



A Community of Jewish Educators in Cleveland

M² Cleveland Educator Cohort Final Evaluation Report

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M² COMMUNITY EDUCATOR COHORTS

The M² Community Educator Cohorts is an initiative that brings local Jewish educators together for the purpose of equipping them with the current and innovative educational methods and tools for creating meaningful Jewish experiences. Fellows represent institutions across their regional community that vary widely in religious observance and background – including camps, schools, teen and student organizations, synagogues, cultural and grassroots organizations, etc.

This evaluation report focuses on the Cleveland Educator Cohort. The report includes data collected from the Cohort's start in October 2023 through the Cohort's end point in May 2025.

The cohort assembled 16 diverse Jewish educators, including: 67% working with teens, 50% engaging elementary age children and families and educators from day schools, synagogues, JCCs, camps, teen organizations, community agencies.

The Community Cohort included:

- ❖ **Three Immersive Seminars** served as intensive learning opportunities for M²'s core approach and frameworks for working in experiential Jewish education. April 2024 introduced foundational concepts to values-centered education, November 2024 deepened understanding of educational methodologies, and May 2025 focused on educational processing and meaning making.
- ❖ **Regular Community of Practice Gatherings** provided bridges between seminars for practicing skills, troubleshooting challenges, and maintaining cohort connection.
- ❖ **Personalized Mentorship** paired participants with experienced M² educators for individualized support and guidance.
- ❖ **The Israel Trip** (February 2025) immersed participants in week-long intensive experience, exposing them to application of M² approach to experiential education, while deepening cohort relationships.
- ❖ **The Ani Ma'amin Capstone Project** challenged participants to articulate their personal educational philosophy and professional mission.

Evaluation Framework

- ❖ **Longitudinal Survey Data** tracked development across baseline (September 2023), post-seminar surveys, including post-Seminar 3 survey, which also serves as the final survey. 11 participants answered both the start and final survey and are included in the start to end of program tables shown in this report.
- ❖ **Qualitative Research** included interviews with six Cleveland participants in May/June 2024 and May/June 2025, plus two Jerusalem focus groups conducted in February 2025.

TOP LEVEL FINDINGS (EXECUTIVE SUMMARY)

Growth in Professional Competence and Identity

Understanding: Participants report substantial growth in their understanding of experiential Jewish education, with those reporting "excellent understanding" increasing from 9% to 55% - a 46-percentage point improvement. 91% report at least a "good understanding" by program's end.

Articulation: The ability to articulate one's motivations for working in Jewish education increases from 27% to 67% answering "to a very great extent," by the end of program, with all reporting impact.

Career: The program catalyzed shifts in professional self-perception. At the end of Seminar three, 91% report that they view Jewish education as their chosen career, up from 64% at program's start. 72% reported that the Community Cohort experience influencing their thinking about their career in Jewish education "to great extent" or "very great extent."

Ability to Apply Learning: Two groups emerge – "Advanced Practitioners" who seamlessly integrate M² methodologies into their work, and "Developing Practitioners" who recognize value but require ongoing support.

Building Professional Community

Transformative Connection: Participants' sense of connection to other Jewish educators in Cleveland increases substantially, with 73% feeling "very greatly" connected by program end compared to 0% at start. All report positive impact, many using language that speaks of a transformative experience.

Collaboration, Community and Pride: Participants report extensive collaboration resulting from the seminar, and a feeling of professional community and pride of profession. The Community Cohort achieved this result by:

1. Enabling **shared processing** of professional challenges,
2. **Rotating host sites**
3. **Structured peer learning** using values-based activities,
4. **Ongoing connection** through the cohort's online discussion group.
5. The February 2025 **Israel trip** in particular is cited as a peak experience, moving the cohort from "a professional development experience" to "a tightly knitted professional community."

Areas for Improving the Community Cohort Model

Participants desire stronger integration between program components, more hands-on practice opportunities, and differentiated support based on professional experience levels. They also desire continued interaction with the cohort going forward and ongoing professional development opportunities with M².

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES

Growth in Understanding of Experiential Education

Participants report substantial professional growth across 20 months, showing a 46-percentage point increase in those reporting an "excellent understanding" of experiential Jewish education by the end of the program.

In terms of your understanding of the practice of experiential Jewish education, which of the following statements best describe you?

	Program Start	Program End	Change
Excellent understanding	9%	55%	+46
Good understanding	64%	36%	-28
Some understanding	27%	9%	-18
No understanding	0%	0%	0
Total	100%	100%	

Ability to Articulate Professional Motivation and Vision

Comparing responses at the Cohort's start to end shows significant increases at the level of "to a very great extent" in participants' feeling they are able to express their educational mission and professional motivations. All participants report positive impact.

