
**Cooperative Purchasing for the Modern Temple Executive Director;
Saving money, supporting mission and helping to repair the
community**

*“My House Shall Purchase Services and Supplies Cooperatively to Save Money,
so the Temple shall be a House of Prayer for All People.”*

FTA Thesis

Ellen E. Agler, Executive Director
Temple Sinai
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INTRODUCTION

As executive director of a large, active temple in Washington, D.C., I do not often have a chance to play a leading role in the social action or interfaith programs of our congregation beyond the usual administrative support.¹ In the fall of 2011, our Temple made a concerted effort to establish a social justice agenda within the Union for Reform Judaism's (URJ) [Just Congregations](#) framework. We became the first Jewish congregation in our area to be a dues-paying member of The Washington Interfaith Network (WIN), an [Industrial Areas Foundation](#) (IAF) organization and our Rabbis became involved with its leadership team. They learned about an opportunity through WIN to purchase electricity collectively with other temples and churches and encouraged me to explore if this interfaith partnership could help Temple Sinai. The results have exceeded all of our expectations. By opening a door for executive directors to pursue the marriage of administration and *tikkun olam* through cooperative purchasing, I discovered that there is the potential to experience deeper connections to our Reform Jewish values and ethical foundation, reduce expenses and improve our communities.

REFORM JEWISH FRAMEWORK

Temple executive directors come to their positions as administrative leaders from a wide variety of prior work experiences including being promoted from other temple positions, working in non-profit organizations, Jewish or non-Jewish, and the corporate business world. Some of us were raised as Reform Jews and others were not. We share a responsibility for administrative management, including temple finances, and a commitment to applying Reform Jewish values to the practical decisions and systems needed for smooth and effective temple operations. Pursuing cooperative purchasing fits nicely within the Reform Jewish framework in several ways:

- **Tikkun Olam.** "Tzedakah is as important as all of the other commandments put together" (R. Assi, BT Bava Batra 9a). The congregation and community benefit when executive directors go beyond day-to-day management activities and lead a *tikkun olam* program in their congregations.
- **Stewardship.** Managing temple budgets effectively is required for Torah traditions to be practiced and studied by our members. Executive directors emulate Moses when demonstrating high standards of financial accountability.¹ They also demonstrate the reality of the rabbinic teaching, "If there is no flour, there is no Torah." (Pirke Avot 3:17).
- **Community.** Convening and sustaining interfaith community is difficult to do, but when successful it can achieve meaningful, tangible results. In doing this, executive directors demonstrate the Jewish prophetic tradition: "For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." (Isaiah 56:7)

References to charity, or *Tikkun Olam*, permeate The Bible and rabbinic literature. Talmudic scholars use the term *tzedakah*, which literally means "righteousness or justice," when talking about charity.² Across congregational life everyone is engaged in

Tikkun Olam, from the school children that bring *tzedakah* (money) each Sunday, to the Sisterhood volunteers delivering meals to families at the NIH Children's Inn, and congregants who participate in social action initiatives either through temple groups or outside the walls. *Tzedakah* is a commandment and we have an obligation to help the needy (see for example, Deuteronomy 15:4). We all should be doing it, including those of us working at the temple in administrative roles. Leading or participating in interfaith group purchasing along the lines of the CPA model is a great way for executive directors to become meaningful *tikkun olam* leaders. The collective purchasing power of a group helps all, especially the most needy; the small churches and temples that may be struggling financially, without expertise to get good deals. Coop participation improves their bottom lines, with the added benefits of receiving opportunities to choose environmentally sustainable services and products, and support vendors that sustain community values through their fair labor practices and contract terms.

