Strategic Plan
2016–2020
September 21, 2016

It is our pleasure to present this strategic plan, the first for Mechon Hadar in its 10-year history. The process around creating this plan engaged dozens of stakeholders, including six members of the board of directors, who spent many hours in meetings working through the high-level vision as well as the specific instantiation of that vision over the next four years. We are grateful to the generosity of the Jim Joseph Foundation, whose targeted grant enabled us to work with the TCC Group and invest the time needed to make this process significant. We are energized about the next steps for Mechon Hadar, and invite you to join us as we implement this ambitious plan.

Jonathan Lopatin,
Chair of the Board

David Gilberg,
Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee
Vision
Jews, in communities throughout the United States and Israel, are living meaningful lives of Torah, Avodah and Hesed.

Mission
Mechon Hadar empowers Jews to create and sustain vibrant, practicing, egalitarian communities of Torah, Avodah, and Hesed.

Impact Statement
Mechon Hadar’s strategy to realize our vision has two parts; each is crucial for the realization of our ultimate goal: (1) Building a core of individuals and communities that lives out our vision of Torah, Avodah and Hesed, and (2) Ensuring that this core radiates out to those in the larger Jewish community who can participate in and shape its vision.
Founded ten years ago with a modest 8-week summer program serving 18 students, Mechon Hadar has emerged as a leader in the field of Jewish education and community building. This strategic plan represents our desire to expand our footprint. We plan to harness the power of our beit midrash, invest in our alumni and partner with communities on the ground to empower more students, teachers, and leaders who will spread our model and message.

Over the past ten years, Mechon Hadar has responded to increased demand for programming and content with dramatic growth. Students in our immersive programs have grown significantly; we now have more than 500 alumni of our summer and year-long yeshiva programs, and 1,500 alumni of our eight 1-week
programs. Hadar’s online presence has skyrocketed, with multiple podcasts, classes and music; there were 1.3 million content downloads in the past two years. Our core operations have grown apace as well. With support from 20 national foundations and more than 1,000 individual donors, as well as direct revenue from hundreds of program participants per year, Hadar has a growing and increasingly balanced revenue base.

With support from the Jim Joseph Foundation, Hadar embarked on its first-ever formal strategic plan. Guided by the TCC Group, Hadar engaged in an 8-month process engaging dozens of internal and external stakeholders, staff, alumni and partners in the field. We emerged with three strategic programmatic goals and one organizational capacity goal, to be accomplished over the next four years. These three programmatic goals represent a doubling down on what we do best, as well as a series of “stretch” goals to push our work further and advance our long-term vision.
We believe that immersive experiences are key for generating the kind of intensity required to navigate today’s world Jewishly. Hadar’s immersive programs are multi-day experiences that are characterized by their holistic nature. The strategic plan calls to double the number of participants in immersive experiences by 2020 through (a) expanding existing programs; (b) developing new programs, and (c) partnering with other institutions to offer programs beyond New York.
The ultimate success of Hadar’s vision depends on a grass-roots manifestation of our vision in communities. This goal stretches Hadar to do more in direct support of communities, working to build networks and strengthen communities on the ground throughout the United States and Israel. We aim to accomplish this through two major strategies:

(1) Invest in the alumni of our immersive programs, numbering more than 2,000, as well as invest in new participants we will actively recruit to help build the field;

(2) Seek direct partnerships with leaders and institutions—grassroots or established—that will extend our impact more directly in the realm of lived communities.

**STRATEGIC PRIORITY GOAL 2**

Support individuals and groups of individuals seeking to create, strengthen, and transform communities dedicated to our vision of Torah, Avodah, and Hesed.
Without content, there is no beating heart to contemporary Jewish community, and Hadar has always been committed to innovative, compelling, and relevant Jewish content. This strategic commitment is central to our outward-facing, broad vision for the role of Torah and Jewish content in the larger Jewish community. We recognize our content is generated from the robust center of Hadar—our *beit midrash*—and this is a core feature of our organization that must thrive in order for the content to be produced at the highest levels. We aim to engage specific urgent contemporary questions, and to disseminate the content to target audiences through written, online, and in-person engagements. Our plan calls for the doubling of our content engagement by 2020.

**Strategic Priority Goal 3**

Impact diverse audiences by offering a vision of Torah that is uncompromisingly honest, spiritually meaningful, and socially responsible.
The expansion of our organization through these three program goals must be accompanied by an expansion of our organizational capacity. We aim to grow capacity in a number of ways: recruitment and retention of staff, marketing and communications, facilities improvements, fundraising and board governance. Through new multi-year gifts, as well as increased revenue, we aim to expand from a budget of $2.7 million to $4.4 million by 2020.
We are blessed to live in a time when the land of Israel has once again become a political, religious and cultural center for the Jewish people. Only when North American and Israeli Jewry work together can the full potential of contemporary Jewish life be realized. Hadar is a North American institution, but we believe that Israel and Israeli Judaism play a critical role in our vision of Jewish life. Even our North American successes will depend on ensuring that our vision and our content interfaces with Israeli Judaism. We aim to do this by (1) networking our Israel-based alumni, numbering over 100; (2) producing Hebrew-language content, and (3) partnering with Israeli institutions that can advance our values.
Conclusion

At Hadar, we see tremendous opportunity for religious and communal growth in the Jewish community. In a socially fragmented world, immersive programs inspire people to share their experiences by creating community with others. People are thirsty for Jewish content that can serve as an authentic guide and an inspiration. As Jews reevaluate questions of identity and affiliation, Hadar is well-positioned to have strong impact. Our voice, deeply rooted in our texts and traditions, offers a creative response to contemporary questions and challenges, and we aim to respond to those challenges with curiosity, creativity and conviction. We are excited for this next phase of our growth and ready to serve, shape and contribute to the dynamic Jewish world we live in.
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I. Vision & Mission

Vision: Jews, in communities throughout the United States and Israel, are living meaningful lives of Torah, Avodah and Hesed.

