

Jewish Voice for Peace



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A quarterly-ish collection of reports, inspiration, and reflections about the fabulous activists and organizing within Jewish Voice for Peace

A Quarterly Report

Elul 5774 // September 2014

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For this revival issue of the JVP Organizing Newsletter, I'm excited to share key insights in grassroots organizing from the brilliant member-leaders and staff of Jewish Voice for Peace. This newsletter provides nuggets of wisdom on base building and escalation, as well as a report back from the Presbyterian General Assembly.

You'll also find opportunities for spiritual support from JVP's Rabbinical Council and information on the upcoming chapter development institute.

After a Summer so heavy with grief, anger, fear, and loss, I am grateful for this time of reflection during the month of Elul. I look forward to continuing to [take collective action](#) informed by our rich tradition during the upcoming High Holy Days.

Solidarity,
Jesse Yurow

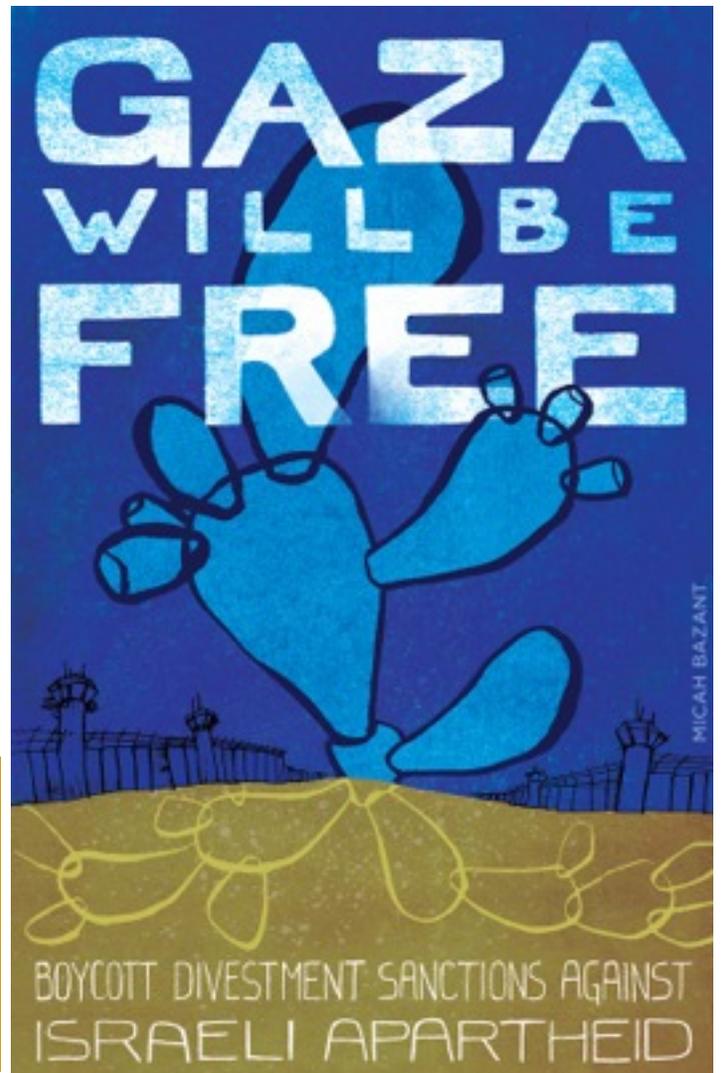
Save the date!

JVP National Membership Meeting

March 13-15, 2015

Baltimore, Maryland

[Fill out this quick survey about what you want in YOUR 2015 JVP Membership Meeting!](#)



PRESBYTERIAN DIVESTMENT

In June 2014, the Presbyterian Church USA voted to divest funds from Caterpillar, Motorola Solutions, and Hewlett Packard at its General Assembly meeting in Detroit - the largest divestiture of funds in protest of Israeli occupation of Palestine to date in the U.S. Jewish Voice for Peace organized a delegation to attend the General Assembly and help pass the divestment vote. Below is a reflection from one member of the JVP delegation, Becca Hanna.

