

# Rise Up

**Nurturing the Soul of Jewish Justice**



**Emerging Outcomes Study**

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## Background

Rise Up was launched in Fall 2019 to nurture innovation that can strengthen movements for multiracial, inclusive democracy. By building the spiritual and organizational capacities of Jewish social justice leadership, Rise Up aims to amplify and energize uniquely Jewish approaches to transformative leadership development, healing and healing justice, and spiritual reclamation and adaptation. The Initiative was created as part of the Nathan Cummings Foundation's Voice, Creativity, and Culture portfolio, which aims to shift dominant narratives about race, class, gender, and ethnicity and build radical solidarity and empathy through voice, creativity, and culture.

Rise Up's multi-faceted strategy includes supporting leaders, strengthening change efforts, and fostering field-building. In addition to funding, Rise Up provides leadership training and organizational assistance to support grantees to increase their capacity and strengthen their impact. Through participating in Communities of Practice (CoP), grantees are collaboratively creating a learning

environment that fosters individual and collective growth.

To date, more than \$600,000 has been granted to efforts that seek to effect progressive social change by drawing on spiritual and religious ideas and practices and by centering the leadership and participation of Jews of Color, LGBTQ Jews, working-class Jews, and other Jews more likely to be on the margins. Rise Up puts a particular emphasis on supporting work led by Jews of Color which comprise over 30% of grantmaking. In addition, the funded efforts that are white-led are committed to integrating and evolving an understanding of oppression in both their internal structures and programmatic offerings.

This study, which is co-sponsored by the Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah, is part of Rise Up's strategy to illuminate the growing field and highlight efforts that are drawing on new and ancient forms of Jewish ritual and wisdom as both the content and approach to justice work.

### Rise Up is drawing on a multifaceted strategy that includes:

Spurring innovation, with a focus on promising experimental work and efforts to transform both social justice institutions and movement building



Deepening relationships, cross-pollinating capacities, and integrating wisdom through Communities of Practice (CoP), using virtual modalities and (eventually) in-person convenings

#### Communities of Practice



Helping leaders manage adaptive challenges, build collaborative organizational structures, deepen listening, and strengthen strategy through coaching, consulting, mentorship and learning opportunities, including a 6-month training on resource mobilization

#### Leadership & Organizational Assistance



#### Sharing Stories



Documenting and sharing grantees' work through a range of methods and platforms

## Transformative Approach

To nourish the soul of Jewish social justice, Rise Up focuses on supporting transformational work that integrates three spheres:



### Centering the Margins

**Rise Up grantees are:**

- Shaping ways that leaders, activists, and citizens can amplify the voices of people who have often been marginalized in mainstream Jewish communal settings
- Increasing access to Jewish participation and practice by reducing financial, educational, and ability-based barriers to participation

### Commitment to Justice

- Shifting power dynamics by working to supplant organizational norms created and perpetuated by white supremacy, patriarchy, anti-Semitism, Ashkenormativity, ableism, heteronormativity, and class privilege
- Reconceptualizing leadership as a collective endeavor – rather than a solo enterprise – that is rooted in a commitment to collaborative justice

### Transforming Jewish Wisdom, Tradition, & Ritual

- Engendering greater depth of participation and connection by developing creative opportunities to access prayer, Mussar, Torah, daily worship, Shabbat, holiday celebrations, song/music, embodiment and contemplative practices, relationship to land, and co-created ritual for collective moments
- Amplifying Jewish spiritual pathways that (1) align with justice values, (2) nourish capacity and wisdom, and (3) exist at the intersections of anti-oppression, feminism, queerness, trauma realities and disability

# Grantees

The evolving Rise Up ecosystem currently includes the 26 funded organizations, programs, initiatives, and projects. (For more information about grantees, see Appendix A). Grantees’ work falls roughly into four overlapping categories: 1) New Jewish Communities; 2) Radical Leadership; 3) Ritual, Arts, and Culture; and 4) Text and Embodied Practice. Every grantee fits into at least two of these categories, so they are grouped by their most prominent component.

New Jewish Communities	Radical Leadership	Ritual, Arts & Culture	Text & Embodied Practice
Kavod	Dimensions Jewish Women of Color Resilience Circle	Jewish Studio Project	Ammud: Jews of Color Torah Academy
Keshet Pittsburgh	Edot Midwest	Laura Elkeslassy & Ira Khonen Temple	Disability Justice Torah Circle
Kol HaPanim	Jewish Bridge Project	Let My People Sing!	Inside Out Wisdom & Action Project
Jews in ALL Hues	Joyous Justice	Reset	Malchut
Linke Fligl	Taproot Community Ritualist Training Program	Rimonim Liturgy Project	Mitsui Collective
Mizrahi Collective			Or HaLev
Synagogues Rising			SVARA
Tzedek Lab			
Wilderness Torah			

## Methods

Rise Up commissioned the current research to highlight emerging outcomes and identify themes that are surfacing in order to raise awareness and increase understanding of this growing field. The study was designed to articulate the ways in which grantees are drawing upon various aspects of Jewish wisdom and explore how the focus on Jewish wisdom and spiritual practice is affecting their work.

Qualitative methods were used to explore research participants' perspectives about individual, communal, and field-level outcomes. Findings are drawn from interviews, small group discussions, and an internally administered questionnaire that was completed by 21 grantees. (See Appendix B for more information about research participants) In-depth, hourlong interviews were conducted with leaders/practitioners of grant-funded efforts (n=13). Interviews were also conducted with program participants (people who have benefited from taking

part in Rise Up funded efforts) (n=12). Interviews were conducted with participants from every initiative except Synagogues Rising, due to scheduling challenges.

Data was also collected using participant observation during four small group discussions that included leaders from 19 grant-funded initiatives. Select grantees were brought together to share stories that exemplify the emerging impacts of their work. These conversations also explored participants' questions, intentions, and concerns about their efforts moving forward. The discussions, organized thematically, focused on: new Jewish communities, leadership development, text and practice, and reclaiming arts and culture.

**Quotes included throughout the report were selected to highlight the broadest possible range of voices and were edited for readability.**

## Research Participants

The leaders and program participants who participated in the research come from a broad range of backgrounds. They identify across the spectrums of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, ability, class, and generation. Every respondent identifies as Jewish. Most have at least one Jewish parent and a few are Jews by choice.

Respondents' Jewish identities and involvement have been influenced by their life stages, educational pursuits, relationships, and evolving socio-political consciousness. Growing up, many were involved with synagogues and organizations across and outside of mainstream Jewish denominations. Some were instilled with a strong sense of themselves as Jews as children, while others began developing their Jewish identities as adults. Most have visited or lived in Israel/Palestine and almost every respondent described how their relationship with the region has changed over time. Many became involved with Jewish environmental and social justice organizations as young adults.

