

CONCLUSION

Our work with the Jim Joseph Foundation began as a study about leadership journeys and the role of leadership development programs. What we found was that the moment we are in calls for both leaders and programs to be in service of intentionally and strategically building networks. **Network leadership is the future of leadership for the social sector, and this guide focuses on how cohorts can help build networks and provide valuable learning experiences for practicing network leadership skills.** In order to fully realize this future, we need to move beyond thinking about leadership development programs as only serving the individual participants – rather the programs can be more effective when they support participants while at the same time “seeding” a network that can mobilize for broader change. Cohort programs have the greatest potential for impact when every element of the program is designed to advance a core goal: to lead continuous, positive change in the world by developing and supporting networks.

Cohorts of leaders are important because they feed a set of connections between people that are important during a fellowship/program and after a formal program ends. These seeded networks have the capacity to expand, shift, grow, and adapt to meet larger field-level needs. Thus, building a social network will increase the return on investment of the initial program. It may also influence how the leaders who went through this experience launch new initiatives as they advance in their careers. Given how tightly connected the Jewish community is in the US, influencing any one part of the ecosystem (network) will have reverberating effects throughout the network.

Successful boundary spanning interventions to foster mutually beneficial interdependence will depend upon leaders who are able to see the bigger picture and take on the role of “ecosystem engineers.” The types of complex challenges that Jewish leaders are facing are best approached by tapping tangibly into the collective expertise of a network of trusted colleagues versus adopting a heroic, individualistic approach to finding solutions or managing challenges. Leaders will need to be “collaborative boundary spanners, who will emphasize broad concerns and community building rather than institutional preservation.”²⁸ Their role will be to develop “systems of shared power [that] incubate creativity across a variety of institutional silos and create invested stakeholders and constituents.”²⁹

Maximizing the success of a widening range of organizations will require “a commitment to interdependence that goes well beyond platitudinous expressions of one-for-all-and-all-for-one.”³⁰ It will be imperative to develop new network-oriented systems and practices that facilitate field-wide collaboration. The boundary spanning work needed to address network-level issues will depend upon bringing together the full range of diverse stakeholders. Therefore, building positive relationships among leaders in different roles and across a variety of organizations is a necessary prerequisite to building a more supportive shared Jewish organizational ecosystem. Funders also have a responsibility – given the commitment and energy that applicants bring, as well as the power differential between applicants and funders – to span organizational boundaries and work together to provide valuable professional development experiences strategically across the sector, rather than solely to further the prestige of the foundation or program.

Within this guide, we have presented a set of core design elements that – when considered through a lens of power and when understood as inherently connected to the future network – are critical opportunities for more purposefully designing successful cohort-based leadership programs that support a larger network for field-level change. Throughout, we have also identified where shifts in our thinking have to occur. Funders, operators, program designers, and participants have to reconceptualize leadership development experiences with the network in mind, understanding what that entails (in particular, a focus on relationships and power) for how to balance content, what competencies need to be supported, what skills can be practiced through application, and how we can shift toward emergent learning to serve the network.

It is our belief that focusing on these core elements and authentically engaging in these mindset shifts will produce powerful, relevant, and transformative leadership development experiences that not only cascade knowledge and skills throughout the network, but elevate and uplift the latent talent and expertise already working to enact transformative social change within the network.

GENERAL SOURCES FOR THE GUIDE

(This is not an exhaustive list)

- CCL Experiences and Expertise
- Popular nonprofit/philanthropic periodicals (SSIR, Foundation Review)
- LOE Interviews
- Site visits, observation of JJF grantee programs & other LD programs
- Follow Up Survey Responses
- CCL Practices
- Pedagogical design elements, design thinking, 4-MAT, etc.
- Similar research & reports, e.g. Schusterman LD Guide

ENDNOTES

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