



Myers JDC
Brookdale

The Kaplan Leadership Initiative

**Evaluation Report:
Findings from the Follow-up
of the First Cohort (2018-2019)
And Second Cohort (2019-2020)**

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Abstract

Background

The Kaplan Leadership Initiative (KLI) is the first international JDC program that has set itself the goal of developing young leadership in Jewish communities in Europe, the former Soviet Union (FSU) and Latin America (LATAM). The program is designed for professionals in mid-level positions in Jewish communities who aspire to strengthen their leadership skills and increase their impact within their organizations and communities. The program focuses on providing knowledge, skills and tools in four areas: community development, leadership, Jewish content and context, and management.

Goals

This report summarizes the findings of the follow-up study of the First and Second Cohorts of the program. The study sought to determine whether program graduates are still working in the Jewish community, if they have changed their roles since graduation, if they use the knowledge, skills and tools they gained through the program, and the extent to which they are staying in touch with each other.

Methods

The follow-up for Cohort 1 graduates was conducted through semi-structured Zoom interviews in English and Russian (N=23). An online self-administered survey was used for Cohort 2 graduates in English, Russian and Spanish (N=42). Research staff also sought information about the non-respondents from program staff.

Findings

Many similarities were found between Cohort 1 and 2 graduates. The vast majority indicated that they continue to work in the Jewish community, mostly in the same organization and in the same capacity as when they participated in the program. Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, all program graduates working in the Jewish community maintained their positions or were promoted. While adapting to the health crisis, many graduates developed new skills.

Graduates reported using the knowledge, skills and tools they acquired in the areas of management and leadership in their daily work, but in the areas of community development and Jewish content and context they reported less

use. Most graduates are part of regional networks which serve as platforms for communication and friendship, both social and professional.

Graduates found the establishment of a global alumni network desirable and expressed interest in participating in such a network in order to be updated on areas of practice of fellow alumni and to benefit from mutual learning and collaboration. Graduates of Cohort 2 seem to be more committed to the global network than their predecessors.

Recommendations

This report offers several recommendations for improvement derived from the findings of the follow-up concerning selection of program participants, expertise in delivering the program, refining program content, supporting graduates after the program ends, and the methods and content conducive to building the global alumni network.

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1. Background

The Kaplan Leadership Initiative (Kaplan Program) is the first JDC global program that aims to provide the necessary knowledge, skills, tools and support for the development of leaders and managers from Jewish communities in Europe, the former Soviet Union (FSU) and Latin America (LATAM). It is funded by Ed and Carol Kaplan, Chicago, USA.

In Europe, the Kaplan Program is part of Yesod, a partnership of the JDC, the Rothschild Foundation (Yad Hanadiv) Europe and the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation. In the FSU, the program is led by JDC-FSU. In LATAM, it is part of Leatid, the training and development arm of JDC-Latin America and the University of San Andrés. The original design of the program plan included three cohorts: 2018-19, 2019-2020, and 2021-22. Each cohort has regional programs, including three regional seminars and one global seminar in the USA in cooperation with an academic institution: For Cohorts 1 and 2, the seminar was hosted by the Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership, Chicago, USA. In between seminars, additional learning activities were conducted. The timing of Cohort 3 has been rescheduled tentatively for the end of 2021, subject to COVID-19 considerations.

Kaplan Program fellows are mid-level Jewish professionals who aspire to increase their impact within their organizations and communities through enhanced management and leadership skills in the context of Jewish life. The program focuses on four areas: leadership, community development, Jewish content and context, and management. These are adapted to local culture, priorities and other characteristics.

2. Evaluation Goals

This evaluation aims to examine the implementation and organization of the Kaplan Program and the extent to which it achieves its objectives. At this stage, the evaluation examines the achievement of its ultimate goals: Graduates' continuing commitment to work within the Jewish community, their impact within their organizations, their use of program-acquired knowledge, skills and tools to strengthen their professional activities, and the establishment of contact and networking among program graduates. It is important to note that the study cannot point to direct causal links between program effectiveness and its graduates' present roles.

The follow-up of graduates of Cohort 1 (which included fellows from Europe and the FSU) aimed to map the career path of graduates and their involvement in the Jewish community and in the fellow network two years after graduation.

