Introduction

❯ Choosing a grant focus area is an adventure in decision-making. There are an infinite number of issues - and subsets of issues – and subsets of subsets of issues! – upon which you can focus your giving circle's funding. As your group goes through the process of figuring out what types of organizations it wants to support, take the pressure off a bit by acknowledging from the outset that there is no "perfect" answer. Your group does not have to find the "best" or "most important" issue to support – rather, it needs to find *the best issue for your group of people right now*: the one that everyone can agree is important, that everyone wants to learn more about, and where your money, the time horizon of your grants (One-Year vs. Multi-Year) and any other assets you bring to the table can be utilized most effectively. Remember: nothing is set in stone! Your circle might decide to switch focus areas every year, or to evolve within a particular area each year (e.g. to support subgroups of a target audience, or the same issue in different geographic regions).

There are so many ways you can slice up focus areas. We've offered a few in this document, as well as a couple of lists of common grant focus areas that can inspire you. Don't be afraid to add your own issues - or your ways of thinking about the kind of change your giving circle wants to make in the world!

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Issue Addressed

Slingshot & Natan's Categories

❯ When applicants apply to Slingshot and the Natan Fund, Jewish giving circles that both support innovative Jewish organizations, they must select a particular issue area that describes their work. These categories are below. As an exercise, ask the members of your circle to select their top three and bottom three issue areas from this list. Discuss everyone's choices and see where the most alignment lies. Remember that, if a category is on this list, it means there are creative Jewish organizations in the world that utilize this focus in their work. (Are there categories on this list that surprise you? Maybe those are the ones your circle will want to learn about this year!)

Focus Areas

Check your focus areas of interest and write in your top and bottom three in the space provided.

○ Advocacy

○ Aging

○ Antisemitism

○ Arts and Culture

○ Community Building

○ Disabilities

○ Disaster Relief

○ Economic Development

○ Economic Security

○ Environment

○ Family

○ Gender

○ Health

○ History

○ Holocaust

○ Interfaith

○ Israel

○ Jewish Education

○ Jewish Studies

○ Leadership Development

○ LGBTQ

○ Media and Technology

○ Outreach and Engagement

○ Philanthropy

○ Poverty

○ Professional Development

○ Ritual

○ Service and Volunteerism

○ Social Justice

○ Social Services

○ Spirituality/Religion

○ Women and Girls

○ *Add your own here*

My Top 3

1.

2.

3.

My Bottom 3

1.

2.

3.

NTEE List: US Tax-Exempt Categories

The National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE) offers another, more generic way to group nonprofit organizations into particular issue areas. This is the classification system that the Internal Revenue Service uses to classify nonprofit organizations across the United States. (An even more detailed list is available at http://nccs.urban.org/classification/NTEE.cfm)

Focus Areas

Check your focus areas of interest and write in your top and bottom three in the space provided.

- ◯ Animal-Related
- ◯ Arts, Culture & Humanities
- ◯ Civil Rights, Social Action & Advocacy
- ◯ Community Improvement & Capacity Building
- ◯ Crime & Legal-Related
- ◯ Diseases, Disorders & Medical Disciplines
- ◯ Education
- ◯ Employment
- ◯ Environment
- ◯ Food, Agriculture & Nutrition
- ◯ Health Care
- ◯ Housing & Shelter
- ◯ Human Services
- ◯ International, Foreign Affairs & National Security
- ◯ Mental Health & Crisis Intervention
- ◯ Medical Research
- ◯ Mutual & Membership Benefit (fraternal societies, cemeteries, insurance)
- ◯ Recreation & Sports (includes camps)
- ◯ Philanthropy, Voluntarism

- ◯ Public & Societal Benefit (government, public administration, military/veterans, public transportation, leadership development, consumer protection)
- ◯ Public Safety, Disaster Preparedness & Relief
- ◯ Religion-Related
- ◯ Science & Technology
- ◯ Social Science
- ◯ *Add your own here* _____

My Top 3

1.

2.

3.

My Bottom 3

1.

2.

3.

Amplifier's Nine Big Buckets

> To help giving circles categorize themselves simply on the Amplifier website, we grouped the Slingshot/Natan and NTEE focus areas into nine "big buckets" for circles to choose from. They're purposefully very big buckets, but we hope that you'll use them as you decide on your circle's specific focus area so that your circle, too, can be listed appropriately in Amplifier's Giving Circle Directory.