Many shared how their perspectives have been shaped by experiences of otherness and onliness (the feeling of being the alone in their identities or perspectives). Several described a sense of double consciousness that comes from being people of color in predominantly white spaces, Jews in predominantly Christian spaces, queer in predominantly straight spaces, and genderqueer in predominantly cis-spaces. For many, their involvement with Rise Up-funded initiatives marked a return to Jewish engagement following a period of disruption or disconnection.

Quotes are labeled as follows to differentiate the type of research participant:

**G** = Grantee

**P** = Program participant

## Findings

Five themes surfaced from the interviews, small group conversations, and written responses. As the research participants shared their perspectives and experiences, they articulated outcomes that powerfully resonate with values/middot drawn from the practice of Mussar, an approach to applied Jewish ethics that originated in Lithuania in the 1800s. These values – wholeness/shleimut, honor/kavod, awareness/zehirut, responsibility/achrayut, and integrity/yosher – are used to frame the study findings.



## Wholeness/Shleimut/שלימות

Wholeness/shleimut – the main goal of Mussar practice<sup>1</sup> – is a theme that emerged from the data in multiple ways. Leaders’ and participants’ involvement with Rise Up funded initiatives provided powerful opportunities to integrate multiple sides of themselves in Jewish contexts.

### **Grantees described the powerful experience of creating and participating in Jewish spaces that promote and support wholeness and integration.**

They expressed a sense of hopefulness as they described their motivation to create opportunities that support people to de-segregate their identities, values, and spiritual lives.

Most of us have experiences of feeling a sense of fully belonging somewhere in our Jewish lives, even if just for a moment. That feeling is what propels a lot of my work: I want to make that feeling possible for more people. **G**

This project is about helping people build the Jewish, spiritual skills and draw on their lineages to inform their activism. We’re working with activists who are passionate about changing the world and helping them connect to Torah. By being in active conversation with anti-racism work and climate work and all kinds of justice, we’re making Torah come alive and creating a platform for people who have a yearning to do the work of integration and then to share it with others. **G**

We see Judaism as a liberatory and transformational tradition. We seek to cultivate more humanity, more interdependence, more solidarity, and more healing in our world by building synagogues that are accountable to movements for justice and to the broader national progressive landscape, while also being local hubs for relationships and community. We’ll know it’s working when there is a powerful Jewish spiritual wing to the politically progressive left. **G**

The overall point of our work is to move us toward a world of greater wholeness, justice, compassion, and joy. We’ll have succeeded when there’s a cohort of Jewish leaders of color that are powerfully advancing the work in a range of ways and feeling like they have the confidence and ability to actualize their dreams without feeling the need to conform to contemporary limited thinking and bullshit rules. **G**

Quotes are labeled as follows to differentiate the type of research participant:

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**Program participants** described how being in community with people of diverse Jewish backgrounds inspired them to show up more fully. One explained:

- P** This community has made me aware of a type of Judaism that wasn't accessible to me growing up in a traditional Conservative community as a queer Jew. Participating has really deepened my Jewish practice and learning. At services and during programs, they pose reflective questions about how we relate to the modern world and the Jewish world and where we fit in. It really showed me that I do have a place, I can own this, and I can learn more.

Another asserted:

- P** For many of us Jews of Color, having these affinity spaces is extremely formative. I had never been in a Jewish space before with people who were totally like me and speak my languages and have similar upbringings and experiences. No one questioned if I was Jewish. That was really amazing. The Jewish community I'm part of is very Ashkenazi-centric, so that's the way I learned to be Jewish and participating has allowed me to see outside of that world.

Still another said:

- P** I am relatively new to exploring my Judaism and it felt important to me to be in a room of people who were coming from many different positions and were modeling different ways of navigating Jewish community and their own identities. It was liberating to have a place where I could feel comfortable admitting that sometimes, in Jewish contexts, I don't know what the hell is going on without being at risk of losing my job in a predominantly white Jewish social justice organization.

One participant explained how their involvement in a Rise Up funded initiative empowered them to request time off for the first time to observe the High Holidays, explaining:

- P** I've been working in social justice organizations for years, and this has always been something I was scared to name, but when I started my new job, I let them know taking time off for the High Holidays was going to be a need for me.

A participant of another initiative shared how their experience gave them the confidence to change careers in order to more fully integrate their Jewish identities with their social justice organizing. Another, who was struggling to find a multiracial Jewish community in their Southern town, was motivated by their experience to create their own such community.

Participants shared how their involvement helped them embrace both ancient and contemporary expressions of spiritual connection as valid. One explained:

- P** My experience empowered me to embrace the fact that singing a niggun or reading Psalms or listening to a Mary J. Blige song are all parts of my Jewish practices and rituals. They are all valid expressions of my identity as a Black Jewish woman and my lived experiences don't have to be compartmentalized.

Another said:

- P** Learning with other JoCs has helped me deepen my connection to my ancestors. I've learned so much more about Torah. I'm in school and last semester I did a project about ancestral Jewish and Mexican/indigenous postpartum practices. I've also started practicing Shabbat and mikveh in my own way.

**Both leaders and participants asserted that cultivating wholeness requires a widespread need for healing from experiences of disconnection and alienation in mainstream Jewish and movement spaces.** Engaging with Rise Up funded initiatives has enabled respondents to connect more deeply to their own Jewish histories, experiment with Jewish practices, and apply this learning to their personal and professional lives.



### Leaders shared:

There are very few folks that are part of our cohort who don't feel like they've experienced harm of some sort growing up in Jewish institutions. Part of the container that we're holding is the opportunity to name that and to talk about what it looks like to heal. That's a very live question and a big part of the work we're doing.

G

I carried a lot of hurt and baggage being queer in religious spaces. That was my starting place and through this process of learning, two things are happening: one is the focus on being a better version of myself and the other is that I'm starting to let go of some of that anger. I'm feeling a sense of connection to my ancestors and my roots through this practice. Prayer is another tool in my tool belt now. I'm proud that I allowed myself to find meaning in it. I went into the experience for the social connection and gained personal, spiritual meaning.

G

### Participants shared:

I grew up observing everything sort of begrudgingly and then I went through my own journey of becoming politicized and feeling like there was no place for me in Judaism, so I pushed it away for years. Then I met other people who were doing this reclaiming work. Hearing a queer rabbi say: 'This tradition is yours. Judaism wants you,' changed everything. It has deeply supported my wellbeing to believe that I deserve to exist as my full self in this world. I brought Judaism back into my life by learning in community and with my chevruta and developing my own personal practice. This community is one of the spaces that I trust the most to hold people's full humanity.

P

My direct organizing has been about climate justice and anti-pipeline organizing, supporting indigenous land defense projects, anti-mining, and also immigrant rights. I felt like I couldn't really sustain more organizing until I took care of myself. I didn't realize how much I was having to push away my Jewish self as an organizer. I really deeply want my political self to come from my Jewish self and now I have more tools to do that. I'm working on some writing around how liturgy can support us to show up in our full selves in order to do our political work in the world.

