



Action for Good in the 21st Century

LAB REPORT



The Jewish Federations®
OF NORTH AMERICA

Introduction and Background

Nearly 250 participants joined FedLab's Action for Good in the 21st Century track, which was planned and presented in partnership with the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation and the Jewish Funders Network's Affinity Group on Jewish Poverty. Together, all participants engaged in a series of dynamic learnings and discussions that served to advance our community's understanding of key issues relevant to the Jewish human services agenda, with a particular focus on poverty, older adults and people with disabilities.

We would like to extend our thanks to all the JFNA staff who contributed their time and talents to FedLab; to our partners at the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation and Jewish Funders Network for their thought leadership and vision; to our moderator, Susan Wolf Ditkoff, for her guidance, wisdom and insight; to our track design partners at trepwise; and to the many speakers, panelists, and presenters who helped create a content-rich experience for participants. All presentations and other resources associated with this track are available online on the [**FedLab Resource Hub**](#).

OUR OBJECTIVES:

- At the local level: Help provide communities with examples, tools, and best strategies and practices to identify, reshape, validate and/or execute their human services priorities.
- At the national level: Identify a national agenda or initiative upon which to focus funder and agency resources.
- Both: Within the Federation system and community, increase awareness of, build urgency around, and validate our commitment to addressing basic human needs.

OUR PROCESS:

The FedLab participant journey followed along a path informed by design thinking:

- Discover: In-depth learning and research around each subject; digging deep to extract insights from diverse user groups.
- Define: Synthesis of learnings and insights in order to clearly articulate problems and questions to be solved.
- Explore and Build: Team ideation, creative thinking and brainstorming to encourage any and all ideas in discussions aimed at identifying exciting new ideas and existing bright spots.
- Plan + Act: Aligning at the community-level around priorities, potential barriers, resources required and outstanding questions.

Throughout, the process was anchored around six key areas of focus: Older Adults and Holocaust Survivors, Mental and Behavioral Health, Food Insecurity, Employment and Jobs, Housing, and Big Picture/Systems. Participants were encouraged to expand their horizons, and activities intentionally brought subject matter experts, lay leaders and agency and federation executives into collective dialogue.

Results

PROGRESS TOWARD TRACK OBJECTIVES

- Highlighted 16 replicable and scalable best practices within the Jewish community ([see here](#)) and six resources beyond the Jewish community ([see here](#)).
- Encouraged collaboration both within the Jewish community and with partners beyond the community as a means of increasing effectiveness in human services delivery and engaging the next generation in our work;
- Focused on challenging current assumptions as a key step toward innovation;
- Inspired participants through text study on leadership, responsibility and the Jewish response to poverty;
- Increased awareness of human service needs by virtue of the track, and identified resources needed to address barriers.

MEANINGFUL REFLECTIONS

Throughout the experience, participants and presenters were encouraged to reflect in writing and through group discussions. Highlights included:

- "Eliminating poverty is a moral imperative."
- "As Jews, poverty alleviation and work in human services are integral to our faith."
- "Vision + Flexibility of Funding + Collaboration = Measurable Success."
- "Stories + Data = The Power to Change."
- "Poverty is often hidden. We cannot assume we know who has need."
- "We should treat the poor as we would treat our own."
- "We need to challenge assumptions about how much we can do and how we can determine what we can do."

- “Ask yourself: What is your ‘more than enough’? Then, challenge yourself to do more than enough.”
- “Find moments that remind us: ‘This is why I do what I do.’”
- “Optimism can help prevent fatigue.”

Additional perspectives shared during the event have been included in Appendix A.

