ANDRÉS SPOKOINY

Money Can't Buy You Love

What we're spending to fight antisemitism

RECENTLY, my organization, the Jewish Funders Network, conducted a formal survey of organizations and funders involved in the fight against antisemitism. We examined approximately 160 organizations that claim to combat antisemitism and interviewed leading funders of the field.

One of the things we attempted to determine was the aggregate amount of philanthropic funding in this space and, no less critically, whether it was having a real impact. So what have we found, and how can we learn and continue to adapt to be effective in this fight?

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One thing we learned is that the battlefield has blurred boundaries. If a local JCC claims that its nonsectarian program is effective

in promoting positive feelings toward Jews in its town, should we count the JCC as an organization fighting antisemitism? If a Jewish news outlet is a reliable source of information about Israel that may counterbalance the demonization so prevalent in the mainstream media, should we consider it in the same category as the Anti-Defamation League? In the absence of a shared, precise definition of what it means for philanthropy to combat antisemitism, any data includes a certain degree of arbitrariness. Our count of 160 organizations could be an overcount or an undercount. More important, a shared definition could help us develop realistic expectations about the impact that philanthropic work can have.

It's also difficult to estimate how much of an organization's budget is dedicated to fighting antisemitism, when many are working on multiple facets of Jewish life. Take, for example, the Israeli-American Council, an organization that serves Israeli Americans with social, educational, and communal activities, but that has a strong public-advocacy component that includes fighting antisemitism. What percentage of its budget should be estimated as fighting antisemitism? Even the ADL, which boasts a $134 million budget, also does nonsectarian work. Looking at full budgets or relying on the organizations' own estimates may result in significant inaccuracies.

Our survey found that the field has a strong, small core made of a handful of organizations (including the ADL, the American Jewish Committee, and Robert Kraft's Foundation to Combat Antisemitism) that, with a combined budget of roughly $250 million in 2024, represents approximately 40 percent of the community's expenditure in this fight. Beyond that core, there is a highly fragmented field composed of relatively small organizations that operate independently. The median budget of the organizations we reviewed is approximately $2 million, and the median expenditure in a given program to fight antisemitism is $1.2 million.

Based on the data and a series of judgment calls, we estimated that the Jewish community currently spends approximately $600 million a year fighting antisemitism. While we didn't track spending over time, we estimate that this likely represents a 20 to 30 percent increase from 2022 and a 150 percent increase over what the community spent a decade ago. More than half of the smaller organizations in the field didn't exist five years ago.

And here is where the hard questions start.

On a superficial level, our data validate many of the questions (and complaints) that funders have been raising about the fight. But given how critical it is to Jewish life now, we must examine these common refrains to be sure that funders are asking the right questions.

Refrain No. 1: "Too much/too little money is going into the fight against antisemitism."

Data can, in fact, validate both positions. Considering the investment that nefarious actors put into shaping public opinion (Qatar is estimated to spend more than $1 billion a year on Al Jazeera alone), Jewish spending on narrative-shaping seems a pittance, and real results demand concomitant investments.

But there is an inherent bias in the community of philanthropists: that money can solve social problems. This is not so. Some problems can't be solved by philanthropy — and others probably can't be solved at all. So why are we spending so much?

Asking the question in a way that focuses only on dollars is not ultimately useful. What we should be asking is, *Given the circumstances, in which areas and sub-areas of the anti-antisemitism*

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battlefield can money make a difference? For example, our survey revealed the importance of distinguishing more clearly between fighting the root causes of antisemitism by changing hearts and minds, and dealing with the consequences of antisemitism by defending Jewish interests and providing physical security for Jews.

The former is a complex problem in which success will always be partial and inconclusive, and there's likely little linear relationship between the money spent and the results. In the latter, which is a more measurable, technical challenge, we see a clearer connection between expense and results. In the area of security, for example, there's a linear relationship between dollars and buildings we can "harden." In the field of legal defense, there's a direct correlation between the money we invest and the lawsuits that can be brought forward. In fields such as social media, however, we often lack a clear understanding of the correlation between investment and results. One could argue that until we can match Qatari-level spending, we're throwing good money after bad into social media. We should, at the very least, ask how to invest in social media more wisely in the meantime.

