



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE  
**AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES**

**MS-831: Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Foundation Records, 1980–2008.**

Series C: Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CIJE). 1988–2003.

Subseries 3: Lead Communities, 1988–1997.

---

Box  
30

Folder  
4

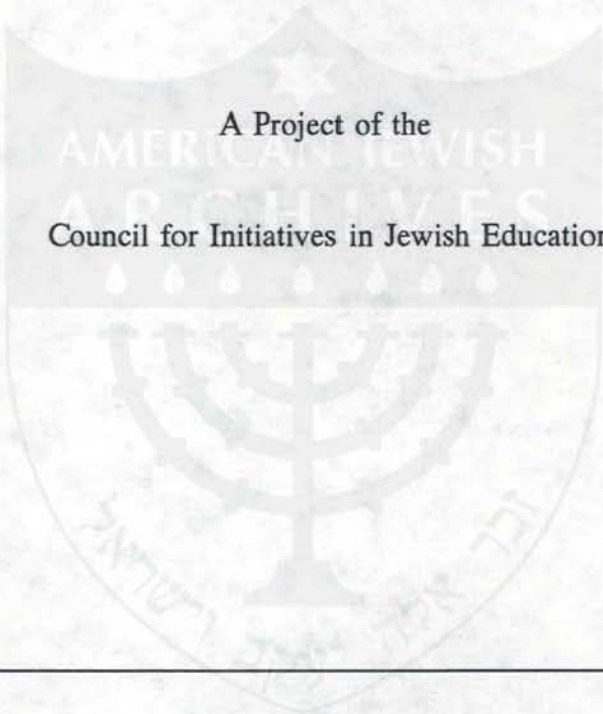
"Document #1: Rationale", January 1992.

For more information on this collection, please see the finding aid on the  
American Jewish Archives website.

---

DRAFT

## LEAD COMMUNITIES



A Project of the  
AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES  
Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education

Document #1:

RATIONALE

January 2, 1992

**The Lead Communities Project is a joint continental - local collaboration for excellence in Jewish education. The purpose is to demonstrate that it is possible to significantly improve Jewish education, both formal and informal, in communities in North America with the right combination of leadership, programs, resources, and planning.**

Three to five communities in North America, each with a Jewish population of between 15,000 and 300,000, will be invited to join with the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education in carrying out the Lead Communities Project.





## **Why a Lead Communities Project**

### Improving Effectiveness

The heart of this effort is a commitment to help Jewish education in North America improve its effectiveness.

Jewish education involves not only acquisition of knowledge but also the development of skills, shaping of values and influencing behavior. It can take place in a day school, a supplementary school, summer camp, congregation or Jewish community center; on a trail in the Galilee or in a living room in Iowa. It happens through study of text, a lecture, film, or discussion.

However it happens, Jewish education must be compelling -- emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. It must inspire greater numbers of Jews, young and old, to remain engaged, to learn, feel and act in a way that reflects an understanding of and commitment to Jewish values.

To achieve this objective, Jewish education must be nurtured, expanded and vastly improved. Both the CIJE and the lead communities will set goals for "improvement." These will take a concrete form, such as:

- More and better Jewish education programs and services;
- Greater participation in Jewish education; and
- Better outcomes (related to Jewish knowledge, skills, behaviors, and values).

The central thesis of the Lead Communities Project is that the best way to generate positive change at the continental scale is to mobilize the commitment and energy of local communities to create successes that stand as testimony to what is possible.

### "Models" as a Strategy for Positive Change

Local efforts that are working well need to be reinforced. Local communities have to be connected to the pockets of excellence across the nation that too often have worked in isolation. Positive change will require a vehicle to encourage visionary approaches and to support innovation and experimentation. This project makes it possible to evaluate, improve and try out a variety of approaches for Jewish education throughout the community, and prepare the groundwork for adoption and expansion of good ideas elsewhere.

Fundamental to the success of this project will be the commitment of the community and its key stakeholders. The community must be willing to set high educational standards, raise additional funding for education, involve all or most of its educational institutions in the program, and, thereby, become a model for the rest of the country.





