Kehilla Community Synagogue

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Renewing Kehilla Organizational Development Project

Report from Dragonfly Partners
June 2025

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I. Introduction

Context

The Renewing Kehilla organizational development (OD) project was in the making for some time before December 2023, when Kehilla launched an RFP for an Organizational Development Initiative:

> *Kehilla's membership growth and ambitions have outsized our capacity and so the work ahead is to help the organization evaluate its current condition and desires, set priorities and align its staffing, organizational design, and resources.*

In the previous 8 years, Kehilla had grown by 50%, to nearly 1,000 members. Kehilla is no longer a community where most people know each other, where decisions can be made through informal consensus, or where volunteers can simply see the gaps and step in to fill them.

Kehilla has also gone through major changes with—and is experiencing significant internal tensions from—the COVID pandemic, the Arc of Change anti-racism process, and the October 7th attacks in Israel and the ongoing assault in Gaza.

At this scale and with these events, the organizational structure and culture no longer function well, members feel disconnected and underutilized, staff can't keep up, conflict is bubbling up, and the budget is tight.

> *How can Kehilla live its values while adapting to new growth and change? The Renewing Kehilla OD project seeks to chart a path forward.*

After a January 2024 information session about the OD project, a team from Dragonfly Partners submitted a proposal. Interviews were held in May and July, and the proposal was accepted in August.

Who We Are

Dragonfly Partners is a 14-year-old BIPOC-led, multiracial consulting firm that operates as a collective of eight partner/owners working in the social change non-profit and community-based sectors in the US and globally. We partner with groups and organizations to help them transform their culture and structures toward liberatory and just practices. We also help groups develop effective, values-aligned social change strategies and campaigns, and do our own work within our Dragonfly team to ensure we are living into our values. Our ultimate purpose is to contribute to building a strong multiracial, multi-issue movement ecosystem working toward collective liberation. More about the Dragonfly team members working with Kehilla here.

Renewing Kehilla Process

At Kehilla, Dragonfly's focus is on organizational culture and structure. *Culture* is the patterns and habits of being together that shape how it feels to be in a community. *Structure* is how processes and organizational set-up support (or inhibit) effective functioning and sustainability.

The goals for the Renewing Kehilla project were captured by Kehilla in these questions:

- *How can we make it easier for people to find connection and belonging?*
- *What would help us build stronger relationships and mutual accountability?*
- *How can newer members contribute their wisdom to our shared culture?*
- *How do we move forward together as a larger community?*
- *How do we ensure financial sustainability while maintaining our values?*

Dragonfly's work has two phases:

Phase I (December 2024–June 2025):

Deep learning and information gathering via one-on-one interviews, conversations with groups, a survey to reach anyone we aren't able to interview or meet with in a group, and the option of groups/committees to submit written reports or letters to us.

A **community gathering** to introduce ourselves in-person and do further listening & learning.

This **report,** that shares our analysis based on what we've learned that we will share back with the Kehilla community. The report highlights key themes, challenges, strengths, and our sense of priorities to be addressed and next steps.

Phase II (July–November 2025)

This focus of this phase has been adjusted from developing a Renewing Kehilla Roadmap to addressing the top priority issues related to organizational structure, to accommodate the Executive Director transition.

Here's a recap of our activities in Phase I:			
Virtual Kick Off	Dragonfly introduced ourselves to the community and launched the Renewing Kehilla organizational development (OD) process with a virtual kick off. Roughly 100 people participated, learning about the process and providing input on their hopes for the OD initiative	Dec 2024	The recording is here and the slides are here.
Interviews	We conducted 19 individual interviews and met with 13 committees and groups, identified by the design team, to explore their perspectives on the strengths, challenges, and opportunities related to Kehilla's structure and culture.	Nov 2024 through Feb 2025	
Community Gatherings	Dragonfly designed and facilitated two gatherings — in-person and virtual—where members engaged with each other on topics ranging from what drew them to Kehilla, communication, inclusion, and sustainability. About 100 members participated in these sessions,	Feb 2025	The notes from the discussions were shared with the whole membership.
Survey	Dragonfly and the Design Team designed a survey for members to give additional input to the Renewing Kehilla OD process. 217 members participated in the survey, of whom 57% had no previous participation in the OD process.	April/May 2025	A demographic analysis of the survey findings is here from member volunteer Kendra Froshman, and Board and Design Team member Ron Glass prepared this narrative report

Here's a recap of our activities in Phase I:			
Notes from members	Kehilla members were invited to write a note to the Dragonfly team and/or the Design Team as input to the Renewing Kehilla organizational development process. Members have shared 26 notes.	Nov 2024 through May 2025	Invitation

Guiding the process is the **Design Team**, whose purpose is to advise Dragonfly on the design and delivery of all aspects of this project. The Design Team members have been:

- Aviva Wilcox, member
- Rabbi Dev Noily, Senior Rabbi
- Lia Barrow, Board member, OD Committee Chair
- Michael Myers, Board Co-Chair
- Michael Saxe-Taller, former Executive Director
- Ron Glass, Board member

In any report of this nature, it is challenging to represent the specific contributions of every individual involved. We are striving to balance anonymity and transparency, as well as thoroughness and synthesis. We focus on patterns and themes that emerge in the data. In so doing, we sometimes speak in generalities - about phenomena, groups, perspectives. This may not capture all the nuance, or the individuality of each person who contributed to our assessment. We are grateful to all who shared with us, and hope that you find yourself reflected here.

