

8th Principle Updates to All Souls' Governance Framework¹

In April 2019, the Board created a study team, the Governance Task Force, to “evaluate the appropriateness of the All Souls Policy Governance Framework and recommend changes to it . . . with attention to diversity and the 8th Principle.” The members of that task force are Brenda Barbour, Barbara Corprew, Bob Jayes, Tom Fox, Erika Landberg, Neil Manzullo, Cathy Tortorici, and Chuck Woolridge, and they meet regularly (usually monthly) with Rev. Rolenz and Executive Director Hughes-Trotter. Since August 2020, Barbara and Neil have been preparing textual updates to incorporate the 8th Principle into the Policy Governance Framework (“the Framework”).

This document summarizes that work and edits the Task Force recommends the Board adopt.

Process

These edits are the product of a transparent and collaborative process:

- In August 2020, the Task Force began to discuss making 8th Principle edits to the Framework. Barbara and Neil then extensively reviewed policy governance documents from progressive churches, food co-ops, schools, and other institutions that have incorporated anti-racism and anti-oppression principles into their policies, and prepared a set of recommended edits.
- In October, the Task Force discusses these recommendations, and submitted them to the Board.
- At its October meeting, the Board gave the Task Force the “green light” to share these edits with the congregation and seek feedback.
- In November, Neil wrote to the congregation in the church’s weekly bulletin explaining policy governance, the work of the Task Force, the intention to update policy governance with 8th Principle edits, and asked for people to contact him if they wanted to provide feedback. Several congregants did, and there were some rich conversations about governance.
- In December, Barbara and Neil met with the Church Council to brief them on the suggested edits. They offered to meet with and take feedback from any group or congregant who wanted to give feedback.
- In January, Barbara and Neil met with the Transformation Team to brief them on the suggested edits, and they submitted written feedback about the edits.
- In February and March, Barbara and Neil met with Executive Director Traci Hughes-Trotter and Rev. Tony Coleman to discuss their professional experiences. These conversations were prompted by the Board’s ongoing read of *Widening the Circle*, the UUA’s report on institutional change, which recommends that churches be especially attentive to the experiences of staff members of color.

Following this feedback, a training session with Laura Park (Unity Consulting) on policy governance, and another Task Force discussion of the proposals, we are submitting these edits to the Board.

¹ The All Souls Board of Trustees adopted these updates on April 28, 2021. This document was submitted to the Board as part of the Task Force’s recommendations, and was slightly modified to reflect the adopted policies.

What's New in the Revised Draft

Between the original draft shared with the Board in October and this draft, this draft significantly enhances the executive limitations policies, which are expressions of Board values that cannot be violated.

These policies identify the decisions and actions the Executive Team may not take in pursuit of our four church Goals. They are prohibitive and are phrased in the negative, so that the Board can exert influence over what the Executive Team does and does not do without interfering in their daily decision making or prescribing the way staff do their jobs.

Edits to Part I: Governance Principles (page 6-7 of the highlighted copy)

In Section A (Policy Governance Commitment), the Board's commitment to policy governance is described at a high level. Because the 8th Principle calls us to accountably examine our systems at a similar level, the added language here—calling on the Board to use an anti-racist, anti-oppressive lens in its work—makes clear that our 8th Principle work begins at the top. The added language also recognizes that the 8th Principle requires us to acknowledge our biases, question our assumptions, and allow for discomfort because this is hard work that requires us to think in new ways.

In Section B (Governing Style), the revised language pares down several policies to focus on the “Style” of how the Board governs. In particular, the added language encourages the Board to:

- Have a democratic style that is connected to the congregation (“Seek out, listen to, and value congregational input”).
- Ensure that its members know how to govern (“Timely orient new members on Policy Governance and on how the Board uses the 8th Principle”).
- Focus on the future (“Plan ahead, including through the use of an annual monitoring calendar”).
- Try to understand what it doesn't know and to structure its work to eliminate oppressions (“Be honest about what the Board and Trustees do not know when navigating issues regarding race and reach out to experts for advice”; “Structure its work to address, eliminate, and prevent actions, decisions and outcomes that result from and perpetuate racism and other oppressions.”).

The focus on governance here—training, calendaring, etc.—may not initially stand out as an “8th Principle edit.” But that principle requires us to change systems. And it is only through understanding *how* governance works and being good at governing that this type of systemic change is possible.

These edits also modify the current Framework's language about Trustees needing to make “generous financial contributions” to the church. Trustees can certainly contribute money, but they can also contribute their time and energy. Setting up financial roadblocks to service as a Trustee limits the pool of people who feel qualified to be a Trustee, and conflicts with our 8th Principle values.

Edits to Part II: Board of Trustees' Responsibilities (page 8-9 of the highlighted copy)

The edits to this section are short but important.

