



**Cultivating Jewish Professionals:
Cumulative Evaluation Findings from
BBYO's Professional Development
Institute**

Executive Summary

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*Prepared for
Jim Joseph
Foundation*

*Prepared by
Informing Change*

INTRODUCTION

In 2007, BBYO—the largest pluralistic Jewish teen movement in North America—launched an ambitious program called the Professional Development Institute (PDI). **The purpose of PDI was to increase the capacity and commitment of talented, early-career Jewish professionals to build a career in Jewish communal institutions.** The hope was that PDI would not only help young professionals grow at BBYO and support the organization in engaging teens, but that they would also help create a workforce of highly-qualified professionals for the Jewish communal sector.

PDI assisted participants through a suite of supports and multiple program components (Exhibit 1). The Jim Joseph Foundation, PDI's sole funder, underwrote the program with a generous grant of \$7.5 million over seven years. Although the goals and outcomes of PDI are meant to be realized over 15 years—through 2023, as alumni move through their careers—the program activities were time-limited. A total of 35 people participated across PDI's three cohorts, with the inaugural cohort beginning in 2008 and the final cohort completing all PDI requirements in 2015.

Exhibit 1 PDI Program Elements



Employment: Full-time employment for three years at BBYO while fulfilling PDI academic requirements.



MBA: An MBA with a focus in nonprofit management from the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University via their online program.



Jewish education: A Certificate in Informal Jewish Education from Hebrew College, with the option of candidacy for a master's degree at the discretion and cost of each participant.



Cohort: A cohort of participants experiencing PDI at the same time.



Mentor: A mentor in the Jewish communal sector to help reinforce the relevance of PDI for participants in their current jobs and, longer term, in their careers. At a minimum, each mentor/mentee pair was expected to meet in person for four hours each quarter.



Career support: ChangeCraft (formerly Center for Leadership Initiatives) provided one-on-one coaching, webinars and in-person seminars to help PDI participants articulate and reach their career goals.



In-person retreats & seminars: Each cohort met in person in the winter and summer for up to one week for an "in-residence" program.



Israel trip: Hebrew College led each cohort, between its second and third program years, on a group trip to Israel, focusing on experiential learning and cohort bonding.



Commitment to working in the Jewish community: After completing the three-year program, alumni were required to commit to working in the Jewish community for two additional years, either within BBYO or at another Jewish organization.

Evaluation Overview

From the inception of PDI, Informing Change worked closely with the Jim Joseph Foundation and BBYO to assess the program. Eight research questions focused on the program’s design and implementation guided the evaluation for the first three years (2008–11) and helped identify opportunities for course corrections in programming and expectations.

As the program neared its conclusion, the evaluation evolved to focus on post-graduate and longer-term PDI outcomes and lessons learned. Three evaluation questions guided the assessment of the PDI program for the evaluation’s final three years (2011–2014) (see box below):

Evaluation Questions

1. To what extent are PDI alumni increasing or sustaining their interest in and commitment to careers in the Jewish community?
2. To what extent are PDI alumni improving and applying their management skills and Judaic knowledge?
3. What lessons learned from PDI are most useful to the Jim Joseph Foundation, BBYO and the Jewish communal sector?

To inform the evaluation, Informing Change conducted 355 interviews and a handful of focus groups with a variety of stakeholders between 2008 and 2014. Evaluation findings rely most heavily on data collected from PDI alumni (both when they were in the program and after they had graduated),¹ as well as from the supervisors and mentors of PDI alumni.² This executive summary provides an overview of findings from the final PDI evaluation report *Cultivating Jewish Professionals: Cumulative Evaluation Findings from BBYO’s Professional Development Institute (2008–2014)*.

