

The Challenge of the Planning Function in the Intermediate Federation*

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All professional practice necessarily stems from basic concepts of function, objectives, social ideology, method and professional role. Furthermore, the practice of planning in an ethnic system like Federation introduces additional philosophical considerations regarding the nature of that system, and these also influence practice in a number of ways. In other words, any intelligent discussion of planning in Federation cannot be separated from a number of basic principles and concepts which too often have been absent from discussion about Federation planning.

The reasons for this are clear. We are essentially pragmatists, extremely busy doers who can barely keep up with the daily demands of campaign, administration, community and public relations, and a tremendous number of related pressures. We tend to be impatient with matters that require extended discussion, much thought, slow and careful process, and considerable time to deal with. It is therefore not surprising that in many intermediate Federations there have not developed what could be considered adequate structures for planning. To a large extent we still react to agency needs and pressures and are constantly "putting out fires."

But it's not only a question of time and pressure. I believe there is a more basic problem and that is how many of us, consciously or unconsciously, view the responsibility of Federation. I believe we tend to see Federation as primarily a fund-raising mechanism which raises and spends money for

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a variety of causes and to support those causes more or less adequately. The day-to-day problems revolve around that understanding, and most of the problems are therefore fiscal ones, in the sense that agency needs are always greater than the available sources. With that kind of understanding, dealing with problems is more or less on an ad hoc basis. Planning is done, but rarely in relation to long term viewpoints and objectives.

Most of us are no longer comfortable with the role of Federation as a reactive mechanism. We are aware that Federations have come of age and that they must play a more decisive role in determining future directions and programs. To help clarify that role, this paper will deal with the following essential aspects of the problem:

1) The evolving concept of the Jewish Federation as an ethnic system, and with a mission that seeks to enrich, strengthen and ensure the survival of Jewish life. Such a concept sees the Federation not as an essentially passive mechanism which reacts to external pressures, but as an entity with a consciousness of its own, with a conscious sense of mission based upon an articulated rationale.

2) The assumption that such a perception requires that Federation develop planning structures and processes to carry out the mandates inherent in the new perception. This means perspectives and guidelines which are pertinent to the ethnic system per se, and which may or may not be relevant to specific agencies. From this viewpoint, agencies are seen as instruments of the community which exist to carry out functions and services which

are deemed relevant to the ethnic community. An important part of Federation planning is therefore concerned with efforts to direct agencies into such relevancy.

3) An outline of those aspects of the planning structure and process which are essential to sound planning in any community.

The Ethnic System

In an earlier article,¹ I pointed out that a group of social forces, outside and inside of this country, which have resulted in a changing Federation view of itself and its role, consisted of the following elements:

- 1) There is a slowly developing consciousness in Federations that the raising of money cannot be separated from the grave responsibility of spending it wisely. There is an increasing awareness that wise spending involves carefully thought out rationales, criteria and judgments about what shall or shall . . . no longer be matters which arise solely from momentum, tradition or inertia.
- 2) While the ideal of service continues to permeate Federation thinking and doing, changes are occurring in the way "service" is being defined. To the traditional meanings which have been related to the needs of individuals, families and groups, has been added such new dimensions as identity and survival, which refer to total community need. This implies less concern with agency definitions of need and function, and more interest in the ways agencies relate themselves to what is considered to be the more important community needs as defined by total community.²
- 3) The increasing focus on the problem of Jewish identity and survival is leading to an ever growing interest in the ways local agencies are related to this problem and are dealing with it. For the first time we see this question being asked in (conscious and) deliberate ways.³

¹ Charles Miller, "Changing Dimensions in Federation-Agency Relationships," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. LIII, No. 1 (Fall 1976), pp. 15-20.

² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

These three considerations all imply that Federation exists primarily to meet the needs of the total community, and that those needs can only be defined by the total community. This in turn suggests that Federation contains within it structures and processes which are able to articulate those needs. A further implication is that the Federation executive has a major responsibility for leadership in helping to define needs and objectives. This can be done only if he has a clear viewpoint about what Federation is and should be. And if the basic thrust of Federation is the survival of the Jewish people, Jewish life and Jewish community, we are talking about an ethnic system which exists to maintain that system and all that it implies.

