



# Celebrating Small Beats

By Rachel Gildiner

Connection looks different these days, as do many things – how we teach and learn, how we celebrate, how we gather. I was reflecting recently with a colleague on how much we miss running into each other at the office and at events. We wished we could achieve that feeling of closeness that comes from being in physical proximity to one another. After some discussion, we identified that it could still be possible to achieve that closeness – we would just have to be more intentional about how we engineered the conditions under which it happened.

Now, the irony in this conversation is that our business at GatherDC has always been to create moments of connection for thousands of young adults during but also outside of Jewish programs – creating ways to acknowledge and value people when they show up at events *and* to demonstrate that we miss them when they don't.

At GatherDC we know that a person's Jewish life extends far beyond when they show up to one of our events. Our work is helping people feel that they are part of a community whether they walk through our doors or not. We understand that a person's life is made up of moments large and small that connect them to their Jewish identity. We use our [Heartbeat Model of Engagement](#) to help us think about what a healthy Jewish life looks like. This model looks not only at major events and life-changing moments, but at the connective experiences and relationships that tie it all together. We refer to these moments as large beats and small beats, respectively.

Last January, GatherDC wanted to engage further with our Heartbeat Model. We dubbed January our first ever "small beats" month. This meant ZERO large beat gatherings for the entire 31 days of January (and yes, we see the irony given that our name is GatherDC.) We wanted to push ourselves to build and deepen community through only small beats, avoiding the draw of planning events that take up our time, attention and resources. What would happen if we stripped all those large beats away for an entire month?

Over and over in our community we see organizations spending most, if not all, of their time on the large beats of Jewish life. These large beats provide vital access points to

content, inspiration, Jewish wisdom and more. But they are also discreet in time and place. When Gather trains organizations and teams in Relational Engagement, we often hear, “I get that we need to focus on relationships, but what does my work *actually* look like if I’m not planning programs?” What we hear in this question is a curiosity and a desire to understand what those small beats can look like – and trust us, they can look like many things.

So how did we fill our “small beat” January? And what could a model of small beat-based engagement look like for you?

### **Small Beats could be...**

#### **1. Organic Outreach:** Who’s on your mind?

Jot down a list of 10 – 20 people who have been on your mind and informally email or text them that you’re thinking of them.

#### **2. Thought Partners:** What ideas do you have or articles have you read?

Follow up with the individuals who you’ve discussed ideas with in the past and see what they’ve been thinking about, share articles, get discussion going one-on-one or in a small group email or chat.

#### **3. Caffeine Companions:** Who haven’t you connected with for a while?

Reach out and get time on the calendar to catch up over a distanced or virtual “coffee date”.

#### **4. Past Participants:** Who has already engaged with your organization?

Review participant lists from past experiences and reach out to say you’re thinking of them and missing your time with them, ask them what they’ve been thinking about and how they’ve been since you were last together.

#### **5. Caring Connections:** Who do you think would like to meet one another?

Introduce the people you know to one another via email or Zoom and start them off in conversation. Are there people looking for jobs and someone you know who’s a recruiter, two people living in the same building, two people who just rescued dogs or who just lost a loved one. Be a weaver and connector for them.

6. **Love Languages:** How can you “see” people when they’re not in front of you?

Send gifts, hand written notes, homemade challah or other baked goods, swag, etc. to the folks you have relationships with to deepen them.

7. **Data Driven:** Who are the folks you don’t even know you’re forgetting?

Re-engage people who haven’t heard from you in a while by running reports and using data of your oldest contacts. Send personal hellos and ask how they’re doing.

The High Holidays are behind us, arguably the largest “beats” in the Jewish communal calendar. This past week we celebrated *Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan* – the Jewish month of the year referred to as *mar* or bitter because of the absence of any holidays, festivals or formal celebrations. While there is indeed an absence of formal celebrations in the month ahead, this new month gives us an incredible **opportunity to refocus our energies on our people**. Now is our chance to dig into the real interpersonal “work” that the High Holidays ask of us all year long.

The heartbeat model of engagement gives us a framework for addressing not only rhythms of Jewish life, but our national, secular rhythms as well. While the Jewish month of *Cheshvan* provides us a respite from large beats, the secular month of November doesn’t afford us quite the same peace and quiet. For Americans, November 3rd will represent a large, important beat in the rhythm of this secular month. Looking ahead, we ask ourselves “how will we remain balanced when this large beat threatens to knock us off course?” “How will we stay grounded during – and especially after – this moment in time?” We cannot predict the results of this election. Nor can we predict how we will feel and react after. But what we do know is that we are going to need each other, need the small, intimate beats of connection, to manage our uncertainty and cultivate hope.

This is GatherDC’s commitment this *Cheshvan* (and November). In this time of uncertainty, we commit to caring for our community and making sure each community member feels seen by us. We commit to the small beats. And we invite you to do the same.

Experiment with the small beats of your organization. Keep track of them. Listen to and glean data from the conversations you’re having. And when someone asks when your next program will be, take that opportunity instead to build a deeper personal connection with them. Remember, people ARE the work. The ways we connect may have changed, but the necessity of meaningful, personal connection remains as

important as ever. And the moments that may seem like the smallest of beats might just have the largest of impacts.

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