PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT & SYNAGOGUE GROWTH
AN ASSESSMENT OF THE KORET SYNAGOGUE INITIATIVE
1997

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INTRODUCTION

The American Jewish community faces enormous challenges as it moves into the 21st century. Declining adherence to Jewish traditions, increasing intermarriage, diminishing giving to Jewish organizations, and weakening emotional attachment to Israel mark profound changes in Jewish life. Jewish community leaders recognize that retaining, let alone strengthening, Jewish identity and commitment, is increasingly difficult. As the need to respond to these challenges intensifies, leaders have begun to stress Jewish “transformation” rather than “continuity.”

Any strategy to revitalize Jewish life must take into account the synagogue’s central role in American Jewish life. Almost all Jews belong to a synagogue at some point in their lives. As the main institutional venue for and sponsor of life-cycle rituals—brit milah, brit bat, bar/bat mitzvah, weddings, funerals—the synagogue is the major institutional gateway to Jewish communal life.

Moreover, the synagogue’s historical functions make it well-suited to meet contemporary needs. American Jews have accelerated their migration from areas of dense Jewish settlement to suburbs and exurbs with sparse Jewish population, far from extended family and Jewish social networks. These dislocated, geographically dispersed individuals sharply feel the need to establish (or re-establish) community. The synagogue, traditionally serving as a beit knesset (house of assembly), can help to ensure that these individuals fulfill their need for community among their fellow Jews.

The synagogue historically has also functioned as a beit midrash (house of study). There is a growing consensus that American Jews need to be better educated in the traditions, texts, and language that form the backbone of their heritage. While this is arguably of more concern to leaders than to most other Jews, it remains true that the vast majority of Jews provide their children with some form of Jewish education. Moreover, a small but growing sector of the adult Jewish population has embraced more serious study of Judaism. The synagogue already provides much of the Jewish education that young and adult American Jews receive.

As many observers—and students—have pointed out, the nature, quality, and coverage of that education needs to improve.

The synagogue’s role as beit t’fillah (house of prayer) also locates it as a crucial institution for revitalizing Jewish life. Religion has begun to gain prominence in securing Jewish commitment partly because the significance of other sources of allegiance has declined. For example, the culture of the immigrant and second generations is waning as its members pass on, thus diminishing the compelling need for a primarily cultural Jewishness. In addition, the Jewish organizations that emphasize fundraising and institutional loyalties provide less sat-
thereby demonstrating that synagogues can play a critical role in the revitalization of Jewish life in America.

The Koret Foundation has been active in all stages of the Initiative, collaborating with the four synagogues and with Brandeis University's Institute for Community and Religion, which has carried out evaluation and research on the Initiative. The KSI began in August 1994 for Beth Am, Beth Sholom, and Sherith Israel, which hired full-time program directors. And in December 1994, Kol Shofar hired a half-time program director under a grant from the Marin Community Foundation.

During the final year of the three-year grant period, the Koret Foundation Board of Trustees voted to add four synagogues per year for three more years. Funding for the experiment will decline progressively, necessitating that the synagogues develop supplementary and, ultimately, alternative funding sources to retain their program director positions.

This study analyzes the impact of the KSI on the people who participated in the activities undertaken by the program directors. The study also explores KSI's effect on the synagogues and on the Koret Foundation. The assessment covers the period from October 1994 to January 1997.

The KSI has affected a wide audience. Participants include families with school-aged children, young single adults, seniors, empty nesters, and women as a distinct group; synagogue members as well as nonmembers have participated in the programs. While the impact on individuals varies from program to program, depending on the program's goals and the participants' needs, the KSI program's accomplishments include extending and enriching participants' knowledge of Judaism and Jewish culture; enhancing feelings of being part of a Jewish community; and strengthening identification with Judaism, the Jewish people, and the synagogue.

The institutional assessment indicates that the KSI has had a significant impact on the programming, culture, and structure of the synagogues. The synagogues have greatly expanded their program offerings and, as a result, participation has increased. Cultural shifts include a sense by the participants that the synagogue is an embracing, receptive community. The main structural changes stimulated by the Initiative are the assumption of leadership positions by program participants and the creation of new institutional forms to accommodate diversity.

