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After Birthright Israel: *Finding and Seeking Young Adult Jewish Community*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	5
Introduction	9
Methodology	11
Findings	13
Challenge of Recruitment	13
Importance of Peer Networks	15
Dynamics of Organizational Engagement	18
Demands for Young Adult Jewish Community	21
Policy Implications: Challenges & Dilemmas	27
Conclusion.....	33
References	35
Appendix	37

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Percentage of Birthright Israel alumni who participated in Hillel activities in the first year after the trip (Students only).....	9
Table 2: Percentage of Birthright Israel alumni who participate in Jewish activities in the community in the first year after the trip (Non-students).....	10
Table A1: Focus groups by city.....	37
Table A2: Focus group participants by trip year.....	37

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since its inception in 2000, *Taglit*-Birthright Israel has provided free educational tours of Israel to more than 150,000 Diaspora Jewish young adults. Systematic evaluation research conducted since its inception, shows that Birthright Israel has had a strong and consistent impact on participants' Jewish identities, but only a modest and inconsistent impact on their Jewish behaviors. The present report seeks to unravel the paradox of engagement by examining the extent to which program alumni find adequate means to express their heightened interest in Jewish life on their campuses and in their communities. The post-trip experience of program alumni was assessed through focus group interviews on campuses and in communities. Fifteen focus groups were conducted in Boston, Atlanta, Washington D.C., Seattle, and Austin. In addition, to learn about the opportunities for Jewish engagement post trip, campus and community-based professionals engaged in programming for Jewish young adults were interviewed. The study is intended as a first step toward more comprehensive research and policy analysis on how best to meet the needs of the next generation of Birthright Israel alumni and, ultimately, the next generation of Diaspora Jews.

Findings

The report explores four key themes relevant to understanding and increasing post-trip engagement.

The Challenge of Recruitment. Campus and community-based Jewish professionals generally organize follow-up activities for alumni of their own programs. However, a majority of Birthright Israel participants travel to Israel on programs sponsored by trip providers that have no professional staff in the communities from which they recruit. Thus, many Birthright Israel participants, including especially those who travel with the largest trip organizers, are underserved. Inconsistent recruitment for post trip explains, in part, the modest level of reported engagement.

The Importance of Peer Networks. Participants in the focus groups validate that peers play a critical role in their decisions about what events they will join. Those who traveled with friends on campus or community-based trips identified their newly established Jewish network as critical to their subsequent decision to attend Jewish activities. Others, who traveled with non-local peers, mentioned the absence of Birthright Israel friends as an explanation for not attending activities. Increased familiarity with the campus and community-based professionals who served as staff (*madrichim*) on Birthright Israel trips was also seen as a key factor in post-trip engagement. To a great extent, participation in Jewish life for alumni is a social network phenomenon.

Dynamics of Organizational Engagement. Although many alumni report increasing their level of Jewish engagement following a Birthright Israel experience, most believe that

the primary Jewish organizations in their immediate environment do not meet their Jewish needs. They view Hillel as either too religious or insular, and they view their local synagogues as primarily geared toward older people. Such alumni do express a desire for Jewish communal engagement, but they seek such engagement in a community of their peers, and in a setting that features the right social mix.

Demands for Young Adult Jewish Community.

On campuses, participants feel connected to Jewish peers regardless of whether they participate in activities sponsored by Jewish organizations. Older alumni living in the communities, however, tend to have sparser Jewish networks, and hence feel a greater need to connect to a community of Jewish peers. Community-based alumni expressed diverse preferences regarding program content. Some favor social programming geared toward Jewish young adults. Others describe purely social activities as contrived or forced and express a preference instead for Jewish activities organized around Shabbat and learning. Many participants did not feel that such opportunities were readily available in their immediate environments.

Implications

The present research makes clear that much can be done to extend the Birthright Israel experience. The policy choices that must be made will likely entail tradeoffs, and the best

choices are not necessarily evident given our current state of knowledge. Specific implications for successful post-trip programming, and related policy dilemmas, include the following:

- Birthright Israel should consider strategies to amplify the social network effects of the trip, including increasing the number of campus and community-based trips. Doing so, however, might create formidable logistical challenges related to scheduling trips and might result in lower overall levels of participation. Moreover, local trips would not meet the needs of college juniors and seniors who are close to graduation and hence relocation. Balancing campus and community-based trips and trips that draw from regions or the country as a whole will require careful strategic planning. More generally, a new paradigm is required to link recruitment, trip preparation, and trip follow-up into an integrated system.
- The reluctance of many alumni to engage in Jewish life beyond Birthright Israel implies a need to develop unique programming for Jewish young adults. Needed are programs that transition alumni from the largely secular and Israel-centered Judaism of the Birthright Israel trip to an American Jewish context in which religion typically claims center stage. In developing new options, Birthright Israel must preserve its reputation for excellence, as well as its

unique status as a program supported by all branches of the North American Jewish community.

- A new strategic vision for post-trip engagement must also grapple with how best to share contact information for Birthright Israel alumni. Absent clear policy guidelines, sharing contact information will likely result in what alumni perceive as “spamming”—crowding their inboxes with unsolicited emails. More generally, a strategic vision for post-trip engagement should envision ways in which Birthright Israel can work collaboratively with Jewish funders and organizations to develop new organizations and institutions geared toward the social, educational, and religious needs of the next generation of Jewish young adults.

INTRODUCTION

Since its inception in 2000, *Taglit*-Birthright Israel has provided free educational tours of Israel to nearly 150,000 Diaspora Jewish young adults and many thousands of their Israeli counterparts (see Saxe & Chazan, forthcoming). Diaspora participants come from around the world, but nearly 80 percent are from North America. The program aims to spur interest in Jewish identity and foster connections among young adult Jews to Israel and the Jewish people. At the core of the program is a ten-day educational trip to Israel that incorporates study of Jewish history and contemporary Israeli culture. An increasingly important element of the experience in Israel is an “encounter” with Israeli peers that lasts five or more days of the program.

Systematic evaluation research conducted in multiple waves since the inception of Birthright Israel has shown that the program has a strong and consistent impact on participants’ Jewish identities (see, e.g., Saxe, Sasson, & Hecht, 2006; Saxe, Kadushin, Hecht, Rosen, Phillips, & Kelner, 2004). In surveys conducted at multiple points (pre-and post-program) with alumni and others who applied but did not participate in the program, participants report much higher levels of connection to Israel and the Jewish people and a greater motivation to raise their children as Jews. In surveys and interviews, the vast majority of alumni are effusive in describing the impact of the program, and they maintain that the experience was transformative and heightened their motivation to participate in Jewish communal life. Yet,

paradoxically, the program’s demonstrated impact on actual Jewish behavior is modest and inconsistent. Although the Birthright Israel experience increases engagement in organized Jewish life on campus, the gain is only partial. In a follow-up study of participants in a 2005 cohort, nearly 40 percent of Birthright Israel alumni on campus reported no participation in the activities of campus-based Jewish organizations during the year following their trip (see Table 1).

Table 1: Percentage of Birthright Israel alumni who participated in Hillel activities in the first year after the trip (Students only)

	<i>Non-Participants</i>	<i>Participants</i>
<i>Never</i>	44.7%	37.3%
<i>Once</i>	16.0%	12.5%
<i>Twice</i>	14.6%	12.1%
<i>3-5 Times</i>	11.7%	16.1%
<i>6 Times or More</i>	13.0%	22.0%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%

*Source: Saxe, Sasson, & Hecht (2006)

The prevailing situation among older alumni in the community is similarly ambiguous. On the one hand, nearly 70 percent of alumni reported attending at least one organized Jewish activity during the year since the trip. On the other hand, the data show that alumni living in

Jewish communities participated in these kinds of Jewish activities at about the same rate as those who applied to the program but did not go (see Table 2).

