

Bylaws Revision 2015

Shared Leadership: Clarity and Transparency

Part 3 Frequently Asked Questions

Dear USSB Members and Friends,

When we update the USSB bylaws, the board invites the members of the congregation to learn about the changes they will have the opportunity to approve at the annual meeting.

Annual Meeting June 7

There will also be other matters for your vote at the annual meeting including voting for board members and members of the nominating committee, and revisions to the endowment bylaws. Separately, you will also be offered short biographies and other information about these voting opportunities. We hope you can attend the annual meeting, or if you can't attend, vote by absentee ballot so we can benefit from your participation.

Bylaws Revision Calendar

Before that annual meeting, the board is offering opportunities for you to engage in the bylaws process.

We are offering a series of informational pieces titled **Bylaws Revision 2015, Shared Leadership: Clarity and Transparency**. We welcome your questions and other responses to any board member.

On **Sunday, April 12 at 12:15**, you will be invited to a **workshop** for members to hear about the bylaws revision and to offer questions and insights in facilitated break-out groups. You will be hearing more about this workshop.

Before April 23, you will receive the **notice of the finalized proposed bylaws revisions**.

A week before the annual meeting, at a **Town Hall meeting** we will present and answer questions about the bylaws revisions.

Absentee ballots will be available the week before and leading up to the annual meeting.

Bylaws Revision 2015 Part 3, Frequently Asked Questions

All three parts of Bylaws Revision 2015 are posted on the USSB website under Leadership and Ministry, Board of Trustees.

Our bylaws revisions support the board’s model in which the lead minister (referred to as “the minister”) leads staff and operations. What skills are we expecting our minister to have?

We expect our minister to be knowledgeable, wise, and articulate, to be able to organize excellent Sunday services and to deliver thoughtful and engaging sermons. We expect them to accept and to work with our goals and values. They have to be able to inspire and organize others, both paid and volunteer, to work successfully toward these goals. And they have to be willing and able to observe the reasonable policy guidelines given to them by the board on behalf of the congregation.

Does the minister need to have administrative skills?

We have a professional administrator.

Rather than having to have administrative skills, the minister has to be able to work collaboratively with professional and knowledgeable staff and volunteers. Administrative work is a professional specialization, and we have a professional director of administration on our staff. The minister supervises and works closely with the director of administration. Although the minister supervises the work, they do not have to know how to manage spreadsheets, fill out grant applications or manage the handling of the plate donations or pledge income.

Personnel work

The minister is also responsible for supervision, appropriate compensation, and staff evaluations. Many staff members’ supervision and evaluation is the direct responsibility of the director of administration, and a few are the direct responsibility of the minister. In either case, they have the support of experienced and knowledgeable member volunteers to consult with in this work. Hiring, evaluations and other personnel processes are the direct or indirect responsibility of the minister but are carried out by a team. The minister is not expected to take care of all this alone.

Finances

The budget is created in a highly collaborative process over a nine-month period involving the board and many other leaders in the budget committee as well as the lead minister and the director of administration. The budget is based on the strategic multi-year plan which is created by the lead minister in collaboration with the various congregational groups, committees and individuals, and the board priorities for the year. This year the board invited the congregation to make suggestions for budget priorities. Once it is drafted and finished by the budget committee, the budget is recommended by the board and then approved by a vote of the members. No specialized skills are needed by the minister in the budget creation process. They provide leadership in keeping the process aligned with the congregation’s values, goals and strategic plan.

The budget is managed throughout the year by the professional director of administration, under the supervision of the lead minister. On a yearly basis, board policy requires that

spending may not exceed income. There are many other board policies that guide and limit the lead minister's spending authority. For example, it is the responsibility of the minister to see to it that "actual allocation does not deviate materially from congregationally approved budget priorities." The director of administration keeps the minister aware of the flow of income and expenses. Under the supervision of the lead minister, the director of administration establishes and follows accepted administrative procedures. With the help of the director of administration and the treasurer and finance committee, the board looks at the income and expenses monthly to make sure that our income and expenses are on a trajectory to balance at the end of the year. Finally, a yearly audit process checks that our record keeping and finances are being handled correctly according to professional standards.

Why does the board delegate leadership of the staff and operations to the minister rather than leading staff and operations itself?

The leadership of staff and operations requires an on-site professional. A nine-person board of volunteers is not well-equipped to handle these responsibilities. Board members meet once a month. They are not at USSB for the staff meetings or the meetings of the membership committee or the worship committee. They are not aware of the background information about daily operations and are not available when decisions need to be made in a timely manner.

Of our professional staff, the called minister is the clear choice for this responsibility. The relationship between the congregation and the called minister is a special one. We trust in their judgment, their commitment to the well-being of the whole congregation, and their ability to lead wisely.

Rev. Julia Hamilton will be our Lead Minister in a few months. How does she see herself in the role of leadership of staff and operations?

In her words, here is Rev. Hamilton's perspective.

"When asked why I think organized religion has value in the 21st century, I often reply, 'Because there are things we can do together that we cannot do alone.' I am well aware that I cannot do ministry alone! In fact, it is one of the reasons that I love my job – I get to work with skilled, intelligent, compassionate volunteers and staff every day.