Seven. Seven is an important number throughout Jewish history and text. Seven days are created at the beginning of Bereshit. There are seven weeks between Passover and Shavuot, counted in the omer. Seven cycles of Shmita mean a jubilee year, shiva is for seven days, seven species on our sukkah, seven blessings and seven circles at a wedding

Day One

Presbyterians from all over the country arrive in Detroit. Commissioners who will vote on the issues at hand, experts who will be brought in to offer illuminating insight on these various issues, and folks to help run the conference in every way from parking to lodging to reporting to greeting.

Members of the JVP delegation arrive, too. Work begins on the ground to launch a plan that's been months in the making and 10 years coming: priming press, gathering resources, and beginning to generate content before plenary sessions even begin.

The focus is on choice, choosing which companies to divest from, choosing to follow the nonviolent intentions behind the Presbyterian guidelines which forbid investment in companies that make weapons.

Jacob labored for seven years for Leah's hand in marriage. The new year occurs in the seventh month, Tishrei. We dance seven hakafot on Sumchat Torah.

Day Two

We meet, we plan, we pray; the energy mounts. We work tirelessly in an all-day session to practice our responses to tough questions, to think through what we might say to the press, to hear the concerns of our Presbyterian allies.

We form committees to address everything from flyer making to social media to elevator speeches. We finish the night exhausted but ready for a big push to the finish.

There are seven holidays in a Jewish year, seven notes on a musical scale, seven continents and seven seas.

Day Three

We talk. We talk to everyone, all the time. We talk in committee, we talk in the hallways, we talk over lunch. We seek out those who we know we haven't yet spoken to and engage them in conversation. "It's a just choice," we tell them, reflecting their language back.

Day Four

Everything shifts. The measure we originally came to support has been stripped, changed, and shifted and is now precisely the measure we want to pass. We make new signs, we write new editorials, we say new words. "Vote yes," we urge, "not because we told you to, because it's the right decision, it's an honorable decision."

The measure passes through the smaller committee stage and moves to floor of the whole General Assembly, we're one step closer to a win.

Seven people are called to Torah on shabbat, Leah bore seven children, there are seven blessings in the silent amidah on shabbat.

Days Five & Six

These days pass in a flurry of energy. As the vote comes closer we fine-tune our messaging: "A vote for divestment is a vote for positive investment, it's a both/and solution."

We meet with commissioners throughout the day, we watch as the hundreds of commissioners take their seats in a giant hall and begin to pray, worship, debate, and vote. The excitement of it all is so thrilling, and the support of our Presbyterian allies is tangible and comforting.

PRESBYTERIAN DIVESTMENT

We talk with them about the ways they've worked on this project, about how best to reach those we're trying to reach, and about how truly amazing it is that Presbyterians are taking up this measure at all.

We work tirelessly on pushing the divestment measure as a balanced and reasoned choice. We remind the Presbyterians that they don't need Jewish permission to choose divestment, reassuring that Jews who are truly friends will not turn on them if divestment is passed, and will continue to sit at the table and talk with them in fellowship.

The mood and the pomp of the General Assembly is contagious and most of the members of the JVP delegation find themselves using Presbyterian buzz words like "calling" and "fellowship" and "just choice."

We trust that our honed messaging campaign paired with an open and honest approach to dialogue on tough issues will show voting commissioners that there does not have to be fear in choosing divestment, that it's a choice they can feel empowered to make on their own.

Seven generations separate Abraham from Moses. We wind t'fillin around the arm seven times. After Noah sent out the dove and raven to scout the weather conditions, they did not return for seven days. After that raging storm, a rainbow.

Day seven

The vote is coming. We wake early in the morning and hold an interfaith prayer service with the amazing allies we've worked with all week. We sing, we read, we talk about our week. We give thanks for the time we've shared together and prepare for the day ahead. "We are waiting," we sing out at the end of the service, "oh, we are waiting."

The debate was long and fraught. It was the end of a long two days of debating difficult issues. The voting commissioners and the observers were exhausted. The tension in the room was palpable as impassioned folks on all sides take the microphone to speak their truth. The call for a vote came and we collectively drew in breath.

Some members of the JVP team who worked tirelessly all week were already in transit all across the country by late Friday when the vote came. Though we weren't together, the feeling of our collective work was palpable.

