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FINDINGS FROM THE
**NORTHERN NEW JERSEY
JEWISH COMMUNITY STUDY**



Jewish Federation
OF NORTHERN NEW JERSEY

jfnnj.org

Friends,

Thank you for ***Joining the Conversation!***

We are very grateful our northern New Jersey community came together to join the conversation and make this important research project possible. We benefitted from the input and guidance of a taskforce of lay leaders, expertise from an advisory council of organizational professionals, the input of synagogue clergy and board members, and of course, the survey respondents.

We embarked on this research with a team of experts from Rosov Consulting, eager to better understand the needs, interests, and aspirations of those within the Jewish community of northern New Jersey. The enclosed report includes the key insights and findings from this research. By sharing this information, we hope to build a stronger and brighter future for our entire community.

In addition to funding from the Federation, this research was made possible with funding provided by The Russell Berrie Foundation. We are deeply appreciative of their partnership, leadership, and passion for this work.

Thank you for your interest in learning more about the Jewish community of Northern New Jersey. This report is extensive and contains an abundance of data that will keep the conversation vibrant for years to come. It is just the beginning! Together we will use this information to strengthen our Jewish future.

Sincerely,

Roberta Abrams, *Chair, Community Strategic Initiative*

Dan M. Shlufman, *President*

Lee Lasher, *Past President*

Jason M. Shames, *CEO*



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Commissioned by Jewish Federation of Northern New Jersey, with support from The Russell Berrie Foundation, and conducted by Rosov Consulting, this study is designed to aid the Northern New Jersey Jewish community in better understanding its needs and aspirations, strengths and challenges, experiences and perspectives. As the community's first comprehensive study in eight years, it is rich in information derived from community leaders, a survey of community members, focus groups and interviews.

THE PROCESS

The study began with a series of engagement meetings with lay and professional communal leaders, which surfaced key issues and challenges facing them in their efforts to serve their varied constituents. These sessions, held in Northern New Jersey, guided the development of the survey categories and questions.

Following the engagement sessions, an opt-in (or nonprobability) survey was designed and fielded online through communal agencies—including Federation, JCCs, day schools, synagogues, and Jewish Family & Children's Services—and lists of likely Jewish households purchased from a data vendor. Federation also implemented a comprehensive marketing plan that included elements focused on reaching those less engaged with Jewish organizations. More than 3,100 respondents in the Federation's service area—which includes all of Bergen and Hudson Counties and parts of Morris and Passaic Counties—completed the survey from December 20, 2021, through February 4, 2022. While opt-in surveys tend to attract more "engaged" respondents than a random sample, the respondents in this study consist of a broad spectrum across social and demographic characteristics *and* Jewish connections.

The study also collected qualitative data from online focus groups and interviews in the spring of 2022. A total of 72 focus-group and interview participants were recruited from survey respondents and through communal organizations. Interviews were also conducted with eight communal professionals working to support different constituents in the community.

THE FINDINGS

CONNECTIONS AND BARRIERS

- The Northern New Jersey Jewish community has a strong foundation of connections and touch points in Jewish life. In addition, there are many opportunities available to strengthen those connections. Nearly four-in-ten respondents to the survey said they feel “very connected” to the Jewish community. Among those who don’t, two-thirds expressed interest in being more connected, and there is a broad range of programming topics that appeal to them.
- In focus groups, participants emphasized social networks, shared values and experiences, support systems, and a sense of belonging as key features of their Jewish communities.
- Simultaneously, the community faces barriers to greater connections and challenges to communal cohesion. As the survey was fielded during COVID-19, pandemic restrictions were indicated as significant barriers. Lack of appealing programs, lack of time, and financial costs are the other top barriers that prevent respondents from feeling more connected to the Jewish community.
- Most respondents say they have “a lot” in common with others who share their denominational identity, but few feel they have a lot in common with Jews in other denominations. Instead, most respondents say they have “some” (as opposed to not much or nothing at all) in common with others, suggesting there are opportunities for bridge building across denominations.

ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNAL ORGANIZATIONS

- The Northern New Jersey Jewish community has many communal organizations, offering community members numerous options to engage in Jewish life, to receive needed services, and to support through charitable donations.
- Survey respondents vary in how engaged they are with communal organizations. Where they live, what Jewish denomination they identify with, their age and their income are among the many factors associated with different *forms* and different *levels* of organizational engagement.
- While there are general patterns of how people connect to organizations, engagement can vary based on factors such as denomination, age, and generation. Examples include:

Orthodox respondents are consistently among the most highly engaged. Age is strongly related to making charitable donations but only weakly related to synagogue membership. And Gen Z respondents are among the least likely to donate to Jewish causes but among the most likely to participate in adult Jewish education.

PRIORITIES FOR FUNDING

- Over 75% of the respondents described the following **causes** as very Important funding priorities: safety and security locally and in Israel, social and human service needs for vulnerable populations, planning for the Jewish future, broadly defined Jewish education, and Holocaust education.
- Over 60% of the respondents described programming for the following **specific groups** as very important funding priorities: programs for older adults, families with young children and teenagers, newcomers to the community, and college students.
- The top **causes** that respondents prioritized for funding outpolled the top **specific groups** they prioritized.

