

# PARTNERSHIP GOVERNANCE WEEKLY UPDATE

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## Week 3: Policies & Planning (Board Work)

Hi all - welcome back to the Weekly Update on Partnership Governance! This week, we'll be focusing on some of the work that is assigned to the Board under Partnership Governance: the development of Board Policies and Planning for the Future.

### Policies as Bowls

At the heart of Partnership Governance are clear written policies that articulate the limits of what the board and the members of the society can and cannot do. These serve as the containers within which the Society can operate. Dan Hotchkiss suggests that a good metaphor for this is a set of nesting mixing bowls. The largest mixing bowl is the **Board-Level Policies**. These are the general statements about what we expect of the Board and the society. These are typically very broad. Beyond this, there can be multiple levels of policy that are developed to flesh out the details.

These might be **Staff-Level Policies** that the staff develops to govern its processes, or **Committee-Level Policies** that determine a Committee's limits. At whatever level, when writing a particular policy, Hotchkiss suggests that congregations ask themselves: "Are we at the point where we said enough that we are ready and prepared to accept anything our leaders do so long as it adheres to the policies we have set so far? Or do we want to be more specific?" This is what the Policy Development Group and the Board have been asking ourselves as we work through crafting our new Board-Level Policies.

Here's a couple of examples: 1. **Conflict of Interest**. The Board Policy book we are adopting has a section on what constitutes a Conflict of Interest for Board members. (e.g.: If a Board Member has a financial stake in a company we are hiring to work for the Society, they cannot be a part of the group making the hiring decision.) This policy clearly lays out what a conflict is, and what should be done in case such a conflict arises. It's pretty specific. We're fairly sure we won't need any more "bowls" beyond this one. 2. **Finance Committee**. The Board Policy book identifies only VERY broadly the role and function of this Committee of the Board. It is fairly clear that this Committee will need to develop further "bowls" to guide its work. There are, of course, other examples. But this should give you a brief sense of the kinds of policies that we're working on. Ultimately, the function of the policy "bowls" is to



identify the limits beyond which we would find action unacceptable. Within those limits, however, the leaders and members of the Society are free to act.

Planning

The part of Partnership Governance that I'm personally most excited about is the way it facilitates long-term and annual planning. Freed of the need to continually approve staff and volunteer actions (because those folks will be free to act without the Board because of the limits set by the Policy "bowls"!), the Board can focus on plans for implementing our Mission. Every year at the start of the Church Year, Partnership Governance requires the Board to develop 3 key texts that structure the Board's work for the year:

- 1. A short list of Open Questions: This is the basis for planning with the Minister, Staff, and Society. It lays out the big issues that the community sees as ongoing and essential to the Mission. Some examples for us could be things like: growth initiatives, campus ministries, communication improvements.
- 2. A Vision of Ministry: This is a short list of top priority areas where the Society will work in the coming year. It is a good starting point for budgeting and staff planning.
- 3. An annual Ministry Evaluation: This is a check-in on how we did as a Society meeting our previous year's goals.

Then, the Board and Minister are also tasked to undertake an annual, mutual, Performance Evaluation of the Minister's and Board's effectiveness in their respective roles. In addition, every few years the Board (and/or its appointed representatives) evaluates the Minister, creates a Strategic Plan, and updates the Mission statement.

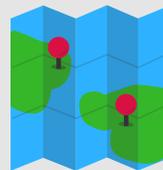
# 4 SIMPLE STEPS FOR BOARD PLANNING

At the start of each church year, Partnership Governance requires the Board to Produce 4 key documents for planning the year's work.



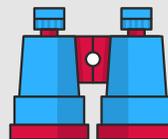
## 1 OPEN QUESTIONS

Determines what are the big picture things we want to work on together.



## 2 VISION OF MINISTRY

Lists the top priority of the Society's goals for the year's ministry work.



## 3 MINISTRY EVALUATION

Assesses how we did on achieving our goals during the previous year.

## 4 PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

The Minister and the Board work together to determine how well each is performing its assigned functions.



**ALL STEPS REQUIRED.**

**ALL STEPS REPEAT ANNUALLY.**

## Implementation

### *Planning*

This past church year (2015-2016), at its annual retreat, the Board crafted a “lite” version of the Vision of Ministry to guide our work. We prioritized revitalizing the RE Program, being welcoming to newcomers, continuing a clear and open budget process, and initiating the transition to Partnership Governance. At our last meeting of the year, we assessed how we did in meeting those goals. The process itself was truly valuable to set an agenda for our year’s activities, and to outline the work we felt was most important. I look forward to doing this again this year, but in a more robust and comprehensive format for the whole Society. In the meantime, be sure to let the Board know what YOU think are the ongoing priorities of the Society. Your input is both welcome and essential!

### *Policies*

You may recall from the first Partnership Governance 101 newsletter, that this summer, the Policy Development Group and the Board are working on the Board Policy manual. To reach back to the Bowl metaphor for policy - this would be the largest mixing bowl in the process. As we develop these policies, we are seeking to both update and upgrade how we do things, as well as adopting policies that reflect our current best practices. These policies will be clearly written down and made readily available electronically to all members and friends of the Society this fall. Be sure to mark your calendars for the two meetings - 1. Presentation of Partnership Governance on Sunday, October 2 at 11:45 am in the Annex. And then the following week, to give you all time to digest and read the policies we will distribute, a time for Questions and Answers about Partnership Governance on Sunday, October 9.

Thanks so much for your attention and for all you do for the First Unitarian Society of Ithaca. Next week, we’ll think about the Ministry side of things and take a closer look at the distinction between “committees” and “teams.”

Cheers-

Laura Free

President of the Board

### **Mark your calendars!**

**Sunday, October 2 @ 11:45 a.m. (Annex): Presenting Partnership Governance (PG)**  
**Sunday October 9 @ 11:45 am (Annex): Got Questions about PG?**

