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After the Storm: Re-envisioning New Orleans'
Jewish Community Following Hurricane
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AFTER THE STORM:
RE-ENVISIONING NEW ORLEANS' JEWISH COMMUNITY
FOLLOWING HURRICANE KATRINA

By

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in Jewish Communal Service in cooperation with
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HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
LOS ANGELES SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This research serves as a case study that captures a particular point in time (August 2006 – March 2007) when New Orleans' Jewish community faced tremendous hardships associated with the trauma of Hurricane Katrina. These challenges are the direct result of the population decrease, turnover in professional staff and lay leaders and a decline in local funding sources. Such tests of leadership have created positive change, including more collaboration between Jewish institutions, an increase in the number of young people engaged in leadership positions and new partnerships with the national Jewish community. Despite these positive outcomes, Hurricane Katrina has also unearthed several long-term issues, including concerns over the community's ability to attract and retain qualified Jewish professionals as well as a newfound reliance on the stability of certain non-Jewish institutions.

As an outcome of this research, I offer recommendations for how the Jewish community can re-imagine itself in a leaner and more unified state. Current leaders can leverage New Orleans' rich cultural heritage and build upon the strengths of the Jewish community to develop a new communal structure that responds to the realities that now exist in the city.

The New Orleans Jewish community has undergone tremendous change in the past 18 months. Despite the challenges of the new paradigm, leaders are passionate about working with local and national partners to re-imagine the Jewish community, to support its existing synagogues and agencies, and to attract new families to be part of the foundation of this exciting endeavor.

INTRODUCTION

At 7:00 a.m. on Monday, August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall in Southeast Louisiana and the Mississippi Gulf Coast as a Category three hurricane. Katrina's massive size and its original ranking as a category-five storm "caused a near twenty-seven foot storm surge on the Mississippi coast, causing a high surge into Lake Pontchartrain."¹ Two of the levees protecting the city's neighborhoods and residents were breached, and within days, over "80% of New Orleans (had) flooded"². Overnight, a place that was famous for its Cajun cuisine, upbeat jazz, and Mardi Gras celebrations became known for its extreme poverty, overcrowded Superdome and inept government.

Although New Orleans has long been known for its food, music and lively culture, it has been over a century since the city was known as a center of the North American Jewish world. New Orleans has never boasted one of the largest Jewish populations in the United States; however, local Jewish history is quite rich. Dating back 250 years to 1757, the city's first "permanent Jewish settler, Isaac Monsanto, a Dutch Sephardic Jew from Amsterdam, came to New Orleans from Curacao."³ Jews formed the city's first synagogue in 1828. Throughout the 19th and early 20th Centuries, Jewish immigrants from Eastern and Western Europe made their home in New Orleans, and in more modern times, Jews from the former Soviet Union began to immigrate to the community.

The city's Jewish population became a blend of various ethnic groups and religious attitudes. Congregations sprung up around the city to address the spiritual needs

¹ <http://www.hurricanecity.com/city/neworleans.htm>, 1998-2007.

² Ibid.

³ Catherine C. Kahn and Irwin Lachoff. *The Jewish Community of New Orleans*. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2005.

of the diverse sub-groups within the Jewish community. Over time, the New Orleans Jewish community developed a unique identity that merged elements of the Southern aristocratic lifestyle with features of the French-Louisiana laissez faire attitude and also with those of Jewish culture and tradition. Examples of this blend are alive today through communal celebrations such as the annual Chabad Chanukah candle lighting on the Mississippi River and Mardi Gras Shabbat at Touro Synagogue. Throughout the city's history, the New Orleans Jewish community has blossomed and shrunk, but its members have remained close-knit and actively involved in both Jewish and secular community endeavors. According to the city's last population study, released in 1988, congregation affiliation rates hover around 66%⁴, well above the national average of 18.9%⁵. Although it is fair to deduce that local affiliation rates have shifted somewhat in the last nineteen years, one can assume that they are still far above the national average.

Hurricane Katrina wreaked havoc on the entire city of New Orleans. Although most members of the Jewish community safely evacuated either before Katrina hit or shortly after the levees were breached, Hurricane Katrina did not discriminate. Members of the Jewish community and Jewish communal institutions were greatly impacted by the storm. Prior to Katrina, the New Orleans Jewish community was estimated at 10,000 people - current estimates now put the Jewish community at 70% of its pre-storm size.⁶

With a communal system that still includes nine congregations, two day schools, and eleven communal institutions (See **Appendix A** for a chart with information on each

⁴ Gary A. Tobin and Sharon Sassler. *A Population Study of the Greater New Orleans Jewish Community: A Summary Report*. Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies. Waltham: Brandeis University, 1988, p. 73.

⁵ Julie Wiener. "Study: Shul Affiliation Rising, but Jewish Population Declining," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (February 27, 2003), p.2.

⁶ Bruce Nolan. "The Local Jewish Federation is Launching a Recruiting Effort to Aid New Orleans' Recovery," *The Times Picayune*, March 25, 2007.

institution), New Orleans has a vast infrastructure for a Jewish community of its size. Even rapidly growing Jewish communities such as Las Vegas do not have as extensive a Jewish communal system as does New Orleans. Today, multiple factors place this system in jeopardy. Many of the city's most prominent Jewish leaders have not returned. The city's Jewish donor base has considerably shrunk. Organizations that were running near break-even levels before the hurricane are now in even more difficult financial shape. The hurricane is still too recent for us to predict its long-term impact and the city is only just beginning what will inevitably be more than a decade-long rebuilding process. What we do know for certain is that rebuilding efforts will require a tremendous degree of leadership, financial resources and volunteered time. The process becomes increasingly complicated with the added challenge of a population that is still in flux.

A significant percentage of the city's Jewish elderly have relocated to other cities to be with their adult children. According to an interview with Micki Katz from *Reform Judaism* magazine, "The storm hit the elderly the hardest...(My) pre-Katrina network of friends, who were like family...are now scattered throughout the South."⁷ These elderly have been long time supporters of the community and in the past have held significant leadership positions at communal agencies and synagogues, often volunteering their time to assist with administrative or programmatic efforts. Their absence has left a tremendous void in the city's Jewish leadership. Other Jewish families, many of whom are more religiously observant, evacuated to cities such as Memphis, Houston or Atlanta, all of which have larger Orthodox populations and offer more religious and educational opportunities that support an observant Jewish lifestyle. This segment of the Jewish community was vital to supporting the city's two Jewish day schools, kosher restaurants,

⁷ Julie Schwartz. "Faith After the Flood," *Reform Judaism*. Fall 2006, Vol. 35, No.1, p. 61.

and Orthodox congregations. The Jewish community also lost a significant portion of its young leadership, consisting of professionals and families with young children. Many of these people had just begun to accept positions on boards, and many were heavily involved in their children's religious education.

There is still tremendous uncertainty surrounding the future of New Orleans' Jewish community. No one knows how long rebuilding efforts will take. People are even less certain whether new Jewish individuals and families, filled with a pioneering spirit, will consider making New Orleans their new home. The trauma of Hurricane Katrina has created leadership challenges associated with the population decrease, turnover in staff and lay leadership, and decline in funding sources. Such leadership challenges have led to positive outcomes, including increased collaborations between Jewish institutions, an increase in the number of young people engaged in leadership positions and new partnerships with the national Jewish community. Despite these positive outcomes, the leadership challenges have also brought forth long-term concerns of staff and volunteer recruitment and retention, and the impact of outside institutions on the Jewish community. Now is an opportune time for the community to unite, assess what is needed to rebuild the city's Jewish community, and bring the New Orleans Jewish community back to its thriving, pre-Katrina level.

Purpose of Research

Researchers are just beginning to investigate the factors that influenced New Orleanians' decisions to stay or relocate. Attention is also being given to the financial, psychological and spiritual needs of the families and individuals who chose to stay. What remains unknown is the impact that the exodus of so many people will have on rebuilding the Jewish community. The loss of 3,000 – 3,500 people, many of whom were active leaders, donors and volunteers, presents significant challenges to the city's congregations and Jewish agencies. Only time will tell how the face of New Orleans' Jewish community will look in 10, 20 or even 100 years; however, this research aims to assess the immediate and long term impact of this exodus. Through this case study, I examine how the trauma of Hurricane Katrina created leadership challenges associated with the population decrease, turnover in staff and lay leadership, and decline in funding sources. These issues are specific to the period of time when the research was gathered, August 2006-March 2007, a time when the Jewish community of New Orleans, and the city as a whole, were in great transition. I discuss how the above-mentioned challenges have created positive outcomes, including increased collaborations between Jewish institutions, an increase in the number of young people engaged in leadership positions and new partnerships with the national Jewish community. At the same time, I discuss how the difficulties have brought forth long-term concerns of staff and volunteer recruitment and retention, and the impact of outside institutions on the Jewish community. Based on these challenges, I recommend several ways that organizations can develop plans for the future.

This case study focuses on the role of leadership from both an immediate and long-term perspective. It evaluates how leaders responded to the storm and how the

Jewish community can rebuild its leadership in the midst of the new post-Katrina realities. To answer these questions, I explored how local and national leaders on both an individual and institutional level responded to the storm. What has the attitude of these leaders been towards those who provided financial, emotional, and religious support? How are local organizations and their leaders handling the stress caused by the disaster? Which organizations suffered the greatest loss of leadership?

I hope that this case study offers insights to local and national leaders that will allow them to make more educated decisions about the future of New Orleans' Jewish community. No one knows what will become of New Orleans. The fate of the Jewish community ultimately rests on the fate of the city as a whole. If nothing else, this research will provide an historical account of the major issues that were on the minds of Jewish leaders in the months following Hurricane Katrina. My greatest hope is that the body of work will help synagogues and agencies decide important issues that will impact the future of New Orleans Jewish community.

Rationale of Topic Selection

My interest in this topic is both educational and personal. Hurricane Katrina is still a fresh, newsworthy topic. The fate of the city is still uncertain, presenting ample opportunities for academic research, some of which will contribute to the rebuilding efforts. Although this case study fulfills academic requirement for the Master in Arts of Jewish Communal Service program at Hebrew Union College, I have a genuine desire to produce research that benefits the field of Jewish Communal Service. The New Orleans Jewish community has received tremendous support from national agencies such as

United Jewish Communities (UJC), The Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), Chabad-Lubavitch, the Jewish Community Center Association (JCCA), the Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies (AJFCA), and many others. This support is predicted to dissipate in the coming years, and in some cases, it will dissolve in just a few months. It is important to understand the role that this national network played in the years following the storm and what role, if any, it will play in the future. Furthermore, this type of academic research will allow the New Orleans Jewish community to better plan for its future financial and institutional needs.

My other motivation is quite personal. My family moved to New Orleans in the summer of 1989. Our reasons for relocating there were driven by two factors: much of our extended family lived in New Orleans, and the city afforded Jewish opportunities that were not available in the small Southern town where we lived. I spent the second half of my childhood as an active youth in the New Orleans Jewish community. I swam at the JCC, was active in my synagogue's youth group, traveled to Israel under a local scholarship program and had many other communal involvements. New Orleans became my home, and although there were aspects of the Jewish and general community that frustrated me, it was home, nonetheless. As I sat in my apartment in Los Angeles and watched helplessly as *my city* was literally drowning – all I could do was cry. I cried for the memories that I had of life in New Orleans. I cried for the uncertainty that existed. And I cried for the disconnect that was created after I left the city in the Fall of 1998 to start college. I have a deep appreciation and love for New Orleans and its Jewish community. I only wish the best for the city, its Jewish organizations and its Jewish leadership. I have extreme confidence in their abilities to rise above the mire that exists

with the current local government. Both time and financial assistance will be necessary, but with these two resources, the New Orleans Jewish community is sure to prevail.

Despite these personal connections, I tried to step away from personal connections to the situation and analyze it from an objective perspective.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Living in Los Angeles while conducting my research, it was necessary for me to have a partner in the local Jewish community. Following Hurricane Katrina, the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans (The Federation) played an instrumental role in locating members of the Jewish community who were scattered around the country. The Federation also became a clearinghouse for national funds that its parent agency, UJC, and other national organizations raised. The Federation has emerged as a voice of the Jewish community that people often turn to when seeking information on the Jewish community. Because of its position within the community and the role the organization played after Katrina, The Federation was the natural choice for a local partner.

Through initial conversations with Federation staff, I learned that Dr. Frederick Weil of Louisiana State University is conducting research about Hurricane Katrina's impact on various religious groups (Jewish, Christian, Catholic, etc.), identifying the factors that influenced individuals to stay in New Orleans or relocate elsewhere. As part of this research, he had created a comprehensive survey that was distributed to the Jewish community through local synagogues and the Federation website. Because Dr. Weil had already distributed his survey and because he had more direct access due to proximity and professional expertise, it did not make sense for me to create a second survey. Additionally, community leaders raised concerns over bombarding residents with too much paperwork. It would have also been challenging to collect a credible sample since the survey would have either been distributed during a single visit to New Orleans or over the internet, both of which are less than ideal frameworks for this type of research.

I ultimately chose a combination of primary and secondary research techniques, including focus groups, interviews, and secondary sources such as news articles, existing surveys, population studies, and historical books. During the week of October 24–29, 2006, I traveled to New Orleans to conduct three focus groups and 14 interviews. The interviews and focus groups allowed me to meet with 30 lay and professional leaders from an array of communal organizations and congregations. Eight additional telephone interviews took place upon my return to Los Angeles. All research subjects were asked to sign a statement of confidentiality (**See Appendix B**), confirming that their name would not be associated with any material shared in focus groups or interviews. I had originally planned to conduct six focus groups but eliminated the groups for Rabbis, Young Leaders, and board members of Jewish Agencies (not including the Jewish Federation). Due to the confidential nature of their jobs, I was concerned that the Rabbis would be unable to share honest answers in a group environment. With regard to the Young Leaders focus group, two of the community's active young leaders were getting married during my trip and another couple was expecting their first child the following week. I decided to cancel the focus group with board members of other Jewish agencies because I was unable to obtain contact information for enough participants. With so many people having changed addresses since Katrina, it was difficult to find the home and email addresses of many people. In order to compensate for canceling these three focus groups, I interviewed representatives from each group individually. Details of the focus groups and interviews are discussed in the following section.

Focus Groups

Three focus groups were conducted with the following participants:

1. Federation lay leaders: three attendees (15 invitees)
2. Jewish professionals: six attendees from four agencies (14 invitees)
3. Congregation board members: seven attendees from four congregations (27 invitees)

Letters were mailed to invitees whose addresses were available, and follow-up email copies were sent (**See Appendix C**). Email was the primary form of contact for invitees whose mailing addresses could not be located, though a few individuals were invited via telephone. The specific method of contact depended on how much information the key contact person provided. For Federation board members, a staff member graciously provided mailing and email addresses under the agreement that contact information remain confidential, which it did. One Federation board member who was unable to attend the focus group agreed to be interviewed individually. A second board member who also served on the board of a synagogue attended the synagogue leaders focus group.

I collected contact information for most Jewish professionals from their agencies' websites. There was only one individual whose email address I could not locate, and it is still uncertain whether this person received the mailed copy of the invitation. Three of the Jewish professionals who were unable to attend the focus group participated by being interviewed individually.

It was markedly more difficult to acquire the contact information for congregation board members. My process began with contacting the rabbis to find out the name of the congregation presidents. I then asked the presidents for the names of three to five people that should be invited, with the hope that one to two would attend from each

congregation, however, most presidents were uncomfortable providing mailing address. Several also mentioned that board members were still in temporary housing, so email addresses or phone numbers were provided. In light of these circumstances, I decided against mailing letters to these board members.

Focus groups were held in private rooms and included the participants, myself and a note-taker. The groups of Federation board members and congregation board members were held at the Uptown JCC, and the Jewish professionals' focus group was held at the office of the Jewish Federation. Each focus group was roughly one hour and was designed to allow people to openly express their ideas, opinions and experiences in a non-judgmental atmosphere. The format proved to be an effective way for participants to feed off each other's comments and experiences.

The Jewish professionals' focus group was an incredibly enlightening experience. The mood in the room became quite emotional. Many of the professionals recognized that it was the first time the group had gathered to discuss the issues of leadership and professional support. The six attendees had over 100 combined years of experience working in the New Orleans Jewish community. They were extremely committed to the Jewish community and had invested much of their life and professional career to serving it. During the past year, these professionals had spent nearly all of their time serving the needs of the community and were just beginning to attend to their own needs.

Despite this sobering realization, the mood during this and the other focus groups was lively. As the moderator, I tried to ensure that no single person or perspective dominated the conversation. We explored questions about organizations' or individuals' responses to the hurricane, whether the organization had lost significant leaders, what

they were doing to find new leaders (if necessary) and how the organizations were managing the rebuilding process. (For a list of focus group questions, see **Appendix D.**)

Interviews

In total, I interviewed 23 Jewish professionals, lay leaders, and researchers. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and one hour. Interview topics mirrored those of the focus groups, though questions were tailored to the specific individual who was being interviewed. (For a list of interview questions, see **Appendix E.**) Interviews were recorded, and I took notes when possible. The trip to New Orleans was incredibly productive but I was unable to speak with young leaders, Jewish medical professionals, and board members of Jewish agencies (not including the Federation). As such I conducted seven telephone interviews following the trip. Below is a full list of the types of individuals who were interviewed:

- Local Rabbis and Cantor
- Lay leaders from the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans
- Young Leaders (identified as ages 25-40)
- Jewish Medical Professionals
- Jewish communal professionals (from New Orleans and other cities that played a significant role in assisting the community after Katrina)
- Congregation Executive Directors
- LSU Sociologist researching Katrina's impact on the N.O. Jewish community
- Oral Historian for the project, Katrina's Jewish Voices⁸

To get a broader perspective of the disaster, I also spoke with representatives from UJC and a Federation staff person from Houston, where a large percentage of New Orleans'

⁸ According to <http://katrina.jwa.org>, "*Katrina's Jewish Voices* is an online collection project to collect, preserve, and present the American Jewish community's experiences of Hurricane Katrina and their recollections of the Jewish communities of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast." The project is organized by the Jewish Women's Archive, in collaboration with the Center for History and New Media.

Jewish population evacuated. Both of these organizations were identified as playing an instrumental role in assisting the New Orleans Jewish community.

