



Denver-Boulder Jewish Teen Initiative Evaluation

Year 1 Report

NOVEMBER 2015

Prepared for
The Jim Joseph
Foundation &
Rose Community
Foundation

Prepared by
Informing Change

INFORMING 
CHANGE

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
How the Initiative Came to Be	1
Initiative Overview	2
Evaluation Overview.....	4
Denver & Boulder Jewish Teens	6
Engaging Jewish Teens	6
Teens’ Jewish Learning and Growth	11
Teen Program Challenges	17
Youth Professionals	19
A Collaborative Professional Network	19
Making Connections	20
Professional Development	20
The Initiative	23
Collaboration & Trust	23
Backbone Functions	24
Synergies	25
Prioritizing Teens	25
Initiative Challenges	26
Initiative Sustainability	27
Recommendations & Conclusion	28
Appendix: Denver-Boulder Jewish Teen Initiative Theory of Change	32

Acknowledgements

The Denver and Boulder Jewish communities are overflowing with dedicated and energetic leaders and youth professionals committed to strengthening Jewish life overall and providing high quality and meaningful experiences for Jewish teens.

We extend our deepest gratitude to representatives from Rose Community Foundation, the Jim Joseph Foundation and the individual organizations, staff members and stakeholders who are at the forefront of these community offerings and who shared their reflections for this evaluation. We also appreciate the efforts of American Institutes for Research (AIR), Rosov Consulting and The Jewish Education Project who, together and separately, are coordinating support and evaluation efforts for North American Jewish communities engaging in community-wide Jewish teen education and engagement initiatives, including this one. Finally, in addition to Rose Community Foundation and the Jim Joseph Foundation, we want to recognize the dozens of individual and institutional funders who are supporting this Initiative in Denver and Boulder and making all of this work possible.

Introduction

HOW THE INITIATIVE CAME TO BE

For a number of years, leaders in the Greater Denver Metropolitan area have been concerned about teen involvement in Jewish life in the Denver and Boulder communities. Low levels of post bar/bat mitzvah Jewish engagement troubled Jewish leaders, especially as Jewish youth programs began to show dropping enrollments.

To address these concerns, starting in 2010, the Jewish Life Committee of Rose Community Foundation and Allied Jewish Federation began gathering local data and input for the purpose of creating an action agenda around greater Jewish teen engagement in the Metro Denver area. The research and community forums identified several important needs, including:

- A system that is teen-centered rather than being organizationally driven;
- More authentic and richer adult-teen connections;
- A systematic focus on reaching teens who are not currently active in Jewish life;
- Increased collaboration and inter-organizational connections;
- A neutral organization to lead efforts; and
- Better efforts at valuing, training and retaining high quality Jewish teen professionals and adult advisors.

Building on this research, in 2014, Rose Community Foundation entered into a partnership with the Jim Joseph Foundation to develop an Initiative to increase the number of teens in the Denver Metro area engaged in Jewish life and learning and to retain their interest through teen-focused programming and strong interpersonal relationships with adults. The Initiative had three initial objectives: to identify a few innovative Jewish teen programs and help them achieve incremental growth; to promote and support a shift in Jewish teen programming to models that intentionally foster adult-teen relationships; and to fund youth-initiated, youth-led programming that could connect and engage a wider circle of Jewish teens than those currently engaged in traditional Jewish youth programs. Initiative leaders believed with an infusion of funding and addition staff, a small group of grantees could move their vision forward.

The Initiative was designed to pay particular attention to:

- Involving Jewish teens who come from diverse Jewish backgrounds;
- Expanding the breadth of Jewish opportunities to meet teens' diverse interests;
- Scaling successful models of teen engagement while piloting new, innovative models;
- Developing relationship-building and mentoring skills among Jewish youth professionals and involved adults;
- Building models for Jewish teen engagement that are financially sustainable; and
- Establishing Jewish teen education and engagement as a priority for local Jewish community leaders and parents.

INITIATIVE OVERVIEW

The overarching purpose of the Denver-Boulder Jewish Teen Initiative is “to make greater Denver-Boulder area Jewish life relevant and meaningful to young people both now and later in their lives, with teens serving as active partners together with their peers, adults and community leaders in shaping their own Jewish journeys.”¹ As the Initiative launched, the five key grantees—Jewish Student Connection (JSC), Moving Traditions (MT), Boulder Jewish Teen Initiative (BJTI), PresenTense Colorado (PT) and jHub—and the lead funders—Rose Community Foundation and the Jim Joseph Foundation—articulated a Theory of Change that specified the Initiative’s key strategies and target audiences (a copy of the Theory of Change can be found in the Appendix). The Theory of Change also outlined a robust set of outcomes for expanding Jewish teen engagement overall, enhancing the Jewish learning and growth of teens involved in the Denver and Boulder communities, developing youth professionals and involved adults, and building community capacity to support teen engagement. The five grantee organizations, selected in large part for their focus on teen-led programming and strong adult-teen relationships, work together on overall Initiative outcomes as well as individually on their own organizational targets.

The Grantees



Jewish Student
Connection

Jewish Student Connection began supporting Jewish student clubs in Denver area public high schools in 2011. With leadership from one or more students in a public school and a teacher to serve as club advisor, JSC organizes and staffs these student clubs, which meet regularly before, during or after school. Students and JSC’s skilled staff educators jointly plan the club’s programs. The Initiative provided JSC with resources to hire a second staff member in order to increase the number of JSC clubs in area public high schools and pilot new middle school clubs. Of the five grantee organizations in the Initiative, JSC has the longest tenure in the area.

MOVING
TRADITIONS

Moving Traditions brings together small groups of teen girls and boys to build positive relationships and think deeply about gender, cultural expectations, ethics and Jewish life. A number of Moving Traditions groups—both *Rosh Hodesh: It’s a Girl Thing* and *Shevet Achim: The Brotherhood*—have been active in the region in the past, sponsored by Jewish organizations and synagogues, but without local staffing since 2007. The Initiative enabled Moving Traditions to hire its first full-time director in Colorado. Moving Traditions is expanding the number of local groups, and is also developing a new community-group model run by trained leaders with paid stipends, but without sponsorship from a partnering organization.



Boulder Jewish Teen Initiative is a new teen-provider collaboration that aims to offer a steady mix of one-time and ongoing classes, activities and opportunities (e.g., hikes, movie nights, JSC clubs, service projects) for teens to explore Judaism and Jewish life in a fun environment with other teens and skilled Jewish educators. With the Initiative’s funding, the collaborative group of Boulder teen advocates hired a Jewish educator as the full-time BJTI director. BJTI is loosely modeled on the Boston area’s successful North Shore Teen Initiative.²

¹ Denver-Boulder Jewish Teen Initiative Theory of Change.

² By emphasizing new teen-designed opportunities and partnerships with synagogues and organizations, the Boston North Shore Teen Initiative has successfully built a network of engaged Jewish teens and a coordinated spectrum of Jewish teen engagement opportunities.



Presentense Colorado, is adapting the Presentense national model—known for successfully supporting young Jewish social action entrepreneurs—to serve high school students in Denver and Boulder and has hired its first staff member in the region to launch the new adaptation. Teens selected as Presentense Fellows will design and market community action projects that reflect Jewish values or teachings and engage their Jewish peers. Workshops, business mentors and a Teen Advisory Board are some of the ways Presentense Colorado will support the Fellows as they design, market and operate their teen-engagement projects.



jHub (formerly the Jewish Youth Professionals Council), plays a multi-faceted role in this Initiative. On a programmatic level, jHub organizes community-wide events and is developing a new teen-adult mentoring program that will model relationship-building as a pathway to greater individual teen engagement in the broader Jewish community. However, jHub's lead role is to support all Jewish teen programs in the greater Denver metropolitan area, by creating a central repository of available teen programs and events; convening, training and supporting the youth professionals in the region; developing a database of teens involved in Jewish opportunities; and advocating for teen programs, including convening a Steering Committee to oversee the Initiative.

New & Expanded Teen Opportunities

A component of the work of all five Initiative grantees is to develop or expand compelling opportunities for Jewish teens. JSC is operating and launching new clubs in public high schools and middle schools. Moving Traditions is expanding the number, types and locations of its *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing* and *Shevet Achim: The Brotherhood* groups. In the Boulder area, BJTI is developing and coordinating one-time teen events, such as hikes and movie nights, as well as ongoing programs and events, including JSC clubs. Presentense Colorado will launch its new Social Entrepreneurship Fellowships for high school students in Fall 2015. And jHub, in addition to organizing community-wide events, will sponsor a new teen mentoring program starting in Fall 2015.

Supporting Youth Professionals

The Initiative seeks to instigate a shift away from teen programs driven by pre-set curricula or traditional designs to program models in which teen-adult relationships are central and program activities are heavily driven by teen voice. This requires professional development for the staff and volunteers of Jewish teen programs to build their awareness and knowledge of youth development concepts and their skills in coaching and mentoring. Initiative leaders believe that programs that follow the relationship-driven model will foster better quality teen-adult connections and better facilitate teens' individualized Jewish journeys.

To accomplish this, the Initiative invested in strengthening what was a nascent Jewish Youth Professionals Council and has helped it transition to a more structured organization with an expanded mission, its first-ever full time staff, and a new name: jHub. jHub hosts a regular calendar of meetings for youth professionals throughout the region (including professionals from Initiative grantees, youth groups, camps, etc.); provides training sessions for leadership and personal skill development; offers networking opportunities; and provides youth professionals with access to financial aid for additional job-related coursework and professional development.

Backbone Functions to the Initiative

The Initiative built in several functions to help it support the growing, developing programs as well as shift the broader culture around teen engagement in the Denver and Boulder communities. Both jHub and BJTI are developing websites to promote Jewish offerings for teens in the Denver and Boulder communities, respectively. jHub is also developing additional outreach strategies and materials, including the use of social media.

The Initiative intends to engage a wider segment of the Jewish communities of Denver and Boulder in its Steering Committee and in the governing boards and advisory bodies of the five Initiative grantees. jHub is convening the Initiative's Steering Committee and is overseeing Initiative efforts to engage more supporters from the community, broadly speaking. Each grantee, in turn, has grant outcomes related to building their base of support in the community, including parent involvement, board development, engagement of Jewish community leaders and fund development.

The National Jewish Teen Education & Engagement Funder Collaborative

This Initiative is connected to a broader, national effort of funders investing in new models for community-based Jewish teen education and engagement. Since 2009, the two main funders of this Initiative—Rose Community Foundation and the Jim Joseph Foundation—have been discussing strategies to support and expand Jewish teen education and engagement. Their conversations included funders from communities across the country with similar interests and questions, leading to the formation of a formal Funder Collaborative. The Jim Joseph Foundation committed to co-invest in up to 10 local, community-wide initiatives through this Funder Collaborative. The funders involved in this national effort have developed shared outcomes, expectations and measures of success.

This evaluation of the Denver-Boulder Jewish Teen Initiative is designed to contribute to a national evaluation sponsored by the Funder Collaborative, referred to as the Cross-Community Evaluation (CCE), which is aggregating findings from evaluations in up to 10 communities that are developing and implementing local Jewish teen initiatives. On the other hand, this local evaluation will benefit from the tools that are being developed by the CCE Evaluators to assess change among teens, parents and educators, as well as to assess sustainability and community investment in the work.

