

## *Re-Imagining UUA Governance*

### **I. Executive Summary**

On November 10, 2014, the UUA Board posted an online survey to gain feedback on possible ways to address three major challenges to effective governance in the Association. These challenges related to **delegates** to General Assembly, the **gathering** at General Assembly, and the **alignment of leadership roles** in the UUA. (A full description of the challenges, as presented in the survey, is included in Section VII.)

As of December 20, 2014, feedback was provided by 900 Unitarian Universalists. (Demographic information is in Section VI).

### **Findings**

A. Essential Characteristics of a More Effective General Assembly and UUA Governance. Respondents were given a list of characteristics that might describe a more effective, democratic and inclusive General Assembly and UUA governance. Respondents were asked to rank the characteristics by importance, choosing no more than four as ESSENTIAL to their vision for the future.

**The following characteristics were ranked as ESSENTIAL or VERY IMPORTANT by more than 50% responding to the question.**

- 1. Economic barriers to participation are reduced. (709 responses, 439-Essential)**
- 2. There is increased participation by young adults, lower income people, people of color and others whose inclusion supports our progressive future. (677 responses, 439-Essential)**
- 3. Delegates (and through them their congregations) have deeper connections to the larger UU movement. (614 responses, 287-Essential)**
- 4. Lines of authority and accountability around UUA vision are clearer. (565 responses, 274-Essential)**
- 5. Energy that now goes to dealing with friction in the system is**

freed up and directed toward the pressing issues of our faith. (558 responses, 281-Essential)

6. Better-prepared delegates enrich the discussions taking place at GA and decision-making is more informed. (543 responses, 202-Essential)

7. Overall cost of GA is reduced. (538 responses, 229-Essential)

8. Geographical barriers to participation are reduced. (521 response, 214-Essential)

9. GA focuses only on the most important issues affecting the entire denomination. (509 responses, 246-Essential)

10. GA's debate & deliberation process is more meaningful, more inclusive, and less repetitive. (499 responses, 143-Essential)

11. Congregations have more direct say in Association discussion and decision-making. (492 responses, 221-Essential)

*See Section II for full listing of responses and rankings.*

The following observations are based on the full list of responses and comments to the question:

**Efficacy Unpopular.** No clear conclusions can be drawn on the overall ranking of priorities—with the exception of “efficacy” as the least popular essential quality.

**Broad Support for Finance Accessibility Concerns about Means.** There was enormous support to address concerns about financial inaccessibility, though no clear consensus on how. Regarding scholarships, for instance, there were concerns about administration, criterion for selection, and potentially dehumanizing appearance of charity handout. Some suggested it was best to dramatically reduce costs for all.

**Go, Democracy!** Broad support-- (even in the comments of very negative tone) with little new in terms of details regarding implementation--for greater democratization. Many respondents expressed desire for greater involvement inside of congregations and of congregations in relationship to UUA.

**Are We Ready to Govern Beyond Face to Face?** There was interest in new technologies for doing this as well as reasonable concerns that technology as a solution will disadvantage congregations with particular resources.

**Does the UUA Have a Vision?** There was marked concern about the UUA lacking a clear or clearly articulated vision/purpose, in relationship to congregations and the larger world.

**Too Top Down.** Predictable concern was expressed about centralizing powers. Of the two leadership alignment possibilities presented, placing vision clearly with President was the least popular. One comment was that to do so would be allowing charisma to win over collective wisdom. Another concern was “too much leadership in an employee.”

**CEO Seems OK; Ceremonial President Not.** In great number people seemed more comfortable with the idea of a CEO that reports to the board, but extremely uncomfortable with a President for ceremonial purposes.

**Strengthen Board Role.** There was a strong level of support for strengthening the board role, in terms of both giving board the vision and possible having board chosen CEO. This is clearly worth looking into.

**Professionalized Delegates.** In terms of more training for delegates, good support and predicable concerns about professionalizing delegates and concern that training could be politically manipulated, and of course, worries that people won't bother with anything requiring additional time

**Senate Model.** Unpopular with folks those concerned about large congregations and those concerned about elitisms. Those overlapping groups are a lot of people.

