

Cracking the Programming Code



The New York Teen Initiative and Its Contribution to the Field of Summer Experiences and the Lives of Jewish Teens

May 2019

Executive Summary

Phase One of the New York Teen Initiative (NYTI) has been a four-year, nine-million-dollar endeavor to redefine the New York City area's Jewish teen engagement through the incubation of new and innovative models for summer engagement, a robust online marketing platform (FindYourSummer.org), and the provision of scholarships to participating teens and their families. The Initiative is part of a national effort—spearheaded by the Jim Joseph Foundation—in which 14 foundations and federations are working together as a Funder Collaborative to expand and deepen Jewish teen education and engagement in 10 communities across the United States. Over its first four years, NYTI has been jointly funded by UJA-Federation of New York and the Jim Joseph Foundation, with The Jewish Education Project serving as lead operator.

A team at Rosov Consulting has partnered with NYTI to evaluate the efficacy of this endeavor. In this report, we explore NYTI's ongoing and lasting impact on the programs it has incubated, their sponsor organizations, and the many teens who have benefited from these programs.

In its first four years, NYTI has introduced to the field of Jewish teen engagement a diverse array of programmatic approaches, concepts, and models, some of which are now being replicated by other program providers. It has supported the personal and Jewish growth of hundreds of teens, many of whom would not have otherwise connected to Jewish life. And it has promoted hundreds of Jewish engagement programs through the implementation of FindYourSummer.org.

KEY FINDINGS

From Surfing on Long Island to Senior Care in Riverdale: **Incubating New Programmatic Models that Benefit the Field**

The range of new programmatic models incubated by the New York Teen Initiative is striking. Not all of the 12 programs incubated by NYTI over the past four years were able to mature and “graduate” from the incubator. Those programs that have gained traction have offered the field of Jewish teen engagement a roster of useful models. Several of these models share a focus on engaging specific segments or “niche groups” of teens through tailored experiences that are shorter in duration (sometimes only one or two weeks long), allowing teens to customize their summers and accommodate multiple personal and family goals and commitments. Over recent years, several other players in the Jewish teen programming marketplace have begun to follow this same approach and offer highly specific programs that are often shorter in duration than would have been common in the past. This is particularly evident in the domain of teen travel programs to Israel.

Making Jewish Summer Programs Affordable to All: **Investment in Scholarships**

The New York Teen Initiative has also included substantial investment in scholarships. Over its first four years, more than \$600,000 were invested in scholarships to Incubator programs, and \$1 million more were allocated for scholarships beyond the Incubator. These scholarships served 995 recipients. UJA Federation of New York's overall investment in scholarship more than doubled during this period from \$1.6 million in fiscal years 2011–2014 to \$3.3 million during the lifetime of the New York Teen Initiative (fiscal years 2015–2018).

Getting Out the Word: **The Success of FindYourSummer.org Requires Continued Investment**

Early on in the life of the New York Teen Initiative, it became apparent that an online portal was needed to promote teen programs throughout the Greater New York City area and drive traffic to these programs. The establishment of FindYourSummer.org has been a learning experience for the Initiative, and the lessons learned are indeed valuable.

- A website such as FindYourSummer.org is a dynamic space that needs maintaining on an ongoing basis, requiring ongoing commitment and investment of human and financial resources.
- A specialized staffer is required to oversee the maintenance of the site, including all aspects of the marketing campaign.
- This person can be expected to dedicate a substantial amount of time to interaction with content providers (programs)—to encourage them to keep their pages up to date—and with content consumers (parents and teens) who contact the site with a variety of questions and requests.
- Paid online (as well as print) advertisements are resources well spent, since they can dramatically increase traffic to the website.

More than three years after its launch, FindYourSummer.org has become a resource whose value and impact extends beyond the New York City area. In the 2018-2019 program year, the site is projected to reach 80,000 users, including 16% in the United States outside of New York and New Jersey and 8% internationally. In the past year, we have already seen anecdotal cases of teens in Europe who have traveled with programs to Israel based on information gleaned from this site.

Putting Bodies on the Bus: **Effective Recruitment is a Ground Game**

The trajectory of the New York Teen Initiative demonstrates just how much new programs rise and fall on recruitment. Even the most innovative programmatic models cannot run successfully if they are not able to get teens to commit and sign up. Getting recruitment right calls for intentional and intensive investment from day one. It means offering targeted training and ongoing support to program providers, especially those who lack the backing of legacy organizations with their own recruitment infrastructure and know-how. No less importantly, it means promoting and teaching the notion that recruitment is a ground game. While effective marketing, a social media plan, and an attractive website that's kept up to date are all very important, programs are unlikely to see recruitment success if they do not undertake the painstaking work of showing up in front of teens and parents, considering the particular needs of every single person who inquires, and diligently following up with these leads to ensure that teens commit to participating.

The evaluation of NYTI's effort to boost teen recruitment, and specifically the new FindYourSummer Ambassadors program, has also indicated some of the external factors that can help or complicate recruitment. We have learned that the yearly cadence of teen recruitment follows a somewhat predictable pattern, with peaks in late fall and early spring. We have also gained a deeper understanding of how different teens approach their summer plans differently. This has allowed us to develop the following typology of Jewish teens based on their approach to securing summer programming.

Teens may be:

- **"Planners"**—those who secure a place in a summer program as early as the prior fall.
- **"Explorers"**—those who may be open to a variety of "niche" or tailored experiences.
- **"Fillers"**—those who may have summer plans in place and look to fill in gaps in their schedules.
- **"Procrastinators"**—those who may express interest in summer programming but do not follow through.

The new FindYourSummer Ambassadors—Jewish professionals dedicated to interfacing with teens and their families to support recruitment—are set up, in great part, to address and capitalize on these learnings. The success of these Ambassadors will be a focus of the evaluation in coming years.

Making a Difference: **Lasting Impact on Diverse Jewish Teens**

The ultimate goals of NYTI have been to attract both more and more diverse teens to Jewish summer programs and to offer them meaningful Jewish experiences that will impact them personally, socially, and Jewishly. Over its first four years, New York Teen Initiative Incubator programs have reached and engaged over 800 teens, and this reach has grown threefold from the Initiative's first year to its fourth one. These teens are indeed diverse not only in terms of their Jewish backgrounds and current level of engagement in organized Jewish life, but also in terms of their ethnic origins, physical and intellectual needs, gender identities, and sexual orientation. We specifically note that:

- About one in six teens has come with limited Jewish background and little engagement in Jewish life.
- The number of participating teens from interfaith families has grown from 15% in 2016 to 24% in 2018—a number that likely comes close to the proportion of teens from interfaith families in the general, non-Orthodox Jewish population of New York City.

These teens have participated in summer experiences that had an immediate as well as a lasting impact on them. In post-summer surveys, teens have consistently shared that they have made new friends, gained important skills, and enhanced their sense of connection to the Jewish community. Importantly, many of these outcomes are associated with short, one- and two-week programs just as much as longer programs. When surveyed nine months later, teens reported continued engagement in Jewish activities as well as staying in touch with their friends. When interviewed two or three years after their participation, teens share that they have maintained relationships with friends made on the program and continued to benefit from practical life skills and productive attitudes that they trace to their participation in NYTI programs. Some have also made Jewish choices during college that they attribute in part to their NYTI participation.

Over the coming three years, NYTI will build on this work in a second phase, which will focus on supporting the most successful programmatic models incubated in Phase One to scale, expand, and move closer toward financial sustainability.

Getting Smarter: **What We Learned**

Operating, so far, over the course of four cycles of programming, NYTl leaders have gained important wisdom through the process of incubating these programs:

- 1 They have seen the need for **sufficient ramp-up time** to launch new programs. New NYTl programs have taken a year or more of planning before being ready to stand on their own two feet.
- 2 They have seen how **establishing a marketing infrastructure** early, before new programs are implemented, would have made it easier for these programs to flourish. Had FindYourSummer.org been in place before the first cohort of programs left the gate, many of the new programs it promoted would probably have seen greater recruitment success.
- 3 NYTl has learned that **successful recruitment for new programs requires a substantial amount of work on the ground** in addition to online and social media marketing.
- 4 Finally, it is possible (though we don't have hard evidence of this) that **if funding for new programs was committed for more than a single year at a time**, before programs needed to demonstrate proof of concept and apply for renewals, programs with less institutional backing might have taken root more easily.