Interviews proved to be more effective than focus groups for speaking with clergy. Understanding the relationship that exists between local congregations, I imagined that many Rabbis and Cantors would be uncomfortable sharing congregation specific information with other Rabbis. I also didn't want their answers to be inhibited by the fear of appearing weak in front of other congregations. With these issues in mind, I decided that individual interviews were more appropriate in gathering information from the local Rabbis.

My goal in interviewing Executive Directors was to collect information on financial, staffing and strategic issues that the Rabbis may not be best suited to address. Unfortunately, the Executive Director of one congregation was leaving New Orleans the week after my visit, so we were unable to speak.

Existing Research

Much research is being conducted to assess Hurricane Katrina's impact on New Orleans, the government's responsibility in responding to the disaster, the long-term economic impact on the region and countless other subjects. It is difficult to access this research because the disaster is still in the recent past. Even if it were accessible, little of this research is directly related to the issue of rebuilding the leadership of the Jewish community. Despite these challenges, the Jewish press has written numerous articles on New Orleans' Jewish community after Katrina, which I was able to review. I also read information about the Jewish community *prior* to Katrina. Much of this research focuses

on the history of the Jewish community, its relationship with the broad community, and demographic trends and issues relevant to the Jewish community. This research does not, however, focus on broader issues of crisis management, leadership behaviors, etc.

I also examined other Jewish communities that have dealt with disasters. I focused on the role that local and national Jewish institutions played in rebuilding these communities and how the community responded to the disaster. Such research provided several case studies that are relevant to the scenario that New Orleans currently faces.

The combination of focus groups, interviews and existing research provided a holistic view of the Jewish community. The focus groups allowed participants to hear what fellow leaders had experienced and what challenges they were confronting. The interaction between the participants also brought forth issues that may not have been addressed in a one-on-one interview. That being said, I still believe that interviews were the most appropriate method for speaking with clergy, individuals who were unable to attend the focus groups and national leaders living outside the New Orleans area.

Limitations and Biases

As is the case with any research endeavor, there are innate biases that will be reflected in the way I approached the research and the way the data was analyzed. I certainly recognize that some of the content may be influenced by my experiences as a member of New Orleans' Jewish community; however, I tried to approach all interviews, focus groups and secondary research with an unbiased eye. I can inform the reader that methodological decisions and research conclusions were made with as objective an eye as possible. There were no individuals or organizations that instructed me to interpret the

data from a particular perspective, thus, I can confidently say that no ulterior motives are behind this paper. My aim is not to promote a specific agenda but rather to offer analyses that will help the broader Jewish community with rebuilding efforts. Any appearances of organizational biases are coincidental and are, in my opinion, indicative of the significant role that the particular individual or organization played in communal rebuilding efforts.

As my research unfolded, time and geographic distance became limiting factors. Being in Los Angeles made it challenging to schedule telephone interviews and focus groups with people in New Orleans. I was fortunate in that most of the scheduled appointments were kept; however, I did ultimately have to cancel a focus group with young leaders because I was unable to find a time that worked for a large enough number of the invitees. It should also be noted that the first focus group with Federation lay leaders had less attendees than I would have liked. This was likely due to the fact that invitations were mailed and emailed the week prior, at which point several invitees had previous commitments. The low turnout may have also been related to leaders' oversaturation with interviews, strategic planning meetings and other Katrina related events. It became apparent to me during my trip that although people speak of Katrina on a daily basis, many are tired of reliving the nightmare.

It should also be noted that my trip to New Orleans was only one week long, therefore, with such limited time, it was impossible to interview every important community leader. I had to choose interviewees based on my having access to individuals and our mutual availability. The rabbinic interviews did not include anyone from Congregation Beth Israel, the city's only Modern Orthodox shul and the congregation that suffered the greatest physical damage from Katrina. Beth Israel lost its

rabbi after Katrina and is in the process of hiring a new rabbi. In addition, the focus group of congregation leaders did not include a representative from Shir Chadash⁹, Beth Israel or Anshe Sfard. (I did not invite Chabad participants since the organization does not have a formal membership or board structure.) The lack of a Conservative and Orthodox presence in the focus groups may have impacted the outcome of the discussion; however, there is no way to know whether the focus group would have taken a different turn had board members from these congregations been present. This is important when one considers that nearly 63% of local Jewish identify as Reform.¹⁰ I would also like to mention that the Jewish Communal professionals' focus group lacked representation from five communal agencies¹¹. Although I conducted a one-on-one interview with the Executive Director of Hillel, the organization's perspective was not included in the focus group with Jewish professionals. Time constraints also led me to exclude Jewish leaders who have left New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina. These former local leaders could have offered an invaluable perspective; however, there simply was not time to include them in the research sample.

My relationship with the Jewish Federation became challenging when, twice over the course of the research, my staff contact left the organization. The issue of staff turnover is addressed in the "Research Findings" section; however, it was time consuming (and probably a slight detriment to my research) to repeatedly have to develop a relationship with a local partner only for that partner to leave the organization shortly

⁹ A Board member of Shir Chadash emailed a few comments prior to the focus group, but there was no official congregational representation during the actual focus group.

¹⁰ Gary A. Tobin and Sharon Sassler. *A Population Study of the Greater New Orleans Jewish Community: A Summary Report.* "Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies. Waltham: Brandeis University, 1988, p. 70.

¹¹ Representatives from Jewish Children's Regional Service, National Council of Jewish Women, Anti-Defamation League, Woldenberg Village (the Jewish retirement home) and New Orleans Hillel did not attend the Jewish Professionals focus group.

thereafter. I do not place any blame on the Federation. Both individuals left for personal reasons, but I do feel that it is important to mention the impact of this turnover on my research.

The last limitation that I want to address is the availability of accurate demographic data about the New Orleans Jewish community. The most recent study of New Orleans' Jewish population was conducted in 1986 and published in 1988. I used the data in this study to provide a general idea of trends that existed in the Jewish community; however, the numbers are no longer relevant and it is unclear if the trends highlighted in the study even exist today. There are a few occasions where I needed a demographic figure, and thus, chose to cite a percentage in the study; however, it is potentially problematic to reference data that is almost 20 years old.

Despite these biases and limitations, I can affirm the quality and scope of this research. The findings will ultimately become a piece of a large puzzle that examines Jewish life in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. It would be impossible for me to address every question in research that is of such limited scope; however, I will attempt to address a substantial number of factors relevant to rebuilding Jewish leadership in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To develop a plan for rebuilding a community, one must first understand the history of that community. Only by digging into the past to analyze institutions' histories, the leading players who have guided communal policies and decision making, as well as the identities of the people who comprise this community, can one begin to plan for the community's future. The New Orleans Jewish community is no exception.

It should be noted that since this research serves as a case study about New Orleans at a particular point in time, the literary resources focus specifically on New Orleans and information that is relevant to the Jewish community's rebuilding efforts.

A Historical Perspective of New Orleans' Jewish Community

Dating back 250 years to 1757, the first Jewish family to settle New Orleans was led by Isaac Monsanto, a Sephardic Jew from Amsterdam. Although Monsanto was part of an early movement of Sephardic Jews to inhabit the city, the Jewish population was soon dominated by Ashkenazi Jews from German and Alsatian descent. According to two local historians:

"Jewish pioneering to New Orleans did not begin in earnest until the purchase of Louisiana by the United States from France in 1803. These men came seeking fortunes, with no interest in practicing their religion. The two Judah's, Touro and Benjamin; Samuel Hermann; and Samuel and Carl Kohn all found tremendous success in their varying endeavors and all, save one, had no connection to the local Jewish community as it began to create religious institutions."¹²

¹² Catherine C. Kahn and Irwin Lachoff. *The Jewish Community of New Orleans*. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2005.

The lone man referred to above who sought involvement in Jewish life was Judah Touro, the son of Isaac Touro, who served as chazzan of the first synagogue in the United States, Yshuat Ysroal, of Newport, Rhode Island. Touro was incredibly generous with his wealth and left almost his entire fortune to Jewish institutions around the country, "as well as to his almshouse in Jerusalem."¹³ In 1852, Touro founded Touro Infirmary, the city's first "Hebrew Hospital." The hospital was established as a "charitable institution for the relief of the indigent sick."¹⁴ Judah Touro also served as a major funder for Nefutzoh Yehudah, or Dispersed of Judah, which eventually became Touro Synagogue.

The unique nature of Touro's generosity serves as an interesting comparison to the community's current state of Jewish philanthropic giving. Possibly the result of historical precedent, the New Orleans Jewish community has never had an overabundance of Jewish philanthropists. Although the city's Jews are among the most educated and economically successful citizens of the city, they don't overwhelmingly support Jewish causes.

Several notable exceptions do exist, including the Goldring and Woldenberg families whose modern day fortunes were made through the Magnolia Marketing Company, a regional distributor of alcohol, wine and beer. Both families established foundations whose names are featured prominently on both Jewish and secular buildings around the city, including the Goldring-Woldenberg Jewish Community Campus, which houses the Metairie JCC, the Jewish Federation and the New Orleans Jewish Day School.

Despite the generosity of these families towards Jewish organizations, there are pages and pages of laurels that have been written about prominent Jewish individuals

¹³ Catherine C. Kahn and Irwin Lachoff. *The Jewish Community of New Orleans*. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2005.

¹⁴ Ibid.

who have supported the city's numerous secular organizations; however, many of these individuals were not major donors to Jewish causes. Some speculate that this was a conscious attempt to gain acceptance by the city's societal elite. Although conducted almost 50 years ago, a study on Jews in the South provides an interesting explanation for the phenomenon that still exists today, to a large degree, in the city's Jewish community.

The tradition of a Southern aristocracy dies hard. It...continues to play a significant role in the social structure of the city. Jews have encountered a status ceiling preventing them from full public acceptance into the social elite because they cannot share in the aristocratic tradition. On all other grounds they possess the necessary qualifications...Some Jews are active in both local and national politics and no doubt they exert a significant political influence in the city...In spite of these economic, political and genealogical qualifications, however, full membership in the status and ruling elite is not open to them.¹⁵

The lack of acceptance into the New Orleans societal elite, including exclusive social clubs and Mardi Gras Krewes¹⁶, may have been one reason why so many wealthy Jewish families have not been large supporters of the city's Jewish organizations. In an effort to be part of the city's elite, these individuals have sought involvement in secular philanthropic causes. It is unclear whether these Jewish families have historically been successful in penetrating the inner circles of elite New Orleans society, however, it cannot be denied that if the Jewish community wants to rebuild its leadership in the years following Katrina, then these previously uninvolved families need to be engaged in Jewish communal work. Their ideas, perspectives, and financial support are extremely valuable, and a necessary component to local rebuilding efforts.

New Orleans' most recent Jewish Population Study, which was conducted in 1988, indicated that while "the largest proportion of gifts to (the Jewish Welfare Fund)

¹⁵ Dinnerstein, Leonard and Palsson, Mary Dale. *Jews in the South*. Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1973.

¹⁶ Krewe is the general term used for Mardi Gras social clubs.

are under \$100, given income levels, the potential for larger gifts is great."¹⁷ This speculation is further supported by evidence that

Larger proportions of New Orleans Jews give gifts of \$500 to \$5,000 to other Jewish philanthropies than to the Federation, and substantial proportions of the population are also giving gifts of (similar amounts) to non-Jewish philanthropies.¹⁸

Although these figures are almost twenty years old, it is not improbable that similar patterns still existed immediately prior to Katrina. The lack of local Jewish philanthropic giving is particularly relevant because in order for the Jewish community to rebuild, it is essential that these institutions have adequate funding, and it is highly unlikely that this funding will come from non-Jewish sources. Sadly, many of the community's leaders who had generously supported local Jewish organizations prior to Katrina suffered tremendous financial losses as a result of the storm. Some of the families and individuals who once provided from their own pockets are among the very people who now seek financial assistance from the organizations they once supported. This role reversal places the city's Jewish leaders and its institutions under great financial strain. As discussed earlier, although much of the Jewish population's incomes are far greater than the city's median income, there is not a deep spring of local Jewish funds from which to draw.

By examining the local Jewish community history, we also find a tremendous source for explaining organizational politics that exist today. As with many Jewish communities in the United States, New Orleans has a history of both inter-denominational conflict and intra-denominational competition. The city's first congregation, Shagarai Chasset (Gates of Mercy), was founded in 1827 as a Sephardic

¹⁷ Gary A. Tobin and Sharon Sassler. *A Population Study of the Greater New Orleans Jewish Community: A Summary Report*. "Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies. Waltham: Brandeis University, 1988, p.166

¹⁸ Ibid.

house of worship. Gates of Mercy was the product of a local leader's outrage with the lack of Jewish communal life. Over time, the congregation's worship style switched to Ashkenazi ritual, a natural response to the fact that nearly two-thirds of its membership was of Ashkenazi descent. Interestingly, of the 33 founding male members, only three were married to Jewish women.¹⁹ The congregation's,

Constitution made concessions to the reality of early New Orleans Judaism, allowing the 'strange,' or Gentile, wives of the members to be buried in the congregational cemetery, and also allowing the children of these 'strange' women to be considered members of the congregation, and therefore, Jewish.²⁰

Such inter-faith marriages were not uncommon for the colonial era; however, they became rare by the 1840's as Jewish immigrants came from Europe in large numbers.

As the city's first religiously observant Jews began to immigrate, a new Sephardic congregation was established under Judah Touro's namesake, Nefutshoh Yehudah or Dispersed of Judah. In 1850, Shaare Tefillah, or Gates of Prayer, was founded, largely because its members, many of whom were small business owners and "river workers," were turned away from the more socially prominent Gates of Mercy. Despite the large number of intermarriages that took place within the Jewish community, the city's first officially chartered Reform synagogue, Temple Sinai, wasn't established until 1870, which coincided with the newly established Reform movement that was gaining acceptance in the United States. Soon after its establishment, Temple Sinai "became the largest, wealthiest, and most socially prominent congregation in the city."²¹ Over time,

¹⁹ Catherine C. Kahn and Irwin Lachoff. *The Jewish Community of New Orleans*. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2005.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

members from Gates of Mercy left the then fledgling congregation to join Temple Sinai, thereby further elevating the congregation's social prominence.

The yellow fever epidemic of the late 1800's caused both Gates of Mercy and Dispersed of Judah to lose significant portions of their membership. Ultimately, the two congregations merged in 1881 to form Touro Synagogue. In the mid-19th Century, the city's Jewish population grew as a number of Eastern European immigrants moved to New Orleans. As occurred in other cities around the country, these immigrants formed Orthodox synagogues and landsmenshaften, cultural groups based on their geographic origins. Several of the groups went on to found small congregations of Polish, Litvak and even Galitzeaner origins. Only one of the congregations had its own building and none of them had more than 50 members. In 1904, many of these small Orthodox shuls merged to form Congregation Beth Israel. "By 1910, (Beth Israel) was the second-largest congregation in the city,"²² and claimed to be the largest Orthodox congregation in the South. The small Galitzeaner shul, Chevre Thilim, remained independent until the 1950's when a portion of its membership left over a disagreement in mixed gender seating and founded Tikvat Shalom Conservative Congregation. The congregations ultimately merged 44 years later to create Shir Chadash Conservative Congregation.

The story of these congregations' origins paints a complex picture that sheds some light on why New Orleans is home to eight congregations (in addition to two Chabad houses) today. One of the immediate questions that arose in the aftermath of Katrina was whether or not a Jewish community of 6,500 people could support so many houses of worship. While an outsider may recommend that congregations of similar

²² Catherine C. Kahn and Irwin Lachoff. *The Jewish Community of New Orleans*. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2005.

religious affiliation merge, a deeper understanding of how these congregations came to be illustrates why merging may not be as simple as it might sound. Certain congregations hold roles of societal prestige and others represent ties to the community's Orthodox past- a past that many community members are not prepared to renounce. What is most important in post-Katrina Jewish life is that regardless of what the future holds for these congregations - they must look to each other as partners in a community-wide effort to build Jewish families, rather than as individual units trying to compete for the resources and membership of these families.

In addition to providing a context for congregational life in New Orleans, the city's history offers a backdrop against which communal agencies were founded. For a Jewish community of its size (estimated at 10,000 before Hurricane Katrina)²³, New Orleans has a large number of communal agencies. To understand why all of these agencies exist, one must look into the city's past to unearth the context behind each organization's creation. As referenced above, New Orleans experienced a surge of yellow fever epidemics from 1817-1905. (Reliable statistics prior to 1817 were not found.) City records estimate that more than 41,000 people died from the disease during this time.²⁴ In response to the number of children that were left without parents due to the fatalities, "members of the Hebrew Benevolent Association opened the Widows and Orphans Home (in 1855), only the second such home in the United States."²⁵ Over the course of the home's 91 year history, it housed almost 2,000 Jewish children. Once it

²³ Bruce Nolan. "The Local Jewish Federation is Launching a Recruiting Effort to Aid New Orleans' Recovery," *The Times Picayune*, March 25, 2007.

²⁴ "Yellow Fever Deaths in New Orleans, 1817-1905," from Louisiana Fact Finder. Louisiana Division of the New Orleans Public Library. 8/23/2005.

²⁵ Catherine C. Kahn and Irwin Lachoff. *The Jewish Community of New Orleans*. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2005.

became apparent that a local Jewish orphanage was no longer needed, the organization redefined itself as the Jewish Children's Regional Service (JCRS), a "social services agency and a charitable fund that provides children in a seven state region with scholarships for summer camp, education and other needs."²⁶ Although located in New Orleans, the Jewish Orphan's Home and the JCRS have a regional scope that mirrors the seven states in B'nai Brith District Seven.²⁷ This type of organization was highly unique for its time, indicating that at one time, New Orleans' Jewish community was on the forefront of Jewish communal innovations.

The JCRS is just one example of a local organization that was established in response to a once-pressing communal need. The Metairie Campus of the Jewish Community Center presents another example of a local institution that arose in response to communal changes. As the local Jewish community moved to the western suburbs, the community saw the need for a second location of the Jewish Community Center. The original Metairie JCC, which was located on the border between two major suburbs, Metairie and Kenner, offered a smaller number of the programs that were provided at the Uptown location. In 2001, a new facility was erected for the Metairie JCC. The building was constructed on the grounds of Congregation Shir Chadash and houses the JCC and the New Orleans Jewish Day School, as well as offices for the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans. With the Jewish community having decreased by 30-35% since Hurricane Katrina,²⁸ the question has arisen over whether there is sufficient demand (and communal interest) to support both JCC's.

²⁶ www.jcrsnola.org

²⁷ These seven states include Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Texas.