As Lead Minister, my job is not to do everything myself, but to work with and inspire staff and volunteers to fulfill the goals of the congregation. The policies created by the Board give the Lead Minister the freedom to say 'Yes!' to volunteers and staff who are ready to get to work on our goals. This also comes with the responsibility of sometimes saying 'No' or 'Not right now' when necessary. As we pursue our individual responsibilities and duties, my role is to keep all the pieces connected and working in the same direction, making sure that people see how their work contributes to the larger whole, and setting appropriate boundaries and expectations as needed. The Unitarian Society should be a place where people are glad to come to work, a place where they are treated fairly, and a place where they feel they can make a difference.

I anticipate working closely with the Board and other lay leaders so that I benefit from the wisdom found here at USSB – I have no desire to make decisions in a vacuum. I also see myself as a resource, helping identify useful practices that will move us forward, as well as providing support that will help us get back on track when we fall short with one another.

I appreciate the thoughtfulness with which the Board has engaged the issue of leadership and the clarity that they are committed to bringing to the organization. I hope to foster an environment that allows our staff and volunteers to flourish, in an atmosphere of mutual respect and creative possibility.”

Does this model give the minister “too much power”?

We want our minister to have adequate power to be creative and do great things! At the same time the board needs to make sure that it does not lose control of its own governing role. How does the board maintain this balance? Briefly, the board gives the minister a good set of directions and then ensures that they are being followed. And since we are a collaborative and leadership-sharing community, the lead minister is not left to make decisions alone or without the advice and perspectives of others. Board policy states, “The authority delegated to the lead minister is balanced with interactive shared leadership with committees, Board, staff and the membership such that they have the opportunity for input, to be engaged and empowered, and share responsibility for the life of the Society.”

Are we giving the minister unchecked power over spending?

No, the minister has authority to spend only within the congregationally-approved budget. The minister can, for example, authorize spending for the auction, for a particular maintenance need, for musicians for the Sunday service, or food for a reception, as long as these are within the budget. These spending decisions are made in collaboration with other staff members or committees. Often they are authorized through the delegated authority of the director of administration or other staff members or committee chairs. There is relatively little discretionary spending in our budget. As seen in the discussion of the budget management above, the budget is generally managed by the director of administration and overseen by the board.

Do we give the minister too much control of staff decisions?

In order for the minister to lead the staff, they must have the authority to do so. That authority is delegated by the board. No one is more interested than the board to ensure that this delegation does not lead to unwanted consequences. These are the ways the minister’s personnel decisions are governed by the board:

The board makes sure the minister understands that the congregation’s values and goals are the foundation for our operations.

The board establishes a set of policies, or guidelines about how it expects things to be done. For example, board policy requires the lead minister to “create a safe and positive working environment where paid and volunteer staff are valued and treated fairly and with respect.” The minister must “follow current written personnel policies”, must “provide for effective handling of employee evaluation and grievances,” and must “protect against wrongful conditions such as discrimination, harassment, nepotism, and grossly preferential treatment”. By board policy, the minister is expected to collaborate and consult appropriately in personnel decisions as in all others. (See Policy 2.2, *Treatment of Staff*)

The minister is chosen for wisdom and leadership skills, alignment with our values and their willingness to work with our policies.

The board makes sure the minister has access to help and advice from experienced and knowledgeable volunteers or consultants.

The minister has a professional expense budget and an allowance to enable them to attend workshop or trainings to develop their skills.

The board and the minister discuss all significant decisions.

Finally, the board’s role is to see to it that the policies are being followed. If they are not, there is a process for addressing the violation. If resolution does not take place, ultimately the board can initiate a termination process per our bylaws. (See policy 4.6-*Consequences of Policy Violation*)

How can we best help our minister to succeed?

Clarity makes it possible for the minister to succeed. When the minister knows the values and goals of the congregation, when the board has established how to measure success, when the board has articulated the limitations, when the board and the minister stay in communication, when the minister knows that they can count on the backing of the board as long as they abide by reasonable interpretations of board policy, then the minister has been given the conditions on which success can be built.

Does our model leave any room for member creativity, leadership, sharing of special skills?

There is no limit to the ways in which or the extent to which a member may contribute their time and special skills or knowledge at USSB. We depend on our members to run the lending library, teach the children’s RE classes, sing in the choirs, manage the endowment, offer adult education, promote our social values, advise on personnel decisions, participate in our worship services, serve on the board of trustees, greet our members and visitors, organize our fundraisers, build community, and much more. Knowing this, ministers and staff welcome volunteers to participate in leadership and in every aspect of our congregation’s life. Ministers are much better than boards at inviting and supporting these volunteers. Just bring your passion and your ability to work

cooperatively. Please let us know if you see any barriers to volunteer service here at USSB.

What is the board's work?

The board:

represents the congregation in first establishing the ends or goals. This guides the work of the congregation. In all its work the board stays in touch with the members.

makes sure that the minister understands and agrees to work within the policy limitations. The board both trusts the minister to lead the work of the congregation within the policies and also checks that they are doing so (oversight or monitoring).

creates policy and adds or change policies as needed.

operates within the guidelines it sets out for itself in policy and monitors its own process as well as monitoring the lead minister.

considers the needs of the congregation as a whole while creating vision for the congregation's future.

We welcome your questions and ideas. Please call or email any board member or talk to us at the "Board is In" table on Sunday mornings. Board meetings are open and there is an opportunity for members to share their thoughts during the open forum. We welcome your participation!

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