Mission: Mechon Hadar empowers Jews to create and sustain vibrant, practicing, egalitarian communities of Torah, Avodah, and Hesed.

Impact Statement: Mechon Hadar’s strategy to realize our vision has two parts; each is crucial for the realization of our ultimate goal: (1) Building a core of individuals and communities that lives out our vision of Torah, Avodah and Hesed. (2) Ensuring that this core radiates out to those in the larger Jewish community who can participate in and shape its vision.

Mechon Hadar operates as part of a long chain of Jewish tradition, and thus our vision is articulated using traditional language: Torah, Avodah and Hesed. This vision, originally expressed by Shimon HaTzadik more than 2,000 years ago (Avot 1:2), means something very specific to Hadar, outlined below.
• Passionate Torah study that is rigorous, nuanced and sensitive to the full range of human experiences, combining critical study and intellectual openness with religious hunger and expression

• A community where Torah study is widely practiced and peer reinforced, that values Torah literacy and fluency, based on the conviction that the Torah is the birthright of all Jews

• A community that is at home in and contributes to the conversation of Torah, which is experienced as a powerful way to address life’s deepest questions

• A commitment to gender equality in practice, leadership and citizenship as the proper application of Torah to contemporary reality and motivated by the importance of encountering each and every human being as the image of God

• Jewish practice that is attentive and consistent, including communal prayer that is spiritually and emotionally resonant

• A community that embraces mitzvot with a full heart and through peer-reinforced practice, which engages our deepest ethical and religious instincts

• There can be no service of God without a journey to greater kindness, empathy and sensitivity; when Torah is studied properly—with heart and not just mind, with vulnerability and presence—it ought to lead to a life of hesed

• A community that is characterized and animated by hesed, such that Torah study, practice of mitzvot, and interpersonal interactions are all shaped by this central value
II. Context

A. Environmental Context

While North American Jewry is certainly in flux and the precise contours of its future demographics are uncertain, this is undoubtedly a moment of renaissance. Jews are enthusiastic about being Jewish and are eager for Jewish content and community. Recent years have seen an explosion in educational and communal endeavors that help young adults organize their own context for Jewish engagement and meaning. On campus, Hillel’s Senior Jewish Educators and Ezra Fellows and the OU’s Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus have engaged thousands of young adults. In popular urban environments, Moishe House and independent minyanim have become an important home to young Jews seeking to build meaningful communities.

On the professional side of Jewish life, major investments have been made to train educators to bring content to schools and other learning environments. For example, the Pardes Educators Program, the Davidson School at JTS and the Kevah Fellowship have invested in cadres of passionate and talented educators who
can teach in both informal and formal settings across the country.

Even amidst this renaissance and renewed investment, however, there are still significant needs in the areas of Jewish education and community-building. While people understand that Jewish content is key to energizing and directing Jewish life, many communities often struggle to effectively define and focus their substantive engagement with Judaism. Even talented educators need to reconnect with the source of their passions and to develop new ideas and approaches to Jewish text. Although Birthright Israel and a host of other young-adult programs have given young Jews multiple pathways to meaning and connection, it takes more than just an experience to build long-term, committed Jewish communities. Successful Jewish communities require a sense of purpose, a strong peer network and communal and institutional support for creativity.

**Mechon Hadar has emerged as a leader in Jewish education and community building.** We have developed content and a way of teaching that is simultaneously rigorous and spiritual. We support communities that are open and creative, while being substantively grounded and mission driven. We have become leaders in taking the best of the traditional *beit midrash* and unleashing its potential in a fully co-ed environment that treats all who enter it as equal citizens. Hundreds of Hadar alumni living in dozens of cities are eager to use their talents and passions—combined with the inspiration and vision they experienced at Hadar—to shape their Jewish communities.

Mechon Hadar is now engaged in a strategic plan that will leverage our expertise and successes to contribute to growth in the Jewish community. We have spent a decade teaching students in immersive settings and educating communities in North America and Israel. We now want to invest in expanding the power of our *beit midrash* to train more students, teachers and leaders who will be able to spread our model, our method and our message to others. A central strategic goal is mentoring and partnering with promising members of our growing constituency—including both our entrepreneurial alumni and leading practitioners in the field—to take the best of Hadar’s model and share it with others. We also believe our content can significantly influence Jewish
learning and thinking around the country and broaden our reach and impact in the years ahead.

**B. Organizational Context**

Over the past decade, Mechon Hadar has grown significantly, reflecting increased demand for our content and our model of teaching and learning. Ten years ago, we planned for our first intensive 8-week summer program, a pilot we ran in 2007 with 18 people in their twenties. During the last decade, our organization has grown dramatically—from our initial annual budget of about $240,000 to our current $2.7 million. We have steadily added new cohorts and programs, and we have watched the seed of that initial program flower into a robust and still-growing organization.
We launched in 2007 with support from foundations invested in our dream, notably Bikkurim, Natan, Dorot, and the Alan B. Slifka Foundation. In 2008, a grant from the Jim Joseph Foundation (JJF) enabled us to double the size of our summer cohort. A wave of significant funding from JJF, the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, the AVI CHAI Foundation, Covenant Foundation, and UJA-Federation of New York allowed us to launch as a year-round institution in the fall of 2009. More and more individuals came to us, hungry for content and eager for leadership, seeking to learn with us and to build strategic partnerships. In response to those who could not learn for an entire summer, or year, we created evening classes and lectures for the broader public that address vital contemporary topics. College-student demand drove us to launch a Winter Learning Seminar during the semester break.
Our musician-in-residence, Joey Weisenberg, has created a Singing Communities Intensive, which draws participants from around the country for a week in December. Rabbis, educators, Jewish professionals and lay leaders asked how they could come to Hadar; we created new week-long intensives to meet this demand. Israelis discovered our *beit midrash*, and their participation has enhanced our North American experience. This sparked seminars and alumni networks in Israel, as part of our effort to connect these two vital centers of Jewish life.

