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Partnerships

An Interview with
Michael Steinhardt

Essays by Steven Bayme,
Rachel Cowan, Barry Shrage,
and Jonathan Woocher



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Jewish Life Network is dedicated to strengthening and transforming American Jewry to ensure a flourishing, sustainable community in a fully integrated free society. We seek to revitalize Jewish identity through educational, religious and cultural initiatives that are designed to reach out to all Jews, with an emphasis on those who are on the margins of Jewish life.

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F r o m t h e E d i t o r

Forming Partnerships in a Time of Division

It's no great secret that we live in a period of discord and division in the American Jewish community. There is so much infighting among competing organizations (e.g. Anti-Defamation League vs. American Jewish Committee), different movements (e.g. Orthodox vs. Reform), and disparate communities (e.g. Diaspora vs. Israel) that it can sometimes seem as if American Jews are more interested in guarding their turf or in conserving their ideological purity than in energizing and sustaining an ancient people and a rich religious tradition. Some observers think that we're beginning to tear ourselves apart from within.

In recent years, there have been several strategic attempts to turn the tide, to improve the Jewish world from the inside out. Some have pursued the programmatic path, hoping that by constructing and promoting exciting, interesting (and often one-time) events they would inspire Jews to become more Jewish. Others focused on outreach, on targeting the unaffiliated and disaffected with a Judaism that was more palatable to their demographic group. For a while, the buzzword, particularly in Federation circles, was "continuity," which frequently took the form of more serious Jewish education in the culture and activities of Jewish institutions.

This issue of *Contact* will focus on a different strategy for strengthening Jewish life: The creation of partnerships, a model which has grown more popular and (arguably) proven itself successful in various parts of our many communities, even though it is a model that has some problems of its own. In addition to an interview with Jewish Life Network Chairman Michael Steinhardt, this issue contains essays that have been written by several leaders in Jewish philanthropic, organizational, and educational life. I invite you to write us with your own views on the subject.

Rabbi Niles Goldstein



Partnerships: An Interview with Michael Steinhardt

... partnership represents a joint effort of people who are otherwise disparate in their lifestyles, occupations, and localities.

by **ELI VALLEY**

EV: You have stated that Jewish Life Network seeks to affect the infrastructure of the Jewish community not through a project here and a project there, but through large-scale programs - e.g. making Day School available to everybody. You have also said that to do so will require partnerships. What exactly do you mean by “partnerships”? How is this approach different from what currently exists?

MS: Partnerships mean just that: A joining together of individuals of like mind who have a shared vision of such magnitude that the goal is beyond the scope of any one individual to achieve using his own resources. But perhaps the important point of significance is not the enormity of the vision, but the fact that the partnership represents a joint effort of people who are otherwise disparate in their lifestyles, occupations, and localities. Yet all see objectives for the Jewish people that at a certain point in time lead to a shared understanding. The shared understanding becomes the basis of partnership.

Partnership is different from individual initiative. It's also different from the actions that have historically been taken by Federation. Consensus building in

Federation life has certain advantages, but also poses the problem of persuading a range of constituencies to work toward a shared goal. It doesn't have the vigor, excitement, and immediacy that partnership offers. So partnership differs from individual action and from that process which Federations have largely used. It is a particularly appropriate medium for this point in time, when the problems that face the Jewish world are often of profound and sweeping magnitude.

EV: You have been critical of an overemphasis on consensus building. What would you describe as the differences between the partnership process and consensus building?

MS: In the partnerships that I have been familiar with, the number of partners has been finite, with focused and limited goals. Because the group is self-selected, the partners can set the objectives at a far higher level. So the inevitable negotiations lead to a goal far closer to the transformation point. Whereas in my experience, the communal emphasis on consensus building combines with powerful status quo interests and the psychology of business as usual, so that the compromise point remains close to the failing status quo.

