

R&R THE REST OF OUR LIVES
Sabbatical Grants Pilot

Exploratory Outcomes Evaluation

Tobin Belzer PhD
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Background

Nonprofit organizations are increasingly facing capacity and sustainability challenges due to widespread leadership and staff turnover, which is, in part, driven by burnout.¹ In both the for-profit and nonprofit sectors, sabbaticals (extended periods of leave provided to employees for rest, rejuvenation, and personal development) have been increasingly recognized as a best practice that promotes individual, organizational, and sector-wide flourishing.² In 2021, R&R: The Rest of Our Lives – an organization focused on promoting talent interventions rooted in Jewish values – was launched to curb this growing trend by normalizing and legitimizing sabbaticals throughout the Jewish nonprofit sector. R&R was developed with a focus on promoting workplace equity, based on the understanding that dynamics related to burnout disproportionately affect BIPOC, LGBTQ+, neurodivergent, disabled, and women leaders.

To grow awareness and broaden the sector-wide discourse, R&R leaders have begun engaging dozens of Jewish nonprofit leaders in conversations about the necessity of promoting rest in the workplace. In addition to providing and advocating for sabbaticals, R&R aims to influence the conversation within the ecosystem by piloting and experimenting with multiple interventions including: Walkshops, Glimmer Cards, BREAKWEEK grants, a blog, and by

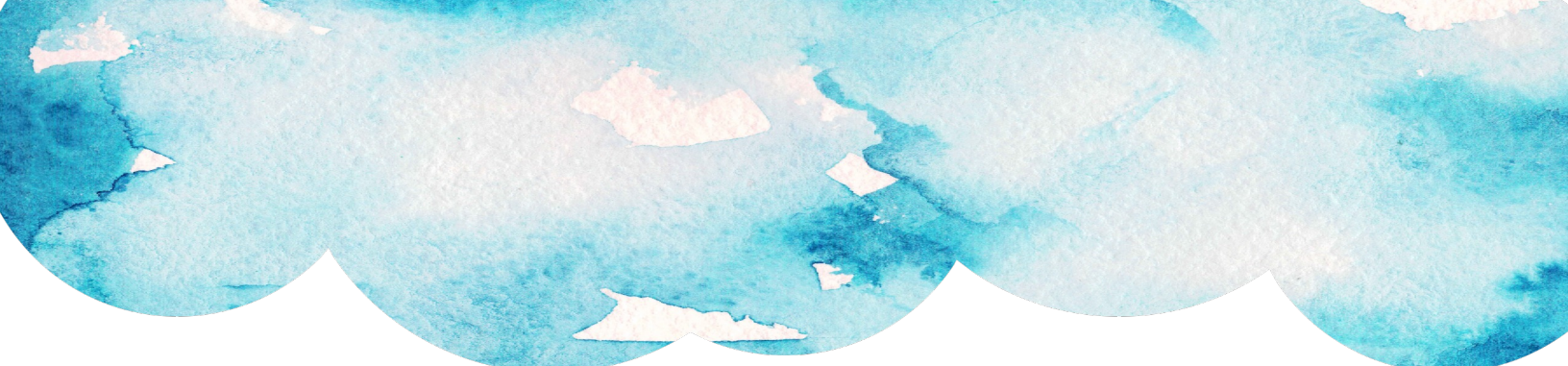
providing thought leadership on LinkedIn. In 2023, R&R became the first organization to provide sabbatical grants to the Jewish communal sector on a national scale.

The pilot cohort of five sabbatical grant recipients was selected from a pool of 26 applicants. Grant selection was guided by principles of trust-based philanthropy and undertaken through an equity lens. The application process included a brief written component, and interviews with the applicant, along with their staff, board, and references. The R&R team and a panel of outside advisors reviewed applications using a numeric scoring rubric. The panel included: Seth Linden, Principal of Gather Consulting; Janu Mendel, Senior Director of Community Impact at Repair the World; Rabbi Heather Paul, Senior Jewish Educator and Rabbi at Illini Hillel - Cohen Center for Jewish Life; and Rachel Sumekh, Principal of RNS Impact.

Each leader's organization was given \$60,000: \$50,000 to support grantees for a minimum of three consecutive months while maintaining their current salary and benefits and \$10,000 for leadership development or salary bonuses for deputies (interim leaders). The sole requirement of the award was that grantees must disconnect from all professional work during their time away. They were given a year window to plan and carry out their sabbaticals.

¹ National Council of Nonprofits. "2023 Nonprofit Workforce Survey Results: Communities Suffer as the Nonprofit Workforce Shortage Crisis Continues."

