Inland Northwest
Unitarian Universalist
Community

REFERENCE GUIDE

About the Governing Circle

What it is, what it's responsible for, and how it makes decisions, in plain terms, for anyone in the INUUC community.

PREPARED FOR
INUUC members and friends

GOVERNANCE MODEL
Dynamic Governance (Sociocracy)

SEE ALSO
The Nitty-Gritty (companion guide)

What the Governing Circle Is

The Governing Circle (GC) is INUUC's board of trustees. Under our bylaws, the congregation's vote is the highest authority at INUUC; the GC acts on the congregation's behalf between those votes, within the authority our bylaws and policies give it. Its job, put simply, is to make sure INUUC lives out its mission and keeps faith with our bylaws and our covenant, using the congregation's resources in ways that serve both.

Five to seven trustees serve at a time: a President, a Vice President, a Secretary, and up to four at-large trustees. They're elected by the congregation at our Annual Congregational Meeting each June, to staggered two-year terms, so the Circle never turns over all at once. A trustee appointed to fill a vacancy partway through a term serves the remainder of it, which counts as one of their two consecutive terms.

What It's Responsible For

01 **Setting direction.** An annual Vision of Ministry, an annual Ministry Evaluation, and a Strategic Plan revisited every three to five years.

02 **Supporting the minister and staff.** Hiring, discharge, and supervision of personnel, including the minister, and negotiating the minister's contract and compensation. (Our minister is also an ex-officio, non-voting member of the Governing Circle itself.)

03 **Protecting our finances.** Approving the annual budget each April, requiring two unrelated authorized approvers on any disbursement of $1,000 or more outside of normal payroll or an existing contract, and commissioning a professional financial review at least every three years.

04 **Protecting our property and records.** Insurance, asset protection, and clear procedures for keeping, and eventually retiring, our documents.

05 **Watching for gaps.** Making sure every circle has a clearly defined domain, and that no two circles' domains overlap.

06 **Holding the line on our values.** Nondiscrimination, conflict-of-interest disclosure, and a fair process for addressing behavior that puts people or the congregation at risk.

WHAT IT DOESN'T DO

The Governing Circle governs. It normally delegates day-to-day programming, Sunday morning operations, and volunteer coordination to the Coordinating Circle and INUUC's program circles (Membership, Communications, Family Ministry, Pastoral Care, Soul Weavers, Healthy Community, UUA Connections, Social Justice, and more), concentrating its own attention on governance and oversight. The GC focuses on mission and direction; the rest of the congregation's circles bring that mission to life, each in its own area of responsibility. The circles carry different, clearly defined authority and accountability, but no circle holds power over another: we're together in this, not above or below one another.

Who Serves, and For How Long

COMPOSITION	5 to 7 trustees (ideally 7): President, Vice President, Secretary, and up to 4 at-large trustees
TERM	2 years, renewable once (4 years max), then a required year off before serving again. A partial term filled mid-cycle counts as one full term toward that limit.
ELECTED	At the June Annual Congregational Meeting; seats are staggered, 4 in odd years and 3 in even years
ELIGIBILITY	Any INUUC member in good standing. No special background or experience required
COMPENSATION	None. Trustees may be reimbursed for direct expenses, but the role itself is volunteer

Two related terms are worth untangling here. The **Treasurer** works closely with the Governing Circle and sits on the Finance Circle, but is appointed rather than elected, reports to the Governing Circle, and isn't one of the trustee seats above. **Delegate** isn't a separate seat either, it's a role some sitting trustees carry to link the Governing Circle with Coordinating, Finance, and Leadership Development, so INUUC typically has a few different trustees serving as delegates at the same time, alongside their trustee duties.

How Decisions Get Made

INUUC governs through Dynamic Governance, also called Sociocracy. Within the Governing Circle, and every circle, decisions are made by consent: not necessarily anyone's favorite option, but one that's good enough for now, and safe enough to try. A concern raised along the way is called an objection, and it isn't a veto. It's treated as useful information that makes a decision better before it moves forward. The congregation itself continues to vote the traditional way on the matters our bylaws reserve to it: the budget, major expenditures, property decisions, and bylaw changes.

For the fuller picture, our companion guide, *The Nitty-Gritty: Governing Circle Operations and Dynamic Governance*, walks through the values, the process, and the reasoning behind it.

The Circles Around It

Connected to the Governing Circle

- Coordinating Circle
- Finance Circle (Fundraising, Endowment)
- Leadership Development Circle
- Personnel and the Circle on Ministry

Connected to the Coordinating Circle

- Membership, Communications
- Family Ministry, Pastoral Care
- Soul Weavers, Healthy Community
- UUA Connections, Social Justice

A Typical Rhythm

TWICE A MONTH	The Circle meets in the evening. Meetings are open to all members, except when the Circle enters executive session for personnel or membership matters; decisions made in executive session are still reported and recorded in the open minutes. Each meeting opens with a lit chalice and a check-in round, and closes with gratitudes.
JANUARY & MAY	Circle leaders across INUUC file semiannual written reports on their progress and priorities.
APRIL	The Finance Circle presents the coming year's budget to the Governing Circle.
JUNE	The Annual Congregational Meeting: elections, the budget vote, and the year's Vision of Ministry.
ONGOING	A Strategic Plan is revisited every three to five years; a professional financial review happens at least every three years; the minister's broader pastoral role receives a Triennial Evaluation on its own three-year cycle.

Getting Involved

Serving on the Governing Circle doesn't call for a finance background, a law degree, or years of board experience. It calls for a willingness to show up, listen well, and help hold the whole of our community in view, the process itself is built to make room for exactly that.

If you're curious, talk with any current trustee, or email the Leadership Development Circle at leadershipdevelopment@inuuc.org, any time of year, the LDC welcomes interest and nominations year-round. Ready to serve? Email the Governing Circle at gc@inuuc.org. Elections are held each June at the Annual Congregational Meeting.