



#EngageJewish

LAB REPORT

Introduction and Background

About 350 participants – 250 from Jewish Federations and another 100 representing diverse engagement partners – came together for #engageJewish. The participants immersed themselves in an exploration of networks and the role they play in peoples' lives, self-facilitating small-group conversations according to a curriculum of exercises.

The track was co-facilitated with Lisa Colton (Darim Consulting), Miriam Brousseau (Tiny Windows Consulting) and Leah Jones (Natiiv Facilitation). These partners provided content and technical expertise, guiding the material we worked with and the format of our conversations and providing hands-on leadership during the conference.

All presentations and other resources associated with this track are available online on **the FedLab Resource Hub**.

OBJECTIVES

- Build foundational knowledge about **networks**: how a network is constructed, its permeable boundaries and other characteristics, and how it differs from 20th-century models of organizational life.
- Empower participants to evaluate their own communities' work through the lens of these new ideas in order to identify where to focus change efforts, what might need to be retired, and where to invest in building new initiatives.
- Shine a light on initiatives that bring network principles to life.
- Create motivation and the capacity for taking on experiments toward the implementation of new ideas.
- Build relationships, preparing participants to support each other in the coming months and years as they try new approaches and shape the future.

PROCESS

- Participants worked almost entirely in self-facilitated groups of 68. Groups included a mix of organizational practitioners and Jewish Federation lay and professional leaders from diverse communities.
- The primary content involved looking at the differences between a "hub and spokes" model of organizing, with centralized power inside a closed system, which characterizes much of how Jewish organizational life is structured today, and a "network" model of organization, where there are many centers of power and permeable boundaries.

- The work began with an exploration of the nature of networks, with a focus on networked businesses and projects outside the Jewish communal world. Participants brainstormed network attributes and defined networks, gravitational pull and permeable boundaries.

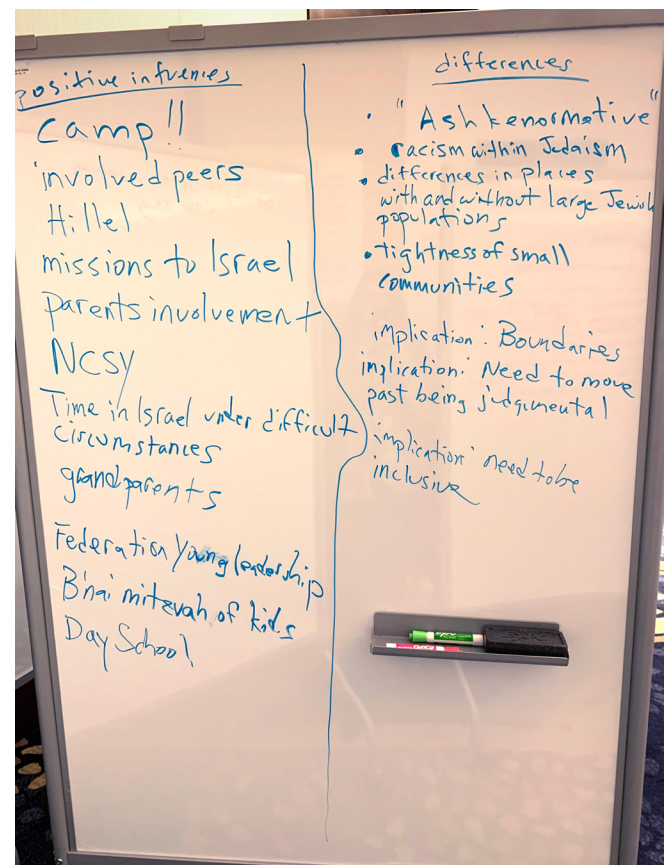
(The [workbook](#) used at #EngageJewish has definitions of these terms, and larger pictures of the hub and spoke and network models can be seen [here](#).)

- Participants heard from their leaders about the complexity of existing networked projects in Jewish life.
- Participants then applied these ideas to Jewish life, brainstorming what Jewish life could look like if it were more networked.
- Through a series of scenarios, participants designed strategies to work on real engagement challenges.
- To close, participants broke into small groups to discuss a series of discussion questions that had arisen during the previous two days and focused on applying the ideas learned to real life and work.

