



Jumpstart Report

issue four | spring 2013

in partnership with



LA 2013: the Jewish future — only sooner a report on the *Innovation to Transformation* summit

Saba Soomekh, PhD

The Los Angeles freeway system is the only secular communion Los Angeles has. Mere driving on the freeway is in no way the same as participating in it. Anyone can drive on the freeway, and many people with no vocation for it do, hesitating here and resisting there, losing the rhythm of the lane change, thinking about where they came from and where they are going. Actual participation requires a total surrender, a concentration so intense as to seem a kind of narcosis, a rapture-of-the-freeway. The rhythm takes over.

Joan Didion (1976)¹

Navigating the terrain of Los Angeles requires both a special kind of commitment and certain kind of surrender: a commitment to traverse far-flung ribbons of swooping cement, and a surrender, as Joan Didion observes, to the sometimes confounding rhythms of the city's unpredictable traffic flow. LA's Jewish philanthropic landscape is no different. The unique geography and psychology of LA are windows into its civic soul. Diverse, diffuse, relaxed, and relentless, there is far more to Los Angeles than the simple projection that fills screens large and small across the planet. For all its centrality in global consciousness, LA is ambivalent about its place as a hub for Jewish life, and as an emerging center for charitable changemaking. These paradoxes were on full display at the *Innovation to Transformation* philanthropy summit in January 2013.

(Continued on page 2)

In this report

page 1

- Report & Analysis

page 3

- The Backstory

page 4

- Engineered Serendipity

page 6

- Gifts & Gaps

page 15

- What Comes Next?

page 16

- Credits

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily represent those of Jumpstart or the Jewish Funders Network. Responsibility for the research and findings in this report rests solely with its author(s).

For the group of nearly eighty social investors and innovators gathered to explore the challenges and opportunities facing LA's philanthropic future, contradictions and counterpoints bracketed nearly every conversation. Whether contrasting immediate results with long-time change, or balancing Jewish giving with broader philanthropy, or pursuing innovation while supporting what is already in place, the discussions were frequently bounded by the desire to find a happy medium between opposing viewpoints. But underlying the quest for balance amidst a sea of countervailing values, there was a real sense that the financial, intellectual, and creative wealth of Los Angeles was greater than the sum of its parts. Without dismissing the challenges facing LA's Jewish community and its potential contribution to the world, there was a feeling that out of the city's rich diversity and contradictions could come equally valuable solutions.

Re-invention, immigrants, and entrepreneurs

Los Angeles is filled with people who seek to break from the past, reinventing themselves and their communities as they do so. The combination of not having a deeply-rooted history, fed by a population of immigrants and transplants, in conjunction with a business sector focused on creativity and entrepreneurialism, is perhaps LA's most powerful dynamic. This image of the city and region pervaded the

Summit. Many funders see Los Angeles as open to progressive ideas and not stuck in a traditional model of doing things. That receptivity to change and celebration of entrepreneurship was regarded as a promising landscape for the reinvention of Jewish life and philanthropy. However, while the openness and freedom engendered by LA's brief history is an asset in seeking collaboration and new ideas, it also can lead to isolation and fragmentation. Emerging through a focused conversation as well as through recurring themes throughout the day and a half, the city's "gifts" and "gaps" became road signs throughout the convening, frequently cited as conversations explored the highways and byways of Jewish Los Angeles.

The creative capital of the world

The region's role as the global capital of the entertainment industry was seen by many as a major asset: the environment fosters creativity and creative ways to communicate. According to Jay Sanderson, president and CEO of the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles and former CEO of the Jewish Television Network, Los Angeles is unique because big ideas and popular culture are created here and migrate outward. Addressing another type of invention, the Liberty Hill Foundation's Paula Litt described the ideal of the successful immigrant entrepreneur as the key to Los Angeles: one who arrives here, amasses wealth, and does great things with it. Because of what the city

The Backstory

LA 2013: The Jewish Future – only sooner is a report based on *Innovation to Transformation: Changing Jewish LA, Changing LA Jewishly*, a private funders' summit, which took place in Los Angeles on January 16-17, 2013. The Summit was organized and convened by Jumpstart in partnership with Jewish Funders Network, and made possible in large part with funding from the Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles. All quotes in the report are from participants and presenters. This report is made possible by a generous grant from the Diane and Guilford Glazer Fund.

Genesis of the summit

Innovation to Transformation: Changing Jewish LA, Changing LA Jewishly aimed to build cultures of innovation and long-term collaborations. The summit's purpose was to share knowledge, strengthen relationships, and explore potential for collective action and impact. Its goal was to accelerate LA's development as a global center for Jewish creativity and community in the 21st century.

Los Angeles is already a dynamic center for Jewish innovation, home to dozens of Jewish non-profit startups, as well as vibrant established organizations working to re-invent Jewish life. However, there have been few opportunities to examine the changing environment as a whole and explore how collaboration and cooperation between funders and other resource providers could achieve positive sustainable change in the

(Continued on page 5)

has to offer, young, energetic people come here bringing with them new talent and ideas.