P

I believe I am a much better parent, partner, educator, and anti-racist activist because my spiritual practice has helped me do those things better. I have a lot of baggage from growing up Conservadox and being told I don't count. It's been huge to figure out that Judaism can be a source of nurturing. This practice has given me tools to heal.

P

The way that Zionism has co-opted Judaism has been profoundly alienating. Participating supported my journey back to finding Jewish spiritual practices that feel meaningful to me.

P

## Honor/Kavod/תִּכְבֹּד

Grantees' collective effort to make Jewish wisdom more widely accessible evokes the middah of kavod, which focuses on honoring others by treating them with respect and dignity, listening and responding to others' needs, and appreciating a variety of perspectives.<sup>2</sup>

**Grantees described the multitude of opportunities they are creating to honor participants' diverse and unfolding identities, experiences, perspectives, and needs.** They are developing new spaces, methods, and roles to enable greater numbers of people – especially those from typically marginalized populations – to leverage the power of Jewish practice and wisdom as both a form of social change and to enhance their social change efforts.

We're creating meaningful spaces where folks are meeting other Jews of Color, getting inspired, and feeling more confident in their Judaism. With this community backing them, people are choosing how they want to show up in the Jewish world. Some of those people will give back to the JOC community and be inspired to start other JOC led initiatives and some people will want to be in more mainstream Jewish communities. We really want to be influencing change all across the board. **G**

Inside of movement spaces and havurot and synagogues, there's starting to be a lot of attention to acknowledging that everyone's voices are really important, which is radical; especially when it comes to Jews of Color, Sephardi, Mizrahi, and queer and trans Jews, whose voices have been absent. There's a beautiful metaphor about when you're braiding challah, you take the braid from the farthest away and you bring it close to the middle over and over again. We're looking at who is most on the margins and working on bringing them to the center. **G**

So many of us were pushed away from Judaism for various reasons. Finding a sense of belonging at the intersection of land connection, environmentalism, and Judaism has been really transformative. **G**

A hundred years from now looking back, I hope we'll have made Jewish life significantly more accessible, more like alive, and a more common part of people's spiritual toolkits and communities. I want people to be empowered to contribute to the mix, even if they aren't experts. **G**





## Creating New Pathways

Grantees described the numerous ways they are increasing accessibility. They are working to ensure that both leaders and participants are from underrepresented and marginalized communities including: Jews of Color, Indigenous, Sephardi, and Mizrahi people, along with those from rural and Southern locations, poor and working-class, disabled and chronically ill, and queer and trans Jews. They are prioritizing the use of traditions from a broad variety of Jewish cultures. Grantees explained how they are purposeful about which resources they use, where they come from, and how they are introduced and credited. Several leaders described being careful to avoid tokenism in both their recruitment strategies and in their organizational practices and processes.

As facilitators, leaders are attentive to how race, class, gender, and ability influence group dynamics. They are proactive about having systems in place to navigate discussions when prejudices directly or indirectly surface. Grantees also encourage people to indicate their pronouns at gatherings. They are making participation more financially accessible by offering cost-free programming and providing scholarships. In addition, a couple of respondents described how they curate scent-free spaces to make their in-person offerings accessible to people with

multiple chemical and fragrance sensitivities.

Online programming has enabled grantees to significantly increase access for many who were previously excluded because of differing abilities or geographical distance. Grantees are working to further develop the accessibility of online programming by distributing written materials and content, providing transcripts, offering automated closed captioning on Zoom calls, and asking about accessibility needs during program registration.

Grantees are also increasing inclusion by normalizing topics and issues that are typically taboo in mainstream Jewish communal spaces, including: systemic racism, white supremacy, workers' rights, health care, reparations, settler colonialism, toxic masculinity, solidarity around land/indigenous community, disability justice, anti-Zionism, Palestinian solidarity, abolition, sexual violence, and racialized misogyny. Several mentioned how they are overtly welcoming to people who have been excluded from other Jewish contexts because of their political views about Israel/Palestine.

## Grantees described myriad ways they are working to increase inclusion while countering the cultures of Ashkenormativity, whiteness/white supremacy, classism, heterosexism, and sexism that typically predominate in mainstream Jewish spaces. They are:

- Prioritizing care of bodies, minds and spirits as a form of liberation
- Resisting false urgency
- Providing containers for people to pursue the ongoing work of excavating internalized oppression
- Decentralizing power by empowering people to take on leadership roles that were once exclusively occupied by rabbis
- Reinvigorating the use of rituals and traditions from across Jewish cultures and ethnicities
- Reducing isolation among Jewish leaders
- Creating conditions that allow people to bring their full selves to their Jewish practice and activism
- Operating from a place of love and gratitude
- Diversifying Jewish organizational leadership to more accurately represent the demographics of the American Jewish population
- Investing resources in the cultivation of leaders' Jewish learning and spiritual practices
- Honoring the complexity and nuance of intersectionality
- Prioritizing relationship cultivation above programming
- Fostering intergenerational learning opportunities
- Acknowledging the need to grieve, mourn, and heal
- Building pastoral care into learning processes
- Supporting leaders who are creating alternative liberatory Jewish spaces in locations that are geographically and ideologically disconnected from Jewish institutional centers

Expanding access to a greater diversity of people has begun to influence how the power of Jewish wisdom is being harnessed. Respondents described many of the small (but not insignificant), ways they are reclaiming, transforming and sharing Jewish wisdom and rituals. In one predominantly queer and trans community, a leader created resources to teach people to give and receive the ancient ritual of the Kohanim blessing, a practice that has typically been taught to cisgender straight men. Another group gathered to offer the Mourner's Kaddish to honor the passing of a non-Jewish activist. One respondent described using prayer as a form of nervous system regulation. Another delineated a wide range of somatic approaches they are using to catalyze individual and social transformation based in Jewish learning, wisdom, and practice, including: dance, yoga, healing, meditation, intuitive movement, song, chanting, breathwork, embodied prayer, Israeli folk dance, mikvah, martial arts, sound vibration, yoga,

**Grantees have faced considerable challenges while pursuing their goal to make Jewish wisdom more widely accessible.** They identified how lack of funding has long been an instrument of marginalization. Many spend substantial time and energy concerned about the financial viability of their efforts. They are dubious about the possibility of receiving significant financial support from other values-aligned funders. A few grantees expressed awareness that funding in the Jewish innovation ecosystem has typically been awarded to white-led initiatives and programs focused on incremental (rather than disruptive) change.

Class differences and varied financial circumstances emerged as a significant barrier for many grantees. Some are pursuing their Rise Up-funded efforts fulltime. Others are earning a living by piecing together several jobs while undertaking this work. One grantee noted that people who are not concerned about their survival are able to participate in the Community of Practice more extensively than those without class privilege. Another grantee shared this observation of the Jewish communal field, asserting:

strength training, connection with nature, art, movement, and conversations with God.

