

At 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.