



The Case for a Federation Giving Circle

Giving Circles established inside Jewish Federations can help bring people together based on their interests or desired philanthropic goals and bring in increased dollars and donors. They can help teach **collaborative giving and Jewish values**, which is what being a part of a Jewish Federation is all about. Today's contemporary donors are looking for a hands-on personalized giving experience. A Federation Giving Circle provide a hands-on way to provide that tailored experience while deeply engaging and educating these donors in the work of their Federation.

What are giving circles?

Giving circles—groups of people who come together to pool their charitable donations and decide how to allocate them—are versatile communities that can enable members to explore their passions, impact their communities, and explore Jewish values.

A Federation Success Story

Many Federations across the country have successfully created Giving Circles as a way for people with a shared interest to come together and make grants using their pooled resources.

In the UJA-Federation of New York Venture Philanthropy Funds (the name they used for their giving circles), many of the initial members were either not donors to the annual campaign, or made comparatively small donations before they joined one of the groups. Throughout years of involvement, members' annual gifts started increasing, as did their involvement.

Many joined and later chaired internal fundraising and allocation committees, were honorees at events, and ultimately are now some of the most connected and generous members of the community. Being a part of a Giving Circle didn't take away from their participation in the annual campaign, but for all it increased their participation in the annual campaign and in leadership roles both in UJA-Federation and in other Jewish organizations in the community. Ultimately, participation in the Giving Circles created educated, engaged, thoughtful philanthropists who understand the mission of the Federated system, support the mission, and are now spokespeople for that mission.

A Federation Education

While one of the ultimate goals of a giving circle can be seen as the grants made, the education and discussion process is as important as the final grant decision. Throughout the year, federation professionals have the chance to educate giving circle members about the Federation's mission and funding areas. While going through this learning process, a Federation has the opportunity to showcase the work it does in a specific area.

Hands on giving

A Federation giving circle is an opportunity for donors to see the allocations process and be a part of it. This is a way to deeply engage donors who want a hands-on giving experience. Essentially, it can provide an experiential education in strategic philanthropy much like what people get on an allocations committee, but because members invest their own money, they are that much more connected to the causes they are choosing to support.

Giving circles are a way for donors to see that their most deeply held philanthropic values are in sync with the Federation's values and work and that of its agencies.

A Federation Giving Circle can be the answer to those who don't want to give to the "black hole" where they never know exactly where their money is going. A Federation giving circle allows members the opportunity to give their own money along with their peers, and be a part of the grant process from education to allocation to follow up, all under the guidance of their local Federation.

Supplementing Federation goals and dollars

A Federation giving circle can be used as a way to further the Federation's many goals as it can be created to cover a specific area of focus, program, or mission that is congruent with the existing structure of that specific community. Federation

professionals have sometimes been nervous about incorporating giving circles into their work, instead of relying on time-tested tools like the annual campaign. However, rather than being seen as competition for a Federation, giving circles can be viewed as helping to raise "added dollars" for the community. In this way, giving circles can be another tool in the Federation toolbox.

Attracting new donors and populations

A Federation Giving Circle can be used as a way to tap existing donors' networks of non-Federation givers who ultimately share the same passions and philanthropic goals as existing Federation donors. Often, this opens up the Federation to a new population not currently involved. An effective way to start a giving circle is to empower one or two current Federation donors to recruit their friends and peers with similar philanthropic interests and work with them to create a Federation Giving Circle that can showcase the amazing missions and values already in place at the community's Federation.

Giving circles can work as an engagement tool for many different groups including

- LGBTQ Community
- Women
- Men
- People with a common funding interest (ie gender issues, innovation, Israel, etc.)

Federation Giving Circle Case Studies

Name: The Women's Giving Circle

Federation: Jewish Federation of Greater Portland

Started: 2016

Number of members: 13 (they recommit every year and want to keep the group small)

Who: Women in their late 40s to 85 years old from all different professions and in different stages and places in their lives

Annual campaign contribution: \$500

Giving circle contribution: \$1000-\$2500

Grant areas of focus: Women and girls, Jewish continuity, social justice

Low dollar, high impact grantors

The Women's Giving Circle at the Jewish Federation of Greater Portland started in 2016 to bring new women into the Federation's work who they otherwise wouldn't reach. The Federation's goals were multifold: build relationships with a diverse group of women, develop their skills, and allow the participants to feel the direct impact of their dollars through directed giving.