²⁸ Bruce Nolan. "The Local Jewish Federation is Launching a Recruiting Effort to Aid New Orleans' Recovery," *The Times Picayune*, March 25, 2007.

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans was home to ten Jewish communal organizations (excluding Touro Hospital). Each agency provided a specific service; yet they were collectively looking to the same pool of leadership for financial support and volunteer governance. Now is the time when the Jewish community of New Orleans must reevaluate each organization's function within the community and make some difficult decisions: first, whether a communal need for the agency still exists, and second, whether the city has the financial resources to support these organizations. In the aftermath of Katrina, some short-term direct-response agencies may be a necessity; however, any new organizations or initiatives that are established must be reevaluated over time to determine if they are still fulfilling a communal need. If not, then the organization may ultimately become a strain on precious communal resources, rather than an aid to those in need.

Disasters of the Past: Learning from Previous Jewish Communal Responses

New Orleans' Jewish community has a rich history that provides a context against which one can better understand inter-organizational politics as well as the structure of the community's Jewish communal agencies. By understanding the Jewish community's past and the circumstances that surrounded the origins of its congregations and agencies, one can make more educated recommendations for the Jewish community's future. Hurricane Katrina was one of the most destructive natural disasters to ever hit American soil. There are few events in modern history to which Katrina can be compared, and even those that parallel in physical destruction become incomparable when one considers two important variables: the vast size of the geographic area that Katrina impacted and the

urbanization of the affected area. These two critical factors combine to make Hurricane Katrina a most unique event that parallels few, if any, disasters in our nation's history.

As such, it is difficult to compare the impact that Katrina had on New Orleans' Jewish community to the impact that other disasters have had on the local Jewish communities. Similarly, it is difficult to extrapolate comparative examples of communal rebuilding efforts. Virtually no community – Jewish or otherwise – was impacted so greatly by a disaster as New Orleans was affected by Hurricane Katrina.

When I began my research, advisors and scholars suggested that I explore other Jewish communities that have been impacted by a natural disaster. Galveston, Texas was devastated by a great hurricane in 1900; San Francisco was shattered by an earthquake in 1906; Charleston, South Carolina was damaged by Hurricane Hugo in 1989; Los Angeles and its surrounding areas were shaken by the San Bernadino earthquake of 1994; Oklahoma City was stunned by the bombing of its Federal Building in 1995; and New York City and Washington, D.C. both fell victim to the horrific terrorist attacks of 2001. Despite the variety of disasters that our nation's cities have faced, few, if any, have been as economically or physically damaging as was Hurricane Katrina. With the exception of the Galveston hurricane, none of these cities experienced the mass exodus of its population as did New Orleans. With the exception of the San Francisco earthquake, these disasters did not impact as large a geographic area as did Hurricane Katrina. While each of the above impacted cities may share some similarities to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, the comparisons are generally limited to one or two isolated variables. None of these cities were confronted with the same scope of devastation as was New Orleans. However, despite the extreme differences between Katrina and previous

disasters, there are some lessons that can be gleaned from the Jewish communities' responses to the disasters they faced.

Galveston

Since Hurricane Katrina, the New Orleans Jewish population has settled at roughly 6,500 Jewish individuals.²⁹ This is a 32% decrease of the pre-Katrina Jewish population. I was unable to find exact numbers of Galveston's Jewish population in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries; however, the city's Jewish community did experience a similar population decline following the 1900 hurricane. A local Jewish historian in Galveston stated that after 1900,

Galveston lost people and businesses to Houston. That's exactly what is happening today if you look at New Orleans and Houston. Houston is in a more sheltered area. It is not as much at risk of being in the eye of the storm. Galveston's B'nai Israel lost some of its most important entrepreneurs to Houston. A number of the most powerful families at Houston's Beth-Israel were originally Galveston merchants. There is a movement of money, merchandizing, and power from the hurricane ravaged city to Houston. It's happening again.³⁰

Over time, Houston quickly surpassed Galveston in population, business development as well as the size of its Jewish community. Galveston made several attempts to attract economic investment, but the city never returned to its pre-1901 grandeur.

To further her recovery, and rebuild (the city's) population, Galveston actively solicited immigration. Through the efforts of Rabbi Henry Cohen and Congregation B'nai Israel, Galveston became the focus of (the) 1907 immigration plan, the Galveston Movement, which...diverted roughly 10,000 Eastern European Jewish immigrants from the crowded cities of the Northeastern United States.³¹

²⁹ Ruskay, John. "John Ruskay's Letter," January 26, 2007 as printed on <http://www.jewishnola.com> on February 10, 2007.

³⁰ Written correspondence with Hollace Ava Weiner.

³¹ Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galveston>.

By design, few of the Jews who immigrated through Galveston chose to stay in the small port city. Most moved to larger Midwestern and Southern cities (such as New Orleans).

Spearheaded by the Jewish Federation, the New Orleans' Jewish community has also implemented a strategy to repopulate its Jewish community. The Federation has launched a public relations campaign that is part of a community wide effort to attract more Jewish families to the city. To ensure that what occurred in Galveston does not occur in New Orleans, the organized Jewish community needs to provide solid communal and religious programming as well as economic and educational opportunities for Jewish families that are considering moving there. New families need to not only be engaged in local Jewish life but also be directed to economic, educational and other secular necessities that will aid their making a permanent home in New Orleans.

San Francisco

Although San Francisco's earthquake of 1906 did not have the same long-term damaging effects on the city's Jewish population as did the Hurricane of 1901, the Jewish community was greatly impacted by the natural disaster. Jews suffered losses with their property and businesses, while the famous synagogue Temple Emanuel on Sutter Street was destroyed. Despite the differences between San Francisco and New Orleans, there is still much to be learned from the Jewish leadership's response to the quake. Similarly to what occurred in New Orleans, San Francisco's Jews "lost photos of their families..., their homes, and businesses. They had to rebuild." One local Jewish leader "suffered

losses... (and still managed to) help save the city from financial ruin."³² In addition, Jewish businessmen played a leading role in developing a new commercial district within the city. Local rabbis worked with the "Jewish community (to pledge) large sums to the city's reconstruction, figuring prominently in its fulfillment."³³

The very scenario described here took place both during and in months following Katrina. Local Jewish leaders suffered tremendous losses, many of whom lived in the Lakeview area, which was almost totally destroyed from a breach in the wall of a nearby levee. The current President of the Jewish Federation, Allan Bissinger, tells a moving story of having to escape from a second story window of his home in order to swim to safety. Similarly, local rabbis from the city's congregations served as a conduit for distributing more than millions of dollars in relief funds and services.

Examining the San Francisco Jewish community today, one finds a kehillah of strength - in terms of population, communal institutions as well as finances. I believe that had it not been for the city's Jewish leadership in the years following the storm, then it would be have been even more difficult, if not impossible, for the city to rebuild its Jewish infrastructure. To that end, the recovery of New Orleans' Jewish community and its ultimate success rests greatly on the community's lay and professional leadership. These individuals will play a pivotal role in rebuilding and redesigning the city's Jewish infrastructure in the coming years. They will be looked to for guidance, comfort, financial assistance and vision.

³² Teresa Strasser. "How the 1906 Earthquake Shook Up Jewish Life Here," *The Jewish News Weekly of Northern California*. July 12, 1996.

³³ Stephen Mark Dobbs. "Jewish Community," *Encyclopedia of San Francisco*.

Oklahoma City

In more recent history, Oklahoma City's Jewish community was shaken by the 1995 bombing that killed 169 lives and injured nearly 500. Fortunately no Jews were killed in the attack; however, the event helped to unite the city's 2,500 member Jewish community. "When the rebuilding process began, the Jewish community made one of its most significant contributions by stepping in where Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) had stepped out." It was also observed that "the bombing...helped Jews in Oklahoma forge closer ties with the rest of the U.S. Jewish community."³⁴ A similar situation has arisen in New Orleans. Sadly, FEMA's response to the disaster was a disappointment to the entire community of New Orleans. Public and faith-based organizations stepped in to fill the voids left by FEMA and the Jewish community was no exception. Organizations such as the Jewish Federation, Jewish Family Service, the JCC and local congregations provided short-term financial assistance, counseling and planning advice to individuals and families, many of whom had been disappointed by FEMA's lack of support. National Jewish organizations, led by the support and leadership of United Jewish Communities, through its Emergency Relief Fund, lent a hand to the Jews of New Orleans by providing over \$14 Million³⁵ in financial assistance of the \$28 Million³⁶ hurricane relief funds that were raised. In addition, thousands of Jewish volunteers from around the country have lent their time to rebuilding efforts throughout the city. The Emergency Relief Fund was established in 1989 after Hurricane Hugo hit South Carolina. Members of the "Emergency Relief Fund committee come from

³⁴ Kurtzman, Daniel. "A Year After Oklahoma Blast, Jews Feel Less Isolated," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 1995.

³⁵ Interview with Howard Feinberg.

³⁶ Howard Rieger. "UJC's Howard's View." February 16, 2007

communities the Fund has helped in the past, including Oklahoma City, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Miami and Charleston.”³⁷ Such a national committee has enabled organizations such as UJC to mobilize Jews around the country to raise funds to help cities, such as New Orleans, that experience an unforeseen crisis.

Looking beyond the trauma of Katrina, the disaster helped local Jews feel closer to the national Jewish community as well as their Jewish neighbors. A recent survey conducted by Frederick Weil, a Sociologist at Louisiana State University, analyzed the Jewish community’s decisions whether or not to stay in the city following Katrina. Preliminary survey results indicated that members of the Jewish community were pleased with how local and national Jewish organizations responded to the crisis; however, they were greatly disappointed by response efforts from FEMA and local government officials.³⁸ As disappointing as FEMA’s incompetence may be, it is comforting to know that whether it be a natural disaster in Louisiana or a terrorist attack in Oklahoma, the national Jewish communal system is effective in providing support in times of need.

The situation that New Orleans currently faces is unique. No American urban city has ever dealt with a disaster of such great financial and geographic magnitude. We can look in our nation’s past to identify cities that have experienced similar disasters, but it would be naive and premature to assume that successful rebuilding efforts in these cities can be directly translated to New Orleans. What we can do, however, is take pieces from these cities’ stories and learn from particular successes and challenges they experienced. With visionary leadership, financial support, and sound planning the city can begin to

³⁷ Kleinman, Lisa. “UJC Emergency Relief Fund Helps Thousands of 9/11 Victims Get Needed Services.” http://www.ujc.org/content_display.html?ArticleID=30760

³⁸ Julie E. Schwartz. “Jewish Institutions Receive High Grades; National, State, and Local Officials Flunk.” <http://www.jewishnola.com>, November 2006.

rebuild its shattered leadership and communal infrastructure; however, we can not apply cookie cutter solutions from the past to this situation.

Conclusion

The existing body of literature allows us to gain a better understanding of the history behind New Orleans Jewish community. By understanding this history, we have a context within which research can be conducted on the current state of the community. By drawing comparisons between pre and post-Katrina Jewish life in New Orleans, one can gather research that is most reflective of the local community. Additionally, much can be gained by examining case studies of other Jewish communities that have confronted disasters. Although virtually no disaster compares directly to Katrina, valuable lessons can be learned by looking at specific components of how a community responded to a disaster.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

More than 26 hours of recorded interviews and focus groups were gathered as part of this study. The conversations were reviewed and the data was analyzed to identify four themes that support the argument that the trauma of Hurricane Katrina created multiple leadership challenges, including a population decrease, turnover in staff and lay leadership, and decline in funding sources. Such challenges have led to positive outcomes concerning institutional leadership, including increased collaborations between Jewish institutions, an increase in the number of young people engaged in leadership positions and new partnerships with the national Jewish community. These leadership challenges are explored through the short term outcomes related to:

- 1) **Institutional leadership after the storm,**
- 2) **Partnerships with national Jewish communal organizations,**

and through the long term concerns over:

- 3) **Professional and administrative staff recruitment and retention**
- 4) **The impact of outside institutions on the Jewish community**

Specific findings associated with each theme are addressed below.

Institutional Leadership After the Storm

- There was no single individual who emerged as a leader in the Jewish community after Katrina. In contrast to what often transpires after a disaster, the leadership was a communal effort, with multiple congregational, institutional and religious leaders assisting community members.
- Despite the tragedies of Hurricane Katrina, the Jewish community of New Orleans, its leaders and congregations are more united since the storm. Collaboration has been critical to rebuilding efforts; however, people are skeptical of its sustainability.
- Compared to their pre-Katrina involvement, a larger number of young people (between the ages of 25-40) are being offered leadership positions with both Jewish agencies and congregations. These young leaders are looking for tangible means of

contributing. Additionally, young leaders want to look beyond institutional histories and politics to increase collaboration among Jewish agencies and congregations.

- Select lay leaders are frustrated by leaders who left the city. Those leaders who stayed in the community express feelings of abandonment, anger and resentment towards their counterparts who left. Current leadership seems to understand people's decisions to leave; however, in several cases, the trust for these people has eroded.
- New individuals and families who have moved to New Orleans since Katrina are being embraced and are engaged in leadership opportunities. Other individuals and families who may not have held leadership positions prior to the storm are now stepping forward to offer their assistance.

Partnerships with National Jewish Communal Organizations

- Several national Jewish organizations emerged as leaders. These organizations were instrumental in helping local institutions recover in the first 20 months following Hurricane Katrina. National organizations that are most often referenced as lending support were (in alphabetical order):
 - Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies (AJFCA)
 - Chabad-Lubavitch
 - Jewish Community Center Association (JCCA)
 - United Jewish Communities (UJC)
 - Union for Reform Judaism (URJ)
- Local organizations that did not have a national counterpart are having the most difficult time recovering in the aftermath of Katrina.
- Many agencies have expressed great trepidation about their financial stability after December 2007 when UJC funds will have been exhausted. Agencies need help determining how, if at all, they should be restructured in the coming year as well as assistance estimating demand for their services.

Professional and Administrative Staff Support, Retention and Recruitment

- Agencies and congregations are concerned over their future ability to attract qualified clergy and Jewish professionals. Institutions fear that the negative press surrounding New Orleans and the disorganization of local and state governments will add to the difficulty of attracting new professionals.
- Jewish professionals and religious leaders were, and still are, in need of emotional and psychological support. These individuals have been instrumental in uniting the Jewish community and lending their support; however, many are just beginning to deal with their own personal and emotional challenges related to the storm.

The Impact of Local Institutions on the Jewish Community

- The local medical system has virtually collapsed, causing large numbers of physicians to leave the city. Since a disproportionate number of New Orleans physicians are Jewish, the local Jewish community has been heavily impacted by the loss of its doctors.
- Tulane University is important to the long-term stability of New Orleans' Jewish community; however, current partnerships between the two are predominantly informal, with a few official programs run through Hillel.
- The rebuilding of the public school system will be of utmost importance in attracting Jewish families to New Orleans. Furthermore, with the closing of the New Orleans Jewish Day School for the 2005-2006 school year and the decrease in the number of grades that are offered, some former day school families have enrolled their children in the city's public charter schools.

DISCUSSION

The trauma of Hurricane Katrina has created leadership challenges associated with the population decrease, turnover in staff and lay leadership, and decline in funding sources. Thankfully, many such challenges have created positive outcomes concerning institutional leadership, increased collaborations between Jewish institutions, an increase in the number of young people engaged in leadership positions and new partnerships with the national Jewish community. Despite these positive outcomes, the leadership challenges have also brought forth long-term concerns of staff and volunteer recruitment and retention, and the impact of outside institutions on the Jewish community.

Institutional Leadership After the Storm

Leadership is a somewhat nebulous term that has a variety of definitions and interpretations. When embarking on this study, I examined how the trauma of Hurricane Katrina created changes with the institutional leadership of the Jewish community. These changes are supported by the following new realities: 1) Leadership following the storm has very much been a communal effort. 2) Organizational leaders have united together to spearhead several collaborations. 3) More young people (ages 25-40) are beginning asked to undertake formal leadership positions. 4) Some lay leaders feel that former lay leaders who left New Orleans have abandoned the community at a time of need. Each of these four issues is discussed in great detail below.

Communal Leadership Response

When one thinks back to the leadership that united New York City after the September 11th attacks, images of Rudolph Guilani come to mind. The leader most people associate with the civil rights movement is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. When most modern scholars study leadership, they usually focus on a particular individual – a person who inspired others with their charisma or humbled the populace with their gravitas. With these images of leadership in mind, I was surprised to discover that no single individual arose as a leader in the Jewish community following Katrina. Nearly every rabbi, Jewish professional, and lay leader with whom I spoke referenced the communal leadership efforts that existed after Hurricane Katrina. This communal effort is likely related to fact that so many of the lay leaders are involved in multiple organizations. One lay leader with whom I met is on the board of the Federation, one of the Reform synagogues, the ADL and other national Jewish organizations. There are also several examples of spouses serving on the boards of different Jewish organizations. The presidents of several agencies have also been synagogues presidents or leaders of other Jewish communal organizations.

The communal response effort is a direct outcome of Hurricane Katrina. Prior to the storm, competitive issues and theological differences often made it difficult for the Jewish community to form a cohesive voice. The severity of Hurricane Katrina caused Jewish leaders to put ideological and competitive differences aside for the benefit of the broader community. No single individual or organization vied to represent the voice of the entire Jewish community. As clichéd as it may appear, the community came together to represent its collective interests. According to a Federation board member,

(This cohesion) contrasts very nicely with almost any other ethnic community within New Orleans. Our community may (have been) dispersed and a decent percentage may not be coming back; but that said, it wasn't for a lack of organization, effort, communication, encouragement... You didn't feel isolated. You couldn't feel isolated.³⁹

The Jewish Federation became a convener between national support and local community members. Federation staff and lay leadership were not interested in being martyrs or leaders (in the traditional sense of the word). Instead, they simply wanted to do their part to aid the community. I spoke with leaders – those involved with the Federation and those not involved with the Federation – who expressed that the Federation's offer to provide assistance marked the first time in years that the organization reached out to the community, not to ask for funds but rather to offer help. Despite the role that the Federation played in identifying and locating dispersed community members, it was not the only organization that took on a leadership role. The Jewish Endowment Foundation of New Orleans, the New Orleans JCC, Jewish Family Service and local congregations all stepped forward, worked together and did what they could to serve those in need. Katrina was the catalyst behind all of these organizations coming together – despite their seemingly different agendas – to help move the community forward.