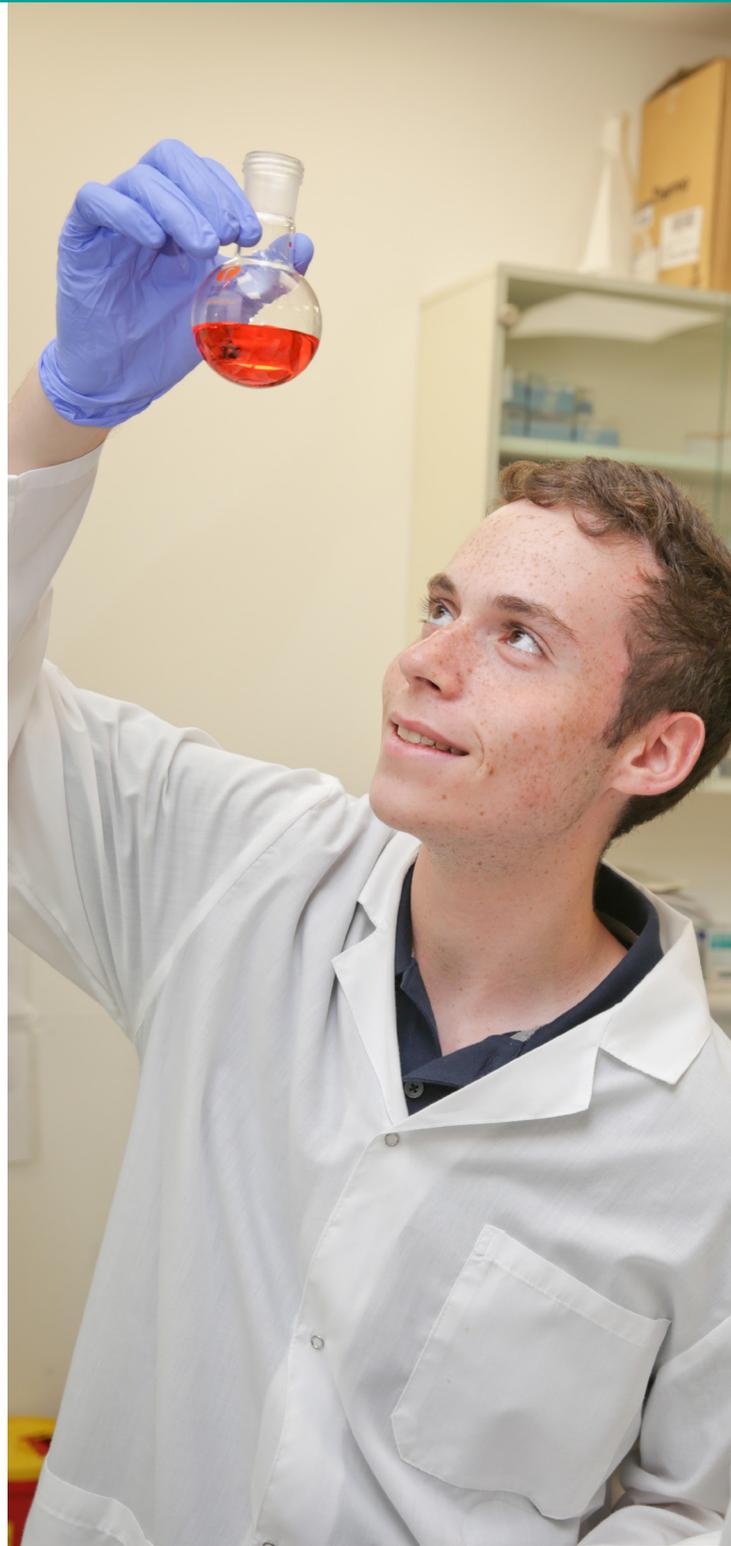


Introduction

For the past four years, the New York Teen Initiative (NYTI) has worked to incubate new and innovative models of Jewish teen summer programs in the greater New York City area. These included programs developed by established “legacy” youth-serving organizations as well as “startup” organizations established originally for providing innovative teen summer programming. The programmatic models incubated included internships, domestic travel programs, Israel travel programs, and more.

In addition to the incubation of new programmatic models, this initial phase of the New York Teen Initiative also included comprehensive marketing to increase awareness of new and existing summer opportunities. The flagship effort in this respect has been FindYourSummer.org—an online portal that aggregates hundreds of teen engagement programs from dozens of sources and providers. NYTI also established scholarship programs to help make such new and existing summer experiences more affordable for teens’ families.

After successfully operating over four consecutive summers (2015–2018), and with renewed investments by the funding partners, NYTI is now poised to embark on its second phase. Beginning in 2019, the focus of the Initiative will shift from the incubation of innovative programmatic ideas to supporting the growth and expansion of the most successful programmatic models. The ultimate goal is to help those successful models mature into financially sustainable programs that could outlast the support of the Incubator.¹



¹ At the same time, the first year of Phase II (Summer 2019) will also include the incubation a new internship program, since that particular programmatic model was identified as something insufficiently developed in Phase I. A second internship program is expected to be introduced in Summer 2020.

Successful Program Incubation Takes Time

As part of the evaluation of NYTI's fourth year and the transition to Phase II, we had a chance to reflect together—the teams at UJA-Federation of New York, The Jewish Education Project, and Rosov Consulting—on the lessons we have learned from the past four years about best practices and recommended approaches to incubating new programmatic models. With NYTI moving on to a second phase, one focused less on program incubation and more focused on the growth of successful models, it is important to document those lessons. Here are the most prominent takeaways.

When the New York Teen Initiative launched, there was great eagerness to get new programs off the ground quickly. In hindsight, both the individual programs and the Initiative as a whole could have benefited from a longer ramp-up time. Some have suggested that a full year, or even longer, dedicated wholly to planning would have enabled the Initiative to make a stronger start. For example, the FindYourSummer.org portal, now a central feature of the NYTI marketing strategy, did not come into being until the Initiative's second year. A longer runway on the front end could have allowed for the development of a marketing platform before programs began to get off the ground.

The same is true for individual programs, all of which needed time to put together their staff, curriculum, marketing, and recruitment infrastructure. In some cases, that required almost a full year of planning. Another consideration in this regard is whether it would have been wise to support promising programs with a two-year grant, rather than fund them one year at a time. It is possible that a longer funding cycle would have allowed more, and more innovative, programs to get off to a successful start. Of course, it is also probable that allowing programs more time to prepare would have meant that NYTI could have only incubated one rather than two cohorts of programs.



The NYTI Incubator Has Provided Programs with Valuable and Valued Support

As part of the process of incubating new programmatic models, NYTI has offered various forms of support and professional development opportunities to participating programs. These ranged from in-person workshops on topics such as online marketing and social media to pairing programs with coaches, specially selected to meet each program's needs (e.g. enhancing the Jewish content of the curriculum, juggling the logistical requirements of a travel program, recruiting participants, etc.).

On the whole, all of the programs deeply appreciated this support. They were grateful for the opportunity to have a professional colleague with whom to think through challenges such as developing a curriculum:



Working with the coach was really helpful. She was able to share other written curricula that we were able to learn from. She and I spent a lot of times talking through ideas. She added outside perspective.



We got paired up with a marketing company to help us with digital marketing. We hope to keep working with them.

A separate aspect of the Incubator that was highly appreciated by the programs was the opportunity to create collaborations and synergies. This was mentioned repeatedly by many of the programs. They felt that, beyond any concrete resource or content that the Incubator provided, the mere fact of sharing time and space with other providers of Jewish summer programming for teens offered significant value for them.



We spent a lot of time together [as a cohort]. We work together and help each other out even outside of competition.



Sababa [Surf Camp] is great to work with. We are learning from them [about their experience of] starting a quick expansion, [developing a] business plan, etc.

