EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This guide is the third report in the Center for Creative Leadership's ongoing Cross-Portfolio Research Study on leadership development in the Jewish social sector, which was commissioned by the Jim Joseph Foundation and began in 2018. Sources of data for our research include leadership development research and best practices, interviews with more than 80 successful Jewish leaders, surveys, program observation, evaluations, and emerging thought in Jewish leadership discourse, philanthropy, and other topics. Based upon that research, combined with the experience and knowledge CCL has across the social sector, this guide identifies key points to elements of design that help cohort programs create transformational learning experiences with the potential to support leaders in numerous ways over the course of a lifetime. Our goal is to provide program designers, operators and funders with best practices for creating leadership development experiences to build the future of an even more interdependent and connected Jewish social sector.

## COHORT-BASED LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS ARE KEY NETWORK BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES

Network leadership is the future of leadership for the social sector and this guide focuses on how cohorts can help build networks and provide valuable learning experiences for practicing network leadership skills.

Cohorts of leaders are important because they feed a set of connections among people that are important during a program and after the formal program ends, relationships which can be leveraged beyond the single program. In cohort-based leadership development programs, the value of the cohort experience is inextricably linked to the network it helps create. Building a social network will increase the return on investment of the initial program. Given how tightly connected the Jewish community is in the U.S., influencing any one part of the ecosystem (network) will have reverberating effects throughout the network. The types of complex challenges that Jewish leaders are facing are best approached by tapping tangibly into the collective expertise of a network of trusted colleagues versus adopting a heroic, individualistic approach to finding solutions or managing problems. This guide focuses on cohort program design elements that drive the creation of a purposeful, powerful network of leaders.

Networking is the strategic use of building relationships that serve multiple purposes: sharing information and resources, collaborating on activities or interventions, offering trust and support, providing sources of deep learning and personal transformation. Network leadership is the ability to cultivate and strategically leverage networks to achieve a shared goal or outcome. Throughout our research we heard that networks are critical to supporting – not "driving" – positive change in the Jewish social sector. We heard several ideas from our interviewees that involve leveraging the power of networks for sector-wide change and an ask for funders and operators to shift their relationships and methods of developing leaders to more purposefully focus on network creation. We argue that the focus should shift toward considering cohort-based programs as a microcosm of sector relationships in which critical issues can be tackled and critical skills developed. With such a shift also come a subsequent reimagining of the relationships of participants, funder/operators, evaluators, and others involved in the development and support of these experiences, and how we understand and measure program success, as we discuss further below.

# WHY FOCUS ON NETWORKS IN COHORT PROGRAMS?

- **Network leadership is the future of leadership for the social sector** because creating change in the complexity of today and tomorrow will require "field-wide collaboration" and resource sharing.

- **Networks can exponentially increase a program's impact** by providing continuous support for participants and disseminating knowledge and skills beyond the participants to other areas of the network.

- **Cohort-based programs provide a critical practice space** for the types of skills needed for network leadership.

- **Networks offer members a chance to build cultural and social capital**, increase opportunities for growth and development, and build supports through which to develop supportive connections and a sense of belonging.

- **Networks are able to grow and adapt** as well as foster connections that support innovation toward solutions for critical challenges that no one person or organization alone could solve.

# LEVERAGING NETWORKS REQUIRES A DIFFERENT SET OF LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND BEHAVIORS

One pre-requisite for sector-wide collaboration is spreading awareness of the value of networks. A second task is to teach leaders how to think strategically about supporting and engaging people, ideas, and organizations through networks. While our overall argument is that process is more important than checking the box on any one aspect of content delivery, there are some leadership development competencies that should be prioritized as focus areas.

