



Executive Summary

Expanding Innovative Opportunities for Jewish Teens

Learnings from a Three-Year Evaluation of the Denver Boulder Jewish Teen Education and Engagement Initiative

Prepared for the Rose Community Foundation & Jim Joseph Foundation

INTRODUCTION

The Denver Boulder Jewish Teen Education and Engagement Initiative (the Initiative) began in 2014 with a partnership between Rose Community Foundation and the Jim Joseph Foundation as part of a larger effort across 10 communities in the US to create new Jewish teen programming and increase teen engagement. The Initiative invested in five grantees to grow existing programs and start new programs for Jewish teens, as well as to provide support to youth professionals who work with Jewish teens and build the community’s interest in and support for Jewish teen programming.

- [Boulder Jewish Teen Initiative \(BJTI\)](#) launched with the Initiative to offer teens in Boulder fun ways to explore Judaism through a mix of one-time and ongoing opportunities. BJTI also serves as a hub for Jewish teen programs in Boulder by curating a website and program calendar.
- [Jewish Student Connection \(JSC\)](#) began organizing Jewish student clubs within public high schools in Denver in 2011. The Initiative funding enabled JSC to hire additional staff members to increase its presence in high schools and explore options for expanding to middle schools.
- [jHub](#) plays many roles related to Jewish teen engagement: organizing community-wide events; housing a central repository of teen programs on its website; convening, training, and supporting youth professionals in the region; convening a Steering Committee to oversee the Initiative; and running teen programs. The Initiative funded a director to oversee and expand into a community-serving organization.

Grantee	Total Unique Teen Participants 2014–17
BJTI	278
JSC	969
jHub	676
Moving Traditions	270
PTC-U	130

This summary draws upon findings from Informing Change’s “Expanding Innovative Opportunities for Jewish Teens: Learnings from a Three-Year Evaluation of the Denver Boulder Jewish Teen Initiative,” November 2017.



- [Moving Traditions](#) brings together small, intimate groups of teen girls and boys to build positive relationships and think more deeply about gender, cultural expectations, ethics, and Jewish life. Initiative support helped Moving Traditions hire a director in Colorado and experiment with a new program model.
- [Presentense Colorado – A Program of Upstart \(PTC-U\)](#) is a new addition to the Denver and Boulder communities, made possible with Initiative funding. It offers a one-year Fellowship for teens to design and market community action projects that reflect Jewish values, while engaging their Jewish peers through empathy interviews and testing prototypes.

The Initiative funders partnered with Informing Change to evaluate the first three years of work using a mixed-method approach, gathering data from teens, professionals, parents, community leaders, and Initiative grantees and funders.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

As one of the first community initiatives to launch, this Initiative paved the way for expanding Jewish teen engagement locally and nationally. The Initiative sought to take risks and try innovative ways to reach new teens, and as to be expected, some have worked while others fell short. Through it all, there has been a constant theme of learning among the grantees and community leaders. What follows are the key takeaways from this study.

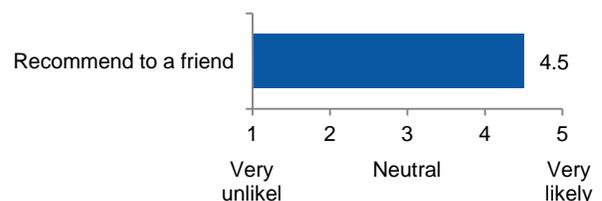
Impacting Teen Jewish Growth & Development

Teens enjoy their Initiative experiences and derive positive outcomes in their lives thanks to Initiative programs.

Throughout the Initiative’s first three years, most teens (71%) rate the grantee programs as great, followed by 22% who say they had good experiences and only 7% saying they had OK experiences. Furthermore, teens express very high likelihood to recommend the programs to their friends (Exhibit 1). Beyond enjoying their time, teens are getting something out of the programs, with most teens who participated in 2016–17 (60–84%) saying they increased in the Initiative’s 13 Jewish learning and growth outcomes. Grantees are successfully growing teen interest in engaging with the Jewish community—most teens participating in Initiative programs report increases in connections to Judaism and the Jewish communities.

Teens are very likely to recommend grantee programs to their friends.

Exhibit 1 | n=214



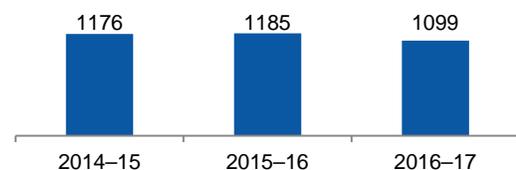
Engaging Teens

Grantees provided over 2,300 program experiences in the first three years of the Initiative.

