

**FUNDING**

**JEWISH**

**INNOVATION**

**A RESOURCE GUIDE**

**4**

Core Questions Around Funding  
Innovation — Answered!

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Reflections from  
Funders in the Field

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Practical Next Steps for Finding  
& Funding Jewish Innovation

A COLLABORATION BETWEEN JEWISH COMMUNAL FUND AND SLINGSHOT



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# INTRODUCTION

**A**s a collective of Jewish funders and as an institution, Jewish Communal Fund (JCF) is interested in fostering innovation in Jewish life. In fact, 41 years ago, when JCF was formed, the very idea of a Jewish donor advised fund was innovative; JCF was one of the first donor advised funds established nationwide. At JCF, we continue to innovate our service offerings, providing state-of-the-art technology that makes grant-making simple and efficient, as well as producing helpful and engaging educational resources that benefit our fund holders and the charities they generously support. We are proud that in the past three years, more than 365 JCF fund holders recommended 608 grants totaling close to \$4 million to dozens of organizations that appeared in the Slingshot guide.

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To provide support for innovation, JCF has housed Slingshot in our offices for the last two and a half years. We have forged a strong partnership and, together with Slingshot, JCF's Center for Next Generation Philanthropy has hosted events focusing on strategic grant-making and micro-finance. Slingshot staff and board members also regularly contribute thought pieces about innovation in Jewish life on the JCF blog. This resource guide on funding innovation in Jewish life is the natural next step, bridging JCF's and Slingshot's collective expertise on the subject.

A fund at JCF gives you the freedom to explore your passions, stay attuned to new philanthropic trends, and support innovative as well as traditional public charities. We manage the administrative back-end and paperwork, freeing you, our fund holders, to focus on impact.

We hope you find this guide to funding innovation in the Jewish world helpful as a tool to make your giving more strategic, thoughtful, and meaningful.

**Karen R. Adler**

*President, Jewish Communal Fund*

# Innovation Snapshot

## OUR JEWISH COMMUNITY

As the sun set on the first night of Yom Kippur, James was in college, thousands of miles from home, Sarah was eight months pregnant, restricted to bed rest for the remainder of her pregnancy, and Dan was abroad, in the middle of his first deployment in a remote area of Afghanistan. At the same time, all three reached for their laptops and logged onto [OurJewishCommunity.org](http://OurJewishCommunity.org) – a virtual congregation based in a brick-and-mortar synagogue in Cincinnati, Ohio. A few clicks later, James and his family, spread across the country, joined services together. Sarah and her husband were able to participate in a service despite being confined to their home, and Dan had his first connection with home in weeks.

These stories are based on real profiles of some of the tens of thousands of [OurJewishCommunity.org](http://OurJewishCommunity.org) participants. For six years running, OJC has hosted one of the world's largest High Holiday services. OJC recognized a need to connect with a community of Jews even when geographical or health concerns prevented people from doing so physically.

# PREFACE

Being “innovative” in the non-profit world is a short-cut term to describe organizations that have built the drive for relevancy and impact into their DNA. Innovation is not an end goal, but rather a mode of operating. These organizations are mission obsessed, meaning they will change existing programs, throw out ineffective tactics, and blaze new trails if it means better addressing their “reason for being.” This rare quality is highlighted in the annual Slingshot resource guide, which annually features the 50 most innovative Jewish organizations in North America. As this sector matures, mainstream organizations have begun to ask themselves how they can learn from social entrepreneurs and make their programs more accessible and engaging.

Funding an existing project carries little risk of unexpected outcomes. Innovation, on the other hand, may happen in an unusual or unlikely place; it may break conventional “rules,” and it may not always work. It can be challenging for funders to know whom to fund and how to measure their success. In partnership with the Jewish Communal Fund, we at Slingshot asked our colleagues for help and built the following “Guide to Funding Jewish Innovation.” What follows is a crash-course in funding innovation. Rather than presenting a “one-size-fits-all” solution to your funding needs, this guide is designed to answer some core questions, introduce you to several key players, and guide you on this exciting journey of supporting innovation in Jewish life.

