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INNOVATING JCCs

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Study conducted by the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS). Founded in 1980, CMJS is dedicated to providing independent, high-quality research on issues related to contemporary Jewish life.

The Cohen Center is also the home of the Steinhardt Social Research Institute (SSRI). Established in 2005, SSRI uses innovative research methods to collect and analyze socio-demographic data on the Jewish community.

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Preface

JCCs are fundamentally 20th century agencies. The world around them has changed, and there is general recognition that they, too, need to upgrade to the 21st century. In order to inspire and inform discussion about such change, the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University undertook a study of new ideas and innovation in Jewish community centers.¹ From January to October 2018, we assembled information from the general literature and stories from the field. The research included key informant interviews, literature reviews, scans of Jewish community centers throughout North America, and interviews with professionals and lay leaders in select JCCs across the country. (See Appendix A for Method.) In the process, it became clear that the issues and opportunities before the JCCs are not unique to Jewish community centers but also have relevance for synagogues and other legacy organizations and agencies in the Jewish community.

The case stories presented herein come from 22 JCCs that have made important strategic moves and learned much in the process. Many of the executive directors in these agencies are creatives. They have what is called an *entrepreneurial orientation* and the qualities needed to turn ideas into action. Their narratives are optimistic and dynamic. They spoke of their agency's mission, strategic goals, business model, programs and services, structure, competition, and place in the local community. At the same time, they demonstrated the leadership style and habits that foster innovation.

The life of an agency is a moving stream, and the report thus captures the stories of these JCCs at a certain point in time. There have been subsequent changes in the JCCs, and their stories are still unfolding. Nonetheless, the ideas and actions described here still provide valuable insight into the innovation process.

Our intent was not to present models for others to adopt, but rather to present information and ideas that would show possibility and spark new thinking. One of the most important findings in this work is that creative organizations and their leaders look wide and far for inspiration and believe that they can learn from anything and everything. We hope this report is received in that same spirit.

¹The study was initiated and supported by UJA-Federation of New York. JCCs in metropolitan New York were intentionally excluded from the study as our aim was to bring in new ideas from outside the local area.

Executive Summary

The mid-20th century Jewish community center was built on the model of a brick-and-mortar, full-service, membership-based community center. This model is increasingly out of step with today's reality. The purpose of the Innovating JCCs study was to seek out new ideas in the field and identify ways that JCCs might break through the old model to become successful 21st century agencies.

Building

Much of the current JCC system emerged in the post-World War II years when large numbers of Jews moved to the suburbs. In the years following, Jews continued to move outward in search of newer or more affordable housing. JCCs, rooted in their buildings, are often challenged by this dispersion of the local Jewish population. Many people in their catchment area cannot get to the JCC without a car, the bane of contemporary suburban life. The JCC thus becomes less attractive to older adults who are loath to drive and to millennials who often prefer public transportation, walking, or biking. Some JCC buildings are aging and do not offer the amenities that their competition does.

Some JCCs face expensive maintenance on their building and too few people to fill the space.

Overall trends suggest that families will continue to move further out from existing residential centers. JCCs in these areas need to consider not only their role in their local communities but also their capacity to be a center of Jewish life for the clusters of Jews living beyond easy driving distance to the building. Innovating JCCs have experimented with a variety of ways to move beyond their walls, including use of public spaces, mobile programming, and online communities and programming. Among the stories that follow are potent examples of how JCCs have come to see their buildings as assets, to think beyond building-centric programming, and even to give up or rightsize their space in order to create a new way of serving the community and fulfilling the JCC's mission.

Purpose

Legacy institutions, like many JCCs, cannot easily think through their purpose and approach de novo. After 40 years or more of existence, they are tethered to an

established reputation, expected programs and services, and a fixed and aging building. They also face the same challenges of any institution regarding leadership and resources for change, relevance to their customer base or audience, up-to-date technology and communications, and the like. Some of the innovating JCCs in this report asked themselves key questions that helped them clarify their essential purpose and values. This clarification, in turn, enabled them to appropriately redirect and re-imagine their structures, staffing, operations, practices, and programs.

Business Model

The traditional JCC generally relies on revenue from membership dues and fees from income-generating programs (most often fitness, day camp, and preschool). Membership dues alone are insufficient to cover budget, and reliance on program fees often cannot fill the gap. Competition in these program areas has increased greatly with the flourishing of boutique gyms, private day camps, and preschools of all stripes (public schools, private schools, Jewish day schools, synagogues, etc.). The competition not only challenges enrollment but also raises the ante on the quality of expected services and experiences. An additional source of revenue might be endowment, but many JCCs failed to build endowment funds early enough in their history to have created a significant revenue stream for today. Some of the innovating JCCs in this report have devised original ways of raising significant new revenue. Others have rethought their dues structure to optimize or stabilize revenue from membership dues.

Jewish Character

JCCs are pluralistic agencies intended to serve all parts of the Jewish community (Ravid, 2017). One of their perceived strengths is that they offer a low-barrier entry into the Jewish community which can be especially appealing to secular, marginally affiliated, or intermarried Jews. What is notable in the stories that follow are the ways in which innovating JCCs are thinking about their role not only vis-à-vis their members or the Jewish community but also in their local community more broadly. In doing so, they are opening up their space and programs to a larger and more diverse population and bringing new opportunities to their members and participants.

Innovation

The literature on innovation makes clear that the JCCs are not alone in the need to innovate and upgrade in order to be relevant, survive, and thrive. The stories of change in JCCs illustrate various types and principles of innovation. The motivation for change is variously driven by competition, changing audiences, changed circumstances, or newly clarified mission. Regardless of motivation, change in the JCCs depends largely on the executive director. Most of the executives interviewed are creatives who continuously and broadly seek new ideas. They use data, they listen to people, and they ask questions. They take action and they give their staff permission to try new things. They understand that innovation is not a once-and-done activity. They follow a path of incremental innovation, building from one step to the next as it becomes apparent. They are

continuously on the lookout for competitive advantage and future trends.

Leadership

Much has been written on the characteristics of leadership for successful innovation. Characteristics include executive leadership style that supports innovation (i.e., focus on change, future orientation, open-mindedness); a board that provides guidance and resources for innovation and helps create an organization culture of experimentation and new ideas; and a staff that is aligned with the change and able to implement it well.

In addition to their openness and creativity, leaders of innovating JCCs also show extraordinary strength and self-confidence. They are not afraid to terminate employees who do not accept change or to veto proposed programs that do not support the agency's mission or bottom line. A common challenge they face is clarifying the role of the board versus that of the executive and the staff. As seen in some of the stories, JCC boards can have a tendency to "get into the weeds" and lose sight of the big picture, major issues, and mission. In these cases, the executive director has had to sort out roles and draw clear boundaries.

Community

People today are seeking community and often find it in what are called third places—informal public gathering spaces (e.g., coffeehouses, town squares) that are neither home nor workplaces. Many types of organizations, from senior centers and

health clubs to churches and hotels, are looking for ways to create sense of community. Some of the innovating JCCs have broadened their concept of community, expanded the idea of membership, brought programs and services out of the building (sometimes using third places), articulated a shared purpose that gives meaning to membership, and found ways to "stay close to the customer." This latter concept focuses on understanding participants and using their input and feedback in the design of programs and services.

Collaboration

Collaboration or partnerships are generally seen as a way that nonprofits can stay competitive in their markets. Such arrangements can encourage innovation through the exchange of ideas and knowledge, the transfer of legitimacy from one organization to another, and the leveraging of each partner's resources. Partnerships also allow organizations to seek bigger solutions to identified problems.

As noted above, the 20th century JCC was a full-service agency. Creative executive directors have come to understand that the JCC cannot be all things to all people. They also understand that the JCC cannot win in today's marketplace with mediocre departments or programs. They say that if the JCC cannot be best in class in a particular area, it should drop that program or service, outsource it, or partner with an individual or organization that is best in class. The stories in this report exemplify different types of partnership that JCCs have

formed with one another, with other Jewish organizations, with non-Jewish organizations, and with the larger community. In each instance, much was gained from the relationship including higher quality, stronger community, greater efficiency, increased revenue, or deeper purpose.

Outline of the Report

The report begins with background on how the 20th century Jewish community center came into being and what future trends portend for JCCs. The next chapters, in order, present findings from the literature reviews and stories from the field related to innovation, leadership, community, and collaboration.

Background

Chapter Summary

Jewish community centers, heirs of the Hebrew Young Men's Literary Association founded in 1854, have long been anchor institutions in the Jewish community. The JCCs' period of greatest growth began in the 1950s as they spread into newly developing post-war suburbs. Alongside the construction of their new facilities, the JCCs developed new understandings of their role in the community and of the programs and services that would come to characterize them. Thus was born the model of the 20th century JCC.

20th Century JCC

Place and Population

The end of World War II was the beginning of a massive move to the suburbs which eventually transformed the United States into a suburban nation (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, & Speck, 2000). In 1990, the United States became the first country to have more suburbanites than city and rural dwellers combined (Baxandall & Ewen, 2000). This migration was driven by population growth (the baby boomers), the GI Bill that made home ownership possible for millions of veterans, economic expansion, highway construction, and longstanding beliefs about the connection

between urban crowding, pollution, and disease (Nelson, 2013). Levittown, the first suburban housing development, was built on Long Island between 1947 and 1949 and was largely for GIs. Its early residents spoke of it as "dreamland." They said that moving there was like "going to heaven" with parking, open air, and trees (none of which could be readily found in Queens) (Hofstra, 2016).

Although motivations may have been the same, Jews suburbanized to a far greater degree than other Americans, and the move had a unique effect on them. Having left the "thick soup" of Jewish life in their urban neighborhoods, Jews could no longer depend on "osmosis" for a sense of

Jewishness but rather had to find intentional ways to be Jewish. Many chose affiliation, especially with synagogues. Affiliation suggested some level of identification with Judaism but did not necessarily equate with knowledge or practice. Some writers critiqued suburban Jewish life as “inauthentic and empty,” separated from everyday life and relegated to the synagogue (Prell, 2007). As JCCs were built, Jews began to affiliate with them in addition to, or instead of, the synagogue (Bubis, 1994).

As suburbs became more crowded and expensive from the 1970s through the 1990s, families moved increasingly further out, creating the exurbs in some areas and sprawl in others (Hanlon, Short, & Vicino, 2010). The personal tradeoff in this outward movement was the onerous commute to work. The societal costs were unbridled housing development, traffic congestion, loss of open space, and an aging suburban population (Hofstra, 2016). The Jewish communal problem was the clustering of Jews further and further from institutional structures. The more the population dispersed, the more difficult it was for synagogues and JCCs to deliver services and maintain a sense of cohesion (Elazar, n.d.; Popper, 2006; Wertheimer, 2007).

During this time, the suburbs also saw demographic shifts. One trend, undeterred by the 2008 recession, has been growth in new housing construction and population. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the highest rate of growth in 2015-16 was in lower-density suburban counties. In 35 of

the 53 major metropolitan areas in the United States, suburban growth exceeded city growth (Frey, 2017).²

A second trend is increasing diversity in the suburban population brought on by the arrival of new immigrants and minority groups (Cornwell & Hall, 2017). The nonwhite proportion of the suburban population grew dramatically in the early 2000s (Berube, 2011). By 2010, the majority of each major racial group in the United States—whites, blacks, Latinos, and Asians—were living in the suburbs (Lacy, 2016). More than one third of the suburban population of the 100 largest metropolitan areas is now nonwhite.

A third trend is an aging population. The suburbs were originally designed to meet the needs of families with children. However, as baby boomers age, empty nesters are replacing young families. Suburban seniors are choosing to age in place (Gallagher, 2013; Parker et al., 2018). As a result, the suburbs are aging more rapidly than other areas of the country (Table 1).

Table 1: Percent growth in the 65+ age cohort since 2000

Region	%
Suburban	51%
Urban	31%
Rural	23%

Parker et al., 2018

² The 53 *major metropolitan areas* are those with populations exceeding one million. *Primary cities* are defined consistent with the Brookings typology that includes the metropolitan area's largest city and up to two additional cities with populations exceeding 100,000.

At the other end of the age spectrum, young adults are delaying marriage, childbearing, and home purchase (Gallagher, 2013). Many are moving back home to live with their parents. For the first time in the modern era, young adults ages 18 to 34 are more likely to be residing with their parents than any other housing arrangement (Fry, 2016).

Demographic shifts have led to the fourth trend, which is greater diversity in income level. As seen in Table 2, recent years have seen greater increases in poverty in the suburbs than in urban centers. Some of this increase is attributed to the 2008 economic downturn which pushed many poor residents out of the urban core and further depressed those already settled in the suburbs (Lacy, 2016).

According to Pew Research, almost 60% of suburbanites say they currently do not have enough income to lead the kind of life they want (Parker et al., 2018). This finding may be as much a reflection of low incomes as of high desires. Nonetheless, the sense of inadequate income may be a common feeling among those served by local Jewish agencies.

Jewish, Community, and Center

The meaning and priority of the terms *Jewish*, *community*, and *center* in the JCC movement have changed over time.

In the 1980s, the then-Jewish Welfare Board established COMJEE, the Commission on Maximizing Jewish Educational Effectiveness of JCCs. The Commission's

Table 2: Percent growth in poverty since 2000

Region	%
Suburban	51%
Urban	31%
Rural	23%

Parker et al., 2018

landmark report, published in 1984, urged a dramatic shift in the mission of JCCs and called for increased emphasis on Jewish education. In 1994, COMJEE II re-assessed the effectiveness of Jewish education in the JCCs and reported “almost universal intensification” over the previous decade (Chazan & Cohen, 1994). Changes were seen in Jewish educational programming, professional development, and commitment of the executive—a true “metamorphosis” in the authors’ view. Despite the apparent success of COMJEE, new concerns about the fate of the *J* in JCC arose as some centers passed the 50% point, meaning that fewer than half of their members were Jewish.

