“What began as a vision for the future of Jewish individuals has turned into a realized community of Jewish pioneers. Founding BYFI was an investment in long-term change for the Jewish community, the results of which I never could have predicted.”
— Edgar M. Bronfman z’l, Founder of The Bronfman Fellowships
The Bronfman Fellowships is a different kind of community. We are composed of thinkers and doers with wildly distinct takes on Judaism, a shared commitment to pluralism and a hunger for life-long Jewish learning. We are both an incredible program for teens and a space for Jewish reflection and inspiration for adults.

The cover of our 2015 annual report is an image of a Bronfman-style whimsical Rube Goldberg machine. This image reminds us of the core elements that make our community unique: mentorship, personal relationships, outstanding Jewish learning, ideas that inspire and, in particular, great discussions with interesting people. When Bronfmanim form a lifelong community the results are splendidly original and have an outsize impact.

In a world where it often seems people are talking across one another without listening, the Bronfman community is one that constantly elevates the conversation. Whether in person or through our vibrant virtual channels, fellows and alumni can engage with people who think differently and where there is genuine interest in learning from one another. This is our definition of a deeply pluralistic Jewish community, where everyone has the potential to be both a teacher and friend.

This report highlights the ways in which The Bronfman Fellowships continues to evolve, engage, and inspire. I welcome your feedback and thank you for your continued affection for and involvement with this rare and wonderful community!

Becky Voorwinde
Executive Director
Becky@byfi.org
What builds and
We are a unique combination of people, conversations, events and ideas sparking dynamism in our community. From a dinner table discussion inspired by a listserv thread, to a professional connection made at a learning event, to a life changing project supported by the BYFI community, The Bronfman Fellowships strives to enrich and support the lives of our alumni as they make an impact in the world around them.
Ma’aseh Projects

The Ma’aseh project allows the Fellows to bring back the Bronfman experience into their home communities, and apply some of the ideas that they encountered over the summer to their everyday life. We also ask older alumni to serve as Ma’aseh advisors, welcoming our Fellows into the alumni community and giving them important resources in a field that they’re interested in.
The Amitei Bronfman Experience

DIVERSITY
Our goal is to identify promising individuals with diverse backgrounds who will grow as leaders. We want the Fellowship experience to add to their identity and development.

Who is an ideal Bronfman Fellow?

There are a lot of them (around 1,105 at last count). Our intentional selection process ensures that our Fellowship Year group and larger alumni community are balanced, diverse and interesting. Our Fellows are as different as can be, live all over the country and define Judaism in many different ways. They are dedicated artists, science whizzes, students who speak multiple languages, animal lovers, bookworms and track stars. What else do we consider? Here are some key qualities.

MATURE
We seek applicants who show humility, energy, sensitivity and responsibility.

PERPECTIVE
Candidates can clearly articulate their opinions and views yet remain open to others. We want young people with strong identities who will sensitively challenge their peers. It’s important that they are open to learning from others, open to questioning their opinions and seeking an avenue for further growth.

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PASSIONATE
We’re looking for Fellows who show true commitment and genuine interest in their passions, whether they deeply engage with one pursuit or are involved with a variety of groups and fields. Top grades or leadership responsibilities are impressive, but can’t replace a love of learning.

CHALLENGE
We’re looking for Fellows who are excited to be challenged, who want to explore their Jewish identities and their place in the world, and who are hungry to pursue their passions into adulthood.

US Trip
One two week trip to the United States to learn about expressions of American Jewish identity.

Mifgashim
Two Mifgashim with American Bronfman Fellows.

Seminars
6 seminars and mifgashim focused on group building, exploring ideas of identity and self and engaging with Israeli society.

The Feurstein Seminar

As one of the 8 seminars during the Israeli Fellowship Year, our Amitim spend a Shabbat with residents of the Feuerstein Institute, a program for people with special needs. In engaging with these students in a non-hierarchical setting, by learning and working together, our Amitim learn about participating in society with those who are different. We strive to teach our Amitim to be responsible for making the communities around them a more open environment, and this experience helps them explore how to make that possible.
Why does BYFI focus on strengthening relationships and networking?

