

Strengthening Congregations

Paving the Road to

Meaningful Young

Adult Engagement

A Report from the 2013–2014 Young Adult Engagement Community of Practice



UNION *for*
REFORM JUDAISM
האיחוד ליהדות רפורמית

AN INTERACTIVE RESOURCE

Is Your Community looking to...



Capture the attention of young adults, and not just their parents?

Create programming that would engage those in their 20's and 30's?



Foster a more active and involved young adult community?

Learn from the work of congregations and experts in the field of young adult engagement?



If you answered **YES!**
to any of these questions—then
***Strengthening Congregations:
Paving the Road to Meaningful
Young Adult Engagement***
is the resource for you!

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A special thanks goes to the seven congregations that participated in the *Emerging Young Adult Initiatives Community of Practice* in January 2013–June 2014:

Temple Chai, Phoenix, AZ

University Synagogue, Los Angeles, CA

Congregation Beth Israel, San Diego, CA

Temple Shalom, Newton, MA

Temple Emanuel, Kensington, MD

Temple Rodeph Torah of Western Monmouth, Marlboro, NJ

Temple Sinai, Toronto, ON

While the URJ facilitated the Community of Practice and brought them together to learn, network and experiment—we gained significant knowledge from their efforts in their congregations. This resource has been made possible thanks to their hard work, dedication and willingness to share their successes, as well as their challenges, with us.

Introduction

We are excited that your congregation is looking for ways to enhance the engagement of young adults in your community. We hope that you will find this document a helpful resource as you consider the various aspects of this work. The information contained within is gleaned from the Union for Reform Judaism's Young Adult [Community of Practice](#) (an 18 month guided learning program) and [Active Learning Network](#) (a 16 week online learning project) initiatives, implemented in 2013 and 2014. There are several resources found within this guide. Each can assist you depending on how you wish to structure your process:



1. The first section in this document is a listing of 11 [Best Principles](#) for Young Adult Engagement. Best principles are fundamental elements that one must consider when creating a new initiative or adapting one that exists. They are concepts forged from experience, which must be the framework around which any program is designed. This is not to be confused with best practices. Too often a program is considered a best practice and it is assumed that if you replicate the program you too will garner success in your congregation/institution. We advise that you view the best principles and treat them as the tenets that undergird a program, regardless of what you might want to implement.
 - **If at this point, all you are looking for is to get a general sense of what are the best principles in the area of young adult engagement**—you will want to read the [Best Principles](#) section, and perhaps browse through the rest of this document.
 - **If you are looking for ways to be inspired to take action in your congregation** and get an expanded view on the topic—you will want to start with the [Best Principles](#), and then continue reading the following sections thoroughly.
2. Following the Best Principles section are several resources from our Young Adult Engagement Active Learning Network (ALN). [The Introduction and Overview](#) explains how the learning was structured. This is followed by the [syllabus](#) and [workbook](#) that were provided to congregations that participated in the ALN.
3. The [syllabus](#) is broken down into units. Each unit focused on a specific topic and was taught by an expert in that field. Each unit of the syllabus includes:
 - a. The topic of the ALN learning unit, including the name(s) of the presenter(s)
 - b. A link to the recorded webinar framing the material in that unit
 - c. A link to the pages within the workbook that relate to this specific topic and presentation
 - d. Links to articles and videos that the instructors provided for additional learning for that specific unit
4. The final section in this document is [the workbook pages](#), created for those involved in the Active Learning Network to bring to a task force or committee within the congregation, to help with the visioning and implementation of young adult engagement. Each unit has 2–3 workbook pages, which include:
 - a. An overview of the topic
 - b. Space to write notes

- c. A text study
- d. Central (general) questions to ponder
- e. Reflection on the conversation to determine next steps.

These workbook pages provide a step by step process to study, discuss and determine how your congregation might implement a young adult engagement strategy.

Should you want to make the best use of these resources, we recommend creating a taskforce or a committee. Watch the recorded session in each unit, study the additional resources in the syllabus and follow this with a discussion, based upon the workbook pages for that particular unit.

Each section can certainly stand alone for your use. However, used together, they can provide a deeper and richer understanding of young adult engagement in general, and more specifically—how it fits into the unique culture of your congregation.

For additional assistance please contact the URJ at 1.855.URJ.1800 or email urj1800@urj.org.

We wish you great success in anything you decide to try, based on your work with this guide.

Naomi Abelson

Lisa Lieberman Barzilai

Young Adult Engagement Best Principles

Based on our experience working with and learning from congregations, experts in the field and individual lay and professional practitioners, the following describes some of the Best Principles for Jewish young adult engagement:

The “J” Factor

Typically, when creating 20s and 30s programming, it’s assumed that communities must keep the programming light and social in nature. Anything “too Jewish” would turn away the very people you are trying to engage. Yet, throughout the 18-month Community of Practice model, congregational leaders learned that young adults sought authentic Jewish experiences. As one leader from Congregation Beth Israel in San Diego said, “we’re good at doing the religious thing!” so why avoid it? Further, including “the J” is the added value of congregational communities. The Reform Movement can offer meaningful holiday celebrations, intimate Shabbat dinners and learning opportunities that individuals cannot easily do on their own.