II. Our Summary Findings

Kehilla is a cherished spiritual home for close to 1,000 people—an inclusive, justice-rooted Jewish community deeply valued by both members and staff. At the same time, Kehilla is facing growing pains that are not unusual for congregations evolving in size and complexity. To sustain its beloved community while meeting the demands of growth, Kehilla has embarked on the Renewing Kehilla organizational development process, with support from Dragonfly Partners. Many people contributed to an assessment, which confirmed that Kehilla must strengthen its organizational structure, re-establish the culture that connects people as a community, and determine how to financially sustain the community.

We recommend three overarching areas for development:

1. Cultivate Structure and Systems Aligned with Congregational Size
Kehilla has outgrown its informal systems. Clear, transparent decision-making protocols will increase accountability and reduce confusion. The distinct and boundaried roles of senior clergy, executive leadership, staff, and the board must be defined, emphasizing clergy focus on spiritual—not organizational—leadership. We recommend hiring an organizer to coordinate and deepen volunteer engagement. For volunteers, structured pathways into leadership must be created, while empowering committees to make recommendations, with final decisions made by the board. These shifts will support overall well-being and the community's ability to function more effectively.

2. Clarify Community Norms and Engagement Pathways
Kehilla's participatory culture is a strength, but without clear boundaries, expectations, and structures for involvement, it can overwhelm staff, frustrate members, and engender conflict. There is a need to create transparent pathways for participation and set new norms for congregational culture. Specifically, we recommend engaging the community in co-creating a new Brit, a set of relationship agreements that reflect Kehilla's growth, articulate core values, set realistic expectations, and incorporate spiritual practices to support conflict and difference. There is also a need for transparent pathways and to actively support structures for BIPOC members to step into leadership roles, with practices co-developed by BIPOC community members. And Kehilla must keep attending to members' disability and accessibility needs, working through conflict to develop inclusive, community-informed guidelines that acknowledge diverse needs and articulate the institutional limitations.

3. Cultivate Capacity
Some recommendations to move toward sustainability: Open up dialogue about class and money, within and across class lines. Clarify shared values around giving, and organize caucuses to encourage collective responsibility and belonging, which could unleash more capacity. Launch grassroots, peer-to-peer fundraising efforts.

Taken together, these recommendations aim to preserve what is most precious about Kehilla—its warmth, its justice orientation, its spiritual depth—while building the systems, cultural, and leadership practices needed to build on that legacy for the future.

III. Takeaways

Through all of the assessment activities, the Dragonfly team heard a wide variety of perspectives on Kehilla's past, present, and future. Here are our takeaways. Note this isn't a comprehensive list of all we heard, but what stood out to us as important themes from our perspective as organizational development practitioners.

Strengths

We asked what drew people to Kehilla and what keeps them there. We heard:

Blend of social justice (*tikkun olam*) and Jewish spirituality

- Historically and in the present, the blend of justice and spirit has drawn many in. Kehilla is seen as a spiritual home and a base for organizing and activism.
- The congregation is rooted in a 40 year history, the founding values, and a culture of kindness, questioning, and exploration.
- There is a strong commitment to progressive values and inclusive, intergenerational community.
- Externally-facing Kehilla committees do powerful, impactful political work.
- There is pride in Kehilla's public stances on social justice issues and respect from the larger Bay Area Jewish community.
- Kehilla offers a big tent for many kinds of Jews. It is accessible for those on the margins of Jewish community. People appreciate the spiritual approach encouraging "wrestling with God."
- Kehilla provides a deep Jewish spiritual experience. Highlights include music, rabbinic teaching, and pastoral care.
- Many named specifically the spiritual leaders, who give so much of themselves to Kehilla. They were seen as role models and teachers, open, honest, thoughtful, intelligent, kind, and compassionate.
- The spiritual leadership team is expanded beyond the clergy to include members with skills for musical and/or liturgical leadership.
- There are many opportunities for Jewish learning and growth.

Sense of community

- There is a strong sense of community, especially within committees or other smaller groups. People take care of each other, there are structures for care, and there is a generosity of spirit.
- Kehilla's big tent also includes a container to hold conflict and a range of viewpoints, within a progressive continuum. The container is frayed but still present.
- There is a great deal of passion and a high level of engagement. Spiritual and administrative leaders, staff, and members care deeply about the community.
- There is a small but dedicated staff committed to the community.
- Community members bring diverse skills and wisdom.
- There are dedicated volunteers willing to commit time, energy, and expertise.

- There was a shift to online-only during the pandemic. There are still robust virtual options for everyone, and there are members who don't live close by who can choose "remote membership, with lower fees and minimal clergy and staff engagement. However, as Kehilla emerged from online-only gathering, the Board affirmed that Kehilla is primarily a brick-and-mortar community whose priority is serving local Bay area membership, whether they attend in-person or online.

