



Roadmap to Operational Sustainability and Strategic Success

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A photograph of a man and a woman speaking at a podium. The man, on the left, has a beard and is wearing a grey suit jacket over a blue and white plaid shirt. The woman, on the right, has long brown hair and is wearing a white cardigan with a black floral pattern over a dark top. She is holding a microphone and speaking. The background is blurred, showing an indoor setting with warm lighting.

Introduction

In January 2018, the USCJ Board of Directors authorized a process to assess and articulate USCJ's path forward considering the changing demographics of the 21st century Jewish community and the challenges those changes present for our member congregations, with the mandate to ensure the organization is financially strong and poised to operate effectively to fulfill its critical mission for our communities.

An advisory committee comprised of USCJ board members and congregation leaders across the network, including presidents, rabbis, executive directors and others, was formed and worked closely with USCJ's executive staff and an outside consultant to conduct research with a representative cross-section of our synagogues and potential funders. We wanted to hear from communities of all sizes across a broad geographic area, including those currently and formerly affiliated and those who never were. Our group of funders included individual and foundation donors who currently support us and those who don't currently but might in the future.

Building on earlier strategic plans and the progress and learning achieved through their implementations, the resulting plan, USCJ's Roadmap to Operational Sustainability and Strategic Success (the Roadmap), shifts the way we serve our member synagogues in both subtle and profound ways. At its core, the Roadmap calls for pivoting elements of our delivery model from a centralized operation, in which USCJ is the sole creator and disseminator of programs and content, to one in which we invest more time and energy in sharing the innovative programming and engagement of our synagogues and partner with them to scale successes across the network.

USCJ's Board of Directors asked for a sustainable path forward for our work with teens, as well. As the Conservative and broader Jewish world

evolves, so, too, do the needs of our teens and our teen programs. As USY's mission says, "*we empower Jewish youth to develop friendships, leadership skills, a sense of belonging to the Jewish People, a deep engagement with and love for Israel and a commitment to inspired Jewish living through meaningful and fun experiences based on the ideology of the Conservative movement.*" For some time, we have been working on USY's evolution in order to retain long-held traditions while striving to create a strong, vibrant future for our teens, and this is articulated in the Roadmap.

The Roadmap is designed to directly address the opportunity we have to become greater than the sum of our parts by connecting our congregations in communities of practice and networks of affinity groups, in which we can all seek meaning together.

Our tagline and credo, "Seek Meaning Together," embodies the sense of peoplehood across our synagogues, USY Chapters and our communities. Just as *hevruta* (group study) is core to how we learn and deepen our awareness, the pathways of the Roadmap lead to strengthening connections among our multitudes of diverse communities and partners—to work, learn, experiment and find innovative ways to build a brighter future together.



Executive Summary

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An advisory committee comprised of USCJ board members and congregation leaders across the network, including presidents, rabbis, executive directors and others, was formed and worked closely with USCJ's executive staff and an outside consultant. Together, they conducted research with a representative cross section of our community and then made subsequent recommendations, which were presented in USCJ's Roadmap to Strategic Success and Operational Sustainability (the Roadmap).

The Roadmap calls for changing the way we serve our member synagogues by shifting elements of

our delivery model from a centralized operation, in which USCJ is the creator and disseminator of all programs and content, to one in which we invest more time and energy in aggregating practices, learnings and experiences from across the network to share and scale.

One of the main tenets of the Roadmap, and one in which we've already made significant progress, is forming partnerships and collaborations with our partner organizations. It is critical that we take a fresh approach to our movement partners to build a truly collaborative relationship in service of a larger vision of Conservative Judaism in North America and its future.

The Roadmap ensures that USCJ not only will become fiscally sustainable for FY 2020 and beyond, but also become greater than the sum of its parts—strengthening connections across our multitudes of communities and partners—to work, learn, experience and identify innovative ways to seek meaning together.