The living work of a week of campaigning/meeting/talking/singing/praying/writing/believing — a collaborative work with our Presbyterian friends and allies — was a beautiful creation. What a blessing it was to work together to move divestment forward, to know we had done all we could, to know we had worked harder than we thought possible, to know that we *had* affected change, no matter the vote's outcome.

As we rode in cars and cabs, trains and plains, we watched and waited as the commissioners keyed in their vote on electronic pads. In the end, all of our hard work manifested into a 310-303 vote in favor of divestment — a margin of just seven votes.

As Jews, we know the value of the number seven, the one that stands for creation, good fortune, and blessing.

Joshua walked around the walls of Jericho seven times before they fell, and we too are waiting for walls to fall.

Seven. Seven made all the difference. Seven. Sheva. Salaam. Shalom. Selah.

ORGANIZING TACHLIS

*In this series, we'll explore the **tachlis**, the brass tacks, of grassroots organizing. Here, Stefanie Fox explores one of the most important concepts in building a successful campaign: **escalation**.*

All summer, JVP chapters have been swift and persistent in pouring into the streets to protest Israel's assault on Palestinians in Gaza. You have led, helped lead, and participated in over 200 actions across the country. These actions were literal demonstrations of JVP's theory of how to make change: we targeted locations that support, profit from, or fund Israel's ongoing war on and Occupation of Palestinians. From the Friends of the IDF to Federation offices, from congressional offices to Boeing headquarters. In so doing, we showed not just our rage and grief but also our demands. We showed not just that Israel must be stopped, but also *how* and *where* it's possible to do so.

It's important to note that we showed up in each of these locations with elevated tone, tactics, and demands. We mobilized bigger crowds, risked more legally and physically, and refused to be moved for longer than we would have in the weeks before the assault began. In so doing, we were demonstrating a very key concept in organizing: **escalation**. The brutality of Israel's one-sided war called for **more**, for **bigger**, for **riskier**, for **bolder**.

We can learn a lot from our instincts to escalate this summer. It's a key component of making change, whether we are responding to an escalation in Israel's actions or we are responding to the trajectory of our own existing campaigns.

If you talk to a member of the JVP Organizing Team about campaign planning, we have probably heard a lot about three things: **targets**, **demands**, and **escalation**. When boiling it down, that's really what sets a campaign apart from an event.

Demands—the change you want, and Targets—the person or people who have the power to make that change—are pretty clear. Figure out what you want (set your demands), and sort out who is between the world and the change it needs (identify your target).

But Escalation is trickier-- it's the physics of organizing: How do we move from here to there? What are the laws of motion to make possible what right now, in this moment, seems impossible? How do we get this target, who is comfortable with the status quo, to decide our demand is worth ceding? Escalation is the path, it's the guts, it's the chutzpah that will catapult us from here to there.

So how do we do it? We asked a few talented JVP organizers, both staff and members, and they had a lot to say:

Realize the calm comes before the storm:

The old tactics, as audacious and powerful as they seemed when first dared, can lose their punch. This summer, our first civil disobedience actions got more and bigger press attention than our 3rd or 8th or 10th. The news cameras tire of the same scenes, and even the once-hostile target will settle into a comfortable relationship to the pressure being applied. This is even more true when applied to our day-to-day organizing of ongoing campaigns. Truth is, organizing is a slog—it's a hard and often thankless road, and one without clear signage, so sometimes it can feel like we've reached a dead end. The trick is that what might look like a lull can actually be a perfect sign that it's time. That we're in the calm; that we need the storm.

Dorothy Zellner, JVP member and former SNCC staffer, recalls a time during the Civil Rights Movement when even the sit-ins got boring to the American audience: "The sit ins started really spontaneously, took everyone by surprise. But after a year and a half the country got used to seeing it, actually got bored with it. That is why the freedom rides started--people realized that we had to push harder."

ORGANIZING TACHLIS

“Look for loopholes”: Find new strategic pressure points.

Even though much had been won through sit-ins at private lunch counters and demos about public accommodations, there were still states that would not budge. Civil Rights organizers knew they needed to take the movement to the next level, that they needed a new approach. Dorothy Zellner explains “The leadership was extremely clever: they looked for loopholes, and they found them...The loophole [in this case] was the Feds had the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) which governed travel state-to-state...we had not only an extremely powerful opponent but also a very clever opponent, but not so clever they had thought of everything.”