Still another grantee is creating a Jewish text-based anti-racist curriculum. A program participant of a Rise Up funded initiative shared:



**P** Something happens when Jews stand up together to recite our ancient texts, words that have been passed down generation to generation for over a thousand years – words we thought we would never know, could never know. Words that are seemingly irreverent, illogical, and unrelatable, and yet carry within them the seeds of what makes us who we are as a people. Ancient words, through whose roots we find our own. It takes a community to remember a tradition and it takes queers to radically reinvent it.

**G** Most of the leaders in the Jewish community organizing landscape are white, and have access to some kind of financial cushion. For people who are coming from different class and racial experiences who don't have financial stability, much of our lives is spent just surviving. Including more people of color means the whole culture has to change.

Even while working to expand participation, respondents talked about resisting the pressure from various funders to measure success in terms of growth in numbers and scalability. At the same time, they are unsure of how to illustrate success using indicators that are less easily measured, like the quality of relationships, the efficacy of collaborations, and the transformational impact of participation. A leader commented:

**G** I've been thinking about metrics and how we judge our success. We want to show that broad reach is important, but if there's a chance that our work helps to save one person's life, that's what really matters from a Jewish perspective.

## Awareness/Zehirut/זהירות

Grantees' focus on teaching and learning evokes the middah of zehirut/awareness. This quality is about being introspective in order to act from a place of self-understanding.<sup>3</sup> By creating learning opportunities for themselves and others, grantees are drawing on Jewish wisdom to support increased awareness as a mechanism for personal and social change.

Grantees mentioned a wide variety of student-centered educational approaches they are drawing on, including: chevruta/partnered learning, mentoring, group discussion, text study, guest speakers, journaling, panel discussions, recitation, storytelling, presentations, reading assignments, and group projects. A grantee described their work in these terms:

**G** Our programs allow for flexibility and accountability for participants, with a multiplicity of structures including live workshops, individual coaching sessions, and self-paced daily spiritual practice with an optional live workshop component. We offer different amounts of spiritual depth for different kinds of learners, the most in-depth being one-on-one coaching with a rabbi, the least in-depth being five-minute spiritual practices.

They are using counter-cultural approaches to teaching and learning and fostering non-hierarchical learning spaces and cultures of mutual support that are flexible and adaptable. Their pedagogical approaches are being iteratively refined based on collective wisdom and feedback from mentors, peers, and participants. Grantees are emphasizing the legitimacy of affective, experiential, and ancestral knowledges; prioritizing cooperation and collaboration; and meeting people where they are on

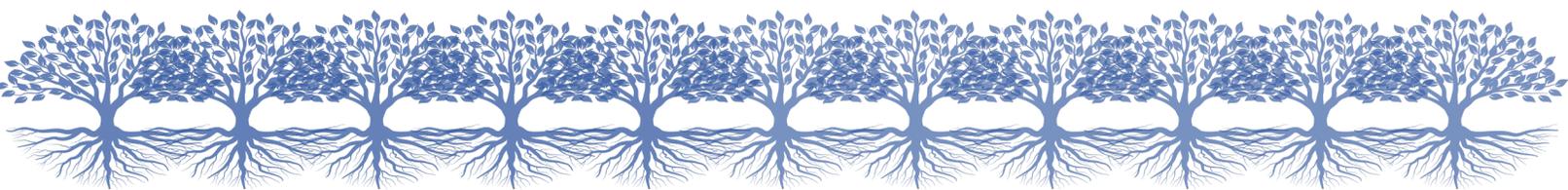
their learning journeys. They are creating politicized learning spaces by engaging people who have been historically denied access.

Learning experiences include formal and informal modes of pastoral care, with the understanding that effective teaching and learning requires attending to personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural traumas from racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, heterosexism, gender binarism, classism, ableism and other forms of oppression. Grantees are creating opportunities for reflection and healing, where learning can happen without the fear of judgement.

Grantees are equipping a wide range of people to draw on Jewish wisdom as a resource to advance the collective liberation of all. Leaders from typically marginalized populations are being empowered and resourced to serve those in their own communities. As one grantee put it:

**G** We are supporting people – especially folks without a ton of Jewish literacy – to transition from learners and practitioners to teachers and leaders of these spiritual lineages.

Many grantees are increasing access to this work by training community leaders and organizers to introduce these ideas and techniques in their communities.





**Program participants described the transformative nature of their educational experiences while learning with Rise Up funded initiatives.**

Part of what was amazing about the learning experience was that everyone brought a really different perspective and personal experience of what Jewish embodiment and social justice means to them. We were both participants and co-creators and were invited to think about spiritual pluralism and why that's relevant to building diverse Jewish communities. Someone shared an African dance and talked about how it links into their own sense of Jewish spirituality. Another person led us in an Amidah focused on our breath and our awareness of the sensation in our bodies. They invited us to see if we can feel the presence of God between us and people on the screen. My own practice deepened through being able to practice teaching and articulating how the Sephirot is our cultural body mapping system. I feel more attuned to that system in myself through having taught those practices.

**P**

I'm really proud that I can read these really esoteric texts myself. I don't understand everything, but it's accessible to me and I'm working at it and I know I have tools and skills and it's part of my personal study practice. I am contributing to our tradition and I feel proud that I can work at that.

**P**

Being in community with Jews of Color, telling our stories, and educating each other is an act of social justice in and of itself.

**P**

**Examples of leadership development opportunities provided by grantees include:**

An 8-week **exploration of whiteness** that includes: historical context; honoring ancestral, somatic, emotional, and spiritual experience; exploring a Jewish justice ethic; and investigating the interplay of antisemitism, racism, and white nationalism within Jewish institutions and in the U.S. at large

An ongoing voting campaign designed to **activate and mobilize Jewish Women of Color** in the service of collective liberation through activating themselves and loved ones to register and prepare to vote

A training designed to **support Jewish social justice leaders** to cultivate sensibilities and acquire tools for drawing on deep wells of Jewish wisdom to inform and support their movement work, including prayer, Mussar traits, Torah ideas, and rituals

A member-led mini training that opens up important and **transformative conversations** and learning about fundraising, class, and capitalism

A two-year cohort training that **equips participants to create Jewish ritual spaces** and develop personal praxis of land stories as tools for change

A learning session exploring **reparation principles in Torah** to support participants to integrate reparations practices into their lives and work

**Through the Community of Practice (CoP), grantees are receiving support, encouragement, and guidance that is contributing to their development as leaders.** They are collaboratively cultivating an environment where they can safely and productively express vulnerability and articulate challenges. A leader commented:

- G** In the Community of Practice, I feel like I can make a mistake and if I do something wrong, I trust that someone is going to tell me and help me.

