THE iCENTER FOR ISRAEL EDUCATION

IMPACT STUDY, 2018

RMC
RESEARCH

Acknowledgements

RMC would like to express deepest gratitude to the following people who generously shared their time and insights in answering questions about the history, impacts, and future of The iCenter:

Gal Ben Shimol, Jewish Agency for Israel, New York, New York, USA

Cindy Presser Benedek, Camp B'nai Brith, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Ari Berkowicz, The iCenter, Northbrook, Illinois, USA

Aaron Bock, Birthright Israel, New York, New York, USA

David Bryfman, The Jewish Education Project, New York, New York, USA

Barry Chazan, Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership, Chicago, Illinois, USA

Hope Chernak, Atlanta Jewish Teen Initiative, Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Simcha Cohen, Herzl Camp, St. Louis Park, Minnesota, USA

Etty Dolgin, Moadon Kol Chadash, Chicago, Illinois, USA

Charles "Chip" Edelsberg, Edelsberg Consulting, San Francisco, California, USA

Joel Einleger, AVI CHAI Foundation, New York, New York, USA

Lisa Eisen, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, Washington, D.C., USA

Vanessa Erlich, Lakeside Congregation, Highland Park, Illinois, USA

Ari Feinstein, The iCenter, Northbrook, Illinois, USA

Lucy Batterman Fishbein, Temple B'nai Jershurun, Short Hills, New Jersey, USA

Lauren Cohen Fisher, Harvard University Hillel, Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Bekkah Gold, Beth El Synagogue, New Rochelle, New York, USA

Clare Goldwater, Clare Goldwater Consulting, Jerusalem, Israel

Aliza Goodman, The iCenter, Northbrook, Illinois, USA

Dvora Goodman, UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Tamir Goodman, Coolanu Israel, Jerusalem, Israel

Jan Katzew, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA

Shelley Kedar, Hillel International, Washington, D.C., USA

Ezra Kopelowitz, Research Success Technologies, Kibbutz Hannaton, Israel

David Korenthal, Combined Jewish Philanthropies, Brandeis University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Anna Langer, Israel Action Program, Hillel International, Washington, D.C., USA

Anne Lanski, The iCenter, Northbrook, Illinois, USA

Rachel Levin, Jewish Experience Center, Kehillat Israel, Pacific Palisades, California, USA

Lesley Litman, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Aleeza Lubin, B'nai B'rith Youth Organization International, Chicago, Illinois, USA

Aliza Mazor, UpStart, New York, New York, USA

Yifat Mikades, Etz Chaim Learning Center, Valley Beth Shalom, Encino, California, USA

Max Miller, Temple Emanu-El, Sandy Springs, Georgia, USA

Nasya Miller, The iCenter, Northbrook, Illinois, USA

Rachael Klein Miller, Temple Emanu-El, Sandy Springs, Georgia, USA

Dawn Bear Novicoff, Jim Joseph Foundation, San Francisco, CA, USA

Avi Orlow, Foundation for Jewish Camp, New York, New York, USA

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Executive Summary

The iCenter was created in 2008 with a bold mission: to advance excellent Israel education by serving as the national hub and catalyst for building the field. The mission is reflected in The iCenter vision:

> *We believe that education is the key to inspiring generations of Jewish youth committed to Israel and the Jewish people. Through content that draws on Israel's richness and diversity, delivered by passionate and knowledgeable educators, children develop meaningful relationships with Israel and understand Israel as core to their Jewish identities. The iCenter is the national hub and catalyst for building, shaping, and supporting the field of Israel education. We support educators across all settings and provide the tools to bring Israel into their students' lives.*

In commemoration of its tenth anniversary, The iCenter commissioned a study of its impact. RMC Research conducted this study during the spring of 2018 by interviewing 60 individuals connected to The iCenter either as a founder and/or a strategist, network partner, or alumnus of its programs. Substudies were also undertaken to gain an independent and deeper perspective on the experiences of Birthright Israel Fellows and participants in the Masters' Concentration in Israel Education.

Outcomes and impacts of The iCenter were extensive. The iCenter:
- became a national hub for Israel education;
- guided definitions of Israel education and gave it shape as a field, providing a common language, set of guiding principles, and description of standardized practices;
- changed the focus of Israel education to being about developing a relationship with Israel, its culture, people, land, and history;
- created a sense of excitement and a shift toward collective action among leaders and practitioners;
- played a key role in transforming the educational approaches used in the Birthright Israel program, day camps, day schools and other specialty groups;
- professionalized the role of Israel educator;
- created resources widely adopted or adapted by practitioners in the field;
- developed and supported alumni networks;
- provided key benefits for network partners, including increasing the sense of confidence and competence among their staff;
- had significant reach and saturation of the field; and
- put into place nearly all of the factors necessary for sustainability.

Introduction

The iCenter was created in 2008 with a bold mission: to advance excellent Israel education by serving as the national hub and catalyst for building, shaping and supporting the field. The initial vision was to have "generations of young Jews for whom Israel is an integral and inspiring component of their personal and collective Jewish identities."[1]

The need for such an organization appeared both urgent and long-term. Leaders and philanthropists noted that efforts in support of Israel education in North America were largely isolated and ambiguous in nature. There were few coordinated efforts to define the field; no real language or standards for practice; content that was disjointed with mostly discrete subject matters based on historical or current knowledge or issues; little connection with formation of Jewish identities; no strong ideological framework; misguided goals; spotty funding and philanthropic interest; few champions; and a lack of professional identity in the field among those Israel educators who were not religious leaders.

This report provides a description of The iCenter, its history and founding, its evolution, its current initiatives and activities, and its outcomes and impacts related to its founding and to each of its organizational goals. Lessons learned are listed at the end of each section.

Methodology. The report is based on 60 interviews with its founders; leaders and staff members; consultants, practitioners, and researchers in the field of Israel education; North American and Israeli Jewish education faculty at higher education institutions; leaders from partner organizations; and program alumni including iFellows (Master's Concentration in Israel Education) and Birthright Israel Fellows. Within the report, respondents are assigned to one of four categories to facilitate ease of interpretation:

1. *Founders,* who helped to develop the organization from its inception;

2. *Strategists,* who as employees, consultants, or others affiliated with The iCenter, were instrumental in developing and implementing The iCenter's three key strategies: Develop the Educators, Create the Resources, and Advance the Field;

3. *Network Partners* who as funders and leaders of collaborating organizations established a long-term relationship with The iCenter; and

4. *Alumni,* who completed the iFellows, Birthright Israel Fellows, Israel @ Camp, Infuse: Day School initiative and other professional development programs provided by The iCenter.

> **THE iCENTER VISION:**
>
> *We believe that education is the key to inspiring generations of Jewish youth committed to Israel and the Jewish people. Through content that draws on Israel's richness and diversity, delivered by passionate and knowledgeable educators, children develop meaningful relationships with Israel and understand Israel as core to their Jewish identities. The iCenter is the national hub and catalyst for building, shaping, and supporting the field of Israel education. We support educators across all settings and provide the tools to bring Israel into their students' lives.*
>
> — The iCenter website, 2018

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[1] Building and Sustaining Excellence in Israel Education.

The report also draws from multiple existing documents related to The iCenter work, including the resources developed by The iCenter and documents that helped shape its progress, such as research reports, field mapping reports, Board reports, and various documents describing the state of Israel education.

Finally, this report includes information from observations of The iCenter in action during the 2018 Birthright Israel Fellows training and informal interviews with its participants. This information reflects an independent verification of the interviewees' reports about professional development and its quality and impact. The vignette describing the training is contained in the "Developing the People" portion of the study.

Data from the interviews were analyzed to identify range of responses, trends among respondents by respondent type for each type of question, and illustrative quotes. Quotes are identified by category of respondent (e.g., Founder, Alumni) rather than by name of the respondent to preserve confidentiality.

Study limitations. This report was conceptualized to be an impact study and both outcomes and impacts have been derived through an analysis of perceptions shared during interviews with respondents. The sample was identified by The iCenter and supplemented with a few individuals who participated in the Birthright Israel Fellows training.

Information from some respondents, such as the founders and strategists, was primarily used to describe the initiation of the organization and its evolution, to identify impact on the field, and to suggest ideas for future growth. Information from other respondents, most notably alumni and network partners, was used to document direct outcome and impact from the perspective of participants in events or partners who observed changes in their staff or service recipients. To this extent, outcome, impact, and lessons learned were captured systematically and can be generalized to the groups that respondents represent. In addition, the triangulation of the data (hearing similar responses from multiple stakeholder types and through documentation and observations) indicates that the data are valid and reliable.

However, a systematic study of a large sample of end-users (e.g., large numbers of educators that participated in the trainings; individuals who downloaded the resources from the website) or the youth impacted by educators was not conducted. Developing a study with these types of samples would be helpful in being able to generalize findings from this report and documenting outcomes on educators and youth. Challenges in conducting an impact study using this type of research design are daunting and possibly prohibitive: there are many sources of influence on an educators' practice and on youth participants, so the impact of The iCenter in particular would be difficult to ascertain. Nonetheless, a study with a greater and more systematic sampling frame would increase confidence in the generalizability of the results found here.

The Origins of the iCenter

In this section, the need for a national hub for Israel education and the process used to establish The iCenter are described. Challenges in developing a field-building initiative, along with the conceptual tools used to drive decision making, early advances in field building, and outcomes/impacts of the first phase of The iCenter's development are discussed. Lessons learned are also presented.

Need for a national hub. The iCenter was established to meet an urgent need in the field. Several foundations, notably the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Foundation, the Jim Joseph Foundation, the Marcus Foundation, and previously the Gilo Foundation noted concerns about the disconnectedness of American Jewry and especially the youth to Israel. Opportunities to integrate Israel education into Jewish education were inconsistent and generally confined to lessons about historical facts, discussions of current conflicts, or brief trips to Israel, all of which yielded a limited view of the vibrant Israeli culture and people. Curricula about Israel at the time typically centered on the land and its history rather than on the learner and their relationship with Israel.

We wanted a cutting edge organization that would in turn create a field, an educational vision of transforming Israel education and develop professionals to work within the field, that would create a framework that emphasizes education rather than politics. To have people committed to Israel.
— Founder

Further, there was no real "field" of Israel education, but rather many discrete initiatives and activities with no shared philosophies on how to build Jewish identity, no common language, no standards for practice, and no routine ways to convene and collaborate. The founding partner foundations agreed that education was the key to creating a field and transforming practice. They believed that sufficient and reliable funding, the right leadership, and a pathway that emphasized relationships with Israel as foundational to Jewish identities were the best way to start. Founders decided to create a new organization rather than fund an existing center for the task.

Shaping the mission. To prepare for the creation of a center, consultants engaged in mapping the field of Israel education to understand where and how a center could play an important role and to set priorities and establish early parameters for the work. Many thought leaders were consulted. Key early decisions included:
- Need for a North American pre-collegiate focus;
- Independence from other organizations;
- Use of research to inform decisions; and
- Strong leadership.

The funders and founders agreed to put the right people in place, create a strong mission and vision, and allow the new leaders to work with key influencers to develop strategies and tactics to coalesce, enhance, and advance Israel education as a field. They generally established a "no advocacy" approach as a parameter given the preferences of one of the funders.

Leadership. After a search and multiple interviews, the founders chose Anne Lanski as the driving force. Ms. Lanski was chosen for many reasons: her expertise, experience, and tireless devotion to Israel education; her background as an educator; her history of founding and scaling up a successful Jewish organization; her connectedness with many of the thought leaders in the field; her ability to establish a strong team; and her highly collaborative nature. Because she was chosen to create and lead the center, The iCenter was established in Northbrook, Illinois near where she resided.

All the founders recognized that to be successful, The iCenter would need to be strategic in its approach, establish its credibility quickly, and be perceived as addressing a specific need in the field rather than usurping anyone else's work. Thus, the initiation needed to include "the smartest and wisest people" in the field and bridge-building to other organizations. Ms. Lanski gathered thought leaders from across the field of Jewish education into an "iTeam" to shape the development of The iCenter.

Once leaders and some senior staff were on board, the initial thinking, which was to focus on high school, evolved to much more ambitious goals. After multiple visioning papers, thought sessions, research, and dialogues with leaders in the field, it became clear that The iCenter would best articulate the mission and vision if it intentionally engaged in a field-building process.

Early challenges. Founders interviewed for the study noted that many challenges occurred during the start-up phase. One major challenge was that some individuals from within the field wanted a program, a curriculum, or simple resources, all of which represented a much narrower view of what needed to be done than The iCenter envisioned. Some wanted to concentrate on Israel advocacy. Some believed that it would be difficult to overcome the "overly romanticized" view of Israel that many youth and adults held. Still others said that the Jewish community was highly polarized in its views about Israel and achieving consensus about anything that had to do with Israel was difficult.