The follow-up of graduates of Cohort 2 (which included fellows from Europe, the FSU and LATAM) aimed to examine whether graduates were still working in the Jewish community, if so, in what positions, whether they were making use of program-acquired knowledge, skills and tools, and whether they were actively engaging with each other one year after graduation.

This is a formative evaluation that seeks to improve various program components while evaluating the program through close teamwork with program staff. The purpose of this report is to summarize the findings of the follow-ups, to improve alumni network activities, and to prepare to receive Cohort 3.

This report includes three sections:

1. The findings of the follow-up study of Cohort 1
2. The findings of the follow-up study of Cohort 2
3. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
4. Recommendations and issues for further consideration

3. The Findings of the Follow-up Study of Cohort 1

3.1 Methodology

In order to map graduates' positions and involvement in the Jewish community, we conducted semi-structured interviews in English and Russian with Cohort 1 graduates in January-March, 2021. Collecting data during a global pandemic was challenging, but eventually we obtained a response rate of 82%, 23 of the 28 graduates. Fourteen of the responders were from Europe and nine were from the FSU. Basic information about the current employment of the five non-responders was obtained through program staff (N=28).

The evaluation focused on four main topics: Graduates' employment by, or voluntary association with the Jewish community; Kaplan Program impact; the Cohort 1 regional fellow network; and the global alumni network and post-program activities. In addition, we asked the graduates about their personal and professional experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.2 Current employment

Most of the program graduates work in the Jewish community. As shown in **Table 1**, as of the time of data collection, 75% (21) of the graduates were working in the Jewish community; 46% (13) were in the same position, 25% (7) had been promoted, and one graduate had moved to the same level position in a different Jewish community. A quarter of graduates (7) were no longer working in the Jewish community. Of those, 18% (5) were working outside the Jewish community and 7% (2) were unemployed.

Comparing between the regions, a higher proportion of graduates from the FSU have stayed in the position they filled during their program participation: 62% (8), as compared to 34% (5) among their European peers. The difference might be explained by the difference in employment opportunities in the respective regions. In Europe, there is a greater variety of employment opportunities in and out of the Jewish community than in the FSU. The difference might also be explained by differences in age and position. The European graduates are younger and initially filled lower management positions, perhaps giving them more room to advance in their organizations or elsewhere.

Many of the graduates who remain in the same organization and position reported that their areas of responsibility and authority have expanded without a formal promotion or salary increase. Several graduates also took on additional roles.

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, graduates made many changes in their work methods and took on new tasks. (See section 5.)

We asked the four graduates who were unemployed or no longer work in the Jewish community whether they were engaged in voluntary service in the community (The fifth graduate was unavailable to be interviewed.) All four were involved in the community in a committed, voluntary position. Their areas of volunteerism were in most cases their own initiatives, which they continued to develop and promote: a Beit Midrash for young people, an art festival for young Jewish artists, and a collaboration between a Cohort 1 graduate from Europe and a Cohort 2 graduate from LATAM to create an online parent training platform.

Table 1: Current employment Cohort 1 (N=28), percentages and numbers

	Total	Europe	FSU
N	100% (28)	15	13
In the Jewish community, same organization, same position	46% (13)	34% (5)	62% (8)
In the Jewish community, promoted	25% (7)	34% (5)	15% (2)
In the Jewish community, same level position, new organization	3% (1)	6% (1)	-
Working outside the Jewish community	18% (5)	13% (2)	23% (3)
Unemployed	7% (2)	13% (2)	-

3.3 Program Impact

The effects of the Kaplan Program, as perceived by Cohort 1 respondents two years after graduation, are:

- Empowerment and personal development
- Use of knowledge, skills and tools
- Deeper understanding of the profession and the broad context in which Jewish professionals function
- Belonging to a peer group

Empowerment and personal development

The participants reported that the program had a great influence on them, increasing their self-confidence and their belief in their ability to achieve professional growth.



The program changed my whole way of thinking. It was a year of analysis and thinking, how a community should be and how it functions, how my community is. Everything I do now is because of this process”.

