LESSONS FROM THE PINNACLE

Coordinated Innovation
Shifts the Landscape
of Jewish Teen Education
& Engagement

JEWISH TEEN
Education & Engagement
FUNDER COLLABORATIVE

Rosov
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INTRODUCTION

*I*t has been said that the most valuable perspective is the one you don't have. When it comes to Jewish teen engagement, I feel privileged to have viewed and influenced the landscape from multiple angles, acquiring important perspectives along the way. Creating 4Front Baltimore alongside my colleagues and funding partners was no easy task, but it offered an up-close view to the challenges and celebrations of this work. I'm grateful for those experiences on the ground and the constant engagement with teenaged participants and co-creators, their parents, and local youth professionals that such a position enabled. Cultivated and internalizing that empathy has served me well since transitioning to the balcony this past January, when I assumed a role with the Funder Collaborative itself. Here, I have the honor and task to hold the bigger picture, supporting the flow of work and sharing both progress and opportunities with our many interested friends and stakeholders. The pinnacle report on the Cross-Community Evaluation presented here is a unique sort of convergence of these two perspectives—and in many ways, conceptually at least, feels like a mirror to my own professional trajectory these past six years.

Our ancient rabbis suggested that a person should recite 100 blessings a day (Talmud Bavli, Menachot 43b). Those same scholars composed scores upon scores of such blessings, enabling people to fulfill this declared obligation. They authored blessings for nearly everything one could imagine, from once-in-a-lifetime holy experiences to daily occurrences. It is not surprising then that there is a well-known blessing for what the following report signifies. The *Shehechiyanu* is a blessing to mark notable milestones and recognize the significance of a particular moment. Importantly, this prayer cultivates a sense of appreciation for the myriads of others who helped us to arrive at this time and place. In this sacred context, we are proud to share the following Pinnacle Report of the Cross-Community Evaluation.
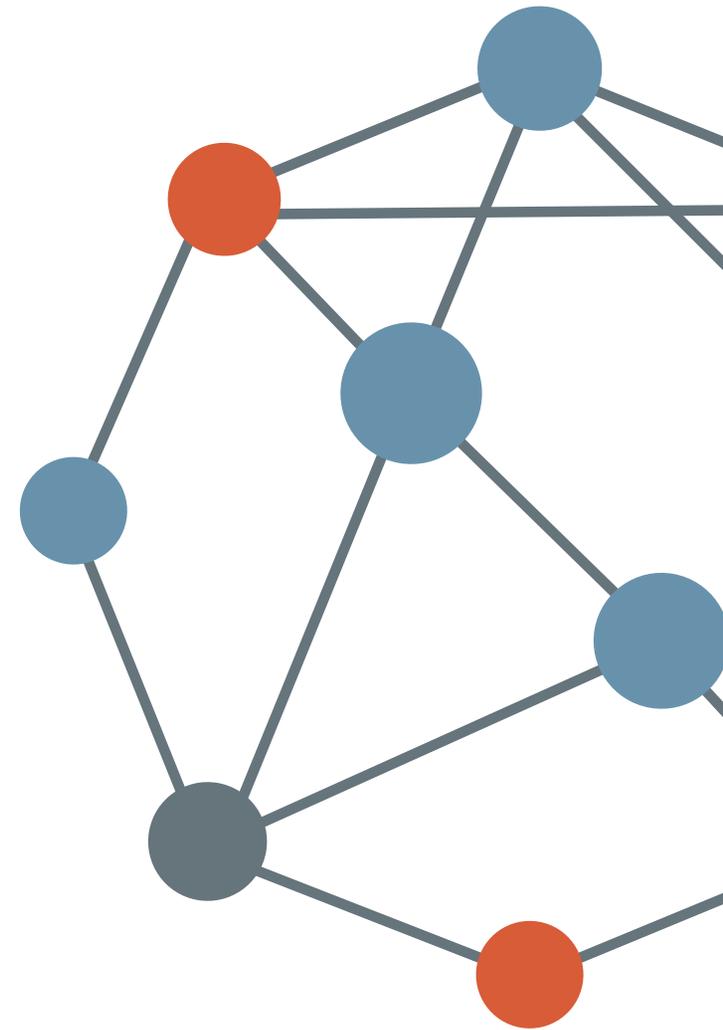
This designation, "pinnacle," is an apt one, as the document captures the peak of this initial and principal climb to significantly improve, increase, and broaden meaningful Jewish teen education and engagement. Yet, as the report itself suggests, there are still plenty of mountains to be conquered. The work of each initiative in the ten Funder Collaborative communities and that of the national Funder Collaborative itself will continue in different capacities still for years. The lessons offered here are the most universal across the ten communities and, most importantly, the implications of those lessons can inform any teen education and engagement effort. While we cannot reflect the entire body of work, accomplishments, or challenges in any given community, we strive to offer vital reflections on an ambitious, coordinated, large-scale effort in the hopes of contributing to ongoing communal change.

We are grateful to all those who dedicated their skill, resources, wisdom and hearts to this meaningful work. Your diligent efforts and untiring commitment both to and on behalf of the teens at the center of this investment made possible this pinnacle moment in time.

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech haOlam, shechiyanu, v'kiyamanu, v'higiyanu la z'man hazeh. Blessed are You, Eternal One, Ruler of the universe, for giving us life, for sustaining us, and for enabling us to reach this season.

Rabbi Dena Shaffer
Director of Learning and Engagement
Jewish Teen Education & Engagement Funder Collaborative

BACKGROUND

Launched in 2013, The Jewish Teen Education & Engagement Funder Collaborative is an ambitious effort to change the culture and practice of how Jewish educational programming is designed and experienced by thousands of young people in 10 different communities across the United States. Spurred by a recognition that teen education and engagement was for many years the "poor relation" of pre–B'nai Mitzvah programming and of efforts to engage college-age students, the Funder Collaborative sought to rebalance the playing field of Jewish educational investment and activity.

This broad goal was distilled into a set of six **Shared Measures of Success:**

1 **NUMBERS OF ENGAGED TEENS**

Dramatically increase the number of teens in targeted geographic areas engaged in Jewish learning during their high school years.

2 **DIVERSITY OF ENGAGED TEENS**

Involve Jewish teens who come from diverse Jewish backgrounds.

3 **TEEN LEARNING AND GROWTH AS JEWS**

Provide Jewish teens with experiences that will contribute to their Jewish learning and growth during their high school years.

4 **SUSTAINABLE MODELS**

Build models for Jewish teen education and engagement that are sustainable.

5 **TEEN EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT A PRIORITY FOR LEADERS AND PARENTS**

Establish Jewish teen education and engagement as a priority for local Jewish community leaders and parents.

6 **SUPPORTING YOUTH PROFESSIONALS**

Ensure youth professionals feel well-prepared with appropriate skills and knowledge, and feel valued as professionals.

While these Measures of Success served as a common set of aspirational goals for the communities and the national funding partners, the community-based initiatives themselves were established as a series of distinct locally formed enterprises and intentionally did not adopt a shared programming template. In this way, they could be sensitive to local needs, build on existing strengths, and uncover or create new innovative programs. To derive deep learning from the initiatives themselves, as well as from the effort overall, each community retained an independent evaluator and the Funder Collaborative retained the services of a Cross-Community Evaluation team. That team developed four distinct research tools that were utilized by the community-based evaluators with the intent of generating a "cross-community" picture of what was taking place across the country. These shared tools helped document:

1. Who the **teens** were that participated in programming and what they gained from these experiences (a special contribution of the specifically developed Teen Jewish Learning and Engagement Scales);

2. What **parents** thought of these experiences and what they hoped their children would gain;

3. Who were the **teen professionals** served by the initiatives, what they learned from professional development, and what they wanted to learn further; and

4. The extent to which efforts to change the **local teen landscape** had truly taken root (explored though what became known as the Sustainability Diagnostic Tool).

Through mining aggregated data gathered from teens, parents, and teen professionals in all 10 communities, the Cross-Community Evaluation team produced a set of reports providing a picture of the teens participating in local programs, the professionals who lead these programs, and some of the outcomes produced for the participants. In addition, the Cross-Community Evaluation team also produced a series of three case studies that documented the Funder Collaborative's genesis and how its governance, organization, and operation evolved.

At this time, eight years after the first local initiative was launched in Boston, we explore what has been accomplished to date. We examine to what extent the Funder Collaborative's goals were realized and the main educational lessons learned from this project. We employ a high-altitude view to search for patterns across the 10 participating communities and across the arc of multiple years. We draw on findings already produced by local evaluators in each of the communities and on the insights gained by those evaluators, as gathered in their annual reports. These insights have been further supplemented through structured questioning of the local evaluators by the Cross-Community Evaluation team. In this way, we construct a picture of the educational and engagement strategies employed, achievements reached, obstacles faced, and implications for future work in this field—key findings are bolded throughout. Ultimately, this pinnacle report provides an opportunity to explore the extent to which philanthropic leadership and coordinated programmatic interventions can induce a largescale shift in how and for whom Jewish education and engagement is practiced.

