



**Serving community,
in community,
with community:**

How a cohort of Jewish
legacy institutions
are translating unmet
constituents needs into
organizational opportunity.

In Jewish institutions we sometimes think we know what people need, and we try our hardest to give it to them. But, we haven't taken the time to step back and ask ourselves what it **really** means to serve people **well**, and what it **really** takes to reach **everyone**.

Rabbi Julia Appel
Director of Innovation Training and Curriculum, Clal
Spark Designer and Lead Faculty

We looked at the full arc [of our members'] lives to understand how they have arrived in this current moment **as full people**... Now it is our job to provide meaning that serves **their entire being**.

- Spark Participant

An innovative, city-based approach to reimagine how Jewish legacy institutions serve the residents of Rochester, NY.



Who

Sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Greater Rochester and its local funders, Spark Rochester engaged ten teams of four to six lay leaders and professionals from four synagogues and six communal institutions. All local Jewish institutions were invited to participate.

What

An 8-month, 4-unit applied learning program that teaches design thinking as an approach through which to realign institutional identity with unmet constituent needs and interests.



When

Fall 2020 - Spring 2021

Where

Virtual team workshops with guest speakers, regular team meetings, 1:1 team leader coaching sessions, and assigned readings and workbook exercises.

Evaluation respondent demographics:

- 40% synagogue, 60% communal
- 33% professionals, 67% laity
- 22% male, 78% female
- 22% under 40, 30% 55+
- 41% no prior experience with prototype development
- 44% no prior experience with pilot planning and launching



In response to findings from Federation's sponsored report, *Every Voice Counts*, and ongoing conversations with local funders, clergy, and Jewish professionals, Spark: Rochester was designed with the primary goal of better serving the needs of Rochester's Jewish and Jewish-adjacent population **by listening for, interpreting, and ultimately responding to the conditions underlying their lives.**

To understand the impact of the first three units of the Spark curriculum on participants, a third party evaluator facilitated participant interviews and a confidential survey in May 2021.

The result is this brief impact report, which captures program impacts, opportunities for program refinement, and recommendations to provide ongoing support to participating institutions as they move to pilot implementation.

“What does it mean to serve your people well? What does it look like when you find out that you’re not? And, what does it look like to pivot?” **Rabbi Elan Babchuck, Clal**

ROCHESTER'S NORTH STAR

Build a more connected Jewish community by:

- Focusing on **engagement**
- Alternatives to member dues
- **Jewish values** and traditions
- Outreach to new, younger Jews
- **Unconditionally inclusive**
- Build on creative momentum

SPARK'S NORTH STAR

- **Train and coach legacy organizations to build cultures of innovation and experimentation**, with the goal of continually intensifying the participation of existing members and better engaging those who are not currently members.
- Teach professionals and lay leaders **how to assess the real-world needs experienced** by their constituents.
- Begin a process that will **help shape the future of Jewish Rochester** based on meaningful collaborative and forward-thinking work in our community.

IMPACT

Spark Rochester was overwhelmingly successful in making the case that legacy institutions can and must do a better job of listening to constituents, not only as a tactic to source new ideas for programs, but as a strategy through which to deepen relationships and generate new relevance in the community.

In this first round of prototype development, the process of gathering customer insights proved to be extremely valuable in and of itself. As teams prepare to test their engagement hypotheses with pilots this summer and fall, what is clear is that this experience had impact on participants, and their institutions **in five critically important ways:**

- 1. Successful development of skillset and mindset** essential to the reimagination of Jewish institutional identity in our changing world
- 2. Affirmation of values and goals alignment** with new, siloed, or often overlooked constituents
- 3. Reinspiration of leadership** during a time when community leaders may have needed it most
- 4. Realignment and deepening of lay/professional partnerships**
- 5. Alignment of intentions amongst participating agencies** and excitement to do more

72% of participants agree that this experience provided them with the tools and language to better serve their community

68% of participants agree that this experience clarified and reaffirmed their commitment to serving Rochester's Jewish community

61% of participants agree that this experience connected them to peers and experts in the Rochester Jewish community who can support them individually and organizationally in an ongoing way as their teams continue to learn and transform

Experiences have impact at different levels, leading to different degrees of individual, organizational, and community transformation over time.

