

Moishe House Peer-Led Retreats - Interview Highlights and Insights

December 2016

The purpose of this qualitative research project was to understand the Moishe House Peer-Led Retreat Program and to gain insight into further improvements to be made to the existing model. The Peer-Led Retreat Program currently recruits and equips Jewish young adults with the skills to lead a weekend Jewish retreat for a group of their peers. Data for this research were gathered during the 2016 calendar year through review of nine responses to a written feedback survey designed and administered by Moishe House, and through phone interviews conducted by the Jim Joseph Foundation with five retreat facilitators and two retreat participants. The common themes that emerged were used to organize and frame the insights, recommendations, and questions below.

Strategic

- All of the facilitators and retreat attendees interviewed had deep involvement in Moishe House and the Jewish community prior to the retreat. It was through this continued involvement that they learned about the opportunity to plan or attend a retreat.
- The interview participants were articulate, passionate, and provided thoughtful feedback about the Peer-led Retreat Program. While there were some constructive suggestions to improve the program, the feedback received was overwhelmingly positive.
- Facilitators feel grateful for the opportunity to participate in this teaching and learning experience and that there are funds available to support them in doing so. Retreat planners provided ideas to improve the system of reimbursement for retreat expenses:
 - Given that retreats require a greater initial outlay of funds than one-time events, they ask whether Moishe House could minimize the burden on planners having to provide advance payment, perhaps by directly covering larger expenses.
 - They also suggested streamlining the reimbursement process to make it more like the reimbursement system for events planned by Moishe House residents.
- Most facilitators leave their retreat experience invigorated and interested in ways they could continue to sharpen their leadership skills and plan future retreats. This led to suggestions for Moishe House to build upon the existing program by:
 - Inviting facilitators to plan even larger retreats, perhaps accompanied by additional coaching and guidance from Moishe House.
 - Encouraging facilitators to plan for a more geographically diverse audience of participants, outside of their region or country, with available travel subsidies. (Additional quality control may be required to justify this expense.)
 - Facilitating more networking and collaboration among veteran retreat facilitators as a way to catalyze new and innovative future retreat programs.
- When asked about the relationship between the Peer-led Retreat Program and Moishe House Without Walls (MHWOW), most participants framed MHWOW as a less intensive version of the retreat program. Some pointed out that MHWOW programs do not always include Jewish content and can be more casual. Noting that MHWOW hosts may be seeking to improve their planning skills, it was suggested that the coaching model being

utilized in the Retreats program could also be offered to MHWOW hosts, particularly to provide support in the area of Jewish programming.

Tactical

- Facilitators found recruitment of participants more difficult than expected, especially given that retreats are not free to participants. Various suggestions arose including: greater utilization of current residents to help market retreats, providing funds to market on a greater scale (including outside of their local communities), and providing residents with techniques to optimize their marketing tactics, such as the utilization of social media and one-on-one outreach.
- Most facilitators found Moishe House support to be extremely helpful in preparing for the retreat. One area which may benefit from greater attention is around logistics. The majority of the challenges facilitators faced fell into this category. Additional training and support could focus on: meal planning, ideal retreat size, budgeting, transportation, selecting venues, and knowing what information to request from participants prior to the retreat.
- Facilitators possessed varying levels of event/retreat planning experience prior to leading a Moishe House retreat. Given this diversity, it may be beneficial for Moishe House support to vary more based on individuals' in need. One recommendation was to host separate Retreatology programs for first time retreat planners and more experienced facilitators.
- First time retreat planners with little previous experience may also benefit from having a co-facilitator. If they cannot find a co-facilitator on their own, Moishe House could aid in making this connection, possibly even matching them with someone not located in their same region.

Questions to Consider as the Program Evolves

- Moving forward, what does Moishe House see as the *primary* goal for this program? Is it to train Jewish leaders to plan and lead Jewish retreats or is it to continue to create innovative new ways to get Jewish young adults involved in Jewish life?
- Who is the primary target demographic for potential retreat facilitators? Would Moishe House prefer to recruit currently aspiring Moishe House leaders or to attract individuals who have not previously been as engaged in Moishe House?
- How and to what extent would Moishe House want to further invest in its veteran retreat facilitators? In what ways would it advance Moishe House's objectives to support their interest in further networking and collaborating with one another?
- Might there be potential retreat planners who have not chosen to take on this role because of the current reimbursement process? If so, how could this be alleviated?
- How could existing reimbursement technology being utilized for other Moishe House programs be adapted for use by retreat facilitators?