



**National Incubator for Community-Based Jewish Teen
Education Initiatives
Qualitative Research on Jewish Teens
Fall 2014-Winter 2015**

**From Theory to Outcomes:
Jewish Teen Education and Engagement Outcomes
Background and Executive Summary**

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This document includes background on the National Incubator's work with the Jewish Teen Education & Engagement Funder Collaborative, as well as an executive summary and introduction to the methodology the National Incubator employed for its qualitative research on Jewish teens.

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Background

The **National Incubator for Community-Based Jewish Teen Initiatives** of The Jewish Education Project, supported by the Jim Joseph Foundation, seeks to expand and deepen Jewish teen education in the United States through its collaborative work with 14 members of the Jewish Teen Education Funders Collaborative—strategic funders re-imagining Jewish life for teens in **10 communities throughout the United States**. The National Incubator consults with these organizations as they develop their strategies and initiatives and supports the Funder Collaborative as a thought partner in this large-scale project.

To augment its work with the Funder Collaborative and create value for the field of Jewish teen engagement at large, the National Incubator is working with a team of researchers and evaluators under the direction of **AIR and Rosov Consulting** to create **shared outcomes, indicators, and measurement tools** that will gauge Jewish education and engagement among teens participating in Jewish experiences during their middle school and high school years. These metrics will allow funders and teen educators to collect important baseline data on local Jewish teens and help the communities measure their new initiatives. In the aggregate, with shared tools evaluating each of the local initiatives, the Funder Collaborative will be positioned to conduct a thorough analysis of its collective efforts. This will enable all stakeholders to gain an understanding of their combined outcomes and provide actionable learnings about which strategies are most effective at influencing the Jewish learning and growth among teen participants.

Importantly, these metrics and effective measurement instruments will be adaptable across communities and different Jewish settings. The tools will be available to educators, funders, professionals, and policy makers from across the Jewish community to gauge their work as well. The Jewish Education Project and Funder Collaborative have engaged a wide range of stakeholders in this process to ensure that the final set of tools will be useful and credible for the field at large.

The Jewish Education Project appreciates the support of the **Jim Joseph Foundation**, the **Schusterman Family Foundation**, the **Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah**, and the **Marcus Foundation** in this project.

Executive Summary

Scholars studying Jews have written extensively about the complexity of Jewish identity in the 21st century. Despite all we posit about Jewish identity, it is still a concept filled with disagreement, dissatisfaction, and murkiness. (Levinson 2014) To emphasize the changing nature of this discourse, Ari Kelman (2014), professor at Stanford University writes, Jewish identity, “ain’t what it used to be.”

The concept of Jewish identity is even more challenging when applied to teens, whose self-understanding and conception of the world is in a regular state of flux. Summarizing a 2009 research study on adolescents and brain development conducted by the Center for Adolescent Health at John Hopkins University, Meredith Woocher (2014) wrote:

As teens move from early to late adolescence, their cognitive capacities expand along multiple dimensions. In the early teen years (ages 10-14), teens expand their intellectual interests and capacity for abstract thinking, or the ability to “think about things that cannot be seen, heard, or touched [such as] faith, love, trust, beliefs and spirituality, as well as higher mathematics.” As they continue to mature (ages 15-19) teens develop a richer inner life through the capacity to examine and reflect upon their experiences and insights through “meta-cognition,” or “thinking about thinking.” They also expand their ability to engage in problem-solving and advanced reasoning, including “thinking about multiple options and possibilities, pondering things hypothetically (the age-old ‘what if...?’ questions), and following a logical thought process.

Consequentially, a schema that attempts to capture the complex nature of Jewish teen identity must account for the developmental transformations teens undergo in these years. The schema must also recognize, as Bethamie Horowitz (2000) demonstrated, that Jewish identity (and identity in general) continues to develop over the journey of a person’s lifetime.

For these reasons, our framework proposes three paradigm shifts for understanding Jewish teens and the objectives of interventions created for them. The first shift is **semantic** but significant: rather than speak of *Jewish identity*, our research will speak about “**Jewish teen education and engagement outcomes**.” Identity is fluid and ephemeral, yet our research elucidated a robust set of affective, behavioral, and cognitive outcomes that can be enacted by an individual’s participation in multiple interventions throughout the course of the individual’s teen years. In the amalgam, these outcomes provide an insightful window into who teens are and can become by virtue of participating in Jewish life.

