



Designing for Networked Leadership: Shifting from “What?” to “How?”

A guide to designing and delivering cohort-based leadership
and professional development programs for the Jewish social sector

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Prepared for the



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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.

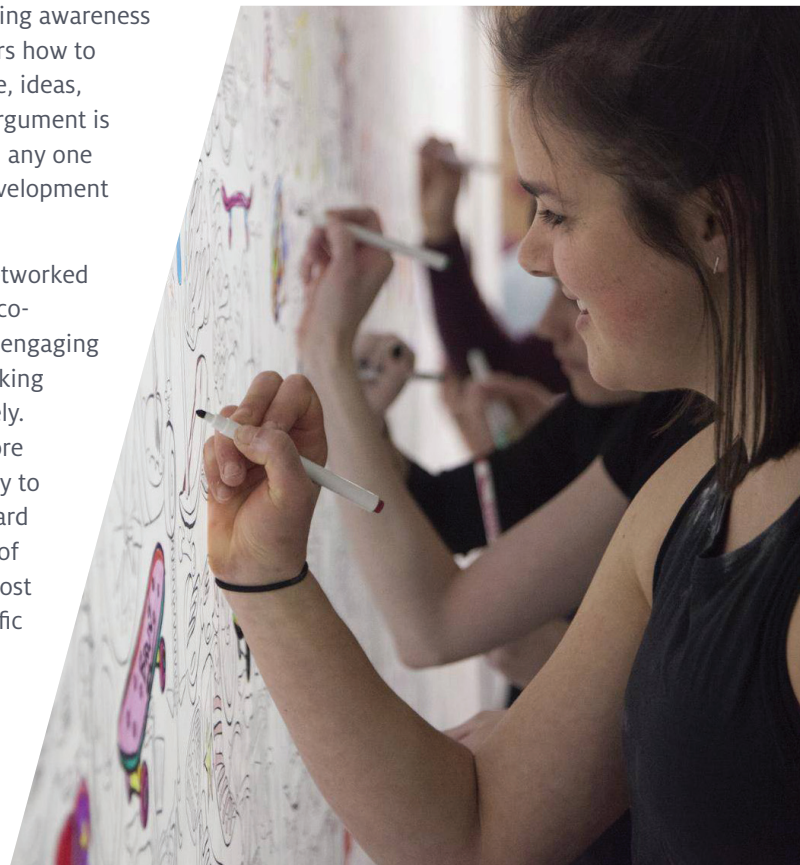
WHY FOCUS ON NETWORKS IN COHORT PROGRAMS?

- **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.

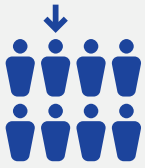
LEVERAGING NETWORKS REQUIRES A DIFFERENT SET OF LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND BEHAVIORS

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.



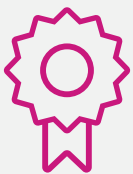
PREPARING LEARNERS

- We are most open to learning when we are 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider all stakeholder relationships within your program (funder, operator, participant, constituent, facilitator, coach, etc.); where do differences of power exist? How do the different roles limit the stakeholder's ability to be vulnerable, offer feedback, or engage authentically? 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? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify opportunities to shift traditional power relationships within program design and delivery (i.e. collaboration, cohort ownership/organizing, etc.) 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. 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)? 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. Organize opportunities for stakeholders to brainstorm ways to shift opportunities for ownership and agency within your program.
ENVISIONING THE NETWORK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are your goals for the network? How is your program/initiative designed to achieve these goals and support them at every step? How are these goals the same or different for different stakeholders in the network? How might the network need to change or grow over time to stay relevant? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generate network goals collaboratively, with network members. This can be done throughout the entire process and revised, as needed. Ask network members what they will need to continue to support the network (resources might include time, funding, etc.). 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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? Who might be most receptive, or stands to benefit the most, from an investment in their leadership in this community? 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)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. Involve, or include input, from leaders in the targeted community in the selection process. 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways will your participants need to be vulnerable in order to build the relationships for extended work? • How will you intentionally build time for connection and trust-building? How can this be built into delivery? • 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. • How will facilitators and funders/operators build trust with participants? And how will they need to be vulnerable to do so? • Reflect on whether you have identified facilitators who are likely to build trust within the network. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • 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. • Properly scaffold feedback experiences and allow time to debrief fully. • Explicitly name and establish trust as a goal/outcome of the program – come to an agreement on what it means, how it will be developed, and how it will be measured/understood.
PREPARING LEARNERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What skills are most critical for the types of collaboration participants (and the field) need? Why are these skills you're identifying most critical? • What skills are participants coming in with? What prior experiences (either success or failure) are they bringing to the experience? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include ways to offer data, feedback, assessments for participants to highlight growth areas. • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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? • How can the content from this program be directly applicable to the challenges participants are facing in the moment? • 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? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?). • 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. • Prioritize skills practice over content delivery (deliver content through discussion or application).
REDEFINING PRESTIGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize interdependence and resource sharing as key responsibilities. • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are critical network challenges that these leaders should be more equipped to address after this program? • 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? • If relevant, how can the design lay the infrastructure to 'seed' the network so that it expands beyond the program itself? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentivize sustained connectivity by providing strategies, platforms, time and other resources for continued collaboration. • Ask participants how they want to stay connected and what they want to provide to each other.
CHANGING HOW WE GAUGE IMPACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will you know that this program has been successful? • How can data-collection and evaluation practices within the program activities be immediately usable to participants and facilitators? • How can evaluation activities be re-envisioned to support utility over performative metrics? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support data literacy and data skill-building as part of the program activities. • Scaffold participant synthesis and use of data to inform their collaborative work. • Encourage 'micro-experiments': small opportunities for data collection, analysis, learning, and sharing what is learned with the community.

COHORT PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT

When we embarked upon this project almost three years ago (January 2018), the goal was to provide the Jim Joseph Foundation with a guide for effective practices in leadership development programs with a specific focus on leadership journeys and critical inflection points where cohort-based programs or other experiences could be especially valuable. This guide was to build upon two prior reports, one outlining key aspects from the literature on leadership development and learning experiences in the Jewish sector, and another report detailing our findings from the interviews conducted ([LINK TO THESE HERE](#)). Until a few months ago, our intent was to complete this project with the publication of a guide to inform the development of cohort-based programs, focusing on what was most useful for participants and drawing on insights gleaned from more than 80 interviews with highly successful Jewish social sector leaders.

Obviously, a lot has changed in 2020. However, as we reoriented ourselves to the profound impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having on professional development and to the unique forms of leadership needed to navigate societal challenges such as growing racism and anti-Semitism, we realized that many core elements of our initial findings still held true, whether we were considering in-person programming or fully virtual events. Moreover, we quickly realized that many of the leadership development benefits derived from cohort-based programs were exactly the types of skills and experiences necessary to both navigate this challenging and disruptive time and envision the future of Jewish leadership development that contributes to a more just world.

Over the last several months, we have reworked our findings and this guide to focus more explicitly on what is so catalytic about cohort-based programs and identify underlying elements that can and should persist, regardless of the method of delivery. In many cases, the information shared here is applicable across sectors, not just the Jewish social sector. As we sought to expand our discussion to networked leadership, we also draw on our experiences with programs outside of the Jewish sector and our leadership development expertise more broadly. Thus, this report is grounded in our latest understanding of fostering interdependent leadership within and across sectors – particularly collaborative, networked leadership toward a more equitable and just society – and is contextualized with the experiences of our interviewees and what they found to be developmentally critical parts of their leadership experiences.

In the guide that follows, we focus on core developmental experiences for leaders, how the context of cohort-based programs uniquely supports them, and the importance of developing a larger network that will support leaders beyond a single program or initiative. We encourage readers to reflect on how these elements manifest in the Jewish world and what specific opportunities exist within the Jewish social sector to mobilize around these insights with more agility and connectedness than might be possible in other sectors.

INTRODUCTION:

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE NETWORKS

Cohorts as Network “Seeds”

Our primary intention for this document was that it would serve as a guide for professionals who design and deliver cohort-based leadership development programs serving the Jewish social sector, as well as be a helpful point of reference for conversations with program funders, operators/designers, evaluators, and people outside of the Jewish social sector. However, as we took a step back to look across our findings throughout this project, we realized that the value of the cohort experience was inextricably linked to the *network* it helped create. Thus, we focus this guide more intentionally on **cohort program design elements that drive the creation of a purposeful, powerful network of leaders**. We firmly believe that networked leadership¹ 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 networked leadership skills.

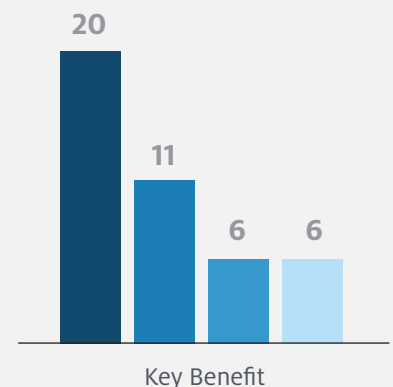
Two critical notes: we focus on cohort-based programs but do not presume that cohorts are the only place where the elements discussed in this report should be considered. In fact, the core elements are likely applicable across leadership development program types, but the cohort provides a useful lens for deeper examination. Second, we believe that networked leadership is critical across the social sector, which includes the Jewish social sector. While the Jewish social sector presents unique opportunities to ground these principles within a specific set of cultural teachings, learnings, and history, we assume there is a significant overlap between the needs of the Jewish social sector and the social sector in the US more generally.