So is the goal to replace the establishment and undo a century of Jewish institutional growth? Not at all. Innovation ensures that

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**Rather than presenting a “one-size-fits-all” solution to your funding needs, this guide is designed to answer some core questions, introduce you to several key players, and guide you on this exciting journey of supporting innovation in Jewish life.**

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the Jewish community continues to innovate. Martin Kaminer, trustee at the Kaminer Family Foundation, which supports New York innovation incubator Bikkurim, says it best: “Your grandchildren’s and even your children’s world will likely not resemble ours and will look even less like the world of our parents and grandparents. The issues that will dominate their lives: the environment, globalization, and challenges we cannot yet imagine (a zero-gravity seder?), will be different from ours and unique to their generations. As different as their world will look to us, we still want them to enjoy rich lives filled with meaningful community involvement and served by community institutions that meet their social and spiritual needs. That starts now, with you.”

Thanks for reading and good luck on your journey into a new and exciting space.

**Will Schneider**  
*Executive Director, Slingshot*

# Innovation Snapshot

## PEARLSTONE CENTER

As Sam toured the Pearlstone Center's farm, he wondered what a farm could have to do with Jewish life in 21st century North America. Jakir, the Executive Director, explained that a Jewish farm embraces values and laws derived from the Torah. Jakir could tell that Sam didn't fully grasp what he was saying. "For example, the corners of the field are reserved for charity; we give that harvest to a soup kitchen," Jakir said. "What a sacrifice for farmers to make," Sam thought to himself. "But I'm not going to be a farmer so how does this apply to me?" He assumed that religion asking you to make sacrifices meant you wouldn't get much in return. But on this farm, Jakir explained, they didn't sacrifice because "God said so" but because in year eight, the land produces a surplus. Sam thought, "What if I could take a year off every seven years? It would teach me spending discipline, knowing I was going to have to take a year off. And if I invested in myself in year seven, imagine what I could accomplish in year eight!" Jakir was talking about the concept of sabbatical. Sabbatical, Sabbath, *Shmita*. Sam had never put it together before and stood there on the farm thinking, "I wonder what else the Torah has to say." Decades into Sam's working life, he needed to hear about the Jewish idea of investing in himself. Sam begun to comprehend thousands of years of Jewish knowledge with a new understanding of the value it could have for his own life.

**What are we talking about**

**when we talk about**

**innovation?**

**QUESTION**

**1**

**When we talk about innovation, we mean finding new ways to create impact. Innovation is not just about doing something trendy or giving things away for free. Rather, innovative organizations and programs are ones that are able to act efficiently, adapt to current demands in the community, and create new models for achieving positive outcomes.**

“Innovation is a mode of operating, not an outcome. Our collective work strives to celebrate contemporary expressions of our heritage and create space for meaningful Jewish life to flourish.”  
– **Lisa Lepson**, *Executive Director of Joshua Venture Group*

“Innovation is what happens when you combine established best practices with new ideas, when you keep your ear to the ground, asking smart questions, actively engaging constituents and challenging existing ideas. It’s about listening - listening to beneficiaries, staff, donors, colleagues, reports, data and more - and absorbing that knowledge into the fabric of the organization, learning and adapting all the while to create the best possible product.”  
– **Rachel Ishofsky**, *Managing Director of Innovation: Africa*

“Innovation isn’t just about inspiring the next new idea, but maintaining its relevancy over time.”  
– **Ariel Groveman Weiner**, *Associate Director of The Samuel Bronfman Foundation*

“Even what seemingly is an old idea such as a Jewish music festival can be innovative if it changes the way Jewish music festivals are created and sustained. For example, Atlanta Jewish Music Festival may create a new way to partner with celebrity Jewish musicians so that when they come to a city, they also serve the local Jewish community. That’s innovation.”  
– **Jennie Rivlin Roberts**, *Founder of ModernTribe.com*

“Innovation is not only the process of creating and implementing new Jewish initiatives, but also the process of keeping the core Jewish initiatives with proven success updated and relevant.” – **Rochelle Shoretz**, *Executive Director of Sharsheret*

“Jewish innovation is the creation and implementation of new ideas that help strengthen the Jewish community and further the goal of Jewish continuity. In my funding decisions, a key part of deciding whether something is innovative is seeing whether it has measurable impact. An idea that is new or groundbreaking is not necessarily innovative if it cannot show that it is effective. As Steven Johnson writes in *Where Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation*, for an idea to be innovative, it has to be a good idea. Applied within the context of the Jewish philanthropy, I would define a good idea as an idea that works – i.e., an idea that makes a difference.”  
– **Simone Friedman Rones**, *President of Emanuel J. Friedman Philanthropies*

