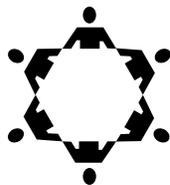


AAA Membership Practices

Attention, Agility and Alterations:
How JCCs Grow Their Membership

A study commissioned by
The Mandel Center for Excellence
in Leadership and Management

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Florence G. Heller-JCC Association Research Center



The Florence G. Heller -
JCC Association
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Mandel Center for Excellence
in Leadership and Management



Executive Summary

In January 2008, membership directors were invited to participate in the online survey on JCCs membership practices; when contact information for membership directors was unavailable, executive directors were invited. Of the 128 JCCs contacted, 87 (68%) responded. We later determined that ten of the surveys came from JCCs that are very different from the norm (some do not offer memberships); these were dropped from the study, leaving 77 responses for the analysis that follows.

Membership growth over the last year constitutes the central measure in this analysis. Growth is simply calculated as the change in membership units divided by the total number of units in the previous year.

Three factors are the most critical in predicting growth:

1. Attention - An organizational culture of closely attending to members and to membership growth. (p. 8)

- This includes motivating a staff that is professionally trained to value membership growth, attending to members at critical points in the entry (and exit) process, staying close to the customer, listening for feedback.

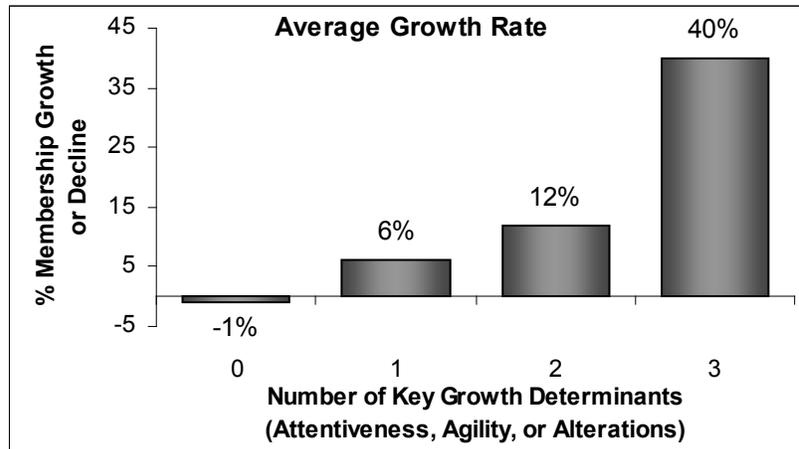
2. Agility - Devising innovative approaches to the membership model. (p. 9)

- Some examples of new models are: monthly memberships and automatic renewal, lifetime lock-in of membership rates, responding to the changing shape of families, a new two-tier membership model offering community and/or fitness, and responding to aging Baby Boomers.

3. Alterations - Recent renovations to the physical plant. (p. 11)

- The level of renovation can range substantially from renovating only the fitness center to renovating the entire JCC to building a new facility or moving to a new location.

While the relative statistical influence of each of these factors is about equal, a JCC's organizational culture of attention to membership is the most influential of the three. Moreover, the three factors operate independently; each contributes to membership growth in the presence or the absence of the other two.



Some other highlights from this study include:

4. Nearly half of responding JCCs now require no membership commitment after the first year, and 11% of these require no commitment ever, allowing month-to-month membership from the start. (p. 14)
5. Fifty-one% of respondents state that the people who sell memberships have not received training in how to “close a sale,” and 11% report the majority of their tour leaders have not been trained in how to lead a tour. (p. 14)
6. Communication with members is mixed. (p. 15)
 - Seventy-six% of responding JCCs said that they communicate with their members via a monthly e-mail newsletter.
 - Only 41% periodically call random members to ask about their satisfaction with the JCC, and just 36% of JCCs conduct an annual or biennial membership satisfaction or feedback survey.
 - Eighty-one% of JCCs thank new members for joining the JCC with a phone call or personal letter.
 - Only 43% of JCCs thank their returning members for renewing their memberships with a similar phone call or letter.
7. While nearly every responding JCC (97%) requires membership to access their fitness facilities, only 72% require it to participate in early childhood education programs, and 38% require membership to attend camp. (p. 16)

8. Fully 75% of JCCs do not offer trial memberships, and only 11% require no commitment ever, thus limiting the ways in which potential members can experience the JCC before committing to a long-term relationship. (p. 17)
9. As many as 57% of respondents said that they were not offered opportunities for training that was paid for by their JCCs in the area of membership recruitment or retention (other than JCC Association's Professional Conference). (p. 17)
10. Only 37% of responding JCCs feel like they do a reasonable job of providing exit interviews for members who have left the JCC. (p. 17)

Introduction

Membership growth is the lifeblood of any institution, and Jewish Community Centers (JCCs) are no exception. JCC members not only provide financial resources through dues, program fees, and donations that support the operations of the JCCs; even more critically, members embody the *raison d'être* of Jewish Community Centers which are, after all, dedicated to serving as centers for building Jewish community.

Indeed, the extent to which JCCs serve as the locus for Jewish affiliation is neither widely known nor well-appreciated. More Jews belong to the JCCs of North America than affiliate with any other movement in Jewish life. The number of Jewish JCC members exceeds those who belong to Reform temples, the largest denominational movement in North America (followed in turn by Conservatism, Orthodoxy, Reconstructionism, and Secular Humanism)¹. Of all affiliated adult Jews in the United States, more than one third belong to JCCs². Of all Jewish JCC members, over three-quarters also belong to synagogues, and rates of participation by JCC members in UJA/federation campaigns significantly exceed those of non-members, including those who only belong to other Jewish institutions³. Clearly, not only JCCs, but organized Jewry in all its expressions, has a stake in sustaining and growing JCC membership.

