

UUA Elections Task Force Report

Staff Feedback Summary – April 2019

UUA staff reviewed the UUA Elections Task Force Report from the February 4-5, 2019, and have condensed their feedback in the following document for the Board of Trustees as it considers how to review and implement recommendations from the report.

Recognizing there are many big-picture questions raised by the report that will not be resolved immediately, this feedback is most focused on issues that will arise around the 2020 election, and other elements that will especially impact UUA staff. This summary does not address the sections around job descriptions/roles and Leadership Development which the Board will review in the future.

The staff wish to thank the task force members for this comprehensive report that charts an exciting path forward for UUA elections. We strongly endorse the overall movement towards transparency, accountability, accessibility, flexibility and practicality. We look forward to working closely with the Board in engaging these new frameworks.

Contributors:

- Susan Frederick-Gray, President
- Carey McDonald, Executive Vice President
- Lauren Smith, Director of Stewardship and Development
- John Hurley, Director of Communications
- Larry Stritof, Applications Development Manager
- Don Plante, General Assembly Meeting Planner

President and Moderator Selection

- **Timelines** – We endorse a shorter campaign cycle and a delayed start to Presidential term, which seem common-sense and humane. The length of the last presidential campaign compounded several problems that needed to be negotiated with staff roles, and was exhausting to staff participating in and observing the process as it was to volunteers. Additionally, a delayed start till roughly mid-August makes time for a President-elect to move, select staff, and learn more about the role.
- **Timeline definition** – We endorse moving campaign timelines (filing deadlines, nomination deadlines, etc.) to rule, because having carefully calibrated timelines are essential for a sound elections process. In general the timeline described in the report feels somewhat cramped, such as around the time allowed to collect petition signatures. Moving timelines to Board-approved rule would allow us to take the time to ensure all the necessary elements of the timelines match up.

- **Moderator role** – We support the new imagination of the moderator term in which a moderator-elect would serve as vice moderator first, which mirrors the term structure of many congregational presidents. Given that this will require conducting twice as many moderator elections, ideally moderator elections would line up with presidential elections so that we are only conducting elections every 3 years, with every other one coinciding with a presidential election.
- **Presidential role** – We are concerned about navigating a competitive presidential election in which different nominations contain different numbers of individuals (e.g. having one person run against a slate of three people). While we wholly affirm the recommendation that co-presidents would share a single salary, we believe that it is impractical to imagine someone could operate as a part-time president. Instead, we imagine that co-presidents might restructure their executive team so that full time roles are shared in a different manner. There is no mandate for the Presidential Search Committee to help these nominations be parallel, or to allow them to only nominate a single option to give more time to shift executive role structures. A long-term co-presidency structure would also appear to require a different accountability structure with the Board of Trustees, noting that the interim co-presidents in 2017 held specific portfolios for only a very short-term role. We hope the Board will take more time to carefully sort out these questions, given that the next Presidential election is scheduled in 2023.
- As we make these shifts, we may want to pay attention to the differences between candidates for moderator and president in order to adjust expectations appropriately, e.g. slightly different timelines or fundraising parameters.

UUA Board, Secretary and Election Campaign Practices Committee

- **CARE Team** – We endorse a newly-empowered Care And Responsibility for Elections (CARE) Team replacing the Election Campaign Practices Committee and taking on some roles of the Secretary, including overseeing practice of elections. One of the more stressful elements of the last presidential campaign was the need for UUA staff to adjudicate complaints and issues raised by the campaigns, and we would value a stronger partner in setting policies and addressing those inevitable concerns. We would support defining specifics around the CARE Team in rule or Board policy, since the team will have a new and evolving role.
- **Secretary** – We understand the Secretary would continue to be responsible for issues related to certifying delegates. This has been a relationship that has operated smoothly in the past with UUA staff responsible for the technical systems that hold delegate credentials and access.

Voting, Delegates and Ballots

- **Electronic voting** – While not addressed in the report, we have identified a number of additional revisions needed to incorporate our electronic voting system into our bylaws, which are currently structured around paper ballot assumptions. We have drafted language for the Board to consider in these areas (not included here but ready to share), which include:
 - Ballot and voting classification and terminology
 - Make all voting electronic and virtual, rather than categories of onsite and absentee, while preserving a paper voting option
 - Explicit permission for electronic voting, aligning with ballot language
 - Ballot order
 - Ballot limited to contested elections
 - Tie-breakers
- **Covenanting communities** – We support allowing covenanting communities to credential delegates, and note that it will have to be a flat number of delegates because they do not report membership. They could be treated like associate organizations which receive two delegates. Additionally, the timelines of covenanting communities' certification to qualify for delegates needs to be on the same timeline as congregations to avoid confusion.
- **Individual proxy voting** – We support greater access to UUA elections but see a number of conceptual questions that must be answered about this proposal before we believe we can implement it with integrity. These include:
 - Are individual voters considered members of the UUA, or are they anyone who completes a form to register? Note that we currently require congregations to make a financial contribution in order to certify their delegates annually, recognizing both rights and responsibilities, and a simple registration process would not capture this reciprocity. It may be more fruitful to explore how the UUA, or in partnership with the Church of the Larger Fellowship, can create a membership category that is more in line with our congregational model.
 - Who validates individual voters? Currently, congregations assign their delegates, and professional delegates are validated through the fellowshiping process and now through the Liberal Religious Educators Association. It is not feasible for the UUA to evaluate individual voters, nor protect against any manipulation of the vote by individual voters.

We hope the Board will take more time to consider these questions, which we believe will be subject of considerable debate, before proposing bylaw language.

- **Delegate credentials** – It would be easy to allow and encourage congregations to credential delegates earlier in the year, but we believe it is not possible to effectively require it. Currently, congregations name most delegates in June, despite being able to do so in April; requiring congregations to certify by February 1 would be at a time when few are paying attention and we believe it would cause disenfranchisement. If the goal is to engage delegates and leaders earlier, we can provide greater access without requiring earlier credentialing (see next section).

Campaign Practices and Finances

- **Creating leader and delegate access** – With better data systems, we can now create the ability for campaigns to send emails to congregational leaders and delegates through a portal that masks individual identities and contact information. An election list could be created in fall before an election, with an opt-out feature, for all current congregational staff, presidents and treasurers, with delegates being automatically added in as they are assigned. We would anticipate working with the CARE Team to set appropriate limits on how candidates could use the list. Additionally, we can pre-schedule forums (including virtual forums) for candidates and promote those via this elections list.
- **UUA campaign funding** – Upon reflection, we do not believe it is realistic to get candidates to focus on raising money for the UUA, especially on a shortened campaign cycle. We suggest a revised version of UUA campaign funding that does encourage candidates to demonstrate some fundraising skills but does not cause an over-reliance on large donors. Specifically, we would recommend the UUA provide a foundation grant to campaigns to get started, and then match contributions (or potentially only small-dollar contributions) up to a certain amount. The UUA could cap its overall spending and pro-rate grants based on the number of nominations made. Additionally, we recommend campaign contribution limits or UUA funding structures be defined in rule or Board-adopted policy to allow sufficient time to plan for a successful approach.
- **Staff roles in elections** – We affirm the need for more conversations about UUA staff roles in presidential or moderator elections, including staff who seek nomination, to ensure staff expectations are fair and clear.