

# RUSKAY INSTITUTE

FOR JEWISH PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP

## MEET THE 2025 – 2026 RUSKAY FELLOWS SHAPERS OF THE FUTURE

The Jewish community relies on knowledgeable and dedicated professionals to provide vision, set priorities, and take the lead in making strategic decisions for our future. These Ruskay Fellows are rising to the challenge.



### ADAM BENDER

**Director of Engagement, Queens Hillel**

Adam is just starting his second year as the director of engagement at Queens Hillel. In his role, Adam meets students where they're at to mentor them in creating the Jewish life and experiences they seek on campus. Adam thrives in his fast-paced role, constantly meeting with students and brainstorming with staff to make Judaism and the needs of students come to life. Prior to Hillel, Adam held a number of roles in synagogues all over Westchester County. Originally hailing from Chicago, Adam received his B.S. in finance from the University of Minnesota, and later his M.A. in Jewish education from JTS. Adam currently lives in Westchester with his wife, Tamra, where they enjoy eating great food, watching baseball, and exploring the great outdoors.



### OR BERGER

**Director of Israeli Partnerships, Masa Israel Journey**

Or Berger says he is a father, an Israeli, and an American resident — in that order. After the birth of his first child, he changed career paths, leaving behind a 13-year journey in radio and television, where he held various creative roles. Today, as director of partnerships at Masa Israel Journey, he channels his passion for communication and cross-cultural fluency to bring people together and strengthen Jewish peoplehood.



### **MIRIAM BRAUN**

#### **Director of Marketing , RootOne, The Jewish Education Project**

Miriam is the director of marketing at RootOne, where she has spent the past four years immersed in brand-building for the organization. Previously, Miriam held marketing roles at the Orthodox Union and Jewish National Fund. She started her career in the for-profit world, managing television ads at the Food Network and HGTV, but quickly learned her passions lie in the Jewish community. Miriam earned her BBA from the Macaulay Honors Program at Baruch College, and is an active member of her community in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn. She enjoys cooking, running, yoga, reading, traveling, and spending time with her two daughters and husband.



### **MARISA BRAUNSTEIN**

#### **Program Manager, Foundation for Jewish Camp**

Marisa (she/her) is a program manager at Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC), where she oversees One Happy Camper®, FJC's signature incentive program. With a deep passion for enriching Jewish identity through immersive experiences, Marisa works closely with Jewish communal organizations across North America to ensure successful implementation and strategic growth of the program. She is passionate about making Jewish organizations incredible places to work — prioritizing opportunities for Jewish joy. Marisa holds a B.A. in media studies and business and liberal art from CUNY Queens College. In her spare time, she enjoys playing guitar, tennis, and riding a Citi Bike around Manhattan.



### **MARA FAHL**

#### **Senior Content Writer and Project Manager, American Friends of Magen David Adom**

As the senior content writer and project manager at American Friends of Magen David Adom, Mara combines her love of writing with her dedication to Jewish nonprofit work. She holds a B.A. in writing seminars from Johns Hopkins University and an M.A. in Jewish history and contemporary Jewry from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Prior to her current role, Mara was the managing editor of JNF-USA's *B'Yachad* magazine. With her blend of nonprofit and corporate marketing and communications experience, Mara aims to help the Jewish world engage as many community members as possible. Born and raised in New York City, Mara lived in Israel for six years and now resides in the city with her husband and two children.



### **ARIEL GLUECK**

#### **Director of Teen and Youth Programming, Park Avenue Synagogue**

Ariel is the director of teen and youth programming at Park Avenue Synagogue in Manhattan. Through the teen program, she facilitates educational experiences for teens through community service, Jewish learning, and educational travel. She feels lucky to work with engaged and impressive teens. As a former Moishe House resident and long-time “camp person,” Ariel has a penchant for creating Jewish communal experiences. After graduating from Hunter College with a B.A. in political science and educational policy, Ariel worked as a teacher's apprentice through AmeriCorps. She also was an assistant English teacher and lead advisory at a project-based middle school in Brooklyn, and worked as an educator for a health education consultant company. Ariel received her MSW from Wurzweiler School of Social Work at Yeshiva University in 2022. Ariel lives on the Upper East Side and enjoys people watching in cafés, window shopping in tchotchke stores, and hiking.



