



Reflections on J-Serve

The Practice and Promise of a Jewish Teen Day of Service



Reflections on J-Serve

The Practice and Promise of a Jewish Teen Day of Service

PREPARED FOR:

CHARLES AND LYNN SCHUSTERMAN FAMILY FOUNDATION

800 Eighth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001
tel 202.289.7000
fax 202.289.4983
www.schusterman.com

PREPARED BY:

BTW CONSULTANTS, INC.

Tina Cheplick • Cinnamon Daniel • Karissa Yee
2550 Ninth Street, Suite 113, Berkeley, CA 94710
tel 510.665.6100
fax 510.665.6129
www.btw.informingchange.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	i
Executive Summary	1
Introduction	4
Findings	6
Teen Participants.....	6
Communities.....	10
National Partners.....	16
Fundors	19
Implications and Considerations	21
Closing Thoughts	25
Appendix	A1



Preface

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

BTW acknowledges the leadership and staff at the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation for their dedication to effective grantmaking and their commitment to making authentic Jewish service a central part of American Jewish life. We are grateful to Wendy Rosov for her insightful guidance throughout the evaluation and to Lia Katz from PANIM for her assistance with program information.

ABOUT BTW *informing change*

At BTW we are driven by our purpose of “**informing change** in the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors.” We work collaboratively with our clients, providing strategic consulting services to inform organizational effectiveness and learning. Our information-based services include:

- Program & Organizational Planning;
- Theory of Change Development: Crafting a Roadmap for Implementation and Evaluation;
- Evaluation;
- Performance Monitoring System Design; and
- Applied Research.

We produce high-quality, easy-to-understand products that present useful information and are designed to be readily applied to practice.

Executive Summary

J-Serve was launched in 2005 by PANIM: The Institute for Jewish Leadership and Values, in cooperation with the Jewish Coalition for Service, to mobilize Jewish youth across North America to engage in service to their communities as part of Global Youth Service Day. J-Serve strengthens teen involvement in Jewish community life and highlights the importance of service as a Jewish value.

This evaluation of J-Serve 2008 was designed and conducted by BTW *informing change* to inform the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation in its decisions about how to best support J-Serve going forward. The evaluation's purpose is to increase understanding of J-Serve's implementation and its impact on participants. Of particular interest to the Foundation is whether and to what degree J-Serve has:

- Increased participants' involvement in Jewish organizations;
- Increased participants' interest in community service; and
- Increased participants' understanding of service as a Jewish value.

This is a summary of the key evaluation findings.

TEEN PARTICIPANTS

After participating in J-Serve 2008, approximately one-third of all teen survey respondents report an increase in their involvement in Jewish activities, with little variation among teens with different levels of involvement in Jewish activities prior to J-Serve.

Twenty-two percent of J-Serve 2008 teen survey respondents report no involvement or low involvement in Jewish activities prior to their participation in J-Serve. Twenty-nine percent of respondents say they participated somewhat often in Jewish activities (once a month or more) prior to J-Serve, and about half say they were involved very often (once a week or more). Findings are similar across these three groups, suggesting that the

quality and impact of the J-Serve program model has the same effect on all teens regardless of prior involvement in Jewish activities.

Approximately one-third of teen survey respondents say that service is more important in their life after J-Serve 2008. Respondents say they value helping others, are more aware of community problems and feel empowered to make a difference in the world both as individuals and as part of the Jewish community.

Over two-thirds of teen survey respondents report that they deepened their understanding of service as a Jewish value after participating in J-Serve. Organizers of J-Serve projects also believe that teen participants' understanding of service as a Jewish value increased.

Teen survey respondents say they enjoy participating in service with other Jewish teens because they make friends, have fun, feel more connected to the Jewish community and feel less isolated as Jews. In their responses to open-ended survey questions, they say they feel proud to put into action the values of the Jewish community. Teen respondents who report low or no involvement in Jewish activities prior to J-Serve cite "being with friends" as a motivating factor for participating in J-Serve more frequently than the other teens.

The number of boys participating in J-Serve is higher proportionally than in a typical organized youth service activity. Data from J-Serve community organizers and from J-Serve 2008 teen survey respondents indicate a more even distribution of boys and girls than most secular youth service programs, which typically report a higher proportion of girls.

Teen survey respondents say they value being a part of a global youth service day through J-Serve. Community organizers also report that they value having a way to link their local Jewish youth activities into the nationwide day of youth service.

COMMUNITIES

Communities report an average of 115 participants, for a total of approximately 7,000 participants in J-Serve 2008.

Inadequate follow-up with participants after the day of service is the biggest gap in implementation of the J-Serve program model and the most significant opportunity for program improvement. Only about a quarter of communities report actively following up with participants after the day of service, and 19% report they did not make any follow-up connections with J-Serve participants.

Small grants from J-Serve have high impact. The 14 communities that received the smallest of the J-Serve community grants—the \$500 Micro Grants—rate the grants as very useful. Communities receiving the larger Mini Grants (\$2,500) and Small Community Initiative Grants (\$1,800) also rate these grants as very useful.

Most communities (88%) report they plan to participate in J-Serve again in 2009. The three most frequently cited motivating factors for repeat participation are youth enjoyment (89%), providing a valuable service to the community (68%) and helping to connect Judaism to service (65%).

FUNDERS

Funders want evidence that J-Serve is achieving the impacts they expect. Funders are attracted to J-Serve by the program's low threshold for participation, which they believe holds promise for attracting youth who are not already engaged in organized Jewish youth activities. To sustain their interest and investments, J-Serve needs to provide data that demonstrates the program's impacts.



As J-Serve has developed and grown, it has become a useful tool for Jewish communities seeking to engage and support young people in Jewish life. By taking on a role in building a strong, supportive network of year-round Jewish youth opportunities, J-Serve can be a more effective gateway for teen participation in Jewish activities and service.

Introduction

*“J-Serve provides Jewish participants with the opportunity to fulfill age-old Jewish values. By engaging in community service, J-Serve participants are fulfilling the ideals of **gemilut chasadim**, acts of loving kindness; **tzedakah**, just and charitable giving; and **tikkun olam**, the idea that Jews are duty bound to help fix a broken world.”*

— J-Serve Web site

BACKGROUND

J-Serve is an initiative launched in 2005 by PANIM: The Institute for Jewish Leadership and Values, in cooperation with the Jewish Coalition for Service, to mobilize Jewish youth across North America to engage in service to their communities as part of Global Youth Service Day. J-Serve is designed to highlight the importance of service as a Jewish value and to strengthen teen involvement in Jewish community life. Now in its fifth year, J-Serve is supported or endorsed by a range of national partner organizations, including B’nai B’rith Youth Organization (BBYO), the Jewish Community Center Association (JCCA), national Jewish denominational youth groups and about a dozen others. More than 60 communities in North America have participated in J-Serve.