The critical mass of new talent and ideas is what drives many young social entrepreneurs to launch their social benefit ventures in Los Angeles. Ben Goldhirsh, founder of GOOD and chairman of the Goldhirsh Foundation, explained how he built his business in Los Angeles in order to find like-minded people—pragmatic idealists, working toward individual and collective progress. GOOD's brand is about meaning; it provides a platform where people who share these values can interact with each other. Asked for his message to young people in their 20s, he responded, "Do. Learn from what you do. Then do better. Don't be afraid of dreaming. We need to create collectively, and we need to create a new reality that needs to be as big and as good as the dream you are able to have."

Diversity, insularity, and (dis)unity

The unique mix of people and cultures consistently featured as one of LA's strengths as well as one of its challenges. As one participant said, "Sometimes the fact that Los Angeles is diverse adds to its divisiveness": multiple ethnic and cultural groups seem to connect only during times of crisis. While many people said that the diversity in Los Angeles sometimes causes conflict and insularity, most thought it a benefit to the Jewish community. Diversity brings energy and multiple perspectives to philanthropy. LA Jews share a wide variety of cultures, musical genres, foods, and traditions. However, many felt that the biggest challenge in Los Angeles is getting all of these diverse communities to break down the walls that separate them and to work together.

(Continued on page 5)

Engineered Serendipity: Creating space for innovation and risk-taking

By Andrés Spokoiny

The state of funding innovation in the Jewish community presents encouraging and discouraging realities at the same time.

On the one hand we are seeing many innovative programs and organizations. On the other, we are seeing big issues and discontents in the field of innovation. In a way, this will be a “yes, but” presentation.

At the program level, we are seeing some innovation. Los Angeles and New York are foci of innovation in the Jewish world and the vibrancy of Israel as a center of innovation is undoubted (I refer, of course, not to the high-tech sector only, but to myriad innovative social programs). Also the newly rebuilt Jewish communities of Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union are producing innovation in community programs. It’s understandable why: they aren’t limited by a tradition of community work and they have to rebuild communal life from scratch.

There’s also innovation in the way we fund. We see the emergence of giving circles, venture philanthropy, impact investing, collaborative funding, co-investment and the like. These innovative ways of funding are only being timidly tested in the Jewish community but they are gaining ground.

To talk about the discontents of the field of innovation I will use three

metaphors: the coffee shop, the printing press, and the recycle bin.

The coffee shop: innovation rarely happens in a vacuum. It needs an ecosystem, a breeding ground that is conducive to the generation of ideas. Innovation comes from an environment in which ideas are shared and networks provide a platform for exchange that is somehow structured but mainly serendipitous. The model for that is the coffee shops that sprung up in Paris, London, and Vienna in the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries, where savants, polymaths, philosophers, and scientists conversed freely. Benjamin Franklin, for example (as Steven Johnson² aptly remarks) is a product of that culture.

Innovation gets accelerated when information flows freely. The modern example is the open source movement that believes that sharing is a new form of owning. Proprietary information goes against that. Ben Franklin seemed to know that 200 years before Linux. He didn’t patent a single one of his inventions.

Networks are the very root of innovation. In fact, an idea, an epiphany, is, in fact, a network in action: neurons making new connections and firing in our brain through new pathways. And yet, we are still very territorial in the Jewish community. We need to re-create a space

where people from different disciplines can exchange information and talk about new ideas with each other—a space where ideas flow freely and information breeds creativity.

The lack of a “coffee shop-like” space in the Jewish community is hurting innovation. Turf and proprietary programs and information put a brake on innovation.

So if we want information to flourish, we need networks. We actually need combinations of networks, and our networking for ideas should not be limited to the Jewish community but should be extended to other sectors in the society.

The printing press: we all assume that Gutenberg invented the printing press around 1430 in Mainz, Germany. In fact, he didn’t. The actual creator of the printing press is a Chinese inventor called Bi Sheng. Gutenberg’s innovation made movable type more efficient and revolutionized the mechanism with which the press operates. Gutenberg lived in the winemaking region of Germany. So Gutenberg’s “invention” was in fact an adaptation of two different, older technologies: the wine press and Bi Sheng’s printing press. This does not detract from Gutenberg’s genius—rather the opposite. What Gutenberg did is something that we call

(Continued on page 8)

Sprawl and diffusion

Many of the obstacles identified in building a successful Jewish community in Los Angeles related to its geographic sprawl, which Dorothy Parker once called “Seventy-two suburbs in search of a city.” The vastness of the urban landscape, combined with a lack of a real center and limited public transport, were seen as contributing to the disunity of the Jewish community and the city as a whole. Participants felt this lack of geographic connection leads to insufficient communication between populations. Despite broad recognition of the benefits of a rich diversity of Jewish expression, much of it is thought to exist in ethnic and denominational silos. Some worried that many immigrant groups and denominations are inwardly focused, only socializing and communicating among themselves. Several participants agreed that a major obstacle in fundraising is insufficient connectivity between communities, organizations, and leaders. One person noted that the only time you see Jews of different ethnic backgrounds coming together in Los Angeles is at Israel-focused events.

