

# Identifying Our Top Priorities



**M.A.P. FOR JEWISH  
LEARNING & LIVING**

*This session orients [My Aspirations Playbook](#) in the context of participants' sense of the community's strengths, weaknesses, and priorities. It is targeted at the school committee, or a leadership group closest to making decisions about the Jewish education program, but it can be used with any group as an introduction to MAP. Repeating these exercises with different constituencies will give a picture of how values are shared across the organization.*

*The goal is to identify a list of aspirations that reflect your organization. This list should be narrow enough that the aspiration statements can guide choices about how the program should look and what it should include. If everything you are currently doing falls under the aspirations you have chosen, this process will have little impact.*

*One application of the work generated in this session is to share broad the list of top aspirations generated by the small groups (before identifying the top four) with other stakeholder groups. Or, you can simply share the top four and continue the process of applying these priorities with your other groups.*

*At the conclusion of the session, participants share how they are feeling. As the activity is challenging, reactions like: overwhelmed, confused, frustrated are to be expected as much as: excited, energized, and satisfied. The facilitator should follow up with individual participants based on the reactions they share.*

## Goal

Participants will reflect on the culture of their organization as they experience it and identify elements of MAP that reflect the organization's core values.

## Materials

- Reflection sheet (below)
- Highlighters or markers in different colors
- Copies of [MAP](#), divided into four sections (each with the preamble and one category)
- Sticky notes

## Plan

*Introduction (10-15 minutes)*

Ask participants to complete the following sentence, "I want my child(ren) to be part of this Jewish community because..." Have volunteers share their responses, and record them. You may record them on sticky notes. If you have time, ask participants to group the responses. Or, you can group them as you record them into the rough categories of MAP (Judaism vis-a-vis our relationship with self and identity/purpose, community, responsibility, God/spirituality).

Explain that just as we have reflected on our own relationship to Judaism, we will be starting our process by reflecting on what matters most to us about our community, and therefore our top priorities for the education it provides.

## *Activities*

### Reflection (5-10 minutes)

Distribute the reflection sheet and have participants complete it individually. This sheet will help participants identify the distinct values of the organization.

### Identifying Top Priorities (20 minutes)

Participants should divide into four or eight small groups to compare their answers. Distribute highlighters or markers and have participants highlight common answers in the same color.

Distribute the sections of MAP, one category to each group. Have participants review their section in the small groups, comparing the statements to their reflections. Challenge them to highlight the top three most relevant aspirations. They can begin by highlighting all of the relevant aspirations and then debating until they come to a consensus of the top three. (If there is time, have the groups identify the one or two goals which they think are least relevant or important to their organization as a contrast.)

Small groups should write the aspirations they chose on sticky notes and combine them by posting them one group at a time. If more than one group had the same section, they should stick the same aspirations on top of each other and similar aspirations near each other.

The entire group should now review the aspirations chosen by their group and others and try to come to a consensus about the four aspirations they think are most important. Each person should be given four star stickers to place on the four aspirations they think are most important for the community. Once the votes are tallied, lead the group in a discussion to see if all are comfortable with the final four choices. (Four is not a magic number, but keep the final result small enough to be meaningful).

### *Conclusion* (5 minutes)

Step back and observe the final list of aspirations. Take a minute to absorb them, what they represent, and how they might impact your program.

Ask everyone to share a word that describes how they feel about the process so far or how they feel about the resulting aspirations. Validate the feelings that are shared and reassure participants that this is the beginning of a process of refining and clarifying goals that, while challenging, will be able to guide you in decisions about the structure and content of the education program moving forward.

## Reflection sheet

Take 5-10 minutes and answer each question with a few words or phrases.

1. What first drew you to the community? What were your first impressions?
2. When you first encountered the community, what surprised you about the organization or school? Can you think of a decision or activity that was unexpected to you? Why was it surprising or unexpected?
3. How would people in your community describe your organization or school? Or, if you were telling an out-of-town relative about your community, what would you say?
4. If you could name the communal leader's top three messages or teaching topics, what would they be?
5. What about the school or organization seems sacrosanct to you? Imagine a subject that if brought up in the school committee, it would be met with a lot of resistance. This could be about the structure, staffing, or content of the program.
6. Does your organization have a short mission that appears, for example, in the staff's email signature? What is it? If it doesn't, could you think of one that might fit?
7. Compared to other schools or organizations in town, how is your place different? If you were contrasting your place to others, how would you describe it? Use the negative this time, as in "We are not a place/community that..."