**Different Models-Rotations of GAs.** All over the board. One suggestion of interest: Do rotation of every other year regional gatherings and just business GA, with every fourth year being an “extended” GA with all the programs and trappings.

B Steps for Improvement that Focus on Delegates. Respondents were

asked to rank steps for improving GA and UUA governance that focus on **delegates**. The following steps were ranked as either a GREAT or INTERESTING idea by more than 50% of those responding to the question:

**Increase financial support for delegates (scholarship fund); use funds to encourage more diverse delegate pool & more inclusive congregational selection process. (725 responses, 456-GREAT idea)**

**Increase training, preparation and accountability for delegates. (688 responses, 339-GREAT idea)**

**Ask delegates for a multi-year commitment and to engage in ongoing dialogue with UUA and other delegates. (439 responses, 128-GREAT idea)**

*See Section III for a full listing of responses and rankings.*

C. Steps for Improvement that Focus on Gathering. Respondents were asked to rank some specific steps for improving GA and UUA governance that focus on **gathering**. The following steps were ranked as either a GREAT or INTERESTING idea by more than 50% of those responding to the question:

**Hold a business/governance GA every other year and regional assemblies in off years. (656 responses, 316-GREAT idea)**

**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. (573 responses, 214-GREAT idea)**

**GA business sessions focus on learning and facilitated conversations—voting happens remotely in home congregations. (624 responses, 277-GREAT idea)**

**Compress business into 1-2 days to reduce travel time commitment. (434 responses, 154-GREAT idea)**

*See Section IV for a full listing of responses and rankings*

D. Steps that Focus on Leadership Roles. Respondents were asked to rank steps related to alignment of **leadership roles**. The steps would modify the roles of President, Moderator and Board to align around a single shared vision, with clearly defined lines of authority and

accountability. The following option drew the most responses for interest (306) and received the most support as a GREAT idea (282 responses):

**Place the responsibility for the 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.**

*See Section V for a full listing of responses and rankings.*

E. Additional comments on Steps (Sections B, C and D above).  
Respondents provided the following comments on the steps related to delegates, gathering and leadership roles:

1. Increasing Training and Preparation of Delegates
  - unrealistic expectations for delegates' time commitment
  - creates class of "professional delegates"
  - won't work if congregations aren't already engaged in UUA business/governance
  - could reduce pool of likely delegates
  - motivation needs to be at congregation level, not from UUA
  - need to incentivize congregations to do this
  - make this optional and encouraged, rather than a "top-down" bylaw requirement
  - questions regarding how it might be implemented
2. Increase financial support with a scholarship fund
  - where do funds come from?
  - congregations and UUA should share burden of funding
  - what gets cut to do this?
  - how are scholarship decisions made?
  - barrier is not only money but time
  - needs to be coupled with a cost reduction
  - based on fair share giving?
  - should be funding for all delegates, not just scholarship
  - how is diversity defined?

3. Limit number of delegates; shift to Senate model of 1 delegate per congregation

- Senate model overwhelmingly not supported in comments
- Not representational; violates 5<sup>th</sup> principle
- Interest remains in some form of reduction in delegates
- Will not create diversity

4. Ask delegates for a multi-year commitment and to engage in ongoing linkage with UUA and with delegates from other congregations between assemblies.

- could reduce overall participation and limit fresh participation
- UUA and congregations might request or encourage this commitment, but should not require
- unfriendly to those in transitional phases of life
- not practical
- if implemented, should consider staggered terms for delegates
- would require financial assistance
- those we most want to encourage to participate would be the least likely to be able to make the commitment

5. Multi-year cycle: hold a business/ governance GA every other year (regional assemblies)

- wouldn't decrease costs
- regional meetings not of sufficient quality
- can hold up important business decisions
- no national discourse in off years
- planning of 5 regional gatherings puts strain on UUA staff
- interaction of non-congregational groups is limited by regional gatherings
- national affinity groups need annual face-to-face gatherings—need to reach others through Exhibit Hall
- could weaken the voice of the UUA in national conversations
- could have biennial arrangement without regional gatherings
- not equitable among regions
- fewer education opportunities at regional gatherings
- regional gatherings should still happen each year

