

Community Conversations 2016 Consultation results

The Five Categories:

Connections and Jewish Identity

The overarching theme that appeared in every conversation was the desire for and the challenge of feeling strong connections to the community. Who feels included in the community? A relatively small number of strong-willed individuals who are strong in their Jewish identity.

Who feels excluded? A large proportion of those who are participants and obviously non participants in the community. The range includes the full spectrum of views on Judaism and religious practice, diverse geography, people with challenges from disabilities to financial stress, individuals with diverse political opinions that they feel are not accepted or expressed by community leadership, some who are new to Winnipeg and others whose families have lived here for generations, and some of those who are heavily involved in various Jewish organizations.

Words like connection, belonging, outreach, and inclusion were used frequently.

Winnipeg Jews are friendly but don't easily make new friends.

Questions for discussion over lunch:

1. How can we best make Jewish Winnipeg a more welcoming place for everyone where any Jew or their loved one can feel that they belong and have a stake in our community?
2. What are the characteristics of an inclusive community? What should we strive for?

The challenges include:

Religious Diversity: *e.g. Responding to a strongly expressed view that the requirement to have expensive kosher food at events inhibited event planning and programming, a religious individual wrote back to "note that I indeed value the fact that food served at Federation events is kosher. It is one of the few places ...where I can just eat..."*

One person used very strong language: "*Winnipeg is where Judaism goes to die.*" While other younger Jews expressed the wish that their contemporaries would accept rather than challenge their Jewish practice, e.g. choosing to keep kosher or go to shul.

With references to a "religious/secular divide" the spectrum of views was broad. There are those who look for Jewish society without religious practice to find inclusiveness. The word tradition was used to describe having a Jewish milieu without prayer or religious practice as the primary purpose to be together, e.g. havdallah at a Saturday night social event.

Intermarriage: With more than 150 comments related to acceptance of interfaith/intermarried/mixed couples the challenge of acceptance by institutions and community members was clear and pervasive!

Geography: *Are we "putting an end to the north end"* was one of many comments about North Enders feeling left out. (56 references to the North End)

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One Winnipegger who grew up in Transcona commented that other Jews were surprised: *Cocooned to the point of being shocked that he went to Transcona on the bus.*

Inclusion and Integration came up for a wide variety of populations including the above as well as: people with disabilities, mental health challenges, addictions, and health challenges; immigrants; elders; those struggling with poverty; gender differences; single parents; and more.

One participant summed it up with two words. The community needs to be more *adhesive and inclusive*, exhibiting the stickiness of belonging and the warm welcome of inclusion.

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With this lens of desire for stronger Jewish identification as part of our community, look at the following four categories:

Programming for the Modern Jewish community

While there was high praise year for the Rady JCC, Gwen Selter Creative Living Centre, Winnipeg Jewish Theatre, our community's synagogues and more and many fine examples of the wonderful programs that fill the calendar with choice of events throughout the year as well as the inclusiveness of the Campus and the vibrancy of Jewish life, there were concerns, desires, ideas brought forth around a full range of topics.

One of the ongoing themes in this category was a desire for continuity of programming between age groups and across demographics. Collaboration and coordination across organizations to make sure no one "fell through the cracks" was a frequent request.

Progression of youth group, synagogues, community centre and camp with groups

And the desire for innovation was repeated in different ways.

Arts and Culture: Use art and music to engage more people through Community art shows and musical performances, talent shows, community musicals, e.g. : *Jewish visual culture; Jewish culture through the arts; Choirs, singing*

- Take advantage of community talent to teach/engage others who want to learn
- Add Jewish context through choice of subject, or simply by gathering in a Jewish place
- Expose our culture to others and welcome other cultures into our community:
 - Strengthen relationships with other ethno cultural communities
 - *Bring Jewish culture to mixed settings- so non-Jews see us*
 - Accept intermarried spouses and their culture
 - *One young woman pointed out that we could be enriched by appreciating the cultures of non-Jewish spouses that add to the fabric of the community.*

Recreation: The desire for recreational programs for all ages in a world where all Jews have access to recreation in so many other ways, reflects a desire to derive Jewish identity through Jewish society, literally being with other Jews, e.g. *Pick up sports or like 3 on 3 basketball; Jewish sports leagues / teams; Tango classes, sushi making*

Social opportunities – In every conversation the observation was made that it was challenging just to meet other Jews and make new Jewish friends. This sentiment was expressed by young and old, born Winnipeggers and immigrants, young couples and middle aged singles (widowed, divorced, never married), teens and the oldest elders, the most socially adept and others struggling with special needs. While praising the variety of programs offered within the Jewish community it was noted that they tend to be transactional in nature, i.e. buy a ticket, come with your friends, and leave. There are few forums and spaces set aside to meet and make conversation and where you can return again and again.

