

The Associated: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, Chai, and JCC Community Agency History



The Associated: Jewish community Federation of Baltimore works to preserve and enhance Jewish life. It addresses charitable, educational, religious, humanitarian, health, cultural, and social service needs of the Jewish community locally, nationally, in Israel and throughout the world. (mission statement)

Baltimore's Jewish community evolved as a small, insular, but relatively wealthy minority community in a southern city, and its institutions today reflect this history. Driving up Park Heights Avenue from Northern Parkway into the suburbs today, the Jewish community is everywhere in evidence in the cluster of social service agencies/JCC just above Northern Parkway, the many small synagogues and half dozen large, imposing synagogue/Temple complexes lining the road, each with a large sign proclaiming *(Agency/synagogue name) is Associated, are You?* The signs are part of the Federation's fundraising campaign, but they attest to the cohesion of the community. You might also see ultra-Orthodox Jews, men in wide hats and dark coats, women in long dresses and head scarves, in this lower end of the community. In the adjacent suburbs, the Jewish community is less clustered and visible, but an equally imposing complex of JCC, performing arts center, and senior housing nestles off a wooded road. It also proudly proclaims *JCC is Associated, are You?* Most of the people at this facility look upper middle class and secular, but it always busy. The same sign is visible outside Lifebridge (Sinai) hospital complex and at most of the other synagogues and institutions outside of this core geographical area. These images characterize a diverse community with internal fragmentation, but proud visibility and strongly networked institutions.

While Jews arrived in Baltimore in the 18th century, the community remained small into the 20th century. Elazar (1995:343) reports 1,000 Jews in Baltimore in 1840, with migration from Bavaria bringing the population to 12,000 by 1855 (Schein 2000). The community started with German and Dutch Jews, many of whom quickly became wealthy. They were followed by waves of Lithuanian and Russian Jews, some of whom also did well financially. The community was deeply divided by country of origin and brand of Judaism, forming two federations by the 1920s (German/Russian) and hosting nationally prominent radical Reform and Orthodox

synagogues. Fissures between descendants of German and Eastern European Jews are still remarked on today, and deeply influenced institutional behavior until the 1970s. Baltimore also led in the development of the conservative movement, with Chizuk Amuno, once staunchly Orthodox, serving as one of the three founding congregations for this branch of Judaism. Despite these factions, this Jewish community developed strong, insular social networks with older residents reporting that most of their friends are still from multi-generational Jewish families.

Perhaps this cohesiveness and other aspects of Baltimore Jewish culture come from the anti-Semitism characteristic of southern cities. While established Baltimore Jews clearly state their identity, culturally they blend well with people of their class throughout the city. Maintaining friendships within the Jewish community and outwardly blending in simultaneously created dense community and insulated members from anti-semitism feared lurking in the outside community. For example, one older leader who lived in neighborhood with Christians reported her father not allowing washing put out on Sunday to not upset Christian neighbors and experiencing anti-semitism for the first time while attending a state college. This pattern was particularly true of the reform and German groups that dominated the institutions. Those raised in 1920s through 1950s report a community where some might be religious, but Jewish events were "Kosher style." The Baltimore Community Council, founded in 1939, focused on combating anti-semitism until the 1960s, when it has gradually moved into intergroup and interfaith relations work. Residents reported restricted covenants keeping Jews out of many neighborhoods into the 1940s and other neighborhoods, previously white Christian, becoming exclusively Jewish in the 1950s as Christian neighbors left. The Associated still uses zip codes as a key mechanism to locate unaffiliated Jews.

This combination of segregation and blending changed as the Orthodox community around Park Heights grew. Orthodox seminary New Israel Rabbinical College, founded in 1933, slowly led to the growth of the Orthodox community, currently over 20 percent of Baltimore's Jewish population. As the federal government spread into Baltimore, and Baltimore/Washington increasingly became one metropolitan area after the 1980s, Baltimore's Jewish community expanded to now over 90,000. A community study nearly a decade ago noted that the Baltimore Jewish community presently includes more people born outside Baltimore than the descendants of the original community. The community, in the form of the Associated, the synagogues and JCC's has creatively tried to reach out to newcomers, with variable success.