- in some regions, scholarships should fund commutes

6. Create multi-year cycle (synods/ social justice)

- slows down progress on issues
- still should minimize business in national gatherings
- what is a synod?
- creates two different groups of GA attendees
- keeps advantage of meeting nationally each year
- creates challenges for CSAI's and other processes
- social justice assemblies could be regional
- doesn't reduce expenses
- don't want to divorce business from social justice
- youth would not attend in business years

7. GA business focuses on learning/ facilitated conversations—voting happens remotely in home congregations; make greater use of technology to enable broad participation

- will congregations really have interest? Already are too detached from GA process
- too much disconnect between discussion and voting
- would congregations participate in discussions on very minor changes to bylaws?
- hard to ensure education of congregations
- need technology for voting
- creates need for strong delegate accountability
- when delegates discuss onsite, can create shift in opinion
- congregational life is already too full—perhaps voting on major issues, but not all
- could congregations vote remotely if they didn't send a delegate?
- would relevant information get back to congregations?
- funding of technology?
- some would like voting to be as in congregational poll
- would remote voting be tied to congregational certification

8. Compress business into 1-2 days (optional days might be offered for learning and other purposes)

- not enough time for deliberation
- not enough time for necessary business
- mix of business with other programs is what makes GA vibrant and engaging
- might instead put business in evenings so remote delegates can participate
- who would travel far for a 1-2 day business session?
- could supplement with virtual meetings
- would reduce opportunities for worship, workshops, etc. if people could only attend for part of the meeting

9. Align roles of President, Moderator and Board squarely around a single vision (Place responsibility for vision squarely with the Board).

Concerns raised with this model included:

- the additional expense of adding a CEO
- the possibility that it would simply create different scenarios for conflict
- that it would lead to ineffective “visioning by committee
- vision needs an electoral connection—delegates need to vote for competing visions
- no outstanding leader would want a role that could be perceived as “figurehead”
- questions on the role of the Moderator in this scenario

10. Align roles of President, Moderator and Board squarely around a single vision (Place responsibility for vision squarely with the President.)

Comments on this model:

- greatest concern was clearly that this model placed too many duties and too much power with one individual
- a few comments stated the need for a dynamic, visible President to speak for the UUA, and a “leader who leads”
- several comments that vision needs to be shared with Board and President

F. Comments on other steps for improving GA and UUA Governance



not listed in the survey:

- Lack of satisfaction with leadership role choices; need for other shared leadership model
- Greater youth participation in some aspect of governance
- Justice GA as a powerful model
- Board has responsibility to create questions worthy of delegates' time
- Reduce number of delegates in ways other than the Senate model
- Address UUA funding issues first
- No need for national gathering
- Give Board greater role in selecting President
- Expand vote to other covenanted communities
- Focus on communication to congregations to encourage engagement
- Direct election by UU's of President

G. Comments on which of the three major challenges they found to be the major concern:

Respondents strongly focused on the issue of delegates as the major concern. Respondents identified and commented on what they viewed as the major challenge as follows:

Delegates	40.63%
Leadership Roles:	19.34%
Gathering:	15.45%
Delegates and Gathering	6.93%

Delegates. The issue of making attending as a delegate financially accessible is overwhelmingly understood. Also of concern was the lack of preparation of delegates and the accountability back to

congregations. A few voices reminded that simply eliminating barriers is not enough—there must be an effort to be intentionally inclusive. Comments on the lack of representative democracy drifted into concerns over gathering:

*“I’m not sure how a democratic process can be formed from this assembly.”*

*“Perhaps a large annual meeting is not the answer.”*

*“But the question is, is GA the best way to govern?”*

*“What would reasonable, effective decentralization look like?”*

One startling idea: it is okay if folks attending GA are not connected to their UU congregation, GA is a form of community ministry!