Along the way, there were differences in opinion about the language to use, the philosophy to promote, the target audiences, the best ways to evolve, and the priorities. By nearly all accounts, there were "bumpy" times but still consistent forward movement. Some attributed the positive evolution to the single-mindedness and resolve of the leaders and consultants; some said it was

> *It was pretty clear that the long-term need required education and someone who could be a passionate and forceful leader. The field was under-capitalized. The Foundations came together and decided that we needed to achieve results, both in terms of changing the field and impacting youth. We needed thoughtful strategies, champions, and a lot of capacity building.* — Founder

> *It felt like an historic opportunity. These two foundations were willing to be bold and make a strategic investment.* — Founder

> *We wanted to establish Israel as the center of Jewish American study, create a language and conceptual foundation, and curricularize Israel education in formal and informal Jewish educational studies. We wanted The iCenter to be able to negotiate the different perceptions of Israel in order to present a more complex and contextualized understanding of Israel among North American Jews.* — Founder

the thought and intentionality that went into all decision making; and some said it was the "intimidating nature of the assembled intellectual power." Most agreed that the strategies identified as the powerful levers for developing and advancing a field were the right ones and that their worth was quickly proven.

The task was bigger than any one of us. At the beginning, it was all about the iTeam, the brain trust. It couldn't just be about teaching Israel, either. It had to be about the learner, about Jewish identity, and not about content or curriculum. Ultimately, it had to be about field building. — Founder

The foundation for field building. The visioning work that took place during the initiation of The iCenter culminated in an ambitious goal of building and advancing the field of Israel education. Field building, according to the Bridgepan Group (2009),[2] requires coordinating efforts of multiple organizations and individuals around a common systemic goal of creating infrastructure and practice and fostering the conditions necessary for them to be achieved. In framing its field-building approach, The iCenter made extensive use of writings by Fine (2001)[3] who summarized the research and identified 11 essential elements of a field. These included:

1. *Developing identity as a field:* distinct and recognized practice that can be clearly described.

2. *Increasing the knowledge base:* credible evidence of results derived from research and practice and access by practitioners to obtain results.

3. *Developing the workforce and leadership:* practitioners, researchers, practitioner-educators comprise a workforce; structures and institutions are created/developed for training, credentialing, supporting, and retaining the workforce; incentives and organizations are available for leadership development; and strategies are in place to attract a workforce reflecting those served through the practice.

WHAT IS A FIELD?

A community of organizations and individuals:

- *Working together towards a common goal; and*
- *Using a set of common approaches to achieving the goal.*
    — Bridgespan Group, 2009, p.2

4. *Establishing standard practice:* descriptions of standard practice that meet an acceptable level of quality; a common language used to describe the practice; interventions modeling best practice that demonstrate a capacity to achieve outcomes in culturally and developmentally responsive ways.

5. *Enhancing practice settings:* places appropriate and equipped for practice.

6. *Fostering information exchange:* vehicles for collecting, analyzing, and disseminating information and knowledge, such as newsletters, conferences, journals, websites, and graduate curricula.

7. *Building an infrastructure for collaboration:* structures and institutions that facilitate collaboration among members and critical allies, including professional organizations, special convenings, networks, and conferences.

8. *Developing resources:* adequate financial and other resources to ensure standard practice.

9. *Nurturing a critical mass of support:* support of key constituencies, including organizations and individual practitioners, researchers, administrators, and influential leaders.

10. *Developing advocates and systemic support:* adherents who work to foster the support of critical constituencies, garnering good will, securing various forms of support, and ensuring appropriate policy context within pertinent institutions.

11. *Promoting systemic support:* key systems support including incentives that encourage practitioners to learn and use standard practice.

These elements formed the basis of the theory of action undertaken by The iCenter in building its approach. The logic model that The iCenter built (Figure 1) shows how each of these elements was operationalized during the organization's evolution.

The principles underlying The iCenter's work were discussed in its defining document, the Aleph Bet of Israel Education.[4] The document laid out core principles, pedagogies and contents of Israel education that identified Israel as a cornerstone of Jewish identities and a learner-centered approach. It also served to provide common language for the field. Chapters provided guidance as to the approaches Israel educators should use for content and pedagogy. In a companion book, Chazan (2016)[5] specified eight principles of a relational approach to Israel education:

1. The individual, not Israel, is the center of Israel education.

2. The content of Israel education is the individual's relationship with Israel.

3. The aim of Israel education is the exploration of core ideas related to the concept of Israel being a part of a larger enterprise of developing and creating a personal relationship with Israel.

4. Along with understanding, meaning making, and relating, the creation of an Israel culture is a primary pedagogic focus of Israel education.

5. A rich corpus of diverse Israel narratives is a part of Jewish heritage and should be encountered and introduced in the context of Israel education.

6. Good Israel education happens when there is connectivity between vision, proximate aim, content, and pedagogy.

7. Israel education requires educators who understand the overall vision, have the ability to make Israel narratives accessible to the students, can shape cultures, and have the courage to be accessible models and teach from within.

8. Recognize the power and limits of education.

Several founders pointed out that the big picture vision led to enormous excitement. There was a sense that contributors were making a big difference and that the potential for success in changing Israel education in positive ways was substantial. Founders embraced the ideas of fostering a different and common identity for the field and developing a specific relational approach to content and pedagogy among educators and leaders.

> *The iCenter's Vision: generations of young Jews for whom Israel is an integral and inspiring component of their personal and collective Jewish identity.*
> — Founder

> *So what is Israel education according to the relational approach? It is the exhilarating and the humbling mission of educating people to think, feel, and integrate Israel into their overall character as Jews and as human beings . . . to help young Jews study their particular culture in an attempt to find meaning in a place, an idea, a people, and a value that has been dear to their tradition and about helping people seek answers to life's most basic questions through the portal of one's particular tradition.*
> — Chazan (2016) p. 11.

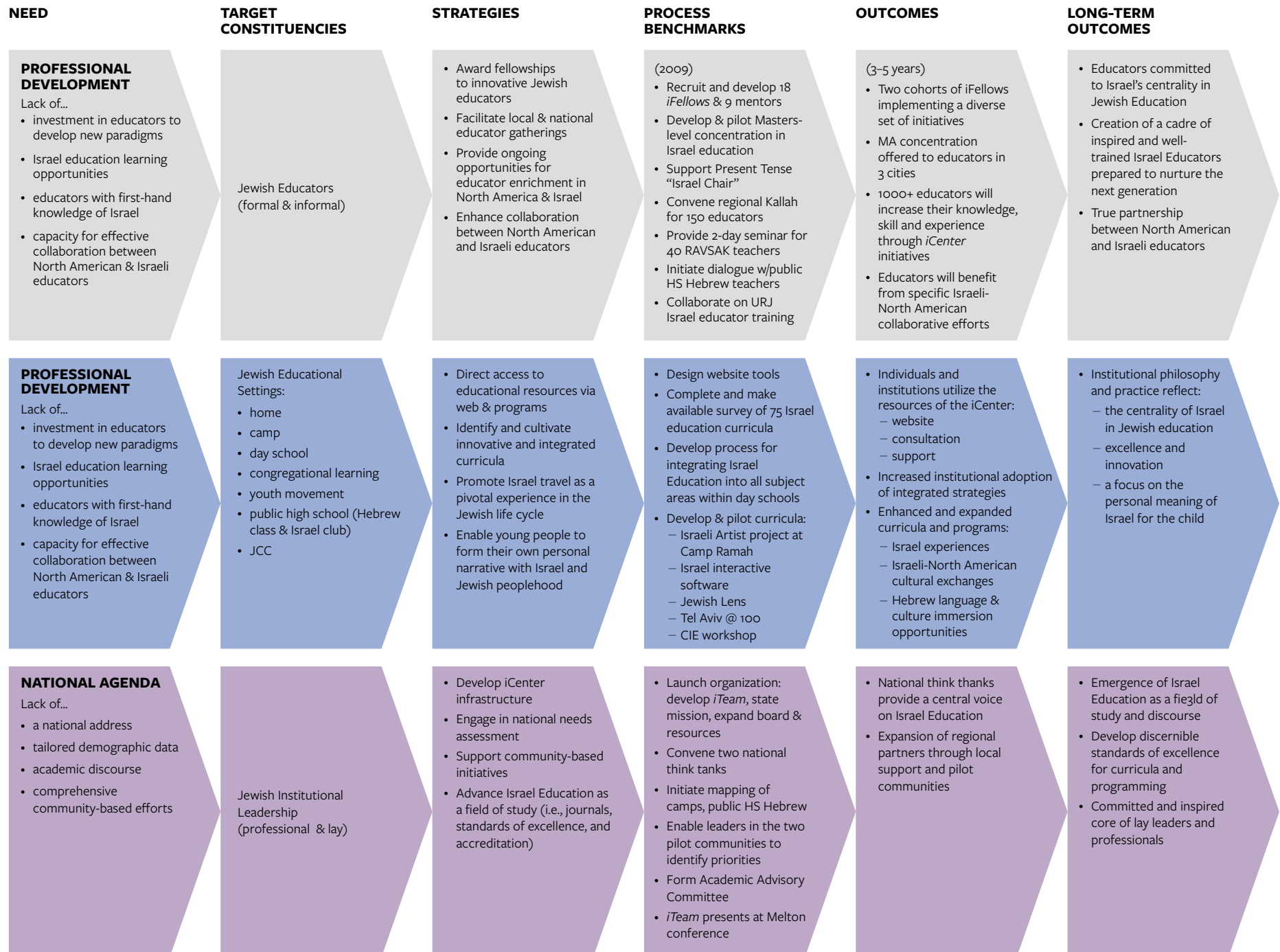> *The iCenter was engulfed by the excitement of the vision for all the right reasons. It was an incredible vision . . . and we were more than happy to align ourselves.*
> —Founder

4 The iCenter for Israel Education (2015). The Aleph Bet of Israel Education, 2nd edition. Northbrook, IL: Author.
5 Chazan, B. (2016) A Philosophy of Israel Education: A Relational Approach. Lincolnshire, IL: Palgrave McMillan.

FIGURE 1. THE iCENTER LOGIC MODEL

NEED	TARGET CONSTITUENCIES	STRATEGIES	PROCESS BENCHMARKS	OUTCOMES	LONG-TERM OUTCOMES
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT Lack of... • investment in educators to develop new paradigms • Israel education learning opportunities • educators with first-hand knowledge of Israel • capacity for effective collaboration between North American & Israeli educators	Jewish Educators (formal & informal)	• Award fellowships to innovative Jewish educators • Facilitate local & national educator gatherings • Provide ongoing opportunities for educator enrichment in North America & Israel • Enhance collaboration between North American and Israeli educators	(2009) • Recruit and develop 18 *iFellows* & 9 mentors • Develop & pilot Masters-level concentration in Israel education • Support Present Tense "Israel Chair" • Convene regional Kallah for 150 educators • Provide 2-day seminar for 40 RAVSAK teachers • Initiate dialogue w/public HS Hebrew teachers • Collaborate on URJ Israel educator training	(3–5 years) • Two cohorts of iFellows implementing a diverse set of initiatives • MA concentration offered to educators in 3 cities • 1000+ educators will increase their knowledge, skill and experience through *iCenter* initiatives • Educators will benefit from specific Israeli-North American collaborative efforts	• Educators committed to Israel's centrality in Jewish Education • Creation of a cadre of inspired and well-trained Israel Educators prepared to nurture the next generation • True partnership between North American and Israeli educators
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT Lack of... • investment in educators to develop new paradigms • Israel education learning opportunities • educators with first-hand knowledge of Israel • capacity for effective collaboration between North American & Israeli educators	Jewish Educational Settings: • home • camp • day school • congregational learning • youth movement • public high school (Hebrew class & Israel club) • JCC	• Direct access to educational resources via web & programs • Identify and cultivate innovative and integrated curricula • Promote Israel travel as a pivotal experience in the Jewish life cycle • Enable young people to form their own personal narrative with Israel and Jewish peoplehood	• Design website tools • Complete and make available survey of 75 Israel education curricula • Develop process for integrating Israel Education into all subject areas within day schools • Develop & pilot curricula: – Israeli Artist project at Camp Ramah – Israel interactive software – Jewish Lens – Tel Aviv @ 100 – CIE workshop	• Individuals and institutions utilize the resources of the iCenter: – website – consultation – support • Increased institutional adoption of integrated strategies • Enhanced and expanded curricula and programs: – Israel experiences – Israeli-North American cultural exchanges – Hebrew language & culture immersion opportunities	• Institutional philosophy and practice reflect: – the centrality of Israel in Jewish education – excellence and innovation – a focus on the personal meaning of Israel for the child
NATIONAL AGENDA Lack of... • a national address • tailored demographic data • academic discourse • comprehensive community-based efforts	Jewish Institutional Leadership (professional & lay)	• Develop iCenter infrastructure • Engage in national needs assessment • Support community-based initiatives • Advance Israel Education as a field of study (i.e., journals, standards of excellence, and accreditation)	• Launch organization: develop *iTeam*, state mission, expand board & resources • Convene two national think tanks • Initiate mapping of camps, public HS Hebrew • Enable leaders in the two pilot communities to identify priorities • Form Academic Advisory Committee • *iTeam* presents at Melton conference	• National think thanks provide a central voice on Israel Education • Expansion of regional partners through local support and pilot communities	• Emergence of Israel Education as a fie3ld of study and discourse • Develop discernible standards of excellence for curricula and programming • Committed and inspired core of lay leaders and professionals

Client/stakeholder groups. Israel education was conceived to be a vital part of any Jewish education endeavor. Thus the vision included working with Jewish summer camps, Jewish day schools, synagogue classes, public high schools where Hebrew was taught, Jewish youth organizations, and credentialing organizations such as institutions of higher education and others that could develop educator certifications. The iCenter convened leaders and practitioners to sessions that became idea incubators. These convenings served to shape the strategies to be used and to ignite commitment among participants.

