



JELF Board Retreat Minutes

Sunday, February 22, 2026 (9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.)

MJCCA (5342 Tilly Mill Road, Dunwoody, GA 30338)

Participating Board Members (23): Jeff Alperin, Irene Aronin, Brian Banner (Zoom), Matthew Bornenstein, Ken Broda, Jason Frank, Barry Gang, Marianne Garber (Zoom) Steven Gluck, Elizabeth Goldberg, Ed Hyken, Philip Kahn, Jonathan Kessler, Lisa Kohring (Zoom), Stan Lowenstein, Jon Mittleman, Richard Peretz (Board Chair), Rob Rickles, Bert Rosenthal, Jane Sandler, Stacey Shapiro, Bob Thompson, Gil Wolchock

Staff Present (5): Sandra Bass (Loan Program Director), Miriam Friedman (Sr. Loan Officer), Cathy Miller (COO), Josh Schaiër (CDO), Jenna Shulman (CEO)

Opening & Icebreaker (9:00 – 9:15 a.m.)

The retreat began with breakfast and a Board Bingo icebreaker facilitated by Jenna Shulman. Board members were encouraged to meet individuals they did not already know well and share one interesting new thing they learned about another participant.

Welcome & Framing Remarks (Richard Peretz, Board Chair) (9:15 – 9:40 a.m.)

Handouts:

- **[Strategic Plans - Compare / Contrast \(Richard's deck\)](#)**
- **[2025 RD Report](#)**
- **[2025 Alumni Overview](#)**

Richard Peretz opened the retreat with introductory remarks, emphasizing:

- The importance of focused discussion within a condensed time frame
- Maintaining solution-oriented dialogue
- Respecting airtime and participation across the board

Purpose of the Retreat

- Align priorities following adoption of the 2025–2030 Strategic Plan
- Clarify execution needs and governance alignment
- Identify areas where bylaws may need modernization

Expected Outcomes

- Greater alignment around strategic priorities
- Identification of potential bylaw updates or clarifications

Richard presented an overview comparing where JELF currently stands relative to strategic goals and highlighted lessons learned from prior strategic planning cycles.

Breakout Session #1 – Strategic Plan Alignment (9:40 – 10:45 a.m.)

Board members were divided into four breakout groups to review past strategic plans and evaluate one measurable goal from the 2025–2030 Strategic Plan.

Objectives

- Reflect on how JELF’s strategy has evolved over time
- Identify lessons from past goals that were ambitious, unrealistic, or slower to execute
- Stress-test current measurable goals for clarity and feasibility

Focus Areas Assigned

1. \$4M+ in annual fundraising
2. Serving 1,000 students annually
3. Achieving 50% of funding from outside Atlanta
4. Organizational capacity to support scale

Discussion Themes

Groups discussed:

- Clarity and measurability of assigned goals
- Feasibility based on staffing, infrastructure, and fundraising capacity
- Ownership between staff, board, and committees
- Early indicators of success or risk

Board members engaged in structured breakout discussions to evaluate the clarity, feasibility, and ownership of key measurable goals within JELF's 2025–2030 Strategic Plan. Overall, participants affirmed strong alignment with the organization's growth ambitions while emphasizing the importance of matching goals with realistic infrastructure, staffing, and fundraising capacity.

Across groups, several consistent themes emerged:

- The need to strengthen fundraising infrastructure and geographic expansion efforts - particularly outside Atlanta - to support multiple strategic objectives simultaneously.
- A desire for clearer definitions of success metrics in certain areas, including organizational capacity and student growth targets.
- Recognition that board engagement will be critical in advancing connections, advocacy, and leadership support as JELF scales.
- Early indicators of progress should include growth in fundraising revenue, increased regional engagement, and expanded board participation.

The discussions reflected a shared commitment to balancing ambitious growth with sustainable execution, ensuring that JELF's strategy remains both aspirational and achievable.

