

אוניברסיטת בן-גוריון בנגב
جامعة بن غوريون في النقب
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev



יחד ננצח!

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A CALL TO ACTION

in Israel's Post-War Reality

Rebuilding the Negev bigger and better
with Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Professor Daniel A. Chamovitz // President

INTRODUCTION

Taking Stock of Ben-Gurion's Dream, the Hamas massacre of October 7 was the single bloodiest day for the Jews since the Holocaust, a reprise of which the State of Israel was meant to protect against. As such, it called into question numerous other conceptions that have guided Israel's institutions for more than a generation. Yet of all the conceptions that were profoundly shaken, alongside our sense of security, the most troubling is the viability of David Ben-Gurion's dream for the Negev.

Declaring that it is in the Negev "that the creativity and pioneering vigor of Israel shall be tested," Ben-Gurion linked the ingenuity and determination needed to make Israel's desert bloom to the ability of its founding generation to build a strong national home. For decades, his dream has inspired Israelis – and Jews – of all backgrounds and ideologies with a sense of meaning and collective purpose. We saw this, for example, in the founding of Kibbutz Be'eri and ten others in one night in 1946, and later in the founding of kibbutzim Sufa and Holit and many others in the barren southern Negev, often by olim who sought a pluralistic society. We saw it again in the spate of agricultural communities that sprung up near Gaza after the 2005 disengagement, each a tangible statement of hope and healing. We saw it in the 1950s in the building of what were then called development towns, and their reinvention over the past two decades into vibrant Negev communities. And we see this today in the IDF's decision to relocate its elite technological units to Beer-Sheva, to turn the Negev into a scientific engine for Israel. This pioneering approach that looks on an impossible challenge and sees a vast opportunity is in many ways what made Israel the Startup Nation, and a source of innovation and solutions for the world.

As Israel wages its current war in Gaza, there is a sense among Israelis that the State of Israel on "the day after" must be a vastly different place. To be sure, we do not yet know what shape this new state will take. But what we do know is that for it to succeed, we must once again pass Ben-Gurion's test of pioneering vigor and creativity. "If we will not stand in the Negev," he declared, "we will not stand in Tel Aviv." Put simply, in response to October 7, we must double down on Ben-Gurion's dream.

Although founded to be, in Ben-Gurion's words, an "Oxford in the desert," Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU) has never striven to be an ivory tower. On the contrary, we are the driving force in the Negev's development and key to its residents' social mobility. The new urgency of the task before us demands a new, and still bolder, commitment to meeting the Negev's needs. In turn, this commitment requires an expansion of our spheres of influence, and a willingness for radical involvement in the Negev's health and prosperity.

This position paper is designed to imagine what an expanded role for Ben-Gurion University of the Negev might look like and is an invitation to partner with us in this critical mission.

CONTEXT

Realizing the Potential of the Negev, and of Higher Education

As the university founded to advance David Ben-Gurion's vision for the Negev, BGU has always been ahead of its time, missionwise. Spurred by the unique spirit of entrepreneurship that defines today's pioneers, we pursue not only outstanding research and education, but also the advancement of the Negev's diverse communities. Indeed, as the anchor university for a long-disadvantaged region, BGU strives to marry academic excellence with broad social responsibility.

In recent years, BGU has further expanded its mission to include economic development. Recognizing that the key to a flourishing Negev is a young professional community, we have worked to make BGU a trusted partner to the region's government and industry, leveraging our role in technological innovation into a burgeoning, knowledge-based Beer-Sheva economy. And indeed, thanks to strategic investments in our core strengths and

active collaboration with government and industry, BGU has helped turn the Negev into a world leader in areas such as water research, desert technologies, medical education, autism research, and cyber security.

