



**Jewish Federation**  
OF NORTHEASTERN NEW YORK

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## **COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN**

**May 2012**

With funding support from



Prepared with the assistance of the  
New York Council of Nonprofits

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the spring of 2011, in recognition of its unique role in serving and strengthening the Jewish community, JFNENY initiated a strategic planning process with the goal of identifying the needs, capacities, and priorities of the Jewish community in northeastern New York. Building on the demographic data collected through a community survey conducted in 2010, the process was designed to engage a broad range of community members with diverse interests and concerns in a unified effort to develop a single set of priorities and related action steps establishing the direction of the Federation for the next several years.

In order to adequately address the challenges related to involving all key community constituencies in the development of the strategic plan, the planning process utilized a two-tiered structure guided by a central Steering Committee and supported by work groups organized around six focus areas:

- Jewish Continuity: Activities that support and reinforce Jewish tradition and values across the life span, including but not limited to youth education, adult education, camps, Hillel, Birthright Follow-up, etc.
- In-reach: Activities that strengthen the connection with individuals who are affiliated at least to some extent with local synagogues or Jewish communal agencies or who participate in Jewish communal events.
- Outreach: Activities that enhance the community's ability to engage Jews who are currently unaffiliated with any aspect of community life.
- Social Services: Services intended to enhance physical and social well-being for Jews across the life span, including but not limited to services offered under the auspices of Jewish Family Services, the Daughters of Sarah Senior Community, and the Jewish Community Centers.
- Israel: Activities that strengthen the community's ongoing relationship with and support for Israel.
- Synagogue/Federation Relations: Activities that strengthen a mutually supportive relationship between the Federation and area congregations.

The work groups were charged with responsibility for exploring each identified area in depth, assessing the community's current strengths and challenges related to each area, and developing specific recommendations for community action. Prioritizing among the extensive set of recommendations generated by the work groups required the Steering Committee to address two key strategic issues:

- What is the role of the Federation in facilitating community change?
- Given finite resources, what is the best approach to balancing the sustainability of current initiatives with new program development?

In response to these issues, the Steering Committee identified two overarching goals to serve as the foundation for the strategic plan and recommended four strategies related to each goal for implementation in the next three years:

**GOAL #1: Strengthen the Federation’s ability to serve as a community builder, facilitator, and change agent.**

Strategies Recommended for Implementation in Next Three Years:

- Enhance the Federation website to better facilitate community connections and communication.
- Revamp the Federation allocations process to stimulate development of creative programming that fosters community integration.
- Begin to facilitate community-wide conversations about opportunities for increased coordination and collaboration.
- Sponsor centralized training for synagogue and agency leadership.

**GOAL #2: Sustain or enhance current initiatives designed to support a thriving, vibrant community that engages all Jews in the region in Jewish life.**

Strategies Recommended for Implementation in Next 3 Years:

- Continue to expand outreach, education, and social activism that engage young adults and families.
- Increase fiscal incentives for travel to Israel.
- Increase the number of events sponsored in the northern areas of the region.
- Identify optimal methods for strengthening Jewish education in the community.

Once the Steering Committee had selected the strategic priorities, the work groups developed specific action steps which collectively constitute the work plan for implementation of the strategic plan over the next three years. Plan implementation will be monitored by the Federation Executive Committee. As the initial action steps are completed, the recommendations for each focus area that were not selected as immediate priorities will be considered for inclusion in the next phase of plan implementation.

The following document summarizes the key themes and recommendations generated through the planning process and presents the vision, goals, and strategies that comprise the Federation’s strategic plan as well as the specific work plan for the next three years.

## INTRODUCTION

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The mission of the Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York (JFNENY) is to build and maintain a strong and united Jewish community in order to ensure the creative survival and continuity of the Jewish people. The Federation is the central agency in northeastern New York for meeting Jewish needs and articulating Jewish concerns in the local community, in Israel, nationally and around the world.

In the spring of 2011, in recognition of its unique role in serving and strengthening the Jewish community, JFNENY initiated a strategic planning process with the goal of identifying the needs, capacities, and priorities of the Jewish community in northeastern New York. JFNENY engaged the assistance of the New York Council of Nonprofits (NYCON) to facilitate the planning process. Building on the demographic data collected through a community survey conducted in 2010, the process was designed to engage a broad range of community members with diverse interests and concerns in a unified effort to develop a single set of priorities and related action steps establishing the direction of the Federation for the next several years.

## SCOPE, APPROACH, AND METHODOLOGY

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In order to adequately address the challenges related to involving all key community constituencies in the development of the strategic plan, the planning process utilized a two-tiered structure guided by a central Steering Committee and supported by several topic specific work groups.

The Federation recruited sixteen individuals to serve on the Steering Committee. Steering Committee members represented the diversity of experience and concerns of the broader community, had strong connections with key community leadership, and had the ability to solicit essential participation of the community in both the development and implementation of the strategic plan. Once the committee was formed, planning proceeded through a six step sequence (see Appendix A), as follows:

1. Establishing The Strategic Planning Framework: The Steering Committee reviewed the data collected through the community demographic survey as well as other information sources and used the key findings to articulate the strategic vision and the overarching values that were used to guide the planning process. The Steering Committee also identified the focus areas around which the plan would be organized.
2. Focus Area Planning: Similar to the Steering Committee, work group participants with experience and expertise related to each focus area were recruited to represent the key constituencies within the community. The work groups were charged with responsibility for exploring each identified area in depth, assessing the community's current strengths and

challenges related to each area, and developing specific recommendations for community action.

3. Initial Priority Setting: The Steering Committee reviewed the focus area groups' recommendations and selected short priorities for Federation action.
4. Action Plan Development: The focus area work groups developed action plans for the selected short term priorities.
5. Action Plan Review and Approval: The Steering Committee reviewed and finalized the focus groups' action step recommendations.
6. Review and Approval of Strategic Plan Report: The final report synthesizing the results of each step in the planning process was reviewed and approved by the Steering Committee for presentation to the Federation Board of Directors.

## VISION AND VALUES

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The Steering Committee articulated the following vision and values to guide the strategic planning process:

*The vision of the Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York is to support a thriving, vibrant community that engages all Jews in the region in Jewish life.*

*Achievement of this vision will be evidenced by our ability to:*

- *Care for our growing aging population;*
- *Stimulate Jewish youth learning and networking;*
- *Sustain a community of learners seeking new ways to broaden our Jewish knowledge;*
- *Involve young adults in leadership roles;*
- *Engage and train emerging leaders;*
- *Offer families and singles of all ages a respected place in our community;*
- *Warmly welcome newcomers, blended families, and alternative lifestyles;*
- *Foster and sustain a close and caring relationship with Israel;*
- *Engage both our philanthropic leadership and the financially challenged in constructive community dialogue;*
- *Support efficient and effective philanthropy;*
- *Structure our Jewish organizations to respond effectively to the needs of our community;*
- *Make best use of available resources;*
- *Foster an environment in which the Federation and its agencies and synagogues are able to create collaborative strategies to meet communal needs.*

## **STRATEGIC PLAN FOCUS AREAS**

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Based on their review of strategic focus areas suggested by the demographic, the Steering Committee members recommended that the strategic planning work groups be organized around the following six focus areas:

1. Jewish Continuity: Activities that support and reinforce Jewish tradition and values across the life span, including but not limited to youth education, adult education, camps, Hillel, and Birthright Follow-up.
2. In-reach: Activities that strengthen the connection with individuals who are affiliated at least to some extent with local synagogues or Jewish communal agencies or who participate in Jewish communal events.
3. Outreach: Activities that enhance the community's ability to engage Jews who are currently unaffiliated with any aspect of community life.
4. Social Services: Services intended to enhance physical and social well-being for Jews across the life span, including but not limited to services offered under the auspices of Jewish Family Services, the Daughters of Sarah Senior Community, and the Jewish Community Centers.
5. Israel: Activities that strengthen the community's ongoing relationship with and support for Israel.
6. Synagogue/Federation Relations: Activities that strengthen a mutually supportive relationship between the Federation and area congregations.