EVALUATION OVERVIEW

The Initiative leaders invested in evaluation from the start of the work together in order to learn along the way about what works and what needs adjustment, and to document the impact of the Initiative overall. Informing Change was invited to evaluate the first three years of the Initiative, beginning with facilitating the development of the Initiative's Theory of Change. We then designed a mixed-methods evaluation that includes surveys of teens and parents involved with Initiative programs; interviews with Jewish youth professionals; interviews with grantees, funders and other community stakeholders; and a review of grantee reports and other materials.

During the Initiative's first year, teen participants from the three grantee programs that were operational—JSC, Moving Traditions and BJTI—were invited to participate in a survey about their experiences in these programs and their involvement in Jewish life in their communities more broadly. JSC used a survey that it administers to all teens in its groups nationally. Informing Change designed surveys for Moving Traditions and BJTI with items from the Cross-Community Evaluation as well as those specifically for Denver-Boulder and their unique programs. These surveys were launched very close to the end of the school year, and later than originally intended, largely due to the coordination with the Cross-Community Evaluation. Due to low survey response rates, the data collected from each program is limited. Only 2 teens from BJTI, 16 teens from Moving Traditions and 44 teens from JSC programs completed surveys. Note that these counts only include respondents who completed a survey and indicated that either they are Jewish or someone in their family is Jewish.

Similarly, our parent surveys included items from the Cross-Community Evaluation and customized items for Denver-Boulder and also had low rates of completion. This is an important limitation to consider when interpreting the parent data in this report. Also, it only includes parents of teens in Moving Traditions and BJTI; 21 parents representing 22 teens from Moving Traditions and 5 parents representing 6 teens from BJTI completed surveys.

The survey data provides insight into the teens' experiences from two self-reported perspectives: teens and parents. However, due to the low response rates, these baseline survey data should be viewed as illustrative rather than as representative in nature.

Informing Change also conducted 34 interviews with a range of informants who were both directly and indirectly involved with Initiative programs. These interviews typically lasted about 45 minutes and were conducted by telephone or in person. They included 2 interviews with local and national funders of the Initiative, 7 interviews with staff of Initiative grantees' staff, 4 interviews with national staff of local grantees, 21 interviews with youth professionals in jHub, 4 interviews with local program advisors or volunteers, and 2 interviews with local stakeholders not directly involved with the Initiative. Please note that there was some overlap among these categories (i.e., grantee staff who were also jHub participants), which is why the total appears greater than the number of interviews conducted.

Informing Change also reviewed mid-term and end-of-year grant reports from each of the five Initiative grantees. Mid-year grant reports were submitted and reviewed in February 2015, and final Year 1 grant reports were submitted and reviewed in August 2015. These reports provided information on grantee progress that was outside the scope of the evaluation's interviews and helped provide a complete picture of grantees' Year 1 accomplishments and challenges.

Denver & Boulder Jewish Teens

Jewish teens are the central focus of the Denver-Boulder Jewish Teen Initiative. This section of the report describes teens in Denver and Boulder, the opportunities available to Jewish teens, and the impact these programs are having on teens one year into the Initiative.

ENGAGING JEWISH TEENS

According to research conducted by American Institutes for Research (AIR) for this Initiative, approximately 11,300 teens ages 13–18 reside in Jewish households in the Denver-Boulder Metro Area in 2015.³ This study also concluded that most of these teens are not involved in Jewish life. About 25% had a bar/bat mitzvah, and only 16% are attending post bar/bat mitzvah programs sponsored by or connected to the congregations, synagogues and other Jewish institutions providing bar/bat mitzvahs.⁴

Over four years, this Initiative is designed to increase the number of teens participating in Jewish life across the Denver and Boulder communities. Through both Initiative grantees and other Jewish teen programs, the Initiative intends to engage approximately 3,200 unique teens who are new to Jewish teen opportunities in addition to approximately 1,600 teens who are already participating in Jewish life.⁵

Initiative grantees engaged several hundred teens in their programs in the first year of the Initiative (Exhibit 1). Of the five grantees, JSC and Moving Traditions—the two that were operating in the community before the Initiative began—surpassed their targets for the number of unique teens involved in their programs. jHub’s new mentoring program was delayed because staff and volunteers needed additional time to address program design challenges and legal issues. Still, hundreds of teens participated in three jHub-sponsored events organized cooperatively by Jewish youth professionals from multiple organizations. BJTI launched mid-year and nearly matched its projections. Finally, since PresenTense Colorado received its grant only in March 2015 after the group hired its local staff member, the program was able to establish its Teen Advisory Board in Year 1, and the Fellowship itself is launching in Year 2 of the Initiative.

It is important to note that the number of teens within each program is a unique count. However there is likely some duplication of teens across programs, so we cannot calculate the total number of unique teens involved in the Initiative overall in Year 1. One component of jHub’s work involves working with youth professionals across the Denver and Boulder communities to develop a system for tracking teen participation that would allow for calculating an unduplicated count of teens. We hope to be able to provide this number in future years of the evaluation.

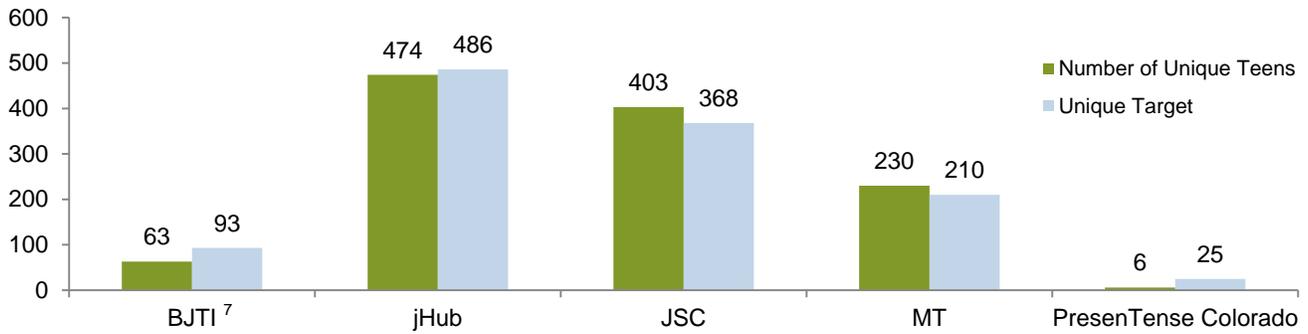
³ Kidron, Y. & Cohen, S.M. (2015). Jewish Teen Population Estimates: Denver/Boulder Metro Area.

⁴ Kidron, Y. & Cohen, S.M. (2015). Jewish Teen Population Estimates: Denver/Boulder Metro Area.

⁵ Rose Community Foundation. *Grant Proposal: Community-Based Jewish Teen Education Initiative (2014–2018)*. 2014.

Exhibit 1⁶

Teens Engaged in Grantee Programs & Advisory Boards – Year 1



Initially, grantee programs are drawing mostly teens who are already engaged in Jewish life. Two-thirds of teens across Initiative programs (BJTI, JSC and Moving Traditions) have mid or high levels of prior Jewish engagement (Exhibit 2).^{8,9,10} This may be a strategy for new programs creating advisory boards—recruiting teens who are already engaged as a strategy to eventually reach new teens. Also, unless a new opportunity is uniquely designed for less-engaged teens, active teens will likely be the first to come. Grantee programs also draw some teens from interfaith families (Exhibit 3).

Exhibit 2

Teens' Prior Jewish Experiences

(n=62)

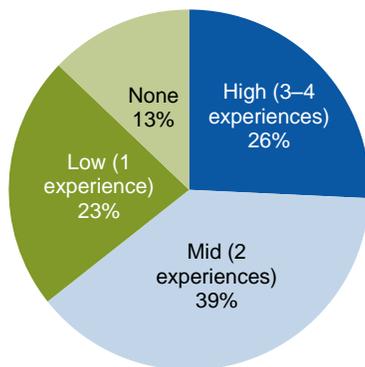
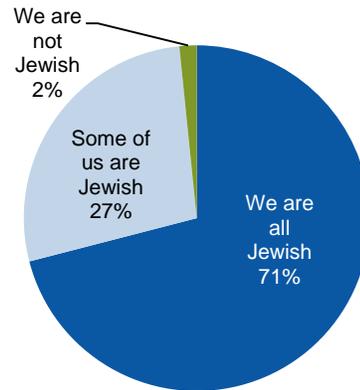


Exhibit 3

Family Background, as Reported by Teens

(n=62)



⁶ jHub's target includes the 12 teens projected for the teen mentoring program in Year 1, which was not achieved because the program did not launch this year, in addition to the 474 teens who actually participated in community events sponsored by jHub—no target was set for these events for Year 1.

⁷ The target of 93 unique teens for BJTI is for all BJTI activities excluding JSC clubs. BJTI has a target of 375 teens involved in JSC clubs in Boulder by the end of Year 4, but did not establish a specific target for Year 1. BJTI's 63 actual teen participants include Year 1 JSC participants.

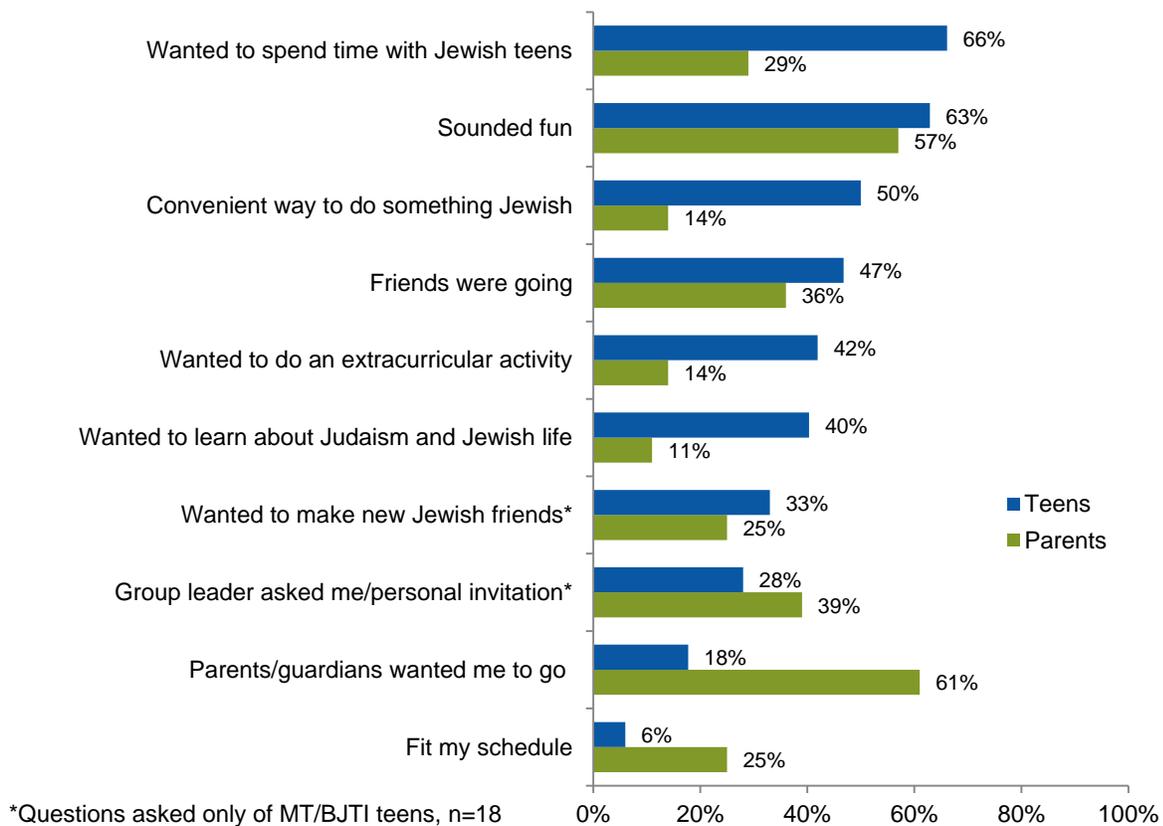
⁸ Teens' level of past Jewish experiences (high, mid, low or none) was based on their responses to four items: 1) had a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, 2) visited Israel, 3) attended a Jewish day school, or 4) attended a Jewish overnight camp. Teens who said "no" to all items were coded as 0, teens who said "yes" to one item were coded as 1, teens who said "yes" to two items were coded as 2 and teens who said "yes" to three or more items were coded as 3 (respectively described as none, low, mid and high).