Even within partnerships there has typically been some further definition of responsibility, where a few partners have been responsible for active decision-making. Certain individuals steer the

boat and steer it with individual judgement, individual responsibility and some reporting process to a broader group of partners who have a real interest but are not active in the immediate judgements that many of these partnership projects call for. To use Birthright Israel as an example: Charles Bronfman and I have made most of the decisions, but we have had outstanding professional help and we have been guided importantly by the professionals whom we have personally chosen to run the program. So technically, there has been no priority for “consensus” in Birthright.

In the case of Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education (PEJE), we have twelve partners who all believe in the furtherance of Jewish day school education. Most have participated through professional delegates who helped shape programs and priorities. About half the partners are personally active. The others have left it to them to make the decisions.

PEJE illustrates another advantage of partnerships. PEJE works toward universal availability of day school education by insuring there is a school in any community that can sustain it. It also helps put up an additional school in a community where it can attract a wider circle of parents. By uniting twelve partners, we show that the idea is not one person's schtick but an emerging new norm in Jewish life and philanthropy.

EV: Don't you run the risk that the people you appoint to your projects will

Michael Steinhardt is chairman of Jewish Life Network.



“I think partnerships arise first because of a vision on the part of some person or persons who see a real need that is not being fulfilled by other communal resources or communal philanthropic enterprises.”

be reluctant to contradict you? Will they merely rubber-stamp the will of the leader, leading to a partnership of one?

MS: I happen to thrive on differences of opinion. My business style was once described as “management by confrontation.” (I’m not sure how flattering that description was.) The point is that I’m rather comfortable with differences and frankly prefer there to be a complete airing of opinion. I take the view that each of the people involved is strong enough, open enough and respectful enough to have a vigorous and at times uncomfortable discussion toward arriving at a wise conclusion. Partnerships must have as an absolute necessity the ability of individual partners to express their views even when they are at variance with those of other partners. The process by which that variance is ameliorated or, ideally, even eliminated is a very constructive one.

EV: So far you have spoken mostly about shared vision and shared financial commitment. What about partnerships of other resources? For instance, with Birthright Israel, one philanthropy could handle marketing and recruitment, one philanthropy could handle programming and education, etc.

MS: No, that’s not necessary. I don’t think partnership evolves because of some jointly recognized achievements, attributes or qualities that allow some people to do some things better than others. I think partnerships arise first because of a vision on the part of some person or persons who see a real need that is not being fulfilled by other communal resources or communal philanthropic enterprises. It’s not so logical to say Mr. X, you do this, or Ms. Y, you do

that. It just doesn’t work that way.

EV: Do you think one reason partnerships are gaining force in the Jewish community today is that they are a reaction against the fragmentation that has divided the Jewish world? Are partnerships an urge to stop the disintegration?

MS: I think it’s a leap of faith to suggest that partnership is becoming so popular in the Jewish world. We can think of a few of them which can be counted on two hands, maybe on one hand. As for those that do exist, I think they have arisen in part because of the generalized decline that continues to occur in Jewish philanthropy both in terms of magnitude and in terms of quality.

EV: Can you be more specific about this deterioration?

MS: Sure. The percentage of the philanthropy of Jews going to Jewish causes declines each year. Not unrelated to this is the fact that philanthropic giving relative to the income of the givers has never been lower. This represents a terrible decline in the once-soaring levels of Jewish giving we once had. In some sense if one wanted to pretend he was Emile Zola, one could accuse the organizations of not doing such a good job.

EV: And how are partnerships a reaction to this?

MS: Because if the central organizations are not performing at an optimum level, there will be less reliance upon them and less confidence in them. This in turn leads to people acting outside of that organizational context.

EV: But if partnerships emerge merely as a method of working outside the organi-

zational system, then partnership is not an ideal in itself, but simply a default response to the status quo.

MS: Yes, I agree that if there were the sense that the central community’s philanthropies were first-rate and were anticipating successfully the community’s needs, there would not be the same focus on partnerships.

