March 2013

BTW informing change and Rosov Consulting collaborated on behalf of the Jim Joseph Foundation to conduct and compile this research and to write this report.

By investing in promising Jewish education grant initiatives, the Jim Joseph Foundation seeks to foster compelling, effective Jewish learning experiences for young Jews in the United States. Established in 2006, the Jim Joseph Foundation has awarded $270 million in grants to engage, educate, and inspire young Jewish minds to discover the joy of living vibrant Jewish lives.

www.jimjosephfoundation.org

Founded in 1998, BTW is a woman-owned strategic consulting firm that partners with foundations and nonprofit organizations to improve their effectiveness and inform organizational learning. Our information-based services include evaluation, applied research, and program and organizational strategy development. Our work is guided by our core values—integrity, intelligence and compassion—and our experience extends across diverse contexts, populations and content areas, including education, health, youth engagement, leadership and philanthropy.

www.btw.informingchange.com

Rosov Consulting is a strategic consultancy helping foundations, philanthropists and Jewish communal organizations to meet their goals, assess progress, and enhance impact. By working at the nexus of the funder and grantee relationship, Rosov Consulting fosters and supports partnerships that stimulate change. Led by Founder and Principal, Wendy Rosov, Ph.D., our team brings years of experience in education, research, philanthropy and nonprofit management to our work on behalf of our clients.

www.rosovconsulting.com
We have long known that the teen years represent a critical period of identity development on the journey to adulthood. When young people engage in effective Jewish learning experiences as adolescents, they are more likely to choose to live vibrant Jewish lives as adults. At the Jim Joseph Foundation, we believe that our Jewish community and traditions are rich with ideas and resources that can support teens throughout this stage of self-discovery.

To date, the Jim Joseph Foundation has invested $92 million in Jewish teen education with the goal of fostering compelling and effective learning experiences for Jewish teens, ages 13-17. Many of these initial investments are grants designed to prepare high-quality Jewish teen educators and to expand and deepen learning experiences for teens who attend Jewish schools and camps. Independent third-party evaluation results from these efforts indicate that these core investments are achieving intended goals with the Jewish educators and Jewish teens they serve.

To complement these principal strategies, the Foundation is also exploring creative approaches to invest in ongoing, year-round Jewish learning experiences that can reach the many Jewish teens who do not opt in to existing program offerings. Such strategies are the focus of this research report prepared by BTW informing change and Rosov Consulting, LLC.

The recommendations in this report complement recommendations from other recent reports on teen education and engagement released during the past three years by Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, Rose Community Foundation, The Samuel Bronfman Foundation, UJA-Federation of New York, and others.

For the Jim Joseph Foundation, this current report provides confirming evidence that BBYO, Jewish Student Connection and the North Shore Teen Initiative—all Foundation grantees providing year-round teen education and engagement—are deploying strategies comparable to those utilized by high-performing peers both inside and outside the Jewish world. We hope that this report will help to inform funders about the innovative efforts of these grantees and of other organizations utilizing similar strategies. For the practitioners from all of these organizations, we hope the findings will help animate their work and identify additional opportunities to refine what they do.

Looking beyond what the Jewish community has developed to date for teen education, the Jim Joseph Foundation believes that there is still considerable work to be done. In most communities, the current menu of learning opportunities for Jewish teens attracts less than 20% of the total potential audience. This challenge calls for new innovations in teen education—both inside and outside of existing organizations. It invites greater collaboration within and among communities. It beckons funders to work together to make substantial, multi-year investments in the most promising strategies.
In conjunction with the release of this report, the Jim Joseph Foundation is committed to the following next steps:

1. Build and lead a community of practice for national and local funders interested in teen education and engagement.

2. Develop a set of shared goals and measures of success articulating what participating funders seek to achieve over a five-year period in an effort to dramatically expand and deepen Jewish learning opportunities for teens.

3. Work with partner funders, local community leaders and practitioners to support sustainable community-based teen education initiatives customized to local community needs and aligned with the shared goals.

4. Work with partner funders and major national providers of teen education to identify strategies to invest in national efforts to achieve the shared goals.

5. Encourage ongoing collaboration across communities and with national partners through shared learning and program evaluation.

We look forward to hearing from you and working with you as we embark on this important work together.

We also wish to express special thanks to Josh Miller, Senior Program Officer, for his leadership on this project and to Dr. Sandy Edwards, Associate Director, and Board Members Phyllis Cook and Jerry Somers for their exceptional commitments during the two years of research for this report.

Alvin T. Levitt
President

Chip Edelsberg, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Overview
Scan of Teen and Young Adult Education and Engagement Programming

Background on Engaging and Educating Jewish Teens There are approximately 540,000 Jewish teens (ages 13-18) in the United States.¹ Scholars, community leaders and philanthropists have long recognized the importance of engaging this demographic to engender their Jewish journeys and support them to live vibrant Jewish lives.² Research has shown that the impact of Jewish education on Jewish identity formation positively correlates with the number of years involved, the variety of types of exposures and the amount of time devoted.³ As such, the process of engaging Jewish teenagers must be multifaceted and ongoing throughout the teen years.

