



The Israel Religious Expression Platform (iRep)

Global Planning Table Voluntary Project Proposal
Civil Society Task Force

Revised May 24, 2014



Introduction

The Global Planning Table of the Jewish Federations of North America proposes the formation of a new strategic initiative that will support issues of **Jewish diversity** and freedom of religious expression in Israel.

The GPT will establish **iRep: The Israel Religious Expression Platform**, a two-year pilot that will engage the Israeli public and participating North American Jewish communities in a unified effort to advance the status of religious diversity in Israel.

iRep will harness the efforts of the Federation system and the Jewish Agency for Israel's Unity of the Jewish People Committee, along with foundations and individual philanthropists. Guided by a nimble board, iRep will have the ability to react to Israel's continually developing political and sociological landscape.

Why Freedom of Marriage? Why Now?

Over the last several months, the issue of marriage freedom in Israel has come into sharp relief both in Israel and in North America. In the Knesset, several political parties have discussed and proposed bills that attempt to offer new marriage and partnership options. As these political endeavors continue to unfold, coalitions of organizations on both sides of the ocean have formed in an attempt to support aspects of the issue in various ways.

In light of this activity, the Jewish Federations of North America has an ideal window of opportunity for providing leadership, legitimacy, and direction to organizations that are at the forefront of advancing these issues. With the principal aim of enhancing religious diversity, iRep's pilot phase will focus concertedly on addressing marriage freedom through an inclusive and positive approach, with work predicated on the realization that these issues must be navigated with the utmost sensitivity.

Efforts to advance religious expression in Israel are complicated and challenging. While iRep will initially focus on the issue of marriage freedom, making an impact in this area will further heighten iRep's capacity to increase the viability for multiple forms of Jewish expression in Israel.

iRep Mission Statement

iRep, the Israel Religious Expression Platform, will serve to impact a range of issues related to increasing religious diversity in Israel. Through education and awareness-building, support of organizations, and sustained and systematic communication between North American and Israeli leadership, iRep will act to enhance Israel's civil society and to strengthen Israel's relationship with North American Jewry based on mutual recognition of and respect for diverse Jewish expressions.

Structure

The governance structure of iRep will be based in part on the successful precedent of other JFNA strategic initiatives. Supported by Federations throughout the system, iRep will be led by an advisory board that will ensure a high degree of alignment between supporting federations and JFNA staff. The advisory board will comprise six Federation professionals and six lay-people, as well as the co-chair of the Unity of the Jewish People Committee. This group will convene monthly via tele/videoconference, as well as in person twice annually. iRep's operations will be overseen by a dedicated Director based at JFNA's Jerusalem office, as well as by a dedicated staff person based at JFNA's NY office. Through regular meetings and ongoing communication, iRep activities will reflect the priorities of the initiative's stakeholders and of the larger Federation system. The iRep Advisory Board will represent a wide base of supporters from across the religious and political spectrum, including members of the Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox communities based in Israel and in North America.

Timeline & Programmatic Description:

*iRep Development Phase (3 months):
April – June 2014*

Due to the timeliness of the issues, interested Federations, foundations and individuals will join the initiative over the course of the next three months. During that time, the details of iRep's structure and internal governance will be established, and funding resources will be identified that will enable activity over the course of an initial two-year period.

JFNA will endeavor to secure a **minimum of \$2 million** for the complete implementation of the two-year pilot initiative. During the development phase, JFNA will secure an initial sum of \$500,000 after which the first phase of iRep activities will commence.

These funds will be critical to ensuring the efficacy of iRep's slate of activities. The majority of funding during the initiative's two-year period will be used for the funding of non-profit organizations whose work will advance iRep's mission.

iRep will hire two professionals: one to be based at the Israel office of JFNA and the other at JFNA's New York office. Their roles will be to oversee the coordination and implementation of the following three core sets of activity that will take place simultaneously throughout the strategic initiative's first two years:

July 2014 through June 2016

(1) Support to Organizations in Israel

iRep will create a pooled allocations process through which iRep members will support organizations working to advance this issue in Israel and in North America. A process will be developed so that resources are allocated to discrete projects and activities. The iRep allocations mechanism will respond to needs that are consistent with the platform's mission statement and to activities that are projected to make significant impact on the issue of marriage freedom during the initiative's two-year pilot phase.

(2) North American Leadership: Education & Awareness

iRep will create and implement an education strategy that will serve to build awareness and engagement among the leadership of the North American Jewish community. Using existing communication tools and leveraging the Federation system's distribution infrastructure, iRep will develop an educational curriculum and toolkit for dissemination to Federations across the system.

These materials will serve to bring the issue of marriage freedom to the forefront of communal awareness, conveying the complexity of the issue and its relevance to issues of global Jewish peoplehood. By maximizing existing frameworks – ranging from online communication tools, FedWeb, JFNA missions to Israel and the JFNA Speakers Bureau, among other platforms– iRep's education campaign will be an effective means of raising awareness and channeling activism without significantly impacting the initiative's operating budget.

(3) Israeli Leadership: Education & Awareness

Led by the iRep Director, the Israel office of JFNA will coordinate with the activities of participating Israeli NGOs, decision-makers and thought-leaders on this issue. Through the establishment of an organized group that convenes these individuals in Israel on a regular basis, the iRep Director will also communicate directly with a staff liaison from the Unity of the Jewish People Committee. This will function as the mechanism for ongoing dialogue between the leadership in North America and in Israel on issues of marriage freedom and on other matters relating to Jewish diversity. This component of education and awareness builds on JFNA's existing capacity for community mobilization across multiple sectors of Israeli society.

Assessment & Measures of Success:

To determine the effectiveness of iRep over the two-year pilot phase, success metrics will be formalized and established by the iRep board. Decisions to support organizations will be based in part on organizations' ability to demonstrate reach, awareness, and impact. In addition to the success metrics of iRep's grantees, iRep will develop both qualitative and quantitative measures that monitor and report on the initiative's overall effectiveness at discrete intervals throughout the initiative's duration.

Anticipated Expenses:

The majority of iRep's budget will be made available to organizations in the form of grants. In addition to these allocated resources, iRep's operating expenses for the first two years will cover:

- salaries of two iRep staff: at JFNA's Jerusalem office & NY office
- development of the educational campaign
- meetings with Israeli leadership
- general initiative administration

iRep Development Phase Activities (not necessarily in sequential order):

- Seek iRep approval from JFNA's Executive Committee
- Secure funding
- Appoint iRep board and leadership
- Solidify iRep members
- Adopt governance structure
- Conduct detailed mapping of currently engaged organizations, coalitions and individuals in Israel
- Develop application for iRep funding candidates
- Disseminate Request for Proposals
- Hire iRep staff in Jerusalem and New York
- Convene iRep Board for official launch

Conclusion:

Marriage freedom is a critical and timely means of bolstering religious diversity in Israel. In light of growing attention and traction on local and international levels, marriage freedom presents the Global Planning Table with a strategic entry point for effecting change across the spectrum of lifecycle events, as well as on a host of other issues that relate directly to Jewish diversity.

iRep will help us address growing rifts between new generations of North American Jews and their relationship to Israel. Creating an Israel that is as Jewishly diverse as the Jewish population for which it is a homeland is key to engaging new generations of American Jews. iRep offers the North American Jewish community a vehicle to make a significant impact by exercising a leadership role in one of the most pivotal matters currently facing both Israeli civil society and the future of Jewish peoplehood.