



THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CONVERSATION PHASE III FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Phoenix is pleased share with the entire community this final report of the Jewish Community Conversation. This report summarizes the activities and recommendations of the Phase III workgroups. Now, as at the start of this endeavor, it is our hope that this is just the beginning of individual and organizational efforts to continually converse, create and implement initiatives, programs and activities which will strengthen our Greater Phoenix Jewish Community.

Under the auspices of the Foundation's Jewish Technical Assistance Center (JTAC) and thanks to a generous grant from the Lodestar Foundation, three workgroups were selected to advance their agendas developed during the first two phases of the Jewish Community Conversation. Arts and Culture, Leadership and Public Affairs workgroups were formed and each met over a period of several months. The groups were facilitated by Shelley Cohn (Arts and Culture), Karen Ramsey, (Leadership) and Sandy Price (Public Affairs).

Invitations to participate in the workgroups were issued to all who had previously attended discussion sessions on these topics during Phase I (September 11, 2011) and professional and volunteer leaders of local agencies, organizations and synagogues who participated in Phase II (February 29, 2012) along with others recommended for their expertise and/or interest in one of the three issues. More than 60 people were actively engaged in this process, many of whom had not previously been actively involved in the local Jewish community. Each group met for at least five two-hour sessions over a period of 5-8 months.

Report and Recommendations from the Arts and Culture Workgroup

Mission of the Arts and Culture Working Group:

Bring together leaders from the Jewish arts and culture community to determine if there are opportunities to work together and recommend priorities and action items to be a catalyst for arts and culture experiences for the Jewish community.

Key Objectives:

Consideration of creating an Arts and Culture Council; increase awareness of arts and culture; better marketing and coordination; develop strategy to increase donors to arts and culture programs.

Recommendation #1: Create a Jewish Arts and Culture Council within the Jewish Community Association with the mission:

Strengthen community-wide Jewish arts/culture experiences by working with cultural organizations, artists, schools and others to enhance the quality of Jewish life.

Recommendation #2: Establish an advisory committee of the Jewish Arts and Culture Council

Comprised of arts and culture organization staff and board members, artists and other interested parties to represent diverse interests and sectors, beginning with those who have served as working group members. Existing working group members will take the responsibility for recruiting and selecting the first advisory committee, with input from the Jewish Community Association.

Recommendation #3: Establish an electronic calendar and mechanism for scheduling within the infrastructure of the Jewish Community Association

Integrate seamlessly within the new JCA website; provide training to encourage organizations to submit information and check regarding conflicts; encourage organizations to link and promote the new website; promote events with Jewish content that are not always provided by Jewish organizations.

Recommendation #4: The arts and culture advisory committee becomes a resource to JCA planning, with some of the following considerations

What is the most appropriate placement within the JCA councils for arts and culture issues; such as a stand-alone council or integrated within another issue; assure that arts and culture are integral and meaningful within the JCA structure; establish funding for arts and culture programs and events throughout the community; begin discussion and planning for community-wide event(s).

Recommendation #5: The JCA staff becomes a leader in helping to cross-promote and market a series of events happening throughout the Valley

Report and Recommendations from the Leadership Workgroup

Key objectives:

Explore various options to support the need for leadership development within the Jewish community. There were many diverse approaches/audiences included in the September 11th summary documentation and the group sorted through them to create the recommended priorities.

Recommendation #1: Community Leadership Project:

Develop a community-wide initiative that is selective and focuses on individuals who have or have had volunteer experience and are identified as having leadership experience and potential. The program is intended to include regularly scheduled meetings and last approximately one year. Curriculum to include leadership skills with Jewish content, including:

- How to work effectively with professionals
- Include a mentoring component
- Intentionally create peer-networking and relationship-building opportunities among participants
- Provide an overall summary of the local, national and global community as it currently exists and include historical context
- Explain the structure of local and national organizations, their histories and policies
- Build in an historic and contemporary Jewish narrative
- How to communicate effectively and address conflict
- How to fundraise
- How to recruit and retain stakeholders (members, leaders, volunteers, and donors)
- How to engage in strategic planning
- How to put together a succession plan
- Financial literacy and how to create and manage a budget
- How to effectively collaborate within the community
- Outline the level of commitment required to serve as a leader in the community and clarify responsibilities and accountabilities
- How to hold yourself and others accountable
- Help participants identify their leadership strengths and how to leverage them
- Engage participants to create passion and connection to the Jewish community

