

The United Way as a Source of Jewish Communal Leaders

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... there may be more and more competition for the managerial group of leaders in the future as the United Way depends more heavily on the Corporate Community and the Jewish Federation finds that the population of Jewish entrepreneurs is declining while the population of Jewish salaried professionals is increasing.

Jewish Federation leaders—both volunteers and professionals—frequently suggest that Jewish individuals become involved in the United Way.¹ Two reasons are usually given for this suggestion. The first is to increase or at least to maintain the level of United Way funding to Jewish communal agencies and the second is to ensure the expression of Jewish interests within the United Way forum.

At the same time, two types of Jewish leaders have been identified as serving the United Way. The first type is those Jewish people who are involved in the Jewish community to a very limited degree—if at all. The second type is those Jewish people who are involved in both the Jewish and the general communities. William Avrunin has described the former group of Jewish leaders as “United Way Jews.” These are people who are “barely identifiable” as Jews and who do nothing to “enhance Jewish participation” in the United Way. Avrunin describes the second group of Jewish leaders in the United Way as having “a strong identity with the organized Jewish community.” These latter Jews, according to Avrunin, do not participate in the United Way

as “official representatives of the Federation,” but they do “recognize the common interest of the Jewish and general community,” and by implication Avrunin suggests that these latter Jews can express both Jewish and general community interests within the forum of the United Way. The further implication of Avrunin’s remarks is that given the two primary objectives of the Jewish community vis-a-vis the United Way—the increase in funding and the expression of Jewish interests—the Jewish Federation should encourage more of the second group of Jewish leaders, those who are also Jewish Federation leaders, to become involved in the United Way.

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that while Avrunin’s recommendation is valid, the “United Way Jews” are often identified Jews, and moreover they should be recognized as such by the organized Jewish community. Furthermore, it is in the best interests of the Jewish community to tap these United Way leaders for leadership positions in the Jewish Federation. Thus while Avrunin and others suggest that the Jewish Federation should encourage Jewish Federation leaders to participate in the United Way, the Jewish Federation should also make use of those United Way Jewish leaders who are not involved in the Federation. Instead of a one-way passage of leaders from the Jewish Federation to the United Way, there should be a two-way exchange of Jewish leaders between the Jewish Federation and the United Way. This recommendation is based on the findings of a recent study of Jewish leaders in the United Way, “The Differential Association of

¹ For example, see Benjamin Rosenberg, “Jewish Agencies and Jewish Responsibility” (paper presented at the 29th General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, Detroit, Michigan, 1960, pp. 4-5); Henry Botuck, “Changing United Way Policies and Their Impact on Federation Planning: ‘Affirmative Action’—Financing of Select Services” (paper presented at the 43rd General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, November 13-17, 1974); and William Avrunin, “Relationship with United Ways,” *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, XLIX, No. 2 (Winter, 1972).

Jewish Volunteers Between Voluntary Community Organizations: The Jewish Federation and the United Way."²

The Study

The purpose of the study was to discover the reasons why some Jewish leaders participate in the United Way and not the Jewish Federation and why some leaders participate in both organizations. The method of inquiry was survey research of three groups of leaders—those involved in only the United Way, those involved in only the Jewish Federation, and those involved in both organizations. It was felt that a comparative analysis of the responses of these groups of leaders to a questionnaire would identify reasons for the differential patterns of association between the two organizations—the Jewish Federation and the United Way. The primary goals of the questionnaire were to measure the respondents' degree of Jewish identification, perception of the functions of the Jewish Federation and the United Way, and demographic characteristics. Four hundred and twenty-four questionnaires were sent to people who had served on decision-making committees of the United Way and the Jewish Federation during the period of 1970-1977 in five New England cities. Decision-making committees were defined as the Executive Committee, Board of Directors, or Allocations Committee.³ The response rate was 79 percent.

The data were analyzed in relation to the three groups of leaders: leaders only in the United Way, leaders only in the Jewish Federation, and leaders in both organizations. These groups will hereafter be referred to as United Way leaders, Jewish Federation leaders, and dual leaders. The primary tools of analysis were proportions and the Chi Square test of significance, and when the data were measured on the interval scale, measures of central tendency were computed.

The United Way Leaders

The United Way leaders are Jewishly

identified. They donate on the average of \$2,421 to the Jewish Federation and an additional \$1,306 to other Jewish drives. This sum is not a "token gift" and is especially meaningful when compared to income figures—70 percent of the United Way leaders had incomes below \$50,000. (In comparison, while the Jewish Federation leaders and dual leaders gave considerably larger average gifts to the Jewish Federation, \$7,434 and \$10,540 respectively, the incomes of these leaders were much higher than those of the United Way leaders; approximately 40 percent of the Jewish Federation leaders and the dual leaders indicated incomes below \$50,000 and approximately 60 percent indicated incomes above \$50,000.)

