

# **2009 REALITY Israel Experience for Teach For America Corps Members**

**Summary of Key Findings and Learnings  
March 2010**



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# INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2009, the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation (CLSFF) and the Samberg Family Foundation (SFF) launched the REALITY Israel Experience for Teach For America Corps Members, a pilot project with the Center for Leadership Initiatives, Inc., (CLI) and Teach For America (TFA) that brought 40 TFA corps members with affiliations and interests in the Jewish community to Israel for 10 days of touring, exploring the Israeli educational system, self-reflection and learning.

The project was built upon a recognition that many young Jews participate in secular service experiences but do not connect the motivations for that service with Jewish values or ideas. By recruiting participants from and working with TFA, we believed we could inspire corps members to embark on meaningful engagement with their personal Jewish journeys, as well as the Jewish community and Israel, and also provide the skills and motivation for corps members to be more effective in the classroom, more engaged TFA alumni and maintain a long-term dedication toward community involvement and service.

With this in mind, we are pleased to share the findings of two assessments of the *REALITY Israel Experience*.

1. The first is a survey of participants conducted shortly after the trip by Teach For America. The results were overwhelmingly positive, not only in participants' support of REALITY as an enjoyable and valuable experience, but also in the reported impact the trip had on participants' attitudes and beliefs. Included on pages 4-5 are the aggregated survey responses and select participant comments.
2. The second is a formal evaluation conducted by Dr. Melinda Fine, principal of Fine Consulting, which explored:
  - a. whether and how programs specifically tailored toward Jewish participants of secular service organizations might prompt these participants to connect their preexisting service commitments with core Jewish values and thus strengthen their affiliation with the Jewish community; and
  - b. the nature of the partnership between Teach For America, CLI and the foundations as a pilot of a relationship between secular service and Jewish organizations.

The report, summarized on pages 6-11<sup>1</sup>, was written and delivered by Dr. Fine, who brings 30 years of experience in strategic learning and evaluation to philanthropies and nonprofits. Dr. Fine specializes in the fields of service-learning, youth engagement and anti-bias education. Her key findings include:

- Participants reported powerful understandings and impacts of their experience, in keeping with partners' hopes and expectations;
- Participants enriched their understandings of key Jewish concepts (like *tikkun olam*) and felt more strongly identified with the Jewish community and Israel;
- The partnership between faith-based and non-faith-based organizations was highly productive, collaborative and successful; and
- Participants gained powerful insights about their leadership capacities and potential.

It is our hope that all of these findings will be used to inform future partnerships between identity groups and secular service organizations, as well as provide a model for engaging young Jews in service as a way to lead richer, more meaningfully Jewish lives.

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<sup>1</sup> A copy of the full report is available by contacting Roben Kantor at the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation at [rkantor@schusterman.org](mailto:rkantor@schusterman.org) or by calling 202-289-7000.

## PROJECT PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation (CLSFF) and the Samberg Family Foundation (SFF) are committed to strengthening young Jewish adults' connections to Jewish life; to fostering their understanding of service as a core Jewish value; to engaging young Jews in service opportunities; and to enhancing the education system in the United States. As a nexus of these efforts, the foundations are pursuing partnerships with secular service organizations, seeking to facilitate young adult participants in those organizations connecting their civic commitments to Jewish life.

Recognizing that young Jews are disproportionately represented in service opportunities hosted by non-faith-based organizations, and that many of these teens and young adults are unaffiliated with Jewish life, CLSFF and SFF are together exploring whether and how programs specifically tailored toward *Jewish* service participants of *non-faith-based* organizations might prompt these participants to *connect* their preexisting service commitments with core Jewish values and thus strengthen their affiliation with the Jewish community.

The REALITY (Renewal, Education, Action, Leadership, and Inspiration) Program is a pilot initiative in this effort. Jointly funded by CLSFF and the SFF (who are also co-commissioners of a formative study evaluating the project), the REALITY partnership involves the Center for Leadership Initiatives (CLI), a Jewish leadership-focused operating foundation of the Schusterman Philanthropic Network, and Teach For America (TFA), a non-faith-based national teacher corps. In its pilot year, REALITY brought 40 competitively selected TFA corps members to Israel for an immersive, short-term experiential learning experience in July 2009. Participants' experience with Judaism varied. Overall, selected participants' affiliation, identification and family/cultural connections with Judaism tended toward the less engaged end of the spectrum. Roughly half of the participants were alumni of Birthright Israel, and roughly half had not previously traveled to Israel.