CONTEXT & EVOLUTION

There are important contextual factors necessary to understand both the PDI program itself and this evaluation. These include:

- **Early Grantmaking:** PDI was among the first grants—and the very first large, multi-year grant—approved by the Jim Joseph Foundation, which began its grantmaking in 2006. PDI was initially conceived as a tool to enhance the quality of Jewish education in BBYO, and as such, was closely aligned with the Foundation’s focus on Jewish education.
- **Recruitment:** For the first PDI cohort, recruitment was limited internally to include only current BBYO employees. BBYO turned to external recruitment to fill the second cohort, and this continued practice generated a 30% increase in applicants from the second to the third year of the program.
- **Lifespan:** The intention of the PDI program was to recruit 80 total participants in four cohorts of 20 people each. When the program did not draw the expected number of applicants, the Jim Joseph Foundation Board of Directors decided to shorten its lifespan. In the end, PDI ran for three cohorts with a total of 35 participants (in cohorts sized 14, 10, and 11 respectively).

¹ The term alumni is used to refer to all participants across Cohorts 1, 2 and 3.

² For the years 2008-2014, Informing Change conducted annual individual telephone interviews with each PDI alum, and either their mentor, colleague or supervisor. Additional data collection includes focus groups with PDI alumni, supervisors or colleagues of participants, BBYO staff not involved with PDI, and BBYO management; online surveys of PDI alumni and teens on regional boards staffed by Cohort 1 participants; observation of PDI events; and materials review.

- **Impact on Teens:** PDI was built with the intention of impacting teens in BBYO through an enhanced quality of Jewish education. However, the program’s direct impact on BBYO teens was too difficult to measure. **In recognition of PDI’s main focus on young professionals (rather than on the teens themselves) Informing Change designed the evaluation to measure impact at the level of the PDI alumni.**
- **Interim Employment Findings:** Employment data presented in this executive summary provide a snapshot of where alumni currently are in their careers. At the time of data collection, Cohort 2 alumni had only just fulfilled their two-year commitment to working in the sector and Cohort 3 alumni were still completing their final year of commitment to working in the Jewish community. As such, more time is needed to fully reflect how the PDI program will influence their post-program employment choices within or outside the Jewish communal sector.

WHO ARE THE PDI PARTICIPANTS?

At the start of the program, PDI alumni were early- to mid-career, millennial professionals who generally had minimal prior work experience.

Before joining PDI, many alumni worked directly with teens or young adults. Some held administrative positions and a few were students. Most were early in their careers; only a few had extensive work experience.

PDI ALUMNI

- 35 people were in the PDI program
- 25 was the average age when people started the program (range 22–39 years)
- 60% worked at BBYO before entering PDI
- 94% completed their academic PDI requirements³

KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

Building Skills & Knowledge

Alumni apply management skills that they gained through the MBA training. Alumni gained a broader and more strategic understanding of how different aspects of an organization interrelate (e.g., human resources, fund development, nonprofit law, finance, change management). They are better able to see the “big picture” and think strategically about the different ways an organization functions.

“There are bits and pieces [from Kelley] that I’m regularly using; it just feels like a normal, integrated part of my professional practice.”

– PDI Alum

Alumni strengthened their business knowledge and skills, and increased their confidence to put these skills to work. Alumni report improvements in “soft” business skills, such as managing time, networking and juggling heavy workloads. They also strengthened their “hard” business skills, such as marketing, accounting, budgeting and operations planning. Alumni are clear that they acquired all of these learnings through the MBA program. Supervisors corroborate their perceptions, noting that they observed alumni using new business skills in their day-to-day work.

³ The 94% completion rate surpasses the goal of 80%, articulated in PDI’s theory of change.

PDI alumni now bring an increased understanding of the Jewish community and a personal sense of Jewish connection to their work. The biggest contribution of Hebrew College, according to PDI alumni, is that it provided them with an “eye-opening” avenue for exploring their relationships with Judaism and enabled them to develop a richer understanding of Jewish culture, history and the North American Jewish community. As a result, PDI alumni increased their confidence and capacity to bring Jewish connections into their work and improved their ability to access Jewish resources and texts. Alumni working with teens or as BBYO program directors draw more heavily from the new “toolbox of Jewish information” they gained at Hebrew College than alumni working in strictly managerial positions. They note their Hebrew College credential and experience brings legitimacy to their roles as Jewish educators.