“The innovation Mechon Hadar introduced was not strictly about the content; it was about the way the content was delivered. Our theory was: demand for substantive engagement with meaningful Judaism is actually very high. Jews, indeed all humans, are looking for ways to connect, for ways to live a deeper life of substance. The problem is, the supply offerings are weak. Either the delivery system is inefficient (people don’t walk into traditional Jewish institutions in the ways they used to), or the content is watered down.” – **Rabbi Elie Kaunfer**, *Executive Director of Mechon Hadar*

**Does something innovative**

**have to be new?**

**QUESTION**

**2**

**This question is often the source of a misconception among some funders around innovation. There's no need to abandon the organizations that have sustained Jewish life for a century or more in order to fund innovation. Innovation is not restricted to new or young organizations, nor is it limited to programs and organizations that cater to young Jews. Innovative programs are happening wherever people are willing to engage with questions in new ways – and that can happen anywhere.**

“New 501c3s aren't necessary to innovate. But it may be that new people are. It is difficult for established organizations to innovate because of the innovator's dilemma: they are too busy serving current needs to adapt to a changing marketplace or foresee its future needs. Therefore, innovation often comes from outside the establishment and by 'outsiders.’” – **Jennie Rivlin Roberts**

“YES: the very definition of 'innovation' is that it means something new – a new process, product, methodology, way of thinking. It can be a new iteration of a classic concept that has been updated to resonate with changes in values. As Mechon Hadar's Rabbi Elie Kaunfer often says, 'I just teach Torah – that's nothing new.' But doing it through a pluralistic, egalitarian, inclusive yeshiva like Mechon Hadar is profoundly innovative. Unfortunately, however, a lot of the resistance to 'innovation' in the Jewish institutional world comes from the conflation of innovation with startups and young organizations. Not all innovation happens in startups, and not all startups are innovative. Innovation also shouldn't be conflated with young people – while some innovators are young, it's certainly not the case that all innovators are young or that all young people are innovative! The arguments over whether to support 'innovation' or established communal institutions are, therefore, specious, founded on inaccurate conflations like these.” – **Felicia Herman, Executive Director of The Natan Fund**

“Jewish innovation is personal. What's tried and true to you might be new and breakthrough to someone else. One of the best ways to innovate and succeed is by leveraging and building upon existing services, capabilities and investments.” – **Dan Eckstein, member of Slingshot and Natan's giving circles**

“Innovative organizations don't have to be startups. While some funders support innovation through the creation of new organizations, it is important to note the wide range of organizations in the Jewish community. Cornerstone institutions that have been around for generations, as well as new organizations, can be innovative and relevant to Jewish life today.” – **Ariel Groveman Weiner**

“We believe that the cumulative force of a series of tiny effects can create systemic change. That's what happens in an ecosystem: countless small-scale ideas and pilot programs with the potential to get bigger, to multiply and evolve, to be adapted and reshaped and shared around the world. For funders, that means continuing to seed experimental new ideas but allocating a greater proportion of their portfolios to the longer-term work of harvesting, harnessing, and expanding promising new pilots with demonstrated initial impact.” – **Joshua Avedon and Shawn Landres, co-founders of Jumpstart**  
<http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/the-next-big-new-idea-is-neither-big-nor-new-discuss/>

**Even though innovation**

**doesn't need to take the form**

**of a new organization,**

**how are startups funded?**

**QUESTION**

**3**

**Jewish startup organizations are often limited to a small pool of funders who are both aware of these projects and also have the desire to bet on a risky venture. Paul Ylvisaker, the former public affairs director for the Ford Foundation, famously called these risk-taking funders “society’s passing lane.” The challenge for the startup is to demonstrate effectiveness and move beyond risk-funders as rapidly as possible by securing a broad base of stable, risk-averse funders.**

“The Jewish Innovation Economy (2011) points out that ‘in the new Jewish economy, stakeholders can be both creators and consumers not only of their own individual Jewish identities, but also of their collective Jewish communities.’ As younger generations assume leadership roles as philanthropists and grantmakers, they are taking an increasingly hands-on role in their giving and ever more frequently directing their funding toward the causes with which they themselves identify as part of the target population or even as participants. Indeed, some members of Natan, the Slingshot Fund, and other giving circles leverage their own expertise as consumers of Jewish life to make more informed and personally relevant decisions about where to direct funds.

When community leaders, whether volunteer or professional, funder or grantee, focus on our visions and connect our passion, knowledge, resources, and skills ... there’s no limit to what we can create together.”