Meaningful Reflections and Ideas Developed

1. Jewishness has changed.

When participants (of all ages and backgrounds) shared the greatest influences on their Jewishness, they found many similarities: family, teen experiences (particularly youth movements) and Israel experiences. They also found differences, particularly related to the strength and connectivity of their childhood communities. Older participants benefitted from the warmth and intimacy of tighter communities; younger participants experienced communities as much less tight-knit, and sometimes as judgmental, exclusive, "ashkenormative" (oriented for Ashkenazic Jews) and even racist. Younger participants were as connected to their Jewishness as older participants, but some had more complexity or more texture to their Jewishness. Their recommendations were to try to understand differences across generations, respond with curiosity and not judgment, and think in terms of "also" and not "but."



2. Networks are owned by participants.

A primary exercise involved exploring cases of networked organizations (primarily businesses) and developing a list of attributes of networks (list follows this overview). The list emphasized flexibility and agility, responsiveness, and a focus on people/users, diversity, accessibility, transparency, and shared ownership.

3. Network structure has implications for Jewish life.

Participants brainstormed a variety of implications of networks, including:

- Antisemitism is no longer a strong enough “gravitational pull” into Jewish life for many (younger) people, and so other, person-centered attractions into Jewish life need to be developed. New gravitational pulls might include family, personal meaning, and mutual relationships.
- The structure of Jewish (organizational) life could be redeveloped to create more platforms, virtual and in real life, emphasizing relationships and allowing people to connect.
- Politically, openness in Jewish life means some will be enfranchised, but others will lose power (as more opinions become included). This will lead to discomfort and even disequilibrium—better in the long term; requiring attention in the short term.
- Greater openness and disequilibrium could have financial implications, which will also need attention. Some donors could grow frustrated, but openness could also expand donor possibilities and interest. A networked approach could also expand our existing fundraising, creating more philanthropic vehicles that are person-centered.
- This kind of work asks for disruptors and innovators – people comfortable with risk and eager for change. It also asks for different kinds of tools that facilitate collaboration (like Slack), give real-time and non-hierarchical feedback, and that rely more on teams.

4. Jewish community (and even ritual) can be reimaged.

Participants explored the reshaping of Jewish community, including ritual, through an applied art project. Participants brought to life on-ramps, new ritual objects, a leadership toolkit, a board game (Jewish journeys as “chutes and ladders”), applying the ideas they discussed at FedLab. (samples right)



5. **A network approach to Jewish life involves structural changes, not just new programs.**

Participants worked with one of seven scenarios, looking at how participants in Jewish programs become producers of (and contributors to) content, how people jump from one program to the next, how to help people develop communal roots and relationships, measures of engagement, the blend of education and engagement, and so on. Participants emphasized the complexity of building engagement infrastructure, noting that genuinely new and different thinking needs to guide the growth of engagement as we restructure Jewish life to expand it. Participants observed:

- A balanced scorecard of multiple metrics will evaluate engagement thoroughly, with all metrics (i.e., giving, leading, participating) viewed as important and strengthening our capacity to hold multiple outcomes together at the same time.
- Engagement at its maximum restructures the way we look at human capital. It makes relationship building a priority, working through those with talents in relationships (the influencers, the leaders).
- Maximizing engagement breaks apart boundaries between “education” and “engagement.” They infuse and inform each other.
- Opportunities for “leadership” in Jewish life need to be more diverse and flexible, starting where people are – thereby expanding the people involved as leaders.

6. **Participants came to Tuesday with a number of “burning questions.”**

On Tuesday morning, rather than focusing on the changes participants wanted to make (the intended program), the program design shifted to focus on the questions and challenges that had emerged for participants. These questions were collected and grouped into conversation topics; participants joined any conversation they wanted to. A few of these topics are shared here (the full list is shared in Appendix A of this report):

- **Local Network Models:** How might I lead the deployment of a network framework/mindset in my community (synagogues, agencies)?
- **Overcoming Fear:** There is fear, concern, and a scarcity mindset. How do we not let that get in the way of new models and proactive, creative thinking, or define the culture of our work and community?
- **Networked Philanthropy:** What’s the story we tell about the importance of supporting a community that invites people to contribute to a shared vision (vs. donating to sustain an institution)?

