

CURRENT CHALLENGES REQUIRE INTERDEPENDENT APPROACHES

Early in our research (and at every stage of the project since), we heard, read about, and witnessed that networks are critical to supporting – not “driving” – positive change in the Jewish social sector. Our first research report reviewed the literature on Jewish leadership, leadership development in the Jewish nonprofit sector, and the challenges facing Jewish leaders. In that report, we focused on five persistent types of challenges which we described as:

- *polarity management* (navigating a set of two orientations that could both be beneficial yet exist in tension with one another², such as stability and change),
- *sense of community* (developing and maintaining a communal sense of Jewishness that appreciates rather than conflicts with the reality that individual expressions of Jewish identities will continue to diversify and adapt to changing times),
- *education* (broadly conceived as supporting and fostering opportunities for Jewish experiences and learning of all kinds),
- *professional* (similar to other social sector organizations: retaining talent, building a pipeline, preparing professionals, etc.),
- *network building* (the importance of leadership across denominational boundaries, organizational functions, etc.).

“How do we address talent development around growing in positions? I think that what we are looking at is talent development around the core of what it is that people are doing. Not their position, but their vision. Not their stature, but what they are trying to change in the world.”

We concluded that all of these challenges “are also critical network challenges because meeting [them] is beyond what can be expected of any single organization.”³ These leadership challenges are perennial and will persist beyond the current crises, though the central challenges within them may be exacerbated during the current economic downturn and social unrest. Networks, which are emergent, 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.⁴

A consensus seems to be emerging among Jewish leaders and philanthropists, and across the entire social and philanthropic sector more broadly, that creating change in the complexity of today and tomorrow will require “field-wide collaboration” and resource sharing. Thought leaders in philanthropy are calling on foundations to more purposefully examine their role in creating system level change – suggesting that single-organization funding will no longer effectively serve to create the changes funders want to see.⁵ In turn, foundations are more readily encouraging and supporting grantees to take more partnership-driven approaches to their community development and change initiatives or altering their funding streams to focus on single, strategic issues or place-based initiatives in order to streamline focus and foster collaboration.⁶ Networked and strategic philanthropy will be more important than ever. They are also calling on funders to examine the ways in which their usual practices of investment, professional development, and measurement may actually be inadvertently limiting their impact.

We heard several ideas from our interviewees that involve leveraging the power of networks for sector-wide change and an ask for funders to shift their relationships and methods of developing leaders. These ideas spanned levels of networks – those within specific developmental programs, to those within organizations or even spanning the sector as a whole. Examples include ensuring that Jewish leaders in any organization or working context could have access to mentorship and coaching, to provide training for mentors, or to support a sector-wide talent service to strategically and intentionally connect leaders with appropriate opportunities for development, volunteering, or job placement within the sector. Networks offer 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. Designing and gaining support for network-level interventions like these will require not only a shift in thinking, but also an unprecedented level of coordination, cooperation, and, ultimately true collaboration among organizations to succeed. Leveraging networks to collaborate across goals, missions, constituents, and competitive funding landscapes requires a different set of leadership skills and behaviors.⁷