Strategies were then developed for field building, professional development, and resource creation and distribution. All of the partners, clients and participants of The iCenter were to be treated as professionals. To that end, a common set of practices related to events was constructed (Figure 2). The practices emphasized on the ideas that both North Americans and Israelis should be at events; Hebrew language should be included to help provide a strong cultural experience; all programming should be related to the Aleph Bet of Israel Education; participants should be treated as individuals and not simply as organizational representatives; and that the quality of all of the logistics, programming, physical environment, and communications should be high and intentionally designed to treat participants as highly regarded professionals.

Evolution. The iCenter framed some of their early work on the field-building strategies identified above and then morphed the approach to be focused on six areas of work reflected in their 2012 logic model:

- Establish and promulgate standards of excellence.
- Enhance educational leadership and professional development.
- Identify, develop, and disseminate quality educational resources.
- Promote a culture of educational entrepreneurship and innovation.
- Increase commitment among educators, communal leaders, and supporters.
- Build internal capacity to achieve.

Identity and standard practice as reflected in definitions of Israel education in the Aleph Bet of Israel Education became part of the goals for standards of excellence. Workforce and leadership and practice settings were combined into a second area of focus: enhance educational leadership and professional development. Information exchange and infrastructure for collaboration were combined into a third area of focus: resource development and dissemination.

FIGURE 2.
STANDARD PRACTICE: THE iCENTER EVENTS

Experience Team's Event Check List:

Program Experience
- Demonstrates the Aleph Bet

Diverse and Inclusive Community
- Ages and Experience levels
- Geographic and educational settings
- Everyone is a learner and an educator
- People come as themselves, not their organization

Israel Immersion
- North American and Israeli participants
- Integrate Hebrew
- Israeli music/food

Hospitality (Kabbalat Panim)
- Personal greetings and attention
- Yisraeliut
- Welcome packets

Professional Logistics
- Materials (formatted, prepared)
- Technology
- Nametags (double-sided w/ Hebrew)

Physical Environment
- Setup is intentional
- Windows (natural light)
- Hallway spaces (conversations happen here)
- Loft ceilings

Tangible Memories
- Creative and thematic
- Stuff people actually want

Communications and Documentation
- Capture the stories
- Social media
- Video and photography

Critical mass of support and advocates became part of the promotion of a culture of educational entrepreneurship and innovation and increasing commitment among educators, communal leaders, and supporters. Finally, systemic support and building the knowledge base became one of the pillars of building an internal capacity to achieve.

In 2015, The iCenter areas of work were further distilled into the logic model shown in Figure 3. Goals were categorized into four major areas of work: Develop the People, Create the Resources, Grow the Field, and Strengthen the Organization. Specific strategies, metrics, and impacts were added.

In the next three sections, the goals that The iCenter developed in 2015 (Develop the People, Create the Resources, and Grow the Field) will be used to discuss progress, outcomes, impact, and lessons learned. Discussion of Strengthen the Organization and Suggestions for Future Growth are provided in the Appendix.

FIGURE 3. THE iCENTER LOGIC MODEL, 2015

GOALS	STRATEGIES	METRICS 2015	METRICS 2018 (3-yr cumulative total)	IMPACT
DEVELOP THE PEOPLE Cultivate a generation of educators and leadership to sustain a vibrant field of Israel education	Provide a broad spectrum of PD across settings an communities Deepen the skills of educators in the field Cultivate a new generation of educators	Intensive Training 121 MA Concentration alumni 200 Senior camp staff 3 Community initiatives Targeted Training 100 Teens 150 Youth professionals 600 Educators 200 Taglit Fellows	Intensive Training 250 MA Concentration alumni 500 Senior camp staff 9 Community initiatives Targeted Training 300 Teens 300 Youth professionals 2400 Educators 600 Taglit Fellows	● Israel educational practice reflects excellence ● Educators embrace Israel as integral to their work and cultivate capacity in their institutions ● MA alumni are leaders in the field
CREATE THE RESOURCES Provide superior materials for this tech-savvy generation	Create Israel educational resources based on the Aleph Bet standards Increase online accessibility and engagement with resources	Online learning platform launch 3 new curricular initiatives Resources introduced to 25% of relevant audiences and settings	9 new curricular resources produced Resources introduced to 50% of relevant target audiences and settings 300% increase in resource hits	● Content-rich Israel resources are integrated into Jewish learning ● The iCenter serves as a source for excellent Israel ed. resources ● Young Jews have personal relationships with Israel and Israelis using iCenter resources
GROW THE FIELD Influence the systems of Jewish education so that Israel is purposefully integrated into teaching and learning	Promote Aleph Bet standards Convene national gatherings Integrate Israel into Jewish conferences Establish robust participant alumni networks Expand organizational partnerships	250 educators attend iCamp Sessions at 7 National conferences Launch alumni network 50 articles in 26 publications 400% increase in social	600 educators attend iCamp 12 national gatherings convened by iCenter Annual research and evaluation reports conducted Increased national and community-based visibility	● Israel education is a priority on the Jewish communal agenda ● Israel is integral to conferences, organizations, and discourse ● Key stakeholders commit to the advancement of the field ● Israel is integral to Jewish educational practice
STRENGTHEN THE ORGANIZATION Increase organizational capacity to support continued growth and sustainability	Grow the iCenter Board of Directors Expand organizational structure and staffing Increase and diversify donor base	2 new boards members Organizational expansion: Director of Development and new office space 20% increase across donor base	6 new board members iCenter staff and office space increase as needed 30% increase i donor base	● The iCenter engages the best minds and talent in the advancement of the field ● Robust organizational capacity supports and sustains the ongoing advancement of the field

OUTCOMES / IMPACT

- **The iCenter was created as a national hub for Israel education.** An ambitious and able leader was identified, an infrastructure was developed, a vision and mission were created, and an early plan of action was articulated to guide the development of the field.

- **Israel education was being defined as a field, with a common language, set of guiding principles, and description of standardized practices.** The Aleph Bet of Israel Education and its iterations and a companion book, A Philosophy of Israel Education: A Relational Approach provided the language for Israel education, a common set of principles and definitions, rationale, and implications for practice.

- **A sense of excitement about Israel education and Jewish education occurred for many in the field.** Many of the original founders noted enthusiasm, increased interest, and a palpable sense of anticipation that positive changes were coming to Israel education occurred among many practitioners who heard about the creation of The iCenter.

- **A shift toward collective action occurred in the mindset for many Israel education leaders and practitioners.** Consistent with what the research (Collaboration for Impact (2012)[6] points out as being critical to success, The iCenter helped shift thinking to promoting the idea that collective action is more important than isolated work and having different views can be helpful and not obstacles to progress. The iCenter fostered commitment to a broad agenda as the way to move the field, and helped forge a willingness to forgo autonomy and share attribution for the evolution of the field.

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[6] Collaboration for Impact (2012). The Backbone Organisation. Downloaded from http://www.collaborationforimpact.com/collective-impact/the-backbone-organisation/

LESSONS LEARNED

In promoting field development, foundations need to fund both operating expenses and capacity building costs and then take a role of advisor and critical friend. Foundations must acknowledge that strategic work associated with field building is a large and complex enterprise that requires time and some level of autonomy. The Board should allow the leader to lead and serve as a support behind the scenes.

Selecting the right leader makes a crucial difference in the success of the organization. Anne Lanski was viewed by founders as the right choice for leading The iCenter because of her vision, depth of knowledge, management skills, and connections with others in the field. One founder stated that "No one else could have accomplished as much as she did" and characterized her as "entrepreneurial, responsive, and opportunistic." She was further described as someone who was accomplished in fostering collaborations, communicating effectively, and attaining objectives in a high-quality way.

By soliciting guidance from a number of prominent thought leaders with diverse perspectives on the formation of The iCenter, including those who did not agree with the direction the organization was taking, The iCenter was able to draw the attention of active leaders in the field.

Leaders became aware that The iCenter had a vision and a mission and was evolving in sound and thoughtful directions.

As a founder observed, "Whether they agreed or disagreed, it was clear that the field was going to change given that there was now a place to develop ideas and strategies, funds to operationalize those strategies into concrete activities, and momentum for change."

Working on big ideas from the start was the best way to proceed. The field would not have coalesced if The iCenter had taken on a narrower scope of work.

Develop the People

The following section first describes the types of professional development implemented by The iCenter and how The iCenter promoted professionalization of the field. Next are discussions about how professional development has deepened the skills of educators. Two special substudies, one on Birthright Israel Fellows and one on the iFellows, are presented to illustrate the work of The iCenter in creating educational experiences and extending the development of advanced learners from the field.

Strategies for this goal area include providing a broad spectrum of professional development across settings and communities; deepening the skills of educators in the field; and cultivating a new generation of educators.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Develop the People was listed as the first goal in the logic model, though respondents note that it is second in priority, after Grow the Field. Staff reported they spent about 40% of their time in this goal area.

The iCenter has created multiple different avenues of professional development to address the needs of Israel educators in different segments of the educational community. Professional development initiatives described on The iCenter website include the following:

- **Master's Concentration in Israel education (iFellows)** is a one-year educational program conducted in conjunction with 11 major academic institutions in the United States that span religious denominations and geographic locations. Partner institutions include Brandeis University, Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion, New York University, Yeshiva University, Hebrew College, Jewish Theological Seminary and Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership. Rabbinic and graduate students from these institutions attend three intensive seminars in Chicago during the year of the program to learn from prominent Israel educators. In addition, iFellows receive mentoring from an Israel education professional and are given a $2,000 stipend to design and participate in an individualized learning experience in Israel. Since the first pilot cohort in 2009-2010, approximately 250 young professionals have received training through this program.

- **Birthright Israel Fellows** program trains select North American and Israeli educators to serve as leaders of Birthright Israel trips to Israel. The iCenter supports learning for Birthright Israel Fellows in enhancing meaning-making by Birthright Israel participants and helping them develop a relationship with Israel as they experience the country first hand. The training provides specific experiences and tools and also models activities the Birthright Israel Fellows can implement during the trip.

- **Israel @ Camp** provides professional development to those in the Jewish camping world. It has two main initiatives: a 20-month customized intensive training experience for camp leadership to help them integrate Israel learning and engagement throughout camp experiences, and extended opportunities to provide hands-on resources and materials, develop partnerships between North American and Israeli staff, and/or support for implementation of a new concept or idea. The iCenter formerly was involved in providing professional development to the Goodman Camping Initiative.

- **iNfuse: Israel in Jewish Day Schools** is a 24-month initiative designed to assist Jewish day school staff in integrating Israel learning and engagement throughout classrooms and activities and to forge enduring connections between students, staff, and parents and Israel and its people.

- **iCon** (formerly iCamp for Israel Education) is a biennial 3-day conference in which several hundred participants share new ideas and best practices with other Jewish educators, thought leaders, and stakeholders from across North America and Israel.

- **Public High School Hebrew** training supports Hebrew teachers working in public high schools with experiential professional development, innovative curricular resources, and standards for foreign language instruction in Hebrew.

- **iCoach** is a program that helps Israel educators to become more effective communicators, supervisors, and team members.

- **Professional Certificate in Israel Education at George Washington University** is a new program that will provide 15 graduate credits from The George Washington University in Washington, D.C. The program will include two 4-day intensives, online learning, individual mentorships with master Israel educators, and an Israel seminar with experienced Israel educators.

PROMOTING PROFESSIONALIZATION

As described in the Origins of The iCenter section, The iCenter developed a set of standards for all events. The standards create an environment conducive to teaching and learning and embed an approach to content that treats all participants as professionals. Content and pedagogy are consistently aligned to the principles in the Aleph Bet of Israel Education and thus are learner-centered and focus on creation of a relationship with Israel. Materials are developed to be content appropriate for the audience and setting. Those who serve youth have customized age-appropriate content and pedagogy.

