

Context

Our intention between the first and second meetings was to gather literature about engaging the next generation, to ask people to read and reflect on the literature, and to facilitate a discussion around people's observations and questions related to the reading. As we reviewed the literature it became clear that the literature base is vast and widely focused. We realized that we couldn't progress into selecting or analyzing readings and evaluating engagement models without answering the following questions:

- What is the purpose of the engagement? What are the intended outcomes?
- Which next generation(s) will we focus on in this initial effort and why?

Defining the purpose of engagement

We opened the meeting by explaining these thoughts and asking if it made sense to the group to spend time addressing these questions before moving forward. They agreed. We broke into two small groups to answer the questions: What is the purpose of engagement? And, what are the intended outcomes?

The themes that emerged are below. These purposes should be viewed as a starting point rather than static statement. As we learn more we will revisit, refine, and perhaps narrow the intended purposes for engagement.

Universalistic Themes

Some of the universalistic themes that emerged during the small group discussions were:

- **Belonging.** The Jewish world provides us with a sense of belonging. The sense of belonging is important to people's well-being and the vitality of the Jewish community.
- **Community.** There was also an extensive discussion about how the Jewish world provides us with a sense of community. The group talked about "horizontal" as well as "vertical" connections. As young people mature it helps them look at others in a positive way. Also that being part of a Jewish community provides people with role models as they engage on the continuous journey of defining their Jewish identity.
- **Non-judgmental/Allowing for Differences.** Each person engages in Judaism in an individual way and we should be sensitive to and non-judgmental about those differences in beliefs and practices. Judaism should be adaptive allowing people to have multiple touch points for engagement within the community.

- **Values.** Engagement happens on many levels. For some it's a way to live out their values. To some extent the discussion was about how Jewish values line up with good, solid, humanistic values. (See below for discussion of particularly Jewish values.)
- **Social Justice.** The Jewish community helps us accomplish important things in the social justice arena. The desire to work towards social justice is both Jewish--acting on the Jewish value of tikkun olam—and universal.
- **Global Interest.** There was discussion about younger people's interest in global issues such as global warming or public health.

Particularistic Themes

Some of the particularistic themes we heard were:

- **Education about Jewish Texts, History, & Wisdom.** The group thought it was important for the next generation to have a strong education rooted in Jewish wisdom, history, and texts. They should have the opportunity to draw on that wisdom as they face life's difficulties and opportunities.
- **Experience of Jewish Ritual.** The group thought it was important for the next generation to have personal experience with Jewish ritual, and to see how they might derive meaning from that ritual. These experiences might include, for example, grieving, learning, Shabbat, other celebrations, and rites of passage.
- **Deep and Broad Particularly Jewish Experience.** The group thought the next generation should have broad and deep exposure to particularly Jewish approaches to life. This will allow them to understand the potential richness of Jewish life, and make their own choices.
- **The Jewish Community's Relationship with Israel.** When engaging the next generation it is important to understand and engage their connection to Israel and their feelings about Israel.
- **Wrestling with Tradition and Beliefs.** There was a sense that younger generations want to choose for themselves and that it is helpful to assure them that there is the ability within Judaism to question and wrestle with the process.

Desired Outcomes

Some of the desired outcomes are listed below. The items listed below are a starting point and are not worded as measurable outcome statements. As with the purposes of engagement listed above, this list will be revisited and refined throughout the process.

- **Welcoming Community/Person Focused Community.** The community should be welcoming of where each individual is at in terms of commitment to the community and how they would like to engage. Engagement is focused on both the individual experience and on creating a connected and vibrant community rather than on membership status.
- **Ritual.** Recognizing that young people struggle with belief, but passing on that there can still be value in rituals. Providing more opportunity for engagement with rituals in a non-judgmental environment. Providing opportunity for young people to draw meaning and comfort from Jewish rituals.
- **Jewish History, Wisdom and Education.** Passing on Jewish history, wisdom and education to the next generation. There was discussion of Jewish wisdom concerning lifecycle events as a possible entry point to this education work.
- **Continuity.** A Jewish way of life will continue, on both the individual and communal levels, even if it looks different from what our lives look like today.
- **Increased social interactions.** More opportunities, such as those described above, will lead to increased social interactions between members of the Jewish community, which will lead to new and deepened connections.
- **Sense of personal fulfillment.** One of small groups hypothesized that all of the above (more opportunities for ritual, greater sense of belonging, living in a connected community) would increase people's well being or sense of person's sense of personal fulfillment.
- **Questioning Is Okay.** It is necessary to create space and acceptance for young people questioning the traditions and rituals.
- **Multiple Touch Points.** There should be multiple and diverse touch points for people to engage with the Jewish community in an accessible way.

Identifying the target population

The panel discussed what age range it wanted to target. Four people wanted to focus on the 18-22 age range, six people wanted to focus on the mid to late 20's, two people on the time between Bar/Bat Mitzvah, and one on high school. It was agreed that we would address the discussion of identifying our target age group in the next meeting.

Next Meeting

The next meeting was set for 8am on January 18th, Sunday of MLK Weekend at Beth Jacob.

Review big decisions and action steps

- Next time, identify target generation and what we want to learn related to our engagement of the Next Generation
- Discuss methods of learning more about the experience within our own community.
- Focus the literature review. What do we need to learn more about the research literature now that we've learned more about engagement and our age group?
- We will revisit and revise the purposes and outcomes outlined in this document when appropriate.