² U.S. Surgeon General (2022). "Framework for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being." ; Davidson, Oranit, Eden, Dov, Westman, Mina & Cohen-Charash, Yochi (2010). "Sabbatical Leave: Who Gains and How Much?." *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 95. 953-964; Schabram, Kira, Matt Bloom, and DJ DiDonna. "Recover, Explore, Practice: The Transformative Potential of Sabbaticals." *Academy of Management Discoveries* 9, no. 4 (December 2023): 441–468; Schneider, M. & Tinkler, T. (2020). "Strengthening Leaders and Building Capacity Through Nonprofit Sabbaticals: A Five-Year Summary of Fieldstone Leadership Network San Diego's Clare Rose Sabbatical Program." San Diego, CA: The Nonprofit Institute, University of San Diego



Grantee Leaders and their Organizations*

The inaugural cohort was purposely chosen to include grantees from typically underserved populations. The cohort

included leaders with a diversity of identities in terms of age, race, gender, sexuality, ability, and career stage. Four grantees identify as women and one uses he/they pronouns. One grantee identifies as LGBTQ+ and one identifies as a Jew of Color.

Grantees have significant experience in the field. They have worked in the nonprofit sector between 18 and 37 years. They have been in their current roles between 7 and 19 years. Four grantees founded or co-founded their organizations.

The organizations vary in terms of staff size, budget, and life cycle stage. The oldest organization, Academy for Jewish Religion, was founded in 1957 and the newest, OneTable, was founded in 2014. One organization has 42 full time employees, while the others have between five and six. Annual operating budgets range from around \$750k to more than \$8 million. Upon applying, none

of the organizations had sabbatical policies.

Leaders collectively described the emotional and physical exhaustion they felt at the beginning of their sabbaticals. They, like most in their sector, have too few opportunities to disconnect from their work.³ In addition, every grantee led their organizations through the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic.

R&R Pilot Cohort

Asher Gellis
Founder
JQ International

Aliza Kline
CEO and President
OneTable

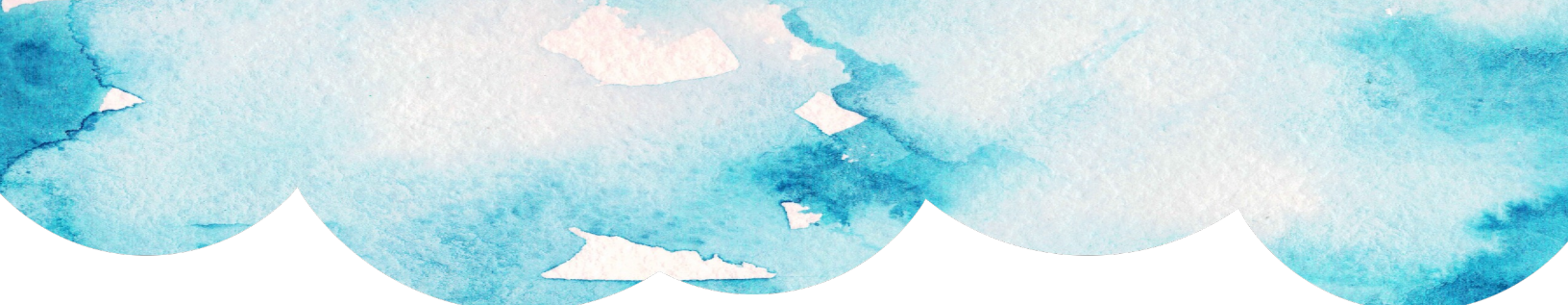
Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum
Rabbi, Co-Founder, & Executive Director
The Kavana Cooperative

Dr. Ora Horn Prouser
CEO and Academic Dean
The Academy for Jewish Religion

Yavilah McCoy
Founder and CEO
Dimensions Educational Consulting

*See Appendix A for brief organizational descriptions

³ Leading Edge (2022). What Is It Like to Lead Jewish Nonprofits? Results from the Second Annual CEO Survey, p18.



Evaluative Methods

This evaluation was designed to explore initial outcomes for individual leaders and their organizations and provide documentation about how the pilot unfolded. Data collection included 20 in-depth, qualitative interviews with members of three populations: grantee leaders, board members, and deputies. A retrospective methodology was used to examine research participants' perceptions of attitudinal, behavioral, and intellectual changes related to their participation.⁴ Data was analyzed using a combination of emergent coding (where codes are derived from themes that surface inductively from the text) and a priori coding (in which select codes are articulated beforehand). Outlying responses were also investigated. This method firmly grounds the insights derived from the data in the perspectives of the research participants.

The study began with baseline interviews with grantees (n=5), which gathered contextualizing data about their backgrounds, and prompted them to articulate their perspectives about their sabbatical goals, plans, and concerns. The second round of data was gathered between

one and two months after the completion of grantees' sabbaticals. This phase included exploratory initial outcomes interviews with three people from each organization, including grantees (n=5), deputies (n=5), and board members (n=5). Data was gathered to understand leaders' perspectives about how the sabbatical experience affected their thinking and actions: emotionally, intellectually, physically, and spiritually. They were also prompted to reflect about insights gained and share their ideas about applying their learning. Interviews with select staff and board members explored organizational, interpersonal, and individual outcomes.

Throughout the report, the quotes included were chosen to represent a variety of perspectives and a balance of voices. Quotes were edited for readability.

⁴ In the retrospective post-then-pre design, both before and after information are collected at the same time. This technique is less intrusive and avoids pretest sensitivity and response shift bias that can result from overestimation or underestimation. Pratt, C. C., McGuigan, W. M., & Katzev, A. R. (2000) "Measuring program outcomes: Using retrospective pretest methodology." *American Journal of Evaluation*, 21(3). 341-349.

