

RE: New Communities Fund Cover Letter

September 11, 2023

To the UUA Board of Trustees:

The Unitarian Universalist Association has been consistently following and expanding its commitment to widening the circle of our faith. Specifically, the UUA is invested in creating comprehensive programmatic support and coaching through what we are currently calling a “New UU Communities Fund.” This fund would follow the recommendations from the UUA Commission on Institutional Change’s 2020 report *Widening the Circle of Concern*, which proposed investing in leaders of new spiritual communities serving BIPOC, LGBTQ, disabled, and other historically marginalized communities within our faith as a core aspect of reparations. The Fund’s goal is to create thriving faith communities, grounded in models of shared leadership and mutual accountability, that are designed to nourish spiritual growth, liberation, and healing for all.



Understanding the changing religious landscape and urgencies before us, we are eager to support the spiritual innovators working in congregations, affiliated communities and new start-ups who are rising to the challenge of transforming Unitarian Universalism into a faith that more closely embodies the Beloved Community we envision. These courageous UU spiritual innovators are developing new forms of UU community that meet the spiritual needs of people from cultures and life-stages that have been underserved in the past. These communities may center on ministry with those who are Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), youth, young adults, disabled individuals and families, neurodivergent people, queer folk, LGBTQ couples and nontraditional families, multilingual and immigrant communities, people who seek virtual faith connection, and many more who are seeking a community that offers a sense of belonging, provides spiritual nourishment, and honors dignity, equity, and liberation.

These changemakers recognize that for our faith to demonstrate what it means to be in Beloved Community we must build what Paula Cole Jones calls “communities of communities” where peoples’ varying cultural and life-stage needs are met and they find belonging as integral members of the larger whole. In this time of great change and possibility in the religious landscape, we deeply believe this work is an urgent priority for our Association to live into the opportunities and calling of the years ahead.

Beyond the resources for exploration that we have provided through the UU Religious Innovators Network and related programs over the last few years, we have been looking for ways to provide more spiritual sustenance, connection, and practical support in two additional tiers:

1. **For innovators actively developing new spiritual communities**, we would provide a one year, cohort-style program offering spiritual sustenance, connection and practical support including leadership coaching and access to expert resources for fundraising, web/communications/database development, accounting, and discounted fiscal sponsorship.
2. **For new communities with the potential to spread, grow and do faithful movement-building**, we hope to offer continuing cohort participation and practical supports along with the potential for additional financial investment in the future.



Over the last few months, we have been in conversation with people and organizations across the larger religious innovation landscape including funders, consultants and support organizations and have identified a potential program partner called Beloved that is grounded in the progressive Jewish tradition. They exist to “support and nourish open-hearted spiritual leaders as they create and sustain new spaces of sacred belonging,” and have developed two programs that support innovators in the tiers we had imagined. Our intention is to enter into a partnership with Beloved to create a cohort-style program for UU innovators in 2024, following the first tier above.

In order to support this work now and for the years to come, we ask the UUA Board of Trustees to create a dedicated New UU Communities Fund. This Fund’s governing panel will create and oversee the programs to carry out the goal of supporting innovative spiritual communities to serve the margins of our faith. The Fund will also be able to receive contributions and donations, which we hope will include assets from dissolving congregations to ensure when a ministry is sunsetting that it can breathe new life into other ministries in our Association.

We are excited about this undertaking and we're eager to establish this new fund to support our UU spiritual innovators on their quest to serve and strengthen the faith.

Delighted to be on this faithful journey with you,

New Community Partnerships Design Team

Members:

Carey McDonald, UUA Executive Vice President  
Rev. Alicia Forde, Director of International Office  
Hillary Goodridge, Director, UU Funding Program  
Rev. Brock Leach, Consultant for Emerging Ministries  
Rev. Marta Valentin, Professional Development Director, Ministries and Faith Development

Cc: UUA President Rev. Sofia Betancourt, PhD

Attachment: Fund Budget Summary



## Attachment – New UU Communities Fund Budget Summary

### *Initial Sources of Funding*

- \$500,000 – Beacon Press surplus sharing (received in FY22, requires Board approval)
- \$239,023 – Restricted bequest for new ministries in Florida (received in FY23)
- *Total* - \$739,023

### *Current projected expenses for Fund programs*

As described in the cover letter, there is currently one program being planned which will be supported by the Fund. This is a cohort collaborative program for UU innovators managed in partnership with Beloved Garden. In FY25, we have discussed adding a ministerial intern position for the Religious Innovators Network – this model was previously used by the Church of the Larger Fellowship when it managed the RIN. These programs would be finalized by the Fund's Panel.

Expenditures of the Fund drawn from the Beacon Press surplus sharing may not support general ongoing UUA operating expenses, per the Beacon/UUA Financial Agreement. Per the Fund governing documents, programs should project to utilize the resource of the Fund in a 5-7 rolling window. The initial \$500,000 investment would cover five years of the Cohort Collaborative program and RIN support as currently planned, including the UUA administrative fee of 17.5%.

The next tier of support and direct investment, which is described in the cover letter, would need to be funded through donor solicitation, assets of closing congregations, grants, or another source of funds. There are not programs currently planned which will be able to utilize the restricted Florida bequest, but this is hoped to be used as a part of the next tier of program support.

### FY 24

- Cohort Collaborative program - \$70,000

### FY 25 and beyond

- Cohort Collaborative program - \$70,000
- Support for Religious Innovators Network - \$20,000

