



Prioritizing Jewish Teens

Findings & Lessons from the LAJTI Year 2 Evaluation

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Prepared by
Informing Change

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Introduction

THE INITIATIVE AT THIS TIME

The Los Angeles Jewish Teen Initiative (LAJTI or the Initiative), through a funding partnership between the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles (the Federation) and the Jim Joseph Foundation (the funders), launched in 2015 and just completed its second year of implementation. To achieve the ultimate goal of **engaging Jewish teens in Los Angeles in activities that promote a healthy, personally meaningful, and fulfilled Jewish life**, LAJTI has three main strategies:

1. Expand and create teen engagement programs of excellence.
2. Nurture the teen ecosystem and build community commitment to teen engagement.
3. Support the professional development of educators of Jewish teens.

LAJTI seeks to create ripple effects throughout the community—including the teens who attend programs, their parents, program staff and leaders who design and deliver teen-focused programming, and community leaders and funders who champion and support the work.

In its second year, LAJTI executed an extensive collection of activities. The first cohort of grantees made its way through the **Jewish Teen Program Accelerator**, facilitated by UpStart, which helped organizations scale and grow existing teen programs, as well as develop and launch new programs. The Federation also ran several teen programs, most notably the **Community Internship** and the **Teen Innovation Awards**. The second cohort of Accelerator grantees was selected and launched at the start of Year 3. **Jewish teen educators** are coming together as a network of professionals through LAJTI's professional development offerings and are learning from each other there. **Teen wellness** continues to be a high priority, championed by LAJTI leaders and increasing in visibility among program leaders. LAJTI leaders have demonstrated nimbleness and commitment to improvement, ensuring that learnings from previous years' successes and challenges are carried into strategy, programming, and outreach during the following year.

EVALUATION FOCUS & METHODS

The funders have partnered with Informing Change to evaluate LAJTI over its first three years; this report represents our second year of evaluation findings. After completing the Year 1 evaluation report, which provided a baseline assessment of LAJTI, we collaborated with LAJTI staff and funders to develop seven evaluation questions to explore specifically in Year 2 (see the box on the following page). LAJTI leaders wanted to understand certain phenomena in this second year of implementation that would inform the Initiative's further development, while also retaining some of the original evaluation questions. This change also necessitated a shift in some of the data collection methods.

Year 2 LAJTI Evaluation Questions

Teens

- How and to what extent is the LAJTI expanding—providing more and different types of—opportunities for Jewish teens?
- To what extent are the LAJTI opportunities reaching a wide diversity of Jewish teens, including those not previously immersed in Jewish teen activities?
- What pathways are LAJTI programs finding successful at engaging Jewish teens in Los Angeles?
- How and to what extent are Los Angeles teens who are involved in activities supported by the LAJTI experiencing Jewish learning and growth?

Teen Educators

- How and to what extent do Los Angeles teen educators perceive growth in their abilities, confidence, and skills as a result of LAJTI professional development?
- In what ways have LAJTI professional development opportunities increased the Los Angeles teen educators' awareness and knowledge of the critical wellness issues facing teens and changed the practices of organizations?

Community

- How and to what extent are LAJTI strategies and accomplishments to date beginning to effect broader change in the Los Angeles Jewish community?

To address these questions, we conducted interviews with 50 teens at six LAJTI programs during the 2016–17 program year, either individually or in small groups. We also analyzed tracking data¹ for the teens in all 12 LAJTI programs collected by each organization. In addition, we surveyed 41 educators, all of whom attended an LAJTI professional development opportunity over the course of this program year, conducted two focus groups with educators, and reviewed the professional development content and curriculum. We also interviewed seven Accelerator program staff members, along with four LAJTI stakeholders, and conducted a Ripple Effect Mapping session² with LAJTI staff. Finally, we reviewed grant reports from Accelerator programs as well as the LAJTI reports to the Jim Joseph Foundation.

As noted with the shift in evaluation questions and methods, our intention with this year's evaluation was to provide data and feedback that will assist LAJTI leaders in how best to refine and support the work going forward. Given the focus of this evaluation, we have assessed some areas of LAJTI more deeply than others this year, which explains why the level of detail about the LAJTI components varies in this report.

What follows in this report is, first, two sections about teens, identifying who the teens in LAJTI-sponsored programs are and what kinds of benefits they gain from Jewish programming. These sections are followed by findings and learnings about LAJTI's efforts to expand opportunities for teens. We then transition to Jewish teen educators and how LAJTI is supporting their development, followed by the ripple effect that we are starting to see from LAJTI out into the community. We conclude with reflections on what it takes to champion the change that LAJTI has set out to accomplish, together with some recommendations for areas to strengthen LAJTI going forward.

¹ The tracking data includes a set of 18 items for each teen who participates in an LAJTI program, including demographics, Jewish background, and motivation for participation in the program. Each program was asked to collect this data and provide it to Informing Change.

² Ripple Effect Mapping is a participatory process that incorporates elements of appreciative inquiry and visual mind-mapping methods to help stakeholders reflect upon and visually map an initiative's intended and unintended effects.

The Teens in LAJTI-Sponsored Programs

LAJTI has adopted an engaged approach to grow or improve teen programs. Its key teen program investments are the Teen Program Accelerator (Accelerator) and a small number of new teen programs operating directly under the auspices of the Federation. Unlike a typical grant to an organization, these investments bring LAJTI staff into teen program planning and operations, allowing a closer view of the process of change, the challenges of launching a new program, and the challenges of recruiting teen participants.

GETTING MORE TEENS INVOLVED

With assistance from Informing Change and using jointly agreed-upon data categories, the 12 LAJTI-sponsored programs gathered detailed information about the teen participants in their programs (Exhibit 1).

Based on this enrollment data, **LAJTI programs engaged 455 unique teens in the 2016–17 program year, with 26 teens participating in multiple offerings.**³ Overall, almost three-quarters of these participants were new to the LAJTI program they were participating in.

Between 11 and 116 teens participated in each LAJTI program in 2016–17.

Exhibit 1

Program Name	Type of Program	Number of Teens Participating in 2016–17	Program Description
Camp JCA Shalom LA Teen Adventures	Accelerator	15	A series of one-day adventure events, including kayaking, rock climbing, and hiking.
Sherut L'Olam One-Day Events & Weekend Retreats	Accelerator	16	A set of one-day events and single weekends addressing social justice and local community service, with leadership roles for teens from the organization's Sherut L'Olam Fellowship program.
Maccabi Clash	Accelerator	76	A series of one-day events to engage teens in different topic areas related to a healthy lifestyle, without the formal admission processes and fees of the popular six-month Maccabi Games teen program.

³ These data were provided by each LAJTI program in June 2017, reflecting the 2016–17 program year.

Program Name	Type of Program	Number of Teens Participating in 2016–17	Program Description
BBYO Entrepreneurial Summit	Accelerator	64	A one-day event focused on entrepreneur skills and experiences. The 2017 event was held on the UCLA campus and included presentations by teen recipients of the LAJTI Teen Innovation Awards.
Camp Bob Waldorf: Kibbutz Tzedek	Accelerator	64	New spring break overnight camp program to serve teens from Jewish Big Brothers Big Sisters.
JQSA “Pop Up” and “Taste” Outreach Programs	Accelerator	14	Events for LGBTQ teens and their allies, as well as community information meetings conducted in partnership with synagogues, schools, and other Jewish organizations.
Moving Traditions Community Groups	Accelerator	36	A new community-based model of their program operated without any sponsorships by institutional partners.
Wise Readers	Accelerator	116	Training for teen volunteers to provide tutoring and support in summer literacy programs for underperforming students in LA public schools.
Community Internship	LA Federation	38	A three-week long program that provides high school students opportunities to work as interns at Jewish nonprofits in LA, with a stipend.
Teen Innovation Awards	LA Federation	20	Cash awards of up to \$1,500, plus mentor support, for selected teens who are turning an idea into a tangible reality.
Teen Leadership Council	LA Federation	12	Small group of selected teens who provided input to the Initiative about ways to reach their less-engaged peers; this group led the process for selecting the Teen Innovation Awards.
Social Media Fellows	LA Federation	11	Trained teens helped promote Jewish teen engagement and specific events through social media (e.g., postings on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter).

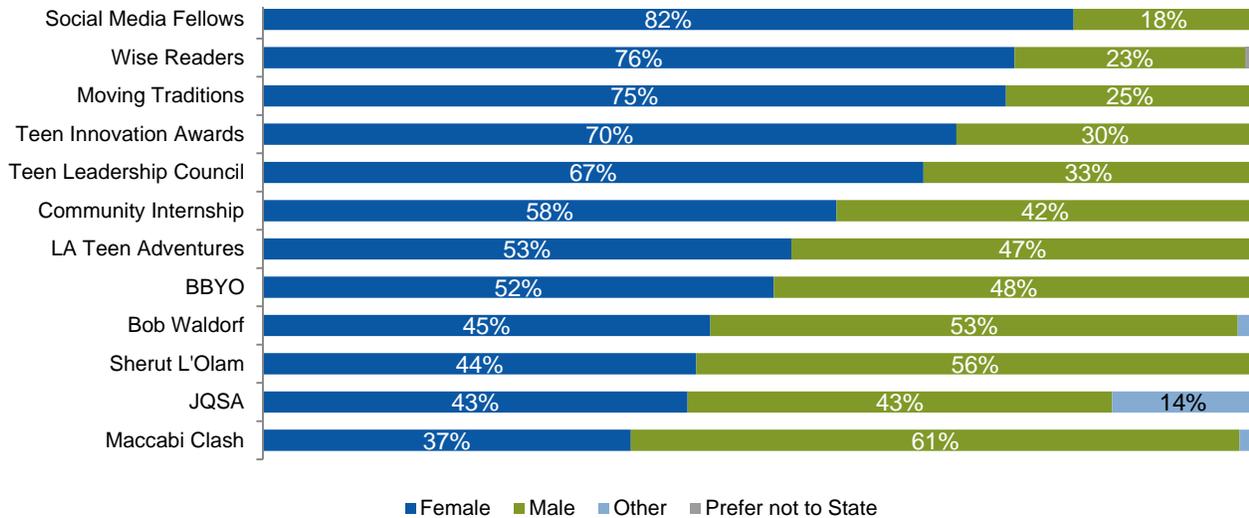
WHO ARE THIS YEAR’S TEEN PARTICIPANTS?