⁹ The Cross-Community Evaluators will be developing standard ways to define various levels of "engagement" and "involvement" across communities in the coming year, so these definitions may change in the next round of data collection.

¹⁰ Available data on teens' prior Jewish experiences are limited to survey respondents from BJTI, JSC and Moving Traditions, and does not represent teens who participated in jHub's Year 1 offerings.

The most important reasons teens decide to get involved with JSC, Moving Traditions and BJTI are because they want to spend time with other Jewish teens (66%) and the programs sound fun (63%) (Exhibit 4). For the teens who did not say they came because the program sounded fun (n=23), almost half of them (n=11) selected that they came because their friends were coming or they wanted to spend time with other Jewish teens. Overall, 76% of teens came because of the Jewish aspects—either they wanted to learn about Judaism and Jewish life or they thought it would be a convenient way to do something Jewish. This suggests that teens in Denver and Boulder are interested in Jewish-based program opportunities, which opens the door for greater offerings. Parents¹¹ agree that teens get involved because they think the programs are fun (57%); however, parents believe they have more influence over their teens’ participation than the teens think themselves. Almost two-thirds (61%) of parents believe teens chose these programs based on parent encouragement, while only 18% of teens say this is the case. Parents may be pleased to learn that their teens are choosing programs on their own, as 100% of parents say it is important to them that their children decide to participate in Jewish programs on their own, and not because parents urge them to do so.

Exhibit 4
Why Teens Participate in Grantee Opportunities
 (Teens n=62; Parents n=26¹²)



¹¹ Parents represent teens in BJTI and Moving Traditions, only. JSC parents are not included in this year’s survey.

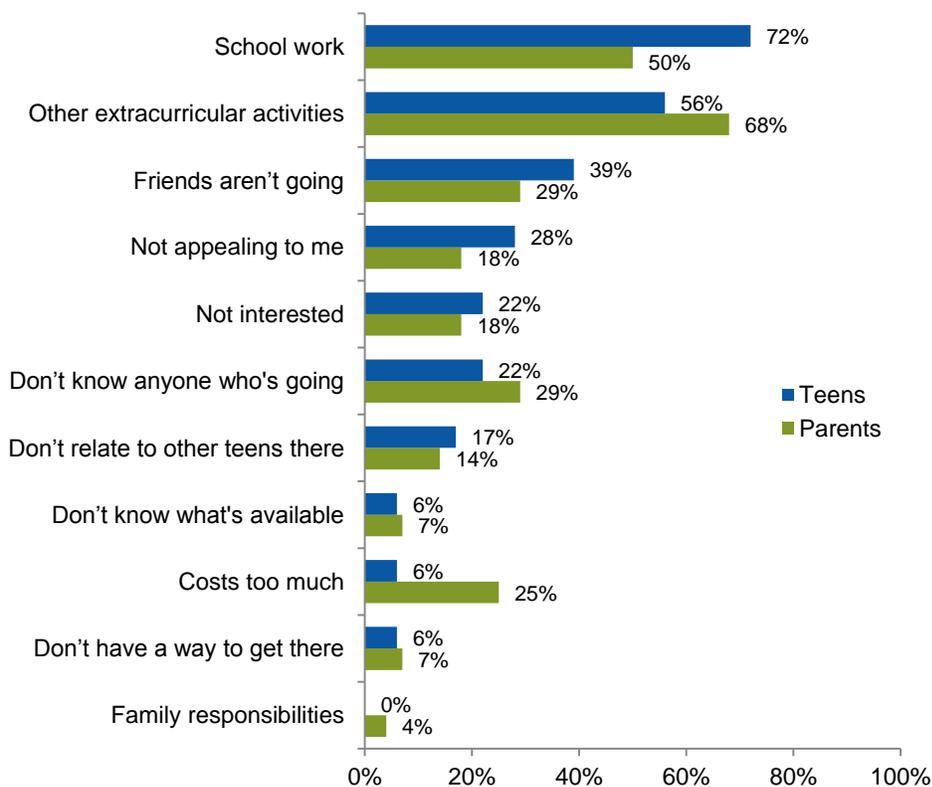
¹² Twenty-six parents responded to the survey. Parents responded to some survey questions about their teens who participated in Moving Traditions or BJTI individually. Percentages shown in the graphs throughout this report therefore represent the percentage of teens (up to 28), rather than the percentage of parent respondents (26).

Teens from BJTI and Moving Traditions say school obligations—homework (72%) and other extracurricular activities (56%)—limit their participation in Jewish opportunities (Exhibit 5). While few teens perceive cost as a barrier, a quarter (25%) of parents surveyed say program cost can be an issue. Teens are generally interested in the content of Jewish opportunities; only about a quarter say the programs are not appealing to them (28%) or they are not interested (22%). Initiative leadership are working hard to ensure teens know what types of Jewish opportunities are available to them, and very few teens (6%) say they do not participate because they do not know what is available. The teens surveyed already go to grantee programs, so it is not surprising that they are interested in the content and knowledgeable about potential opportunities. These data, however, do not tell us about teens who are not involved in Jewish life, who could have different opinions. No teens said they did not attend because of a job, disliking the adult leaders or not being a group member.

“A lot of information is available about the programs in our community. Those who are interested seem to seek it out. For those who don’t find it as important, they aren’t aware of the great programs.”

– Parent

Exhibit 5
Barriers for Teens Participation in Jewish Opportunities – BJTI & MT
 (Teens n=18; Parents n=26)



It is important to the parents surveyed of teens in Moving Traditions and BJTI that their children participate in Jewish life. All of these parents believe it is important for their teens to feel connected to the Jewish community (including 92% who feel it is *very* or *extremely* important) and believe it is important for their teens to have Jewish friends (including 81% who feel it is *very* or *extremely* important). These parents believe their teens feel Jewish life is important as well, however, to a lesser degree than for the parents. Given the small sample and that only parents of Moving Traditions and BJTI responded to these surveys, these parent perspectives may or may not

be shared more generally by parents in Denver and Boulder. To this point, several people interviewed for this evaluation say they have observed the opposite: parents not being involved in ensuring that their teens have an active Jewish life.

During Year 1, grantees added a number of new Jewish opportunities for teens in Denver and Boulder than were previously available, with more planned in the coming years. Before the Initiative began, grantees offered teens a total of 24 opportunities of varying content and duration, and by the end of Year 1, this number increased to 44 (Exhibit 6). JSC clubs expanded into new high schools during Year 1 of the Initiative and meet either weekly or twice a month. BJTI offered a 3-session discussion series, as well as a number of one-time programs and JSC clubs. Moving Traditions expanded its monthly group availability for *Rosh Hodesh: It’s a Girl Thing* and *Shevet Achim: The Brotherhood*. And as noted earlier, PresenTense Colorado and jHub’s mentorship program are launching in Year 2 rather than in Year 1, as originally planned. Two grantees also established teen advisory boards to support their commitment to teen-led programming and teen leadership development; jHub engaged a group of teens in planning the j-Serve event. Initiative grantees are poised to meet their benchmarks going forward and have plans and calendars in place to actualize these efforts.

“JSC is important for my school to have because it allows kids to be more involved in Judaism”

– JSC Teen

Exhibit 6

Grantees’ Program Offerings for Jewish Teens – Year 1

Ongoing Opportunities	Teen Advisory/Planning Boards	One-Time Events
JSC Clubs (Hosted by JSC and BJTI) – 10 clubs	PresenTense Colorado	BJTI - 8 events
BJTI’s monthly discussion series	BJTI	jHub - 3 events
MT - 17 groups	jHub	

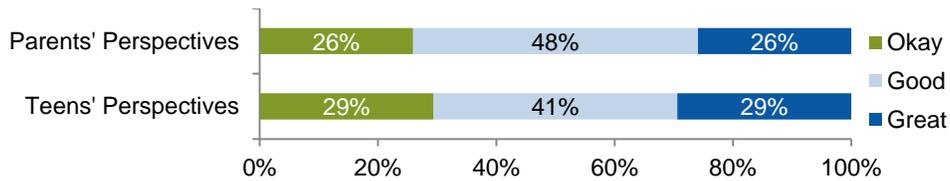
Some teens (56%) and parents (40%) from BJTI and Moving Traditions say they are starting to see more Jewish opportunities being offered in the Denver and Boulder communities (only 1 teen (6%) indicated he/she sees fewer options). Not surprising for a baseline year, these numbers are not particularly high. The same can be said for the quality and range of local Jewish programs. Some parents (45%) say they see higher quality programs, while nearly all others (50%) say the program quality has remained the same. Similarly, some parents (45%) think there is a broader range of offerings than before, while all others (55%) say the range has stayed the same.

Parents and teens from BJTI and Moving Traditions agree that teens generally enjoy these Initiative programs. Both teens and parents rate program quality on average as “good” (Exhibit 7), which, while positive, also leaves room for improvement going forward.¹³ The Initiative’s investment in programs that are of interest to and enjoyed by teens is strategic and will ultimately help meet the Initiative’s longer-term goals.

¹³ Teens and parents rated program quality on a 5-point scale: 1=awful, 2=poor, 3=okay, 4=good and 5=great.

Exhibit 7
Quality of Grantee Opportunities – BJTI & MT

(Teens n=17; Parents n=25)



However, there is some dissonance between program quality, as represented by a teen’s willingness to recommend a program, and retention, i.e., their interest in continuing themselves. Six in ten (61%) teens say they are likely to participate again, but less than half (45%) would recommend the program to someone else. Currently available data shed little light on this discrepancy; it is a topic to be explored further in future years of this evaluation. Also of note is that parents of teens in Moving Traditions and BJTI are more likely than the teens themselves to recommend the program (mean of 4.40 for parents compared to 3.44 for teens). Beyond grantee programs, two-thirds of teens (67%) say they are likely to participate in other Jewish activities because of their experiences in the program, which is a priority outcome of the Initiative. As grantee programs become more established and further developed, it will be important to monitor teen reflections on program quality and their interest in continued participation. Ideally, as teens become more familiar with the programs and other participants, the ratings will rise.

“I always loved going to Rosh Hodesh.”

– Moving Traditions Teen

While parents surveyed represent only a small collection of voices from BJTI and Moving Traditions, their suggestions about how to improve Jewish teen opportunities align with the Initiatives focus: marketing opportunities to a wider audience in meaningful ways (using Facebook, magazines that reach more than the “usual suspects,” implementing a “bring-a-friend” incentive campaign), involving teens in program planning and development, and fostering connections between high quality group leaders and peers.