Enhancing Your Online Presence

When young adults seek information, want to find new opportunities or ways to get involved in their community, their first stop will be online. Recognizing this, congregational communities seeking to reach those in their 20s and 30s must consider their web presence on their website, Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In, YouTube, etc. Lisa Colton, Chief Learning Officer of See3 Communications, shares five keys to social media success, particularly applicable for the young adult community:

1. Attention Economy: Treat an individual’s attention as a scarce commodity with much competition—this is especially true for young adults
2. Be Social: Listen for online conversations and questions; respond to individuals; be personal in your responses—even when “speaking” as the voice of the community
3. Add Value: Content shared should be engaging and newsworthy, have a tight copy and help connect individuals—do not just advertise your calendar listings
4. Be Real: Bring your real self/ your personality forth, create the warm environment online that you truly seek to build
5. Strengthen the Network: Don’t compete but complement what’s happening the field. Mention people and organizations that add value, connect people to one another for mutual benefit, and share mission-centric content from others.

Relatedly, it is important to recognize the value and opportunity that online communities and networking have for this population. For Temple Beth Sholom in Miami Beach, FL, this best principle is expressed through their young adult community, The Tribe. For the High Holidays, The Tribe created a unique service experience that encouraged active participation from the young adult congregation. “By actively participating—instead of simply listening—people are drawn in to the sensation of being present and more open to the experience. Using the communications tools with which they are most comfortable could make it easier for them to get the most out of the experience.” This played out in a variety of different ways: [a machzor that could be viewed on an iPad](#) and they also provided space for note taking and written contemplation and question prompts displayed on a large screen on the bimah, encouraging the congregation to text their responses to share with the others.

Understanding 20s & 30s: Shared Experiences

When seeking to build young adult communities, it is important to recognize and build from the shared experiences of many in the age cohort. A primary example is Taglit-Birthright Israel, which over 400,000 young adults have experienced to date. What would a community look like if it were comprised of many individuals that



have had a meaningful 10-day experience with peers in Israel that left them with questions about the role of Judaism in their lives and a deeper relationship with Israel? What might these individuals seek? How could the community you seek to build complement and build from this powerful experience?

Further, to effectively serve young adults, one must also be knowledgeable about his/her local community. [Community mapping exercises](#) can provide overviews of local demographics, unique community characteristics and help identify local leadership and organizations. For example, what events are popular for young adults in your community? What are popular methods of transportation? Where do people go for information about local community life? Which organizations currently serve this cohort well, how and why?

Low Barrier Entry Point & Meeting Them Where They're At

Much has been written about the millennial generation over the years and the 2013 Pew Study: *A Portrait of Jewish Americans* continues to be analyzed, dissected and expounded upon. In a DIY era when young adults want to craft their own journeys, congregational leadership must think about the real and perceived barriers to engagement. As the Pew Study states, low barrier entry points are essential when it comes to young adult engagement.

Rabbi Oren Hayon has spent his career engaging young adults. Currently the Greenstein Family Executive Director of the Hillel at the University of Washington, Rabbi Hayon elucidates several barriers to engagement:

1. Financial: Young adults have less discretionary income at this point in their lives. Lowering or eliminating dues is a successful strategy but does not succeed on its own. You must demonstrate to young adults that there is value in paying, that there is something worth paying for and to connect with the community.
2. Marketing/Communications: Are your website/newsletters/Facebook page aimed at “insiders” or “outsiders?” Are young adults able to recognize themselves in these marketing channels?
3. Cultural: Are young adults likely to see themselves at the synagogue? Is your building a safe and comfortable place for a diverse population? Consider moving programming outside your walls.
4. Leadership: Do young adults have a pathway toward leadership in your community? Are young adults in charge of determining the programmatic/educational offerings for themselves and each other?

All of these questions must be considered and addressed. Yet these are not sufficient, congregational leaders must also remember that whatever is offered must be of consistently high quality, so that young adults don't just attend one event, but are compelled to return and become more deeply immersed in the community.

Partnerships

Though it often feels easier to do it alone, partnerships between an organization and community stakeholders can strengthen your work. Partnerships are mutually beneficial and build upon the strengths of each community involved; they are smart business practices—diversifying nonprofit's limited human and financial resources and expanding the organization's reach to a wider audience. Finally, partnerships are the wave of the future—a trend that external funders crave, which complement our understanding of shared experiences of young adults.

While some partnerships develop organically between organizations, others bring together strange bedfellows, for example: URJ Keshet (a Taglit-Birthright Israel trip provider) and Aish HaTorah NY. Recognizing a shared interest in helping Birthright alumni stay connected to the Jewish community, and maintain a relationship with Israel. Aish invited URJ to pilot their nascent program Bring Israel Home, a post-trip 4-week competition among 8-9 buses, with the winning group receiving a reunion weekend in the US with all participants—North American

and Israelis —flown in for the occasion. This partnership was based from the beginning on shared goals and common ground, willingness to put aside our differences for a true collaboration that strengthened the work and—of course—the desire to create a positive, successful experience for participants. Reaching ‘across the aisle’ in this way further highlights our true intentions and looks beyond our immediate program to helping young adults lead meaningful Jewish lives. In two cycles, this program has helped over 1,575 Keshet alumni engage in Jewish life and has brought in over \$200,000 worth of programmatic services to URJ Keshet’s post-trip engagement work.

