

The Future of USY Leadership

Background

USY leadership, at all levels, has been significantly affected by the impact of COVID on synagogues, immersive experiences, and changes to the structure of USY. Without question, if USY is to remain an organization that defines itself as “by teens, for teens”, then it must have ample opportunities for teens to take on leadership roles within the organization. To ensure the success of our teen leaders, we must commit to investing in them with training, leadership development opportunities, and making leadership roles accessible for teens across the continent.

When implemented, this will accomplish two primary goals:

1. Strengthen the leadership pipeline by opening opportunities for local and International leadership
2. Clarify the role and responsibilities of community and International leadership through an updated constitution

It is important to note that one of the pillars of this proposal is the concept of increasing the number of community director positions around the country. This will be done with the building of new partnerships between USCJ/USY and synagogue communities around the country. In addition, significant time and resources will be devoted to providing education and training opportunities to current and aspiring USY leaders. In turn, USYers must strive to take advantage of these offerings so as to maximize their time as leaders and be ready to apply their skills to their position.

This proposal has been crafted at the direction of the USY Int'l Executive board, and reviewed and supported by the USY director team and senior USCJ leadership. We now share it with you for your honest feedback and eventual support. As you read through elements of this plan, try to think as objectively as possible and set aside your personal feelings about the current state of USY, regardless of how it has affected you. The goal of these changes is to enable USY teen leadership to move forward- you may not feel them right away, especially if your time in USY is coming to a close. Think about the next 5-10 years of USY leaders as you weigh the merits of this proposal. There is still room for additional suggestions and changes, so please don't think that the train has left the station.

The IEB and IGB

The IEB will, overall, remain stable, however, we will restructure the board to look as follows:

President- oversight of IEB goals and direction, represent USY at appropriate functions, direct liaison to USY professional staff, oversight of IGB application and IEB election processes, oversight of National Leadership Council (see below)

Program VP- general USY programmatic initiatives, immersive programs, summer, online trainings, SATO, Israel programs

Jewish Life VP- education/jewish learning initiatives, programming related to Shabbat, holidays, other ritual moments, oversight of tefillah and other ritual at conventions organized by the Int'l office.

Communications VP- social media, newsletters, story telling, statements

Engagement and Outreach VP- create and oversee broad teen-teen engagement and outreach strategy,

Further guidelines about the IEB will be in the updated constitution,

International General Board (IGB)

The IGB will continue to function in support of the IEB. IGB chair positions will be more focused, given the ways in which programmatic focus is being divided among the restructured IEB. The specific roles can be determined on an annual basis by the IEB, in a way that reflects their goals and is relevant to the needs of USY leadership at that time.

Teen Leadership Council

We have a responsibility to provide leadership opportunities for teen leaders who's chapters do not have a community director serving their community. While the community director model continues to grow, there will be a need for a body of leaders from all communities who want to come together to discuss the future of USY, and support the work of the IEB, IGB, and central staff. This body will also support the implementation of national USY initiatives in their communities, and serve as ambassadors for the programs that USY is offering. This provides yet another pipeline for higher leadership, training opportunities, and an additional way to hear the voices of our teen leaders from around the continent.

Led by the USY President, this group would meet monthly on Zoom to discuss current issues, give feedback, and share ideas about local programming and the future of USY. There will also be leadership training opportunities made available to them, and we will work with each member to ensure that they can come to LTI to keep open the possibility of one in-person gathering of this group.

Regions and Communities

“Regions” will be centered around community directors. Where there is a community director, there is a “region”. Each community director will form a “community council”, which will function for the community director’s area of focus as a regional board once did. These leaders will have training, access to LTI, and be the source of the next crop of national leaders. They will give input to the community director on programming, working with the community director to determine goals and strategy. The scope of the programming, as well as type and frequency, will be determined in partnership with the stakeholders supporting the community director.

Community councils will meet monthly, with their work and deliverables supervised by the community director, and their training and development overseen by the DLD (Director of Leadership Development). Anyone who is considered a member of USY can be on the community council, and the stakeholders, which include teens and organizational partners, will work together to determine the process for filling the council, as well as its format. Community councils can choose to distribute any of the traditional board positions among its members either via application or election.

There are already efforts in some areas of the country to maintain the regional teen leadership structure that previously existed. This is being done with the supervision of a community director or local professionals and lay leadership. International USY will continue to support these efforts, so as to maintain as many pipelines to leadership as possible and empower local communities. Teen leaders who fall into this category will be invited to participate in all initiatives from the DLD, and the DLD will work with the adult stakeholders to support ongoing training and education. Whether these situations arise in former regions or sub-regions (or both), or among synagogues that are working together, Int’l USY will support them as long as there are adult stakeholders. This work can also fall under the role of the community director if and when applicable, and be born out of the community leadership structure that is detailed above. The DLD will work with local leaders to determine election or selection procedures.