Because there are large immigrant communities in Los Angeles and large numbers of in-migrants from other parts of the United States, organizations may not have relationships with families that go back generations. Some observers offered that some ethnic Jewish communities are unaccustomed to being involved in philanthropic organizations or volunteering their time because they did not have a tradition of doing so in their country of origin. Immigrant Jewish communities may find it difficult to embrace LA’s pluralistic Jewish environment because it may be perceived as an assimilatory threat to their own particular cultural traditions.

(Continued on page 7)

The Backstory continued

Jewish community. Amidst the creative output of individuals and institutions, even with the emergence of innovative Jewish projects native to Los Angeles, there is widespread agreement that LA is missing—both within and beyond the Jewish philanthropic world—the kind of strategic information-sharing, let alone coordination and collaboration, which provide for truly fertile ground for experimentation and risk-taking.

Despite the enormous wealth and vitality of philanthropy in LA, passion and expertise dedicated to supporting local, national and global causes, no forum has existed to discuss and explore the strategic landscape facing Jewish funders in Los Angeles, and to focus discussion and cooperation in order to better understand how to best effect change in the city. It is against this backdrop that Jumpstart and Jewish Funders Network conceived of the Innovation to Transformation philanthropy summit.

The gathering convened nearly eighty select leaders in Los Angeles philanthropy who are committed to making Los Angeles a global center for Jewish creativity and community in the 21st century, through innovation and long-term collaboration. Invitations to the event—sent only

(Continued on page 7)

What unique resources/assets & needs/challenges does Los Angeles have?

Summit participants were asked to fill out cards with the pluses and minuses in pursuing philanthropy and social benefit work in Los Angeles. The cards were collected and posted at the summit for review, and later a simplified list was entered into the Wordle app to make the word clouds below. Sizes of the words reflect the frequency with which they appeared on participant cards.

GIFTS



GAPS



Images created by the Wordle.net web application are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 United States License by Jonathan Feinberg,

This observation extended beyond Los Angeles Jewry as a challenge to the broader civic culture. Because the city is so large and diffuse, the absence of connectivity engenders an absence of community. Participants felt that the social and geographic isolation makes it easy for people to disconnect from the city's most pressing problems such as poverty and crime, and thus, they do not feel a social pressure to give.

The challenge LA faces, however, according to some participants, is that there is a culture of individualism, and a feeling that people are running from Judaism. We not only need to participate nationally, but we need to interact globally—we should be an innovative marketplace for the Jewish world. Yet others argued that we already have programs in LA that define Los Angeles as a global center. But other participants wondered, if there are so many great things happening in Los Angeles, why are we failing to establish ourselves as one of the critical sources of Jewish innovation? Why is LA not doing a good job selling itself? Is it because of our failure to articulate the value of Los Angeles? Do we not recognize it ourselves? In order to make Los Angeles a global Jewish center, many participants said that we need to focus on the city's defining strengths. We must tap into the resources that make Los Angeles different than other cities.

The comparison of Los Angeles Jewish philanthropy with New York Jewish philanthropy came up numerous times during the summit. Some participants wondered aloud whether LA donors have an inferiority complex. Another later wrote, "The repetitive comparisons to the East Coast, New York in particular, are counterproductive and frankly, a bit offensive to a

(Continued on page 9)

The Backstory continued

to individuals who directly influenced the allocation of resources to charitable endeavors—were curated by a host committee with deep roots in the community and social networks spanning the breadth of Southern California. There was a special focus on recruiting emerging philanthropists, individuals of means who were still forming their personal approach to funding charitable projects; in the end, 29% were under 40, 55% were 40-60, and 16% were over 60. The participant group was diverse, representing the various populations and interests present in Jewish LA. The interplay of differing perspectives, seasoned with input from local philanthropic peers with experience and expertise, catalyzed conversations that deepened understanding and have led to documented interest in collaborative action.

The summit included a varying mix of brief, provocative expert presentations, small group discussions, participant-generated conversations, and facilitated action planning over the course of an evening and a day. Dr. Saba Soomekh was engaged as the summit's rapporteur, and Dr. Thomas Backer, Jumpstart's evaluator in residence, oversaw the evaluation process. ■

Engineered Serendipity continued

“exaptation,” taking something from an external, seemingly unrelated field and adapting it to our own. Creation *ex nihilo* (from nothing) pertains only to G-d. We, humans, create by combining, adapting and exapting existing knowledge. “Invention” in Latin shares the same root as “inventory.” One can only invent with what one has.

Fields of knowledge that are self-contained produce less innovation because they lack exaptation. The Jewish community is far too insular and if we are so, the possibilities for exaptation are limited. The best laboratories of ideas are always a little contaminated.