This example demonstrates a partnership that seems unlikely. We encourage you to similarly think about partners within your own community—even if unusual—who could collaborate with you (from other congregations to the local Federation).

Leadership Development

The 20s and 30s demographic is one defined by transience. They move through various life stages (recent graduation, marriage, parenthood, career changes) within this age bracket. As a result, congregations’ young adult communities often struggle with cultivating and sustaining great young leadership. While this can prove to be a challenge for congregations seeking to build a sustainable young adult community, it is the norm and one that can be seen as exciting, as congregations are thus able to meet and work with many young adults with varied interests and backgrounds.

A rabbi from Temple Shalom of Newton, MA spent a considerable amount of time and energy nurturing a young couple to lead their young adult initiative. After months of activism, the young couple decided to leave Boston for a new adventure. This was a setback to the momentum built. The congregation was left without lay leaders and with a rabbi who had invested a considerable amount of time in grooming them. Having learned from this situation, the congregational leadership was able to reassess their leadership recruitment and development strategy, gain momentum and invest in a new cadre of young leaders to take the helm.

Like Temple Shalom, congregations must accept that leadership can quickly change. We must continue to train and “pay it forward” to the new communities where young adults will find themselves.

membership (with a small m)

Most communities immersed in young adult engagement have asked themselves some or all of the following questions: How much will young adult programming cost? Should we charge for programming? Should it be free? Should we provide a special rate for young adults to join the synagogue? How do we fund this work if we don’t ask young adults to financially contribute? If we’re investing heavily in young adult engagement, what is our ROI?

For many of us, it’s clear that collectively, organizations and synagogues must be willing to financially support the creation of young adult communities. For a variety of reasons (limited funds, high student loans, the “Birthright effect,” not seeing the value in congregational membership), young adults are not willing or able to pay the real costs of being an active participant in Jewish life. How do we acknowledge this reality while also pushing the bar forward?

A variety of models can be seen across Reform congregations: free tickets to the High Holidays, discounted or voluntary members, pay-for-service models, angels from within the congregation that underwrite programming, etc. There is no “one size fits all” model, yet it is important to start from a place of “small m” membership: true meaningful engagement that leads to on-going participation, then leadership and financially supporting the community of which one is an active Member.



FUBU: For Us, By Us

For young adult communities to be successful and sustainable, they must move from staff-centered programs into networked communities. Without a core group of dedicated, trained and mentored lay leaders, staff will quickly burn-out. Further, the congregation would only be offering passive programming that requires nothing more than one's attendance and does not sustain community.

To challenge this issue, Jamie Schiffman, Director of Professional Development at International Hillel, recommends that we “move away from transactional relationships to transformational relationships” between staff and lay leaders. This adjustment to our culture will create space for young adults to rise into leadership positions and co-create the community they seek to be a part of. Their engagement will strengthen their relationships with one another *and* with the institution.

Further, this is a generation of individuals who prefer to create their own experience rather than it be handed to them by others—a “for us, by us” culture. Not only should the organized community recognize this trait within this generation, but it can and should capitalize on this attitude and provide readily-accessible leadership opportunities that can, in turn, strengthen the congregation.

DIY Judaism

In today's world, young adults are virtually invisible from organized Jewish life. This is especially true as one need not join a congregation, JCC or be a contributor to Jewish organizations to meaningfully practice Judaism. Today's society provides a surplus of alternative and personalized opportunities to live one's Judaism outside the walls of the established community. Why turn to a congregation? A quick Google search will tell you who Moses was, the blessing for lighting the Chanukah candles, a how-to video on baking challah or recommend a great Israeli film.

Young adults are especially prone to creating their own Jewish experiences “outside our walls.” Why practice in the way their parents practice when they can create their own experiences that reflect their personal spirituality and the aspects of culture that resonate?

While it is important to note this as a reality, there also lies an opportunity for organizations and synagogues to tap into the “DIY Judaism” concept and co-create experiences that simultaneously reflect the organization/ congregational community and provide space for young adults' unique practices and interests. One successful example is Congregation Beth Elohim's Brooklyn Jews program, Shabbat in the Hood. “Brooklyn Jews... help[s] young, unaffiliated Jews build robust Jewish experiences based on what THEY want. Evenings can be structured around dinner, learning, singing, prayer, wine and cheese, or anything else you can imagine! You provide the space, we together invite the guests, CBE will send you a rabbinic student with a guitar, a prayer book, or whatever else you think might add to your evening.” Not only does this model provide meaningful support for DIY Judaism, it also empowers young adults in the community to step forward and take on a leadership role.

Role of Personal Connections in Community-Building

Often, when we evaluate success, we count the number of attendees and more equals better. We create large-scale events (Matzah Balls, Purim Parties, etc.) to attract a crowd. While these events often bring the numbers we associate with success, attending them don't necessarily help one personally connect and become involved in Jewish community. However, when paired with smaller-scale, intimate programming—small groups of young adults coming together to talk, learn, eat and socialize—we can create a cohort of networked relationships that will sustain the 20s and 30s community and help identify great leaders.