The story is far from over.

MAP OF FUNDER COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITIES

SAN FRANCISCO

LOS ANGELES

SAN DIEGO

DENVER/BOULDER

CHICAGO

CINCINNATI

BALTIMORE

NEW YORK CITY

BOSTON

ATLANTA
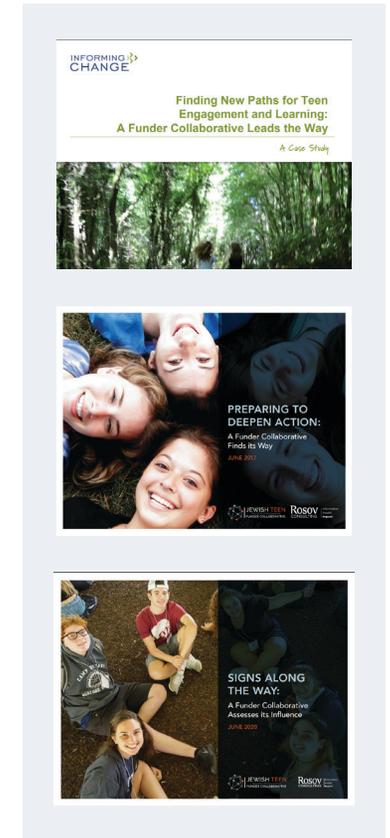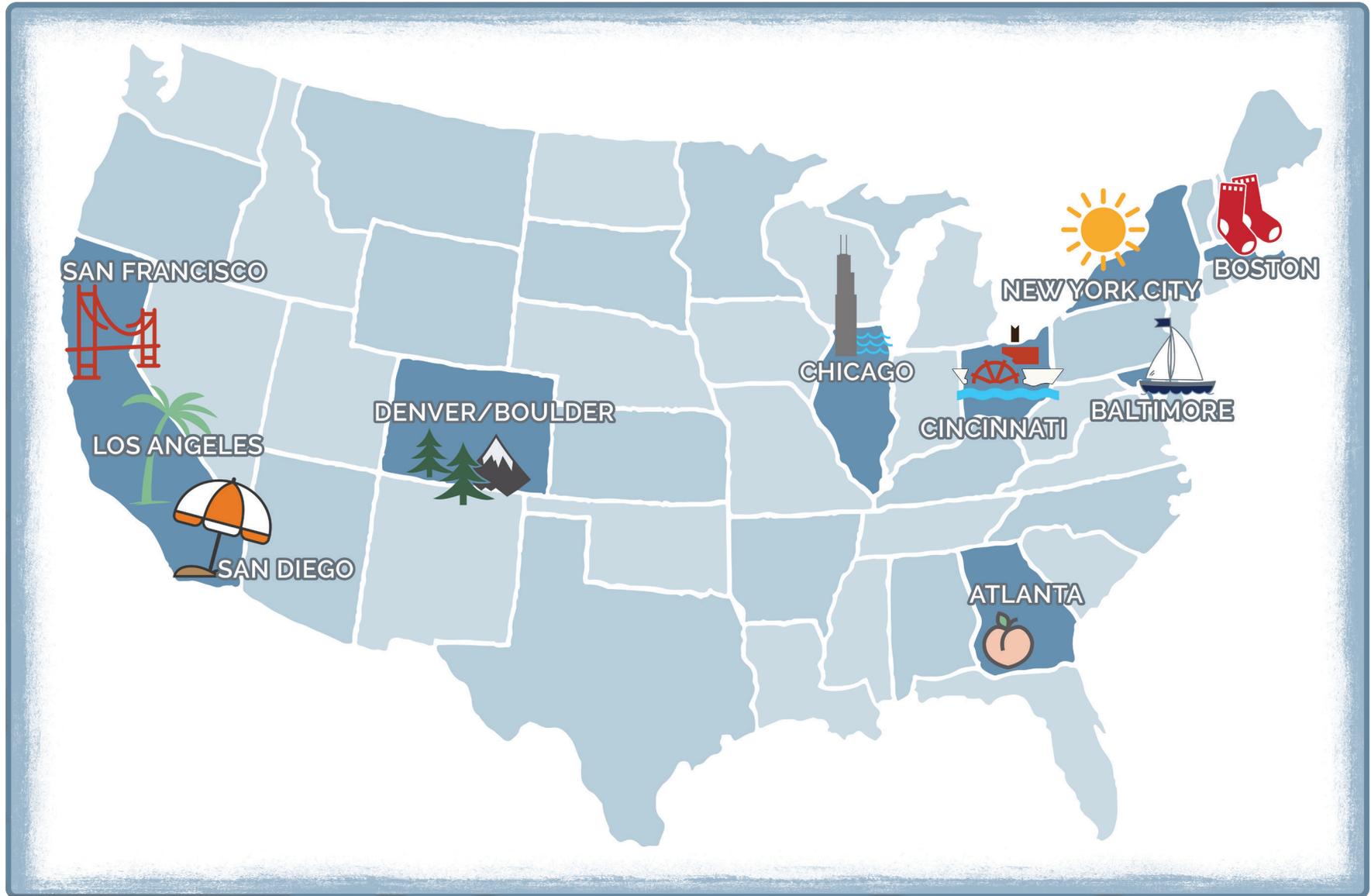
Local Enterprises Meet Local Needs & Reflect Culture.

Peer-to-Peer Learning Facilitates the Spread of Good Ideas

*A*t the heart of this overall effort is a paradox: The Funder Collaborative was launched thanks to the initiative of a small group of national funders; through their association they enabled a series of distinct, community-based teen initiatives to come into being. Financial support for each initiative comes from a partnership between a local funder (most commonly a local Jewish Federation) and the Jim Joseph Foundation. This arrangement reflects the reality that Jewish education in most instances is a locally based and locally shaped endeavor. The plurality of teens in most communities experience Jewish education within the confines of organizations and institutions close to home. Often, the programming has a distinctive, occasionally unique, local flavor. This is because communities' cultures and the scale at which communities operate can differ significantly from one another. Communities' offerings also draw on different organizational histories.

> For example, when Atlanta's JumpSpark proposed to "expand and enrich the Jewish teen landscape and focus resources on supporting and strengthening the people, organizations, and systems of that landscape," it reflected the local Jewish community's deep roots and institutional geography. This community has a strong sense of identity and structure, along with many programmatic options and microcommunities with many activities. The initiative's design reflected a community ethos that "there's something for everyone."

> In similar fashion, the complexity and multicomponent character of the Los Angeles Jewish Teen Initiative matches the large and diverse community it serves. It includes many ways to engage many stakeholders—some deep (its Accelerator program), some direct (through awarding teen scholarships). The LA initiative encourages experimentation through the Accelerator while its leadership sets out to implement a strong coherent vision. This is a balance it can sustain with a leadership team high enough in the Federation hierarchy to keep the initiative visible and appropriately maintained. The initiative's structure and style are very much a product of its local circumstances.

These examples show that **community-based efforts were the right approach to ensure, as much as possible, that the teen initiatives gained traction and would be best positioned to achieve sustainability.**

In embracing these communal variations the initiatives did not set out to establish a shared brand. While engaged in ongoing collaboration, networking and sharing, since the inception of the Funder Collaborative, and over many subsequent years, they did not become a movement even while engaged in the same broad effort. For example, Baltimore's 4Front is not obviously connected to Chicago's Springboard or to Boston's JTI (Jewish Teen Initiative), although all have made the development of teen professionals a strong focus of their efforts. The Bay Area, Boston, Los Angeles, New York, and San Diego initiatives each built online search engines for teens to find program opportunities, but these resources all function independently of one another.

It is unlikely that, at the local level, the majority of professionals involved in some component of their community's teen initiatives see themselves as part of a larger movement bringing change to their field; they are meeting the needs of their local communities— not an insignificant task in itself. Moreover, the upside of this loose structure is that each community could invest in activities that made the most sense for them: Cincinnati's focus on Israel education and Israel experience programming built on preexisting strengths in that area; the Bay Area's innovation acceleration and stimulus of entrepreneurial thinking and experimentation aligned with local culture; and San Diego's big bet on service learning came from an understanding of local priorities.

Many initiatives focused on the same *areas*—professional development of teen educators, activating teens to be agents of their own program design, and health and wellness issues among teens. But given their commitment to embracing and fostering local experiments, the 10 initiatives did not share a common set of *programs or practices*. The initiatives not only differed across the Funder Collaborative communities, but also efforts within some initiatives *internally* were quite diffuse. This diffusion was expressed in intense, sometimes continuous experimentation (especially in San Diego, Atlanta, Boston, and the Bay Area according to the evaluators working in these communities) with a plethora of programmatic and strategic alternatives. Although experimenting was encouraged in order to ensure that initiatives took root locally and filled gaps and empty spaces within communities, there were and are consequences to it as well: Many years in, it is still unclear if all the initiatives have decided on a settled strategy for accomplishing their goals. Continuous experimentation, no matter how reasonable, can become or at least be experienced as being unfocused.