EDUCATING CHILDREN

- For parents deciding on Jewish educational experiences for their children, the most important factors that inform their decision-making are the overall quality of the school, program, or offering; appropriate services and fit for their children; a Jewish environment with other Jewish children; and the Jewish content of the school/program.
- Denominational affiliation and household income are strongly related to immersive Jewish educational choices, such as day schools, day and overnight camps, and teen trips to Israel. Modern Orthodox respondents and those earning \$250,000 or more are the most likely to provide their children with these educational experiences.

ISRAEL

- Connections to and support for Israel are generally strong among survey respondents, with 87% saying they are very or somewhat emotionally attached to Israel.
- At the same time, there are emerging challenges in the community's relationship with Israel, especially among some younger survey respondents, Reform and Just Jewish respondents who do not feel as strongly connected to Israel as others.
- Most respondents feel safe expressing their views about Israel to other Jews in Northern New Jersey all or most of the time, but a minority say they feel safe only sometimes, only once in a while, or never.

ANTISEMITISM

- Eight in ten survey respondents think there is some or a lot of antisemitism in Northern New Jersey, and half (52%) think there is more today than five years ago. A third of survey respondents reported a personal experience with antisemitism in the past year.
 - Certain groups reported experiences with antisemitism more than others. Notably, antisemitic experiences were elevated among respondents identifying as People of Color or LGBTQ+, respondents with disabilities, younger respondents, and respondents residing in Hudson County and Morris/Passaic Counties excluding Wayne.
 - Up to 20% of survey respondents refrained from certain Jewish activities and behaviors due to concerns about antisemitism. Examples included: removing or not wearing something distinctively Jewish (20%), not identifying themselves as Jewish (19%), or not participating in Jewish activities or events (14%).
 - A very large majority of respondents who experienced antisemitism did not report it to Jewish communal agencies or law enforcement agencies. Even respondents who were physically threatened or attacked only reported the incident about half the time.
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DIVERSE IDENTITY GROUPS

- Survey respondents from diverse identity groups included those who: identify as People of Color (3%); identify as LGBTQ+ (5%); have a disability (6%); have a child with special needs or a disability (5%); are in an interfaith marriage or partnership (6%); are Russian Speaking Jews (5%); and are Israelis (7%).
- Between a half and three-quarters of respondents from diverse identity groups—Jews of Color, LGBTQ+ Jews, those in interfaith marriages and partnerships, and those with disabilities—report a sense of and desire for community with those who share their identities.
- At the same time, they often feel less connected to the broader Jewish community than others. Among respondents from diverse identity groups, barriers to connection include feeling the broader community is not welcoming enough to them; does not offer meaningful programs, events, and opportunities for them; and—for those with disabilities—does not provide adequate services and accommodations. Additionally, some feel uncomfortable in Jewish organizational spaces.
- Russian-speaking and Israeli respondents have their own tight-knit communities but often report lower levels of communal engagement and connections to the broader Jewish community.

HUMAN SERVICE NEEDS

- Human service needs are widespread, with 46% of respondents indicating one or more services were needed for themselves, someone else in their household, or a close relative in Northern New Jersey in the past year. It is helpful to again note that the survey was fielded during COVID-19. The most commonly cited need is mental health serviced for adults, followed by needs around financial planning, career counseling and job training, coordinating/providing care for others, and mental health needs for teenagers and children.
- About a third of respondents who indicated a need for human services did not receive them, though it is important to note the survey did not ask about the cause or causes of these service gaps.
- When asked about potential future service needs, respondents said It is most important to receive the following services from a Jewish organization: older adult needs, mental health needs, care for those who can't care for themselves, and respite care for caregivers.

ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY AND FINANCIAL AFFORDABILITY

- Overall, most respondents' socioeconomic status is strong, but others face economic challenges.
- Twenty-one percent of all respondents are economically vulnerable, defined as those who said they are currently just meeting or do not have enough to meet, their basic needs (12%), or who just met or did not have enough to meet their basic needs at some time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, though they are more financially secure now (9%).
- Among selected groups of respondents—People of Color, people who identify as LGBTQ+, those with disabilities, and the unemployed—levels of economic vulnerability approach or exceed more than 50%. For others—including those who are divorced, separated, or never married; residents of Hudson County and Morris and Passaic Counties (excluding Wayne); Gen Z and Millennial respondents; and those with less than a college degree—levels of economic vulnerability approach or exceed 35%.
- Among all respondents, about four in ten report they have experienced financial constraints on their own Jewish communal participation, while about the same share of those with children ages 6–17 report financial constraints on their children's community participation.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

In all of these areas, the survey findings and the insights provided in the qualitative data suggest a series of strategic questions for the Jewish community (and communities) of Northern New Jersey. For example:

- How should the community confront antisemitism, and how can the community address safety concerns among institutions and their members?
- How should the community both build upon our strong connections to Israel and foster further connections and support?
- What else can the community do to help those facing economic vulnerability and other service needs?
- How can the community better support parents who wish to make Jewish educational choices for their children?
- And, how can the community facilitate greater connections among its members with each other? How can the community address the concerns of diverse identity groups that often feel less connected than others to the Jewish community?

Addressing these and other important strategic opportunities and challenges will be key to the community's strength and vitality as it charts its path forward.



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