### **RUTHIE HOLLANDER**

#### **Director of Community & Youth Programming, Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun**

Ruthie is director of community and youth programming at KJ, where she creates engaging educational experiences. She serves on the board of Tizmoret Shoshana, a performing arts camp for observant young women, and is a UJA Shapiro Family Fellow. Ruthie has also participated in ADL's Glass Leadership Institute, Orthodox Leadership Project, JFNA Changemakers, Machon Siach Graduate Fellowship, and iCenter's Conflicts of Interest. Her writing on Jewish education and culture has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Times of Israel*, *Kveller*, *18Forty*, and more. She lives on Manhattan's Upper East Side with her husband, toddler, and dog.



### **ABBY JOHNSON-GUEZ**

#### **Director of Membership, Development, and Strategy, Sutton Place Synagogue**

Abby loves her work as director of membership, development, and strategy at Sutton Place Synagogue. In her role, she oversees the membership and development functions, as well as strategic initiatives and program operations. Previously, Abby worked at Brooklyn Heights Synagogue as the education program manager and at the Yiddish Book Center as a residential assistant for their Great Jewish Books summer program. She earned her undergraduate degree from Vassar College, where she studied English and women's studies, and her graduate degree in nonprofit management from Gratz College. Abby lives in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, with her wife and their dog.



### **RINA KATTAN COHEN**

#### **Community Organizing & External Relations, UJA-Federation of New York**

Rina leads strategy and grants for UJA's Combating Antisemitism Initiative — spanning K-12 education, campus, workplace, and Jewish arts and culture. Across all sectors, she works to ensure that Jews feel safe, proud, and supported — wherever they live, learn, work, and gather. She also leads UJA's Sephardic & Mizrahi Initiative and spearheaded the inaugural 2024 symposium uniting organizations in this space. Previously, Rina oversaw the Time For Good initiative — a \$14 million investment in building the volunteer infrastructure across 34 Jewish nonprofits. She holds a master's degree in nonprofit management from NYU Wagner and a bachelor's degree from Barnard College.



### **DANIELA KOGAN**

#### **Program Director, Center for Shared Society, Jewish Community Relations Council - New York (JCRC-NY)**

Dani serves as the program director for the Center for Shared Society, a division of the Jewish Community Relations Council that focuses on building bridges in NYC. Through this position, she has trained dozens of fellows in unique JCRC programs, led international and domestic trips for clergy leaders, and worked with the Mayor's Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes to provide grants to New York Jewish nonprofits. She has a dual M.A. from the Jewish Theological Seminary in Jewish education and biblical studies. Dani has lived in Washington Heights for the past eight years, and is involved in the uptown Jewish community.



### **KATIE LIPSON**

#### **Development Executive, UJA-Federation of New York**

Katie is a development executive at UJA-Federation of New York in Westchester. Her diverse portfolio includes overseeing the White Plains community, New Rochelle families, and managing volunteer initiatives and site visits in Westchester. Katie has worked at UJA for over five years, starting as the leadership coach and program executive for J-Teen Leadership, UJA's teen program in Westchester, and taking on a new role in development in 2022. Prior to that, Katie worked as a recruitment and admissions officer for the Hebrew University in Jerusalem's Rothberg International School, after living in Jerusalem for three years. Katie spent 10 years at Camp Havaya, and even met her husband there! Katie now lives in White Plains with her family, and enjoys cooking, trying new local restaurants, and spending time with her family and friends.



### **MAX MANDEL**

#### **MHWOW Senior Program Specialist, Mem Global (Moishe House)**

Max Mandel is a passionate Jewish community builder and senior program specialist for Mem Global's Moishe House Without Walls (MHWOW) program. He brings a thoughtful, inclusive, and data-informed approach to helping young adults explore Jewish life on their own terms. Max is always looking for creative ways to foster belonging. His most formative Jewish experiences come from his years at Camp Ramah in California, where he was a camper, counselor, and supervisor. Originally from Los Angeles, Max now lives on the Upper West Side and can often be found hosting Shabbat picnics at Central Park or cheering on the New York Mets.