In the months after Katrina, there were several events that helped to unify the community. The JCC sponsored a spaghetti dinner and a Chanukah party, both of which attracted hundreds of people. “(People) didn't realize how important community was until these events. People (were) aching to get to something like this to see people.”⁴⁰ Several organizations and congregations came together to co-sponsor similar community-wide events. Congregation Gates of Prayer hosted a Yom Kippur Kol Nidre service that

³⁹ Focus group with Board members from the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans, October 2006.

⁴⁰ Focus group with Jewish professionals, October 2006.

was open to anyone from the Jewish community who had returned to New Orleans.⁴¹ More than 500 people who were members of congregations in the Greater New Orleans area attended the service, which was truly a communal event. Similar services were hosted by Reform Congregations in Baton Rouge and Mandeville, LA as well as by Chabad in Monroe, LA. These community-wide events played a pivotal role in helping people deal with some of the challenges associated with Hurricane Katrina.

Hurricane Katrina made institutional leaders realize that they needed to set aside differences and work together. While the federal government, FEMA and the insurance companies were failing those who needed them the most, Jewish leaders quickly realized the need for collaboration in order to assist community members. Any efforts to claim ownership of individuals or families would have only created fissures. What was necessary – and what took place – was the convening of agencies, individuals and congregations. Led by their staff and boards, nearly every Jewish communal organization played an important leadership role following Katrina. In the words of a local rabbi, “We realized that if we wanted something good to happen, we had to do it ourselves.”⁴² Initial results from a Post-Katrina New Orleans Jewish Community Survey, conducted by Louisiana State University’s Department of Sociology and distributed by the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans, indicate that

New Orleans area Jews believe the leaders of local Jewish institutions did a wonderful job. Over 70% gave positive ratings to local and national Jewish leaders and organizations, and to their own congregational leaders and rabbis. Local Jewish leadership, including the Federation, fared especially well with 85% approval. By contrast, survey participants rated the job done by government leaders, whether federal, state, or local, as “poor.” President Bush earned

⁴¹ Yom Kippur began at sundown on October 11th, 2005, just six weeks after Katrina made landfall in South Louisiana, three weeks after Mayor Nagin originally announced that residents could return to the city and just two and a half weeks after residents were finally given the green light to return to New Orleans.

⁴² Interview with rabbi, October 2006.

especially low grades, with 57% of respondents rating his job performance as "terrible," and an additional 25% saying it was "bad."⁴³

The fact that leadership was a communal effort, rather than individual or organizational, lends support to the idea that virtually every institutional leader felt invested in recovery efforts. None of the organizations' leaders felt the need for their organization to come out on top at another organization's expense. Rather, it was critical that the entire community emerged from the storm safe and united. This cohesion has helped New Orleans' Jewish community begin their rebuilding efforts relatively quickly compared to other religious and community groups.

Post-Katrina Collaborations

Another positive outcome of Hurricane Katrina has been increased collaborations between Jewish institutions. Despite the tragedies of the storm, the New Orleans Jewish community, its leaders and its congregations are more united than ever. According to a local rabbi, "What was apparent immediately was that the protecting of my turf wasn't there any more. This versus that. For most people, it was all about us as a community."⁴⁴ Some of the local institutional "turf wars" are historically based, dating back more than a century to reasons that led to an organization's founding. Such is the case with Temple Sinai and Touro Synagogue, two Reform congregations that are located less than a mile from each other on St. Charles Avenue. Competition has long existed between the two congregations. Despite the new realities of New Orleans' smaller Jewish population, it is unclear if long time congregational leaders will support even small collaborations

⁴³ Julie E. Schwartz. "Jewish Institutions Receive High Grades; National, State, and Local Officials Flunk." <http://www.jewishnola.com>, November 2006.

⁴⁴ Interview with rabbi, October 2006.

between the two congregations, including proposals such as a combined religious school. It is even more unclear if the congregations will encourage larger initiatives such as a merger. If such a move could ever be conceived, now is the most opportune time. The greatest challenge will be finding the similarities and overcoming historical differences.

While a merger between these two Uptown based Reform congregations may remain to be seen for quite some time, Katrina has caused the city's Orthodox Congregations, Beth Israel and Anshe Sfard, to begun discussions about a potential merger. Beth Israel's building was completely destroyed by more than eight feet of water that flooded the shul after the walls of a nearby levee were breached. As New Orleans' Orthodox population has decreased over time, both congregations have suffered similarly from declining membership. The congregations have recently held combined worship services and holiday celebrations, including a joint Purim party and megillah reading that was held at Anshe Sfard.⁴⁵ The small size of the New Orleans Orthodox community and the financial requirements of running a congregation make a merger of these two institutions quite practical; however, in a city that has a two hundred and fifty year Jewish history, practicality does not always prevail. For congregants who are halachichly observant, the location of the shuls may present an added problem. Anshe Sfard is located in a neighborhood that many locals consider to be unsafe, whereas Beth Israel's temporary home is in a more residential area. If the congregations were to merge, the leadership needs to determine how to solve the issue of its members who need to walk to shul, despite the fact that the two buildings are more than ten miles apart. What is clear is that Hurricane Katrina was the impetus behind the recent dialogue regarding a merger

⁴⁵ Julie E. Schwartz. "Anshe Sfard, Congregation Beth Israel, Hold Joint Events." *Jewish News*, www.jewishnola.com, February 9, 2007.

between the two congregations. The incremental steps toward collaborative programming are extremely important in testing the waters for a potential merger.

In addition to historical reasons, institutional differences can be ideological, resulting from conflicting interpretations of Jewish law and dissimilar religious observances. During an interview, a local Chabad Rabbi referenced a presentation by Alan Dershowitz that poignantly describes the ideological differences that often create fissures in Jewish communities:

You look at Chabad and the first thing that comes to mind for most people are the differences - the separation of men and women at services, the views on Reform and Conservative conversions, and all of the highlighted differences. "90% of the things we agree on and 10% we disagree on. Let's highlight the 90% and deemphasize the 10%." (Focusing on the differences is) what (went) on here for a long time. I hope we can follow some of those community feelings that we experienced in the aftermath (and focus on the 90% we have in common).⁴⁶

There have been several examples of religious leaders and congregations putting ideological views aside for the benefit of the community. One example is of a Reform rabbi who attended the community Chanukah celebration for the first time. While it may seem odd for a rabbi to not attend the city's Chanukah celebration, the annual event is sponsored by Chabad, which represents Jewish ideologies that often conflict with many of the beliefs supported by the Reform movement. Despite the ideological differences with Chabad, it can be assumed that this rabbi saw the importance in communal solidarity after Katrina.

Congregation Beth Israel and Congregation Gates of Prayer are also putting aside ideological differences to create a mutually beneficial partnership. Since the Fall of 2006, Gates of Prayer has served as Beth Israel's temporary home. Gates of Prayer

⁴⁶ Interview with rabbi, October 2006.

initiated discussions with Beth Israel and offered to open their doors to the shul.

Although several other congregations had also made offers to Beth Israel, the collaboration between Gates of Prayer and Beth Israel seemed to fit because “if Beth Israel (goes) to Gates of Prayer, then (Beth Israel) (wouldn’t be) in jeopardy of losing its distinctiveness.”⁴⁷ Beth Israel has been holding Shabbat and High Holiday services and other congregational functions in Gates of Prayer’s chapel. The Orthodox Congregation also purchased a house just a few blocks from Gates of Prayer so that visiting Rabbis and guests of the shul can stay within walking distance of the Reform synagogue.

Highlighting Beth Israel’s appreciation, during Yom Kippur services, an Orthodox Rabbi leading services at Beth Israel asked to address Gates of Prayer’s congregants. The Orthodox Rabbi shared the following midrash about the Kidushah prayer:

There is the section where you bow to the right and to the left before you get on your tip toes for *kadosh, kadosh, kadosh* (holy, holy, holy). The midrash tells us that God has angels on either side. They are often bickering angels that argue with each other. It is only when one is talking to the other that you can say ‘*kadosh, kadosh, kadosh.*’ We have such a moment now.⁴⁸

Gates of Prayer and Beth Israel have also begun to discuss the possibility of combining administrative functions in the future, but it is uncertain whether this will ultimately take place. The collaborations described above, between Reform and Orthodox congregations or two competing Orthodox congregations, are quite unique. These partnerships may serve to attract rabbinical candidates who are interested in either intra-denominational work or cross-congregation partnerships. While the collaborations are cause for excitement, it is important that the relationship between Beth Israel and Gates of Prayer be approached in a delicate manner so that neither institution feels marginalized or

⁴⁷ Interview with rabbi, October 2006.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

disadvantaged. Both synagogues - and their leadership - must realize the benefits from the newly established relationship.

Discussions have also emerged regarding a merger between the New Orleans Jewish Day School (NOJDS) and the Torah Academy. The former was founded in 1996 as a non-denominational community day school, and the Jewish Federation has been its primary source of funding. The latter institution is primarily funded by Chabad, with a significant portion of the school's students coming from children of local Chabad rabbis. Both schools suffered a significant loss in their student population after Katrina. Many of the families whose children were enrolled in the day schools evacuated to cities with larger Jewish populations and multiple day school options. Several of these families chose to stay in their new cities and at their new schools, despite the New Orleans day schools reopening in Fall 2006. Other families stayed but enrolled their children in other New Orleans schools. "The kids were shuffled around a lot last year and the parents don't want to put them into an unstable environment – they want to be sure their (child's) grade will be there next year."⁴⁹ Seventeen new families joined the NOJDS for the 2006-2007 academic year.⁵⁰ Despite this influx of families, the overall student population was significantly smaller than before Katrina, so the school was able to offer Kindergarten through 3rd grade for the 2006-2007 school year. Prior to Katrina, the NOJDS served students in grades Kindergarten through 8th grade. The school has experienced several challenges due to the shrinkage of the local Jewish population. In response to this decline, the school has been forced to scale back its curriculum to focus on early childhood, preschool and elementary education. Torah Academy also faces significant

⁴⁹ Focus group with Jewish professionals, October 2006.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

challenges, including a departure of over 50% of its students (most of who were from Metairie).⁵¹ Both schools are in need of additional families to keep the schools running and financially stable.

Although the schools are operating independently, local leaders have encouraged the two institutions to merge. Ideological differences over issues such as mixed gender learning, interpretations of Judaic text, and prayer styles will present significant challenges to the merger. Despite these difficulties, the schools may have no choice other than to merge. With a combined student population of less than 50 children, it is unclear whether New Orleans can support two independent Jewish day schools. It will certainly not be simple to combine two institutions with different boards, different funding sources, different ideological foundations and different facilities. The NOJDS operates out of the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Jewish Community Campus in Metairie, and the Torah Academy operates from the old Communal Hebrew School building, which is just over a mile away on West Esplanade Avenue in Metairie. Regardless of when (or even whether) the merger takes place, the schools now need to focus on recruitment. The Jewish Federation is offering incentive packages to newcomers who make their home in New Orleans, including vouchers for discounted tuition at one of the day schools. Such efforts may certainly help the school to attract a few new families; however, it still may not be viable in the long-term for the two institutions to operate as separate entities.

Hurricane Katrina has led to the creation of several organizational partnerships. It is unclear how long these collaborations will last; however, leaders are trying to leverage the existing relationships to make policy and organizational changes that will benefit the Jewish community for years to come. According to a local leader,

⁵¹ Interview with rabbi, October 2006.

The dialogue amongst various institutions has greatly improved and become more open, and yet at the same time, we have issues of institutions needing to merge or move forward given the changed dynamic of the community.⁵²

People are cautiously optimistic about the sustainability of these partnerships. One local leader predicts that:

As time goes by, people will be re-entrenched in their position and institutional inertia will likely resume. When we needed to be there for one other, we were there for one another as much as is possible... We were supportive for one another and united for one another. Post Katrina, there are aspects where everyone is starting to go their own way again, but we all served each other's people, and I think we appreciate that.⁵³

It is the hope of many people with whom I spoke (particularly young leaders) that these organizational partnerships will last in the long-term. One young leader poignantly described the situation:

For our generation, the biggest challenge is (getting) organizations to work together. We need people to get over some of (their) long held views and really become a New Orleans Jewish community.⁵⁴

The local Jewish community is no longer big enough to support the large organizational infrastructure that existed prior to Katrina. This infrastructure was developed over time to service a Jewish population that, as recently as the 1980's, numbered more than 13,000.⁵⁵ Since Hurricane Katrina, estimates of the Jewish population have ranged from 6,500 to 7,000. The Jewish community no longer has the donor base or population to justify such an extensive communal infrastructure. It is because of the local Jewish community's long history that such a vast network still exists. In the realities of post-

⁵² Focus group with Board members from the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans, October 2006.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Interview with Young Leader, February 2007.

⁵⁵ Gary A. Tobin and Sharon Sassler. *A Population Study of the Greater New Orleans Jewish Community: A Summary Report.* Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies. Waltham: Brandeis University, 1988, p. 3.

Katrina life in New Orleans, collaborations may become more pressing due to budget cuts and a population decline. As time progresses, and if the population remains at current levels, then more mergers and collaborations will be inevitable.

Feelings Toward Leaders Who Left

As discussed, Hurricane Katrina has created leadership challenges associated with the population decrease, turnover in staff and lay leadership, and a decline in funding sources. Some of the city's prominent Jewish leaders did not return after the storm, causing existing leaders to have mixed feelings towards these former leaders. Rabbis consistently mentioned that, although it may have been difficult, they fully supported congregants who chose not to return to New Orleans. As the spiritual leader, it was important that the rabbi be supportive and understanding that congregants' personal and emotional needs had to come before the financial or leadership needs of the synagogue. Some rabbis even helped to put congregants in touch with synagogues and families in the cities where they relocated. It is this kind of support that makes the New Orleans Jewish community so special. These rabbis could have easily pushed aside those who left and focus solely on people who remained. This did not occur because there was an understanding that people needed to be supported in their difficult decision to relocate.

Although no specific numbers were made available to me, several community leaders mentioned that a larger number of people who left were elderly that had children and grandchildren in other communities. These individuals may have one day left New Orleans to be closer to their adult-children, but the move came sooner than many had

expected. The Jewish community also lost a significant portion of its "Young Professionals" population.

Some of the younger people left because of school and educational opportunities that they didn't perceive were (in New Orleans), and some people in the middle left because they couldn't deal with the emotional stress of being here.⁵⁶

Several people with whom I spoke observed that once someone decides to leave, it is uncommon to see (them) change their minds or to see them move back to New Orleans (as least in the immediate future). There are several examples where a portion of a multi-generational family left, and some of the family remained in New Orleans. Having relatives in the city may one day attract these families back to New Orleans; however, there are mixed sentiments over the degree to which those who left will be welcomed back into the community. Some believe that anyone who is Jewish and wants to become part of the community will be warmly welcomed. Others express great frustrations and resentment towards those who left. Lay leadership seem to be angrier about other leaders who left than are professional staff and clergy. In a focus group with congregational board members, I discovered quite a bit of resentment towards Jewish leaders who did not return to New Orleans. Many of the people who remained in the city are faced with the task of rebuilding their families, businesses as well as the Jewish community. Issues of abandonment and frustration arise as they discuss feelings towards leaders who left. The board member of a local congregation expressed what several others in this person's position seemed to feel:

I have little respect for those who claimed to be leaders in this community and then ran. I think that they enjoyed seeing their names in the *Jewish News* and having their egos massaged, but they were clearly not "leaders" in the correct sense of the word. If they were, they would have stayed. That's what true leaders

⁵⁶ Focus group with Jewish professionals, October 2006.

do. Those who remained have worked hard and will work hard. Someday we will see the fruits of (our) labor. It is these folks, men and women of true character, who can and should be proud of their leadership.⁵⁷

This anger is disconcerting when one thinks about what would happen if leaders who moved away eventually decide to return to New Orleans. Although there is hope that they will be warmly welcomed back into the community, the individuals who have been engrossed in Jewish communal rebuilding efforts may feel that those who left have no place at the table with those who stayed and participated in rebuilding efforts.

Despite the frustration with leaders who left the city, there is much gratitude and appreciation for individuals and families who have moved to New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina. Such individuals are being warmly welcomed into the community and are already being engaged in leadership opportunities. An example of this hospitality is the New Orleans Newcomers party that the Jewish Federation hosted in March 2007. The event was open to anyone who had moved to New Orleans since Katrina. Similarly, congregations and communal agencies eagerly embrace newcomers who want to be involved in Jewish communal life. These individuals are being invited to sit on boards, participate in strategic planning discussions and are being engaged like long-time New Orleanians. While it is important to involve these new families, it is also important that it does not happen at the expense of those families who stayed in New Orleans after Katrina. Retention needs to be as much -- if not more -- of a focus as recruitment.

⁵⁷ Written correspondence with Congregation Board member, October 2006.

Young Leadership

One of the more positive outcomes of Hurricane Katrina has been an increase in the number of young people engaged in institutional leadership. The young people who live in New Orleans are drawn to “(the city) for the close-knit community and the sense of belonging that one feels. (They) enjoy the fact that people know each other and that you feel a part of the community.”⁵⁸ Young people also appreciate (as do New Orleanians of all ages) the unique culture the city affords and the combination of an urban environment and a small town feel. Although a significant portion of the Jewish community that left New Orleans is young (ages 25-40), many young people who remained are being offered an increased number of leadership positions. Before Katrina, congregations looked to their younger members as future leaders but few were engaged in current leadership positions. According to one rabbi,

We had to bring in some newer members, some younger families, some people who probably would not have been in the leadership this soon, but there’s a level of excitement on the board that we haven’t had in quite some time – with a lot of new blood.⁵⁹

These young people understand the responsibility they hold as the next generation of Jewish leadership. According to one person that I interviewed, “It’s now the time for young people who have stayed to stand up and get involved.”⁶⁰ Young people are being empowered to share their ideas and offer a fresh perspective on tackling organizational challenges. While this change is certainly positive, organizations must be conscious about generational differences in what one may consider a worthwhile contribution. Several young leaders with whom I spoke mentioned that they don’t consider attending a

⁵⁸ Interview with young leader, March 2007.

⁵⁹ Interview with rabbi, October 2006.