The United Way leaders belong to synagogues and temples; 79 percent of them indicated membership in these religious institutions. Although the United Way leaders did not follow Jewish traditions and practices to the same degree as the Jewish Federation leaders, our data demonstrate that they cannot be written off by the Jewish community as unidentified Jews.

² See Deborah Kaplan Polivy, "The Differential Association of Jewish Volunteers Between Voluntary Community Organization Agencies: The Jewish Federation and the United Way" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1978.)

³ The campaign structure was not used as a direct source of individuals for the study although many of the individuals involved in the committees noted above were or had been involved in campaign. Campaign was not included because the focus of the study was on decision making committees which were defined as the Board of Directors, Executive Committee, or Allocations Committee. Although we realized that many campaign committees are decision making committees, we were concerned with involvement in more than the fund raising structure. We were concerned with an ongoing commitment of time. Campaign can be a peripheral, time limited involvement although in the case of particular individuals, this may not be true. However, most often, those people who are involved in an ongoing decision making capacity in campaign will also serve on the Board of Directors of the respective organization.

The United Way leaders support the activities of the organized Jewish community. This support is indicated not only by their contributions to Jewish charities and their memberships in synagogues and temples, but it is also indicated by their responses to several questions on the questionnaire. The United Way leaders indicated that fund-raising is necessary for the local Jewish community as well as for Israel. They did not agree with the statement, "if not for the needs in Israel, there would be little importance to Jewish fund-raising." They also agreed with the statement, "Jewish services are important because they ensure the continuity of the Jewish people." Although the Jewish Federation leaders were much more ready to serve the needs of Jews than the United Way leaders, (the Jewish Federation leaders ranked serving the needs of Jewish people as their first priority whereas the United Way leaders ranked service to the general community as their first priority), the latter in no way negated the need to serve Jews. On the contrary, through their responses to questions on the need for Jewish fund raising and their actual donations, they demonstrated their support for the provision of services to the Jewish community.

While the United Way leaders clearly supported the provision of social services to the Jewish community, many of the United Way leaders also supported the current emphasis of Jewish Federations on educational and cultural services. The leaders were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement, "it is not the business of the Jewish Federation to promote Jewishness; its function is to help Jews in need." Although the statement seems to be asking two questions—should the Jewish Federation promote Jewishness or should the Federation just help Jews in need, the intent of the statement was to determine whether or not the respondents felt that the Jewish Federation should pursue the course of heightening Jewish identity or whether the Federation should solely provide services to Jews in need. A negative response (disagree) was interpreted to mean that the

Federation should not be only helping Jews in need, but also should be helping to heighten Jewish identity, whereas a positive response (agree) would indicate support only for the function of helping Jews in need. Approximately 50 percent of the United Way leaders disagreed with the statement and thus indicated their support for the Federation's emphasis on the areas of Jewish education and culture. Furthermore, not only did 50 percent of the United Way leaders support the Federation's thrust in these areas, but this same percentage thought that the Jewish federation should increase its efforts to heighten Jewish identity. These United Way leaders agreed with the statement, "the Jewish Federation should put more emphasis on Jewish education and culture." Whereas the United Way leaders are not as supportive of the Federation's efforts to heighten Jewish identity as the Jewish Federation leaders and the dual leaders, as would be expected, many of the United Way leaders do support the efforts of the Jewish Federation to heighten Jewish identity.

The United Way leaders are identified Jews who express interest in the affairs of the Jewish community. However, the United Way leaders are not likely to demonstrate their support of the Jewish community in the general community forum of the United Way. Avrunin was correct in noting that the dual leaders are likely to express Jewish interests within the United Way while our data indicate that the United Way leaders are not likely to do so. Whereas 68 percent of the dual leaders indicated that their desire to help the Jewish community was an important reason for their joining the United Way, only 27 percent of the United Way leaders expressed that sentiment. Furthermore, whereas the dual leaders expressed somewhat mixed responses as to what the role of Jewish leaders on the United Way should be, the United Way leaders overwhelmingly agreed that Jews should *not* serve as guardians of Jewish interests within the United Way and should *not* help Jewish agencies obtain increased allocations.

While the United Way leaders differ in a

significant way from the Jewish Federation leaders and the dual leaders in terms of *how* they express their Jewish identity, they also significantly differ in terms of their demographic characteristics. The United Way leaders, for the most part, were salaried individuals; 74 percent of the United Way leaders were *employees*, while only 20 percent of the Jewish Federation leaders and 32 percent of the dual leaders were such. Whereas the United Way leaders were likely to hold positions in education, government, and corporations, the Jewish Federation leaders and the dual leaders were more likely than the United Way leaders to be in the medical and legal professions or own their own establishments. Furthermore, as previously noted, 70 percent of the United Way leaders indicated incomes below \$50,000 whereas 40 percent of the Jewish Federation leaders and dual leaders indicated incomes of that order.

