

UUSJ Special Board Meeting
June 22, 2014 2-5 p.m.
Washington Ethical Society

Goal: The goal of this special meeting is to reach consensus about what we need to work on to move forward with the UUSJ Strategic Plan.

Attendees:

Bill Alsmeyer-Johnson – Secretary – Mount Vernon Unitarian Church - delegate
Kay Scott – Cedar Lane UU Church - delegate
Lavona Grow – Co-chair – UU Church of Arlington - at large member
Al Carlson – Co-chair – UU Church in Reston - delegate
John Gubbings – Treasurer - Cedar Lane UU Church - at large member
Nancy Sorden – Washington Ethical Society - delegate
Catherine Morris – Facilitator – Towson UU Church - facilitator
David Strauss – UU Congregation of Rockville (Standing in)
Jim Alcauskas – Bull Run Unitarian Universalists - delegate
Ed Kringer – Accotink UU Church - delegate
Liz Echols – Davies Memorial UU Church (Individual Member)
Martha Aides – UU Congregation of Fairfax (via phone) - delegate
Cyn Snavley – UUSJ Administrator
Yaa – Goodloe Memorial UU Congregation - delegate

Lavona Grow, UUSJ Board Chair opened the meeting.

Introductions

Catherine Morris from Towson UU Church will be the facilitator.

Quorum present

Agenda Review

Strategic Plan Report

Lavona Grow lead a discussion on progress to-date on the Strategic Plan that was developed by UUSJ in 2013. [Note: Refer to our strategic plan “UUSJ Strategic Goals 2013-2015” (attached) for detailed descriptions of each Goal.]

Program Goals

1. Advocacy: To provide leadership that increases the impact of UU influence on public policy issues.
 1. Completed
 2. Not started – been opportunistic
 3. Not Started
2. Giving Witness: To increase public awareness and to influence policy makers by taking a public stand in public forums for UU principles and values on social justice issues.

- 2.1. In Progress
 - 2.2. Well on promoting, have participated in a couple of opportunities – ongoing but needs attention
 - 2.3. Some have started, starting to plan, developing structure
3. Capacity Building: To increase the ability of Unitarian Universalists in the national capital region to carry out effective social action.
 - 3.1. Started – have had two meetings with ministers – Cedar Lane and Mt. Vernon; reached out to Paint Branch but not a good time to meet this summer.
 - 3.2. In Progress – Not as far along as wished.
 - 3.3. Almost Done – Martha Aides, chair of Issues Identification and Selection Task Force
 - 3.4. Not Started
 - 3.5. In Progress
 4. Collaboration: To increase outreach to other faith-based and secular organizations to pursue common activities that support UU principles and values.
 - 4.1. In progress
 - 4.2. Not Started
 5. Communications: To improve our internal and external communications.
 - 5.1. In Progress: committee started but no regular meetings or current progress
 - 5.2. Not Started
 - 5.3. Completed
 - 5.4. In Progress
 - 5.5. Partially done
 6. Resource Development: To grow our financial base to pursue social justice more effectively.
 - 6.1. In Progress
 - 6.2. Not Started

Recommendations Reports

On June 16, 2014, the Executive Committee, along with David Strauss and Jim Alcauskas, met with Steve Schaff, who was the featured speaker at the May 3, 2014 UUSJ program on Income Inequality. Steve has worked professionally with non-profit organizations and offered UUSJ some pro-bono time to discuss our future options.

David Strauss gave a summary of the meeting with Steve Schaff. David also provided his personal comments - thoughts and suggestions based on the meeting.

David's report on the meeting with Steve:

- Strengths – Cash flow – not starting from zero.
- We need to have a plan that outlines the best way to meet our strategic plan goals.
- Hiring an Executive Director at this time is not necessarily best move.
- Recommended that having a team of volunteers to work intensely for 3 to 5 months would be a more effective use of Executive Director money.

- Steve has sent a suggested statement of work.
- Steve said that at the low end an Executive Director full time would cost about \$65K, and an administrative assistant \$15 per hour.
- [Lavona added after the meeting from her written notes: he said it would take about one year to get the organization geared up; we need more Hill contacts; and need to “paint the picture” for congregations as to where we want to take UUSJ.]

David’s comments:

- David felt Steve’s stress on fund raising is premature – hard to do when a group is not in a place of clarity.
- Since the UUA closed their Washington office there is a strong opportunity for interfaith work.
- Building UUSJ up will bring in more money and more member congregations.

Jim feels that we are not at a place right now to take on an Executive Director. He feels that there is enough “low hanging fruit” for us to work on so we don’t necessarily need a consultant at this time.