Only over time, from the ground up, thanks to facilitated exchanges between the youth professionals and directors on the ground and the frequent interaction of Funder Collaborative members, *certain* practices and programs did in fact spread between some communities.

> Boston pioneered the concept of a Peer Leadership Fellows program, in which teens were trained to connect and build relationships with individuals in their peer networks so that more teens continue to engage with the Jewish community after their B'nei Mitzvah. The program was adapted in San Diego, Cincinnati, Baltimore, and New York as well as in two communities outside of the 10 Funder Collaborative communities; some of the communities also collaborated to provide a shared training experience for teens.

In another example of the diffusion of good ideas, communities doubled down on programming focused on teen wellness. Los Angeles, the second initiative to launch, had a head start in this respect. Other communities quickly got on board. This is less a case of adopting the same program model and more an instance of different communities learning from one another about what content resonates and has potential to truly make a difference in the lives of young people. **This kind of "peer-to-peer" learning can be an effective means by which ideas spread.**

Communities took longer to determine a coherent path forward than they would have if that path was marked out for them from the start. But while more structure might have helped solidify strategies and offerings more quickly, it would have resulted in a collision with local forces and culture.

It's All About the Teens.

Shifting the Mindset of Jewish Growth and Learning
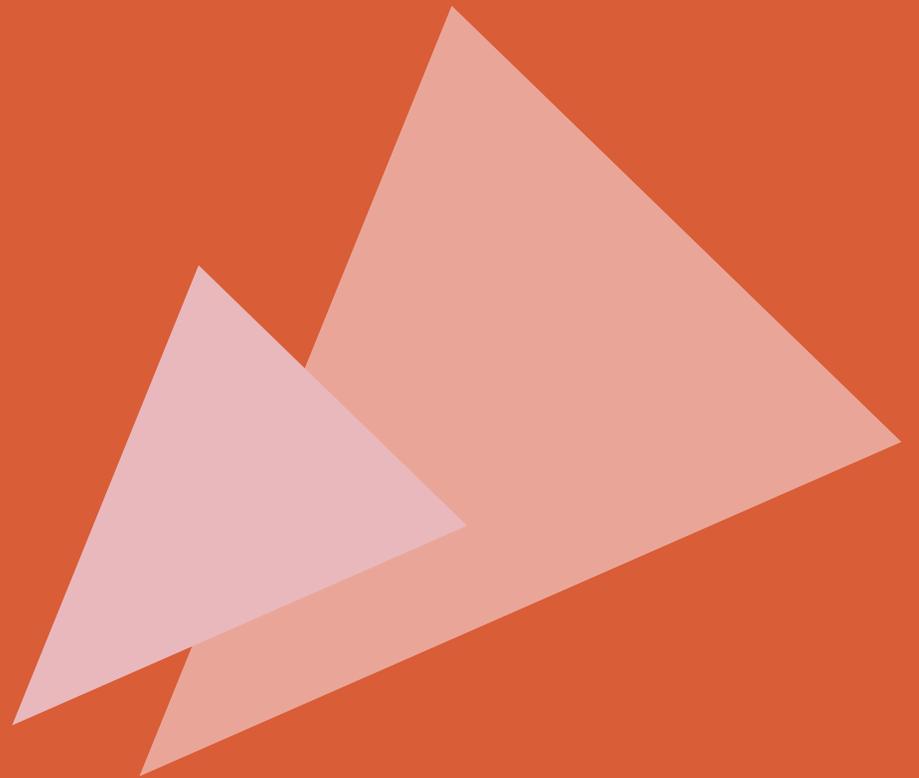
THE TEEN AS SUBJECT NOT OBJECT

In the early years of the initiatives, as reflected in the Funder Collaborative's Measures of Success (see page 4), there was a strong focus on recruiting more Jewish teens to Jewish programming. The task was to engage those who were at best under-engaged or, more challengingly, who, until now, were unengaged.

Addressing this challenge meant, first, determining where to find these young people. By definition, the contact information of unengaged individuals does not appear in organizations' contact lists. The approach taken by many initiatives was to design attractive and interesting programs and experiences that would compel the teens to find them and opt-in—an "if you build it, they will come" philosophy. This strategy was especially common where there wasn't much on the landscape in the first place; what economists call "blue ocean." The early phases of the initiatives saw creative program design: new service-learning experiences in San Diego, innovative spring break opportunities in Chicago, and out-of-the-box "day camp" experiences for teens in New York. Few of these creations gained real traction, however. Local evaluations repeatedly reached the same conclusions: "the programs in the Initiative continue to attract teens who already have some connection with Jewish life" and "Teens with a 'substantial' Jewish background were much more likely to be engaged in the programming."

Over the last few years, two related changes have occurred in respect to teen engagement. First, many initiatives moved away from the "if you build it, they will come" philosophy and increasingly approached the engagement challenge by mobilizing more engaged teens to identify and recruit their less-engaged peers; this was the strategy behind the Peer Leadership Fellows mentioned earlier. The hope, originally, was that peers would recruit peers to programs. This proved unrealistic. What was undoubtedly successful was teens identifying substantial numbers of contemporaries who were previously off the communal radar. In Cincinnati, the evaluation team estimated that 10% of the teens reached by Peer Leaders were previously unknown to the community. In San Diego, it was estimated that in its first year this program helped identify 100 "new" Jewish teens. This is a major step forward: communities now know where to find the unengaged.

This shift to activating and empowering teens to identify and engage their own peers was mirrored by a second development present at the start of some initiatives and more widespread over time: giving teens a strong voice in the development and design of initiative offerings. Initially, at least, the thinking was that if programs were designed and shaped by teens, they would likely be more appealing to their peers. It was also assumed that these programs would enable young people to develop valuable leadership skills. Data from Cincinnati suggest that the outcomes from these efforts were mixed. The community's Venture Awards program (a teen microgrant initiative) drew participants who would have mostly participated in Jewish programs anyways, although those who did participate unquestionably engaged in valuable life-skills learning.

Cincinnati's experience was replicated elsewhere, including Boston, Denver-Boulder, and San Diego. Microgrants do not substantially widen the circle of engagement, but they considerably deepen the engagement of those within the circle. In these communities, it became clear how delicate the work of empowering teens is and how much it depended on recruiting a nimble organizational partner. There's more: a balance must be struck between providing structure and accountability, on the one hand, and creating space, on the other. Teens might appreciate being given a voice but do not necessarily want either the responsibility or

stress of bringing to fruition things they previously trusted adults to create. It is also evident that their lives are already very full, particularly with extracurricular opportunities at school. Youth professionals must calibrate what a teen can actually do, not just what teens say they want to do. They must tactfully insert an "invisible" adult hand to nudge or support the project to success. Indeed, a decisive insight from the evaluation of these efforts is that "giving teens a voice" is less about the teens being involved in program design and more about the program providing teens with a chance to explore the things that matter to them.

The moves toward activating teens as peer engagers and as program designers were undeniably related. Fundamentally, they reflect a shift from seeing teens as objects to seeing them as subjects, viewing young people as partners and agents in the experiences in which they participate. This is an important shift in emphasis in the grounding principles of Jewish teen education and engagement even while it has long been an important principle for some youth serving organizations. It is possible, therefore, that these developments will ultimately see both a greater number and greater variety of teens getting involved in Jewish programming, but it will take time. For the moment, that has only happened to a small degree. Engaging the unengaged is a painstakingly slow and challenging task, and as Jewish communities become more diverse, and teens' lives become even more programmed, it only gets more challenging.

In the meantime, in some communities there is a palpable sense that norms are changing in relation to how teens are regarded and engaged. In Baltimore, many of these changes came together in one place. Today, at the JCC where the local initiative is housed, there is a fully functioning Teen Advisory Board; additionally, two teens now sit on the JCC Board. Teens have helped shape the design of new programs, too, especially since the onset of COVID-19,

and a Peer Leadership Fellows program cultivates a network of less-engaged young people. All told, young people now have an opportunity to be active agents in their own experiences if that's a role they want.

JEWISH TEEN GROWTH AND LEARNING

Each year, local evaluators have gathered both profile and outcomes data about the teens touched by each of the local initiatives. These data—when aggregated by the Cross-Community Evaluation team—open a window on the more than 25,000 teens who have participated in local initiative programs and some of the ways in which teens have been impacted by these experiences.