**- Shawn Landres, *Jumpstart CEO***

*Increasing Supply, Not Only Demand (2011)*

[roicommunity.org/blog/increasing-supply-not-only-demand](http://roicommunity.org/blog/increasing-supply-not-only-demand)

“Money for Jewish innovation comes from diverse sources. Many of the projects we support are launched with sweat equity and in-kind resources (donated office space, expertise, etc.). Federations have been a strong partner to many of our projects, particularly [UJA-Federation of New York’s] COJIR and the Peoplehood commission. At some point, most projects are seeking foundation support or individual donors (or likely a combination of the two). A subset of the groups we have supported have managed to build out strong revenue streams. A great example of this would be Hazon, which earns nearly 50% of its budget through a combination of participant/program fees, participant fundraising, and rentals.”

**- Aliza Mazor, *Executive Director of Bikkurim***

“Many innovative startups receive disproportionate (and ultimately unsustainable) amounts of funding from institutional sources: the handful of risk-tolerant foundations, Federations, giving circles, and individuals that are willing to take chances on new people and new ideas. The challenge for the startups is to break into the individual donor market – the donor-advised fund holders, the individuals giving out of their checkbooks, and the smaller, usually unstaffed foundations. They can accomplish this partly by spreading awareness of their work, and partly by demonstrating to everyone – especially the risk-averse donor – that their innovative approach is effective.” **- Felicia Herman**

**Okay, I'm in!**

**What's next?**

**QUESTION**

**4**

## STEP 1 Identify what's important to you

As with any philanthropic effort, funding innovation begins with determining where your focus lies. What do you want to support? What do you want to change? What outcomes do you want your efforts to achieve? Once you've spent time clarifying your focus, you'll be better equipped to discern which organizations are working in line with your vision.

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### EXERCISE

#### Write your "I wish" statement

Many of us have our own ideas for building a more engaging and relevant Jewish community. Often, these brainstorming ideas emerge from our own experiences and life stages. For example, "I wish there were a way to learn about Jewish texts online," or "I'm a new parent and I wish the Jewish community could help me in this new stage of my life." Often, there is already a Jewish social entrepreneur who has come up with an innovative model to accomplish just what you are looking for. Find organizations that fulfill your wishes by flipping through the Slingshot guide or searching online. Visit [www.slingshotfund.org](http://www.slingshotfund.org) to research possible grantees and opportunities to get involved.

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"Once a funder finds the answers to these questions for herself, this becomes the baseline for seeking out innovative projects aligned with her values and investment priorities."

– Lisa Lepson

"In *Where Good Ideas Come From*, Steven Johnson writes that a majority of breakthrough ideas emerge from collaborative environments, and that the 'natural state of ideas is spillover and flow and connection.' Ultimately, the most important step that a funder interested in making their first gift to Jewish innovation should take is to get involved with other funders invested in this space. For example, funders should read

the Slingshot resource guide and attend the annual Slingshot Day in New York. This will have a positive impact on both the funder and on the Jewish community as a whole."

– Simone Friedman Ronnes

Email [info@slingshotfund.org](mailto:info@slingshotfund.org) for more information about Slingshot Day, and visit [www.slingshotfund.org](http://www.slingshotfund.org) to request a copy of the Slingshot resource guide.

"Someone who is really excited about funding startups and young organizations has so much opportunity in front of them. It's very important to start by mapping your own assets as a donor. Think strategically – and honestly and humbly – about all of the ways you can be useful to new organizations, which need so much. Do you have friends who might also become donors and supporters – and can you make introductions between those friends and the organization? Do you or people in your networks have skills you can offer to the organization – technological know-how, HR, graphic design, legal, fundraising experience? Can you connect the new organization to established institutions and other mentors for advice and strategic partnerships? For example: I often introduce Natan grantees to my kids' excellent community day school, knowing that there's often a mutual benefit: innovative new programs and leaders can enrich the school's offerings, and the new organizations benefit from the school's *heksher* (seal of approval) and access to the hundreds of students, parents, and other stakeholders."

– Felicia Herman

## STEP 2 Connect to the Network

There are several existing resources in the Jewish community that can connect you with innovative programs and organizations. As part of the growing world of Jewish innovation, these organizations are uniquely placed to help you find and fund innovation. Connect with any one of them to learn more about the opportunities available to you.

### Slingshot

[slingshotfund.org](http://slingshotfund.org)

Slingshot uses philanthropic tools to connect next gen Jews with innovative Jewish organizations. Slingshot's best known product is the annual Slingshot resource guide, which features the most innovative organizations in Jewish life.

