



CHARLES AND LYNN
SCHUSTERMAN
FAMILY FOUNDATION



Virtual Engagement Research

August 2020

Research Objectives

- Assess how Jewish young adults are responding to the ongoing pandemic and how they are engaging (or not engaging) with virtual programming from organizations right now.
- Understand what kinds of virtual programming Jewish young adults are seeking out right now, and why: what appeals to them about certain programs and/or organizations, what kind of needs they fill, and what it is about a program that makes it worthwhile or meaningful.
- Identify how organizations can enhance and expand virtual Jewish programming to best meet the needs of young Jews today.

Methodology

- Benenson Strategy Group surveyed 1,001 American Jews nationwide, ages 18-40, from June 29 – July 15, 2020.
- Surveys were conducted via online panel; respondents have all opted in to do research and receive invitations to the survey through their preferred method of contact. Our survey then screened respondents for self-identification as Jewish.
- Data were weighted to ensure the sample was representative of the Jewish young adult population of the United States.

Executive Summary

- COVID-19 is affecting all aspects of life for Jewish Americans ages 18-40 (personal, financial, and mental health), and they are **eager for sources of connection** to other people that they have been missing.
- One way this cohort is attempting to revive that connection is through virtual engagement, with **90% participating in at least one form of virtual engagement** since the pandemic started. And, 70% of those who have participated in a virtual event during the pandemic say that they have had at least one **worthwhile experience** doing so.
- What separates successful virtual events from unsuccessful ones is their ability to meet three key needs that are facing young American Jews right now: the needs for **community, fun, and fulfillment**.
 - ✓ While an event does not necessarily have to satisfy all three needs to be meaningful, it should satisfy at least one—and respondents gave many examples of events that satisfied all three.
- Young people are seeking out virtual activities as a way to connect and fill a void of missing things they used to do, and how participants feel during and after the event plays a key role in whether they view the event as worthwhile or meaningful. Successful virtual events can overcome Zoom fatigue and leave participants feeling good. Poorly executed events can have a negative, not neutral impact.
 - ✓ Great events leave participants feeling happy, relaxed, connected, and twice as likely to attend another event by the same or a different organization. Individuals who attend a satisfying event are also more likely to share their experience with others, explore a new ritual or practice at home, or do something differently offline as a result of that virtual experience.
 - ✓ Poorly executed or unsatisfying events leave participants feeling more tired, disconnected and frustrated, and they are much less likely to participate in another event by any organization.

Executive Summary (continued)

- While young Jews are engaging in a variety of different virtual experiences – everything from concerts to political events to lectures to trivia nights – there are **distinct needs** that many young Jews have around community, fun, and fulfillment **related specifically to their Jewishness**.
 - ✓ 70% are feeling that it is particularly important for them to connect to their Jewish identity right now, and 63% have participated in something Jewish virtually since the pandemic began.
- Overall, Jewish organizations are doing a very good job meeting young people’s needs – satisfaction numbers are high (55% very satisfied, 34% somewhat satisfied), as are intentions for repeat engagement (75% definitely or probably would attend another event).
- However, virtual engagement is not the same as in-person engagement, and organizations need to intentionally plan for virtual events rather than transplanting in-person program plans online. In addition, many virtual events fall short on issues like keeping the event fun and engaging, enabling participants to connect with each other, technological problems, or letting events go on for too long.

Recommendations for Designing Virtual Jewish Experiences

Jewish engagement has, by and large, successfully moved online. As virtual engagement continues, there are ways organizations can enhance and expand their ability to meet the needs of today's young Jews.

- **Design events that address 3 key needs for young Jews - community, fun, fulfillment.** Any given event does not necessarily have to satisfy all three of these needs to be meaningful, but it should satisfy at least one.
- **Intentionally design programming for the virtual environment rather than transferring an in-person program plan to Zoom.** Explore and understand the differences between in-person and virtual engagement, and employ best practices for virtual facilitation and creating social norms, intimacy and connection virtually.
- **Plan for hearts first, minds second.** How participants feel during and after the event plays a key role in whether they feel the event was worthwhile and whether they will attend again – with the same organization or any other. When setting goals for a virtual event, consider how you want people to feel along with the content you want to convey. You are more likely to achieve content goals if you achieve emotional goals first. In addition, while a successful event leaves participants feeling happy and relaxed, poor experiences with virtual events can leave individuals feeling worse than before the event.
- **Plan for the full lifecycle of the virtual events.** Just like you would in-person events, your virtual event should include preparation and expectation setting, the event itself, and follow up.
 - ✓ Set the tone, culture, and social norms in advance and at the beginning of the event to help participants feel relaxed rather than uncertain or anxious.
 - ✓ Don't just offer online programs - look for ways to build on rewarding virtual activities with things participants can do at home following the event - e.g. cooking, writing, reading, art, music
 - ✓ Build in ways for participants to connect personally or in small groups before, during and/or after the event
 - ✓ Follow up after the event with ways for participants to stay connected, keep learning, and/or take action.
- **Do not forget the basics.** Zoom fatigue is real, especially among Jewish young adults ages 18-29, and individuals have a low threshold for technical issues, events that run on too long, events that are not interactive or engaging.