## **FOCUS AREA ASSESSMENTS: KEY THEMES**

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Individuals with experience and expertise related to each focus area were recruited to serve on work groups charged with responsibility for exploring each focus area in depth, assessing the community's current strengths and challenges related to each area, and identifying opportunities to build on existing strengths as well as gaps that need to be addressed. Several common themes about the strengths and challenges of the community as a whole emerged through these discussions and are summarized below. The complete assessments related to each individual focus area are documented in Appendix B.

### **Current Community Assets/Strengths**

- The community is a “full service Jewish community” with a strong sense of “sharing and caring” among community members.
- Community members feel comfortable openly identifying themselves as Jewish.
- The community is perceived to be open and embracing, manageable in size, non-competitive, easy to approach, inclusive and welcoming to all lifestyles.
- A wide range of social, recreational, and educational programs are offered in multiple venues throughout the region.

- A broad spectrum of community based and institutional services are available for both youth and the elderly.
- There is a wide array of youth education programs including day schools, nursery schools, and congregational schools.
- Synagogues offer a wide range of worship options and serve as a primary entry point into community life.
- Good relationships among the diverse congregations are supported by the Capital District Board of Rabbis.
- The strong Federation is known as the “go to” information hub for the community, supported by knowledgeable lay leaders and staff, a strong IT infrastructure with significant capacity for managing communications, and a comprehensive data base of community members.
- Federation financial support underwrites events with broad community appeal that can also serve as both in-reach and outreach vehicles.
- A strong community connection with Israel is supported by the Federation, JERNY, and local chapters of national organizations such as Hadassah, Israel Bonds, and JNF.
- The community historically has made good use of nationally sponsored programs.
- Well-developed communications mechanisms provide regular access to lots of information.
- Development and growth of the Federation endowment fund provides ongoing support for twelve community organizations.

### **Current Community Challenges**

- The community is aging and older individuals are more connected than those who are younger. Personal priorities and approaches to spirituality are different for younger individuals; they need different reasons to get and stay connected.
- Not much is known about unaffiliated Jews living in the community—who they are, where they are, and why they choose not to be connected. Although the community offers multiple entry points, there is no formalized mechanism for helping people get connected.
- For individuals new to the community, getting connected “takes a lot of work.” It is not easy to break into established social networks.
- Synagogues serve as a primary entry point into community life but the cost of synagogue membership is prohibitive for many families.
- The Federation and synagogues both need to be more visionary and creative in their approach to engaging and sustaining connections with community members, thinking strategically about how to allow for many different ways to identify as a community member.
- The wide geographic area encompassed by the community as well as the lack of a Jewish campus limits the ability to establish a central gathering point for the full community.
- The cost of supporting multiple Jewish organizations is becoming difficult to sustain and Jewish communal agencies do not have the capacity to serve the full range of needs that exist

within the community. A large percentage of those served by Jewish communal agencies are non-Jewish, which is necessary to ensure organizational economic survival in a community with relatively small numbers of Jewish residents.

- A large number of Jewish families and individuals in the area are not affiliated with any Jewish institution, thereby lacking the connections that would facilitate access to services when needed.
- There are a limited number of community members with sufficient economic resources to underwrite major service expansions or new initiatives.
- There appears to be a “disconnect” between expressed belief and behavior among those who openly pray for Israel at their synagogues but aren’t involved with or support any other pro-Israeli organizations or activities.
- Despite existing communication mechanisms, it is still difficult to consistently promote events in a way that generates broad participation. Established communications mechanisms such as the Federation website, the Jewish World, and list serves are not being utilized to their best advantage.
- There is a lot of competition for the attention, time, and resources of both affiliated and non-affiliated Jews.
- The extensive role of the Federation in supporting community institutions is not readily visible and therefore not fully appreciated.

## **FOCUS AREA RECOMMENDATIONS: PRIORITY THEMES**

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Based on their assessment of the community strengths and challenges related to each focus area, the work groups recommended several goals and related strategies for addressing identified issues of concern (see Appendix B.) Comparable to the initial assessment process, several common themes recur throughout the individual work group recommendations.

The cross-cutting themes that emerged through the individual focus area discussions are as follows:

1. The Federation should initiate planning to ensure long term community sustainability, including:
  - Increasing coordination and collaboration to better utilize finite resources, and
  - Increasing the role of the Federation in initiating community change.
2. The Federation should play a more prominent role in facilitating community access and connections, including:
  - Enhancing its ability to serve as a communications hub and improve community-wide communication,
  - Rebranding the Federation as a community facilitator as opposed to a fund raiser,
  - Subsidizing a “Community Concierge” program to strengthen community engagement,

- Increasing support for young adult outreach and leadership development,
  - Supporting incentives to reduce the fiscal burden associated with community membership,
  - Exploring the potential for localized campuses to enhance community connections, and
  - Sponsoring community wide social action initiatives.
3. The Federation should sustain its current level of support for social services and expand services for the elderly as feasible.
  4. Youth programming, including educational programs, summer camp experiences, and the Israel Experience, should be strengthened.
  5. The base of support for Israel should be strengthened through:
    - Increased opportunities for travel to Israel, and
    - Expansion of local educational and program initiatives.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS AND STRATEGIES**

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Prioritizing among the extensive set of recommendations generated by the work groups required the Steering Committee to address two key strategic issues:

- What is the role of the Federation in facilitating community change?
- Given finite resources, what is the best approach to balancing the sustainability of current initiatives with new program development?

In response to these issues, the Steering Committee identified two overarching goals to serve as the foundation for the strategic plan and recommended four strategies related to each goal for implementation in the next three years:

**GOAL #1: Strengthen the Federation’s ability to serve as a community builder, facilitator, and change agent.**

### Strategies Recommended for Implementation in Next Three Years:

- Enhance the Federation website to better facilitate community connections and communication.
- Revamp the Federation allocations process to stimulate development of creative programming that fosters community integration.
- Begin to facilitate community-wide conversations about opportunities for increased coordination and collaboration.
- Sponsor centralized training for synagogue and agency leadership.