Slingshot also runs a giving circle for funders in their 20s and 30s called the Slingshot Fund. The Slingshot Fund exposes its members to a professional grant-making process. While many members come from families that are actively involved in philanthropy, most have yet to review grant proposals, conduct site visits, and make allocation decisions. In conjunction with a group of their peers, Slingshot offers members the opportunity to develop those skills and learn from experts in the field while leveraging their small gifts into a significant grant pool.

For more information about Slingshot, please email Will Schneider at [will@slingshotfund.org](mailto:will@slingshotfund.org)

### Jewish Communal Fund

[jcfny.org](http://jcfny.org)

Jewish Communal Fund is one of the largest networks of Jewish funders. JCF's donor advised funds make giving easy, flexible and efficient. No need to worry about tracking receipts for donations to charities; donors receive a single letter for tax filing. JCF handles all of the administrative work. Our secure website makes it easy to recommend grants and view grant history online, any time of day or night.

*How it works:* Donors fill out the online application, make a contribution of cash or appreciated securities, and take an immediate tax deduction, while paying no capital gains tax. Donors have the flexibility to set the timetable for recommending grants to their favorite IRS-qualified charities, both Jewish and secular. Charitable assets grow tax-free, and donors choose from JCF's menu of highly rated investment options.

JCF's NextGen Funds for those 30 and under begin at \$1,800.

For more information about JCF, please email Michelle Lebowitz at [michelle@jcfny.org](mailto:michelle@jcfny.org)

“Getting involved with rapidly-growing innovative Jewish organizations is easy. Slingshot is the unrivaled expert at connecting funders with emerging organizations that match their vision, their values, and their ways of getting involved. Slingshot continuously analyzes and assesses hundreds of organizations from a funder’s perspective and has guided thousands of funders to some of the most meaningful and enjoyable experiences of their philanthropic lives. Talk to them!” – **Martin Kaminer**, *Founder and Board Chair of Bikkurim*



## Natan

[natan.org](http://natan.org)

Natan is a giving circle through which dozens of young professionals give collectively to innovative Jewish and Israeli startups, emerging organizations, and social entrepreneurs. Since 2002, Natan has partnered with some of the most creative new organizations working to strengthen the Jewish identity of young Jews, to connect Jews around the world with each other, and to develop Israel’s economy. Natan has given over \$8.7 million to 150 innovative Jewish and Israeli social entrepreneurs and startup nonprofits around the world, and has been part of some of the important new research on the startups sector conducted by Jumpstart and Bikkurim. Natan welcomes new members who are interested in giving collectively through its giving circle model. It is also developing a robust set of resources to strengthen and expand the field of Jewish giving circles.

For more information about Natan, please email Felicia Herman at [felicia@natan.org](mailto:felicia@natan.org)

## Jumpstart

[jumpstartlabs.org](http://jumpstartlabs.org), [jewishjumpstart.org](http://jewishjumpstart.org)

Jumpstart is a philanthropic research and design lab based in Los Angeles. Jumpstart’s unique combination of research, convenings, and funding enables creative changemakers - philanthropists and institutional leaders alike - to realize their own visions and advance the common good. Funders turn to Jumpstart for analysis and forecasting, based on original research such as its North American and European Surveys of New Jewish Initiatives (2008, 2010) and the Connected to Give / National Study of American Jewish Giving (2013). For funders seeking to achieve collective impact, Jumpstart designs and facilitates highly collaborative summits that connect, inform, and empower leaders with the capacity to create meaningful change in their communities. Through its fiscal sponsorship platforms and other funding vehicles, Jumpstart delivers resources to new initiatives that are reshaping Jewish and community life globally.

For more information about Jumpstart, please email [connect@jumpstartlabs.org](mailto:connect@jumpstartlabs.org)

## STEP 3 Ask Questions!

Once you've narrowed down the list of programs and organizations to a handful that you might be interested in funding, start asking questions! That will be the best way for you to determine if the organization is the right fit for you. Ask about their process – how do they develop new programs? Make sure you can understand their business model and efforts to achieve sustainability. Ask them about their organizational culture and their evaluation process – and ask them where your money will go.

“Examine the programs that organizations are creating or tweaking in the name of innovation, and consider the following by engaging in a conversation with the not-for-profit professionals:

1. Why is innovation important to your organization at this particular point in time?
2. What threats or opportunities are you currently identifying?
3. What tools will you use to advance innovation to address these threats or opportunities?
4. How will this innovation effort affect the other programs you currently manage?
5. How will you evaluate the tools you are using to advance innovation?
6. How and how often will you modify the tools you are using to advance innovation?
7. How will you communicate to me, the donor, the results of your innovation efforts?