We are referring to networks as the collective of meaningful connections that bring individuals together to support a common purpose. Networking, unlike what you might traditionally think of as something that (perhaps) awkwardly happens at conferences, 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.

When designing cohort programs, it is important to understand the potential role of cohorts in developing networks that can exponentially increase a program's impact. For example, from the perspective of program participants, becoming connected to an alumni network can effectively extend the duration of a program indefinitely. In fact, in our follow-up survey of interview participants, the network was the highest reported benefit of their program experience. By maintaining a connection with others in their cohort or alumni network, they gain access to ongoing developmental learning experiences through peer mentoring, accountability partnerships, thought partnership, knowledge exchange, and collaboration. In recognition of the immeasurable benefit these networks can provide to individuals, we are presenting elements of cohort program design that make network development their primary goal. However, we do not presume that the network within the program is the only network worth focusing on or the most critical network in terms of driving the advancement of the sector. Therefore, we also focus on how cohort-based

REPORTED TOP BENEFITS OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN THE JEWISH SECTOR

- Network
- Leadership Development
- Prestige
- Mentorship



programs provide a critical practice space for the types of skills needed to further network development beyond the program, whether in communities or across organizations.

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.

Each of these design elements can be beneficial to a program, but in concert they make it possible for programs to catalyze the formation of enduring networks. This represents a critical shift in the work of cohort program design. **The emphasis is no longer solely on the individual leader experience – equally important is the way that programs can “seed” networks that will take on a life of their own**, grow and adapt as contexts change, and bring about agility and change within the fields or sectors they serve. The focus is no longer bringing a group of leaders together only to experience something at the same time but that is largely unique to their needs. Rather, 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 comes 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.

“I think that the networks and the relationships over time are a big deal and we need money and systems to put those in place. ... We need to all – those of us who have similar vision, we need to band together, we need to get together, we need to have time to spend with each other. ... The cohorting, I just can’t say enough about the power of the cohort. Just about everything that I’ve done in my own professional development and then what I try to lead, is related to traveling together and studying together and reflecting together. So, we need more of those opportunities, so that it’s just networks on networks on networks. Because it really works.”

Note: All sidebar quotes in this report are derived from interview transcripts with 80+ leaders in the Jewish social sector.



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

NETWORKED LEADERSHIP REQUIRES NEW MINDSETS

A necessary pre-requisite for sector-wide collaboration is spreading awareness of the value of networks.

Many leaders inherently know the value of the connections that they build, but getting specific and strategic about the value that networks can bring, particularly at different career stages or different stages of change management or community transformation, can elucidate the value the network could have to offer. This can include larger networks for broader systemic change and “micro-networks” – smaller networks that develop within alumni groups or within programs, which may serve critical gaps in the broader system.

A second task is to teach leaders how to think strategically about supporting and engaging people, ideas, and organizations through networks.

This requires new leadership skills and behaviors. It is incumbent upon leaders to identify their developmental areas, for program designers to shift experiences to more specifically leverage network skills, and for funders and operators to adopt a network-level view of programming and impact. Leading large-scale change through networks will look different from every leader’s unique perspective and will not be the work of only larger or more established organizations (or traditional, more established leaders). By providing long-term stability and supportive infrastructure, funders and large organizations can help networks to form and thrive. But, the true power of a network is realized through the emergent, complex, and unpredictable interactions it makes possible by connecting people, ideas, and resources (see [Repair the World](#), for example).

This guide introduces elements of supporting network leadership that will not only benefit cohort program designers, but also their participants and leaders of all types who are striving to lead positive change in the age of complexity. It should also spur funders and operators to consider how their practices can be revamped to truly support collaborative networks. We believe it is impossible to address the power and importance of cohort-based leadership development programs without focused attention on network creation, and vice versa.

We believe that cohort programs are among the most effective interventions for leadership development for field building and social change. More than anything else, in our study cohort program participants report that the most important aspect of a leadership or professional development program is that it serves to connect individual leaders to a broader network. Even after their program, participants often remain connected to their cohorts or to networks that include multiple cohorts of the same program and may continue to engage with them for years or decades. As we found in our research, these networks establish pathways for ideas to be exchanged, for collaboration, for professional networking, and for personal advice or emotional support through difficult circumstances. And across participants, leaders, operators and funders, there seems to be an awareness that networks can and should be leveraged to do more.

“In our ecosystem of progress, we really have two choices. We can be fueled by fear and we can be driven by love. And I feel like so much of the current discourse, certainly in the Jewish world, comes from fear. Fear of spoiling what we’ve inherited, fear of desecrating the sacred, fear of disillusion, and fear is not helpful. Reverence is, fear is not. And to be driven by love is saying, “We are the caretakers of an ancient technology and methodology that has to be revised and rethought in order to be meaningful, and we have to trust, and we have to come from love.” If we do that, I think we’ll be in much better shape.”

Our key takeaway from the research is that right now, cohort programs have the greatest potential for impact when every element of the program is designed to advance a core goal: to lead continuous, positive change in the world by developing and supporting networks.

We explore the many facets of that takeaway in the guide that follows. Each principle of cohort program design, from start to finish, is understood through a lens of network building. In the remainder of this guide, we dissect elements of program design and what we learned from participants in this study and from our organization's experience in designing leadership development programs. We begin by focusing on selection and recruitment for programs, then focus on building trust and adequately preparing leader learners for their experience. We then shift to the facilitation of the learning experience itself and the tools and content that will equip leaders to build, join, and engage a network. Finally, we explore the post-program experience and context to share insights around network prestige and sustainability. In doing so, our goal is to provide program designers and funders with best practices for creating leadership development experiences to build the future of an even more interdependent and connected Jewish social sector. *(Note: we do not dive into in-person and virtual setting differences. In our work at CCL, we are finding that many of the same elements persist, and the nature of the elements can be adapted for virtual settings and still provide valuable and meaningful connection.)*

"You can't get into their programs unless you're already fabulous. Is it an award for past behavior or is it investment in a frontrunner that's likely to be able to celebrate a few years from now? Or are they in the business of helping people behave in different ways than they did before? It's like asking a chief executive to lead change. Chief executives have a bias in favor of the status quo because it produced them at the top and it must be working really well to produce me at the top. I think with these fellowship programs is that people who get into these highly competitive programs are already superstars. How can [the foundation] support outliers, people who are running risky experiments? If you use the frame of experiments, then it's not like your credibility is on the line all the time."

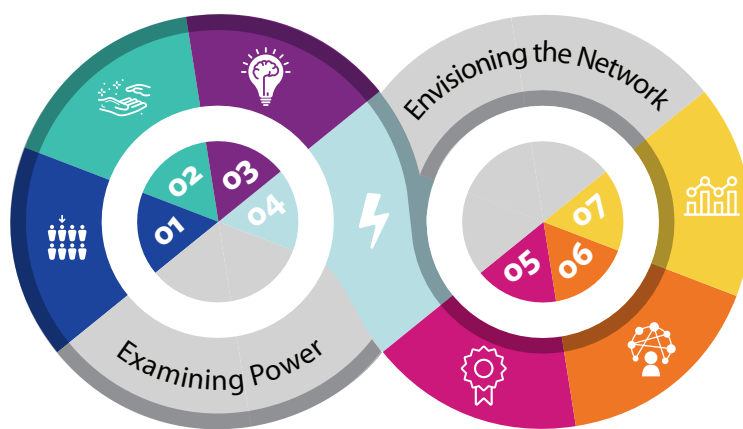


GOING IN DEPTH: COHORT PROGRAM DESIGN ELEMENTS

Our original research set out to explore the role that powerful leadership development programs played in the overall leadership journeys of successful Jewish leaders. Across more than 80 interviews, we learned a lot about leadership journeys and the role that programs and experiences played during critical inflection points in the journeys of Jewish leaders. Across the interviews, **leaders cited several key elements of their cohort-based learning experiences that were particularly powerful**. Here, we explore those with a shifted focus toward how each can be leveraged for network building, and how each can be expanded or reimaged in order to move the sector toward interdependence. Specifically, we explore the following principles:

- Selecting with Intentionality
- Establishing Trust and Vulnerability
- Preparing Learners
- Delivering Powerful Content and Tools
- Redefining Prestige
- Launching Alumni to a Larger Network
- Changing How We Gauge Impact

Throughout each of the sections below, we examine these design elements and their critical importance to program design through two additional lenses: through a reflection on the power inherent in each, and through a reflection on how attention to each helps envision the future network.



SELECTING WITH INTENTIONALITY

The recruitment and selection process presents an opportunity to expand preconceptions around who is a leader and what a community or organization needs to foster change. Thoughtful selection processes that continue to leverage the pool of applicants recruited will better serve the network.