Through program-collected data on almost every program participant this year, we have a clear understanding of the basic demographics of the teens participating in LAJTI programs. These teens are generally either in 9th, 10th, or 11th grades. A few programs are attracting participants on the younger and older ends of the teen spectrum: Maccabi Clash saw younger participants in this program year compared with the other LAJTI programs, and BBYO, Social Media Fellows, Teen Leadership Council, and JQSA that attract more upperclassmen.

The majority of LAJTI program participants overall identify as female (58%). The ratio of female to male participants is lower than our survey results showed last year (1.4:1 this year vs. 2:1 in 2015–16), which indicates LAJTI programs are reaching more male participants than previously thought. When viewed program by program, however, more dramatic gender divides appear in both directions: Maccabi Clash, Sherut L'Olam, and Camp Bob Waldorf attract more male participants, while Wise Readers, Moving Traditions, and Social Media Fellows attract more who identify as female (Exhibit 2).

Although there are more females than males in LAJTI programs overall, gender distribution by program is more varied.^{4,5}

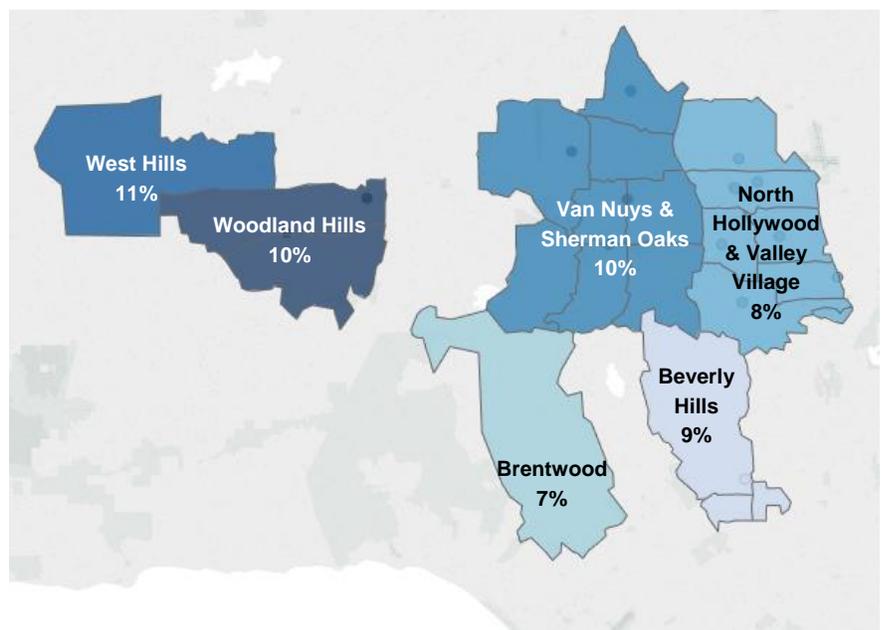
Exhibit 2



Geographically, there is a concentration of LAJTI program teens in a few cities/regions; the rest are scattered across a number of Los Angeles–area cities. Of the teens we were able to categorize into the Federation’s catchment areas (148 unique teens), more than half are from these six areas: West Hills, Van Nuys and Sherman Oaks, Beverly Hills, Woodland Hills, North Hollywood/Valley Village, or Brentwood (Exhibit 3).

LAJTI teens are concentrated in a few regions.

Exhibit 3

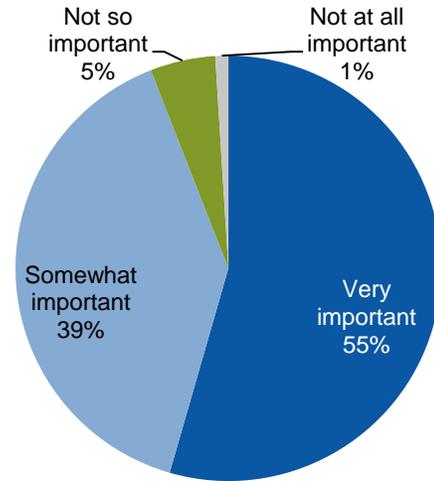


JEWISH ENGAGEMENT OF TEENS IN LAJTI PROGRAMS

Most 2016–17 LAJTI participants come from Jewish backgrounds and currently engage in Jewish teen activities. Almost all teens (94%) who participated in LAJTI programs in the past year identify personally as Jewish. Over half of the Jewish teens consider being Jewish “very important” in their lives, and another 40% consider being Jewish “somewhat important” to them (Exhibit 4). More than three quarters of teens say they come from all Jewish families, although almost one fifth of teens (18%) say they come from interfaith families. Moving Traditions, Bob Waldorf, and the Social Media Fellows specifically have a larger number of teens from interfaith families as compared with the aggregate (Exhibit 5). There are a few programs with a larger proportion of teens who come from families that do not identify as Jewish at all, as well as teens who don’t personally identify as Jewish: namely, Sherut L’Olam, LA Teen Adventures, and the Teen Innovation Awards. To take a closer look at the data, all 2016–17 LAJTI teens who come from families that don’t consider themselves Jewish also do not personally identify as Jewish, which indicates that some programs are (either intentionally or unintentionally) recruiting some non-Jewish participants.

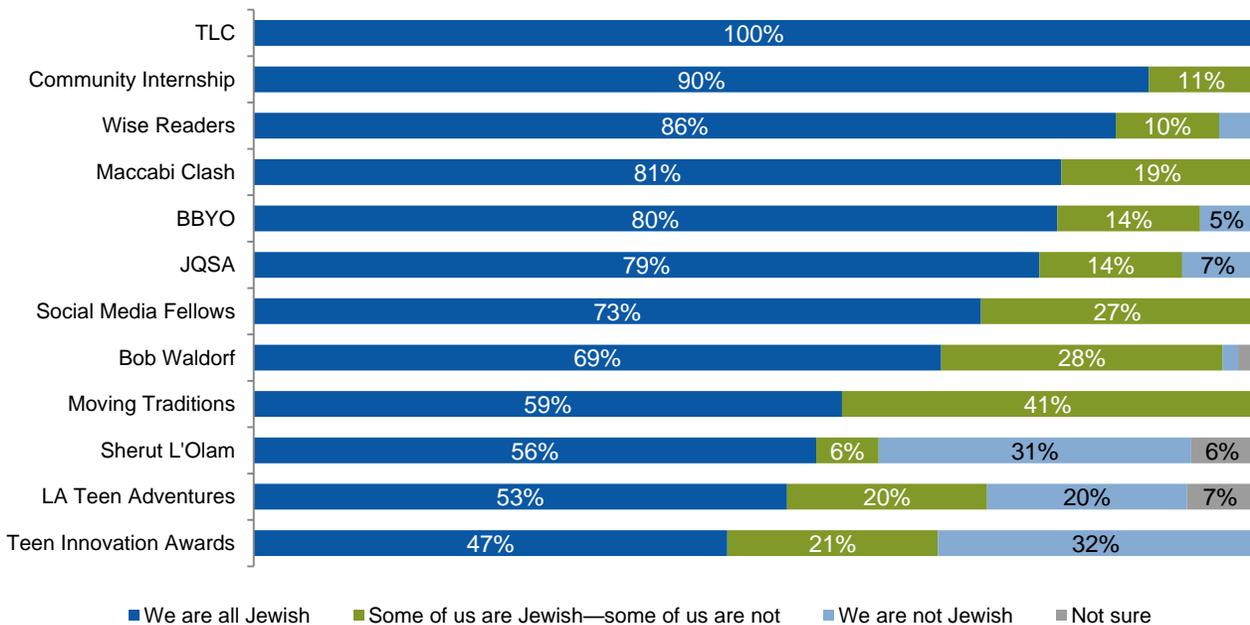
The vast majority of LAJTI participants say that being Jewish is important to them to some degree.

Exhibit 4 | n=400



A few LAJTI programs have a larger proportion of participants from interfaith families and families that don’t consider themselves Jewish.⁴

Exhibit 5

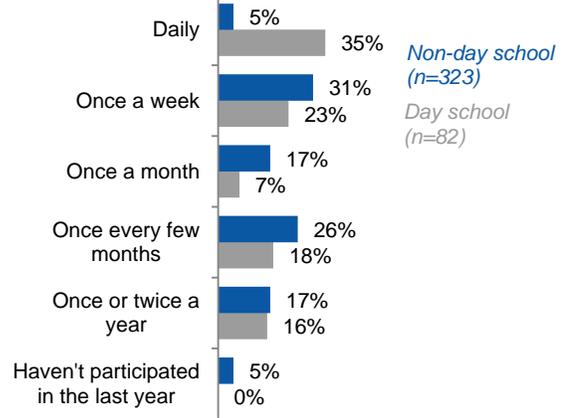


⁴ The number of teens included in each program can be found in Exhibit 1.

The majority of the teens in LAJTI programs who identify as Jewish report engaging in Jewish activities at least somewhat frequently in the past 12 months. Slightly fewer than 40% of those teens participate in Jewish activities either daily or once a week. Another group of 39% says they engage in Jewish activities from once a month to once every few months. While only 82 out of 405 Jewish LAJTI participants are currently in day schools (18%), over half of these day school students participate in Jewish activities daily (35%) or once a week (23%) compared to only one-third of teens who are not in Jewish day school (5% participate in Jewish activities daily and 31% weekly) (Exhibit 6). Looking at the data by program, it seems that BBYO and JQSA teen participants are the most frequently engaged in Jewish programs; almost three quarters of their teens say they participate in Jewish activities either daily or once a week.

LAJTI participants enrolled in day schools tend to participate more frequently in Jewish activities.

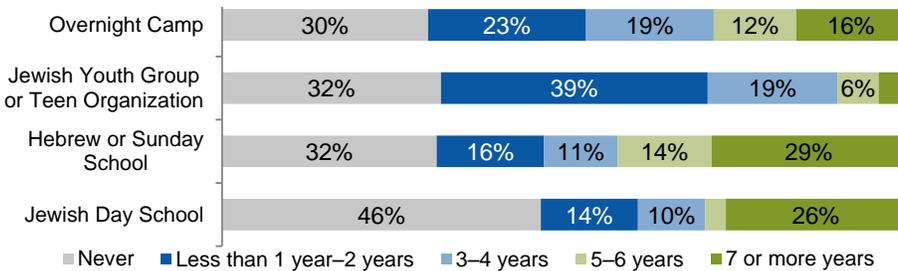
Exhibit 6



How teens feel about being Jewish is connected to how often they participate in Jewish activities—the more teens feel being Jewish is important, the more frequently they participate. Fifty-six percent of teens who report that being Jewish is “very important” to them participate in Jewish activities either daily or once a week compared to only 24% of teens who say being Jewish is “somewhat important.”

