



SUPPORTING AND NURTURING VARIED RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION IN ISRAEL

Federations have long been committed to advancing freedom of religious expression in Israel as a concrete extension of their commitment to fostering Jewish life and engagement around the world. In addition to helping seed the field and nurturing many grassroots organizations and initiatives, Federation leadership has been active on the ground representing the North American Jewish community during numerous debates, controversies and as potentially harmful legislation has been brought forward for consideration. Federation's commitment then as now has been to ensure that no changes are advanced which might narrow current practices or reduce opportunities for alternative conversions, while seeking to make the entire conversion process more open and accessible to all.

Based on the most recent information provided by Federations to JFNA, we are pleased to present the following snapshot of how our communities are advancing various forms of religious expression and supporting organizations big and small in Israel with that goal in mind.

Support through The Jewish Agency for Israel for the Reform, Conservative, and Modern Orthodox communities

In 1987, a UIA Assembly resolution directed the Jewish Agency to support programs fostering religious pluralism in Israel. In 2017, that amount totaled \$2.7M for 30 educational programs operated by organizations representing the three main Jewish streams: Reform, Conservative and Modern Orthodox. Programs include leadership development, pluralism education, youth groups, congregations, rabbinical training, and Bnai Mitzvah training, among others.

This annual funding provides resources which help ensure the ongoing presence of these movements in Israel, assuring religious diversity and facilitating inclusion. According to the Jewish Agency, approximately 600,000 Israelis participate each year in the programs funded by these allocations to the religious streams.

Beneficiary organizations include Hebrew Union College, International Young Israel Movement, Midreshet Schechter, OU Israel, Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies, Schechter Rabbinical Seminary, TAL Education Fund, The Israel Movement for Reform and Progressive Judaism, The Masorti Movement, United Synagogue of Conservative Jewry and Yeshiva University.

iRep - The Israel Religious Expression Platform

The mission at the heart of JFNA's Israel Religious Expression Platform (iRep) is to increase religious pluralism in Israel and advance meaningful change to the religion-state status quo. Through education and awareness building, support of Israeli civil society organizations, and sustained and systematic communication between North American and Israeli leadership, iRep strengthens Israel's relationship with North American Jewry based on mutual recognition of and respect for diverse Jewish expression.

iRep brings together interested Federations and leverages their resources to create greater impact. 18 Federations and two foundations have already invested in iRep including: Ann Arbor, Boston, Cincinnati, Greensboro, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, St. Louis, Washington, D.C, MetroWest, San Francisco, Colorado, Dallas, Milwaukee, Western Massachusetts, Princeton-Mercer-Bucks and Chicago. Discussion is actively underway with several additional communities which are likely to opt in shortly.

iRep's first initiative is focused on expanding the range of legally-recognized options for marriage in Israel, which would also impact practice and regulations related to divorce. Since its foundation, the only marriages conducted locally that are recognized by the Government of Israel are those which take place under the auspices of the Chief Rabbinate. There are no options for civil marriage in place today. This situation impacts hundreds of thousands of Israelis who cannot get married through the Rabbinate, and also prevents many couples from choosing a "legal" Jewish ceremony as they wish to avoid placing themselves under the hegemony of the Rabbinate.

iRep works in partnership with Israeli organizations – including Orthodox organizations – to raise awareness about the problems with current marriage laws and to strengthen Israel's burgeoning grassroots movement to provide alternative marriage options and achieve legal recognition for these alternatives.

Since the beginning of 2017, iRep has allocated \$436,000 to various projects including,

- Yisrael Hofsheet (Be Free Israel), IMPJ (Reform) Movement, and the Masorti (Conservative) Movement received a grant to run a joint media and grassroots campaign encouraging secular and traditional Israeli couples to choose alternative marriage options.
- Hiddush raises awareness and advocates for marriage freedom through public opinion polls on different aspects of the marriage issue.
- Ne`emanei Torah Va`Avodah raises awareness among the National Religious sector about halachic marriage options, concerns about current marriage laws and possible solutions.
- Mavoi Satum's "Private Halachic Wedding Initiative" provides a platform for answering the growing demand of couples wishing to get married in accordance with Jewish law, without the involvement of the Rabbinic establishment.
- The Rackman Center for the Advancement of the Status of Women at Bar Ilan University is mapping the field of alternative marriage ceremonies including available options and their legal, religious, personal, financial and social implications.
- Beit Hillel runs a Beit Midrash (study and discussion group) for Orthodox rabbis and women clergy on the issue of marriage and divorce in Israel, and will publish its findings.

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- The Center for Women’s Justice is producing materials for the public including a primer on halachic prenuptial agreements; Q&A on marriage facts and misconceptions; and an educational campaign via seminars and social media.
- Atid Ba`midbar and Project Keshet Israel are two organizations focusing on Jewish identity work within the Russian-speaking community in Israel for whom the current situation is particularly challenging.

Nearly \$800,000 has been allocated in support of iRep’s goals since the initiative became operational in 2016.

Direct Investment by Federations in the Field

Individual Federations have provided direct support for an array of Israeli organizations which broaden Jewish learning and engagement in the Israeli public through non-denominational programs, and for grassroots organizations seeking change to the status quo.

