

NETWORKED LEADERSHIP REQUIRES NEW MINDSETS

A necessary pre-requisite for sector-wide collaboration is spreading awareness of the value of networks.

Many leaders inherently know the value of the connections that they build, but getting specific and strategic about the value that networks can bring, particularly at different career stages or different stages of change management or community transformation, can elucidate the value the network could have to offer. This can include larger networks for broader systemic change and “micro-networks” – smaller networks that develop within alumni groups or within programs, which may serve critical gaps in the broader system.

A second task is to teach leaders how to think strategically about supporting and engaging people, ideas, and organizations through networks.

This requires new leadership skills and behaviors. It is incumbent upon leaders to identify their developmental areas, for program designers to shift experiences to more specifically leverage network skills, and for funders and operators to adopt a network-level view of programming and impact. Leading large-scale change through networks will look different from every leader’s unique perspective and will not be the work of only larger or more established organizations (or traditional, more established leaders). By providing long-term stability and supportive infrastructure, funders and large organizations can help networks to form and thrive. But, the true power of a network is realized through the emergent, complex, and unpredictable interactions it makes possible by connecting people, ideas, and resources (see [Repair the World](#), for example).

This guide introduces elements of supporting network leadership that will not only benefit cohort program designers, but also their participants and leaders of all types who are striving to lead positive change in the age of complexity. It should also spur funders and operators to consider how their practices can be revamped to truly support collaborative networks. We believe it is impossible to address the power and importance of cohort-based leadership development programs without focused attention on network creation, and vice versa.

We believe that cohort programs are among the most effective interventions for leadership development for field building and social change. More than anything else, in our study cohort program participants report that the most important aspect of a leadership or professional development program is that it serves to connect individual leaders to a broader network. Even after their program, participants often remain connected to their cohorts or to networks that include multiple cohorts of the same program and may continue to engage with them for years or decades. As we found in our research, these networks establish pathways for ideas to be exchanged, for collaboration, for professional networking, and for personal advice or emotional support through difficult circumstances. And across participants, leaders, operators and funders, there seems to be an awareness that networks can and should be leveraged to do more.

“In our ecosystem of progress, we really have two choices. We can be fueled by fear and we can be driven by love. And I feel like so much of the current discourse, certainly in the Jewish world, comes from fear. Fear of spoiling what we’ve inherited, fear of desecrating the sacred, fear of disillusion, and fear is not helpful. Reverence is, fear is not. And to be driven by love is saying, “We are the caretakers of an ancient technology and methodology that has to be revised and rethought in order to be meaningful, and we have to trust, and we have to come from love.” If we do that, I think we’ll be in much better shape.”

Our key takeaway from the research is that right now, 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.

We explore the many facets of that takeaway in the guide that follows. Each principle of cohort program design, from start to finish, is understood through a lens of network building. In the remainder of this guide, we dissect elements of program design and what we learned from participants in this study and from our organization's experience in designing leadership development programs. We begin by focusing on selection and recruitment for programs, then focus on building trust and adequately preparing leader learners for their experience. We then shift to the facilitation of the learning experience itself and the tools and content that will equip leaders to build, join, and engage a network. Finally, we explore the post-program experience and context to share insights around network prestige and sustainability. In doing so, our goal is to provide program designers and funders with best practices for creating leadership development experiences to build the future of an even more interdependent and connected Jewish social sector. *(Note: we do not dive into in-person and virtual setting differences. In our work at CCL, we are finding that many of the same elements persist, and the nature of the elements can be adapted for virtual settings and still provide valuable and meaningful connection.)*

"You can't get into their programs unless you're already fabulous. Is it an award for past behavior or is it investment in a frontrunner that's likely to be able to celebrate a few years from now? Or are they in the business of helping people behave in different ways than they did before? It's like asking a chief executive to lead change. Chief executives have a bias in favor of the status quo because it produced them at the top and it must be working really well to produce me at the top. I think with these fellowship programs is that people who get into these highly competitive programs are already superstars. How can [the foundation] support outliers, people who are running risky experiments? If you use the frame of experiments, then it's not like your credibility is on the line all the time."