Stewardship of the congregation's financial resources is a primary job of the executive director. Torah text and ethical teachings shed light on the importance of stewardship for the very survival of our Reform temples, and direct us to execute this responsibility with inscrutable standards. Parshat Pekudei, for example, portrays Moses as a responsible financial steward and detailed record keeper regarding the donations of the Israelites for Mishkan. In the early first century, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah said that in order for there to be Torah, there must be bread (flour). Rashi commented directly that, "If one does not eat, how can one learn?"³ The historical context is relevant today with a modern twist: In order to study and observe Torah rituals, we must provide and maintain the basic sustenance of our institutions. Literally, the lights must be kept on, custodial and security tasks tended to, and logistics coordinated. These teachings lift up the need to have a designee responsible for insuring that the place is available and can be sustained. Once a building and support staff are established, we also need financial management and accountability. Executive directors are responsible for this fiscal oversight so that there shall always be "bread" and therefore Torah. Group purchasing is one avenue they should pursue in order to fund the facilities and staff necessary for the study and practice of Torah.

Community, especially convening and maintaining a strong partnership of diverse religious backgrounds, is difficult to achieve. The prophet Isaiah articulates this messianic dream of interfaith gathering, but the dialogue lacks a path for action. Our synagogues usually try to build interfaith community through prayer or study programs. They deal with controversial issues common to the participating faiths, are political in nature or promote a spiritual or religious dialogue. While these programs may produce a measure of good will and understanding, they are not naturally recurring events and therefore limited in impact. It is difficult to achieve lasting and meaningful connections across faiths by this type of programming alone. In contrast, the CPA venture is more than good will oriented. Rhetoric and controversy that often is at the heart of interfaith dialogue is absent when different faith organizations come together to purchase goods and services they use in common. There is a practical incentive to continue together, as all participating institutions reap financial and social benefits on an ongoing basis. The deliverables from a cooperative purchasing venture are real and practical.

Learning from each other's best practices is an added benefit of participation, further reinforcing the importance that executive directors make time to engage in building community through leading interfaith group purchasing in their regions

CASE STUDY; DC METRO AREA [COMMUNITY PURCHASING ALLIANCE](#)

*Brief History and Early Results*⁴: As I wrote in the NATA Journal (Winter 2013) edition on collaboration, Temple Sinai enthusiastically joined the 2nd round of electricity procurement administered through a non-profit community group in October 2011. With many participating institutions having large sanctuaries, utility bills were identified as a particular source of savings. The group purchase was structured to help community based institutions enter the "consumer choice" electricity market responsibly with enhanced consumer protection, transparent pricing, and renewable energy opportunities. The group was organized in a way that sought to unlock the community's shared economic power to grow sustainability and prosperity on the local level. Renewable energy resonated in a positive way with values expressed by the congregation to take incremental steps toward making our synagogue more "green", but was not something that had been pursued in the past.

I quickly learned of the multi-faceted value this collaborative effort could bring to our temple, and to the larger community. Though Temple Sinai had negotiated good electricity rates on our own, I was interested in participating with the group for a few reasons:

1. Get an immediate financial return on our investment in WIN membership.
2. Further our social justice work and environmental values.
3. Establish Sinai as a congregation willing to lead the way, helping smaller non-profits in the community by leveraging our temple's relatively large energy consumption to create a competitive bid environment for renewable energy.

The results achieved by this initial interfaith electricity purchasing group were compelling:

- **Financial Benefits for Institutions.** Examples of organizations that benefitted significantly included Seed Public Charter School in Southeast, DC that saved \$28,540 in one year. In Maryland, the NAACP Headquarters in Baltimore estimated a one-year savings of \$7,000. In 2011, average savings were 15% for each institution, and they grew to an average of 17% in a second procurement round in 2012. Rates for 3 years into the future were then offered, locking in savings 5% below the default rate in a volatile market.
- **Benefits to Members** (of institutions in the group). Over 350 member families that switched to clean energy offset over 1,400 pounds of CO₂. Residential rates were, on average, 18% below the standard service rates at the time.
- **Institutional Clean Energy Investment.** In 2012, of the \$4.7 million value of the group electricity purchase, 88% was tied to clean energy investment.
- **Environmental Impact of Institution Group.** 44.2 million kWh in renewable energy (100% green-e certified wind power nationally sourced).

