



2020: The Year of Innovation

By Jenna Beltser and Abigail Rochlin

2020. Glad that's over? Though we have certainly seen an abundance of challenges, this could be promising for the world of innovation. As a product of the pandemic, many are predicting there will be a myriad of new inventions, ideas, and investment opportunities.

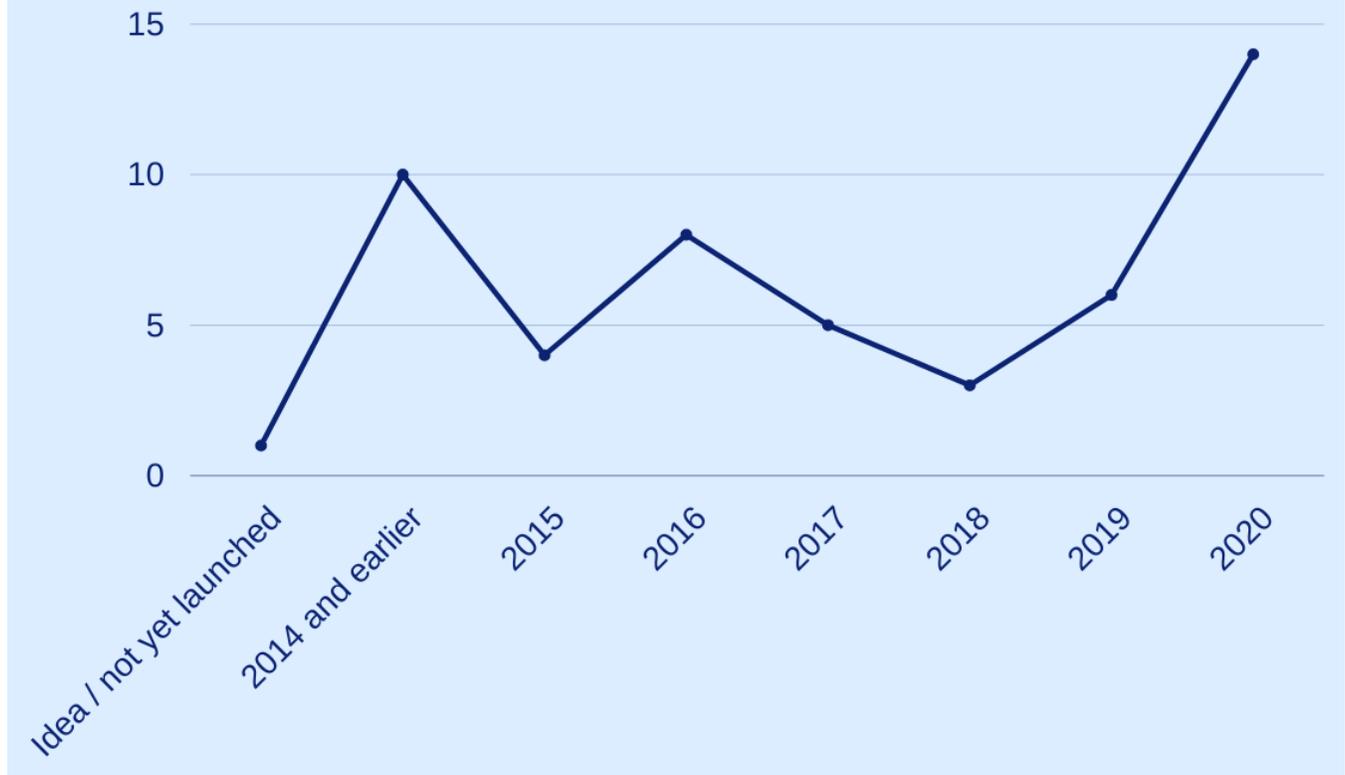
While these are predictions in the startup and tech world, we have already witnessed some of these changes closer to home. The Jewish community has been hit hard by the pandemic, but even amidst this difficult time, we have taken responsibility, as we usually do, to pave a path forward.

The OU Impact Accelerator closed its application for the third cohort in November and has just completed interviews with the top candidates. We received many impressive and creative applications from startup nonprofits finding new solutions to age old problems. While we were unsure of what the 2020 application cycle would bring, a word does come to mind: inspiring.