Other Leadership Initiatives to Consider (in descending order of importance):

- Traditional Wexner program every four years
- Leadership development for professionals
- Board development for organizations
- Ad hoc leadership support
- New and emerging leaders development program

Suggested possible funding sources include local Jewish agencies, organizations and foundations, national foundations and fees for participation.

Report and Recommendations from the Public Affairs Workgroup

History

The Public Affairs Work group of the Jewish Community Foundation's Jewish Community Conversation is the most recent iteration of the first Jewish Community Conversation held September 11th, 2011, at Arizona State University. That afternoon, over 350 people gathered to discuss a variety of issues facing Phoenix's Jewish community. After a plenary session, a break-out group gathered to talk about whether the Jewish community should have a greater voice in public affairs. Later, at a follow-up discussion convening representatives of Jewish organizations, we continued the discussion. As a result of these two conversations, the Jewish Community Foundation asked Flo Eckstein and Sandy Price to convene a Work Group to address the need to amplify the "Jewish voice" in our community. This recommendation represents the culmination of the Work Group discussion.

Introduction

The Jewish community's presence and voice in the larger Phoenix community has diminished over the last two decades. Although the Jewish community has grown from around 80,000 to an estimated 100,000, it has dropped as a percentage of the metropolitan community, and we are now a very small percentage of the larger community. These numbers are rough, as there has not been a demographic study since 2002.

Over that same period of time, the Phoenix Jewish community has grown to 50 congregations, 10 agencies and scores of organizations. Our population has scattered itself geographically throughout a much larger built-out metropolitan area, and "we," meaning Jewish activists both within the Jewish community and in the broader community, are now less cohesive as a group, less well-known than we once were – inside and outside our community.

Until a few years ago, we had a formal voice, the Jewish Community Relations Council, to speak out on Jewish issues or issues important to the Jewish community, such as human rights, cultural and religious traditions and values, poverty, hunger, the environment, intergroup relations, and of course, providing accurate information about Israel. Today no single organizational "voice" speaks for Jewish issues. We do have a few organizations who speak out, but only when the issue falls within their mission, e.g. ADL, AIPAC, AJC, etc.

Additionally, and perhaps equally important, our community is assimilating. Although there are still many Jewish activists and business people involved in the larger community, they are less likely to pointedly identify themselves as Jewish in those circles. In fact, many Jews who are active and well-known in the larger community are minimally or not at all active in the organized Jewish community. Preservation of our community in part requires that the Jewish community become more aware of its own inherent value and power – something we can promote through the amplification of a communal Jewish voice.

In a nutshell, Public Affairs Work Group participants see compelling and urgent reasons to revive a local Jewish voice for public affairs in our community. Although individual organizations may step forward from time to time when subject matter is within their mission, they do not purport to speak for the entire community, nor do they cover all important topics. Needs are wide-ranging, from advocating to protect Jewish (and other) service organizations from loss of funding, to answering questions and correcting inaccuracies about Judaism, the Jewish community and Israel, to speaking out when bigotry raises its specter.

Challenges

Despite a shared sense of urgency, participants realize that several issues must be addressed to achieve this ambitious project, including how to reconcile the multitude of political perspectives in the community, funding, and ensuring the “voice” has the autonomy necessary to fulfill the mission. The group identified some core factors for success:

- Takes action based on core Jewish values as the decision-making denominator.
- Is independent, and has the ability to gather and represent the larger Jewish community rather than those who may belong to a single organization.
- Funding must be identified quickly to ensure a consistent and sustainable professional presence that volunteers cannot always provide.
- A process be adopted to build consensus among the diverse Jewish organizations and interest groups when possible, and to acknowledge differences when consensus is not possible.

