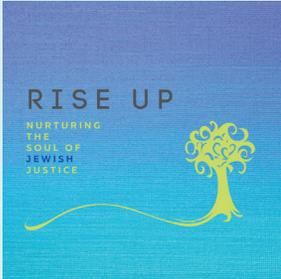




THIS TRADITION IS YOURS

A REPORT ON
RISE UP INITIATIVE'S
IMPACT 2019-2026

PROJECT OVERVIEW



RISE UP'S MISSION IS TO nourish the soul of Jewish justice work.

Through grantmaking and capacity-building support, Rise Up works to strengthen our movements

for multiracial, inclusive democracy by investing in the spiritual and internal resources of Jewish social justice leadership and the communities they lead.

We fund transformative work that integrates deep Jewish wisdom and practice, centers the margins of our community, and drives progressive action for social change. All of this expands entry points for hundreds of thousands of Jews across the country who often feel alienated by the majority of Jewish spaces. Instead of asking Jewish people to only use traditional avenues for accessing Jewish life, we meet them where they are. In just six years, we have grown into a powerful seed funder, distributing over **\$2 million to 60 projects** working at the intersections of justice and spirituality and developing over **150 organizational leaders**.

The diversity of our grantees illustrates the success of our approach: **Half of the projects we fund are led by Jews of Color and 94 percent are led by someone with a marginalized identity overall** (including Jews of Color; Jews who are poor/working class; queer, trans, and/or gender non-conforming Jews; disabled or chronically ill Jews; and/or Mizrahi/Sephardi Jews). This representation is why our grantees have collectively reached **hundreds of thousands of Jewish people** across the country throughout the course of our grantmaking.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KEREN SOFFER-ROTH (she/her) is the co-executive director of the [Jewish Liberation Fund \(JLF\)](#). She is also continuing as the director of [Rise Up Initiative](#) until both organizations officially merge in July 2026.



Keren has over a decade of leadership experience in the Jewish social justice sector and nearly two decades in the government and nonprofit sectors. In her four years at Rise Up, she raised over \$2 million; doubled the organization's funder portfolio; launched its first collaborative grants program; increased grants for marginalized Jewish leaders by over 30 percent; and helped steward the organization's merger with JLF.

As a former senior organizer at [Jews For Racial & Economic Justice \(JFREJ\)](#), Keren co-founded the first ever Mizrahi & Sephardi Caucus in the country; deepened the organization's Jewish-Muslim solidarity work; diversified its cultural organizing strategy; built the largest education and organizing program in JFREJ's then-30 year history; and co-authored the groundbreaking resource, [Understanding Antisemitism: An Offering To Our Movement](#).

Throughout her career, Keren has trained over 5,000 people, developed over 550 leaders, and led over 30 teams. She is an avid home cook, dedicated cookbook collector, and intermediate potter. Keren is a proud Arab Jew with lifelong roots in Queens, NY, where she lives with her wife, Natasha, and their daughter.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AS OUR STATES OF EMERGENCY REACH A FEVER PITCH IN THE United States and across the globe, the disconnect between American Jews and the communal institutions responsible for representing them has never been greater. Our American-Jewish institutions have failed to adapt to the changing spiritual needs, political beliefs, and diverse make-up of our community—a failure that has contributed to a sharp decline in traditional forms of Jewish expression and record levels of disaffiliation among Jews from these same institutions. This includes Jewish foundations that have, in recent years, significantly decreased funding for Jewish work that does not fit their narrow definition of Jewish identity and engagement.

Yet even as this gap widens, hundreds of thousands of Jews are finding new and creative ways to practice Judaism, informed by an alert and moral engagement with the world. These Jews are driven by the foundational Jewish principle that all human beings are made in the image of the divine and a profound yearning for more values-aligned spiritual communities where they can lead whole, integrated lives. For six years, [Rise Up Initiative](#) has proudly resourced 60 inspiring organizations on the forefront of building these desperately needed communities—making our movements for inclusive, multiracial democracy more grounded and resilient, and bringing Judaism into the 21st century in the process. As we prepare to merge with the [Jewish Liberation Fund](#) in 2026, we offer this comprehensive report to the field, which includes an overview of our founding, strategy, and approach; a showcase of six incredible grantees; a summary of how secular and Jewish foundations shifted funding between 2019-2026; our reasons for merging with JLF; and recommendations for other funders about how we can ensure adequate funding for this field.

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“Hearing a queer rabbi say,
“This tradition is yours.
Judaism wants you,
changed everything.”

—*Anonymous Rise Up Grantee*

INTRODUCTION

“For many people, their politics are their religion right now. That’s because the Church doesn’t teach that racism is a sin. What happens when we don’t create faith communities that are nuanced, hold complexity, or see the whole person? People leave to seek that elsewhere.”¹

—[Reverend Jennifer Bailey](#), long-time leader in multifaith movements for justice and founding member of the Rise Up Leadership Team

SINCE ITS FOUNDING IN 2019, RISE UP INITIATIVE HAS BEEN ROOTED IN A TRANSFORMATIONAL [approach](#) to *tikkun olam*² that brings Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel’s concept of “prophetic consciousness” to life. In his seminal work *The Prophets*, Rabbi Heschel dives into the stories of various prophets from the Tanakh: agitational and confrontational figures who delivered urgent messages to the Jewish people about the need to alleviate suffering and end injustice. These prophets acted as direct messengers for G-d, communicating his rage and [anguish](#) over the state of humanity, which he saw as tragically complacent in the face of oppression.³

“Prophetic consciousness” is therefore the foundation for a moral engagement with the world, driven by a strong sense of justice and ethics. It is less about a state of mind and more about a state of spirit—keeping us wide awake to the broken world around us and grounded in our personal and collective responsibility in [piecing](#) it back together.

At Rise Up, we have always wondered what might become possible in our movements for inclusive, multiracial democracy if we pushed Rabbi Heschel’s framework of “prophetic consciousness” toward one of [prophetic imagination](#). To this end, we have consistently asked ourselves and our grantees the following questions:

- ◆ Who are our own modern-day prophets, and what have they been trying to tell us?
- ◆ What does our Jewish tradition—our ancient texts, liturgy, history—have to teach us about solving the biggest moral crises of our time?
- ◆ As we get swept up in the grief, terror, rage, despair, and shame that comes with living in our profoundly broken world today, how does our connection to a politicized spiritual community—rooted in organizing *and* ritual, in prayer *and* protest—help us cultivate hope, pride, [accountability](#), and resilience for the fight ahead?

Finally, we ask why, given all of this, does an experience of Jewish justice work that is authentically rooted in our ancestral wisdom and sacred spiritual practices still feel so rare? What’s getting in the way?

¹ Interview with Reverend Jennifer Bailey, Sept. 10, 2025.

² This Hebrew term means “repairing the world.”

³ While modern day debates abound about how — and whether — to gender G-d or divine spirit, Rabbi Heschel uses he/him pronouns when referring to G-d in his texts.

IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE LACK OF INTEGRATION BETWEEN justice and spirituality more broadly, we have to explore what interferes with our ability to even see ourselves as spiritual to begin with.

In the Pew Research Center’s 2023-24 study on the U.S. religious landscape, 29 percent of Americans reported [no religious affiliation](#)—a phenomenon known as the rise of the “[nones](#).”⁴ This trend of disaffiliation has global echoes; international [scholars](#) see it within a broader model of a long-term “secular transition,” in which the official shedding of religious identity is the final stage.

The American-Jewish community is far from immune to this phenomenon. In Pew’s study on Jewish Americans from 2020, **65 percent of Jews in the U.S. [reported](#) that nobody in their household was a member of a synagogue.** For decades, this decline in synagogue membership and formal religious affiliation more broadly has fueled tremendous anxiety among the Jewish establishment about “Jewish continuity”—a term that is colloquially understood to mean the longevity of the Jewish tradition among future generations, but is in fact rooted in [sexist expectations](#) of women’s reproductive role in perpetuating the Jewish community as well as fears about intermarriage. This panic has resulted in billions of dollars in [funding](#) focused on what the largest 250 American-Jewish foundations tend to refer to as “engagement”—activities which, as they describe it, “bring the least involved Jews to episodic gatherings of a Jewish flavor.”⁵

What does this decline in religious affiliation really represent? Is it as simple as what the Jewish establishment apparently believes—that dwindling synagogue membership is the ultimate sign of declining engagement with Jewish life? And if that argument were true, does attending the odd Shabbat dinner at a campus Hillel—or any other “episodic gathering of a Jewish flavor”⁶—qualify as anything beyond surface-level participation?

⁴ For more information about the disaffiliation of millennials in particular from religious institutions, see Harvard Divinity School’s [How We Gather](#) report, written by Angie Thurston and Casper ter Kuile in 2015. The report also analyzes the alternative communal organizations those same millennials have built to meet their generation’s evolving spiritual needs.

⁵ For more information about these funding trends, read Jack Wertheimer’s 2018 book, *Giving Jewish: How Big Funders Have Transformed American Jewish Philanthropy*. Wertheimer estimated that, in the years leading up to 2014, the top 250 American Jewish foundations had collectively made grants between \$900 million to \$1 billion a year for what they called Jewish “engagement.”

⁶ *Ibid.*

65% of Jews in the U.S. reported that nobody in their household was a member of a synagogue.

Writer and labor organizer Dania Rajendra puts it this way: “The majority of American Jews don’t belong to a synagogue anymore, and who can blame them? What’s on offer is not values-aligned, and also not particularly interesting, relevant, or deep.”⁷ While many American synagogues subscribe to a highly-circumscribed vision of what kind of politics belong behind the pulpit—rallying to the Israeli government’s defense, for example, while shying away from domestic social justice issues—there is in fact a growing number of spiritual communities across the country who foreground justice in their understanding of Jewish theology, a handful of which Rise Up has proudly funded.⁸

Rather than offering a vision for Judaism that is grounded in our long-held tradition of fighting for justice [wherever](#) we live, our legacy institutions take a different approach. At best, they look to increasingly superficial [signifiers](#) of “continuity” as proof of the “engagement” they seek. At worst, they demand [unquestioning](#) support for the Israeli government’s actions, most egregiously in Gaza following the October 7 attacks. Any expression of Jewishness that doesn’t resemble those signifiers—or accept those moral compromises—is rendered illegible and even disqualifying by those who claim to represent the majority of American Jews, and who also believe they have the power to divide our community into “good Jews” and “bad Jews.”

These false binaries between “good Jews” and “bad Jews,” however wrongheaded they may seem, have real and material consequences for our ability to identify and connect with Judaism—let alone see ourselves as spiritually grounded people. As Rabbi Andru Kahn of the [American Council for Judaism](#) writes, “Many, if not most, American Jews [...] will refer to themselves as ‘bad Jews’ for various gaps in their Jewish practice, be it rarely attending Shabbat or holiday services, not keeping kosher, not being able to read Hebrew, not having visited Israel, being an atheist, or marrying someone who is not Jewish.”⁹ What is then added to this list is that to oppose the destruction of Gaza or [support](#) the Movement for Black Lives also makes one a “bad Jew.”

⁷ Interview with Dania Rajendra, Sept. 30, 2025.

⁸ A number of synagogues exist that share this approach, including but not limited to [Kol Tzedek](#) in Philadelphia; [Hinenu](#) in Baltimore; [Keshet Pittsburgh](#) in Pittsburgh; [Kolot Chayenu](#) in New York; [Egalitarian Sephardi Mizrahi Kehilla](#) in New York; [Kadima Reconstructionist Community](#) in Seattle; [Tzedek Chicago](#) in Chicago; [Kol HaPanim](#) (online); and those involved with [Synagogues Rising](#).

⁹ To understand more about the “performance” of Judaism, read Rabbi Andru Kahn’s [essay](#) from 2019, “The Present and Future of Reform Aesthetics and Identity: Performadoxy and Emergent Custom.”

“I grew up observing everything sort of begrudgingly and then I went through my own journey of becoming politicized and feeling like there was no place for me in Judaism, so I pushed it away for years. Then I met other people who were doing this reclaiming work. Hearing a queer rabbi say: ‘This tradition is yours. Judaism wants you,’ changed everything. It has deeply supported my well-being to believe that I deserve to exist as my full self in this world. I brought Judaism back into my life by learning in community and with my chevruta and developing my own personal practice. This community is one of the spaces that I trust the most to hold people’s full humanity.”

—Anonymous Grantee,
[Rise Up Emerging Outcomes Study](#)

Moreover, these narrow definitions of what it means to be Jewish today often make us illegible even to ourselves. This self-consciousness and perceived lack of authenticity only fuel a sense of inevitable failure, which does the opposite of motivating people to deepen their relationship with a Judaism that always feels slightly out of reach. What we're left with is actually a decrease in Jewish literacy, which only repeats the cycle.

The American-Jewish establishment is not the sole authority on these determinations, even if it often portrays itself as such. Yet these legacy organizations' vast resources mean they are able to disproportionately fund Jewish life in America in service of these harmful narratives. In the face of these misdirected resources, Rise Up's grantees have built dozens of vibrant, diverse, and inclusive Jewish communities for those who have been left behind or even intentionally excluded from this reductive portrait of Jewish belonging—and they've done so on shoestring budgets.

All of this certainly begs the question: if we were to adopt a broader and deeper definition of what qualifies as Jewish engagement, expression, morality, and communal affiliation, how many more Jews might [report](#) a stronger connection to Judaism? How many might stop doubting whether they “qualify”? As this report will explore, Rise Up's grantees have demonstrated how many Jews are, in fact, desperate to lead a Jewish life on their own terms.

THE SAME PEW [STUDY](#) FROM 2020 REFERENCED ABOVE FOUND that among the Jews who go to synagogue no more than a few times a year, more than half said they also express their Judaism in other ways. Additional survey [data](#) from 2001 showed that for the majority of American Jews, a commitment to social justice is “intimately bound up with [the] construction of their Jewish identities.” A remarkable 94 percent from that same survey agreed with the statement, “When Jewish organizations engage in social justice work, it makes me feel proud to be a Jew.”¹⁰

While the involvement of Jews in various social movements is [nothing new](#), the existence of a more formal Jewish social justice sector is a feature of more recent decades, led by over 70 organizations across the country, including those [convened](#) by the [Jewish Social Justice](#)

¹⁰ The same [survey](#) data also showed that, when asked to choose the quality they consider most important to their Jewish identity, 47 percent chose “a commitment to social equality,” as opposed to 24 percent who picked “religious observance” and 13 percent who selected “support for Israel.”

These narrow definitions of what it means to be Jewish today often make us illegible even to ourselves.

“Most of us have experiences of feeling a sense of fully belonging somewhere in our Jewish lives, even if just for a moment. That feeling is what propels a lot of my work: I want to make that feeling possible for more people.”