While the Board relates to congregational boards (or their leaders) for linkage, a suggestion was made that the Board do the same for governance.

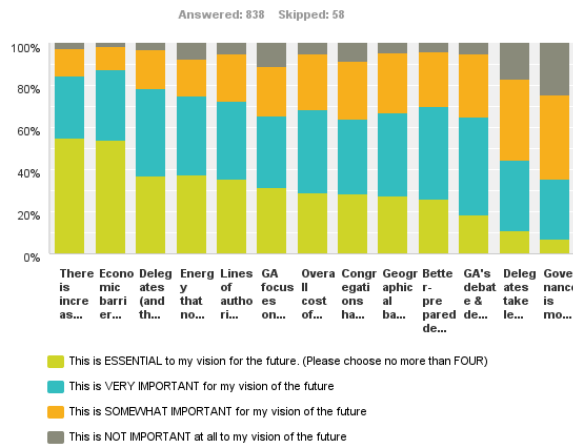
Gathering. Many comments focused on the lack of congregations’ connection to GA, either before GA or afterwards. Comments also expressed concern with the expense to attend, along with an interest in regional gatherings, conducting business online, having greater discussion and dialogue at GA, and holding biennial GA’s.

Leadership Roles. There was wide understanding of the problem of leadership alignment, with a more nuanced understanding than expected. While there was interest in a governance model that created a CEO accountable to the Board, there was also concern the President role remain strong in leadership and vision.

H. Who Took the Survey? Demographic information is provided in Section VI.

## II. Governance is More Effective, Inclusive and Democratic.

**Q2** Imagine an ideal future in which GA and UUA governance is more effective, inclusive and democratic. What would that look like? The following list shows some of the ways people have described their vision of an improved future for GA & UUA governance. Please indicate how important each one is for your own vision of an ideal future. Please choose **NO MORE THAN FOUR** as "essential." If there is an element that is essential to your vision of an ideal future that is not listed here, please include it at the end.



	This is ESSENTIAL to my vision for the future. (Please choose no more than FOUR).	This is VERY IMPORTANT for my vision of the future.	This is SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT for my vision of the future.	This is NOT IMPORTANT at all to my vision of the future.	Total
There is increased participation by young adults, lower income people, people of color & others whose inclusion supports our progressive future.	54.87% 439	29.75% 238	13.13% 105	2.25% 18	800
Economic barriers to participation are reduced.	54.33% 439	33.42% 270	10.89% 88	1.36% 11	808
Delegates (and through them their congregations) have deeper connections to the larger UU movement.	36.65% 287	41.76% 327	18.26% 143	3.32% 26	783

Energy that now goes to dealing with friction in the system is freed up and directed toward the pressing issues of our faith.	<b>37.52%</b> 281	<b>36.98%</b> 277	<b>18.02%</b> 135	<b>7.48%</b> 56	749
Lines of authority and accountability around UUA vision are clearer.	<b>35.22%</b> 274	<b>37.40%</b> 291	<b>23.23%</b> 181	<b>4.88%</b> 38	778
GA focuses only on the most important issues affecting the entire denomination.	<b>31.58%</b> 246	<b>33.76%</b> 263	<b>23.23%</b> 181	<b>11.42%</b> 89	779
Overall cost of GA is reduced.	<b>29.21%</b> 229	<b>39.41%</b> 309	<b>26.15%</b> 205	<b>5.23%</b> 41	784
Congregations have more direct say in Association discussion and decision-making.	<b>28.66%</b> 221	<b>35.15%</b> 271	<b>27.89%</b> 215	<b>8.30%</b> 64	771
Geographical barriers to participation are reduced.	<b>27.47%</b> 212	<b>39.41%</b> 307	<b>28.88%</b> 225	<b>4.24%</b> 64	779
Better-prepared delegates enrich the discussions taking place at GA and the decision-making is more informed.	<b>26.03%</b> 202	<b>43.94%</b> 341	<b>26.16%</b> 203	<b>3.87%</b> 33	776
GA's debate & deliberation process is more meaningful, more inclusive, less repetitive.	<b>18.62%</b> 143	<b>46.35%</b> 356	<b>30.21%</b> 232	<b>4.82%</b> 37	768
Delegates take less time off work.	<b>11.18%</b> 85	<b>33.42%</b> 254	<b>38.55%</b> 293	<b>16.84%</b> 128	760
Governance is more efficient because there are fewer business meetings.	<b>6.91%</b> 52	<b>28.32%</b> 213	<b>39.89%</b> 300	<b>24.87%</b> 187	752