EV: What is your view of the strengths and the weaknesses of the partnership approach to solving problems in the American Jewish community?

MS: The strength is that he who has had the vision, and has had the courage to go ahead and initiate the partnership, is usually he who is involved in the decision making. Therefore there is a distinct and direct relationship between originality of the idea, execution of the idea, and responsibility for the idea. This in itself is a great virtue. The weakness is that it’s done outside of community consensus. It is an undemocratic approach to things.

EV: The Birthright Israel Initiative has used the concept of partnerships a great deal – e.g. with other philanthropists, with the Federations, and even with the government of Israel. Do you feel this has been a success from the fundraising side, and from the program implementation side?

MS: On the program side it’s been an extraordinary success, a success beyond my wildest dreams. From the fundraising side, some people call it a success because we have gotten the government of Israel to commit and they have never committed before to anything related to the financing of Diaspora educational programs. We have also been unusually successful in getting the total number of requisite philanthropists in this time frame. We are not sure what is going to happen with the federations, where we have made some progress. The federations are important because they represent the community in a certain sense. In a peculiar way they are the crux of the issue here. This comes right down to some of the things we have spoken about. Here the partners have gone out on their own, taken the initiative, made judgements, really gotten way ahead of the curve. They have succeeded in convincing the State of Israel something that they still haven’t necessarily convinced the community. But if we achieve success with the federations, then it will indeed be a complete success. ✿

As our American Jewish community enters a new millennium and our federation movement begins its second century, both face a crisis and an opportunity of historic proportions. This is primarily a crisis of faith and leadership, vision and meaning. But it is also a crisis of governance and structure. Our children are asking: How can we create meaning and community and at the same time create organizations that will allow for the independence and choice that our times demand?

Establishing A New Mission

The central struggle of the federation system as it begins its second century is the development of a new shared vision. There are two very different perspectives on the nature of this vision and the future of the federation movement. A recent *Wall Street Journal* article captured the dichotomy well: Will overseas needs and “sacred survival” continue to be the glue that holds our system together or will we allow a true development of the new theme of “renaissance”? The nature of the vision that emerges to guide our future is not unrelated to the structure that we must create. The old “sacred survival” agenda seemed to require highly centralized fundraising and planning. This system was stable and effective, but it was also very slow to change and often seemed literally and figuratively frozen and limited. The renaissance agenda, on the other hand, demands more openness, new partners and far more flexibility.

Beyond these realities, it is becoming increasingly clear that a new generation of donors requires more direct connection to smaller scale, more personal charities with less bureaucracy and more ability to “make a difference.”

The Funnel and the “Partnership” Network

To understand the old Federation/UJA system, picture a funnel with multiple tubes at the bottom. The donor pours in his or her money. From the point of view of most donors, decision-making takes place at local federations (or nationally through the UJA) in a “black box” and money flows out the bottom to a number of pre-determined institutions — a classic “benefactor/beneficiary” relationship. The

Barry Shrage is the president of Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston.

Network Partnerships: A New Structure for the Age of Jewish Renaissance

by **BARRY SHRAGE**

system we’re beginning to develop in Boston is more like a computer network — linking donors and communal needs with local and international agencies and serving more like a central processor, joining visions and nurturing creativity.

In a partnership both sides give and take. Both sides play an important role. Both sides work together to shape strategy and goals. In our work in Boston, we identified hundreds of new groups and programs that desperately wanted a Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP) connection. Many of these groups were not even asking for financial assis-

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tance, but simply access to ideas, fundraising support and participation in communal strategy. As we completed our Strategic Plan, we realized that as we responded to their needs, we expanded our connection to the community and increased the size of our communal network and our “reach” as a federation.