In early 2009, the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation (the Foundation) commissioned BTW *informing change* (BTW) to evaluate J-Serve and provide the Foundation with information that would help guide future decisions about how to best support the initiative. BTW is a strategic consulting group that provides information-based evaluation, planning and consulting services to nonprofit and philanthropic organizations.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND METHODS

The purpose of this evaluation is to gain a better understanding of the implementation of J-Serve and its impact on participants, as well as the perspectives held by the program’s major stakeholders on J-Serve’s accomplishments, challenges and future potential. Of particular interest to the Foundation is whether and to what degree J-Serve has:

- Increased participants’ involvement in Jewish organizations;
- Increased participants’ interest in community service; and
- Increased participants’ understanding of service as a Jewish value.

The evaluation questions reflect the Foundation's dual interest in understanding the impact of the program on participants and possible strategies for expanding the program to engage more participants and communities.

This evaluation focuses on J-Serve 2008, which took place on April 13, 2008. BTW collected data for this evaluation in February and March 2009. The evaluation methods included three online surveys: a survey of J-Serve community organizers, a survey of over 3,000 J-Serve teen participants and a follow up survey of 225 of these J-Serve teen participants. The follow-up survey was sent to 75 teen participants in each of three categories: teens who had high, some or low involvement in Jewish activities prior to participation in J-Serve 2008.¹ In addition, interviews were conducted with national partner organizations, funders and J-Serve program staff. Please see the appendix for further description of the evaluation methods.

THIS REPORT

This report presents the evaluation findings organized by three perspectives:

- 1.** Teen participants of J-Serve 2008 – information about who they are and J-Serve's impact on them;
- 2.** J-Serve communities – why they chose to participate in J-Serve 2008 and how they implemented the program at the local level, as well as the community organizers' perceptions about their teen participants; and
- 3.** J-Serve's national partners and funders – their motivations for supporting J-Serve, their expectations and their willingness to continue to support J-Serve.

These findings are followed by implications of the findings and considerations for J-Serve as it moves forward. These implications and suggestions are not necessarily exhaustive but are offered as a preliminary step for using the evaluation findings to increase J-Serve impact and inform planning for expansion.

¹ The even proportions across the three levels of involvement groups result in a slight oversampling of low involvement teens and a slight undersampling of high involvement teens. This is consistent with the interests of the funders who seek to identify effective methods to engage under-involved teens in Jewish life.

Findings

TEEN PARTICIPANTS

Participant Characteristics

“There are so many different ways to help out the world and be a positive Jewish person.”

— J-Serve Teen Participant

Half of J-Serve 2008 participants were frequently involved in Jewish activities prior to their participation in J-Serve. Fifty percent of respondents to the *Teen Participant Survey Part 1* (n=401) participated in Jewish activities very often (once a week or more) prior to J-Serve 2008; 29% participated somewhat often (once a month or more), 15% participated not often (less than once month) and 7% almost never participated in Jewish activities.²

Participants ranged in age from 11 to over 19 years of age, with an average age of 16 years old. While J-Serve is targeted to middle school and high school students, the average age of J-Serve participants matches the pattern for Jewish teen activities, which are typically organized as group activities targeted to high school students.

“[J-Serve] strengthens the sense of community that we as Jews feel...When you're doing service together it's no longer about who you are but about what you can all accomplish together.”

— J-Serve Teen Participant

More boys participate in J-Serve than in typical secular organized youth service activities. Teen survey respondents were almost evenly divided between boys and girls (53% and 47% respectively). Community organizers, however, estimate that approximately 57% of their participants were girls and 43% boys. While we surmise from these data that boys may be somewhat overrepresented in the teen survey sample, even the community organizers' estimates suggest that J-Serve attracts a more even distribution of boys and girls than most secular organized youth service activities, which typically report a higher proportion of girls.³ The higher level of boys also contrasts

² In the remainder of this report, teen data are from the *Teen Participant Follow Up Survey*, a sub-group of teens (n=225) who were evenly divided into teens who had high involvement in Jewish activities, some involvement in Jewish activities and low involvement in Jewish activities.

³ U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2008). *Volunteering in the United States, 2008*. Washington D.C.

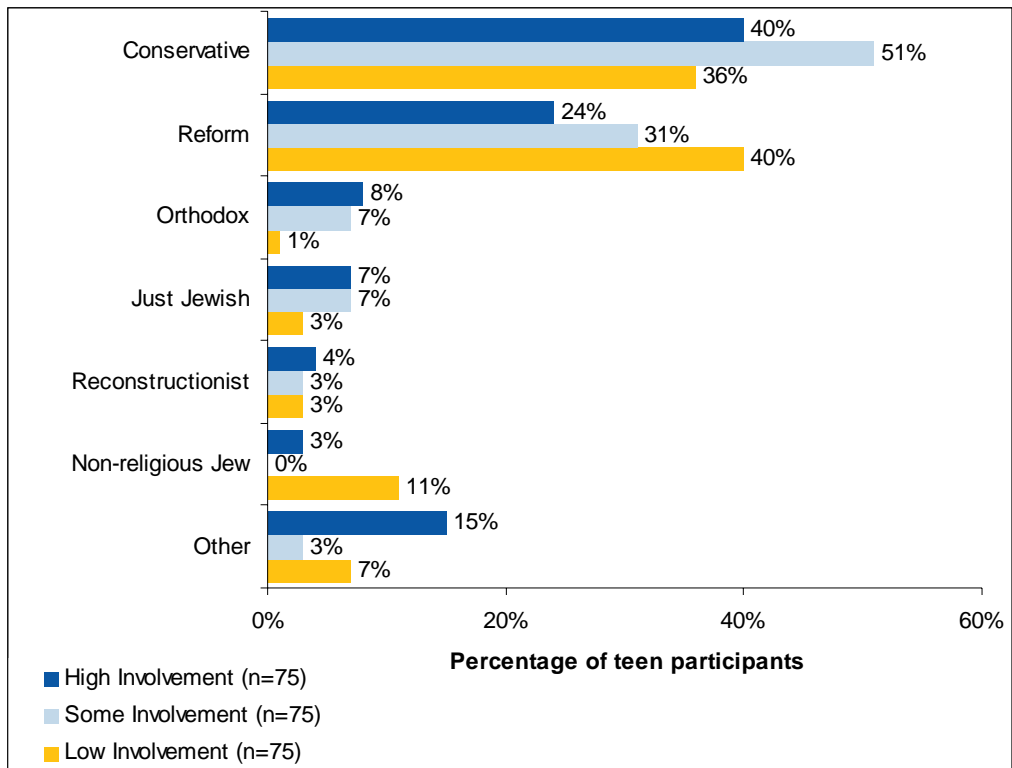
with recent research that indicates Jewish boys are more likely than Jewish girls to describe Jewish-sponsored classes or activities as “boring” (25% to 17%, respectively) and offering little of interest (41% to 32%, respectively).⁴

“If you are non-religious or don't know much about Judaism, [in J-Serve] you get the chance to learn about and experience a good deed that your religion encourages and promotes.”

