CROSS-SECTION

A Look at Jewish Arts and Culture in North America Today Through the Lens of Artists and Arts Organizations

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In 2015 we looked around and saw glimmers of a Jewish cultural renaissance taking shape. A new generation of artists, authors, musicians, performers, and designers were exploring innovative ways to preserve and reimagine Judaism and Jewish identity, making them relevant for our times.

This flurry of cultural creativity was met by a funding community that was often unsure how best to support this growing field, and, more often still, not focused on arts and culture as an area for support or as a strategy for education, building Jewish community and identity, or other philanthropic goals. (And this despite the fact that a 2013 Pew Study looking at Jewish Americans found that six in ten consider being Jewish mainly a matter of culture or ancestry.)

To glean insights into their challenges and interests, we convened funders from across the country. We asked them why arts and culture mattered, what trends were influencing the field, what barriers blocked their support, and how we might together generate new strategies to grow the field. Their answers and insights formed the basis for the 2016 report Devising Strategies to Support Jewish Arts & Culture.

Among other findings, Devising Strategies revealed that the Jewish philanthropic community did not seem to have a “coherent strategy for identifying or supporting winning ideas or their creators.”

“Which organizations are best poised to capture the imagination of our generation?” it asked. “Which artists have the potential to be the next Sholem Aleichem, Barbra Streisand, or Amos Oz? The next Mark Rothko, Wendy Wasserstein, or Michael Chabon? And how do we encourage them to explore their Jewish roots? We have few indicators to shape our decision-making, and fewer curators to guide us.”

Two-plus years later, the glimmers of the Jewish cultural renaissance that excited and inspired us in 2015 continue to glow, illuminating the possibilities of a better-resourced field—one that could more deeply enrich Jewish communal life in North America.

Many of the barriers to realizing those possibilities also remain, however, and they impact organizations of all sizes.

The Yiddish Book Center—an organization that now boasts 20,000 members, a $27 million endowment, and real estate holdings worth $20 million—isn’t immune. “Even with all our success, we struggle to find funding,” said Aaron Lansky, the Yiddish Book Center’s founder and president. “We have a $6 million budget for next year. Culture is expensive. It has to be first-class, and education costs a lot.”

Fortunately, we have bright periods in the field’s history to point to and our own recent efforts to build upon.
Devising Strategies suggested a series of next steps needed to capitalize on the efforts of both artists and funders in the field. Those interviewed for the study identified three needs they hoped would be addressed:

- An illustration of funding patterns and gaps in existing support
- Increased Jewish arts and culture advocacy
- Improved coordination

This follow-up report focuses primarily on the first and third items. As Devising Strategies states, “Participants in every city expressed interest in a resource that would provide a clear and current picture of Jewish arts and culture funding and needs.” One of the recommended next steps was to “convene conversations with key artists, creatives, and professionals in the field to determine their priorities and gather additional insight.”

We took that step in creating this report, and the feedback was clear: artists and non-profit leaders working in the space believe that a healthy Jewish arts and culture landscape requires three essential components to flourish—support mechanisms for artists and arts organizations, robust distribution channels, and engaged funders.

In this report we articulate the need for each of these components and provide examples of how they’ve been supported—and contributed to the field’s success—over time (page 22). These examples do not represent a comprehensive list. Instead, they are citations given to illustrate how funding does and can bolster the field. We also point to current challenges, including the lack of a national umbrella organization to connect the field, uneven support given over time, the closure of certain critical funds, the complicated artist-funder dynamic, and more.

These obstacles may seem great, but we believe the opportunity to overcome them is greater, and we’re encouraged by the willingness we’ve seen on the part of funders to tackle these issues strategically. Early ideas for possible next steps are outlined on page 53.

While this report does not look far beyond non-profits working squarely within the field, it should be noted that other Jewish communal organizations—synagogues, JCCs, day schools, camps, federations, and more—are critical to the larger ecosystem as both users and producers of Jewish arts and culture. It would be meaningful to study the ways in which the interests of these groups align and intersect with those of artists, the leaders of arts non-profits, and arts funders.

Our hope is that this overview sparks further discussion and collaboration among stakeholders working to make the field of Jewish arts and culture brighter and stronger, and making the Jewish community stronger and brighter in turn.

We look forward to continuing the conversation,

Lou Cove, Rachel Levin, Tzivia Schwartz Getzug, Shayna Rose Triebwasser

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The authors of Cross-Section conducted in-depth interviews with more than 30 members of the Jewish arts and culture community, including artists, presenters, executive directors of non-profit organizations, and select funders in order to better understand their perspectives, priorities, and needs. We spoke with younger artists just starting out and career veterans. We attempted to survey practitioners and representatives from organizations working in each medium of artistic expression, including visual art, literature, music, dance, theater, performing arts, digital media, film, and episodic web-based video.

We began by interviewing program officers at key foundations that provide funding to arts and culture endeavors that are explicitly Jewish, executive directors of Jewish-related institutions, and Jewish artists themselves to get a clearer picture of the rich landscape of Jewish arts and culture in North America.

These discussions led us to conduct additional interviews with arts and culture professionals working both within and outside the Jewish world. The interviews we conducted took place between December 2016 and October 2017 and centered on a series of questions intended to shed light on institutions’ and artists’ origins, setbacks, and successes.

We also worked to identify key flex points in the careers of artists and in the arcs of institutions. We wanted to

**WHO WE SPOKE TO**

Aaron Henne
Artistic Director, Theatre Dybbuk

Aaron Lansky
Founder and President, Yiddish Book Center

Adene Sacks
Organizational Strategist and Philanthropic Advisor

Alicia Jo Rabins
Writer, Musician, and Performer

Ayana Morse
Executive Director, Silverlake Independent Jewish Community Center

Danya Shults
Founder, Arq

Dara Horn
Writer

David Katzenelson
Executive Director, Reboot & Idelsohn Society

David Rittberg
Senior Program Officer, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Foundation

Elise Bernhardt
Former President and CEO, Foundation for Jewish Culture

Emily August
Director of Public Programs, National Museum of American Jewish History

Eszter Margit
Founding Director, Art Kibbutz

Frank London
Musician

Felicia Rosenfeld
Executive Director, Dance Resource Center

Jamie Elman
Co-founder, YidLife Crisis

Jay Sanderson
President and CEO, Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles

Jonathan Horowitz
Senior Program Officer, The Klarman Family Foundation

Jordan Gill
Executive Director, BimBam

Jordan Peimer
Former Program Director, Skirball Cultural Center

Josh Kun
Music Critic and Academic
know how these critical moments affected the creation, dissemination, and support of new work. We tried to determine what catalyzed artists and institutions to work within a Jewish context and the ways in which their art and programs impact the greater community. We also looked at different umbrella structures and supportive organizations—some that have been successful, others that have not—in both the Jewish and mainstream worlds.

Our report utilizes this body of research, first-person interviews, and the researchers’ own collective experience in the field.

Cross-Section is a starting point. This report does not purport to solve the myriad problems and challenges facing the sector today, but intends rather to serve as a source of information and inspiration for new and seasoned funders alike looking for perspective from practitioners in the field and strategic opportunities to help it flourish. We trust that you will bring your own experience and wisdom to this ongoing dialogue.

Lexi Leban
Executive Director, Jewish Film Institute

Lisa Farber Miller
Senior Program Officer, Rose Community Foundation

Lori Starr
Executive Director, Contemporary Jewish Museum

Malka Travaglini
Program Officer, The Klarman Family Foundation

Mark Reisbaum
Chief Philanthropy Officer, Contemporary Jewish Museum

Meredith Lewis
Director of Content and Engagement, PJ Library

Naomi Firestone-Teeter
Executive Director, Jewish Book Council

Rachel Cohen
Founder, Cadence Arts Network

Rebecca Guber
Founding Director, Six Points Fellowship & Asylum Arts

Richard Siegel
Former Executive Director, Foundation for Jewish Culture

Robert Adler Peckerar
Executive Director, Yiddishkayt LA

Ronda Spinak
Artistic Director, Jewish Women’s Theatre

Russell Gottschalk
Executive Director, Atlanta Jewish Music Festival

Sasha Anawalt
Founding Director, Annenberg Innovation Lab, USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism

Susan Booth
Artistic Director, Alliance Theater

Susan Nelson
Executive Vice President, TDC

Susan Weiss
Chief of Staff, National Museum of American Jewish History

Yona Verwer
Director and Co-Founder, Jewish Art Salon

Yuval Sharon
Artistic Director, The Industry
You can feed and clothe a person, but to what end? The arts are where we discover and express our humanity, privately or collectively. They provide us the tools to share our common joy and grief, to find communion with each other, to pass our stories and wisdom from one generation to the next.

