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Lessons from the National Study on American Jewish Giving
Connected to Give: Key Findings

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Lessons from the National Study of American Jewish Giving
Key Findings, Volume I

In their first of a series of publications based on the National Study of American Jewish Giving and the companion study of non-Jews, National Study of American Religious Giving, “Connected to Give,” authors Gerstein, Cohen, and Landres present top-level findings on American Jewish charitable giving behavior. This first report discusses any type of giving, annual or planned giving. An upcoming report will discuss planned giving.

The top findings in this report focus on these areas:

- Demographics (age and income)
- Motivations for giving
- Types of Jewish and non-Jewish organizations for contributions
- Comparisons with giving patterns of non-Jewish Americans

Methodology and Key Findings

The study included a phone survey of about 3,000 American Jewish households with an oversample of those with incomes of \$100,000 or higher. It also included 12 or more focus groups with different subgroups of Jews, e.g., Jews who do and do not contribute to Jewish causes or organizations.

The Five Key Findings are based only on the non-Orthodox Jews in the study:

1. “Most American Jews are charitable givers.” (76% donated in 2012, with a median annual gift of \$1,200. As comparison, 63% of non-Jews made a charitable contribution, with a median annual gift of \$600.)
2. “Most Jews who make charitable donations give to both Jewish and Non-Jewish organizations.” Of Jewish givers, 92% gave to a non-Jewish charity, and 79% to a Jewish charity.
3. “Engagement with Jewish community is a paramount driver of Jewish charitable giving and even drives giving to non-Jewish organizations.” Based on an index of Jewish

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connectedness, the negative statement of this finding is that “Those who are intermarried, have few Jewish friends, never attend services, and decline to volunteer are very unlikely to donate.”

4. “As the income levels of American Jews rise, so do all measures of their charitable giving.”
5. “...overall, younger Jews clearly are less likely to give to Jewish organizations.”
 However, of younger Jews who do contribute are much more likely to do so using new methods (text messages, giving circles, crowdfunding sites.”

These key findings about non-Orthodox Jews are not surprising, though they do have some implications for strategies in the Jewish giving world. I have listed some of my thoughts and comments below.

Interpretation of Key Findings, and Implications for Giving Strategies

Age Differences in Jewish Giving. Other information in the report shows that Jews age 40 and above still have the inclination and income means to be robust givers. Jews in the under-40 age group are less likely to give to Jewish organizations, but they do give.

Similar proportions of the 40 to 64 year old age group and the 65+ age group donate to Jewish congregations, to Jewish organizations that provide basic needs, and Israel-related funds. However, the 40-64 year olds do contribute less than the 65+ age group to the Jewish Federation (40-64: 35%; 65+: 45%).

Although the under-40 year olds are *less* likely than those 40 and over to give to each of the 8 listed giving categories, it is notable that, at this point in their lives, a significant portion (one-quarter) do give to each of the big causes listed above. Jews under the age of 40 are actually *more* likely than older Jews to give in certain areas - (1) Jewish educational organizations, (2) Jewish organizations that improve neighborhoods and communities, (3) Jewish international aid,

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and (4) Jewish environment organizations. It appears, however, that the only meaningful¹ differences are in options (2) and (4).

Community Implications. If there is going to be any giving efforts targeted to Jews under age 40, it is clear that it must be done using new methods. Moreover, in addition to focusing on the top causes mentioned above for this age group, it might be a worthwhile strategy to highlight Jewish organizations that improve neighborhoods and communities and Jewish environment organizations for this age group.

Universalist Principles and Giving. Educated Jewish parents have transmitted universalist principles to their children. This naturally results in universalist thoughts about giving, so much so, that a large portion of Jewish giving goes to non-Jewish causes.

Community Implications. When representatives from Jewish agencies have an opportunity to communicate with its givers, perhaps it honor this universalist impulse in some way, but also provide the plain facts:

American Jews and non-Jews give to non-Jewish causes, but predominantly Jews give to Jewish causes. A large portion of American non-Jews ARE givers, so don't worry about the causes you are interested in not being funded. On the other hand, if Jews don't give to Jewish causes, it is true that they will not be funded.

Understanding this might help parents of any age category to encourage their children to always include (and even prioritize) Jewish giving in their list of causes. This strategy might be advised only for direct face-to-face conversations and not for mass calling or written messages.

Community Engagement and Giving. Based on the index of Jewish giving used in the study, 96% of Jews who are highly engaged definitely give to any cause, and 93% give to a Jewish cause. This is an ideal, and it is not surprising, nor does it seem that much needs to be done to perpetuate it. Conversely, Jews who are engaged only at a *very* low level are unlikely to give, and probably very little could be done to change this. Much more interesting is the fact that 66%

¹ And, likely, statistically significant differences, as well.

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of Jews who are moderately engaged in the community give to a Jewish cause, and 43% who are engaged only at a low level also give to a Jewish cause. 43% is *almost* half - thus, a little less than half of Jews who are hardly involved are still giving.

Community Implications. Don't give up on those who are only nominally involved. Think carefully in our community context to distinguish between those who are truly unaffiliated and uninvolved, and those who are nominally involved. Provide programs or strategies for the latter groups, as the statistical analysis of this study leads to the following: if we could only get the nominally involved to participate in just *one* area, it could make a difference in giving. It could be something small - PJ Library comes to mind for young families. Or, for the 40-64 year old group that has an elderly parent in a local Assisted Living center, providing a Jewish speaker or entertainer for a 'parent and child' program.