

## MENTAL NOTES

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**The benefits of collaboration:** When looking at how the Jewish communal world can dig out of its financial hole, some groups are eyeing existing infrastructure to build something new.

**Jay Ruderman**, the chairman of his family's foundation, said he never had been involved with the federation system until his family decided six years ago to start a foundation focused on special needs education in the Jewish community. The Rudermans believed they could maximize their impact by working with other like-minded foundations -- and their local federation in Boston.

The Boston federation, **Combined Jewish Philanthropies**, had been working to revamp the local day school system through **Peerless Excellence**, an initiative launched with a \$45 million grant from anonymous donors.

That attracted the **Ruderman Family Foundation**, which came on board with a grant to help two older organizations, Etgar L'Noar and the Jewish Special Education Collaborative, merge in 2006. The result was a group called **Gateways: Access to Jewish Education**.

Through Gateways and a multimillion-dollar investment from the Rudermans, Boston has been able to place dedicated staff in 12 of the area's Jewish day schools for special needs students. The initiative also has helped schools rewrite their missions to include special needs programming. This has opened the doors wider for special needs students and led to greater enrollment and better service, according to the foundation and the federation.

The key here is that a foundation decided to focus its mission instead of spreading around its money to a number of organizations, and then the federation helped the foundation pinpoint and enact its plan, Ruderman said.

"If you really want to have an impact on society, then try to take whatever you have and do it in the biggest way possible," Ruderman told The Fundermentalist. "Try to form partnerships with federations and other donors and make them true partners."

The Fundermentalist's take: To be effective, federations must look at the community holistically, helping foundations pick out individual projects that appeal to them and work with them to create effective plans and programming in those areas. Where other areas are still in need of funding, the federation should step in.