The KSI has also significantly affected on how the Koret Foundation operates. The innovations that the Koret Foundation has undergone in the course of planning and implementing the KSI have profound implications for how foundations, federations, and synagogues respond to the challenges facing the American Jewish community.
METHODOLOGY

This report relies on both quantitative and qualitative methods. The data come from six sources:

- Institutional Survey
- Synagogue Membership Survey
- New Member Survey
- Program Survey
- Personal and Telephone Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Program Materials
- Participant Observation

These surveys were designed and administered by scholars at the Institute for Community and Religion. Personal interviews with program participants during all three years of the KSI were carried out by research personnel at the Institute for Community and Religion.

INSTITUTIONAL SURVEY AND INTERVIEWS

Data dealing with the synagogues as institutions are drawn from a variety of sources, including a survey of each synagogue's institutional structure, policies, and staffing, and from personal and telephone interviews with the lay leaders, staff, and lay members.

SYNAGOGUE MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

Data on synagogue members and non-member participants in long-term programs are the result of a mail-back survey sent in July 1995 to all synagogue members and to all non-member program participants. There were 3,710 surveys mailed; 1,332 surveys were returned for a response rate of 36%, which far exceeds the norm for mail-back surveys. The response rate for Beth Am members was 35%; 36% for Beth Sholom members; 44% for Kol Shofar members; and 27% for Sherith Israel members.

NEW MEMBER SURVEY

Data on new synagogue members are based on data from two mail-back surveys. The first survey was conducted in January 1996 of members who had joined the synagogues during the Initiative's first three months. The second survey was carried out in October 1996 and targeted households that had joined their synagogue between the fall of 1995 and the fall of 1996. In all, 374 surveys were mailed, and 115 were returned, for a response rate of 31%.

EVENT SURVEY

Data on one-time events sponsored through the Initiative were obtained through an evaluation that participants were asked to fill out at the end of each event. There were 1,260 evaluations completed. (Some individuals who participated in more than one event may have filled out an evaluation for more than one event. Thus the sample may overrepresent individuals who are more active in the Jewish community.)
MAJOR FINDINGS

IMPACT ON PARTICIPANTS

VOLUME AND SCOPE OF KSI PROGRAMMING

The program directors were extremely productive in terms of programming. They were involved in the creation, implementation, or support of a total of 102 programs during the first three years.

Programming was diverse, with Jewish education, social/recreational, and ritual/spiritual offerings forming the bulk of the programming. Cultural and secular educational programming was also developed. The program directors' efforts embraced both ongoing and one-time programs.

DIVERSITY OF PARTICIPANTS

A great diversity of individuals attended the KSI programs. Programming targeted a wide variety of demographic groups, including families with young children, seniors, young and older single individuals, young couples, empty nesters, and women, among others. Given the variety of programs offered, there was also a great diversity with respect to individuals and their interests.

PARTICIPATION IN SYNAGOGUES BY NONMEMBERS

The KSI reached both members and nonmembers. Synagogue members constituted 51% of those who completed 1,182 program evaluations, and 49% were filled out by nonmembers.

ATTRACTS NEW MEMBERS

The KSI has played a significant role in attracting new members to the participating synagogues. A majority of recent members cited synagogue programming as an important factor in their decision to join their synagogue. Sixty-three percent (63%) of new members reported that synagogue programming was an important or very important factor in their decision to join their synagogue (including 41% who said that it was very important).

MEMBERS' ACTIVITY INCREASED

Key informants note that their members have embraced the new programming. These informants, lay and professional, are heartened by the alacrity with which members have availed themselves of the program opportunities. In some cases, professionals and lay leaders have observed that the programs have energized participants to take part in other programs (whether sponsored through the KSI or not) and, in some cases, to attend services more regularly.

IMPACT ON SYNAGOGUES AS INSTITUTIONS

DIVERSITY, COMMUNITY-BUILDING, AND CREATING NEW STRUCTURES

KSI programming has prompted the formation of new subcommunities based on shared demographics. This has transformed the synagogues
Community

Participants report that the KSI has helped them feel a greater sense of community with their fellow participants. At the same time, at Beth Am, Beth Sholom, and Kol Shofar, participants who are synagogue members stated that their involvement has made them feel much more part of a synagogue community. This outcome is more likely at these synagogues precisely because these participating members already have a connection to the synagogue as a whole and many are seeking to achieve a greater sense of belonging to the synagogue.

