



Opportunities



Around:

Federations Building Effective Jewish Engagement



Documentation of JFNA's FedEngage! Think Tank

AUGUST 2017

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Opportunities Abound: Federations Building Effective Jewish Engagement Documentation of JFNA's FedEngage! Think Tank

As the North American Jewish landscape unquestionably evolves, there are a wide range of perspectives about what the future holds for Jewish life here.

What does the national landscape look like at the moment? We're part of a massive shift in Jewish life. Our core and historic institutions and the places where great education happens—day schools, congregational schools, camps, and youth groups—are all searching for ways to engage more people.

We know from the 2013 study by the Pew Research Center, A Portrait of Jewish Americans, that we have a significant population of Jews in North America—and non-Jews in Jewish families—who are not participating in our organized Jewish communities or involving themselves in traditional Jewish behaviors. But we also know from that study that they feel deeply Jewish. Their Jewish pride is high, but their knowledge is low, including their knowledge of the kinds of Jewish journeys they want to craft for themselves.

We believe that Jewish Federations are perfectly poised to meet the needs of this rapidly changing Jewish reality.

These principles framed FedEngage!, an action-oriented think tank convened in November 2016 by The Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA). More than 100 Federation professionals, along with other professionals who practice Jewish engagement and/or education, and Federation volunteer leaders, came together on the heels of the 2016 JFNA General Assembly to share their experiences and to learn together.

FedEngage! showcased a series of experiences that modeled engagement activities—interspersed with speakers sharing their insights and “engagement tricks of the trade”—followed by reflection on the design principles that formed the foundation of that experience. As we learned, we sought to answer some big questions: What are the changing dynamics of North American Jewish life? What does effective Jewish engagement look like today? What is Federation's role in the engagement business? How do Federations plan and implement effective Jewish engagement?

As we joined together to search for answers, we steadfastly believed—as we do today—that Federations can help offer meaningful Jewish experiences to all segments of our community, through outreach, planning, grant making, and direct programming.

FedEngage! affirmed for us that we are in fact offering a lot, and to a lot of different people. Jewish engagement when done right, first and foremost, empowers individuals to decide and act on what they want to add to their lives.

Opportunities Abound. It is our pleasure to offer this new publication imbued with optimism and the core belief that effective Jewish engagement catalyzed and supported by Jewish Federations can help make Judaism a personal, authentic experience, rich with meaning and value. Effective Jewish engagement is a catalyst for deep and personal relationships that individuals have with each other and that individuals have with their Jewish community at large.

This documentation is designed to be used by Federation professionals and others who want to effectively engage people in Jewish experiences and build a methodical, sustaining strategy around this Jewish engagement. As opposed to just sharing a laundry list of details of program models, we have tried to tell a story—to weave together key tactics and strategies from the numerous models discussed at FedEngage!

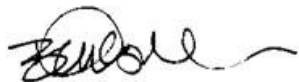
We don't claim to have all of the answers to solve the modern riddle that is Jewish engagement. Adapt these strategies, approaches, and models in ways that work for your community and are in line with your goals. If you're a professional, share what we share with other members of your team. Get their feedback, and see what they think will work best.

We express special gratitude for the David S. and Karen A. Shapira Foundation for sponsoring FedEngage! and for the expertise of The Jewish Education Project, which helped us design the 24 hours we had together. We can and will strengthen our North American Jewish future through collaboration, conversation, and experimentation.

Enjoy, and we hope to work with your community soon!!



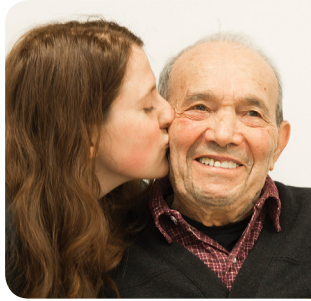
Ann B. Pava
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FedEngage! at a glance

Some of the key concepts and ideas shared at FedEngage! and discussed in this documentation include the following.



BUILD AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS.

Compel people toward Jewish engagement through the safety of a friend and mentor. Help them explore Jewish life within a community.



FOLLOW THROUGH.

Build continuous relationships—don't let an invitation come out of the blue. Help them along their Jewish journeys by reaching out and sustaining ongoing engagement in Jewish opportunities.



DESIGN FOR COMMUNITY.

Help people develop Jewish community by consciously building it. Introduce them to each other—make any program or class also a chance for people to know one another intimately. Help them learn each other's stories. Build informal, ongoing communities—playgroups and havurot and 21st-century clubs.



BE RELEVANT, MEANINGFUL, SACRED.

Generate content that is deeply relevant to people's lives. Be valuable to them; create opportunities that are personally significant, worthy of their time, and embedded in their rhythms and interests. Get engagees to the most sacred, most important, and most engaging questions and issues in their lives.



MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE.

Create Jewish experiences wherever life occurs—at home, in cafés, at parks, and elsewhere. Do not simply wait for people to walk into institutional walls. Similarly, meet them where they are figuratively on their life journey, accounting for their emotional and spiritual feelings and beliefs.



FACILITATE OWNERSHIP.

Empower people to live their Jewish lives independently, on their own terms. Help them experiment directly with Judaism in a safe place, with a mentor/teacher and with others in the same stage of Jewish analysis or travel as they are.



CREATE PEER-TO-PEER ENGAGEMENT.

Enable peers to engage their peers. Help them validate and support each other and use their own stories as a demonstration that Jewish growth is possible, even for people on the fringe of Jewish life.



BUILD DEEP PARTNERSHIPS.

Be an unselfish organization. Share resources and important learnings whenever possible. If a community member isn't the right fit for your offerings, help them find another organization that suits them best. In nearly every effective engagement model, some degree of organizational cooperation is a component.



WHOLE PERSON LEARNING.

Speak to the whole person, to emotional, to spiritual, to behavioral, and to cognitive growth, and to human change, and evaluate the impact based on who people become, in totality.



CONTEXTUALIZE IN MEANINGFUL JEWISH IDEAS.

Meaningful engagement needs to lead to meaningful Jewish growth. The relationships fostered through effective engagement are the context in which individuals can explore Jewish teachings to grapple with the implications of Jewish ideas for their lives. Engagement helps engagees encounter Jewish ideas in ways that are low-barrier, offer high content, and help that content be considered personally.



The Case for Engagement

“Engagement is more than just connecting with people—it is an approach to involving someone in their Jewish life and Jewish exploration.” **Dr. Jonathan Woocher, z”l**

Dr. Jonathan Woocher, z”l, passed away July 7, 2017. Dr. Woocher was a colleague, mentor, teacher, and friend to many in the field of Jewish education. He left a lasting legacy, influenced countless individuals, and will be sorely missed.

It's not an overstatement to say that North American Jewish life is changing. Fewer and fewer North American Jews are affiliating traditionally—joining or even involving themselves—with our community's traditional institutions.¹ Yet we also know that this decrease in affiliation doesn't mean they care less about “being Jewish.” The same research that demonstrates low affiliation demonstrates high levels of pride. But pride does not equate to community involvement. Programs (community events and speakers)—regardless of how great they might be—will not attract not-yet-engaged people and families.



The unengaged will remain on the sidelines of Jewish life if programs and events fail to add value and relevance to their busy, hectic lives. We need to help “reweave” Jewish communities, person by person, so each can find that relevance in their life. Why? *Abundant Community*² argues that communities, or physical neighborhoods, used to have ingrained systems to ensure that we were connected with each other, we valued each other, we supported each other. But many of these structures have broken down. It's now up to us to rebuild community by reweaving relationships one person at a time.

Federations can begin rebuilding community by focusing on quality, not quantity, and on relationships and impact, instead of evaluating by solely the number of people attending an event. Instead, we can offer people an accessible and welcoming form of Jewish life that places the person—not the organization or the event—at the center of the experience. Relationship-based Jewish engagement is how Federations reweave Jewish community. In the following sections, we introduce core principles of engagement, review case studies and real-life examples, and take a close look at key ideas, like measurement. Our hope is that you have what you need to take these concepts seriously and to make engagement an integral part of your work.

What Are We Trying to Do Here?

- 1 Make Judaism relevant to more people; help more people live meaningfully Jewish lives.
- 2 Help people have more Jewish friends and community with whom to live their lives.
- 3 And help people create Jewish activity on terms that work for them, that are personally meaningful, within the context of Jewish tradition.



Primary Ingredients

“If I were to boil down my Torah of engagement to four sefarim,³ one would be **curiosity**: How are you feeling? Two is **empathy**: seeing if I can understand how you’re feeling once you tell me. The third is **trust**: I have to actually believe what you’re saying and give that merit and integrity. And the fourth is **humility**. So it’s a cycle because the humility leads to the curiosity. I don’t think you can get to one without the other. In order to understand where people are, you have to understand that my experience is not what is important here.” *Aliza Kline, Executive Director, OneTable*

We continually build relationships. But relationship-based *engagement* is a careful practice that lets people explore Jewish life and their own Jewishness in the context of interpersonal relationships. It demands a new communal infrastructure and a new set of opportunities that will sit beside our more traditional institutions. It includes the non-institutional Jewish life in the “in-between” spaces of community. Federations and partners can build these opportunities using a host of strategies, including the following.

1.1

Create Jewish Growth Through Relationships

To practice effective Jewish engagement, premised on relationships, we need to unpack what exactly “relationship-based engagement” means. We’ll present this here, replete with examples that highlight the how and the why of developing and maintaining relationships for the purposes of creating vibrant Jewish communities.

To many, the importance of relationships may seem obvious. In many aspects of life (be they personal or professional, decisions that impact ourselves or our children), we often make decisions based on our relationship, their trust, and our comfort with another person.⁴ This is true in everything from selecting a camp for a child to attend to choosing a restaurant for dinner to what to say—or not say—in a business meeting, and much more.

Judaism, for many people, is no different. A generation or two ago (and still today in traditional settings), communities and their institutional walls opened up doors, literally, for programs and services. However, frequently, these offerings were mass produced and mass consumed. The same programs every year were held in roughly the same way, regardless of the genuine needs or desires of an ever-changing audience.

In the post-modern world, however, Jewish life must be more personal. People—consumers—demand nothing less. As consumers, most of us are hard-wired to believe that nearly anything can be personalized—from the coffee drinks we order to what we watch on TV to the type of music we filter on mobile devices specifically for our listening pleasure. Moreover, we want to help people live a Jewish life that is personally relevant and lived in their own space, on their own time. What can we do to offer Jewish life that is just as personal as the rest of our life experience?

A relationship between at least two people lays the foundation for personal, meaningful Jewish experiences. Engaged people ultimately become attracted to Jewish exploration because they feel compelled by the person with whom they are in a relationship, motivated by the relationship itself, and emotionally safe to explore within the context of the relationship. As communities and organizations have witnessed, failure to adopt this version of Jewish engagement ultimately leads to a decrease in people engaged in Jewish life. Without meaning, and without relationships that help create this meaning, people simply opt out. There are too many other areas of life to turn to to get what they desire.

At FedEngage!, Dr. Jonathan Woocher, z”l, of the Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah presented a useful framework—PERMA. Developed by Martin Seligman, professor at the University of Pennsylvania, PERMA supports thinking about Jewish experiences in a way that will help people say, “Yes, I want to be a part of that.”