The Synagogue Partnership

Congregations are the most widespread form of grassroots communal organization available to American Jews. Surveys show that American Jews of all denominations, unmarried as well as intermarried, continue to feel closer to their congregations than to any other form of Jewish organizational life. Many new congrega-

tions are already showing surprising energy, reflecting the power of volunteers who are hungry for real community and spiritual meaning in their lives.

Central to the work of the new federation system and integral to the renaissance process must be a new partnership with the synagogue world. Congregations are not the only locus of community energy, or the only source of face-to-face community, but they are a massive and widespread system of potential engagement that has for too long stood outside the federation matrix without significant federation support or synergy.

A New Focus for Federation/Synagogue Cooperation for Jewish Continuity

Central to our strategy for Jewish renaissance is a process of reinventing and reenvisioning the congregation and the federation to meet rapidly changing needs. The congregation of the 21st century must be transformed from a house of prayer, on the one hand, and a school for children, on the other, into an integrated educational environment that brings all the elements and arms of our movements and federations *together* with one overarching aim — the spiritual/religious/ethical transformation of every Jewish family that passes through the congregational gateway. The critical touchstone for the work of *Tikkun Olam* will require significant new financial resources and a true partnership with federations. For this to happen, the vision and the structure of each will need to change in revolutionary ways.

Building the Jewish Renaissance in the 21st Century

We now have a historic opportunity to focus the great human energy of the Jewish people on creating a golden age of Jewish learning, culture and spiritual engagement that will revitalize Jewish life today for ourselves and ensure a vibrant future for generations to come. Continuity alone is not an adequate rationale for Jewish existence. Our goal, our opportunity, is a renaissance that can transform Jewish life in America, in Israel and around the world. We must commit ourselves to building and strengthening vibrant, inclusive Jewish communities here and abroad, taking as our model what Professor Arnold Eisen describes as a community “with Jewish values and learning at its core and social justice as its goal.” ✿



From Coalitions *to* Partnerships *to* Mergers

by STEVEN BAYME

American Jewry has built a network of Jewish communal organizations that not only exceeds by far anything comparable in Jewish history but has also aroused the envy of virtually every non-Jewish group eager to learn whether the secrets of Jewish success in America are replicable. Precisely at a time when forebodings about the Jewish future are legitimate for reasons of assimilation and mixed marriage, the communal structure appears so vibrant that prophecies of imminent doom sound exaggerated.

Yet fewer numbers of Jews will mean weaker and smaller Jewish organizations. Conversely, greater commitment to Judaism translates into more intensive involvement in Jewish communal life. Therefore, despite external perceptions of Jewish organizational and communal vitality, virtually every Jewish organization is reexamining its agenda and asking whether it is well-positioned to meet the new challenges of the 21st century. Given the reality of assimilation, some shakedown in Jewish organizational life is likely, and those agencies that demonstrate their capacity to reposition themselves and develop new strengths and expertise will be those most likely to survive such a shakedown.

In this context of looming assimilation and organizational repositioning, new partnerships and even mergers between agencies have already become evident. To be sure, Jewish organizations have often

formed coalitions, in particular in the political arena, so as to speak with a stronger voice. These coalitions, however, have often proved little more than loose alliances, fashioned to meet immediate external threats with little impact upon internal communal culture. In recent years, however, new partnerships have developed—between federations and synagogues, between philanthropists, and between the Israeli Government and Diaspora Jewish organizations — for the specific purposes of addressing current challenges of continuity and assimilation. In at least one case a full-blown merger occurred, creating the newly-formed United Jewish Communities from the relatively disparate Council of Jewish Federations, United Jewish Appeal, and United Israel Appeal.

Several factors have driven these developments. First, limited economic resources suggest elimination of unnecessary overhead and duplication so as to free funds for the programmatic work that underlies organizational purpose. More profoundly, the emergence of partnerships reflects the need to bridge traditional divides in addressing current communal needs. Thus the New York Federation, among others, has increasingly sought to fund creative programming within synagogues, thereby breaking the informal separation between civil and religious sectors.