**GOAL #2: Sustain or enhance current initiatives designed to support a thriving, vibrant community that engages all Jews in the region in Jewish life.**

Strategies Recommended for Implementation in Next 3 Years:

- Continue to expand outreach, education, and social activism that engage young adults and families.
- Increase fiscal incentives for travel to Israel.
- Increase the number of events sponsored in the northern areas of the region.
- Identify optimal methods for strengthening Jewish education in the community.

**STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING**

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Once the Steering Committee had selected the strategic priorities , the focus area work groups developed specific action step recommendations which are documented in the table commencing on the following page. This constitutes the work plan for implementation of the strategic plan priorities over the next three years. Plan implementation will be monitored by the Federation Executive Committee. As the initial action steps are completed, the additional recommendations for each focus area that were not selected as immediate priorities will be considered for inclusion in the next phase of plan implementation.

**JEWISH FEDERATION OF NORTHEASTERN NEW YORK  
STRATEGIC PLAN: OVERARCHING GOALS, PRIORITY STRATEGIES AND ACTION STEPS**

The following table outlines the Federation’s strategic plan priorities for the next three years and the recommended action steps, milestones, and resources for strategy implementation. The action steps have been designed to provide broad guidance to the individuals and groups charged with responsibility for developing and overseeing implementation of more specific plans for addressing each priority.

| <b>GOAL #1: Strengthen the Federation’s ability to serve as a community builder, facilitator, and change agent.</b> |   |   |   |   |
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| <b>Priority Strategies<br/>2012-2014</b>  | <b>Action Steps</b>   | <b>Timeline/Milestones</b>  | <b>Necessary<br/>Resources</b>  | <b>Intended Outcomes</b>  |
| A. Enhance the Federation website to better facilitate community connections and communication.                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appoint a board Marketing Committee and charge it with responsibility for developing a plan for upgrading the website, including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Researching model Federation websites</li> <li>○ Identifying goals for website functionality based on strategic plan recommendations</li> <li>○ Identifying priority website components to achieve desired functionality</li> <li>○ Assessing cost of proposed upgrade</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marketing Committee established by January, 2012</li> <li>• Proposed plan, including cost estimates prepared by October, 2012</li> <li>• Funding allocated for website upgrade in 2013 allocations process</li> <li>• Website upgrade completed in 2013</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff support for Marketing Committee</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information about the full range of activities and services available in the Jewish community will be easily accessible through a central location.</li> <li>• Opportunities for coordination and collaboration will be more readily identifiable.</li> <li>• Participation in all aspects of community life will increase.</li> </ul> |

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| <p>B. Revamp the Federation allocations process to stimulate development of creative programming that fosters community integration.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Charge Executive Committee with responsibility for developing recommendations for modifying the allocations process to enhance its ability to support strategic plan goals. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Research allocations models used by other Federations to identify best practices.</li> <li>○ Solicit input from throughout the community.</li> <li>○ Address the perception that the allocations process is a closed process.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Solicit assistance from JFNA or other neutral facilitator to guide the planning process.</li> <li>• Prepare a plan for proposed modifications to be rolled out in incremental steps to allow sufficient time for the community to adapt to the new process.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Executive Committee initiates review process by March, 2012.</li> <li>• Initial transitional modifications approved by the Federation Board of Directors for implementation in 2013 allocations process.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff support for Executive Committee</li> </ul>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual allocations will support implementation of strategic plan goals and strategies.</li> <li>• The allocations process will be flexible enough to respond in a timely manner to emerging community needs.</li> </ul> |
| <p>C. Begin to facilitate community-wide conversations about opportunities for increased coordination and</p>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of Goals 1A, 1D, 2A, and 2D are first steps toward facilitating increased coordination and collaboration.</li> <li>• Establish Strategic Plan</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See 1A, 1D, 2A, and 2D</li> <li>• Committee established</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No additional resources beyond those already</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased community networking will build bridges that help foster shared solutions to</li> </ul>   |

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| collaboration.   | Oversight Committee or charge Executive Committee with responsibility for monitoring implementation and identifying appropriate next steps based on strategic plan recommendations.  | upon completion and formal approval of plan  | noted in 1A, 1D, 2A, and 2D<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff support for Oversight Committee</li> </ul>   | common concerns.  |
| D. Sponsor centralized training for synagogue and agency leadership.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue efforts of Synagogue/Federation Relations Committee to initiate an ongoing training program for emerging leaders.</li> <li>Solicit JFNA assistance in training development.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training plans finalized by spring, 2012</li> <li>1-2 workshops scheduled for 2012.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff support for Synagogue/Federation Relations Committee</li> <li>Funding to design and implement training workshops</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership capacity throughout the community will be strengthened.</li> <li>Individual synagogue and agency efforts will be strengthened with Federation support.</li> </ul> |
| <b>GOAL #2: Sustain or enhance current initiatives designed to support a thriving, vibrant community that engages all Jews in the region in Jewish life.</b> |  |  |  |   |
| <b>Priority Strategies 2012-2014</b>   | <b>Action Steps</b>  | <b>Timeline/Milestones</b>   | <b>Necessary Resources</b>   | <b>Intended Outcomes</b>  |
| A. Continue to expand outreach, education, and social activism that engages young adults and families.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish new Federation staff position to serve as a “Community Facilitator/ Liaison” with responsibility for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working with Jewish community institutions to constantly update and</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research “Community Concierge” programs sponsored by other Federations by March, 2012.</li> <li>Finalize desired program model and develop job description for new</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funding to support full time staff position</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participation in all aspects of community life will increase.</li> <li>Newcomers to the community will be easily connected with Jewish</li> </ul>                            |

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|  | <p>disseminate information about the multitude of opportunities for connecting with Jewish community life in the region,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Providing newcomers and currently unaffiliated residents with a warm and welcoming introduction to the community,</li> <li>○ Developing a broad range of mechanisms to promote participation in community activities,</li> <li>○ Identifying and facilitating opportunities for “building community” through resource sharing and joint sponsorship of activities and events, including community-wide events.</li> </ul> | <p>position by May, 2012.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Recruit and fill position as soon as necessary funding is secured.</li> </ul>          |   | <p>community life.</p>  |
| <p>B. Increase fiscal incentives for travel to Israel.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide synagogues and Federation agencies with stipends to enhance their mission trips to Israel to include visits to sites supported by Federation contributions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Solicit input from Rabbis to assess potential costs.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Identify and pursue necessary funding in 2012 with intent to fully implement recommended actions by 2013.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Additional funding allocated as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 20% for mission stipends</li> <li>○ 40% for youth</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● More community youth will have the opportunity to travel to Israel.</li> <li>● Participants in mission trips will have a deepened understanding of the value of</li> </ul> |

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|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase funds allocated to Federation scholarship fund supporting youth travel to Israel.</li> <li>• Increase annual Federation matching support for Israel Experience Savings Plan.</li> </ul>   |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ travel scholarships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 40% for Israel Experience Savings Plan</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federation support for Israel.</li> <li>• Positive travel experiences will strengthen individual connections with the Jewish community at home.</li> </ul> |
| C. Increase the number of events sponsored in the northern areas of the region. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Charge Federation staff with responsibility for working collectively to ensure that Federation sponsored programs and events are scheduled evenly throughout the region, with initial focus on smaller programs and events.</li> <li>• Organize or provide support for small programs designed to strengthen social networks in local communities (e.g. social action, “open houses,” presentations by Federation staff) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Solicit input from North County leaders to identify best approaches to engaging local Jewish residents.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commence with planning for 2012 programs and events.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding to support additional programming, as feasible</li> <li>• Allocation of staff time to support North Country activities, as feasible</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation of “North Country” residents in regional Jewish community life will be strengthened.</li> </ul>  |