We have found several competencies to be critical for networked leadership: acting collaboratively (interdependence and co-creation); engaging in systems thinking; developing and engaging networks (inspiring movements, building consensus, making (or breaking) connections); and communicating effectively. Program content that focuses on these skills and their core behaviors, and provides participants with the opportunity to build the skills while applying their learning (ideally toward field-level challenges) can be an extremely effective use of limited program delivery time while building the skills most necessary to have transferrable impact beyond the specific program.
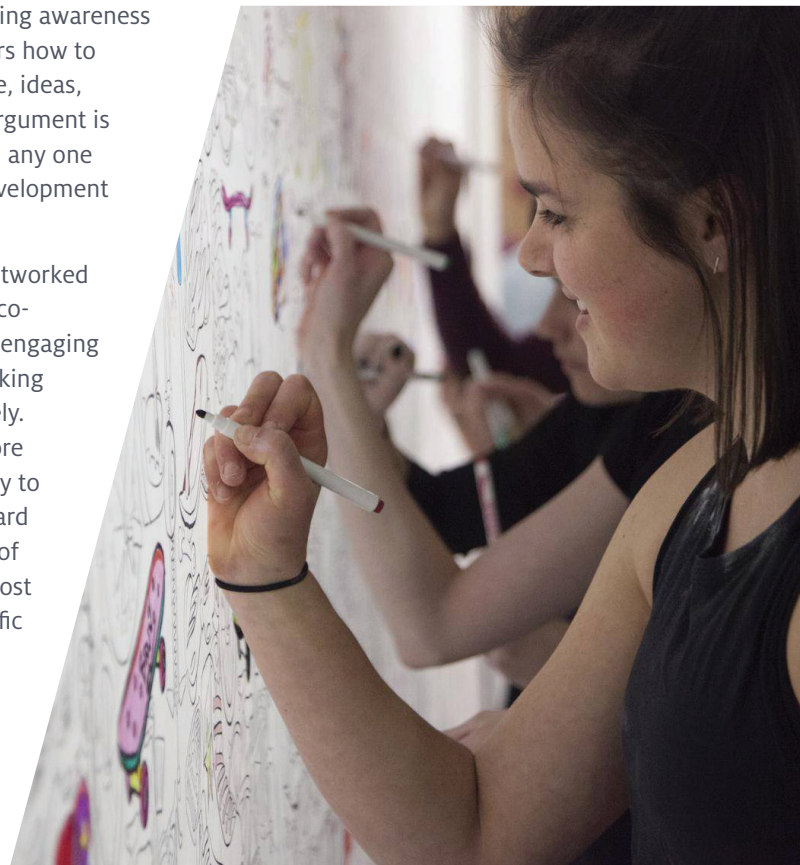
# DESIGNING PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT NETWORKS REQUIRES KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS
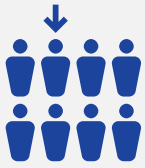
## SELECTING WITH INTENTIONALITY

- Recruitment and selection should consider the role of place (maintaining a geographic focus or explicitly deciding to not limit by geography), sector, experience or managerial level, organizational representation, and other factors.

- Selection is influenced directly by the recruitment strategies that informed the applicant pool. Intentional selection requires intentional recruitment.

- Funders & Operators should decenter their assumptions by going to communities and identifying who is trusted, connected, and leading, whether they have the resources or not.

- Always be thoughtful about the ongoing cycle of how participant competition and selection may affect the network.

- Current processes of recruitment and selection do not leverage the information or energy that applicants provide, or that program designers invest in learning about the cadre of qualified individuals. A best practice is to find a way to keep non-selected applicants engaged even if they aren't selected.

## ESTABLISHING TRUST

- Trust and psychological safety are levers for effective leadership development experiences. Effective collaboration hinges on trust, and the complex challenges that leaders face require specific attention on trust-building.

- Individuals need to trust that they will be able to bring their authentic self to the program before they are able to invest the level of effort required to learn.

- Trust-building and content should not be seen as mutually exclusive aspects of design.

- The primary responsibility of the facilitator in trust-based experiences is to 'curate' a learning environment that allows for co-creation of meaning around the content presented. Being real, authentic, and vulnerable presents a modeling opportunity so that participants can follow their example to engage with the group with authenticity and vulnerability.