Table 2: Percentage of Birthright Israel alumni who participate in Jewish activities in the community in the first year after the trip (Non-students)

	<i>Non-Participants</i>	<i>Participants</i>
<i>Never</i>	25.7%	29.3%
<i>Once</i>	22.1%	16.5%
<i>Twice</i>	15.9%	18.6%
<i>3-5 Times</i>	23.9%	21.6%
<i>6 Times or More</i>	12.4%	14.1%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%

*Source: Saxe, Sasson, & Hecht (2006)

The present report attempts to unravel the paradox of heightened motivation coupled with modest levels of engagement. Our goal is to understand better the dynamics of participation in Jewish activities, both in the community and on campus, following a Taglit-Birthright Israel trip. The present research was not designed as a comprehensive evaluation of post-trip programming; rather, it is a preliminary effort to determine the extent to which alumni find adequate means to express their heightened interest in Jewish life on their campuses and in their communities. Toward this end, we sought

to understand the post-trip experience from the perspective of program alumni. In addition, we sought to learn how Jewish professionals engaged in programming for students and young adults view Birthright Israel and seek to meet the needs of its alumni. The study is intended as a first step toward more comprehensive research and policy analysis on how best to meet the needs of the next generation of Birthright Israel alumni, and ultimately the next generation of Diaspora Jews.

METHODOLOGY

To learn about the attitudes and experiences of Birthright Israel alumni, focus group discussions with Jewish college students and older alumni were conducted in five communities: Atlanta, Boston, Austin, Washington D.C., and Seattle. These five cities, while disparate, are among the top ten destinations for young adults (*Forbes Magazine*) and were chosen to represent the diversity among communities where young adult Jews reside. A common characteristic is that they each have universities with relatively large Jewish student bodies and an established Jewish community. With the exception of Austin, all of the communities had a Birthright Israel post-programming professional assigned to them at the time of the study. Interviews and site visits were conducted in late 2006 and through spring 2007.

Approximately a dozen individuals were recruited for each focus group, although typically the actual groups were comprised of 7-8 participants. The campus focus groups were recruited with the assistance of local Hillels and took place on the campuses of the University of Washington, Emory University, George Washington University, University of Maryland, University of Austin-Texas, and Boston University. The community groups with post-college young adults were recruited by randomly selecting alumni from the Birthright Israel registration database. Overall, 87 individuals participated in 12 focus group discussions (49 students and 38 post-college alumni).

Interviews with alumni explored their post-Birthright Israel experience, with a special focus on the participants' descriptions of opportunities for Jewish life on their campuses and in their communities, and their explanations of how they make personal choices regarding their own participation. Focus group participants also completed a short background questionnaire.

In addition to the alumni focus groups, professionals and lay leaders in each community were interviewed. Interviewees were selected from among those who organize and are responsible for programs targeted at Jewish young adults. In all five cities, interviews were conducted with campus-based Hillel staff, both at the junior and senior level. The interviews also included Birthright Israel post-trip professionals, as well as other educators, rabbis, and organizers responsible for programs designed to engage Jewish students and young adults. These professionals represented a variety of organizations, including federations, JCCs, synagogues, as well as Orthodox outreach groups (i.e. Chabad and Aish HaTorah). In total, over fifty such interviews were conducted as part of this study (see Appendix). In keeping with social scientific convention, all individuals quoted in this report are identified by pseudonyms.

FINDINGS

Interviews with both Birthright Israel alumni and community professionals yielded rich information about the variety of dimensions of the Birthright Israel experience, alumni programming, and the Jewish choices of young adults. This report focuses on themes relevant to understanding and responding to the paradox of the positive attitudes of alumni and their moderate engagement. Four key themes emerged from the interviews and site visits to each of the communities:

- Challenges of pre- and post-recruitment
- Importance of peer networks
- Dynamics of organizational engagement
- Unmet desire for peer community.

Although the four themes are intertwined, the report examines data relevant to each in turn. First addressed is recruitment, including recruitment for follow-up as well as for the trips themselves, because we found that one cannot understand follow-up without understanding how the trips were formed and who organizes them. We next turn to the importance of peer social networks, a key element of participant reactions that emerged in every community. We conclude by focusing on the dynamics of how participants decide to become engaged or not and the ways in which communities are and are not meeting the needs of the participants.

Challenge of Recruitment

Across communities in the study sample, Jewish professionals view Birthright Israel as their most effective way to engage new members and participants in their programs. Particularly on campuses, it is the most common pathway into Hillel and other forms of Jewish engagement. As one young Hillel staff member put it, “Birthright [Israel] brings them into the door and makes them feel comfortable.” Despite the pervasiveness of such comments, not all staff reported being able to take advantage of the opportunity, with recruiting efforts for Birthright Israel varying considerably from one setting to another. At some campuses, there is an intense focus on recruitment, involving previous attendees, fraternity and sorority houses, information tables, and Israel-themed events. At others, the Hillel staff simply report that they do not have enough time—or sufficient capacity on trips—to commit to extensive recruiting. At one large university, for example, where the Hillel sends dozens of students on Birthright Israel each winter, the only active recruitment effort consists of “tabling” in the student union on a few occasions. As a result, according to one campus professional, recruitment focuses on the “low hanging fruit.” The most easily recruited students are, for them, often the students most highly motivated and already engaged. At other campuses, it means that overall enrollment—and enrollment on campus-based trips—is lower than would be the case if greater staff attention were committed to recruitment.

Campus and community-based Jewish professionals generally organize follow-up activities for the alumni of their own programs: Hillel organizes reunions for participants in Hillel trips; Chabad for alumni of Mayanot trips; and the local federation for its own community-based trips. Follow-up by local trip organizers with their own participants is relatively easy and generally successful. Organizers have developed personal ties to alumni both individually and as a group. Notably, however, the majority of Birthright Israel participants travel to Israel on programs sponsored by trip providers that have no professional staff in the communities from which they recruit.

Asked if they reach out to participants of non-Hillel Birthright Israel trips as part of their general post-trip follow-up, Hillel professionals on five of the six visited campuses indicated that they make no special effort to do so. In part, their failure to reach out is due to a lack of information about alumni from programs that they did not themselves organize. Hillel directors, Chabad rabbis and other campus-based Jewish professionals, at the time of our visits, did not possess comprehensive lists of Birthright Israel alumni on their campuses. Most of those individuals reported knowing that such lists could be obtained (according to Birthright Israel policy) from their local federations, but just one Hillel in our sample routinely tried to obtain and utilize such lists. As a consequence, most campus-based professionals have no systematic contact

information regarding the majority of Birthright Israel alumni on their campuses.

Surveys of Birthright Israel alumni testify to the significance of these dynamics. Although Hillel participation increases following the trip, it does so primarily among those who participated in activities at least once prior to the trip, and thereby get on the Hillel list. Moreover, there is a strong association in the survey data between being invited to Hillel events and actually attending Hillel activities (see Saxe, Sasson, Phillips, Hecht, & Wright, 2007). By implication, many Birthright Israel participants, including those who travel with the largest trip organizers, fall through the proverbial cracks.

For Birthright Israel professionals working in communities, follow-up also tends to focus on participants in community trips (in most cases, federation-sponsored). In all of the communities that were visited, federation-sponsored trips included, as members of the trip staff, local Jewish professionals responsible for young adult programming. The trips therefore provide an opportunity for the post-professionals (or other young adult organizers from the local community) to get to know the next batch of Birthright Israel alumni. Organizing alumni activities, and assisting alumni to find their own places in the Jewish community, is greatly facilitated in this fashion.