We cannot plan or force exaptation. It occurs, as in the coffee shop, by serendipity. We can only create the conditions for that neural connection to take place and create a new idea.

The recycle bin: innovation cannot take place without a culture of high tolerance for risk and failure. Many of the big ideas of humanity were, actually, mistakes or failures. They came from the “recycle bin,” but they were not dismissed. Viagra failed as a heart disease medication, but it created the best pharmaceutical business in history. Imagine if somebody had emptied that recycle bin at Pfizer.... A culture in which we learn from both past failures and

successes is critical. Innovation is almost always born out of an iterative process of trial and error. In many cases, it’s born out of reusing and recycling previous failures.

We sometimes pay lip service to failure but our actual tolerance for risk and failure in the Jewish community is limited. We don’t support those that fail, we don’t circulate the learnings that stem from failure, and we don’t reward risk-taking. Moreover, we don’t create structures that facilitate the process of learning from failure and capitalize on the lessons of past experience. Learning needs vehicles, structures and channels. As it’s often said: we need to fail fast, cheap, and smart.

There are a few extra issues with the way in which we fund innovation. Sometimes we, as funders, unwittingly create paradoxes that make innovation harder.

Governance: it is hard to be innovative in a highly bureaucratic environment. Yet, we sometimes force funders to become structured too soon. And by “structure” we mean an old-style system of boards and committees. Yes, governance is critical and the lack thereof is a recipe for disaster, but the governance mechanisms we choose need to be conducive to innovation.

Scaling: we are in love with start-ups; they really are “à la mode” these days. However, sometimes our love of small, innovative organizations prevents them from growing into scale. We fund start-ups, but we don’t give them the means to build capacity and grow to scale. It is true that not every start-up needs to grow. Actually, not every start-up needs to survive. That’s the nature of innovation. But those that could grow to scale should be allowed to do so. Our funding cycles are not always conducive to that. We give short-term grants that don’t allow start-ups to build capacity. We fund the innovators, but then we starve them of funds precisely when they are ready to take their innovation to scale. It’s important to devise funding cycles that are in line with the nature of the activity. Amazon.com took six years until it distributed dividends. Without a longer funder relationship, scaling is impossible. Funders have a responsibility to allow for the creation of an open environment where nonprofits feel free to create and innovate without having to worry about not being funded tomorrow.

Confusion between innovation and engagement: Sometimes we fund innovation as a way to provide an avenue to Jewish engagement for the innovator himself. That’s not neces-

(Continued on page 10)



New Yorker. Just as I know remarks about California from New Yorkers must be. But every time someone feels they must compare LA to NY, it is a diffusion of creative energy—who cares what NY does? The comparisons sound juvenile and are fruitless. Do your own thing, claim it, and celebrate it.”

Balancing risk and reward: making change possible and sustainable

Most participants recognized LA’s potential as a center for Jewish innovation but many felt that the organized community does not sufficiently invest in this capacity. Others argued that philanthropic dollars are best spent on organizations that have proven themselves over time. Peter Lowy, Co-Chief Executive Officer of Westfield Group, asserted that collaborative change manifests itself in philanthropy when funders rise above purely institutional motives. He stressed that two questions are essential: “Is the funder ready to make a change?” and “Is the institution ready to change their bureaucracy to make that change?”

For Lowy, innovation comes from collaboration, unification, accepting change, and a lack of ego. To be sure, the need for organizational humility is not limited to institutions.

“The problem with young organizations,” noted one participant, “is that they think they should stand alone and that’s not the case. They have a good idea but can’t be on their own. There should be people who can group projects into bigger organizations and the money can get allocated into that by the funders.”

The summit surfaced a need for conversation between startups and funders about realistic expectations, goals, and paths to sustainability. Many presenters

suggested rethinking how efforts are deemed a success or failure, instead seeing each project as a learning opportunity. We usually measure the wrong things, and often we are not measuring impact, said one participant. “There also isn’t one way to judge the quality of an organization,” added another. “Do you go by numbers, a skilled evaluator, a qualitative interview? One of the real challenges is we have a threat of imposing metrics on organizations [on which] you can’t put a mathematical evaluation.” Moreover, many participants were concerned with how to make donors feel more comfortable with the idea of risk taking in general. One participant added, “The funders do a huge disservice to the organizations by putting a time limit. You don’t have to go from three years to an infinite amount of time. You have to have a conversation with the funders about what your goals are. You have to build infrastructure.”

Nevertheless, argued Andrés Spokoiny, President and CEO of the Jewish Funders Network, funders have a responsibility to allow for the creation of an open environment where nonprofits feel free to create and innovate without having to worry about not being funded tomorrow. Innovation cannot come from isolation, he said: funders must create environments that are conducive to it.