Congregation Beth Israel in San Diego found success (numbers-wise) in their large young adult High Holiday service and Passover Seder, yet they couldn't identify who the “regulars” were and/or who might be interested in getting more involved as leaders. In addition to their large-scale programming, Beth Israel also runs a successful Introduction to Judaism class and realized that this program might serve as a great feeder into young adult

programming. Months of learning together as a cohort in the class allowed friendships to develop that often continue after the class. Tapping into the natural leaders of these cohorts as leaders of the young adult community could help bring new networks of folks together, co-develop programming that speaks to their needs/ interests and provide a natural next step for couples and individuals who are committed to making a Jewish life for themselves.

Temple Shalom's (Newton, MA) young adult community, Shalom Y'all, wanted to find their unique place in the Boston Jewish community with over 60 organizations in the area seeking to engage Jewish young adults. It was critical for the congregation to think carefully and intentionally about what was their niche in the rich and vibrant community seeking to engage 20s and 30s. Rather than compete with the large-scale, successful programming being done in the area, they opted for Shalom Y'all to reflect the values of their own congregational community by focusing on forming deep relationships and helping people live more meaningful Jewish lives. Their young adult leadership decided that they are "ok with not doing bar nights. We want to focus on building community" in smaller cohorts. This realization and ownership over who they—and also who they aren't—opened the door to strategic partnerships within the community that they previously hesitated to develop.

Congregational Buy-In

To sustain a successful young adult community, it is imperative that congregational leadership supports the work. This is especially important as young adult communities are typically removed from the congregation—physically and in terms of leadership.

University Synagogue's young adult engagement community is called Brentwood Chavurah. Almost all of the programming they do is "off campus" and doesn't require traditional congregational membership. For the synagogue leadership, there has always been a *theoretical* understanding of the need to invest and support 20s and 30s, but not always a practical one. They struggled to comprehend the importance of investing in Brentwood Chavurah because 1) their own journeys were very different, 2) when it comes to budget questions, they aren't necessarily seeing their "bang for their buck" and 3) some board members see the separate 20s & 30s group as "taking away" from the synagogue.

To address this issue, Brentwood Chavurah leadership wanted a seat on the congregation's board. This position would help break down these issues and build a base of support for young adult community within the leadership of the congregation. Initially, the associate rabbi (who is a young adult himself) was opposed to this idea, believing his voice was strong enough on the board to speak on behalf the young adult community. After some discussions with his lay leader and URJ staff, he realized that Brentwood Chavurah needed to be seen as a priority of the congregation—not just part of his portfolio. Further, he realized the significance of having this voice around the table and became an advocate to help move the proposal forward.

Soon thereafter, they led a campaign to educate the board about the value of this position and University Synagogue's board not only welcomed a young adult at the table, but *rewrote* their bylaws to reflect this new position. When looking for language for the bylaws, they turned to URJ staff for information from other congregations who have already engaged in this effort.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Young Adult Engagement Active Learning Network

The **Young Adult Engagement Active Learning Network** (ALN) was a 16 week process that the URJ offered to congregations in spring 2014. The ALN brought together URJ congregational professional and lay leaders who were interested in building vibrant young adult communities. Through the ALN process, congregations had the opportunity to learn together, network with others in the field, obtain great tools and resources and identify ‘next steps’ to take action at home!

The ALN process operated in a 4-week cycle. In the syllabus below, each week is coded by letter and color and remains written as if you were the participant. Additionally, titles of each presenter reflect their positions at the time of the presentation:

- **“A” Weeks:** Participants will **watch an online, pre-recorded learning broadcast** (much like a *Ted Talk*) **and read supplementary articles** related to a given topic. These learning broadcasts and readings will be available on URJ’s web portal, “The Tent,” and can be watched on your own time—at your leisure!
- **“B” Weeks:** Participants will join **live online chat sessions** with the presenter from the previous week’s pre-recorded learning broadcast. These experts will lead a lively conversation around the topic and will be prepared to answer your questions and help you think through how this topic is relevant to your home community. The live online chat will be offered twice that week—feel free to attend whichever time is more convenient for you! *Note: the live online chat sessions will include participants from all the URJ ALNs.*
- **“C” Weeks:** Participants will **receive articles** focused on a specific young adult engagement topic, to be read at your leisure!
- **“D” Weeks:** Participants will join a **live learning broadcast webinar** related to the previous week’s articles. On this webinar, participants will hear success stories from congregations in the field and learn with a topical expert.

Even if your congregation did not participate in the Young Adult Engagement ALN, you can still benefit from reading this document and accessing the resources provided. If you view each webinar, study the recommended readings and complete the relevant workbook pages—you can learn most of what was offered to our ALN participants.

We hope that this document will help you discover more about how you can better engage young adults in your congregation and will inspire you to take action in your local community.