Our work began as an organic outgrowth of independent minyanim and their constituency of young adults. We have watched demand and interest grow from all corners of the Jewish world as we have become sought-after teachers and voices in the broader Jewish community.
Our faculty members have served as scholars-in-residence at major national conferences—including JFNA’s General Assembly, Jewish Funders Network, and the National Conference on Jewish Camping (JCamp 180). They teach widely at synagogues and Jewish institutions around the country. Our teachings have reached hundreds of thousands of people through ELI talks, articles in the general media, published books, and our heavily trafficked website (1.3 million content downloads since November 2014), all developed in response to strong demand for content from our constituency, especially from those who live outside New York City.

We are grateful and honored to have emerged as one of the few Jewish start-ups from the 2000s with staying power. With support from over 20 national foundations and more than 1,000 individual donors, Mechon Hadar has an increasingly stable revenue base. The Samuel Bronfman Foundation’s Second Stage Growth Fund and Project Accelerate have both recognized us as successfully moving beyond the start-up stage and ready for our next stage of investment and growth. Rabbi Avital Hochstein joined our Executive Team in 2010, and we have cultivated a next generation of faculty who are now running the day-to-day operations of our summer and year-round programs. They are also gaining recognition as desired speakers who share their unique and innovative ideas with a growing public. We are proud of this aspect of our organizational growth and continue to prioritize and invest in it.

We last engaged in serious strategic planning a decade ago, as we launched Hadar. Our first decade has been one of growing and adding programs, attracting students and constituents and building financial and communal support for our work. We saw opportunities to expand our programmatic footprint and seized on them. We are now ready to consolidate the gains of our first decade of programming and to focus proactively and strategically on the next phase. This strategic plan is focused on increasing Hadar’s impact. We want to leverage our initial successes to stimulate and grow Jewish communities on the ground who are engaged and inspired by Hadar’s mission.
C. Planning Objectives

The critical questions that guided the 2016–2020 strategic planning process included:

• What needs to be in place (in 5, 10, and 20 years) in order to actualize Hadar’s long-term vision—building a core and ensuring it radiates out?

• What or whom is the target of change (individuals, institutions, society)?

• Where does Mechon Hadar have a unique role to play in bringing about this change?

• What is the most strategic pathway for future growth?

D. Key Findings from Planning Process

Through a series of interviews and focus groups, TCC Group discovered the following findings:

• **Strategy**: Hadar has a strong reputation for delivering high quality programs; however, there is stakeholder support for better weaving the programs together under a cohesive, overarching strategy.

• **Staff Development**: As a founder-led organization that has experienced significant growth in recent years, stakeholders agree there is a need to invest in staff development to build the leadership bench, with a particular focus on the newer faculty.

• **Partners**: There is a recognized need among internal stakeholders to engage in authentic and mutually-beneficial partnerships; the fact that partners have their own, unique vision and values should not be viewed as a barrier to partnership, but as an opportunity for bi-directional sharing and learning; staff and board feel as though partnership should be about advancing each party’s respective needs and goals.

• **Alumni**: There is a recognized need to increase investment in alumni; as with
partnership, the approach must empower alumni to pursue their individual aspirations.

• **Content:** Internal stakeholders affirmed that content production and dissemination is essential to everything Hadar does. It is supportive and integral to its other activities; it is also important in its own right.

• **Immersive Programming:** Despite some stakeholder feedback that the target audience for immersive programming is small and skepticism about the feasibility of living out Hadar’s core values in one’s daily life, there was a strong feeling among stakeholders that immersive programming is core to Hadar and should not be diminished.

• **Individuals and Communities:** There was a desire among internal stakeholders to focus Hadar’s investment on those individuals and communities that have demonstrated a strong commitment to living out Hadar’s vision and values.
**MECHON HADAR THEORY OF CHANGE**

*Mechon Hadar empowers Jews to create and sustain vibrant, practicing, egalitarian communities of Torah, Avodah, and Hesed.*

**Short-Term Outcomes**
- Significant network of people who use their energies and talents to strengthen Hadar’s central values in local communities.
- Increased number of Jews experience Hadar’s central values in a supportive, communal, immersive learning environment.
- Increased opportunities for Hadar alumni to continue their communal learning and practice in Jewish population centers across the United States and in Israel.
- Increased number of alumni assume leadership roles in their communities or institutions.

**Interim Outcomes**
- A more solidified base of communities with a commitment to Hadar’s central values has been established.
- Increased presence of Hadar alumni and communal leaders in a select number of significant Jewish centers.
- Increased number of communities or institutions have been created or renewed by Hadar-trained leaders.
- A significant number of Jews from a wide variety of backgrounds and communities have increased the quality of their own practice of Torah, prayer and/or Hesed.

**Long-Term Outcomes**
- Hadar’s central values are being lived out organically by a critical mass of Jews in community hubs of meaningful Jewish life throughout the United States & Israel.
- Multiple sites throughout the U.S. and Israel have created institutions offering a high quality, exemplary model for living out Hadar’s core values.
- A robust network of Jews equipped to teach and model Hadar’s central values exists throughout the United States & Israel.
- Mechon Hadar’s yeshiva remains a vital, financially stable and thriving center in Jewish society.

**Impact**
- Any number of Hadar’s central values find broad reinforcement and support in the programming and content of a range of Jewish communities and institutions in the United States and Israel.
- Increased number of Jews have intensified their prayer practices, Hesed, and engagement with a variety of mitzvot.
- Increased numbers of Jews share the vocabulary of Torah, and see its language and traditions as relevant wisdom and counsel for engaging contemporary issues.
- Increased number of Jews feel that a commitment to gender equality is fully compatible with a deeply traditional, committed practice of Judaism.
III. 2016–2020 Goals

We emerged with three strategic programmatic goals, and one organizational capacity goal, to be accomplished over the next four years.

