

# St. Louis Jewish Community Strategic Plan

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## Introduction – Purpose

Recognizing the pivotal window of opportunity that exists to engage families with young children (0-4 years) in ways that can positively impact their Jewish identities throughout their lives, the Jewish Federation of St. Louis initiated a community strategic process to enhance the community's ability to more effectively engage these families. Dr. Bill Robinson of the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education was engaged to head a consulting team to lead a process designed to mobilize and unite the community around a core vision for engaging families with young children and to advance a concrete plan to achieve shared goals.

The goals of the process were to:

- Understand the challenges and opportunities facing the community by listening to and synthesizing the diverse perspectives of the lay and professional stakeholders in the community.
- Uncover the unique perspectives of families with young children in the community, including the inspiring ways that these families are already being engaged through Jewish early childhood education.
- Tap into the individual passions of community leaders to build community passion and envision an emerging future that makes widespread those moments that inspire them.
- Elicit commitment from the various community constituencies about how they will work to create the envisioned future together.
- Creatively design a path for the community to realize this vision.

## The Process

Working in close consultation with planning staff of the Jewish Federation of St. Louis, the consultants engaged community stakeholders in an iterative planning process.

### Grounding

The consultants immersed themselves in understanding the St. Louis Jewish community by reviewing documents including the 2014 Community Study and the 2017 Early Childhood Study and conducting in-depth conversations with Federation Planning staff.

## **Stakeholder Conversations**

On November 28-29, 2017 consultants made a two-day site visit to St. Louis to meet with key leadership including synagogue rabbis, JCC professional leadership and day school heads, members of the Early Childhood Directors Council, and senior staff and lay leaders of the Jewish Federation of St. Louis. The conversations centered on: their perceptions of the current Jewish community, its strengths, opportunities and needs; their visions of what success would look like; and emergent ideas about what might advance the community toward its vision.

The consultants submitted an interim report summarizing what they took away from the conversations that focused around three vital strategic questions:

- **What is the common vision we are all seeking to achieve?**

While the starting point of the conversations was the importance of Jewish early childhood education, they all broadened into articulation of a larger aspirational vision: *fostering meaningful Jewish lives and connections for families with young children*. Jewish early childhood education was seen as playing an important role in conjunction with other factors and efforts.

- **What is the best means to achieve this vision?**

While there was consensus that high quality Jewish early childhood education is the single most powerful level for guiding families on journeys of meaningful Jewish life, it was noted that increasing the quality of programs and prompting families to cross high barriers to enrollment requires exceptionally high investment of funds and effort. Other lower-cost strategies such as providing resources to be used in the home, low-barrier programming and building connections among Jewish families have been shown to be highly effective alternatives in other communities. St. Louis lay and professional leaders considered how the community might offer *“lots of ways for people to be Jewish, with both legacy and emergent spaces for Jewish living and learning”* in which *“the wonderful taste and smell of Jewish early childhood education can be found throughout the community”* to such a degree that *“people want to come to the St. Louis community”* to make it their home.

- **What are the levers through which the community can build the means to realize its vision?**

Focusing on the Jewish early childhood center as the primary means of change, the leadership considered the potential impact of increased scholarships, better quality programming, better trained teachers, increased opportunities to learn best practices from exemplary providers and/or more locations and expanded hours as means of increasing enrollment in Jewish early childhood education.

Focusing on the broader vision of how to engage more families with young children more deeply, the leadership pondered how to foster a vibrant, diverse set of communal offerings that foster meaningful Jewish lives and connections for these families. They considered whether this is best achieved through increased funding of existing programs or accessing new programmatic ideas, attracting new talent, and/or strengthening professional networks within and beyond the St. Louis Jewish community.

### **Parent Focus Groups**

In February 2018, consultants conducted two in-person focus groups with parents in the St. Louis community. One focus group was comprised of parents with children in Jewish early childhood education programs and the other of parents with children in non-Jewish early childhood education programs.

Key findings from the focus groups included:

- **When considering preschool programs, parents prioritize convenience (in location and hours), curriculum, quality of staff, safety, cost, community, and overall environment.**  
... many parents (not limited to those in interfaith households) wanted to use the Jewish preschool environment as a way to connect socially to other Jewish families, who, potentially, would have like-minded values.
- **Overall, some parents in both groups expressed interest in exposing their children to diversity through their preschool experience.**  
Those families who send their children to Jewish preschools spoke about this even more, noting that they wished their children's preschool could incorporate more diversity, while still being in a Jewish environment.  
  