I wrote at that time, and still remark that it gives me hope that in the Washington DC metro area, over 100 faith-based organizations including Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and Jews are collaborating along with other non-profit community organizations. We come together to help each other make smart business decisions that improve our individual and collective operations; invest in local renewable energy; and improve the environment for future generations. The Union for Reform Judaism and Religious Action Center endorsed the Community Purchasing Alliance, and encouraged other area Jewish congregations to join this effort.

Evolution to an Independent Purchasing Cooperative: A small “steering group” of religious leaders and a WIN organizer that were involved in the early group electricity purchases, discussed shared interests in expanding beyond electricity to purchasing other goods and services as a group. They were motivated by the significant drops in contributions that followed the 2008-2009 recession, to find ways to cut costs. Natural gas, cleaning supplies, waste hauling and other large expense line items were identified as likely candidates for new service offerings. One of the leaders, Paul Hazen, expressed the motivation to move this initiative forward when he aptly wrote in the Co-Operative News⁵: “For many years, I sat in the pew of my church thinking about how we could harness the economic power of faith- and community-based organizations for social justice. In CPA, I believe we’ve made an important step toward fulfilling our missions together in a way that makes each congregation more environmentally and economically sustainable.”

I was energized by the shared vision of expanding interfaith group purchasing and volunteered to play an active role in strategic conversations, inspiring other Jewish organizations to purchase collectively with us, and creating an e-mail communication framework. Temple Sinai led the way by reinvesting over 50% of the first year’s energy savings in the coop, along with several churches whose leaders were actively involved.

In early 2013 our steering group hired a consultant to conduct a feasibility study to evaluate whether the cooperative purchasing model we envisioned could be sustainable, given the track record of the previous two years of electricity purchasing and potential of more than 1,200 eligible institutions in the Washington/Baltimore region; the answer was “yes”! In March 2014 I helped organize a “launch celebration” attended by over 75 community members that came together to learn about the coop’s early success, and pledge their support to participating in building an even stronger Community Purchasing Alliance Cooperative (CPA). I took the opportunity to involve the clergy and invited my Senior Rabbi, Jonathan Roos, to join the meeting and offer the opening *Shehecheyanu* prayer. A committed group of church, temple and charter school leaders signed membership agreements and made initial financial contributions, creating a leading membership base of 20 non-profit institutions. Temple Sinai and the Reform movement’s Religious Action Center (RAC) were proud to be counted among them. CPA became incorporated that month as well, and I have the honor of serving as Vice President.

Since then, CPA has received grants, gained national visibility for its innovative work, and put together additional group purchasing opportunities including an affordable solar panel installation. To date 150 institutions have collectively saved over \$960,000 in a variety of operating areas including electricity, gas, copier leasing, maintenance and office supplies, and waste hauling. I led the copier lease group purchase at the time Temple Sinai needed to evaluate different lease options, which saves 25-30% for participating institutions and promises to represent nearly 20% of the projected \$323K collective savings in 2015. Average annual savings for institutions that participate in multiple group purchasing areas is estimated to range from \$2,000 to \$8,000.

Reflecting on the early formative phase of CPA there are four factors that were essential for building the foundation of this unique purchasing coop:

1. The initial group purchase consisted of over 100 IAF-affiliated institutions that were already organized.
2. IAF resources helped launch the initial group purchases and complete feasibility work, with the agreement of some future remuneration from the coop once it reached operating sustainability.
3. Experimenting with group purchasing for the first time with a product that was “exciting” because it both saved costs and supported environmental sustainability, sparked immediate interest by leaders of religious institutions, inspiring momentum to pursue doing more together.
4. Staff and religious leaders guiding the group articulated the broader benefits of coop purchasing beyond the bottom line, creating a story that attracted interest from institutions within their denominations to learn more.

