Phase 2: Focus Group Results & Indicators for Strategic Planning
Building on Phase 1
Project Summary: Phase One

• Statewide survey of Jews via lists and targeted (by surname) phone calls plus e-mail, mail and online surveys

• Population estimate derived from Brandeis study

→ *Survey tells us where and who we are, focus groups generate ideas to improve*
Phase One: Recap

• Jewish population in New Mexico is much older than the national Jewish population

• 87% are from out of State; 40% have been here more than 20 years

• Relatively solid levels of “importance of being Jewish,” “attachment to Israel;” high levels of Seder attendance, donation to Jewish charities
  • Softer “importance of Jewish community” results
Phase One: Challenges

- Younger Jews feeling disengaged, wanting to leave NM
- Older Jews who do not feel the need for “spirituality and prayer”
  - Many came to retire, the “Jewish community” is what they did in their previous life
  - Exception seems to be Renewal/Reconstructionist movements
- Geographic isolation
Phase One: Opportunities

- Social, personal connections seem critical
- Importance of spirituality to younger Jews
- Background, upbringing for middle-age/older Jews
  - Need for connection vs. a need for services?
- Involvement in Jewish life, if not in Jewish community
### Project Overview: Phase Two

- **Focus groups:**
  - Moderated discussions
  - 90 minutes in duration
  - Respondents recruited, compensated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Venue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - 65 &amp; Older</td>
<td>Sunday, April 12</td>
<td>10:30 am</td>
<td>JCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - 20-45</td>
<td>Thursday, April 16</td>
<td>7 pm</td>
<td>JAAS L.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - 46-64</td>
<td>Thursday, April 30</td>
<td>7 pm</td>
<td>JAAS L.</td>
</tr>
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<td>4 - Taos</td>
<td>Sunday, April 19</td>
<td>12 pm</td>
<td>Taos JC</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 - Santa Fe</td>
<td>Tuesday, April 28</td>
<td>7 pm</td>
<td>SF Soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - Las Vegas</td>
<td>Saturday, May 2</td>
<td>10:30 am</td>
<td>Plaza Hotel</td>
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<td>7 - Las Cruces</td>
<td>Sunday, May 17</td>
<td>1 pm</td>
<td>Branigan Library</td>
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<td>8 - Clergy 1 (phone)</td>
<td>Tuesday, May 12</td>
<td>10 am</td>
<td>Federation</td>
</tr>
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<td>9 - RAACA</td>
<td>Tuesday, May 12</td>
<td>1 pm</td>
<td>CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 - Clergy 2</td>
<td>Tuesday, May 19</td>
<td>1 pm</td>
<td>JCC Lounge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Phase Two: Goals

• Focus groups set out to examine attitudes regarding:

  • Jewish identity
  • Perceptions of the NM Jewish community
    • What are characteristics of the ideal Jewish community?
  • Existing and potential services or programs
  • Perceptions and understanding of the JFNM
Focus Group Findings

Jewish Identity
Identity is about continuing tradition and culture; also connecting socially

- Core of Jewish identity (across the groups) is sense of being part of continuity of tradition and culture that goes back thousands of years
  - Living by Jewish ethics (especially service/Tikkun Olam)
  - Study and intellectual pursuit (Jewish and secular topics)
  - Celebration of holidays

- Equally important is the social aspect: getting together with others who share something in common
Spirituality/religion at core of identity for primarily observant Jews

- For more observant Jews - as well as for many Jews by choice - the religious aspect (ritual, prayer, Kashrut, etc.) is as central as the cultural or social aspects of their Jewish identity

- For less observant who attend synagogue, the religious aspect is important, but the synagogue is typically not their only source of spirituality
  - Being religious is not the central factor they associate with their Jewish identity
  - Rather be outdoors than indoors
  - Links to other religions (Native American, Eastern) they have incorporated into their practice
Focus is on next generation and looking to the future