The information presented below provides summary data about designated gifts from Federations, including to iRep, from 2015 to date which flowed through JFNA. We have included all grants to organizations that work in the pluralism arena even though some may be supporting other aspects of their work. Click on the organization title to visit their website. If there is something missing or the data is incorrect, please contact Stacey Hess at Stacey.Hess@JewishFederations.org to provide new/updated information so that we can make the necessary corrections and/or if you would like help connecting with other communities which are supporting these organizations.

[Alma](#)

\$110,000

Founded in 1996 by Dr. Ruth Calderon, the Alma Home for Hebrew Culture, located in the heart of Tel Aviv, joined the Shalom Hartman Institute in late 2015. Alma is a liberal arts center for the study of Hebrew culture aimed at introducing secular Israelis to Jewish heritage and culture as a meaningful and vital element of their Jewish identity and of Israeli society.

[Atid Bamidbar](#)

\$42,360

Located in Yeruham and serving the Negev since 1990, Atid Bamidbar works to strengthen social solidarity and Jewish peoplehood and builds bridges across gaps in Israeli society, fostering mutual acquaintance and respect around a common denominator of Jewish and Israeli culture, in an open, pluralistic, and egalitarian approach.

[Be Free Israel \(Israel Hofshit\)](#)

\$482,800

A civil, nonpartisan movement that works to change the relationship between religion and state, ensuring freedom in the public sphere and establishing a free, pluralistic and democratic society in the spirit of Zionism and the Declaration of Independence.

[Beit Hillel- Attentive Spiritual Leadership](#)

\$36,292

Beit Hillel believes that the Torah’s way is relevant in every generation, and that the depth and complexity found in the Torah should guide Jewish Israelis in dealing with the new reality and the complexities of our generation. This platform includes the basic principles in which they believe with respect to three main areas: Society and Democracy, the Status of Women, and Education.

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[Beit Tefilah Israeli](#)

\$61,050

A creative, innovative and inclusive Jewish-Israeli community that offers meaningful Jewish ritual, study, activism and a sense of belonging to the general Israeli public and a worldwide Jewish community.

[Brit Neemaney Torah V'Avoda](#)

\$60,760

The Ne'emaney Torah v'Avodah Movement is a religious Zionist movement that seeks to restore religious Zionism to its roots, integrating the Torah with science, with the vision of Zionism, and with modern life. The movement strives to strengthen the integration of religious society into general society, in order to promote tolerance, equality and justice, and in order to shape the Jewish-democratic character of Israeli society. The Movement is committed to halakha, to creating an open religious culture that encourages a courageous halakhic discourse that addresses the challenges of time.

[Collot Ba'Negev \(Voices in the Negev\)](#)

\$165,000

Collot Ba'Negev was established in 1995 as a pluralistic center for learning, encounter and education in the Negev.

[Ein Prat - The Midrasha](#)

\$320,800

Ein Prat's programs nurture young adults' sense of themselves as Jews and Israelis, promote a sense of belonging and community among people of diverse backgrounds, and facilitate activities that express Jewish values and democratic ideals while adding value to society at large.

[Elul - Elu Va'Elu](#)

\$35,000

Elul is a home for Jewish renewal that expands traditional Torah study to new horizons. Since its inception, Elul has given expression to the diverse voices in the Jewish and Israeli discourse, believing that these and others deserve to be heard

[Hebrew Union College](#)

\$17,000

Hebrew Union College is the academic, spiritual, and professional leadership development center of Reform Judaism in Israel.

[Israel Association of Community Centers](#)

\$82,250

The Israel Association of Community Centers (IACC) is the leading national organization in Israel dedicated to the promotion of communities and of Israeli society as an empowered civil, just, and egalitarian society, which encourages social responsibility and involvement.

[IMPJ - Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism](#)

\$1,379,059

The Israel Movement for Reform and Progressive Judaism in Israel (IMPJ) is Israel's liberal Jewish religious movement and a constituent member of the World Union for Progressive Judaism.

[ITIM - Jewish Life Information Center](#)

\$511,100

ITIM helps people navigate the religious authorities' bureaucracy in Israel. ITIM provides information and offer free advocacy services in order to simplify the process and find solutions to complex problems.

[Kol Israel Haverim - Kiah](#)

\$285,750

All Israel Alliance ("Alliance Israel") seeks to promote a tolerant Judaism, to nurture general education, to promote social responsibility and to foster respect for the "other" in society.

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[Kolech - Religious Women's Forum](#)

\$8,000

Kolech is the leading Orthodox, feminist movement in Israel. Its mission is to further the status and rights of women in the realms of halakha, religious leadership, the religious establishment and community life.

[KOLOT](#)

\$45,000

Kolot's vision is to create a moral, value-based society in the State of Israel that can be an example to all nations. Utilizing its own custom-designed curricula, its mission is to train networks of leaders throughout Israel to use Jewish ethical principles as the basis for creating a values-driven vision for the Jewish State.

