

RESULTS FROM THE
**2020 ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY SURVEY
OF JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS IN ST. LOUIS**

CORE COMMITMENT 4
INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

NOVEMBER 2020



Jewish Federation
OF ST. LOUIS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Jewish Federation of St. Louis fielded an organizational capacity survey in early 2020 (before the COVID-19 pandemic) for the purposes of gaining a community-wide understanding of areas of strength and opportunity regarding organizational capacity (the ability of an organization to fulfill its mission through sound management, governance, and achievement of results). Lay and professional leadership from all local and regional Jewish organizations were invited to participate. The survey asked them to reflect on their organizations' practices and abilities in the following capacity areas: board/lay leadership, staff, front-line/direct service volunteers, financial management, technology, human resources, community relations & outreach, fundraising, and program development and evaluation. Seventy-three responses were recorded, a 72% response rate.

All data from this survey is self-reported. It is not an objective, outside assessment; rather, it reflects how the community's lay and professional leaders understand their organization's capabilities from their inside perspectives.

The survey data highlights specific strengths and challenges in nine capacity areas – a summary of which can be found in the table below – as well as cross-cutting patterns that provide important insight about the pre-pandemic local Jewish organizational ecosystem:

- **Organizations have a strong positive perception of their financial management capabilities.** The respondents as a whole did not rate any of the items in the financial management section as a challenge (in contrast to the other sections, all of which had at least one item rated as a challenge overall). Two-thirds of respondents reported having balanced budgets, more than two-thirds reported that they have three months' cash in reserve, and even more than that undergo an annual audit or review by a CPA.
- **Organizations feel successful in celebrating and appreciating volunteers.** Recognizing both front-line volunteers and board-level lay leaders was identified as an overall strength.
- **Perceptions of lay leaders and professional leaders sometimes differ significantly.** The two groups diverged notably in their ratings of board understanding of organizations' finances, board engagement in reviewing budgets, staff development, volunteer management, cybersecurity, HR resources, and impact evaluation.
- **Getting the right people in place to ensure future success – both short- and long-term – is a challenge for organizations.** Organizations are having difficulties recruiting new board members, creating growth pathways for talented staff, conducting succession planning for both lay and professional leadership, and identifying new donors.
- **Organizations likely face equity issues around compensating their employees** due to a prevalent lack of clear and transparent compensation structures.
- **Budget constraints hinder organizations' ability to succeed in their work.** Organizations report that they have a hard time obtaining all the revenue they need and meeting their fundraising targets. Lack of financial resources was identified as a root cause of challenges in many capacity areas, including hiring, technology, marketing, and fundraising.

The following pages summarize the most important information gained from analyzing the survey data in each capacity area. To view the full report, please [CLICK HERE](#).

- **There is a pervasive lack of capacity around impact evaluation.** Every question relating to evaluation, from tracking program outputs/participation to conducting more sophisticated evaluation of outcomes to demonstrating to donors the impact of their gifts, was identified as a challenge.
- **Smaller organizations face increased challenges in many capacity areas.** They are less likely to have three months of cash reserves, have less time and fewer skills for grant writing, are less likely to consistently meet fundraising targets, have a harder time reaching their target audience through their marketing efforts, and are less likely to have robust cybersecurity infrastructure.
- **Some organizations do not have enough dedicated staff or staff time to focus on essential organizational functions.** This issue was raised specifically in the areas of marketing and fundraising.

This report constitutes a baseline of how our Jewish communal organizations were doing before the deep disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. While we do not yet understand the full implications of this crisis on the sustainability of our region's Jewish communal organizations, we can reasonably assume that the pandemic has not ameliorated any of the challenges identified through this survey and has likely exacerbated many of them.

These data demonstrate a substantial proportion of community organizations went into the pandemic from a position of financial strength, which has helped them weather the storm thus far. Two-thirds reported having cash reserves equal to at least three months of operating expenses before the pandemic and about the same reported balanced budgets. For the one-fifth that did not have that much in reserve and one-quarter that did not report having a balanced budget (if we assume the imbalance is a deficit, which may not be the case), the pandemic will likely be more challenging.