- Sense that each Jew is responsible for passing identity (and community) to the next generation
- Important to create something that allows younger Jews who choose to engage the community an opportunity to do so
- Gives the next generation of Jews a “voice” in the overall cultural landscape of New Mexico into the future.
  - Ensure that others understand and respect Jewish traditions and heritage
Israel is central to the Jewish identity of older Jews

- Center of their Jewish identity (as we also saw in the survey)
  - See Israel under siege, believe support for the Jewish state (flawed or not) is critical for survival of the Jewish people

- Younger Jews express frustration and separate the situation with the West Bank/Gaza from their feelings about Israel
  - Share strong concerns that attacks on Israel tend to be a thin veil for underlying anti-Semitism
  - Very concerned about these trends on college campuses in New Mexico
Focus Group Findings

Jewish Community
Many are transplants, and many grew up in a big city surrounded by Jews

• Being a transplant is a core driver of how many view the community in New Mexico and what they expect from a Jewish community (even if they have been in the state for a long time)
  • Grew up in place where being Jewish is integrated into common aspects of life (including for non-Jews)
  • Need to actively choose to be part of a Jewish community in a place like New Mexico

• Frustration that too many take it for granted that the community exists without their support – and will be there when they need a life cycle event, or will speak out against anti-Semitism
Pride that “we built this” among those in New Mexico for a long time

• Sense of pride that Jews practice and connect across the state
  • Creating Jewish community by trying and doing whatever works with whatever resources were available
  • Potential for common ground, despite fact that so many brought Jewish identity from other parts of country or world

• The sense that they are working to build, maintain and defend a Jewish community is especially true for those born in New Mexico, and is also truer in smaller, more rural parts of the state

• Connection to crypto-Jews and history also compelling and unique aspect of Jewish community in New Mexico
Many feel synagogue is the center of community, but many connect outside of the synagogue as well

- Affiliated and active in a synagogue tend to view the synagogue (as well as their home) as the center of their Judaism
- Unaffiliated either connect through cultural or non-denominational groups
- Shabbat dinners (along with Seder, or holidays like Purim that are more “social”) are very common times where Jews (affiliated and unaffiliated) connect
Many feel synagogue is the center of community, but many connect outside of the synagogue as well.

- In Albuquerque, many Jews view the JCC as an important center of Jewish life.
  - Many are drawn to the idea of the JCC as a “campus” that offers community-wide events (with support from all congregations and organizations).
  - Place for Jews to get together, including social, educational, sporting, cultural/art/dance events or activities.
In Albuquerque, we heard great concern that the community is too fragmented and “siloed”

- Many unaffiliated (and many affiliated) find politics and division to be a significant turn-off to more active participation in the Jewish community
- The clergy we spoke with express a desire for unity and more cohesion
  - Believe breaking down “silos” would be beneficial for the community as a whole
Outside Albuquerque, communities driven by feeling of isolation

- Most center around synagogue, while those with no synagogue exist through individuals coming together for dinners, services, and other informal gatherings

- Key commonality among smaller “Jewish outposts” is the struggle to find funds and resources

- Do not feel connected to Jews in other parts of the state; want to be part of an overall NM-wide community
Ideally, want leadership to create opportunity for Jews across NM to connect as they wish

- Ideal Jewish community across New Mexico would seek unity to overcome division across levels of observance, affiliation, gender or other issues
  - Especially true in a state like New Mexico
  - Particularly important to appeal to younger or less engaged

- Ideal community would be grounded in strong, vibrant congregations, while offering unaffiliateds a way to meet other Jews and engage in social or cultural events
Focus Group Findings

Ideas
From Seder or Shabbat to events and camps, the key is driving friendship and connection

• Meals are critical (many communities are already largely driven by a family or organization hosting meals)
  • Other events (fun, educational, adventurous, etc.) that introduce Jewish people to other Jews in their community, or from other locations in New Mexico, could be effective

• Desire for summer camp opportunities (perhaps out-of-state) to create bonds of friendship among young Jews in New Mexico