At the same time, some programs have experienced the Incubator as overbearing in some cases:



The 'let's check-in' mindset [of the coach] was not helpful. We'd like to use coaches more as a reference. Coaches should wait for our staff to call them, not vice versa.

Others felt that more individualized attention was needed:



[We would like] more cohort time, less fly-in crash-courses that are short and overwhelming... More time on a fewer things, more depth. Each program has separate needs and different capacity, so the speakers have to be generic, that can be hard.

NYTI's Role in Shaping the Field of Jewish Teen Programming

One of the questions we have asked ourselves, as part of evaluating NYTI's overall impact, is whether and how NYTI has had any impact on the youth-serving organizations who conceived and sponsored many of the NYTI programs? To this end, we interviewed senior leaders of four of those organizations. Two, NCSY and URJ (Union for Reform Judaism), run programs supported by NYTI. Another, Young Judeaea, was accepted to Cohort Two of NYTI but was unable to get the program off the ground. A fourth, Ramah, submitted a Letter of Intent but did not have a program included in one of the two NYTI cohorts. In interviewing these informants, we had two goals in mind:

- 1 We asked these organizational leaders to reflect on some of the broader trends the field of summer programming for teens has been seeing over the past few years.
- 2 We asked them to reflect on ways in which NYTI has helped them rethink or re-shape their work with teens, especially around summer programming and Israel travel.

We begin by exploring what we learned about the field in general, looking first at "demand side" trends—what teens and their families look for, and then at "supply side" trends—how program-providing organizations have been responding to these demands. Finally, we explore the question of NYTI's impact on these organizations.



“Demand Side” Trends

In all, the four organizational leaders shared the following observations about the social and cultural trends in the lives of Jewish teens and their families—trends which shape how they work with these teens.

Increasingly, parents of Jewish teens take on a parenting style which can be described as “coddling.” Parents prefer to be their children’s “best friends” rather than challenge them to excel and grow. In this regard, several of the professionals we interviewed noted that the often-observed pressure on teens to perform well academically does not originate with their parents, but rather with the school environment and with the teens themselves. There is a self-reinforcing dynamic at work.

That said, it is clear that teens are under a great deal of pressure. Even more than in other locations, high schools in New York City push teens to focus on pre-college achievement. In some cases, this applies to teens in middle school as well, who view enrollment in specialized private high schools as a precursor to entering top-ranking colleges.

As part of these larger phenomena, these interviewees observe a shift in the degree to which high schools push teens to secure “fancy” resume-building experiences in order to enhance their ability to enter the college of their choice. If in the past (especially following the 2008 financial downturn) schools strongly encouraged teens to seek specialized experiences abroad, in more recent years schools put greater emphasis on teens having “authentic work experiences” that could be found closer to home. This trend translates into a common expectation, among high school seniors in particular, that they will spend at least part of the last summer (or two) before college engaging in some kind of internship or work experience.

With respect to the teens themselves, these interviewees note an increased expectation to fully control and even “curate” their extracurricular experiences. Increasingly, teens expect to be able to build a set of summer experiences that neatly fit their schedules and their personal interests and that leave them with very little down time. One interviewee argued that this expectation of control now extends to the level of programmatic itineraries and curricula. That is, teens expect to be able to pre-determine what they will do on any given day of a travel program, for example.



“Supply Side” Trends

The four organizational leaders we interviewed generally agreed that these trends shape the programmatic approaches that they, and “the market” more generally, take in order to attract Jewish teens and their families. Increasingly, providers envision teen summer programs that are shorter, often only one or two weeks in duration. This makes it easier for teens to commit, and it fits well into the teens’ expectations to “curate” their summer, allowing them, for example, to combine a short internship with a family trip or another travel program and still have time to attend a session of a camp program that fits their personal passion.

Increasingly, too, providers seek to offer highly specialized programs that are closely tailored to the interests of participants. This has certainly been the case when it comes to programs that bring teens to Israel. As one interviewee observed, offering the traditional Israel itinerary is no longer enough in order to attract teens:



There has to be a second thing, something about the [Israel travel] experience has to speak to what resonates with the teens: social entrepreneurship, resume building, extreme adventure, scaling mountains... that's the selling point. —Youth-Serving Organization, Leader

However, the interviewees were not in agreement as to the merit of this recent trend. Two of the four interviewees questioned whether the “niche program” approach is in fact effective in attracting more teens—and specifically teens who would not have otherwise traveled to Israel.



I'm not sure that the "niche" is the juice that's worth the squeeze, [as compared to] more traditional Israel travel. Niche experiences are much more impactful, absolutely. But it's not where the numbers are... Are we using the wrong vehicle? A sad statement, as an educator. I want to work with a unique group of people and connect to their existing passions and ideas, that's fantastic. But I don't know that that's the way to get more teens.

—Youth-Serving Organization, Leader



NYTI's Role in These Trends

There is little doubt in the minds of the organizational leaders we spoke with—including those whose organization did not actively participate in NYTI—that NYTI has been part and parcel of these trends. Yet, it is difficult to pinpoint cause and effect. While some feel that NYTI pushed the field in the direction of offering more tailored Israel travel experiences, others believe that this trend was already developing when NYTI came on the stage and that some of the NYTI programs “tested the water” in this regard. By helping to provide proof of concept for these program options, their initial success encouraged others to follow suit. Ultimately, it is difficult to conclude one way or the other. One professional, speaking about the role of NYTI in promoting these trends, explained that:



We all [at legacy organizations] follow trends. We are trying to look at people's best practices and want to share what we have learned as well. —Youth-Serving Organization, Leader

That is, this professional does not feel that NYTI can rightly take special credit for spearheading a new trend in Jewish teen summer programming. At the same time, this professional acknowledges the important role that NYTI did and does play within this field.

That said, there was more agreement, especially among organizations who benefitted from NYTI's coaching and workshops, that NYTI empowered and motivated youth-serving organizations to think about teen programming in new ways. For example, one leader noted that NYTI pushed their organization to grow and go outside of its comfort zone:



One example [of a way in which NYTI has impacted legacy organizations] is by challenging us on the appropriate rate of growth and trying to ensure that we are setting ambitious goals that are also responsibly achieved. That's something that any good partner would want to be doing, but certainly has come from NYTI.

—Youth-Serving Organization, Leader

Another reflected that their organization's educational approach was shaped in new ways as a result of participating in the NYTI Incubator:



[NYTI] pushed legacy organizations to change a lot... They are able to be more flexible... It pushed them educationally, opened them up to different types of learning... [We, at my organization] learned to rethink how Judaism is taught... I don't think ten years ago [legacy organizations] could have had these conversations, but now they can.

—Youth-Serving Organization, Leader

In the final analysis, it is clear that the New York Teen Initiative has played an important role in shaping the field of Jewish teen summer programming over the past four years. We cannot say with certainty whether NYTI has had a transformational influence, but we are certain it has played a pivotal role.