By using bus stops under federal jurisdiction, Civil Rights leaders changed the game, and turned the power structure upholding segregation on its head. This offers us great advice about how to approach campaign escalation: look for the loophole, the crack in the armor of our opposition, and figure out some tactics that will push right on that spot.

“Make it real to them”: Escalate into people’s homes, minds, hearts

In addition to choosing new strategic angles in a campaign, escalation should include messaging that translates the flashy tactics into heart-moving stories. Escalation is absolutely about a media strategy that not only grabs headlines, but wins hearts. Zellner explains: “Somehow or other there has to be a way of getting through into people’s minds, making it real to them. That is one of the difficulties with any campaign--is that we need to make it real to people, so their emotions are stirred, so they actually begin to care.”

Our own Organizing Co-Director, Alissa Wise, gives similar advice from her days as a tenant organizer. A landlord was evicting an elderly woman who had lived her entire life in the two-bedroom apartment in Brooklyn. After months of trying to meet with him to negotiate alternatives to eviction, they had gotten nowhere. He was moving forward with plans to double the rent. Alissa explains: “We needed to make sure he understood that she wasn’t just an elderly tenant on a fixed income, she was a member of a community. Her favorite activity in her retirement home was playing bingo with her friends, so we brought a bus full of her friends and played bingo on her landlord’s lawn. That sure got his attention! He then sat down with her and worked out an agreement for her to stay in the apartment.”

Playing bingo on the landlords’ lawn as the tenants and activists in Brooklyn did to save an elderly woman from getting evicted appealed to the landlord’s fear of being vilified, and was an extremely compelling image to the media. The photos told a story of a person whose life would be unraveled, not just another nameless victim of gentrification.

“It taught me to think big”: Creative tactics

The most noticeable element of campaign escalation across time and movements is the inclusion of radical, creative, surprising tactics. How do we brainstorm these magical game-changing ways of taking action?

JVP Member and PICO Organizer Annie Fox recalls the moment when PICO members organizing around an immigration justice campaign had seemingly tried everything to get a meeting with Congressman McCarthy, and he just wouldn’t agree to sit down with them.

So the group decided to escalate: they didn’t stop with a 280 mile pilgrimage, they held a 2000 person rally. And they still didn’t stop—escalating even further with an all-night vigil sit-in. Sometimes the breakthrough ideas for our campaigns are just beyond the limits we set for ourselves, and if we allow ourselves to get creative and dream big, we can hit upon the ideas that will take our campaigns to the next level.

When we asked Annie what she learned from her experience with the recent campaign escalation, she said “It taught me to think big.”

ORGANIZING TACHLIS

“You’re provoking the racists”: Liberal criticism and fearless action

Nonviolent campaigns for justice leverage people power against institutional power by applying strategic pressure, often through direct action. In his Letter from a Birmingham jail, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. explained that nonviolent direct action “seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored.”

Escalation is about the tug-of-war rope between the organizers of a campaign and their target. When you pull it more taut through smarter strategy, bigger tactics, and more moving messaging, the target and all those invested in the status quo are also going to pull harder against you. This is good! It’s good to provoke the target and the opposition. That’s how we build the creative tension that Dr. King references, that’s how we know we are on the precipice of winning.

In many cases, escalating with more creative, impactful tactics will require more risky, dangerous, and contentious action. Sometimes the best way to know if you’ve hit upon a nerve, is to see the criticism that comes from within your own ranks. Zellner explained: “If you escalate people will say “this is going to provoke people”, “This is counterproductive”, “You’re not nice, you’re not using reason and logic and sitting and dialoging.” That’s what they did and said...And the lesson that I learned from that is to totally ignore it. It can make you a little scared but actually the freedom ride was perfectly right.” While careful, focused planning is always key, there is a difference between waiting for the right moment, and just waiting.

