

**Social Justice
Strategic Planning Subcommittee
Final Report
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I. Executive Summary

We began our planning effort in the area of social justice by asking, “How can we build a Jewish community where the commitment to significant social justice is at the center of our synagogues, schools and organizations?” In the past decade, we have come to appreciate the inherent link between Jewish learning, Jewish identity and social justice and the ways in which these come together to strengthen the fabric of the Jewish community and the community around us.

The Jewish community pursues social justice through several different approaches, including direct volunteerism, efforts to achieve systemic change in the world around us and the provision of direct social and vocational services to address the needs of the Jewish and non-Jewish community in greater Boston. Over the past years, an increasing number of people are looking to volunteer as an expression of their faith and a desire to improve the world around them. It is an inherently personal process that not only provides critical support to others but also changes the volunteers themselves.

The Jewish community, led by the Jewish Community Relations Council, has increasingly sought to address ongoing systemic challenges facing individuals as they seek to improve their lives. This work is often done in collaboration with other faith communities. More recently, these efforts have expanded to a broader set of organizations and synagogues looking to play a deeper role in resolving problems in the broader community and are looking to Jewish communal organizations to provide Jewish frameworks in which they can intensify their role as agents of positive change.

For decades, CJP and its partner agencies have provided critical direct services to people throughout the community. For example, The Jewish Family and Children’s Service, The Jewish Family Service of MetroWest, The Jewish Vocational Service and The Jewish Big Brother and Big Sister all provide direct services to a wide variety of people in need.. In addition, these agencies provide critical advice and support to other organizations seeking to improve the lives of people throughout the area. Our partnerships, and our agencies’ partnerships, are of critical importance and merit strong continued support. It

has been a central part of the way through which CJP and the Jewish community have participated in our mission of Tikkun Olam.

Social justice provides a compelling entry point for meaningful connection to the Jewish community through volunteerism, service learning and congregational organizing. Over the last ten years, there has been much innovation in this area, resulting in the involvement of a significant number of individuals and synagogues whose Jewish lives have been invigorated through the lens of social justice.

We have achieved significant success in two areas, both of which are rapidly gaining momentum. They are: service learning (specifically with young people) and congregational organizing. Service learning participants provide service that responds to real community needs while engaging in learning that promotes critical thinking and civic engagement. In congregational organizing, congregants engage in one to one and small group conversations to identify issues of such deep concern, that they are willing to work together toward public solutions. As their leadership is developed, they join with similarly organized members of other congregations to build the power necessary to win victories resulting in systemic change. At the same time, we are beginning new efforts to build partnerships across the community to address critical needs facing the Greater Boston community.

Our recommendation is to forge and deepen our alliances with community organizations and significantly increase service learning and synagogue organizing efforts. We anticipate that these expanded efforts will result in: strong partnerships with far reaching benefits, a new wave of teen and adult leadership, increased engagement with synagogue life including those previously uninvolved, a deeper understanding of Jewish values in members of the Jewish community, young and old, and an ongoing sense of social responsibility informed by those values. Ultimately, we also expect our efforts to positively impact the quality of life for all throughout greater Boston.

Aspirational Vision

For the purposes of this document, social justice refers to a society which gives individuals and groups fair treatment and ensures equal access to resources and opportunities. Jewish law and tradition compel us to pursue justice through our individual actions and the fulfillment of our collective responsibility to build and sustain a society in which the rights of the disenfranchised are upheld and the innate dignity and infinite worth of every individual is affirmed.

- The Jewish community takes personal and collective responsibility for improving the world around us through tzedakah, public advocacy, and volunteerism
- The Jewish community is a full participant in broader efforts to improve the quality of life in greater Boston and is, in turn, transformed by these partnerships.

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- **A commitment to social justice and the capacity to take effective action is a part of the normative life of synagogues, day schools and other Jewish institutions.**
- **Teens, college students and young adults are fully engaged in social justice activities that strengthen Jewish identity by underscoring the connection between social justice and Judaism, and inspire lifelong commitment to community service and civic participation.**
- **The organized Jewish community brings its resources to bear in addressing the most pressing concerns facing greater Boston, and affects positive change through strategic community alliances.**