Strong culture of volunteering

- Volunteering is a form of giving: Many participants view volunteering as a significant way to contribute to Kehilla, parallel to financial donations.
- Volunteering is seen as a way to connect with others and build relationships within the community. Some people meet others and feel a strong sense of belonging through volunteering.
- Volunteers appreciate the chance to use their skills and talents to support Kehilla.
- Many are inspired to give their time and energy because they believe in Kehilla's values and mission.

Shared valuing of inclusion and belonging

- There is a strongly held value of Kehilla as an inclusive place where everyone has a sense of belonging.
- Growth has increased the diversity of membership.
- There is a vibrant queer community.
- Kehilla has invested in efforts to embody racial justice through the Arc of Change process, increasing BIPOC leadership, adoption of shared practices, and the creation of affinity spaces.
- Efforts have been made to attend to accessibility and disability justice through masking policy and multi-access events.
- The dues structure is designed as one way to address economic accessibility.

The Kehilla School

- Many parents view the school as a joyful, accepting environment for children to develop a positive, multifaceted connection to Judaism. Upsides include encouraging critical thinking, a focus on social justice and community engagement, and a culture of queer, trans, & gender-fluid belonging.
- The B' Mitzvah program is viewed as intensive and exceptional; B' Mitzvahs are seen as beautiful, deeply personalized coming of age experiences for young people and their families.

Challenges

Focusing particularly on structure and culture, we asked what was in the way of Kehilla living into the vision of the beloved, inclusive, progressive Jewish community that everyone aspires to. We heard:

Structure and systems

- Kehilla's growth was unplanned, such that organizational systems and structures didn't develop with growth in membership.
    - Current structures—for communication, decision-making, staffing, and member engagement—can't meet the needs of a 1,000 person congregation.
    - There is tension between the volunteer, relationship-driven culture and the need for more professional management at this size.
    - There is also tension for leadership in balancing multiple, often divergent individual needs with organizational needs.
    - Staff turnover, understaffing, and unclear staff roles contribute to a sense of instability.
- There is no clear, formalized decision-making process.
    - Decision-making protocols are unclear, not always transparent, and accountability is weak or non-existent.
    - It is unclear who has authority in decision-making.
        - There is tension between the need for timely action and the desire for and valuing of inclusive decision-making. "*So much attention to everyone's feelings, then everyone ends up frustrated, so somebody needs to make the decision.*" Decisions often default to senior leadership; the process was described as "*give input and then (leader) decides.*"
        - In the absence of clear lines of authority, leadership is faulted by some for making decisions and seen as holding too much power or control. This places senior leaders in an untenable position.
- The role of the board and committees is unclear.
    - There are unclear roles/responsibilities between board, staff, and clergy.
    - The role, selection process, and accountability of the board is unclear or not well-known.
    - Volunteer committees are a core part of the community and the reason some members join. It is not clear what the synagogue's responsibility is in relation to them, what their responsibility is to the whole, or how the work of committees flows to enrich the life of the community. There are no clear mechanisms to support, leverage, or track volunteer efforts.
    - Some groups formed through the Arc of Change process, with leadership support, do not currently experience themselves as having agency or authority.
- Communication is universally cited as a problem.

    - Many volunteer leaders report difficulties getting responses, feeling undervalued, or lacking clear direction. This can lead to feeling unsupported and unappreciated for their contributions.
    - Meanwhile, many staff are frustrated with too little communication from senior staff and from too little grace from members.
    - Many mourn the loss of the Kol Kehilla newsletter, which served to inform and connect but was an outsize drain on staff time, with significant cost attached.

Capacity

- Response to need for systems
    - There is a recognition that more robust systems are needed for all aspects of organizational life, from managing volunteers, to developing leaders, to fundraising and business development. There is not enough capacity to create systems. The raw material—skilled members, highly capable leaders, good staff—is there, but there isn't the time or collaboration ability to create the necessary systems.
    - While some were enthusiastic about his leadership, others lay the capacity and management issues at the feet of the previous Executive Director, whose leadership was seen as contributing to multiple systemic failures.
- Scarcity culture
    - Everyone is aware of the strain on leadership and staff. Many are aware of Kehilla's financial challenges and the need for sustainability. This awareness creates a sense of scarcity, where resources are perceived as limited.
    - Many people spoke to the importance of adequate staffing and fair compensation for staff, along with concerns about staff turnover and its impact on the community. There is a strong sense that there are not enough staff resources.
    - While passion, commitment, and dedication are all abundant at Kehilla, almost everyone we heard from feels inadequately supported.

Sustainability

- Unsustainable
    - There is a strong sense that the community is not sustainable as it is.
    - The collective needs or wants far outweigh the financial means.
    - The dues structure is inclusive of a range of financial circumstances but is inadequate to cover costs.
    - Kehilla’s income has not grown commensurate with increased membership, heightening the financial burden.
- Culture around money
    - This is cited as a key factor. The discomfort in talking about class and money hinders open discussion about financial challenges and solutions, exacerbating the feeling of scarcity.

- Fundraising
    - There is not a grassroots fundraising program to proactively ask more people to contribute as much as they are able.

Inclusion and Belonging

Everyone believes in inclusion and means different things by it.