Engaging even a majority of young American Jews in some form of Jewish education is a chronic problem. The most recent censuses of classroom-based Jewish education for school-age children estimate that 230,000 are enrolled in supplementary schools (grades 1–12), and that slightly fewer children are enrolled in Jewish day schools (228,174 from junior kindergarten to grade 12).⁴ Combined, in any given year, those enrolled represent 45% of all Jewish youth within this age-range. In supplementary schools, students are clustered in the grades leading up to bar/bat mitzvah; their numbers then fall precipitously. In day schools, enrollment peaks in senior kindergarten (age five), and then falls steadily with each grade.

In the formal Jewish education sector, enrollment rates are even lower. It is estimated that, outside the Haredi community, about 100,000 children age five and over attend Jewish not-for-profit day camps in North America, of which more than 65,000 attend JCCA camps.⁵ The Foundation for Jewish Camp reports that a further 70,000 attend Jewish overnight summer camps. Combined, therefore, only 20% of Jewish children between the ages of 5 and 16 attend a Jewish camp of any sort each summer.

Engaging teens beyond their b’nei mitzvah has emerged as a particular challenge, and engaging the large portion of those who opt out of a formal Jewish education experience in the pre-teen years leading up to bar/bat mitzvah remains especially problematic. Among those who partake in formal Jewish education, research has shown that participation typically declines following their b’nei mitzvah: more than one-third of supplementary school students drop out after grade 8, and by grade 12 only one-seventh remain enrolled.⁶

There has been considerable communal effort to address declining rates of participation in the teen years. Notably, a number of organizations and efforts are successfully attracting large numbers of teens. Denominationally-based youth groups collectively engage between 20,000–30,000 young Jews locally, regionally and nationally each year.⁷ BBYO engages approximately 40,000 Jewish teens each year in their summer and academic year programs. Approximately 22,800 Jewish pre-teens/teens (grades 6-8) and 16,200 teens (grades 9-12) attend Jewish camp each summer.⁸ Participation in Israel programs has been another way to engage young people: in 2010 roughly 11,000 teens traveled to Israel.⁹

Efforts to engage teens are predicated on the fundamental recognition of the importance of this life stage. Developmental psychologist Erik Erikson famously conceptualized adolescence as a significant period when individuals struggle to define their identity in the face of role confusion.¹⁰ During this particularly malleable stage, religion can potentially play a positive role in teens’ lives. Based on a review of research about the influence of religious identity on an individual’s broader social identity, Jeffrey Kress and Maurice Elias concluded: “Religious identity can be seen as functioning like a lighthouse, providing guidance for navigating uncertain territory, and a beacon with which to take one’s bearings when fixed points are lacking.”¹¹ This assertion is corroborated by findings from the National Study of Youth and Religion, which show that “religion is significantly associated with positive outcomes across a variety of important youth attitudes and behaviors.”¹²

Adolescence presents a unique opportunity for the Jewish community. Unlike emerging adulthood (a life stage that is typically characterized by years of transience), adolescence more often occurs in a single locale. School, where teens spend most of their waking hours, strongly dominates teens’ daily lives.¹³ Consequently, adolescence is a time “when children move out from the primary sway of their families to the influence of peer groups,” according to Sylvia Barack Fishman.¹⁴ Yet teens’ lives also remain strongly influenced by their parents and the other adult role models with whom they connect through school, summer programs, extracurriculars and family.¹⁵ Each of these levers of influence (among others) represents an opportunity for those seeking to engage and educate Jewish teens.

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The Jim Joseph Foundation (the Foundation) has identified engaging Jewish teens in educational experiences as fundamental to the Foundation’s mission of fostering compelling, effective Jewish learning experiences for young Jews, primarily ages 13-30.

To date, the Foundation has invested substantial resources in efforts focused on engaging teens in a variety of Jewish educational experiences. Funding has enhanced training for practitioners who work with Jewish teens, including educators trained at the Jewish Theological Seminary, Hebrew Union College, Yeshiva University, Pardes and the Shalom Hartman Institute.

The Foundation also supports programs to strengthen their capacity to provide high-quality Jewish educational opportunities. The BBYO Directors of Jewish Enrichment initiative is one such example in which the Foundation funded the creation of new, high-level staff positions for Jewish experiential educators. In another case, the Foundation is partnering with The AVI CHAI Foundation in supporting the Nadiv program, a pilot initiative to enhance the quality of Jewish education taking place in Jewish summer camps. In yet another instance, in partnership with the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, the Foundations established and sustain the iCenter, a national Israel education resource center focused on pre-collegiate Israel education.

Additionally, the Foundation has supported the creation of new programs to engage teens and pre-teens. For example, the Foundation for Jewish Camp was awarded a grant to create an incubator to launch new Jewish specialty camps. Jewish Student Connection was awarded funding to expand the development of clubs for Jewish teens in public high schools that are staffed by full-time Jewish educators in two regions in the United States. The Foundation’s funding also established the North Shore Teen Initiative, a community-based teen education initiative in 23 towns and cities north of Boston. Finally, the Foundation’s funding benefits teens on the individual level. In the Boston Area, Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area and Washington, D.C., for example, the Foundation is concluding a four-year grant that has provided need-based tuition subsidies for Jewish day and high school students and Jewish residential campers. Another Jim Joseph Foundation project in the Los Angeles area seeks to make tuition more affordable for middle-income families enrolling their teens in five local Jewish high schools.

