



Institute for
Jewish Spirituality

Strategic Plan

2022–2025

ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם
And they shall make me a sanctuary,
that I may dwell within them.

Exodus 25:2

ובתוכם לא נאמר אלא בתוכם
It is not written “within it,”
but rather, “within them.”

Rabbi Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl, Me’or Eynaim (18th c.)

We face enormous
challenges today.

IJS has a plan to meet
those challenges and
transform Jewish life.



The Need

We face the challenge of emotional and social health. U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy observes, “So many of the problems we face as a society, from addiction and violence to disengagement among workers and students to political polarization—are worsened by loneliness and disconnection. Building a more connected world holds the key to solving these and many more of the personal and societal problems confronting us today.”ⁱ

This struggle is particularly acute for young people. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, rates of anxiety, depression, and even suicidality had reached critical levels. The pandemic only added fuel to the fire. A recent study found that “The prevalence of depression and anxiety symptoms have doubled,” with 1 in 4 children, and 1 in 5 teens, experiencing them.ⁱⁱ American Jewish youth are particularly at risk.ⁱⁱⁱ

Parallel to this challenge of emotional and social health is a continuing crisis of Jewish meaning and belonging. The Pew Research Center’s study of Jewish Americans in 2020 showed that Jews are among the least spiritually engaged populations in America. The percentage of Jews who attend religious services weekly is less than half the average for Americans overall, while the percentage who don’t believe in any higher power is more than twice as high.^{iv}

A recent study of Americans ages 13–25 found that Jewish young people feel less of a sense of belonging and connection with their tradition than any other demographic group.

The same study reported that young American Jews feel they are “not flourishing” at the highest rate of any religious group.^v

These two challenges are related. For all of our communal investment over recent decades in continuity and community, too many American Jews—especially young American Jews—are still suffering emotionally and disconnected Jewishly.



Our Response: Spirituality

What have we been missing?

Spirituality: A felt inner sense of living relationship to an ultimate, loving, guiding life-force.

That life-force goes by many names: nature, spirit, universe, Creator, God.^{vi} When that sense of relationship—of being held in compassion, love, and care by the life-force of the universe—is foundational to our identities, our ability to respond to life’s challenges, and our capacity to live as healthy, contributing members of our communities, is dramatically enhanced.

For instance: We know that a healthy spiritual identity results in an up to 75 percent reduction in risk for clinical depression among teens.^{vii} Likewise, while young people across the board experience high levels of uncertainty in their lives, spiritually engaged young people are 20 percent more likely to say their lives are valuable and worthwhile.^{viii}

Fully 87 percent of participants in IJS’s programs say that Jewish spiritual practice deepened their connection with their Jewishness.

And: We know that Jewish spirituality can be transformative. 94 percent say they are more emotionally resilient. 98 percent report they express gratitude more frequently. Jewish spirituality works.^{ix}

Our society and our community have made many important efforts to promote engagement and education, from Holocaust education to Israel trips to camps, schools, and children’s books. Many of these efforts have helped. But too many of us—and too many of our young people—are still suffering.

We’ve been overlooking spirituality, but it has been here all along. It’s time to take it seriously.

We can transform
this picture.

We can create thriving
multigenerational
communities with
rich spiritual lives.



Our Vision

Make Spiritual Practice a Vital Part of Jewish Life

We can help our young people learn to manage the stresses and anxieties of life—as engaged and connected Jews. We can reconnect and renew—through Jewish spirituality.

We can do all that by nurturing Jewish spiritual practices.

What are Jewish spiritual practices? They are the things we do to cultivate that inner sense of relationship with an ultimate, loving, guiding life-force. They can include Jewish mindfulness meditation and contemplative prayer and Torah study, embodied practices like yoga, and character development or *tikkun middot*. Rituals, when done well (and not just by rote), are spiritual practices. So are blessings, experiences in nature, and mindful activism.

Drawing on the deep well of Jewish texts, rituals, and traditions, IJS has been developing and teaching Jewish spiritual practices since 1999.