Respondents reported that professionalization was essential in training educators who could infuse Israel into Jewish learning and see Israel education

> *It's empowering to show that [Israel education] can start with yourself and the stories you have, knowing that we are all in it together and understand Israel from a personal standpoint. It's important to say, "I don't know everything either, but I have my own stories and want to share them with you."*
>
> — Strategist

as an inextricable part of their work rather than as an add-on or something at the periphery. They also viewed professionalization as encouragement for Jewish educators who might otherwise feel they did not know enough about Israel to teach it or had conflicted feelings about Israel and were hesitant to discuss their feelings with students. Respondents said The iCenter formulated a fundamental approach to Israel education that developed a common language and changed the relationship that many educators and students have to Israel.

Foremost among the factors they perceived as facilitating the impacts of professionalism were the relationships that The iCenter has built with people and organizations in the field. They thought it was easier to build relationships because The iCenter was not selling a product or insisting on things being done a certain way, but asking what partners wanted and looking to build mutually beneficial collaborations for the sake of growing and deepening the field. Respondents consistently praised The iCenter's efforts to ensure that all partners and participants felt valued and cared for.

Respondents also described barriers to progress that existed. They said that The iCenter staff is small and continually struggles with being stretched too thin. They thought the staff needs to better prioritize what they do by focusing on areas of greatest impact. Other barriers were seen in having philosophical differences with some partner organizations that did not always draw clear lines between education, advocacy, and politics, and not having enough certified Hebrew teachers to fill the needs in schools.

Respondents regarded the most effective and unique approaches of The iCenter's approach to Israel education as:

- Empowering educators to understand they do not need to know everything about Israel to become an excellent Israel educator;
- Helping students to develop more questions and think more deeply about subjects, or in the words of one consultant, "Turning exclamation points into question marks";
- Providing a new way of thinking about topics;
- Discovering how to put ideas into practice;
- Customizing professional development and filling needs for partner organizations;
- Building long-term relationships with participants in professional development activities;
- Promoting diverse narratives about Israel;
- Bringing together professional development participants with leading scholars and researchers in the field;

The iCenter gives you the tools to do Israel education properly. They are not giving you a program, they are giving you a philosophy of how to approach students.

— Strategist

The iCenter recognizes the reality of multiple intelligences. Israel education is at its most successful when it engages the learner physically, emotionally, sensorially, and intellectually. The iCenter encouraged me to think outside the box in terms of programmatic ideas and into the bodies and souls of the learners.

— Strategist

- Emphasizing that good Israel education is good education and that experiential education is a core tenet of instructional efforts; and
- Not being prescriptive with pre-determined answers, but enabling students to be creative and adventurous and innovative.

A few respondents were less positive. They noted that the concept of good Israel education being good education was not transformational but simply articulated better than the norm in the field. Some thought that the focus on relationship with Israel was overemphasized. Others were concerned that too much attention and cost was being expended on some aspects of professionalism, particularly on the creation of an Israeli flavor in the environment and other aspects of the training, mostly related to logistics and food. These sentiments were expressed by a small number of respondents.

CREATING RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Participants in professional development activities sponsored by The iCenter universally agreed that programs contained not just information but practical, usable, helpful strategies and materials that could immediately be utilized in practice settings. They described repeatedly receiving valuable tools to teach Israel education in ways that were compelling and relatable to the experiences of students, colleagues, families, and educators.

DEEPENING THE SKILLS OF EDUCATORS

Without exception, all respondents who were alumni of the various programs reported that they had deepened their skills as Israel educators. Many reported that participants went beyond "factoids" about Israel to understanding the ways in which the culture affected Israeli perspectives on the world, relationship to family, and relationships with non-Israelis. Some mentioned they learned about the importance of ritual and the influence of music and art.

DEEPER DIVES: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR BIRTHRIGHT ISRAEL FELLOWS AND THE IFELLOWS EXPERIENCE

As part of this study, two groups were singled out for greater focus: Birthright Israel Fellows and iFellows. The Birthright Israel Fellows training was used to validate and illustrate The iCenter's approach to professional development. The iFellows experience was probed to understand how The iCenter works with advanced learners.

> *Israel education is a minefield and the challenges are not going away. The iCenter has been great, but I'm not sure that Israel has to be omnipresent in all activities provided in the programs.*
>
> — Network Partner

> *Whenever I was at an iCenter program, there were always take-aways or program ideas, or they provided an experience or a lesson that I could transform into the work I was doing. For me, it was always a given that there was something I would walk away with and use, whether for teenagers I taught, with colleagues in my workplace, or with professionals I was training.*
>
> — Alumnus

> *I have gone to a lot of trainings before, but really, this one so far is the best. They take care of every little detail: the signs, the names of the rooms, the luggage tags, the food that provides things like salads that replicate the Israel experience. They focus on relationships and culture and they ensure that everybody has a voice. Really, it's the best.*
>
> — Birthright Israel Fellow

VIGNETTE: BIRTHRIGHT ISRAEL FELLOWS

The iCenter's approach to Birthright Israel Fellows training is a good example of their general approach to professional development. This vignette illustrates the experiential nature of the training, the focus on building relationships, and the integration of understanding about Israel into all aspects of training activities.

This year's event was held in Atlanta, Georgia from February 11-13, 2018. Participants were greeted and invited into a special room with games, food, and photo booths to encourage early networking. After a lunch that catered to anyone's dietary needs (e.g., kosher, vegan, gluten-free), a ritual welcome by Birthright leaders was provided, following a brief presentation on expectations for participants and a welcome from The iCenter.

The first session, which was for the entire group, focused on relationship building, which was strongly emphasized as being key to the work of being a Birthright Israel Fellow. The group engaged in an opening circle activity that allowed participants to share something about themselves, followed by an activity that helped participants see the importance of ritual and how ritual can serve to elevate an experience. Groups of randomly assigned participants engaged in conversation about themselves and their motivation to participate in Birthright Israel and become a Fellow. They also shared an artifact that had meaning for them. This experience served as a model for how to enjoin the Birthright Israel participants into a conversation that had safe self-disclosure, discovery of commonalities, identification of special talents and skills that each individual brought to the experience, and a norm of having each voice respected and valued.

In the late afternoon, participants joined different groups and learned about the values framework on which Israel education is based. The group engaged in dialogue about the ways in which shared values can be used to build community and the responsibility of Birthright Israel participants in creating connections between trip experiences and participants' ongoing exploration of Jewish identities and life journeys. The group ended by discussing the concrete tools that can be used to achieve this desired outcome.

Evening activities included a brief presentation on the Birthright Israel itinerary so that participants had a common mental model of the work ahead. Discussion groups were convened to initiate conversations about how Birthright Israel Fellows can convey meaningful messages while on the trip and the educational themes they should highlight. Groups then reflected on their experiences of the day, highlighting what they learned about identity development and how they could apply what they learned to the upcoming trip experience.

> *I really liked the way they put us together in ongoing discussion groups. I feel like I have gotten to know people already and some may become lifelong friends since we have so much in common. I really like the way they are so positive about everything and everybody. Some of us are not the most popular kids on the block, but they make us feel like we have a lot to offer as leaders and facilitators.*
>
> — Birthright Israel Fellow

On day 2, after framing the day, small groups were convened to discuss the Jewish experience of Talmud Torah or learning for the sake of learning. Participants then engaged in a "get up stand up" activity that explored Jewish prayer ritual through nonverbal performance. Participants learned a series of movements that they needed to replicate and then perform together. This was meant to model the ways in which ritual can be accessible to all types of participants. Participants reflected on the experience, which they found to be meaningful, especially in the sense that working together made the effort better and more useful. They also were guided through meaning-making as the facilitator reminded them to start to unpack "sacred time" through movement, music, and ritual and to continuously provide an experiential approach to learning. This was followed by a short, practical session where the Fellows learned how to navigate the staff hiring process.
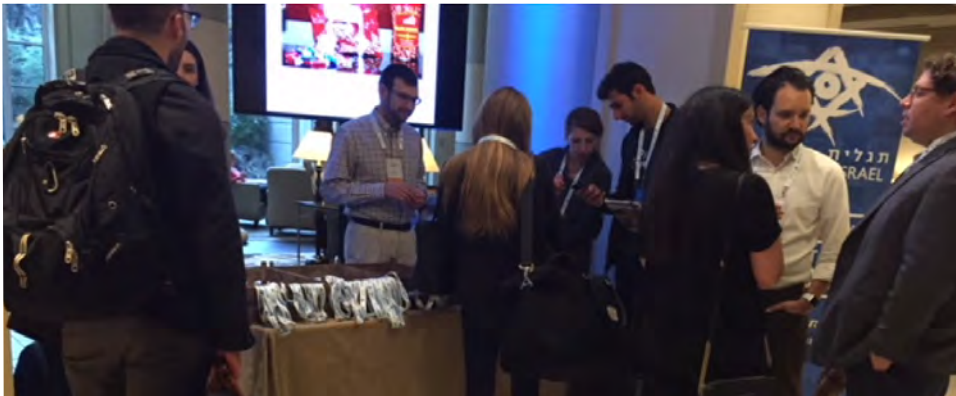
They had a great mix of lecture, discussion, physical movement, theoretical and practical advice, and networking with nearly everyone here. I loved it . . .. I am exhilarated and exhausted at the same time!

— Birthright Israel Fellow

After lunch, Dr. Zohar Raviv provided a framing speech where he defined ritual in terms of meaning-making, group cohesion, and values verification. He used multiple analogies to make the information come alive and prompted the audience to think symbolically and identify the Jewish context for all they do. Fellows then moved into breakout sessions: in one, they learned to explore the ways in which core experiences in the Israel trip could transform routine into ritual. Specific tools and ideas for this purpose were shared. In the other session, they learned how to facilitate relationship building among the Birthright trip participants. After dinner, a practical session was presented that addressed how to manage groups, both logically and educationally. Finally, participants went back to their original tie-in group and reflected on the day, summarizing learning and thinking about connection and ritual.

Day 3 started with framing the day around experience building and how to embrace real-life learning in real time. The educational language of Birthright Israel was discussed, and then participants met in small groups to talk about what resonated with them, what questions the approach raises, and how to translate ideas into practice. Then participants engaged in an exercise that allowed them to explore shared values, personal meaning and expression, and tensions between different values that Birthright participants may hold. After lunch, participants departed for their field experience at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial. They learned "how to give voice to stones," an activity which addressed how sites convey stories and provide a language for participants to use to process experiences. Groups of participants reflected on the messages they received from the site and the "language of the landscape." After dinner, the group had an interactive, energizing experience on group dynamics and team building, then discussed contemporary Israel in terms of the language of the people and the sounds they hear. The evening ended with a special performance by an Israeli musician who had been a Birthright Israel guide and now was a pop star in Israel.

On the final day, the framing session addressed how to share Israel experiences during and beyond the trip to Israel. The objective was to help participants promote an inspiring and long-lasting sense of Jewish identity and global Jewish connection. Participants met in groups to learn about the experiences and passions of master Israeli educators and then joined another session on facilitation and discussion techniques. In the closing session, they reflected on their experience during the conference, the ways in which participation helped them to think differently or how they might change their practice, and any suggestions they had for improving Birthright Israel Fellows seminar. At the close, they discussed hopes for their roles as Birthright Israel Fellows moving forward.

IFELLOWS SUBSTUDY

A substudy of iFellows was conducted to understand how The iCenter addresses professional development of advanced learners and its effects on the learners and the field of Israel education. Multiple components of the iFellows program were formulated to deepen the skills of the educators in graduate programs so they could become more effective Israel educators in their work as rabbis, camp leaders, teachers, or program administrators. This program has become a pipeline for leaders in the field. About 75% of all eligible students in the rabbinic and graduate programs participate in the iCenter's Master's Concentration and 99% of all of those who enroll in the program complete their credential.

I liked the energy of all the presenters and especially the way that they made us all feel heard. They build a sense of family among us. It was fun to mix people from Canada and the U.S. together, too. It would have been great to have even more Israelis here – the ones who were here were really interesting and way different than I thought they would be given my Birthright experience. It made me realize that I had to honor that they are as diverse as we are.

— Birthright Israel Fellow
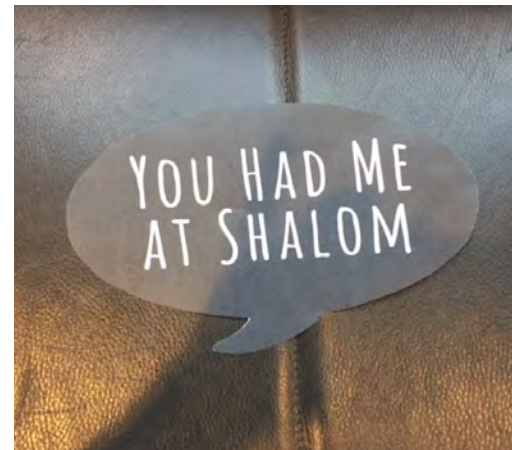
I feel so ready for this trip now. I have lots and lots of ideas I want to try. This was great!

