Understanding the Israel Fellows Program: Program Theory and Implementation Challenges
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The Cohen Center is also the home of the Steinhardt Social Research Institute (SSRI). Established in 2005, SSRI uses innovative research methods to collect and analyze socio-demographic data on the Jewish community.
Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

Concern regarding support for Israel on North American campuses led to the development of the Israel Fellows Program (IFP). The IFP, a collaboration of Hillel: the Foundation for Jewish Campus Life (Hillel) and the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), brings Israeli young adults to American college campuses to work on Israel education, advocacy, and engagement. The IFP was launched in 2003 on six American campuses. In the 2012-13 academic year, 56 Fellows served 70 North American colleges and universities. JAFI and Hillel are working to develop systematic data that can be used as a basis for strategizing how best to extend the reach and impact of the program. The first phase of this research, conducted by the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS) at Brandeis University, focused on the implementation of the IFP within the context of its program theory of change.

Eight single campus-based and two metro-level Hillels were chosen as the focal point for study representing the full spectrum of campuses involved in the program. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants on each campus including Israel fellows, their supervisors, Hillel directors, and student leaders. In addition, five JAFI staff members were interviewed about recruitment, selection, training, placement, and tenure of fellows.

Program Theory

IFP’s underlying theory of change is student-centered and is comprised of two components: (1) building relationships between young Israelis and American students and (2) disseminating the impact of these relationships through student networks.

Authentic Person-to-Person Contact: The core tenet of the IFP is that developing a relationship with an Israeli peer will help Jewish young adults in the Diaspora engage more closely with Israel and their Jewish identity. Fellows present Israeli culture and society through their own lives thereby providing students with a personal, authentic encounter with Israel and moving the conversation beyond history and conflict.

Networking Impact: Fellows identify potential student leaders and build small clusters of students to develop broader campus programming.

The IFP theory of change faces several issues. First, the theory lacks goal clarity. For JAFI, the IFP primarily represents an intervention to promote Israel education and engagement. For campus Hillel organizations it is part of the larger goal of fostering engagement with Jewish identity. Second, the IFP theory of change relies on dissemination of impact through student networks which by definition lack the immediacy and authenticity of direct contact with an Israel fellow. Third, reliance on personal relationships and student networks may not be an effective strategy for influencing engagement with Israel on the broader campus.
Understanding the Israel Fellows Program:

**Challenges to IFP Implementation**

Over the last decade the IFP has developed from a small improvised pilot to an established program with formal protocols for recruiting, selecting, training, and placing fellows. Nonetheless, several challenges to the successful implementation of the IFP program continue into its second decade of operation.

*Retention of Fellows:* Fellows are expected to make a two-year commitment, but most leave after their first year. Hillel organizations see the premature departure of a fellow as the loss of their investment in selecting, acculturating, and training this individual. However, the greatest cost is in the potential loss of the network of relationships formed by that fellow. Although there are isolated cases where a fellow has been homesick or unable to adapt to the particular campus, the primary causes of attrition appear to be more endemic to the program. Taking on the role of a fellow is a difficult assignment, and it carries substantial personal costs. Fellows put their professional and personal lives on hold for two years. In addition, their living stipend, particularly at schools in metropolitan areas, is inadequate.

*Selection and Placement:* One of the challenges to the successful implementation of the IFP, especially relevant to program expansion, is the selection and retention until placement of high potential candidates. The ideal candidate is young yet mature, has knowledge of Israel and Israel education, speaks English fluently, and possesses strong interpersonal skills. Not surprisingly, other programs and businesses compete for the same stellar candidates. JAFI staff also needs to develop a diverse pool of candidates to respond to the needs of particular campuses.

*Training for the Right “Toolbox”:* There are several discrepancies between the training fellows receive and the skills and knowledge they actually need to succeed on campus. Training focuses on education, program development, advocacy, and public relations. Once on campus fellows find that Hillel’s approach of working through students requires skills of networking, relationship building, and advising/supervising groups of students. Training often leads fellows to expect politically charged campus environments. The reality they find is often political apathy and a lack of public discourse about Israel. Fellows also receive extensive information on American national Jewish organizations, but learn little about the personal nature of Jewish identity among American young adults.

