

GEO Member Story



How the Jim Joseph Foundation and other foundations helped launch an experiment in leadership development to support nonprofit resilience.

The solutions to complex challenges are not always apparent. In the social sector, solutions tend to emerge through a cycle of reflecting, accumulating knowledge and taking action. Oftentimes nonprofit leaders have difficulty embracing this cycle of learning because their organizations face a pressing mission or a host of other demands. A leadership transition combined with these persistent challenges can create even more uncertainty.

Through more than a decade of conversations directly with grantee executives and directors, the Jim Joseph Foundation saw clearly how often nonprofits find themselves in these challenging positions. The foundation also came to see these transition points as opportunities for organizations to assess their culture, make changes if necessary, and position themselves and their professional team for future success. It was through these conversations — and by taking the time to listen earnestly to what its grantees needed most — that the foundation identified a need in the Jewish professional world for executive-level development programs that support new CEOs at the beginning of their tenures. These conversations evolved into the foundation’s **CEO Onboarding Program**. Charles “Chip” Edelsberg, Ph.D., executive director of the Jim Joseph Foundation says that “this program responds to the empirical data in the sector. It began with and gained momentum from the [2014 Bridgespan Leadership Pipelines](#) report which showed that there would be a significant amount of CEO level turnover in the coming decade and indicated that there’s very little that has been done in this area.”

Stewarded by [TBF Consulting](#) and operated in partnership with [Leading Edge](#), the CEO Onboarding Program invests in new leaders during their critical transition period and includes individual professional development coaching. Along with this executive coaching, cohort members are engaging in convenings with consultants and veteran field leaders, and participating in an on-the-ground Israel experience to provide a better understanding of how to facilitate important conversations within their organizations. The 11 cohort members are the most senior professional leaders of organizations in the Jewish community who are between contract signing and 18 months of employment and represent federations, service agencies and other organizations. According to Edelsberg, the makeup of the cohort is intentional — saying that “the cohort is heterogeneous by design and the CEO’s represent very diverse organizations” — and that this exposure to a diverse set of peers is integral to the success of the program. Cohort members can share resources and learn together with peer professionals from vastly different backgrounds, different professional experiences, and from different types of organizations (both in terms of size and mission).

Now, this cohort of individuals is growing together as a powerful network. The urgency and complexity of the problems nonprofits and grantmakers are trying to solve demands that they come together to glean insights from their work, leverage resources and combine forces. With a significant number of nonprofits in the United States hiring new CEOs and executive directors this decade, there are a number of questions about whether and how leadership pipelines are being filled and what can be done to strengthen the pool of potential leaders for senior positions in the field.

Learning communities and cohort programs like CEO Onboarding are powerful vehicles for both individuals and communities to amass a shared collection of experience from learning and results from collective action.

To date, participants in the pilot program have participated in a leadership assessment inventory, webinars, online sessions, an in-person retreat and an extensive 360 review to gain critical self-knowledge for improvement. The 12 month program will help these new leaders lay the groundwork for organizational success. Cohort members work directly with expert consultants, Jewish community leaders and thinkers, and institutions specializing in leadership development to improve their competencies and the impact of their organizations. “Participants in the program will be well positioned for success in their organizations. Through the intensive program model, they are given a number of opportunities to further develop skills and to understand various ways to approach organizational challenges and opportunities. It appears pretty clear to a person that they are finding value in the cohort and the network that it has created.” says Edelsberg.

The CEO Onboarding Program is just one of the ways that the Jim Joseph Foundation works to better understand the challenges that its grantees face and to learn what can be done to solve them. By listening earnestly to its grantees, the foundation is responding to field needs and intentionally experimenting to deliver what matters most for the nonprofits it funds. Taking these lessons and improving over time empowers the Jim Joseph Foundation to continue building strong learning experiences and supports nonprofit resilience by helping grantees understand how to make their work more effective, find innovative solutions to challenges and scale the best ideas and practices.

Founded in 2006, the Jim Joseph Foundation fosters compelling, effective Jewish learning experiences for youth, teens and young adults in the U.S. In line with this philanthropic mission, the Jim Joseph Foundation invests in leadership development based on the proven principle that talented individuals yield ongoing positive returns for the health and sustainability of the organizations they lead.

To find out more information on the Jim Joseph Foundation, please visit <https://jimjosephfoundation.org/>

GEO resources that relate to the topics covered in this member spotlight:

Coaching and Philanthropy: An Action Guide For Grantmakers



Leveraging Social Sector Leadership



Learn and Let Learn

