

ENGAGEMENT, FEDERATIONS, AND THIS MOMENT IN AMERICAN JEWISH LIFE

INTRODUCTORY FRAME (WHAT WE'RE DOING HERE)

In August 2017, we woke up to an article in EJewishPhilanthropy that declared “legacy institutions to be “no longer working.”¹

The article wasn't particularly (new) news. We see it every day, in the phones in our hands and in the ways we interact. The jump from 20th to 21st centuries is characterized by a jump from the institutional to the virtual age. That is, the dominance of the network—as mindset and as daily tool and playground—demonstrates the extent to which we have abandoned the organization as a predominant setting for action. This means, in turn, that we reject the norms and characteristics of the organization, including hierarchy, membership, opaqueness, and so on.²

In the Federation system, in adapting to this change, we have a massive ship to turn. But we've already started moving. The engagement work that Federations have launched, which in many places began with but is no longer restricted to PJ Library, represents much of the shift we need to make.

This initial shift demonstrates that legacy organizations aren't dead—or, irrelevant. Rather, in an ever increasingly atomized society, where we are busier and busier and crave the company and meaning that we can't make time for (despite our “friends” on Facebook), the “why” of our organization is even more important: We will, always, exist to build the infrastructure of Jewish community to help Jews (and those who love them) live safely and with meaning, in dialogue with Jewish tradition. We will help *kehilat Yisrael* to be human, Jewishly.

Still, we know that *how* we do our work, as well as our tactics, need to change.³ This essay explores that needed change and, specifically, the implications of our expanding engagement agenda for the rest of the Federation system. It reviews in greater detail the societal trends we face, shares a vision for the future, and then offers a collective to-do list as we move forward.

TRENDS (MORE ON THE WORLD WE'RE FACING)⁴

Trend: People's lives are dictated by personal networks. These networks are increasingly not Jewish.

The existence of social media means that we get peer feedback in real time; the prevalence of social media means that we crave this feedback. And so, more than ever, we do the things that our friends do,

¹ Toby Tabachnik, “[Old Models of Legacy Institutions No Longer Working](#)”. The article was written for and first run in *The Jewish Chronicle*.

² The helpful text *Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact* (John Cleveland, Madeleine Taylor, and Peter Plastrik, 2014) provides deeper analysis of the end-of-century transition away from the organization.

³ [Simon Sinek](#) convincingly argues that a successful social movement has a “why” and also a “how” and a “what.” I'm suggesting that our “why,” our *raison d'être*, will never change, but our “how”—our strategies—and our “what”—our tactics—need to.

⁴ These trends are informed by the work of the Cleveland Jewish Federation in its strategic planning process.

because we follow what they do or because they approve of our choices. Even what we know is informed by our social media feeds, which are rooted in our small slices of the world.⁵

As a result, if our peers aren't going to Jewish opportunities, or engaging in Jewish behaviors in their homes, we won't, either.⁶ Without friends involved in Jewish activities, we won't even know about them—and if we do find out about something, we won't have our peers' approval of our participation.

Immersed in non-Jewish social networks, those who are not born into active Jewish life have trouble inserting themselves into it. One choice leads to another set of choices and a lack of Jewish engagement becomes more concrete. That is, without Jewish friends in the teenage years, we do not look for Jewish friends in college, which reinforces our lack of Jewish friends and connections while dating, which leads to intermarriage, which—statistically—leads to increased choices away from Jewish life related to neighborhood, school choices for children, synagogue participation, and so on. Intermarriage is a symptom, generally of assimilation but specifically of a lack of Jewish social networks, a lack of Jewish friends and of tightknit (or, often, any) Jewish community. Similarly, families are increasingly choosing no Jewish education for their children (over religious school or day school) because their friends, Jews in Jewish/ plus homes or non-Jews, are doing the same. Judaism was meant to be lived in intense community. For most North American Jews, that community is gone, and many rich individual Jewish connections have gone as well.