Recommendation:

Launch a project with the following mission:

To foster dialogue and understanding within the Jewish and larger metropolitan communities, to amplify the Jewish voice in response to matters of importance to the Jewish people and on issues that inherently cry out for a Jewish response, to facilitate collaborations for good among Jews and between the Jewish community and its neighbors.

Strategies will include:

1. Identify a committee of coordinators
2. Identify passionate spokespersons – existing and willing
3. Collaborate to select themes and design relevant messages, and begin to “put them out there”
4. Using social media, press releases, advisories
5. Collaborate to monitor news outlets for opportunities to speak out or to correct misinformation
6. Facilitate timely and important conversations – inside the Jewish community as well as across the larger community
7. Build a web site to amplify the Jewish and greater communal work of members of the metropolitan Jewish community
8. Build influence through relationship-building with power brokers and media representatives within the greater Phoenix area
9. Work to promote Jewish community members for inclusion on various influential community boards and committees

By doing so, we hope to achieve the following goals:

- ✓ Amplify the Jewish voice and our relevancy in policy-making locally and beyond
- ✓ Strengthen support for Jewish institutions and for other institutions that perpetuate Jewish values
- ✓ Raise awareness among our own community of the important works and influence of the Jewish community
- ✓ Recognize and coordinate with the ongoing interfaith work of local organizations, including congregations
- ✓ Create role models for the future young leaders of our community

Next Steps:

1. Strategically share the ideas of the Public Affairs Work Group with members of the Jewish institutional community
2. Identify willing coordinators and spokespersons
3. Develop an action plan, and a “business plan” for achieving it
4. Begin the search for funding

CONCLUSION

In 2010 when the Jewish Community Foundation first began to consider a concept which would become known as the Jewish Community Conversation the Foundation’s vision was to present an unprecedented opportunity for diverse members of the local Jewish community to begin to dialogue about their hopes, dreams and aspirations for the Jewish community they would like to see in the Valley of the Sun. It was hard to imagine at the outset exactly how this project would evolve and where it would take us as a community.

In 2013, as this bold and courageous project concludes, we see what grassroots engagement and bottom-up visioning can produce. The third and final phase of the Jewish Community Conversation focused on the three areas described in this report: *Public Affairs, Arts and Culture, and Leadership*. The more than 60 volunteers who served on each of these working groups were able to explore various ways in which the quality of Jewish life in the Valley could be enhanced. Discussions and creative thinking by people of good will who were able to set aside their organizational, institutional and even personal agendas allowed for a true focus on what could be helpful to the broader community.

In the 143 years since the Aaron Bennett became the first recorded Jew to settle in the Valley, generations of Jews have been engaged in a continual process of community building in Phoenix and throughout Arizona. Such has been the work of the Jewish people for thousands of years. And so will the work of building community be a never ending story for us.

The recommendations contained in this report are just that – recommendations. They were never intended to be a mandate or directive but rather the results of the best thinking of people who care deeply for the Phoenix Jewish community. The conclusions contained in this report as well as the findings and observations that came out of the entire two-year Jewish Community Conversation project represent one of the most valuable gifts the Foundation could make to this and future generations. And we offer this gift as seeds planted to help grow and stimulate positive communal change for the future. Community Foundations like ours are important for much more than the stewardship of philanthropic funds and the grants they are able to make. They are critical engines for economic and social change which makes them invaluable assets to their communities.

We encourage those who have remained interested and involved in this work to continue to offer their time and talent to those individuals and organizations who share their vision for the future and their passion to make that vision come true. We hope that the Jewish Community Conversation will be the dawn of a new era of cooperation and collaboration among and between the diverse and varied interests and agendas in our community. And most of all, we hope that the Foundation's contribution of critical thinking and visioning will help usher in a time of unprecedented commitment to make the Greater Phoenix area one of America's great Jewish communities.

In publishing and disseminating this report and the report from the initial Jewish Community Conversation event in September 2011, it is our fervent hope that the best for this Jewish community lies ahead and that we will continue to listen to the voices of the entire community as we go from strength to strength.