—Anonymous Grantee,
[Rise Up Emerging Outcomes Study](#)

[Roundtable](#). These organizations offer meaningful pathways into Jewish life that are rooted in a vision of justice and equity for all people, and are often outside the conventional understanding of what the establishment considers formal “engagement.” Unlike many institutional Jewish spaces, which often cling to exclusionary and harmful markers of what counts as “Jewish,” these spaces are also more inclusive of Jews with marginalized identities—such as Jews of Color, Mizrahi/Sephardi Jews, and queer, trans, and/or gender non-conforming Jews—whose Judaism isn’t immediately questioned at the door. For many, these organizations are not only the central place in which they practice their Judaism; they are spiritual and political lifelines.

The existence of the Jewish social justice sector in itself is proof of a vibrant American-Jewish community in which a proliferation of ways to practice Judaism is the norm, and is the context from which Rise Up and most of our grantees emerged. Yet this field—which is ironically leading the charge on a new definition of “Jewish continuity” by drawing in hundreds of thousands of unaffiliated Jews,¹¹ while also setting the moral standard that the American-Jewish establishment has decisively abandoned since October 7—continues to be vastly underfunded by the Jewish Federations and foundations that instead focus significant resources on synagogues, day schools, summer camps, Hillels, and Birthright trips. This trend of highly circumscribed funding reproduces, once again, one “acceptable” way of being Jewish; anything that falls outside of that framework, like a vision for Judaism where our safety and thriving is bound up with that of our neighbors, doesn’t count—and doesn’t get funded.

At Rise Up, we believe that this flourishing of American-Jewish life today, where justice and Judaism are inextricably intertwined, has been a direct response to—and a salve for—the erasure, exclusion, and neglect caused by the very Jewish institutions whose job it is to help foster meaning and belonging in all of our lives. While the 2020 [Pew](#) study may not paint a simplistic picture of a community in decline, it does illustrate an important [generational shift](#), caused by many of these same issues. **Many Jewish people *are* disengaging from institutional Jewish life. But they are doing so at least in part because of the [consistent moral failures](#) of our communal leaders to stand against all injustice and model the courageous [leadership](#) we need and deserve.**

¹¹ This is data that Rise Up has regularly maintained over the course of our grantmaking through meetings with Rise Up grantees, applications, and mid- and end-of-year reports.

“We see Judaism as a liberatory and transformational tradition. We seek to cultivate more humanity, more interdependence, more solidarity, and more healing in our world by building synagogues that are accountable to movements for justice and to the broader national progressive landscape, while also being local hubs for relationships and community. We’ll know it’s working when there is a powerful Jewish spiritual wing to the politically progressive left.”

—Anonymous Grantee,
[Rise Up Emerging Outcomes Study](#)

Reflecting on this landscape, Zahara Zahav, a long-time organizer with [Jews For Racial & Economic Justice](#), and a founding member of the Rise Up Leadership Team, shared: “A lot of people do feel the urge to turn their backs on Judaism right now. But the opposite is also happening: others are digging in deeper than ever. Is their shame too great to continue holding onto this [religion]? Or are they hungrier than they’ve ever been to build a working relationship with Judaism, where they’re called into Torah, prayer, and community?”¹²

Rise Up’s grantees show just how much hunger exists for a Judaism that is defined by justice. While many Jews today actively reject the morally compromised version of Judaism they’re being offered by the majority of their communal institutions, not all of them are rejecting Judaism outright. Many of them are writing a new chapter in Judaism’s story that is, in fact, grounded in some of the oldest Jewish values: that all human beings are made *b’tzelem elohim*, in the image of G-d, and that the principle of *pikuach nefesh*, saving a life, supersedes virtually all other commandments. **These Jews rightfully see themselves as fighting not only for the future of the American-Jewish community, but for its soul.**

All of us, regardless of formal religious affiliation, live our lives in search of greater meaning, purpose, and belonging. In the absence of enough houses of worship where honoring the sanctity of all human life is foregrounded as fundamental to leading a moral and ethical life, where will we find it?

At Rise Up, we, alongside our grantees, have sought to answer that very question.

¹² Interview with Zahara Zahav, Aug. 7, 2025.

PROJECT FOUNDING

RISE UP LAUNCHED IN THE FALL OF 2019 THANKS TO GENEROUS SEED FUNDING FROM THE [NATHAN Cummings Foundation](#) (NCF), through their former Voice, Creativity, and Culture portfolio. The three key figures in the project's founding deserve ample recognition: [Isaac Luria](#), NCF's former director of the Voice, Creativity, and Culture portfolio, current senior director of Place-Based Initiatives, and member of the Rise Up Leadership Team; [Shifra Bronznick](#), a strategist to social sector networks, organizations, and leaders, and member of the Rise Up Leadership Team; and [Claudia Horwitz](#), Rise Up's initial lead researcher, founding director between 2019–2022, and thought leader on spiritual activism.¹

Rise Up was Isaac Luria's vision. As Shifra describes it, "he had the *cheyshek*—the yearning—to see it born."² The seeds for the project were planted in 2018, during Donald Trump's first term in office, amidst an outpouring of resistance to racial injustice, growing antisemitism, assaults on democracy, and rising global authoritarianism. From Isaac's point of view, Jews had a critical role to play in movements for inclusive, multiracial democracy, and were at risk of being undermined by internal division, disagreement on political analysis, and lack of accountability regarding racial justice and equity in the Jewish social justice sector.³ "It was going to be a very challenging couple of decades," he recalled, "and grounding in Jewish spiritual and ancestral wisdom was going to be increasingly necessary" if we had any chance of fighting back and doing so effectively.⁴

Even then it was clear that work like this, at the intersection of justice and spirituality, already existed. But it had not yet been named as such, and identifying whether it would help the field to invest in it specifically would require a more formal needs assessment. So Isaac brought on Shifra as an advisor and coach, and Claudia as the initial field researcher.

Shifra, one of the earliest leaders of the Jewish social justice sector in the U.S., had already worked as a principal investigator for action research projects at the Nathan Cummings Foundation a decade before Rise Up was even an idea. Her influential 2008 report, *Visioning Justice and the American Jewish Community*, co-authored with Didi Goldenhar and commissioned by NCF, resulted in the creation of the [Jewish Social Justice Roundtable](#), which still convenes many of the organizations in the field to this day. The report outlined the strategic opportunities and unique challenges of bridging Judaism and justice, at the same time that it revealed some of the spiritual gaps that already existed among organizations in that era.⁵

¹ Before leading Rise Up, Claudia Horwitz wrote *The Spiritual Activist: Practices to Transform Your Life, Your Work, and Your World* (2002), which made her particularly suited to leading a project focused on justice and spirituality.

² Interview with Shifra Bronznick, Sept. 10, 2025.

³ Interview with Isaac Luria, Aug. 21, 2025.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Shifra Bronznick and Dodi Goldenhar write in their 2008 report, *Visioning Justice and the American Jewish Community*, that meaningfully integrating spirituality into justice work was less common for Jewish social justice organizations. "While many organizations include language about the centrality of Jewish values or even link their programs to Jewish holidays and rituals," they write, "much of the rhetoric feels grafted onto the mission as an afterthought."

The work to name the modern Jewish social justice sector occurred as religious [disaffiliation](#) was on the rise (see Introduction). This complex phenomenon meant that **the Jewish social justice sector had to step in to fill a tremendous spiritual gap that had been created by the failures of the Jewish establishment.** As thousands of Jewish people entered these social justice organizations with profoundly unmet spiritual needs, many groups had to function as both [spiritual and political](#) homes—addressing a gap they had never signed up to fill.⁶ This challenge laid the groundwork for the emergence of a rich tapestry of spiritually-infused justice organizations, which went on to inspire the creation of Rise Up and were among our first grantees—organizations like [Kirva](#), [Dimensions](#), [Let My People Sing!](#), and [Taproot](#). But this pressure also clarified that, while some organizations were well-positioned to incorporate spiritual teachings into their work for social change, not all were equipped to do so or even interested in doing so. Both of these realities led Isaac and Shifra to wonder what would be possible if this emergent sector were to be named, celebrated, and sufficiently resourced.

In 2018, Claudia was brought in as the initial field researcher. Her goal was to better understand the current landscape, gauge reactions to and need for the proposed project, shape initial hypotheses and strategic approaches, and synthesize learnings from leaders in the field.⁷ She held 30 in-depth conversations with key leaders across the sector, in addition to a few regional gatherings—spanning various religious backgrounds, types of work, and institutional affiliation. The majority of those conversations were intentionally held with those who would not become beneficiaries of a fund, in order to maintain as much objectivity as possible.

Some of the biggest takeaways from those conversations included calls from leaders to:

- ◆ Continue funding the Jewish social justice movement’s organizing, infrastructure, and wider ecology, as well as the long-term internal and spiritual capacity of Jewish leaders engaged in justice work
- ◆ Steep movement work in the deep well of Judaism—its rich lineage of sacred texts, prophetic teachings, ritual, and song—and ground movement leadership in soulful and liberatory Jewish tradition and practices

⁶ Interview with Zahara Zahav, Aug. 7, 2025.

⁷ Interview with Claudia Horwitz, Aug. 22, 2025.

The Jewish social justice sector had to step in to fill a tremendous spiritual gap that had been created by the failures of the Jewish establishment.

- ◆ Support Jewish justice leaders in deepening their analyses on antisemitism, racism, economic inequality, and other forms of oppression, and on the ways they feed on one another
- ◆ Help Jewish organizers better understand their relationship to non-Jewish communities and make catalytic investments in the leadership of more marginalized Jews (Jews of Color, LGBTQ Jews, working class Jews, and others)
- ◆ Recognize that a range of experiments are already underway to make this well of resources more accessible and impactful for more people in our community and our movement⁸

The need for resources was clear, but there wasn't a clear-cut way to support the work through NCF. As Isaac put it, "NCF wasn't going to be a good funder at a \$10,000-\$25,000 level. We're designed to make larger grants, which means moving more slowly and working with organizations that are more established. We needed to help set up an initiative run by someone else who deeply understood the field and could be responsive to its evolving needs."⁹

And so, in 2019, Rise Up Initiative was born, with an initial grant from NCF of \$900,000 over two years. As an intermediary funder, our overall goal would be to strengthen movements for justice by building the spiritual and internal capacity of Jewish leaders. We would do so through funding, coaching, and convening a range of experimental initiatives at the intersection of Jewish tradition and justice movements, helping to amplify and synthesize their fruit. The hope was that by shining a light on this work, we would enable the scaling up of its collective impact on individuals, organizations, and the ecosystem at large.

⁸ Claudia Horwitz, "Rise Up Launch: Process and Text," Aug. 1, 2019. Internal Rise Up document.

⁹ Interview with Isaac Luria, Aug. 21, 2025.

THEORY OF CHANGE

“A hundred years from now, when our great, great-grandchildren look back on this era from their already-liberated world, what stories will they tell about us—their ancestors? What are the most important things for us to leave behind, so that we can be their constellations for getting through the hardest times?”

—[Aurora Levins Morales](#), *writer, artist, and Rise Up grantee*¹

AT RISE UP, OUR THEORY OF CHANGE IS SIMPLE. WE BELIEVE THAT our Jewish justice movement would be more powerful, effective, and resilient with deeper spiritual grounding.

Given our history of oppression and marginalization, Jewish people have a unique role and vested interest in fighting against the oppression of all people, specifically as Jews. Our rich traditions provide a timeless blueprint for us to draw on as inspiration in moments of crisis, practically equipping us with ancient tools for our present-day struggles. Grounding in this tradition as we engage in justice work also enables us to be more visible as Jews in multiracial movements. In a time when many inside and outside our Jewish community seek to divide Jews from our neighbors, this visibility makes our solidarity with others—and their solidarity with us—all the more undeniable. Beyond these strategic benefits, cultivating deep spiritual grounding is also fundamental to maintaining perspective, patience, and hope for the long haul. In a time of unprecedented global humanitarian crises, climate catastrophe, racism, and economic inequality—when many of us so often feel numb, depleted, terrified, and hopeless—the cultivation of this internal capacity is critical.

In our role as a funder, we at Rise Up repeatedly hear from organizers, artists, cultural workers, and movement leaders that the community

¹ Conversation with Aurora Levins Morales, Nov. 6, 2025.

We believe that our Jewish justice movement would be more powerful, effective, and resilient with deeper spiritual grounding.

events they host which are rooted in art, culture, and ritual are the ones that “crack people open” and “make them weep”—enabling their group to move past numbness and truly feel, in an embodied way, the depth of their grief.² In moments of profound pain and heartbreak, participating in Jewish rituals that served our ancestors over thousands of years has the potential to stir something deep within us—reminding us that we’re not alone, and that many Jews before us lived through and went on to survive their own version of inconceivable struggle. **Experiences like these connect us to the faith that another world is possible, and that staying in these struggles is worth it. Our faith is, in fact, a crucial part of what makes that world possible.**

But we cannot achieve any of this without leaders—or modern-day prophets—to guide us through the overlapping crises of our time. At Rise Up, we believe it is long since time to invest in a new generation of bold, courageous, and prophetic leadership that actually represents the true breadth, depth, and diversity of our American-Jewish community today.

Experiences like these connect us to the faith that another world is possible, and that staying in these struggles is worth it. Our faith is, in fact, a crucial part of what makes that world possible.

² Conversation with Zahara Zahav, Aug. 7, 2025; Conversation with Aurora Levins Morales, Nov. 6, 2026.

FUNDING STRATEGY

RISE UP'S STRATEGY HAS BEEN TO FUND TRANSFORMATIVE WORK that integrates deep Jewish wisdom and practice, centers the margins of our community, and drives progressive action for social change. We have intentionally invested in work that:

- ◆ Sits clearly and explicitly in an antiracist framework and centers the leadership of Jews of Color, and Jews who are queer, trans, and/or gender non-conforming, poor or working class, Mizrahi/Sephardi, and/or disabled
- ◆ Increases spiritual and religious Jewish resources for movement-building and movement leaders in a way that helps build our collective power
- ◆ Strengthens the moral voice and prophetic consciousness that Jewish leaders bring to our intersectional movements for justice
- ◆ Supports the emergence of a new and robust spiritual landscape that better meets the evolving needs of the American-Jewish community

This focused strategy has meant that:

Half the projects we fund are led by Jews of Color

94% of the projects we fund are led by someone with a marginalized identity¹

Our grantees have collectively reached hundreds of thousands of Jews across the country²

“Rise Up was the first institution in the Jewish world to say: we want to see you bring this concept into being and we trust you to do it. We would not exist without it.”

—*Rabbi Alana Alpert,*
[Synagogues Rising](#)

¹ Within this category we include Jews of Color and Jews who are poor/working class; queer, trans, and/or gender non-conforming; disabled or chronically ill; and/or Mizrahi/Sephardi.