The grantees each succeeded in reaching hundreds of teens, and collectively, they provided over 1,000 program experiences each year (Exhibit 2). Grantees experimented with different programming options and recruitment techniques to bring in more teens, which resulted in 66% of the teens surveyed through these first three years saying they were new to grantees’ programs and 11% of the Jewish teens specifically saying that they were new to Jewish programs overall.

Grantees reached many teens in Denver and Boulder.

Exhibit 2 | n=5 grantees | Teens served by Initiative grantees (duplicated count)



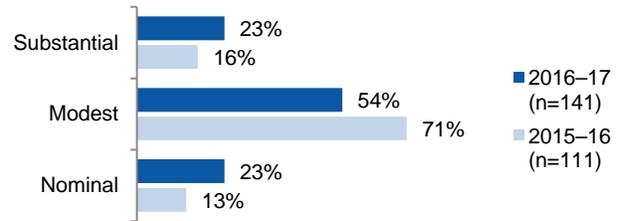
Diversifying Jewish Teen Involvement

Grantees had some success in introducing new teens to the Jewish community and continuing to engage teens who were already fairly involved.

Over the first three years, the teens who completed the surveys and participated in grantee programs represent a more highly engaged population than the Initiative was hoping to reach in the first years. For example, 75% of Jewish teens have had a Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

Nevertheless, there are some signs of more diversity among participating Jewish teens, including those who have been less involved in the Jewish community previously. From their survey responses, 23% of teens who came to grantee programs in 2016–17 are from nominal Jewish backgrounds (Exhibit 3), which is significantly higher than the 2015–16 teens (13%), suggesting that grantees have made some progress in recruiting less-engaged Jewish teens.¹

The Initiative reached more Jewish teens from nominal backgrounds in 2016–17.



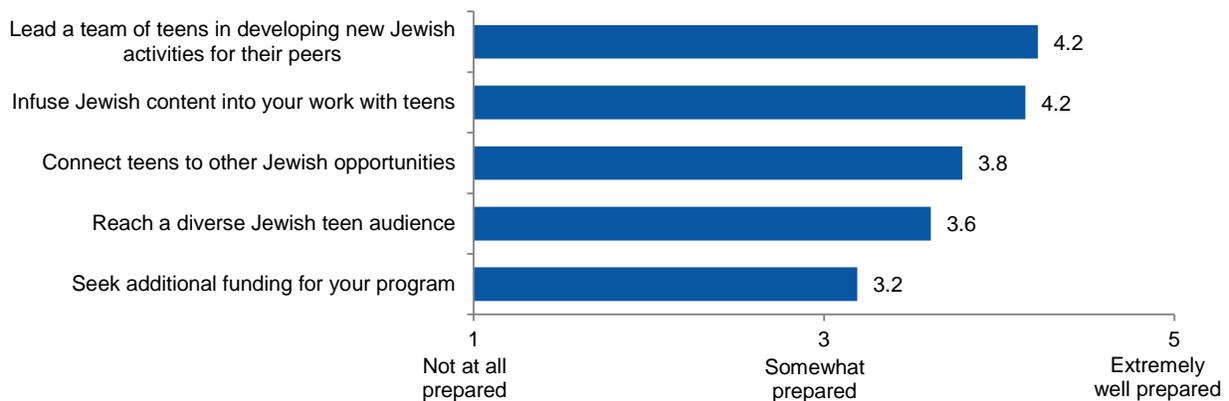
Professional Development

Most professionals feel prepared to work with teens and connect them to Jewish opportunities, but less prepared to support their programs' finances.

Professionals feel ready and able to support teens in developing programs for their peers and to infuse Jewish content into their work (Exhibit 4). In addition to their group work with teens, nearly all (93%) professionals surveyed provide one-on-one mentoring to teens, with almost half (47%) saying they do it often. This enables them to provide individualized guidance and support for teens. Organizationally, fundraising is the area flagged as professionals' top need for more professional development by themselves and by community stakeholders. A challenge, however, is that not all professionals have this as part of their specific roles although all of their organizations would benefit from further developing this skill.

Professionals feel prepared to reach diverse teens and provide them with a meaningful Jewish program experience.

Exhibit 4 | n=23–28 | Extent to which youth professionals feel prepared to...



¹ Based on scoring of the Background Classification Framework (Appendix B in the full report provides more information).