In respect to the demographic profile of teens, the analysis has involved (i) ascertaining teens' **Jewish background** pre–high school, whether nominal, modest, or substantial (based on the extent of their Jewish education and other Jewish experiences during those years); (ii) determining the intensity of their **Jewish engagement** during the most recent 12 months, whether not at all, minimal, moderate, high, or full (based on the extent to which and intensity with which they attended Jewish activities); and (iii) classifying their **families' Jewish composition.**

DIVERSITY OF JEWISH TEENS

current Jewish education and engagement (past 12 months)

44% engaged/somewhat engaged

32% highly/fully engaged

25% not/minimally engaged

Jewish education and engagement growing up (pre-teen years)

27% substantial

54% modest

19% nominal
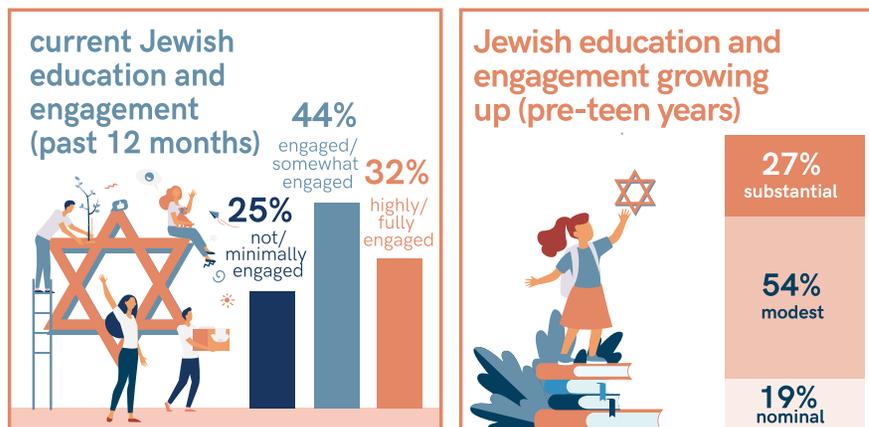
Across communities and year after year, the initiatives have reached a similar mix of teens: slightly more than half can be defined as having modest Jewish backgrounds, about a quarter have substantial Jewish backgrounds, and the remainder, about a fifth, have nominal backgrounds. About a quarter report that their families are comprised of some people who are Jewish and some who are not. A plurality (44%) can be classified as having been moderately or somewhat engaged during the most recent 12 months, while about a quarter have not been at all engaged or minimally engaged, and about a third highly or fully engaged.

The task of identifying the contribution of the programs to the lives of teens has been analytically complex but has been substantially aided by the development of a common outcomes measurement tool, the Teen Jewish Learning and Engagement Scales (TJLES). The tool is grounded in a set of **14 outcomes** associated with Jewish teen education and engagement efforts developed in the course of an extended deliberative process by The Jewish Education Project. The 14 outcomes cluster into four areas: two relating to universal themes ("Social Action" and "Self and Relations") and two relating to Jewish themes ("Jewish Peoplehood" and "Jewish Life"). The outcomes were operationalized* through the work of the Cross-Community Evaluation team as the lens through which to explore the activities of the Funder Collaborative communities in respect to teens.

Learn more about the 14 outcomes at jewishedproject.org/ generationnow

Holding constant the backgrounds of participating teens, the cross-community analysis examines the extent to which outcomes exhibited by teens are associated with the intensity of their Jewish engagement during the previous 12 months. The findings produced have offered encouragement to Jewish youth professionals in the local initiatives. **They indicate that whatever the background of participants, more frequent engagement in Jewish youth programming is associated with higher outcomes scores, even for those who come from the most substantial backgrounds .** This seems to be a case of "the more teens keep going, the more they keep growing." The findings also indicate that across the population of participants as a whole, universal outcomes (those concerned with "Social Action" and "Self and Relations") are stronger than particular Jewish outcomes (those concerned with "Jewish Peoplehood" and "Jewish Life."

TEEN LEARNING AND GROWTH AS JEWS

Social Action	4.04
Self and Relations	4.00
Jewish Peoplehood	3.87
Jewish Life	3.70

strongly disagree — disagree — neither agree nor disagree — agree — strongly agree

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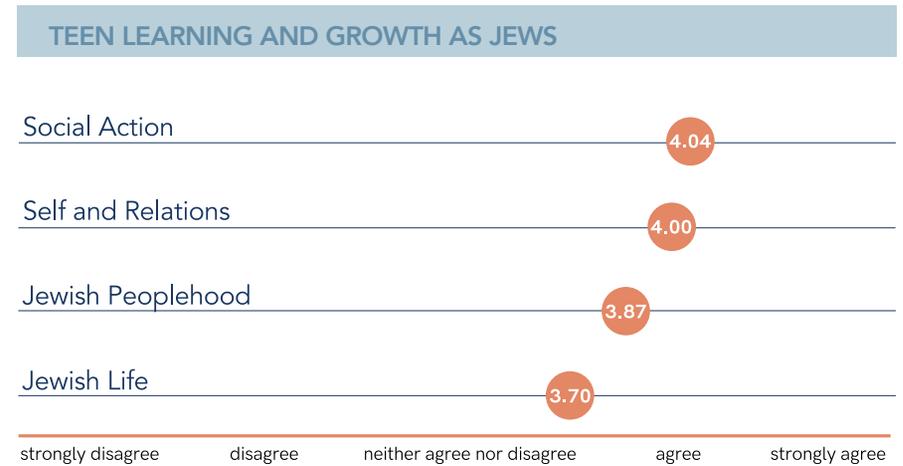
* The 22 items in the TJLES were collapsed into four dimensions using the method of factor analysis. Factor analysis is a tool that uncovers underlying dimensions (aka latent constructs, or factors) that are not easily measured directly. The technique provides a more reliable approach to analyzing the data—relying on condensed information rather than on individual items. These four dimensions were confirmed in several studies that were conducted under the auspices of the Funder Collaborative as well as the *GenZ Now* study conducted by The Jewish Education Project and Rosov Consulting with over 17,000 teens across North America.
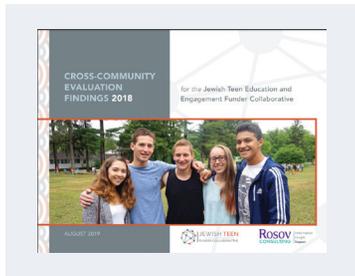
These findings have been consistent over the years of the Cross-Community Evaluation. Here we draw on examples from the [2018 Cross-Community Evaluation Findings](#) where these patterns were especially clear:

- ▲ For teens with nominal Jewish backgrounds, there is a pronounced relationship between higher levels of engagement and the Jewish outcome areas ("Jewish Peoplehood" and "Jewish Life"), although, as might be expected, for teens from nominal backgrounds it takes high levels of engagement to produce outcomes (across all areas) on par with those from modest and substantial backgrounds.

- ▲ Across all background groups (nominal, modest, and substantial), minimally engaged teens have significantly higher outcomes in the universal areas ("Social Action" and "Self and Relations") than those who are not engaged at all. Thus, even the most minimal engagement in initiative offerings seems to be a "foot in the door" to get teens to be more engaged, which, in turn, might lead to even higher universal outcomes.

- ▲ In all outcome areas, there is a significant difference in outcomes scores when comparing the highly engaged with the fully engaged. The "bump" is generally the biggest for those teens who come from nominal backgrounds. These teens who are fully engaged reach almost the same level of outcomes as fully engaged teens from modest backgrounds (in the Jewish outcome areas) and as fully engaged teens from substantial backgrounds (in the universal areas).

- ▲ The outcomes associated with participating in Jewish programming seem to be contingent on the richness of their Jewish content. The majority of teens (69%) participating in local initiative programs estimated that many-to-all of the programs they attended contain Jewish content. It turns out that the presence of Jewish content in these education and engagement programs is a strong predictor not just for the Jewish outcomes, but for all outcome areas. In other words, the more teens are engaged in programs that have Jewish "stuff," the higher the outcomes. By the same token, regardless of the number and frequency of activities teens attend, if the vast majority have no Jewish content, little to no improvement is observed in any of the outcome areas.

These findings have served as both a caution and inspiration to those leading the initiatives and have implications beyond the participating communities. The findings confirm how even though the initiatives have been quite effective at reaching teens with modest Jewish backgrounds, so far it has been difficult to reach those with nominal Jewish backgrounds, an audience the Funder Collaborative very much wants to engage and believes could be reached in the long-term. The findings indicate, nevertheless, how impactful Jewish teen programming is for those teens when they are reached, especially when the programming includes Jewish substance. Finally, the findings prompt a question about what accounts for stronger universal than Jewish outcomes among participants in these programs: to what extent is this because of the content and emphases of programs and to what extent are Jewish teens simply more receptive to universally oriented stimuli?