“Not-for-profit professionals enjoy the opportunity to have meaningful discussions with funders that involve more than a conversation about giving. Consider a discussion that lifts the veil of innovation as a concept and explores the substance of the tools with which innovation can happen.” – **Rochelle Shoretz**

“Most organizations are open to meeting with potential funders to explain how they view innovation. There are also giving circles to connect with if you are looking for advice to establish your giving process criteria. Don't be shy – contact the organization yourself or with a group of friends to find out more information.” – **Dan Eckstein**

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### NEXT STEPS

#### A challenge to the reader

Your donor advised fund at the Jewish Communal Fund is a significant resource for enhancing the future of the Jewish community. Most likely, you are already supporting Jewish organizations, and perhaps some of them fit into the innovation framework. You now have the opportunity to take your giving to the next level, using this guide as a starting point. After reading through this guide and learning more about the innovative organizations that exist in the Jewish community, you may want to consider committing 10% of your year-end giving to innovative projects that strengthen the Jewish community. Slingshot and the Jewish Communal Fund would like to hear where you put your 10% – please email [will@slingshotfund.org](mailto:will@slingshotfund.org) so we can connect you with additional resources.

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# Innovation Snapshot

## HILLEL'S ASK BIG QUESTIONS

Sarah identified as Jewish, but she assumed programs on campus at Hillel were only for religious Jews, or that she wouldn't get along with the students who went to Hillel. In her sophomore year of college, Sarah met Jessica, who was hosting some kind of Jewish dinner and invited Sarah to join. It turned out that Sarah had been invited to a "big" question event - Hillel's new program, designed to help students on campus have important conversations with each other, and gain a deeper understanding of themselves and others on campus. About 15 people attended, Jews and non-Jews alike, and the question over dinner was, "When do you conform?" Jessica had some training, and she shared a poem, a few images, and even a few Jewish laws. Sarah became engrossed by the question, the stories they read, and the answers from other students. Sarah learned that "big" questions are different from "hard" questions. Hard questions need experts to answer, but anyone can answer a big question, and listening to others answer helps you understand yourself better. She ended up joining a monthly meeting of students to explore different "big" questions. Before long, Sarah found herself making plans to head to Hillel to see her new friends and chat with the campus rabbi. By the end of the year, Sarah was asked to host her own "big" question group. When she returned for her junior year, she gravitated to Hillel right away, which moved from a marginal presence in her life to being of central importance to her social and educational experience.

# THE INNOVATION ECONOMY

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**As research focused on the field of Jewish innovation becomes available, JCF will provide our donors with the data that can help to inform their giving. Below is a summary of research on innovative startups in the Jewish community.**

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In an innovation economy, knowledge, technology, entrepreneurship, and creativity are the core engines of change and growth. As of 2010, the number of new Jewish nonprofit initiatives in North America had reached more than 600 initiatives serving more than half a million people across the continent. Put another way, these innovative Jewish organizations had engaged more than 9% of the North American Jewish population with less than 2% of the roughly \$10 billion spent annually in the Jewish nonprofit sector. Today, well over \$200 million per year flows to the North American Jewish startup sector each year, along with a robust portfolio of education, leadership, and organizational development programs in which many of the sector's leaders have participated. Indeed, the Jewish innovation economy is the result of many years of philanthropic investment in Jewish education and leadership development.

As new networks connect emerging leaders across the world, a spirit of social entrepreneurialism has led hundreds of Jewish leaders to create new initiatives that reflect their values and needs. Jewish education and community building are the central activities of global Jewish innovation. While the phenomenon is most visible in North America, Europe also is witnessing a revival of contemporary Jewish life through the emergence of more than 250 new initiatives reaching hundreds of thousands of people. In fact, relative to their respective Jewish populations, there are nearly twice as many Jewish startups in Europe (1 project: 6,400 people) as in North America (1 project: 11,000 people). European Jewish startups tend to focus on an accessible approach to European Jewish life—through arts, culture, general education, pluralism and festivals, while in North America, the top four areas are identity expression, spirituality, ritual, and 20s/30s outreach and engagement. In short, around the world, Jewish innovators have built a thriving sector that runs lean and burns hot with the twin fuels of knowledge and social capital.