What did we learn?

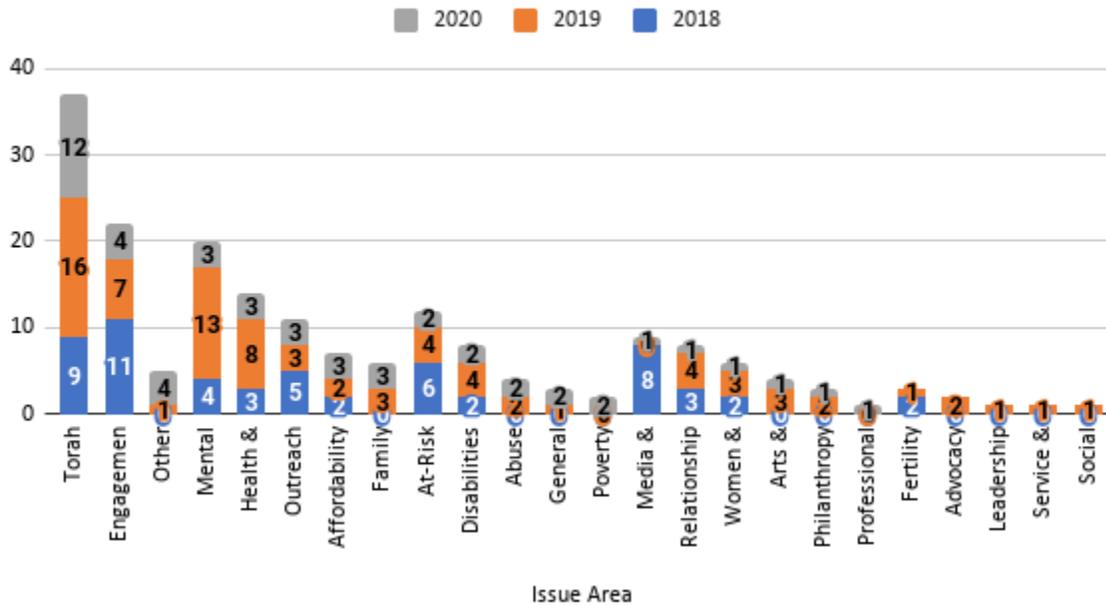
We respond: Although some of our applicants founded their ventures even earlier than 2008, the largest founding year was 2020. Coincidence? We think not.

YEAR FOUNDED



We innovate: Not only were there more ventures founded in 2020, but the number of technology and virtual solutions for our community was also much higher than in previous cohorts. Whereas some in our community would avoid the use of technology, one venture created a curriculum about measured use of smartphones and screens. Others created technology solutions to address issue areas from education to *Shidduchim*, and *parnassah* to *chesed* opportunities.

Venture Focus, 2018 - 2020



We grow stronger: As part of the Accelerator, we introduce the venture founders to mentors who are experienced in their fields. It is a hard time to get together, or meet as a group, and yet we've had more mentors than ever interested in joining our network. More people are looking to give back to our community and join forces, virtually.

At the Accelerator we like to quote Arthur Ashe: "Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can." Even amidst a pandemic, with our health at risk, our communities forced to distance, and the economy oscillating, we are still making a difference. We never cease to be amazed by the resourcefulness of these nonprofit founders. They are normal people who see a need and have created a way to fill it.

This year has taught us that we are strong and resilient. We can overcome hardship and build bigger and better from it. It has been lonely, isolating, and often scary. But it was also a year of great innovation, reimagination, and bettering our nation. As we welcome in 2021, we are hopeful for a brighter future.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks *ztl* said, "We can face any future without fear so long as we know that we won't face it alone".

And the same is true here. Not only can we face our future, but we can face it head on, adapting and innovating in the presence of challenge, so long as we continue to work together and support one another.

Join us and continue to transform the landscape of the Jewish future, together.

Stay tuned for the Cohort II Demo Day on March 8th and Cohort III announcement.

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<https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/announcement-2020-the-year-of-innovation>