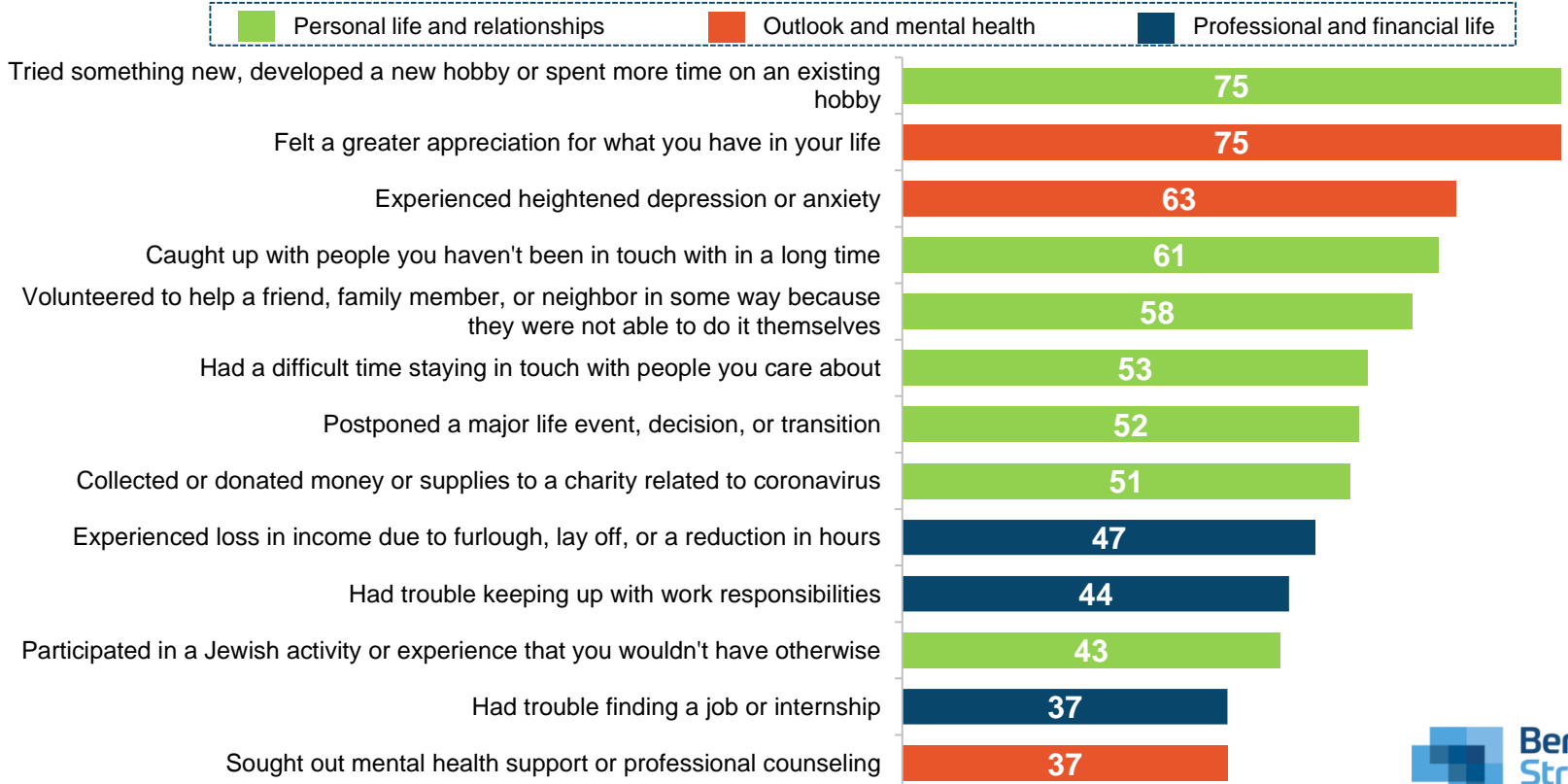


How COVID-19 Is Affecting Young Jews

The coronavirus has affected all aspects of people's lives: personal lives and relationships, their mental health, and their professional and financial lives

The effects of the coronavirus on young Jews have been far-reaching—it has touched all aspects of their lives, in both positive and negative ways—including **negative mental-health effects** for more than half of the audience, and difficult professional and/or financial consequences for nearly half. These **negative impacts have fallen particularly hard on those 18-29 years old**, including 66% who say they have experienced heightened depression or anxiety and 46% who say they've had trouble finding a job.

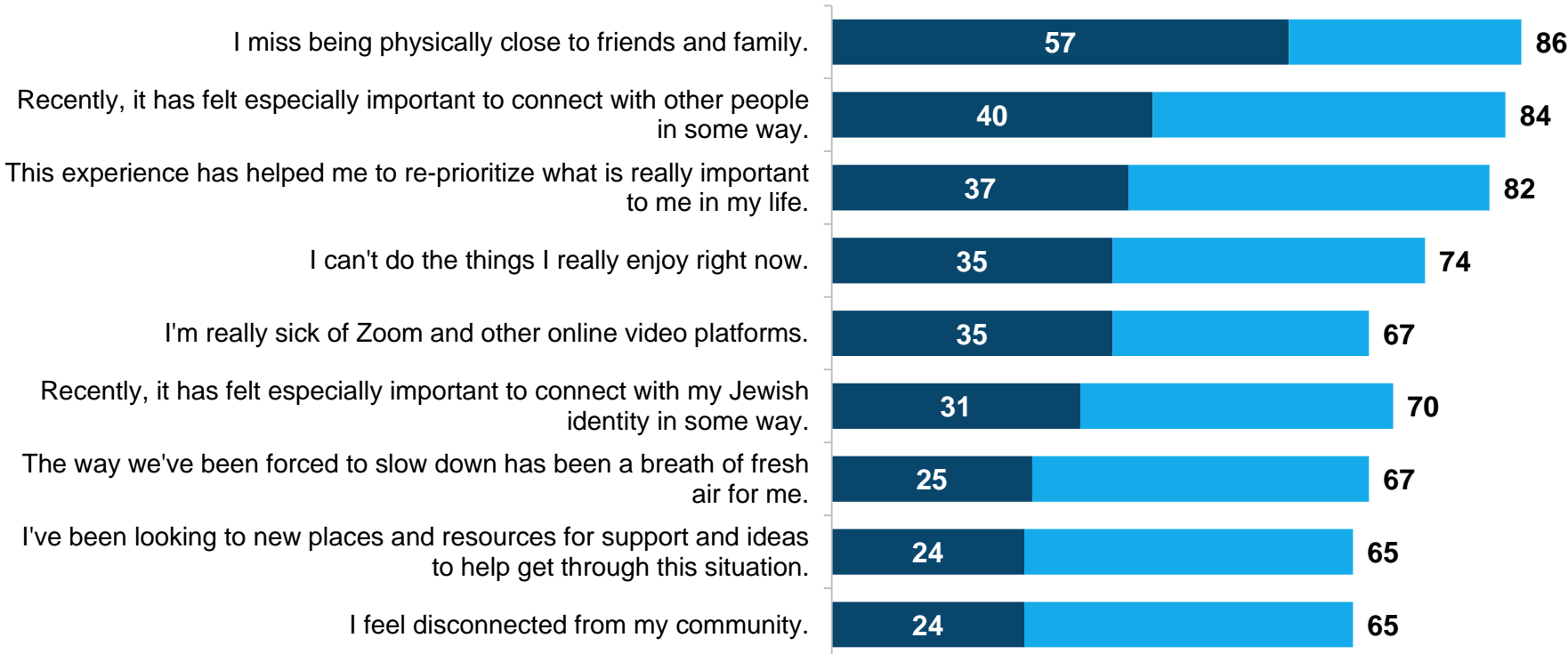
Have you experienced or done any of these things over the past few months because of the coronavirus?
% who say 'yes'



People are trying hard to stay connected—it's their top need and a top priority

In response, the top priority for young Jews is clearly to **connect with other people**. People are sick of Zoom and feel general fatigue around the pandemic, but they're still working hard to feel close to their friends and family, because that is what they have been missing the most. **Zoom fatigue is particularly acute among those under 30**, with 40% of 18-29 year olds saying they are really sick of Zoom and other online video platforms.