II. Context

Environment

The Jewish community's longstanding commitment to social justice throughout greater Boston is reflected in a number of ways. First, CJP's agencies provide direct services to the broader community by providing a range of social and vocational services to the community at large. The need continues for these vital services. Second, is our involvement in social justice engagement activities, which is an area of growth and innovation both locally and nationally. Over the last decade, The Greater Boston Jewish Coalition for Literacy, funded by CJP, has engaged more than 2200 volunteers in weekly tutoring to support children attending under-resourced schools in low-income neighborhoods achieve literacy. Nationally, The Jewish Coalition for Service, established in 2001 by fourteen Jewish service programs in order to "support one another and build a movement" has expanded to more than 65 programs. Along with the expansion of opportunities has come a demonstrated increase in the interest of young people to devote a period of their lives to service. The number of young people engaged in Jewish service has grown each year since 2002 by approximately 20%. In Jewish service learning, opportunities are provided for learning and reflection through the lens of particular Jewish texts, traditions and history as they focus on universal issues of societal concern.

On an institutional level, there has been an explosion in the number of synagogues engaged in congregation-based community organizing. Boston's Jewish community, under JCRC's stewardship, was a pioneer in bringing synagogues into this model, which had previously been limited primarily to churches. Boston has been joined by communities around the country engaged in serious community organizing efforts. The Boston experience inspired "Just Congregations" a national initiative created by the Union for Reform Judaism in 2006 and directed by Rabbi Jonah Pesner, formerly of Temple Israel, to support congregational organizing in all Reform synagogues. The Jewish Funds for Justice, a national organization which works to expand synagogue based organizing is currently working with 63 congregations, after beginning their work with a mere handful of synagogue and communities just a few years ago.

Social Justice is at a tipping point on several critical fronts. When CJP's last strategic plan was written, the task at hand was about "making the case" that social justice engagement was an integral expression of Jewish values and that embracing action in this arena would serve to build Jewish identity and revitalize our community. Ten years later, we are witnessing the transformation of lives and communities as a result of compelling social justice initiatives, such as service learning and congregation-based organizing.

Additionally we have gained new insight into the profound impact of successful social justice engagement, not only on individual Jews and synagogues, but on Boston's Jewish community as a whole. When our community's commitment to improving the quality of life in Greater Boston is translated into action, whether it is by tutoring children in low-income neighborhoods, working side by side with other faith

communities to ensure equal access to health care, providing direct services to those in need, or contributing philanthropic dollars to address community problems, we deepen our relationships and partnerships across socioeconomic, racial, religious and ethnic lines. Establishing our rightful place at the community table working for the common good is of inestimable value. Not only do we ensure that our community fulfills the mandate of our tradition and provides a source of pride to those who see Jewish identity linked to the pursuit of justice, but we leverage critical support from our partners for the issues that most concern us.

Current Work

1. Engaging with Partners to Affect Change in the Broader Community

- CJP's partner agencies: Many of CJP's partner agencies including Jewish Family and Children's Service, Jewish Family Service of MetroWest, Jewish Big Brother/Big Sister and Jewish Community Relations Council have strong and vibrant partnerships which extend their reach into the broader community by providing services to populations including families, school age children, seniors and individuals with disabilities. For example, Jewish Vocational Services is making a vital contribution as the largest workforce development agency in the area, focusing much of its work on the broader community.
- CJP's Alliances with Community Organizations: Examples include:
 - JCRC's partnership with the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO) to implement campaigns on such public issues as affordable housing and access to health care
 - CJP's recently formed partnership with three leading community organizations: The Boston Foundation, Catholic Charities and United Way of Mass Bay and Merrimack Valley to affect change in the broader community on pressing local issues through leveraging joint resources. The first areas of focus include: early childhood education, K-12 school reform, after school programs, college preparatory programs and workforce development.

2. Congregational Organizing

- Twelve synagogues are currently engaged in organizing efforts including two that are engaging teens in distinct organizing campaigns.
- Congregants focus on issues of primary importance to them which have included: affordable health care and housing, environmental issues, legalization of same sex marriage and aging concerns
- Congregation members are playing key leadership roles in community- wide systemic change in Boston, such as the campaign to affect the recent health care reform law

3. Service Learning

- **TELEM:** CJP/JCRC effort in partnership with synagogues, Prozdor, and the JCC, has engaged 1,000 teens since its launch in 2005 in weekly service learning throughout Greater Boston. Through TELEM, teens integrate learning sessions and volunteer service opportunities and work in a variety of areas including hunger and homelessness, literacy, special needs and aging.
- **Teen, college and young adult immersion programs:** There have been a number of domestic and international service learning trips over the last few years in partnership with the American Jewish World Service and the Jewish Funds for Justice