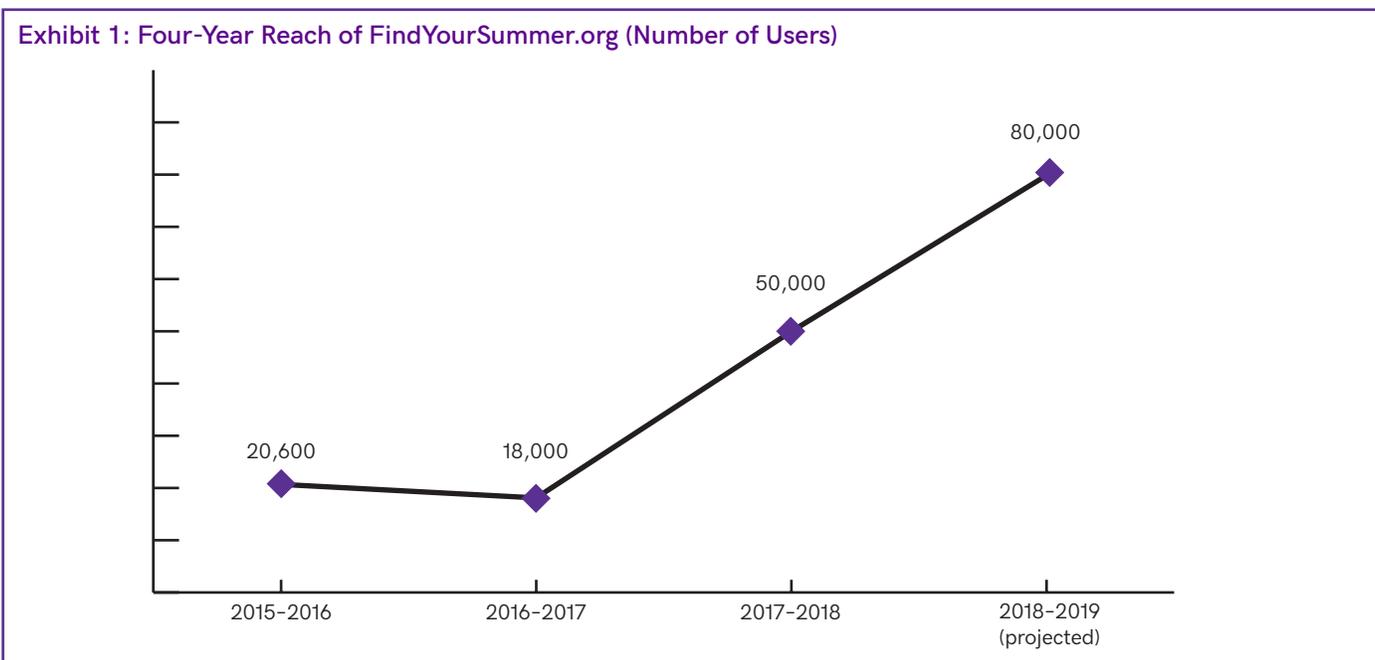


The Big Picture

In a continually evolving summer program marketplace, shaped by social forces that extend far beyond the Jewish community, the New York Teen Initiative has played an important role. It has incubated new program models—incentivizing their launch, supporting their design and development, and promoting them to potential participants. It has helped give form to a new landscape of summer experiences, often more focused than was typically the case before and customized to satisfying changing consumer preferences. In this respect, the Initiative has gone a long way to realizing its founding vision.

Getting Out the Word through FindYourSummer.org

Although not launched until the second year of the Initiative, FindYourSummer.org—an online portal and clearinghouse for Jewish teen summer programs—has become an essential feature of NYTJ. The site now features close to 400 different programs and is estimated to have reached 117,000 visitors since its launch in September 2015. The site is projected to reach 80,000 users during the 2018–2019 program year (see Exhibit 1).²

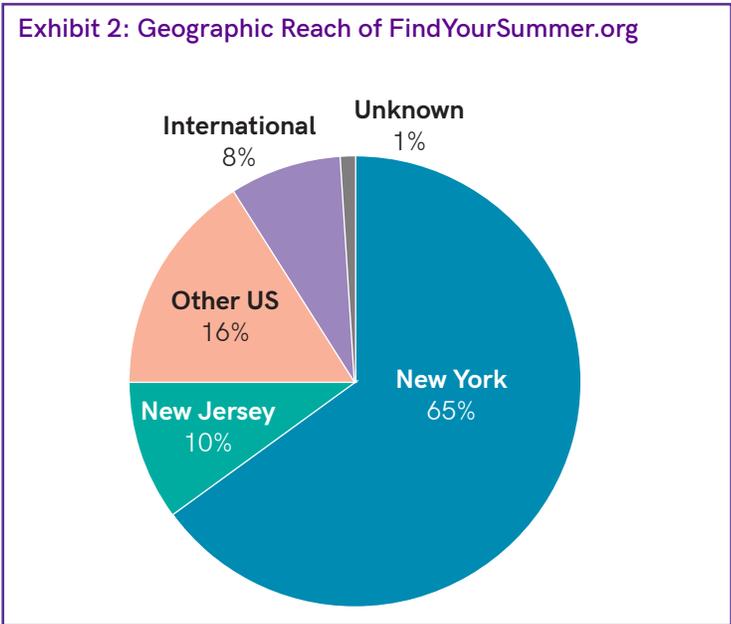


Despite its remarkable growth, FindYourSummer.org had a bumpy beginning, and those early experiences led to important lessons, some of which we share here.³ First, a website such as FindYourSummer.org is a living, constantly changing entity that requires ongoing maintenance and the continued (though modest) investment of human and financial resources. As a result of this realization, NYTJ hired, in 2016, its first Marketing and Communications Manager. This professional was able to develop an effective marketing strategy for the website, including the optimization of search terms used to promote Google Ads and other display ads and video ads. This online marketing strategy was augmented by some use of print advertising. The site was also promoted by FindYourSummer Ambassadors—Jewish youth professionals who work within their institutions to support teens and their families in finding summer activities and programs that are a good match for their interests. Within a year, it became clear that these changes resulted in a substantial increase in both first-time and repeat traffic to the website.

² These numbers are based on the Google Analytics data on the website during its total lifetime: from September 2015 through March 2019. During this period, Google Analytics has recorded 117,000 “Users” (Google’s estimation of unique visitors), 158,000 “Sessions” (incidents in which a user visited the website), and 510,000 “Pageviews” (incidents in which a user visited a particular web page). Each program year spans July 1 through June 30. As of March 15, 2019, the actual reach during the 2018–2019 program year was 56,500.

³ The NYTJ team has shared these and other lessons in an *eJewish Philanthropy* article (<https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/soup-to-nuts-building-findyoursummer-org/>).

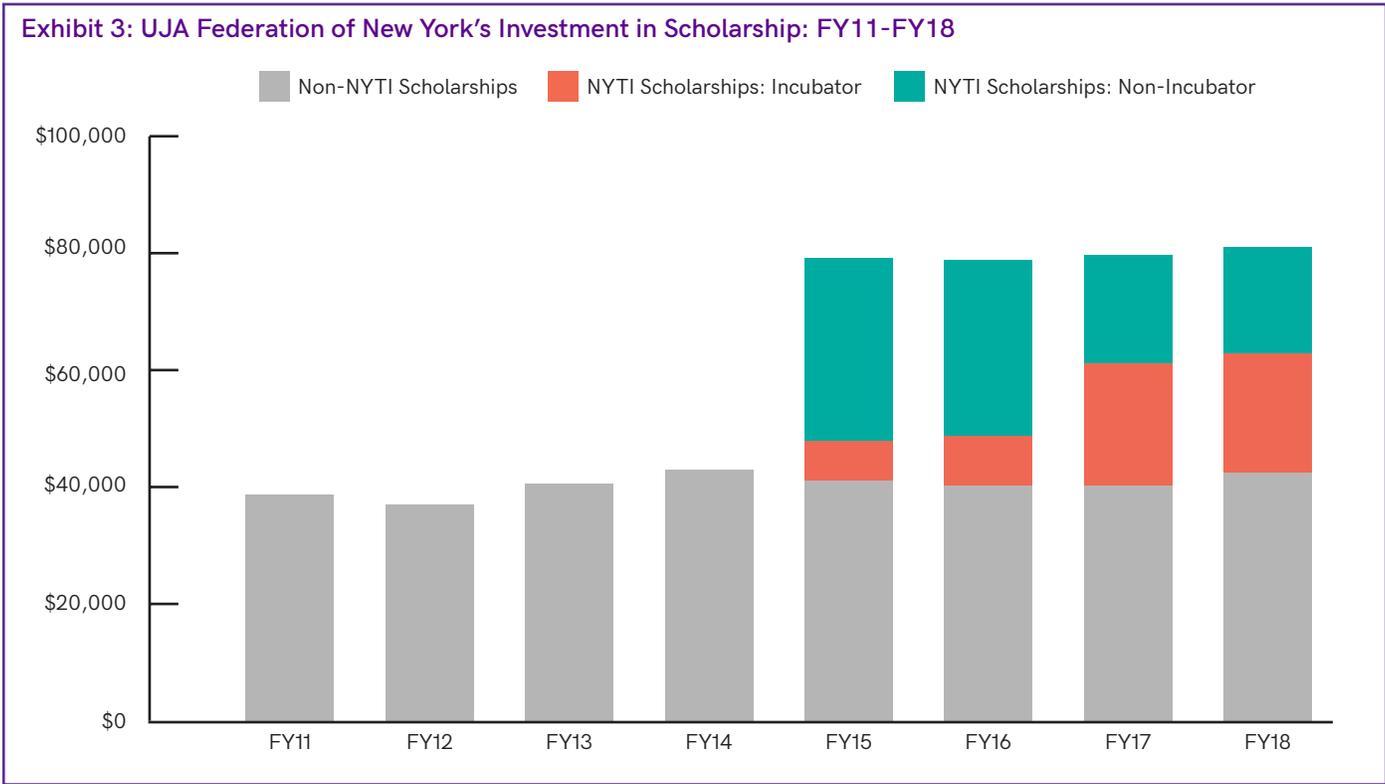
The FindYourSummer.org website was conceived and designed initially for New York area consumption. However, as it continued to grow, the site has taken on a life of its own. Today, the site is accessed not only by users from New York and New Jersey—who may be attracted by the local program listings—but also from users from across the United States and even internationally. Over its lifespan so far, 16% of the site’s users came from states other than New York or New Jersey, and 8% of the site’s users were abroad (see Exhibit 2). In summer 2018, 29% of the participants in NYTI Incubator programs came from outside the New York metropolitan area.⁴ Anecdotally, we know of a handful of European teens who joined one of the Israel travel programs after seeing it featured on FindYourSummer.org.