1 Education, Outreach and Community Building

→ Focus areas: Community Building, Education, Family, History, Holocaust, Israel (Education & Israel Studies), Jewish Education, Jewish Studies, Leadership Development, Mutual & Membership Benefit (fraternal societies, cemeteries, insurance), Outreach and Engagement, Philanthropy, Professional Development, Science & Technology, Social Science

2 Arts, Culture, Media/ New Media

→ Focus areas: Arts and Culture, Humanities, Media and Technology

3 Economic Development, Empowerment, & Security

→ Focus areas: Economic Development, Economic Security

4 Outdoor, Environment, Agriculture, Food, Sports

→ Focus areas: Camps, Environment, Food/Agriculture/ Nutrition, Outdoor Adventure, Recreation & Sports

5 Diversity and Inclusion

→ Focus areas:
Disabilities, Gender, Interfaith, Women & Girls, Gender, LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer)

6 Religion and Spirituality

→ Focus areas: Religion-Related, Ritual, Spirituality/Religion

7 Basic Needs

→ Focus areas: Aging, Crime & Legal-Related, Disaster Relief, Diseases/Disorders/Medical Disciplines, Domestic Abuse, Health, Health Care, Housing & Shelter, Human Services, Human Trafficking, Mental Health/Crisis Intervention, Medical Research, Poverty, Social Services

8 Advocacy, Politics, Social Justice

→ Focus areas: Advocacy, Antisemitism, Civil Rights, Community Improvement, International/Foreign Affairs/ National Security, Israel (advocacy, politics), Service and Volunteerism, Social Action, Social Justice, Public & Societal Benefit, Public Safety,

9 Other

→ Focus areas: Animal-related

Other Ways to Focus

Population Served

> Focusing on a particular population can help you to narrow your funding interests down even more. This is a slightly-amended version of the list that the Slingshot Guide uses to categorize applicants.

- → 20s & 30s ("young adults")
- → Adults
- → Baby Boomers
- → Children
- → College Students
- → Disabilities
- → Educators
- → Elderly
- → Families
- → Interfaith
- → Jewish Professionals
- → LGBTQ
- → Multiethnic
- → People of Color (incl. Jews of Color)
- → Teens
- → Women/Girls

Geographic Area

> Your group should consider which geographic area it is most interested in affecting – and also which area's needs you understand enough about or want to dive into learning about. Most giving circles in the US fund locally, in communities their members know intimately and want to improve, and where they can easily see and touch the work their grantees are doing. Many giving circles also prefer to support small, grassroots organizations – where smaller dollars can have larger impact and that larger, traditional funders are not yet willing to take a risk on supporting – and this preference, too, tends to lead to funding local organizations.

That said, funding outside of your own community is a tremendously powerful learning experience. If your group chooses to go this route and fund internationally, make sure you have experts to guide you in the history, culture and needs of that country, and experts and/or institutions that can facilitate the transfer of charitable dollars to that country's nonprofit organizations. The major levels of geographic focus are:
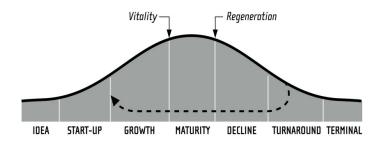
- → City/town
- → State
- → Country
- → Continent:
  - Africa
  - Asia
  - Australia
  - Europe
  - North America
  - South America

Organizational Lifecycle

> Some funders, though admittedly not many, focus their funding on a particular stage of the organizational lifecycle. For example, there are many "startup" funders, sometimes called venture philanthropies (like venture capital). Other funders might choose to support organizations that are past the startup stage and are working to "scale up" their operations. Still others only support the big brands: large, established organizations.

In her book *Nonprofit Lifecycles: Stage-based Wisdom for Nonprofit Capacity*, Susan Kenny Stevens depicts the nonprofit lifecycle this way:

There are risks and rewards to funding at each lifecycle stage.

The more toward the left side of the spectrum an organization is, the more risk to the funder that the organization will not survive, the more impact of small dollars, the more need for advice/input/active engagement of donors. Investing in early-stage organizations also offers the funder the opportunity to support the piloting of a new idea, something potentially game-changing that more established funders won't take a risk on.

The more advanced an organization is along the lifecycle, the less risk there is to funders that the organization will not succeed. The "impact" of small contributions may be less obvious, but in a successful organization with proven methods, dollars may be stretched farther because they are used to support activities happening on a larger scale.

To learn more about the issues facing Jewish startups and post-startups, see The Innovation Ecosystem: Emergence of a New Jewish Landscape (2009) and The Jewish Innovation Economy: An Emerging Market for Knowledge and Social Capital (2011), created by Jumpstart, Natan, and The Samuel Bronfman Foundation; and From First Fruit to Abundant Harvest: Maximizing the Potential of Innovative Jewish Start-Ups (2012), created by Bikkurim.