— J-Serve Teen Participant

The majority of J-Serve participants identified themselves as Conservative (42%) and Reform (32%). Almost all teen respondents (96%) report that they had a bar/bat mitzvah, indicating that most had some kind of connection to a Jewish community in their early teen years regardless of their more recent level of involvement or affiliation. This bar/bat mitzvah rate is higher than the national bar/bat mitzvah rate of 85% reported in recent research.⁵

Exhibit 1
Jewish Self Identification of J-Serve Teen Participants



⁴ Kedushin, C, et al. (2000). *Being a Jewish Teenager in America*. Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University.

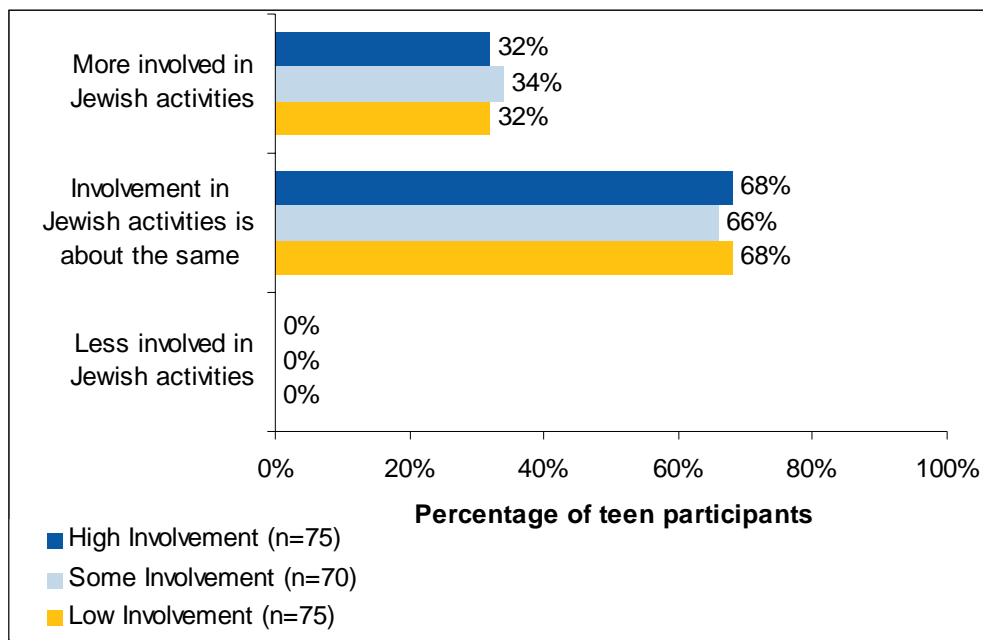
⁵ Greenberg, A. (2005). *OMG! How Generation Y is Redefining Faith in the iPod Era*. New York: Prepared for Reboot.

Teen Experience and Impact

After participating in J-Serve 2008, approximately one-third of all teens report an increase in their involvement in Jewish activities. Later in this report we identify opportunities within the J-Serve program implementation structure for increasing the likelihood of post-service day involvement by participants.

While there was slight variation between teens with different levels of involvement in Jewish activities prior to J-Serve, the data for each group are roughly the same (Exhibit 2). This similarity in findings across involvement levels is true for all of the teen data, suggesting that the quality and impact of the program has the same effect on all teens regardless of prior involvement in Jewish activities.

Exhibit 2
Change in Involvement with Jewish Activities after J-Serve 2008



“When I think about how service is different in my life, I think how powerful [it is that] a small group of Jewish teens can make a worldwide difference once [brought] together.”

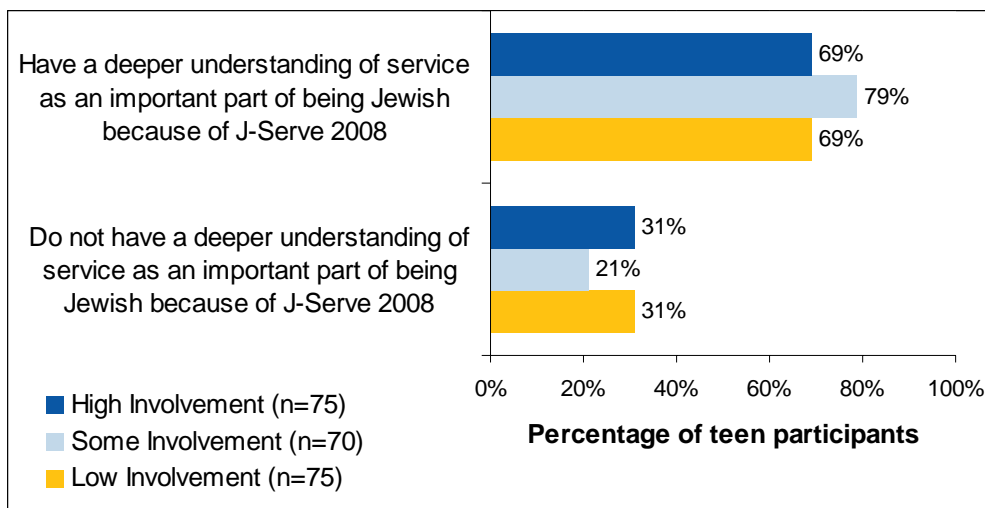
— J-Serve Teen Participant

Approximately one-third of participants say that service is more important in their life after J-Serve 2008. When asked how service is different in their life after J-Serve 2008, a number of themes emerged in teens’ comments, including that teens value helping others and making the world a better place; teens are more aware of community problems and needs; and teens value connecting with the Jewish, local, national and global community. Teens report that, because of J-Serve, they feel empowered to

make a difference in the world both as individuals and as part of the Jewish community.

Over two-thirds of teen survey respondents say they deepened their understanding of service as a Jewish value after participating in J-Serve (Exhibit 3). These teen respondents agreed with the statement, “Because of my J-Serve experience, I have a deeper understanding of service as an important part of being Jewish.”

