



Learning from the 2023 JCamp 180 Conference

CONTEXT

You are the people that people want to hear from.

At the 2023 JCamp 180 conference we focused on “Engage: Today, Tomorrow, Forever.” We imagined that everything camp needs, our stakeholders have—and, we acknowledged that they want to hear from us as much as we need to connect with them.

For years, the primary business for Jewish camps has been summer camp. But **our impact has been on people**. Camp is the place where people become their authentic selves. We are part of some people’s Jewish community; we are some people’s only Jewish community. In either case, **our mission matters for people throughout their lives**. And as a result, they crave lifelong engagement, we can influence them all year long, and the more we connect with them, the more they will give.

LEARNING FROM “RELATIONSHIP-BASED ENGAGEMENT”¹

- “Relationship-based Engagement” is the act of reaching others, getting to know them, and connecting with them on the basis of their interests, ambitions, and passions.
- Engagement doesn’t “bring people in” from the outside but rather seeks to understand them and find common interests, offerings, and/or experiences that meet them where they are.
- Engagement prioritizes relationships over participation. We care about people whether they show up or not.
- Engagement is a mindset and a skillset that animates community and builds a deep sense of authentic connection and belonging. It isn’t a calendar of programs; it is a people strategy. We build opportunities around people. We spend more time on pre-program work and post-program follow up. We plan small or organic experiences, not just programs. When we plan programs, we design them for maximal relational connection.
- In the “**heartbeat model of engagement**,” we weave together small beats of ongoing connection and relationship building with large programmatic moments.
- We create opportunities (hosting, or curating), we connect people to each other (embedding organic connections), and we design partnerships (co-hosting with other organizations or borrowing an organization’s work to support a cohort of stakeholders).

¹ Definitions come from the work of Rachel Gildiner as CEO of Gather, Inc. Rachel is now the Chief Engagement Officer of Hillel International.

A lifelong camp journey involves big heartbeats and small, in-between heartbeats. As they are engaged more, we succeed more, and they give more, creating a virtuous cycle of engagement.

IN BUILDING A VIRTUOUS CYCLE OF ENGAGEMENT, WE WANT TO...

- Bring people to camp
- Bring us to our people, throughout the year
- Involve people in planning for themselves
- Connect people to each other
- Use swag strategically
- Use light touches at key moments

This set of steps, a kind of formula, applies to any audience: parents who are or are not alumni, current staff, older campers, community members (not otherwise connected to camp), and more. The important piece is to tweak these steps as appropriate for each audience, based on their unique interests, wants, and needs.

SPECIFIC IDEAS FROM YOUR PEERS

Below are some of the many ideas shared throughout the conference experience. In addition, you can find [more details from the four Camp Spotlights shared during the conference on our website](#).

We hope your camp will find some of these ideas helpful for engaging with your community.

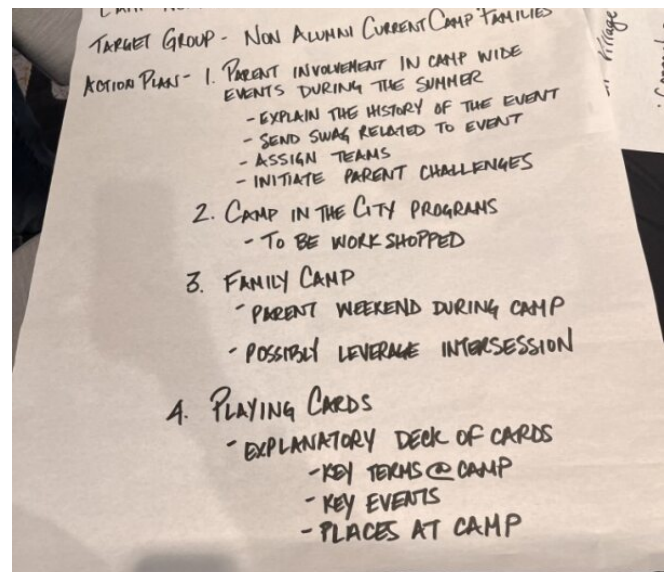
FOR ALUMNI, THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE

- Bring alumni to camp:
 - For weekends, family camps, workdays, as specialists/ experts, for Shabbat, for one-off programs
 - Engage alumni in specific programs at camp like Color War, talent show
- Involve alumni in planning for themselves:
 - Create an Alumni Council that creates these events.
 - Create Alumni Councils for different cohorts (for specific programs at camp, or specific years)
 - Hire (very part-time) Alumni “connectors,” responsible for reaching out to certain cohorts of alumni
- Connect alumni to each other (Create camp throughout the year):
 - Build a tool that tracks careers, and develop a career mentoring program.
 - Don’t use careers and simply connect younger, graduating alumni to older alumni as mentors.
 - Focus this work on cities outside of your own, to which younger alumni may be moving with no resources.
 - Program for alumni: learning opportunities on zoom or in living rooms, an Israel trip, a service day at camp or separately

