



## UUSJ Board Orientation Frequently Asked Questions

### What Is UUSJ?

UUSJ is a membership-based, non-profit Unitarian Universalist organization dedicated to three purposes: (a) to provide leadership for effective social action; (b) to advance the social justice work of Unitarian Universalist congregations and organizations; and (c) to increase the frequency, impact, and visibility of UU advocacy and collaborative efforts that reflect UU principles. Legally, UUSJ is a tax-exempt charity, 501c3, and prepares IRS 990 reports annually. UUSJ celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020 (one-page history of UUSJ in Annex A)

The past two fiscal years have been ones of strategic transformation, re-thinking who our stakeholders are, and our vision, mission, and values. The resulting revisions follow:

**Vision:** A just, compassionate, and sustainable world community.

**Mission:** Advance equitable national policies and actions, aligned with UU values, through engagement, education, and advocacy.

**Moral Owners:** UUs, UU congregations, Impacted communities, Organizations that represent impacted communities.

**Values:**

- We are effective and responsive
- We are faithful to our UU Principles
- We respect others

**Desired Ends:**

- UUs vigorously and effectively support through engagement, education, and advocacy national policies and actions aligned with UU values.
- UU congregations effectively and authoritatively engage, educate, and advocate at the federal level for a just, compassionate, and sustainable world community aligned with UU values.
- Frontline communities have the power to improve their lives and communities,
- Organizations that represent front-line communities are effective in engaging, educating, and advocating on policies and actions on the Federal level that will improve the lives in the communities they represent.

## Annex A: A Brief History of UUSJ

During the 1980s, most Washington, DC area UU congregations worked together to launch and support the UU Affordable Housing Corporation. In 1998, Jack Edmondson, the Executive Director of UUAHC, asked Rev. John Buehrens, President of the UU Association, to explore how the various Washington-based UU entities might cooperate more effectively through a coalition.

After exploratory discussions, Rev. Buehrens embraced the idea and funded a UU consultant, Bob Johnsen, to develop the vision. After conducting meetings with area ministers and UU leaders, Bob convened an organizing meeting in 1999 of 20 UU congregations and organizations to choose among three options that emerged. Meeting participants decided to support the “big vision” option -- that the interests area congregations would be best served by supporting members’ social justice efforts through technical assistance, networking, education, and training. Rev. Roger Fritts, then Senior Minister at Cedar Lane UU Church, convened an organizing meeting to start to implement this decision. UUSJ was incorporated in April 2000. [add picture of Bob Johnsen]

UUSJ initially provided educational programs, disseminated “best practices” and offered opportunities for networking with area social justice members. Over the years, UUSJ moved from having a single-issue focus to multiple priorities, offering annual “Skills-Building Workshops.” Local public education was the first issue priority, followed by the needs of children and families. In 2003, an “Educational Networking Directory” featuring congregational best practices was developed and 1,000 copies distributed.

Since then, UUSJ has been active in many ways to implement the “big vision.” It has:

- Conducted nearly 80 programs including workshops on immigration, LGBTQ rights, climate change, economic justice, dark money in politics, freedom to marry, and voter mobilization.
- Experimented with new UUA-focused program offerings such as conducting pre- and post-General Assembly briefings, spearheading area contributions to review of Statements of Conscience and Congregational Study Action Issues.
- Conducted regular conference calls and later workshops for social justice chairs.
- Conducted large energizing events with inspirational national leaders such as former UUA president Rev. Bill Sinkford, Common Cause president Bob Edgar, and Member of Congress Jaime Raskin.
- Co-sponsored with UUs for a Just Economic Community two national conferences, in 2017 Reversing Economic Inequality and 2019 Mobilizing for a Green New Deal. Each included a lobby day with UUSJ providing “how to” training for organized Hill visits.
- Established regular awards events to recognize outstanding social justice efforts.

Since its inception, UUSJ had been educating about advocacy. In 2013, UUSJ launched a direct advocacy program to bring critical issues to the attention of public policy makers, given its strategic location in the Capital region. In 2017, a volunteer monthly Capitol Hill Advocacy Corps was launched, after the UUSJ Board voted to “go national.” A letter-writing campaign (Write Here! Write Now!) was developed to elicit letters from constituents and briefings were prepared to inform Advocacy Corps members for their scheduled meetings with Congressional staff and (and occasionally Members of Congress). The Corps delivered over 11,000 personal letters written by UUs across the country.

UUSJ has been staffed over the 20 years by a part-time Executive Director, (currently Pablo DeJesus) and part-time administrative staff (currently Paulette DeMers).