Exhibit 3
Understanding of Service as a Jewish Value for Teen Participants



Almost all community organizers (95%) report observing some change in teens’ understanding of service as a Jewish value. The amount of change noticed ranged from a somewhat deeper understanding (69%) to a significantly deeper understanding (26%) of service as a core Jewish value.

“[It was] fun to be with Jewish teens from all over and do community service together while other Jewish teens from all over the world were doing community service too.”

— J-Serve Teen Participant

Teen participants value being a part of a global youth service day. Most survey respondents (86%) know that J-Serve is part of a global day of youth service. In their comments, they note that the connection to a national or global service event is meaningful and inspiring—they feel a sense of camaraderie and connection to something bigger than their own local community. This interest in national or global connections conforms with the experience of secular one-day youth service programs (e.g., Martin Luther King Jr. Annual Day of Service sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service).

Teens enjoy helping their community, being with their friends and being with other Jewish teens through J-Serve (Exhibit 4). Teens state that they enjoy participating in service with other Jewish teens because they make friends, have fun, feel more connected to the Jewish community and feel

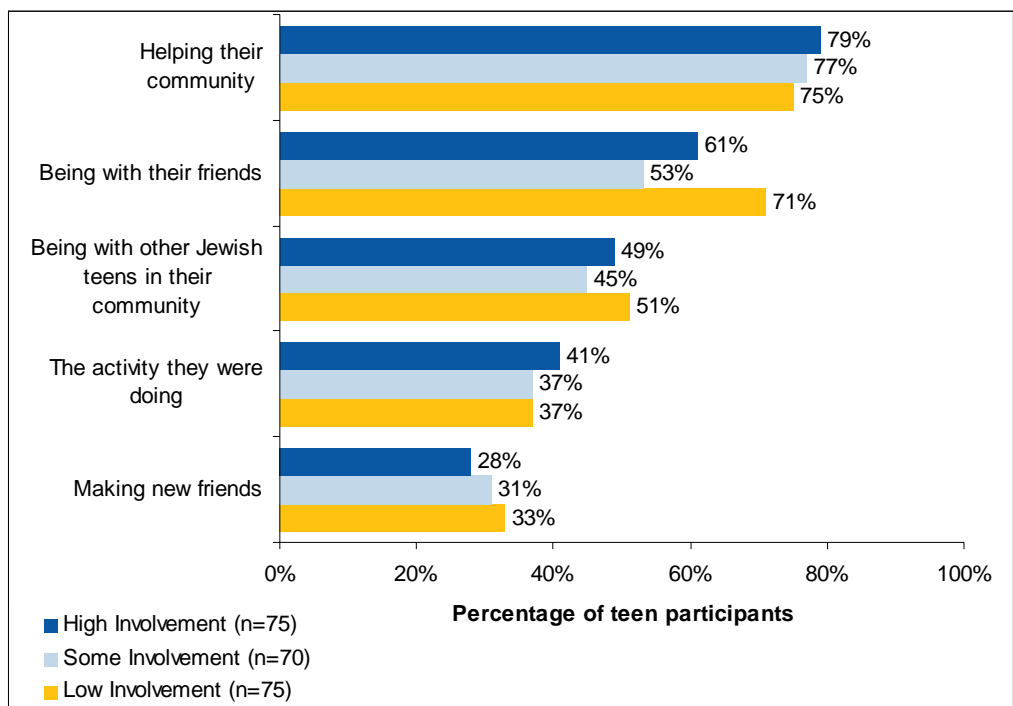
“[In J-Serve] you become closer to fellow Jewish friends and connect in a way that you wouldn’t otherwise be able to.”

— J-Serve Teen Participant

less isolated as Jews. In their responses to open-ended survey questions, they say they feel proud to put into action the values of the Jewish community.

Being with friends was particularly important for teens with low involvement in Jewish activities prior to J-Serve (71%), in contrast to teens who reported some involvement (53%) and those with high involvement (61%). This difference by involvement-level group is the most significant variance among the three groups in the teen survey data.⁶

Exhibit 4
J-Serve’s Most Enjoyable Aspects for Teen Participants



COMMUNITIES

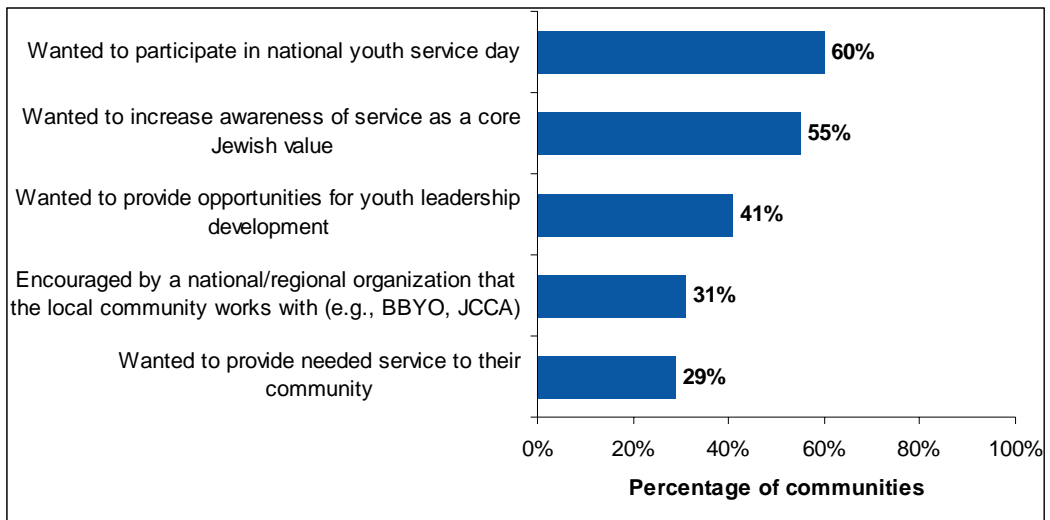
Sixty-one communities participated in J-Serve 2008, representing 22 states, one community in Canada and one community in Israel. Most communities had previous experience participating in J-Serve. For 15% of respondents to our survey, 2008 was the fourth year their communities participated in J-Serve, for 20% it was the third year and for 32% it was the second year. One-third (33%) were participating for the first time.

⁶ Further examination of the 71% of low involvement teens who indicate the importance of being with friends reveals no additional information related to gender or impact levels.

Most organizations coordinating J-Serve in their communities provide ongoing youth programming. J-Serve 2008 was a one-time, stand-alone event for youth for 31% of the organizations represented in the community organizer survey. For 69% of survey respondents, J-Serve 2008 was part of the ongoing, regularly occurring youth programming at their organization.