Sabbatical Preparation

R&R provided a suite of optional supports to help grantees and their organizations to plan for their sabbaticals:

Executive coaching to assist with sabbatical preparation. (Extra support for re-entry was added following the events of October 7).	Communities of Practice for grantees and deputies (designed based on the expressed needs of participants)	Resource bank of sabbatical-related best practices gathered from across the nonprofit sector (now publicly available)	Consultation As needed from the R&R team
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When preparing themselves and their organizations for their three months of leave, leaders took a variety of approaches.

Each grantee planned their sabbatical over the course of six months or more. To support with envisioning and planning, leaders took advantage of R&R's optional support to varied extents. They created modified organizational charts to establish how roles would be structured, took time to articulate their work processes to their deputies, and explicitly communicated with board members about how to best support staff members. They strategized about operations and decision-making processes and had staff meetings to address questions and concerns that emerged.

Prior to their sabbatical, one leader dedicated one of their regular, quarterly day-long staff retreats to sabbatical planning with an external consultant. They also worked with the consultant to purposefully frame communications about the sabbatical both internally and to their constituents. Leading up to the sabbatical, the interim leader in another organization was given a larger platform to engage with constituents with the goal of instilling greater confidence in

their leadership and supporting the community to adjust to the change.

Every leader chose the timing of their sabbatical to correspond with their organizations' quieter period. One leader leveraged their sabbatical as a growth opportunity for their organization. Their time away was designated as a planning period, during which staff members were tasked with reflecting on the systems, structures, roles, and capacities needed to allow the organization to function independently of the leader.

Every organization opted for a distributed leadership model during their leaders' absence.

One leader appointed a team of three to collaborate during the sabbatical. In other organizations, the leader appointed a deputy who had ultimate decision-making ability, while also distributing their responsibilities across two or three team members. Because of recent staff transitions, one organization opted to bring in a board member as the interim leader. In addition, board members in some organizations were tasked with the temporary responsibility of supervising and/or checking in with deputies and staff members.

Leaders' Sabbatical Experiences

Leaders designed their sabbaticals to enhance their emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual wellbeing.

Sabbatical activities included:

Meaningful time spent with friends and family	Travel in & outside of the U.S.	Purposeful rest	Movement
Creative expression through music lessons, art making, and fashion	Immersion in meditation and writer's retreats	Jewish ritual celebration	Unplugging from technology

Leaders were revitalized by their sabbatical experience:

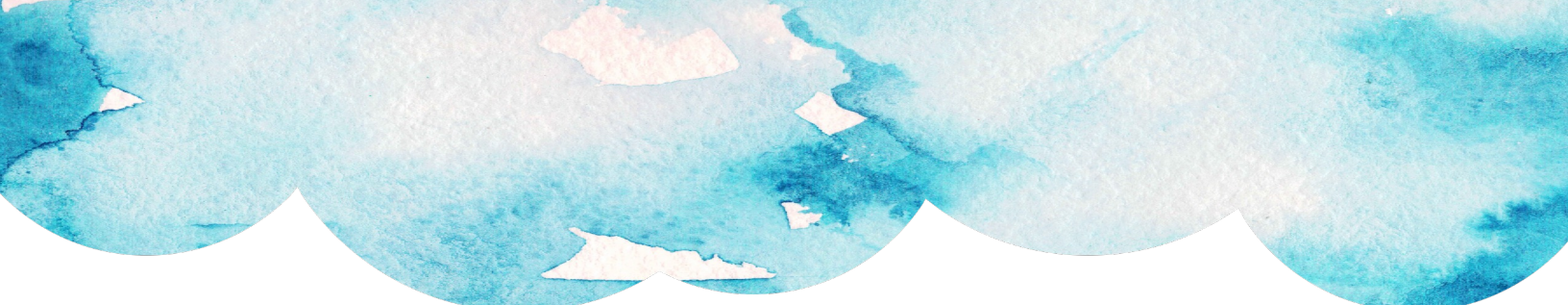
I felt **physically healthy**. I caught up on doctor visits. I took the time to listen to my body. I slept later and took naps. I'm got a personal trainer and I'm going to continue working with them to keep strengthening my body.

My goal was about **reconnecting**. I visited with friends from different life stages and people visited me. I rekindled some of the relationships I wasn't able to make time for.

The sabbatical gave me more **spaciousness and the resources to unplug** from a place of abundance rather than scarcity. It's different to prepare to let go and rest. It brought my humanity back in a way I didn't even know I needed.

My **travel felt spiritual**. I felt lots of moments of aliveness and profound gratitude. I thought about my work as assisting people to get that feeling.

Spending **shabbat** in other communities was a highlight. It was refreshing to be held in a prayer space.



Key Findings

Research participants described positive outcomes related to sabbaticals for leaders, organizations, and the Jewish communal ecosystem.

Leader Outcomes

Leaders returned from their sabbatical noticeably recharged.

Leaders gained insights they intend to apply.

Sabbaticals amplified ways to increase Leaders' efficacy.

Sabbaticals enabled leaders to gain perspective about their career and life goals.