Yet some families expressed that they chose Jewish preschools so that their child(ren) wouldn't feel like a minority in a broader setting.
- **Some described barriers to welcoming, including "cliquishness" and feeling judged for "not being Jewish enough."**  
More specifically, some parents who are new to St. Louis or have recently returned, felt the Jewish community can sometimes be "cliquey." Therefore they'd like to see targeted events that help forge community and connections geared towards those who are "St. Louis transplants."  
  
Parents mentioned that feeling judged for not being Jewish enough can occasionally cloud their feelings towards the Jewish community, and can occasionally turn them off to certain Jewish community events.

### **Community Meeting**

On April 12, 2018 the consultants facilitated a community meeting on *Educating & Engaging Jewish Families with Young Children in St. Louis*. More than 35 community leaders once again including synagogue rabbis, JCC professional leadership and day school heads, members of the Early Childhood Directors Council, and senior staff and lay leaders of the Jewish Federation of St. Louis were engaged in structured discussions and exercises to:

- Deepen an emerging communal vision for engaging and educating families with young children.
- Review relevant findings from the St. Louis Community Study, the Early Childhood Education Study Report, stakeholder meetings with community leaders and focus groups with early childhood parents.

- Identify assets and opportunities for engaging and educating families.
- Gain inspiration from promising practices, communal approaches and innovative programs in other communities;
- Generate ideas for new directions for the St. Louis Jewish community.
- Outline final steps in the process.

## Emergent Vision for the Future

Ideas from the rich conversations with community lay and professional leaders along with the candid responses of parents with young children coalesced into a new vision for engaging and educating families with young children in St. Louis.

Jewish families with young children will be connected to other Jewish families and to existing and emergent Jewish institutions and communities in which they feel welcome and joyfully choose to participate. These strong connections will endure over their lifetimes. These families will proudly identify themselves as Jewish, raise their children as Jews, and see Judaism and Jewish learning and values as joyful and adding meaning to their lives.

In order to realize this vision, the St. Louis Jewish community, through both legacy and emergent spaces for Jewish living and learning, will offer a plethora of pathways for people to express and explore their Judaism so that *“the wonderful taste and smell that characterizes Jewish early childhood education [though not only through early childhood centers] can be found throughout the community.”* This culture will be so pervasive that *“people want to come to the St. Louis Jewish community to make it their home.”*

## A Theory of Change

Creating the kind of community St. Louis envisions is an ambitious but attainable goal. In order to realize its vision, the St. Louis Jewish community needs to focus primarily on three key strategies:

- building networks,
- leveraging under-utilized resources, and
- staging change.

### **Building Networks**

Much has been written recently about the power of networks to influence behavior and bring about change. (Please see select bibliography.) We know from research that one’s health, political behavior, and even professional practices are influenced by the behavior and views of one’s friends or colleagues. Strengthening professional and social networks is an essential factor in creating the kind of community St. Louis envisions.

Effective programs with stellar reputations depend on passionate and knowledgeable professional staff who are always learning to improve their practice. Essential to achieving this is strengthening the collegial relations among teachers (and other relevant practitioners) within and across St. Louis' Jewish institutions, as well as with others in the broader community from whom they can learn.

Similarly, the joy of Jewish living and connection is contagious. Simply put, if ensuring that more families in which at least one parent identifies as Jewish raise their own children Jewish is the goal, then strengthening the relationships among Jewish families is foremost. This principle is key to the recommendations articulated below.

A network-based strategy depends on truly hearing and understanding what people value and responding to their needs and desires with programs and experiences that are aligned with them through an adaptive (ongoing) process that is iterative and responsive. This means taking the input generated by this process, initiating experiments based on the findings, learning from successes and failures, tweaking and revising, trying again, and doubling-down on what works. With regard to both the professional realm and community members that we seek to engage, it is essential to listen to the families and teachers that the community seeks to engage and (whenever possible) allow them to co-design the programs and experiences that are provided for them.