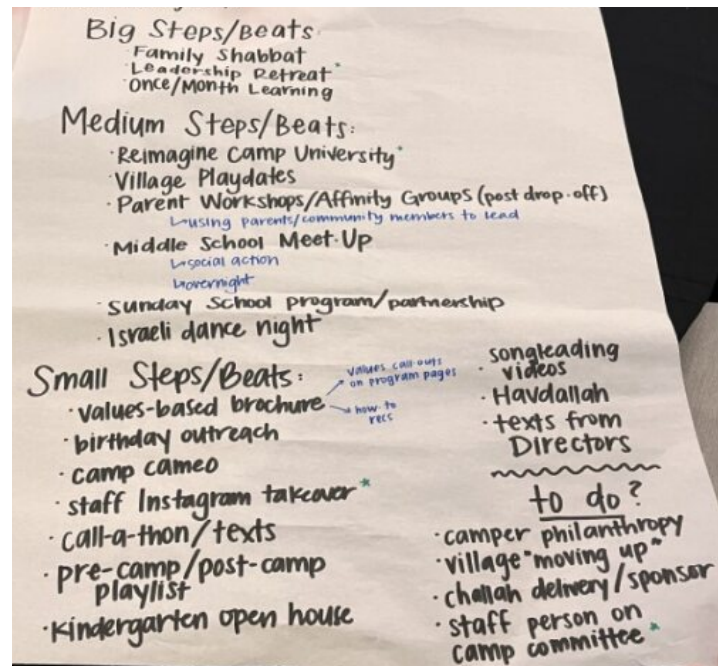
- Build unique alumni swag, rooted in their years at camp, sent to them at key milestone moments (birthdays, anniversaries, anniversaries of their first summer at camp)
- Boot up the work:
 - Dive into your data. Tag cohorts.
 - Collect data through a word-of-mouth campaign and through social media
 - Engage key stakeholders in each cohort
 - Create a newsletter for each cohort, with current camp highlights and about the cohort's alumni
 - Create social media stories for each cohort
- Use light touches at key moments (small heartbeats):
 - A newsletter that is highly personal, with milestones and celebrations
 - Build periodic promo videos based in camp culture, celebrating rituals

FOR PARENTS, THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE

- Bring parents to camp:
 - For weekends, family camps, workdays, as specialists/ experts, for Shabbat, for one-off programs; explore intercession as an opportunity for programming
 - Engage parents in specific programs at camp like Color War, talent show
 - Intro days for parents, where campers show off camp to them, during the year or even during the summer: Create "days of play," where parents stay nearby and are at camp for the day
 - Create family shabbatot, particularly for younger siblings
- During the year:
 - Create parent-only programming, such as monthly learning, and focus programming on select groups of parents
 - Coordinate family leads in each bunk, where parents reach out to other parents and create a reunion
 - Engage a parent committee and camp ambassadors
 - Create a camper philanthropy project, ideally with a matching donor
 - Create joint PJ Library events; look into a partnership with PJ Our Way (if in your community)
 - Create year-long social action projects, that will encourage repeat participation
 - Offer camp social/ info nights, with childcare
 - Create family programs around unique camp offerings, like Israeli dancing
- Build unique parent (kid) swag, rooted in their kids' experiences



- Create playing cards with key terms/ definitions at camp: places, events, in-jokes
- Send pictures or cards to families when they register, even for returning parents/ families
- Create stickers, other activities in cards for Hanukkah or birthdays
- Use light touches at key moments (small heartbeats):
 - A newsletter that is highly personal, with milestones and celebrations
 - Periodic promo videos based in camp culture, celebrating rituals
 - Pictures to families when they reregister
 - Call parents to welcome them; make midsummer calls; call parents at the end of the summer to check in
 - Interview families on social media



FOR CURRENT STAFF, THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE

- Keep staff at camp
 - Turn their staff position into an internship, with speakers during the summer
 - Raise funds specifically to supplement their salaries (create donor-designated opportunities)
- Keep staff engaged outside of camp
 - Match them with alumni mentors
 - Provide educational programming during the year
 - Engage staff to lead bunk programs during the year
 - Ask (hire) staff to create mementos for their campers, making birthday messages or otherwise sending videos (offer parents opportunity to pay for a birthday message for campers)

FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS*, THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE

**Usually donors who don't have a personal connection to camp)*

- Bring them to camp, even virtually (livestream Shabbat)
- Send a unique newsletter to community partners
- Create a piece of opening day/ week for community partners (video/photo from first opening day - "you made this happen")
- Invite community partners to Shabbat, other events; engage them in the events