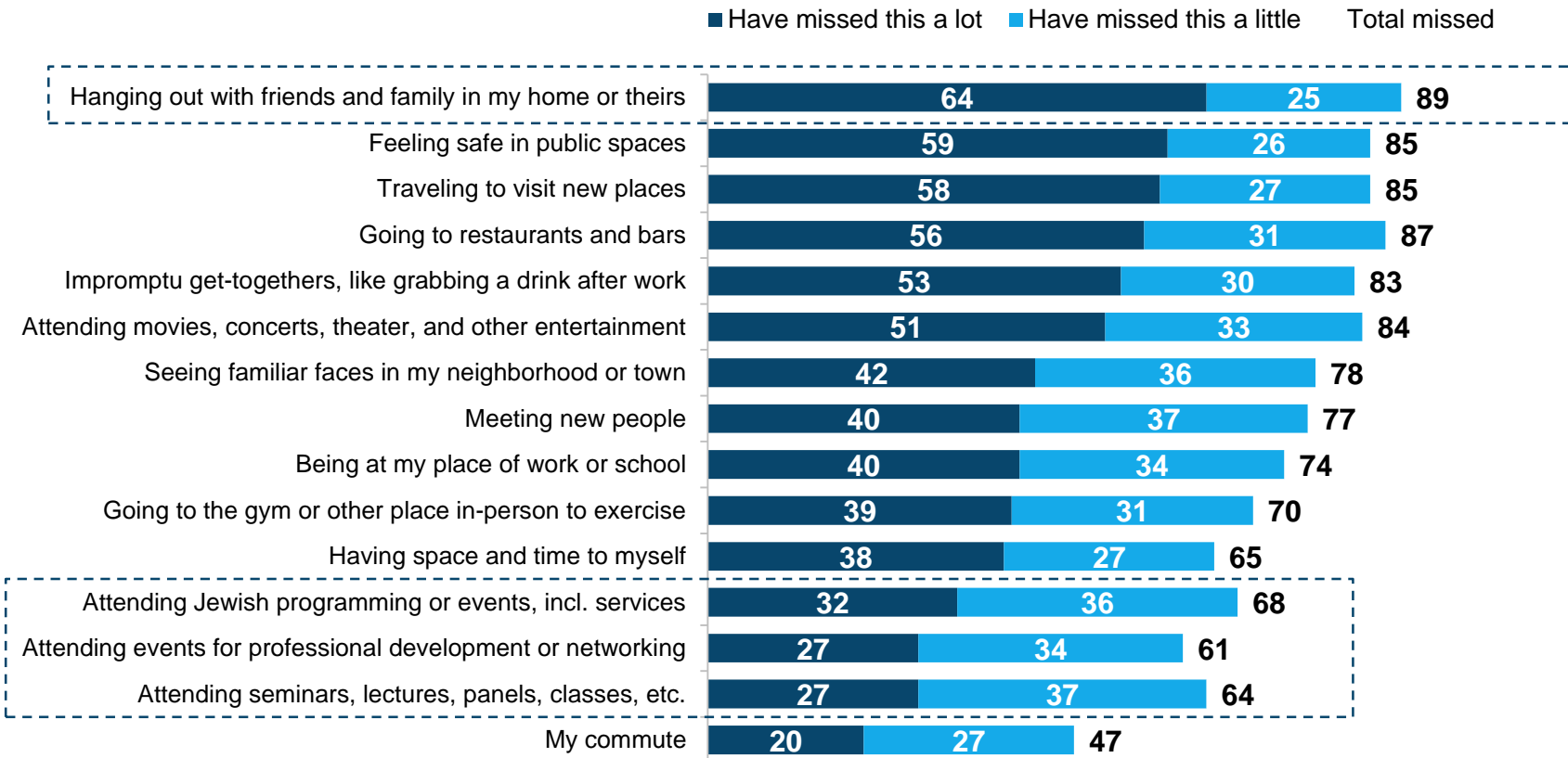
Coronavirus attitudes (% strongly agree / % total agree)



Being together with people is what is most missed, not being at events per se

That desire for connection comes through in what respondents said they have missed since the pandemic began, specifically around **being with friends, family, and other loved ones** in casual settings. When it comes to the events that Jewish organizations are offering, people **don't miss events for their own sake**—they miss **community and connection**, which those events can facilitate even in virtual settings if planned and executed thoughtfully.

Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, which of the following parts of in-person 'normal life' have you missed?



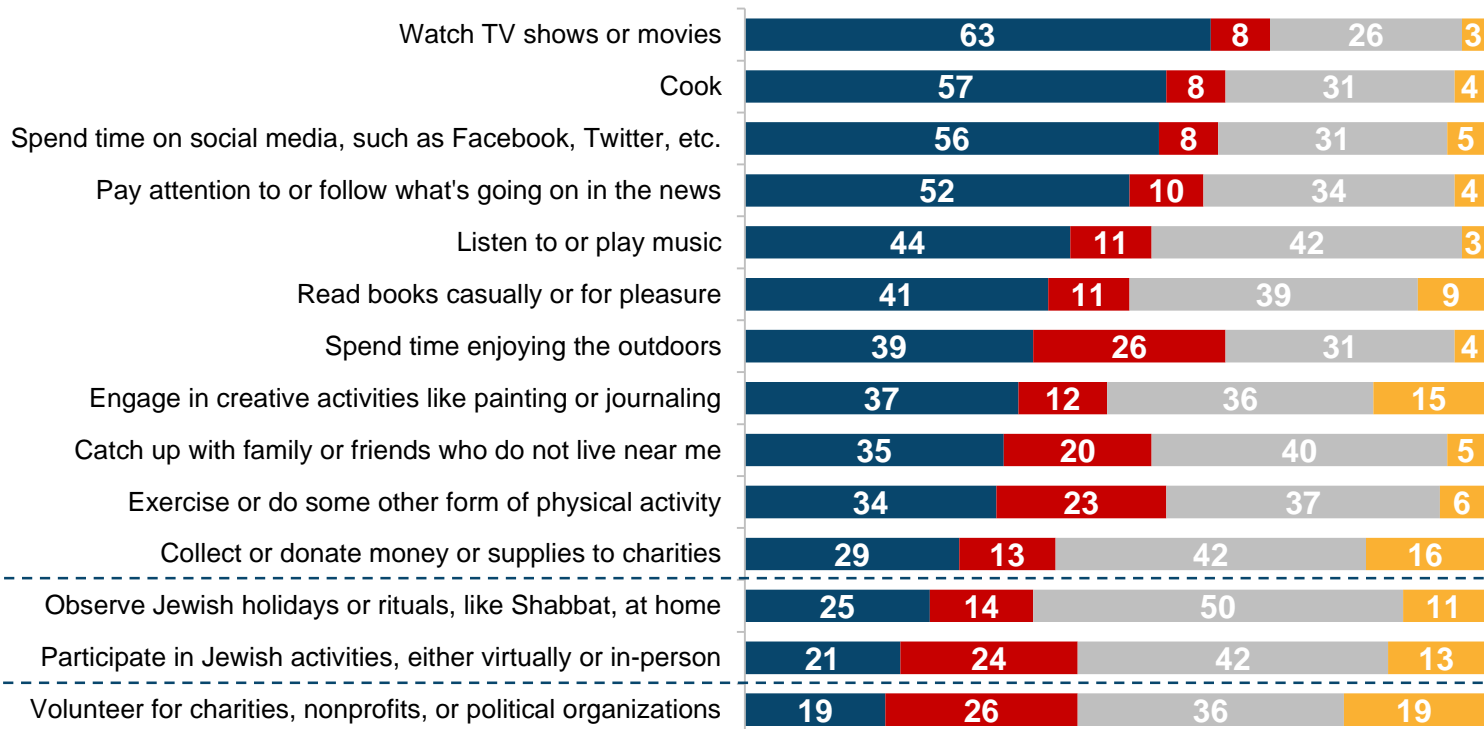
Note: Question text has been edited slightly for length

Organizations should look for ways to build on rewarding activities being done at home—cooking, reading, art, ritual—not just offer online programming

Young Jews are spending their time in a more casual way, in an at-home environment. They are spending significantly more time reading, cooking, and picking up art and creative hobbies; **organizations may be able to bring people fulfilling, meaningful programming that fits into these activities at home**, in addition to more standard live online programming in front of a computer screen. By building programming around things young Jews are doing already, organizations offer a chance to **connect with others around things they find fulfilling** rather than asking them to fit something new into their life.

