

Local Federations, the new owners of the UJC, have been adjusting to this, some with greater success than others, for a while. It is therefore not unexpected that one of the major challenges that the UJC will have to address is how to serve the Jewish community transformed by the increased "affluence, security and acceptance" that is our fortunate lot.

Donor-directed giving and the desire of many to define their own agenda certainly provide a challenge to Federations that have traditionally used the annual campaign and volunteer-based allocation to address a variety of Jewish needs. But the system has historically adjusted to and reflected the issues and attitudes of the day. This flexibility has ensured over a century of existence in some communities, and provided a template for newer communities seeking to organize their communal endeavors. The UJC, as Sheingold points out, is reflecting in its structure what already has occurred in most Federations.

Mirroring the independence of many donors is pressure within communities to establish their own priorities not only locally but also nationally and internationally. The challenge is to mediate between the conflicting approaches of collectivity and centrality, and community independence and autonomy. It is expressed in discussions about how much independence and money local Federations are willing to cede to a centralized body to operate on behalf of the collectivity and about what this means for local initiatives and for local fundraising.

Articulating the meaning of "ownership" to describe the relationship between the UJC and local Federations gives evidence that the system as a whole understands the need for a new paradigm to describe Jewish communal organization. We are indeed in the

midst of a major change and, as with all innovations, there is uncertainty about what the final product will look like. New partners have joined the endeavor. The UJC, especially in its Renaissance and Renewal Committee that brings together Federations, academics, foundations, and the religious streams, declares that the national agenda requires broad-based collaborations. For those who have served under the previous iteration of national organizations, the change may well be difficult.

The challenge is to harness multiple visions of community, to leverage the excitement of change and the independence of philanthropists, to use the various initiatives that have sprung up throughout the country, and to bring these all together in new and innovative ways. To do this well, and to bring benefit to the Jewish community locally, nationally and internationally for the long term, we need an effective, open, interactive centralized system representing the many constituencies of our multifaceted Jewish community. The UJC is the only organization that can serve in this capacity, and it needs to succeed. If we didn't already have it, we would need to invent it to do the work of the community as we change with the generations.

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## Common Sense

*Barry Shrage*

Carl's essay describes many of the critical issues faced by our national system in a time of radical change. He is right on target when he writes that "the most effective and efficient national service mechanism will not, in the long run, generate enthusiasm and loyalty from individuals or individual Federations unless also connected to larger issues and

larger dreams." He may be wrong, however, in linking these new "larger dreams" to an old question: To what extent will local communities be willing to "reduce their autonomy in order to collectively address common issues?" This may well be the wrong question being asked at exactly the wrong moment in American Jewish history.



While it is tempting to think about our current challenge in constitutional terms (as if the UJC were the Federal Government and the Federations the states!), it is important to remember that the UJC is *not* a government and neither are local Federations. We don't have governmental power and we certainly can't tax. Our work is not and cannot be about reducing autonomy. It is about harnessing choice, autonomy, joy, and passion to a common vision. Our system has always, even in times of terrible crisis, been a voluntary association of donors and organizations. When we worked hard to communicate our mission, most Federations cooperated in meeting significant international needs. But when we simply demanded 50 percent and threatened those who asked questions, the entire structure of Federation life began to deteriorate. As donors and Federations demand more autonomy (not less!), the system will need to work harder to bind our very autonomous parts together with passion and vision.

The central struggle of the new system is the development of a new shared vision. All of our intellectual energy must be devoted to open, energizing debate on this issue. Unfortunately, we are very far from identifying common vision on behalf of which we might want to "reduce our autonomy," even if this were an appropriate goal. Much of the current debate is simply out of sync with the real needs of the Jewish community. The grassroots of the Jewish community is desperately seeking spirituality and Jewish learning and returning to their synagogues. The mega-donors are so desperate to address the "renaissance" challenge and so sure that the Federations are not ready to address the issue that they are investing tens of millions of dollars and literally "doing it themselves." Even knowing this, our Federation movement will spend the next two years arguing about "mandatory collective responsibility" for the Jewish Agency and overseas needs. Those needs must and will be met, but mustn't become the obsessive core of our work together.

