

Ambassador Meetings Summary

This is a summary of eight Ambassador meetings with a constituency that included high school and University students, young families with children and seniors.¹

1. What brought you to Edmonton? How long have you been here?

Common reasons for coming here were school and work. 45% were born here and 55% moved here. Length of time in Edmonton ranged from 2 years to 79 years.

2. How do you find Jewish community life generally in Edmonton?

There was a consistency in response from the various age groups that Edmonton is a very welcoming and warm community and that there are lots of activities available for those that wish to engage. The diversity of groups and programs offers many opportunities to connect, the downside being that it might be contributing to dividing the community. This seems more acute since the JCC was sold.

There were a few comments regarding how the community has changed over the last couple of decades – growth in the orthodox community along with a feeling that the community is not as united as it once was. Mention was also made of the need for more programming targeted for teens, young adults and singles.

Outlier comments: Not a comfortable community or welcoming if you are LGBT; Difficult to get people to become more involved; the seniors who participated were particularly happy with what the community has to offer; we need strong community leadership to provide cultural programming

3. Thinking of your aspirations/expectations of community life, what would you like to see the community offer that would enrich your Jewish life? Do you see any challenges/barriers to realizing those aspirations?

What to offer: The general consensus was that the community needs a gathering place that can offer cultural programming for all ages. We need strong leadership to coalesce the community; leadership that will undertake a strategic planning process to ensure the Federation is delivering programs that the community wants. The community should find ways to make it easier for youth, young adults (post-University) and singles to engage in community programming as these groups have fewer opportunities to connect with the community. It might be prudent, with Alberta's strong economy, to make an effort to recruit newcomers to the community as Edmonton has lots to offer

Challenges/barriers: History, money and a small population from which to draw on were identified as significant barriers. Determining the location of a JCC could be difficult. For instance, if you are in post-

¹ Shane Asbell, Freya & Lewis Wasel, Stacey Leavitt-Wright, Sharon Marcus, JCORE, JAHSENA, Hillel and BBYO

secondary school, a young working adult or senior your focus might be on having a gathering place downtown. Other challenges identified include a lack of community leadership, the need for fresh ideas, organization and communication and the willingness to take a calculated risk.

4. What value might there be in having a central gathering place for the Jewish community, and what purpose(s) might it serve?

Value: There was a lot of talk of the value of having a non-denominational gathering place to meet and interact with people from other synagogues, organizations and/or the unaffiliated. A central gathering place can be a welcoming place for newcomers (making it more attractive to move to Edmonton). The need for space should be addressed by looking at existing facilities.

A central meeting place is needed but to be successful, it is imperative to have substantive programming - that will make the facility a success.

Any project will need to determine that any capital costs and the ongoing operational costs can be met by the community. We need a central gathering place but we need to be fiscally responsible.

Purpose: Components of a JCC might include a coffee/deli (“food is important” was mentioned many times!), indoor playground for young families, meeting rooms and a gym/multi-purpose room. Consider including a library, archives and Holocaust education centre along with a teen/BBYO lounge.

Most felt it was not necessary to duplicate recreation facilities, like having a pool or offering fitness classes, as we can't compete with places like the Y.

Any decisions will require a transparent and open decision making process.

Last thoughts: I believe the overall theme is that a central (that word needs to be defined) gathering place is something that the majority of those interviewed would support. Such a facility offers the opportunity to provide greater cultural programming, the chance to meet socially with community members from other walks of life and could be a unifier in bringing Jewish Edmonton together in one place to share and celebrate.

Overwhelmingly, participants appreciated the Ambassador meetings and the open and transparent process it afforded in gathering input and information about our community. Continuing in such a matter will be critical to our success.