Organizational Outcomes

Sabbaticals offered new perspectives on organizational capabilities.

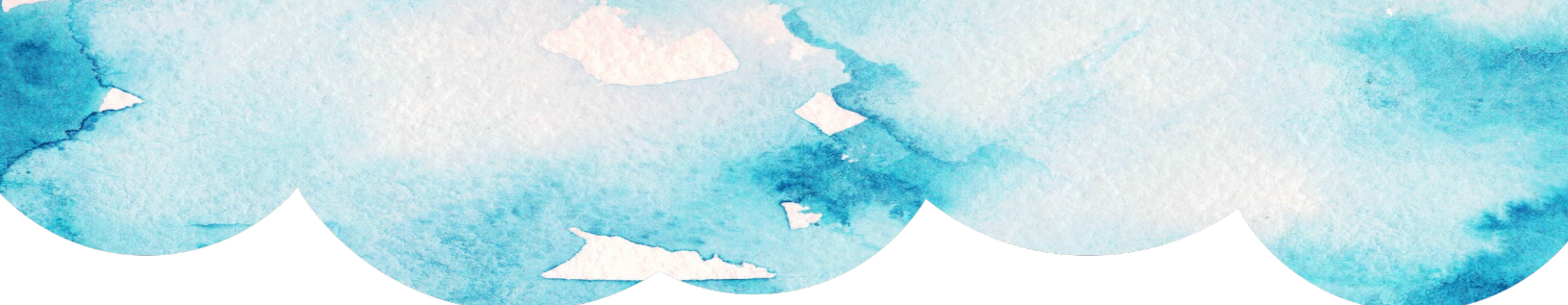
Sabbaticals enhanced working relationships.

Sabbaticals increased organizational capacity.

Sabbaticals highlighted areas for enhancement.

Ecosystem Outcomes

R&R has begun to move the largely theoretical conversation about sabbaticals toward a discussion that is more strategic and practical.



Leader Outcomes

Leaders returned from their sabbatical noticeably recharged.⁵

Staff and board members shared observations about positive changes they observed related to their leaders' behaviors and attitudes upon their return. One board member especially appreciated how the leader described the benefits of their sabbatical.

I loved reading their thoughtful way of framing the different dimensions that were affected by the experience and how they brought us into the story. It's beautiful that they were transformed as much as they were in just three months. They got every last drop of marrow from the experience.

Another shared:

The leader came back reinvigorated and lighter, with more fun energy and a rested, recharged vibe. They were particularly present and enthusiastic at a meeting. They

want to help us think about how we can increase our sense of vibrancy and discussed how to apply their organizational values to the staff. Their ideas included better health care and the gift of time off.

A staff member reflected,

Their cup is more full. They've come back more patient and with awareness that sometimes them getting involved makes us less efficient. They are trying to be less controlling.

Every leader mentioned how the sabbatical positively affected their ability to lead following the events of October 7 and the related ongoing crisis. They were revitalized by their time away, which better equipped them to navigate their role.

⁵ According to sabbatical research, the positive changes leaders experienced could potentially remain with them "one year or longer, post-sabbatical." Deborah S. Linnell and Tim Wolfred. "Creative Disruption: Sabbaticals for Capacity Building & Leadership Development in the Nonprofit Sector," page 5.

Leader Outcomes

Leaders gained insights they intend to apply.

I gained perspective about the urgency I bring to the work. I felt less pressured about this and realized I don't have to push myself so hard. There are always going to be things that need attention, and we'll work it out. I'm not waking up in the night worrying like I used to. I hope that doesn't come back.

Before I left, we figured out how we want to have impact related to mind, body, and spirit, and developed a timeframe. To come back and notice how the team is doing it has given me a big lift. We created a space that holds the staff in their multiple identities with or without me there. During staff meetings, folks are living into their practice, asserting boundaries, and valuing relationship before task. We are impactfully changing people's lives based on our practice. We are in deep alignment around our mission, vision, and principles and we are charting our own progress around liberatory practice.

We're working on an operations manual and thinking about our roles and how our capacities work together. We would have been headed into this anyway, but the sabbatical is a great opportunity to make sure we have good operating systems outside of me. It's a growth stage for us. The redivision of labor is still unfolding and the dynamics are changing for the good. We're still thinking about how to have more flexibility about giving people time off. How to change that structure is still evolving.

I came back having disconnected in a way I never did in my life. I was caught off guard by how it affected me. I realized that I've set a bad example for my staff by making myself available while on vacation and also by taking an insufficient amount of vacation. I'm pushing my staff to take time off, which is a shift for me.

During my trip, we went to different sites and saw how indigenous cultures are good at overtly articulating their values. I took pictures and I want to do something like that at work. I want everybody to be able to articulate our organizational and personal values.

Sabbaticals highlighted ways to increase Leaders' efficacy.

The sabbaticals enabled leaders to gain insights about ways to improve organizational culture and empower their team members.