Several grantees mentioned the value of learning that they are not alone in their practices and struggles. A leader said:

- G** It was comforting to hear about two different organizations in Rise Up that are also doing internal work. There's something relieving and normalizing to realize it's okay not to be constantly out-putting.

Another explained:

- G** When we've talked about our organizations, it's great to hear that our approach isn't odd or out of place. The CoP gave me a place to try on ideas and actions with folks that understand.

Grantees mentioned how they are supporting each other to navigate the funding landscape. They have strategized about how to engage most effectively with various foundations and program officers.

Through their participation in the CoP, leaders at different career stages and with varied educational experiences, Jewish backgrounds, and organizational roles are strengthening their professional and spiritual capacities as both teachers and learners. Respondents described how they are gaining new skills by observing their colleagues' approaches to leading and facilitating. A leader explained:

- G** I'm learning facilitation techniques from the CoP meetings. Folks make room for silence, use music to mix up the group energy, and don't rush the pace.

Others shared how they are learning about new resources. Leaders are exposing one another to a broad range of traditional practices, songs, and rituals. They are introducing new topics and issues to each other. A grantee shared how engaging with other leaders helped them to better articulate the significance of bringing Jewish learning into their life as both a way to honor the past and as a transformational process.



The opportunity to learn about resource mobilization through a six-month training and coaching program offered by Rise Up was particularly valuable according to several respondents. About half of the grantees opted to participate. As a result of the training, grantees have developed fundraising strategies, which many have already put into practice. Several leaders mentioned how they were introduced to new concepts. A leader described the value of this learning experience sharing:

- G** We are newer at fundraising and having an expert to plan and reflect with was so affirming. The experience motivated us to have critical conversations about our relationships with money and capitalism and to reflect on how that influences our fundraising. I was able to connect my nervousness around asking for money to the gender dynamics at play. Even though it's training about the business-side of stuff, it felt very human, which is unlike typically entrepreneurial energy that is cold and feels very masculine. I appreciate having a different kind of environment to learn this material: one that centers our humanity.

A few leaders also mentioned participating in a peer-led discussion about racial violence and misogyny. They were given a template for reflecting about how these issues manifest in their work along with a series of questions for leaders to bring back to their organizations.

## Responsibility/Achrayut/אחריות

Respondents' increasing interconnectivity was a theme that strongly emerged from the interviews. This outcome relates to the middah/soul-quality of achrayut/responsibility.<sup>4</sup> Grantees have a growing sense of responsibility to support each other's efforts. They are gaining clarity about their role in the growing ecosystem of organizations working at the intersection of Jewish spirituality and social justice.

Participating in the Rise Up CoP has begun to crystalize leaders' awareness of this emerging field. The experience is enabling grantees to see their work as contributing to something bigger. They are gaining understanding of their work in the context of the Jewish communal sector and in the broader landscape of social justice organizations, coalitions and movements. A leader observed:

**G** This ecosystem is in the process of real-time birthing new containers for being Jewish, creating new roles for spiritual leadership, and creating spaces that are specifically for marginalized folks to gather, learn, and create together.

The CoP is increasing grantees' understanding of the broader landscape. Those who are newer to the Jewish communal sector are gaining familiarity with the key players and acquiring the language of the field. Leaders' growing understanding of their role in this rapidly expanding shared project has increased their sense of responsibility to support each other's work. Leaders described their growing sense of interdependence.

Rather than seeing themselves outside or on the margins of the mainstream Jewish community, both Rise Up grantees and people who participate in the funded endeavors have begun to see themselves as part of a critical mass of allies who are creating a new center. A leader described how their orientation is shifting:

**G** I no longer have time to worry about whether someone's inviting me to stand at the edge of their tent. There is so much connection happening and opportunities to learn and be with people who share my values. It almost feels like there's another center of gravity forming and we don't need permission from anyone else to gather.

A leader who has a long history of pursuing work at the intersection of Jewish wisdom and social justice described their work within a broader contemporary context explaining:

**G** I wouldn't be on this path if my queerness and Jewishness hadn't been integrated by the Jewish pioneers of the seventies and eighties and nineties who created pathways for me. I'm in the same place but the landscape has shifted and I'm wondering how to pass along lessons generationally.

Contextualizing their work as part of a larger ecosystem has enabled leaders to gain new understanding of their contributions. Some grantees have been able to more clearly articulate their mission and vision through the process of describing their projects and having their work reflected back to them by trusted colleagues.





A leader explained:

- G** The other grantees are helping us see more clearly what already exists within the ecosystem and where there are holes that need filling. Having our work reflected back to us has been really important to shaping our work.

Another shared:

- G** Part of the CoP that has been really important is the opportunity to have our work reflected back to us. It's such a lovely touch point to have this opportunity to build relational tissue with other amazing groups within the ecosystem. Being in those relationships really helped us to move into the next iteration of our work. It's helped us to see what already exists within the ecosystem, and where there's room to do more.

The CoP is a central aspect of leaders' experience of Rise Up. They feel nourished by the opportunity to engage with people they respect and admire who are taking like-minded approaches to integrating Jewish wisdom and social change efforts. The multiracial and multicultural container for relationship building is supporting grantees to broach topics – like white supremacy, equity, reparations, and liberatory practices – that are not typically discussed in Jewish organizational settings. A leader commented:

- G** It's wonderful to be in a community of progressive Jews who combine the political and spiritual and who speak the same language. We're learning about the other projects and thinking about how we can support each other. It's starting to feel like there is a root system, a mycelial web connecting us.

Grantees shared their appreciation for the thoughtfully curated virtual gatherings that provide the rare opportunity for them to engage as participants instead of leaders. They described how these gatherings are contributing to their sense of resiliency by providing vital moments of spiritual connection and respite. A leader shared, "I have had

moments on these CoP calls where I've had tingles down my back and thought, 'I needed that today.'" Another commented:

- G** Connecting with other kindred spirits who are doing this work and knowing that there are funders and influential people who give a shit about what I'm doing is so important.

Leaders and participants alike talked about introducing and being introduced to others throughout the ecosystem. They enthusiastically mentioned how cross-pollination is happening between and among both leaders and participants from different organizations. There is a vibrant word-of-mouth culture, where people are eager to facilitate connections through personal introductions and to share information about communities, learning opportunities, and online resources.

Almost every leader mentioned being in conversation with other grantees about potential ways to collaborate and support one another's efforts. Many leaders had professional and social histories with others prior to connecting through Rise Up. They are benefiting from the structured opportunities to connect more regularly with colleagues and enthusiastically accepting the invitation to learn from others' experiences and perspectives. Several of those with significant experience in the field said they particularly appreciated the opportunity to build relationships with emerging leaders and learn more about newer organizations.

