

Proposed Business Resolution
For General Assembly Consideration: June 2022

Renewing UUA Bylaws for Theologically Grounded, Innovative, and Mission-Focused Governance

The time to renew and rewrite the UUA bylaws is long overdue

Our bylaws are outdated, inflexible and overly complicated. This creates obstacles for meaningful participation in the UUA's governance. It diverts precious resources (including volunteers) toward maintaining the structure that has been, rather than freeing our energies to live our mission in innovative and effective ways that meet our needs today. So much in our Association is changing; our bylaws describe a structure that no longer serves us well.

In June 2020, the Commission on Institutional Change issued its report, Widening the Circle of Concern. The report dedicates a chapter specifically to Governance. It identifies significant challenges in our governance structure that prevent us from living faithfully into a liberatory expression of Unitarian Universalism where all can thrive.

The 1993 Commission on Governance and 2014 Strengthening Governance reports included calls to make significant changes to governance, including the leadership structure, the role of covenant in governance, and meaningful engagement in decision making by congregational delegates.

In order for the UUA to best live its principles and purpose, we need bylaws that provide role clarity, accountability to our values, and flexibility that allows for innovation and meaningful participation so we can unleash the leadership gifts of our people and the impact and values of our Association.

The COVID-19 pandemic made the challenges of our bylaws even more clear. The stress of the pandemic exasperated the reality that many of our bylaw codified volunteer positions require unreasonable time expectations. Our structure is rooted in outdated models of volunteer labor that don't represent the reality of many people's lives today, nor the diversity in leadership we need for our Association.

During 2020 and 2021, an incredible number of people volunteered to support our first ever all-virtual General Assemblies. Thousands of UUs along with over one hundred core leaders volunteered for UU the Vote making it one of the most successful Association-wide justice efforts. During this same period, many of our bylaw standing committees went unfilled. People want to offer their gifts to the Association. However, our structures serve the institution as it was, rather than what it needs to be. We are following the lead of many congregations who have updated their bylaws to remove many standing committees recognizing changing models of volunteerism and the need for flexibility and innovation.

The pandemic also created the opportunity to hold the General Assembly virtually. This has allowed even more innovative ways to gather and engage our congregations and delegates in governance. It also made clear the ways that our bylaws fundamentally constrain our ability to reimagine our General Assembly in ways that have long been called for by delegates.

The UUA bylaws also contain significant inconsistencies and outdated sections because the mechanism to amend them is costly in terms of leaders' and delegates' time and attention.

In conclusion, the time to reimagine - not just edit, but rewrite our bylaws to create an agile, accountable, flexible and responsive governance system that helps us organize our time, talent, attention and leadership on ministry, mission and core values is now.

Therefore the 2022 General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association calls on the UUA Board of Trustees to conduct a thorough review of the current UUA Bylaws. This review should involve stakeholders in collaborative discernment and conversation about considered changes. These new bylaws should create a governance system that supports the UUA in accountably achieving its mission and aspirations consistent with our core values.

These values and goals should guide the new bylaws framework:

- a. Reflect our theological commitment to liberation and inclusion.
- b. Provide accountability to our long-standing anti-racist and anti-oppressive commitments.
- c. Create flexibility, allowing for innovation and experimentation.
- d. Provide clarity of role and authority among leaders and groups that support diverse leadership and the UUA's shared mission, values and Principles.
- e. Written in plain language to be understandable and clear.
- f. Enhance meaningful participation in governance by UU congregations, delegates, stakeholders.
- g. Address foundational areas of governance required in bylaws, leaving details of policy and procedures to documents that can be revised between General Assemblies.

Finally, the hope of the 2022 General Assembly is that substantial bylaw replacement, including the possibility of an extensive rewrite of the bylaws, will be brought to the General Assembly for consideration at the 2023 General Assembly.