



# RECONSTRUCTING JUDAISM



2021-2026  
**STRATEGIC PLAN**



## FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

### OVERVIEW

As the central organization of the Reconstructionist movement, Reconstructing Judaism is the engine behind a vibrant, imaginative, and intellectually curious approach to Jewish life. For decades, our movement has been on the vanguard of change, imagining and inspiring the contours of the Jewish future, sharing new thinking and writing, and bringing a strong moral voice to the critical issues of the day.

Following the 2012 merger between the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC), leading to the adoption of our mission-driven name, our expanded mandate has been both to train the next generation of rabbis and to support communities and other expressions of Reconstructionist thought and practice in the wider world. As we look ahead, we find ourselves at a critical inflection point. The challenges of the last year, and the steps we have taken to meet those challenges, together with changes to our funding model, have presented both opportunity and need to rethink our strategy and organizational infrastructure so that we can best achieve our intended impact. We know that now is the time to ask thoughtful questions and to chart the course ahead.

Our strategic planning process, which took place between August 2020 and March 2021, was designed to develop a long-term vision and to set our strategy for the next five years. This work was facilitated by Third Plateau, a social impact strategy firm, and overseen by a 14-member Steering Committee composed of Reconstructing Judaism board members, staff leadership, and other key stakeholders. Additionally, Reconstructing Judaism simultaneously engaged in a scenario planning process, supported by the Jewish Federations of North America and the Mandel Foundation, to examine short-term considerations for the movement in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This process was facilitated by Michael Miloff, an independent consultant, and engaged a committee comprised of 23 representatives of the board, staff, and strategic partners. Although the committees operated separately, we designed the scenario planning process as a component of the strategic planning process to ensure that the discussions and recommendations informed and complemented the plan that follows. Third Plateau staff and 10 Reconstructing Judaism representatives served on both committees to ensure continuity.

While the last year has demonstrated that predicting the future with any kind of certainty is a fool's errand, the scenario planning and strategic planning processes allowed us to consider future possibilities. These thought exercises and the discussions that followed have led us to a few tenets that have guided our planning:

- We believe that Jews and fellow travelers (defined as non-Jews who participate in Jewish life but who do not necessarily wish to become Jews-by-choice) will continue to seek out



communities for Jewish belonging, learning, spirituality, and social justice. Those communities will include conventional congregations and new forms of gathering, in-person, virtual, and hybrid. Reconstructing Judaism should support the growth and formation of these communities. This includes our continued commitment to an integrated approach to serving young people and to supporting holistic educational experiences, including through Havaya Summer Programs.

- We believe that Jews and fellow travelers will continue to seek meaning and inspiration, both online and offline. Reconstructing Judaism should expand its efforts to generate, disseminate, and engage with new and provocative ideas, to empower others to do the same, and to develop leaders who can build on this commitment.
- As Reconstructionists, we believe that Judaism is an evolving religious civilization, deeply interconnected with and influenced by the broader world in which Jews live. As the world continues to diversify, we aspire for our communities to mirror this diversity, pushing critical, and sometimes difficult, questions of inclusion to the forefront. Given our history and values, Reconstructing Judaism must rise to this moment.

Given this, the plan identifies five core goals for the organization in the next five years:

- Engage, cultivate, and strengthen diverse communities that align with Reconstructionist values;
- Develop, support, and market platforms for individuals to connect with one another, find community, and co-create their Jewish lives;
- Invest in the future of Reconstructionist rabbinical education;
- Join and lead Jewish efforts to dismantle systemic racism, and to advance racial diversity, equity, and inclusion within the Reconstructionist movement;
- Build a sustainable organization.