## Definition of Community

For the purposes of this project, a "community" is an urban or metropolitan geographic area with a communal organization structure and decision-making system in place. The initial focus is on communities with a Jewish population of 15,000 to 300,000<sup>1</sup>.

A cornerstone of the Lead Communities Project is the emphasis on the entire local community, rather than the individual school, program or Jewish camp. The evidence is growing in general education as well as Jewish education that lasting educational reform involves the interaction of school, family and community because there is a continuing interplay among them. One needs to affect the entire system, not just a single setting.



---

<sup>1</sup>The 57 communities within this range account for about 3,500,000 out of about 5.5 million Jews nationally. These figures are based on data from the Council of Jewish Federations.

## **What Makes a Lead Community**

A lead community will be characterized by four areas of community commitment: leadership, programs, resources, and planning.

### **Leadership**

A lead community is expected to chart a course that others can follow. The most respected rabbis, educators, professionals and lay leaders will serve on community-wide Steering Committees to guide the project in a specific community. All sectors of the community -- congregations, schools, community centers and Federations -- will need to be involved. Recruiting top community leaders to the cause of Jewish education and involving all sectors of the community will help raise Jewish education to the top of the communal agenda.

Lead community leadership, both professional and lay, also will participate in the ongoing effort to define and refine the project as it is extended to other communities.

### **Programs**

Each of the lead communities will engage in the process of redesigning and improving Jewish education through a wide array of intensive programs. The programs of the lead community need to reflect continental as well as local experience and ideas.

Lead communities will benefit from successful experiences across the continent. CIJE is undertaking a systematic effort to identify the best examples of specific programs, projects or institutions in North America, called the "Best Practices Project." In preparing action plans, lead communities will have access to the inventory of the most promising programs.



The report of the Commission on Jewish Education in North America recommends that Lead Communities concentrate on personnel and broadening community support as critical "enabling options." They are necessary for the significant improvement of Jewish education. A promising programmatic option is study and travel in Israel, which has proven to be a very effective motivator for young and old alike. Thus, personnel, community support and educational travel to Israel will be important ingredients in the community's plan of action.

Local initiatives may include improvement or expansion of existing programs or the creation of new ones. Examples of other programs that could be undertaken as part of a Lead Communities program include:

- Replicating good schools and/or establishing model schools;
- Intensifying and improving early childhood programs;
- Designing programs in adult and family education;
- Developing new models of post bar-mitzvah or bat-mitzvah education;
- Developing strategies for outreach;
- Raising the level of Jewish knowledge of communal leaders;
- Integrating formal and informal education (e.g. camping/study programs); and
- Using new technology (video and computers).

Lead community projects are expected to address both scope and quality: They should be comprehensive enough to make an impact on a large segment of the community; and focused enough to insure high standards of excellence.



### Financial Resources

A program of breadth, depth and excellence will require new monies, primarily because the endeavor has long been underfunded. The economic recession and substantial resettlement needs make communal fund-raising more challenging. Nevertheless, a lead community will point a direction in this area as well -- substantially upgrading the local investment in Jewish education. Increased funding will come from federations, private foundations, congregations, tuition and other sources.

An important part of CIJE's role is to mobilize private foundations, philanthropists, and other continental resources to match the financial efforts of local communities.

### Planning

The plan for each lead community will include: an assessment of the state of Jewish education in the community at the present time; an analysis of needs and resources; the development of a strategy and priorities; the design of programs; and the preparation of a multi-year integrated implementation plan for improving educational effectiveness. CIJE can help focus the resources of national agencies -- JESNA, JCC Association, training institutions, and religious movements -- on the needs of local communities.

How will we know the lead communities have succeeded in creating better outcomes for Jewish education? On what basis will the CIJE encourage other cities to emulate the programs developed in lead communities? Like any innovation, the Lead Communities Project requires evaluation to document its efforts and gauge its success. In addition, each lead community needs to know how well it is doing as a basis for making change along the way. CIJE will design and implement a consistent monitoring, evaluation and feedback system for use in each lead community to help answer these questions.

## **Lead Communities: A Continental Enterprise**

Improving Jewish education throughout the continent is the ultimate goal of the Lead Communities project: to re-energize Jewish education, and to demonstrate and validate successful approaches to Jewish education that can be found in and replicated by communities throughout North America.