Most teens have had one or more of these Jewish experiences at least to some degree at some point in their lives.

Exhibit 7 | n=387–392



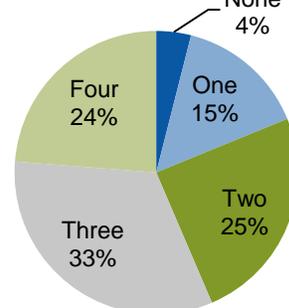
Overall, most of the teens coming to LAJTI programs this year who are Jewish have had certain Jewish experiences—going to Hebrew or Sunday school, attending a Jewish Day School, going to a Jewish overnight camp, or participating in a Jewish youth group or teen organization—at least to some degree (Exhibit 7).

However, the programs are attracting only some teens who have never before had one or more of these experiences (Exhibit 8). Almost half of teen participants this year have never attended a Jewish day school. Interestingly, there is an almost equal proportion of teens who have never participated in either Hebrew or Sunday school and of teens who have participated for seven or more years.

Teens who have had only one of these select Jewish experiences primarily went or go to Hebrew/Sunday school (47%), Jewish Day School (21%), Jewish youth group (19%), or overnight camp (14%), whereas teens who have had three of these experiences primarily participate in overnight camp (89%), Jewish youth group (89%) and Hebrew/Sunday school (73%) more so than Jewish day school (47%). Teens from Jewish day schools and other schools participate in roughly the same number of Jewish activities.

The majority of teens have had two to four of these select Jewish experiences.

Exhibit 8 | n=400



Program Benefits from the Teen Perspective

The Los Angeles Jewish community is providing a wide range of program opportunities for teens, with thousands of middle and high school youth participating in ways that range from occasional small-scale engagement of just a few hours to yearlong fellowships and immersive experiences involving international travel.

How do teens view their participation in these programs, particularly teens on the lower end of the engagement scale? As part of the evaluation, Informing Change conducted site visits to five Jewish teen programs participating in the Initiative's Accelerator and interviewed small groups of participating teens. These interviews provide a glimpse into teens' perspectives on why they participate. **Four elements—fun, friends, a connection to the larger world around them, and a sense of belonging—are the simple and unquestionable beacons that characterize the favorite Jewish teen experiences of the teens we talked with.**

“I was very reluctant to go to Hebrew school or be at all involved because I thought there was only one way to be Jewish and it involved learning the stories in the Torah ... This [program] has taught me there are so many different ways to be Jewish, and that it's about the values you carry with you.”

– Teen Participant

such as Jewish texts that relate to their concerns about the world, *havdalah* dancing without self-consciousness, and conversations calibrated at just the right spot for adolescent social-emotional learning.

Jewish programs facilitate teen-to-teen relationship building and help Jewish teens feel part of the Jewish community. In recounting what makes a program Jewish, teens frequently comment on what it feels like to be together with other Jews their age and how that attribute makes the activity feel different. As one teen put it: “It's fun to be around all these people who have the same religion as me.” The program leaders also

Most of the teens had difficulty finding words to describe the Jewish content in programs and how they have been affected by it, **but it is clear that the programs provide meaningful opportunities to learn and practice Judaic teachings.** Teens say this is where they have learned and practiced prayers, celebrated Shabbat in cool and meaningful ways, and asked a wide range of questions about Jewish life: What is the meaning of a Jewish text? What's it like to live on an Israeli kibbutz? What values undergird a Jewish entrepreneur's business decisions? Teens also clearly express their enjoyment of learning and practicing Jewish things in teen-sized ways,

“This is a community. If we weren't all Jewish it would just be an event ... but Jewish is our common ground.”

– Teen Participant

recognize that “teens want to be connected to each other at this stage of development,” and consider that interest in their program design.

In talking about why they participate in programs, teens intertwine the benefits as they relate to multiple pieces of their emerging identity, one of which is being Jewish. **Jewish teen programs offer them a chance to explore the Jewish aspect of their identity and consider how it intersects with other aspects**—artist, athlete, cook; gay, straight; courageous, timid. To do so in a supportive community of peers feels great to them and it’s what keeps them coming back for more. As one teen shared: “Here we get into deep topics that we wouldn’t talk about outside of camp [like] your feelings and emotions ... your relationship ... with yourself.”

Do all teens in these programs gain a deeper understanding of Judaism and Jewish identity? No. Some are already deeply connected through home and

religious school and have supportive environments that foster building their Jewish identity. But a portion of the participants are without such a home or school environment, and there are many whose Jewish environment has been fading away since their *b’nai mitzvah*. For these teens, the Jewish teen programs provide some scaffolding for their emerging identities and their views of what constitutes Jewish life.

“This program gives me confidence in the fact that there is community at this intersection of queer and Jewish. That I don’t have to exclude one to be involved in the other; that you can be involved in both. That is a powerful thing and gives me confidence.”

– Teen Participant

“A lot of temples I have been to don’t have teen programs. After Hebrew School, you don’t connect with your religion and you can lose it. Having programs like this lets you stay connected to it ... and to your heritage.”

– Teen Participant

Expanding Opportunities for Jewish Teens

The second year of LAJTI has been a fruitful time for learning about what Jewish teens seek in teen programs. LAJTI leaders are committed to expand and create programs of excellence for the region's teens, and in the past year they and their partners have explored, tested, struggled, and sometimes triumphed in this work, striving month after month to find a recipe that attracts and retains the Jewish teens who linger at the edges or outside a circle of Jewish involvement.

EXPANSION OF TEEN PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES

Through the Teen Program Accelerator

Within the LAJTI design, the Teen Program Accelerator is a key driver of changes to the available teen program opportunities and to teen outreach and marketing. The Accelerator is an incubator program designed to support organizations as they scale and grow already successful programs and develop and launch new, innovative programs for teens. The first cohort of eight programs graduated from the Accelerator in June 2017.

The original expectations of the Accelerator programs included large increases in the number of teens served. During Year 1, it became clear to LAJTI that such a high level of growth was unlikely in the time frame and resource allocation of the two-year Accelerator program. Year 2 expectations were renegotiated with each program in the cohort. **All programs served more teens in 2016–17 than in the previous year, yet only half (five programs) met or came close to meeting their revised target numbers.** Year-end reports show that Maccabi Clash, BBYO and JQSA exceeded their projected number of teen participants this year, and Wise Readers and Camp Bob Waldorf Kibbutz Tzedek came close to hitting their 2016–17 targets. Three Accelerator programs—Moving Traditions Community Groups, Sherut L'Olam One-Day Events and Weekend Retreat, and LA Teen Adventures—missed their target recruitment numbers.

It is difficult to say why one Accelerator program reached its target recruitment goal while another did not. Choosing a target number at the beginning of the program year (August–September 2016) was aspirational for all, but perhaps unrealistic in some cases and a lucky or unlucky guess in others. It is important to remember that at the time of setting recruitment goals, most of the Accelerator programs had just completed the first annual cycle of a revised or adapted program; a few had launched their pilot programs within the prior nine months.

After studying the enrollment numbers and areas with growth and comparing these data with our knowledge of the Accelerator program operations, we have three observations about recruitment challenges:

- Short-term activities (a few hours or half-day) have the potential to attract larger numbers of teens than programs that are recruiting for overnight events or multi-session commitments.

- Whether or not a teen has transportation to an activity makes or breaks their participation. Addressing this challenge is difficult and costly for programs, as it is often related to parent decisions beyond the understanding of program leaders or the teens themselves. Although teens enjoy activities where they meet teens from other areas and different schools, it may be unrealistic to expect that programs wanting to offer regional Jewish teen events can commit enough resources to draw adequate participants from the full geography of the Los Angeles region.
- Logistical hurdles differ from program to program (e.g. location, schedule, parent involvement, setting and collecting fees). The issues that negatively affect one program may not be an issue for another. Each program needs to adjust for these over time, with the first program cycle serving as a pilot and subsequent cycles testing the effectiveness of some strategic adjustments.

Although the Accelerator did not generate the numbers of new teen participants initially anticipated, **the Accelerator has been successful in expanding the types of opportunities available to Los Angeles Jewish teens.** The Accelerator also prompted organizations to adapt existing opportunities in ways that attract or offer access to a broader range of participants. By the beginning of 2017, most of the Accelerator programs were offering new opportunities, either via a newly designed program or event (e.g., JQSA, Maccabi Clash, LA Teen Adventures) or new content (e.g., BBYO), or because the programs had lowered barriers to participation and widened the range of eligible teens (e.g., Moving Traditions, Sherut L'Olam).

Most of the organizations report they are continuing to offer the new or modified programs developed through the Accelerator. West Side JCC will run another series of Maccabi Clash events, Wise Readers has an expanded series of one-day events during the school year to stay connected with its summer teen volunteers, and JQSA will augment the regular monthly meetings it offers with an additional weekend retreat this year. Staff leaders of Sherut L'Olam have adapted and expanded the organization's Accelerator pilot projects (one-day events and weekend retreats) into a "Junior Fellowship" to serve middle school students alongside the established nine-month Senior Fellowship program for high school students. Camp Bob Waldorf hopes to offer a 2018 Kibbutz Tzedek winter session, and is seeking the resources to do so. Three Accelerator organizations, however, do not plan to repeat their Accelerator programs, either because they would be too costly to sustain as ongoing programs (Moving Traditions, BBYO) or because the enrollment level during the pilot year was too low (LA Teen Adventures).

As the first Accelerator cohort ends, the Initiative is releasing into the community a new asset: 20 or more program leaders with unique knowledge and insight about Jewish teen programs, born of tough experiences under Accelerator guidance and deepened through thoughtful interactions with peers. The influence on their organizations' programs will likely continue to be seen in the next few years.

Through New Programs Housed at the Federation

The Community Internship program and the Teen Innovation Awards are new opportunities created under the Initiative's auspices.⁵

This was the Federation's third year running the Community Internship program. While the core framework of the program remained the same, the Federation incorporated learnings from the past two years to enhance the experience, including preparing supervisors prior to the start of the program and introducing new ways to integrate Jewish content that are relevant to teens. Many of the supervisors involved in the Community Internship program have been involved for two to three years, which indicates strong relationship and partnership building. In a group interview with teens in this program, several said they were drawn to it because they wanted to have a

⁵ In Year 2, the Federation ran its second pilot of the Social Media Fellows and, based on learnings from the first two years, will not be continuing this effort. Similarly, during Year 2, the Teen Leadership Council was phased into the Teen Innovation Awards.

productive summer while also having fun. Many mentioned that they liked the fact that the program allowed them to meet and learn from new people.