Improving the philanthropic product

Evan Schlessinger, President of The Springboard Company, a consumer research and innovation consulting firm, explained how he applies business principles from his new product development company to the world of philanthropy. His presentation focused on how to increase consumer satisfaction by

(Continued on page 11)

Engineered Serendipity continued

sarily bad in and of itself, but one has to be careful. Engagement has other rules and other goals; it is different from innovation. One has to be extremely clear – and careful – about what we are actually funding. If, for the sake of engagement, we fund programs that produce unnecessary or unscalable innovation, we at least should be clear about it.

Two final thoughts:

1. Even when we're being innovative in terms of programs, we see very little innovation in the realm of ideas and ideologies. Ideologically, we live in 1880, as almost all of the leading movements that organize Jewish life (Reform, Conservative, Orthodox,

Zionist) were created then. There has been virtually no ideological innovation since Mordechai Kaplan. True, there's a paucity of ideas in the world in general, but the lack of ideological innovation – by that we mean the development of new concepts of G-d, society, community, Judaism, identity, etc. – makes the quest for meaning very hard, especially for young people. In the 21st century, it's hard for them to find meaning in ideologies that were created to respond to historical realities of nearly 200 years ago. In this realm as well, we seem not to give ourselves permission to experiment, tinker and play. We need this meta-innovation probably more than the innovation in programs and services.

2. In the Jewish community we are not innovative enough in terms of organizational architecture. We are still using organizational models and governance that served very well those organizations that were based on the industrial paradigm. Our highly structured and hierarchical organizations respond to the modern model. The post-modern organization necessitates a new model, one in which leadership is distributed and not concentrated, and in which information is shared and not owned. The networked organization will be the ultimate vehicle for innovation to take place.

In sum, we need to invent a new way of inventing ■

Andrés Spokoiny is the President and CEO of the Jewish Funders Network. He is a long-time Jewish communal leader with a history of leading successful organizational transformations. The CEO of Federation CJA in Montreal from 2009–2011, he helped fundamentally change the Federation's operations and its relationship with the community. Before joining the Federation, Andrés worked for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Community (JDC) in Paris. Originally from Argentina, Andrés has a multidisciplinary academic background including business, education and rabbinical studies in different institutions around the world. He is fluent in Hebrew, English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Yiddish, and is proficient in Russian and German.



identifying positive attributes that consumers want more of and negative attributes that consumers want less of. Schlessinger shared several examples from the food industry to illustrate his point. Nabisco, for example, learned from consumer research that Oreo users wanted “more of the good stuff they like,” so they created Double Stuffed Oreos.

Schlessinger then shifted from the food industry to Jewish philanthropy; using the same vocabulary, he stressed that philanthropists are consumers too, making purchasing decisions with their charitable contributions. Schlessinger argued that organizations must seek to increase donor satisfaction by understanding what donors find to be important, and then giving them more of it.

“In the old days, there was more anonymous giving,” he noted. “But now most major gifts come with contracts and strings attached. It’s pretty obvious that givers want something back. Some want to be active participants, they want access, to have their thoughts and opinions heard at the table. Others want greater amounts of acknowledgement, which is accomplished through naming and other recognition rights. But all givers also want to know that they are effecting change, they want to be able to measure the difference that their philanthropy is making, they want to measure impact, [and] they want to feel like they are contributing to solving problems.”

Donor recognition, donor appreciation and donor acknowledgement are therefore critical, he stressed; indeed, one cannot thank people enough. Given that past donors are most likely future to be donors, he challenged summit participants to constantly be thinking of ways to do a better job of giving donors more returns on their charitable investments.

Measuring success: resource management in the local economy

What are the measures that define success? This question informs the tension between working for immediate outcomes and pursuing long-term goals. Is it more important to measure outcomes of specific projects and organizations or to calibrate culture change and shift the behavior of the entire community? There was debate among the funders and change-makers regarding whether to assess broad culture change and systemwide impact or to focus on the incremental steps necessary to make that change. Measuring individual steps is much easier—they are defined by time, and can be measured via simple quantitative metrics. On the other hand, participants noted, while it is much harder to measure culture change, it may be more critical to shaping the future.

Philanthropists are always asking themselves if they are spending money wisely, creating the greatest impact for their money and, perhaps most importantly, if they have selected the right organizational vehicle. But they also want to know if the money they gave ultimately helped measurably affect an issue. Is that something that can be measured? And, how do you get people comfortable with giving to a goal that may not be measurable?

One participant worried that the organizations that raise the most money tend to do less because they focus too much on fundraising: “Sometimes the quality of the program is not the key determiner of how great an organization is. A lot of the time, programs that do nothing get a lot of money because they have good fundraisers. We need to look at the quality of what they are doing separate from their ability to raise money.”

Success is visible in collective impact and culture change, argued Paul Vandeventer, CEO of Community Partners. There are too many expectations from individual institutions, when, as he sees it, nonprofits exist to foster community through building the resilience of the collective. Asking the people who run these organizations to quantify those kinds of results in a concrete way is asking them to measure things that are difficult to measure, such as relationships or respect.