Reconstructionist Judaism is needed in the world now more than ever. We remain fundamentally defined by the core elements of what makes us distinctive: our understanding of Judaism as an evolving religious civilization; our affirmation of the value of relationships and mutual obligation in an otherwise disjointed world; our exploration of non-supernatural expressions of religion; our capacity for respectful and substantive engagement across difference, including around our abiding relationship with Israel; and our commitment to the inclusion and empowerment of those who have been historically excluded from Jewish leadership and full participation, including Jews partnered with non-Jews, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and women. At the same time, we recognize that our organizational focus, approach, and structure must change to address new realities of our communal landscape and the evolving needs of those we serve. Our plan commits us to a bold future that centers community, online and in-person connection, and racial justice, and that envisions a more integrated and sustainable future for our organization.



## OUR PURPOSE

### Vision

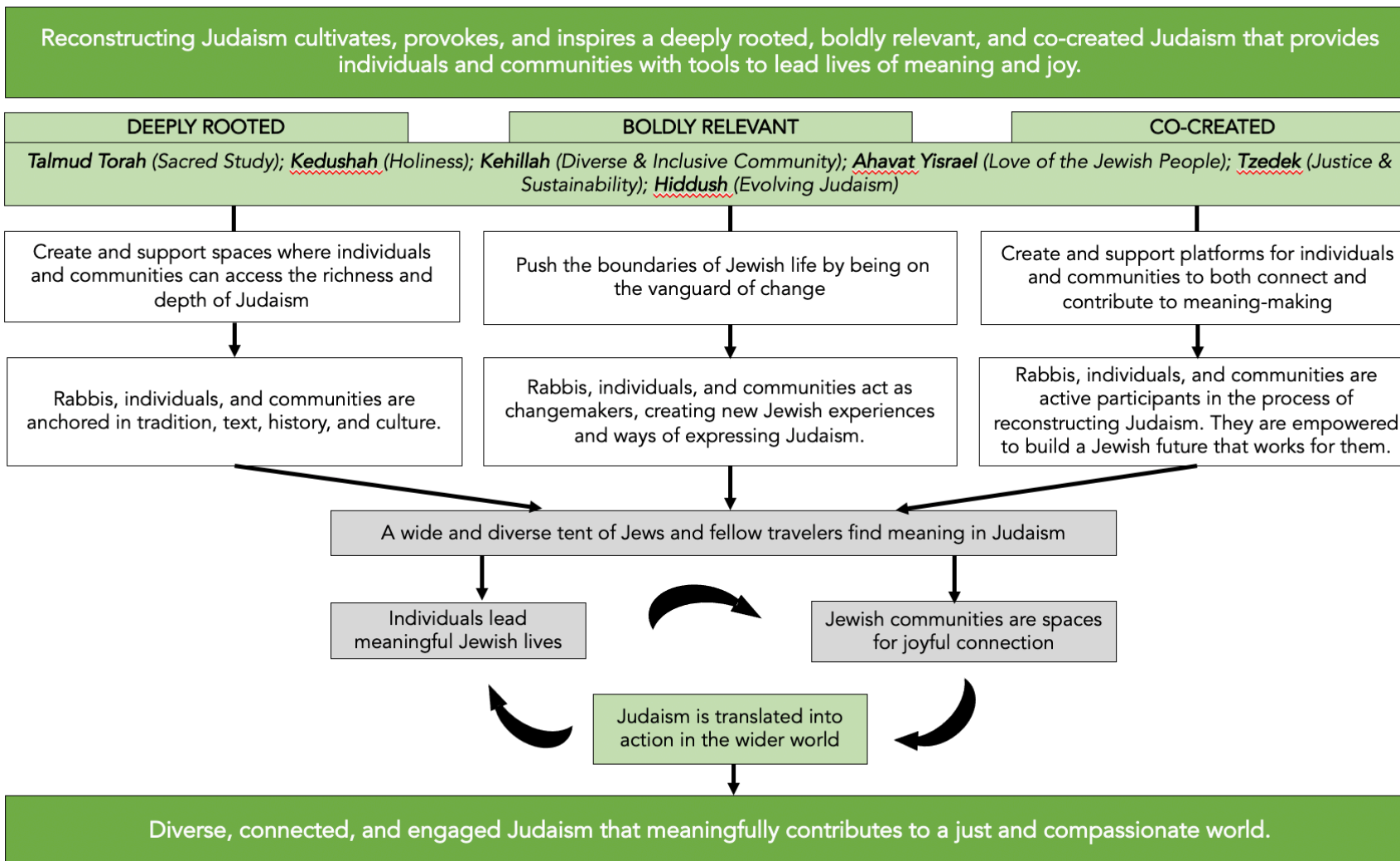
Diverse, connected, and engaged Judaism that meaningfully contributes to a just and compassionate world.