Over the years, overall membership in JCCs has held steady⁴. During this time, some JCCs have seen their membership rosters swell, while others have experienced membership decline. Undoubtedly, the changing demographics of Jewish life explain some of these variations. But with that said, factors above and beyond the migration of Jews from one neighborhood or community to another underlie shrinkage or expansion of JCC membership. Certainly, influencing major demographic change lies largely beyond the control of individual JCCs. At the same time, the attitudes, actions, and approaches of JCCs—particularly their professionals and predominantly their membership departments—can indeed influence the recruitment and retention of members and ultimately whether JCC memberships grow or decline.

This study examines one critical perspective on membership growth. We turned to JCCs' membership directors to understand how their departments' practices and the policies set by their boards of directors influence membership growth. Working with the Mandel Center for Excellence in Leadership and Management, we designed a survey of membership directors to help us learn the extent to which patterns of JCC membership change are subject to the influence of the following illustrative factors, among others:

- The Jewish composition of a JCC's membership
- Changes in membership models
- Changes in membership fees
- Quality of contact and communication with potential and departing members
- The number and quality of tours for prospective members
- The personnel engaged in giving such tours
- Staff resources committed to membership services
- Training of membership-related professionals
- The professional background of membership directors

In designing the survey instrument, the researchers concluded that all of these factors seemed to have the potential to influence membership growth. In point of fact, as we learned from the survey, only some of these factors significantly influence membership growth.

The Survey of Membership Directors

In January 2008, we sent invitations to membership directors to participate in the online survey we had constructed; when contact information for membership directors was unavailable, we sent the survey to a JCC's executive director. Of the 128 JCCs that were invited, 87 (68%) responded. We subsequently determined that ten of the surveys derived from JCCs of a very different order from the norm (some do not offer memberships) and these were dropped from the study, leaving 77 responses for the analysis.

The respondents represent significant diversity with respect to JCC size and region. That said, the sample somewhat under-represents JCCs in New York City. Similarly, larger JCCs are somewhat over-represented.

	All JCCs	Responded to survey
NYC	16%	7%
Northeast	28%	34%
Southeast	19%	18%
Midwest	12%	13%
Southwest	7%	10%
West	13%	12%
Canada	6%	5%
	100%	100%

Size of budget*	All JCCs	Responded to survey
Small (\$0-4.9 million annual revenue)	56%	44%
Medium (\$5-9.9 million annual revenue)	26%	35%
Large (\$10 million + annual revenue)	18%	21%
	100%	100%

* Categories coincide with those used in the 2007 JCC Excellence: The Benchmarking Project reports.

Measuring Growth in Membership

Growth is a product of two factors: recruitment and retention. Membership growth over the last year constitutes the central measure in this analysis. We asked respondents to report their JCC's membership figures for the current and previous years. Growth is simply calculated as the change in membership units divided by the total number of units in the previous year.

Membership change in the previous year ranged from a decline of 20% to a increase of over 200% . However, of the responding JCCs, 80% of them fell within growth rates ranging from a decline of 5% to a rise of 21%, with a median growth rate of 3%. In other words, on average, responding JCCs report having grown about 3% in the last year, albeit with very wide variations. Clearly, some JCCs are experiencing significant contractions in membership size, many report a membership that is stable or growing very slowly, and still others report sharp increases. The key questions for this analysis are what factors hinder or stimulate growth?

Three Determinants of Growth

We analyzed all the individual items in the survey and sorted through their relationships with each other and with the central measure of growth. We found that three factors were the most critical in predicting growth:

- **Attention - An organizational culture of closely attending to members and to membership growth.**
- **Agility - Devising innovative new approaches to the membership model.**
- **Alterations - Recent renovations to the physical plant.**

In other words, JCCs that demonstrate an organizational culture of attending to membership, that report having adjusted their membership model over the last three years (such as adjusting their membership categories to more accurately reflect local population, or allowing month-to-month membership payment via credit card or bank draft), and that have recently altered their facilities, are those which have experienced the highest rates of growth. In fact, the contrary is also true. The JCCs that report an inattentive culture, that have kept their membership model unaltered in recent years, and that have undergone no major renovation, actually report slight declines (on average) in the number of members.

While the relative statistical influence of each of these factors is about equal, a JCC's organizational culture of attention to membership is the most influential of the three. Moreover, the three factors operate independently; each contributes to membership growth in the presence or the absence of the other two. An elaboration of these issues is in order.

Attention to Membership: A Matter of Culture

In canvassing the several items that could potentially influence changes in membership, we noted that several practices or characteristics were associated with membership growth. For example, JCCs experienced more growth if they reported that they did an extraordinary job in greeting members when they enter the building or following up with potential member who don't join on the spot. Growth was also associated with JCCs where professional staff is especially well-trained in such matters as giving tours or in "closing a sale." None of these individual issues mattered a lot; but taken together, they all mattered a great deal. We came to understand that these influential items are indicative of a culture of attention to membership, which can greatly influence the membership growth of a JCC.

The organizational culture of attention to membership embraces:

- A staff that is motivated and professionally trained to value membership growth
- Attending to members at critical points in the entry (and exit) process
- Staying close to the customer, listening for feedback.

As noted, this culture of attention to membership emerges as the most critical determinant of membership growth, even more critical than major capital improvements. The 17 JCCs that scored higher on this measure of membership attentiveness experienced an average one-year growth rate of 17%. In contrast, those with a lower score report an average growth rate of only 2%.