In contrast, the post-professionals are less likely to become acquainted with alumni from non-

local trips. Moreover, although they have much more comprehensive information about alumni at their disposal than their campus-based counterparts, they report not having access to up-to-date contact information. Post-trip professionals receive updates regarding new alumni cohorts but do not have access to the database as a whole. They only infrequently receive information on address changes. Conversely, several alumni in the focus groups mentioned that they receive notification of events only at their previous place of residence, and that they do not know how to update their contact information. Alumni of the earliest trips claim to receive no announcements whatsoever.

Post-professionals would also like to advertise more broadly for alumni activities, but indicate that they do not have adequate financial resources to do so. Publicizing offerings for young adults was, for each of our interviewees, a particular challenge. This challenge was poignantly made evident in our focus group conversations. Repeatedly, participants expressed a need for programs that already existed in their communities. Clearly in these cases, information about available resources was not reaching participants. The Jewish professionals interviewed were well aware of this problem. Indeed, several expressed frustration over financial constraints on their ability to advertise, especially in mainstream venues more likely to catch the attention of unaffiliated Jewish young adults.

Interviews with other Jewish professionals who sponsor activities for Jewish young adults about their recruitment of Birthright Israel alumni yielded similar comments. Those organizers working outside of the federations had no access to information from Birthright Israel and, as a result, made no special efforts to publicize their activities for Jewish young adults to Birthright Israel alumni.

Importance of Peer Networks

Overwhelmingly, participants in focus groups conducted on each campus and in each community made clear that peers play a critical role in decisions that alumni make about the events they choose to attend. Thus, they are much more likely to attend Jewish events if their friends are also going. To a great extent, participation in Jewish life is a social network phenomenon. Personal connections become especially important during the latter years of college, and thereafter, when peer groups are more fully established. Students and young adults in each of our groups made clear that they do not like to attend events without their core group of friends.

In the following extract, a member of the University of Maryland focus group explains that, prior to Birthright Israel, he had “the same problem of everyone else”; namely, an absence of Jewish friends interested in participating in Jewish communal activities. His Birthright Israel experience spurred him to subsequent involvement in communal activities

by locating him in a new network of engaged Jewish students. As he recounted to an interviewer:

For me, I'd say Birthright had a big impact. Last year, I did almost no Jewish or Israel-related activities on campus and then at the beginning of this year, I made the decision to myself that I wanted to get more involved, come to Hillel and meet new people. But like the same problem as everyone else, I didn't have anyone to go with. I was kind of intimidated and I never did. And then after I went on Birthright—that was like the impetus to get me to go, to see some faces I knew, and now I come to Hillel far more often. I come regularly, I'd say, and I've been trying to participate in other Hillel-sponsored events.

Similarly, in the community focus groups, participants stressed the importance of having friends with whom they could attend activities. For these individuals, the networks established by Birthright Israel facilitated the decision to participate in Jewish activities post trip. Consider the following comments made by an Atlanta participant:

I think something that's really good about my trip was that when you get back and you get these emails from the JCC or the federation someone that you know that was on that trip and they're people in town who were on your trip. They say, 'oh there's this Jewish event on Thursday, and [do] you want to go together?' so it's kind of a [built in] for people to get more involved with. So I

think that's helped me get more involved knowing that I have friends that are going to be at this dinner or this happy hour or whatever it is, so it's not just going and trying to get involved but not knowing anybody, which is pretty hard to do. But knowing, like, Aaron's always there, and other people from my trip, it's made a big difference.

In contrast, consider the following remark, from a student explaining why she will *not* go to her university Hillel. The speaker is a Boston University student who went on Birthright Israel with a Canadian group. "I would rather go where I knew people from my group [but] they are all in Canada...I guess I feel kind of awkward going [to Hillel] because I had a totally different trip and no one would even be there who had gone in my group or anyone like that."

Among program alumni in the community, Jewish peer networks tend to be weaker, and the difficulty locating "friends to go with" more pronounced. The lack of Jewish friends with whom to attend events was mentioned most frequently in Austin, where most members of the focus group claimed to have no or few Jewish friends. However, the difficulty establishing Jewish "social capital" (Putnam, 2000) was mentioned at least once in all five community discussion groups. Consider the following exchange in a group conducted with Atlanta alumni:

Interviewer: What would you like to do Jewishly that you haven't yet done and what keeps you from doing it?

Rebecca: I would like to go to more Jewish [events] like when I do see the emails come up and I don't do them because I don't really have Jewish friends to do it with. I don't just want to go by myself...No matter how old you are some places are like a clique, and just to walk over and say, 'hey I'm Rebecca and then like who are you?'...So if you have like a buddy system or something, at least like one person to go with you won't feel so—it won't feel so hard to actually go. And my mother would be so happy. She was so happy I came here today!

In many cases, the absence of a Jewish friendship network leads Birthright Israel alumni to incorporate non-Jewish friends into their religious observances. To be sure, these young adults often enjoy sharing their Jewish culture with their non-Jewish friends, but in several instances described in the focus group discussions, the cultural sharing seemed prompted by necessity more than by their desire to celebrate diversity. In this next extract, a Birthright Israel alumna describes her isolation from Jewish friends and family, and a search for an age-appropriate Jewish community. In her case, her path led her to Boston's Vilna Shul:

I feel like my free time is almost non-existent, but I like to run a lot. I like to wander, walk through Boston. I like to read, and I like to listen to music. And I really would like to find some kind of Jewish

community because I had such a warm feeling when I was [in Israel] and I would love to have that back. But I am really struggling. It is so hard because none of my friends are Jewish and, if they are they are, really just completely [assimilated] they just don't have an interest. And, so, I like to have—like last year Passover and I couldn't go home for seder so I had my own seder. My kugel came out of the oven, and I called my mom. I was like, 'Mom it looks normal.' But I like to include my non-Jewish friends in all of my cultural kind of activities, and for Rosh Hashanah I had people over and we had a honey cake and things like that. But it is really not the same. I did find the Vilna Shul which is in Beacon Hill and they have services about once a month on Friday nights.

If having Jewish friends willing to attend Jewish activities with alumni is conducive to participation, so too is having a personal relationship with Jewish professionals. In Seattle, Maryland, and Austin, focus group participants stressed the significance of meeting and forming friendships with Hillel staff members, first in the context of their Birthright Israel trip, and subsequently during Birthright Israel follow-up and other kinds of Jewish activities. The following statement, also drawn from a focus group conducted in Maryland, attests to the significance of the staff-participant relationship:

Our leaders, Avi and Laurie, are really active in working here. Whenever there's activities sponsored by Hillel, they send [emails] out

and I would get them before I went on Birthright and I still get them after, but I'm far more likely to actually respond or participate in whatever activity they send on their email. I almost never responded or participated in activities, and now I do a lot.

Similarly, University of Texas students stressed the value of getting to know the campus's Hillel staff:

Alex: Well I feel like I got to know the Hillel personnel more, Dana. Do you know who she is?

Robert: She is great.

Alex: Yes, and I didn't really know her before and now her and Dov I am friendly with so I feel more—I feel like Hillel is more friendly now. It is more welcoming towards me because I know them.

Susan: That is how I feel and that is why I got more active. I felt more comfortable coming every Friday to services because I recognized so many people.

Dynamics of Organizational Engagement

Numerous comments made in the focus groups indicate that many Jewish young adults avoid joining Hillel as students and, later, they avoid local synagogues. For these alumni, the core campus and community Jewish organizations appear to be either too religious or feature the wrong social mix.

