

Community Partner Covid-19 Needs Assessment

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Jewish Federation
OF ST. LOUIS

Introduction and Methodology

The Covid-19 pandemic is affecting the St. Louis Jewish community as it is affecting the rest of the world. To better understand the specific needs of our community's Jewish organizations and the people they serve, the Jewish Federation of St. Louis conducted a needs assessment. Staff from the Community Impact and Community Engagement departments reached out to 69 Jewish organizations in St. Louis and surrounding areas, including Springfield and Columbia, Missouri. Interviews were completed with fifty three organizations. We often spoke with Executive Directors, Senior Rabbis, and/or lay leaders. Interviewers asked organizations:

- a) What plans they have enacted in response to the Covid-19 crisis;
- b) What their current needs are;
- c) What their anticipated future needs are;
- d) What increased costs they have incurred or are expected;
- e) What losses have been incurred or are expected; and
- f) Assessment of interest in convening zoom meetings with colleagues.

Results of the conversations are shared below, first an overall analysis by question and then summarized by organization type. A section regarding Passover is added to the analysis since there are specific concerns around that and the holiday is fast approaching. Finally, recommendations are pulled out of the overall analysis for consideration.

These conversations are a first step to understand the needs of our organizations and community in a quickly changing crisis situation. Many that we spoke with were trying to wrap their heads around the situation and assess their own organizational needs. Certainly as things develop, needs may change. Federation intends to continue these conversations with our partners to keep our pulse on the changing and developing needs of the community and be flexible in our planning so we can work together to care for one another.

Current Situation and Plans Enacted

Across organization types, most buildings are closed with staff either working from home or not working. A few organizations reported one or a few staff were still going into their office or building because they could work away from other co-workers. Obviously Crown Center and Covenant Place remain open and have essential staff on-site but both have cancelled public events and their cafes. Other service organizations, like JFS and MERS/Goodwill, also remain open to provide needed social services to the community.

Current Situation and Plans
Most buildings closed
Service organizations remain open
No staff layoffs
Major outreach efforts to vulnerable populations
Many providing virtual programming

No organization has reported that they have stopped paying any staff, including part time and/or hourly workers, though many expressed concern about the financial strain this is currently or will in the near future put on the organization.

Many organizations reported cancelling or postponing events or programs. Many of these were fundraising events and there is concern about how this will impact overall budgets of organizations.

Seventeen organizations reported contacting vulnerable populations to check in on them and assess their needs. This includes not only elderly and medically compromised but also students and families who were receiving the organization’s services. Congregations are checking in on their members, nonprofits are checking on their volunteers, teachers are checking in on their students. Some of these organizations seemed more aware of what community resources are available to those they are checking on than others.

Some organizations, both small and large, are seriously concerned about what their organization and the services they provide will look like after the crisis is over. A few smaller organizations are seriously contemplating if they will be able to exist post-crisis. Two larger organizations have a higher sense of urgency and concern than the other organizations.

Many organizations report providing some but not all of the programs or services that they normally do. Thirty organizations report providing some kind of virtual programming including streaming of services, zoom meetings, virtual gatherings, and online education.

Current Needs

Organizations report an array of current needs including:

- Reaching the isolated (11 organizations)
- Figuring out how to deliver services under these circumstances (6 organizations)
- Technology including support, equipment purchase and applications for streaming/meeting (6 organizations)
- Financial and/or food assistance to constituents (6 organizations)
- Financial assistance for the organization including to continue to pay staff, make up for lost earned income, and support programing (5 organizations)
- Congregant or other constituent job loss (4 organizations)
- Being able to continue to pay staff (4 organizations)
- Increased domestic violence (3 organizations)
- Communicating information to constituents (3 organizations)
- Delivering meals or other goods to constituents (3 organizations)
- No current needs (12 organizations)

Most Indicated Needs
Reaching the isolated
Organizational structure support: Fundraising and Direct support
Maintaining Staff
Meeting basic human needs

Clearly there are many diverse immediate needs in our community resulting from the current crisis. It may be that some which were mentioned less often may actually be more immediate or severe. For example, concern about potential increase in domestic violence (DV) only came up in a few conversations. Times of increased stress plus families being home together and isolated will likely contribute to an increase in DV while at the same time make providing services more difficult. Our partner organization, MERS/Goodwill, has a domestic violence program that the Jewish community may not be aware of. Also, some of the issues, like constituent job loss, might increase over the next several weeks and therefore rise as a top concern. And, while just a few organizations mentioned immediate concern about the ability to pay staff, many did voice this as a longer term issue (see below).