Up to the current era, agencies have been ends in themselves. They were created to meet a variety of personal needs and social needs. With the growth of the welfare state, with the increasing question in relation to a more or less stable level of fund-raising, we can no longer avoid basic questions of rationale about what we should support and about new needs and priorities. On every hand we are faced with decisions which, in the final analysis, challenge us to provide rationales for what we do. We find that our historic pragmatism no longer serves to answer the questions. Should the percentage be more or less to overseas or local? Why? To Jewish education, homes for aged, community centers, family agencies? Why? Agencies always feel very clear about what they do or should do within their established functions. Are we in Federation as clear? Do we have the right or responsibility to influence these functions and services? If so, on what basis? In accordance with what criteria? Who established the criteria? Do the criteria reflect community thinking?

The existence of an ethnic system does not automatically provide rationales and objectives. The system must be helped to develop these, and in this the executive has to play a crucial role. There is a great deal of experience and thinking to guide him, but he must see his role as one of active leadership. If he exerts this leadership with dynamism and skill, he

will find that the Federation, in articulating its own planning objectives, has taken the initiative from the agencies. The control of planning and budgeting, based on clear planning perspectives, creates a climate in which agencies must now react to community definitions of needs, objectives and priorities. To receive support, agencies must increasingly develop functions and services which support community definitions. Sometimes agency and Federation views will coincide, but just as often they will not. Then will come the test of the Federation's apparatus for insuring that its planning decisions can be implemented.

I do not imply that revolutions in agency services are in the offing. Agencies are in the business of serving specific needs, and will continue to do so. I am referring to a gradual process of change in which certain aspects of agency function become more or less important in relation to community criteria. From this viewpoint, for example, family life education in family agency would become Jewish family life education, and might grow into a major function. Another example would be an intensification of many Jewish identity programs in community centers, and a decreasing focus on other types of activities.

In stressing the importance of the total ethnic system and its objectives, a word of caution is due about the dangers of oversimplification in relation to the role of agencies. We make a serious mistake if we assume, consciously and unconsciously, that they need us more than we need them. I stated elsewhere that:

Jewish communal services are more than mechanisms for doing things for people. They are social institutions of the Jewish community; they express our historic, religious, and cultural values; their support calls for unified communal effort and they are therefore unifying influences; they are the visible symbols of united communities, visible to the client, to Jews, and to non-Jews. They are therefore concrete affirmations of the will of the Jewish community to maintain its sectarian identity, to develop, and to survive.

The elimination of a Jewish agency must therefore be regarded as a matter of major importance concerning the life and survival of the Jewish community. There must be compelling reasons, both from the point of view of sound social policy and valid planning considerations.

For many people, Jewish social agencies provide a major vehicle of identification with the organized Jewish community. In our secularist world, large numbers of people make their basic identifications with political and social groups, service activities, institutions, and "communities" of all types. One reason for the amazing viability of our communities is that they have offered so many opportunities to so many people to identify with so many institutions which symbolize total community.⁴

In the future, not all agencies will continue to be equally relevant to the objectives of the ethnic system. However, before we decide to eliminate or diminish a major Jewish institution, let us make sure that we have exerted every possible effort to increase its Jewish relevance.

Structure And Process

It is trite to say that in order to achieve the reality and potentials of social planning it is necessary to have appropriate structures, processes, knowledge, skill and other resources. But it has to be said, because the fact is that this combination of resources is not often present in intermediate Federations. The suggestions I make have to do more with general attitudes and approaches which influence the nature and scope of planning structures and processes, than with the specifics of planning which are primarily administrative procedures with which we are all familiar.

1) *The Problem of Professional Attitudes*

The first and most important suggestion I have to make is to try to be more aware of our own attitudes and limitations in the area of

⁴ *An Introduction to the Jewish Federation*. New York: Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, 1976, p. 31.

planning. The Federation professional is usually a highly intelligent and competent person. The community regards him as its professional leader, as a person of ability and stature, and as someone who is expected to know the answers.

The Federation executive is in a special position of power and authority because of actual or potential influence in relation to community decision-making, and the effects of this power are such as to create in him the sense that he knows what is right and what must be done. That is, since he is expected to know the answers, there is an almost automatic assumption that he has the necessary knowledge and wisdom to provide them and therefore has the right to move the community to accept his judgment as the necessary answer to the planning problem. To deny this is to deny a basic reality. To recognize and accept is the first step toward an appropriate handling of the problem.