Most of the program alumni in the campus-based focus group discussions reported

increasing their participation in Jewish communal activities following their Birthright Israel experience. Much can be learned, however, by examining the experiences of those who did not seize upon Birthright Israel as a bridge to increased communal engagement. Although such individuals were a minority in the campus-based focus groups, in actuality they represent a much larger segment of program alumni. In an evaluation survey administered following the winter 2006/7 trips, an estimated 40 percent of campus-based alumni reported no involvement in Hillel-sponsored activities during the three-month period that elapsed between trip and survey (Saxe, Sasson, Phillips, Hecht, & Wright, 2007). In a survey administered one year following the 2005 trips, half of alumni on campus reported attending one or fewer (i.e. none) Jewish activities on campus during the previous year (Saxe, Sasson, & Hecht, 2006). On the basis of these data, we estimate that roughly half of alumni might accurately be characterized as "Birthright only."

One characteristic of the "Birthright only" participants is their discomfort with campus Hillel and other Jewish organizations. Consider the following two discussion extracts, the first from a student at the University of Texas, and the second from a student at George Washington University:

I went there thinking it would be a Birthright Shabbat, but it was a sham. I went there and it was just a normal Hillel Shabbat, but I

thought it was going to be like a Birthright reunion. I felt pretty embarrassed.

* * *

There was this SAFI event—Student Alliance for Israel—that tricked me into coming. They said it was for Birthright alumni and I went...but it was really just a speaker.”

Alumni who do not attend Hillel events provided several explanations. Several focus group participants explained that they had completed their Jewish explorations in high school, or that they could not easily translate Birthright Israel’s putative emphasis on Israel to a Diaspora context that emphasized (in their view) Jewish religious practice. In the following quote, a participant from Austin explains that Birthright Israel’s emphasis on the viability of non-religious forms of Judaism paradoxically left him without good options once he returned to his normal university life:

I go [to Jewish activities] less I would say. It seems like going to Israel to a lot of people on the trip was just like the biggest deal and you don’t have—like all the discussion that we would have, a lot of people would say that it is not really important to be religious...They didn’t really make it seem like...being Jewish is that important. Just being in Israel was more important than that.

More commonly, alumni who do not attend Hillel explained that the campus Jewish organization appears to be either “too Orthodox” or “too cliquy.” As campus Hillels

have garnered additional resources and built new facilities, they have become more known for attracting observant students. For example, on-campus kosher dining facilities, funded with Hillel support, become a magnet for the most observant students (cf. Sales & Saxe, 2006). Some participants explained further that if a student does not begin attending events in his or her first year of college, it becomes difficult to join later and feel like an authentic insider. One participant at Boston University makes each of these points in the following conversation extract:

I think that the reason why I am not really involved in Hillel is just because I am not really—I am not Orthodox and I don’t go to Hillel every single week, therefore I don’t really know anybody in Hillel. I know there are a few things that I wanted to go on freshman year, but I just was with my other friends I guess. I don’t know. I just would really like to have a social event where I guess upperclassmen could meet each other and—just as a freshman it was easier to meet tons of people and stuff. As you get older your friends obviously get smaller and stuff.

One “Birthright only” alumna, in a Boston University focus group, endorsed the idea of Birthright Israel partnering with Hillel to sponsor events. Such a partnership, she felt, could help reopen the door to Hillel, a door that she felt closed following her first year at the university:

Sarah: But I think that if Birthright sponsored some sort of a [match] with Hillel I would definitely go on that. Freshman year I kind of missed the boat on getting involved with Hillel and the Jewish community as a freshman because I didn't know a lot of people in Hillel. And I think that is why I am not really one to get involved or do a lot of the programs here because I don't really know anybody.

Interviewer: So to join Hillel with Birthright Israel activities?

Sarah: Yes. Birthright, if they started—I would definitely be more willing to get involved now, because my freshman year I was kind of doing my own thing.

Rachel: I totally agree with that. If anything Birthright-related I feel like I want to participate, not like I owe them anything or like I am indebted to them, but the experience that they gave us was completely free and amazing.

The issues facing older alumni are related, although not identical. Older alumni, living in all of the communities studied, report that they are caught in between two organizational worlds: In their view, Hillel is for undergraduates and regular synagogues are for older people. Finding an appropriate Jewish community for young adults in their 20s is a challenge. Consider the following exchange from an Austin community focus group:

Janet: I just feel the Hillel building is absolutely beautiful, and maybe it's just the

fact that I just don't know, but I feel like it's strictly college. There's nothing here for really my age group. I feel like I'm sort of too young for the synagogue groups. I just kind of like to see if there's anything here for people that are 24-29, something like that.

Andrew: Right now, I just feel very disconnected from Judaism in general. I used to feel more connected to it in some ways, but things change. I grew up, grew older, and I'd like to find something that could make me feel more emotionally connected to the religion and people that I meet. Yeah, just part of that is just finding a community and, again, there's really, to my knowledge, I don't know of anything out there that kind of fills that gap between the older people who typically go to the synagogue and then like people here at the UT Hillel.

The sense that regular synagogues are a poor fit for young adults was nearly universal among focus group participants. In their experience, conventional synagogues are for families with children and for older folks; they are not comfortable places for Jewish young adults. For example, in the quote that follows, a Birthright Israel alumnus young adult describes his inability to find an appropriate congregation in his hometown of Austin:

My family, we were pretty involved in reformed [sic] congregations like growing up. So my family lives here in Austin so I still have Shabbat with them sometimes. And we went to services growing up. I had a bar mitzvah. When I went off to Tufts, I went to

services at the Tufts Hillel and went to a few of their activities and then once I got back here, I kind of ran into the problem of, well, I'm not in college any more and I didn't go to [the University of Texas] so I felt kind of out of place going to the Hillel services. And then, at the same time, going to services at Temple Beth Israel, I got really sick and tired of being the only one who wasn't either an old person or a young, newly married couple with a kid. And I felt really out of place everywhere I went so I just kind of stopped going to services 'cause I just couldn't find any people I really connected with. I kind of miss that because I was getting to know people at the Tufts Hillel. I was sort of acquaintances with people there, but most of my close friends at Tufts were not Jewish though.

The perception that synagogues are for families and older people is complemented by the view that they require prohibitively expensive membership dues. In the following extract, two young adults from the Atlanta community group discuss their feelings about attending services in the city's synagogues:

Alison: During college I would go to services every Friday night...And I come back from college I'd go once in a while but I just haven't found the synagogue that I really liked...It's hard. There's not really any synagogue that is welcoming to young people except Chabad and I think a lot of people just don't want to go...But other than that there's really no other option...The synagogues are

just married couples in their 30s and in love, and it's cost-prohibitive for most people...

Rebecca: I'd be more likely to go to synagogue if I had people to go with and also if there were more young people. I tried Reform, I'm not very observant anyway so I tried to find a synagogue that had more young people, and the times I've gone it's been mostly people my parents age or people with families and that's not really—like I don't really have anything in common with couples in their 30s who have four kids or something. That's kind of hard and so I haven't really made too much more of an effort to go since I haven't had much luck with that. I would like to be more involved if there were more options.

The description of synagogues as a poor fit for young adults stems as much from desire as disappointment. Most of the young Jewish adults with whom we spoke would like to join in Jewish activities. They wish to do so, however, in a community of their peers, and in a setting that features the right social mix.

