



STRATEGY SNAPSHOT

Addressing Poverty in the U.S. Jewish Community

February 2026

Everyone deserves the opportunity to achieve stability and thrive.

Yet 23% of Jewish families in the United States struggle to make ends meet, and roughly the same number earn less than \$50,000 annually, which falls far short of what most require for basic needs.¹ These households have difficulty affording everything from food to housing to health care. They also experience isolation or even exclusion from the broader Jewish community because of their financial challenges, facing obstacles to participation in important aspects of Jewish life, such as education, summer camps, and synagogues. In addition, stories about American Jews — including those who experience poverty — tend to perpetuate problematic stereotypes that do not match reality.²

The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation strives to build public knowledge and awareness about Jewish poverty in the United States, while also supporting and strengthening nonprofits that help individuals and families meet basic needs and achieve economic stability.



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Find endnotes and examples of this strategy's impact at www.hjweinbergfoundation.org/jewish-poverty-snapshot.



The Challenge

Many do not see poverty

as an issue in the

Jewish community.

In fact, the opposite is true: They see Jews as having money and power, a stereotype that media and entertainment reinforce by portraying predominantly wealthy Jewish individuals and characters.³ The few stories about Jewish poverty usually concentrate on specific groups, including the ultra-Orthodox community and Holocaust survivors, as well as other older adults. These groups only represent a fraction of Jewish households with low incomes.⁴ Indeed, most of these households mirror the broader

population and include single-parent families, people with disabilities or chronic illnesses, and individuals experiencing unemployment.⁵

In addition, a dearth of reliable data on financial hardship in the Jewish community masks the issue. National and local studies about U.S. Jews have used different definitions and measures of economic instability, making it difficult to capture the extent of the problem, identify themes or trends, or draw comparisons.⁶

The lack of awareness and attention to this issue has translated into little investment to address it. This, in turn, has meant many Jewish nonprofits — including those committed to helping people connect with Jewish culture and community — are not well prepared or able to reach, engage, or support Jews with low incomes.

The Strategy

Since helping to launch a national initiative to raise awareness about Jewish poverty in 2019,⁷ the Foundation's strategy to address the issue has involved three key components:

- **Developing a strong base of research and demographic data** to help Jewish nonprofit and community leaders better understand the scope and scale of poverty among U.S. Jews — for example, those most likely to experience financial instability and related challenges — and develop appropriate solutions. This effort includes supporting the standardization of data collected through Jewish community studies, as well as national research on Jewish economic stability and portrayals of Jews in the media.
- **Building nonprofits' ability to address Jewish poverty** by investing in national networks that connect and equip local agencies and organizations with training, tools, and other learning opportunities, enabling them to expand

programs and services and increase their effectiveness. These networks drive national initiatives and collaborations that amplify the nonprofit sector's collective reach and impact, benefiting even more people.

- **Investing in proven or innovative programs for groups within the Jewish community that are sometimes sidelined or overlooked** — and disproportionately affected by poverty. The Foundation aims to bolster and grow these strong programs to reach more people across the country.

Addressing Jewish poverty requires reliable data, strong nonprofits, and investment in communities often overlooked.

The Impact

A more comprehensive and cohesive picture of poverty in the Jewish community. This work has outlined clear priorities for addressing poverty and set the stage for greater investment to that end.

- Today, standard demographic data exists for local areas that collectively represent over 50% of the 7.5 million Jews in the United States.⁸ The data is the result of a Foundation-supported initiative led by Jewish Federations of North America to establish a more consistent approach to measuring poverty in community studies.^{9,10}
- Research on economic hardship has provided insight into the primary causes of Jewish poverty — for example, job loss or health crises — and groups more likely to experience financial hardship, such as single parents and LGBTQ+ families.¹¹

New investments of over \$50 million in nonprofits and other efforts committed to addressing Jewish poverty. Collecting data and sharing research were critical first steps in raising awareness, leading to greater attention to and funding for the issue.

