

Center for Analytics, Research and Data (CARD)

Mission

To gather and provide data and research for ministry transformation

Vision

To empower and champion innovation and change for a just world for all

Values

Inclusion
Truth-telling
Empowerment

Summary Explanations

Mission: CARD's mission is one which provides both infrastructure support and practical resources for the purpose of transformation in ministry—transformation of individuals and communities through carrying out the UCC's Purpose, Mission, and Vision in the world. Data and research are not merely meant to inform, but rather to transform people, programs, institutions, and communities. This is the *praxis* model of ministry—a continual interplay between reflection and action on data and research as it relates to loving God and neighbor.

Vision: Our hope is that the data we collect, maintain, analyze, and interpret—as well as the tools and resources we create—serve as models and catalysts for innovation and change both within and beyond the denomination. To that end, we strive to champion change by developing an innovative database infrastructure, streamlined data sharing tools, reflective assessment and evaluation resources, and research that fosters informed planning and decision-making. In these ways, our work seeks to bring about justice through inclusive truth-telling (making plain the realities of the past and present) and storytelling (identity formation as a denomination).

Fulfillment of the UCC Purpose, Mission and Vision

The Center for Analytics, Research and Data understands its role and function in relation to the UCC Purpose, Mission and Vision in two major ways:

1. As a lived embodiment of these statements in fulfillment of our team's mission and vision; and
2. As a ministry that provides administrative infrastructure to those individuals and entities that are called to carry out the UCC Purpose, Mission and Vision more directly.

Lived Embodiment

Because of CARD's expression as a ministry function of the United Church of Christ, our very work is both undergirded and carried out with the intention to love God with our heart, mind, soul, and strength and our neighbor as ourselves. In CARD's own unique way, our mission "to gather and provide data and research for ministry transformation" is a commitment to embodying our love of God and others.

In particular, this love of God and neighbor is lived out through our exceptional support of middle judicatories through the maintenance and development of the UCC Data Hub, providing guidance and resources for annual *Yearbook & Directory* data collection, and creating relevant research and statistical reports for ministry decision-making and flourishing. In addition, our support of local churches and ministers by being the holding place for denominational and historical records/data provides a necessary function for the furtherance of God's ministry as expressed through the United Church of Christ.

Moreover, CARD seeks justice and works toward a just world for all by its very gathering, providing, and interpreting of data. The role of data is to demonstrate truth plainly; data tells us who we are and how we are in a matter-of-fact way. Without data and analysis of the data, who and how we are can remain shrouded in mystery and left to individual interpretation. CARD seeks to tell a truthful story—and to share that story with others—through a variety of formats:

- Annual *UCC Yearbook & Directory* production and publication
- Availability of real-time data and information viewing for all through Access UCC
- Location and other information on local churches through Find A Church on ucc.org
- Monthly updates of local church staff changes and deaths on ucc.org, as well as the cataloguing of UCC minister necrologies (in partnership with MESA and the PBUCC)
- Database infrastructure and the development of a shared information network (UCC Data Hub) for all middle judicatories and national entities
- Data reports and preliminary consultation on evaluation/assessment projects to local churches, middle judicatories, and national entities
- Timely statistical reports like the annual *UCC Statistical Profile*, Yearbook reports, Conference reports, and other important research and presentations
- Original and collaborative data collection, analysis, and research reports (e.g., Faith Communities Today, congregational vitality and ministerial excellence, multiply-affiliated congregations, Flourishing in Ministry Project)
- High-impact denominational research for the good of the whole (e.g., Mission: 1, Mission 4/1 Earth, Strategic Visioning Task Force, Giving Task Force)
- A weekly blog with writers from across the life of the church that seeks to investigate ministry issues of importance through research and statistics
- Partnerships with, and participation in, wider ecumenical and interfaith conversations and research on religious life in the U.S. and globally
- Contributions to national setting communication forums such as Facebook/Twitter, Congregations Weekly and United Church News on relevant ministry and statistical topics.

Administrative Infrastructure

In many ways, CARD functions as a backbone which enables all other settings of the United Church of Christ and beyond to carry out their ministries faithfully; in this sense, we provide administrative infrastructure to those who are called to carry out the Purpose, Mission and Vision more directly. Some examples of this include the following:

- Providing data to various national and middle judicatory entities in order to tell a more complete picture of who and how we are (e.g. UCC Annual Reports, Conference Annual Meeting reports, CFO Report to General Synod, statistics for determining General Synod delegate numbers, General Counsel case building, statistics and reports for PBUCC ministerial assistance initiatives, etc.)

