

How we got to our vote on Iran



by [Leslie Dannin Rosenthal and Dov Ben-Shimon](#)

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After several weeks of consultation, deliberation, and discussion, our Federation Board convened on Wednesday, Aug. 5 and voted overwhelmingly to issue a statement urging rejection of the proposed Nuclear Agreement with Iran unless and until certain parameters are addressed.

We're proud of this statement. But more importantly, we're proud of the process by which it was reached.

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For the past nine years our Federation has been a national leader in the charge against a nuclear-armed Iran. Many in our community initially felt that it was our role to speak out immediately and to urge our elected representatives to oppose the agreement, while others weighed in that we should either support the Agreement or not take a position. We weren't ready to make a decision and we didn't think the Board was either.

Throughout this entire process we both have grappled with our internal conflicts and doubts about the Agreement and our response. Leslie felt almost paralyzed with anger at being forced into what some had portrayed as a conflict between our government and Israel, her other home. Dov, a former Israeli soldier and diplomat, and a career Jewish communal professional, came into the discussion opposed to making a statement and accepted the views of some in the Israeli military and intelligence circles that this deal was acceptable for Israel's security.

We had to educate ourselves and find a clear path to help educate the community. We knew it would have to be a careful and thoughtful process -- for ourselves and for our leadership.

We spent several weeks engaging with the community -- with rabbis, leaders, groups, and delegates -- to learn about the agreement. Our Community Relations Committee (CRC), chaired by Rabbi Elliot Mathias and staffed by Melanie Roth Gorelick, created a roadmap for the community and our Board to discuss and evaluate the Agreement. Together, they built an online study guide and set up a speakers series to help encourage the community to learn and ask questions.

We spoke with advisors and consulted our Executive Committee, past presidents, the CRC, our Board of Advisors, and finally, our Board of Trustees. We debated and learned. We insisted that the Board members educate themselves while continually emphasizing the need for a safe place to speak out. We discussed binary (yes/no) statements and nuanced clauses, and how to craft a statement that would be clear and meaningful, expressing concerns but pointing to ways to move forward. We were mindful that a Federation Board statement should frame our concerns without alienating community members. And we wanted to frame a statement that continued the outreach and engagement process to previously unaffiliated groups in our wide and diverse community.

You can read our Board statement [here](#).

It reflects the thoughtfulness of our engaged leaders, their mutual respect, and our love for Israel and for the United States.

It reflects our core Federation values – to care, build, and save Jewish lives.

And it reflects a process of which we are proud.

Leslie Dannin Rosenthal is President and Dov Ben-Shimon is CEO of the Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest, NJ

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