In its inaugural year, the Teen Innovation Awards featured nine projects with a total of 29 participants; overall, \$10,321 was awarded. The projects ranged from an all-teen theater production, to art exhibitions to heighten awareness of important social issues, to a workshop on body positivity and female empowerment. Project teams were paired with a mentor who provided guidance as they brought their ideas to fruition.

“After my bat mitzvah, I wasn’t connected to my Judaism anymore.... I am a cancer survivor so I got together with four of my friends from Diller Teen Fellows who were excited about raising money for cancer patients. We create these bracelets, share [patients’] stories, and sell the bracelets. All the proceeds go to an organization in Los Angeles and one in Israel. Not only could I feel connected as a cancer survivor, but also a connection between Israel and America.”

– Teen Innovation Award Participant

Through Wellness Grants

A first round of Wellness grants began in Spring 2017, and nine of the grantees were operating and engaging teens during the last half of this evaluation period (January–June 2016) in a variety of programs. These grantees reported enrolling 962 teens in the grant projects. Most of these early-start Wellness grant programs are incorporating wellness elements into existing programs, not adding new opportunities to the Jewish teen program landscape. However, by the time all 13 of the Wellness grants are in full operation in 2018, as a group they will create several new types of opportunities for Jewish teens.

IMPROVING JEWISH PROGRAM CONTENT

Through the Accelerator, several organizations further developed the Jewish content of their programs. All of the Accelerator programs participated in Jewish content workshops, and a few worked with an expert advisor or a coach to strengthen this aspect of their programs. For example, Wise Readers staff reported that the Accelerator resources—particularly the coaching and the dedicated time for planning—helped them design program elements that connect Jewish wisdom with contemporary social issues currently affecting both the teen volunteers and the students that the teens work with in their summer literacy classes (who come from low-income families and have limited proficiency in English).

“Selah and AJU and the other educators [in the Accelerator] have helped me bring in better Jewish content. Also, we’re really listening to the teens about this. They have great ideas for Jewish content and tell us things they are comfortable with.”

– Accelerator Program Staff

“We wanted to link Jewish values to the universal issues of home and family, and we’re doing much better on this [because of our Accelerator work] ... and the teens relate to our theme. What is home? Who am I as an American, a Jew, a Los Angeleno?”

– Accelerator Program Staff

RECRUITING TEENS

The Initiative’s focus on reaching Jewish teens with low levels of engagement was a loud and constant message that rang in the ears of Accelerator program leaders for the two years they were in the program. During the first year, program leaders spent a lot of time in conversation with LAJTI staff trying to figure out who under-engaged teens are and how to recruit them. During the second year of the Accelerator, these leaders say they did more outreach and tried different communication methods in their recruitment efforts. However, **the general conclusion of Accelerator participants is that the greatest benefit from the Accelerator was not any change in their recruitment methods, but increased insight into how to do better what they were already trying to do.** These program leaders repeatedly cited the benefit of time to reflect and plan with others in the Accelerator and with their own program staff teams in their organizations, and the ability to spend more staff time on marketing and outreach thanks to Accelerator grant funds.

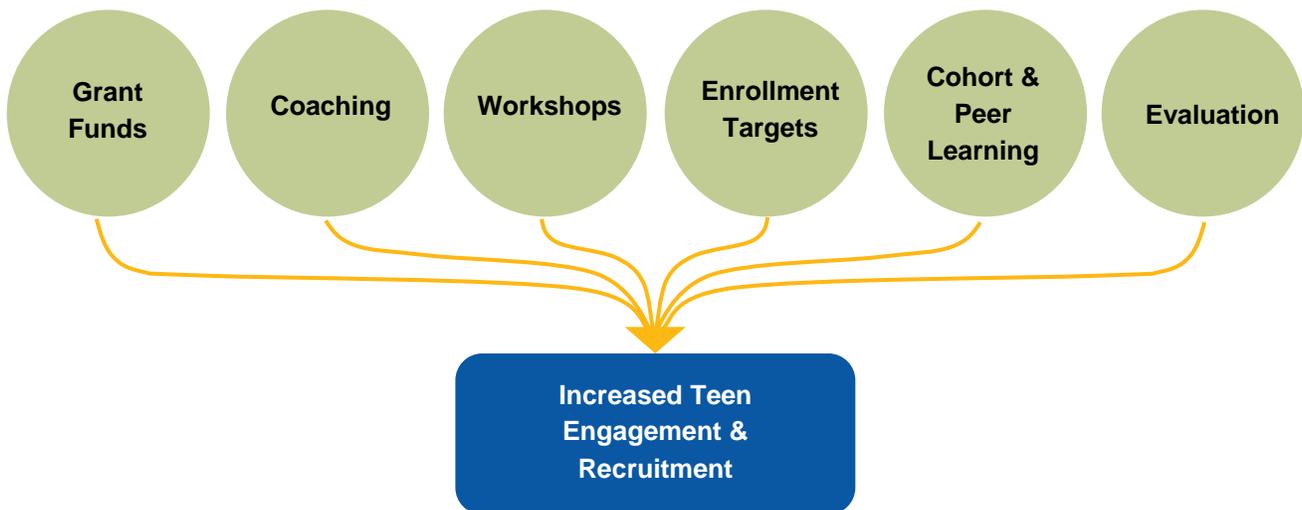
“Our branding now is more in line with our message. The coaching is really helpful for this.”

– Accelerator Program Staff

The Accelerator elements spurred programs to be more proactive in their recruitment and to try different avenues in hopes of reaching new teens (Exhibit 9). Across the interviews and conversations throughout the year, Accelerator program leaders consistently describe how the Accelerator experience supported them to think differently and more frequently about their program marketing and messaging. It is apparent that for many of the experienced educators, the gatherings and the coaching sessions were prompts to keep addressing outreach and not fall back into the comfort of program delivery. The presence of these interventions was as much of a support as the content of the workshops and coaching discussions.

The various LAJTI Accelerator elements combined to push and support better teen recruitment.

Exhibit 9



New Ways vs. Old Ways

Accelerator program leaders, as well as LAJTI staff, expected and hoped that at least a few programs would discover some great new techniques for effectively recruiting teens. Based on interview data, no program did. However, program staff do report doing a better job of recruiting and outreach because they were more strategic and more proactive in their use of “traditional” techniques.

As a group, the Accelerator programs reached teens and their parents primarily through outreach and marketing by program staff, supported by teens doing outreach to friends and sharing “testimonials” with peers. Program staff say they used traditional outreach and communication methods: emails, announcements in newsletters, paper flyers and posters, speaking to groups, asking youth leaders and teachers for referrals, and tabling at community fairs and events. Guidance counselors, coaches, and community service staff in schools were also sources of teen recruitment, or at least information sources for teens and parents.

No single type of media was more successful than others. Several Accelerator programs report that they worked at using social media to promote their program or event, but they did not feel it was a good source of recruitment.

A few Accelerator program leaders say their teen-to-teen outreach and recruitment became more effective as the staff applied what they learned about human-centered design. These program leaders describe how they opened up new ways for teens already in the program to shape the messages to be used in outreach and recruitment.

“I was dragged here by a friend. I wanted to come to a certain extent but then I didn’t want to come ‘cuz I have finals coming up that I need to study for. My other friend rallied us. He said, ‘Hey, we should do this thing,’ and so we did.”

– Teen Participant

“Having a teen leader as your recruiter doesn’t always get the kids, even if you think it’s a great idea. If your teen is not popular and doesn’t have a ‘following,’ their leadership or design won’t really get you more kids.”

– Accelerator Program Staff

Teen leadership of programs (i.e., teen-led programs), as a program feature, is not necessarily a draw for new teens, but it does build teen ownership and pride in the program, increasing the likelihood that participating teens will tell others.

Accelerator program leaders say that as much as they like having teens design and lead programs, they don’t depend on teen leaders for recruitment, and in fact are cautious not to overemphasize individuals or cliques who

might deter other teens from joining in. Teens also say the attraction of a program is not whether teens are leading it but whether the event or activity is welcoming and well organized when new participants join. Thus having teens in visible leadership roles is more helpful in retaining regular participants than in attracting a first-time participant.

One successful outreach method cited by several Accelerator program leaders is leveraging their organization’s existing relationships to find avenues to new teens. For example, Maccabi Clash used their connections with the coaches and school counselors they knew through their Maccabi Games program and with parents of teens who were alumni of the Maccabi Games program. Moving Traditions staff found that one parent with no synagogue affiliation often knew other unaffiliated families who were interested in attending a program information session. Sherut L’Olam and LA Teen Adventures describe how the Accelerator coaching process led them to realize they had relationships with Jewish families and individuals “beyond the synagogues” that could be nodes from which to inform new families about the organizations’ programs.

From the teens as well as the Accelerator staff we heard about the importance of parents—as communicators, as facilitators, as motivators of teens’ actions. Parents inform teens about a program opportunity and influence the decision to participate—for example, by agreeing to pay fees (or not), taking care of registration, and providing transportation to and from the program location.

“My Mom thought [this program] would be good for me and it could help with my college applications and would get me to know people outside of school and to be more social.”

– Teen Participant

“This is my friend, and it’s our first time at a thing like this. Her mom found it and she didn’t want to go alone, but I was down to go, so we came. And it’s fun. I like it.”

– Teen Participant

“My Mom made me go to this, actually. I wasn’t looking forward at first, but once I got here it turned out to be fine.”

– Teen Participant

Awareness + Motivation + Taking Action = Recruitment

Our interviews with teens confirmed that what is often given a one-word name—recruitment—is a set of multiple decisions made sometimes by a teen alone, but more frequently by a teen and a parent. To secure these teens’ engagement requires getting and keeping their interest through three stages:

1. **Awareness of the event.** This typically comes as information from a friend, a parent, a teacher, a counselor, or through reading an email or poster or other public announcements. Teens frequently say they heard about an activity from more than one source, reinforcing a best practice of planning to disseminate information through multiple methods and channels.
2. **Motivation to take action (i.e., sign up, show up).** Teens say their motivation is initially stimulated by whether the opportunity is attractive, either because of what will be happening or who will also be there. Fun, friends, and something worth doing are the three things teens say they look for. To sustain this motivation, the opportunity must pass a second level: access. Does this opportunity fit into the teen’s schedule or the family schedule? Is there any barrier because of fees and related expenses such as equipment? Other access issues that help or diminish motivation are transportation, distance from home or school, getting parental approval, and timing of needed decisions (e.g., youth frequently make decisions to attend activities in time frames that adults consider “too last-minute”).
3. **Buy-in after arriving at the program or event.** Once in the door, teens look quickly for something interesting to do, a sense of purpose for being there, and a feeling of welcome. Without these, they will find a way to slip out or tune out, and not return. Teens say they return to programs because they feel welcomed for who they are, the activities are well organized, and the attractions that first motivated them to attend—fun, friends, and something worth doing—endure.