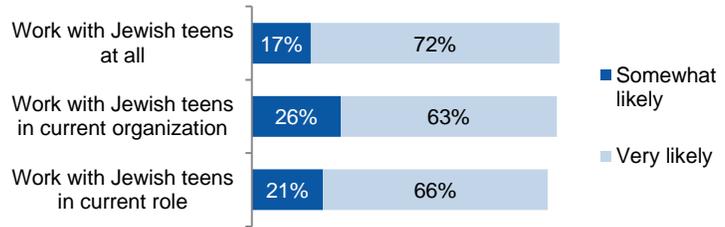
Professionals' Commitment to the Field

Youth professionals are committed to their work with teens, at least in the short term.

On average, youth professionals in Denver and Boulder have been working with Jewish teens for five years and in their current positions for three years. Almost all believe they will still be working with Jewish teens in their current role (66%) in the next two years (Exhibit 5). A similar percentage of youth professionals believe that they will still be working with Jewish teens in their current organization (63%), and the majority believe they will still be working with Jewish teens in any capacity in the next two years (72%). However, Initiative leaders often speak of high turnover among the youth professionals, leading to the hypothesis that the professionals feel committed to their organizations but are open to new opportunities as they arise.

Youth professionals are committed to continuing their work with Jewish teens in the near future.

Exhibit 5 | n=27-29 | Over the next two years, how likely professionals are to...



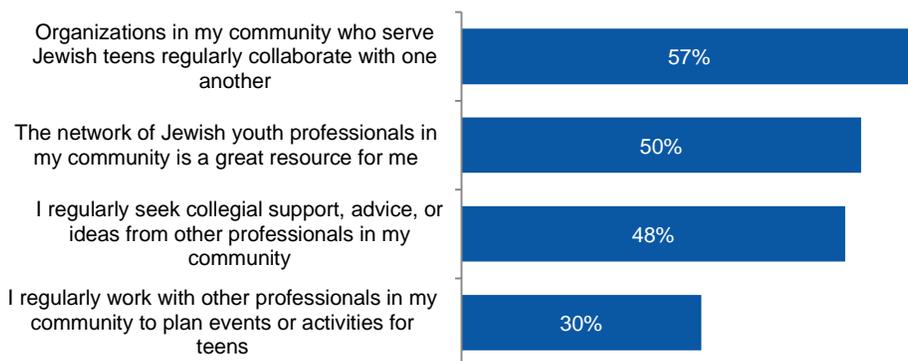
Community Collaboration & Network

Grantees demonstrated excitement and cooperation in working with one another, but their example of collaboration has not trickled out to inspire other community professionals to collaborate more.

Throughout the course of the Initiative, grantees shared introductions to teens and parents, engaged in cross-program promotion and recruitment, and learned with one another. However, in the Denver and Boulder communities, the focus remains on supporting the quality and success of individual programs. Over the course of the Initiative, professionals report that collaboration within the community—among individuals and organizations—increased for some and remained the same for others (Exhibit 6). Compared with individual collaboration, more professionals tend to report an increase in the frequency with which organizations in the community that serve Jewish teens regularly collaborate with one another. It may be that the individual professionals do not take part in collaboration as an aspect of their own roles.

Overall, some professionals report that community collaboration and the value of the Jewish youth professionals' network increased over the course of the Initiative.

Exhibit 6 | n=21-23 | Percentage of professionals reporting increases



LESSONS LEARNED & RECOMMENDATIONS

In the first three years of this Initiative we have learned a great deal, as have the grantees and Initiative funders. Knowing what we know now about both the Initiative’s challenges and its successes, we offer the following reflections in order to share what we’ve learned with other communities considering similar approaches.

High quality programs produce high quality results	Very small operations have natural capacity limitations	Launching new programs takes time, iteration, and patience	Targeted supports strengthen and accelerate innovation	It’s hard to provide one-size-fits-all professional development to a diverse group of educators and professionals
Build capacity to prepare for inevitable changes	Setting goals supports reflection and learning	Intentional strategies are essential to formulating intended outcomes	The task of tracking data on teens should not be taken lightly	

Specific to the work continuing in Denver and Boulder, we identify four recommendations based on evaluation findings over the first three years:

- ❖ Update the **goals** of the Initiative for the upcoming grant cycle
- ❖ Provide more individualized **professional development** for youth professionals
- ❖ Re-clarify **relationships** between funders and grantees
- ❖ Develop more concrete goals and strategies for **community engagement**