

The National Affinity Group on Jewish Poverty presents

COVID-19 Funder Briefs (6 of 6) Systems

In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, the system of organizations combatting poverty within the Jewish community, and in particular key actors such as community-based Jewish human service agencies, have needed to ramp up and pivot services and dramatically expand capacity to address intensifying poverty in the community and increasing challenges for vulnerable populations and older adults. These organizations are stepping up in the face of emerging need, even as they experience significant loss of revenue and unprecedented pandemic-related challenges.

It should be noted that the sector itself has many partners, including government (local, State, Federal), other nonprofit organizations that provide critical support and educational services including advocacy organizations that work to effect social change, and direct service organizations addressing focused needs or populations. And throughout, social media and the Jewish press play critical roles in promoting the availability of human services and portraying the impact of current community needs in this service arena. Lastly, the increasing basic needs of Jewish community members have extended to other Jewish communal organizations and synagogues, highlighting the growing need for increased scholarship assistance for day schools and camps and requests for dues reductions with synagogues and JCC's.

The National Affinity Group on Jewish Poverty seeks to bring to the forefront the pandemic response of Jewish human service agencies and the participation of other organizations that provide complementary services in this space as they work to alleviate poverty during these challenging times. Highlighted here are concrete opportunities to fortify these organizations, invest in their critical and time-sensitive work, and perhaps more importantly help them build the necessary capacities that will best position them to build back even better than pre-COVID.

Needs

The challenges of the COVID 19 crisis for human service agencies have been vast and significantly intensified by the abrupt pace by which the pandemic shut down entire systems. **Agencies have needed to adapt to new realities, implementing new modes of service delivery in multiple areas.**

As the system as a whole is being retrenched and service delivery models are restructured, agencies need to better understand how to shift organizational work, transition services and programs, and prepare for the post-pandemic reentry process. In meeting emerging and growing needs, agencies have had to innovate and pivot creatively. These pivots, while abrupt and challenging, have also opened the door for **reimagining programs and services in ways that could grow reach and expand meaningful impact.**

The following are some key areas in which agencies have had to shift, ramp up, or work differently.

Interagency Response. Pivots and ramp-up of services to meet community needs during the pandemic have prompted a greater level of coordination among service providers. There is a growing need for collaboration among agencies and establishment of wraparound services across multiple sectors. These sectors might cover a range of services and programs aimed at alleviating poverty, including housing and food insecurity, employment services, and mental health services.

Community Outreach and Education. Alongside coordination and colocation of services, agencies and nonprofits need to increase education around access to support individuals in navigating services and connecting with resources. This is particularly vital for those facing need for the first time as a result of the pandemic, who may not know where to turn to for support and assistance. As one CEO of a direct service agency explained, “Despite the inclination to cut expenses at this time, we need to double-down on our marketing efforts to be sure our community knows what we have to offer them.” Additionally, there is a critical need to “change the narrative” so that the changing face of Jewish poverty is reflected in community outreach efforts, to normalize the process of seeking assistance, and to also educate community leaders as to the scope and extent of the challenges facing families.

Data Collection. Accurate, reliable data that is prompt and integrated among all providers is necessary so that agencies are better able to respond to needs while ensuring the sustainability of agencies and nonprofits.

Data is needed:

- So that agencies know who is being served and how.
- To understand the scope and extent of need and the collective impact of all services and programs.
- To articulate what frontline agencies are seeing on the ground.
- To better understand where the gaps are and what the roadblocks are to closing those gaps.
- To identify and document specific case studies to be able to adapt services and programs effectively.
- To understand impact over the long term.

Capacity Building. There have been significant and growing layoffs in Jewish communal organizations. These have not, for now, been widespread within human service agencies. However, these layoffs will nonetheless have an impact on human service agencies and clients served by multiple sectors. Additionally, the growth in need and the expansion and transition of services has meant direct service agencies and nonprofits need to expand their capacity, add new staff, and ramp up training and support for existing staff as they address new pandemic-related challenges.