### Mission

Reconstructing Judaism cultivates, provokes, and inspires a deeply rooted, boldly relevant, and co-created Judaism that provides individuals and communities with tools to lead lives of meaning and joy.

## THEORY OF CHANGE

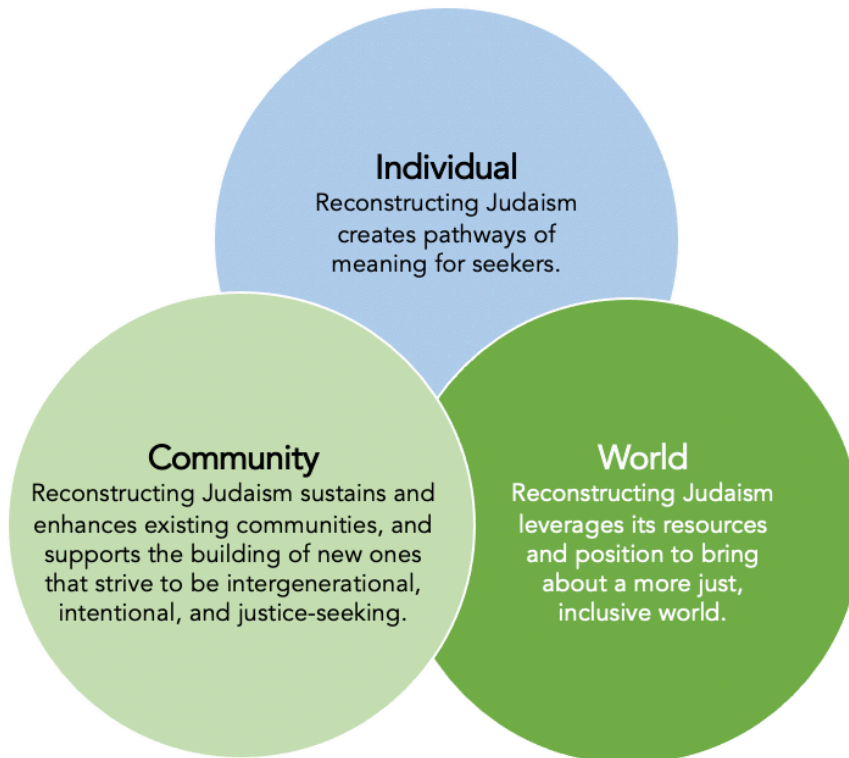
Our theory of change articulates how we will fulfill our vision, and the logic behind how our mission and activities will produce outputs and outcomes that lead to our vision.