Though early in the process to fully capture how Spark seeded communal culture change or changed public perception of Jewish institutions' success in responding to broader communal needs, what is clear is that the impact the program had on its participants and over 250+ constituents whose voices were heard in new and profound ways.

Impact #1: Development of skillset and mindset essential for driving change

Though participants began Spark with a range of previous exposure to design thinking as both a theory and practice, survey respondents and interviewees overwhelmingly agreed that Spark provided a very useful, thoughtful, and organized (re)introduction to the approach, uniquely contextualized by the particular history, challenges, and opportunities facing America's Jewish community. Rather than approaching engagement from the same, traditional vantage point, racking their brains to figure out what their agencies can do to increase attendance at the annual Hannukah party, participants embraced a new mindset that gives permission *not* to have all the answers. This is a process that must be practiced — asking the right questions, listening intently, and then translating insights into ideas that fulfill the unmet needs of constituents as whole people (not just Jewishly). Participants shared excitement in leveraging Spark's methodology and materials to tackle other organizational challenges. Spark reimagined the role that Jewish legacy institutions play in the lives of their users. Our data shows that Spark was successful in conveying the transformational potential that comes from adopting a design thinking mindset and skillset, with particular praise being given to the following program components: team leader sessions (88% found very/effective), 1:1 coaching with Rabbi Julia (73% found very/effective), the Research Phase workshop (79% found very/effective), and the process of conducting user interviews.



"I've learned to plan even more carefully to elicit and listen to other people's experiences, opinions, and ideas in a way that surfaces helpful information while also building connection."

- Spark Participant

Impact #2: Alignment with constituents

Sometimes it takes a small setback, or even a big failure, to motivate an organization to engage in often well overdue and critically important self-reflection. Spark created the constructive space and structure for professionals and lay leaders together to evaluate the value proposition of their institutions through a process of user discovery. The result was not only a wealth of feedback regarding existing programs or services, but also the opportunity to better understand their members not only as Jews, but as parents, spouses, caregivers, etc. Spark helped participants seed new, mutually-beneficial relationships with currently siloed or recently disengaged members, and will serve as an onramp for the identification and cultivation of new lay leadership.

86% of team leaders feel that the Research Phase workshop — which introduced the innovation cycle and design thinking, and taught teams how to write smart interview questions and engage in active listening — was effective or very effective.

"I am much more likely now to ask my constituents directly for what they need and listen for the answer behind the answer, and also more likely to remove my ego from the program. "

- Spark Participant

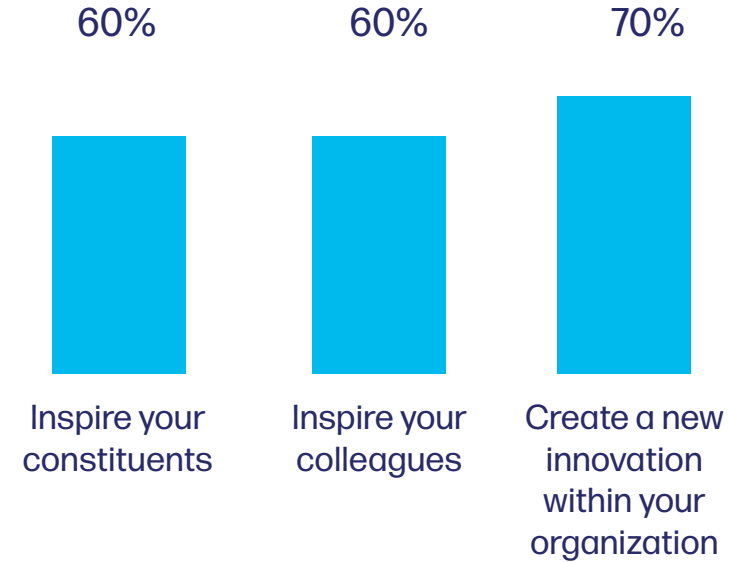
"Soliciting user feedback and making that a critical part of the design process (through all iterations) is something I was never as committed to as I am now. "