Looking past immediate needs to future needs, three items stood out as of top concern:

- Fundraising and direct financial assistance for the organization (15 organizations)
- Maintaining current organizational staffing level (13 organizations)
- Meeting basic needs of constituents (10 organizations)

Increased Costs

Interviewers asked partner organizations if there were increased costs anticipated because of the crisis. For most, the concern was not a matter of increased costs as much as maintaining where they were prior to the crisis. Exceptions to this are food and technology. Technology has been a fairly minor cost increase for most organizations with the exception of one day school which has a lot of technology (high dollar) needs. The cost of food is yet unknown as organizations expect an increase in demand as children are home from school, people lose income, and to meet needs of older adults, but cannot quantify that yet.

Current Increased Costs
Food security
Technology

Anticipated Losses

Earned income loss is an area of concern for several organizations. This include loss of tuition for camps, programs, early childhood, day school, and other income generating activities such as stores/shops and rental properties.

A few organizations were concerned that they may lose their physical space since they are renting and unsure how this crisis will impact their future finances.

Interest in Conversation Participation

Several groups already have support in place for information and idea sharing including support from national umbrella organizations, similar organizations across the country and/or local affinity groups. For the most part, day schools are interested in convening for support and idea sharing but are currently overwhelmed and do not feel like they have time right now for group calls. Congregations and nonprofits were mixed on their interest to convene through Federation. Some say they do not have time as they must prioritize service to their clients/congregants. Others are interested in convening to share resources including:

- Work from home tips and tools
- Fundraising given the times
- Resource sharing
- Meeting the needs of the vulnerable including mental health needs particularly of students, food needs, and isolation of elderly

Passover

Many organizations, both congregations and some nonprofits, are thinking about how this crisis will affect Passover and how to best serve constituents. Some organizations are preparing Passover kits for their constituents. Concerns around Passover include:

- Getting kosher for Passover food to people who need it
- How to celebrate together without being together
 - Congregations having virtual seders—how could this be done?
 - Helping families to come together virtually
- Helping people understand that they need to remain isolated through Passover and they should not hold their traditional family gatherings this year

Analysis by Organization Type

Day Schools

Overall, day schools are overwhelmed right now and doing everything they can to continue serving their students. They all struggle with finances and fundraising on a regular basis and this crisis is certain to exacerbate that challenge. Some have identified current financial needs—mainly continuing to pay staff and technology related—others have not yet had time to figure out what their financial needs may be given the new circumstances. While they do not necessarily have mechanisms in place to communicate with each other locally, they seem to each have some support either from national networks, parent organizations, or local relationships. While some are interested in convening locally, others do not think that is possible until things settle a bit.

College Campus Based Organizations

Campus based organizations seem to have fewer needs than other organizations at this time. Their main concerns are around the mental health of students and, to a lesser extent, Passover related. They seem to have support and resources from their national partners. Their constituents are more accustomed to the technology and using it to address isolation issues. They report few financial needs at this time.

Community Organizations

Both small and large nonprofit organizations are faced with serious new challenges at this time including:

- How to transition staff to working from home (having the technology they need, resources and know-how)
- Continuing to pay staff who are not working
- Reconsidering how to provide services
- Concerns about ongoing fund development given cancelling of fundraising events, increased unemployment, and serious market declines

Congregations

Of the congregations spoken with, only 1 was holding in person services in their building. Many, but not all, are live streaming services with some Orthodox congregations streaming services other than on Shabbat. Congregations are busy reaching out to their members and thinking about how to provide

services (spiritual, educational, etc.). Congregations are in need of funding to support members who have lost their jobs (i.e. through expanded Chesed funds).

Summary

Organizations are still figuring out their needs and the needs of their constituents during this time of extreme and rapid change. The biggest immediate needs at this time are:

- Providing basic needs, particularly food, for at risk community members (elderly, people with medical conditions, people experiencing job loss)
- Ensuring each organization, particularly schools, have the technology they need to function in the current environment

Beyond these primary, immediate needs, organizations are beginning to consider what they will need to be sustainable in the next weeks, months and over the next year.

- Organizational structure support: Fund development and direct funding
- Maintaining current organizational staffing level
- Meeting basic needs of constituents

Recommendations

It is recommended that Federation consider taking the following actions. These recommendations were synthesized from conversations had with the 54 community partner organizations.

Federation as Funder

We recognize that needs will far outweigh the financial support that Federation can provide. Many other organizations across the St. Louis region are facing similar issues, assessing need and seeing what part they might play in filling them. Federation will work with others in the St. Louis community to meet the overall needs as we continue to assess and address whatever comes out of the Covid-19 crisis situation. There are some funding needs that Federation may consider in the near-term.