Feeling part of the larger congregational community as a result of participating in KSI programs has also led some participants to take part in more activities at the synagogue.

The Sherith Israel young adult havurot participants by and large felt less a part of the synagogue community because most were not yet synagogue members. Attempts to generate greater involvement of havurot members in synagogue life have not met with much success in the short-term. However, most of the synagogue’s leadership views the integration of this demographic segment as a long-term process. At the same time, participants in creative Shabbat services and the Rosh Chodesh groups report feeling more part of the community as a result of their participation.

The Program Director’s Role

The institutional impact has differed in its scope and pace at each synagogue. These differences were primarily due to differences in the way that the program director position was integrated into the synagogue’s overall strategy for achieving its mission; the degree of support the program director position enjoyed from the board and the rabbi; and the influence within the congregation of the principal group benefiting from the program director’s efforts.

The KSI had greater institutional impact on the synagogues in which the role of the program director was integrated into a well-thought-out plan for congregational transformation.

The involvement and support of the synagogue board of directors and of the rabbi is crucial to success.

Efforts to change the synagogue organizationally are more likely to succeed when major programming is directed at a core constituency within the synagogue. Conversely, focusing efforts on a population that does not have a strong power base within the synagogue could compromise the effectiveness of a program director’s work. Strategies that combine inreach and outreach stand a better chance of success.
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

COMMUNITY INVESTMENT IN SYNAGOOGUES

Foundations and federations should consider investing significant resources in synagogues. The KSI demonstrates the positive impact of a well-planned, long-term project centered on the synagogue.

SYNAGOOGUES

Synagogues should consider creating program director positions. The KSI shows that, among other achievements, the program directors have increased programming, involved more people and a greater diversity of individuals in synagogue life, and enhanced the sense of community among members and nonmembers.

Prior to hiring a program director, a synagogue would benefit greatly from formulating a clear plan for synagogue enhancement. The program director’s role should be conceptualized as part of this plan and include clear lines of communication and responsibility among program director, the board of directors, and other synagogue staff.

While the KSI experience suggests that synagogues can be successful by relying on one or the other, the data indicate that by combining inreach and outreach synagogues will place themselves in a position to extend their influence beyond their membership and into the Jewish community at large.

Each synagogue might find it useful to initiate a congregation-wide effort, including group discussions, workshops, and retreats, to clarify the meaning of community, the degree to which it is being realized among congregants, and the possible means to foster it more effectively. Developing a sense of community is among the important goals of stakeholders at all the synagogues, as well as of Jewish communal organizations and non-affiliated individuals. Special emphasis should be placed on how small groups formed within the synagogue can serve as building blocks for creating of a greater sense of community.

The foregoing recommendations—formulating a clear plan for synagogue enhancement, combining outreach and inreach, and initiating congregation-wide discussion on community—should also be used as opportunities to anticipate and address the dilemmas that successful outreach can bring. In particular, synagogues must be aware that new members brought in by outreach efforts may have needs and interests different from those of longer-standing members. Efforts to integrate the new members should be planned early in the outreach process and modified continually to remain responsive to all of the members.

FOUNDATIONS

Foundations should consider developing more initiatives that involve their staff and lay leadership more intensively in cooperative rela-
IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICATION

The KSI provides guidance for other Jewish communities that wish to revitalize their members’ Jewish lives. The KSI offers a model of how to launch and sustain an initiative and how to manage it programmatically and on the institutional level.

The KSI joins other recent efforts by Jewish communal organizations and private foundations to transform synagogue life. The four most visible initiatives are those sponsored through the Boston Commission on Jewish Continuity, UJA-Federation’s Jewish Continuity Commission, the Avi Chai Foundation, the Experiment in Congregational Education, and Synagogue 2000. These projects indicate that the synagogue is coming to occupy a high priority on the communal agenda. The KSI model differs from these efforts in that it entails hiring new personnel at the synagogues (the program directors), as well as provides funds for programming.

SYNAGOGUE PARTNERSHIPS, THE LONG TERM, AND EVALUATIONS

The KSI experience demonstrates that private foundations can significantly reshape Jewish life. Their impact can be magnified by becoming partners with the local federation. The federation would contribute financial resources, as well as its knowledge of communal needs and its reputation as the central body representing local Jewish interests. Collaboration between foundations and the federation would thus greatly enhance the chances of success for initiatives of this type.

