

Our Evolution as a National Funder

The Jim Joseph Foundation's approach to funding Jewish education through national and local initiatives has evolved over its twenty-year history.

Early Years: National and Local

In its initial years of grantmaking, the Foundation had an intentional strategy of funding both national and local initiatives. While most of the larger grants went to national organizations, some major early local investments included piloting a [teen engagement initiative](#) in the North Shore of Boston, a Jewish [high school affordability initiative](#) in Los Angeles, and an [early childhood education initiative](#) in the San Francisco Bay Area, among others. The Foundation utilized model documentation, incentive dollars for scaling, and other tools to attempt to spread models from these pilots to other locations, with mostly limited success.

Middle Years: A Coordinated, Large Scale, Local-National Partnership

As we were gravitating away from funding one-off local initiatives, the Foundation launched its major [community-based teen education initiative](#) in partnership with ten communities across the United States. This multi-faceted initiative was a fruitful ten-year experiment in national-local partnership. It yielded many positive outcomes, relationships, and lessons learned. It was also a tremendously time-consuming endeavor, requiring hundreds of staff hours to manage and monitor each year. Through this work, we developed a deep awareness of challenges faced by local funders, federations, and Jewish education nonprofits, and the kinds of roles that national funders can play in the funding eco-system.

Current Approach: Impacting Local Communities Through National Investments

Building on these lessons learned, the Foundation's current strategy for achieving impact on a local level is through our investments in national organizations that deploy a range of strategies to serve local nonprofits, leaders, educators, and learners:

- **Umbrellas and intermediaries** – The Foundation's broadest reach into local education nonprofits comes from its investments in organizations like the [Foundation for Jewish Camp](#), [Hillel](#) and [Prizmah](#). These field-building entities utilize regranteeing, professional development, training, convening, and coordinated fundraising to strengthen their sub-fields. They each have strong knowledge about the hundreds of local organizations in their respective networks. This uniquely positions them to utilize our funds to make catalytic local investments. Their teams have a nuanced understanding about which members of their networks would benefit from growth capital, and which would be best positioned to serve as pioneers and role models for others. Developing this skillset and level of knowledge in-house at the Jim Joseph Foundation would require a much larger grantmaking team than we currently have.
- **National nonprofits that operate locally** – Many Jim Joseph Foundation grantees operate nationally but deploy teams of professionals or volunteers to run programming in local communities. For example, [Mem Global](#) operates over a hundred houses and pods in cities across the United States, [BBYO](#) has over 40 regional offices, and [M²](#) has run educator cohorts in dozens of communities. These organizations function by raising national dollars to support their national infrastructures and local dollars to pay for local programming. In small and mid-sized communities especially, the presence of these national providers enables them to offer high quality programming and access to experiences that it would be difficult to develop on their own. National funders like the Jim Joseph Foundation play a critical role in making this possible.

- **Nonprofits that have local and national presence** – The Foundation’s grants portfolio also includes a handful of nonprofits that have a strong local presence in a major Jewish population center while also operating regional hubs in other parts of the country. The New York-based [Shalom Hartman Institute of North America](#), [Jewish Education Project](#), and [Hadar Institute](#), and the Baltimore-based [Adamah](#) all serve leaders, educators and learners in their home cities while also operating satellite programs in places like the Bay Area, Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, Cincinnati, DC, Atlanta, and Palm Beach. In each case, the added infrastructure required to operate multiple regional operations is paid for by national funders like the Jim Joseph Foundation, enabling local funders to get involved by paying for local staff and expenses.
- **National Organizations that Serve Everyone** – The Jim Joseph Foundation also plays an essential role in supporting national Jewish education organizations that provide experiences and resources to leaders, educators and learners wherever they are. An important feature of travel programs like [Birthright Israel](#) and online offerings provided by [Sefaria](#) and [70 Faces Media](#) is that they are accessible to all interested learners, regardless of where they live. Similarly, professional development offerings and resources from [Leading Edge](#), [Institute of Jewish Spirituality](#), [Atra](#) and others are open to leaders and rabbis from every region of the country. Culture change grantees like [SRE Network](#), [Keshet](#), [BeWell](#), and others are also designed to serve Jewish nonprofits everywhere. While all these organizations work proactively to engage local funders, their presence in the eco-system relies on national funders like the Jim Joseph Foundation.