

Jewish Poverty Challenge, Year Two:
A Project of the NJHSA Center for Innovation and Research
Program Innovation in the Face of a Pandemic
Request for Proposals

Description

Overnight, COVID-19 has thrown NJHSA member agencies and our society in general in a state of uncertainty and change. On an almost daily basis, agencies have to reflect on and question everything. Who is their client? What are the client's needs today, in a week, a month, a year? Who funds the agency today? Who will fund the agency next month or next year?

At the same time, however, most agencies find themselves in an almost impossible situation. As busy and overcommitted as the agency was before the pandemic, the agency is now busier. Operating at a pace that threatens to burn out employees and volunteers, the agency must somehow find the time to challenge core assumptions, engage in new partnerships, and find new sources of funding all while developing more efficient and effective ways to serve current and new clients.

Failure to innovate now may threaten an agency's existence, with potentially devastating consequences for the health and well-being of its increasingly vulnerable clientele. To address these challenges, the agency has little choice. Now is the time to innovate.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, we no longer have the luxury of the status quo. Normally, a decline into a recession takes place over a 6-month period. Because of the pandemic, this recession arrived faster than any in modern history. The implications are overwhelming and potentially paralyzing. It would be easy to get stuck in the weeds of survival -- heads down to deal with the crisis of today, but to do so could have catastrophic consequences for our agencies and our clients. We must anticipate the path and implications of the recession. To survive as organizations, and ensure our clients survive and thrive, we must rethink and redesign products and services, and adjust our assumptions and organization models.

The social and economic environments are chaotic as are the circumstances faced by most agencies. There is no right path or right answer. The best we can do is continuously think, problem solve, plan and adjust. We face great challenge and great opportunity.

The Program

To accommodate the rapid pace of service responses developed by NJHSA member agencies in a short amount of time and the critical need to innovate, the Network's Center for Innovation and Research has modified the NJHSA Jewish Poverty Challenge program in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Having administered an Intensive Incubation Program in Year One with support provided to three-member agency teams (JFS Columbus, JFCS of Greater Philadelphia and JFS Detroit, JVS Human Services Detroit and Yad Ezra), the Jewish Poverty Challenge will be restructured in Year Two to provide assistance to a much larger number of agencies. Additionally, the workload and related assistance will be more flexible. All NJHSA member agencies will be able to access relevant content in the form of webinars, shared content and a social innovation toolkit. In addition, up to ten (10) agencies will have the opportunity to qualify for monthly one-on-one assistance and guidance. In all cases, Year Two of the NJHSA Jewish Poverty Challenge will help NJHSA member agencies better analyze the marketplace, launch and manage solutions, and implement sustainability measures for success to address the many dynamics associated with responding to Jewish Poverty. The content will include, but not be limited to the following:

1. Reckoning with Uncertainty
2. Assessing the Value Delivery System
3. Crafting or Re-crafting Your Intervention(s)
4. Risk Factors & Competitive Landscape
5. Talking Scale
6. Business & Service Model

NJHSA has contracted with the team at [Start Co.](#) to deliver the content via monthly webinars, blogs, educational content and access to a social innovation toolkit.

Additionally, the ten (10) agencies selected to receive individualized, one-on-one support will also benefit from the following:

1. Monthly sessions to customize content and apply the content to the agencies' current activities, strategies, and concepts. Strategies can include client diversification targets, new technologies and innovations, new client engagement tools, operational processes and systems, volunteer and donor pipelines, data solutions, etc.
2. Pitch development - Development and articulation of core value propositions designed to help create better internal and funder alignment.

3. Level set assessment meetings - Creating and continuing to maintain alignment with goals and objectives over the 6-month period.

Evaluation Criteria

In selecting the 10 agencies entitled to receive individualized, one-on-one support, NJHSA wishes to challenge its agencies to create high impact and sustainable solutions to poverty. Through the Jewish Poverty Challenge, NJHSA is seeking solutions applicable to all vulnerable populations but will focus on those that take into account nuances and challenges unique to Jewish clients. More specifically, to be eligible for selection, at least 50% of the targeted clients (individuals or families) should be members of the Jewish community. The applications need not focus on completely new / start-up services or programs. Submissions can also focus on the enhancement or scaling of existing approaches, although in the case of existing approaches, selection will depend in large part on the potential for dramatically increased and sustainable impact. Solutions tailored to or seeking to adapt to poverty as impacted by the pandemic will be heavily favored.

Submissions will be judged based on the responses to three core categories:

1. The Idea- Addressing severe pain points, preferably Pandemic related through practical and achievable solutions.
2. The Team- The ability and willingness of the agency to commit human resources to the effort – the more engagement by a diverse team the better.
3. Feasibility- Does your agency have the ability to pursue what it creates?
4. Jewish community impact – the degree to which the idea helps the agency to achieve greater impact in its responses to the dynamics of Jewish poverty.

It is important to note that the incubation process will challenge many of the assumptions, preconceptions and approaches applicants bring to the process. The applications are not expected to include fully developed concepts or business models. When appropriate, applications should identify those aspects of the idea or concept you hope to test, refine or develop in the course of the incubation process.

Timing

1. Application Period
 - a. Commences June 18, 2020 and ends August 1, 2020.
2. Information Session (online)
 - a. NJHSA and Start Co. will host a one-hour information session on July 8, 2020 at 1pm EDT. NJHSA and Start Co. will publish on the Network's web site the answers to questions raised during these sessions.
3. FAQs
 - a. As noted, applicants can ask questions during the information session and NJHSA/Start Co. will make the answers available to all applicants.
 - b. Also, applicants may submit their questions in writing by sending an email to [Reuben Rotman](#) at NJHSA. The question period will end at the close of business on July 15, 2020.

Evaluation

1. Phase I – Written Application Review – August 1-28, 2020
 - a. NJHSA will form an evaluation committee (the “Evaluation Committee”) consisting of Start Co. and the NJHSA’s Grants & Opportunities Committee, a Committee of the NJHSA Board of Directors.
 - b. The Evaluation Committee will review the applications and submit their results by August 28, 2020.
2. Phase II – Questions – August 1-28, 2020
 - a. If the Evaluation Committee has questions, it may submit those questions to the applicant in writing. The Committee may also choose to engage in a short conversation with an applicant.
 - b. The Evaluation Committee will not engage in an interview with or submit questions to all applicants who apply. It will engage with an applicant only if it feels the discussion or questions would be helpful to its evaluation.
 - c. Based on a combination of application review, follow up questions and interviews, the Evaluation Committee will select up to 10 applicants for immediate participation in the intensive incubation program. Start Co. expects to announce the selections during the first week of September 2020.

Please fully complete the [Jewish Poverty Application](#).