² This number is our best estimate of the total reach among all of our grantees, based on data from the final year we funded them. We calculate this number by tracking organizations' total number of event attendees, email subscribers, and social media followers in a 12 month period. We recognize that there is overlap between organizations' email lists, event attendees, and social media followers, and some of the same people will participate in events or subscribe to more than one organization within the same year, which leads to inevitable duplication. However, they are still uniquely participating in both of those organizations, which means each of those organizations still has their own respective reach number, regardless of the duplicate participant. Ultimately, we believe in demonstrating how powerful and effective our grantees are at reaching more people than they get credit for, and share this data point with the necessary context and caveats.

While we made more broad-scale investments across the sector in our early years, including in small organizations with budgets under \$500,000 and mid-size organizations with budgets up to nearly \$2 million, we pivoted in 2023 to invest more specifically in early-stage organizations.³ We made this decision for a few key reasons. First, our own budget at Rise Up has been, on average, around \$500,000, including both grantmaking and overhead. It was therefore logical for us to prioritize funding organizations at or below our own budget size. Second, the demonstrated need was notably higher for smaller organizations; the majority of them had fewer institutional funders, and many had none. Not only would our smaller **average grant size of \$12,500** go farther in a smaller organization, but our strategic investment would also inspire others to fund their work.

Kirstie Kimball at [Build Power Strategies](#)—who has provided consistent fundraising training and coaching for dozens of our grantees since 2023⁴—shared:

“There is an exceptional amount of work happening on shoestring budgets, mostly led by volunteers. These smaller groups aren't seen by bigger funders as having substantial reach on their own, but as a bloc of Rise Up grantees, they do. While I generally believe that larger grants to fewer groups are preferable because it allows funders to have deep impact in one area, sometimes choosing to fund ten groups at \$10,000 each, rather than one group at \$100,000, means **we're investing in the diversity of spiritual homes we need**. Each of these unique organizations reaches a highly specific group of people—like young Asian Jews, or queer Jews—who wouldn't be able to access a traditional Jewish community without it.”⁵

Rise Up has been well-positioned to incubate projects across the field, many of them without proof of concept, and see how they blossom before referring them to other streams of funding. Often, we have absorbed the initial risk on an early-stage project before larger funding bodies have been able to fund them. We are incredibly proud that:

³ It is important to note that due to this shift in our criteria starting in 2023, there are organizations on our list of all-time grantees (see Appendix) that have budgets larger than \$500,000. Those organizations became ineligible for funding starting in 2023, though most of them had already been funded by Rise Up for three years.

⁴ We share more about our fundraising training and coaching in later sections of this report.

⁵ Interview with Kirstie Kimball, Sept. 30, 2025.

“Some funders say to us: Once you have proven results, we can fund you. They don't want to take a risk on a new project, so it's been a hill to climb. But Rise Up was our first funder. **You took a risk on us and it's the reason we were able to secure other funding.**”

—[Josh Feldman, R&R: The rest of our lives](#)

“Rise Up helped me take an idea and turn it into a non-profit that normalizes Jewish spiritual leaders of color, which helps offset some of the racism that we experience. The funding I received helps me create a community led by BIPOC Jews where all who want to come are radically welcomed and included, and we embrace diversity in our community.”

—[Rabbi Sandra Lawson, Kol HaPanim](#)

Nearly **40%** of grantees report that Rise Up was their first institutional funder⁶

Over **55%** of Rise Up grantees report that Rise Up was among their first three funders⁷

While it is impossible to accurately calculate whether a grant from Rise Up directly correlates to a subsequent grant from another funder, we have heard anecdotally from many of our grantees that our funding has helped make other funding possible.⁸ Whether it was our own investment in supporting their project to grow and making it possible for a project to gather evidence of their impact for others; our consistent capacity-building support around fundraising through intensive training and one-on-one coaching; or the direct introductions we made to other funders in the field—our goal has always been to increase overall funding for the field.

“Rise Up was among our earliest funders. This allowed us to develop the ‘proof of concept’ needed to secure other funding.”

—*Rabbi Kendell Pinkney,*
[The Workshop](#)

“Rise Up’s grant was the first we received after five long years of building our spiritual community. **It was a vote of confidence, saying, ‘we believe in you,’ and it gave us a collective boost of confidence to take greater leaps.**”

—*Kohenet Keshira*
[haLev Fife, Kesher Pittsburgh](#)

⁶ This is data that Rise Up has regularly maintained over the course of our grantmaking through meetings with Rise Up grantees, applications, and mid- and end-of-year reports.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ We share more quotes and examples which speak to this trend in later sections of this report.

GRANTMAKING APPROACH

At Rise Up, we first and foremost hold ourselves to a model of [ethical grantmaking](#). Given the high level of opacity and numerous barriers to entry that exist within philanthropy, we have strived to create a grantmaking process that is clearer, less burdensome, and less restrictive for our grantees.

The following values have been at the heart of how we approach this aspect of our work:

EQUITY

We prioritize the distribution of resources based on our core commitment to funding projects led by those on the margins of our society.

ACCESSIBILITY

We strive to make our grantmaking application as simple and accessible as possible, knowing that grantees generally have to spend too much time applying for funding, which takes time away from doing their actual work. When Rise Up has needed to gather data from grantees for our own fundraising, we've intentionally woven those requests into our annual application process, rather than creating multiple touchpoints throughout the year when grantees are doing that labor.

TRANSPARENCY

We have always been clear with grantees about our eligibility requirements, decision-making criteria, and funding limits. Instead of doing an open LOI process, we pre-screen grantees based on mission and project alignment to ensure all grantees who formally apply to Rise Up are strong fits for funding.

FLEXIBILITY

When grantees experience changing conditions in their work, shifts in staffing, health issues, or anything else that would get in the way of completing their goals or submitting materials on time, we offer, within reason, flexibility around grant expectations and deadlines. We do this when a grantee has stayed in active communication with us, with exceptions made for emergencies.

NIMBLENESS

In order to remain responsive to evolving needs across the field, we have prioritized using a consultative decision-making process in our grantmaking, rather than a unilateral or consensus-based approach. This enables us to move grants twice a year.

LONGEVITY

While our own fundraising challenges have made it difficult to make formal multi-year investments, we have only funded organizations we feel confident we would fund for up to three years. This commitment has required us to build a substantial budgetary reserve to ensure we are never unable to follow through on that commitment to our grantees.

All of these values have guided us in creating a clear and simple grantmaking process that reduces the burden on grantees, sets them up for success, and distributes resources quickly. Given the incredibly small size of our staff throughout the history of our project—**including one part-time project director and a part-time project administrator**—we have had to discern the best way to maximize money given to organizations with as little staffing as possible. While we’ve admired and taken real inspiration from the work that others in the field have been doing to create more robust and participatory grantmaking processes, such as [Third Wave Fund](#), [North Star Fund](#), and [Jewish Liberation Fund](#), our process has been decidedly smaller and intentionally consultative—rather than consensus-driven or unilaterally decided by the project director.

Throughout the course of our grantmaking, **we have been able to fund the vast majority of interested projects who have clearly fit our funding criteria**, given our highly-specific focus on funding spiritually-rooted Jewish justice work. If our scope and set of criteria were broader, as they are for many of the funders referenced above, we would need a much more intensive process in order to properly discern which organizations are the strongest fit.

“The first funding I got for my project, *Rimonim*, was because Claudia called and asked if I was interested in applying. I told her that I was too sick and tired to go through the formal application process, so she told me to dictate it all to her over the phone. That’s what we did. Then, the Jewish Liberation Fund also decided to fund the project. That’s why this book is in the world.”

—*Aurora Levins Morales*,
[Rimonim Liturgy](#)
[Project](#)

INVESTMENT BEYOND FUNDING

“I often think about when Moses struck the [selah](#) rock impatiently. The question for all of us trying to advance social change is: how do you cultivate patience for the journey?”

—[Shifra Bronznick](#), *Rise Up Leadership Team Member*

FAR BEYOND SIMPLY PROVIDING GRANTS, THE SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT WE MAKE IN OUR grantees’ leadership skills, spiritual resilience, and long-term organizational sustainability sets us apart from the majority of funders. We know just how critical moving resources is, and have always understood our primary role as a funder to be distributing as much funding as we possibly can. However, we’ve also strived for a multi-pronged approach, not only funding transformative work but also supporting leaders one-on-one, strengthening the capacities of their organizations, and fostering movement-building across the sector. It is so often the case that individual leaders will influence more than one organization; an investment in one person today can determine the strength of another organization well into the future. Over the past six years, **we have invested in the leadership development and spiritual resilience of over 150 organizational leaders through our capacity-building programs.**¹

Communities of Practice

In our project’s early years, the primary way we made this investment was through our **Communities of Practice** (CoP), where grantees met in cohorts based on the years they were funded to deepen relationships across the sector, share various skills and capacities, and integrate emerging wisdom through shared and distinct work. These CoPs were always fundamental to the way we understood our role investing directly in the spiritual and internal capacities of the leaders we’ve been incredibly proud to fund. These meetings were opportunities for them to have dedicated spaces to talk about challenges leaders normally face alone, such as struggling to lead—as anyone would—through a global pandemic, and fighting isolation through deeper connection and praxis. Guiding questions for these spaces included:

- ◆ What is our Torah for these times?
- ◆ How can we make ritual pedagogy engaging in an online setting?
- ◆ What does Jewish leadership development that’s rooted in racial equity look like?

Offering our Communities of Practice was also the primary way we communicated to grantee leaders—in addition to funding their work—that we deeply cared about their spiritual well-being and longevity.

This spirit of collaboration is something we’ve intentionally nurtured through our work, and the CoPs were the

¹ This is data that Rise Up has regularly maintained over the course of our grantmaking through meetings with Rise Up grantees, applications, and mid- and end-of-year reports.

original starting point for that cross-pollination. Over the last six years, we've heard countless stories from our grantees about how they've hosted events with another grantee, completely unprompted by us or any of our funding requirements. In fact, we've calculated that a remarkable **96 percent of Rise Up grantees collaborated with another grantee throughout the course of our grantmaking.**²

Collaborative Grants

Over the years, as our portfolio of grantees grew, and in an effort to remain responsive to our grantees' evolving needs and clear desire to work more closely together, we launched our first-ever **Collaborative Grants Program** in 2024, with a slate of four shared grants across eight organizations, totaling \$35,000. This program was a natural culmination of everything that worked about our Communities of Practice and a testament to their necessary evolution: it was an opportunity for our grantees to continue sharing successes and troubleshooting challenges, and thinking big picture together about how shared work might catalyze the rest of the field—except this time with more dedicated funding behind it. Our Collaborative Grants Program is still in its early stages, but our first year bore fruit that we know will have ongoing ripple effects across the sector, including the following work:

- ◆ [SVARA: A Traditionally Radical Yeshiva](#) and [Ammud: Jews of Color Torah Academy](#) convened their collective faculties to explore new opportunities for pedagogical alignment, techniques for nurturing affinity spaces, and best practices for teaching self-directed adults
- ◆ [Let My People Sing!](#) and the [Egalitarian Sephardi Mizrahi Kehilla](#) co-led a 15-week course where they trained 47 new song leaders in Sephardi *nusach*³
- ◆ [Uri L'Tzedek](#) and [Jewish Coalition for Immigrant Justice NW](#) co-hosted an advocacy summit and co-led a digital campaign focused on engaging Jewish communities in immigrant justice movements
- ◆ [Edot: Midwest](#) and [Der Tkhines Projekt](#) co-hosted a coalition tour honoring [Madame Goldye Steiner](#), nurturing new and existing Black/Jewish communities in the process

² *Ibid.*

³ This Hebrew word refers to musical melodies for Jewish prayer.

96% of Rise Up grantees collaborated with another grantee throughout the course of our grantmaking.

“For many of us queer Jews of Color, having these affinity spaces is extremely formative. I had never been in a Jewish space before with people who were totally like me and speak my languages and have similar upbringings and experiences. No one questioned if I was Jewish.... [Participating in these spaces] really showed me that I do have a place [here], I can own this, and I can learn more.”

—Anonymous Grantee,
[Rise Up Emerging Outcomes Study](#)

Fundraising Training and Coaching

At Rise Up we believe that spiritually-grounded leaders make for spiritually-grounded organizations. We also believe that the more leaders we train in fundamental skills like fundraising, the stronger and more sustainable their organizations become. That's why we've invested heavily in skills-based and capacity-building training for our grantees each year, including two six-month series on Resource Mobilization with [Lauren Spokane](#) in 2021 and 2022; two eight-week Fundraising Bootcamps with Kirstie Kimball at [Build Power Strategies](#) in 2023 and 2025; and tailored, one-on-one fundraising coaching for each grantee in tandem with group learning. These training and coaching spaces have been significant learning and support opportunities for organizations around fundamental fundraising skills that are too often gate-kept and hard to access, such as:

- ◆ Creating a culture of fundraising
- ◆ How to prospect for new funding sources
- ◆ The pros and cons of institutional versus major donor fundraising
- ◆ Building a grassroots fundraising strategy and engaging small-dollar donors
- ◆ Running your first membership drive
- ◆ Gathering data about your impact
- ◆ Shaping a clear and compelling case for support
- ◆ Basics of grant writing
- ◆ How to plan and run a meeting with a funder or donor
- ◆ Making the ask
- ◆ Knowing when you're "right-sized" as an organization
- ◆ Building new systems when your budget rapidly increases
- ◆ Finding new sources of funding when your budget is unexpectedly halved
- ◆ Rapid response funding for security after facing threats

In analyzing pre- and post-training surveys shared with our grantees, we know that their confidence before and after these trainings on topics such as general fundraising, how to lead major donor meetings, and grant writing increased by over 30 percent.⁴

⁴ This number is calculated based on self-identified levels of confidence in specific training topics before and after each session.

Rise Up grantee budgets grow an average of **125% after three or more years of being funded by us.**

“The fundraising training you offered was the most helpful professional development I’ve had since I became a first-time executive director. I walked away with the hard skills I really needed as someone without a fundraising background to do my job better.”

—*Brady Gill, JYCA*

This intentional investment in the fundraising capacities of our grantees has been a fundamental example of our impact in the field. While it is impossible to accurately calculate whether fundraising training and coaching hosted by Rise Up directly correlates to increased fundraising skill among a leader, and therefore increased fundraising success for their organization, we do know that **Rise Up grantee budgets grow an average of 125 percent after three or more years of being funded by us.**⁵ At the very least, we know that our concrete support is part of making that tremendous growth possible, based on grantee testimonials⁶ like the following:

“It is great that these funders understand the need for this type of learning and that not all small organizations have development professionals leading their fundraising work.”

“Lots of funders talk about the importance of capacity building... these folks actually fund it. This will exponentially increase our organizational capacity and ability to leverage volunteer time on fundraising more efficiently.”