It is important to recall that initiatives require a long time to bear fruit—five to ten years. Short-term seed granting is clearly inadequate to the task. The long duration of an initiative and the concomitant need for great investment in funds and communal will also make foundation-federation partnerships imperative.

Moreover, evaluation should be built into the initiative design. Evaluation is necessary to understand what is effective and why. Evaluation during the course of the initiative enables synagogues, foundations, and federations to adjust their actions to increase the effectiveness of a program director’s efforts.

MANAGING AN INITIATIVE

On the institutional front, synagogues should be required to conceptualize and articulate clearly their mission and how their participation in an initiative would enable them to fulfill it. This point cannot be stressed enough. Maximizing the program director’s efforts requires that the synagogue have a clear idea of how the program director can best impact the synagogue.

To realize the synagogue’s mission, the synagogue board and the rabbi must strongly support the program director and the programs
can draw on the considerable talent, energy, and enthusiasm among women, within and outside the synagogues.

Synagogues should consider creating or expanding programming for empty nesters. Many middle-aged parents do not renew their membership once their children are grown. Keeping them involved in the synagogue requires attending to their needs, especially for community, as they enter this phase of life.

Synagogues should consider lowering barriers to seniors’ fuller participation in synagogue life. More programming targeting seniors is needed. Moreover, synagogues should facilitate transportation for seniors to the full range of synagogue programs (for example, establishing a ride-share hotline to services and other activities).

Programming for young single adults is also needed. Young adults report that they want venues where they can socialize with their Jewish peers, form friendships and seek spouses. Synagogues must also be sensitive to the fact that most Jews under age 30 believe that synagogue membership is too expensive. Synagogues should consider offering free membership for under-30s.

Efforts to reach underserved segments often result in the formation of small groups. Such efforts are to be encouraged. The organizing principle for any particular small group should emerge from discussions among prospective group members and synagogue staff. For example, young adults, especially those associated with Reform synagogues, appear more interested in age- and life-cycle-based groups with a social, as opposed to a religious, orientation. Other groups may choose to focus on other issues, such as study or social action.

However, there is the danger that small groups based on shared demographic characteristics and/or interests might become isolated from the congregation at large. Professional staff should therefore help integrate small group members into the synagogue. Planned events should involve interaction among rabbis, program directors, other staff, and small group members. The approach should not be heavy-handed; members of small groups need to feel that they are connected to the individuals and ideas at the center of the congregation’s mission. Achieving this connection is a wonderful opportunity to strengthen the synagogue and intensify the synagogue’s impact on the lives of group members.

Synagogues might consider giving small groups greater autonomy in financial and administrative matters. This would help to increase members’ sense of community within the groups. Moreover, if the members see their group as part of the larger whole, such autonomy is less likely to result in the group’s isolation.

The KSI experience also demonstrates the benefits of programs that incorporate more than
DATA ANALYSIS

IMPACT ON PARTICIPATION IN SYNAGOGUE LIFE

VOLUME AND SCOPE OF KSI PROGRAMMING

The program directors were extremely productive, involved in the creation, implementation, or support of a total of 104 programs during the first three years. These programs include 25 havurot or other groups, some of the programs constituted an ongoing series.

Programming was diverse, the bulk of it Jewish education, social/recreational, and ritual/spiritual offerings. Thirty Jewish education programs were created during the first three years; 29 programs emphasized social or recreational aims; 22 focused on ritual or spirituality; 14 were primarily cultural; four were dedicated to social service; and three featured secular education. (See Table 1.) The program directors’ efforts embraced both ongoing and one-time programs.

DIVERSITY OF PARTICIPANTS

A great diversity of individuals from a wide variety of demographic groups attended the KSI programs, including families with young children, seniors, young and older single people, young couples, empty nesters, and women, among others. And the variety of programs reflected the great diversity of individuals’ interests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1: KSI PROGRAMS BY TYPE</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jewish education</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/recreational</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritual/spirituality</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social service</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular education</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>104</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The table presents the number of programs only. Programs varied greatly with respect to many factors not reflected in here, such as the frequency with which they met, and the amount of preparation they required.

The KSI reached both members and nonmembers. Synagogue members constituted 51% of those who completed 1,182 program evaluations; 49% were filled out by nonmembers.