For the past two years, the Foundation has extended its efforts by exploring possible funding strategies to further address the dramatic drop in teens’ Jewish educational engagement. To this end, the Foundation reached out to a variety of local and national philanthropic foundations such as The Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati, Leichtag Foundation, Rose Community Foundation, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, Sierra Foundation and others who expressed an interest in Jewish teen education and engagement. Together with a number of scholars and other community leaders, this group volunteered to participate in an Advisory Committee for this project. Advisors collectively and forthrightly encouraged the Foundation to explore the possibility of supporting interventions that would be substantially different from past efforts to engage and educate teens. They recognized that existing day high schools, community Hebrew high schools, youth group programs, camps and Israel travel programs are successfully engaging a subset of Jewish teens with strong Jewish backgrounds, and they identified their interest in developing new approaches that will enhance the existing array of teen education opportunities and appeal to Jewish teens who are under-engaged and/or unengaged. With guidance from the Advisors, the Foundation commissioned research that would examine pluralistic educational programming for Jewish teens in the United States.

The Foundation engaged BTW informing change (BTW) and Rosov Consulting, LLC, to conduct a broad scan of teen and young adult education and engagement efforts from a variety of spheres,
including those outside of the Jewish community. The purpose of the scan was to identify examples of programs that are scalable (i.e., programs that could attract substantial numbers of participants) and employ innovative practices (including funding approaches and community collaborations), and to identify the components, parameters, structural considerations and limitations of such programs. The scan was meant to stimulate the thinking of funders, practitioners and Jewish communal leaders as they consider ways to dramatically expand and strengthen community-based Jewish teen education and engagement by highlighting select efforts aimed at attracting and involving teens in compelling and substantive learning experiences.

We acknowledge that education and engagement are not, by strict definition, the same thing. Engagement is about getting people to participate in something, while education is about having them learn something. In many cases they can be combined, but engagement does not necessarily include deep learning. We believe it is also important to consider engagement approaches because they may be what is needed to get teens to the “learning table.”

In conducting the scan, we—BTW and Rosov Consulting—employed a reputational sampling strategy to identify leading efforts inside and outside of the Jewish world that are engaging young people in experiences that are relevant, meaningful and ongoing. We considered programs to include in the scan based on a review of recent research, suggestions from the Advisors, BTW and Rosov Consulting’s own knowledge, and additional investigation. These programs were based in the Jewish communal sector, other faith-based sectors and the secular sector. There were approximately 150 programs identified through the initial scan.

With input from the Advisors, 21 programs were chosen for inclusion in the more in-depth scan, along with the information that would be collected and compiled in brief program summaries. The scan includes 8 Jewish programs for teens and 2 for young adults ages 20–40, along with 11 secular and other faith-based programs for teens and young adults (see the table to the right). The key criteria, along with the targeted interest of Advisors, guided program identification. For example, the scope of this study includes only year-round and academic year learning experiences that can provide ongoing Jewish learning integrated into teens’ lives throughout the school year and, in some cases, into the summer.

Based on other observations in the field of Jewish education, Advisors also expressed a strong interest in learning more about program models utilizing some of the following components: micro-granting, peer-to-peer education, technology and social media, and concierge approaches. Likewise, despite the considerable developmental differences between adolescents and emerging adults in their 20s, the Advisors were curious about the adaptability of some aspects of programs for young adults that have garnered substantial communal investment and have seen high levels of success. Secular and other faith-based models were included because Advisors wished to broaden their thinking about what is possible in the Jewish arena through increased awareness of other spheres of teen activity.

After much consideration, some program categories were excluded. Since this report is intended for readers who have a strong familiarity with the more established and traditional models of Jewish teen education and engagement, programs such as denominationally-based youth programs were excluded. Programs for which there are substantial extant data about implementation and audience were also excluded.

The programs included in this scan are as follows:

**Jewish Programs**

1. Beged Kefet Hebrew Language School
2. Diller Teen Fellows
3. JCC Maccabi Games and ArtsFest
4. The Jewish Lens
5. Jewish Student Connection
6. Jewish Teen Funders Network
7. Moishe House (young adult)
8. Moving Traditions
9. North Shore Teen Initiative
10. ROI Community (young adult)

**Universal and Other Faith-Based Programs**

11. Chicago Freedom School
12. DoSomething.org
13. The Food Project
14. Gay-Straight Alliance Network
15. Hand Up Teen Leadership Program & Girls Give Back
16. Mobilize.org (youth and young adult)
17. National Indian Youth Leadership Project
18. The Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries, Unitarian Universalist Association
19. TEDxYouth
20. YMCA Youth & Government
21. Young Life
Report Overview This report offers 10 overarching observations of key themes that emerged from the research about the programs included in the scan, as well as from consultations with leading innovators inside and outside the Jewish world. Importantly, our reflections in this report have also benefitted from a series of group and one-on-one meetings with the Advisors throughout the 18-month process as well as a half-day focus group conversation with a diverse group of Jewish teens. Accompanying this report are 21 in-depth program summaries that include background information and details about key programs and activities, along with some noteworthy characteristics and qualities. This report is intended to be read in conjunction with the accompanying program summaries (see Appendix).

