

FOUNDING DATE

1995

NO. OF MEMBERS

365

MEMBER AGE RANGE

35-85

ANNUAL MEMBER CONTRIBUTIONS

\$100-\$100,000

GRANTS AWARDED

Gave \$450,000 in 17 grants last year

DURATION OF GRANT CYCLE

Year-round

ISSUE AREA OF FOCUS

Women's Issues

Economic Security, Leadership and Advancement, Health and Well-Being, and Social Entrepreneurship.

FINANCIAL SETUP

UJA-Federation of New York is the sole corporate member.

UJA is a separately incorporated 501(c)(3) public foundation.

NO. OF MEETINGS PER YEAR

Year round for various committees

CONTACT

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Case Study: Women's Giving Circle

by Joy Sisisky, Executive Director

The Jewish Women's Foundation of New York imagines a world in which all women and girls in the Jewish community are ensured a healthy and supportive environment - a world in which we all have equal opportunity for economic, religious, social and political achievement. To achieve our vision, we utilize strategic and innovative grantmaking, education and advocacy, making JWFNY uniquely positioned to create lasting, system-wide change for women and girls.



Giving circles don't follow a formula: they can be large or small, in-person or virtual, time-intensive or low-key. But they all share a passion for connecting, learning, and giving with greater intent and impact—by giving together. Our Case Study series introduces you to some amazing giving circles, showcasing their unique models. Find more Case Studies at www.AmplifierGiving.org

Starting Out

JWFNY was founded in 1995 by five women who shared a single vision: to promote economic, religious, social and political equality for women and girls in the Jewish community in New York and Israel. At the time, only a small percentage of funds raised within the Jewish community were used to support causes that specifically impacted women and girls and our founders knew more needed to be done.

With the support of UJA-Federation of New York, the founders began working with a professional to establish the Foundation, and started recruiting friends, colleagues and other women leaders in the Jewish community to join the cause. New members are drawn to JWFNY because we place women and girls at the center of our mission and because we are a giving circle, a hands-on, collaborative organization that encourages participants to help determine how their donations are invested.

The Circle Experience

There are many different ways for members to engage with JWFNY. Some simply write a check and are satisfied in knowing their contribution is leveraged to grow a strong voice for women and girls in the Jewish community. More often, participants are engaged and involved decision-makers. They each have the opportunity to join any number of our working committees, including Grants, Advocacy, Finance, Development and Research, and we ask that they make a minimum annual contribution of \$2,500 as a participation fee, though many give significantly more (and sometimes less) based on their capacity.

Committees meet to determine and identify communal needs, manage our assets, and make grants. Our most popular committee is the Grants Committee, wherein members participate in every step of the process from finalizing the grant theme and application, narrowing down the LOIs, reading grant proposals, interviewing potential grantees and voting. Every participant is entitled to one vote, generally conducted by secret ballot or a show of hands.

We have many lifetime members, while others participate as their schedules allow. Many past donors and participants still identify as “members” of our community and welcome back to committee work at anytime and always included in events and special programs.

Committees meet throughout the year, usually in person. We meet during the day on weekdays, which works best for our members, who include mothers with young children, working women, and women who live outside of New York City.

Circle Activities

JEWISH EDUCATION EVENTS

JWFNY hosts Jewish education events that focus on issues related to women and girls, including eating disorders, genetics, advancing women professionals in the Jewish community, international development, and intergenerational philanthropy. These events are sometimes hosted in partnership with JWFNY grantees.

PUBLIC ADVOCACY & OUTREACH

JWFNY's professionals and members regularly participate in public advocacy work that complements our grantmaking and broadens the reach of our work with community leaders both inside and outside the Jewish community. Some examples include: New York Women's Agenda Equal Pay Day, Better Work Life Campaign, the Slingshot guide Women and Girls supplement, and the We Were Slaves: The Jewish community nited against sex trafficking conference.

In addition, our Executive Director served for many years as the Co-Chair of the Funders of Women and Girls Network at Philanthropy New York.

