



**Faith Based Community Organizing
RB-INTD-562
Spirituality and Social Justice Leadership Program**

**Meir Lakein, Director of Organizing,
[JOIN for Justice](#), the Jewish Organizing Institute and Network
3 graduate credits
Spring Semester. Wednesdays, 4:00 – 5:30 pm
February 6 – May 25, 2019**

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Course Description:

Students will learn the fundamentals and principles of community organizing that will help them bring people together as a real community united around a common purpose and ready to act collectively both to live out their values in the public square and to build the communities they dream of having. The course will cover the building blocks of community organizing, tools such as one on one relational meetings, house meetings, power analysis, leadership development, and strategy, Jewish learning, case studies, and ample opportunities for students to learn off of their own experiences. While much of the course will refer to congregation-based organizing, the group will also discuss other approaches to organizing and will welcome other wisdom and experience from class participants.

We dream of a Jewish community that is both vibrant and powerful. Members of our community struggle with how broken the world can be – they experience it in their own lives as they try to make ends meet, support their families, and work and volunteer; some are constantly struggling, others can feel marginalized not only by the world around them, but by their own Jewish community, and others look at the world around them, read about children in cages, and grieve how much more broken the world can be for other people. We don't want to be satisfied with Jewish institutions that can offer comfort about that brokenness – our institutions are sources of power that enable us to *act* heroically to make the world better.

Often, if our communities and institutions organize to act on our values in the public square, we will find that our institutions themselves transform. They cease being made up of atomized individuals paying a fee for service, where people do things by rote until they realize that they can't give their children a compelling reason to be part of the community, and where laypeople sit back and expect their rabbis to "be Jewish" for them.

In this community for which we strive, we would not be known for our laundry list of programs and activities, but rather for how we came together to collectively live out our values, both when we built our own community and when we acted in the world around us. That sort of community won't just happen; it requires dedicated, trained leadership.

The principles and practices of organizing provide seminary students with invaluable professional

skills; alumni of JOIN's seminary training now in pulpits or other places in the field talk about how often they employ what they learned, even at times they are not explicitly "organizing." The course will use discussion, interactive and engaging training, role plays, small group work, and time for reflection. You will begin to learn how to uncover the stories, talents, and interests of the people you'll serve, and will explore these aspects of yourself as well.

Learning Objectives:

Students will complete the course with a basic understanding of the fundamentals of community organizing and an ability to connect them to their own stories and experiences. Students will have an initial facility with how to bring people together around a common purpose and goal, develop power, leadership, and strategy, and act collectively. In short, students will be ready to begin to organize.

Among the concepts that students will learn are: understanding and building power; recognizing and articulating common values and interests; engaging lay leaders as partners and developing them as leaders; navigating between your public and private lives as clergy; the relational meeting and the house meeting; building public relationships committed to common purpose; developing healthy, thriving institutions; organizing alongside other communities; power analysis; and, learning to conduct successful, strategic campaigns and take effective action.

Required Texts:

Articles to be assigned include:

- "Creating Covenantal Communities: Building Relationships, Developing Leaders, Taking Action," by Jeannie Appleman and Meir Lakein
- "What is Organizing," by Prof. Marshall Ganz
- "The Soft Arts of Organizing," by Larry B. McNeil
- "Writing Our Own Story," by Meir Lakein
- "Finding and Making Leaders," by Nicholas Von Hoffman
- "Is a Leader a Nursing Father?" by Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks
- "Rabbis in Red Lipstick," by Rabbanit Dasi Fruchter
- "Of What Was Moses Afraid?" by Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks
- "A Call for Organizing, Confrontation, and Community Building," by Rev. Johnny Ray Youngblood
- "How Can We Raise More Awareness in Darfur of How Much We're Doing for Them?" by the Onion
- "In College, I Marched Against Racism—And It Worked," by the Onion
- "How David Beats Goliath: When Underdogs Break the Rules," by Malcom Gladwell

Optional Texts:

Students are encouraged to learn from Going Public, by Michael Gecan, Roots for Radicals, by Edward Chambers, To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility, by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Recharging Judaism: How Civic Engagement is Good for Synagogues, Jews, and America, by Rabbi Judith Schindler and Judy Seldin-Cohen, Stand Up! How to Get Involved, Speak Out, and Win in a World on Fire, by Gordon Whitman, Sacred Strategies: Transforming Synagogues from Functional to Visionary, by Isa Aron, Steven M. Cohen, Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman, and Ari Kelman, Story as a Way of Knowing, by Kevin M. Bradt, S.J., and I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle, by Charles M. Payne.