The second shift is a **move from prescriptive Jewish educational outcomes to descriptive ones**. Educators and policymakers historically conceived the

enterprise of Jewish education as making people “more Jewish” or making Jewish institutions “stronger.” Conversely, our framework starts with the individual and, borrowing from Jonathan Woocher (2012), asks, “As a result of participating in Jewish educational or engagement experiences, to what extent do you find in **your Jewishness** resources that help you live a more **meaningful, purposeful, and fulfilling human life**? Our working assumption is that Judaism and Jewish life can add tremendous depth and value to individuals in every life stage, and teenage years—precisely because they are marked by accelerated developmental change and identity grappling—offer a unique opportunity to inspire and empower young people as Jews and human beings.

The third shift is schematic. We have built our framework around **Four Core Questions for Jewish Teen Education & Engagement**, and concomitantly, **Eight Dimensions of Jewish Teen Education & Engagement** that comprise and categorize an assortment of approximately forty **Jewish Teen Education & Engagement Outcomes**. This schema expands upon the “Six C’s of Positive Youth Development”—competence, confidence, connection, caring, character, and contribution—which Lerner et alia offered in a recent Tufts University study (2013). Meredith Woocher (2014) added **Jewish content and context** as two additional C’s to this framework to encapsulate the Jewish orientation of the interventions and outcomes the framework will assess.

Methodologically, we arrived at our framework and the resultant outcomes after a comprehensive process that included:

- **A literature review** on adolescent development, Jewish identity, and relevant studies by Jewish and secular organizations working with teens—summarized in an interim report (M. Woocher, 2014)
- **Interviews** with field professionals, researchers, and funders working on initiatives related to Jewish teens—summarized in an interim report (M. Woocher, 2014)
- **Sixteen focus groups** of approximately 140 Jewish teens in Atlanta, Boston, Denver, and Los Angeles, where teens (ages 12½ -17) shared—on their own terms and in their own language—how they understand themselves as Jews and the ways in which they connect (and do not connect) to Judaism and Jewish life. We analyze these particular findings in a companion report (forthcoming).
- **Sixteen interviews** with Jewish parents from Atlanta, Boston, Denver, and Los Angeles to examine how they understand being Jewish and their children’s identity vis-à-vis the teens’ descriptions. We analyze these particular findings in a companion report (forthcoming).

It would be disingenuous to describe the findings of a process informed by nearly 200 minds and voices as unitary, self-evident, or entirely consistent. Nevertheless, we uncovered a number of themes and conceptions of what it means to be a Jewish teen that resonate with teens living in four different cities

and falling along a wide spectrum of engagement with organized Jewish life. We also found commonality among a diverse cross-section of adults—community professionals, researchers, and parents—who shared their insights with us. Unified by the eight dimensional-framework, the plurality of the outcomes reflects the multitude of influences and informants for this project, as detailed in the full report.

Below is a summary of the Four Core Questions of Jewish Teen Education & Engagement and their corresponding Dimensions of Jewish Teen Education & Engagement, along with a chart enumerating the Jewish Teen Education & Engagement Outcomes.

The Four Questions of Jewish Teen Education and Engagement

Inspired by the “Six Cs” of Positive Youth Development outlined above, we have constructed four core questions that we believe encompass comprehensive Jewish educational and engagement experiences:

1. Who am I?

- How do individuals better understand who they are and how they are developing in the world as a result of participating in specific Jewish experiences?
- What wisdom do individuals need to acquire to participate more fully in different aspects of their lives?

2. With whom and what am I connected?

- How do individuals understand their lives in relation to the life cycle and calendars of the communities in which they live?
- In what ways do individuals feel more connected to other individuals (including family, friends, educators, et al.) as a result of participating in specific Jewish experiences?
- In what ways do individuals feel a stronger sense of connection to the Jewish community, to God, and to Israel as a result of participating in specific Jewish experiences?

3. To whom and for what am I responsible in this world?

- In what ways do individuals feel responsible for their communities and society as a result of the Jewish experiences in which they participate?

4. How can I bring about positive change in this world?

- In what ways are individuals inspired and empowered to bring about positive change in the world as a result of participating in specific Jewish experiences?

The overall framing of these four questions does not necessitate that every Jewish teen experience strive to address all four questions. However, we urge leaders and institutions to consider what it would look like if every Jewish teenager were afforded the opportunity to grapple with all four of these questions in a variety of Jewish contexts during their teen years.