- Input and Engagement
    - For some, the primary focus is providing input and being included in major decisions, which is seen as a strong community value.
    - It is unclear under which circumstances community engagement is necessary, where that engagement means consultation and where it means decision-making.
    - While participation is highly valued, there is some concern that new members are not adequately onboarded or integrated into community life.
- Diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB)
    - For others, the primary focus isn't about inclusive decision-making, but rather DEIB. For many, DEIB is first and foremost a matter of race. Disability and class issues are named secondarily. Most people do not highlight gender and sexuality when talking about DEIB.
    - Many BIPOC, disabled, working-class, and low-income members feel that their needs and voices are not always adequately represented, addressed, or prioritized. Some have experienced microaggressions in the community.
    - Anti-racism is a strong value, which the congregation invested in through the Arc of Change process in 2021–2022. This was a significant, marker event in congregational life. For many who participated, it was positive, inspiring, and empowering. There were some conflicts in the process, and for some it felt ultimately alienating. For many, there are concerns that the process was incomplete and is not being implemented effectively or deeply enough or integrated into organizational systems.
    - One outcome of the Arc of Change work was the creation of several groups, including the BIPOC Congress and the DEIB Committee. Although there are organizational leaders, including board members, on these committees, the groups have unclear roles and tenuous connection to the institutional decision-making process.
    - Some BIPOC members expressed a need to shift from tokenism to more meaningful inclusion. There are questions among some BIPOC members about their own leadership and whether they are tokens or actual trusted leaders. A piece of the struggle is being such a tiny minority in the community.
    - The Disability Justice Committee (DJC) is a small, vocal group addressing issues in the community related to disability, chronic illness, and accessibility. While some access needs have been addressed, on the whole this group has felt deeply disempowered. Members experience being asked for input but don't see their guidance reflected in decisions. The sense is that they have to scream to be

heard, that there is a lack of understanding and commitment from leadership about disability justice, and a perception that financial concerns are prioritized over the safety of disabled and immunocompromised members. Conflicts over masking have been especially upsetting.
    - We also heard from people with disabilities in the congregation who do not see the DJC as speaking for them.
    - There is also a perceived lack of awareness of class issues; working-class or low-income people see themselves as needing to raise awareness in a mostly middle-class congregation. There is responsiveness when they do, but they would like not to have to do this.
    - For all these concerns, leadership sees itself as values-aligned but—given multiple, often conflicting, interests and other demands on their time—is unable to give the attention that is asked of them.
    - Many acknowledge the complexity of the issues and indicate a desire for ongoing work and growth.

The Kehilla School

- There is a sense that the school is disorganized. While some speak highly of the program, others describe it as “mediocre.”
- There is a critique that the school does not pay enough attention to inclusivity or families of color, and, for some, causes harm through lack of racial awareness.
- There is also a critique of the lack of attention paid to disability and access needs; on the other hand, the masking requirement, which has been lifted for the 2025-26 school year, was seen as an impediment to engagement of young people.
- While B’Mitzvahs used to be more integrated into congregational life, they are no longer as anchored to the full community, and B'Mitzvah families don’t always maintain their connection to Kehilla post B'Mitzvah ceremony.
- People sense that young people who go through the Kehilla School don’t tend to remain at Kehilla, and there isn’t a good sense about why.

Fault Lines

There are three primary areas of tension at Kehilla:

- Masking/disability justice
    - This is a significant source of conflict.
    - There are strong contradictory feelings: on the one hand that masking is essential to protect the health of immunocompromised people, and on the other that masking is a significant barrier to community engagement, particularly for some young people.
    - A recent process about the possibility of exceptions to the policy of always masking indoors has been described as “*highly contentious*” and “*ugly.*”
- Racial justice

    - This is another area where there is tension.
    - Some BIPOC members and allies have organized around advocating for greater representation of BIPOC in leadership and for cultural practices that counter white supremacy culture.
    - After initial leadership engagement, there is now a sense of us/them in relationship to leadership, a mistrust that there really is a commitment to espoused anti-racist values.
- Israel-Palestine
    - Like many progressive Jewish communities, fault lines around Israel-Palestine, Zionism, and Gaza have grown since October 7th.
    - Some strongly believe that Kehilla should be explicitly anti-Zionist, some believe Kehilla has not demonstrated enough care and compassion for Israeli lives, and others believe the agreements forged in 2016 around Israel/Palestine should continue to serve as guidance.

The impact of these fault lines is that the community still has broadly shared progressive values, but there is now a more fractured sense of being in this together. The "culture of kindness" is strained. Confidence in being able to navigate disagreements is low.

Leadership

- Senior Leadership
    - Leadership grapples with the delicate balance of empowering enthusiastic volunteers while implementing professional staff management, often struggling to achieve an equilibrium that works well.
    - Senior clergy are overwhelmed by administrative work to the point of burnout.
    - While many people express a strong connection with spiritual leadership, there is some disconnect with and critique of senior leadership in their administrative capacity.
    - Senior leaders are critiqued for not effectively empowering committees or delegating decision-making. "...*Very unclear as to what (the senior rabbi's) jurisdiction is, and where they have veto power. I don't think it's malicious, but it comes off as hoarding power. I think their emphasis on process and slowness is in the service of inclusivity, but not sure whose voice is actually being centered in that process.*"
    - Some express a desire for more partnership or collaboration with leadership. There is some frustration that the senior team is burned out and needs much more help and support than they currently have, but are seen as not willing to let go of power to let other folks take over some of that work and responsibility. Meanwhile, those who believe they can help feel underutilized.
- Volunteer Leadership
    - There is a robust cadre of volunteers serving in leadership roles at Kehilla.
    - Some noted that in the past there has been volunteer coordination by staff.