During their 10-day, intensely packed, educationally focused experience, TFA corps members met with a range of individuals and organizations in Israeli society who worked on a variety of social, political and economic issues. Through a series of guided reflections, probing questions and textual studies, participants grappled with the themes of tikkun olam and educational inequity, among other topics. A considerable portion of time was devoted to participants' personally reflecting on their own motivations, capacities and social justice commitments, as well.

## POST-TRIP SURVEY RESULTS

Using questions based on the goals that the funders and Teach For America established for the trip, participants were asked about the feelings and insights prompted by the 10-day experience. Of the 40 trip participants, 38 provided the following the responses:

- **100% strongly agreed with: "I would recommend this trip to a friend."**

- **89% agreed or strongly agreed with: "I feel a greater connection to Teach For America as a result of this trip."**

- **97% agreed or strongly agreed with: "This trip enabled me to strengthen my convictions and commitments toward solving inequity in our society."**

*"I have come out of this experience with a deeper desire to 'fix' the social ills that not only plague American culture but the people of Israel as well. I've realized that there [are] particular themes and patterns that contribute to the injustices all over the world and it is breaking these cycles that call me to action."*

*"REALITY exposed us to gaps that exist in Israel...Gaining knowledge of these gaps actually strengthened my personal connection with Israel. Seeing Israel as a complex, multi-faceted and flawed society makes it a much more interesting and real place than the wonderful vacationland utopia it is often portrayed as."*

- **97% agreed or strongly agreed with: "This trip allowed me to reflect and rejuvenate in ways I would not have been able to do otherwise."**

*"I have been consumed in my classroom and often let that take over my life. I realized on this trip the extreme importance of continuing to learn and develop myself in order to increase my effectiveness as a teacher."*

*"This provided the most ideal atmosphere to fully reflect on my year in education. So often, I feel as if my days are so busy I never get time to sit and reflect. Even after the year was over, I felt like there was so much to process and debrief on. This trip allowed me to gather my thoughts and realize what things I was successful with and what things I can still work on! This trip really allowed me to focus on my style of leadership and really reflect on my strengths and weaknesses. Even more [than] that, I thought about what I want to accomplish after TFA and how I can best get there."*

*"I feel reinvigorated, reinvested, and reenergized to start my next year and to be thinking of the big picture as well to see what success I can have in different fields this year and as I start to shape the direction I will head in after my two year classroom commitment to TFA is completed."*

*"After completing my first year in the Teach for America Chicago Corps, I found myself drained of energy and not entirely, but somewhat, depleted of my initial vigor with which I entered the classroom day one of year one. After spending 10 days with people that share my passion and drive toward social change, I feel an invigorated sense of spirit. The togetherness of people with like minds empowers all of them to do great things, and I feel inspired to re-enter my classroom for year two."*

- **97% agreed or strongly agreed with: "This trip gave me important insights about how I can make change in the world through leadership."**

*"We learned just how many people can lead and that it is not necessarily about standing in front and being charismatic. The goal is to move people and make them feel important by giving them power as well. From the day of goat herding, we learned that you must lead from the back, which also supports the idea of dividing power and entrusting those who you lead."*

*"Reflecting on the kind of leadership I embody, I am humbled and more inspired to consult others, work cooperatively and solicit partners who will [complement] my leadership skills with their own in my fight against educational inequality. On a program with 40 accomplished people, the leadership dynamic was one that required flexibility, modesty and humility. I appreciated both the opportunity to spend 10 days with such amazing people as well as the chance to sharpen these values and skills as a leader."*

- **100% agreed or strongly agreed with: "My fellow participants enhanced the value I gained from this experience."**

- **91% agreed or strongly agreed with: "This trip has changed how I view my potential future involvement in Jewish life."**

- **100% agreed or strongly agreed with: "I feel a greater connection to Israel as a result of this trip."**