Refrain No. 2: "We are failing."

Many funders feel that we are failing to mitigate, let alone defeat, this scourge.

The frustration is understandable and perhaps justified, but what our study illustrated is that parameters of success are often poorly defined. One goal that several organizations cite in some form is eliminating antisemitism, which is neither realistic nor something that can be measured in the short term. To provide more clarity about what success could look like, we created a taxonomy that divides the field into 11 areas (e.g., campus, media), 61 subfields (e.g., student activism, faculty education), and over 200 types of programs

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(e.g., trips, advocacy initiatives, visiting scholars, litigation, curriculum development).

Each of them requires specific key performance indicators and measurements, and the sheer variety of them is enough to challenge organizations as well as funders. Many organizations have made significant progress in defining their goals more realistically, establishing clear measures of success, and evaluating the effectiveness of their programs. Funders played a leading role in encouraging practitioners to be more precise in this work. For most nonprofits, counting outputs (e.g., the number of views on social media) may be easy, but assessing their impact is more difficult. Even with the caveat that many things aren't measurable, organizations need help to determine clear, realistic, and achievable goals for every strategy per subsector.

As with all investments, time is a key dimension. Because we feel the pain of antisemitism and have rightfully developed a sense of urgency, many funders and practitioners expect rapid results. Alas, cultural change may take years, if not decades, as it has for our enemies, and funders and nonprofits alike often lack patience.

Instead of concluding that we are failing, funders and organizations should be asking, *What, exactly, are we trying to achieve, and what is a reasonable timeline to expect results?*

Refrain No. 3: "There are too many organizations in the field."

I have joined the chorus of those complaining that there's too much duplication in the fight. But I have also participated in many meetings that begin with someone saying "There are too many organizations" and end with someone saying "We need to create a new organization that does X." While there may be overcrowding — and no doubt wasted resources because of redundancy — there are also

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gaps. As with counting dollars, perhaps counting organizations is not the only (or most useful) measure to consider.

Nonprofit ecosystems vary. In some cases, a multiplicity of organizations is beneficial to tackle hyper-local challenges and to motivate and engage different types of volunteers and activists. In others, "natural monopolies" are better suited to obtain results. The real question is not whether we have too many or too few organizations, but how effectively the ecosystem works together, both through collaboration and efficiency creation.

Instead of expressing certainty about the crowded field, better to ask, *Is the ecosystem healthy and functional?*

The problem might not be that there are too many organizations in a given subfield, but that they create their own inadequate infrastructure. Some conduct separate opinion polls and message tests, while others develop duplicative AI tools. While mergers and acquisitions very well might eliminate some inefficiencies, what we truly need is to define a coherent ecosystem, regardless of the number of organizations that exist. This involves, for starters, investing in shared infrastructure and common utilities.

Refrain No. 4: "Various areas of the fight against antisemitism are under- or over-funded."

This refrain contains every possible meaning under the sun. There is a plethora of funding directed toward addressing antisemitism on social media, but not enough attention has been focused on other arenas in which antisemitism has grown. I have often noted, for example, that K–12 education is an area that needs more funding to address the problems of antisemitism, from anti-Israelism in ethnic studies, to teachers' unions, to graduate schools of education. Yet before determining that it is underfunded, we must acknowledge the vastness

of the field and understand what type and degree of intervention is necessary. Surely the problems in elementary school require different solutions than those in high schools.

Bridging the technology and education spaces, there are many reasons why we should be taking a closer look at large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT, which are playing a growing role in research and learning. But we should do so deliberately. First, we need to understand the scale of the problem that we face in LLMs. What are the levers of change and influence open to philanthropy, and what level and kind of investment do they require? LLMs draw from "open source" information, particularly sources such as Reddit and Wikipedia, which have shown consistent bias against Israel and Jews. Hostile actors, such as Al Jazeera, put out an enormous amount of content—considered trustworthy by LLMs—as open source, while much of our high-quality content is hidden behind paywalls or memberships. How much does philanthropy need to spend in order to "flood the internet" with open-source content?

