

UUA Bylaws Renewal Team Report to General Assembly 2023

The Commission on Institutional Change, as well as other leaders, have observed that our governance practices are outdated and opaque, stymie innovation and inclusivity, and hold us back from being the mission-driven organization we aspire to be. Recognizing that reality, the 2022 General Assembly (GA) passed a business resolution mandating a review of the UUA bylaws, building on the work of a UUA Board “deep divers” bylaws group that had begun the year prior to the resolution. After the GA vote, the Board appointed the UUA Bylaws Renewal Team which included some of the previous Board bylaw group members along with three new members, who applied through an open application process. Each member has bylaws experience and brings a unique perspective to the work.

The bylaws renewal team has had high level conversations about roles, authority and accountability with respect to the Officers of the Association, (Article 8), General Assembly (Article 4), Committees of the Association (Article 5) and discussions of Membership (Article 3) including questions about broadening the definition of membership beyond congregations.

The team has identified a series of “big questions” that any review of the bylaws raises: What is the proper role of the General Assembly in decision-making? How do our current practices empower or disempower important voices? What policies should be embedded in the bylaws versus more flexible rules and procedures? How can volunteer energy best serve our association and its mission? The team is also identifying simple fixes to overly complicated bylaws wording and confusing processes.

Even though the team meets every other week, the work has turned out to take more than originally anticipated when we had hoped to bring recommendations to the 2024 General Assembly.

We also recognize that the ongoing process for renewal of Article 2 of the UUA bylaws and the work of the Article 2 Study Commission, which has been in process since 2020, takes precedence.

Therefore, we expect to share a summary of our progress with the Board in Fall 2023 with a request for an extended timeline. The greatest challenge for us this year has been to organize our shared conversations and possibilities into a helpful document. Additionally, the “big questions” will require extensive discussion among key stakeholders, including the incoming UUA President.

We are hopeful to begin engaging Unitarian Universalists in “big question” workshops during the Spring 2024, at GA 2024 and into the Fall of 2024. While we may recommend a few bylaws changes to the Board for GA 2024, we do not expect to have a fully renewed set of bylaws until GA 2025, at the earliest.



This expanded timeline would allow bylaw change workshops and discussions to continue into 2024-2025 fiscal year, with potential votes at the 2025 and 2026 General Assemblies.

We appreciate everyone's patience as we prepare thoughtful ideas and discussions for the future of our faith.

Submitted by the UUA Bylaws Renewal Team::

Rev. Ariel Aaronson-Eves, Kathy Burek, Barbara de Leeuw (convener), Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray (as UUA president), Larry Ladd, Rev. Tom Shade, and Rev. Connie Simon.

Administrative support: Brent Lewis

