



Memo

Leah Meir, The AVI CHAI Foundation

To: Josh Miller & Steven Green, The Jim Joseph Foundation

Abby Knopp, Ramie Arian & Avi Orlow, The Foundation for Jewish Camp

From: BTW *informing change*

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Subject: Key Learnings from Nativ's Launch

INTRODUCTION

This memo summarizes main themes from the process-oriented first phase of the Nativ Program (Nativ) evaluation. It shares successes, key learnings and offers recommendations for ongoing implementation and future partnerships. Through this framing, we address the following research questions:

1. Which elements of Nativ's initial planning year were important to Nativ's implementation?
2. How could the development and launch process be improved for future Nativ partnerships?

The interest in this research stems from the desire of Nativ's funders to document learnings so that they may inform the six pilot Nativ partnerships as they move forward as well as future to-be-developed camp-school partnerships. Many of these lessons may also be relevant to other Jewish institutional collaborations, not necessarily limited to camp-school partnerships.

The primary audiences for these lessons are the key Nativ stakeholders: The AVI CHAI Foundation, the Jim Joseph Foundation, the Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC), the six camp-school partnerships, the Advisory Council and the Nativ mentors. That said, this memo may also have utility for others who are deeply interested in Jewish education, Jewish institutional partnerships, and collaboration and synergy more broadly in the Jewish community. It is our hope that future collaborations benefit from learning about this model's initial development and implementation. For readers less familiar with the Nativ program, we recommend reading the accompanying memo entitled *The Nativ Story, Unfolding*, which explores *what happened* during the planning and early development.

The information contained in this document is based on BTW *informing change's* (BTW) analysis of key informant interviews with 30 individuals and a review of select relevant materials.

RESEARCH METHODS

1. Interviews:¹
 - The AVI CHAI Foundation and the Jim Joseph Foundation: Leah Meir, Joel Einleger; Josh Miller, Steven Green
 - FJC: Abby Knopp; Ramie Arian; Jeremy Fingerman
 - Union for Reform Judaism's (URJ) North American Camping Unit (NAC): Lisa David, Paul Reichenbach
 - Michelle Abraham
 - Camp Directors of partner camps and two additional camps not participating in Nativ
 - Heads of partner schools
 - Nativ Educators
2. Materials review, including but not limited to reports to funders, grant agreements, camp-school partnership memos of understanding, FJC and URJ PR materials, work plans, and camp site visits reports (2011 and 2012)

NATIV'S EARLY SUCCESSES

Six camp-school partnerships have been formed, six Nativ Educators have been hired, and the Nativ program is getting off the ground. Without sounding trite, Nativ is a risky experiment. That Nativ has launched without major setbacks should be considered both a success and a testament to a thoughtful process.

Camp and school partners and Nativ Educators feel fortunate, even honored, to have the opportunity to participate in this experiment. They consistently identify four main themes in what they find compelling about the Nativ model:

1. Improving the quality of Jewish education, specifically experiential Jewish education *“I’m so invested in informal education. There’s so much to gain from it. You’re having so much fun and the kids don’t even know they’re learning things. That’s awesome. Stronger people, stronger Jews.”*
—Nativ Educator
2. Institutional collaboration for a whole-child approach *“Like doctors who don’t look at the whole patient, there are disconnects in Jewish education. It’s important that institutions are thinking about a shared position across institutions...They should see the whole child as part of their entire role.”*
—Key Stakeholder
3. Consistency of Jewish education that otherwise would not exist, particularly for camps *“It’s been so frustrating to hire a new Jewish educator every summer. We were lucky if we got two summers out of a 21 year old. There is no way we could have found the funding on our own to hire a full-time Jewish educator.”*
—Camp/School Director
4. Being part of an innovative experiment *“It’s exciting to work with other smart people towards a common goal and to really try to cook up something entirely new together.”*
—Key Stakeholder

¹ The attribution of “key stakeholder” quotes in both memos refers to the funders, FJC, URJ and Michelle Abraham and is used to prevent direct attribution to individuals that compose these small informant categories.

While each Nativ Educator has a natural proclivity either toward camp or school, all believe Nativ is a tight fit with their talents and passions and are eager to explore Nativ's possibilities. Some are particularly interested in what Nativ could mean for Jewish education more broadly.

For camps and schools, there is a preliminary sense that the partnerships are becoming more than a signed memorandum of understanding (MOU). The most common words used to describe the nascent partnerships are respect, communication, collaboration, support and trust. While partnerships continue to build their relationships and clarify a shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the Nativ program, they all report commitment to the Nativ vision and their institutional partner. They are eager to continue program implementation and are speaking candidly about mutual concerns. Finally, the URJ is pleased that three of the six Nativ camps are Reform movement partnerships.

KEY LEARNINGS

The learnings below identify elements of Nativ that were important for Nativ's planning and initial implementation. Learnings are offered both with an eye toward strengthening the current pilot as it moves forward and informing future Nativ partnerships. The learnings also raise issues that may be relevant to others drawing from this partnership model.