Over 500 rabbis and cantors have developed and deepened their spiritual practices through our flagship Clergy Leadership Program. Hundreds of laypeople have participated in our retreats and training programs. During the pandemic, thousands more have now discovered the power of Jewish spiritual practices through our online offerings.

Vision, Mission, and Values

Loving Connection *Chesed*

We experience God as present in all aspects of Creation. We engage in spiritual practice in community to cultivate awareness of God's love flowing through us, and, in the Divine image, to extend compassion and love to all beings.

Lifelong Practice *Avodah*

We experience spiritual growth as a lifelong process that requires ongoing commitment, practice, and guidance.

Silence & Stillness *Shabbat Mind*

We understand that letting go of our striving and doing to create moments of silence and stillness enables us to hear the still, small voice within, calling us to our true divine nature and into right relation with other creatures and our planet.

IJS envisions

a world in which spiritual practice is a vital part of Jewish life, leading to compassion, justice, and peace.

Practice for Social Transformation *Tikkun Hanefesh – Tikkun Haolam*

Our inner work leads us to acts of compassion and justice that mend and heal the larger world.

Emergence *Hitchadshut*

We witness that everything is always changing and new again, that Revelation is ongoing. We engage in practice to continually renew our relationship to self, community, and Jewish tradition, and thus enliven Jewish life.

IJS's mission

is to develop and teach Jewish spiritual practices so that individuals and communities may experience greater awareness, purpose, and interconnection.

Inclusion & Equity *Tzedek u-Mishpat*

Our practice helps us grow in awareness of our biases, limitations, and intersecting identities and privileges. We aspire to support every person in nurturing their expression of spiritual life

Diversity & Integrity *Shivim Panim*

We recognize that all Jews, within their particular identities, inherit and contribute to a shared living Torah. We respect the integrity of diverse spiritual traditions and seek to deepen our Jewish practice by learning from their wisdom.

A hand holding a glowing orb against a sunset background. The hand is positioned in the upper right quadrant, with fingers gently cupping a bright, sun-like sphere. The background is a soft, hazy landscape with a horizon line, all in shades of green and yellow. The overall mood is serene and hopeful.

Theory of Change

IJS responds to fundamental needs on three intersecting levels: the individual, the communal, and the societal.

- **On the individual level**, we respond to the need that every human being has for practices that help us become self-aware, feel like we belong, cultivate wisdom, and manage the challenges of living from day to day and moment to moment.
- **On the communal level**, we respond to the need of organizations and institutions to be responsive to what people actually need and want. We help to develop Jewish leaders and communities that can teach Torah and foster Jewish life that leads to human flourishing—pre-requisites for survival in the twenty-first century.
- **On the societal level**, we respond to our collective need, as individuals and communities, for mindfulness, compassion, the ability to listen, and the capacity to take wise and courageous action.

We pursue our mission in response to these needs.

When we're successful, we help individual Jews, our communities, the Jewish people and the world, to be more responsive and interconnected, more meaningful, more intentional, more compassionate, more just, and more peaceful.

Why we do what we do



Seek guidance and practices to cultivate self-awareness, belonging, and wisdom, and to manage the challenges of living.

Human Beings

Lead lives of greater purpose and fulfillment as Jews.

Seek Torah, practices, and leadership that address human needs in compelling ways to be sustainable.

Jewish organizations & communities

Are more responsive to human needs and become more vibrant & sustainable.

Seek individuals and communities who are mindful, compassionate, connected, and capable of wise and courageous action.

The Jewish People & larger civil society

Become more compassionate, just, and peaceful and help the larger world to do the same.



Now is the Moment for

Jewish Spiritual Practice

When IJS was founded over two decades ago, spiritual practices like meditation and yoga were still seen as “out there.” Today they are multibillion-dollar industries. Children learn these practices in school. Workplaces offer them to their employees.

Back then, they were also viewed as outside of Jewish life. Hundreds of thousands of Jews looked to eastern traditions like Buddhism because they sought spiritual practice and couldn’t find it in Judaism.