- P (Positive emotions).** People want to feel good about their lives in a deeply satisfying way.
- E (Engagement).** People can become deeply emotionally involved in what they are doing, so much so that they don’t even notice the passage of time.
- R (positive Relationships).** Relationships are the lynchpin, the central element to being satisfied.
- M (Meaning).** People want their lives to amount to something, to leave behind a legacy in some respect, to have a purpose.
- A (Achievement).** People want to feel that they’ve accomplished something.

“If you do want to engage in these ways, we’re talking about big paradigm shifts: willingness to listen, willingness to be flexible, willingness to take the time.

And, willingness to stop asking how many people showed up and start asking how many people meaningfully connected.

It’s not about those numbers. It’s not about programs being packed but how many are coming back.”

Rabbi Susan Goldberg
Wilshire Boulevard Temple,
Los Angeles

“*The Experience Economy*⁵ explains that consumers not only pay for goods like shoes and services like FedEx, but they pay for an experience—a total sensory operation. Think about airlines like Virgin Air or a gym like Equinox. Those are full sensory experiences, and you can think about how they are different than their competitors. The generation of people coming of age now is [composed of] the savviest consumers that have ever been in the Jewish world, and they go for experiences.” **Rabbi Dan Smokler**, Chief Innovation Officer, Hillel International



Focusing our engagement efforts on people's desires and ways of interacting with each other increases the likelihood that our efforts will lead to results we want.

What is relationship-based engagement?

A technique that draws on principles of community organizing, leveraging the power of social networks, to emphasize building relationships with people before attempting to connect them to Jewish life.

Building Meaningful Friendships and a Community of Belonging: *Social by Design*.

Hillel International very effectively practices a strategic and deliberate relationship-based approach to Jewish engagement. To build relationships with college students, Hillel follows a “social by design” model, an educational approach that strategically cultivates friendships and a community of belonging.⁶ In this model, Hillel places the relationships with and among students at the center—not its campaigns, programs, or real estate. Thus, a college student has a relationship with the community, with the project, with the rabbi, with an individual, and with peers, and all gatherings are designed to facilitate the building of community—hence, social by design.

Building these relationships is a skill that can be taught. As part of this skill set, an individual responsible for building relationships should be curious, be empathetic, and ask open-ended questions when engaging an individual. These desired traits offer instruction about how we approach these kinds of

conversations. Are we open enough? Do we ask the right questions that can lay a foundation for building meaningful relationships?

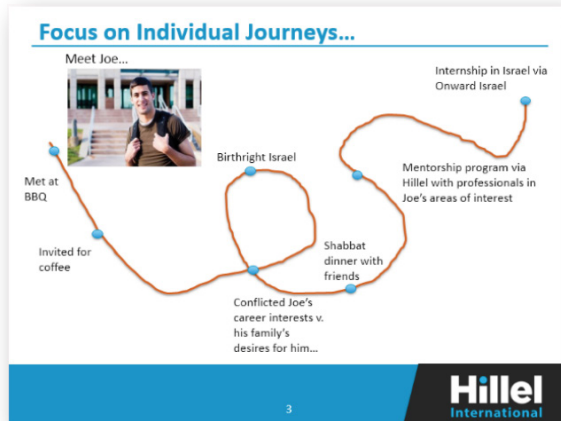
Hillel's Three Rules for Effective Relationships: Continuous, Personal, and Not Creepy.

Continuous Maintain a steady relationship over time—be in touch regularly. You cannot simply pop into someone's life and say, “Hey, want to go to Israel?” There's no relational foundation as part of that interaction. Rather, these invitations need to follow and be built on a continuous relationship.

Personal As a relationship builds, get to know the person for the unique individual that she or he is. Rabbi Dan Smokler notes that he never sends a mass email “because that's not personal. A mass email, if you're doing relationships, indicates that I think of you like a mass consumer. Amazon knows exactly what I want to read. Why can't you know me on that same level?”

Not Creepy Be socially appropriate. Don't cross boundaries such as family issues, financial issues, or politics. Establish a deep relationship with someone where it's understood that these types of personal matters are OK to address. Only within the context of that relationship, engage in these conversations.

Here's how this approach plays out for hundreds of thousands of Jewish college students across the country.



Continuous line = continuous contact

1.2

Ask Peers to Engage Their Peers

Fundamental to many of the key concepts discussed in *Opportunities Abound*—personal relationships, connecting with others in similar life stages, authentic Jewish experiences—is the power of engaging with one's peers. Different from engaging with an “organization representative,” peer-to-peer relationships are one of the key elements of many of the most effective engagement models today, including jBaby, Jewish Teen Initiative (JTI) of Greater Boston, BBYO, Hillel, Moishe House, Kevah, and others. Many Federations, too, have engagement strategies in place that rely on strong peer relationships. Of note, these models cover a spectrum of age cohorts and life stages.

Utilizing peer-to-peer engagement is a way to leverage people's personal networks to identify, reach, and engage new individuals in Jewish life. Peers are trusted, whereas contact from a Jewish professional can feel intimidating to someone unengaged in Jewish community life due to an inherent power imbalance. When individuals, particularly young people, are first engaged by a peer, they are more likely to opt in to the Jewish opportunity being offered. Since the peer might also have been unengaged at one point, or perhaps still is to a large extent, she can use her experience to validate any feelings of trepidation about engaging and offer a sense of security as they explore Jewish life together.

Social Engineering and Access to Social Networks

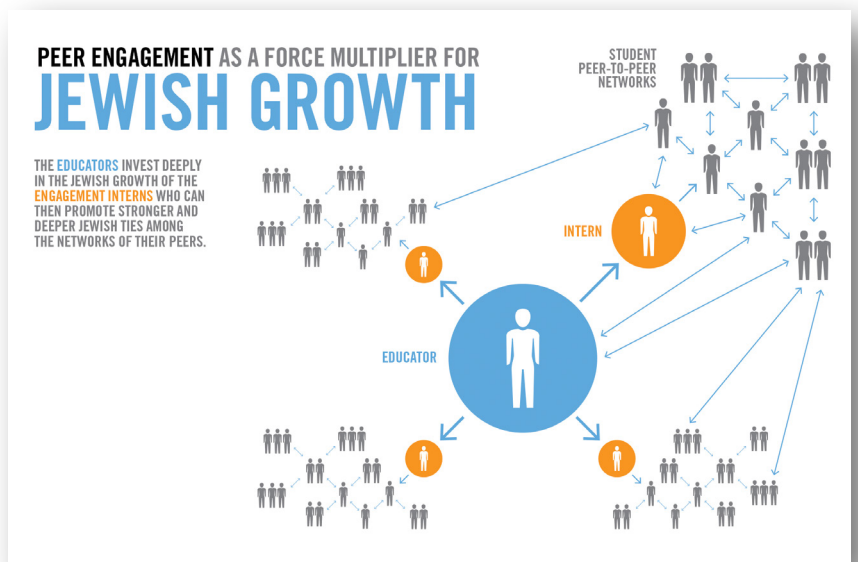
High school lunch rooms conjure images of cliques. There is an understandable negative connotation with this word. Yet, for our engagement purposes, a clique represents an opportunity to efficiently reach and engage people in the community. In thinking about how to create a sense of belonging and a

deeper connection to Jewish life, PJ Library looks for a clique of people to find the right person to be the welcomer, the facilitator, and the leader to help engage the entire peer group in Jewish life.

Rabbi Dan Smokler, Chief Innovation Officer at Hillel International, emphasizes the importance of a social network, for reach and for substantive engagement:

There is a growing mountain of research about social networks, which essentially includes someone's friends, their friends of friends, and their friends of friends of friends. We really can have a lot of knowledge about someone who is three degrees removed from one individual. We know a lot about her or him. If I know Jon's friends of friends of friends and whether they vote left or right, I can predict better than random whether he'll vote left or right. That's been demonstrated with regard to weight loss, depression, job satisfaction, residence, smoking. I make the uncontroversial assertion that it's true for Jews, too—that who someone's friends are, and who their friends of friends are, actually informs the original person's Jewish practice much more than any journey or any sense of meaning ever could. By working within a social network, we can help those in the network reinforce with each other their new connections to Judaism.

Peer-to-peer engagement remains a centerpiece of Hillel International's Senior Jewish Educator/Campus Entrepreneurs Initiative.⁷ In the model below, we can see how an educator builds relationships with “interns”—in this instance, students who are identified as social leaders, who in turn, engage their peer networks in Jewish life experiences and conversations.



By tapping into an existing peer network, and finding ways to bring every member of that network into Jewish life, we underscore a value of Judaism, which for many people is one of its most powerful. Avi Rubel, Co-CEO of Honeymoon Israel, also emphasizes the power of the group, adding a larger layer to it: *When you have a group, and you are trying to create community, always bring people back to the group, regardless of the activity. In fact, we tell everybody who comes into contact with us that we are all part of the family—in its essence, Judaism is a family, it is a tribe, we are a people. People often respond, “Whoa, we’ve never heard of this.” And I always say, “Well, I’m not religious, I don’t care if you’re religious; you’re Jewish, which means you’re in my family.”*




For reflection: What existing social networks in our communities can we take advantage of? (professional groups, geographic sub-communities, groups according to interests and activities) How can we engage individuals who will engage their peers in these networks?

The Macks Center for Jewish Education (CJE), supported by The Associated: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, uses a model that demonstrates how peers can extend the reach of Jewish professionals and create entirely new communities of Jewish life. With limited funding, CJE launched its Connector Project, premised on Hillel’s “coffee date” model. The first cohort of four connectors was given a \$500 stipend and, after some training about the Baltimore Jewish community’s various agencies and offerings, were tasked to meet up with people to simply talk with them about Baltimore Jewish life.

As an engagement tip, CJE Director of Educational Engagement Lisa Bodziner suggests, the best connectors are friendly, are open, will talk to anyone, want to meet new people, and have their own networks of people who can still be engaged. They care, they listen, and they also are looking for something more in life.

The first connector mom posted a basic online message and had 37 people instantly who wanted to meet up with her to learn more. Lisa explains, *The peer-to-peer model is really all about trust. There are no barriers because it’s simply two “regular people” getting together. We’re not trying to get people to join anything. We want connectors to let people know everything that is available to them.*

Now in the fourth cohort, each connector receives \$2,000 for coffee dates and a \$3,000 stipend. They commit to 11 months (with an option to extend to a second year) of training, tracking, programming, and relationship-building, all to welcome people to Baltimore Jewish life. Connectors are expected to spend 5–7 hours/week connecting and tracking their interactions. Every interaction and piece of information they glean from an individual—her interests, how she communicates, her organizational memberships—is tracked by the connector and shared in a database. The model has been so successful that CJE now utilizes it to reach and engage individuals even in neighborhoods where Jews have not traditionally lived in Baltimore. There are mom, dad, and family connectors; synagogue, downtown, and young adult connectors. And when wanted, CJE will step in and help connectors create opportunities based on what they now know people want.



Before Beginning, Jessica:

- Experienced intensive training before she became a connector
- Learned about sister Agencies and the Associated

Currently, Jessica is:

- Facilitating Jewish programs for families with young children
- Meeting with her cohort frequently
- Attending a national conference for PJ Library and presenting to an international audience
- Executing sold-out events for families that currently are not involved in Jewish life

Meet a Connector



For reflection: How can peer engagers complement or expand your current engagement work?