On the average, the United Way leaders seemed to be better educated than the Jewish Federation leaders. Although most of the Jewish Federation leaders graduated from college, approximately 25 percent did not while less than 10 percent of the United Way leaders did not graduate from college. Furthermore, the United Way leaders were more likely to hold masters degrees than the Jewish Federation leaders. Whereas 41 percent of the Jewish Federation leaders held degrees above the college level (masters and higher degrees), 57 percent of the United Way leaders held these higher degrees.

The data indicate that different types of individuals are involved in the United Way and the Jewish federation, and while some of the associational patterns can be explained by differences in the degree of Jewish identification of the individual, some of the pattern is also explained by the nature of the fund raising campaign of the respective organization. The United Way conducts what has been referred to as a "mass appeal" to a large number of community contributors.⁴ The number of gifts

⁴ See John R. Seeley, et. al., *Community Chest: A Case Study in Philanthropy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957).

is emphasized and therefore the United Way primarily involves those individuals who have the opportunity and the influence to solicit many other individuals in organizations with large number of potential givers. This fact helps explain the preponderance of salaried Jewish individuals who are involved in the United Way.

The Jewish Federation, on the other hand, conducts an individualized campaign which depends on large gifts from people within the Jewish community. Therefore, potential participants are primarily selected on the basis of the size of their gifts although access to other contributors at the same level of potential gift giving may also be an important criterion.

Conclusions

The Jewish Federation has a stake in attracting the United Way leaders to its own organizational apparatus for two reasons. The first is to educate the United Way leaders about the interests of the Jewish community so as to improve their expression of those interests within the United Way. The second reason that the Federation should begin to tap Jewish United Way leaders is to widen its own source of leadership for the future. If there are demographic changes in the Jewish community and young Jewish individuals are moving into the professional and managerial occupations and are more likely to become employed in large organizations rather than establish their own enterprises as was done in previous generations, then these individuals might be attracted to the United Way. Furthermore, since these individuals will be salaried, they will be less likely to give the large gifts that came from the entrepreneurs of previous generations, and thus, given the nature of the Federation campaign, they may in fact be ignored by the Jewish Federation in its leadership selection process. Not only did our own study indicate that such a managerial and professional class is involved in the decision making apparatus of the United Way, but the *1975 Community Survey* conducted by the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston demonstrates that there is a

change in the occupational demographics of that Jewish community. The *1975 Community Survey* reports that

the most notable change in occupation over the past decade has been the decline in managers and proprietors among males. Traditionally, many Jewish men who owned their own businesses have played an important role in the Jewish community. The percentage of male Jews in this category has declined from 37 percent to 27 percent. The primary corresponding increase is in the rate at which male Jews are employed as professionals, but there also is a slight increase in the rate of male Jews employed in clerical and sales jobs.⁵

Our data indicate that the managerial class is being attracted to the United Way. Furthermore, our data illustrate that this group believes in the necessity of Jewish social services, and therefore it seems that the Jewish Federation might consider involving these individuals within the Jewish Federation apparatus particularly in those areas which are oriented toward social service delivery.

The Jewish Federation has the instruments to involve a group of people who have expressed a commitment to the Jewish community and who have experience working within a structure which is oriented to social

⁵ Floyd J. Fowler, Jr., *1975 Community Survey* (Boston, Massachusetts: The Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, 1977), pp. 16-17.

welfare—the United Way. It seems that there may be more and more competition for the managerial group of leaders in the future as the United Way depends more heavily on the corporate community and the Jewish Federation finds that the population of Jewish entrepreneurs is declining while the population of Jewish salaried professionals is increasing. Thus, given the warning signs, the Jewish Federation may want to begin to involve managerial leaders within its organizational structure.

It therefore seems that it would be in the best interest of the Jewish Federation to develop a system of "exchange" of Jewish leaders with the United Way. The Jewish Federation contains the potential dual leaders who give fairly substantial gifts to the United Way and who are experienced campaigners, and the United Way is tapping the salaried, professional Jewish individual. In the short run, the Jewish Federation may not consider such a system of exchange to be advantageous in terms of its fund raising goals since it might see itself as "losing" leaders to the United Way. However, in the long run, if the demographic trends described herein are maintained, the Jewish Federation will find such a system beneficial in that the Federation will have developed for itself a strong, potential leadership pool.