The center movement next focused on the two *Cs* (community and center). At its 2000 Biennial in Boston, the Jewish Community Center Association (JCCA) adopted “meaningful Jewish community” as its theme. New research noted the decline in sense of community among Jews but also the continuing desire for community (Cohen, Fein, & Israel, 2000). The research examined the current role of the JCC in building community and the ways it might enhance this work in the future. In essence,

the report called upon the JCCs to shift focus from service delivery to community building. The key innovation was to view “services not only as ends in themselves, but rather, as effective means to generate the numerous relationships and feeling of attachment that are at the heart of well-functioning, intimate communities of Jews.” In other words, the call was not to change *what* the JCCs do but *how* they do it.

The term *center* also began to receive renewed attention. The facilities in many older communities were seen as both a strength and a weakness. A source of great pride and expense, a number of these buildings were no longer in the geographic center of the community as the Jewish population had increasingly moved to more distant suburbs. These communities began to discuss the possibility of relocation or the development of satellite sites. The notion of a JCC beyond walls had yet to be born.

Much of the 20th century JCC model remains today. Physical facilities are still central to the budget and the program. Dues are an important revenue stream, and attracting and retaining members and users remains an essential task. In places where members are viewed as customers, customer care displaces community building. JCCs continue to be challenged in balancing their Jewish mission with the diverse populations that work at, join, and/or participate in the JCC.

Social realities today have added to these historical concerns. Like synagogues and other legacy membership organizations, JCCs face declining interest in affiliation,

busy lives, the allure of other activities and providers, and little need for specifically Jewish socializing. The meaning of *community* has changed (and will continue to do so) with the advent of the Internet and social media. Real-time, in-person community building of the last century may now be a limited tactic.

21st Century Trends

Given that JCCs and other legacy institutions are rooted in their buildings, it matters where the Jewish population resides and how local demographics are changing. This may be less of an issue for JCCs in large urban centers, but it is highly relevant for JCCs in suburbs, smaller cities, or cities with a declining Jewish population.

Population Shifts

Some data suggest that the suburban population is likely to hold, while other data point to population decline as the more likely future. Nationally, the suburbs—with their excellent schools and open space—remain a desirable destination for many. Of those who would like to move, approximately 40% of suburban and urban adults say they would choose a suburban community (Parker et al., 2018).

Many aspects of suburban life, however, have become unattractive and may eventually decrease demand.

- Market research indicates that most Americans are seeking a new paradigm of living characterized by closer proximity to services, stores, and

entertainment. They want to know their neighbors and be in close proximity to people in their social network (Nelson, 2013). Suburbs spread people too far apart from each other and from the things they want to do (Gallagher, 2013). On Long Island, for example, only 21% of the population lives within a half-mile of a downtown center, meaning that many residents do not have walking access to jobs, services, shopping, entertainment and other lifestyle amenities (Armstrong & Wellburn, 2014).

- Suburbs are built to be dependent on the automobile and do not easily accommodate pedestrians. The reliance on cars is costly both in terms of gas prices and environmental impact. Time spent in the car for commuting or other purposes takes a toll on personal health (Gallagher, 2013).
- Housing prices have held up better in cities making city real estate the better investment (Gallagher, 2013).

Suburbs (at least in their current form) may be less attractive to millennials than to their parents' generation.

- The demographics of the emerging adult population point to a preference for urban options. These include smaller households, later marriages, and increasing singlehood (Ehrenhalt, 2012).
- A 2011 real estate study found that 77% of millennials plan to live in an urban center (Gallagher, 2013). A National

Association of Realtors study found that 62% of millennials would rather live in a neighborhood with a mix of houses and businesses near transportation than in a community with large lots and no sidewalks (Gallagher, 2013).

- Teens and young adults are regular users of public transportation. They are not as interested in cars as they once were, and the percentage of those with a driver's license has declined (Gallagher, 2013).
- Suburbs lack the diversity, social environment, and lifestyle amenities that millennials seek (Ehrenhalt, 2012). Amenities are defined as lively, walkable districts with restaurants, retail stores, bars, theaters, and the like (Ehrenhalt, 2012; Gallagher, 2013; Henning & Sun, 2014).

Gallagher (2013) concludes that millennials do not want lawns, museum-sized homes, and long commutes. They do want adequate space for entertaining, an open kitchen, and "maybe a space for their dog." And they often want to rent because renting (rather than owning) gives them flexibility and mobility.

New Urbanism

In the 1990s, New Urbanism, a movement already familiar in Europe, emerged in the United States.³ New Urbanists are architects, planners, designers, municipal leaders, and others who work to promote the ideal of human-scaled urban design. Their vision is of residential communities

³ <https://www.cnu.org/resources/what-new-urbanism>

centered around pedestrian life and a town square in densely populated urban and suburban areas. Key principles are walkable streets, housing and shopping in close proximity, and accessible public spaces (Gallagher, 2013). New Urbanism stands in direct contrast to the sprawling, single-use, low-density, automobile-dependent patterns of post-World War II development that resulted in today's suburbs.

Larry Levy (2014), Director of the National Center for Suburban Studies, argues for transit-oriented development and smart growth. Suburbs could become "less wasteful and more appealing to young and elderly people alike if they offered a greater variety of housing, employment, and cultural options—fewer cookie-cutter houses and more apartments built around rail and bus hubs, more villages where people can connect and create."

There is much to be learned from the examples of communities that have been redesigned and revitalized in this fashion. For one, suburbs can be made more attractive to millennials who are seeking affordable housing in settings with lifestyle amenities.

- It is not surprising that Amazon selected Arlington County, Virginia as one of the sites for its new headquarters. Clarendon, a neighborhood in Arlington, is an instructive example. The opening of the Clarendon Metro station in 1979 led to the transformation of the surrounding area into an urban village

with unique shops, trendy bars, and restaurants. Luxury apartments, office buildings and upscale chain stores followed. The former Sears parking lot and automotive department were developed as a mixed residential/commercial project that now includes townhouses, luxury apartments, and retail stores. The town has attracted young professionals, who are drawn by Clarendon's proximity and accessibility to the city and the walkability and human scale of its neighborhoods (Ehrenhalt, 2012).⁴

- Tysons (Fairfax County, VA) created what is considered a "mid-level" urban experience—neither urban nor suburban. It achieved diversity through affordable housing. It created a walkable downtown center by building residential units around the existing shopping mall. Like Arlington, it has benefited from being on the metro line, which serves as both a transportation system and economic catalyst. Future plans call for the creation of "villages" to be built around the new metro rail stations, giving easy access to local amenities and to the city (Ehrenhalt, 2012; Gallaher, 2012).⁵
- New Cassel (Long Island, NY) revitalized its main street with new high-density, mixed-use projects; street improvements; and a new community center complex (Henning 2014). Other options were proffered for bringing the neighborhood in line with the lifestyle

⁴ For more details see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clarendon, Arlington, Virginia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clarendon,_Arlington,_Virginia)

⁵ For more detailed history see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tysons, Virginia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tysons,_Virginia)

amenities sought by millennials: bicycle infrastructure, public availability of recycling, public art, retail stores, and other community amenities (Henning & Sun, 2014).

Suburbs can also be made more livable for seniors who may choose to age in place.

- In 2008, through grassroots efforts, the community of North Hempstead (Nassau County, NY) established Project Independence as a means to keep the town relevant and accessible to an aging population. Instead of redesigning the landscape, the town developed a comprehensive program to connect seniors to services and groups that provide transportation, healthcare, education, social programming, and home repair services, among others. With funding from the New York State Office for the Aging, it has been able to offer services for free or at low cost to every town resident over age 60 (Davis, 2013).

The creative executives in our study are on the lookout for such trends. One exec, for example, made a winning strategic decision

based on the calculation that a new medical center signaled an impending revitalization of the downtown. Others have responded to the increasing diversity in their area by opening up membership and opportunity to a broad audience or by forming partnerships across religious, ethnic, or racial lines. The execs have found that these partnerships give purpose to the JCC, excite the younger generation who grew up in a more inclusive society, and build community relations. Still others are seeking ways to provide programs and services outside of their building or to turn the building into a revenue generator through rentals or space sharing agreements. Those who understand the allure of the town square are trying to create that environment within their own space.

It should be noted that other challenges or opportunities present in the literature did not appear in the JCCs in this study. These include serving and engaging an aging population, providing for resource-stretched families, and taking part—as a communal agency—in local or regional planning and revitalization.

Innovation

Chapter Summary

The purpose of the Innovating JCCs study was to inform and inspire new thinking and action in JCCs. To that end, we scoured the literature on innovation in nonprofit organizations seeking information and examples of the various types and drivers of innovation. This chapter begins with the findings from the literature review on innovation and then briefly lays out types of innovation observed in the JCCs in our study.

Literature Review

Nonprofits are under pressure from the government, foundations, and private funders to become more efficient, entrepreneurial, and innovative (Pearce, Fritz, & Davis, 2010). In addition, the social context in which nonprofits operate is changing as are the issues they are expected to address. There is an increasing demand for their services. Costs and competition for resources are on the rise. In a fast-changing world, old assumptions that an agency may have about its field, its business, or the preferences and needs of the market no longer pertain (Beekman, Steiner, &

Wasserman, 2012; Damanpour, Walker, & Avellaneda, 2009; Jaskyte & Kisieliene, 2006). Nonprofits need to innovate to be relevant, survive, and thrive. This is true across the board, including in the Jewish community.

Definition

When organizations innovate, they transform ideas into new or improved products, services, or processes. Their purpose is to improve their work and compete successfully in the marketplace (Baregheh, Rowley, & Sambrook, 2009; Beekman et al., 2012).

Slingshot has recently developed a new definition and criteria for its annual selection of innovating Jewish organizations:

Innovation is a mode of operating, of finding new ways to create impact. Innovative organizations and programs are ones that are able to act efficiently, adapt to current demands in the community, and create new models for achieving positive outcomes. The drive for relevancy and impact is built into their DNA. Innovative organizations have a culture of perpetual improvement, where calculated risk is in service of always trying to do better.⁶

Types of Innovation

Slingshot recognizes that innovation might affect what the organization does or how it does it. This distinction is a longstanding one in the literature and is generally referred to as product innovation versus process innovation (Abernathy & Utterback, 1978; Barras, 1986; Kazanjian & Drazin 1986; Kotabe & Murray, 1990; Schumpeter, 1942; Utterback & Abernathy 1975; Zmud 1984).

- Product and service innovations are designed to meet the needs of external users (customers, clients, members, participants). Product and service innovations are essentially the same. Both are externally focused, intended to differentiate the organization from its

competitors, motivated by users' demands or by management's desire to expand the organization's market or improve its offerings (Abernathy & Utterback, 1978; Damanpour & Gopalakrishnan, 2001; Damanpour et al., 2009; Miles, 2001; Sirilli & Evangelista, 1998).

- Process innovations focus on internal needs for organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Some of these innovations focus on how products and services are delivered. Others target administrative processes (e.g., changes to organizational structure, leadership practices, reward systems, administrative systems) (Abernathy & Utterback, 1978; Beekman et al., 2012; Daft, 1978; Damanpour & Evan, 1984; Damanpour & Gopalakrishnan, 2001; Damanpour et al., 2009; Light, 1998; Meeus & Edquist, 2006).

Example: The Fremont Clinic in MN brings education on sexually transmitted diseases to isolated and distressed communities. Instead of using existing clinics and hospitals for this purpose, they have formed partnerships with local businesses such as barber shops. The new process for delivering education has enabled the clinic to increase efficiency, cut costs, and reach new clients (Bankston, 2012; Beekman et al., 2012).

⁶ <https://www.slingshotfund.org/selection-criteria/>

Another way to think about innovation is whether it involves new products and services and/or new clients (participants, members, audiences, markets). As seen in Table 3, innovation might entail bringing existing programs to a new audience or bringing new programs to an existing audience. Total innovation entails bringing new services into new markets.

Example: Fan of the Feather, a nonprofit in San Marcos, CA, exemplifies total innovation. Its founding mission was to help those who were homeless or at-risk to return to independent living. Within this context, the organization opened a transitional home for homeless female veterans, a fast-growing but under-served population. In addition to housing, the organization helps these clients with post-traumatic stress disorder, military sexual trauma, and substance abuse using resources it developed specifically for this group of women (Mecija, 2012).

Others have proposed a category of incremental innovation. Such initiatives

continue to target the same audience with the same programs or services but incrementally improve the organizations' offerings (Osborne, 1998).

In addition, Slingshot distinguishes innovation by the life stage of the organization, as follows.

Start-up organizations are innovative in why they were created. They are groundbreaking, inventive, pioneering, or creative in their response to the changing needs of the Jewish community and the world around it.

Mezzanine organizations are innovative because of their culture of constant improvement. As they grow, they continue to find new ways of doing business and maintaining a thrust toward risk-taking.

Legacy organizations express innovation through projects derived from established structures and a willingness to try operating in new or different ways to best address the changing needs of the Jewish community.⁷

Table 3: Types of innovation

Services	Clients	
	Same	New
Same		Expansionary innovation
New	Evolutionary innovation	Total innovation

⁷ <https://www.slingshotfund.org/selection-criteria/>

Drivers of Innovation

Innovation is often driven by necessity: competition, changing audiences, or changed circumstances. The literature suggests that it should also be driven by the organization's mission.

Competition

The case can be made that nonprofits need to operate more like for-profit organizations and seek competitive advantage through innovation (McDonald, 2007). As seen in the example below, competition can motivate an agency to differentiate itself from its competitors.

Example: Until the late 1980s, the United Way of Chicago had a monopoly on workplace giving. When it began to face competition, the agency changed its approach to allow for designated giving. This move, however, undermined the United Way's role in assessing community needs and allocating dollars among communal organizations and causes. United Way then tried to reverse course through a communications campaign that stressed the importance of undesignated gifts. Eventually, United Way created an entirely new framework to differentiate itself from the competition. It highlighted its traditional method of allocation, renamed it the Community Fund, and rebranded donations as "investments" in the Community Fund. The fund was described as similar to a mutual fund that offered a return. United Way altered its practices and messaging to make the new approach work. It cancelled its grant program and focused

solely on the Community Fund. It changed its solicitation materials and created new training for those leading the campaigns to focus on the metaphor of a mutual fund (Barman, 2002).