First, the edits require the Board to consciously work with the Leadership Development & Nominating Committee ("LDNC") to become a Board that is "more diverse, especially with respect to race." A conscious intention to becoming more diverse helps the Board govern better because the Board will have access to a broader variety of perspectives. If the Board, for instance, is composed of all white people, then it impacts the Board's ability to govern well in issues that impact race, especially at a church which has a diverse and multicultural staff. Similarly, if the Board is composed of all people of one gender, then it impacts the ability to work on issues relating to gender. The phrase "more diverse" specifically encompasses the degree of racial diversity, but the Board should also work with LDNC to understand the Board's current composition, and how an increase in other types of diversity would benefit the Board. The Board already, in practice, does this—but it is important that this kind of practice isn't lost over time and is a specific commitment.

Second, the edits require the Board to regularly engage in self-monitoring. Right now, the Board monitors the Executive Team, and is engaging in some self-monitoring through quick monthly check-ins. A successful Board will find ways to analyze and improve its own functioning, and including language here calls on Trustees to hold the Board accountable for functioning well and in compliance with policies and the 8th Principle.

Third, the edits task the President with onboarding new Trustees to policy governance and the 8th Principle. Laura Park (Unity Consulting) described the President as "the Chief Governance Officer" of the Board. It is critically important that the Board have a shared understanding of how to govern, and the person best situated to make this happen is the Board's Chief Governance Officer.

Edit to Part III, Section C (Board Delegation to the Executive Team) (page 18 of the highlighted copy)

The one edit to this section requires that the Executive Team provide a written interpretation of both the Goals and Executive Limitations. This has been the Executive Team's practice during the current church year, and it has been a critical part of the Board learning to use policy governance well. The writing of these interpretations fleshes out the broad values contained in Board policies.

Edit to Part IV: Board Monitoring of Executive Team Performance (page 21 of the highlighted copy)

The Board's monitoring role can be strengthened through the use of data. For instance, the Board might seek data about how well a particular Goal is being implemented, and the data might reveal that progress on that Goal has only been felt within a small portion of the church's communities.

Since this is just an edit to the Framework itself, this edit only sets a value: use data. It's up to the Board to figure out what kind of data the Board wants to use. Unity-Unitarian in St. Paul, for instance, uses congregational surveys that ask members about the church's Goals and the impact on their lives. As All Souls moves into the next few years, when we will likely write new Goals/end statements, the Board should think about what data it might collect to measure those ends.

Edits to Executive Limitation #2, Staff and Volunteer Treatment (page 22-23 of the highlighted copy)

These edits include a few new policies, but they also reframe many policies to be phrased proscriptively, as limitations. Reframing these policies clarifies the boundaries and the specific actions and activities that the Board is prohibiting. Previously, the policies were phrased in the positive. This isn't appropriate for executive limitations, which are supposed to use negative language to limit the Executive Team's discretion. It also created confusion because some limitations within the Framework *are* phrased in the negative and some *are not*.

The new limitations generally speak to the values that limit the type of work environment the Executive Team can provide. Previously, some of those values were things like not having an unsafe work environment or an unhealthy one. The new edits build on to these values by:

- Emphasizing that the Executive Team must provide a collaborative and positive work environment ([The Executive Team shall not] “withhold from Staff timely, candid, and constructive feedback and positive reinforcement”).
- Making clear that any time the church hires, the church should always be trying to make the Staff more diverse ([The Executive Team shall not] “hire Staff members without intentionally searching for candidates who will make the Church’s Staff more diverse”). Like the policy that applies to the Board and its work with LDNC to become more diverse, the Executive Team should always consciously pursue the same goal for church staff.

The UUA is a largely white institution, and, in that kind of institution, it can be more difficult for people who are not white to connect and find mentoring opportunities. *Widening the Circle* recognized this, and it's also the experience of Black people we have heard from at All Souls (and elsewhere, pertaining to their own institutions). All Souls should have a staff culture that pushes for these mentoring opportunities, particularly for individuals who historically have had a hard time finding these opportunities, and one new policy sets a value: All Souls is a place that equips its Staff to thrive ([The Executive Team shall not] “Allow Staff—particularly Staff who are Black and Brown—to lack mentoring and professional development opportunities, regardless of background, that will provide them with the tools, resources, and support to excel in their positions.”).

These edits also spell out in more detail the limitations that apply to some internal processes:

- Conflict resolution ([The Executive Team shall not] “Deny staff a prompt, safe, and effective conflict resolution process”). The Executive Team recommended to the Board in March 2021 that the conflict resolution and evaluation policies be separated out from each other.
- Performance evaluations ([The Executive Team shall not] “Fail to conduct formal performance evaluations on at least an annual basis”).
- A legal review of personnel policies ([The Executive Team shall not] “Fail to ensure that the Church’s written personnel policies and procedures are reviewed for compliance with all applicable laws by a qualified third party every 3 years”). This cycle matches the audit cycle.
- An 8th Principle review of policies ([The Executive Team shall not] “Fail to regularly review personnel policies to ensure their compliance with the 8th Principle”).

