
Data Governance Charter

Data Services Department
General Council on Finance and Administration
The United Methodist Church

Document Status: Draft

Version: 2.0

Date: December 15, 2025

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1. Introduction –

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this Charter is to define the guiding framework, principles, and responsibilities for Data Governance within the Data Services Department of the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) of The United Methodist Church.

As the administrative agency entrusted with supporting the Church’s mission, GCFA recognizes that **data is a God-given asset and resource**—a sacred trust to be managed with integrity, transparency, and care. Reliable data enables the Church to make **strategic, faithful decisions** that advance disciple-making and mission across the connection.

Data Governance at GCFA ensures **availability, usability, integrity, and security** of denominational data. This includes compliance with *The Book of Discipline*, connectional policies, and applicable legal requirements. Our work directly supports the **Five Areas of Focus**:

1. **Making New Disciples in New Places** – Informing where new ministries are emerging and directing resources to communities ready for new discipleship
2. **Leading Where God Calls** – Equipping leaders with trusted, timely insights to discern calling and respond faithfully across the connection.
3. **Overcoming Poverty Together** – Aligning ministries through shared data to target need, strengthen collaboration, and measure collective impact
4. **Seeking Health and Wholeness for All** – Providing accurate data for health-related mission impact.
5. **Dismantling Racism** – Ensuring reliable reporting to protect and nurture children.

In addition to these guiding principles, our **purpose** is guided by The United Methodist Church's *Book of Discipline*.

¶ 606. Records and Archives—

1. The annual conference shall keep an exact record of its proceedings according to the forms provided by the General, jurisdictional, and central conferences. If there are no archives of the annual conference, the secretary shall keep the bound copy or copies or a digital version to be handed on to the succeeding secretary. The conference shall send to its jurisdictional conference or central conference copies of the minutes of the quadrennium for examination.

2. Each annual conference shall send without charge to the General Council on Finance and Administration, Wespeth, the General Commission on Archives and History, the Central Conference or Jurisdictional Commission on Archives and History, and the Annual Conference Commission on Archives and History two printed copies or a digital version of its annual journal. In addition, the annual conference shall send one printed copy or a digital version of its annual journal to the Connectional Table and one printed copy or a digital version to United Methodist Communications. If available, one copy of a digital version of the journal shall be sent to the General Commission on Archives and History and one copy to United Methodist Communications.

3. The annual conference may form a committee on journal publication. The annual conference journal shall include the following divisions, in the following order:

- a) Officers of annual conference,*
- b) Boards, commissions, committees; rolls of conference members,*
- c) Daily proceedings,*
- d) Business of the annual conference report (formerly known as the disciplinary questions),*
- e) Appointments,*

f) Reports as ordered by the annual conference,

g) Annual report of the district superintendents, if any.

h) Memoirs as ordered by the annual conference following the guidelines of the General Commission on Archives and History,

i) Roll of dead-deceased clergy members,

j) Historical,

k) Miscellaneous,

l) Pastoral record (including the records of accepted local pastors in such manner as the conference may determine),

m) Statistics,

n) Index.

4. An annual conference in the United States and Puerto Rico shall include in its journal a list of the deaconesses and missionaries, clergy and lay, active and retired, who have gone from the conference into mission service or who are presently serving in such capacity within the bounds of the annual conference.

5. The annual conference journal shall include a listing of the consecrated diaconal ministers and their service records.

6. The secretary, treasurer, or other administrative officer named by the annual conference shall keep a complete service record of ordained and diaconal ministry personnel in the annual conference. Service records shall include but not be limited to biographical information supplied by the individual, a list of appointments, and a record of annual conference actions with regard to conference relationships. In addition to service records, the secretary, treasurer, or other administrative officer named by the annual conference shall keep descriptions of circumstances related to changes in conference relationships, credentials surrendered to the bishop or district superintendent, and confidential trial records.

7. The local church report to the annual conference shall be submitted on the prescribed forms no later than thirty days following the close of the calendar year. If the annual conference sets an earlier deadline for receiving the reports, the earlier deadline shall apply.