Example: In 2014, the *New York Times* (NYT) took a candid look at its place in the marketplace prompted by its shrinking share of the digital news market. To understand the problem, an internal committee engaged in an extensive process of inquiry. The committee interviewed current and former staff members from across the organization and reviewed data on user behavior on their digital platform. The inquiry identified NYT's rich, often unparalleled resources as an underutilized asset. For example, the paper's archives from over 100 years of publishing give the NYT access to original historical reporting on most any topic, news item, or trend going back further than any of its competitors. The archives were now seen as a treasure trove, and planning turned toward how to market this resource to diverse segments of the audience (*New York Times*, 2014).

Changed Audience

Organizations may be driven to innovate because users have changed or circumstances have changed. (See the Community chapter of this report to learn how innovating organizations maintain their responsiveness to the needs and interests of their client base or audience.)

Example: Libraries traditionally positioned librarians as providers of

information and users as receivers. The advent of online information resources meant that users no longer had to depend on librarians nor did they have to come to the library (Casey & Savastinuk, 2010; Crawford, 2006). Makerspaces (also called hackerspaces or hack labs) emerged from the desire to draw people back into the building.

Makerspaces provide communal space for education about and use of tools, digital fabrication, and/or electronics (e.g., 3D printers, laser cutting) for art and personal manufacturing. Makerspaces are not only found in libraries but also in schools, museums, and independent spaces. Makerspaces tap into the institution's educational mission, deploy the physical facilities in new ways, and create community in the process (Antleij, Leen, & Russo, 2017; Good 2013; Smith, Hielscher, Dickel, Soderberg, & van Oost, 2013; Taylor, Hurley & Connolly, 2016).

Example: Historical archives traditionally focused on the collection, documentation, and preservation of historical materials. Users were professional researchers who were familiar with the vocabulary used in organizing materials and had the time to scour the archive. The new user comes to the archive for personal pursuits. This user has neither the time nor training to engage with the archives as the professionals do. One response has been the development of participatory digital archives that focus on making resources readily accessible to users (Huvila, 2008). For example, two digital

history archives introduced a wiki approach in which topics and materials are organized by topic and users are involved in curating the information on related pages (Huvila, 2008).

Example: The literature also includes articles on organizations in the Jewish sector that have innovated out of necessity. Kings Bay Y in Brooklyn NY, for example, was close to shutting its doors. Its programming was stagnant and mainly served native-born senior citizens, even though they were no longer the dominant demographic of the community. In a major turnaround, the Y changed its mission to focus on serving secular American Jews, Russian Jewish immigrants, and young Orthodox families. It also reinvigorated the agency with new dollars and a diversified board (Petlakh, 2010).

New Organizations

Innovation also arises from entrepreneurial spirit and the impulse to create new organizations. Over the years, a number of Jewish organizations have been created as incubators for innovative startups. These have included Bikkurim, JumpStart, PresenTense, ROI, Joshua Venture Group, and UpStart among others (JumpStart 2009; Sherman & Budlow, 2013).

New organizations also emerge from mergers, which themselves are an innovation. The merger of the Educational Alliance and Midtown Y in Manhattan in the 1990s, for example, leveraged established assets to support innovation. Assets included physical space, populations served, donor bases, administrative support functions, and long-term unrestricted

funding. The result is the now thriving 14th Street Y (Bernstein & Arnoff, 2010).

Mission

The argument is made that innovation should also be driven by mission. An empirical study of nonprofit organizations in the healthcare industry found that an organization's mission statement can guide the strategic plan of an entire organization and also assist at the more tactical level of innovation. A survey of some 350 hospital administrators found that the nonprofit's mission can help the organization develop and adopt innovations that are likely to further the mission. The mission helps create the employee buy in and motivation essential for successful innovation. The research concludes that innovation must be seen as critical to the achievement of the mission, and the mission should be at the heart of all activities and define which innovations are pursued (McDonald, 2007).

Stories From the Field

In the JCC world, a variety of circumstances have provoked innovation. At the JCC of Northern NJ, for example, it was the sale of the building which called for radical rethinking of the meaning, purpose, and operating pattern of the JCC. At the North Shore JCC in Marblehead, MA it was the closing of the local Jewish Federation which opened up opportunities for the JCC to play a new role in the community.

In Boulder, CO, which was contemplating a new building and campus, innovation was provoked by the decision to rightsize the JCC. After years of dreaming of a new

building and campus, Boulder JCC leaders decided that rather than build a large building, they would rightsize the planned building to make it achievable. Importantly, the new building would have no fitness center. The JCC thus shifted its revenue model away from fitness and toward fundraising, including a capital campaign as well as an endowment for long-term sustainability. In the new model, fundraising would be the core business of the JCC and its core strategy for engagement. The other main sources of revenue would be the early childhood program and rentals (i.e., civic space).

For some JCCs, innovation was a response to unfavorable trends in membership, revenue, and competitiveness. Many cases, however, also describe creative executives and activist boards who knew they could do better or who became inspired to make change and modernize for the 21st century.

Inspiration for New Thinking

We asked interviewees about the inspiration for their new thinking. Many of the execs interviewed are creatives who natively engage in lateral thinking, bringing ideas from widely different sources into their own work. They seek ideas from local marketing research, books, websites, TED talks, and other presentations that span the spectrum of disciplines and perspectives. They read magazines seeking trends in the marketplace: Who's advertising, what are their messages, what are the trends in those messages, how are they trying to segment their market, how does branding work, how are they keeping people's interest? They

subscribe to newsletters and follow others on Twitter, seeking out people doing interesting things.

The JCC execs in our study listen to people and bounce ideas off of others. When they bring new ideas to their team, they encourage their colleagues to argue and discuss. They build from the bottom up. One exec told us that when he came into his position, he held 70 one-on-one conversations about the JCC currently and in the future. Another explained that innovation does not emerge from sitting in an office and conjuring up an idea. Rather, it comes from getting myriad ideas from staff and others in the community...and then trying something.

The JCC execs use data as a source of information and inspiration. When the data show how many people come to JCC events but do not join, the creative exec sees a market opportunity and asks, "How can we engage them more?" "If you are not measuring it," one exec reminded us, "you are not managing it." The advice from these execs is to be honest with yourself and honest in assessing your reality. Pay attention to the data; scan trends; and assess your environment, your model, and the customers you seek to serve. These execs emphasize the importance of understanding what the community has to offer, what the community needs, and what their JCC excels at.

Examples of Innovation in JCCs

The JCCs we studied represent various forms of innovation as described in the literature review. We present them as a way to anchor the broad concepts of the

literature review in the Jewish world. There are lessons to be learned from each example.

Incremental Innovation

Innovation can take place over time in many steps. An incremental approach allows a developing program to respond to interests and needs as they become evident. It enables a program to expand and grow with new leadership and/or as additional resources become available. It avoids the obstacle of risk aversion and can use current success to convince staff and stakeholders of the program's future promise.

In Orange County, CA, an Italian Jewish family came to the **Merage JCC** and asked for an Italian immersion class in the preschool. The family had 15 other families lined up and the JCC opened the immersion program the following September. When they saw that it was working, the preschool opened a Spanish immersion program. Given the large number of Mexican Jews in the area, the program filled in one day. When the local day school, located on the same property as the JCC, started a transitional kindergarten (TK) program, the JCC's TK enrollment declined by half. With the empty classroom, they decided to start a Mandarin immersion program. Most of the students are Asian and not Jewish, but they participate in the preschool's Shabbat observance. The JCC preschool also started an afternoon Hebrew immersion program. As of the time of our interview, six of the 19 classes in the preschool were immersion classes.

Kaplen JCC on the Palisades in Tenafly, NJ began its work with the Israeli community more than 20 years ago with a volunteer who ran cultural programs for adults such as Israeli dancing and singing. In 2006, an Israeli JCC board member donated funds for a part-time position to support additional activities of interest to Israelis. From that point on, the JCC's Israeli Center grew incrementally, with each step producing notable growth over the previous stage.

In 2006, the newly hired part-time coordinator brought *Tsofim* (Israeli scouts) into the JCC. His successor initiated programs for children and young professionals, one-off holiday programs, and an Israeli business circle. The latter was the first time Israelis brought into a JCC program. The amount raised was not great, but it represented a shift in culture. In 2011-12, the current coordinator began to create programs that catered to the needs of the Israeli family in America. The Israeli Center transitioned from one-off holiday programs to continuous programs and semester- and year-long series. In 2014, the Israeli Center opened an Israeli afterschool program. Conducted in Hebrew and including Israeli culture and holiday celebrations, the afterschool program gave a significant boost to the JCC overall. In 2015, the Israeli Center established large community events, notably a Yom Ha'Atzmaut celebration. The following year, the JCC created a partnership with The Big Idea to develop a high-tech camp program for

elementary grades led by Hebrew-speaking staff. In its first year, the program generated 1,000 camper weeks over an eight-week season and a six figure surplus.

Also in 2016, the JCC combined forces with Israeli American Council (IAC), a collaboration that doubled the number of people working on Israeli- or Israel-related programs at the JCC. The collaboration built lay support, and several Israelis now hold seats on both the JCC and IAC boards. It also increased program offerings and participation. IAC runs an adult education program for Israelis that focuses on Jewish, Israeli, and American identity. The program is held at the JCC. It brings Israelis into the building on a weekly basis and fosters a connection to the place. The IAC and JCC partnership showed the Israeli community that the JCC can be a real home for them regardless of membership or organizational leaning. The JCC and IAC are now serving more people together than they did separately. In the words of the director, "one plus one equals three."

New Program (or Product)

Examples of new programs abound in the JCCs' stories. We offer one example here. Others are found in the chapter on Community and the chapter on Partnerships and Collaboration.

Boulder JCC arrived at its new vision by asking what makes Boulder a great place to be, and why do people live

here? They came up with four answers and built their engagement strategy around them: education, food and farm-to-table movement, arts and culture, and innovation and entrepreneurship. The JCC's response to the food movement is a good example of program innovation. The JCC created a farm and sustainability department with fulltime professional positions and added farm education to the early childhood curriculum. It secured land on an adjoining property and built a farm with a barn, greenhouse, raised beds, a fruit grove, beehives, and a *tzedakah* garden. In 2017, its first summer, the garden produced 1,600 pounds of food that was donated to local food banks. The JCC's building includes a full-scale commercial kitchen so the JCC can partner with local chefs and offer programs related to food, including a local chef series. The kitchen is also used for classes that are not specifically Jewish (e.g., cooking with ancient grains). The JCC received a grant to be a presence at local farmers markets where they can reach out to the community. Two of the programs promoted there are farm-side yoga and farm-side Shabbat for young families.

New Business Model

Innovating JCCs develop multiple revenue streams that go beyond the three traditional revenue-generating programs (usually fitness, early childhood, and camp). These programs are intended to be self-sustaining, supported by tuition and fees. Excess revenue is expected to go back into the program to expand or improve it. The

problem is that these programs cannot be relied upon to support other programs and services at the JCC. In many JCCs, the fourth leg is grant writing and fundraising. Some of the successful JCCs also have a fifth leg: facilities rentals; partnerships with corporations, foundations, or other communal agencies; fee-based service provision (e.g., administration, registration, bookkeeping) to other nonprofits; and fee-for-service programs in the broader community. Below is but one example. Details on various fifth legs can be found in the chapter on Community and the chapter on Partnerships and Collaboration.

At **JCC Chicago**, the fifth leg is before and after school programs called J at School. The program takes place in Chicago public schools and competes with the YMCA and with for-profit programs. The JCC hired a young professional to grow the program by selling it to individual schools. The first year, the program brought in \$100k in revenue. Four years later gross revenues were over \$4M and net was over \$600k. Over 2,000 children a day participate in J at School.

New Facility

A few of the JCCs we studied underwent dramatic change as a result of changing their facilities. The Buffalo JCC offers a good example.

Buffalo was about to close its suburban JCC and restructure the agency. The new executive director at the time had a different idea, which was to invest in the city center where "money can grow."

The Jewish population in that area was relatively small. However, the neighborhood was beginning to change, and a new medical campus was about to hire thousands of new employees. The executive's vision was to turn the downtown JCC into a cash generator and then rebuild and rightsize the suburban facility to make it modern and attractive to new members. The vision became a reality. The downtown building was refurbished with a no-interest loan from a donor. JCC membership began to grow at a rapid pace, with some 2,500 new members in 2011. The Jewish foundation and Federation offices were moved from the downtown facility to the suburban location to free up space for a downtown early childhood center (ECC). The downtown ECC grew from 60 children a day to 220 children a day, with waiting lists. There is also an afterschool program with 100 children (twice that of the suburban program). As envisioned, the downtown programs provide revenue support to both centers and space for all local Jewish organizations. Today, the downtown facility is undergoing the third renovation in eight years to create "a stunning, rehabbed building."

In another strategic move, in 2013 the JCC relocated its day camp from the exurbs of Buffalo to a site behind the suburban facility. Although the original site was much beloved by the community, the move had many benefits. The site was deteriorating; transportation was expensive;

attendance was shrinking. The JCC leased 20 acres of land from the Weinberg campus (part of the Jewish community but not the JCC) for \$1 a year. Recently, the Weinberg property was sold and, as part of the deal, will become part of the JCC. The JCC has invested heavily in the campsite, which boasts a \$300k arts facility, an amphitheater, composting toilets, shelters, and the like. Money saved from the elimination of transportation costs and the need for year-round maintenance staff was poured into improving the program. The JCC took the risk and it has paid off—the camp is "fully paid for," brand new, and thriving.

The biggest effects of these changes have been on staff who see the outcome of risk taking and are now more open to it. They are willing to think differently about how to make the JCC more competitive. "It's become socially unacceptable to do things the way they used to be done," the exec said.

Strategic Planning

New ideas inevitably emerge from strategic planning.

At the time of our study, the **Mittleman JCC** in Portland, OR was in the midst of a strategic planning process. The agency had drafted a new mission and vision statement, and six task forces were working on different aspects of the JCC: arts and culture, children and young families, facilities, financial sustainability, fundraising, and

community engagement. Some of the ideas were consistent with initiatives already underway (e.g., creating a J Without Walls, extending the age range of day camp, addressing long-term capital needs, finding ways to better serve the Israeli community). In addition, new insights—large and small—were emerging from these groups. The fundraising task force learned that over one fourth of members did not understand that the JCC was a nonprofit. The community engagement task force learned that the Orthodox community was not interested in the JCC's cultural arts program but were interested in single-sex swimming and fitness classes. The children and young families group learned that the quarterly program guide, currently organized by department, would be more useful to young families if it were organized by age group. This detail alone points to a new way of marketing that would improve the customer's use of marketing materials and thereby increase program participation.

