

THE LARGE-INTERMEDIATE FEDERATION RESPONDS TO FISCAL CRISIS

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Since 1989, the Hartford federation experienced a precipitous decline in campaign resources; many members of the Jewish community suffered economic reversals. To keep the community not only alive but vibrant, the leadership had to make some hard decisions: they broadened the campaign base, altered the Israel-local agencies allocation ratio, revitalized the Young Leadership Council, encouraged agency fund raising within the federated concepts, and designated Jewish continuity as the single domestic priority.

As the executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford, which experienced a nearly 50% drop in annual campaign revenues from 1989 to 1995, I feel as if I am living out the Chinese curse, "May you live in interesting times." Yet, with committed and inventive lay leadership and professional staff, we are making major strides not only in maintaining our services to the community but even strengthening them.

The Hartford federation was founded in 1945 when the world had its first realization of the extent of the Nazi horror. Against that terrible backdrop, the leaders of the Hartford Jewish community found the optimism and hope to create a new beginning. The challenges facing the community, among others, were to launch a community-wide campaign, open a new Jewish hospital, build a new Hebrew Home and Jewish Community Center, create day schools, resettle refugees from Europe, and work toward making a Zionist dream a reality.

In working toward these goals, the Hartford federation was not unique. We did what scores of other federated communities have done: we built, rebuilt, rescued, and resettled; we planned, both short and long term; we allocated in normal (?) years and responded heroically in times of crises; and we acted as the central planner and coordinator for Jewish community life.

The situation changed dramatically in

1989. The Connecticut economy was dependent on the insurance and defense industries and on banking, which was accommodating real estate developers who were heavily in debt from the halcyon 1980s. All these industries began to suffer great financial losses almost simultaneously, and as a result the campaign began a free fall. In the next few years, we would lose 19 contributors of \$100,000 or more—some for legitimate, heart-wrenching reasons and some because their cash flow decreased; although others would still consider this latter group wealthy, their perception was that their finances were in jeopardy and so they could no longer be active participants in communal affairs. The peer pressure that is such an important motivating force in soliciting contributions virtually disappeared. The end result—a decrease from the 1989 campaign of \$8.1 million to \$4.5 million in 1995.

THE ROLE OF FEDERATION IN RESPONDING TO THE FISCAL CRISIS

Despite the precipitous loss in campaign resources and the economic dislocation experienced by many members of the Hartford Jewish community, our leadership made a commitment to keep the community not only alive but also successful and vibrant. To do so, the federation had to implement both short- and long-term strategies.

We knew that the time of complacency, when we relied on a very few individuals,

families, or corporations to raise the majority of dollars, was over. Although we had intended to launch a long-range strategic planning process in the late 1980s, we put that effort on hold and focused instead on short-term stopgap measures in the areas of agency and federation fund raising, allocations, and agency revenue enhancement.

Fund Raising and Community Building

Our first initiative was to broaden the base of contributors in order to cope with the loss of a significant number of \$100,000+ contributors. We attracted 1,500 new contributors, which did not stem the flow of significant dollars lost but was a crucial beginning effort to address the drop in campaign revenues.

We also devoted much time, energy, and dollars into building a community of meaning, which is a prerequisite for successful fund raising. We began to invest in the young through a newly revitalized Young Leadership Council that involved both campaign responsibilities and Jewish learning.

In addition, we made a sincere effort to work closely with our agencies to help them raise funds—within limits—while at the same time ensuring that this effort would not jeopardize the concept of federated giving. Trying to maintain a “We are One” theme during tough times is an extraordinary challenge. Yet, our agencies and schools responded both with efforts to secure grants and with an understanding that times had changed.

Recognizing that over the next two decades the largest intergenerational transfer of wealth will take place, the Endowment Foundation was strengthened to meet that challenge.

Allocations

The Israel-local agencies allocation ratio changed from 50:50 to 25:75. Although many members of the Hartford Jewish community voiced concern over this shift, many more felt we had no choice if we were to

keep this Jewish community vibrant so that future generations would continue to care and give.

We also had no choice but to slash agency budgets. Yet, at the same time, we provided some modest but still significant funds—\$250,000 over two years—to agencies and congregations to encourage the creation of programs in Jewish continuity.

Priority Setting

The drastic drop in campaign revenues gave added urgency to the need to set priorities. After a lengthy deliberation process, Jewish continuity was designated as our single domestic priority.

In 1992, the task force on Jewish continuity was reconstituted as a permanent Council in Jewish Continuity, with a goal “to stimulate and oversee the implementation of programs by communal institutions which will instill a heightened commitment to and knowledge of Jewish learning, religion, values, and culture in all members (of the community) in order to live Jewishly with joy and pride.”

The Council is a community-wide alliance of people and organizations with the objective of forging common aims and re-establishing a common agenda of Jewish continuity. The Synagogue/Federation Cabinet was created as part of the Council to develop a stronger working partnership between those institutions. Key to the success of both the Cabinet and the Council was the initial commitment and staffing by the executive and associate executive of the Hartford federation and the involvement of credible, powerful lay leaders.

LONG-RANGE PLANNING

Five years after the dramatic decline in campaign revenues and after the series of short-term efforts described above, we realized that long-range strategic planning could no longer be put on hold. We faced serious challenges that band-aid measures could no longer fix.

The focus of this long-range planning effort is on *building community* and determining whether the nature and quality of the services offered by our Jewish institutions match the interests and needs of current and potential community members. The Service Priorities Committee is assessing what considerations or criteria should determine which services most deserve federation support. And the goal of the Financial Resource Development Committee is to create a first-class campaign and development program staffed with excellent professionals who can raise the dollars needed to implement the strategic plan.

CONCLUSION

Being a professional during these challenging times requires a sense of equilibrium, clarity of purpose and mission, an inner feeling of being part of something greater than the individual, a comfort with Judaism, and a desire to create a community of respect of others' beliefs. And, of course, a sense of humor, humility, and hope.

As a federation, how authentically inviting we are and how clear we are about our mission will determine our responsiveness to the community and our ability to broaden our base of support.