“While receiving grant funding is obviously important, the fact that Rise Up invested in *me*, as an individual professional, is incredibly meaningful. It speaks to their trust in their grantees and in our leadership. I can't think of a better way to invest in our movement for the future than with grant dollars and professional development for our leaders.”

As Rise Up prepares to merge with the Jewish Liberation Fund in the summer of 2026, we have also made sure to provide additional coaching from Build Power Strategies for our grantees. This includes a two-hour group coaching session for all grantees, past and present, as well as one-to-one coaching with Kirstie Kimball to explore additional funding opportunities after the merger. This ties back to accountability as one of our core values: as a funder, we want to ensure that our grantees are always set up for success.

⁵ This number is calculated by taking an organization's budget in the first year we fund them and comparing it to their budget after three or more years of Rise Up funding. The longer we have funded a project, the higher this number gets. We used to share this statistic as: “Our grantees' budgets grow an average of 83%,” but that number included organizations we had funded only once, and those we currently fund, who have only been on our roster for only two years. Those organizations have had considerably less time to grow their budgets, which is why we updated this statistic recently.

⁶ These quotes were gathered by Build Power Strategies, which has led our fundraising coaching and training for grantees since 2023.

“Beyond supporting our fellowship for Latinx Jewish leaders working on immigrant justice, Rise Up has also provided invaluable guidance on fundraising and organizational sustainability, helping us strengthen our internal processes, enhance our capacity-building efforts, and ensure the long-term viability of our programs. From supporting our fellows, to expanding our outreach to new Hillel chapters across the country, Rise Up's funding has been the cornerstone of our success in advancing social justice and building a more equitable world.”

—*Eddie Chavez Calderon,*
Uri L'Tzedek

Organizational Development

In the fall of 2024, we hosted an eight-week Organizational Development Training Series in partnership with the Jewish Liberation Fund, after years of gathering and analyzing data on our grantees' additional needs beyond fundraising. We curated an incredible lineup focused on the most highly-requested topics with some of the most sought-after experts in our field. We explored Organizational Strategy with [Ginna Green](#); Ethical Leadership and Group Decision-Making with [Pippi Kessler](#); Addressing Conflict with [Kiran Nigam](#); Building a Liberatory Organizational Culture and Team with [Imani Chapman](#) and [Franny Silverman](#); and Equitable Governance Structures with Rachel Gottfried-Clancy.

Even during a trying presidential election season, we had over 30 organizations participate in the series and, as noted above, tracked that their confidence in all of these topics increased by over 30 percent as a result of the workshops.⁷ Unsurprisingly, addressing conflict was a topic our grantees had the least confidence in going in, and the highest confidence in after leaving the session. After the series, we continued the conversation by offering more free coaching for grantees on topics related to organizational development with the trainers we hired for the series.

⁷ This number is calculated based on self-identified levels of confidence in specific training topics before and after each session.

“The investment in my leadership and community by Rise Up has gone so far beyond the funding. Once I was in the Community of Practice and meeting others doing similar work, getting to share successes and challenges, I started to feel so much less isolated. It has completely elevated the quality of the work I’ve been doing with my congregants, because those spaces have instilled a greater sense of confidence in my own leadership and given me opportunities to partner with others. The lessons I’ve learned in those cherished spaces regularly make it into my monthly *dvars*.”⁸

—*Kohenet Keshira*
haLev Fife, Keshet
Pittsburgh

⁸ This Hebrew word refers to a “Dvar Torah,” which literally translates to “word of Torah.” Our spiritual leaders and those knowledgeable about our religious texts share reflections about how each week’s Torah portion contains meaning for our lives today.

RISE UP: BY THE NUMBERS

\$2,000,000+
moved to **60** organizations
in 6+ years

50%
of grantee projects
led by Jews of Color

Our grantees have
reached **hundreds of
thousands** of Jewish
people nationally

94%
of grantee projects
led by someone
with a marginalized
identity

150+
organizational leaders developed

Our grantees hosted
3,300+
events in the years
we funded them

125%
budget growth for grantees
after 3 or more years of funding

55%+
of grantees report Rise Up was
among their earliest funders

96%
of grantees
collaborated with
each other

GRANTEE OVERVIEW

IN THE PAST SIX YEARS, RISE UP HAS MOVED OVER \$2 MILLION TO 60 INSPIRING ORGANIZATIONS.

Many of our grantees are based in cities with smaller Jewish populations, such as Atlanta, Hawaii, Cleveland, Portland, Chicago, Detroit, New Mexico, Minneapolis, and Milwaukee. For more information on our grantees, including a comprehensive list unlike the sampling below, see this report's Appendix.

Our grantees' work can be grouped into the following overlapping categories.¹ While each grantee fits into more than one of these, they are grouped by their primary focus area.²

NEW SPIRITUAL COMMUNITIES

Meeting the spiritual needs of a subset of the American-Jewish population that is otherwise not being met by our existing Jewish communal institutions

TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Offering innovative, experimental, and spiritually-rooted methods for training and supporting the next generation of prophetic and courageous Jewish leaders, especially those who are marginalized from Jewish spaces and have less access to this development

ART, CULTURE, AND RITUAL

Making our movements more inviting, emotionally-resonant, and rooted in our lineage through art, prayer, song, liturgy, poetry, performance, and many other forms

TEXT STUDY AND EMBODIED PRACTICE

Increasing access to a meaningful and embodied engagement with ancient Jewish texts and practices for those who are most marginalized from the majority of our community's educational spaces

SPIRIT-ROOTED MOVEMENT-BUILDING

Leveraging sacred Jewish practices — and tending to the long-term spiritual resilience of our leaders — in order to strengthen our collective movements for inclusive, multiracial democracy

¹ This list builds off of important research Rise Up published in 2021 through our [Emerging Outcomes Study](#), which was led by Tobin Belzer and supported by Rise Up's founding director, Claudia Horwitz. Since this report was published nearly five years ago, we have made updates to both categories and categorizations. It may not be immediately obvious why a particular organization fits within each category, or whether they do work that is clearly spiritually-focused. It is important to note that organizations have often submitted sub-projects for funding consideration, and they would have only been funded by Rise Up if they met our criteria. For consistency, we list our grantees by organizational name, not by sub-project.

² This list does not include every single organization we have ever funded (it is approximately half our total number of grantees), but is rather a sample to demonstrate these categories. All of the grantees we have ever funded are listed in this report's Appendix.

NEW SPIRITUAL COMMUNITIES

Egalitarian Sephardi Mizrahi Kehilla of NY

Jews in ALL Hues

Keshet Pittsburgh

Kol HaPanim

Linke Fligl

Mizrahi Collective

TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Edot Midwest Regional Jewish Diversity
Collaborative

Jewish Bridge Project

Jewtina y Co.

Kirva

New Jewish Culture Fellowship

The Workshop

Tiyuv Initiative

Uri L'Tzedek

ART, CULTURE, AND RITUAL

Ayin Press

Der Tkhines Projekt

Jewish Studio Project

Let My People Sing!

The LUNAR Collective

Queer Nigun Project

Rimonim Liturgy Project

The Illuminated Hilchot Teshuvah

Ya Ghorbati

TEXT STUDY AND EMBODIED PRACTICE

Ammud: Jews of Color Torah Academy

Disability Justice Torah Circle

Matir Asurim: Jewish Care Network for
Incarcerated People

Mitsui Collective

Nonbinary Hebrew Project

Palestinian Voices Study Group

SVARA: A Traditionally Radical Yeshiva

Shel Maala

SPIRIT-ROOTED MOVEMENT-BUILDING

Achvat Amim

Dimensions Educational Consulting Inc.

Jewish Coalition for Immigrant Justice NW

Jewish Youth for Community Action

Joyous Justice

Shleimut

Synagogues Rising

Taproot

Tzedek Lab

GRANTEE SHOWCASE

EGALITARIAN SEPHARDI MIZRAHI KEHILLA OF NYC

GRANTEE CATEGORY	NEW SPIRITUAL COMMUNITIES ¹
TOTAL AMOUNT FUNDED	\$37,140
PEOPLE REACHED PER YEAR	1,656
BUDGET GROWTH	\$7,000 IN 2022 TO \$79,000 IN 2025

RISE UP WAS THEIR FIRST FUNDER

[The Egalitarian Sephardi Mizrahi Kehilla](#) is a women-, queer-, and trans-led Sephardi spiritual home in New York City. There are only a handful of egalitarian Sephardi synagogues in the world; this is the **only one that is led by women, queer, and trans folks, making it a first of its kind globally**. This community hosts Jewish ritual events during the High Holidays and for Mimouna every year, each time hosting hundreds of people who otherwise do not attend services elsewhere. Beyond just providing a spiritual space, the Egalitarian Sephardi Mizrahi Kehilla also invests in the long-term skill and confidence with which Mizrahi/Sephardi women, queer, and trans folks lead Sephardi *nusach*²—something they have been excluded from accessing in the majority of non-egalitarian Sephardi communities. This dedicated investment in skilling up their lay leaders has created a vibrant co-led spiritual space, where hundreds get to reclaim lost languages, rituals, and cultures. Rise Up has supported this community from its inception, and also awarded a Collaborative Grant between their project and Let My People Sing! to train 47 Mizrahi/Sephardi leaders in Sephardi liturgy.

¹ Our grantees' work can be grouped into multiple categories, referenced in this report's "Grantee Overview" section. They are grouped here by their primary focus area and also to illustrate a diverse set of approaches.

² This Hebrew word refers to musical melodies for Jewish prayer.



“Rise Up has been our first and primary source of funding, making it possible to expand our reach and take the time to concretely define who we are. Without the grant we received, we would not have been able to host egalitarian High Holiday services for hundreds of Mizrahi/Sephardi Jews each year. Before this grant, we had to rely on Ashkenazi-majority organizations to support our work, which meant being in conversation with them about ritualistic and political aspects of our programming, and limiting our ability to function autonomously. Now, we have more time and space to engage in the foundational process of creating a sustainable, independent community for the long-term.”

—*Emmanuelle Berdugo*,
[Egalitarian Sephardi Mizrahi Kehilla NY](#)

KIRVA

GRANTEE CATEGORY	TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
TOTAL AMOUNT FUNDED	\$115,000 ³
PEOPLE REACHED PER YEAR	4,193
BUDGET GROWTH	\$152,000 IN 2020 TO \$545,000 IN 2025
RISE UP WAS THEIR SECOND FUNDER	

[Kirva](#), formerly IOWA: Inside Out Wisdom and Action Project, “integrates the Jewish spiritual practices of *musar*⁴ and *chasidut*⁵ with social justice efforts, fueling personal growth and effective systemic change.”⁶ In many

ways, **Kirva represents exactly what Rise Up was created to support.** Over the years that Rise Up has funded them, Kirva has developed the spiritual resilience and leadership of dozens of activists and organizers working inside and outside of the Jewish community, namely through: producing the film [40 Days of Teshuvah](#) as a spiritual response to the racial justice uprisings in 2020; creating an antiracism musar curriculum, “Dismantling Racism from the Inside Out,” which was taught in rabbinical associations, Hillels, and synagogues; training over 30 rabbinic facilitators to lead groups in their own institutions; and launching two cohorts focused on “Disability Wisdom as Soul Care” led by [Rabbi Lauren Tuchman](#). Kirva has grown considerably in budget and in credibility as a leader on spiritually-rooted social change, and Rabbi David Jaffe, Kirva’s Founding Executive Director, sees Rise Up as having helped them “get off the ground.”⁷



³ The total amount funded is higher here than for other organizations listed in this section, solely because Kirva was one of our earliest grantees in 2019. This means they accessed higher average grants in our earliest years and also received a higher number of grants before we introduced a cap on three years of funding in 2023.

⁴ This Hebrew word refers to applied Jewish ethics.

⁵ This Hebrew word refers to applied Jewish mysticism.

⁶ This is Kirva’s mission statement, found on their [website](#).

⁷ This is data that Rise Up has regularly maintained over the course of our grantmaking through meetings with Rise Up grantees as well as applications, mid-year, and end-of-year reports.

LET MY PEOPLE SING!

GRANTEE CATEGORY	ART, CULTURE, AND RITUAL
TOTAL AMOUNT FUNDED	\$52,860
PEOPLE REACHED PER YEAR	307,634 ⁸
BUDGET GROWTH	\$31,985 IN 2019 TO \$300,000 IN 2025
RISE UP WAS THEIR FIRST FUNDER	

Let My People Sing! is a “cultural project focused on expanding the ancient and transformative practice of Jewish communal singing.”⁹ They gather in multiracial and multicultural Jewish community, representing a range of Jewish genders, lifting up songs and leaders who have been pushed to the margins. Since Rise Up became their first funder, they have consistently experienced an overwhelming demand for their programs that far exceeds their resources and capacity. Their 220-person annual retreats in 2024 and 2025 both sold out within

10 minutes of registration going live, with waitlists of over 200 additional people.¹⁰ One of the main reasons they cannot open up additional retreats is the gap between their community’s demand and their organizational resources. Let My People Sing! has been a hub for Jewish art, culture, and ritual across the country for years now, creating deep, in-person spiritual experiences for hundreds each year, and reaching hundreds of thousands more through their online musical repertoire. Projects like this illustrate exactly why we need to invest in the margins that the Jewish mainstream has so long excluded: **Let My People Sing! reaches and supports hundreds of thousands of Jews a year to lead a ritually-grounded Jewish life at a singular scale.**

⁸ Let My People Sing! has tremendous reach in part through their SoundCloud subscribers.

⁹ This is Let My People Sing!’s mission statement, found on their [website](#).

¹⁰ This is data that Rise Up has regularly maintained over the course of our grantmaking through meetings with Rise Up grantees as well as applications, mid-year, and end-of-year reports.



THE LUNAR COLLECTIVE

GRANTEE CATEGORY	ART, CULTURE, AND RITUAL
TOTAL AMOUNT FUNDED	\$35,000
PEOPLE REACHED PER YEAR	14,256
BUDGET GROWTH	\$49,448 IN 2021 TO \$425,000 IN 2025
RISE UP WAS THEIR FOURTH FUNDER	



[The LUNAR Collective](#) “cultivates connection, belonging, and visibility for Asian-American Jews through intersectional community programming and authentic digital storytelling.”¹¹ **They are the only organization by and for Asian Jews.** When Rise Up began funding The LUNAR Collective, they were in the midst of transitioning from a film project into an organization. Over the past few years, they have hosted one-of-a-kind cultural events, grounded in Jewish ritual, for hundreds of Asian Jews across the country: hosting multiple Passover seders using an Asian-Jewish Haggadah they created; launching an Asian-Jewish theater production, *What Do I Do With All This Heritage?*; and leading a new fellowship for young Asian Jews across six cities. The LUNAR Collective has rightfully built significant support among an array of Jewish funders, and Rise Up has been proud to intentionally invest in the skills and sustainability of their leadership for the long haul through the one-on-one fundraising coaching we offer grantees.



