

Ambassador Meetings Summary

This is a summary of nine ambassador program meetings which included: JFED, JFSE, Drop-in Centre and five non-organizational meetings.

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

Some of the participants of the sessions were lifelong Edmontonians; either being born here or brought as small children by their parents. This cohort represented a minority of approximately 15-20%. The vast majority of the participants moved to Edmonton as adults from elsewhere in Canada, and from around the world; largely South Africa, Russia, and Israel. Of those having moved here 66% have been in Edmonton for more than 20 years while 30% had been in Edmonton for less than 4 years.

Of those who moved to Edmonton the motivating factor was building a better life. Most people came to Edmonton for a job opportunity or came with their spouse. The University of Alberta was mentioned many times as a reason people came here, to study, teach or conduct research. Some people moved to Edmonton from smaller communities after immigrating to Canada in order to be in a city with a Jewish community.

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

Jewish community life in Edmonton is warm and vibrant for those who seek it. There are many organizations in the community which offer a variety of activities and programming. The common theme was a sense of community fracturing and divisiveness. Religious observation was a common driver of this perception; many identified it was difficult to be an active Jew if you don't belong to a Synagogue.

The community is small, and most people agreed there is more synagogue and community programming supply than the demand from active members of the community.

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?

Everyone is motivated to create a more cohesive community: more co-operation, less competition. The prominent theme was a non-denominational Jewish centre would create a central gathering place which would be a home for all members of the community. People identified wanting an opportunity to congregate and socialize in a Jewish setting, which was neutral.

There was a small and vocal minority who stated the expectation: the \$4.8M belongs to the building of a Jewish Community Centre and the current generation has a responsibility to future generations to continue that legacy.

Summary of Ambassador Program by: Clive Oshry

The most identifiable challenge was funding and sustainability. People were concerned about the ability of a small community to sustain a facility long term. Some also felt the pessimism of the failure of the former JCC as a barrier.

Hiring professional staff and management was seen as a major challenge.

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

The general theme of value was to create a single gathering place which would represent a central home for Jews in Edmonton. The purpose of the centre would be to help foster a sense of inclusiveness and Jewish culture. A central gathering place could also act as a point of first contact for Jewish newcomers and also to help attract Jews to Edmonton and retain them.

People were most interested in creating a sense of community and vibrancy. Of the specific purpose of offerings, a kosher kitchen/café was frequently mentioned as was the potential to aggregate programming currently offered by Synagogues. A facility and programming for youth and young families were prevalent as was an auditorium for dance and sports activities. Office and meeting space for federation and other organizations were also mentioned frequently.