The virus's impact on behavior: Things people are doing more, less, or about the same of since pandemic began

■ More often ■ Less often ■ About the same amount ■ Never did this



Young Jews are doing more at-home ritual and less Jewish activities. 10% are doing ritual for the first time, 8% Jewish activities for the first time

Note: Question text has been edited slightly for clarity

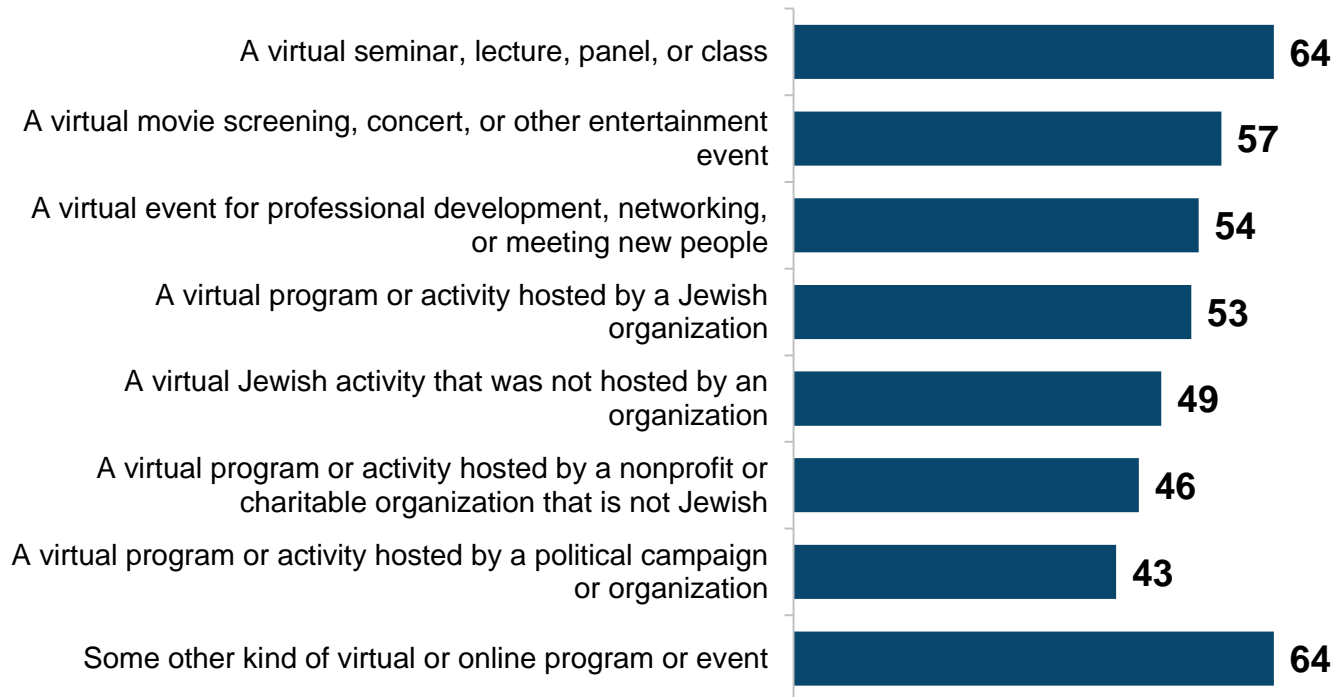


How Young Jews Are Engaging During the Pandemic

Virtual engagement with both Jewish and non-Jewish organizations is widespread and frequent

Virtual engagement, including with Jewish organizations, is broad. At least 43% had participated in each distinct type of engagement tested, and nearly two-thirds had joined a virtual seminar/lecture/panel/class (this number is disproportionately high among students). Although satisfaction with socially-distanced experiences is higher than for virtual experiences, **virtual experiences can still be very satisfying and engaging** to most of this audience if designed effectively.

Virtual Engagement since the Start of the Pandemic
% have done this at all

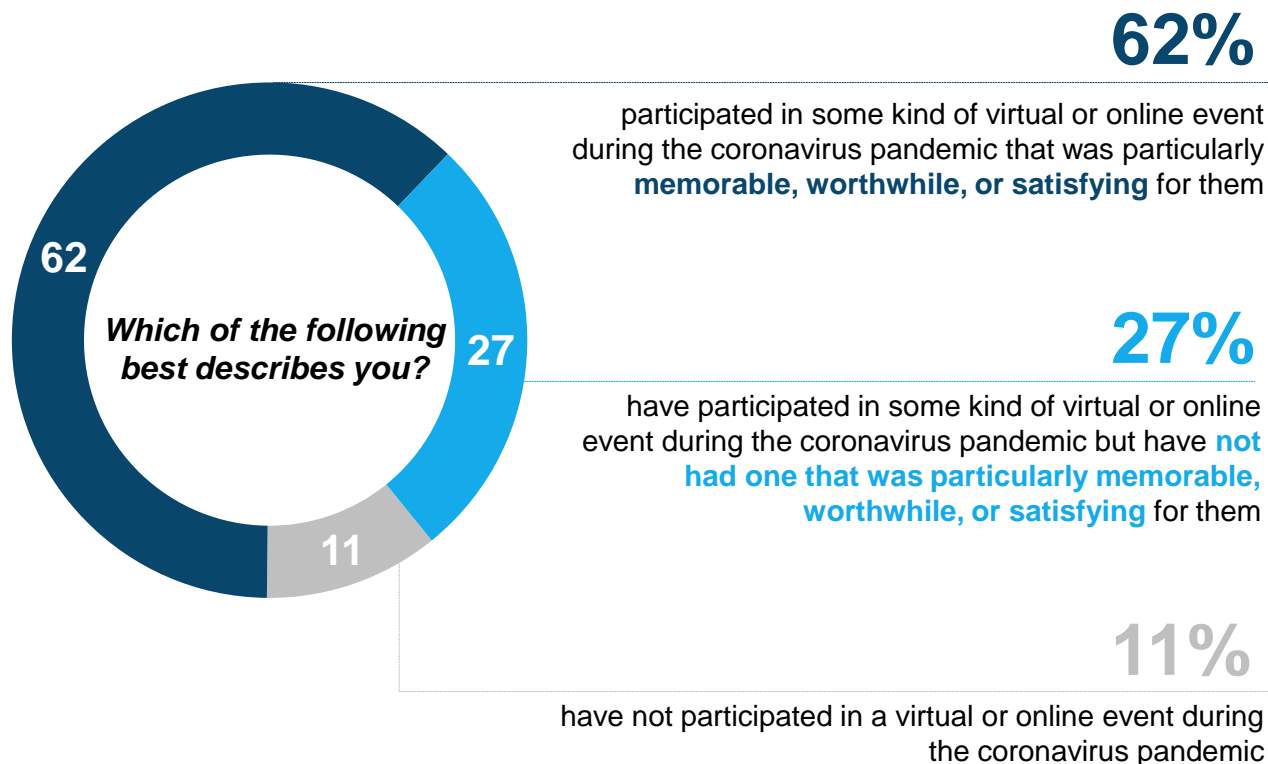


90% of young Jews have done at least one of these forms of virtual engagement since the start of the pandemic

38% are doing at least one thing weekly or more

Among those who are engaging virtually, most have had at least one worthwhile experience

Among those engaging virtually, their experiences during the pandemic have largely been positive. **Nearly two-thirds of respondents have had at least one worthwhile virtual experience** over the last several months, providing a rich set of experiences for digging into what made those virtual programs and events worthwhile and satisfying.