“Why expect people to go inside an organization to ‘do Jewish’? Instead, Moishe House is an example of bottom-up grassroots organizing, putting power back to the people to create and design community around them. It empowers them to create programming and gives them a great responsibility to create community.” *Brandon Mond, a resident and leader of Moishe House*

1.3

Meet People Where They Are

When you say this out loud, it seems like a circular statement: “People want to engage in Jewish life where their life occurs.” And yet, in many ways we are still catching up to this reality. Federations cannot wait for people to walk into an institution’s walls. We need to meet people wherever they are in life—at home, in cafés, at parks, and elsewhere.

CJE’s Connectors program offers a stipend for people to connect with their peers, find out what they want from Jewish life, and build relationships with them to help create the Jewish experiences that are accessible to them. Strategically, the connectors are deployed into geographic areas in which they live and operate. One example of the many successes is the downtown Havdalah group. As Lisa explains, the connectors met with parents of young kids in the same area and learned quickly that from 5:00 to 6:30 on Saturday evenings—after nap, before dinner—parents are looking to do something. But it has to be easy, home-based, nearby. And that’s how the downtown Havdalah group was formed.

Beyond the physical, literal meaning of the “meet them” lies an important deeper meaning as well. It means that we need to create Jewish life opportunities relevant for any stage of life and for any previous level of engagement in Jewish life. Let’s also meet people wherever they are—physically, emotionally, and spiritually.




For reflection: Where are (Jewish) individuals in your community—where are people spending time? How can we get to those spaces?

Bring Jewish Life to the People PJ Library sees a lot of success with its neighborhood-based programming, connecting parents with young children who live in the same neighborhood. This makes natural meetups at a park or in someone’s home convenient and financially feasible.

Honeymoon Israel’s Avi Rubel expands on this idea of neighborhood and home-based experiences: *People want convenience. They need convenience. People don’t want to walk into buildings. They want the intimacy of being in other people’s homes—the informality of that. But nobody knows their neighbors! In big cities especially. If you can just connect people to their neighbors, it’s like political organizing, community organizing. They start hosting each other. This is entirely different than programming things for an institution.*

Center the Experience on People’s Needs Aliza Kline, Executive Director of OneTable, explains that Jewish rituals are designed to keep community together, to maintain continuity, and to sustain practice. But fundamentally, if people don’t feel safe coming into a ritual environment, then they simply won’t go. When helping people create Shabbat dinner experiences and meet new people, OneTable thinks through every step:

- What does it feel like to come into a dinner?
- When you’re invited, what’s on the invitation?
- Do you know what to wear?
- Do you know what to bring?
- Do you know what is expected of you?

“I had a couple from San Francisco on a Honeymoon Israel trip and at the end of the trip—he’s a Jewish guy, she’s an African-American Christian woman. After the closing session, they came over to me together. Every trip has two Shabbatot because then couples really see [after two Shabbatot], ‘Wow, Shabbat we can turn off our phone, have a romantic dinner and light candles and it’s Jewish?!? Cool!’ They come up to me and said we decided on this trip our big takeaway is we’re going to do Shabbat every week. Because it’s important for us to unplug. But, we’re going to do it on Sunday. Because he is a cop—he works on Saturdays, and—and I was like, that’s awesome!”  **Avi Rubel**, Co-CEO, Honeymoon Israel

If the answers to these questions are negative (or that I feel badly, or that I’m confused), Shabbat can feel like a closed opportunity.

To help change the answers to these questions, OneTable began asking a series of questions, trying to examine our assumptions about what Shabbat is in order to make Shabbat home for anyone: “How do I redefine access to it?” “What are people doing on Friday night if they’re not celebrating Shabbat? Or if they are celebrating Shabbat, what does it mean to them?”

OneTable posed these questions to young adults and, in the great Jewish tradition, began to hear their questions: What does it mean to be a host? What does a dinner mean? What is expected? Where do people want to be, and what do they do on a Friday night? It turns out that people in their early 20s and early 30s answer those questions in different ways, even over those ten plus years. But as OneTable heard the entirety of their answers (“I want to meet new people,” or “I want to deepen relationships with existing friends”), the organization’s leadership realized they could help design personalized, home-based, park-based, and “elsewhere-based” Jewish experiences directly based on what people wanted and what helps them feel at home.

Meaningful Jewish Engagement with Interfaith

Couples For Sixth and I Historic Synagogue in Washington, DC, non-Jewish partners in couples comprise 30–50% of its audience. Rabbi Shira Stutman of Sixth and I says, “I’ve had to switch my mindset from a place of *l’dor v’dor*, which emphasizes the Jewishness of children and Jewish continuity, to a place of ‘Judaism is inherently meaningful to this generation,’ which emphasizes the couple’s finding their place in Jewish life and helping them to start to build a Jewish home that works for them.” She adds, “When we create a low barrier to entry, we end up building community—or when we welcome people on their terms, we succeed in connecting them to Judaism.”

Honeymoon Israel’s Avi Rubel comments on these themes as well. Avi exhibited excitement, not dismay, when the couple (referenced above) told him how they would “do Shabbat.” He also showed empathy, inclusiveness, and understanding for their reality. By engaging people in a way that doesn’t just acknowledge, but genuinely accepts, their reality (from their schedules to their hobbies to their fears and ambitions), we are able to engage people from all backgrounds, whatever their approaches to Jewish life.

This also serves as a helpful example of the effectiveness of Jewish engagement in a group with like-minded people experiencing the same things in life. On Honeymoon Israel trips, a non-Jewish partner may wonder, “Am I the only one who doesn’t know what Shabbat means?” or “Am I the only one who doesn’t know this ritual?” But if everyone asking these questions comes together in a safe and welcoming environment, the playing field is leveled.

Because there are so many non-Jews in our audiences, and Jews who know less about Judaism, we can’t start with Judaism. We might want to ask something like, “What Jewish thing in your life is most important?” But instead, we start with the person, asking, “What value in your life is most important?” We create level playing fields, spaces that don’t require knowledge and commitments before people walk in. Avi explains, “People often get turned off because they don’t understand a word, and they already think ‘OK, I guess this isn’t the right fit for me,’ so, I think in the very beginning of any engagement program, be very aware of language and then create a space for people to say, ‘I don’t know what that is.’ Certainly, for us, we have both Jews and non-Jews who don’t know certain terms or practices. Make them all feel comfortable.”



Whole Person Engagement Whole person engagement is an art and skill. It involves connecting with people on their own terms, in their own space, and in the context of their own ideas and commitments and helping them find their place in Jewish life.

Dr. Jonathan Woocher, z”l, of the Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah, shares the belief that Jewish teaching, Jewish practice, and Jewish community all can contribute meaning to a person’s life—to their whole person.⁸ But we need to be intentional about connecting these teachings, practices, and community to the positive impact they have—or can have—in people’s lives.

Jon says, “By approaching engagement with this mindset, Federation professionals will help to align Federation goals with individual goals. The paradigm shifts. It’s no longer, ‘We want you to do something for us.’ Rather, it’s ‘We want to help you find what it is in Jewish experience, in Jewish teaching, in Jewish practice, and in Jewish community that can actually in fact help you live your life and shape a better world.’”

1.4

Build Deep Partnerships: Don’t Go It Alone

Collaboration has to be something that is fairly voluntary, where people have skin in the game and they’re willing to struggle to come together, and they really have shared outcomes and shared vision.

– Laura Baum, Associate Vice President of Learning and Engagement, Combined Jewish Philanthropies

The first four key concepts we addressed are all about engaging with an individual or group of people. This concept—addressing partnerships and collaborations—is an outlier in that it deals with the importance of organizational relationships. Yet we see from nearly every engagement model that the most effective models involve some degree of organizational cooperation. Sometimes, these relationships are formalized; sometimes, they are more informal and relationship-driven.

Our strategy is to position ourselves as creators of new approaches and provide funding or provide funding for people who come to us wanting to create something. We always convene with partners. Only by walking the walk can you overcome people saying, “You’re swimming in my lane.” You have to provide funding and really be partners. – Steven Rakitt, CEO, The Jewish Federation of Greater Washington

At the same time, every partner is not looking for funding—and those are opportunities, too. We can be a convener and modeler of great partner[ships]. The partners that aren’t asking for funding are simply asking to have their niche in a program. Take ADL, for example—we’re not going to fund them, but we need them around the table, we need to listen to them. – Arlene Miller, President and CEO, Jewish Federation & Family Services, Orange County, CA

“There are a lot of different niche organizations that are doing incredible things. They are experts in those areas. I would never say I’m the expert in any one of their areas. As much as I would love to say that I know a lot about the arts, I am not an arts expert. That is why Jewish Arts Collaborative in Boston is the organization that CJP complements in that area and asks how we can help. As a community, we want to think differently about how we collaborate and help each other.”

Laura Baum
Associate Vice President of
Learning and Engagement,
Combined Jewish Philanthropies

“The biggest of the paradigm shifts is the willingness to co-create. It may sound like a good idea until you get into it. So this is also Jewish professionals being honest about sharing power. I think we have to share power in order for this to work. But it does mean that you have to be willing to not always be the only expert, to listen to what people want, support other organizations, and continue to lead.”

Rabbi Susan Goldberg
Wilshire Boulevard Temple,
Los Angeles

Different Types of Organizational Relationships⁹

Coordination is the sharing of resources, letting other organizations know what's going on (for example, it's good for all organizations to know when the JCC, the local congregations, and any other Jewish community groups are doing their Hanukah programs)

Cooperation is working together and sharing resources for the same goals (for example, organizations help promote each other's events and programs to the same audiences; an attitude of “we're all getting to the same place together and we're doing it in a cooperative spirit”)

Collaboration is an entirely different level of working together. More than sharing calendars or resources, collaboration implies organizations creating a joint vision. All sides are invested heavily in the process, which at its heart is relationship-based and voluntary. Collaboration is an ongoing interactive process that organizations and people decide for themselves is worthwhile.

Combined Jewish Philanthropies' (CJP) collaborative approach to their role in the Boston community offers insights for others to consider:

CJP doesn't do programming if someone else in the community can do that program well. CJP may financially support that program still, but it's a collaboratively shared vision between CJP and the organization running the program.

The exception is the young adult/20s–30s arena, where CJP employs a “hub and spoke” model, serving as a central point of a collaborative network. CJP's role is to offer financial support, engage young adults directly, and do everything in between. In this area, CJP implements programs because it's expected to bring people in the doors. At the same time, CJP is expected to “show them the exit,” too, so they can move freely about the community, taking advantage of the numerous organizations and communities that work with and for young adults.

CJP offers three types of grants (awarded based on the decision of a lay leadership committee) under this umbrella as a way to invest in creativity within the community. There are no significant strings associated with the funding. CJP trusts that the organizations or people who receive grants are the experts at what they're doing. Instead, CJP looks to start and maintain a conversation with them.

Genuine collaboration means operating as an organization in an unselfish manner. Connecting someone in the community to any other organization or program in which they find meaning is deemed a success. And organizational leaders are willing to help in substantial ways, even as conduits to potential donors. This is exactly what CJP did for JTI, of Greater Boston, connecting its executive director, Adam Smith, to existing Federation donors, including board members and other leaders. Even if the dollars go directly to the other organization, and do not travel through Federation, that is a winning situation for the community because Jewish life grows, and Federations can and should support these developments.