In the wake of October 7, we are called to yet another challenge: transforming the Negev into not only a scientific engine, but also a resilient society. In pursuing this ambition, we may look to America's "Fifth Wave" universities as a model.¹

In the so-called "Fourth Wave" of higher education, universities turned to research as a means of improving humanity. Their breakthrough discoveries and technological innovations have incalculably bettered the human condition. Yet these accomplishments were accompanied by a siloing of knowledge and an increasing disconnect from society. These universities are inherently limited in their ability to engage with complexity and to bring the benefits of their research and education to the widest possible numbers in their communities.

Fifth Wave universities, by contrast, strive for integration and responsivity. In a Fifth Wave university, there is no contradiction between academic excellence and societal responsibility and integration. From BGU's perspective, by viewing the university as an evolving platform for effecting large-scale, systemic change, we also measure our success against social outcomes. Indeed, by using the Negev's advancement as an institutional North Star, BGU both inspires and participates in producing the results that the Negev, Israel, and the world, need.



¹ See, for example, Michael M. Crow and William B. Dabars, *The Fifth Wave: The Evolution of American Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2022).



Professor Chamovitz with a reservist faculty member

MISSION

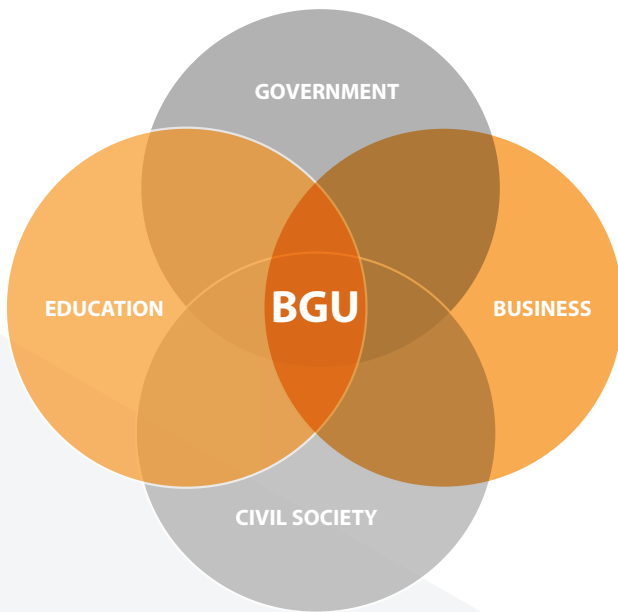
Expanding Ben-Gurion University of—and for—the Negev

As a Fifth Wave university, the BGU of the post-October 7 reality will play an even more vital role in reinvigorating the integrative health of the Negev's communities. By placing key resources and unique expertise in a reciprocal relationship with the region's government, military, business sector, and civil society, we will accelerate the outcomes that the Negev needs.

Working proactively with all stakeholders committed to the Negev's success, BGU will serve as the anchor for a regional ecosystem, integrating knowledge and efforts across sectors and within communities. Guided by Ben-Gurion's vision of the Negev as a source of solutions for Israel and the world, we will work with partners to close the gaps between education, discovery, innovation, and real world practice, leading to both transformative and sustainable social change.

By drawing on the complementary strengths of our partners, whether in infrastructure, technology, or expertise, and capitalizing when possible on existing assets rather than developing new systems or entities, we will also minimize costs while maximizing benefits for the Negev and BGU's own capacities. Finally, our unique emphasis on our social mission alongside research and teaching excellence will have the added benefit of attracting committed, idealistic students and faculty. We will be a beacon for both Israelis and Jews around the world who want to be part of something larger and to help make the desert bloom.

THE ECOSYSTEM-ANCHOR MODEL



As the nexus between government, industry, and civil society, BGU will anchor a regional ecosystem that both enhances education, discovery, and innovation, and extends their benefits throughout the Negev.

