

Foundation for Jewish Camp Specialty Camps Incubator 2010–11

Executive Summary

PREPARED FOR:

The Jim Joseph Foundation

PREPARED BY:

Ellen Irie
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INTRODUCTION

In 2009, the Jim Joseph Foundation (the Foundation) launched a five-year investment in the Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC)'s Specialty Camps Incubator (the Incubator). The Incubator is supporting the creation of five new specialty camps in order to increase the number of middle school and high school youth experiencing Jewish summer camp.

To assess how and the extent to which the Incubator is achieving its intended outcomes, the Foundation commissioned BTW *informing change* (BTW) to evaluate the Incubator. BTW worked with Incubator and Foundation staff to develop an evaluation framework and key research questions. The findings of the 2010–11 evaluation are summarized below.

FIVE INCUBATOR CAMPS

- 6 Points Sports Academy
- Adamah Adventures
- Eden Village Camp
- Passport NYC
- Ramah Outdoor Adventure

EVALUATION FINDINGS

Expanding Opportunities for Jewish Youth to Attend Camp

As a whole, Incubator camps continue to exceed enrollment benchmarks and are well on their way to reaching the desired camper retention rate by the end of the Incubator.

The five camps enrolled 1,010 campers in summer 2011, a 71% increase over the 590 campers enrolled in 2010. The camps' combined 2011 enrollment numbers surpassed their overall target benchmark by 15%.

Exactly half (50%) of the campers who attended Incubator camps in summer 2010 returned in 2011 for a second summer experience. The Incubator has set a target camper retention rate of 60% for the new camps, which if met will exceed that of many established specialty camps.

The Incubator camps are successfully attracting the target camper population of middle school and high school Jewish youth: 90% of the youth who returned for a second summer were between the ages of 11 and 18 years, as were 73% of new campers. Overall, the average age of campers is 13 years old.

The Incubator camps and their programs are appealing to experienced campers as well as to youth with no prior Jewish camp experience: 40% of all new Incubator campers in 2011 had never attended Jewish camp before (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1

Campers' Previous Experience in Jewish Camps

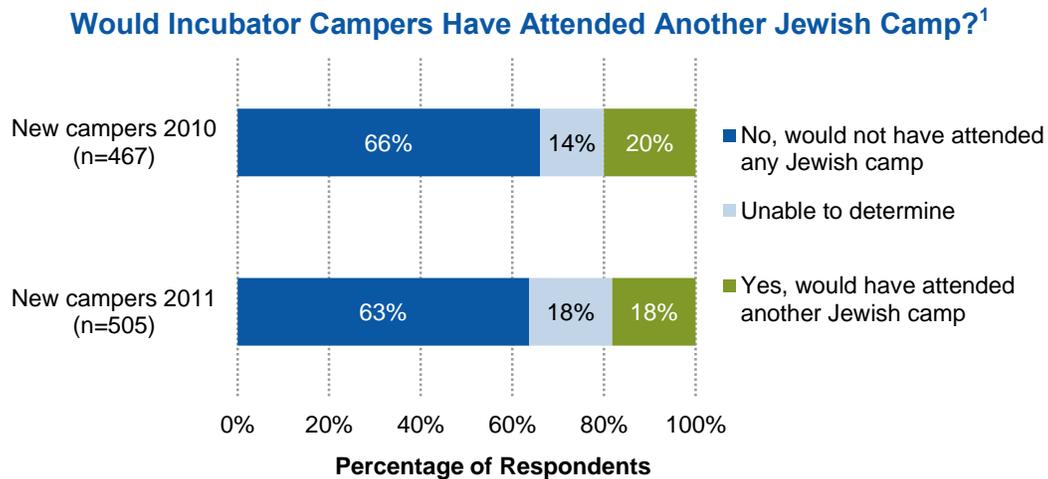
(n=475 for 2010; n=551 for 2011)

Have New Campers Ever Attended Any Jewish Camp?

	No	Yes
2010	37%	63%
2011	40%	60%

Almost two-thirds (63%) of Incubator campers in middle school and high school say they would have skipped Jewish camp completely in 2011 if the Incubator camp they attended had not existed (Exhibit 2). The percentage of campers who report this in 2011 is very similar to what was recorded in the Incubator camps' first summer.

Exhibit 2



The most frequently cited reason for choosing an Incubator camp, for both campers and parents, is the specialty programs. Most campers are considered moderately Jewish, with connections to and some level of interaction with their Jewish community.