⁴Based on teens’ self-reported zip code. Twenty eight percent (28%) of Summer 2018 Incubator participants came from the five boroughs of New York City; another 28% came from other New York State zip codes; 13% came from New Jersey; 2% from Connecticut; and 29% came from zip codes in other states.

Supporting Teen Programming Through Scholarships

The New York Teen Initiative has also included substantial investment in scholarships. Over its first four years, more than \$600,000 were invested in scholarships to Incubator programs, and \$1 million more were allocated for scholarships beyond the Incubator. These scholarships served 995 recipients. UJA-Federation of New York’s overall investment in scholarship more than doubled during this period from \$1.6 million in fiscal years 2011–2014 to \$3.3 million during the lifetime of the New York Teen Initiative (fiscal years 2015–2018). Exhibit 3 describes this increase.



We cannot know how much the increased availability of scholarships translated into new, or first time, program participants, since the roster of programs attended by scholarship recipients was in principle unlimited in number and variety. Furthermore, as discussed in our Year 1 and Year 2 reports, in the Initiative’s early years, scholarships were used as much to make programs more attractive to those who didn’t think them worth the money as to make them more accessible to those who didn’t have the money.

Getting Teens to Come: Lessons About Recruitment

A Ground Game

Some of the more creative, out-of-the-box programmatic ideas incubated by NYTI ultimately failed to mature because such programs were unable to secure sufficient numbers of participants. This was especially (though not exclusively) true of startup programs, without affiliation to a legacy organization with institutional experience and infrastructure (see below). A more concerted focus on building the capacity of program providers in the areas of marketing and recruitment would have better supported some of those early experiments. At the same time, we learned that even the most marketing-savvy program cannot escape the need to invest time and energy in one-on-one interactions with teens and parents in order to “close the deal” and make sure that participants commit to the program. The FindYourSummer Ambassadors program, launched over the past year, is one approach to supporting NYTI programs in this area. The contribution of the Ambassadors program to the Initiative will be one of the foci of the evaluation in coming years.

Legacy Organizations and Startups Each Have Some Structural Advantages

In the first years of NYTI, the Initiative solicited proposals and received Letters of Intent from a wide array of program providers. Some were associated with legacy youth-serving organizations, while others came from individuals and small startup organizations without any institutional backing. Over the years, and specifically in the second cohort of NYTI programs, the programmatic mix swayed more toward legacy-organization programs and away from startups. There were good reasons for this, as programs run or backed by legacy organizations enjoy some structural advantages: a recognizable brand name, a pipeline of participants, and the infrastructure and expertise needed for effective marketing and recruitment.

At the same time, these advantages may become a disadvantage when it comes to recruiting less-engaged populations; the well-recognized brand name may attract more highly engaged teens from stronger Jewish backgrounds or may disproportionately draw recruits from within their own program networks. This pattern is evidenced by data to a certain extent. Some of the programs that were most successful in attracting the least engaged participants were also those with the least-recognized “brands.” To illustrate, URJ’s Sci-Tech Israel and NCSY’s Next Step Israel—programs run by well-established legacy organizations—respectively reached 5% and 6% of teens who had previously been “minimally” or “not engaged” in organized Jewish life. This compares to 19% of Sababa Surf Camp participants and 55% of DOROT Summer Teen Internship participants who were “minimally” or “not engaged.” Sababa and, arguably, DOROT are programs with less-recognized brands. They don’t have the luxury of securing recruitment-wins from within their own systems. Of necessity, they have to look further afield.

Four “Types” of Teens

Our conversations with NYTI’s FindYourSummer Ambassadors—a new initiative designed to recruit teen educators for the purpose of connecting teens with NYTI’s summer opportunities—have generated helpful insights about New York’s Jewish teens. Specifically, by examining this initiative, we learned about teens’ habits and expectations when it comes to exploring summer options. First, the three Ambassadors we spoke with drew a similar picture of the ebb and flow of their work. Teens seem to be most actively looking for Jewish summer activities during the late fall (roughly October–November) and again in the spring. The winter season is a quieter time for the Ambassadors.

Second, the Ambassadors also shared similar insights about the types of programs that teens seek. While demand for highly specialized and resume-building programs is very real—with even some eighth graders inquiring about such options, especially those who seek to enter specialty high schools—there is also demand for programs that offer more straightforward opportunities for fun and relaxation.



Teens are no longer interested in going away to sleepaway camp... [Rather, they look to] build their resume, something more than fun time. But we do have some kids that look for just fun. [What] I love about the [New York Teen Initiative] is that it echoes the multiple avenues of engagement... If we offer multiple types of programs, we can meet people where they are...

—FindYourSummer Ambassador

Finally, the Ambassadors shared similar insights about the kinds of teens they work with. Based on their reflections, the Rosov Consulting team has developed the following “segmentation” of the teen market. These “types” are not only of academic interest. The more that program providers and recruiters can understand the market segments they are trying to engage, the more they can tailor their recruitment strategies to these different audiences. Importantly, these “types” are neither exhaustive, nor mutually exclusive. Rather, they illustrate the kinds of teens and the kinds of needs that the Ambassadors serve.



“Planners”

These are teens that have a detailed summer plan in place as early as the prior fall. Often, these are teens who attend the same camp program year after year and may look to the Ambassadors for help with filling gaps in the early and late summer, looking for what some call “shelf programs.” (Many “planners” are also “fillers” as explained below.)



They have ‘their’ camp that they go to every summer, or they have a family obligation.

—FindYourSummer Ambassador

“Explorers”

These are teens who look for help in designing a tailor-made summer experience and may consider a variety of options. While some may seek a very carefully constructed experience, others may seek to balance resume-building programs with opportunities to have fun and relax.



It totally depends on the kids. They each want a certain number of qualities on their resume: academic, and social service, and travel... Every experience gives something different.

—FindYourSummer Ambassador

“Fillers”

These are teens that may have some summer plans in place and look to fill in gaps (e.g. a week-long program for very specific dates). These teens often look in late spring for “filler” programs.



Kids ask me about [what to do when I am] “home for a week in between two things.” A lot of camps start by the first week of July, and schools are letting out in early June [so we have a] gap in late June that had nothing to offer them. Same in [late] August.

—FindYourSummer Ambassador

“Procrastinators”

Finally, the Ambassadors also interact with teens who express some interest in a program, but never follow through or fully commit.



[They say:] “oh, maybe I’m interested, but probably not...”