Specifically, this strategy calls for **USCJ** to:



Continue to offer opportunities for synagogues and leaders to convene and do meaningful work together



Build on the value of successful programming such as Sulam by making it more accessible



Actively reach out to synagogues to gather, collate and distribute best practices and to curate educational content and program ideas



Provide more programs, products and support for our underserved smaller congregations



Continue our Large Congregations Conference and work with synagogues to create other affinity groups, both online and off, to share expertise and operational guidance



Develop and deepen partnerships with other centers of excellence through the Jewish and professional worlds



Engage more lay leaders regionally and seek additional lay involvement from member congregations

With regards to **USY**, the Roadmap calls to:



Continue to offer signature programs, including International Convention (IC), Summer Experience (Wheels, Pilgrimage and DREAM) and Nativ, the college leadership program in Israel



Provide increased engagement opportunities for current USYers and those teens not-yet-involved, including new engagement opportunities for tweens grades five to eight through Kadima



Extend its reach to teens where they are, such as schools and camps



Create a new regional engagement network as the USY map is reimagined in order to maintain the history, identity and continuity of each of the regions while internal infrastructure changes occur

Feedback From the Field

To begin the process, we sought to bring voices from across our community into conversation. We spoke with a wide range of leaders at currently affiliated member congregations, formerly affiliated congregations and never affiliated congregations, as well as current and potential funders.

Despite the diversity of the synagogues, the challenges expressed were consistent. When asked, “What keeps you up at night?” we heard:

- ▶ The changing nature of membership
- ▶ Generating revenue
- ▶ Controlling costs
- ▶ Running an effective organization

The obstacles faced are, in large part, due to the changing nature of synagogue membership. Congregations are working to find new ways to generate revenue, control cost and ultimately run their “business” on budget.

However, the issues facing synagogues are not only operational—they are also existential. Several times we heard versions of, “Who are we in this changing Conservative and broader Jewish world?” Our members are wrestling with this question and how it dovetails with the needs and identities of their communities.

What keeps our synagogue leaders up at night



We next asked congregations about their relationship with USCJ, both in regards to membership and the programs and services we offer. We learned that USCJ currently offers many assets valued by our congregations, including:

- ▶ Relationships with the professionals who partner with synagogue leaders to address their day-to-day and most pressing leadership issues
- ▶ Events and programs like Sulam programs, our biennial convention and district conferences
- ▶ USY and USCJ's engagement of teens

By building on the most valued aspects

of our network, we open doors for further organizational focus and development.

We concluded our research by asking what is needed in the 21st century and beyond. Respondents described:

- ▶ A future built on a strong foundation of operational sustainability
- ▶ A base from which they can connect to one another, their local community and the broader USCJ network and the movement
- ▶ An environment of learning and helping their congregants feel part of something bigger and stronger
- ▶ Ways to continue inspiring the next generation of Jews

How USCJ can help



As we designed next steps for our teen engagement, we did so with the knowledge that youth service organizations are embarking on a new decade of innovation and engagement for Jewish teens across the country. This pivot stems from the Jewish Education Project's monumental recent study *GenZ Now: Understanding and Connecting with Jewish Teens Today*. The study, which is one of the largest studies of American Jewish teens ever conducted with almost 18,000 teens, demonstrates “an unprecedented understanding into who these teens are, what they care about and want, and to some extent, what the Jewish community can do to enhance their lives as people, and as Jews.”

USY was privileged to participate in this study with 13 other national youth-serving organizations. Through this process, we examined the full scope of our programming—who attends USY, our strengths and our areas for growth. What was unanimously clear is that USY provides tremendous benefit for those teens who participate. Across the board, according to *GenZ Now*, teens who participate in a youth-serving organization score higher on almost every measured outcome, including teens connecting to being Jewish and teens feeling good about themselves, their relationships and their ability to make change in the world.



The Road Ahead

The recommendations of the advisory committee and professionals, accepted by USCJ's Board of Directors, reflect the feedback from USCJ's stakeholders, the progress of our existing partnerships and the organization's direct experience. The mandate for this plan, directly from the Board, was to chart a path forward that would build a sustainable foundation for the organization's growth going forward.

The Roadmap is a pragmatic framework to enable USCJ and USY to excel in providing what

we uniquely can, to strengthen the network and collaboration across synagogues and to deepen strategic partnerships, which will underscore and demonstrate that we are part of a movement.

The Roadmap ensures that not only will USCJ become fiscally sustainable for FY 2020 and beyond but also become greater than the sum of its parts—strengthening connections across our multitudes of communities and partners—to work, learn, experience and identify innovative ways to seek meaning together.

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The Power of the Network

The Roadmap identifies the power of the network as the single greatest asset of USCJ. The core priorities moving forward will both amplify the existing strengths of the network and improve areas in which the network has potential to grow. Seek Meaning Together comes alive as we deepen connections among communities and partner organizations. The four pillars will be:

Convening: The Art of Gathering

USCJ will ensure that every key constituency (e.g. presidents, large synagogues, etc.) has opportunities to convene to do meaningful work together. In some instances, USCJ will organize and lead the convening (e.g. our biennial convention, Large Congregations Conference) and in some instances, USCJ will partner with congregations to create new convenings, such as Kol Tefilla, a *Shabbaton* that focuses on elevated

prayer initiated by Temple Beth Am in Los Angeles and now embarking on its third year.