The scale we constructed to measure a JCC's culture of attention to membership consists of the following items (with included responses shown in parentheses):

- In your view, how well are the following functions performed at your JCC? (We do this extraordinarily well)
 - Greeting members when they enter the JCC
 - Following every tour by asking if they'll join
 - Following up with potential members who don't join on the spot
 - Sharing membership retention information with program department heads
 - Providing exit interviews for members who have left the JCC
- Does someone at your JCC periodically call random members to ask about their satisfaction with the JCC? (yes)
- Do most JCC department heads view membership retention as part of their responsibility? (yes)
- Have you taken any undergraduate or graduate courses in the following fields: business administration, marketing, finance, sales, branding, management, or communications? (yes to 5 or more)
- Have most individuals who sell membership at your JCC received training in how to close a sale? (yes)
- Have you ever attended JCC Association's Professional Conference? (yes)

Agility: Changing the Membership Structure

Over the past several years, JCCs have been grappling with alternative membership structures. The traditional membership model is year-long and allows the dues-paying individual or family to use a full range of JCC-sponsored services including fitness facilities. In contrast, many JCCs have moved towards new models, seeking to adapt to their local communities and local competition. What this means for each individual community varies widely, demonstrating that there is no one right membership structure for every JCC. Some of the trends in membership change include:

- **Monthly memberships and automatic renewal**

Many JCCs have begun offering annual memberships that require monthly payment and that automatically renew. The traditional annual membership, in contrast, must be actively renewed by the member. Members often like this option, as automatic monthly bank or credit card deductions make paying the bill almost mindless, certainly easier than writing one big check each year. This billing model requires the member's action to cancel membership instead of making the active choice to renew membership. As a result, JCCs using this approach have seen an increase in their retention rates. Monthly payment also provides JCCs with the added benefit of a more predictable cash flow. Other JCCs have begun offering monthly memberships with no annual commitment, and have found that their members like the freedom of not being locked into a year-long contract. This final option is often offered as a response to a competitive local environment.

- **Lifetime lock-in of membership rates**

The Levite JCC in Birmingham, Alabama offers membership for life. Rates are guaranteed never to increase as long as membership is maintained, providing members with added financial incentive to maintain their JCC membership. The Levite JCC began this program two years ago, so we do not yet know the long-term outcomes of this change. However, in its first year, this innovation has resulted in a 96% increase in membership sales and 19% increase in retention rates (they now sell memberships to 45% of all tours, and have attained an extraordinary 95% retention rate), as well as additional program income.

- **Responding to the changing shape of families**

The Leo Yassenoff JCC in Columbus, Ohio recognized that not all families include children and/or two adults who want to utilize JCC services, and adjusted their membership offerings accordingly. Family memberships are structured according

to the number of individuals in the family, so that a couple pays the same rate as a single parent and child. The membership options are: single adult, two member family, three member family, and four or more member family, with discounts available for teens, college students, young adults, and senior adults. This structure simplifies the options for both members and JCC staff, and therefore provides Columbus' staff with more time to focus on other membership issues.

- **A new two-tier membership model: community and/or fitness**

Basic JCC membership has traditionally included fitness center access while a second-tier of premium membership gave people access to more luxurious health club facilities such as a private locker room or sauna. The JCC of San Francisco has changed this model to appeal to members with little interest in fitness but who still want to support the JCC and participate in non-fitness programming. They now offer a two-tier membership that consists of Community (tier-one) and Center (tier-two) memberships.

San Francisco's Community membership includes discounts on classes, programs, and special events, priority registration for camp, discounts with local retailers, and members-only special offers. Center membership is the second-tier; in addition to all of the Community membership benefits, it includes access to fitness and aquatics facilities, priority use of drop-in child care, priority registration for adult recreation, sports leagues, and some fitness and aquatics classes, as well as parking discounts in the JCC's garage.

- **Responding to aging baby boomers**

In ten years, 16% of the United States population will be over 65 (more than 51 million people), a 23% increase from 2008 population levels⁵. Consequently, many JCCs have begun to reduce the price differential between their adult and senior adult memberships. As the large baby boomer population grows older, many more individuals will become eligible for senior adult memberships. If these memberships are priced significantly below the adult membership rate that these individuals are currently paying, JCCs will experience a substantial drop in membership revenue. Among others, the Springfield JCC in Massachusetts and the Tucson JCC in Arizona have already begun to bring membership prices for these two categories into closer alignment so that their aging population's impact on membership revenue is reduced. Other JCCs have begun to raise the age of eligibility for senior adult memberships to 70 or 75.

In this context, one of the more intriguing findings in our analysis is that reports of changes in the membership model over the last three years are strongly related to membership growth. The specific type of change appears to be irrelevant, as what works well for one community may prove ineffective in another location; it is the act of change itself that seems to make the difference. JCCs that are responding to the specific changing needs of their local area appear to benefit simply because they are more in tune with the needs of their local communities and are willing to embrace change.

Of those 28 JCCs reporting a recent change in membership structure, they experienced an average rate of growth of 13%. Those whose membership structures remained static could report an average growth rate of only 1%.

Growth through Alterations

JCC leaders have long known that alterations, expanding or renovating their facilities, stirs renewed interest in JCC membership. Membership growth almost always follows upon significant improvement in facilities. Our analysis certainly validates this commonly held observation.