— Birthright Israel Fellow

The iFellows program utilizes rigorous selection criteria for each cohort, and generally selects one to four students from each of the member campuses. The iFellows then attend three face-to-face seminars that take place over 4 days for an intensive learning experience. The seminars are led by expert faculty from North America and Israel and focus on topics related to philosophy of education, the history of Israel, ways to relate to Israel through religion, politics, history, and the Bible, the origins and evolution of conflict, and many other aspects of Israeli culture and Israel education.

The seminars were widely regarded as useful and informative. Respondents repeatedly referred to the quality and accessibility of faculty members and the opportunities to interact with scholars who possessed extensive knowledge about Israel education and authored books and articles that informed students' coursework. Participants liked the opportunity to discuss "big ideas" and to be challenged around their own thinking and their own relationships with Israel. They also noted the breakout sessions gave them choices and an opportunity to engage in more in-depth dialogues with peers.

One component of the program designed to help in this regard was the assignment of a mentor to each of the iFellows. The experienced Israel educators who served as mentors were expected to share their experiences with mentees, provide guidance, encouragement, and support, and be a point of regular contact with the graduate students. For some iFellows, the mentor/mentee relationship worked very well and formed the basis of a productive relationship that endured well beyond the year of the program. For others, the assigned mentor was not someone with whom they felt an affinity, and so they sought out one or more mentors with whom they felt more compatible. Several iFellows made a distinction between "assigned" mentors and "chosen" mentors, suggesting that allowing students to select their mentors over the course of the program was probably a better approach than staff creating matches. Many iFellows said they found multiple mentors in the program among the faculty and were gratified to study with such outstanding scholars and practitioners. iFellows universally reported that the Israel experience embedded in the program substantially enlarged their capacity as competent Israel educators. They appreciated the great latitude they were given in designing the experience and tailoring it to their needs. Several indicated they would not have been able to undertake study in Israel without the financial assistance provided by the program.

The Master's Concentration in Israel Education nurtures and challenges the next generation of knowledgeable and passionate educational leaders committed to the integral role of Israel in contemporary Jewish life. Its goal is to develop an approach to Israel education rooted in a sophisticated understanding of contemporary Israel and its history, combined with an innovative educational strategy and practice.

— The iCenter website

The first seminar in particular was amazing, actually life-changing. It challenged my view of myself and my place in the world and I got a lot of information that I could apply immediately in my graduate program and in my work as an Israel educator — iFellow (Master's Concentration)

The seminars were really great. They tended to be a little academic and text-heavy, but I like that type of work. The Aleph Bet is bite-sized, and lends itself to in-depth discussion. The whole thing was fascinating. — iFellow (Master's Concentration)

Some iFellows regarded the final assignment, in which they were asked to develop something that could be used in the field of Israel education, as being too broad and unstructured. They asked for clearer guidelines and expectations to make the process more beneficial.

An aspect of professional development that iFellows most appreciated as they developed their skills as Israel educators was the opportunity to interact with people from different Jewish denominations and educational backgrounds who normally would have had no opportunity to meet, much less form friendships and collaborative learning and working relationships. Participants not only deeply valued the presence of peers from Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox backgrounds, but welcomed the many occasions to interact with Israeli shlichim working in different parts of the country. iFellows stated that the interdenominational, international character of the program helped them better understand that Israel education transcends boundaries in the Jewish world and is the shared responsibility of people across the spectrum of religious practice.

IMPACTS OF PARTICIPATION IN THE IFELLOWS PROGRAM

Some individuals reported that participation in the iFellows program was instrumental in helping them to secure a job with employers who were interested in bringing more connections with Israel into educational programming. All respondents believed that involvement with the iFellows program created lasting impacts on professional work. Impacts that were mentioned by multiple respondents included:

- Understanding the essential need for educators to build relationships with students as a precursor to students building relationships with their Judaism and with Israel;
- Infusing the study of Israel throughout the curriculum and into every grade level rather than just one or two;
- Viewing the role of the educator as giving students the tools to form their own relationship with Israel through an exploration of diverse narratives;
- Developing the language needed to present information about Israel that goes beyond the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, leading to wider and more thoughtful discussions about the realities, complexities, and contributions of Israel;
- Connecting experiential education with Jewish education;
- Acquiring the skills to be a competent leader;
- Learning from the model of iCenter trainings and conferences about the importance of paying attention to detail in every part of an event;

There were a number of faculty members who served as mentors. I may have been assigned a mentor, but found it better to choose a mentor or have them choose me. The mentorship I received was excellent. I still rely on my connections to those faculty members. — iFellow (Master's Concentration)

I know the one thing that struck me as having a far-reaching impact is the idea of bringing together people from varied backgrounds and Jewish organizations, from various denominations and professional studies and bringing them together to meet and discuss with each other. These groups would not normally come to the table together. The idea was that Israel education impacted a broad spectrum among Jewish professionals.. — iFellow (Master's Concentration)

It gave me a bit of an edge in the job interview process . . . people saw a strong portfolio dealing with Israel and turned to me to lead efforts to integrate Israel into education. — iFellow (Master's Concentration)

- Becoming more adept at providing a support system for educators;
- Seeing Israel education in new and more creative ways; and
- Developing curriculum based on principles contained in the Aleph Bet of Israel Education.

Israel is often discussed only when the conversation is about the conflict in the Middle East. The iCenter has given me the language and focus to pull the conversation to other areas. I came into the Education Committee and said that looking at conflict is a very strong goal, but culture and history are a big part of the conversation. The committee was very open to that. — iFellow (Master's Concentration)

OUTCOMES / IMPACT

- **The iCenter was perceived by respondents as playing a key role in developing educators in the field of Israel education in North America.** Participants in the Birthright Israel training sessions, the seminars for camps and day schools, and training provided for specialty groups in communities were unanimous in declaring that The iCenter was responsible for improving the professional development in the field. Some respondents noted that there was very little training for educators before The iCenter sponsored its professional development opportunities and the training that existed in the past was focused on knowledge rather than helping individuals nurture a relationship with Israel.

- **The iCenter's approach to promoting educator professionalism catalyzed a change in the field.** The iCenter reinforced the view of Israeli educators as facilitators of learning rather than coordinators of activities and strongly nurtured a sense of mission as an Israeli educator responsible for helping develop students' Jewish identity. Respondents noted that whenever they attended an event hosted by The iCenter, they were treated as professionals, both in the ways that the environment was created and the care they took to meet the needs of respondents and in the intellectual challenge they provided, with approaches that were consistent with adult learning and experiential learning. Professional development provided by The iCenter was described by participants as being rich in practical and usable strategies and materials. The approach was variously called authentic, relevant, immediately useful, and empowering.

- **Respondents said the program had lasting impacts on their work and they continued to use strategies and materials gained from the program.** Because of their association with the program, they were intentional in building strong relationships with students and integrating Israel into every aspect of Jewish education.

- **Respondents, particularly iFellows, substantially benefitted from the program bringing together participants from different religious backgrounds.** They learned from and formed lasting relationships with those whom they otherwise would never have interacted with outside of the program.

- **The nature of education in partner organizations changed.** Respondents reported that by training key individuals in organizations such as rabbis, youth leaders, teachers, and program administrators, The iCenter was changing the nature of education throughout those organizations as program graduates shared strategies, techniques, and resources with others and integrated Israel education into their respective work environments.

LESSONS LEARNED

Professionalization is essential in training Israel educators to infuse Israel into the Jewish learning experience and see Israel education as an inextricable part of their work. Professionalism raised the bar for Israel educators in terms of their responsibilities for nurturing Jewish identity. Professionalization of the field was needed to move Israel from a peripheral part of Jewish education to its very center.

Professional development was needed in multiple types of Israel education venues. The iCenter discovered that professional development was needed for nearly every venue where Israeli educators were found, including day schools, camps, public high schools that taught Hebrew, Hillels, congregational groups, and many other venues where Jewish education was being taught.

Success at building relationships facilitated the process of professionalizing the field. The iCenter was viewed as highly competent in building mutually respectful and productive relationships with people and organizations. The fact that The iCenter was not selling a product, but rather endeavoring to find approaches and solutions that best fit partners' needs, was regarded as a profound facilitator to efforts.

A national hub needs to be "right-sized." The iCenter's success has led to a lot of demand in the field. Respondents thought it was critically important for the staff either to grow to accommodate more participants or to prioritize activities and focus on areas of maximum impact.

Create the Resources

This section begins with responses to the question of why creation of resources was needed in the field. The section continues with how resources, including online resources, have been used in the field and how those resources have contributed to the field of Israel education. Last, respondents share ideas for resources that may still be needed.

The strategies for this goal are to (1) Create Israel educational resources based on the Aleph Bet standards and (2) Increase online accessibility and engagement with resources.

RESOURCES DEVELOPED BY THE ICENTER

The iCenter has developed a number of resources, most of which are available online through its website at *https://www.theicenter.org/educational-resources*. Resources include the following:

- **The Aleph Bet of Israel Education, Second Edition.** This compilation of articles by leading educators and scholars detailed a set of core principles, approaches to content, and essential pedagogies that together created a framework for the field of Israel education.

- **Israel @ Camp.** This extensive searchable database includes stories of modern Israel for Jewish summer camps and provides activities for different age groups that can be used to deepen understanding. Forty activities with resources are included in the database.

- **Educator's Backpack.** With a number of online resources, this collection features best practices in Israel education and helps educators to think creatively about the work they do.

- **Approaching Conflicts.** Within this resource are materials that help educators and students explore sensitive topics through thoughtful discussion, challenging assumptions, and creating stronger and more meaningful connections with Israel.

- **iNfuse Toolkit.** The tools and resources contained within the toolkit help Jewish day school educators to more fully integrate Israel education into classes and activities.

- **Israel Democracy Institute Curriculum.** Created in partnership with the Israel Democracy Institute, the curriculum utilizes cases from the Supreme Court in both the United States and Israel to explore issues of civic responsibility, social justice, and human dignity.

- **Topical Resources.** The iCenter website features more than 300 articles, interviews, activities, reflections, videos, and other materials related to numerous topics relevant to Israel education. Topics include Arts and Culture, Conflict and Peace, Environment, History, Hebrew Language, Holidays (Chanukah, Lag B'Omer, Pesach, Purim, Rosh Hashanah, Sukkot, Tu B'shvat, Yom Ha'shoah, Yom Ha'zikaron, and Yom Ha'atzmaut), Innovation, Israeli Elections, Israeli Figures, Modern Israeli Society, and Music.

- **Voices from the Field.** This section of The iCenter website features stories, perspectives, and ideas from different contributors that contribute to the conversation about Israel education.

- **Israel Resource Cards.** First introduced in 2013, Israel Resource cards are a deck of 80 cards that contain information about Israeli history, people, events, and culture. They can be utilized for a large variety of activities with students in different settings and with almost any age group. Some ideas for activities with the cards are contained within the Israel at Camp database.

- **Camp Resource Box.** First disseminated in 2017, the Camp Resource Box contains physical materials such as activity guides, educational materials, banners and posters designed for use in camp settings to support the integration of Israel learning into .

- **Professional Development Materials.** Additional resources have been created for educators involved in the iFellows, Birthright Israel Fellows, and other training programs.

Figure 4 provides a description of Core Criteria for all resources.

FIGURE 4: **CORE CRITERIA**
The iCenter both creates resources and curates resources developed by others. All resources are placed within two basic categories: ones for learning, which are aimed at students, and ones about teaching and learning, which are designed for educators. The organization incorporates authentic Israeli resources from arts, culture, media, and core texts throughout its online and physical materials. It uses the following criteria in both developing and selecting appropriate resources: 1. Authentic and Contemporary   2. Timely and Timeless   3. Accessible to learners and educators across a broad range of settings and perspectives.   4. Adaptable resources that serve to model pedagogy for educators grounded in Aleph Bet Principles and can also be utilized by educators with their learners.

THE NEED FOR CREATING AND DISSEMINATING TOOLS AND RESOURCES

The second goal for The iCenter listed in the 2015 logic model was to create resources. Strategies included creating Israel education resources based on the Aleph Bet standards and increasing the online accessibility and engagement with the resources. The iCenter staff estimated that 20% of their effort is spent in this area.