**Strategic Priority Goal One:** Strengthen and expand Hadar’s immersive experiences.

**Strategic Priority Goal Two:** Support individuals and groups of individuals seeking to create, strengthen, and transform communities dedicated to our vision of Torah, Avodah, and Hesed.

**Strategic Priority Goal Three:** Impact diverse audiences by offering a vision of Torah that is uncompromisingly honest, spiritually meaningful, and socially responsible.

**Organizational Capacity Goal Four:** Mechon Hadar will build a sustainable and effective base of operations to achieve its strategic priority goals.
IV. Strategic Priority

Goal One: Strengthen and expand Hadar’s immersive experiences

A. Rationale

Jews connect to Judaism because it provides community in an often lonely world. They seek something larger than themselves, and Judaism beckons to them with an eternal message and an opportunity to connect to a deep past. In an open world of radical choice, one cannot rely on organic manifestations of community and practice. We believe that immersive experiences are key for generating the kind of intensity required to navigate today’s world Jewishly. In short, they create miniature Jewish societies. Immersion experiences serve as a kind of incubator for Jewish content and practice, an island in a cosmopolitan world that offers Jews the rare experience of total Jewishness. It is a great blessing to live in an age in which Jews are broadly welcomed into the broader society and when full integration is possible. But that fluidity can also diffuse the energy of Jewish life and scatter it beneath the threshold of vibrancy or even viability. Immersion experiences are critical to maintaining a sense of Jewish purpose and commitment.

From the outset, we have believed in the power of immersive experiences. Our initial signature
programs, the 8-week summer program and the year-round fellowship, were always envisioned as full-time immersive commitments. In recent years, we have experimented with shorter models of immersive programming, including intensives of a few days targeted at college students, rabbis and laypeople passionate about Jewish learning.

Hadar’s immersive programs are multi-day experiences that are characterized by their holistic nature. In its most robust form, the immersive experience serves as a catalyst for the participants, and Mechon Hadar becomes an important home for years to come. These programs set in motion a substantive, ongoing relationship. Immersion experiences last anywhere from a few days to a year; they combine learning, prayer and social interactions as they weave the heart and mind together in an all-encompassing experience. It is precisely this stepping outside of one’s routine that enables a quantum leap of intellectual and spiritual growth and which creates cohorts of colleagues who are inspired to foster change in the world.

This strategic plan calls for a renewed commitment to this model and an investment in expanding the numbers of participants in our immersive programs. Our plan calls to double the number of participants in immersive experiences by 2020. We plan to do this by more intensively recruiting for our existing programs, developing new programs for a broader constituency than we currently serve and exploring sites for immersive programming beyond our current Manhattan campus.

B. Implementation Detail

Goal 1, Objective 1: Increase opportunities for immersive study

Benchmarks:
- Immersive outcomes have been defined and adopted by Dec. 2016
- All immersive programs have been tailored to fit the definition of “immersive” and best meet the intended outcomes by May 2017
• Two new immersive program timeframes (eg. month-long, second semester, Israeli calendar) have been designed and launched by June 2018
• Three new target audiences (eg. rabbinical students, gap year, high school students) for immersive programming have been designed and launched by June 2018
• Three strategic partners with which to collaboratively offer immersive programs have been identified by May 2017 and launched by June 2018
• Total enrollment of immersives (with focus on 1-week seminars) has doubled by 2020

Goal 1, Objective 2: Deepen the quality and impact of immersive programs at Hadar

Benchmarks:
• Metrics for measuring the quality and impact of immersives have been established by May 2017
• Data collection tools and evaluation methods have been developed and implemented by Dec. 2017
• Continuous improvement of immersive programs has been demonstrated by May 2018
V. Strategic Priority
Goal Two: Support individuals and groups of individuals seeking to create, strengthen, and transform communities dedicated to our vision of Torah, Avodah, and Hesed

A. Rationale

We believe that, while strong and compelling Jewish communities are led by visionary leaders, they are ultimately defined by their members. Individual pathways to meaning are important, but rich Jewish life is almost always marked by living in community with peers who reinforce and support one’s practices and values. We seek to support individuals by strengthening and empowering their Jewish communities to thrive.

Strong Jewish communities are those where each person’s practice and commitment is supported and strengthened by others, where the web of community is so thick that it spiritually connects its members. As we move forward, we will do more in direct support of communities, working to build networks and strengthen communities on the ground throughout the United States and Israel.

The ultimate success of Hadar’s vision depends on a grass-roots manifestation of our vision in geographically-defined communities. Synagogues, schools, Jewish camping, and rich campus life are essential elements of committed, grounded Jewish community. We
also define community broadly, as a network of relationships and interactions. That means the communities Hadar supports may also be situational, ideological, career-based, ritual-based, or a combination of these.

We are committed to two broad strategies for taking Hadar’s impact to greater communal depth. The first focuses on the people who attend our immersive programs. Since the founding of Hadar, our alumni have been central in shaping and realizing Hadar’s vision. We invest considerably in our students during their immersive experiences and we have seen that alumni of our immersive experiences have demonstrated impactful leadership upon returning to their Jewish communities. We have always invested in the alumni of our longer programs. Moving forward we will seek to support and empower the alumni of all of our immersive experiences, including shorter, week-long programs (and the term “alumni” in this plan is meant to include this group). We are proud to have more than 2,000 people who have joined us for immersive programs since 2007. In addition to the people who have already attended our immersive programs, we also intend to recruit change agents and future Jewish leaders to newly designed selective programs that are explicitly focused on building community in the field. We expect that the leadership programming we will launch in our own beit midrash will attract entrepreneurial talent who will infuse a range of communities with renewed spirit.