After reading an article (<https://conta.cc/2QnCVGw>) written by women in the giving circle about why they are members, other women in the community, including those who were not currently Federation donors, joined the giving circle and are now \$500 Federation donors

As a group, the participants are able to connect with women they wouldn't normally connect with - a diverse group of women with a range of experience. They also enjoy the opportunity to develop new skills, learn something new, and feel empowered. Through the giving circle, the participants are able to feel the direct impact of their dollars through directed giving.

The giving circle helped revitalize women's philanthropy. This is another way for women to engage and participation in the giving circle is complementary to the Federation Annual Campaign as it is now part of a portfolio for women to become involved in the federation. Today, the giving circle members are entrenched in federation. Some are past leaders, some have leadership positions in other places, some are former board members, and some are brand new to the entire system.

Name: Nadiv (means Generous)

Federation: United Jewish Federation of Tidewater

Started: 2016

Who: Young professional men

Number of Members: 40 members

Giving Circle contribution: \$54

Annual Campaign Contribution: not mandatory, will be solicited, giving circle gift must be a separate gift from Federation contribution.

Grant areas of focus: Decided each year by the group (has funded Jewish Community Center camp sports equipment and food for the Jewish Family Service pantry in past years)

Teens and college students have a great space in the Jewish community to gather and have a shared experience (youth groups, fraternities, Hillels, college clubs). Nadiv was started as a way to fill that gap for young professional men who were missing those experiences now that they have graduated college and find themselves in the professional workforce, not always connected to the Jewish community.

Nadiv includes attributes that the men in this community value and seek out - business networking, career focused speakers, giving back to the community, and a little Jewish learning. The group strives to provide opportunities for networking, career advice, social action, Judaism, and brotherhood.

After watching the group's allocation process constantly evolve, and the members' involvement in the group grow, they are now becoming meaningful donors and active participants in the Federation and the greater Jewish community

“Giving circles belong in federations. The only place in the community where people are in the same space is at a federation”

Federation Giving Circle Case Studies

Name: San Francisco Jewish Women's Fund

Federation: San Francisco Jewish Community Federation

Started: 2014

Number of members: 27 members (no more than 30)

Annual campaign contribution: no mandatory contribution

Giving circle contribution: \$10,000 (some contribute \$15,000)

Grant areas of focus: Primarily Bay Area, last year made some grants in Israel

The San Francisco Jewish Community Federation wanted to help create more strategic donors for the local Jewish community, strengthen Jewish philanthropy, and get people to give more and learn more about strategic grant making. Their top goal was to grow overall dollars sent out into the community (both through a 'gender lens' and general philanthropy). For example, the giving circle members will look at board make-up and parental leave policy in organizations they're considering funding. Also, giving circle members sometimes provide additional support, beyond their group's grants, to organizations that they learned about through the giving circle.

This giving circle's mission is to "strengthen the Jewish community by helping women and girls living in the Jewish community flourish. With this expression of tikkun olam we deepen our connection to each other and to our Jewish heritage." This group includes a major social component that helps with community building, and the group is divided into four teams to review and rank organizations before bringing funding recommendations to the larger group. One of the challenges they had recently was not being prepared for the support needed in funding start-ups.

Currently, members can be in the giving circle and give nothing to the annual campaign. Some have Donor Advised Funds (DAF), some give to the annual campaign, and others are not donors. However most of the women are involved in the federation in some way or are on boards within other community organizations.

Name: The Jewish Pride Fund

Federation: San Francisco Jewish Community Federation

Started: 2017

Number of members: 10 Men (open to women if they would like to join)

Meet: 6-8pm meetings at Federation offices

Annual campaign contribution: not mandatory

Giving circle contribution: \$1800

Grant areas of focus: intersecting needs, values and interests of LGBTQ and Jewish community

The Jewish Pride Fund is committed to supporting the intersecting needs, values and interests of the LGBTQ and Jewish communities in the Bay Area, nationally and in Israel. The Vision of the Fund "is to create a world where Jewish LGBTQ voices are heard across Jewish secular and religious society. We believe that if we empower LGBTQ individuals and families that identify with the Jewish community through financial and activist support of deserving organizations, we contribute to the rising power and agency of the LGBTQ community as a whole. We believe that members of the Jewish LGBTQ community have a unique role to play in civil right, social justice, and religious inclusion."

This is the only LGBTQ giving circle, and it has provided an incredible depth of conversation around collective giving. San Francisco Federation is currently ok with members just being a part of the giving circle and not giving to the annual campaign. Some give to the annual campaign, some do not.

The chair of the group is on the Federation board, other members have Donor Advised Funds (DAF), one is on National Young Leadership Cabinet, many are event committee members.