ATTRACTS NEW MEMBERS

The KSI has played a significant role in attracting new members to the participating synagogues. A majority of recent members cited programming as an important factor in their decision to join their synagogue. Sixty-three percent (63%) of new members reported that synagogue programming was an important or very important factor in their decision to join their synagogue, including 41% who said that it was very important. (See Figure 1.)
further—diversity among participants. Furthermore, some participants in the programs have taken on, or increased their involvement in, leadership and volunteer roles. In addition, many of the KSI programs, as well as the program director positions, are becoming institutionalized at the four synagogues. Finally, as one key informant noted, outreach programming is leading the synagogues to reconsider their predominant focus on members.

**Community Building**

**Creation of New Subcommunities**

KSI programming has prompted the formation of new subcommunities based on shared demographics. This has transformed the synagogues into institutions that are—and are increasingly perceived as such—much more welcoming to groups that have in the past felt less included in synagogue life. Young single adults and women at Beth Sholom are two examples. Programming that targets these groups tends to be more successful when it responds to the groups’ critical needs and is consistent with the synagogue’s overall orientation. Thus the young adults group provided a needed social outlet for young adults, while tying socialization tightly to the ritual and spiritual activities that form the core of Beth Sholom’s culture. Similarly, the women’s Rosh Chodesh group at Beth Sholom afforded an opportunity for women to explore Jewish spirituality, the first time that the synagogue had offered programming focused specifically on women’s spiritual lives. Young adults’ participation in the synagogue has earned Beth Sholom a reputation as an institution where young adults are present and welcome. Likewise, even women who have been long-standing members have stated that their feelings toward the synagogue have changed as a result of participating in the Rosh Chodesh group.

**Creation of New Structures to Accommodate Diversity**

KSI programming has helped diversify synagogue membership, drawing people who then join the synagogue, as well as attracting individuals who do not join yet who attend programs regularly or sporadically. While the programming is usually not the only factor in the decision, it is one entry point into the synagogue for many new members.

Successful outreach, however, can lead to a challenge, that of integrating individuals and groups whose needs differ from the majority of the congregation. KSI program directors have created new structures to accommodate this diversity and integrate these individuals into the congregation. For example, the program director at Kol Shofar explains the synagogue’s community-building efforts to staff and congregants in terms of creating small groups based on age, life cycle, occupation, and geography. The staff have created new structures that give the differing constituencies meaningful connections to the synagogue: a havurah for older singles, a social group for empty nesters, a
to which this has occurred in each synagogue depends on a number of factors, such as the strength of the pre-existing volunteer structure, the degree that the program director and other professional and lay leaders emphasize volunteerism, and the amount of outreach versus inreach.

Beth Am has traditionally had a strong volunteer structure; therefore, it is not surprising that its family education program, Shabbaton, has been a catalyst for greater volunteerism and leadership. Key informants believe that Shabbaton has been a vehicle for many parents to become volunteers at the synagogue. Regular, meaningful contact with the program director enables leadership to identify members’ skills and interests, which helps to match them with appropriate volunteer opportunities. Shabbaton families have helped to organize Shabbaton events, and have become involved in conducting a song session as a lead-in to the Young Children’s services as well as organize the Young Readers’ Service. Shabbaton families are also involved in committees and even on the board.

The fact that Shabbaton targets families with young children may also help to account for the increase in volunteerism. Parents tend to be more active in settings that involve their children, especially their children’s education. The fact that these parents participate in their children’s Jewish education to a greater extent than those in traditional formal Jewish education might also mean that they are more predisposed to involvement in synagogue life as volunteers.

Perhaps because of the congregation’s cultural predilection for charismatic rabbinic leadership, synagogue operations at Beth Sholom are largely staff-driven; volunteerism is not as widespread nor as deeply rooted as staff would like it to be. This is not to minimize the efforts of lay people who do serve as leaders or who volunteer for synagogue activities. However, staff initiate and sustain most synagogue activities and operations.

KSI has not greatly increased the synagogue’s volunteer capacity, perhaps because of the relative weakness of the pre-existing volunteer structure. Nor can the outreach portion of Beth Sholom’s programming be expected to enhance volunteerism. However, there are encouraging signs that the Initiative has sparked greater involvement by some program participants. For example, young adults have assumed responsibility for organizing their own group, which was started with the program director’s assistance. The high regard that synagogue staff, members, leaders, and even nonmembers have for the group’s activities attest to the strength of the group’s self-organization. Furthermore, several individuals active in KSI programs were elected to the board during the Initiative’s first two years, and they became more involved in synagogue life through the programs.