The Eight Dimensions of Jewish Teen Education & Engagement

From these Four Core Questions have emerged Eight Dimensions of Jewish Teen Education & Engagement:¹

1. Who am I?

Bein Adam L'Atzmo/a² (The Individual and Themselves) – **The Self Dimension**

Outcomes related to personal growth and development

Bein Adam L'Chochmato/a (The Individual and Wisdom) – **The Knowledge Dimension**

Outcomes related specifically to the knowledge (Jewish and general) individuals can acquire and assimilate in Jewish settings—to apply in those settings and in the world at large

2. With whom and what am I connected?

Bein Adam L'Zmano/a (The Individual and their Time) – **The Time Dimension**

Outcomes related to the life cycle and the calendars (including Shabbat and holidays) that guide individuals' lives

Bein Adam L'Chavero/a (The Individual and their fellow Human Beings) – **The Ethical Dimension**

Outcomes connecting individuals in a values-driven way to their families, friends, role models, educators, communal leadership, et al.

Bein Adam L'Mekomo/a (The individual and their Spiritual Being) – **The Spiritual Dimension**

Outcomes equipping individuals to grapple with their own spiritual journeys

3. To whom and for what am I responsible in this world?

¹ It is important to acknowledge that many of these outcomes are intertwined, and at this level the distinctions might not be actualities, but that they nevertheless create a taxonomy that is worthwhile for the purpose of this project.

² This framing of “Adam L’...” was adapted from the Jewish Agency’s Impact matrix of Jewish Identity as discussed in <http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/measuring-jewish-identity/>. This framing also resembles an articulation of important connections in Jewish people’s lives, as expressed by Ron Wolfson in his book, “Relational Judaism.” However the variation of the dimensions is different and the content within each dimension is also qualitatively different.

Bein Adam L’Kehillotav (The Individual and their Communities) – **The Communal Dimension**

Outcomes connecting people and allowing them to flourish within and across their various communities (including the Jewish community, their geographic community, and civil society)

Bein Adam L’Amo/a (The Individual and their Jewish People) – **The Jewish People Dimension**

Outcomes reflecting the individual’s sense of belonging to the Jewish people and to Israel

4. How can I bring about change in this world?

Bein Adam L’Olam/a (The Individual and their World) – **The Global Dimension**

Outcomes reflecting the individual as a global citizen inspired and empowered to create a better world

Jewish Teen Education and Engagement Outcomes

These are the outcomes that The Jewish Education Project delivered to American Institutes for Research (AIR). These outcomes, developed after extensive research and focus groups, were used by AIR to craft teen surveys designed to measure the effectiveness of Jewish teen initiatives.

These “Outcomes” in the right column should finish the following sentence:
As a result of a particular intervention:

Core Questions	8 Dimensions	Outcomes
Who am I?	Bein Adam L’Atzmo/a – The Self Dimension	1. Jewish teens have a stronger sense of self. 2. Jewish teens feel a sense of pride about being Jewish.
	Bein Adam L’Hochmato/a – The Knowledge Dimension	3. Jewish teens have experienced learning that has been both challenging and valuable. 4. Jewish teens have learned things that enable them to be more active participants in Jewish communities
With whom and what am I connected?	Bein Adam L’Zmano/a - The Time Dimension	5. Jewish teens learn about and positively experience Jewish holidays and Shabbat.
	Bein Adam L’Chavero/a - The Human Connected Dimension	6. Jewish teens establish strong friendships. 7. Jewish teens develop strong and healthy relationships with their families. 8. Jewish teens develop significant relationships with mentors, role models, and educators. 9. Jewish teens are able to express their values and ethics in relation to Jewish principles and wisdom.
	Bein Adam L’Makomo/a – The Spiritual Dimension	10. Jewish teens develop the capacity (skills and language) that allows them to grapple with and express their spiritual journeys.

To whom and for what am I responsible in this world?	Bein Adam L'Kehillotav – The Communal Dimension	11. Jewish teens feel connected to their various communities.
	Bein Adam L'Amo/a - The Jewish People Dimension	12. Jewish teens develop the desire and commitment to be part of the Jewish people now and in the future. 13. Jewish teens develop a positive relationship to the land, people and State of Israel.
How can I bring about change in this world?	Bein Adam L'Olam/a - The Global Dimension	14. Jewish teens are inspired and empowered to make a positive difference in various communities and world in which they live.