KEY ELEMENTS OF NATIV'S PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION

- Decentralized, local ownership
- Funder coordination
- Strong project management
- Eagerness to learn from others
- National recruitment effort

Launching a project always takes longer than anybody plans for. Nativ began with a particularly tight timeline, and additional unanticipated internal and external factors slowed the process. For example, national recruitment events, an important source of candidates, were scheduled before most partnerships were ready to begin recruitment and hiring. While investing in a thoughtful navigation of the camp selection process minimized possible negative fallout, this was a lengthy, non-linear process. Partnerships also initially expected their Nativ Educator would begin in spring 2012. This, however, was unrealistic because many candidates, who were either employed in a school setting or completing higher education programs, were unavailable to begin working until the summer. Schools and camps reported pressure to quickly recruit, hire and orient Nativ Educators; this ambitious timeline was particularly stressful to partnerships that joined Nativ relatively late and those that needed to return to the interview process after an offer was not accepted.

"It took a long time to get everything signed, sealed and delivered. I wish we had started earlier."

— Camp/School Director

"Once upon a time we thought the educators would start the summer of 2011. In retrospect, it was insane. This year was still a push."

—Key Stakeholder

Independence is invaluable to each partnership, though providing additional written resources earlier on may have supported a smoother process. As time-consuming and complicated as it was to rapidly navigate a new partnership and a significant financial commitment, all partnerships much prefer it to the alternative of a top-down funder-dictated process. Camps and schools greatly valued the independence to build their unique partnership; locally defined roles, hours, salaries and timeshares reflect the different organizational needs, cultures and capacities.

During the partnership building process, though, schools were facing both tactical (e.g., insurance and HR issues) and strategic choices (e.g., how to best activate the Nativ Educator; developing an appropriate time-share), all within a tight timeline. More proactive tactical support may have freed up partners to focus their efforts on the strategic choices. As partnerships reflect back on the overall planning year experience, they report that they would have appreciated:

- More and clearer “how to” supports for sharing an employee, such as a range of possible cost and time share arrangements and information about HR (e.g. salary, benefits and vacation considerations), insurance, liability, and working with an employer of record.
- More templates, such as sample contracts, letters of employment and MOU’s for partnerships to adapt.
- More written materials about Nativ for camps to share with possible school partners.
- A grant agreement between the camp and FJC before camps started courting potential school partners.
- A detailed outline of expected tasks and deadlines for each camp-school partnership.

“I appreciate that partnerships have freedom. That will be really important for long-term success, but it was a pain in the short term. We took more leaps of faith than we would have liked.”

—Key Stakeholder

“We were having conversations but not seeing things in writing in a timely manner. Things could have been spelled out much more clearly and decided earlier. But, this is their first go-round.”

—Camp/School Director

Much information on these topics was provided, yet camp and school directors report that it often came on the phone or in emails, and was sometimes less detailed or came later than partnerships would have liked. Non-participating camps noted that more information earlier on—particularly around financial commitments and possible partners—could have more quickly eliminated candidates that were not an appropriate fit.

In order for this model to succeed, Nativ must offer a clear and compelling value add to schools. Unlike participating camps, some of the schools, while ready and willing to participate in the experiment, were unsure in the initial stages about the potential added value of Nativ to their schools. They also were unclear about what exactly would be expected of them. This was further complicated by the reality that Nativ’s character and structure vary across the congregational and day school settings. It may not be a surprise, then, that making the case for schools to participate in Nativ was not as easy as camp directors or key stakeholders expected.

“It felt like the motivation for the initiative was coming to and from the camps. It wasn’t with the schools.”

— Camp/School Director

A readiness to learn from other partnerships, thought leaders and practitioners created a more thoughtful, informed model. Naturally, the designers of Nativ are expecting that this will return dividends of richer, more resilient partnerships in the current pilot and future partnerships. But not only were these preliminary learning conversations critical to identifying and thinking through potential pitfalls, they also embody Nativ's values of collaboration and learning.

“We were hands on that first summer as it all came together. More and more we were doing a lot of listening and periodic, ‘Have you thought about that?’”

—Key Stakeholder

It is too early to make any determination about partnerships' plans for sustaining Nativ after the grant, including the strategy of recruiting students to attend Nativ partner camps or other Jewish camps (i.e., cross-recruitment).² Partnerships are eager to assess results following early implementation before making any funding decisions. Should the Nativ model prove valuable, many partnerships are confident that they will acquire the necessary funds to operate the program. Some are more actively planning and strategizing than others. Some, for example, are planning on local fundraising while others expect to absorb the position into the organizational budget without outside funding. In the future, it is possible that the partnerships may be able to leverage the name recognition of large national funders for local fundraising efforts.

Many partnerships question whether cross-recruitment might be a successful strategy, either in partnership camps or Jewish camps more broadly. The most commonly reported concerns with cross-recruitment are:

- Some camps are already operating near full capacity
- Some camps do not expect to overtly recruit at schools due to political sensitivities
- Some schools are not comfortable with one specific camp directly recruiting on site
- Concern that cross-recruitment might not be as financially lucrative as other possible revenue sources to sustain Nativ, such as winter retreats or local fundraising

Close funder coordination in a jointly funded program has been “tremendous in making everything run smoothly.” This coordination has another critical effect: funders report they are learning from each other and integrating this learning into their broader work.