Communities of Practice

Communities of practice are “formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor” (Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 1991). USCJ already offers communities of practice, which we call cohorts, both on its own, like Sulam for Strategic Planners, a 12-15 month training program that helps synagogues think strategically and plan, and in partnership with other organizations, such as the USCJ/ Keshet Leadership Project, a year-long program that helps congregations transform into truly inclusive communities for people regardless of gender and sexual identity. We will continue to lead these programs, but at the same time, the



**Convening:
The Art of
Gathering**



**Content Curation:
Data and Stories
from the Field**



**Communities of
Practice**



**Community
Organizing**



Roadmap outlined a desire from congregations for a greater variety of affinity groups. Moving forward, USCJ will work with synagogues to create short-term and longer term affinity groups, both online and off, to support professionals and lay leadership as they look to wrestle with and/or explore issues and questions being raised in their own communities. USCJ is the platform that can enable this so those interested and curious can connect with peers to share their thinking.

Content Curation: Data and Stories from the Field

Curation includes the qualitative and quantitative information that congregations want shared with one another. Some of this already exists in the form of documents, such as the USCJ Salary Survey, or the Solomon Schechter Awards. More recently, the photo essay *Wait, Doesn't Chabad Do That?* was a

great example of how telling the stories of innovative congregations benefits the network and amplifies the value of USCJ. As we heard in our research, "There are a lot of clever things happening out there. Exposure to that is the highest and best use of a national organization such as USCJ." USCJ will actively reach out to synagogues to gather, collate and distribute best practices and curate educational content and program ideas. To improve upon this area, greater focus will be put on producing reports and case studies of the highest production value; the resources congregations need the most will be the ones to whom USCJ devotes the greatest dollars.

Community Organizing

Community Organizing requires a method of training high quality leaders to be advocates and trainers for other congregations, amplifying the work of existing staff. This pillar

needs to include both “grassroots” organizing—training volunteers to work with congregations at the ground level—and “grasstops” organizing—amplifying leaders from the network whose exemplary work can benefit the network at the continental level.

From the feedback we heard during our research, it became clear that the current KST Department excels at facilitating convenings and communities of practice. However, our current work regarding content curation and community organizing has room for considerable growth. As such, the implementation plan will require continued building of our convening and communities of practices, while devoting greater energy to building core capacities in content curation and community organizing.

These four pillars will be instrumental in our goal of creating what is known as a “network affect.” Fueled by social media, the network effect is “a phenomenon whereby increased numbers of people or participants improve the value of a good or service” (Will Kenton, “*Network Effect*,” *Investopedia*, 20 November 2017). The network of human capital in member congregations is extraordinary, and the outstanding programs that already exist are just scratching the surface of what is possible. In Judaism, this principle also known as *b’rov am hadrat melekh*, or “in multitudes there is glory of the king” (Mishlei 14:28). The more the network functions at its highest capacity as a network, the greater the benefits of affiliation for everyone.





The Department of Synagogue Leadership

Formerly known as the Kehilla Strengthening and Transformation department, our new synagogue team will be known as the Department of Synagogue Leadership. While the word *kehilla* was adopted by USCJ to express the evolving nature of how one can form Jewish community, we are returning to the nomenclature for our team that is dedicated to serving synagogue leaders. While this will not stop USCJ from focusing on engaging unaffiliated Jews through non-traditional

models of community, the synagogue remains the primary customer of USCJ. Furthermore, USCJ sees its role as an advocate for the synagogue, as it remains the most-affiliated Jewish institution in North America by a wide margin.

Redefining Roles

Kehilla Relationship Managers will now become Synagogue Consultants, continuing as the primary point of contact with congregations in their district. Building on that relationship, the

Synagogue Consultant will serve as the lead community organizer and network weaver in their area, identifying talented professionals and lay leaders who have the potential to benefit other congregations and the network as a whole.

In addition, areas of expertise and programming will be assigned to each Synagogue Consultant, extending USCJ's ability to bring knowledge that is internal and inherent in our community to the fore. Synagogue Consultants will use their specialty to provide additional consultations to congregations anywhere in the network.

For example, a consultant with a specialty in volunteer engagement will not only provide support for his/her congregations, but to any congregation in the network that has a need in this area. The Synagogue Consultant might also produce content such as a data-driven study on volunteerism in congregations or a toolkit to increase volunteer engagement.