Several European graduates said that they gained new skills, expanded their professional fields of practice, and took on additional roles in the Jewish community. One became a guide for “The March of the Living” program held in Poland. Another established an annual conference, the Jewish Women Empowerment Summit of Europe, and one graduate took on a part time job as a program developer for a Jewish heritage organization. Others did such things as working in a Jewish summer camp and mentoring a young Jewish community professional.

Use of knowledge, skills and tools

Graduates reported having gained knowledge, skills and tools through their participation in the program. They provided numerous examples of the new proficiencies they used in their daily work, including:

- **Management:** Work planning - strategic planning, work plans, contact mapping, budgeting, social media (Facebook, Instagram, Telegram), communication and public speaking.
- **Leadership:** Delegation of authority, followership. A few graduates specifically referred to the insights and inspiration they gained from Prof. Hal Lewis’s lectures at Spertus.
- **Community development:** The life cycle of a community.

Several graduates emphasized the uniqueness of the knowledge, skills and tools they acquired, which showed them that there are many ways to introduce innovations in their field as well.

Many graduates said they kept their program notebook and materials within close reach and often referred to them.

It is important to note that only a few graduates mentioned using the knowledge or skills in the area of Jewish content and context.

Several graduates noted that after graduation, they continued to look for opportunities for further study and professional development. Such opportunities included participation in “Limmud”¹ conferences, mentoring and coaching provided by Yesod and other organizations, programs for managers of non-profit organizations, project management courses and more. Another theme which arose from graduate responses was that they felt participation in the Kaplan Program enhanced their professional prestige:

¹ [Limmud](#) is a British-Jewish educational charity which produces a large annual winter festival and several other regional events throughout the year on the theme of Jewish learning.

“ The idea of a Jewish professional community, and the way the profession is viewed, was very significant. I come from a different field, and when I moved to work in the community people looked at me like I was down a level. What Kaplan did was change the stereotype for me: you are an expert and entrepreneur like in other fields. It was a dramatic change for me. At that point I was thinking of leaving work in the community and one of the reasons I stayed was the timing of the Kaplan Program in my life.”

Deeper understanding of the role of Jewish professionals in a broader context

Graduates pointed to several insights they gained about the Jewish community. They felt that they acquired a broader picture of the regional context in which their communities exist, a better understanding of the commonalities and differences between various Jewish communities, and their shared challenges, such as the tensions in many communities between the older and younger Jewish community leadership, regard for tradition, and fear of change, as opposed to modern thought, renewal, progress, innovation, and the need for enhanced professional training in the field of Jewish community development.

“ For me it was an initial experience of being exposed to a variety of Jewish professionals and recognizing that there are common challenges and a European perspective to all of this. It's not like talking to people from your organization.”

“ Many Jewish organizations are outdated, there is no contemporary managerial thinking -creating impact, strategic thinking, sharing processes, etc.”

Belonging to a peer group

Connecting to their peer Jewish professionals was reported to provide support, opportunities for collaborations and sharing of experiences, an increased sense of belonging to the group and a decreased feeling of professional loneliness.

In conclusion, one of the graduates summed up the impact of the program:

“ Beyond the tools and knowledge we have learned, what is fascinating is the process. As time goes on, I see the wide impact beyond the concrete tools. The program has opened up a whole lot of things for me: further learning, participation in additional training programs, new initiatives and also significant promotion in my organization”.

3.4 Cohort 1 Network

Most graduates reported being on friendly terms with several other graduates from their region. A small number of graduates from Europe and the FSU reported that they maintain cross-regional professional relationships.

Several graduates reported engagement in collaborations such as participation in online webinars for another graduate's community, providing assistance in organizing seminars for another graduate, and as mentioned above, collaboration on a joint project of online activities for young parents initiated by a graduate of Cohort 1 and one from Cohort 2, that renewed their previous friendship after they met at the alumni network's webinar.

Many European graduates commented that although they were not currently in touch with many of their peers, they had confidence in the bond formed between them and their ability to make use of their connection with them when needed.

