

JFNA/JCPA Blue Ribbon Task Force on Jewish Community Relations Final Report

Recommendations to Federations, JCRCs, and Philanthropists
January 10, 2019

American Jewry needs a new road map to navigate today's hyper-polarized political landscape; a strengthened community relations network holds the GPS.

Context

Amidst America's changing demographics and political polarization, a National Blue-Ribbon Task Force was appointed in 2017 to explore strengthening Jewish community relations, the irreplaceable strategy upon which individual and collective Jewish security rests.

Jewish community relations advances the collective values and interests of American Jewry in the public affairs arena by: 1) building bridges to public officials, civic leaders, ethnic groups and faith communities; and 2) mobilizing the organized Jewish community to educate and advocate on issues of critical concern to our security, including:

- *Support for Israel's quest for security and peace*
- *Combating anti-Semitism and bigotry*
- *Promoting a just and pluralistic American society committed to strong democratic institutions*
- *Advocating for international human rights*

The Blue-Ribbon Task Force, created by the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) and Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA), in cooperation with the Israel Action Network (IAN), conducted extensive research, including a survey of Federation and JCRC professionals, in-depth interviews with two dozen Jewish thought leaders, and an all-day meeting in Chicago. (See attached Survey Results, and Emerging Themes from the Interviews).

This Task Force report is not intended to be the final word. Rather, we see it as a springboard for robust dialogue and planning among federations, JCRCs and the wider Jewish community on how we can strengthen the community relations enterprise as the vehicle to protect our interests and promote our ideals.

This report recommends a new road map, illustrating the opportunities and challenges that require strengthening Jewish community relations.

Trends that inform the road map include:

- Increase in anti-Semitism, and acquiescence to it, on both ends of the political spectrum
- Escalation of efforts to delegitimize Israel in some progressive political and civic circles and calls to weaken U.S.-Israel ties from both the far left and the far/isolationist right, threatening sustained US support for Israel
- Gradual erosion of support for Israel among American progressives, ethnic minorities, the younger generation, and among younger Evangelicals
- Growing concern about potential threats to the health of American democratic institutions and the erosion of bipartisanship
- Growth and increased political engagement of some ethnic and religious groups such as Latinos, Asian Americans, and Evangelical Christians
- Transition to a younger generation of leaders both in the Jewish community and general public with very different perspectives and priorities
- Highly polarized political discourse and strains on America's social fabric, including within the Jewish community itself
- The ever-expanding role of social media as a means of influencing public discourse, an opportunity for social connection, an accelerant of polarization, and a driver of a flatter, less hierarchical social organizing model

The Task Force believes that one of the most effective yet unheralded ways to address anti-Semitism, our country's health, American support for Israel and other external challenges facing our community is to foster relationships with influentials in the media and government, and to build alliances with an array of religious, ethnic and other partners. These alliances are at the heart of the community relations field's everyday work – aimed at fulfilling the mission of safeguarding the conditions under which Jews and Jewish communities can thrive. The relationships that produce mutually supportive alliances and ensure the safety and security of the Jewish community cannot be taken for granted. They must be constantly nurtured.

The Task Force recognizes the critical need to infuse additional resources into our community relations infrastructure but defers making specific financial recommendations at this stage while a complete national plan (which includes input on local needs) is finalized, premised on the task force recommendations.

A Vision for a Stronger Vibrant Community Relations Field

The Jewish community -- through dedicated community relations bodies working in coalition with public officials and civil society allies -- plays an integral role in fostering a healthy, pluralistic and democratic America. This is essential for ensuring the security of the Jewish people and other minorities. The Blue Ribbon Task Force envisions the following:

- The ‘organized’ Jewish Community maintains strong, vibrant and credible relations with key external groups and their emerging and current leaders;
- Support for Israel remains a bipartisan American issue and a ‘political firewall’ exists around Israel preventing attacks on its fundamental legitimacy;
- Community Relations and, by extension the JCPA and JCRC network, are viewed as indispensable to the wellbeing and security of local and national Jewish communities and to the well-being of our nation.