—FindYourSummer Ambassador



The Big Picture

The New York Teen Initiative has provided an opportunity to become much smarter about teen recruitment. Some of the most innovative programs launched by the Incubator have floundered or folded because they couldn't crack the recruitment code. Over a four-year period, with the maturation first of FindYourSummer.org and then with the launch of the Ambassadors program, the Initiative has created resources that can help all programs. At the same time, insights derived from evaluation work have helped individual programs better understand the choice patterns and preferences of potential recruits. While developing new program models has been an important dimension of the Initiative's field building role, its contribution to supporting and sophisticating the task of recruitment has been no less significant.

Making a Difference for Teens

Over its first four years, the New York Teen Initiative has reached and served 819 teens through 12 Incubator programs, many offered in multiple locations or sessions (see Exhibit 4 below for detail). When we try to evaluate NYTI's overall success, however, two questions come to mind. First, are these the "right" teens? More accurately, have the teens reached by the Initiative been as diverse as hoped? Second, what kinds of positive impact has NYTI had on these teens? And are those fleeting, short-term effects, or does the impact of NYTI linger even years after the experience?

Exhibit 4: NYTI Incubator Enrollment Years I to IV

	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Sababa	38 ⁵	70 ⁶	56 ⁷	48	212
DOROT UWS	18	20	20	20	78
DOROT Riverdale	--	--	11	15	26
ARTEL	21	19	15	13	68
JAM	8	28	--	--	36
InternNYC	15	18	--	--	33
JustAct	--	15 ⁸	--	--	15
PopUp	--	9	16 ⁹	--	25
URJ 6 Points Sci-Tech	--	--	28	42	70
Zeke Teen	--	--	11	16	27
Roots Israel	--	--	32	43	75
Food and Farm	--	--	36 ¹⁰	36	72
Next Step Israel	--	--	26	56	82
Total	100	179	251	289	819

⁵ Sababa 2015 numbers include 13 participants who took part in two sessions. This means that in total there were 87 non-duplicated participants in 2015.

⁶ Sababa 2016 numbers include 28 participants in grades 6-8.

⁷ Sababa 2017 and 2018 include four sessions.

⁸ JustAct 2016 numbers include 7 participants aged 13 and below.

⁹ PopUp 2017 included two locations.

¹⁰ Food and Farm 2017 and 2018 included two sessions.



Diversity of Participating Teens

One of the goals of the New York Teen Initiative is to reach a diverse audience of teens. In its fourth year, NYTI program providers report that the participants in their programs are diverse by various measures: they come with a wide array of Jewish backgrounds; physical and intellectual abilities; racial and ethnic backgrounds; and gender/sexual orientation identities. Survey data collected from participating teens sheds further light on the diversity of teens in terms of their Jewish background and their current engagement in organized Jewish life. As seen in Exhibit 5, NYTI programs have consistently reached a minority of teens (roughly one in six) from marginal Jewish backgrounds and who until recently have been only minimally engaged in Jewish life. For example, 14% of the teens participating in Summer 2018 programs had only limited formal Jewish education, and 16% were “minimally” or “not engaged” in Jewish programming over the last year.

One in four (24%) of the 2018 participants come from families where not all members are Jewish (ranging from 11% among Next Step participants to 43% of DOROT participants). This is a marked increase from 15% during Summer 2016.¹¹

¹¹ These numbers should be read in the context of the demography of the Greater New York City Jewish community. According to the 2011 NYC Jewish Community Study, 22% of all married Jewish couples in the UJA-Federation of New York catchment area are intermarried, and among non-Orthodox couples, the rate is closer to 40%. Additionally, in 2011, 12% of children ages 0-17 who were raised in households (including Orthodox ones) with at least one Jewish adult were raised in intermarried households. Taken together, these data lead us to estimate that the proportion of children from interfaith families who have participated in NYTI program is close to being in line with the proportion in the general, non-Orthodox Jewish population of the New York City area.

Exhibit 5: Diversity of Participating Teens (2016-2018)

		2016 (N=139)	2017 (N=224)	2018 (N=249)
Jewish Education¹²	Limited Jewish Education ¹³	15%	13%	14%
	Some Jewish Supplementary School	64%	65%	62%
	At least four years of Jewish Day School	32%	35%	37%
Family Jewish	Fully	81%	74%	75%
	Partly (Interfaith)	15%	21%	24%
	Not Jewish	5%	4%	1%
Friends Jewish	All/Most	49%	44%	44%
Jewish Background¹⁴	Nominal	17%	20%	17%
	Modest	45%	48%	48%
	Substantial	39%	31%	35%
Current Engagement¹⁵	"Not Engaged" or "Minimally Engaged"	--	15%	16%
	"Moderately Engaged" or "Engaged"	--	40%	44%
	"Highly Engaged" or "Fully Engaged"	--	45%	40%
Age	12-14	14%	3%	12%
	15-16	49%	60%	58%
	17-18	37%	37%	30%
Gender	Female	65%	57%	52%
	Male	35%	36%	47%
	Other	-	7%	1%

¹² These Jewish education categories are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, numbers add to more than 100%.

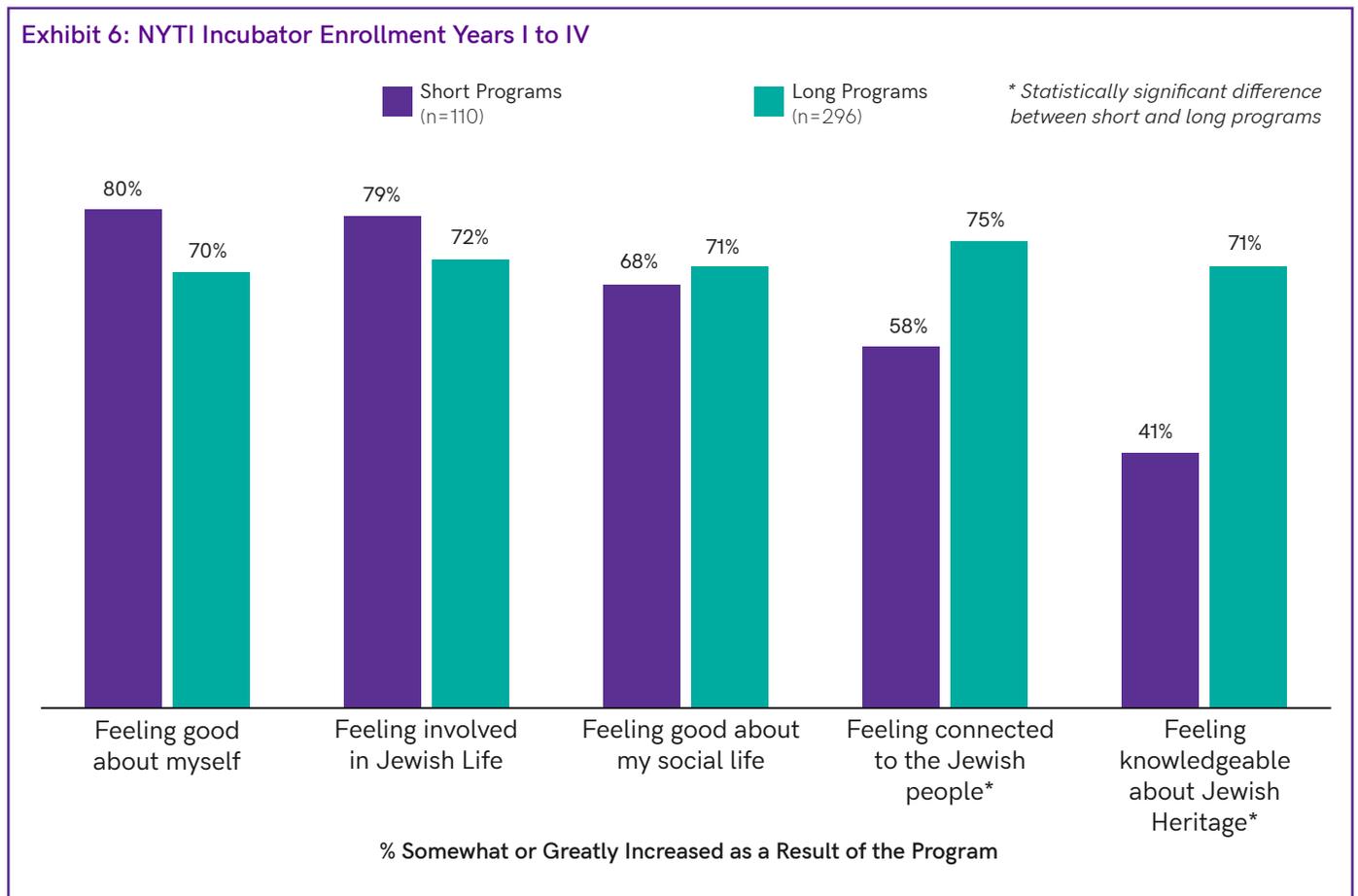
¹³ No Jewish supplementary school and/or only less than four years of Jewish day school.