It is important to note that those who commissioned this research as well as those of us who conducted it are not the first to explore this issue. Throughout the past decade, numerous studies, program evaluations and general articles have shed light on some of the essential characteristics and qualities of successful Jewish education and engagement efforts. This study is not designed to replicate those efforts; rather in some cases it corroborates their findings and, in other cases it provides further nuance to those findings and also adds new learnings. The programs included in this research are not meant to represent a definitive list of the 21 best. Nor is this list a representative sample of all extant programs. Rather, it is a cross-section of programs and organizations with certain characteristics or components that appear to be promising strategies or tactics for engaging teens in educational endeavors.
The following are our overarching observations and the key themes that emerged from this research. We recommend that the issues outlined below receive equally thoughtful deliberation; we intentionally do not present them in any order of importance.

1 Models of Teen Involvement Among the programs included in this scan, there is a range of modes of involving and working with teens that build on youth empowerment, youth development and peer-to-peer engagement theory. The programs give teens and young adults different levels of responsibilities, with adults serving in supporting roles. Many programs include opportunities for teens or young adults to take the lead in planning and implementing programming. For example, Jewish Student Connection operates student-led clubs in high schools, supporting the creation and implementation of programming for and by teens. Similarly, teens in Young Life play a leading role in designing their regular gatherings. Another form of young adult ownership of their work can be seen in micro-granting programs, such as in the ROI Community, where participants are not only encouraged to conceptualize a project, but they can then secure funding to execute that plan and be responsible for its realization. As teens and young adults take responsibility for designing their programming, adults serve as resources and collaborators, helping to facilitate effective communication, self-reflection and skill-building. Participants can also take part in a program or organization’s governance process, serving as board and advisory committee members, as is the case with the Chicago Freedom School (CFS) and the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) Network. CFS convenes a Youth Leadership Board, comprised of youth ages 14–19, which guides the direction for CFS’s youth programs and supports the organization by participating in recruiting program participants/Fellows, staff hiring and media events. The GSA Network offers several leadership options for youth: they can serve on the Board of Directors, on regional Youth Councils or on the Statewide Advocacy Council. Notably, opportunities for teens to participate on boards are more common among the non-Jewish programs in the scan.

In a slightly different approach to involving teens, there is a focus on building teens’ abilities and competencies through programs (often developed by adult experts) designed to provide supportive and empowering opportunities for skill-building, self-reflection and horizon-broadening. The philosophy guiding this approach posits that positive identity development—achieved by fostering...
resilience and competency building—is central to helping youth navigate adolescence in healthy ways. In the Diller Teen Fellowship, for example, teens take part in a variety of local, national and international gatherings during which they participate in informal experiential education activities designed to help develop skills, knowledge and a sense of commitment as young leaders in the Jewish community.

Many programs also rely heavily on current participants to recruit their peers, which helps teens build skills to foster effective engagement and authentic connections with other teens. DoSomething.org’s (DoSomething) youth-led groups, for example, provide a forum for peer-to-peer engagement around DoSomething causes. Each youth-led group starts with at least four young people who commit to creating and posting volunteer projects, and adopting at least two DoSomething campaigns per year. Those four members then engage, on average, 160 peers. This happens across 375 groups, helping DoSomething build to 60,000 members nationwide.

2 Flexible Participation Research has shown that duration of involvement correlates with impact: the longer a young person is involved, the greater the effect. Yet teens have different levels of interest in and capacity to participate in any given program. Having multiple entry points or varying tiers for involvement enables a range of teens to participate in a program in accordance with their interests and availabilities. Episodic opportunities can also serve as a low-barrier “hook” to help teens get to know an organization before they decide to opt into deeper, longer-term involvement.

With the understanding that some teens will partake more fully than others, programs have created opportunities for varied doses of involvement. Programs offering flexibility in terms of how and how often participants are involved seem to yield promising results. For example, some programs offer both sporadic and serial participation opportunities. Others create opportunities for active participants to become more involved as leaders. In the case of Hand Up Teen Leadership Program, for example, teens can participate in at least four ways:

1. They can attend regular club meetings as frequently or infrequently as they wish at their public and private high schools.
2. They can volunteer to participate in monthly food drives at locations of their choosing around San Diego County.
3. They can opt to take on more responsibility by applying for a position on the Advisory Committee.
4. Once they have completed a year on the Advisory Committee, they can choose to take on an even greater leadership role by applying to become a member of the Executive Committee.

In another example, teens who participate in the GSA Network can do so on the local or national level: they can participate in a GSA club on their high school campus to whatever extent they choose, and they can attend national trainings and events such as the three-day Advocacy & Youth Leadership Academy or the Queer Youth Advocacy Day at the State Capitol.
Pedagogical Approach

The programs included in the scan offer multiple pedagogical approaches. They include a variety of learning modalities including social, intellectual, spiritual, emotional, artistic and corporeal educational opportunities. Some incorporate multiple modalities, while others are more focused on a single methodology. Moving Tradition’s Rosh Hodesh: It’s A Girl Thing! and Shevet Achim: The Brotherhood, for example, utilize three modes of learning—sensory, cognitive and emotive—during each monthly session, which place teen girls’ and boys’ coming-of-age experiences at the center of the groups’ educational activities. Moving Traditions is also a prime example of a program that intentionally addresses the different stages of adolescent development in its pedagogical approach.

Some programs include mifgash as a pedagogical approach: encounters with Jewish peers from around the country and from Israel. Such encounters are a key component of the ROI Community and JCC Maccabi Games and ArtsFest, which bring together diverse groups of Jews from various geographic locations. The action and reflection-based pedagogical approach of service-learning is employed by programs such as Hand Up Teen Leadership Program & Girls Give Back and Mobilize.org.