***Strategic recommendation: A dramatic increase in strategic civic, government and intergroup engagement over the next five years** (Note: With additional resources targeted toward the recommendations, specific measures of success will be developed for each strategic and tactical recommendation)*

The trends cited above strongly argue for a Jewish community that is maximally leveraged with key power centers and demographic segments in American society, both in local communities across the country and at the national level. Segments that require special attention include African Americans, Asian Americans, Latino Americans, LGBTQ leaders, mainline Protestants, young Evangelicals, Muslims, women activists and public officials at the national, state and local levels. The 2018 midterm elections underscore how these demographic changes are affecting the makeup of Congress. The expanding array of groups comprising the American mosaic and engaging the public square makes community relations work ever more complex and necessary.

Our recommendation is for the Jewish community relations field, working in close partnership with Jewish Federations and philanthropists, to **dramatically increase its government, intergroup and civic engagement over the next five years**. Such engagement which varies considerably from community to community with respect to priority and resources with some excellent models already in place to build upon, should be done strategically, based on a thorough mapping of political and demographic groups. It requires that community relations organizations clearly identify their highest public affairs priorities and dedicate themselves to building relationships with the people and organizations that will have the greatest impact on those priorities. To successfully build alliances for our most important causes, we must be prepared to join with other groups on their priority concerns, even when they may not be high on our community agenda. Individual organizations should carefully evaluate whether current programs should be expanded, reduced, eliminated or undertaken by another organization.

***Strategic recommendation: Effective management of community polarization and intensification of internal civil discourse** (Note: With additional resources targeted toward the recommendations, specific measures of success will be developed for each strategic and tactical recommendation)*

The Jewish community relations field – which for decades has created the one table within our communities that brings diverse perspectives to find common ground on public affairs issues - is uniquely positioned to foster civil discourse based on shared Jewish values and to assist Jewish

institutions with managing polarization. The field should be an incubator for sharing ideas and discussing difficult topics in a respectful and meaningful way, with an eye toward achieving consensus whenever possible. In today's polarized reality, however, consensus may not always be possible. In such cases, the goal should be to humanize the discussion, expanding awareness of both common values and areas of potential agreement that might bring us together.

Our recommendation is for the Jewish community relations field, working in close partnership with Jewish Federations and philanthropists, to **significantly intensify its intra-communal engagement in the next five years**, building upon JCRCs' unique function as exemplar of civil discourse in the Jewish community.

Key Tactics for Strengthening Community Relations

Tactic 1: Strengthen professional and lay talent in the field locally and nationally by

- Budgeting for and attracting the best and brightest professionals
- Providing significant opportunities and resources for ongoing training for professionals and lay leaders
- Building strong and diverse lay leadership with special emphasis on attracting young adults (up to age 40) through hands-on engagement vehicles and expanded relationship-building with non-Jewish counterparts on issues of common concern
- Providing significant additional resources to JCRCs to enable them to scale up their intergroup engagement program as a key community priority

Context: We know from experience that upgrading any enterprise requires a significant investment in talent development on both the lay and professional side.

Tactic 2: Build capacity of JCRCs (in accordance with a model JCRC) by

- Developing an agreed upon definition of a 'Model JCRC' in terms of principles and practices (Spring 2019)
- Scaling the model so that 75% of JCRCs fit the criteria of 'Model JCRC' and 95% of JCRCs are committed to the model (2023)
- Cultivating a cohesive Jewish community that can fully and effectively participate in the shaping of American domestic and international policies
- Helping JCRCs develop tools for self-evaluation

Context: While every community is different (and successful models exist of JCRCs as committees of Federation and as independent JCRCs in close partnership with Federation) and requires a distinct approach at the local level, many of the core methodologies and skills of community relations cut across size and geographic differences, such as the ability to map out the political and civic influencers in a community; conduct effective intergroup engagement; engage public officials on the community's core interests; and serve as a civil voice in an ideologically diverse environment. In order to meet its full

potential, the JCRC field should carefully define excellence in community relations and seek to bring it to scale throughout the system.

Tactic 3: Embrace full range of communications tools and social technologies locally and nationally by

- Making use of various communications vehicles aimed at reaching multiple influential audiences and enhancing impact
- Expanding the use of cutting-edge social technologies and platforms to reach and influence younger audiences, build new alliances and advance education and advocacy goals

Context: While direct, person-to-person engagement is still critical to advancing understanding of Jewish issues and priorities, the community relations network must seek to amplify its voice and its relationships to emerging influencers through online engagement.

