

Mitzvah Corps Fundraising Toolkit

At Mitzvah Corps, we know that not only are you choosing to dedicate your time to engage with others, but that it takes a significant financial investment, as well. We are proud to be your partners in both the summer experience itself, and in the process of obtaining financial aid, and are committed to providing as much support as we can.

To that end, we've compiled a toolkit of resources, language for scholarship applications and fundraising efforts, and ideas for you to utilize in your pursuit of financial support for your program. Inside this toolkit, you will find:

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Language that explains what exactly Mitzvah Corps is.

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Language that explains why communities benefit from your participation.

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List of organizations to consider asking for scholarships or grants.

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A step-by-step template to set up a GoFundMe account and raise money.

Additionally, please don't hesitate to peruse www.mitzvahcorps.org, especially our **About Us** page, and use language from any section that would be helpful on scholarship or grant applications. You are also welcome to visit our **Blog Photo Albums** at www.mitzvahcorps.org/blog and use photos for your personal fundraising pages.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to us with any questions, or for additional support!

Defining Mitzvah Corps

Mitzvah Corps is a network of social justice travel programs. A program of the Union for Reform Judaism, we have been providing social justice experiences for high school students for over 50 years, giving teens the opportunity to travel the world, build meaningful relationships with one another and their global peers, understand the complexities and challenges facing various communities, take action on issues they care about, and embrace the ways that Judaism empowers them to enact real change.

Our Philosophy. Faced with an overwhelmingly complex global community, teens are driven to find creative solutions to the problems that exist, and to take real steps toward positive change. Yet what it takes to make a real difference is evolving; fundraising, campaigning, and rallying are powerful tools, but in an ever-increasing online environment, over saturated with causes worth fighting for, we believe that people are inspired by the idea of coming face-to-face with other cultures, ideologies, innovations, and humans from around the world.

Our Approach. Mitzvah Corps focuses on engaging teens in social justice through relationship building, providing opportunities for meaningful interaction, and elevating an understanding of the complex dynamics of a given challenge, and the ways to create unique solutions. We address the systemic causes of the issues we focus on, and the narratives each of our participants are weaving as they journey from the comforts of home to the adventure of something completely new.

Our programs go beyond a traditional volunteer or service trip, working alongside innovative partners in communities around the world to play a role in existing change mechanisms, support local economies, and engage in social justice efforts that are sustainable, positive, and sensitive to the unique needs of different cultures. Supplemented by a curriculum designed to address the real issues of privilege, power dynamics, and inherent challenges in volunteer travel, Mitzvah Corps experiences offer teens the chance to engage in dynamic conversations, ask the right questions, and understand the process and methodology behind the projects we support.

Our Effect. Our participants come away with an understanding of how and why a particular issue manifested itself the way it did in a particular community, what current solutions exist and the ripple effects they are having, and the role they can play in the advancement of the cause. They return home able to articulate the powerful experience they've had, asking similar questions and seeking answers in their own communities.

Our Connection to Judaism. Judaism provides a unique lens with which to engage in this type of personal growth, offering a strong foundation to apply both traditional value, and nuanced teachings, in a relevant way to the world around us. Mitzvah Corps is rooted in the idea that Jewish life should be lived actively, both within and outside of existing Jewish institutions, and our teens are able to understand its importance in empowering them to be global citizens.

Educational Value of Mitzvah Corps

Every Mitzvah Corps program has an issue focus. This focus guides the narrative of the program, and will be addressed in a comprehensive way through historical context, current events, conversations with local leaders, direct service, and more.

Additionally, the educational curriculum through which that issue focus is discussed centers around five core concepts:

Judaism: Empowering Agents of Change

Judaism plays a role in obligating and empowering us to engage in a purposeful and positive way with the world around us.

Developing a Personal Narrative

Telling our personal story in a way that is concise, relevant, and meaningful allows us to build shared narratives with those we interact with.

Privilege & Power Dynamics in Cross-Cultural Encounters

The presence (or lack thereof) of privilege, and the power dynamic which stems from it, informs the lens through which we view the world.

Beyond Good Intentions: The Right Questions and the Language of Social Justice

Adjusting our language, listening, and learning to frame our questions according to our environment allows us to develop a substantive dialogue with others.