- Spark Participant

Impact #3: Reinspiration of leadership

Serving the Jewish community, though personally gratifying and professionally fulfilling in many ways, is also hard work that has been made even more challenging by the precautions and pressures facing service organizations in the wake of Covid-19. Professionals' extra efforts to maintain program quality and to build community have sometimes gone unrecognized. The pressures faced by Jewish organizations to remain relevant in the midst of demographic changes that existed pre-pandemic haven't gone anywhere. Spark was an invitation to think more expansively about their role in relation to the real, present-day needs and wants of their members, helping professionals and lay leaders alike reconnect with their callings to serve the Jewish community. In particular, participants spoke to the curriculum's successful integration of theory and practice in building their professional confidence to approach their work from a place of empathy and humility, rather than feeling pressured to always have the right answers.

More confident in your ability to...



"Though we have a lot to learn about what our community members want, it was also reassuring to know we're in many ways already on the same page. "

- Spark Participant

"Spark has impacted the how and who we ask to be involved in our institution to make sure we look beyond our regular reach."

- Spark Participant

Impact #4: Deepening of lay/professional partnership

It is common for Board members to engage regularly with executive leadership, but what is often missing from internal strategy development is the cross-pollination of ideas between those with fiduciary responsibility and those holding the majority of member relationships, working on the front lines, hearing what goes on in the hallways. By encouraging agencies to invite staff and lay leaders who are not already involved as intensely in organizational transformation projects, Spark created an important onramp for the integration of new voices and ideas, and the cultivation of new, intergenerational relationship-building. Sometimes, even with the best of intentions, leadership forgets how important it is to make sure that all parties are speaking the same language before charging ahead, especially when it comes to strategic planning or other projects focused on organizational/culture change. Additionally, this project fulfilled what is often an unrecognized need for most Jewish agencies: a facilitated opportunity to truly level set on organizational goals and gaps, and to align around a common pathway to move forward.

"This program was incredibly valuable in setting up critical conversation between our staff and lay leaders about what leadership development should look like for our organization."

- Spark Participant

"Coming together as a team of staff and Board to align around language and concepts was a huge step for us."

- Spark Participant

"I'd love to get our SPARK group back together for a Zoom six months from now to share experiences and lessons learned from our first round of innovation projects. It's a terrific cohort of people and a great opportunity to continue building those relationships and learning from each other!"

- Spark Participant

"It seems that though our organizations have different missions and serve different people in different ways, we've all learned together the importance of listening to our constituents, and are committed to continuing this process going forward as a community. We spend lots of time trying to figure out what people want, but until now we've never really asked them! "

- Spark Participant

Impact #5: Laid the foundation for important cross-communal work

Though there is ripe opportunity to engage an expanded cohort of Rochester's agencies in a Spark 2.0 experience, this year brought important structure and accountability to a subset of the community, including Federation and local funders. Jewish professionals who participated shared their excitement around embarking on a professional and leadership development opportunity alongside colleagues from other institutions (and their own lay leaders), and now head into a new fiscal year with the skills and a methodology through which to engage in aligned, cross-communal work.

OPPORTUNITIES

Spark: Rochester not only inspired participants to embrace a new approach to member engagement and service, but also opened the door for productive discussion, reflection, and learning amongst agencies in 5 key areas:

Opportunity #1: Moving from cooperation to collaboration

Designed intentionally as an introspective exercise for participating organizations to better understand the needs of their own constituents, Spark helped prepare leaders to now engage in a new period of collaborative problem-solving. Participants are eager to leverage their new empathy listening skills to foster healthy working relationships between, rather than just within, teams and organizations.

Participants also shared a desire not only to co-design *new* programming, but also to explore opportunities to improve or altogether eliminate *existing* programs that may no longer be meeting the needs of Rochester's Jewish community. Furthermore, these discussions could include the exploration of shared service models, or even programmatic or institutional consolidation.