Working With Synagogues of all Sizes

Smaller synagogues make up the majority of all affiliated congregations, but we have not, to date, focused specifically on their unique needs. With this in mind, we will have dedicated staff people who will focus on the strategic and tactical needs of smaller congregations and convene

cohorts to address specific concerns, interests and opportunities. Of course, they can continue to join all congregations in addressing universal issues. Additionally, our trained community organizers will play a special role in helping us best serve smaller congregations.

The Fuchsberg Jerusalem Center

The Fuchsberg Jerusalem Center (FJC), which provides immersive experiences for both laity and future clergy, aligns with the Roadmap objective to “deepen contemporary Jewish engagement, leading to the enrichment of Jewish life in North America and the strengthening and transformation of our kehillot.” FJC has the potential to transform Jews in the pews as well as Jewish seekers who are not yet in the pews.

FJC professionals and participants provide regular, insightful and thoughtful content and experiences that build our network. Working in Jerusalem with Ramah, Moishe House, JTS, Marom Olami, Machon Schechter and others, extends our partnerships and collaboration to Israel.

The Power of Partnerships

USCJ will seek to coordinate and consolidate its activities with other constituent arms of the Conservative Movement to improve the overall relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the Movement. Where feasible, intentional partnerships will support and enable USCJ's content curation and expertise cultivation.

By developing genuine partnerships, our community will:



Have greater access to expert content



Realize efficiencies resulting from eliminating duplication



Benefit from coordinated and more impactful efforts



Capitalize more often and more naturally, on opportunities

The Power of the Lay Leadership and Professional Teamwork

A part of this change will include engaging more lay leaders regionally to help with broader outreach (e.g. build on work done by Kehilla Ambassadors) and develop a more robust leadership pipeline.

Our District Leadership Council, representing the District congregational lay leadership of the Conservative Movement, strives to strengthen our congregations, create passion for and commitment to the principles and practices of Conservative Judaism and build multigenerational communities in our affiliated synagogues.

Importantly, District Council works in partnership with the District Synagogue Consultant to provide the highest level of service possible to our synagogues and their leadership teams by strengthening the lines of communication and engagement between the synagogue and USCJ.

The Roadmap calls for the lay leadership and professionals to work together to strengthen and extend the partnership in the Councils across the continent, and to spearhead and pilot a Volunteer Network with which we'd leverage interest and expertise among lay leadership of USCJ and our synagogues to extend our overall ability to provide more connection and support for our member synagogues.

A Strong Vibrant Future for Our Teens

As we are doing with the department of synagogue leadership, the Roadmap also calls for shifts both subtle and profound in our USY model, moving toward an increased focus on engagement and collaboration.

With the outcomes of the GenZ study and our learnings from the change process, which began in 2016, in mind, USY is embarking on a transformational change to evolve our model and program to meet the needs of our teens across the country. For almost 70 years, USY has been the foundation for the Conservative Jewish teen experience. As the Conservative and broader Jewish world evolves, so, too, do the needs of our teens and our program.

The strategy calls for USY to continue offering its signature programs, including International Convention (IC), Summer Experience (Wheels, Pilgrimage and DREAM) and Nativ, the college leadership program in Israel.

NEW INITIATIVES INCLUDE:

Increased Engagement Opportunities

At USY, we work hard to empower teens to engage with the Jewish community in authentic ways. We will be providing new, exciting and innovative opportunities for current USYers and those teens not-yet-involved to participate

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Create a new regional engagement network as the USY map is reimagined in order to maintain the history, identity and continuity of each of the regions while internal infrastructure changes occur



Provide increased engagement opportunities for current USYers and those teens not-yet-involved, including new engagement opportunities for tweens grades five to eight through Kadima



Increased Engagement Opportunities



Fresh Partnerships and Collaborations



Ongoing Professional Development Investment



A New Regional Engagement Network

in our programming and chapters across North America through new peer-to-peer engagement, stronger Kadima programming for tweens in grades five to eight as a bridge to USY, and the inauguration of USY programming in non-traditional settings, such as schools and camps, which will unfold beginning at the chapter and expand to the regional level.