*Acclimatization:* Like other young adults starting a new job, fellows are often facing their first experience of moving to a new city with no social or family connections. They can feel lonely, dislocated, and overwhelmed. Fellows are also confronted with and confused by the cultural differences between American and Israeli society and between American and Israeli Jews, thereby making it more difficult to learn how to maneuver in this new cultural context.

*Being Stretched Too Thin:* Fellows are often stretched too thin. Serving multiple campuses requires time and resources sometimes above and beyond reasonable expectations. At smaller Hillel
Program Theory and Implementation Challenges

organizations, fellows’ responsibilities often extend beyond Israel engagement. Fellows are often perplexed by the competing goals and priorities of Hillel and JAFI, and they search for ways to juggle their responsibilities to multiple supervisors.

Explication of IFP program theory and implementation challenges will enable JAFI and Hillel to move toward a stronger and richer engagement with Israel on American college campuses. This research also lays the groundwork for the development of a comprehensive evaluation of the IFP.
Understanding the Israel Fellows Program:
Introduction

In the midst of the second intifada, leaders of the Jewish communities in the United States and Israel grew increasingly concerned about anti-Israel actions and sentiment on American college campuses (Seidler-Feller, 2003; Steinberg, 2003). At the conclusion of a tour of 13 American college campuses, Natan Sharansky, then Israel’s Minister for Diaspora Affairs, decried that American students were ill equipped and reluctant to show their support for Israel and concluded that Zionism was “flunking on campus” (Sharansky, 2003). Jehuda Reinharz, then president of Brandeis University, spoke of “the rise of anti-Zionist and anti-Israel sentiment on some university campuses in the United States, including some of our leading universities” (Reinharz, 2003).

Concern with the status of Israel support on North American campuses led to the development of the Israel Fellows Program (IFP) with the intent “to strengthen the standing of Israel on university campuses across North America” (Hillel). The IFP, a collaboration of Hillel: the Foundation for Jewish Campus Life (Hillel) and the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), brings Israeli young adults aged 24-30 who have served in the IDF and graduated from university to work on Israel education, advocacy, and engagement on American college campuses. The IFP was launched as a pilot program in September of 2003 on six American campuses: Rutgers University, University of Maryland, University of Florida, University of Texas, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and University of California Davis. Since then, the program has grown steadily in the number of fellows and campuses served. Another metric of the program’s growing penetration is that only a small portion of IFP sites have elected to exit the program after their initial year of involvement. In the 2012-13 academic year, 56 Fellows served 70 North American colleges and universities. The IFP currently operates on a number of American campuses including large state universities (e.g., University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, University of Virginia) and smaller private universities (e.g., Johns Hopkins, Washington University, Yale).

Hillel and JAFI envision the IFP as a replicable model for providing Israel education on diverse college campuses. As the IFP enters its second decade of operation, they see the need to develop a rich body of systematic data that can be used as a basis for strategizing how best to extend the reach and impact of the program. Toward that end, both the implementation and impact of the IFP need to be examined and understood. This report is the result of the first phase of research conducted by the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS) at Brandeis University. The goal of this study was to develop an understanding of the IFP within the context of the program’s theory of change. Theory-based evaluation begins by explaining how an intervention’s components and activities are expected to bring about desired outcomes (Weiss, 1997). The IFP is a multi-site
initiative with individual fellows embedded within diverse college campuses and Hillel organizations across the United States. In the face of the inevitable diversity of local campus realities, articulation of an overall program theory for IFP is critical for understanding both the program’s successes and challenges.

The report begins with a description of our methodology. The next section articulates the theory of change that underlies the initiative and suggests several aspects that may need further development. This is followed by discussion of current challenges confronting the IFP. The concluding section previews implications of the theory of change and implementation challenges for the summative evaluation of the program.
Research Strategy

Eight campus-based and two metro-level Hillels were chosen as the focal point for study. The campuses selected included state universities from different regions in the United States and private universities. The metro-area Hillels were located in major metropolitan areas. These campuses represent the full spectrum of colleges involved in the program.