Why CPA? Paul Hazen summarized it well in a Cooperative News article⁶, by noting that “CPA has three goals; saving money for its members through bulk purchases, organizing for social change, and aiding the environment. Rebates and dividends are used for investments in sustainability, worker equity and community organizing. While it’s not always possible, the cooperative tries to support only vendors who engage in business practices consistent with the group’s values and social mission.

Experts at CPA do the research and analyze proposals, making it easy for institution leaders to reap benefits and better spend time furthering their missions. Most of the facilities are managed by people with little experience in negotiating contracts. An early participant, Rev. Donna Claycomb Sokol of Baltimore’s Mount Vernon Place United Methodist Church, put it this way: “These are not the kinds of things that are taught at seminary.” One church was paying \$2,000 a month for trash hauling; it now pays \$300. Another institution saw its monthly copier bill drop from \$2,400 to \$600. In both cases, the organizations had no idea their previous contracts had such unfavorable terms.

While there are other local and regional organizations that facilitate group purchasing, none of them combine the *raison d’être* of cost savings, with the values articulated in our missions to help make our communities a better place. Most focus solely on the utility market, while CPA recognizes that there are many other high dollar expense line

items our institutions have in common where purchasing together has the opportunity of achieving significant savings.

CPA Model: The Community Purchasing Alliance adapted a traditional coop business model to this local/regional endeavor. It partners with legal and other experts to facilitate a competitive bidding process with suppliers in a way that ensures institutions receive the most competitive rates and services (with good contracts and with vendors that demonstrate fair labor practices to the extent possible). The group purchasing power translates into reduced individual rates for each organization. Finally, each vendor builds-in a percentage of their rate as a “cooperative fee”, to fund the ongoing work of this group.

The CPA Cooperative Difference

- **Member Owned.** As a cooperative, Community Purchasing Alliance is owned and governed by faith institutions that are the investors, participants, beneficiaries, and Board of Directors. .
- **Saves Money.** Leverages group buying power in more than 10 operational areas.
- **Improves Quality.** Shares expertise and best practices, resulting in better contracts and service levels.
- **Benefits Communities.** Generates rebates from vendors that fund the coop and community organizing.

CPA makes it easy for participants to stay informed through every step of the purchasing process. They creatively used on-line methods to collect information about utilization and rates. Regular conference calls and webinars are organized to keep the group connected and involved in setting priorities and contract terms for each group purchase.

Once participating institutions begin saving through purchasing with CPA, they are asked to sign membership agreements and reinvest a portion of their savings as a one-time fee that is scaled based upon operating budget size; ranging from \$750 for budgets under \$400K to \$5,000 for budgets \$2.4M or greater. These fees are necessary to make the coop successful and expand to offer new programs. A modest annual fee of \$100 - \$500 in subsequent years is all that it costs to maintain membership; institutions will save a lot more and support other mission priorities at the same time. As the coop matures, members will receive annual rebate checks proportional to their level of participation.

Members of CPA commit to purchasing in 5 of the areas that are offered, provided the terms are favorable for their institution. In addition to ongoing electricity and natural gas procurements, agreements currently in place include:

- **Hardware.** A local owned cooperative business offers CPA members 10% across the board savings, and deeper savings for high volume products and those purchased routinely.

- **Copier Leasing.** The preferred vendor offers savings of 20-35% in many sizes and configurations of Canon equipment.
- **Solar.** Save 10-30% on electricity bills at no upfront cost through a special program available only to CPA member institutions.
- **Waste Hauling.** CPA has preferred arrangements with two local vendors. Institutions in our group have saved 35% on average.

All institutions have enjoyed the savings from participating in CPA contracts, and done so knowing their coop provides trusted expertise in vetting vendors and contracts to get the most favorable terms. Temple Sinai participates with CPA for purchasing electricity, natural gas, waste hauling and copier leasing, saving around \$20,000 to-date. In addition, the values our institutions share related to environmental sustainability and strengthening our communities continues to be lifted up through the cooperative purchasing process. For example, recent copier and waste hauling contracts shifted CPA members from supporting vendors with unfair contracts and/or labor practices to those offering living wages and contract terms with reasonable termination clauses and rate stability assurances.