ESTABLISHING TRUST

Trust and psychological safety are levers for effective leadership development experiences. Trust building and content delivery should not be seen as mutually exclusive aspects of design. Effective collaboration for fieldlevel change hinges on trust, and leaders need experiences that will help them build trust in one another and trustbuilding skillsets to apply in their networks.



PREPARING LEARNERS

Cohort programs are uniquely positioned to create a space for vulnerability and communal support in which participants can be encouraged to reflect on their own leadership and/or life struggles and leverage them to extract new learning and personal strength.



DELIVERING POWERFUL CONTENT

Network leadership skills should be prioritized for any content delivery. However, the traditional emphasis on delivering content in a program has to be balanced with creating a developmental learning space that allows participants to practice these new skillsets and mindsets in a supportive environment.



REDEFINING PRESTIGE

Programs that provide the space to allow participants to reflect on their choices and experiences, understand their definitions of leadership and how that is inextricably linked to their identity as leaders, and envision the ways their identities as leaders must grow to work in new ways toward bigger challenges are key to redefining prestige in service of the larger network.



LAUNCHING TO A LARGER NETWORK

Funders and designers must recognize that the network can never be owned, but it can be developed, supported, catalyzed and engaged. The program lays the infrastructure so that the individuals can stay connected, but that what flows through those pipelines might change with what is most needed in that time and space.



CHANGING HOW WE GAUGE IMPACT

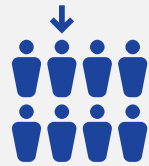
Leadership experiences for network-based impact require a different approach to learning and evaluation than we are used to. The mindset has to also shift to encouraging and explicitly supporting data collection that serves the ultimate learning of the network and informs the broader field.

SELECTING WITH INTENTIONALITY

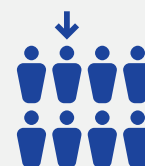
It is important for funders and program operators and designers to consider the ultimate outcome they envision for their initiative. Programs aimed at building independent leaders will be fundamentally different than programs aimed at building interdependent movements. **A great deal of any program's success rests upon the careful selection of participants.** There should be a clear reason for these specific individuals to be brought together. Yet, typical selection criteria may not be setting programs up for their greatest possible impact. Individual development considerations are one aspect. Participant abilities and experiences should be complementary so that they can better learn from the experiences of others and support each other. At the same time, their developmental needs should be similar enough that the content you choose to deliver during the program will be appropriate and beneficial to everyone. If the situation or design precludes similar developmental needs or previous experiences, intentionality in crafting a learning experience that leverages peer mentoring, coaching, or structured peer-learning becomes critical (see DELIVERING POWERFUL CONTENT).

However, developmental characteristics or needs of individual leader participants shouldn't be the only factor to consider with intentional selection. When it comes to network building, considering 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 may influence selection. Especially with regard to place-based approaches, recent network leadership practitioners⁸ have suggested that operators and funders decenter their assumptions by going to communities and identifying who is trusted, connected, and leading, whether they have the resources or not.⁹ Rather than accept fellows from within the pool of applicants, operators are being pushed to broaden their lens beyond who is simply applying for opportunities to who may have power within the systems they wish to impact.

Selection is of course influenced directly by the recruitment strategies that inform the applicant pool. A typical approach to recruitment is for foundations to put out a call for applicants and then to select from those applicants. This often relies on word of mouth, which is inherently inequitable because those in power and “in the know” may not be representative of the potential applicant pool. Intentional selection may require more intentional recruitment. Learning the community first and identifying the existing network players can ensure that those who already hold power within the network are encouraged to apply. Learning the landscape of the communities also allows the operator's mental model of who is a leader to be expanded and may uncover unconscious biases inherent in the more traditional, unidirectional recruitment process. Moreover, there is an opportunity to recruit an applicant pool that is diverse and representative of the different identity groups relevant to the community(ies) the network or funder/operator wishes to serve. This will enable greater success for systemic change and also build a culture of equitable inclusion of different perspectives and identities in the network.



“The part that [big institutions] have to play is letting go of their status as an institution. So their number one goal cannot be to have people join my institution or contribute to my institution. Their number one goal has to be much broader to say I want people to have a meaningful Jewish experience, period, whether it's at my institution or another one, or no institution. How can I contribute to the whole? I think that that's what we're going to have to all have to do is like give up our piece of, you know, look at the benefit of the whole. And to be less attached to the institution and more attached to the experiences.”



Select to Serve the Network, Not (just) the Program

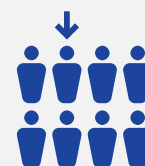
Intentional selection for cohorts should match the intentional outcome(s) for the program. It's true that some of a program's prestige comes from the later accomplishments of alumni, and the program's prestige might even factor into funding decisions (see REDEFINING PRESTIGE). It can be tempting to try to gain prestige by selecting participants who are already accomplished leaders or seem destined for greatness. While accomplished leaders like that may occasionally be a perfect fit for your cohort, it shouldn't be an overriding factor in their selection. Demonstrate your confidence in the transformative power of your program and select leaders that stand to benefit the most from the experience. If field-wide impact is of greater priority than resource winning or dominance, funders should support "building constellations" rather than stars.¹⁰

Similarly, be intentional when deciding whether or not to accept applicants who previously participated in similar programs or fellowships. On the one hand, strive to give opportunities to applicants who haven't had the benefit of similar experiences in the past. They may stand to benefit more or be more open to learning and personal transformation through an experience that will be entirely new to them (see PREPARING LEARNERS). On the other hand, depending on the current state of your alumni network, part of your strategy to support the network might be to help your alumni connect more with the alumni of other networks. In that case, it may be appropriate to discuss with your applicant whether they would be willing to help build bridges between the alumni networks by making introductions or otherwise raising awareness within each network about the other and highlighting areas where interests or needs intersect.

Recognize the Power in Recruitment

The recruitment, application, and selection process is not benign. While selecting to serve the network, it is critical to not lose sight of the individual. Always be thoughtful about the ongoing cycle of how participant competition and selection may affect the network, as well as how participation in the network may affect participants. Also, keep in mind the overall goals you hope to achieve through the program. If the focus is on a specific geographic area – such as building rural leadership, for example – it may serve the overall efforts to select participants who will be more able to collaborate, either because they are focused on the same issue or population or because they are co-located. This may mean that other highly qualified applicants are not selected and that tradeoff is acknowledged in favor of "seeding" a specific area with focused development. That balance becomes easier to navigate in multi-year, repeating cohort efforts, where applicants can be encouraged to reapply or selection focus can be adjusted each cycle and communicated to applicants. For example, if the goal is to provide leadership development to Jewish educators, intentional selection may mean that the funder decides to prioritize a specific developmental focus (such as early childhood), region or state, experience level (new teachers with less than 3 years of experience or aspiring school directors) for selection knowing that there may be other highly qualified candidates, but the focus on certain characteristics may help this specific cohort gain traction more quickly and have a better chance at sustainability.

"I don't think there's a lot of nourishment for Jewish leaders. ... So the idea is that we're always "networking". Like, we're meeting other people for the sake of the work. I'm very interested in human beings and what we need in order to feel love and value, and I'm not sure that the community that I'm part of, in a big sense and in a small sense... knows how to value people for who they are and help them discover and nurture their call. I would say like, for me, I feel like a lot of the work that I do is despite the crap that I get in the community. I feel like there's a big schism between the people who I serve and the like institutional community. ... [My organization] never fit into any bucket in the institutional world, and so there was not a lot of like nurturing, guidance, support, funding, any of those things."



Leverage Vetting Efforts to Support Non-Selected Applicants

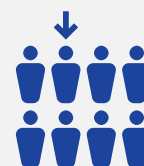
Potential participants who apply to leadership development programs offer a variety of information about their background, passion, and goals for the future. They come with energy and enthusiasm for the work, and engagement in their organization. It is an honor and a privilege to have program applicants (who are the key stakeholders, after all) devote such attention to the promise of a developmental experience. Program organizers review applications and unfortunately, since space in the program is usually limited, may have to turn away some promising applicants. And, even those who aren't selected were individuals who applied because they believe in the power of the program's brand, experience, or network.

To do justice to the process and convene the most suitable cohort possible for your program, you may invest considerable time and effort in reviewing applications and learning about the people who applied. 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. Don't let their investment, or yours, go to waste. Many existing narratives that decry leader pipeline issues presume that the pipeline is lacking people to fill it versus examining if there are leaks in the pipeline that result in talent going unnoticed (and the biases that might be causing the leaks). The vast amount of information provided through the application process is a potential antidote to pipeline woes.

A best practice is to find a way to keep non-selected applicants engaged even if they aren't selected. Applicants to a program may feel disheartened at not being accepted. In the worst-case scenario, they may lose some of the excitement they felt when imagining themselves in the program and envisioning how it would help them contribute to the Jewish social sector thereafter. Aside from this impact on the individual leader, what might that ultimately do to a budding network and how might we support the broader constellation of talented leaders?

