Program Evaluation Case Study

25 years ago the Jewish Federation embarked on what was then a unique Israel teen’s savings program. The idea of the program was that families would set aside a small amount each year ($300) from third grade with the intention that once the teen reaches tenth grade, he/she would be eligible to go on a recognized six week teen trip to Israel. Federation would add $2500 and the family’s synagogue would contribute an additional $500. The idea was that that at the end of the road there would be sufficient funds to cover the trip, then estimated at $5000.

Federation’s portion was partially funded by an endowment made by the John and Ruth Rosenberg, who were insistent that in recognition of their contribution the program be called the John and Ruth Rosenberg Gift of Israel Program, even though their part covered only a third of Federation’s cost.

The program was very successful for many years. However, recent trends have caused both enrollment and actual kids going to Israel to severely decline, for the following reasons:

- Synagogues and religious schools, where the most effective recruitment takes place, have shown less interest in the program.
- Educational trips to Israel have grown increasingly expensive and the gap between what the total savings are and the actual costs are has widened
- There is general less interest in going on long (six week) trips to Israel
- Birthright has become major competition offering a free trip to Israel once the child reaches 18, such that teenagers defer going to Israel till they are eligible for Birthright.
- Many families have reached maturity in completing their savings yet the “child” has not elected to go to Israel

As a result, the Federation feels that a serious evaluation is needed to assess the current situation and to suggest changes in the program. There are, however, three additional factors:

- The Rosenbergs have become increasingly disenchanted with Federation, for reasons not related to this program. They have significantly cut their gift to the annual Campaign and there is concern that about upsetting them further.
- The Federation receives many requests from teenagers and young men and women who are seeking financial aid to go on personal and short term educational trips to Israel, such as archeological digs, summer at a university, volunteering, etc. The Federation has had to decline assistance as it is financially committed to the Rosenberg GOI program.
- Another agency runs a camp program whereby they give scholarships for teenagers. However these scholarships are only for domestic camps and not for Israel. The Agency might be persuaded to consider scholarships for Israel if approached in the right way.

Group questions:

1. Is an evaluation called for? What should be evaluated? What methodology should be used? What policy objectives must be considered?
2. Who should be involved in the evaluation? Should the Rosenberg’s be involved? What should we tell them? What might happen if the recommendation is to scrap the program?
3. Should the possible alternative agency be involved?
4. What should be the organizational structure for the evaluation?
5. Should a consultant be hired? Or just an internal evaluation?
6. Who or what committee should make these decisions?