    - The Board has a strong commitment to work together to tackle the current challenges, but feels pulled in different directions by the various tensions and demands on the organization and lacks confidence in its ability to make hard decisions.
    - Many volunteer leaders report feeling unsupported in their roles.
    - There is a need for a system of volunteer leadership development, with particular focus on welcoming BIPOC leaders.

Impact of the pandemic

- Short-term impact
    - The pandemic placed an enormous strain on leadership.
    - There was a sense of positive adaptation in the short-term.
- Longer-term impact
    - The pandemic and its ripples disrupted communication, volunteering, and in-person interactions, leading to disagreements over health measures, changes in community culture, and feelings of disconnection and loss, all contributing to fractures within the Kehilla community.
    - There was a struggle to reopen in person—disagreements or difficulties in navigating the transition back to physical gatherings further weakened community bonds.
    - The shift to online communication has created some challenges, and some people miss more direct, in-person interaction. This shift has exacerbated existing communication gaps and led to some feeling disconnected.
    - The pandemic shutdown impacted volunteering. It appears that pre-pandemic, there was a “strong volunteer community,” but now some describe a “fee for service culture,” an expectation of receiving a service for which dues have been paid.
    - How COVID policies should evolve has been an ongoing issue.
    - Many see less intergenerational interaction; some attribute this to the requirement that kids are masked, which has alienated some young people and parents. Others name the lack of youth programming or accommodation during spiritual services as a barrier to having their children participating in the community life of Kehilla.

In Summary

Kehilla is a passionate, values-driven community with great strengths—in the realms of spirituality, activism, and inclusivity. Rapid growth and major cultural upheaval have brought significant new challenges. With organizational development support to intentionally strengthen and evolve systems and culture, Kehilla members can collectively navigate these challenges and continue to nurture Kehilla’s vision of being a loving community that reaches for joy, shared liberation, and justice, rooted in Jewish spiritual teachings and practice, and sustained by interdependence and mutual care.

IV. Reflections

Building on what we heard about Kehilla's strengths and challenges, and bringing our OD experience, we have some thoughts about the themes outlined above.

Kehilla as Beloved Community

Kehilla is a deeply central community for many members and staff. For many, this is the first or only Jewish community that feels like home, the most inclusive Jewish community they've been a part of—welcoming members' gender, queerness, racial identity, family configuration, family of origin, radical politics, relationship to Zionism/anti-Zionism, religion and spirituality, and more. Being embraced at Kehilla is a foundational experience in many people's Jewish lives, and it is not easily replaced.

While the options are growing, there's not just another synagogue down the street to switch to. The strength of connection to Kehilla means the stakes are high when people feel frustrated or disappointed. An ouch is deeply painful, often bringing a sense of exile and dislocation. As a community of activists and advocates, people are ready to fight to keep Kehilla in their lives. Just as we fight the hardest with those we love most, sometimes Kehilla members encounter each other with fear and defensiveness.

Growth and Systemic Gaps

On many levels, the community has not caught up with being a 1,000 member congregation. Longtime members are mourning the loss of intimacy while newer members have expectations of the synagogue that it is unable to meet. Some still resist seeing that Kehilla is now at a different stage, and needs to operate less as a family and more as an institution. It is understood that processes, systems, and structures are lagging behind the current complexity.

However, like many left-leaning organizations, in Kehilla there is resistance to formalization or professionalization. There is a history of conflating activism and progressive values with loose, family-like structure, along with an aversion to hierarchy and authority, and a deep value of inclusion and community participation.

While there is a strong upside to these values, attachment to informality inhibits the development of clear systems and structures. This, along with the capacity issues, makes it very difficult for leadership to institute necessary changes to how things are done.

In some ways, the passion and dedication that contributes to what makes Kehilla so special obscures the systemic issues. Senior leaders, staff, and volunteer leaders all work overtime to make things happen. The organization depends on individuals going above and beyond. This leads to burnout, and it also makes it harder to clearly see and address the gaps in the organizational system. Things get done, albeit not always smoothly.

There are costs to not attending to gaps in the organizational systems. Some obvious costs are alluded to above: senior leaders are seriously overtaxed, staff are stretched very thin, and volunteer leaders feel unseen and underappreciated. There are no clear lines of authority, and there is a sense of haphazardness. The pattern of not naming who is in charge and how decisions are made is replicated through the organization: the decision-making power of committees is unclear; many committees or groups have no clear internal structure. "*No one knows who has authority. We don't even know staff responsibilities.*"

A less obvious cost: Systemic issues are individualized. In the absence of clear structure and systems, things get personalized. There is an over-reliance on individuals rather than systems to get things done. When this occurs, individuals are blamed or targeted for systemic gaps. If one person doesn't make a decision because it's not clear who should make the decision, another person may be frustrated with their failure to decide. If one person steps in to make a decision, another person may be frustrated with their presumption of authority. Mistrust develops and grows as the underlying issues aren't addressed.

