

Jewish Community Action and Social Justice in Synagogues

Phases of Development

Phase I: Social Action (Justice) Committee Development

Jewish Community Action (JCA) will build formal relationships with social action (justice) committees in synagogues using the model proposed by Rabbis Spilker and Glaser. This builds on the ongoing work JCA has been conducting with committees in the largest synagogues in the Twin Cities (see draft model for affiliation). Essentially JCA provides training and technical assistance on organizing, updates on issues, delivers presentations on a variety of topics while committees provide access to lay and religious leaders, assistance with publicity and visibility and sends leaders to JCA working groups and issue campaigns. Social action committees may provide an annual financial contribution to support the work of JCA in collaboration with synagogue committees.

Through this formal relationship, JCA will create an advisory committee consisting of leaders from social action (justice) committees that will meet with JCA organizing staff on a regular basis. Through these meetings, the committee will evaluate congregational organizing work and advise JCA on how to strengthen this work across all synagogues and in specific congregations. The goal of this first phase is to develop a core group of leaders, a specific plan for further development and begin a more concentrated focus on training and leadership development.

Phase II: Training and Building the Base

JCA will work with the synagogue core group and/or social action (justice) committee to develop and implement training on organizing and community building in congregations. The goal will be to build the base of synagogue members involved in social action work, especially social justice work in the community. In addition to specific training, JCA will work with congregational leaders to implement an inreach to conduct one-to-one relationship-building visits with at least 100 members of the congregation. The visits will be targeted to leaders from other committees and lists of names identified by board members and clergy as individuals more likely to have an interest in social justice. It is from the inreach and training that JCA, working with the core group from the congregation, will have identified a much larger pool of individuals interested in social justice and action.

Phase III: Integrating Social Justice into the central mission of the Synagogue

It will be this larger base of individuals identified through one-to-one visits, and closer ties with clergy, that will begin the process of integrating social justice into many more aspects of synagogue life. Some of the outcomes that will indicate the extent to which social justice is more integrated:

- Clergy regularly speak about social justice from the Bimah and encourage congregants to actively participate
- There are numerous social action projects, including many service projects, in which many congregants regularly participate
- The synagogue newsletter has monthly features and references to social justice work
- Social justice updates are a regular discussion item in board of director meetings
- Adult education and youth education programs focus on social justice throughout the calendar year – with opportunities to get involved in projects through the synagogue or directly with JCA
- A significant number of synagogue members are involved in JCA social justice issue campaigns and present updates in synagogue committee meetings

Phase IV: Board Approval of Social Justice Campaigns and Work with JCA

At this point, the synagogue has a substantial number of congregants involved in social justice work with JCA, the clergy is strongly supportive and is speaking about social justice issues on a regular basis. Congregants attend adult and youth education programs related to social justice on a regular basis. The board has been receiving written and verbal reports from congregational leaders about their work on social justice, their relationship with JCA and its vital role in supporting this work, and there is a general excitement in the congregation about the focus on social justice. In addition, the social action) justice committee has been providing an annual financial contribution to JCA in support of the relationship with the congregation (including the training and technical assistance) and the board is well aware of this contribution.

With a core group of leaders working with the clergy, and a much larger number of congregants involved in a variety of social justice work, the social justice leadership is then ready to bring to the board a motion for the synagogue, as an institution, to support the work of JCA, both financially and programmatically. Funds will come straight from the synagogue budget and the board will consider supporting various issue campaigns and coalition in which JCA and synagogue members are involved. This does not mean that every issue will be brought to the board, but that an assessment will be done on each campaign together with synagogue leadership and clergy before bringing the matter to the board for approval.

Phase V: Synagogue Power Supports JCA and Social Justice

This is the final phase which emerges after the board endorses a formal relationship with JCA on social justice issues. All of the outcomes summarized in phase three will now be regular aspects of synagogue life. Clergy and lay leadership will be working with JCA on issue campaigns that are specific to the synagogue as well conducted through coalition building in the broader community. The board of directors will be discussing and providing broad synagogue support on certain issue campaigns and calling on its members to work with the social action (justice) committee and JCA in pursuing these campaigns to achieve social change.