Jewish Values

The values underlying our vision and recommendations derive from Jewish teachings and history. From the very beginning of the Torah, we learn that we are all created equal, in God's image and of infinite value. As such, we are charged with being God's partners in creation and in guarding the earth and its inhabitants. The most ubiquitous mitzvah addresses the fair and equitable treatment of strangers. The memory of our years of oppression and enslavement inspire us to deal empathically and justly with the strangers in our midst and to resist the inclination to see them as "other". The Torah's precepts ensuring social and economic justice are further elucidated in the Prophets and in later rabbinic writing. We are not only mandated to ensure that resources are equitably distributed but to be scrupulous in affirming the dignity and respect of the disenfranchised. Our ideal stance should be that of partners and our ultimate goal is to ensure self sufficiency and independence. Finally, we are mandated to sustain this Jewish ethic throughout the generations by diligently teaching our children, as Abraham did, "to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is just and right..."

III. Priority Strategic Initiatives

Initiative #1: Expansion of Community Partnerships

Description

By leveraging its resources in strategic alliances with other segments of the community, CJP has the capacity to have significant impact on the landscape of greater Boston, as well as increase the social capital of the Jewish community. Partnerships provide the opportunity to address issues of broad concern as a community and build valuable bridges and alliances across racial, ethnic, religious and socio-economic lines.

CJP should pursue partnerships that leverage additional resources in addressing issues of deep concern to the Jewish community as well as those in which we can contribute unique added value. We anticipate that such issues as housing and senior services will become more critical and that we will be in increasing need of alliances to adequately respond to these daunting challenges. Partnerships should be formed for the purposes of joint fundraising, policy advocacy and other forms of action.

As one example of a community partnership, the leadership of United Way of Mass Bay and Merrimack Valley, Catholic Charities, and the Boston Foundation has recently formed a strategic alliance to focus on issues of broad impact. To counter the current trend of young people inadequately prepared to enter the mainstream economy, much less have an opportunity to prosper, this agenda may include: high-quality early education and after school program, pilot and charter schools, nonprofit college preparatory programs focusing on access and retention and employer-driven workforce development programs. Jewish Vocational Services has been selected to address the workforce development issues. Other examples may include innovative private-public partnerships which may be pursued through the partnership between JCRC and the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization to address large scale community needs such as long term care for seniors.

To move from planning conversations among community leaders to a partnership with broad community impact, the next step is to create a funding mechanism so that CJP donors who are interested in working on broader community efforts will have a way to make this happen.

Finally, as the work of synagogue organizing progresses, additional opportunities for strategic alliances are likely to emerge, such as the creation of private/public partnerships to address the challenge of long term care for seniors.

Challenge

The main challenge this initiative must tackle is the reality that there are some significant donors who believe their contributions to CJP should be dedicated to helping with Jewish causes, directed solely to Jewish recipients. The case needs to be made that funding such ventures ultimately strengthens the Jewish community as well.

Implementation

We recommend that this partnership be pursued in accordance with donor interest. We also recommend that public/private partnerships be explored to develop adequate solutions to large scale challenges facing our community, such as long term care for seniors and others surfacing in the congregational organizing work. Existing partnerships should be evaluated to see if there are additional models to expand and build upon.

Attractiveness to Donors

For donors who are particularly passionate about social justice and motivated to support initiatives benefiting the broader community, this would provide a Jewish vehicle to do so.

Initiative #2: Taking Congregational Organizing to Scale

We recommend a major expansion of congregation-based organizing in our community. This expansion will be achieved by adding staff to provide training, mentoring and support of congregational leaders engaged in organizing. Taking congregational organizing to scale will allow us to engage more synagogues in this initiative, to deepen engagement within currently invested synagogues and to develop more teams of teens to organize in their synagogues. As additional synagogues join these efforts, formal and informal leadership networks will be developed across congregations for peer mentoring, sharing expertise and implementing joint campaigns. Going to scale will result in engaging a critical mass of synagogues and congregational leaders with the ability to effect substantive change as a community.

The power of this model lies not only in inspiring and sustaining involvement in efforts leading to real and lasting improvements to our community, but also in transforming our congregations in the process. As synagogue members engage in organizing, they start relating to their institutions as stakeholders committed to ensuring their vibrancy and relevance, rather than as passive consumers waiting for the provision of services. New members are drawn to synagogues that provide opportunities for them to express their Jewish values through their congregations and members sustain their congregational connection, even beyond the typical “drop off” points when their children graduate from religious school. Organizing provides an all too rare opportunity for collaborative work across the generations with a congregation. Finally, leadership development through congregational organizing provides benefits well beyond the scope of social justice. All aspects of synagogue functioning benefit from strong leaders, as do other Jewish organizations in which they serve. As the organizing work shifts the culture of synagogues from bureaucratic to more relational, the ground becomes fertile for caring communities to emerge.