Demands for Young Adult Jewish Community

The Jewish young adults we interviewed desire to have Jewish friends and connect with a Jewish community of their peers. How this need is felt and expressed, however, differs on campuses and in communities. On campuses, participants reported that they feel connected to Jewish peers regardless of whether they participate in activities sponsored by Jewish organizations. The sizeable Jewish populations

on the campuses included in the present study lend plausibility to this sentiment. A student from George Washington University expressed this view succinctly:

I am not really interested in the social aspect of like hanging out with other Birthright kids. I have my own group of friends, a lot of whom happen to be Jewish and I don't really need that outlet. If I were someplace where there was not a large Jewish community at all, maybe I would feel differently.

Many Jewish students on contemporary university campuses do not feel the need to join informally-sponsored Jewish activities in order to feel Jewishly connected.

Among older alumni living in the communities, Jewish networks tend to be sparser, and the felt need to connect to Jewish community is greater. If attending services at synagogues has little appeal for this age group, what kinds of Jewish activities and communal engagements do they seek? A number of participants spoke highly of social activities designed expressly for young adults, including Birthright Israel post-trip activities, as well as “Jews and Brews” gatherings at clubs, “turbo dating” and kindred singles events, concerts, and holiday parties. In Seattle, in particular, focus group participants spoke of the importance of a Hillel program for graduate students and post-college young adults—Jconnect Seattle—and the social events it sponsors (see Appendix). They describe the program as critical in aiding their transition to Seattle, and for providing a sense of community. Consider the following discussion extract from

the Seattle community group. The first two speakers, Liz and Robert, met on a Birthright Israel trip and subsequently were married. They are joined in this exchange by Amy, a third “Jconnector” and Birthright Israel alumna:

Liz: What happened, for me, is that...after my bat mitzvah pretty much I was like, I don't want to be a Jew, like, kind of screw this, everyone is Jewish, what's the point?...And so like I had a non-Jewish boyfriend and like all my friends weren't Jews. And then, I was kind of drawn back into the community, and so I went on Birthright, I was trying to really search for a reconnection into that community, and so what Jconnect really helped me do was to reconnect with the local folks that I had lost touch with, that I had like gone to school with and all of that. And so it really was a good way to make my way back into the community.

Robert: I didn't really identify with my Jewish roots before the trip, and the trip really helped me do that, and I would say that my ratio of like Jewish friends to non-Jewish friends has really, it sort of flipped around. And I think that Jconnect was just a great opportunity to be able to see some of those people and other people in a space where there were already activities preplanned and taken care of...that really just helped keep the experience alive for me. I don't think I really gave a lot of thought to the connection between Birthright and Hillel [University of Washington sponsor of Jconnect], but I think they did a really good job of really trying to bring the people in, to keep the community together.

Amy: Once I moved back home to Seattle, you know, I was looking for somewhere to connect with really, anybody, and so I found Jconnect, and it was more, you know, I wanted to reconnect with the Jewish community, but you know, the synagogues in Seattle, you don't necessarily feel comfortable just going to... Anybody who has really tried to go understands. It's just not really somewhere where, you know, a young 20-year-old would feel comfortable going on a regular basis to meet friends and whatnot. And so Jconnect kind of gave me the place to go to make friends...All my friends were doing it. Sure, why not? And so, it's more something that I want to do now, as kind of, you know, friends are going, it's something Jewishly turned into what I want to do.

The comments of these three Jconnecters highlight not only the success of that particular program, but also the importance of Jewish social networks for enabling participation in Jewish life. When young adults are bound up in networks of engaged Jewish peers, then Jewish activities become (to borrow Amy's apt phrase) "turned into what I want to do."

For many focus group participants, however, expressly social events programmed for young adults give off the "wrong vibe." For these informants, the young adult social programs have the feel of a "meat market." The phrase *meat market* appears in multiple conversations and signifies the limits of programs expressly aimed at social mixing. David speaks for many of his already-partnered peers when he states that Washington D.C.'s Geshar Entry Point

"seems to be primarily structured around dating and meeting people, and I'm in a relationship." Others regard programmed social activities as too contrived, overt, or "forced." John, a participant in the D.C. discussion group, explains his experience attending GLOE, a gay and lesbian outreach organization. "I went to one of their events and frankly I thought it was too forced. I get very nervous around structured social interactions now. They make me feel very awkward."

In several groups, individuals thus expressed a desire for more content-rich Jewish engagements, especially Shabbat observances and Jewish study. Consistent with the sensibilities discussed above, they seek such activities in the community of young adults, and outside of the conventional synagogue context. Those who have had experiences with Boston's Vilna Shul and Jconnect's educational offerings described those experiences as indicative of what they are seeking (see descriptions in Appendix). Consider the following comments, the first from the Boston community group describing the participant's visits to the Vilna Shul:

When I first got back, I was home for the summer for another four weeks before school started so my sister and I would make challah which was really great, and then I went to a service on the beach, which was awesome, and then back here I went to the Vilna Shul for—I went to another thing in Boston, which I didn't really like. It was just very—I didn't know anyone. It was very small and

nobody was my age—so then I went to the Vilna Shul and actually saw two people, well one person who led; he was like our leader... So he was in Boston and I emailed him about it, and he showed up with another person from the Birthright trip. So that was really great. But otherwise it is hard and I went home for Rosh Hashanah and then I went back to the Vilna Shul just before—so it has been up and down I would say in terms of my Jewish activities, but mostly up.

The young adult havurah that meets monthly at the Vilna Shul filled a void in Rachel's Jewish life. Unlike the "other thing" she attended in Boston, the congregation is neither sparse nor old; rather, Vilna packs dozens of young adults into the historic downtown synagogue for a spirited Shabbat evening service, followed by dinner and an engaging guest speaker.

In the next quote, Liz, a Seattle alumna, speaks in similar terms about how Jconnect's Jewish Learning Initiative, a program of weekly evening classes on rotating topics, fulfilled a personal need:

Kind of a nice happy coincidence that happened when we came back from Israel is that Jconnect was starting up the Jewish Learning Initiative, which is just free—I mean, it's not—it's free for students, but very cheap or free learning. Classes change every month. And I think that was really valuable for me especially, because I know, when I came back, I just had a lot of questions and I wanted to learn more and like, that kind of desire for more knowledge was really sparked. [And so I feel that] resources for where to

learn more, like where to find out more about the questions that had been brought up for you, would be good as well.

Although these "serious" learning and Shabbat-oriented programs focus on religion, it would be a mistake to regard them as devoid of social content. Religious and learning programs also provide opportunities for socializing and meeting potential life partners. However, as one discussion participant noted, in such settings, the agenda is less overt. That difference makes these activities more appealing to many of these young adults.

Ultimately, it is the informal community that emerges from and complements the formal programs that is often perceived as most rewarding. Consider the following comment:

I cooked for 30 people one night, and that was the first time I had ever done anything like that, and it was the best Shabbat experience I have ever had. And it was actually great, because it ended up culminating in the police being called, because we were singing the prayers too loudly at the end! It was wonderful. But what I found is that in Seattle, the institutionalized organizations, like the synagogues and—and even Jconnect to an extent, like, it's not as—it's just not as organic. Like what—what I found is that Jconnect really gave me a place to, like a safe place to kind of develop my own Jewish identity, but getting together with friends and like, actually doing things ourselves, was—was the best thing and the most meaningful and powerful.

To be sure, informal Jewish gatherings of the kind described in this narrative do not materialize in an institutional vacuum. Rather, such social groups develop in the context of institutionally-supported Jewish life, especially when programs reach beyond the merely social to provide high quality, content-rich contexts for learning and praying. Unfortunately, high quality initiatives designed for Jewish young adults emphasizing learning and Shabbat observance are established in only a limited number of centers of Jewish life.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS: CHALLENGES & DILEMMAS

There is no question that Birthright Israel has been successful in generating interest among young adult Jews in Jewish life. As well, a great deal is working reasonably well in the domain of Jewish programming for university students and young adults. There are multiple opportunities for involvement post trip and, on some campuses and in some communities, there is substantial involvement by Birthright Israel alumni. Moreover, there is broad recognition of what needs to be done. Our interviews are, perhaps, mere “snapshots of a moving stream.”