# Development of Sustainable Models Takes Many Forms.

Positive Change Tied to Structure and Innovation Strategies
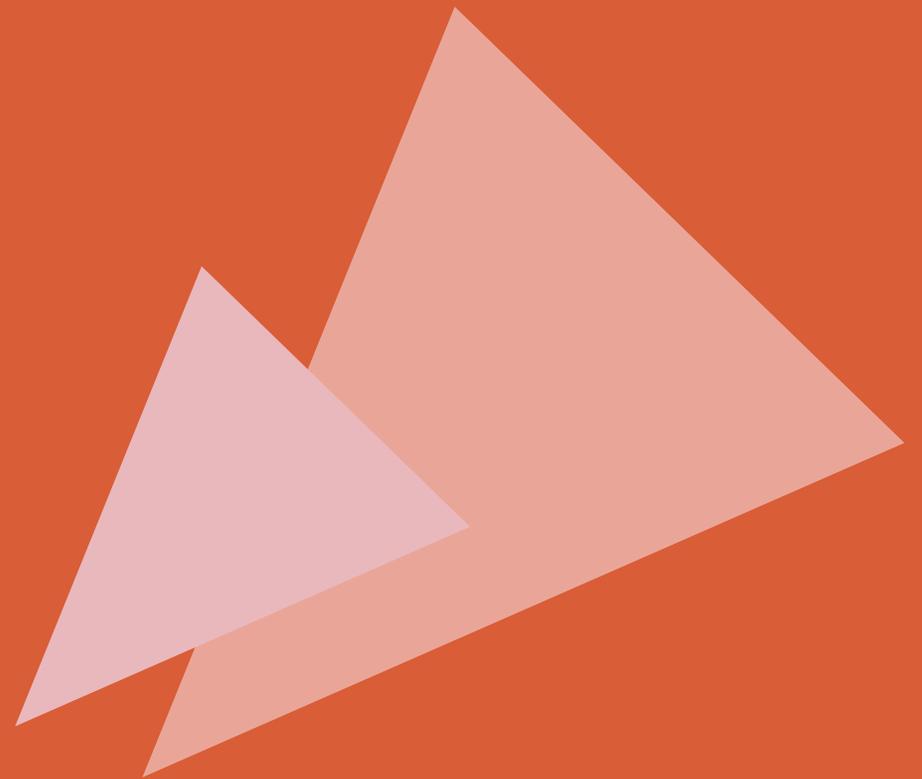
TO CREATE NEW PROGRAMS OR GROW EXISTING ONES?

The Funder Collaborative took shape out of a desire to repair a chronically underperforming segment of the Jewish education and engagement field. Fulfilling this desire did not necessarily require creating new educational models and experiences. In fact, the 2013 report that in part prompted the Funder Collaborative's formation, _Effective Strategies for Educating and Engaging Jewish Teens,_ identified examples of scalable and innovative programs that engaged teens. The report's purpose was to provide a vision of what was possible for the field. Implicitly, it indicated that repairing the field did not mean creating programs from scratch. Programs and models already existed that could be applied to new contexts and communities.

Effective Strategies for Educating and Engaging Jewish Teens

What Jewish Communities Can Learn from Programs That Work

There was a desire to seed new community-based experiments which might also take root. The overwhelming majority of the community initiatives began with an explicit intention to create new and innovative programs. In New York, the initiative's most visible goal was to create and incubate new models for summer experiences for teens. Chicago had a similar goal for spring break programs, as did Atlanta (in its first 18 months) for developing and stimulating 1–2-week content-based "intensives." Denver-Boulder also initially looked to incubate new programs, doubling down on teen-initiated program concepts. And in the Bay Area, initiative leaders made clear from the start that their accelerator and microgrants were intended to enable innovation and experimentation—in other words, the creation of new programs.

This emphasis on innovation was driven by what the Funder Collaborative partners established as some of their primary goals for success. The Funder Collaborative's first Measure of Success was to "dramatically increase the number of teens in targeted geographic areas engaged in Jewish learning during their high school years;" its second was to "involve Jewish teens who come from diverse Jewish backgrounds." Many community leaders assumed that these goals, and especially the second, could not be accomplished without developing genuinely new models and products for the field. How else could one imagine disrupting a situation that had been so disappointing for so long?

Within a couple of years, the initiatives modified their strategies in all cases referenced above. In a shift from outside-the-box to inside-the-box innovation, the second cohort to join New York's incubator was recruited from legacy organizations rather than from entirely new entities or partnerships. This new cohort included, for example, a slate of niche Israel experiences, each of which constituted a variation of a known entity. In Chicago, where newer programs repeatedly struggled to recruit participants and often could not run as result, the Initiative leaned more heavily on already well-established organizations. In Atlanta, halfway through the second year of the initiative, JumpSpark shifted its emphasis and also began to partner with and support existing teen programs; this effort gained greater traction than its previous focus on short-term "intensives" even while it continued to generate its own programming. In Denver-Boulder, large parts of the initiative's activities were consolidated around school-based clubs, a venture it supported in its first year that thrived and expanded. Finally, in the Bay Area, the initiative purposefully shifted in the second year from focusing on innovation to focusing on relational engagement, reflected in an evolving Theory of Change, grant offerings, and professional development offerings.

Those communities that started out with less radical aspirations saw steadier program growth over time. In Baltimore, the initiative started out by offering teens a mix of year-long program options, including some that already existed and some that were completely new. Only as the initiative's brand name, 4Front, became better known and its reputation deepened, did it expand its new program offerings. Progress was steadier once the initiative had gained some traction. On a different scale, but employing a similarly balanced approach, the Los Angeles initiative funded two cohorts of existing teen programs that included a mix of longer established and newer programs. This latter category included JQSA, a teen program of JQ International, and a Federation-led teen internship summer program with placements in Jewish organizations around the city.

These experiences underline how challenging it can be to create and sustain genuinely new programs. Out of the 14 programs in New York, just one, Sababa Surf Camp—a mix of Jewish spirituality and surfing—made the move from entirely new entity to ongoing enterprise. At the same time, another half a dozen programs that involved a mashup of already existing forms and frameworks—teen travel and internship experiences, social justice work, and travel—found their feet and are thriving. More progress was made with the adaptation of older products than with creating entirely new ones.

Across all 10 communities, the arc of change saw a move from establishing new products to establishing new practices that are no less consequential to teens' experiences. Thus, while new programs did not take off in Denver-Boulder quite as hoped, community professionals today celebrate the extent to which their offerings now give teens a voice in the design and delivery of their programming. This kind of recalibration and reinvention was just as meaningful in the Bay Area. Increasingly, innovation there meant *not* developing something new for the field; rather, developing something new specifically for the participating organizations. For one organization, for example, empowering teen voices was a deeply meaningful innovation. For another organization, the innovation was meeting teens where they were, close to home, instead of drawing them out to their programs. In Boston, the consolidation of existing programs rather than the creation of new ones enabled a more efficient and coherent web of experiences for young people to take shape. In this instance, smart subtraction was just as valuable to the teen landscape as any addition might have been.

Taken together, these experiences challenge the notion that the choice for teen initiative leaders was either to create or to grow. **Positive change took different and sometimes unexpected forms. In the long run, more modest inside-the-box changes (i.e., intrapreneurial) proved to be more consequential for teens than some of the bolder efforts to change the landscape.** This conclusion is consistent with a perspective on educational change that suggests that tinkering with educational forms often yields more significant results than attempts to transform them. The changes that the initiatives ended up making, rather than those they had first intended to make, are more likely to meet another of the Funder Collaborative's Measures of Success—the aspiration that the initiatives' efforts are sustainable and scalable.

HOW MUCH OF A DIFFERENCE DID IT MAKE WHERE INITIATIVES WERE HOUSED?

A noteworthy facet of the initiatives' non-standardized construction is the different institutions that house each initiative in their communities. Some (Atlanta, Bay Area, Chicago, Los Angeles) operate out of community Federations, others (Baltimore, Cincinnati, San Diego) out of JCCs, and some within another entity, either preexisting (as in New York) or created specifically for these purposes (Boston, Denver-Boulder). These choices were often

complex, reflecting the need to balance multiple concerns: that the initiative's home be genuinely cross-communal and, if needed, an organizational hub (in some communities a problem with the JCC option); that it have a good chance of outliving the lifespan of grant funding (a problem with creating entirely new entities); and that it could function as home to a team of educators and organizers who would have credibility across the community (a problem in some Federations).

In a few instances, the "housing option" adopted ultimately failed or had ongoing challenges. And yet, these difficulties say less about whether a particular model could ever work and more about the application of the model to a particular context. In Cincinnati, for example, the housing of the teen initiative at the JCC was challenging from the start. The initiative had to continuously justify itself as a "community project" rather than the "J's project." These concerns made it difficult to engage local organizational partners, although over time the JCC formed new relationships with other youth-serving entities, such as synagogues. Similarly, 4Front Baltimore was established as a community-wide initiative housed and managed by the JCC. From the start, there was an inherent tension between the JCC serving as a site of active programming, on the one hand, and a provider of support to other organizations offering teen programming, on the other. With intention and significant effort, over time that tension resolved, and 4Front has become a hub around which teen programs have coalesced. The JCC functions today as a home for many of the initiative's newest programs, a palpable contribution to the community.

The inside-Federation model, where adopted, had the fewest challenges and also offered the best chance of achieving financial sustainability. But much depended on the existing structure of teen programming within the Federation and the level of stability of the Federation itself. The Los Angeles Federation, which houses its local initiative, already was positioned as a leader of teen programming

and further enhanced that position through its initiative. The Federation's size and community footprint enabled the initiative's sustainability, fundraising capabilities, and influence on Jewish community leaders, as well as its access to local and Federation talent. The only downside is that the Federation's visibility around Jewish teen engagement and Jewish teen wellness eclipsed or was perceived as competition for other organizations.