We coded individual JCCs by whether they undertook significant renovation in the last three years. Examples of renovation ranged substantially and included:

- **Renovating the fitness center**

The Betty & Milton Katz JCC in Cherry Hill, New Jersey recently renovated and expanded their health and wellness center to include an additional 17,500 square feet, 6,000 of which are dedicated to fitness. Their facilities have changed from a cramped space to a state-of-the-art health and wellness area that includes more than one hundred new pieces of equipment, two new group wellness studios, a family activity center/multi-purpose room, a new cycling studio, and relocated physical therapy space. In the nine months since this renovation, this JCC has recruited 866 new members—more than twice as many as they gained during the same time period the year before. Retention has also increased.

- **Renovating the entire JCC**

In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the Harry & Rose Samson Family JCC underwent a recent transformation and expansion. They not only gutted the interior of their existing fitness center to reconfigure the space, but Milwaukee also added to their non-fitness spaces as well. Among other changes, the JCC now boasts an additional 42,000 square feet, renovated classrooms, a café, and a community hall. Because they

completed the fitness center renovation first, Milwaukee experienced membership growth before their entire renovation project was completed.

- **Building a new facility/moving to a new location**

The Katie & Irwin Kahn JCC in Columbia, South Carolina and the Merage JCC of Orange County, California sold their old facilities and moved to new locations. In so doing, both JCCs constructed brand new buildings from the ground up, designing and building facilities to meet the current and future needs of their communities. Because the new facilities included space for programs and services that weren't previously available, both communities have experienced dramatic increases in membership.

Of the 15 JCCs who recently undertook alterations, the average growth rate amounted to 17%; in contrast, the non-renovating JCCs reported a rate of only 3%. Clearly, investment in renovation can dramatically increase membership. These results are in line with those from the Florence G. Heller-JCC Association Research Center's 2004 survey on facility renovation, expansions, and additions. Of the 27 responding JCCs that had already completed construction or renovation, 89% experienced membership growth above their pre-construction base. For 63% of these JCCs, membership growth was more than 10%. Similar results occurred for program enrollment in the newly renovated or added areas; 79% of responding JCCs with completed construction experienced increased program enrollment. For 63% of those JCCs, program enrollment increased by more than 10%.

The only matter is whether the payoff in membership over the years is sufficient to warrant a particular investment, and this judgment lies beyond the scope of this analysis.

Capitalizing on All Three Predictors of Growth

As we have discussed, three factors are the most critical in predicting growth:

- **A culture of membership attentiveness**
- **Agility, as symbolized by recent changes in the membership model**
- **Alterations: recent renovation**

However, the converse is also true; JCCs that report an inattentive culture, that have held their membership model static, and that have let their facility grow old actually report slight declines (on average) in membership.

Not only is the relative statistical influence of each of these factors similar (attentiveness holds slightly more influence), but the three factors operate independently. Each one of these key growth determinants contributes to membership growth in the presence or the absence of the other two. Consequently, a JCC that is able to take advantage of two or more of these growth factors is likely to experience a more substantial growth in membership than if it enacted only one change.

The graph (fig 1) illustrates this relationship and the dramatic impact these factors can have on membership. On average, JCCs that were able to capitalize on any one of the three growth predictors (attending to membership, adjusting their membership model, or altering facilities) increased membership by 6%, regardless of which measure they enacted. JCCs that were able to practice any two of these determinants saw membership increase by an average of 12%. The few JCCs that were fortunate enough to have recently experienced all three predictors of growth saw a dramatic average membership increase of 40%. On the other hand, those JCCs that did not meet any of the key growth determinants experienced an average drop in membership of 1%.

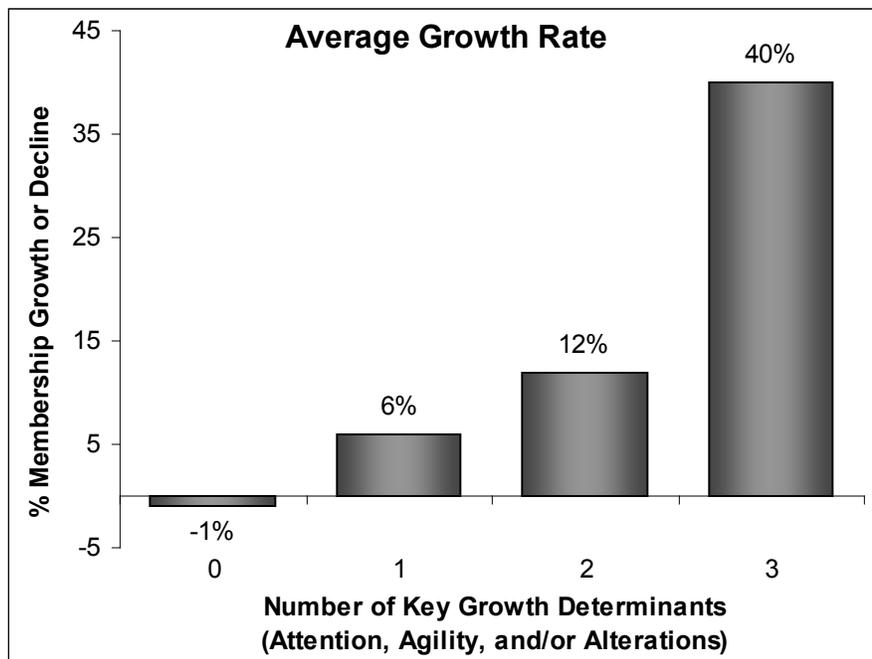


Fig 1: Average growth rate vs. number of key growth determinants.