Trend: Organizations are owned by constituents. Federations were built by the 20th century. They were birthed in a time when immigrants lived almost on top of each other, when America was only working because those who got here five years before were taking care of those just arrived. Life, and, therefore, charity were personal—door-to-door and hand-to-hand. Federations grew with the Jewish events of the 20th century, with the birth of the state of Israel and decimation of the Holocaust, with the success of Israel in the 1967 war, with the emigration (even rescue) of Soviet Jews and Ethiopian Jews. And they grew with the events of American life more generally in the 20th century, with the return to home and community in the 1950s and early 1960s and with the big money boom of the 1980s.

The 20th century was a time in America when organizations mattered. Civic and community engagement was intense, on trend. We bowled *together*, as Robert Putnam has demonstrated.⁷ And we wanted our organizations to reflect the intensity of our involvement. We built physically big and complex organizations that were oriented around hierarchies



What does this mean for the Federation system?

From *Stanford Social Innovation Review*
August 30, 2012

⁵ Because we are so rarely “friends” with people who exist in social networks different from ours, our media networks reify our choices. See, for example, [“The Reason Your Feed Became an Echo Chamber and What To Do about It”](#) (July 2016).

⁶ Nicholas Christakis has studied these ideas, with James H. Fowler: *Connected: How Your Friends' Friends' Friends Affect Everything You Feel, Think, and Do* (Little, Brown and Company, 2009).

⁷ *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. by Robert D. Putnam. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

and that operated on power. They were impersonal, showing their authority by putting people on pedestals, away from the masses.⁸ Maybe it didn't matter that they were impersonal; we were volunteering with people we saw in synagogue, on Saturday night in town or at the country club. The organizations we built were appropriate for the time they were in. They made us feel good and they got the job done.

When we say that networks govern our lives today, what we mean is that the centers of society are virtual, organic collectives of people rather than physical, tangible institutions.⁹ We meet on Instagram and Facebook. Our lives are lived on the internet and this has reshaped society. We expect transparency and opportunity for collective action. The emphasis is on what we can do together, with all as equals.

When Millennials explore a non-profit, they look at the people. Who's driving this machine? What can I know about their careers, their families, their values? They look at the direction of the money—and sometimes, they get great specificity. We're all competing with [charity: water](#), which purports to pinpoint the relationship between a bottle of water purchased and the well or water project those dollars support. They look at their opportunity to feel like their work matters, that they count. They don't want to feel they're being used in someone else's project but rather that the project could not go on without them.

Trend: Among the non-Orthodox,¹⁰ **particularism has disappeared.** Multi-culturalism was introduced into American school curricula in the early 1990s, about halfway through the education of Generation X. Millennials came of age when the concept was already deeply embedded into schooling and during a period of heightened immigration to America, when diversity grew and American liberal values came to include caring for the immigrant, wherever they are from. For most of us, particularism no longer works in the US as it once did. We don't take care of only or primarily our own; we see everyone as our own.

These cultural realities combine with other forces in Jewish life. We are of greater distance from the period of mass immigration (1880-1924) and from the Jewish collective memory of the 20th century.¹¹ Israel is no longer a unifier and it is also not *parve*; instead, it raises confusion and, among some, dissension. As a result, and particularly because it is in conflict with American cultural relativism, Jewish particularism has dissipated for the vast majority of (North) American Jews.¹² There are ethnic enclaves, for sure, with Jews and Jewish families in these enclaves actively engaged with Jewish institutions, Jewish community, Jewish learning and exploration, and each other. But these are shrinking and this way of life is eroding. Moreover, we could once assume—but cannot anymore—that being born Jewish

⁸ Cleveland et al, *Connecting to Change*

⁹ The ideas of Beth Kanter and Allison Fine about “networked nonprofit” organizations present more deeply the virtual nature of the network as applied to organizational life. (“[Becoming a Networked Nonprofit](#),” in *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 2012). Clay Shirky, in *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations* (2009) establishes the extent to which society itself is now organized by network.

¹⁰ More precisely, this is among the non-religious: Those who are on the Orthodox spectrum and in a more traditional segment of the Conservative-identified community still live within particular communities.

¹¹ The rich collective memory, of course, of the Holocaust, of Israel's founding in 1948, and of Israel's decisive military victory in 1967.