### **ETHAN MARCUS**

#### **Managing Director, Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America**

Ethan Marcus is the managing director of the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America, the national umbrella organization for the Ladino-speaking Sephardic community in the United States. In this capacity, he has rapidly grown the Sephardic community's membership base and developed innovative programs to engage a new generation of young Sephardic Jews around the world. He previously served as the Brotherhood's director of communications and as director of community development for the Seattle Sephardic community. From 2019 to 2020, Ethan studied in Athens, Greece, on a Fulbright scholarship, where he conducted an independent research project on the unique liturgical customs of the Romaniote Jews of Greece. He is a graduate of Princeton University's School of Public and International Affairs. His family originates from the Sephardic communities of Veria in modern-day Greece and Izmir in modern-day Turkey.



### **EZRA MOSES**

#### **Manager, Strategic Planning and Grants, Jewish Life, Global and Israel, UJA-Federation of New York**

As the manager of Strategic Planning and Grants, Jewish Life, Global and Israel, at UJA-Federation of New York, Ezra oversees grant portfolios on community development in Europe and the former Soviet Union; shared society in Israel; and Jewish religious pluralism in Israel. After receiving his bachelor's degree from McGill University, he served as a Jewish Service Corps Fellow with the Joint Distribution Committee in Kharkiv, Ukraine, and Tbilisi, Georgia. While there, he initiated Active Jewish Teen, a youth movement with over 50 chapters across the region. Ezra then went on to earn master's degrees in public administration and Hebrew and Judaic studies from New York University. Ezra and his wife, Hannah, live on the Upper East Side of Manhattan and enjoy traveling.





### **AVERY ROBINSON**

#### **Engagement Officer, Natan Fund**

Avery Robinson is the engagement officer at the Natan Fund. Before joining Natan, he worked as an editor and researcher at the Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization. Avery has worked as a Jewish informal educator for many years, including 10 summers spent as a wilderness trip leader with Camp Ramah in Canada. He is a culinary historian, frequent reviewer of cookbooks for the Jewish Book Council, and a licensed New York City guide who leads Jewish food tours of the Lower East Side. Avery is the chair of Hekdesh, a Dorot Fellowship alumni giving circle, and the chair of Rye Revival, a nonprofit promoting rye as a climate change mitigation strategy. Avery lives in Brooklyn with his fiancée.



### **GILA ROMANOFF**

#### **Director of Programming, JQY**

Gila Romanoff (she/her) serves as the director of programming at JQY, a nonprofit that supports LGBTQ+ Jewish teens and young adults. In her role, Gila creates spaces where queer Jewish youth can feel seen, celebrated, and empowered — helping them build confidence and resilience, deepen their Jewish and queer identities, and envision and build a future in which they can thrive. She previously served as teen and community program manager at JQY. Gila holds a B.A. in fine art from Yeshiva University and trained in pastry and baking arts at the Institute of Culinary Education. Originally from Israel and raised in Elizabeth, New Jersey, Gila now lives in Livingston, New Jersey, with her husband and teenage stepson.



### **REBECCA SALEMAN**

#### **Director of Hotline Services, Shalom Task Force**

Rebecca Saleman, LMSW, joined Shalom Task Force as director of hotline services in December 2020. While earning her B.A. in psychology from Brandeis University, she completed several internships focused on abuse prevention. She earned her MSW from Columbia University, with field placements focused on foster care and children impacted by domestic violence. After graduating in 2015, she worked as a foster care case planner and held prevention-focused school roles. After working in secular spaces, Rebecca is grateful to be at Shalom Task Force, where she contributes to ensuring that high-quality services are accessible to Jewish survivors seeking safety and support.



### **AVIGAIL SCHNEIMAN**

#### **Associate Director of College Student Network, Shalom Hartman Institute**

Avigail Schneiman is a passionate community builder and educator dedicated to cultivating meaningful Jewish experiences for students and young professionals. As associate director of the College Student Network at the Shalom Hartman Institute, she designs and leads programs that inspire connection, identity exploration, and leadership development among Jewish college students across North America. Originally from Philadelphia, Avigail holds degrees in social work from the University of Pittsburgh and NYU. She is a volunteer escort at Planned Parenthood. In her free time, she enjoys Pilates, long city walks, swimming, and traveling.