### **Leveraging Under-Utilized Resources**

Conversations with St. Louis stakeholders and the community meeting revealed that St. Louis is blessed with an abundance of Jewish and secular resources that can be mobilized to enhance the education and engagement of families with young children. While the community can certainly access resources nationally and from beyond St. Louis, cultivating and accessing local under-utilized resources should be the primary focus.

Participants in the discussions identified outstanding (non-Jewish) programs for families with young children and (non-Jewish) early childhood centers in St. Louis that can provide models of excellence, expertise, and training to enhance the community's Jewish programs. There are universities, cultural institutions, and state and local organizations with faculty and staff that can be engaged to support and develop training (and possibly programming) for the Jewish community.

With regard to Jewish resources, there are members of the St. Louis Jewish community whose passions and talents can be nurtured and developed in order to advance the community's goals. Engaging these community members will not only benefit the participants they interact with, but will also strengthen their connections to the community and to Jewish life.

### **Staging Change**

The changes needed to achieve St. Louis' desired goals are complex and will require engaging multiple levers; but not all of them should be pulled at once. The community must pace its actions so as to achieve early successes that will sustain interest and commitment for the long-term while not becoming overwhelmed or pulled in too many directions. Conversely, it is important to recognize that some goals require more time to

achieve. In particular, changing the culture and practices of legacy institutions require investing in building the capacity for change before any results are visible. Typically, institutional change takes 3-5 years before a noticeable and significant impact on children and families is seen. Thus, we recommend initially focusing on the “low hanging fruit” while planting the seeds for longer-term change. Staging change over time will enable the community to realize its ultimate vision: a strong integrated communal system that engages and supports families with young children in raising their children Jewishly and live joyous and meaningful lives.

## Strategies for Change

This section outlines specific strategies that exemplify ways to operationalize the elements of the theory of change and realize the community vision.

### Enhancing and Expanding Jewish Early Childhood Education

Numerous studies demonstrate that parents, children, synagogues, JCCs and communities as a whole can benefit from stronger and more accessible Jewish ECE programs. Parents are more likely to be involved and invested in Jewish home rituals and celebrations as a result of their child's own involvement in those experiences at ECE centers. The preschool years have proven to be a critical time in the development of a child's personality and identity-including their religious identity. Research suggests that 85% of a child's cognitive development is formed by age five, with the majority by age three. Additionally, synagogues and JCCs benefit from ECE centers that are integrated into the entire organization and serve as gateways to ongoing participation.

Conversations with the directors of the early childhood centers and focus groups with parents of young children in St. Louis revealed significant assets:

- The ECE Council offers a **strong foundation for collaboration** among directors of Jewish early childhood programs;
- There is evidence of **community support** for Jewish early childhood education, as demonstrated by the community study and the current strategic planning process;
- There is widespread **endorsement for the curriculum and values** conveyed in Jewish early childhood programs;
- Parents of children in Jewish early childhood centers greatly value the **relationships and their family-like culture**;
- There are **considerable local resources for educator professional development** including ECE specialists, special school districts, and colleges and universities;
- There is a **rich array of accessible cultural resources** in the community including museums, libraries, and a variety of educational centers.

At the same time, there are significant challenges and opportunities for improvement:

- There is a **disparity between facilities**, with some viewed as state-of-the-art and others in need of upgrading;
- **High tuition levels** are barriers to enrollment for some families;
- **Perceived lack of flexibility** (with regard to yearly calendar, weekly schedule) impedes enrollment;
- **Lack of diversity among programs** (with regard to curriculum, approach, scheduling) does not offer parents sufficient options;

- **Underdeveloped staff qualifications**, especially with regard to Jewish aspects of the curriculum, limits the quality and reputation of the programs;
- The **ramifications of modern life** present tensions and choices for families with young families.

While early childhood centers hold enormous potential for ensuring families' life-long commitment to Jewish life by building strong Jewish communities and deep Jewish educational experiences, it cannot be denied that they require a relatively high level of cost and commitment on the part of families, host institutions and the Jewish community. Even as the community considers the lower barrier and lower impact strategies outlined below, St. Louis leaders should consider options for enhancing Jewish early childhood programs as they build a diverse portfolio of communal strategies. The investment is clearly worthwhile if the community is willing and able to commit the necessary resources for the long term.