Implementation

Budget

- 3 additional professional staff: \$225,000. We recommend adding one new position each year for the next three years (reflects salary and benefits).
- Training (Stipends and Travel): \$30,000 annually

Additional staff will allow for expanded organizing work with teens and adults. They will focus on developing leadership and leveraging best practices and networking opportunities. Given the challenge of workforce limitations, we will need to prioritize the training of new professionals, and to explore partnerships with the Jewish Organizing Initiative (JOI) and the Hebrew College Rabbinical School. Following the model of other organizing training bodies, we will explore bringing on training fellows through JOI for summer trial periods, during which they will participate in organizing apprenticeships. If they remain interested and are well suited to the field, they will remain in the position for the duration of the program year. We will also explore

training rabbinic fellows from Hebrew College. Implementation of these recommendations would position Boston to be a national training ground in organizing for the Jewish community. A travel fund will be established to provide travel stipends to congregational leaders.

Population

Synagogue Community: Multigenerational

Challenges

The most significant internal challenge will be to identify appropriate candidates for the new staff positions. Synagogue challenges include sustaining the involvement and commitment of leaders over time, particularly given the often slow pace at which systemic change takes place.

Fit with Overall Strategic Plan

Synagogues that prioritize social justice and provide hands on opportunities for engagement are also more likely to attract young adults, who will see them recognizing, validating and acting on the concerns in their lives. This strategy will appeal to teens when they are afforded unique opportunities to develop leadership alongside adults within congregations.

Implications for Other Subcommittees

- Develops leadership
- Engages participants and connects them to Jewish life
- Strengthens synagogues
- Attracts teens and young adults
- Effectively addresses needs of Jews in the local community
- Leverages partnerships for support on issues of concern, including Israel

Attractiveness to Donors

This initiative is likely to appeal to donors with diverse interests. Those with a commitment to building synagogue life will be drawn to organizing, as will those with a passion for social justice and inter-group relations. Donors who value developing people, particularly those of the next generation, will find this to be a compelling approach. Additionally, since organizing campaigns focus on a variety of issues, i.e. affordable housing and health care and elder services, donors interested in these issues may choose to support aspects of the organizing work connected to their interests. We believe that donors who are interested in supporting the interests of interfaith couples and families should also be attracted to social justice initiatives.

Initiative #3: Expansion of Service Learning

Our recommendations to expand service learning are two-fold: Bar/bat mitzvah programs -ongoing weekly volunteer service in the Greater Boston area and 2. Immersion Experiences, i.e. domestic or international service trips for a designated period of time, such as alternative winter/spring breaks. Service in either category would be accompanied by Jewish service learning sessions. In the first category, we recommend that service learning opportunities expand to include bar/bat mitzvah age children. In the second category, we recommend that CJP invest in building the capacity of college students and young adults to participate in domestic and international Jewish service learning trips.

Approximately one thousand Jewish teens have been engaged in service learning through TELEM, in less than three years. Expanding service learning to include bar/bat mitzvah age children will significantly increase our reach across the community. Although we want to begin implementation immediately, the goal is to phase in implementation, increasing the overall number of participants by 10% in the first year, as we pilot this new component, while doubling the number of overall participants by Year Five.

Rationale

Community service, particularly when paired with learning, can be a powerful experience for young people, one that ignites passion, builds a sense of social responsibility and connection to the community. Additionally, participation in Jewish service learning results in strengthened Jewish identity, as evidenced by a recent study of alumni of Jewish service programs, who remarked that they felt more engaged as Jews and more specifically, as Jews committed to social justice after the program. High quality Jewish service learning enables young people not only to understand and appreciate but to act on their Jewish values within the context of their peer community. In light of the overall commitment of this strategic plan to engage the next generation of Boston's Jewish community, service learning opportunities provide an important vehicle to achieve this critical goal.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Programs

Many synagogues require some kind of community service as a condition for bar/bat mitzvah, though they seldom have the capacity to provide a full service learning peer experience. Families are still involved with their children at this point in their lives and can be engaged as partners in promoting their children's involvement, a factor which studies show, increases the participation of youth. Finally, early engagement in community service is more likely to result in sustained service through the teen years, as participants come to see this activity as a normative part of their lives.