Instead, Vandeventer suggested, we should define and measure ourselves by what we want to achieve: a caring and self-nourishing community. He believes that there are several components to a caring community: promoting a sense of physical and emotional health, helping people feel secure and fostering capability in individuals and empowering them, and inspiring prosperity and confidence. “When you are prosperous,” he said, “you feel like the future is yours.”

Inside/Outside: Jewish and non-Jewish giving

Another tension that surfaced repeatedly was how to balance giving to Jewish and non-Jewish causes. Even more fundamentally, there was some disagreement about what constitutes a Jewish cause, and how Jewish giving is defined.

Jessica Aronoff, Vice President for Philanthropy of Roll Global LLC, noted that very little of her philanthropic work is with Jewish organizations; nevertheless, she argued, all of it is Jewish in nature insofar as it is fundamentally motivated by a commitment to *tikkun olam*, repairing the world. She believes that while this is not a uniquely Jewish idea, Jews accept

this responsibility as self-evident. Moreover, the Jewish organizations to which she is most drawn personally are those that help people most in need, who generally are not Jewish. To her, “This duty to contribute to the betterment of our world is, in fact, simply a part of being Jewish—or maybe of just *being*.”

Janice Kamenir-Reznik, a former Soviet Jewry activist and co-founder of Jewish World Watch, echoed these ideas, noting that through her work, she has taken values from the Torah and Judaism and used them to make a difference in the world. She believes that all funders and grantees can take core Jewish values and apply them to their lives. Her remarks touched on a dilemma that recurred throughout the day: should Jews mostly give to Jewish causes? Many people felt it is important to convince Jews to support Jewish causes, while others disagreed and said that by giving to nonprofits in general, donors are expressing Jewish values. One participant said she picks organizations based on what speaks to her—what she feels emotionally connects. “I know that by devoting my time and money to a good cause, I am fulfilling a mitzvah,” she said. Another participant argued that it was appropriate to recognize and honor Jewish funders’ passions for causes beyond the Jewish world.

There were spirited discussions and numerous disagreements about why it is that even many philanthropically inclined Jews in LA do not give to Jewish causes, and whether or how that might be changed. Participants had a number of explanations for the phenomenon. These included the perception that Jewish causes have enough money and it is more important to give to non-Jewish causes, as well as



disinterest and distrust—prospective donors may not believe in the cause or have confidence that their money will be used effectively. One participant cited “Jewish arrogance”: the sense of entitlement of Jewish organizations to Jewish dollars.

Many participants felt that Jewish organizations have not marketed themselves well. There was general agreement that Jewish causes do not do a good enough job of establishing their value in a very competitive philanthropic marketplace—not even for freely available services. “We have a lot of resources,” said one participant, “we are just not doing a good job promoting them.” Prospective funders may believe that there is not enough need in the Jewish community or simply may not be aware of those needs. Still, as one participant said, “if the importance of being Jewish is to be a better person and to help the world, than there is a need for certain organizations in the realm of Jews, especially in education.” While some participants felt comfortable with the idea that any giving was Jewish giving, another noted that “if we can’t build community among ourselves, then we cannot help ourselves or others.”

Beyond money: social and knowledge capital

Summit participants celebrated Los Angeles for its highly motivated, capable, wealthy, and engaged individuals. The region attracts people from all over the world who are driven and have the potential to contribute not only financially, but also through their networks and resources. Thus, what Los Angeles lacks in philanthropic capital it makes up for in human and social capital—relationships that can drive dollars to worthy causes, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

However, identifying and mobilizing that capital is another matter entirely. In today’s challenging and unpredictable economic climate, it is much easier to ask people to volunteer than to ask for money. But as Peter Lowy asked, how do we get people involved in a city where there is a low turnout rate for volunteering and where there is not “a” center of Jewish life?

Rachel Cohen Gerrol, executive director of the PVBLC Foundation and co-founder of the Nexus Global Youth Summit on Innovative Philanthropy and Social Entrepreneurship, pointed out that one can fund organizations with all sorts of “currency,” citing the PVBLC Foundation’s use of billboards and advertising space as one example. Many participants pointed to Gerrol’s idea of using assets, networks, and time instead of money in philanthropy as a creative way to get people involved and said it was something they wanted to encourage in their communities. Not having money to donate, they stressed, does not mean people cannot be involved philanthropically.

Adam Miller, who chairs the Cornerstone OnDemand Foundation, explored the significance of volunteering, even for high-level donors. He explained that philanthropists can be activists and capacity builders as well as donors. “If you are going to give, give to something you are passionate about,” he said, “and if you are passionate about it, then you should give more than just money.” Other ways to give to a cause include donating assets and venues, sharing networks, and getting people involved. “It isn’t just about what we can give,” he noted, “but what our entire ecosystem can give. Don’t just limit your contributions to just your dollars but give with everything you can do.”

