

Jewish Community Center—Federation Relations*

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Historically, Centers and Federations have enjoyed a strong commonality of outlook and leadership. The community focus of both has made this affinity a natural one, and it is little wonder that so many Federation leaders had their origins in Centers.

Viewed in the perspective of Jewish community history of the last generation, Jewish community centers and YM & YWHA's are among the favorite domestic children of the Federations of North America.

This Golden Age in the growth of Centers and Y's could not have occurred without the benign encouragement, support, and commitment of the Federations. Though unquestionably it was an achievement of inspired Center lay and professional leaders, actively abetted by the National Jewish Welfare Board, the blessings of the Federations were indispensable.

The New York experience in this respect is instructive. Between 1960 and 1979, the proportion of Federation's allocations which went to Centers rose from 17% to 28.5%. The total of the funds Federation allocated during the period advanced 81.5%, whereas grants to Centers increased 204.5%.

In this process, Federations have initiated and guided planning for Center expansion, interpreted the values of Centers to communities, helped reorganize Center structures, encouraged lay leaders to serve on Center boards, aided Centers in their relationships with United Funds, and stimulated better working relationships between Centers and other community groups—not to speak of the practical aid they provided in fund-raising and financial support.

Though the relationships between Centers and Federations generally have been positive, periodic tensions between Centers and Federations, as between Federations and agencies generally, are inevitable. The personalities of lay and professional leaders of either or both may conflict and natural institutional gravitation towards self-preservation and expansion contains seeds of difference. The intrinsic limitations imposed by Federation affiliation are foreordained to lead to frustration. This arises predictably from the restrictions on independent operating or capital fund-raising and the requirements for approval of new programs, capital expansion, major operating relationships with organizations, and other community commitments. It results from competition regarding similar functions performed by both—leadership recruitment and training, public relations, governmental relations, promotion of deferred giving, and the centralizing of community relationships by Federation (such as with the United Fund). The unavoidable necessity for Federations to monitor agency program and administrative standards and operational effectiveness for accountability to contributors is a source of difficulty. Every institution understandably prefers to be independent and unshackled in freedom to act without externally imposed limits; that Centers and other agencies chafe under these restrictions can be forecast.

Coping with these problems undoubtedly is the price of securing important benefits to the community through the enlargement and deepening of the scope of the Federation's place in the contemporary

* Presented at the Biennial Convention of the Jewish Welfare Board, Los Angeles, May 2, 1980.

Jewish community. The maturing of Federations has resulted in new dimensions of a coherent, organized Jewish community. It is a community with substantial capability for unified planning and action, for more productive internal and external relationships, for a concerted confrontation of threats to Jewish survival, for ascending levels of resource development, for the cultivation of leadership, and for creative unity with Israel and world Jewry. A strong, effective Federation is necessary to the fruition of these purposes which are shared by the Center and Federation, and is indispensable to the realization of the Center's communal character and its inescapable commitment to an organized, federated Jewish community.

The responsibility of both Federations and Centers is to design working associations which reflect mutual acceptance and confidence and the broadest agency autonomy which is possible within the context of a viable central community process. The community's interest—and therefore Federation's—is best served by effective, responsible agencies capable of functioning independently. By the same token, the community's advantage is best realized by sound central community organization through strong Federations.

At the start of the 1980's it is profitable for Federations and Centers to reflect upon the opportunities which they share in common, as well as the issues of relationship between them. The Jewish community enters the new decade with an anxiety for the future of Jewish life, a determination to strive for its perpetuation, and confidence that the institutional resources exist to accomplish this. Centers and Y's are an important force in realizing this objective. The opportunity for both Federations and Centers is to maximize the part Centers play in fulfilling this task.

The areas of concern which trouble the Federation-Center relationship are several. From the Center's vantage point, as the

Federations grow in strength and prestige, Centers fear a reduction in their own status. The anxiety of Centers is heightened by the rise in authority and influence of the Federation, notwithstanding the fact that the proportion of the Center budget provided by Federation grants has fallen as governmental support and internal income have risen. The sanctions of the Federation are related to its central position in the community and its assertion of leadership, at least equally to the dollars it provides for agency support.

Centers are uneasy about the attractiveness of the Federation to important lay leaders and to promising professionals, many of whom have taken active roles in Federations instead of Centers. Having traditionally presented the Center as the embodiment of the total community, Centers are apprehensive that the new Federation is displacing them in this role. Centers are threatened as Federations support services which are not part of the traditional roster of health and welfare functions: they ponder whether this means a declining place for the original service commitments of the Jewish community. They tend to connect this with the emergence of Federation lay and professional leaders who have come up through the campaign route rather than the agency ladder, and are uneasy about the possibility that the traditional identity between Federation and Center leaders may disappear. Centers are apprehensive about the emphasis upon Israel in campaign appeals and fear the denigration of local services in campaign messages. Centers worry that they will be damaged by the insufficiency of resources available to them, as well as to other agencies, and that changes in community priorities will hurt them.