Jim suggests that we appoint a vice-chair for each of the major areas in the strategic plan.

David suggested that given managing the possible program areas that we should consider only have a single chair. Jim feels that given the right people co-chairs, working together, communicating regularly, could work.

On April 17, 2014, Lavona Grow and John Gubbings met with Dan Furmansky, formerly the UUA Standing on the Side of Love campaign director and now an independent consultant “helping progressive organizations advance our issues.” [Note: Following are John and Lavona’s notes from the meeting meeting with Dan provided with greater detail than was presented at the board meeting.]

Furmansky agreed UUSJ needs to take a step back and ensure its vision and goals are what we really want and include an achievable product (visibility could be measured, whereas we could never claim credit for a piece of legislation passing); for example, do we really want to influence congress or make UU Social Justice efforts more visible. John’s comment: If it is the latter, maybe we might want to go to congress with a coalition and pay more attention to that in our planning.

Furmansky thinks that to implement our strategic plan as currently written requires a full time Executive Director. It is unrealistic to think that a part-time Executive Director could do the job. A conclusion based on this judgment might be that UUSJ needs to either establish a lot more income before hiring or reduce the scope of our plan or a combination of these.

Furmansky is available as a consultant - his specialty is running issues campaigns and could organize and launch our issue task forces. He can also review plans with a view to helping progressive organizations achieve their goals of influencing Government. He would love to review our plan after we have revised .

Furmansky recommends we should have Cyn and Terry review their job descriptions and make modifications to reflect reality of what they do - co-chairs also. Furmansky would then review them in the light of the revised plan mentioned above.

Furmansky thinks he could help us draft a new job description for the Executive Director for the Search Committee. He is NOT interested in applying for the job. He wants no part of fund raising or anything like it. He can facilitate a deep discussion with the ExCom and/or Board but that he thinks that this isn't the best use of his skills and our money.

On June 21, Lavona met with Lisa Maurer, a consultant at BDO USA, LLP, where she provides project management and strategic consulting where she assists clients that “enable the organization to operate more efficiently and effectively.”

In a nutshell Lisa believes that our next step should be to develop from our strategic plan an operational plan (note: Steve referred to a similar plan as a or what she called a “work breakdown.” She sent an example from the U.S. Government Accounting Office of the structure of a work breakdown to provide some possible ideas. It is very comprehensive overly detailed for our use but might provide some insights. She is a young adult and connected with the James Madison University internship program. She provided suggestions about tapping into unpaid internships that many college students are in need of as part of their semester in D.C. She believed we are a viable organization for an internship but the lack of daily weekday oversight by staff may be an issue. She directed us to look at these non-paid and paid internships and jobs with college students who need experience for their portfolios.

Facilitated Discussion

Catherine Morris facilitated the discussion on “What are UUSJ’s Challenges and Barriers?” We were asked to write our comments on the sticky notes that were then placed on a flip chart and organized into categories. Below are the comments from the sticky notes for each category. (Note: lines of this color at linked)

1 - Discussion on Challenges and Weaknesses

- Limited hours for Executive Director
- Staff – Volunteers and Paid
 - All volunteers have limited hours to devote to this
 - Everyone is so busy so there may not be as much commitment to UUSJ as people have to their congregation.
 - No Denominational staff commitment to advocacy/lobbying.
 - Resources, personnel, money
 - Staff – limited hours
- Governance
 - Role of board not clear, Board training and development
 - Board needs training, not enough expertise, structure – is the best to carry out the work?
 - Board too diluted in efforts
- Work Organization Plan
 - Assignments to committees have not been clearly enough defined to get them to commit sufficient hours to complete work
 - Need to develop specific time line and job descriptions
 - Need time line for strategic goals, someone to oversee implementation.
 - Lack of specific plan to implement mission of UUSJ (goals, time tables, persons, assigned, etc)
 - No one is responsible for each section of the plan. Committees are used and multiple action groups are used in tach plan action group listing. Diffused responsibility.
 - Lack of milestone and reporting mechanisms, accountability.
 - We still have remnants of previous tasks that are committed to that do not contribute to strategic plan goals
 - Breadth of strategic plan (relates to resources)
 - Strategic plan document is hard to read – too detailed – too wordy – maybe because there are redundancies or need a different format

