

UUSJ Executive Committee Meeting January 12, 2021

Present: Charlotte Jones-Carroll, Beyssa Buil, Mariano Vera, Pablo De Jesus, Rev. Peggy Clarke.

Absent: Chloe Emily Ockey (wifi issues)

The entire Executive Committee meeting was devoted to a discussion about ways to think freshly about what UUSJ is now (a national UU organization focused on federal policy education and advocacy) and how to convey that message more widely.

- UUSJ is an asset for the UU community as the principal organization focused on federal policy and legislation, with organizing capacity in the National Capital Area.
- How can we get UUs in 50 states and Puerto Rico to plug into federal issues?
- Action teams (immigration, democracy at least) used to be very locally staffed with volunteers, around DMV (District, Maryland and Virginia) but currently, the Democracy team's convener is in Massachusetts, while co-chairs of Immigration are in MD and VA, but both have core members outside DMV. Partners for Economic Justice and Environment (PPC and UUMFE/UUJEC) are located outside of DMV. Of UUSJ staff, ED is in DC, Admin Asst is in Minnesota and Advocacy Asst is in California.
- Current membership team (working under ED's supervision) is basically doing a fundraising task. Should be relating to the Development Committee. Their work is needed and appreciated. However, given that (i) a separate Membership Committee is a recent phenomenon and (ii) its work of defining what a member is and setting dues is done, there does not seem to be a need for a formal Board Membership Committee. Scarce board resources could be better used on development, outreach, policy and governance matters. Since the Membership Committee is stipulated in Bylaws, this implies an eventual change in Bylaws, if Board agrees.
- While outreach to congregations should still be part of UUSJ strategy, the most potential lies with individuals (both for funds and engagement). This is confirmed by latest (December 31) actuals on income – congregational donations at 30% while individual donations (including personal foundations) are at 176% of budget goals.
- We reach out to congregations to alert individuals to join advocacy zoom meetings as constituents, where we identify a specific state/district representative in Congress as crucial to advance (or reduce obstruction to) important legislation. But contacting via congregations is mainly for ease of finding contacts (using UUA website for those).
- We should do outreach in a clear and simple way, widely shared, on a specific issue. (differences of opinion in EC about whether we need a single issue for all of UUSJ for all of a year, versus clear issue in one of our priority areas for a specific advocacy initiative).
- UUSJ has four focuses: infrastructure (internal organization and resources), following (relationships with partners and allies), education (using webinars and training opportunities to explain and engage on issues) and leading (national campaigns using social media, petitions, letter writing, action alerts, zoom meetings, witness events, etc.) Following partners as allies and seeking partners to follow our lead are both important.

- Need to tell more people and organizations who UUSJ is and what we do first, before asking for money. Engage people on issues, educate on specifics, involve them in advocacy meetings and listening sessions with impacted people/partners. Only then ask about donations or doing a share-the-plate at their congregation.
- Focus on the future, not on the past. Our honorable past was a membership collective of congregations sharing information about social justice within the DMV. Our future is as a national unique UU organization. We need to have a strategy and sharp focus for a few issues, decide what needs to be done to achieve the goals related to that strategy and seek resources we need to do those things. Best not to think “we have few resources, thus we can’t do this or that.” If we need to start out leading about only one issue, then start that way and build our brand.
- To “build our brand” we need a pithy slogan that describes who we are (ex. “UU voices in the Nation’s Capital) and have a clear communications strategy about this.
- Meanwhile, we can continue to follow partners lead as allies and add more partners in our (limited) issue areas. We can use their information to share knowledge with UUs in various issue areas. This might require some internal homework to get up to speed where we don’t have super-active action teams.
- Would it help to hire a communications person (or define such tasks for existing staff) to support ED on this work? Seek resources for this.
- We could develop monthly (or bi-monthly) webinar briefings on the state of legislation and policies at federal level, and make these well-known regular events, always same time each month/alternate month. This could build our brand as well. We can use similar vehicle to share how to “do” advocacy via zoom with Congressional staff.
- How can UUSJ make sure “your liberal religious voice is expressed in the Nation’s Capital?”

Charlotte Jones Carroll, note-taker