Claire Peeps, President of The Durfee Foundation, in answer to her own question, “Why arts?” Grantmakers in the Arts newsletter, 1999
The Israel Trail Procession by Meirav Heiman and Ayelet Carmi, funded by Asylum Arts
The Landscape of Jewish Arts and Culture: What, Why, Where, and How
THE LANDSCAPE OF JEWISH ARTS AND CULTURE: WHAT, WHY, WHERE, AND HOW

For the purposes of this report we define Jewish arts and culture as that which expresses ideas or themes connected either to the Jewish religion and history or the cultural Jewish experience more broadly. By this definition, Jewish arts and culture can be created by artists and culture-makers of any religious faith or background.

WHAT IS JEWISH ARTS AND CULTURE?

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WHY DOES JEWISH ARTS AND CULTURE MATTER?

For deepening understanding, connections, and identity among Jews—and between Jews and other cultures.

What do we have to learn from one another through Jewish arts and culture? Consider a documentary that provides a glimpse into the world of the ultra-orthodox (Trembling Before G-d); a play that repurposes the incendiary and occasionally taboo work of a great Yiddish author and wins two Tony Awards (Indecent); a musical compilation of classic Jewish songs performed by African American artists like Billie Holiday, Johnny Mathis, and the Temptations (Black Sabbath); an international architecture competition that reimagines the Sukkah and draws tens of thousands to a public display (Sukkah City). Each of these projects has
In the larger world brimming with possibilities.

Jewish arts and culture is not produced or experienced in a silo. Rather, it exists within the larger world, is consumed by diverse audiences, and in addition to Jewish ideas and themes, often incorporates concepts that are not strictly—or even remotely—Jewish in nature.

Artists and organizations are seeking new ways to re-contextualize Judaism, Jewish themes, and Jewish tropes—often within a multicultural framework. Indeed, the contemporary artists we spoke with do not see themselves as bound by genres or definitions, especially when it comes to their own identities and how identity plays out in their work. This can make it difficult for organizations to engage artists in the creation of Jewish Art. Some artists working in this space produce works that are Jewish just some of the time, and they actively resist the label Jewish Artist because it’s limiting and imprecise.

At the same time, Jews and Jewish culture are attractive to outsiders who want to explore what it means to be Jewish, including its traditions, customs, history,
stories, and issues. Nowadays, mainstream artists and organizations are also participants in the creation and distribution of Jewish culture alongside Jewish institutions. *Roman Vishniac Rediscovered*, an exhibition of Vishniac’s photographs of pre-Holocaust Jewish life curated by Maya Benton for the International Center of Photography, and *This Place*, a group exhibition organized by photographer Frédéric Brenner exploring the complexity of Israel that debuted in the U.S. at the Brooklyn Museum in 2016, are just two photography-specific cases in point.

As a result of this crossing over, it’s increasingly difficult to locate art that fits neatly into a more traditional Jewish arts and culture box. Instead, we’re witnessing the rise of what we’ll describe here as arts and culture that’s Jew-ish+ (that is, work that either deals with mainstream issues but through a Jewish lens and/or art that mashes up Jewish contexts with that of other cultures).

The upshot: Conditions are ripe for new and larger audiences to engage with Jewish art and culture.

“Of course we want to identify amazing artists who just happen to be Jewish. But we’re trying to engage with all artists from all backgrounds with Jewish ideas and values,” said Lori Starr, executive director at the Contemporary Jewish Museum (CJM). There, she’s found that new audiences are more interested in Jew-ish+ programming. The museum uses it to engage young Jews who work around the museum and in San Francisco. “They don’t want to go to places and just be with other Jews,” she said. “They want to be in dialogue with everyone else. So we do public programming. The gallery chats at noon have become very popular destinations.”

In part as a result of this approach, CJM has been successful engaging artists who are Jewish but whose work is not. When illustrator Roz Chast exhibited her work at the museum this year, it was the first time she agreed to show it within a Jewish context. “That gives us a whole season of Jewish humor,” said Starr. Thanks to public programs and a partnership with Camp Towanga and Camp Newman, the impact of the show was designed to extend deep into the community. “We’ll have all the counselors and counselors-in-training come to see the show and be trained in a meaningful way about Jewish humor... not just making mosaic ashtrays or lanyards,” she explained. “Through the counselors, we’re exposing kids to art as a part of the camping experience.”
CJM’s Havruta initiative, which engages mainstream artists in the Jewish practice of communal study in the creation of new art, is yet another mash-up idea. “It’s not necessarily following a Jewish storyline,” explained Starr. “It’s artists and scientists, dancers, poets, etcetera making a new piece and then putting it within the Jewish context of havruta.”

Reboot’s Sukkah City, a 2010 design competition that invited Jewish and non-Jewish designers to conceive of and produce new takes on the sukkah so that modern day audiences might experience and consider the Jewish tradition, is another successful example of a cross-cultural initiative from the Jewish world. Design finalists were showcased in an outdoor exhibit that was open to the public in the heart of New York City. In addition to engaging large audiences, the show garnered coverage in highly regarded mainstream media outlets including New York Magazine.

For Susan Booth at the Alliance Theater in Atlanta, a mainstream performing arts presenter, producing work that has Jewish content has been a key way to serve her local community. “The Jewish experience is a rich part of Atlanta’s fabric,” she explained, “and so it’s on our stage quite frequently.” In addition to staging work from Jewish writer Janece Shaffer every other season, the Alliance recently produced The Temple Bombing, a play about the 1958 bombing of Atlanta’s oldest synagogue. “We were interested in The Temple Bombing for a host of reasons,” she said. “The causes of that act and the resonances after the fact are enormously defining in Atlanta culture. Our history as a city with a deeply connected African American and Jewish community has direct lines to that moment in history, and many would argue the city’s civil rights DNA passes through that event in a singular way. As 2017 is the 150th anniversary of the founding of The Temple, this was the Alliance’s way of participating in the commemoration of our neighbor (The Temple being, quite literally, down the street from the Alliance).”

Musician Frank London shared his own story of how his Jewish work benefited from his crossover experience and appeal. His band, the Klezmatics, was given access and some money to work with Woody Guthrie’s archive. Because of that mainstream project, he says, “We got one of the largest recording budgets of our career.” The band went on to make two albums: Wonder Wheel, which won a Grammy, and Woody Guthrie’s Happy
Through discovery.

Like all arts and culture, Jewish arts and culture impacts both individuals and communities and has the power to transcend time and place.

A number of the artists we interviewed described the ways in which contact with Jewish culture directly inspired them to create new Jewish works. Music critic and academic Josh Kun, who became a MacArthur Fellow in 2016, first got interested in exploring Jewish culture through his own work when he discovered the music of Mickey Katz while conducting research on race and American popular music at Berkeley in the 1990s. “In order to understand Mickey Katz,” he said, “I had to find other music that would put him in context.” Kun’s search for additional material led him to the Hatikva Jewish Music store on Fairfax Avenue in Los Angeles. “If you’re interested in Mickey Katz, then you’ve got to know about the Barton Brothers.” Kun and his associates bought Barton Brothers cassettes and started amassing a collection of marginalized Jewish vinyl that had been left out of the mainstream historical record. That moment was the beginning of the model of the scholarship and work Kun likes to do now—academic research that ends in public facing work.” Katz’s music was, as Kun put it, his “way to Jewish content.”

Aaron Lansky, founder and president of the Yiddish Book Center—a nonprofit that rescues, translates, and disseminates Yiddish literature and presents educational programs to the public—has seen the iterative nature of Jewish arts and culture first-hand. “Nobody is advocating going back in time,” he said. “People will go forward, but moving forward is based on unearthing the treasures of the past and waiting to see what comes next.”

Yidstock, an annual festival of modern Jewish music put on by the center, presents a perfect example: At this year’s event, Frank London and Alexandra Aron performed a new version of Yiddish playwright I.L. Peretz’s Nighttime in the Old Marketplace, a piece that was—as Lansky described it—“un-performable” when it was published in 1907. London and Aron transformed the work into a multimedia extravaganza. According to Lansky, “If you reclaim old music traditions and let people do something with it, you get something hip, new, and cutting edge.”

Joyous Hanukkah. “We almost doubled the number of available Hanukkah songs in one fell swoop,” said London. “We get to tour this stuff. People do cover versions of it. It’s really spread culture and it has spread information and consciousness.”

Broadening the view of what is Jewish has implications for how we measure success, what work is available, and who can create and distribute it. In philanthropic advisor Adene Sacks’ opinion, this provides an enormous opportunity for funders interested in Jewish identity projects. Her take? They should look to the arts and to artists, because they “are at the forefront of intersectionality of identity.”
How We Got Here: A Historic Overview of Philanthropy and Jewish Arts and Culture
HOW WE GOT HERE: A HISTORIC OVERVIEW OF PHILANTHROPY AND JEWISH ARTS AND CULTURE

The field of Jewish arts and culture in North America is a vibrant tapestry made up of institutions and artists producing inspiring projects that utilize both the most traditional and contemporary tools available. From paintings and sculpture to podcasts and YouTube series, Jewish works hail from every corner of the arts.