¹⁴ Variables used to calculate participants' Jewish background include years of day school, years of supplementary school, whether all family members are Jewish, having had a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, and frequency of Passover celebration.

¹⁵ Participants' current Jewish engagement is calculated based on self-reported frequency of participating in Jewish activities of different intensity and length over the past 12 months. See Appendix A for more details. whether all family members are Jewish, having had a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, and frequency of Passover celebration.

Impact on Teens Post Summer

Data collected over the past four years indicate the impact that an experiential summer program can have on participating teens. The outcomes produced by individual programs were described in some detail in previous reports. An aggregate analysis of the TJLES (Teen Jewish Learning and Engagement Scales) data collected during Summers 2016 and 2017 reveals some additional trends.¹⁷ Specifically, it does not seem to require an extended period of programming for positive impacts to materialize. Shorter, one- and two-week programs can produce outcomes that do not differ much from those of longer programs. Below, Exhibit 4 offers a comparison between the 110 teens who participated in either the week-long Sababa Surf Camp or the two-week-long PopUp for Change program, and 296 teens who participated in the other, considerably longer-duration programs.¹⁸ As seen in Exhibit 6, there is not a significant difference in the degree to which the shorter programs impact teens' perceived wellbeing ("feeling good about myself" and "feeling good about my social life"), as well as their sense of being involved in Jewish life. There were, however, significant differences when it comes to teens' feeling of connection to Jewish heritage and knowledge of Jewish life.



¹⁶ These numbers exclude participants of the Sababa Surf Camp pre-teen session.

¹⁷ The Teen Jewish Learning and Engagement Scale (TJLES) is an aggregate measure of Jewish teens' learning and growth along four broad domains: Self and Relations, Jewish Peoplehood and Israel, Social Action, and Jewish Life and Heritage. The TJLES was developed by The Jewish Education Project in collaboration with Rosov Consulting and rigorously validated through research with thousands of teens across the United States.

¹⁸ The vast majority of the participants in short-term programs participated in Sababa Surf Camp. PopUp for Change was not included in the Incubator in 2018, and Sababa Surf Camp participants did not receive a post-program survey in 2018.

Longer-Term Impact on Teens

Beyond immediate post-program impact, did NYTI Incubator programs have any impact on participating teens over a longer period? We took two evaluative approaches to addressing this question. First, approximately six months after the end of Year 1 and Year 2 programs (that had run in 2015 and 2016), we conducted a “tracking survey” of participating teens to learn how their NYTI experience shaped their choices over the subsequent school year. We consistently found that a large majority of the participants, including those previously less engaged in Jewish life, continue to keep in touch with their peers and participate in Jewish activities during the year; many of them were planning to attend additional Jewish summer activities in subsequent years. For example, we found that following Summer 2016 (during the 2016-17 school year), two-thirds of the participants (67%) kept in touch with friends they made on an NYTI program, and the same number (67%) had recommended an NYTI program to a friend. In addition, almost three-quarters (73%) of teens who were previously less engaged reported participating in a Jewish program during the year. Almost a third (29%) of those previously less engaged were planning on “doing something Jewish” over the coming summer.¹⁹ In reminiscing about their experiences the previous summer, teens shared comments such as:



Sababa Surf Camp meant a lot to me because it made me realize that Judaism can be found in the world around me and not just in a synagogue. The concept of Judaism being all around me is something that I learned from Sababa Surf Camp. It helped me keep in touch with Judaism throughout the year.

—Sababa Surf Camp 2015, Alum



I loved InternNYC because it made me appreciate Judaism and lifted my confidence. [It made me] comfortable speaking to adults and asking them questions. The program also helped me connect more with my grandpa who is very Jewish.

— InternNYC 2016, Alum



Artel was a phenomenal experience that I feel helped shape me to become a better individual as I've learned more about how important it is to be able to work in groups and be nice to people. Also, Artel showed me what a life in Israel can be like, and I am definitely interested in returning to Israel in the future.

— Artel 2016, Alum

A second area of inquiry has been to see whether outcomes such as these were discernible even two or three years after the end of a program, when many of the participants had begun college. To do this, we tracked down and interviewed 10 alumni of NYTI's first two summers (2015 and 2016). We intentionally focused on teens who, according to their pre-program surveys, were previously less engaged in Jewish life. Therefore, seven of the ten alumni interviewees were less-engaged prior to participating in NYTI.²⁰

¹⁹ “Less engaged” teens were those who, before participating in an NYTI program, reported participating in Jewish activities less than monthly during the preceding 12 months.

²⁰ The 10 alumni we interviewed participated in four NYTI programs during the summers of 2015 and 2016: DOROT, JAM, Artel, and InternNYC. Two of the interviewees participated in the same NYTI program for two consecutive summers. The interviewees ranged in age from 17 to 21 years, with six college students, three high school seniors, and one finishing a two-year yeshiva program in Israel. Half of the interviewees were male, and half were female.

Overall, four major themes emerged from these interviews:

Making Sustained Social Connections

We know from post-program surveys that one of the most powerful aspects of a summer program is its social dimension. Teens have meaningful, often intense, experiences with Jewish peers who frequently become good friends. Several of the interviewees mentioned still being friends with people they first got to know on their NYTI summer program even two years later:



[One of my fondest memories is] working with the other [DOROT] teens. The quality of teens who come into the program is very high, I liked them all: dedicated, committed, that was great. I made some really good friends ... I'm grateful for this experience and relationships.

—DOROT 2015, Alum

Building Upon Areas of Personal Interest

For several of the interviewees, the choice to join an NYTI program was the result of a pre-existing interest they wanted to explore in greater depth. These participants have subsequently continued to explore these passions during college. Rather than bringing about a dramatic shift in their interest, it seems that NYTI programs have played a supporting and enhancing role, providing teens with avenues by which to explore their passions.



I always wanted to go into sciences... Artel had a tech track, so joining that I was already set on what I wanted to do in future.

—ARTEL 2015, Alum



As I'm entering my freshman year in college... I'm thinking about majoring in history. The [DOROT Summer Teen] Internship was a good way to explore history, [for example through] filming an interview with a Holocaust survivor... I've taken a lot of high-level history classes in high school.

—DOROT 2015, Alum

Gaining Useful Life Skills

Several of the teens mentioned helpful skills they gained during their NYTI summer. Such skills were typically of the "softer" variety, ranging from the specifics of office etiquette to more broadly defined dispositions such as following one's passions. The internship program InternNYC stands out in this respect.



I was a PR intern at a JCC, [and] I learned how to interact in an office environment, how to be cordial, how to build professional relationships. How to conduct myself professionally.

—InternNYC 2016, Alum



[At InternNYC I learned] to pick something [I'm] passionate about and run with it. It helped me to see how picking something you're passionate about makes it more enjoyable.

—InternNYC 2016, Alum

Supporting Jewish Identity and Jewish Choices

Finally, some of the interviewees, particularly the alumni of the ARTEL program, mentioned gaining a greater sense of pride and “comfort in their own skins” as Jews.



Being in a Jewish state, where people are openly Jewish, I became more comfortable with my Jewish identity. Brooklyn is super diverse, I was never religious, but I became more comfortable identifying Jewish.

—ARTEL 2015, Alum

Others have translated their NYTI experience into Jewish choices during college, such as choosing to participate in Hillel.