Organizational Identity: What Holds People Together?

Those who have been in the community for a long time speak to a sense of cohesion in the early days that persisted for some time, bound together by the core values of justice and spirituality, and the capacity to hold a range of political views and ways of being Jewish.

That sense of common ground is still there, but more fractured. Kehilla is now a large organism with different interests and levels of engagement. Connections are made in clusters—committees, havurot, school—but not as much as a full community. This raises questions about what holds the congregation together as a whole, how the community defines itself, and where the boundaries are.

For many synagogues, spiritual life is at the center. This does not seem to be the case for Kehilla. The congregation is described as a "*progressive, politically active community first; spiritual center second.*" A small number of people regularly attend Shabbat services. Many more are engaged in activism, primarily through committees. There is ongoing tension for some between Kehila's strong activist identity and the desire to foster deeper forms of spiritual practice and engagement. There is also some tension around Kehilla's stance on social justice issues, and whether Kehilla should create a boundary that makes it clear that it can't be everything to the Jewish left. This is particularly the case around Israel/Palestine.

In the recent Renewing Kehilla survey, the top priority across all 217 respondents was deepening spiritual and community offerings. The external political reality creates an even stronger need to have a spiritual and political home, yet so much at Kehilla is loaded. The culture of kindness is frayed, as is the big progressive tent for a range of stances on issues. People hold tight to fixed positions and talk *about* more than *to* each other. As one person put it, "*The brokenness of the Brit has resulted in lack of trust that isn't expressed as lack of trust, but as a fear of talking to each other. So a great deal gets funneled through (the spiritual leaders), who almost everyone trusts. It's as though we can't talk to each other."*

This is evident in the internal conflict over how to best support Palestinian liberation, and also in the tension over disability justice issues, antiracism efforts, and even this OD process. There is a sense of strong positionality and stuckness, a lack of faith that talking across the divides could be generative.

Inclusion and the Challenge of Leadership

There is a pattern in how the charged issues have played out at Kehilla. There is excitement and a sense of possibility around coalescing to address a significant cause related to a group that has been marginalized or oppressed. Leadership is attentive and engaged. As other needs emerge, that focused attention is not sustained, or there are some unresolved differences about process, strategy, or principle. This is interpreted as anything from lack of commitment to betrayal. The group then moves from working collaboratively with leadership to organizing and activism from within to influence Kehilla, sometimes with mistrust and hostile energy.

A case in point is Kehilla's work on racial justice. There is widespread desire within Kehilla to be more welcoming to Jews of Color. At the conclusion of the multiyear Arc of Change process, the BIPOC group created a vision that Kehilla could be a Bay Area magnet for Jews of Color. Some BIPOC members and white allies have committed a great deal of time and energy to shifting the culture such that white supremacy norms are not a barrier to full inclusion in the community. The Arc of Change process rallied people around this and created committees to work on it, but there were unresolved tensions, the process was incomplete, and there was no infrastructure to support the integration of their work into the community. Lessons from the Arc of Change were tacked onto the culture in a mechanistic way. There does not appear to have been much discussion about implementing certain practices, such as "*Make Space, Take Space*," and there is some white fear about challenging these practices. Decentering whiteness is challenging in a predominantly white community, and it is difficult for white people committed to racial justice to know their role. BIPOC members have been able to create BIPOC-only spaces, some are in leadership roles with significant influence, but there is little sense among BIPOC of the agency to make change. For some, this has generated personal distress and anger. Overall, the excitement of those engaged in this work turned to frustration and disappointment about the perceived lack of support from leadership to fully address racial justice in the community.

Similarly, excitement around a focus on accessibility and disability justice during the pandemic became anger and grief around the sense of deprioritizing the needs of disabled, chronically ill, and immunocompromised members with a return to congregating in-person. Disability justice advocates in the community feel deeply disempowered, like they are treated as too needy. The perceived unwillingness to meet health-related needs feels like a betrayal.

These dynamics are pervasive in many progressive organizations. And the conflict around approaches to the assault in Gaza is alive in most progressive Jewish organizations. Kehilla has always been aligned with efforts for Palestinian liberation. After October 7th, it was one of few Ceasefire congregations and seen as a place welcoming to anti-Zionists. Kehilla has continued to operate on a community agreement regarding its stance on Israel/Palestine after a long process in 2016. Some members want to push Kehilla to be more explicitly anti-Zionist, which

leadership has been unwilling to do. A stance that was once appreciated is now seen by some as backward, too Zionist, not radical enough. Meanwhile, there is also disappointment from some who see too little concern for Israeli Jews.

In all of these conflicts, Kehilla leadership is viewed as not paying enough attention, not doing enough, or not being brave or bold or committed enough. When the value of centering those most impacted is seen as not being upheld, leadership is seen as abandoning people whose lives are at stake. Like most organizations, Kehilla leaders see and hold the whole in a way that generally isn't possible for others in the community. While they may at times center some needs, it is their role to hear all perspectives, balance them against the needs of the whole, and draw some boundaries. With emotion so high, it is very difficult for those engaged in these struggles to acknowledge other perspectives or needs as valid, especially when they are seen as coming from a place of privilege. In this context, leaders' making space for a range of congregant needs is read as misalignment.