⁶⁰ Interview with young leader, February 2007.

board meeting to be an endeavor that makes a valuable difference. Young generations are demanding more hands-on experiences and are not as interested, as were previous generations, in the policies and procedures that have long been associated with Jewish communal life. One young leader said, "If being involved in the community is just about sitting in meetings, then I'm not sure that Jewish communal involvement is for me."⁶¹ Another young person mentioned frustrations with being the sole young representative on one of the local synagogue's board and strategic planning committee. This individual felt that older leaders need to be more receptive to the ideas of the young. While organizations are taking a positive step by inviting young people to sit at the table, young leaders need to be active participants in discussions related to the future of the organization and the local Jewish community.

It also seems that the same young people are often asked to sit on the boards of multiple organizations. While these people are extremely capable and have much to offer all of the organizations, there are many other young people – both local New Orleanians and newcomers to the city – who should be engaged in leadership opportunities. If organizations continue to target the same young leaders, there is the danger of these leaders prematurely "burning out".

The young leaders are also in support of intra-organizational collaborations that have emerged from Katrina. Whereas in the past, congregations may not have opened their programs to non-members, today's young people see great opportunity in inviting the entire Jewish community to attend certain synagogue functions, despite existing policies or bylaws that may, in some situations, prohibit an open invitation. In other cases, synagogues may not want to invite non-synagogue members due to institutional

⁶¹ Interview with young leader, February 2007.

histories. In other scenarios still, the decision may be based on financial restrictions. These restrictions notwithstanding, young Jewish leaders in New Orleans want to develop a congregational life that includes inviting non-members to certain programs and events. Young people recognize that “change is hard for people, and people who have been in this community for a long time are used to things being done a certain way.”⁶² While change can be difficult to spearhead, all of the young people with whom I spoke embrace institutional change. If organizations want to continue the post-Katrina trend of involving more young people in institutional leadership, then the more senior leaders must come to accept organizational change.

With the new realities of a smaller Jewish population, turnover in lay leadership, and decreased funding sources, there may be a need for multiple young professional groups to consolidate or sponsor more collaborative programming. New Orleans has seven prominent young adult groups⁶³ that are sponsored by various organizations and congregations. It is questionable whether it is in the Jewish community’s best interest (as opposed to the interest of a single organization) to have so many programs that recruit from the same basic pool of young people. If the same general people are involved in all or many of the groups – regardless of who sponsors them – then there is a concern over burnout and inefficient utilization of financial resources. Resources will go farther if budgets are combined and human resources are consolidated. With the heightened awareness of lay leadership turnover, organizations should be conscious about not overwhelming young people with an overabundance of programs that target their age

⁶² Interview with young leader, February 2007.

⁶³ These seven groups include the Young Adult Group (Federation Sponsored), Young Jews of the Crescent City (JCC sponsored), Gates of Prayer Young Adult Committee, Touro Synagogue Young Adult Committee, Temple Sinai Young Adult Committee, Young Women of Hadassah and a new young group with the National Council of Jewish Women.

demographic. A board member of a local congregation expressed concerns over the issue:

The 30's population is beginning to take on positions on boards of synagogues and agencies, but it's important that organizations not overwhelm these young people or organizational fatigue may take place.⁶⁴

Since many young professionals have children (or may have children in the near future) and are building their professional resumes, their time is often limited. Organizations must be careful to provide meaningful involvement opportunities that young people will consider both a valuable use of their time as well as personally fulfilling, yet not place a strain on other areas of their lives. It was also mentioned in multiple interviews that networking is not a compelling enough reason why young people should get involved in Jewish communal life. With the relatively small size of New Orleans' Jewish community and with so many members having grown up in the city, networking is not as much of a reason for involvement as is the opportunity to make a positive difference.

As more young members of the Jewish community are offered formal leadership positions on synagogue and agency boards, the existing leadership "must stress to (them) that they play an important role as leaders both within the Jewish and broader community."⁶⁵ Young people must feel appreciated. Their opinions and contributions need to be validated by the organizations with which they are involved. It is also important that the young leaders are properly trained. Whereas prior to Katrina, one might have taken on much smaller positions before being invited to sit on a board, young people are now being offered positions that carry greater responsibility. Organizations must be careful not to set up these young people for failure, since a negative experience

⁶⁴ Focus group with Board members of the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans, October 2006.

⁶⁵ Focus group with congregational leaders, October 2006.

could have a long term detrimental impact on their willingness to accept future leadership positions.

One of the most positive outcomes of Hurricane Katrina has been the increased number of new young people who are being asked to accept institutional leadership positions. The New Orleans Jewish community has tremendous enthusiasm and gratitude for the young people who are committed to rebuilding the city; however, organizations must be aware of the communal priorities that concern this generation. They must be sure not to overburden these young leaders, and they must be strategic in their use of financial and human resources to program for this demographic.

Partnerships with National Jewish Communal Organizations

A direct outcome of Hurricane Katrina has been a special partnership between New Orleans and the national Jewish community. Congregations, JCC's, Federations and other Jewish organizations initiated fundraisers and supply drives to benefit New Orleans and neighboring Jewish communities that were impacted by the storm. Volunteers traveled to the city in droves to lend their time and physical abilities to cleaning and rebuilding efforts. Much of the support that New Orleans received – both in the form of financial aid and volunteer assistance – was funneled through a vast network of national organizations that were truly leaders in the aftermath of Katrina.

This national support became critical when local leaders and organizations realized the tremendous challenge that stood before them. On top of personal struggles, it would have been nearly impossible to handle the added strain of organizing massive fundraisers and supply drives. The support from the national Jewish community helped

organizations, individuals and families get back on their feet. People were given gift cards to stores like Target and Wal-Mart, which allowed them to purchase the basic necessities they so desperately needed. Cleaning supplies were distributed. Fences were mended and houses were cleared. In an article from the *Cleveland Jewish News*, a New Orleanian discusses the support of the national Jewish community:

The good news is that...the national Jewish community – led by United Jewish Communities – is keeping us afloat. It has and continues to be generous, compassionate, and yet it demands results and accountability. The dollars (that) the North American Jewish communities have donated are keeping our synagogues from losing their mortgages and paying the salaries of our most important Jewish community employees, from rabbis to social workers. You continue to maintain this Jewish community, where every institution suffered damage to site and soul.⁶⁶

From the funds that it raised and allocated, to its professional consultants who were deployed in New Orleans, the interviewees repeatedly mentioned the critical role that UJC played in New Orleans after Katrina.

The UJC and local Federations helped to raise more than \$28 million for hurricane relief efforts.⁶⁷ These organizations responded quickly because the government did not. They realized that neither FEMA nor the federal government nor the insurance agencies were going to assist the people of New Orleans, so it was the responsibility of the Jewish people to do what they could, truly exemplifying the biblical directive, “*lo alecha hamlecha ligmor, v’lo alecha ligmor.*” You are not required to complete the work, but neither are you at liberty to ignore it. As of February 8th, 2007, roughly \$20.1 Million of these funds were allocated New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Biloxi, MS, and several other cities where evacuees had landed. The remaining funds were allocated by

⁶⁶ Julie E. Schwartz. “National Jewish Community Has Come Through for Us.” *The Cleveland Jewish News*. September 25, 2006.

⁶⁷ Howard M. Rieger. “UJC’s Howard’s View.” February 16, 2007.

local Federations. The UJC also worked in partnership with nearly every synagogue movement, national Jewish organization, and multiple private foundations, to raise money for the two year Jewish community stabilization plan. As part of this plan, \$15 to \$16 Million was given to New Orleans' Jewish community and funds were also distributed to Jewish communities in Baton Rouge and the Mississippi Gulf Coast.⁶⁸ Additional allocations were made through directed grants to non-Jewish community that supported social services and mental health programs. Local organizations also helped to support the community stabilization plan. The New Orleans Jewish Endowment contributed roughly \$1.4 Million, and the "Goldring-Woldenberg Family Foundation...issued a challenge grant that will match 20 cents for every dollar brought into the New Orleans Jewish Community in 2006 and 2007, up to \$3 million, for the New Orleans Jewish community."⁶⁹ Although the funding was truly a collaboration of many Jewish organizations, the UJC played a critical role in bringing these parties together. According to a board member of the Jewish Federation,

The UJC was the conduit of generosity and largesse from so many Jews throughout the country....Without these funds, our agencies would be in dire straights and synagogues would be at the brink of closely.⁷⁰

This funding made it possible for the Federation to cancel its 2006 fundraising campaign while maintaining its financial commitments to local agencies. This funding is expected to carry the community through December 2007. The money has allowed Jewish institutions to make physical repairs, close budgetary gaps related to Katrina, provide

⁶⁸ Interviews with Howard Feinberg, November 2006 and April 2007.

⁶⁹ "UJC/Federations Allocate \$8M in 'Historic' Katrina Relief Package," March 30, 2006.

⁷⁰ Focus Group with Board members of the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans, October 2006.

programming, and focus on short and long term planning. These funds have been and will continue to be instrumental to the community's rebuilding efforts. It is also because of these funds that the New Orleans Jewish community has been able to begin the rebuilding process relatively faster than other religious or minority groups within the city.

In addition, the URJ provided tremendous support for the area's local Reform congregations. Although the URJ was initially hesitant to facilitate a national fundraising drive, with some encouragement by local Reform rabbis and lay leadership, the organization came through. Their assistance "was unprecedented. Not the Katrina relief fund – they've done that before with natural disasters – but the SOS (Save Our Synagogues) fund was unprecedented."⁷¹ "More than 16,000 people (contributed) more than \$4 Million to the Hurricane Relief and SOS funds, which supported New Orleans' four Reform congregations."⁷²

The outpouring of monetary donations and in-kind contributions from the national Jewish community have been critical in helping the city's Jewish community embark on what will inevitably be a long rebuilding process. A local rabbi discussed the tremendous financial support that came from rabbinic colleagues. In a true act of solidarity, the rabbi's alumni rabbinic school class raised more than \$100,000. Congregation Beth Israel, which suffered the greatest physical damage of the city's nine synagogues, was met with an outpouring of support from the national Jewish community. The Orthodox Union (OU) was instrumental in helping Beth Israel get back on its feet after the congregation's building was devastated by the flooding from Katrina. The shul's torahs

⁷¹ Interview with rabbi, October 2006.

⁷² Union for Reform Judaism Advertisement. *Reform Judaism*. Summer 2006, Vol. 34, No. 4, p. 27.

were destroyed by the more than more than eight feet of water that flooded the building.

Beth Israel's President Jackie Gothard spoke about the support of the OU in an interview:

Without the OU's help, Beth Israel would not exist today. I do not mean simply that they were very helpful and made our job easier. I mean that without the OU, Beth Israel would not exist today. When we inquired if they could help us find someone to read the Torah for Yom Kippur, they sent us a rabbi, two Yeshiva University students, a Torah, and fifty High Holiday prayer books -- all on 48 hours notice. They have had two staff rabbis here on four different occasions to help us conduct services, as well as five different students; sent 50 brand new ArtScroll prayer books...and have worked with our leadership very closely in planning the short term and long term vision of the shul.⁷³

Beth Israel also received a tremendous amount of supplies from The National Council of Young Israel (NCYI). The organization sent down:

trucks laden with linen, clothing, beds and furniture, toys, sports equipment, seferim, kitchenware, and other household necessities were rolling in to assist those in need. (In addition,) monies were distributed, lifecycle event bills were covered, and summer camp scholarships were handed out by NCYI.⁷⁴

It was gracious gestures such as these that enabled New Orleans' area congregations to move forward after Katrina.

National Jewish partners also provided structure and administrative support, which was critical in mobilizing community members who were spread across the country. Leaders from the UJC's Emergency Committee were in touch with professional staff and lay leaders from New Orleans - even before Katrina made landfall. The committee, which is ad hoc and meets as needed, ensured that the collaboration between UJC and the local community began almost immediately. This collaboration was facilitated by local leaders who maintained an ongoing dialogue and relationship between

⁷³ "At Burial of Destroyed Torah Scrolls in New Orleans, OU Delivers Words of Comfort and Hears Gratitude for its Post-Katrina Role." Orthodox Union Department of Public Relations. March 21, 2006.

⁷⁴ Adam Okun. "New Orleans Jews: 'We are So Lucky.'" *5 Towns Jewish Times*. September 7, 2006.

the national offices and the local community. According to one community leader, "(The UJC) bent-over backwards to make this transition (after Katrina) as palatable as it could possibly be."⁷⁵ UJC helped the Jewish Federation get their website and email system running smoothly. The offices in New Orleans lacked a back-up server outside of the city. Since people were not allowed back in New Orleans for several weeks, this technological assistance became vitally important.

Similarly, the worldwide Chabad Lubavitch movement granted Chabad of New Orleans and Metairie access to web services, listserves and blogs, all of which were instrumental in disseminating information and identifying displaced persons. Using the Chabad.org web system, the local Chabad houses reached out to New Orleanians within hours of Katrina making landfall. These virtual networks also allowed them to contact and connect evacuees with regional Chabad affiliates from Texas to Arkansas to Tennessee. The New Orleans Chabad also released an "all points bulletin" that was posted on 500-600 Chabad websites throughout the world. This bulletin allowed Chabad affiliates to collect the names and addresses of Jews who were stuck in their homes because they chose not to evacuate. This list led to a partnership with the Jewish Federation where the two organizations worked together to secure an emergency team that rescued over 50 people from their homes.

There were a lot of elderly people who didn't want to leave. By bringing down Yeshiva students and other young people, we provided a comforting face that stood out from the uniformed officers in high boots who might have been more intimidating.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Focus group with Board members of the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans, October 2006.

⁷⁶ Interview with rabbi, October 2006.

The Chabad network enabled its rabbis to establish a fundraising drive and place evacuees with families in the cities where they had relocated. The network also became the means through which Chabad rabbis connected to residents who were dispersed throughout the South. They were able to offer information to people throughout the world who were concerned about the safety and well-being of members of the local Jewish community.

National networks were also an essential part of UJC's recovery efforts. The team of local leadership and national UJC representatives created a communications link with Federations in the cities that received large numbers of evacuees. This coordination allowed local Federation staff to locate community members who were dispersed in hundreds of locations around the country. The team also developed a coordinated approach to securing financial assistance and ground response, such as rescuing people from their homes and putting individuals in touch with their families. In addition to UJC's support, the Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies (AJFCA) underwrote office expenses for the local Jewish Family Service (JFS). AJFCA also put the local JFS in touch with mental health professionals who were traveling to New Orleans and were willing to donate their services to assist the JFS staff.

Regardless of the type of support that was extended, it became quite clear through my research that local Jewish institutions that had support from a national parent or partner agency are in far better shape today than are those who lack a national affiliate. The New Orleans Jewish Day School (NOJDS) is a prime example of this. As an independent educational institution, the NOJDS does not receive funding, consulting services or administrative support from a national parent. The day school does receive

funding from the Jewish Federation and The Jewish Endowment Foundation. It has also received funding as part of the two year Jewish community stabilization plan; however, it does not receive money from a national day school affiliate. While the local funding provides a significant revenue source, it cannot compensate in the long run for the tremendous financial losses that the school experienced after Katrina. The school, which was founded eleven years ago and had gradually built its Kindergarten to Eighth grade curriculum, suffered a loss of nearly 75% of its student population. Some of the school's families relocated to other cities while others chose to keep their children enrolled in other local schools that they attended after Katrina.⁷⁷ In the two academic years since Katrina, the school has refocused its curriculum on early childhood and elementary education. The NOJDS is receiving consulting services from RAVSAK and the Partnership in Excellence for Jewish Education (PEJE); however, in the future, the school must move be able to operate without funding from a national parent organization.

The New Orleans Jewish community is fortunate to have only a small number of organizations that lack a national parent. In many cases, these organizations are further behind in their rebuilding efforts; however, they are leveraging other local and national resources to move forward. Through this research, it became clear that there is tremendous value to having a national Jewish communal system. National organizations such as UJC, JCCA, URJ, Chabad and AJFCA were instrumental in helping local Jewish institutions reemerge from Hurricane Katrina. As I discussed in the "Literature Review" section, this national system has proven its worth time and time again as disasters have struck national and international Jewish communities. Although national agencies' value

⁷⁷ The NOJDS closed after Hurricane Katrina and did not reopen for the 2005-2006 school year.

cannot be solely defined by disaster preparation and relief, they have been and will continue to be vital to Jewish rebuilding efforts.

Despite the increased partnerships with national Jewish organizations, there is enormous concern about agencies' and congregations' financial stability after the Fall of 2007 when funds from the two year Jewish community stabilization plan are set to expire. The rebuilding process will take much longer than community members initially anticipated.

We originally thought that this would be a two year process. It was an honest appraisal by those here but in retrospect we were all wrong. This is not a two year, but more like a five or seven year process.⁷⁸

Agencies need assistance determining how they may need to be restructured (if at all). There is still uncertainty about the size of the Jewish population and the long term demand for communal services. Some predict that although the population is smaller, demand for certain services, including counseling at JFS or synagogue programming, may have actually grown since Katrina. Evidence has shown that people are attending community functions in larger numbers than before the hurricane, so demand does not seem to have waned. Board members at the Jewish Federation are willing to "work with agencies and synagogues to prepare for the future because there's a finite amount of money available."⁷⁹ Because of the support of UJC and other national funding sources, organizations have been able to operate with relative financial health since Katrina. Once these funds are no longer available, it is uncertain how agencies and congregations will fare. Prior to Katrina, the Federation's four major beneficiary agencies were somewhat dependent on Federation funding, and the NOJD was highly dependent on this funding.

⁷⁸ Focus group with Board members from the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans, October 2006.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Because of the decreased Jewish population (and in effect, the decreased pool of financial resources), agencies cannot expect the same level of Federation funding in the future. Furthermore, some significant supporters of the local Jewish community have not returned since Katrina. Their absence will be felt even more once national funds are no longer available. Although national partners have been instrumental in supporting New Orleans' Jewish community since Katrina, local organizations must learn to operate without national funding.

The New Orleans Jewish Endowment Foundation will play an increasingly important role in the future life of the Jewish community. The relationship between the Federation and the Foundation is considered by many to be "better than ever," and the two organizations are working closely to ensure that communal priorities can be adequately funded. Leaders must adapt to the newfound realities of a decreased population and a decline in funding sources and realize that it will be nearly impossible for the community to maintain the Jewish infrastructure that existed prior to Katrina.

Professional and Administrative Staff Support, Retention and Recruitment

Although Katrina has led to some positive outcomes, including collaborations between Jewish organizations, increased numbers of young people engaged in leadership positions and strengthened relations with national Jewish organizations, the storm has also created several long-term concerns. One such concern is the issue of staff recruitment and retention. The concern emerged from the fact that almost every local organization in New Orleans – Jewish and non-Jewish alike – has experienced some degree of staff turn-over since Hurricane Katrina. The exodus of professional leadership

has not been limited to Jewish professionals. Many of the more recent departures –from both the Jewish community and city at large – have been well-educated professionals.