The history of this tapestry explains why it’s laid out the way it is, why and where it needs mending, and how modern-day stakeholders might move forward to preserve and ensure its richness.

For much of the twentieth century, Jewish artists benefited from the existence of umbrella organizations that connected the cultural projects they produced with larger communities. Europe had the Culture League (Kultur-lige) while North America had (and still has, though in a different capacity) the Workmen’s Circle (Arbeter-ring), the Association for Yiddish Culture (YKUF), and the Congress for Jewish Culture. These organizations were all created before World War II and the Holocaust, and they served as clearinghouses for a vast array of Jewish (mostly Yiddish) arts and culture. As a product of this function, they promoted and enhanced the field. They supported and spawned Jewish theater, painters, writers, and other artists. Funding for these organizations was provided primarily in the form of membership dues.

During the postwar years, as Jews in North America gained upward mobility and moved away from the labor-centered world of prewar Jewish artistic and cultural life, the ways in which the sector was supported began to shift. Jewish arts and culture continued to shape Jewish identity, but organizational support declined and private philanthropic support increased.

The larger arts and culture field experienced a similar shift at the same time. Individual giving to the arts, although deemed a worthy tax deduction as early as World War I, became a small but regular part of overall charitable giving after World War II.

State support for the arts kicked into gear in 1965 with the congressional formation of the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities. Around this same time, state arts councils began to form across the country (New York formed its council in 1960), and county and

Giving to arts, culture, and humanities, 1976–2016
(in billions of dollars)

In the Jewish community, organized group giving at the community level played an especially active role in supporting Jewish arts and culture between 1950 and 1980. A few examples from Los Angeles illustrate how this kind of support wove arts and culture into civic life. The Bureau of Jewish Education (known today as Builders of Jewish Education, or BJE)—funded almost entirely by the Los Angeles Jewish Federation during this period—employed Hollywood character actor Than Wyenn as its drama consultant for 37 years. During his tenure, Wyenn introduced theater into Jewish schools on a consistent basis. The Los Angeles University of Judaism (now American Jewish University) employed Benjamin Zemach as its director of music and dance from 1948 to 1971. Zemach, who had previously acted for the seminal Habima Theater in Moscow (his brother Naum went on to found the Habima Theater in Palestine) incorporated revolutionary contemporary art forms including modern dance (he had studied the form in the Soviet Union and with Martha Graham in New York) and new methods of theater into the university’s curriculum.

During this time, Jewish federations played a critical role in supporting the arts at both the local and national levels. Indeed, the federation system funded the Foundation for Jewish Culture (FJC)—an umbrella group that acted as a clearinghouse and connective tissue for Jewish arts presenters across the country from its inception in 1960 until its demise in 2014. Richard Siegel, FJC’s former director, called it “a creation of the Jewish Federation in America.”

Unfortunately, the federation system’s support for the arts declined over the past several decades. (The availability of public funding has also decreased. According to The Atlantic, “As of 2014, only four percent of all funding in America ($1.2 billion) comes from public sources. While funding has increased numerically, it has not kept up with inflation, leading to a decrease of around 26 percent in public grant money since 1995.”)
The closure of the FJC in 2014 after 54 years was a watershed moment for the Jewish sector. Elise Bernhardt, the foundation's last president and CEO, said its demise was slow but steady—and due in part to the loss of support from the Jewish federations. “The combined federations were giving close to $1 million annually when I started,” she said. “That dropped by about $100,000 a year over the eight years I was there.” While other grants supported FJC programs like the Six Points Fellowship, Bernhardt says those funds were, unfortunately, too restricted to keep the larger foundation alive.

When the FJC disbanded, initiatives that fell within its purview were either dropped or slated to be moved to new homes—with varying degrees of success. One example, the New Culture Network, which is now housed at the National Museum of American Jewish History, is detailed later in this report.

In FJC’s absence, new networks emerged to connect arts organizations dedicated to the same genre, but no new umbrella organization brings arts presenters, artists, and funders together in the same way. Today, Jewish arts and culture projects are now much more disparate and localized as a result.

The larger arts and culture sector has faced funding challenges in recent years, too. While Americans for the Arts found that the number of gifts above $10,000 given to arts and culture nonprofits slightly increased between 2001 and 2012, the total dollars gifted to the sector did not keep up with the pace of inflation. Rather, when adjusted, funding decreased by around 18 percent over that time. And, per Grantmakers in the Arts, when adjusted for inflation, total U.S. public funding for the arts has decreased by seven percent over the last 20 years. Two prominent California institutions, the Irvine Foundation and the California Community Foundation, significantly reduced their arts funding in the past two years alone.

The relationship between artists and arts funders has been a complicated one throughout. Many of the artists we spoke to expressed some wariness of those currently funding Jewish art. Rightly or wrongly, the perception we have heard from artists is that support for Jewish arts and culture is largely “transactional”—meaning funders are overly focused on what return they’ll receive on their investment and how that return will be satisfactorily measured. In other words, the approach many funders take in supporting the arts fails to treat art production as the creative and often open-ended process that it is. Going off the record, a prominent artist we spoke
with said, “If I cared about that too much, I could be very pissed at the Jewish community who has gotten so much out of my work and has given so little to get it.”

“I remember when the so-called official Jewish organizations were talking about continuity and maintaining connection to Judaism,” recalled musician Frank London. “It was so obvious that the artists in my world felt a deep connection to Jewishness. But it never got the attention of those who were funding continuity. They were funding yeshivas and trips to Israel. This is a real way of connecting and engaging with identity.”

Aaron Henne, artistic director of Theater Dybbuk, explained how this dynamic plays out for him today. The L.A.-based theater company Henne runs has been able to greenlight different projects but has had trouble finding more flexible funding to support organizational growth. For Henne, this comes down to trust. His dream: to be shown trust in his work as expressed through critical operational support.

At the same time, digital dissemination, most of it free, has inspired new, online-driven projects and paved the way for person-to-person support through crowdsourcing and other digital fund-raising models. And the ways in which artists and arts and culture can be deployed to achieve other philanthropic goals are increasingly understood, driving new thinking about the sector.

This history brings us to a moment ripe for strategic investment and cross-field collaboration. With increased support from philanthropists and other private sources, artists and arts organizations could recover from the loss of funding they’ve sustained from public sources and federations over time, begin to build capital and capacity, and extend their reach into communal life. They could utilize digital tools to better support and disseminate work, and funders, non-profit leaders, and artists could use this same technology to connect to each other and community partners in ways impossible until now.

Like all sectors, there’s no question the field of Jewish arts and culture has experienced significant financial shifts over time. What remains to be seen is if and how funders step up to sustain and support the field in a meaningful way moving forward. The vibrancy of its future depends upon it.
Cave...A Dance for Lilith, Theater Dybbuk (co-production with L.A. Contemporary Dance Company)
Photo by Aaron Henne
What the Jewish Arts and Culture Sector Needs to Thrive
WHAT THE JEWISH ARTS AND CULTURE SECTOR NEEDS TO THRIVE

Our reporting shows that three components are essential to the overall health of the Jewish arts and culture landscape. We break down each of these components in the sections that follow. We also list specific challenges to address.

1. Support mechanisms for artists and arts organizations in the form of financial support and networks:

   - Early/R&D funding
   - Project completion funding
   - Commission funding
   - Capacity building and capitalization for arts organizations
   - Networks for artists

2. Robust distribution channels:

   - Networks for organizations
   - Consumer-facing distributors
   - Digital platforms

3. Engaged funders:

   - Strategic opportunities for supporting the field
The catalytic power of early-stage grants came up repeatedly in our interviews.

The work of Jon Adam Ross, a writer and performer who hails from Memphis and became involved in cutting-edge Jewish theater during his years at StorahTelling, offers a prime example of what early R&D funding can achieve.

Ross conceived of a three-year, traveling theater initiative called In\[heir\]itance Project—a series of five plays rooted in five cities: Austin, Twin Cities, Seattle, Kansas City, and Charleston. Each play’s script was inspired by the narrative of a matriarch or patriarch from the Book of Genesis and informed by the experience of the community in which it was or will be performed.

The Covenant Foundation awarded Ross a grant of $150,000 to get In\[heir\]itance Project off the ground, and has since provided additional funding for him to expand the project’s educational team, develop curriculum, hire a production manager, cover the cost of
additional visits to each city for the purpose of holding open rehearsals, and compensate artist-collaborators.

Perhaps most compelling about the effort is that—beyond the production of new Jewish creativity rooted in communities that are, for the most part, not “the usual suspects”—Ross created an unusual model that insures In[heir]itance Project begets new works: Because the project is fully funded by the Covenant Foundation, Ross and his team requested that all box office receipts be compiled and distributed back to the community in the form of micro-grants for Jewish and black artists.

While the question of the project’s long-term sustainability remains open, the freedom to create, perform, and inspire new works through a single grant suggests an exciting new approach to leveraged funding of the arts.

