

Strengthening Our Community

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Like the Jewish people, Jewish agencies and institutions must continuously adapt to the ever-changing environments in which they operate. The impact on Jewish communities from social, economic, and geopolitical shifts has historically served as a bellwether for how these conditions will effect broader populations. Thus, the Jewishly-rooted organizations that serve us must also be designed to evolve along with our needs, challenges, and opportunities.

Indeed, while the mission of federations and Jewish community centers (JCCs) has always focused on ensuring the continuity of Jewish peoplehood, their character in 2021 has necessarily changed dramatically from their founding in the early-mid 20th century. JCCs were born of the necessity to create social gathering places for Jews in an era during which we were unwelcome at country clubs, health clubs, and other community organizations. Meanwhile, the roots of federations such as Jewish Long Beach lie in the effort to fund the migration of European Jewish refugees escaping pogroms, and later the Holocaust, to British Mandate-era Palestine, the United States, and eventually to the State of Israel.

Today, while Jewish Long Beach and other Jewish federations across North America continue to provide significant support to Israel and overseas Jewish communities, our primary focus is local, ensuring that Jewish life can thrive here in our area, throughout the life cycle, from generation to generation. JCCs have also evolved as American society has become more egalitarian, still providing social opportunities, education, and access to Jewish life for Jews of all ages, but also serving largely as a bridge between the Jewish and broader communities. JCCs offer a Jewishly-rooted physical space in which community members of all cultural backgrounds and faiths are welcome to engage in recreation, education, and socialization, demystifying and normalizing Judaism by exposing the broader

community to Jewish life and culture.

Perhaps most significantly, JCCs and federations have become increasingly symbiotic, with federations not only providing financial support, but also setting the community priorities that, in many cases, drive JCC programming and outreach. In fact, almost one-third of communities around the country that house both a federation and a JCC have chosen to integrate their agencies, creating a single, seamless organization positioned to serve the Jewish and broader communities for generations to come.


In October 2019, members of the Alpert JCC (AJCC) board established the Future Visions Committee, a working group initially comprised of Jewish Long Beach and AJCC lay leaders, and later joined by the organizations' respective chief executives, charged with exploring the possibility of an integration between the two agencies. The committee spoke with board leaders and senior staff from communities

across the country whose federations and JCCs had joined, learning how these integrated organizations have served their communities more effectively and with greater impact than was possible as separate agencies.

In April 2020, the two boards voted to move from an exploratory process to a preparatory one, instructing the Future Visions Committee to create integrated governance and financial models, as well as new mission and vision statements reflecting the agencies' shared goals. This month, after nearly a year-and-a-half of intensive exploration, due diligence, and deliberation, the committee will present its final recommendations to both boards, which are expected to vote on integration at their March meetings.


If integration is approved, it will signal the dawn of an exciting and unprecedented new era for our Jewish community and its agencies. Jewish Long Beach and the AJCC will, for the first time, become uniquely positioned to seamlessly set and adjust community priorities while creating impact-driven programming, education, grant funding, leadership development, and advocacy opportunities designed to advance Jewish life in a manner that is not only deeply effective, but also efficient and sustainable for the long term.

We realize that this news will generate significant questions and curiosity. Should the boards vote to integrate, we will hold a community town hall meeting in April to unveil the integrated structure, mission and vision, and process for carrying out the consolidation of two long-standing agencies with distinct but complimentary identities.

We and our lay leadership are energized by the possibilities that lie ahead, which will undoubtedly bring the Long Beach and West Orange County Jewish and broader communities from strength to strength. 



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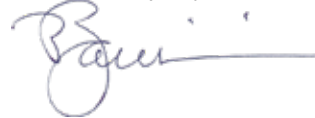


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