

2015 Innovation Fund Grant Application



1. Applicant Information

Applicant Name/Organization	Address
Temple Beth-El Rabbi Marina Yergin	211 Belknap Place San Antonio, Texas 78259

Telephone	Email	Website
(210) 733-9135 x102	myergin@beth-elsa.org	www.beth-elsa.org

2. Project Information

Project/Initiative Name
#MitzvahQuest

Applicant/Organization Mission
The mission of Congregation Beth-El (also known as "Temple Beth-El") is to create a welcoming and vibrant house of God that inspires a community of Reform Jews committed to meaningful worship, spiritual growth, <i>tikkun olam</i> , and outreach within and beyond our Congregation.

Project/Initiative Anticipated Run Dates	Grant Amount Requested	Percent of Project Budget
Beginning January 1 st , 2016 and running indefinitely as we intend for this to be a sustainable program that will enhance our B'nei Mitzvah program for years to come.	\$5,000	67%

Target Population	Estimated Number of Participants Served
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - B'nei Mitzvah Students at Temple Beth-El and their families - The larger Temple Beth-El Community - The larger San Antonio community 	About 25 B'nei Mitzvah Students and their families a year (will vary based on enrollment for the year)

3. Project Narrative/Goals

Describe the project or initiative for which you are requesting funding.

Please consider:

- What is your inspiration for this project?
- What goals do you hope this project achieves?
- What is the issue or challenge that your initiative sets out to resolve? Or what is the absence of something that requires you to create this project/initiative?

Description:

#MitzvahQuest is a B'nei Mitzvah revolution that encourages an engaging and active participation of the B'nei Mitzvah student and their families during the entire B'nei Mitzvah process. At their first meeting with Rabbi Mara Nathan, the families will begin the conversation about their Torah portion, service, and meaning of the process. This meeting takes place nearly 8 months before the day the student becomes a bar/bat mitzvah. The next meeting takes place about 5-6 months before the day the student becomes a bar/bat mitzvah. This one is with Rabbi Marina Yergin about their D'var Torah. This is also a time to discuss #MitzvahQuest based on the attached document.

Note: #MitzvahQuest will also be explained to parents in an informational meeting during the 6th grade Shabbaton that Temple Beth-El has each year. The students will not learn the details until their meeting with Rabbi Yergin, but it gives the parents the opportunity to ask questions and understand the process. We are also planning to have some adult education courses specifically surrounding social media; how to use certain platforms, how to use them based on Jewish values and ethics, how to use them with your children, and how to enhance your Judaism with social media.

Besides the #MitzvahQuest boards and social media aspects, there are two more pieces. The first is that Sam Stern, our Director of Youth Engagement, and Rabbi Marina Yergin, our Assistant Rabbi, will check in with each student once a month by text message or phone call. Rabbi Yergin will reach out once via text message (if applicable) and two weeks later, Sam will reach out with a personal phone call. By doing these things, the students develop stronger relationships with our clergy and staff, see that they are personally cared about, and give them encouragement along their B'nei Mitzvah process.

The second additional item is the Mitzvah project piece. In the past, our students have been encouraged to complete a Mitzvah project, but it has not been completed in many cases. Many students and their families are not sure where to start so we have created a guide for them. In conjunction with The Mitzvah Bowl, an organization that serves as a resource for B'nei Mitzvah students to find a meaningful and rewarding Mitzvah project. The founder of The Mitzvah Bowl, Cheryl Friedenber, will be doing research on San Antonian, national, and international organizations that students can work with to complete their Mitzvah project. Each student will get a list of suggestions that is divided into categories based on their interests. (See <http://www.themitzvahbowl.com/> to get an idea of what the site already provides.) Each student will also be able to utilize a document that will be created which highlights themes from each Torah portion and some ideas of Mitzvah Projects that they can complete that fit with their Torah portion. (An early draft of this document is also attached.) These two options will let students and their family have many options and make the process extremely meaningful. It should be noted that we strive for projects that have the potential to be sustainable and not just a simple donation or two hour volunteer shift. To truly teach our students *tikkun olam*, we need to give them the resources to explore it for themselves.