### Critical Indicator of Success

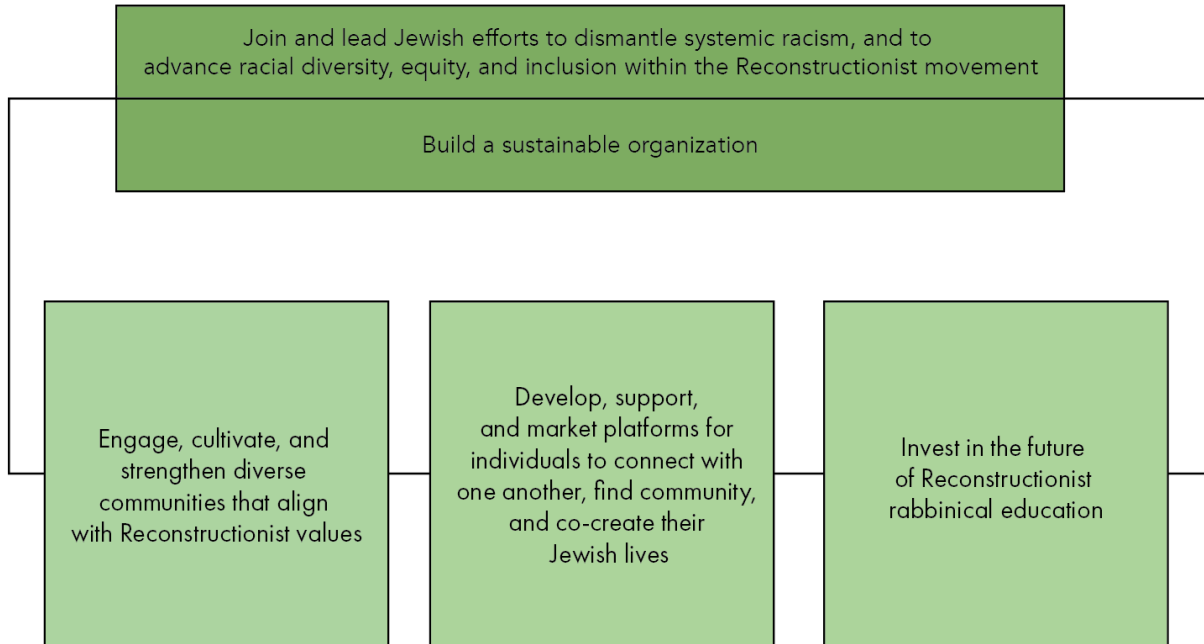
Judaism that works for a lot more Jews and fellow travelers.

### Points of Impact



## FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC FOCUS

To make significant progress towards Reconstructing Judaism’s vision in the next five years, we will focus on five key goals. We view these goals as equal in importance, and commit to a fully integrated and collaborative approach to their implementation.



### Goal 1

Engage, cultivate, and strengthen diverse communities that align with Reconstructionist values.

### Goal 2

Develop, support, and market platforms for individuals to connect with one another, find community, and co-create their Jewish lives.

### Goal 3

Invest in the future of Reconstructionist rabbinical education.

### Goal 4

Join and lead Jewish efforts to dismantle systemic racism, and to advance racial diversity, equity, and inclusion within the Reconstructionist movement.

### Goal 5

Build a sustainable organization.



## FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

To reach our goals (in **blue** and designated by numbers), we will pursue the targeted strategies (in **bold** and designated by uppercase letters) and tactics (designated by lowercase roman numerals) detailed below. Strategies represent our main approach to achieving the goals; tactics represent the concrete, specific actions that we will take within each of the strategies. Our strategies and tactics are designed to be implemented incrementally over the course of the five years ahead, with flexibility to adjust for changing circumstances.

1. **Engage, cultivate, and strengthen diverse communities that align with Reconstructionist values.** For the purposes of this plan, we define a “community” in broad terms, as a group of individuals who are committed to one another and share a sense of purpose and/or belonging either virtually or in-person. As such, we create and nurture congregations and communities that strive to be intentional, inclusive, and justice-seeking. These communities serve Reconstructionists, as well as other Jews and seekers who are drawn to our vision and ideas, and create spaces for individuals to bring their whole selves.

*To support this goal, we will:*

- A. **Provide expert guidance to, and facilitate connection and co-creation among, affiliated Reconstructionist communities.** We affirm the value of our affiliated congregations and *havurot* as special intergenerational spaces. Our role is to support these communities and connect them to one another and to the movement at large, in an effort to foster their long-term viability and vitality. This work is supported by our commissions (at current, the Tikkun Olam and Joint Israel Commissions) and the plenum, which serve as primary vehicles for community voice within our movement. To do this, we will...
  - i. Connect and convene affiliated communities for joint programming and other resource-sharing opportunities. We can explore ways to do this through Convention, online groups, movement commissions, targeted use of Ritualwell and Evolve, and other platforms or convenings. These opportunities can also include joint experiential offerings for youth.
  - ii. Connect and convene lay and professional leaders of affiliated communities, including rabbis and educators, to share best practices around key issues they are facing, including growing membership, running virtual and/or hybrid programs, inclusion of people with disabilities, and raising money.
  - iii. Collaboratively create and curate substantive materials, including guides for values-based decision making, best practices for congregational governance, and new liturgy.
  - iv. Launch a commission focused on placement of rabbis and rabbinic-lay partnership within our communities.