"It's been great to see Jewish organizations using a similar methodology to help them address their own challenges. Now, we need to look across agencies at community-wide issues that need to be addressed through collaboration."

- Spark Participant

"Now that we're planning for our first pilots as separate organizations, I want to see our community working together on innovative programming."

- Spark Participant

Opportunity #2: Jewish identity dilemma

An ongoing discussion for most Jewish institutions in the U.S. is how much or in what ways "being Jewish" shows up across its programs, services, and communications - especially when reevaluating its role, purpose or value in light of newly gathered constituent insights. Especially for communal organizations with significant non-Jewish staff or constituents, but truly relevant for all Spark teams, participants voiced interest in having more dedicated and facilitated time to assess the role of Judaism in their organization's identity, operating model, and/or strategic path forward.

"Whenever the rabbis participated in our sessions, our minds were opened in new ways and the work we set out to do somehow became even more exciting and important... As we think about applying what we learned here to other efforts to engage our members, I hope Clal will continue to help us explore how our Jewish institutional identity shows up in that work."

- Spark Participant

OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunity #3: Goal-setting at the community level

Participants would like to engage Clal to facilitate a gallery walk in Q4 of 2021 to showcase impact stories and learnings from MVP pilots; to cultivate new interest in program engagement and funding; and to engage constituents of participating agencies in hands-on, design-thinking challenges as a way of modeling the impact potential of future pilots. It would be an opportunity to manage community expectations and to generate critical buy-in from potential partner and donors. Participants believe there is new interest in developing a broader and deeper sense of community.

"We are very interested in true collaboration and the idea that if we are all strong, it is better for everybody. We don't have a competitive mindset. Sometimes it takes the outside person to come and convene people."

- Spark Participant

"We need support navigating through the changes we're about to test. Innovating is one thing, implementing is another...."

- Spark Participant

Opportunity #4: Sustaining the work

Almost every participant raised concerns around sustaining the work beyond the final symposium, not only with regards to funding to enable MVP implementation and ongoing iteration and delivery, but also with regards to their own internal capacity and mastery of relevant knowledge. Teams are looking for:

- "Innovation funding" from sources beyond their own budgets. (Only 54% of survey respondents said that their organization set aside a budget line for "innovative programming" in the coming year.)
- Consulting and/or coaching from Clal for the upcoming fiscal year to support the process of MVP implementation, evaluation, and iteration, and to hold teams accountable to the process of design thinking.
- A series of facilitated community gatherings to enable structured learning between teams, and to set a foundation for strategic communications with key stakeholders in Rochester, including funders.
- Pilot a version of Spark that engages teams consisting of lay leaders and staff from different agencies. Each team would be charged with developing an MVP to address a particular challenge facing Rochester's Jewish community as a whole. This approach would enable a pooling of available resources and capacity, and could forge fruitful conversation and the formalization of structures to support other collaboration across the city.

Opportunity #5: Formalize an orientation to Spark and augment program design

Participants shared ideas regarding how to best prepare participants for Spark, as well as ways to optimize the time spent together:

- Add a session at the offset of Spark focused on goal-setting and consensus-building at the community level.
- Dedicate more time in group sessions to discuss: operating and earned revenue models; program evaluation and best practices to incorporate findings in an agile, iterative way beyond an MVP; strategies for sharing learnings and program milestones/accomplishments with stakeholders beyond institutional leadership. The suggestion was also made to allocate more time to the final unit of Implementation.
- A required pre-program orientation to level-set on program expectation and requirements, and to effectively contextualize Spark with information about the program's origins, evolution, and design.
- A streamlining of the workbook and greater sensitivity to the timing of the sessions for laity who cannot dedicate 3-hours during the workday. (68% of survey respondents said they looked at the workbook only 2-4 times per month, though they spent 2-3 hours per week on program activities.)

"This was an exercise in learning how to lean into the unfamiliar to challenge ourselves to become a place that serves all different kinds of people...but if we are afraid to continue ask the hard questions out of fear that we may offend someone, this project will just be another missed opportunity to move our organization and the Jewish community forward."

- Spark Participant

PROTOTYPES

Jewish Federation of Greater Rochester

What was your team's final "How might we" question?