For Kehilla spiritual and Board leaders, there is frustration and hurt around the claim that they are failing people whose interests they share. Anything short of 100% is viewed as inadequate, and, from a leadership perspective, 100% is impossible, given the diversity of interests and needs in the congregation. While they understand that some needs should be centered more than others, they would like to see acknowledgement that others are carrying pain that also needs to be attended to. They yearn for the community to be a sanctuary for all, a place where people can disagree while still loving and being kind to one another.

The current dynamic is unhealthy and needs to shift. Paradoxically, it is clarity about boundaries that creates more freedom. Leadership will need to manage expectations, acknowledge that Kehilla can't meet all needs and clearly delineate what interests can and can't be met. Some members may decide that they can't thrive within the container delineated through this process. Some people might decide to leave. For those who remain, the boundaries around what is and isn't possible will be transparent, so that members know what's possible and what's off the table. Activist members who have been pushing from the outside will need to be brought in to help shape the container, such that it reflects the most inclusive practices that can work in a diverse community. In so doing, they would also be brought into a commitment to the larger purpose of the community

Culture around money

The reluctance to directly address the values tensions around class and money are a barrier to sustainability. There is a values polarity, with one pole being inclusivity of membership regardless of financial circumstance, and the opposite pole being needing the resources to pay staff well, have enough staff, and to support members well. Kehilla is attending well to the former value, but not the latter.

V. Recommendations

We recommend that Kehilla consider these action steps that build on your strengths and address the most pressing organizational development challenges.

Dragonfly would lead Part I and the Executive Director (E.D.) would lead the prioritization and implementation process for Parts II, II, and IV.

Part I: Establish structure and systems to match congregational size

As a foundation to all other recommendations, Kehilla needs to create a senior team, board, and staff with clear and manageable roles, distinguish between operational and spiritual leadership, and delineate where authority and responsibility lie.

The transition of a new E.D. creates the opportunity and imperative to get Kehilla's house in order. The E.D. will lead the OD work moving forward. This requires first re-examining and clarifying roles and responsibilities and determining what in the organizational structure needs to change to create more clarity, consistency, capacity, and stability. This, in turn, will make it possible to develop effective mechanisms for communication, distributed decision-making, and meaningful pathways for community engagement.

Dragonfly would lead this work, working closely with the senior staff and board. We would mentor the new E.D. to lead the OD prioritization and implementation process going forward (Parts II - IV), with a goal of stabilizing the organizational structure and nurturing a sustainable culture. Elements of this process are:

Decision-making

Dragonfly will work with the Board and senior staff to develop clear and transparent decision-making protocols. This includes:

1. Determining what decisions the E.D. makes independently, what decisions the E.D. and Board chairs make jointly, what decisions the E.D. and spiritual leadership make jointly, what decisions the clergy do not have a role in, and what the Board's role is in decision-making.
2. Creating a clear boundary for senior clergy that is focused primarily on spiritual and not organizational leadership. This would delineate those few areas of organizational leadership and decision-making that require senior clergy engagement (e.g., high level policy-making).
3. Determining who gets to weigh in, who is consulted, who decides—and how. Consistent use of a DARCI or MOCHA framework will be helpful. This is a way of determining where leadership and power are centralized and where leadership and power are distributed. This could be anything from designing a holiday celebration or ritual, to deciding on a political policy (e.g. stance on Israel/Palestine).
4. Developing a process to create a clear understanding—and selectiveness—about issues which require a long, inclusive process and others where certain people offer input but

don't make the decision. This will provide more clarity about authority and structures on the one hand and clear avenues for participation on the other hand.

Management practices

1. Dragonfly will work with the E.D. and other leaders to streamline or sharpen Kehilla's operational practices to better support the clergy and community.
2. A key element of this work is reviewing staff roles, improving how staff can be responsive to the community, and working to create sustainable jobs for all Kehilla staff.

Community Engagement and Communications

1. A Board committee is currently developing policies governing committees and affinity groups. This process will need to clarify the authority of volunteer groups and the status of the groups formed out of the Arc of Change process.
2. Implementing the recommendations above related to clarifying decision-making, professionalizing management and increasing staff capacity should be accompanied by intentional communication to the broader Kehilla community about how these clarifications and changes will impact the community. This part of the process will culminate in a community forum, sponsored by the E.D and the Board, to provide an overview of the changes made in Part I and to outline the process/timeline/responsibility for Parts II through IV.

Part II: Cultivate culture to learn new ways of being together

Establish new community covenant (Brit):

1. Develop an inclusive process to create new grounding agreements to be in relationship with one another. Examples are: clearly defined shared values, shared expectations for treating each other with kindness and respect; listening across difference; separating intent from impact, practicing compassion for those with whom we disagree, stopping to reflect before forming an opinion.
2. Take into consideration how Kehilla has grown and the implications for what it means to be a community.
3. Set expectations about what needs the community can and cannot meet, acknowledging the pain of setting limits.
4. Offer spiritual practice and leadership to talk across differences. This could include healing old wounds and learning new ways to engage conflict in a generative way.
5. This process would be led by the E.D, in collaboration with at least one member of spiritual leadership and at least one board member.

Develop renewed disability/accessibility guidelines:

1. Using the grounding agreements established in the Brit, begin with an acknowledgement of legitimate needs on all sides.