- v. Improve two-way communication with affiliated congregations around movement-wide programming and resources.
- vi. Principally through our commissions, Evolve, and other initiatives, promote respectful and constructive, values-based conversations across Reconstructionist communities about issues related to Israel.

**B. Support newly forming communities.** To do this, we will...

- i. Explore potential models for engaging with and supporting entrepreneurial or emergent communities that go beyond affiliation, including communities started or led by rabbinical students, graduates, and young adults who grew up in the Reconstructionist movement.
- ii. Develop criteria to determine whether and how to nurture new affiliated communities both within and outside of the U.S. and Canada.

**C. Engage in strategic partnerships with values-aligned communities.** We operate in an ecosystem of experimental communities which are serving a wide range of modern seekers. In collaborating more deeply with those communities that share our values of justice and inclusion, both Jewish and non-Jewish, we grow our reach and exposure as a movement and expand potential resources and relationships for our existing affiliated communities. To do this, we will...

- i. Partner with Havaya Summer Programs to identify and prioritize youth-serving organizations and communities with whom we want to explore collaboration.
- ii. Explore partnership opportunities and ways to both support and learn from a select number of values-aligned organizations, coalitions, and communities focused on key issues, including social justice, disability rights, LGBTQIA+ inclusion, and Israel. Modalities of support can include curation of Jewish texts, spiritual practices for activists, and/or ritual guidance.
- iii. Consider learning and volunteer opportunities with partner organizations for members of our affiliated communities.

2. **Develop, support, and market platforms for individuals to connect with one another, find community, and co-create their Jewish lives.** For the purposes of this plan, we define a "platform" as an online or in-person environment where individuals can both give and receive value. As such, we are committed to building and sustaining platforms that not only provide meaningful content and resources, but also foster interconnection, mutual obligation, and interaction in service of deepening Jewish identity and practice. We seek to grow the impact of these platforms by reaching a wide range of individuals, wherever they are, who are interested in and committed to a deeply rooted and boldly relevant approach to Jewish life.

*To support this goal, we will:*



- A. Ensure an aligned and integrated future for our family of online platforms.** Viewing our online platforms as a unified whole rather than as individual component parts, we will adopt a more strategic approach to our online presence that better meets user needs, promotes a single brand, centers our areas of expertise and distinctiveness, and streamlines our internal processes. This will increase the ease of use of our platforms and allow for effective cross-promotion across our sub-brands. To do this, we will...
- i. Upgrade the user experience on our platforms, including Ritualwell, Evolve, and ReconstructingJudaism.org, to increase the accessibility and discoverability of our content.
  - ii. Ensure that our platforms are accessible to people with disabilities.
  - iii. Increase collaboration and communication across platform teams.
- B. Invest in enhancing our online platforms in known areas of distinctiveness.** Building on the strong reputation and recent growth of our “flagship” online platforms, Ritualwell and Evolve, we will continue to enhance the features of these platforms with the goal of facilitating connection, learning, covenantal conversation, and ritual co-creation, and of serving a wide and diverse community of users. To do this, we will...
- i. For both Ritualwell and Evolve:
    1. Grow and enhance components of both platforms that are interactive and relational, including immersions, workshops, and conversations.
    2. Partner with Havaya Summer Programs to feature younger voices on our platforms.
    3. Create a fundraising plan, including major gifts and foundations, that allows us to leverage both platforms as tools for investment in the organization at large.
  - ii. For Ritualwell:
    1. Evaluate and experiment with some or all of the recommendations that were developed in collaboration with a consulting firm around monetization and marketing strategy. These experiments will build on our existing work and are an investment in long-term revenue potential.
    2. Pursue mutually beneficial partnerships with other values-aligned organizations to expand our audience and learn best practices around virtual programming and audience engagement.
  - iii. For Evolve:
    1. Effect site migration so that Evolve shares the same programming platform as our other online platforms, with attention to an integrated approach.