Leaders used the transformational experience of the sabbatical to enhance their leadership. In some cases, this change meant learning to do less. As staff members successfully stepped into more supervisory roles, leaders realized that empowering their team required them to change their approach. "I'm trying to extricate myself from the weeds of my organization" a leader asserted, continuing, "It's hard because things aren't getting done how I would do it, but I'm choosing my battles." Another leader was able to acknowledge the benefits of enabling their staff to work more independently.

Some leaders used the sabbatical as a catalyst to enable others on their team to take on more responsibilities moving forward. One leader described how this plan is successfully unfolding. During the sabbatical, their senior level staff members successfully represented their organization in their fundraising efforts for the first time. The leader intends to continue expanding their team members' roles. Another leader is moving toward a more distributed model of supervision, which they piloted during the sabbatical.

The sabbatical enabled leaders to incorporate their staff members' input more readily. One leader explained:

During the sabbatical it became clear to the team what's working and what isn't. They identified someone who needed to be let go. We're moving forward with their recommendation. Before this, I would have needed to be more involved in the decision-making. I was able to listen better.

Another intends to incorporate their team's feedback about right-sizing their involvement. They observed:

The staff has much more empathy for my job. They get it now, and they have been encouraging me to be less involved. I'm aware that I micromanage and now I only want to be involved in the things I need to know.

Leader Outcomes

Sabbaticals enabled leaders to gain perspective about their career and life goals.

Leaders reflected on their legacy, priorities, and choices moving forward.

I'm at a career midpoint and it was nice to reflect on the first chapter. It was nice to have a chance to step back and think about the next chapter.

I've been good at giving to my work and family, but not good at giving to myself. That's a piece I noticed and I'm continuing to prioritize things that are important to me.

I'm envisioning what legacy looks like and asking new questions about how to move forward.

I can see a beginning and an end to this work. I'm thinking about what else I want to do and reembracing that my work is a choice I'm making.

I'm getting more comfortable making choices that aren't all about pleasing people.

Organizational Outcomes

Sabbaticals offered new perspectives on organizational capabilities.

The five participating organizations were strengthened by their leaders' sabbaticals in many ways. Prior to the sabbatical, leaders were confident that their staff and board members would be successful without them. The process of preparing for the sabbatical with support from R&R provided further assurance. The sabbatical experience definitively demonstrated how the organizations could function productively without their leaders. This actuality proved valuable to leaders, board members and staff teams alike.

Board members understood and appreciated how much effort was required of staff members during the sabbatical. They recognized deputies' significant contributions to their organizations. Observing deputies effectively take on more responsibility increased board members' esteem for their staff.

In one case, a board member articulated how detrimental it would be if the deputy were to leave, asserting: "They add value that is hard to quantify." Another board member said:

We were fortunate to have our deputy. They stepped up and provided that leadership. They showed the ability, confidence and talent needed to be CEO. It's hard to see someone as a leader until they are the leader. It reminded me there are other great people in the organization and gave me

more confidence in people's ability to step up.

Board and staff members took pride in their ability to maintain their organizations' momentum. Before the sabbatical, one organization was undertaking an in-depth process of restructuring the board with significant input from the leader. During the sabbatical, the process did not stall, as some key stakeholders feared. Staff members had autonomy to support the development of policy related to board governance, so the deputy and other colleagues were able to maintain the momentum of the transition. A board member admitted, "I was apprehensive, so I was pleasantly surprised when we were able to move forward without the leader."

In the absence of their leader, another staff team made a significant, decision related to the venue for a key event. They discussed how to make the decision as a team and felt confident the leader would appreciate their choice.

These outcomes echo a finding from research on sabbaticals, which concludes: "A benefit for organizations is the realization that when sabbatical recipients leave, the organization does not fall apart. They gain a keener appreciation of their staff's abilities."⁶

⁶ Deborah S. Linnell and Tim Wolfred. "Creative Disruption: Sabbaticals for Capacity Building & Leadership Development in the Nonprofit Sector," 5; & Schneider, M. & Tinkler, T. (2020). "Strengthening Leaders and Building Capacity Through Nonprofit Sabbaticals: A Five-Year Summary of Fieldstone Leadership Network San Diego's Clare Rose Sabbatical Program." San Diego, CA: The Nonprofit Institute, University of San Diego, 15.

Sabbaticals offered new perspectives on organizational capabilities. (Continued)

The grant from R&R enabled organizations to put their values into action. The sabbaticals enabled organizations that have long aspired to support their staff members' flourishing do so more proactively. For many years, one leader's contract included provisions for a sabbatical that went unused because they were understaffed and overtaxed. The grant from R&R, coupled with the organizations' strategic growth process, finally enabled the leader to take their sabbatical. The board member reflected that mentorship and financial support from R&R enabled the organization to "live into their values and fulfill their goals."

Another board member articulated the value of the sabbatical as an investment in organizational flourishing:

If it buys her more time with us, it's great for us. The break will enable the leader's more expansive thinking. It will be a time for the leader to envision and develop ideas about how we can move the organization forward.

Research on the impact of sabbaticals in the nonprofit sector has also identified the experience as an important tool for succession

planning.⁷ This finding was corroborated by research participants, who said they gained confidence in their organizations' ability to weather the eventual succession of the leader. A board member admitted: "Organizationally, I've had anxiety about what happens once the leader leaves." The sabbatical gave them new perspective:

Now I can imagine it and I trust the leader to figure it out beautifully. It reminded me that we need to think about succession planning in a more formal way.

