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Can young Jews give as good as they get?

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On the last day of a Birthright alumni mission to Israel last year, participants got a taste of something that was not a part of their initial trip to Israel: a fundraising pitch.

Birthright is credited with reframing the formative Jewish years for 200,000 young North Americans who have received the gift of a free trip to Israel over the last 11 years. The experience also put them squarely on the receiving end, and some wonder if it has also imbued this generation with a sense of Jewish entitlement.

But this group of 25 alumni — who each paid only \$500 to go on the mission organized by the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington — donated \$14,000 to Federation while on the trip, signaling their readiness to pay it forward. The same group raised \$22,000 for Federation in 2011, and, on top of that, members of the group organized a photo exhibit to benefit a program for Ethiopians they had visited in Israel, bringing in hundreds of people and raising thousands of dollars.

"I think Millennials will act and become those funders, but only after they see where the money is going, and after they've been inspired," said Rachel Cohen Gerrol, a Birthright alumna who led the mission and is a founder of The Nexus: Global Youth Summit, an organization for young philanthropists.

Figuring out how to get these 20- and 30-somethings — alternatively called Gen Y, Next Gen or Millennials — to pivot from receiving to giving Jewish philanthropy is a challenge whose outcome will define the Jewish future.

As teens, Jewish Millennials were beneficiaries of the Jewish community's "anything to get you through the door" response to their alarming indifference to Jewish involvement — free pizza to come to Jewish clubs, free Hillel Shabbat dinners, services and events in college, capped off with a free trip to Israel. Raised by parents focused on building their self-esteem and their college resumes, they turned out to become more dedicated to community service and more diverse, tolerant and fearlessly active than generations before them. But, they have shown little patience for formalities, bureaucracy and hierarchical structures, believing passionately in their own power.

How that will play out in terms of financial giving is still unfolding.

"There is an incredible amount of education and awareness that needs to happen," said Irit Gross, who heads the Birthright Israel Foundation's Alumni and Young Leaders Campaign, a fundraising department founded last year. "If you can create awareness that other people have done things for you, and if you can make a good enough case for giving, and get people to understand that we're not looking for millions and that every \$18 check counts because collectively we can make a difference, then it actually clicks that they've received a gift and want to do whatever they can to pay it forward and make a difference for the future. It's about changing the mindset of giving," she said.

The largest challenge, to be sure, is that the vast majority of 20- and 30-something Jews are not actively connected to an organized Jewish community, and so have no reason to give Jewishly. For the small percentage that has a strong Jewish identity, Judaism might be one of many pieces of an identity that may or may not rise to the top as they determine where to focus their giving.

Gerrol asserts that because this is a generation so focused on community service, to give them a Jewish context for that work and for their charitable giving might accomplish the dual goals of making them stronger Jews while also making them bigger givers.

"I think we are plagued as a generation by a picture in our minds of what it looks like and sounds like and feels like to be Jewish — Federation happy hours, pro-Israel rallies and High Holy Days services. But I think our generation is actively choosing not to opt into those activities in big numbers," said Gerrol, who sits on the board of The Jewish Federation of Greater Washington. "It seems like the Jewish community needs to work to connect the dots between the values that Millennials are

already living by and how those values are Jewish. ...We need to reframe the Millennial experience."

Next summer, Gerrol hopes to take 100 Jewish philanthropists to Rwanda through a new organization she founded, the Olam Project, which will bring young Jews to rebuild in areas torn apart by genocide.

Gerrol was inspired to found the Olam Project after she realized at a Nexus: Global Youth Summit that, of the 400 young wealth holders there, many were Jewish.



Birthright alumni give to some philanthropy projects; Birthright Next programs focus on engagement, such as at a Tu B'Shevat cooking class last year. Photo by Matt Gold of McGold Photography.

"I started asking people, 'How does being Jewish inspire or influence where you give your money?' And the resounding answer was there was no correlation. One is about my family and where I celebrate holidays, and the other is where I spend the money I earn," said Gerrol.

The 2011 Millennial Donor Study, conducted by nonprofit consultants Johnson, Grossnickle and Associates and Achieve, surveyed 3,000 mostly college-educated 20- to 35-year-olds, not specifically Jews. It found that 93 percent had donated money to nonprofits in 2010, and that most gave small gifts to multiple organizations. Nearly 80 percent volunteered time, and while they do their giving through online mechanisms and research the organizations online, they are most likely to give to organizations that are endorsed by peers or to which they are personally connected. Eighty-five percent reported they are most driven to give by a compelling mission or cause.

They want to know how their money is being spent, and to believe they can trust an organization to use the money to make the impact they seek.

In its first foray into turning to alumni as funders and fundraisers, The Birthright Israel Foundation has found some of this out firsthand.