The increase in volunteerism at Kol Shofar is a direct result of the program director’s efforts to help congregants assume more responsibility for the synagogue’s ritual and organizational life.
success of the KSI in contributing to structural change within the synagogue.

The KSI programming and, potentially, the program director position, seem to be firmly rooted at Kol Shofar largely because of strong board support. Unlike at Beth Am, these programs did not spring from a plan designed by lay and professional leadership. Some programs or groups are becoming institutionalized by lay people have assumed—or been trained to assume—control over them, such as the empty nesters group; these programs have generated powerful lobbies. Others, such as Saturday Night at the Synagogue (a monthly social, cultural, educational, and religious event) have such a large following both within and outside the membership that they have become integrated into the identity of the synagogue. Kol Shofar is seen as the synagogue that offers these programs. The leadership is invested in maintaining this identity and strongly supports the programs. Moreover, these programs also have mobilized their own constituencies, including, significantly enough, board members. Even board members who do not attend the KSI programs support them because they believe they are beneficial to Kol Shofar and to the local Jewish community in general.

Where the leadership is divided on whether the KSI programs are successful, there is less board support for the programs and thus less likely they will become institutionalized. For example, at Sherith Israel a minority of board members has reservations about the KSI program-

ming for young adults because it has not yet led to a large upsurge in young adult membership. A majority of board members supports the programming because it has enhanced the young adults’ Jewish identity and they believe that greater involvement and increased membership will result in the long run. Thus board divisions put in doubt the institutionalization of the programs. Also because the programs target mainly nonmembers, there is a relatively weak internal constituency for institutionalizing the programs.

**IMPACT ON INDIVIDUALS’ JEWISH IDENTITY AND PRACTICE**

KSI programs have had major positive effects on the lives of program participants. These effects can be organized into three categories: Jewish education, Jewish observance, and Jewish community.

**Jewish Education**

Beth Am focused on the Jewish education of families. This emphasis arose out of a long process of reflection on the congregation’s needs, culminating in a vision that places lifelong Jewish learning at the center of congregational life. Dissatisfaction with traditional formal, generationally segregated Jewish education led to the decision to concentrate resources on family education.

The impact of the Shabbaton program on Beth Am families has been remarkable. Parents
directly in spiritual and ritual activities. This focus is consistent with the synagogue leadership’s desire to provide direct access to experiences that enhance congregants’ spiritual and ritual lives. Some women felt that the Rosh Chodesh group and the women’s retreat offered them a more personal or emotional means of experiencing spirituality than formal prayer services. One woman explained: “The Rosh Chodesh group is like the services except that there’s something that hits me, that strikes me more personally. I think that I have more confidence in my Rosh Chodesh group. I feel more confident about myself as a Jew and therefore that liberates me more to think about things.”

The intensity of retreats, and hence their potential transformative power, is well-known. At least one participant reported that on the women’s retreat, for the first time in her life, she had what she described as a very powerful religious experience: “On this weekend there were a couple of times where I felt what I must say were religious feelings that I couldn’t explain rationally, where I felt the presence of God, I felt in the presence of God personally. And that was a very new situation and I think it required the intensity of an entire weekend to get to that point.”

Participants in the Rosh Chodesh group, as well as in the Shabbaton program, also reported that “learning about” ritual and spirituality prompted them to change their own practices. For example, some women who participated in the Rosh Chodesh group and the women’s retreat have become more cognizant of women’s ritual and spiritual capabilities, and thus are more willing to try new—and traditional—religious/spiritual practices. Similarly, Shabbaton at Beth Am has prompted many families to assume new practices, such as celebrating Havdalah or reading the weekly Torah portion at home. Other families indicated that Shabbaton has enriched their Shabbat observance by providing them with explanations for rituals. The greater knowledge has also translated into greater enthusiasm on the part of both parents and children for participating in ritual life.