Their sabbaticals also prompted leaders to think more strategically about succession planning. One leader was reassured that their team did not need them to carry on day-to-day operations. "I feel more secure that I can leave my organization in a place that will flourish," they asserted. Another leader said that thinking about where they want to be in three to five years helped them realize they need to put a succession plan in place for their eventual transition.

⁷ Deborah S. Linnell and Tim Wolfred. "Creative Disruption: Sabbaticals for Capacity Building & Leadership Development in the Nonprofit Sector," 12.

Sabbaticals enhanced working relationships.

Temporary changes to the organizational structure necessitated by the sabbatical led to enhanced collegiality. Working more closely during the sabbatical deepened board members, deputies and staff members' relationships and made working relationships throughout the organizations more productive. The absence of the leader enabled staff and board members to develop more productive working relationships. Findings from "Creative Disruption" illustrate how working more closely with staff members provided board members with new perspectives about their organizations and enhanced their working relationships (page 9). The evaluation of the R&R pilot corroborated and expanded on these findings.

One organization created one-on-one pairings between staff members during the sabbatical, which enabled staff to become more cohesive and supportive of each other. Upon their return, a leader observed that their staff "felt like a team more than ever." Another leader observed how the team "banded together, developed better relationships, and did a great job" during the sabbatical.

Other organizations paired staff and board members. According to a leader, the depth of

those relationships was observable through staff and board members' interactions during the first board meeting after the sabbatical.

One board member particularly appreciated the opportunity to "work in tandem and deep collaboration" with staff members. A deputy extolled the pleasures of participating with other staff members on the sabbatical leadership team. They said:

It was lovely to interact more directly with the other leader. They have a very gentle and appealing style.

Staff members appreciated how the sabbatical altered workplace dynamics for the better. Upon one leaders' return, their staff team initiated a clarifying conversation to establish what changes they hoped to maintain and what work they looked forward to handing back to the leader. A deputy from another organization noted that the culture of the staff team changed for the better and hoped the leader would be able to adjust to the new energy, which functioned without a sense of "false urgency."

Sabbaticals increased organizational capacity.

As they took on new roles, board and staff members gained and honed competencies.

This is consistent with research on sabbaticals, which found that in the absence of the leader, “the capacity of the second tier of leadership can be enhanced” and “governance can be bolstered” (“Creative Disruption,” page 9). Team members were tasked with greater and new responsibilities around fundraising, supervising colleagues, making new hires, and onboarding new staff members. Their temporary roles necessitated that some team members manage interpersonal conflicts, which they had not done previously. One reflected:

I’m not usually in the weeds of the people dynamics. It was up to me to do the emotional labor to manage dynamics in our community, and with staff and board members. It was a big time-suck for a couple weeks in a way I didn’t anticipate. I learned a lot.

A deputy at another organization described how they grew from a challenging experience:

When the leader left, we were handed a fundraising assignment that was new to us without much guidance. I had lot more contact with board members, and spent a lot of time consulting with them, which wasn’t helpful. I learned so much doing it and failing at it.”

During the sabbatical, board members and staff played a more active role in the organizations’ outward facing

communications and were more visible to

constituents. The shift in roles necessitated by the sabbaticals created opportunities for staff and board members to interact more directly with one another and with constituents. In one organization, the sabbatical provided a seamless entry point for a relatively new leader to expand their visibility as a community leader. Board members (with support from a staff member), successfully led the planning of an annual meeting with community members that was usually led by the leader. In addition, the board was responsible for reaching out directly to community members for the first time. During the sabbatical, they created a more formal structure for communication that aimed at “making people feel more connected, seen, and valuable.”

Staff and board members’ confidence

increased with the leader’s absence. A board member observed:

Sabbaticals increased organizational capacity. (continued)

The staff is so competent but tend to defer decision making to the leader. Everyone had to do their job without the reassurance of checking in with the leader. Things went well in spite of the lack of the leader's valuable contribution. The staff took on new roles seamlessly and handled challenges.

A board member's experience leading during the sabbatical increased their confidence in their ability to participate in organizational decision-making. Another board member described how their leaders' confidence in them deepened their sense of connection to their organization:

There is something very special about being trusted to help guide the community in the absence of the leader. Knowing that the leader felt confident in my leadership on the

board deepened my connection and care for the community.

While deputies articulated many positive outcomes of temporarily stepping into new leadership roles, they also pointed to several challenges. Like some of the research subjects in "Creative Disruption," the sabbaticals gave some deputies insights into dysfunctional leadership and organizational dynamics.⁸ Some expressed resentment that they were not given a choice but were implicitly or explicitly required to add a significant amount of work to their already overloaded portfolios. Others did not feel they were adequately compensated for the additional work they were expected to perform.

⁸ Deborah S. Linnell and Tim Wolfred. "Creative Disruption: Sabbaticals for Capacity Building & Leadership Development in the Nonprofit Sector," 12.

Sabbaticals highlighted areas for enhancement.