Why are we doing this?

Our B'nei Mitzvah students meet with Rabbi Nathan about 8 months before their B'nei Mitzvah. About 5-6 months before their B'nei Mitzvah, they meet with Rabbi Yergin to discuss their D'var Torah and Mitzvah Project. The rest of the communication with the students and Rabbis is done via email or phone helping to conclude the process of writing their D'var Torah. Our current process has raised some issues for us.

- We discovered that these students are not able to enhance or develop personal relationships with the clergy and staff unless they are meeting them on a more regular basis for tutoring. This program will allow the students to build and enhance a relationship with the staff and clergy so that when it comes to the day of their B'nei Mitzvah, they feel that they really know the people on the Bima with them. One of our goals is for the students to see the merit in staying involved Temple Beth-El through 12th grade from these strong relationships.
- We learned that many of the students and their families are not fully engaged with the Temple Beth-El community nor the San Antonio community. It seems that many of our families strive to check off the day the student becomes a Bar/Bat Mitzvah and do not find a lot of meaning in the process as a whole. This program develops a way to keep both the student and family engaged in dialogue with one another and the community, actively participating in *tikkun olam*, and enriching their Jewish identities. One of our goals is that these students and families will strengthen their connection to being a lifelong Jew through these experiences.
- We recognized that the students were not fulfilling the requirement of a Mitzvah Project for the completion of their B'nei Mitzvah process. While some students may have done a project of some sort, many of those were one-time events or participation. This program fosters a foundation for *tikkun olam* by providing B'nei Mitzvah students and their families multiple options for Mitzvah Projects which will allow the students to do something they are passionate about. The students will be able to choose organizations or projects based on their interests, Torah portions, or topics. Through the #MitzvahQuest board, we are emphasizing family participation in projects so that the family will experience *tikkun olam* together. The hope is that this will then foster stronger family connections and family ties to the community.
- Before the student's B'nei Mitzvah date, minimal information is posted about them on our website, in our weekly e-mail blasts, and in our bulletin. It has been pointed out to us that many of our congregants do not know nor have any opportunity to learn about the B'nei Mitzvah student. Through this program, we will collect pictures of their activities, quotes from their D'var Torah, and a more in-depth look into who the student is and how they prepared for their B'nei Mitzvah over the last 8 months. This will allow the student to feel like they are famous and have so much to share and will also allow the congregation as a whole to get a glimpse into the student.

We have acknowledged that our current program is lacking in engagement opportunities in many ways, but specifically for the student to connect with Judaism and our synagogue in a much more contemporary way. This program will introduce the use of social media to further one's Jewish identity and journey. By meeting the students where they are and using the platforms that they are using daily, we are acknowledging their wants and needs. Included in this program is an in-depth look at social media from Jewish, parenting, and ethical perspectives.

What makes your project unique?

While many congregations strive for a formalized B'nei Mitzvah program which allows students and families to come together in strengthening their Jewish identities through the B'nei Mitzvah process, our program offers a unique approach. It is the first of its kind to involve *tikkun olam*, Divrei Torah, social media, synagogue community, larger city community, and a relationship with staff and clergy.

4. PROGRAM VIABILITY

How do you intend to measure the qualitative and quantitative results of your project?

We will measure the qualitative results by witnessing a large amount of participation by our B'nei Mitzvah students and families. We will notice a change in the feeling of the B'nei Mitzvah service itself as it becomes more personalized. As Temple Beth-El, we will become stronger as each family finds their own reasons for being a part of our Temple community, Jewish community, and the San Antonio community.

The quantitative results will be measured by the number of students who are able to complete the #MitzvahQuest board and be rewarded. We will also see an increase in the number of people who come to Shabbat morning services when a B'nei Mitzvah is happening. This will show that congregants are able to identify with the student based on the biographies, pictures, videos, and D'var Torah snippets we send out. We will also notice a rise in the Temple Beth-El social media participation. The quantitative results will also be visual as we post a large #MitzvahQuest board in our building for students to visually track their progress.