CONVENINGS

From time to time, JWFNY invites grantees, Jewish communal leaders and professionals, and key stakeholders to meet to discuss the pressing issues women and girls face in the Jewish community. Every few years, JWFNY hosts a half-day convening for past and potential grantees on a variety of topics related to women and girls in the Jewish community. We also use these convenings as a chance to understand from grantees how we can better work together to reach our goals.

COACHING & MENTORING

This is often expressed in key components of programs that we fund through our grantmaking.

PHILANTHROPIST SUPPORT

JWFNY encourages our participants to view all philanthropic efforts through a gender lens.

CONNECTIONS & NETWORKS

In addition to funding grantee organizations, we try to serve as a resource to organizations by opening doors for new potential sources of funding and/or technical support. Professionals represent JWFNY at a variety of communal events to help raise the status and profile of the Foundation.

Giving & Impact

OUR GRANTMAKING PROCESS

JWFNY professionals and members meet year-round with potential applicants, who come to us to initiate a relationship. Increasingly, we have been approaching organizations that we'd like to work with, a more proactive approach than waiting to receive Letters of Inquiry.

Most of our grantmaking is still done through a public (or by-invitation-only in Israel) request for LOIs. A team of participants and professionals, review the LOIs, narrow the choices, and invite select applicants to submit grant applications, which the full Grants Committee reviews. Applications are submitted and reviewed online through the JWFNY website, to which members have administrative access.

The Grants Committee selects finalists and interviews them in person or by Skype. The Grants Chair and JWFNY professionals facilitate the interviews, guiding the grant applicants through a 45-minute conversation that includes questions that were drafted by the committee and provided to the applicant in advance. In order to vote, members must have read all grant applications and been present for the majority of interviews. After a robust discussion, votes are generally counted by secret ballot and sometimes by a show of hands.

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OUR IMPACT ON THE WORLD

JWFNY invests in successful, impactful projects that create long-term social change for women and girls in the areas of economic security, leadership and advancement, health and well-being, and social entrepreneurship. We conduct research to identify the most pressing unfunded needs and provide resources to address them, including program/project support, general operating funds, and capacity-building grants. We fund both large (up to \$100,000) multi-year grants and small (up to \$15,000) one-year grants. Larger grants are for program and project support while smaller grants are reserved for organizations with budgets of less than \$750,000 that need general operating or capacity building support.

JWFNY funds programs that have the potential to create social and institutional change. Our goal is to focus and coordinate grantmaking and advocacy efforts to support work like financial literacy, leadership development, preventing bullying, and breaking the glass ceiling. For a full list, visit our website at <http://www.jwfnny.org/grants/current-grants/>.



Unique Circle Features

In 2014, to celebrate our 18th anniversary, JWFNY raised more than \$1.8 million to double our impact and provide more funding to meet the needs of women and girls in the Jewish community and beyond.

To that end, JWFNY recently launched the second cohort of Isha Koach Global, a giving circle that operates alongside our more established Foundation activities. Isha Koach (loosely translated from Hebrew as “women of strength”) addresses the global needs of women and girls using a Jewish and gender lens. The circle funds Jewish women social entrepreneurs who founded and lead organizations that improve the quality of life of the world’s most vulnerable women and girls, most of whom are not themselves Jewish. Many of the founders describe their work as a reflection of their Jewish identity and their responsibility to repair the world (*tikkun olam*). Isha Koach both supports the work of Jewish women leaders changing the world and makes a strong statement that Jewish women care about all women and girls.

In its pilot year, 10 members contributed \$10,000 each and made five grants totaling \$100,000 to groups like We Care Solar, founded by Laura Stachel, which reduces maternal mortality in developing countries by providing health workers and clinics with reliable lighting, mobile communication and blood bank refrigeration through solar electricity using the revolutionary “solar suitcase.” This year, thanks to increased membership and contributions, the group will give away \$250,000. It meets twice a month for two hours over a nine-month period for education and a rolling grantmaking process. Potential grantees are interviewed in person and are asked to submit only a very short application.

Launching this new giving circle is one of the most satisfying and successful programs in the recent history of the Foundation. We are fortunate that we still remain nimble enough to respond quickly to our members’ evolving interests, the changing philanthropic landscape, and the needs of our target populations.