

# More than Money: How Funders Can Use All Their Resources to Advance Change

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*by Charlene Seidle*

Sarah Kass's recent article in [eJewishPhilanthropy](#) about the spend-down of the Avi Chai Foundation addresses the issues of abundance versus scarcity. In a perpetual foundation framework, Kass argues, resources are abundant and there is neither a pressing need to choose among focus areas nor to actively seek out funding partners for projects or areas of interest. Spend-down however creates a culture of scarcity, forcing hard choices and thoughtful consideration of how to sustain that which is created and supported.

When the Leichtag Family Foundation, a private independent foundation based in San Diego, made the decision in 2009 to pursue a modified spend-down, we viewed the situation differently. Spending down was an acknowledgement of the urgency of the issues we faced. We realized too that, in order to address these opportunities, we had to seize the moment and invest significant resources. Spend-down therefore was an expression of abundance. Board members agreed that a limited lifespan would propel us to bolder, more inspired thought, granting and disciplined leadership.

Our unique relationship with the Jewish Community Foundation of San Diego (JCF) also influenced our decision. In this relationship, our two organizations work hand in hand to implement the Foundation's strategies, manage granting processes, create and leverage relationships with funders and nonprofits, and reflect best practices. It's a partnership that shares staff, infrastructure and institutional knowledge to exponentially increase our collective impact.

In our decision to spend down, we knew that we had to plan for our last day from the first. We did this in two major ways.

First, we agreed on a modified spend-down where, after the termination year of 2025, (18 years after the death of our co-founder, Lee Leichtag), a significant portion of our assets will be reserved and then deployed in field of interest funds at the JCF to continue to support our focus areas. We already had a robust relationship with the JCF but this decision has transformed the partnership. The JCF has become both our implementation partner and, in effect, our successor.

Second, we developed a set of tools for impact that go beyond direct granting and focus on all the resources at our disposal to advance the areas we care about. The tools include:

**1. Convening and facilitating nonprofit partnerships and networks:**

Collaborations between organizations sometimes make sense and sometimes do not. They cannot be forced. As funders, we have a rare overall view of the sectors we support. Our role is to create the space for the organizations we fund to connect with each other, engage in conversation and pursue shared learning in topics of common value. Collaboration then evolves naturally.

**2. Inspiring funding partners and successors:** We avoid going it alone.

Organizations with single or few funders aren't sustainable. Rather, we actively seek out other partners on behalf of projects we support. Challenge grants are a useful and frequent strategy. Additionally, we vigorously prospect for grantors already knowledgeable and leading efforts in the areas we support so that we can partner with them.

**3. Strengthening grantee infrastructure and improving grantee capacity to fundraise:** We will only be successful if we leave behind stable institutions with sufficient resources and capacity to achieve their goals. The Foundation will soon launch an initiative where we proactively provide resources for our major grantees to assess their organizational infrastructure and core capacities in order to identify gaps and opportunities. We will then provide funding specifically to help address infrastructure improvements.

In addition, the Foundation supports the JCF's Endowment Leadership Institute which provides individual coaching, group training and incentive grants to help organizations in San Diego's Jewish community secure bequests and endowments.

**4. Investing in young leaders and philanthropists:** We approach our spend-down with a great deal of optimism. San Diego is home to a flourishing community of teens, college students and post-college young adults who care about making a difference in the community. The JCF pioneered a youth philanthropy program for high school students, which has now been replicated in at least a dozen other communities across the country. Local young adult initiatives like Hillel and Moishe House are thriving. A critical part of our strategy is to support younger generations in the ways they want to be supported, individually and collectively, creating the space and intensifying the opportunities for them to renew and lead.

**5. Advocating for systemic change:** In addition to directly supporting programs, we fund research and support innovative film and electronic media efforts. We are conscious of the power of our voice as well as our checkbook.

The Leichtag Family Foundation's ultimate goal is to support the evolution of fields that will endure well beyond our relatively brief lifespan. By design, these fields comprise an abundance of diverse resources and partners.

Kass concludes her thoughtful article by beautifully describing the effect of spreading the Avi Chai resources, empowering stakeholders around the globe to lead opinion and efforts for their spheres of influence and to connect those networks with each other for a huge multiplier effect. We share these lofty goals. It makes our mission easier. In the wise words of our Sages, a community is indeed too heavy to carry alone.

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