

Recommendations for Off-site General Assembly Delegate Project  
October 2010 Board Meeting

*We envision a just, democratic, and respectful General Assembly that will proactively include as many delegates as possible without regard to race, nationality, economic situation, age, accessibility, family situation, location, or other factors that discourage full participation. We propose to creatively bridge old limitations on inclusion and modern threats to personal safety through emergent technologies of community.*

According to the Fifth Principle Task Force<sup>1</sup> less than 60% of our congregations typically send delegates to General Assembly, and less than 45% of the potential delegates are actually present. Those who attend General Assembly are often those who can afford the time and cost to travel, register, and participate in meetings, and most likely do not represent the diversity of Unitarian Universalism or our vision of Beloved Community.

*The delegates speak*

In the motion that created a special “Justice” GA for 2012, the following language directed the Board to “...recognize[s] that people with historically marginalized identities will be exposed to increased risk and inaccessibility, and therefore instructs the UUA Board to work ... to identify measures that can be taken to increase safety and accessibility at the 2012 “Justice” GA”.

The responsive resolution “Regarding 2012 General Assembly” envisioned, among other points, that:

- appropriate consideration is given to make this General Assembly accessible for all participants;
- efforts are made to recognize the voices of delegates who choose not to attend General Assembly 2012 for reasons of safety or personal ethics;

With these factors in mind, we envision an integrated system of systems that will enable participation by authorized GA delegates from locations other than the Assembly location. Such a system would include:

- allowing offsite participants to watch, listen, and speak during plenary sessions
- allowing offsite participants to watch, listen, and speak during mini-assemblies
- queuing of offsite participants who wish to speak
- secure credentialing, voting, and tabulation for offsite participants

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<sup>1</sup> Fifth Principle Task Force Report to the UUA Board of Trustees, December 2009

A “mini-trial” of such a system was implemented at General Assembly (GA) 2010, and deemed a success from the point of view of both participants and planning team<sup>2</sup>. Technology to improve the process is readily available “off the shelf” at a reasonable cost and the planning team learned enough from the mini-trial to create the human interfaces and training that will make off-site participation meaningful. Review by counsel suggests no overt barriers to off-site voting within our by-laws, but recommends we clarify with the amendment identified in the recommendation at the end of this document.

### *Proposed Development Approach*

Our goal is to define, assemble and operate a system to support voting by delegates who are not present at GA. Major elements of the system include:

- Organize, train, and support delegates voting individually, in groups, and in congregations.
- Issue, receive, and confirm credentials.
- Display questions and amendments as they change in real-time.
- Support orderly offsite participation in mini-assembly and plenary debates.
- Conduct voting online and over the phone or other mobile device.
- Tabulate and report results real-time.
- Verify results.
- Survey participants, evaluate their experience, and adjust systems.

It may be desirable to engage a consulting expert in remote, online, and electronic voting systems. It may also be desirable to engage an independent 3rd party to act as an auditor of the process.

- Milestone 1: Minneapolis, 2010 - Proof of concept testing and evaluation.
- Phase 2: July 2010 - May, 2011 - Evaluate test results; define, assemble and test all systems.
- Milestone 2: Charlotte, June 2011 - Run all systems but votes will not count.
- Phase 3: July 2011 - May 2012 - Adjust and test all systems.
- Milestone 3: Phoenix, 2012 - Run all systems and votes count.

Considerable planning and testing will be necessary in a relatively short amount of time. Constraints imposed by GA voting processes (e.g. multiple elections spread over three days, microphone queues, etc.) must be accounted for. Communications infrastructure decisions (e.g. toll-free telephone access, vs. long distance billing for delegates) have yet to be identified. Quotes for voting software that appear to meet some but not all of our requirements range from \$1,000 for “do-it-yourself” approaches to \$50,000 for supported approaches. In consideration of the above, we request a budget of \$75,000 to achieve Milestone 2 by June, 2011.

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<sup>2</sup> See full report “Off-site Trial June 2010” included in October Board packet and previously distributed August 2010.

## *Motions*

The Off-site GA Planning Team respectfully requests approval of the following resolutions:

1. Implement a complete technology and process solution for Off-site delegate participation in 2011. Votes will be published but not counted for decision-making until 2012. The solution will address:
  - allowing offsite participants to watch, listen, and speak during plenary sessions
  - allowing offsite participants to watch, listen, and speak during mini-assemblies
  - queuing of offsite participants who wish to speak
  - secure credentialing, voting, and tabulation for offsite participants
2. Place the following (non-C) by-laws change to Section 4.5 on the GA 2011 agenda: *“Subject to procedures and guidelines adopted by the Board of Trustees, delegates not physically present at General Assembly may be deemed present in person to participate in and vote at General Assembly by means of remote communication.”*
3. Authorize expenditures for GA2011 for Off-site delegate work up to \$75,000.

## *General Assembly Off-site Planning Team*

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