The power of early funding goes beyond propagating art by artists already working within a Jewish context. For more mainstream artists, R+D funding has sparked long-term engagement with the Jewish community. Frank London described, for example, how micro-grants from John Zorn paved the way for him and other musicians to create Jewish works. “When John Zorn started the Tzadik label, he would call you up and give you $5,000 or $10,000 to do a Jewish project. He’d call lots of people to do a Jewish project. Most had not done anything with Jewish music. I used to call it ‘the Zorn grant.’ And it created amazing amounts of Jewish music.”

Asked what it would take for him to consider incorporating Jewish themes into his own work, Los Angeles-based opera director and 2017 MacArthur Fellow Yuval Sharon pointed to a line in the budget of his production company, The Industry. “The Industry has a research and development budget every year of $20,000,” he said. “We raise this money specifically to try things out, fly artists to L.A. and house them, do research, create prototypes, etcetera. Usually that amount goes to explore several projects simultaneously, so I would say a $10,000 grant would be a comfortable budget for an exploratory process with artists who might want to conceive of a project together.”

Asylum Arts, an organization dedicated to fostering emerging talent, provides micro-grants for artists in its network. In 2016, Asylum Arts gave small grants totaling more than $92,000 to 32 projects by 40 artists. A recent report from the organization showed that projects which had received small grants from Asylum Arts in 2014 and 2015 have reached a combined audience size of more than 830,000 people and counting. One example: Hadassa Goldvicht’s video installation The House of Life—a project that received seed funding from Asylum Arts in 2015—was presented by the Israel Museum in conjunction with the 57th Venice Biennale. Asylum Arts was seeded by significant funding from the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation and has received additional support from the Righteous Persons Foundation, Natan, and Genesis Philanthropy Group. In addition, Asylum Arts receives small but diverse local funding for projects outside of the U.S.
SUPPORT MECHANISMS FOR ARTISTS AND ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

WORD GRANT FUND: THE BRUCE GELLER MEMORIAL PRIZE

In the spring of 2016, American Jewish University announced the launch of the WORD Grant Fund: The Bruce Geller Memorial Prize via the university’s Institute for Jewish Creativity. This fund aims to “support artists creating projects that explore Jewish ideas, themes, tradition, history, and identity.” Grants of $500 to $2,000 will be awarded for the creation or presentation of new work; $20,000 will be awarded in total.

THE HARTLEY FILM FOUNDATION

The Hartley Film Foundation provides seed grants to support film projects about religion and spirituality. In September 2017, the foundation partnered with Auburn to create the Hartley Media Impact Initiative at Auburn. The partnership’s goal: to broaden the group of community organizations and leaders using storytelling for social good. The foundation supported 39 projects before partnering with Auburn.

THE FOUNDATION FOR JEWISH CULTURE’S NEW PLAY COMMISSIONS

An earlier example, The Foundation for Jewish Culture’s New Play Commissions supported the initial development of 69 new Jewish plays presented by both mainstream and Jewish theaters with $5,000 grants. This program was supported by the Nathan Cummings Foundation.

Early/R&D Funding - Challenges to Address:

- Specific outcomes can be difficult to foresee at the earliest stages of an artistic project, so early funding requires patience, consistency, and a higher tolerance of risk
- No national clearinghouse exists to help funders find or select artists and projects to support
- Financial support has been uneven
- Many funds making early/R&D grants have sunsetted
Beyond the spark of an idea, artists face myriad challenges developing and nurturing ideas into fully formed pieces that are ready to be shared with the public. This is an individual process that can entail significant time. For some artists, organizations play a critical role by offering financial and managerial support.

Take, for example, the Fund for Jewish Documentary Filmmaking, which at its height received an average of 85 applications and gave out $150,000 per year in grants ranging up to $50,000. The fund was established at the Foundation for Jewish Culture in 1996 with seed money from the Righteous Persons Foundation, followed by a $1 million challenge grant from the foundation with the goal of creating an endowment to support “original documentary films and video by American documentarians that promote thoughtful consideration of Jewish history, culture, identity, and contemporary issues among diverse public audiences.” Films including Ari Folman’s Academy Award-nominated Waltz with Bashir, Nathaniel Kahn’s Academy Award-nominated My Architect, Aviva Kempner’s The Life and...
Times of Hank Greenberg, Menachem Daum and Oren Rudavsky's *A Life Apart: Hasidism in America*, and Joseph Dorman's Peabody Award-winning *Arguing the World* were all supported by the fund. But its success went beyond the individual works it bolstered: The fund brought much-needed attention to the importance of documentary films and got other funders from within the Jewish world interested in lending additional support.

While this fund ceased operations when the Foundation for Jewish Culture closed, the Righteous Persons Foundation is interested in re-investing in this space, and is currently working to better understand what kind of funding the documentary space needs now given the many ways in which the landscape has changed.

At the same time, the Jewish Film Institute in San Francisco, previously known as the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, is taking on the challenge of raising money specifically to provide critical completion grants to filmmakers. While conversations with potential funders are ongoing, Lexi Leban says the institute is looking to build a multi-million dollar fund that provides grants ranging from $20,000 to $50,000. Funds likely won’t be limited to documentary projects.

The Durfee Foundation provides a secular example of how completion funding can work. In 2000, the foundation launched the Artists’ Resource for Completion (ARC) grants program to provide short-term, rapid assistance to individual artists so they could take advantage of imminent opportunities to exhibit their work. More than 600 artists at various career stages received grants of up to $3,500 each before the program closed in 2014. Modelled on a program created by the New York Foundation for the Arts called Special Opportunity Stipend, ARC was highly visible and popular among artists.

Writing for the online blog Grantmakers in the Arts in 2010, Durfee Foundation executive director Claire Peeps reflected on a decade of experience with the program. Among other lessons, she highlighted the importance of small grants. “Small grants allow artists to navigate across all kinds of terrain and to move from one project to the next, from small opportunities to larger ones,” she wrote. “They help prevent artists from becoming isolated or immobilized. And they provide the platform from which artists make the leap to larger grants. The larger grants, in turn, buy them expanses of time—an artist’s most prized commodity—and material supports. But they generally need to cross the stepping stones of small grants to get there. ‘Even though it’s not a huge amount of money,’ said one artist, ‘sometimes it comes at just the right time. That has happened to me at crucial plateaus in my career. I get a grant, and I think, OK, I can go on a little bit longer.’”

In a memo sent to the Durfee Foundation’s board this year, Peeps laid out the main challenge the ARC program faced: It was labor intensive for foundation staff. “We processed 44 rounds of ARC in-house before we handed the program to the Center for Cultural Innovation as a third party to administer,” she wrote. “Our intention was to help CCI raise funds from other foundations to sustain the program, but we learned the hard way that funders are disinclined to support something they perceive as being owned by another foundation.”

**Project-Completion Funding - Challenges to Address:**

- No national clearinghouse exists to help funders find or select artists and projects to support
- Institutional support has been uneven
- Many funds making project completion grants have sunned
COMMISSION FUNDING

In addition to early/R&D funding and completion funding, funding for projects developed on commission—that is, by invitation from an organization—helps keep artists financially sustained and engaged in the creation of Jewish arts and culture.

While the majority of new works are not produced on commission, this method can be mutually beneficial for artists and commissioners; when commissioned, artists have the security of knowing in advance that they will be paid for their work, while commissioners get to work with artists of their choosing and the opportunity to specify what it is they are looking for upfront.

Our research indicates that the Contemporary Jewish Museum (CJM) in San Francisco is an important progenitor of new Jewish work in the United States. While this wasn’t always the case, CJM executive director Lori Starr has seen commissioning new work become a core part of the museum’s mission, something she feels has allowed the museum to function as a springboard for artists who benefit from having its seal of approval and, as a result, go on to tour works more easily. One example: The San Francisco debut of *Shanghai Angel* by Heather Klein, a soprano who was asked by CJM to create a one-woman opera about her grandmother Rosa’s migration. Rosa went from Nazi Germany to Shanghai in search of sanctuary and then on to Angel Island. A recent check of Klein’s website showed that *Shanghai Angel* had performances lined up in California, Texas, and Nevada following its debut at CJM.

As we mentioned above, the museum also launched an initiative called Havruta, which pairs artists and non-artists in the artistic process. “A havruta is where you study *Tanach* together,” said Starr. “We created a spin on that. We invite an artist to choose a partner from a different field of endeavor and together they create a new work of art.” Scientists, dancers, and poets have participated in past collaborations.
An earlier example of a successful piece of art produced on commission is *The Hating Pot* by the late writer-composer-director Elizabeth Swados. The musical—which blended Yiddish, African, and Spanish music and featured actors sharing personal stories about race and prejudice—was commissioned in 1993 by the Covenant Foundation. The show was performed off-Broadway and in schools and broadcast on PBS.