The Bay Area also benefited from its initiative being housed at the Federation, with an outside partner managing professional development. However, the full benefits of this housing structure were not initially apparent. With changes to key Federation personnel and the integration of the East Bay Federation with the San Francisco Federation, it was challenging to clarify the relationship between the initiative and other teen programs that already existed under the Federation. The initiative had to gain the trust of certain grantee organizations. With these process challenges now resolved, the teen agenda today is considered a pillar in the Federation's new strategic direction and an example of what is possible when the Federation works to build the capacity of its community to address a critical issue.

The most challenging model to establish and sustain was that of creating new institutional hubs for local initiatives. This approach was attempted in Denver-Boulder with the goal of establishing a new hub to facilitate connections between the new entities and the existing ecosystem. The new hub was discontinued after three years due to confusion about its role, territoriality, and staff turnover. Today, the initiative is situated under the roof of its local funding partner. This was a sound short-term move but one that will make it difficult in the long term to build grantee sustainability with no external candidate emerging to take leadership of the local teen ecosystem. A similar story played out it in Boston, where the JTI (Jewish Teen Initiative) started out as an independent entity and has now been absorbed into Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP).

A Common Cause: Professional Development for Teen Educators.

Investing in Professionals is an Important Ingredient for Long-Term Change
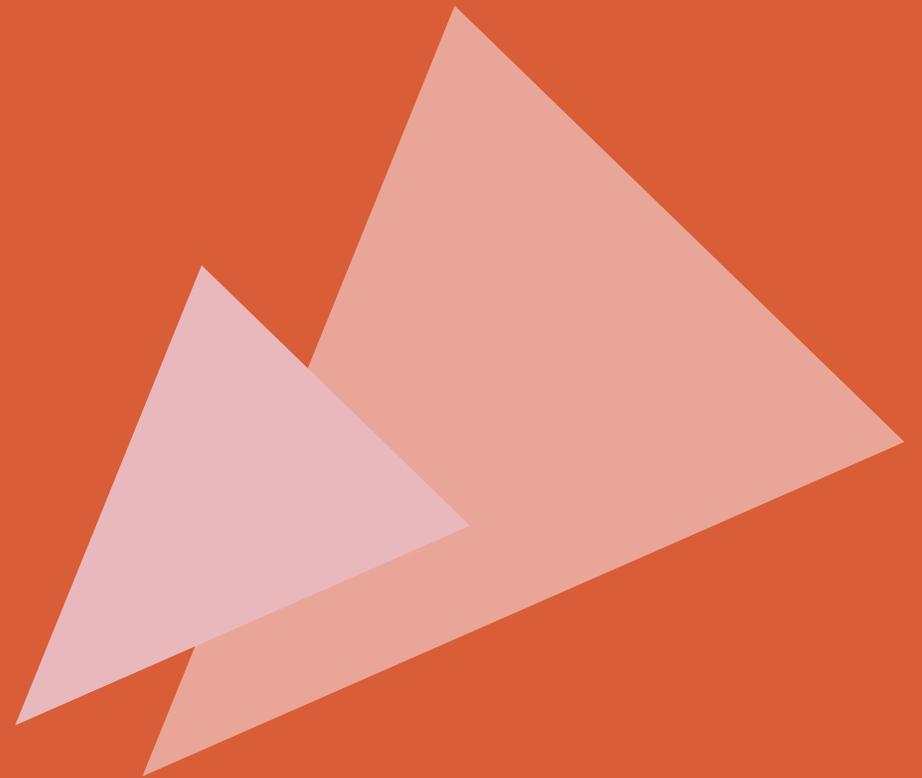
BRINGING YOUTH PROFESSIONALS TO THE CENTER

Alongside the shift in how teens were viewed and engaged was a similar, no less significant change in relation to Jewish youth professionals in local communities who work with teens. Before the launch of the initiatives, if local youth-serving professionals were not employed by national organizations, they had limited access to professional development and were often quite isolated as the sole youth professional in their organizations. **The initiatives changed this reality by enabling locally based youth professionals first to become part of a larger collective, and second to experience the kinds of professional learning to which they previously had limited access.**

When the Funder Collaborative started and established its Measures of Success, none of the five measures specifically focused on changes to the status and support of youth professionals. Of course, it was understood that youth professionals would play a critical role in bringing about the Funder Collaborative's larger goals—professional development was an important piece of every initiative's work—but, implicitly, providing support for these educators was secondary to the larger objective of transforming the experiences of teens. This is no longer the case. **Over the last three years, the goal of "supporting youth professionals: ensuring that youth professionals feel well-prepared with appropriate skills and knowledge and feel valued as professionals" became a desired outcome and measure of success for which all participating initiatives are held accountable.**

Establishing a specifically stated outcome of this kind reflected the reality that emerged over the first few years of the various initiatives as communities saw positive results by connecting and investing in their local educators. The local initiatives themselves actually pushed to articulate this outcome as a goal of the Funder Collaborative. This provided additional stimulus to placing support of youth professionals at the forefront of communal efforts. **Investing in local educators may also prove an important ingredient in longer-term changes to the landscape of teen programming in local communities.**

The initiatives' efforts with youth-serving professionals tended to include two overlapping components. First, nurturing networks of previously isolated professionals, providing them with opportunities to learn from one another and to participate in shared experiences that help crystalize a shared identity. Many youth professionals are often in their first post-college job. Their professional identities are still unformed. The employment path before them is unclear too. Creating networks of this kind is consequential; these networks help ground professionals' work and identities in a set of shared practices while also elevating their professional status. While youth professionals' salaries are not generous, these educators appreciate being the beneficiaries of investment in their professional development and growth, with many indicating that such opportunities contribute to their likelihood of staying in the field.

For those at an early stage of their professional lives, accessing meaningful networking opportunities would be valuable in and of itself. But the value of these connections was deepened further by a second component: the opportunity to learn about matters very relevant to their work. Local evaluation data confirm how across the country the initiatives provided professional learning opportunities previously unavailable to Jewish youth professionals in their communities. Participants in these experiences report that learning—often for the first time—about topics such as adolescent development, parent engagement, and adolescent health and wellbeing enhanced their capacity to perform their job. In a field

where few employees experience preservice preparation before a first job, these opportunities have the potential to make a difference in professionals' day-to-day performance.

Two additional phenomena were amplified by deeper investment in youth-serving professionals. First, it is now clear that supervisors play a critical role helping staff access and appreciate the value of these professional development experiences. In Denver-Boulder, the initiative's leaders started out with an assumption that if scholarships were made available to youth professionals, they would identify and access their own learning experiences. This did not prove to be the case; the professionals needed more direction and a tighter framework within which to access opportunities. Similarly, in Chicago, it was assumed that youth professionals would inform each other about opportunities for learning. It turns out that employers had to encourage and share knowledge to make these experiences known to staff. **Evidently, supervisors are key facilitators, enabling and encouraging professional development, and intensifying positive outcomes back in the workplace for participants in these experiences.**

SUPPORTING YOUTH PROFESSIONALS

1,000+ unique youth professionals engaged

64% say that the network of Jewish youth professionals in their community has been a great resource for them

56 professional development series

289 professional development sessions

A second phenomenon concerns the consequences of this investment. By creating opportunities for fellow professionals to learn side by side, those professionals not only come to think about their own work differently, they also think differently about the work of their peers. Bringing people together from different, and often competing, institutions for shared learning cultivated an environment in many communities in which educators are now less likely to see themselves as competing for the attention of individual teens and more likely to view their work as part of a larger endeavor. In Los Angeles, youth professionals expressed a change in how they view their communal role, shifting from serving their organizations to now serving teens. If a teen joined a colleague's program, that's still a success! In Baltimore, interviews with professionals and their supervisors revealed a similar sentiment in which professionals described themselves as collaborators rather than competitors. They no longer saw teen recruitment as a zero-sum game.

In sum, just as youth-serving professionals now think differently about the teens with whom they work, they also now think differently about themselves, their roles, and their relationships with their colleagues in other organizations. These changes have shifted the center of gravity for teen education and engagement; now both the teens *and those who work with them* are at the center of this field. The question is whether this reorientation puts communities on a new path in their approach to educating and engaging Jewish teens. Is Jewish teen education and engagement truly on a new trajectory?

(Re-)Setting the Communal Table.

