

Challenges and Opportunities in Building Human and Financial Capital for the Jewish Community in the 21st Century

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Social work and community organization practice continue to occupy a central place in the life of Jewish communal organizations, which are dedicated to the provision of educational and social welfare services as the core of their mission. To achieve this mandate, the fundamental requirement remains the marshalling of human and financial resources to respond to evolving challenges and opportunities. Communal institutions are challenged to adapt to new realities in their efforts to build the necessary capital to advance their stated mission.

To understand the nature and extent of the changes affecting Jewish federations, one need only recall the Jewish world our parents and grandparents knew—the one that still prevails in some communities across North America. Under this traditional model, federations served as “taxing agencies” for the Jewish community, and it could be assumed that most Jews would give to the annual campaign according to their means. Jewish support for Jewish charity was natural and automatic. Jewish organizations in general were set up to respond to crises and imperatives, and giving was therefore regarded as obligatory.

The traditional federation model encouraged unrestricted giving to a central pot, a “community chest,” as the most efficient and effective way to raise and allocate resources. There were few opportunities for segmented or designated giving. The focus—and the message to the community—under this system was the undeniable social service needs of clients and the unquestionable needs of Israel and of distressed communities principally throughout Europe.

Federations solicited community members by articulating how the system would meet the pressing needs. The message infrequently emphasized the needs of donors. It was more the pragmatics of confronting harsh realities of the time.

Today, federations can no longer rely on Jews to support their annual campaign as a matter of instinctive obligation. With the erratic nature of Jewish affiliation and the increasing options open to Jews to give and become involved in charities of whatever type, federations and other Jewish communal institutions now face intensified competition for the Jewish philanthropic dollar and interest. The 21st-century federation is increasingly seen as just another player in a crowded philanthropic field.

Younger donors especially are more interested in personalized, decentralized giving. They seek opportunities to support specific projects or causes of interest to them. This signals a shift away from an attitude of community to one of individualism or particularism. There is also a rise of benevolent self-interest or “what’s in it for me.” For the community organizer, this represents a disturbing shift that must be addressed or potentially it could tear away at the very fabric of what social workers and Jewish professionals hold dear—the interconnectedness and support of one human being to another. Simply put, it undermines the concept of community.

More and more Jewish individuals and families today have unprecedented wealth, both self-made and inherited. Connecting with this enormous transfer of wealth presents one of the greatest community organization and fundraising challenges and

activities, to ensure continuity of effort after their return from Israel. Working in conjunction with Hillel, we must redouble our efforts on post-trip integration. *birthright Israel*, successful as it has been, is the “door opener.” We must also recruit *birthright* alumni, most of whom want to return to Israel, and others for MASA, the partnership between UJC, the Jewish Agency, and the State of Israel to promote longer term study in Israel.

2. This year we are celebrating the 40th anniversary of the beginning of the Soviet Jewry movement and the 20th anniversary of the historic rally in Washington that helped open the gates for Soviet Jews to leave. It was largely through the actions of the collectivity of the Jewish people that well over a million and a half Jews engaged in an exodus that has changed Israel forever and enriched the lives of Diaspora Jewish communities, particularly the United States. We in MetroWest, together with our network of resettlement agencies, HIAS, synagogues, and elected officials, will celebrate this milestone by hosting a community event for all former Soviet Jewish refugees and émigrés. This event will also serve to reconnect many of these families to our community fabric. Our celebration of these events reinforces the notion that collectively we can literally achieve miracles.
3. We will soon be celebrating the 60th anniversary of Israel. We should use this opportunity to showcase Israel’s achievements in medicine, technology, business, and culture despite being involved in 60 years of unceasing wars and hatred. We should ensure that Israel in 2008 is at the center of our Jewish peoplehood efforts.

4. Israel, her neighbors, and the West are facing an existential threat from Iran. We must galvanize our efforts, just as we have done for Darfur, in confronting the Iranian issue as the ominous problem of our time. Alliances built around Darfur should be leveraged for this issue; our Jewish communities must unite to effectively engage in this important challenge. The recent National Intelligence Estimate, which understated the Iranian threat, makes our advocacy efforts that much more important.

5. We must educate the educators about the Jewish peoplehood agenda. Makom, an initiative of the Jewish Agency, has helped a number of communities put Israel first and foremost on the Jewish educational agenda. This effort must be supplemented by the promotion of Jewish peoplehood for teachers, the rabbinate, communal professionals, and *birthright* participants and alumni.

We must all, therefore, include the *K'lal Yisrael* agenda in our curricula, sermons, language, activities, and mission. We must help people in their journey of Jewish identity, a journey that takes them as individuals to the joys of Jewish family, to the purpose of Jewish community, and to the pride of Jewish peoplehood—the recognition that we are all indispensable parts of *K'lal Yisrael*.