### **What are the Duties of a UUSJ Board Member?**

Trustees have the following duties (from Section 5 of the Policies):

**Duty of Knowledge** Know the content of the fundamental documents: laws, bylaws, and Board policies

Know the purpose, vision, mission, and ends of the organization and understand how the organization translates the purpose into action

**Duty of Care** Act in accordance with a minimum standard of care

Exercise the care, diligence and skill of a reasonably prudent person

**Duty of Skill and Prudence** Act with practicality and not necessarily expertise in mind

Act cautiously and anticipate any probable consequences of any course of action that the organization may choose to take

### **Duty of Diligence and Loyalty**

- Act in the best interests of the organization
- Adhere to the organization's values
- Be as fully informed as reasonably possible about all aspects of the organization
- Act prudently and reasonably to protect the integrity and reputation of the organization
- Review the agenda and supporting material in advance of each Board meeting
- Attend meetings of the Board
- Prepare before the meeting so as to discuss the business knowledgeably
- Vote on matters that come before the meeting

### **Duty to Manage**

- Appoint and supervise the Executive Director
- Establish policies and provide guidance
- Comply with legal requirements
- Acquire adequate knowledge of the business and functioning of the organization
- Measure management's implementation of Board policies
- Elect officers and members of committees

### **Fiduciary Duty**

- Avoid acting in such a way that personal interests conflict with the interests of the organization (fill out and sign conflict of interest statement annually)
- Act honestly and in good faith
- Be loyal to and act in the best interests of the organization and subordinate every personal interest to those of the organization
- Develop and maintain relationships with moral owners

### **What does it mean to “be in covenant” with Board Members and Staff? (Section 2 of Policies)**

Serving on the UUSJ Board is a calling and doing its work is a spiritual practice.

UUSJ Trustees serve together in a covenantal relationship and mutually promise to:

- Offer our time, treasures, and talents to carry out the mission and vision of UUSJ.
- Make every attempt to attend meetings regularly and arrive on time.
- Be prepared to participate.
- Speak openly, straightforwardly, and authentically as well as discuss concerns directly with those with whom we have disagreements.
- Listen to each other with open minds and hearts.
- Acknowledge that we may not always agree with the group decisions, but we support and participate in decision-making processes that are collaborative and democratic.
- Work collaboratively and build bonds of mutual trust.
- Encourage and empower each other, and treat each other with genuine respect and honesty.
- Respect and honor individual and cultural differences.
- Keep in mind the effects of our social justice work on present and future moral owners and other stakeholders.
- Follow the written policies and procedures of the Board, as well as remain open to changing them.
- Read and respond, as appropriate, to emails/correspondence in a timely manner.
- Participate on at least one committee of the Board.
- Gather and share information and insights with fellow Board members.
- Reach out to individuals and groups to support and promote the UUSJ program.
- Speak with one voice following actions of the Board, affirming and positively representing all actions.

### **What are the standing committees of the board?**

The four officers (Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Treasurer) form the Executive Committee, together with the Executive Director (ex officio). Other standing committees include Nominating, Finance, Development and Membership. Chairs are chosen by the Board from among Trustees. Non-trustees may serve on these committees (except the Executive Committee) but trustees should be the majority of members on each committee (with exception of Nominating). Duties are spelled out in Section 3 of the Policies document. The Board may appoint special committees as well for time-bound important tasks.

### **Can Board Members be involved in implementing UUSJ programs?**

The Board's major policy focus will be on the intended long-term effects and accomplishments of the organization, not on the administrative means of attaining those effects and accomplishments. In other words, the Board should set strategy and policy and supervise the Executive Director's work to carry out agreed upon programs. The Board is responsible for oversight of the organization's actions and its financial status and must be kept informed about these by the Executive Director and/or relevant committee. The Executive Director should hire, supervise, and terminate other staff and consultants, and oversee volunteer staff to help implement the agreed work plan to meet Ends set by the Board. Thus, a Board member should not take on leadership of or active membership in, e.g., the issue action committees. However, Board members can and should participate from time to time in UUSJ witness actions, fundraising and awards events, webinars, advocacy meetings with Congress and when asked by the Executive Director to join, meetings with partners.

### **What if something goes wrong? Am I protected?**

Like any good non-profit, UUSJ carries Directors' and Officers' (D & O) insurance, which protects your personal assets in the event anyone is personally sued by other parties for actual or alleged wrongful acts in managing UUSJ.

### **Where does UUSJ get its operating funds?**

The main sources are individual members and donors (53% in FY20-21), congregational donations (16%), grants from UU Funding Program (16%) and events (14%). A small amount (2%) comes from UUSJ participation in the Combined Federal Campaign. In the recent past, a donor made a large, earmarked contribution so that UUSJ could carry out a specific action – getting out the vote in 2020 – while other times individuals contribute matching funds to release match grants from UJFP.

### **What is expected of me in terms of fundraising and donating to UUSJ?**

All board members are expected to be UUSJ members, which means joining and paying dues. Such dues are flexible, but \$60/year is suggested. Those who are financially capable of donating beyond that are encouraged to do so each year, to demonstrate their commitment to sustaining the organization. In requesting funds from individuals and funders, it is important to show that all board members themselves are donors. Board members involved in the Development Committee or fundraising events will be actively reaching out to raise funds in other ways.

### **How does UUSJ decide on its policy priorities?**

Every two or three years, UUSJ surveys its members about priorities. Similar inputs should be sought from all moral owners (e.g. UU Congregations and partners, impacted persons and the organizations they lead) but tools for this are emerging only now. The Board then takes those results into account along with an understanding of our available resources – human in the form of active issue action committees and staff, funding from grants and donors – and our capacity limits, along with our understanding of UU grounding, accountability to moral owners and fit with our niche (federal level policies and legislation) to decide on future priorities.