Building a Holisitc Ecosystem Involves Teens, Parents, Educators and Stakeholders
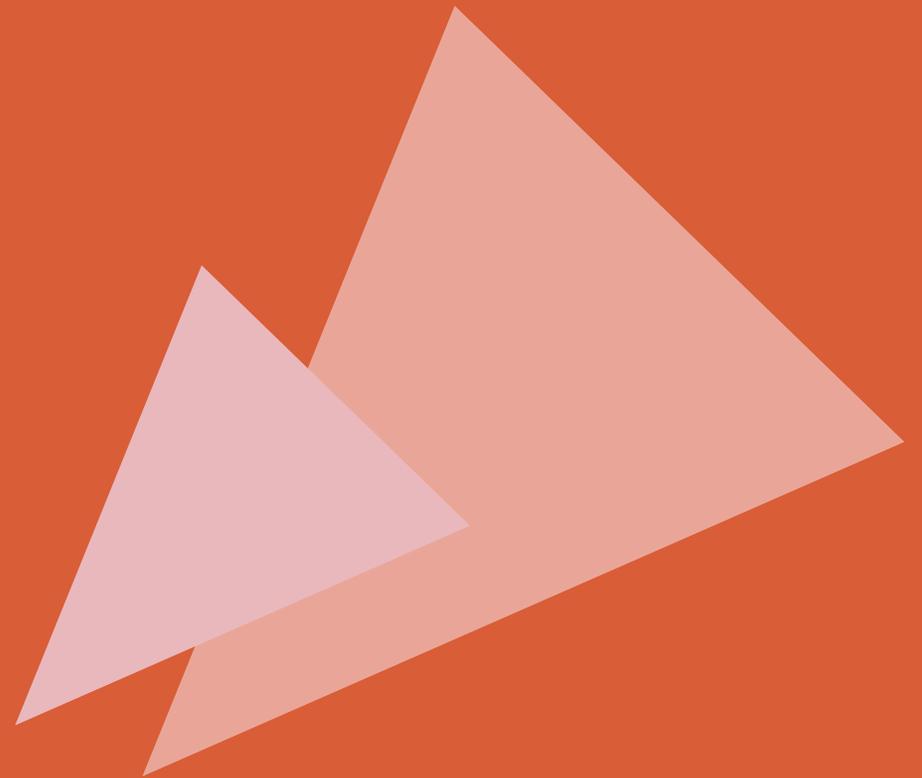
MAKING TEEN EDUCATION A COMMUNITY PRIORITY

The Funder Collaborative aspired to elevate Jewish teen education and engagement as a priority issue in the 10 participating communities. In its "founding documents," the Funder Collaborative envisaged indications of success in this realm as including:

> Continued/increasing/guaranteed financial support from the local Federation; public statements from varied stakeholders about the importance of community-wide teen engagement; multi-institutional collaborations to engage teens; financial and/or volunteer involvement of families of teens; increasing numbers of teens on boards of local Jewish communal organizations; and strategic   communications and outreach tools that foster the development of broad community support. (Text excerpted from full version of Measure of Success #5)

The Cross-Community Evaluation's Sustainability Diagnostic Tool (SDT) and accompanying scoring rubric brought this concept to life in the five communities that used it to date. Similarly, the communities that are near the end of their grant cycle instructed their local evaluators to gather data around these indicators explicitly.

The third and final installment of the Funder Collaborative Case Study depicts the ways in which community initiatives helped to positively influence and elevate a broader culture shift around the status of Jewish teen education and engagement more generally. What are some of the specific pieces of evidence at the community level suggesting that this elevation did or did not occur?

Looking across the 10 communities, we see evidence of inroads and progress. In New York, the phenomena that come closest to indicating a shift are the creation of the Find Your Summer Ambassadors recruitment initiative and the FindYourSummer website. The same goes for Chicago's Teen Engagement Specialists, a new concierge role in the community. These mechanisms reflect teen engagement understood as a community challenge, not simply a matter of each organization trying to meet its own recruitment targets and educational goals.

In Baltimore, interviews with teen program leaders and community leaders suggest that the initiative led to a more collectivist orientation to engaging teens—an "all for one, one for all" ethos. Specifically, 4Front was established as a hub, a go-to address for youth-serving organizations and their professionals, and successfully nurtured strong relationships that undergird this evolving culture.

In a similar vein, stakeholders in the Boston area agree that the initiative supported greater collaboration among professionals and programs than previously existed. However, while there are now fewer "turf and territory" issues and a reduction in duplication of offerings, stakeholders still report that programs are competing for the same funding or already-engaged teens.

In the Bay Area, the teen initiative employed different levers to elevate and expand work with teens. They invested in JBridge, an online hub for sharing information and resources about teen engagement. They developed grantmaking guidelines to elevate the expectations and requirements of teen engagement efforts for organizations applying for support. And they employed the Sustainability Diagnostic Tool to bring greater attention at the organizational level to the concept of sustainability for teen work.

It is too early to determine the results of these various strategies, but community stakeholders are positive about the prospects.

In San Diego, a group of stakeholders, including educators, teens, parents, and rabbis see various components of the initiative as laying essential groundwork for sustainable, community-wide prioritization of teen education and engagement. These components include (a) building teen leaders, (b) gaining educators' (youth professionals') commitment and collaboration, (c) creating multiple pathways for teens to engage, and (d) redefining success with data.

When it comes to developing the infrastructure for a sustained shift around the status of Jewish teen education and engagement more generally, communities repeatedly point to changes regarding how they now service and support their youth professionals (see above). They reference more networks, more sharing of ideas, and more learning among frontline educators, although less so at the supervisor level. **The widespread nature of these changes and the enthusiasm with which they were embraced suggest that it is via this means—through the creation of scaffolding and infrastructure that supports the work of youth professionals—more than through the creation and launch of new programs that the Funder Collaborative's investments may have the most far-reaching impact.**

Finally, there is evidence that evaluation work was an intervention in and of itself on this measure. Most immediately, because of the need to report on progress and impact in a systematic and ongoing fashion, educators have become socialized in and enabled to contribute to a data-informed youth-serving culture; they're tracking teen participants to a degree that few were doing previously. **More broadly, the several data gathering activities happening across the communities—with data coming from youth professionals; from Federations, foundations, and/or organizational leaders; from parents; and of course from teens— contributed, in the opinion of the local evaluators, to some of the elevation of teen education and engagement.** Some communities have now even brought these kinds of data-gathering activities in house, increasing the likelihood that they will continue employing such practices. While this may seem circular, the process of being asked about dimensions of teen education and engagement, and then consuming and contemplating data about it, helped substantiate the seriousness of these endeavors.

CONCLUSIONS

While the partners in the Funder Collaborative were devoted to supporting a mosaic of diverse communities—10 initiatives each situated within a distinctive culture of Jewish education and Jewish community—their investments were neither separate from nor unrelated to one another. As we saw, the development of each initiative was part of a bigger picture with implications relevant to all 10 communities and beyond.

A COMMUNAL, RESOURCED "HOME" IS KEY TO SUSTAINABILITY

A foundational question for all the initiatives was where within a community they each should be housed. As we have seen, there was no optimal location. There were advantages to being situated within a Federation, a body perceived to be genuinely cross-communal. This structure also placed initiatives in most cases close to their sources of funding, typically an advantage especially if the initiative was to be sustainable. But this was only a suitable scenario if the local Federation was positioned as a program provider or implementer, was staffed appropriately, and had an appetite for risk. Without such conditions, there was potential for confusion about whether the initiative was a service provider, a funding mechanism, or an implementer. With the demise of central agencies for Jewish education in most of the communities, few initiatives had the luxury of being situated in an institution mainly staffed by educators and identified as genuinely cross-communal. JCCs could fulfill that role in some communities, but they were not an optimal solution. These tensions offer a salutary lesson in what has been lost with the termination of so many central agencies and bureaus for Jewish education.

INSIDE THE BOX INNOVATION IS EFFECTIVE

When it came to launching new programs, once it was determined where they should be located, the story of the various initiatives suggests that inside-the-box rather than outside-the-box innovation was more likely to survive and thrive. It was very difficult to sustain new programs and organizations created from scratch.

Across all 10 initiatives, no more than a handful of programs transitioned from genuine startup to well-positioned ongoing offering. And yet, almost every initiative can point to promising outcomes produced by tweaking and building on existing models.

Evaluator reports reveal how the expectation to innovate created pressure to start from scratch, to create new models, and—most prized of all—to uncover a magical solution not previously considered by the field. It was especially instructive to see how rarely such intentions yielded a truly sustainable product. Even if grounded in high-quality concepts, these "magical solutions" struggled to capture the attention of enough of the audience in a crowded marketplace. While programs might be able to withstand financial pressures resulting from undersubscription, they cannot maintain excitement around a program when there are only a few people in the room. It is difficult to resist market forces even with a strong appetite for risk inside any one organization or across the broader communal landscape. When programs can build on an existing brand name and can tap already established pipelines of potential recruits, they are not forced to sprint from a standing start. And when this is the case, they tend to go further.

