

# Social Justice Tending Project Final Report

## Project Overview

Sustain Studio was contracted to facilitate a reflective and participatory alignment process that tended to human connection and lead to clear structures that unlock emergence.

The goal of this project was to help the First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis define the vision and structure needed to determine the staffing and volunteer infrastructure for responsive justice work.

Sustain provided ongoing support and consultation on how to synchronize and deepen social justice work, including facilitating strategic engagements, designing and hosting spaces for nourishment and providing suggestions and support to create clear and easeful work across issue areas.

First Unitarian Society of Minnesota was responsible for connecting Sustain Studio to relevant stakeholders, providing resources and documentation to understand history, and coordinating logistics for strategic engagement opportunities.

This project took place from June 2025 - March 2026 and had three core phases:

### 1. Meeting the Moment Labs

The Meeting the Moment Lab was a series of gatherings designed to support those deeply engaged in social justice work, as well as those seeking meaningful ways to get involved. Each session offered a space for learning, creative expression, and authentic connection — nourishing both the spirit and the collective imagination.

With a unique theme at the heart of each gathering, participants explored social justice through reflection, dialogue, and embodied practices. Specifically, the sessions were as follows:

1. Bending Without Breaking: Navigating the Long Arc of Justice
2. The Work That Is Yours to Do: Finding Your Role in Social Justice
3. We Belong to One Another: Practicing the Art of Solidarity

 [Meeting the Moment Lab Materials Compiled](#)

 [Meeting the Moment Lab On Solidarity Slides.pdf](#)

## 2. Social Justice Alignment Retreat

In September 2025, Sustain Studio conducted exploratory conversations with key social justice stakeholders — many of which chair social justice action teams. These conversations created a snapshot of what is working well, core challenges, and the social justice engagement landscape at FUS.

### What's Working Well in Social Justice at FUS

1. Deep Passion and Values Alignment
2. Historic Track Record of Social Justice Work
3. Strong Grassroots Energy and Initiative
4. High-Impact, Tangible Outcomes
5. Variety of Ways to Participate

### Core Challenges in Social Justice Engagement

1. Lack of Central Coordination and Leadership Continuity
2. Diffused Focus and Limited Strategic Alignment
3. Engagement Gaps and Volunteer Fatigue
4. Communication and Visibility Barriers


### Core Types of Social Justice Work at FUS

1. Direct Service and Mutual Aid
2. Advocacy and Civic Engagement
3. Education and Awareness
4. Fundraising and Resource Redistribution
5. Cross Organization Collaboration

### Current Pathways for Engagement

1. Multiple Entry Points and Flexible Involvement
2. Peer Invitation and Relationship-Based Recruitment
3. Communication Channels and Visibility

Full Detailed Summaries of conversation takeaways on pages 4-6 :

 [FUS Social Justice Retreat Documentation FINAL.pdf](#)

## Social Justice Impact Summary

On October 5, 2025, social justice stakeholders gathered to develop a shared understanding of a collective vision of social justice impact that the First Unitarian Society has and can have as a congregation.

The core forms of impact the group surfaced are the following, in no particular order:

- Identify and generate resources (for social justice)
- Raise our outside voices
- Influence public policy
- Build strategic alliances
- Enhance internal leadership
- Create empowering education opportunities
- Inspire meaningful participation (of congregation in social justice work)
- Celebrate our people + our actions
- Choose compelling projects
- Cultivate internal visibility for social justice projects

The result was recommendations for experiments to try to start addressing social justice alignment. The result was the project in phase 3

### 3. Experiment: Monthly Social Justice Highlight

After honing a menu of options to increase responsiveness and decrease overwhelm in responding to justice needs in the congregation. The following experiment was recommended to try over the coming 2-3 months to start moving the needle.

Purpose: Regularly highlight one social justice project so people can learn what's happening, meet the leaders, and understand clear pathways to get involved.

Activity:

- Once a month (during the Assembly or Mini Meal), feature one project/team.
- Each spotlight includes:
  - 1–2 minute story of the project (“what we’re doing + why it matters”)
  - Who’s leading (names + faces)
  - One clear way to Learn, Support, or Lead
- Provide a simple way to express interest (QR code, clipboard, conversation table).