The Birthright Israel Foundation doesn't solicit alumni in the first 12 months after participants return, other than giving them the opportunity to donate back some or all of their \$250 deposit. In 2010, more than 1,000 participants donated \$165,000 of their deposits.

While the Birthright Israel Foundation works with Birthright Next — the alumni programming arm — for the most part, Birthright Next stays away from fundraising and focuses on building on the positive Israel experience with opportunities for engagement and networking. A Birthright Next office in Los Angeles has two full-time employees and eight community engagement fellows, who plan events and meet personally with some of the 18,000 alumni in Los Angeles.

In June 2010, The Birthright Israel Foundation set up the Alumni and Young Leaders Campaign to reach out to the maturing population of alumni — the oldest alumni are now 37. In 2010, the alumni campaign raised \$230,000 from 1,400 past participants, and so far this year it has already reached nearly 1,900 alumni and young donors, who contributed a total of \$272,000.

Most of the alumni fundraising for Birthright has been through personal solicitations with select participants — those who stepped forward wanting to give back after the trip transformed their lives, or those who had been identified as potential donors or having connection to potential donors.

Birthright's fundraising material lets past participants know that tens of thousands of young people are wait-listed because of lack of funds and gives them specific giving targets — \$36 for a night in a Bedouin tent for one participant, or \$150 to pay for five people to hike Masada at sunrise.

But the campaign revealed some surprising results, too.

"Although this generation lives and breathes e-mail and handheld devices, we have not yet had tremendous success from e-mail campaigns," Gross said.

Jeffrey Solomon, president of The Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, said the Millennials who choose to engage in philanthropy fall into two extremes.

"The first extreme is the growth of Twitter philanthropy — when there's a spontaneous, almost impulsive giving, whether to the Haiti earthquake or because it's Justin Bieber's birthday," Solomon said.

"There is a second group that studies philanthropy a bit more, and thinks about it more, and engages with a quest for information that has the potential to make them far more effective in philanthropy than their parents and grandparents, because in every aspect of life, information is available and they want that same information about their philanthropy, and want to be certain they are making the impact they want," Solomon said.

Solomon has worked with the population through two organizations the Bronfman Philanthropies spawned — 21/64, which guides family foundations in involving all the generations, and Slingshot, which produces a Zagat-type guide to innovative Jewish organizations.

Slingshot was founded in 2003, and in 2007 it added the Slingshot Fund, composed of 30 young philanthropists who pool their resources to support a subset of undercapitalized organizations featured in the Slingshot guide. Over the last five years, the fund has distributed \$1.8 million to organizations from the list, giving members experience in analyzing institutions and making thoughtful grants.

Giving circles — collective funds where donors decided where to put the money — have become a popular way for Millennials to give.

Lana Volftsun, who is a member of Slingshot, is executive director of the San Francisco-based One Percent Foundation, which is the largest online giving circle and is not Jewish.

"We're building a generation of young philanthropists, and the model is you don't need to be a high net-worth adult to make an impact on the world," she said.

Already, around 2,500 18- to 39-year-olds have pledged 1 percent of their income — the average gift is \$30 to \$70 a month — and approximately 500 of them are active in deciding who gets the money. Participants nominate, vet and then vote on organizations online. The top two vote-getters split grants totaling \$20,000 each quarter.



"What is cool is we found that most of our partners, after they've participated for one or two quarters, have come across an organization or institution that they are passionate about, and they start giving time or money to that organization," Volftsun said. "That is what we are looking to foster — people who give thoughtfully and strategically, and people who will give forever."

Four young adults live in the Moishe House in L.A.'s Valley Glen, hosting around six programs a month to encourage their peers to participate in Jewish life, such as at this Rosh Hashanah dinner.

But if establishment Jewish organizations — especially large ones, like Federations — want to tap into that population, they are going to have to reframe not only the umbrella structure that is so unattractive to young givers, but even the time-honored ways they reach out to young people.

"I'm actually very affiliated with Federation, which is not a typical Millennial move, and I am not interested in happy hours," said Volftsun, who is 24 and recently moved to San Francisco. "I'm interested in programs about Israel; I'm interested in the opportunity to do hands-on work, I'm interested in the opportunity to engage other young people and network with young Jewish philanthropists. Yet Federation continuously invites me to happy hours and things I'm not interested in," she said.

The Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles recently revamped its Young Leadership Division, re-creating it as YALA, Young Adults of Los Angeles. YALA removes the programming structure for young adults — defined as 25 to 40 — from the fundraising department, where it used to reside, and places it in programming departments that offer opportunities to connect Jewishly and to volunteer in and impact the wider community.