Is it your intention to continue this project beyond the current year? If so, please describe your anticipated funding model/resources/needs for the next 2-3 years?

Yes. We hope that this will be a sustainable program with a large majority of our funds stemming from our first year or so. This year will serve as our pilot year and will allow us to begin many of the models that we will then continue for many years to follow. In terms of funding for those pieces which cannot be reused year after year, we are hoping to continue to apply for grants, potentially publish our program so that it can be a model program for other synagogues, and we will also utilize funds from other locations in our Temple budget.

5. Community Impact & Connection

What impact do you anticipate your project will have on the target population? What impact do you anticipate your project will have on the larger San Antonio Jewish Community?

This program will have a major impact on our students as it will allow them to see that becoming a bar/bat mitzvah is not just a one time worship service and party. Instead, it shows that being Jewish can be fun and that each one of us can find some way to relate to Judaism in a unique experience. The program will allow families to be closer as they discuss the *tikkun olam* opportunities and participate in them together.

The larger San Antonio Jewish Community will also be impacted by this program because it will allow

our students to recognize what we have in the Jewish community. Specifically for *tikkun olam*, the students we learn about new organizations, programs, grants, communities that are in need in various ways. It will break the stigmas and stereotypes of Jews and highlight that we have people in our own community who need help. This program has the potential to bring the entire Jewish community closer together by promoting helping others and spreading the word through social media.

How does your project align with the JFSA Community Priorities?

JFSA has many areas of focus that work well with #MitzvahQuest. This program serves to “build the Jewish community” while “securing a favorable Jewish future” as we educate our soon-to-be Jewish adults in the importance of Judaism and how they can make it their own. Our program clearly focuses on *tikkun olam* as we enhance our students’ Mitzvah projects. Part of that is *tzedakah* and *klal Yisrael* as we recognize what it means to stand up for what we believe in, find what we are passionate about, care about those around us, help the Jews in need, and be the best people we can be every day. With all of these things and so many more, #MitzvahQuest holds very similar priorities as JFSA.

Please describe your involvement in the San Antonio Jewish Community.

Temple Beth-El is extremely involved in the San Antonio Jewish Community. It is the oldest and largest congregation in San Antonio. We strive to be involved on many levels of the Jewish community outside our walls.

Do you anticipate opportunities for collaboration? If so, with whom?

#MitzvahQuest provides many opportunities for collaboration as our students experience hands-on mitzvah projects all over San Antonio, the nation, and the world. We will be collaborating with The Mitzvah Bowl to compile lists of project ideas as well as help on the social media side. We hope that #MitzvahQuest will be the start of many long-term and in-depth collaborations with many organizations.

Provide the names and brief profiles of key leaders responsible for project execution.

<i>Names</i>	<i>Profile</i>
Rabbi Marina Yergin	Assistant Rabbi, Temple Beth-El - http://www.beth-elsa.org/MarinaYergin
Sam Stern	Director of Youth Engagement, Temple Beth-El - http://beth-elsa.org/node/1215
Cheryl Friedenber	Mitzvah Bowl creator - http://www.themitzvahbowl.com/about-us/

6. Supplemental Attachments

Please include the following with your completed application:

- Project Budget, (in Excel spreadsheet)
- 501c3, Tax Exempt Letter

Application Submission:

- Deadline for all applicants is October 9, 2015
- Completed applications and all supplemental attachments must be submitted electronically to Caitlin Strayer, strayerc@jfsatx.org
- Notifications of grant decisions will be made on or around November 1, 2015

For any additional questions or information on the 2015 Innovation Fund, Grant Application process, please contact Caitlin Strayer, Office Manager at the Jewish Federation of San Antonio, strayerc@jfsatx.org or 210-302-6960