**Excerpted from "The Jewish Innovation Economy: An Emerging Market for Knowledge and Social Capital" by Joshua Avedon and Shawn Landres. For more information about this research, please visit [jewishjumpstart.org/reading](http://jewishjumpstart.org/reading).**

# Innovation Snapshot

**G-DCAST**

Jessica waited in her living room listening to muffled voices coming from her 10-year-old daughter Halle's computer in the next room, punctuated by bursts of Halle's laughter every few minutes. Jessica was amazed, because Halle was in her second straight hour of learning stories from the Torah. Jessica grew up Jewish, but in a nonobservant household, and she married a non-Jewish man. Jessica wanted her daughter to know more about Judaism, and was told by a friend to visit [G-dcast.com](http://g-dcast.com) to watch a 2-minute animated version of a story from the weekly Torah portion. Still skeptical, Jessica sat Halle down to start watching, and Halle wouldn't stop until she had seen the full series. Halle is now conversant in Torah stories and has asked her mom to take her to classes to help her learn more. Jessica emailed G-dcast to thank its staff for creating high quality, engaging material that was as good as anything secular her daughter might watch, and in a medium she thought was cool. G-dcast "got through to her daughter" for the first time.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A special thank you to the following thought leaders in the Jewish innovation sphere who so generously shared their insights with us:

## **Ariel Groveman Weiner**

Ariel Groveman Weiner serves as Associate Director of The Samuel Bronfman Foundation and works closely with the various initiatives the foundation supports. Ariel received her BA and MA in Jewish History from the University of Pennsylvania and lives in New York with her husband, Josh, and their three children.

## **Dan Eckstein**

Dan Eckstein has been a member of both Slingshot and Natan's giving circles. He currently lives in New York City with his wife Carrie and works at Hewlett Packard in their services group. He is passionate about Jewish peoplehood, innovative grassroots organizations, and micro-giving.

## **Felicia Herman**

Felicia Herman has been the Executive Director of The Natan Fund, a giving circle of young philanthropists supporting Jewish and Israeli social innovation, since 2005. She is a frequent commentator on topics such as funding innovation, new trends in Jewish life, and the power of the giving circle model for engaging people in Jewish philanthropy. Felicia serves on the board of Bikkurim: Advancing New Jewish Ideas, as well as on the advisory boards for several of Natan's partners and grantee organizations. Felicia is a recipient of the Jewish Funders Network's JJ Greenberg Memorial Award. She holds a Ph.D. in Jewish History from Brandeis University and lives in Brooklyn with her husband and three children.

## **Rachel Ishofsky**

Rachel Ishofsky is the Managing Director of Innovation: Africa, a non-profit organization that brings Israeli innovation to African villages. While studying art and literature at New York University, Rachel took some time to study and teach in West Africa, where she founded a small non-profit for street children. She has eight years of experience as an informal Jewish educator and has worked with various non-profit organizations promoting the arts, education and humanities. She has taught English on three continents and has traveled to over 30 countries.

## **Martin Kaminer**

Martin Kaminer is the founder and current board chair of Bikkurim: Advancing New Jewish Ideas, currently celebrating ten years of investment in, and support of, new Jewish nonprofits. He has also been a board member and active supporter of other organizations, including JESNA, the Jewish Theological Seminary, and the Jewish Funders Network. When he's not dispensing bromides to aspiring social entrepreneurs, he runs an online learning company. Martin lives in New York City with his wife Sarit and his children Gidon and Ayelet.

## **Elie Kaunfer**

Rabbi Elie Kaunfer is the co-founder and Executive Director of Mechon Hadar ([www.mechonhadar.org](http://www.mechonhadar.org)). A graduate of Harvard College, Elie was ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he also completed an MA and is pursuing a doctorate in liturgy. A Wexner Graduate Fellow, Elie is the author of *Empowered Judaism: What Independent Minyanim Can Teach Us about Building Vibrant Jewish Communities* (Jewish Lights). He has been named multiple times to the Forward 50 and to the Newsweek list of "Top 50 Rabbis in America." He has served as Scholar-in-Residence at the Federation's General Assembly and at the annual Jewish Funders Network conference, and has lectured widely on building grassroots Jewish communities.