However, this largely consists of attempts to connect the newcomer, unaffiliated population with institutions and each other as every Jewish newcomer I met commented on the cliquishness of the established Jewish population. As such, Baltimore's Jewish community still has its divisions, although now primarily on Orthodox/non-Orthodox, newcomer and established resident. Regardless, the community and its institutions remain deeply committed to creating a cohesive community with support mechanisms through its core institutions. This study included the Associated and two agencies integrally involved in creating community: the Jewish Community Center and Chai, the community development corporation for Park Heights. Chizuk Amuno, and its day school also participated in the research. Sinai hospital, now part of Lifebridge Health system, participated in phase 2 of the research.

Despite its small size and internal divisions, Baltimore has always been a nationally prominent Jewish community, with leadership roles in most national organizations and early leadership in Zionism. Its Federation is one of the strongest in the country. While many of the large synagogue complexes face dwindling membership like other established religious institutions, Baltimore remains a vibrant Jewish community with its institutions well supported by its members.

Associated History and Structure

The Associated reflects this community history. While German Jews founded the Hebrew Benevolent Society, precursor to what is now Jewish Community Services; in 1856 Baltimore developed Federation structures in the first decade of the 20th century. German Jews founded Federated Jewish Charities in 1906 and the Russian Jews founded United Hebrew Charities the next year. A recent Associated fact sheet, *History of the Associated*, reports that these two federations brought together 24 societies, a hospital, an orphan asylum, religious academies, homes for the aged and free loan associations to prevent duplicate fundraising and develop community wide planning. The two federations merged into Associated Jewish Charities in 1920 to "streamline fundraising, eliminate agencies no longer needed, prevent duplication of services and establish new agencies to meet new needs."

Consolidation of fundraising for Jews overseas and Israel occurred slightly later. In 1941, the Jewish Welfare fund was created to consolidate various fundraising initiatives for European Jews and Israel. Unlike the Associated, which always had a significant planning role, the welfare fund existed solely to raise money for Jewish causes outside of the United States. Until 1950, the welfare fund and the Associated held their fundraising campaigns every other year.

The Associated's now consolidated fundraising apparatus includes various divisions that focus on different kinds of donor's and a variety of fundraising techniques. The signs are only one emblem of cooperation between agencies and federation in garnering support from the Jewish community. With the possible exception of Sinai and special purpose events like the JCC's Jewish of Hall of Fame event started in 2008, the Associated is the primary fundraiser for the agencies under its care. Agency board members are required to participate in the Associated's fundraising campaigns, in addition to donating to the Federation themselves. A 2004 Baltimore Sun article (Hollin 2004) reported that this highly effective fundraising system is ranked third in the nation among Federations in per-capita fundraising and 5th for aggregate fundraising.

In addition to fundraising from the Jewish community for Jewish causes, the Associated also serves as a major conduit for funding from the greater Baltimore community. In 1969, the Associated became a founding member of the Maryland United Fund, now United Way. While United Way funds account for approximately 2 to 3.5 percent of the Associated's revenue, they receive one of the largest allocations from Baltimore's United Way. United Way funds are used to serve non-Jews at Associated sponsored agencies or programs for the broader community. While most Associated agencies are clearly Jewish, many - including the social service agencies, hospitals, Chai and even JCC serve non-Jews. This outreach is understood as tikun olam in the broader sense of repairing the entire local community.

Older community leaders report that while federation staff came from both Russian and German Jewish communities, wealthy, established German Jews dominated the lay leadership of the Federation until the late 1970s. Gender segregation also remained much longer than elsewhere with the Women's division a separate auxiliary housed in an agency basement off campus from the main Federation building until 1985. The women's division became a full department of the Associated in 1993.