While graduates from Europe noted their ongoing feeling of connection with Yesod and the Kaplan Program, graduates from the FSU said they did not feel a substantial connection to JDC-FSU and the Kaplan Program after their graduation. This may be because of the program staff turnover in JDC-FSU between Cohorts 1 and 2, and the lack of contact between graduates and the new staff until the establishment of the Kaplan Program's global alumni network program.

3.5 Global Alumni Network and Post-Program Activities

Global Alumni Network

The Kaplan Program global alumni network program that was established at the beginning of 2021, includes a group module (global group and regional groups) which offers an option to take part in multi-regional task forces that develop ideas and activities for the global group and quarterly global webinars, as well as a personal module which offers individual coaching.

Graduates said that they valued networking and the promotion of close connections between program participants because it fosters continued collegiality, the sharing of knowledge and a sense of group identity among Jewish professionals. Some attributed equal importance to maintaining a global alumni network and conducting another cohort. They offered several suggestions for improving the alumni network, which are presented in the last section of this report.

Post-program involvement by the respective operating organizations in the lives of graduates: The operating methods of Yesod (Europe) and JDC-FSU (FSU) differed. Yesod's stated mission is to strengthen European Jewry by investing in key individual Jewish community professionals and educators to create a sustainable and meaningful European Jewish community life.² To achieve this goal, Yesod's investment in Kaplan Program graduates continues after graduation. Graduates expressed great appreciation of Yesod's sustained personal contact with them, assistance with their further professional development, creation of new opportunities for professional study, mentoring and counseling, and enrichment, which also included gifts of educational books at Chanukah. Yesod's investment in the "human capital" of its graduates reflects a fundamental element of its long-term mission. As noted above, the lack of connection between the program and the FSU group can be attributed to turnover in the FSU staff. Yesod's post-program investments and continuing relationship with graduates can serve as a model for other operating organizations.

² <https://yesodeurope.eu/about/>

4. The Findings of the Follow-up Study of Cohort 2

4.1 Methodology

An online self-administered survey was conducted among graduates of Cohort 2 in March-May 2021 to examine whether its graduates are still working in the Jewish community, and if so, in which positions; and whether graduates are making use of program-acquired knowledge, skills and tools, and are actively engaging with one another. The response rate was 86% (36 of 42 graduates). Basic information about the current employment of the 6 non-responders was obtained by program staff (N=42). In addition, we asked the graduates about their personal and professional experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.2 Current Employment

As shown in **Table 2**, as of the time of the survey, most program graduates continued to work in the Jewish community. Of those, 67% (28) were in the same position, and 19% (8) had been promoted. Ten percent (4) of the graduates no longer worked in the Jewish community. Of those, three worked outside the Jewish community, and one was unemployed.

Table 2: Current employment Cohort 2 (N=42), Percentages and Numbers

	Total	Europe	FSU	LATAM
N	100% (42)	15	14	13
In the Jewish community, same organization, same position	67% (28)	52% (8)	71% (10)	77% (10)
In the Jewish community, promoted	19% (8)	26% (4)	21% (3)	8% (1)
In the Jewish community, same level position, new organization	5% (2)	7% (1)	7% (1)	-
Working outside the Jewish community	7% (3)	7% (1)	-	15% (2)
Unemployed	2% (1)	7% (1)	-	

Two of the four graduates who no longer work in the Jewish community completed the questionnaire. Both of them reported that they volunteer in the community sometimes. One runs activities and serves as a consultant; The other has established an online project designed to bring Jewish-Romanian music to social networks of community members.

Additional learning and training

Twelve graduates of Cohort 2 reported that they have participated in additional professional training since the program ended. The training included management, Jewish studies, community development and leadership skills. Two graduates enrolled in master's degree programs, and one began studying for a doctorate. Other graduates were engaged in furthering development of their skills: mentoring, coaching and presentation skills.

4.3 Program Impact

The Kaplan Program affected graduates in different ways. We received a variety of answers to the questions "What was the most significant learning or professional experience of the program for you?" and "What is the main thing that has changed in your work as a Jewish professional?" Many graduates reported that the most significant experience was meeting each other and connecting, sharing their experiences, learning about other communities, and creating understanding of the global Jewish world:

“ As a Jewish professional, the most significant learning was (a) the interconnected way that Jewish communities work across the world (b) that we need to share our knowledge more across the entire community...”