“I enjoyed the fact that I learned actual professional skills and that I gained knowledge at Hebrew College. I think it was important to have both of those things.”

– PDI Alum

The degree to which alumni apply learnings from PDI in their current work is a function of three key factors:

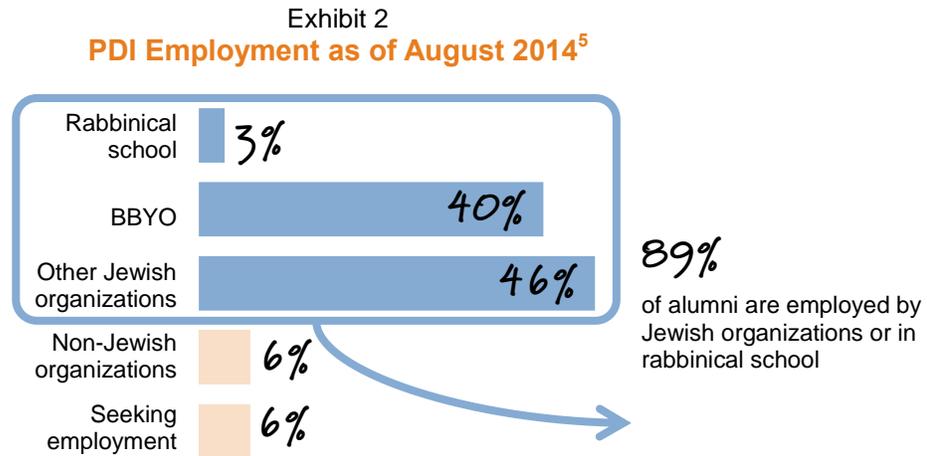
- Position – whether their current jobs offer opportunities to apply what they’ve learned;
- The employer – whether they are supported by skilled supervisors and given room to continue growing; and
- Personal initiative – whether they have personal interest in and commitment to ongoing learning and improvement.

With few exceptions, alumni are meeting or exceeding their supervisors’ expectations, and their job performance continues to improve.⁴ Almost all supervisors (89% of those who feel they can make the assessment) say that the quality of the alumni’s work has improved over the past year; the remaining 11% say there has been no change. In addition, supervisors of alumni who recently took on new positions or entered new organizations generally report that the alumni are settling into their roles and improving in their work.

⁴ Across all three cohorts, the average supervisor rating of alumni’s job performance is 3.9 on a 5-point scale (where 1 = unsatisfactory, 2 = improvement needed, 3 = meets expectations, 4 = exceeds expectations, and 5 = exceptional). The supervisors’ average rating of alumni is slightly lower for alumni working within BBYO (3.5) compared to those working in other organizations (4.1); however, there is little variation across the cohorts.

Career Growth

Almost all (89%) PDI alumni are either working in the Jewish community or pursuing further Jewish education (Exhibit 2). Since graduating from PDI, alumni now work at a wide range of organizations that have varying missions, approaches, locations and sizes. Most PDI alumni working outside of BBYO work in administrative and management roles, whereas among those within BBYO, some have management roles and others hold teen programming roles.



Currently, most PDI alumni can be categorized as mid-level professionals who have the potential to advance professionally. Supervisors report that three out of four PDI alumni will be able to assume more organizational responsibility and move into higher leadership roles in the future, assuming strong ongoing performance.⁶ Mentors have also seen positive changes in the professionalism of PDI alumni, noting their increased confidence, self-awareness and understanding of their organizational contexts.

However, PDI alumni need more professional experience before they will be able to advance as leaders and need more time to put newly acquired skills into practice. Supervisors note that alumni should continue enhancing a handful of skills, such as building more confidence and relationships; developing leadership and supervisory skills; enhancing their marketing skills; and strengthening their strategic and visioning capabilities.

Throughout the program, alumni grew in their professional roles. By the end of the evaluation, almost all alumni (94%) had taken on greater responsibility in their jobs, and 86% had received formal promotions since beginning PDI. Many are expected to continue this professional growth as time goes on, and they appear to be moving along an upward career trajectory (Exhibit 3). **While PDI helped these professionals develop skills to support their new roles and responsibilities, the growth cannot be attributed solely to their PDI experience.** Some career growth is also likely due to the natural increase in employment tenure and experience for early- to mid-level professionals.