One way you can help surplus applicants hold on to their excitement is to redirect promising applicants to other developmental opportunities. Maintaining contact with them through a mailing list or notifying them first once a new program application opens up can signal your continued interest. The methods for supporting non-selected applicants will have to be balanced of course by the number of applicants, the capacity of the operator/funder and the goals of the larger initiative for the network. If capacity permits, this might include scheduling a follow-up coaching conversation, matching them with an appropriate mentor, or recommending them to a priority waitlist shared among several different cohort programs. If you have no capacity to follow up in those ways, you might offer to create a social media group (or similar) connecting all of the applicants you wish you could have accepted as an independent cohort. Then share some educational materials or activities for the group to engage with on their own or together. This option has lower costs, honors your surplus applicants, and opens avenues for them to support each other as a network of highly engaged, impressive leaders who hope to contribute their unique perspectives and abilities to make the world a better place.

"Jewish philanthropies have changed dramatically in the last five years, from what I can tell. ... Large foundations want to have a much closer proximity to and more tactile experiences with what they are funding. They want to play the role of the convener. They want to play the role of the thought leader and innovator. They're thinking about their own legacy and how they are branding their own legacy as they are doing their philanthropy and that's a huge shift. ... And this shift creates a host of challenges, because it can put the foundation in a competitive role with its grantees, in terms of naming and bragging rights for the work and the innovation. It changes the level of trust between funder and grantee. Often the grantees have – because of their expertise doing the on-the-ground work, they've already kind of sorted out what are the best strategies and what aren't going to be most effective. And there's really intellectual power in all of that experimentation and once a funder kind of gets much closer to it, the funder brings certain ideas out of their own needs, that may not have a lot to do with the needs of the constituents being served by the work."



Other options may include: intentional sharing of applicant pools across programs to coordinate developmental experiences for a larger group of applicants, supporting different delivery modalities such as offering a larger convening to spur network building that encompasses but is not limited to the selected cohort, or providing a virtual experience or access to complimentary materials for applicants while encouraging them to reapply the next year. Non-selected participants are still critical parts of the network and could also provide feedback or interact with products the cohort produces, especially if the opportunity for virtual feedback is provided (low-cost). When the goal shifts to building the network, the recruitment and selection opportunities can begin to take on new forms.

All of these suggestions point to a network challenge that exists for funders of leadership development programs: the challenge of balancing field level priorities with the time and resource commitment required for a cohort-based program, as well as the need to challenge existing mindsets around participant selection and program prestige. Programs can remain competitive and prestigious while coming up with innovative ways to serve the sector overall. Funders, operators, and designers have a role to play in communicating selection criteria as well as considering ways to still support qualified, eager, but not accepted applicants, who often present a wealth of energy and talent that is at risk of disengaging. Funders also have a responsibility – given the commitment and energy that applicants bring, as well as the power differential between applicants and funders – to span organizational boundaries and work together to provide valuable professional development experiences strategically across the sector, rather than solely to further the prestige of the foundation or program.

“One of the problems with all of the kind of national cohort-based leadership is that you bring [together] such a disparate group of people. The power of doing something community-based, which could potentially also serve as a platform for communal change, boy, imagine that. Imagine if we could touch 200 influencers in [a city] over the course of a five-year period. It would change the face of the entire community. That’s exciting. That gives me hope.”



ESTABLISHING AND TENDING TO TRUST



The challenges facing Jewish social sector leaders today are complex and will require deeper ways of working with one another. **Programs that build relationships able to evolve, challenge, and support one another are critical to supporting the well-being and success of the leaders and network.**

One element of cohort programs that we heard about over and over in our interviews was the critical role that trust played in the strength and bonding of the cohort. Trust is also a critical element for network-based work. **Effective collaboration hinges on trust, and the complex challenges that leaders face require specific attention on trust-building.** This is particularly true for efforts related to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI).

Trust exists at the interpersonal or dyadic level of relationships between people. Psychological safety is a related construct that exists at the group level (though its perceptions are measured at the individual level), and is defined as “a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking”.¹¹ Psychologically safe teams, organizations, and networks accept risk and failure, thereby encouraging individuals to try new skills, behaviors, and ways of thinking and working. Thus, both components are important elements of trust that exist in terms of individual perceptions, interpersonal behaviors, and group-level climate.

While in some program designs, collaboration toward a larger goal can foster relationships and build trust, in other efforts, such as EDI or programs where diverse leaders are intentionally brought together, trust and relationships may need to be built before collaboration can happen. Often we presume that working together on a project will result in people building connections with one another, without considering that the opposite may be true, especially with regard to social identities. Social identities refer to the ways we understand and label the groups that we belong to, such as gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, etc.¹² Our identities inform our beliefs and behaviors in the world, and the contexts we are in are sometimes welcoming or threatening for various aspects of our social identities. **Individuals may need to trust that they will be able to bring their whole, authentic self to the program and be received fully before they are able or willing to invest the level of effort required to collaborate and learn.** This is particularly true for efforts that intend to span faith, where beliefs and behaviors may create differing views or priorities.

In-depth, multi-session programs are especially good opportunities for creating a “third space” – a space in which individual cultural capital and experiences merge with content and application – where participants are able to reconceive of their selves and ways of being in the world and work collectively to envision how they and their network could inform the future.¹³ Understanding the role that trust will play, and what your participants will need in order to trust each other, and trust the facilitator, is a critical element of program design that cannot be overlooked. In fact, it may be the most important aspect of all. Moreover, understanding how the trust created in the program depends on the sense of psychological safety and, indeed, will fuel or undermine the resulting psychological safety of the entire network, is a critical aspect.

“The third one has to do with moving the field to a place where they really understand what our role is to play in the ecosystem and the way Jews both help advance and the way Jews also sometimes impede the progress that we could have. And one of the things that we’re learning is there are a lot of skills we need to develop now and a lot of understandings we need to develop that we haven’t figured out. ... Because over the years, I’ve seen a lot about how we talk about speaking truth to power, but the hardest thing is to speak truth to peers because our peers put back on us, we want to please our peers, we want to be included by our peers. So, how do we all learn to push each other enough so that we really have the growth that we need to live in these coalitions that are both multifaith, multiracial, this new world we’re in where we both have to contribute our talents, but also learn to censure leadership on people most impacted. And how do we actually, within our Jewish community, really embrace what we can learn from the Jews of color who are really rising in power and influence in the Jewish community, and also struggling to shift the narrative and be in a different type of relationship with their white brothers and sisters.”



Integrating Trust and Content

For funders, operators, and designers, a commitment to trust and trust-building requires navigating a mindset around content and delivery (discussed further below). It is very tempting for designers to fill programs full of specific content (and for funders to expect to see many elements of program content to signal that the investment was worth it). However, **content at the expense of relationship building can undermine program impact**. Signaling to participants the importance of trust and relationship-building, often at the perceived “expense” of content, has been a key learning in CCL’s own journey. **Trust-building and content should not be seen as mutually exclusive elements of design**. Rather, aspects of trust building and the creation of psychological safety exist across many aspects of leadership development (e.g. boundary spanning leadership).

Trust and psychological safety are levers for effective leadership development experiences. When present, they amplify the experience, underscore the relevance of the content, and allow participants to take risks and try new behaviors. Trust underlies authentic learning experiences and effective facilitation and taking the time to build it, so that everyone can show up fully, can be challenging for facilitators and designers who are used to covering a specific set of content skills or modules and only focus on checking those boxes. More importantly, **when trust is overlooked as the foundation of the program or experience being built, it will inevitably create issues that may undermine the goals and impact of the program**.

Moreover, trust between participants is only one aspect of trust and vulnerability required in these types of programs. Another sometimes overlooked aspect is trust between the cohort and the facilitator, and even program staff. This trust flows both ways and is interdependent. **In today’s leadership learning environments, facilitators are no longer the presupposed experts who exist to deposit knowledge into leaders. Learning is multidirectional – from facilitator to participants and vice versa, and between participants**. While participants likely expect some expertise from the facilitators, 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.

Participants will often voice their needs and concerns or push back on topics, models, or content areas. How the design and facilitation team(s), operators, and funders respond to this can signal several things to participants: the level of trust that the designer/funder has in them; the level of vulnerability the designer/funder is willing to share; and the way that power will be negotiated through the program experience. **If a central outcome of a leadership development program is to impact a field or address a complex social challenge, and if the program is intended to provide applied learning toward building networked leader competencies, then the design has to allow for participants to flex their voice, skills, and power**. If, for some reason, the design is wholly inflexible, transparency will be absolutely critical or else trust can be diminished.

“Well, I think they have the power not only to convene, but to create an environment, short term environment, that would feel less risky to people, taking people away to a neutral place, having no report afterwards, having a skilled and outside external facilitator of conversation. I think there are ways of using their convening power to get people to come, and then creating spaces which people could have conversations that would be beyond their imagination.”



