

# Transforming Jewish Communities Through Legacy Giving

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*By Arlene D. Schiff*

Maintaining the vibrancy and strength of Jewish communities across the country continues to be a concern for those of us involved, whether professionally or as lay leaders, in the Jewish communal enterprise. How do we ensure that the variety of Jewish organizations that make up the fabric of our communities continue to exist for future generations and are financially stable to meet current and emerging needs?



Endowments, once a luxury, are now an essential element of every Jewish organization's financial stability strategy. How do we build and grow these endowments so they provide the level of funding needed to compensate for declining annual giving? While at the same time converting our Jewish communal organizations from competitors to collaborators and encouraging our most loyal and committed donors to support these valued institutions at a level many never thought possible.

Legacy giving initiatives are transforming Jewish communities across the country by addressing all of these issues. Not only are they taking advantage of the tremendous transfer of wealth provided by the baby boomer generation, but these efforts engage younger generations in changing the language and landscape of giving.

In just two years, through partnerships with Jewish federations and Jewish community foundations in 12 communities across the country, the LIFE & LEGACY™ program of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation has assisted 183 Jewish organizations in locals, as small as Omaha and as large as Chicago, to secure more than 2,000 legacy commitments with an estimated valued of over \$70 million in future gifts. More importantly, these communities are actively engaged in integrating legacy giving into their philanthropic culture, fostering camaraderie and respect among Jewish organizations and providing generous and forward-thinking members with the opportunity to express their passion, purpose, and commitment to sustaining vital programs and services.

One of the hallmarks of Harold Grinspoon's philanthropic strategy is to inspire other donors. To encourage them, he offers incentive grants to spark conversations which ultimately support Jewish institutions of all kinds. It's a method that he very successfully integrated into his Jewish camping program to help endow camps across North America. With LIFE & LEGACY, a two-year-old program, he is also realizing gains. His \$3 million investment has already resulted in \$70 million in future gifts.

So here is what we have found to be the key elements of a successful legacy initiative: a comprehensive training curriculum, ongoing support, a structure which prioritizes organizational collaboration, establishing goals, tracking efforts and most importantly monetary incentives which motivate organizations to make

legacy giving a priority and donors to take action during a limited timeframe.

LIFE & LEGACY partner communities are provided matching grants to support the implementation of the program as well as funds to incentivize their local organizations to be successful. Legacy commitment goals are established for each organization and the community as a whole. Matching grants are paid on an annual basis upon achievement of the community goal. Organizational incentives are granted each year as institutions achieve, or in many cases, exceed their individual goals. The receiving organizations have the discretion to use these funds as they see fit. With a return on investment that is more than 20 fold, it's a formula that works.

Just as matching grants encourage donors to increase annual giving, incentive grants motivate donors to take the necessary action today that will result in after-lifetime contributions to organizational endowments that are critical to future operations. Additionally, as a result of the collaborative structure of the program, we have found that on average donors are making legacy commitments to multiple organizations.

Because each commitment counts toward organizational goals one Jewish professional told me that her greatest joy was calling the professional of another organization to advise them that a legacy commitment was secured. And this cooperative spirit is extending beyond the boundaries of individual communities as evidenced by the development of a network of Jewish professionals who are sharing best practices, brainstorming around challenges, supporting each other's efforts, and thinking strategically about encouraging legacy commitments to Jewish institutions throughout North America.

Through the mobilization of communities, both big and small, to integrate legacy giving into their philanthropic culture in an incentivized, systematic and collaborative way, we will provide our most loyal donors with an opportunity to support vital Jewish organizations in a way they previously thought impossible, strengthen and maintain dynamic Jewish communities, and assure a strong Jewish future.

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