What Successful Virtual Engagement Looks Like

Young Jews seek out virtual events to have fun, connect with their community, and explore personal interests

Among those who have had worthwhile event experiences, the dominant reasons for wanting to attend fell into three broad categories: wanting to **have fun**; to **connect with a community/other people**; and to **spend time on topics or issues of interest**. The specific motivations in these categories were cited by **at least 50%** of those who have had worthwhile virtual experiences and made up the bulk of what they cited as their most important reasons for participating.

Which of the following are reasons why you personally chose to attend or participate in that event?
Asked among those who attended a worthwhile event (62% of young Jews)

% Most important reason

Reason	Percentage	% Most important reason
It seemed like fun	57	10
I wanted to connect with other people	56	10
The org or people hosting work on issues or topics I care about	52	11
I wanted to learn something new	51	11
It was more accessible to me since it was online	51	4
I knew other people participating	51	5
The org/topic had a meaningful connection to part of my identity	50	10
I've been wanting to do something with that org/topic for a while	46	7
I wanted to try something different	46	5
A friend recommended it	44	4
I'm an active member of that organization	44	7
To create some structure and routine	43	4
Online events don't cause the same social anxiety for me	40	6
To help me mark time	40	3
I didn't have anything else to do	40	3
Another reason	19	4

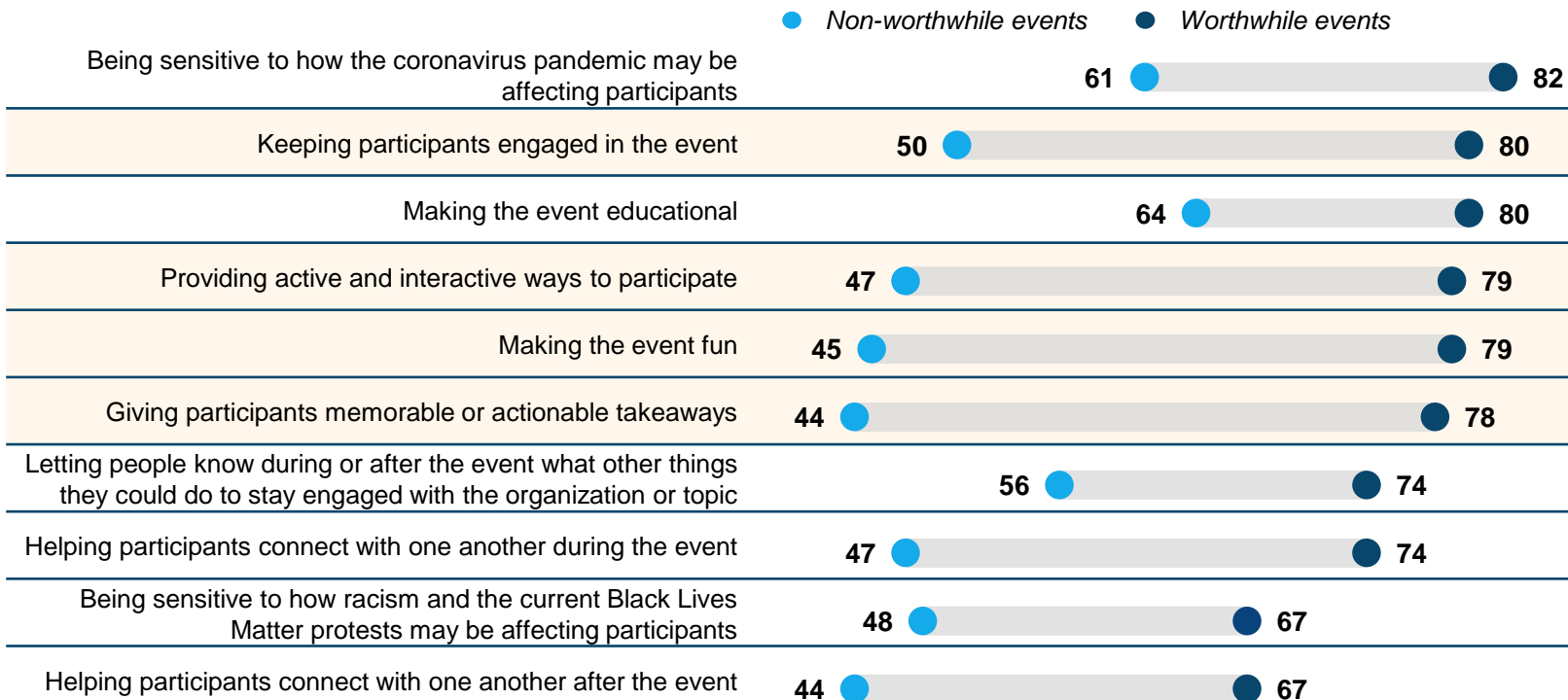
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Events not seen as worthwhile fall short on these needs—they're less engaging, interactive, fun, and don't leave participants with meaningful takeaways

Comparing worthwhile and non-worthwhile events, the key disparities are on those three key needs: **community, fun, and fulfillment**. On a range of metrics, worthwhile events outperform non-worthwhile events by an average of 25 points. But these gaps are highest on metrics reflecting how well events **facilitated participation**, gave participants **a fun time**, and left them with **actionable takeaways**. Event organizers looking to improve their events, or troubleshoot unsuccessful ones, should focus on these metrics as key drivers of participants' satisfaction.

Rating the event on various categories

% excellent or good job, asked among those who attended a virtual event (89% of young Jews)



A worthwhile event outperforms a non-worthwhile event by an average of **25 points** on each of metric. The starkest gaps are highlighted with a 30-point gap or more

To recap: successful virtual events satisfy 3 primary needs for young people

Community



- Connect with other people
- Join others who have something in common
- Feel part of something

Fun



- An opportunity to have fun in the absence of being able to do the things they used to look forward to

Fulfillment



- Learn something new
- Do something related to an issue, cause or topic they care about

Events don't necessarily have to touch on all 3 needs simultaneously, but those that can have a greater chance for success

How young Jews talk about worthwhile events they've participated in:

"It was a virtual painting class in **my neighborhood**. They provided an easy-to-get list of supplies that we could easily obtain for the Zoom session. They had somebody instruct us over Zoom **how to paint a flower**. It was **relaxing and quite interesting**."

"The range of **fun and competitive games** we played to **get to know each other better**. There was also time to exchange coronavirus updates and activities that we do as stress relievers. Plus, we talked about **how to improve our resumes**."