Other Findings

The main “take-away” from this analysis is that a culture of customer service and a willingness to change are important factors in predicting membership growth. Yet beyond this central lesson, other important findings emerge from the analysis. Among them are the following:

1. Fully 92% of responding JCCs increased or decreased their fees within the past three years. JCCs that have increased their membership fees also report slightly higher rates of growth than others. While the relationship between fee increases and membership growth is difficult to disentangle, from a policy point of view one implication can be readily inferred: in the context of growing membership, appropriate increases in fees do not seem to limit growth. In fact, in all likelihood, the same measures that serve to make the JCC more attractive to members old and new, and thus increase membership, also make the market more accepting of higher dues and fees. Services that are attractive to more people are services that are more highly valued; and vice versa.
2. Nearly half of responding JCCs now require no membership commitment after the first year, and 11% of these require no commitment ever, allowing month-to-month membership from the start. This indicates a response on the part of JCCs to people’s desire for flexibility and their preference to avoid being locked into an annual contract; accepting payments monthly also provides JCCs with a more predictable cash flow from membership revenue. In addition, this allows JCCs to remain competitive with providers of similar services in their communities.
3. Slightly more than half of respondents state that the people who sell memberships had not received training in how to “close a sale,” and 11% report the majority of their tour leaders have not been trained in how to lead a tour. Best practice would dictate that JCCs ensure that everyone who has tour or sale-related contact with potential members, regardless of the department they work in, has been trained in how to best complete these tasks.
4. Large JCCs (as measured by annual revenue) tend to have more Jewish members than their smaller counterparts. On average, small JCCs estimate their Jewish membership rates at 50-59% of their total membership. Medium JCCs have 60-69% Jewish members on average, and large JCCs have 70-79% Jewish members on average. While JCCs have anecdotally reported an increase in the number of Jewish members, all three size groups have experienced a decline in the percentage of Jewish membership over the past three years. This decline has been greater among smaller JCCs. While JCCs clearly have very different membership demographics, they all must remain

attuned to changes in their local communities and be prepared to respond accordingly. At the same time, JCCs must find a way to balance these changes while remaining true to their mission.

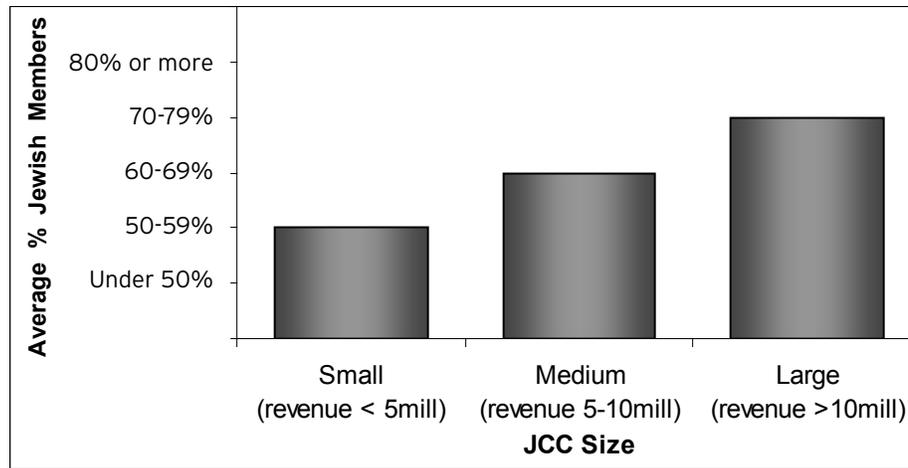


Fig 2: Average percentage of Jewish members by JCC size.

5. Respondents feel that their JCCs perform particularly well in relation to a member or potential member's first interactions with the JCC.
 - 96% of JCCs feel that they do a reasonable or extraordinary job of providing membership and program information and tours to prospective members.
 - 88% of JCCs feel that they do a reasonable or extraordinary job of greeting members when they enter the JCC.

However, communicating with members does not stop when tours are over or when a member has passed through a JCC's lobby. While 76% of responding JCCs said that they communicate with their members via a monthly e-mail newsletter, only 41% periodically call random members to ask about their satisfaction with the JCC, and just 36% of JCCs conduct an annual or biennial membership satisfaction or feedback survey. In addition, only 9% of JCCs use an outside company to help them in retaining members; companies such as Retention Management often provide services such as personal member communications (birthday cards, holiday greetings) throughout the year. While 81% of JCCs thank new members for joining the JCC with a phone call or personal letter, this practice is not generally carried over to returning members. Only 43% of JCCs thank their returning members for renewing their memberships with a similar phone call or letter. This points to an area for further study on how members perceive the frequency of conversation and contact with staff.

6. Membership directors are relatively confident about the ability of their JCCs to increase membership in the future. Over two-thirds see their membership numbers increasing in coming years, and just 7% predict decline. This optimism is loosely related to a JCC's current growth rate. JCCs that have lost membership units over the past year were the only JCCs that expected their membership to decline in the future, while those experiencing recent growth all remain optimistic about future growth. Almost no variation in expectation exists by size of JCC or region. Of course, whether their optimism will be borne out remains to be seen, but until then, people expect that the future will hold good things for JCCs.
7. While nearly every responding JCC (97%) requires membership to access their fitness facilities, only 72% require it to participate in early childhood education programs, and 38% require membership to attend camp. While this study did not collect information on prior practices, these figures probably attest to a decrease from previous years when membership was more often required to participate in early childhood and camping programs.
8. JCCs benefit from a reasonably well-trained and experienced professional membership staff. Rather large numbers of respondents reported having undergone the following academic classes and other educational or professional experiences:
 - Have taken classes in:
 - Management (57%), Marketing (53%), Business administration (52%)
Communications (51%), Finance (44%)
 - 20% have earned a graduate (or higher) degree
 - 58% have worked in retail sales during their adult career
 - Average of 5.4 years working in their current positions
 - Average of 7.4 years working in the membership sales field
 - Average of 8.7 years working in the JCC field
 - 66% have attended the JCCs of North America Professional Conference
9. The findings point to several additional areas where responses suggest room for significant improvement.
 - 60% of respondents did not receive an orientation to their JCCs when they were hired.
 - Of responding JCCs, 19% continue to accept post-dated checks as a method of payment. This practice puts a JCC at risk for being unable to collect the membership dues and program fees.