Entrusting Nativ’s management to a seasoned professional who holds the trust of key players enhanced the project’s legitimacy and leadership. A project manager with camp expertise and deep relationships with key stakeholders, the URJ in particular, also heightens the public face of Nativ.

The recognition that Nativ is an experimental pilot softened the blow of challenges. Quite frequently, criticism of the process was immediately followed by a statement of understanding or some kind of recognition of the inherent lack of clarity and learning-by-doing that characterizes pilot experiments.

² BTW's evaluation of Nativ will not measure intended outcomes related to financial sustainability of the camp or school partnership, or changes in enrollment or recruitment at non-Nativ camps. FJC will assess progress toward these short- and long-term intended outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below are based on this year's findings as well as BTW's experience evaluating other pilot programs and complex collaboratives. As we consider the implications of this evaluation for moving forward within the Nativ pilot and other future partnerships, it is important to remember that Nativ is a new experiment. We offer these reflections at this time in the spirit of continuous learning and ongoing improvement.

Clarify and communicate Nativ's expectations with schools, camps and Nativ Educators. A key strength of Nativ thus far is the detailed documentation of the early implementation and coordination between funders and implementers. Now that same strength must be applied in increasingly deliberate communication and coordination between FJC and the six camp-school partnerships, and within each partnership.

All camp-school partnerships are eager to arrive at greater clarity of expectations, specifically a clearer articulation of program goals, benchmarks and expectations. Most camp and school directors welcome more communication. Leverage this energy for a generative, iterative discussion during the November Nativ Community of Practice Seminar. During this process it will be important for Nativ leaders to get a sense of how the motivations and expectations of day and congregational schools might be similar and different.

Anticipate challenges, monitor progress, and provide support as needed. As with all new projects, there will be bumps along the way and respondents do have some concerns as Nativ moves forward. Outlined below are targeted suggestions for Nativ leaders to focus their energies.

- Actively manage the challenging overlap between the end of school and the beginning of camp, when Nativ Educators may likely be pulled in two directions at the same time.
- To keep the position sustainable and to prevent burnout, ensure that partners protect the position by respecting the terms of the time-share and encourage the Nativ Educator to use vacation to refresh.
- Manage the presence and dosage of the many active stakeholders to prevent “too many cooks in the kitchen.”
- Anticipate and troubleshoot calendaring tensions, especially during the camp season, and provide as much advance notice for calls and meetings as possible.
- Be prepared to recalibrate the timelines if needed.
- **“With that pace, how can they have a family life, be productive and rested?”**

“These are six different and new partnerships. Cultures are coming together. There are many possibilities for misunderstanding.”

—Key Stakeholder

—Key Stakeholder

Continue establishing and advancing Nativ's support structures. Mentors and the community of practice will be important tools for both supporting the Nativ Educators and detecting problems as they arise, especially as Nativ Educators find their place in their new environments. Some feel they are being “pulled in a million different directions, not sure who to answer to.” All are looking to the community of practice for mutual support and learning, and are particularly eager to “integrate these two roles, bringing the informal to the formal.”

Additionally, camp and school directors report interest in networking with and learning from each other. They are particularly curious about what other camp-school partnerships are doing. Given this, creating an opportunity for the first cohort of Nativ camp and school directors to share learnings may enhance Nativ's overall impact and broaden the reach of the Nativ network.

Continue transitioning the role of funders away from day-to-day management of Nativ. The AVI CHAI and Jim Joseph Foundations, which have been deeply involved in developing the Nativ vision and design, have already begun this transition. Funders recognize that a hands-on approach made sense during the planning phases but is not appropriate for ongoing implementation. It could, in fact, make some partners nervous to step forward as the program progresses. It is important to reinforce that the Advisory Council—as a group and as individuals with deep expertise—was created to be a key address for ongoing support for Nativ.

Share Nativ's Lessons. With plans to scale and replicate, the larger lessons of integrated education, co-funding and institutional partnerships can inform the field of Jewish education and the broader Jewish and philanthropic community. On both the local and national levels, there should be concerted efforts to identify forums for raising awareness about the Nativ camp-school partnership and the model generally, such as conferences, informal Nativ Educator reflections and blog posts. Some stakeholders, for example, are already wondering how Nativ's efforts at school, such as enhancing synagogue family education, might be packaged and shared with other schools.

“There is a broader story to tell and we haven’t told it yet...We need a platform to talk about this.”

—Key Stakeholder

CONCLUSION

As the Nativ story continues to develop, we appreciate the interest in using formative evaluation to identify what worked and what did not, learn early lessons and explore recommendations that may shape the Nativ pilot going forward and other future institutional partnerships. Together with the accompanying memo that summarizes Nativ's early story, we hope that the program's early accomplishments and lessons will inform the work of Nativ and many others.