Community organizers value having a way to join a nationwide day of youth service. Similar to what teens report, community organizers are attracted by J-Serve’s relationship with Global Youth Service Day. This is the most frequently cited reason for wanting to be a part of J-Serve, with 60% of communities indicating this as a motivating factor for their involvement (Exhibit 5). The next most frequently cited reasons were to increase the awareness of service as a core Jewish value (55%) and to provide opportunities for youth leadership development (41%). Only 31% say encouragement by a national organization motivated their community’s participation. Given J-Serve’s structure and intention for national partners to encourage participation in J-Serve, the number of community organizers who indicate that encouragement from a national organization motivated their J-Serve participation seems low. This could indicate that communities with repeat participation in J-Serve are less motivated by partner encouragement over time.

Exhibit 5
Community Organizers’ Motivation for J-Serve Participation



Experience on the Day of Service

Communities report an average of 115 participants in their J-Serve events; extrapolated to all 61 communities, this sums to an approximate total of 7,000 participants in J-Serve 2008.

- Most teens were involved in large team activities with 12 or more volunteers on one site (74% of communities).
- Half (48%) of communities had multiple project sites, with 2 or more volunteers providing service at each site.
- Projects were slightly more likely to take place at non-Jewish service sites than at Jewish service sites (79% and 62%, respectively).
- Reflection activities (e.g., discussions, journal writing) were part of most communities' day of service activities (69%).⁷

All communities used the J-Serve name in advertising and promoting their projects. Communities used a variety of avenues to promote J-Serve in their communities (Exhibit 6). The most frequently used method of promotion is through Jewish groups and organizations (88% of communities). Only 36% of communities promoted J-Serve through non-Jewish organizations, which could be an effective avenue to reach teens who are not currently involved in Jewish activities.

Exhibit 6
J-Serve 2008 Promotional Methods

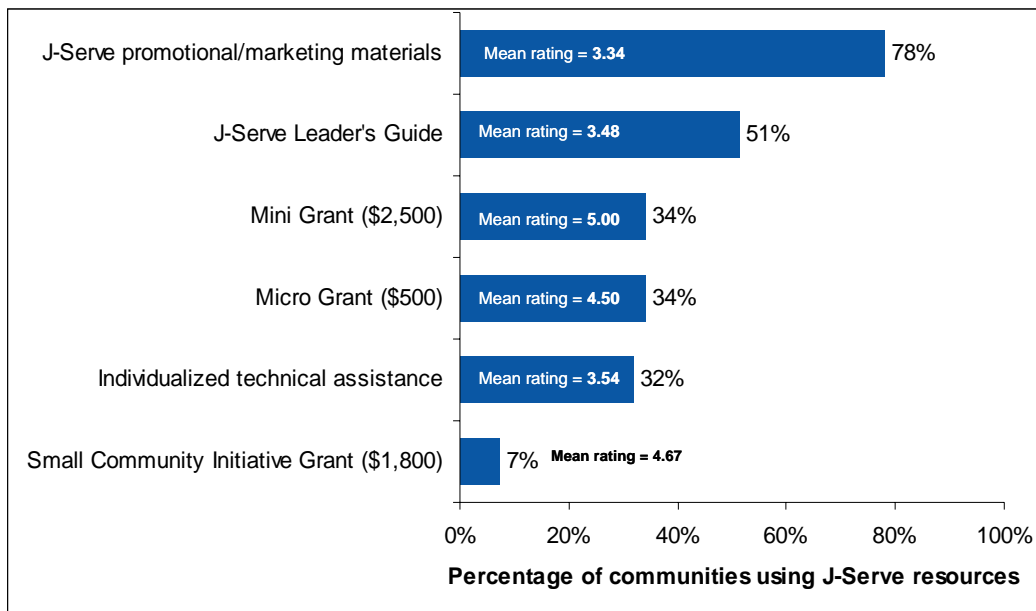
Ways Communities Promote J-Serve	Percentage
Through Jewish groups and organizations	88%
Announcements at events	74%
Direct e-mails to potential teen participants	74%
Direct contact with youth group leaders	74%
Ads in electronic media	64%
Ads in print media	43%
Through non-Jewish organizations, schools or groups	36%
Other (e.g., direct mailers, flyers, text messaging and phone calls)	10%

The most highly rated J-Serve resources were used by only a minority of communities. The J-Serve resources used most often were promotion/marketing materials and the J-Serve Leader's Guide (78% and 51% of communities, respectively); these resources were rated somewhat useful (mean ratings of 3.3 and 3.5, respectively, on a scale where 5 means extremely useful). Individualized technical assistance received a usefulness

⁷ Learn & Serve America defines reflection as "the process of deriving meaning and knowledge from experience and occurs before, during and after a service-learning project. Effective reflection engages both teachers and learners in a thoughtful and thought-provoking process that consciously connects learning with experience. It is a critical component of successful service-learning programs."

rating of 3.5; about one third of the communities used this resource (31%). Exhibit 7 shows the relative use of J-Serve resources.

Exhibit 7
Use of PANIM Resources for J-Serve Implementation⁸



J-Serve's small grants have high impact on communities. The 14 respondents (33%) whose communities received the smallest of the J-Serve community grants—the \$500 Micro Grants—rate the grants as very useful (mean rating of 4.5). Seventeen respondents report their communities received one of the larger J-Serve grants, either a \$2,500 Mini Grant (33%) or a \$1,800 Small Community Initiative Grant (7%); communities that received these larger grants also rate the grants as very useful (mean ratings of 5.0 and 4.67, respectively).⁹

Communities report that they also rely on funding, supplies and in-kind contributions from a range of organizations and groups, including synagogues, community based agencies, non-Jewish faith based groups, business sponsors and the service sites themselves.

In the open-ended survey questions, several community organizers expressed appreciation for guidance and help provided by J-Serve staff. One