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|---|--|---|---|---|
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen the message that the Federation serves a unified region by promoting Federation sponsored activities to the entire region, not specifically to the area where they are held.</li> <li>• Promote the activities in the North Country that currently receive Federation support.</li> </ul>  |   |   |   |
| <p>D. Identify optimal methods for strengthening Jewish education in the community.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revamp the CCJE advisory structure by establishing a broader based Education Vision Committee charged with responsibility for creating an educational vision for the community and developing a plan for vision attainment.</li> <li>• Survey current educational initiatives to assess current strengths and identify opportunities for enhancement.</li> <li>• Develop recommendations for maximizing current resources as well as identifying increased investment opportunities.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Committee established by January, 2012</li> <li>• Initial survey completed by April, 2012</li> <li>• Recommendations developed by June, 2012.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No additional resources necessary initially. Recommendations for educational enhancements may require funding for training, tools, etc.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthened educational programs will engage increased numbers of youth, young adults, and emerging leaders.</li> </ul> |

**Step 1:**

Steering Committee:

- Affirm planning process/timeline
- Articulate vision and values
- Select focus areas
- Recruit focus area work groups

**Step 2:**

Work Group 1:

- Assess environment
- Recommend priorities

Work Group 2:

- Assess environment
- Recommend priorities

Work Group 3:

- Assess environment
- Recommend priorities

Work Group 4:

- Assess environment
- Recommend priorities

Work Group 5:

- Assess environment
- Recommend priorities

**Step 3:**

Steering Committee:

- Review work group recommendations and select short and long term priorities

Federation Board of Directors:

- Review priorities

**Step 4:**

Work Group 1:

- Action plans for selected priorities

Work Group 2:

- Action plans for selected priorities

Work Group 3:

- Action plans for selected priorities

Work Group 4:

- Action plans for selected priorities

Work Group 5:

- Action plans for selected priorities

**Step 5:**

Steering Committee:

- Review and approve action plans

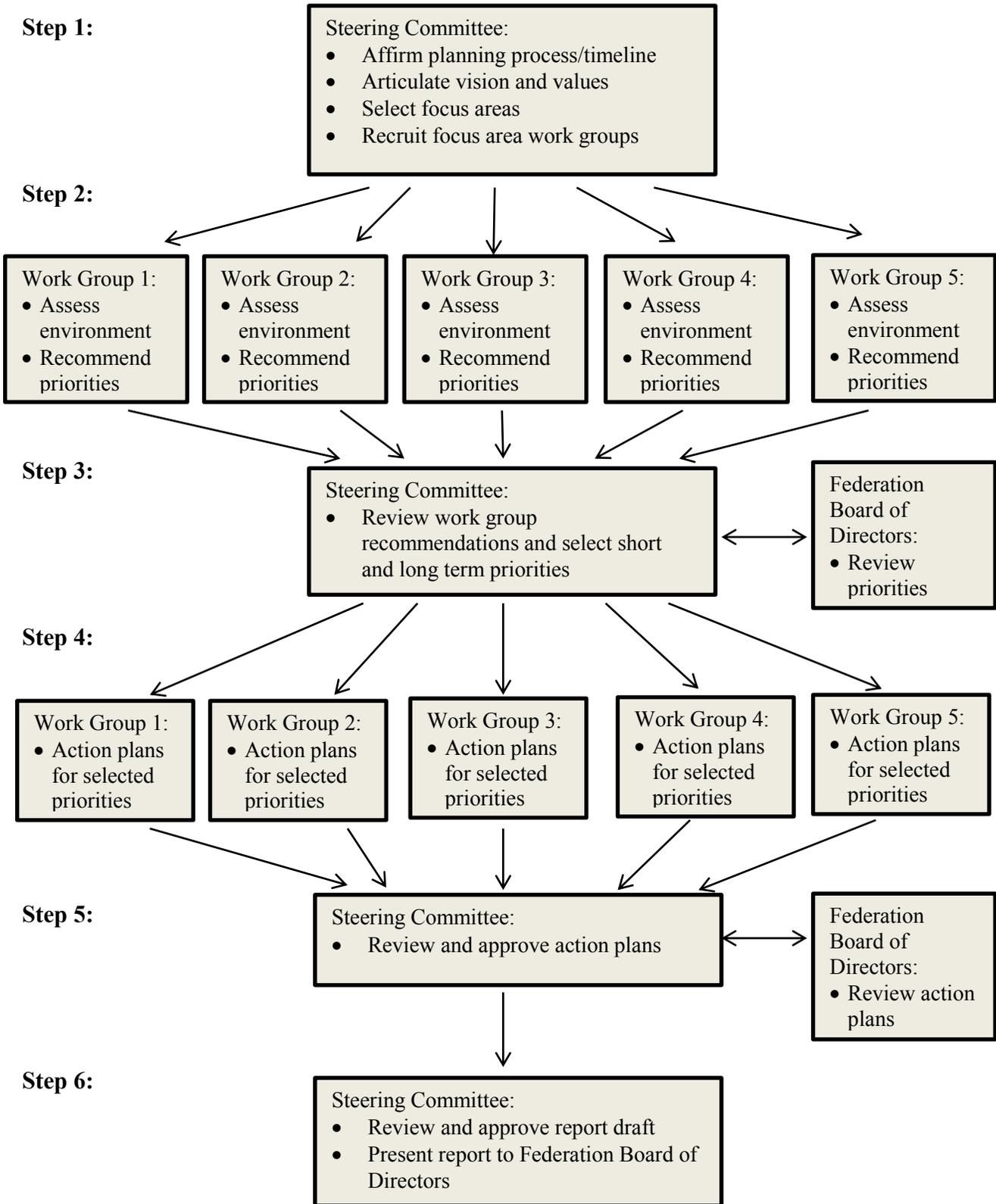
Federation Board of Directors:

- Review action plans

**Step 6:**

Steering Committee:

- Review and approve report draft
- Present report to Federation Board of Directors