Most importantly, partnerships reflect the desire of leading philanthropists to dedicate resources to specific needs and launch new initiatives to address them. In so doing,

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they effectively create “facts on the ground” that existing institutions may well imitate at a future point. Thus philanthropists can lead by action and example rather than await full communal consensus.

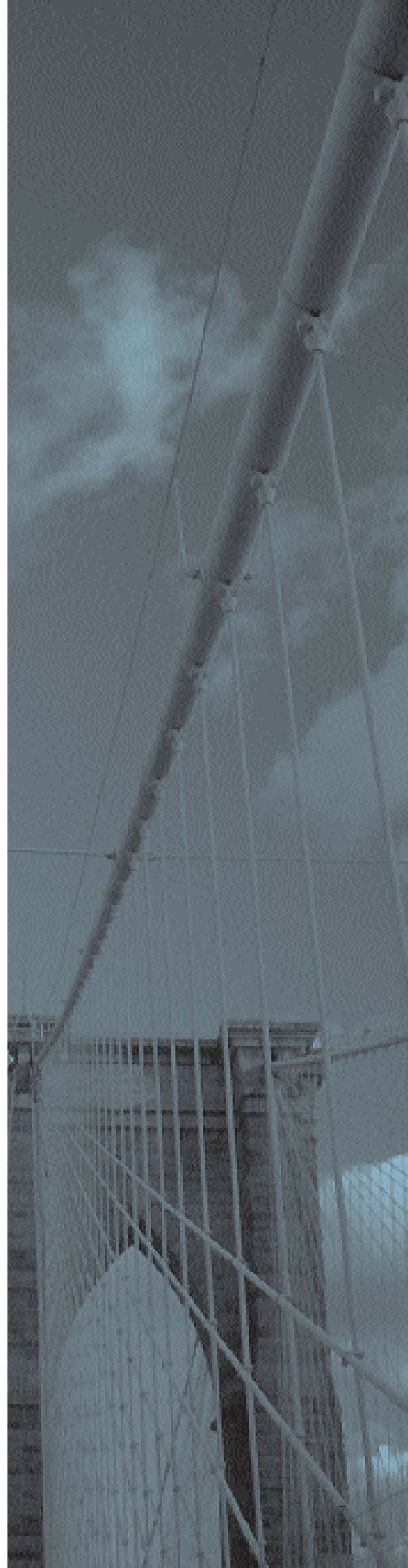
Much here can and should be applauded. That leading philanthropists are pooling resources to secure the Jewish future in itself helps alter philanthropic norms and signals to the community that there is no greater priority than combating assimilation. New projects, in turn, may be funded on an experimental basis before the community more generally is prepared to devote resources to them.

The most significant drawback to this development lies in the as yet unanswered question as to whether it may inhibit communal debate by imposing an artificial conformity of opinion in the name of chasing the availability of philanthropic funding. One need not be crudely Marxist to note how concentrations of ever larger amounts of resources in smaller numbers of hands can limit the freedom to dissent for fear of losing one’s next potential grant or donor. The Hebrew phrase, *lo ha-meah, lo-hadeah* (“money talks”), resonates even more strongly in the new world of partnerships. One would do well to recall that one reason American Jewry built so many organizations was precisely to allow the diversity of expression and plurality of opinion that have allowed for both traditionalist and liberal agendas to flourish. One may legitimately ask whether distinctive, minority, and politically-incorrect opinions will continue to be heard

or whether one will run the risk of finding oneself marginalized for daring to challenge philanthropic wisdom.