2. Develop strategies to raise the profile and expand the reach of Evolve, with the goal of establishing it as the central location for the emergence and elaboration of Reconstructionist perspectives on important issues of Jewish life.
- C. Develop and promote opportunities for meaningful in-person connection and learning.** Our in-person programs have historically served as deeply enriching platforms for engaging with our movement and deepening connections across members of our congregations and to the central organization. As soon as it is safe to do so, we will resume in-person gathering with the goal of facilitating true “togetherness,” both for our congregations and other audiences. These gatherings will build off of what we have learned about successful online convening, and whenever possible, will include an option for active and engaged virtual attendance to increase reach, participation, and accessibility. To do this, we will...
- i. Plan and host our next movement-wide Convention in 2022 in collaboration with the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association (RRA) and Havaya Summer Programs.
  - ii. Plan and host Days of Learning or Shabbatonim in key regional markets.
- D. Develop a platform that allows individuals to engage with and experience offerings from a range of Reconstructionist communities.** We are moving towards a future where belonging is not primarily characterized by membership in brick-and-mortar synagogues, and where individuals are increasingly comfortable engaging virtually. In partnership with our affiliated communities, we will develop and market a platform that widens access to Reconstructionist experiences and increases connection between individuals and our movement at large and across Reconstructionist communities, regardless of geography. To do this, we will...
- i. Evaluate if and how Recon Connect should be integrated into such a platform.
  - ii. Research the specific needs that individuals may be seeking to meet through the platform, including conversion and pastoral care.
  - iii. Explore collaboration with Havaya Summer Programs to develop and distribute youth- and family-oriented programming.
  - iv. Develop and test a monetization strategy that is at least partially driven by individual membership to the movement and/or a fee-for-service model, and that is sensitive to the financial needs of our congregations.
3. **Invest in the future of Reconstructionist rabbinical education.** We believe that Reconstructionist rabbis are powerful forces for change in the world. By continuing to invest in the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC) as a distinct institution and in the



distinctiveness of Reconstructionist rabbinical training<sup>1</sup>, we are educating future rabbis to meet the needs of diverse communities and constituents and to offer Jewish wisdom to the world.

*To support this goal, we will:*

- A. Continue to grow student enrollment and retention by increasing the accessibility and affordability of our program.** It is imperative that we provide an education for rabbis who come from varied backgrounds, reflecting the diversity of the communities they serve in terms of race, socioeconomic status, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and more. To this end, we will work to ensure that we can grow our program and increase both affordability and accessibility to a wide range of students. To do this, we will...
- i. Create a fundraising plan to raise money for scholarships, including dedicated funds for our students who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).
  - ii. Make necessary investments in recruitment efforts.
  - iii. Build on the components of our new curriculum that allow for remote learning and geographic flexibility for our students, particularly in their final two years.
  - iv. Continuously evaluate and improve upon our accelerated program options for qualified students, to better accommodate students with extensive work experience, prior relevant knowledge or skills, and/or a high degree of motivation. These options should allow certain students to complete the program in under five years.
  - v. Continue to invest in transforming the rabbinical program to support students with disabilities.
- B. Engage in intentional robust partnerships with other seminaries and organizations.** We will collaborate more deeply with other institutions as we seek to amplify our program where we are not currently distinctive or well-resourced, as well as to further strengthen our offerings in key areas of growth. Successful partnerships will provide valuable opportunities to our students, and in some cases, may increase efficiencies and/or potential cost savings to the organization. To do this, we will...
- i. Strengthen mutually beneficially partnerships with congregations and other Jewish communal institutions around field education. To benefit both the students and organizations, we will work closely with Reconstructionist congregations, Jewish and multifaith social justice organizations, Hillels, chaplaincy sites, Havaya Summer Programs, and other institutions. These

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<sup>1</sup> While we believe that this plan sets us up to operate an independent and financially sustainable rabbinical program, we will remain open to other models that may ultimately become more viable for us in the future.

efforts will both strengthen field training opportunities for our students and support future job placement for graduates.