Tactic 4: Strengthen the effectiveness of the JCRC network and JCPA's capacity as the hub, including by enhanced resources from federations and the wider Jewish community with a focus on:

- Adopting enhanced and strategic intergroup engagement as the JCRC field's primary vehicle for achieving the Jewish community's public affairs priorities (including but not limited to: combatting anti-Semitism and bigotry, various domestic agenda items of concern to each community, and advancing support for Israel)
- Providing high level training and support in intergroup and civic engagement for the field and in related professional development
- Developing strategic mapping tools and providing facilitation services that help JCRCs prioritize external engagement
- Developing a tracking and measurement system for local JCRCs to create and sustain strategically targeted external relations
- Initiating future oriented trend analysis on key relationships and issues likely to affect the American Jewish community
- Consulting with local JCRCs in the development of a national level advocacy agenda and intergroup engagement around priority issues of concern
- Convening JCPA national member agencies and other strategic partners on major emerging issues and crises to maximize impact

Context: For the JCRC network to achieve its full potential, it requires a robust, centralized network hub that can continually identify needs, promulgate best practices and provide education and training. The recommendations will require that JCPA, which has already been shifting its emphasis toward greater servicing of the network of 125 JCRCs around the country with increased professional development and timely webinars, move more rapidly and boldly to strengthen the community relations system through the specific recommended tactics and actions.

Task Force Membership

David T Brown, Chair, Chicago
Vicki Zell, Vice Chair, Southern New Jersey

Richard Sandler, Los Angeles
Cheryl Fishbein, New York
Kathy Manning, Greensboro
Tom Kasten, San Francisco
Sam Kaplan, Washington, DC
Shelley Nicely-Groff, Miami
Jocelyn Krifcher, Washington, DC
Naomi Adler, Philadelphia
Shep Englander, Cincinnati
Andrew Rehfeld, St. Louis
Jay Tcath, Chicago
Lindsey Mintz, Indianapolis
Elana Kahn, Milwaukee
Jeremy Burton, Boston
Jessica Cohen, Cleveland

Michael Miller, New York
Alisa Doctoroff, New York
Carol Brick-Turin, Miami
Alisa Finsten, Los Angeles
Sandy Cardin, Schusterman Foundation
Rafi Rone, Harry and Jeanette Weinberg
Foundation

Staff

David Bernstein, JCPA
Melanie Roth Gorelick, JCPA
William Daroff, JFNA
Stephan Kline, JFNA
Ethan Felson, IAN

Consultants

Martin Raffel
Doug Kahn

Implementation and Rollout Plan

The specific recommendations approved by the Task Force are aimed at strengthening the community relations field. Swift implementation will greatly enhance the ability of the American Jewish community to address the serious challenges outlined above with maximum effectiveness and impact. Toward that end, the following rollout plan is aimed at ensuring the plan is given the attention and support required.

Action	Timeline	Responsible Party
Place on agendas of JFNA and JCPA Exec Comm and Boards with the goal of getting feedback at 1/27/19 JFNA Board of Directors meeting; also integrate into JFNA GA and JCPA Conferences		
Place on Agendas of Jewish Federations Executive Groups		
Ask for comment from other key stakeholder groups, including JCRC professionals, Board chairs, national agency reps		
JCPA holds webinars to educate Federations and other stakeholders on key topics and provide strategic questions for conversations		
Develop and distribute case studies -- e.g., Pittsburgh/Tree of Life -- on how JCRCs help at times of crisis and the work that needs to be done in anticipation of a potential crisis		
Provide feedback opportunity for select interviewees		
Ask for feedback/Public comment from thought leader interviewees		
Hold discussions with other Federation professional groups, e.g., endowment planners, marketing and communications		
Generate press release, opinion pieces and other media		
Develop discussion guide/toolkit for communities, aimed at supporting implementation		
Approach Brandeis and other universities to host discussion forum on community relations		
Hold discussions with JFNA and individual foundations about the report and its recommendations		
Make Task Force Chairs, JFNA and JCPA leaders, and Task Force consultants available to brief local communities		