Immersion Programs

Young adults surveyed for this plan confirmed their desire to express their Jewish identity through social justice and their interest in connecting with peers who share their passion. Birthright participants return to their home communities yearning for

continued meaningful Jewish experiences and connection to the community. But the life stage of college students and young adults requires a different mechanism for engagement than for teens. While service learning can be incorporated into the infrastructure of synagogue schools and youth groups, young adults are a disperse population without parallel affiliations. The demands of their academic and professional lives seldom enable them to participate in regular service learning throughout the year. Jewish immersion experiences offer a valuable alternative. When young Jews participate in an alternative spring break in another culture and community, domestic or international, they come away with a visceral understanding of the connection between social justice and Judaism, enhanced responsibility to continue serving the community and a heightened commitment to engage in this activity as Jews.

Target Populations

- Bar/bat mitzvah-aged children
- Young adults

Implementation

A. Bar/Bat Mitzvah Initiative

Our partners in this endeavor will include (but not be limited to) the JCRC, the synagogue movements, day schools and individual synagogues throughout greater Boston. CJP can play a critical role in building the capacity of synagogues to provide a comprehensive service learning experience for this segment of the community, and invest not only in building our youths' Jewish identity and commitment to service, but their connection to their synagogue communities as well.

Implementation for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Service Learning Initiative will begin immediately with a pilot program in one or two synagogues based on data collected from area synagogues about their programming needs and interests. A curriculum will be developed and training will be provided to educators in the pilot sites. Staff will research and select appropriate volunteer sites to match with the initial synagogues. The initiative will be increased in each subsequent year with the addition of new synagogues.

The budget for implementation of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Service Learning Initiative will include: development of new (and revision of current) curricula, staff to provide training, coordination and support for educators in the field, transportation costs for participants traveling to local service sites and program costs for periodic community-wide gatherings of participants. Costs for the initial implementation will be covered by JCRC but in subsequent years, will need to be supported by new funds. The major anticipated expenses will be in the area of staffing, with the addition of two FTEs (\$175,000) and the development of curriculum (\$25,000).

B. Immersion Service Trips

Phase I – Service Learning Trips for Young Adults. Initial implementation will begin with CJP's overall strategy for engaging Birthright alumna. The budget for immersion trips will be devoted primarily to travel subsidies for participants. Depending on the ultimate design of post Birthright outreach and programming, funding may also be needed for a part-time staff member to act as liaison to campuses and service programs during the recruitment phase, to staff the trips and to convene alumni and connect them to ongoing programming upon their return. As a comprehensive, community-wide post Birthright engagement strategy is developed, engaging young people in immersion trips along with other kinds of social justice programming, will be an essential component.

Anticipated costs for the staff person (including travel costs) will be \$42,000. Funding for stipends will cost approximately \$1000 per participant so overall costs will increase with participation, beginning with an anticipated \$30,000 for the first year (covering 2 trips) to \$75,000 in Year Five.

Phase II – After successful implementation of service learning trips for young adults, we will then assess interest in family trips.

Challenges

Successful implementation of bar/bat mitzvah initiative will require ongoing strong partnerships with our synagogues. The most significant challenge to implementing service trips is making them appealing and affordable for participations. Enabling them to prioritize the time to devote to service represents an additional challenge.

Attractiveness to Donors

The Service Learning initiative should prove to be a particularly attractive option to donors with a range of interests. Those motivated by the need to engage the next generation, build strong Jewish identity and connection to the community, will find this to be an exciting means to that end. Additionally, donors seeking a Jewish way to express their passion for social justice and to demonstrate the Jewish commitment to justice in the larger community will find this to be an effective vehicle as well. Donors in interfaith families will be attracted to these initiatives, which are effective in bridging the gap between the Jewish and broader communities. Finally, donors with a particular interest in supporting international development and promoting global citizenry in our youth will be drawn to supporting the unique opportunity to engage young people in these pursuits.

Implications for other Sub-Committees

- Provides highly effective form of informal Jewish Education component
- Represents strong tool for participation and engagement with teens and young adults
- Builds capacity of synagogues to provide meaningful experiences for bar/bat mitzvah students
- Has the potential to align with Boston-Haifa partnership

Please note that that all of the recommendations in this document may or may not be implemented. All budget figures in this document were preliminary rough estimates by the subcommittee. These projections will be re-evaluated and updated as appropriate during the implementation of the final plan.