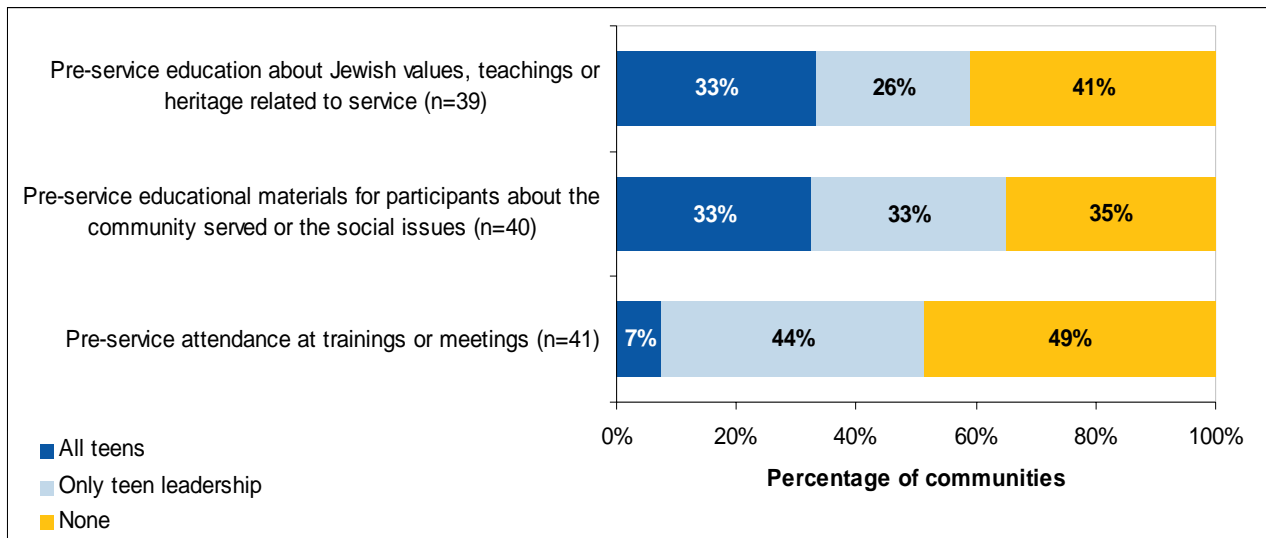
⁸ Ratings are on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "Not at all useful," 3 being "Somewhat useful" and 5 being "Extremely useful."

⁹ In 2008 J-Serve offered 3 types of grants: Micro Grants (\$500) were available to any community and were distributed on a first-come, first-served basis; Small Community Initiative Grants (\$1,800) and Mini Grants (\$2,500) were awarded to a limited number of communities.

community organizer comments, “The J-Serve staff has been exceptional in answering questions and calling to check in.”

Only one-third of the communities provided all teens with pre-service education about Jewish values related to service. Teen leadership groups and planning committee members received the highest dose of pre-service training, and 41% of participants received no pre-service education about Jewish values related to service (Exhibit 8). As stated earlier, approximately two-thirds of J-Serve participants report that they deepened their understanding of service as a Jewish value because of J-Serve, which is likely conveyed through activities on the day of service, since most participants do not receive pre-service education on this issue.

Exhibit 8
Pre-service Project Components



Only half of the community organizers (55%) describe their J-Serve 2008 service sites as a good match for teen interests (Exhibit 9). Most describe the service sites as welcoming of teen participants (86%); however, a smaller number felt their service sites were skillful at engaging teen volunteers (45%). This finding reflects two very common volunteer management challenges faced by J-Serve community organizers: ensuring the quality of multiple service opportunities in large, multi-site volunteer events and assigning youth volunteers to age-appropriate placements with supervisors skilled in working with youth.

Exhibit 9
Assessment of Service Sites

Assessment of Service Sites	Percent
Welcomed the teen participants	86%
Educated the teens about social and community issues related to service	60%
Were a good fit for our teens' interests	55%
Were well-organized and skillful at engaging teen participants	45%
Provided education about Jewish values, teachings or heritage related to service	21%

One quarter of communities actively follow up with participants after the day of service. Follow-up with teen participants after the day of service was not universal. Most follow-up that was reported tended toward more passive types of engagement, such as sending participants invitations to another event or adding participants to an e-mail list (70%). The more active follow-up activities include inviting participants to share their experience with others in a public presentation such as at a synagogue or Jewish Community Center (10%) or meeting personally with participants and/or their parents to encourage further participation in Jewish activities in the community (17%). Nineteen percent of communities report they did not make any follow-up connections with J-Serve participants. This reveals the biggest gap in how communities currently implement the J-Serve program model.

Youth service experts also identify that one-day service events must incorporate strategies to engage participants in subsequent civic activities, whether episodic volunteering or other opportunities, if they wish to achieve the events' full potential impact. For example, the goals of Global Youth Service Day for the annual event include "support youth on a lifelong path of service and civic engagement" and "educate [others] about the year-round contributions of young people as community leaders."¹⁰ Organizers of AmeriCorps-sponsored one-day service events in California ask event sponsors to connect participants with additional opportunities for service, whether ongoing or episodic, and help them learn more about the issues and communities that their one-day service projects are trying to impact.¹¹

¹⁰ Youth Service America. *Global Youth Service Day Planning Tool Kit*.

¹¹ Batenberg, Mark and Esgate, Kaira. *Nine Critical Elements of High Quality Days of Service*. Distributed at Service-Learning Institute 2008 by California Volunteers and Youth Service California.

“The beauty and challenge of J-Serve is that it is one single day. One day of service makes it easier to attract teens to work and it makes it truly special because of the singular focus. However, it is easy to have [schedule] conflicts and it limits the depth of the relationship [between the service site and the teens].”

— Community Organizer

Future J-Serve Participation

Most communities (88%) report that they plan to participate in J-Serve again in 2009. The three most frequently cited motivating factors for repeat participation include youth enjoyment (89%), providing a valuable service to the community (68%) and helping to connect Judaism to service (65%). Community organizers’ perception of the level of change among participants also encourages them to continue J-Serve: respondents estimate that 20% of teen participants became more involved in Jewish activities following J-Serve 2008. A few communities indicate they will not or may not participate again, citing schedule conflicts (5%) and the higher cost of operating a one-day group project (5%) as the barriers to their repeat participation.

Community organizers have requests for and ideas about new resources to help them to improve and grow J-Serve in their communities. These suggestions can be grouped into five categories.

- **Marketing and visibility** – Community organizers would like to see J-Serve become better known in the Jewish community and they suggest increasing marketing efforts with schools, rabbis and community-based organizations. They would like to see the crafting of a thoughtful marketing message about how a one-day service event relates to service as a core Jewish value.
- **Connections and collaborations** – Communities would like help in building collaborations among local groups. They appreciate J-Serve’s multi-organizational model but don’t always have the skills to create strong connections between Jewish organizations in their community.
- **Follow-up** – Community organizers are aware that they could improve their follow-up efforts and they would like J-Serve to help them do this more effectively. Many request help from J-Serve in compiling resource lists of local and national service activities to share with participants, both in a brochure format on the day of service and an electronic online resource that would be available year round.
- **Technology** – The J-Serve Web site is not seen as an effective avenue for communication with teens or communities. Community organizers comment that it was difficult to use and not as sophisticated as what teens are used to elsewhere. Communities would also like help in reaching J-Serve participants through social networking, since this a communications tool frequently used by young people.
- **Communication loop** – The community organizers, local service sites, community groups and their national sponsoring organizations (e.g., JCCs, Federations, denominational youth groups) would like

J-Serve to provide more information about what happened nationally on the day of service. They suggest direct contact from the J-Serve staff as well as posting photographs and stories on the J-Serve Web site.