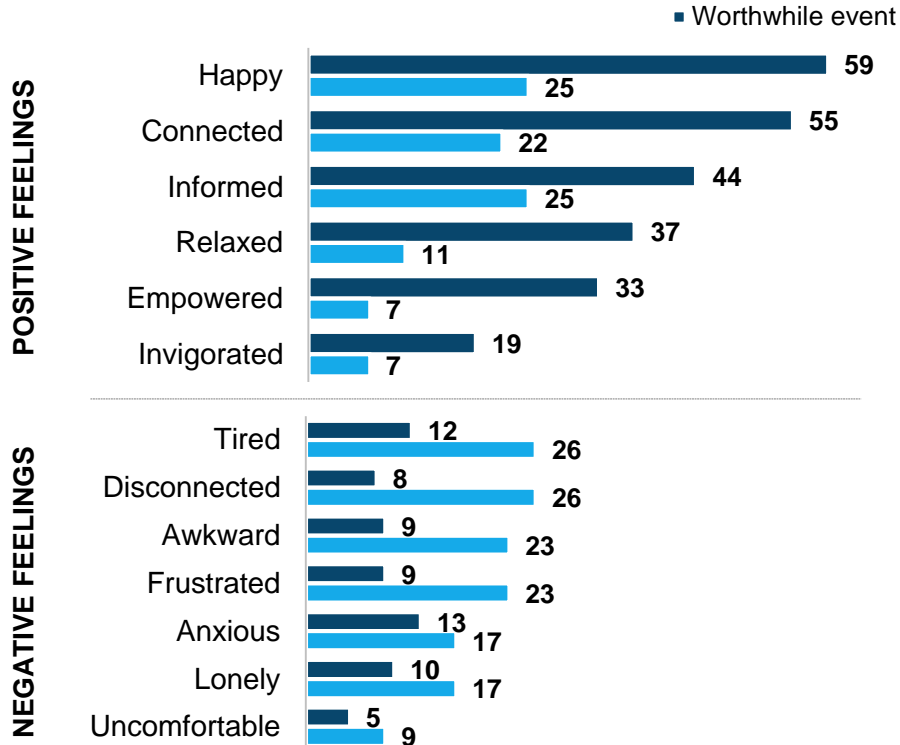
"Joining the virtual Seder hosted by [this organization] for Passover was **so fun**, because it was a glimpse into how **families all over the world** celebrate this special holiday, and a time to come together to **remember how strong the Jewish people are**."

Great events can overcome Zoom fatigue and attract repeat participation, while poorly executed events leave many feeling disconnected and tired

Worthwhile events are twice as likely as non-worthwhile events to leave participants with positive feelings like "happy," "connected," "informed" or "empowered." Critically, the likelihood of future behavior is much higher with those who leave with positive feelings. Those with worthwhile experiences are very likely to attend again, or even become a promoter to their friends, family, and acquaintances. Young Jews who had a worthwhile experience are **twice as likely to "definitely" attend another event** hosted by the same organization—54% vs. 20%.

How did you feel after the event?

Asked among those who attended a virtual event (89% of young Jews)



After you participated in the event, did you...

Asked among those who attended a virtual event (89% of young Jews)

	Worthwhile event	Non-Worthwhile event
Tell anyone in your life about it	54	37
Participate in another virtual event with same org.	32	15
Post on social media about it	32	9
Think about engaging in a new ritual or practice	27	11
Do something different or new offline	26	14
Participate in another virtual event with another organization	22	10
None of the above	11	37

54% of young Jews who attended a worthwhile event would **definitely participate again** (compared to 20% of those who attended a non-worthwhile event)



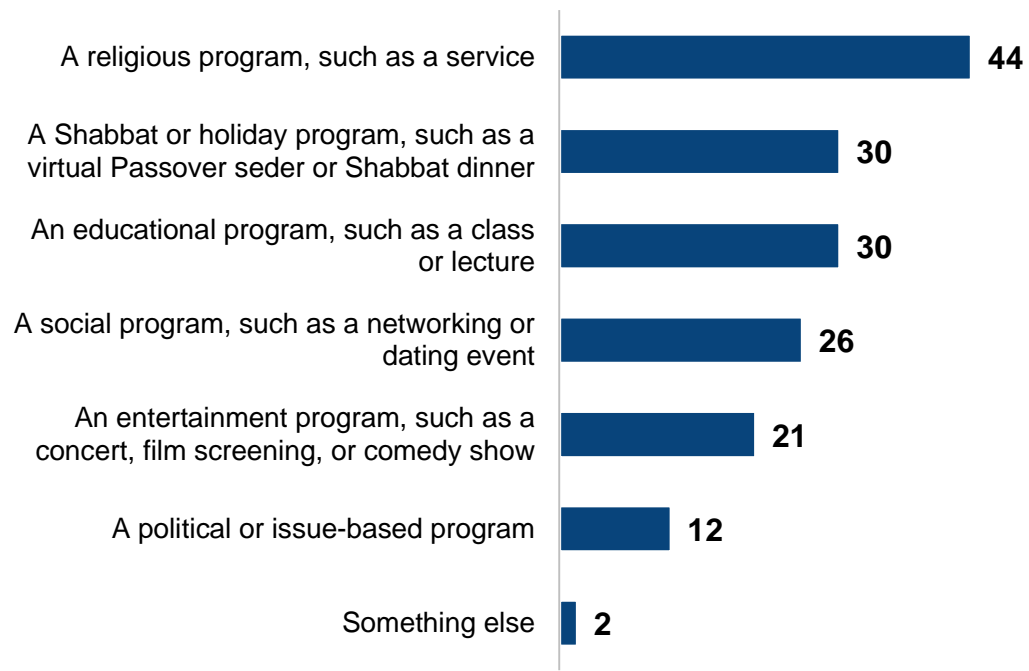
Jewish Engagement

The most common virtual Jewish experiences are religious or Shabbat programs, but many are also participating more broadly

Recall: Six in ten Jews have participated in a virtual Jewish experience during the pandemic. The most common forms of Jewish virtual engagement relate to religious programming or holidays, but there is meaningful interest in other types of Jewish activities. The quotes on the righthand side include excerpts from how young Jews talk about the virtual Jewish activities they've engaged in. There is a positive sense that **going virtual increases accessibility**. The events that stood out as successful often hit at least one of the three key themes of **community, fun, and fulfilment**. **Uplifting events** during this challenging time are appealing as well.

What kind of program was it?