8. Official records of secretaries, statisticians, and treasurers shall be kept according to the forms prepared by the General Council on Finance and Administration so that official statistical and financial items shall be handled alike in all annual conferences and that uniformity of reporting shall be established as a worldwide church policy.

9. All records of candidates and ordained and diaconal ministry personnel maintained by the conference secretary, treasurer, or other administrative officer named by the annual conference, Board of Ordained Ministry, board of pensions, and the district committee on ordained ministry are to be kept on behalf of the annual conference in conformity with guidelines provided by the General

Council on Finance and Administration, in consultation with the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry and Wespath, and the following principles:

a) The annual conference is the owner of its personnel records and files;

b) Individuals in whose name a record is kept shall have access to the information contained in a record or file, with the exception of surrendered credentials and information for which a right-of-access waiver has been signed;

c) Access to unpublished records by persons other than the bishop, district superintendent, conference secretary, treasurer,

or other administrative officer or the Board of Ordained Ministry,

through its chair, board of pensions, through its chair, the district

committee on ordained ministry, through its chair, counsel for the

Church, and committee on investigation, through its chair, shall

require written consent of the person in whose name a record is

kept; access to trial records shall be governed by the provisions of

¶¶ 2712.5, 2713.5.56

This Charter will be reviewed annually. Any updates must be recommended by the Connectional Outreach Committee and approved by GCFA's Board of Directors.

1.2 Scope

The GCFA Data Governance Charter provides:

- A **Vision** of data as a ministry asset that advances the Church's mission.
- A **Mission Statement** emphasizing stewardship and confidence in data integrity.
- Defined **capabilities, roles, and responsibilities** for implementing governance practices.
- Oversight structures to ensure accountability, transparency, and connectional collaboration.

1.3 Audience

This Charter is intended for:

- Connectional Outreach Committee and GCFA Board Members
- GCFA Executive Leadership

- The Data Services Department
 - Data owners, stewards, and custodians throughout the connection
 - Any stakeholder responsible for or engaged in the creation, management, or use of denominational data.
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2. Vision

Our vision is that **data will be recognized and managed as a sacred and strategic ministry asset**—accurate, secure, and readily available—so leaders across The United Methodist Church can make **evidence-based decisions that faithfully steward resources and advance the mission**.

This vision ensures:

- **Clarity** – through a shared business glossary defining critical data elements.
 - **Consistency** – standard processes and definitions across the connection.
 - **Compliance** – safeguarding data in accordance with Church policy and law.
 - **Confidence** – enabling leaders to trust the data they use for ministry decisions.
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3. Mission Statement

The mission of GCFA's Data Governance program is to ensure confidence in the integrity of our data so that it can be used faithfully and strategically in the stewardship of God-given resources—empowering leaders to make informed decisions that advance the Church's Five Areas of Focus and fulfill our calling to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

4. Approach

Core Principles

- **Data as a Ministry Asset** – Treated with the same care as other resources entrusted to the Church.
- **Collaborating with Data Creators and Consumers** – Working with data creators and consumers to meet the needs of the connection, keep stakeholders informed, reduce administrative burden, and support shared standards and a cohesive roadmap across the connection.
- **Faithful Stewardship** – Processes rooted in responsibility to God and the connection.
- **Transparency and Accountability** – Clearly defined roles and open processes.
- **Quality and Consistency** – Ongoing monitoring and improvement of data accuracy.

- **Security and Compliance** – Protection of sensitive data, ensuring privacy and legal adherence.

The approach will prioritize critical denominational data sources, including statistical reporting, financial and apportionment data, clergy and church records, and program-specific mission data.

The **denominational data glossary** will serve as the Church's **single source of truth** for data definitions. The Data Services Department, together with stakeholders, will curate and maintain this glossary, ensuring alignment with GCFA and UMC priorities.

The **Connectional Outreach Committee** will approve priorities and provide executive sponsorship and removal of roadblocks and barriers requiring a denominational lens. **GCFA's Executive Team**, including the General Secretary, will provide sponsorship, oversight, budget approval, removal of administrative roadblocks and participate in the visioning process along with DGO to ensure the vision is well crafted and well communicated. The **Data Services Department** will serve as the enabling body, providing tools, training, coordination, customer service, and oversight. The Data Services Department will actively seek feedback and collaboration with stakeholders to ensure consistent, robust understanding of data from inception to consumption.