- As many as 20% of JCCs either do not ask prospective members to complete an information form, or they wait to do so until after the tour is over. These JCCs are missing the opportunity to highlight programs and services during the tour that prospective members are interested in and to follow up with prospective members after the tour.
- Approximately 20% of JCCs felt that they did not do a good job at the following tour-related tasks such as:
 - Collecting contact information from prospective members.
 - Following every tour by asking the prospective member if she will join the JCC.

Without collecting contact information from people, a JCC cannot follow up with prospective members. Similarly, without formally asking someone to join, a JCC can not expect him to sign on the dotted line.

- Fully 42% of JCCs feel that they do not do a good job of following up with potential members who did not join immediately after their tours.
- As many as 61% of JCCs say that they do not do a good job of sharing information about new members and their interests with program department heads.
 - A similar percentage feel that they do not do a good job of sharing membership retention information with program department heads.
- Only 37% of JCCs felt like they did a reasonable job of providing exit interviews for members who have left the JCC.
- As many as 75% of JCCs do not offer trial memberships, thus limiting the ways in which potential members can experience the JCC before committing to a long-term relationship.
- Fully 57% of JCCs do not personally thank members for renewing their memberships.
 - 19% of JCCs do not personally thank new members for joining.
- Just 38% of respondents said that they had participated in training that was paid for by their JCC in the area of membership recruitment or retention (other than JCC Association's Professional Conference).
- Only 37% of respondents feel that department heads view membership retention as part of their responsibility. However, it is often the department head, not membership director, who has daily contact with members in their classes and programs, and therefore has the greatest opportunity to influence a member's decision to renew membership.

A Final Word

Confronted with a variety of complex challenges and incomplete information, professionals understandably wonder if their actions affect outcomes. Does good professional practice really make a difference? Theory is one thing; results are another.

This modest investigation of the determinants of membership growth in Jewish Community Centers points to the efficacy of good professional practice and policy. JCC membership levels are subject to many forces outside the control of JCC leaders, both lay and professional. Among these are economic conditions and local demographic circumstances. But as this investigation has shown, good practice can and does promote good results. We found that attentiveness, agility, and alterations—operating either singly or together—can determine whether JCC membership numbers grow or decline. All levels of JCC leadership, then, can draw a general lesson that their actions and approaches do matter, certainly in the area of retaining and recruiting members, but, in all likelihood, in other domains as well.

APPENDIX

List of Responding JCCs

Levite JCC - Birmingham, AL
Valley of the Sun JCC - Phoenix, AZ
Barness Family East Valley JCC - Tempe, AZ
Tuscon JCC - Tuscon, AZ
Peninsula JCC - Foster City, CA
Merage JCC of Orange County - Irvine, CA
Barbara & Ray Alpert JCC - Long Beach, CA
Westside JCC - Los Angeles, CA
Lawrence Family JCC of San Diego County - San Diego, CA
Jewish Community Center of San Francisco - San Francisco, CA
Addison Penzak JCC of Silicon Valley - San Jose, CA
Osher Marin JCC - San Rafael, CA
Friends of Valley Cities JCC - Sherman Oaks, CA
Contra Costa JCC - Walnut Creek, CA
Greater Hartford JCC - West Hartford, CT
JCC of Stamford - Stamford, CT
Washington District of Columbia Jewish Community Center - Washington, DC
Bernard & Ruth Siegel JCC - Wilmington, DE
Adolph & Rose Levis JCC - Boca Raton, FL
Samuel M. & Helene Soref JCC - Fort Lauderdale, FL
David Posnack JCC - Hollywood, FL
Jewish Community Alliance - Jacksonville, FL
Michael-Ann Russell JCC - North Miami Beach, FL
JCC of Greater Orlando - Orlando, FL
JCC of the Greater Palm Beaches - West Palm Beach, FL
Marcus JCC of Atlanta - Atlanta, GA
August Jewish Community Center - Augusta, GA
JCCs of Chicago - Chicago, IL
The Jewish Community Center of Greater Kansas City - Overland Park, KS
JCC of Louisville - Louisville, KY
New Orleans JCC - New Orleans, LA
Leventhal-Sidman JCC - Boston, MA
JCC of the North Shore - Marblehead, MA
Springfield JCC - Springfield, MA
Rose & Max Rady JCC - Winnipeg, MB
JCC of Greater Baltimore - Baltimore, MD
JCC of Greater Washington - Rockville, MD
JCC of Washtenaw County - Ann Arbor, MI
JCC of the Greater St. Paul Area - St. Paul, MN
St. Louis JCC - St. Louis, MO
Raleigh-Cary JCC - Raleigh, NC
Omaha JCC - Omaha, NE