NATIONAL PARTNERS

High Commitment or Low Priority

National partners fall into one of two distinct categories: those with high commitment to J-Serve implementation and those for which J-Serve is a low priority. High commitment partners share J-Serve’s vision of a meaningful service experience for Jewish teens that increases their connections and involvement with the broader Jewish community. Low commitment partners have a limited view of J-Serve’s potential and its contributions to their organization’s goals. Exhibit 10 outlines the differences between types of partners.

Exhibit 10
National Partners’ Perceptions of the Potential of J-Serve

J-Serve can...	Limited Partnerships	Deep Partnerships
...increase understanding of service as a Jewish value	X	X
...lead to increased participation in other activities in the Jewish community		X
...lead to increased levels of involvement in the partner’s own organization		X
...break down barriers between Jewish groups and model positive collaboration		X

“We do not supply any funding or educational materials. Because J-Serve is run by another group, it is not a priority for us. The most we do is encourage individual communities to take it on themselves.”

— National Partner

The less committed partners serve primarily as communications channels for J-Serve; they have limited expectations of J-Serve. This category of limited partners includes the denominational youth programs. Their commitment typically consists of providing information to regional and local chapters. Additional attributes of this group include the following:

- Limited partners do not provide other J-Serve-related resources to their affiliate groups. While they will not deter local chapters from participating, neither do they plan on increasing their commitment to J-Serve.
- While J-Serve’s goals match these organizations’ value of service as a core element of Jewish life, the organizations do not see J-Serve participation as an effective vehicle for increasing teen participation in their own organization.

- Despite their designation as national partners, these organizations have a low level of familiarity with the J-Serve program. This suggests that criteria and expectations for national partners may not be clear.
- These organizations have little interest in collaborating with other groups. The multi-group, collaborative aspect of J-Serve can be a deterrent for national partners that view other youth programs as competitors. These organizations are hesitant about participating in an event that might pull their members into another group.
- As a result of their limited investment in J-Serve, these national partners have limited knowledge of local chapters' experience with J-Serve. They do not have communication feedback loops to connect them to what happens with their affiliates' J-Serve projects, making them less likely to become more invested in J-Serve participation.

“We say to our field staff, J-Serve is important, we want you to do it, we want to help you market it and we’ll provide resources that will help make it meaningful and help you to follow up.”

— National Partner

The more committed national partners have higher expectations of J-Serve and provide higher levels of resources to support and encourage their affiliates' J-Serve involvement, including funding and training for participants and leaders and in-kind contributions. The national partners with deep commitment to the J-Serve program include the non-denominational organizations. Other attributes of these national partners include the following:

- The more committed national partners have a deeper knowledge of local communities' experience of J-Serve, leading to both their willingness to invest more in J-Serve and their desires for more from J-Serve. These national partners actively follow up with their local affiliates, asking about their planning efforts and day of service experiences, so that they can better support their affiliates' future participation in J-Serve.
- These national partners appreciate J-Serve's community collaborations. The organizations see themselves as builders of the entire Jewish community and value collaboration with other groups. They would be gratified to have teens attracted to their programs, but their main interest is for Jewish teens to become involved with *any* program that will increase their involvement in Jewish life. They will refer teens to activities/programs that might be a good fit for them. They are committed to reducing the silo effect among Jewish teen organizations and to showing teens that the Jewish community can come together for positive, cooperative ventures.
- The more committed national partners perceive J-Serve as a shared effort among national partners. These organizations would like to see a dialogue among all national partners and they consider J-Serve a valuable opportunity for building relationships among national Jewish youth-serving organizations.

National Partners' Perceptions of J-Serve's Ability to Grow

PANIM gets high marks for initiating and launching J-Serve. National partners respect PANIM's championing of J-Serve and implementing it on an annual basis. PANIM is viewed as an excellent educational organization and its overall reputation among the partners is positive. Many national organizations partner with PANIM on Panim el Panim trips.

National partners are not confident, however, that PANIM will be able to grow J-Serve beyond its current scope. Specific limitations mentioned in key informant interviews include:

- **Inadequate strategy in place to grow program.** National partners express concern that J-Serve's approach to growth lacks a deep, multi-year vision.
- **Inadequate staffing level and limited experience growing national programs.** While there is awareness that J-Serve staff are very dedicated and talented, national partners report that, to spur significant program growth, J-Serve staff need to be seasoned professionals with experience in taking a national program to scale.
- **Shaky relationships with national partners.** J-Serve's connections to national partners are sometimes tenuous. While there are strong relationships with some groups, even these partners express uncertainty or concerns about J-Serve's leadership and future direction.
- **Low visibility of program within national networks.** The larger Jewish community remains largely unaware of J-Serve. Partners believe that significant growth in new communities is unlikely without comprehensive, strategic outreach to national Jewish organizations.

FUNDERS

Funders are attracted by J-Serve's goals, but they are unclear if the program's impact is meeting their expectations. In its first five years, J-Serve has received funding from four foundations and donors. Funders interviewed for the evaluation endorse the objectives of J-Serve in general and they support the concept that a focused day of service can encourage Jewish organizations to work together to engage the less affiliated Jewish youth in their community.

Funders express interest in J-Serve because of its potential to engage large numbers of Jewish youth in service. They are attracted to J-Serve by the fact that the program's low threshold for participation holds promise for attracting a wide range of youth, especially young people who are not already engaged in organized Jewish youth activities. Other attributes favored by funders are

the multi-organizational approach at the local community level and the opportunity for youth leadership development and practice.

As J-Serve enters its sixth year, however, funders want evidence that the program is having the impact they anticipated. J-Serve has not been able to provide this information to funders' satisfaction.

Funders question J-Serve's ability to ensure consistent program quality and participant follow-up. They express concerns about whether the structure and standards of J-Serve can ensure the desired quality across all participating communities. In particular, there is a sense that participant follow-up is not adequate across all communities. Funders acknowledge that the level of follow-up in the program is critical to counterbalance the inherent limitations of a one-day service event on participants and communities.

J-Serve's rate of growth and inability to control local quality make it less attractive for funder investments in comparison with other Jewish Service opportunities. Funders interested in supporting the expansion of Jewish Service, whether in program development or numbers of participants, note that many new opportunities for investment in the growing field are being presented to them. In this competitive environment, they need to hear about more than a goal of increased numbers from J-Serve. Specific issues that funders feel need to be addressed are: a multi-year strategy for program development and expansion; the level of J-Serve staffing at PANIM and experience growing national programs; shaky relationships with national partners; and the program's low visibility within the Jewish community.