Several national publications have recently published articles about the “brain drain” that New Orleans is supposedly experiencing. According to *The New York Times*, “while many poorer residents have moved back to the city, the ‘brain drain’ of professionals that the city was experiencing before the storm appears to have accelerated.”⁸⁰ Locals debate whether a brain drain is in fact taking place; however, it seems fair to assume that New Orleans is in danger of losing some of its most talented professionals, particularly younger ones who are mobile and can easily find employment in other cities. Turnover is also related to the large numbers of people who have been “let go” since Katrina. Several Jewish professionals discussed having to fire significant numbers of staff due to budget cuts and financial uncertainty. Following Katrina, the JCC fired 50% of its staff, one of the most difficult responsibilities the agency’s leadership had to assume after the storm.⁸¹

There is also an added challenge of finding the *right* person to fill a job. Some congregations and agencies lost long-time staff people who chose to relocate after the storm. Although there are plenty of job seekers within New Orleans, it is proving challenging for some organizations to fill vacancies with the *right* professionals and *right* administrative staff at salaries that the organization can afford. Since Hurricane Katrina, salaries for blue collar jobs such as maintenance workers have risen significantly. Restaurants, hotels and other businesses are in need of maintenance personnel. Many of these workers either lost their homes during Katrina or were not permitted to return to

⁸⁰ Shaila Dewan. “Fed-up New Orleans Residents are Giving Up.” *The New York Times*. February 16, 2007.

⁸¹ Focus Group with Jewish Professionals, October 2006.

rental properties. Rising rents have made it nearly impossible for many of these people to find affordable living options in New Orleans, resulting in a shortage of low-skilled labor. Consequently, large numbers of low-skilled laborers did not return after evacuating. A local congregation referenced a recent decision to raise the salary and offer health care benefits to its maintenance person. The decision was necessary to encourage this individual to stay. The effort proved successful but is becoming increasingly expensive for Jewish organizations in the community. With growing pressures to cut budgets due to shrinking funding sources, it will be increasingly challenging for Jewish organizations to compensate their staff and administrators at competitive levels.

The long-term concerns over staff recruitment can be temporarily assuaged when one observes the tremendous commitment of New Orleans' Jewish professionals. It is not uncommon to find congregations and agencies with professional leaders who have worked in the local community for more than 20 years. Once these individuals retire or leave, it will be difficult to find replacements that have the same level of local knowledge and passion for the New Orleans Jewish community.

Although so many of the current Jewish professionals are extremely committed to the community, several agencies have lost significant staff members since the storm. People have left for a variety of reasons, including a need to separate themselves from the stress they encountered in the past two years, a desire to be in a community with a Jewish Day School that caters to elementary and middle school age children,⁸² and various others. Some organizations, such as the New Orleans Hillel, have been lucky in their

⁸² Since Hurricane Katrina, The New Orleans Jewish Day School had to eliminate several of their classes. The school used to service Kindergarten through 8th grade, but has since downsized to emphasize early childhood, primary and elementary school education.

efforts to fill staff vacancies. Shortly after their Executive Director decided not to return, a local rabbi who had been serving part-time as the Hillel rabbi, accepted the position of Executive Director. Not all organizations have been as fortunate as Hillel. The Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans lost three of its top professionals, including its Executive Director, Assistant Executive Director and Director of Planning and Community Services. These very individuals were cited by Federation board members as being important leaders in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. According to lay leadership, the Federation professionals, along with its President, provided the organization, communication and encouragement that was necessary to get the Jewish community back on its feet.

Jewish Family Service, which is primarily a social services and counseling agency, employed 19 staff persons prior to Katrina, only 3 of which were able to return to their homes (due to physical damage) after the storm. The instability and lack of a permanent home led several staff therapists to resign. The agency as a whole has suffered tremendous staff turn-over since Katrina. The New Orleans Jewish Day School was also not spared in this regard by the impact of Katrina. The school's new principal left to assume the Executive Director position at Tulane Hillel after the Hillel Executive Director made a permanent move to Georgia.⁸³ The school was fortunate to have its former principal return from retirement. She recognized that a familiar face provided comfort to the school's children and families. Professionals such as this are deeply committed to the city and its agencies and want to ensure that they survive; however, the city's Jewish professionals and clergy are experiencing an extremely high level of stress.

⁸³ The former Executive Director is still working for Tulane Hillel in a fundraising capacity, but the individual no longer lives in New Orleans.

People all over the city are experiencing similar levels of high stress; however, this should not marginalize what Jewish professionals are feeling.

Decreased staff size has placed additional strains on the existing staff. Almost every Jewish professional with whom I spoke discussed the challenge of limited staff. One professional stated, "the community's expectations are greater...people don't want to hear that something isn't being offered or was cancelled because of Katrina."⁸⁴ The community still expects its Jewish professionals to fulfill the roles that they played prior to the Hurricane; however, the reality is that there are less human resources, stress levels are higher, and less funding is available. Staff members have the added stress of dealing with their own Katrina-related issues. Many staff were displaced from their homes or were functioning in remote offices outside of New Orleans until the spring or summer of 2006. Several professionals also discussed the challenge of prioritizing long term versus daily responsibilities. Before the storm, staff teams were larger so these issues could be delegated amongst a bigger team of people. Downsizing has made prioritization much more difficult. A prime example of this challenge relates to the JCC. Demands led the organization to increase its day care options, but the organization had to do this with 20% less staff than before Katrina. Professional staff can only handle so much stress, and many that I met appeared to be at their saturation point.

The realities that existed in the year after Katrina made it such that Jewish professionals had to attend to the community's needs before their own. As a result, several are now just beginning to deal with some of the shock, anger and other emotions related to post-trauma. When asked who they went to for support after the storm, most staff cited friends, family and people within their professional network. Few, if any,

⁸⁴ Focus group with Jewish professionals, October 2006.

discussed seeking counseling; however, it may be helpful to create a support group for local Jewish professionals to discuss job-related stress. There are few people within the city who can relate to the dual role that communal leaders must play by rebuilding their community while rebuilding their own lives. As an agency focused on mental health, Jewish Family Service (JFS) was keenly aware of their staff's mental health needs. Through funding that it received from national supporters, the agency created a staff wellness program. JFS capitalized on health professionals who were traveling to New Orleans for humanitarian purposes. The organization invited these individuals to lead staff workshops on acupuncture, stress relieving breathing exercises, massage therapy and more. The goal of these workshops was not to change their staff's mental well-being overnight but rather to give them an outlet where they could spend a few minutes taking care of their own mental needs. Programs of this type make a statement to staff that their personal needs are just as important as those of the community. If the staff is healthy and if their needs are being met, then they are better able to serve the community.

Organizations are concerned about the long-term challenges to staff recruitment. It is a fair assumption that at the time this is being written (August 2006-March 2007), New Orleans is not the most desirable destination for people to move to. The media has not made it any easier to attract newcomers to the city, with the images of flooded homes and residents stranded in the streets and on rooftops still fresh in the public's mind. Even before Katrina, New Orleans was a Jewish community where a full 50% of the population was born in Louisiana.⁸⁵ The city was never a place where large numbers of non-locals made their home, but those who are from New Orleans have strong ties that

⁸⁵ Gary A. Tobin and Sharon Sassler. *A Population Study of the Greater New Orleans Jewish Community: A Summary Report.* "Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies. Waltham: Brandeis University, 1988, p. 34.

ran deep, often through many generations. The ineptitude of local government, job availability and decreased funding will inevitably impact the city's ability to attract new Jewish professionals. At the same time, salaries for Jewish professionals and clergy are not as high in New Orleans as they are in some other cities.

In terms of rabbinic salaries, (New Orleans) has never been at the high level, and we should be... When (current Rabbis) retire, (congregations) are going to have to pay more anyway... Congregations often think that they can bring a new rabbi or cantor that is young and doesn't have the longevity (of the) predecessor and (they) can pay him/her less but you can't. This is a source of concern.⁸⁶

As some of the city's current clergy near retirement age, the congregations must be aware that they may soon need to increase rabbinic salaries if they wish to attract top talent.

Young rabbis are being well compensated, and New Orleans congregations must be able to offer competitive pay. In a similar vein, a local congregation discussed concerns over finding someone to replace their cantor who has been with the congregation for nearly five years. Prior to their current cantor, the congregation had not had a cantor for more than three years at a time. This congregation is concerned about finding someone who is not only qualified but also willing to move to New Orleans and stay for a considerable period of time. Organizations must also face the reality of competition from larger Jewish communities, many of which have congregations and agencies that are able to offer salaries greater than those in New Orleans – without the added challenge of living in a city that is still quite fragile.

Staff recruitment is often a concern of medium size Jewish communities such as New Orleans, but the issue has become even more heightened due to the current state of the city. Staff retention, though, is something the community has rarely had to deal with,

⁸⁶ Interview with rabbi, October 2006.

and presents a host of new obstacles for organizational longevity and effectiveness. Recognizing these challenges is the first step toward overcoming them, and the city's Jewish organizations are not only recognizing them but also addressing them head-on. It remains to be seen whether or not organizations can continue to meet their staffing needs as the immediate becomes the long-term.

The Impact of Local Institutions on the Jewish Community

With the passing of Hurricane Katrina, there has been a heightened realization that the New Orleans Jewish community is not an island unto itself. Non-institutions and political issues have had a tremendous impact on the Jewish community's stability.

According to a Jewish professional,

What presents such a huge challenge to New Orleans is that there are so many other issues. It's not just the shrinking Jewish population. We have all of these other issues which make it so hard.⁸⁷

Such issues include the ineptitude of the local government, the growth in crime, and residents' inability to secure the federal funds that have been allocated to the city. In addition, institutions such as Tulane University, corporate businesses and the education system are having a tremendous impact on attracting newcomers to the city. These seemingly peripheral issues and institutions arose as being critical to rebuilding the local Jewish community. I recognize that it would be naive to think that only political, economic and educational issues are affecting New Orleanians' decision to stay or rebuild their lives elsewhere; however, for the sake of this case study, I focused on three

⁸⁷ Interview with Jewish professional, October 2006.

issues that are of critical importance to the Jewish community: the collapse of the medical system, the role of Tulane University and the condition of the public school system.

The Collapse of the Medical System

One of the most serious challenges associated with Katrina has been the collapse of the medical community and its impact rebuilding the Jewish community. Many of the individuals and families who have left New Orleans are connected in some way to the medical field. For decades, the city's medical system has faced tremendous strains from the state's Charity Hospital system, which served as the sole medical care option for uninsured patients. The main branch of Charity Hospital was located in a part of town that suffered tremendous flooding. The hospital was deemed uninhabitable and has not reopened since the storm. As a result, the city's other hospitals – largely dominated by Tulane, Oschner, Touro Infirmary⁸⁸ and LSU – have absorbed the large numbers of uninsured patients, and these medical institutions are under tremendous financial pressure. Patient care must be provided, but hospitals and physicians are not being reimbursed for the costs of assisting uninsured patients. In addition to Charity Hospital, several other New Orleans hospitals closed after Katrina. Many of the city's medical facilities faced similar flooding as did Charity Hospital. It became costly for the hospitals to rebuild, and as a result, many did not and have yet to reopen. With the closing of several of the city's hospitals, a large number of physicians, many of whom are Jewish, left the city. Practices eroded nearly overnight, rendering them virtually unable

⁸⁸ Touro Infirmary was established by Judah Touro in 1852 as New Orleans first Jewish hospital to care for the indigent and sick.

to make a living. According to an article that cited the University of North Carolina's Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research,

"The Category 3 hurricane created the biggest migration of doctors in the United States since the 1940s, when the World War II draft siphoned thousands of health care workers from the nation's economy...The region's doctor population may be as few as 1,200,"⁸⁹ which is estimated at "just 15% of physicians who practiced in New Orleans before Katrina."⁹⁰

One Jewish doctor estimated that a disproportionate number of medical professionals are Jewish. As a result, the Jewish community was more heavily impacted than were other religious or minority groups by the collapse in the health care system. These Jewish physicians were important not only to the patients whose health they attended, but they also played important roles on the boards of Jewish agencies and synagogues, sent their children to the Jewish day schools, and contributed financially to local Jewish institutions (as well as other philanthropic efforts). In the long term, their departure becomes more evident with the decline in synagogue memberships and the loss of their financial support.

Before Katrina, the Jewish community did not boast any formal programs that intentionally connected the Jewish medical community to the general Jewish community. Physicians and their families tended to affiliate on their own, not as the result of a Jewish communal initiative. When asked about the role that the Jewish community had in keeping Tulane's Jewish medical students in New Orleans, a Jewish faculty member of Tulane's Medical school mentioned that "(Students) are more focused on figuring out

⁸⁹ Keith Darce. "Finding Doctor No Easy Task," *The Times Picayune*. February 7, 2006.

⁹⁰ News Staff. "New Orleans Suffers from Dearth of Caregivers," *American Academy of Family Physicians News Now*, <http://www.aafp.org/online/en/home/publications/news/news-now/health-of-the-public/caregiverdearth.html>. February 16, 2006.

their education (than getting involved Jewishly). There is a Jewish Medical Students club but there are many other (clubs) as well.” Furthermore,

Following medical school, students go off for their residency. For a small number of students, their (residency decision) may be impacted by the Jewish community but for most, it’s not important. There’s a huge opportunity for (us) to show students that there is a vibrant Jewish community in New Orleans. Many (students) from the North are often surprised by this – as well as the city’s long Jewish heritage. There is an opportunity to give (students) a chance to participate in Jewish life while they’re in school, but it probably won’t have an influence in their decision to stay.⁹¹

A direct outcome of the collapse in the medical system has been a decrease in the number of residency positions. People who may have considered staying in New Orleans for their residency are now choosing residencies elsewhere. I learned of one Tulane Medical School student who was quite connected to the local Jewish community but will be moving out of state due to a decline in residency positions in the student’s field of practice. If fewer young Jewish physicians accept residency positions in New Orleans, then it will have a detrimental impact on the city’s young Jewish population. If the medical community can rebound in the coming years, then new, young Jewish doctors will have greater incentive to move to New Orleans, but without this inflow of medical professionals, the local Jewish community will inevitably suffer.

⁹¹ Interview with Jewish Faculty Member of Tulane’s Medical School, March 2007.

Tulane's Role in New Orleans' Jewish Community

Tulane University has long been a pillar in the Crescent City; however, its importance to the Jewish community has become even more accentuated in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. As one of the city's five colleges and universities⁹², Tulane provides tremendous economic support for the city while creating an academic community whose benefits extend far beyond the university. The university generates \$430 Million in earnings each year, which provides \$24.6 million in gross tax revenues for the city.⁹³ Tulane is also consistently listed among the finest universities in the country, attracting top-ranked students and professors from around the world. Several of the university's programs, including the School of Medicine and the Law School, are among the top national graduate programs in their respective fields. Tulane has also consistently attracted a large Jewish student population. This phenomenon grew from Tulane's refusal in the early and mid 20th Century to follow the lead of other top private schools that instituted quotas that limited the number of Jewish students they would accept. As a result, top Jewish students from around the country chose Tulane, which helped to elevate the school's national reputation. Despite its long history of a strong Jewish population, the president of Tulane estimates that the number of Jewish students decreased after Hurricane Katrina; however, the number of Jewish students as a percentage of the entire student population remained at roughly 20-25%^{94,95}. Many of these students come from cities in the Northeast where they have been part of Jewish

⁹² The other four schools include Loyola University, The University of New Orleans, Dillard University and Xavier University. Delgado University is also based in New Orleans; however, it serves as a community college and was therefore excluded from the count.

⁹³ "Tulane University Economic Impact: New Orleans and Louisiana." Tulane University Office of Government/Agency Affairs. http://hometowntour.tulane.edu/tulane_econ.shtml

⁹⁴ Interview with Hillel Staff Person, October 2006.

⁹⁵ "FAQ about Jewish Life on Campus," from <http://dreamland.tcs.tulane.edu/~hillel/new/faq.php>.

communities much larger than that in New Orleans. These students are often attracted to the university for its relaxed surroundings as well as the vast recreational and cultural opportunities that New Orleans affords. As is the general case with academia, Tulane also draws a significant number of Jewish professors and researchers.

In the aftermath of Katrina, Tulane's role within New Orleans became even more pronounced as the university became the largest single employer in the city. As such,

Tulane is going to be the institution that will draw Jews to the city. As the medical community and the hospitals rebuild, Tulane will play an important role in trying to bring more Jews to New Orleans. That's what we need.⁹⁶

Local congregations and Jewish agencies have an opportunity to expand their relationship with Tulane. Internships, mentoring programs, home hospitality and other related programs can be used to encourage Tulane students to become part of the local Jewish community and to stay in New Orleans following their undergraduate or graduate education. Jewish leaders see the tremendous opportunities in getting more Jewish undergraduate, and in particular, graduate students, to stay in New Orleans. There is also enthusiasm surrounding Tulane Hillel and its willingness to partner with the leadership of local Jewish agencies and congregations to make these recruitment initiatives a reality.

Some initiatives have already been put into place that connect Jewish Tulane students to the broader New Orleans Jewish community. In 2007, Tulane students volunteered to work at the JCC Purim carnival. Students are also invited to participate in an ongoing program where members of the Jewish community invite Hillel students to their home for Shabbat dinner. These programs are primarily geared towards undergraduate students. Focusing on the University's graduate student population,

⁹⁶ Focus group with Board members from the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans, October 2006.

Tulane Hillel and the Jewish Federation have created an internship program. According to Tulane Hillel staff,

Members of the Jewish community have created paid internships for (Jewish Tulane) students in hopes that some of these students will choose to stay in New Orleans and start their Jewish families here. The contacts are Jewish and work as professionals, including lawyers, city council members, etc.⁹⁷

Students enrolled in pre-professional schools such as Law, Business, Medicine, Architecture and Social Work should be prime targets for this internship program. Other students may have more interest in hands-on volunteer opportunities. Such opportunities should be created and marketed to these students. One Hillel staff person with whom I spoke observed that although the percentage of Jewish students has not changed, the type of student that Tulane is attracting has changed.