Shimon & Sara Birnbaum JCC - Bridgewater, NJ
Betty & Milton Katz JCC - Cherry Hill, NJ
JCC of Western Monmouth - Manalapan, NJ
Milton & Betty Katz JCC - Margate, NJ
JCC of Central NJ - Scotch Plains, NJ
YM-YWHA of North Jersey - Wayne, NJ
JCC MetroWest - West Orange, NJ
Ronald Gardenswartz JCC of Greater Albuquerque - Albuquerque, NM
Sidney Albert Albany JCC - Albany, NY
The JCC of Greater Buffalo - Buffalo, NY
Sid Jacobson JCC - East Hills, , NY
JCC of the Greater Five Towns - Cedarhurst, NY
Barry & Florence Freidberg JCC: Long Beach - Oceanside, NY
The Educational Alliance - Manhattan, NY
Central Queens YM-YWHA - Queens, NY
JCC of Greater Rochester - Rochester, NY
JCC-Y of Rockland - New City, NY
Robert & Dorothy Ludwig Schenectady JCC - Schenectady, NY
JCC on the Hudson - Westchester, NY
The Mandel Jewish Community Center of Cleveland - Cleveland, OH
Leo Yassenoff JCC of Greater Columbus - Columbus, OH
Marjorie and Oscar Boonshoft JCC - Dayton , OH
Youngstown JCC - Youngstown, OH
Bathurst Jewish Community Centre - Toronto, ON
Miles Nadal JCC - Toronto, ON
Schwartz / Reisman Centre - Toronto, ON
Allentown JCC - Allentown, PA
Jewish Federation of Greater Harrisburg - Harrisburg, PA
Jewish Community Alliance of Lancaster - Lancaster, PA
Kevy K. & Hortense M. Kaiserman JCC - Philadelphia, PA
JCC of Greater Pittsburgh - Pittsburgh, PA
York JCC - York, PA
Ben Weider JCC - Montreal, QC
Katie & Irwin Kahn Jewish Community Center - Columbia, SC
Memphis JCC - Memphis, TN
Gordon JCC - Nashville, TN
Aaron Family JCC of Dallas - Dallas, TX
JCC of Houston - Houston, TX
Barshop JCC of San Antonio - San Antonio, TX
JCC of Northern Virginia - Fairfax, VA
Marilyn & Marvin Simon JCC - Norfolk, VA
Weinstein JCC - Richmond, VA
Stroum JCC of Greater Seattle - Seattle, WA
Harry & Rose Samson Family JCC - Milwaukee, WI

The 2008 JCC Membership Survey

Except for those labeled minimum, maximum, median, or average, all numbers shown are percentages and represent those answering "yes."

Except where otherwise noted, the number of responses to individual questions (N) is 70 or greater.

Trends in Membership at Your JCC

About how many units of paid membership do you currently have at your JCC? Include all categories and count each household as a single unit. Do not include complimentary memberships.

Minimum	Maximum	Median	Average
150	7,005	2,100	2,329

About how many units of paid membership did your JCC have 12 months ago? Include all categories and count each household as a single unit. Do not include complimentary memberships.

Minimum	Maximum	Median	Average
150	6,826	2,000	2,255

During the last 12 months, about how many NEW membership units joined your JCC? Include all categories and count each household as a single unit.

N = 69

Minimum	Maximum	Median	Average
20	1676	538	582

Over the last 3 years, would you say that the number of paid membership units at your JCC has...

Increased a lot	Increased a little	Held steady	Decreased a little	Decreased a lot
29	27	11	27	6

Over the next 3 years, in your best estimate, do you think that the number of paid membership units at your JCC will...

Increase a lot	Increase a little	Hold steady	Decrease a little	Decrease a lot
22	46	25	6	1

About what percentage of your paid membership is Jewish?

N=69

Under 50%	50-59%	60-69%	70-79%	80-89%	90% or more
23	19	19	13	13	13

How has the percentage of Jewish members at your JCC changed over the past 3 years?

Increased a lot	Increased a little	Held steady	Decreased a little	Decreased a lot	Not sure
1	7	36	39	4	13

Membership Fees and Related Issues

When was the last time you changed your membership fees?

Within the past 12 months	About 2 years ago	About 3 years ago	4 or more years ago	Not sure
76	11	5	4	4

Comparing your membership fees today to three years ago, about how much have they changed? N = 66

	Family Membership	Adult Individual Membership (not young adult)
11% or greater decrease	2	2
6-10% decrease	2	2
1-5% decrease	2	0
No change	8	6
1-5% increase	29	28
6-10% increase	26	28
11-15% increase	18	22
16% or greater increase	15	13

Have you changed your membership structure in the past 3 years?

Yes
37

Which statement best describes the current period for membership at your JCC?

Membership is offered on an annual basis and renews annually for a full year	53
Membership is offered on an annual basis but becomes month to month after the first year	35
Membership is month to month with no annual commitment beginning in year one	13

In which of the following ways do you accept payment for membership?
Check all that apply

Monthly credit card draft	91
Monthly bank draft	86
Post-dated checks	20

Do you allow your members to lock-in a set membership rate for life?
Not lifetime membership donors.

Yes
5

Is membership required to use the following areas of your JCC?

	Yes	No	We don't offer this program
Fitness	91	3	7
Early childhood education	72	28	0
Camp	37	61	1

Tours of the JCC Facilities for Prospective Members

About how many prospective members are taken on tours of the JCC during an average month?

1-25	26-50	51-75	76-100	100 or more
39	28	16	4	12

Of those individuals who took a tour, about how many joined the JCC?

