



**Alliance for Continuing Rabbinic Education:
Strategies to Advance the Assessment of the
Outcomes of Continuing Rabbinic Education**

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Concept Paper Prepared and Submitted By:

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BACKGROUND

Founded in April, 2009, the Alliance for Continuing Rabbinic Education (ACRE) is the first ever effort to craft a coordinated, systemic approach to post-rabbinical school education for rabbis. There are three major types of organizations working with North American rabbis: those organizations that are seminary-based; those that are affiliated with a professional rabbinical association and denominational; and those that are stand-alone organizations. ACRE member organizations represent a wide spectrum of American Jewish life. Each member organization is motivated by a vast array of ultimate goals for its programs, and conceives of different indicators for success.

ACRE is seeking to understand attitudes and practices in relation to evaluation in its member organizations. The Alliance is working to build consensus around the need for and utility of a set of metrics that would, by making explicit the outcomes of their efforts, help the providers of continuing rabbinic education (CRE) to design and refine their programs. ACRE's key stakeholders and supporters share the view that if the positive impact that CRE providers have on end-users (those served by the rabbis in CRE programs) can be shown, these data can also be strong advocacy tools for securing additional funds for CRE providers.

In the spring of 2013, ACRE leadership invited Rosov Consulting to launch a consultative process with key informants in the field. The consultation culminated in a half-day convening that explored the opportunities and special challenges in demonstrating the impact of continuing rabbinic education for "end-users," that is, beyond the rabbis who are direct beneficiaries of such programs. Following the convening, the Rosov team submitted a memo summarizing the issues that surfaced during pre-convening interviews and during a review of program documents. The memo outlined the key components of the discussions during the convening, and provided a set of recommendations for moving forward.

Based on further feedback to the June memo provided by members of the ACRE group, Rosov Consulting has been asked by the professional leadership of ACRE to provide a concept paper outlining some practical initiatives that can build on the conclusions reached at the convening, and that can advance the organization's interest in developing measures to assess the extended impact of continuing rabbinic education.

OUR PROPOSED APPROACH

We propose to focus on the following three measurement-related initiatives to be carried out during the first half of 2014. The combined effect of these initiatives is intended to help ACRE come to grips with the special challenge of establishing end-user impact. Our firm will:

- (i) **BUILD CAPACITY:** Depending on budget, we will coach a select number of up to four CRE providers to help them develop an evidence base for the impact of CRE on practice.
- (ii) **IDENTIFY SHARED USER OUTCOMES:** Depending on budget, we will conduct two to four focus groups with participants/alumni of CRE, lay-leaders in settings that employ beneficiaries of CRE and "Jews in the pews" to help articulate what they identify as shared/common end-user outcomes of CRE programs.

- (iii) **CREATE COMPELLING EXAMPLES:** Depending on budget, we will run an experiment with either one or two CRE providers to provide some demonstration-proof of what's involved and what's learned when measuring end-user outcomes.

THE DETAILS

1. **Building Capacity** – The diversity of both CRE providers and the various communities they serve makes it difficult to develop a one-size-fits-all approach to assessment. We propose to work separately with a select group of up to four ACRE affiliated organizations in order to build the capacity of each to evaluate their programs. By coaching and guiding them in the design and implementation of assessment approaches that have proved useful in other similarly diverse professional fields, we can help organizations adapt and adopt assessment tools that serve their needs. The core principle here is not that our firm will be subcontracted to develop such instruments on behalf of these organizations. Our intent, instead, is to coach each of them in the tasks involved so that going forward they will have the capability to develop further such instruments themselves.

We anticipate that by working in this way with a group of ACRE affiliates an additional collateral benefit will follow: this activity will consolidate both know-how and interest across ACRE affiliates for further assessment work, moving towards the ultimate goal of developing a joint strategy for assessing the end-user benefits of ACRE programs.

2. **Identifying Shared Outcomes** – The ultimate beneficiaries of CRE (congregants, school families, and other clients of organizations for which rabbis serve as lead professionals) are invariably located a number of moves away from the CRE programs themselves. Those beneficiaries interact with and learn from rabbis at different degrees of intensity and regularity. Yet ultimately their lives are touched in ways that may follow patterns that can be systematically identified. In a further effort to uncover the commonalities that cut across end-users' experiences, we propose to conduct four focus groups with participants/alumni of CRE programs, with lay-leaders in settings that employ beneficiaries of CRE as well as with "Jews in the pews" to help articulate what they identify as shared/common end-user outcomes of CRE programs. What we learn from these focus groups will inform longer-term efforts to develop a common approach to assessment, and in the short-term will feed directly into the third part of this proposal, an experiment in program assessment.

3. **Creating Compelling Examples** – While the two previously proposed steps lay down building blocks for a field-wide approach to assessing the ultimate impacts of continuing rabbinic education, it will be strategic in the short-term to enable CRE providers and their stakeholders to see what the assessment of end-user outcomes looks like in practice, to see what can and cannot be learned from assessment, and what are special challenges in its implementation.

Complementing the strategy constituted by the previous two steps, and building on what is learned from them, we propose, depending on budget, to conduct one or two small-scale experiments. These experiments will assess the outcomes set in motion by beneficiaries of CRE programs in ways that can be traced back to the contribution of the programs themselves. The experiments can serve as case-studies that make visible what is gained by engaging in this assessment work and also what complicates it, recognizing the special challenges in measuring end-user impact. Ideally, the rabbis involved in these experiments will be alumni of programs that join as partners in the capacity-building activity proposed in step #1 thereby creating opportunities for bi-directional learning between the stimuli for change (the CRE programs) and the focus of change (the end-users' experience).

PROPOSED DELIVERABLES

The deliverables associated with this project would be:

1. Instruments developed by up to four CRE providers for assessing their impact with coaching provided by the team at Rosov Consulting;
2. A 3-5 page memo detailing potential shared outcomes; and
3. A 3-5 page experiment report reflecting on the process and findings from assessing end-user outcomes.

PROPOSED TIMETABLE

Presuming a launch date of January 1, 2014, the first two deliverables will be completed by the end of March 2014. The assessment experiments will be completed and the associated reports submitted by end of June 2014.

PROPOSED PROFESSIONAL FEES

We are offering two options related to this proposal, as follow:

OPTION 1: Capacity building with four CRE providers; four focus groups (in the identifying shared outcomes component of the work); and running two experiments measuring end-user outcomes. Approximate professional fees are \$27,500.

OPTION 2: Capacity building with two CRE providers; two focus groups (in the identifying shared outcomes component of the work); and running one experiment measuring end-user outcomes. Approximate professional fees are \$22,500.

PROPOSED PROJECT TEAM

- Alex Pomson, Ph.D., Director, Research and Evaluation (Project Team Leader)
- Wendy Rosov, Ph.D., Principal
- Eitan Cooper, Associate

For information on any of our proposed team members, please visit www.rosovconsulting.com.