

## From the J-Vault: Is "Federation" a Dirty Word?

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**This week, from the J-Vault: *Miscellanea: Should Social Lending Agencies Affiliate With Federations?* (1928)**

In this exchange of letters, published in the Jewish Social Service Quarterly (predecessor to the **Journal of Jewish Communal Service**), the director of a Federation-affiliated independent agency in Philadelphia (in this case, a social service microfinance agency) complains to the research director of **Cleveland's Jewish Federation** that the Federation brand makes Jews reluctant to take advantage of the agency's services.

"There is a definite place for a social lending agency in the community structure," writes William Hirsch. However:

[I]t is best that the lending agency should not be a part of the case working agency... The Federated Loan Association is only nominally a Federation agency. We receive no funds from the Federation. We are organized under a separate charter, incorporated in this State, and have entirely independent funds...

...We are not associated with the Federation, but since our name, "The Federated Loan Association," smatters very strongly of federation, our growth has been materially hindered. We have had any number of complaints about the name, from our clients and prospective clients, and invariably the inquiry over the telephone indicates a confusion in the mind of the inquirer as to our connection with the Federation. In fact, it is so serious that we will be compelled shortly to change our title. We know definitely of a large number of prospective clients who would not come here because "Federated" appears in the name... It is only after we have interviewed our clients and they learn definitely that we are not a part of the Federation, certainly not associated with the Jewish Welfare Society, that we are able to get co-operation.

John Slawson responds -- perhaps understandably a tad coldly -- questioning whether this association between Jewish Federations and charity (or, the taboo of being "a charity case") holds true in every community:

I should like to suggest that the attitude is conditioned in a very large measure by the type of federation and the type of case work agency in any given community.

If a federation is avowedly a centralized social instrument designed specifically for the care of the miserable and needy—the pauper, the sick, the maimed—then, of course, there is ample justification for the feeling of dependency upon an association with an instrument of this nature.

However, if a federation interprets its mission as that of serving the entire Jewish community, in all of its communal needs, regardless of the economic status of the group served... not limiting its activities to cure, nor even to prevention, but functioning with the object of positive enrichment of the social life of the entire community—then affiliation with the federation simply implies a joining with a central instrument for the purpose of rendering the most effective mutual service in the community.

Hirsch takes up his pen once more:

Dear Dr. Slawson:

After reading your letter twice I cannot quite seem to agree with you...

...The federation is "avowedly a centralized social instrument designed specifically for the care of the miserable and needy." In addition, however, federation would like to be a preventive instrument and would like to serve those whom it can aid through guidance, advice and information. True, federation does try to serve the entire community, but just so long as the entire community, or that part of it that can afford it, supports federation with a view to helping those who are in need, you may rest assured that it will not be appealed to by persons financially independent. After all, the financially independent, in the main, are the supporters of the federation. They are the ones who talk federation, who take part in the campaigns and who have to support it by word of mouth against attack. You cannot say that the federation is primarily for the help of those who support it... Certainly, were we to eliminate the helpless, the sick, the maimed, the cripple, the mentally deficient, and the pauper, there would be no need for maintaining any sort of a federation. If it were to be purely a public service organization to help at a nominal charge or free of charge, without the pauper problem, you could not very well organize or maintain such an instrument in the community.

It would seem to me that the federation you have in mind would embrace also the work of public school guidance and civic aid. The work that you have in mind is not purely Jewish work and as such should be done by the city's various bureaus...

...[T]he Federated Loan Association is hampered by its name and is injured by its very remote association with Federation to the extent of being unable to reach those who today are being bled by the usurer and the commercial lenders.

If Slawson responded again, his response was not published in this article. It appears, however, that Slawson's vision of comprehensive Jewish Federations as incorporating far more than social services, **has long since won the day.**

*Download the complete article.*