“If it’s a one-shot thing, forget it”: Persistence is everything

Even once you hit upon the right loophole to develop a new escalated strategy, find the right big and fearless tactics, ignore your critics, and ready yourselves, the first action in your escalation strategy is unlikely to win. During the freedom rides, the opposition met the rides with violent mobs and a straight shot to prison. Hundreds of people in Mississippi went straight from the bus stop to the penitentiary. But wait, Zellner said, because “...They kept on coming! That’s the other trick--once you find the loophole and go through it, you have to have backup. If it’s only a one-shot thing, forget it.” Another key aspect of preparing for escalation is to be ready to keep on coming when they try to shut it down.

Putting it together

This summer, Israel’s actions demanded we put the principles of escalation into practice. It’s been an education in action for us all about the potency and potential of turning up the volume in our organizing. We all know that even once a ceasefire holds, Israel’s war on Palestinian freedom, equality, and justice will be long from over. And we will need to steadily and continuously escalate our local and national campaigns if we’re to achieve real justice and peace.

BASE BUILDING

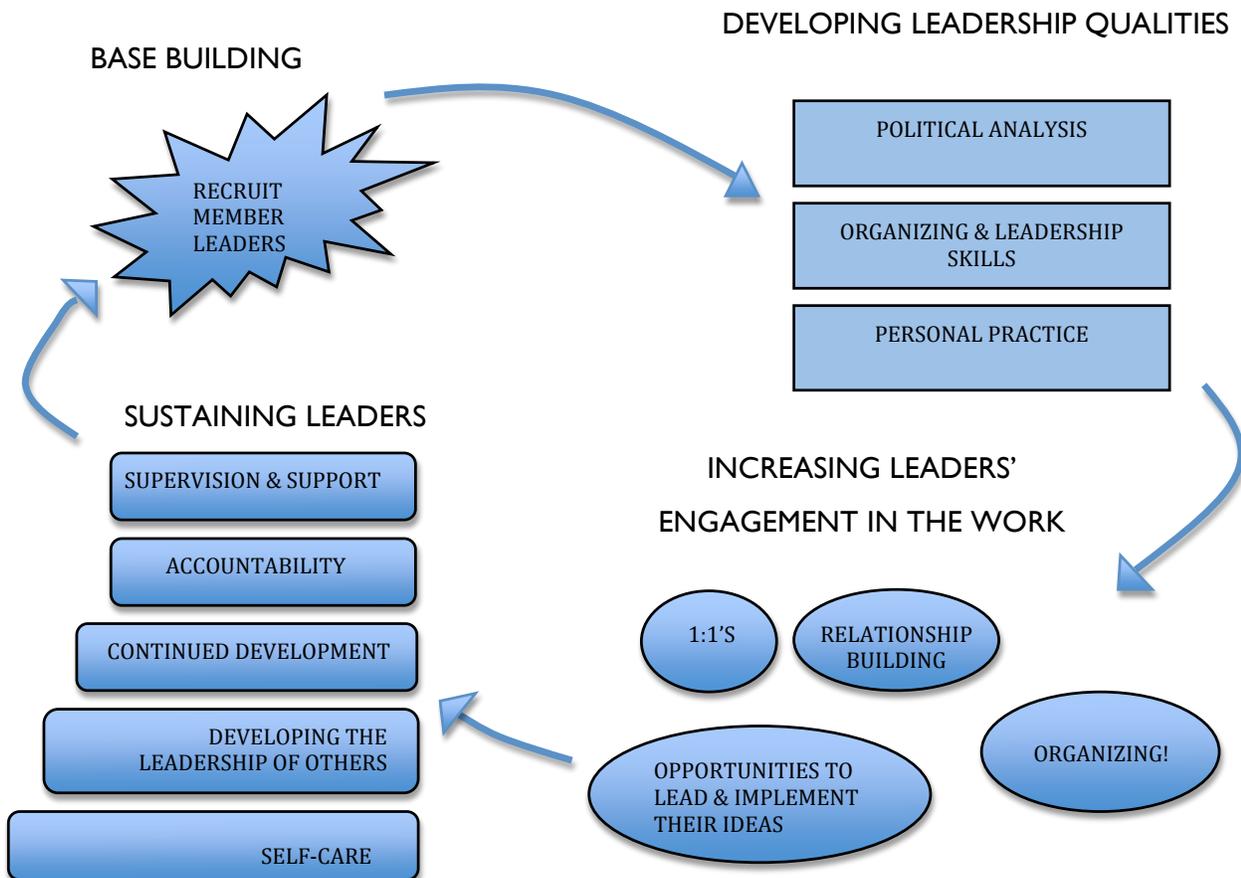
In this horrible time, tens of thousands of people of conscience are waking up, are speaking up, are trying to find their sea legs as they join, for the first time, the struggle for justice in Palestine.