In the mainstream, the commissioning of new works by artists, both established and new, is common and widespread. Take Bloomberg Philanthropies’ Public Art Challenge, which invited cities around the country to compete for grants worth up to $1 million. According to Bloomberg Philanthropies’ website, the program incentivized mayors to “collaborate with artists and arts organizations to develop innovative projects that engage residents and attract visitors.” Two hundred and thirty-seven cities submitted proposals, “affirming the many ways in which the arts can celebrate, address, and advance critical urban issues.” The 12 projects selected as finalists spoke to issues ranging from how to revitalize underused urban spaces to civil rights, neighborhood safety, environmental stability, and civic pride.

CURRENT: LA, the initiative put forth by Los Angeles—one of four projects that ultimately received Los Angeles funding—set out to do two things: 1) commission up to 15 multidisciplinary artworks and public programs with a focus on L.A.’s environmental concerns and 2) produce an inaugural Public Art Biennial featuring those works to inspire civic discourse on water conservation and other issues. The first biennial took place last summer, with installations by 16 artists at locations all across the city. According to the *Los Angeles Daily News*, pieces “ranged from a 16th century sailing ship at a park in South Los Angeles to model gardens at an old rail yard by the L.A. River in Glassell Park, to a memorial to 100 murders in Echo Park, created by waters used to clean the streets where they were slain.”

Despite the importance of commissions, it’s important to note that commissions alone could not sustain a healthy ecosystem for artists who maintain the need at times to create independently of external desires and expectations.

**Commission Funding - Challenges to Address:**

- Few organizations have enough resources to commission new works
- Few local and no national clearinghouses exist to pair funders or non-profits with artists they could commission for specific projects
- Despite the many ways in which the arts can be used for education and community engagement, too few organizations dedicated to those areas consider leveraging artists and the arts
In addition to the kinds of support detailed above, the health of the greater Jewish arts and culture landscape also depends upon the capacity and the financial well-being of the arts organizations that dot it.

Arts organizations need support for growing their staff, diversifying revenue streams, developing business plans, building endowments and capital reserves, and all the training and staff development needs that accompany these endeavors. Despite this, many organizations do not have enough resources on hand to foster institutional growth.

For “Capitalization & Strategy,” a public presentation shared with funders in early 2015, nonprofit management consulting and research firm TDC studied arts and human services organizations in several cities and found that a large majority of the organizations they looked at had highly constrained capital structures. Of the three elements needed by all organizations—working capital, operating reserves, and risk capital—typically all were either inadequate or not present.

TDC also found that many nonprofit leaders can point to the corrosive effects of poor capitalization but feel powerless to address it. That may be in part due to trends that are counterproductive to the field including three pointed to in “Capitalization & Strategy:"

- Funders and supporters focus on breakeven annual budgets or the success of isolated projects
- Organizations do not want to appear weak and worry they will perceived as “unfundable” if they are honest about undercapitalization
- Reserves and endowments are under-emphasized and often not included in capital campaign goals because they can make projects appear impossible.

TDC’s executive vice president Susan Nelson summed up why it’s particularly important for arts organizations to break the cycle of being under-capitalized this way: “The very nature of art is risk. Capitalization is, at its simplest, having cash to do the things you want to do,
when you want to do them. Without cash you can’t take a risk. Without risk, art grows stale.” Nelson told us these pitfalls aren’t limited to individual organizations that are under-capitalized but rather extend to the larger field. “Organizations on insecure financial footing have to concentrate on meeting payroll,” she explained. “As a result, they make safer artistic choices, cut seasons short, underpay artists—the impacts permeate the sector; they aren’t isolated.”

Non-profit organizations with annual budgets of under $1 million typically rely on funding cobbled together from earned income, government support, and private funds from foundations and individual donors. While the precise mix of funds may vary from year to year, the implication for these organizations stays the same: They are often insufficiently financed to address infrastructure needs or support the proper development of their staff—an investment that would, ironically, make them more likely to grow beyond their current limits. In these situations, a hit to the economy, the death of a principal funder, or even a change in board leadership or staffing can be significant to the bottom line.

In fact, the very first piece of advice offered to nonprofits by Nonprofit Finance Fund in the online resource “Issues Facing Small Nonprofits” is “spend time seeking and applying for capacity grants, even small ones, if they’ll allow you to take care of deferred infrastructure needs.”

And without proper staffing, fund-raising itself can be an institutional drain. On the condition of anonymity, the director of a national theater company that has tried to increase its work in the Jewish space described the difficulty like this: “Beyond ticket sales, membership, and commissions, we rely on gifts and grants to make budget. It’s a significant percentage. And those gifts come from the consistent fundraising efforts of our artistic directors. While we enjoy the process of connecting with our patrons, it takes time away from our creativity and our management of the theater. We rely heavily on our board for support in this area but their experience and confidence is limited (as is ours!).”

It may be helpful to think of the power of capacity building grants this way: Would a funder invest in an under-capitalized for-profit business? Unless they are comfortable taking big risks, probably not. The same is true in the non-profit world. So gifts to organizations that increase capital and capacity give these organizations a boost beyond the immediate growth the original gift provides—they make them more attractive to additional funders and thereby make them (even) more sustainable over time.
THE JEWISH COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF LOS ANGELES

The Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles piloted its first cycle of Next Stage Grants—grants of up to $250,000 over a multi-year period with customized coaching—to Los Angeles Jewish nonprofits including arts and culture organizations that previously received a Cutting Edge Grant from the foundation. Next Stage Grants are specifically intended to build capacity of nonprofits to expand and serve the community. One such grant went to the Silverlake Independent Jewish Community Center to help it develop a fundraising strategy and business model to sustain its growth as a center for cultural programming for young Jews in Los Angeles.

GENESIS PHILANTHROPY GROUP

Genesis Philanthropy Group—a foundation that supports a number of Jewish arts and culture organizations and initiatives including Asylum Arts, PJ Library, and the Jewish Book Council—recently provided a general support grant to the Jewish Women’s Theatre.

THE CHARLES AND LYNN SCHUSTERMAN FOUNDATION

The Charles and Lynn Schusterman Foundation has been the major supporter of Asylum Arts. The non-profit has used this funding to host artist retreats, provide small grants to artists within the program, and further develop the organization’s stature within the art world.

Capacity Building and Capitalization - Challenges to Address:

- Training and support is needed for arts organization executives and board leaders
- Fund-raising events don’t seek this kind of investment often enough
- More funder education is needed in this area
The final support mechanism that artists and arts organizations report needing isn’t financial per se, although it can lead to financial rewards—it’s networks that provide professional training, opportunities to network and even collaborate with peers, co-education, and more.

Many of the artists we spoke to said interaction with other artists inspired the creation of new works while giving them a long-lasting and emotionally rewarding sense of community. They also said it gave them a much-needed opportunity to share and learn best practices. Elise Bernhardt, the former president and CEO of the Foundation for Jewish Culture, pointed to the success of the legendary liberal arts school Black Mountain College. “That friction of crazy ideas rubbing up against each other,” she said, “that’s what is transformational.”

Several programs incubate Jewish arts and culture by inviting a number of artists to develop art through a Jewish lens as a group. Nationally, groups such as Asylum Arts, which rose from the ashes of the Six Points Fellowship, foster cohorts of Jewish artists through retreats. Reboot and Art Kibbutz are engaged in similar endeavors, while Yiddishkayt’s Helix program creates diverse cohorts of artists and academics ranging in age from 19 to 60 that come together to explore how Jews fit into a mosaic of cultures in Eastern Europe and East Los Angeles.

Participants and leaders we spoke to from these programs emphasized the impact in-person connections can have on the creative process. Frank London pointed out that community-building efforts are especially important for artists who live and work outside of major metropolitan areas with vibrant Jewish communities where it is possible for new Jewish work to emerge and grow more quickly. “The community in New York makes it easier for stuff to happen,” he said, giving the 14th Street Y’s LABA program, a laboratory for Jewish culture in which classic Jewish texts inspire the creation of new art, as an example. “In New York, you can call upon everything you need to make something happen. The people and resources are here.”

It’s critical to note that in addition to creating community, many of these programs are designed to develop non-art skills such as finance or marketing, which increase the programs’ impact and importance. Rachel Cohen, who founded Cadence Arts Network in 1989 to provide national and international visibility to dance companies, said, “Every artist needs some kind of management support. The thing that holds professional artists back is administration.”

Indeed, for writer, musician, and performer Alicia Jo Rabins, the Six Point Fellowship was a career-changer because it offered both training and the opportunity to build community through artistic practice. She also benefitted from Creative Capital training, which taught her “profound stuff about the business of art.” She said that these experiences, combined with a grant from Joshua Venture Group and distribution support from JDub Records, made her career sustainable.