A key avenue for establishing trust and supporting psychological safety is the way in which the program facilitator role is defined and experienced. Program designers and facilitators do not have to be the official content experts. **From an EDI perspective, it is critical that designers center the leaders in the cohort as experts and the role of the facilitators as working to create a container and provide tools to help them reflect and do their work most effectively.** Program facilitators play a key role in establishing trust and modeling behaviors that build trust. They should show what skills and background they bring to the room and purposefully help others feel that they belong and feel included. Facilitators can be transparent about the ways they are also striving to grow as a leader in the way they will ask participants to strive. 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. Transparency around the challenges you face and the ways that your learnings and relationships with the participant leaders are informing your own practice will help build authentic connection.

Also with regard to EDI, we have seen that trust-building becomes more complex when we consider the role of “ally” behaviors.¹⁴ The term “ally” is often used problematically in that it is frequently a label individuals may claim to feel better about their place and privilege but without doing critical work that minoritized groups see as true allyship. Therefore, we emphasize that ally is a verb and not a noun – it consists of taking action to address systemic inequalities. We define “ally” in this context in terms of a person with privilege who leverages their power in pursuit of addressing issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion. While it may be easy to conflate trust-building with being nice, warm, and accommodating to participants, it cannot come at the expense of challenging conversations or through avoiding conflict when difficult topics arise. In those instances, modeling trust may involve “calling in”¹⁵ (as opposed to ‘calling out’) a participant who uses offensive language, which helps signal to participants that you are willing to put in the labor and use your position as facilitator to correct, educate, and model. Doing so in a way that does not alienate participants is the challenge.

Trust is therefore a critical component of inclusive leadership and requires continuous action and reinforcement to build and maintain. Vulnerability, and a willingness to admit that true collaboration will involve mistakes, is a powerful network skill that facilitators can model through their practice. Funders should look for providers of leadership development experiences who understand this fundamental idea, and view skilled facilitation of the group as more important than unilateral delivery of content. And, when working together, funders and providers can allow for the vulnerability and redesign necessary to truly meet the needs of the participants, and therefore their communities and the larger network.

...Leadership requires courage, and not everyone feels equipped to act skillfully with courage and to be willing then to take the risk that might in fact be necessary because we haven't yet strengthened our risk-taking and courage muscles in the way that I believe is all eminently very learnable. And [with our organization] each one of these decisions has and had controversy around them, and each one of the decisions ultimately if, you know, if I and we come back to why we exist as an organization and what we're trying to do in the world meant that we took a course of action that was really reflective of our DNA in many ways, and, though, it also involved significant points of conflict and tension with members of our own community as well as just—like—none of those choices have been easy choices to make, but I think that they are, they have been critical choices to make.

PREPARING LEARNERS

Set the Stage for Vulnerability

We are most open to learning when we are made appropriately aware of our developmental needs and when we are pushed beyond our current comfort zone. We are most capable of learning through relationships and interactions with others. Being open to those relationships requires vulnerability.¹⁶ Decades of learning theory have explored the role that awareness, challenge, dissonance, and connection with those who may have more or different experience can all inform our processing of new information and experiences and our incorporation of that information into our leadership mindsets. Understanding the perspectives of others, and seeing ourselves through our interactions with others, are shifts that provide powerful learning opportunities, but that can also be stressful or uncomfortable.

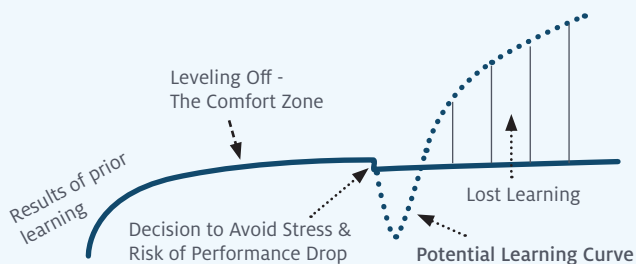
At CCL, we refer to the stress and discomfort of new learning as a “going against the grain” moment that will yield exponential benefit, particularly when compared to the potential for lost learning by avoiding the learning experience. **If we take the time to process, engage, reflect, and learn from an uncomfortable moment, we stand to rebound significantly further than if we avoid learning out of fear of the discomfort.** This is known as adopting a learning (or growth) mindset.¹⁷ Rather than presume that our abilities are static and unchangeable, we recognize that we are on a path of perpetual development, informed by each new experience and piece of feedback. We recognize that mistakes present opportunities for understanding, reflection, and cultivation of new skills. **Moreover, networks present opportunities for deeper growth experiences through mistakes** – by providing a multitude of connections for help seeking when an individual encounters a challenge to deliberate strategic use when individuals need help evaluating new strategies to use.



ANATOMY OF A LEARNING EXPERIENCE



AVOIDING A LEARNING EXPERIENCE



“So having other CEOs with which you can share some of your learnings, your struggles, your successes, your pain, your achievements, your challenges, is a very helpful part of growth as a leader. And then sort of pulling on and sort of maintaining relationships with those people over years and building a certain trust with them that is one not of competition but one of partnership in the work is I think what I’m referring to. And to a certain extent, I think the power in these transformational experiences come from being given the opportunity to actually get some learning and best practices in the field but not from a [conventional] way but actually in doing exercises, breaking out in dyads or triads, working closely in some sort of simulated way. ... Any training program that does that well does that in a way that is long-lasting and it’s something that you can pull back in moments of crisis or in moments of difficulty into the work you’re doing.”



How can programs provide experiences that put leaders in a learning mindset, or even an “against the grain” moment? A key way that leadership development programs, and cohort-based programs in particular can foster these moments is through feedback. Feedback within cohort-based programs can arise from experiential activities, role-playing, video-recorded activities, or 360-surveys. We cannot know how others see or experience us until we have an opportunity to obtain feedback. Sincere advice and honest feedback are priceless gifts that deserve to be delivered with extreme wisdom and care. Feedback furthers a network because it furthers the relationships that build the web of the network.

Cohort programs are uniquely positioned to create a space for vulnerability and communal support in which participants can be encouraged to reflect on their own leadership and/or life struggles and leverage them to extract new learning and personal strength. These spaces can be safe *and* brave. Safety can allow for comfort in expressing the range of emotions experienced while being vulnerable or marginalized, and brave requires acknowledgement of power differentials and asks learners with privilege to be open to learning.¹⁸ Cohort-based programs can provide trust-filled relationships that can support feedback, processing of information such as 360s or other observations of behaviors, and techniques such as accountability partners or peer-coaching to help implement new strategies to support behavior change.

Preparing learners through vulnerability connects to network challenges and networked leadership due to the roles that communication, interdependence, and relationship building play in networks. Complex sector-level challenges will require collaboration across a variety of organizations, sectors, and other silos that may exist. Preparing learners for feedback, encouraging them to adopt a learning mindset, and helping them get comfortable with discomfort is a critical component of preparing them to engage, build, and persist in their network outside of the program.



DELIVERING POWERFUL CONTENT

As mentioned above, a central challenge for program designers is the pressure to balance delivery of content that covers specific areas or modules that may be important to funders and operators with delivering an experience that feels valuable, relevant, and applicable to all participants, who are likely entering the program with different needs and expectations. The aforementioned point that, in the most transformative leadership development experiences, facilitators' key function is to create a space and hold a container for the participants' expertise to flourish and grow, is a helpful reminder here.

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

Relationships hold extremely high value in the intense experience of cohort-based programs and short-changing the relationship-building in favor of content delivery can undermine the strength and longevity of the network.

Within leadership development, we know that learning happens both within and outside of the classroom. Through our 70-20-10 model, we have found that learning happens primarily through challenging assignments (70%), developmental relationships (20%), and coursework and training (10%).¹⁹ Networked leadership challenges this notion, because the assignments often require relationship building that becomes developmental and transformative.

This is a particularly relevant frame considering the previous suggestions around intentional selection for what the program or network needs to accomplish within the community and the facilitative role of the designer/deliverer. Rather than ask what content needs to be covered within the single category of coursework or training, more generative questions for designers and funders are:

- *What skills do these leaders need to develop or enhance to be more effective at creating the changes they seek?*
- *What experiences will enable leaders to practice new and critical skills?*
- *How do we provide the safe space, adaptive mindsets, and important skillsets and toolsets to help them get there?*

When we move from content to skills, from what to how, we expand our understanding of what leadership development can and should do, and we approach learning from a more facilitative, curative mindset as opposed to a didactic delivery model. We weave together assignments within the context of a program that build on a small piece of focal content and provide opportunity for building relationships and skills.

This is not to say that content is irrelevant. Content is still critical (especially content specific to network leader competencies, see below), but designers are forced to get to the crux of what is important about the content and allow space for application. This is especially true in virtual or hybrid settings. Considering the cohort as a microcosm of relationships and challenges that leaders encounter in the world, what greater opportunity exists than to have a reflective, focused, supported experience attempting to apply learnings in real-time? The support of facilitators, peers, professional coaches, and powerful feedback and data can open a leader to practicing new behaviors in a safe environment. Content that cannot or will not be leveraged through application may be extraneous to the ultimate goals of the program.