- Awareness
 - Making UU's pay attention to UUSJ – its activities, its goals. No matter how you advertise they don't pay attention
 - Lack of clear understanding by UU's in National Capital area of purpose, activities of UUSJ
 - Congregations have their own priorities and it has been a challenge to get them to provide sufficient volunteers to work with UUSJ
- Relationships/Partners
 - Need anti-racism allies
 - Competition with cluster groups [Note: JPD is currently forming a cluster of congregations in Northern Virginia and a cluster of congregations in the Greater Washington area. There are also UU Legislative Ministry organizations performing advocacy work at the state level in Maryland and Virginia.]
 - Need more ministerial by-in
 - Not full support and by-in of ministers whose congregations are members
 - No strong connections with other denomination's advocacy/lobbying staff
 - Integration/participation of individual member congregations
 - UU's operate independently – rather work in Interfaith groups but not with/among UU's
- Money
 - Fund raising: preferably a system that does not depend on a “poll-tax” type of assessment. A system based on voluntary contributions that works.
- Solutions
 - Prepare articles on UUSJ
 - Include anti-racism as a topic in UUSJ e-news

2 - Strengths and Opportunities

Catherine facilitated the discussion on “What are UUSJ's Strengths and Opportunities?” We were asked to write our comments on the sticky notes that were then placed on a flip chart. Below are the comments from the sticky notes for each category. (Note: **Lines of this color are linked under this category**)

- Location
 - Location in National Capital area
 - Being in the vicinity of the nation's capital is an opportunity that UU's cannot ignore
 - Strategically located in the national capital
 - We have the ability to make a physical presence for advocacy
 - 6,500 UUs in the region
- Compelling Advocacy Mission
 - No UU organization is advocating on the Hill – there is a gap to be filled
 - The message of UU advocacy resonates with many people including ministers
 - With advocacy role in place there's an opportunity to engage more members
 - We now have a great idea for a mission – advocacy.
 - There is an interest in taking a UU voice to Capitol Hill

- **Track Record**
 - Work done on strategic plan is well started.
 - We have a vibrant history and we should promote it capitalize on our past achievements
- **Potential Partners**
 - Pivotal.org to educate about issues
 - UUA office is supportive
 - There are numerous social justice organizations in this area that we can collaborate with.
 - We have the ability to work with both the Maryland and Virginia legislative ministries.
 - There are people in UUSJ who are knowledgeable about advocacy and the issue we hope to address in our strategic plan
 - There are other organizations with whom we can partner
 - There is interest in my congregation in having UU's work with other faiths on social justice issues.
- **Available Resources**
 - We have facilities available for training
 - We have some limited funds
- **Committed Staff and Volunteers**
 - Organize by individuals committed to responsibility to carry forward each part of strategic plan. One name each action. We need clarity of responsibilities
 - Put priority on recruiting enough people to get the job done
 - The other side of being "volunteers" is that we are committed ... Are here because we want to be
 - Dedicated volunteers who want to promote the goals of the organization
 - UU's are more water than fire – respond when needed
 - 7000+ people in 20+ congregations – big concentration of UU's
 - Interested volunteers
 - Strong dedicated staff working to promote UUSJ and dedicated volunteers
 - Board members, enthusiasm and committees
 - Congregational talent available

Possible Solutions and New Approaches - Next Steps

Discussion then followed on possible solutions and new approaches to moving forward for UUSJ. It was determined that our governance structure and process was the most important aspect to start working on.

Governance

- Clarify role of current and future Board
 - Working board or board of “liaisons”?
 - Advisory board or working board?
- Clarify qualifications for Board members [Note: Current UUSJ document, “Responsibilities of Member Congregations, Roles and Responsibilities of Board Members” to be reviewed by Core Group]
 - Create a job description for a Board member (job descriptions exist but must be reviewed)
- Clarify role of Executive Committee
- Clarify role of co-chairs
- Clarify connections with member congregations and their liaisons
- Who does the Board training and development, orientation?
- How often should Board meet?
- Review by-laws
- Create staff job descriptions to correspond with new vision

Immediate Next Steps Discussion

- Delay Executive Director hire 3 – 6 months
- Convene core group to tackle governance and organizational work plan
- Report back to Board by September 2014
- Continue Advocacy (Immigration, Economic Justice)
- Continue issue selection
- Continue task force information and work
- Make sure racial justice is part of all issues and task forces
- Monthly e-mail blast must include a racial justice component depending on content availability.

It was agreed that a core group be formed to work over the next three or more months on coming up with recommendations on how UUSJ should move forward on these ideas and suggestions.

Designated Core Group to follow through 3+ Hours/Week. Beginning date TBD.

- David Strauss
- Bill Alsmeyer-Johnson
- John Gubbings
- Lavona Grow
- Jim Alcauskas

Closing reading and meeting was adjourned