Hillel and post-trip professionals seem to be well aware of the importance of trying to meet the needs of highly motivated program alumni. They are aware of the potential, as well as the difficulties. They understand the problems of developing new social networks, and the difficulty outsiders feel in joining Hillel activities. Indeed, Hillel’s new Campus Entrepreneurs initiative is aimed at recruiting groups of friends outside of the normal Hillel frameworks. The Birthright Israel Foundation’s post-trip professionals sponsor many creative programs and work diligently to link alumni to existing opportunities in the community. It is evident that the Foundation has succeeded in recruiting dedicated, hardworking staff.

As the data from our focus groups indicate, however, much can be done to extend the Birthright Israel experience. The policy choices that must be made will entail tradeoffs, and the best choices are not necessarily evident given our current state of knowledge. The present

research, however, suggests a number of promising directions for policy and program development. Below, four specific challenges for successful post-trip programming are highlighted and related policy dilemmas discussed.

1. How can Taglit recruit networks? The interviews conducted for this study unequivocally demonstrate the importance of friendship/social networks in fostering post-trip Jewish engagement. On campus and in the community, Birthright Israel alumni prefer to engage in Jewish activities with people they know. Indeed, when their Jewish friends participate in Jewish activities in a routine fashion, then such activities become the normal “thing that we do.”

One implication is that Birthright Israel consider strategies that magnify the social network effects of trips. One obvious option is to expand the number of campus and community-based trips. The advantage of such trips in terms of social networking is significant: Pre- and post-trip activities can be built into the program, and personal relationships established between participants and staff. The intra-group ties that develop, moreover, will be those between members of a single Jewish community rather than a far flung collection of individuals. It is therefore unsurprising, but still noteworthy, that the campus and community-based professionals with whom we spoke strongly advocate local (campus and

community) trips over the “national” trips that draw from a broader region or the country as a whole.

Expanding the number of local (campus and community-based) trips seems like an obvious policy choice, but is not without costs and may not be feasible for most participants. First, the logistic challenge of mounting more local trips that are date/time convenient for everyone would prove a formidable challenge. Second, many Birthright Israel participants prefer to go on national rather than local trips. They speak passionately about their desire to meet new people and begin with a fresh social slate. Finally, specialized “niche” trips, including those emphasizing specific themes (e.g., “peace & justice”) and activities (e.g. hiking), as well as those designed for professionals in specific fields, are increasingly popular. As Birthright Israel expands (from taking less than 20,000 per year to more than 30,000 per year), the tradeoffs in developing local versus national trips will become acute.

A key policy choice is therefore how to balance the costs and benefits of sending relatively more community and campus-based groups. How should the beneficial impact of local trips on post-trip engagement be weighed against the likelihood that offering a mix of local, national, and niche trips will attract a larger number of overall applicants and participants? Solutions will likely be complex and will require thinking differently about trips. For example, one possibility is to encourage campus-based

organizations (in particular, Hillel) to give priority to freshman and sophomores (who will return to campuses for at least two years). Juniors and seniors (who will soon graduate) would then be encouraged to participate in national trips.

But the critical role of networks also suggests a need for new thinking regarding recruitment. How can participants be recruited as members of networks? Should application materials ask for names of friends? Should incentives be established to enroll groups rather than individuals? Should individuals with common interests—for example, a cappella singing, be recruited as a network even if they will not return to the same community? Is it possible to achieve the benefits of network recruiting by organizing multi-campus trips on the basis of geographic proximity, for example, trips for Chicago-area students attending University of Chicago, Northwestern, and University of Illinois at Chicago?

Perhaps the most important question is whether a new paradigm is required so as to think of 1) recruitment, 2) trip preparation, and 3) trip follow-up as one system. In this paradigm, follow-up would be a component of recruitment. It does not, necessarily, require a change in the competitive environment among trip organizers. Instead, it means that campuses and local communities would learn to work with providers from the beginning of a participant’s contact with the program, not simply after he or she has returned.

In terms of research, the next phase of policy-oriented research must determine whether and to what extent campus and community-based trips result in higher levels of post-Birthright Jewish engagement. A carefully controlled comparison of post-trip engagement among alumni of “local” versus “national” trips could help to determine the importance of the local campus/community and could help to structure new arrangements between local communities and trip organizers. Further, policy-oriented research must determine the proportion of Birthright Israel applicants favoring local, national, and special-interest tours, and their reasons for expressing such preferences.

2. How can Taglit-Birthright Israel meet the needs of “Birthright only” alumni? In all research sites, we encountered program alumni who are very positive about their Jewish identity and attached to Birthright Israel, but express no interest in any other kind of Jewish organizational involvement. The existence of the “Birthright only” segment of the alumni population has spurred much interest in post-trip programming. The reluctance of so many alumni to engage in Jewish life beyond Birthright Israel implies a need for Birthright to “step up” with its own form of programming for Jewish young adults. Such a vision however entails several risks. First, the Birthright Israel “brand” is highly regarded across the Jewish world. This accomplishment is due in part to tight quality control over the kinds of activities organized under the auspices of Birthright Israel. Expanded post-trip programming risks

diluting the Birthright Israel brand. An organization that excels at providing a rewarding and safe experience for Jewish young adults in Israel might not prove equally adept in organizing Jewish activities on college campuses and in Jewish communities. After all, programming for young adults is an area in which many well-intentioned organizations have encountered mixed results. In short, expanding post-programming entails the risk of overextension and the attendant dilution of Birthright Israel’s reputation for excellence.

Second, one of Birthright Israel’s signal accomplishments is that it enjoys the support of Jewish organizations and individuals across the denominational and political spectrum. Few other Jewish institutions receive the active support of Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and unaffiliated Jews, and Jews from the political right, center, and left. Taglit-Birthright Israel has achieved a rare breadth of support by limiting its range of activities and engaging the active collaboration of other Jewish organizations. By sponsoring its own campus or community-based initiatives, Birthright Israel risks becoming identified with a particular branch or expression of Judaism rather than as a property of the Jewish people as whole.

Above and beyond the question of whether and how much alumni programming should occur is the question of program content. How can Birthright Israel replicate the excitement of Israel in the United States? Just as important, how can Birthright Israel transition alumni

from the largely secular and Israel-centered Judaism of the Birthright Israel trip to an American Jewish context in which religion typically claims center stage? What kinds of programs and experiences can help bridge the Jewish identities cultivated during Birthright Israel and the realities of Jewish life in the American Diaspora?

Striking the right balance between outreach to the “Birthright-only” individuals, protection of Birthright Israel’s unique status in the Jewish world, and programs that can transition alumni to American Jewish life, will prove challenging but does not seem impossible. Policy decisions regarding the scope, duration, and contents of Birthright Israel’s alumni programming, however, need not be made in an information vacuum. Future, policy-oriented research can illuminate the tradeoffs by providing clear and systematic evaluations of existing programming efforts. Birthright Israel’s post-professionals organize a growing number of alumni events in communities, and the organization has begun experimenting with activities on selected campuses, including the new *Celebration* initiative. Systematic evaluation of the reach and impact of such programs, and how they are regarded in the broader Jewish community, could be accomplished for selected research sites.