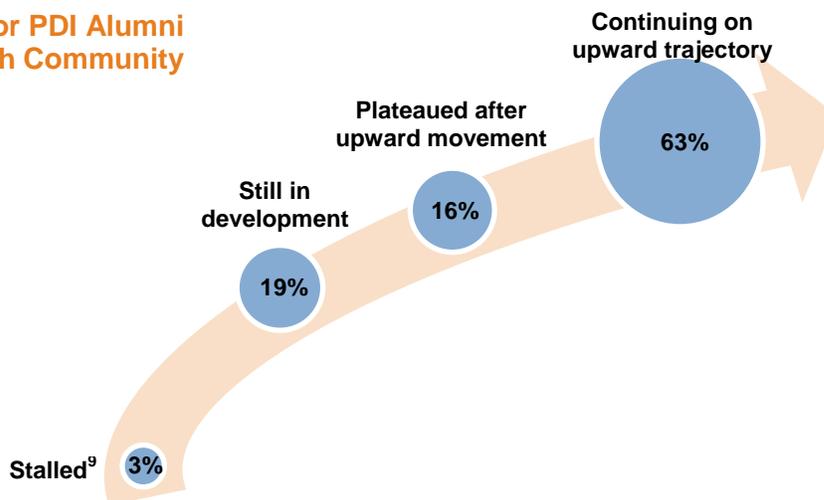
“I’ve grown a ton in this division, and I have a high level of responsibility... I think that the Jewish community has provided me with some really great opportunities, and that’s why I am here.”

– PDI Alum

⁵ Total amounts to more than 100% due to rounding.

⁶ Most alumni whom supervisors identify as currently being less ready to advance are from Cohort 3, the program’s most recently graduated cohort.

Exhibit 3⁷
Career Trajectories for PDI Alumni Working in the Jewish Community
 (N=32)⁸



Careers in the Jewish Communal Sector

Thinking about their professional futures, fewer than half of PDI alumni are sure they want to continue their career in the Jewish communal sector (Exhibit 4). While alumni are likely to be working in the Jewish community two years from now, they are less likely to continue working in the field within five years. A greater percentage of Cohort 3 alumni are unsure about staying in the Jewish communal sector than do other cohorts most likely because Cohort 3 alumni are approaching the end of their PDI commitment and anticipating job transitions.

Exhibit 4
Likelihood of Staying in the Jewish Sector in Five Years¹⁰
 (N=32)

| | | Cohort 1 | Cohort 2 | Cohort 3 |
|-------------------|--|----------|----------|----------|
| Likely | These alumni are currently pursuing a clear career path, or have a general sense of what they want to do, within the Jewish community | 6 icons | 6 icons | 3 icons |
| Unsure | These alumni note that they do not have a clear future career path and will approach making decisions about each career opportunity as the time arises. | 3 icons | 1 icon | 5 icons |
| Not likely | These alumni are either interested in exploring professional opportunities outside the Jewish sector, or they have already made career moves out of the sector with no plans to return in the near future. | 4 icons | 2 icons | 1 icon |

⁷ Rankings are based on alumni's increased responsibility over time, their position at the evaluation's conclusion, supervisors' ratings of on-the-job performance and other qualitative data.

⁸ Three alumni are excluded from this analysis: one is currently in rabbinical school, and two have left the field, although they are still advancing in their careers.

⁹ Those who have stalled had not been performing well in their positions and were looking for work at the time of final data collection.

¹⁰ Alumni were asked to rate their likelihood of continuing to work in the Jewish communal sector on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = not at all likely and 5 = highly likely. Ratings of 1–2 were grouped as “not likely,” ratings of 2.5–3.5 were grouped as “unsure,” and ratings of 4–5 were grouped as “likely.”