Here’s how five select networks work in more detail:

- **Asylum Arts**
  Rebecca Guber started Asylum Arts around three years ago. It grew out of the Six Points Fellowship, a program which lost its funding and subsequently shut down in 2013. (That program provided two-year grants to artists in addition to counseling, training, and retreats.) Asylum Arts identifies the most compelling Jewish artists working in the field today and brings them together for artist retreats. The organization’s goal: concretizing a Jewish voice in the artists’ work and building community among the artists. “Asylum Arts is creating the next generation of Jewish artists so that they can encourage the next generation of art-goers to engage in their Jewishness,” said Guber. “The Jewish community wants to create meaningful and content-rich opportunities...to make being Jewish new and relevant; Asylum Arts is part of that.” Relationships that took root there have already lead to viable projects. According to the *Times of Israel*, the residents of El Paso, Texas would likely never have had the opportunity to enjoy New York-based artist Tirtzah Bassel’s “thought-provoking...
installation” *Your Dreams Available Now*—a work that depicted scenes from the border at El Paso and Juarez, Mexico—“had she not attended the first-ever Asylum Arts retreat in Garrison, New York.” That’s because Bassel met photographer and conceptual artist Peter Svarzbein at the retreat, and it was Svarzbein who later invited Bassel to El Paso. *Hineni*, a performance piece about biblical stories and modern-day struggles, is a second example. According to a review published in Tablet when *Hineni* opened in New York in 2014, “The project progressed when [Jewish choreographer Sasha Soreff] met Israeli composer Yoav Shemesh through Asylum Arts... *Hineni’s* debut marks exactly one year since the two artists met and decided to collaborate, with Soreff choreographing and Shemesh composing an original score for the piece.”

**Art Kibbutz**
Patricia Eszter Margit, founding director of Art Kibbutz, provides an inspiring and peaceful space for artists to work, learn, and seriously explore the rich heritage of Jewish experience that informs their creative process. According to Margit, “Art Kibbutz is the only art residency that provides a place and community where artists can work and connect Jewishly. [It’s] a meaningful Jewish connection for artists who then create artwork based on those connections. They then go back to their communities and duplicate their experiences.” In 2011, the group organized Shofar FlashMob, an event that saw participants in 17 cities blow the shofar—all in public space, all at the same time. A video of the event has garnered more than 60,000 views on YouTube to date. Although Art Kibbutz receives regular requests from Jewish organizations to partner, the organization has not received much funding from within the Jewish philanthropic world, a fact which Margit said has inhibited the organization’s growth and reach into the community.

**Jewish Art Salon**
Jewish Art Salon started when visual artist Yona Verwer realized she didn’t know other artists creating Jewish art. At the time, she knew of a group of Jewish artists in California that met regularly, and she set about to recreate this in...
New York. There was demand for the community-building project from the start. “It was a fun mix of people, artists, art historians, and curators,” she said. “Lots of people came, even a curator from the Jewish Museum. This success started to lead to more exhibits.” When Verwer began developing subsequent events, she invited artists to explore Jewish themes, and she found that in some cases this was their first engagement with Jewish texts. Today Jewish Art Salon describes itself as “the largest international artists and scholars organization for contemporary Jewish visual art.” It is completely volunteer-run and includes members from the U.S., Israel, Europe, Australia, and South America.

- **Reboot**
  Reboot is a non-profit committed to creating new ways for communities and individuals to make Jewish traditions their own. At its core is a network of more than 500 young artists, activists, entrepreneurs and other creative professionals who identify as Jew-ish. “Rebooters” connect online throughout the year and in person at an annual three-day retreat designed around three questions:

  Who am I? What have I inherited? What, if anything, do I want to do about this? This engagement has led to the development of Reboot programs and projects including Sukkah City, an international design competition that challenged artists to reimagine the ancient practice of constructing a Sukkah, and 10Q, a digital initiative inspired by the Jewish High Holy days that promotes self-reflection. The programs are implemented in part by the more than 1,000 local and national Jewish community organizations Reboot partners with (temples, JCCs, Hillels, arts orgs and more). Reboot has also inspired the creation of new Jewish arts and culture at the individual level. *Transparent* creator Jill Soloway draws a direct line from her being in the network to the award-winning show’s exploration of Jewish content. Josh Kun, another Rebooter, credits Reboot with introducing him to David Katznelson, Roger Bennett, and Courtney Holt, his partners in The Idelsohn Society, a Jewish music collective. In fall 2017, 10 Rebooters completed a fellowship at the Yiddish Book Center designed to inspire the creation of new Jewish works and experiences.
• **ROI 360**
ROI Community’s year-round program is called ROI 360. It is an active, ongoing community where Jewish innovators collaborate and offer each other strategic support and advice on different aspects of their personal and professional lives. Members have access to a wide range of offerings, including professional development courses and delegations, micro funding, leadership opportunities, ROI Community events and more. This suite of year-round opportunities is geared toward creating ongoing learning and connections that spark game-changing, collaborative ideas. The web series *YidLife Crisis* was invited to be a part of the ROI Community, and when we spoke to co-creator Jamie Elman, he described it as a turning point for the show because it gave him the confidence he needed to move forward with the program.

The true impact of networks extends far beyond the individuals they engage. By existing, artist and arts organization networks make it possible for community-facing groups outside of the field to connect with artists on projects and vice versa. An afterschool program looking for artists to work with children, for example, could utilize these networks as a resource. When and where they don’t exist, however, it becomes much more challenging for event programmers working outside the field to plug art into their programs. The implication is that in addition to the ways in which these groups support artists and organization professionals directly, networks also lay the groundwork for art to be used for purposes beyond its own sake.

Just like the artists we spoke to, arts organization representatives pointed to the ways in which peer networks helped them develop shared standards, collaborate on projects, and strengthen their leadership skills. Yet few major networks for arts organizations exist following the demise of the Foundation for Jewish Culture. Those that do provide a second, equally important benefit for the field: they double as distributors.

For that reason, an overview of key arts organization networks is included in the following section devoted to distribution channels.

**Networks for Artists - Challenges to Address:**

- The value of networks to artists is difficult to quantify and thus, not well understood by the funding community
- Perceptions of elitism dampen funder enthusiasm (this is notably not typically a problem with other fellowships or scholarships)
COMMUNITY VOICE

When we ask our community what it is that they want to do or want to experience with us, arts and culture ranks high on that list. So when we’re planning our Yom Kippur service, for example, we plan for it to feel like an installation. Our use of the arts is less about bringing in a particular play and much more about using it as a living part of our conversation...We’ve done so many different iterations of programmatic partnerships with Reboot. Over Passover we’ve partnered with [Reboot program] Beyond Bubbie. We have a build-your-own haroset bar with a whole range of wacky ingredients—some that are traditional and some that are off the wall. Reboot staffs that and helps people remember their family recipes or write down the new recipe they just created on the spot. Everybody does it—kids, adults, everybody. It gives people a nice way to connect.

Ayana Morse, Executive Director, Silverlake Independent Jewish Community Center
Whether you believe that art should exist for art’s sake, be used as a vehicle for change in other issue areas—or something else—those larger goals for art require that an audience experience and interact with the creative work. So, we had to ask: Once art is developed, how does it become public-facing? There are different outlets for different genres. Some works end up in a theater venue, others on digital platforms, at film festivals, or even in bookstores. We found that across the field, distribution most typically happens via an arts organization network; consumer-facing distributors; and emergent, digital platforms. Below are some pertinent examples of each.

NETWORKS FOR ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

Regardless of the type of art, arts organizations and presenters are crucial for production and distribution, and our research found that they benefit greatly from pooling information and resources. Peer networks help organizations develop shared standards, collaborate on projects, and develop the leadership skills of their staffs.

And yet, the past few decades have witnessed a shift in how Jewish arts and culture organizations support each other and function within the larger Jewish community. During its existence, the Foundation for Jewish Culture (1960 to 2014) operated as the de facto clearinghouse for coordinating and aligning Jewish arts and culture initiatives. Since it disbanded, some of the groups that fell within its purview, such as the Jewish Performing Arts Network and the Fund for Jewish Documentary Filmmaking (described earlier in this report) have struggled to fully recover. As a direct result, Jewish arts and culture projects are now more disparate and localized.

Some organizations have responded by stepping up to provide leadership for peers working within the same genre. The world of Jewish film offers one of the best examples. The San Francisco Film Festival, the oldest Jewish film festival in the world, has taken on an international role in the promotion and distribution of films. Recently rebranded as the Jewish Film Institute in recognition of its year-round mission and work, the Institute draws upon its expertise distributing and presenting films to support filmmakers in two key ways: it helps promote those films selected for the Jewish Film Festival to other film festivals around the world and it manages a digital streaming service—executive director Lexi Leban refers to it as “JewTube”—to ensure films continue to be available to new audiences. Leban explained that JFI also published a resource guide for how to set up a film festival. (Today there are about 250 Jewish film festivals worldwide.) “Festivals nationwide look to us for their programming,” said Leban. “They look at our roster of events on our website, and then these presenters can contact the film distributors. All the information [they need] is on our website.”

The Jewish Film Presenters Network, established in 2006 and led by the film program at JCC Manhattan, has a similar mission. It aims to provide Jewish film festivals of all sizes with “the professional tools and guidance which will allow them to raise the quality of their programs, expand their reach, and meet industry standards.” JFPN launched JFilmBox, its digital platform for film presenters and distributors, in 2016.

