

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, *Cultivating the Talent: Women Professionals in the Federation System*, results from an AWP study commissioned by the UJC in November 2006.

The study was launched with an email survey of 950 women federation professionals in UJC's database. The email survey posed two questions: "*Are you interested in advancing to a more senior position in federation?*" and "*Would you be willing to discuss your professional aspirations in a follow-up phone conversation?*"

In response to this email, 130 women affirmed that they sought advancement to senior positions in federation and agreed to participate in a telephone interview. The interviews with this self-selected sample of women professionals focused on their career aspirations and the resources that might help them to achieve their stated goals. The women who participated in this study represent a wide range of professional positions and functional departments from 47 federations of varying sizes and locations across North America.

The central finding of the study is that these women professionals aspire to diverse leadership roles in the federation system, as well as in other Jewish agencies. Most noteworthy is that 21 women out of the 130 interviewed (16%) aspire to become federation CEOs. A significant number of professionals in this sample can envision themselves as federation COOs, Campaign Directors and other senior management positions, and as CEOs of other Jewish agencies. Their high aspirations manifested throughout the life-cycle continuum, including women with and without children, married and single women, and women with grown children, both single and partnered. This finding was represented across all professional levels and functional roles, and across all federation sizes and locations. Only 15 women said they felt unsure about their long-term career aspirations.

Our interviews explored the contributing factors to professional growth thus far. Federations were credited for providing on-the-job learning, good supervision, and special projects that accelerate learning and build relationships with professional and lay leadership. Many women also recognized self-motivation and community visibility as critical elements of successful federation careers.

Asked what professional resources would support their career aspirations, the majority of women professionals called for mentoring and networking within the system; off-site learning opportunities; on-the-job coaching; and high-visibility assignments. Many women seek greater expertise in fundraising development, fiscal management, and strategic planning. Among more discrete skill sets, these professionals cited the need for training in negotiation, conflict resolution, and public speaking.

While this study focused primarily on future career aspirations and needs, the interviews briefly explored obstacles that have been experienced along the career path. The most commonly cited barriers to advancement were a lack of clear career pathways, limited job

openings at the highest ranks, work-life issues, and gender bias, particularly in the area of compensation.

The study concludes with recommendations that address three broad areas: *first*, public support for women's career aspirations, beginning with broad distribution of this report; *second*, sequenced career planning, through pilot projects at selected federations, and *third*, policy development for workplace flexibility over the career trajectory. By sharing the findings of this study and pursuing these recommendations, UJC will send a positive message to women federation professionals – about its commitment to leverage existing strengths, address systemic barriers, and cultivate the talent of women professionals on behalf of the federation system and the Jewish community.