Assessment:

Students will be assessed based on:

- Class participation
- Their work on and learning from a small personal organizing project, discussed below
- Bi-weekly one-page written reflections
- Two one-on-one meetings with the course instructor or teaching assistant
- A final short paper reflecting on their organizing project, their learning in the course, and their plans for

what to do with their learning

Course Accommodations for Disabilities:

Hebrew College is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in programs. Accordingly, if a student has a documented disability, and as a result, needs a reasonable accommodation to attend, participate or complete course requirements, then he or she should inform the instructor at the beginning of the course. For further information, see the Student Handbook at http://hebrewcollege.edu/sites/default/files/student_handbook.pdf.

If you require course accommodations because of a documented disability or an emergency medical condition, please email your instructor as soon as possible. We are happy to work with you on any issues you have to ensure that you can participate fully in the class and complete the course requirements. Please do not wait until the assignments are due for a retroactive accommodation, but discuss the situation with your instructor before you experience difficulty.

Course Structure:

February 6: Orientation to the fundamentals of organizing

- What is organizing? Why organize?
- Getting to know each other: Why do we need to do this? What is our vision for ourselves and our community? What is our calling?
- The cycle of organizing – what does organizing look like? Case study and small group practice

February 13: Why we organize: organizing around people's values and interests

- Understanding people's values and interests and engaging them through what's important to them, not what we think should be
- The critical role of story in organizing
- The self-interest stick figure

February 20: What fuels our organizing: power

- Text study: Talmud Yerushalmi, Pesachim 39b: Fleeing from and embracing power
- Understanding and building the power that we will need to realize our mission

February 27: Building public relationships and the art of the relational meeting

- The art of the relational meeting
- Fishbowl and paired practice
- Our organizing projects – sharing our plans with each other

March 13: Leadership and leaders who develop other leaders

- Identifying and developing other leaders and helping them realize their potential and lead
- Text study: Yismach Moshe, 2: 7.2: The role of conflict in building community and leadership
- Building strong leadership teams
- Navigating the public and private realms of our lives – or, how do I succeed in public life without spending all my time worrying if everybody likes me?

March 27: Building a base

- "Power analysis" of an institution
- Congregational "community conversation" campaigns to develop a common purpose
- House meetings
- Finding common ground for your vision, your constituents' vision, and the community's vision

April 3: Campaigns, not programs

- Acting through campaigns, not programs

- Action and reaction
- What can different schools of organizing teach each other about campaigns?

April 10: Campaigns to transform our congregations and communities

- Understanding congregational culture: are our synagogues built around relationship and purpose, or bureaucracy and marketing?
- Using our organizing to build healthy Jewish institutions built around relationship, common mission, leadership, and action
- Congregational campaigns to develop our communities: case study
- Text study: Chibah Yeteirah, Rav Yehudah Henkin: Calling on communities to act

April 17: Preparing our communities to work for justice

- Text study: Talmud Bavli, Berachos 5b: A prisoner can't free themselves from prison – how we need each other and other communities to be free
- How do we help our constituents develop the curiosity and courage to get involved in public life to make the world better?
- Building respectful, reciprocal, and collaborative relationships with other communities and leaders

May 1: Campaigns to change the world around us, part I

- Text study: Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 20b and Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Melachim, 1:2: Learning the role of politics through three collective commandments
- Crafting strategies to make a difference

May 8: Campaigns to change the world around us, part II

- Negotiating with stakeholders and powerbrokers: role play
- Public action

May 15: Closing

- Student led text study
- Organizing outside of campaigns – applying organizing in our day to day public lives
- Living out our calling - closing reflections, and thoughts on how to apply what you have learned and continue learning

Final Assignment:

Over the course of the semester, students will conduct their own “organizing project,” an opportunity to others to work with them to act on a shared strategy that brings about a concrete outcome that advances their shared purpose. *This project should be small and ideally something that the student is already doing*, so as not to add more time to their schedule. It does not have to relate to justice, since the goal of the project is not to change the world, but to help the student develop skills and insights that they will use down the line to change the world. The first class will provide examples of projects; basically any way that a student is bringing people together to act strategically would count as a project.

Students will *not* be assessed on the success of their project. The project is to create an opportunity for students to apply their learning and to create specific, current experiences to bring to class for discussion and evaluation. Therefore, students will be assessed in part on their thinking as they design and carry out their project and primarily on their learning from their project.

Students should talk to the instructor about their ideas for a project and be ready to identify their project by February 27 at the latest. From then on, there will be time set aside in many classes to discuss and get input into people's projects, and most sessions will begin with a volunteer talking about their work and getting feedback.

At the end of the semester, students will turn in a five-page paper reflecting on their learning from the class in general and in particular, their work on and learning from their project.