**In addition to contributing to the growing ecosystem through their participation in the CoP, grantees described how their programs are similarly focused on deepening relationships and supporting cross-pollination.**



With our program, we've brought together a terrifically diverse and wide-ranging group of practitioners and teachers. Jewish affiliation in our program includes Neo-Hasidic, Reform, Renewal, Kohenet, Reconstructionist, Orthodox, Cultural, and Non/Post-Denominational. Geographically, participants are from the San Francisco Bay Area, Brooklyn and Harlem NYC, Western Massachusetts, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Durham, NC.



The assembling of this program, both in the creation of the cohort itself and our amazing team of mentors and guest teachers, has allowed for an abundance of intergenerational cross-pollination, weaving and deepening in relationship. Our mentorship team alone brings together movement elders, Kohenet priestesses and younger movement rabbis to learn from and with one another as they support our cohort.



**The ongoing development of the Rise Up ecosystem promises to have an impact far beyond the grantees.** A significant characteristic of the emerging landscape is the extensive interconnectedness of like-minded people. The list below is an inexhaustive sampling of the wide array of organizations and communities to which respondents are connected.

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| Abrahamic House                                  | JoC Mishpacha Project                         | Project Shamash, An Initiative of Bend the Arc |
| American Civil Liberties Union                   | JOIN for Justice                              | Rising Song Institute                          |
| Aleph: Alliance for Jewish Renewal               | Jewish Liberation Fund                        | Ritual Well: Tradition and Innovation          |
| Avodah Jewish Service Corps                      | Jewish Social Justice Roundtable              | ROI Community: A Schusterman Initiative        |
| Bend the Arc: , A Jewish Partnership for Justice | Judaism on Our Own Terms Network              | Romemu Yeshiva                                 |
| Black Jewish Liberation Collective               | Judaism Unbound                               | Reconstructionist Rabbinical College           |
| Congregation Beit Simchat Torah                  | Jewish Voice for Peace                        | Temple Beth Zion                               |
| Center for Jewish Nonviolence                    | JVP Havurah Network                           | Teva Learning Center at Isabella Freedman      |
| Hazon  | Keshet: A LGBTQ Community                     | TransTorah                                     |
| Hadar  | Kohenet Hebrew Priestess Institute            | Tzedek Chicago                                 |
| Hebrew College                                   | Lab/Shul                                      | Urban Adamah: Jewish Community Center          |
| Hillel International                             | Mayim Hayyim                                  | Women's March                                  |
| IfNotNow   | Mishkan Chicago: Progressive Jewish Community |  |
| Institute for Jewish Spirituality                | Moishe House                                  |  |
| Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ)     | Never Again Action                            |  |
| Jews of Color Initiative                         | One Table                                     |  |

## Integrity/Yosher/יושר

Grantees' determination to align their values and actions in their work evokes the virtue of yosher/integrity.<sup>5</sup> They are purposefully building and maintaining organizational cultures that do not replicate the characteristics of white supremacy and capitalist culture. Leaders are working to enact the values they espouse in the endeavors they are creating.

Instead of trying to find their place in Jewish communities where they are not free to bring their full selves, respondents are contributing to a growing culture where they can more fully align their values and identities. Leaders shared how integrating their spiritual and professional lives with their work is contributing to a greater sense of wholeness and wellbeing.

Through their initiatives, leaders are working to create cultures of empowerment instead of judgement, in which vulnerability is encouraged. Several grantees pointed to the hyper-critical energy of predominately white, Ashkenazi spaces that leads so many to feel they are "not Jewish enough." Participating in the CoP has enhanced grantees' confidence and decreased their "imposter syndrome." Leaders said they are increasingly able to show up with their full selves and express identities and sentiments that have typically been invisible and unwelcome in mainstream Jewish contexts.

As they develop their organizational cultures, leaders are prioritizing relationship and trust-building and encouraging authentic expressions of emotions. A grantee explained:

**G** Our work requires a tremendous amount of cultivating our interdependence and accountability in our relationships with each other. It's a different kind of work that requires a lot of tenderness and attention. It has been really meaningful to see how our focus on tending to our relationships is influencing the rest of what we do.

Respondents mentioned how they are creating conditions that make it possible for people to talk about their needs and express their opinions. One shared:

**G** In my day job, I was very explicitly told that I can't be public about some of my beliefs, so I stayed quiet because I couldn't afford to lose my job. With this work, we've created a place that supports people to show up more fully. It makes me feel completely emboldened and empowered, and has helped me understand that I have a responsibility to speak up.

Others mentioned how their commitment to centering typically underrepresented voices is both a goal of their work and a strategy. A leader explained:

**G** We've been working to apply our values and principles as an organization in our focus on equity in hiring. It takes time to build up relationships with people from diverse backgrounds before you can invite them to lead. We've been doing this for a while and now we're seeing it come to fruition and it's amazing to be in spaces with all these wonderful people.

Some respondents are exploring and experimenting with compensation models to ensure their communities are more equitable and accessible.



A leader shared:

- G** When you get more funding, you have to create new budgets that reflect the values of your organization. We're thinking about that when considering what makes sense in terms of pay. We're trying to find a balance between what makes sense in the world we currently live in, how that's different from the ideal situation, and what funders want.

Another grantee described how focusing on enacting their values influences their decision-making processes:

- G** The question of gatekeeping is a real and important question when considering compensating individuals in our community. Another challenge/fear is about creating processes and systems: how much do they help, and how much do they keep us stuck and afraid of experimenting? How much is process wrapped up in white supremacy culture and classism?

Many grantees said they are determined to remain focused on meeting the expressed needs of the people they serve, rather than being guided by funders' definitions of success. They are aware that this orientation toward their work will likely limit their access to funding from some of the largest funders in the Jewish philanthropic sector. A leader asserted:

- G** I don't want to be reliant on that kind of funding because it seems very fickle and unreliable. I'm not doing that shuck and jive dance for funding right now. I'm just not doing it.

Others see themselves as bridges between typically marginalized populations and mainstream Jewish funders. By positioning their work on the margins of mainstream Jewish life, these leaders hope to leverage the available resources. Respondents described some of the consequences of that strategic choice. One shared:

- G** The funders want us to grow bigger so they feel justified in giving us the money. But we're trying to go a little more slowly and trying not to overextend so we don't implode, which also reflects our values.

But most funders don't want to invest in our backbone, because that's not flashy. They want to know what new programming we're going to add.

Another explained:

- G** We've considered the consequences of getting funding from foundations, because you give up something when you make that choice. We had to acknowledge that basically all the money at that scale is pretty dirty, and we're just glad it's being redirected to us. We chose to be a non-profit because we're naming the way a certain system works and trying to exist within it.

Grantees described Rise Up as a hybrid model, where the power dynamics inherent in the funder/grantee relationships are being investigated and problematized from a values-driven perspective. The act of naming and attending to the power differential between grantees and funders has enabled leaders to show up more authentically and fully. Respondents said they feel safe expressing themselves honestly without concern about putting their funding in peril. A leader shared:

- G** Rise Up was my first time applying for funding where I didn't feel like I had anything to hide. Rise Up is allowing me to be more out about how my social justice work is grounded in Jewish mysticism. By supporting my spiritual development, Rise Up is helping me desegregate parts of my inner world and become more whole.