These questions have no immediate answers. For the present, new partnerships hold out the possibility of formulating new communal priorities, providing resources to address them, and effecting fundamental communal change. Clearly, new alliances are necessary in critical areas, e.g. advocacy for Jewish education. Moreover, it is precisely on the agenda of Jewish continuity where the “culture of consensus” long favored by the community may be failing our current needs. Precisely because the internal questions of Jewish identity are themselves so divisive, it may not be helpful, and indeed it may prove counterproductive, to avoid divisiveness by lending communal support to whatever programs may interest Jews (and, in some cases, non-Jews as well) regardless of their long term impact upon Judaic cultural and religious distinctiveness. In this sense, philanthropic partnerships wish to act quickly, to realize a “big idea.” Yet such “big ideas” usually generate counter-voices, and they need to be heard.

Partnerships, to be sure, have not mandated ideological conformity. Some have tried to be inclusive of dissenting opinion. Yet even as we advocate new coalitions and applaud new partnership initiatives, let us be mindful that the old adage, “two Jews, three opinions” no less lauded the diversity of Jewish communal expression than it bemoaned the absence of Jewish unity. ❁





For Jewish education funders, partnerships may be desirable, even necessary. But partnerships are also inherently fragile, even frustrating.

Education is about partnerships: partnerships of teachers and students that makes learning possible; of the generations, coming together to transmit culture and values; of parents and schools; of those who establish and pay for educational programs and those who benefit from them.

In recent years, as philanthropic funding of Jewish education has moved to a more visible place within the world of Jewish giving, the focus on partnerships has grown commensurately. Funders are working harder to build genuine partnerships with those whom they are supporting as program deliverers. Growing numbers are seeking better ways both to ensure that their funds are being used well and to help recipients succeed in doing just this. And, as our horizons and ambitions for Jewish education expand to encompass far-reaching initiatives and systemic change, funders are beginning to forge partnerships with one another. These funding consortia — of which the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education (PEJE) is the most prominent example — make possible initiatives on a scale greater than any single funder is prepared to embrace.

For Jewish education funders, partnerships may be desirable, even necessary. But partnerships are also inherently fragile, even frustrating. Understanding how to forge *effective* partnerships — with educators, institutions, program participants, and other funders — is one of the vital skills that committed funders need to cultivate in themselves and in others with whom they work. Here are some issues that frequently determine whether partnerships soar or founder:

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“Get Yourself a Companion” Funders, Partnerships, and Jewish Education

by DR. JONATHAN WOOCHEER

1. Who sets the agenda. Jewish education is resource-poor. In such a climate, the role of funders in setting priorities and shaping agendas, both for individual institutions and for the Jewish community as a whole, is necessarily delicate. The issue is not really one of “boutique philanthropy” vs. “communally” determined priorities, as it is sometimes presented. Rather, the fundamental question is how *all* of the legitimately interested parties — funders, visionaries, administrators, teachers, students — can speak to and be heard by one another as agendas are determined.

This isn't easy. There are few forums where such a conversation can take place. Instead, funders interested in a “partnership model” of agenda-setting need to create their own ways of doing so. At the Covenant Foundation, for example, we not only hold an open grants competition each year, but also identify specific areas within Jewish education we are especially interested in supporting. In this way, the board feels that it is involved in shaping a larger Jewish educational agenda, but not to the exclusion of others who bring their own visions and ideas. Other funders will want to “partner” in different ways. The key is to recognize that no one has all the wisdom. The more that funders are prepared to engage with others in formulating their visions and agendas, the more likely they are to be successful in realizing them down the road.

2. The nature of the working relationship between funder and recipient. Precisely because the relationship is inherently asymmetrical, true partnering between program funders and program providers is difficult. The keys to achieving a relationship that merits the term “partnership” are:

1) reciprocal accountability; 2) openness; and 3) a shared commitment to learning.

Typically, we think of recipients of funding as being accountable to those providing the resources. But it is equally important that funders see themselves as continuing to be accountable to those whom they support. This accountability takes the form of being accessible when unanticipated problems or opportunities arise, being willing to make modifications in the terms of grants when appropriate, and, most of all, finding ways to help support recipients succeed in what is, after all, a shared ambition. Increasingly, funders are adopting this approach by providing grant recipients with technical assistance, introductions to other potential funders, and even supplementary grants when circumstances warrant.