Power is not wisdom, nor is it knowledge and skill. In fact, if improperly used, it interferes with an essential element in Federation planning, namely, relationships of mutual trust and confidence. I do not suggest that the Federation professional compromise his basic role of leadership and his basic objectives. I do refer to a professional stance in which there is a recognition that the possession of power requires the use of it with appropriate humility and skill. This implies a number of related qualities and ways of functioning.

2) *The Matter of Knowledge*

The first quality that flows from an appropriate sense of humility is to know what we don't know and to have some idea about what one has to know in order to affect decision-making in a constructive manner. In dealing with fields of service, the planner cannot be an expert in each field, but he can and must know the general philosophy, objectives, programs, issues and trends in each field. These are easily available in the literature, or can be made quickly available by the people in the field. It means that a vast

amount of highly selective reading must be done in the several fields and that there must be frequent consultation with key people in the fields. Attendance at specialized conferences can be helpful, as is an occasional scanning of specialized literature.

I also assume that in any planning project, the planner has or plans to have all pertinent data on needs, target groups, financing, agency sponsorship and any other relevant considerations.

3) *The Matter of Structure and Process*

It is a commonplace of knowledge that sound planning must stem from sound structure and process. How easily those words drop from our lips and yet how often are structure and process inadequate and inappropriate.

In many communities the structure for planning has no clearly defined mandate or authority, constitutionally or by Board action. This to a large extent accounts for the vagueness and lack of clarity about the planning operation. For example, the role of agencies and their relationship to the planning structure is often not clear, with the result that a planning approach to an agency is often viewed by the agency as a threat.

I know of one leading community where they boast about the fact that agencies never participate as partners in planning processes affecting those agencies on the assumption that they are vested interests which cannot contribute constructively to the process. How often have I been asked to conduct studies of agencies where the Federation has not discussed the study with the agency or has done so in a way which suggests that the study is really an "investigation" which the agency views with fear and trepidation? In how many communities is planning thought of as a process whereby a few Federation decision-makers decide what's best for agencies and the community in the way of services, without reference to masses of data or to national experience?

If the challenge is to develop some sound

sense of "community" need and objective, then we must ensure that the key planning committees are dominated by representative community viewpoints, such as contributors, organizational and religious interests, Federation leadership, etc. In such a structure the agency viewpoint takes its proper place, not as a dominant viewpoint, but as an important one. It is free to present its views and materials openly and fully, but these are tested against the broader framework of total community and other relevant concepts of need. This means a continuous sharing of data and viewpoints and an assumption that differences of opinion are valid and do not necessarily express opposition to planning.

4) *The Matter of Leadership and Skill*

I combine the elements of leadership and skill because I believe that successful planning in the Jewish Federation requires that both elements be successfully integrated in the planner.

There is frequent reference to the fact that an effective planner must be a leader; that is, that he must be a creative thinker, ready to present his ideas forcefully and with courage and skill.

Note the words I have just used: "creative," "forcefully," "courage" and "skill." Every one of these words implies a viewpoint, and a readiness to push that viewpoint. It is precisely around this role that we face our greatest difficulties as planners. The more aggressively we assert leadership, the more is there a tendency, particularly in agency circles, to regard us as power-driven manipulative people with a need to control decision-making.

The fact is that while some of us in the fields of community organization and planning are manipulators in the negative and unprofessional sense, many of us are not. We do give sound professional leadership and do so in a way which does leave the decision-makers free to make their own decisions. We know that it's a matter of *how* we do what we do. We also know that the truth about this comes out sooner or later. The dishonest manipulator is

found out sooner, and the skilled leader somewhat later, since preconceptions die hard.

I don't want to be misunderstood about any of this. I don't for a moment suggest or imply that if one is competent and honest he will be liked or that the planning decisions will be popular. The most one can hope for is that the community, and the agencies, will come to respect the planning function in Federation as one which is fairly objective, rational, judicious and effective.

5) *The Matter of Relationship and Communication*

Perhaps as important as any other factors in planning are those of relationship and communication between the Federation and agency executives. Since the former sits in the position of power in relation to the latter, it is he who must take the primary responsibility.