- Enabling Conferences and Associations to have basic database infrastructure and use of data for effective ministry (e.g. downloadable reports for local churches, administrative transfer of ministers between judicatories, ministerial professional development and training management, board/committee group management, etc.)
- Empowering Conferences and Associations to utilize data infrastructure (Data Hub) as a tool for middle judicatory administration and communication (e.g. creating data sharing connections for Conference-specific databases, pulling data from the Data Hub to Conference websites, etc.)
- When appropriate, building database infrastructure (within the Data Hub) for direct management by various Covenanted Ministry teams (e.g. ministerial fitness review and military chaplain/pastoral counselor endorsements management by MESA, etc.)
- Maintaining a website of training materials and resources for local churches regarding program evaluation/assessment, survey development, Data Hub use, and annual church data reporting
- Upon request, providing data to educational/non-profit institutions for the production of research that benefits the furtherance of knowledge about U.S. religious life
- Providing preliminary consultations and reviews of surveys and reports for national setting entities and staff, Conferences, and Associations
- Maintaining national contracts and administrative oversight for ministry empowerment tools for wider church use such as MissionInsite and SurveyMonkey
- Offering a forum for national ministries to coordinate data infrastructures through convening the Data Management Table.

Long-Term Impact

Through both the lived embodiment of the UCC Purpose, Mission and Vision and by providing administrative infrastructure to various settings of the church, our mission and vision has been—and continues to be—realized more fully. We hope to continue on this path, as detailed in CARD's Long-Term Impact Plan (2017-2020). These long-term impacts can be summarized in the following four statements:

- *Data Infrastructure:* The UCC Data Hub will be a shared, cutting-edge, flexible yet robust data management system for the whole UCC, thereby creating a solid data infrastructure for ministry transformation.
- *Data Sharing:* The *UCC Yearbook & Directory* and *Access UCC* will be products and services developed in an increasingly simplified and streamlined manner with sustainable returns on investment.
- *Research:* CARD will be engaged in conducting innovative research that positively informs and transforms not only UCC congregations and ministers, but also Christianity, other faith traditions, and the community at large.
- *Assessment and Evaluation:* CARD will foster a culture of assessment among all settings of the church through an empowerment model (versus a direct service model).

A detailed timeline for realizing these impacts has been developed and will be shared with key stakeholders.

Alignment with the Purposes of the UCC National Setting

The purposes of the UCC national setting are two-fold: a) Branding (proclamation); and b) capacity building. CARD uniquely contributes to each of these purposes in important ways.

Branding (Proclamation): First, the data infrastructure, analysis, and interpretation that CARD provides enable the UCC to “tell our story.” Proclamation includes reporting the statistical state of the denomination—essentially, who we are as congregations, participants, and ministers of the UCC. In order for the national setting to communicate our core values to the world, “those core values must be consistent with our identity and serve to support our missional calling” (“Purpose of the National Setting of the UCC,” p. 4). Our identity is not only rooted in facts and figures collected and interpreted by our team, but we do provide foundational pieces that help the UCC to know and understand its past and present identities.

Second, regarding technological infrastructure, CARD has led the way in this area. As stated in the original “Purpose of the National Setting of the United Church of Christ” document:

An ever-expanding and constantly developing technological infrastructure requires a workforce that has a sophisticated and developing sensitivity to the most effective and cost-efficient delivery systems. That delivery system must give the National Setting the capacity both to disseminate meaningful material to our mission partners and to collect essential feedback in real time about the shifting and on-going needs of those partners—as well as the effective impact of any material developed in, for and by the National Setting. (p. 4)

While CARD does not carry out this function in a comprehensive manner since other teams and systems are necessary for this work, our team has led the way in the creation and on-going maintenance/upgrading of an adaptive technological infrastructure (UCC Data Hub) that has increased greatly the capacities of the whole church to engage in its ministry work. This work is ongoing, however; and even greater capacities are envisioned regarding these efforts in coming years.

Finally, CARD continues to orient its work around a “commitment to innovation” (p. 4). Research completed in the last two years by CARD staff has given testimony to this, including reports on 30-Year Projections, Congregational Vitality and Ministerial Excellence, Strategic Visioning, Young Adults, and Multiply-Affiliated Congregations. Also, continually evaluating what data are collected from local congregations and ministers and developing new and better categories to track both participation and impact as a denomination have been at the forefront of CARD’s work in recent years.

Capacity Building: Technological infrastructure is another key facet that fosters the ability of the national setting to build capacities across the church. We are called to “build and maintain the kind of infrastructures and networks of support that assist and facilitate the health, vitality, relevance, and capacity of the church and its covenant partners for the furtherance of mission” (p. 4). Once again, CARD’s leadership in developing a shared information network in the Data Hub, as well as enabling more streamlined data gathering and sharing processes as a result of the Data Hub, has no doubt impacted the mission of the whole denomination. We expect this to continue in coming years as Conferences and national setting entities increasingly seek to connect their database infrastructures with the Data Hub.

In addition, CARD has worked across several other capacity building endeavors through forming partnerships with seminaries and institutions of higher education, participating in the training of Committees of Ministry and Conferences, partnering with other research-focused mission partners to conduct innovative research (thereby positioning the UCC as a relevant institution in the research world), and providing consultation and guidance on assessment resources around theological formation. The work of capacity building is woven into the fabric of CARD, as data sharing and applied research provide infinite possibilities for increased capacities between national, Conference, Association, local church, and even ecumenical, interfaith, and non-religious entities.