Cross-Cutting Solutions

During the lab, participants collaborated in working groups to identify solutions specific to the track’s six areas of focus. Key themes from these tabletop discussions included:

- **Awareness Raising:** Utilize awareness-building campaigns and targeted education that focus on encouraging the use of services, reaching new populations, and reducing stigma within the community at large.
- **Change the Narrative:** Ground efforts around optimism and the idea of “a hand-up instead of a handout.” With so many available resources, there is no reason for a scarcity mindset.
- **New Models for Partnership:** Explore traditional and unexpected partnerships, including opportunities for multi-community learning and collaboration.
- **Data:** Leverage data to identify drivers, predict potential and emerging challenges and opportunities, and bolster the case for support.
- **Collaboration and Resource Sharing:** Reflect on where communities are duplicating efforts. Consider how the community can provide comprehensive services and create shared intake processes but utilize data and partnerships to prevent the inefficient use of resources.
- **A Jewish Approach to Human Services:** Root the importance of providing human services (both for Jews and for non-Jews) in Jewish learning and leverage Jewish learning while developing solutions.
- **User Centricity:** Meet those in need where they are, centralizing resources and services when possible, and rooting services in human connection when appropriate.
- **Shared Goals and Planning:** Launch concerted local, regional, and national planning efforts to galvanize our collective Jewish voice around the biggest issues facing our communities.

A detailed reporting of the questions raised, and solutions identified is included in Appendix B.

Planning Ahead

At the conclusion of the event, participants joined in city-size discussions around the plan ahead. These discussions surfaced the following areas of focus to consider going forward:

BARRIERS TO OVERCOME

- Time
- Access to information, funders, government partners
- Community buy-in
- A competitive or territorial mindset among agencies
- Confidentiality
- Stigmas around poverty

RESOURCES REQUIRED

- Grant funding for new and pilot programs
- Sustainable public funding sources
- Operating funding for agency resources
- New staff to support holistic, collaborative efforts
- Long-term endowment support
- Sharing of success stories on a national level in order to help raise awareness and increase interest among funders
- Expertise among staff and lay leaders
- A national template/guide for action
- A shared database managed at the national level
- Corporate support and champions

BIG OUTSTANDING QUESTIONS

- What are the real needs within our communities?
- What should our overarching message be?
- What are the areas of overlap between agencies?
- What “bright spots” exist within our communities that we can model or build services around?

Call to Action

As we reflect on the overall experience and the path ahead, we ask you to consider the following questions:

- In what ways can you advance the work of human services in your community even more?
- What assumptions will you challenge, and what new ideas will you introduce?
- How might you influence the agenda?
- What do you plan to tweet? What article do you plan to write?
- Who here can you bring into your community to share experience and expertise?
- Which communal voices will you encourage to join in the conversation?
- What bright spots will YOU create?

APPENDIX A: NEW PERSPECTIVES

The following perspectives were sourced through a "tweet" exercise during the event:

"Stories + Data = Power to Change."

"Financial wellness needs to be a priority within the Federation system for clients and employees."

"There is no such thing as a settled assumption when it comes to social services."

"Vision + Flexibility of Funding + Collaboration = Measurable Success."

"#JewishHumanServices as social justice work."

"Jewish Poverty is Real. Collaborate to Eliminate."

"What is your 'More than Enough'? Challenge yourself to do more."

"Eliminate, not ameliorate."

"Poverty is often hidden. Don't assume who has need."

"Find moments that remind us: 'This is why I do what I do.'"

"Once you see it you cannot ignore it. Join us in the collective fight against Jewish Poverty."

"We can't talk about poverty without talking about income inequality and systems."

"Fill your reservoir with optimism."

"Those in greatest need, need to be our greatest priority."

"Agency and inclusion are the keys. Collaborate to eliminate."

"Assumptions can be damaging to eliminating poverty."

"Tackling poverty is about tackling root causes."

APPENDIX B: KEY THEMES FROM BRAINSTORMING

Older Adults and Holocaust Survivors

BIG QUESTIONS

- How might we support Holocaust survivors who often need emergency cash assistance in addition to other services in order to not have to decide between expenses?
- How might we create awareness in the broader Jewish community about survivors' needs?
- How might Jewish services better anticipate the future needs of survivors?
- How might we design new approaches to providing services with dignity for survivors?
- How might we address the problem of isolated seniors aging in place?
- How might we collect and use data to impact older adults?