- ii. Explore partnering with other rabbinical schools to jointly offer classes and training where appropriate (e.g., entrepreneurship, Hebrew language instruction, *Mekhinah*).
- iii. Explore partnering with other Jewish and non-Jewish seminaries and organizations to enhance our offerings related to multifaith studies and social justice organizing.
- iv. Continuously evaluate the viability of facilitating cross-registration in courses at other rabbinical schools.
- v. Partner with values-aligned organizations in Israel to ensure the successful implementation of our summer term Israel program.

**C. Ensure faculty and staff are equipped to meet the needs of the next generation of Reconstructionist rabbis.** To do this, we will...

- i. Prioritize expertise in the field and in multifaith studies and social justice organizing in upcoming hires.
- ii. Prioritize hiring faculty and staff members who are BIPOC.
- iii. Increase training opportunities for faculty and staff. We will provide more robust training in key areas, including how to center and serve BIPOC, how to teach students with diverse learning styles and abilities, and how to facilitate excellent online learning experiences.
- iv. Partner with the RRA to understand emerging needs of Reconstructionist rabbis in the field, with the goal of addressing them in our curriculum.

**D. Foster greater integration between our rabbinical school and the organization at large.** To ensure that our rabbinical students are benefiting from the unique assets of our organization and our movement, and vice versa, we need to work to ensure a greater degree of synergy between RRC and Reconstructing Judaism. This will involve a commitment from the rabbinical program to draw upon learnings from across the organization, and from our organization to continually seek input from and co-create with our faculty and students. To do this, we will...

- i. Support opportunities for rabbinical students to participate in and contribute to movement programs and initiatives, including through intentional internship placements within other departments of Reconstructing Judaism and contribution of content to Ritualwell and Evolve.
- ii. Explore opportunities to deploy faculty expertise beyond the rabbinical school.
- iii. Continue to integrate resources and materials produced by Reconstructing Judaism in our curriculum.



- iv. Continue to support staff members with appropriate credentials from Reconstructing Judaism and affiliated entities (i.e., Havaya Summer Programs) to be directly involved in the rabbinical program as teachers and mentors.
4. **Join and lead Jewish efforts to dismantle systemic racism, and to advance racial diversity, equity, and inclusion within the Reconstructionist movement.** Supported by our Jews of Color and Allies Advisory Group and the Tikkun Olam Commission, we commit to diversifying our movement at all levels, to enacting powerful and transformative allyship, and to leveraging our power and the richness of our traditions to lead the fight for racial justice in partnership with other values-aligned organizations. We acknowledge the intersectionality of different axes of exclusion, and recognize the continued need to sustain our historic commitments and to seize opportunities to support and institutionalize a culture of inclusion across our movement, particularly with regard to disability inclusion. Given the urgency of the moment, this plan maintains a dedicated focus on race.

*To support this goal, we will:*

- A. **Strive to become an anti-racist organization.** We commit to creating a model of anti-racism within our organization and to cultivating a shared commitment to this work among our staff and board. To do this, we will...
  - i. Onboard our inaugural Director of Racial Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and continue to seek funding to grow and sustain this function and related programs.
  - ii. Develop a rubric that defines what it means to be an anti-racist organization, including, but not limited to, ensuring our hiring practices are diverse, equitable, and inclusive.
  - iii. Set realistic five-year targets for recruitment of new staff, board, and faculty members who are BIPOC.
  - iv. Increase support for BIPOC within our rabbinical school.
  - v. Continue to create and facilitate learning opportunities around systemic racism for key stakeholders.
  - vi. Build on our new curriculum for rabbinical students to ensure that anti-racism is embedded within our training approach.
  