Hillel and JAFI professionals, fellows, and other campus stakeholders are in the best position to describe the history of the IFP and to articulate the theory that underlies it. Toward this end, interviews were conducted with both JAFI staff members and campus key informants. Five JAFI staff members were interviewed about recruitment, selection, training, placement, and tenure of fellows. Campus key informant interviews were conducted with current IFP fellows, Hillel professionals, student leaders, and select faculty members on each of the ten target campuses.

Interviews with campus stakeholders focused on developing an understanding of local objectives and implementation of the IFP. Questions centered on the unique culture, political climate, and Jewish life on each campus as well as the fellows’ successes and failures on the ground, relationships with students, and suggestions for programmatic changes. Grounded theory, consisting of an iterative process of content analysis resulting in identification of main themes and categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), was used to analyze the interviews.

Key informant interviews were conducted by phone with nine of the ten Israel Fellows and nine of the ten direct supervisors involved in the IFP on the target campuses (Table 1). At one of the universities, there was a transition in leadership and the exiting supervisor could not be contacted. Additional key informants were also interviewed at eight of the universities/metro-areas. These key informants included Hillel executive directors not directly involved in supervision of a Fellow, undergraduate student leaders, and Jewish Studies/Israel Studies program faculty/administrators.

Table 1: Campus Key Informant Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Number of Interviews Conducted</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Israel Fellows</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Supervisors</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillel Executive Director (not involved in direct supervision)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Leaders</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Campus Informants</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Understanding the Israel Fellows Program:
IFP Program Theory

There are three program models currently employed in the IFP. The first, and most common, involves assignment of a fellow to a single campus with his/her work exclusively focused on that campus. The second variant is a multi-campus model in which the fellow works at several related or unrelated campuses in the same geographic area. For example, in Philadelphia, one fellow is responsible for the University of Pennsylvania and two smaller campuses. In a third model, the Federation oversees a fellow who works on several campuses as well as within the broader local Jewish community.

Interviews with JAFI staff and campus key informants indicate that regardless of which model is employed, IFP’s underlying theory of change remains the same. It is student-centered and includes individual relationship building, a cascading approach of identifying potential student leaders, and a networking strategy leveraging small cohorts of involved students to reach a broader swath of the campus community. Regardless of whether they serve one or several campuses, the work of fellows typically includes recruiting and staffing Taglit-Birthright Israel trips, meeting with individual students, coordinating campus organizations and clubs to co-sponsor events and learning opportunities, and identifying and developing student leaders. This section describes the major assumptions and components of the IFP program theory.

Authentic Person-to-Person Contact

In many ways the IFP approach to influencing the Israel dialogue on campuses is the same as that followed by many Israel advocacy organizations—building relationships with individual student leaders as a conduit to influencing the larger campus (http://www.davidproject.org/meetdavid/aboutus/). The major distinction between the theory of change of IFP and that of other Israel advocacy organizations is the use of Israelis to lead the effort on campus.

The IFP is grounded in the belief that developing a relationship with an Israeli peer will help Jewish young adults in the Diaspora engage more closely with Israel and their Jewish identity. On IFP campuses, the fellow embodies Israel for the students they encounter and helps to “normalize” Israel by moving the conversation beyond the conflict and headlines to a fuller appreciation of contemporary Israeli society. Fellows’ convey authenticity through the presentation of their own lives and perspectives, thus “bringing Israel [directly] to students.”

What I like about this program is that you don’t have to always create programs, because you’re Israel 24/7. So...I’ll take a student for coffee, and we just talk about life, Israel, my memories. (Fellow)

The goal is not to present a simplified or overly positive view of Israel, but rather to allow the fellows to use their own unique backgrounds and experiences as the lens for exposing students to a richer understanding of Israel and Israeli society. Research on the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise (AICE) program to place visiting Israeli professors on American university campuses...
indicates that students particularly value a balanced perspective on Israel in combination with the authenticity of personal experience that Israeli faculty bring to classroom discourse (Koren et. al., 2013).