*"The REALITY Israel Experience brought me deeply closer to my Judaism as well as my commitment to the corps. Talking to the individuals who dream of a 'Teach Israel' allowed me to realize how groundbreaking Teach For America is. The most profound quality being the immense unity within the program throughout the nation. The ability to unite leaders to a common goal is mind-boggling and something I did not notice as much in Israel. We met a number of inspiring activists and groups whose steps toward social change are undeniable. However, I could not shake the feeling that none of these groups were truly united...Imagine the endless possibilities for the state of Israel if such a situation were to arise."*

- **100% agreed or strongly agreed with: "I have a greater understanding and appreciation for social justice as an inherent Jewish value as a result of this trip."**

*"Before this trip, I would never have connected my work toward equity (particularly through TFA) with my religion. However, over the past 10 days, I have seen the many ways in which Judaism and TFA are linked...In a sense, recognizing that my TFA work and my Judaism are linked makes me want to become more active in my Judaism."*

*"Hearing Avraham [Infeld] speak during the middle of the trip made me feel the most Jewish I have ever felt...I do not feel excluded because I am not a religious Jew."*

*"This trip has made me realize that I have an immensely strong devotion to Judaism, and that my commitment to tikkun olam, making the world a better place than how I found it not just for Jews but for the world, is something that I will continue to work on for the rest of the my life."*

*"I realize now that 'justice' is a part of my Jewish identity. It has been the foundation of my upbringing and a cornerstone of my beliefs since I was born. As a member of the Jewish people, I am called to leave the world better that I found it. Until Avraham [Infeld] shared his speech about leadership and being Jewish, I never realized that my deep desire to make [the] world a better place was part of my Jewish self. Making this connection has given me not only a better understanding of the origins of my beliefs but also a better sense of the unity and bond I have with the Jewish collective."*

# SUMMARY OF REALITY PILOT PROGRAM AND PARTNERSHIP EVALUATION REPORT

## I. RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative, formative study of the REALITY pilot program was conducted by Melinda Fine, Ed.D., Principal of Fine Consulting. Key research questions include:

- What are partners' key goals for the REALITY program and the partnership collaboration?
- What accounts for perceived implementation strengths and challenges?
- What are participants' key understandings and impacts?

Interviews were conducted with program partners at the beginning, middle and end of the pilot project period, as well as with a sample of corps members at the summer trip's conclusion. Material review provided supplemental background context. Data was coded thematically in successive waves over the course of the program year and then again holistically at the project's completion, according to the major research questions of the study.

## II. KEY FINDINGS

### Program Model

#### Successful program elements:

##### *Features of trip itinerary/implementation*

- Highly creative itinerary that exposed participants to unusual speakers and activities; participants embraced their distinctive, "once-in-a-lifetime" opportunity
- Resonant and relevant activities and speakers (including peers) enabling easy transference to corps members' core commitments back home (e.g., Youth Renewal Fund, Teach for All)
- Interactive, experiential and affective-oriented learning opportunities (sheep-herding activity, Bema'aglei Tzedek, Dinner in the Dark), which spoke to corps members' hearts as well as their minds
- Provocative subject matter enabling challenging (i.e., not surface-level) conversations (e.g., about the Arab-Israeli conflict)
- Exposure to inspirational figures who share corps members' life commitments and values and to whom corps members aspire and look up (e.g., Lynn Schusterman, Avraham Infeld)
- Judicious use of trip staff who were "of" the corps member community (i.e., TFA alumni themselves), and thus able to bridge TFA and Israeli context (Andrew Mandel, Neil Spears, Yamit Taragon)
- Smooth logistics that did not detract from substantive program time

##### *Features of trip pedagogy*

- Off-site, allowing for intensive reflection far away from daily life
- Time-limited, allowing for full immersion, removed from other commitments
- Scaffolded reflection opportunities (small dialogue groups, journaling, one-on-one conversations, text-based studies, formal and informal dialogue with peers), allowing for various levels of personal reflection, through multiple modalities, over time
- Scaffolded opportunities through which corps members could increasingly assume leadership and responsibility to lead discrete parts of the trip/group (Shabbat dinner, reflection groups, committees at trip end)

- Palpable tone of respect and “good treatment,” making corps members feel special and honored, and building their sense of themselves as leaders and change agents

#### *Features of trip composition and planning*

- Judiciously selected participant sample, vetted, reviewed and analyzed by program planners, so that trip supports could be tailored to their needs and interests
- Homogeneous participant sample with shared interests, commitments and values, thus allowing for depth of conversation, candid exchange and building of trust
- High performing, responsible and highly self-initiating participant group

#### Program elements in need of further development:

##### *Reflection activities:*

- Though interviewed corps members expressed feeling productively challenged by the amount and the level of reflection they engaged in throughout the trip, some partners suggested that more frequent and more rigorous reflection exercises might have been feasible to achieve, given the caliber of the particular participant group.