Today, these divisions seem largely part of the past. Much of the staff and lay leadership are young - in their 30s through 40s, with both men and women playing key roles. One older community leader noted that the leadership skipped a generation - the early baby boomers who reached adulthood in the 1960s are missing from the lay leadership, with younger members predominating. While no clear reasons were given for this shift, it seems to come in part from the strength of the Associated's young Leadership program and initiatives to promote Jewish education that came out of a strategic plan in the late 1980s. This led to significant increases in funding for the Board of Jewish education, which supports day and afternoon education, as well as continued or new support for adult education, youth enrichment programs like Hillel and trips to Israel and other mechanisms to promote Jewish identity and community involvement among youth.

The Associated plays a clear role in developing leadership for the entire community and its agencies. Both historical reports and interviews suggest that the Associated grooms board members and its committee volunteers through a combination of the young leadership program and a strategy of placing people with potential leadership qualities in successively important roles in either the Associated or its agencies. In earlier times, leadership development involved informal networking, with community leaders moving through progressively more important roles in the agencies and Federation. None of the agencies in the study have board members officially appointed by the Associated, but the Federation often suggests members.

While this may be changing today as the Associated reaches out to newcomers, some of the current leadership also comes from families who have been active participants in community institutions for years. Leadership development involves discernment between the agencies, the Associated, and individuals about where they best fit. For example, two current board members of Chai reported coming out of the young leadership program and being guided to Chai because they worked in real estate. As a key community institution, there is particular interplay between leadership in JCC and the Associated. For example, the current lay leader for the Associated is a recent past president of JCC.

In addition to facilitating board placements for its agencies, the Associated plays a role in hiring key leadership. With the possible exception of Lifebridge, Associated leadership interviews candidates for executive director positions at its sponsored agencies. Agencies form their own search committees and have a large say, but the Associated either staffs these committees or

contributes search committee members. As such, the Federation has a role in the leadership selection process. As with the executive director of Chai, sometimes Associated staff move over to run agencies. In other cases, leaders are drawn through umbrella associations or other Jewish professional networks. While the Associated clearly maintains some control over leadership through this process, in most cases, Associated involvement is not formalized in agency by-laws but informal as part of community process.

Fundraising and leadership development are only two ways that the Associated plays a central role in planning and governance for Baltimore based institutions providing for health, education and social services for Baltimore Jews. Even at its creation in 1920, the Associated was mandated as a planning institution empowered to consolidate agencies and generate new ones to meet community needs. As such, it serves as a precursor to the combined UJA/Federation structure now prevalent throughout the U.S. A leadership role in consolidating agencies to eliminate redundancies has existed throughout the agency history. For example, Cahn (1971: 17) reported that by 1929 the Associated consisted of 16 local agencies. Among them, Levindale already was an amalgamation of two earlier homes for the aged and incurables. The Associated encouraged mergers between Levindale and Sinai. In 1998, this system merged with a community hospital to form Lifebridge health. While Lifebridge is now on the fringe of the Associated agencies, only receiving allocations from United Way and endowment funds held by the Associated, it is still considered an Associated agency.

Strategic plans in 1987 and 2005 further pushed for integration of Associated agencies, as well as highlighting initiatives. The Associated played a larger role in other agency mergers, creations and transitions. For example, as discussed below, the Associated played a key role in creation of the current JCC system in 1951 and has been responsible for its expansion over time. Chai came out of an Associated planning process. Three longstanding social service agencies: Jewish Family Services, Jewish Vocational Services and Jewish Big Brother/Big Sister merged into a single Jewish Community Service Entity. Baltimore Hebrew University, recently struggling, was merged with state-owned Towson University in 2009.