While some alumni have identified career paths in the Jewish community, others do not see these options for advancement. Almost a quarter of alumni (21%) have identified work that interests them in the Jewish communal sector and see opportunities for growth along related career paths. As alumni receive “stretch” opportunities on the job, apply their professional skills and receive recognition for their work, they tend to find their careers in the Jewish sector more compelling. However, more than a third of alumni (35%) want to advance their careers in the Jewish sector, but do not see enough opportunities to do so. In particular, they see few career paths as they approach middle management. Some alumni (18%) have already identified, or are very interested in exploring, specific career interests outside of the Jewish communal sector. They report that their current work is no longer as rewarding to them as it once was, and are interested in other avenues outside of the sector.

Alumni believe in the mission of the Jewish communal sector, but identify challenges to working in some of its institutions. Almost all alumni (97%) are drawn to the sector because they believe in the overall mission of the work or feel it is connected to their personal identity. It is important to them to help strengthen the Jewish

“While the community is a compelling reason to have a career in the Jewish sector, it is also pretty scary to think that you’re putting yourself in a bubble.”

– PDI Alum

community, connect with their Jewish identities and contribute to Jewish peoplehood. At the same time, about one-third of alumni (32%) view traditional Jewish communal organizations generally as less effective than they would like, and complicated by community politics and low

employee salaries. They identify various un-met organizational needs that make employment in the sector less attractive, including the need for stronger and more effective leadership, stronger supervision, more regular employee assessment, more openness to change and innovation, and improved organizational cultures of excellence. While some alumni may not continue their professional careers in the Jewish sector, they may continue to be engaged in the community in their personal lives.

Although not all alumni are fully committed to the Jewish communal sector, some say that their commitment did increase due to four key elements of their PDI experience:

- **PDI’s two-year, post-graduation commitment to the Jewish community** gave many alumni time to think about their career paths and to develop strong professional networks in the sector. However, some alumni feel that this time mainly helped them to more deeply understand why they did not want to continue working in the Jewish community.
- **The Hebrew College experience and mentors** introduced alumni to a broader spectrum of Judaism and Jewish communal organizations, as well as to a network of professionals.
- Alumni developed a broad **network of professionals** in the Jewish communal sector through PDI and BBYO. This strong peer network benefits alumni in giving them a resource to call upon for professional and career support. However, others say that developing the majority of their professional contacts in the Jewish community makes them feel a bit “stuck” in the sector or that they are working in a “bubble,” which they fear will have unwanted implications for future career decisions.
- The skills learned through PDI, especially the **MBA program**, helped alumni advance in their jobs while working in the sector. Alumni find additional value in the degree, noting that they now have a new credential that others view with high regard and that will continue to help them advance in their careers.

CONCLUSION & LESSONS FROM PDI

Overall, PDI helped train and advance the careers of a group of early- to mid-level Jewish professionals working in the Jewish communal sector. While PDI clearly provided some important professional boosts to its participants, the evaluation could not definitively establish that the program was responsible for all their career growth. Any group of engaged professionals interested in advancement would likely pursue opportunities to enhance their career trajectories. There is evidence that PDI's interventions may continue to support alumni in their pursuit of long-term Jewish sector careers. However, it remains to be seen whether currently committed PDI graduates will stay professionally engaged in the Jewish communal sector over the longer term.

PDI was valuable to its alumni, as well as to BBYO, whose capacities grew as a result of having specially trained employees. It did not transform the field, however, due to its limited scope. At the same time, the cost of PDI was high, prompting the question of whether its alumni's ongoing contributions will be commensurate with the level of investment. It will be telling to continue monitoring alumni's career paths to more fully understand the longer-term outcomes of the PDI program on alumni, the organizations they work for and the broader field.

This evaluation surfaced a number of learnings about the professional development of early- to mid-career professionals in the Jewish communal sector. These lessons are documented in more detail in two brief reports, *Advancing Early-Stage Jewish Careers: Lessons from BBYO's Professional Development Institute* and *Strategies for Professional Development: Lessons from BBYO's Professional Development Institute*. The briefs are intended to provide guidance for others who may be interested in offering professional development opportunities within organizations or planning larger-scale initiatives.



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