## IN-REACH

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### CAPACITY ASSESSMENT

#### Current Community Assets/Strengths

- A wide variety of social and educational events
  - Federation Society events open to all regardless of membership status
  - Synagogue sponsored educational and entertainment programs
  - Special events open to the full community, sponsored both by synagogues as well as community organizations
  - Holiday celebrations at synagogues
  - Women's philanthropic events
- Diverse Shabbat services tailored to meet individual needs (e.g. tots, families, etc.) and outreach to enhance participation
- Federation funding support for Havurah Vatik, a socialization program for seniors in the North Country, and the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y program that offers a variety of diverse programs at reduced cost
- Federation support for Jewish camps which are well loved by both campers and parents
- Youth programming offered by several individual synagogues
- Leadership development programs targeting young people through individual synagogues, the Federation, and the Daughters of Sarah Foundation
- Well respected Hillel programs at SUNY Albany, Union, and Skidmore as well a positive relationship between Chabad and Hillel
- Inclusion of special needs children in religious school programs with Federation funding support
- Facilitated access to the PJ library for pre-schoolers
- Organized missions to Israel, Washington D.C., etc.
- Collective volunteer activities such as the Reading Coalition
- A diversity of social activity groups sponsored by synagogues (e.g. gardening clubs, bridge groups, etc.)
- Enthusiasm and professionalism of Federation staff
- The visible role of the Federation as a "cheerleader" for the community, building pride
- Good relationships with long tenured rabbis
- Good relationships between different denominations, supported by Board of Rabbis
- The Federation's extensive data base of community members
- Well-developed communications mechanisms that provide regular access to lots of information
  - The Jewish World
  - The Federation Executive Director's weekly email
  - Synagogue newsletters
  - Facebook
  - Federation mailings

- Committee structures within Jewish institutions that define purpose and facilitate connections
- Development and growth of the endowment supporting twelve community organizations
- Federation provision of emergency funding in response to critical needs locally, nationally, and internationally

### Current Challenges

- The Federation and synagogues both need to be more visionary and creative in their approach to engaging and sustaining connections with community members, thinking strategically about how to allow for many different ways to identify as a community member. Movement boundaries are blurring nationally but “we are still stuck with old definitions here.”
- The community is aging and older individuals are more connected than those who are younger. Personal priorities and approaches to spirituality are different for younger individuals; they need different reasons to get and stay connected.
- Several different organizations within the community are now competing for young adult participation and membership.
- The mobility of younger individuals also limits the incentive to get and stay connected.
- There is a small core group of individuals who consistently participate at all levels in the community. Complaints about community offerings tend to come more from those who are less engaged.
- The wide geographic area encompassed by the community as well as the lack of a Jewish campus limits the ability to establish a central gathering point for the full community.
- The cost of supporting multiple Jewish organizations is becoming difficult to sustain.
- The cost of membership in community institutions (e.g. synagogues, JCCs, day schools, etc.) is high and for synagogues, membership is not required for participation. Additionally, families frequently deactivate their synagogue memberships once their children have completed Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, based on a perceived loss of relevance relative to the cost.
- The JCCs have reduced their youth programming due to limited resources.
- The Federation is not using its leadership potential to best advantage. The Federation could serve as the communications, information, and advocacy hub for the community, playing a central facilitator role in fostering increased connections and collaboration among other community institutions.
- The Federation’s ability to more fully engage the community is potentially limited by resistance based on the perception that it is competing with synagogues for finite fiscal and volunteer resources. The community as a whole needs a larger pool of leaders and volunteers.
- The Federation also has an “image problem” related to the perception that one needs to make significant fiscal contributions in order to be an active participant in Federation affairs.
- Increased collaboration is also potentially at odds with individual synagogue identity as it raises the question “If we are working together, why join one?”
- The Federation needs a better web presence, particularly if it wants to serve as a central communications mechanism for the full community.
- College students need to be engaged in planning efforts.
- Barriers to ongoing engagement of seniors in community life need to be better understood.

## **GOAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Goal 1: Foster stronger collaborations between area synagogues and Jewish communal agencies.**

#### Potential Strategies:

- Increase and formalize the role of the Federation in facilitating communication among the synagogues and communal organizations.
- Coordinate scheduling of programs and events to improve ease of access in local communities.
- Provide fiscal and other resource support for collaboratively sponsored programming and events.

### **Goal 2: Reduce the fiscal burden associated with community membership.**

#### Potential Strategies:

- Increase Federation funding allocated for scholarships that support participation in community programs (e.g. camps, etc.)
- Subsidize the cost of synagogue membership for families willing to make a commitment to being active participants in synagogue life.
- Establish an endowment fund for Jewish education.
  - Use the endowment to provide direct support for a broad array of educational programs serving the entire community.
  - Use a separate campaign to fund the endowment to energize and engage a group of long term supporters.

### **Goal 3: Increase connections and cohesiveness among community members residing in the northern areas of the Federation region.**

#### Potential Strategies:

- Increase the number of events sponsored in the local community that draw people together.
  - Sponsor more Federation events in the northern areas of the region in addition to the annual fund raising events.
  - Provide a designated allotment to each synagogue to support local programs.
  - Expand the role or number of Federation Societies to engage local community professionals.
- Increase the role of the Federation in facilitating community connections.
  - Dedicate a Federation staff position to community development activities in the North Country.

**Goal 4: Revamp the Federation allocations process to stimulate development of creative programming that fosters community integration.**

Potential Strategies:

- Reduce the barriers to innovation inherent in the current allocations process.
- Once the strategic plan has been completed, use the annual allocations process to support plan implementation.

**Goal 5: Increase coordination and sharing of services throughout the community.**

Potential Strategies:

- Expand the Federation's role in supporting community wide communication and collaboration.
  - Strengthen the capacity of the community calendar to serve as a coordinating mechanism for community events.
  - Increase the use of technology to connect community members with each other, the Federation, and community organizations and events.
  - Develop a professional resources guide to facilitate connections between community professionals and community members seeking services.
  - Facilitate cross-community sharing of "back office" expenses (e.g. administrative personnel, purchasing etc.)
  - Explore models for "global community membership."
- Establish a central campus for Jewish life in each "sub-community" in the region (i.e. Albany, Schenectady, Troy, North Country.)
  - Co-locate religious services and follow services with collective social activities (comparable to Hillel and Charlotte, NC models.)

**Goal 6: Strengthen efforts to develop leaders among the community's young adults.**

Potential Strategies:

- Strengthen follow-up to current leadership development programs targeting young adults to connect participants with leadership opportunities in the community (e.g. boards of directors, etc.)

# OUTREACH

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## CAPACITY ASSESSMENT

### Current Community Assets/Strengths

- The Federation is known as the “go to” information hub for the community. Its efforts are supported by knowledgeable lay leaders and staff, a strong IT infrastructure with significant capacity for managing communications, and a comprehensive data base of community members enhanced by the willingness of several congregations to share their member lists. Key communication efforts currently include the community calendar the Federation hosts on its website and the CEO’s weekly email that keeps community members both informed and connected.
- Federation financial support underwrites events with broad community appeal that can also serve as outreach vehicles. The Federation also provides fiscal support for activities that enhance youth connections such as Jewish camping and the Israel Experience.
- The Federation’s Women’s Philanthropy division sponsors an annual event that is open to all with no expectation of a pledge commitment.
- The Federation has made a specific commitment to strengthening outreach to young adults through the establishment of a Young Adult Division supported by a new staff position, the Director of Young Leadership and Programming.
- The synagogues jointly sponsor a Jewish high school program open to youth from all movements.
- The community is a “full service Jewish community” with a vibrant and diverse range of worship options, two Jewish day schools, a kosher market, two JCCs, Jewish Family Services, and housing and services for seniors offered under Jewish auspices.
- The NORC (Naturally Occurring Retirement Community,) operated through a service collaborative that includes Jewish Family Services, conducts extensive outreach to seniors in the Pine Hills area of Albany.
- The Project 5 transportation assistance program for seniors operated by JFS also serves as a good outreach mechanism.
- The Jewish World provides good coverage of local community activities.
- The community is perceived to be open and embracing, manageable in size, non-competitive, easy to approach, inclusive and welcoming to all lifestyles. Community members feel comfortable openly identifying themselves as Jewish.
- The Board of Rabbis facilitates good relationships among the synagogues.
- Strong Hillel chapters at SUNY Albany, Union, and Skidmore engage college aged youth.
- Ne’imah, the Jewish community chorus, is open to all and performs for the whole community.
- The PJ Library helps establish connections with families with young children. PJ Library books will now also be available at the Bach branch of the Albany Public Library.
- Daily minyans are available at synagogues throughout the community.

