

Restructuring UUA Governance

Questions and Answers

Why are changes being proposed to how the UUA Board and Nominating Committee are elected?

Our congregations and multiple task forces have told us that our governance is too complex, and needs to be more representative. Our current system produces a Board of 26 members that is too large to be effective. It provides geographical diversity, and balances representation for ministers, lay people, and genders; but it provides minimal representation for young adults, youth, people of color, and other historically marginalized voices. Separate District elections tend to result in Trustees who are, by and large, rather similar to each other in class, age, and ethnicity.

What changes are proposed?

The restructured UUA Board will have 14 members (instead of 26), including the Moderator, Financial Advisor, and 11 at-large Trustees. The President will continue to be a Board member without voting privileges. All Trustees will be elected by the General Assembly. Trustees will be elected for up to two three-year terms (instead of two four-year terms).

Nominating Committee members will be elected by the General Assembly for up to two three-year terms (instead of one six-year term). Also, the Nominating Committee is given a specific charge for diversities to be considered in nominating Trustees: “especially in regard to historically marginalized communities, but also balancing amongst size of congregation, lay and ordained, geography, age (including youth and young adults), and gender, among others.”

What are the benefits of the proposed changes?

A restructured Board will be more effective and nimble, able to make decisions and respond quickly to changes. More diversity will enhance our cultural competency, make us more accountable to historically marginalized voices, expand access to leadership opportunities, and increase our connections to the growing edges of our movement. We will have a Board that can support moral, spiritual, and numerical growth. Shorter terms will enable us to frequently balance and rebalance the Board, with more people moving into and through leadership positions.

The changes to the Nominating Committee will make it possible to create an effective Board team with the right balance of skills, geography, church size, identities, and experience.

When will the proposed changes take effect?

If the proposed Bylaws changes pass, the changes will take effect at the close of General Assembly in 2013.

How will the transition to the new Board structure be handled?

All Trustees’ terms will expire at the end of General Assembly in 2013. By the prior October, the Board will select four current Trustees who will continue by serving two-year terms beginning in 2013. For GA 2013, the Nominating Committee will propose four Trustee candidates to serve one-year terms, and three candidates to serve three-year terms. This approach will enable the Board to transition to the new structure immediately following GA 2013.

How can we be sure our (regional) interests will be represented?

As is true for our current Board, our new Board will be responsible to our Association as a whole, not to regional interests. However, the Board and Nominating Committee will work to ensure that there is a balance of geographical identities on the Board, as well as seeking balance in other areas. All Board members will be accountable to all regions (again, this is not a change). We currently have 19 District Trustees: 6 west of the Mississippi and 13 east of the Mississippi, plus four at-large Trustees (including the Youth Trustee).

If we don't have a District Trustee to report to us, how will we know what's going on?

Connecting with congregations—in particular with congregational Boards—is an essential part of the Board’s work. Last year Board members contacted about 100 congregations to talk about the relationship between the Board and congregations. In the coming year, the Board and Staff will connect with an even larger number of congregations through the “Gathered Here” project, using appreciative inquiry to focus on congregational vision.

Our new Communications Working Group will work to engage the greater Association in new ways through social media, written communications, and face-to-face interactions. Consider inviting a Trustee to your District Annual Meeting or to other District meetings.

The UUA Board will continue to work closely with District leadership through the District President’s Association (DPA), especially in nourishing our connections to congregations and in fostering leadership development.

How will leaders from our region find their way to national leadership?

Board and Staff can improve the preparation and opportunities for national leadership through improving our leadership development programs. There are many opportunities for involvement in the work of our Association; Districts and regions can support engagement of our members at all levels of our Association.

How will the new board handle all the work of the current Board?

It will not. The Board's current workload includes responsibility for staffing, liaising with, or serving on many of our Association's committees, serving on Board committees and working groups, trying to have meaningful discussions in groups of 26, hearing 25 people say "I agree with Joan," and being deeply involved in operational concerns.

Going forward, we will need to be more clearly focused on governance: our vision for the future, our connections with our member congregations, and our delegation of authority to UUA Staff and committees (with appropriate oversight).

With restructuring in mind, the Board has already begun to change how it works, and those changes will continue throughout the next two years.

How will congregations get to know at-large candidates and what they stand for?

The evolution of information technology, including widespread use of social media, greatly increases opportunities for easy access to candidates and information about the candidates.

The Election Committee will work with the Board and appropriate UUA Staff to ensure that GA delegates have ample access to information about all candidates.

How will congregations participate in electing trustees and members of the Nominating Committee?

Member congregations of our Association will elect Trustees and members of the Nominating Committee through their GA delegates. Nominations by petition will provide an alternative path for proposing candidates.

Work remains to be done to implement the recommendations of the Fifth Principle Task Force, to ensure that the delegates sent to General Assembly truly represent our congregations, and are not limited to those who have the time and financial resources to attend GA.

What does our current Board look like?



What would the new Board look like?

Our Board's governance policies call us to govern on behalf of Our Sources of Authority and Accountability:

- 1) *Our member congregations*
- 2) *Current and future generations of Unitarian Universalists*
- 3) *The heritage, traditions, and ideals of Unitarian Universalism*
- 4) *The vision of Beloved Community*
- 5) *The Spirit of life, love, and the holy*

What do you think that would look like?

Who developed this proposal?

The task force on restructuring was chaired by the Rev. Susan Ritchie, Trustee from the Ohio Meadville District. Other members included the Rev. Erik Carlson, Paula Cole Jones, Jim Key, Janine Larsen, and Thomas Schade. The Nominating Committee also provided extensive feedback.