In 2008, funding was allocated among four key initiatives: 1) creating a caring community, 2) sustaining a learning community, 3) committing to a community of social justice, 4) building an involved community, and 5) building a Jewish community worldwide. The allocation funds 51 local and national initiatives. Its agency listing includes 24 local agencies, divided into 10

devoted to Jewish identity and education, 9 social service agencies, 2 cultural/retreat centers (Jewish Museum, Pearlstone conference center), the Baltimore Community Council as its outreach arm, the JCC and a Jewish volunteering network. But this list does not show the Federation's reach into the community. For example, the Jewish Board for Education provides planning, curriculum and scholarship support for day schools under the control of various synagogues. Other initiatives reach out to rabbis. As such, the Federation attempts to maintain ties and create community cohesiveness beyond its formal relationships with sponsored agencies.

In addition to income from its annual campaign and United Way, the Associated manages endowment income from a variety of small Jewish foundations as well as receiving grants from several large Baltimore based Jewish foundations for special initiatives. For example, the Weinberg foundation gave the Associated a large grant to use for scholarships at the Jewish day schools. Analysis of income from selected annual reports and allocation forms from 1989 to 2008 shows that roughly 3/4ths of Associated income comes from its campaign and special fundraising initiatives. United Way allocations have gradually decreased from roughly 3 ½ percent to nearly 2 percent in 20 years, in keeping with national trends. The remainder of the income primarily comes from endowments and foundations. Agency rental and service fees have increased from 1 percent in 1997 to nearly 4 percent as the Associated has increasingly taken over back office activities for its agencies in an effort to consolidate costs.

Agency allocation trends show shifts from 1969 through 2008, with a number of agencies consolidated, several ceasing to exist, and a few new organizations coming under the Associated umbrella. In 1969, allocations for Israel and overseas were nearly 55 percent of the total, however this report did not include Associated operating expenses so the actual percentage could have been much lower. From 1989 on, the amount allocated for overseas has gradually decreased from 35 percent to 20 percent, but the actual dollar amount has only gone down by a little over \$1 million dollars. Allocations for national organizations and membership dues in national umbrellas remain the same at approximately 4 ½ percent. Allocations for Jewish identity and education, which includes support for day and after school religious schools, Baltimore Hebrew college, B'nai B'rith, support for synagogues and rabbis, Hillel and youth groups, and various programs to connect Jews to Israel was nearly 17 percent in 1969, then has remained steady at approximately 8 percent from 1989 on.

Social service and welfare organizations - including various social service agencies, burial societies, refugee resettlement and Chai, jump from 11 percent in 1969 to roughly 15 percent in 1989, then remain relatively stable after that. The bulk of funding in this category goes consistently to Jewish Family Services and related agencies that eventually are merged into Jewish Community Services. Chai remains around 1 percent of the total Associated allocation, but rises from slightly over 5 percent to 8 percent of the social service total in 2008. JCC's allocation was not included in the social service category, but hovers between 7 and 8 percent from 1969 to 1997, dropping to roughly 6 percent in 2008. Sinai hospital and the various programs for seniors (Levindale, transportation, meals on wheels, the senior center) account for 11 percent of the total, even though from 1989 on Sinai/Lifebridge only receives endowment income and United Way pass through from the Associated.

This Federation's ties to its agencies go beyond the planning, fund allocation and membership role in other federations. With the exception of the Jewish museum and Sinai's buildings, the Associated now owns all of the property and buildings of its member agencies. As such, it is responsible for planning, maintenance and facility development for most Jewish community institutions. While it is unclear exactly when this policy evolved, a 1992 deed trace produced by Chai for JCC suggests that the Associated bought the property that now houses the Park Heights Jewish agency campus in 1954. The 1951 incorporation papers for the newly formed JCC says that the merged agency owns the property associated with the three previous organizations, but lists the executive director of the Associated and the Federation's address as the resident agent for the newly formed nonprofit corporation. This implies that the Associated had responsibility, if not full ownership of JCC properties from the beginning.

Associated land ownership has created a one stop shop for Associated agency services at Park Heights, with a similar facility rapidly developing in Owings Mills at the suburban JCC campus. A late 1980s planning document notes that "60 percent of the Jewish population still lives within 10 minutes of Park Heights." As a result, the JCC, Jewish Community Services, Jewish Information and Referral Services, Baltimore Jewish Council, Center for Jewish Education and several other agencies are located at this visible campus or nearby. Chai is currently located in a converted bungalow across the street.