As chapter leaders, this is an important time to find opportunities to plug new people into your organizing. Folks are desperate for a place to do this work, and we can be that place. We should do this not only to grow the numbers in the streets for our immediate protests, but also for the long haul.

Just as we are all doing everything in our power to denounce Israel’s current assault, we must also be focused on building a movement that is going to fight until we’ve rooted out the true causes of this current violence—Israel’s ongoing war on Palestinian freedom, equality, and justice. To build that movement, we must engage and activate new members all the time

- Alana Krivo-Kaufman

PROCESS OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT



BASE BUILDING

Tips for Base-Building

Bring a sign-in sheet to your protests

It's the basic rule we often forget. Bring that sign up sheet and clipboard and get the names and numbers of new folks! Follow-up with them within the week and let them know what's next for the chapter.

Designate an outreach person

Someone should get in touch with all those awesome new people who signed up on the sign in sheet!

Host a casual gathering with space to pray or process or cry together

In the urgency of the moment, we often throw a sign at our new members and ask them to meet us at the protest. That's okay! But let's not stop there. Consider hosting a casual Shabbat meal, potluck, or discussion group for other Jews and allies who are devastated and outraged by these terrible times. Our protests will be stronger for having groups that know and trust each other.

Give people a chance to lead—even on small things

It's easy to just handle everything ourselves when we are hurrying from one demo to the next. But being in the midst of the action is the perfect time for folks (including each of us) to try out new skills. Give newer or less experienced members tasks they can own and accomplish—outreach phone calls, supply shopping, copy-editing the flyer, etc.

Have a work party

Bringing folks together to paint signs, make banners, create props, and silkscreen t-shirts is a perfect way to boost the engagement of newcomers while also checking off that epic to-do list.

Communicate about opportunities to get involved!

Write up a calendar of upcoming events led or sponsored by your chapter and your coalition partners, then have JVP National send to our list of supporters in your geographic region. We have thousands of new supporters in areas with chapters—let them know how to plug in! Email jesseyurow@jvp.org to send your calendar out.

Have a BDS 101 session

Many folks are just starting to pay attention because of the utter horror of Israel's assault, and they may not even know about the Palestinian call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions or our local and national BDS campaigns. Take the time to invite them out to hear about it. Our Go & Learn curriculum has pre-packaged curricula that does just that! Email organizing@jvp.org if you need directions for accessing it!

Developing new leaders for the long-haul

Host a New Member Orientation

Give new members a chance to get to know your group, each other, and what you're working on! Host a potluck, movie-screening or meeting specifically for new members. Make sure to have at least 3 ways people can get more involved and that everyone leaves with a commitment!

BASE BUILDING

Plan a Political Education Series

All over the country during the past month people have taken action for the first time, spoken out in their families, and begun to question the status quo of occupation and siege. To bring people into the movement it's important to take time to wrestle with the issues in political community. Plan a movies series, Shabbat lunch-and-learn, or speaker series to move new members from action, to reflection, and back to action.

Invite some new members to join a planning committee with longer-term members!

Chapter Feature: *In Boston, the JVP chapter put together an Israel/Palestine 101 class, taught by longer-term chapter members and broadly advertised to the Boston community. Participants committed to attend a series of 6 courses, each featuring longer term chapter members in their areas of expertise. At the end of the class, leaders for the next round were recruited from the participants.*

Chapter Building 1:1 Campaign

Turning those new names on your list into active members isn't magic, it's about building relationships! Designate a time period to take on an intensive recruitment campaign, and form an outreach team to take on engaging new contacts.

Get together and host a phone-bank to invite your new contacts to your next big event! Make sure to keep a record of who is interested, and who you should follow-up with further.

Identify new contacts with the potential to become more active. Each person on your outreach team, or in the chapter can take 5 people and find a time to get coffee or meet-up before an event. Get to know more about them, why they came to JVP, and what skills and questions they bring! Follow-up and individually invite them to upcoming events and meetings. Email organizing@jvp.org to set up a training for the your chapter building 1:1 campaign!