The sabbaticals surfaced insights about changes that would benefit the organizations.

Deputies and board members recognized their organizations' need to streamline administrative processes and develop more efficient internal and external communications. The leaders' absence also highlighted staff members' need for professional development related to their supervision skills. The importance of ensuring that staff members feel empowered in their roles also became more apparent. For example, a board member who participated in committee meetings observed how less seasoned staff members were hesitant to make decisions in the absence of the leader. Similarly, upon their return, a leader noted that the pace of work slowed because their staff "was scared to make decisions." A board member wondered if a longer sabbatical might have pushed interim leaders "to do more than maintain the status quo."

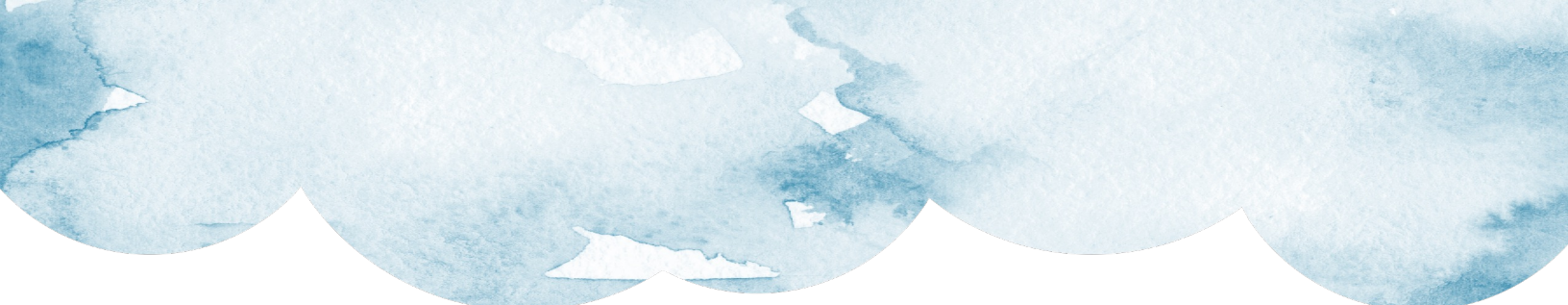
Some board members gained perspective about staff culture and acknowledged the unrealistic workload expectations for their staff. One reflected on the need to change the organizational culture by right-sizing staff portfolios. Another noted that attracting high quality employees in the future will require them to offer more robust benefits, better pay, and a more formalized sabbatical policy.

They reflected: "I worry that if we don't treat our people better, we can't attract quality leaders from the next generation."

The sabbatical also alerted board members to necessary staffing changes, including the need to hire additional staff members. One asserted that increased administrative support for their leaders would, "enable them to focus on applying their energy more productively and might allow them to maintain the energy and renewal of the sabbatical." Another board member, who said they gained "a fresh set of eyes to assess the organization," acknowledged the need to replace an ineffective staff member and recognized the opportunity to streamline roles and internal processes.

Upon their return, one leader shared how they are making substantive changes based on insights offered by their deputy. They explained:

The deputy gave me valuable feedback that helped me think about what we need in terms of staffing. They shared insights about who is overwhelmed with tasks and who is doing too little. I realized I need to replace one staff member who isn't doing their job and add a new staff position to support me. We're creating a new organizational structure, which includes adding more staff, so I don't need to be at every meeting.



Ecosystem Outcomes

R&R has begun to move the largely theoretical conversation about sabbaticals toward a discussion that is more strategic and practical.

For the participating organizations, the conversation about sabbaticals is active among leaders, board members, and staff alike. Sabbaticals fit solidly into the mission and values of one participating organization. The leader explained:

I want rest to be seen as something that gets us closer to being in liberation as human beings and as Jews. A sabbatical is a crucial ingredient about how we are liberated. My dream outcome would be to have this conversation at all levels of power.

Another organization made a commitment to draft a sabbatical policy that provides paid sabbaticals for all full-time staff after a fixed amount of employment.

Another leader noted that the R&R application process brought multiple stakeholders into the conversation, which spread awareness about sabbaticals. They described that participating in the program “was a public experience” that reinforced sabbaticals as an opportunity for leaders that benefits organizations.

Leaders have continued to share their experience with funders, lay leaders,

constituents, and community members. A board member intends to raise a conversation about sabbaticals with their board as part of a larger discussion advocating for the need to transform and update their organizational culture.

Another noted that sabbaticals have not been a frequent topic of communication in their organization, but said R&R prompted them to think more about the possibility. They reflected,

We haven’t talked about it, but we could. It will require more time and will take a very strong executive and insightful board leadership before sabbaticals are normalized.