## Current Challenges

- Not much is known about unaffiliated Jews living in the community—who they are, where they are, and why they choose not to get connected. Although the community offers multiple entry points, there is no formalized mechanism for helping people get connected.
- For individuals new to the community, getting connected “takes a lot of work.” It is not easy to break into established social networks of community “insiders.”
- Synagogues serve as a primary entry point into community life but the cost of synagogue membership is prohibitive for many families.
- With the exception of Saratoga County, the community is not growing and its members are aging. Young parents are “too busy to be Jewish.”
- Throughout the community at large, longstanding traditional organizations are beginning to fade and may eventually disappear. It is not yet apparent what types of new opportunities for group affiliation will emerge to replace them.
- Inter-marriage often results in weakened connections with the community.
- Despite existing communication mechanisms, it is still difficult to consistently reach key people in key places to help promote events in a way that generates broad participation. Established communications mechanisms such as the Federation website, the Jewish World, list serves, etc. are not being utilized to their best advantage.
- Alternatively, some individuals may be on too many email lists and tuning out due to “email overload.”
- There is lots of competition for the attention, time, and resources of both affiliated and non-affiliated Jews.
- Reluctance to affiliating with the community may be related to prior life experiences or unaddressed concerns such as:
  - Fear of anti-Semitism,
  - Negativity related to previous bad experiences,
  - Concern that minimal involvement may result in guilt over the lack of interest or ability to be involved to a greater extent,
  - Negative perceptions of Israel and the community’s support for Israeli nationalism,
  - The perception that the community is not open to a broad spectrum of political views, particularly as they relate to Israel.
- The observance of Kashrut rules may limit attendance at events.
- The extensive role of the Federation in supporting community institutions is not readily visible and therefore not fully appreciated.

## **GOAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Goal 1: Engage and retain young adults who are approaching or in the early years of parenthood, midlife “empty nesters,” and intermarried adults as active participants in community life.**

### Potential Strategies:

- Rebrand the Federation as a community facilitator as opposed to a fund raiser.

- Develop ways to support the targeted groups' connection to Jewish life with no initial expectation of a fiscal contribution.
  - Build on the success of current initiatives (e.g. PJ Library, Israel Experience)
  - Actively promote the role the Federation is already playing in supporting issues that may be of concern to the targeted groups (e.g. Haiti relief.)
- Increase the capacity of the Federation to serve as a “community concierge,” conducting outreach, identifying opportunities for community engagement, and facilitating social connections.
  - Increase the use of technology (e.g. social media) to initiate conversations with and among targeted groups.
  - Follow-up initial contacts with in-person meetings to ascertain individual interests and concerns that may serve as a link into community life.
  - Involve active community members in providing grass roots support for outreach efforts within their social networks.
  - Strengthen initial connections through periodic sponsorship of social events customized to appeal to the unique interests of each targeted group.
  - Improve the ability to use the current Federation data base to better target outreach efforts.

## **JEWISH CONTINUITY**

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### **CAPACITY ASSESSMENT**

#### Current Community Assets/Strengths

- A strong Federation with an increased presence in the community through its sponsorship of a large number of community events
- The sense of “sharing and caring” within the community supported by the high level of cooperation among the rabbis and the perception that “people practice their religion”
- A shared concern for the community’s past, present, and future
- Resources for all levels of Judaism and unique congregational identities—there is a place of worship for everyone
- Programs at the JCCs that do a good job of engaging the otherwise unaffiliated (e.g. preschool, camps, etc.)
- The Federation’s Community Coalition for Jewish Education which works in strong collaboration with the community’s religious education programs
- Naturally forming groups of community members that sustain themselves (e.g. Jewish home schooling families)
- Good utilization of nationally sponsored programs:
  - Birthright Israel significantly strengthens the connection of young adults and increases the giving level of their satisfied parents
  - Synagogue youth groups
  - PJ library
  - Summer camps
- Two day schools (although declining enrollment)
- Vibrant congregational schools, many with customized offerings including the ability to engage children with special needs
- The Hebrew Immersion preschool program at Temple Israel
- Synagogue nursery schools
- Availability of kosher food and a VAAD
- Services provided through a strong local Chabad
- A strong connection to Israel supported both by the Federation and JERNY

#### Current Challenges

- There is no Jewish high school. Families that desire Jewish secondary education for their children need to send them out of the area.
- The curriculum at the Hebrew Academy lacks sufficient attention to modern orthodoxy.
- Jewish youth tend not remain in the community following high school/college graduation, although this is an area wide issue not specific to the Jewish community.
- The community encompasses a wide geographic territory with three major cities and no real center.
- The community is both shrinking and aging due to intermarriage and a declining youth population.
- There are a limited number of community members with sufficient economic resources to underwrite major service expansions or new initiatives.

## **GOAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Goal 1: Strengthen the Federation's focus on and support for Jewish education.**

#### Potential Strategies:

- Work with the JCCs to increase the Jewish program content in their after school programs.
- Assess the scope of Jewish home schooling in the area and identify the educational support needs of parents engaged in Jewish home schooling. Begin to develop relationships with these families.
- Assist synagogues' efforts to strengthen their religious schools.
- Prioritize fiscal support for the day schools.
- Create and provide support for non-traditional adult and teen educational programs.
- Link teen educational programs with social action activities.
- Use youth activities as opportunities to re-engage and re-educate parents.
- Continue to provide support for youth groups and summer camp participation.

### **Goal 2: Foster multiple options for initiating and sustaining connection with the Jewish community.**

#### Potential Strategies:

- Identify and support new ways to be connected with the community while maintaining support for existing congregations.
- Continue to provide support for the Federation's young adult leadership initiatives.
- Use the CCJE to establish connections with parents engaged in Jewish home schooling.

### **Goal 3: Encourage joint action among all community institutions around all components of community life.**

#### Potential Strategies:

- Organize community-wide social action activities.
- Support collaborative education and program initiatives.
- Increase the Federation's role in facilitating community connections and collaboration.

### **Goal 4: Create community-wide opportunities for social and political activism.**

#### Potential Strategies:

- Organize bus trips to New York City for the Israel Day Parade.
- Celebrate Lag B'Omer.
- Recruit NextDor participants to organize these types of activities.

### **Goal 5: Increase community awareness and understanding of the role and value of the Federation.**

Potential Strategies:

- Ensure that all organizations receiving Federation support publically acknowledge this assistance.
- Assess the potential to build on the success of the assistance provided to families with children with special needs to increase donations from the parents who are benefitting from the program.