The iCenter created many resources tied to the Aleph Bet standards. In addition to revising the Aleph Bet (first published in 2011 and then revised and expanded into a Second Edition in 2014), The iCenter commissioned and distributed a supporting book entitled A Philosophy of Israel Education: A Relational Approach in 2016. The iCenter also developed materials that helped Israel educators make the standards come alive for their constituents. For example, camp curricula were developed that have themes related to the Aleph Bet, including Israel & Me which explores how Israel is part of one's story and the story of the camp; A Land and its People that addresses the landscape of historical and current Israel and how one is connected to Israel as a place; The Pioneering Spirit, which talks about how one can pioneer a vision; A People's Hope, which promotes the value of making the world a better place; Creation & Rebirth, which talks about ways that history can be expressed in present time; and Dreams & Realities, which helps participants envision community in the future. The values promoted in the curriculum include authenticity and joy. The curriculum also promotes learner-centered instruction, partnership between Israeli and American staff; and leveraging an Israel experience.

Respondents said that resources are needed because most educators are constantly looking for materials and have little time to make them. They thought that especially in smaller communities, educators may have very limited access to resources. Respondents praised the quality and creativity of resources produced by The iCenter and reported that the organization provided additional materials whenever they were requested.

Multiple respondents stated that much of the value of resources developed by The iCenter resided in the fact that they were intentionally used in conjunction with professional development activities. In other words, those involved in trainings did not just receive the resources, but were given instruction on how to effectively use them. Recipients appreciated both the materials and the ideas provided by staff about how to utilize the resources with various audiences. As one strategist pointed out, the integration of professional development with resources is vital because ideas shared with educators will only "stick" if they are given tools and resources to reinforce the ideas. Respondents also said that items such as the Israel resource cards and the conflict toolkit were designed to be used in flexible ways to address the needs of different classrooms, groups, and organizations.

Our resources have been developed in a way that their interest is not limited to a specific subject, but to whatever an organization's mission statement is. It's speaking a language that enables [participants] to have a thoughtful discussion in any context. — Strategist

Some respondents expressed a concern that The iCenter is not well-equipped to develop a large quantity of resources because staff may not have the appropriate level of content or pedagogical expertise or because there are too few people on staff who have the time to devote to the task. They thought while The iCenter should continue to develop some materials, a better role for staff may be to seek out existing resources, evaluate their quality and appropriateness, and publicize their availability through the website, conferences, and trainings. Additionally, they said there is currently no one central place to access all of the resources pertaining to the field of Israel education and educators subsequently struggle with obtaining appropriate materials. They would like more attention on collecting and curating resources rather than developing new ones.

Maybe our job should be to curate rather than create [resources]. Other organizations have hundreds of content creators on staff but we don't . . . I don't think we are staffed in a way that makes resources a priority, which is why we haven't done our best work in that area. We are not content creators. — Strategist

HELPFULNESS OF RESOURCES

Three resources were frequently mentioned as having a large impact: the Aleph Bet of Israel Education, Israel Resource Cards, and the Camp Resource Box.

Aleph Bet of Israel Education was referred to as a key resource that promoted academic rigor in the discipline of Israel education by setting standards, establishing frameworks, and describing best practices. It was seen as a kind of yardstick against which practitioners could measure the depth of their efforts in relationship to the standards in the field. One respondent mentioned using the resource in a summer camp by selecting quotes and using them to spur discussions on different topics.

Israel Resource Cards were prized because they provided information that could be employed in many ways and in virtually any educational setting. Respondents said they can be used, for example, to have people introduce themselves or to explain what is important to them. One individual described placing cards on a table and having workshop participants select cards and discuss them. Several respondents thought the cards could be made even more useful by having a set printed in Hebrew. Over 6,000 sets of these cards have been distributed. The cards have been translated into three other languages.

Israel resource cards are practical and really loved by all who use them . . . they find uses the creator never had in mind. They provide tremendous satisfaction and joy. I think we can provide more ideas of how to use the cards. They bring in playfulness, something that is really important in educational settings.
                                          — Strategist

Camp Resource Box was described as containing a variety of practical, easy-to-use, hands-on resources to make aspects of Israel come alive for young people. For example, the use of Israeli spices in cooking classes and the creation of food popular in that country, part of the "Golda in the Kitchen" activity, were used to prompt conversations about Israeli culture and history. Last year the box was completed and distributed shortly before or in some

cases after camps had begun without instructions on how to use the different components. This year all recipients of the materials will be required to attend a webinar that will explain each resource and demonstrate how it can be used to develop a deeper understanding of Israeli history and culture. Shlichim are also being trained on the uses of materials in the camp resource box and asked to share the materials in summer camps with which they are associated.

ONLINE RESOURCES

The Goodman Camping Initiative database (*http://goodman.theicenter.org/*) was regarded as being especially useful because resources included step-by-step instructions for activities. However, respondents thought the "camping" descriptor was somewhat misleading, as most of the resources were not just applicable to camps but to a variety of educational settings. However, without entering directly into the database of resources contained within the Goodman Camping Initiative, it may not possible for a user to locate resources that might, for example, be useful in a Hebrew class or history lesson or another venue.

In general, while the website was seen as attractive and providing access to useful resources, it was also characterized as being difficult to navigate and lacking the means to move between different entry points and various resources. Respondents wanted the website to feature more interconnections between tools and resources so that users would not be limited by the separate "silos" of resources that currently exist. They also requested links to useful resources outside of those developed by The iCenter.

IDEAS FOR RESOURCES

Respondents thought there was a much greater need to provide users with practical examples of The iCenter approaches and practices. The main example given was the Aleph Bet of Israel Education, which for all its enormous value in defining best practices and creating a common language still lacked guidance on turning concepts into practice. They pointed to online holiday resources as another example, saying there was insufficient instruction on how to use the stories and other materials with students. Respondents wanted to ensure that all resources came with instructions for how to use them in different settings.

Some teachers want a lesson plan now. Some do not want to do things on their own. It may be helpful to say, "Here is the goal, here are the guiding questions." Maybe that would help the teacher so they don't have to go to other websites. — Strategist

One form of practical assistance suggested by respondents was in developing and/or collecting lesson plans that could be posted online. They thought that teachers struggled with creating lesson plans for the same reason they were limited in creating resources: they had little time. Additionally, they said, teachers sometimes lacked content expertise to design quality resources.

Other ideas for resources included materials that could bring more Hebrew into classroom settings to create an immersive environment; a modular curriculum on Israel education that could be used in Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox settings; and more digitization of existing resources. A network partner thought The iCenter needed to become even more involved with online learning opportunities, providing webinars, PowerPoints for others to use, and disseminating more resources so that they could serve people beyond the North American audience who can not attend their events. A final idea was to have more resources for teachers and students in early childhood education.

Yes, I think they need to take more of their resources online . . . there is so much of what is out in the field that could be digitized for efficient dissemination.

OUTCOMES / IMPACT

- **The Aleph Bet of Israel Education is acknowledged as a key resource for the organization.** The Aleph Bet has defined the field by setting standards, establishing frameworks, and describing best practices.

- **Respondents appreciated the diversity of resources provided by The iCenter.** Over time, The iCenter created a large number of resources targeted to different client groups or for different purposes. Respondents acknowledged that they appreciated the array of resources available. They wanted even more.

- **Respondents lauded the high quality of the resources.** Without exception, respondents who discussed The iCenter resources reported their high quality. They noted the careful attention to detail, the adaptability, and the reliable accuracy of information contained within each one. They also valued the directions for use that accompanied the resources.

- **The resources have been widely downloaded, distributed, and used.** The value of the resources has been demonstrated through their wide use, as evidenced by the number of downloads or distributions (e.g., more than 6,000 sets of Israel resource cards have been distributed) and by the descriptions of the utility of the resources by the respondents.

LESSONS LEARNED

The value of resources was enhanced because they were often tied to professional development. All forms of professional development provided by The iCenter included both resources and guidance on how to use the resources in the field.

While the website was described as attractive and providing access to many valuable resources, it was also characterized by some as being difficult to navigate. There are currently few interconnections between tools and resources on the website, making it challenging for users to locate the information they need.

There is a need for a centralized repository for information about the field of Israel education. Respondents stated that there is currently no one central place for people to access Israel education resources. They especially wanted a site where articles, books, and other materials could be accessed and downloaded or ordered.

There is a perceived need to develop more resources with practical applications. Respondents wanted more resources that showed how to translate concepts contained in the Aleph Bet of Israel Education into strategies and materials that could be used in educational settings. They specifically mentioned the need to develop or identify lesson plans and to provide instruction on the use of holiday materials contained on the website.

Grow the Field

In this section, the efforts, activities, and outcomes related to growing the field of Israel education are discussed. First, the goal of becoming a national hub is discussed, followed by a discussion of the specific goals in this section with a focus on alumni networks and partners, and the extent of integration into other organizations and educational opportunities. Finally, The iCenter's reach and efforts to come to scale are documented.

Strategies in this section include promoting Aleph Bet standards; convening national gatherings; integrating Israel into Jewish conferences; establishing robust participant alumni networks; and expanding organizational partnership. Becoming a national hub and reach/bringing efforts to scale are also described since they are primary goals of The iCenter and key areas of growing the field. The iCenter staff reported they spend about 40% of their time in this goal area and that this area is its absolute priority.

BECOMING A NATIONAL HUB

One of the main goals of The iCenter is to build a national hub for Israel education. Research by the Collaboration for Collective Impact (2012)[7] shows that to have a collective impact, a national hub must serve as a backbone to the field and demonstrate effectiveness on 27 indicators. Figure 6 summarizes the research on "backbone effectiveness."

The iCenter has successfully become the national hub for Israel education. While not intentionally using the framework provided in Figure 1, it has nonetheless aligned its practices with those indicators that apply to the maintenance and scalability of the field of Israel education. Evidence for each of these areas of becoming the backbone of the field, based on interviews and documents, are as follows:

Guide Vision and Strategy. The iCenter has successfully helped the field to create a vision and develop a set of robust strategies for field building. Consistent with the literature on effective practices (FSG,2012),[8] the iCenter engaged both thought leaders and "unusual" suspects, that is, those who have great influence but also bring gravitas to the process. They invited people with "lived experience" and outliers with multiple perspectives. This group was consulted in the early stages to define the problem, and later during an iCamp to discuss the field, its complexities, and its multifaceted nature, and the need to move forward. The iCenter leaders maintained a disciplined focus on process and results. They engaged in mapping the field, engaging the community, understanding needs, and developing an action plan. The iCenter successfully met challenges including negotiating through competing priorities and agendas; focusing on the core goal rather than a laundry list of activities; keeping credible decision makers and leaders at the table; dealing with the tension of being the convener without being the "driver"; and establishing avenues for input, feedback, and continuous improvement from the beginning.

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[7] Collaboration for Impact (2012). The Backbone Organisation. Downloaded from http://www.collaborationforimpact.com/collective-impact/the-backbone-organisation/
[8] Ibid.

FIGURE 5: **BACKBONE EFFECTIVENESS**

Backbone Effectiveness: 27 Indicators

Guide Vision and Strategy	• Partners accurately describe the **common agenda** • Partners **publicly discuss / advocate for** common agenda goals • Partners' **individual work is increasingly aligned** with common agenda • Board members and key leaders increasingly **look to backbone** organization for initiative support, strategic guidance and leadership
Support Aligned Activities	• Partners **articulate their role** in the initiative • **Relevant stakeholders** are engaged in the initiative • Partners **communicate and coordinate** efforts regularly, with, and independently of, backbone • Partners report increasing levels of **trust** with one another • Partners increase **scope / type of collaborative work** • Partners improve **quality** of their work • Partners improve **efficiency** of their work • Partners feel **supported and recognized** in their work
Establish Shared Measurement Practices	• Shared **data system** is in development • Partners **understand the value** of shared data • Partners have robust / shared **data capacity** • Partners **make decisions** based on data • Partners **utilize data** in a meaningful way
Build Public Will	• Community members are increasingly **aware** of the issue(s) • Community members express **support** for the initiative • Community members feel **empowered** to engage in the issue(s) • Community members increasingly **take action**
Advance Policy	• Target audience (e.g., influencers and policymakers) is increasingly **aware** of the initiative • Target audiences **advocate** for changes to the system aligned with initiative goals • Public **policy** is increasingly **aligned** with initiative goals
Mobilize Funding	• Funders are asking nonprofits to **align** to initiative goals • Funders are **redirecting funds** to support initiative goals • **New resources** from public and private sources are being contributed to partners and initiative

Source: FSG and Greater Cincinnati Foundation   1   © 2012 F

Support Aligned Activities. The iCenter is aligned with all eight indicators in this area. They built a strong, thoughtful, and dedicated staff; developed tools such as logic models; built the backbone infrastructures; created good will in target audiences; utilized process experts; managed expectations; and created specific activities that aligned with goals. These activities were aimed toward professionalizing the field, developing useful resources, creating networks, and expanding partnerships. They engaged in continuous improvement of all their services and products.