Syllabus

(for online resources referenced in this syllabus go to urj.org/20s30s)

Intro **Introduction to Young Adult Engagement & Active Learning Networks**
Live Learning Broadcast Webinar (D)

Naomi Abelson, URJ Associate Engagement Director—Young Adults
Graham Hoffman, Deputy Director of Development, AIPAC

- [Recorded Webinar](#)
- [Workbook Pages](#)

Unit 1 **Building a Base of Congregational Support**
Pre-Recorded Learning Broadcast (A)
Live Online Chat (B)

Rabbi Jonah Pesner, Senior Vice President, Union for Reform Judaism

- [Pre-Recorded 20-Minute Learning Broadcast](#)
- [Recorded Live Chat](#)
- [Workbook Pages](#)

Unit 2 **Young Adult Leadership**
Readings (C)
Live Learning Broadcast Webinar (D)

Lila Foldes, Co-Director, Just Congregations

- [Recorded Webinar](#)
- [Workbook Pages](#)

Readings:

- [Organizing Notes on Leadership](#)
- [Small Groups with Purpose](#) (Leadership Chapter)
- Optional Additional Readings: [Leadership](#)

Unit 3 **Culture & Change with Rabbi Sam Joseph**
Pre-Recorded Learning Broadcast (A)
Live Online Chat (B)

Rabbi Sam Joseph, Elanore Sinsheimer Distinguished Service Professor of Jewish Education & Leadership Development, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and URJ Faculty Member

- [Pre-Recorded 20-Minute Learning Broadcast](#)
- [Recorded Live Chat](#)
- [Workbook Pages](#)

Unit 4 **Barriers & Entry Points**

Readings (C) Live Learning Broadcast (D)

Rabbi Oren Hayon, Director, Hillel UW

- [Recorded Webinar](#)
- [Workbook Pages](#)

Readings & Videos:

- [Be the Jew You Make](#), Shaul Magid on post-ethnic Judaism
- [“I am Jewish” Video](#), Andrew Lustig, Spoken-Word Poet
- [Top 10 Take-Aways from the Pew Study](#)
- [Black & White Necessity for Grey Zone Judaism](#)
- [Optional Additional Readings: A Few Thoughts on the Roots of the Identity Discourse](#)

Unit 5 **Experimenting & Measuring with Amy Asin**

Pre-Recorded Learning Broadcast (A)

Live Online Chat (B)

Amy Asin, Senior Consultant, The Experiment in Congregational Education and URJ Faculty Member

- [Recorded Webinar](#)
- [Workbook Pages](#)

Readings & Videos:

- [Blog Post: When Numbers Aren't Everything](#)
- [Using New Measures to Change the Conversation about Success—NATA Journal](#)
- [Optional: Changing the Conversation Towards a Relational Culture Recorded Webinar](#)

Unit 6 **Partnerships in Young Adult Engagement**

Readings (C)

Live Learning Broadcast (D)

Lisa Lieberman Barzilai—Director, Expanding Our Reach, URJ & Jennifer Zwilling, International Hillel Vice President for Strategic Initiatives

- [Recorded Webinar](#)
- [Workbook Pages](#)

Readings:

- [The Difference between Partnerships & Collaboration](#)
- [From Founder's Dilemma to Founders' Advantage](#)
- [From Harlam to Hillel: How Harlam Has Shaped My Work as a Hillel Professional](#)
- [NFTY & BBYO: We Can Make Each Other Stronger](#)
- Additional Resource: [Young Adult Community Mapping Exercise](#)

Unit 7 **Being a Networked Congregation**

Pre-Recorded Learning Broadcast (A)

Live Online Chat (B)

Miriam Brosseau, Engagement & Program Director—ELI Talks, See3 Communications

- [Recorded Webinar](#)
- [Workbook Pages](#)

Readings:

- [The Art of Building Virtual Communities](#)
- [Networks vs. Communities of Practice](#)

Final **Putting it All Together: Concluding Young Adult Engagement ALN Session**

Live Learning Broadcasts (D)

- [Recorded Webinar](#)

ALN Participant Notes Page

Engaging Millennials—Connecting Jewish 20's & 30's to Jewish Life

Graham Hoffman, Deputy Director of Development, AIPAC

Engaging those uninvolved or under-involved in Jewish life requires two key ingredients: 1) **Understanding them:** their interests, ambitions, and passions (individually and collectively) and; 2) A re-orientation of how institutions approach their work – from offering programs and activities which we try to get people to attend to focusing our efforts on **relationship-building** and **community organizing**. Our discussion will provide the foundation for your synagogue community to ensure each of these elements are effectively deployed as you commit yourselves to making breakthroughs with this critical population.

Notes

Taskforce Discussion Guide

Engaging Millennials—Connecting Jewish 20's & 30's to Jewish Life

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Part I: Topic Overview

To begin the taskforce meeting, the ALN participants will share an overview of their learning on this topic as part of the ALN process.

Part II: Central Discussion—Questions to Ponder

- Who are the key target population(s) you're trying to reach?
- How many individuals from within your target demographic(s) do you know personally (first-hand)?
- What are the attributes you know that pertain to engaging them?
- Which population do you seek to engage that you know very little about?
How can you find more information?
- What are the most compelling assets of your congregation that would appeal to young adults?
- How will your congregation be different once you engage those populations?

Part III: Next Steps

- Summarize the Discussion.
- What are your next steps?