¹² Canadian patterns are slightly but not entirely different, particularly in the West.

once meant a certain sense of inherited generational obligation and belonging. Now, commitment to *klal yisrael* is inherited rarely, only sometimes among the most philanthropic families. Most do not live their lives in dialogue with the Jewish narrative, always pushing away from or being pulled toward it, but instead ignore it. “The Jewish community” is a meaningless phrase to most. It implies belonging to a group that does not represent them.

Trend: Everyone owns meaning. Non-profit life has been made more complex by the new economy, in which businesses prey on meaning and fairness exactly because these compel new customers, particularly Millennials and GenXers, toward their services. So AirBnB is building a more inclusive world¹³; by hosting, we are better people and we promote equality. Blue Apron delivers a “better food system,”¹⁴ putting itself in the same camp as small agriculture, CSAs and farmers’ markets. We don’t need to turn to non-profit life to feel like we’re making the world better or like we’re good people.¹⁵

Typical Federation marketing sells Federation’s role in supporting Jews’ lives because it’s the Jewish thing to do. Today, Jews are interested in people, not Jews, in being inspired to understand their greater role and potential impact in and on the larger world. Our differentiator has always been that we are the meaning people in the Jewish space. We still deliver meaning, but we’re in a larger meaning space. Our differentiator is lost.

Trend: Giving is episodic, spontaneous, but not random. Non-profit engagement was once understood as a ladder, with each step up the ladder drawing someone more deeply into involvement in that non-profit’s cause, requiring greater behaviors from them that support that cause. Now, non-profit engagement is non-linear and temporary.¹⁶ As a result, Millennials have developed a reputation for not caring. But according to the companies actually studying their civic engagement and attitudes, they care a great deal. They simply lack loyalty to an organization or to a specific cause—they’re more interested in supporting any issues that make the world more fair and just. And, they are drawn to experiences, so a one-time opportunity is attractive if it’s the right kind of opportunity.¹⁷ Their engagement, therefore, is neither random nor meager. It’s on their terms, it’s experiential, it’s personal, and it’s interesting. It is not predicated on loyalty, rooted in an annual commitment, or remote.

Context: The Jewish poor and the world’s needy are not going away. And still. We need to bring meals and medicine to a 94-year-old in the Ukraine. We need to model best refugee practices for the world. We need to facilitate transportation for the elderly home-bound throughout North America. And perhaps we need to do this more than ever: As the world becomes an increasingly dangerous place for Jews and increasingly polarized for everyone, we take a greater and more important role caring for our own and advocating for refugees. Similarly, as our system of social services in America is challenged, our work on behalf of the poor and indigent becomes more crucial.

¹³ The Airbnb “belong anywhere” campaign can be seen [here](#).

¹⁴ The Blue Apron commercial advocating its promotion of a “better food system” can be seen [here](#).

¹⁵ For exploration of this idea, see “[The Moral Voice of Corporate America](#),” *New York Times* August 19, 2017.

¹⁶ TMI Strategy documents these ideas: “[4 Keys to Reaching the Hearts \(and Wallets!\) of Millennial Donors](#),” accessed October 10, 2017.

¹⁷ This is how the ice-bucket challenge became so popular—it was a compelling cause merged with an experience on social media embedded in networks.

We need to do our work of reinvention in the context of the work we have always done. We cannot abandon our core mission—to help Jews and those in Jewish families thrive, to live more fully and safely. But we can't also expect to achieve our core mission as we always have, succeeding with new donors because we're doing the same thing ever better. We need to approach our work anew.

A FEDERATION RESPONSE (HOW WE BUILD ON OUR ENGAGEMENT WORK FOR TRUE CHANGE)

Our Approach: Engagement (Community, Intimacy, Meaning, and Humanness)

It is within the context of and in response to these trends that Federations' work in Engagement has developed. It has begun as a series of activities: coffee dates, the formation of parent playgroups or NextGen clusters, hosting holiday tastings in grocery stores. But it has become—or maybe has always been—an approach, a way of interacting, working, and being that emphasizes relationships, intimacy, and the building of community. Engagement focuses on humanness, on the ups and downs of being people, on vulnerability, and on genuinely inspiring and important content. It focuses those engaged in meaning. By emphasizing relationships, it plays on the trend toward networks. As such, it offers more than only an opportunity to engage people newly in Jewish life. It is a bridge between 21st century organizational trends and Federation.