## PREPARING LEARNERS

- We are most open to learning when we aware of our developmental needs and pushed beyond our current comfort zone. We are most capable of learning through relationships and interactions. Being open to those relationships requires vulnerability.

- Networks present opportunities for deeper growth experiences through mistakes. Human relationships are rarely straightforward. Due to the roles that communication, interdependence, and relationship building play in networks, preparing learners through experiences that provide opportunities for real vulnerability readies them for network challenges.

- A key way that cohort-based programs can foster learning moments is through feedback. Feedback furthers a network because it furthers the relationships that build the web of the network.

## DELIVERING POWERFUL CONTENT

- Cohort design for networked leadership requires a step-back to understand the bigger picture and goals of the cohort developmental experience.

- Power manifests with regard to content in both what is presented and how it is presented. When we move from content to skills, from what to how, we expand our understanding of what leadership development can do, and we approach learning from a more facilitative, curative mindset as opposed to a didactic delivery model.

- One key opportunity for determining content is discovery and data collection prior to program kickoff. Gathering data and incorporating it into design is one way that decisions around content can be more focused and grounded in the specific needs of cohort members.

- Shifting our mindset to think of cohort-based leadership development experiences as opportunities to 'seed' a new network, or connect existing networks, changes our understanding of what needs to happen during the program experience in order to enable the network to grow and evolve beyond the program.
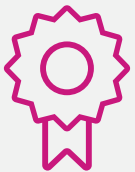
## REDEFINING PRESTIGE

- A fundamental challenge to network-focused cohort-based leadership development programs becomes redefining prestige as a shared attribute, and accepting that our traditional understanding of prestige may be short-lived in emergent networks.

- The shared experience of the program and entry into the larger network can ignite new collective identities, presenting an opportunity to redefine what it means to be a "fellow" of a program.

- We can also reframe the purpose of the program through the story that gets told about what makes it prestigious in a way that emphasizes interdependence as an ultimate goal.

## LAUNCHING TO A LARGER NETWORK

- If equipping leaders to address complex challenges in their field or sector is the ultimate outcome of the program, then connecting them to a network and building the strength of that network should be the ultimate purpose of the program.

- The idea then is that the program lays the infrastructure so that the individuals can stay connected, but that what flows through those pipelines (learning about new opportunities, giving or receiving emotional support, etc.) might change with what is most needed in that time and space.

- Cohort-based programs should provide content and experiences that help your participants cultivate their network awareness.

## CHANGING HOW WE GAUGE IMPACT

- Leadership experiences for network-based impact require a different approach to learning and evaluation than we are used to.

- The mindset has to also shift to encouraging and explicitly supporting data collection that serves the ultimate learning of the network and informs the broader field.

# FUNDERS AND OPERATORS NEED TO CHANGE BEHAVIORS TO SUPPORT NETWORK DEVELOPMENT

## Funders and Operators must shift their thinking in several key ways.

It starts with recruitment and selection – being intentional in building a representative applicant pool, selecting with intentionality, and expanding the definition of who is a leader within the communities. Funders, operators, and designers also have to shift their mindset from static outcomes to gathering data that informs the understanding of the dynamic processes at play and that fuels the network with information needed to act most efficiently and effectively. Operators must create the conditions that foster a learning approach over a performative/evaluative approach. Measurement is not benign, and funders, designers, and network architects can thoughtfully consider how to leverage measurement to build the network.

## The funder and designer/implementer relationship needs to evolve.

For funders and designers, a commitment to trust and trust-building requires navigating a mindset around content and delivery. Funders and providers can work together to allow for the vulnerability and redesign necessary to truly meet the needs of the participants, and therefore their communities and the larger network. How content is presented becomes a delicate balance of structure and adaptability and is especially challenging in longer-term multi-session programs. The arc of a learning journey may be established at the start of the program, but as network factors and contexts change, the learning plan may have to be adapted.