Asked among those who have attended a virtual Jewish event (53% of young Jews)



*"I am enjoying attending Kabbalat Shabbat services on Zoom. Normally I'm home with my kids while my husband goes to synagogue, but **virtual services means I can listen, participate, and sing along** while I am home with my kids preparing for Shabbat."*

*"The virtual program consisted of hearing the story of a Holocaust survivor and being able to ask questions at the end. What made the event memorable was her heartbreaking yet empowering story. It was **meaningful to be able to connect to Judaism in such an isolating time**."*

*"It was an online Shabbat celebration. I had the opportunity to participate by joining the Zoom call but I chose to just watch the event... I was able to sing along from my kitchen while cooking shabbat dinner and **feel like a part of the Jewish community**."*

*"It was a group of people who were all clearly worn down by the events going in the world but were still determined to **help others** and try to push positive ideas. It felt **refreshing** and helped me **feel a little better** in general."*

People are participating Jewishly for specifically Jewish reasons; although enjoyment is important, events don't have to be just light and fun

Many of the top reasons for engaging Jewishly come back to **finding community**—whether it is wanting to connect with other Jewish people specifically or just other people generally. The top “most important reasons” all link back to either community, fun, or fulfillment, including in specifically Jewish ways. Fun events often work—but **there are other ways they can succeed as well.**

Reasons why respondents personally chose to engage in a Jewish event
Asked among those who have attended a virtual Jewish event (53% of young Jews)

% Most important reason

Reason	Percentage	% Most important reason
I wanted to connect with Jewish people	54	11
The org/topic had a meaningful connection to part of my identity	50	9
I wanted to connect with other people	49	9
I felt drawn to doing something Jewish during a time like this	47	4
It seemed like fun	46	9
I knew other people participating	46	6
It was more accessible to me since it was online	44	3
The org or people hosting work on issues or topics I care about	41	5
I'm an active member of that organization	40	6
I wanted to learn something new	40	7
A friend recommended it	40	5
I wanted to try something different	39	4
To create some structure and routine	39	3
I've been wanting to do something with that org/topic for a while	38	6
To help me mark time	35	3
Online events don't cause the same social anxiety for me	33	3
I didn't have anything else to do	29	3
Another reason	15	4

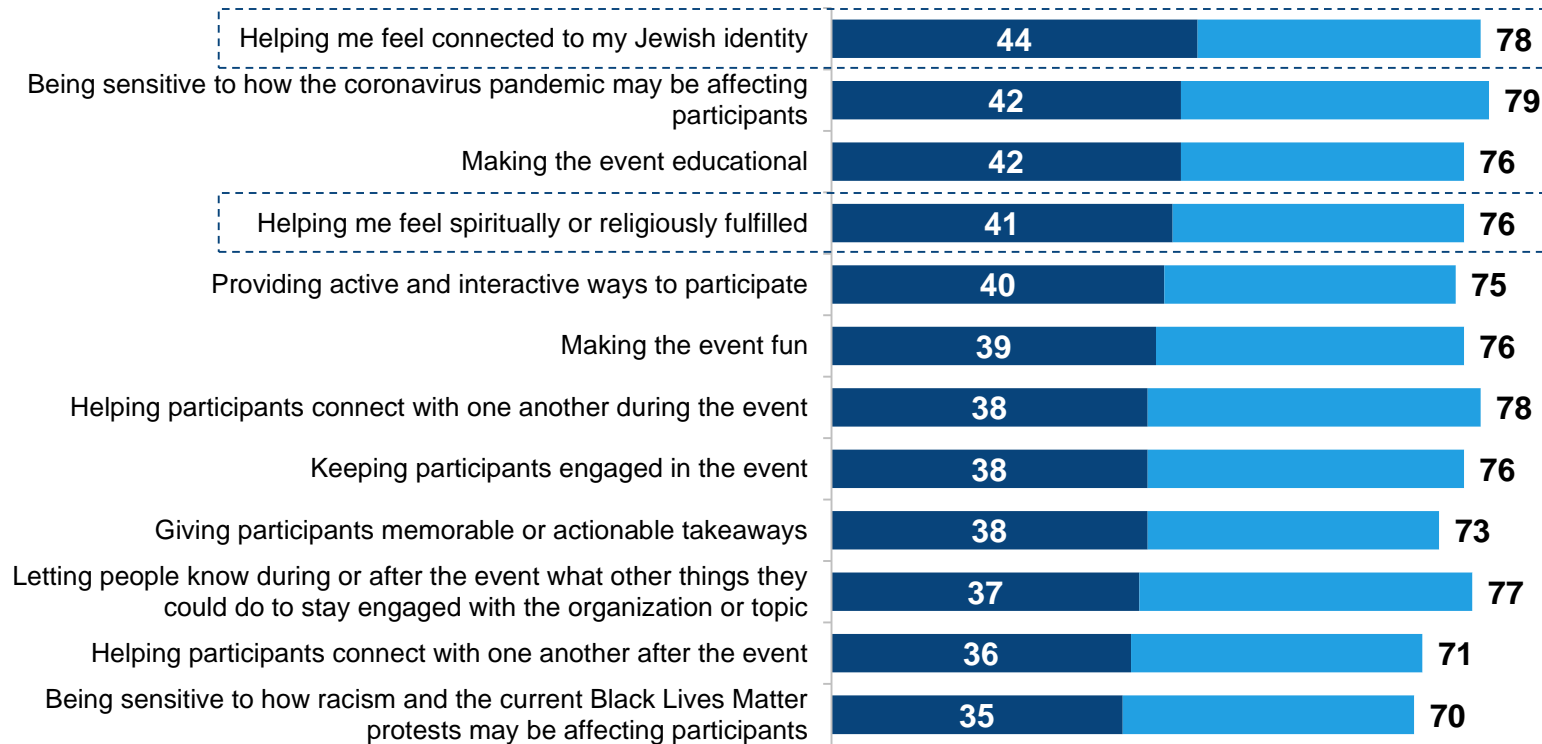
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Jewish organizations are performing well across the board, on many aspects of their virtual engagement

When asked to rate individual aspects of the event they attended, **young Jews are generally satisfied**. Most say the event did an “excellent” or “good” job on each of the aspects tested. The gap between the highest-rated attribute and the lowest-rated is relatively small, showing that Jewish organizations aren’t consistently falling short in any particular area. But Jewish organizations have room for improvement, particularly around **keeping people engaged during and after the event** and **being sensitive** to how current events could be affecting participants (a particular concern with Jews who identify as an ethnicity other than white).

Job ratings on all Jewish events (regardless of whether it was worthwhile)

% excellent or good job, asked among those who have attended a virtual Jewish event (53% of young Jews)



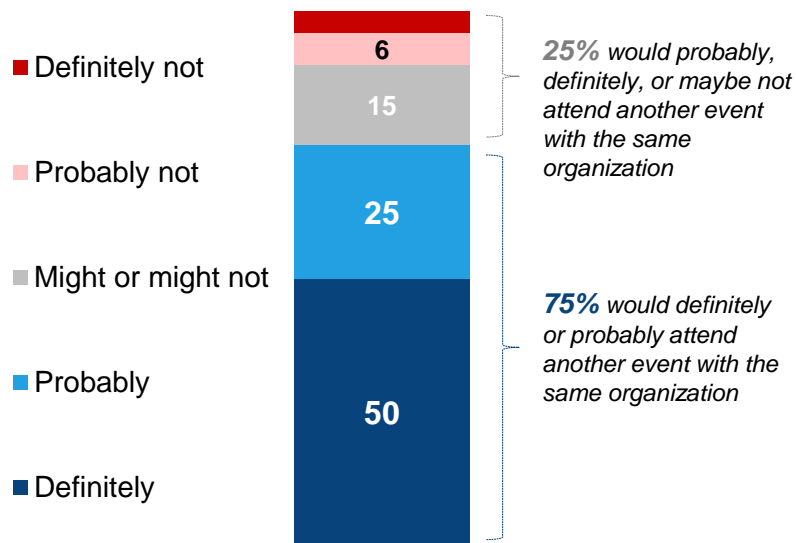
Overall satisfaction with Jewish events is high—**55%** are very satisfied, and **89%** are satisfied in total. But there is still progress to be made: LGBTQ Jews, Jews 18-29, and Jews who identify as a race or ethnicity other than white report lower rates of satisfaction.