We began this chapter with the observation that nonprofits, including JCCs, need to innovate. As common wisdom has it, in a fast-changing world, those that remain the same are falling behind. There is ample evidence to suggest that JCCs across the field have and will continue to make significant changes and adjustments to suit changing times, social needs, audiences, and circumstances. As these examples testify, there is ample opportunity for them to do so.

Leadership

Chapter Summary

Successful innovation requires the right executive director, board, staff, and organizational culture. This chapter begins with a review of the literature on the role of the executive director in promoting innovation and then considers the role of the board of trustees. It then shifts focus to innovating leadership in Jewish community centers and details findings from JCCs across the country.

Literature Review

Nonprofits that are most successful at innovation have a visionary executive and board members who champion the innovation (Beekman et al., 2012).

Executive Director

Executive directors' most powerful impact on innovativeness comes through the organizational culture they create. They also affect innovativeness through the attitudes and behaviors they model, the resources they direct toward innovation, and the influence they exert over others (Jaskyte, 2004). Innovating executives bring staff along and create a staff culture that is conducive to the implementation of new ideas.

The literature recognizes the key behaviors and attitudes among innovating executives (Allen, Smith, & DaSilva, 2013; Beekman et al., 2012; Jaskyte, 2004). Innovating leaders confront the status quo and seek new challenges. They stay up to date and ask what can be learned. They take risks and experiment. They also adopt a democratic or transformational leadership style and exhibit leadership qualities that support innovation. These include a focus on change, future orientation, and open-mindedness.

With regard to staff, innovating leaders create a work culture of sustained learning and creativity. They challenge familiar processes. They model collaboration and teamwork and inspire shared vision. They

encourage their employees to innovate, and they recognize and celebrate achievements.

Staff

In the 1960s, the United States embarked on a grand project to implement a fundamentally different way of teaching math in the primary grades. The New Math initiative immediately encountered significant resistance from teachers who were neither prepared nor onboard with this radically different approach which they felt was foisted on them. The failure to successfully roll out New Math became a cautionary tale of the power of frontline workers to make or break an innovation (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Sarason, 1971).

A common challenge cited in the change literature is aligning staff with the new thinking required to implement innovation. Often staff do not “get it” or feel that they were included in defining the problem or the solution. Case study research on a variety of community-based nonprofit organizations suggests that those that empower staff (both paid and volunteer) in learning about the issues facing the organization are more successful at organizational transformation than those that do not (Perkins et al., 2007).

New views of innovation in the public sector emphasize the importance of transformational or democratic leadership. The critical point is that senior leaders share the responsibility for leading and driving change with frontline managers and employees (Hartley, Sorenson, & Torfing,

2013). Such leadership approaches depend on having an organizational culture that supports collaboration, distributed responsibility, and shared leadership. Empirical research suggests that leaders first need to change organizational culture and leadership practices that impede innovation: “Organizations characterized by deeply embedded leadership practices and organizational values risk success because they can stop questioning the need to change and respond to the external environment” (Jaskyte, 2004).

Board of Trustees

Agency boards can promote innovation directly by providing guidance and resources and indirectly by helping create an organizational culture of experimentation and new ideas (Jaskyte, 2018). Boards can equally delay or squelch innovation by their attitudes, actions, or inaction.

A comprehensive survey of over 400 nonprofit organizations found staff members and peer organizations to be the most consistent and important sources of innovative ideas (Salamon, Geller, & Mengel, 2010). This finding suggests that, given the right opportunity, JCCs might be important sources of ideas for one another.

Over 60% of the organizations in Salamon et al.’s study rely on board members for ideas, and one third of these do so often. About one in five said that board members were a significant source of pressure to innovate.

It is clear from the literature that the board has an important role to play in organizational innovation although it may not always be playing that role to the fullest.

Board Qualities

An organization's capacity for innovation is seen in the speed at which it responds to needed changes—how long it takes to spot the need to do things differently, to welcome new ideas, and to change procedures to meet new conditions (Jaskyte, 2018).

A survey of board members of over 100 local chapters of the Arc of the United States (a national organization that serves people with disabilities) found critical questioning, shared vision, and human capital— knowledge, skills, and expertise—all to be positively related to innovation (Jaskyte, 2018).

Other research has identified additional characteristics of boards in organizations with a relatively high capacity for innovation (Bruni-Bossio, Story, & Garcea, 2016; Connelly, 2004; Thrall, 2007; Jaskyte, 2018; Jaskyte & Renz, 2012; Long, 2013). Boards with high capacity for innovation have commonality of purpose, enthusiasm for pursuing collective goals and mission, and are cohesive and work well together. They have a culture marked by respect, support, and trust between the board and professional leadership. Such a culture allows for open and productive discussion and debate within the board and between the board and professional leadership. Boards with high capacity for innovation

critically review proposals from professional leadership and partner with them in changing the organization's direction. Importantly, they are also willing to make financial contributions and help secure resources needed to implement innovations.

Developing an Innovating Board

The literature on nonprofit board development is concerned with building the right kind of board, creating effective board culture, and defining board roles. These tasks are considered prerequisites for innovation.

Building the right board. In building the right board, agencies need to attend to board size, diversity, and cohesiveness.

- Agencies need to determine the optimal size for their board. In one case study, for example, reducing board size increased the trustees' knowledge of the organization and their sense of ownership. The smaller board was able to work together to encourage management to open a new site for service delivery (Thrall, 2007).
- Research has shown that the collective skillset and knowledge base of board members has significantly more impact on a nonprofit's degree of innovation than the board's demographic profile (Beekman et al., 2012). Diversity among board members can promote innovation, as it can yield a better understanding of the external environment, more effective problem solving, richer sources of information,

broader perspective on issues, and more help securing critical resources (Jaskyte & Renz, 2012; Kreutzer, 2009). In this regard, one writer suggests bringing on board members who live outside of the agency's neighborhood or market area (Thrall, 2007).

- Cohesiveness means that board members like each other as individuals and are motivated to stay on the board. Board cohesion can help with collaboration which, in turn, can have a positive effect on innovation (Jaskyte & Renz, 2012).

It should be noted that research findings are not consistent. Larger boards may have more resources and visibility, but they may also interfere with board cohesion. Diverse boards are seen to have many advantages, but extreme diversity can lead to conflict. Although a relationship clearly exists, there is no definitive formula for the correlation between innovativeness and board size, diversity, and cohesiveness (Jaskyte & Renz, 2012).

Promoting entrepreneurial orientation.

Research on nonprofit innovation points to the importance of an entrepreneurial orientation. This orientation is associated with active boards that involve themselves in setting new organizational priorities, developing plans for strategic change, identifying and obtaining needed resources, and maintaining relationships with internal and external stakeholders (Brown, 2005; Brudney & Murray, 1998; Morris, Coombes, Allen, & Schindehutte, 2007). Not

surprisingly, active boards exhibit higher levels of entrepreneurial behavior than do passive boards (Beekman et al., 2012).

The literature suggests that nonprofits will be more effective at innovation when the board of directors, senior management, and key staff members share an entrepreneurial orientation. This entails alignment around innovativeness, risk taking, and pro-activeness—three essential attitudes for nonprofits to respond successfully to the need to change (Alexander, 2000; Beekman et al., 2012; Dees, Emerson, & Economy, 2001; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2005).

- Innovativeness is the willingness to experiment with new ideas that may result in the introduction of new products and services (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). It involves actively seeking original solutions to organizational issues and needs. Whatever these needs—finances, membership, program, services, leadership, operations—innovativeness requires looking for new possibilities from a broad range of sources outside the organization (i.e., boundary spanning).
- Risk taking refers to acting in ways that are considered bold, such as committing resources where outcomes are uncertain (Wiklund & Shepherd, 2005). Risk taking may be particularly difficult for boards that see their primary role as stewardship and protection of resources. At the same time, the board has an important role to play in allaying the concerns that others may have

about a potentially risky innovation (Beekman et al., 2012).

- Pro-activeness is the commitment to implement an innovation and to persevere through setbacks and obstacles (Beekman et al., 2012). It is also the confidence to seek new opportunities, anticipate future demand, and introduce products and services ahead of the competition (Venkatraman, 1989).

Defining board roles. Board members often do not know or understand their role or their role vis-à-vis that of top management and staff. And sometimes they do not know how to perform their own role well. These failures are generally due to insufficient orientation, education, and annual evaluation of board members (Bruni-Bossio et al., 2016; Connelly, 2004; Jaskyte & Renz, 2012).

Another critical issue is the board's relationship with external stakeholders and how well the board communicates with them and attends to them (Bruni-Bossio et al., 2016). In terms of innovation, research shows that communication and consensus building with stakeholders are especially important when the innovation is controversial or a significant departure from current approaches, when the organization has experienced resistance to previous change efforts, and when stakeholder resources and approval are necessary (Lewis et al., 2001).

Common wisdom is that the board should focus on the future of the organization and establish a collaborative relationship with

the executive director (or top management of the agency).

Example: The board needs to understand its responsibility for the future of the organization and to give the necessary time to future thinking. One example from the literature is the board of a healthcare agency that refocused its role by streamlining time spent on financial data and allocating 75% of meeting time for discussion of the organization's future (Thrall, 2007).

Example: In another example from the literature, the agency's board took the lead in developing a multiyear strategic plan. Once the plan was established, the organization chose a collaborative leadership model in which the board focused on policy and the professionals on implementation (Thrall, 2007). Power could have been concentrated in the hands of the president, and/or the executive director, and/or the board. A collaborative executive-board relationship, however, is the most facilitative of innovation (Jaskyte & Renz, 2012).

Stories from the Field

Principles from the literature review are brought to life through our interviews with executive directors and other top leadership at JCCs that have built the capacity for innovation, engaged in new thinking, taken risks, or implemented change. Findings cover three topics: executive qualities and behaviors, staff development, and board development.

Executive Qualities

Executive qualities most often noted in the study are strength, business sense, and open mindedness.

Strength

JCC executives who are change makers exhibit notable strength. In some cases, the executives came to the JCC from successful careers in business or from their positions as lay leaders and major donors in the community. They want but do not necessarily need the job, and thus are willing to take risks. During the interview process, one executive essentially told the search committee that if they wanted him, they had to let him do the job as he saw fit. Another executive director found himself in a battle with the board, which was having difficulty adjusting to his activist style. He told the board to decide whether they wanted to live with him or not. His success in multiplying the agency's revenue, increasing membership, improving the facility, and keeping the agency debt free won the day. The board now accepts his motto: "Take risks, think big, get big."

Yet another executive director was hired to turn the JCC around. The agency had had high rates of turnover in the top position and was two payrolls away from closing. At his first board meeting, a call was made to go into executive session. The exec confronted the president on this move, and the president backed off. Years of experience in the field had taught this exec what it takes to be assertive. As he explained, a JCC executive must be able to

speak with strength and clarity about the relationship between the board and the executive director and about the mission of the agency, from both a programming and financial perspective. The executive director, he added, needs to be political enough to develop a voting block on the board that will support him at critical moments.

Business Sense

The historical social work model of JCC leadership is over, and today's agencies are seeking executive directors with business savvy and experience. In one case, the JCC selected a new executive director with good business sense and an entrepreneurial orientation. Although the exec would describe himself as mission driven, he also knows that if there is no money, there is no mission. He constantly asks staff about how the JCC's offerings will make money or contribute to revenue. When staff approach him with ideas for a new program, he asks how they are planning to fund it. If a program is mission aligned, they may seek outside grants to subsidize those who cannot afford the program, but families who can afford the program are expected to pay the full cost of their participation.

Open Mindedness

The innovating executives we interviewed are open minded and constantly seeking inputs for new ideas. They read magazines ranging from business and industry to lifestyle publications. They subscribe to newsletters and follow other agencies on Twitter.

Interviewees mentioned books they had read, TED talks they had watched, and presentations they had attended. They cited the work of John Connor, Jim Collins, Dan Pallotta, Simon Sinek, and Thomas Friedman⁸ and talked about how these had influenced their own thinking and practice. For example, in *Thank You for Being Late*, Friedman notes that the world's largest taxi company (Uber), the largest retail business (Alibaba), and the largest hotel (Airbnb) do not own anything but rather push out other people's content. The Oshman Family JCC in Palo Alto has followed this model, pushing out content with the Shalom Hartman Institute, Judaism Unbound, the local youth theater, the Commonwealth Club, and others. As the executive director explained, the point is not about renting out the space or co-branding. It is about getting people into the JCC and providing valuable content. Most importantly, creative executive directors think by analogy. They abstract from one field or perspective and apply it to the JCC world. "I am constantly looking at trends in society and how JCCs can attack them," one exec says.

One executive conducted her own brand of market research. Over the summer, she hired interns to research the JCC's competitors in fitness, early childhood, after school, and camping. The search was limited to a five-mile radius in which there were scores of organizations and programs. A key

finding was that many competitors allow customers to buy a customizable package of services with no long-term obligation and no penalty for leaving. The simple, low-cost study sparked the exec's thinking about implications for the JCC.

Staff Development

Innovating JCCs create a culture that attracts and retains the right people. A few of the JCCs have worked with Leading Edge on creating such a culture. These JCCs have learned how to create a dynamic work culture, manage work/family balance, appreciate and acknowledge workers, be transparent about the agency's budget and goals, and build a strong staff team. As one exec explains, "culture eats strategy for breakfast."

Our research included national scans of JCCs, one of which focused on capacity building for change. Results of this scan showed that 85% of responding JCCs had made changes in how they "select, onboard, train, support, supervise, mentor, evaluate, and/or develop staff, or have taken other steps to help their staff embrace new thinking, innovation, or change." Our subsequent interviews with JCCs yielded ideas about new jobs, new staff, new culture, as well staff learning and staff reorganization.

⁸Jim Collins, *Good to Great*; Dan Pallotta, *Uncharitable: How Restraints on Nonprofits Undermine Their Potential*; also Pallotta's TED Talk, *The Way We Think about Charity is Dead Wrong* (https://www.ted.com/talks/dan_pallotta_the_way_we_think_about_charity_is_dead_wrong); Simon Sinek's TED Talk: *How Great Leaders Inspire Action* (https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action); Tom Friedman, *Thank You for Being Late*.