Graduates felt that connection and a sense of belonging to the global Jewish community are important in the strengthening of their identity as Jewish professionals, and in motivating them to continue working in the community long-term, as one graduate explained:

“ I feel far more connected to the wider Jewish community. Before the program, I wasn't sure I'd stay working within the community after my current job. But I now feel a much stronger connection. Also, with the experience of COVID-19, the connection with the fellows felt incredibly important”.

Many graduates emphasized the distinct contribution of the program to raising their self-confidence and, consequently, to enhancing their personal and professional development:

“ [The program] enabled me to have time away from work and family stress and consider who I am as a leader, who I am as a manager, and gave me space to laugh and learn. It truly was incredible fellowship that I would recommend to anyone who is open to learning and developing who they are”.

The program helped some graduates think and consciously seek out their personal style as managers and leaders:

“ Before, I thought leaders should lead and set an example. Now it’s changed a little bit. Now my job as a leader is to help improve skills of others, make them feel that they are the future and that they are doing a great job. Everything about them is meaningful”.

Many graduates noted the importance of the new knowledge, skills and tools they gained, and in particular, the leadership sessions by Hal Lewis, the storytelling workshop given by Lior Shoham, and the emotional intelligence instruction offered by Kylie Eisenberg:

“ Now I can look at something like a book by Simon Sinek, or “Bowling Alone” by Robert Putnam, or use the output of the Orthodox Union’s demographic research unit in the USA and put it to good use to the extent it can be used in our context. This is partly a change of confidence, but also I think we were just given so many examples of nuggets of really useful information in many sessions during Kaplan, that I learned to find them out!”

“ I go back to different ideas and tools. My Kaplan notebook is opened a few times a month, and sometimes I consult with friends from the program about how to solve situations and many times, those skills are skills from the program. I also find myself sharing the skills and thoughts I gained in the program with colleagues”.

In addition, graduates noted the significant contribution of the mentoring and coaching they received.

Beyond changing perceptions and attitudes, the program aims to motivate participants to apply their new perceptions, knowledge, skills and tools to their work. Figure 1 presents the graduates’ reports concerning the extent to which they have applied their learning in the four core content areas – Jewish content and context, community development, management skills and leadership.

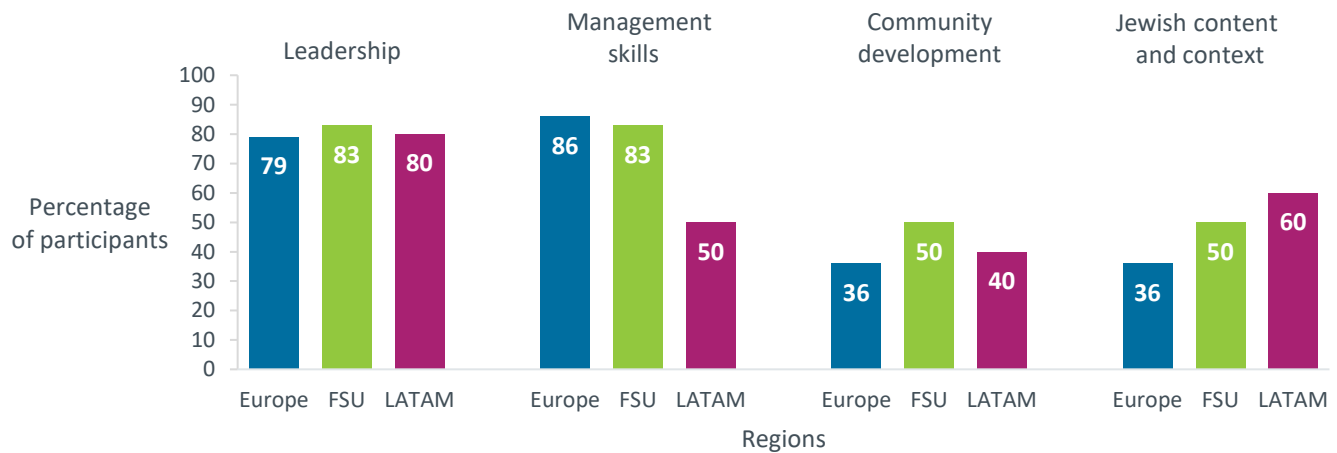
The knowledge and skills that most graduates in all the regions made use of were in the fields of leadership and management (particularly in Europe and the FSU). Since the LATAM graduates were much more experienced managers before they entered the program, it is understandable that they made less use of knowledge and skills offered by the program in that field.