Jewish visual arts organizations also benefit from networks that support the distribution and dissemination of work plus information about new and emerging artists. Museums trade information freely through the Council of American Jewish Museums and the International Council of Jewish Museums. Lori Starr, executive director of the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco, had this to say about these networks: “They are our natural partners for sharing information about exhibitions and related programs and how we might tour our shows to one another.” In addition to block-booking...
ROBUST DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS

exhibitions, CJM actively researches the work of new artists and then shares this information to its partner institutions worldwide.

The Jewish Book Council (JBC) provides a similar role in the distribution of Jewish literature. In addition to circulating editorial content (reviews, interviews, essays, “staff picks,” reading lists, and more), the council awards literary prizes, runs the 300-club strong National Jewish Book Club, and operates the JBC Network Platform—an initiative designed to connect authors with JCCs, synagogues, Hillels, federations, and culture centers across the country. According to JBC executive director Naomi Firestone-Teeter, more than 120 groups comprise the network, which meets each year to discover new Jewish-interest books, meet authors, and discuss ideas for programming. It’s worth noting that JBC’s model doesn’t rely on charitable giving alone. About 55 percent of JBC’s income is earned; the remaining 45 percent comes in as gifts or grants.

Changes to the publishing industry at large—fewer marketing resources are now available to authors than in the past—make what the JBC does to promote Jewish literature especially critical. It’s also programmatically successful: Through the council, more than 2,300 authors have participated in author tours over the last ten years, more than 680 authors have won a Jewish book award since 1950, 387 authors have written essays through its “Visiting Scribe” series, and more than 3,000 books have been reviewed in the past years alone. When we spoke with author Dara Horn, she credited the council with having launched her career. Resources permitting, could the council be doing more? Firestone-Teeter says yes. “There is a huge opportunity to create an on-going author network that goes beyond the annual conference and gives [authors] the opportunity to really form a community and be a resource to one another…we can provide the framework for this and create educational opportunities through the program to help enrich them.”

Unfortunately, everyone we spoke with in the performing arts (dance, theater, music, and more) concurred that the lack of national or even regional coordination between institutions was remarkable, and that it often prohibits the exchange of basic information, let alone the strategic leveraging of resources.
Jordan Peimer, who served for 19 years as program director for the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles, experienced the disadvantages of this lack of coordination firsthand. “[When I started at the Skirball] there was no network for Jewish work. There was a lot of research that I needed to do,” he said. “I would share what I knew with other colleagues as they asked. There were people who would repeat the programs that I did. But for the most part there was no network.” As a result, Peimer had to devote considerable time and energy to developing his own personal network of contacts from scratch.

There have been periods with more connectivity. When it was active, the Foundation for Jewish Culture (FJC) formed and fostered the New Jewish Culture Network, a group that, in addition to providing opportunities for professionals from different arts organizations to meet and share best practices, co-commissioned works and played a critical role in connecting artists and arts programming to presenters across the country.

When FJC disbanded, the National American Jewish History Museum (NAJHM) took the network over. “It was a way to extend our national footprint,” said Susan Weiss, the museum’s chief of staff. Back then, the network was comprised of thirtysomething members, but many were inactive, and so NAJHM set about hiring a consultant to re-engage the group, which now includes 36 active member organizations, 15 of which pay dues (the museum is in the process of implementing a new model that has a modest amount of earned revenue). It includes music festivals, JCCs, university arts presenters, museums, and other cultural institutions of varying sizes from across North America.

Three years in, NAJHM is supporting the network with funding from the Howard and Geraldine Polinger Family Foundation. This allows NAJHM to connect network members via a listserv and to host an annual convening—touchpoints that are meaningful. “Most of the members have expressed to us that they want to communicate with other organizations who care about what they care about and do what they do in order to improve their own work,” said Emily August, NAJHM’s director of public programs. “They want to share thoughts and think creatively together about ways to engage audiences with quality performing arts of a Jewish variety.”

With funding, NAJHM could do even more, including facilitating block-booking across network members, a step August described as “the most logical thing.” For now, she’s hoping the network continues to grow and that it will be able to connect other networks to each other moving forward.

“There does seem to be a communication gap in the field,” she said. “First it was individual organizations that we were talking to, and now we realize the networks...
could connect as well. We need to know what our collective goals are.”

In some ways, the aspiration of the New Jewish Culture Network resembles The National Performance Network (NPN), a mainstream model that was founded in 1984 and successfully solved multiple obstacles faced by performing artists and performing arts organizations. Before NPN’s formation there was a great deal of new and exciting work being created at smaller independent venues around the country. In spite of the surge of activity, most artists were unable to share their creations outside of the city they worked in. The genius of NPN as imagined by David White, the legendary director of Dance Theater Workshop in New York, was to tackle all of these issues with one fell swoop. He proposed a network of presenters culled from a select group scattered across the United States. This group shared a common interest in risk-taking. They presented work that was new but not necessarily commercial, and they all had established credentials as administrators presenting cutting-edge dance, theater, and performance art.

This newly-realized presenters network exchanged information between peers through an annual conference, with travel expenses for all attendees underwritten by the funders. Just assembling this diverse group in one city for a regular exchange of ideas was a breakthrough. But this solved just one leg of the problem.

The other key act of the newly minted NPN program was establishing cash subsidies for touring. Artists received a fee for their work based upon the size of the company and the number of days spent in residence at the visiting presenter plus a travel subsidy to the company for airfare, shipping, insurance, and administrative costs. This reduced these costs to sums that artists could realistically afford.

With initial support from the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations along with the National Endowment for the Arts and the Pew Charitable Trust, NPN started with a modest group of 12 presenters. Now, more than 30 years later, NPN boasts an annual budget of more than $3 million and a network of 77 partners located in 47 cities in 31 states across the country. NPN continues to be a crucial part of the nation’s arts ecosystem for smaller presenters scattered across the country, for thousands of artists, and for tens of thousands of audience members. All have benefited from NPN’s approach, which lowered the economic and intellectual obstacles that remain a reality for most non-profits and performers outside the network. It has become a critical vehicle through which network presenters can be introduced to work from beyond their own regions and provides a way for new artists to grow audiences quickly.

A second model for the distribution of Jewish arts and culture is more consumer-facing. The massive growth of PJ Library as a distributor of Jewish children’s literature serves as an important case study worthy of examination. Developed by the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, the program is, by design, dependent on institutional and funding partnerships for success. And success is quantifiable: Today, more than 180,000 books are distributed monthly across North America, with more than twice that number being sent internationally to Israel, Russia, Latin America, Australia, the UK, and beyond. To date, more than 10 million books have been mailed in North America, and more than 20 million worldwide.

PJ Library requires two distinct partnerships in each community it serves: 1) an “Implementing Partner” to administer the program, manage the mailing list, raise matching funds, and provide “beyond the books” engagement programming (this role is largely filled
When we interviewed author Dara Horn, we learned that a print magazine played a critical role in launching her career. Her first published piece was inspired by a family trip to Spain in 1992. “It was the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews. We went to these sites of Jewish historical interest,” she recalled. “I was seeing this place where there were no Jews, just these archaeological sites. That was interesting to me. At the encouragement of my mom, I kept a journal during that trip. My mom read my journal and suggested that I edit it down and send it to Hadassah magazine. So I did and they published it.” Without that platform, Horn’s piece could have ended up staying in her journal. Instead, it put her on the radar.

While traditional outlets like Hadassah still have an important role to play—as does arts and culture coverage by outlets including The Forward, Tablet, and JTA—Sasha Anawalt, who heads up the Innovation Lab at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, says the rise of digital media has had huge implications for artists and other arts and culture stakeholders. “Everything is changing, and it changes every single week,” she said. “Now that everyone is carrying around a cell phone, [the] means of distribution has changed. The relationship between artists and audience also completely changed. The audience now has the power to decide whether they come along with you or not. The Internet affected the arts too, and how art is consumed. People expect real engagement. More and more, they want art on their own terms, when, why, and how they want it—habits, shall we say, that are being reinforced by social media, cellphones, Internet, and a 24/7 lifestyle defined by interruptions and accessibility.”

She believes artists no longer need the imprimatur of a review to disseminate information about their art and that the larger role for journalists today is to frame art within the larger context of society.

Concurrent with these changes, arts organizations are shifting dollars away from traditional media marketing and even away from presenting the performing arts in front of live audiences in favor of digital distribution.