Hillel professionals confirm the importance of the authentic person-to-person encounter with IFP fellows and emphasize that it cannot be replicated with the use of American staff that may have lived or studied in Israel but are not Israeli. As one Hillel professional put it, fellows model for American students “loving Israel unabashedly, even while you recognize that Israel is a complex nation.”

*When they’re speaking about their own personal narrative, it’s just so much more powerful.* (Hillel Professional)

*What makes the Israel Fellow program indispensable is that personal relationship. A student has an opportunity, over a number of years to create a really meaningful relationship with an Israeli who is just slightly older than them.* (Hillel Professional)

Using the student’ own interests as the jumping off point, fellows are expected to “feel what is connecting him/her to Israel” and “ignite some sort of a spark” that will engage that student with Israel. At the level of individual students, this process of uncovering the “thread” is seen as forming the core of potential attachment to Israel.

*Everything stems from relationships on campus. You want to be able to have programs, but relationships are what drive college students. And once you have those relationships, then advocacy, and education, and program, kind of follows, based on the interests of the individual students.* (Hillel Professional)

The centrality of relationship building with individual students is reflected in the daily work of fellows. In interviews it became apparent that the majority of fellows’ time in a typical week is spent meeting with students individually. In many ways, they are in the “business” of having coffee, primarily with Jewish undergraduates. This student-centric model of intervention is also reflected in the metrics used to measure program success. The REACH system, Hillel’s relationship management database system, is used by fellows to track the number and depth of their contacts with students. Fellows are expected to develop meaningful relationships with a minimum of 100 students during the ten months of each academic year.

**Cascading and Networking Impact**

Forming relationships with individual students is also the first step in the IFP approach to influencing the larger campus community. In a cascading model of intervention, fellows leverage relationships with individual students to accomplish two tasks: identify potential future leaders and bring together groups of interested students to support the development of campus activism and programming.

Through their relationship building efforts, fellows are instructed to identify potential student leaders and start the process of building their commitment and repertoire of skills. This may include suggesting different kinds of training or conference opportunities or putting the potential leader in touch with...
existing student leaders and campus initiatives. Staffing Taglit-Birthright Israel trips is seen as critical to this aspect of the program because it allows the fellow to see students in a group setting and identify those who demonstrate leadership potential.

“You have the Israel fellow who’s going to bring back, in their second year, a group of 40 [Birthright] students, and they’re their students. Now they will work through with them, both as a group and individually.” (Hillel Professional)

“We certainly want our fellow to lead our Birthright students, because we get a lot of leaders out of the Birthright group. Most of our Birthrighters are students who have never had anything to do with Hillel before. So it’s a great opportunity for us to build those relationships, and get to know them, and hopefully groom a few for future leadership.” (Hillel Professional)

Once student leaders and/or core groups of interested students are identified, the fellow works through them in two related ways. First, the student leaders, individually and in groups, are seen as networking conduits through which the fellow’s reach will extend to other groups and clubs on campus. Core students may be encouraged to engage in conversations about Israel with members of their networks of peers. The fellow’s role is also to be a resource and a guide for students as they develop programming, either under the auspices of Hillel or through other student-led groups and clubs to which they belong. For example, a student leader with ties to a sorority might be encouraged to develop programming related to women’s issues in Israel. Taglit-Birthright Israel alumni programming is also a venue for identifying students motivated to become more involved in the topic of Israel.

The fellow was able to build relationships with students, a lot of very good personal relationships with that approach, and develop a cadre of leaders—of student leaders who then would be able to extend their network of people who were engaged with the same kind of approach. So, [fellow] was able to build relationships with—close relationships with maybe two-dozen students, who in turn, expanded the reach through their peer network.” (Hillel Professional)

There were a few student organizations that we were working with, but again, it wasn’t me that had the connection with them, it was my students. So I would sit with the student and kind of evaluate who are the right organizations to contact, or what are our priorities, but I never had any personal connection with any of those groups.” (Fellow)

Potential Issues with the IFP Theory of Change

- Lack of Goal Clarity. The IFP is a collaborative effort between JAFI, Hillel International, and the local campus Hillel organizations, each of which have slightly different goals for the program. For JAFI, the IFP primarily represents an intervention to promote Israel education and engagement, “bringing Israel to students and students to Israel.” For campus Hillel organizations this initiative is seen as one avenue to the larger goal of fostering engagement with
Understanding the Israel Fellows Program:

Jewish identity including, but not limited to, Israel. Because there is no explicit prioritization of goals, it is more difficult to determine program success.