Enhancing and expanding Jewish early childhood education in St. Louis requires a long-term, reflective process. The St. Louis Federation can support this endeavor through the Early Childhood Council, facilitated by a dedicated staff person hired by the Federation, as well as drawing upon the experience and expertise of those who have facilitated similar processes in other communities and nationally. The Federation might provide resources, training and expertise to enable individual programs to embark on their individual strategic improvement processes.

Peter Senge, a renowned expert on organizational change and improvement, has identified four initial steps for these processes: shared vision, team learning, mental models, and personal mastery. The first step is reflection and visioning. Since there is no single definition of a high-quality center of Jewish learning and living, stakeholders in *each* of the programs will be guided to articulate the core values/vision that defines who they are and that will drive every educational decision of the program. Centers are likely to have different core values, such as individual creativity, social justice, nature and exploration, and spirituality. This will create more diversity among the programs. Each center, led by the Director and involving teachers, families and other stakeholders, will determine its own focus and engage in its own singular process.

Once there is a clear, shared vision, teachers in each center will engage in collegial professional development (communities of practice). These learning collaboratives will involve reflection on current practices, learning from what others about emergent effective practices in the field (including from non-Jewish early childhood centers in St. Louis and Jewish programs nationwide), critical conversations that question their assumptions, and (most importantly) developing the ability and inclination to listen deeply to the children in order to respond to their desires and potential for growth. This should include a focus on inclusion, to ensure that all children can access a Jewish early childhood education.

Only once they develop these skills and dispositions for change, will early childhood teachers and directors be able to design, introduce, and refine the Jewish early childhood educational environment and curriculum that they envision. This third stage will involve piloting new educational and family engagement practices, assessing and refining them over time. While each center will offer a unique approach, all will require

common resources (such as Jewish content and family engagement strategies) that will require additional communal support and guidance.

It must be acknowledged that this process is a multi-year effort in which results will only become apparent years later (referred to by business scholars as “the S-Curve”). At this point, the centers will be ready to work together with the St. Louis Federation to increase brand awareness and marketing of their high-quality Jewish offerings.

### **A New St. Louis Welcome: Connecting Families**

A key aspect of the vision for St. Louis is a strong interconnected web of families that share joyful Jewish experiences and experience the welcoming warmth of community. Achieving this goal will require strategies to overcome the perceptions of some that it is hard for newcomers or “outsiders” (with alternative family configurations, special needs, perceived lack of Jewish knowledge, non-Jewish members) to feel part of the St. Louis Jewish community. The goal is to create a “thick” network with multiple interconnections (in contrast to a hub-and-spoke model that links families or individuals with a central professional or volunteer figure) that endures and strengthens far beyond an initial welcome.

This strategy would go beyond St. Louis’ original concierge initiative, and coordinate with Shalom Baby and PJ Library to create a robust system of network weaving. The initiative would be staffed by an engagement professional complemented by a team of paraprofessional “ambassadors.” With support and coordination from the lead professional, ambassadors will initially reach out to families with very young children (ages 0-1) and community newcomers with young children (ages 0-4). In addition to initial *Shalom Baby* and/or welcome visits, team members will get to know the families’ needs and interests, connect them with other families, suggest local programs of interest, and curate small individualized programs and meet-ups (in both homes and “third spaces”) tailored to their needs and interests.

The lead professional will also work with community Jewish organizations to ensure that they are excellent “catchers” to warmly welcome and integrate the young families that are directed to them. By building a web of personal connection among families with young children, it is more likely they will choose Jewish early childhood education and involvement with legacy Jewish institutions. In addition to providing welcoming training and referrals, the lead professional will oversee the creation of a web-based clearinghouse to disseminate information about programming and opportunities offered by Jewish organizations and entrepreneurs in the community, and use social media to promote available programs and resources. This web-presence could be supplemented by articles of interest to families with young children, and even a Q&A section, both aiming to provide value that will increase usage.

This lead professional and her “ambassadors” will develop strategies to identify new families such as a referral system from realtors, pediatricians, doulas, community members, Jewish schools and organizations. They will maintain relationships with the families beyond the initial contacts and will keep track of their families by means of a CRM (client relationship management system) in order to more effectively follow up and share information. Interactions will include face-to-face meetings, telephone check-ins, social media connections, etc.

