

What Does Collaboration Look Like?

[ejewishphilanthropy.com/what-does-collaboration-look-like/](http://www.ejewishphilanthropy.com/what-does-collaboration-look-like/)

eJP

As a “sector-within-a-sector,” the Jewish innovation space must work together if we are to achieve maximal impact. Important conversations about growth, sustainability, and impact cannot take place exclusively behind the closed-doors of boardrooms or within the four walls of any one organization.

by No’a Gorlin, Lisa Lepson, Aliza Mazor, Toby Rubin, Jenny Kibrit Smith, Justin Rosen Smolen and Naomi Korb Weiss

Business experts tell us that the proverbial saying “two heads are better than one” is actually true. Organizations that stress cross-functional collaboration in diverse teams see the benefits of enhanced camaraderie, heightened creativity, and a greater return on investment than organizations that operate in compartmentalized silos. But thinking more broadly, what does collaboration look like across multiple organizations? Does the proverb still ring true when there are ten heads, representing six organizations and hundreds of constituents, gathered around the table to produce a joint initiative?

These are the types of questions that framed our experience in planning and convening the first “Collaboratory,” a day of networking and training for alumni from five organizations in the “Jewish innovation space,” as this growing niche in the Jewish institutional landscape is sometimes called. With the generous support of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation and the Slingshot Fund, and in partnership with JumpStart and Makom Hadash, we – colleagues from Bikkurim, Joshua Venture, Presentense, ROI Community and UpStart Bay Area – formally brought together our networks under one roof for the first time. Together, our five organizations have helped over 500 people launch, accelerate, or incubate approximately 400 ventures while creating a combined international network of more than 2,000 change-makers who represent nearly as many organizations worldwide. These ventures touch every imaginable (and once-upon-a-time, unimaginable) area of Jewish life. Our alumni have opened Jewish-infused yoga studios offering fresh interpretations to ancient rituals; launched ventures that engage children in Jewish education through visual art, rap, and song; created new prayer groups, camps, and schools; and mobilized the Jewish community around various social justice issues including, among others, poverty, education, and the environment.

Historically, each organization has recognized the untapped potential of idea sharing and increased contact across our networks, yet apart from some smaller collaborations among a few of the organizations, we had never intentionally partnered as a sector. And so, what began as an exploratory conversation last fall quickly morphed into a daylong convening for our alumni networks to do just that: to work with high-level trainers to develop applicable skills for scaling their ventures; to be inspired by each other’s visions; and, most of all, to meet and mingle in a structured but relaxed setting. We named this convening the “Collaboratory” to stress both the collaborative and experimental (“laboratory”) aims of the day.

The Collaboratory took place on Tuesday, May 7th on the heels of [Slingshot Day](#), a gathering for stakeholders in Jewish innovation. The Collaboratory brought together 74 participants from 59 organizations and built upon the themes from Slingshot Day with a special focus on the needs of second-stage organizations. In the opening session, Collaboratory attendees heard from Dr. Merrick Furst, director of Flashpoint, the accelerator at Georgia Tech, who encouraged attendees to first develop a solid understanding of their constituents and then build resonant programs that respond directly to their needs. In the afternoon, participants chose from skill-building sessions on on-boarding and training new employees, networking their nonprofits, crowd-funding, and a follow-up session with Dr. Furst on applying his frameworks to their organizational strategies. Attendees mingled over lunch and shared challenges through case-study conversations that fostered joint problem-solving across networks. (You can read one of our attendees’ reflections [here](#), and a written case-study on our collaboration is forthcoming from the Schusterman Foundation.)

The Collaboratory is one step in what we hope becomes an ongoing process. We know there are a myriad of unmet needs in the Jewish community, more market opportunities to explore, and unborn ideas for our community to harness. And as our alumni have taught us, Jewish innovators have a plethora of interesting ideas about how to address these communal needs. Yet we also know the serious challenges young organizations face, from capacity building and strategy development to solid fiscal and human resources management, and there is much to be learned from one another across the field. The more we network, communicate, and collaborate, the better poised we are to weather

challenges and capitalize on new opportunities.

As a “sector-within-a-sector,” the Jewish innovation space – its funders, accelerators and incubators, and ventures – must work together if we are to achieve maximal impact. Important conversations about growth, sustainability, and impact cannot take place exclusively behind the closed-doors of boardrooms or within the four walls of any one organization. Most of all, we believe that collaboration should not be limited to one small slice of the Jewish organizational pie. By coming together in settings like the Collaboratory – newer organizations and more established entities – we can actualize the potential of the Jewish community, refining our ideas and transforming our organizations, young and old, into vibrant ecosystems of creativity, ingenuity, and empowerment. In time, we will reap the benefits of the shared data, hypothesis testing, and creative solutions that emerge from these laboratories.

No'a Gorlin, Lisa Lepson, Aliza Mazor, Toby Rubin, Jenny Kibrit Smith, Justin Rosen Smolen and Naomi Korb Weiss are members of the Steering Committee for the Collaboratory.