1-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51 or more
28	19	16	16	4	16

Which of the following people give tours to potential members at your JCC?
Check all that apply

Membership director	90
Membership staff	77
Fitness staff	46
Reception desk or customer relations staff	44
Early childhood staff	40
Other program staff	31
Camp staff	16
Other	14
Volunteers	5

When do prospective members who take tours usually complete an information form?

Before the tour	After the tour	Not at all
80	13	7

	Yes	No	Not sure
Does your tour route generally vary according to a person's interests?	95	4	1
If a person does not join the JCC after taking a tour, do you usually provide him/her with a membership packet?	90	7	4
Have most individuals who give tours at your JCC received training in how to give a tour?	89	11	0
Does your staff have a specific list of places to visit or things to mention on a tour?	83	14	3

Membership Recruitment and Retention Practices at Your JCC

In your view, how well are the following functions performed at your JCC?

	We do this extraordinarily well	We do this reasonably well	We do this, but not well	We don't do this
Collecting membership dues	57	43	0	0
Providing membership and program information to potential members	47	49	4	0
Providing tours to potential members	44	52	4	0
Following every tour by asking if they'll join	41	38	17	4
Collecting information about all individuals who are given tours including address, phone and e-mail	36	46	16	3
Obtaining information about interests from prospective members	29	53	17	1
Following up with potential members who don't join on the spot	22	36	31	10
Greeting members when they enter the JCC	20	69	10	1
Sharing membership retention information with program department heads	17	25	26	32
Sharing information about new members and their interests with program department heads	13	26	43	17
Providing exit interviews for members who have left the JCC	11	26	30	33

Do you offer a 1 - 3 month trial membership? (NOT a summer or snowbird membership)

Yes
25

How many trial memberships do you sell in an average month?

N = 16

Minimum	Maximum	Median	Average
3	350	20	42

About what percentage of trial members convert to a full membership?

N = 16

Minimum	Maximum	Median	Average
5	90	42	43

	Yes
Do new members usually get thanked for joining the JCC with a phone call or personal letter?	81
Does your JCC communicate with members via a monthly e-mail newsletter?	76
Have most individuals who sell memberships at your JCC received training in how to close a sale?	49
Do returning members usually get thanked for renewing their membership with a phone call or personal letter?	43
Does someone at your JCC periodically call random members to ask about their satisfaction with the JCC?	41
Do most JCC department heads view membership retention as part of their responsibility?	37
Does your JCC conduct an annual or biennial membership satisfaction or feedback survey?	36
Do you ever use a collection agency to obtain outstanding membership fees?	20
Do any membership sales staff work on commission?	18
Does your JCC use an outside company to assist you in retaining membership?	9

How many total full-time equivalent (FTE) staff members provide membership services as a primary part of their job at your JCC?

FTE: calculate so that 1 full-time staff member represents 35 hours. Include relevant professional and support staff in this calculation. Do not include people in the marketing department.

Minimum	Maximum	Median	Average
0	45	2	3.8

About You

Do you fulfill the following professional responsibilities?

	Yes
Membership director	92
Other	55
Marketing director	30
Program department director/assistant	17
Website manager	15

How many years have you been working...

	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Average
In your current position?	0	21	3.1	5.4
In the JCC field?	0	31	5	8.7
In the membership sales field? (including the years you've worked in membership at JCCs)	0	21	6	7.4

What is the highest educational level you have attained?

High School	Some college	BA or BS	MSW	MBA	Other graduate degree or higher
3	16	61	5	7	8

Have you taken any undergraduate or graduate courses in each of the following fields?
Check all that apply

	Yes
Management	57
Marketing	53
Communications	51
Business administration	52
Finance	44
Judaic studies	33
Sales	31
Branding	20

	Yes
Do you feel that you are very knowledgeable about all the departments and programs offered by the JCC?	94
Have you ever attended JCC Association's Professional Conference?	66
Have you ever worked in retail sales (outside of the JCC) during your adult career?	58
Did you receive an orientation when you began your employment at your JCC?	35

Since you began this job, have you participated in training that was paid for by your JCC in the area of membership recruitment or retention?

Please answer only about training other than that provided at JCC Association's Professional Conference.

Yes	No, I was offered some but did not attend	No, none were offered to me
38	5	57

Do you self-identify as Jewish?

Yes	No	Prefer not to say
72	26	1

How important is being Jewish in your life?

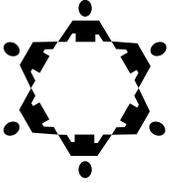
Extremely important	Very important	Somewhat important
42	49	9

Do you belong to a synagogue, church, or other house of worship?

Yes	No	Prefer not to say
65	32	3

Endnotes

1. Cohen, Steven M. 2004a. "Jewish Members of Jewish Community Centers in the United States: Jewish Households and Individuals." *The NJPS 2000-01 and the JCC Movement* 1:3.
2. ----- . 2004b. "Demographic Characteristics of JCC Members: Comparison with Affiliated and Unaffiliated Jews in the United States." *The NJPS 2000-01 and the JCC Movement* 2:5.
3. ----- . 2004c. "Jewish Community Centers and Their Jewish Members: Profiles in Religious and Ethnic Identity." *The NJPS 2000-01 and the JCC Movement* 3:3-4.
4. These trends emerge in comparison of local Jewish populations studies, available at the Mandell L. Berman Institute's North American Jewish Data Bank website (<http://www.jewishdatabank.org>).
5. U.S. Census Bureau. "U.S. Interim Projections by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: Detail File." Retrieved March 13, 2008 (<http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/usinterimproj/>).



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