InternNYC helped with [my decision to be active in] Hillel: meeting other Jewish teens in the city that summer helped. I don't have many Jewish friends, so that was cool. Hillel was the same kind of thing - meeting other Jewish kids. Connecting to them, learning how they're different: some are observant and some not.

—InternNYC 2016, Alum



DOROT was the most Jewish thing I did in high school. My parents are both Jewish. My father is secular, my mom is a bit more religious... I do want to get engaged with Hillel, it's a good way to connect with people, not necessarily over Jewish things, even if we don't talk about Jewish things we would have things in common.

—DOROT 2015, Alum





The Big Picture

If the proximate goal of the New York Teen Initiative was to help change the landscape of summer programs for Jewish teens, then the Initiative's ultimate goal was to make a meaningful contribution to the lives of those teens, especially to teens who would not otherwise have participated in Jewish programs. Early on in our evaluation work, we were able to identify the kinds of short-term outcomes produced by programs for their participants. In the fourth year of our work, our analysis goes much further: we have been able to compare the outcomes produced by shorter and longer programs, and we have been able to explore the extent to which the outcomes produced continue to make a difference to the lives of these teens. Although our findings are tentative, given the modest size of the participant pool, they do suggest two conclusions of great significance: shorter programs can match the social outcomes produced by longer programs, although not necessarily their Jewish outcomes. Furthermore, between two and three years after the end of these experiences, participants can trace the continuing contribution of these programs to their lives.

Concluding Thoughts

Four years ago, UJA-Federation of New York launched the New York Teen Initiative as an experiment intended “to redesign and redefine Jewish teen engagement in New York.”²¹ Over these first four years, 12 different programs have gone through the Incubator of Immersive Summer Experiences for Jewish Teens. In total, these programs have engaged over 800 teens, most of whom came from “modest” or “minimal” Jewish educational backgrounds, and roughly one in six of whom can be characterized as “less engaged” in organized Jewish life.

At its inception, the aim of the New York Teen Initiative was “to offer innovative and compelling summer programs in ways that the current market does not.”²² There is no doubt that on this count NYTI has met its goals. Four years later, programs such as Sababa Surf Camp, URJ 6 Points Sci-Tech Israel, and the DOROT Summer Teen Internship (to name a few) offer Jewish teens new ways to engage in Jewish life while also exploring and satisfying their passions. Even beyond the limits of the NYTI Incubator, Jewish youth-serving organizations now increasingly offer innovative approaches to Jewish summer programming—and to summer travel to Israel in particular. While we have resisted claiming a causal role in these changes for NYTI, the evaluation of NYTI over the past four years makes clear that the Initiative played an important role in shaping this new trend.

Though not identified as a central concern at the time of its launch, the task of program recruitment has assumed great importance over the course of the Initiative’s maturation. Today, four years after its launch—with FindYourSummer.org and the Ambassador program now fully functioning—NYTI has brought to life recruitment resources that can benefit a great many programs. At the same time, thanks to the analysis of enrollment patterns and choices among those who signed up for programs (or who did not), educators in this field can be much smarter about how to succeed at recruitment. NYTI has been able to support and sophisticate this aspect of the Jewish teen programming field.

A significant component in our evaluation work has involved assessing the outcomes for teens of participating in the programs supported by the Incubator of Immersive Summer Experiences. After four summers of doing this work, and with a large enough dataset to examine, we note now how shorter programs—two weeks long or shorter—seem to produce some outcomes that match those associated with longer programs—more than two weeks in length. This is especially the case with respect to social and emotional outcomes and less so with respect to outcomes involving connection to the Jewish community. With so much pressure on program providers to develop and deliver shorter-length offerings in response to shifting marketplace pressures, this finding should provide reassurance that programs can continue to achieve many of their goals within a shorter educational framework.

²¹ “Request for Proposals: Evaluation of the New York Teen Initiative and the New York Incubator of Immersive Summer Experiences for Jewish Teens.” UJA-Federation of New York, 2014.

²² Ibid.

In a similar vein, having been engaged in this work for four years, we have now been able to explore another untested objective of the Initiative: that the experiences it supports have more than just an ephemeral impact on the lives of participants. We have known for a few years already about the various short-term outcomes associated with the programs, observable within a few weeks of the programs' end; we did not know for how long these outcomes might be sustained. New, qualitative data from this past summer, while small-scale, are suggestive. They indicate that two or three years after a New York Teen Initiative summer experience, alumni can identify a sequence of positive, and in some cases Jewish, outcomes that contribute to their lives today, which they attribute to the time they spent in the programs. Such consequences were certainly hoped-for at the time of the Initiative's launch, but they were probably more aspirational in nature than definitely expected. In this respect, then, some of the Initiative's programs may have exceeded expectations.

The New York Teen Initiative and its innovative teen programs have now reached a level of maturation where they are ready to venture beyond the incubation stage and onto a phase of growth and expansion. The Rosov Consulting team is thrilled to partner again with UJA-Federation of New York on the evaluation of this second phase. How will the new FindYourSummer Ambassadors program support and improve the recruitment of teens? How will programs overcome the challenges involved in scaling up? What models of attaining financial sustainability will prove most suitable to the NYTl programs? These and others are questions that will animate the evaluation of NYTl in coming years.

Appendix A: Year Four Data Collection

In the final year of NYTI’s Phase I, the evaluation has taken on a more thoroughly summative stance—taking a step back to reflect on the Initiative’s broader impact on its teen alumni, on the program-providers and their sponsor organizations, and on the field of summertime Jewish teen programming writ large. This shift in the evaluation focus has been reflected in our methodological approach over the past 12 months, which included:

- ① Surveys of **participating teens** with an emphasis on tracking teens’ diversity in terms of demographics, Jewish background, and current Jewish engagement.²³
- ② Interviews with 10 **alumni** of the Incubator’s first two summers.
- ③ Interviews with 10 **parents** of participants in Summer 2018 programs.²⁴
- ④ Post-summer interviews with the **directors** of the 7 programs supported by NYTI in 2018.
- ⑤ Interviews with 21 **professional and volunteer leaders** involved in Jewish teen engagement.²⁵

Exhibit 7 offers a summary of the data collected as part of the evaluation of NYTI’s fourth year.

Exhibit 7: Evaluation Data Sources and Response Rates

		N	Response Rate
Teens	Pre-Program Surveys	249	90%
	Post-Program Surveys	185*	96%
	Interviews with Alumni of NYTI 2015-2016 Incubator Programs	10	--
Parents	Post-Program Interviews	10	--
Program Providers	Post-Program Interviews with Program Providers	7	--
NYTI Leaders & Programs	Post-Program Focus Group with UJA-Federation of New York	7	--
	Post-Program Focus Groups with The Jewish Education Project	4	--
Other Teen-Serving Professionals	Interviews with FindYourSummer.org Ambassadors	3	--
	Interviews with Leaders of Youth-Serving Organizations	4	--
	Interviews with Other Israel Travel Experts	3	--

**Post-program surveys were collected only from 193 participants in Cohort II programs.*

²³ Only the newer, Cohort II program participants (those in Food and Farm Road Trip, Next Step Israel Internship, Roots Israel, URJ 6 Points Sci-Tech Israel, and Zeke Teen) received surveys before and after the program, as was done in the past. Participants in Cohort I programs (DOROT Summer Teen Internship and Sababa Surf Camp) received pre-program surveys only.

²⁴ In Next Step Israel, DOROT Summer Teen Internship, Food and Farm Road Trip, and URJ 6 Points Sci-Tech Israel. We selected parents who also had older children than those that participated in this summer’s programs. We hoped they would be in a position to reflect on shifts in the teen programming marketplace over recent years. Ultimately, parents’ capacity to reflect on changes in the marketplace was limited.

²⁵ See Appendix B for a list of these professional and volunteer leaders. Israel travel experts were selected from among the participants in a 2017 “Israel Seminar” facilitated by David Bryfman in collaboration with Makom. Conversations with the teams at UJA-Federation of New York and The Jewish Education Project were conducted in a group setting.

Appendix B: Names of Interviewees

The following professional and volunteer leaders participated in interviews and focus groups as part of this year's evaluation:

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