The pursuit of allyship is one in which this question of rightsizing funding is acute. When many of our historical allies in other communities deserted us or worse after October 7, reasonable people made opposing arguments about what this apparent failure means. Some have argued that the money we spent on building bridges (taking non-Jews to Israel, for example) was wasted. Others argue, however, that we failed because we didn't invest nearly enough time and energy developing deep, mutual alliances.

The replacement question here is, *Where is our attention and our funding best spent?*

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Our mindset needs to evolve. We need more clarity about where money can make a difference and where it can't. We need to challenge precon-

ceived notions about the fight against antisemitism and the battlefield upon which it is fought. And we need a realistic theory of change for philanthropy in this area. In many cases, we need painful reality checks.

We can't expect our money to stop antisemitism. But we can expect it to make Jews and Jewish spaces safer. We can expect it to help identify, understand, and educate about current manifestations of antisemitism. We can expect it to provide authentic and proud Jewish voices and knowledge about Jews, for Jews and Gentiles alike. Perhaps, as Jews have done many times in our history, we can offer an alternative vision of genuine pluralism and tolerance — an image of the world as it ought to be.

In the most immediate term, there are specific actions that funders can take to make sure that our dollars achieve a better return on investment. Here are some ideas:

- There are demonstrable funding gaps in several areas of concern: legal defense and lawfare, K–12 education, and various online spaces. These are areas of the battlefield where philanthropy can certainly make a difference.

- To minimize duplication and encourage efficiency, the Jewish community needs to create platforms and forums that allow smaller nonprofits to share infrastructure, utilities, and resources. From sharing market research and impact reports to circulating best practices and utilizing new technologies, funders can support structures that "lift all boats." While messaging may need to be decentralized, support structures must be optimized. Even simply creating working groups of fellow travelers in different subsectors would help.

- The relationship between philanthropy and politics is tricky, but

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smart funders learn how to harmonize their c3 (nonprofit) and c4 (political/advocacy) work and spending. While our community has flexed its political muscle in national elections, there are significant challenges in the local arena where our investment is minimal. This is a battlefield where we could win if we showed up.

- Our allyship assumptions and strategies need to be reevaluated before we can assess their funding needs. We've been guided by inertia in focusing on some communities while disregarding others, such as Hindu Americans, or non-Jews who wield particular types of cultural power. A conversation about the best use of resources in that area is overdue.

- Open communication among funders and between funders and practitioners is critical, and the field needs to get better at it. For example, both nonprofits and funders complain about the prevalence of short-termism in the field, and they both think that it's "the other" who expects it. Funders complain that nonprofits "inflate" their results, and nonprofits assume that their donors expect spectacular results and penalize nonprofits for not achieving them. Improved communication can clear these perceptions and help align expectations on goals and parameters of success. Funders can improve their return on investment by being clear about the angles of the problem they are trying to tackle. The maxim "If you grasped too much, you grasped nothing; if you grasped a little, you have grasped something" can be a helpful guide.

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The fight against antisemitism presents a paradox: It demands great

resources, and at the same time, money has only a limited effect. That makes the need to spend wisely even more acute.

We need a strategic, financial, and structural audit. What we can do is encourage people to view the field with a broader lens, challenge their assumptions, and establish mechanisms for communication and networking among funders and leaders. Funders must double down on demanding clear goals and measurements, and they must hold themselves accountable for enforcing them. It's good to remember that in philanthropy, effectiveness and excellence are always self-imposed. Critically, an ever-evolving threat demands that we continually reassess our approach and adapt to the mutations of the scourge.

Because the key question is not *how much* we spend, but *how*. ✳

ANDRÉS SPOKOINY is the president and CEO of Jewish Funders Network.