The glory of Jewish peoplehood cannot be imposed from above, but must be taught, person by person. Clearly we all have a role to play in imparting this message—whether as members of families, federations, agencies, synagogues, or Jewish organizations. While our activities should never be uniform, we must be united in confronting the essential challenges facing our Jewish people, conceptually and in deeds.

opportunities of the 21st century. Yet, the opportunities for leadership and “high profile” recognition are somewhat limited under the traditional model of centralized, unrestricted “community chest” giving. To capture this transfer of wealth, therefore, new opportunities must be created for involvement, recognition, and communal leadership beyond the traditional model that has driven the federation system for more than 100 years.

Yet, for Jewish federations, the principal revenue development stream must nevertheless continue to be the annual campaign! Its role is critically important for three important reasons. First, it is a core Jewish value to contribute to the community on behalf of the community. In other words, responsibility to community is a sacred covenant. Jewish communal professionals need to aggressively integrate this Jewish value into all aspects of community building work. Second, the annual campaign is the premier community-building event, which gets people involved and committed and talking to one another about matters of importance. It is through this community organizing principle of the annual campaign that diverse community members come together to engage in dialogue about issues and share different viewpoints. The federation’s annual campaign model presents the most inclusive community-building endeavor in Jewish life. Political, religious, cultural, economic, and social differences are set aside for the greater good of the community. Lastly, every Jewish community will still have to deal with unforeseen emergencies and opportunities. In an environment that requires quick but deliberate response, the annual campaign provides lay and professional leadership the flexibility and access to act on behalf of the community with relative speed and efficiency. Having every dollar designated or leveraged dampens that ability.

Federations in the 21st century are challenged to strike a balance: they must provide greater opportunities for individualized giving while continuing to emphasize

the importance of the annual “non-designated” campaign. In essence, they must emphasize the primacy of community and then drill down from there to individual preferences. The roadmap for each community and/or institution in achieving this dynamic must be deliberate and disciplined. In other words, each action has a reaction and must be thought out relative to implications.

What, then, is the proper course for a Jewish federation that wishes to remain viable in today’s rapidly changing philanthropic world?

First, federations should recognize that human and financial resource development are interdependent, and significant attention must be devoted to both efforts. Our task must be to articulate and demonstrate a value proposition to the next generation of Jews who have choices, as their ancestors may not have, to opt into Jewish life instead of opting out.

Achieving this task requires that the federation’s message to the community be based on hard data, analysis, a recommended and negotiated direction, Jewish values, and Jewish outcomes. Funders, clinicians, community workers, lay and professional leadership, synagogues and other stakeholders need to come together around desired communal outcomes and dreams. Anecdotal stories about people in need may continue to move many hearts, but today’s donors demand evidence and accountability. Strategic thinking around planning, resource development, and donor involvement is a must for any nonprofit. Donors want to know that there is efficacy, utility, and reach in their investment of human and financial capital. Attention also needs to be paid to elements that distinguish one nonprofit from the other. In the case of federations, the emphasis on the totality of the Jewish people is a distinguishing factor. Simply put, all are welcome under the federation tent. The agenda is so expansive, so inclusive that opportunities for participation are only limited by one’s imagination.

Toward this end, THE ASSOCIATED: Jew-

ish Community Federation of Baltimore in 2006 convened a “Visioning Task Force” to undertake a thorough, wide-ranging analysis of emerging trends in the Baltimore Jewish community and suggest appropriate responses around the “Peoplehood/Community” agenda. The task force emerged with a series of data-driven recommendations for improved organizational efficiencies and, more importantly, strategic community priorities and benchmarked goals relevant to the Baltimore Jewish community. As a result, the federation is able to offer data-based evidence of need and, most important, to demonstrate “return on investment.”

Indeed, in an era of choice, giving is no longer a tax, but in many respects is an investment. Borrowing financial services jargon, the annual campaign serves as a mutual fund and offers its donor-shareholders leveraged results that support and invigorate the breadth of the Jewish experience. As with mutual investment funds, the annual campaign affords its donors far greater impact than could be accessed individually. Yet, as with for-profit investors—even in mutual funds—donors must have a “prospectus”; they must be able to understand and evaluate the “investment strategy” and have confidence that the managers will be able to achieve their philanthropic-investment goals.

In addition to crafting a message based on hard data and analysis, federations should ensure that their message speaks not only to the needs of the community and its service recipients but also to the interests and values of their donors in advancing a shared vision. In other words, the federation should be prepared to demonstrate a dual purpose: to move forward a shared agenda *and* to help the donor find appropriate outlets for his or her philanthropic hopes and desires.

Federations should seek creative ways to involve and empower individuals in their own philanthropic “planning and visioning” through “market of one” strategies. Examples include the following:

Expanding opportunities for targeted giving over and above support of a “community chest” model for a defined donor population appropriate for that community and/or institution. Today’s donors, especially among the emerging generation, often wish to target their gifts to specific causes of interest to them. While every donor should be encouraged—indeed, expected—to support the annual campaign, sufficient opportunities for targeted supplemental giving should be widely and strategically available and embraced. In addition, it is important that federations and other nonprofits actively solicit individual donors’ ideas and involvement in decision making and strengthen lay-professional collaborations. Essentially, donors become part of the community’s planning process.

