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

CORE COMMITMENT 4
INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS ASSESSMENT
NOVEMBER 2020
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.
• **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.
# TOPLINE LEARNING BY CAPACITY AREA

## BOARD/LAY LEADERSHIP

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<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Using Jewish values to guide work.</td>
<td>• 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.</td>
<td>• 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).</td>
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<td>• Having adequate written bylaws.</td>
<td>• Day schools and congregations “in particular” are challenged by creating a pipeline of new lay leadership.</td>
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<td>• Celebrating contributions of lay leaders.</td>
<td>• Congregations and youth and student engagement organizations have challenges with their boards providing strong direction, support, and accountability to staff.</td>
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<td>• Lay leaders’ understanding of the financial situation of their organizations.</td>
<td>• Recruiting younger board members, people from diverse backgrounds, and people who are not already maxed out on other commitments.</td>
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<td>• Member composition reflecting the communities they serve and providing the mix of skills and expertise needed.</td>
<td>• Supporting current lay leadership via ongoing training (specifically around fundraising) and setting clear expectations for board members.</td>
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<td>• Providing strong direction and accountability to organizations.</td>
<td>• Regularly conducting strategic planning with boards.</td>
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For detailed survey results, [click here](#).
### STAFF

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| - Using **Jewish values** to guide work.  
- Maintaining a low rate of **turnover**.  
- Managers **supporting staff** through regular check-ins and feedback. | - **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. | - 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](#).
TOPLINE LEARNING BY CAPACITY AREA

FRONT-LINE/DIRECT SERVICE VOLUNTEERS

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<td>• Setting expectations with volunteers.</td>
<td>• Having enough staff time and skills to meet organizations’ volunteer management needs.</td>
<td>• Lay leaders saw organizations as strong in successfully recruiting the volunteers they need, while professionals saw this area as a challenge.</td>
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<td>• Celebrating volunteers.</td>
<td>• Successfully recruiting the volunteers organizations need in general.</td>
<td>• 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.</td>
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<td>• Recruiting and utilizing skills-based volunteers who lend specific expertise.</td>
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<td>• Only the organizations in the largest budget size category saw their capacity to meet their volunteer management needs as a strength.</td>
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## FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

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<td>Organizations expressed a deep understanding of their strengths and weaknesses regarding <strong>financial management.</strong></td>
<td>Congregations had the lowest rate of respondents reporting <strong>balanced budgets.</strong> Day schools had the second lowest.</td>
<td>About 20% more lay leaders assessed the <strong>board’s engagement in reviewing performance against budget</strong> as a strength than professional leaders.</td>
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<td><strong>Strong board engagement</strong> in approving annual budgets and reviewing performance against budget on a regular basis.</td>
<td>Day schools had the lowest rate of reporting having <strong>cash reserves</strong> equal to three months of operating expenses.</td>
<td>Over two-thirds of respondents reported having <strong>balanced budgets.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Strong staff engagement</strong> 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.</td>
<td>Congregations had the highest rate of reporting that they conduct <strong>neither an annual audit nor an annual review.</strong></td>
<td>Two-thirds of respondents reported having <strong>cash reserves</strong> 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.</td>
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<td>Having appropriate <strong>internal controls and segregation of duties</strong> in place.</td>
<td>The most frequent answers to the open-ended question about challenges with financial management pertained to struggles with <strong>obtaining adequate revenue.</strong></td>
<td>Just over half of respondents reported that a CPA conducts an <strong>annual audit</strong> of their organization; 19% reported that a CPA conducts an <strong>annual review</strong> of their organization; and a quarter reported that they conduct <strong>neither.</strong> The most frequent factor that impacted the choice of whether to conduct an independent audit was cost; the second was funder requirements.</td>
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<td><strong>Social services</strong> stood out as particularly strong across the financial management questions.</td>
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## TECHNOLOGY

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| • 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. | • **Cybersecurity**, including risk education for staff and secure IT infrastructure.  
• **Affording new technology** and/or enough licenses for specific technologies. | • 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

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<td>• Providing adequate and affordable health benefits to employees.</td>
<td>• Providing adequate retirement benefits to employees.</td>
<td>• 15% more professionals than lay leaders saw an overall lack of HR resources as an issue.</td>
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<td>• Day schools and other educational organizations are challenged with providing adequate and affordable health benefits.</td>
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<td>• Organizations expressed an overall challenge with not having the HR resources they require to meet their needs.</td>
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<td>• 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.</td>
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For detailed survey results, [click here](#).
## COMMUNITY RELATIONS & OUTREACH

### STRENGTHS

- **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.

### CHALLENGES

- 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.

### OTHER KEY LEARNING

- 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](#).
#TOPLINE LEARNING BY CAPACITY AREA

##FUNDRAISING

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| • 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. | • 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. | • Only organizations with budgets of at least $5M were strong at consistently meeting **fundraising targets**. |

For detailed survey results, **click here**.
# PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT & EVALUATION

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<td>Regularly <strong>assessing community needs</strong> to ensure that programs respond to those needs.</td>
<td><strong>Evaluating the impact</strong> of their work (i.e., specific changes in behavior, attitude, or knowledge).</td>
<td><strong>More lay leaders than professionals rated impact evaluation</strong> as a challenge.</td>
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<td>In contrast to the overall respondent pool, cemeteries, social services, and youth and student engagement organizations rated themselves as strong when it comes to <strong>evaluating the impact</strong> of their work.</td>
<td><strong>Researching proven/promising practices</strong> to inform program development.</td>
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<td><strong>Setting performance indicators</strong> for programs and using <strong>performance data</strong> to make changes to programs.</td>
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<td><strong>Tracking program outputs and participant satisfaction.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Incorporating a broad range of constituent input</strong> in developing and evaluating programs.</td>
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This work has been overseen by the Assessment & Planning Subcommittee of the Community Impact Committee

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