
An Impact Study of InterfaithFamily's Your Community Initiative

August 2016



Rosov Consulting conducted an impact evaluation of InterfaithFamily's (IFF) Your Community Initiative (YCI) in the San Francisco Bay Area, Chicago, and Philadelphia between Fall 2015 and Spring 2016. The evaluation studied both interfaith couples and families (IFF's participants) as well as professional staff of Jewish organizations in these cities. The goals of the study were threefold:

- To determine if and to what extent YCI activities **generate desired outcomes** for Interfaith couples and families as well as for Jewish institutions;
- To **uncover the impact of specific YCI activities** relative to individuals and institutions and to determine the cumulative effect measured either by quantity or intensity;
- To **uncover contextual factors**, if any, which enhance and impede desired outcomes in each of the cities under review.

Overall, **participants attribute gains in each of the desired short-term outcomes to InterfaithFamily**. Almost half of the survey respondents also attributed desired long-term outcomes to IFF.



I would say, 100% I feel more connected to finding a Jewish community, and more engaged in the question of how to find it. Without IFF, I would not have done that at all.

Methods

- A **survey was fielded to participants** in San Francisco, Chicago, and Philadelphia who had experienced one or more of a series of YCI services, such as officiation connections, multi-session classes, one-off events, and consultations. The survey was sent to 4,526 contacts; **623** complete responses were analyzed. 333 (54%) are from Chicago, 169 (27%) from Philadelphia, and 121 (19%) from the Bay Area.
- A **survey was fielded to Organizations** in Chicago and the Bay Area who had participated in at least one of three YCI activities: IFF Month (formerly IFF Shabbat), Professional Development (formerly IFF Training), and Adult Education (formerly IFF presentations). The survey was also fielded to a group of organizations who had not participated in any IFF activities. The survey was sent to 469 organizational contacts representing 284 organizations; **96** complete responses were analyzed with a nearly even distribution between Chicago and the Bay Area. An organizational survey was fielded in Philadelphia in 2015 as part of a pilot study which preceded this evaluation.
- We conducted **interviews with participants (30)** with attention to particular demographic characteristics that, based on survey data, we hypothesized could have a bearing on outcomes. In addition to ensuring an even geographic distribution, these included: number of programmatic touches, affiliation with a Jewish organization (or not), children and parents of interfaith families, and interfaith families with and without children. In speaking with couples, we attempted to interview both partners together (**and spoke with 12 such couples**) but when that was not possible, we interviewed the partner who was available.
- We **conducted focus groups and interviews with organizational leaders (15)**, with attention to geographic distribution, ensuring a balance of synagogue and non-synagogue professionals, and the level of contact they had with IFF.



Key Findings: Interfaith Couples and Families

► Couple and Family Dynamics Improve

As reported in the Continuum study commissioned by the Jacobson Family Foundation,¹ couples who make decisions about faith collaboratively and early on are more likely to establish a stable identity for their children. Moreover, the study found that it is important to interfaith couples to deepen their emotional connections to each other at the same time as they are infusing their understanding of Jewish traditions with meaning. Additionally, as part of Rosov Consulting's evaluation of Honeymoon Israel, we have found that when couples are afforded a non-judgmental but serious opportunity to talk with each other about their respective faith traditions and their aspirations for their family, they are more likely to begin to share those decisions rather than assign them to one partner or another.



The idea that we have to keep open communication came about for us from IFF, and now that we know that we are raising our child Jewish, how do I as the non-Jewish partner, keep a Jewish household? I now have a place to go to – the IFF community and website – to learn and understand that.

¹ "Interfaith Insights and Workbook". Rep. N.p.: Continuum, 2015. Web.

In light of these findings, the Rosov team combined a set of survey items focused on family dynamics, to better understand the ways in which IFF is addressing this dimension of interfaith family life. The impact demonstrated in this area is both significant and noteworthy.

- Eighty-eight percent of couples without children and 79% of couples with children indicated that IFF YCI programs helped them “very much” or “somewhat” when it comes to talking to their partner about the role Jewish traditions can play in their life.
- 71% of couples without children and 55% of couples with children indicated that IFF YCI programs helped them “very much” or “somewhat” to appreciate the similarities and differences in their respective cultural and religious traditions.

► **IFF Multi-Session Programs are Associated with Greatest Impact**

When isolated and compared with other IFF offerings, participating in a multi-session program (an in-person class like “Love & Religion” or online offerings like “Raising a Child with Judaism”) is associated with the greatest impact across all of IFF YCI’s short-term impact goals. Interviews with couples reveal that an intimate setting for learning as well as the opportunity to engage with other interfaith couples and families are two meaningful differentiators of this type of program.