While Park Heights remains the center for the Orthodox community and older residents, many younger Jews have moved out of the city toward Owings Mills. The JCC complex at Owings

Mills currently includes its facilities, a performing arts center and a senior housing complex built by Chai. However, a now underway expansion of the building will bring Jewish Community Services and other Associated agencies into the program. The Associated headquarters, along with several in-house programs and smaller agencies, are located in center city Baltimore. A few other agencies are scattered throughout Baltimore and its suburbs.

In addition to land ownership, the Associated provides insurance for most of its agencies and increasingly consolidates back office operations like bookkeeping and payroll for smaller agencies. Large institutions like JCC maintain separate back office systems. The result of this comprehensive planning, fundraising, land ownership and other consolidated services is an integrated system which now encourages the agencies to work together. While agencies participating in the study now report cordial, strong relationships with the Associated, this was not always the case. Both interviews with key leaders and published reports (Sapolsky and Ziffer 2004) report competition among agencies in the past and a sense of paternalistic control from the Associated. However, the Federation is currently moving toward more involvement of the agencies in funding, planning and allocation with a new process inaugurated in 2009.

The Associated, as center for the Jewish community, also sets cultural rules for its agencies. Until spring 2009, no Associated agency was allowed to be open on Saturday in respect for Jewish Sabbath rules. Owings Mills JCC just received permission to open on Saturdays as a center for Jewish activity after 30 years of debate and discussion. The exception was Sinai/Levindale, which as a hospital was exempt from these rules and Pearlstone conference center, which needed to open weekends to meet its mission. Both agencies are considered on the fringe of the Associated and “not Jewish” by more religious members of the community. Associated agencies also close for Jewish holidays and serve Kosher food at their events and facilities. No agency can engage in independent fundraising without special permission from the Associated.

The Associated attempts to maintain a big tent approach to the internal fissures within the community, and remains highly sensitive to managing the different versions of Judaism present in the community as they evolve. For example, while Associated events in the 1950s were “Kosher style,” since the increased presence of the Orthodox, all events at the Associated and its agencies serve Kosher food that meets the highest standards of the local Orthodox community. All Associated agencies have remained closed on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath,

since the beginning, but less religious elements have been pushing to open the JCC in Owings Mills and several of the cultural centers on Saturdays to provide a Jewish environment since the late 1970s. While defeated by Orthodox activism at that point, Saturday opening was approved in late spring 2009 with limited Orthodox community protest. Likewise, the JCC and Associated sponsor events in center city and other places where young, unaffiliated Jews live in an effort to reach the unaffiliated.

The study witnessed the last year of the Associated's allocation process, which included discussions with agency leadership, but decisions made by lay community leaders. Agencies have representatives on the Associated's board. The Associated has begun a new policy in 2008-2009 where agencies will be much more actively involved in allocation and planning processes.

Taken together, Baltimore has benefited from its socially close knit and geographically concentrated early development to form a strong Federation with firm control over its agencies. At least for the three agencies in the first phase of the study, this has led to a sense of collaboration among the Associated and its agencies, as well as community cohesion. While clearly divisions within the community exist, and organizations continue to be founded independent of the Associated, it remains a strong and largely positive presence for its agency and community. It has done this, in part, by clearly acknowledging all the different types of Jews in the community and developing programming appropriate for a wide range. It remains a clearly Jewish focused entity, and its sponsored organizations are largely targeted toward Jews, yet it situates itself as an entity also providing Jewish support for others in Baltimore that use its agency programs. This complicated strategy influences both its relationship to Chai and JCC and the history of those organizations.



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University of Maryland, Department of Anthropology, 1111 Woods Hall, College Park, MD 20742

Phone: 301.405.7121 Email: faithandorganizations@anth.umd.edu