Today, thanks in large measure to IJS, you can find Jewish spiritual practices in communities across the country, around the world, and online at any time of day.

That tells us that there is both an opportunity right now—and an opportunity cost if we fail to act.

The opportunity: Engage Jews, especially younger ones, in Jewish spiritual practices like Jewish mindfulness meditation and yoga, and help them reconnect with their tradition, themselves, and the universal life-force.

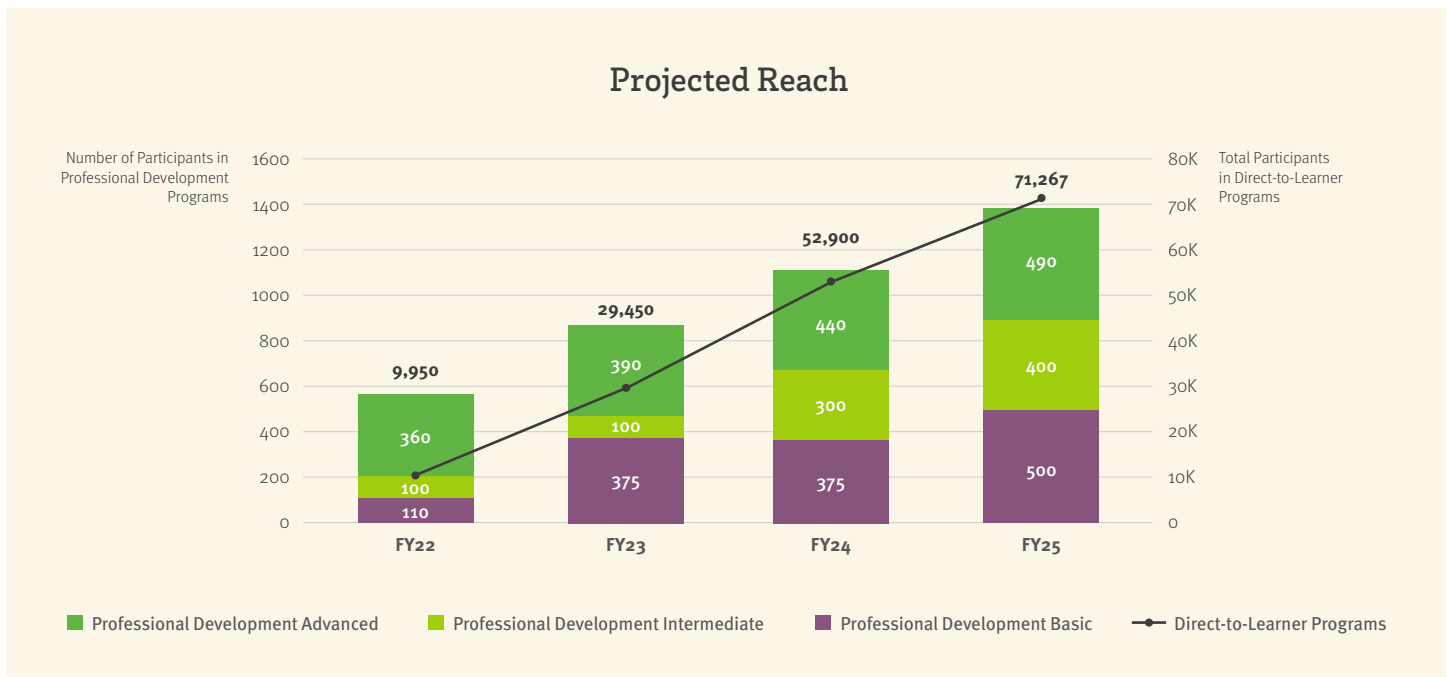
The opportunity cost: If we don’t do so, they are likely to pursue these practices—but outside a Jewish context.