"This generation needs to feel engaged before they are willing to provide financial support. They don't do financial support on autopilot or because they're supposed to. They do it because they care, and they care when they're involved and engaged. So, for us it's a continuum. We're interested in engagement for its own sake, and as a path toward long-term support," said Andrew Cushnir, chief program officer at The Federation.

The effort to turn active young volunteers into donors needs to be intentional, said Rhoda Weisman, a Jewish communal consultant and an early architect of Birthright.

"I think many of the Gen Y group — especially those in their late 20s to early 30s — do not have the background to understand either how philanthropy works in general or in the Jewish community, and certainly not what their responsibility is," she said. "But I don't believe it's because they don't care, or they are selfish or self-centered, or that they're not giving because they're used to getting things for free. I think they're just uneducated about how the Jewish world works."

It's up to Jewish organizations, she said, to educate them about where the money goes, and what their responsibility is. And once they buy in, she said, they want to know their voice is being heard.

"If you don't involve them in more of the flat hierarchy they respond to, they are not going to give. What used to be called a passive donor is not passive in the world of social networking. They're connected to everything," Weisman said.

Large Jewish organizations need to rethink how they allocate board seats, she said.

"The danger is assuming that youth and inexperience automatically mean knowing less. Often it's knowing different," said Solomon of Bronfman Philanthropies.

Gerrol thinks currencies other than dollars need to be recognized.

"I think what we don't recognize is the power of young people to raise money for something they believe in," Gerrol said. "I would be willing to take someone who has a \$50,000-a-year salary and 2,000 Facebook friends. They can post something on Facebook and raise unbelievable amounts of money from their network."

That network also provides something else the Jewish world covets — the unaffiliated. Having young people invite in their diverse circles could open up a whole new population to Jewish life.

Birthright Next has recognized this with its Next Shabbat program, where it reimburses alumni who host Shabbat dinners for friends.

"The list of people who come to a Next Shabbat dinner are not the same people on the list of any Jewish organization," Gerrol said.

One organization that has tapped into that model is Moishe House, which in the last five years has established 40 cooperative-living homes, including three in the Los Angeles area, where three to five residents live in each house, with subsidized rent. The residents commit to planning and executing Jewish programs for their networks and local young people. Around 40,000 people a year attend events through Moishe House, including Shabbat dinners, social service projects and arts events.

And while nearly all the programs are offered for free, eventually buy-in has to come from more than just pitching in to set up or clean up, said Jordan Fruchtman, chief program officer for Moishe House, based in Oakland.

At Moishe House's national retreat, residents see the nitty-gritty of the budget and fundraising, and get to meet with donors. Last year, Moishe House residents sent an e-mail blast to peers asking for donations, and the response was solid, Fruchtman said.

"We want a model where there is buy-in, and not where everything is handed to you by the Jewish community on a silver platter," he said.

Young donors can surprise themselves with what they can contribute if the request is framed in the right way — \$83 a month is easier to get your head around than a \$1,000 annual gift, for instance.

And letting budding donors know what is expected is key. IKAR, a Los Angeles spiritual and social service community, recently launched a \$3 million capital campaign for a new building to serve as a hub of Jewish activity for the unaffiliated. During an appeal on Yom Kippur eve, the board president asked everyone to envision the largest gift they could imagine giving — and

then double it.

"When he first said that, I thought, 'That's ridiculous. I can't believe he even said that,' " said IKAR member Maya Barron, a community organizer who used to work for IKAR. "Then I started thinking about how much we need the building, and how beautiful the vision for it was, and that it's not just a space for us, but a space for the Jewish community of Los Angeles," Barron said.

Though she lives on a modest salary, she determined that forgoing about five Anthropologie shopping sprees would enable her to make a significant gift.

IKAR also has sought to make its fundraising consistent with its focus on social justice. When IKAR raised \$120,000 to start a preschool last year, it also pledged \$8,000 to \$12,000 a year to Jewish Heart for Africa to support a preschool in Uganda.

"Our goal is to have people think about it in a different way. It's not about, 'Oh, they're coming after me for money again,' but about, 'How can I participate in a way that is meaningful to me and meaningful for IKAR, even in the confines of my limited disposable income?' " said Melissa Balaban, IKAR's executive director.

And once you get the younger generation to start thinking like philanthropists, the trick will be to get the older generation to see them as such.

This is the first time in history, Solomon of The Samuel Bronfman Foundation points out, that four generations are sitting around the same table, and the education process is complex.

"So often, parents and grandparents would like to think, 'They are going to be like me — they're just young now.' And we know that is not the case," Solomon said.

He tells the story of one woman who went through training in strategic planning in philanthropy with 21/64.

"When she went to her first family foundation board meeting, her father sat across the room from her texting her how to vote," Solomon said. "The parent generation has to recognize this is a very empowered young adult generation, and they expect to have a voice."

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