“Rise Up was one of our earliest funders, back when we were a film series working off a \$5,000 starter grant. **Your belief in us has made all the difference.** Thanks to your fundraising training and coaching, our grant proposals have become more focused, our pitches have become more engaging, and overall, we've improved our confidence and credibility as young, women-of-color leaders. We scaled up our operating budget from \$65,000 in 2022 to \$350,000 in 2024, secured multiple multi-year grants, developed new fundraising systems, and are now focusing on building relationships with major donors. All of this has in turn allowed us to expand our team, launch in new cities, and reach thousands of new people.”

—*Maryam Chishti, The LUNAR Collective*

¹¹ This is the LUNAR Collective’s mission statement, found on their [website](#).

MATIR ASURIM: JEWISH CARE NETWORK FOR INCARCERATED PEOPLE

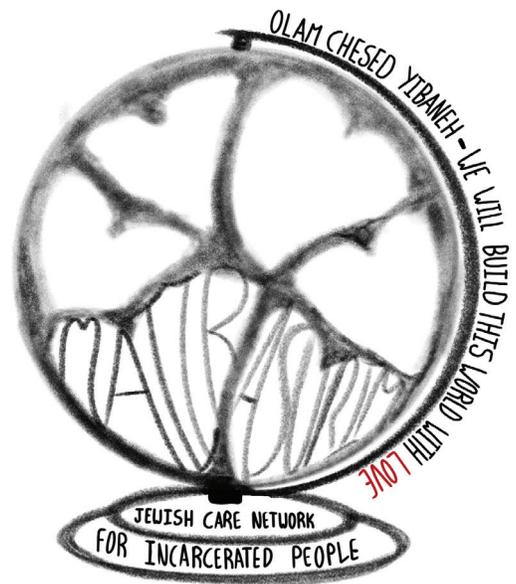
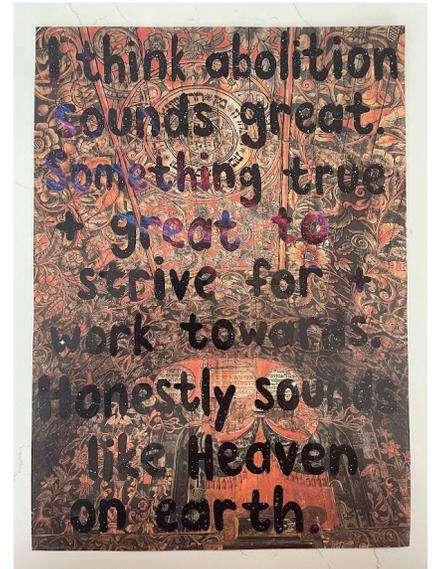
GRANTEE CATEGORY	TEXT STUDY AND EMBODIED PRACTICE
TOTAL AMOUNT FUNDED	\$30,000
PEOPLE REACHED PER YEAR	2,355
BUDGET GROWTH	\$6,000 IN 2023 TO \$43,200 IN 2025

RISE UP WAS THEIR SECOND FUNDER

[Matir Asurim](#) is a network of community organizers and activists, people directly impacted by incarceration, artists, rabbis, chaplains, and healers who connect Jewish spiritual, cultural, and communal resources to those who have experienced incarceration. This project began because queer incarcerated Jews were getting turned away by Chabad—which, at the time, was the only way to access Judaism while incarcerated—and writing to the Reconstructionist movement for support.

A dedicated, intergenerational group of activists and clergy responded to the call and created this network to offer critical pastoral care and access to Jewish spiritual resources for those most neglected by our existing communal institutions. In the few years they've been around, Matir Asurim has built a pen pal network, matching over 57 incarcerated and non-incarcerated people; sent out numerous holiday mailers and guides that are appropriate for incarcerated people, connected Jewish teachings to broader prison justice and abolitionist movements; offered constant material support for things like accessing kosher food and raising money for classes; and hosted educational opportunities on the Jewish case for abolition, rooted in Torah, at a number of synagogues. **This project is doing something no one else is—bringing the voices of some of the most marginalized Jewish people and the “incredible Torah they have to share” to the fore.**¹² Rise Up is proud to have been their second funder.

¹² This is data that Rise Up has regularly maintained over the course of our grantmaking through meetings with Rise Up grantees, applications, and mid- and end-of-year reports.



JEWISH COALITION FOR IMMIGRANT JUSTICE NW

GRANTEE CATEGORY	SPIRIT-ROOTED MOVEMENT-BUILDING
TOTAL AMOUNT FUNDED	\$35,000
PEOPLE REACHED PER YEAR	3,591
BUDGET GROWTH	\$12,200 IN 2023 TO \$310,000 IN 2025
RISE UP WAS THEIR SECOND FUNDER	

[The Jewish Coalition for Immigrant Justice NW](#) organizes Jewish people in the Pacific Northwest to take part in immigrant justice work. Rise Up has primarily funded their accompaniment program which provides opportunities for Jewish people to be present alongside immigrants as they navigate an increasingly terrifying system—especially under the current Trump administration. In addition to building a base of organized Jewish people in the Pacific Northwest to fight for immigrant justice and legislative reform, the Jewish Coalition mobilizes their base to join and support people at their immigrant hearings or appointments; posts bonds to get folks out of detention; staffs legal clinics; and organizes mutual aid.

Their accompaniment program is rooted in the Jewish practice of *shiva*¹³ and a belief that participating in acts of justice which affirm the dignity and humanity of all people is a profoundly holy act. The Jewish Coalition has used training for this program to recruit new members into a multi-faith movement for immigrant justice that is led by those most directly impacted and supported by those who want to take meaningful action against injustice in the place they call home. Rise Up is proud to have been their second funder.



¹³ This is the Jewish practice of sitting with mourners in their grief.

CHANGES IN THE FIELD 2019-2026

ONE OF THE PRIMARY ROLES RISE UP HAS BEEN PROUD TO PLAY IS AS A FIERCE ADVOCATE FOR THE work of our grantees and the vibrant ecosystem they've created. Beyond distributing our own funding, we are constantly assessing changes in the Jewish social justice landscape and identifying opportunities to make our grantees' work more visible, widely understood, and meaningfully resourced.

Since 2023, we have witnessed the following complex and compounding changes in the field, characterized by a stark decline in funding for the majority of our grantees, as well as our own project:

- ◆ A decrease in funding for progressive Jewish work—including racial justice and racial equity initiatives—across Jewish philanthropy.¹ This trend has been exacerbated since October 7 and has led to an increase in litmus tests, even for organizations whose work has nothing to do with Israel-Palestine.
- ◆ Ongoing resistance from secular funders to fund Jewish groups, especially those focused on cultural and ritual work. These funders wrongfully see this work as solely religious, rather than supporting multi-faith movements for justice, and therefore something that Jewish philanthropy is solely responsible for funding.
- ◆ A marked decline in Jewish philanthropic funding sources for Jews of Color-led work.
- ◆ Fewer pathways for emerging projects and organizations to access start-up funding.
- ◆ A growing number of Jewish funders and donors who have decreased their major giving for progressive Jewish work, focusing instead on primarily giving to non-Jewish justice efforts.
- ◆ A pivot within both secular and Jewish philanthropy from funding spirituality toward funding “self-care” and “wellness.”

In order to understand these interdependent shifts across the field, it is important to first map out the context in which Rise Up emerged and all that has changed since.

Rise Up's fall 2019 founding happened toward the end of Trump's first presidency—a critical moment in the U.S. political landscape, within secular and Jewish philanthropy, and across the Jewish social justice sector.

Isaac Luria, a member of Rise Up's Leadership Team and a long-time funder of the Jewish social justice

¹ Racial justice efforts focus on upending the systems of oppression that both depend on and perpetuate racism, such as abolitionist work to divest from police and prisons. On the other hand, racial equity work focuses more on increasing diversity and representation of people of color in our institutions. While it is critically important, a racial equity approach is not always paired with an understanding of the root problem and often champions cosmetic changes within a particular institution as success. Within philanthropy, there has been greater comfort in funding racial equity over racial justice, because the latter threatens the system which makes the accumulation and preservation of wealth possible; without that, we wouldn't have philanthropy. However, there are foundations that intentionally fund racial justice and share this analysis, and both Rise Up and our grantees have benefited from their funding.

sector, reflected that the “initial shock” of Trump’s first win resulted in a “reckoning about the resurgence of authoritarianism...[and] white nationalism that [many] didn’t think would happen.”² Reverend Jennifer Bailey, another member of the Rise Up Leadership Team and a long-time leader in multi-faith movements for justice, also situated this moment in the specifically post-Obama political landscape that resulted in Trump winning office in the first place.³ In her view, Trump’s victory revealed that “we didn’t have the spiritual fortitude to deal with our original wounds as a country.”⁴ In response, we witnessed a “re-articulation of the left,” a pushing back against the narrative that America was actually “post-racial,” and “an increased understanding that this country is not actually the liberal stronghold we hoped it was.”⁵

This moment of heightened sensitivity to the conditions which led to Trump’s first term resulted in increased philanthropic support for racial justice and racial equity initiatives; movement- and power-building efforts; Jews of Color-led work; and anything that seemed like it was resisting the first Trump administration.⁶ It was in this time period that organizations such as the [Movement for Black Lives](#), [Women’s March](#), [#MeToo](#), and [Jews of Color Initiative](#) emerged. Rise Up Initiative launched soon after, with the [Jewish Liberation Fund](#) following in 2020.

It was an expansive moment for many of our grantees. Their work finally seemed to gain long-deserved visibility from both well-established Jewish funders and two new progressive Jewish funders who were excited to invest in them.

Within months of our public launch, the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown began; soon after, the murder of George Floyd sparked racial justice uprisings across the globe. These twin crises, and the movements that erupted in response to them, signaled increased urgency to funders about investing in work that was rooted in both a vision for racial justice and Black liberation, and an honest accounting of the spiritual depletion and hopelessness facing most movement leaders after several years living under Trump. For many in the Jewish social justice sector, including the Rise Up ecosystem, the years 2020–2023 brought both heartache and—in some cases—an increase in attention to and resourcing of this work.⁷

A number of our grantees experienced some of their most significant budgetary growth during this period.⁸ Our own fundraising at Rise Up also felt the most abundant during this period, in our early years of seed funding from the Nathan Cummings Foundation before their funding priorities began to shift in 2023. That corresponded to higher grant awards ranging from \$5,000 to \$40,000, with an average grant size of \$18,575, distributed to our grantees between 2019–2021.

However, these funding shifts in response to the pandemic and racial justice uprisings of 2020 were often more cosmetic than they may have at first seemed, and by early 2023, our grantees began to report a return to the status quo before 2020.⁹ Many of the foundations that once invested in our grantees’ work began to scale back

² Interview with Isaac Luria, Aug. 21, 2025.

³ Interview with Reverend Jennifer Bailey, Sept. 10, 2025.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Anecdotal accounts from conversations with grantees over the last six years.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

their initial investment. We also learned, in retrospect, that those grants were often coded as “discretionary” or emergency grants rather than multi-year commitments.¹⁰ Dozens of our grantees have shared that other funders of theirs have gone through “restructuring” or restrictive changes to their funding criteria, which have resulted in a significant sector-wide effort to defund Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives; racial justice; and Jews of Color-led work altogether.¹¹ These changes have only accelerated since Trump returned to the White House in 2025.

In an anonymous interview, a grantee who has been a leader in the Jews of Color sphere for over a decade described Rise Up, alongside the Jewish Liberation Fund, as some of the “only philanthropic spaces where visionary ideas are nurtured,” while, more broadly, “there has been a consolidation of power and downward shift around movement-building work that centers the experiences and leadership of Jews of Color and Mizrahi/Sephardi Jews.”¹² This same grantee described Rise Up and the Jewish Liberation Fund as “stalwarts that have served as a humble, loving counter to the destabilization and defunding of the movement.”¹³

Early-stage Jewish organizations have also experienced a decline in access to more start-up funding opportunities in recent years, outside of Rise Up and the Jewish Liberation Fund.¹⁴ They have been repeatedly told by larger institutional Jewish funders that their organizations aren’t reaching enough people to qualify for support.¹⁵ This presents a catch-22: if they can’t access funding to begin with, they can’t then reach more people in order to qualify for the funding they’re being denied. This has made our case for funding this work all the more clear and urgent, because we know the impact these younger projects can have, whether they host High Holiday programming for Jews of Color and/or Mizrahi/Sephardi Jews; gather queer, trans, and/or gender non-conforming Jews every summer for ritual singing retreats; or offer Jewish programming in an area where Jews comprise one percent of the population. These organizations, regardless of their comparative size, are often the only Jewish touchpoint for the people they reach.¹⁶ **They also tend to be one of the few spaces that exist where Jews with a marginalized identity can access Judaism and feel whole, without compromising any aspect of themselves in order to participate.**

¹⁰ Many of our grantees who would not normally be a “fit” for more mainstream Jewish funders due to their explicit racial justice orientation received discretionary funding starting in 2020. The fact that this funding was discretionary was not always clear to them at the time. Grants like these require less oversight from foundation boards—which tend to lean more wealthy and conservative in comparison to foundation staff—and allow individual program officers to make faster and unilateral grantmaking decisions in moments of increased need. As those grants came to an end around 2023, after a traditional three-year funding cycle, many of these organizations lost the very funding which helped them grow in the three years prior. Over the years, we have also heard countless examples of foundation staff and program officers disagreeing with their boards about whether this work should be funded and working hard to build their internal case. This has been especially acute for those operating within family foundations.

¹¹ Anecdotal accounts from conversations with grantees over the last six years.

¹² Anonymous interview with a Rise Up leader, Aug. 11, 2025.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Anecdotal accounts from conversations with grantees over the last six years.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

These overarching trends have also impacted our own fundraising at Rise Up. From 2019–2020, we received our first two-year grant from the Nathan Cummings Foundation totaling \$900,000. From 2021–2022, we received another two-year grant renewal totaling \$900,000. Starting in 2023, however, NCF began the process of closing the portfolio that Rise Up was a part of.¹⁷ Given the disproportionate role that Rise Up played in funding the Jewish social justice sector through that portfolio, we experienced a longer off-ramp than most—receiving a tie-off, two-year grant totaling \$600,000 from 2023–2024 and a final exit grant of \$100,000 in 2025.

Since the founding of our project, we have worked hard to diversify our funding sources and, since 2023, have successfully replaced the lost funding from NCF.¹⁸ We are so grateful to funders like Crown Family Philanthropies, the Philip and Bernice Krupp Foundation for Jewish Life, the Faith & Philanthropy Pooled Fund, and donors Rabbi Becky Silverstein and Naomi Sobel, who stepped up to help us fill the gap. Still, this loss made it that much more difficult for Rise Up to grow, as we faced many of the same challenges as our grantees in a particularly difficult fundraising and political climate. As a result, our budget has remained more or less stagnant since we started this work, while the need for funding our grantees and the number of requests we have received each year has only grown. From 2023–2025, our grants ranged between \$5,000 and \$10,000, with an average grant award of \$8,226, which is a marked decrease from 2019–2021.