WE ENCOURAGE alumni to use their strengths to make a difference by supporting their passions. Our committed staff, faculty mentors, and alumni leaders work together to reach as many cross sections of our community as possible, maintaining deep connections AND SPARKING NEW CONVERSATIONS.
Viewpoint

Throughout the year, our Israeli community hosts “Viewpoint” conversations, where we invite experts in their fields to a small informal breakfast. During one Viewpoint meet up, featuring author Matti Friedman (’94) talking about his experience with Israeli journalism, participants sat speaking with him for 3 hours. After the conversation was over, a small group even extended the discussion to lunch.

Catch ups

One of our core values is the individual attention we give to Bronfmanim, and we love knowing first hand what’s on their minds. To do this, our staff in both Israel and America devote time to sitting down 1:1 with alumni to catch up about what’s new, offer career advice and let them know what’s going on at BYFI. This year, we met with over 30% of our Israeli alumni and over 10% of our American alumni. These personal connections allow us to serve as a hub for the community, introducing Bronfmanim to others in their field, passing along job and volunteer opportunities, providing Jewish resources, and helping connect them to local communities.

Collegiate Weekend & Shabbat Bogrim

In both our American and Israeli alumni communities, we host large yearly gatherings for our youngest alumni. Engaging with the collegiate or army population allows us to continue to support our alumni through large transitions while introducing them to our alumni community. We invite faculty members to join us and plan a mix of text study, informal social time and conversations about issues important to this alumni demographic.

At this year’s Collegiate Weekend and Shabbat Bogrim, alumni had the chance to sit down with BYFI staff for informal “office hours” to chat about activities, internships, or future opportunities. We hope not only to introduce younger alumni to the connections available in the Bronfman community, but also to provide a forum for them to talk through their options and think long-term. We’re excited to help alumni explore their passions and think holistically about their futures.
BYFI VIRTUAL COMMUNITY

The Bronfman community is the consistent place to turn for thoughtful commentary on current events, with alumni from diverse backgrounds and perspectives coming together for nuanced conversation. We love that our alumni are always excited to learn, and that Bronfman is a space where anyone can contribute their thoughts on the weekly Torah portion, what's in the news, or share personal challenges and triumphs. Bronfmanim use our virtual community to discover new ideas and solicit trusted opinions that they can bring to their family, workplace or community.

LISTSERV

Our listserv continues as one of the most vibrant centers of our alumni communications.

Here’s what’s been going on there this year:

- Simchat Bat ceremony ideas
- Supporting women in Orthodox leadership roles
- Status report from Israel

MOST POPULAR TOPICS

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BRONFTALKS

With experts in everything from government to the environment to education policy, our community is poised to respond to current topics in a reflective and honest manner that goes beyond the headlines.

Alumni, parents of alumni and friends join our calls to get a balanced and informed briefing on what's going on in the world.

TOPICS INCLUDED

- Water accessibility
- Israel and the Temple Mount
- Iran Nuclear Deal

WHAT WE ARE LEARNING

This year, we launched a new quarterly email, in memory of our founder Edgar M. Bronfman z’l, that asks a group of alumni to share something they've been reading with the community. Here's what we found in our inaugural email:

- Let There Be Water
- Mechoz Hadar podcast
- The Fragile Framework
- John Mcphee’s series on the art of writing
- Jill Lepore’s article on the accuracy of surveys and polls
Our **Divrei Torah project** began last year with an open call to Bronfmanim to contribute their thoughts on the **weekly torah portion** to the community. We were thrilled with the response, and glad to see a diverse group of our alumni take this project on. From Rabbis who were looking to experiment with their typical divrei torah to alumni who had never had the opportunity to write one before, we saw unique thoughts and interesting formats coming from a wide cross section of the community.

From the 24 alumni who contributed in 2015, there was original poetry, an important reflection about mental health, a piece co-written by two friends, a paper cut-out illustration, and thoughts about everything from the meaning of light over Hannukah to Rabin’s legacy. We are proud that the Divrei Torah project shows the diversity of the ideas of Bronfmanim, and that our alumni are so excited to share them with this community.