This team will participate in professional development opportunities to increase their skills and value to the community, which may include training in welcoming and hospitality, network weaving, social media, and Jewish engagement, as well as design thinking (with the entrepreneurs described below). As part of this professional development, they will learn from the efforts of similar programs in other communities, where each community can offer expertise in at least one area of activities (i.e., para-professional connectors, social media, etc.). They will also tap into the wisdom of related programs aimed at different age cohorts, such as OneTable and Moishe House.

### **Doing Jewish together: Programs, People and Platforms**

While a more robust team of connectors will be able to identify, reach out and weave together families, an expansive and diverse set of stimulating engagement opportunities is needed to involve them. The St. Louis Jewish community already offers a range of programs for families with young children including: Tot Shabbat and other synagogue and JCC programs; Jewish Family Centers; *Rhythm and Ruach*, and *PJ Library*. While these programs provide a foundation to build upon, they do not fully actualize the envisioned community in which diverse Jewish families flock to inventive, inspiring programs that support them on their joyful Jewish journeys.

Findings from the community conversations and focus groups underscore that there are not enough *different* kinds of opportunities for families to engage in exciting programs that appeal to the variety of ways they wish to express their Jewishness (i.e., not only through ritual but also through culture, values and interests), at diverse times and in novel and/or accessible spaces (i.e., not only on Shabbat and accommodating different schedules, sometimes outside of legacy institutions in public or secular spaces). Such programs need to not only be convenient and attractive to the variety of families with young children in St. Louis, but must also be characterized by warmth and inclusiveness and have a clear focus on building community and forging thick networks. This ethos must be “baked in” to the DNA of programming provided by *all* providers (legacy or entrepreneurial) in St. Louis.

Creating an expansive and diverse range of Jewish opportunities for young families involves three approaches:

- enhancing the offerings of legacy institutions,
- nurturing entrepreneurs, and
- expanding community-wide events.

### **Enhancing the Offerings of Legacy Institutions**

This approach aims to increase the quality and quantity of programs designed for families with young children by legacy institutions, while also shifting from a programmatic approach to a people and, eventually, “platform” approach to engagement. As described briefly above, the synagogues and the JCC offer a number of enticing programs. Two straight-forward ways of enhancing these programs to attract more families are increasing the variety of times they are offered and offering them outside the walls of the institutions.

**Creating a Welcoming Culture.** More fundamentally, institutions should take a step back and assess how welcoming their programs, and their institutions as a whole, are to

families with young children. As a first step, institutions should undertake a “congregational audit” in order to develop greater understanding and empathy for the experience of young families. The audit will allow professional and lay leaders to see the experience of walking into their institutions and programs with fresh eyes and to assess whether it feels daunting or confusing to newcomers vs. exemplifying “audacious hospitality” from the first encounter. [URJ’s *Families with Young Children Guide* offers helpful advice in this regard.] Lay and professional leaders might assume the roles of young families and/or have conversations with young families about their experiences of walking in to their institutions and then contrast this with having the whole group walk into St. Louis institutions that are known as places that practice “audacious hospitality” everyday (a restaurant? a cultural institution?). Following their observations, participants in the audit (institutional leaders and representatives of young families) should brainstorm and prototype specific strategies for becoming truly welcoming institutions.

*NB:* This recommendation (as well as those that follow) do not focus on simple technical fixes. Creating a warm and welcoming culture is an adaptive challenge that requires continual experimentation, modification and learning in an ongoing process.

*Investing in People.* In addition to becoming truly welcoming places, legacy institutions need to invest in people in contrast to programs and/or institutions. The starting place for “program-based models”(which predominate in many communities) is: What services we can offer that people may value and for which we can charge them at the point of service or require that they join the institution. This type of transactional model expects a quick return on investment and does not place a premium on relationship building.

In contrast, “people-based models” focus on nurturing the Jewish lives of families with young children (not the programs they attend) and their relationships with other families, and suspends demands for immediate return on investment in favor of building relationships, emotional investment, and cultivating a desire to support the community. A people model may achieve this through various ways, including personal spiritual coaches or multi-day family retreats devoted to the above goals, at little to not cost and especially for those that are not yet members.

