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UJA-Federation of New York Awards \$1.6 Million to the Experiment in Congregational Education

Grant for Third Cohort of The RE-IMAGINE Project Will Improve Quality and Impact of Religious Schools in Greater New York Area

February 8, 2006 (New York, NY) - In a continued effort to improve Jewish education in the approximately 300 Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, and unaffiliated congregational schools throughout the New York area, UJA-Federation of New York's Commission on Jewish Identity and Renewal (CoJIR) has awarded the Experiment in Congregational Education (ECE) a grant of \$1.6 million to bring The RE-IMAGINE Project to 20 more synagogues in the area. The project, which has the potential to directly affect the lives of thousands of Jewish children, family members, congregants, and teachers and to transform the landscape of congregational education in New York, reflects UJA-Federation's commitment to renewing and strengthening the Jewish people.

“We are pleased to further the relationship between COJIR and ECE. Our efforts will help make Hebrew Schools more engaging, relevant, and enjoyable for Jewish children in the New York area,” said Scott Shay, COJIR’s Chair. “We are both excited and gratified by the results that we are seeing from the first congregations that participated in this renewal process. Promoting excellence in Jewish education so as to ensure that succeeding generations remain engaged Jews is a core part of UJA-Federation’s mission. With this expansion of RE-IMAGINE, COJIR is looking forward to partnering with congregations from the entire New York area and across all of the Jewish movements.”

RE-IMAGINE was pioneered starting in 2003 in five New York area synagogues, and received an additional \$1.05 million grant in 2004 to work with an additional 14 congregations. The \$1.6 million commitment from CoJIR will challenge 20 more local congregational schools to create new models of supplementary Jewish education, and it will fund support for the original 19 congregations as they continue to innovate. It also will include an investment in enhancing the local agency skill base to support RE-IMAGINE alumni congregations in new ways and to bring similar approaches to congregations that do not participate in the project.

Through the RE-IMAGINE process congregations learn to:

- Reshape religious school to speak to today's children and their families.
- Foster partnerships between professionals and congregants.
- Change the basis of discussion from complaint to constructive thinking.
- Explore alternative models of religious school and adapt them to their congregants' collective vision.

- Build the capacity to make institutional change happen.

The ECE, an initiative of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion/Los Angeles, is working closely with lead staff people from New York area agencies of Jewish education and the major denominational movements to coordinate support for congregations before, during, and after their involvement in RE-IMAGINE.

Rob Weinberg, director of the ECE and leader of The RE-IMAGINE Project, said, "In addition to allowing us to work with 20 more New York area congregations, our continuing relationship with UJA-Federation of New York is a serious investment in the underlying infrastructure of the New York congregational education community. The Federation-sponsored think tanks that we will convene will expand the collective knowledge base about what it takes to align the practical operational business of running an educational program with a congregation's vision of what children's education could be. This will be a joint inquiry with staff from New York area agencies so that we all can add new tools to our toolkits as we support congregations who want to be innovators."

Cyd Weissman, The RE-IMAGINE Project's New York Director, has worked closely with the 19 congregations. She notes, "The new initiatives that we see coming out of the first 19 congregations are very exciting. These congregations are set to innovate towards their visions and meet the challenges of today's environment while staying true to their own congregational cultures and values. This grant will allow us to continue working with them as they implement their ideas. We look forward to helping 20 more congregations move from strength to strength."

ECE and UJA-Federation have recently invited applications from more than 70 congregations of all sizes and across denominations. Congregations participating in the project will pay a fee to help cover project costs.

For more information about The RE-IMAGINE Project, visit www.eceonline.org, or contact Cyd Weissman at 347-200-1515 or cweissman@huc.edu.

About The Experiment in Congregational Education (ECE)

The Experiment in Congregational Education (ECE), an initiative of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education of [Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion](http://www.huc.edu), Los Angeles, is the nation's first synagogue transformation project. The ECE seeks to strengthen synagogues as critical centers of Jewish life in North America by helping congregations to become **Congregations of Learners** and **Self-Renewing Congregations**.

About UJA-Federation of New York

The world's largest local philanthropy, UJA-Federation of New York cares for those in need, rescues those in harm's way, and renews and strengthens the Jewish people in New York, in Israel, and around the world. Funds raised by UJA-Federation sustain the activities of 100 health, human-service, educational, and community agencies. Every day, these community-based organizations provide a multitude of services that improve and enhance people's lives. For more information, visit the UJA-Federation website at www.ujafedny.org.