## Funders and Operators should reimagine how they are supporting their participants and networks.

By providing long-term stability and supportive infrastructure, funders and large organizations can help networks to form and thrive. Funders must begin to conceptualize what network support beyond the sessions of the program will look like, and what their role will be to foster the self-organizing and expansion of the network. Funders and designers must recognize that the network can never be owned, but it can be developed, supported, catalyzed, and engaged.

# MAKING THE GUIDE ACTIONABLE

The tables below provide a companion piece to help put the learnings from the guide into action. Reflection questions are intended to help the reader consider various aspects of design related to the key concepts discussed in each section of this guide. Action steps provide some (certainly not all) concrete actions to take when designing for networked leadership. The first table addresses the cross-cutting elements — examining power and envisioning the network — discussed throughout the guide and present in all stages of the work. The second provides reflection questions and action steps for each of the core design elements presented in the guide (see chart on page 16). Together, the reflection questions and the action steps allow program designers, operators, and funders to have generative conversations and identify ways to continuously improve their leadership development programs to support network development and networked leadership.

## CROSS-CUTTING ELEMENTS

| | REFLECTION QUESTIONS | ACTION STEPS |
|---|---|---|
| **EXAMINING POWER** | • Consider all stakeholder relationships within your program (funder, operator, participant, constituent, facilitator, coach, etc.); where do differences of power exist?<br>• How do the different roles limit the stakeholder's ability to be vulnerable, offer feedback, or engage authentically?<br>• Why have we developed our program (recruitment, design, delivery) the way we have? What assumptions are these decisions based on? What can we rethink, redesign, or alter to give all stakeholders more power and agency? | Identify opportunities to shift traditional power relationships within program design and delivery (i.e. collaboration, cohort ownership/organizing, etc.)<br>• Tune in to assumptions – decisions that are made quickly "because that's how it's usually done" (i.e. recruitment via application and nomination versus recruitment within a specific community through a focused network). Keep a running list of these assumptions and get stakeholder feedback, or examine program data, to determine if there are other ideas.<br>• Speak with stakeholders in different positions within your program and ask them to share their experience with power: when are they able to be vulnerable (or not)? Offer feedback (or not)? Engage authentically (or not)?<br>• Identify opportunities for stakeholders in different positions to own or organize different elements of your program that they usually would not be able to. Ask them to provide feedback on these opportunities.<br>• Organize opportunities for stakeholders to brainstorm ways to shift opportunities for ownership and agency within your program. |
| **ENVISIONING THE NETWORK** | • What are your goals for the network? How is your program/initiative designed to achieve these goals and support them at every step?<br>• How are these goals the same or different for different stakeholders in the network?<br>• How might the network need to change or grow over time to stay relevant? | • Generate network goals collaboratively, with network members. This can be done throughout the entire process and revised, as needed.<br>• Ask network members what they will need to continue to support the network (resources might include time, funding, etc.).<br>• Align the network's longevity and maintenance to meet your goals for the network. State the intended longevity of the network, and revisit the goals and need for the network regularly to ensure it's still meeting all stakeholders' needs. |

## SPECIFIC ELEMENTS

| | REFLECTION QUESTIONS | ACTION STEPS |
|---|---|---|
| **SELECTING WITH INTENTIONALITY** | • Who is traditionally identified as a leader in this community? Why? What important voices in this community are not traditionally identified as a leader? What unique experiences and perspectives could they contribute?<br>• Who might be most receptive, or stands to benefit the most, from an investment in their leadership in this community?<br>• What are the overall goals of the program and how can recruitment serve to advance toward those goals (i.e. waiting list or alternative options build a larger initial network; geographic focus can serve specific communities)? | • Challenge your own perspective – conduct pre-program data gathering to identify key leadership needs in the community, key leadership gaps, and/or identify who would benefit the most. Have these conversations across stakeholder groups to map different perspectives and be able to see the whole system/context.<br>• Involve, or include input, from leaders in the targeted community in the selection process.<br>• Determine how you can support individuals who aren't accepted into your program – how can you keep them engaged or offer immediate resources that provide some level of support? How might they still be involved in the network? Consider asking what supports they could use during recruitment/application so that you know what they need. |