Challenges and Next Steps: The CPA executive director and board are working hard to grow membership participation and investments, and to secure outside funds to continue supporting start-up operating needs.

The business plan describes a financial roadmap that requires enrolling 180 institutional members who each participate in at least 5 purchasing areas by 2017. Achieving these goals will not only demonstrate that the innovative CPA model is sustainable in the longer term, but also position CPA to fund dividends to members and community organizing activities consistent with CPA's mission.

Growing the membership base has several challenges. First, it requires getting out the CPA message through the dense tangle of information about energy saving groups and green initiatives that decision-makers receive via e-mail, voice-mail and snail mail on a daily basis. Other purchasing groups, particularly for electricity, have aggressive outreach strategies that can confuse potential CPA members as to who-is-who. CPA sends e-mails with updates and invitations to learn about upcoming procurements, and utilizes a web site for information and sign-ups. However, cutting through the noise requires personal outreach and relationship-building with a message that is easy for decision-makers to connect with and take action on. Making personal contacts is the critical factor for driving participation and membership.

Recognizing that the community organizing model of engagement is required to grow membership, CPA is also challenged by having limited resources to apply given that the organization is in a start-up phase. The executive director plays a key role in member recruitment, but has many other responsibilities as well. CPA board members and advisors share the responsibility on a volunteer basis. There are different approaches

utilized depending upon the denomination or group; the process can be time-consuming and requires patience, perseverance and creativity.

For some potential member institutions, meeting with executive directors individually or in small groups is appropriate. Certain denominations have regional religious bodies that play an administrative role for many churches in an area, and the path for reaching and influencing decision-makers can be complex and require multiple steps. Getting meetings scheduled can be a challenge. But, when they happen, CPA leaders usually find that the CPA mission and benefits resonates with their interests.

Why is it that while most of the institution/denomination leaders are supportive of CPA's mission, values and cost savings opportunities, engaging them is a slow process? Most organizations are not nimble when it comes to choosing a new approach (e.g. joining a group purchase), or committing to a formal membership agreement (e.g. returning a portion of savings as a membership investment). There are several factors at play including the fact that institutions, in general, fear change and have little incentive to innovate. In addition, religious organizations tend to have a web of decision-makers, in contrast to traditional corporate business models with clear hierarchal lines of authority. The authority and influence of boards and committees, and the high level of importance given to member feedback can slow down or stop an evaluation process. Each denomination and religious group has unique decision-making dynamics and paths.

Recruiting Jewish temples/synagogues in the Greater Washington, DC area has been one of my contributions as a leader of the coop. My experiences are a microcosm of the challenges in growing CPA membership in general. In the Jewish temple world we often refer to our organization model as the "three legged stool" with the senior clergy, temple president (representing the congregation) and executive director forming each of the legs. Getting decisions made in a triangular dynamic of influence and power, coupled with congregant input and institutional inertia, is an inefficient model. When interest stagnated following early experiences with saving money on green energy, I decided to tailor information and opportunities exclusively for the 50 or so Jewish temples and synagogues, hoping that the more personal outreach would generate interest in additional cooperative purchasing. The results of targeted electronic communications, group conference calls and in-person meetings were encouraging but slow to produce engagement:

- **October 2013.** A webinar developed especially for Jewish institutions, hosted by the RAC about the upcoming electricity procurement; 12 participated.
- **January 2014.** A meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Association of Temple and Synagogue Administrators (MATSAA) at Temple Sinai which featured a presentation and discussion with the CPA executive director; 13 attended.
- **March 2014.** The CPA Launch Celebration; 1 synagogue was represented in addition to Temple Sinai and the RAC.

- **August 2014.** I met individually over coffee or lunch with several colleagues. By then, they each had a basic understanding of the CPA model and many saved on electricity costs through the group. These conversations prompted interest in more deeply engaging with the coop, including discussing making membership investments with their leadership.