TEENS’ JEWISH LEARNING & GROWTH

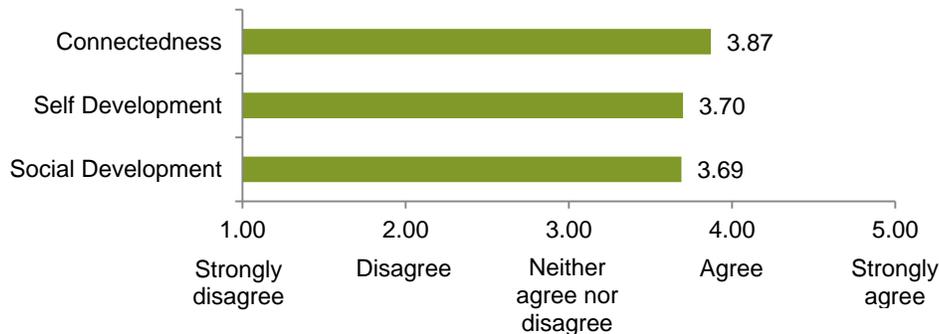
The Cross-Community Evaluators and the national incubator for the local Jewish teen initiatives, led by The Jewish Education Project, established a set of potential outcomes from Jewish teen education and engagement initiatives. These outcomes fall into eight explicit dimensions: Self, Knowledge, Time, Human Connected, Spiritual, Communal, Jewish People and Global. The Cross-Community Evaluators then developed a set of statements for teens to describe themselves related to these outcomes using a 5-point agreement scale. The outcome questions are subsequently organized into three sub-scales: Sense of Connectedness, Self Development and Social Development.

Responses to these outcome questions in this first year of the initiatives are intended to serve as a baseline measure on these issues in the Denver and Boulder communities. We also asked if teens had experienced any change around these items in the past year to understand whether and where the Initiative is having an effect on participants. **Given the low response rates to the teen surveys in Year 1 of this evaluation, the data on teen Jewish learning and growth outcomes should be interpreted more as directional rather than definitive in nature.** In addition, because JSC conducted its own survey, and PresenTense Colorado and jHub have not yet launched their teen programs, we only have data for Jewish outcomes of teens in Moving Traditions (16 teens) and BJTI (2 teens). We have provided a separate summary of JSC outcome data based on their unique, but related, survey questions.

Jewish Outcomes for Teens in BJTI & Moving Traditions

As a baseline measure, teens involved in BJTI and Moving Traditions had moderate levels of connectedness to the Jewish community, self development and social development. Teens generally “agree” with all of the *individual statements that feed into these composite sub-scales*. The average score for the Connectedness sub-scale was slightly higher than the Self Development or the Social Development sub-scales (Exhibit 8).

Exhibit 8
Overall Agreement with Areas of Jewish Learning & Growth – BJTI & MT
 (n=18)



Specific to Moving Traditions, advisors are charged with creating safe spaces for teens to engage in meaningful conversations. This space and time itself is most valued by the teens. Nearly three quarters of Moving Traditions teens surveyed (73%, n=15) appreciate having the Moving Traditions venue to

“[To me, being Jewish means] a sense of community and belonging—a guide, more or less, to life.

– BJTI Teen

think critically about Judaism. Other program goals have varied success. Half of Moving Traditions teens (50%, n=16) agree that the program helps them think about how teens treat one another, and less than half (40%, n=15) agree that the program helps them challenge traditional gender roles. These results are somewhat lower than the findings from Moving Traditions national evaluation, so it will be important to compare these baseline results to Year 2 findings, hopefully from a larger, more representative sample of Moving Traditions teens, to ensure that Denver and Boulder teens achieve results at least comparable to those nationally.

Across all of the individual outcome items on the survey, six received a mean score of at least 4.0 (Exhibit 10). **Given Denver and Boulder’s diverse Jewish population and the many interfaith families in the community, it is important to note that the item with the highest marks is having teens understand diversity within the Jewish community, which is an outcome specific to the Denver-Boulder Initiative.** Teens agree that they know about different ways people are Jewish that are different from their own families’ ways of being Jewish (Exhibit 9). This area increased for 7 of the 18 teens who answered the question.

Exhibit 9
Knowledge of Jewish Diversity
BJTI & MT
 (n=18)

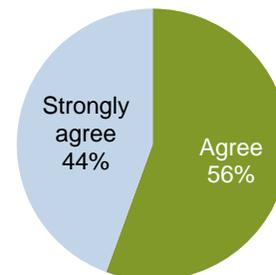


Exhibit 10
Highest Rated Jewish Teen Outcomes – BJTI & MT
 (n=17–18)

Outcome Statement	Mean Score	Dimension
I know about different ways people are Jewish that are different from my own family's way of being Jewish	4.44	Jewish Diversity
I feel part of a Jewish community	4.22	Communal
I feel a strong connection to my Jewish heritage	4.17	Self
My participation in Jewish activities has helped me develop skills that I can use in my life	4.06	Knowledge
Participating in Jewish activities makes me feel good about myself	4.06	Self
In the past, I have received helpful advice and encouragement from counselors or other staff whom I met at Jewish activities	4.00	Human Connected

In addition, the largest proportion of teens indicated increases in the following four areas over the past year: receiving helpful advice from a caring adult, making good friends while doing Jewish activities, and feeling part of a Jewish community and connected to their Jewish heritage (Exhibit 11). It is encouraging that these items are receiving top marks because the Initiative is highlighting the importance of high quality mentoring relationships between teens and adults and supporting Jewish teens' connection to each other.

Exhibit 11
Greatest Increases in Jewish Teen Outcomes – BJTI & MT
 (n=15–18)

Outcome Statement	Percentage Who Increased	Dimension
In the past, I have received helpful advice and encouragement from counselors or other staff whom I met at Jewish activities	67%	Human Connected
I've made some really good friends in Jewish activities	61%	Human Connected
I feel a part of a Jewish community	53%	Communal
I feel a strong connection to my Jewish heritage	50%	Self

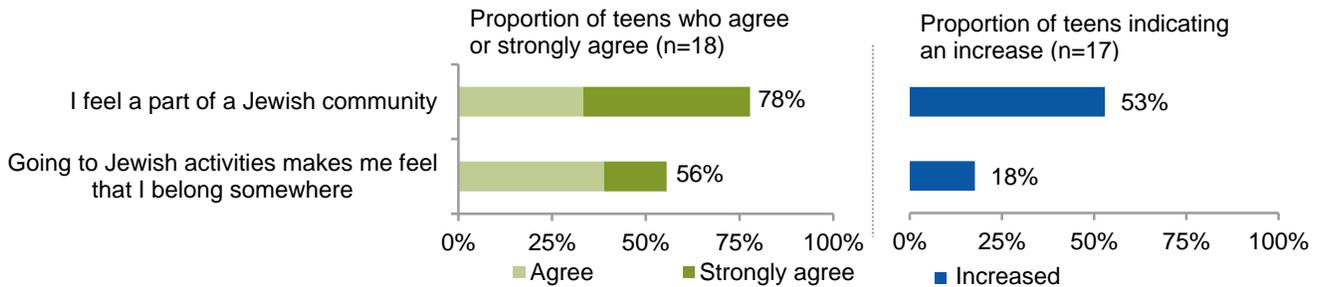
Following is more detailed information about teen responses to each of the three sub-scales.

Connectedness

BJTI and Moving Traditions teens feel connected to the Jewish community, which has increased over the past year. Their involvement in Jewish activities also contributes to a sense of belonging (Exhibit 12).

Exhibit 12¹⁴

Agreement with & Increase in Connectedness Outcomes – BJTI & MT

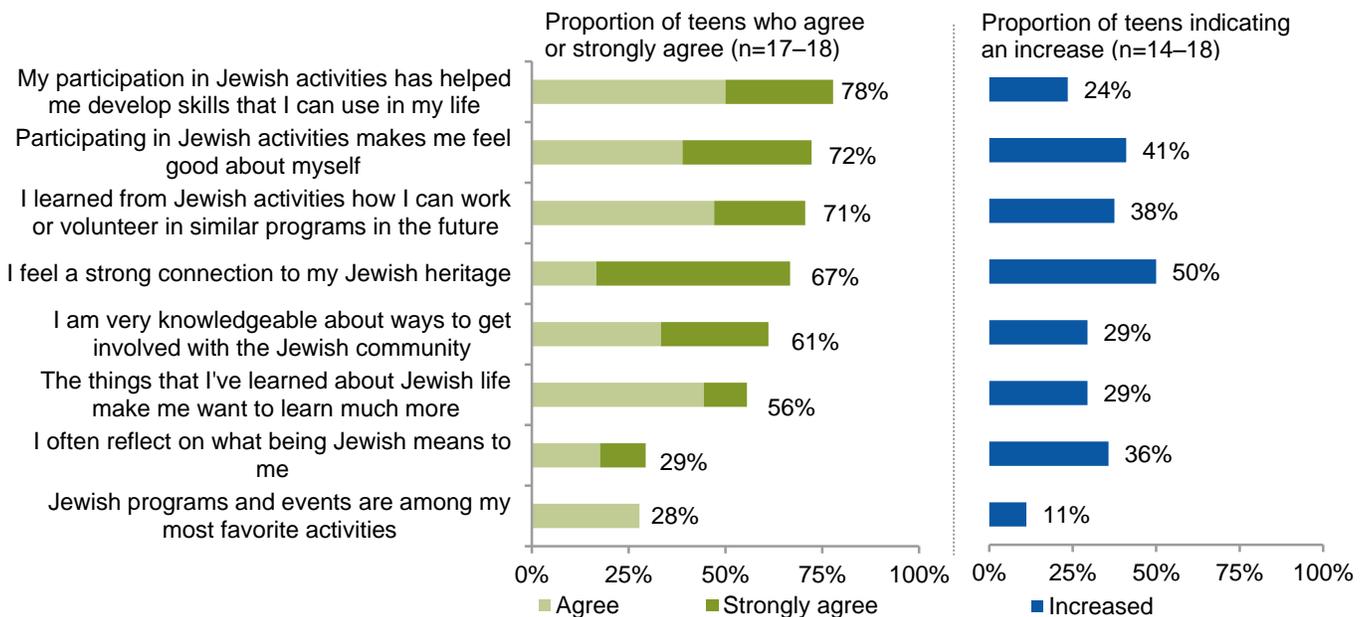


Self Development

BJTI and Moving Traditions teens are developing a sense of self and gaining knowledge through their engagement in Jewish life and activities (Exhibit 13). They tend to agree that they feel connected to their Jewish heritage and feel positively about Jewish experiences. Teens are also beginning to report change in these areas. Within Self Development, more teens report an increase in the Self dimension compared to the Knowledge and Spiritual dimensions.

Exhibit 13

Agreement with & Increases in Self Development Outcomes – BJTI & MT



¹⁴ While they are included in the overall sub-scale means, 4 of the 6 questions on the Connectedness sub-scale and 2 of the 10 on the Self Development sub-scale were asked only of teens in BJTI, not Moving Traditions. Given the low number of BJTI responses, these items are otherwise excluded from this report.