Report Outs:

Group # 1: Philip Kahn, Jason Frank, Jon Mittleman, Matthew Borenstein, Jenna Shulman, Marianne Garber, Lisa Kohring, Brian Banner, Bob Thompson

Assigned Goal: 50% of funding from outside Atlanta

This goal is clearly defined and measurable. To achieve, we need:

- Major lead generator
- Support Base
- Success in FL (continued RD increase)

Ideas:

- Set-up performance measurables (i.e. for each trip outside Atlanta, measure cost vs. revenue)
- Specifics about reasons why to target specific communities?
- Possible new major gifts person
- More Alumni participation

- More Board members outside Atlanta (4 from Florida right now)
 - Goal of 25% Board Members outside Atlanta??
- Increase outside Board participation

Biggest Risks / Constraints:

- Money
- Hiring correct personnel
- Grant / one-off funding (not recurring)
- Staff time allocation (current staff could be stretched too thin)

Ownership:

- South Florida Committee (Josh / Amy)
- Resource Development Committee (Josh / Stan / Gil / Warren)

Board Members role matters most:

- Connections
- Support for potential personnel
- Generating leads / advocacy for JELF
- Events

By Year 2, we would know we were on track if:

- Growth in dollars raised
- Increase in board participation
- Increase in events in other cities (outside Atlanta)

Group #2: Steven Gluck, Jeff Alperin, Jane Sandler, Sandra Bass, Barry Gang, Jonathan Kessler, Rob Rickles

Assigned Goal: \$4 Million in Annual Fundraising

This goal is clearly defined and measurable.

For this goal to be achieved, what has to be true?

1. Retain current base (reduce churn) of donors and amounts
2. Increase number of new donors (better tap South Florida)
3. Increase donor amounts
4. Enough resources

The biggest risks or constraints are:

1. Limited donor pool (Jewish borrowers only limits grants, which means we rely more on individuals)
2. Only helping students in a five-state region
3. Small fundraising team / # of employees

As far as the Board's ownership: everyone should participate, however the JELF development team is really the ones who own it, though the Board / Strategic Planning committee are the ones making the goals.

Board Members' roles matter most in supporting the development of JELF in some way (giving names, signing letters, outreach).

By year 2, we would know if we were on track based on what percentage of \$4 million we can reach.

Group #3: Ed Hyken, Bert Rosenthal, Ken Broda, Richard Peretz, Cathy Miller, Josh Schaier, Gil Wolchock

Assigned Goal: 1,000 Students Served Annually

This goal is clear, but not backed up with data or a truly achievable number according to the rest of the plan. Therefore, it is hard to understand what success looks like. The metric should be the percentage of need met.

For this to be achievable, this has to be true:

- Raise more money (\$6.4 million)
- Prove tht there are 1,000 people based on our current mission

Biggest risks or constraints are that students will have less of their need met especially as government funding lacks.

The board's role matters most to identify if the goal is appropriate.

Group #4: Stan Lowenstein, Irene Aronin, Stacey Shapiro, Eizabeth Goldberg, Miriam Friedman

Assigned Goal: Organizational Capacity to Support Scale

This goal is not clearly defined or measurable and we do not understand what success should look like, other than more humans and more money.

To be achievable, this must be true:

- Growing need
- Capacity to handle growth

The biggest risks or constraints are:

- Goal setting to meet need and determine need
- Changing process and changing culture
- Growth vs. culture (high touch)
 - What is JELF's most 'sacred cow?' Loan Reviews.

The responsibility of achieving this goal lies on the Loan Program and / or efficiency committees, as well as the Board and staff.

Board members' roles matter most when serving as ambassadors and donors.

In past strategic plans, JELF has done a good job of finding more students outside Atlanta but still needs work in finding more donors to support outside of the region.

10:45–10:55 | Break (10 min)

Breakout #2: Bylaws Review & Governance Alignment (11:00 – 11:35 a.m.)

Purpose: Jenna explains that the purpose of this breakout session is to review JELF's current bylaws through a practical lens – identifying where they support the organization well, where they create confusion or friction and where updates could better reflect how JELF actually operates today.

- This is **not** a legal rewrite session. It's about clarity, alignment, and governance effectiveness.
- Bylaws are meant to guide how we govern - not sit on a shelf. As JELF has grown, our operations, board roles, and committee structures have evolved.
- This session is about stepping back and asking: Do our bylaws still reflect how we work today - and how we want to work going forward?

Board member groups were mixed up from the previous session and each group was assigned one focus area of the bylaws.