Responding to the Moment:

Our Plan

IJS aims to lead the Jewish community in making spiritual practice a vital part of Jewish life. Our plan focuses on three programmatic priorities over the next four years:

- 1. Reach Young People.** Through strategic partnerships with youth-serving organizations, IJS will help tens of thousands of young people develop greater emotional resilience and a deeper sense of belonging in Jewish life.
- 2. Develop New Leaders.** While continuing to support the vital role of clergy in the spiritual lives of American Jews, IJS will launch cohort programs for activists, community leaders, and agency executives to deepen their own leadership and become champions of Jewish spiritual practice.
- 3. Become the Platform for Jewish Spirituality.** IJS will power the development of a network of organizations, individuals, researchers, and funders to create research, develop media channels, host convenings, and train a new generation of teachers of Jewish spirituality.



Invest in People and Systems

In order to accomplish these goals, we will invest in people and systems. Specifically, we will:

- Create a strong digital media presence with broad reach.
- Diversify our board, faculty, and staff.
- Strengthen our use of research in designing, executing, and assessing our programs.
- Maintain a balanced mix of earned revenue, individual donations, and foundation support even as we double our budget size over the next four years.

People: IJS currently boasts an exceptional faculty, including four full-time faculty members and dozens of adjunct instructors. As part of this plan, we aim to both diversify and increase our core faculty. As important, we plan to invest significantly (up to 4 staff positions) in adding talent to our team in the areas of digital product design and marketing, project management, and integrated learning assessment and program evaluation.

Systems: Just as important, our talented people need technological and financial systems to support them. These include an upgraded accounting system, a new customer relations management system that will enable us to be data-driven, and new communications systems that will help us effectively engage new audiences.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Our commitment to best practices in DEI flows from our values. Over the coming four years, IJS will deepen that commitment in order to make our faculty, staff, and board representative of the diversity of Jewish life so that as many people as possible can feel at home in Jewish spiritual practice.

Finally, our plan will help us build up our cash reserve—a critical step that will give us the financial security to experiment and take risks as we pursue our mission. In FY21, IJS’s cash reserve represented just less than 15 percent of expenses. Over the course of this plan, we will invest 3 percent of our annual expenses into our cash reserve as we aim to reach 25 percent of expenses.

MAJOR INVESTMENTS

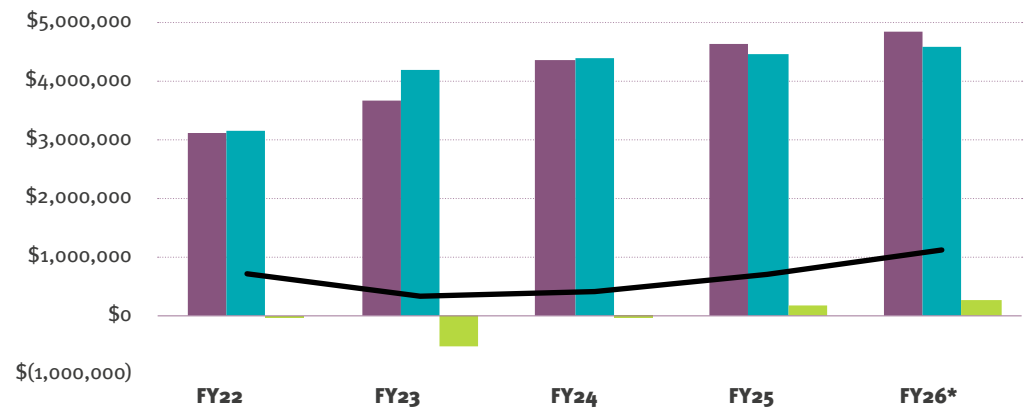
Personnel

- COO
- 4 FTEs to expand digital program operations & earned revenue
- 2 Faculty FTEs (could be part-time)
- Additional Development Associate

Systems

- New accounting system
- New Customer Relations Management (CRM) system for program and development
- Branding, marketing, and communications
- 3% of Expenses invested in cash reserve → Cash assets = 25% of expenses by FY26

Financial Projection



	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26*
Total Revenue	\$3,121,895	\$3,668,440	\$4,352,897	\$4,625,031	\$4,838,508
Total Expenses	\$3,145,723	\$4,187,946	\$4,388,155	\$4,453,646	\$4,567,424
Net	\$(23,828)	\$(519,506)	\$(35,258)	\$171,385	\$271,084
Total Cash Assets EOY	\$722,172	\$324,645	\$417,197	\$718,301	\$1,122,417