Professional Articulation Measures – "very great extent"	Start	End	Change
I have thought about my educational vision in the past year	9%	64%	+53
I feel able to clarify my educational vision and values at this point in time	18%	64%	+46
I have thought about my motivations to work as a Jewish educator in the past year	27%	73%	+46
I am able to articulate my motivations to work in Jewish education	27%	64%	+37

Career Perspective Shifts

The program inspired significant changes in how participants perceive their professional identities. By the conclusion of the final seminar, 91% reported viewing Jewish education as their chosen career, a notable increase from 64% at the outset. For those who change, although they initially saw their roles—perhaps as a rabbi or camp director—as including elements of Jewish education, it was only through the program that Jewish education came to be recognized as the central focus of their professional lives.

Which of the following best describes your work as a Jewish educator

	Program Start	Program End	Change
I view Jewish education as my chosen career	64%	91%	27
I currently work as a Jewish educator but do not view it as a career choice	9%	9%	0
My current work is not in Jewish education	0%	0%	0
Other, please elaborate	27%	0%	-27
Total	100%	100%	

72% report the Community Cohort experience having influenced how they think about their career in Jewish education "to great extent" or "very great extent." For example, in an interview, one junior educator reported discovering her professional identity.

"I was trying to figure out now what? And I decided that I really am interested more in the Jewish education piece."

Experienced educators also report refining their understanding of their chosen profession:

"I think it has secured my identity as a Talmud teacher. I feel much more secure that this is what I'm supposed to be doing."

The Ability to Apply Learning

The evaluation shows two distinct groups.

- ❖ **Advanced Practitioners** demonstrated successful transition from learning to confident application, integrating M² methodologies seamlessly.
- ❖ **Developing Practitioners** recognize the importance of experiential Jewish education but need ongoing support for implementing in a systematic and sustainable fashion. One noted: *"M² focuses a lot on the theoretical and less on the practical. I would like more personal and practical applications."*

COMMUNITY BUILDING AND NETWORK DEVELOPMENT

Network Growth

Participants report a dramatic increase in their professional connection to Cleveland's Jewish educator community. The most striking change occurred at the level of deepest connection, with 73% reporting feeling connected to "a very great extent" by program's end, compared to 0% at start.

To what extent do you currently feel connected to a cohort of Jewish educators in Cleveland?

	Program Start	Program End	Change
Very great extent	0%	73%	+73%
Great extent	45%	18%	-27%
An extent	36%	0%	-36%
Small extent	18%	9%	-9%
	100%	100%	

Creating a Diverse Professional Community

M² intentionally assembled a diverse cohort across denominational orientations, career stages, institutional affiliations. One participant reflected:

"The intentionality of who is in the cohort is definitely something I have not seen in other programs. The group is well-rounded and diverse across ages, Jewish identities, and professional experience levels."

The cohort brought together Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and community organization educators, most of whom had little intensive prior contact, if at all. One Reform educator observed:

"Things are very siloed in the sense that the Reform movement does things together very well. We have nothing to do with the Orthodox or Modern Orthodox communities."

Cross-Institutional Collaboration

Over half of participants (55%) developed educational initiatives with other Cleveland educators, with the vast majority of these collaborations (83%) occurring across different denominational orientations. Specific examples illustrate the depth and diversity of these partnerships.

- ❖ An Orthodox educator collaborated with a community center on "a pride challah bake," describing the benefit as gaining access to *"a constituency that I would not normally have access to,"* while the others noted how the diverse group enjoyed the educator's *"powerful insights into the mitzvah of challah."*
- ❖ Another collaboration involved creating "an experiential Women and girl's retreat" between an educator from a community educational institute and a synagogue professional, representing partnership between community organizations and congregational settings using M² values frameworks.

- ❖ Additionally, ongoing youth programming partnerships emerged, with one participant noting:

"I have worked more closely with two of my colleagues who also work with teens and youth in various capacities. I feel closer to the community educational program arms as a result."

These examples demonstrate how the program broke down institutional silos, enabling participants to move beyond their traditional denominational boundaries. The result is educational programming that leverages diverse expertise and reaches new constituencies across Cleveland's Jewish community. One educator explained:

"I can call any one of them and say, 'Hey, I'm thinking of something. Do you have some ideas?' They are always happy to meet and share."

Strategies for Building Professional Community

The following are the elements of the professional community building process that stand out:

1. **Opportunities for personal sharing** were important for developing empathy and trust. This proved particularly powerful post October 7th, when the cohort provided a critical safe space for navigating complex Israel/Zionism personal and professional challenges. One participant reflected:

"We are realizing that we have a lot in common, even when our institutions approach things very differently."

2. **Rotating host sites** for the Community of Practice meetings enabled systematic exposure to Cleveland's diverse educational landscape. Monthly meetings at different institutions gave unprecedented access to colleagues' work environments.