New Jobs

Staff development in an innovating JCC may mean the creation of new positions. The executive director of JCC Greater Boston notes three new areas of expertise that did not previously exist but are now essential to the agency: (1) family connectors who are sited in neighborhoods and serve as front-line engagement professionals; (2) staff who can think strategically about program, innovation, risk taking, technology, finances; and (3) someone who knows how to collect and use data and produce the information the JCC needs.

New Staff

In order for innovation to succeed, staff need to get behind new initiatives and have the creativity and talent to implement them well. The Buffalo JCC, for example, has emphasized to staff that taking risks and accepting minor failures are positive events. This notion has been communicated to staff through the employee newsletter, emails, and town hall meetings.

Assembling the right staff for innovation may also require laying off current staff members, some of whom may have a long history at the agency. One executive director explained that as good as it was to have employees with institutional knowledge, “they can also hold you back.” More than one interviewee told us that the executive director cannot be afraid of turnover. It may be difficult, but it brings rewards. One JCC, for example, found that by eliminating positions, the staff team gelled in a way that it had not before. Employees felt their efforts were being

recognized, and they appreciated that the “deadwood” was being cast off.

New Culture

As noted in the literature review, the most powerful step the executive director can take toward innovation is changing the agency’s culture. The new executive director at the Indianapolis JCC, for example, realized the need to change the internal culture of the agency before they could take care of external members and customers. Over the course of a two-day staff retreat that invited input from everyone, they developed a set of internal service standards for staff and created written plans to “drive home” these standards.

The standards included respect for one another, gratitude, communication, Golden Rule, ownership, and accountability. Staff were divided into five groups, and each group took responsibility for the promotion of one of these standards. Each month, they focused on one of the standards. For example, during their month, the gratitude group asked all staff, using any medium they chose, to submit what they were grateful for at work. The team turned responses into a video montage and then held a wine and chocolate viewing party. Each week during its month, the respect group sent out a short humorous video about the right and wrong way to interact with others. The catchy tagline for the wrong way was “Don’t be that guy.” The standards changed the agency’s culture. People refer to them frequently and they call out their colleagues when they fail to abide by them.

Staff Learning

Staff development also entails continuous staff learning. One executive director shares books with staff and regularly sends out short articles from *Harvard Business Review*. Staff often discuss the material at meetings, seeking out the relevance for their own work. This is an example of staff development that promotes new thinking and does not cost anything.

Staff Reorganization

In some cases, improvement resulted from staff reorganization. Indianapolis JCC, for example, combined its membership and fitness departments. Fitness was a principal reason people joined the JCC, but members were not getting full service from either department. The unified department has been better able to maximize the membership experience.

Board Development

The strength of the executive director and top management raises the agency's capacity to build a strong and effective board. As one JCC exec noted, the public perception that the agency is well run and making a difference in people's lives adds prestige to board membership. It also eases the board's role by adding legitimacy to fundraising efforts.

In our Capacity Building for Change survey, we found that 88% of responding JCCs had taken steps to develop a board supportive of a nimble and creative agency (see page 73). Below are findings from interviews with some of the JCCs that have made changes in board membership, role clarification, and fundraising.

Board Membership

As noted in the literature review, board size and composition matter when it comes to innovation.

The executive director of one JCC considers himself the gatekeeper of board membership. Although he will take suggestions from trustees, he takes control of the process in order to assure that they get the "right" people on the board.

Another JCC restructured its board. It eliminated community representatives from the Jewish Federation and Board of Rabbis. Instead of standing committees, it now works primarily through ad hoc task forces. Most importantly, the board is now open to non-Jews so that it can better represent membership. At first, current board members did not want to have non-Jewish trustees, as they feared they would not understand Jewish values. Suspecting that current board members themselves did not understand Jewish values, the executive began to bring Jewish education to the board.

Yet another JCC currently has 17 people on its board. This JCC finds that a relatively small size works for them as it increases board members' investment in the agency and its work. A fourth JCC recently tried to downsize its board. The effort proved to be a difficult but instructive undertaking. The effort was led by the executive director, board president, and a small task force of board members. They first eliminated community representation, which decreased board size to 39 trustees (plus 10 officers). Their next proposal, which was to trim the number to 30, was met with

disfavor. Board members like being on the board and did not want to leave. This sentiment was particularly strong among trustees from families with a legacy of serving on the JCC board. Board members did not grasp the problem and argued that “if it’s not broke, why fix it?” Over the next month, the executive director and board president met with board members individually and in small groups. They explained the proposal and how the size of the board was having a negative impact on the board’s effectiveness. Trustees came to understand and agree with the goals of the plan (although the timeline for implementation is now extended).

Many lessons were learned in the process. For example, discussion should have taken place earlier in the year; more time should have been given to presentation and discussion of the plan; and people’s feelings about the change should have been anticipated. Importantly, the process called into question the purpose and role of the board. Contrary to the officers’ assumption, board members did not understand their role, a topic that had not previously been discussed. Role clarification, as seen below, was a positive outcome of the process.

Role Clarification

Role clarification has three aspects: sorting out the work of the JCC board from the work of professional staff, focusing the board’s work, and establishing the board’s fundraising responsibility.

Lay-professional relationship. According to one JCC executive director, lay leaders and professional staff need to be mutually

respectful and agree on roles and responsibilities. Lay leadership should not, on its own, make unilateral decisions and then tell the staff “now you go and do it.” Respecting each other and working together changes the agency’s culture and generates the synergy necessary for work at the highest level.

The board of the Bronfman Family JCC in Santa Barbara has changed significantly over the past several years. A decade ago, when the new executive arrived, board meetings were three hours long and contentious. There were difficulties among and between staff and lay leaders, and between the agency and the local Jewish community. The exec understood that they could not change the relationship with the community until they changed the internal culture of the agency—the values, the way people treat each other, and the understanding that staff run the programs because they are the professionals. JCC board meetings are now half the length they once were. All staff regularly meet in what the exec calls “a family meeting.” And the various arms of the community work well together and help each other.

Focus. Ten years ago, the Mittleman JCC’s board was operationally focused with central concern on the “nuts and bolts” of membership numbers and the like. Today the board is strategically focused. This shift has been important for the agency’s long-range planning process. The trustees agree that the planning process is important and support the executive director’s devoting his time to this effort.

JCC boards are more likely than others to “get into the weeds.” As one JCC executive explained, board members are JCC members; they are consumers as well as leaders. Because they use the facility and are often in the building, they constantly hear “the small stuff.” In the particular case, the board was going directly to the staff with board issues, and the staff were using the board to pressure the executive. When the new exec arrived, he directed the board to come to him and not to staff or department heads with their issues. He refocused the board on the big picture—major issues and mission.

Fundraising. The literature on nonprofit boards emphasizes the board’s role in fundraising, a critical role for innovation. Yet many JCCs have low rates of board giving and participation in fundraising. The executive at one of the JCCs in our study recently raised the issue with the board. Although board members came to understand the need to give, they did not accept the concept of a minimum requirement. At another JCC, in contrast, the board approved its first minimum gift policy for board members just last year. Board giving matters to outside funders. In

Buffalo, for example, local foundations refused to support the JCC’s fundraising for a capital project because there was only one gift from a JCC board member. The executive director challenged the board: He would personally give one dollar for every two dollars they donated, with the caveat that there had to be 100% board participation and a minimum gift of \$5,000. Reluctant to leave money on the table, the board agreed, putting the exec in a position to return to the foundations.

The issue is not simply board giving but board participation in fundraising. The executive director at the JCC of the North Shore in Marblehead, MA is the primary fundraiser for the agency but relies on the board to introduce him to prospects. He recently tried a new approach with incoming board members. Rather than directing them to a committee, he met with each one to talk about fundraising. He solicited their ideas for prospects and helped them understand fundraising as their key responsibility. Starting in this way, he hopes to change the board’s participation fundraising.

COMMUNITY

Jewish community will either speak to actual needs, articulate obligations which people recognize, provide fulfillment for which people yearn—or it will not elicit their energies or shape their lives. —Professor Arnold M. Eisen, 1995

Chapter Summary

Human beings strive for sense of community. They long to be part of something larger and more important than themselves and, within this context, to be recognized and valued as unique individuals. JCCs have *community* in their name and over the decades have wrestled with how to achieve a strong and meaningful community. This chapter reviews the contemporary literature on community—what it means and how it is built. It then turns to examples from the JCCs to illustrate how they are creating new models of community.

Literature Review

Benefits

A strong sense of community has been empirically shown to have many benefits to individuals and their communities.

- In general, sense of community enhances personal outcomes such as wellbeing and life satisfaction (Farrell, Aubry, & Coulombe, 2004; Prezza & Constantini, 1998).

- Within organizations, a greater sense of community is associated with higher levels of participation, empowerment, social cohesion, and attachment (Hughey, Peterson, Lowe, & Oprescu, 2008; Long & Perkins, 2007; Talo, Mannarini, & Rochira, 2014; Wilkinson, 2007).

Communally, sense of community has been associated with various forms of civic engagement including neighboring behaviors, local involvement in advocacy, and intentions to vote or be politically active (Chavis, Hogge, McMillan, & Wandersman, 1986; Davidson & Cotter, 1989; Doolittle & McDonald, 1978).

Elements

Practitioners and researchers have described and studied the elements that constitute the experience of community. Among these are connection, shared purpose, and reciprocal responsibility (Bishop, Chertok, & Jason, 1997; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Sarason, 1974). Each of these can be fostered within an organization.

- Connection means that individuals are recognized as part of a group or organization. They feel that they belong and are linked to other members through a web of relationships. They know others and are known by them in return. They feel at home in the organization and sense that this is a place where they can comfortably be themselves (Kanter, 1972). Recent research on Jewish young adults in urban communities, for example, noted that many yearn for the connection and sense of easy familiarity they enjoyed in youth group or Jewish camp while growing up (Chertok, Koren, Bernstein, & Belzer, 2017).
- Shared purpose is the perception that an organization has important values or goals that transcend individual members. Shared purpose can imbue all facets of participation in the organization with a sense of meaning that continually reminds members of the greater purpose of their membership (Kanter, 1972).
- Reciprocal responsibility balances the collective purpose and needs of the group or organization with those of individual members. Organizations that value reciprocal responsibility affirm the central role of members and create multiple ways for them to get involved and contribute. *How We Gather*, for example, describes how many emerging organizations provide services similar to those of more traditional institutions but do so with a special emphasis on the underlying values of obligation, transparency, authenticity, creative expression, and social justice (Thurston & ter Kuile, 2015).

Strategies

The literature discusses several ways that organizations emphasize and build community. These include staying close to the customer, developing communities of practice, targeting sub-communities, and creating third places.

Staying Close to the Customer

As society changes and the communal marketplace has become more competitive, the need to understand the customer or member has become ever more critical. JCCs are not alone in this need.

- Senior centers are faced with changing conceptions of retirement, the growing segment of baby boomers who have not been attracted to traditional senior centers, and greater competition in the marketplace of senior programs (Pardasani & Thompson, 2012; Turner, 2004; Young, 2006).

- Cultural institutions (e.g., libraries, archives, museums) have had to rethink how they relate to users and members. In many instances, their traditional users were researchers seeking information for professional purposes. Their growing new audience, in contrast, is lay people seeking information for personal reasons (Adams, 2007).
- Mainstream religious organizations are contending with the expanding number of Americans who do not identify with a religion and describe themselves as atheist, agnostics, or “nothing in particular” (Pew Research Center, 2015). These “nones” constitute over one third of the millennial generation. Jewish communal leaders, like their counterparts in other faith communities, have noted “the seeming absence of an entire age cohort from organized religious life” (Belzer & Miller, 2007).
- Studies of nonprofits have found that stakeholders’ perception of the organization’s responsiveness to their priorities and needs is strongly related to their perception of the organization’s effectiveness. Organizations rated as high performing also engaged stakeholders more often (Balser & McClusky, 2005; Herman & Renz, 2004).
- In for-profit organizations, stronger customer orientation is associated with greater operational and financial performance. Organizations that focus on their customers create competitively differentiated services and thereby outperform peer organizations and increase customer retention (Kelly, 1992; Narver & Slater, 1990; Wright, Pearce, & Busbin, 1997).

In all of these cases, the organizations in question need to understand the interests, needs, and concerns of their new or prospective audiences. Customer orientation has significant benefit for agencies looking to innovate with new programs or services.

- Research shows that community center members have a greater sense of belonging and shared ownership when their needs and preferences are included in the organization’s program development (Glover, 2004).

One strategy for staying close to the customer is using design thinking for program development. Design thinking is based on the premise that new ideas need to be tested in the market during their seminal phases. The process begins with empathy—understanding the perspective of the potential user of the product or service (Kelley & Littman, 2001; Voss et al., 2006). This first step forms the foundation for the following phases of framing, brainstorming, prototyping, and testing. Innovators seek out various sources of data about people’s reaction to new products and services. These include surveys and interviews with customers at different touchpoints, with employees who interface with customers at these touchpoints, and with potential or former customers (Foss, Laursen, & Pedersen, 2011; Manohar & Pandit, 2014;

Rose, 2017). The resultant information enables the organization to learn from its customers about what is working and what is not.

Communities of Practice

Communities of practice are groupings of individuals with similar interests. These communities allow participants to pool their knowledge and experience and to encourage each other in pursuit of common goals. In the process, participants tend to form strong bonds with one another (Wenger, 1999; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

Example: CrossFit, an affiliate network of fitness centers, essentially operates as a community of practice. It focuses on building a sense of purpose and accountability among members through shared language, group exercise programs, and celebrations of progress on personal fitness goals. Research on CrossFit notes that these gyms engender higher levels of social capital than do traditional gyms (Whiteman-Sandland, Hawkins, & Clayton, 2016).

Community of Communities

Participation rates tend to be higher within smaller organizations. A classic study of student involvement found that those who attended small high schools were more likely to be involved in school activities as compared with their peers who attended larger schools. These students were more likely to see their contributions as critical and to feel a heightened sense of obligation (Barker & Gump, 1964; Wicker, 1969). Similarly, research on different size Jewish

communities found that members of small local Jewish communities are more likely to get involved and participate in a greater variety of ways than are their counterparts who live in more densely populated Jewish areas (Boxer, forthcoming).