- **Networking Authenticity.** Central to the IFP theory of change is the authenticity that an Israeli can bring to American students in direct face-to-face contact. The next step, the students’ use of their own relationships and networks to extend that thread to others on campus, by definition lacks the immediacy and authenticity of direct contact with an Israeli. It is unclear how or how well this translation from the personal encounter to the larger network takes place.

- **Influencing the Broader Campus.** The IFP approach is highly focused on individuals and small groups of students. This may be an effective intervention strategy for reaching students and influencing their personal knowledge of and attitudes toward Israel. However, the goals of the IFP extend beyond students to include influence on the public discourse on Israel in the larger campus community, including academic departments and divisions such as study abroad. Although a small number of fellows related successes in reaching out to offices and department within the campus community, for the most part the work of fellows is not directed beyond students. There appears to be an assumption in the IFP theory of campus change that working with individual and small groups of students as the focal unit will translate into changes in other arenas of university life. In other words, expanding the cadre of Israel-attached students and the accumulation of their programming and advocacy efforts will reach a “tipping point” that influences Israel discourse in academic departments. In fact research on Jewish life on the American college campus indicates that professors within Jewish studies programs are reticent to participate in discourse on Israel and Jewish engagement on campus, a divide that student leaders are unlikely to be able to bridge (Sales & Saxe, 2006). This gap in IFP program theory is the impetus for the newly developed Israel Engaged Campus model of intervention currently being piloted.
Implementation Theory and Challenges

Over the last decade the IFP has developed from a small improvised pilot to an established program with formal protocols for recruiting, selecting, training, and placing fellows. This section examines key aspects of and challenges to the implementation of the IFP. Several of the unresolved issues with IFP program theory relate to challenges encountered in implementation. The discussion begins with consideration of the retention of fellows for their full two year commitment, since this is perhaps the largest threat to program success and is likely to be influenced by all of the other elements and challenges discussed.

Retention

Each fellow is expected to make a two-year commitment to the IFP. Our analysis of the tenure of cohorts of fellows between 2006-07 and 2012-13 indicates that over half (58%) stayed for only one year. There has been some improvement in retention going from a low point of 20% of the 2006-07 cohort to 52% of the 2011-12 cohort that stayed for at least two years (see Table 2). Nonetheless, attrition after the first year of the program remains a problem.

Hillel organizations see the premature departure of a fellow as the loss of their investment in selecting, acculturating, and training this individual. However, the greatest cost is in the potential loss of the network of relationships formed by that fellow. As mentioned earlier, the IFP theory of change is predicated on the development of a network of relationships with students. The loss of the center node of that network, the fellow, is a critical blow to program effectiveness.

When they’re leaving, they’re taking away their relationships that they had with the students and everything. It’s kind of like you cut it off, and then you start all over again with a new fellow. (Hillel Professional)

I think that the fact that after a year, when I told a lot of students that I’m leaving, they all said how upset they are, and how important I was for them during the year. (Fellow)

Hillel leaders describe cases where the fellow has been too homesick, shy, or unable to adapt to the particular campus. However,

Table 2: Tenure of Fellows by Year Started

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<tr>
<td>Cohort Size</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Year</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Years</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>43%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Years</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
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</table>
these seem to be isolated cases and the underlying issues appear to be more endemic to the program. Taking on the role of a fellow is a difficult assignment, and it carries substantial personal costs. Fellows put their professional and personal lives on hold for two years. For many, particularly those living in metropolitan areas, living on a limited stipend means that they are lowering their standard of living and will not have surplus income to save for graduate education. Perhaps just as daunting is the implicit expectation that fellows not develop romantic attachments with Americans that might decrease their likelihood of returning to Israel after their assignment.