In making these edits, we tried to name the values that should apply to personnel management, without getting into the specific operational details (such as how to conduct evaluations, what type of mentoring opportunities to provide, etc.). It is the Executive Team's job to figure out those specifics.

New Executive Limitation (Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression Commitment) (page 28 of the highlighted copy)

This is an entirely new Executive Limitation, which touches on many issues relating to how governance works, how the church works, and how to uproot oppression.

Some of these policies set a broad value: the Executive Team must think about the 8th Principle at all times, and keep track of how well it's being implemented ([The Executive Team shall not] "Interpret policies, including Goals and Executive Limitations, without considering how to consciously implement the 8th Principle in that interpretation"; [The Executive Team shall not] "Allow the Church's progress in embedding the 8th Principle into all levels of the institution to be unmonitored"). The Executive Team already does this, frequently. However, it's not yet expressed as a written value in our Framework, and we believe it should be. We also think it's appropriate for the Executive Team to tell the Board—through its interpretation of these limitations—how it intends to monitor the embedding of the 8th Principle into the church in order to comply with these requirements.

Some of these policies deal with hiring Staff and with onboarding Staff and volunteers:

- When the Executive Team hires, it should think about whether or not an individual, as appropriate for that person's position, is ready to work on the values that undergird the 8th Principle ([The Executive Team shall not] "Hire Staff without assessing, as appropriate for each position, an individual's commitment to and ability to advance the values of 8th Principle.").
- The Executive Team may not operate without ensuring that its Staff and volunteers have a shared understanding of the 8th Principle and how to live it out ([The Executive Team shall not] "Allow Staff and volunteers to be unacquainted with the 8th Principle and how to align their duties and activities with that principle."). From what we heard and read, this type of orientation and shared understanding is a tangible need within the church.

Some of these policies are about transparency:

- Who we employ and how we pay them ([The Executive Team shall not] "Allow the Board to be uninformed about the diversity of Staff, including the number of positions held by and percentage of salary paid to individuals who are Black, Brown, Indigenous, Asian-Pacific Islander, people of color and of different genders."). While this policy specifically calls out a couple types of diversity in areas that have been of concern during the church's past, it is flexibly designed to allow for expansion through the Executive Team's interpretation of the policy.
- Who we contract with and why ([The Executive Team shall not] "Engage vendors in an amount greater than \$10,000 annually without assessing any such vendors using a matrix of values, such as giving special consideration to vendors that pay fair wages or employ significant numbers of D.C. residents."). While we do not think it is appropriate for the Board to specify the "matrix of values" that would apply to analyzing contractors, we want to specifically note that during the church's Third Century Campaign, the church did a large amount of work to identify relevant values here, which can be easily imported into the Executive Team's interpretation.

- How we use our money ([The Executive Team shall not] “Allow the congregation to be uninformed about the work being done to live out the 8th Principle, and the measurable outcomes of that work, including the percentage of church donations that go to communities of color.”).

Some of these policies also touch on church programming. While the Board should not get involved in the specifics of church programming, we do think it is appropriate to set a value that it would be inappropriate for the Executive Team to provide church programming unless it offers lifespan education on certain issues that are core to our multicultural identity ([The Executive Team shall not] “Allow the congregation to be without lifespan opportunities to develop their anti-racist, anti-oppressive, multicultural skills”) and unless that programming is intentionally designed after considering the spiritual needs of congregants who are not white, so that their needs are not an afterthought ([The Executive Team shall not] “Design church programming without considering the spiritual needs of congregants who are Black, Brown, Indigenous, Asian-Pacific Islander, and people of color.”).

One new executive limitation deals with access to church programming for individuals with disabilities. Ensuring that congregants with disabilities have equitable access to church programming is part of the 8th Principle. The UUA has extensive guidelines available - <https://www.uua.org/accessibility> - for ensuring access. Our church currently works hard towards both physical access (e.g., elevators) and other types of access (e.g., ASL interpreters). However, there is currently no policy in our Framework that sets access for individuals with disabilities as a value. Especially as we move into the era of hybrid church programming, it is important that the church think through what accessibility guidelines it will use. This policy does not get into the details—how the church will provide access, what type of accommodations are an undue burden, etc.—but it does set as a value that the Executive Team must have thought through access issues.

These policies may take some real time, conversation, and collaboration to interpret and comply with. It is important to not rush this work. We suggest the following schedule, assuming the Board adopts the edits at the April 2021 meeting:

- November 2021 – the Executive Team briefly checks in with the Board on their progress on interpreting these policies, and informs the Board if the Executive Team sees any roadblocks to bringing the church into compliance with the policies by April 2022.
- April 2022 – the Executive Team submits their first monitoring report on Executive Limitation No. 5 (Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression Commitment). If the Executive Team was unable to bring the church into compliance by this date, the Executive Team will let the Board know a reasonable date for compliance.