

Slingshot hot list offers diverse mix

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Organizers say the diversity of this year's Slingshot list of 50 hot nonprofits underscores the continued sprouting of new innovative groups and the increasing willingness of old-school organizations to adapt.

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NEW YORK (JTA) -- When a group of young philanthropists decided to put together a short Zagat's-style directory of innovative programs four years ago, the goal was to identify cutting-edge Jewish causes for their peers to invest in.

The result was Slingshot, an annual directory of 50 hot nonprofits that has helped put several upstarts on the philanthropic map and offered a yearly snapshot of giving trends in the Jewish foundation world.

Among the cutting-edge groups named in the first edition: JDub, a Jewish record label that produces artists whose music is an expression of their heritage; Storahtelling, a drama troupe that retells biblical stories through modern avant-garde theatrical works; and Jewish Funds for Justice, an organization that uses Jewish charitable resources for supporting nonsectarian social action projects.

Since landing on the initial list -- it emerged out of Grand Street, a project of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies that convenes Jews aged 18-28 who have seats on their families' charitable foundations -- these organizations have attracted additional support and moved toward financial stability.

This year's edition of Slingshot, released Monday, lists all three groups, as well as other repeat choices with similar reputations for innovative programming. But in what organizers describe as a significant shift, the new edition also includes decades-old organizations (the Jewish Book Council and the Foundation for Jewish Culture) and seemingly conventional ones (JCC of Manhattan).

In addition, some of the relatively newer groups focus on causes generally identified with older generations. Two of the entrants -- the National Yiddish Book Center and Yiddishkayt LA -- are dedicated to preserving Yiddish, and several others are dedicated to Holocaust education, including Centropa and Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation.

The diversity of this year's list, organizers say, underscores the continued sprouting up of new innovative groups, but also the increasing willingness of old-school organizations to adapt -- and of foundations to recognize such efforts.

"One of the things we noticed this year is that while many skeptics worry that innovation signifies hip or young Jewish life, we found that many of the organizations out there are making the old new," Sharna Goldseker, the Bronfman foundation's vice president, told JTA. "Many are focused on Jewish history and language and

heritage, and we see a number of organizations that really build on tradition in an innovative way."

Holocaust education, for example, might be a topic that one would not expect to find in a guidebook billed as identifying the next wave of worthwhile, innovative Jewish programs. But Centropa has eschewed the creation of a textbook, instead conducting interviews with 1,400 elderly Holocaust survivors and collecting some 25,000 photographs from them, leading to the creation of a digital archive.

Overall, even with the inclusion of some longstanding organizations and groups focused on more traditional issues, this year's edition -- chosen by the young representatives of more than 20 foundations -- shows that the social entrepreneur movement is taking root among Jewish nonprofits.

The philanthropic world in general increasingly is driven by social entrepreneurs -- loosely defined as those who seek social change through innovation and a radical re-thinking of how the status quo works.

The Jewish nonprofit sector has experienced a similar groundswell of innovative Jewish nonprofits in the past decade, from the advent of Birthright Israel, which seeks to take every Jew between the ages of 18 to 26 on a free trip to Israel, to the rise of the independent minyan movement and the creation of a slew of Jewish social service organizations.

As the trend picks up steam, longstanding Jewish organizations are starting to contemplate their role in supporting such initiatives: The United Jewish Communities, the umbrella organization of the Jewish federation system, recently partnered with two other organizations to hold a daylong symposium for social entrepreneurs and potential funders.

Still, those behind Slingshot say, support from the Jewish communal establishment has been slow to arrive.

"If you compare the amount of money spent on funding dedicated to continuity and renewal and renaissance, it towers over the money that has gone to the social entrepreneur movement," Roger Bennett, the Bronfman foundation's senior vice president, told JTA. "What is crucial now is to look at the series of actions that have occurred and to see that social entrepreneurship and the organizations in the Slingshot book are alive and well -- and to close the gap in terms of philanthropic dollars."

According to research commissioned by the Bronfman foundation, organizations listed in past editions of Slingshot say they have benefited from being included: Ninety-three percent say the book has been a useful tool for them; 86 percent have collaborated with other organizations listed in the book; and 62 percent have been able to enlist new board members because of the book.

In the past year, Grand Street has started a Slingshot fund that allows the organizations included to apply for \$45,000 grants.

Ultimately, though, those included say that the real benefit is not in the immediate donations that come in but securing a stamp of approval that will help them gain support and respect in the philanthropic community.

"We have definitely had a couple of small donations made from those who saw us in the book," said Aaron Bisman, the executive director of JDub. "But being able to talk about the inclusion in the book is definitely helpful. As a young organization, we need a lot of validation."

For a hard copy of the book, send an e-mail request to info@slingshotfund.org. Starting Sept. 19, a PDF

version of the book can be downloaded from www.slingshotfund.org.

The following organizations are included in the latest edition of Slingshot (the asterisk connotes groups that are new to the list):

Advancing Jewish Women Professionals
American Jewish World Service
* Be'chol Lashon
Birthright Israel
* B'Nai Tzedek
Centropa
* Dawn
Encounter
* Etgar36
Footsteps
* Foundation for Jewish Culture
Four Seasons Project
Gateways
Goldenring Woldenberg ISJL
Hadar
Hazon
Ikar
Institute for Jewish Spirituality
InterfaithFamily.com
* JCC Manhattan
* Jconnect Seattle
JDub Records
Jewish Book Council
Jewish Funds for Justice
Jewish Milestones
Jewish Outreach Institute
Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation
Jewish World Watch
Just Vision
Keshet
* Kivunim
Limmud NY
Mayyim Hayyim
Mazon
* Moishe House
Moving Traditions
* National Yiddish Book Center
* Nextbook
* Professional Leaders Project
Progressive Jewish Alliance
* Project Chessed
Reboot
Seeking Common Ground
Selah Leadership Program

Sharsheret

* Six Points Fellowship for Emerging Jewish Artists

Sixth & I Historic Synagogue

Storhtelling

* The PJ Library

* Yiddishkayt LA