The application of knowledge and skills in the field of community development was lower. This could be a result of changes and adjustments in the functioning of communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another explanation might be that consistent with the findings of previous research reports regarding the relatively

limited time devoted to the subject of community development, there was a corresponding lower application of related knowledge and skills.

Lower application rates were reported also in the field of Jewish content and context. As detailed in previous reports, integrating Jewish content in the program has been a challenge in both cohorts. Although the program’s Jewish aspect sets it apart from other leadership programs, some fellows previously reported that the program does not include enough Jewish content (especially those from LATAM). Other fellows reported that the integration of Jewish content in the program, did not feel natural, and was not always relevant to their work (FSU). The relatively high application rates reported in LATAM may be explained by the fact that some of the LATAM participants are rabbis, and others work in organizations dealing with Jewish culture.

Figure 1: Graduates’ Application of Program-Acquired Knowledge, Skills and Tools in Their Daily Work (N=36), Percentages[^]



[^] To a great extent or very great extent

We asked graduates for examples of ways in which they applied what they learned:

- Leadership:** In the field of leadership, graduates tended to indicate the use of specific program-acquired tools or content like delegating authority and using different leadership styles, along with the more general contribution to their self-confidence and personal development of their leadership qualities:

“ New tools help me in guiding, leading and motivating my team to do better and develop. I give them more space for initiative and development”. “I think the program has made me far more confident as a leader. I think it helped me understand the difference between leadership and management and that some people are incredible leaders, some are incredible managers, and some are both...”.

- **Management:** Graduates reported many examples. In particular, they mentioned management knowledge, skills and tools, including teamwork, planning, negotiation, management style:

“ I consider more often the style of management and how this might impact those I manage”.

“ I also apply skills when negotiating with colleagues and partners to strengthen my activities”.

- **Community development:** Understanding the local community and the role of their organization in the local context:

“ I have a better understanding of the Jewish community of [the city], the role of my organization in this community, about the establishment of inter-organizational ties, etc.”

- **Jewish content:** using Jewish texts and contents in different aspects of their work:

“ I decided to implement Jewish content into the programs that I am responsible for much more than before”.

4.4 Cohort 2 Network

We examined the relationships of Kaplan Program graduates with peers from their region and from other regions and asked them about the nature of their interactions.

Nearly all graduates reported that they are in touch with their peers from their region (92%). They reported few relationships with peers in other regions: 20% of graduates said that there is a Europe-FSU connection, 25% said that there is a Europe-LATAM connection and 36% said that there is an FSU-LATAM connection. It is possible that once the global alumni network develops more momentum, the extent of peer relationships between regions will increase.

As seen in **Table 3**, most peer interactions are for friendship or information exchange. There are fewer interactions for consultation and promotion of joint projects. FSU graduates reported more connections of all kinds compared to graduates from the other regions. Many graduates from LATAM reported their involvement in a joint project they created following the Kaplan Program, a network of Jewish professionals across LATAM region.

Table 3: Interaction with the Network (N=36), Percentages and Numbers

	Total	Europe	FSU	LATAM
N	36	12	14	10
Personal\friendship	67% (24)	64% (8)	75% (10)	60% (6)
Exchanging information	61% (22)	42% (5)	75% (10)	70% (7)
Consultation	47% (17)	29% (3)	75% (10)	40% (4)
Promoting a joint issue\project	36% (13)	21% (2)	42% (6)	50% (5)

4.5 Global Alumni Network

After the conclusion of Cohort 2, the Kaplan Program team decided to devote effort in the operation of a global alumni network. Most of the graduates participated in at least one network activity, 86% in total: all graduates from LATAM (100%), and most of the European (83%) and FSU graduates (77%). However, only a few of the graduates reported that the activities were relevant to them: 33% in Europe, 30% in LATAM and 14% of graduates in FSU.