(Continued on page 14)

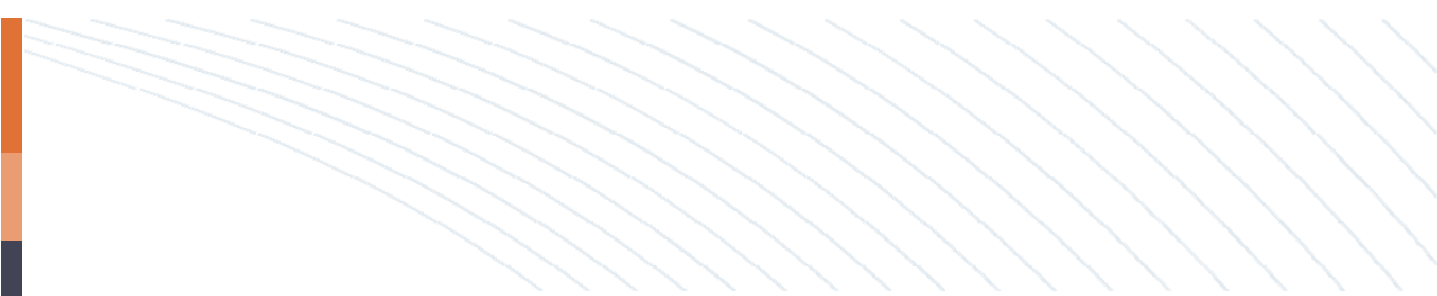
What LA offers the rest of the world for the (Jewish) future

“What does Jewish Los Angeles have to offer Los Angeles, and what does secular Los Angeles teach the Jews?” asked Adlai Wertman, Professor of Clinical Management and Organization at the USC Marshall School of Business, and founding Director of the Society and Business Lab at Marshall. Angelenos have something to teach the world, he said, and secular Los Angeles and Jewish Los Angeles need to partner with each other more effectively. By the end of the summit, many participants had expressed interest not only in learning more but also in working together to make Los Angeles a global center for Jewish life and Jewish contributions to the greater good.

What will it take? “A willing heart” said Jumpstart’s Shawn Landres, citing the generosity of the Israelites in the desert who donated gold and jewelry to create the Tabernacle (Exodus 35:22). The Summit encouraged people to sit down, engage, and most importantly, converse with each other. JFN’s Andrés Spokoiny

called for an open, transparent platform to share information [see sidebar article on page 4 ‘Engineered Serendipity’]. We must build bridges among young people, the established organizations, startups, and nonprofits. “No single problem can be taken on alone,” he said; through networking and open conversations, innovation will develop when there is a context of free-flowing ideas. The conveners of *Innovation to Transformation* sought to connect like-minded funders and donors. They hoped the summit might increase both awareness and interest in collaborations that could help build cultures of innovation through philanthropy.

As one participant said, “New ideas are our currency.” Participants agreed that LA’s greatest asset is that it is a source of ideas, and that many of the challenges and opportunities in Los Angeles are actually the challenges and opportunities of the Jewish world at large. LA may be unique today, but to paraphrase John Deasy,⁴ Jewish Los Angeles is Jewish America, only sooner. ■

- 
- 1 Joan Didion (1976), “The Diamond Lane Slowdown,” *Esquire* 86:2 (August), pp. 35-37.
 - 2 Johnson, Steven (2009), “Green Ben: Benjamin Franklin and Ecosystems,” *American History* 44:3 (August), pp. 26-33.
 - 3 Gene Shalit (2002), *Great Hollywood Wit* (New York: St. Martin’s Press), p. 96.
 - 4 As quoted in R. Christine Hershey (2012), “The L.A. Narrative,” *RE:Philanthropy – What Matters Now?* (Arlington, VA: Council on Foundations), <http://www.cofinteract.org/rephilanthropy/?p=4062> (accessed March 15, 2013).

What comes next?

Although the organizers of *Innovation to Transformation* aimed primarily to shift the overall landscape rather than yield specific proposals, nevertheless participants generated a number of specific ideas for collective action. Based on the responses to surveys distributed after the summit, virtually all participants expressed interest, and 55% strong interest, in collaborating with other summit participants on matters they discussed. A similarly large majority reported feeling (38% strongly so) a greater commitment to building cultures of innovation through their philanthropic work. More than half reported a commitment to moving one or more specific ideas forward; these included projects related to philanthropic collaboration (30%), making LA a global center for Jewish life and Jewish contributions to the greater good (28%), diversity and connectivity (22%), and the economics of Jewish life (14%), among others.

A recurring theme was the need to improve communication and collaboration, not only among funders but also across organizational silos, whether geographic, programmatic, or structural, among established institutions, and startups. Specific strategies to address the issue included:

- Fielding a full-scale demographic survey of Los Angeles Jewry (the last one was conducted in 1996)
- Sharing data and organizational learning
- Agreeing on common metrics and evaluation standards
- Creating platforms—whether in-person salons, online directories, or a think tank-cum-concierge—to facilitate relationships, share ideas, and overcome inefficiencies
- Setting up new philanthropic models, such as giving circles and fast-pitch gatherings, to give funders easier information about, and access to, new ideas

The strategies extended beyond the philanthropic/nonprofit sectors into community development, as well. Participants sought opportunities for cross-communal interaction among different Jewish ethnic and immigrant groups.