Amid significant sector-wide funding contraction, we remain proud that while our grantmaking has decreased over time, our budgeting practices and commitment to maintaining a strong reserve have meant that we have never failed to follow through on our funding commitments to the organizations we support.

¹⁷ Rise Up was funded through the Nathan Cummings Foundation’s former Voice, Creativity, and Culture portfolio, which totaled \$1.6 million in grants to the Jewish social justice sector annually. The grant to Rise Up was their biggest within that portfolio, in part due to the reasons we emerged (see Project Founding). It is worth noting that when NCF began the process of closing this portfolio in 2023, they did not stop investing in racial justice work overall, in the way many other funders did. See more about the work they currently focus on via their [website](#).

¹⁸ Isaac Luria, the former director of the Voice, Creativity, and Culture portfolio at NCF, and current senior director of Place Based Initiatives, played a key role in Rise Up’s founding and has been a dedicated member of our leadership team since 2019. After this portfolio closed at NCF, Isaac played a key role in supporting our fundraising efforts in other ways.

“This past year, Rise Up’s funding has meant the difference between continuing our work or closing up shop. Many Jewish institutions seem to have lost momentum when it comes to racial justice commitments. I’m seeing shortcuts, empty rhetoric, and tokenizing hires, all of which have made for personal heartbreak and revenue decreases. Rise Up’s ongoing commitment has countered the effects of both—through the validation and shared vision, the community of aligned leaders and projects Rise Up has created with the community of practice, and of course, through the help with the bottom-line. It is not an exaggeration to say that Rise Up has made our work possible.”

—April Baskin, Joyous Justice

WHATEVER BOUNDARIES AND RED LINES EXISTED IN THE Jewish funding landscape before 2023—and there were many—have been entirely rewritten since October 7.

October 7 and the ensuing devastation in Gaza undoubtedly contributed to the narrowing of donors' giving in an already constrained field. It also, as Isaac Luria notes, significantly undermined some of the budding coalitional work on racial justice in the Jewish social justice sector between groups with divergent views on Israel-Palestine.¹⁹ As he puts it, the Jewish right emphasized that “a particular form of Zionism is synonymous with American-Jewish expression, and they did whatever they could to avoid confronting the reality that the Israeli state pursued war in a way that would make an equitable solution with Palestinians impossible. Now, anyone who doesn't accept their narrative is *treyf*²⁰ and deserves to be excluded, and any efforts to do racial justice work, or even DEI, are seen as 'anti-American' and 'anti-Jewish.’”²¹ His assessment in 2025 was that the sector lost “many of the gains we made in the time of the 2020 uprisings.”²²

These observations support a clear pattern of decreased funding for many domestic Jewish social justice organizations since 2023, including work that has nothing to do with Israel-Palestine.²³ Jewish funders in particular have also increased investment on the ground in Israel, raising an unprecedented [\\$850 million](#) in emergency aid, almost half of which, in August 2024, was still [sitting](#) unspent in Federation bank accounts. This amount of funding would be absolutely transformative for domestic Jewish organizations. However, a 2024 [study](#) on Jewish philanthropy since October 7 found that from October 2023 to May 2024, most philanthropic Jewish giving focused on Israel, security, and antisemitism.

This trend has significantly impacted those in the Rise Up ecosystem. In November 2025, **we asked our grantees via email whether they lost funding after October 7, and over 80 percent of respondents said yes.**²⁴ **Over 50 percent of the projects that lost funding are led by**

¹⁹ Interview with Isaac Luria, Aug. 21, 2025.

²⁰ This Yiddish word means un-kosher.

²¹ Interview with Isaac Luria, Aug. 21, 2025.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ It is important to note that some Jewish organizations based domestically which focus on Israel-Palestine experienced a fundraising boom after 2023.

²⁴ This is data we compiled from grantees through an email request in November 2025. There was a difference between grantees who noted a concrete loss of funding, and those who shared a loss of warm leads and prospects. While we still view the loss of

“We had a number of synagogues and organizations pull back from their interest in running our anti-racism program in their communities after 10/7.”

—*Rabbi David Jaffe,*
Kirva

“We have lost funding and also faced challenges prospecting for new funding sources due to the priority shifts after 10/7, on top of trends already underway moving away from support for JOC-led/focused work.”

—*Yoshi Silverstein,*
Mitsui Collective

We asked our grantees via email whether they lost funding after October 7, and over **80% of respondents said yes.**

Jews of Color.²⁵ Of those who reported no loss in funding, the majority noted that they have a small number of “values-aligned” funders and donors, and others still remarked that they’ve either lost funding opportunities, remained flat in their budget, and/or sensed a “change in the atmosphere around what kind of funding is possible.”²⁶

It is worth noting that 95 percent of our grantees’ work focuses entirely on domestic Jewish activities and is completely unrelated to Israel-Palestine.²⁷ This means that losses of funding have come down to real or perceived ideological differences between organizational leaders and/or program participants and their funders, as opposed to the merits of and need for the work itself. This unethical behavior on behalf of funders has created a culture of fear, scarcity, and pressure to conform in every direction for organizations across the political spectrum. The impact of this has been to punish not only those doing this important work, but also the communities whose need for these projects has only grown in recent years. The shift in foundation priorities toward focusing significantly more funding on Israel has also created a serious resource gap for American-Jewish organizations working domestically. In a time of increased communal division and destabilization, the very groups who are best positioned to build communities across difference have been the most limited in accessing the funding they need to bridge those gaps.

At Rise Up, we have faced many of the same strained relationships and litmus tests with funders around Israel-Palestine. This was true well before October 7, but even more so afterward. Since 2023, we have experienced a number of prospective funders, whose increasingly narrow priorities around funding in Israel and against antisemitism, close doors for funding that had previously seemed open.

Given these changes across philanthropy, it has been a particularly challenging time to also witness a decrease in specifically progressive Jewish funding for progressive Jewish work. **We have observed a common misperception among both progressive Jewish funders and donors that funding the Jewish movement for racial justice is somehow less timely or needed than funding non-Jewish justice**

prospects as significant, we only counted those who lost concrete, pre-existing funding in this calculation.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ This is data that Rise Up has regularly maintained over the course of our grantmaking through meetings with Rise Up grantees, applications, and mid- and end-of-year reports.

“SVARA lost some major donors and had some sticky conversations with philanthropic partners that we believe contributed to laddering down on funding. What’s harder to quantify, though, is the narrowing in philanthropic priorities by many of the larger Jewish foundations. SVARA had what felt like several prospective funders in our pipeline pre-October 7th, and none of those have manifested into giving since. Some stopped responding, and others shared that their priorities had shifted towards areas like fighting anti-semitism.”

—Ayana Morse, SVARA

“We had funding revoked for a specific event, just weeks before, and though nobody told us why explicitly, we could read between the lines.”

—Kohenet Keshira
haLev Fife, Kesher
Pittsburgh

work. This also deeply undermines Jewish leaders of color who have to continually fight for recognition that their work matters.

Kirstie Kimball, a fundraising strategist who has worked with the majority of our grantees over the last four years, observed that “there are a lot of donors out there with the capacity to give five-figure gifts who say, ‘I only give \$1,000 to Jewish groups because I’m focusing on funding the ‘frontlines.’ But how are Jews of Color-led organizations fighting for racial justice or leading spiritual nourishment for our movements not the ‘frontline’? There’s a real disconnect there.”²⁸

FOR ALL THEIR INCREASED SUPPORT FOR RACIAL JUSTICE AND power-building work before and soon after 2020, too many foundations and philanthropists have fallen short of supporting sustainable infrastructure and the creation of lasting alternatives. The question Reverend Jennifer Bailey keeps hearing among progressive funders is: “How do we respond to burnout in this season of heightened anxiety?”²⁹ Over the last decade, a number of key funders such as the Faith & Philanthropy Pooled Fund³⁰ and the [Fetzer Institute](#) have made real investments in spiritually-rooted work to this end.

Others, however, have closed their religious portfolios and shifted toward funding “self-care” and “wellness” instead—a much shallower framework that fails to offer the long-term grounding and resilience that true spiritual work provides. As Reverend Jennifer explains:

“We’re seeing a morphing of ‘spirituality’ to mean ‘wellness,’ which is also how funding patterns have changed, but there’s no real depth to it. It’s been stripped of what is actually sacred. The central question behind it is, ‘How can I help you survive so that you can keep producing?’ versus ‘How can I support your long-term thriving and spiritual transformation so you can birth a new reality that opposes the backward authoritarian agenda we’re living under?’”³¹

²⁸ Interview with Kirstie Kimball, Sept. 30, 2025.

²⁹ Interview with Reverend Jennifer Bailey, Sept. 10, 2025.

³⁰ [The Faith and Philanthropy Pooled Fund](#) is a collaboration among a diverse group of philanthropic leaders and foundation program officers at places like the Ford Foundation, Fetzer Institute, Henry Luce Foundation, Open Society Foundations, and Gates Foundation. They created a pooled fund in 2022 in order to make joint grants focused on the role of faith and spiritual imagination in addressing society’s most pressing issues. Rise Up received a one-time grant of \$200,000 over two years in their first round of grantmaking in 2023.

³¹ Interview with Reverend Jennifer Bailey, Sept. 10, 2025.

We have observed a common misperception among both progressive Jewish funders and donors that funding the Jewish movement for racial justice is somehow less timely or needed than funding non-Jewish justice work. This also deeply undermines Jewish leaders of color who have to continually fight for recognition that their work matters.

In other words, investing in “wellness” rather than spirituality has long-term implications; these changes may relieve some important pressure in the short-term, but they do little to address the underlying systemic issues leading to the depletion of our precious leaders.

All of these factors have contributed to an extreme narrowing of funding pathways for all of the organizations in our ecosystem—including Rise Up—that are committed to building a spiritually-rooted Jewish movement for justice and equity for all people. At Rise Up, we consider it a tremendous responsibility of ours to keep fighting for the collective pool of resources to finally match the overwhelming need for this work.

“We’re seeing a morphing of ‘spirituality’ to mean ‘wellness,’ which is also how funding patterns have changed, but there’s no real depth to it. It’s been stripped of what is actually sacred. The central question behind it is, ‘How can I help you survive so that you can keep producing?’ versus ‘How can I support your long-term thriving and spiritual transformation so you can birth a new reality that opposes the backward authoritarian agenda we’re living under?’”

—*Reverend Jennifer Bailey*

MERGING WITH THE JEWISH LIBERATION FUND

As noted in the previous section of this report, Rise Up and the Jewish Liberation Fund launched within months of each other in 2019 and 2020. Although we were created with distinct organizational strategies and priorities, a natural overlap has emerged among our grantees in the years since. This has come as no surprise to us, given the role each of our organizations has played as the primary—and often only—sources of funding for the Jewish social justice landscape and the Jewish left.¹ While this has been true throughout both of our organizational histories, this state of affairs has become even more pronounced in the last three years as our grantees have faced significant fundraising struggles.

This overlap led us to begin collaborating more intentionally on shared capacity-building opportunities for our grantees starting in 2023.² Since then, we have hosted two eight-week fundraising intensives, a six-part organizational development training series, and one-on-one coaching for dozens of our shared grantees.³ We did this in part to reduce overall costs to our organizations so that we could maximize grant dollars for our grantees, but also to nurture more collaboration and cross-pollination across the field. Over the years, we have also been asked by our current and prospective grantees, funders, and donors what differentiates us from each other—an indication that we have been perceived, for better or worse, as comparable players in the field.

In late 2024, prompted by our deepening collaboration, an uptick in related inquiries from our shared funders and stakeholders, and significant funding challenges across the field, JLF approached Rise Up to ask if we would ever consider merging. Given the state of the sector, we had already been thinking about this option when they asked. We knew that the loss of any progressive funder in the field would likely bring up feelings of anxiety and/or scarcity among our grantees, especially given the number of foundations that have shifted away from funding

¹ Anecdotal accounts from conversations with grantees over the last six years.

² As of November 2025, Rise Up and JLF have 116 combined grantees across the ecosystem. Nearly half of Rise Up's 60 grantees are also grantees of JLF.

³ Read more about these offerings in this report's earlier section, "Investment Beyond Funding."

“As members of the JLF Steering Committee, we're in full support of the JLF and Rise Up merger and excited about what it makes possible for our collective work, and most importantly, for our movements for justice. Many of us have been involved with JLF since its formation and have also benefited from Rise Up's important grantmaking over the last several years. This merger is a moment for us to celebrate the transformative impact of both of these organizations and embark on a new chapter together where we significantly grow resources for the Jewish left, build more resilient and long-lasting infrastructure, and dream bigger about how to transform our Jewish communities and the world at large.”

—Nadav David, JLF
Steering Committee
Chair, on behalf of the
JLF Steering Committee

this work in recent years. But we also believed that **the prospect of a merger was important enough to explore if it meant seizing a timely and strategic opportunity to resource the field more sustainably for the long haul—precisely because of how much our grantees have been struggling.**

Throughout 2025, Rise Up and JLF embarked on an intensive merger exploration process. We closely analyzed the benefits and losses of a merger for each of our organizations, respective staff, grantees, and the ecosystem at large. We did this with the help of some key thought partners, including fundraising coach Kirstie Kimball; organizational psychologist and leadership coach Pippi Kessler; JLF Steering Committee Chair Nadav David; and Rise Up Leadership Team Member Zahara Zahav. We also talked to members of other organizations who went through similar merger processes—in particular, those who came to regret it—and gathered data from co-directors about what does and does not work in that fairly new leadership model. Finally, we spoke to our shared funders and donors to more accurately identify whether this merger could indeed result in an increase in resources for the field over time, which was always a primary motivation for the process. Ultimately, we decided after conducting this in-depth process that the benefits of merging significantly outweighed any downsides.

By the fall of 2025, both the Rise Up Leadership Team and JLF Steering Committee formally approved a merger. We launched a fundraising campaign to gather support among our funders and donors, and began planning for how to meaningfully integrate Rise Up into JLF by the summer of 2026.⁴

⁴ While we explored the prospect of merging into an entirely new organization, we decided against it at the recommendation of a fundraising expert who warned we would lose too many donors. Given JLF is more than double the size of Rise Up—in terms of budget, staffing, donors, and grantmaking programs—it was a natural decision that Rise Up would become part of JLF, rather than the other way around.