It's not about where you would give your money or how you live your life or giving reflecting how you live your life. It's more complicated when working with a group to make funding allocations.

Federation Giving Circle Case Studies

Name: Jewish Innovation Funds (Giving Circle Incubator Circle)

Federation: Jewish Federation of Cincinnati

Started: 2015 (taking a break in 2018/19 to reassess)

Number of members: 8-10

Annual campaign contribution: additional gift separate from Giving Circle contribution

Giving circle contribution: \$10,000

Grant areas of focus:

Innovation in Cincinnati's Jewish community including tackling an unmet need, helping organizations start up, launching something brand new, or franchising something to Cincinnati. This is a way for entrepreneurs and innovators to address needs through a Jewish lens.

Wanting to create a local 'Natan-like' experience, the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati recognized that certain people operate a certain way in their business and professional world, and wanted to create a similar experience in their philanthropic world. The goals of the giving circle included bringing in more dollars for the community, providing an opportunity for ideas to materialize by funding community entrepreneurs. The giving circle could fund whatever they wanted, thus connecting people to philanthropy.

As a group, they learned what it means to support innovation which needs more than money. The Jewish Innovation Funds giving circle always offered individual entrepreneurs coaching through UpStart, offered mentorship through giving circle members. Through the process, they learned about ethical philanthropy, the balance between funder and grantee, and the right amount of support and involvement. This giving circle also offered a "Shark Tank" night at end of the process where the finalists presented.

The Jewish Innovation Funds received early support envisioning their giving circle from Amplifier, as part of the Giving Circle Incubator. Their connection to Amplifier also helped them gain coverage in eJewish Philanthropy, which added to the cache of the group and helped when it came time to recruit new giving circle members.

Not all of the giving circle members were donors to the annual campaign, but most became donors after they participated in the giving circle process. Some of the members have funded organizations in addition to the giving circle grants received. Most are involved in significant ways in the Federation and in the community, and all feel more connected to Federation because of the process.

Giving Circle Advice

It's not about where you would give your money or how you live your life or giving reflecting how you live your life. It's more complicated when working with a group to make funding allocations.

Connect people to meaningful giving and to groups of people — expose people to different ways of thinking of processes.

Process is everything — the way the group decides to come to their decisions is equally important to the actual decision made

To do a Giving Circle right takes strategy, thought and time — the Federation wants this to be an excellent journey for those involved.

Federation Giving Circle FAQ

Will participation in a giving circle take away from participation in our annual campaign? No. In fact, based on existing giving circles, being a part of a Federation sponsored/supported giving circle can boost ones participation and involvement in the Annual Campaign as it creates educated and connected philanthropists. Rather than take away from a Federation Annual Campaign, a giving circle can in fact bring donors closer to the mission and annual campaign because it's yet another tool for creating educated donors and teaching responsible philanthropy.

Participation in a Federation giving circles could come with an obligatory Annual Campaign contribution (in addition to the Giving Circle buy in) however in the long run, it can be worth NOT requiring a mandatory Annual Campaign contribution as that ultimately limits the amount a participant might choose to give on their own. If a Federation requires an \$1800 contribution to the giving circle along with a minimum \$360 contribution to the annual campaign, the giving circle members may never go above the \$360 annual campaign donation. However through participating in a well run Federation Giving Circle, members will feel impacted by the process and therefore might consider a greater gift to the Annual Campaign as they continue to learn about all the amazing work being done by the Federation.

What if the Federation Giving Circle gives outside our mission or network of agencies? The structure of the giving circle and where the money is allocated is completely up to the organization and group that creates it. If it's important that the money allocated remains within the Federation network then it can be structured in such a way that the mission of the giving circle is closely aligned with a certain area of funding. Otherwise, it's worth trusting the group and realizing that over the lifetime of a giving circle, a good majority of grants may be directed towards Federation specific programs, and the rest will go to worthy organizations (approved and vetted by the Federation prior to being discussed). Because these grants will ultimately be under the Federation name, it will be beneficial for everyone.

How do we recoup staff time and cost? While an administrative fee can always be charged (a small annual % of the fund balance) it is sometimes worth absorbing the staffing costs of a giving circle. Knowing that a good experience in a Federation giving circle will create educated and connected Federation donors, it might be worth looking at the long term gain of the Financial Resources Division to NOT charge a fee. That said, many giving circle participants understand and will welcome the fee as they know and will learn through the giving circle grant process when reviewing other potential grantee organizations, that in order for an organization to provide a service, an administrative fee needs to be covered.