Kol Shofar also featured KSI programming that engaged participants’ ritual and spiritual lives. During the KSI, Kol Shofar’s Neshama Minyan, an alternative Shabbat service, expanded from once a month to twice a month and consistently drew more of participants than the main service. Although Neshama Minyan participants are more likely to be nonmembers than members, from 20 to 30 members regularly attend the Minyan. This suggests great interest in enhanced spiritual and ritual life among members and nonmembers alike. Moreover, opportunities for ritual and spiritual engagement are also built into Saturday Nights at the Synagogue, which is perhaps Kol Shofar’s most widely attended program.

Few KSI programs at Sherith Israel focused primarily on spiritual or ritual matters. Rather, the program director focused on bringing young
community. However, few feel that this sense of community extends to the synagogue as an institution. On the contrary, most feel little connection to Sherith Israel. This is mainly because most young single adult havurah members do not belong to the synagogue, and attempts to get them more involved in synagogue life have not met with much success. Thus the collateral benefits of the sense of community fostered within the havurot have not been as significant at Sherith Israel as at the other synagogues. However, it should be noted that most of the synagogue’s leadership views the integration of this demographic segment as a long-term process. Members of other groups at Sherith Israel, such as its two Rosh Chodesh groups and the empty-nester group, apparently do feel greater connection to the synagogue, in large part because most were synagogue members before they participated in the groups.

THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR’S ROLE

RELATIONSHIP TO RABBI, OTHER STAFF, AND LAY LEADERSHIP

The KSI outcomes are intimately tied to the relationship of each program director to her synagogue’s rabbi(s), other staff, and lay leadership. The institutional impact has differed in scope and pace at each synagogue. These differences were primarily due to differences in the way that the program director position was integrated into the synagogue’s overall strategy for achieving its mission; the degree of support the program director position enjoyed from the board and the rabbi; and the influence within the congregation of the principal group benefiting from the program director’s efforts.

In general, the KSI had greater institutional impact on the synagogues in which the program director’s role was integrated into a well-thought out plan for transforming the congregation. The involvement and support of the synagogue board of directors and the program director was crucial. Synagogue boards differ greatly in their orientation toward the program director and the KSI programming—from strong support with the program director position integrated into a cohesive congregational plan generated by lay and rabbinic leaders, to much weaker support where there were difficulties fitting the program director’s efforts into the congregational plan.

The rabbi’s support of the program director and the programming is also vital to KSI effectiveness. The rabbi has the moral authority to advocate effectively before the board for a program director’s activities, and the rabbi’s imprimatur can be a tremendous help in promoting the programming.

Efforts to change the synagogue are more likely to succeed when major programming is directed at a powerful constituency within the synagogue. Conversely, focusing efforts on a population that does not have a strong power base within the synagogue can compromise a program director’s effectiveness. Strategies that
sible that as synagogue leaders experience the value that a half-time program director brings to the congregation, over time many, if not most, synagogues committed to the KSI will upgrade this position to full-time.

**Institutionalization of Program Director Position**

The boards of directors and professionals at the four synagogues strongly support the institutionalization of the program director position. A senior staff member at one synagogue noted that the board did not clearly realize the potential benefit of the KSI program director position at the start of the Initiative. But “now the board leadership couldn’t conceive of our leadership team without a program director.” Institutionalizing the program director position would enable the four synagogues to sustain their extensive program offerings, enhance their efforts to build community, strengthen volunteer and lay leadership capacities, and attract new members.

**Impact on Koret Foundation**

The Koret Foundation, through the KSI, has begun a major shift in the way it operates. The impact of this change is likely to be felt far beyond the Foundation itself, affecting the types of organizations that private Jewish foundations fund, the aims of funding, and the way that foundations interact with grantees and other organizations such as federations.

**New Target: Synagogues**

The KSI represents a significant shift in the Foundation’s strategy for change in the Jewish community. Private Jewish foundations rarely provide funding for individual synagogues. Although the Koret Foundation has funded synagogue-based projects in the past, the KSI places the synagogue at the center of the change effort.

At the same time, it is unlikely that this shift would have taken place had the Foundation not risked making several other changes in the way it operates. One major change was to design the KSI with the aim of enhancing the synagogues as institutions. While Koret has always envisioned the KSI’s ultimate goal as affecting the lives of individual Jews, the Foundation has been clear in recognizing that to do this it must help synagogues become more effective institutions.