Federation has thus far conducted two needs assessments during the pandemic, finding that organizations are now facing new challenges in the areas of scenario planning, fundraising, personnel management, technology, and meeting new needs among their constituents. Some areas that organizations rated as strengths in this Organizational Capacity Survey, such as having the technology they need and having access to adequate expertise to support their technology operations, have become areas of acute challenge under the circumstances of the pandemic. Some areas that were already challenges before the pandemic, like cybersecurity, are now cause for significant concern as many employees are working from home.

The strengths and challenges identified in this survey provide a starting point for efforts to bolster the organizational capacity of St. Louis' Jewish community organizations through individual or cohort-based training, consultation, centralized infrastructure, and/or financial investments. Strengthening capacity in the identified challenge areas will help ensure that local Jewish organizations will be able to continue to pursue their missions over time and navigate crises like the COVID-19 pandemic more successfully. Any capacity-building efforts, however, will need to center more recent data on organizational capacity needs and the priorities of our community's organizational leadership in the context of the pandemic. Findings from this survey have already been included in needs assessments during the pandemic and will continue to inform ongoing needs assessments and planning. Federation lay leadership and community lay and professional leaders will be engaged in determining next steps for responding to these findings.

BOARD/LAY LEADERSHIP

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES	OTHER KEY LEARNING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using Jewish values to guide work. Having adequate written bylaws. Celebrating contributions of lay leaders. Lay leaders' understanding of the financial situation of their organizations. Member composition reflecting the communities they serve and providing the mix of skills and expertise needed. Providing strong direction and accountability to organizations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning for future lay leadership, including creating a pipeline of new lay leadership, recruiting board members based on specifically assessed needs, and conducting succession planning for top lay leaders. Day schools and congregations “in particular” are challenged by creating a pipeline of new lay leadership. Congregations and youth and student engagement organizations have challenges with their boards providing strong direction, support, and accountability to staff. Recruiting younger board members, people from diverse backgrounds, and people who are not already maxed out on other commitments. Supporting current lay leadership via ongoing training (specifically around fundraising) and setting clear expectations for board members. Regularly conducting strategic planning with boards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lay leaders feel more strongly that boards understand the financial situation of their organizations than professional leaders do (though both see it as a strength overall).

For detailed survey results, [click here](#).

STAFF

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES	OTHER KEY LEARNING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using Jewish values to guide work. Maintaining a low rate of turnover. Managers supporting staff through regular check-ins and feedback. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Succession planning for senior leadership, employing a “growth pipeline” to retain talented staff, identifying new talent, and identifying and addressing staff development needs. Training staff to work effectively with lay leaders and volunteers. Education, development, lower-salaried, part-time, and maintenance positions were noted as the hardest types of positions to fill. Limited budgets for salaries was identified as the most important factor that impacts staff recruitment and retention. Congregations, day schools, and social service agencies reported more challenges in the area of staffing than other organization types. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only about a fifth of respondents reported collecting any data to understand their organizations’ patterns in retaining employees. Staff development needs are perceived very differently by lay leaders (who see it as a challenge) and professional leaders (who see it as a strength).

For detailed survey results, [click here](#).

FRONT-LINE/DIRECT SERVICE VOLUNTEERS

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES	OTHER KEY LEARNING
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Setting expectations with volunteers.• Celebrating volunteers.• Recruiting and utilizing skills-based volunteers who lend specific expertise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Having enough staff time and skills to meet organizations' volunteer management needs.• Successfully recruiting the volunteers organizations need in general.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lay leaders saw organizations as strong in successfully recruiting the volunteers they need, while professionals saw this area as a challenge.• Half of professionals do not think their organizations have enough staff skills and time to meet volunteer management needs, while only one-third of lay leaders perceive this area as a challenge.• Only the organizations in the largest budget size category saw their capacity to meet their volunteer management needs as a strength.

For detailed survey results, [click here](#).