As we now aim to broaden our impact in the Jewish world, we see deepened investment in all of our alumni as an essential part of our strategy. We plan to mentor and network these alumni to create communities on the ground that will embody our core values and shape the broader Jewish world. Building on prior initiatives and micro-grants, designed to catalyze creativity and action, we now intend to invest much more significantly in the people who attend our immersive programs as the agents for making communities of Torah, Avodah and Hesed a reality. Our goal is to empower these communities in their work toward creating the Jewish world they want to see, broadly aligned with our vision.

Our second strategy is to seek direct partnerships with leaders and institutions—grass-roots or established—that will extend
our impact more directly in the realm of lived communities. Building on our experience with day schools—through fellow placements and immersive seminars—as well as our recently-launched standards for Jewish education, we intend to work more closely with a select group of schools to strengthen the substance and culture of Jewish learning. We also will seek to build on our existing partnerships with Hillel International to impact campus-based Jewish communities inspired by Hadar and its mission. We are eager to work with synagogues and minyanim in our network who are open to re-imagining their communities in significant ways. Through these collaborations, we intend to deepen our impact on the broader Jewish world.

Hadar has been blessed with steady and strong leadership since its founding. A central goal in the next phase of our organizational life is to invest deeply in the creation and sustenance of communities that are an essential element of our intended long-term impact.

**B. Implementation Detail**

Goal 2, Objective 1: Build strong networks of individuals (beginning with alumni) with shared passions/goals (the right people, having the right conversations) to advance their work.

**Benchmarks:**
- Rubrics for evaluating what successful networks (across degrees of intensity) look like have been created by June 2018
- Guidelines for determining priority networks have been developed by June 2018
- At least three low-level/public networks (e.g. listservs, Facebook pages) have been created by Jan. 2019
- At least five high-intensity cohort groups have been created by June 2020
Goal 2, Objective 2: Empower select alumni to be effective in their work by creating and facilitating multiple tiers of mentorship and support.

**Benchmarks:**
- Multiple mentorship and support models have been designed by May 2017
- Metrics for measuring the quality and impact of each investment level have been established by May 2017
- Lowest-level (micro-grant) investment model has been assessed and re-launched by May 2017
- Mid-level model has been launched by Sept. 2018
- Deepest level model (e.g. 2-year cohort) has been launched by Sept. 2019

Goal 2, Objective 3: Develop and pilot models for strategic partnership with communities dedicated to our vision of Torah, Avodah, and Hesed

**Benchmarks:**
- Criteria by which to choose pilot opportunities have been established by Jan. 2017
- Identified five potential partners by June 2017 and selected two to design partnership by Jan. 2018
- Launched at least two pilot partnership programs by Jan. 2019
- Following initial pilot models, Hadar has the ability to clearly determine mutually beneficial strategic partnership investment opportunities (and therefore start marketing them) by Jan. 2020

Goal 2, Objective 4: Develop content, practical tools, and resources for people to live more committed lives of Jewish practice, consistent with the vision (e.g. Online tefillah resources, practical guides)

**Benchmarks:**
- Priority areas for practical tool creation have been identified by May 2017
- Current content has been assessed to determine its effectiveness by Jan. 2018
- At least two new content production opportunities have been created by May 2018 with three additional opportunities by 2020
VI. Strategic Priority

Goal Three: Impact diverse audiences by offering a vision of Torah that is uncompromisingly honest, spiritually meaningful, and socially responsible.

A. Rationale

Without content, without Torah, there is no beating heart to contemporary Jewish community. In 21st century America’s world of virtually limitless possibilities, a world in which ethnicity no longer meaningfully binds and in which Judaism competes in a marketplace of ideas, Judaism must offer a sense of mission and purpose in order for it to be compelling. People don’t choose a millennia-old religion because of its comfortable correspondence with the familiar and the conventional. They choose it because of its transcendent power and its ability to critique and direct one’s life. Judaism, anchored in Torah, beckons by imagining who you might be instead of simply reflecting back at you that which you already are.

When Torah—the treasure trove of Jewish wisdom accumulated by our people—stands at the heart of Jewish life, that sense of relevance and importance becomes palpable. Jewish individuals and communities are at their most compelling when on a path of self-discovery, when they are engaged in deep learning about what is demanded of them as human beings and Jews. Belonging for the sake of belonging
alone is no longer enough. Our commitment to building Jewish community has thus always entailed a commitment to innovative, compelling and relevant Jewish content.

We are committed to advancing and sharing a particular sort of learning. It is a learning that is uncompromisingly honest, that flinches from no questions and hides from no knowledge, no matter how challenging. In a world where, increasingly, all knowledge is instantly accessible and community is increasingly global, conversations of Torah and Jewish content must directly address any and all potential challenges. It is a learning that is spiritually meaningful, that seeks to engage the heart as well as the mind. Jewish studies can now be found in all the world’s great universities. We need Jewish houses of study—batei midrash—that embrace both academic scholarship, and the emotional and spiritual aspects that are often absent in the ivory tower. It is a learning that is socially responsible, that recognizes that the eternal teachings of the Torah and the Jewish people can be refracted through the lens of each age, as they are faithfully and thoughtfully applied to an ever-changing world. We seek to generate and teach Jewish content that responds, sometimes counter-culturally, to the needs and challenges of the present. Overall, we aim to be substantive, avoiding simple appeals to textual authority or communal boundaries as a way of avoiding discussion of difficult issues. Instead, our content illuminates the topics we discuss, inviting people to greater nuance and deeper passion.