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

- Spread awareness of the issues facing Holocaust survivors and older adults through PSAs, JFNA campaigns, social media, high-profile "stars," crowdsourcing, etc.
- Launch targeted education or funding campaigns specific to subsections of the community, such as the young Russian community, funders outside of Federations, new Jews, teens, and the Wexner cohort.
- Explore new ways of sharing Holocaust history, such as through art stories and connecting the Holocaust with other genocides.
- Develop new avenues for financial or in-kind support, such as by instituting a nationwide Federation dues fund for survivors, partnering with dentists to provide pro bono services, and partnering with Holocaust museums.
- Focus on data collection as a tool for better addressing the needs of older adults, leveraging volunteers and technology (i.e., online food ordering, virtual senior centers) to expand reach and ensure data is shared across agencies.
- Ensure older adults have a physically present support network, including transportation support, training and respite for caregivers, and intergenerational "Buddy Chains."

WILD IDEAS

- “Air B&Z” (i.e., “Air Bubbie & Zadie”) would connect young people with older Jewish adults who could benefit from a physically present support network. Activities could include Shabbat dinners and social and Judaic programming. There would be a vetting process, and the program would be crafted to be a mutually beneficial experience. The program could be leveraged to address the needs of families living in poverty and could include a Section 8 housing focus.
- Microlending and emergency cash assistance for Holocaust survivors.

Mental and Behavioral Health

BIG QUESTIONS

- How might we determine what initiatives will have the greatest impact on addressing youth mental health issues in the Jewish community?
- How might we provide a robust and integrated response across Jewish communities, including across parents, educators and children?
- How might we reach and support those who can’t advocate for themselves?
- How might we get buy-in from our communities at large?

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

- Prioritize community-wide education, focusing both on addressing mental health issues and reducing stigma.
- Highlight resilience and grit through camps and youth groups as early opportunities for education.
- Review research and deepen understanding on a variety of topics related to mental health, including how to address mental health issues at the earliest ages.
- Develop multi-community initiatives, including mandatory suicide awareness training for clergy/youth leaders and teachers across communities.

WILD IDEAS

- Create “Head Space” centers in the United States.
- Partner with community agencies to create/augment mental health services in public school settings.

Food Insecurity

BIG QUESTIONS

- How might we offer social services and supports embedded with Jewish values, and in a distinctly Jewish way, whether or not the clients are Jewish?
- How might we build a social service agency to fight food insecurity from scratch? If we can design the agency from scratch, how can we make it normative?
- How might we identify the underlying issue(s) driving food insecurity?
- How might we produce and distribute food access across the country, including the storage and reproduction of food, and ensure employment programs prioritize jobs with career pathways?
- How might we collaborate with organizations outside the Jewish community in order to better meet constituent needs?
- How might we apply our intentional Jewish eating practices to an intentionally designed response to food insecurity?
- How might we take what is working already in other communities and re-tool those strategies to our communities?

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

- Engage in community awareness campaigns around food insecurity, and poverty at large, that come directly from our Rabbis and are intended to educate, encourage the use of services, and reduce stigma.
- Add additional social supports to existing food pantries, such as additional caseworkers and wrap-around services.
- Explore new opportunities in data and collaboration, including tracking needs and challenges across Federations and connecting with other service providers to identify successes and areas for cross-programming.
- Engage in cross-sector discussions at the policy, industry and non-profit levels.
- Test new models of food banking that leverage technology and other emerging trends (i.e., digital pantries, online food pantry “wish lists” to be fulfilled by donors, new evidence-based delivery methods, etc.).
- Root new initiatives in Judaism by aligning the planning and delivery of food with Jewish text, communicating the value of serving Jews and non-Jews alike and providing Kosher meals.

WILD IDEAS

- Test a Kosher Meals on Wheels program run by one of the Chabad families and supported through volunteer service.
- Establish a new trading company, including establishing a farm with kosher chickens.
- Restructure food banks to allow for more experimentation, such as providing free vending machines, food reserves without rules, and recapturing food waste.

