

DEFINING THE RELATIONSHIP

The Federation/Jewish Community Relations Council Connection

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The merging of shared concerns between the federation and community relations field has grown over the past three decades. However, at times, areas of tension have arisen over different approaches to these concerns, particularly in communities where Jewish community relations councils are independent federation agencies. This article recommends ways in which federation and JCRCs can work together in a positive partnership.

Relationships by definition are transitional. They evolve and operate on the basis of historical experiences, mutual interests, and desired achievable outcomes. Yet, the mission of the community relations field, as with the federation system, is rooted in certain principles. Simply stated, the community relations discipline is based on the principle of assuring the security and rights of Jews and others. As defined by Phillip Bernstein (1983), the mission statement for federations involves a commitment to building, serving, and enhancing Jewish communal unity.

The Jewish community relations field, in great measure, predates the modern federation network and in certain community settings Jewish community relations councils (JCRCs) were formed and operated through a different institutional track from that of the federation model. Likewise, over the past 50 years, JCRCs have evolved, incorporating a variety of different structural models ranging from independent agencies to dependent federation committees. Just as there are diverse institutional systems, there exists among JCRCs and their leadership a variety of perceptions regarding the substance of JCRC-federation relationships.

The initial JCRC mandate was to effectively integrate American Jews into the mainstream of this society. Its specific emphasis was to counter anti-Semitism, defend the constitutional principle of the separation

of church and state, and expound the themes of civil liberties and the cause of social justice while pursuing new and more equitable options in America's immigration policies. As a discipline, this field was particularly influential in the 1950s and 1960s in fostering coalitions that focused Jewish efforts in nurturing interreligious relationships and in championing civil rights campaigns for minorities. The employment of coalitional models has represented an effective strategy to achieve defined objectives.

MERGING OF SHARED CONCERNS

The merging of shared concerns between federation and the Jewish community relations field has grown since the 1967 Six-Day War. It became increasingly clear that the established coalitional partnerships were less intact after that time. In contrast, federation's agenda and its appeal to the Jewish community became more compelling. This was particularly evident in federation's ability to attract influential lay leadership and to galvanize the community around an ethnic political focus. Establishing the case for Israel became both a financial and political imperative, and the corresponding emergence of a Jewish awakening in the Soviet Union directed a mutual response to the cause of Russian Jewry. During the past 25 years, as a result, there has been a different and more complex relationship.

These arenas of shared concern have

been approached at times by these two segments of our community from different avenues of interest. Some of the leadership associated with these two instruments of Jewish life have, at times, perceived each other in a competitive relationship, each with varying expectations of the other's role and responsibilities within the community. This is particularly apparent in communities where JCRCs are independent federation agencies. Earl Raab has given specific attention to this issue:

A trend in recent years has been the movement of Jewish influentials from the formal advocacy enterprise. At one time, they participated in both the federations and in overall community relations agencies. Yet, the necessary growth of federation enterprises has drawn more of these influentials' attention and energies.

Concomitantly, some federations themselves have increased their involvement in community relations matters, especially those relating to Israel and Soviet Jewry, because of the interest of the Jewish public in those matters. However, federation policy makers have generally not had the opportunity to accumulate the understanding of the overall community relations mission nor the specialized knowledge and experience that have been available to professionalized advocacy bodies.

In addition, some of the more glamorous aspects of directly influencing government policy makers on the national level, an important part of the advocacy mission, have tended to draw some influentials away from participation in and understanding of the total advocacy enterprise (Raab, 1991, pp. 186-187).

Contributing factors to some of the areas of tension are by definition impediments that neither institution can easily eliminate. Fiscal pressures and competing demands on federation place fewer available resources in the hands of the federation system. In an environment of scarce resources, competition for dollars becomes more apparent and

creates heightened institutional concerns. JCRCs have been directly affected by these budget constraints. Major independent JCRCs and their smaller counterparts in recent years have been required to reduce program and staff services, thereby decreasing the impact of these structures. As Raab noted, in seeking to create a new environment of giving, federation and United Jewish Appeal campaigns have sought to draw upon the political agendas and substantive components that represent the underpinning of the community relations field. As federations have increased their involvement in public affairs, there has been a blurring of agendas and competition for leadership.

Correspondingly, JCRCs and federations are collectively challenged today by single-issue constituencies, offering the alluring benefits of a specifically focused arena of Jewish activism. Highly visible and successful, these enterprises of Jewish civic and philanthropic expression tend to reduce the depth and range of Jewish interests to "sound-bite" proportions.

TASKS FACING JCRCs

The tasks facing JCRCs and the community relations field in the future are sixfold:

1. JCRCs agendas must be clear, creative and inclusive.
2. They need to attract community leadership, not only those who are well situated within the larger community, but also identified players within the federation/campaign system.
3. JCRCs must continue to effectively demonstrate their political skills in marshalling support from governmental elites around core issues and in establishing viable coalitional efforts that can enhance Jewish and general community interests.
4. JCRCs need to demonstrate that they are proactive by defining issues and shaping appropriate political responses and community strategies to meet those concerns, yet always taking into ac-

count the interests as well as the impact on federations' mandate within the community.