This year we asked nine Bronfmanim - from Israel and America - to host us in their Sukkah for a moment, by sharing a text or image that serves as a blessing and inspiration, in their lives. Tradition has it that on Sukkot, the most wondrous guests visit one’s Sukkah. Called Ushpizin - Talmudic-for guests – they usually consist of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and so on, each on their own special night, each bringing with them their own stories.

The Bronfman Fellowships encourage Fellows to appreciate guests of all kinds as inspirations: people, texts and art. We were excited to share these printed booklets with our entire alumni community, as well as alumni parents.
We’ve asked ourselves for a long time whether an adult Bronfman experience was possible. Could we ever recreate the close connections, exciting content and meaningful discussions that typify Bronfman? This year we gave it a try by running two adult overnight seminars.

Germany Close Up

11 alumni travelled to Germany for 8 days through a program subsidized by Germany Close Up, a great organization that facilitates trips for American Jews to encounter modern Germany. The diverse group of alumni and their partners took a week away from their lives, to engage in conversations and ask questions that allowed them to go back to those intellectually curious 17 year olds that they once were. We asked alumni to contribute content during the trip, from leading small discussion sessions to coordinating the Shabbat experience.

Germany Close Up was a uniquely "Bronfman" experience in a lot of ways - from the intense discussions, to the sites that we visited, to the always-legendary pre-trip reading, and above all, the amazing group of people that tromped all around Berlin together. Our days were filled with facts and figures, peppered with firsthand accounts of War and Communism and narratives from all walks of life, mixed together with awesome group leaders who kept us on our toes.

— Kaitlin Nemeth ’05

Discussion with non-profits grappling with the refugee crisis in Germany

Meeting with a member of German Parliament

Guided tour of the Memorial and Museum at the Former Concentration Camp Sachsenhausen

Thanksgiving dinner with young Germans
Bogrim Seminar

In Israel, the oldest members of our alumni community are now 35, with careers, families and growing responsibilities. This year, we expanded our programming for this demographic through a forum for them to discuss issues pertaining to their lives. Sixty of our Israeli alumni, 6 American alumni and 30 spouses and partners of alumni attended a two day program. Our Israel office modeled the programming on the structure of an Amitei Bronfman Seminar, with external speakers and faculty members providing content and moderating group discussions. The Vaad, our Israeli Alumni Advisory Board, organized a planning committee that was intimately involved in determining the seminar topics and content for the day.

Seminar topics included:

- The Path Not Taken
- Should I Specialize or Keep a Broad Focus?
- Tradition vs. Finding My Own Path

The event felt very high-quality and serious – I feel that this is the beginning of a direction the community needs to think about, how we support each other during critical junctures in our lives.

— Igal Avrahami ’00
Launched in 2005, the Bronfman Alumni Venture Fund (AVF) is the first Jewish peer-to-peer giving fund program of its kind - fundraising from alumni for the sole purpose of redistribution to alumni-led projects in both Israel and America.

In the 10 years of our AVF

200 Grants to 143 Alumni

With contributions from 501 alumni

10 YRS

In 2015, we received a record 33 applications from alumni all over the US and Israel

28 grants were awarded ranging from $500 to $3,000, totaling $25,800 in distributed funds

$25,800
Changemakers and cultural innovation

Beyond funding, the AVF connects to experienced professionals within our rich alumni network, and provides additional forums for feedback and support. Alumni changemakers and influencers utilize the AVF as a living laboratory and incubator to innovate.

Co-deliberation between Israelis and Americans

Our Israeli and American alumni jointly review applications and steward the use of donations to ensure grants are awarded to projects that are innovative and high-impact. The AVF is a leader in this cross-cultural co-deliberation process.

As a result, Israeli and American alumni are well aware of what Jewish, social, and cultural innovation looks like in each country, and are exposed to each society’s current questions and issues.

Meet some of our 2015 grantees

This year, the AVF supported several new media initiatives in Israel and America, aimed at inspiring conversations between unlikely subjects and prompting new ways of thinking about history and the present.