Reciprocal accountability cannot be implemented without openness. Grantees must be willing to share the real story of what is happening. They are likely to do so only if funders establish an atmosphere of trust. Reaching this stage, where the relationship really does feel like a partnership, requires time and practice.

Most important, a partnership relationship needs to be based on a shared desire to *learn*. Doing educational work and providing financial support for such work are good in their own right. But even better is doing so while being part of a process of continuing innovation, experimentation, evaluation, and improvement. Funders and recipients can contribute to this unfolding process of improvement when they are explicit in making learning *how* to improve part of their shared agenda. This also requires that the fruits of

such learning be shared with others. Again, funders and recipients should be partners in this endeavor, which means that funders need to take some responsibility for providing the financial wherewithal needed for dissemination to take place.

3. How funders work with one another.

Philanthropic partnerships like PEJE, or those that are energizing Birthright Israel, Synagogue 2000, STAR, the Jewish Venture Network, and a growing number of local initiatives, represent a powerful new force on the Jewish educational scene. The potential of such funding partnerships is enormous. But they also raise a host of new issues — especially when one or more of the partners is a “public” Jewish institution (e.g., a federation or the State of Israel).

Large-scale philanthropic partnerships multiply many-fold the problems of agenda-setting and of establishing solid working relationships with those who must implement the visions. Internally, it may be difficult to hold such partnerships together when inevitable differences in perspective or levels of commitment emerge, or when the original agenda begins to metamorphose in new directions. Also, the sheer size, financial capacity, and ability to garner publicity of some of these partnerships may arouse concerns that they will be able to bend other institutions and funders to their agenda, placing alternative visions and projects at a distinct disadvantage.

Will there be more such funding partnerships in the future? We should hope that the answer is “yes.” But these partnerships will make their maximum contribution to Jewish education if they also embody the other principles of partnership noted above: agendas based on extensive conversations among multiple stakeholders, and integration between funders and front-line institutions to help each succeed in reaching mutually shared goals.

“K'neh lecha haver,” “get yourself a companion,” teaches Pirkei Avot. It's good advice. Jewish education funders should welcome the new climate of partnership — and do what's needed to make these partnerships work. 🌱

The Israel Cooperative Program: A Creative Partnership

by RABBI RACHEL COWAN

Six years ago, the children of Joy Ungerleider Mayerson, ז"ל — an extremely innovative, passionately committed philanthropist — assumed the leadership of her Dorot Foundation.

Joy's children wanted to carry on her work in Israel, but none of them had her personal connection with the land. They believed that the work of the Cummings Foundation matched in spirit and style the work of their mother while sharing their own interests in the promotion of civil society and the protection of the environment. For the Cummings Foundation, which also lacked staff on the ground in Israel, this partnership offered the opportunity to expand the scope of its grant making and its effectiveness.

Peter Ungerleider, ז"ל, the oldest of Joy's children, and Dr. Ernie Frerichs, the director of the Dorot Foundation, met often with me to work out the initial structure of the relationship. We created a steering committee for the partnership and narrowed the field of interest in order to focus on two areas. We chose environmental protection and Jewish pluralism as two critical yet underfunded issues that were close to the

hearts of our board members. We then commissioned two experts living in Israel to write papers outlining possible foci and strategies in each area.

Dr. Elan Ezrachi's paper, "On Creating a Jewish Renaissance," pointed out the importance of supporting Israelis who were developing — through a broad range of organizations — a multi-faceted, non-fundamentalist Israeli Jewish identity. He found that Israelis might express their Jewishness as Reform or Conservative, but more likely it would find expression through art and culture, through secular life style ceremonies, through open, pluralistic *batei midrash*. These Israelis need Jewish experiences that feel authentic, meaningful, and uniquely *Israeli* before they can view Judaism as something for themselves, not as the property of the Orthodox.

