

LAUNCHING ALUMNI TO A LARGER NETWORK

As part of a follow-up to our interviews with Jewish sector leaders, we surveyed interviewees to ask about the overall benefits of LD programs. By far, the most emphasized benefit of programs from our respondents were the ability to become connected to a larger network. This network became a source of support that leaders could leverage far beyond the momentary experiences of the program.

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. Therefore, every other element of the program should be considered an integral element in the top priority of serving this goal. But our conceptualization and vision for the network cannot remain static. And, more critically, 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.

The Network (as you know it) May be Short-lived

The network will outgrow the program and will be far more valuable to alumni than the specific content that gets covered (hopefully). Truly emergent networks may also grow, splinter, reform, or fall apart as other issues or relationships take priority. Consider some of the most powerful networked movements of our time, which are popularly deemed largely "leaderless" yet which are actually "leaderful":²⁴ Occupy, Black Lives Matter, and the Tea Party.²⁵ These movements offer a shared identity that network members could use to anchor their perspective and experience and communicate their values. The collection of voices in the network conveyed shared values and commitments, but the manifestation of movement activities within the network was largely localized, distributed, and non-hierarchical. The common narrative of action within these movements was not the idea that a specific type of leader, statement, or action exemplified the movement, but that each person was responsible for "doing the work" within their context and that there was value and leadership in that.

Funders, operators, and designers must recognize that the network can never be owned, but it can be developed, supported, catalyzed, and engaged. This can be especially challenging when our ideas of program prestige take precedence over program impact. Exercise humility; hope and expect that the network will collectively be wiser than what you or any other single party could ever have planned or designed for it. Also recognize that the purpose and utility of the network may change over time. **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.**



"My biggest hope, I guess, is that we find a way to shift from a scarcity mentality to an abundance mentality. There's so much talent in the field of Jewish education. There is so much money in the Jewish philanthropic systems. The scarcity mentality turns organizations against each other, disincentivizes collaboration, fosters counterproductive innovation, by which I mean the launching of an organization around every idea. There's got to be some way to flip that switch and cultivate an abundance mentality where there's collaborations, more mergers and acquisitions than innovation. More kind of open-handed philanthropy, like, hey, you guys are doing an incredible thing with this school. What would happen if you, for five years, didn't have to worry about the bottom line? Just play."



Cultivate Network Imagination and Exploration

It is extremely challenging to learn how to think in terms of networks. We are largely conditioned (at least through Western paradigms) to think individually versus systemically. Therefore, **learning to truly think in terms of networks – how people, ideas, and resources are (or could be) connected – will be paramount to achieving impact through a network.** When we see networks we can influence them. Judaism itself is actually highly self-reflective, thus the groundwork for revisioning is already there. For example, the growing critique within Judaism around Ashkenormativity (the privileging of Jews of Ashkenazi descent and the marginalization of Sephardic or Mizrahi Jews) is an example of how the sector has brought in other perspectives from around the globe and sought to revise, as a community. **Cohort-based programs should provide content and experiences that help your participants cultivate their network awareness.** Unearthing assumptions, uncovering existing relationships, gaps in relationships, pathways of power and influence, and untapped areas of overlap can make networks more visible. Once networks are more visible, they can be influenced, engineered, and mobilized to create the shared changes network members seek.