**Responses by Youth and Young Adults (101 responses):**

There is increased participation by young adults, lower income people, people of color and others whose inclusion supports our progressive future	Essential	Very Important
	83% (83)	13% (13)
Economic barriers to participation are reduced	56% (56)	37% (37)
Energy that now goes to dealing with friction in the		

system is freed up and directed toward the pressing issues of our faith

43% (41) 36% (34)

**Responses by People of Color (49 responses):**

There is increased participation by young adults, lower income people, people of color and others whose inclusion supports our progressive future

74.47% (35) 17% (8)

Economic barriers to participation are reduced

62.50% (30) 27% (13)

Energy that now goes to dealing with friction in the System is freed up and directed toward the pressing issues of our faith

45.65% (21) 37% (17)

**Responses by GLBTQ community, those who identify as a person with a physical, emotional, or developmental challenge, and people of color (Vision of Beloved Community) (228 responses)**

There is increased participation by young adults, lower income people, people of color and others whose inclusion supports our progressive future

63.38% (156) 25% (59)

Economic barriers to participation are reduced

61.83% (149) 32% (88)

Delegates (and through them their congregations) have deeper connections to the larger UU movement

37.44% (85) 43% (98)

Energy that now goes to dealing with friction in the system is freed up and directed toward the pressing issues of our faith

36.61% (82) 39% (88)

**Responses by Called and Elected Leaders (260 responses):**

Economic barriers to participation are reduced

52.51% (136) 36% (93)

There is increased participation by young adults, lower income people, people of color and others whose inclusion supports our progressive future

50.98% (130) 35% (88)

Energy that now goes to dealing with friction in the system is freed up and directed toward the pressing issues of our faith

42.26% (101) 35% (83)

GA focuses only on the most important issues affecting the entire denomination

35.69% (91) 31% (78)

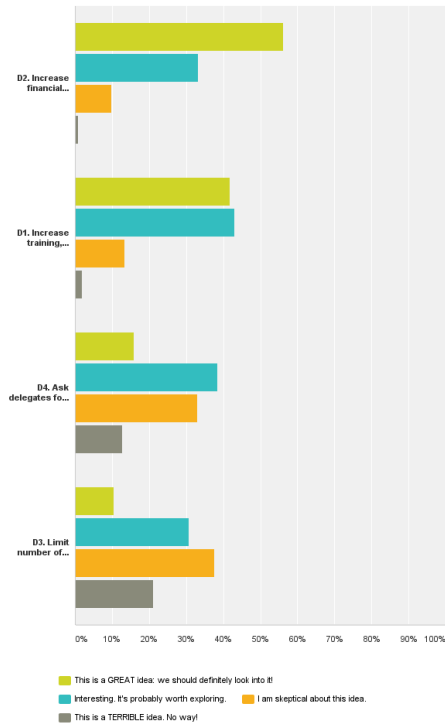
Delegates (and through them their congregations) have deeper connections to the larger UU movement

35.43% (90) 45% (114)

### III. Steps that Focus on Delegates

**Q4** The following are some specific steps for improving GA and UUA governance that focus on DELEGATES, along with a couple of pros and cons for each. Please indicate your response to each one.