“That teen council thing at my temple, they host events, but they’re usually not that big or get canceled because not enough people sign up. It’s just not appealing to go to them. It’s a hassle and the people that do go usually are the ones you don’t really want to be around.”

– Teen Participant

REMOVING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

Family Support—or Not

Parents play a very important role in making Jewish teen opportunities accessible to teens. A teen’s decision to participate in a program is heavily affected by whether the parents’ decisions add or remove barriers. Adults can decide whether or not to pay the fees, provide transportation, submit a form by a deadline, allow homework to wait, or be flexible with other family plans. In interviews, stakeholders and Accelerator program leaders point out that not all families think it is important or are willing to ease the way for their teens to participate in Jewish youth programs, and that this attitude is a huge force that works against the recruitment of less engaged teens.

Scholarships

Most Accelerator programs were able to keep their program fees very low because of their Initiative grants. Program staff acknowledge that in the future, they will likely add or raise the fee, and they are hopeful that this will not lower their enrollment, but only time will tell.

The Initiative is directly addressing the barrier of program fees through its scholarships and financial aid. In the 2016–17 program year, LAJTI tripled the number of teens impacted by the Initiative’s Incentive Grants and Financial Aid opportunities. The Initiative allocated \$45,695 in scholarships and grants to teens this year, a 64% increase from the 2015–16 program year. These opportunities have not only positively affected Jewish teens in Los Angeles, but also facilitated stronger partnerships between the Federation and Los Angeles’s teen programs.

Supporting Jewish Teen Educators

In its second year, LAJTI continued its extensive professional development strategy to support Jewish teen educators. The professional development opportunities are designed to

- nurture a supportive network of Jewish educators,
- build educators' individual skill sets, and
- make the field-wide case for professional development amongst organizations.

This strategy (Exhibit 10) includes three layers of support for educators:

1. A community of practice provides a foundation for networking, collaboration, and collective learning.
2. Formal instruction and skill building take the form of subsidized university offerings and service learning training provided by BJE.
3. Individualized supports are offered through a one-on-one mentorship program and customized service learning consultation from BJE.

LAJTI provides Jewish Teen Educators with multiple layers of professional supports.

Exhibit 10



Findings from the first-year LAJTI evaluation showed that while Jewish teen educators feel prepared for the multifaceted aspects of their work, including programmatic and administrative responsibilities, there is room for them to grow their skills. In the second year of LAJTI we see that Jewish teen educators are continuing to grow their skills to better plan and implement programs for teens that are engaging and resonate with teens. Overall, stakeholders and educators reflect that the LAJTI professional development opportunities seem to be more coordinated and more successful than they were in LAJTI's inaugural year. However, this evaluation demonstrates that the different professional development opportunities are achieving different outcomes, to different degrees, and that there is still room for improvement

This section of the report speaks to these issues and draws on data collected from a sample of educators who participated in the 2016–17 LAJTI professional development opportunities.⁶

⁶ Educators who responded to the survey range in age from 24–54, with the average age of 36 and median age of 33; have a degree higher than a BA/BS (including MA/MS/MBA, Doctorate, Rabbinate/Cantorate) (57%); are employed full time at one organization (82%); have typically been working in the field of Jewish education and engagement for five years or more (82%); and have been working directly with Jewish teens for five years or more (52%).

COMMUNITY NETWORK

After two years, the greatest change resulting from the LAJTI's focus on Jewish teen educators is an increased sense of belonging to a network of professionals. Nearly all educators (82%) agree or strongly agree that the network of Jewish teen educators is a great resource for them, and nearly 3 in 4 (73%) report that their sense of the network has improved over the past 12 months as a result of their involvement in LAJTI.

LAJTI is also promoting and influencing collaboration among Jewish teen educators and community organizations. Though educators continue to work together regularly at high rates (80%) and observe organizations in the community working together, though less frequently (58%), nearly half (46%) report they have increased their own level of collaboration, because of LAJTI. In addition, 51% report that they believe collaboration among organizations in the community has also increased because of LAJTI. Despite the positive nature of these results, they also indicate room for LAJTI to support greater collaboration among educators and organizations in the community.

Evidence is surfacing that it will take more than professional development to shift the perception that a position as a Jewish teen educator has long-term career potential. With the exception of educators involved in the Mentoring Fellowship, educators again report that professional development opportunities contribute only somewhat to increased job satisfaction and the sense that the work they do with Jewish teens can be or is a long-term career. Educators acknowledge that the structure of a work week that supports teens happens outside the 9-to-5 setting, and that many teen-serving positions are “not meant to last” but to be held for two to three years. This illustrates an inherent tension between sustainable Jewish teen educator positions—at least in some cases—and the reality of the work.

“When people are just on the ground working with teens, it’s a part-time position. It becomes a more full-time professionalized position when you start taking on more of those [administrative] roles and you start putting on six, seven, eight hats.”

– Educator

The payoff for doing teen programs is so low. We have programming, we work hard, and in the end there’s not much to show for it. It’s really hard to stay in the job. There’s a shelf life for adults who work with teens... They do excellent work and might stay for years, but then they need to move on to other things. That’s just how it is.”

– Stakeholder

BUILDING THE SKILLS OF INDIVIDUAL EDUCATORS

Selah Community of Practice

Selah fosters a community of practice for Jewish teen educators by hosting network gatherings; providing training via workshops and retreats; and creating a forum for problem-solving, resource sharing, and collective learning, with the goal of advancing educators’ work in Jewish experiential education. In the second year of LAJTI, Selah offered six programs, drawing in 54 unique educators.⁷ Attendance ranged from 9 to 23 participants at each

⁷ Not including unique participants from the final May event.

meeting. Meetings addressed various topics, such as teen wellness, experiential learning, supporting teens in developing a nuanced understanding of Israel, and using the arts to create connections with teens. **Educators surveyed gave Selah an overall rating of 3.7 out of 5.**⁸

Selah’s highest value is its contribution to educators’ sense that there is a Jewish professional network in their community—90% of educators report the Community of Practice has contributed some or a lot to their sense of network (including 62% who say a lot). One of Selah’s main design elements is being accessible to and bringing together the many Jewish teen educators in Los Angeles; but with such a potentially large audience in a geographically spread-out city, this directive poses some challenges. While educators value the time and space to meet and network with one another, repeat attendance is inconsistent, stalling momentum for ongoing relationship building and skill building.

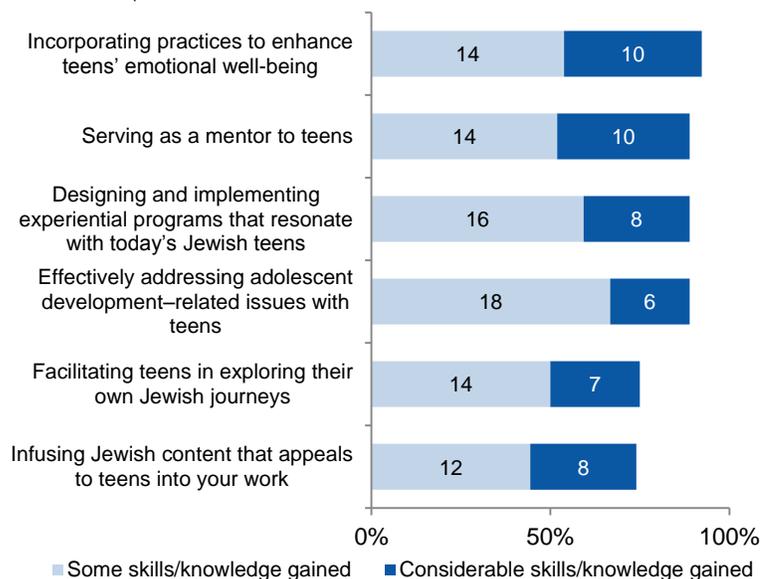
Educators also report that they are gaining new knowledge through Selah (Exhibit 11) which is strengthening their confidence to some extent. To illustrate, almost all (92%) report learning about incorporating practices to enhance teens’ emotional well-being, while only 60% say their involvement in Selah increased their confidence in this area. The results are similar for designing and implementing programs with today’s teens: 89% say they gained some or a lot of knowledge, while 73% attribute greater confidence in this area to Selah. Overall, two in three (67%) report that Selah contributed somewhat or a lot to their confidence in their ability to do their jobs well.

It is important to note that Jewish teen educators in Los Angeles have a wide range of skills and experience. This means that workshops intended to reach the entire community of practice may not actually meet the needs of the full Selah membership. While Selah markets its offerings as opportunities for the full network, there is evidence this approach is not serving everyone in the network. **Educators reflect that they are not able to consistently take tangible skills and learning from Selah meetings and readily apply them to their work, and educators do not consistently find value in the content-driven workshops.** This may also account for the difference between educators saying they learned about an issue but not having gained as much confidence to execute on that knowledge

Moving ahead, educators suggest a few common program improvements: increase time in Selah for networking; share a pre-defined calendar so educators can better plan for the meetings; improve quality and depth of speakers, including case studies in workshops; and ensure that workshops and trainings help educators make connections between what they learn and how to apply their learning to their work.

Through Selah, educators report that they are building some skills and knowledge to help improve how they design programs for and interact with teens.

Exhibit 11 | n=26–28



⁸ Across the professional development offerings, most educators gave a rating of three to five stars. Only one or two educators gave each program a rating one or two stars, with the exception of the Mentoring Fellowship— no educators rated this program below three stars.

“There were some of the times when the meetings were not on the mark of what I thought it was going to be, but I always enjoyed spending time with other Jewish educators, actually being able to network and see each other, talk to each other, actually having faces to these names.”