Several grantees commented on how Rise Up's relational strategy is dramatically different from their experiences with other funders. This approach is reflected in Rise Up's effort to magnify grantees' collective impact and counter mainstream narratives of scarcity and competition. A leader shared the sentiments of several others explaining:

- G** I've really appreciated how the CoP puts everyone in conversation together, as opposed to in competition.



## Issues for Consideration

The following questions, which emerged from the research, are offered to further support Rise Up's efforts moving forward.

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**How can Rise Up most effectively support grantees to:**

**Realize their organizational goals while also actively contributing to the growth of the broader ecosystem?**

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**Maintain their commitment to supplanting organizational norms created and perpetuated by white supremacy, patriarchy, anti-Semitism, Ashkenormativity, ableism, heteronormativity, and class privilege, while successfully functioning within the philanthropic and non-profit sectors?**

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**Collaborate while navigating Jewish communal cultures that promote competition, rely on tokenism, and perpetuate a sense of scarcity?**

---

**Engage in field-building while also focusing on affinity-based relationship development?**

---

**Learn and grow in ways that account for their particular leadership and organizational development needs?**

---

**Succeed as social entrepreneurs, despite lacking the economic and racial privileges that are typically needed to enable people to take risks and invest their time?**

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**Acquire enough funding to sustainably enable them to focus on their organizational missions, rather than remaining in the physically and emotionally precarious state of survival mode?**

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**Partner with additional values-aligned funders who will support their efforts to advance disruptive innovation?**

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## Concluding Thoughts

This study sheds light on the emerging ecosystem of leaders who are harnessing the power of Jewish wisdom, tradition, and ritual to advance social justice. They are contributing to the creation of new Jewish communal forms that are infused with cultural norms and values grounded in leaders' and participants' intersectional identities. Grantees are developing opportunities for participation that are enabling greater numbers of people from historically marginalized populations to draw on ancient Jewish tools to enrich their lives and advance social change efforts. They are passionately engaging in a process of spiritual reclamation, adaptation, and empowerment.

The multifaceted support from Rise Up is accelerating the development of this ecosystem. Grantees described the myriad ways they are experiencing spiritual, intellectual, and emotional growth through their participation in Rise Up, which in turn, is positively influencing the efficacy of their work. Many are also equipping a new cadre of leaders to further amplify their impact.

Grantees are increasingly embracing their roles in this burgeoning network. They have a deepening sense of interconnection and responsibility to support one another to advance their shared goals. Both leaders and program participants are experiencing a deep sense of belonging and wholeness in this work, which many never thought possible in Jewish communal contexts. Rather than rejecting Jewish community – where many have been marginalized for their identities and political ideologies – they are creating a new field with their interests at the center.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Alan Morinis, *Everyday Holiness: The Jewish Spiritual Path of Mussar*, Trumpeter, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> David Jaffe, *Changing the World from the Inside Out: A Jewish Approach to Personal and Social Change*, Trumpeter, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Kohenet Ketzirah Lesser HaMa'agelet, "#MussarWithMe teachings on Zehirut," <https://devotaj.com/kesharim-kdoshim/adar-zehirut-illuminated-awareness>.

<sup>4</sup> Rachel Barenblat, "Essay on Allyship" *Chaver Up! 49 Rabbis Explore What It Means To Be an Ally Through a Modern Jewish Lens*, edited by Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum and Rabbi Mike Moskowitz, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Louis E. Newman, Ruth Messinger, Deborah Waxman, and Georgette Kennebrae. "Jewish Ethics and Leadership: Four Perspectives." *Journal of Jewish Ethics* Vol. 6, No. 2 (2021): 224-250.



## Appendix A: Grantees (funded through Spring 2021)

1. **[Ammud: The Jews of Color Torah Academy](#)** provides Jewish education for Jews of Color, by Jews of Color and opens up new conversations about text, tradition, and liberation.
2. **[Dimensions](#)** Jewish Women of Color Resilience Circle, supports Jewish women leaders of color through transformational leadership development.
3. **[Disability Justice Torah Circle](#)** provides a space for Jews with disabilities to build community around Torah and engage Jewish text through a disability lens.
4. **[Edot Midwest](#)** Regional Jewish Diversity and Racial Justice Collaborative, affirms Jewish racial and ethnic diversity across communities in the Midwest region.
5. **[Laura Elkeslassy & Ira Khonen Temple](#)** are unearthing and reinventing the Judeo-Arabic North African and Middle Eastern musical repertoire from a feminist and antiracist standpoint.
6. **[Inside Out Wisdom and Action Project](#)** integrates inner, spiritual development with the work of social change by supporting activists to develop rigorous Jewish spiritual practice.
7. **[Jewish Bridge Project](#)** uses the Jewish values of Tikkun Olam and deep reflective inquiry to build a bridge to transformational abolitionist, anti-racist and decolonial engagement.
8. **[Jewish Studio Project](#)** helps individuals and communities move through challenge and change with creative practices from art therapy, Jewish learning techniques and spiritual community building.
9. **[Jews in ALL Hues](#)**, an education and advocacy organization that supports Jews of Color and multi-heritage Jews, is building a future where intersectional diversity and dignity are normative.
10. **[The Joyous Justice Collective](#)** and their Ko'ach Fellowship is an intersectional and liberation-focused leadership program with group coaching and advanced training by and for accomplished JOC leaders.
11. **[Kavod](#)** is a multi-ethnic, multi-racial community led by young Jews in Greater Boston that is committed to each other and to building a liberated world for all people through vibrant Jewish ritual, transformative social justice organizing, and collective responsibility.
12. **[Keshet Pittsburgh](#)** is an independent, post-denominational community underpinned by Jewish values, rhythms and practices. V'ahavt/a is a cohort focused on anti-oppression as a Jewish spiritual practice.
13. **[Kol HaPanim](#)**/All Faces is an online community developed by Rabbi Sandra Lawson, a Queer, Black educator and activist that brings Judaism to where people are and accepts them without question.
14. **[Let My People Sing!](#)** believes in the liberatory potential of song and the importance of a vibrant Jewish singing culture; they bring together singing traditions across Jewish time and space.
15. **[Linke Fligl](#)**, a queer Jewish chicken farm and cultural organizing project, is building a radical diasporic Jewish future rooted in land, tradition, healing and justice.
16. **[Malchut: Feminism All Night](#)** creates transformative decolonial and prophetic educational spaces that weave the spiritual with the political.
17. **[Mitsui Collective](#)** builds resilient community through embodied Jewish practice and racial equity, including cohort-based Kollel programs for teachers and practitioners to uplift liberatory somatic leadership and best practice.

