

organizations spending significant time, energy, and resources fundraising, diverting focus away from the implementation of other aspects of their strategic growth plans.

COVID-19 had a significant impact on funding, onboarding, and program execution. Grantees who received funds before and during COVID-19 reported challenges from the pandemic. The economic uncertainty that came with COVID-19, followed by significant inflation, both reduced the monetary value of Build Grants and created more uncertainty regarding their future value. At the same time, grantees were grateful that JJF maintained their grants during the pandemic, especially those that had to pause programming due to pandemic restrictions. Grantees viewed maintaining funding as a strong show of support during the pandemic.

COVID-19 also impacted programming, particularly for organizations whose primary interventions required in-person connection. Social distancing delayed programmatic growth or the implementation of new in-person programs for these organizations. Still, some grantees reported that the pandemic increased demand for their virtual services, supporting their growth. In particular, grantees with significant web presence before COVID-19 felt that the pandemic increased participant engagement.

• **Considerations for Future Planning**

The evaluation surfaced many potential opportunities to improve the grant impact and continue to effectively support grantees. The considerations below reflect recommendations from grantees, field-wide best practices in capacity building grantmaking, and Third Plateau's synthesis and insights.

Adapt the grant's length and disbursement structure. JJF could adjust the length and financial structure of the grant to better meet grantee needs. Increasing the duration of the grant and/or tailoring the grant term to individual grantees may enable JJF to better position organizations for sustainable scaling. This sustainability challenge is common among both capacity-building and scaling grants. Ford's BUILD grant created similar challenges for grantees despite five years of continuous support. Evaluators recommended that Ford both extend its engagement to seven or more years to slowly reduce funding dependence and give even more time to organizations undergoing leadership transitions or other challenges.⁵ JJF could review its commitment to decreasing the grant and instead work with organizations to plan a disbursement schedule that best suits their needs.

Increase communication and transparency surrounding Build Grants and additional grant opportunities. JJF could cultivate a common language around Build Grants and JJF processes with grantees to align on the support JJF can offer and the reasons behind those norms. It could create spaces for grantees to learn about how JJF staff discuss grant opportunities with its board, and under what circumstances grantees can make presentations or receive introductions to board members. JJF might share clear guidelines for if and how grantees interact with JJF board members, leadership, and other staff members. It could also provide a clear sense of what opportunities, if any, exist at JJF for grantees post-Build Grant, and what non-monetary resources (e.g., convening, networking, expertise) JJF staff

⁵ Raphaëlle Bisiaux, Ron Dwyer-Voss, Maggie Bangser, Susana Morales, Anthony Boateng, Florian Poli, "[Final Report: BUILD Developmental Evaluation](#)," Niras, March 2022.

can leverage on behalf of grantees. A list of the common ways JJF helps grantees might empower organizations to ask for assistance and create clearer expectations between grantees and JJF.

Increase financial sustainability through professional development and networking. In response to prevalent concerns around fundraising, JJF

could provide professional development in that area. Grantee suggestions include a coaching program built to complement the grant or a consulting partner who can offer additional technical assistance, a common best practice when provided alongside an unrestricted monetary grant.⁶

“ I would want [a major] funder to offer a little bit more of their understanding of us and thinking about other investors in an active way. Could I call them up and say, I see this funder in our space could you make a phone call?

Development capacity building could also take the form of supporting grantee networking by leveraging JJF’s role in the philanthropic field. A few grantees suggested a more intentional approach on the part of JJF to formally convene funders and grantees and to provide more opportunities for grantees to present to JJF board members. Other grantees would appreciate additional casual opportunities to network, like being invited to a specific session or sessions at the Jewish Funders Network conference. While JJF already informally or formally connects some grantees with other funders, it could focus on a more equitable and systemic approach for all grantees.

Offer opportunities for collaborative learning. Creating spaces for Build grantee organizations to network with, learn from, and potentially partner with other Build organizations may significantly increase the Build Grant’s impact. Grantees suggested numerous types of interventions. JJF could encourage grantees to share their experiences, lessons learned, and data with each other informally or through more formalized and supported communities of practice for Build grantees. Some

“ I wonder knowing that JJF is focused on Jewish education, would there be value in helping grantees convene to discuss education strategy.

suggested a cohort or convening as a way to learn from each other’s experiences, gain more perspective on the field as a whole, and build a network of peers. JJF could use its network to bring together additional organizations outside the Build program but with similar business models to help cultivate more partnerships and cross-collaborations across the field. Only some grantees are interested in joining a cohort given past experiences, the time commitment, and that some of the leaders already belong to other foundation cohorts (which they have found rewarding). Instead, some would prefer periodic convenings to

celebrate grantee work and to come together for specific networking opportunities and professional development training. As a best practice, these convenings have potential to strengthen the field as a whole by fostering connections between Jewish professionals and leaders.⁷

Create a list of pre-vetted, subsidized consultants. Grantees could benefit from a pre-vetted list of consultants and would like JJF to consider subsidizing specific consulting services that would increase the impact of Build Grants. Grantees view consultants as a critical component to building some internal organizational capacities, such as organizing data, building a CRM, and leading evaluation. They described finding appropriate consultants for their particular needs and the high cost of such services as a burden they would like support in addressing. JJF could leverage its relationships to reduce the price

⁶ Third Plateau, “[Capacity Building Grantmaking Best Practices](#),” Jim Joseph Foundation, January 2023.

⁷ Ibid.

of consulting services by employing one or more consultants for multiple projects. Best practices in capacity building also recommend providing a pre-vetted list of consultants to grantees.⁸

Clarify and communicate expectations regarding diversity. Grantees largely did not mention diversifying their target audiences or staff throughout these interviews, either in terms of intended goals, internal capacities, or achievements. The few times diversity was mentioned, it was a question of values alignment between the grantee organization and JJF. For example, one grantee wondered how JJF was defining “diversity,” especially regarding target audience alignment. Program officers noted that this diversity component is about reaching a new audience in a more “traditional” sense and finding new audiences for programs. If serving diverse audiences is a priority for JJF, it should clarify its definition of “diverse” and the intended outcomes for this goal and communicate both explicitly with grantees. If JJF is still navigating that conversation internally, best practices recommend having a transparent and honest conversation with grantees despite not having clarity yet.⁹

Continue to build in strong evaluation processes and build upon lessons learned. Third Plateau recommends that JJF consider implementing a continuous cycle of evaluation that centers quality of the grantee experience and organizational impact. Creating a participatory evaluation plan alongside grantees could help identify common metrics to measure both the impact of the grant strategy, as well as the grantee experience. This type of structure could also help grantees to develop their internal evaluation capacities while strengthening the grantor/grantee partnership. Alongside or as an alternative to this approach, JJF could run an annual mid-year anonymous evaluation grantee survey to identify areas of success to maximize and challenges that can be addressed throughout the grant cycle.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.