

Financial Resource Development: A Role for Central Agencies

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INTRODUCTION

Funding Jewish education is at the top of the Jewish communal agenda. This represents an evolving awareness of the critical importance of Jewish education and its relationship to Jewish identity, continuity and affiliation on the part of Jewish communal leadership. It also presents challenging opportunities for institutions to think creatively and strategically about effective ways to articulate compelling cases for funding Jewish education programs and initiatives that are relevant, planful and, above all, responsive to unmet communal needs.

Traditionally, central agencies for Jewish education limited their activities to programs and services that were either programmatic or consultative in nature. Today however, central agencies are beginning to evolve into effective conduits for federation and foundation funding. Recently, the organized Jewish community is turning to central agencies to assist institutions in the areas of grantsmanship, donor cultivation, and financial resource development (FRD). As a result of their expanding and evolving roles in the area of FRD, central agencies currently influence the disbursement of close to \$340 million. This figure includes millions of dollars raised or leveraged through central agency advocacy, fund-raising and FRD efforts.¹

However, as fund-raising activities for Jewish education on the local, regional and national levels become more sophisticated, complex and competitive, central agencies are challenged to take on even greater FRD responsibilities. This will surely test their viability, effectiveness, leadership and vision.

The challenge for central agencies therefore is to equip themselves with the necessary human resources, expertise and leadership to support and promote future growth and success in this critical area.

SOCIAL PLANNING: THE CONTEXT FOR JEWISH EDUCATION

FRD “involves a systematized approach to the securing of more funds and services for Jewish educational programs.”² Sometimes referred to as grantsmanship or development, FRD combines advocacy, lay leadership development, fund-raising, research into foundations and corporations, program development, and proposal writing.³ Effective FRD involves a holistic systems approach that begins with a social planning process, and a strategic planning focus that provides a priority-setting context for potential funders and funding sources.

Thus, effective FRD for Jewish education should be an outgrowth of a comprehensive social planning process. As such, a planful FRD campaign should *assess the needs, and determine objectives, costs and benefits of the service/program to be provided*. Such planning processes have recently been instrumental in capturing the interest and imaginations of major contributors.

EFFECTIVE FRD PARTNERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT

Most central agencies for Jewish education are either autonomous federation member agencies or actual federation entities. For this reason it is absolutely essential that central agencies forge FRD partnerships with their local federations. If the “bottom line” is raising addi-

tional dollars for Jewish education, it would be short sighted not to partner with the most effective fund-raising instrument in the Jewish world. The challenge lies in determining the most effective ways to effect this partnership.

One possible strategy is for central agencies and federations to jointly initiate coordinated communal efforts to raise funds specifically targeted to Jewish educational programs, projects and institutions.

The first step in this effort would be to establish a joint central agency/federation body, housed either at the federation or at the central agency, which would:

- Engage in a comprehensive FRD strategic plan;
- Oversee the planning, coordination and implementation of FRD initiatives on behalf of Jewish education in the community;
- Provide oversight guidance and policy in the areas of grantsmanship, agency-based proposal development, solicitation, foundation/donors cultivation and public/private foundations;
- Monitor and assess the progress of the central agency's FRD efforts on behalf of Jewish education in the community; and
- Promote and advocate for increased funding for Jewish education in the community.

Obviously, the success of this effort will depend on appropriate professional leadership and staffing, lay leadership engagement and commitment, a shared vision resulting from the strategic planning process, mutual trust and understanding; and a passion and commitment to make it work!

The nature and scope of the structure required for such strategic collaborative partnerships will vary from community to community. However, all must be based on true central agency-federation partnership.

Another possible strategy for central agencies and federations is to jointly convene a forum of local senior philanthropic leadership. This group would:

- Create a “common language” or “vocabulary” and a critical mass of funders for Jewish education;
- Introduce “major issues” or “big ideas/concepts” in Jewish education in consultation with national foundations and institutions;
- Discuss and debate what it would mean from a human, capital and financial perspective to have an organized Jewish community that takes Jewish education seriously;
- Assess or inventory the magnitude of private funding in support of Jewish education in the community;
- Compare and contrast federation endowment support versus funder independence, and determine ways in which to create a confluence between their support and independence; and
- Provide recognition in order to “give credit where credit is due.”

Creating such a forum would enable the central agency and the federation jointly to develop a local funders group that is conversant with the major issues of Jewish education. This group could then: (a) embark on educational initiatives either individually or collaboratively, (b) be knowledgeable and competent evaluators of educational proposals they review for potential funding, and (c) create a critical mass of individuals who have both the resources and clout to influence the Jewish education agenda consistent with articulated communal priorities.

GETTING STARTED

As a first step toward establishing a central agency-based FRD program, the agency must differentiate between programs and initiatives that require *short-term* funding and those that require either permanent and/or *long-term* support. Doing so will determine whether an endowment or other funding mechanisms are required. Parenthetically “permanent dollars” resulting from an endowment is the ideal, in contrast to one-time-only “soft dollars” that continually require new sources of funding.

Once a “menu” of funding opportunities is compiled by means of a communal priority-setting process, the

agency will be ready to embark on a solicitation campaign. Depending on the structure of the agency and culture of the community, the solicitation team may be comprised of lay members of the agency board of directors, federation lay leadership, the agency director or a combination of the three. When submitting formal proposals the grant-writers must conduct research about the foundation's composition, goals and giving history. Knowledge and familiarity with potential funders, their interests and funding history are essential for successful solicitations. The potential for success is also greatly increased when at least one member of the team is personally acquainted with the potential donor.

Finally, the central agency director and/or an agency liaison should establish an ongoing professional relationship with the local federation endowment/foundation director. This will help the agency identify prospective donors and potential sources of funding. These relationships should be built upon trust and commitment to a shared vision—the essential ingredients for building an effective FRD effort in any environment.

POSTSCRIPT

This paper presents a contextual framework for the critical need for central agencies to build their capacities in the areas of fund-raising and FRD. Financial support for Jewish education must be further developed by means of a partnership between funders and leaders of central agencies for Jewish education.

Funders should come to see central agencies for Jewish education as key local agencies for planning and implementing such programs for the community. Central agencies must develop the experience, expertise and authority to manage communal processes (in partnership with their local federations) that will identify and prioritize the educational programs that the community requires. Funders should leverage their resources and independence to support bold, innovative projects. Together they will take the necessary risks to forge a mutually held vision that will sustain a healthy Jewish community well into the 21st century. The challenge is to think creatively and boldly about ways that central agencies can plan and implement effective financial resource development programs that are meaningful, relevant, vision-driven and, above all, responsive to communal needs.

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1 "Central Agencies Count." *Association of Directors of Central Agencies*, Fall, 2000.

2 Blum, Deborah Cardoza. "Resource Development for Jewish Education." *Jewish Education*, Vol 53, No. 4, Winter 1985, p.45.

3 Ibid.