Federations bring additional concerns to this equation. They too, are apprehensive about the lessened appeal of Centers to top lay and professional leaders, whose abilities are essential to administering the far-

reaching programs, extensive financial resources, and substantial physical plants of Centers. They regard the fact that Federations—and other important Jewish organizations—have drawn their professional talent and lay leaders from the Center field as a compliment to Centers. They wish to see Centers continue to fill this important leadership development role and are confident of the Center's capability to do so, if the effort is well-conceived and skillfully executed.

Federations are troubled by reduced Center effectiveness in program areas such as work with Jewish youth. They fear that an insatiable Center appetite for encompassing other functional fields (like family counselling and Jewish education) may result in a diffusion of focus and a watering-down of quality in the Center. They are uneasy about the tensions between Centers and synagogues and other Jewish organizations. They worry about where the community support will come from to finance the rapidly expanded and expensive physical facilities of Centers, and they look to Centers for greater initiative and creativity in increasing their income by such means as foundation grants for special projects and by maximizing internal income.

Federations have approved and abetted the explosion in Center operations, measured in dollars, facilities, persons served, and personnel employed. Federations are concerned whether the management and administration of Centers have advanced in sophistication to match this growth. They ask if Center organization has been redesigned (centralization, decentralization or otherwise) with creativity sufficient to the scope of the Center's tasks.

The issues raised by such a dialogue cannot be dismissed out of hand. Some are more intractable than others, but all require constructive thinking by Center and Federation leaders.

This conversation cannot proceed fruitfully, however, unless the ultimate dispo-

sition of each towards the other is clarified. Any fear that new emphases in the domestic concerns of Federations (such as Jewish education, community relations, neighborhood organization, and campus programming), or pre-health and welfare services, and more particularly from the Center, must be emphatically put to rest. As a practical matter, these new thrusts need not detract from Centers but can afford opportunities for enterprising Centers to offer to adopt these new program areas, thus attracting additional Federation support.

The commitment to these basic Jewish community services is not altered by the Federations' recognition of new tasks to be fulfilled. There is no gainsaying the problem which arises in apportioning limited resources, but goals and motivations should remain clear. Conversely there must be no question about the Center's intrinsic acceptance of an organized Jewish community, and its embodiment in a strong, effective Federation. This discussion should proceed in an atmosphere which is free of any reservations on this score. Federations and Centers must have a high degree of reciprocal acceptance and mutual commitment.

Closely related to this must be the recognition, particularly on the part of established agencies, that in a changing community, the Federation agenda must be dynamic by being responsive to evolving needs and to the concerns of all constituencies. With inadequate resources in an inflated economy, Federations must tread sensitively between their ongoing responsibilities and emerging community requirements. To argue, however, that new needs must await complete and adequate financing of existing services spells atrophy and declining relevance for a community structure. Moreover, this can severely damage the universality of support for the community campaign. A successful campaign requires the participation of every sector of the Jewish community, which is connected

to the responsiveness of community services to the needs and interests of each group. Innovation, mobility, and new program initiatives are directly related to an expanding campaign achievement.

The Center field learned this lesson many years ago when it became aware that Center outreach and new programs could not be deferred until current programs were adequately supported, lest the agency be bypassed by the march of events. While this is a troublesome dilemma, agencies must reflect carefully on this matter before they criticize Federation initiatives in new fields until existing services are optimally financed.

Some of the most acute tensions between Federations and Centers result from the severe financial stringencies of this inflationary period. With insufficient funds for all needs, Federations and agencies must follow a rational course of accommodation. Like Federations themselves, Centers must establish priorities, lest their total enterprise become over-committed and thin in quality. Decisions must be made with Federations as to which services are of first importance, and which may have to be eliminated or downgraded. Each program of an agency does not merit continuance equally with the others and the reordering of priorities means giving up some services in order to sustain or initiate others.

In circumstances of either fiscal normalcy or stress, the adaptability of the organized Jewish community depends upon an orderly process of long range as well as short term social planning. The fundamental planning responsibility is that of the Federation, and planning for Center work should be done in close association with Centers. Opportunities for constructive Center involvement in the process should be assured, with adequate communication mechanisms and instrumentalities for leadership participation in the formal planning structures as well as informal advising and consultative roles. There

should be channels also for agency input in the broad aspects of Federation social planning of future emphases and directions, beyond the range of particular functional fields. In this planning, it is important that the function of the Center be focused and interpreted clearly. With respect to social planning in fields to which the Center is related, such as Jewish education, the Center must define its particular function and distinguish it from that of other community agencies. This can help the Center's relationships to synagogues, alleviating fears of duplication and accenting the Center's special role.