Among the Jewish organizations included in the scan, it is important to recognize that they have different goals as well as different theories about how those goals can be achieved, and consequently different strategies for achieving them. Therefore, the intensity of the Jewish learning component varies across these organizations.

4 Young Staff

Scholars and practitioners widely acknowledge the fundamental importance of a talented staff to successfully engage teens. In his review of research about effective approaches to engaging teens, Michael Whitehead-Bust notes an emphasis “on the importance of sustained participation and high-caliber staffing in developing successful models of youth programming.” The significance of opportunities for teens to build substantive relationships with adults also echoes through the literature. Through their active investment in both the content of a program and its participants, young staff members can be effective engagers and mentors.

As such, it is important to employ staff members with whom teens can relate. For their deep understanding of the population they serve, post-college young adults, often in their early to mid-20s, can be ideal in this capacity. Yet hiring, training and retaining young adults is challenging, in part due to their transient life stage, limited professional experience and the typically low wages in youth-serving positions. Some organizations have addressed this challenge by purposefully transforming high turnover from a perpetual liability into an opportunity. Acknowledging the need for young adult staff, along with the reality of young adults’ lives, is key. For example, DoSomething has developed employment and professional development tracks that account for employees’ differing intended time commitments. Young adult staff members who express interest in a longer tenure are supported differently than staff members who commit to employment for two years. Some programs also utilize internship and employment opportunities as pathways for participants’ continued involvement. For example, at The Food Project, once youth complete both the Summer
Youth Program (SYP) and the Academic Year Program (AYP), they are eligible to apply for two- to four-year internships. As paid interns, they present workshops about food justice and healthy eating at local organizations and schools and at the AYP and SYP. They also contribute to The Food Project’s social media presence.

It is also important to recognize that programs also have success hiring slightly older, more experienced professionals (in their late 20s or 30s) at a slightly higher cost than young adults fresh out of college. Examples include Jewish Student Connection and the North Shore Teen Initiative; The Curriculum Initiative has also documented this as a successful practice. The result is employing young educators with some additional skills and experience, who can still relate to teens but are more mature. These professionals can also relate to adults, which is especially important if they are training volunteers or interacting with parents, community partners and donors. They are typically at a point in their work lives where if it’s a good fit, they may be inclined to stay at the job for three or more years.

5 Utilizing Adult Volunteers to Expand the Reach of Staff The largest programs in the scan (in terms of the total number of participants) tend to utilize the talents of committed volunteers to increase their capacity to reach and serve teens. These programs often include a structured volunteer training and supervision program. For many programs, large numbers of volunteers are integral to program operations that otherwise, with a relatively small number of full-time staff members, would have much more limited capacity.

While involving volunteers can be time consuming and costly, the benefits are numerous. Volunteers can be key to a program’s scalability, which is dependent on the financial viability and sustainability of infrastructure. BBYO, while not included in this scan, is an important example in the Jewish world of a teen organization that has achieved broad reach through the mobilization of adult volunteers who advise over 600 BBYO chapters worldwide.

Engaging volunteers from within a local community can have other important effects beyond reach and finances—it can strengthen the overall fabric of communal life and foster additional organizational connections. In “Bridging the Gap from Bar Mitzvah
to Birthright,” Adam Gaynor notes the importance of involving trusted and respected adults to broaden communal support for teen engagement efforts. Additionally, the involvement of volunteers broadens teens’ opportunities to forge positive connections with adults. Volunteers can also act as role models and positively demonstrate the importance of lifelong community involvement for teens. Offering the opportunity for alumni to volunteer provides another avenue for their continued organizational investment.

Volunteers are critical to the Young Life model, for example. Young Life is currently aiming to reach two million youth within the next seven years. It intends to do so by utilizing up to 40,000 volunteers. The organization is currently transitioning staff members’ roles from working directly with teens to focusing on recruiting, training and supporting the ever-growing cadre of volunteers to engage in direct service with Young Life youth. YMCA Youth & Government is also reliant on volunteers to run the program. The California state office has institutionalized a volunteer training structure, which provides single-day volunteer advisor trainings throughout the year and has incentivized volunteer advisors to ensure that they are well-prepared to fulfill their commitments. Many YMCA Youth & Government volunteers are also program alumni.

6 Founding and Funding The programs included in the scan employ a variety of funding strategies. Support is from the government, philanthropy (individuals, private foundations and corporate philanthropy), earned-income revenue and, of course, combinations of the above. Some also receive in-kind support. Regardless of the funding model, almost all program representatives interviewed for this research said they are focused on ongoing financial sustainability.

While the impetus for a program’s establishment does not appear to be key to its success (there is no consistency among how or when the programs included in the scan were founded), how a program was founded can have direct consequences on its financial stability. The extent and type of financial support dictate how much of staff members’ work must be dedicated to fundraising efforts. For programs with few staff members that rely exclusively on grants, hours spent on fundraising can decrease time devoted to organizational development. Programs that are primarily supported by one philanthropic institution, as opposed to those that rely on multiple types of support, face a different challenge: reliance on a single or primary donor creates vulnerability through complete dependence.
Though employing a fee-for-service component seems promising, we did not see widespread evidence of programs that were successfully employing viable business models that include substantial revenue-generating income streams. The National Indian Youth Leadership Project, which had relied heavily on government grants to support its work in the past, is now actively focusing on fee-for-service and pro bono replication services as a means of not only expanding the program’s reach but also securing additional financial support as government grants decrease. Another program that relies heavily on a fee-for-service model is The Jewish Lens. The Jewish Lens offers a curriculum, educator training and ongoing support to educators in a variety of educational settings. They have devised a community-wide approach in which centralized agencies are securing local funding to enable cohorts of local schools and organizations to utilize The Jewish Lens’ program.