This content is critical to our mission. In many ways, it forms the intellectual and spiritual backbone of everything we do. When we push the boundaries of existing knowledge, when we tackle a vexing problem through the wisdom of the ages, we are fulfilling one of our core purposes, which is to champion the voice of Torah in the world. But it is also a key engagement tool for Jews who are thirsty for answers to life’s deepest questions, but who may not, now or ever, turn to Hadar’s immersive and intensive communal dimensions as a plausible life path. We have seen how our content has enabled us to engage a vastly broader audience than we can reach through our immersive programming alone. There are Jews for whom many aspects of Jewish practice are difficult, but for whom learning and questioning are a life-giving elixir. Other Jews are deeply committed
to Jewish communities that starkly limit their ability to experience a variety of forms of Jewish life, but they are curious and eager to study new perspectives on Torah. Our content aims to reach all of these people, including our immersive constituency. Some people who we reach through content end up in our immersive programming; others do not. All, we hope, are persistently moved to act and think differently as a result of having encountered us and our ideas. This strategic commitment is central to our outward-facing, broad vision for the role of Torah and Jewish content in the larger Jewish community.

B. Implementation Detail

Goal 3, Objective 1: Model an engagement of deep study that fuels and fulfills our vision of Torah

Benchmarks:
- Hadar continues to be a robust *mekom Torah* (place of Torah), and is recognized as such, continually through 2020 (and beyond)
- Each faculty member will have clearly articulated individual and collaborative learning goals by June 2017
- Cross-faculty learning has been operationalized by Sept. 2017

Goal 3, Objective 2: Engage urgent contemporary questions

Benchmarks:
- Hadar has articulated 5–8 key pressing questions by Jan. 2017 (noting the evolving nature of the questions)
- A plan for prioritizing content production by faculty has been established by Dec. 2017
- Through books, articles, and public programming, we have deepened the discourse around 3–4 of these pressing questions by June 2018
Goal 3, Objective 3: Creatively and effectively disseminate content to targeted audiences

Benchmarks:

• Target audiences for each type of content (new and already existing) have been identified by May 2017
• Format for five key pieces of content has been determined by Dec. 2017
• Three new creative content dissemination strategies (a new podcast/newsletter/book) have been created and disseminated by Dec. 2018
• Content has been accessed more by community leaders beyond Hadar’s core demographic by June 2019
• Content has been accessed by more than twice as many people by June 2020

Goal 3, Objective 4: Bring ideas to public discourse through teaching and convening

Benchmarks:

• A proactive plan has been established for Hadar faculty to teach publicly about these ideas in at least 10 key places, including conferences and convenings, by June 2017
• Hadar convenes at least 8–10 annual public conversations (including yemei iyyun—day-long learning programs—and public lectures) by June 2018
VII. Organizational Capacity Goal Four: Mechon Hadar will build a sustainable and effective base of operations to achieve its strategic priority goals.

A. Implementation Detail

Goal 4, Objective 1: Streamline internal operations for evaluating and improving programs (maps to Goal 1, Objective 3; Goal 2, Objective 1)

Benchmarks:
- Needed staffing changes/training have been put in place by Dec. 2017
- Needed technology and/or systems have been put in place by Dec. 2017

Goal 4, Objective 2: Invest in recruitment, retention, and development of staff (Staffing)

Benchmarks:
- New job descriptions and reporting chart have been adopted by Dec. 2016
- Appropriate salary adjustment targets have been set by Dec. 2016
- Supervision structure and review process have been evaluated and adjusted by June 2017
- Training protocols have been updated by June 2017
• Staff Handbook has been revised and adopted by June 2017
• All new hires and all role shifts have been finalized by Dec. 2017

Goal 4, Objective 3: Invest in ability to market and communicate Mechon Hadar’s core messages and recruit for all programs (External Communications)

Benchmarks:
• Public version of strategic goals has been published and circulated by Oct. 2016
• Priority audiences for current programs have been identified by Dec. 2016
• Priority audiences for our new programs are identified and targeted on an ongoing basis through 2020
• Communications and Recruitment Director has been hired by Jan. 2017
• New marketing language, including visual language, has been adopted by June 2017
• Systems (technology and processes) needed to implement communications plan have been fully adopted by Dec. 2017
• Strategic communications plans for current audiences, including faculty teaching outside of New York headquarters, have been implemented by Dec. 2017
• Each current program has a clear recruitment plan (target audience, communications outreach, follow up) by Dec. 2017, and each new program will have a recruitment plan as it is created through 2020

Goal 4, Objective 4: Invest in facilities to keep pace with growth and uphold reputation

Benchmarks:
• Immediate facilities needs have been outlined by Dec. 2016
• Immediate facilities needs have been addressed by June 2017
• Five-year plan for meeting facilities needs has been created by June 2017

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Goal 4, Objective 5: Increase revenue to ensure Mechon Hadar achieves long term strategic priority goals (Financial Sustainability)

**Benchmarks:**
- Baseline of current giving has been mapped (e.g. repeat donors, new donors, increased gifts, etc.) by Sept. 2016
- Prospect list of potential foundations has been created by Dec. 2016
- Fundraising plan to engage program participants as potential donors has been updated and implemented by Mar. 2017
- Further leverage top 25 donors: increasing support and engaging networks by June 2017
- Further leverage top 50 donors: increasing support and engaging networks by June 2018
- Solicit 10 new multi-year grants from individual donors and foundations by Sept. 2017
- Fundraising plan for each current organizational partnership has been created by June 2017, and a plan is created for each new program
- Assess tools that can help with prospect research by Dec. 2016
- Salesforce tracking system has been fully implemented by June 2017
- Increased direct revenue from increased participation and new programming through 2020
- Board members will continue to “give or get” support, with increase to $700,000 by Jan. 2019
- Communications strategy reflects fundraising priorities (e.g. more than content and program PR) by Jan. 2018

*Note: See Fundraising Revenue Targets in the Summary of Financials*

Goal 4, Objective 6: Ensure board, staff, and alumni accountability in plan implementation (Plan Implementation/Accountability)

**Benchmarks:**
- Outline the role of each stakeholder in plan by Dec. 2016
- Each group has discussed the strategic plan and understands their role by Jan. 2017
• Protocols for effectively communicating with each group about the plan’s ongoing progress have been established by Jan. 2017
• A “plan champion” from each group has been identified and engaged by Dec. 2016