Philip Warburg, an environmental lawyer who had moved to Israel with his family, described a variety of environmental crises, but focused on transportation and open space protection as two causes which could benefit from the kinds of intervention our two organizations could afford. He also argued that it was extremely important to build up a sophisticated environmental movement in Israel, with education, advocacy, and policy capacities, on the grassroots and professional levels.

We created a partnership between the Israeli staff, the American staff, and the steering committee. After four years of grant making totaling \$9,000,000, the Israel Cooperative Program (ICP) can report many successes, both in terms of the development of these two fields of work and in the growth and impact of many of the individual grantees. There is now a strong movement for Jewish Renais-

Rabbi Rachel Cowan is Program Director for Jewish Life at the Nathan Cummings Foundation.

sance in Israel, which flowers in a thousand forms. There is now a rapidly growing, diverse, and increasingly sophisticated environmental movement, consisting of influential policy and educational organizations, and a vastly expanded network of grassroots community groups, including Arabs in the Galilee and the Negev. And American Jews are beginning to understand that the environment is one of the most critical issues facing Israel's future.

By having staff on the ground in Israel, our grant dollars have been leveraged in significant ways. Our staff has provided technical assistance to grantees on organizational development, fund-raising, strategic thinking and networking. They have connected grantees to other foundations, to individual donors and to Federations, and they have worked with other foundation representatives to form funders groups. They have also worked with Ernie and me in the US to promote the importance and potential for funding these issues.

It is challenging to bring together two foundations with different cultures, modes of operation, and passions. The Dorot Foundation put substantially more funds into the grants pool, but both foundations shared the overhead equally. Dorot always wanted Cummings to increase its financial participation; Cummings board members always wanted Dorot board members to commit time to site visits in Israel. Each responded to the other. As of next year, the grants budget will be divided equally between Dorot and Cummings—though the total will be significantly less than it has been previously — and some Dorot board members will travel to Israel. One thing we learned in this partnership is that we both struggle with the compromises required, and deeply appreciate the benefits gained.

The biggest challenge to ICP has been to bring in other partners. Expanding such a close partnership is not easy. First of all, once a partnership is established, others tend to see it as the property of the founders. It is important to most foundations to have

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their own identity, their own name connected to their grants. Secondly, when the funding is targeted as specifically as ours is, it is hard to find other funders with identical goals. We are two large foundations, but we don't have the flexibility to respond spontaneously to another funder's offer of partnership on his or her enterprise. Furthermore, for foundations without staff in Israel, joining ICP meant laying out funds for overhead, something many funders (erroneously, in my mind) pride themselves on not doing. The small foundations, in particular, felt they would be lost in relating to larger players. For foundations with staff, ICP was interesting and useful as a resource, but not as a partner.

In this light, we concluded that ICP could best serve as a catalyst, not as a funding pool. We would continue to work with other foundations with similar interests. We would cooperate on projects, and become a resource for people who wanted to fund in similar areas, if not exactly the ones where we were most specialized.

We realized, however, that to promote ICP as a partnership opportunity, as a catalyst, or as a resource required more time and money than we could make available. What is really needed is a Foundation Services Center which could work with a number of funders, helping them to think strategically, plan focused programs, identify grantees, and evaluate progress.

In my experience, the Jewish funding community needs to grow in this direction. Working together synergistically or in close partnership, funders can think together about building a whole field rather than isolated projects. They can expand their knowledge base and skills. They can support research, evaluation and reflection. This is the direction in which we are moving, the expanded kind of partnership we are seeking. 🌸





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Partnerships mean just that: A joining together of individuals of like mind who have a shared vision of such magnitude that the goal is beyond the scope of any one individual to achieve using his own resources. But perhaps the important point of significance is not the enormity of the vision, but the fact that the partnership represents a joint effort of people who are otherwise disparate in their lifestyles, occupations, and localities. —MICHAEL STEINHARDT