As such, large organizations may focus on creating a sense of belonging within the sub-communities that exist within the larger entity. This strategy is particularly common in the synagogue and church world.

Example: At Saddleback Church—one of the largest, most successful, and most studied megachurches—understanding members' lives is an essential step toward securing their ongoing participation and commitment. Pastor Rick Warren explains: "Within our community there are most likely many subcultures, or subgroups. To reach each of these groups you need to discover how they think. What are their interests? What do they value? Where do they hurt? What are they afraid of? What are the most prominent features of the way they live? What are their most popular radio stations? The more you know about these people the easier it will be to reach them" (Wilford, 2012).

Third Places

Third places, a term coined by sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1989), are informal public gathering spaces—such as coffeehouses or town squares—that bring people together outside the realms of home and work. A third place is often experienced as a home away from home. Third places have been popularized by Starbucks, and community

organizations are now trying to create them within their own buildings or through gatherings of members in various local venues. Such efforts are in keeping with market research that shows the preference of empty nesters and young adults for living situations that are close to stores, entertainment, and communal gathering spaces and conducive to knowing their neighbors (Grant et al., 2013).

Citing Big Tent Judaism's concept of "public space Judaism," Rabin (2018) argues that the next stage for the Jewish community is teaching leaders to turn public space into the default mode of Jewish engagement: "When we create our synagogues as if they are built out of bricks, we tie ourselves to one location and lose sight of Judaism's unequivocal preference for bringing Torah to the Jewish people, as opposed to assuming that the people will show up no matter how or where we offer Jewish life." The same can be said for Jewish community centers.

Stories from the Field

Stories from the field illustrate a variety of innovative approaches to community building in JCCs. These include developing a broader sense of community, expanding the idea of membership, bringing programs and services out to the community, using third spaces, articulating a shared purpose, and finding ways to stay close to the customer.

Broadening Sense of Community

The executive director of the Mayerson JCC in Cincinnati is promoting a new view of

community to suit current realities. Rather than a singular focus on the agency, he wants the staff and board to consider how the JCC is part of the fabric of the larger community and how the JCC connects people to each other (and not necessarily to the agency). He understands that the JCC does not "own" its members and that members have multiple options for creating community in their lives. This idea is central to his leadership. In his words, he "did not take the job to run a JCC but to drive this sense of community."

One of his first initiatives was a community sukkah art exhibit. The theme of the event in 2013, the inaugural year, was community. The JCC erected a huge sukkah in its courtyard and invited every Jewish community organization plus United Way, the city's art museum, and others to create 3'x6' panels expressing their organization's interpretation of the theme. The JCC provided support in the form of advisors and funds for supplies. Despite initial pushback (how would it get done? how would it be paid for? etc.), most of the groups participated, crowds of people saw it, and the verdict declared it "cool." Schools of all types came to see the exhibit; Jewish and non-Jewish families came with their children; there was coverage in the news media; and the topic itself sparked great conversations. The sukkah art exhibit has continued annually and remains the JCC's strongest message that the agency is about creating community.

The JCC also started a farmer's market a couple of years ago. In addition to the farmers who participate, anyone or any

group can come and, without charge, set up a booth and sell crafts, baked goods, or other products. People come. They mill around, have coffee and talk to each other. It is a third place, a community gathering.

The exec has trained staff to understand that programming is not just about the program but about how it fosters community. He has let go staff who did not embrace the concept. Whenever staff are planning an activity or event, he asks how it connects people, and if there is no good answer he asks “then why are we doing it?” A few years ago at the annual meeting, he gave a TED-like talk in which he explained that connecting people is the JCC’s “why.” “It drives everything we do.”

Redefining Membership

Innovating JCCs are changing how they define the community they are serving and how they structure their membership dues.

Who Is Served

Innovating JCCs are redefining what it means to be a *Jewish* community center. Executive directors are often called upon to defend revenue streams that have no apparent Jewish content. Creative executives generally do not care if partners and tenants are Jewish, although they may seek out partners and tenants whose values are consistent with those of the JCC. They see that there are many ways that these outside programs are consistent with the JCC’s mission. The programs provide the JCC with additional revenue that can be used throughout the agency. They serve a population of concern to the JCC (e.g.,

children), and they get the JCC name out into the community.

The same holds for membership. One JCC attributes its success to its freedom from “old Jewish constructs.” JCCs like this one embrace all kinds of families. They delight in non-Jewish preschool families that choose to do Shabbat because they love the idea. These JCCs promote Shabbat digital detox as a Jewish value, even for non-Jews. They include non-Jews on their board. As one exec said, “Torah commanded the Jews to be a light unto all nations. Nowhere in the Torah does it say to help only Jewish people.”

Given shifting demographics, the JCC of Youngstown has had to reframe its mission toward serving the community—Jews and non-Jews—with Jewish values. The JCC will address the needs of its Jewish members (a small minority of total membership) and support Jewish life in Youngstown, but it will also express Jewish values as a way to serve the broader community. Although some Jewish funding sources will not support the agency because of its large non-Jewish population, the JCC is positioning itself to diversify its funding base.

Membership Dues

One executive director noted that membership cuts two ways. Requiring formal membership emphasizes the transactional nature of the customer’s relationship with the JCC. However, eliminating formal membership undermines people’s sense of connection to the agency.

Several JCCs in our study have revised their dues structure. Dues are an essential revenue stream for JCCs and it is likely there will be more experimentation with new models in the future.

JCC Chicago's new dues structure was inspired by Amazon. Anyone can buy anything from Amazon. However, if you want two-day delivery and all the add-ons (photos, video, music, two-hour grocery delivery, Amazon Fresh), you have to become an Amazon Prime member. In fact, Amazon has added so many benefits to upsell the customer that they now have the weekly Prime newsletter to help customers get the most from their membership.

With basic membership at JCC Chicago (J-Connect), the customer can do anything at the JCC and simply pay for the program—early childhood, camp, fitness, or other programs. When someone pays early childhood tuition, they automatically become a J-Connect member for free. J-Connect includes a set of basic benefits (e.g., 12 free visits to the fitness center, two tickets to the film festival). Once someone becomes a J-Connect member, the JCC's goal is to upsell them. If the individual has used the fitness facilities 12 times and now wants to use them more frequently, they can become a J-Fit member. As with Amazon Prime, this gives the customer all of the basic benefits plus unlimited use of the fitness facilities, group exercise classes, pools and gymnasiums. One benefit to the strategy is that the JCC can now claim

thousands of members, a number that impresses potential funders. The challenge is training frontline staff in upselling. The JCC needs to be highly intentional about preparing staff for the new strategy and may eventually need a coordinating position (e.g., director of engagement) to manage the shift.

About 20% of revenues at **JCC Greater Boston** are from membership dues. Securing these dollars has become increasingly difficult and costly in recent years. The JCC has had to give more discounts and incentives to get people to sign on. Because people want more flexibility, the JCC eventually went to month-to-month membership. As a result, it is losing weeks (e.g., as people go on hiatus), but it is gaining in terms of predictability and planning. Membership forecasts are now based on a new calculation of what it costs to get the member (e.g., cost of waiving the registration fee) and the smaller number of people who will pay for a full annual membership.

In 2017, **JCC of Youngstown** made the decision to reduce the annual price of a family membership by \$200. The JCC was previously part of a discount membership program for employees of local corporations. However, the program was not effective in attracting new people. The JCC ended participation in the program and transferred the amount saved to all member families.

There was also a sense that the previous membership structure was not giving members enough value for the monthly cost. Membership covered the fitness center and pool, but did not include program discounts. The new membership structure stipulates a 25% differential in all program fees for members versus nonmembers. This policy is consistent with the literature on connection and the clear distinction between insiders and outsiders. The policy makes the value of membership apparent and adds to the motivation to join. In the first year, these changes resulted in a 30% growth in membership and a 50% increase in building visits.

In spring 2018, the **JCC of Greater Columbus** implemented several changes to its dues policy. The aim was to increase membership with a particular focus on young adults and members of the Jewish community. The previous structure had as many as 24 membership categories (based on age, household size, etc.). In the new system, people can join online. Membership is available monthly or annually and simplified into six categories. Members under age 30 pay only 50% of membership fees. The definition of family member was narrowed, but there are now deep discounts for a second or third relative on the membership application. (Nontraditional families or same sex partners living together were and continue to be considered families for the purpose of membership). Responses to the changes were positive although it will take some time to measure impact.

Bringing Programs to People

A number of JCCs provide programs and services in multiple locations, in public spaces outside of the building, and/or in people's homes and backyards. One JCC has a community engagement director with designated staff who travel to the homes of people who have no Jewish institutions in their local area. The engagement professionals help families or groups of families have meaningful Jewish experiences, such as celebrating Shabbat or building a sukkah. Other JCCs host programs in bars, restaurants, libraries, parks, senior housing, schools, university buildings, and a host of other venues. One JCC understands that their brand holds regardless of location, and it thus works hard to be a "recognized brand more than a destination or facility."

Leaders at another JCC believe that their teen room was a mistake and their best move was assuming responsibility for Jewish Student Connection (JSC), a program run within the local high schools. Once they had JSC, they were able to develop student clubs within the schools (where the students are) and connect teens to other opportunities in the JCC—overnight camp, counselor positions in the day camp, volunteer work, special teen programs, and the like.

JCC Greater Boston aspires to provide services and platforms wherever Jews live. When the JCC acquired the franchise for PJ Library, they began to build an infrastructure around it for delivering services. They built a database of 14,000 households that

receive PJ Library books. The JCC received support from the local Jewish Federation for a family engagement professional. It built a Department for Family Engagement which now has eight “family connectors” located in different parts of the metropolitan area. These connectors run over 100 programs outside the walls of the JCC—everything from a large Purim event at the Boston Children’s Museum to a more intimate mothers’ group that meets at a local playground.

Seeking ways to reach out to different geographic areas, **Aaron Family JCC of Dallas** purchased a trailer truck as a moveable classroom, the J on Wheels. The program, which started in fall 2017, has provoked great creativity in outreach and programming. The trailer has been used for yoga, a challah braiding class, a preschool “truck time” program, an exercise program for seniors, Shabbat programming for day campers at outlying bus stops, CPR training, a Mommy and Me program, and more. They are still in the experimental stage, trying out different types of programs, in different locations, for different age groups and demographics.

After the decision was taken to close its building, the **JCC of Northern New Jersey** undertook a strategic planning process to determine how to continue to fulfill its mission beyond the walls. The planning process identified the need for early childhood services in four

geographic zones previously served by the JCC. The agency is now developing early childhood programs “little by little,” beginning with one zone. The program will be run by the JCC in spaces rented from synagogues, community centers, office buildings, and other “creative locations.” In this way, the JCC can assure that the program will be pluralistic with no barriers to entry. In the next few years, if the right talent can be found, lessons learned from the first zone will be carried over to a second zone in need of early childhood programming.

The Columbus JCC reaches non-member Jews through outreach programs that are open to everyone. Of the 13 films shown at the most recent Jewish film festival, for example, only three were shown at the JCC and the rest were shown in theaters throughout the city. The JCC runs a Jewish book fair across Columbus. The main site is the JCC, but the fair also has a presence in a local mall and in synagogues. The JCC also ran a Hanukkah program for the Columbus Zoo’s “Zoo Lights” festival (usually perceived as a Christmas celebration) which drew Jews—both affiliated and unaffiliated—region wide.

Pursuing Shared Purpose

The literature describes shared purpose as a quality that can imbue an organization with a sense of meaning and remind members of the greater purpose of their membership.

The JCC of Greater Pittsburgh has established an overarching shared purpose through its new Center for Loving Kindness and Civic Engagement. Programmatically, the center links the JCC's efforts in civic engagement with its American Jewish Museum. Issues currently at the forefront are racism, immigration, environmentalism, and gun violence. The work is not done just by and for the JCC, but by and for the JCC in concert with community partners.

The Center has sparked great creativity in programming. It has given the museum a focus and has opened up the whole JCC community to the civic engagement platform. It is strengthening the JCC's brand by celebrating diversity within the agency and extending its community relations work. The Center enables the JCC to speak the same language with United Way as it would with the Jewish Federation. Teens and young adults are attracted to the idea as they live integrated lives and believe the Jewish community benefits from engagement with the world. As the JCC moves ahead, it envisions lovingkindness and civic engagement defining who they are in camping, early childhood, and in health and wellness. In the end, it will be an integrated platform that weaves existing pieces together.

The executive director summarizes this work as follows: JCCs have to be relevant. To be relevant they have to speak the language of the Jewish community and the larger community. If the platform is built on values and these

values exist within the JCC's service areas, it becomes integral to the definition of a 21st century JCC. It is unlikely that the Center for Loving Kindness and Civic Engagement will be a revenue generator, but it could attract and inspire a new donor base and could also be a differentiator in the JCC's core business.

Staying Close to the Customer

The literature describes shared purpose as a quality that can imbue an organization with a sense of meaning and remind members of the greater purpose of their membership.

When the **Merage JCC** in Orange County opened in 2004, they decided to do as many programs as they could, keep whatever worked, and eliminate the rest. In the first pass, they kept about 420 "excellent" programs and eliminated 235 programs. To this day, the JCC staff team continues to evaluate programs at the end of every year, dividing them into four categories based on whether or not they generate revenue and whether or not they align with the core mission. Excellent programs with low participation are discontinued as are programs of poor quality.

When the **Oshman Family JCC** in Palo Alto opened its new building, it offered numerous afterschool classes and programs for children, but only a few people registered. The executive director wondered why no one wanted to come—was it the price or the quality of the program? He hired instructors with some

money from the marketing budget. He then offered more than a dozen free classes, all at the beginner level, all things that children like. Families that wanted a more advanced class could pay a small fee to move up. That semester every class was full. The experiment cost “almost nothing” and answered the question.