"I thought the Community of Practice meeting at my school was spectacular. These are not folks that necessarily would ever walk into our Jewish day school."

3. **Structured peer learning with a focus on Jewish values** provided a common experience and shared vocabulary transcending denominational differences. M² methodology created neutral ground for educational design collaboration using the same educational framework. The shared language became a bridge for professional communication across organizational and denominational boundaries. The following are two examples, one is evidence of colleagues who already worked together deepening their professional relationship, the other shows the contribution to participants' ability to communicate with one another as educational professionals.

"We already worked together, but now we think of it from a different perspective. The cohort gave us a shared language."

"The vocabulary is something I didn't realize I needed. Now I can explain what I'm doing. Like, I can say, 'This is experiential education,' or 'We're using a polarity model here,' and people get it. Before, I was doing it, but I didn't know what to call it."

4. **Technology-enabled ongoing connection.** Using WhatsApp groups enabled participants to maintain connection and momentum between gatherings. The platform provided an accessible venue for professional consultation, resource sharing and personal encouragement.

Sustaining Professional Community into the Future

Participants want the Community of Practice sessions to continue: 82% found the meetings valuable “to a great extent” or “very great extent”, 82% want to continue the meetings beyond the program’s formal end. Other means of continuing connection include group messaging (91%) and annual local trips with an experiential learning focus (82%). In that context, one participant spoke of “missed opportunities to integrate local Cleveland spaces,” such as historic synagogues and cultural sites into the group’s experiential learning. 73% asked for continuing one-off mini trainings.

ISRAEL SEMINAR IMPACT

Transformative Learning Experience

The February 2025 Israel seminar transformed participants' engagement with the Cohort. Participants described the Israel experience as elevating the cohort from valuable professional development to transformative growth. One camp director:

"I can't imagine the program without it. That, to me, changed the whole experience."

Observing Methodology in Practice

The Israel seminar provided direct observation of M² methodology in Israeli educational contexts. Participants visited organizations where Israeli M² alumni implement experiential approaches with local communities, offering concrete examples of theoretical framework translation into sustained practice.

"Being able to experience the theory in practice in an experiential, not abstract way, was very powerful. I was like, 'Wow, this is taking shape in an authentic way here.'"

The trip occurring in the context of the war, provided exposure to educational leadership under crisis conditions, demonstrating how experiential education principles maintain and adapt during significant stress periods.

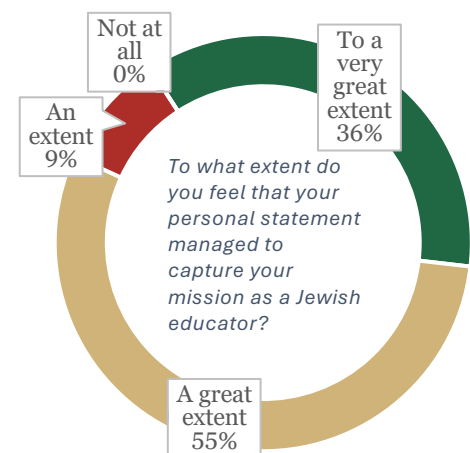
Deepening Relationships

The week-long immersive format created an “unprecedented opportunity” (in the participants words) for deeper relationship building. Shared Israel travel experience, combined with intensive educational programming, fostered connections participants consistently describe as more profound than what occurs in one’s home community.

ANI MA'AMIN CAPSTONE PROJECT

The Ani Ma'amin Project involves the educators developing their professional mission statement. 91% reported that their statements captured their mission as Jewish educators “to great extent” or “very great extent.”

In interviews participants spoke about substantial shifts in how they think about their work. They described how their capstone project helped them identify the purpose of their work, leading to a feeling of greater meaning and resilience.



"It helped me identify my purpose. It gives me a greater sense of meaning and helps me feel like there's a reason I'm doing this even on days when I feel burnt out."

BUILDING ON SUCCESS: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The M² Cleveland Educator Cohort achieved impressive results across all of the program's core objectives. The program generates significant professional development, establishes lasting collegial networks, and is creating measurable impact on Cleveland's Jewish educational landscape. The findings also point to areas where the program can be further strengthened.

Elevating Professional Confidence and Competence

The cohort demonstrates remarkable success advancing participants' professional capabilities. Participants show significant growth across multiple competency measures, with most reporting a good to excellent understanding of experiential Jewish education practices. This transformation from tentative practitioners to confident advocates represents major program achievement.

Success builds on M²'s systematic skill-building through multiple reinforcing experiences. Intensive seminars, ongoing mentorship, and peer learning create robust environments where educators experiment with new approaches while receiving continuous support.