We asked an open-ended question, “What do you think could improve the networking between the program fellows?” Graduates responded by specifying different types of joint activities. In addition to an in-person reunion, graduates suggested different online activities, like video calls, webinars and workshops. Graduates reported that they want more time to share and exchange professional experiences, as well as to receive assistance in the development of inter-regional projects. In addition, they stressed the importance of promoting “communities of practice” working in accordance with common interests and specializations:



I'm excited to see how the post- program project will go for alumni. The topics seem interesting and could be very helpful. I also wonder whether communities of practice could be formed (e.g., those working with youth, those working in community orgs, those working in schools) and sharing information, etc. I don't know how relevant it would be, but potentially, it could be something to pilot”.

Beyond that, graduates suggested initially defining the objectives of the global alumni network and learning from other successful alumni networks to determine the structure and content of the Kaplan Program global alumni network. Further recommendations are detailed at the last section of this report.

5. The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected graduates of Cohorts 1 and 2 on personal, familial, and professional levels. As the health situation in the world changed, graduates and their families were not immune from illness, physical, economic, social and emotional loss, and feelings of loneliness, uncertainty and stress. At the same time, these challenges helped them discover new understandings about themselves – personally and professionally. Despite the major impact of the pandemic, the positions of nearly all graduates working in the Jewish community before the pandemic were not affected. Graduates harnessed their resourcefulness, courage, initiative and leadership in leading their work teams, organizations and communities. The graduates coped with new tasks providing emergency care to their people and also adapted their routine ways of working due to social distancing and quarantines.

The world's shift to online activities required graduates to invest time and effort in adapting to the new reality, learning how to maintain the connection and involvement of community members and the involvement of specific groups within the community, such as college students and the elderly. Working with older people who were not skilled in technology or did not have the necessary equipment was especially challenging. Remote work also presented managerial challenges, including maintaining personal contact with staff and promoting employee morale and motivation.

Graduates reported that during this challenging period, they valued their relationships with peers from the Kaplan Program, the ability to exchange information and solutions with each other, increased self-confidence, and a newly enlarged set of practical tools, especially those involving working online.

Additional unexpected positive effects of the pandemic were the increase in the scope of participants beyond the community in that people from distant places could participate in online programs, the ability to offer services online and developing fundraising skills despite isolation lock down conditions.

6. Recommendations and Issues for Further Consideration

Based on all the study findings, we recommend action in the following areas:

6.1 Selection of participants: Educators or managers – What serves the goals of the program?

The program caters to professionals in two fields, education and management. These roles serve different functions within the Jewish community and affect the perceptions, expectations, program requirements, and career trajectory of fellows. While education-centered fellows usually have a clearer professional vocation and are interested in knowledge, tools and values from the field of education, the transition to the non-Jewish world of employment is complex and less suitable for them. In contrast, the management-centered fellows' career path is less obvious, the transferability of their skills to the non-Jewish world is less complicated, and their motivation to continue to advance professionally within the Jewish community is often conflicted:



A person who works in a Jewish organization can be in another non-Jewish organization, if he feels dissatisfied and unappreciated, the added value of working in a Jewish organization is not always enough.”

The Kaplan Program is designed for mid-level Jewish professionals in managerial positions, and initially, it is advisable to identify program candidates who meet this definition. However, recognizing that the reality is more complex, and many fellows are education-oriented, this difference between potential participants should be acknowledged and addressed, beginning with program development to meet the needs and interests of a diverse array of participants.

6.2 Strengthening the expertise of the program team and supporting graduates

The program for Cohort 1 was run by two organizations that are different in nature. In Europe, the program was run by Yesod, most of whose activities entail Jewish study programs and training courses. The JDC-FSU organization focuses on other kinds of programming, although professionals with the necessary expertise have been recruited to run the Kaplan Program. One of the differences between Yesod and JDC-FSU may be reflected in the connection the respective organizations maintain with graduates, and as a result, in the graduates' sense of

connection to the program and their colleagues after two years. While JDC-FSU maintained only minimal contact with graduates because of staff turnover and other possible factors, Yesod maintained continuous contact with graduates by means of newsletters, educational gifts, on-going coaching, mentoring and professional guidance. Consequently, the FSU graduates feel disconnected from the program, compared to their European peers.