(56 references to social, socializing, social networking)

- *Need more space to talk!*
- *No drop in center like the "old Y"*

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- *Social connections for young adults*
- *Drop in centre for young teenagers*
- *opportunities to mingle with opposite gender*
- *opportunities to make lasting Jewish friendships*
- *Socializing in a Jewish context!*
- *“My kid wasn’t allowed {because they couldn’t bring a non-Jewish boy/girlfriend}.” “But don’t want to lose the kids you love because of the kids they love.”*
- *Activities are not equal to socializing (needs to be built in to the program design)*

Jewish experience and informal education – Programs with Jewish content, programs that include Jewish traditions, programs that celebrate Jewish holidays, informal educational programs that teach Jewish traditions without the participants even realizing it, spiritual experiences that don’t require the rejection or rigidity experienced in denominational life, innovative approaches to Judaism.

Young Jews and middle aged Jews who have travelled or lived elsewhere bring back experiences of Judaism and Jewish life that strengthen identity, provide a strong sense of community and peoplehood, and facilitate their Jewish practice. Many look for these positive Jewish experiences from all community programs, across a full range of religiosity.

The full gamut of diverse wishes for Jewish life begins with doing things with other Jews (a Tango class at the Campus, cuz I want to learn to dance and I feel Jewish when I’m in the building) and works its way through Jewish crafts to more profound holiday celebrations, all the way to a more supportive environment for being religious Jews and educational programs for those who don’t attend dayschool.

- *Jews want religion but want to craft identity without it, cultural Judaism*
- *Being Jewish is still more important in the Jewish community than ethnicity is for other cultures in the rest of the community. The intense feeling of Jewishness is from the heart of Jewish identity – anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, and the State of Israel, bereft of religious cultural content and historical knowledge. Main point – see that identity enriched with cultural, religious, linguistic content. Tradition and Culture, the heritage of a people are important.*
- *Jewish community – my Jewish community (creative around holidays) different from the institutional Jewish world (Federation and Campus)*
- *Miss the diverse communities in a place like New York City*
- *Keeping the traditions and holidays is very important for the family but would like to have more.*
- ***It would be nice to have a community that understands what I’m doing {Jewishly}.***
- *Israeli traditions at holidays. Sufganiyot, like in Israel. We need Israeli traditions but they’re not in Winnipeg. It’s Winnipeg isolation – we don’t even know Israeli artist and music*

Innovative Jewish program ideas: While the practice of Shabbat offers low barrier Jewish experiences with diverse approaches to traditions, other innovative examples offer studying the Jewish lens in innocuous and attractive ways while acting on personal beliefs and morals.

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No heart behind the activities, change the colour and it's the next holiday, not meaningful, couldn't take kids to another Purim carnival that is the same year after year. Too much over stimulation and big events, and not enough small community events with kids they know and recognize.

- **Shabbat dinner theory – glue that retains identity. And tradition (45 references to Shabbat)**
 - *Example of a home hosted chavura for kabbalat Shabbat as a community thing – religious, fun, food, but traditional religious experience. Replicate it.*
 - *Shabbat in My Neighbourhood as modelled by PJ Library in Winnipeg.*
- *Moishe House, residence with four or five people who live and run programs for peers – 22-35, Shabbat dinners, etc. (birthright leaders, active young Jews) Moishe House WOW – without walls*
 - *Need more convenient opportunity for younger generation to learn about Judaism in a non-religious manner for kids who are not involved in any other Jewish activities.*
- *Ethical gardening through a Jewish lens, e.g. Urban Adamah*
- *Social justice tourism – referring to Jewish groups that do significant work like building a school in Africa (modelled by American Jewish World Service – the Jewish Peace Corps, and copied freely by many Jewish organizations*

Discussion questions:

1. What speaks to you most about the programming issues identified through the Community Conversations? Was there anything important missing?
2. What should be the top priority to get the most impact for the future?

Other related questions for discussion:

3. Should the action planning focus exclusively on the suggestions for innovative programs?
4. How do we, as a community, accomplish inclusion and integration? (What are reasonable expectations?)
5. What do you think we should do to create more opportunities for socialization, to make friends, not just be friendly?
6. How do we program to accommodate the diversity of the community?