Social Development

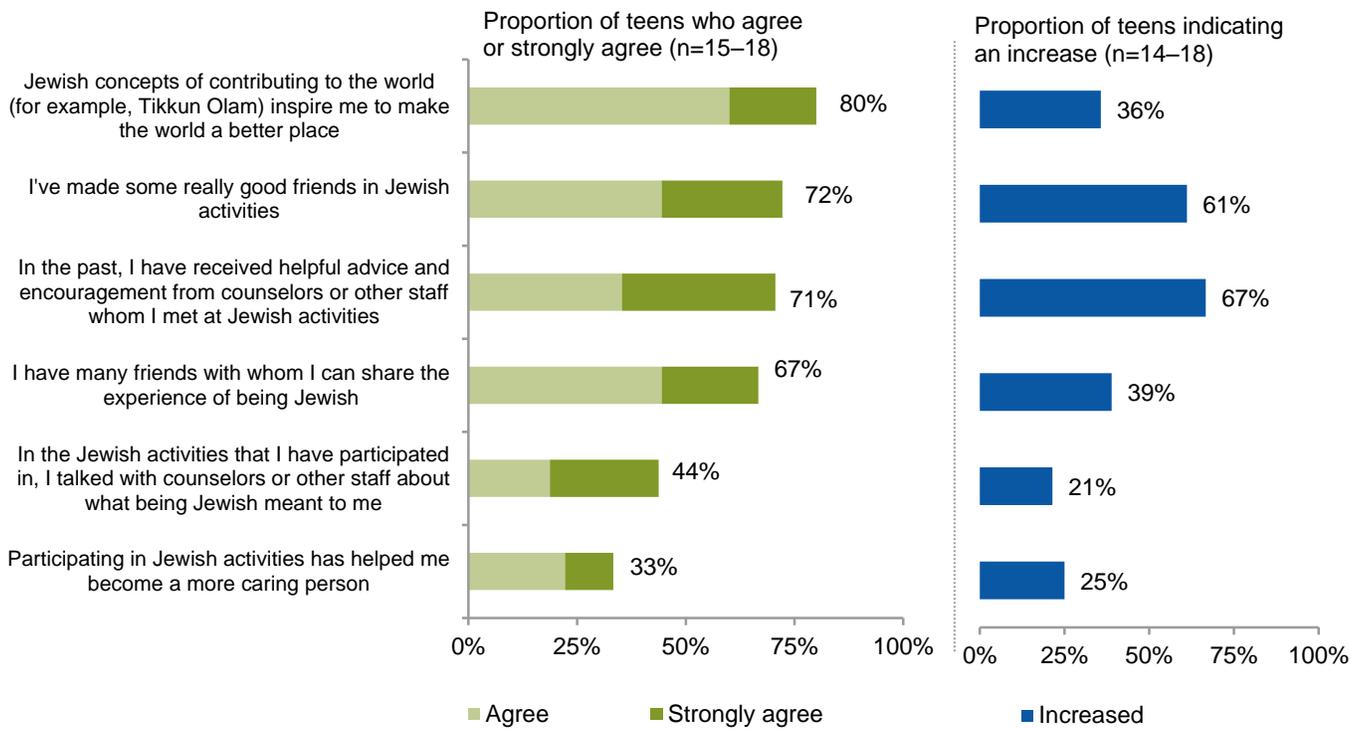
BJTI and Moving Traditions teens are developing connections through their engagement in Jewish life and activities. They have made good friends through Jewish activities and identify program leaders as mentors. Teens are beginning to report increases in their connections to Jewish peers and adults. Within this Social Development sub-scale, the top-rated area to increase this past year (i.e., the highest proportion of teens say they experienced an increase) is their connection to program leaders (Exhibit 14).

“My leader was amazing.”

– Moving Traditions Teen

Exhibit 14

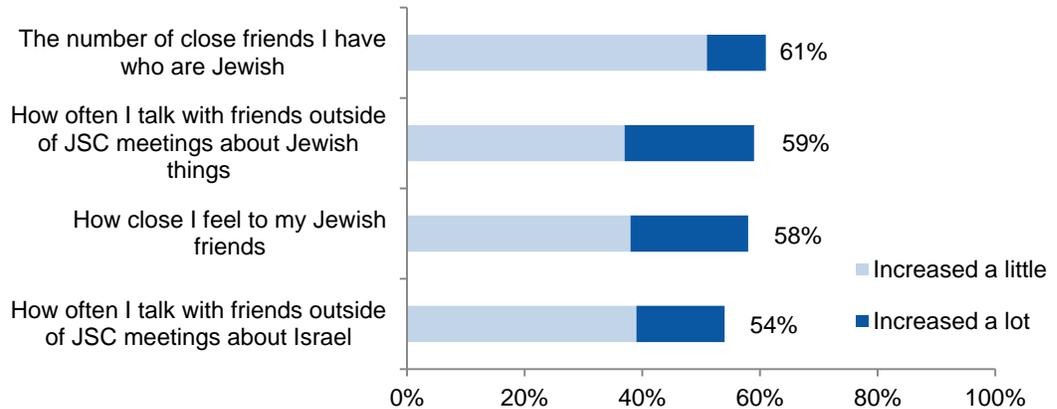
Agreement with & Increases in Social Development Outcomes – BJTI & MT



Jewish Outcomes for Teens in JSC

Based on the results from JSC’s survey of teens, JSC teens are also developing their sense of self and connections to others. Most importantly, **JSC teens feel closer to their Jewish friends and are more interested in learning about Jewish life or Israel as a result of being involved in JSC** (Exhibit 15).

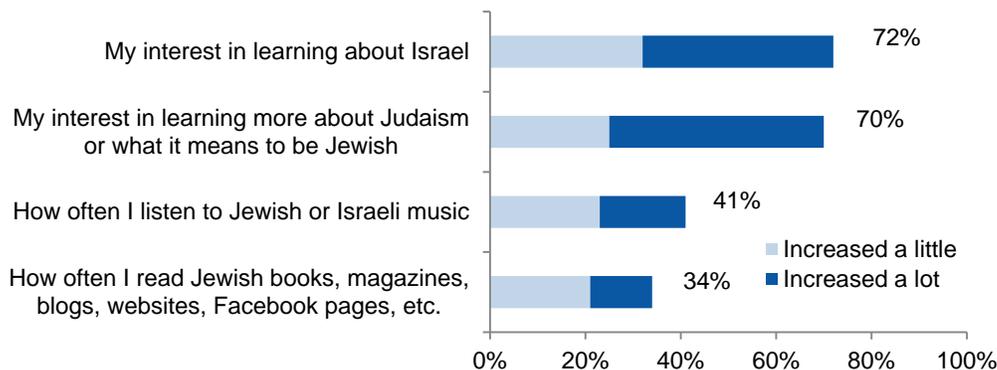
Exhibit 15
Increases in Social Development Outcomes – JSC¹⁵
 (n=39–41)



“[When I think about Jewish community, I think] about a much larger and more diverse community than I thought it was before.”

– JSC Teen

Exhibit 16
Increases in Self Development Outcomes – JSC¹⁶
 (n=38–40)



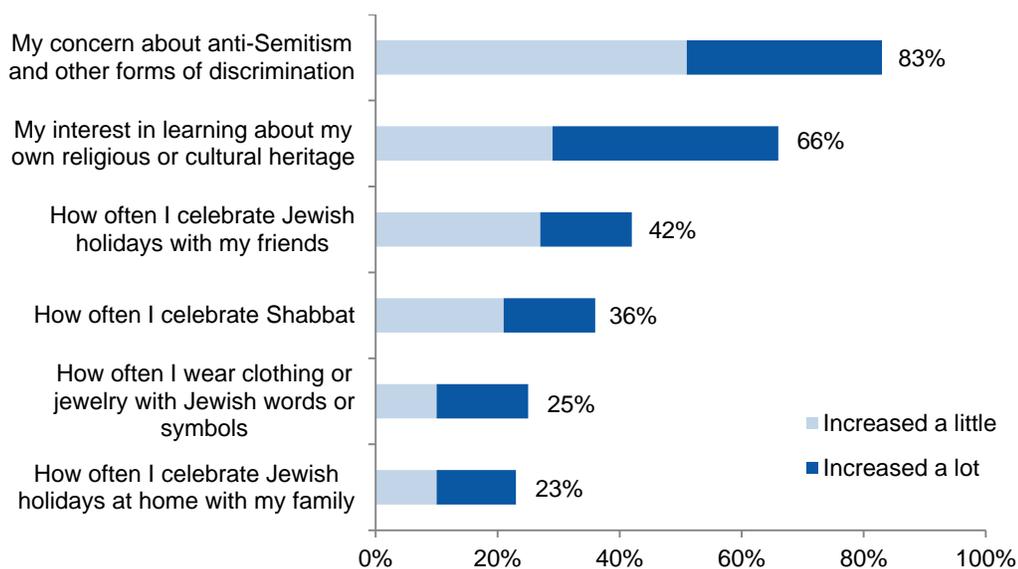
“[When I think about Jewish community, I think] I’m part of it.”

– JSC Teen

¹⁵ For the purpose of comparison, JSC survey questions are grouped into categories similar to the CCE sub-scales, although the questions and groupings are not exact matches.

¹⁶ For the purpose of comparison, JSC survey questions are grouped into categories similar to the CCE sub-scales, although the questions and groupings are not exact matches.

Exhibit 17
Increases in Connectedness Outcomes – JSC¹⁷
 (n=39–41)



Teen survey responses affirm the idea that JSC is a good connector. Nearly two-thirds of JSC teens also report that their level of participation in other Jewish activities increased after they joined JSC (63%, n=40), however some teens report that their involvement with specific programs outside JSC actually decreased after joining JSC. Few say they joined new activities following their JSC involvement.

TEEN PROGRAM CHALLENGES

Looking across the five grantees, the biggest challenges they have faced in engaging Jewish teens in the Denver and Boulder communities have to do with the time and effort to start up the new programs and become known in the communities.

Launching the new programs took longer than initially anticipated. The decision by the Initiative leaders to invest in program innovation required grantees to lay the foundation for their work in the first year before expanding the number of new opportunities and new participants. Building infrastructure included:

- Recruiting, hiring and onboarding highly qualified new staff.
- Allowing new staff time to build partnerships and relationships to support programming.
- Articulating program messages and clarifying organizational relationships across the Initiative (e.g., When is jHub acting as a separate organization and when it is representing the collective group of involved Jewish youth professionals?).
- Branding and marketing.
- Developing websites.

In all cases, a national office outside of Colorado or a local fiscal sponsor is shouldering the financial and administrative tasks for grantees as well as board oversight and legal compliance. **This begets a nimble**

¹⁷ For the purpose of comparison, JSC survey questions are grouped into categories similar to the CCE sub-scales, although the questions and groupings are not exact matches.

operation on the ground in Denver and Boulder, which facilitated grantees' ability to focus on developing their programs. In the Initiative's first year, this agility was especially valuable to the four grantees that hired their very first staff member in the area. With back office support already functioning but not under their supervision, the new staff were able to jump into teen outreach and program development in the middle of the grant year. Without this organizational support, grantees' first year progress would likely have been further protracted.

All of the grantees needed time to develop or refine their program models in the first year of the Initiative.

- Presentense Colorado is adapting its curriculum (designed for young adults in their 20s or 30s) for a high school audience, including workshop topics, the mentoring component, and determining when and how to bring in consultants to work with teen entrepreneurs.
- Moving Traditions will pilot a new community-based model which will need different support from staff than their tested model of groups housed within institutional partners (e.g., JCCs, synagogues).
- Jewish Student Connection is exploring opening clubs in middle schools, and finding that they need to adapt their existing procedures for starting new clubs to fit into the middle school environment.
- To develop its new teen mentoring program, jHub spent time researching best practices and studying other teen mentoring programs. The planning team had to work through risk management issues (i.e., purchasing liability insurance) and legal issues with jHub's sponsoring organization, which was not experienced with placing adults in one-on-one activities with minors. Meanwhile, jHub was involved with moving forward its multiple agendas (e.g., professional development for youth professionals, Initiative backbone functions).
- Before designing a full calendar of activities, BJTI invested time in convening local Jewish teens, listening to their needs and interests, and learning about the opportunities that already exist.

