

## **How the Jim Joseph Foundation Adopted a New Paradigm for Outcomes in 2019**

The Jim Joseph Foundation embarked on a strategic planning process in 2017-2019 to update its desired outcomes, strategic directions, and priorities. Rather than a fundamental shift in mission and vision, the Foundation articulated and deepened its commitment to outcomes centered on connection, meaning, and purpose. This approach reflects an intentional decision to amplify the powerful impact Jewish learning can have in fostering individual flourishing, ensuring we remain responsive to the evolving needs of young Jews in modern society.

The Foundation was influenced by thought leaders such as Jonathan Woocher (z"l) and David Bryfman, among others, who advocated for a Judaism that focused on thriving and flourishing rather than survival and continuity. These leaders, as well as our grantee partners who were responding to direct feedback from young people, emphasized the capacity for Jewish education to help individuals live richer, more purposeful lives.

A few important themes emerged during the Foundation's strategic planning process: 1) Jewish learning must resonate with young people's lives today, connecting tradition to modern realities. 2) Jewish learning programs can engage learners through meaningful experiences that foster a deep sense of connection, meaning and purpose. 3) Embracing innovative approaches ensures Jewish learning remains dynamic and responsive to societal changes.

These themes underscore the Foundation's belief that Jewish learning can inspire individuals to lead lives filled with connection, meaning, and purpose—building stronger families, communities, and contributions to the world. The Foundation's aspiration reflects the innate human needs of helping individuals understand themselves and what matters most to them; cultivating relationships with others (including Jewish and non-Jewish family and friends) that foster a sense of belonging; and empowering individuals to make unique positive contributions to their communities and society.

### **What This Means for How We Measure Success**

Research from [Atlantic 57](#) and [GenZ Now](#) guided us towards understanding contemporary reasons for young people's engagement with Jewish learning, which was not driven by an obligation to perpetuate Judaism for its own sake. The research illuminated the need for moving beyond traditional metrics of Jewish continuity and survival toward holistic outcomes that address the whole self and an aspirational view of Jewish identity and community, and their place in it. This new direction allowed the Foundation to expand and think beyond classical measures of Jewish education that focused on literacy, practice, membership rates at institutions, and donations to Jewish causes.

This paradigm shift also redefines how success is measured. Moving away from behavioral metrics or traditional indicators of making young people "more" Jewish (i.e., lighting shabbat candles, synagogue attendance, intent to marry a Jewish partner, etc.) the Foundation embraces holistic social emotional outcomes such as these:

*Connection: Through Jewish learning experiences, young Jews*

- Develop significant relationships with mentors, role models, and educators

- Form deep and lasting friendships
- Develop a positive relationship to Israel - the land and the people
- Create Jewish community that creates a sense of belonging for them
- Connect to the Jewish collective
- Feel meaningfully connected to other Jewish people
- Feel more connected to Jewish tradition, wisdom, or culture
- Feel they can bring their non-Jewish family and friends into their Jewish connections
- Feel connected to God, a higher power, or something greater than themselves

*Meaning: Through Jewish learning experiences, young Jews*

- View those experiences as both challenging and valuable
- Have a stronger sense of self
- Create Jewish experiences that are meaningful to themselves
- Grow and stretch as individuals
- Value Jewish joy
- Articulate what Israel means to them
- Explored something that mattered through a Jewish lens
- Saw themselves reflected in the experience—as a participant, contributor, or creator
- Are better able to make sense of the world and the time they live in
- Can see the many connections that Jewish life has to many different parts of their lives

*Purpose: Through Jewish learning experiences, young Jews*

- Acquire building blocks of Jewish culture and practice
- Explore and sustain a Jewish self
- Develop the desire and commitment to be part of the Jewish people now and in the future
- Are inspired and empowered to make a positive difference in the various communities and world in which they live
- Feel more curious or motivated to explore something Jewish

### **Where We are Headed**

The Foundation continues to explore meaningful indicators for the full spectrum of young Jews regardless of their background or participation in traditional Jewish communal life. In addition, work has recently begun to pilot the measurement of a shared set of outcomes among some grantee partners; as well as piloting new evolving metrics to capture how people are learning with technology and emergent ways of gathering and engaging in Jewish life in a quickly shifting landscape. While this work is all in process, early signs are encouraging. Finally, the Foundation invests in the development of valid and reliable instruments for the field to adopt in measuring outcomes of connection, meaning and purpose for young people.

The Foundation's current updated Road Map represents a vision for Jewish learning that is rooted in tradition yet responsive to modern realities. By focusing on flourishing rather than survival, the Foundation seeks to ensure that Jewish learning inspires young Jews of all

backgrounds and engagement to lead connected, meaningful, and purpose-filled lives. This paradigm reflects Judaism's enduring ability to evolve over thousands of years to meet human needs for flourishing. The Foundation ultimately aims to build a future where Jewish learning serves as a powerful tool for individual thriving and communal strength.