- B. **Engage and support our congregations and communities in the work of transformational change.** There is an enormous amount of work that needs to be done to build communal spaces that are both embracing and empowering. We commit to a future where our communities are open and engaged in this ongoing process of transformation. This work will primarily involve centering and supporting



BIPOC, and it will also involve working with white Jews within our movement to create meaningful change. To do this, we will...

- i. Provide and amplify resources, trainings, and other educational opportunities for congregations and communities to learn about and commit to racial justice, including for children and families in partnership with Havaya Summer Programs. These opportunities will promote sustained, rather than isolated, conversations about race.
- ii. Increase support for BIPOC within our affiliated congregations, including children.
- iii. Support BIPOC to rise to leadership positions or other positions of increased visibility within their communities, including as rabbis and educators.

**C. Elevate the voices and experiences of BIPOC in our texts and tradition.** To do this, we will:

- i. Invest in developing Ritualwell and Evolve content that is by and for BIPOC. We can do this through partnerships with BIPOC-led organizations and/or through the cultivation of writers and contributors who are BIPOC.
- ii. Create liturgy that reflects voices and experiences of BIPOC.

**D. Advance an anti-racist agenda in the public sphere.** To do this, we will:

- i. Commit to applying a racial justice lens to public statements and policy positions that we take both independently and in partnership with others.
- ii. Join coalitions with other Jewish and multifaith organizations to advance specific policy priorities.
- iii. Build relationships with organizations led by and serving BIPOC to understand how we can best support and amplify their work.
- iv. Engage in thought leadership around the intersectionality of antisemitism and racism.

**5. Build a sustainable organization.** Our organization is in a moment of transition. In order to position ourselves for success and vitality in the long-term, we need to strengthen our finances and our communications and staffing infrastructure, so that we are equipped to deliver on our mission and goals at the highest level.

*To support this goal, we will:*

**A. Build a revenue model that ensures our long-term financial sustainability.** To do this, we will...

- i. Create and execute a comprehensive and diversified fundraising plan to sustain our programs and operations for the next five years and beyond.



Designed in consultation with Third Plateau, the plan will focus on defining the public phase of the Momentum Campaign through identifying new major donors, expanding our donor base to new target segments, and aligning our grant and donation requests to our strategic priorities and to our most innovative areas of work.

- ii. Evaluate needs related to executing our development plan, and hire or reassign staff members focused on addressing those needs, as appropriate.
- iii. Continue to elevate and train our board members, rabbis, and lay leaders as fundraisers, stewards, and ambassadors within their communities and beyond.
- iv. Explore other revenue-generating opportunities that are in direct alignment with our goals, including an individual membership model and fee-based classes and convenings.

**B. Strengthen our branding and external communications.** We will only succeed in raising our profile and garnering more support if we effectively communicate about our work to our current and potential audiences. To do this, we will...

- i. Create and execute a communications and marketing plan that aligns with our strategic priorities and development plan. Building on the work we have previously done with Big Duck, the plan will focus on articulating a set of clear and concise messages, leveraging social media, and elevating the authentic stories of individuals and communities within the movement.
- ii. Evaluate needs related to executing our communications plan, and hire or reassign staff members focused on addressing those needs, as appropriate.

**C. Streamline and redesign our internal operations.** To do this, we will...

- i. Identify the appropriate organizational structure and staffing model that aligns with our strategic priorities and increases efficiency across the organization.
- ii. Invest in staff retention and professional development.
- iii. Continue to increase collaboration and communication between key departments and program areas.
- iv. Develop clear metrics and data collection protocols by which to measure and evaluate success across the organization. This will involve calibrating our dashboard metrics to our strategic priorities and aligning data collection with our annual assessment.