“Platform models” represent a third approach. They extend the idea of investing in people to empowering and supporting participants so that they can “program” for themselves. Rather than a top-down methodology in which the leadership of institutions plan and program “for” participants, “platform models” assume that families know best what they care about most and what experiences are most likely to be satisfying. In this model, professionals are responsible for cultivating the ability of families to co-design and collaboratively run dynamic lively programs. This model promoted by *STAR: Synagogue Transformation and Renewal*, transformed synagogues by offering multiple Shabbat experiences under one roof: alternative minyanim (e.g., yoga and meditation, arts and music-based spiritual experiences, learning opportunities) and (later in the day) multi-generational schmoozing with music, food and drinks for a communal *Seudah Shleshit*. [More information can be found in Hayim Herring’s *Leading Congregations and Nonprofits in a Connected World*.] The long-term endeavor of empowering families will not only increase the human resources available to create meaningful experiences but will also build relationships, and transform people’s lives, creating new institutional cultures and new ways of leading. Yet, it involves a transformation in how we think of

leadership. Instead of hierarchical or expertise notions of leadership, leadership involves, in the words of Marshall Ganz, “accepting responsibility for enabling others to achieve shared purpose in the face of uncertainty.”

### Nurturing Entrepreneurs

Many parents in the focus groups, spoke highly of *Rhythm and Ruach*, yet wished that it was offered in more times and spaces that were more convenient for them. *Rhythm and Ruach* is just one example of programs designed by creative entrepreneurs to engage and connect families with young children. These programs share the attributes of tapping into the characteristics, needs and interests of young families in interesting, inventive, fun, and meaningful ways that promote strong families, Jewish identity and strong community relationships. They are attuned to the norms and unique characteristics of their communities, and tap into local resources and opportunities.

The following example of a food-related initiative is offered to spark entrepreneurial potential in St. Louis:

- Family cooking classes (that can be independent or in conjunction with non-Jewish organizations that run cooking classes).
- Shared Shabbat (patterned on *One Table*).
- Meet-ups in the Park for Potluck and Playtime.
- Mini-grant funding to support in-home classes and programs.
- “Jewish Cooking School” for Families (interactive involving all ages, possibly offering classes for different age groups).
- Create collaborative cookbook.
- Holiday-themed sessions.
- Culminating “Iron-Chef”-type event.

Like other communities, St. Louis boasts talented individuals who can be identified and supported to develop innovative programs that will excite and attract Jewish young families in the community. Taking a cohort-approach, the community should selectively recruit and train a small group of potential entrepreneurs who might wish to engage in this work full- or part-time and who make a commitment to enhancing their knowledge and skills in Judaic content and/or program delivery in order to develop and implement their programs. The entrepreneurs need not create their own programs from scratch: they might partner with exemplary non-Jewish organizations which offer programs that Jewish families with young children already attend (e.g., the St. Louis Zoo, Magic House, the Planetarium) to integrate Jewish content with the secular. By recruiting a diverse group of individuals with regard to expression of Jewish identity and interests (i.e., cooking, music, drama, etc.) to participate in this collaborative innovation incubator, the community will benefit from a diverse range of offerings and cohort members will benefit from collaborative learning.

### Expanding Community-Wide Events

Finally, we recommend that the Jewish community increase the number of events that bring the whole community together. While the importance of “meeting people where they’re at” and developing “thick” ongoing family networks cannot be over-emphasized, evidence from other successful communities demonstrates the power of periodic community-wide gatherings to generate excitement and enthusiasm and to strengthen communal bonds. To ensure that all families feel welcome to stop by, these rituals of

Jewish civic life should “pop-up” in public venues and require little or no cost to participate. These “big events” will not only re-invigorate those who are already engaged, but are also an opportunity to attract and identify new families and to seed connection to more ongoing programs in legacy and entrepreneurial settings.

### **Research and Evaluation**

No matter which strategies are employed by St. Louis to enhance the engagement and education of Jewish families with young children, the community will embark on an ambitious change process. Ongoing research and evaluation is a hallmark of best practice for change processes. The community needs to know whether its efforts are working and whether communal dollars are well spent. Emergent processes, such as the one recommended in this report, require an approach to evaluation that supports experimentation, analysis, and adaptation, even as it assesses its impact. *Developmental Evaluation*, an approach pioneered by renowned evaluator Michael Quinn Patton [*Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use*], uses knowledge gathering and analysis to support this type of innovation. Ongoing *developmental evaluation* should therefore play a critical role in shaping and contributing to the success of this exciting emergent program.

