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The Update - Multi-Generational Philanthropy: A discussion with Sharna Goldseker

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Can you describe 21/64?

21/64 is a non-profit consulting division of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies (ACBP). Based in our New York offices, 21/64 offers services to individuals, families, foundations and federations in times of generational transition. 21/64 symbolizes our multigenerational approach to philanthropy, as 21 connotes a young person coming of age and 64 a seasoned person considering his or her legacy.

In this era, when there are four generations above the age of 21 in society and around our philanthropic tables, multiple generations are learning how to work together --to understand each others' "generational personalities," motivational values, and visions. So 21/64 emerged to help facilitate the process of values clarification, strategic visioning and communication to help multigenerational families. And Grand Street, a network of 18-28 year olds who are involved or will be involved in their family philanthropy, is one of our most dynamic offerings for members of the next generation.

How did you get into this work?

I'm a next generation board member of the Goldseker Foundation based in Baltimore, Maryland. Through conferences like JFN's and peer groups I found in my early 20s, I was able to ask questions and explore what the opportunities and responsibilities of family philanthropy meant to me. Five years ago I joined the staff of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies and co-founded 21/64 in order to work on next generation philanthropy professionally.

Share a lesson from the field that illustrates how family dynamics are portrayed in your workshop setting.

This year at the conference, we've been asked to bring 21/64's Motivational Values Cards and train funders on how to use them with their family foundations. This is a tool we developed after speaking with hundreds of young people and asking them about what motivated them to participate in philanthropy. Rather than naming causes such as "education" or "Israel," we found young people described values such as "innovation," "justice", and "integrity" as the driving forces behind their engagement. Given the myriad of organizations soliciting their participation, the values cards have become an effective tool in helping younger funders --and really funders of all ages-- prioritize what they value in the world and how they wanted to actualize those values through their philanthropy.

Can you discuss how you combine issues related to family responsibility and individual interests and values of family members in running your workshops?

Over time, as younger funders used the cards, they wanted extra sets to bring to their parents and grandparents. They knew their parents funded Jewish institutions such as the Federation, ADL or AIPAC, but they didn't always know why, or what motivated them to do

so. They wanted the cards to help illuminate the underlying values which motivated their families to support such organizations. So we re-designed the pack with an instruction card and a “how to facilitate” worksheet and have facilitated workshops as well as distributed sets to family foundations and groups of funders working together.

What surprises families most is that the next generations often have similar motivational values even when their funding interests look different. For example, I watched a grandmother, who thought her grandson’s funding interests were vastly different than her own, recognize they had the same top motivational values. When her grandson explained that he supported immigrant organizations because of her story of immigrating to the United States, she realized his commitment to family values and legacy transcended the difference in where they sent their checks. The tool becomes a vehicle to unpacking a complicated conversation about individual identity, family and decision making.

Can you give an example of something that has surprised you in doing your workshops? Something unexpected?

I always like to remember the story of a parent who called me asking for the agenda to a program which her son would be attending. While her son was already a young adult, she wanted to know who the speakers were and what he’d be learning at the gathering, a weekend-long program we facilitate annually for Grand Street. Ultimately, her son returned from the weekend eager to hear about the family philanthropy and participate in the life of the foundation, so her earlier call fell by the way side; however, we know these transitions from childhood to adulthood can be emotionally challenging, especially where financial resources are involved. At 21/64, we believe that given the opportunity to explore candidly, issues of identity, family, wealth and philanthropy, the next generations are eager to participate in their family’s tradition of giving with an earnestness and genuine interest that often surprises even their parents and grandparents.

How does the presence of different generations in a session that you are leading impact on the overall discussion?

Families and foundations often assume that “involving the kids” means inviting them to meetings to see what the foundation is already supporting. However, next generations family members have terrific energy, ideas and want to express their values in a meaningful way. They don’t just join the discussion and watch it run status quo, they bring themselves to the table and that naturally shifts the tenure of the interactions. When families realize this and see the “kids” as peers in decision making, worlds open up. Adult relationships emerge that not only affect the philanthropy, but also the relationships of the parents and their children.

Is there anything you want to add?

At 21/64 these past few years we have enjoyed a terrific partnership with younger funders who we invite into Jewish philanthropy conversations as peers. Given a space to ask their own questions, they respond with amazing creativity and examples of the ways in which they can play a role in Jewish life. For example, Slingshot: a Resource Guide to Jewish Innovation was an idea that emerged from the Grand Street network, to highlight the innovative and effective programs in Jewish life each year. They also recently initiated the Slingshot Fund and are inviting other funders to join them in supporting the next generation of Jewish life. We look forward to ongoing work with the next generation as well as with families and foundation experiencing multi-generational philanthropy.