ALN Participant Notes Page

Building a Base of Support

Rabbi Jonah Pesner, Senior Vice President, URJ

- Understanding the role of the leader in moving a community
- Creating a “power analysis”—better understanding who can influence change in an institution
- Understanding the interests of those with power & finding ways to expand and deepen relationships with them

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Taskforce Discussion Guide

Building a Base of Support

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Part I: Topic Overview

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Part II: Text Study

Exodus Chapter 18:1-27 Yitro

¹ Jethro priest of Midian, Moses’ father-in-law, heard all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people, how the Lord had brought Israel out from Egypt.² So Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, took Zipporah, Moses’ wife, after she had been sent home,³ and her two sons—of whom one was named Gershom, that is to say, “I have been a stranger in a foreign land”;⁴ and the other was named Eliezer, meaning, “The God of my father was my help, and He delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh.”⁵ Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, brought Moses’ sons and wife to him in the wilderness, where he was encamped at the mountain of God.⁶ He sent word to Moses, “I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you, with your wife and her two sons.”⁷ Moses went out to meet his father-in-law; he bowed low and kissed him; each asked after the other’s welfare, and they went into the tent.

⁸ Moses then recounted to his father-in-law everything that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel’s sake, all the hardships that had befallen them on the way, and how the Lord had delivered them.⁹ And Jethro rejoiced over all the kindness that the Lord had shown Israel when He delivered them from the Egyptians.¹⁰ “Blessed be the Lord,” Jethro said, “who delivered you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh, and who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. ¹¹ Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods, yes, by the result of their very schemes against [the people].”¹² And Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices for God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to partake of the meal before God with Moses’ father-in-law.

¹³ Next day, Moses sat as magistrate among the people, while the people stood about Moses from morning until evening.¹⁴ But when Moses’ father-in-law saw how much he had to do for the people, he said, “What is this thing that you are doing to the people? Why do you act alone, while all the people stand about you from morning until evening?”¹⁵ Moses replied to his father-in-law, “It is because the people come to me to inquire of God.¹⁶ When they have a dispute, it comes before me, and I decide between one person and another, and I make known the laws and teachings of God.”

¹⁷ But Moses’ father-in-law said to him, “The thing you are doing is not right;¹⁸ you will surely wear yourself out, and these people as well. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.¹⁹ Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You represent the people before God: you bring the disputes

before God,²⁰ and enjoin upon them the laws and the teachings, and make known to them the way they are to go and the practices they are to follow.²¹ You shall also seek out from among all the people capable men who fear God, trustworthy men who spurn ill-gotten gain. Set these over them as chiefs of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, and²² let them judge the people at all times. Have them bring every major dispute to you, but let them decide every minor dispute themselves. Make it easier for yourself by letting them share the burden with you.²³ If you do this—and God so commands you—you will be able to bear up; and all these people too will go home unwearied.”

²⁴ Moses heeded his father-in-law and did just as he had said. ²⁵Moses chose capable men out of all Israel, and appointed them heads over the people—chiefs of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens;²⁶ and they judged the people at all times: the difficult matters they would bring to Moses, and all the minor matters they would decide themselves.²⁷ Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell, and he went his way to his own land.

Text Study Discussion Questions

- What does Jethro teach Moses?
- Why is Jethro’s insight critical to move the community forward?
- Why is Jethro successful in helping Moses grow and become a more effective leader?
- How can we apply these insights for our own congregational leadership?

Part III: Central Discussion—Questions to Ponder

- How would you rate your base of support for your initiative?
- To what extent does your base of support extend beyond the usual suspects and those within your target audience that are already involved?
- How would you rate your congregation’s awareness about your initiative?
- How would you rate [the buy-in of your senior rabbi & temple president](#)?
- How would you rate [the buy-in of other critical players](#)? For example:
 - Board Members
 - Donors & Potential Donors
 - Other Key Stakeholders
 - In your congregation, how strong is your understanding of where power to make change lies?

Part IV: Next Steps

- Summarize the Discussion.
- What are your next steps?

ALN Participant Notes Page

Don't Lead Alone: Building Your Team of Leaders

Lila Foldes, Co-Director, Just Congregations

Most of us have felt the thrill of conceiving a meaningful vision, followed shortly by that awful feeling when you realize that you'll never be able to pull it off on your own, and you're not sure who is going to help you get there. Don't Lead Alone will focus on how to not get "stuck" leading alone. Drawing on best principles from community organizing, we will begin a conversation about the huge topic of [leadership](#).

Notes

Taskforce Discussion Guide

Don't Lead Alone: Building Your Team of Leaders

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Part I: Topic Overview

To begin the taskforce meeting, the ALN participants will share an overview of their learning on this topic as part of the ALN process.

Part II: Central Discussion—Questions to Ponder

Our Team Leadership

- Do you agree with this definition of a leader? Why or why not?
- When you look at this list of qualities of a leader, which leadership strengths of your own do you see? In which areas might you want to support each other in growing?
- What is your own story of entering leadership at your synagogue or in other areas of your life? Who invited you in? Who helped you move from crawling to walking to running? Share your stories with one another and look for both common themes (in order to find great principles of leadership engagement) and interesting differences (what can we learn about shaping our invitations to a first step of leadership to the specific person we want to reach?).

The Leadership We Want To Build

- Who are the people showing up to our young adult programs right now? Are they leaders? (It's ok if the answer is no!)
- Whether they're already involved or not, what is the list of potential leaders you most want to engage?
- How do you want to reach out to the potential members of your 'dream team?' How might you get to know them better? What first ("crawl") steps might you invite each person to take?

Part III: Next Steps

- Summarize the Discussion.
- What are your next steps?