Going from Micro to Macro

Enacting sustainable change commands that we relate what we know about a specific issue in one community to the impact that issue has on a national or global scale.

Upon completion of a Mitzvah Corps program, participants return to their home communities better equipped to engage in honest discussion about the value of various types of social justice engagement, identify issues that they'd like to address, and begin meaningful conversations about ways to provide sustainable support to communities or areas of interest.

Living Judaism

Much of Jewish learning is passed down through storytelling. The *Torah*, the *Mishna*, oral history; through retelling and reexamining the stories of our ancestors, we extrapolate values that are relevant in our lives today, and continue to embody the principles and conduct our actions in ways that do justice to our collective narrative.

Mitzvah Corps is also about listening to the stories of others, developing our own, and finding ways that they intertwine to enact positive change. By speaking with local community members, peers who have different life experiences, and building a shared narrative through our work and engagement together, Mitzvah Corps participants are writing their own stories to add.

Relevant Judaism. At Mitzvah Corps, we provide opportunities for our participants to use Reform Jewish values as the foundation for their engagement in social justice. Our programs are designed to be as immersive into the local communities as possible, and to engage participants in the powerful process of identifying the ways that Judaism influences the way they view their role in the world. Each participant, with the support of their peers and staff, will become equipped with the tools to integrate their values into their daily routines, conversations, and activities, and live a relevant, meaningful Jewish life upon returning home.

Diverse Jewish Experiences. We ensure a welcoming environment for children from a variety of Jewish backgrounds; although many of our participants have experience within the Reform Jewish movement, we also welcome teens whose families affiliate with other denominations, including Conservative, Reconstructionist, Modern Orthodox, as well as families that are unaffiliated, interfaith, or new to Judaism

Among each group, participants have had a range of previous Jewish experiences; some being well versed in immersive Jewish experiences, and some never having participated in Jewish programming before. Our staff are prepared and enthused about building communities of teens with diverse experiences, and we find the variety in perspectives to be a significant strength of the Mitzvah Corps program.

Shabbat. As one of our primary goals is to create environments that allow participants to apply Jewish values to any and all of their surroundings, each Mitzvah Corps program celebrates Shabbat in a way that is unique to the community they are immersed in.

Each Friday evening will include extra time in the afternoon to rest and prepare for Shabbat, as well as a special meal and a Shabbat evening worship or spiritual experience. Saturday mornings typically allow for a late wake up, and an alternative, meaningful way to engage in the week's Torah portion. When possible and appropriate, groups may observe Shabbat as part of a congregation affiliated with any Jewish movement, an alternative unaffiliated Jewish community, or amongst themselves.

Benefit to Home Communities

A successful Mitzvah Corps summer impacts not only the neighborhoods that we engage with, and not only the teens who participate, but the communities that they return to, as well.

Creating a Culture of Inclusion. Mitzvah Corps is dedicated to creating environments for all participants that will be open, understanding, and accepting, and where bias and prejudice will not be tolerated. Participants can expect to work, live, and learn alongside peers with a variety of gender identities, sexual orientations, Jewish movement affiliations, physical or non-physical disabilities, communication styles, and backgrounds, among other factors that contribute to each teen's unique character.

By being immersed in communities with such a diverse group of peers and partners, when participants return from Mitzvah Corps, they are able to approach situations with many different perspectives in mind.

Have a Lasting Social Impact. Our programs support your community in advancing major social action causes by training and empowering your teens to be social justice leaders. Each Mitzvah Corps program has a specific issue focus, aligned with current events, conversations that teens are actively having with their peers, and the social justice priorities of the Reform Movement, NFTY, and many Reform congregations.

Mitzvah Corps participants return home well versed in these issues and the role that Judaism plays in addressing them, and prepared to actively incorporate their newly developed skill set into your community.

Renewed Engagement in Jewish Life. Teens choose to spend their summer on a Mitzvah Corps program because they are interested in traveling, challenging themselves to have an out-of-the-box experience to enhance their personal growth, and begin to be able to envision the role they can, and will, play in the world around them. While some Mitzvah Corps participants are active in their NFTY regions, camps, and local youth groups, many are not. We welcome a diverse array of participants, who bring a different perspective, prior Jewish experiences, and set of typical extracurricular activities, yet who are all committed to building a community of like-minded peers, searching for ways to play an active role in the world.