Employment and Jobs

BIG QUESTIONS

- How might we provide training and employment opportunities for working-age individuals with disabilities in order to help people live a life of dignity and be part of society?
- How might we ensure stakeholder buy-in around scalable models for providing long-term, wrap-around supports?
- How might we change the narrative to ensure our programs are seen as economic impact, not charity?

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

- Bring employment services/supports directly to congregations and Jewish Community Centers.
- Look to other scalable models (e.g., DC Central Kitchen, Project Chana) in order to develop long-term, wrap-around supports.
- Change the narrative – it is not about a handout; it's about a hand-up.
- Find new ways to help people achieve self-sufficiency (e.g., skill-building) – access to employment is just a first step.
- There is so much need, it is important to focus on specific groups in need (e.g., people with mental and behavioral health challenges, young women and people with disabilities).

WILD IDEAS

- Partner with headhunters.
- Pursue social impact bonds and impact investing pathways.

Housing

BIG QUESTIONS

- How might we create a single point of entry for people who need housing and services with manageable options while maintaining dignity and respect?
- How might we help Jewish agencies provide emergency/short-term housing (to address extenuating circumstances, such as death, loss of a job, fire) to those who are non-eligible for Federal support, in order to avoid spiraling?
- How might we provide housing and support for adults aged 21+ with developmental disabilities?

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

- Develop standardized approaches for merging intake, triage and referral services between and among agencies and for creating sharing knowledge streams (e.g., a database across agencies).
- Identify high-risk factors (e.g., drug addiction, medical bills, for-profit school loan default, child support, etc.) and create new awareness within the community around these needs.
- Invest in and develop new housing units, such as creating affordable housing on synagogue-owned property and mixed-use developments to create sustainable sources for earned revenue.

WILD IDEAS

- Employ a concierge, case-manager, or navigator to provide support to individuals once problems are identified.
- Partner with homebuilders that overbuilt during the housing bubble and have available stock.
- Create a “rent-to-own” program or other programs to encourage property ownership (e.g., a person earns “credit” by providing services, maintenance, or rebuilding property in exchange for payment).
- Develop relationships with city-wide housing trusts.
- Partner with banks to provide financial literacy education around homeownership.

Big Picture/Systems

BIG QUESTIONS

- How might we create advocacy and policy solutions in order to change the cultural landscape, so that barriers around money, pride, social status are removed?
- How might we efficiently deal with one-offs while also pursuing long-term organizational goals?
- How might we motivate prospective collaborative providers to put in the time and energy required to tackle communal challenges?
- How might we identify and serve individuals who are off the radar and falling through the cracks?
- How might we develop a comprehensive community plan to address poverty at all life stages?

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

- Create a single point of access for assistance, so that there is clarity about how to get help and reduce confusion.
- Make sure stories are told, involving people in need (focus groups), in order to educate the community about “warning signs.”
- Create new “one-stop-shops,” concierge options, and centralized communication portals (e.g., helpline with texting capabilities and/or in partnership with 311 systems).
- Designate resources to serve as “community ambassadors” to monitor and refer people in need and to crowdsource challenges/ideas.
- Identify a local organization to serve as a backbone or trusted “convener” who is neutral and can effectively bring stakeholders together, create common objectives, and build a shared narrative.
- Better market a suite of services, branding these services in a way that de-stigmatizes the idea of “neediness.”
- Create a national initiative to identify areas of need and use the power of the collective to create shared resources and scalable solutions for helping people in need.

- Gather and leverage data in order to identify the root causes of poverty, then map resource gaps/needs.
- Engage employer partners to understand their evolving needs.

WILD IDEAS

- Tell stories via podcasts, with new people brought into the conversation and reached.
- Learn from and leverage insights from the Hillel engagement intern model.
- Create an online platform to crowdsource ideas and questions (e.g., Jewish “Wiki” community hub).
- Open an account at Costco so that people can buy what they want.
- Create local affinity groups around poverty and other areas of need.



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