There are two very different perspectives on the future of our movement, but life is too short and the real work is too demanding to spend much time trying to bridge unbridgeable gaps. The recent *Wall Street Journal* article captured the dichotomy well: Will

overseas needs and "sacred survival" continue to be the glue that holds our system together or will we allow the new "renaissance" theme to fully develop? Until a new overarching vision develops for the American Jewish community, individual Federations can, should, indeed must pursue their own visions. Right now our system needs diversity and creativity far more than collectivity and uniformity, if it is to continue to provide leadership, or even serve a useful purpose for the American Jewish community.

Beyond the reality of a new vision, it is becoming increasingly clear that a new generation of donors requires (and is demanding) more direct connection to smaller scale, more

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personal charities with less bureaucracy and more ability to "make a difference." But if "donor choice" is part of the answer, we still need to assure that communal needs are met and that our Federations can continue to generate a sense of overarching community and Jewish peoplehood. In a world of donor choice, what will be the "value added" of the Federation?

Perhaps we must redefine "collective responsibility" and think about addressing even large-scale challenges through a network of small-scale, community-based, donor-supported voluntary efforts linked to a national plan. The Boston CJP has successfully experimented with this type of partnership and entrepreneurship, both in the Boston-Haifa link and the CJP's work in Dnepropetrovsk. The more flexibility we demonstrated in international initiatives, the more our donors wanted to participate in building a Jewish renaissance stretching from Boston to Haifa to Dnepropetrovsk.

The American Jewish community is desperate for real leadership. The UJC will not collapse. Those who claim that the new system is "fragile" and requires conformity and stability to survive are simply wrong. The Federation movement needs a trade association to provide service and represent its needs to the larger world. The UJC will always fill that role. But the American Jewish community needs much more: vision, leadership, commitment, shared values, faith in the Jewish people and in our

mission — the creation of a sacred community built on Torah, the service of God and acts of lovingkindness.

The UJC must aspire to this great responsibility if it expects to truly lead the American Jewish community.

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*Philanthropies of Greater Boston. A fuller discussion of these issues can be found in two new papers — “Unity and Self-Determination, Ownership and Independence” and “Creating a New Vision for the American Jewish Community: The Challenge of Developing Leaders and Storytellers for Our Future” — available at [www.cjp.org](http://www.cjp.org).*

## UJC: An Opportunity for Change

*Evan Mendolson*

Carl Sheingold’s essay on the UJC merger asks several critical questions about the direction of this evolving entity. At this important juncture of American Jewish communal experience, what new institutional connections and framework are necessary to address the profound changes taking place in the philanthropic environment? What will be the relationship between individual donors and the public interests and institutions of the Jewish community as they both seek to respond to profound changes in Jewish life? How will the UJC resolve the complex political challenge of “collective responsibility” in order to address communal needs that transcend local realities?

The tremendous accumulation of wealth that is taking place in the Jewish (as well as the broader American) community and the transfer of over \$10 trillion to the next generation of Americans in the next two decades is having an incredible impact on our community. To capitalize on these factors, communal institutions will have to rethink how they relate to the community members who were once primarily thought of as annual donors to a central campaign. The enormous growth in private foundations and donor-advised funds is emblematic of the desire of Jewish funders to express their own personal values and priorities in their philanthropy. These independent funders want to be actively involved with their philanthropy. They have more choices both in the Jewish and American nonprofit communities of ways to make a difference with their *tzedakah*.

The Federation system, represented nationally by UJC, needs to reflect these changes in its structure and processes. There must be new ways for individual funders’ interests to be joined with communal priorities and needs. Donor-centered services and broader involvement of donors and

community members in the identification of needs and setting of communal priorities will help. Applying critical entrepreneurial thinking to the great American Jewish communal experiment is imperative. If UJC develops its “pillars” and “foundation” with these ideas in mind, it could help unleash this enormous philanthropic potential. But if it gets bogged down in the politics of control and fear of change, it will lose an incredible opportunity.

The same thinking is needed for the issue of local control vs. national and international collective responsibility. Individuals and local communities must understand how the larger national and international issues affect them so that they can “let go” of the control that is their natural tendency. Individuals are inclined to fund locally, where there is more accountability.

Wonderful examples exist, both in and out of the Jewish community, of ways to provide opportunities for funders to exercise their desire to make a difference.

Building trust as a willing partner is essential if the UJC is to succeed in responding to the challenges of a changed philanthropic environment. The individual/local community vs. the local community/collective responsibility issues are paramount, as is partnering with a broad range of individuals and institutions that bring new resources to the Jewish communal enterprise.

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