- Federation may consider how to provide direct funding assistance to meet the needs described by partner agencies including:
 - Meeting increased basic human needs, particularly for the most vulnerable including food, medicine, financial assistance, and meeting mental health needs
 - Technology needed due to people being isolated in their homes
 - Assisting with costs related to Passover including kosher for Passover food and Passover related programming
 - Work to address the unexpected financial needs Jewish organizations have as a result of this crisis
- Partners look to Federation for financial assistance, both directly and indirectly. Federation may consider what kind of support they can provide in addition to direct investment. Some ideas include:
 - Tracking funding opportunities (grants, government, foundation, etc.) and sharing these opportunities with partner organizations
 - Assistance completing funding applications

- Creating opportunities for organizations to share information and collaborate around funding

Federation as Coordinator and Convener

- Federation convene all community partners around the following topics as soon as possible:
 - Passover
 - Converting to working from home
 - Mental health concerns
- Federation continue to work with community partners to coordinate these activities and inform other partners about the coordinated effort:
 - Services to the elderly and those with health conditions
 - Coordination of volunteers during the crisis
- Consider developing a community response to mental health needs similar to how the community is responding to meeting the needs of older adults. Include in this domestic violence resources. Possibilities include designating a mental health counselor for the Jewish community and developing and distributing a list of community resources with an emphasis on Jewish resources (primarily JFS and MERS/Goodwill).
- Federation convene all community partners around the following topics over the coming weeks and months:
 - How to engage people in the community while we remain in isolation (i.e. how can people help in the community, how to engage current lay leadership, etc.)
 - Fundraising in the time of Covid-19
 - General resource sharing across organizations
 - Lessons Learned: What are we learning as a community to use after the crisis is over

Federation as Communicator

- Federation is seen as playing an important role in communication both with partner organizations and to the community. Federation should consider how to provide regular communication and information to both constituent groups: organizations and the community at large. Federation should also consider quickly providing resource information to both constituents. For example, distribute a flyer and/or place an ad in the Light regarding where to go for food, financial assistance, domestic violence, mental health assistance, etc. within the Jewish community.

There were other minor themes and singular recommendations that may be of interest as we move forward addressing the needs of the community. Community Impact staff will compile these over the coming weeks. This needs assessment report represents the consensus of the conversations had with the 54 organizations and is not intended to call out individual suggestions or ideas.

Appendix A: Community Partner Organizations

The following organizations completed semi-structured interviews:

Agudas Israel of St. Louis
Aish HaTorah
Anti-Defamation League STL
Ashreinu
Bais Abraham Congregation
BBYO St. Louis Chapter
B'nai Amoona
Camp Ben Frankel
Cemeteries: Beth Shalom, Chesed Shel Emeth
Central Reform Congregation
Chabad at the University of Missouri
Chabad of Greater St. Louis / Congregation Bais Menachem
Chabad of The Central West End
Chabad on Campus
Chabad St. Charles
CJL
Community Engagement
Covenant Place
Crown Center for Senior Living
Cultural Leadership
Esther Miller Bais Yaakov
Friends of Israel Scouts/Shevet Keshet
Hadassah
IgniteYP
Jewish Community Center
Jewish Community Relations Council
Jewish Family Services
Jewish Rock Radio
Jewish Student Union
Kol Rinah
MaTovu
MERS/Goodwill
Missouri Torah Institute
Moishe House STL
National Council of Jewish Women STL
Neve Shalom Congregation
Next Dor STL
NORC
Nusach Hari B'nai Zion
Saul Mirowitz Jewish Community School
Shaare Emeth
St. Louis Friends of Israel
St. Louis Jewish Light
St. Louis Kollel

Temple Emanuel
Temple Israel
Tomchei Shabbos
Torah Prep School
Traditional Congregation
U. City Shul
United Hebrew
University of Missouri, Columbia (Mizzou) Hillel
Vaad Hoer of St. Louis

We attempted to contact the following organizations but interviews were not complete at the time of this report:

American Jewish Committee STL
Cemeteries: B'nai Amoona Cemetery, Chevra Kadisha Cemetery, United Hebrew Cemetery
Cemetery: New Mount Sinai
Chabad of Chesterfield
Community Security
Congregation Beth Shalom (Columbia)
Epstein Hebrew Academy
Hillel at Washington University
HMLC
Maryville Hillel
Shir Hadash
Temple Israel-Springfield
UMSL Hillel
Yeshivat Kadimah High School
Young Israel of Saint Louis