## **SOCIAL SERVICES**

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### **CAPACITY ASSESSMENT**

#### Current Community Assets/Strengths

- The range of services for older adults offered through the Daughters of Sarah Senior Community:
  - Skilled nursing residential care
  - Short term rehabilitation
  - Medical model adult day care
  - Assisted living residence
  - Respite care
  - Palliative and hospice care
- A wide range of social, recreational, and fitness programs at the Albany and Schenectady JCCs
- JCC children's programs including nursery school, daycare, a Kindergarten at the Albany JCC, and after school programs sponsored by the Schenectady JCC in conjunction with the Niskayuna school district
- A broad array of programs offered by Jewish Family Services:
  - Clinical counseling for adults and families
  - The Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) which coordinates services to support seniors' ability to remain in their own homes in Albany's Pine Hills
  - Project 5—transportation assistance specifically for Jewish seniors
  - Information and referral, care coordination, and family supports for seniors
  - Supervised visitation program for non-custodial parents
  - Some assistance to homeless or transient individuals
- Assistance for families with children with special needs through the Friendship Circle
- Area synagogues that offer both opportunities for social connection as well as serve as an entry point into the formal service system
- Jewish sponsored housing for independent seniors in both Albany and Schenectady
- Fiscal assistance for needy families through rabbis' discretionary funds, the Federation Glott fund, and Price Chopper cards for Passover through JFS
- Chaplaincy programs including the Federation's nursing home visitation and holiday programming as well as individual rabbi chaplaincy to local hospitals, psychiatric facilities, etc.

#### Current Challenges

- A large percentage of those served by Jewish communal agencies are non-Jewish, which is necessary to ensure organizational economic survival in a community with relatively small numbers of Jewish residents.
- The JCC programs serve primarily youth and older adults, with less to offer to working-age adults.
- There are no counseling or mental health services for youth or adolescents offered under Jewish auspices and a very limited number of child therapists in the area as a whole.

- Psychiatric services are not offered by JFS and are difficult to access through secular organizations or private practitioners in the area.
- No Jewish communal services are located in the outer counties of the region.
- Although there is an identified need, there is no Jewish sponsored AAA group due to concerns about the difficulty of maintaining participants' anonymity in a small community.
- Problems related to addiction, domestic abuse, developmental disabilities, psychiatric illnesses, etc. are underreported in the community due to the perceived lack of privacy in a small community and the related reluctance to acknowledge problems and seek services, particularly among older adults.
- Similarly, Jewish families tend to be reluctant to apply for available entitlement assistance such as Medicaid for adult day care, food stamps, etc.
- Jewish families are reluctant to access the adult day care program. Beyond the issue of applying for Medicaid (although cost does remain a large factor), marketing the program to them produces little interest. The day care program at Daughters of Sarah is almost completely comprised of non-Jewish attendees.
- Daughters' staff see no reluctance on the part of Jewish families to engage in fairly extensive Medicaid planning to qualify for benefits in the nursing home setting. (In fact, it seems that a greater percentage of Jewish families pursue Elder Law Planning when faced with nursing home admission.) Medicaid reimbursement currently pays substantially less per day than the actual costs of care, and, in an era of government retrenchment, that reimbursement is only going to drop. As a vast majority of Daughters' residents are Medicaid eligible, this trend of families seeking Medicaid qualification serves to increase the burden on the community at large, as grants must be sought and fundraising pursued to bridge the reimbursement gap. Because there is no legal obligation for children to support parents, funds that could pay for care are being transferred to family members with the expectation that the government will step in and take care of everyone. As government extricates itself from that social contract, pressure on the community to provide the missing support will come to the fore.
- A large number of Jewish families and individuals in the area are not affiliated with any Jewish institution, thereby lacking the connections that would facilitate access to services when needed. This is a particular concern for seniors who need increased assistance as they become more frail and need help in order to remain in their own homes.
- There is no visitation program for shut-ins.
- There is an increasing need among Jewish families for economic assistance, but the extent of that need is unknown and the current system of informal supports available through the Federation, local rabbis, and JFS may be insufficient.
- There is no kosher food pantry.
- There are no Jewish housing programs for children with special needs, adults with developmental disabilities, or shelter programs for victims of domestic abuse. The need for Jewish supportive housing is believed to be sufficient but not economically viable to justify development of this type of service without significant fiscal subsidy.
- Assisted living programs are not affordable for many seniors throughout the general community and in particular for those wishing to live in a Jewish environment with kosher food.
- The lack of practically any government support at the assisted living level of care is creating a social challenge with seniors almost being forced to seek to qualify for Medicaid and re-locate from assisted living into nursing homes. The net result is that society finds itself

paying twice as much for the cost of care. More dramatic, however, is that, on a personal level, individuals end up in a more restrictive living environment than their health care needs would otherwise require. Due to the lower rate of reimbursement for individuals with fewer care needs, nursing homes simply cannot afford to accept these individuals, and the question of where they can receive housing becomes a challenge. The Massry Residence does offer scholarships to help subsidize rental payments. At present, 18% of the facility receives direct scholarship support. Even so, the need for support outstrips the ability to meet it.

- The community lacks the ability to address an occasional need for Jewish foster care, which although infrequent can be quite severe.
- There is no local capacity to assist with Jewish adoptions but also little request for adoption assistance.

## **GOAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Goal 1: Sustain the level of service currently provided through Jewish communal agencies.**

#### Potential Strategies:

- Maintain the current level of Federation fiscal support for social services.
- Prepare to address operational deficits created by decreases in governmental funding.

### **Goal 2: Strengthen services designed to help Jewish seniors continue to live in the community.**

#### Potential Strategies:

- Subsidize the cost of assisted living for seniors who lack sufficient economic resources to pay for this level of care (e.g. increase availability of Massry Residence scholarships.)
- Encourage synagogues to explore sponsorship of congregation nurse programs.
- Develop the capacity to provide assistance with care management for Jewish seniors living outside of the NORC area.

### **Goal 3: Foster an environment that encourages those needing assistance to seek help.**

#### Potential Strategies:

- Establish a collaborative single point of entry system, possibly in conjunction with a community concierge program, to help community members in need of assistance get connected with appropriate services.
- Explore web strategies to facilitate easy access to both information and services.
  - Upgrade the Federation website.