Handouts:

- [JELF's Current Bylaws](#)
- [JELF's Current Executive Board Structure](#)

Group 1: Jenna Shulman, Jeff Alperin, Jonathan Kessler, Jane Sandler, Irene Aronin, Philip Kahn, Brian Banner, Marianne Garber, Lisa Kohring

Analyzed: Articles I (“Name, Location and Charitable Purpose”) and II (“The Directors”)

- 1.01 - Change to: Corporation (“JELF”) and then replace JELF everywhere else
- 1.04 - Definite higher education to include any education beyond high school that leads to a degree or certificate
 - o Including **by not limited to** scholarships, education....
- 2.03 - Expand the definition of cause (must reflect the values of the organization)

Group 2: Ed Hyken, Stan Lowenstein, Bob Thompson, Bert Rosenthal, Jason Frank

Analyzed: Articles III (“The Officers”) and IV (“Chief Executive Director”)

- 3.03 - Leading of the Strat. Plan Committee = Vice Chair but we only have one every other year
- 3.06 - Consider adding specific titles to each of the VPs
- IV - Add that CEO changes can be recommended by the Board Chair or **any other Board Member**

Group 3: Richard Peretz, Miriam Friedman, Jon Mittleman, Rob Rickles, Elizabeth Goldberg, Steven Gluck, Gil Wolchock

Analyzed: Articles V (“The Committees”)

- 5.07 – The loan committee shall be responsible for....processes....for **approval** and disbursing loans.
- 5.08 - Better address sub-committees (i.e. South Florida and Alumni, which fall under R.D.)
- 5.10 - Is there a governance committee?
- 5.11 - How does the Nominating Committee actually work?

Group 4: Sandra Bass, Matthew Borenstein, Ken Broda, Barry Gang, Stacey Shapiro

Analyzed: Articles VI (“Meetings”), VII (“Fiscal Year”) and VIII (“Amendment of Bylaws”)

- 2.05 – This is in the Director section but actually belongs in Meetings.
- 6.01 - Be clearer about how often meetings can take place (i.e. all in one month, etc.). There are no regulations about how often committees should meet.
- The potential 6-month period for the timing of the annual meeting seemed long. Also, given the current wording that directors/officers start their positions the January 1 following their election, it seemed odd to have it happen after January 1. If we allow that, we would need to clean up the wording about when terms actually start.

- Discussion (but no consensus) about whether wording should be added regarding any structure that should be put into place (# of meetings, timing of meetings, etc.) for the various committees mentioned.
- Fiscal year – we know many non-profits have a July – June FY. May make more sense given we want to have financials done well in advance of loan review – but need to confirm with leadership that calendar year still makes sense.
- Amendment of Bylaws – Should this be a 2-step process? i.e. presented at one meeting and voted on at another – so that people have time to digest the changes, ask questions, etc. May not be practical to have multiple meetings but given bylaws don't change often, it seems like a big deal to make sure it is a thoroughly vetted discussion prior to the vote.

Other food for thought:

- Should expenses of a year size or above have to go before Exec/Board?
- Should accepting gifts of a certain size have to go through Exec/Board (even if there are separate gifting policies)? The bylaws could also require a gifting policy that be created and reviewed periodically.

Closing Remarks (Richard Peretz) (11:45–12:00)

During closing remarks, Board Chair Richard presented an updated JELF organizational chart and facilitated discussion related to leadership structure, governance alignment, and long-term sustainability. The conversation reinforced many of the themes surfaced throughout the retreat, including strategic execution needs, organizational capacity, and the importance of thoughtful succession planning.

Richard introduced a [Board Succession Questionnaire](#) focused on leadership continuity within JELF. All board members present were asked to complete it at the conclusion of the retreat. Board members who were unable to attend will be invited to complete the questionnaire following the meeting so their input can be included.

Richard thanked participants for a candid and collaborative discussion. He noted that the retreat helped:

- Align near-term and long-term priorities
- Identify risks and execution needs
- Clarify where board leadership can have the greatest impact
- **Bring up 1 important “Parking Lot” issue:**

- *Should JELF consider a fund for individuals who are not Jewish to avoid being a discriminatory organization and potentially open ourselves up to more grants / funding?*

Staff will synthesize themes, feedback, and next steps and share a follow-up summary with the board.

Retreat concludes.