Consultation results

Jewish Identity and Experience –

Participants offered incredible insights into modern approaches to Jewish identity and experience. Four major areas were highlights:

- **Recognition of a paradigm shift in the way people identify and act on their Judaism.**
- **Desire to innovate and redefine to create new experiences as well as to preserve synagogue experience in new modes.**
- **Concern re youth engagement and continued Jewish experience**
- **Appreciation of immersive experiences for youth and families**

The flow of comments and ideas were diverse:

- *encourage participation across organizations – passport to Jewish life*
- *What is the new Jewish normal?*
- *Want us to be confident in who we are and comfortable in our Judaism, to engage people from different places (languages)*
- *The shifting identity of what constitutes a Jew is at risk, multiple shifting paradigms, have to redefine. As we move in to DIY Judaism, how do we redefine? Disappearing cultural markers.*
- *It's hard to sell Jewish particularity when universalism is the norm – go to work, come home, why would they choose to do something with a Jewish stamp, waiting for a fish to fly.*
- *Need to followup on immersive experiences like birthright, Gray retreat, want to invest and have a return as in they will gather to do something after, e.g. volunteer in a social justice activity.*
- *Covenantal Judaism vs practice without meaning*
- *Israel – central to identity*
- *Israel played a big part cuz of the mystique of being inaccessible, motivated to learn Hebrew. Now it's so easy, doesn't have the same appeal*
- *It would be nice to have a community that understands what I'm doing {Jewishly}.*
- *Jews want religion but want to craft identity without it, cultural Judaism*
- *World wide problem – synagogues have become places for life cycle events. Don't want you on the Sabbath, just when we need you, then you'd better be there. Hard to keep the life blood going as well as the plant. How to keep the institution going to keep all the services going at a cost they can afford. Don't pay to come on Shabbat. Have to keep the door open.*
- *Going forward do we have a community where everyone who identifies themselves as a Jew has a place and can express themselves as a Jew from the more religious to the least*
- *What role can we play with synagogues? Can't have a community without our religious institutions.*

Specific comments around Jewish Education highlighted several areas of need:

- **Strengthen day school;**
- **Add supplementary primary option;**
- **Support Jewish Studies at university;**
- **Add adult ed;**
- **Make informal adult education and experiences available;**

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- **Make all affordable**

Affordability in different spheres – MOL

Fatal to not have a high school. Education is critical /Large decline in attendance at Jewish School / Reverse the drive taking people out of the Jewish day school

Coherent, scaffolded education for children and adults that is partnered throughout the community, Limmud as an example

Do something for kids who don't have anything else. Little offered, often cancelled, yet strategic as an investment in community

Don't have our own continuing education for adults that is done in a comfortable and convenient way

Future – diversity, more educated Jews to contribute to religious life in meaningful ways

Moment in the new shul – pot luck sukkot, multiple people who held lulav and etrog for the first time, just little moment with high impact

Leftists from the early nineteen hundreds were well educated in Jewish tradition, knew what they were rebelling against, some came by after Holocaust

Went where got enough Jewish intellectual stimulation – adult education, matching chavruta partners, bus to take all the kids to conclave in a region.

Some people reject studying Torah because it was taught one way for too long that made them uncomfortable. Could have the same passage taught from twelve different angles, important to have university. Need the different ways of teaching.

Serious scholarly enterprise of Jewish studies – more than an “activity”, international standing because it's serious intellectual engagement, not just for Jewish students, unusual in North America

Daughter: “thank you for not sending me to the Jewish school system” would never have had the clothes, already mean girls in public schools, couldn't afford + already in trouble

Discussion questions:

1. What speaks to you most about Jewish identity, synagogue life, and education identified through the Community Conversations? Was there anything important missing?
2. What should be the top priority to get the most impact for the future?
3. Other related questions for discussion:
4. How do we, as a community, revitalize synagogue life as well as support new ways of acting on our Judaism?
5. What should be the goal in terms of the percentage of children we reach with Jewish education?
6. Should we do something to bring Jews together more in the age of DIY religion?
7. How do we accommodate the diversity of the community?

Consultation results

Caring Community

A community is measured by the way it treats its most vulnerable members. How do we support those struggling with addictions, mental health challenges, poverty, the infirmities of aging and more? many areas of support were named during the consultations

Affordable Housing for Seniors and for Adults with various challenges and seniors

- *Close to Campus*
- *Support services to meet a range of needs and independence*
- *A Jewish home, With access to Jewish society*
- *Kosher food*
- *Affordable for all incomes*

More support for Jews struggling with addiction

More support for Jews struggling with mental health challenges

- *Culturally appropriate services*
- *Affordable housing*
- *Accessible/affordable programs*
- *Services in the North End*
- *Affordable Transportation (door to door) to Jewish sites and events – Campus, shul*
- *Cooking in Baba's kitchen*

Transportation

- *Seniors*
- *Kids*
- *Adults with some disability*
- *Those struggling with affordability*
- *To get to the Campus*

Short Term Emergency Shelter

- *Fill the gaps – housing, transportation, short term emergency shelter*

Hospice Care

Employment Networking – Jews hiring Jews

Senior Isolation – Outreach and Transportation

Poverty

- *Basic needs*
- *Inclusion in Jewish life*

Consultation results

- *Poverty – inclusion/participation of poor*
- Breaking the cycle of poverty, addressing child poverty
- Emergency food and shelter
- “Dining with Dignity”