Selection and Placement

The JAFI IFP staff oversee the recruitment and selection of fellows. Through a process of psychological evaluation, security clearance, individual interviews, and group simulations, prospective candidates are carefully vetted to make sure that they can successfully fulfill the role.

One of the challenges to the successful implementation of the IFP, especially relevant to program expansion, is the selection and retention until placement of high potential candidates for the role of fellow. In many ways the IFP is looking to recruit an ideal young adult—one who has knowledge of Israel, maturity, ability to work independently and good people skills. The preferred candidate also has a background in Israel engagement or Israel education activities and possesses fluency in spoken and written English.

Some of the most important characteristics of the successful fellow have to do with their interpersonal orientation and facility with developing relationships with a broad array of people. Deficits in these aspects of character and temperament are difficult to address in training and therefore need to be central to the selection process.

You need somebody who is not going to be intimidated by anti-Israel messages, either from faculty or students, and who’s going to help students not to be intimidated, even more importantly. And so you need a positive attitude, and strength in your own beliefs; you need a strong Zionist belief. (Hillel Professional)

We’re looking at males and females that are independent, that are creative, that are sophisticated, and the most important thing is that they have the passion to make something meaningful and work with the Jewish students on campuses. (JAFI Professional)

I think that the most important thing for us is someone capable of having a rapport, who’s really willing to go out beyond their box. (Hillel Professional)

JAFI staff also needs to develop a diverse pool of candidates to respond to the needs of particular campuses. This may mean finding a fellow with Russian language skills or one that can spearhead Israel advocacy in response to specific anti-Israel campaigns. Although IFP staff may have in mind the campus where a candidate would do well, the final placement decision is under the control of the local Hillel. For all of these reasons JAFI staff needs to develop a larger pool of candidates than may eventually be placed.

JAFI is seeking to recruit and place high potential young adults, and it is no surprise that these same individuals are being courted...
by other programs and companies. The time between acceptance into the IFP program and final placement can be a matter of months. During this period some fellows are approached with other offers of employment and leave the program.

Training for the Right “Toolbox”

In analyzing both IFP training materials and interviews with administrators and fellows, it appears that there are several discrepancies between the “tool box” that fellows acquire during training and the skills and knowledge they actually need on the ground once they arrive and begin to work on campus. Training of fellows, especially in Israel, focuses on education, program development, advocacy, and public relations. Fellows often remarked that they left training with the expectation that their job was to create and implement Israel education programming on campus. Once on campus they quickly realized that the Hillel approach was to work through students; therefore the skills they would be employing involved networking, relationship building, and advising/supervising groups of students. These are skills that fellows may not have acquired in their previous work life.

I thought that what I’ll do is I’ll plan events, or I will lead sessions, I’ll lead programs for students, and I’ll just invite students to come to events that I’m organizing. And I thought that I’ll also do a lot of advocacy...I realized that I’m not going to do any program by myself. I’m not going to plan anything I’m not going to lead any session. The students are going to do everything, and I’m only going to be their advisor. (Fellow)

So when you’re working on these campuses, to what extent are you creating the programming, and to what extent is it coming from the students and you’re just consulting with them?
(Fellow)

Hillel professionals also report that fellows often arrive on campus expecting to find a situation fraught with political dissension and anti-Israel sentiment and action. The reality on many campuses is that there is little to no political discourse of any kind, and Israel advocacy is a relatively small part of their work as a fellow. One fellow reported that she was “expecting...more what we called Israel advocacy, but [Campus] is not a political campus, so I didn’t have to face things like that.”