5. Oversight and Enablement

5.1 Connection Outreach Committee

Purpose:

According to the GCFA Board Charter, the Connectional Outreach Committee exists to make recommendations to GCFA on matters that will:

- encourage, enable and evaluate relationships and connections of GCFA with affiliated groups, agencies, conferences and local churches in their efforts to fulfill the Church's mission;
- facilitate and assist annual conferences and local churches in the areas of stewardship and administration, by providing software, data services, research, consulting, and training; and
- interpret the agency's work and develop specific recommendations concerning the responsibilities of GCFA as a connectional body.

Meetings:

- Once a quarter, in conjunction with GCFA Board Meetings and as needed on monthly Board call.

5.2 GCFA Executive Team

Purpose:

- Provide strategic direction to the Data Services Department.
- Champion a Connection-wide, data-driven culture.

- Ensure governance aligns with the Church’s mission and Five Areas of Focus.
- Approve enterprise-wide policies and resolve governance-related conflicts, or choose when to escalate to the Connectional Outreach Committee.
- Require the safeguard sensitive and confidential data.
- Monitor performance metrics and remediate risks.
- Avoid mission creep and stays within the bounds of the charter.

Meetings:

- Discuss Data-governance related progress and organizational shifts in data handling, usage, and governance throughout the organization monthly.
- Agendas will include updates, strategy review, policy approval, success metrics, and adverse data event reviews.

Membership:

- Chief Information Officer (Chair)
- General Secretary
- Chief Human Resources and Training Officer
- Chief Relationship Officer
- Chief Financial Officer
- Chief Communications Officer
- General Counsel
- GCFA Department Directors (as applicable)
- Data Governance Lead
- Invited subject matter experts as needed

5.3 Data Services Department at GCFA

Purpose:

- Collect and maintain the denomination’s official data per *The Book of Discipline*.
- Develop and maintain a system of data governance, including both strategy and a roadmap to guide in this ministry’s work.
- Promote data literacy across the connection.
- Enhance data quality, transparency, and accessibility.

- Support compliance, security, and privacy standards.
 - Facilitate term curation, denominational data glossary updates, and reporting.
 - Remove barriers to effective data use.
 - Responsible for Connection-wide communication regarding data as an asset, including the development and maintenance of denomination data definitions and related quality and integrity issues, deadlines, and appropriate trainings.
 - Coordinate success metrics reporting to the GCFA Executive Team.
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5.4 Data Consumers and Providers

Purpose:

- Provide feedback on definitions and usage and maintain domain-specific data quality.
- Participate in surveys and other requests for information that serve to strengthen the unity and usage of denominational data
- Monitor and report adverse events and implement corrective actions.
- Provide input on infrastructure, tools, and standards.
- Submit timely and accurate data within mandated timeframes in accordance with due dates and definitions outlined throughout this charter.

Membership:

- Data Owners and Stewards by domain
 - Data Custodians
 - Information Security Representatives
 - Compliance Officers
 - Architects and Analysts as needed
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6.0 Conclusion

The Data Governance Charter establishes the foundational vision, mission, and structure necessary to steward denominational data as a sacred ministry asset. Through clearly defined roles, collaborative processes, and a commitment to quality, security, and transparency, GCFA affirms that data is essential to faithfully advancing the mission of The United Methodist Church.

By aligning governance practices with the Church's core values and the Five Areas of Focus, this Charter ensures that leaders across the connection can rely on accurate, consistent, and well-

curated information. The shared glossary, oversight model, and ongoing commitment to improvement create a unified approach that strengthens connectional ministry, reduces administrative burden, and promotes clarity in decision-making.

As this Charter is reviewed annually, all stakeholders, including the Connectional Outreach Committee, GCFA Executive Team, Data Services Department, and data consumers and providers, share the responsibility of upholding and refining these standards. Together, we ensure that our data practices reflect faithful stewardship, support the health and vitality of our ministries, and empower leaders to make informed decisions for the transformation of the world.