– Selah Participant

LAJTI Mentoring Fellowship

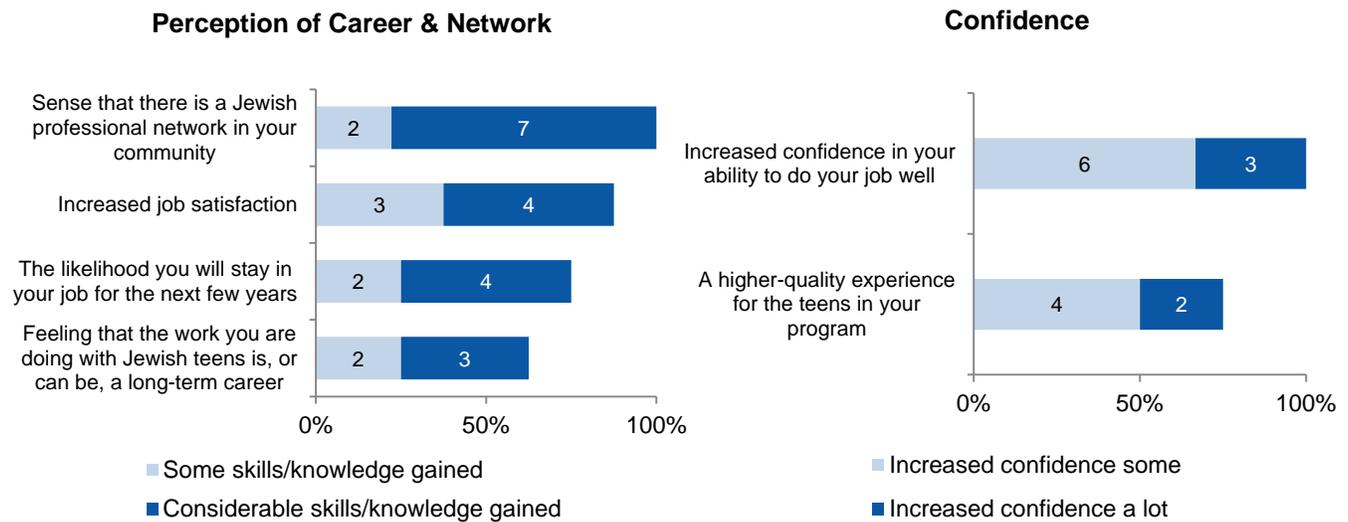
The LAJTI Mentoring Fellowship pairs educators with a field professional who is not their boss or coworker for a year of project-based training and one-on-one mentoring. Fourteen educators began the mentorship program, and 11 completed it. This intimate and individualized support allows educators to build and foster a relationship with another educator in the field and focus on their personally most pressing needs. Through this one-on-one relationship, educators are increasing their job satisfaction and their confidence to do their work (Exhibit 12). **Educators surveyed gave the LAJTI Mentoring Fellowship an overall rating of 3.9 out of 5**, the highest rating of any of the professional development offerings.

“I think if we see value in it we’ll make the time.”

– Selah Participant

Through mentoring, Jewish teen educators report that they are building their confidence, job satisfaction, and the sense that there is a professional network.

Exhibit 12 | n=8–9



At the same time, Jewish teen educators in the mentoring program report that they are building skills and knowledge to help improve how they create programs for and interact with teens, but only to *some* extent. For example, 67% report the Fellowship has helped only somewhat in improving their skills to serve as a mentor teens, and 22% said a lot.

Looking ahead, educators ask for clearer direction, mission, and a program calendar to increase participants’ understanding of the mentoring program, manage their expectations, and plan for meetings between mentor and mentee pairs (mentoring pairs met irregularly and at inconsistent intervals).

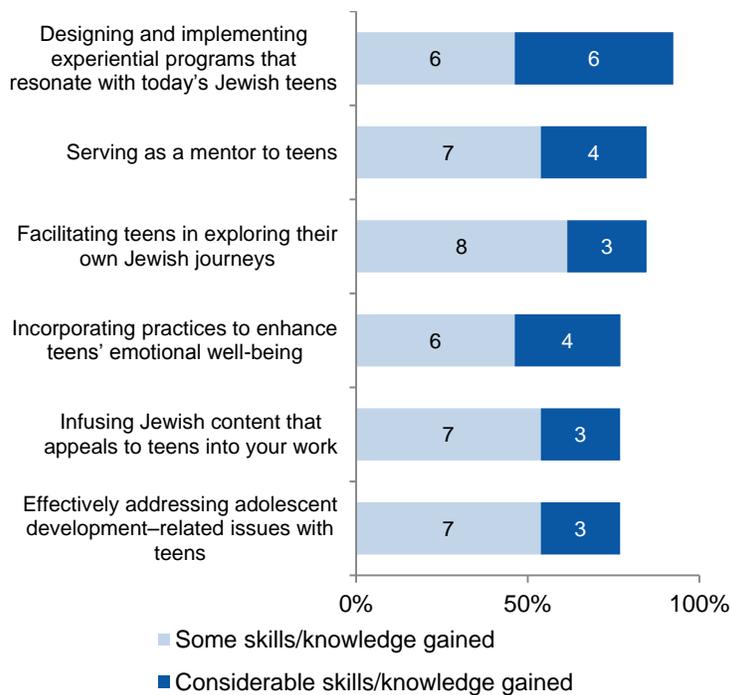
BJE IMPACT Service Learning Network

BJE IMPACT Service Learning Network brings together teen educators who share a focus on Jewish Service Learning to participate in a networking and learning forum. Eighteen educators participated in the BJE IMPACT Service Learning Network and “Demonstration Day,” which featured a series of service learning-focused workshops that built on each other, and culminated in a daylong service project. **Educators give the BJE IMPACT Service Learning Network an overall rating of 3.6 out of 5.**

In this intimate group setting, educators learned together and built tangible skills, coming away from the experience with a toolbox of readily applicable skills and strategies for working with teens (Exhibit 13). Educators value these programmatic strengths, although the network is contributing only somewhat to a higher-quality experience for the teens in educators’ programs in the same year educators go through the training (62% of educators reporting some impact, and 8% reporting a lot). The Network is a direct and specific way for educators to build their capacity to bring service learning programming to teens in their programs, and 69% of participants report they’ve increased their confidence to incorporate these concepts into their work (46% to some extent, and 23% a lot).

Educators are somewhat improving their skills and knowledge to deliver relevant programming to Jewish teens through the BJE IMPACT Service Learning Network.

Exhibit 13 | n=13



The highest value of the BJE Impact Service Learning Network is building educators’ sense that there is a Jewish professional network: 77% of participants report the Network has increased their sense that there is a Jewish professional network in their community (23% somewhat, and 54% a lot).

University Access

University Access provides resources for Jewish teen educators to take courses to meet their specific needs at a highly subsidized rate—75% of the tuition is paid—with the aim of helping educators build and improve on their skills related to working with teens. This year, 16 educators took courses related to program management and

leadership (such as Project Management Fundamentals, Leadership and the Human Element) and delivering Jewish content to teens (such as Talking Tough Topics with Jewish Teens, and Exploring Voices and Young People During the Holocaust). **Educators give the University Access program an overall rating of 3.5 out of 5.**

Though rated the lowest among professional development offerings, University Access builds educators’ skills and knowledge. The skills are related to the particular content of the courses offered, so the benefits vary: from designing and implementing programs for teens, to serving as a mentor for teens. Ultimately, the offerings lead to a better experience for teens in programs, and contribute to the sense that there is a Jewish professional network.

The University Access program leverages the knowledge of experts, resulting in little need to design and offer new programs. With minimal staff time needed to coordinate the program and relatively small course fees, University Access is a low-cost way to support Jewish teen educators in their professional development (with costs totaling \$3,141 in total course fees plus additional staff time).

CHALLENGES TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Challenges related to offering professional development that surfaced during the first year of LAJTI continue to hamper the quality and effectiveness of these investments. Jewish teen educators report feeling supported by the community and their individual organizations to participate in professional development and build their skills—something to be celebrated in the community. However, educators continue to cite the availability of their time as one of the greatest hindrances to participating in LAJTI’s professional development opportunities. LAJTI staff also feel this tension, and reflect that it is challenging to get a consistent group of educators to attend Selah meetings and workshops; participation in other LAJTI professional development opportunities is somewhat low.

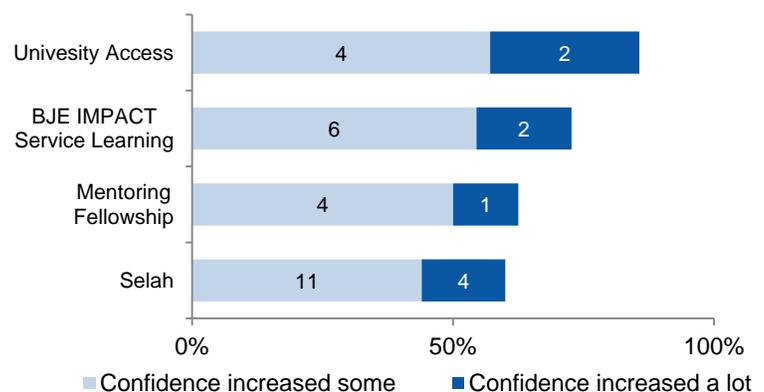
Although these different strategies combined provide a cohesive plan that can target multiple different audiences and meet professionals with varying skill level and development needs, the LAJTI professional development suite could benefit from further refinement. The Selah Community of Practice is a challenging undertaking, given its dual purpose of developing skills for a broad range of educators *and* building a network. Smaller, more intimate opportunities—BJE IMPACT Mentorship and Service Learning Network events—provide more specific and customized training than the larger Community of Practice. Even so, their impact can be strengthened as well.

FOCUS ON TEENS & TEEN WELLNESS

LAJTI is trying to create an ethos of teen-focused programming—meaning that teen programs, and how adults interact with teens, respond to what teens want and need, rather than what adults think teens should be getting. The main manifestations of this ethos are promoting the wellness of teen participants and ensuring that teen programming is shared as a community priority.

While educators report that teen wellness was an important component of their programs prior to LAJTI, educators continue to increase their confidence in their ability to integrate teen wellness into programs and to support healthy teen development through LAJTI professional development offerings.