### **HALEY SCHULMAN**

#### **Director of HereNow, The Jewish Board**

Haley is the director of HereNow at The Jewish Board, where she has worked since January 2025. She has previously held roles at Pardes, Hadar, Hillel, and the American Hebrew Academy. As an active lay leader, Haley serves on the board of her synagogue, Kehilat Hadar Shaare Zedek; sits on the Springboard Alumni Advisory Committee; and volunteers as a mentor for the Kol Koleinu Teen Feminist Fellowship. She recently completed her M.A. in Jewish professional studies at Spertus. Haley lives on the Upper West Side with her husband and enjoys reading, singing, crafting, and maintaining and propagating her houseplants.



### **RYAN SIEGEL**

#### **Director of Campus and External Affairs, Hillel at Baruch College**

Ryan is the director of Campus and External Affairs of the Hillel at Baruch College. He is part of an innovative new cohort of Jewish professionals within Hillel International whose job it is to communicate and work with campus administrators to focus on the needs of Jewish students in the face of antisemitism. He works with a cross-campus Hillel community made up of nine universities in Manhattan, and is proud to be working in a grassroots climate with such an impactful mission. Ryan received his M.A. in diplomacy and conflict resolution with a focus on Middle East politics from Reichman University in Israel. Currently, Ryan lives in Staten Island, and hopes one day to live in Israel.



### **BRUCE SPIERER**

#### **Program Manager, Adamah**

Bruce cultivates human connections with the natural world, empowering individuals to become loving, environmental stewards. He currently serves as program manager with Adamah's Climate Action team, where he guides Jewish institutions in climate-action planning to combat the climate crisis. He studied at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, which inspired him to become a Jewish communal leader. Previously, Bruce spent eight years as an environmental educator and horticulturalist in New York City. He is also a certified *shochet l'ofot* (kosher poultry slaughterer), educating communities about ethical, sustainable meat and collaborating with local farms to provide regenerative poultry.



### **DANIEL SPIRO**

#### **Director of Content and Communications, Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah**

In his work with Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah, Daniel Spiro has contributed across programmatic, strategic, and communications areas to help articulate and catalyze approaches to helping people thrive and shape a better world by applying Jewish wisdom. Before coming to the Foundation, he lived in New Orleans, where he managed a secondhand bookshop, and Mendocino County, California, where he worked on an innovative farm teaching adaptive farming practices. He holds a B.A. in English from Columbia University and an M.F.A. in fiction writing from Eastern Washington University. He lives in Queens with his wife, Ginny, a professional comedy writer, and their daughter, Yael.



### **VIOLETA STOLPEN**

#### **Director of Operations–NYC, Jewtina y Co.**

Violeta Stolpen (she/ella) serves as Jewtina y Co.'s director of operations–NYC. Violeta oversees the organization's day-to-day operations, ensuring cohesive implementation of strategic goals, and is the lead programmer for the New York City Jewtina hub. She loves engaging others in the diverse multicultural customs and celebrations of her family and community. Dedicated to community and economic development, she has served in nonprofit and for-profit spaces, helping historically marginalized individuals and entrepreneurs access affordable capital and supportive services. Violeta is a current fellow of JOIN's Jews of Color Organizing Fellowship. She serves as board chair of Tiyuv and board member for Jewish Family Services of Delaware. Violeta holds an M.B.A. from New York University's Stern School of Business and a bachelor of arts from Bucknell University. She enjoys spending weekends introducing her two kids to museums and playgrounds around the city.



### **JESSICA SWEDARSKY**

#### **Associate Director, Client Services, UJA-Federation of New York**

Jessica is the associate director of client services at UJA-Federation, where she's spent over six years leading marketing campaigns from inception to completion. She collaborates closely with fundraising and internal teams to deliver creative and impactful solutions. Jessica holds a bachelor of science in marketing from Yeshiva University's Sy Syms School of Business. She lives on the Upper West Side and enjoys baking sourdough bread, hitting her Goodreads reading goal, and spending time with friends.

The Ruskay Institute is supported by a special fund created by the friends and colleagues of John Ruskay on his retirement after 15 years as CEO of UJA-Federation of New York. This unique program is a tribute to his visionary leadership and commitment to professional development.