Budget Summary

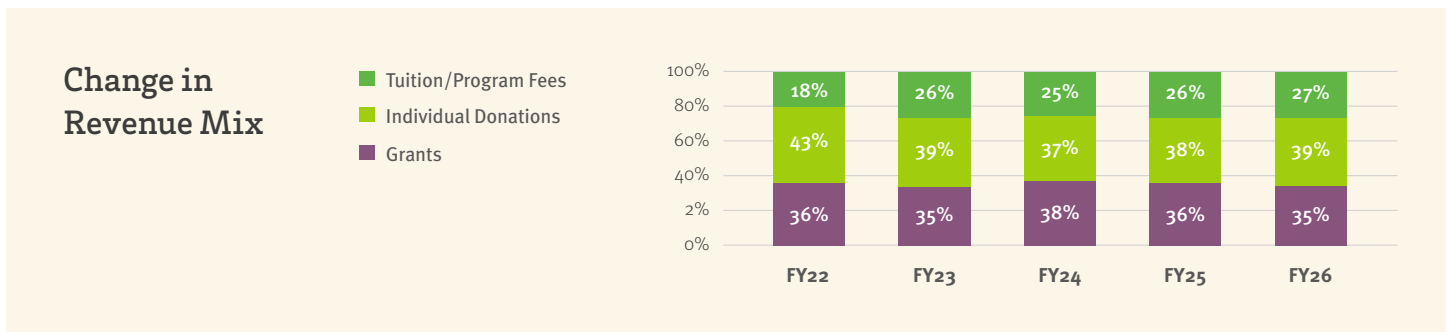
		FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26*
Revenue						
	Grants	\$1,110,000	\$1,325,000	\$1,650,000	\$1,700,000	\$1,700,000
	Individual Donations	\$1,345,000	\$1,500,000	\$1,625,000	\$1,762,500	\$1,882,500
	Tuition/Program Fees	\$566,895	\$843,440	\$1,077,897	\$1,162,531	\$1,256,008
	Government Programs (e.g., PPP)	\$100,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
	Total Revenue	\$3,121,895	\$3,668,440	\$4,352,897	\$4,625,031	\$4,838,508
Expenses						
Compensation	Salaries & Parsonage	\$1,825,680	\$2,394,723	\$2,590,387	\$2,655,966	\$2,722,365
	Taxes & Benefits	\$307,736	\$421,545	\$460,677	\$473,793	\$487,073
Program	Consultants	\$243,900	\$405,000	\$417,150	\$429,665	\$442,554
	Program Development & Innovation	\$50,000	\$125,000	\$125,000	\$125,000	\$125,000
Operations	Consultants	\$285,184	\$243,856	\$228,772	\$189,285	\$194,964
	Equipment and Supplies	\$100,921	\$109,675	\$113,305	\$116,014	\$118,805
	Facility	\$102,322	\$56,489	\$58,184	\$59,929	\$61,727
	Travel and Meetings	\$154,070	\$202,692	\$208,773	\$215,036	\$221,487
	Insurance, Fees, and Other	\$35,910	\$36,987	\$38,096	\$39,239	\$40,416
	Technology	\$40,000	\$70,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000
	Cash Reserve Deposit (3%/year)	\$0	\$121,979	\$127,810	\$129,718	\$133,032
	Total Expenses	\$3,145,723	\$4,187,946	\$4,388,155	\$4,453,646	\$4,567,424
	NET	(23,828)	(519,506)	(35,258)	171,385	271,084
	EOY Cash Assets*	\$722,172	\$324,645	\$417,197	\$718,301	\$1,122,417
	Cash as % of Expenses	23%	8%	10%	16%	25%

*FY26 financial projections are based on growth trajectory established during the years covered by this plan, FY22-25

Revenue Plan

IJS has historically benefitted from a strong earned revenue stream in addition to individual support and foundation grants. Our plan aims to sustain that healthy mix, even as our total budget doubles from FY 21 levels. To do that, we focus on three main areas:

- 1. Invest in Earned Revenue Streams.** IJS already has experience developing and successfully marketing paid online content. Our digital offerings grossed over \$570,000 in FY21. By adding staff members and consultants with expertise in market research, digital product design and marketing, we aim to double revenue from paid offerings over four years. These offerings will include access to our exceptional archive of digital material—meditations, text studies, courses—as well as creation of a Jewish mindfulness app that will be available through annual subscription.
- 2. Increase Fundraising.** FY21 was IJS’s most successful fundraising year in its history, with over \$1 million contributed through nearly 2,500 gifts. Of those 16 were major gifts (above \$10,000), including three in excess of \$100,000. Over the next four years, we aim to increase total donors to more than 3,500, and to grow the number of major gifts to 44, including seven annual gifts of \$100,000 or more. To do that, our plan focuses on: hiring an additional member of our development team; creating study groups, retreats, and other special opportunities for current and potential major donors; and creating a legacy giving program for bequests.
- 3. Increase Foundation Support.** IJS has benefitted from the generosity of several longtime foundation partners. For the first time, in FY21, we successfully secured funding from several major Jewish educational foundations. We have worked with those and other foundations—both within and outside the Jewish world—in developing this strategic plan and are securing major investments that will enable us to invest in our talent and systems. Nevertheless, we aim to avoid becoming overly reliant on foundation funding and plan to keep total grants at roughly one-third of total revenue.





A World Transformed

The needs and opportunities of this moment are enormous. Wherever we look, we are confronted with staggering challenges: pandemic, mental health, civil discourse, climate change. Technology is driving changes in the lives of individuals, families, communities, and society, and the pace of change is only accelerating. Jewish life likewise confronts big and quickening transformations.

The question is: How will we respond? How will we invest our time, energy, and resources to ensure healthy and flourishing individual and communal lives and a vibrant and engaged Jewish people?

We believe Jewish spirituality is the key. We know it from our decades of experience. We know it from the science. But most of all, we know it from our minds and hearts.

IJS is building a platform for the Jewish present and future. It's a platform that starts with moments of being quiet enough to hear the still, small voice within us—the voice of the life-force of the universe pulsating, calling to us, inviting us to be present and experience our interconnection. The still, small voice is inside each of us, but in the noise of today's world we often don't stop to listen for it.

What if we did—at Shabbat dinner, on a nature hike, at a prayer service? What if we truly listened? What if we truly reconnected? What if we allowed ourselves to be renewed?

We would transform Jewish life and the world. That's what we plan to do—with you.

Join us.



Institute for Jewish Spirituality



jewishspirituality.org



facebook.com/jewishspirituality



youtube.com/c/InstituteforJewishSpirituality

ⁱ Vivek H. Murthy, *Together: The Healing Power of Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World*, Harper Collins (2020), xix.

ⁱⁱ Racine N, McArthur BA, Cooke JE, Eirich R, Zhu J, Madigan S. "Global Prevalence of Depressive and Anxiety Symptoms in Children and Adolescents During COVID-19: A Meta-analysis." *JAMA Pediatr*. Published online August 09, 2021. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2021.2482

ⁱⁱⁱ See, for instance, the Detroit Jewish community study: <https://myjewishdetroit.org/2018/02/01/anxious-times-growing-concerns/>.

^{iv} Pew Research Center, May 11, 2021, "Jewish Americans in 2020."

^v *The State of Religion & Young People: Navigating Uncertainty*. Springtide Research Institute 2021. Figures on flourishing are part of internal, unpublished data shared with IJS.

^{vi} This definition draws on that developed in Lisa J. Miller, *The Spiritual Child: The New Science on Parenting for Health and Lifelong Thriving*, Pan Macmillan (2015), 6.

^{vii} Lisa Miller, *The Awakened Brain*

^{viii} Springtide 2021

^{ix} IJS Program Evaluation by Tobin Belzer, PhD (University of Southern California) with Gila Silverman, 2019.