Initiative players had to adjust and revise timelines and benchmarks of success for Year 1. The mismatch between the Initiative's initial goals for Year 1 and grantees' capacity or approach can be attributed to the need for a longer start-up phase. Once the grantees had the chance to further define their programs and build more awareness of the community context, they each worked with the funders to revise their initial benchmarks, timelines and expected outcomes. Not surprisingly, with the time and resources needed to develop infrastructure and refine program plans, a smaller number of new opportunities for Jewish teens were launched and the target number of engaged Jewish teens had to be adjusted downward.

“Tending to the relationships and to the infrastructure is a lot [for the start-ups]. The build-up has been much more than I think we all would have hoped, but totally reasonable.”

– jHub Member

Youth Professionals

A cadre of professionals staff programs and opportunities for Jewish teens throughout the Denver and Boulder communities. Jewish youth professionals had been meeting informally as the Jewish Youth Professionals Council (JYPC) for several years before the Initiative launched. They self-organized in order to network and support one another and to strengthen the landscape of opportunities for Jewish youth in the region. Through the Initiative, JYPC—now jHub—expanded to welcome professionals in both the Denver and Boulder metro areas. jHub serves to increase the capacity of Jewish professionals and involved adults to effectively educate and engage teens.

During Year 1, jHub grew from 19 to 27 member organizations. For the first time, memberships are offered at two levels: many organizations pay dues to participate in jHub and others partake in jHub’s free membership. This includes members from synagogue and non-denominational youth groups, independent Jewish organizations, Jewish camps and JCCs. jHub’s members have been working in the community for varying amounts of time. Some just completed their first year of employment in the area, while others have been working with area teens for upwards of five years. They also work with teens in varying capacities, including planning and implementing programs with teens, mentoring teens and recruiting program participants. Some professionals’ responsibilities involve less direct involvement with teens but are still closely connected to them. Some hold leadership roles at camp, while others are responsible for organizational communications, marketing and outreach. Some professionals hold more than one position within the community’s organizations, piecing together close to full-time employment across different jobs.

A COLLABORATIVE PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

Jewish youth professionals now experience a more supportive peer network through jHub, contributing to increased job satisfaction. Those who were involved with jHub prior to 2014 report that now having a full-time staff member to guide the network has led to more consistent and

structured meetings and opportunities. jHub members highly value the ability to network and collaborate with their colleagues. Attending regularly occurring membership meetings provides professionals with time for mutual learning, resource sharing and problem solving. jHub supports a collaborative mindset and a sense of shared purpose, facilitating cross-organization recruitment and teen events, which is not something that exists in all communities. Professionals who were previously acquainted with the area’s offerings report deeper understanding of the programs and opportunities available to teens and stronger connections with those programs’ staff members as a result of jHub. Representatives of national organizations familiar with Jewish youth staff interactions in other cities, say the collaborative approach in Denver and Boulder is noteworthy for its strong mutual support and the lack of a competitive atmosphere.

“I think definitely just having the opportunity to collaborate on a really high level and build partnerships and build the network is a really, really strong skill to develop and something that I’m very grateful to [jHub] for facilitating.”

– jHub Member

Despite this clear network formation, there are reported challenges to joining the Denver and Boulder metro areas into one professional hub. The distance makes traveling for monthly meetings necessary yet difficult. The youth professionals also speculate that teens would also be challenged by needing to travel from one city to the other for programs, which raises a question about the importance of cross-recruitment for programs in Denver and Boulder. As jHub continues, it needs to consider what structure can best connect professionals from both cities—across and within each.

“There’s more attention to relationships. ... The Initiative has set the assumption that we do things collaboratively.”

– jHub Member

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Youth professionals are generally prepared to connect teens to Jewish activities in Denver and Boulder. Most say they are “pretty prepared” or “fairly ready” to connect teens to Jewish activities, particularly those who have been working in the area for some time and are familiar with what the area has to offer. While many feel knowledgeable about the different teen opportunities available, jHub is deepening their understanding of and connection to a vast array of programs and ultimately allowing professionals to better connect teens to the best fitting program.

“Through jHub, I have a greater understanding that we should let teens know about other programs and activities. And if I do this, others will do the same for me when I have an event. So now when we have a group of kids, I say ‘Hey, did you hear about so-and-so’s program that will be happening next week? Did you hear what this group or that group has been doing?’”

– jHub Member

“I feel like, even being with this group of people once a month, I have learned more about their programs. There are people who have come out of the woodwork and programs that we didn’t know about.”

– jHub Member

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

jHub has had limited success in further developing the skills and abilities of its members. During Year 1, jHub offered three professional development training sessions: one about the teenage brain—how and why teens think what they think—one about social media—e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram—and one about teen engagement, broadly speaking. The trainings were well attended, each drawing between 15 and 23 attendees, however the utility of these 101-style trainings varied depending on the participant. Some youth professionals found the trainings interesting and informative, while others say they were ready for more advanced information to take their skills to the next level, particularly those who have been working in the field for some time.

“Since the [jHub] training, I think a little bit more about the decisions I make regarding my interactions with teens. Is this the way to start the conversation? Does he need more information from me, or should I wait?”

– jHub Member

This feedback mirrors the challenge faced by jHub’s Professional Development Committee, which guides jHub’s professional development offerings. jHub members have diverse backgrounds and skill levels, making it difficult to select training topics and events that will serve this wide audience. Given limited resources and vast member experience, in Year 1 jHub looked inward, leveraging its human resources by having jHub members facilitate trainings. jHub’s approach was both strategic and resource-savvy. In future years, however, jHub may look outward to new resources for training opportunities that expand potential focus areas to meet the network’s diverse needs.

jHub also offered five \$1,000 scholarships for network professionals to use toward tuition reimbursement for university or graduate-level course credit in pertinent fields. Two professionals used these scholarship funds in Year 1. Demand for the funding was lower than hoped because few jHub professionals are currently engaged in university or graduate-level course work. This criterion will be lifted in the second year of the Initiative, opening the scholarship to support a larger number and wider range of professionals and learning opportunities.

jHub is not the sole provider of professional development for Jewish youth professionals in the Denver-Boulder area, nor should it be. Some professionals, particularly those connected to affiliated groups, indicate that they already have access to professional development opportunities—more than they are able to take advantage of—and do not find jHub’s offerings as valuable as other professionals do. For example, camps are supported by camp-specific organizations such as the Foundation for Jewish Camp, which cater to camps’ unique needs. JCC staff are supported by their own JCC and JCCA offerings, and the Reform youth groups are supported by the larger NFTY and URJ networks. Even so, there is no single professional development source or venue that professionals consistently cite or hold in high regard to a greater degree over others. As jHub continues to develop its approach to and strategies around supporting the professional development of its members, the Professional Development Committee should consider how it can leverage these outside opportunities and networks.

jHub members are interested in continued learning and growth, specifically to support them as they move through their careers. At baseline, the jHub youth professionals seem comfortable with their current abilities related to teen engagement. Their interest in ongoing learning is more related to career development generally, rather than needing to fill gaps in their skillsets or strengthen a specific area to help them do their work better.

Given their broad range of experience and skills, jHub youth professionals identified a range of areas for future personal professional development:

- Business and management
- Development, including grant writing and fundraising
- Advanced social media and marketing
- Teen advocacy and counseling skills
- Self-advocacy in the workplace

In the short-term, professionals are happy doing their current work, and most plan to continue working with Jewish teens. Many professionals expressed genuine love and enjoyment in their work and have a strong commitment to supporting youth development. They truly believe in the work they do.

“There are so many reasons [why I plan to continue working with teens in the coming year]. ... It definitely never gets boring....They’re fun. And I’ve really been able to see that the things that we do with them as high schoolers have helped them develop their strengths and the things they pursue in college. That’s really cool.”

– jHub Member

Their ideas about their long-term career goals, however, are less clear. Some have clear aspirations that put them in higher level management and leadership positions with Jewish youth-serving organizations. Others are much

more uncertain of their career trajectory. They are considering both their role and the potential environment for future employment—working within or outside of the Jewish community, working within or outside of the nonprofit sector, and deciding whether or not to continue to work with teens. Their futures are undetermined.

Given this uncertainty, jHub will need to continue to devote time and attention to changing the perception that Jewish youth work is just a stepping stone, not a career, even though few professionals describe their work with Jewish teens as a detour before they get back on their career paths outside the Jewish and nonprofit sectors.

“Doing teen work is both humbling and humiliating, because of how many times do you have something and 50 people say they’re going to come and 5 come. How many times do you invite [a teen] and they don’t respond? It takes a lot of guts and strength to keep on doing it. It’s hard. But you do it because you care. You care, and that is unwavering. And then all of a sudden, something will happen. You don’t know when, you don’t know who, you don’t know what, but you know you affect people’s lives.”

– Initiative Grantee

The Initiative

By the end of Year 1, the Initiative had established a narrow but strong base of new and expanding Jewish teen programs and a lively network of Jewish professionals interested in improving the region's capacity to recruit and engage Jewish teens in quality programs. In reflecting on the accomplishments of the first year, most stakeholders first describe the successful relationships and trust that has been built across programs.

COLLABORATION & TRUST

Interactions among the five Initiative grantees are marked by collaboration and mutual support. The new staff say they receive generous, helpful support from one another, with little sense that the programs are competing for teens. Grantee staff assist one another to make community connections and meet teen leaders. They promote the shared vision of greater teen engagement across the region, along with promoting their own programs. One stakeholder notes that having five new staff hired within months of each other has helped to create a grantee cohort with a shared mission.

“We work [with Jewish youth programs] in cities all over, and I will say that Denver is one of the most collaborative that I’ve seen. Particularly when [groups are] working with the same funder, people tend to get territorial, but it’s not the case here.”

– Initiative Grantee

Program leaders in the grantee organizations see JSC as an “onramp” to Jewish engagement and an avenue for communicating with teens who may have few other Jewish activities in their lives. JSC’s open invitation to its Initiative partners to speak at the school-based clubs has fostered cross-organization recruitment and collaboration amongst the grantees. For example, Presentense Colorado was invited to present their fellowship program to a club and create enthusiasm for the program.

“JSC draws the most unaffiliated teenagers out of anything else that I’ve heard of in my Jewish professional life. I’m relying very heavily upon that platform to advertise everything else that I’m doing.”

– Initiative Grantee

The Initiative’s presence is bringing positive energy and attention to quality programming for Jewish teens outside of grantee programs. Jewish youth professionals and Initiative stakeholders speak optimistically about the prospect of stronger teen programming in the region with the arrival of new programs, new staff and a more cohesive network for Jewish youth professionals. Among Initiative stakeholders and jHub members, there is an emerging sense of shared responsibility for engaging each individual teen in an opportunity that matches his or her needs and interests and the beginnings of a shared vision of quality programming. One jHub member recounts hearing a presentation about a new teen opportunity that, in his opinion, was not a quality activity. “The woman really didn’t have it together,” he assessed. He then raised the question to other jHub members as to whether they could advertise a teen opportunity that they considered substandard. Regardless of the decision in this particular instance, such discussions of standards are a sign of field-building.