Israel Fellows come thinking that they just need to bust onto the scene basically and scream Israel, and it’s not a comfortable position for many Hillels to be in. (Hillel Professional)

They [fellows] have been prepared to think that campus is on fire. Everybody hates Israel and they’re going to save the world. I want them to be excited and feel like they’re really going to make a difference. But they need to understand that they’re walking into institutions that have existed for many years on campus and they have their own rhythm and they have, you know, the way that they do things, and you have to be flexible and work within it. (Hillel Professional)

A third area of training that may require re-evaluation relates to preparation for understanding Jewish communal organization in the United States. Fellows are given a great deal of information about the United States’ national-level Jewish community. In one of the handouts from the JAFI training, upwards of 50 national Jewish
organizations are listed. This list includes major organizations such as the Jewish Federations of North America and the Anti-Defamation League, as well as smaller players such as Aish Hatorah and Hebrew College in Boston. Regardless of size or import, all of the organizations are given the same amount of description—about two sentences—and perceived prevalence in America’s Jewish community. The fellows will rarely, if ever, encounter most of the national organizations currently included in training materials, but they will need to know the intricate workings of the Jewish community in the cities and campuses in which they work. Perhaps more importantly, fellows need more information on the personal—as opposed to the institutional—nature and enactment of Jewish identity among American young adults.

Understanding the Jewish world here and the Jewish world in Israel is very different. As Israelis, we’re not familiar with that, so you need to get to know things here. (Fellow)

There’s a lot of conversation around identities and I think that we [Israelis] just don’t talk about that. For us it’s like, ‘Yeah, I’m Jewish okay, good.’ It’s very obvious, and we don’t deal with that. (Fellow)

Acclimatizing to the American College Campus

Fellows face multiple adjustment and acclimatization challenges. Interviews with fellows suggest that Hillel staff is instrumental in helping them through each aspect of adjustment. However, not all Hillels take this role as seriously and fellows are often left to fend for themselves. The first adjustment challenge is developmental. Like other young adults starting a new job, fellows are often facing their first experience of moving to a new city with no social or family connections. They can feel lonely, dislocated, and overwhelmed.

It was very hard at the beginning adjusting to the place, to the city, moving all your life. (Fellow)

The loneliness factor is huge. You know, they’re coming from networks of people and friends and family into a place where they don’t know anybody and making sure they’re set up, you know, for a few weeks with lots of dinners and lots of things to do and events to go to and whatever it might be—I think is really important. (Community Professional)

Once they arrive in the United States fellows are also confronted with the juxtaposition between their common history and heritage with American Jews and the differences between the groups in terms of culture and understandings. Cultural groups differ along multiple dimensions including language, worldview, values, normative patterns of relationship, and in the ways that they perceive and weight information (Triandis, 2006). Some of these cultural differences, such as language, are obvious but others are harder to discern, making it more difficult for fellows to learn how to maneuver in this new cultural context.

It was also my first time in the States, so it was really shocking in like, ‘What am I going to do here?’ I was really afraid of the language, and how will I get used to it. (Fellow)
Being Israeli, you’re in a different culture, with American staff, the way you express yourself, the way they express themselves, the way they give feedback and you give feedback. We know there’s an expectation for us to understand and for us to change, but I don’t always feel like there is understanding that this is the way we are, and you have to give back a little bit. Both sides try to adjust. (Fellow)

There’s such a big gap, a cultural gap and the language gaps, and there are so many gaps, actually, between living and working in Israel and living and working in the US. (Fellow)

Supervision: Reporting to Multiple Masters

Supervision of fellows can feel like a kitchen with too many cooks. Each fellow has a local supervisor, typically a Hillel staff person. The title and role of the direct supervisor of fellows we interviewed varied by campus and community; they were often, but not always, the executive director of the Hillel. In program sites where the Hillel is part of the Federation or in community models where the fellow covers a geographic area, they may also report to a Federation supervisor. On the JAFI side every campus has a coordinator that works closely with the fellow. Once every two months IFP staff also conducts a conference call with the fellows.

The lack of clarity about IFP goals described earlier is also reflected in tensions around supervision. Fellows often described their consciousness of the differing expectations of their Hillel and JAFI supervisors and were too often left confused about their priorities and goals. At the core of the confusion is the question of to which organization, Hillel or JAFI, the fellow owes their primary allegiance. One Hillel supervisor went as far as to state that the fellow should think of themselves as “100% employee of Hillel” and that the fellow’s perspective should always be “Hillel first.” Fellows also described situations in which they were being asked by their local supervisor to participate in more general engagement activities such as Shabbat dinners that are central to the Hillel agenda of engagement with Jewish life but not as clearly aligned with the Israel engagement agenda of the IFP.