**New Way of Working for Koret**

The KSI has led Koret to modify its usual way of making grants. Koret’s grantmaking normally entails reviewing proposals submitted by potential grantees. The Foundation’s role is largely reactive, responding to needs identified by the grantees. The conception and execution of the KSI represents a dramatically different model. Koret’s chairman and professional staff were intimately involved in conceiving of the Initiative.
Extending and Expanding the Initiative

The Koret Foundation has also broken new ground by extending the grant period from three years to seven years. It is extremely unusual for Koret, other foundations, or federation to prolong funding for innovative projects. Such projects are usually conceived of as requiring “seed money” for an initial period, after which the grantees must secure new sources of funding.

Though Koret funding for years four through seven will decrease, obligating the synagogues to find alternate funding, the time extension and the additional funds are both noteworthy because they manifest the Foundation’s desire to spread and intensify the KSI’s impact on the local Jewish community.

The extended funding could have a ripple effect on local Jewish philanthropy. The federation’s endowment program, which funds innovative projects, does not often grant for more than two years. It is possible that the experience of the KSI could influence the endowment program to modify its seed funding practices.

In addition, the Foundation has voted to expand the KSI to include four new synagogues in each of the three additional years. This increase in coverage is another interesting reversal of most foundation (and federation) funding strategies. Rather than merely ending the project, Koret has opted to expand the KSI’s reach from four to 16 synagogues, even as it progressively diminishes its funding to the original four. By year seven, these four synagogues will be funding their participation in the KSI program without the Foundation’s aid.

Involving Federation

Another major breakthrough that Koret has achieved through the KSI is the search for a partnership with federation in extending and expanding the KSI. Koret’s lay leadership and staff have been working with the participating rabbis to forge a partnership with the federation. Again, this strategy suggests that Koret believes that the KSI is so important locally and nationally that collaborating for the common good should be a primary focus of all Jewish institutions.

In San Francisco few private foundations have worked closely on jointly funded projects. While more common in other communities, foundation-federation partnerships here remain rare. The enormous growth of private Jewish foundations, coupled with the increasing wealth of federation endowment programs, make foundation-federation partnerships potentially the most powerful instrument for funding programmatic and institutional transformation in the Jewish community.

Through the KSI, the Koret Foundation is transforming itself and the Jewish community’s funding environment even as the KSI has influenced the local and even national Jewish
CONCLUSION

The KSI has had a significant impact on the individuals participating in programming it has sponsored, on the synagogues as institutions, and on the Koret Foundation and the funding environment in the Jewish community. Thus, the KSI has made inroads toward enhancing Jewish life at various levels, from the most intimate (individual spirituality, knowledge of Judaism, family observance) to the primary institution that links individuals into a community and provides them with opportunities for Jewish learning and practice (the synagogue) to the funding institutions that shape individuals’ and synagogues’ possibilities (foundations and federations).

Through the KSI the synagogues have become more effective vehicles for generating Jewish community. The synagogues’ programming has touched members and nonmembers, making synagogue participation more attractive to both. At the same time, the communities that the synagogues are creating have become more inclusive and more directly serve women, young single adults, empty nesters, seniors, and others who are often underserved. While much remains to be done to make the synagogue more welcoming, the KSI programming as a whole has made a powerful statement of inclusion.

Broadening and strengthening Jewish community through the synagogue is especially important in the Bay Area, given the high percentage of Jews here who were born and raised elsewhere. The national trend toward settlement in areas of sparse Jewish population makes the KSI experience relevant to the American Jewish community as a whole. Moreover, much of the KSI programming that was not directly aimed at community-building in fact did produce a greater sense of community among participants. While perhaps obvious, it is worth stating that Jewish learning and general participation in synagogue life will be greater when individuals feel that they are part of a community, a setting in which they are known and in which their involvement is valued. Thus, community-building is valuable in and of itself, while at the same time facilitating Jewish learning, Jewish observance, and participation in Jewish organizations.

Enriching Jews’ lives through the KSI has entailed strengthening the synagogues. To some degree the participating synagogues made conscious adjustments to the changed conditions brought about by the KSI, and in other cases institutional changes were an unintended consequence of the KSI. These changes—which differed in degree, pace, and nature among the four synagogues—have helped the synagogues become stronger organizations, better able to fulfill their mission.

The KSI has also involved the Koret Foundation in a process of redefining its operations. This process has important implications for the Jewish community. The Koret Foundation has
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PHILANTHROPY • VOLUNTEERISM
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