Establish Shared Measurement Practices. The indicators identified in this area were not goals of The iCenter. While The iCenter consistently collected data on their effectiveness, quality, and impact, they did not have a goal of

We are a national umbrella organization and we want to be that for the field of Israel education. It means standards and shared practice. The Aleph Bet of Israel education has been that. We provide ideas, support, and training to put that into practice. That's how we have been working and evolving.

— Strategist

sharing data or building data capacity. The iCenter routinely used data for improving their services and activities. For example, The iCenter felt strongly that Birthright Israel Fellows should have an opportunity to apply their newly acquired skills in a simulated trip activity. They developed various simulations over the years for this purpose, but many felt the time spent in buses going to simulation sites or in the activity did not have as much yield as they would like. The iCenter continued to develop different simulations that were more meaningful, including a recent simulation used in Atlanta at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial to demonstrate the importance of place, with modeling and opportunities to dialogue and discuss ways that place can be used to convey important messages.

You need to let people know that it takes time to do this work and for programs to help young people develop a Jewish identity. You can't do Jewish education without creating a Jewish identity. The iCenter has built bridges to this concept — it's the core of the web. At the end of the day, it's changing the paradigm of Jewish education. — Founder

Build Public Will. The "public" for this are the educators and others working in the field of Israel education. According to respondents, those who consider themselves to be Israel educators are aware of The iCenter and many have established strong connections to The iCenter through training and use of materials. Those in the larger Jewish education sphere are thought likely by respondents to have awareness of The iCenter, particularly if anyone in their community has attended an event hosted by the organization. However, many respondents believed that outreach efforts to others in Jewish education could be enhanced.

The "publics" who are involved in The iCenter have clearly been affected and often refer others to The iCenter activities. Respondents noted that those who engaged in any efforts by The iCenter are supportive and feel empowered. These community members adopt the philosophy and use materials and knowledge and skills from the trainings in their Israel education work.

Advance Policy. This area is not pertinent to the work of The iCenter.

Mobilize Funding. The iCenter has been very successful in attracting a variety of funders for its work. Respondents from foundations that fund Israel education reported that while they are not explicit in asking their grantees to align to the goals of The iCenter for Israel education, many of their grantees do so. New funders have been garnered for the field.

PROMOTE ALEPH BET STANDARDS

The Aleph Bet Standards are used as the foundation for all of the services and events that The iCenter offers. For example, posters with values expressed by the Aleph Bet are available and widely distributed to clients and partners; both specific and general activities in the Birthright Israel Fellows training were based on the principles embedded in the Aleph Bet; and the Aleph Bet is used as part of a culminating activity for the iFellows. Additional illustrations appear throughout this report. The standards are completely infused in all the work of The iCenter.

NATIONAL GATHERINGS

Every other year, The iCenter gathers Jewish educators, thought leaders, and stakeholders from across North American and Israel for a 3 day-conference. During the convening, participants hear presentations, discuss best practices, share ideas for innovation, and conduct deep conversations about Israel education and the issues of the day. Over time, interest and participation in this event (initially called iCamp and now called iCon), attendance grew exponentially: in 2009, there were 90 participants; in 2011, there were 150 participants; and in 2014, there were 220 participants. Enrollment in 2018 is expected to be 350 participants

The participants come from a wide range of backgrounds: they include rabbis and educators from Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox congregations; shlichim; leaders of national Jewish organizations; funders of Jewish causes; faculty members from institutions of higher education; iFellows; program alumni; network partners; and many others who are interested in Israel education.

Respondents widely lauded iCamp/iCon as the "go-to" place to discuss Israel education, its successes, and its future. Many respondents reported that they learned new ideas, new approaches, and made new friends. Some described it as a place where people with conflicting ideologies can have civil conversations.

ESTABLISH ROBUST PARTICIPANT ALUMNI NETWORKS

The iCenter creates participant alumni networks as part of its work with most stakeholder groups. For example, the iFellows, Birthright Israel Fellows, Israel educators at the camps, and others have established Facebook pages, Instagram accounts, and other ways to connect.

The iFellows network is one of the more formal and active networks. iFellows stated that they maintained ongoing relationships with some members of their cohort and were comfortable reaching out to them or former faculty if they had questions or concerns. Some iFellows mentioned occasionally accessing a Facebook page for the group, although did not see it being widely utilized. They reported they really were not treated as a cohort and found they relied more often on the gradate cohort at school. However, iFellows frequently mentioned being part of a community of practice conducted by The iCenter through monthly online meetings with a faculty member. They saw great value in learning how Israel education was being implemented in synagogues and other educational sites. They requested dates be established several months ahead of time so they could be more readily

Israel education is a field that demands creative and innovative thinking. The conference provides that. I find it to be stimulating and thought provoking, but it also has an immediate applicability to my work. — Network Partner

You have to go. It's like a norm. If you don't go, you feel like you have missed something important that may affect you or your work.
— Strategist

With so many professional development programs, you finish and you get disconnected. That is not what they have done at The iCenter. They keep asking us what we need and where we need support. This is the group I am most connected to in my professional life. — Alumnus

incorporated into busy professional schedules. Several iFellows mentioned that the iCenter convened a group in New York with participants from different cohorts for a series of sessions and thought it would be helpful to host convenings for iFellows graduates in other parts of the country. Most did not have opportunities to meet or interact with individuals from other cohorts.

Many participants continue their relationships with each other after events. Birthright Israel Fellows, for example, developed Facebook pages where individuals post information on their activities, pose questions or submit answers to questions, and otherwise serve as resources to each other. Some respondents mentioned they have developed lifelong friends with people they met through The iCenter professional development activities. Still others talk about network formation in their communities, where people who attended common events become co-planners of activities in the community. Others discussed maintaining looser connections, but still discussed the feeling of belonging that was generated during time spent with peers or job-alike colleagues.

EXPAND ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

The iCenter has formulated networks and partnerships with many of the key organizations and individuals in the fields of Israel education and Jewish education. Respondents reported that the strongest relationships The iCenter has with the field is with Jewish camps and Jewish day schools. The camps and Jewish day schools have been strongly influenced in the ways that their sites have infused Israel throughout students' experiences. Respondents also mentioned that these partners have changed their views about staffing: nearly all have a dedicated Israel education specialist and most make sure that there are Israeli staff as well.

I think they have a ripple effect among partners. You see others now emphasizing the idea of experiential education and trying to be creative in their delivery of services. — Network Partner

Partnerships have been established with many organizations that offer Jewish educational opportunities. For example, the iCenter has served as the primary provider of professional development activities for Birthright Israel for the past 4 years. Birthright Israel has a small staff and relies on The iCenter to create and deliver the training for its Birthright Israel Fellows both in North America and in Israel.

They have a beautiful philosophy of education and an expertise and understanding of what our staff need and how they can grow. Much of the vision behind this is as much theirs as it is ours. They are always willing to fine-tune and adjust. — Network Partner

The iCenter has other partnerships that are not as extensive. For example, The iCenter has a good relationship with Hillel and often provides them with ideas, materials, and sessions at their conferences. They have a strong relationship with some B'nai Brith Youth Organization (BBYO) chapters, synagogues, and other Jewish educators. Representatives of these organizations referred to The iCenter as a "go-to" hub for resources and training ideas, and many routinely use portions of the Aleph Bet and other materials in their work.

Some new organizations, such as the Israel Action program, have depended on The iCenter to help them with start-up and to provide training with the staff. They accessed Israel education content and materials and customized them to meet the needs of their organizations or for their clients.

In addition, several partner organizations rely on The iCenter to be a pipeline for provision of skilled staff. Some even prefer to hire individuals who have been through at least some training offered by The iCenter or have received a credential through the iFellows program.

Finally, multiple respondents discussed the value of the consulting they receive from The iCenter. They reported being able to call and discuss challenges, hear ideas for resolving the challenges, or receive advice for program planning and implementation.

Respondents discussed the factors that served to facilitate or impede the collaboration they have with The iCenter. Nearly all mentioned the quality of The iCenter training and materials was a significant contributor to maintaining their partnerships. They consider The iCenter to have set the standard for quality in the field and that individuals who serve as facilitators are well known and respected. The iCenter was also highly regarded in the way it prepared and empowered educators. Collaborators felt the individuals who participated in the training typically improved their practices greatly.

One issue raised in several interviews was the challenge of having mutual funders. This makes everyone cautious about critiquing one another since they do not want to jeopardize funding. Another challenge mentioned by a few was the cost of the services. A final challenge for some was the perceived lack of responsiveness of The iCenter when individuals call for support. These individuals said that when they reached The iCenter, staff were very supportive and helpful, but there was sometimes a lag time between leaving a message and receiving a call in response.

IMPACTS OF PARTNERING ON ORGANIZATIONS

All respondents were asked to discuss how the work of The iCenter impacted their respective organizations. Participants in professional development said their training with The iCenter helped them to establish Israel education as an integral part of the educational mission of synagogues, camps, or other organizations and utilize resources and tools they had acquired as part of professional development. Many said they used educational strategies learned through professional

The Goodman Camping Initiative for Modern Israel Education – that changed the field. Israel education was always a part of programming, especially in a Zionist camp. But the work with The iCenter changed some of the focus. Israel was infused in the experience. The athletic teams took on the names of Hebrew cities. Arts and crafts supplies were labeled with Hebrew names . . .. It's become personal to see oneself as an Israel educator, no matter how religious you are. It's been a shift in identity.

— Network Partner

We have a lot more work to do in supplementary, part-time education, in synagogue education, which is where most young Jewish children are. Because it is so vast and tied to a movement that already has its own relationship with Israel, it has been difficult to find the right strategies. We haven't cracked the nut of youth engagement, like BBYO and youth groups. I think we can do a lot there.

— Strategist

development, such as having students use all their senses to explore new topics or to integrate Hebrew names into every lesson; these strategies were shared with other educators and utilized throughout classrooms or camps. Others said that the content and quality of professional development given by The iCenter shaped how professional development was conducted within their own organizations. Some created a position of Israel Educator within their organization where the position had never existed before.

Those who worked for local, national, or international organizations said that The iCenter demonstrated that Israel education can be a joint effort supportive of the strengths and capabilities of both organizations. They noted that The iCenter staff are able to listen to concerns and work through issues until mutually beneficial solutions can be found.

Founders and network partners stated that their association with The iCenter allowed them to bring back tools, techniques, and resources; connected them to other partners who enhanced the work of the organization; helped to integrate consistent language and educational content about Israel into curriculum and trainings; and recruited faculty from some partner institutions to strengthen the relationship. Other impacts included receiving accurate information about efforts on the ground and how to most effectively support trainings and curriculum.

IMPACTS OF PARTNERING ON THE ICENTER

Network partners were asked to share perceived impacts on The iCenter resulting from the collaborative work between organizations. One impact was to assist The iCenter in understanding an Israeli way of thinking that could be integrated with the American approach to produce the best Israel education. Another impact was to encourage greater transparency on the part of The iCenter to discussing problems so that both organizations could look at issues, decide on a best course of action to address the situation, and produce better outcomes for both entities. Other impacts included encouraging The iCenter to have more outreach to different organizations working in Israel education; pushing for better research to understand the field of Israel education; finding more effective ways of working with shlichim and understanding their evolving role; and learning to target the educational needs of young adults and professionals involved in programs such as Birthright Fellows.

The iCenter helped us to see that Israel education had to be deeper than one day. It forced us to think about our vision of Israel education that feels like it is truly us. It helped us understand how and when we would teach Israel.
— Alumnus

When one of us has an idea, we brainstorm what to do and how to approach it. We are sincere in wanting it only if both our organizations will benefit from this program.
— Network Partner

We are partnering for the same goals. It brings us to the same discussion about how to bring Israel to the hearts of people in the Jewish diaspora here, how to bring Israel to Jewish life outside of Israel. — Network Partner

INTEGRATE ISRAEL EDUCATION INTO JEWISH CONFERENCES

As part of its work, The iCenter staff regularly attend 24 to 30 national conferences/convenings a year to implement workshops and/or to engage alumni.

Examples include:

1. Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) Biennial Conference
2. The Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI) — Shlichim Trainings
3. Hillel Global Assembly
4. AIPAC Policy Conference
5. The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ) Convention (Youth)
6. Leaders Assembly (Foundation for Jewish Camp)
7. Jewish Educators Assembly (JEA) (Conservative Movement)
8. Early Childhood Conference (ECC)
9. General Assembly of the Jewish Federation of North America (JFNA)
10. Illinois Council for Teachers of Foreign Languages (ICTFL) — iCenter interest is Hebrew

These sessions are more of a "light touch" approach, but serve as outreach opportunities and ways to introduce others in the field to a common language, standards of practice, and specific activities to enhance the skills of Israel educators.