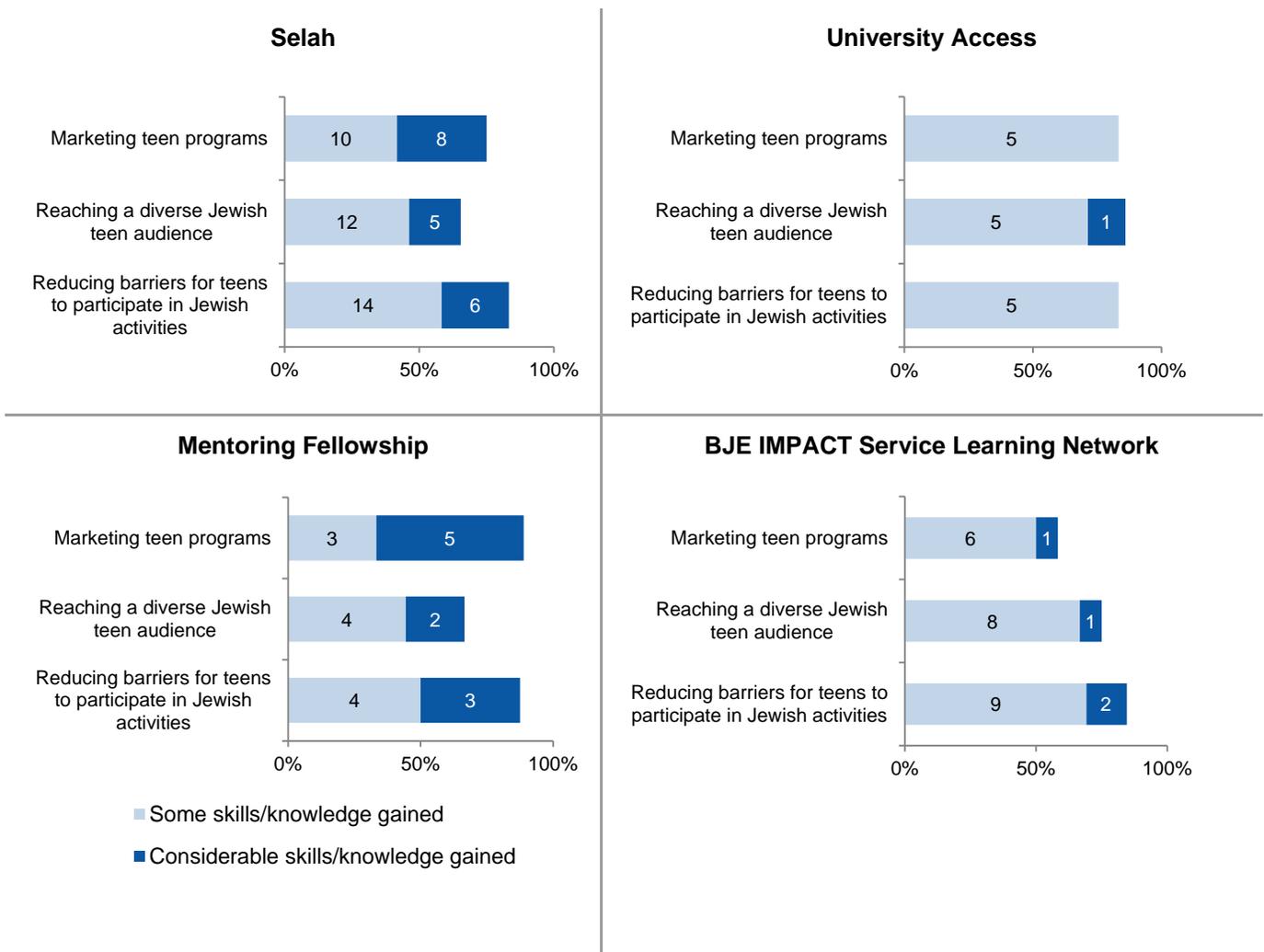
Exhibit 14 | University Access n=7 | BJE IMPACT Service Learning n=11 | Mentoring Fellowship n=8 | Selah n=25



Educators continue to build their skills, somewhat, and refine their approaches to working with teens (Exhibit 15). Although nearly all (93%) report having built some or considerable skills to help them treat each contact and communication with teens as an opportunity to create a positive relationship this year, there is not strong evidence that educators are building the individual skills that roll up to this approach.

Educators are building skills and knowledge needed to market their programs and reach diverse teens in Los Angeles.

Exhibit 15 | Selah n=24–26 | University Access n=6–7 | Mentoring Fellowship n=8–9 | BJE IMPACT Service Learning Network n=12–13



Findings from the first year of LAJTI showed that educators were already thinking of themselves as role models to the teens with whom the educators work; they question and learn alongside their teens. This learning has continued into the second year of LAJTI. Educators report they are learning how to better model to teens that the educators themselves are growing in their own lives as Jewish adults and pushing themselves to learn and question alongside teen participants (92.3% reporting some or considerable skills or knowledge gained). Educators are committed to serving teens in this capacity. When working with teens, educators want teens to have a relationship with an adult who cares about them (and to feel this connection and caring) and not just their accomplishments.

Ripples of Change in the Community

As LAJTI adds new or changed opportunities to the landscape of Jewish teen programs, the shape of Jewish teen life in Los Angeles is starting to shift, to some degree at least. With the breadth and diversity of this landscape and the multiplicity of organizations in the community, it can be difficult to see how much of a difference LAJTI's investments in Accelerator programs, wellness programs, and Jewish teen educators are making. Yet changes are present and building traction, particularly visible at this point in the LAJTI programs (i.e., the Accelerator programs, the Community Internship program, and the Teen Innovation Awards) and their host organizations.

More broadly, in a larger circle of programs, numerous Jewish teen educators are applying the skills and knowledge they acquire through LAJTI professional development programs, and as educators apply what they have learned within their organizations—numbering around 85 in just the past year—the landscape of Jewish teen programs in Los Angeles shifts again.

Perhaps one of the most important changes resulting from LAJTI is the shift in the mindset of Jewish teen program leaders that is opening them up to listening more to teens, designing and redesigning programs to reflect who teens are and how they think, and being more comfortable with the ups and downs of teen-designed and teen-led programs. These program leaders are relying less on program models from the past as inspiration for the current opportunities for Jewish teens.

In earlier sections of this report, we describe the changes that are under way in LAJTI programs and in Jewish teen educator professional development and networking. Here we present some additional evidence of community-level change.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES

Accelerator program leaders have taken information and learning from Accelerator sessions and shared it with others in their organizations. Seven of the eight Accelerator programs report that other departments or co-workers have used or are now using human-centered design principles learned from Accelerator coaches and workshops. Many also report that they have used a tool or technique learned in the Accelerator with other programs or departments (e.g., Case for Giving, work planning).

Although all of the organizations in the Accelerator were focused on a single, contained teen program, several report broader organizational changes as a result of what they learned through implementing or experimenting with their Accelerator program:

- better understanding of the target market, resulting in reshaping programs to serve middle school in addition to high school

- better linkages across all teen programs offered by the organization
- administrative adjustments that reduce or eliminate impediments to enrolling Jewish teens from more diverse backgrounds
- an approach of embedding Jewish content throughout youth programs instead of reserving dedicated time periods for it

Changes are rippling into the Federation’s organizational fabric to some degree too. **LAJTI staff believe that individually and collectively they have shifted the ways they approach community partnerships and program development due to their experiences with LAJTI.** The staff say they have become more flexible and adaptable; they appreciate iteration and strive for transparency. As these traits change the ways in which the Initiative staff team works together and with partner organizations, they are also influencing the work patterns of other people and departments at the Federation.

TEEN WELLNESS OUTREACH & EDUCATION

LAJTI is contributing to promoting teens and teen wellness as a community priority. Many educators (69%) agree or strongly agree that there is a community-wide priority on reducing barriers to teen participation in Jewish programs and events, and that LAJTI is playing a role in emphasizing the priority (71% report the priority of teens has increased because of LAJTI in the past year). Some educators reflect that wellness has been a long-standing element in their programs, even prior to LAJTI.

In our interviews, some community leaders as well as program leaders say the topics of teen wellness, teen mental health, and communicating with teens closely align with current interests and needs of parents, and thus are catching the attention of synagogue leaders, although not enough of them. Identifying some good model programs to share with synagogues would be a good next step, says one synagogue leader, because these wellness programs can also introduce families to Jewish teen programs unfamiliar to them.

Teen educators from Accelerator programs and the community more broadly incorporate wellness elements into their programs by creating welcoming, safe, and supportive spaces where teens feel valued for who they already are. The environment that welcomes teens and allows them to explore their identity allows teens to build a strong sense of self as well as their self-confidence. While this approach is not brand new for many programs (four Accelerator programs report that even before LAJTI, they were already incorporating wellness into their programming and ensuring teens’ mental and emotional health was taken care of), the Accelerator reinforced this priority focus. Accelerator programs continue to carry teen wellness into their programming in the second year of the Accelerator. One Accelerator staff leader reflects that for their program, the focus on wellness was extremely beneficial: it allowed them to incorporate a few overarching themes into a cohesive program, including creating a stress-free environment, and scheduling time for teens to relax, unplug, and unwind.

“Most of us have finals, but we chose this weekend retreat because we know we’ll be relaxed and it will be better for us, and we get to see each other.”

– Teen Participant

A small group of Jewish educators working with LAJTI Wellness grants say that while parents might be seeking a program that helps their teen communicate, reduce stress, or otherwise maintain good mental health, these issues are not on the radar of the majority of rabbis and congregational leaders. The program leaders say congregational leaders are unaware of programs and approaches that could help teens and their families with mental health and resilience in stressful times.

When this healthy environment is intentionally created, teens feel it. They favorably describe programs that create emotionally healthy environments for them, reflecting that program activities connect them to their own identity and to a larger Jewish community.

LAJTI’s wellness activities seem to be fostering community-level awareness and support for quality teen programs. During the past year, Initiative leaders delivered a series of engaging workshops focused on teen wellness for parents in the Jewish community (Exhibit 16).

LAJTI’s Parent Workshops attracted 231 attendees across the 12 workshops offered.

Exhibit 16

Season	Workshop Topic	Number of Times Workshop Offered	Parents in Attendance
Fall 2016	Active Listening and How to Effectively Communicate with your Teen	6	118
Winter 2017	Mindful Parenting of Teens	4	66
Spring 2017	Parenting in the Digital Age	2	47

“Our parents are thirsty for [wellness programming]. Our public schools no longer do programs about drugs and alcohol. It was a surprise to us that parents and kids don’t have opportunities to talk about these issues Parents are embracing this.”

– Synagogue Leader

Teen-led programming, another key focus of the LAJTI, is increasing somewhat through the Accelerator programs as well as the Teen Innovation Awards. After intentional planning through the Accelerator, three Accelerator programs introduced teen-led opportunities and recruitment strategies. Staff acknowledge that this strategy requires significant time to provide mentorship to teens designing and leading programs. A fourth program (Maccabi Clash) designed but did not incorporate the teen-led offering. Programs can continue to experiment with how they approach teen-led programming, and may leverage the best practices from other youth programs that have done this successfully. Staff may need additional training and skill development to support this approach.