An important long-term sustainability strategy utilized among the organizations that have a local community presence is to solicit local donors to support the locally-based efforts. Jewish Student Connection, the North Shore Teen Initiative, Moishe House and YMCA Youth & Government all recognize that it is essential to have early, local buy-in. This begins with devoting time and resources to cultivating local volunteer leadership and potential donors who will become champions of the work because they believe in the mission or are connected to the program’s beneficiaries. For national organizations with a local presence, therefore, fundraising needs to happen on two fronts: local funders who support local operations and national funders who support national operations.

7 Partnerships Organizational partnerships are ubiquitous among the programs included in the scan. No single program operates alone, and programs utilize a number of different partnership models. The North Shore Teen Initiative (NSTI) is perhaps the clearest example of partnership, in that it serves as the connective tissue between existing youth organizations and synagogues, thereby producing broader social opportunities for teens across 23 communities than would have otherwise occurred. In addition, NSTI partners with national organizations to provide teens with opportunities well beyond those regional boundaries. The Jewish Lens, for example, couples its expertise in attracting teens with partners’ content expertise about causes to create unique and powerful opportunities for youth activism. Jewish Student Connection (JSC) brings local partners into club meetings to provide content about issues that students have identified as areas of interest. In doing so, JSC exposes teens to the work of these partners and introduces teens to potential opportunities for involvement.

8 Social Media and Technology Teens are fervent users of social media and technology for communicating with family, friends and others. A 2011 study from the Pew Internet & American Life Project reports that 95% of all teens ages 12–17 are now online.25 Of online teens, 80% use social network sites (e.g., Facebook, MySpace, Twitter) and 93% of those have an account on Facebook. The same study reports that 77% of teens have a cell phone, typically getting their first cell phone at age 12 or 13. In addition, the study documents that texting has become a dominant daily mode of communication between teens.

As the frequency and volume of social media use among teens continues to rapidly increase, we observe a range of uses of social media and technology across the programs. For some, they are core to the operational and programmatic fabric. To illustrate, TED videos, which provide content and resources and facilitate participant connection, are the central component of any TEDxYouth program, both programatically and operationally. The TEDxYouth YouTube channel is also one of the many TED channels that serve as a platform to share TEDx events from around the world. Building on the popularity of texting among teens, DoSomething has a text-message–based platform to reach and communicate with teens in almost all of its programs.
For other programs, though, the use of social media and technology is ancillary. For those that operate primarily offline, social media is often used as a recruitment and marketing tool. For example, the ROI Community uses Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube and a blog to maintain regular contact with its 8,444 community members and their extended networks. Programs small in scale and/or that rely on face-to-face relationships tend to use social media less. Other programs are also working to integrate technology more fully into the programmatic design through blogs and social networking opportunities, such as the relatively new Unitarian Universalist Association’s blog, Blue Boat. Finally, while most programs see value in using social media to achieve a specific purpose, many recognize that it is a means to an end, not an end in and of itself.

**9 Branding** Strong branding, which is a hallmark of a number of programs in the scan, is used to achieve various ends. A brand can be utilized as a method of maintaining standards, employed as a marketing tool and relied upon to evoke name recognition. In the case of TEDxYouth, strict licensing regulations that dictate how the brand can be used ensure consistency across events, thus upholding program quality. The DoSomething brand is used extensively as a part of the organization’s marketing strategy to increase interest in their partners’ causes. For programs like YMCA Youth & Government and JCC Maccabi Games and ArtsFest, the national and international brands convey a sense that participants are part of something larger than themselves and create a feeling of connection with a broader movement. For any program, developing a strong, clear brand adds credibility to its work.

**10 Structure** The programs in the scan represent a diversity of sizes and structures: stand-alone organizations, regionally-based organizations, and national and international organizations with regional and/or local affiliates. Programs embedded within larger organizations have access to broader resources and supports, both financial and in-kind, which may result in economies of scale as well as increased opportunities for sharing best practices. In many cases the national umbrella organization offers local operations marketing, fundraising and content support. Local YMCA Youth & Government chapters, for example, receive marketing materials (e.g., brochures, flyers) and content support (e.g., tool-kits, templates for bills) from the state office. Additionally, the state office leads an annual fundraising campaign that provides conference scholarships and also logistics and operations supports for events. In the case of Mobilize.org, a move from national to customized regional hubs has resulted in flexible implementation that more tightly aligns with the needs of a particular region. Finally, the North Shore Teen Initiative is an example of a structure put in place to strengthen the work across a large region that lacks the centralized support that can often be found in a major metropolitan area with a large Jewish population.
Implications for Strategy Development As we consider the implications of this work, it is important to revisit the purpose and context for this research. The Jim Joseph Foundation and other Advisors to this work are interested in increasing Jewish teen education and engagement efforts through a community-based approach that can be supported by both local and national funders. In exploring teen education and engagement efforts, the key criteria for this scan are all issues of importance. The intention is to reach growing numbers of Jewish teens, focused particularly on those who are not regularly participating in Jewish life at present, with promising approaches of relevant, meaningful Jewish education and engagement—and to do so in a way that is financially sustainable. While there are some givens of what works and what elements should be considered, there are also many additional variables across contexts and types of programs.