I think for me the main issue is always the Jewish Agency versus Hillel. Is Hillel the people who tell you what to do, or is the Jewish Agency? The Jewish Agency would want me to do some project, and the Hillel would not see it as a priority at all, so what do I do with that? (Fellow)

Fellows Stretched Too Thin

One of the key elements of the IFP value proposition is that the fellow can devote full time to promoting Israel engagement on a campus. This means that each Hillel can have a more concerted and locally originated focus on Israel.

I think the biggest change is you have a staff person that is dedicated 100% for you, and it’s a great resource if students learn how to use it. (Hillel Professional)

However, the reality is that fellows’ time is often divided and many serve multiple
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campuses. In addition, as described earlier, local Hillel organizations, especially those that have few full time staff, often ask fellows to be involved in the more general operation of the organization. Regardless of the reason, it is clear that some fellows are not able to devote their full time to Israel engagement on a single campus. Using the same fellow to serve multiple campuses is a financially responsible approach. However, it may also undermine the ability of these fellows to develop a deep and broad network of relationships on a campus, a time intensive task.
Implications for Evaluation

The discussion of program theory and implementation challenges described in this report lays the groundwork for the development of a comprehensive summative evaluation of the IFP. In particular, the theory of change inherent to a program such as the IFP (Lipsey & Cordray, 2000) suggests a number of intermediate objectives and final results that should be part of a comprehensive assessment. For example, the development of in-depth relationships with individual students, identification of their potential points of connection with Israel, and the use of these relationships to reach a wider swath of the student body are all intermediate goals that can be assessed. Should any of these elements in the sequence be absent it will help to explain shortfalls in program outcomes.

Examination of the program theory also suggests that the goals of the IFP need to be further clarified especially as those between Hillel and JAFI diverge. For example, is the program a success if a group of individual students develop a meaningful personal connection with the fellow but do not engage with larger groups of peers to educate about or advocate for Israel?

In a separate document, we propose a summative evaluation plan for the IFP to be conducted by the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS). Based on further clarification of program goals, the proposal describes a strategy to assess the extent to which the IFP succeeds in expanding engagement with Israel on campuses where it has been implemented. The evaluation will address the following questions:

- **Self evaluation.** How do staff and student leadership responsible for Israel engagement on campus evaluate the success of the program? What are their concerns and what do they consider its principal successes?
- **Discourse on campus.** What impact, if any, has IFP had on the overall quality and quantity of Israel discourse on the campus, on student enrollment in courses about Israel, and faculty creation of new courses?
- **Efficacy of specific program models.** What differences, if any, can be seen in the outcomes of various program models (multi- or single campus, direct responsibility to Hillel director indirect), and how does the fellow’s involvement in non-Israel-related responsibilities affect the fellows’ overall effectiveness?
- **Relationship building with Israelis.** How does connection with Israel fellows on their campuses contribute to student understanding of Israelis? To what extent has the relationship led them to encounters with other Israelis or extended their contacts with Israelis from Taglit-Birthright Israel mifgashim?
- **Cascading and networking impact.** To what extent are relationships between fellows and individual students leveraged to further disseminate engagement, to identify potential future leaders, or to bring together groups of...
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interested students to support the
development of campus activism and
programming?

- Creating an Israel Engaged Campus.
  What impact has IFP had on the level of
individual student engagement with
Israel? What role does IFP play in
increasing participation in Israel trips
such as Taglit-Birthright Israel or
MASA, study abroad, or taking Israel-
focused courses? How do students on
IFP campuses think about Israel, and
what role do they think the fellows may
have had in changing their understanding
of, and attitudes towards, Israel?
References


The Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University is a multi-disciplinary research institute dedicated to the study of American Jewry and religious and cultural identity.

The Steinhardt Social Research Institute, hosted at CMJS, is committed to the development and application of innovative approaches to socio-demographic research for the study of Jewish, religious, and cultural identity.