

Essay Title: Considering Policy Governance®

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IF YOUR GOVERNING BOARD MEETINGS go on way too long, if they get bogged down in congregational minutia, it may be time to consider Policy Governance. Policy Governance is a fundamental redesign of the role of a board. It calls on a board to focus on the organization's vision and goals rather than minutia, and to give staff more freedom in making decisions. The concept was developed and trademarked by business consultant John Carver over the past three decades. Various forms of Policy Governance have been adopted by public and nonprofit boards since then. Many UU congregations have adopted Policy Governance and many more are considering it. It is especially valuable to congregations experiencing growth surges.

Unity Church-Unitarian, St. Paul, Minn. adopted a form of Policy Governance a dozen years ago. "It frees boards to stop being bogged down in day-to-day decisions," says the Rev. Janne Eller-Isaacs, co-minister. "And from making decisions that really should be made by staff. Meetings are about planning and goals. It's been incredibly freeing."

Here are the basic principles of Policy Governance:

- The governing board shifts away from hands-on, day-to-day management and focuses instead on articulating vision, comprehensive policy-making, and oversight.
- Staff and volunteers are empowered to make day-to-day decisions. The board controls staff not by telling them how to do their jobs, but by setting boundaries—defining what's unacceptable—and allowing staff to design their work within those boundaries.

Should you consider Policy Governance? If your governing board agendas are overloaded, if there's unclear accountability and your meetings are interminable, those are good clues," says the Rev. Marge Keip, a Policy Governance advocate who thinks many UU congregations would find it useful. "Policy Governance frees all levels of leadership to fulfill their focused roles. It allows a board to safely empower others and to delegate, insofar as possible, whole jobs. I'd call it shared ministry in the most luminous meaning of that phrase."

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