“The Hitchhikers,” a web documentary series directed by Yair Agmon ’04 creates a space for unusual yet critical conversations about Israeli identity with a kaleidoscopic cast of characters: hitchhikers he picks up in his camera-rigged car while driving throughout the country. The intimacy of the enclosed vehicle and probing presence of the cameras unravels the candid charm and roughness of the passengers. Both driver, hitchhiker, and viewer know the journey is transient, however, the impressions of these exchanges, ranging from nationalism, to love, to cigarettes — are powerful and lasting. These episodes are distinctly Israeli, yet they provide a window for understanding the many faces of one place, which Agmon demonstrates is only possible through taking a journey and lending a hand.

Can We Talk?, a podcast produced by Judith Rosenbaum ’90 and Nahanni Rous ’92 with the Jewish Women’s Archive, brings stories and conversations about Jewish women and the issues that shape our public and private lives. Alternating between a documentary style and a roundtable format, Can We Talk? includes profiles of historical and contemporary Jewish women, frank discussion of culture, politics, and current events, and little-known stories from our past and present.

Tracking AVF Trends

Projects that receive AVF funding are also bellwethers of change in the greater Jewish community. AVF grantees are exemplars who are redefining how to bridge the gaps in communities they serve, whether through their career, independent project, or student-led organization.

2006

The rise of new Independent Minyanim with alumni spearheading these alternative communities. (Hadar in NYC, Washington Square Minyan in Boston, Tikkun Leil in DC, Kavana in Seattle and Minyan Naaleh in Denver)

2009

Rise in interest in supplemental Jewish education for children as more alumni start families (Darkhei Noam Children’s Siddur, Hyde Park Jewish Enrichment Center, Olam Montessori School)

2013

Projects focused on LGBT and inclusion issues in Israel (Jerusalem Gay Group, The Normal Heart)
This year, for the first time ever, we turned to our Bronfman community to partner with us in supporting the BYFI mission. We raised over $118,376, a truly impressive milestone for our community.

We are so thankful for the outpouring of support we received from alumni, parents and friends, and excited to be activating our community in determining the future of The Bronfman Fellowships. Though we have raised money since 2005 to support the Alumni Venture Fund, this was the first year that donors were able to designate their gift towards the BYFI budget.

Our alumni are showing that young Jews are excited to be equal partners in funding their Jewish experiences, and willing to contribute their voices, time and money in advocating for a very different model of Jewish community. These contributions ensure that the program's core mission as a need-blind, merit-based Jewish community of diverse thinkers and doers remains strong.
We are thrilled to have you as partners in BYFI’s growth!

We’d like to thank:

- **319 individual donors**
- The **66 donors** who increased their gift this year
- **63 Amitim** who donated to the 2015 campaign
- Our **62 first time donors**
- Our **26 class representatives** who helped talk to their peers about the campaign
- All members of the 2014-2015 Alumni Advisory Board and Vaad
- Our **2015 Fellows and Amitim** for their class gifts
- Donors from **EVERY one of our Fellowship years**
- Adam R. Bronfman for his commitment and guidance
- The Samuel Bronfman Foundation for their sustaining support
- Edgar M. Bronfman z”l for his founding vision
2015 Budget

$1.61 million

7% from individual donors

93% anchor grant from The Samuel Bronfman Foundation

Thank you to our in kind supporters, who are an integral part of keeping our operation costs low by donating space and professional support.

Beit Avichai Israel
Diamond McCarthy LLP
Foundation for Jewish Camp
Hebrew College
Mechon Hadar
The NYU Bronfman Center
Paul Hastings LLP
The Shalom Hartman Institute of North America
The Samuel Bronfman Foundation

Thanks to The Samuel Bronfman Foundation for its ongoing support, including the $25.52 million investment in the Fellowships over the past 30 years.

What are The Bronfman Fellowships’ expenses?

Recruitment, Selection, Fellowship Year: 54%
Administration: 16%
Alumni Programming & Initiatives: 20%
Partner & Funder Relations: 3%
Alumni Venture Fund Management & Grant Support: 7%
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