##### *Pre-program supports:*

- Had corps members been able to receive the *Sourcebook* and/or other basic background information earlier on, space would have been “freed up” on the trip itself to go a bit deeper and a bit faster, regarding certain issues and content covered.
- Several participants noted that discussions about the Arab-Israeli conflict, in particular, might have been helped by providing a richer diversity of reading materials (representing different points of view and historical information).
- Others requested background information/links to organizations they would meet with; bios of key speakers; key educational and/or literary texts; and guiding questions and/or prompts for reflection topics to consider in advance of the trip.

##### *Post-program components:*

Service-learning research in both secular and Jewish contexts suggests that short-term, immersive learning experiences, however powerful, can only go so far: to sustain learning and ensure lasting impact, short-term experiences must be augmented with ongoing supports. This finding is consistent with what we know about what it takes for any educational intervention to “stick.”

Not surprisingly, then, corps members sought out ways to extend their experience at the trip’s end, spontaneously organizing themselves into committees to augment their learning and to sustain their relationships with one another. Now that the pilot trip is over, CLSFF and SFF are exploring ways to sustain and augment participants’ experience as well —entering into conversations with its organizational partners toward these ends and entertaining ideas corps member themselves are putting forward. To date, the foundations have committed themselves to providing financial stipends to trip members to participate in other Jewish gatherings and hosting reunion activities for trip participants at select TFA-sponsored alumni gatherings.

### **Partnership Collaboration**

Individuals interviewed for the study were uniformly positive about the spirit of collaboration that characterized the multi-partner partnership. Partners shared the perception that the key partner organizations worked exceptionally well together and succeeded in crafting an intervention that brought all of their best thinking to the table. The roles and responsibilities of partner organizations shifted considerably over the course of the pilot project, with TFA increasingly assuming an enhanced and integral role in program conceptualization and operation (albeit still secondary to CLI in this regard). TFA’s heightened engagement was heartily welcomed by

CLSFF, SFF and CLI. For its part, CLI creatively and tirelessly succeeded in adapting and re-adapting its programmatic themes and associated activities/speakers, seeking always to align them with TFA’s core concerns (as well as those of the foundations) in order to maximize learning opportunities for selected participants.

#### Successful partnership elements

- Transparency and candidness in communication among partners
- Genuine collaborative spirit: cooperative, considerate, respectful
- Self-initiating mentality on the part of all partners balanced by a careful attention to “not stepping on anybody’s toes”
- Each partner bringing their expertise to the table and each appreciating what the other had to offer: generosity of funders (CLSFF/SFF); volunteer labor and passion of constituency organization (TFA); creativity and responsiveness of trip developer (CLI)
- Flexibility and adaptability of program itinerary, thus accommodating and integrating TFA’s chief interests and concerns
- Enhanced programmatic engagement of TFA, ensuring meaningful resonance with participants—all programmatic partners engaged in “meaning-making,” not just operational issues
- Willingness of TFA to make its organizational culture, values and priorities understood and accessible to itinerary planner, so activities/educational inputs could reflect TFA discourse and culture
- Dedicated, meaningful work contributions provided by each partner organization
- Israel-based contacts provided by Schusterman Foundation Israel and SFF
- Smooth communication, operational and logistical support provided by convener (CLSFF)

#### Aspects that require further attention

- Even clearer up-front articulation about expectations for who does what organizationally, particularly earlier on in project planning
- More responsibility delineation concerning program elements that fall outside of the immersive trip experience (pre- and post-trip supports)
- Clarification of CLSFF’s role as a *convener* (i.e., defining the rights and responsibilities of the convening function and securing shared agreement from all partners)
- More engagement of constituency organization (e.g., TFA) in micro details of programmatic planning to ensure positive and resonant educational experiences for participants