Achieving this sort of community buy-in along with a true spirit of collaboration is not without its challenges and requires finding innovative ways to mend relationships that were deeply damaged in the past. The payoff, however, will come back as a community's success is linked directly to working together equally and keeping the community in this together.

Then, let your actions build on these words. CJP received all of the community congregations' membership data because it demonstrated value by asking what the congregations needed help with—and then delivering. In this case, CJP's marketing expertise and in-house graphic designer was a valuable service that it made available to all congregations.

CJP allocates some funding to organizations to make these partnerships possible, but also asks these partner organizations to allocate some existing funding to programs as well. This helps create buy-in among all parties of the collaboration. Periodically, CJP brings together all organizations and staff involved in these engagement efforts to share what's working, track benchmarks, and learn how to be even better.

The Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York offers another way to cultivate community collaboration. KB Goodkin, head of community engagement at the Federation, developed a Community Engagement Package (CEP)¹⁰ that she gives to a rabbi, synagogue president, executive director, or any other leader when she meets with them. The CEP includes offerings of online communications support from someone at Federation who helps community organizations with their online presence—their Facebook pages, their websites. She reaches out to these partners and offers them tutorials if they need it. She administers the pages for them if they don't have enough staff.

KB says, “I tell them, ‘Federation has some new resources—we’d love to sit down with you to talk about things.’ Then when we meet, I say, ‘Everything that’s in this package is free.’ That’s the first thing I say. Anything they want in this package is free. A Federation staff member will sit with the congregational leadership, review the CEP, and help determine the congregation’s needs and plan moving forward—together. In fact, the CEP’s first page states the Federation’s mission “to build a vibrant Jewish community,” and the last page says Your Organization’s Plan. It’s the Federation’s way of saying to these organizations, ‘We want to do what you ask of us, and we are here to help.’” Finally, if Federation cannot offer the help they need, then KB finds the right person or organization that can help them.

Know When to Cut Losses with a Partner

Don’t stick too long with a partner if the collaboration isn’t working. Be nimble and engage with the community; try new things and experiment. You will succeed, but you may also fail. And that’s OK. Try tweaking the programs, or maybe moving them in-house if they can be transitioned effectively. At the end of the day, Federation should do what’s right with the community dollars—and not every collaboration works toward this vision.



1.5

Connect People to People

Connecting people to each other often means designing activities intentionally so that they build community. With almost every age cohort, among people with various interests, regardless of prior levels of engagement in Jewish life, a common denominator is that people want to be with other people they know, they like, and with whom they have something in common.

Debbi Cooper, Assistant Vice President, Young Family Engagement, Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, explains that parents seek out friends, information, support, spirituality, and community.

85% of parents with children under two are looking to develop new friendships.
71% of new parents are not as connected to Jewish life or community as they want to be.¹¹

With this core principle, jBaby Chicago helps expectant parents and parents of newborns and toddlers (0–24 months) make connections, build friendships, and engage in Jewish life in Chicago. This model—a useful reference for an engagement strategy for any cohort—relies extensively on **parent ambassadors** who identify expectant and new parents in the community. Then these ambassadors organize jBaby Chicago playgroups and events, design and host new parent dinners and nights out, meet one-on-one with new parents, participate in online conversations with topics of interest to new parents, and serve as “eyes and ears” in the community.

“jBaby has helped me connect with a great group of women who are all going through the same things I am. I am happy to have the support and connection with these families. It is especially fun when we do things together like Passover Rocks and the Hanukkah Song session. We are very grateful for jBaby. I feel part of something.”

jBaby Parent



“Parents will drive 20 minutes for a Jewish experience—maximum. Parents want close, intimate, grassroots, relevant, convenient, à la carte, authentic Jewish experiences.”

Lisa Bodziner
 Director of Educational Engagement,
 The Louise D. and Morton J. Macks Center for Jewish Education, Baltimore

jBaby is very selective in its choice of ambassadors. These people are the face of the program in the community. And, often, they are the first engagement a new parent and/or new person in the community has with organized Chicago Jewish life.

As an **engagement tip**, Debbi emphasizes that ambassadors must be appropriately trained—and able to articulate—what the program is for which they are serving as an ambassador and, equally as important, what a Federation is and what it strives to do in the community.

Working with teens, college students, and young adults also means knowing their people connections—and here, we want to know who they already connect to. Hillel’s Rabbi Dan Smokler explains: “The first question on their mind when you invite them to something will be, ‘Who else is going to be there?’ That’s a lot more compelling than the flyer.” Social networks, he explains, or the groups of people we all feel like we do (or don’t) belong to, dictate what we do: “If the social networks are fraying, people are going to participate a lot less. That means participate less in Shabbat, in philanthropic giving, and study of Torah and keeping of *mitzvot* and watching Jewish films and going to the JCC—you pick your indicator. If you have a weaker social network, there is going to be less participation.”

When the **Jewish Teen Initiative (JTI) of Greater Boston¹²** began in 2008 (then known as the North Shore Teen Initiative, NSTI), its leadership conducted a community-wide “listening tour” to understand why more teens in the 23 cities and towns north of Boston were not engaging in Jewish life. Adults interviewed as part of this process responded with statements about various congregational sizes and budgets and a lack of collaboration among the different Jewish agencies. But teens, who also were

interviewed as part of JTI’s listening tour, answered that they were unlikely to engage in a Jewish program because “I won’t know anyone,” “My friends aren’t going,” and “No one invited me.”

As discussed in detail later in the “Models and Methodologies” section, JTI absorbed the stark differences in these answers and built an approach that enabled teens to connect directly to each other and to promote events on their own so they know who else was attending.

A community concierge is also about connecting people to people, reweaving social networks and community. KB Goodkin fills this role at her Federation. She helps guide people in the community on their journey. She explains, “People see my face on the website, and they love knowing who they’re going to talk to when they call Federation. I’m there to help them in any way, especially if they are new to the community.”

Community Concierge

Like | Tweet | Pin | Share

How can I help you?

Job Search – KB can provide an overview of local employers, pass resumes and make relevant introductions. [Check out a current listing of job postings locally!](#)

House / Rental Search – Looking for a place to live but not sure where to start? KB can answer your questions about school districts, proximity to the Jewish community and provide a general overview of local neighborhoods. She can also help connect you with a realtor or rental agency that will suit your needs.

Social Connections – Getting to know people your age and with similar interests can be difficult after a relocation. KB can help make these initial social connections for you!

Jewish Community – Confused with all the options? Looking for Jewish education for your children? Curious about adult education options? Want to learn more about scholarships and financial aid? KB can help you sort out the options!

About the Capital Region – New York’s Capital Region offers something for everyone! A short distance from the Berkshires, the Catskills and the Adirondacks, the largest wilderness area east of the Mississippi River! We have wonderful ski spots, sporting events and culture venues. Ask KB about all that’s available, she has a wealth of knowledge she can share!

Another way to learn more about our Jewish community is to look through our [Jewish Community Directory](#). The directory provides you with contact information for Jewish agencies and organizations in our region, as well as links to their website and email contacts.



As the community concierge, KB runs a jobs board on the Federation website. She sees the jobs being posted by people and businesses in the community and the resumes of job-seekers. What does this mean practically? Not only can KB connect employers to employees, but she also gains knowledge of the pulse of the community—the growing businesses, the types of people moving in. Real estate agents post ads on their Federation page to attract clients; KB ends up having hour-long conversations with people about their neighborhood options for living,



kosher markets, school options, and more. Organically, she gains a deep knowledge about the people who comprise their Jewish community and is able to connect them to each other and to opportunities in the community that she knows they will find of interest and meaning.

Additionally, **PJ Library** offers a strong example of building and bringing community together out of a disparate group of people in a room. It offers an activity meant to engage people as soon as they walk into an event; the activity helps those in the room begin to talk. The activity is often a question, answered when they are also offering their name and personal information. They're writing their email address but also checking to see how others are answering a question, and they're learning about the group in the room.

For example, PJ Library might ask the question: "How do you and your family do acts of *tzedakah*?" Meredith Lewis of PJ Library explains that they sometimes even pose the question on a graffiti wall, which gets people out of their chairs, talking, and sharing their answers with each other, even before the event starts.

This creates conversation about good ideas, if we did this or that. It opens this space where people aren't just coming and passively engaging, but you're sowing the seeds for a more communal connection, for the parents to be talking on the parents' level of values and what matters to them.
 – Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg, Rabbi-in-Residence, Avodah

1.6

Create Intimate Experiences

Today, people demand carefully crafted social experiences. These experiences are intimate, fundamentally different from 100-person events, and much more conducive to building peer connections and, ultimately, meaningful friendships. PJ Library recently launched a micro-grant project in ten communities with neighborhood-based *chavurot*. In some instances, people requested to be in a *chavurah* with people they already know; others asked to be with new families. **But the common denominator is that parents with young kids want those opportunities outside preschool to make intimate, personal, meaningful connections with peers in similar life stages.**

Avodah's Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg points to a series of ten discussion guides using questions from her book about parenting, available at NurtureTheWow.com. These guides give new parents a space to talk with one another about what they're experiencing at this stage of life—what's challenging, what are their hopes, and what are the special moments they want to always remember. The idea is to help people connect on a deep level about their day-to-day experiences. Danya points out that these discussion guides are meaningful gifts for new parents or new people in the community or people looking at a preschool. **A Federation or other organization that gives this type of gift says, "We're not just interested in your kids, we're also interested in you," and we want to help you form those special social connections that add value to your life.**

“A Federation professional must be authentic to effectively engage someone. Share your story, why you’re a work in progress too.”

Rabbi Aryeh Ben David,
Founder and Director, Ayeka

Within smaller group dynamics, it does not take long to facilitate listening and sharing among people to help build connections. Rabbi Aryeh Ben David of Ayeka runs an exercise that looks like this:

- Aryeh asks, “In an average week, how well do you relate to the people in your organization? How well do you see the holy spark in them? How do you relate to them in an ‘I-Thou’ relationship?”
- He then instructs, “Now rate yourself. On a 1–10 scale, what number would you give yourself, usually, for how you relate to the people that you work with? And then write your answer as to why you gave yourself that number.”

participants work silently

- He poses another question: “If I could give you this magic pill in my pocket and all of a sudden, instead of being a 7, you’re an 8. And instead of being an 8, you’re a 9. If you, all of a sudden, jumped up a number or two—what would be different? How would that look? What are the obstacles that are holding you back from being that higher number? What’s getting in the way of being one or two numbers higher?”
- He then asks, “If you were to give yourself one piece of advice—a small practical piece of advice—that you could actually do in the next week—what would you give to yourself to help you relate to the people you work with in a more sacred, spiritual, angel kind of way. What small piece of advice would you give to yourself?”

participants work silently

- Then he says, “Find a partner and take three minutes to speak to one another. The rules are ❶ whatever is said stays between the two of you, and ❷ each person must exhibit confidential listening, or safe listening, which means not offering advice back to the person.” Participants describe this part of the exercise as “content,” “calm,” “self-reflective,” “honest,” “meaningful,” “enlightening,” “scary,” and “compassionate.”