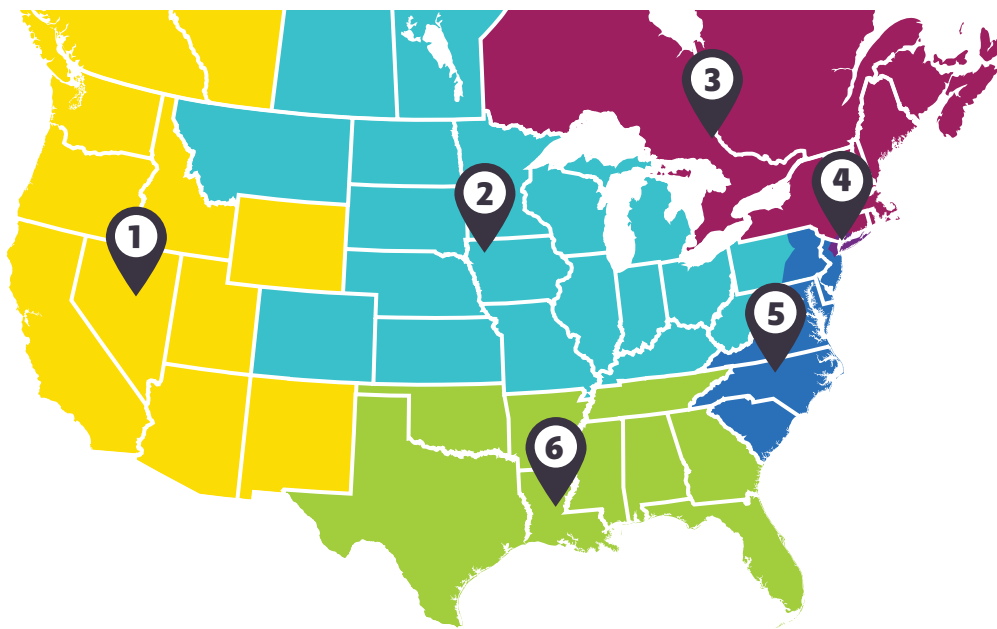
Ongoing Professional Development Investment

We are fortunate to have such amazing talent working for USY. Going forward we plan to invest more in our staff by providing training that will result in shared languages, experiences and competencies, from the chapter level to the regional and international levels. In fact, many of our USY staff has been trained in Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) and some of our professionals are

certified trainers.

Fresh Partnerships and Collaborations

USY will also expand its programming through partnerships and collaborations with organizations both inside and outside the Conservative movement, including the Ramah Camping Movement, the Jewish Education Project, Keshet, AIPAC, Noam Olami and other teen initiatives. These partnerships will allow for new opportunities such as cost efficiencies. We will also be able to leverage these relationships for programming and educational offerings, such as a pilot program we recently ran in partnership with the Center for Israel Education, in which teens from across the country gathered in New Jersey for three days to think deeply about Israel's past, present and future).



- BRANCH #1**
New Frontier,
Pinwheel, Far West
- BRANCH #2**
EMTZA, CHUSY, CRUSY
- BRANCH #3**
HaNer, Tzafon,
ECRUSY
- BRANCH #4**
METNY, Hagalil
- BRANCH #5**
Mizrach, Seaboard
- BRANCH #6**
HaNegev, SWUSY

A New Regional Engagement Network

The USY map is being reimagined, allowing regions to maintain the history, identity and continuity of each of the regions while also creating new opportunities. Through our new shared staffing model, regions will be grouped into USY Branches. There will be six “branches”

comprised of two to three regions each; each Branch will have a team of staff, including a Branch Director, a Director of Engagement (formerly known as a Regional Teen Engagement Director/RTED) and Engagement Associates. Teens will continue to see their friends from across the region at their chapter, regional and international events.





Path Forward

It is clear that USCJ and USY today don't look how they did in the 20th century. As we approach a new decade and beyond, we expect, and, in fact, we encourage, these changes to continue.

We have already begun making progress toward the goals set forth in the Roadmap. Specifically, with regards to partnerships, we are planning for 20/20 Judaism, a collaborative convention with the Rabbinical Assembly in Boston December 6-10, 2019, which we hope leads to broader convenings across the Movement. And we continue to deepen our exploration of synergies and collaborations with organizations such as NAASE, JTS, the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, Cantors Assembly, Jewish Educators Association, the Women's League for Conservative Judaism, the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs and the Ramah Camping Movement. We are excited for what the future holds as we

continue to collaborate with our partners in the movement.

We have begun making our content more accessible by offering programs such as Sulam via video and facilitating the sharing of ideas, resources and best practices on our digital platform, The Commons.

Our teen programming is evolving and innovating, as new programs await the teens eager for the coming summer and school year curricula.

We are confident our Roadmap will help to meet the needs of our member congregations and Jewish youth both today and in the future as we demonstrate what an authentic and dynamic Judaism looks like, inspire people to be a part of it, and advance its critical role in the world.



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