



**PATHWAYS FOR
YOUNG ADULT
PARTICIPATION IN
JEWISH LIFE**

AN EVALUATION

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GATHERDC

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RELATION BASED ENGAGEMENT (RBE)

GatherDC is the go-to resource for Jewish DC's 20s & 30s to successfully engage in Jewish life across the greater Washington area. At the heart of the GatherDC's operation is a relationship-based engagement (RBE) strategy for enabling young Jewish adults to increase their involvement in Jewish life ([Link](#)).

GatherDC seeks to enable participation for young adults who are unfamiliar with, or uncomfortable with Jewish life; and, to encourage those who are already Jewishly active to depend and broaden their participation.

WE ASK

This study evaluates the contribution of the GatherDC's RBE strategy to the lives of Jews in their 20s and 30s, and other participants, in the Washington D.C and Northern Virginia region.

Do GatherDC participants, past and present, manifest changes in their Jewish lives, including:

- 1. Understanding** of their personal connection to other Jews, Judaism and organized Jewish life?
- 2. Participation** in Jewish social circles, both informal and institutional Jewish life?
- 3. Engagement** in Jewish family, cultural, religious life and beyond?

THE EVALUATION

Interviews:

Document best case stories

- GatherDC staff nominated 6 individuals who represent diverse examples of GatherDC's RBE engagement methodology having a significant effect on the Jewish life of young adults.
- The interviews informed the survey write-up.

Survey: A survey of GatherDC participants and alumni

- Evaluate the extent to which GatherDC's RBE enables young adults to increase their engagement with Jewish life, including areas in which the strategy can be further improved.
- May 30th to June 28th, 2021
- 582 responses.

THE SURVEY

The 582 respondents are 11% of GatherDC’s contact list of 5131 individuals with effective email addresses. The list includes all individuals with any contact with GatherDC since its founding six years ago.

GatherDC staff assign each contact a “faded engagement score,” which considers quality of engagement + time of last engagement.

The survey response aligns with the faded engagement score, indicating that the findings in this survey are representative of the broader population who have had contact with GatherDC.

	GatherDC Staff Assigned Faded Engagement Score for Total Contact	
	List	Survey Response
Observer (0 points)	3%	5%
First Step (1 to 9 points)	75%	67%
Emerging (10 to 24 points)	13%	18%
Involved (25 to 50 points)	6%	7%
Super User (50 + points)	3%	3%
Total	100%	100%

THIS ANALYSIS INCLUDES:

All respondents 45 years or younger whom, based on their survey answers we know have had contact with GatherDC in the past five years.

These are 487 respondents.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

of Findings

RBE – CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

When successful, GatherDC’s RBE strategy enables young adults to find their “Jewish space,” which is an understanding of “where I fit Jewishly.” “My Jewish space” is about feeling comfortable, thereby enabling participation in organized Jewish life.

RBE’s success depends on three strands, which together enable participation in Jewish life.

1. **Social relationships** – providing access to Jewish spaces in which individuals feel socially comfortable, meet people with similar interests, making or reinforcing friendships.
2. **Intellectual engagement** – providing access to Jewish spaces that individuals find personally “meaningful” and relevant to their broader life interests and concerns. These spaces include opportunities for learning, celebration, social or communally focused action, often in small intimate groups in an intensive immersion retreat or cohorts that continue to meet over periods of time.
3. **Professional guidance** – providing mentorship and guidance facilitating young Jewish adults’ access to social and intellectual opportunities appropriate for them.

PATHWAYS TO PARTICIPATI ON IN JEWISH LIFE

GatherDC's RBE strategy plays out as intended, with two distinct variations.

- 1. Activating** – Sparking interest in, and ability to participate for those who are not comfortable in Jewish spaces.
- 2. Expanding** participation for those who are comfortable but are seeking to enrich their Jewish life.

When activating, a weave of all three RBE strands (social relationships, intellectual engagement and professional guidance) are equally important. A minority of those in contact with GatherDC need such intensive holistic RBE. **They report the experience transforming their Jewish lives.**

The majority report GatherDC as expanding their Jewish participation. **The social relationship aspect of GatherDC's RBE strategy are what they are looking for, and they report receiving such an experience.**

ACTIVATING PARTICIPATION

Significant Group. 20% of the respondents describe GatherDC as having a “significant” or “very significant role” in their Jewish life. These young adults describe GatherDC as ...

- Changing how they think about and live their Jewish life**
- Providing a primary or important Jewish space** for them
- Providing a wide range of social and intellectual opportunities** for Jewish involvement with the **active guidance** of GatherDC staff
- Enabling them to become comfortable in Jewish spaces.** Crediting GatherDC for helping them to understand their Jewish needs and connecting to Jewish spaces in which they find what they are looking for.

