

*MATANEL FOUNDATION*

*ACTIVITY REPORT*

**Program:** *Matanel Global Leadership Fellowship*

**Year:** 2025-2026

**Please present your activity report according to the following lines. The whole report will not exceed 2 or 3 pages (as word document).**

**Name of the Program:** Matanel Fellowship for Global Jewish Leadership

**Year of activity:** 2025-2026

**Name of the report's writer:** Grace Baker

**Function of the report's writer:** Director of Development and Communications

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**Number of active participants in the program:** 15

**Estimated number of impacted participant** 15

**Give the actually state of the program (where the program stands at the date of the activity report, no more than ten lines):**

Participants have successfully completed all planned learning sessions and are in the final stage of the fellowship. While the cohort Shabbaton was canceled due to the war with Iran, participants have been invited to join the next cohort's Shabbaton to ensure they still receive that shared community-building experience. Students are currently completing their capstone projects, which will serve as the culmination of their learning and leadership development. The students' projects will be compiled into an online/digital journal which will be disseminated throughout the Hillel network, social media and digital assets as well as posted on the Hillel Israel website. The program remains on track and will conclude following the presentation of these projects and the final closing activities.

**The main achievements during the last year of activity (main achievements, number of events, number of participants, etc.):**

The fellowship successfully delivered eight interactive online learning sessions for the cohort. Based on lessons from the first year, each session was extended from 90 minutes to two hours, creating more space for meaningful discussion,

personal reflection, and peer exchange. When the Budapest retreat had to be postponed, we added an optional storytelling session to help foster the personal connections that would normally have developed during the in-person gathering. This session became one of the highlights of the program, providing fellows with a meaningful opportunity to share their experiences and build deeper relationships across campuses. **See below Appendix for session descriptions and a poem compiled by the students about Jewish Memory.**

**The evaluation (methodology, results, comparisons with the precedent year, conclusions for the future...):**

As the fellowship concludes at the end of August 2026, a comprehensive end-of-program evaluation will be conducted following the final session. Fellows will complete the same survey used for the first cohort, allowing for direct comparison across cohorts and enabling us to assess participant satisfaction, learning outcomes, and the overall effectiveness of the program. The findings will inform both longitudinal evaluation and future program development.

In addition to the formal evaluation, the implementation of the second cohort has already provided valuable operational insights. While extending the online sessions from 90 minutes to two hours proved to be a clear success, the postponement of the Budapest retreat highlighted the critical role that immersive, in-person experiences play in building trust, community, and meaningful peer relationships.

This past year, we shifted the fellowship from a calendar-year model to an academic-year model (November 2025-August 2026) to better align the student's academic calendar. While this change had clear advantages in theory, our experience showed that the original calendar-year structure better supported the fellowship's goals. We plan to return to that model for the third cohort.

The fellowship also faced significant unforeseen challenges, most notably the war with Iran, which prevented the Israeli fellows from traveling and forced the postponement of the Budapest retreat. As the retreat serves as the program's primary opportunity for relationship-building and community formation, its postponement affected the cohort's ability to develop the same level of connection experienced by the first cohort. We plan to invite this year's cohort to the Shabbaton next year.

**Provisional guidelines for the advancement of the program in the next year:**

Based on our experience with the second cohort, we plan to implement several improvements for Cohort 3:

- Return to a calendar-year model, with the fellowship running from January through December 2027.
- Extend the nomination period to allow partner campuses more time to identify and recruit outstanding candidates and establish a waitlist if needed.
- Develop clearer nomination guidelines outlining the desired participant profile to support campuses in selecting fellows.
- Explore partnering with a different U.S.-based Hillel to strengthen the international exchange component of the fellowship.
- Maintain the two-hour online session format, which has allowed for richer discussion and greater participant engagement.
- Dedicate a larger portion of the online sessions to intentional community-building through structured storytelling, peer dialogue, and relationship-building activities.

**Please join the Evaluation Report, the Financial Report and the list of the participants to the program (as PDF documents) - attached**

**Please join photos – as JPG files – and any link or any other document connected to the program which will seem to you relevant – as PDF document.**

Attached are several draft proposals of the students' capstone projects, which will be compiled into a digital journal in the coming months.