Strengthening Jewish Identity & Broadening Networks of Jewish Peers

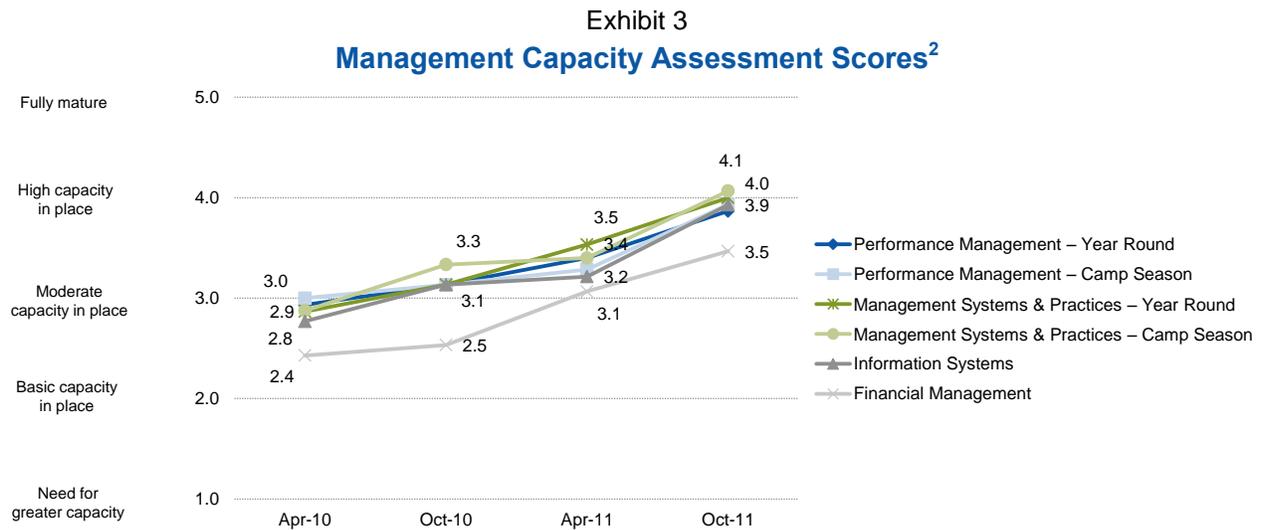
Parents and campers are very satisfied with their experiences in the Incubator camps both immediately following the summer experience and a year after campers return home. Most campers entering camp have moderately high ratings of Jewish attitudes and behaviors, and the Incubator camps contribute to reinforcing these values and beliefs.

- Most returning campers (80%) report improved skills in their specialty area, as do most of their parents (76%).
- Most parents of returning campers (83%) also report positive changes in camper self-confidence.
- Three quarters of returning campers' parents (74%) report that attending an Incubator camp positively impacted campers' Jewish identity.
- The majority of returning campers' parents (65%) report positive changes in campers' Jewish knowledge.
- Some parents (31%) report changes in camper behavior related to Jewish identity, such as increased participation in synagogue or Jewish community organizations.

¹ Percentages are calculated only for campers within the target age range. "No" means that campers only went to Jewish camp because they were attracted to Incubator camps. "Yes" means that campers would have gone to Jewish camp, regardless of whether Incubator camps existed.

Developing Sustainable & Effective Nonprofit Camp Organizations

The Incubator was designed to launch and mold camps into sustainable entities programmatically and operationally. The Incubator camps show a slow but rising trend line on most organizational capacity indicators, including improvements in management capacity overall and in financial management in particular (Exhibit 3). Most camps in 2011 expanded their year-round senior management team and summer in-camp leadership team. Programmatically, camps continued to refine and strengthen their programs' Jewish experiential education components.



The young camps still face large challenges on their paths to organizational maturity, most notably building their fund raising capacity and developing strong governing boards and advisory boards. Most camps also had to deal with facilities challenges as they developed their specialty programs and planned for enrollment growth.

Three of the five Incubator camps were launched under the auspices of large, established nonprofit Jewish organizations. The Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), the National Ramah Commission and New York City's 92nd Street Y each sponsored a camp in the Incubator. The sponsoring organizations have helped these Incubator camps access resources and expertise, but being part of larger, complex organizations has sometimes slowed the process of camp development. The two independent camps, in contrast, have been able to move more nimbly in fund raising and have depended more heavily on the camp directors' personal networks for marketing and communications.

A Successful Strategy for Developing New Nonprofit Jewish Camps

The directors of the Incubator camps and the experienced professionals who mentor them agree that the Incubator has had a crucial role in each camp's development progress to date. The most valuable support from the Incubator in 2011 was the individualized, targeted technical assistance provided to each camp by Incubator staff, mentors and consultants. These one-on-one services are becoming increasingly valuable as the camps become more established and differentiated from one another. The cohort approach of the Incubator has provided the new camp directors with a supportive network of peers and highly experienced camp professionals that is helping them with problem solving, planning and new program development.

² For this evaluation, Incubator staff, camp directors, and camp mentors use a BTW organizational capacity assessment tool to track the five camps' organizational development needs and progress on a semi-annual basis.

IMPLICATIONS

Drawing on the evaluation findings, the evaluators suggest five areas for consideration for future Incubator programming.

1. **The Incubator’s effectiveness rests in large part on its ability to assess gaps in the camp directors’ awareness, knowledge and skills and determine how to fill them.** The flexibility of the Incubator’s training and development plan for the camp directors has been a critical element of its success. However, to ensure success of future camp incubators, Incubator staff should work now to identify which incubator elements and strategies are essential and which are optional depending on the needs of the participating camp directors.
2. **Aggressive benchmarks, though daunting for camp directors, are helpful for the camps to make breakthrough progress.** The future success of the Incubator camps will depend on their ability to sustain growth and improve programs and operations. More benchmarks and targeted technical assistance provided by Incubator staff will help camp directors to continue to hone their leadership skills and learn from each other.
3. **The long-term viability of the camps depends on the engaged support of strong post-Incubator governing boards.** The Incubator should ensure that camp directors have access to consultants with expertise in board development.
4. **Land and facilities issues continue to present challenges to camps’ growth and potentially to their long-term sustainability.** Incubator leaders are encouraged to continue providing technical assistance and support for facilities planning and real estate negotiation.
5. **The challenges of this Incubator provide information that can be useful to future investments.** Incubator leaders are encouraged to reflect on the different development trajectories of the Incubator camps—some more successful to date than others—as a way to identify concepts that have been most effective in launching new specialty camps. Lessons from the successes, errors and failures of the current Incubator camps can help FJC further develop its repertoire of Incubator strategies.



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