

Shared Future, Shared Resources

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by Jason Brzoska, Adam Gaynor and Becky Voorwinde

The economic downturn and the Madoff scandal have escalated discussion in the Jewish communal world about collaboration. In fact, the recommendations of the just-released report [The Innovation Ecosystem: Emergence of a New Jewish Landscape](#) indicate that organizations want to and should be collaborating and sharing resources. The report says organizations should “collaborate and cooperate to reduce costs.” As organizations who are productively partnering with one another, we found that the initial time and effort put into building relationships between our organizations has truly paid off in saved time and money.

In nature, when resources are scarce, survival instincts kick in. In the Jewish organizational world today, funding, the lifeblood of not-for-profits, is limited. Strategic collaboration with like-minded organizations, while often beneficial in normal times, can be one of the most effective means of stretching our dollars in these lean economic years.

Strategic collaboration goes beyond personal catch-ups and coffee meetings; it is about identifying opportunities to share resources effectively. As small organizations, we can achieve ends beyond our own means through the sharing of both knowledge and infrastructure.

This past Fall, through informal networking, Rebecca Voorwinde, Director of Alumni Engagement for the [Bronfman Youth Fellowships in Israel](#) (BYFI), and Adam Gaynor, Acting Executive Director of [The Curriculum Initiative](#) (TCI), learned they were both interested in investing in a new database platform. BYFI was able to identify the best platform to use through their initial research, while TCI did the legwork to identify the most knowledgeable and cost effective database consultant. In the end, both organizations saved time and money by choosing the same platform and same consultant.

After [MyJewishLearning.com](#) (MJL) opened the doors of its new office in 2008, its leadership realized that MJL was only using its conference room for a couple of hours a week, so it decided to invite other organizations who need such a space but do not have their own. When out-of-town organizations need a home base while working in New York, MJL opens up its offices to allow other professionals an “office away from home.” MJL understands the value of this because, for 6 years, MyJewishLearning.com lived as a largely remote organization in several such shared office spaces,

including that of the Bronfman Youth Fellowships' office in Albany, the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington, and the [90 Oak Street communal space](#) in suburban Boston.

MJL and TCI frequently share fundraising and outreach strategies. As young fundraisers, we are learning from our successes, and our failures, all the time. By exchanging information about best practices, successful strategies and research, we are maximizing our ability to raise money, expanding our reach, and in the process creating an informal peer network.

The Jewish people are not a private mailing list. It is in our best interest to share contacts and potential supporters. All three of our organizations have utilized each other's networks to promote opportunities of relevance to our constituencies. For example, students who participated in TCI's programs have become Bronfman Youth Fellows because of TCI's willingness to promote this opportunity to their networks. If an opportunity offered by another organization can benefit our constituencies, we believe it is our obligation to promote it to them.

In addition to financial support, the best way that individual funders and Foundations can assist is by acting as a convener of these relationships. From their unique perch, they have a bird's eye view of the Jewish communal world, giving them the ability to speak with multiple organizations who are constantly experimenting, and to hear the needs of each organization. Funders can use their higher level perspective to disseminate lessons learned and to make *shidduchim* for potential resource sharing.

The shift from a closed organizational culture to one that is more open to working together requires a certain level of commitment among individuals, organizations and their supporters. There needs to be sincere follow-up, and a genuine trust between each party engaged in such collaboration.

We are writing as a call to action, both to non-profits and funders. Fostering a collaborative and open culture among Jewish organizations is key to the survival of many organizations during these difficult times. We believe in the power of collaboration to further our individual visions which, though not identical, complement one another and add to the collective well-being of the Jewish community.

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