Garnering Support to Move Ahead

As your new model of learning touches more people in your congregation, you want to be sure that your efforts are welcomed with enthusiastic support by your synagogue’s leadership. You already strategically included your Social Connector parents in the development of your model. Think about the others – committee members and other key individuals – that would be helpful to have on board as you plan to expand. Getting the necessary approvals and permissions in advance will help clear the way for your growth. Anticipate concerns and questions now so you can prepare strategies and collect the evidence that will compel your congregational leadership to share your excitement and become your passionate advocates.

# Approvals

There are official approvals you will need to expand your model. In addition, there may be others in your congregation whose support would be very valuable and could help smooth your path. It is smart to get this kind of “buy in”. Consider the following:

* Which individuals, boards and/or committees in your congregation have not yet been brought aboard? Which of these needs to officially approve your expansion or would be good to have invested in your work as you move forward?

What kinds of presentation(s) and/or documentation might be helpful when seeking this approval and buy in? Which stories and reflections from students, parents and teachers could you include that would help make your case?

Are there any preliminary formal or informal conversations that would help pave the way?

# Budget

How you are going to fund the expansion and intensification of your model will likely be one of the first questions you get. Prepare a written budget for the upcoming year and be prepared to share and explain it to those from whom you need approval.

There are three ways congregations cover the costs of new models of learning:

* **Redirecting funds**

Too often we, and others, jump to the conclusion that doing more will require proportionally more money. Think creatively about where the resources you need already exist in your school or synagogue budget. For example, redirection can mean eliminating a current expense, such as a Hannukah workshop, or it can mean redirecting part of a teacher’s salary towards his/her involvement in the new model. Monies used to purchase classroom supplies can be applied, instead, to your model. Likewise, your synagogue may have money in special or restricted funds that could be used for your purposes.

* **Charging fees**

Whatever your current fee structure for student learning, you might want to break down current fees and assign a portion of them to your new model. By assigning “costs” to different offerings, you create a way for families to see the “value” of the new learning and you are able to put a clear price tag on what you know is a qualitatively different learning experience.

You may or may not want to increase the overall cost to parents at this point in the development of your new model. If you choose not to charge more, then you know your tuition dollars are what you have to work with, though you may be allocating them in new ways.

* **Procuring new funding**

If charging fees and reassigning existing monies still leaves you short, consider applying for grants or seed money for new projects. These may be available to you through UJA Federation of NY, the Conservative, Reconstructionist or Reform movements, or a local foundation. You may have someone in the congregation, or a small group of people, who would be willing to underwrite part of your new costs to honor or memorialize someone. When tapping any of these resources, be sure to plan how to sustain your innovations after the grant or the gift runs out.

As you work on your budget, ask yourselves these questions:

1. Can your projected costs be absorbed into your current school budget without an impact on your current bottom line?

1. Which budget lines in your congregation’s current budget could be re-directed to support your model? Which special or restricted funds could be tapped?
2. What other potential funding sources exist? How should they be approached and by whom?

# Other considerations

Though budget may loom the largest in your thinking, there are other ramifications of expanding your model to address in your planning and to help you when you go to your board and/or lay committees for approval.

* **Expanding and sharing leadership**

By pulling in new people at this point you can avoid team burnout. Consider adding a parent and/or a teacher to your team. You may want to consider offering honoraria from the grant money to help compensate teachers for their time working with the team. Redistribute responsibilities so everyone has designated areas of responsibilities.

* **Staffing changes**

As you expand, you may want to rotate in different teachers/facilitators to work with your learners. If you are going to include parents as learners, you want to be sure that your teachers are comfortable working with adults as well as children. Consider giving clergy a larger role and/or bringing in specialists, such as in the arts.

* **Continuing with your Social Connection and Communication Boosters**

Your Social Connectors can continue to play a vital role in the promotion and development of your expanded model. Keep using them as conduits for information and feedback. Keep your congregation and your community apprised of your successes and plans for expansion.

* **Administration and Management**

This is a good time to get your records from this year in order and to devise a good system for keeping track of even greater participation next year.

As you plan for 2012-13, ask yourselves these questions:

1. How might we expand our leadership and/or organize their roles and responsibilities for the new model?
2. What changes in staffing might better fit our new model?
3. What role will the Social Connector parents play?
4. How will we keep the congregation apprised of our successes and continue to build buy-in?