A *developmental evaluation* approach facilitates assessment of where things are, and reveals how things are unfolding. Feedback is supported by data and delivered in an interactive way that helps innovators fine-tune what is going on, consider and adapt to uncertainties and inform their decisions going forward. It helps discern which directions hold promise, which should be abandoned, and suggests new options to try.

A *developmental evaluation* approach is collaborative by its very nature. The evaluator is in ongoing dialogue with the program provider and participants in an effort to answer:

- **WHAT:** What do we see? How is the program interacting with the people and settings it touches? What cues can we capture to discover changing patterns as they emerge?
- **SO WHAT:** What sense can be made of the emerging data – in this moment and for the future? What evidence would indicate that the program is working or not? Why were we successful/not? How can we learn from our success/failures? What effects are current changes likely to have on the program, participants, external work, etc.?
- **NOW WHAT:** Based on our data and analysis, what are our options? How can we act to optimize opportunities? Given where we are and where we want to go, what are foreseeable decision points?

Thus, beyond answering “Did this program work?” or “Did we achieve our intended goals?” the proposed evaluation will also shed light on “What are we learning about the realities in which this program operates, and how can we use our growing knowledge to increase our ability to achieve impact?”

## Action Plan

We offer the following multi-year staging for the strategic recommendations that were articulated in the prior section. The staging front-loads those “low hanging fruit” strategies that we believe can have more immediate impact upon families with young children: Parent Ambassadors (foremost) and Entrepreneurs. Those strategies that focused on Legacy Institutions and Jewish Early Childhood Education, while promising substantial rewards for engaging families with young children, require a longer investment to build the organizational capacity needed to do so. Thus, the work in those latter strategic areas during the first two years will focus on creating the organizational conditions needed to effectively impact families with young children.

Creating robust infrastructure is key to a successful process. The Action Plan therefore begins with establishing a Steering Committee to oversee and guide the enhancement of engagement and education of young families in St. Louis.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
<b>Steering Committee</b>	Refine strategic recommendations as needed  Advocate for community support	Oversee implementation  Assess and make mid-course corrections	Cont'd	Cont'd  Plan for future phase(s)
<b>Jewish ECE</b> <i>(each activity continues into the next year, as strategy expands)</i>	Directors CoP – Focus on Vision	Launch Vanguard Teachers CoP	Institutional Change	Institutional Change Cont'd and Plan for Marketing Stage
<b>Connecting Families</b>	Launch New Parent Ambassador Initiative	Refine and Expand Model, Build Social Media	Cont'd	Cont'd
<b>Doing Jewish – Legacy</b>	Learning about Audacious Hospitality	Audacious Hospitality Pilot Projects	Learning about Investing in People and Moving to a Platform Model	People or Platform Pilot Projects
<b>Doing Jewish – Entrepreneur</b>	Entrepreneurial Cohort 1	Entrepreneurial Cohort 1	Cont'd (Cohort 2)	Cont'd (Cohort 2)

The following offers a detailed plan for the first year of implementation.

### **Steering Committee**

The implementation phase should begin with a review of the strategic recommendations presented in this report by all of the stakeholders who attended the community convening on April 12, 2018 and any other key leaders who were unable to attend but who will be instrumental in advancing this agenda in order to achieve agreement to proceed and the general direction to move forward. A Steering Committee that is representative of the various stakeholder groups should be appointed to refine and implement of the agreed-upon strategic recommendations.

This will involve working with professional staff and consultants to:

- Refine the strategic plan based on stakeholder input, review job descriptions and the budget created by the professional staff.
- Set forth measurable objectives for each year and work with a consultant to evaluate activities accordingly.
- Provide input into the design of the following year activities based on the evaluation.
- Ensure that the concerns and desires of the various stakeholder groups are heard.
- Ensure that communal support continues for the work.