- **What is Community?:** Once we create a network of committed, inspired individuals and nodes with engagement, what will group identity/*Klal Yisrael* look like?
- **Supporting Innovators/Disruptors:** How can I build relationships with and learn from the innovators in my community? In what other ways can we support those who are leading in emergent and agile ways?
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** How can my Federation represent the entirety of our community? How can I better understand the experiences of those who I maybe haven't come in contact with?

What's Next

#EngageJewish wasn't prescriptive. Participants developed for themselves the new ideas and changes to implement and take home. It's our hope that whatever their ideas, they continue to unpack how our assumptions and traditions reinforce a hub and spokes model and evaluate the health of that model and the potential to open up a network approach.

JFNA's Jewish Education and Engagement Department will continue to provide content and learning opportunities about the concepts shared at FedLab, showcasing examples of emerging best practices. Staff are also available to consult individually with Federation professional and volunteer leaders eager to advance this agenda in their communities.

Network Attributes Brainstormed at FedLab

Rigid Models vs. Designed by Experts

Design for lifestyle, ease, convenience
Iterate with input and data
Responsive to disruption in the marketplace
Agility reduces risk in times of change
Multiple operating systems

Agile and Adaptive vs. By/With/For Users

Ability to change and adapt
Meet people where they are
Empower users to customize the experience
No longer one size fits all
Be able to see yourself represented

Centralized vs. Decentralized

Decentralized delivery
No single home base or center (platform)
Expansive notions of ownership
Shared power
Non-hierarchical and non-authoritarian

Other Juicy Nuggets

Infrastructure is present but invisible
Platform can be infinitely scalable without being heavy
Tension can be productive
Disruptors are good for the industry (Jewish people) even if they are competition today
Radical inclusivity to counteract/balance latent assumptions or feelings

Old Economy vs. New Economy

Changing definitions of value
Small \$ x big #'s = supporting wide platforms
Dynamic pricing
Gig economy
Efficiently connecting resources with needs

Culture and Values

Intention: the "why" not just the "what"
Belief that your success is my/our success
Creativity and joy
Trust and transparency
Co-created and collaborative
Diversity = strength and resilience

Boundaries vs. Accessibility

Identifying and breaking down barriers
Balancing security and hospitality
Easy accessibility
Multiple points of entry
You can dabble/À la carte options

APPENDIX A

FULL LIST OF TUESDAY OPEN SPACE TOPICS

- **Role of JFNA:** What is the role of JFNA in our network?
- **Telling the Story of FedLab:** When I get home, how do I share this experience in a way that helps bring others into this conversation and advances the culture and discussion locally?
- **Our Network Across Federations:** How might we better function as a network across Federations?
- **Supporting Emerging Leaders:** How do I go about changing the leadership structure and composition of our organizations so that younger people/potential community leaders teach us “their” normative culture and infuse it into our world?
- **IQ/EQ/NQ (Intelligence, Emotional and Network Quotients):** Who do we need on our teams to do this work well?
- **Local Network Models:** How might I lead the deployment of a local network framework/mindset in my community (synagogues, agencies)?
- **Overcoming Fear:** There is fear, concern, scarcity mindset. How do we not let that get in the way of new models and proactive, creative thinking, or define the culture of our work and community?
- **Networked Philanthropy:** What’s the story we tell about the importance of supporting a community that invites people to contribute to a shared vision (vs. donating to sustain an institution)?
- **Research/Listening:** How can I better listen to the younger demographics and more deeply understand the changing market in my community?
- **What is Community?:** Once we create a network of committed, inspired individuals and nodes with engagement, what will group identity/*Klal Yisrael* look like?
- **Supporting Innovators/Disruptors:** How can I build relationships with and learn from the innovators in my community? In what other ways can we support those who are leading in emergent and agile ways?
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** How can my Federation represent the entirety of our community? How can I better understand the experiences of those whom I maybe haven’t come in contact with?

- **Federations' Grant-Making Role:** How does my Federation's current allocations process support or limit the growth of the network model? What partnership model might better benefit Jewish life?
- **Leapfrog:** How can I help my community stop "playing catch-up"?
- **Holding the Big Picture:** How do we create a space in my Jewish community to hold the larger picture without the constraints of sustaining a specific institution?
- **Appreciative Inquiry:** What "bright spots" are under our noses? How do we learn from them and share their insights?
- **Ask a Better Question:** How do I help my team back home ask better, more insightful, less defensive questions?



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