Lori Starr says the success of digital platforms has changed how the Contemporary Jewish Museum engages the public with its work. “Ninety-nine percent of our marketing dollars go to online and digital media engagement,” she said. “The number of visits and the length of the stays online are remarkable. The website and digital platforms are our portal to engaging with younger Jews through the content that we capture out of our programming [and] then share online.”
The trends of online audiences led Rob Adler Peckerar, executive director of Yiddishkayt, to rethink the organization’s output, which consequently shifted from a biennial festival to online content. “Yiddishkayt enthusiastically embraced the expansion of its digital presence in order to translate the idea of a ‘culture festival’ into a digital age,” he said. “The fact that a post on a Yiddish partisan poet is as easily read by someone in Buenos Aires or Paris as it is by someone in Los Angeles is thrilling and empowering, and it allows for a distribution of a small, well-crafted exhibition to reach a huge number of viewers at minimal cost. A recent exhibition, for example, on ‘Big Bad Yiddishe Mamas’ garnered 65,000 page views in 24 hours!”

Another Yiddish-centric project, the web series YidLife Crisis, made its mark solely through its Internet presence. Three years in, co-producers Eli Batalion and Jamie Elman do live events around the show.

BimBam (formerly G-dcast), is another digital story worth sharing. The non-profit organization produces digital media about Judaism for people of all ages. For younger viewers BimBam produces mobile apps and an animated series called Shaboom! For older audiences there’s resources on parenting, Jewish rituals, the weekly parsha, and more. And along with its output, the organization’s audience is growing: BimBam products garnered 2.9 million minutes of watch time in 2016 and more than 3.2 million minutes in the first nine months of 2017.

What's perhaps most interesting about BimBam, though, is the fact that it doesn't identify strictly as an arts non-profit despite the fact that its work is intrinsically an artistic endeavor. “We hold the tension between wanting to educate and wanting to entertain,” said Jordan Gill, BimBam’s executive director. “People have been doing education from the front of a room forever. Some people love Sunday school. There’s also a lot of people who don’t. And there’s a lot of people for whom traditional Jewish spaces are intimidating. Our effectiveness is rooted in the fact that we’ve chosen a medium that’s artistic, creative, and makes it easy for the end user to engage.”

While “arts patrons aren’t knocking down BimBam’s door,” as Gill put it, the organization has found more ROBUST DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS

A still from Shaboom!, an animated series for young children from BimBam
success with funders and foundations concerned with Jewish identity and community development. “We have an investment from the Jim Joseph Foundation for the first time this year, and their mandate is around education, but it’s also around thriving Jewish community and making Judaism feel relevant and current and innovative,” said Gill. “That overlaps with arts and culture significantly.”

For BimBam—and all arts producers—understanding that overlap has crucial implications for audience development. The organization has already begun to strategically share its content with community partners including URJ, United Conservative Synagogue, PJ Library, JCCA, and Interfaith Family, and BimBam recently hired a marketing manager specifically tasked with “building relationships with legacy institutions that can help with distribution.” Gill said conversations with Moishe House, Hillel, and Honeymoon Israel are underway.

Meanwhile, the media company Arq uses digital platforms to raise the visibility of Jewish arts and culture makers and their products and events. The site’s tagline: Arq helps people connect with Jewish life and culture in a more relevant, inclusive, and convenient way. Founded by Danya Shults—a marketing creative who quit her job at a venture capital firm to dedicate herself full-time to the project—Arq sends more than 2,000 subscribers “The Ish,” a highly-curated, weekly roundup of Jewish content. One recent edition promoted an “insider’s tour” of the San Francisco Film Festival alongside links to purchase the book *A Living Lens: Photographs of Jewish Life from the Pages of the Forward* and a *New York* magazine article about a comic that tells the story of a couple looking to preserve Jewish heritage through food. The newsletter regularly features events, food news, products, and suggested reading. Shults says she started Arq, which is self-supported, as a personal project, “a way to connect with Judaism. I needed to find a way to make it relevant and accessible to me, and to integrate it into the entire life that I’ve chosen to live.” And while it has helped Shults and her husband, who she notes isn’t Jewish, infuse their own lives with Jewish meaning, it’s had an outward effect, too: amplifying Jewish stories and experiences that readers wouldn’t otherwise discover.

Shults says her readers “aren’t going to sit down for three hours and scour the Internet and do the work that it takes to curate, because that’s not their job. They have other things going on.” So, she uses digital tools to meet them where they are. Shults points to mainstream lifestyle platforms like Goop and Food52 as inspiration, and credits Arq’s tone and design aesthetic with its appeal. “Good design is a new type of currency for trust in brands,” she said. “Arq had to look and feel like something cool and relevant, and like everything else [our subscribers] bring into their lives.” The result: “It gives people a familiar way to connect with things that are Jewish.”

The Los Angeles County Arts Commission’s website provides a mainstream example of how a civic organization can connect the public to artists and their work (in one of the most populous counties in the nation, no less). It offers easy to use directories of arts educators, public artists, musicians, and partners in the arts for school districts, making the website an easy-to-use tool for a large and varied audience.

**Considerations to address:**

- No national network currently bolsters distribution by connecting arts programming to arts presenters across the country
- Digital platforms are providing new opportunities for artists and arts presenters to reach and engage audiences from all over
- Leveraging existing networks of Jewish organizations can exponentially increase reach and impact, and provide a broader base of financial support over time
COMMUNITY VOICE

PJ Library has been a game-changer for our organization and for our Jewish community. It has allowed us to identify otherwise unaffiliated families, helped us to strengthen their Jewish identities, and assisted us in bridging the gaps between different cohorts of young Jewish families to build one unified PJ Library community. We feel very fortunate to have felt the magic of what PJ library can do.

Naomi Rosenfeld, Executive Director, Atlantic Jewish Council
Our 2016 report *Devising Strategies to Support Jewish Arts & Culture* identified four obstacles to a vibrant Jewish arts and culture ecosystem:

- No leading voice is making the case for Jewish arts and culture in the U.S
- Jewish arts and culture is seen as apart from other areas funders care about
- Funders lack confidence when it comes to supporting Jewish arts and culture
- Jewish arts and culture does not seem like an urgent issue

While support mechanisms for artists and arts organizations and robust distribution channels are essential, the Jewish arts and culture sector—like the secular arts sector—cannot thrive without engaged funders willing and able to support these other elements. And yet, we know significant barriers keep a large number of funders from being active (or more active) in this space.

In addition to advocating more successfully on behalf of Jewish arts and culture and making clear the many exciting ways in which it can be connected to other issues funders care about, there are a number of ways invested funders, artists, and presenters can work together to reduce barriers for increased support of the field.
COMMUNITY VOICE

The number one priority of the federation is to build and sustain our Jewish community. We could not do that without the heart and soul provided by arts and culture. We just couldn’t do it. We have to figure out how to use arts and culture more and more, and how to bring it in to what we’re already doing more and more. Without it? The Jewish community is empty. I believe we need Torah, but arts and culture is the great unifier. It brings people together, and we don’t have a lot of things in our society—let alone in the Jewish community—that bring people together in a joyous experience, and one you remember for days, months, and years to come. We need more of that in the Jewish community than we have.

Jay Sanderson, President and CEO, Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles
A finalist of Reboot's Sukkah City, an international design competition
04 Strategic Opportunities for Today’s Jewish Arts and Culture Funders
It can be easy to feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the challenge of growing the field of Jewish arts and culture, but there are a number of practical steps we can take to begin to move the needle and indeed, impact the field quickly and significantly. In addition to serving as an important guide for further discussion, the lessons we take from the research that went into this report provide us with renewed optimism.

As we see evidence of impact and leverage in R&D funding, project-completion funding, commissions, capacity building, artist networks, and robust distribution channels, we see opportunity.

That said, we remain clear-eyed about real risks. Projects may stumble. Organizations may come under critical fire. Audiences are often distracted and pulled in too many directions.

But a path to rewards for Jewish arts and the broader community is visible, and the risks of investing in the space can be calculated ones.

This report is intended to both fuel and shape a larger conversation, one that started with the question, How might funders more strategically support the field of Jewish arts and culture?

With its release, we’re eager to convene stakeholders in a targeted discussion around its findings and possible next steps. While a detailed agenda will be designed around participants’ unique needs, questions, and interests, we have begun to think of ways funders might move forward together in support of the sector.
1. Creating a Jewish arts and culture peer network made up of interested funders:

- This network will set its own agenda, including how often and where and how to convene, prioritize strategies and mechanics for moving the field forward, and develop projects
- With financial support from network participants, the network could be staffed by JFN, which would help oversee network operations

2. Creating an ad-hoc advisory committee including:

- Experts, executives, and practitioners in the field of Jewish arts and culture
- Leaders from Jewish communal organizations that utilize the arts to advise and support the network

3. Exploring the possibility of funder collaboration, either in the form of a giving circle or other collaborative grant-making models with a specific commitment to:

- Investing in early/R&D funding, completion funding, and commissions
- Providing network-supporting grants to invigorate the field
- Investing in capacity-building and capitalization for arts organizations
- Exploring ways to bolster and expand Jewish arts and culture distribution networks
- Incentivizing and inspiring those funders currently on the sideline of the Jewish arts and culture funder community

Doing this work in partnership would demonstrate recognition by the Jewish community that the field is both important and ripe for impact. We look forward to discussing these and other ideas for bolstering Jewish arts and culture as this conversation continues.