3. How can Birthright Israel encourage more effective programming for young adults in Jewish communities? Evidence from the current study suggests that highly motivated

and charismatic young educators, organizers, and rabbis play a crucial role in establishing and nurturing the most successful programs for Jewish young adults. The importance of leadership is clear in Seattle, where Rabbi Dan Bridge established Jconnect, and in Boston, where Rabbi Jeremy Morrison organized The Riverway project. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that the Jewish community has no capacity to influence the prevalence of such individuals. Charisma is certainly not a quality that is universally possessed by Jewish professionals, but neither does it appear and become manifest in an entirely random fashion. Jewish professionals specializing in organizing programs and congregations for young adults can be recruited and trained. Federations, rabbinical seminaries, and Jewish professional programs clearly have an important role to play. Recruitment, training, and support for the next generation of professionals specializing in outreach to Jewish young adults should be a high priority.

Taglit-Birthright Israel potentially has an important role to play. At present, Birthright Israel post-trip professionals collaborate with others in the local Jewish organizational and Federation environment to develop programs for young adults. Such collaboration might extend to the design of additional social, educational, religious, and social justice programs that build young adult Jewish community. In many communities, this would entail establishing programs run out of Hillel or a downtown JCC along the model of Jconnect.

Elsewhere, it would entail assistance in seeding young adult Jewish havurot or minyanim, along the model of The Riverway Project or the D.C. Minyan, as well as providing support to electronic bulletin boards and social programming initiatives, such as Gesher City.

Future policy-oriented research can identify the most promising programs for Jewish young adults. There is a paucity of evaluative research that can be used to understand and develop initiatives for this. Needed research would examine the most successful initiatives for Jewish young adults to determine who participates, why, and how the effort might be brought to scale.

4. How can Taglit expand data sharing without “spamming” alumni? One immediate need is for better management of, and more fluid and universal access to, the Birthright Israel registration database. Under current arrangements, campus-based Jewish professionals have access only to participants in the Birthright Israel trips sponsored by their organizations. This fact alone might explain why, although the trip increases Jewish engagement on campus, it appears to do so only among those who were at least somewhat engaged prior to the trip. Similarly, although Birthright Israel’s own post-trip professionals receive regular lists of current participants, they have only their own privately-created files on alumni from earlier cohorts. Finally, Jewish professionals engaged in outreach to young adults, who do not work for Birthright Israel, have no direct access to Birthright Israel alumni lists.

Hillel staff (and other campus-based Jewish professionals) could potentially make good use of contact information about the majority of Birthright Israel participants who traveled with other trip providers. Post-trip professionals would benefit from access to the entire database and from updated address information on alumni who have relocated. Jewish professionals working with young adults in the community would also certainly benefit from email contact information for alumni in their community.

The policy dilemma is how to keep alumni informed of Jewish activities in their communities without overwhelming them with unwanted solicitations. Future policy-oriented research can address this dilemma by ascertaining how widely Birthright Israel alumni expect their contact information to be shared. Preliminary data on this point suggests that Birthright Israel participants are glad to hear from Jewish organizations and appreciate being kept up to date on activities in their areas. Several discussion group participants commented that they regard sharing of their contact information with Jewish organizations as “part of the bargain” with Birthright Israel. Just how widely these sentiments are shared however might be a topic for further study. More generally, developing policies—and the technical capacity—for data sharing, both within and beyond the organization, should be a top priority for Birthright Israel moving forward.

CONCLUSION

The success of Birthright Israel in creating a transformative experience for 18- to 26-year-old Jewish young adults is unequivocal. Yet, although program alumni are often attitudinally transformed, their positive motivations do not typically translate into substantial changes in behavior. Alumni may participate more in organized Jewish community activities, particularly students who attended a campus-organized trip, but the majority do not substantially increase their level of Jewish communal engagement. The findings of the present study suggest that there are a number of ways to change this situation. The most promising direction involves finding ways to draw upon and extend participants' existing social networks.

No single intervention or policy change will by itself reverse the present situation. Rather, a combination of policy changes (e.g., how trips are organized and how information about participants is shared), along with new programmatic options (e.g., efforts like those in Boston and Seattle to foster young adult Jewish community) will likely be necessary. Replicating on a day-to-day basis the level of intellectual, emotional, and behavioral engagement of a Birthright Israel trip will be hard to accomplish. At its core, however, Birthright Israel is about the establishment of human relationships in the context of Jewish peoplehood. The challenge for post-trip programming is much the same, albeit on a larger scale.

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APPENDIX

Focus Group Recruitment

Participating Hillels organized focus groups among campus-based Birthright Israel alumni. Cohen Center and SSRI staff organized the community focus groups. Calls were made to those individuals whose demographic information suggested they had completed college and possessed, at the time of registration, a primary or secondary address in the city where focus groups were being held. Names to be called were selected randomly from the database. Calls continued to be made until at least ten alumni agreed to participate in the designated group. For a list of groups see Table A1.

Table A1: Focus groups by city

<i>City</i>	<i>Group</i>	<i>Number of Participants</i>
Atlanta	<i>Campus – Emory</i>	7
	<i>Community</i>	8
Austin	<i>Campus – University of Texas</i>	7
	<i>Community</i>	6
Boston	<i>Campus – Boston University 1</i>	8
	<i>Campus – Boston University 2</i>	5
	<i>Community</i>	9
Seattle	<i>Campus – University of Washington</i>	10
	<i>Community</i>	11
Washington DC	<i>Campus – George Washington University</i>	5
	<i>Campus – University of Maryland</i>	7
	<i>Community</i>	4
Total	12 Groups	87

Focus Group Participants

All rounds of the trip are represented among the focus group participants. More than half went on trips in 2005-7 (see Table A2).

Table A2: Focus group participants by trip year

<i>Trip Year</i>	<i>Number of Participants</i>	<i>Percent</i>
2000	4	5%
2001	5	6%
2002	3	3%
2003	8	9%
2004	7	8%
2005	17	20%
2006	23	26%
2007	15	17%
Missing	5	6%
TOTAL	87	100%

Close to half of the participants (43 percent) went on Hillel trips. The rest went with other trip providers such as Oranim, Shorashim, and Mayanot. Most participants came from affiliated households—29 percent report that they were raised Conservative and 37 percent Reform. Thirteen percent report that they were raised “Just Jewish” or culturally Jewish. Eighty-four percent report that they had some kind of Jewish education while growing up (most had part-time Jewish education) and 82 percent report having a bar/bat mitzvah

ceremony. In general, participants in the study came from somewhat more affiliated backgrounds than the recent cohorts of Birthright Israel alumni.

Research Sites

The volume and quality of programming crafted for Jewish young adults varied from one city to another in our sample. This section of the appendix provides a general overview of the Jewish communities and institutions geared toward Jewish young adults in each of the study's research sites.

Austin

Austin, Texas is one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the United States. Although no current Jewish population data is available, Austin's Jewish population in 2005 was estimated at 15,000, constituting roughly two percent of the area's population. Many of Austin's Jews are young adults who have moved to Austin to take positions in the high-tech sector, attracted by the city's climate, progressive mindset, and cultural offerings. However, the sparse Jewish population makes it hard for them to meet other Jews, and also makes it hard for Jewish institutions to identify them.

Several Jewish organizations are attempting to address this reality. The Jewish Community Association of Austin, a federation/JCC hybrid, has a Young Adult Division which offers 4-6 programs a month. In addition, several Jewish

individuals have formed their own Jewish social groups. Still, for the most part, there are relatively few offerings for them, especially in synagogues, and Austin's Jewish young adults tend to have tenuous Jewish involvement. At the time of the study there was no post-trip Birthright Israel professional in Austin.