OBJECTIVES OF AN EXPANDED MISSION

In rededicating our mission to develop the Negev for the future of Israel, Ben-Gurion University will employ the following approaches:

- **Engage BGU faculty and students in local solutions.**
Collaborations for the betterment of local communities will involve, as much as possible, students and faculty, utilizing our vast pool of expertise. At the same time, this will lead to profound benefits to both education and research.
- **Emphasize data and evidence-based decision making.**
BGU's preeminence in data sciences will enable us to integrate data to lead in strategy building, and we will encourage our partners to use evidence-based practices, share and integrate information, and engage in rigorous evaluation.
- **Enhance BGU's brand and build on its strengths in ways that contribute to further growth and ability for impact.**
By emphasizing activities that align with our strengths, and in which we are positioned for success, we will build trust in our partnership model, attract accomplished and idealistic faculty and students, and secure the resources needed for still-greater impact.
- **Match key BGU resources with the Negev's needs and opportunities.**
We will identify existing assets that can serve as a foundation for larger efforts or be strengthened for still greater impact. We will also seek out complementarities between our resources and the Negev's needs and emphasize the unique potential of the Negev to solve pressing global challenges.
- **Create alliances that represent and empower all of the Negev's communities.**
We will strive to include multiple perspectives when working with partners to design solutions and emphasize sustainability.
- **Leverage strategic partnerships for the Negev's development.**
Alongside collaboration with industry and entrepreneurial impact, we will contribute knowledge and experience to build a strong and resilient Negev.



BGU's Hi-Tech Park, part of the ecosystem surrounding the Marcus Family Campus

THE PLAN

Planting Strategic Seeds

The following are proposed strategies for developing a thriving post-war Negev, along with specific ideas that may serve as starting points for discussion and exploration.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Economic development, innovation, and entrepreneurship are central to our mission. At the heart of entrepreneurship is the translation of ideas into action, of ideas into economic or social opportunities. The founding of the State of Israel was the result of an entrepreneurial spirit, as was the founding of the University. This makes the provision of entrepreneurial skills, and the cultivation of an entrepreneurial mindset, vital to BGU's efforts to foster regional growth and prosperity. Moreover, we must create the conditions for still more knowledge spillover to Negev industry and ensure alignment between our knowledge production and the needs of local industries. As our graduates are a sought-after commodity for industry, we can help incentivize company relocations to Beer-Sheva, thus enhancing knowledge exchange between our university and local industries.

SOCIAL EMBEDDEDNESS AND EMPOWERMENT

BGU will embed its teaching, research, and human capital at every level of the Negev's society. We will develop mutually beneficial strategies for solving problems, empowering communities to address their own challenges, and creating a vibrant civil society.

RESEARCH AND GLOBAL SOLUTIONS

As the complexity of our society and the world's problems is interdisciplinary, BGU must accelerate its efforts to integrate knowledge and research across faculties, thus increasing research outputs in critical fields. Moreover, we must leverage our intellectual capital and the unique potential of our location into solutions that Israel and the world needs.