“We are very grateful in this community to have this chance to work with our youth professionals and our teens and some really creative, progressive best practices for teens.”

– Community Stakeholder

BACKBONE FUNCTIONS

jHub has taken the lead role in expanding the Initiative’s influence beyond the five grantees. The Initiative grant to jHub, which operates under a fiscal sponsor agreement with the Colorado Agency for Jewish Education (CAJE), allowed it to hire its first executive director, accept the backbone responsibilities and transition into a multi-pronged, more intentional organization renamed from JPYC to jHub. Drawing on lessons learned in large, successful collective impact efforts, the Initiative designated jHub as the one grantee organization to serve in this “backbone” capacity.¹⁸ In this Initiative, the backbone has four primary functions, which will support the full network of Jewish teen opportunities in the region over the life of the Initiative:

1. Networking for Jewish teen programs and their supporters;
2. Professional development for Jewish youth professionals;
3. Developing and managing a system for collecting and learning from teen participation data; and
4. Organizing and supporting Initiative leadership and advocacy.

Jewish youth professionals and other Initiative stakeholders have mostly positive things to say about jHub’s work in the first two backbone functions: networking and professional development. As already noted in this report, they appreciate having regular, well organized convenings, which provide a sense of support and comradeship in positions that are often part-time and under-resourced. With a full-time jHub staff member, communications are more regular and more helpful than in previous years. A couple informants specifically noted going to jHub’s director as an information broker and neutral “sounding board” when they needed a thought partner who was not affiliated with any particular teen program.

One of jHub’s backbone functions is to develop a database for tracking teen participation in Denver and Boulder. The Jewish youth professionals identified this as a priority project before the Initiative launched in order to help them understand how many unique teens they are collectively serving across their programs and which teens are involved in multiple programs, as well as possibly to help programs support teens in finding other opportunities that are of interest to them.

¹⁸ Turner, S., Merchant, K., Kania, J., & Martin, E. (2012). Understanding the Value of Backbone Organizations in Collective Impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Retrieved from: www.fsg.org

As jHub staff delved into the process of designing this database in Year 1, beyond the expected questions of which data elements to include and definitions of those data elements (e.g., what constitutes “participation”), additional issues of integration with existing organizational databases, data sharing agreements, confidentiality protections and functionality of various database options slowed progress on this work. jHub is now refocusing its efforts on the data elements and related data sharing agreements and has opted to start by creating an Excel database on a secure server. Once this system is established, jHub will then tackle the question of whether another technological platform will better facilitate this process.

The Initiative’s grantees are the most vocal about the benefits they receive from their partnership with jHub. It has been a key connector, support and information clearinghouse. Among the non-grantee organizations, the praise is more general, with those newer in the community or to their positions more impressed with jHub’s offerings than veteran staff who have been in their positions for years.

SYNERGIES

Given the tight interactions among the five Initiative grantees around common outcomes, there is an expectation of some efficiencies and a positive chain reaction leading to more teen participation and more community buzz about the available Jewish teen opportunities. Early in this Initiative, the synergies are beginning to show in teen recruitment, shared learning and shared programming.

Synergy: when the combined action of two things is greater than the sum of their effects individually.

In Year 1, the greatest shared benefits, according to grantees, are shared introductions to teens and parents, cross-organization promotion and recruitment, and peer learning exchanges. The peer learning includes grantees learning with non-grantees, as well as with each other. All grantees share office space with another Jewish youth service provider, which facilitates peer-to-peer learning and networking. Another example of synergy is the sharing of skilled staff and volunteers. For example, one staff member will soon be working part-time for two Initiative grantees, enabling her to have full-time work in a profession she loves and laying the groundwork for potential synergies in the future. Several Initiative staff have “loaned” themselves to summer camp programs to do a few days of work, which likely contributed to camps’ program quality and to grantee organizations’ network connections with teens and other youth leaders.

PRIORITIZING TEENS

One of the goals of the Initiative is to permanently elevate teen engagement as a priority concern in the Jewish communities of Denver and Boulder. While informants say that a low level of teen engagement is a concern in the Jewish community, up to this time, interest in the problem has not translated into direct action. Jewish community leaders have seemed uncertain about what to do or where to begin to tackle the issue of engaging Jewish teens. **A few informants point to signs of higher interest in moving forward on the issue in Denver, possibly because of Initiative-generated dialogue. Initiative stakeholders in Boulder are generally positive about the prospect of raising and maintaining the support of Jewish community leaders for greater teen engagement.**

As for communication in the community about prioritizing Jewish teen programming, grantee staff see their organizations gaining traction in certain areas, based on parents of Jewish teens and community members stepping forward to help with programming and recruitment. Parents of Jewish teens involved in Moving Traditions and BJTI also note they are seeing some increases in champions dedicated to support Jewish opportunities for teens (33% report an increase, while the remaining 67% say it is about the same). Grantee staff have conducted many meetings and one-on-one conversations with Jewish organizations and parents, which they

believe have benefited the Initiative overall and elevated interest in teen programs. They see their work so far as establishing critical building blocks for continued work in the coming years.

INITIATIVE CHALLENGES

Looking back over the first year of the Initiative, the insights of those involved in the Initiative and the analysis from this evaluation point to several key challenges in getting to this point. Going forward, grantees will need to strategize about how to address these challenges in a systemic way to secure a productive path for the Initiative going forward.

With delays in launching new opportunities for teens and the Year 1 focus on infrastructure development, fewer teens with less prior involvement in Jewish life are participating than were expected.

An additional delay has been around outreach targeted to these less-engaged teens. Except for JSC, which by design takes its clubs into public schools where it is likely to attract some teens who have less prior involvement in Jewish life, grantee programs have made their first connections to teens through already-established channels of Jewish community organizations (e.g., rabbis, existing Jewish youth groups, individual teens known to be interested in Jewish youth activities). As noted earlier in this report, grantees count on these links to Jewish teens as a means to eventually reach less-engaged Jewish teens.

The Initiative is identifying commonalities and differences in what to expect from the two communities of Denver and Boulder.

Over time, it is becoming clearer that Denver and Boulder need to be considered as separate communities in this Initiative with ample room for cooperation, but not necessarily joint activities. Informants cite the travel time between the two cities as an obstacle to participation in joint events, whether it be for events for teens, adults or program staff. But more than distance and geography, each city has a somewhat distinct culture, and each is strengthening its own network of Jewish youth programs. With Initiative support, the communities are coordinating activities when it makes sense to do so, but program providers and professionals are also seeing where there are ultimate limitations in cross-community collaboration.

There is confusion about the role of the Initiative backbone and questions about jHub's capacity to fulfill the role as currently structured.

Some Initiative observers and stakeholders, particularly jHub members who are not Initiative grantees, see jHub only as a coordinating body and an advocate for Jewish youth professionals and volunteers in similar roles. Other Initiative stakeholders understand the backbone functions to include advocating for broader community commitment and support of Jewish teen engagement programs. Among those who consider jHub as holding the responsibility for broader advocacy, some question whether the Initiative goal of *'creating a community culture that prioritizes teen engagement'* can be accomplished with jHub's current structure. Informants who are familiar with backbone organizations in other community initiatives are not confident jHub, as currently resourced and staffed, has adequate capacity to fulfill the functions of a typical backbone organization.

jHub's first year workplan depended on active committees of Jewish youth professionals to expand what the one-person staff could accomplish; however, most of the committees were advisory rather than operational. Committees made recommendations, but the legwork for implementation remained with the jHub staff. It appears likely that this dependence on staff work to advance jHub's intended outcomes will continue, based on interviews with many of these committee members who say they appreciate being asked for input but they have little time to attend committee meetings, let alone do operational tasks in between those meetings. jHub's staff capacity will increase in Year 2, with the addition of a part-time position to focus on jHub's mentoring program.

While this will help, it could still fall short of providing adequate human capital for jHub's organizational backbone functions.

INITIATIVE SUSTAINABILITY

Grantees are currently in various early stages of working toward long-term sustainability of their programs beyond the duration of the Initiative. Several experienced staff of programs that are not Initiative grantees say a good foundation is being laid for broader support from the Jewish community in Denver and Boulder going forward, including ongoing financial support. However, grantee discussions of sustainability focus on making connections for their teen programs, and have not focused on sustaining the infrastructure that the Initiative is putting into place.

Grantees describe taking the following initial steps this year on their path to financial sustainability:

- **BJTI** is in the process of creating an advisory board.
- **jHub** has established a steering committee for the Initiative overall that includes 10 lay leaders and representatives from Rose Community Foundation and JEWISHColorado.
- **jHub** secured a grant from a new funder to support a part-time staff member for its new teen mentoring program, as well as a government technical assistance grant to support the development of mentor training.
- **JSC** has already met one of its intended outcomes by securing commitments from 8 funders. JSC has subsequently increased its target to 12 funders, including the Initiative funders.
- **JSC** also held its first fundraising event, a leadership and mentoring event for Jewish teen girls, which raised \$1,200. JSC plans to build on this success with a series of similar events during the next several years.
- **Moving Traditions** reports generating \$30,000 in individual donations during its first program year.
- **PresenTense Colorado** has established an adult advisory group that began meeting at the end of Year 1.

The grantees' modest progress toward ultimate sustainability is in line with what should be expected for a project like the Denver-Boulder Jewish Teen Initiative at this early stage. The Initiative is an ambitious, complex effort that will play out over the long term. It will need time for grantees to establish themselves and for the community to fully understand who they are, what they do and how they fit into the broader Jewish communal landscape. It will be important to see ongoing progress towards sustainability in the coming years.

Recommendations & Conclusion

After its first year, the Denver-Boulder Jewish Teen Initiative is on its way toward achieving its objective of enhancing teen engagement in the region. While progress toward outcomes has been modest and there is still a long way to go, this is to be expected during the start-up phase of a multi-year initiative. What follows are Informing Change's conclusions and recommendations for the Initiative, drawn from the first year of our evaluation.

Teen Engagement

1. In addition to recommending that each grantee creates an outreach plan to indicate how they will connect with more teens who have been less involved in Jewish life, we recommend that each grantee also have a method for tracking and monitoring their enrollment and participation—at least quarterly—to assess their progress in reaching these targets. Cross-organizational recruitment has been useful for the grantees in Year 1, and it is a good way to identify and recruit experienced teens for leadership positions. But too much dependence on this method will result in re-circulating the teens who are already involved in Jewish life rather than expanding the circle. In Year 2, we would expect to see more attention on recruiting teens beyond the venues of Jewish organizations, camps or synagogues. This will likely mean activities in which already-involved teens recruit their less active peers.
2. The one-on-one relationships being cultivated by grantee staff are contributing to the Initiative's desired outcomes for teens, but on a very small scale. Grantee staff need to plan how to continue to achieve similar relationship-building or mentorship on a much larger scale as their programs recruit and engage larger numbers of teens. Grantees may benefit from discussing this with practitioners in other communities with Jewish teen initiatives, as this issue of how to scale individualized relationships with teens is a common theme across this work.

Professional Development

3. Since Jewish youth professionals give the jHub monthly meetings high marks for meeting their needs, whereas feedback on the three training sessions is less enthusiastic, we suggest that jHub think about how it might leverage the monthly meetings to build knowledge and skills around mentoring and relationship-building with teens. Examples might include asking a few members to share a good idea about this at every meeting or having a problem-solving forum. As noted earlier in this report, it is a challenge to select a training session for a membership group with such a broad mix of professional experience and training.