## **Shawn Landres**

Jumpstart co-founder and CEO Shawn Landres, PhD, helps philanthropic and community leaders expand what they know, adapt how they think, redefine what is possible, and advance the common good. His award-winning work has earned wide recognition, from the White House to TIME, the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, CNN.com, Chronicle of Philanthropy, GOOD, and Fast.Co.Exist. Shawn serves as a Los Angeles County Commissioner on the Quality and Productivity Commission; he also co-chairs the Clinton Foundation Millennium Network Leadership Council and advises the Nexus Global Youth Summit and Sh'ma. Shawn serves on the board of managers of Hub LA and Spark Experience Design, and advises The Mother Company

and InVenture. He holds advanced certification from 21/64 and is a CLI-certified facilitator. An Ariane de Rothschild Fellow, two-time Nahum Goldmann Fellow, and member of the ROI Community and Selah Leadership Network, Shawn lives in Santa Monica with his wife Zuzana Riemer Landres and their two young daughters.

#### **Lisa Lepson**

Lisa Lepson is the Executive Director of Joshua Venture Group, which identifies, funds, and cultivates social entrepreneurs who are transforming the Jewish landscape. She has extensive experience building startup non-profit and for-profit social ventures including founding leadership roles at RockCorps, Upwardly Global, Exhale, and Killing My Lobster Theater Project. In 2011, Lisa developed and taught an inaugural course on social entrepreneurship for high school students in the Genesis program at Brandeis University. Lisa received an MBA from The Anderson School at UCLA and a BA from Brown University.

#### **Aliza Mazor**

Aliza Mazor is the Executive Director of Bikkurim, a joint project of Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) and the Kaminer Family. Bikkurim has incubated 29 innovative startups that contribute significantly to the diversification and reinvigoration of Jewish life. Previously, Aliza served as an independent organizational consultant, associate director of an international public foundation, director of development for a regional management assistance organization, and director of training for a national social justice organization. A Chicago native, Aliza spent fifteen years living and working in Israel and holds an MSW from Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She currently lives in New York City.

#### **Simone Friedman Ronces**

Simone Friedman Ronces is President of Emanuel J. Friedman Philanthropies. EJF Philanthropies ([www.ejfpilanthropies.org](http://www.ejfpilanthropies.org)) has several funding priorities, including the support of innovation within the Washington, D.C.-area Jewish community.

#### **Jennie Rivlin Roberts**

Jennie Rivlin Roberts is an e-commerce and consumer product entrepreneur and founder of ModernTribe.com. She earned a Ph.D. in industrial and organizational psychology from Georgia Tech and previously worked with Fortune 500 companies in

leadership development and strategic marketing. In 2012, she founded the first formal support program for Atlanta's Jewish social entrepreneurs called ProtéJ. Passionate about business and Jewish American life, Jennie is an Atlanta native, wife, and mom.

#### **Will Schneider, Editor**

Will Schneider is the Executive Director of Slingshot, an organization that uses philanthropic tools to expose Jews to organizations that resonate with them. Through Slingshot, tens of thousands of Jews have learned that Jewish life can be relevant, meaningful, and exciting. Slingshot's toolbox includes the popular Slingshot resource guide, the Slingshot Fund for "next gen" funders, and the 90-minute Slingshot Fund conference activity. Prior to joining Slingshot in 2009, Will worked as a fundraising consultant for dozens of non-profit clients across several sectors. Will's expertise includes major gifts fundraising, messaging for funders, trends among funders in their 20s and 30s, incubating projects from foundations, and the role of innovation in Jewish life. Will lives in Brooklyn with his wife Rachel and his son, Max.

#### **Tamar Snyder, Editor**

Tamar Snyder is the Associate Director of Strategic Initiatives & Communications at Jewish Communal Fund, the largest Jewish donor advised fund in the country, managing \$1.2 billion in charitable assets. An award-winning journalist, Tamar holds a master's degree in journalism from Columbia Journalism School, a Masters in Public Administration (MPA) from NYU/Wagner, and an MA in Hebrew and Judaic Studies from NYU. She lives in the New York area with her husband and two children.

#### **Rochelle Shoretz**

Rochelle Shoretz is the founder and Executive Director of Sharsheret, a national organization supporting young Jewish women facing breast cancer. A two-time breast cancer survivor, Rochelle is a member of the Advisory Committee on Breast Cancer in Young Women under the auspices of the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. She is a graduate and former board member of the Joshua Venture Group fellowship for young Jewish leaders and serves on numerous non-profit boards in the Jewish community and in the cancer field. A resource for major media on issues related to breast cancer in young women and a graduate of Columbia Law School, she also served as a law clerk in 1999 to United States Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.



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