process might work.

From there, move to concrete recommendations that you can easily implement: what were they? What change do we need to make? Perhaps it would be easy for your congregation to do multigenerational service and social justice projects. Talk about how these simple changes can be achieved.

Finally, talk about the recommendations that may be difficult, though necessary, whichever those are for your particular situation. What impediments do you face? How might you be able to overcome them?

Wrap up the conversation by outlining what the leadership's plan is for moving forward. Be sure to include avenues for your participants to give further feedback that might not have struck them immediately.

After your Conversation

Congregational leadership (both professional and lay) should re-gather following the conversation, having also invited others into the process to develop an action plan for moving forward. With the feedback from the conversation, what are your congregation's immediate priorities? What are your immediate needs? What is important but needs a long-term plan? What can you implement in a short period of time?

Once you have a plan, the work of implementation begins. Each congregation will have different needs and different plans. As we work to implement the recommendations of the Working Group, more resources will be made available to congregations. Keep in touch with the UUA's Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries to find out when those resources become available.

Connect with the UUA Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries

You can easily reach the staff of the Youth and Young Adult Ministries office by calling 617-948-4350 or emailing youth@uua.org or youngadults@uua.org.

Sign up for our monthly Youth Ministries e-newsletter: <http://www.uua.org/members/youth/>.

Follow us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/uuyouthministry.

Resources and news are available at www.uua.org/youth.

If you're interested in Young Adult Ministry, visit www.uua.org/youngadults for our young adult ministry newsletter, resources and other information.