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES	OTHER KEY LEARNING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizations expressed a deep understanding of their strengths and weaknesses regarding financial management. Strong board engagement in approving annual budgets and reviewing performance against budget on a regular basis. Strong staff engagement in preparing monthly financial statements, monitoring performance against budget on a monthly basis, and regularly re-forecasting year-end revenue and expenses to assist management decision-making. Having appropriate internal controls and segregation of duties in place. Social services stood out as particularly strong across the financial management questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Congregations had the lowest rate of respondents reporting balanced budgets. Day schools had the second lowest. Day schools had the lowest rate of reporting having cash reserves equal to three months of operating expenses. Congregations had the highest rate of reporting that they conduct neither an annual audit nor an annual review. The most frequent answers to the open-ended question about challenges with financial management pertained to struggles with obtaining adequate revenue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> About 20% more lay leaders assessed the board's engagement in reviewing performance against budget as a strength than professional leaders. Over two-thirds of respondents reported having balanced budgets. Two-thirds of respondents reported having cash reserves equal to three months of operating expenses. 19% reported not having that much in reserve. The bigger an organization's budget, the more likely they were to report having these cash reserves available. Just over half of respondents reported that a CPA conducts an annual audit of their organization; 19% reported that a CPA conducts an annual review of their organization; and a quarter reported that they conduct neither. The most frequent factor that impacted the choice of whether to conduct an independent audit was cost; the second was funder requirements.

For detailed survey results, [click here](#).

TECHNOLOGY

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES	OTHER KEY LEARNING
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff have the technological tools they need to do their jobs effectively and efficiently.• Organizations have adequate access to the appropriate expertise to support their technology operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cybersecurity, including risk education for staff and secure IT infrastructure.• Affording new technology and/or enough licenses for specific technologies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 30% more professionals than lay leaders rated cybersecurity as a challenge.• Nearly two-thirds of respondents reported that their organizations utilize a constituent relationship manager or database other than Excel, most commonly to track donor information, revenue, and constituent engagement.

For detailed survey results, [click here](#).

HUMAN RESOURCES

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES	OTHER KEY LEARNING
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing adequate and affordable health benefits to employees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing adequate retirement benefits to employees.• Day schools and other educational organizations are challenged with providing adequate and affordable health benefits.• Organizations expressed an overall challenge with not having the HR resources they require to meet their needs.• The majority of respondents reported their organizations lack a clear compensation structure that is reviewed against benchmarks, regularly updated, and transparent to staff throughout the organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 15% more professionals than lay leaders saw an overall lack of HR resources as an issue.

For detailed survey results, [click here](#).

COMMUNITY RELATIONS & OUTREACH

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES	OTHER KEY LEARNING
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaborative partnerships with other organizations that enhance organizations' abilities to reach their target population or mobilize resources.• Networking with local and national organizations doing similar work.• Effective websites.• Social services rated their success in reaching their target audiences as a strength.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overall challenge with reaching target audiences.• Lack of staff skills and time around marketing, public relations, and advocacy.• Using data to inform marketing and outreach efforts.• Creating marketing and communications plans with clear tactics and goals.• Providing public relations training to executive leadership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The larger an organization's budget, the more likely it was to report success in reaching its target audience.

For detailed survey results, [click here](#).

FUNDRAISING

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES	OTHER KEY LEARNING
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thanking and celebrating donors.• In contrast to the overall respondent pool, meeting fundraising targets consistently was a strength for social services and day schools, and cultivating a diverse set of funding sources was a strength for social services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A third of respondents said their organizations struggle with writing grants. Cemeteries, congregations, day schools, and organizations with budgets under \$100K expressed challenges with writing grants at the highest rates.• Identifying and cultivating new donors and funders.• Meeting fundraising targets consistently.• Raising funds from a diverse set of funding sources.• Creating viable fundraising plans that are regularly reviewed by the board.• Demonstrating impact of gifts to donors.• Organizations noted that they do not have enough dedicated staff responsible for fundraising and lack the time and resources they need for fundraising.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Only organizations with budgets of at least \$5M were strong at consistently meeting fundraising targets.

For detailed survey results, [click here](#).

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT & EVALUATION

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES	OTHER KEY LEARNING
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regularly assessing community needs to ensure that programs respond to those needs.• In contrast to the overall respondent pool, cemeteries, social services, and youth and student engagement organizations rated themselves as strong when it comes to evaluating the impact of their work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluating the impact of their work (i.e., specific changes in behavior, attitude, or knowledge).• Researching proven/promising practices to inform program development.• Setting performance indicators for programs and using performance data to make changes to programs.• Tracking program outputs and participant satisfaction.• Incorporating a broad range of constituent input in developing and evaluating programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More lay leaders than professionals rated impact evaluation as a challenge.

For detailed survey results, [click here](#).

**This work has been overseen by the Assessment & Planning Subcommittee
of the Community Impact Committee**

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