ALN Participant Notes Page

Culture and Change

Rabbi Sam Joseph

Our congregation's culture is the "way we do things around here". Real change happens when those **cultural ways** are **examined** and judged as **ways for now**, ways that need to be changed or ways that should be eliminated. A great challenge is that most of the time the elements of that culture are part of the unconscious behaviors of the members. New people only learn them when they inadvertently violate them. Change requires intentional reflection and evaluation of the unconscious cultural behavioral assumptions by which congregations maintain their culture.

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Taskforce Discussion Guide

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Part II: Text Study

What we want to change we curse and then pick up a tool.
Bless whatever you can with eyes and hands and tongue.
If you can't bless it, get ready to make it new

By Marge Piercy, Poet

1. What does Piercy mean in her first line? Her second line? Third line?
2. How may this apply to what we can do in our congregation?

Part III: Central Discussion—Questions to Ponder

1. If a "person from Mars" landed in our congregation, what are examples of important artifacts that this person would see? What do they mean and why are they important?
2. What are our congregation's espoused values?
3. Do the artifacts and the espoused values align?
4. Looking at one small facet of the congregation, what do we think people assume about that facet? Examples to look at are... when people hear religious school what do they assume; Friday night or Saturday morning services; dues and congregational financial obligations; mail and communications from the congregation; the youth group; WRJ?

Part IV: Next Steps

- Summarize the Discussion.
- What are your next steps?

ALN Participant Notes Page

Breaking Down the Walls & Building Bridges

Rabbi Oren Hayon, Greenstein Family Executive Director Hillel at the University of Washington

Recent demographic research indicates that today’s Jewish young adults relate to the Jewish community—and to their own identity—in completely different ways than their parents and grandparents did. These differences mean that the previous ways of congregational outreach to young adults simply don’t work anymore. What might tomorrow’s post-ethnic, post-religious, post-Zionist Jewish community look like, and how can we succeed in reaching and engaging these young adults in meaningful, mutually fulfilling communal relationships?

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Part II: Text Study

Numbers 11:24-30

²⁴ Moses went out and reported the words of the Lord to the people. He gathered seventy of the people's elders and stationed them around the Tent.²⁵ Then the Lord came down in a cloud and spoke to him; He drew upon the spirit that was on him and put it upon the seventy elders. And when the spirit rested upon them, they spoke in ecstasy, but did not continue.

²⁶ Two men, one named Eldad and the other Medad, had remained in camp; yet the spirit rested upon them—they were among those recorded, but they had not gone out to the Tent—and they spoke in ecstasy in the camp.²⁷ A youth ran out and told Moses, saying, "Eldad and Medad are acting the prophet in the camp!"²⁸ And Joshua son of Nun, Moses' attendant from his youth, spoke up and said, "My lord Moses, restrain them!"²⁹ But Moses said to him, "Are you wrought up on my account? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord put His spirit upon them!"³⁰ Moses then reentered the camp together with the elders of Israel.

- What is the meaning of the strange description of Eldad and Medad in v. 26: "They were among those recorded?" Why is this included, and what does it mean for someone in this community not to be "recorded?"
- Why does the Torah seem to feel comfortable with God's prophetic vision being shared with the 70 Elders (v. 25) but not with Eldad and Medad (v. 26)?
- Is Moses' response to Joshua in v. 29 meant to be taken literally? What would it look like if the entire
- Israelite people suddenly became prophets?

Part III: Central Discussion—Questions to Ponder

- If you joined your congregation as an adult, describe what it was like when you first came into the community. How did you make the decision to stay and get involved? Now: How would you like new synagogue members to answer this same question?
- One hard question is to think about the people who aren't currently members of your congregation. Why aren't they joining? Why do they stay away?
- What does your congregation do better than any other synagogue in the world? Why do young adults need to get some of it for themselves?
- If you could reduce or eliminate some of the barriers that separate young adults from your congregation, what would the effects be—both positive and negative?

Part IV: Next Steps

- Summarize the Discussion.
- What are your next steps?

ALN Participant Notes Page

Changing the Conversation about Evaluation

Amy Asin, Asin Associates

Making change happen in our congregation not only requires learning new ways to engage congregants or run programs or [raise funds](#), it also requires learning new ways to measure what we do. Old measures like attendance and complaints won't go away and shouldn't. But if we are really trying something new, shouldn't we also be looking for new ways to define success?

Notes

Taskforce Discussion Guide

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Part I: Topic Overview

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Part II: Text Study

EILU d'varim she-ein lahem shiur,
she-adam ocheil peiroteihem
baolam hazeh
v'hakeren kayemet lo laolam haba.
V'eilu hein:
kibud av va-eim,
ug'milut chasadim,
v'hashkamat beit hamidrash
shacharit v'ar'vit,
v'hachnasat orchim,
uvikur cholim,
v'hachnasat kalah, ul'vayat hameit,
v'iyun t'filah,
vahavaat shalom
bein adam lachaveiro,
v'talmud Torah k'neged kulam.