EDUCATION, ACCESS AND EQUITY

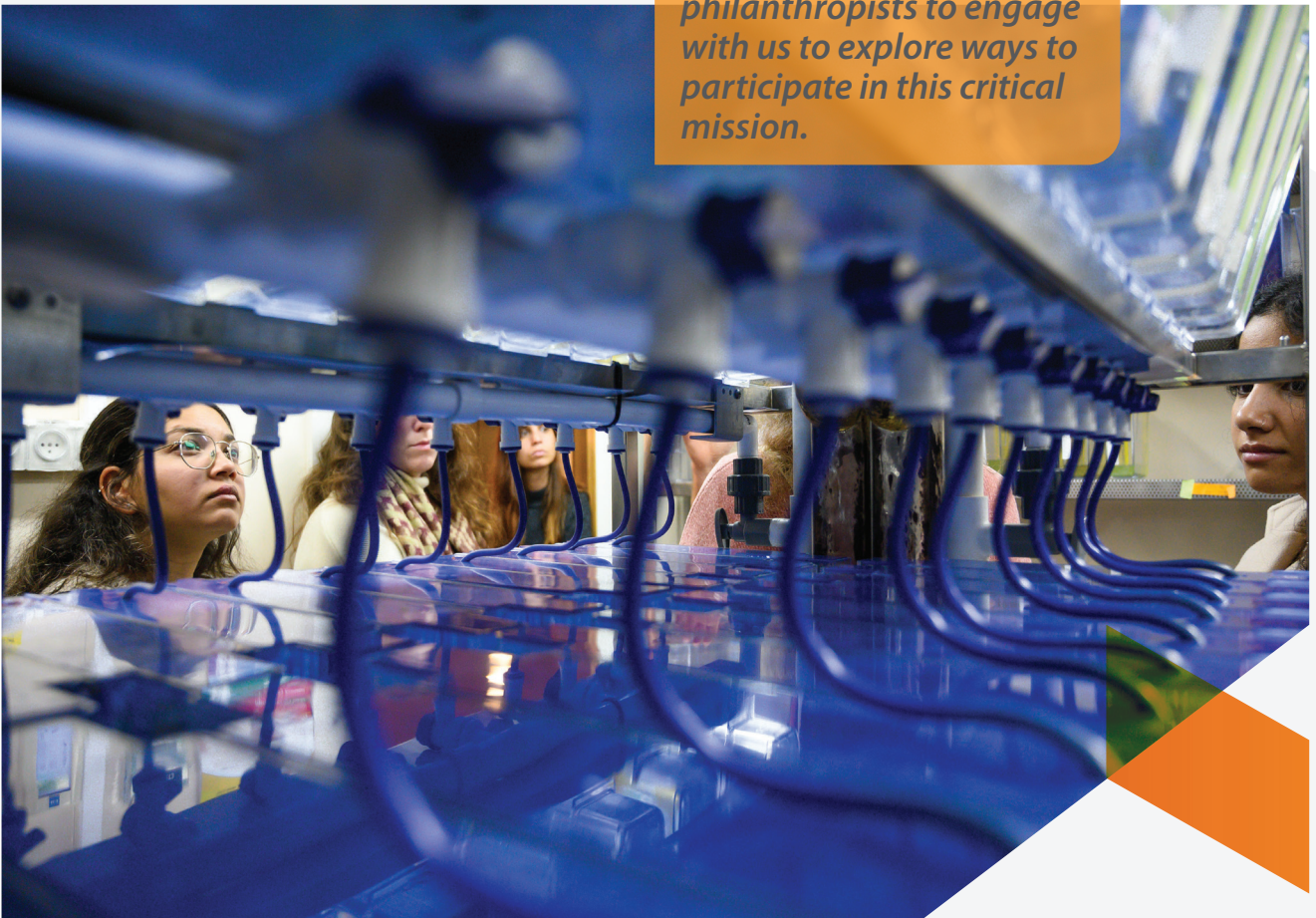
In the coming decades, Israel will need hundreds of thousands of new graduates who can contribute to, and benefit from, an economy increasingly based on the application of new knowledge and technologies. To that end, we must develop the untapped potential in the Negev, even as we work to attract more top talent to the region. This is needed not only in training the medical professionals who will serve the Negev, but across all fields.

A CALL TO ACTION

Building Support and Capacity

Inherent in the design of Fifth Wave universities is an emphasis on lean, integrated, and technologically intensive operations, which minimize waste, and costs for stakeholders even as they increase impact. By building on existing education and research assets as well as strong partnerships, we will obviate, as much as possible, the need for new bureaucratic entities and systems, and their associated inflated costs. While at the time of writing the war in Gaza is far from over and the shape of a victory far from clear, the ideas put forward here can already serve as the basis for further exploration. The outcomes of that exploration will help us not only respond to the devastating events of October 7, but also spearhead the Negev's recovery and future prosperity. David Ben-Gurion once said that "the fate of Israel depends on two things: its strength and its righteousness." As our finest soldiers express this on the battlefield, we at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev can seize this pivotal moment to express this through our work for the Negev and Israel.

We invite like-minded foundations, corporations, investors, Jewish federations, and individual philanthropists to engage with us to explore ways to participate in this critical mission.





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