The University of Texas has approximately 4,000 Jewish undergraduates, served by a dedicated Hillel staff in a newly-built Hillel building. Aided by the presence of a JAFI Israel Fellow, the Hillel has been successful in its efforts to recruit for Birthright Israel. Eighty students from UT-Austin went on a Hillel-sponsored trip in the winter of 2006-7, accompanied by several Hillel staff members. While there is an extensive effort to engage students after their trip through one-on-one contact, only a few programs specifically target Birthright Israel alumni.

Seattle

Seattle has a Jewish population of 37,000, slightly over one percent of the population of the total metropolitan area. Relative to most other Jewish communities in the United States, intermarriage rates are particularly high and affiliation rates are very low. With high-tech employers like Google, Amazon, and Microsoft, and the attractions of the Pacific Northwest, the Seattle area is a magnet for many young professionals from across the United States.

Young Jewish professionals who move to Seattle lack friends and family in the area, so

they actively seek Jewish community. The University of Washington Hillel, with a newly constructed facility, is the only Hillel foundation in the United States that successfully serves both the needs of young adults and those of undergraduate students.

Jconnect Seattle, based at Hillel and created in 2003, offers 30-40 programs each month to young adults, publicized to an extensive list of email addresses. One of the Jconnect leaders also serves as the post-trip Birthright Israel professional. About one-third of the most active participants in Jconnect are Birthright Israel alumni. On occasion, Jconnect partners with other local Jewish organizations, including the Young Leadership Division of the federation, a synagogue-based program called Next Generation, and the local Chabad. Overall, Jewish programming for young adults is well-coordinated and extensive. Jconnect is well-known among Jews in Seattle, and Jewish young adults who live elsewhere but are contemplating a move to Seattle often contact Jconnect for information about Jewish life.

The University of Washington has an estimated 2,000 Jewish undergraduates. This past year, about 40 attended a Hillel-sponsored Birthright Israel trip, while another 40 young adults attended a trip organized by Jconnect. Although there is extensive programming for students, there are only a few programs that specifically target Birthright Israel alumni.

Atlanta

Atlanta has 120,000 Jews, representing slightly over four percent of all Atlanta households. The Jewish population has grown 56 percent over the past decade. More than 80 percent of all Jews in Atlanta were born outside of Georgia, and two-thirds of those married since 1990 are intermarried.

Young adults in Atlanta, almost all of whom are transplants, tend to live in the city rather than the suburbs. They have many different opportunities to participate in targeted programs offered by a variety of organizations that operate independently of each other. A number of local rabbis are especially attuned to young adults and have developed programs and activities specifically for them, including social events, study sessions, avant-garde Shabbat services, and free High Holiday tickets. Chabad Intown offers an annual “Grateful Yid Purim Bash” with comedians and jazz that draws 400. The JCC has a series of primarily social programs for young adults called 2135, and the federation has a Young Leadership Council. The local Birthright Israel post-trip professional is a federation employee who devotes approximately 20 percent of her time to Birthright Israel.

Emory University has approximately 2,500 Jewish students. A new Hillel building is currently under construction. Until it is completed, Hillel will continue to offer programs in university facilities. Emory Hillel sends approximately 25 students to Birthright Israel

programs each year, but does not do much programming specifically for students returning from trips. Instead, it encourages them to attend regular Hillel programs.

Boston

Metropolitan Boston has a Jewish population of 210,000 representing 7.2 percent of the overall population. The Jewish population grew by 17 percent between 1995 and 2005. The geographical dispersion that characterized the population in earlier decades has stabilized in recent years, with roughly half of Boston Jews living in the city or in the older streetcar suburbs of Brookline and Newton, and half living further out. Marriage patterns are comparable to New York, with 29 percent of households intermarried and 34 percent intermarried.

Boston's universities and high-tech industry make the city a magnet for young adult Jews from around the world. The city boasts a number of vibrant Jewish educational institutions, an entrepreneurial Federation (the Combined Jewish Philanthropies), and a number of programs devoted to Jewish young adults. Gesher City serves as a clearing house for young adult activities, posting dozens of events on its weekly electronic calendar, and organizing programming on its own and in collaboration with other organizations. Temple Israel's The Riverway Project draws hundreds of Jewish young adults to its Shabbat celebrations and learning groups, including weekly and monthly events at Temple Israel, and decentralized

gatherings in the homes of volunteer hosts. The Vilna Shul hosts weekly services of the Havurah on the Hill, one of several successful young adult minyanim, a list that also includes Tehilla and the Washington Square Minyan. Kavod House provides support, encouragement, and religious community to its network of hundreds of Jewish activists united in their commitment to *tikkun olam*.

Boston University (BU) is home to approximately 3,000 Jewish students who comprise 15 percent of the overall student body. Hillel is housed in an elegant new building with ample, attractive space for the full spectrum of Hillel's program. The organization sends 1-2 Birthright Israel buses per year, but many BU students choose to travel with other providers. Overall, Boston University sends 150-200 students on Birthright Israel annually. The BU Hillel obtains a full list of returning alumni from Boston's Combined Jewish Philanthropies and engages in outreach to all of them.

Washington D.C.

Washington D.C. has a Jewish population of 215,000, slightly larger than Boston's. The Jewish population is concentrated in the suburbs of Lower Montgomery County (Rockville, Bethesda, Silver Spring), Northern Virginia (Arlington, Alexandria) and downtown Washington D.C. In contrast to Boston, however, the rate of affiliation and participation in Jewish life in Washington D.C. is comparatively low.

Washington D.C. appears to be poised for a renaissance of downtown Jewish life. Two landmark buildings of Washington's downtown Jewish community, the JCC and the Sixth and I Historic synagogue, were recently reacquired and renovated. The downtown JCC sponsors a wide range of social and educational programs geared toward Jewish young adults, and also hosts a traditional-egalitarian prayer group, the D.C. Minyan. The Sixth and I provides a venue in its beautifully restored sanctuary for concerts and lectures, as well as space for a semi-monthly Orthodox outreach minyan. Housed at the Reform Movement's Religious Action Center, Tikkun Leil Shabbat is a weekly Friday night minyan emphasizing social justice and tikkun olam. Jewish young adults in downtown and suburban Washington D.C. also meet in special interest clubs (known as 'clusters') organized under the framework of Gesher City-Entry Point. The latter organization also maintains an electronic bulletin board of young adult events in the D.C. area. Jewish life outside of the downtown is based in synagogues and attracts fewer young adult participants.

University of Maryland boasts an undergraduate Jewish population of 5,400 comprising over 20 percent of the overall undergraduate student body. The University's Jewish population is diverse, including a large number of Orthodox Jews who dine in the University's full-service kosher dining hall housed at the Hillel. Hundreds of students celebrate Shabbat by joining one of the Hillel's many prayer groups (Orthodox, Reform,

Egalitarian, etc.) each week. Jewish life on campus also includes Chabad, which provides Shabbat meals to as many as 100 students on a given Friday evening. Maryland Hillel prides itself on sending three Hillel-Birthright trips each winter season. Overall, more than 300 Maryland students participated in Birthright Israel trips last year.

Located in downtown Washington D.C., George Washington University (GW) enrolls approximately 2,750 Jewish students comprising approximately 32 percent of the undergraduate student body. The university Hillel organizes one Birthright Israel bus per year but many GW students travel on Birthright Israel with one of the other tour providers. In recent years, the University sent between 180 and 200 students annually. The campus Hillel sponsors one post-trip reunion for the participants in the Hillel trip and generally encourages participation in its regular activities. The Hillel does not engage in outreach to Birthright Israel alumni of different providers.



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