“When I first heard of Keren and Jo’s idea to team up, I was thrilled. Both of these powerful Jewish leaders have been toiling in similar streams—building philanthropic support for a joyous, open, and life-giving Jewish future beyond convention, border walls, and white supremacy. We need more folks to see the value in combining work, especially in our vulnerable ecosystem, and building sustainable institutions for the long-term. We’re working on a generational project that will take decades and we need the institutions to sustain that growth. Bringing Rise Up, with its emphasis on liberatory spiritual innovation, and Jewish Liberation Fund’s focus on justice movements together is a beautiful *shidduch*.⁵ I’m excited to see what Keren and Jo can accomplish together!”

—*Isaac Luria, on behalf of the Rise Up Leadership Team*

⁵ This Hebrew word means “match,” referring to the traditional process of arranging a marriage.

Four Reasons for Merging

BUILD A DEEPER BENCH OF FUNDING FOR THE FIELD

In order to meet the tremendous funding need that exists across our sector, we need to increase resources moving to our grantees, including finally making formal multi-year commitments so our grantees can feel more of the security they deserve. This becomes possible through a merger because we're pooling our shared resources and increasing our fundraising and grantmaking capacity. The merger itself also creates additional fundraising momentum with current and prospective funders and donors.

INCREASE OUR CAPACITY AS A PROGRESSIVE FUNDER TO IMPLEMENT BEST PRACTICES

This merger enables us to combine and capitalize on our unique strengths, experiences, and perspectives from funding the Jewish social justice sector, as well as minimize redundancies in costs related to operations and grant administration—all without sacrificing total grant dollars out the door. This makes us more informed, agile, and effective in the work we do, which not only includes funding across the field but also working to shift the challenging conditions our grantees operate within. Ultimately, our hope is that our increased expertise and efficiency will make our grantees' experiences accessing our funding more positive and less labor-intensive.

CONSOLIDATE OUR POWER WITHIN PHILANTHROPY

We have an opportunity to tell a more compelling, coherent, and unified story about why the Jewish social justice sector needs meaningful funding and where to easily do so for maximum impact. This merger eliminates the perception of any competition between Rise Up and JLF and also decreases confusion, uncertainty, and inaction among funders about where to invest. Growing our organizational blueprint also helps us to claim more authority within the progressive Jewish funding landscape, which will in turn increase our ability to impact and organize more funders and donors.

SEIZE A TIMELY OPPORTUNITY TO ACCESS SECULAR FUNDING

Secular funders have often locked the Jewish social justice sector out of funding opportunities. Sometimes, this lack of funding comes down to organizational size; other times it's simply about being less familiar with the landscape. This merger helps us convey to the widest possible spectrum of funding partners that we can be the go-to (and sufficiently large) progressive Jewish funding body that can invest resources on their behalf—with deeper knowledge, relationships, and insight into the field.

RISE UP'S LASTING IMPACT

“I always saw Rise Up grantees as the best of Judaism.”

—*Claudia Horwitz, Rise Up Founding Director, 2019–2022*

AS WE PREPARE TO MERGE WITH THE JEWISH LIBERATION FUND in the summer of 2026, we reflect often on what Rise Up's lasting impact on the field will be. Even though this version of our project is coming to a close, we know that there are a number of ways our legacy will live on and that we're uniquely positioned to strengthen JLF's vision and strategy for the long haul. As April Baskin, a national leader on racial justice and member of the Rise Up Leadership Team, put it, our merger with JLF is an opportunity for the “magic and momentum of what was established here to continue on an even bigger platform with even more marginalized leadership.”¹

In our countless conversations with grantees, funders, and stakeholders over the last six years, a few consistent areas of impact have emerged again and again.

We explicitly named that a vibrant ecosystem of spiritually-infused justice existed, and that it really mattered.

One of our foundational goals at Rise Up was to articulate that while a growing field of spiritually-infused justice work already existed before 2019, it needed to be more explicitly named, recognized, and resourced as a strategic contribution for our social movements. Many of our grantees have shared with us that having other funders who believe in their work has never felt like a foregone conclusion. Now, the fact that this vibrant ecosystem exists is more widely acknowledged, even if it continues to be

“A hundred years from now looking back, I hope we'll have made Jewish life significantly more accessible, more alive, and a more common part of people's spiritual toolkits and communities.”

—*Anonymous Grantee, Rise Up Emerging Outcomes Study*

¹ Interview with April Baskin, Aug. 11, 2025.

underestimated and under-resourced.² Reverend Jennifer Bailey calls this the “**indescribable value of being seen**,” particularly for spiritual innovators.³ In a philanthropic landscape where spirituality is deeply misunderstood, trying to harness ancestral wisdom and engage in the sacred task of transforming our world can feel deeply isolating.⁴ Isaac Luria also reflected in 2025 that he doesn’t currently know of a “leading social justice organization that doesn’t have people within it who speak this language or are trying to gain fluency in their own ways.”⁵

We increased the visibility and viability of options for accessing Jewish life.

We know from tracking years of data about our grantees’ work that they have reached hundreds of thousands of Jews through their programs, many of whom are formally unaffiliated with the institutional Jewish community.⁶ We have also witnessed what becomes possible when our spiritual leadership represents the true breadth and diversity of our American-Jewish community: those who have felt alienated and excluded from institutional Jewish life finally get to see themselves reflected in their communal leaders and find new pathways for participating in and expressing their Judaism. The number of projects and organizations in this ecosystem has also grown significantly since our founding; many in Rise Up’s leadership have observed that our spirit of experimentation through grantmaking has led to a proliferation of projects and an increase in institutionalization for a number of organizations in the past six years.⁷ The fact that there are more organizations doing this work now than there were before we emerged is a testament to our impact.

We cultivated a highly skilled, courageous, and diverse cohort of Jewish communal leaders.

² Anecdotal accounts from conversations with grantees over the last six years.

³ Interview with Reverend Jennifer Bailey, Sept. 10, 2025.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Interview with Isaac Luria, Aug. 21, 2025.

⁶ This is data that Rise Up has regularly maintained over the course of our grantmaking through meetings with Rise Up grantees, applications, and mid- and end-of-year reports.

⁷ Interview with Claudia Horwitz, Aug. 22, 2025; Interview with Isaac Luria, Aug. 21, 2025; Interview with Zahara Zahav, Aug. 7, 2025.

“We are supporting people—especially folks without a ton of Jewish literacy—to transition from learners and practitioners to teachers and leaders of these spiritual lineages. Being in community with Jews of Color, telling our stories, and educating each other is an act of social justice in and of itself.”

—*Anonymous Grantee,*
Rise Up Emerging
Outcomes Study

As explored in a previous section in this report, “Investment Beyond Funding,” Rise Up has been defined by the dedicated investment we’ve made in our grantees’ leadership, beyond the funding we’ve provided. We have truly led on grantee education and nurturing cross-sector collaboration, which has led to a significant “skilling-up” and professionalization of the field, in particular around spiritual practices for social justice work and grassroots fundraising. All of this mentorship, training, and coaching support has had a tremendous impact on individual leaders, especially those on the margins who are consistently excluded from these types of professional development opportunities. Kirstie Kimball, a fundraising strategist who has coached our grantees for years, reflected in 2025 that the organizations that have integrated grassroots fundraising strategies are the ones that have best weathered the storm of the last few years.⁸

We created more spiritual homes for progressive Jews.

As we explored in the story of our founding, the need for more spiritually-rooted justice organizations, as well as more justice-oriented spiritual communities, was a core reason Rise Up emerged. In just six years of funding this work, we’ve seen a real boom in both types of organizations. Moreover, the increase in diverse spiritual homes that, in particular, better meet the needs of marginalized and progressive Jews, has led to tremendous relief across the sector for organizations that previously had to fill the gap created by our communal institutions.⁹ Many of these Jewish social justice organizations have felt outsized pressure for too long to not only lead political work, but also be [everything](#) for the Jews they organize. The multitude of new, values-aligned spiritual communities has made it possible for more of these political organizations to focus on their missions.¹⁰

“Inside of movement spaces and *havurot*¹¹ and synagogues, there’s starting to be a lot of attention to acknowledging that everyone’s voices are really important, which is radical; especially when it comes to Jews of Color, Sephardi, Mizrahi, and queer and trans Jews, whose voices have been absent. There’s a beautiful metaphor about when you’re braiding challah, you take the braid from the farthest away and you bring it close to the middle over and over again. We’re looking at who is most on the margins and working on bringing them to the center.”

—Anonymous Grantee,
[Rise Up Emerging Outcomes Study](#)

⁸ Interview with Kirstie Kimball, Sept. 30, 2025.

⁹ These dynamics are more deeply explored earlier in this report, in the “Introduction” as well as the “Project Founding” section.

¹⁰ Interview with Zahara Zahav, Aug. 7, 2025.

¹¹ This Hebrew word means “friendship” or “fellowship,” and refers to an informal group of Jewish people who meet together for religious and/or educational purposes.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

WHILE WE WILL CONTINUE TO RESOURCE THIS CRITICAL WORK at the Jewish Liberation Fund, we still consider it a profound responsibility to ensure a continuity of funding for this sector. After years of resourcing and advocating for this work, we share these final five recommendations to our peer funders in the field.

1. Take risks in your grantmaking.

If foundations only fund well-established organizations in a position to absorb six-figure grants, they are not doing their duty to the entire ecosystem. Even if an organization doesn't "make it" after being funded, there are important lessons in their attempt. We as funders have to take more bets and be willing to accept and even appreciate failure; it is the only way we grow.

2. Reinvest in racial justice and Jews of Color-led work.

Philanthropy was created to protect intergenerational wealth and reproduce inequity. If we are privileged enough to have access to these resources, it is our duty to meaningfully redistribute them where they are most needed—especially to work that threatens the status quo.

3. Abide by principles of ethical grantmaking.

Be transparent about grantmaking processes and how funding decisions are made. Make multi-year investments. Stop restricting funding based on real or perceived ideological differences between a funder and the organizational leaders and/or program participants being funded. Focus instead on the merits of and need for the work itself.

4. Consider how spirituality makes justice work stronger.

Spirituality-infused social justice makes our work more grounded, imaginative, and compelling, regardless of what individual funders believe. It also strengthens the resolve—and tends to the wounded souls—of our leaders and communities. It is vital, and needs to be funded.

5. Acknowledge the majority of American Jews whose Judaism is intertwined with the pursuit of justice.

Relying on outdated markers of "engagement" to assess the state of Jewish life today is not only misguided, it also poses serious material consequences for organizations leading Jewish communal work across the country that reaches hundreds of thousands of unaffiliated Jews.

CONCLUSION

IN HER [TEDX TALK](#) FROM 2014, RABBI BENAY LAPPE, FOUNDER AND CO-LEADER OF [SVARA: A Traditionally Radical Yeshiva](#), outlines what she believes was the biggest “crash” in Jewish history: the destruction of the Second Temple over 2,000 years ago.

Rabbi Lappe notes that the Jewish people faced three different paths in the lead-up to the Temple’s destruction. The first involved a “fight to the death” to maintain Temple Judaism, amid denial that the “crash” or destruction would even occur, and an inability to imagine a different way of life.

The second path was one of defeat: a belief that it was “all over” for Jews, and that the only reasonable decision was a complete abandonment of Judaism and full assimilation into the Roman Empire—a decision which, she says, 90 percent of Jewish people at that time chose to make.¹

But there was one small group of “queer, fringey, radical, outsider, hippie guys,” as Rabbi Lappe describes them, who chose a third path:

“They accepted the crash, *embraced* the crash, went back to the tradition, took with them what still worked, mixed the old with the new, and created a radically new tradition, a radical new Judaism that would have been unrecognizable to a Temple Jew.”

“If you’re Jewish today,” she goes on to say, “that’s because your great, great, great, great-grandparents were part of that 10 percent who got what these guys were up to. Who said, ‘I see what you’re doing... [It] doesn’t feel very Jewish to me, but it will to my grandchildren. So count me in.’”

These “guys,” Rabbi Lappe reminds us, are who we call rabbis today. And the new spaces they met in, outside the Temple, are what we call synagogues.

TWO THOUSAND YEARS LATER, AMID A MOMENT OF RECKONING FOR THE AMERICAN-JEWISH community, the potential decisions Lappe describes are profoundly resonant.

Some might call this moment a “crash,” an inflection point, or perhaps an opportunity. Either way, we face three drastically different options for how we proceed as a community. Where will we go from here?

We could emulate the approach of the Temple priests and keep in line with our Jewish communal leadership, no matter the moral compromises required or that such an approach is already failing. We could follow leaders who believe that the Jewish community will always be made in their image and therefore nothing needs to change.

Or, we could take the route of resignation and recognize the injustice surrounding us, but still give in to despair and give up on the belief that things could ever be different. We could resign ourselves to expect nothing of our Jewish communal leadership in times of crisis—or, by extension, of ourselves.

¹ [“An Unrecognizable Jewish Future: A Queer Talmudic Take,”](#) Rabbi Benay Lappe, May 29, 2014.

Our third option is to refuse to turn away from injustice and pretend that our current system is working. We can work, every day, to build a better world, and, in so doing, create a new/old Judaism that reflects our traditions, diversity, and moral convictions. We can continue to become and develop the leaders who are sorely missing in order to meet this moment and transform our broken world.

For Rise Up and our grantees, option three has always been the only viable path.

AS OUR STATES OF EMERGENCY REACH A FEVER PITCH IN THE United States and across the globe, the disconnect between American Jews and the communal institutions responsible for representing us has never been greater. Our American-Jewish institutions have failed to adapt to the changing spiritual needs, political beliefs, and diverse make-up of our community—a failure that has contributed to a sharp decline in traditional forms of Jewish expression and record levels of disaffiliation among Jews from these same institutions. This includes Jewish foundations that have, in recent years, significantly decreased funding for Jewish work that doesn't fit their narrow definition of Jewish identity and engagement.

Yet even as this gap widens, hundreds of thousands of Jews are finding new and creative ways to practice Judaism informed by an alert and moral engagement with the world. For these leaders, **Judaism offers both the blueprint and the toolbox for solving the biggest moral and ethical crises of our time.** As Reverend Jennifer Bailey² says, it offers us a “cosmology of the future,” at a time when, as Dania Rajendra explains, “good ideas for transforming our world are in short supply.”³ We already have all that we need to strike that third path Rabbi Lappe describes—we just need to see it and invest in it.

Rise Up has been incredibly proud to fund many of these same leaders over the past six years. Since 2019, we have funded 60 inspiring organizations and developed over 150 Jewish leaders who have guided their communities through an unprecedented number of crises, including a global pandemic, the re-emergence of an authoritarian government, and continued assaults on what remains of our democracy. We have seen, firsthand, what becomes possible when we resource work that integrates deep Jewish wisdom and practice, centers the margins

² Interview with Reverend Jennifer Bailey, Sept. 10, 2025.

³ Interview with Dania Rajendra, Sept. 30, 2025.