Answered: 816 Skipped: 88

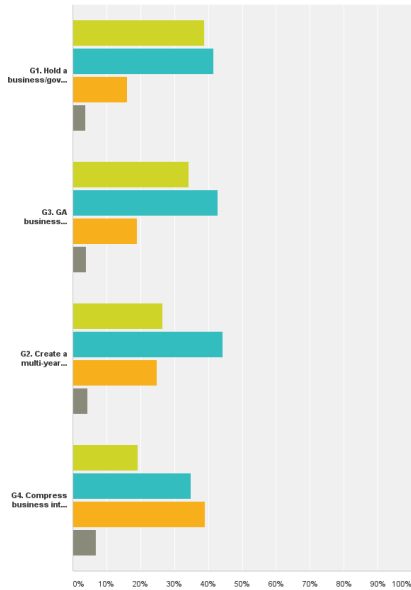


	This is a GREAT idea: we should definitely look into it!	Interesting. It's probably worth exploring.	I am skeptical about this idea.	This is a TERRIBLE idea. No way!	Total
Increase financial support for delegates (scholarship fund); use funds to encourage more diverse delegate pool & more inclusive congregational selection process.	<b>56.23%</b> 456	<b>33.17%</b> 269	<b>9.74%</b> 79	<b>0.86%</b> 7	811
Increase training, preparation and accountability for delegates.	<b>41.85%</b> 339	<b>43.09%</b> 349	<b>13.21%</b> 107	<b>1.85%</b> 15	810
Ask delegates for a multi-year commitment and to engage in ongoing dialogue with UUA and other delegates.	<b>15.76%</b> 128	<b>38.30%</b> 311	<b>33.37%</b> 271	<b>12.56%</b> 102	812
Limit number of delegates; shift to a "Senate model" of 1 delegate per congregation.	<b>10.47%</b> 85	<b>30.67%</b> 249	<b>37.56%</b> 305	<b>21.31%</b> 173	812

## IV. Steps that Focus on Gathering

Q5 The following are some specific steps for improving GA and UUA governance that focus on GATHERING, along with a couple of pros and cons for each. Please indicate your response to each one.

Answered: 815 Skipped: 81



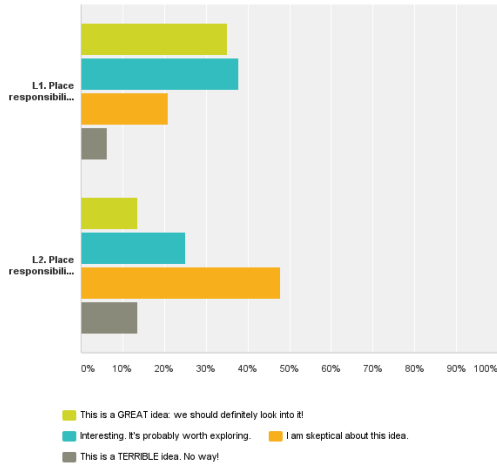
■ This is a GREAT idea: we should definitely look into it!  
■ Interesting. It's probably worth exploring. ■ I am skeptical about this idea.  
■ This is a TERRIBLE idea. No way!

	This is a GREAT idea: we should definitely look into it!	Interesting. It's probably worth exploring.	I am skeptical about this idea.	This is a TERRIBLE idea. No way!	Total
Hold a business/governance GA every other year and regional assemblies in off years.	<b>38.73%</b> 316	<b>41.67%</b> 340	<b>15.93%</b> 130	<b>3.69%</b> 30	816
GA business sessions focus on learning and facilitated conversations—voting happens remotely in home congregations.	<b>34.20%</b> 277	<b>42.84%</b> 347	<b>19.01%</b> 154	<b>3.95%</b> 32	810
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.	<b>26.42%</b> 214	<b>44.32%</b> 359	<b>24.81%</b> 201	<b>4.44%</b> 36	810
Compress business into 1-2 days to reduce travel time commitment.	<b>19.20%</b> 154	<b>34.91%</b> 280	<b>39.03%</b> 313	<b>6.86%</b> 55	802

## V. Steps that Focus on Leadership Roles

**Q6** The following are some specific steps for improving GA and UUA governance that focus on LEADERSHIP. Both options would modify the roles of President, Moderator, and Board so that all are aligned around a single shared vision and lines of authority & accountability around that vision are clearly defined. NOTE: pros/cons for these steps appear below -- scroll down to view.

