



Case Study: A Multi-Family Giving Circle

by Nancy Astor Fox

FOUNDING DATE

2011

NO. OF MEMBERS

43 families

MEMBER AGE RANGE

5-70

ANNUAL MEMBER CONTRIBUTIONS

All families give \$5000

GRANTS AWARDED

Gave \$200,000 in four first place grants in 2013, plus \$18,000 in 2nd place awards

DURATION OF GRANT CYCLE

9 months

ISSUE AREA OF FOCUS

Programs in Israel

Funding categories change each year and are voted on by members.

FINANCIAL SETUP

Hosted by Jewish National Fund

NO. OF MEETINGS PER YEAR

Numerous evaluation meetings and one annual meeting to vote on grant awards

CONTACT

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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

Three years ago, a group of friends was thinking of ways to enhance our charitable experiences. We wanted to have a greater impact and understanding of the donations we were giving. We wanted a better way to increase awareness and funding to the plethora of worthwhile organizations in Israel. And, perhaps most importantly, we wanted to share our passion and connections with our children.

We started the Acharai Fund in 2011 in Suburban Philadelphia. We recruited via parlor meetings and word of mouth, and we held an initial orientation meeting to gather everyone together and share our plans. Soon, our initial group expanded, and we had 36 families participating in the first year. A small steering committee was formed and a “to do” list was created. Acharai members developed our website, created our logo and drafted the Letter of Inquiry application, our evaluative criteria and our grant-making guidelines. One of our first group decisions was whether to create our own 501c(3) organization or find some other fiscal sponsor to ensure that our contributions would be tax-deductible and could be distributed easily to Israeli organizations. We chose to find a fiscal sponsor, and JNF agreed to play that role.

The Circle Experience

The Acharai Fund is a completely volunteer organization. Families can participate as much, or as little, as they like. Everyone is invited to help on evaluation committees that meet 3 to 4 times per grant cycle to determine finalists in each funding category. Our members, young and old, participate in detailed financial reviews and exhaustive proposal evaluations. Our kids, the “next generation” group, take full responsibility for choosing their area of focus, vetting their applications and ultimately, selecting their grant winner.

We also have other events throughout the year to build a sense of community within Acharai. These range from hamantashen-baking parties to Shabbat dinners. Members love the connections within and between families and peers. The best part is watching our children learn about and evaluate the meaningful work conducted by nonprofit organizations and *amutot* (nonprofit organizations) in Israel.

Each year we lose a few families due to financial or time constraints. We continue to gain new members, however, and now have 43 member families. We all remain committed to democratic decision-making, transparency and inclusiveness. We are dedicated to teaching and modeling Jewish philanthropy to our children.

Circle Activities

JEWISH EDUCATION EVENTS

Planning to have 2x a year Book Club (focusing on Israel and related topics)

JEWISH CULTURE EVENTS

Hands-On Shabbat Dinners

JEWISH RELIGIOUS EVENTS

Hands-On Shabbat Dinners

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Developing family mitzvah projects (like delivering *Shalach Manot* packages)

COACHING & MENTORING

Working on mentoring program between “adult” and “next-generation” members

CONNECTIONS & NETWORKS

Connections growing between “next gen” group

CONVENINGS

PUBLIC ADVOCACY & OUTREACH

PHILANTHROPIST SUPPORT

Giving & Impact

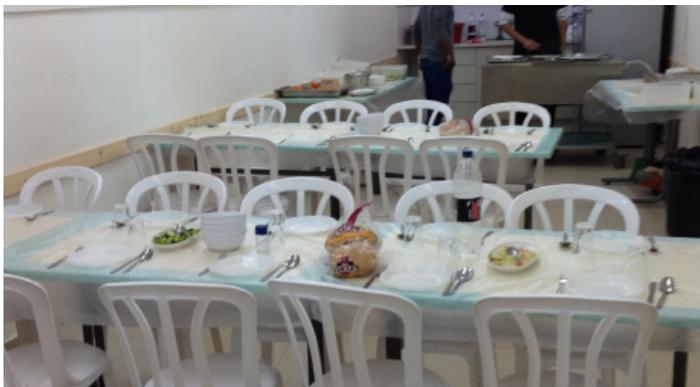
OUR GRANTMAKING PROCESS

Each year, Acharai Fund members vote on our funding categories and distribute our LOI to our networks via the internet. Members serve on evaluation committees for each of our funding categories as well as for a careful financial review of all applicant organizations. These sub-committees evaluate all applicants and ultimately select two finalists within each category.

The multi-part grant review process is conducted over a nine-month period. To determine final grant award winners, families gather together one Sunday afternoon in September and watch homemade videos created by the finalist organizations. Each family has one vote per funding category with the “next gens” casting the vote in their area of focus. Those families who cannot attend, or those kids who are out of town, are sent a private YouTube link so they can watch the videos and send in their votes before the meeting.

“Acharai is making an impact in many ways. The raindrops collect to form a reservoir. And, as your name implies, others may follow your example”

AN ACHARAI FUND GRANTEE



OUR IMPACT ON THE WORLD

As a result of our grants in the past two years, the Acharai Fund families are responsible for feeding the elderly and hungry in Jerusalem, for providing support for wounded IDF soldiers helping other wounded IDF soldiers, for building a playground for preschool children with cancer, and for supporting an Arab and Jewish girls’ basketball team playing and learning together in Haifa. Our children are responsible for the construction of a dining room in a children’s home in Netanya and for scholarships for some of the brightest Palestinian and Jewish high school students— votes they cast in order to help other children to have some normalcy in their often difficult lives. Our group decided to fund projects exclusively in Israel for our first three years. We will revisit this idea in 2015 and may expand to global projects. All of the Acharai grants are for one year.

Unique Circle Features

The Acharai Fund creates a more meaningful and “hands on” way to build connections to Israel and to practice Jewish philanthropy with our children. We are not the first to recognize the significance of the word “Acharai,” nor are we the first to create a giving circle focused on funding programs in Israel or Jewish philanthropy. But what is different about the Acharai Fund, and what distinguishes us from other wonderful groups and collaboratives, is the fact that this truly is a multi-generational giving circle, with our children responsible for vetting, evaluating and selecting the recipient of one of four \$50,000 grants.

The Acharai Fund families are a diverse and talented group. Some of us are very active in Jewish philanthropy while others have never participated in a Jewish organization. Some have lived in Israel and others have never been. Some attend every meeting and help on numerous committees and others are content to write their check and send in their votes via email. We are parents and children and now even grandparents and grandchildren. But we all care about our future and the future of the Jewish People. We do a wonderful job at working collaboratively to have the greatest impact possible. We are most proud of the community we have created and know that this is as important the dollars we have given. This diversity of membership leads to challenges to engage everyone in a meaningful way, but we are trying numerous ways to be innovative and inclusive.

Perhaps the best way to describe Acharai is from the words of one of our grantees: “What would we do without friends like you? Acharai is making an impact in many ways. The raindrops collect to form a reservoir. And, as your name implies, others may follow your example.”