## Appendix A (continued)

18. **Mizrahi Collective** is a community of US-based organizers, cultural workers, spiritual leaders, educators, healers and artists, that strives to bring together the many different layers of our identities, experiences, and histories with the goal of nourishing connection, healing, and growth.
19. **Or HaLev**, a Jewish path to a more vibrant, whole and awakened life through mindfulness and innovative Jewish practice, provides a program on spiritual activism.
20. **Reset**, a project of Reconstructing Judaism, helps Jewish activists learn about, experiment with, and commit to Jewish spiritual and resilience practice.
21. **Rimonim Liturgy Project** of Puerto Rican Jewish poet Aurora Levins Morales, creates new liturgy that is fully inclusive of Indigenous Jews and Jews of Color, rooted in diasporic Jewish cultures, accountable to indigenous people and responding to our ecological crisis.
22. **SVARA**, is a traditionally radical yeshiva dedicated to the serious study of Talmud through the lens of queer experiences with a unique pedagogy that makes Talmud study in the original accessible to all who want to learn.
23. **Synagogues Rising** is a network of seven synagogues that integrate justice and spiritual practice and are convening to share resources and practices, offer mutual support, amplify their justice work and Jewish teaching, and expand the base for Jewish solidarity in justice movements.
24. **Taproot** offers a Community Ritualist Training Program where Jewish leaders can deepen their practice, weave justice work and spirituality, and offer meaningful, Jewishly-sourced ritual and spiritual care.
25. **Tzedek Lab** is a multiracial network of Jews and allies, political educators, community organizers, spiritual leaders, artists and cultural workers that supports bold action against antisemitism, racism and white supremacy.
26. **Wilderness Torah** is co-creating a new center for earth-based Judaism that nourishes the connections between self, community, earth, and Spirit, which provides scholarships for Jews of Color.

## Appendix B: Research Participants

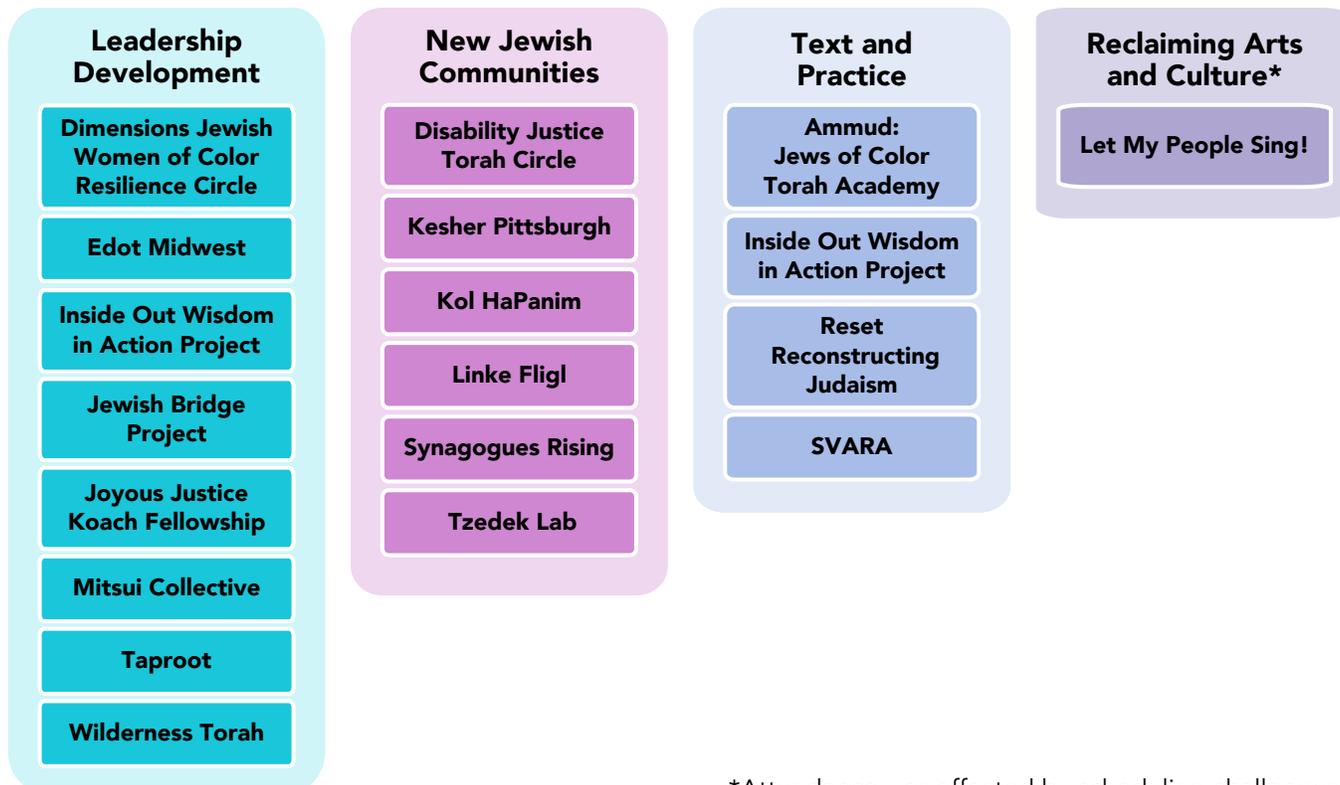
### Interviews

One leader was interviewed from each of the initiatives listed below. Interviews were also conducted with one program participant from each initiative (except Synagogues Rising, due to scheduling challenges).

1. Amnud: Jews of Color Torah Academy
2. Dimensions Jewish Women of Color Resilience Circle
3. Edot Midwest: Regional Jewish Diversity & Racial Justice Collaborative
4. Inside Out Wisdom in Action Project
5. Joyous Justice Koach Fellowship
6. Let My People Sing!
7. Linke Fligl: Queer Jewish Chicken Farm Cultural Organizing Project
8. Mitsui Collective: Justice & Embodied Jewish Practice Kollel
9. Rimonim Liturgy Project
10. Synagogues Rising: Centering Justice & Spiritual Practice
11. SVARA: A Traditionally Radical Yeshivah
12. Taproot: Community Ritualist Training Program
13. Tzedek Lab: Jewish National Multiracial Network of Practitioners

### Small Group Discussions

Leaders participated in small group discussions around the following four themes:



\*Attendance was affected by scheduling challenges

## Rise Up Stakeholders

**Project Director:** Claudia Horwitz

**Project Administrator:** Josh Bloom

**Leadership Team:**

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Rev. Jen Bailey, Founder and Executive Director, Faith Matters Network

Shifra Bronznick, Social Change Strategist in Residence, Auburn Seminary

Melissa Carter, Director, Global Spiritual Life, New York University

Zahara Zahav, Community Organizer, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice

**Project Advisor:**

Isaac Luria, Director of Voice, Creativity and Culture, Nathan Cummings Foundation