At the same time, participants desire additional hands-on practice opportunities, particularly during conceptual sessions. This reflects different learning preferences - some seek immediate application while others benefit from deeper theoretical grounding. Participants also want stronger connections between the learning taking place in the Seminars and the other program components.

Recommendations: One way forward is to establish clearer thematic progressions connecting mentoring discussions and community of practice sessions to the seminar content. Community of Practice sessions can provide structured practice opportunities maintaining progression from deeper understanding to application. Seminars can reinforce learning to date, and further support application in the field.

Creating Cross-Institutional Collaboration

The Community Cohort achieved exceptional outcomes in terms of developing a deeply meaningful and impactful collegial network among Cleveland's diverse Jewish educator community. This success is the result of deliberate design choices around cohort composition and shared experiences, which enabled the acquisition of a common educational language and approach for educators with varying experience levels and backgrounds.

Recommendations: Participants want to continue the network. Going forward, there is a need for support to maintain the network, building on the valuable diversity, while providing targeted support for different career stages. Junior educators seek structured guidance for translating learning into practice, while senior educators desire opportunities to deepen understanding. Options might include, facilitated discussion groups, mini-seminars and local trips to explore M² applications within their professional contexts and the Cleveland Jewish community. Advanced practitioners might take the lead engaging in facilitation, while newer educators receive additional scaffolding.

Transforming Professional Identity and Institutional Impact

Participation elevates how educators perceive their professional status. They report the Community Cohort experience significantly influencing thinking about their careers, including how they view Jewish education as a chosen career. Success is an outcome of M²'s emphasis on values-based education and the ability to engage in personal reflection and collegial support with peers through the program. Participants have either come to perceive themselves as part of a professional community, with common standards, methods and goals; and/or have deepened their understanding of, and attachment to the field. Cleveland is perceived as a professional home, in the sense of a shared professional community with support from the JECC.

Recommendations: A challenge is that cohort participants are, for the most part, the sole representative of their institution. Thus, there is no developed support or collegiality for their day-to-day work, as they seek to implement their learning from the cohort. The result is that their ability to achieve success and impact is limited by lack of shared vocabulary and common frameworks among their colleagues. Next steps could include:

- ❖ **Encouraging participation of other staff** to participate in M² professional development and then to include them in the growing local community of Jewish professionals who see themselves as experiential Jewish educators.
- ❖ **Train the trainer programming** for Community Cohort alumni, to bring their learning to their colleagues.
- ❖ **Leadership briefings** and workshops for the leadership of local organization to deepen their understanding and support for introducing values focused frameworks for community building and education.

Creating Lasting Systemic Change

Beyond the individual participants the Community Cohort is producing cross-institutional collaboration patterns that previously didn't exist. There are now new standards for experiential Jewish education and community building across a range of Cleveland's institutions and their educators. Building on success, includes creating a critical mass of M²-trained educators serving as change agents within their respective institutions and the broader Cleveland Jewish community. These educators are advocates for experiential education, and pioneers working to integrate M² methodologies into institutional planning and staff development.

Recommendations: Maintaining momentum and connection beyond the end of the Cohort is both an opportunity and a challenge. While participants express a strong desire for continued engagement, translating preferences into sustainable support and implementation structures requires ongoing coordination and resource allocation. Opportunities could include structured alumni engagement programming, providing continued access to M² resources and peer networks through, and opportunities to participate in future programming.

Conclusion

The M² Cleveland Educator Cohort demonstrates that sustained, values-based professional development can transform both individual educators and entire educational ecosystems. Over twenty months, 16 diverse Jewish educators evolved from professionals working separately into a connected community of

practice, dramatically improving their professional competence while building cross-institutional collaboration.

The program's success stems from its integrated design: combining intensive learning experiences with ongoing peer support, personal mentorship, and an immersive travel experience. Most significantly, M² created neutral ground where educators from Orthodox to Reform backgrounds could collaborate professionally without compromising institutional identities.

Participants report high levels of understanding of experiential Jewish education, feel very connected to Cleveland's Jewish educator community, sharing with their colleagues a values-focused approach to Jewish education and community building. Participants attribute deep impact for their professional identity, being able to articulate their educational "why" with confidence, view Jewish education as a professional field rather than job, and are motivated to serve as change agents within their institutions. One educator captured this shift: *"I now have a team behind me. I know that there are people who understand the work and I can count on them to help."*

The evaluation also shows clear pathways for enhancing and continuing the Community Cohort experience: stronger integration between program components, more hands-on practice opportunities, differentiated support for varying experience levels, and institutional engagement beyond individual participants. These recommendations build on the Community Cohorts demonstrated strengths.

The M² Cleveland Community Cohort show how effective professional development in Jewish education is the outcome of both individual skill-building and the development of professional community. By investing in both simultaneously, participants experience lasting change that extends far beyond the formal boundary of the program itself, establishing a model worthy of replication.