INFORMATION & MARKETING

Getting the word out about LAJTI and Jewish teen programming is vital to ensuring teens and parents are aware of the new and exciting opportunities in the community. As noted earlier in this report, **Jewish teen program leaders note that they had hoped LAJTI would provide them with more or more visible marketing opportunities, but this has not yet developed, in their opinions.**

The LAJTI website was still under construction during this second year of the Initiative. The delays with the website have been disappointing to many LAJTI participants and observers. Accelerator program staff had expected to be able to introduce their programs to new audiences through the website.

LAJTI leaders have experimented with a mix of marketing strategies. Excitement was high this year for LAJTI swag—including highly revered custom socks delivered via swag bags to *B’nai Mitzvah* and Jewish day school

teens, and mugs for Community Internship supervisors. More traditional print and email methods of marketing, and brochures and print advertisements, also advertised Initiative opportunities.

Recognizing that at least one parent tends to be involved in a teen's decision to participate in an activity or not, the Federation continues to send email blasts and post social media ads directed toward parents.

LAJTI has spent time trying to help programs use social media for outreach and marketing. During the past program year, LAJTI staff drew on lessons they learned last year from their Social Media Fellows program. Several Accelerator program leaders say they learned more about social media during the past year, through experience as well as training, and as a result they have adjusted their expectations of what social media can and cannot do for recruiting teens and marketing their programs.

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

It is difficult at this time to determine whether the Initiative's efforts are changing the Los Angeles Jewish community's perception of Jewish teen education and engagement. In interviews, the small set of stakeholders and Accelerator staff concur that LAJTI activities have expanded awareness of Jewish teen programs and their value, but this increased awareness is still within the near reaches of programs active in LAJTI (e.g., community members added to advisory committees, synagogues publicizing new activities, staff and volunteers in Jewish communal organizations).

It is expected that several activities launched during this program year (2016–17) will expand the Initiative's circle of influence further into the Los Angeles Jewish community over time (e.g., parent workshops, Wellness grants, new cohort of organizations participating in the Accelerator).

Several of the design elements of LAJTI—the choice to incubate innovative but small programs, the concentrated efforts with strategic partner-grantees, and the investments in Jewish teen educator professional development—aim for deep changes with potential to reverberate and affect others. The true understanding of whether and how LAJTI has raised community interest and support for teens will likely not be possible to see or hear until several years down the road.

“Teens are always an issue for our synagogue, but the solutions to getting them in are elusive. No matter how hard we work at teen issues and families, it doesn't seem to matter—teens are not coming. It's not just about the teen, it's about the family. No matter what we do, some families just won't engage.”

– Synagogue Leader

Championing Change

Considering LAJTI's work over the past two years—both the benefits accrued to involved teens, professionals, and organizations, and the structures and systems LAJTI has put or is putting in place to make changes possible—it becomes clear that LAJTI is designed to be more than a collection of innovative teen programs and supports to make them possible. At its most fundamental level, LAJTI has taken on the mantle of championing change for the Los Angeles Jewish community in its approach to Jewish teen life.

LESSONS LEARNED

Looking through this frame, we offer the following insights into LAJTI's process and experience of championing change. We see these ideas as part of the growing understanding of what is necessary for LAJTI to cultivate the broad-scale change needed to succeed in the long run.

Shifting Mindsets from Teens as the Object to Teens as the Subject

LAJTI's Theory of Change defines the Initiative's ultimate impact as follows: Through a rich, collaborative infrastructure and a diverse mosaic of accessible and affordable Jewish teen opportunities, Los Angeles Jewish teens engage in activities that promote a healthy, personally meaningful, and fulfilled Jewish life. What is important to note in this statement is that teens are not the object of what LAJTI is doing; rather, teens are the subject, with the work of LAJTI aimed to provide teens with what they want and need to live whole lives—now—as teens.

LAJTI is embracing and finding value in this orientation of putting teens at the center of their work. LAJTI intentionally choose the human centered design process championed by UpStart to “accelerate” program concepts—a concrete manifestation of a teen-centered mindset. LAJTI staff also say they are drawing upon what they are learning from UpStart about the human-centered design process in other areas of their work. And they hope and intend that others in the community will see value from the example being set by the LAJTI initiative programs and incorporate this approach into their work as well. There are anecdotal examples of this happening already; time will tell whether this broader uptake can be realized.

Living the Experiential Learning Experience

The concept of learning by doing is embraced by many Jewish educators, and educators more broadly. Though an experiential learning experience wasn't what LAJTI staff were expecting for themselves, some staff describe their work and the benefits from it in those terms. LAJTI gives space to learn by doing—try an approach, see what works and what doesn't, and make adjustments based on reflections and learnings. This method is espoused on

many levels, from the Funder Collaborative guiding the Jewish Teen Education and Engagement Initiatives across ten communities, to the LAJTI staff leadership, to UpStart’s work with Accelerator programs.

LAJTI’s response to the Social Media Fellows is a prime example. LAJTI staff had a concept of how to capitalize on teens’ social media facility for the benefit of the community. The initial pilot shed light on limitations of the program, and LAJTI staff made adjustments to try to accommodate. After a second pilot, LAJTI staff realized that some core assumptions behind this program model didn’t hold true, and they have since shifted LAJTI’s approach to social media outreach.

In another example, BJE staff shared that even though the LAJTI Theory of Change talks about integration, and on paper this concept resonated with them from the start, each staff member began working on different supports for teen educators. The concept of integration and collaboration started to fully take form only when staff members found natural opportunities to strengthen their work through creating connections and linkages. They had to experience the limitations of more siloed work to start to find ways to break down these silos. This development was not dictated but rather learned from experience.

Experiential learning translates into LAJTI staff being better able to accomplish what they set out to do. There is humility in this realization. It assumes that a design will not be perfect the first time out of the box, or even the second or third. Experiential learners value flexibility, seek to learn and not just confirm, and embrace the concept of failing forward. Understanding that no one has all the knowledge needed for success also helps to level the playing field. Everyone is a learner—and learns through experience—to move forward on a positive path.

Embracing the Variable Pace of Change

The experience of LAJTI in its first two years illustrates that change happens at different rates in different places, and what moves forward more quickly or slowly is not always what was anticipated. For example, the Teen Leadership Council, conceived in the first year of LAJTI, was slow to start, but the work quickly gathered momentum in Year 2 with the shift to the Teen Innovation Awards. Since LAJTI is rolling forward at an uneven pace across components, it is important for LAJTI leadership to step back and look beyond the individual pieces of work to ensure that, as a whole, the Initiative is making steady forward progress.

Shifting away from the Federation at the Center

An important realization over the course of the past two years is that LAJTI’s ultimate success depends, at least in part, on shifting the focal point for the work with teens away from the Federation and toward a more diffuse system with broad community buy-in, involvement, and ownership. The concepts that LAJTI is espousing—from a human-centered design process, to teen wellness, to experiential learning as an operational practice and more—will hold water in the long term if these concepts are embraced and incorporated into work with teens across the community, in a grassroots way, rather than as an ongoing directive from the centralized Federation. This runs somewhat counter to the current culture, and it is still a question as to how much this shift can actually happen. But it is becoming more and more clear that this shift will be necessary for the sustainability of what has been seeded by LAJTI. BJE staff referred to the Hebrew word *tzimtzum* to suggest how the Federation will need to—and is already starting to—intentionally make space to be filled by others.

Recognizing LAJTI as a Systems Change Initiative

More than creating programs and developing educators to run those programs, LAJTI is attempting to fundamentally change the Los Angeles Jewish community’s orientation to teens. To ensure the Initiative’s ultimate success, stakeholders should consider LAJTI as a systems change effort.

A system comprises multiple components or elements that are interrelated and interconnected. Shifting a system therefore requires addressing not only the individual components, but also the relationships and connections among those components. A systems change effort aims to create the conditions where change can happen.

It is evident, then, that LAJTI's long-term goals require a systems change approach. LAJTI is promoting a view across the Los Angeles Jewish community—among organizations, stakeholders, funders, and others—of Jewish teens as a community asset to be supported and embraced for who they are. This effort will require individuals and organizations to shift their approaches to Jewish teens and connect with others in different ways. This is very much a work in progress, as witnessed by the limited evidence at this time suggesting that these kinds of changes have taken place throughout the community. Nevertheless, the goal is no less important. Sustainability of LAJTI's outcomes and intentions over the long term will require a system of relationships, prioritization, funding mechanisms, and champions, which can be adapted over time to provide creative, engaging, nourishing opportunities for Jewish teens.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and lessons learned from this evaluation, we also offer the LAJTI leadership the following recommendations to consider in the coming year.

- **Maximize learnings from the Accelerator:** To further the benefits of the Accelerator, it would be useful for participants from the first cohort to engage in learning conversations with other Jewish educators to further discussions about innovative program ideas and marketing techniques. Rather than making one or two formal presentations, it might be preferable to arrange to have cohort members in conversations with participants in Selah meetings and at other LAJTI educator events.
- **Continue to refine professional development offerings:** To further the benefits of professional development offerings, double down on the strategies and tactics that have demonstrated the highest impact. Consider re-focusing the Selah Community of Practice solely on network building, and explore options for more localized gatherings and/or virtual connections to navigate the geographic spread, and more actively facilitating connections among members outside of meetings. At the same time, leverage the expertise of seasoned educators and professionals via the Mentoring Fellowship and the accessibility of already-existing educational opportunities via the University Access program to provide skills and knowledge building opportunities.
- **Explore greater application of human-centered design:** While learning around programming for teens is an obvious priority, consider what best practices or key learnings from this arena, and in particular human-centered design, can be applied to adults and adopted into the professional development offerings.
- **Highlight teen wellness:** The first two years of LAJTI established teen wellness as a foundational issue. It will be important to showcase the work of the teen wellness grantees and the Teen Wellness Community Conference in Year 3 to provide tangible examples of ways educators and programs can enhance wellness in their work with teens, even if this is already a key part of the pedagogical framework.
- **Revisit the LAJTI Theory of Change:** Initiative leaders should review the theory of change and assess whether and how the strategies, tactics, and constituent groups have combined to create the broader influence on the community. This reassessment and adjustment becomes increasingly important as the Initiative passes the halfway point on its timeline, and sustainability issues begin to loom large.

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