



UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST
ASSOCIATION

Re-Imagining UUA Governance

UUA Board Linkage Fall 2014



“Re-Imagining UUA Governance”

- Congregational dialogues and online survey in November/December 2014 to discuss possibilities for more inclusive and democratic General Assembly and more effective UUA governance.



The Conversations

- Dialogues with leaders of 40 congregations across 5 Regions:
 - Central East Regional Group 6
 - New England 8
 - MidAmerica 8
 - Pacific Western 9
 - Southern 9

- 1-99 9
- 100-249 17
- 250-399 9
- 400-550 1
- 550+ 6



The Conversations

- Interviews conducted by:
 - Regional and District Presidents and Board members in MidAmerica and Southern Region
 - lay leaders and members of denominational affairs committees of First Unitarian Portland, First UU Church of San Diego, and All Souls, Unitarian
 - UUA Board Trustees.
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- Spoke *primarily* with congregational Board Presidents (or trustees), and called ministers. (also a few interim ministers or denominational affairs lay leaders).



Who Took the Survey?

- **Online survey Nov. 10-Dec. 20**
- **900 Responses**
- **UUA Staff widely distributed through UUA website, social media, email lists, and blogs.**
- **Specific outreach to youth and young adults, identity groups such as DRUUMM**



Who Took the Survey?

- Many never attended General Assembly nor participated as delegate (805 responses):
 - Never attended 27% Never a delegate: 39%
 - Attended 1-5 41% Delegate 1-5 GA's: 39%
 - Attended 6-10 16% Delegate 6-10 GA's: 11%
 - Attended > 10 17% Delegate > 10 GA's: 11%



Who Took the Survey?

- Ages (806 responses)
 - 17 or younger 2%
 - 18-35 11%
 - 36-55 31%
 - 56 or older 57%
- Other Characteristics (800 responses)
 - Seminarian or recent graduate 6%
 - Elected or called leader 34%
 - Ordained minister, engaged in ministry in ways other than as a called leader of a congregation 15%
 - GLBTQ 21%
 - Person with physical, emotional or developmental challenge 10%
 - Person of Color 6%



Who Took the Survey?

- Size of congregation or fellowship with which respondent is affiliated (773 responses):
 - Under 100 members 19%
 - 100-249 members 43%
 - 250-549 members 26%
 - over 550 members 14%



What Did We Ask?

- First posed 3 challenges to effective governance:
- **Delegates:** General Assembly is not, in practice, very democratic or inclusive.
- **Gathering:** General Assembly is not especially participatory and does not promote shared learning.
- **Leadership:** There is [sometimes] poor alignment among leadership roles.



What Did We Ask?

- What **Positive Changes** Would You Most Like to See in Governance (What are your **Priorities**?)
- In Dialogues: Given list of 19 positive statements about the future of GA and UUA governance and asked to choose 3 **priorities**.
- In Survey: Given list of 13 positive statements about the future of GA and to rank from (“**ESSENTIAL** to my vision of the future” to “**NOT IMPORTANT** at all to my vision of the future”)



Priorities (Dialogues)

- Increased participation by young adults, lower income people, people of color and others whose inclusion represents our progressive future (34)
- Better-prepared delegates enrich the discussion taking place at GA and allow for more informed decision-making (27)
- Geographic barriers to participation are reduced by relying on regional assemblies. (27)
- Economic barriers to participation are reduced. (23)
- Delegates bringing information and insight back from GA engage congregations more fully in discussion and decision-making (22)



Priorities (Dialogues)

- Lines of authority and accountability around UUA vision are clearer (22)
- Delegates (and through them their congregations) have deeper connections to the larger UU movement (19)



What characteristics are **ESSENTIAL** or **VERY IMPORTANT** to your vision of a more effective, democratic, inclusive GA and UUA governance? (survey responses)

- Economic barriers to participation are reduced (709 responses-439-*Essential*)
- Increased participation by young adults, lower income people, people of color and others whose inclusion supports our progressive future. (677, 439)
- Delegates (and through them their congregations) have deeper connections to the larger UU movement (614, 287)
- Lines of authority and accountability around UUA vision are clearer. (565, 274)
- Energy that now goes to dealing with friction in the system is freed up and directed toward the pressing issues of our faith. (558, 281)



Other **ESSENTIAL** and **VERY IMPORTANT** characteristics

- Better-prepared delegates enrich the discussions taking place at GA and the decision-making is more informed (543, 202)
- Overall cost of GA is reduced (538, 229)
- Geographic barriers to decision-making are reduced (521, 214)
- GA focuses only on the most important issues affecting the entire denomination. (509, 246)
- GA's debate and deliberation process is more meaningful, more inclusive, less repetitive (499, 143)
- Congregations have more direct say in Association discussion and decision-making (492, 221)
- Delegates take less time off work (339, 85)
- Governance is more efficient because there are fewer business meetings. (265, 52)



“Essential characteristics” ranked by Youth and Young Adults, People of Color, Called and Elected Leaders

- There is increase participation by young adults, lower income people, people of color and others whose inclusion supports our progressive future
- Economic barriers to participation are reduced
- Energy that now goes to dealing with friction in the system is freed up and directed toward the pressing issues of our faith



What steps were leaders most interested in? (Dialogues)

- GA business sessions focus on learning/facilitated conversation—voting happens remotely in home congregations; make greater use of technology to enable broad participation (45)
- Increase training, preparation and accountability for delegates; improve report-back from congregations (42)
- Increase financial support for delegates with a scholarship fund; use funds to encourage a more diverse delegate pool and more inclusive congregational selection process (38)
- Multi-year cycle: hold a business/governance GA every other year (regional assemblies). (32)
- Align roles of President, Moderator and Board around a single vision (Place responsibility for vision squarely with the Board). (25)



What steps were survey respondents most interested in taking?

- Increase financial support for delegates (scholarship fund); use funds to encourage more diverse delegate pool and more inclusive congregational selection process (456-Great idea!) (269-Interesting...)
- Increase training, preparation and accountability of delegates (339) (349)
- Hold a business/governance GA every other year and regional assemblies in off years (316) (340)
- Place responsibility for vision squarely with the Board: President elected by GA serves as the public voice of UUism, is a voting member of the Board and serves ceremonial/spiritual functions (not CEO). Board hires Executive Director to act as UUA CEO and handle fundraising. (282) (306)



What steps were survey respondents most interested in taking?

- GA business sessions focus on learning and facilitated conversations—voting happens remotely in home congregations. (277) (347)
- Create a multi-year cycle, holding a business/ governance GA every other year and other national meetings like synods and social justice assemblies in off years. (214) (359)
- Compress business into 1-2 days to reduce travel time commitment. (154) (280)



What steps were survey respondents *least* interested in taking?

- Ask delegates for a multi-year commitment and to engage in ongoing dialogue with UUA and other delegates (128) (311)
- Place responsibility for the vision squarely with the PRESIDENT: President elected by GA acts as CEO, chief fundraiser and public voice. President leads all visioning activities on the Board. (107) (198)
- Limit number of delegates; shift to a “Senate model” of 1 delegate per congregation. (85) (249)



Surprises?

- Interest in regional assemblies.
- Interest in remote voting.
- Interest in strengthening Board role and possibly Board-chosen CEO.
- Interest in some form of multi-year cycle that allows for more discussion/engagement on issues—less up/down voting.