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Solomon: Perhaps temper the optimism at the JFN

By [Jacob Berkman](#) · April 13, 2010

Trying to get the pulse on the state of Jewish philanthropy here at the Jewish Funders Network Conference in Phoenix has produced something of a mixed bag.

The atmosphere is certainly mellow -- a stark difference from last year's conference which could have best been described "freaked out," as no one knew exactly what the future would bring, and many assumed the worst -- not to mention that it is absolutely gorgeous outside. And polling here by the JFN has shown that more than 30 percent of attendees say that they will increase their giving to Jewish causes this year, while around 60 percent say they will keep their giving stable.

But Jeff Solomon, the president of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Family Foundation warned not to be too optimistic even about those vows -- because in all likelihood the major foundations would be those who continued to cut.

While roughly 18 percent of those in attendance either gave away or worked for foundations that gave away more than \$20 million per year, the vast majority donated somewhere between \$25,000 and \$100,000. While nothing to sneeze at

those donors are on the low end of the major donor spectrum.

For those on the lower end, said Solomon, who is widely regarded as one of the most astute observers of the philanthropy world, money set aside for charity is akin to discretionary money, and thus spending it is largely tied to confidence in the economy. Now that the economy has seen something of a bounceback in recent months, many are now feeling more confident than they have since before the recession hit and may well indeed increase their giving.

But those on the high end of the spectrum, who have seen multi-hundred million dollar foundations take huge hits, and that mostly give out five percent of their assets each year as tax laws demand, are by and large not going to increase their allocations over the next year. In fact, says Solomon, the Council on Foundations predicted that foundations will not reach their 2007 levels of giving -- their peak before the recession -- until somewhere around 2017.

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