“This point about not just building intensive things that reach a few people very deeply. ... It’s such a blessing to be able to offer that much to people, to give them these really intense experiences, and I really feel like it leaves a lot of people out because a) it’s expensive and does not reach that many people, B) because a lot of people just won’t be able to say yes. ... So rather than be negative about it, to be positive about it, the more different kinds of options we can offer people – light touch, medium touch, high touch, intensive, not so intensive, ongoing but on video – you know, the more we can try to really understand the diversity of the audience that we’re trying to reach and the different constraints on their ability to participate the better.”

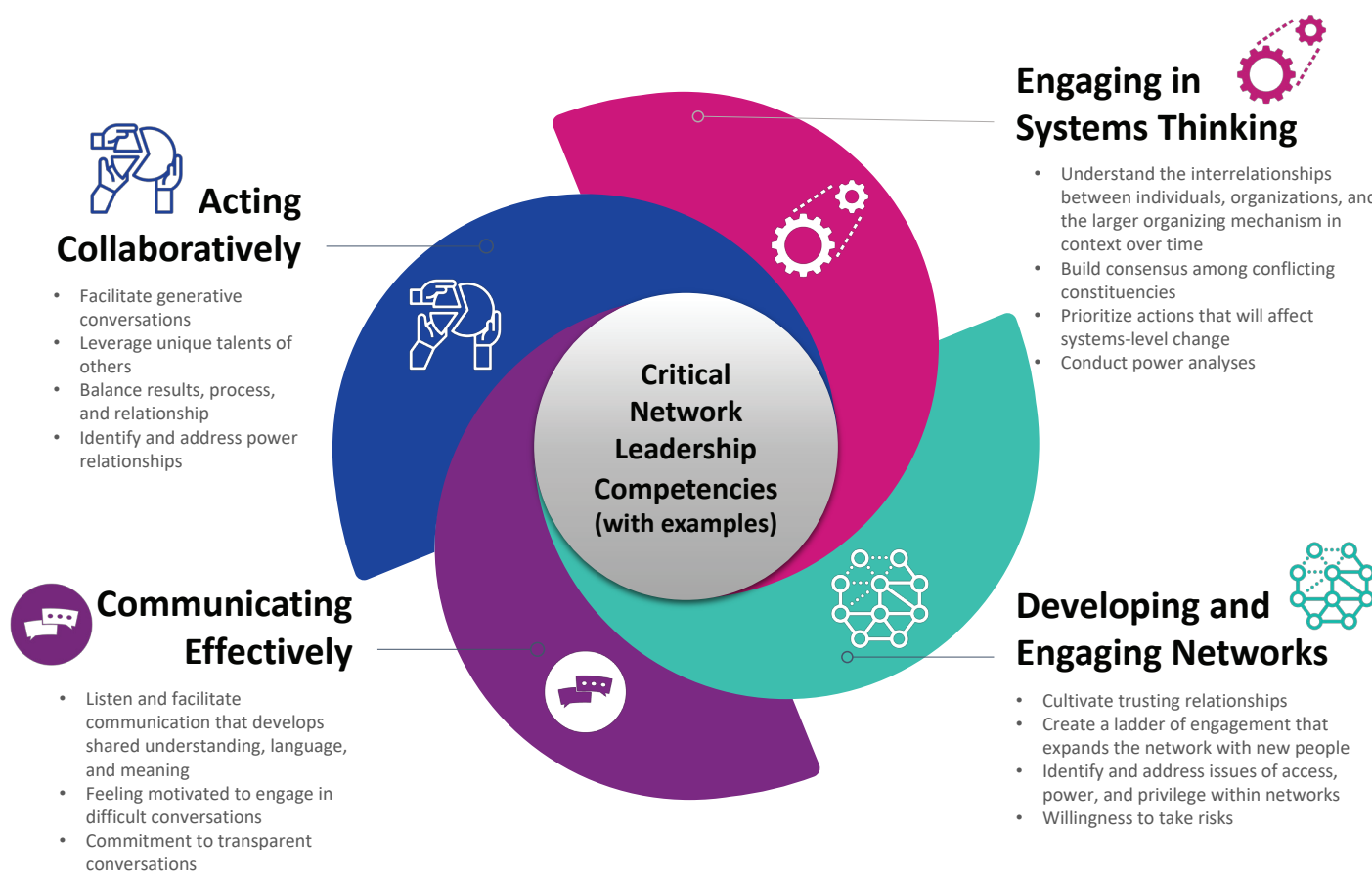
Prioritize Content Specific to Networked Leadership Competencies

There is an endless amount of leadership development content that can be covered in any sort of program. **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.** When working with networks, success must depend upon leadership, not authority. Helping participants to understand that what their leadership looks like in a complex, ever changing, informal network of people, organizations, ideas, challenges, and opportunities is necessary. As stated earlier, acting in (or with/through/for) networks is emphatically not about the sometimes shallow and transactional encounters or exchanges that are often called “networking.”

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.



“And so, I think that interdependent, I think shared, I think more horizontal, I think more network is probably what it ought to look like in the future. But there are too many people who are like vying for the hubs of those networks and who are jealous of that person for getting the grant or that person for getting the award and all this kind of stuff and not enough people who are willing to share. Like in the Jewish world—to get back to the philanthropic portion—there’s no shortage of resources. That can never be the problem. Ego? Probably a bigger problem.”





Tailor Content to Cohort Specifics

One key opportunity related to determining content to include or omit, that is often overlooked, is the value of discovery and data collection prior to program kickoff. While the funder/operator and designer may have expertise and insight from their point of view, understanding the leadership challenges that participants face – the ones that are *really* getting in the way of their work, or in the way of their network building – can be informed through relatively simple data collection. For example, in some of our programs we have incorporated the use of baseline social network mapping to reveal existing connections and existing isolations or silos and brought that information into the classroom so that designers could strategically foster connections (through projects or breakout sessions) and relationship building experiences. In other programs we have leveraged short measures of trust or culture to provide the participant with a snapshot of data specific to their team or organization, which helps the content be more relevant and applicable as they consider what they should apply to address their specific weak spots or leverage their existing strengths.

A hallmark of effective experiential learning is a shift from instruction to facilitation and curation. As discussed previously, this can be incredibly challenging for program designers (and funders) to shift their focus to creating an engagement that builds relationships and experiences over content.

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. It is also a way of collaborating at the start, potentially establishing trust, and building buy-in or deepening commitment if the buy-in is already there.

As mentioned previously, **the specific developmental needs of participants should also be factored into the decisions regarding content.** When the developmental needs vary widely, it can be challenging to offer a meaningful experience for everyone. This is an opportunity for designers to consider the chance for relationship building through peer-coaching or peer-mentoring across developmental needs. It can also be an opportunity for differentiation within program design, whether through different breakout groups or tracks within the program geared toward different developmental needs. This is a particularly important consideration when programs combine leadership development content with technical assistance, where participants may be entering from varying levels of technical experience. At its core, most leadership development content can be applicable across experience levels. Technical skills may be more challenging to both assess and design for. Yet, **gaps in technical skills could present interesting opportunities for leveraging the network within the classroom or cohort and potentially even expanding the network beyond the classroom, by bringing in strategic partners to build capacity around certain technical skills** (such as fundraising or budget management) and, by doing so, seeding future network connections.

Interviewer: Do you see that there are certain values or commitments or collective practices that are needed to advance the field of Jewish education more broadly?

“[Similar] to what I said earlier around it being a value to bring an analysis that takes into account the ways in which people experience both power or privilege and disenfranchisement or marginalization. So a sensitivity to those issues and understanding that, of course, those dynamics play out in the Jewish community, a commitment to our communities really being representative of who Jews are in America and if your community isn’t 10% to 20% people of color or 10% LGBTQ people, etc., to recognize that there are people who are choosing not to show up because your community hasn’t been sufficiently welcoming to them and to relate to inclusion as a value both in and of itself in terms of honoring the experience and identities of people of multiple identities and in terms of what powerfully inclusive Jewish community is a stronger, more vibrant community and how that is, therefore, better for all of us.”



Reflect on Content and Power

It is also critical to acknowledge the way that the positioning and prioritization of content within programs serves as an avenue for communicating power in terms of the funder—participant—designer/operator relationship. While this is a critical reflection for any program addressing social justice issues or community leadership, **we argue that a reflection on power through content is actually a key EDI lens that all programs should examine, particularly programs focusing on networked leadership.**

Power manifests with regard to content in both what is presented and how it is presented. For the what, power resides in what content, what speakers, what instruments are given time and space in the classroom. The history of those instruments, how they have been used, whose voices they have excluded or whose experiences they have privileged are all important considerations. Positioning content such as assessments or leadership models as “the” way versus “a” way can be detrimental to program impact. Positioning it as “the” way implies that the path of expertise in the program is from facilitator/funder to participant. Networked approaches inherently require a different path. **Positioning content as “a” way, something that participant leaders can leverage depending on their context, implies that the path of expertise resides within the leaders** (or cohort, network, or community), and that it is up to them to determine their consumption and application (or rejection) of the content.