Goal 4, Objective 7: Reinvigorate governance culture (Governance)

**Benchmarks:**

• Board has established a Governance Committee and appointed Committee members, and determined meeting schedule and plan for formulating proposal by Nov. 2016
• Committee has submitted proposal addressing issues such as: target number of board members, term limits, diversity targets, etc. to the board by Dec. 2016
• All documents have been approved and resolutions have been adopted by the board by Jan. 2017
VIII. Our work in Israel: Engage the creative forces and vital Jewish communities in Israel to strengthen Hadar's vision for Jewish life in the world

A. Rationale

We live in a remarkable moment in Jewish history; a time of great freedom and creativity in Jewish communities around the world. While many are focused on demographic challenges and uncertainties in contemporary North American Jewry, it is undeniable that North American Jewry is enjoying a period of astounding creativity and is engaging fundamental questions of Jewish identity that have not been this deeply explored for millennia. In so many ways, the ideas and vision at the heart of Hadar could only have emerged from this moment in North American Jewish history, with the great privilege enjoyed by Jews living here and the broad and near-comprehensive welcome that Jews have received in this society.

We are also blessed to live at a time when Jewish political and cultural sovereignty has returned to the land of Israel. The plurality of deeply committed and engaged Jews in the world has returned to Israel. Even as Israel faces so many deep and unsettling political challenges, the revolution wrought by the revival of Hebrew and a deep and broad Israeli investment in Jewish culture has led to a renaissance in Israel.
As such, anyone seriously engaging with any vision of Judaism today must ask: how does this translate to and engage with an Israeli context?

There is a deeply symbiotic relationship between these two centers of Jewish life. The North American Jewish community is creative, bold, and on the cutting edge in its exploration of new models of Jewish thinking and living. If the weakness of North American Jewry lies in its demographic uncertainty, its strength lies in a willingness to experiment and to pioneer in all areas of Jewish life. Israeli Judaism is demographically strong and enjoys majority status in a sovereign cultural space. Ideas and practices find deep institutional support there. Only when the North American center and the Israeli center work together can the full potential of contemporary Jewish life be realized.

At Hadar, we are passionate about realizing our vision through the symbiosis of these two centers. As a North American institution, we believe that Israelis and Israeli Judaism play a critical role in our own vision of Jewish life. We have been blessed to have a number of Israeli students in our North American beit midrash ever year. More than 100 alumni of our immersive programs currently live in Israel. Many of our faculty and alumni have spent significant time in Israel and the United States and have a fluency with both cultures. We see a future wherein Israeli Judaism will exert an increasingly influential role in key arenas of committed American Jewish life. As more committed American Jews spend significant time in Israel, have Israeli teachers and look to Israel as a major Jewish cultural center, even our North American successes will depend on integrating our vision and our content with Israeli Judaism. We aim to do this by networking our Israel-based alumni, through the production of Hebrew-language content and through partnerships with Israeli institutions that can advance our values in an authentically Israeli idiom and milieu.

Our goals for Israel-based programming and recruitment are thus fully integrated into our strategic vision and are reflected in our overall impact statement. Here we have pulled out some of our concrete Israel-related strategies for the coming years in order to highlight the specific work that will need support and staffing as we expand what has been a more ad hoc framework into a strategic and sustainable one.
B. Israel-based Implementation Detail

Israel Strategic Goal: Engage the creative forces and vital Jewish communities in Israel to strengthen Hadar’s vision for Jewish life in the world

Objective One: Engage a greater number of Israelis in Hadar-driven immersive programming
(Connects to: Goal 1, Objective 1)

Objective Two: Support alumni in integrating their Hadar experiences into their lives in Israel, and thereby impact Israeli Judaism
(Connects to: Goal 2)

Objective Three: Engage the broader Israeli public and establish Hadar values in Israeli public discourse
(Connects to: Goal 3, Objective 4)

Israel Organizational Goal: Stabilize and strengthen Hadar’s institutional presence in Israel

Objective One: Build a broader Israel-based constituency
(Connects to: Goal 4, Objective 3)

Objective Two: Establish an Annual Calendar of Programming
(Connects to: Goal 4, Objective 3)

Objective Three: Develop a long-term financial vision for Israel-based programming
(Connects to: Goal 4, Objective 5)

Objective Four: Cultivate Israel-based faculty and staff to support this plan
(Connects to: Goal 4, Objective 2)
IX. Conclusion

A. Summary of Financials

The financial implications of the strategic plan are captured in the grid below, categorized both by the type of expenditure and the corresponding goal in the plan.

Strategic Plan Implementation Expenses (Projected)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expense Category</th>
<th>Plan Goal</th>
<th>FY16</th>
<th>FY17</th>
<th>FY18</th>
<th>FY19</th>
<th>FY20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expanded Programming (Immersive)</td>
<td>One</td>
<td></td>
<td>$72,040.00</td>
<td>$392,901.20</td>
<td>$408,604.74</td>
<td>$601,101.88</td>
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<td>Expanded Programming (Leadership)</td>
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<td>$77,680.00</td>
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<td>$5,000.00</td>
<td>$19,000.00</td>
<td>$19,000.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Programmatic Learning/ Fundraising</td>
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<td></td>
<td>$58,760.00</td>
<td>$55,200.00</td>
<td>$56,856.00</td>
<td>$58,561.68</td>
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<tr>
<td>Network Building</td>
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<td></td>
<td>$4,000.00</td>
<td>$8,000.00</td>
<td>$12,000.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>External Communications</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td></td>
<td>$49,800.00</td>
<td>$71,800.00</td>
<td>$68,654.00</td>
<td>$70,563.62</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thought Leadership</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>$15,000.00</td>
<td>$17,500.00</td>
<td>$27,500.00</td>
<td>$27,500.00</td>
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<td>Staffing</td>
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<td>$140,000.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facilities</td>
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<td>$5,000.00</td>
<td>$10,000.00</td>
<td>$10,000.00</td>
<td>$50,000.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Four</td>
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<td>$49,200.00</td>
<td>$50,376.00</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>$112,500.00</td>
<td>$448,300.00</td>
<td>$834,457.20</td>
<td>$989,612.42</td>
<td>$1,272,754.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- FY 16 expenditures indicate supporting activities that are already underway and included as part of the organization’s total operating expenses