• Other specific ideas worth noting include: wilderness/outdoor outings, arts and cultural exhibitions or lessons, cooking classes, educational seminars/discussions
Need for better coordination of services for Jewish elderly in New Mexico

• The need for a home for Jewish elderly was met with less interest than we anticipated (given the survey results)
  • More pressing: need for better connections to services and resources such as transportation and financial planning

• Computer classes are a generally positive idea
  • More specifically, help elderly Jews to sign-up for and use Jewish social-media and access relevant websites

• Those caring for elderly parents need help as well
  • From general information to specific services (connection to health care, transportation, etc.) to support groups
Also critical to find ways to engage Jews across the age spectrum more broadly

• Strong desire for better coordination across organizations that work with Jewish youth (from youth groups to camps to synagogues to the JCC)
  • Especially in smaller cities

• Also heard interest in more opportunities for Tikkun Olam targeting less-fortunate Jews in New Mexico
  • Perhaps education to mitigate the misperception that there is not a need for support among Jews
Also critical to find ways to engage Jews across the age spectrum more broadly

- Some interest in connections perhaps from Jewish organizations to general services/programs/education that target parents or younger workers
  - Can include job referral/networking opportunities, parenting classes, volunteer work, etc. to help the younger generation find a way of prospering (and staying) in NM

- Suggestion there be a Jewish presence or resource available on each of the university/college campuses across the state
  - Not necessarily physically there, but available to students and professors as a resource
Coordinate events across New Mexico to foster a sense of belonging

• Events, dinners, gatherings

• Can use social networking and “virtual” aspect (in a way that is respectful of observance, but also provides greater connection and sharing – and friendship – across all age groups)

• Could be in homes, synagogues/facilities, or outdoors

• Can consider “sharing” speakers across the state when they come to New Mexico
Focus Group Findings

Perceptions of JFNМ
Initial impressions tend to be neutral to negative, with little understanding of what JFNM does.

Most participants seem to view Federation with either confusion or somewhat negative perceptions:

- Strong association with fundraising alone
- Few have a sense of what Federation does beyond “distribution of money.”
- Many carry a perception of Federation based perhaps on the Federation in the city where they were growing up
- Awareness of The Link is high in Albuquerque
Many want to see Federation acting to create more unity within and across communities

• Want someone to unite the community by first helping coordinate and “break up the silos”
  • Goal of transcending the divisions and fracturing of the community at the congregation/geographic levels
Many want to see Federation acting to create more unity within and across communities

• Opportunity to support smaller communities
  • Provide better coordination of information, sharing of resources (such as a technology infrastructure that all communities can utilize, with minimal staff or volunteer intervention required)

• Also, need to enhance the “brand” of the Jewish community
  • Time to move beyond the frustration/fracturing to a more positive, emotional appeal for the community to thrive
Enhancing The Link and leveraging website and social media are critical next steps

• The Link is currently seen as the main source of information about the Jewish community

• Need regular maintenance and updates (and better promotion) of existing websites
  • Most importantly, “shared” calendar of Jewish events

• Social media hub/Facebook page
  • Everyone is able to post
  • Communities can share information
  • Could have sections for different interest areas (from food to holidays to education about Jewish history or ethics
Conclusions
Conclusions

• Critical first step to growing Jewish community is solidifying and strengthening the community for those currently engaged

• Ultimate goal is attracting the “marginally interested” – those more likely to participate or engage if you offer something relevant or new or different
  • Difficult to engage these individuals and families with divisions and without a cohesive, coherent voice for Jewish life
Conclusions

• We believe this situation represents a clear opportunity for the Jewish Federation of New Mexico

• Jews across the state want centralized, unified source for information, ideas, support and excitement about Jewish life across New Mexico

• Jews in Albuquerque want a more cohesive community within the city
Conclusions

- Opportunity for JFNM to move brand beyond fundraising and distribution
- Create partnerships, leverage statewide reach and resources to respond to real needs
  - Major force driving for unity and cohesion
  - Coordinator/educator on best practices and programs
  - Infrastructure for social networks and outreach efforts