I found that it takes multiple “touches” to move temple decision-makers along the continuum from being “interested” to “active” in more than one (1) coop purchasing area. To-date, nine (9) Jewish institutions have joined at least one of the group purchases and two (2), Temple Sinai and the RAC, have joined CPA as founding members. Three (3) other synagogues have committed to reinvesting a portion of their savings as membership commitments.

This experience confirms the importance of relationship-building, which takes time. It also highlights the challenges of making awareness of the unique cost savings + social purpose benefits of purchasing with CPA easily accessible, and then inspiring engagement.

Continuing to apply as many CPA resources as possible to grow membership commitments and participation in group purchases is essential in order to offer new programs, and fulfill the vision of providing additional benefits for members and the community. To-date, 23 participating organizations have re-invested \$60,000 of their previous savings and 4 others have joined them for a total of 27 members.

Concurrent with pursuing growth of the cooperative through membership, CPA is also seeking alternative funding sources through foundation grants and loans (though this is a less attractive funding source). New funds will be used to: Hire consultants to lead development of new purchasing areas; develop a membership management technology platform; board development; manage the web site and other communications; coordinate member meetings and; document the CPA experience so that it can be replicated in other geographic areas.

PRACTICAL STEPS FOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

Executive directors and administrators can lead their institutions and communities forward in the related areas of financial stewardship, interfaith cooperation and improving the community outside their walls. The CPA experience in the Washington DC metropolitan area can be used as a springboard for exploring how similar models could work in other communities across the country.

Prompted by interest expressed by my colleague Jane Sable-Friedman, executive director of Temple Beth El in Aptos, CA, CPA developed the following [CPA Guide; How to Start Building a Buying Group](#), to assist Jane and her IAF partner with exploring how they might form an interfaith purchasing group in their area.

CPA Guide: How to Start Building a Buying Group

- Initiate conversations with decision-makers at peer institutions to identify where there could be mutual benefit to cooperative/ joint procurement. Discuss where there are commonalities in shared values (e.g. community organizing, environmental responsibility, fair labor practices), high cost categories, and products/services that may be difficult to purchase as individual organizations.
- Identify and meet with a community organizer or respected leader that already has trust with a significant number of clergy or other decision-makers at institutions that might be interested in participating.
- Build a small team of experts that will help facilitate a demonstration group procurement of a product of service where there is a common operational need. Partner with individuals who bring:
 - Legal expertise to help review and/or draft contracts.
 - Sector-specific knowledge and relationships.
 - Organizational and communication skills to oversee the project.
- Facilitate a demonstration.
 - Choose an area where there is a good chance it will be a positive and cost-saving experience for the participants.
 - Build-in a rebate to the group to begin a funding stream for conducting a feasibility study and paying consultants as needed for future purchases.

Initial Steps

- 1) Find the right people to help organize the group.
- 2) Generate interest among area non-profits to participate.
- 3) Facilitate a demonstration.
- 4) If successful, assess potential to grow the group.
- 5) Conduct a feasibility study to assess the broader potential, and to help define a roadmap of next steps.

Our Experience in the Washington DC area

Found the People

- A Washington Interfaith Network community organizer had an initial vision for bulk energy purchase and the relationships with dozens of local clergy and institutional decision-makers.
- Staff at a local environmental non-profit had energy-sector knowledge, relationships with potential suppliers, and the capacity to work on the initiative.
- A lawyer from a local congregation who specialized in energy procurement heard about the initiative and volunteered to help draft the request for proposals and review contracts.
- Together, the three individuals, with the support of their organizations and the willingness of the twelve participating faith congregations, put the initial joint procurement of energy together in March 2011.

Facilitated a Demonstration

- Had preliminary conversations with potential vendors to assess their interest and ability to provide quality service, offer discounted pricing to participants, and a rebate / fee to the organizers of the group.
- Talked with participating organizations to solicit vendor suggestions and ensure their ability to participate (for example, end dates for any existing contracts with current vendors).
- Collected participant information needed to write a Request for Proposals (RFP) and define the terms and timeline for the group negotiation, and the evaluation/ selection criteria.
- Solicited and evaluated proposals and proposed contract terms and hold a conference call with participants to help select a winning vendor.