Make Opportunities for New Ideas

As you bring new people into your chapter structure, make sure you have ongoing space and opportunities for their ideas to shape your work. Take 30mins in your chapter meeting to brainstorm new projects and events, new tactics for your campaign or ideas for how to strengthen your outreach. Make sure everyone leaves the meeting with something to do—type up the notes, reach out to a speaker or research potential new coalition partners!

Skill-Building “Buddy” System

Move new members beyond taking on single tasks and into taking ongoing leadership by giving them more responsibility and support! Pair up a newer member with a more experienced member to take on a project, such as organizing an action, planning a strategy session, or developing a social media plan. Working in pairs creates accountability and opportunities to learn a new skill and gain confidence.

Do the same people always facilitate your chapter meetings? Start a rotating facilitation structure, where one experienced facilitator one newer facilitator pair up! Host a facilitation training for newer chapter members to increase the confidence and skills of your whole group. Better meetings=a stronger movement.

Ongoing Space for Community Building

To make our work sustainable we need both new leaders, as well as time and space for community building. Recruit new members to take on organizing a regular Shabbat dinner or social gathering. Check out the resources at www.jvp.org/highholidays2014 for ideas for the upcoming High Holidays.

FEATURED RESOURCES

In response to the escalation of violence in Gaza this summer, the JVP Rabbinical Council offered spiritual support to activists and organizers. Spiritual support is much-needed these days, as we try to attend to the many feelings that come up from the violence in Israel and Palestine, from engaging with American Jewish communities around the violence and occupation, from our relationships with family and friends who may have different beliefs than us. We get frayed at the edges, and having a sounding board to attend to the spiritual needs that can emerge from crises in the world makes a concrete difference in the lives of activists and organizers, many of whom don't have other sources of spiritual support.

[**CLICK HERE TO REQUEST SPIRITUAL SUPPORT**](#)

During this first round of spiritual support, 100 people were part of this effort: 24 JVP rabbis and cantors offered counseling and 76 participants received some support. We are in a process of evaluating how to continue offering this support occasionally throughout the year. In the month of Elul (starting August 27), a period of reflection before the High Holidays, we are offering an additional round of Spiritual Support.

The experience of speaking with JVP members in our first round of pastoral counseling this summer showed to me how deep the heartbreak goes for so many Jews working for justice in Palestine and Israel. So many of us feel there is no place in the richness of Judaism to find strength and healing. In these meetings I found that I was able to access new space in Judaism to find hope, and to rededicate myself. As we do the work in the month of Elul to rededicate ourselves during the High Holy Days, we must process more deeply this summer's war on Gaza. The name of the month Elul shares a root with the Aramaic word meaning "search." So many of us are still searching for our place--in the movement, in our communities, our families. JVP has given me a home, and tools in my searching, and homecoming. - Ariana Katz

Chapter Development Institute

The Chapter Development Institute is a five-part online webinar series where we bring together JVP veterans and brand new members alike to discuss everything our new chapters need to know to get off the ground. Each session will last two hours: the first hour will be dedicated to the chapters sharing insights on building strong, effective, and vibrant chapters, and the second hour will be a skill-building training session on a related topic led by a staff person, member, or outside expert.

This cycle of the Chapter Development Institute will kick off on Monday, October 6th at 5pm PST/8pm EST. Each session is 2 hours. Here's a full schedule:

Monday, October 6, 5pm PST/8pm EST. Session 1: Bringing People Together
 Monday, October 13, 5pm PST/8pm EST. Session 2: Reaching In, Reaching Out
 Monday, October 20, 5pm PST/8pm EST. Session 3: Taking it to the Streets
 Monday, October 27, 5pm PST/8pm EST. Session 4: Clarifying Goals and Messages
 Monday, November 3, 5pm PST/8pm EST. Session 5: Chapter Growth for the Long Haul

[**Click here to RSVP for the Chapter Development Institute**](#)

For more information contact organizing@jvp.org

Need spiritual support during Elul?

Get matched with a member of the JVP Rabbinical Council.

Sign up at: tinyurl.com/JVPSpiritualSupport

Jewish Voice for Peace