### **Participants’ Understandings and Perceived Impacts**

Participants in the interview sample were of one mind in feeling that the REALITY trip had provided the experience they’d hoped for; indeed, nearly all felt their expectations had been surpassed. Participants’ top-line takeaways were one and the same with the themes designated as essential by the foundations. Specifically, participants described the experience as “transformative,” “remarkable” and “life-changing” and did so precisely because it allowed them to engage deeply with questions about their Jewish identity and their civic responsibilities. While participants certainly anticipated opportunities to engage with Jewish and civic topics on their trip—indeed, their desire to engage with these topics propelled them to apply for the trip in the first place—it was the depth and quality of their engagement that they found so deeply satisfying and that far exceeded their expectations.

Generally speaking, participants attributed the depth of their reflection, and the trip’s consequential impact, to two factors: the quality of their peer community and the inspirational power of particular individuals with whom they interacted.

Peer community: Most participants expressed feeling energized, excited, challenged and, at times, even a bit intimidated by their fellow peers on the trip. All

*“Being with peers who share my commitments and obligations for teaching was inspiring, but having conversations with them about how being Jewish fits into that and shapes that was really amazing.”*

appreciated the opportunity to reflect candidly with others who shared their commitment to education *and* their affiliation with the Jewish community (though differences among these affiliations caused some awkwardness for some participants, as noted below). Some expressed a deep hunger for these types of conversations and expressed a commitment to sustaining them with corps member participants and/or other Jewish young adults after the trip.

*“Meeting Lynn Schusterman and hearing Avraham Infeld speak were both really formative experiences. They strengthened my sense of who I am: living my life committed to social justice is being Jewish.”*

Inspiring individuals and organizations: Participants were also deeply moved by particular individuals and/or organizations with whom they met and whose stories/key messages resonated with their own personal and professional interests, life experiences and dilemmas.

**Connections to the Jewish community:** As already noted, one of primary goals of REALITY’s funders is to strengthen young Jewish adults’ connections to the Jewish community; in this objective, the program was resoundingly successful. Interviews with corps member participants suggest four principle ways the trip experience helped to clarify and/or strengthen various dimensions of connection to the Jewish community.

Legitimizing membership: Several corps members expressed a sense of validation and legitimation in their Jewish identity as a result of their trip experience. These members felt a new sense of belonging to the Jewish community—a community they experienced as suddenly more inclusive and with which they identified in new ways. Many found it relieving to be granted “permission” to be included in the Jewish community for reasons *other* than religious doctrine—i.e., for shared cultural heritage, shared secular values, shared history, etc.

*“[Avraham Infeld] painted a picture for me of how I am every bit as Jewish as someone who is an Orthodox Jew. It was very relieving and legitimating.”*

*“For the past eight years I haven’t been very connected to my faith. Through this trip, I’ve made a commitment: when I get back to America, I will be back in touch with the Jewish values my family raised me with; I will go to Friday night Shabbat services; I will join a Jewish organization to extend my service to the community; and I will raise a Jewish family in the future.”*

Strengthening cultural and/or religious commitments: A somewhat smaller group of participants expressed a heightened sense of connection to religious observance because of their experience. For some, the trip revived religious or cultural practices they’d observed at earlier points in their lives; for others, it catalyzed a new desire to commit to these practices.

Catalyzing a critical engagement with Israel: Fully half of the 40-member participant group had been to Israel before REALITY, under the auspices of a Birthright trip. It is consequently not unfair to assume that some portion of participants felt a strong connection to the State of Israel; indeed, developing and/or reconnecting with Israel was cited as a motivation for applying to the REALITY program in the first place. Interestingly, however, most trip members expressed that their connection to Israel became more complex, more nuanced and indeed richer because of their critical exploration of various social inequities in Israeli society over their 10 days in the country.