# ISRAEL

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## CAPACITY ASSESSMENT

### Current Community Assets/Strengths

- A significant number of families participate in the Israel Experience Savings Plan which provides matching funds to help underwrite the cost of youth trips to Israel.
- The Federation's Community Relations Council (CRC) sponsors an annual "Teaching Israel" course designed to support the ability of social studies teachers in local public schools to promote Israel in a positive light. One or two sessions have been conducted each year for the past five years, with about 40 teachers attending each session. Participants are provided with free books for their students as well as a binder of resource materials.
- Students in the Jewish day schools learn about and pray for Israel on a daily basis and Hebrew Academy eighth grade students go to Israel. The Jewish high school curriculum and synagogue youth groups incorporate a focus on Israel as well.
- Two or three of the books distributed each year by the PJ library promote Israel.
- Major community events such as Yom Ha'atzma'ut, sponsored by the Federation, and Yom Yerushalayim, sponsored by JERNY, are well attended by the full community. Yom Yerushalayim in particular draws very large numbers.
- The Principals' Council coordinated by the Federation's CCJE jointly develops curricula and materials that include content on Israel.
- The Israel Committee of the Federation's CRC examines issues related to Israel.
- Over a third of the revenue generated through the Federation's annual campaign is allocated to Israel.
- Both the Federation and local synagogues sponsor periodic missions to Israel.
- The Albany JCC day care program, which serves a large number of non-Jewish families, reinforces a positive image of Israel in their programming, including providing children with Israel flag tee shirts.
- Each year there are several lectures about Israeli issues available to the Jewish community as well as the community at large, including Union College professor Stephen Berk's regular talks as well as speakers at Federation society events. Additionally, rabbis talk about Israel on Shabbat.
- Christians United for Israel is strengthening support for Israel within the Christian community.
- Family connections and events such as weddings draw people to Israel, often leading to changed perceptions about the country.
- A large number of community members have visited Israel and established positive connections there.
- There are Israeli citizens who currently are living in the region and connected with the Jewish community here.
- The Federation's Partnership 2000 program has established a "sister city" relationship with the Eshkol region of Israel, fostering person-to-person relationships around specific projects.
- The local chapters of national organizations such as Hadassah, Israel Bonds, and JNF promote Israel through organized events.
- Federation scholarships support overseas trips and camps.

- Area Hillel's sponsor Birthright Israel, providing free trips to Israel for young adults.
- The Federation CEO's e-newsletter and the Jewish World routinely address issues related to Israel.
- There are currently two rabbis on the SUNY Albany campus who are developing opportunities for students to visit Israel.

### Current Challenges

- Families often do not start contributing to the Israel Experience Saving Plan until their children are in middle school. The program could be even more effective if families were encouraged to start contributing when their children are younger.
- The interest in and frequency of community missions to Israel has been declining, at least in part due to the cost.
- Youth Zionist groups seem to have disappeared from area college campuses even though there is still strong interest in and support for Birthright Israel.
- There appears to be a disconnect between expressed belief and behavior among those who openly pray for Israel at their synagogues but aren't involved with or support any other pro-Israeli organizations or activities.
- There are several barriers, including cost, time, fear, and politics, that limit travel to Israel. Of particular concern are the negative images created by the press and the resulting association of Israel with war as well as increased anti-Israeli venom on college campuses.
- Among young Jewish adults, liberal political beliefs do not necessarily ensure support for Israeli nationalism. Among this age cohort, there is now a perceived disconnect between liberalism and nationalism. This age group is also tends to be less engaged with any Jewish institutions in the community and therefore less connected with Israel.
- Resource limitations potentially restrict any significant expansion of current community activities that strengthen support for Israel.
- Although many organizations in the community actively promote support for Israel, their efforts are not coordinated.

## **GOAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Goal 1: Strengthen the value of locally sponsored trips in enhancing long term caring, commitment, and support for Israel.**

#### Potential Strategies:

- Offer area synagogues stipends to ensure that their missions to Israel include visits to sites that are directly supported by Federation contributions (e.g. funding for bus fare and tour guides for site visits, etc.)
- Establish a competitive stipend award program for families making their first trip to Israel.
  - Establish specific criteria and expectations for awards to ensure that awardees will make a commitment to promoting the value of their trip upon their return.
  - Award the stipends at an annual community event.

- Encourage outside supporters (e.g. evangelical Christians) to take part in missions.
  - Consider offering competitive stipends comparable to proposed family stipends.
- Subsidize trips for emerging community leaders.
- Develop a marketing campaign highlighting unique Israeli travel opportunities.
  - Assist in packaging and promoting affinity trips organized around special interests ((e.g. environmentalism, science, wine tours, horticulture, professional shadowing, etc.)
  - Post information about all planned trips to Israel on the Federation website.
  - Host a “community built” website that provides a venue for community members to share their Israel travel experiences.

**Goal 2: Strengthen local activities designed to increase understanding of and support for Israel.**

Potential Strategies:

- Expand access to the Israel Experience Savings Plan.
  - Increase Federation fiscal support for matching funds, possibly by creating opportunities for individual donor sponsorship.
  - Increase promotion of the savings plan to engage families earlier.
- Strengthen the effectiveness of the summer camp experience in enhancing youth commitment to Israel.
  - Enhance Federation scholarship assistance to increase summer camp participation.
  - Enhance Israel focused program content in summer camp activities.
  - Increase and promote the attractiveness of summer camp attendance for youth who have other options.
- Strengthen local outreach and education about Israel.
  - Engage all community institutions in the development and implementation of a marketing strategy for promoting Israel in the community at large.
  - Increase the number of community wide events that celebrate Israel.
  - Improve the community’s commemoration of the Holocaust to increase understanding of the direct link between the Holocaust and Israel.
  - Make speakers available to local high school students to prepare them to respond to anti-Israeli attitudes on college campuses.
  - Sponsor a Community Israel Emissary position for a post IDF Israeli citizen.
  - Make use of former community residents who have made Aliyah when they are visiting in the area.
  - Ensure that all community events are accessible and attractive to youth.
  - Assess the extent to which synagogue Hebrew schools’ curricula focuses on Israel and identify ways it might be enhanced.
  - Identify initiatives underway in other Jewish communities that might be replicated locally.

# **SYNAGOGUE/FEDERATION RELATIONS**

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## **CAPACITY ASSESSMENT**

### Key Synagogue Concerns

- Aging membership
- Declining enrollment in pre-schools and supplementary religious schools
- Unaffiliated Jews, particularly in younger age cohorts
- Cost of membership as a potential barrier
- Increasing financial strains
- Aging physical plants, limited handicap accessibility
- Lay leadership development and succession

## **GOAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Goal 1: Enhance the ability of local congregations to recruit, nurture and sustain members.**

#### Potential Strategies:

- Exchange mailing lists
- Support for youth groups
- Help promote adult education programs (e.g. Federation website)
- Share best practices
- Develop capacity to use social media to maintain connections with college youth
- Develop community wide youth and family programming (e.g. Shabbaton, Dances, Youth Seder)
- Offer visits for homebound

### **Goal 2: Reduce barriers to synagogue membership.**

#### Potential Strategies:

- Lower direct synagogue member cost:
  - Subsidize new members
  - Provide scholarships to congregations for school enrollment
  - Offer incentives to synagogues for post B/BM enrollment
  - Support adult education

### **Goal 3: Locate and engage currently unaffiliated Jews.**

#### Potential Strategies:

- Provide synagogues with lists of unaffiliated Jews
- Sponsor community-wide “Judaism 101” Course
- Training in membership recruitment techniques and strategies
- Training to increase understanding of the “next generation”

- Subsidize pre-school and daycare
- Subsidize adoption process
- Market Capital Region to downstate and assist with relocation
- Conduct and share demographic study

**Goal 4: Enhance synagogues' ability to cultivate and sustain well trained lay leadership.**

Potential Strategies:

- Provide training for synagogue board members
- Provide training in fund raising