### **Enhancing and Expanding Jewish Early Childhood Education**

Key action items related to enhancing and expanding the Jewish early childhood education aspects of the plan include (but are not limited to):

- Engage the Early Childhood Directors Council in focused discussions leading to the development and refinement of inspiring, actionable visions (including Jewish education/engagement goals) for each their centers.
- Form a teachers' Community of Practice (CoP) comprised of select group of vanguard (the most willing and capable) teachers from each Jewish early childhood center to collaboratively learn and share effective practices for aspects of Jewish early childhood education
- Engage select non-Jewish early childhood centers in St. Louis to serve as sites for ongoing learning about best practices in early childhood education for the members of the CoP.
- Engage an experienced facilitator of educator learning in the area of Jewish early childhood education to assist in designing the learning process for the Early Childhood Directors Council and the Vanguard Teachers CoP.
- Assess and plan for year 2.

### **A New St. Louis Welcome: Connecting Families**

Key action items related to expanding the work of connecting families with young children include (but are not limited to):

- Integrating *PJ Library* and *Shalom Baby* programs with the new Parent Ambassador initiative.
- Network with leadership of similar programs in comparable communities (e.g., Baltimore, Chicago, Columbus, LA, MetroWest NJ, San Diego, Denver) as well as

analogous programs such as OneTable to obtain guidance about hiring and training para-professional Ambassadors and other strategies to engage families with young children.

- Define measurable objectives for each year of the program.
- Recruit, hire, and train para-professional Ambassadors (which includes the use of design-thinking, see below under Nurturing Entrepreneurs).
- Launch new Ambassadors initiative, including funding to support network-based, micro-programming (i.e., gatherings led by Ambassadors and volunteer parents).
- Assess and plan for year 2.

### **Doing Jewish Together: Programs, People and Platforms**

Key action items related to expanding the engagement aspects of the plan include (but are not limited to):

#### Enhancing the Offerings of Legacy Institutions

- Engage a consultant to work with the Director of the Millstone Institute to design and facilitate an Audacious Hospitality Design Group.
- Plan first year process with consultant.
- Recruit participation in the Audacious Hospitality Design Group to include teams comprised of key staff and lay leaders from participating legacy institutions.
- Initiate training and planning process for the Audacious Hospitality Design Group based on Design Thinking that will include: reflecting on how they currently operate (audit), learning from exemplary spaces and organizations, prototyping new ways of being audaciously hospitable, assessing efforts, and designing a pilot for Year 2.

#### Nurturing Entrepreneurs

- Recruit initial cohort of six (potential) entrepreneurs (full- or part-time) for a two-year engagement.
- Engage a consultant to conduct Design Thinking Training (can also work with Parent Ambassadors and Audacious Hospitality Design Group)
- Engage in Design Thinking exercises to refine their initial ideas.
- Provide seed funding to launch pilot entrepreneurial programming (which could involve partnering with already existing non-Jewish programs for families with young children).

#### Expanding Community-Wide Events

- Build community support and enthusiasm (including from legacy institutions) for community-wide events.
- Assemble a planning committee representing diverse constituencies to provide input and be advocates for the events.
- Access financial resources and appropriate staffing.
- Design and launch 1-2 new community-wide events that engage a sizeable number of families from across multiple parts of St. Louis.

### **Staffing Recommendations**

To achieve the above, we recommend the following staffing (some of which is already in place):

- Top-level Federation staff from Community Impact and Direct Services to direct Steering Committee, develop job descriptions and budget, and work with evaluation consultant.
- Top-level Federation staff in collaboration with the Director of the Millstone Institute to manage the work with Legacy Institutions.
- PJ Library Coordinator to direct Parent Ambassadors, as well as PJ Library and Shalom Baby.
- Connectors (3 part-time positions in year 1, expands annually).
- New staff person hired to direct work with early childhood centers.
- Consultants potentially needed for:
  - Audacious Hospitality Design Group (of legacy institutions).
  - Entrepreneur and Connector “design thinking” processes.
  - Early Childhood directors and teacher Communities of Practice.
  - Overall evaluation.

To move forward with the strategic recommendations, as delineated above, will require the St. Louis community to consult with other communities, organizations, and individuals with expertise in the particular strategies and areas of work. Some recommendations of exemplary communities are indicated above. Upon request, recommendations of specific communal personnel and consultants can be provided.

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