*“I want to commit myself to Israel, but I want to tailor my work in Israel toward working toward social justice in Israel. Of course there’s injustice everywhere in the world, but it feels different when it’s carried out in my name, as a Jew. I feel a commitment to working to change that injustice because I want to make sure that Israel represents my Jewish values to the world well.”*

Embracing tikkun olam: In seeking to strengthen young adults’ affiliation with the Jewish community, one of CLSFF’s and SFF’s core objectives is to strengthen young Jews’ commitment to service—and furthermore, to

*“Before the trip, I felt that being Jewish was about how much you go to synagogue. I don’t do that much, so while Judaism is important to me, I’ve always questioned how I fit in and where I belong. This trip gave me an affirming and different way to understand that I’m really, deeply Jewish. I now feel a profound affirmation of my Jewish identity as expressed through my enaqagement with tikkun olam.”*

strengthen their recognition that service is a core Jewish value. In this respect, the REALITY program also appears to be resoundingly successful.

Some corps members joined the REALITY program already aware that their service commitments (TFA and other voluntary service commitments in their lives) were expressions of Jewish values; indeed, they stated this understanding in their application materials. For these

corps members, the REALITY trip appeared to reaffirm their personal justice commitments, providing them with rich examples of how their personal life choices were echoed in Jewish history and tradition.

A greater number of corps members (at least as far as the interview sample is concerned) were seemingly *new* to the concept of tikkun olam. These participants were either unfamiliar with the concept altogether before the trip, or they had simply failed to connect it to their personal commitment to work for social change. For these trip participants, it was tremendously powerful to recognize that this fundamental Jewish value was in sync with their personal life (and work) commitment. This synergy gave them a new sense of “belonging” to the Jewish community—one that seemed to heighten their commitment to the Jewish community and appeared to underscore their commitment to doing social justice work.

*“A guest at Lynn Schusterman’s house said that it’s no coincidence that CLSFF is working with TFA because the values of TFA and Judaism are the same, and I realized—he’s right! It makes perfect sense that TFA would be something I’d want to do because the values I was taught in Friday night service are that every deed counts. This is the very meaning of tikkun olam! I can repair a school, I can repair a community, by working with the children in my classroom. The connection was made by this man that night and I was blown away by it. It was a new idea to me, but it clicked and made perfect sense!”*

**Future intentions regarding the Jewish Community:** Corps members returned from the REALITY trip with ambitious plans for how they would sustain and augment their intensive learning experience. As noted earlier, several action committees were organized by corps members themselves near the trip’s end: one focused on building knowledge of Israel; another on strengthening social connections among group members; a third on building Jewish identity; and a fourth on supporting the development of future REALITY trips. Voluntary action on these committees is well underway now that corps members have returned and resumed their busy lives. All committees share a common purpose: to extend learning beyond the limited 10-day experience, sustain community among like-minded peers and deepen the reflection that seemed so critical and enriching to enabling effective change work.

Corps members’ expressed intentions for engaging with the extended Jewish community include a range of anticipated cultural, religious, social and community practices. These include:

- Studying Hebrew
- Practicing Shabbat (or some modified, dedicated space for weekly reflection)
- Joining a local congregation, teaching Hebrew school, reconnecting with a childhood congregation, engaging with youth programming at a local synagogue
- Seeking out and connecting to the Jewish community in one’s teaching locale
- Learning about Jewish holidays, rituals and customs
- Delving more deeply into the news about Israel—reading multiple sources, critiquing media portrayals and seeking out multiple points of view
- Delving more deeply into the Arab/Israeli conflict—joining a discussion group, seeking out models for peaceful resolutions to the conflict
- Pursuing ways to support Teach for All

- Returning to Israel to do voluntary service, teaching in Israel, working with a justice-oriented organization in Israel
- Sustaining and deepening relationships with REALITY trip corps members

**Leadership capacity:** When asked explicitly whether (and how) the REALITY trip had influenced their understandings of leadership, participants tended to identify one of three concepts:

*“I’m the only person in my family and peer group back home that is a mover and a shaker, so I really identified with the pioneer women we heard about at that kibbutz. I was moved by their strength and ability to leave their families and take on that nontraditional role. It made me think, I’m not crazy, I’m not the only one who is so passionate about fighting injustice and doing these things, regardless of what my family and my friends think.”*

First, leadership does not always mean being out in front of others—often a good leader “leads” from the back or the side, moving others forward by guiding them, gently and indirectly, from various vantage points. Participants cited their “sheep-herding activity” as the source of this insight—an activity that was enthusiastically remarked upon by all interviewees. Corps members readily applied this insight to their classroom experience, noting that teaching requires leading students from a variety of positions (literally and figuratively) in order to help students succeed.