To say this differently: When Federations adopted Engagement as a platform and as part of their mission, we adopted an approach that allows us to deepen our organizations' positions as ones of meaning. But to maximize our work in this way, Engagement needs to be incorporated properly into the rest of the organization. It needs to be linked to Federations' education function, and to allocations and grantmaking, and even to FRD. And this synergy needs to develop alongside our traditional work, as we also work with those at the heart of our organizations, doing both well. How do we succeed? By holding both in our heads and hands at the same time, by doing what we have always done *while* stepping into the unfamiliar with full hearts, humility, and openness to true synergies and collaboration.

Synergy: Grantmaking can complement Engagement, so that the two help to design an infrastructure for Jewish opportunity. What it means to be “unengaged” in Jewish life is to have no Jewish friends, no Jewish activities, and little sense of what this tradition means in one's life. It is to live with a personal identity but little interaction with Judaism or Jews.

But Judaism (life, really) is meant to be lived with others, in community.¹⁸ Because networks dominate the day, we can use networks—relationships, and the networks or micro-communities to which we can connect people through relationships—to rebuild Jewish community. The best way that we know to do this is to hire peer connectors to work with their peers and to organize small friendship groups. And we can, within the context of a safe relationship, also introduce a Jewish mentor who can play in the meaning space, helping people to be better people in the context of Jewish tradition. Peer connectors and senior educators: That's Engagement.

¹⁸ God told Adam, It's not good for man to live alone (*Lo tov cheyot adam l'vado*) (Genesis 2:18). We are not meant to live this life in isolation.

This work of establishing systems of peer connectors and senior educators, or rabbis without organizational portfolio, is not just Engagement. It is also the work of designing a new infrastructure of Jewish education. It shouldn't replace the old infrastructure—it's really an enhanced infrastructure, not a new one—but these new pieces need to exist in order to play off of themes in the zeitgeist to reach those not yet engaged in Jewish life.

Very often, Federations are in the Engagement business directly, as implementers of programs. And very often, Federations make investments in Jewish education. These initiatives complement each other, the same people are the constituents of our grants and our direct program. Still, we usually approach them separately, through distinct strategies. We could be using all of the tools at our disposal—including grantmaking, or allocations—to redesign our community's landscape of Jewish opportunity, our infrastructure of Jewish education.

PRACTICALLY, this asks us to approach direct program work and grantmaking as one seamless project, to:¹⁹

- Imagine the community and the infrastructure that we want to see. Do we want (and need) a set of opportunities for parents-to-be? Stronger and more early childhood classrooms? Better options for families with children entering and in middle school? Expanded opportunities for those in a certain geographic area? Probably all of this and more!
- Take stock of community partners and internal capacity and strategy. Which needed program interventions are line with Federation's strategy and capacity (i.e. When should Federation do it)? Where are there logical partners? Where are there subject matter experts in the community who need some technical assistance to fill a need in the relevant space?
- Create grant opportunities that incentivize the program design that is needed. Create a targeted grant opportunity (co-design an intervention with a Federation/ agency task force) and build an open RFP that is targeted toward a certain specific goal.
- Deliver programs directly from Federation when needed in order to achieve all desired ends.
- And, co-locate all of this work within one office. That is, design an office responsible for achieving a strategic goal—engaging families with young children, for example—and award a lay and professional team the responsibility of meeting that goal using direct programming, grantmaking, and technical assistance as tools. In this way we can concentrate all of our tools on reweaving Jewish community.

Grantmaking and facilitating program are each related to certain skill sets. Particularly in larger Federations, it is likely that these each need specialists who can work deeply in specific areas. But, they can be joined within one team by their unified goals, their common vision of a certain kind of communal infrastructure. Grantmaking and Engagement (program) are each a means to a shared end of engaging more Jews more deeply in Jewish life. They need to complement each other. The best way to achieve

¹⁹ This section borrows from a core text in strategic grantmaking: by the TCC Group: "Funding for Impact: How to Design Strategic Grantmaking Programs" found [here](#). The basic recommendation is to 1) Identify the issue, 2) Articulate assumptions, 3) Scan the field, 4) Take stock of internal capacity, 5) Validate assumptions, and 6) Implement/ evaluate/ plan again.

that synergy is to join the organizational functions—and in a smaller Federation, to identify an individual who can be trained in the best thinking in each of these areas and be responsible for executing on both, in an intertwined portfolio.