2. Fully explore all interests related to accessibility, masking and related needs.
3. Explore all possible solutions to arrive at the most expansive possible policy.
4. Publicize the new policy, sharing the process and acknowledging the need for and the pain of setting limits.

Part III: Cultivate capacity to draw on the abundant human and financial resources within the community to meet more of each other's needs

Create a deliberate process for member engagement and leadership development

1. We strongly recommend hiring an organizer, who can leverage member talents and hours to increase organizational capacity, which will enable a virtuous cycle of growth.
2. The organizer assesses community skills and capacity, perhaps through a survey and 1:1s for existing members and 1:1 intake for new members to learn about the resources that exist within the Kehilla community.
3. The organizer would have authority to meet the needs of the committees, such as publicizing committee events to the broader community.
4. The organizer interfaces between staff and member requests for labor and member offerings of labor. The organizer strives to engage volunteers and meet congregational needs in a way that is mutually rewarding for members and staff, and tracks this with regular assessment tools like post-project surveys.
5. The organizer seeks to develop the leadership capacity of members and should develop an intentional process to nurture all potential leaders. There should be a clear process delineating how members become leaders, and we recommend a ladder of engagement model. The process would involve assessing the leadership capacity of new volunteers, identifying appropriate roles, and supporting members to step into leadership roles, should they aspire to. The organizer would assess the leadership capacity and values alignment of each volunteer and invest in their leadership development accordingly, prioritizing BIPOC, disabled, working-class, and low-income members. Any policy and process needs to be transparent, include active support for the leaders, and mechanisms for mutual accountability.
6. Proactive leadership development prioritizes these members and ensures Kehilla grows with their wisdom and provides opportunity to those who want to contribute in new ways. It also creates a pipeline to developing the diverse set of experiences and skills needed to enhance leadership and decision-making in an increasingly diverse Kehilla community.
7. The organizer works with the director of the B'Mitzvah program to support B'Mitzvah families to take on leadership projects with the hope of developing ongoing leadership of parents after their children are no longer in the program. These parents then can maintain their connections to Kehilla outside of the B'Mitzvah program.

Communication

Kehilla staff should establish clear mechanisms (e.g. a newsletter, social media posts), and set transparent protocols and expectations for how and when communication happens to and from various parts of the organization (e.g. staff, committees, and the congregation at large)

Talk about class and money

1. Invite open conversation about class and money. This could start with spiritual leadership, including a *dvar*, small groups, and provisional commitments.
2. Invite people into conversations within and across class backgrounds and money stories.
3. Develop clear values (e.g., everyone should contribute what they're able, everyone should get what they need, everyone should give money and time, everyone should give money or time) for the new Brit.
4. Based on these values, staff and/or volunteers can set up caucuses, groups organized around common interests, where members can discern what they're able to contribute to meet Kehilla's labor and financial needs. Members with more resources may need to encourage each other to contribute more. Members with fewer resources may need to remind each other that they belong at Kehilla.

Develop new, creative approaches to fundraising

1. In parallel, Kehilla could set up a grassroots fundraising team to proactively make direct asks to other members to contribute specific amounts based on their past giving and their self-reported ability. Some Kehilla members know how to do this based on experience with Jewish Voice for Peace and elsewhere.
2. Ensure all members are paying dues, whatever the amount.
3. Proactively follow up with members who stop renewing to encourage them or find out why.
4. Make sure that asks for money are not the only connection members have with synagogue leadership.

Part IV: Focus more attention on the Kehilla school and young people

1. Kehilla needs to pay more focused attention to the school, young people and families with children.
2. We recommend initiating an evaluation process to assess the needs of young people and their families. This would be an openhearted exploration of why some experience Kehilla as not family, children, or youth friendly, why young families are leaving and how Kehilla could better meet their needs. The assessment would specifically address the experience of young people of color and young people with different learning needs, and their families.
3. The outcome of this process would be more robust, inclusive programming for Kehilla school, young people and families.

Conclusion

The Renewing Kehilla process has been a long time coming, and it has ended up happening in a period full of trauma, loss, anxiety, and uncertainty:

The process launched a few months after the October 7th attacks in Israel and in the early months of the assault in Gaza.

Shortly after Dragonfly's work began, Donald Trump was re-elected, bringing a wave of fascist attacks on immigrants, BIPOC, trans people, universities, Palestinians, Muslims, advocates for Palestinian liberation, and Jews—much under the cover of fighting antisemitism.

Midway through the process, Kehilla's Executive Director of 10 years retired, opening new questions about the leadership needs at Kehilla now and placing additional strain on the existing systems. At this writing, an interim Executive Director is serving and a new Executive Director has been hired.

Kehilla is changing, wants to change, and needs to change.

These recommendations are aimed at helping Kehilla change with intention—strengthening internal systems, deepening shared culture, and tapping into the abundant talents and resources of the Kehilla community. By cultivating clear structures and systems, by cultivating culture to be together in new ways, and by cultivating capacity to meet more of each other's needs, Kehilla can become even more resilient, inclusive, politically potent, and spiritually grounded, supporting members through and giving members opportunities to impact this harrowing historical time.

We look forward to discussing these takeaways, reflections, and recommendations with you.

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