Moreover, positioning program content as sacred or immovable can actually be traumatic. For example, if funders, operators and designers have practiced intentional selection, brought together less “traditional” leaders, or are bringing in community practitioners, then it is likely that the room will be primarily composed of people who have not experienced the usual privilege associated with formal leadership roles and other social demographics. This may be one of the first times these individuals have been in a funder-supported space intentionally focused on their development and with the goal of amplifying their individual and collective voice. Program designers have to recognize that prior experiences, oppression, and trauma will surface. In fact, they *should* surface if the aforementioned stage setting for vulnerability has been prioritized. The healing work required will likely manifest, and **programs that are unable to adapt to allow for healing may inadvertently retraumatize participants.** Thus, a very fine tension exists for funders, operators, and designers to navigate – creating the conditions for healing work that also allows a network and community to be envisioned anew, through new skillsets, mindsets, and behaviors. When given space and attention, this trauma and healing work can then be translated by funders, operators, and designers into other work across the ecosystem by understanding ways that current programs or initiatives may be exclusionary or unwelcoming, so that participants do not continue to be put into spaces where they do not feel a sense of belongingness.

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

“I do think it’s a problem because I think it also shows like what’s valued and what isn’t and there’s a certain denigration of work on the ground, and a certain idealization of like executive leadership. And I think not everyone should be an executive. Some people should just be those amazing program managers. So, I think part of it is just how we conceptualize that, just in terms of like reputation and recognition and payment. Like I think for a lot of people, it becomes kind of both a prestige thing and a financial thing. Like, okay I’m going to leave the work I love but there will be these other benefits. But I think also ensuring that we’re elevating the right people, the people who have the capacity to be mentors and lead others, because I think that’s a very different capacity than doing certain other kinds of work. And I think some people are really attuned to that and some people are not.”



have to be adapted. **How the opportunity for feedback and adaptation is built into the design of the content signals to participants where power will reside.** Clearly, this is a challenge that could, at worst, pit program designers and participants against funders/operators if the participants feel strongly that they are not getting what they need, yet the funder/operator is placing specific demands on the design and delivery team. Therefore, it is helpful to keep the ultimate goal at the forefront of everyone's minds. Adding a lens of power helps with this. If the ultimate goal is to ignite a network that will catalyze social change, the impact of the program has to extend and persist beyond the funder or the singular programmatic learning experiences. Considering how framing, inclusion, application, and flexibility will play into the design in order to meet the needs of this specific group of leaders in this specific network can shift the focus to assessing and designing for true network needs versus box-checking of content.

Design for the Microcosm of the Network...(and be ready to adapt)

"Emergent Strategy" utilizes ecological and biological principles, such as fractals, to explain relationships and networked leadership. Author Adrienne Maree Brown writes that²⁰ "Emergence notices the way small actions and connections create complex systems, patterns that become ecosystems and societies... In the framework of emergence, the whole is a mirror of the parts. Existence is fractal—the health of the cell is the health of the species and the planet." A fractal is the smallest element of a system that repeats itself to create the larger whole (a classic example of a fractal is a snowflake). Emergent strategy provides an incredibly useful lens for viewing the potential of cohort-based programs geared toward creating field-level or systemic change, and how these will (and must) adapt over time.

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. In large part, this may involve letting go. Letting go of an established design, letting go of goals that are not grounded in the community, and letting go of assumptions mired by power or bias. And, while program designers and facilitators may be ready and willing to completely abandon one program component in favor of an emergent path from the participants, program funders must also exercise trust in the process and be flexible in their expectations around specific content (see below re: evaluation).

The societal challenges that surround participants as they enter their program experiences are so intense and consuming that they require special attention and adaptability on behalf of program designers. Understanding that program sessions offer a structured, facilitated, and scaffolded opportunity to build relationships and learn content in ways that can be dissected, scrutinized, and improved helps us shift to exploring what experiences in relationship building participants need to become better network leaders. It also helps redefine mindsets and power relationships between participants, funders, operators, and designers in ways that, ideally, can continue to impact the network beyond the program.

"I mean, it's funny, so much of the attention of Jim Joseph and other foundations have put on leadership has led to this like—you know, this sort of reunification of the concept I think and a kind of fetishization of good leaders. Like who are they and how do we replicate them? Let's get in the brains of Gloria Steinem and see if we can create tons of Gloria Steinems. And so you end up that you create more people who think they're leaders—There's probably one [program] per...I mean, in Jewish education alone there's probably like one for every seven Jewish educators, right? And some people go through multiple ones. So, the problem is that now we have all these leaders, but no one is following them."

REDEFINING PRESTIGE

Cohort-based leadership development programs often come with a certain level of cache. Successful applicants are often given a title of “fellow” and this often has deep meaning, both personally and within the community. This is important to consider because identity is an extremely powerful motivator. The ways that we claim certain aspects of our selves or understand our ways of being in the world all inform our identity. Many programs function by offering a new collective identity to participants: “Program Fellow”. That identity may have cache in certain circles, may garner additional funding, and provide access to spaces where decisions are made. The power of this identity in turn conveys prestige to the funder (and potentially even the implementation partner), as more and more people seek to be part of the program and, upon leaving the program, go out to do amazing things and attribute some of their success to the program.

Yet, while the identity may be extremely powerful *within* the cohort, it can be problematic in the broader network. Self-promotion can actually be toxic to networks.²¹ Prestige at the individual level often invokes competition, resource hoarding or other forms of gate-keeping. Even the recruitment process for highly selective programs itself, referenced above, can create their own ingroup and outgroup phenomena that are not helpful to the funder’s overall intent or to the health of the overall network or community where the participants serve.

So, **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.** Igniting a shared collective identity may be one avenue for redefining prestige. Changing the meaning of what prestige looks like and what is expected in exchange for prestige may be another.

Foster a New Collective Leader Identity

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. Collective identities are group-based identities that we claim that offer an organizing framework for our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. They can be made more salient based on the contexts in which we find ourselves and, more importantly, they can be mobilized for collective action. For example, one may claim roles or identities like homeschooling mother, nonprofit professional, or feminist, and those identities may offer a broader community of support, understanding, or action. While one may individually identify as a leader, identifying as a member of a network-based leadership development program – one focused on solving issues that extend well beyond the program – offers a more clear collective identity that one can join.

Cohort-based leadership development programs present an opportunity to redefine the collective identity of “fellow” in a way that can be more purposefully leveraged for the benefit of the network. For example, it could be established as part of the program that an element of the prestige comes from how the current participants will use that privilege to help and elevate others in their network – the antithesis of hoarding resources or gatekeeping.



“I wish that we could transform from a scarcity mindset to an abundance mindset. ... A scarcity mindset looks at [70 to 80 percent intermarriage rate] and says “Oh, My God, the people are shrinking.” And an abundance mindset looks at it and says “Oh, my God, the people are growing.” ... This is a little bit of our mantra at our foundation – like, funding innovations. It’s a profoundly optimistic place to be, empowering people to create new ideas, to create things that work for them and their peers; to just find new ways to play with this incredible tradition and wisdom is really optimistic and abundant – abundant sort of universe to live in.”



An expectation may be that an outcome of the program is that participants are able to show how they are elevating the work of others in their community toward shared goals.

Generate New Norms

There are several aspects of how we collectively define leaders and leadership that can influence the norms within our larger communities and society and influence how we frame “prestige”. Leaders themselves, along with funders, operators, thought-leaders, program designers, and others can all influence the shape of those norms by expanding the stories we tell. Two important stories of leader journeys seem particularly relevant here: 1) what constitutes a key leadership experience and, 2) how we explicitly value interdependence over independence. We can influence these norms through the stories we tell and value.

For example, we craft our individual stories of our collective identities by making sense of our past experiences and how they got us to our present point. A leader may be a newly appointed recipient of a prestigious fellowship that bestows a title and admits them to a network but, as our data showed across the board, they make sense of this new identity through the lens of their earlier leadership experiences. Many of our study participants were able to identify ways that their leadership role at a summer camp when they were a teenager, or an early role in their synagogue, actually launched their understanding of themselves as a leader, and their ability to claim that identity. Connecting the dots back to these early experiences, ones that were powerful and yet not connected to the present prestigious opportunity, expands our ideas of where leadership can develop and be fostered within our own settings (see *Lessons of Experience* report for deeper exploration of youth experiences and their connection to future leadership).

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. Cohort-based programs present an opportunity to change mental models around the false dichotomy between collaboration and competition and the negative connotations around self-promotion. If building your own skills and opportunities is reframed as making the community program stronger, it changes the narrative around self-promotion and networking. If sharing the skills gained or leveraging those skills to elevate others outside of the program is framed as further bolstering the impact of the program, it connotes a shift from individual to communal value. Within the field of higher education, research has shown that narrative framing influences how norms are conveyed, and these norms become powerful motivators for individual performance. For example, first-generation college-students, who are more likely to come from an interdependent cultural context, achieve better performance outcomes when the interdependent aspects of the university (“we’re part of a community”) are emphasized over the individualistic aspects (“everyone is paving their own path”).²²

“Many of the funders are working together and looking at field-level issues and yes, still funding programs and starting programs, but also really looking at what we are learning, how do we connect these dots, how do we fund in coalition, how do we support the field [and move the field] to create things that wouldn’t happen without us brining organizations or even working beyond organizations together around a challenge or a bigger issue. ... And I also think we’re going to continue to see like, you know, a desire to really see the ROI and metrics around your giving and the struggle to kind of figure out what that looks like. And you know, a lot of these studies just for the sake of studies that are not really what I think help us see what’s happening.”