As a Federation professional, what is the takeaway from this exercise? Certainly, these specific questions and this activity need to be posed in a certain type of environment—otherwise, we could run afoul of worrying about Hillel’s creepiness. But the real takeaway is that this type of activity, while lasting only a limited amount of time, establishes genuine relationships between people and helps people discover a “better version” of themselves, within the context of that relationship. The mini-community helps to facilitate their growth.

If something like this sounds like therapy, it’s because in many ways it mimics a therapy session. Therapy involves talking, which most of us learn on our own at the ages of two or three. It is a more natural human experience than writing, which is generally not taught until the ages of five or six. This has significant implications for our engagement work: Talking in the context of a real relationship matters.

Notably, this type of interaction reflects the concepts of PERMA. In a brief time, participants have a positive emotion and engage deeply in the activity, develop a genuine relationship with their partner, and have a sense of meaning and accomplishment.

1.7

Don’t Just Listen. Share Power

Grassroots organizing empowers people to create programming they want, and gives them the great responsibility to create community. – Brandon Mond, Moishe House resident and leader

How do we move from the initial step of listening to what people want out of life in general, and from Jewish experiences specifically, to empowering them to make those experiences a reality, to helping them to build their own Jewish lives? Empowering

helps people build Jewish community in part because the “institutional” part of “institutional Jewish life” often keeps people away. Now, however, by reworking our priorities to focus on the power of the individual, we can help North American Jews develop personal expressions of Jewishness that feel integral and true to their sense of themselves.¹³ Later, we will explore some engagement models that have the concept of empowerment as a key principle. But first, here are some helpful empowerment strategies that can be applied to nearly every form of Jewish engagement program or initiative.

Offer Space for Participants to Set the Goals Individuals need to co-create their Jewish experiences with Federations and other community organizations. This co-creation occurs often in networks and micro-communities so that we can help individuals have others to do Jewish with and so that their Jewish activity will take root in their natural networks. The emphasis is not on what Federations can provide people. The emphasis is on empowering friends to create Jewish experiences they want.

Make an Experience Authentic A Jewish experience should feel just as natural to someone as any other activity in which they participate. For many, a program that feels institutional or cookie-cutter or forced won't feel authentic because it does not reflect the ways they engage in other parts of their life. Helping people own the experience, and own the creation of the experience with peers, inherently makes the experience more authentic because the experience reflects who they are.

We can start with them (not us) through the basic one-on-one coffee date. In this example from Rabbi Susan Goldberg of Wilshire Boulevard Temple, we learn how listening—what Susan terms “empathy interviews”—is effectively translated into empowerment for the individual. Susan’s goals in these interactions are to find out what people want from life, from Judaism, from community, and then to follow through with them:

In these empathy interviews, I start by asking people what it is that they're looking for. This person said, "Well, when you lead services, you talk about Judaism like it's a spiritual practice. So that is what me and my friends are into—we do a lot of yoga and we study the yoga sutras—for us, the yoga practice is very serious. Do you think you can teach us about Judaism as a spiritual practice?" I responded to her, "Absolutely! You think you can get some friends together?" And the conversation progressed from there. We ended up doing these Judaism and spiritual practices once a month for six months in her home. If somebody gets some friends together, I will go to their home and teach a whole variety of things—really! Anything they want to learn.

Don't Plan Until You Know What People Want

Susan only plans programs, events, classes, and other engagement opportunities only once she hears directly from people what they want. “When I first arrived at Wilshire Temple, I politely had to tell our marketing department—in the midst of putting together the Temple brochure for the year—that I didn’t have any information to give them about what programs I would run for the year. This was a pretty big shift for them. But I needed to first listen to people before I could decide how to co-create Jewish experiences with them. Now I run Shabbatot, study groups, parallel holiday services, and other programs that I know people want because I listened first.”

Listen before leading. This is a dynamic interplay, always evolving and always happening in effective Jewish engagement. Listening allows us to understand, and respond accordingly, to what people in the community want; leading allows us to help make a change in people’s lives.

1.8

Contextualize in Meaningful Jewish Ideas

Meaningful engagement needs to lead to meaningful Jewish growth. The relationships we foster through effective engagement really are the context in which individuals can explore Jewish teachings to grapple with the implications of Jewish ideas for their lives.

In this regard, engagement helps engagees encounter Jewish ideas in ways that are low-barrier, offer high content, and help that content be considered personally. Tiffany Shlain’s *The Making of a Mensch*¹⁴ asks viewers to consider what *menschlichkeit* means for their lives. Kevah, the Berkeley-based study organization, “empowers individuals and organizations to build Jewish learning communities” around Torah study, “regardless of age, Jewish background, or sexual orientation”—and to have that study become a part of their everyday rhythms. The Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah’s Jewish Sensibilities Cards generate meaningful conversations about ideas that are Jewish and human. These sources don’t demand that facilitators or students be experts in sacred Jewish texts. They are accessible and relevant to everyday life.

TEN JEWISH SENSIBILITIES





Snapshot: Ten Steps to Engagement

With these previous key concepts as our starting point (and elements we can look to infuse in any program and event), we can begin to build a cohesive and comprehensive engagement strategy. Different Federations, of course, have different resources, different types of communities, different potential partners, and many other variables. Use these ten steps below, adapted from The Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York, as initial considerations and frameworks to build an engagement strategy right for you.

Ten Steps to Engagement

Step 1: Be Goal Oriented.

- Define engagement internally for your organization.
- Define specific, tangible, and measurable goals and outcomes.
- Do not view the annual campaign as the benchmark for success with the unengaged.

What does engagement mean to you?

The Torah says 36 times how we should treat the stranger with kindness; the Baal Shem Tov said from every human being a light rises straight to heaven and when two come together, their lights collide and grow ever brighter; *namaste* means the light within me recognizes the light within you. Engagement means seeing other people, their needs and their desires, and putting those before your agenda to create a sacred space, an immersive moment, an opportunity for true brotherhood and sisterhood and then helping them to feel empowered to take control of their community.

Step 2: Build Relationships with Key Lay Leaders.

Establish buy-in from key lay leaders for the journey ahead. Understand that work, time, and long-range vision are involved—this is not a quick process. Engagement initiatives need long-term planning, goal-oriented strategies and tactics, and numerous measurable steps. Attain buy-in from key lay leadership; gain their understanding that it's going to be a journey. Get the right people “on the bus” as early as possible in the process, keep them updated as often as possible, and they will be your best advocates. They also will stand by you as you face inevitable challenges along the way.

Clusters and Multipliers

Consider enlisting the help of leaders in the community—meet them where they are, talk to them in groups, get their ideas—to access different people's social networks and to create clusters of people with common interests and in similar life stages. Examples from Federations include an outdoors cluster, an arts and entertainment cluster, a philanthropy cluster, a Tikkun Olam cluster, a young adult networking cluster. Sit down, listen to what people want, and then let them own the programming. Through organic relationships, they then become the “multipliers”—people who are comfortable and skilled at engaging others and growing a social network. And Federation provides the tools for people to take the reins themselves.

Step 3: Listen, Learn, Engage, Adapt.¹⁵

- **Listen** to what your community wants.
- **Learn** how you can move through the engagement process with members of the community; as you're learning, other community partners are learning, too, and they'll be able to teach others.
- **Engage** people in the process of learning about engagement every step of the way.
- **Adapt** what you are doing that isn't working so the entire process is worthwhile.



Building Shabbat at Home

To empower engagees to create their own Jewish life, KB helps people create Shabbat, experiences in their homes based on activities in the home they are already doing. She adds children's books and information about Shabbat rituals to their existing Friday nights to make their evenings more Shabbat-like. The only requirement? The next Shabbat participating families are asked to invite another family over, share what they learned, and help a new family to participate more fully in Jewish life.

Step 4: Learn About Your Community. Be Vigilant About Collecting Community Data. From the beginning, learn about your community demographics. Find out people's interests, jobs, income, how they spend their free time, and more. Learn about people through Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Interact and make commonalities the basis for conversations. Build trust, relationships, and meaningful exchanges.

Invite those not yet engaged to a meeting and directly ask, "What can we be doing to help you feel more a part of community?" Be sure to bring a gift or swag to every engagement meeting with your logo and contact information on it. KB gives them a pen and paper so they can fill out all of their correct contact information. While they're doing this, she's up getting them something from the bar or café. By the time KB returns, the person is finished writing down his or her information, and KB dives right into the conversation, which leads to more information. Opening questions might be, "What can you tell me about your life?" and "If you could do anything on a Saturday night, what would it be?" This isn't a typical cup of coffee, and it shouldn't be.

Step 5: Find the Right Person. Hire the Right Person! What do they look like? Someone who smiles a lot, actively listens, and is able to function independently and responsibly. Their body language is on point; they dress professionally but at the same level as those they meet with; they're willing to put boots on the ground. They are creative, intuitive, and sensitive to others' needs, and understand the impact of language. Finally, they get excited about the small stuff and let go of the big burdens. Having the right person lead your engagement efforts is key.

Step 6: Envision, Plan, and Follow Through. Write it down, chart it out, and track how you're doing every step of the way. Try to do a community study

to learn what people think of Federation—or if they even know you. If that's not possible, do a strategic planning process and include focus groups on different areas, such as in-reach, out-reach, PJ Library families, millennials, and others. Try to include different types of people in these groups: people who are actively involved, lay leaders, larger donors, small donors, friends of friends who had never heard of Federation.

Respond to what you hear from these focus groups. In the case of Northeastern New York, Federation leaders heard that **1)** people wanted it to be a hub, a resource, and a partner. A focus group participant said, "As a Federation, you have resources that we may not have. Share them! As a resource, as a Federation, you can be the convening body. Do it! That's what we want as a community. Be that for us."

2) Congregations, agencies, and volunteer organizations wanted help spreading their brand and improving their online search engine optimization. Of course, they could pay for it from a marketing firm, but the easiest way to get this without paying for it is for Federation to make sure that its community listings are up-to-date and as frequent as reasonably possible online. This is low-hanging fruit for Federation.

3) Everyone wanted help reaching more young people. Since the Federation in this case was seeing success in its young adult engagement, it spread those same strategies to other areas—like PJ Library and communications in general—to expand on those initial successes and help other organizations in the community.

Step 7: Rebuild Broken Relationships. As discussed previously, create meaningful partnerships, even if it means taking the backseat in projects so the partner agency can shine. Keep the end goal in mind, and understand how the results, exposure, and partnerships will broaden shared experiences and will alter how the Federation is viewed by a partner organization and community participants at a program or event.

“My work starts before a meeting or coffee date. I check them out on Facebook or Instagram. I want to know what they look like, what they do, have they ever engaged with us before. You have to do your homework to make it worthwhile.”

KB Goodkin
Director of Community
Engagement and Advancement,
Jewish Federation of
Northeastern New York

“Don’t be afraid to disrupt. If you’re sitting on your La-Z-Boy and you’re watching your favorite show on television and you have your snack right next to you, what’s going to make you get up out of that chair? If you have to pee! Discomfort inspires change. Discomfort is what’s going to make you move. I live for the awkward moment because everything blooms out of the awkward moment—it grows! And then you have a meaningful experience.” **KB Goodkin**, *Director of Community Engagement and Advancement, Jewish Federation of New York*

Step 8: Build Momentum. Update the core investors often, but build that circle of multipliers. Get people excited with data and facts about successes; keep them excited by giving them language to talk about what you are doing as a team. Encourage that excitement and further funding by giving them the tools to participate in the process so they can become multipliers for the vision.