In order to support the proposed strategic priority goals, Mechon Hadar will need to increase revenue both from individual donors as well as foundations. A number of the planned program expansions have associated direct revenue with the program launch, and so we predict a rise in direct revenue commensurate with program expansion. We also intend the plan to energize our existing donor base as well as attract new donors—both individuals and foundations—to help support the implementation of the plan. Below is a budget for the plan years, through 2020 (Fiscal Year ending August 31).
### Operating Budget (Projected)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FY16</th>
<th>FY17</th>
<th>FY18</th>
<th>FY19</th>
<th>FY20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>REVENUES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earned Revenue</td>
<td>$299,200</td>
<td>$354,100</td>
<td>$395,150</td>
<td>$440,750</td>
<td>$620,750</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foundation Revenue</td>
<td>$1,203,333</td>
<td>$1,400,000</td>
<td>$1,625,000</td>
<td>$1,800,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual Revenue</td>
<td>$1,200,000</td>
<td>$1,500,000</td>
<td>$1,660,000</td>
<td>$1,750,000</td>
<td>$1,800,000</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Revenue</strong></td>
<td>$2,702,533</td>
<td>$3,254,100</td>
<td>$3,680,150</td>
<td>$3,990,750</td>
<td>$4,420,750</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EXPENSES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Expenses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel</td>
<td>$852,286</td>
<td>$902,000</td>
<td>$947,100</td>
<td>$994,455</td>
<td>$1,044,178</td>
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<td>Benefits and Taxes</td>
<td>$93,427</td>
<td>$98,300</td>
<td>$103,215</td>
<td>$108,376</td>
<td>$113,794</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>$803,537</td>
<td>$893,500</td>
<td>$938,175</td>
<td>$985,084</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Program Expenses</strong></td>
<td>$1,749,251</td>
<td>$1,893,800</td>
<td>$1,988,490</td>
<td>$2,087,915</td>
<td>$2,192,310</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program Administration Expenses</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations</td>
<td>$280,565</td>
<td>$306,000</td>
<td>$321,300</td>
<td>$337,365</td>
<td>$354,233</td>
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<td>Marketing and Communications</td>
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<td>$29,000</td>
<td>$30,450</td>
<td>$31,973</td>
<td>$33,571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Program Administration</strong></td>
<td>$305,556</td>
<td>$335,000</td>
<td>$351,750</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational Administration Expenses</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel</td>
<td>$307,713</td>
<td>$313,200</td>
<td>$328,860</td>
<td>$345,303</td>
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<td>Benefits and Taxes</td>
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<td>Marketing and Communications (Other)</td>
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<td>$30,000</td>
<td>$31,500</td>
<td>$33,075</td>
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<td>Operations (Other)</td>
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<td>$34,650</td>
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<td>Administrative Core (Other)</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
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<td><strong>Total Organizational Administration</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Total Operating Expenses</strong></td>
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<td>$2,837,100</td>
<td>$2,978,955</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Strategic Plan Implementation Expenses</strong></td>
<td>$112,500</td>
<td>$448,300</td>
<td>$834,457</td>
<td>$989,612</td>
<td>$1,272,755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total Expenses</strong></td>
<td>$2,633,930</td>
<td>$3,150,300</td>
<td>$3,671,557</td>
<td>$3,968,567</td>
<td>$4,400,657</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- FY 16 and FY 17 have been approved
- Total Strategic Plan Implementation Expenses: See expense detail in table above

*The $112,500.00 already included in above expenses. See table above.*
B. Summary of Planning Process

• In December 2015, with a targeted grant from the Jim Joseph Foundation, Mechon Hadar retained TCC Group—a management consulting firm specializing in nonprofit strategy and capacity building—to guide the planning process.

• The process was highly inclusive, engaging a wide range of key stakeholders through individual interviews, focus groups, and two online surveys, including: board members, staff, alumni, funders, leadership/field experts, and current and prospective partners (Hillels, day schools, synagogues, and one summer camp).

• In addition, key staff and board members participated in two “Theory of Change” discussions to help ensure alignment between Hadar’s desired outcomes and its programmatic activities.

• To supplement the data, TCC Group also conducted benchmarking research on organizations that have extended their reach in ways that are of interest to Mechon Hadar.

• The quantitative and qualitative data collected by TCC Group was summarized, synthesized, and employed to inform a scenario planning exercise at a full-day decision-making retreat. The exercise presented three potential pathways for expanding the organization, each carefully constructed to illustrate trade-offs.

• Mechon Hadar emerged from this discussion with strategic priorities for the next four years. These were approved by the board of Directors at the June 2016 board meeting. The full plan document, complete with organizational implications and financial projections, was approved in July 2016.
Strategic Planning Committee Members

Vicki Abrams*
Michael Bohnen
Alisa Doctoroff*
David Gilberg, Chair of Strategic Planning Process*
Harman Grossman*
Hannah Kapnik Ashar, Alumni Representative
Jonathan Lopatin, Chair of the Board*
Sally Mendelsohn*
Sarene Shanus
Eli Ungar

Mechon Hadar Staff Strategic Planning Committee Members and Working Group

Rabbi Shai Held
Rabbi Avital Campbell Hochstein
Rabbi Elie Kaunfer
Rabbi Avi Killip
Ilana Mantell
Rabbi Aviva Richman
Rabbi Jason Rubenstein
Jeffrey Stein
Rabbi Ethan Tucker
Dena Weiss

*Mechon Hadar Board Member

Photo credit: Emil Cohen & Eli Spector