Answered: 810 Skipped: 86



	This is a GREAT idea; we should definitely look into it!	Interesting. It's probably worth exploring.	I am skeptical about this idea.	This is a TERRIBLE idea. No way!	Total
Place responsibility for the 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.	<b>34.94%</b> 282	<b>37.92%</b> 306	<b>20.82%</b> 168	<b>6.32%</b> 51	807
Place responsibility for the vision squarely with the PRESIDENT: President elected by GA acts as CEO, chief fundraiser and public voice. President leads all fundraising activities on the board.	<b>13.44%</b> 107	<b>24.87%</b> 198	<b>47.99%</b> 382	<b>13.69%</b> 109	796



## **VI. Information about Those Taking the Survey**

### **A. Attendance at General Assemblies (805 responses)**

Never attended:	26.71%
Attended 1-5 GA's	40.99%
Attended 6-10 GA's	15.78%
Attended more than 10	16.52%

### **B. Participation as Delegate at General Assembly (807 responses)**

Never:	38.54%
Participated as delegate in 1-5 GA's	39.16%
Participated as delegate in 6-10 GA's	11.15%
Participated as delegate in more than 10 GA's	11.15%

### **C. Age (806 responses)**

17 or younger	1.74%
18-35	10.79%
36-55	31.02%
56 or older	56.70%

D. Economic status (800 responses)

Poor	4.38%
Working class	7.25%
Lower-middle class	11.25%
Middle class	41.38%
Upper-middle class	33.38%
Other (please specify)	5.63%

F. If member of or affiliated with a congregation or fellowship, its size: (773 responses)

Under 100 members	19.28%
100-249 members	42.69%
250-549 members	25.87%
Over 550 members	13.97%

G. Other characteristics (800 responses)

Primary UU affiliation is congregation or fellowship	89.88%
Primary UU affiliation is through community or “congregation without walls”	5.50%
Attend worship or other activities at UU congregation at least twice/month	77.88%
Attend non-congregational UU activities on regular basis (cons, district events, camps, etc.)	44.63%
Seminarian or recent theological school graduate	5.75%
Elected or called leader of a congregation	34.38%
Ordained UU minister, engaged in ministry in ways other than as a called leader of a congregation	15.25%

GLBTQ	20.50%
Person with physical, emotional or developmental challenge	10.13%
Person of Color	6.25%
Speaking on behalf of a larger group	2.88%

## VII. Major Challenges to Effective Governance, as Described in the Survey:

**1. Delegates.** One of our challenges to effective governance as an Association is that our annual General Assembly is not, in practice, very democratic or inclusive:

- In an average year, more than 40% of member congregations do not send any delegates to GA.
- Among congregations that do send delegates, many of these delegates are self-selected and self-funded.
- Many delegates have minimal accountability to their congregations, either in preparation for voting or in reporting back.
- There are significant barriers to creating a more diverse and inclusive delegate pool (especially barriers of money, time and geography).
- The processes that we use for debate and voting favor the more aggressive and physically able among our delegates.

**2. Gathering.** A second challenge to effective governance of our Association is that our Annual General Assembly is not especially participatory and does not promote shared learning:

- Most delegates have little preparation for the work they will do, and little attention is paid to how delegates' work at GA feeds back to their congregations.
- There is little opportunity for intentional dialogue and learning among the delegates to aid in the discernment process for issues that affect the Association.
- Large annual meetings are very expensive for the association and member congregations. (Most other denominations meet for business once every two or three years.)

**3. Leadership.** A third challenge to effective governance is that there is poor alignment among leadership roles of the UUA:

- Currently, the bylaws say that the Board (led by the Moderator) acts on behalf of the General Assembly to “make overall policy for carrying out the purposes of the Association” and “direct and control its affairs.” As it carries out this responsibility, the Board articulates a vision based on what it learns from the delegates and its other sources of authority and accountability.
- At the same time, the General Assembly elects the UUA President on a platform that usually includes his or her own vision.
- The result is that the Moderator/Board and the President/Staff sometimes have conflicting visions, making progress difficult.