Second, leadership is a collaborative activity. While everyone has leadership strengths, no one has all the necessary leadership strengths. One must consequently surround oneself with others who can complement one’s strengths and weaknesses. Interviewees credited this insight to their conversation with Avraham Infeld, which prompted many to think about how they might better cultivate the leadership strengths of their students.

Third, leadership often means making more room for others. Listening rather than speaking is a key leadership habit—one corps members acknowledged they must work harder to develop in themselves. Some realized this by default, when they felt intimidated to speak up in front of their high-achieving peers and realized inadvertently the benefits of listening to others. When these participants finally *did* find their voice, they realized they garnered respect by more inclusively incorporating others’ perspectives into their own comments.

**Future intentions regarding civic commitments:** According to Teach For America’s Alumni Social Impact Report,<sup>2</sup> over 90 percent of corps member alums continue to support TFA’s mission after completing their teaching service through their career choices, philanthropy, volunteerism or graduate study, and more than two-thirds choose to remain full-time in the field of education. In this context, it is not surprising to find that all interviewees indicated an intent to continue some sort of service work after their REALITY trip (and corps service period). Corps members came to the REALITY program dedicated to public service (to varying degrees, of course); corps members’ commitment to social justice work thus cannot be attributed to their REALITY experience. However, the REALITY program arguably can be credited with contributing to participants’ service commitments by re-energizing their will to civically participate; enriching their understanding of key civic concepts (like what constitutes effective leadership); and deepening the well from which they draw their inspiration to engage (by linking their personal/professional motivations to their cultural/religious values).

When asked whether and how they intended to engage in tikkun olam-focused activities in the future (including but not restricted to their corps service), participants responses included mention of the following types of activities: completing corps service; continuing classroom teaching (beyond the corps commitment period); pursuing a graduate degree in a social policy-related subject (e.g., education and social change; public interest law; urban problems; public policy and education); and working in a refugee camp in Asia. Several corps members noted an intention to engage in service and/or activism-related work on behalf of Israel: supporting Teach for All, returning to Israel to teach and joining organizations to address the Arab-Israeli conflict.

<sup>2</sup> The TFA Alumni Social Impact Report is publicly available on the TFA website ([www.teachforamerica.org](http://www.teachforamerica.org)).

## CONCLUSION

As both the post-trip survey and the summary of the evaluation suggest, the REALITY Israel Experience for Teach For America Corps Members can be seen as a resounding success in its pilot year. While immediate post-trip perceptions cannot of course guarantee the program's enduring influence on participants' lives, the strength of corps members' remarks certainly suggests the program was immediately successful in providing a powerful experience in which young adults identified with Jewish life and linked their commitment to civically engage to the Jewish value of tikkun olam.

With this success in mind, CLSFF, SFF, CLI and TFA have all signed on for a second REALITY trip, set to take place in July 2010 with 47 participants. Mindful of the still-evolving nature of the program, all partners are using the post-trip survey and the pilot study as a formative inquiry to ascertain perceived strengths and challenges of the planning process; surface issues that might aid in developing future program components; and determine trip value and preliminary impacts (as perceived immediately following the trip) by corps member participants. The goal is to support development of a more robust program model in year two.

Furthermore, while analysis of REALITY's strengths and challenges are of course based on a particular constellation of partners—CLSFF, SFF, CLI, TFA—and perceived outcomes for participants are based on the experience of TFA's particular high-performing corps member constituents, it stands to reason that many of the program and partnership elements described in this report are likely to hold with other partnership configurations. Indeed, whatever the constellation of organizations involved, ingredients for program success are likely to include: intentional, meaning-oriented interventions that resonate for participants; dynamic and inspiring speakers; stimulating peers; and crafting and management by organizations who work well together, with well defined roles, compatible responsibilities and synergistically aligned goals.

By shedding light on factors that appear to enable and constrain successful collaboration with a secular partner—based on CLSFF's and SFF's singular experience with TFA—we hope to begin developing a model for partnerships with non-faith-based organizations that have the potential to foster Jewish service participants' connection to the Jewish community and engagement with tikkun olam.