Students used to be attracted to Tulane for New Orleans' party atmosphere...it's laid back environment, etc. Now people are coming to be a part of rebuilding, wanting to be part of this exciting time. These students are more likely to get involved in Hillel.⁹⁸

Socially conscious students present a great opportunity for the New Orleans Jewish community. These are the kinds of students who want to be somewhere they can make a difference, and opportunities for doing so are plentiful in New Orleans. The Jewish community simply needs to provide these opportunities and take increase its efforts to connect Tulane Students to the broader Jewish community.

It is clear that in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Tulane is playing a more prominent role within the local Jewish community. As the Jewish community embarks on a journey of re-imagining itself, its partnership with Tulane University will most likely

⁹⁷ Interview with Hillel staff person, October 2006.

⁹⁸ Interview with Hillel staff person, February 2007.

become even stronger. The Jewish community should emphasize its relationship with Tulane to attract new people to New Orleans as well as appeal to those who currently live there. By improving the direct contacts that Tulane students have with members of the New Orleans Jewish community, there is hope that Tulane's students will "see that it has a really warm, friendly Jewish community and decide to stay."⁹⁹ It is unclear if Jewish opportunities will play a deciding role in whether or not they stay in New Orleans; however, regardless of the decisions of individual students, Tulane as an institution is playing a more prominent role on the agendas of Jewish leaders.

Education System

One of the most positive outcomes of Hurricane Katrina has been the renovation of the Orleans Parish Public School system. This institution has no direct ties to the Jewish community, and few Jewish children currently attend local public schools, but despite this lack of direct contact, the strengthening of the public school system could play an important role in attracting young Jewish families to the city.

For generations, the New Orleans education system has experienced problems: schools have undergone serious budget cuts; public schools confront tremendous competition from private and parochial schools; teacher salaries are ranked 42nd out of 50 states;¹⁰⁰ and many schools are in deteriorating physical condition. Many people link these problems to a historically inept Orleans Parish School board. Others say the problems began decades ago when integration prompted many affluent families to enroll their children in private schools. Another reason may be the plentiful availability of

⁹⁹ Interview with Hillel staff person, February 2007.

¹⁰⁰ Jewell Gould. Table: "Average Teacher Salary in 2004-05 State Rankings, American Federation of Teachers." *Survey and Analysis of Teacher Salary Trends 2005*. American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO. (Washington, 2005)

affordable Catholic schools in a community that has a very large Catholic population. Mostly likely, the decline in the New Orleans education system has been a result of all the reasons above and more. It can be stated with certainty that a large percentage of Jewish children in the area attend private schools. It should also be mentioned that until 1996, New Orleans did not have a nondenominational Jewish day school. Therefore, the only option for parents who wanted their children to have a Jewish day school education was to attend the Orthodox day school. Because the vast majority of the city's Jewish population is affiliated with the more liberal Reform or Conservative movements, few seriously considered the Orthodox day school as an option for their child's education.

In the months that followed Hurricane Katrina, parents, educators and community advocates saw the storm's destruction of several public school facilities as an opportunity to rebuild the city's public school system. According to a local leader,

The public education is on the verge of being good. There is more opportunity now than before. There is more good stuff going on now. The storm blew up the Orleans Parish public school system. There is still a long way to go, but it's better off now than it was years ago.¹⁰¹

Several charter schools were founded, including the Lusher Charter School, which is partially funded by Tulane University. Several Jewish families have embraced the new charter school system and enrolled their children in Charter schools in Orleans and Jefferson Parishes. It was also mentioned that many of the children who had attended the NOJDS enrolled in one of the city's charter schools (often because their grade was no longer included in the school's condensed curriculum).

While several public schools have benefited from the newly founded charter system, the NOJDS and Torah Academy remain at a distinct disadvantage since Katrina.

¹⁰¹ Focus Group with Board members of the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans, October 2006.

These schools are faced with challenges in the aftermath of Katrina, but communal leaders realize that it is essential for the city to have a Jewish day school. Most Jewish communities of New Orleans' size have a day school option, and it is important that New Orleans continue to offer this option as well. Discussions are underway regarding a merger between the NOJDS and the Torah Academy, the city's Orthodox day school.

The situation's unique dilemma is that limited communal resources must be divided – though not necessarily evenly between rebuilding the day schools and improving the public school system. The two systems are not in direct competition with one another, but even before Katrina, many families who could not afford the expensive private schools found the day schools to be an affordable option for quality education. However, as the public schools continue to improve in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, it is not unreasonable to think that more Jewish families will choose public schools for their children instead of private schools or even Jewish day schools.

The improvement of the New Orleans education system provides hope in the efforts to rebuild the city's Jewish community. Many families' decisions to stay or move have been heavily influenced by both public and Jewish educational opportunities that are available in New Orleans and in other cities. The Jewish community of New Orleans can support both of these educational systems but must recognize that each will play an important role in attracting new people to the city.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The research gathered throughout this case study makes it clear that Hurricane Katrina has created several leadership challenges, including a decline in the Jewish population, turnover in staff and lay leadership, and a decrease in funding sources. The New Orleans Jewish community has responded to these obstacles by making positive strides, including increased collaborations between Jewish institutions, an increase in the number of young people engaged in leadership positions and new partnerships with the national Jewish community. However, Katrina's impact has also brought to light long-term concerns of staff and volunteer recruitment and retention, and the impact of outside institutions on the Jewish community.

To address these and other long-term concerns, leaders of New Orleans' Jewish community have begun an extensive strategic planning process called the Greater New Orleans Jewish Community Recovery Plan. The plan includes five task forces that are focused on key issues facing the community: population (recruitment, retention and return of evacuees), funding (from existing and new sources), service delivery and community development, Jewish communal collaborations, and serving the regional Jewish community. Task force members have been meeting since early 2006, and much work is already underway. It is my hope that these recommendations will assist the task force members and other community leaders who are working hard to rebuild New Orleans' Jewish community.

It is a credit to the local Jewish leadership that several of the recommendations below are already being implemented. I debated whether or not to include these recommendations in this case study, yet I ultimately decided that it was important to

provide a comprehensive list of the options available to the community. Furthermore, because this document may one day serve as a historical account of the leadership changes that emerged from the trauma of Hurricane Katrina, I felt it was important to include all recommendations, regardless of whether or not they are already being implemented. The following recommendations focus on maintaining three of the positive outcomes from Katrina: collaborations between Jewish organizations, New Orleans' relationship with the national Jewish community, and the increase in young leaders. My recommendations also address two of the long term issues that are identified: staff recruitment and retention, and the impact of the stability of non-Jewish institutions on the Jewish community.

Collaborations Between Jewish Organizations

- **Develop mutually beneficial synergies between Jewish organizations:** Jewish leaders should continue to foster collaborations between Jewish organizations by creating mutually beneficial opportunities; however, these collaborations can not be forced. Mutually beneficial synergies may include joint purchasing of office equipment to secure bulk discounts, pooling health insurance policies to secure better prices, combining administrative office functions such as bookkeeping and accounting, developing a list of preferred vendors that offer discounts to Jewish organizations in exchange for business commitments, and more. Such synergies will help to avoid duplication of human resources. They will also help make the limited financial resources go farther in meeting the organizations' operational needs. It is important to realize that change takes time, and long-standing institutional histories may make the change process a slow one.
- **Develop a dialogue group for the Presidents of Congregational boards:** I was surprised to learn during the congregational leaders focus group that most of the attendees had never officially met with the leaders of other congregations. Realizing that confidentiality is critical, it would be valuable to create a dialogue group for the leaders of New Orleans' congregations to discuss critical issues. A similar dialogue group exists for the city's clergy. A dialogue group for Presidents would help to develop closer relationships between local congregations while giving the Presidents an opportunity to discuss important issues with leaders serving in similar positions.

- **Combine young adult programs:** There are many different types of young adult programs in New Orleans. While such an array of programs could be supported in a larger Jewish community, it makes little sense for a Jewish community of New Orleans' size. The sponsors of these groups should consider combining social programs, leadership development initiatives, and other outreach strategies for the city's young Jewish population. By combining resources, the young adult programs would have a broader and deeper impact while also signaling to the city's young that the city's Jewish agencies are interested in working together, an issue that is important to younger generations.
- **Develop combined youth programs:** New Orleans hosts seven programs for the city's youth in 9th – 12th grades. Four of the programs are part of NFTY, with the other three sponsored by Young Judea, USY and BBYO. There is an opportunity for the city's youth programs to combine efforts and programming. Although each program has a different goal, there are opportunities to co-sponsor programs. In addition, the youth present excellent prospect for breaking down denominational barriers and for looking at their peers as members of the Jewish community as a whole rather than members of a particular congregation. The youth can learn a great deal from their peers about different religious practices, etc.
- **Develop a "Synagogue Pass" Program:** Most synagogue programs are open only to members of the sponsoring congregation. While this strategy may have worked in the past, the Jewish community is now much smaller. A "Synagogue Pass" Program would allow synagogue members to attend programs at the other synagogues. For example, it makes little sense for three synagogues to run their own Rosh Chodesh groups. Congregations will be able to pool from a larger group of people if they open programs to members of other local congregations. A nominal fee can be charged for certain programs, members can be given a number of programs to attend for free, or members could buy a block of programs and choose which they would like to attend.
- **Pool local Judaic knowledge to develop a community-wide adult education program:** New Orleans boasts a knowledgeable network of Jewish clergy, professors and historians. Many organizations currently sponsor adult education programs. Several of these programs are highly successful; however, there are now opportunities to combine Judaic knowledge to develop a community wide adult education program. Different sessions of the program can be led by various Rabbis and Jewish scholars in the community, and different classes can be hosted at various community agencies and congregations to reinforce the communal nature of the program.
- **Lease some of the Metairie JCC facilities to the Torah Academy and some move daytime programs to the Uptown JCC:** As Torah Academy and the New Orleans Jewish Day School discuss merging, it would be beneficial for the schools to operate from the same building. This would provide a necessary step towards collaboration between the day schools. It will be difficult for the JCC to give up some of the space in its Metairie facility, but the classrooms can still be used for evening programs and during the summer for camp. Daytime programs that take place in the classrooms at

the Metairie JCC can be shifted to the Uptown facility. Again, it is important to realize that these changes will not be easy; however, in the long term, they are in the best interest of the community.

- **Combine religious school for Touro Synagogue and Temple Sinai:** For years people have discussed a merger between Touro and Sinai. While such a merger may not take place for quite some time (if at all), the congregations would benefit from a combined religious school. The combined school would increase the size of the student body, pool certain resources (such as teachers), and save money. The congregations will need to negotiate curriculum issues; however, this should be feasible since they are both affiliated with the Reform movement. If a combined religious school emerges, the congregations should consider rotating – either on an annual or semester basis – between the two facilities to ensure that the children spend time in their home congregation.
- **Combine religious school for Gates of Prayer and Shir Chadash:** The close proximity of Gates of Prayer and Shir Chadash make a merged religious school quite feasible. The combined school would increase the size of the student body, pool certain resources (such as teachers), and save money for both congregations. However, because Gates of Prayer is affiliated with the Reform movement and Shir Chadash with the Conservative movement, they will need to have extensive conversations about religious curriculum. Inter-denominational religious schools are becoming increasingly common across the country. The synagogues can look to other combined schools as models. The congregations should consider rotating – either on an annual or semester basis – between the two facilities to ensure that the children spend time in their home congregation.
- **Continue co-sponsored programs between Anshe Sfard and Beth Israel**
The two Orthodox congregations have already begun to plan and implement combined programs. Discussions are also underway regarding a merger between the two congregations. With the fairly small Orthodox population in New Orleans, it makes sense for these two congregations to continue co-sponsoring programs, and ultimately, to merge as one institution.

Continuing the Relationship with the National Jewish Community

- **Market New Orleans as a Jewish tourist destination:** New Orleans has long been a travel destination for people around the world. The Jewish community can leverage the city's strong tourism industry to develop a tour of Jewish New Orleans. Members of the Jewish community can be identified to develop and lead the tour. The Jewish community can partner with the New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau to advertise this tour to visitors. By continuing to generate interest in New Orleans and

the city's rich Jewish history, the Jewish community can continue to benefit from the good will and support from Jews around the country.

- **Encourage National Jewish Organizations to Host Conferences in New Orleans:** It is becoming increasingly difficult for the Jewish community to solicit funds from Jewish communities around the country. In an effort to generate revenue for the city and build awareness of New Orleans as a vibrant Jewish community, Jewish leaders should try to bring more Jewish conferences to the city. There are hundreds of Jewish conferences that take place each year, and New Orleans has excellent conference facilities, hotel options and leisure activities for visitors. The Jewish community will need to ensure that sufficient kosher dining options are available for conference attendees, but this is a small challenge that can be easily overcome.
- **Develop a Program for Volunteer Missions:** Hundreds of Jewish volunteers have traveled to New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina to lend their support to rebuilding efforts. These efforts will continue for years to come. The Jewish community should partner with Jewish volunteer trips such as Hillel alternative spring breaks, Federation and UJC Missions, NFTY Mitzvah corps programs, The Jewish Coalition for Service, and Nechama: The Jewish Response to Disaster. These trips will continue to draw support for the New Orleans from Jews around the country.
- **Share Your Knowledge about Disaster Response:** Because of their experiences over the past two years, leaders of New Orleans' Jewish community have essentially become disaster response experts. It is important that this institutional knowledge is recorded and compiled in a way so that others can use it in the future. As other disasters arise, New Orleans' Jewish community will have an opportunity to give back to those who supported it by sharing its knowledge about disaster response. In addition, New Orleans Jewish leaders may be able to work with leaders of Jewish organizations around the country to help develop disaster preparation plans.

Recruitment and Retention of Staff and Lay Leaders

- **Develop a short term support group for Jewish professionals:** The city's Jewish professionals have been under tremendous stress since Hurricane Katrina. JFS should consider organizing a Jewish professional's support group for the next few years. The group will serve as a confidential forum for professionals to share their concerns, struggles and stresses of work and life. As the Jewish community continues to deal with issues of downsizing and as organizations are forced to make difficult decisions, it will be important for Jewish professionals to have an organized support system.
- **Target Jewish professionals and clergy with connections to New Orleans:** Since Hurricane Katrina, several organizations have experienced a significant amount of staff turnover. As organizations look to hire new Jewish professionals and clergy, they must understand the added challenges of attracting people to New Orleans. The

city has experienced a great deal of negative stress, and salaries may be lower compared to what is offered in larger Jewish communities. Organizations should aim to recruit people with ties to New Orleans. This may include people who are from the South, who have traveled to the city on a volunteer trip or mission, people who have family or friends in the city, etc.

- **Look to a broader pool of young people to draw from when engaging new young leaders:** Since Hurricane Katrina, Jewish organizations are engaging more young people for board positions and other leadership opportunities. Several of organizations have targeted similar young people. As the community continues to rebuild, organizations should make a more concerted attempt to involve NEW young people. This is not limited to people who are new to New Orleans. It should also include people who are from the city or who have lived there for several years but have not been approached for Jewish leadership opportunities.
- **Develop more "hands-on" experiences for young leaders:** Keeping in mind that many young people are eager to "get their hands dirty" and make a direct impact in the community, organizations should work to develop more hands on experiences for young leaders. These experiences do not have to be limited to one-time volunteer projects. They can include mentoring programs, Jewish consulting projects, and program planning opportunities for young leaders.
- **Avoid Leadership Burn-out:** Even before Hurricane Katrina, people often served as leaders in multiple Jewish organizations. The community's leaders have undergone tremendous stress over the past two years. To avoid burn-out, Jewish organizations should continue to look to new individuals for leadership positions. They should also give existing leaders an opportunity to step down or take a break if needed. It is important that the city's most committed leaders do not become overburdened so they will continue to be involved for years to come.

Partnering with Non-Jewish Organizations

- **Foster business within the Jewish medical community:** Compile a directory of Jewish physicians in the city and distribute to members of congregations, JCC and other members of the Jewish community. This list will help to refer new patients to Jewish physicians, thereby helping to maintain their patient base. As more people leave New Orleans, many doctors' practices will shrink. If the Jewish community can do its part to help support Jewish physicians, then the community may be able to prevent a loss of even more Jewish physicians.
- **Advertise residency positions to Jewish medical school students:** Jewish organizations, in concert with Tulane's School of Medicine, can work with local Jewish doctors to advertise residency positions to Jewish medical school students. While preference can not be given to a student because of his or her religion, students

who may not be aware of training opportunities in New Orleans may discover professional opportunities from these marketing efforts.

- **Local job search assistance for students:** If the New Orleans Jewish community wants more Jewish students from Tulane to stay in New Orleans after they graduate, then it must identify competitive job opportunities. These opportunities need to be attractive since local businesses are competing against larger cities such as New York, Washington D.C. and Atlanta for the same professional talent. Both formal and informal networks can be used to identify job opportunities, which will help ensure that New Orleans retains its share of its own qualified graduates.
- **Mentoring opportunities:** Undergraduate and graduate students can be paired with community members in the field of their choice. Mentors can provide professional advice, emotional support, and information on the Jewish community and the larger community as well. This personal connection gives students a stronger understanding of the local Jewish community. Through these relationships, students will feel more connected to local Jewish life and community members will be more connected to Tulane.
- **Partnership with the Judaic Studies Department:** Tulane's Judaic Studies Department offers an array of classes on topics that are open to anyone and may be of interest to members of the Jewish community. Unfortunately, few people outside of the university are familiar with the courses that are offered. By advertising these courses in the local Jewish newspaper, in congregation newsletters, in coffee shops and on the internet, people will be more aware of the Jewish education opportunities. Such course offerings may be attractive to people unaffiliated with a congregation, retirees or people who work part-time. To help offset the cost of the class, it would be ideal to have an endowed program where course fees are highly subsidized. The Judaic Studies Department also creates many opportunities to bring speakers, Jewish cultural exhibitions and other related programs to the broader Jewish community.
- **Attracting Jewish academics to Tulane:** When Jewish academics interview at Tulane, they can be put in touch with local Jewish liaisons. Academic candidates should be taken out to dinner by a local Jewish leader, who can serve as the candidate's liaison to the broader Jewish community. Candidates may also be given a folder with information about local Jewish resources. If the candidate accepts the position at Tulane, then their liaison can continue to lend support following the professor's move to New Orleans.
- **Small business loans for graduates of Tulane's School of Business:** Economic growth is a critical issue facing New Orleans. The Jewish Federation and Jewish Family Service are offering interest free loans to Jewish people who have moved to New Orleans since Katrina. Loans can be offered to graduates of Tulane's School of Business who are staying in New Orleans, as this will allow young entrepreneurs to start a business while helping to rebuild New Orleans' economy.