| | REFLECTION QUESTIONS | ACTION STEPS |
|---|---|---|
| **ESTABLISHING TRUST** | • In what ways will your participants need to be vulnerable in order to build the relationships for extended work?<br>• How will you intentionally build time for connection and trust-building? How can this be built into delivery?<br>• How diverse is the group you are gathering (diverse in all ways) and what trust may need to be built to span differences? Examine 'incoming trust' – whether participants know one another; historical power differentials or relationships.<br>• How will facilitators and funders/operators build trust with participants? And how will they need to be vulnerable to do so?<br>• Reflect on whether you have identified facilitators who are likely to build trust within the network. | • Ask program participants (anonymously) what they will need – from peers, facilitators, funders, etc. -- in order to show up with their full selves. Ask before the program starts and check-in regularly. If needs aren't being met, be open about what is getting in the way and commit to addressing it.<br>• Build opportunities for participants to collaborate with each other and to plan for collaboration with others in the network, as part of the program design.<br>• Properly scaffold feedback experiences and allow time to debrief fully.<br>• Explicitly name and establish trust as a goal/outcome of the program – come to an agreement on what it means, how it will developed, and how it will be measured/understood. |
| **PREPARING LEARNERS** | • What skills are most critical for the types of collaboration participants (and the field) need? Why are these skills you're identifying most critical?<br>• What skills are participants coming in with? What prior experiences (either success or failure) are they bringing to the experience? | • Include ways to offer data, feedback, assessments for participants to highlight growth areas.<br>• Co-create a list of skills with stakeholders (to promote buy in and shared understanding). Define what the skills involve and what it looks like to develop them (i.e. operationalize). Articulate ways the program will support participants developing these skills. |
| **DELIVERING POWERFUL CONTENT** | • What are the ultimate goals for the initiative/network that extend beyond this single program? What influence should this group of people have and toward what purpose?<br>• How can the content from this program be directly applicable to the challenges participants are facing in the moment?<br>• How will the design, and the design team, be open to adjusting program content and/or design to address feedback from participants? How can the program articulate the design to the participants so they understand why decisions are being made? | • Gather data ahead of the program that allows participant voice to inform program design and content (What skills do they need most? What challenges are they working to address? What barriers stand in their way within their team or organizations?).<br>• Identify program facilitators and coaches who are receptive to feedback and adapting in the moment. Ideally, identify those who are familiar with the community they will be working with.<br>• Prioritize skills practice over content delivery (deliver content through discussion or application). |
| **REDEFINING PRESTIGE** | • What should it mean to be a 'fellow' or 'alum' of this program? What responsibilities to the network should that entail? What responsibilities do participants/alum have to the network, to one another, and vice versa? | • Emphasize interdependence and resource sharing as key responsibilities.<br>• Have stakeholders co-create norms and expectations. How do they want to show up for each other (resource sharing or champions/sponsors, collaborators, respectfully challenging ideas). |
| **LAUNCHING TO A LARGER NETWORK** | • What are critical network challenges that these leaders should be more equipped to address after this program?<br>• How can the program design lay the infrastructure and 'seed' the network so that it persists beyond the program (to the extent that it needs to) to facilitate connection and collaboration amongst participants?<br>• If relevant, how can the design lay the infrastructure to 'seed' the network so that it expands beyond the program itself? | • Incentivize sustained connectivity by providing strategies, platforms, time and other resources for continued collaboration.<br>• Ask participants how they want to stay connected and what they want to provide to each other. |
| **CHANGING HOW WE GAUGE IMPACT** | • How will you know that this program has been successful?<br>• How can data-collection and evaluation practices within the program activities be immediately usable to participants and facilitators?<br>• How can evaluation activities be re-envisioned to support utility over performative metrics? | • Support data literacy and data skill-building as part of the program activities.<br>• Scaffold participant synthesis and use of data to inform their collaborative work.<br>• Encourage 'micro-experiments': small opportunities for data collection, analysis, learning, and sharing what is learned with the community. |