Synergy: Engagement and Education need to be blended, one informing the other, as one process of growth for constituents. From a Federation perspective, “Jewish education” represents an opportunity to engage Jews (and the people who love them) in the exploration and celebration of Judaism. It is a series of organizational opportunities, a framework that includes programs and classes and activities that dictates what people in the community get to do Jewishly.

Engagement is part of this framework. But, to separate the project of Engagement from what we consider to be “Education” is intellectually false. Federation leaders sense that. As part of the same framework, both Engagement and Education and all of our related activities and investments can be animated by the same vision²⁰ of who people can become. When it works toward a vision of an Engaged Jew, Engagement can help those engaged develop their Jewish connections and commitments and their own Jewish community, to develop personally meaningful Jewish practices in the context of their community, and to grow Jewishly.

To do this, Engagement needs Torah. A sense of what Jewish tradition is and can be and a sense of how to live in dialogue with tradition in the 21st century are each needed in order to help more people engage genuinely and deeply with Judaism. To work toward these ends, Engagement professionals need a sense of what it looks like when Jewish education happens in the context of relationships, what Jewish mentoring looks like, how to anchor a Jewish conversation, and how to empower someone Jewishly. This last point is terrifically important: To address the challenges of Jewish community today, the lack of Jewish friendships and distinctive community, Engagement professionals need to know how to help a group of people become a Jewish community that will engage in Jewish time together, a Jewish community that can be a context for its members’ Jewish and even human growth. Engagement professionals need to understand how to help engagees become Jewish community that practices the importance of collectivity, of *klal yisrael*. Only then can engagees become communal Jews, growing as human beings in the context of community.

This growth is the prize of Jewish education. Through it, people become more and better than they were, with greater emotional intelligence related to their life roles, a more complex understanding of tradition and ritual in their lives, a deeper sense of who they are in relationship to community and something called God.

And so, Engagement and Education need not only to complement each other but to intersect and, ideally, even be seamless.

²⁰ The concept of vision-guided education was developed in a Jewish setting by Daniel Pekarsky and then by the Mandel Foundation. (See: “Vision-Guided Jewish Education” in *What We Know Now about Jewish Education* by Pekarsky and *Visions of Jewish Education*, edited by Scheffler et al.) It is outlined for use by Jewish organizations by Rabbi Dan Smokler in the essay, [“From Silver Bullet to Golden Theory.”](#) The particular vision offered here is highly informed by Dan’s work.

PRACTICALLY, this means:

- Engagement professionals need their own mentors who are cultivating their capacity to be mentors and teachers themselves and helping them develop their philosophies of or approaches to Jewish education.
- Education professionals and Engagement professionals work together to identify the “growth” opportunities in any Engagement opportunity and how to build series of Engagement initiatives that foster growth.
- Specifically, Engagement professionals and their mentors need to work on Engagement professionals’ capacity to work with engagees’ on their sense of Jewish community and commitment and their related conversation skills. Through conversation and program, Engagement professionals can challenge and deepen engagees’ sense of *klal yisrael*.
- Federation itself need be examined, its rituals and practices pieced apart, to understand how Jewish tradition can infuse the daily life of Federation. Education officers need be given a platform to articulate inspiration and guidance from Jewish wisdom, messages that can shape what it means to live in the community.

Synergy: We need unique FRD products and frameworks for an Engagement audience; FRD needs to be influenced by Engagement. Federation’s core FRD efforts are shaped by a set of assumptions that are rooted in 20th century Jewish life: Donors will give once during a year, every year, for their adult lives.