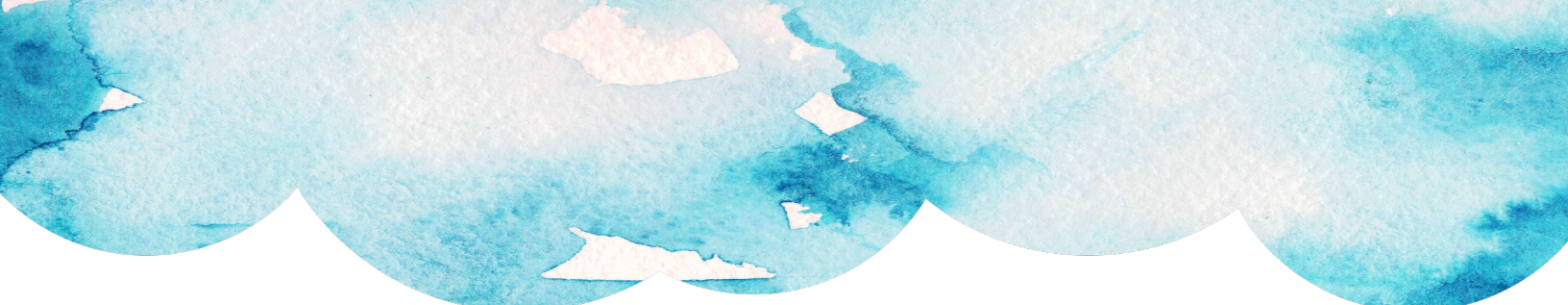
Some deputies were more engaged in the conversation about sabbaticals than others. One said: “Sabbaticals were on our radar, but going through this process and seeing the research about the benefits has helped us establish this as a proven need.” Others were not aware of discourse about sabbaticals. One explained that sabbaticals were not at all a topic of conversation because of their organization’s precarious financial situation. Another was unsure if their soon-to-be-updated handbook would include a sabbatical policy.

“Most people are skeptical or don’t understand” they asserted, “Culturally it’s not viewed here as something useful that people need.” Still another said, “people have always wanted sabbaticals, but when we talk about it, it’s just with envy.”

Their sabbatical experience amplified leaders’ understanding of the necessity of this intervention. One said:

We need more of this because so much valuable leadership is burning out. When I’ve talked about it to donors, their eyes glazed over. The lack of prioritizing of staff wellbeing is a real problem.

Another leader emphasized the urgency of the need to address burnout related retention, saying, “The Jewish communal sector is out of control related to stress and we need to figure this out.”



Concluding Thoughts

This evaluation of R&R's sabbatical program strongly corroborates research in the broader nonprofit sector that details the multifaceted benefits that extended periods of leave can bring to individuals, organizations, and the broader ecosystem. Like leaders in other nonprofit organizations, Jewish nonprofit professionals emerged from their sabbaticals recharged and reinvigorated, with fresh perspectives on their roles and renewed enthusiasm for their work.

The outcomes for organizations were also consistent with research on nonprofit sabbaticals. Temporarily changing operational dynamics supported deputies and board members to improve collegiality, increase confidence, and promote skill-building. The sabbatical experience also highlighted areas for improvement that can drive future organizational development and success.

R&R has begun to enliven the discourse around sabbaticals across the Jewish communal ecosystem. This shift is crucial for the long-term efficacy and vibrancy of leaders and their organizations.

These emerging outcomes illustrate that R&R's sabbatical program can be a powerful model to address leadership sustainability challenges in

the Jewish communal sector, where supporting leadership is a key to strengthening the organizational structures that promote Jewish flourishing. The success of the pilot underscores the need for continued investment in such initiatives, with a focus on equity, to ensure that all leaders can benefit from transformative experiences. These findings suggest that expanding sabbatical policies and programs across the Jewish nonprofit sector is a promising approach to effectively supporting leaders and organizations to thrive.

Appendix A: Organizations

Asher Gellis

Founder



JQ International celebrates the lives of LGBTQ+ Jews and their allies by transforming Jewish communities and ensuring inclusion through community building, educational programs, and support and wellness services to promote the healthy integration of LGBTQ+ and Jewish identities. JQ envisions a world where all LGBTQ+ Jews feel a strong sense of self, pride, and community – a place where LGBTQ+ Jews and their allies can connect, learn, and thrive.

Aliza Kline

CEO and President



OneTable invites people in their 20s and 30s to connect: to each other, to Jewish ritual, and to community, while building a Shabbat practice that feels personal, authentic, valuable, and lasting. While remaining rooted in the ancient and powerful wisdom of Shabbat, their online platform matches hosts with resources and helps guests find community.

Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum

Rabbi, Co-Founder, & Executive Director

The Kavana Cooperative is a pluralistic, non-denominational Jewish community nonprofit in Seattle. Kavana's vision is "building an innovative, model community that empowers each of us to create a meaningful Jewish life and positive Jewish identity."



Dr. Ora Horn Prouser

CEO and Academic Dean

The Academy for Jewish Religion serves the needs of the Jewish community by ordaining rabbis and cantors and training leaders and scholars who combine their mastery of the intellectual and spiritual richness of our tradition with openness to its application in the pluralistic, contemporary Jewish community, and an awareness of living in the presence of God.



Yavilah McCoy

Founder and CEO

Dimensions Educational Consulting is a Black women and people of color led nonprofit that provides training and consultancy in diversity, equity, and inclusion alongside community development programs for emerging Black women leaders. Dimensions supports multiracial, multicultural, and multifaith leaders in reflecting, innovating, strategizing, collaborating, and producing deeper equity and healing in themselves and the world around them.