אֵלוֹ דְּבָרִים שֶׁאֵין לָהֶם שְׁעוֹר,
שֶׁאָדָם אוֹכֵל פְּרוֹתֵיהֶם
בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה
וְהִקְרָן קַיֵּמֶת לוֹ לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא.
וְאֵלוֹ הֵינּוּ:
כְּבוֹד אָב וָאִם,
וּגְמִילוֹת חֲסָדִים,
וְהַשְׁכָּמַת בֵּית הַמִּדְרָשׁ
שַׁחֲרִית וְעֶרְבִית,
וְהַכְּנַסַּת אוֹרְחִים,
וּבִקּוּר חוֹלִים,
וְהַכְּנַסַּת כֶּלֶה, וּלְנִיחַת הַמֶּת,
וְעִיּוֹן תְּפִלָּה,
וְהַבָּאָת שְׁלוֹם
בֵּין אָדָם לְחֵבְרוֹ,
וְתַלְמוּד תּוֹרָה כְּנֶגֶד כָּלֶם.

From Mishkan T'filah,
CCCAR Press

These are things that are limitless of which a person enjoys the fruit of this world, while the principle remains in the world to come. They are: honoring one's father and mother, engaging in deeds of compassion, arriving early for study, morning and evening, dealing graciously with guests, visiting the sick, providing for the wedding couple, accompanying the dead for burial, being devoted in prayer, and making peace among people. But the study of Torah encompasses them all.

Text Study Questions

- The text tells us that these things are limitless and immeasurable. We are told that this means that we cannot ever have done enough of them. There is no point at which we can say, we have made enough peace. Do you agree with this precept—that there is no limit to what we can do in these areas?
- Pick one of the areas that relates to something that you do at your congregation. Even if the amount you do should be limitless, how can you tell if you are doing it well? What measures would you use?

Part III: Central Discussion—Questions to Ponder

- Do a “conversation audit.” When you talk about what is going well or not going well in your ALN topic area, what are the measures that you are using to define success? Are they old measures or new measures?
- What is one new measure that you can start to use in your ALN area? How can you collect data?
- What are two or three success stories based on new measures that you want to start sharing? How can you use these stories to start changing the conversation about success in your congregation?

Part IV: Next Steps

- Summarize the Discussion.
- What are your next steps?

ALN Participant Notes Page

Partnerships and Collaboration: Stronger Together

Lisa Lieberman Barzilai, RJE, Director—Expanding Our Reach, URJ
Jennifer Zwilling, Vice President for Strategic Initiatives, Hillel International

Gone are the days when congregations and organizations can exist on their own. With limited resources, both financial and human, and funders seeking to support joint endeavors **it is critical to find partners for collaboration.** Ultimately it is possible to create and implement bolder initiatives with others who seek to achieve similar or complementary goals.

Notes

Taskforce Discussion Guide

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Part I: Topic Overview

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Part II: Text Study

Joshua 2:1-14: Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim, saying, “Go, reconnoiter the region of Jericho.” So they set out, and they came to the house of a harlot name Rahab and lodged there.² The king of Jericho was told, “Some men have come here tonight, Israelites, to spy out the country.”³ The king of Jericho thereupon sent orders to Rahab: “Produce the men who came to you and entered your house, for they have come to spy out the whole country.”⁴ The woman, however, had taken the two men and hidden them...⁹ “I know that the Lord has given the country to you...¹² Now, since I have shown loyalty to you, swear to me by the Lord that you in turn will show loyalty to my family. Provide me with a reliable sign¹³ that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and save us from death.”¹⁴ The men answered her, “Our persons are pledged for yours, even to death! If you do not disclose this mission of ours we will show you true loyalty when the Lord gives us the land.”

- Why do you think the spies went to Rahab’s home?
- What benefit did Rahab gain by lodging and hiding the spies?
- On the surface this would seem an unlikely partnership—a harlot and Israelites preparing to take the land. What unlikely partnerships can you imagine in your work engaging young adults?

Part III: Central Discussion—Questions to Ponder

- Who are some natural or possible partners/collaborators in your community?
- What makes them good partners/collaborators?
- In what way would you want to partners/collaborators?
- Who would you approach at these organizations?
- Who are unlikely partners/collaborators in your community?
- What makes them good partners/collaborators?

- In what way would you want to partners/collaborators?
- Who would you approach at these organizations?
- What do you hope to get from the partnership/collaboration? What would the partnering/collaborating organization/congregation gain?
- In addition to these questions, we recommend you utilize the [Community Mapping tool](#) posted on The Tent.

Part IV: Next Steps

- Summarize the Discussion.
- What are you next steps?

ALN Participant Notes Page

Connected Learning in the Digital World

Miriam Brosseau, Engagement & Program Director—ELI Talks, See3 Communications

Building any learning network takes work, and it can seem particularly challenging online. But “[connected learning](#)” in the digital world also offers unique opportunities for growth. In this session, we’ll take a look at what makes a healthy community of practice, explore how those elements look and feel different online, and uncover how to make the most of our online learning.

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Part I: Topic Overview

To begin the taskforce meeting, the ALN participants will share an overview of their learning on this topic as part of the ALN process.

Part II: Central Discussion—Questions to Ponder

- What are our goals for our learning?
- If we are wildly successful, how will our work/congregation be different?
- What will it take to make our learning a regular practice? How can we build it into the existing system, and where will we have to develop new behaviors?
- How transparent will we be? What are the boundaries? How can we embrace vulnerability to help deepen the connections in our community while maintaining a sense of safety or privacy?

Part III: Next Steps

- Summarize the Discussion.
- What are your next steps?

General Notes Page



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