How might we create non-judgmental, low-barrier Jewish experiences for 25-40 year olds with no children, so they can make new friends.

What is the underserved user group your team decided to interview?

25-40 year olds who have no children

Please describe your prototype/"minimum viable product" and any short term goals you have for it.

A getting-acquainted event with an experienced facilitator and with beer tasting, to be held in July. The goal is for participants to meet new people and begin new friendships.

What are your institution's immediate next steps after launching the prototype/MVP?

Implementation of this project by first deciding on logistics, including location, marketing, and development of activities.

National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW)

What was your team's final "How might we" question?

How might we engage women in their 20s and 30s to showcase the work of NCJW, build leadership skills, connect with other like-minded women their age as well as connect with seasoned community volunteers and advocates.

What is the underserved users group your team decided to interview?

Women in their 20s.

Please describe your prototype/"minimum viable product" and any short term goals you have for it.

Part of the program will be a mentor/mentee pairing. We will be doing a short version of this piece for our MVP.

What are your institution's immediate next steps after launching the prototype/MVP?

Getting feedback and tweaking as needed. We are also working with our board and potential participants on a full program.

JCC Rochester

Temple Sinai

What was your team's final "How might we" question?

How might we provide casual, unstructured experiences so that parents, kids and families can drop-in to socialize, enrich lives through self-care and create meaningful friendships through personal connection and family time.

What is the underserved users group your team decided to interview?

Families with children ages 5-12.

Please describe your prototype/"minimum viable product" and any short term goals you have for it.

Our MVP is Sunday Fundays at the JCC. The goal is to provide casual, fun activities for families with kids ages 5-12 in a casual, non-threatening, fun atmosphere. Parents will have the option to spend quality time with their children or to drop their kids off at an activity if they need some quality time for themselves to re-energize.

What are your institution's immediate next steps after launching the prototype/MVP?

The JCC is interested in expanding this program in the Fall, so we will be surveying families to assess the pros and cons of the day, what was missing, what was successful, what were the challenges and how we can expand it to make it more successful in the Fall. Our goal is to adapt the program taking into consideration the comments of the participants and to scale up somewhat.

What was your team's final "How might we" question?

How might we facilitate opportunities for social connection so that our congregants in their 40s & 50s can build relationships with each-other and feel engaged with the Temple Sinai community - despite the end of their involvement with the Religious School and/or despite the many competing demands on their time and energy from family and career.

What is the underserved user group your team decided to interview?

Sinai congregants in their 40's & 50's, represented in approximately 150 households

Please describe your prototype/"minimum viable product" and any short term goals you have for it.

For parents with children in the Religious School, our MVP, "Parents Lounge," is an interaction for Sunday mornings during the time-frame when their children are in class. For parents with high school/college age children, re-envision former "College Connection" activity as relationship-building programming among parents with life-stage commonalities"

What are your institution's immediate next steps after launching the prototype/MVP?

Next steps will be linked with phased re-opening of Temple facility with resumption of in-person social programming, post High Holidays.

Temple B'rith Kodesh

What was your team's final "How might we" question?

How might we empower a team of members in their 40s and 50s to foster initiatives that enable them to ongoing friendships with one another find ways for Judaism to enter their lives beyond holidays and life cycle moments.

What is the underserved user group your team decided to interview?

Those in their 40s and 50s/with children past the age of bnai mitzvah.

Please describe your prototype/"minimum viable product" and any short term goals you have for it.

Relationship building activity, drawing on the pool of those who were interviewed plus their spouses and a handful of others in the target demographic. Hope is it help them start a relationship and to draw them in to the process for future activities for others.

What are your institution's immediate next steps after launching the prototype/MVP?

Repeated and expanded relationship building activities.

Temple Emanuel

What was your team's final "How might we" question?

How might we provide outdoor experiences so that people who have connected with the congregation in the past two years may feel engaged, meet their spiritual needs, and feel more committed to the congregation?

What is the underserved users group your team decided to interview?

Because our congregation is so small we didn't feel there was such a group. Instead, we chose a group that we want to have become more committed to the congregation.