Oshman JCC has also done an exemplary job in developing its ICC@JCC (Israeli Cultural Connection). It followed an incremental process, responding to the needs of the Israeli community as they became evident. The program started with one professional and one lay leader, both Israelis, who went out and listened to the Israelis in the community. The Israelis wanted to bridge the gap with the American community, so ICC built a leadership program. Recently arrived Israelis did not know how to “plug in” so ICC created a Hebrew website (like Angie’s List). Families that were not joining a synagogue wanted a program for their children, so, ICC started a uniquely Israeli bar/t mitzvah program (no Torah service). Parents were concerned that their children would lose their Hebrew language, so, ICC built Begeg Kefet, a school that teaches both Hebrew language and Israeli culture and is eligible for high school credit. After meeting with pregnant mothers, they launched Libi, a center for growing families. Concerns about how Israel is perceived politically led to the creation of

Israel for Reel, which uses Israeli films to educate on the complexity of Israeli culture. Israel for Reel was so successful, ICC started to run it in schools and now there are discussions all over the community.

When the executive director arrived at **Silverlake Independent Jewish Community Center** in Los Angeles in 2009, she began a process of community conversations. She was committed to listening and responding to what people want and what they would show up for. This approach was particularly important in the competitive Los Angeles market. The first opportunity emerged from the successful preschool, as there was nothing for children and families when they aged out. The JCC began a program for post-preschool Jewish engagement with 30 families. The program has multiplied in size. It has grown grade by grade and eventually (beyond their anticipations) added a customizable, individualized bar/t mitzvah mentoring program.

Partnerships and Collaboration

Chapter Summary

Collaboration is the process by which two or more individuals or groups define common problems or opportunities and develop and implement joint solutions or responses. Most relevant for JCCs are collaborations between organizations—whether other JCCs, nonprofits, private businesses, or government agencies.

This chapter begins with highlights from the literature on nonprofit collaborations and concludes with various examples of inter-organizational partnerships from our interviews with innovating JCCs. Through these relationships, the JCCs have opened the door between themselves and other organizations and have become players in the wider community.

Literature Review

Inter-organizational partnerships or collaboration come about in several ways: through a brokering organization or individual (e.g., the mayor) who draws attention to a problem that needs solution, through an initial agreement on problem definition, or through prior relationships or existing networks in which trust has already been built (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006). For such collaborations to form, participating organizations must shift their focus from a traditional, organization-centric view to a network-focused view that

acknowledges the organization's interdependence with its environment (Svendsen & Laberge, 2005).

Where collaboration is successful, participating organizations hold a positive view of the relationship and understand the need for it. They feel strongly about solving the problem and about the proposed project, and they trust and appreciate their partners. Participating organizations also need to appreciate what it is that they, themselves, bring to the relationship (Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson, & Allen, 2001).

Benefits of Collaboration

Collaborations or partnerships are one way that nonprofits can stay competitive in their markets. Relationships with other organizations can encourage innovation through the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and resources; the transfer of legitimacy from one organization to another; and the leveraging of each partner's resources. Importantly, partnerships can help an organization better understand and connect to its target audiences and engage new audiences (Jaskyte & Lee, 2006). Partnerships can also help organizations seek bigger solutions to identified problems.

As described in the following examples, different types of collaboration yield different benefits.

Collaboration for Social Innovation

The nonprofit sector has become an important source of social innovation both in the United States and Europe. Social innovation seeks new ways to meet needs that are not adequately met by the market or the public sector. It may promote behavioral changes needed to tackle major societal challenges, such as climate change. It may also empower people and create new relationships and models of collaboration (Sanzo, Álvarez, Rey, & García, 2015).

Collaborations for social innovation benefit by building relationships with external stakeholders. These may include other organizational sectors (e.g., neighborhood groups, faith-based organizations,

government entities), and community residents, leaders, and policy makers (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001).

A study of over 200 nonprofit human service agencies found that the extent and quality of collaboration corresponded with higher levels of engagement in social innovation. Collaboration helped agencies build capacity (information and resources), align goals, and secure buy in from key stakeholders. Collaboration also helped the agencies focus their efforts, identify common issues, and create larger scale solutions. Larger agencies, with more human and financial resources, were more likely than smaller agencies to engage in social innovation. The same held true for agencies that were less reliant on fees for service and other market-based revenue (Shier & Handy, 2015).

Collaboration of Nonprofit and For-profit Organizations

For-profit organizations may have a corporate commitment to social responsibility that can drive a partnership with nonprofits. In such collaborations, the corporation or business firm creates economic value by enhancing its competitiveness at the same time that it creates value for the community by developing new models for solving social problems. A survey of nonprofits involved in such arrangements in Europe found that participating nonprofits not only gained financial support from the for-profit partnership but also enjoyed other benefits such as knowledge, connections, technology, and best practices (Sanzo et al., 2015).

Coming Alongside

Another form of partnership is between established organizations and newer, less developed organizations. Thurston and ter Kuile (2017) describe collaborations in which well-established organizations that are seeking to expand their offerings or markets work with emerging organizations that have innovative or niche offerings but lack resources such as space or professional expertise. In this process of “coming alongside,” organizations form a synergistic relationship that benefits both.

Successful Collaboration

Successful collaboration requires many of the same elements as any other successful operation or innovation—clear purpose, common vision and goals, action plans, and commitment to follow through. Other characteristics cited in the literature include the following (Bryson et al., 2006; Dorado, 2005; Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Mulroy & Shay, 1997; Svendsen & Laberge, 2005):

- diversity among the collaborating partners;
- conveners who are politically skilled and have credibility with each of the partners, familiarity with the problem being addressed, perceived neutrality;
- future orientation that allows for new courses of action;
- clarity on the presenting problem, the mandate of the collaboration, and commitment of resources by various stakeholders;
- social networking that supports resource mobilization;
- clear structure and personnel for

planning, decision making, and implementation;

- strong leadership skillful in communication, conflict resolution, resource development, administration, relationship building, and vision;
- sponsors to provide the collaboration with prestige, authority, and resources; and champions to sustain the collaboration.

Collaborations are built between organizations, but they require the interpersonal skills of individuals to make them work. Relationships among collaborating organizations need to be based on trust. Building trust may involve learning about the history and points of view of partner organizations or developing shared language and concepts (Bryson et al., 2006; Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Sanzo et al., 2015; Svendsen & Laberge, 2005). In addition, partner organizations may need to adjust their external boundaries to participate. They may need to redraw their catchment area or learn how to share turf (Mulroy & Shay, 1997).

Once formed, several elements are needed to sustain a collaboration. These include clear objectives that address community needs and suit the community’s ecology and culture, human and financial resources, continuous learning and gathering of feedback and evaluation data, and the capacity to change as conditions change (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001).

Collaboration does not always lead to innovation, especially if the actors remain the same and are of a single mind.

Catalyzing innovation may require reframing the purpose of the collaboration, bringing in new knowledge and organizations, encouraging transformative learning and creative thinking, and other techniques known to stimulate new thinking and action (Hartley et al., 2013).

Stories from the Field

Collaboration and partnerships offer many benefits to a Jewish community center. Depending on the type of partnership, they may provide opportunities for cross-marketing, increase program participation and associated tuition and fees, make better use of the facility, and extend the JCC's reach into different geographic areas. Partnerships and collaboration can be attractive to prospective donors. Partnerships that entail shared staff, technology, and space can lead to greater efficiency. Partnerships with best-in-class providers can raise the quality of content in JCC programs and help the JCC reach new markets.

Several of our interviewees have broadened the scope of their JCC to include the wider Jewish community and beyond. They are open to partnerships and cooperative arrangements of all types. They have helped lay leaders understand that the vision is not about what is best for the JCC, but what is best for the Jewish community and, for some of them, the wider community in which they live. They believe that the future is not about new agencies or more buildings but integrated partnerships that leverage capital, assets, and skills.

The examples below exemplify different forms of partnership that JCCs have formed with one another, with other Jewish organizations, with non-Jewish organizations, and with the larger community.

Partnerships with Other JCCs

In 2016, the **St. Paul JCC and Sabes JCC** in Minneapolis began to build a partnership focused on joint efforts and resource sharing. To begin, the two JCCs held their first joint fundraiser. The event, which featured a humorous video about “the great divide” between the two communities, proved that the two agencies could work together. They then undertook small projects, collaborating on existing programs like the annual book fair and film festival. They then created a shared marketing department and began to partner on cultural arts under the rubric of Twin Cities Cultural Arts.

Several elements eased the way for the partnership. The new execs at both agencies were ready to collaborate. St. Paul JCC was primed for the partnership. Its culture and structure had long eschewed silos, with professionals sharing responsibility and working across departments. The agency also had years of experience working collaboratively with other community organizations, both Jewish and secular.

A joint meeting of the two boards gave trustees a chance to get to know each other and to talk through issues in collaboration. A four-day workshop

brought together staff from both agencies to imagine possibilities for programs and services. The workshop helped staff get to know their colleagues in the other JCC and, together, to think beyond current frameworks.

Critical lessons learned along the way were the importance of having the right partner at the individual level (“the right fit”), getting to know the partner well, and establishing a compatible working style.

After the conclusion of our study, the two JCCs entered into a two-year agreement for their agencies to be managed by a single CEO. During the next two years, committees will explore the possibility of even deeper ties between the two agencies. As per the designated CEO, “We’re trying hard to not have a preconceived notion of what the best outcome is. But we are never going back to the time when we aren’t collaborating.”⁹

JCC with Other Jewish Organizations

Leadership at **Oshman Family JCC** in Palo Alto has come to realize that, given customers’ desire for high quality, the JCC can no longer be all things to all people. In areas where the JCC may not be the best provider of content, it now seeks to promote others’ content. For example, the JCC is working with Reut Institute on Zionism 3.0 (concerning the place of Diaspora Jews in Israel), with

Tova Birnbaum (founder of the secular yeshiva BINA) on a new kind of Jewish learning, and with Days United (which does content for Jewish, Chinese, and Hindu holidays) on monthly boxes for Jewish home observance. The JCC is the lead sponsor for Judaism Unbound, a podcast hosted by Daniel Libenson of the Institute for the Next Jewish Future. The JCC helps assure the podcast’s continuation. As a secondary benefit, it gets prime billing as a forward-looking agency. Although these examples are all Jewish related, they need not be. The JCC embraces the idea of amplifying others’ strengths whether Jewish or not.

The **Bronfman Family JCC** in Santa Barbara has sought to be complementary to—and not competitive with—synagogues. They believe that more engagement, regardless of locale, is good for the Jewish community. For many years, the community had had a “meet the rabbis” program, a pre-holiday show promoting the various synagogues to the unaffiliated. The JCC proposed reinventing the program. Today it is a multi-month Jewish education series run by the JCC adult education department. Each rabbi has one evening in which to teach whatever s/he chooses. The topics have been appealing and more people than ever before are coming to the center and meeting rabbis. With a small investment of marketing and staff time, the JCC is beginning to affect organizational relationships within the Jewish community.

⁹ <https://tcjewfolk.com/st-paul-sabes-jccs-heading-into-new-era/>

Mittleman JCC in Portland has a unique organizational structure in which it shares staff and a campus with Portland Jewish Academy, the local community day school. Although each organization is its own 501(c)3, there is significant overlap in lay leadership across the two organizations. Teaching staff are dedicated to the school, but the administrative staff (IT, HR, CFO, marketing and development) work for both organizations. This shared model was established in 2006 after the JCC had become insolvent, its board had resigned, and the JCC had temporarily closed its doors. Some members of the community feared that the school would not survive without the JCC. Some felt the JCC was critical to the community and wanted to revive it. The partnership with the school was a win-win move. A restructuring plan was developed and capital funds were raised. The community has benefited from a multimillion dollar renovation of the campus, and the JCC now has an operating model that ensures its long-term financial sustainability.

JCC with Non-Jewish Organizations

The **JCC of Greater Baltimore** has crafted an exclusive partnership with LifeBridge Health Systems (LBHS). The partnership links JCC members to the health and wellness resources of LBH and gives LBH access to the JCC “market.” This arrangement has resulted in annual revenue to the JCC of \$250k and improved health and wellness programming for the JCC community. It

has also become an important source of referrals for the hospital. A fulltime LBHS wellness educator is now part of the JCC management team, and the program is branded as LifeBridge Health Living Well at the J.

In order to upgrade programs and services, the JCC could have outsourced certain functions to best-in-class providers. Rather, the JCC shifted its vision to partnering, which creates a different kind of relationship and enlarges the JCC brand. The JCC hopes to extend this model further. It is seeking Jewish and other nonprofits and businesses that want to partner in delivering service to the community—whether in fitness, camp, older adults, or any other area. It is thinking about potential partners in each market and ways to leverage the JCC brand and facility to create the partnership.

JCC with the Broader Community

Some JCCs, like Milwaukee, form partnerships with community foundations and agencies with shared interests or overlapping missions. Other JCCs in our study, like Youngstown, understand that they are not so large that they can survive or flourish in and of themselves. Their partnerships with the larger community are strategies for sustainability.

Partnership resides at the heart of **Harry and Rose Samson Family JCC** in Milwaukee. For them, partnership is not asking another organization to join the JCC in solving a problem. Rather it is

collectively identifying and defining the problem and then working together on its solution. Partnership is not a calculation of what the agency can get from the partner. In fact, the JCC may not benefit immediately from a partnership (although it will in the long run). The philosophy is that building a healthier Milwaukee makes the community stronger and that, in turn, makes the Jewish community stronger. So central is partnership to the JCC that it created an award to recognize the best partner organizations. The award is considered a high honor in the community.

The JCC runs a highly successful annual fundraiser and shares the proceeds with smaller nonprofits in the community. The JCC is part of the community's Hunger Taskforce and has been running a large food pantry for 40 years. The JCC gets significant support for the pantry from a local foundation. This support eventually grew to include support and collaboration on other programs of mutual interest (e.g., summer camp for children with cancer).

Given declines in the Jewish population, the **JCC of Youngstown** has reset its mission to serve the broader community with Jewish values, while still maintaining its commitment to support Jewish life and community. The JCC has established a number of revenue generating partnerships that support this mission.

United Way has engaged the JCC as a vendor to provide after school programming in 13 city schools. All staff in the program are JCC staff. The program offers a range of content from fitness to Israeli culture. Being a United Way service vendor has proven to be more profitable than being a grantee, yielding a net profit of \$120k. In summer 2018, the United Way paid the full rate for 24 children to attend the JCC day camp. The partnership also benefits the JCC. It enables the JCC to serve people in need, to enact the Jewish value of caring for those in need, and to generate revenue.

