Report from the Joint Task Force on District-UUA Board Communication

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Summary

As the structure of the UUA Board changes, gaps in governance emerge that were formerly the responsibility of district-elected trustees. We examined the UUA governance through a framework for healthy organizations provided to us by Kirk Bogue (Appendix A) and identified several key areas that we recommend the new Board work with the District Presidents Association (DPA) to rectify. Specifically, they are:

1. Direct input from congregations to the UUA Board (linkage);
2. Having a mechanism for congregations to ask questions about UUA governance;
3. Providing reports to congregations that give an overall view of UUA governance;
4. Ensuring a healthy, aligned organization.

We discussed each of these gaps, and came up with desired outcomes and some recommendations in the sections that follow. We believe that the Board, Administration and Districts/Regions will need to work together in significant ways to address the gaps that eliminating district-elected trustees creates.

Direct Input from Congregations to the UUA Board

One of the main governance gaps we identified is the role that district-elected trustees served as conductors of linkage between congregations and the Board. Many district-elected trustees spent significant time engaging in the process of collecting input from congregations on key governance questions facing the Board.

We recommend that this linkage be embedded in the growing partnership between the UUA Board and the DPA. One example of how this could work in a new system is the way in which the Board and DPA collaborated to provide linkage on the draft Ends policies that the Board was writing. District boards conducted interviews with congregational leaders about the draft policies, and then submitted their linkage input to the UUA Board. This resulted in high-quality linkage work that helped us significantly improve our Ends policies.

As the roles of district and regional leadership change to meet the changing ways our Association relies on our middle judicatory structures, one key governance role that middle judicatories can play in UUA governance is this linkage function. If the relationship between the

Board and district/regional leadership is a healthy partnership, the quality of linkage will likely be much higher than was produced by the district-elected trustees, who had different levels of connection with the congregations in their districts.

Mechanism for Congregational Questions and Concerns

The second gap we identified is the lack of identified trustees to whom questions and concerns from congregations can be addressed in the new system. Currently, leaders in many congregations feel comfortable knowing that their questions and concerns about UUA governance can be sent directly to their district-elected trustee, who will forward them on to the appropriate people.

We recommend that a communication system be put in place for congregations to ask appropriate questions and voice concerns about governance. We recommend that the Board and the Administration work together on such a system because questions and concerns about governance are not easily separated by many congregations from questions and concerns about programs and service delivery, and one set needs to go to the Board while the other to the Administration. There should be one, integrated communications system for both kinds of concerns.

Such a system needs to take into account the highly relational culture present in some districts, in which the district-elected trustee has a direct relationship with congregational leaders, though it need not replicate it.

Reporting to Congregations the Overall View of UUA Governance

All but one of the district-elected trustees surveyed in January of 2013 gave reports to their districts—at board meetings, district assemblies, UU Ministers Association (UUMA) chapter meetings and other venues—that gave our congregations an overall view of the governance of our Association and our work towards its Ends. These direct reports, along with the built-in opportunities for conversation and engagement, will disappear once all trustees are elected at-large and not every district is home to a trustee.

There is clearly a need for such communication flowing between the Board and our member congregations. Many district-elected trustees find that even our best efforts at electronic communication do not substitute for the in-person conversation that happens at district and regional events.

Given the recent success of the regionalization vote in the MidAmerica Region, as well as successful regional assemblies and efforts in the other regions of the Association, it seems that that regionalization is moving forward across the Association. Therefore, we recommend that the UUA Board have at least one trustee present at each regional meeting.

We further recommend that a system should be put in place so that district and regional leaders can feel comfortable discussing UUA Board-level governance issues. This is particularly true for middle judicatories that have adopted the UUA's Ends. Members of the DPA, then, would convene these conversations at district assemblies, especially in districts that do not take part in regional gatherings. Further, DPA members and regional leaders could convene governance conversations at board meetings in the various middle judicatories.

Finally, we recommend that the Board engage in a partnership with the UUMA, the Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA) and the UU Musicians Network (UUMN) to ensure that good communication exists with our organizations for religious professionals. We believe that some system of in-person conversations between the Board and our organizations for religious professionals (perhaps at the chapter level) would be beneficial to our governance. We hope that the professional organizations will engage as partners in this communication, perhaps by disseminating information to their members and chapters from national liaisons to the UUA Board and DPA.

Ensuring a Healthy, Aligned Organization

We believe that of paramount importance is the alignment of our Association—that is, that congregations, districts/regions, and the UUA Board and Administration are all working in the same direction.

