

Jewish Community Foundation Celebrates 50 Years of Helping Donors Achieve Their Philanthropic Goals

More than \$1 billion in charitable grants distributed on behalf of donors to date

For the last 50 years, the Jewish Community Foundation (JCF) of San Diego has been a major philanthropic resource helping to match the philanthropic passions of donors with a wide range of grantee recipients in their community and around the world.

“Our goal is to enable our donors to leverage their philanthropic assets to have the greatest impact on the causes they care about,” said JCF President and CEO Beth Sirull. “We facilitate donor giving to a vast array of grantee recipients in San Diego, the United States and abroad.” She noted that schools, hospitals, the arts, social services and a multitude of other charities have benefitted from donors advised by the JCF.

“JCF facilitates grant making typically in excess of \$110 million per year on behalf of our donors,” added Sirull, who joined the Foundation in March. “And most of those funds (70 percent) stay in our community.”

In fact, the Foundation distributes the largest number of grant dollars annually in San Diego and has aided generations of donors in awarding more than \$1 billion in charitable contributions since its 1967 launch.

Foundation donors distribute grants to both Jewish and secular organizations, with the majority – roughly 70% – going to secular organizations.

“Over the years, these contributions have made an enormous impact on so many lives,” said Sirull. “We are proud and honored to have played a supportive role in facilitating the generosity and good works of our donors for the last 50 years. We look forward with excitement to the opportunities and innovations of the next 50 years.”

The Jewish Community Foundation, a nonprofit philanthropic service provider, helps donors in numerous ways, ranging from researching causes to advising on gift structuring. “We want our donors to feel like they have a true partner helping them fulfill their philanthropic dreams,” said Sharleen Wollach, the Foundation’s Vice President of Operations.

While the organization serves donors from all walks of life, JCF proudly operates on Jewish faith-based values of “making the world a better place,” said Sirull.

“Our mission is to grow the impact of philanthropy in this region and around the world,” she said. “We really live that every day in that we provide truly personalized services and are constantly innovating to help our donors be more impactful.”

JCF is proud of its efforts. Over the last 50 years, it has assisted donors in awarding over \$1 billion in over 60,000 grants to more than 5,000 nonprofits in San Diego, Israel and around the world.

How They Serve

JCF welcomes donors, Jewish and non-Jewish, at all giving levels. “We provide an inclusive home for philanthropic giving,” said Sirull. “Donors can open a fund with as little as \$1,800 and take advantage of all the services offered by the organization.”

Regarding how they assist donors, Wollach noted that the Foundation’s services are “behind-the-scenes, but important” and can play a critical role in ensuring the highest impact and most meaningful philanthropy is achieved.

“Our role is to help guide our donors through the grantmaking process,” she said. “Our committed and highly trained staff do all the research and due diligence.” This includes handling all associated paperwork and other administrative functions along with advising donors on different gifting opportunities, tax considerations and other technical matters.

In addition, JCF provides periodic educational programs on charitable opportunities, including those aimed at ensuring the long-term vitality of the San Diego Jewish community. The Foundation also serves the San Diego community by offering post-lifetime charitable planning to ensure that local organizations remain strong for generations to come.

In a typical scenario, Sirull said a donor may come in and express interest in helping a specific cause, for example the homeless. However, they may not be familiar with the various San Diego organizations and types of services they provide to the homeless.

JCF is very knowledgeable about the needs of the community. “We know who the organizations are and what they do,” said Sirull. “If it’s hunger, we know the food banks, if the donor’s interest is in animals, we know all the animal charities.”

In handling the administrative aspects of donor giving, Sirull noted that JCF staff offer a tailored, customized approach. “For instance, the donor may want to ensure that the charity meets certain milestones to continue receiving their contributions. We can write up a grant agreement that spells out the donor’s intentions and then serve as the facilitator between the donor and grantee to ensure the donor’s wishes are met.”

The Secret to Their Success

Asked about key factors that have contributed to JCF’s success over the years, Leo Spiegel, JCF board chairman, summed it up in two words, “trust and innovation.”

“I believe these are the main reasons that we’ve been successful,” Spiegel said. “With over \$330 million in assets under management, our donors clearly trust us as the right place to invest their philanthropic dollars. Donors know that the Foundation will provide confidential support and top-notch counsel. In addition, people appreciate that we have continually innovated to create new programs to keep up with changing needs.” Spiegel continued, citing specific examples of the Foundation’s innovative programming, “JCF was one of the earliest community foundations to integrate youth philanthropy. Just this year, JCF is the first Jewish Community Foundation to introduce an Impact Investment Pool.”

Looking to the Future with New Programs

Looking forward, Sirull said the Foundation hopes to build on past success by continuing to grow philanthropy in the region. “We’d like to engage more people in charitable giving, particularly young people,” she said.

To that end, JCF is developing new multi-generational programs aimed at encouraging millennials and Gen X-ers to consider philanthropic giving earlier in life. As part of this effort, the Foundation is developing new products and services that leverage current trends in philanthropy including opportunities for donors to not only make grants to effect social change but also to invest their philanthropic dollars for social impact.

“We want to ensure that we maintain a vibrant philanthropic community in San Diego,” said Sirull. “This means making sure young people understand how philanthropic resources can be used to solve the world’s problems. After all, you’re never too young or too old to make a difference.”

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