



History of Project InCiTE

A Partnership Between The Jewish Education Project and The iCenter

TEEN EDUCATION is challenging. Many institutions and organizations are unsatisfied with their record for delivering high-quality experiences for learners in the years between bar/bat mitzvah and college. Additionally, the educators and youth professionals who work with Jewish teens often find themselves lacking the peer and professional support, communal resources, and professional development opportunities needed to bring new ideas to the table that better reflect 21st century teens and their families.

Inspired by this recognition and with a mandate to bring strong Israel engagement to teen settings, the Project InCiTE Innovating Creative Teen Engagement Fellowship (<http://www.projectincite.blogspot.com>) was created through the work of the New Center for Collaborative Leadership at The Jewish Education Project (<http://www.thejewisheducationproject.org>).

We Started by Asking Ourselves:

- Is it possible to create an environment that fosters innovative ideas that will emerge as new models of Israel engagement for teens?
- How do we facilitate a process that will see these ideas through the creative, design, and implementation process?
- Can we deliver innovative projects that meet the needs of the organizations and settings where they will be piloted?

Charged with this task, we gathered together a diversely affiliated group of educators from national and regional institutions and organizations, and we designed the Fellowship to address these questions in four fundamental ways:

Innovation Training

We invested in working with SIT (Systematic Inventing Thinking) (<http://www.sitsite.com>), an Israel-based company of thinking trainers who worked directly with the Fellows. SIT facilitated retreats and training sessions and provided ongoing support to the Fellows. Participants were immersed in this process during the ideation and creative phases of Project InCiTE, learning strategies that broadened their capacity to think and innovate as they began to develop ideas for their projects.

Coach Support

We selected a group of seven high-level professionals in the field, each who brought his or her own expertise, experience, and perspective to the table. Coaches were assigned to individual Fellows whom they met with regularly, providing multiple support and guiding roles that varied during each phase of the Fellowship. As projects began to develop, coaches worked with cluster groups around common themes that emerged, allowing for their particular expertise to impact Fellows they had not worked with in the earlier stages of the Fellowship.

Institutional Sponsors

In addition to the qualifications of each Fellow candidate, we took into consideration two equally important factors during the selection process. We understood that for an educator to succeed, he or she must have buy-in from his or her institution and strong support from a professional (sponsor) within the organization. The sponsor could act as a champion to advocate for and help facilitate with the development and implementation of the educator's project.

Peer Relationships

We recognized early on the value of the Fellows working in groups, especially the insight they gained from the perspectives of others who were as committed to teen education, yet came from a significantly different educational or denominational setting. We invested in building these relationships by designing multiple experiences that fostered both personal and professional bonds—particularly during the ten days the Fellows spent together in Israel. These new relationships have had a positive effect on the educational landscapes the Fellows all participate in. We expect that the relationship webs that have formed will continue long after participation in Project InCiTE ends.

A Note on the Organizational Process and Personalities

One aspect of Project InCiTE that did not make its way into the *10 Things We've Learned About Innovation* report or *Contribution to the Field of Israel Education* report is our internal management process. From an organizational perspective, we feel it bears mentioning.

We had in place at the beginning of the Fellowship three foundational understandings:

- End Goals: Developing projects and spreading the ideas to the wider community
- Strategies: Intentionally picking an eclectic cohort, SIT training, coach support, and peer development
- Structure: Overnight retreats, an intense Israel experience, monthly or weekly coach support calls and meetings

Other than this overall working plan, we intentionally left room for Project InCiTE to be open and fluid. Meaning, we knew that we would discover things along the way that we could not anticipate or expect and wanted to have the capacity to evolve as we went along, which we did. We also learned that personality types present in a process like this one or any other initiative could influence the undercurrent of how it will flow, what will be reacted to, and what will rise to the surface and require attention. It proved to be an exciting, challenging, and often elevating experience to be both responsive and proactive in this way, and we learned not to underestimate its value.

Project Information

- Funding: In just eighteen months, fourteen of the twenty Fellows were

granted seed funding to launch their projects.

- Projects: The Project InCiTE webpage houses pages for each Fellow. Each page has a description and assessment about the project that the Fellows developed and a “how to” for implementing it in other settings.
- The Project InCiTE webpage also contains copies of process documents including a list of the outstanding educators in Israel with whom we worked. The webpage will be updated as projects are implemented and assessed.

The Project InCiTE team is proud of the wonderful group of professionals who embarked on this journey with us. Their collective commitment and hard work has contributed a body of work that will positively impact the wider educational community. We wish them *hatzlachah* as they continue in their personal and professional Jewish journeys.



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