Concerns about the affordability of Jewish life also attracted considerable attention. Many participants were concerned that Jewish life in Los Angeles is expensive. Jewish day schools, camps, and synagogue memberships are not accessible for many who lack the funds to pay for them. How, then, to create affordable access for the next generation? Among the many suggestions:

- Financial aid endowments for day schools, supplemental schools, and camps
- Independent complementary Jewish education programs (beyond synagogue Hebrew schools)
- Vouchers for participation in Jewish life, including a “birthright camp” model to guarantee every young Jewish Angeleno a Jewish camping experience

- Sharing organizational infrastructure costs, such as back-office administration, web development, human resources, and insurance

Still, key questions remained, among them how to expand these discussions to include those who were not present and to invite all those who might not feel welcome yet, including ethnic and immigrant groups with diverse philanthropic traditions, such as Iranian, Iraqi, Israeli, and Russian Jews. Questions about “sustainability,” however the term is defined, recurred throughout the summit, encompassing explorations of creative revenue streams as well as mergers & acquisitions. Participants remained concerned about Los Angeles’s tenuous funding and organizational development pipelines, plagued by significant gaps, for innovative projects to move from new startup to established program or institution.

Whether or not there is a mandate for change depends, ultimately, on the will of the summit participants to act on the conversations they began at the summit, as well as the capacity of the summit organizers not only to harness their energy but to anticipate their needs moving forward. There was widespread agreement that Los Angeles is a unique and compelling source of ideas for the Jewish future and that Jewish LA has a great deal to offer the global future. The rest is up to us. ■

INNOVATION TO TRANSFORMATION



Presenters

Jessica Aronoff
Joshua Avedon
Sonia Cummings
Rachel Cohen Gerrol
Ben Goldhirsh
Lisa Greer
Sarah Indyk
Janice Kamenir-Reznik
Shawn Landres
Paula Litt
Peter Lowy
Adam Miller
Jay Sanderson
Evan Schlessinger
Andrés Spokoiny
Paul Vandeventer
Adlai Wertman

Host Committee

Sonia Simon Cummings, Co-chair
Lisa Greer, Co-chair
Adam Miller, Co-chair
Vivian Alberts
Julie & Steve Bram
Linda & Lorin Fife
John Fishel
Richard Gunther
Janice Kamenir-Reznik
Mitchell Kamin
Emily Kane
Ron Leibow
Paula Litt
Eve Madison Rodsky
Liba Wenig Rubenstein
Jay Sanderson
Evan Schlessinger
Marvin Schotland
Jacob Segal
David Weiner
Adlai Wertman
Sam Yebri

Jumpstart

Jumpstart is a research & design laboratory that the Jerusalem Post says has “changed the global conversation about Jewish innovation.” Jumpstart inspires and equips visionary leaders and philanthropic supporters of Jewish and interreligious causes around the globe, offering them the knowledge, relationships, and hands-on assistance they need to achieve measurable impact, build stronger communities, and transform the world.

Learn more at jewishjumpstart.org.

Jewish Funders Network

The Jewish Funders Network (JFN) works with Jewish funders, at the individual and collective levels, to improve the quality of their giving and maximize their impact. Through JFN, influential leaders from the not-for-profit and business worlds come together to explore the crucial issues facing the philanthropic community today. JFN leverages the power and the creativity of networks to produce change in the Jewish world.

Learn more at jfunders.org.

About the summit and this report

Summit organizing team: Joshua Avedon, Wendy Jackler, Shawn Landres, Andrés Spokoiny, Hanina Stettin

Editorial team: Joshua Avedon, Shawn Landres, Saba Soomekh, Andrés Spokoiny

Production: Joshua Avedon

Citation: Soomekh, Saba. 2013. “LA 2013: the Jewish future — only sooner.”

Jumpstart Report 4. In cooperation with the Jewish Funders Network.

Los Angeles: Jumpstart.

About the author

Dr. Saba Soomekh is a researcher and lecturer in religious studies, women’s studies, and Middle Eastern history. She teaches and writes extensively on world religions, gender, and the geo-politics of Israel and Iran. She is the author of *From the Shahs to Los Angeles: Three Generations of Iranian Jewish Women between Religion and Culture* (SUNY Press, 2012). Saba earned her BA from UC Berkeley, her MDiv from Harvard Divinity School, and her PhD from UC Santa Barbara.



LA 2013: the Jewish future — only sooner by Jewish
Jumpstart is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-
NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.

v1.3

Innovation to Transformation
Los Angeles
Summit Sponsors

THE FOUNDATION
JEWISH COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
LOS ANGELES

Anonymous

Diane and Guilford Glazer Fund

Peter & Janine Lowy

Jeff Ayeroff & Marty Longbine