If there is one thing we excel at, it is building the relationship. It's unique and we don't have an agenda. We are not saying this is how it needs to be. We say, how can we help you achieve what you need to be? — Strategist

EXPANDING THE REACH/BRINGING EFFORTS TO SCALE

Another dimension of becoming a hub and influencing the field is to grow the number of participants that are connected to The iCenter. In 2009, The iCenter established an initial set of process benchmarks for reach reflected in the logic model. For professional development, these benchmarks included the recruitment and development of 18 iFellows and 9 mentors; and convening a regional Kallah for 150 educators; providing a 2-day seminar for 40 RAVSAK teachers. By 2012, the goals grew to be 60 thought leaders, 48 Masters students; 250 camp educators; 60 shlichim and youth workers; 500 educators in 6 cities; and 200 teen leaders. Finally, by 2015, the goals increased to 100 Masters students; 300 experiential educators, 500 Birthright Israel Fellows, 360 camp educators; and 12 community cohorts. Through targeted training, they hoped to reach 1,000 educational leaders, 5,000 educators, and 1,000 team leaders. The outcomes far exceeded goals and expectations, as shown below.

A few respondents, though, thought that The iCenter should do more outreach, especially to Jewish educators in day schools, synagogues, and in early childhood programs. In their opinions, the outreach efforts currently underway tended to result in The iCenter having "groupies," that is, individuals and organizations dedicated to participation in The iCenter events and too few others—especially outside the Chicago area—knowing of their work. These individuals thought

that an outreach dissemination strategy for specific types of educators or youth would be helpful. On the other hand, the same respondents worried that too much outreach would spread the current staff too thinly and thought that coming to scale more quickly could have negative repercussions, especially for burn-out of the current staff and consultants.

OUTCOMES / IMPACT

The iCenter has become the national hub for Israel education. Without exception, respondents referred to The iCenter as the "go-to" organization in the field.

- **Thought partners and leaders that attended convenings can accurately describe The iCenter's mission, goals, and common activities meant to reach goals.** Nearly all partners publicly discuss and advocate for the major thrust of The iCenter, which is to have young people establish a relationship with Israel and its people. This is expressed in work being done in nearly all settings directly touched by The iCenter, including camps, day schools, Birthright Israel, and through the iFellows program. Partners' individual work in many of these settings is aligned with The iCenter's agenda. Board members and key leaders and many others in the field increasingly access The iCenter for support, strategic guidance (in the form of consultation and solicitation of advice), and leadership.

- **Partners can articulate their roles in Israel education.** Stakeholders that rely on The iCenter include Birthright Israel Fellows, educators in Jewish day camps and Jewish day schools, teachers in public high schools that have Hebrew instruction, institutions of higher education (through the iFellows program), and many thought leaders throughout the field of Israel education. Partners often download resources, seek guidance and advice from consultants, attend training conferences, participate in convenings, and use The iCenter guidance and toolkits in their work. There is strong two-way communication with The iCenter and the amount of collaborative work has increased substantially over time, with participants sharing practices, asking questions, and otherwise communicating via the website and other linking mechanisms. Interviewees have reported the quality of their work has increased substantially. Efficiency has changed through the access of resources that constituents no longer have to create, for example, in the use of arts and culture resources in the camps and day schools. Partners consistently reported that they felt strongly supported in their work.

- **The Aleph Bet of Israel Education has been infused in nearly all of The iCenter services and products.** The underlying values and principles of the Aleph Bet are embedded in nearly everything The iCenter does.

From a camp perspective, it seems like the reach has been enormous. So many of us now have connections to The iCenter. I don't know of any camps who are not familiar with or haven't used The iCenter's materials. And the connections keep growing. For example, we just added the Piven material. I think the lesson is that once we hear about a good thing, the word spreads like wild fire. The lesson is to make it a good thing. — Strategist

- **The national conferences (iCamp, iCon) are highly regarded as "must attend" events by thought leaders, organizational leaders, Jewish educators, network partners, and other practitioners in the field.** The content and processes used to facilitate thinking and action are widely lauded and admired. Participants of all backgrounds feel valued and say that they are given voice to discuss important issues in a civil way. All respondents reported they were able to use something they learned in their organization or practices.

- **Alumni networks were created among attendees of ongoing projects.** For example, iFellows and Birthright Israel Fellows have Facebook pages and reach out to each other to share and seek advice. The iFellows network is more robust and valued among its participants, though it could benefit from more intentional cohort team building.

- **Without exception, respondents reported that the partnerships formed with The iCenter by various organizations resulted in strong benefits for the partner organization.** Specific benefits cited by respondents included increased confidence and competence among their staff; a better understanding of Israel education; "raising the bar" on what professional development and programming should look like; and understanding that a thoughtful and reflective approach is needed to understand the complexity of the field. If given the opportunity, all partner organizations would opt to collaborate with The iCenter again.

- **The reach of The iCenter over time has been extensive.** From 2014-2017, The iCenter participants included:
  - **710** Birthright Israel Fellows
  - **6,875** Youth professionals, teens and other targeted trainings
  - **447** iCon participants (3-day convening of the field)
  - **407** Camp educators reaching approximately **15,800** campers
  - **313** Israeli educators (JAFI shlichim) working throughout North America
  - **90** Day school educators
  - **250** iFellows (Master's Concentration 2010-2017 total) working in
    58 North American communities
  - **47** Hillel campus professionals (Hillel's Ezra Fellowship and Global Assembly workshops)
  - **22** iCoach supervisors
  - **20** Public school Hebrew teachers/department heads ongoing training and resources

- **The iCenter also reached many participants in North American communities who reported adopting The iCenter approaches.** Not surprisingly, given the location of The iCenter, Chicago had the greatest number of participants. However, 16 other communities were involved. The number of participants by community, 2014-2017 included are listed in Figure 6.

FIGURE 6: **NUMBER OF THE ICENTER PARTICIPANTS IN COMMUNITY-BASED INITIATIVES**			
Community	**Particpants**	**Community**	**Particpants**
United States		**Canada**	
Chicago	250	Ottawa	92
Cincinnati	127	Toronto	73
Detroit	112	Montreal	26
New York	94		
Miami	58	**Argentina**	3
Dallas	58		
Virginia Beach	47	**Israel**	376
Denver	40		
Baltimore	33		
Atlanta	30		
Philadelphia	28		
Pittsburgh	23		

- **Field saturation was also relatively high.**
  - **40%** of Jewish overnight camps (affiliated with Foundation for Jewish Camp) have partici-
    pated in an intensive professional development initiative ranging from 14 to 24 months.
  - **42%** of camps received and used iCenter created resources in summer 2017.
  - **75%** of all eligible students elect to participate in the iCenter's Master's Concentration.
    (Eligibility defined any student enrolled in a rabbinic or graduate program at one of
    iCenter's 11 partner institutions.)
  - **51%** of the 289 respondents to an October 2014 survey of Jewish educators said that they
    were drawn into the Field of Israel Education by an iCenter program.
  - *https://www.theicenter.org/sites/default/files/knowledge_base/iCenter%20Field%20
    Building%20Report%20-%20Short%20Version%20Final.pdf*

LESSONS LEARNED

Having a national hub is helpful in catalyzing change. Helping people feel they are a part of something much larger than themselves provides a sense of purpose and creates momentum and good will among most.

The saying of "go slow to go fast" is applicable to The iCenter. While it took a little while to develop and refine the Aleph Bet, doing so shaped the underlying philosophy and the practice in the field. Once the foundation and values were expressed, the materials and professional development became much easier to create and for sites to adopt and use, even if they did not attend training seminars. Going slowly also allowed The iCenter to take more risks since they had more permission to "fail" given that their reputation was not yet solidified.

This pace also allowed for greater thoughtfulness and a pattern that enabled the small staff to create professional services for a wider variety of stakeholders.

The iCenter benefitted greatly by not having its own agenda but rather focusing on meeting the needs of its partners. This helped to put partner organizations at ease.

There is a fine balance between being responsive and being proactive. The strategies require proactivity in shaping the field, promoting the standards, and nurturing professionalism. The need for funding, though, requires the organization to be responsive so that it can grow. Finding that balance and then holding to it is critical. There should be bright white lines that identify the non-negotiables clearly to any funder or partner organization.

Conclusions

The iCenter was founded in 2008 to promote meaningful Israel education in North America by serving as the national hub and catalyst for developing and supporting the field. As The iCenter marks its first ten years of existence, it commissioned a study to describe and evaluate the strategies used for goal attainment and the outcomes/impacts that the organization has had on the field of Israel education. RMC Research conducted 60 interviews with Israeli educators, including those associated with the founding of The iCenter, key strategists involved in its past and current evolution, network partners, and program alumni. Substudies were conducted on the Birthright Israel Fellows to provide external validation of data from the interviews and on the iFellows to provide a more in-depth examination of The iCenter work with one constituency group. Interviews explored The iCenter's founding, strategies for field building, professional development services, resources, specific programs and initiatives, perceived outcomes and impacts, and suggestions for future growth. Findings are presented, along with lessons learned as synthesized from the interview data.

FINDINGS

The iCenter's founding was grounded in what the research shows to be effective strategies for creating, building, and supporting a field. Funders were savvy in selecting the right leadership, the framework to guide field-development, and the balance between support and autonomy. The journey included multiple steps, with outcomes/impacts along the way. Through its work with Jewish and Israeli education thought leaders, The iCenter conducted environmental scans and needs assessments and developed a logic model and strategic plan for its work.

The iCenter created the Aleph Bet of Israel Education which served to establish the principles, values, and intellectual foundation for the field. The Aleph Bet provided a common language and standards for excellence by closely describing a vision for Israel education that put the relationship to Israel and its people, history, place, language and culture, at the center of any Israel education experience.

Through the efforts of The iCenter, a widespread shift in thinking about the focus of Israel education occurred among Jewish educators. Educators understood that its purpose was to affect Jewish identity and not just help learners acquire knowledge about Israel.

Outcomes and impacts associated with each of the three goals guiding The iCenter are shown below.

DEVELOP THE PEOPLE

To address its goal for Develop the People, The iCenter provided professional development opportunities to a wide range of educators, including those from Jewish camps, day schools, Israel trip leaders, youth groups, synagogue groups, public high school Hebrew classes, and institutions for higher education.

The professional development approach included high-quality content, learner-centered pedagogies, and treatment of all participants as professionals.

OUTCOMES/IMPACTS

- The iCenter was perceived by respondents as playing a key role in developing educators in the field of Israel education in North America.

- The iCenter's approach to promoting educator professionalism catalyzed a change in the field.

- Respondents said the program had lasting impacts on their work and they continued to use strategies and materials gained from the program.

- Respondents, particularly iFellows, substantially benefitted from the program bringing together participants from different religious backgrounds.

- The nature of education in partner organizations has changes.

CREATE THE RESOURCES

To further its goal for Create the Resources, The iCenter created hundreds of resources for various stakeholder groups.

The resources were authentic, timely, accessible, and could be flexibly used. Resources were available online and in print, and were generally considered well-conceived and useful. Some respondents asked for more direction and support in their use.

OUTCOMES/IMPACTS

- The Aleph Bet of Israel Education is acknowledged as a key resource for the organization.

- Respondents appreciated the diversity of resources provided by The iCenter.

- Respondents lauded the high quality of the resources.

- The resources have been widely downloaded, distributed, and used.

GROW THE FIELD

For its goal centered on Grow the Field, The iCenter put into place all of the elements necessary to become a national hub for Israel education.

It infused the principles within the Aleph Bet into all its products and services; convened national conferences for thought leaders, heads of organizations, and many others to discuss issues and advance the field; create networks of alumni to keep them informed and provide a forum for sharing and problem solving; and develop effective partnerships with other organizations involved in Israel or Jewish education.

OUTCOMES/IMPACTS

- Thought partners and leaders that attended convenings can accurately describe The iCenter's mission, goals, and common activities meant to reach goals.

- Partners can articulate their roles in Israel education.

- The Aleph Bet of Israel Education has been infused in nearly all of The iCenter services and products.

- The national conferences (iCamp, iCon) are highly regarded as "must attend" events by thought leaders, organizational leaders, Jewish educators, network partners, and other practitioners in the field.

- Alumni networks were created among attendees of ongoing projects.

- Without exception, respondents reported that the partnerships formed with The iCenter by various organizations resulted in strong benefits for the partner organization.

- The reach of The iCenter over time has been extensive.

- The iCenter also reached many participants in North American communities who reported adopting The iCenter approaches.

The overall conclusion for the impact study is that The iCenter has had an enormous impact on the field of Israel education such that its underlying philosophies, educational approaches, and resources are widely implemented in the field. The iCenter serves as the national hub in the field and has an extensive reach and impact for each of the constituent groups with which it has worked.

the iCenter

The iCenter for Israel Education
Impact Study, 2018