Affordability of Jewish life – With more than 130 direct references to affordability and cost as a barrier to participation, the solutions are diverse enough to be studied in much greater depth. It should be noted that most often this was not mentioned in the context of affordability for those living with poverty but rather the larger group of families and individuals who find cost to be a barrier to full participation in Jewish community and Jewish life

Daycare – With hundreds of children still on wait lists for Jewish daycare even after the Rady Centre opened a new offsite child care centre, it is not a surprise that the demand and lack of space was mentioned frequently. Young parents are looking for Jewish early childhood education as well as coverage for their work day and there are not enough spaces in a Jewish milieu. (>30 references)

Kashrut – frequently mentioned, the desire is for affordable kosher food, especially accessible and available fresh kosher meat

- *Need kosher facilities, etc to maintain Jewish life needs and service, sustainable religious life*

Serving the North End – see Connections and Inclusion

- *North enders, feel hard done by, everything has moved away*
- *Biggest gap – north end – gap in services presence in the north end*

Discussion questions:

1. What speaks to you most about the list of deep needs identified through the Community Conversations? Was there anything important missing?
2. What should be the top priority to get the most impact for the future?

Other related questions for discussion:

3. How do we, as a community, decide on priorities in this list?
4. How can we set realistic goals?
5. How do we accommodate the diversity of the community?

Consultation results

Infrastructure and Community Capacity

Words like cohesion, coordination, collaboration, leadership, and breaking down silos were used to describe a general desire that there be more leadership shown in various areas, sometimes specifically pointing at Federation as the host of the consultations as being the appropriate entity to take the lead as a coordinating body. These suggestions included:

- developing leadership;
- coordinating the calendar;
- bringing together partners for collaboration;
- finding sponsors;
- acting as visionaries.

Leadership role and development – As leaders in building community cohesion the community is looking to Federation to develop leadership for our organizations and support good governance with succession planning, and other kinds of governance education and tools.

One of the key thoughts that came up in different contexts was that leadership need to be more diverse and inclusive. Perceptions of leadership that was recycled from one organization to another was expressed as needing to “break up the old boys club”.

Volunteer Engagement and Empowerment – there were upwards of twenty specific examples of individuals who had made offers to create/lead/run/help with programs that they thought were being accepted where in the end they experienced rejection. This rejection was seen diversely as ageism, rejection of youth, too innovative, lack of interest in unaffiliated Jews, political ideological rejection (e.g. too left), and a “we don’t do that or do it that way” rejection of ideas.

Volunteerism is the lifeblood of our community but it seems that there is work to do in regaining the habit of accepting volunteer offers.

Baby Boomers, as they have throughout their aging, once again define the needs in this regard to engage the cohort who have time, resources, and dollars. They express the desire to get involved but without the restrictions of the work that is being offered.

- *I’m not just going to usher anymore. I want to do something meaningful.*
- *Too many gatekeepers*

Fundraising – While there is widespread understanding of the need to fundraise there was a range of comments expressed about discomfort at being asked for money or being asked to fundraise. Others felt judged for their decisions on their gift which came out as feeling rejected. There were also volunteers who wanted to feel that their work was valued even if they were not able to contribute dollars.

Communications – *“I want to know what’s going on in the community. No, I don’t read email anymore and I don’t get the Jewish paper anymore?” “If you want to reach me it better be on facebook.”* The effective communication challenge!

Consultation results

Community Capacity Building

- Recruiting and retain Orthodox and traditional Jews
- Social Justice – presence in larger societal initiatives for issues of human rights, combatting poverty, supporting the rights and acceptance of others such as indigenous women, responding to racism, etc. *“Why was there no one from the Jewish community at the vigil for indigenous women?” (find exact quote??)*
- Jews supporting Jews – There were a number of individuals who expressed the need for the community to support business and employment networking where:
 - Those looking for employment or career opportunities could be connected with other Jews who would help provide opportunities
 - Professionals and entrepreneurs would be supported in their business and professional practice by other Jews who would give preference to patronizing Jews over others in a relevant field.

Financial Sustainability - There is a certain angst over all the needs and desires of the community and the financial sustainability of all the programs and institutions needed.

Discussion questions:

1. What speaks to you most about the list of deep needs identified through the Community Conversations? Was there anything important missing?
2. What should be the top priority to get the most impact for the future?

Other related questions for discussion:

3. How do we, as a community, develop leaders?
4. What does a cohesive community look like and how can we set realistic goals?
5. How do we achieve financial sustainability? How do we raise enough funds for everyone every year?
6. How do we accommodate the diversity of the community?