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of our community, and drives progressive action for social change. Our social movements become more powerful and resilient, and hundreds of thousands of Jewish people—many of whom feel alienated from the majority of Jewish spaces—reconnect with Judaism, find their spiritual homes, and feel whole.⁴

Over these past six years, we have fought, every day, for this work to be resourced by others in the field. We have advocated for acknowledgement that this vibrant ecosystem not only exists, but also offers us the most viable path toward dignity, safety, and thriving for Jews *and* our neighbors. We have strived to communicate as widely as possible that the vision of Judaism this community holds is the one that most faithfully reflects the fundamental Jewish principles of *b'tzelem elohim*, that all human beings are made in the image of G-d, and *pikuach nefesh*, that saving a life supersedes virtually all other commandments. **This is the only vision of Judaism that does not compromise our humanity or the humanity of others.**

The intentional decision to nourish our collective “prophetic imagination” has driven Rise Up’s work from the start, taking Rabbi Heschel as inspiration. And it continues through our merger with the Jewish Liberation Fund, an organization that has invested under the same mandate and done the same advocacy alongside us in an increasingly challenging funding landscape. **We know that this merger will get us one step closer to building the long-term, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure that our beloved Jewish social justice sector needs to finally bring forth *olam ha’ba*—the world to come. Doing so is critical and it is urgent. May it come speedily, in our days.**

All of us deserve to feel the magic of finding a sacred place to call home. For years, Rise Up grantees have been creating the values-aligned spiritual communities we all yearn for and desperately need, all while working on shoestring budgets. Like the first rabbis 2,000 years ago, they’ve re-imagined what the Temple can be: nurturing sacred ties in living rooms, community centers, grassroots organizations, protests, and Zoom study groups—making Judaism more joyful, meaningful, and accessible than ever before. At a time of mounting civil unrest, alienation, and hopelessness, the need for these spaces—and for courageous Jewish leaders at their helm—has never been stronger.

⁴ This is data that Rise Up has regularly maintained over the course of our grantmaking through meetings with Rise Up grantees, applications, and mid- and end-of-year reports.

This is the only vision of Judaism that does not compromise our humanity or the humanity of others.

We know that this merger will get us one step closer to building the long-term, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure that our beloved Jewish social justice sector needs to finally bring forth *olam ha’ba*—the world to come. Doing so is critical and it is urgent. May it come speedily, in our days.

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Thank you to Rise Up's leadership team, most of whom have served in their role since the project's founding and stuck with us through a director transition: Reverend Jennifer Bailey, April Baskin, Shifra Bronznick, Melissa Carter, Isaac Luria, Rabbi Elan Babchuck, and Zahara Zahav. Thank you to Isaac Luria, in particular, for dreaming up Rise Up to begin with and for making this project a reality with significant institutional backing, and for all of your support with our fundraising since.

Thank you to Claudia Horwitz, Rise Up's initial lead researcher and founding director between 2019–2022, for your brilliant leadership and stewardship of this project from the very beginning. Rise Up wouldn't be the same without your moral and spiritual compass.

Thank you to Josh Bloom, Rise Up's tireless project administrator, whose precision and commitment to detail has made our data tracking work so comprehensive and impressive, which has in turn tremendously supported our fundraising efforts.

Thank you to Kirstie Kimball, Magdalena Moranda, and Phoebe Kimes at Build Power Strategies for the years of fundraising and leadership coaching for us and for our grantees, as well as your support in shaping, editing, and proofreading this report.

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Thank you to all of our interviewees for this report, for your thinking and collaboration: Reverend Jennifer Bailey, April Baskin, Shifra Bronznick, Claudia Horwitz, Isaac Luria, Dania Rajendra, and Zahara Zahav.

Thank you to Joanna Ware for your thought-partnership and commitment to ensuring that this era of Rise Up's work is closed without urgency, and with thoughtfulness and care.

Thank you to Natasha Soffer-Roth for your tremendous editing support and for all of your encouragement.

And finally, thank you to Rise Up's incredible grantees. It has been an honor to support and lift up your work over the last four years. May you all go from strength to strength.

RISE UP STAFF (PAST & PRESENT)



Josh Bloom, Project Administrator

Josh Bloom has spent 25 years engaged in international peace-building, human rights, and socially conscious travel planning. Before joining the Rise Up team, Josh was a travel planner with MEJDI Tours and a consultant to the Nathan Cummings Foundation. He has previously worked for T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, Rabbis for Human Rights, Mercy Corps, American Jewish World Service, the Conflict and Health Programme at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Amnesty International USA, the Health and Human Rights Programme at the University of Cape Town, and UNICEF. Josh celebrates his Mashadi Persian heritage. He lives in Western Massachusetts where he is a rebbitzin, married to Rabbi Jodie Gordon, Senior Rabbi of Hevreh of Southern Berkshire.



Claudia Horwitz, Founding Project Director, 2019–2022

Claudia Horwitz has been working at the intersection of leadership, movement-building and spiritual practice for three decades. Her first book, *The Spiritual Activist: Practices to Transform Your Life, Your Work and Your World* (Penguin Compass, 2002), helped to build the field of spirituality and social change. She founded and ran stone circles and co-founded The Stone House, a retreat center for activists. She helped to found Rise Up in 2019 and served as its first director until 2022. Currently, she supports systems leaders as Leadership Development faculty for the Annie E. Casey Foundation and works with Rabbis for Ceasefire. The author of [numerous articles](#), Claudia is a trained yoga teacher and lives on Ocracoke, in North Carolina's Outer Banks.



Keren Soffer-Roth, Project Director, 2022–2026

Keren Soffer-Roth (she/her) is the co-executive director of the [Jewish Liberation Fund \(JLF\)](#). She is also continuing as the director of [Rise Up Initiative](#) until both organizations officially merge in July 2026.

Keren has over a decade of leadership experience in the Jewish social justice sector and nearly two decades in the government and nonprofit sectors. In her four years at Rise Up, she raised over \$2 million; doubled the organization's funder portfolio; launched its first collaborative grants program; increased grants for marginalized Jewish leaders by over 30 percent; and helped steward the organization's merger with JLF.

As a former senior organizer at [Jews For Racial & Economic Justice \(JFREJ\)](#), Keren co-founded the first ever Mizrahi & Sephardi Caucus in the country; deepened the organization's Jewish-Muslim solidarity work; diversified its cultural organizing strategy; built the largest education and organizing program in JFREJ's then-30

year history; and co-authored the groundbreaking resource, [Understanding Antisemitism: An Offering To Our Movement](#).

Throughout her career, Keren has trained over 5,000 people, developed over 550 leaders, and led over 30 teams. She is an avid home cook, dedicated cookbook collector, and intermediate potter. Keren is a proud Arab Jew with lifelong roots in Queens, NY, where she lives with her wife, Natasha, and their daughter.

RISE UP LEADERSHIP TEAM (PAST & PRESENT)



April Baskin, Founding Director, Joyous Justice

April N. Baskin (she/her) is an award-winning Black & Cherokee Jewish leader and a rising Hebrew priestess. She works full-time as the director of Joyous Justice, a multiracial community-powered social justice and spiritual transformation organization providing liberatory life & leadership coaching, consulting, and education. For 20 years, April has helped shift communities and institutions toward more equitable outcomes within and outside of the Jewish world. Recognized as a faith leader to watch by the Center for American Progress, April previously served as the racial justice director of the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable and is the Union for Reform Judaism's immediate past vice president of audacious hospitality.



Rabbi Elan Babchuck, Founding Director, Glean Network; Executive Vice President, Clal

Rabbi Elan Babchuck serves as the Executive Vice President at [Clal](#), the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, and the Founding Director of [Glean Network](#). He was ordained and earned his MBA in 2012, and is on track to complete a PhD in late 2026.

A sought-after thought leader, he is the co-author of [Picking Up the Pieces: Leadership After Empire](#) (2024, Fortress Press), and [Meaning Making – 8 Values That Drive America's Newest Generations](#) (2020, St. Mary's Press). He has delivered keynotes at stages ranging from the Pentagon to [TEDx](#), he has been published in The Atlantic, The New York Times, The Guardian, The Boston Globe, Washington Post, Psychology Today, and Religion News Service, and he has a column for [The Wisdom Daily](#).

He is a [Faith & Media Initiative Fellow](#), a Founding Partner of [Starts With Us](#), a movement to counteract toxic polarization in America, and a founding [Board Member](#) of [Springtide Research Institute](#), which focuses on spirituality, mental health and Gen Z. He lives in Providence, Rhode Island with his wife and their three children, and in his spare time he enjoys rock climbing and gardening.



Isaac Luria, Senior Director of Place-Based Initiatives, Nathan Cummings Foundation

Isaac Luria is an organizer, resource mobilizer, and movement builder committed to elevating the voices of spirit and moral courage, working to advance racial, economic, and environmental justice across all religions, spiritual traditions, and communities. He currently leads NCF's place-based initiatives. This includes our funding in the Israel-Palestine region and the U.S. South (at geographies soon to be determined).

Isaac joined NCF in 2017 to support grantmaking in the Voice, Creativity, and Culture: Religious Traditions and Contemplative Practices and Israel-Palestine portfolios. He advised donors and foundations on strategic philanthropy supporting progressive social movements advocating for racial justice and inclusive democracy, as well as Jewish social justice, spiritual community innovation, progressive organizing in Israel, countering white nationalism, and building effective cross-sectoral responses to antisemitism and its causes.

He is a Senior Fellow at the Nexus Project, which studies the role of antisemitism and Israel within American politics, at the Knight Program in Media and Religion of the USC Annenberg School of Communication & Journalism.

Isaac has held leadership roles at Auburn Seminary, a leadership development shop for the multifaith movements for justice, where he led programs that train thousands of faith leaders in media, storytelling, digital campaigning, social media, and more. Isaac co-founded Groundswell, a digital platform where hundreds of thousands of people of faith participate in social action. Isaac was also on the founding team of J Street, the political home for pro-Israel, pro-peace Americans.

Isaac holds a bachelor's degree in American studies from Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife, Rabbi Sara Luria, and their three young children. **As a staff member of one of Rise Up's funders, Isaac has recused himself from all grantmaking decisions.**



Reverend Jennifer Bailey, Founding Director, Faith Matters Network; Executive Director, The Dan and Margaret Maddox Fund

Reverend Jen Bailey is an ordained minister, public theologian, and a leader in the multi-faith movement for justice. She is the Founder and Executive Director of the Faith Matters Network, a Womanist-led organization focused on "healing the healers" by accompanying spiritually grounded leaders on their journeys to heal themselves and their communities.

Jen is Co-Founder of [the People's Supper](#), a project that aims to repair the breach in our interpersonal relationships across political, ideological, and identity differences over shared meals. A sought-after commentator and public speaker on the intersection of religion and public life, she has spoken at the inaugural Obama Foundation Summit, Makers, TEDxSkoll, and the White House. Her work has been featured on OnBeing with Krista Tippett, CBS This Morning, the New York Times, the Washington Post, and dozens of other publications. She is the author of *To My Beloveds: Letters on Faith, Race, Loss and Radical Hope* (Chalice Press, 2021). Rev. Bailey is ordained in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Follow her at @revjenbailey.



Shifra Bronznick, Social Change Strategist

Shifra Bronznick is a strategist to social sector networks, organizations, and leaders. Her partnership with Auburn has deepened its influence and impact on the multi-faith movement for justice. Shifra has been selected to represent and engage the Jewish stream as part of Powered by Faith and leads Jews for Freedom, a major initiative aimed at dismantling authoritarianism and securing a robust democracy.

Shifra created the groundbreaking Better Work, Better Life paid leave campaign. The Men as Allies initiative she launched has influenced creative approaches to diversifying thought leadership. The leadership programs she designs support hundreds of women in cultivating their full potential and advancing systemic change. Her change management consulting projects have affected the trajectory of many leading organizations. Shifra was Founder and President of Advancing Women Professionals & the Jewish Community, recognized annually by the philanthropic guide, Slingshot for leadership and innovation. She co-authored Leveling the Playing Field, with Didi Goldenhar and Marty Linsky. Her action research projects with foundations, including Visioning Justice, strengthened the field of faith-rooted justice and led to the establishment of the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable. As a consultant and senior advisor to Catalyst, National Council for Research on Women and the leadership strategist to the White House Project for over a decade, Shifra's feminism spans four waves of activism from baby boomers in the early 70's to Gen Z. Shifra received the 2019 Lives of Commitment Award from Auburn Seminary, the Leading Lights award from the Future Work Institute, the Distinguished Leader Award from A Better Balance and a Ford Foundation Public Voices Fellowship. Shifra has been a senior fellow at the Research Center for Leadership in Action at NYU/Wagner where she co-created and taught the cohort course in strategic leadership for the Executive Master of Public Administration program.



Zahara Zahav, Director of Organizing, Jews For Racial and Economic Justice

Zahara Zahav is the Director of Organizing at Jews For Racial & Economic Justice working with the Caring Majority, a movement of older adults, people with disabilities, family caregivers, and home care workers, to win fair pay for home care workers in New York State.

She loves science fiction, learning Torah, and learning anything, her hometown of Key West, and seltzer.

APPENDIX: RISE UP GRANTEES

3W Consulting	Jewish Social Justice Roundtable	Or HaLev: Center for Jewish Spirituality and Meditation
A Queer Nigun Project	Jewish Studio Project	Palestinian Voices Study Group
Achvat Amim - Solidarity of Nations	Jewish Youth for Community Action	Queer Mikveh Project
Ammud: Jews of Color Torah Academy	Jews in ALL Hues	R&R: The Rest of Our Lives
Atlanta Jews of Color Council	Jewtina y Co.	Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
Ayin Press	Joyous Justice	Rimonim Liturgy Project
Camp Tawonga	KAJ Ventures	Shel Maala
Communal Loss and Adaptation Project (CLAP)	Kavod	Shleimut
Daily Queer Mincha	Kesher Pittsburgh	SVARA: A Traditionally Radical Yeshiva
Dayenu	Kirva	Synagogues Rising
Der Tkhines Proyekt	Kol HaPanim	Taproot
Dimensions Educational Consulting Inc.	Let My People Sing!	The Illuminated Hilchot Teshuvah
Disability Justice Torah Circle	Linke Fligl	The LUNAR Collective
Edot Midwest Regional Jewish Diversity Collaborative	Malchut: Center for Prophetic and Decolonial Judaism	The Workshop
Egalitarian Sephardi Mizrahi Kehilla of NY	Matir Asurim: Jewish Care Network for Incarcerated People	TischPDX
Jewish Ancestral Healing	Mitsui Collective	Tiyuv
Jewish Bridge Project	Mizrahi Collective	Tzedek Lab
Jewish Coalition for Immigrant Justice Northwest	Mosaic Visions	Uri L'Tzedek
Jewish Covid Resilience Network	Nefesh LA	Wilderness Torah
	New Jewish Culture Fellowship	Ya Ghorbati
	Nonbinary Hebrew Project	