**Please join a 5 minutes movie which presents your institution and the particular project supported by the Matanel Foundation. The movie should be accessible to the philanthropic world and to other potential donors.**

Attached

#### **Appendix 1 – Session Descriptions:**

The sessions and speakers this year were:

Session 1 - November 23, 2025

- Creating a cohort + What does Global Jewry mean to you?
  - Esther Abramowitz (the Associate Vice President of Global Israel Experiences at Hillel International, bringing over three decades of

leadership in immersive Jewish and Israel education across global campuses.)

- Esti Palmer (the Associate Director of Immersive Israel Experiences at Hillel International, where she specializes in developing experiential educational programs and immersive leadership journeys for global Jewish youth.)

#### Session 2 - December 14, 2025

- Oy and Joy of being Jewish in Israel, America, Poland
  - Panel - Michalina Majewska (a Jewish cultural educator and activist in Poland who works with organizations like the Galicia Jewish Museum and Hillel Poland to engage youth and preserve Jewish heritage and contemporary Jewish life.), Rabbi Melissa Simon (representing USA, the Director of Israel Education at Hillel International's Center for Jewish and Israel Education, bringing years of campus rabbinic leadership to empowering students through inclusive Jewish education and engagement.), Yishai Goldflam (the Deputy Director of Hillel Israel, leading major donor relations and strategic partnerships to advance youth empowerment and Israel engagement across university campuses.)
  - Debrief conversation among participants

#### Session 3 - January 11, 2026

- Global Jewry - what we have in common
  - Avraham Infeld (a renowned global Jewish educator, author, and President Emeritus of Hillel International, widely celebrated for his "Five Pillars of Jewish Identity" framework for Jewish continuity.)

#### Session 4 - February 8, 2026

- For the Sake of Argument - how to have a healthy argument within the Jewish community
  - Abi Dauber Stern (a veteran global Jewish educator, rabbi, and co-founder of *For the Sake of Argument*, an educational initiative dedicated to fostering constructive debate and healthy discourse within Jewish communities.)

#### Additional Session

- Storytelling and Jewish Memory

#### Session 5 - April 19, 2026

- Israel and Global Jewry - who needs who more? Is there a mutual responsibility?
  - Alon Friedman (the Founding Executive Director of ENTER: The Jewish Peoplehood Alliance and former CEO of Hillel Israel, dedicated to building global Jewish connections, youth empowerment, and peoplehood initiatives.)

#### Session 6 - May 10, 2026

- Global Jewish Leadership - how do we meet the needs of the day?
  - Elmira Tarivierdieva (the Director of Leadership Programs at Hillel Deutschland and a Limmud FSU leader, dedicated to empowering young European Jewish leaders through innovative educational and community-building initiatives.)

#### Session 7 - June 7, 2026

- Jewish Memory Through Songs and Poems
  - Esther Abramowitz and Esti Palmer

#### Session 8 - August 30, 2026

- Project presentation

#### **Appendix 2 - poem written by the students during Session 7:**

Students were prompted to write two lines to complete the sentence "for a Jew in 2026, memory is..." and we compiled them into one poem. It was a part of a session about learning about Jewish memory on different cultures through music and poems.

#### ***For a Jew in 2026, memory is...***

*For a Jew in 2026, memory is an act of resistance*

*and a way of honoring those who came before us*

*It means standing by one another and remaining close to our community,*

*because Jewish life thrives through shared bonds and collective belonging*

*For a Jew in 2026, memory is to remember the history of our people*

*and believe that no matter what we will survive*

*It is to remember about those we tragically lost  
and make sure we never forget them*

*For a Jew in 2026, memory is remembering the sad and the bad,  
all the experiences that we've had, but still choosing simcha*

*For a Jew in 2026 memory is something you come across every day*

*For a Jew in 2026 memory is shaping the future  
we would like to live in*

*For a Jew in 2026, memory is something you share with your family  
on the other side of the world  
without being in the same experience*

*For a Jew in 2026, memory is a time machine  
that brings us to where we want to be*

*For a Jew in 2026, memory is a dedication to those who came before us  
and a commitment to transmit to those who come after us*

*For a Jew in 2026, memory is the smell of their grandmother's chicken soup,  
the taste of spicy fish, the dance of joy from within,  
the pain of loss and the aching of hope*

*For a Jew in 2026, memory is being in touch with reality during global changes,  
Nothing new under the sun*