

## From idea to initiative

By SAM CROSS

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500 young Jewish innovators brainstorm for the community's future.

What happens when 500 leading Jewish innovators come from all over world to think up creative solutions to the challenges that face the Jewish people?

On Wednesday at Hotel Kfar Maccabiah, participants in the ROI Global Summit for Young Jewish Innovators embarked on an ambitious two-day journey to do just that.

At its annual leadership conference, ROI hosted their first-ever "Community Brainstorm & Action Planning" experiment with the goal of generating potential project ideas and then putting them into action.

ROI, funded by philanthropist Lynn Schusterman, is committed to helping prepare the Jewish community's young leaders to take the reins from their elders.

"For five or six hours over the next two days, we want to add energy and interaction to the [ROI participants] without trying to tell you what to do," Yoni Gordis, director of the Center for Leadership Initiatives, which was created by Schusterman in partnership with Birthright Israel, and which sponsors ROI.

In only the first half-hour of the experiment, ROIers placed 298 problems – 10 percent of which were contributed from abroad – on the conference's agenda. After a few hours of group discussion on topics ranging from environmental sustainability to visions of Israel, the 120 collaborators had already formulated large-scale plans to strengthen worldwide Jewry.

Lisa Eisen, national director of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, facilitated putting the ideas of these "energetic and creative minds" down on paper.

"The younger generations are very concerned about major strategies of our time, and I think they are going to be able to come up with the solutions," she said, after leading the brainstorming session.

After defining a set of challenges, summit participants broke up into different discussion groups meant to generate innovative solutions.

During the Visions of Israel seminar, Dana Peer, a 26-year-old Jerusalemite, said that she would use her prior expertise in organizing flash mobs to help gamer support for Gilad Shalit. Having already organized two other flash mob events with over 300 participants, Peer wants to turn this form of entertainment into a tool that spreads international awareness.

"Organizing flash mobs is something that I know how to do and that can attract the attention of all people," she said. "It's a way that everyone can just show up, and show their support."

Meanwhile, Chaim Landau of Perspectives Israel strategized with David Katz of J'Burgh and Lisa Appel of Miss Lisa, Inc. & Smart Fitness about the fate of the Jewish people.

"What if we create an internship program for young Jewish Israelis to see life in the Diaspora?" Landau hypothesized, hoping to bridge the gap between Israeli and American Jews.

"How about bringing Jews from different backgrounds together through recreation activities?" suggested Appel, who said that she already does something like this in her holistic fitness programs. "Like a 'Mommy and Me' class or something."

These ideas are just some of the potential initiatives that ROI innovators may take

from a concept to a future business. Summit members plan to walk away with a variety of projects that have clearly defined next steps and individuals committed to implementing them.

At the end of the program's first day, Justin Korda, director of ROI, looked back on the work that he and his colleagues had just completed.

"In half an hour, we generated over 300 challenges, for which the members of the community proposed around 100 solutions. Of those 100 solutions, we have 40 potential projects, and tomorrow, we will begin to see if any of these projects turn into action plans," Korda said.

"All in all, I would say that the experiment was a great success and offered us a great opportunity to learn how to do this better – and essentially, that's what this year's ROI summit is all about."