Step 9: Devote Resources to Get the Job Done. In other words, budget appropriately. Effective engagement is not cheap. A year’s worth of meetings and exploratory conversations can be anywhere from \$1,000 per year to full salaries and budget lines. Leaders of each Federation need to decide what makes sense for their community. But try to give the person hired to do this work the tools she or he needs to do the job to the best of her or his ability. If you provide professional development opportunities and space to grow, you are much more likely to achieve success. Another sometimes forgotten piece is that research shows that people are happier coming to work if they have friends there. So team building, employee engagement training, staff retreats, and a physically happy environment all should be built into the engagement team, too.

Step 10: Follow Through on These Principles. Create trust, ownership, and empowerment. Be a communal trust that people want to belong to and support.



Build out your community offerings and tell people about it.

Reframe projects under the engagement umbrella. Make sure every agency in the community is aware of these opportunities. How? Try to have a meeting at the beginning of every year with leadership from every single relevant organization in the community. Walk them through your offerings and find out what they want and need. Then spend the rest of the year working through those offerings together.



Snapshot: Measuring and Tracking

When our focus is on programs, understanding our success is easy: We count participants. Relationship-based engagement, however, asks us to understand our success based on the ways that participants change and grow Jewishly. And so, we have to understand where they have come from. Moreover, we are building experiences that work for their lives—another reason for us to know all that we can about who they are. Careful use of data is imperative, therefore, in engagement work.

“Don't forget evaluation. We tell our partners that we will evaluate their work...We're tough on our...partners. We want to know if they're doing their best work. And are their partners doing their best work?”

Naomi Adler
CEO, The Jewish Federation
of Greater Philadelphia

Information Gathering and Data Tracking

Understanding our work by tracking relationships and using data to guide engagees' journeys are traits of nearly any successful engagement strategy. Numerous Federations, CJE in Baltimore, PJ Library, Hillel International, and Moishe House are among the organizations that do this especially well. They know the demographics, interests, and depth of relationship that their engagees have with their organizations and with Jewish life broadly.

At CJE in Baltimore, its connectors track every single question, interaction, and interest that a person expresses to the connectors. CJE's Lisa Bodziner says, “The follow-up is critical to building a deep relationship, but that can only happen if you know every detail about what happened the last time you interacted with someone.”

It's nearly impossible for one person to keep track of more than 100 people at a time. Dedicate resources and time to a client relationship management (CRM) program. Any touch point a Federation has with a community member or organization should be entered in a database.

Are we using predictive analytics over time to figure out what people are doing and what they want to do? You'd better use analytics or some kind of an app to mine that database to find trends so that when a person comes to the next Federation or JCC dinner, you can say that at the last seven dinners, somebody has sat next to these three people, and I could ask if they would like to sit next to those same people again. It's not only good work, it's what they expect because Netflix knows what they want to watch, Amazon knows what they want to buy, Facebook knows who they're friends with. Why can't the Jewish world figure it out, too? If we don't do that, we're saying that we operate outside a market economy. – Rabbi Dan Smokler, Chief Innovation Officer, Hillel International

Hillel offers a powerful example of an organization that has transitioned to being data-driven, through its Drive to Excellence initiative. Here's how Hillel thinks about measurements and metrics.

First, Hillel identified its impact goals: Hillel wants to know all the Jewish students on campus, and wants to see 70% of them at least once. Hillel wants students to have a Jewish social network and for students to see Judaism as central to their social lives.



For reflection: What are your Federation's goals related to people in your community? Follow Hillel's example and be as specific as possible. What percentage of your community's people and households might you know (i.e., have in a database)? Have you had one interaction with them, or more? How are they engaging in some kind of meaningful Jewish experience and/or leadership capacity? Are donors giving more over time?

“We’re one of the communities that adopted BlackBaud [a data management system], and there’s a volunteer module. So we’re actually using resources to develop that volunteer module and build it out to make sure we’re putting people in the system. That becomes a priority component of the data we input. It’s not simply someone checking a postcard saying I’m interested in these three things. It’s checking a postcard of someone going to a synagogue event and calling that person to have a discussion with them about what we know they are interested in.”

Ilan Hurvitz, Chief Planning Officer, Jewish Federation of Palm Beach County



Key Aggregate Findings

1+ > 0	6+ > 4+	6+ = High-Impact
Any participation is better than none.	More participation correlates with higher outcomes. Six interactions have the highest marginal effect.	6+ interactions lead to equivalent student outcomes as participation in one high-impact interaction.

Second, Hillel wanted to understand how its interventions relate to those goals:

The more someone engages (the number of connections), the more Hillel sees greater outcomes. Hillel believes that there is a class of things that it does that creates the greatest impact. “High-Impact Experiences” are immersive, sustained, rich in Jewish content; build community; or ask someone to give of themselves to others in a leadership capacity or service capacity. It’s worth noting that:

- These were hypotheses that Hillel set out to test over several years.
- Hillel facilitated a survey of students to track how many students they reach and how they reach them.
- Hillel began to track student engagement in a pilot initiative; 18 Hillels volunteered to share their data initially, and then 46 Hillels participated most recently.

Third, Hillel identified its magic number and the kind of engagement that leads to its goals:

Engagement continues to grow at six interactions, but not at the same rate; a Birthright Israel trip might be equal to six engagements on campus. The best is six interactions and one high-impact engagement (like Birthright Israel).

Like Hillel, Federations and other Jewish organizations can identify the desired impact we want to have and translate that goal into measurable outcomes. Those outcomes can then drive strategy.





Snapshot: Programs and Initiatives

As you think about your engagement efforts, what are the strategies and tactics that make the most sense to bring into your community? Can you engage in this way? What makes sense for you? We've examined key parts of some successful models already. Let's hone in now on some of the tested models and methodologies that address a variety of age groups and people in different life stages. At FedEngage!, expert practitioners shared these models. What makes them unique? What have the leaders of each program identified as the critical, "can't-miss" elements? Most importantly, what can we, as Federation professionals, learn from them?

jBaby Chicago

A program of Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago (JUF), jBaby Chicago helps expectant parents and families of newborns and tots (0–24 months) make connections, build friendships, and engage in Jewish life in Chicago.

- JUF is an effective conduit to these families because it is **community oriented**, is in touch with this demographic (also implements PJ Library and JUF Right Start), and has access to resources. jBaby Chicago helps JUF solidify its role as community builder, connector, resource, builder, and supporter of Jewish life.
- Key characteristics and components of jBaby Chicago include relationship building with **parent ambassadors**; delivery of jBaby swag bags; creation of **Jewish playgroups, classes, and experiences with community partners**; **capacity-building and sharing** among Jewish organizations; and a **website and e-newsletter** geared to new parents.
- **jBaby Swag Bag** includes high-quality/highly sought after baby/tot items that are handpicked by jBaby ambassadors and automatic sign-up into PJ Library.
- As discussed on page 13, **jBaby ambassadors** identify expectant and new parents in the community, staff jBaby Chicago playgroups and events, design and host new parent dinners and nights out, meet one-on-one with new parents, participate in online conversations with topics of interest to new parents, and serve as "eyes and ears" in the community.



jBaby learned that it's optimal to offer classes, like music class or swim class, at four different times to ensure that everyone who wants to participate is able to.

- jBaby partners with organizations and grants them funding (generally about \$2,500) to run events that reflect that specific organization's values. jBaby does not want to offer free classes; rather, it wants its partners to offer programs at a cost that undercuts competitors.
- **Social media is a key tactic for outreach**; jBaby pays for professional photographers at events to have high-quality pictures for social media platforms and sends a Shabbat picture and greeting every Friday via social media, along with other information, tips, and event details throughout the week. jBaby has learned that this investment of time and resources is more effective than paid ads in a newspaper.

Jewish Teen Initiative (JTI) of Greater Boston

With initial funding from the Jim Joseph Foundation, JTI connects Jewish teens to their peers, motivates participation in Jewish life, and builds community among Jewish teens of all backgrounds and affiliations through organizational collaboration; innovative, high-quality programming; and participation in national opportunities.

- When JTI started in 2008 (known then as the North Shore Teen Initiative), instead of beginning by offering programming, it first **started with building relationships with other organizations and people**. JTI went to congregations, JCCs, and schools and asked: Are you open to working with other people? Are you meeting teens “where they are”? What is your obligation to make sure each teen is engaged? What are you proud of, and where are your opportunities for growth?

Adam Smith, Executive Director of JTI, says, “I’m not asking people to take a big leap—I say to a youth director, ‘You’ve self-reported that you are only offering a student-teaching program, and you told me you’d like a Tikkun Olam program. Can I help you launch that?’ It’s empathy-design interviewing.”

- JTI **breaks down organizational silos and barriers** to work together and to offer programming that is available to all teens in the community.
- Many teens **don’t attend events simply because they are unaware** of them or don’t know peers who are going. JTI focuses on changing those dynamics.
- By **working with local partners and national organizations** such as Habitat for Humanity, Sloane Peer Leadership Fellows, and others, JTI engages the whole teen in programming, including travel, advocacy, camp, youth group, Israel, Tikkun Olam, arts, student teaching, sports, and more.
- JTI **meets teens where they are** by serving as a central connector to other organizations and programs. If teens are already engaged somewhere, JTI works to build on that.

- JTI **diligently tracks data** and knows that it has partnered with 50+ organizations, engaged 900+ Jewish teens, offered 220+ program opportunities, and had an industry-leading 35% engagement rate in 2012 (climbing ever since).

- Success breeds success:** Since the original grant, JTI has become a model for youth engagement with ten cities currently launching teen initiatives. In 2016, JTI received a grant from CJP to bring its lessons learned and model to the cluster of cities and towns known as MetroWest outside Boston. JTI has also launched a national teen leadership pilot to advance its mission of engaging and inspiring underserved Jewish teens.



- jBaby Chicago is **diligent about tracking data** and knows that more than 1,300+ new parents have signed up for jBaby Chicago; ambassadors have met with 900+ of them to date; 40% are new to JUF; 73% have attended a class, playgroup, or event; 100% of organizational providers report that jBaby Chicago strengthened their capacity to serve expectant and/or new parents.
- People connect to jBaby as a brand; each flyer includes a short explanation about the relationships between jBaby and the community and JUF and jBaby. Then jBaby uses this brand awareness to connect parents to other parts of JUF.



jHUB Cleveland

A joint initiative of The Jewish Federation of Cleveland and the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland, and an InterfaithFamily affiliate, jHUB Cleveland connects interfaith families to Jewish life in Cleveland.