In this connection note is taken of the resentment some Centers feel towards increased Federation functioning in areas such as young adult services, newcomer programs, cultural activities, and leadership recruitment and training. Most Federations hold to the view that functional services appropriately are the role of agencies and turn to them to meet unmet needs. Some new programs, especially those which arise out of creative campaigning, can generate jurisdictional problems with agencies. Such matters do not need to exacerbate relationships, and open consideration of cooperative approaches should prove to be mutually reinforcing.

The ultimate resolution of the problem of insufficient funds is the success of the federated campaign in raising more money. Centers must join with Federations in renewing the commitment to central community fund-raising. If fund-raising discipline is permitted to break down and the centrality of the community campaign is weakened, the resulting long term damage will far out-weigh short term gains.

It is comprehensible that the tight fiscal situation causes Centers to turn to their own Board members for contributions (where the Federation rules permit this). This must never displace the community campaign as the Board members' primary obligation, nor should the Center's search

for new funding sources cloud its first responsibility to work for the success of the campaign.

On every level, Centers must give strong support to the Federation campaign, recognizing that the hope for suitably financed community programs lies in raising more funds—a goal which is within the grasp of communities. A vastly increased campaign result is achievable, both in terms of the resources of American Jews and the potentialities for improved campaigning.

Federations at this very time are involved in new dimensions of joint planning for more effective campaigns, even as they are pressing ahead with deferred giving programs, increasing endowment funds, aiding agencies in grant seeking, and encouraging Centers to secure government funds where this is appropriate (food subsidy for camps and senior citizen centers, arts programming, CETA workers, etc.).

Historically, Centers and Federations have enjoyed a strong commonality of outlook and leadership. The community focus of both has made this affinity a natural one, and it is little wonder that so many Federation leaders had their origins in Centers. Concern has been voiced that these ties have diminished and if this were so, the result is a loss to both. This special sense of connection needs to be renewed, but it will require a particular effort by each. The Center must address itself to the question: How best can it express its commitment and direct its energies not just to a service program, but to building a community?

If the Center reaches out to the Federation, seeking to share in this mission, it will be stronger, and its communion with the Federation will be richer. Centers must encourage their leaders to participate actively in Federation affairs, not only on the fund-raising level, but in all the Federation's aspects: its Board and committees, representation to other bodies, etc. Centers must offer themselves to the Federations as

resources for furthering the entire range of Federation interests: wider campaign giving and service, broader participation in agency government, joint efforts at leadership cultivation, greater use of the campaign as a vehicle for awakening Jewish identity, neighborhood organization, and constructive relationships with synagogues and other community groups.

Federations in turn need to be mindful of the distinctiveness of the contribution Centers can make to a strong community. They must encourage the Center to extend itself to unserved constituencies, to originate programs to meet new needs, and to cultivate creative new inter-agency relationships. This reach-out should be a mutual one, each to the other.

The relationship of Federation and Center professionals, especially the executives, is critical to the effective association between the organizations. As a general matter, this relationship is good, though there are complicating factors concerned with relative status, competitiveness and autonomy. Mutual regard and acceptance on the part of the executives are the most single factor in this area. Reciprocal respect for professional capacity and judgment, ease of sharing of problems and joint handling of them and a judicious regard for the obligations of each to the other are important contributors to good rapport. The structure of organization should support the personal and professional relationships with systems of agency-executive consultation on Federation goals and policies, as well as inter-communication. None of the foregoing can cope with severe personality clashes and incompatibility, which can destroy any constructive effort. But this relationship is so central to the agency-Federation liaison that it requires special cultivation.

Some Federation observers view the Center as needlessly defensive in its community relationships. They sense an institutional insecurity which causes an excess of

self-justification, parochialism, protective internalizing of problems and the tendency to be a reactor rather than an initiator. Some Centers have a perception of loss of status which though not warranted profoundly affects their outlook. They feel that the emergence of the broader Federation role has been costly to the Center in relative position and that the focus on Israel has displaced local services. This jeopardizes the Center's self-assured approach to relations with the Federation, as well as synagogues and other organizations, and can result in a retreat from community outreach to a building-centered agency, particularly in a time when finances are inadequate. Such a predisposition is greatly to be regretted and the Federation

should be the first to encourage the Center confidently to pursue a broad communal strategy.

It is comprehensible that there are times when Centers view their relationship to Federations in adversary terms. On occasion, Federations find themselves in this stance towards Centers. Such an atmosphere should not be the aim of either. Centers and Federations share the same goals with respect to Jewish life: both view their mission in communal terms. They should appraise community needs together and plan and evaluate cooperatively. Mutual reinforcement and support should be their keynote. It is the obligation of the leaders of both to mold Center-Federation relationships to conform to this standard.