

## Blog Post: Can Jewish Organizations Really Work Collaboratively? Early Lessons from Nativ

By Josh Miller, Steven Green, Leah Nadich Meir and Joel Einleger  
March 4, 2013

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*Today we hear from Josh Miller, Steven Green, Leah Nadich Meir and Joel Einleger about Nativ, a collaboration between the Jim Joseph and AVI CHAI foundations. Nativ is a pilot program to create six senior experiential educator positions to be shared by overnight camps and Jewish day/synagogue schools.*

Collaboration and partnership have become the buzzwords of our time. The business world as well as the nonprofit sector heralds the advantages of collaboration: sharing resources, bringing multiple perspectives to address difficult issues, eliminating duplication, learning from one another and pooling assets.

The Jim Joseph and AVI CHAI Foundations, as funders interacting with multiple organizations across sectors, have a bird's-eye view of what can result when organizations function from within their own separate silos: duplicate efforts on the one hand and unaddressed needs on the other. This led us to ask: can we, as funders, use our resources and influence to catalyze collaboration? And taking that one step further: can we, as funders, collaborate to more effectively advance our common goals?

On the topic of funding collaboration efforts, David La Piana, in his monograph *Real Collaboration: A Guide for Grantmakers*, offers a sobering observation. "Funders cannot create Real Collaboration. They can only help to enhance it. In most instances, a 'grant for collaboration' will not seed or create a partnership where none existed before unless the motivation to create a partnership is present and strong."

We are fortunate that talented professionals in the areas of Jewish education that our two foundations support were already thinking of developing and nurturing collaboration and were highly motivated to see it succeed. Jewish camp leaders wanted year-round educators devoting their skills to deepen Jewish learning in camps and Jewish school leaders wanted to inspire their students with more immersive "camp-like" Jewish experiences during the school year. To address these needs, our foundations have jointly funded a five-year grant to the Foundation for Jewish Camp's Nativ Initiative, an experiment designed to create new connections between Jewish camps and schools, leveraging unique professional knowledge and best practices for the benefit of both.

Nativ involves a complex array of individual, organizational and system collaboration in order to produce camp and school alumni whose Judaism deeply engages both their heads and their hearts:

- Each of six experiential Jewish educators is "shared" by a camp and a school in the same geographic area.
- Each camp-school pair works together to determine the role of their Nativ

- educator.
- Educators, heads of school and camp directors participate collectively in a community of practice to learn from one another's successes and challenges.
  - The Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC) and the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) together helped develop the program and are directing its implementation.
  - Two foundations have co-invested in the project, communicating regularly and learning the give-and-take required by funding partnerships.

Can so many levels of partnership succeed not only simultaneously, but in such a way that the partnerships build on each other and each strengthens the whole? While Nadiv is just in its early stages of implementation, the first evaluation report has been conducted by BTW *informing change*. One of the two sections of the report, "The Nadiv Story, Unfolding," tells the story of Nadiv's collaborative process as it unfolded, with all the turns and twists in the road. The second section, "Key Learnings from Nadiv's Launch," shares successes along with key learnings and offers recommendations for ongoing implementation and future partnerships.

Even in this early stage, Nadiv is turning out to be a fascinating story about collaboration, with multiple characters and plotlines. At the individual level, six educators from a range of backgrounds are working across institutions and denominational affiliations to support one another and share learnings. At an organizational level, camps and schools are leveraging their partnership to retain a talented educator and strengthen one another's educational work, bringing more of the joy of camp to school and introducing more of the substance of school to camp. At the field level, FJC and URJ are deepening their relationship, identifying shared measures for success, and laying the groundwork for future collaborative efforts. And on the funder level, two foundations deeply committed to Jewish education are bridging their differences to enhance their leverage. While it is too early to identify concrete results, BTW's report notes encouragingly: "The most common words used to describe the nascent partnerships are respect, communication, collaboration, support and trust."

At the first Nadiv convening this past fall, energy and excitement ran high as school and camp heads, Nadiv educators and their mentors reached across their organizational divides and talked together about the best ways to inspire and educate Jewish youth. Participants left with a sense of being "*balutzim*" (pioneers) in a model that can bring down some of the walls that separate classroom-based and experiential education, winter and summer, teacher and counselor.

We will have to wait several years to fully understand whether this experiment to catalyze new institutional collaboration will achieve what it set out to do. If it does, we hope that other camps, schools and educational institutions will adapt elements of the Nadiv model for their own collaborative experiments. We equally hope that other funders will be inspired to invest (or even better, co-invest) in such efforts.

We will, of course, continue to "learn in public" as the project progresses and look forward to your reactions and your own stories of collaboration in the Jewish education world.

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Reposted from the Jim Joseph Foundation blog.

Photo courtesy of Camp Coleman.