Connecting people to volunteerism and direct service opportunities. Promoting hands-on involvement in the community is one of the most effective ways for a federation to demonstrate value. THE ASSOCIATED has established a new agency—the Jewish Volunteer Connection (JVC)—to encourage community members not only to fund needed services but also to be intimately involved in the provision of those services, to be donors of time not only of money. Like most other federations, THE ASSOCIATED traditionally raised funds and then reported to the community about how we spent their dollars. By getting people involved in JVC, now we show them what we do with our collective resources and allow them to add their “sweat and intellectual equity” to their monetary contribution, which enhances their sense of ownership and inclination to make further investments. The power of volunteerism at every level—whether it is sending groups of adults and teens to help with reconstruction in New Orleans or sending families to Odessa, a city-to-city twinning effort with Baltimore, or to volunteer in Israel in Baltimore’s partnership city of Ashkelon, or to mentor inner-city schoolchil-

dren in Baltimore—all empower people to witness and internalize that our federation not only has the vision but also the professional and volunteer leadership to successfully manage, implement, evaluate, and produce meaningful results.

Involving donors at all levels. Several years ago, THE ASSOCIATED established the Center for Funds and Foundations, whose purpose is to serve the needs of donors who have established philanthropic funds and support foundations through the federation. In addition to providing the usual range of administrative services, the Center works to find creative ways to connect individual philanthropists with giving opportunities in the community and beyond. Similarly, the Center encourages collaboration among multiple funders, further demonstrating the power of the collective, and by extension, the community.

At what may appear to be the opposite end of the spectrum, our Teen Leadership Council works with adolescents to involve them in the annual campaign and in hands-on community service. Participants in the Teen Leadership Council gain exposure to the federation's top leadership and an early understanding of the community's needs and priorities. We regard this as an essential investment in our future: today's Teen Leadership Council members are the annual campaign chairs in the year 2020 and beyond.

In an effort to involve donors at all levels, it is also important to emphasize social and business networking as a way of keeping people connected and involved. THE ASSOCIATED annually sponsors a wide variety of events, from seminars on investment in Israel to wealth management strategies for women, to conferences on raising healthy children in 2008 and beyond, intended to deliver content and foster networking and connections through the community. In other words, we deliver relevance and meaning to our donors in their daily lives.

Improving donor stewardship by fostering

and strengthening relationships. Here again, federations would do well to borrow from best business practices and build a "customer for life" mentality. This means making an effort to provide donors with meaningful roles and thanking, honoring, and recognizing them for their contributions. Nonprofits need to be mindful that fundraising is a relationship-based endeavor and that a short-term gain could translate into a long-term loss if people are not treated with dignity, respect, and value.

Understanding the 21st-century donor. To empower individuals through a "market of one" strategy, it is necessary to understand 21st-century donors. As suggested briefly above, people's attitudes today are in many respects very different from their parents and grandparents. The first step toward understanding today's market is to recognize that times are different; not paying attention to this fact can result in slow and painful organizational atrophy.

In a case study conducted in 1999 by the Harvard School of Business on the Willow Creek Church (Chicago) and its outreach strategies, analysts contend that people fall roughly into two groups: "seekers" and "believers." These are useful distinctions, but again, the federation system or nonprofits in general should not judge where people present on the continuum. In other words, "seekers" are "believers" waiting for compelling reasons to participate. The federation should work to develop appropriate strategies for invigorating and stewarding all who desire a communal connection. The community organizers must always strive to empower individuals to realize their full potential. With a greater connection comes a pronounced investment of time and money. The lesson of Willow Creek is not to mistake structure for mission. We must recognize that today's seekers may never come through precisely the same doors our veteran donors did, but we can build with them

new entry points through which they will carry on the same timeless mission.

None of these recommendations can be implemented overnight, and no one should adopt them in the expectation of immediate results. Success depends on one final, essential ingredient: the development of a patient, deliberate, coherent, value-based, long-term perspective. Federations must be willing to make an investment in the future, even if there are few present rewards. THE ASSOCIATED'S Teen Leadership Council represents just such an investment. The seeds we are planting now will bear substantial fruit for our community in the future.

Federations must resist the temptation to focus on short-term gains, however lucrative. Taking the long view, planning for the future, and building relationships will secure the community's future and vibrancy. Once the necessary groundwork has been laid by building trust, relationships, value, and vision, then the federation is in a strong

position to ask its donors for capacity investment. Supporters and potential supporters alike will understand at that point that unfunded dreams will always remain mere dreams.

In conclusion, the philanthropic playing field today is extremely competitive, and Jewish federations and all Jewish communal organizations must be prepared to participate as major players, recognizing new rules and new realities. Both in North America and in Israel, the number of new nonprofit organizations is growing exponentially, and Jewish organizations can no longer stake claim on Jewish donors. Nonprofits are challenged to demonstrate that they have a sound business plan, accountability, and a focus on the needs of an emerging generation. Today more than ever before, community organization is about working hard, building relationships, envisioning our future, and responding to emerging challenges and opportunities.