

Ambassador Meeting Summary

This is a summary of nine ambassador meetings with a total participant number of 70. These groups included several non-organizational groups, a Kollel/Chabad (Ultra Orthodox movement) group, a Beth Shalom (conservative synagogue) Women's League group, and a Temple Beth Ora (reform synagogue) group.

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

More participants in these groups moved to Edmonton than were born here. Most moved for work, spouses' work, to attend university, or to be close to family.

Of the participants who moved here, most have been here since some time in their twenties or early thirties. Although the number of years they have been here varied greatly, most moved during young adulthood as this corresponded to major life milestones such as starting careers, starting families and attending university.

2. How do you find the Jewish community in general?

Many comments were made about how such a small community does a very good job at having diversified programs that interest many subsections of the community. Several people commented on how programs are poorly attended, and that existing spaces are poorly utilized. Some suggested that these spaces are not accessible for groups within the community wanting to use them.

Others used the term divided or polarized to describe the way programming is separated by affiliation and identified that it is difficult for unaffiliated members of the community to fit in without a non-denominational meeting place.

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?

Many people suggested that the community has many vibrant and approachable synagogues that meet the spiritual and religious needs of our community members. Participants spoke of a need for "neutral" or non-denominational space, some suggesting "central", while others specified in the west end, for other programming needs such as social, leisure, and education. This came up several times in each meeting. Specifically, participants identified a lack of kosher food options as well as a lack of space for dance, sports, and youth programming.

Participants recognize a need for more intergenerational programming so that our youth learn about history and our seniors have more opportunities to be involved and socialize.

There was also much discussion about programs that seem to be run by different organizations within the community. It seemed that participants want more cohesion and togetherness, and less divisiveness and duplication.

Barriers: Participants spoke of a lack of cohesion and a leadership without a vision or drive, and lack of willingness to take a risk as barriers to building a strong community (or community center in some cases). Lack of social services within the community as well as challenges bringing in the unaffiliated Jewish population were also brought up as challenges, although JFS was praised. Lack of money or willingness to contribute, and inability to make decisions as a cohesive community were also brought up as barriers.

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

Much of the conversation during this portion of the discussion seems to have revolved around facility. What people did seem to speak of in terms of value was a central gathering space for community. It was repeated that it must be inclusive and non denominational. It should be a place where everyone feels welcome, and where the community can hold large events and draw people in.

Some posed concern with the leadership of this community and a perception that this would never get done.

Some specifics as to what a facility should house were recurrent, including but not limited to: Kosher kitchen and café, childcare, multipurpose auditorium, indoor playground, gym, and dance space.

Many people involved expressed appreciation for the process and being included.