We suggest two possible courses of action for JDC-FSU. If it is to serve a more influential role in serving Jewish community leaders, we recommend that it cultivate staff expertise to emphasize strong professional and personnel development of fellows and to maintain effective contact with graduates as part of the alumni network, beyond offering them activities. Another option is to change the operating structure of the program so that responsibility for program content and continuing graduate development is delegated to an organization with specialized expertise in these areas.

6.3 Recommendations regarding program content

The Jewish community: Program staff must continue to develop greater expertise to present more content concerning community challenges arising from the characteristics and structure of Jewish communities in terms of their different geographical and demographic attributes, historical and religious roots, and present cultural and political realities.

Applied learning: The graduates reported applying their program-acquired knowledge mainly in the areas of management and leadership, as compared to the areas of Jewish context and content, and community development. This finding is directly related to previous evaluation findings in which participants indicated that they would like to expand learning these areas in the program.

Implementing knowledge, skills and tools: Some graduates need consulting and other assistance in harnessing program-acquired knowledge, skills and tools to the specific challenges of their organizations and communities. This need should be addressed during the program and through post-program follow-up activities.

Investing in the creation of a global network: At the Global Seminar, preparation should be undertaken to establish connections between fellows from different regions through working in small groups, peer learning, devoting time to the "peer fair", and developing their English communication skills. This investment will increase the chances of establishing a post-program fellow network.

6.4 After graduation

Maintaining regional networks: Along with the important activities of the global network, it also remains important to maintain the regional fellow groups.

This study revealed that graduates maintain friendly relationships to a greater extent than professional connections with their peers. Perhaps assigning joint projects during the program will strengthen both social and professional relationships. It would be worthwhile to examine the factors which naturally led to the establishment of the LATAM regional network of professionals, in order to enhance the development of the networks in other regions.

Adjusting to graduates' post-program needs: Opportunities must be created to enable graduates to continue to get to know each other, to update each other and share their professional experience. Some graduates have expressed interest in taking part in joint projects and working in small work groups in various fields of interest.

6.5 Alumni global network goals

The purpose of the global network and its plan of action: Graduates desire a clear picture of the goals, objectives and program structure for the global network in order to decide the extent to which they wish to participate in it and incorporate its activities into their professional lives.

Global network content:

- **Getting to know fellows:** The greatest need expressed by almost all graduates is to get to know all the members of the network and their areas of work. This acquaintance is important for the sharing of knowledge and experience concerning common issues and challenges. One graduate suggested the circulation of a newsletter featuring information about fellow graduates, their professional challenges and achievements.
- **Peer learning:** Graduates expressed a need to learn from their peers and to think together about various topics, such as coping with COVID-19 challenges, involving the service users in developing new activities, and establishing community teamwork. Graduates expressed interest in adapting to a post-COVID era, one which is likely to incorporate "hybrid" methods of physical and online activities; and continuing the session they attended at their global seminar. It would be helpful to learn not only from the successes, but the failures of their peers.

Meeting structure: During peer learning and brainstorming sessions concerning common areas of interest or shared dilemmas, it is advisable to conduct activities in small groups because graduates said they find it difficult to express themselves in large groups.

Group integration: When activities involve individuals from different regions and cohorts, the level of trust and sense of intimacy that might exist in regional groups or in the same cohort, is not present. In settings in which there is less familiarity among participants, it is less advisable to include topics that might involve exposing weaknesses and difficulties (such as during the Hanukkah workshop). In addition, several graduates from the FSU reported that they find it difficult to express themselves freely in English in zoom sessions, especially in the presence of fluent English speakers.

Scheduling of activities: It is difficult to find a time which suits all potential participants. Graduates live in different time zones. While some can participate in activities during their workday, others are available only in the evening or on weekends. It may be worthwhile to vary the timing of activities to enable as many people as possible to participate and perhaps set the date of future meetings according to the schedules of the people interested in participating, rather than having people choose what to attend according to a pre-determined date.