

# Jewish Community Center— Federation Relationships: Comment on Aizenberg–Rosen Proposals

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Jeffrey Aizenberg and Harry Rosen's article is an interesting attempt at trying to clarify an old problem. The authors can be credited for grappling with the subject and offering some proposals. However, their analysis and recommendations do not take full account of both history and present-day practicalities in their proposals for change in the relationship of Jewish community centers and Federations.

Their emphasis is on the primacy of the Jewish community center as *the* functional agency in a given community. I believe that the Center indeed plays an important role in the community and should and will continue to do so. However I do not share the authors' view that the Center is losing its standing in the community because of what the authors perceive to be Federation's role, nor because of Federations' *actual* role.

I am concerned that their view is clouded by the actual experience within their own community, but clearly that local experience does not reflect national trends. Even beyond that which is attributable to local influences, the authors raise issues and define general working principles for Centers and Federations that cause me some concern.

The Center does not exist as a "functional" arm of the Federation. Rather, the Center is a major cultural, educational, recreational and social agency for the Jewish community. It performs these broad functions in order to meet its own goals and objectives, not those of the Federation. The Center's mission may, and should, be similar to

that of the Federation. However, at bottom, the Center exists to meet its own, self-directed goals.

In similar fashion, the Federation, in all of its functions, seeks to involve the broadest possible number of individuals and groups in the community. This is how, in effect, the Federation is able to reach community consensus. No one individual or agency holds an "exclusive" on the delivery of a particular service. As the authors correctly note, a little competition can go a long way in helping to enhance the delivery of services, an agency's performance or even its determination of programs and priorities.

Historical purviews, as the author's write, are just that—history. Because things have been done in a particular way in the past does not mean that they must continue that way. Jewish communal agencies must respond to today's needs and changing conditions. If one agency is unable to meet an articulated need and another is capable of doing so, then the former must be given the task to do. It is also quite possible for an agency to change and refocus its mission to reflect more accurately changing conditions both within the community and the agency. It also holds true that the agency may need to change its direction at the behest of the community, even though it does not feel such change is warranted. In short, the community is in a state of flux and hence so must communal agencies be to remain responsive.

As for the authors' list of "talking points" outlined in their proposal, I do

not believe that the ongoing relationship requires a set of such concrete rules. The dynamics of the relationship are such that it is ever-changing, and this enables the two institutions to be responsive to changing conditions. Granted that there are certain basic principles which guide the relationship between the Center and the Federation. However, these principles apply to and form the blueprint not only to the Center but to all Federation constituent agencies.

Clearly, the Center has as its major responsibility the operation of its program and the determination of its own destiny. The Federation has an inherent role in this via its functional role as the "central communal address." However, there is no dispute that the agency ultimately has the privilege and power to chart its own course.

Beyond this, there will always be a natural "tension" between the Center and the Federation in determining their ongoing relationship. However, that relationship does not require the set of recommendations the authors have developed, which are discussed as follows:

1. I concur that one of the Federation's functions is as the central fund-raising entity in the community and that the Jewish Community Center should play an important role in interpreting the needs of the annual campaign in the community. However, I cannot agree that Federation assumes the major responsibility for raising funds for the Center's budget. This is not to say that in any one community experience this may not be the case. The proposal does not however clearly reflect the Center's own role in revenue production. Further, the authors assume that the Center is *the* community priority. What about other communal agencies and programs supported by the Federation campaign? The Federation campaign serves to meet articulated communal

needs, not necessarily communal agencies.

2. The primacy of the Federation's campaign must not only be respected in terms of the types of independent fund-raising activities the agency undertakes, but also the timing of such efforts. Further, the cap on the amount an individual may be allowed to contribute may not be realistic or appropriate. The authors make no mention of whether they have a responsibility to report both the contributions they solicit as well as unsolicited gifts to the Federation for communal cross-referencing.

3. I cannot accept the premise that it is the Federation's role necessarily to assume the fund-raising responsibility for the agency in either a capital or similar drive. This is the Center's responsibility; it may seek the advice and consultative services of the Federation. However, it is a service which Federation may offer and is not a "right" to be expected. If the agency is to be serious in its fund-raising endeavors then it must apply its own appropriate resources.

4. It is a step in the right direction that the authors acknowledge the role that both lay and professional leadership of the Center must play in the promotion and enhancement of the Federation campaign. But what does this mean? Are the authors willing to stipulate one-hundred percent participation by Center leadership at their maximum capability? Rhetoric is cheap, actions will help to raise the communal funds necessary.

5. I understand the concern expressed by the authors for Federations funding rival services; however I do not wish to make this point an iron-clad rule by which the relationship of Center and Federation is governed. There needs to be room for growth and creativity by the Federation and other organizations within the community. No one agency holds an exclusive on programming.

Rather, there should be open discussion and cooperative efforts in these matters.

6. The authors' concern for the sites of Federation functions expresses their naivete. The utilization, or its lack, of Center facilities in no way adversely affects the Center's prestige or image in the community.

7. The Center, as with any agency, should have the responsibility of self determination. Along with that responsibility must come the realization that the Federation also has a role to play in regard to budget lines and salary levels; there must be in them, adherence to communal standards that are related to overall communal objectives. This can only be achieved with the Center agreeing that the principle is one of shared responsibility.

8. It is clear to me that whenever special committees are formed to deal with community-wide issues such as those the authors enumerate, the broadest possible representation will be sought from all segments of the community.

9. Federation allocation procedures will differ from community to community: including use of percentages, formula and the like. The same holds true for practices concerning agency surplus: where they are applied and who retains the right to communal funds that are not expended.

10. Rather than press for overall responsibility for coordinating community

events the Center should serve as central resource and coordinator for such community based programs in order to achieve greater community participation in the programs as well as in Center related activities.

11. Good communication is essential; however I question the effectiveness of mandating specific types of liaisons. Communication is effectuated in many ways other than through formal channels such as exchange of liaison individuals.

12. As made clear in my comments above, it is a truism that effective communal planning requires broad communal involvement and including participation of the Center.

The authors proposal is indeed a point of departure for more dialogue on this issue. The specifics of their proposal may be good for Dallas, but will it play in Columbus or Philadelphia? That is why I am more concerned with the development of a broad statement than a narrowly defined set of recommendations.

In the final analysis what is needed is open, frank discussion and not binding contractual obligations. There must be a willingness to be open and to leave institutional biases out of the dialogue for the benefit of the total community in which both the Center and Federation have a stake.