I know that many Federation executives have pleasant relationships with agency executives, but positive personal relationships are not identical with professional relationships of mutual trust and confidence. Does the agency executive feel free to bring any kind of agency or community problem to the Federation executive? Does he feel that the latter will be really interested, and will be ready to help if desirable and feasible? Will they both be free to express disagreements without creating enmity? Will they both avoid hidden agendas which will ultimately emerge and create tension and hostility? Will they both avoid confrontation or open criticism in the presence of lay people? Will they avoid personal attacks of any kind? Will there be a readiness to communicate frequently by telephone, memorandum and personal discussion?

While these questions apply to both Federation and agency executives, I stress that the primary responsibility for carrying out their implications lie with the Federation executive. Preoccupied and often overwhelmed by concerns about many causes and agencies, he naturally tends to see an agency as one of many responsibilities. But to the agency executive, the agency and its problems are a

major part of his life. By bridging this gap through relationship and communication, the Federation executive will go a long way toward dealing more effectively with local planning problems.

6) *The Matter of Planning Status*

I have often been struck by the fact that in community after community, where planning is relatively ineffective, there is a lack of recognition, both on the part of the lay and professional leadership; that the basic reason for the lack of effectiveness is the low status of planning within the Federation framework. This low status expresses itself in a number of ways, such as:

a) The Federation executive often regards it as a secondary rather than a primary activity which is usually handled by a younger and less experienced staff person.

b) With few exceptions, top rung lay leadership is rarely involved with planning. This is related to the idea that planning is a kind of *spielerei*, a kind of window-dressing which we need in modern Federations, but which really isn't concerned with important things like campaign and budgeting. Too often those identified with planning are not active in the campaign, and are seen as people who spend rather than those who raise the money. This also tends to denigrate the role of local services in relation to the dramatic impacts of Israel and Soviet Jewry.

c) Key planning decisions are made outside of the official planning structure. Major budget decisions affecting programs and services may or may not be related to planning considerations. Planning is not interpreted in continuous and forceful ways.

d) The planning structure is separate from the budgeting structure and process and has no power to implement its decisions with financial support. It therefore soon becomes an objective of scorn.

Although the *status* of planning is an intangible, I have no hesitation in saying that it is the most important aspect of planning. Status establishes the climate in which

planning operates; it correlates with how much planning is recognized and accepted and its decisions respected and implemented.

Planning, Local Agencies And Future Viability

I think there is another aspect of planning which may have significant implications for the future. I refer to the possible growing importance of the local service picture as this may affect the future viability of fund-raising, and therefore the Federation itself.

For the first time, there has appeared on the horizon a ray of hope regarding the possibility of peace in the Middle East. Not that at this moment there is much reason for optimism. The situation remains tense and uncertain. Nevertheless, we are compelled to face up to the fact that peace is within the realm of possibility. Let's think ahead.

What happens to our campaigns if some kind of stable peace is achieved? Even if we assume that Israel's needs will be overwhelming for a number of years, we can also assume that barring certain major crises, the major basis for high level fund-raising will decline over the long pull. What do we have to substitute for the appeal of Israel and crisis? The one thing we do have is the dramatic story of our local services and their growing needs, particularly in relation to the problems of the poor, the elderly, troubled youth, Jewish identity, family break-up, single parents, etc. As the Israel appeal declines, we will need every possible visible symbol of community problem-solving. If and when that time comes, how many of us will be in a position to make the best use of such an approach? To what extent will our agencies be geared to share in this effort? To what extent will they see themselves as part of the ethnic system which supports them and which they have the obligation to support and continuously strengthen? To what extent will their lay and professional leadership see themselves as partners in this communal effort? The planning challenges to Federation are clear.

I know that I am speaking of potential. I am

aware of the many frustrations and failures in dealing with agencies. I know that even where planning is creative and skillful, it can fail because of negative agency attitudes. But I also know that we will never solve the problems unless we see them as challenges to our knowledge and skill. It is we in Federation who carry the overall responsibility for constructive community change. It is we who must change the ethnic system so that agencies are not ends in themselves, but are instruments created by the system to serve and strengthen the system. It is we who must insure the survival of Jewish life and community in this country.

To quote a great American, Charles Kettering, the industrial giant who built General Electric: "Nothing ever built arose to touch the skies unless some man dreamed that it should, some man believed that it could, and some man willed that it must." Kenneth Clark, in his book, *Civilization*, says, "We can destroy ourselves by cynicism and disillusion, just as effectively as by bombs."

These are the challenges and the *caveat* of planning today in the intermediate Federation. It affords a tremendous opportunity to help shape the future in ways that insure Jewish survival in America.