Virtual Jewish events receive strong ratings on likely repeat attendance, which is connected to good feelings from meeting participants' 3 key needs

Half of young Jews who have attended a Jewish virtual event say that **they would “definitely” attend another** by the same organization again—a **very high and encouraging share**, even accounting for the fact that not everyone will follow through on their stated intentions. The key difference for repeat engagement (those who would definitely or probably attend another event by the same organization) is how the event performs on participants' needs for **fun, community, and fulfillment**. Those likely to attend in the future are much more likely to say they felt **happy, connected, relaxed, informed, and empowered** after the event, compared to those who are less certain about attending again.

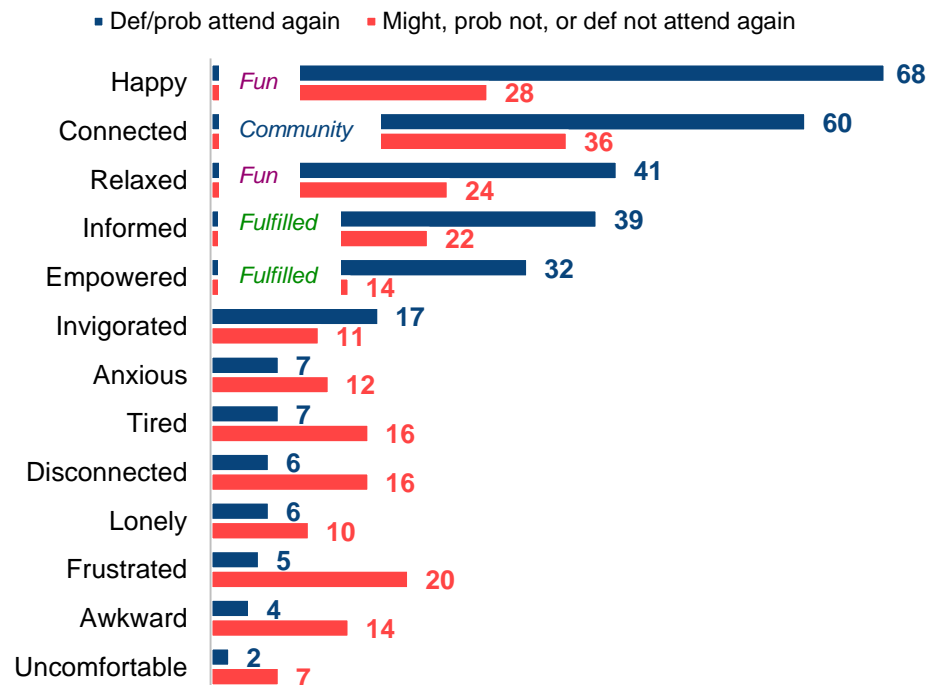
Would you attend or participate in an event hosted by that same organization again?

Asked among those who attended a virtual Jewish event (53% of young Jews)



How did you feel after the event?

Asked among those who attended a virtual Jewish event (53% of young Jews)



When we asked young Jews to give Jewish organizations advice for virtual programming, their responses closely tracked to meeting their key needs

*In your opinion, what makes a virtual or online experience meaningful or successful for you personally?
What advice would you give to Jewish organizations trying to design this kind of programming?*

Community

“If a feeling of a personal connection can be achieved with all participants, I feel that makes the experience that much more significant and meaningful for everyone.”

“I think the main thing is to feel connected and a part of something while we are all in isolation... I do miss the feel of a community.”

Fun

“Virtual experiences can be successful when they engage everyone and keep it fun and interesting. Jewish programs should keep in mind to keep it entertaining and allow everyone to be involved.”

“The main speaker/host needs to be enthusiastic, friendly, and interesting. It doesn’t matter how great of a program you have if the host’s robotic introduction causes everyone to immediately sign off.”

Fulfillment

“[It’s successful] if I have some type of takeaway that made it worthwhile. Did I learn something I can use in my daily life?”

“No one is going to enjoy it when it’s boring and meaningless to them. To be able to walk away with learning something new and leave feeling satisfied is the key detail.”

*If you could change anything about the event, what would you change, and why?
Asked among those who have attended a non-memorable virtual event (27% of young Jews)*

Smaller groups

“I would have found a way to break into smaller discussions so people could talk with one another and feel connected.”

More interactive/participation

“There need to be more ways for participants to engage and interact with the event.”

Went on too long

“The event lasted entirely too long (10 AM to 5 PM) which made it very difficult to stay focused.”

Tech issues/connectivity

“It makes me lose interest when event leaders [can’t] manage the technology.”

Better organization

“I would make it more organized. It needs to have clean instructions and clear goals.”

I’d rather do this in person

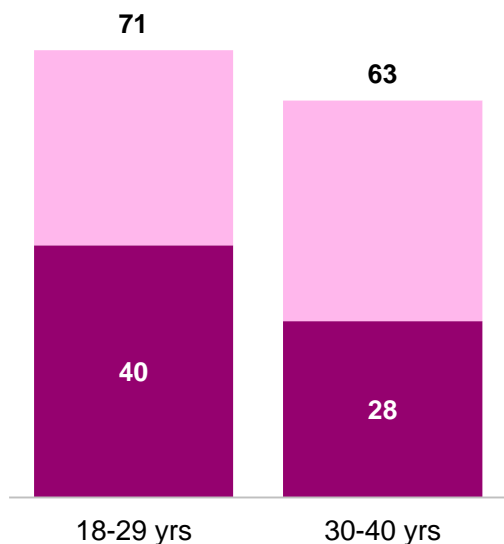
“I would’ve just liked to be able to join in-person without worrying about a pandemic.”

18-29 year-olds are more skeptical of organized virtual events: overcome anxiety by setting expectations, making it interactive, and including small groups

Jews under 30 had many anecdotes about online events being **awkward, overwhelming, or anxiety-inducing**. To help young people feel more comfortable, organizations can set clear expectations for participants, make events more interactive, and include small group breakout sessions so people get a chance to talk and interact.

18-29-year-old Jews feel greater exhaustion with typical virtual programming

"I'm really sick of Zoom and other online video platforms"
% agree (strongly/total agree)



What advice would you give to Jewish organizations trying to design virtual programming?

Quotes from Jews 18-29 years old

Set expectations

*"[Virtual events should have] organization and create frameworks. Clearly lay out the event, participant expectations, and what is required or not required. Sending out a list in advance and the guidelines is really helpful... Just leaving things open-ended is **awkward and anxiety inducing**."*

Make it interactive

*"I would try and keep it as interactive as possible. Giant group video calls can be **overwhelming**, and it feels like there's no real chance to connect. I think things like cooking or baking, that people can follow along with at home, would be more fun and garner interest."*

Include small groups

*"To Jewish organizations, I would say you should have breakout rooms where you can converse and discuss topics with other people. Things can get **awkward** very fast in a huge Zoom call."*