- In 2024, Together Ending Need — the national initiative on Jewish poverty supported by the Foundation and Jewish Funders Network — engaged over 130 new funders through events raising awareness about Jewish poverty, collaborations with fellow philanthropies to take on the issue, and direct funding to nonprofits or giving circles addressing the problem.



- The Natan Fund, a giving circle based in New York City, supports startups and pilot projects aimed at strengthening the Jewish community. In 2022, the Foundation helped seed Natan's first giving circle geared toward fighting poverty. For the third giving-circle round in 2024, Natan brought in four additional funders to invest in promising solutions to reduce poverty.

Stronger national networks for nonprofits and philanthropy to promote data-informed practices and solutions, foster collaboration, and bolster the work of local organizations serving the Jewish community. Investing in the growth of key networks — through the Association of Jewish Aging Services, Center for Small Town Jewish Life, and Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies, among others — increased support for nonprofit leaders and staff in hundreds of communities nationwide. This laid the groundwork for collaborating on major initiatives; providing training and other development opportunities; sharing research and data; and creating connections that have helped nonprofits weather crises and coordinate responses to emergencies.

- Supporting the growth of the Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies positioned the organization to launch Project EM in 2021. This virtual program, which involves 19 local agencies, provides job seekers across the country with the support and guidance they need to secure employment. In its first three years, Project EM placed nearly 4,000 people in jobs and standardized the way agencies track placement and retention data, aligning with best practices.¹²
- The Foundation supported the collaboration of NTEN with Jewish Federations of North America and the Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies, which enabled Jewish nonprofits to make much-needed technology updates as they emerged from the pandemic. NTEN's expert training for nearly 100 organizations from 26 states, including many members of both networks, improved their technology and ability to meet community needs.¹³

The growth of more than 20 nonprofits and programs focused on underserved members of the Jewish community. Boosting these efforts and extending their reach into the community has helped lift up strong and promising approaches for others to adopt or replicate.

- Met Council and UJA-Federation of New York’s virtual food pantry allows New Yorkers experiencing food insecurity to choose items online based on their dietary needs and pick up customized boxes at sites throughout the city. The program prioritizes accessibility and dignity and incentivizes healthy eating. The Foundation’s support enabled Met Council to expand the digital pantry to 13 sites. From July 2024 through June 2025, the nonprofit distributed more than 2.3 million pounds of food to nearly 42,000 individuals through this system.¹⁴
- Most of the roughly 16,000 Jewish students enrolled at City University of New York (CUNY) campuses are first-generation college students from working-class or low-income families who juggle school and family responsibilities. With funding from the Weinberg Foundation, several other philanthropies, and UJA-Federation of

Increased awareness has led to more philanthropic investment in programs to reduce poverty in the Jewish community.



New York, all CUNY Hillels now provide food assistance, counseling, case management, and job training, enabling students to participate in their campus programs. In the 2023–2024 school year, the Hillels nearly doubled the students served over the previous year, to more than 3,100.¹⁵

- Founded in 2021, Baltimore’s imadi serves families with children who have a chronic illness or disability, helping them navigate the medical system and providing programming for kids. With the Foundation’s grant — which funded a new data management and reporting system, as well as general operations — and imadi’s strong leadership, the nonprofit has almost doubled its budget over three years, improved service delivery, and secured new hospital partnerships. These efforts helped imadi expand its reach to more than twice as many families, from 60 in 2022 to 155 in 2024.

Conclusion

Jewish organizations should support Jews facing financial hardship.

Although the issue has received more attention, the Foundation’s work has just begun. Philanthropy and nonprofits can and must do more to recognize

and highlight the diverse economic experiences within the Jewish community; evaluate the most effective programs and strategies to reduce poverty and take them to broader scale; and remove the financial obstacles that keep people from fully participating in Jewish life. These are crucial steps toward eventually building a future, as envisioned in the *Torah*, where there are no needy among us and where everyone feels welcome and at home in the Jewish community.