Among the variability seen across the programs in this scan is how the learning, growth and identity development can happen. Rather than being prescriptive, we believe it is useful to consider this diversity of approaches, including the following:

- **From whom do teens learn?** Their peers; college-age or adult role models.

- **What do they do and explore?** Ritual practice (e.g., Shabbat, holidays), culture (e.g., movies, music, literature, cuisine), different backgrounds (e.g., different Jewish religious backgrounds, non-Jewish backgrounds), values in action (e.g., volunteering, social action, philanthropy), creative expression (e.g., art, theater, photography, writing, video production, performance), discussion of relevant topics within a particular (e.g., Jewish) context.

- **How do they do it?** Facilitated discussions led by adults and/or peers; one-on-one, small group as well as large group activities; experiential education (e.g., group games, role playing, field trips, simulations); engaging with the broader world (e.g., service, sharing creative expressions).

As the Jim Joseph Foundation and other Advisors now contemplate how to invite communities to develop approaches that help teens explore what being Jewish means to them, we suggest that any community response should consider the following nine issues.

1. **“Location, Location, Location”** A common refrain of teens when asked why they “drop out” or don’t participate in Jewish activities is, “I’m too busy; I don’t have the time.” Yet, through our research, we have seen that meeting teens where they go every day, both physically and virtually, helps maximize
participation. Whether at their school, on a playing field, in a studio or online, teens not only need easy access to reach the program, but the program also needs to reach into and be in the spaces where teens already are. Then, after teens are involved in spaces that are familiar to them, under the right circumstances they may choose to go out of their way to be Jewishly involved, which is required for certain kinds of powerful, proven immersive Jewish learning experiences (i.e., retreats, conventions, camp, service-learning, Israel trips).

2 “People, People, People” Relationships are central to participants’ positive educational experiences, be it with peers, alumni, staff members or volunteers. The facilitation of participants’ sense of connection with one another, with individuals slightly older or younger and/or with adult staff or volunteers overseeing the learning experience should be a central component of any Jewish education and engagement effort.

Existing teen program providers need to recognize what opportunities they are providing for teens to build relationships at multiple levels and how this can contribute to long-term participant outcomes. This may require reframing existing offerings to emphasize the development of these relationships.

When designing new Jewish education programs, a critical question to ask is how to design experiences around enabling teens to build meaningful relationships that will help them advance on their Jewish journeys. This emphasis on relationships built, rather than numbers of programs or attendees, may lead to entirely different methodologies for supporting Jewish teens to learn and grow Jewishly.

In addition, the Jewish community has an opportunity to carefully consider how to attract, train, support and retain teen leaders, staff, volunteers, parents and other adults who interact with teens to ensure that the cadre on the “front line” is adept at building relationships with Jewish teens and guiding their Jewish growth.

3 Multiple Portals of Entry An apparent component of successful program scaling is offering multiple portals for entry and flexible engagement structures once inside the system. Avoid the one-size-fits-all trap and consider porous boundaries to facilitate entry. In terms of content, this can mean providing subject matter that speaks to the diverse interests of the target audience, such as the range of causes offered by DoSomething. It can also mean offering tiered levels of engagement that can shift over time, including opportunities to take on various leadership roles over the course of a program or the possibility of simply showing up and participating at any point. Short, one-time activities, or even a few mouse clicks, can be important entry points for curious teens who require a low barrier to entry. More intense programs—multi-day retreats, year-long commitments—can both deepen engagement for those more interested and committed and serve as an internal leadership track. Opportunities for participation at local, regional, national and international levels are another way to provide multiple entry points.

This “menu” of opportunities for teens can be achieved within a single organization that is capable of offering a wide range of opportunities under one brand, such as Young Life and BBYO have done. It can also be achieved at a community-wide level when the range of independent teen-serving organizations decide to...
work together with the collective goal of advancing the Jewish journeys of all teens within the community. This requires a courageous effort on the part of individual organizations to set aside their own agendas and to devote serious time and effort to coordinate with their organizational peers.

**4 Skin in the Game** Some teens thrive upon opportunities to have a stake in the work, not be passive recipients, which can increase the likelihood and relevance of their involvement. This is particularly true if peer-to-peer engagement is part of the strategy; teens are less likely to engage others without feeling personally empowered. This can range from young people driving the vision and design of the work, such as providing leadership or serving in governance roles, or teens participating in developing content, leading events or activities, being responsible for giving or receiving grants, or simply providing participants with choice in what they do.

The challenge here is that (adult) program providers need to take the leap of faith to trust that teens can and will step up to the plate to take on real responsibility if it is offered to them. If teens are treated like adults, they will act like adults. The role of the adults who work with those teens is to earn their trust and then be adept at providing teens with the right support, guidance and encouragement so they can succeed in their empowered roles. This is a skill that can be taught; it requires humility and trust.