But Engagement constituents have no inherited loyalty to Jewish community, no sense of responsibility to Federation. Moreover, they are often (although not always) Millennials and members of Generation X; however old they are, they are shaped by and respond to giving trends of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. They give when they receive. They want experiences, personal satisfaction, and emotional reward. They give in response to a well-stated and concrete need. They may give to the annual campaign but only after an immersive and meaningful education process or if framed in language they understand. And, they may give to a specific cause, to Federation’s work, but likely once, through an experience, and on their terms, not ours.

PRACTICALLY, this means that if we want to engage them as donors, we need to develop new products that meet these criteria.

- Our engagement events can also be FRD events if they are meaningful and memorable, important and also Facebookable, so good that it goes on Facebook. And, we need to understand that participants are not making their annual pledge at that event, but rather making a gift because of the experience offered. They may even make another gift that year, if another experience calls to them.
- We should expect donor retention only because of repeated experiences and the ongoing telling of our story. They gave once, but they won’t necessarily give a second time. We need to encourage that second gift as though it were a first gift.

- We should use the best of the internet to tell our story, and we should tell it all the time. That might mean weekly messages sharing Federation’s impact. That probably means ensuring that our stories of impact subtly convey ideas about collective responsibility. That definitely means asking for a contribution every time we tell a story. The days of campaign corridors and times when we emphasize our message more and not less are over—with today’s constituents, we need always to be reminding them of what we do, helping them to know that their dollars matter.

And, FRD events need to be shaped by the principles of Engagement.

- This demands a return to basic principles of relational fundraising. Professionals and volunteers need to work the room, getting to know as many people as possible. Follow-up conversations need to strengthen relationships and serve as further get-to-know-you opportunities.
- Shared get-to-know-you moments need to be created (with icebreakers!), where those present tell their stories out loud to each other. Moments of intimacy can happen, where participants share daily challenges and concerns. We should all walk out of these events knowing more people, having shared of ourselves, with a greater sense of community, than we did at the events’ beginning. We cannot let anyone at any event remain anonymous.

Federation itself, and all of its contact with community members, need to be shaped by Engagement.

- We have to make individuals count, helping anyone connected with Federation to feel valued. We need to see those connected to Jewish life as people and as partners, not donors (or pledge cards) or even customers. We are all part of the same story—and, at the same time, we need to affirm their choice to be part of the Federation story. How can we help people feel like they matter in Federation and in the world, even when they just call for information? How can we interact with them like family members?
- Similarly, we should occupy, as much as possible, a space of meaning—in people’s lives, in Jewish community, in the non-profit zeitgeist of our cities and towns. We should inspire and support, helping people to make sense of the world around them. Messages we send should reach as many people as possible, breaking the “member mindset” in Jewish communal life. We should create a foundation of humanness—of being about things that matter in our daily lives—on which we can do the rest of our work.

Synergy: A vision of an Engaged Jew will animate our collective efforts. Federations look like fundraising organizations. But fundraising, of course, is a means to an end. Still, too often, we measure our work by the number of donors to a campaign and the number of dollars raised. A unified vision²¹ of an engaged Jew needs to animate our work in education, in engagement, and in FRD. All of our activities need to be evaluated by the same vision of who people can become as a result of our raising dollars that we spend to help Jews be Jewish.

²¹ Again, this is informed by Rabbi Dan Smokler’s work.

What is that vision? In today's context, where Jews lack Jewish friendship groups (social networks), Jewish community, and active Jewish living, we propose the following as an understanding of the goals of our work together.

1. All should have a commitment to Jewish community and should engage actively with Jewish community—with friends and with organizations—during their lifetimes. They should:
 - have Jewish Friends
 - have Jewish Organizations where they feel that they belong
 - commit Time and Money to those organizations
2. All should have a strong sense of how the Jewish tradition and narrative speak to who they are and want to be in the world. They should:
 - have a Mentor and be engaged in a process of Jewish Growth
 - Celebrate Jewish Time

We seek people whose lives are informed by Jewish tradition, who build homes that are infused with Jewish values and rituals, who create meaningful and inspiring Jewish communities that inform their lives and that others want to join, who are better humans and Jews because of their engagement with Judaism and with Jewish community. Preventing intermarriage, building Jewish identity, and even donating to Federation are each too simple to be lone measures of our success. If we seek to develop fully realized Jews, we need all of it.