5. JCRCs need to demonstrate that their deliberative, inclusive decision-making process is important to the overall well-being of the Jewish community.
6. Finally, JCRCs, in partnership with federations, must be able to reaffirm the scope of their multifaceted interests. The historic strength of the American Jewish community has been its commitment to a diversity of concerns. This is no more appropriately demonstrated than through community relations.

ROLE OF FEDERATIONS

In response, the federation network needs to continue to acknowledge the important and essential roles that JCRCs can play with reference to the substantive agenda of the federation system and its community-building process (outreach and leadership development). These functions include recognizing and using the JCRC as the public affairs arm of the organized Jewish community. The JCRC's ability to interpret and articulate the complex set of political interests on behalf of the organized Jewish community can serve as a valuable resource to the annual campaign, other departments, and services of federation, as well as to its family of agencies. JCRCs must be seen as the appropriate community structure in which debate and action on controversial issues are not only permissible but understood by federations as having value for the organized Jewish community. This deliberative process, in fact, gives credibility to the federation's status and image.

Correspondingly, federations must continue to recognize the value of their JCRCs as an appropriate address for placing key community leadership and as the central marketplace for Jewish political interests. Federations need to realize, as well, the importance of their financial relationships, as they represent the primary funding source for many JCRCs and the exclusive source of support for most. In turn, JCRCs must be

supportive of the institutional ingredients central to the federation's mission: the primacy of campaigning, its planning and allocations functions, and its community-building responsibilities.

At a time when this nation is undergoing significant economic and social stress, the JCRC-federation partnership can be a particularly positive and essential one in helping the Jewish community define its internal as well as external priorities and in effectively managing the political mine fields ahead within American and Jewish life.

Additionally, the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey addresses some of the shared concerns affecting Jewish identity and participation patterns that have implications for the entire Jewish community. There are, however, specific challenges here as well that would permit JCRCs to play an important role in providing opportunities for marginally and nonaffiliated Jews to understand better the social and political imperatives inherent in Jewish continuity.

As the Jewish community moves beyond its postwar focus — namely, the case for Israel's security, the battle against anti-Semitism, and the struggle for human rights for Jewish communities residing under repressive regimes — there are new opportunities for federations to position the community relations agenda in the emerging set of priorities around Jewish identity and continuity. For many American Jews the political arena has been a center of primary interest for them in transmitting their religious values into practice. Such causes as social justice, economic opportunity, and environmental responsibility have attracted Jewish participation. More careful attention needs to be paid by the community relations field in developing appropriate Jewish institutional responses to these considerations.

RELATIONSHIPS ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL

The Council of Jewish Federations and the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC) also play a special role in this scenario. The tenor of rec-

ognition and support given to JCRCs must be replicated in a national context as well:

- Financial and program support for NJCRAC as the instrument of action on behalf of the communities and their JCRCs are prerequisites for asserting the federation's commitment to the community relations discipline and to the special relationship that NJCRAC has had historically and will have, for the future, as part of the federation system.
- Access to the Washington political scene is a critical necessity for JCRCs and NJCRAC. This objective serves, as well, the interests of federations, as they seek to maximize their own credibility and impact as local constituencies with a national agenda. The challenge to CJF and the federation system should include ensuring an effective Washington presence for the NJCRAC. One such approach might include an expanded CJF Washington Action Office that could offer the appropriate institutional option for such access by NJCRAC and JCRCs.
- The introduction of a UJA-NJCRAC partnership may also be an appropriate direction in linking more prominently the messages and meaning of the annual campaign to the political framework of community and social action.

On a personal note, when I spoke at the Minkoff Institute, I referred to certain new realities:

I would note that the once vaunted sense of Jewish identity and community is dissipating as Jews geographically disperse, move from one generation to another, and politically divide even around such once unifying issues as Israel...namely, we are a diminishing presence, with a weakened sense of resolve around our core issues. On another, more parochial basis, there is a kind of smugness about us and about our institutional mode of operation. Very few of us are tapping into community models that are external to our own Jewish institutional world. As a result,

we tend to replicate always from within, rarely drawing on the achievements and experience from without.

Ultimately, the principle upon which we now must recast our focus is based on the theme that Adam ultimately learned from his experience in the Garden of Eden when he reportedly said to Eve, "Easy come, easy go, my dear. We live in an age of transition" (Windmueller, 1991).

CONCLUSION

We are living in a period of fundamental change, which serves to remind us of the shared purposes that drive and motivate all of our colleagues in the field of community service. Earl Raab's definition of community relations has meaning and validity for our federation colleagues as well:

The primary and essential Jewish community relations mission is advocacy for the security of the Jews — for the ability of the individual Jew to be Jewish without disability and the ability of Jewish institutions to be Jewish without disability, in the United States and elsewhere....Jewish self interest is the cornerstone of...(our) professional mission (Raab, 1991, p. 181).

Ultimately, our respective enterprises need to create a common language, one that acknowledges the community relations field's commitment to Jewish security while also affirming our collective dedication to the principle of Jewish continuity.

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