CONCLUSION

The New Orleans Jewish community has found itself in a state of flux. Hurricane Katrina brought forth several organizational challenges, including a population decline, financial instability, and turnover in staff and lay leadership. Local Jewish leaders, with the assistance of national Jewish organizations, have begun to tackle the long-term challenges that have arisen in the shadow of the storm. One response has been increased programmatic collaborations between local synagogues as well as Jewish agencies.

These institutions are also now replacing leaders who left the city with more young people and others who were not previously involved. Katrina has also inspired the Jewish community to focus on its relationship with non-Jewish institutions such as Tulane University, the medical community and the public school system.

The coming years – and even decades – will bring many more change for New Orleans' Jewish community. Strong leadership is needed for the city's organizations and congregations to re-imagine themselves in a way that they will be better prepared to face the new realities presented by Hurricane Katrina. With such leadership and a willingness to change, the city can continue its 250 year legacy as a strong, thriving center of Jewish life and activity.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Overview of New Orleans Jewish Communal Agencies and Synagogues Referenced in Research

The following chart provides a historical timeline of New Orleans congregations.¹⁰²

Congregation Name	Year Founded	Religious Affiliation	Notes
Congregation Shangarai Chasset (Gates of Mercy)	1827	Sephardic, later Ashkenazi	Founded by a New Yorker who was enraged by the city's lack of Jewish communal life. Merged with Dispersed of Judah in 1881.
Nefutzoh Yehudah (Dispersed of Judah), later Touro Synagogue	1845	Sephardic	Original property was donated by Judah Touro. Merged with Gates of Mercy in 1881.
Congregation Shaare Tefilah (Gates of Prayer)	1850	Alsatian, German	Founded by Alsatian and German immigrants. In 1975, became the first congregation to move to the suburb Metairie.
Tememe Derech (The Right Way)	1857	Polish	"The only one of the small Eastern European congregations to build its own synagogue."
Temple Sinai	1870	Reform	The city's first congregation founded on Reform principles. Chartered by former members of Gates of Mercy.
Chevre Thilim (The Society of the Psalms)	1877	Galitzeaner, later Orthodox	A debate over mixed seating in the 1950's caused many members to leave to form the city's first Conservative congregation.
Chevre Mikve Israel		Orthodox	Small congregation that had less than 50 members.
Congregation Agudath Achim Anshe Sfard	1896	Lithuanian, later Orthodox	Organized by Polish, Russian and Lithuanian Jews.
Congregation Beth Israel	1904	Orthodox	Formed when Tememe Derech disbanded and several small Orthodox congregations merged.
Chabad Center of Metairie	1990	Orthodox	Established to meet the growing suburban Jewish community.
Conservative Congregation of New Orleans, later Tikvat Shalom (Hope of Peace)	1958	Conservative	Formed when members of Chevre Thilim who were opposed to mixed gender seating sued those members who were in favor of the change.
Chabad of Louisiana	1975	Orthodox	Started when Rabbi Zelig Rivkin and his wife moved to LA as emissaries.
Northshore Jewish Congregation	1996	Reform	Founded by the growing number of Jewish families that moved to the Northshore and its surrounding suburbs.
Congregation Shir Chadash (New Song)	2001	Conservative	Created from merger of Chevre Thilim and Tikvat Shalom

¹⁰² Much of the information in this chart is from *The Jewish Community of New Orleans*. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2005.

The second chart lists all of the locally operated Jewish organizations that are referenced in the research.¹⁰³

Name	Organization Role	Website
Chabad at Tulane University	Provides religious programming, social events, educational classes, holiday celebrations and other programs for Tulane students.	www.tulanechabad.org
Jewish Children's Regional Service	Charitable fund serving Jewish children in 7 Southern States. Provides scholarships for college, overnight summer camp and special needs.	www.jcrsnola.org
Jewish Community Center	Offers nursery school, day care, classes, fitness facilities and classes, swimming pool and classes, sports leagues, camps, teen programs, young adult programs, senior programs, and Jewish holiday celebrations.	www.nojcc.com
Jewish Endowment Foundation	Receives, administers, and distributes funds to serve New Orleans' Jewish community.	www.jefno.org
Jewish Family Service	Provides for the counseling and social services needs of Jews and non-Jews. Licensed adoption agency. Offers programs to support interfaith couples, senior citizens, teen suicide prevention, and more.	www.jfsneworleans.org
Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans	Central coordinating body for the Jewish community. Oversees the Greater New Orleans Jewish Community Recovery Plan. Allocates funds to local, domestic and international Jewish causes.	www.jewishnola.com
Hadassah	The world's largest Zionist organization. Contribute to medical care, education and youth programs in Israel; and local community service projects, health awareness and Jewish continuity.	www.hadassah.org
National Council of Jewish Women	Volunteer run. Works to improve the quality of life for women, children and families, and strives to ensure individual rights and freedom.	www.ncjwneworleans.org
New Orleans Hillel	Engages Jewish college students through programs related to social, cultural, community service, and career opportunities as well as Jewish holidays and Israel.	www.neworleanshillel.org
New Orleans Jewish Day School	Non-denominational community day school offering early childhood and elementary education from Pre-Kindergarten through 4 th grade (as of 2007-2008).	www.nojds.com
Torah Academy	Affiliated with Chabad, Torah Academy is a Jewish Day School serving children in pre-K through 8 th grade.	www.torahacademyneworleans.net
Touro Infirmary	Private, not-for-profit, full-service hospital.	www.touro.com
Woldenberg Village	The only full service Jewish retirement community in the Gulf South. Offers a continuum of services for aging in place.	www.woldenbergvillage.com

¹⁰³ Much of the information in this chart is from the "Community Resource Guide." *Jewish Community News of Greater New Orleans*. Volume 2, No. 7: 2006.

Appendix B: Research Consent Form

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

You are asked to participate in a research study on **Rebuilding Jewish Leadership in New Orleans Post-Hurricane Katrina**. The researcher, **Amanda Abrams**, wants to learn how **organizational leaders responded to the crisis, are finding new leaders and are developing long term plans for engaging new generations of leaders**. You are asked to participate in a **focus group** as part of this study. The identity of all participants will remain confidential - no names or other identifying information will be disclosed.

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT: Amanda Abrams, 601-201-2154, Masters candidate in Jewish Communal Service and Business Administration at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion and the University of Southern California

RISKS AND BENEFITS: There are no risks associated with this study. Benefits include **contributing to scholarship about the Jewish people, helping with the rebuilding of Jewish leadership in New Orleans and long term community planning**.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Interviews may involve **20-60 minutes** of your time.

PAYMENTS: There will be **no** payment for participation in this study.

AUDIO TAPING: The tapes will be heard by **Amanda Abrams** and will remain in **Amanda's** possession and possibly used for future studies.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS: If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand that your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study. If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact – anonymously, if you wish – Steven Windmueller, Director of the HUC-JIR School of Jewish Communal Service: swindmueller@huc.edu, 3077 University Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90007, or toll-free at 800-899-0925.

Please sign and date: I give consent to be audio-taped / observed for this study:

SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____

The extra copy of this consent form is for you to keep.

May I contact you with further questions? If so, please write your phone # or e-mail address:

PHONE # _____
E-MAIL ADDRESS _____

Thank you for participating.

Appendix C:
Focus Group Invitation Letter

Amanda Abrams
1455 S. Wooster St. Apt. 8
Los Angeles, CA 90035

Name
Address
City, ST Zip

October 13, 2006

Dear X,

I hope this letter reaches you in health and happiness in the New Year. Last year presented the New Orleans Jewish community with many challenges. The events of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita were unprecedented, and the aftermath of these storms is still being felt. Although I do not currently live in New Orleans, I spent most of my childhood as an active member of the local Jewish community, so the situation certainly hit close to home. These personal ties to New Orleans led me to focus my Masters thesis on post-Katrina congregational and Jewish communal leadership. This thesis will serve as the culmination of my studies for a Masters of Arts in Jewish Communal Service at Hebrew Union College.

Now is an ideal time to begin the strategic planning processes that are necessary for congregations and communal institutions to ensure their long term vitality. The Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans has begun an intensive evaluation process through the Jewish Community Recovery Plan. The purpose of this group is to create a plan for the greater New Orleans Jewish community based on the challenges – and opportunities – that arose in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. My goal is to provide this committee with research from my thesis that will supplement their work. I have also collaborated with Rick Weil of L.S.U. and will use his research on the Jewish community to enrich my work.

As a local Jewish leader, I invite you to participate in a focus group on **"Congregational Leaders' Response to Katrina" OR "Federation Lay Leaders' Response to Katrina" OR "Jewish Professional Leaders' Response to Katrina"** on **DATE at TIME at LOCATION**. Your participation will provide insight and information that are essential to analyzing the current state of congregational Jewish leadership. The focus group will last 1-1 ½ hours. All information will be confidential and is for research and community building purposes only. Your name will not be connected to specific comments made during the groups.

I would be most appreciative of your participation in this important research. **RSVP by October 20** to Amanda Abrams at amabrams@yahoo.com or by calling 601-201-2154. I will also be in touch in the coming week to answer any questions you may have regarding the focus groups and my research, in general. I appreciate your participation and look forward to seeing you on the 29th.

Sincerely,

Amanda Abrams

Appendix D:
Focus Group Questions

Federation Focus Group Questions

Questions:

- 1) Introduction:
 - Name
 - How long you've lived in New Orleans
 - Describe your most vivid memory of Jewish community life in New Orleans
- 2) Was there a defining leadership event / organization that brought together the Jewish community after Katrina?
- 3) Was there a particular individual(s) that inspired confidence in the community following Katrina?
- 4) Considering that you are looked to as a community leader, who did you turn to for support and guidance during the disaster?
- 5) What role do you feel the Federation played in local Jewish life Before/After Katrina?
- 6) How financially dependent were Jewish organizations on Federation funding Before/After Katrina?
- 7) Describe some of the ways new people are brought into Federation leadership positions.
 - Does this process differ from what was in place prior to the hurricane?
 - Has it become more difficult to bring in new Jewish leaders since Katrina?
 - What are the plans for engaging future leaders?
- 8) What are your feelings towards Jewish leaders that have permanently relocated since Katrina?
 - What short term impact will their departure have on rebuilding the Jewish community?
 - What long term impact will their departure have on rebuilding the Jewish community?
- 9) What are the major leadership challenges the Jewish community currently faces?
- 10) What are the major issue(s) of institutional viability the Jewish community faces?

Congregation Leaders Focus Group Outline & Questions

Questions:

- 1) Introduction:
 - Name
 - Congregation, board position
 - How long you've lived in New Orleans
- 2) Describe some of the ways new people are brought into congregational leadership positions.
 - Does this process differ from what was in place prior to the hurricane?
 - Has it become more difficult to bring in new Jewish leaders since Katrina?
 - What are the plans for engaging future leaders?
- 3) What are your feelings towards Jewish leaders that have permanently relocated since Katrina?
 - What short term impact will their departure have on rebuilding the Jewish community?
 - What long term impact will their departure have on rebuilding the Jewish community?
- 4) Was there a defining leadership event / organization that brought together the Jewish community after Katrina?
- 5) Was there a particular individual(s) that inspired confidence in the community following Katrina?
- 6) Considering that you are looked to as a congregational leader, who did you turn to for support and guidance during the disaster?
- 7) What role did national branches of the religious movements play after Katrina?
- 8) What are the major leadership challenges the congregation currently faces?
- 9) What are the major issue(s) of institutional viability the congregation faces?

Jewish Professionals Interview Questions

- 1) For what organization do you work?
- 2) How long have you been a Jewish Professional in New Orleans?
- 3) What role did the organization play in the community:
 - Before Katrina?
 - After Katrina?
- 4) How has demand for your organization's services changed since Katrina?
- 5) At what level do you see demand for services stabilizing?
- 6) What role did Federation funding play in your organization before Katrina your organization /immediately after/and in the future?
- 7) Did you loose any major lay leaders because of the hurricane?
 - If yes, roughly how many?
 - What was the financial impact of the departure of these individuals?
 - How do you plan to recoup the funds that have left?
 - How do the remaining board members feel towards those who left?
- 8) Did you lose any major volunteers because of the hurricane?
 - If yes, roughly how many?
 - What was the impact of the departure of these individuals?
- 9) What process have you used to fill vacant leadership positions since Katrina?
 - Does this process differ from what was in place prior to the hurricane?
 - Do you have a plan for engaging future leaders?
- 10) Was there a defining event that brought the community together?
- 11) Did a particular individual or organization emerge as a leader?
- 12) Who did you turn to for support and guidance during the disaster?
- 13) How did you respond to community members' needs while addressing your own?
- 14) How did you feel assisting community members with their relocation efforts if their leaving negatively impacted the congregation or Jewish community?
- 15) What are the major leadership challenges that your organization currently experiencing?
- 16) What are the major issues of institutional viability that your organization faces?

Appendix E: Interview Questions

Rabbinic Interview Questions

- 1) How long have you been a Rabbi in New Orleans?
- 2) What was the size of your congregation's membership base:
 - Prior to Katrina?
 - After Katrina?
- 3) At what number do you see the membership stabilizing?
- 4) Did you lose any major congregational leaders because of the hurricane?
 - If yes, roughly how many?
 - What was the financial impact of the departure of these individuals?
 - How many board members, if any, left the community?
 - How do the remaining board members feel towards those who left?
- 5) What process have you used to fill vacant leadership positions since Katrina?
 - Does this process differ from what was in place prior to the hurricane?
 - Do you have a plan for engaging future leaders?
- 6) Was there a defining event that brought your congregation together?
- 7) Did anyone emerge as a leader?
- 8) What did congregants ask of you as a spiritual leader?
- 9) Who did you turn to for support and guidance during the disaster?
- 10) How did you respond to congregants' needs while addressing your personal needs?
- 11) How did you feel assisting congregants with their relocation efforts if their leaving negatively impacted the congregation or Jewish community?
- 12) What are the major leadership challenges your congregation is currently experiencing?
- 13) What are the major issues of institutional viability that your congregation faces?

Chabad Interview Questions

- 1) How long have you been a Rabbi in New Orleans?
- 2) What was the size of Chabad's constituency:
 - Prior to Katrina?
 - After Katrina?
- 3) At what number do you see this stabilizing?
- 4) How is your professional leadership structured?
- 5) What role do lay leaders play in your organization?
- 6) Did you loose any major lay leaders because of the hurricane?
 - If yes, roughly how many?
 - What was the financial impact of the departure of these individuals?
 - What process have you used to fill vacant leadership positions since Katrina?
 - Does this process differ from what was in place prior to the hurricane?
 - How do you plan to engage new leaders in the organization?
 - In what ways, if any, will national Chabad assist in these efforts?
 - How does the leadership and remaining constituents feel towards those who left?
- 7) How do you plan to rebuild the Orthodox community in N.O.?
- 8) Was there a defining event after Katrina that brought the Jewish community together?
- 9) Did a particular individual or organization emerge as a leader?
- 10) What did people ask of you as a spiritual leader?
- 11) Who did you turn to for support and guidance during the disaster?
- 12) How did you feel assisting congregants with their relocation efforts if their leaving negatively impacted the congregation or Jewish community?
- 13) What are the major leadership challenges Chabad is currently experiencing?
- 14) What are the major issues of institutional viability that Chabad in New Orleans faces?

Jewish Professionals Interview Questions

- 1) For what organization do you work?
- 2) How long have you been a Jewish Professional in New Orleans?
- 3) What role did the organization play in the community:
 - Before Katrina?
 - After Katrina?
- 4) How has demand for your organization's services changed since Katrina?
- 5) At what level do you see demand for services stabilizing?
- 6) What role did Federation funding play in your organization before Katrina your organization /immediately after/and in the future?
- 7) Did you lose any major lay leaders because of the hurricane?
 - If yes, roughly how many?
 - What was the financial impact of the departure of these individuals?
 - How do you plan to recoup the funds that have left?
 - How do the remaining board members feel towards those who left?
- 8) Did you lose any major volunteers because of the hurricane?
 - If yes, roughly how many?
 - What was the impact of the departure of these individuals?
- 9) What process have you used to fill vacant leadership positions since Katrina?
 - Does this process differ from what was in place prior to the hurricane?
 - Do you have a plan for engaging future leaders?
- 10) Was there a defining event that brought the community together?
- 11) Did a particular individual or organization emerge as a leader?
- 12) Who did you turn to for support and guidance during the disaster?
- 13) How did you respond to community members' needs while addressing your own?
- 14) How did you feel assisting community members with their relocation efforts if their leaving negatively impacted the congregation or Jewish community?
- 15) What are the major leadership challenges that your organization currently experiencing?
- 16) What are the major issues of institutional viability that your organization faces?

Medical Professional Interview Questions

- 1) What is the current state of the N.O. medical community?
- 2) How vital do you believe the medical community is to the Jewish community?
- 3) What role did the medical community play in New Orleans Jewish community before Katrina?
- 4) How was Tulane a part of this role?
- 5) Roughly what percentage of the Jewish medical community do you believe was not originally from N.O.?
 - Has that percentage changed since Katrina?
- 6) Do you believe that the local Jewish community plays a role in Jewish medical students' decision to stay in N.O. after graduation?
 - If yes, in what ways?
- 7) Are you aware of any efforts by the Jewish community to retain existing or attract new Jewish doctors following medical school?
- 8) Do you have any suggestions for building the medical community (and in turn the Jewish medical community) since Katrina?
- 9) Do you have any last comments?

Young Leaders Interview Questions

- 1) How long have you lived in New Orleans?
- 2) What is it that attracts you to New Orleans and to the Jewish community there?
- 3) (*This was only asked of select people that were interviewed*) You were part of the Leman Stern program. What role does this play in the local community? Could there be other programs to get young people involved?
- 4) What role do young leaders play in the local Jewish community?
 - Has this role changed since Katrina?
- 5) Do you feel the community is receptive to the ideas of young people?
- 6) As a young leader, what are your greatest concerns for the local Jewish community?
- 7) Do you feel responsibilities as a young leader?
- 8) Do you see yourself staying in New Orleans?
 - What are your concerns related to this issue?
- 9) How do you think the community can attract/retain more young members?
- 10) What are the major leadership challenges that the New Orleans Jewish community currently faces?