What I liked about the IFF class was that it helped us to talk to our families in terms of how we would live our lives.

► **A “Community” of Interfaith Families is a Value**

Participants across a range of demographic categories (e.g. age, location, parent or non-parent) are interested in developing a community of other interfaith couples. 60% of those surveyed indicated that they would like to develop a community of friends with other interfaith families. Beyond a class, meet-up, or lifecycle event, participants would appreciate being able to tap into like-minded interfaith couples and families for support. 71% of participants with more than three points of contact with IFF say that IFF helped them “somewhat” or “a lot” to connect to other interfaith couples compared to 26% of those with only one point of contact.



Going to the workshops and dinners it has been a relief [to know] families [who] are going through [the] same issues and challenges.

Select Findings for Interfaith Couples and Families by Logic Model Outcome Area

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

Overall, participants attribute gains in each of the desired **short-term** outcomes to InterfaithFamily. It is notable that there are no marked differences between cities with each Your Community Initiative generating similarly positive results. The findings below point to IFF's continued progress in making a difference for interfaith families.

AWARENESS

Interfaith families become aware of and connect with local and online Jewish community resources.

👉 **62%** of respondents to the participants survey responded "A lot" or "Somewhat" to the question "Have the programs, services, and information provided by InterfaithFamily helped you to learn what resources and services are 'out there' (either locally or online) to support your connection to Jewish life and the Jewish community?"

RELATIONSHIPS

Interfaith couples have a positive experience with IFF/YCI staff, mentors, and volunteers.

👉 **87%** of respondents to the participants survey responded "extremely positive" or "positive" to the question "Which of the following best describes your experience with InterfaithFamily professionals and volunteers in your community?"

JEWISH LEARNING & COMMUNITY BUILDING EXPERIENCES

Interfaith couples learn how to talk about the place of religion in their lives and about Jewish traditions

👉 **64%** of respondents to the participants survey responded "A lot" or "Somewhat" to the question "Have the programs, services, and information provided by InterfaithFamily helped you to talk to your spouse about the role that Jewish life and Jewish traditions can play in your family's life?"

Interfaith couples learn how/why to integrate aspects of Jewish life and community into their lives

% of respondents to the participants survey who responded "A lot" or "Somewhat" to the question "Have the programs, services and information provided by InterfaithFamily helped you to:"

- 👉 expand your knowledge of Judaism, and/or Jewish life?: **55%**
- 👉 better understand the meaning behind specific Jewish rituals or traditions?: **53%**
- 👉 modify, experiment or make "your own" homebased Jewish traditions to incorporate both partners?: **52%**

Interfaith couples develop skills to navigate the Jewish communal landscape

👉 **57%** of respondents to the participants survey responded "A lot" or "Somewhat" to the question "Have the programs, services, and information provided by InterfaithFamily helped you to learn about the organizations and professionals in the Jewish community and what they provide?"

Interfaith couples connect more with other Jewishly engaged interfaith couples

👉 **36%** of respondents to the participants survey responded "A lot" or "Somewhat" to the question "Have the programs, services, and information provided by InterfaithFamily helped you to develop relationships with other Jewishly engaged interfaith families in your community?"

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

Although our study posited that it was premature to seek strong impact in each of InterfaithFamily's desired **long-term** outcomes, almost half of the survey respondents attribute their growth in these areas to InterfaithFamily.

COMFORT AND CONFIDENCE

People in interfaith relationships feel comfortable and confident in Jewish settings and when making Jewish choices

👉 **48%** of respondents to the participants survey responded "A lot" or "Somewhat" to the question "Have the programs, services, and information provided by InterfaithFamily helped you to feel more confident participating in Jewish rituals, celebrations and events?"

👉 **39%** of respondents to the participants survey responded "A lot" or "Somewhat" to the question "Have the programs, services, and information provided by InterfaithFamily helped you to feel more comfortable in institutional Jewish settings (such as a synagogue)"

CONNECTION

People in interfaith relationships maintain connections with other Jewishly engaged families and Jewish organizations

👉 **44%** of respondents to the participants survey responded "A lot" or "Somewhat" to the question "Have the programs, services, and information provided by InterfaithFamily helped you to connect with local Jewish organizations where you and your family feel included and welcomed"

👉 **55%** of respondents to the participants survey responded "A lot" or "Somewhat" to the question "Have the programs, services, and information provided by InterfaithFamily helped you to enhance your sense of connection to the Jewish community?"

CHOOSING JEWISH

People in interfaith relationships make Jewish choices using the skills and assets they've acquired

👉 **44%** of respondents to the participants' survey responded "A lot" or "Somewhat" to the question "Have the programs, services, and information provided by InterfaithFamily helped you to incorporate Jewish traditions in life cycle events (birth ceremonies, bar/bat mitzvah, weddings, funerals)?"