**5 Accepting Teens As They Are** More than anything, teens want to be accepted for who they are. This is not just about accepting teens for who and where they are on their Jewish journeys. Teens do not want to compartmentalize their multifaceted interests or identities, so professionals and volunteers who work with Jewish teens must start from the place of accepting teens where they are on their life journey. Yet, the teen years arguably represent the most intense period of developmental growth and change in the shortest period of time. Where and who teens “are” as they enter into the bar/bat mitzvah year is likely to be far from who and where they will be by the time they enter high school. As such, it is essential to provide developmentally appropriate programs for teens of different ages. Since teens are strongly influenced by peers who are immediately older and younger, opportunities to interact across ages are also important.

**6 Quality Amidst Growth** We have seen that core content combined with appropriate training and oversight can facilitate quality control over a large scale. One of the concerns frequently raised with broadening reach is that, by definition, it lessens depth and/or overall ability to control for quality. While there is some truth to this, the programs in this scan show that there are concrete ways to address broad-scale quality control. First, it is important to have defined core content that clarifies the essential elements of the model. This does not mean that the program is completely prescriptive, but essential elements are defined, while also leaving space for building relevant learning experiences around topics that emerge from the interests of participants.

There also need to be systems and structures to ensure that this content is delivered as envisioned. This can come in the form of licensing standards or agreements in using the core content. Volunteer recruitment and training are also critical, since volunteers are the lifeblood of many programs with broad reach. Programs need a plan not only for volunteer recruitment and training but also for ongoing support and management to ensure they utilize the core content within the parameters envisioned, even when great flexibility is core to the model. In addition, hiring talented, creative, adaptive educators and offering consistent training to ensure all of those educators are focused on a shared set of desired learning outcomes (not necessarily defined content) is key. Community-based education and engagement approaches, therefore, need to address not only what the core content is, but also what steps will be taken to effectively disseminate the content based on the chosen channels.

**7 The Business of Doing Business** Any effort that is going to be fiscally sustainable over the long term, regardless of cost per capita, needs a viable business model that articulates how it will develop the financial resources to enable it to do the work over the long term. Philanthropy can be one, but should not be the only, revenue source and efforts
relying primarily on a single funder have proven particularly difficult to maintain. While there are limits to securing public funding for Jewish-focused efforts, fee-for-service or earned income, such as charging for procuring core content and implementation support, should be considered as possible revenue streams. Strategic partnerships also have the potential to either produce revenue or, on the flip side, reduce costs. Understanding what combination of revenue is anticipated, how secure these sources are, and whether the funding mix is anticipated to shift over time will help to determine if any effort is viable and sustainable.

Communities making investments in new initiatives need to recognize that it takes time and start-up capital to build a new program to a place where it has the proven track record and organizational capacity to generate enough revenue through fundraising and other sources to survive without outside support. It generally takes at least five to seven years of annual core operating support to seed a new initiative. It is therefore important to consider whether a new initiative can be housed within an organization that can provide existing infrastructure.

8 Build for Scale from Day One Any new effort must also effectively address the issue of scale. Scale is important for expanding reach and potential outcomes. Effective scaling also, by definition, ensures a reasonable cost per capita. Some high-quality programs included in this scan simply are not scalable due to the high cost per capita, and they must consider what cost is realistic, given their programmatic model. The meaning of scale for a particular program—in a particular community—and how it will be achieved, are important issues for consideration.

When considering how to build a program that can scale beyond an individual community, it is important to consider from the outset how the model can be designed to be adaptable in other communities with different contexts and existing infrastructure. It helps to work with a national partner and to run early experiments in multiple locations.

9 Know Your Goals and Consider Your Metrics Many of the programs we reviewed in depth have, over the past several years, increasingly been called upon and/or have chosen to engage in the serious work of articulating specific, measurable, attainable, result-oriented and time-bound (“SMART”) goals and milestones. We firmly believe that the articulation of such goals and accompanying metrics, coupled by a culture of accountability around them, leads to better programming and, ultimately, to stronger outcomes and impact. This work is not easy and often requires the assistance of an outside expert who can facilitate it. This work is even more challenging when adding the complexity of the “shifting sands” of the developmental continuum in the teen sphere.

Concluding Thoughts: Drawing upon the learnings from the program models included in this scan, we believe that there are new opportunities that can be explored specifically in the Jewish teen education and engagement space. Given this report’s focus on community-based approaches specifically, it will be critical to apply the lessons and implications from this research to the unique contexts of individual communities—thinking about their composition, needs, individual and collective interests, existing infrastructures, etc. Armed with the information generated by this research and with a comprehensive knowledge of those communities, we believe that national and local funders will be well positioned to partner with community-based stakeholders to consider new approaches to working in the teen sphere, with the ultimate goal of forwarding and deepening Jewish teens’ journeys.
The National Jewish Population Survey estimates that in the United States there are 90,000 young Jews in each age cohort. By that measure, there are a total of 540,000 Jewish teens ages 13–18.


These figures are estimates from field practitioners.

These figures are approximations based on 2011–2012 camp data from JData at the Foundation for Jewish Camp, and reported by 118 of 155 overnight Jewish camps. Notably, camp attendance decreases significantly over the course of the high school years: 7,400 teens attend in grade 9 to just 1,000 attend by grade 12.


Educational efforts highlighted in the scan include discreet programs as well as organizations offering educational opportunities.


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