Participants are able to take Jewish values outside their comfort zones, and return to their home communities reinvigorated and inspired to continue living Jewish lives.

Potential Sources of Funding

There are plenty of organizations who are excited to give financial support to teens who are traveling the world, engaging in meaningful social justice and/or volunteering, and having substantive Jewish experiences.

Tips for searching. Some tips for identifying potential financial aid opportunities:

- ✓ Widen your search terms to include: grants, scholarships, work study programs, financial aid, financial support, and donations.
- ✓ Look for organizations, foundations, endowments, programs, and federations.
- ✓ Consider organizations or foundations that are aligned with at least one component of your specific program's location, issue focus, or Jewish involvement.
- ✓ Make phone calls to organizations that look promising, even if you can't find anything specific on their website. They may have information that isn't public, or have other ideas of where you can look.
- ✓ Use terms like philanthropy, volunteering, community service, community engagement, social action, social justice, advocacy, community organizing, and social entrepreneurship in order to search for grants that may be applicable

Common sources of funding. Participants are typically able to identify financial aid opportunities through the following:

- ✓ Local synagogue, both the **rabbi's discretionary fund** and **youth fund**.
- ✓ Local **Jewish Federation**. Most have a social justice grant and scholarship fund.
- ✓ Many **NFTY and BBYO regions** have separate scholarship funds.
- ✓ School clubs or **programs with a focus on community service** or social justice.
- ✓ **Work study** program at your congregation - teaching religious school or tutoring in exchange for financial aid.
- ✓ URJ camp alumni can apply to their **camp director** for financial assistance.

Jewish Federations. Many Jewish Federations have scholarship dollars to use, but the scholarship programs or grant opportunities usually go by different names at each Federation. Visit www.jewishfederations.org/federation-finder to locate the Federation nearest you!

One Happy Camper \$1000 grants. If you have never been to overnight Jewish summer camp, or a similar immersive Jewish summer program, you may be eligible for a One Happy Camper grant of up to \$1,000. Eligibility requirements vary by community. Visit the Foundation for Jewish Camp's One Happy Camper website at www.onehappycamper.org to learn more, and/or contact your local Jewish Federation directly for more information.

GoFundMe

GoFundMe is a personal fundraising website, which has helped thousands of people raise millions of dollars for various causes. This platform allows you to share with your friends and family what you're doing and why you're doing it, and gives them the opportunity to financially support your experience.

- ✓ **What it costs.** It's free, but they keep a small percentage of what you raise as a fee.
- ✓ **Who it reaches.** Anybody! Consider friends, teachers, clergy, advisors, parents of friends, adult relatives, coaches, and people who have seen you take an interest in social justice.
- ✓ **When to use it.** Whenever, and for however long, you want. It's especially helpful during birthdays or holidays to ask for donations to your campaign in lieu of presents.
- ✓ **How to use it.** Set up an account, and share it with your network through social media, email, and even text messages. Follow the steps below for a template!

Visit www.gofundme.com and select **Sign Up Free**.

Once you've created an account, you'll follow prompts, and be asked to enter:

1. Your fundraising goal – how much you'd like to raise.
2. Your campaign title – what you'd like to call your fundraising efforts. We recommend something descriptive, yet short and catchy that will appeal to people who have never heard of Mitzvah Corps. For example, *Support My Work in Tanzania* or *Rivka's Fight for Racial Equality*. It's best to NOT say *My Mitzvah Corps Trip* because someone may not know what Mitzvah Corps is, and therefore less likely to help. There will be an opportunity to explain that later on.