Please describe your prototype/"minimum viable product" and any short term goals you have for it.

We hosted a Shavuot program entitled "The Earth Teaches Torah," based on a midrashic teaching that, with each word at Sinai a distinct fragrance went from one end of the world to the other - in other words, that Torah is something we (also) experience through our senses. It involved an opening song circle and story followed by activities: two "Blessing Walks" on a nature trail - one for adults and one for families/ children - involving connecting nature blessings with what was being experienced (eg, a first flower, a smell, etc.); making traditional Shavuot rose/flower papercuts with a flower making option for younger children; a "mystery aroma" exercise where participants closed their eyes and tried to identify various smells; and text study of several midrashim about Torah and the senses. We then closed with another song circle.

What are your institution's immediate next steps after launching the prototype/MVP?

The event was far more successful than we had expected and we are forming a more permanent team to continue this model of developing programming.

Temple Beth El

What was your team's final "How might we" question?

How might we create meaningful, engaging, inclusive, and accessible Judaic programming for families of young children?

What is the underserved user group your team decided to interview?

Families just leaving the preschool age

Please describe your prototype/"minimum viable product" and any short term goals you have for it.

We have a mobile tent that we will bring Shabbat to families' homes. We are looking to have the EC Director as well as other families learn how to lead a service.

What are your institution's immediate next steps after launching the prototype/MVP?

We will get feedback from our Mobile Mini Minyonaires, and then try and get more families to volunteer to host.

Hillel Community Day School

What was your team's final "How might we" question?

How might we provide opportunities for parents of current students to deeply connect with one another and school staff and to contribute their unique experiences and skills to the school community, while being accessible to parents' schedules?

What is the underserved users group your team decided to interview?

Current families

Please describe your prototype/"minimum viable product" and any short term goals you have for it.

We would like to create a "Parent Institute." Through interesting, fun, engaging programming, we will provide an environment to connect on a deeper level with current and perspective families. Programming would begin in the fall 2021 school year with pre-event panel discussion before the community Sukkot event. One goal is to create deeper connections to school and each other through providing an environment for social interactions and learning.

What are your institution's immediate next steps after launching the prototype/MVP?

After launching the prototype, we will gather feedback from interviewees as well as a wider parent and family population. We would like to form a committee of SPARK team members and parents who can refine the format, plan for future programming, and create incentives for more families to participate.

Jewish Family Service of Rochester

Jewish Senior Life

What was your team's final "How might we" question?

How might we meet the needs of caregivers in our community.

What is the underserved user group your team decided to interview?

Caregivers

Please describe your prototype/"minimum viable product" and any short term goals you have for it.

A letter with 3 ways for the client to connect with ONE person at JFS who will connect them to other resources within and outside of the agency.

What are your institution's immediate next steps after launching the prototype/MVP?

Collect data on how many people reach out to us

What was your team's final "How might we" question?

How might we offer easy-access opportunities so that Jewish people who are not part of JSL can build and/or strengthen relationships with members of our community and develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of how JSL supports older adults and their families.

What is the underserved users group your team decided to interview?

Jewish community members who live at another senior care facility and the adult children who of Jewish community member who have or will be helping make that living situation decision for their loved one.

Please describe your prototype/"minimum viable product" and any short term goals you have for it.

We are targeting the creation of a geriatric mobile wellness and educational service. The long term goal is that this will be a truck/bus with numerous capabilities to serve the elderly Jewish population in our area who are not connected to us for wellness and educational services such as dementia screening, kosher snacks, food security screenings, navigating senior living options, technology support, etc. Our first goal will be to smart small with a tent in the community during an event which we intend to partner with JFS or the JCC to do this and based on timing of scheduled events, it will likely occur in July. We expect it to grow from there.

What are your institution's immediate next steps after launching the prototype/MVP?

We will used several iterations of the MVP over the next 6-12 months to tune the program and evaluate what works and what does not and hopefully grow it to where it makes good sense to invest in larger infrastructure like a truck/bus that can just be driven and parked out in the community.

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