If this is our vision, Engagement cannot work alone, but neither can Education, and neither can FRD. They meet each other, bringing people to content, bringing questions of humanness to questions of our tradition, returning the sacred to acts of tzedakah.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

I work at a Federation. What do I do now?

1. Examine and map the social networks that exist across the community, including professional, geographic, age-related, activity related. Develop a comprehensive strategy that identifies and leverages central connectors in each of these networks to engage them in Jewish community of their own.
2. Put together Education people and Engagement people. Start to talk together about the ways that "Engagement" events can relate Torah. Begin to develop a working relationship with Engagement professionals and a vision of how Engagement opportunities immerse participants in Judaism. Help Engagement professionals develop an understanding of and confidence in themselves as educators. Explore the concept of "back-pocket Torah"²² and big questions for coffee dates.

²² Hillel International articulates the concept of "back-pocket Torah" as pithy, meaningful, relevant texts that an educator knows intimately and can teach easily, readily, and in any setting.

3. Put this team together with FRD professionals. Begin to shape FRD opportunities with Engagement principles. Develop ice-breakers appropriate for FRD events. Find prompts that can create moments of intimacy, vulnerability, and connection in events.²³
4. Identify an Engagement audience with whom to test new messages and products. Design a messaging series, for example, for a PJ Library audience. Include as part of the pilot one or a few events that bring together the crowd to help them study and think through the tradition of collective responsibility in Jewish and American life, or to help them consider their family giving—topics that will help them consider Federation as a source of their giving.
5. Work with Engagement and FRD to develop a system for “working the room” at any Federation events, for identifying prospects for further conversation from these events. Such prospects might be ripe for leadership or giving or both, after extensive get-to-know-you and educational conversations with Federation leadership, FRD and Engagement.
6. Bring Engagement ideas to Board work and other rituals of organizational life (of Federation life). Examine all the written / other artifacts of the organization to make it a welcoming place and to make it a doorway into Jewish community and commitment, not just Federation community and commitment. (What happens when someone calls Federation? What does a bill look like? etc.)
7. Bring Judaism to the same rituals, allowing all Federation practices to help those engaged with Federation to encounter Jewish ideas through their Federation work. This might be as simple as putting the Jewish date on materials and as complex as raising texts and Jewish ideas for conversation during meetings.
8. Look for opportunities to bring a moral voice to constituents, via any possible channel.
9. Maintain, during this work, a sense of sameness and connection for our traditional audience, recognizing that we are running two operating systems simultaneously. Sit with traditional leaders to help them understand current trends (remembering that they see these trends in the homes of their children and grandchildren, and even their friends) and to ask for their support as you take risks. Remind them, repeatedly, that you are building not donors but Jews—who will, some of them, give in kind.

At JFNA, we will:

1. Develop a list of practices related to the role of Engagement in FRD and in daily Federation life and be able to consult in these areas.
2. Keep the best thinking about the relationship between Engagement and FRD on the agenda at Federation conferences (the GA, Professional Institute).
3. Provide models of education toward *klal yisrael* that can be used with Engagement audiences.
4. Pursue a framework of evaluation, measurement, and data use for the Federation system that evaluates our vision of an Engaged Jew.

²³ See Rabbi Josh Bolton’s [“100 Prompts, Provocations, and Situations for Jewish Growth on Campus”](#) for examples of these kinds of prompts.

CONCLUSION

When parents are paired with parents to talk about the challenges of parenting, they are able to be authentically themselves, to share their greatest fears or hopes for themselves as parents and for their children. When near-engaged couples are gathered for conversations about their future homes and conflicts related to couplehood, when twenty-somethings create a Havdallah bonfire where they tell their stories, when grandparents share their confusion about the universalism of their grandchildren, they all similarly share their hopes and fears. At its best, Engagement helps people be their best, in the context of Jewish tradition.

We thought Engagement was a series of activities. In the context of relationships and in the meaning space, it plays to the current zeitgeist while also helping us to make Jewish tradition come alive. To maximize Engagement as a response to the world today, we can and should let it influence all of our work. We are in new territory but as a system, this work is within our reach.