- jHUB Cleveland began after Cleveland Federation's strategic plan and population study in 2011 showed that **about 50% of interfaith families in greater Cleveland value Jewish community and 70% of interfaith families don't feel connected to the Jewish community.** The majority of interfaith families want community but did not feel connected. How could they have an opportunity to connect?
- jHUB Cleveland is an entree to Jewish life: meeting with people, learning their stories, hearing what they want, and trying to connect them. **If something that they want already exists, jHUB connects them to that; if it doesn't, jHUB will try to create it.**

One of the first things that I did as director of JHUB was to meet with my colleagues, including the rabbis and educators. "This is what we want to do with jHUB, and this is how we can support you." The interfaith couples workshops are community offerings so if rabbis have couples that they're working with, they can benefit from it. They can send them to me and know that I'm not looking for members. We have a community-run intro to Judaism class. There was buy-in already from the non-Orthodox clergy. I think they trust what I say because they've seen the results. — Melinda Mersack, jHUB Cleveland

- jHUB is housed at the local Jewish education center so that it can continue operating during Federation's campaign, when other programs stop.
- jHUB Cleveland offers **discussion groups and safe spaces** for people to be able to talk and share and learn from each other.
 - Its **interfaith couples workshops** engage couples who are navigating specific issues unique to an interfaith relationship and who want to meet other interfaith couples and share experiences in a confidential space.
 - Its **workshops on grandparenting** interfaith grandchildren engage grandparents in a transparent way about the initiative and its goals.
- **In these workshops**, people start to create their own community.
- **jHUB Cleveland is never prescriptive** so it's really supporting people on their journey, wherever they are and wherever they are going.



In an effort to make jHUB better known and to meet new people, jHUB sends 800+ holiday boxes—Seder in a box, Hanukkah in a box, basically a starter kit for celebrating the holidays in a home with information and games and activities.

- jHUB advertises on Interfaith Family, on its own website, on Facebook, in newsprint, and in flyers. Still, personal emails are most effective, along with word of mouth.

We are always looking to explore things collaboratively. Whoever is going to be willing to participate, fantastic. — Melinda Mersack, jHUB Cleveland

OneTable

This organization helps people, primarily those in their 20s and 30s, host and attend unique Shabbat dinners.

- As discussed on page 10, OneTable's premise is that **Shabbat as a ritual offers many opportunities for meaning and engagement.** OneTable simply asks the question: "How do I redefine access to it?"
- OneTable **recognizes, and tries to account for, the fears people may have about hosting or attending:** what to cook; what to wear; what to say (both in terms of blessings and conversation). What does hosting mean? What does the dinner mean? What is expected? What do people want to be doing on a Friday night? What's the difference between being in your 20s or 30s in terms of looking for friendships and relationships?
- OneTable works because **the model is inherently scalable.** Different people around the country can host hundreds of dinners every week in six hubs: New York, San Francisco Bay Area, Chicago, Colorado, Washington, DC, and Atlanta. Outside the hubs, anyone can host a dinner through an Airbnb-type platform.
- **A host truly owns the dinner**—sets the table, determines the topic of conversation, the food, decorations, and more.
- OneTable partners with organizations like Repair the World, Moishe House, and others, to engage more people and to offer resources that people may want to **facilitate challenging conversations** about current events, social justice, and more.

“There were so many questions, but once we started to get answers for them, we could start designing OneTable offerings based on what we learned. That's market-driven Jewish life.”

Aliza Kline
Executive Director, OneTable

Snapshot: Engagement at Every Stage of Life



As this report details, an effective engagement strategy must account for all age groups in the community and for people in different life stages. A life journey, a Jewish journey, is ongoing—and Federation has a role to play every step of the way. These key concepts, comprehensive step-by-step plans, and programmatic models from various life stages offer an array of tools from which we can choose to begin, continue, or refine our engagement efforts. At FedEngage!, we explored more deeply the following specific target populations. Insights about different age cohorts and other group-defining characteristics can help us be even more effective in creating vibrant Jewish life and community.

Teens

How to engage Jewish teens? Teens want opportunities to lead and create meaningful experiences; to be inclusive of their non-Jewish friends; to challenge themselves; to add value and gain skills that will help them in their lives; to question and be curious about Jewish life and ritual, as well as their lives more broadly; and to create change for good through authentic service experiences—among many other opportunities they express. Ideas that are relevant to teens as humans are as important—maybe more important—than Jewish ideas. Address the whole teen, all aspects of her or his life, and recognize that teens today float often seamlessly among different groups of friends and organizations and programs.

They will come once for pizza, they will come twice for pizza, but the third time and beyond, Jewish teens will only return to a program if they sense real value. . . . Teens expressed that ongoing Jewish programming should offer them recognizable value in their life. Only then, one can conclude, will the programming attract and retain Jewish teens. The nuance here is that value can, and does, mean many different things to Jewish teens today.

– Generation Now: Understanding and Engaging Jewish Teens Today.¹⁶

College Students

Focus on building relationships with individuals to provoke people to articulate what they need for themselves and empower them to do it for themselves. At Penn Hillel, we want 500 people in the building, and we want 500 people outside doing Shabbat. – Mike Uram, Executive Director and Campus Rabbi, Penn Hillel

Young Adults

How to engage young adults? Post-college, young adults in their 20s and early 30s are out in the real world, with no one to dictate what to do or how they spend their time and money. **Young adults want to be the creators of their lives and their community.** Organizations that want to engage this age group successfully heed this principle. Young adults are truly in the midst of defining themselves and finding the personal expressions that they feel suit them best.

I got a call from a 24-year-old young woman who wanted to talk about how she's longing for Jewish community and she heard that that's what I talked to people about. So I had a cup of tea with her. She said, "I really want to be doing more Jewish things, and I feel like my friends do, too. But I feel like I don't want what my grandpa wanted." And I said, "OK, what is it that your grandpa wanted?" "I think my grandpa wanted a community." I then asked her what the difference was. "I wanted to be in a place where we celebrate together and we're there for each other and it's spiritual and connected to bigger questions." So I said I thought that actually WAS what your grandpa was looking for. But I'm hearing that you've been wanting to do that in different ways. So what DO you want? – Rabbi Susan Goldberg, Wilshire Boulevard Temple, Los Angeles

Hyper-inclusivity, being welcoming to non-Jewish friends, is a component of successful Jewish engagement for young adults. It's challenging to create authentic community with this population without also including their non-Jewish friends.

“People often get turned away because they don’t understand a word and they already think, ‘OK, I guess this isn’t the right fit for me.’ So, I think in the very beginning of any engagement program, be very aware of language and then create a space for people to say, ‘I don’t know what that is.’ Certainly, for us, we have both Jews and non-Jews who don’t know certain terms or practices. Make them all feel comfortable.”

Avi Rubel
Co-CEO,
Honeymoon Israel

Interfaith Couples

How to engage interfaith couples? Sixth and I in Washington, DC, jHUB in Cleveland, and Interfaith Family show that when engaging interfaith couples, the willingness and ability to listen, to offer a safe space, and to connect couples to other interfaith couples are integral to successful engagement. Recognize, too, that couples won’t necessarily “do Jewish” in ways that you want them to or in ways that reflect traditional benchmarks for successful engagement.

I wanted them to light Shabbat candles; I wanted them to have Jewish children, to not baptize their children. But then we developed a motto: Cede power to gain community – Rabbi Shira Stutman, Sixth and I

Today, 71% of non-Orthodox Jews are from interfaith families, and 51% of non-Orthodox Jewish millennials have one Jewish parent.¹⁷ Interfaith couples and families comprise a significant portion of our community: Create space for conversations around values they care about. People want to talk and open up, even though this can be very challenging. This is especially powerful when it’s not just one couple with each other, but ten couples doing this together. Ultimately, this levels the playing field among partners, regardless of who is Jewish and the amount of Jewish knowledge they have. Sixth and I’s interfaith couples workshop, for example—a four-week guided class—starts by having interfaith couples write their case studies about the challenges they’re confronting in the relationship. They then share them in open conversations with the group, while also doing such exercises as listing and discussing what they think makes a Jewish home. During these conversations, Rabbi Shira Stutman answers questions only if she’s asked. Shira emphasizes the **need to focus on finding out where people are coming from, what each person is bringing to the table, rather than sharing her own opinions or expectations.**

With interfaith couples especially, language matters, too. If you don’t know someone very well, don’t ask a question like “What Jewish thing in your life is most important?” **Instead, ask, “What value in your life is most important to you?”**

Parents with Young Children

How to engage new parents? Parents want to feel supported and validated in this hectic time in their lives; they want easy and to do right by their children; they want to be stimulated as human beings and as parents, and they, themselves, want to make friends, kindred spirits during this time. The successful models for this age cohort account for this reality. Build partnerships, such as with Music Together, with yoga studios, and with swim clubs. Empower parents to do for themselves. Stimulate them as parents and help them translate what they learn into discussions with their children—don’t spoon-feed them. Give them time to get to know each other without their children present, even just 15 minutes.

New parents tell us they’re feeling so judged on every level every day about being a parent. “Should I do this, should I do that, how do I do this, how do I do that?” They cannot fathom putting themselves into a situation where they might be judged for anything else in their life. Offer them engagement experiences that are safe and easy—free of judgment from family or friends. – Debbi Cooper, Assistant Vice President, Young Family Engagement, Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago

Baby Boomers

How to engage Baby Boomers? *The singular challenge for the Jewish community is going from the Greatest Generation—which in my community makes the majority of the highest level of major donors—to Baby Boomers, who are moving to my community in South Florida in droves. – Ilan Hurvitz, Chief Planning Officer, Jewish Federation of Palm Beach County*

As with other age cohorts, the **most meaningful engagement for Baby Boomers often occurs within the context of meaningful relationships**—yet we often prioritize only the transactional with these older constituents. Baby Boomers in these relationships behave more like Millennials than like the Greatest Generation. They’re all about “me” and their “personal agenda.” In Palm Beach County, 48% of Boomers have left their synagogue, and 54% of current members are considering leaving. Federations have a pivotal role to play to create gateways of engagement for this generation, too.

In some ways, thinking about building an engagement strategy around Baby Boomers may be most challenging simply because there is less research and generally fewer resources devoted to this age cohort than to others. Partly because of that, we want to **look closely at the success The Jewish Federation of Palm Beach County has had engaging this demographic**, as it welcomes thousands of “snow-birds” to its community each year.

Federation began its engagement work with research: data about the cohort’s attitudes, interests, values, needs, concerns, and Jewish connections. A strong emphasis in the data on volunteering led to Federation’s development of a Jewish volunteer center, which now emphasizes two kinds of volunteering: “Encore Careers,” which places volunteers in what is essentially a professional role, half-time or more, but as volunteers, and “Incremental Opportunities,” which gives one-time or occasional opportunities to volunteers. Notably, the incremental opportunities often involve the elderly, which allows Baby Boomers to see the kind of care they may need one day (and, therefore, answers a curiosity that they have).

These are the two spokes of volunteering we focus on. We know we can’t do everything all the time for everybody. So we prioritize based on our resources, and our three- to five-year plan has benchmarks that we want to accomplish in terms of donors, dollars, and leaders. We spend our resources to align with those priorities. – Ilan Hurvitz

Federation also offers micro-grants to synagogues to develop spirituality-based programs because **Baby Boomers say they want belonging and meaning and purpose**. Like many in the engagement space, they want these opportunities in their spaces, and so Federation targets the prevalent gated communities of South Florida with these grants. Having the program accessible in what is almost like a summer camp environment for retirees is a very high priority. And as with models for other age cohorts, so, too, is finding the right person who organizes social networks and groups of friends in those communities and can persuade their peers to opt in.