PILLARS AND PRINCIPLES RATHER THAN PROGRAMS CAN DRIVE CHANGE

In related fashion, we saw evidence that the most powerful ways to engineer the kind of far reaching change the Funder Collaborative sought depended less on the successful launch of new programs and experiences and more on addressing in systemic fashion the factors that previously inhibited success in this field: the difficulty of locating and involving unconnected young people and the relatively isolated, unsophisticated, and under-professionalized status and practice of those who work with them. While it was exciting to see the birth of new programs and new models, the efforts that have made the greatest difference to the teens' experiences and that continue to have the best chance of being sustained over time are those that directly address these inhibitors in a deep-seated fashion.

The central pillars in the activities of the initiatives—what we called "treating teens as subjects, not objects" and "bringing youth professionals to the center"—

have potential to underpin a continued effort to educate and engage Jewish teens more deeply. Some of the tools employed to construct these pillars—such as teen microgrant initiatives and the more laissez faire approaches to stimulating professional learning—have proved less effective than hoped. Other tools have been more effective, especially the creation of community-level positions for educators who help teens navigate to well-matched programs, and the forming of venues and spaces for youth-serving professionals to convene and coordinate. Both of these tools fuse teen education and engagement efforts into a larger local whole. More important, the pillars ("treating teens as subjects, not objects" and "bringing youth professionals to the center") constitute appropriate and promising strategies in and of themselves, regardless of the tools used. No doubt other tools could be developed for the same purposes.

FOCUS ON THE HORSE AND THEN THE CART

Local initiatives were launched with the headline goal of increasing the number and diversity of Jewish teens that participate in Jewish programming. For many communities, success in their early years was all about moving the dial on these matters. This was fully aligned with these outcomes being the first two of the Funder Collaborative's Measures of Success.

In retrospect, it seems that this was a case of putting the cart before the horse. Communities found how difficult it was to make headway with these teen recruitment objectives before they brought about change in other, more foundational ways. They found that the horse that pulls all else along was the quality of the youth professionals in their community. "Supporting Youth Professionals" had not been one of the Collaborative's original Measures of Success; it was adopted after a few years at the prompting of the local initiatives. The initiatives found that if they could enhance the capacities of their youth professionals and provide the supports to enhance their work, then changes in teen recruitment would follow. Not only that, but if they also took steps to ensure the sustainability of their work (Measure 4), then they would be better prepared for the prolonged effort required to improve participation numbers over time. Once out on the dancefloor, they came to see how best to choreograph these various complex steps.

GREATER COMMONALITY OF PRACTICE AND NOT JUST COMMONALITY OF PURPOSE CAN STRENGTHEN A MULTIPLIER EFFECT

The initiatives understandably reflect their local contexts, but they may have gained greater visibility and gathered more momentum if, on the ground, they had been better branded as part of a single effort, not just at the level of partner funders. They have shared a powerful common purpose but relatively few common practices.

This does not mean there should have been one central headquarters to run the initiatives; no evidence leads to that conclusion. But being more closely united under the same name and around a common, although not uniform, set of practices may have led to a stronger multiplier effect. While the jury is still out on relational strategies' influence on the increased involvement of unengaged teens, undoubtedly those who brought this program to their communities benefited from learning about the experiences of their peers with the program and were inspired by evidence of its successes. Few initiatives launched either identical programs or similar iterations on the same concept. If anything, it seems that appetite to innovate led initiatives to design their own unique offerings and not only adapt successful offerings from elsewhere. This was a case of "letting a thousand flowers bloom" as opposed to "transplanting seedlings." While seedlings might have a uniform appearance, they usually survive much longer than flowers. It is noteworthy that today the Funder Collaborative is a more mature entity actively pursuing a scaling-up strategy to bring promising programs, practices, measures, and metrics from the 10 original communities to an increasing number of other communities in the country.
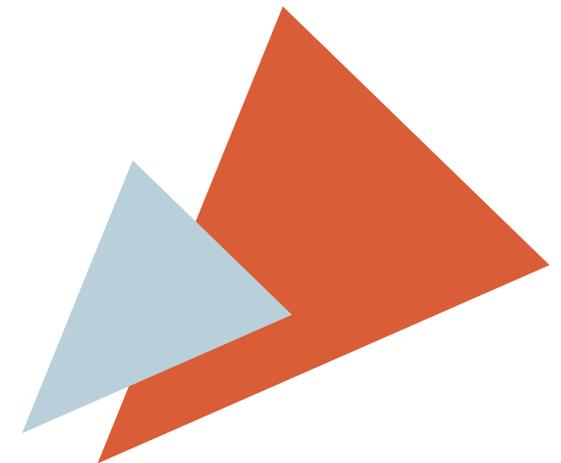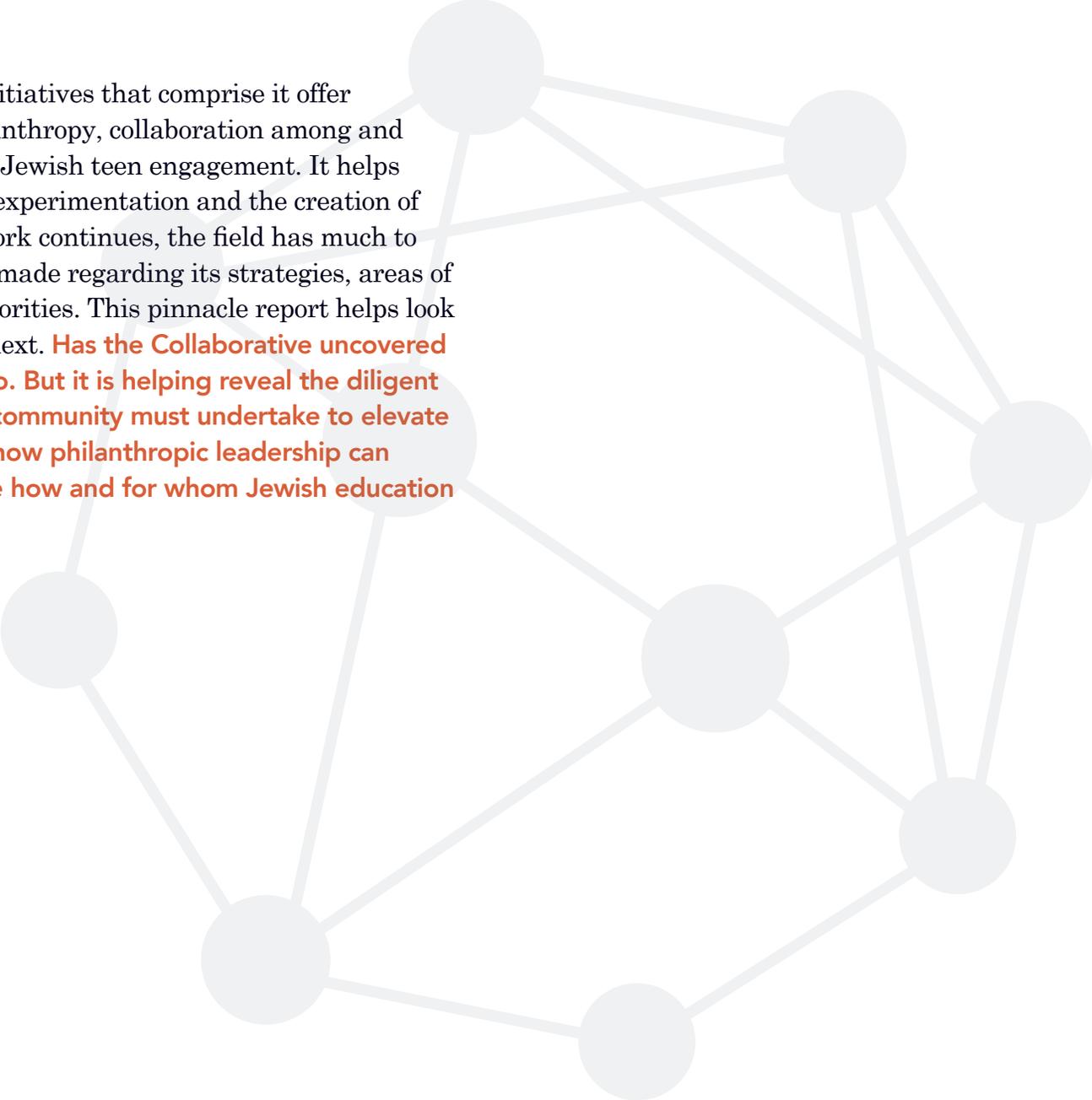
The Funder Collaborative and the 10 initiatives that comprise it offer important insights about strategic philanthropy, collaboration among and between funders and practitioners, and Jewish teen engagement. It helps clarify how to maximize the promise of experimentation and the creation of new educational models. Even as the work continues, the field has much to learn from the decisions each initiative made regarding its strategies, areas of focus, structures, and programmatic priorities. This pinnacle report helps look back and looks forward to what comes next. **Has the Collaborative uncovered a silver bullet for teen engagement? No. But it is helping reveal the diligent work and cooperative efforts that any community must undertake to elevate its Jewish teen offerings. It is showing how philanthropic leadership can catalyze investments seeking to change how and for whom Jewish education and engagement is practiced.**