Assessed Potential to Grow the Group

- Succeeded in saving participants money and delivering increased value.
- Interviewed participants about other operational areas where a joint/ group procurement could have value for them.
- Engaged other groups of organizations who may be able to bring new participants to help grow the effort.

Conducted a Feasibility Study

- Collected purchasing/spend information from participating institutions in areas where there might be sufficient mutual interest in group purchasing.
- Consulted with purchasing cooperative experts to assess feasibility and found that the proposed cooperative model could be self-sustaining based on reasonable assumptions for number of participating institutions, their levels of participation in a certain number of group purchases, and conservative overhead expenses.

When CPA leaders spoke with Jane and her IAF liaison it emerged that a key first step for launching a similar type of program in their area was identifying a purchasing opportunity (a good or service), where institutions could get excited about saving costs; low hanging fruit. Demonstrating the financial benefits and value of the group purchase would be necessary to inspire volunteer leaders to step forward to do the work required to make it happen. Two people could not do it alone, and it was suggested that next steps for launching a Bay Area group included:

- **Volunteers.** Build a core group of volunteers with a variety of skills who could lend their expertise to first analyze the “high spend” areas, and then develop a RFP for the product or service, coordinate a bid process, develop the vendor contract, finalize the contracting process, evaluate and monitor; and
- **Financial Management.** Identify an appropriate way to hold coop fees received, and manage them consistent with the purpose of the group.

The CPA Guide and telephone consultation served as a starting point. It was necessary for the two local leaders to develop a strategy tailored for their institutional landscape and local culture. As of this writing CPA has not been in touch with the Bay Area group. It may be that the spark of interest is still smoldering, but without the forward momentum needed to bring the embers to life at this time.

CONCLUSION

The success of launching the innovative interfaith Community Purchasing Alliance in the Washington, DC area has been the result of an exciting journey that, at each turn, has been a learning experience. I appreciate having an opportunity to share this story with other executive directors and offer these “lessons learned” to assist others who are inspired, as I was, to lead a social justice program as a part of their administrative role:

- **Network.** Use the CPA Guide or other similar resources to inform a local conversation.
- **Generate Interest.** Engage clergy, the temple president and other lay leaders who can lend expertise and help communicate about the value of this project for not only your institution, but also the community outside your walls.
- **Provide Financial Support.** As cooperative purchasing saves your temple/synagogue money, commit to reinvesting a portion of it into the coop.
- **Develop Partnerships.** Partner with membership organizations such as a local IAF affiliate and the URJ, who can help bring together mission- based institutions to use their collective buying power for individual and community good.

It is uniquely meaningful for executive directors to be leaders in nurturing interfaith partnerships in the group purchasing arena. There is satisfaction that comes from both contributing to the social justice activities and values that underpin the missions of our temple/synagogues, and helping the bottom line. A further reward is being a part of a collaborative effort, partnering with committed leaders from other faith communities. I’ve learned that, while we come from different faiths and we use different words, we are all saying the same thing when it comes to being stewards of our congregations’ finances, of the environment and making our communities a better place.

For more information about CPA's work, please contact Felipe Witchger, Executive Director of Community Purchasing Alliance at felipe@cpa.coop.

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FOOTNOTES (See references above)

¹ NATA Journal

² Encyclopedia Judaica (p.569-570)

³ Pirke Avot (p.47-48)

⁴ NATA Journal

⁵ Co-operative News

⁶ Co-operative News

¹ In Parshat Pekudei, Moses makes an explicit accounting of the donations for mishkah. See for example, AJWS D'var Tzedek from 5770, http://ajws.org/what_we_do/education/publications/dvar_tzedek/5770/vayakhel-pekudei.html