Implications and Considerations

The implications of these evaluation findings fall into three categories: improving program quality, adjusting program infrastructure and communications with program supporters.

Relative to all three categories, it is important to note that the J-Serve program is just emerging from its start-up years and is moving into an “adolescent” stage of organizational development. The considerations and recommendations in this section reflect many predictable challenges and expected development needs for programs in this stage of development.

PROGRAM QUALITY CONSIDERATIONS

It would be worthwhile at this point for J-Serve staff to reassess the specific strengths and weaknesses of the J-Serve program, given the program’s goals. All of the key players in J-Serve are keenly aware of the inherent strengths and weaknesses of the one-day service program model, and they express a desire to strengthen the J-Serve program components within their purview. This openness to program improvement is a valuable asset which J-Serve can put to immediate use.

Based on the findings of this evaluation and BTW’s knowledge of and experience with other program development efforts, we recommend J-Serve consider the following actions.

Clarify the essential program elements of J-Serve. Know what makes J-Serve J-Serve and which program elements are non-negotiable. Make certain that all communities—experienced as well as new—understand and accept these as essential elements, as well as national partners and supporters.

Gather better participant and outcome data, and use it to inform program development decisions and continuous program improvement.

- Given that J-Serve is currently achieving similar levels of impact on participants regardless of their previous level of involvement in Jewish

organizations, it is possible that, with more information about participant satisfaction and post-service involvement, J-Serve leaders could identify adjustments to make within the program to heighten impact on the under-involved group. Also, by sharing with national partners the available data on participants by affiliation group, J-Serve may be able to stimulate new interest and ideas about growing and expanding J-Serve.

Set expectations for the appropriate level and type of pre-service and follow-up activities at the community level. Define the standards and then clearly communicate them and the rationale behind them. Provide guidance and resources to help communities execute these activities and assess their impact.

- Addressing the gaps in follow-up presents the most significant opportunity to improve J-Serve implementation overall. Community organizers understand the importance of this program component, and they want assistance and guidance to do it better.
- Increasing the prevalence of pre-service education is another opportunity for increasing program impact. Pre-service information augments the limited exposure to service and learning available in a one-day service activity. J-Serve can consider developing its own framework for pre-service education, or promote the use of the growing body of resources on Jewish Service.

Continue to build the capacity of communities to deliver J-Serve through training, financial incentives, peer learning and other means. Encourage and support communities in assessing participant satisfaction and program impact, and in increasing the number of youth-appropriate service sites.

- The lower percentages of service sites reported as being skilled in working with teens and matching teen interests call for program development and partnerships at the community level, especially in the veteran J-Serve communities. This is an area to consider for future J-Serve support and training. The one-day service model requires skills for assessing a community's available service opportunities in many aspects, including participant capacity, location and access on the day of the scheduled event as well as the fit with teen interests. There is greater potential to positively impact participants' future involvement levels when service sites are more skillful at engaging teens.
- As the number of experienced communities increases, there is a need for variation in J-Serve resources and technical assistance to match community experience levels. For example, the support needed by communities new to J-Serve differs from that needed by experienced

ones who seek to improve their collaborations or the quality of their J-Serve projects. Also, the increasing number of experienced communities offers the prospect of providing more opportunities for shared learning and peer support among communities.

Balance the pace of program growth with continuing efforts to ensure program quality. Look for new communities with existing youth service networks and youth leadership opportunities.

PROGRAM INFRASTRUCTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Based on the findings of this evaluation, we suggest J-Serve consider the following:

- Define and clarify national partner roles and responsibilities.
- Seek new and diversified revenue sources. Although J-Serve can no longer attract funding through the status of a start-up, the program has the opportunity to restate the case for supporting the program as it accumulates data on impact.
- Develop and use a strategic plan to guide decisions about pursuing opportunities and addressing challenges.

COMMUNICATIONS WITH PROGRAM SUPPORTERS

Funders, national partners and leaders of J-Serve communities all serve as key communicators about the program, its accomplishments and its potential. Based on the findings of this evaluation we suggest J-Serve consider the following:

- Articulate the benefit of J-Serve's connection to a unified global day of youth service so that national partners and funders understand the rationale for including it in the J-Serve program design.
- Share data on J-Serve's impact. The promise of a good idea, faith in reputable leadership and excitement around a start-up fades with time. Understanding how J-Serve is meeting its goals and impacting participants and communities is likely to re-energize funders, national partners and communities.
- Take some time to reflect on the complexity of the network of organizational and individual relationships and agreements required for J-Serve's success and continued growth: national linkages (J-Serve staff to national partner staff), national-to-local linkages (J-Serve staff to community organizers) and local-to-local linkages.

J-SERVE'S POSITION IN A LANDSCAPE OF JEWISH SERVICE

J-Serve is only one tool for involving Jewish youth in service and community life, and to be effective it must be utilized within the context of a community's full tool kit for engaging youth. J-Serve as a single day of Jewish Service is most successful when it occurs within a community framework that includes many other structures and organizations to provide youth engagement and leadership opportunities on the other 364 days of the year.

In order for this to happen, the organizers of a community's J-Serve event have a two-part job: to organize and operate the one-day J-Serve projects and also to engage with a broader community network to which they can link J-Serve teen participants. Communities involved in their first or second year of J-Serve will first need to focus on establishing the one-day event and building their participation levels. The more veteran communities, however, should also be involved with building partnerships with both Jewish and secular organizations that provide ongoing service and leadership opportunities for Jewish youth.

J-Serve can be an effective gateway to greater Jewish involvement and Jewish Service by teen participants if it grows to embrace this two-part view of its contributions to a community—operating a one-day event and building a strong, supportive network of year-round Jewish youth opportunities. When this is in place, J-Serve could have an integral role in growing Jewish Service in communities across North America.

Closing Thoughts

J-Serve was launched with a vision of connecting Jewish teens with one another and with their communities and community leaders through service, based in the belief that the experience of Jewish Service can strengthen teens' involvement in Jewish life. As the program has developed and grown, it has become a useful tool for Jewish communities seeking to engage and support young people in Jewish life. More than 60 communities in North America have used the inspiration and structure of J-Serve in their efforts to encourage Jewish youth to become involved in service and Jewish organizations.

A single day of service is only one element of a community's network of service opportunities and resources, as J-Serve leaders are acutely aware. As J-Serve accumulates experience, it will increase its understanding of the program's position and unique characteristics within the larger set of community resources. We hope the findings of this evaluation will assist leaders and supporters of J-Serve in understanding the program's role and potential, as well as its current level of impact, and inform their decisions about its development.