Add a photo or video! You can upload a photo, or embed a video that you've created. Tips:

- ✓ This is your first chance to make an impact on your audience – wow them!
- ✓ A photo can be either of yourself, or of the people you'll be meeting on your trip.
 - It should be clear, high resolution, and represent what you're doing.
 - If you use a photo of yourself, make sure it captures the essence of why you want to participate on this program, like you hanging out with kids, hiking, or lobbying on Capitol Hill.
 - If you'd like an actual photo of the program you'll be on, you can visit www.mitzvahcorps.org/blog to use a photo from our website.
 - You can also visit www.morguefile.com for a stock photo; it's a website of over 350,000 professional photos that are FREE for commercial use.
- ✓ Don't feel like you have to make a video – it's better to have quality photos than a poor video. But it can also be fun, and there are plenty of options.
 - Make it simple, just use your own words to tell your story.
 - Make it energizing, perform a spoken word poem.
 - Make it elaborate, with multiple scenes or action shots.

Tell your story. This is where it gets interesting! When you get to this page, GoFundMe includes several tips. You're welcome to draft all your own language. For your convenience, we've also created a template for Mitzvah Corps that you can use:

*Hi! I'm **YOUR NAME**, and I've chosen to spend my summer far outside my comfort zone, making a real impact in **YOUR PROGRAM LOCATION** with Mitzvah Corps.*

*Mitzvah Corps is a network of global social justice travel programs. They connect teens with opportunities to understand the complexities of injustice around the world, how to engage with local communities in a sensitive and respectful way, and how Judaism empowers us to be agents of positive, sustainable change. The program I'm attending, **YOUR PROGRAM NAME**, focuses on **ISSUE FOCUS**, and we will be **USE LANGUAGE FROM THE ISSUE FOCUS SECTION OF YOUR PROGRAM'S WEB PAGE**.*

In order to make this experience a reality, to immerse myself in a new environment, to learn from people doing incredible things, and to come back home with a renewed ability to enact lasting change, I need your help!

My Mitzvah Corps tuition is used to support the costs of traveling to, living in, and working alongside, local communities. While the benefits of engaging face-to-face with these communities is invaluable, it puts a financial strain on them to make it all possible; welcoming visitors includes spending time talking to and teaching them, giving them materials and supplies to work together, providing them food and housing, and more. Additionally, Mitzvah Corps hires and trains a global staff to ensure that the safety, security, and integrity of the programs are met, and that our engagement in communities lasts far beyond my summer visit.

*Your financial support toward my program tuition will help to offset these costs, and every little bit helps! Even just \$18 would help me reach my goal of **YOUR FUNDRAISING GOAL** by **YOUR DEADLINE**.*

Having a trip like this one, where I can go off-the-grid, meet amazing people, learn about innovative solutions to global challenges, and come home to be an agent of social change, is so important to me. Your support means the world, and I can't wait to share my experience with you when I return!

While we encourage you to use the above language as a starting point, the most successful pages are tweaked so that it represents your authentic "writing voice"!

Add a photo of yourself. This can be either from Facebook, if you registered that way, or one that you upload yourself.

Invite your contacts. You can enter the email addresses of people you want to send your page to, and/or copy the link of your GoFundMe page and use it in the body of an email you write and send yourself.

Here are some categories of people you may want to consider:

- ✓ Family members – they love and support you, and are usually thinking hard about what types of presents to give you; make it easy for them.
- ✓ Your friends – the people who know you, and have your back.
- ✓ Parents of your friends – people who know how much of an impact you have on others (their children, your friends!).
- ✓ Jewish professionals – rabbis, youth group advisors, or educators who will support the social justice work you're doing in a Jewish setting.
- ✓ Teachers (school or congregation) – those who have seen you think critically, engage in meaningful discussion, and apply abstract concepts.
- ✓ Coaches or mentors – people who have seen you work hard and persevere, especially regarding things you're passionate about.
- ✓ Friends of your parents – especially people who work in fields that are related to, tangential to, or supportive of social justice.
- ✓ People you've donated to – great chance for them to return the favor.

Share on social media. GoFundMe easily allows you to post your fundraising campaign to Facebook, share it in a message with some friends that you select, or post to Twitter. It also gives you a link to your fundraising page that you can share on other platforms, and even allows you to opt into regular updates.

Check back regularly to monitor your progress toward your goal!

Tip – send thank you notes. Send a hand-written thank you note to people who donate to your campaign. It adds a good personal touch, and make them more likely to support you in the future! You can also add all of your donors to an email list and send them updates from your trip, or write to them afterward describing the experience you had. It will make them feel like part of your ongoing team!