👉 **53%** of respondents to the participants' survey who have children at home responded "A lot" or "Somewhat" to the question "Have the programs, services, and information provided by InterfaithFamily helped you to participate in Jewish rituals (such as lighting Shabbat candles, lighting a Hanukkah menorah, participating in a Passover seder, or saying Hebrew blessings over food)?"



Key Findings: Jewish Organizations

► Organizations are Ready to Move Beyond Inclusive Policies

IFF interventions **do not** seem to be correlated with the existence of inclusive policies toward interfaith families in Jewish organizations. Interviews with organizational professionals revealed that more often organizations feel that their approach to policy enactment is **validated by IFF but not necessarily prompted** by them. While this finding does not demonstrate IFF impact, it may signal a more widespread trend toward inclusive policies and suggests that IFF’s efforts are best devoted to deeper, longer-term cultural and behavioral change in organizations. In fact, as noted below in Cross-Cutting Findings, IFF interventions are **equipping organizational leaders with knowledge** that fosters inclusion and **influencing the way organizations communicate** with interfaith families.

► Volunteer Leaders are the Next Frontier

Organizational survey respondents included a small number of lay leaders. Their survey responses coupled with interviews with Jewish professionals suggest that lay leaders feel less equipped, and are less sure about how to support interfaith families in their organizations. In particular, professionals report that their volunteer leaders need more training so that organizational change efforts can be supported at the level of the board. We see this as a trend to follow and may be an important sub-population for IFF to target in its offerings to Jewish organizations.



There are challenges still with lay people who with best of intention say things like “but then you’re not Jewish” or other bizarre things that could be hurtful and damage the brand of your institution.

Select Findings for Jewish Organizations by Logic Model Outcome Area

INCLUSIVENESS

Jewish organizations refer members to interfaith resources

🔗 86% of professionals who had multiple points of contact with IFF refer others to IFF compared to 31% of those with little to no contact.

Jewish leaders use inclusive language and explicitly communicate welcome

🔗 71% of professionals who had multiple points of contact with IFF use educational resources that are inclusive compared to 37% of those with little to no contact.

Educators and educational programs attend to the needs of interfaith families

🔗 68% of professionals who had multiple points of contact with IFF also publicly acknowledge interfaith families and their stories compared to 41% of those with little to no contact.

Jewish organizations implement inclusive policies

🔗 Although there are no statistically significant differences associated with policies, 79% of synagogues with multiple points of IFF contact will include the names of both parents when calling a child up for an aliyah compared with 60% of synagogues with little to no contact who only use the Jewish parent’s name.

Cross-Cutting Findings

We highlight two key findings that apply to both groups of interest.

► **More Participation is Associated with Greater Impact**

The more interfaith couples, and organizational leaders, participate in IFF YCI offerings and engage with IFF YCI staff, the more likely they are to report positive impact. When looking at couples and families, 41% of multiple-time users report that they engage in some form of Jewish practice in their home or in a communal context, whereas only 22% of one-time users report the same. For organizations, 95% of staff with intensive IFF contact report the use of inclusive language in their organization's communications compared to 67% of those with minimum IFF contact. 71% of organizations indicate that they have the tools and knowledge to be inclusive compared to 47% of those with minimum IFF contact.

► **The High Caliber of the IFF Director is Essential**

Both interfaith couples and families (87%) and Jewish professionals (based on our focus group data) report a high level of satisfaction with IFF staff and volunteers, especially with the IFF YCI director in their community. The caliber, expertise, and disposition of the IFF/YCI director is critical to the engagement of both couples and families and Jewish organizations. This high touch relational approach exemplified by skilled and sensitive IFF staff continues to be a critical factor cited by all.

Questions for Further Consideration

1. How can IFF/YCI further capitalize on the value-add of multi-session programs which enable couples to more meaningfully connect to each other and their extended family? While impactful, time and location are oft-cited barriers to connecting with IFF/YCI programs (and by extension with other interfaith couples). This is a challenge faced by many organizations with programs aimed at millennial couples and families. Are there natural partners with whom IFF/YCI can be collaborating to meet these young families where they are and integrate IFF's offerings more organically?
2. As synagogues and Jewish organizations more readily acknowledge the presence of interfaith families in their midst, are there deeper longer-term interventions with organizations that IFF can be aiming toward?
3. How might IFF/YCI begin to explicitly and directly work with lay leaders around issues of inclusion? For example, to what extent might it make sense to tap into existing leadership programs (e.g. JFNA/Young Leadership Cabinet; Spertus/Certificate in Jewish Leadership; Legacy Heritage Foundation/OnBoard; etc.) to offer modules around inclusion of interfaith families?