A key opportunity in network-focused cohort-based leadership development programs, then, is tapping into existing leader identity while at the same time enabling participants to create a new collective identity as “network leader” and to influence the narrative that gets told about the function of the program and what success will look like for the entire community. As discussed throughout this guide, network leadership requires different work,²³ different manifestations of leadership (less hierarchical or directive, more adaptive or collaborative), and different skills than what our hierarchical systems typically reward, which may require some revisioning of one’s leader identity. **Programs that provide the space to allow participants to reflect on their choices and experiences, understand their definitions of leadership and how that is inextricably linked to their identity as leaders, and envision the ways their identities as leaders must grow to work in new ways toward bigger challenges are key to redefining prestige in service of the larger network.**



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.



CHANGING HOW WE LEARN AND GAUGE IMPACT



Lastly, a critical and often overlooked aspect of any program design process is the role of learning, data, and evaluation. While we previously discussed the role of data in informing design, shifting our lens around how we define and measure impact is necessary for network-based work. **Leadership experiences for network-based impact require a different approach to learning and evaluation than we are used to.** In fact, the old methods of monitoring and evaluation will fall far short and perhaps even undermine impact by not providing timely or actionable metrics. At worst, traditional methods of evaluation can also reinforce power imbalances by privileging the funder perspective, valuing some forms of knowledge over others, and generating questions and data collection methods that are an ineffective use of time and resources that weaken the important work required in the communities.

Funders, operators, and designers have to shift their mindset from static outcomes to gathering data that informs the understanding of the dynamic processes at play and that fuel the network with information needed to act most efficiently and effectively. 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. Understanding how relationships are built and supported, identifying gaps within the networks, and gathering data related to the needs of specific communities *before* designing and intervention (or supporting grantees in doing so) are all ways of shifting use of data.

Measurement efforts can assess the size, shape, and growth of the network, particularly after a certain amount of time has passed. However, in terms of communicating return on investment, that is one relatively limited use of measurement. It also results in data literacy and measurement skills remaining outside the network (in the hands of operators and evaluators) versus becoming a critical network skill on its own.

Many network-leadership scholars are suggesting that network-based movements adopt an emergent learning approach. Critically, funders must create the conditions that foster a learning approach over a performative/evaluative approach. This involves equipping leaders with relevant data about their context and facilitating data meaning-making and connecting it to goals and strategies (of the leader and the network). Emergent learning practices then identify proximal opportunities to test new ideas and quickly gather data on their effectiveness. Cohort programs can amplify these efforts by providing data literacy skills as well as dedicated time to share ideas, discuss generalizability or transferability, and learn from improvements. The learning orientation can be further amplified if program designers build collective problem-solving into the program itself. When fellows (who often may be or become future grantees) work together toward common goals they build stronger relationships.²⁶

This requires a shift for funders to let go of their common metrics of evaluation and even their overall mindset of performative evaluation (monitoring that fellows or grantees comply with various metrics). Prioritizing network metrics may increase both the funder and the participants' understandings of new connections and lead to collaborative projects, pathways of funding, or policy wins. There are ways that this shift can be enacted on both a macro and micro scale.



For example, field-wide network analysis studies that map relationships among leaders, organizations, goals, and resources can be an instrumental step to provide Jewish network influencers with the information they can use to identify high potential impact initiatives and synergistic collaborations that stand to benefit the field as a whole.

On a more micro level, network members can be guided through an emergent learning process to understand what the most immediate needs of the network are: Where are its strengths? What practices are getting in the way of progress? What immediate action can be taken and how will we know it is successful? The number of emergent learning experiments, case studies of specific communities, or platforms for gathering and using data become bigger-picture outcomes that focus on achieving network impact versus demonstrating just program impact.

Focusing on what we measure is also important because often what is measured becomes what really matters. Those shifts – toward emergent learning through shared measurement and data meaning-making – also encourage collaboration over competition amongst fellows, which is critical to the overall health and success of the network and its ability to influence the field. **Measurement is not benign, and funders, operators, designers, and network architects can thoughtfully consider how to leverage measurement to build the network.** Imagine if funders and operators decided that the focus of measurement would not solely be about documenting the impact to convince others of its power. Rather, the measurement efforts could focus on leveraging the resources to enable participants themselves to collect the data and information they need within their communities. This would allow them to: elevate the voices of their community constituents, identify the most pressing needs, and collect just-in-time data to determine if the efforts emerging from the network were making a difference, how they could be improved, and what others in the field could learn from them. It is an entirely different lens of measurement that decenters stories of impact that serve the funder to building data capacity and the ability to leverage data within the network.

An Ask to Funders: After the Experience

A persistent theme across many of the interviewers is a frustration with philanthropy and the constant push to obtain funding. One participant likened the experience of receiving startup funding to a ladder – being funded to build up five rungs of a 25 rung ladder, in terms of potential – and then having funding wane and being forced to secure funding in order to maintain the current rung, rather than continue to progress. Therefore, a critical question for funders who seek to invest in networks toward social change, is how will they adapt their funding and measurement strategies to allow for the time and learning required to leverage networked learning and action?

The persistent slog for funding is burning out some of the sectors most productive and innovative leaders. Yet, many argue that it doesn't have to be that way. In what ways could funders relying on old funding models be harming or limiting the success of the network by artificially creating competition or funneling energy toward what is important to the funder but perhaps not the network or community?

CONCLUSION

Our work with the Jim Joseph Foundation began as a study about leadership journeys and the role of leadership development programs. What we found was that the moment we are in calls for both leaders and programs to be in service of intentionally and strategically building networks. **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.** In order to fully realize this future, we need to move beyond thinking about leadership development programs as only serving the individual participants – rather the programs can be more effective when they support participants while at the same time “seeding” a network that can mobilize for broader change. Cohort programs have the greatest potential for impact when every element of the program is designed to advance a core goal: to lead continuous, positive change in the world by developing and supporting networks.

Cohorts of leaders are important because they feed a set of connections between people that are important during a fellowship/program and after a formal program ends. These seeded networks have the capacity to expand, shift, grow, and adapt to meet larger field-level needs. Thus, building a social network will increase the return on investment of the initial program. It may also influence how the leaders who went through this experience launch new initiatives as they advance in their careers. Given how tightly connected the Jewish community is in the US, influencing any one part of the ecosystem (network) will have reverberating effects throughout the network.

Successful boundary spanning interventions to foster mutually beneficial interdependence will depend upon leaders who are able to see the bigger picture and take on the role of “ecosystem engineers.” 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 challenges. Leaders will need to be “collaborative boundary spanners, who will emphasize broad concerns and community building rather than institutional preservation.”²⁸ Their role will be to develop “systems of shared power [that] incubate creativity across a variety of institutional silos and create invested stakeholders and constituents.”²⁹

Maximizing the success of a widening range of organizations will require “a commitment to interdependence that goes well beyond platitudinous expressions of one-for-all-and-all-for-one.”³⁰ It will be imperative to develop new network-oriented systems and practices that facilitate field-wide collaboration. The boundary spanning work needed to address network-level issues will depend upon bringing together the full range of diverse stakeholders. Therefore, building positive relationships among leaders in different roles and across a variety of organizations is a necessary prerequisite to building a more supportive shared Jewish organizational ecosystem. Funders also have a responsibility – given the commitment and energy that applicants bring, as well as the power differential between applicants and funders – to span organizational boundaries and work together to provide valuable professional development experiences strategically across the sector, rather than solely to further the prestige of the foundation or program.

Within this guide, we have presented a set of core design elements that – when considered through a lens of power and when understood as inherently connected to the future network – are critical opportunities for more purposefully designing successful cohort-based leadership programs that support a larger network for field-level change. Throughout, we have also identified where shifts in our thinking have to occur. Funders, operators, program designers, and participants have to reconceptualize leadership development experiences with the network in mind, understanding what that entails (in particular, a focus on relationships and power) for how to balance content, what competencies need to be supported, what skills can be practiced through application, and how we can shift toward emergent learning to serve the network.

It is our belief that focusing on these core elements and authentically engaging in these mindset shifts will produce powerful, relevant, and transformative leadership development experiences that not only cascade knowledge and skills throughout the network, but elevate and uplift the latent talent and expertise already working to enact transformative social change within the network.

GENERAL SOURCES FOR THE GUIDE

(This is not an exhaustive list)

- CCL Experiences and Expertise
- Popular nonprofit/philanthropic periodicals (SSIR, Foundation Review)
- LOE Interviews
- Site visits, observation of JJF grantee programs & other LD programs
- Follow Up Survey Responses
- CCL Practices
- Pedagogical design elements, design thinking, 4-MAT, etc.
- Similar research & reports, e.g. Schusterman LD Guide

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