When a private swim club in the local area was on the brink of closing for lack of funds, the JCC made an offer to assume ownership and make the required capital improvements. Had it not been for the JCC, the club today would be a neighborhood eyesore, an empty hole in the ground. Instead, the outdoor pool is filled with children and families and serves as a viable source of significant revenue and membership for the JCC.

When the city of Youngstown was down to one public pool, the mayor approached the JCC and asked if the city could hire the JCC to train lifeguards and manage the chemicals to keep the facility open. The JCC agreed to do so if the effort would involve the city schools. The JCC is now seen as a place that teaches children to swim and provides jobs and job training for teens who want

to be counselors, life guards, swim instructors, or work at the snack shack. The hope is that the partnership will create a leadership loop in which the children who learn to swim at the JCC will one day return as pool staff.

In addition, the JCC partnered with a school district to convert an old warehouse into a youth recreation center which the JCC uses to operate after school programs and host sports leagues. After school programs now serve 12 schools and generate net profits of \$40k annually. The JCC partners with Mercy Health to provide JCC memberships to patients with chronic diseases. The memberships are paid for by the Mercy Health Foundation. The JCC provides security training to local community groups including churches, schools, and mosques. It has also become a service provider to the Jewish Federation and other Jewish agencies and local synagogues, helping with security, program coordination, and marketing.

These partnerships have diversified revenue sources and thereby added to the JCC's long-term stability. Importantly, they have helped promote relations with both the Jewish and general community in Youngstown.

Epilogue

In presenting initial findings from the Innovating JCCs study, the research team often heard that the case stories were all well and good but, given fundamental differences among JCCs, they did not pertain to “my” JCC. Or we heard that “my” JCC cannot do these things because it lacks the resources—money, time, talent, location, or space. These reactions belie a core message of the report; namely, that creatives seek out new ideas from a broad array of sources and hold to the belief that new ideas can come from anywhere and everywhere. Journalist Robert Weider is often quoted as saying, “Anyone can look for fashion in a boutique or history in a museum. The creative explorer looks for history in a hardware store and fashion in an airport.” The question is not whether an organization can replicate what is described in the report but rather what ideas the report sparks in the reader’s own thinking.

Also note that many of the ideas in this report were not expensive. Building a culture of innovation is part of the executive’s job which is already covered by salary. Sharing articles and readings with staff is low-cost professional development.

Incremental innovation starts with a single manageable step and builds from there. Trying out different program options before they are fully formed (known in Silicon Valley as minimal viable product) is a relatively inexpensive way to test the market. Building partnerships may take significant upfront time, but the eventual payoff—financial and otherwise—far exceeds the input.

Admittedly, there is something misleading about describing a year or more of concerted effort in a paragraph. It may suggest that the work was easy, its success was assured from the beginning, and there were no missteps along the way. The reality, of course, is quite different. A second observation about innovating JCC leaders is that, regardless of difficulties, they take action. Asked about advice they may have for others, they variously said: “Innovation and competitiveness do not come about by sitting in your office and conjuring up an idea.” “Doing something is better than doing nothing.” “You have to be willing to go first. You cannot wait for signs.” “You have to push the boundaries as far as you can, something we are afraid to do in the Jewish

community.” “Have intestinal fortitude. Be patient with failure but not with failure in the same way twice.”

A third finding is that innovating executives accept that their JCC can no longer be all things to all people. They understand that quality is paramount. They, therefore, do what they can uniquely do best, and they drop the rest or partner with other organizations or talent to get it done. As one JCC exec said, “greater success comes from expanding the tent by focusing more narrowly rather than more broadly.” In this regard, the innovating JCC execs ask strategic questions. In seeking the program areas where the JCC could be best in class, one exec asked, in what areas can we lead and in what areas can we participate? The former became the agency’s strategic priorities. Others, following the teaching of Simon Sinek, asked about the agency’s “what, how, and why.” One exec said that the answers to these three questions have driven everything at his JCC for the past seven years. Every time someone brings a new program idea, another exec asks how it supports the agency’s mission and its bottom line. There is no tolerance for programs that do not contribute positively

to the work of the agency. Other common strategic moves seen in the stories are rightsizing space, staff, and programming; creating the right staff positions for a 21st century JCC; terminating staff who cannot accept new ways of working and bringing on new people who can; building an effective board for innovation; and redefining the place of the agency within the Jewish and wider community.

Based on the literature reviews and the case stories, it appears that moving JCCs and other legacy membership organizations into the 21st century will entail a shift in focus from quantity to quality—a commitment to excellent programs and services and to powerful experiences for participants. The reality, as one exec explained, is that investing in quality staff and programming may take more resources upfront, but it yields greater impact and growth over time. Moving into the new century will also require strong leadership—high in creativity, savvy in business, and unafraid of taking action. And it will entail much broader definitions of and attention to community, engagement, and partnerships.

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Appendix A: Methodology

The study of innovating JCCs was conducted between January and October 2018. It entailed key informant interviews, scans of Jewish community centers across the United States, case interviews with select JCCs, and literature reviews on key topics. Although the research was national, it intentionally did not include any of the JCCs in Greater New York. These JCCs are well known to UJA-Federation of NY, and the purpose of the study was to reach out far and wide beyond New York.

Key Informant Interviews

In the early weeks of the project, interviews were conducted with key informants at UJA-Federation of New York, JCC Association of North America (JCCA), and in innovating organizations outside of the JCC world. These interviews included 12 lay and professional leaders at UJA-Federation, five JCCA community consultants, and top professionals at five innovating Jewish organizations outside of the JCC movement. A full list of interviewees appears in Appendix B.

Key informants at UJA-Federation and JCCA were asked for their definition of a successful JCC, their understanding of the current JCC model, their ideas for alternative models, and their nominations for innovating organizations. They were also asked for their views on innovation: areas they believe are most amenable to innovation and the forces operating for and against change.

Key informants at outside organizations were asked about their innovations: why and how they came into being, how they currently operate, and where they are heading in the future.

Scans of Jewish Community Centers

Two brief national scans of JCCs across the country were conducted in January and May 2018 respectively. The first was an attempt to identify JCCs with experience in innovation. The second was a search for JCCs that had worked to build their capacity to undertake innovation or change. In both instances, responses to the survey were used to identify JCCs for further, in-depth study (as described below).

New Ideas

The New Ideas survey was sent to the executives of 157 JCCs in North America. JCCs included those that are affiliated with JCCA and those that are not. Responses were received from 78 agencies (50% response rate).

The survey asked participants if their JCC followed a traditional model (i.e., building centric; membership based; reliant on early childhood, fitness, and camp). 48% said yes, completely; 39% said yes, somewhat; and 13% said not at all.

The survey then asked whether their JCC had undertaken change efforts in seven areas of their operations as seen in Table A1. Every responding agency claimed at least one area of innovation. Many used the space provided on the survey to provide additional details.

Capacity Building for Change

The Capacity Building for Change survey was sent to the executive director at 143 JCCs.¹⁰ This second survey focused on the

various capacities associated with innovative JCCs. The list of capacities was derived from the first round of interviews and the literature review on innovation. The purpose of the survey was to identify agencies that had increased their capacity to be agile, resilient, and creative in matters relating to board development, staffing, management, fundraising, and member relations. Responses, received from 59 JCCs (41% response rate), appear in Table A2. As with the previous survey, many used the space provided on the survey to add comments about these efforts.

All of the responding JCCs had made changes in at least two areas. Just over half answered “yes” to all six questions. Such a high level of activity suggests pervasive effort at building JCCs’ capacity for change and/or the self-selecting nature of respondents.

¹⁰ JCCs that were New Ideas case stories were not included in the second-round survey.

Table A1: Number of JCCs exploring change (in descending order by percent “yes”)

Area of change	Question	% Yes
Media and technology	Have you used social media or other technology to enhance the member/participant experience, build community, deliver programs or services, or fulfill your agency’s purposes in a new way?	93%
Role in larger community	Have you redefined your agency’s role in the larger community, changed how you enact that role, or built new kinds of relationships with other organizations and agencies (including the local Jewish federation)?	91%
Programs and populations	Have you moved into new programming areas or reached out to new populations?	85%
Business model	Have you sought new sources of revenue (including philanthropic dollars), redesigned your dues or fees model, or considered other ways of balancing the budget and generating excess revenue?	84%
Physical space	Have you found new ways to use your physical space or locations outside the building for programs, services, or community building?	80%
Other	Have you considered or experimented with other changes to your JCC’s model and operations?	70%
Membership	Have you changed how you think and talk about the concept of “membership”?	64%

Table A2: Number of JCCs that have built capacity for change (in descending order by percent “yes”)

Type of capacity	Question	% Yes
Management team	Have you made changes to the management of your agency in terms of personnel, roles and role responsibilities, team building, professional development, or have you taken other steps to invest in and develop your management team?	93%
Board development	Have you made changes to your board size, composition, structure, expectations, selection, training, procedures, or have you taken other steps to develop a board supportive of a nimble and creative agency?	88%
Mission, vision and values	Have you made changes in how you think about, talk about, or enact your agency’s core purpose, values, and aspirations?	88%
Staff	Have you made changes in how you select, onboard, train, support, supervise, mentor, evaluate, and/or develop staff, or have you taken other steps to help your staff embrace new thinking, innovation, or change?	85%
Member relations	Have you made changes in how the agency and members relate to one another? This may include public relations and communications; information sharing; opportunities to get to know each other better; opportunities for member input, volunteerism, engagement, or contribution; or other steps to build a new kind of relationship between the JCC and its members and participants.	78%
Resource development	Have you tried new ways to increase financial support for experimentation or innovation?	78%

Case Interviews

Based on findings from our scans and nominations from our key informants, we chose JCCs for in-depth interviews about their innovating efforts. Two rounds of interviews were conducted. The first, conducted in February and March 2018, focused on new ideas in 14 JCCs. The second, conducted in July 2018, focused on capacity building for innovation in an additional eight JCCs. All interviews were conducted by telephone and lasted approximately one hour.

- The New Ideas interviews focused on the innovation cited in the survey response. Interviewees were asked to trace the story of the particular innovation from the initial motivation for the innovation, sources of new ideas, and options considered to the issues encountered in implementation. They were also asked what they had learned from the experience—both positive and negative—and what advice they would give to colleagues who were interested in exploring the same possibility at their JCC. The final question asked where they envision their JCC will be in five years with regard to the particular innovation.
- The Capacity Building interviews similarly focused on the specific effort noted in the agency's response to the survey. Interviewees were asked to describe what they were doing in regards to the particular effort (e.g., management, staff, or board development). Follow up questions

concerned the motivation for moving in this direction, lessons learned, implications for the future of the JCC, and advice for colleagues who might pursue this same route.

Literature Review

Several literature reviews were conducted in order to gain context and perspective from outside the Jewish community and the JCC movement. These focused on suburban trends, innovation in the nonprofit sector (including the role of leadership), community building and new models for community-based and membership organizations, and inter-organizational collaboration.

The reviews cast a wide net and included searches of databases of literature on these topics and the collection of scores of publications on organizations of all types. Literature includes theoretical articles, research reports, and published articles written by expert practitioners. The presentation of this information highlights common themes and ideas most relevant to Jewish community centers.

Appendix B: Key Informants

UJA-Federation of New York		
Amy Bressman	Chair	Jewish Life Department
Brett Barth	Chair	Jewish Communal Network
Martine Fleishman	Lay leader	UJA-Federation Board of Directors; Westchester
Hana Gruenberg	Managing Director	Jewish Life Department
Deborah Joselow	Chief Planning Officer	
Alexandra Roth Kahn	Managing Director	Caring Department
Elisabeth Kostin	Director of Agency Assessment	
Jill Mendelson	Deputy Managing Director	Jewish Communal Network
Hindy Poupko	Deputy Chief Planning Officer	
Alan Raboy	Managing Director	Jewish Communal Network
Jodi Schwartz	Chair	Caring Department
Ellen Thurm	Westchester Director	Program Services and Venture Philanthropy

JCC Association of North America		
Dorie Denelle	Vice-President	Certified Governance Trainer
Janet Elam	Senior Vice-President	Community Consultation and Executive Leadership
Alan Goldberg	Senior Vice-President	Operations
Andy Paller	Vice-President	Community Consultant / Benchmarking
David Posner	Vice-President	Community Consultant / Strategic Performance
Innovating Jewish Organizations		
Irene Lehrer Sandlow	Executive Director	Sketchpad (Chicago)
David Dring	Executive Director	SelfHelp Innovation Services (NY)
Heather Moran	Executive Director	Sixth & I (Washington DC)
Fraidy Aber	Director of Education and Civic Engagement	Contemporary Jewish Museum (SF)
Joy Levitt	Executive Director	Marlene Meyerson JCC (Harlem)

Appendix C: JCCs Included in the Study of New Ideas

(In alphabetical order by state)

Organization	City	State
Merage JCC of Orange County	Irvine	CA
Silverlake Independent JCC	Los Angeles, CA	CA
Oshman Family JCC	Palo Alto	CA
Bronfman Family JCC	Santa Barbara	CA
Boulder JCC	Boulder	CO
JCC Chicago	Chicago	IL
JCC of Indianapolis	Indianapolis	IN
JCC Greater Boston	Newton	MA
JCC of the North Shore	Marblehead	MA
JCC of Greater Baltimore	Baltimore	MD
St. Paul JCC	St. Paul	MN
Kaplen JCC on the Palisades	Tenafly	NJ
JCC of Northern NJ	Township of Washington	NJ
JCC of Greater Buffalo	Amherst	NY
JCC of Youngstown	Youngstown	OH
Mayerson JCC of Cincinnati	Cincinnati	OH
JCC of Greater Columbus	Columbus	OH
Mittleman JCC	Portland	OR
JCC of Greater Pittsburgh	Pittsburgh	PA
Kaiserman JCC	Wynnewood (Philadelphia)	PA
Aaron Family JCC of Dallas	Dallas	TX
Harry & Rose Samson Family JCC	Whitefish Bay (Milwaukee)	WI