We recommend that the Administration, Board and DPA work together to develop a practice of checking the health of the Association. Many existing "health check" tools are available that use the five-point framework (found in Appendix A), and an annual check-up involving congregations, middle judicatories, our Administration and Board can help us determine whether alignment of the various parts of our Association exists (and where changes need to be made).

We would like the Board to think about alignment as possibly being a part of our operational definition and monitoring of Policy 3.2 (Governance/Board Job Description). To do so would help the Board assess the quality of our governance and linkage work.

Appendix A: Organizational Health Framework

Columns A-D are examples of how this framework could work in a system made up of the four organizational levels shown here.

Framework	**A. Congregations & Their Leaders**	**B. UUA Trustees**	**C. Staff**	**D. Middle Judicatory* (under review in most districts/ regions)**
Results – what outcomes are supposed to be	· The "curriculum" · The organized faithful · Impact to people, causes and communities	· ENDS Statements · Fiduciary success	· Strategic structure and operational tactics · Strategic and operational planning · Desired goals and metrics	· Connectedness Advisement and Support that facilitates effectiveness of "the UUA system" · Ways for leaders to serve beyond congregational walls
Accountability – delineation of roles/responsibilities and consequences for performance	· Fulfillment of UUA Membership requirements · Implementation and oversight of organizational structure to be and do "the curriculum"	· Monitoring requirements o Performance o Financials · Trustee Reports	· Organizational clarity (exec leadership to field staff) · Staff Reports to stakeholders (A, B, C, D) · Performance Management · Leadership Development	· Structure for oversight it is empowered to perform · Structure for interface with and service to other stakeholders it serves · Self-reported metrics regarding services and impacts
Commitment – allocation of resources (time, talent, finances)	· Do the "system" inside of congregational walls	· Approval of budgets · Approval of initiatives and	· Install the "delivery" system · Manage the	· Help Trustees: research, listen · Help Staff: advise staff, get

towards shared objectives and goals	· Build and live "covenants" with other UU communities/entities · Support and develop leaders · Good stewardship	major decisions · Commissioning of research to study new things · Engage with and listen to Sources of Authority	system · Manage staff and others who are enlisted to serve the system · Identify and cultivate leadership contributors · Engage with and listen to other stakeholders re: needs, process/tools and performance · Help design and support role of middle judicatory	feedback from congregations, with self-imposed accountability, with organizational development, identify and cultivate leaders, train congregations and leaders · Help Congregations: identify leaders and find ways for them to serve, if asked, help them have their voice heard by other stakeholders, represent them on advisory or oversight boards set up by other stakeholders · Help all stakeholders assess health of the relationship among and between them
Productive Conflict – collaboratively generating ideas that best serve interests of the common cause, avoiding need to be right	· Engage with stakeholders under covenant with covenantal behavior	· Engage with stakeholders under covenant with covenantal behavior	· Engage with stakeholders under covenant with covenantal behavior	· Engage with stakeholders under covenant with covenantal behavior
Trust – confidence to act	· Be who you say you will be and	· Be who you say you will be and	· Be who you say you will be and	· Be who you say you will be and

authentically with vulnerability	do what you say you will do	do what you say you will do	do what you say you will do	do what you say you will do

* *Some thoughts regarding the possible roles of a middle judicatory in UUA policy governance, understanding that different districts and regions are presently coming to different conclusions with respect to the issues raised:*

· Trustees are listening to congregations (a source of authority) to articulate the vision/mission of the UUA and translating that into expectations for staff to implement and achieve.
· Staff is creating the strategic organization structure (e.g. senior leaders in Boston as well as field staff dispersed geographically) and the service delivery system to implement their objectives and report back about their performance.
· Congregations are recipients of those services and are able to interact with both trustees and staff to weigh in about each' s performance and engage with each about future desires.
· If the above model regarding trustees, staff and congregations worked perfectly, a middle judicatory would not be needed for oversight purposes (though it could still serve other roles).
· As it will be challenging to have the above work perfectly, a middle judicatory could be designed and implemented to help with actual or potential gaps the system holds. The middle judicatory role designated in the table above was derived from the assumption that each stakeholder type would be willing and able to identify and articulate areas a middle judicatory could assist with and it reflects speculation about what those specific needs might be. The middle judicatory column can be modified once actual needs for that entity are known.
· The model outlined in the table above assumes trust among all stakeholders exists. If trust were assumed to not be present, then additional responsibilities by the middle judicatory might be needed (e.g. congregations don't trust staff, thus their district or regional board might be charged with making sure staff performs well; that's a different way to implement a middle judicatory role than had staff said "we want help in being held accountable to congregations").