Learning Goal: Does consistent visibility and storytelling lead to more engagement and help distribute leadership across multiple projects?

[☰ FUS Social Justice Project Monthly Feature](#)

[☰ Monthly Social Justice Highlight Prep Worksheet + Presentation Script](#)

## Takeaways From Experiment

The initial plan for which Social Justice team would present in each month changed due to the escalated ICE presence in Minnesota throughout December 2025 - February 2026, causing a new “immediate response” effort to emerge.

*January:* Active Voices ▶ Active Voices

*February:* Refugee Support ▶ Immediate Response

*March:* An Emerging Project (TBD) ▶ Immediate Response

This meant that only Active Voices moved through the originally laid out process and were highlighted in January 2026. From feedback with the core organizers of Active Voices, they reflected that this effort increased visibility for their work, but did not result in an influx of new members.

The Immediate Response effort seemed to build energy and momentum, creating a new pathway for otherwise unengaged congregants to plug into social justice work at FUS. Due to this momentum, it was decided to maintain “immediate response” as the focus for both February and March 2026.

Ultimately, this effort helped increase visibility for social justice work at FUS, gave leaders the opportunity to be recognized for their work, and created a structure through which new efforts could emerge and build momentum.

## Final Recommendations

Based on the work completed so far, the relationships built, and the impact statements surfaced during the retreat, the following recommendations aim to build on existing efforts and strengthen FUS’ social justice impact in the context of the evolving Twin Cities landscape. The recommendations are organized to move from clarifying priorities to enabling coordinated action.

*There is a need for more prioritization across social justice efforts to create clear impact.*

### 1. Establish an Annual Social Justice Prioritization Process

Establish a yearly process to identify and affirm a set of shared social justice priorities for the congregation. These priorities would help focus energy, guide programming, and ensure alignment across different groups working on justice-related efforts.

**Decision Point:** A clearly designated person or group should be responsible for determining the congregation’s social justice priorities each year. This body would gather input from relevant stakeholders, guide the discernment process, and ultimately determine the direction for the congregation’s social justice work.

### 2. Use Impact Statements as a Framework for Prioritization

Use the congregation’s impact statements from the retreat as a filter for determining which initiatives align most closely with the congregation’s priorities. This framework can help groups assess how their work contributes to the larger mission and guide decisions about where to invest time and resources.

*There is a need for more synchronized coordination across social justice efforts to reduce miscommunication and increase alignment.*

### **3. Designate a Social Justice Coordinator Role**

Identify a core staff member or dedicated volunteer to serve as a social justice coordinator. This role would:

- Track ongoing initiatives across the congregation
- Support communication between groups
- Help steward the annual priority-setting process
- Ensure momentum and alignment across different efforts

Even as stakeholders generated a range of creative alternatives to this role, this point surfaced repeatedly in conversations with those involved in social justice work at FUS.

### **4. Revitalize a Cross-Congregational Justice Council**

Form a revitalized council (potentially under a new name) composed of representatives from different justice-focused groups. This body would:

- Meet periodically to coordinate efforts and share updates
- Align activities with the annual priorities
- Support collaboration across social justice initiatives
- Help shape the rhythm of the congregation's social justice engagement throughout the year

*There is a need for clear communication about social justice efforts with the congregation to increase engagement pathways to get involved.*

### **5. Use a “Social Justice Highlight” Rhythm Throughout the Year**

Continue the rotating highlight process that elevates different justice priorities at different points in the year. This can help pace congregational focus, build awareness, and create opportunities for deeper engagement.

### **6. Make Impact Areas Visible Through Organizational “Tags”**

To help members understand how different initiatives connect to the congregation's priorities, consider labeling or “tagging” projects by impact area and tactic. These tags could also be reflected on the website to make it easier to see what kinds of justice work different groups are doing and how they connect to shared priorities.

### **7. Focus on High-Energy Engagement Pathways**

Prioritize activities that generate strong engagement, such as:

- Fundraising for aligned causes
- Direct service opportunities
- Partnerships with community organizations
- Civic and political engagement (e.g., calling representatives, attending demonstrations)
- Educational programming such as book groups, speakers, and learning events.