In their engagement of Baby Boomers, **Federation leaders hope to engage them in Jewish life, in philanthropy, and in leading Federation.**

Federation leaders have learned that for Baby Boomers not yet engaged with Federation or with philanthropy, collective responsibility is not a call to give. Instead, engagement with Jewish life and then with the Federation story leads to giving. And for each of them, the reason to connect with Jewish community and the reason to give may be different—these reasons are personal and emotional. That reason to connect even includes leadership—Federation has lowered its minimum gift to be involved in community planning committees because simply getting people involved and educated as stakeholders in what Federation does has been demonstrated to result in giving.

Ultimately, volunteerism or some other type of engagement is needed before any engagee can have a conversation about giving.

Donors

How to engage donors? Engagement sits in the context of Federation’s mandates to steward financial resources to strengthen the community and to cultivate leadership to guide Jewish life.

To that end, we need to touch on the **implications of the engagement agenda for philanthropy. When—and how—do we engage people as donors?**

Arlene Miller, President and CEO of Jewish Federation & Family Services, Orange County, CA, builds donor engagement into the Federation’s overall engagement strategy, while not making it the only priority. She notes that:

1. Engagement doesn’t mean we stop caring about people in need.
2. Engagement isn’t about the event—we can’t solicit at an event. We have to get to know people first.
3. We have to ensure that leadership understands that our responsibility isn’t to fill the room—it’s to create a quality group, a quality mini-community.
4. We can raise funds and invest in community in meaningful ways while investing in people who may never give. **That’s engagement—saying it’s OK to not show up. We have to be open and supportive of that, too, if we want to expand the number of people engaged with Jewish life.**

“Just having the conversation about the annual campaign doesn’t work anymore. The only way they’re going to give is the same reason they give to their children—out of love. They have to love that Federation is doing something that connects with their personal passion, their personal agenda. That’s the key to success with engaging Baby Boomers.”

Ilan Hurvitz
Chief Planning Officer,
The Jewish Federation of
Palm Beach County



“I sit with donors all day long. They want to know about the cool new funky thing we’re doing. They want to invest more in us when they hear that stuff because that’s what they’re reading about. So the answer is engagement—if you’re not in that space, you’re left behind. Because our donors want to know what you’re doing will affect their kids’ lives. They want you to be relevant.” **Steven Rakitt**, CEO, The Jewish Federation of Greater Washington



We started with the question: What is the role of Federation? We are a Midwestern community—we have a sense of “group”—everyone is affiliated, without necessarily paying membership, and they consider themselves part of the “group.” Every Federation needs to identify its engagement goal and its philanthropic goal. Engagement means engagement—there cannot be a “bait and switch.” You need a lot of people who care about being part of community, so that some (smaller number of people) will give, and so that some (even smaller number of people) will lead the community.
 – Miryam Rosenzweig, Chief Development Officer, The Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit

The return on investment (ROI) of engagement encompasses much more than only philanthropy, and not everyone who is engaged will be solicited. And we need to date before we can marry—we can’t solicit everyone immediately, even if we will solicit them eventually. At The Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York, people are solicited only after they have been part of a certain number of events or demonstrated a certain type of leadership. At The Jewish Federation & Family Services of Orange County, CA, they are building their base of people engaged in Jewish life and working to strengthen the Federation engagement of those already involved. Arlene explains, “We mapped an organization chart for community volunteer engagement, and we actually created new positions to ensure volunteers are as happy as can be and remain engaged. One volunteer becomes a donor, and then you move that donor along a continuum.” Merely working on the depth of engagement of those already involved will strengthen their community.



FedEngage! was a dynamic, inspiring, challenging, and creative 24 hours of conversations and learning. We hope we captured all of that here.

Clearly, there is no single answer to effective Jewish engagement. So we cannot leave you with a corresponding single thought, either. What we can say is that throughout North America, Federations and other organizations and programs are seeing vibrant Jewish life—of all kinds with all sorts of people—built on genuine, deep relationships. We think you’ll see similar success taking that approach, utilizing the array of strategies, programs, tactics, and overall concepts discussed here.

Be fearless in your experimentation. Try something entirely new in your community. If an engagement approach is working, keep pushing forward. If it’s not working, learn why and correct course.

We all know that Jewish life is evolving right before our eyes. We have to evolve and be nimble with it. Connect with the people at the center of the evolution. Better yet, connect with the people on the outskirts and help them find the center of their evolution.

We deeply believe that Federations continue to be well-positioned to do this connecting and to create vibrant Jewish communities. Together, through our strong Jewish communities that we all envision and create, we can engage more people in Jewish life—helping them make meaning and build relationships that add value, relevance, tradition, and joy to all they do.



FedEngage! Discussion Guide

Study and Discuss

Why do we spend time in relationship with others?

Martin Buber, I and Thou

All real living is meeting.

Leviticus 19:33-34

When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong them. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love the stranger as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the LORD am your God.

Rabbi Jill Jacobs

For the Bible, the experience of not being fully secure in Egypt obligates the Jewish people, now secure in their own land, to care for those who remain perpetually on the outside. Though we may reject the rabbis' disregard for non-Jews, we can at least learn from the rabbis that our own history of imperfection should prevent us from feeling superior to others.

Who are the "outsiders" in our community—who is on the edge? What keeps them outside? Similarly, who participates heavily in mainstream Jewish community? What can we learn about the ways in which we're exclusive and inclusive from these patterns?

Who are our resources and possible partners in creating space for more people to show up? How can we learn about those different from us from these partners?

Where can we create micro-communities within our larger community? What are the "in-between" spaces for us?

We work together as Federation and organizational leaders—but how well do we know each other? How can we change our ways of interacting to make them more sacred?

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk

The Torah was given to everyone in equal measure, but everyone chooses to receive it according to their wisdom and their capacity to understand.

What does it mean for people to express themselves Jewishly and personally? How does it feel to us to know that people will interpret Judaism in their own ways—how can that be something we can become comfortable with?

How can our community create incentives and supports for people to build their own Jewish life on their terms and in their spaces? Should we consider grants, coaches, advertising, something else?

Activities

Pull together a group of organizational leaders—professional, lay, or both—and read together, a chapter at a time, Rabbi Mike Uram's *Next Generation Judaism*. Discuss its implications for your institutional community and how you can work together to implement some of its ideas.

Review your grants portfolio/allocations. Discuss what funds support true engagement activities and what funds support the core of the community. Is this divide something you're happy with?

Look at how people gather within Federation or your organization. Consider: How can you do more to use programs to build relationships? How can you connect people to each other outside programs?

Look at your Federation or organization's programs. Go through, program by program. Discuss the purpose of each one. What are they doing to connect people to each other or to Judaism? How does each program help participants deepen their experience of Judaism, Jewish life, or Jewish community?

Resources

Aryeh Ben David. *Becoming a Soulful Educator: How to Bring Jewish Learning from Our Minds, to Our Hearts, to Our Souls—and Into Our Lives*, 2016

Peter Block. *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, 2009

Beth Cousens' JTalk: Ownership. For JCCA, 2014

Lisa Bodziner. *Relational Judaism: The Only Experience Left for Jewish Community*, eJewishPhilanthropy, 2016

Rachel Gildiner. *Strengthening Jewish People through Relationships*, eJewishPhilanthropy, 2014

Deborah Kerdeman. *Pulled Up Short: Challenges for Education*, 2003

Rabbi Jonathan Leener. *Quality vs Quantity*, eJewishPhilanthropy, 2016

John McKnight and Peter Block. *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods*, 2012 (chapter on connectors)

NPR TED Radio Hour. *What Role Do Relationships Play in Learning?*, 2013

Rabbi Dan Smokler. *Social By Design In All that We Do*, eJewishPhilanthropy, 2016

Clive Thompson. *Are Your Friends Making You Fat?*, New York Times Magazine, 2009

Sherry Turkle. *The Flight from Conversation*, New York Times, 2012

Rabbi Mike Uram. *Next Generation Judaism: How College Students and Hillel Can Help Reinvent Jewish Organizations*, 2016

Eric E. Vogt et al. *The Art of Powerful Questions: Catalyzing Insight, Innovation, and Action*, 2003

Rabbi Ron Wolfson. *Relational Judaism: Using the Power of Relationships to Transform the Jewish Community*, 2013



End Notes

- 1 A *Portrait of Jewish Americans*, Pew Research Center, October 1, 2013
- 2 John McKnight and Peter Block. *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods*, 2012
- 3 Sefarim means “books” in Hebrew. In this context, the analogy is being made to the *Five Books of Moses* that comprise the Torah.
- 4 Debbi Cooper, Assistant Vice President, Young Family Engagement, Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, FedEngage! Presentation, November 2016
- 5 B. Joseph Pine II (Author), James H. Gilmore. *The Experience Economy: Work Is Theater & Every Business a Stage*, 1999
- 6 *Social by Design: Building a Jewish Home on Campus*, Erica Frankel, eJewishPhilanthropy, February 17, 2016
- 7 Hillel’s Senior Jewish Educators information at <http://www.hillel.org/jewish/jewish-education/senior-jewish-educators>
- 8 Whereas Jewish education has typically emphasized cognitive learning, engagement is about whole person learning, about emotional, spiritual, behavioral, and cognitive growth—about human change. Evaluate the impact based on who people become in totality.
- 9 Laura Baum and Dani Weinstein, Combined Jewish Philanthropies, FedEngage! Presentation, November 2016
- 10 Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York Community Engagement Package information at <http://bit.ly/2t2vmdC>
- 11 Debbi Cooper, Assistant Vice President, Young Family Engagement, Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago FedEngage! Presentation, November 2016
- 12 Jewish Teen Initiative (formerly North Shore Teen Initiative) engages teens from 23 towns and cities north of Boston in Jewish experiences
- 13 Beth Cousens, JFNA, JTalk Ownership speech, 2014
- 14 *The Making of a Mensch*, an initiative of *Let it Ripple*, information at <http://www.letitripple.org/films/making-of-a-mensch/>
- 15 As discussed in *What’s the Future of Business?: Changing the Way Businesses Create Experiences*, by Brian Solice, March 11, 2013
- 16 A series of recently produced in-depth reports on Jewish teens have greatly increased the knowledge we have in this space. This includes *Effective Strategies for Educating and Engaging Jewish Teens: What Jewish Communities Can Learn from Programs That Work*; *Building a Community of Jewish Teens: A Model Documentation of the North Shore Teen Initiative*; and *Generation Now: Understanding and Engaging Jewish Teens Today*
- 17 A *Portrait of Jewish Americans*, Pew Research Center, October 1, 2013



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The Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA)

The Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) brings together 148 Federations and 300 members of the Network of Independent Communities to maximize our impact as the central address of North American Jewry. JFNA provides services that build the capacity of local Jewish communities and helps Federations learn from one another, build affinity groups, and provide training, collateral materials, and seed funding for innovation. In the fields of caregiving, aging, philanthropy, disability, foreign policy, homeland security, and health care, we are thought leaders and advocates.

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The Jewish Education and Engagement office of JFNA empowers Federation leaders to facilitate the Jewish exploration of Jews and those in Jewish families. Federations aim to reach people wherever they are, giving them the tools they need to live more engaged and meaningful Jewish lives. Whether Federation leaders are managing grant processes, working collaboratively with partners, or implementing initiatives directly, we help Federation leaders help vibrant Jewish communities come to life.



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