4. jHub members are interested in a broad range of professional development—more than can be satisfied by a jHub annual calendar of events. We suggest that jHub clearly define the type and focus of the training or professional development sessions it will offer and, for the near future, limit the focus of these sessions to mentoring skills and working with teens. For jHub members who do not have access to youth development training from a national organization (e.g., BBYO, NFTY, FJC), this type of training will fill a gap.
5. jHub can also consider becoming a coordinator and communicator of information about professional development opportunities offered by other organizations. For example, several jHub members are interested in building their management skills and their knowledge about nonprofit development so they can advance into higher-level roles in Jewish organizations. Among the breadth of organizations and universities in Denver and Boulder, there are likely many trainings and seminars of interest to jHub members. jHub might also benefit from connections with professional development efforts in other communities running Jewish teen initiatives to identify opportunities for its members. Then, jHub staff time can be better spent building partnerships or offering scholarships for opportunities that match members' needs and interests.

Initiative Backbone

6. A priority activity for the first half of Year 2 is to activate the Steering Committee to spread the word among key communicators in the Jewish community about the Initiative's vision, its accomplishments and how they can help. To date, grantee communications have focused on short-term goals and needs. The Denver and Boulder Jewish communities now need to hear about the longer-term vision for Jewish teens and how individuals and organizations can support it. We recommend that the Steering Committee develop a workplan for 2015–16 with benchmarks and timelines for work to be done by Committee members. It will also be important to anticipate the amount and type of support jHub staff will need to accomplish the workplan's goals. This tactical plan for the Steering Committee will help ensure that the work of broadening the circle of Initiative supporters does not get eclipsed by immediate grantee needs.
7. As the Steering Committee and jHub work to engage a wider circle of Initiative supporters, we would remind them to tell the Initiative's story, not only to colleagues and organizations working toward the same vision (e.g., Jewish teens engaging in Jewish programs) but also to those whose goals may not fully overlap (e.g., teen health and well-being, teen civic engagement, intergenerational volunteering, girl empowerment). Finding allies with a shared agenda builds a broader base of community support and opens pathways to new funding sources. This may also be a place for collaboration with professionals leading Jewish teen initiatives in other communities to make joint introductions to national organization with overlapping interests.
8. We applaud the jHub Task Force that took on the job of deciding how to centralize Jewish teen program participant data. Their Year 1 effort helped the whole Initiative learn about what data is needed centrally versus within each program. Going forward, we encourage the team to keep striving for consistent, quality data about all programs' teen participants, focusing on data quality and consistency over full data sharing. Again, collaborating with colleagues in other communities about creating useful shared definitions may be beneficial to this work. It is important to recognize that to get quality data may require asking for fewer data points or less detail. The most important point is to have as many programs as possible reporting their teen data within the same reporting format and using the same definitions.

9. Given the important role of the jHub website and online database of opportunities, we urge the Initiative to take a very critical mid-year look at the inquiries and enrollments that have resulted from having these tools in the community. Parent usage of the tools will also be important to assess. In addition to actual usage data, it will be important to inventory the number and variety of ways teens and parents are learning about these new resources. By assessing website usage at mid-year rather than waiting until the end of the next program year, you will facilitate course corrections that can be made before teens and parents start looking for summer opportunities.

The Initiative Overall

10. Given grantees' slower start in Year 1, we recommend that Initiative leaders take a clear-eyed look at overall progress to date compared to the original intentions for the Initiative. Are there opportunities to intensify work in Year 2 in order to still reach the Initiative's overall goals by the end of Year 4? Do target numbers for Year 2 and beyond need to be increased, or will the overall timeline be extended? Even though it was important for grantees to take more time initially to establish their footing, now the Initiative needs to reaffirm the overall teen engagement goals as well as each grantee's targets through the remainder of the Initiative term. Some grantees have already revised their targets, and we encourage all to reassess given their actual performance to date.
11. Unlike some initiatives that proceed in a linear way, this initiative is designed to stimulate more organic change by modeling teen-led activities and sharing innovative approaches to teen engagement. This investment is intended to be catalytic, creating a burst of new approaches that will in turn cause other Jewish teen programs to make adjustments as well. To improve the likelihood that more local youth-serving organizations will adopt relationship-based and teen-centered approaches in their work, the Initiative needs a more explicit plan for the diffusion of its successes and lessons learned. Currently, the monthly jHub meetings are the only active diffusion mechanism. Initiative leaders and grantees should assess whether their current workplans describe ways of sharing lessons learned that may stimulate a response by a broad set of Jewish teen-serving organizations in the area. Additional dissemination tactics are probably needed, such as peer-to-peer site visits, sending Initiative representatives as speakers and presenters to local events, or sponsoring a regional conference. Other possible dissemination tactics include publishing articles, running an online blog, and disseminating recommended resources about adult-teen relationships. Although all grantees—staff, volunteers and advisory board members—can take on specific dissemination activities, we recommend having jHub and the Steering Committee as responsible for the planning, coordination and regular assessment of an overall diffusion strategy for the Initiative.
12. In some aspects of the Initiative, the differences between the two communities of Denver and Boulder are creating hesitation or questions. Several informants raised the separate, unique natures of the two cities as an issue to some degree in different parts of the Initiative—leadership roles, program partnership agreements, professional development, teen outreach, and communications with parents and community organizations. There are some positive themes about doing Initiative work differently in the two communities, as well as tension. Our recommendation is to deal with this explicitly and not let it become an undercurrent. Identify where there have been benefits of Boulder working separately from Denver, and claim them as Initiative successes. Likewise, determine what questions and concerns remain, clarify which of these are true obstacles to Initiative success, and address each obstacle directly.

CONCLUSION

The Initiative has made good progress toward its goal of fostering incremental growth for innovative Jewish teen programs and promoting strong adult-teen relationships as the key to successful teen outcomes. Grantees are providing more opportunities for Jewish teens to design and launch their own ideas of Jewish teen engagement.

As of the writing of this Year 1 evaluation report, the Denver-Boulder Jewish Teen Initiative is already well underway with Year 2 activities. We hope that the vantage point presented in this Year 1 evaluation helps all those involved in the Initiative consider where they can make beneficial refinements in their work. We believe others investing in Jewish teen initiatives across the nation may also learn from this early progress in Denver and Boulder about taking the time to establish a foundation for the work, the importance of collaboration and more. In the coming years, we hope to see how grantees and others see and benefit from their mutual intentions of ensuring a meaningful and vibrant Jewish life for Denver and Boulder Jewish teens now and throughout their lives.

Denver-Boulder Jewish Teen Initiative Theory of Change

PURPOSE To make greater Denver-Boulder area Jewish life relevant and meaningful to young people both now and later in their lives, with teens serving as active partners together with their peers, adults and community leaders in shaping their own Jewish journeys.

ASSUMPTIONS & CONTEXT

- Effective Jewish development for teens has to include effective youth development more broadly. Teens develop their whole selves, not just their Jewish selves.
- Teens in the Denver-Boulder area have diverse interests and span a wide geographical area, so there cannot be a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to programming to engage teens. It is necessary to provide multiple options, particularly to reach the teens who have been less involved in Jewish life.
- Teens are in a formative stage of self-development, making this a prime time to reach them for impacting their lives as adults.
- Not all teens are benefitting from the existing offerings of Jewish programs and events, in part because they do not find them engaging, appealing or accessible.
- Denver and Boulder represent two distinct, but related communities. They share resources and connections but have different Jewish communities with different needs for their teens.
- Parents put less priority than earlier generations on their teens engaging in Jewish activities.
- The grantee programs in this initiative are part of the larger communities in Denver and Boulder but do not represent all of the opportunities for teens.

ISSUES ADDRESSED

- Decline in teen involvement in Jewish life in the Denver-Boulder area
- Development needs of Jewish youth professionals and involved adults to successfully engage with teens and meet teens where they are
- Capacity of the Denver-Boulder Jewish community to successfully support teen engagement
- Community commitment to teen engagement
- Limited diversity of Jewish educational opportunities to meet teens' needs and interests

TARGET AUDIENCES

Within the greater Denver-Boulder area:

- Middle school and high school teens from Jewish/interfaith¹ households, particularly those who have been un- or under-engaged in their Jewish communities
- Jewish youth professionals and adult volunteers working with Jewish/interfaith teens
- Jewish community leaders
- Current and potential future donors of Jewish teen programs

STRATEGIES

- Scale innovative teen engagement models
- Pilot new, innovative teen engagement models
- Promote youth-initiated, youth-led ideas that engage teens and their peers in Jewish life
- Develop relationship-building and mentoring skills among Jewish youth professionals and involved adults
- Map, connect and track Jewish teen engagement opportunities
- Build community commitment to ongoing teen engagement

¹ We use the term "interfaith" to denote households that include Jewish and other backgrounds. We recognize that other terms and descriptions exist for these households and that the grantees may use different terminology in their work.

OUTCOMES

Engaging Jewish Teens

- Increase in Jewish opportunities for teens
- Increase in the number of teens involved in Jewish opportunities and the depth of their involvement
- Increase in the diversity of Jewish backgrounds of involved Jewish teens

Developing Youth Professionals & Involved Adults

- Youth professionals and involved adults develop new, or improve existing, skills in mentoring and relationship-building approaches with teens
- Youth professionals and involved adults successfully utilize mentoring and relationship-building approaches with teens
- Increase in youth professionals' satisfaction with and commitment to working with Jewish teens

Impacting Jewish Teens

- Jewish teens are more comfortable with the different ways to be Jewish

The Self Dimension

- Jewish teens have a stronger sense of self
- Jewish teens feel a sense of pride about being Jewish

The Knowledge Dimension

- Jewish teens have experienced learning that has been both challenging and valuable
- Jewish teens have learned things that enable them to be more active participants in the Jewish community (including rituals, Jewish history and sense of Jewish peoplehood)

The Time Dimension

- Jewish teens learn about and positively experience Jewish holidays and Shabbat

The Human Connected Dimension

- Jewish teens develop strong friendships
- Jewish teens develop significant relationships with

mentors, role models and educators

- Jewish teens are able to express their values and ethics in relation to Jewish principles and wisdom

The Spiritual Dimension

- Jewish teens develop the capacity (skills and language) that allows them to grapple with and express their spiritual journeys

The Communal Dimension

- Jewish teens feel connected to their various communities

The Jewish People Dimension

- Jewish teens develop the desire and commitment to be part of the Jewish people now and in the future
- Jewish teens develop a positive relationship to the land, people and State of Israel

The Global Dimension

- Jewish teens are inspired and empowered to make a positive difference in various communities and world in which they live

Building Community Capacity to Support Teen Engagement

- Initiative-funded programs achieve specified outcomes and goals
- Active utilization of a community-wide system to gather and manage data on Jewish teen engagement
- Increase in strategies used to reach under-engaged Jewish teens
- Increase in active, effective partnerships among organizations working with Jewish teens
- Increase in synergy across components of the initiative
- Initiative components sustained financially through and beyond four years
- Teen-centric system for Jewish teen engagement prioritized by the community

ULTIMATE IMPACT

Throughout their lives, every teen in the Denver-Boulder Jewish community can answer the question: How can my Judaism inform, inspire and advance the good I seek to do in the world?

INFORMING 
CHANGE

2040 Bancroft Way, Suite 400
Berkeley, CA 94704
tel 510.665.6100
fax 510.665.6129

informingchange.com