Technology. Technologic needs are vast and there is a need to clarify its role moving forward. Technology has been used to address social isolation, to provide ongoing services to facilitate client intake and easy access to services, and to facilitate greater collaboration between sectors, allowing for more meaningful coordinated responses to community need. Ways in which technology has been integrated during the pandemic will need to be documented and assessed, with some service models maintained, developed further, or replicated to increase efficiency, reach, and impact.

Fundraising. Agencies and nonprofits have experienced dramatic loss of revenue as a result of the pandemic. Fee-for-service programs have been reduced or eliminated. Fundraising events and dinners have been cancelled or shifted to more limited virtual formats. Overall funding sources have become more limited. Organizations need to find alternate sources of revenue in order to continue providing highly effective and impactful services and to assist the community in the recovery from the pandemic. Organizations need support now so that when reentry takes place they are still around to serve those in need.

Advocacy. Coordination around advocacy is needed to keep issues critical to vulnerable communities at the forefront. Most recently, the Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies worked with its member agencies to identify critical gaps in service needs (specifically the need for both audio and video tele-mental health services and the need for SNAP beneficiaries to be able to use their supplemental food assistance entitlements to receive food via delivery) and to advocate for system change to address those gaps. With increased attention to advocacy efforts, human service agencies will be recognized as critical partners in service delivery and their responses to government procedures will be considered when policies are crafted.

Investment Opportunities: First Response

- Jewish human service agencies continue to need funds that are flexible and allow for organizational nimbleness during the crisis.
- To address changing needs and new modes of program delivery, funds are needed to hire new staff and support existing staff, including funds for COVID-related hazard pay and needed trainings.
- Funds are needed to ensure an adequate and ongoing supply of PPE to ensure client, staff, and volunteer safety and to also support needed capital upgrades to ensure social distancing and to implement needed safety protocols.
- Funds are needed to grow volunteer programs that will support the work of poverty alleviation while preparing the next generation for organizational leadership in the field.
- Agencies will need investment in technology to support remote office work and virtual program delivery.
- It will become critical to invest in, assess, refine, and expand online service delivery models initiated during the pandemic.
- Support will be needed for the gathering of industry data and analysis of case studies to understand what recovery looks like in various regions and sectors to facilitate recovery and long-term planning.
- Aggregated and coordinated services will need to be supported. Agencies may have opportunities to take advantage of existing capabilities of the Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies and of new services that are developing across the country.

Investment Opportunities: Organizational Resilience and Sustainability

- Agencies and nonprofits need operating funds, as well as funds to replenish their reserves, to ensure their long-term stability and sustainability even as they face declining revenues.
- At the same time, resources are needed for thoughtful planning and program development to allow for integration and application of innovative initiatives begun during the pandemic.
- Investment in long-term coordinated interagency response to the pandemic and post-pandemic recovery will be needed. Innovative partnerships and collaborations have the potential to increase impact, better utilize resources, and expand reach.
- Investment in systemwide data collection and technology upgrades are essential to ensure that successful pivots, new service delivery methods, and strategic collaborations will continue to develop and mature. Such investments will also ensure agency preparedness for future crises.
- Organizations will need funds to regroup and develop new funding sources to replace revenue loss from cancellation of fundraising events, interruption of fee-for-service programming, and ongoing fundraising challenges during the crisis.
- As direct service organizations have dipped into their reserves deeply in order to serve critical client needs, funds are needed to restore their stability and to ensure they do not go under, potentially leaving clients under-served and with nowhere to turn.
- Lastly, now more than ever, Jewish human service agencies need funding partners which can support investments in innovative service responses and models that are new and that drive the agency to achieve greater impact, while respecting the restrictions often associated with government funding. The opportunity to provide risk capital can be the difference needed to help an agency to explore an untried method, to develop meaningful models for collaboration, and implement new ways of addressing unprecedented levels of need.

Philanthropic Response

Foundations and donors are invited to reach out and join in this work within the framework of the National Affinity Group on Jewish Poverty.

Please contact **Deena Fuchs, Executive Vice President of Jewish Funders Network**, at Deena@jfunders.org to learn more.

Data, quotes, and other insights included in this brief are sourced from convenings, webinars, and work-group meetings hosted by the National Affinity Group on Jewish Poverty; JFN COVID-19 response surveys; and organizational websites.