[Masa Chai](#)

\$10,000

Masa Chai is the Israeli branch of the American Jewish community-building program Chai Mitzvah, adapted to best strengthen community awareness in Israel. Masa Chai provides a platform for motivated individuals to study relevant Jewish texts together, and carry out projects in the local community related to these texts. The projects reflect the rituals and traditions of the Jewish calendar, and concentrate on social involvement and mutual responsibility.

[Masorti Foundation for Conservative Judaism in Israel](#)

\$1,102,600

The purpose and mission of the Foundation is to support the work of Israelis in building a Judaism that preserves observance and tradition while recognizing how modern life in Israel is lived.

[Mavoi Satum](#)

\$96,200

Mavoi Satum is a non-profit organization founded in 1995 to provide legal and emotional support to women who have been refused a Jewish divorce (get). One out of every five Jewish women in Israel is unable to freely exit her marriage. Jewish law (halakha), which is supported by Israeli law, gives absolute authority over marriage and divorce to the religious courts and empowers men as the sole executors of the divorce process.

[Meitarim](#)

\$12,500

Meitarim is a grassroots network of schools where children receive an education in which there is no contradiction between Judaism, pluralism, humanism, and democracy.

[Merchavim \(Bina Center for Jewish Identity and Hebrew Culture\)](#)

\$518,530

BINA is the leading organization at the intersection of Jewish Pluralism & Social Action in Israel. BINA strives to strengthen Israel as a democratic pluralistic society, by emphasizing Judaism as a culture, through Jewish values of Tikkun Olam.

[Nitzanim Jewish Israeli Identity and Zionism](#)

\$10,000

Nitzanim: Jewish Israeli Identity and Zionism originated in 2007 as a project within the Avi Chai Foundation, and in 2013 began operating independently as a national network of local authorities in which the rich & diverse Jewish cultural heritage serves as a fundamental common resource in shaping a tolerant, vibrant, multi-cultural environment.

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[Oranim - Academic College of Education](#)

\$241,000

Oranim College of Education is the largest and leading academic college of education in the North of Israel, catering to thousands of students enrolled in bachelor's and master's degree programs in education, teaching certification courses, and advanced career training, including the Seminary for Training Israeli Rabbis - Hamidrasha Educational Center for Jewish Renewal in Israel.

[PANIM for Jewish Renaissance in Israel](#)

\$188,000

Panim, founded in 1998 and re-established in 2011, gathers together the strength of 60 member nonprofits and their tens of thousands of constituents to advance Jewish-Israeli identity and culture across Israel. Panim leverages its members to bring balance to the dichotomous structure of Israeli society and develop a Jewish, democratic, and pluralistic Israel.

[Poteach Shearim \(Open Gates\)](#)

\$1,750

Open Gates promotes Jewish renewal and maintains a Beit Midrash which trains young people on how to lead a Jewish-pluralistic life in Israel.

[Ruth & Emanuel Rackman Center for the Advancement of the Status of Women, Bar Ilan University](#)

\$7,500

The Ruth and Emanuel Rackman Center for the Advancement of Women's Status, operating within the framework of the Faculty of Law of Bar-Ilan University, was founded in 2001 in order to eradicate discrimination against women and strengthen their status in Israeli society by translating academic knowledge and research into practical steps and activities. The Center operates a legal assistance program for women in matters of family, and is engaged in public activities, in research, and in the empowerment of women.

[Schechter Institute for Jewish Studies](#)

\$14,946

Associated with the Conservative Movement, the Schechter Institutes connect Israelis with their Jewish heritage, conducting educational programs and nurturing values of tolerance, pluralism, learning and dialogue.

[Shalom Hartman Institute](#)

\$73,250

The Shalom Hartman Institute is a pluralistic center of research and education deepening and elevating the quality of Jewish life in Israel and around the world.

[TALI Education Fund](#)

\$127,840

The TALI (Hebrew acronym for "Enriched Jewish Studies") network of schools provides a pluralistic Jewish Studies program to approximately 50,000 schoolchildren in 325 public schools and pre-schools throughout Israel—comprising more than 12% of all secular public schools in Israel.

[Tzohar](#)

\$155,000

Founded upon loyalty to the State of Israel and commitment to Halacha, TZOHAR's mission is to guarantee the Jewish future of the State of Israel. Over the past two decades TZOHAR has become one of the most prominent brands of Jewish identity in Israel, directly impacting hundreds of thousands of families, nurturing moderate rabbinic leadership and shaping public policy.

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[Women of the Wall](#)

\$180

Women of the Wall is a group of Jewish women from Israel and around the world who strive to achieve the right to wear prayer shawls, pray and read from the Torah collectively and out loud at the Western Wall (Kotel) in Jerusalem, Israel.

[Yaacov Herzog Center \(Mercaz Herzog\)](#)

\$105,680

The Yaacov Herzog Center is an educational center which works to bridge gaps in Israeli society through Jewish culture and discourse on Jewish identity, with the goal of understanding one another better and cultivating a more respectful society.

[Yerushalmit Movement](#)

\$10,000

The Yerushalmit Movement (Heb: Hatnuah Hayerushalmit) was founded in 2009 by a group of Jerusalem activists to forward Jerusalem's pluralistic character through activism, community organizing, and inter-sectoral dialogue.