EXPANDING PARTICIPATION

The remaining respondents divide into two groups.

- 1. Somewhat Significant:** These are 57% of the respondents who attribute “some significance” of GatherDC to their Jewish lives. That significance is primarily social. These respondents have other Jewish spaces in which they feel comfortable. GatherDC offers them the ability to expand their Jewish social life and Jewish social networks through participation in social events and receiving information for participation opportunities through the GatherDC website and newsletter.
- 2. Not Significant:** These are 23% of the respondents who don’t attribute any significance of GatherDC to their Jewish life. Their contact with GatherDC is similar to the Somewhat Significant Group but is far less intensive.

GATHERDC RBE ENGAGEMENT METHODOLOGY

GatherDC's RBE engagement methodology has two complementary dimensions. The first is to activate individuals who are either not comfortable and/or interested in Jewish life. Once socially engaged and intellectually interested these individuals find their community, joining many other young adults who are already involved in Jewish life who want to expand their participation and maximize their contribution.

Activating

Social relationships: Providing conditions for establishing Jewish social relationships for those who do not feel comfortable in Jewish social spaces.

Intellectual engagement: Offering meaningful Jewish experiences for those with little to no interest in Jewish life.

Professional guidance to enable individuals to find their Jewish space.

Expanding

A person has found their Jewish space:

Opportunities to expand participation in Jewish life

And **maximize their contribution** to the Jewish community and broader society.

DYNAMIC NATURE OF JEWISH ENGAGEMENT

The dynamic nature of the process in which a young adult will seek out and find “my Jewish space” is a master theme that arose from the interviews.

- **They want the ability to figure things out** – to move back and forth between different Jewish places and social frameworks, growing and adapting until they find modes of Jewish engagement that enrich their lives.
- **Feel constricted:** Prior to engaging with GatherDC the young adults we interviewed reported feeling forced to choose “a place,” such as joining a synagogue or a Jewish Community Center.
- **GatherDC offers a chance to figure out the type of Jewish space they are interested in.** In some cases, GatherDC provided assistance for creating a Jewish learning or social group with peers that share like interests. In so doing, **these young adults report not only finding their personal Jewish space, but also creating involvement opportunities for others.**

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD: PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE

For Jewish community organizations seeking to enable the participation of young adults.

- GatherDC is part of a larger movement comprised of organizations such as Hillel, Chabad, Base and innovative synagogues that are seeking to meet young adults where they are at, with the goal of increasing their participation in organized Jewish life.
- The approach of these innovative organizations is to counter a norm at many Jewish institutions where staff interact with constituents per event or activity. The result is that each staff person has limited awareness of any one individual's interests and needs.
- **GatherDC's RBEs success depends on:**
 - ❖ Seeing the entire person in terms of their social and intellectual being; and, as a result being able to guide and enable them to build on each Jewish experience to figure out their place in Jewish life.
 - ❖ The approach requires expertise and resources for a holistic approach to engagement that activates all the three RBE strands – social, intellectual and professional guidance.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD: EXPONENTIAL EFFECT

Multiplying opportunities for young adult engagement.

GatherDC provides individuals with the ability to figure out their Jewish involvement, supporting them in the process. Some take a leadership role, creating new forms of Jewish space, in which they feel comfortable, engaged and valued. The result:

- An increased range of opportunities for Jewish involvement that are of interest to young adults.
- Leading to more young adults engaging and in turn becoming leaders for communal innovation.



IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD: CONNECTING YOUNG ADULTS WITH ORGANIZED JEWISH LIFE

- **Jewish Institutions:** Amongst those in contact with GatherDC, at least half engage with Jewish institutions such as synagogues and JCCs, which they cite as playing a “strong positive influence” in their lives.
- **Non-Organizational Involvement:** For those who are uninterested or uncomfortable engaging with Jewish institutions, friendships and informal networks are very important for their connection to Jewish life. Informal forms of engagement include non-organizational, intimate forms of Jewish engagement such as OneTable and self-organized small group experiences.
- **GatherDC Facilitates Involvement:** GatherDC enables those who are uncomfortable engaging with Jewish institutions to figure out their Jewish space. After five years or more of involvement with GatherDC, young adults “activated” by GatherDC are as likely as their peers to report participation in organized Jewish life.

IMPLICATIONS FOR GATHERDC

GatherDC should draw a clear distinction between “activating” and “expanding.” Each pathway for promoting Jewish engagement has implications for:

1. Different target audiences
2. Development of professional expertise
3. Allocation of resources
4. Understanding and communicating impact.

Activating demands the **greatest allocation of resources**, reaching fewer people but with **transformational impact**.

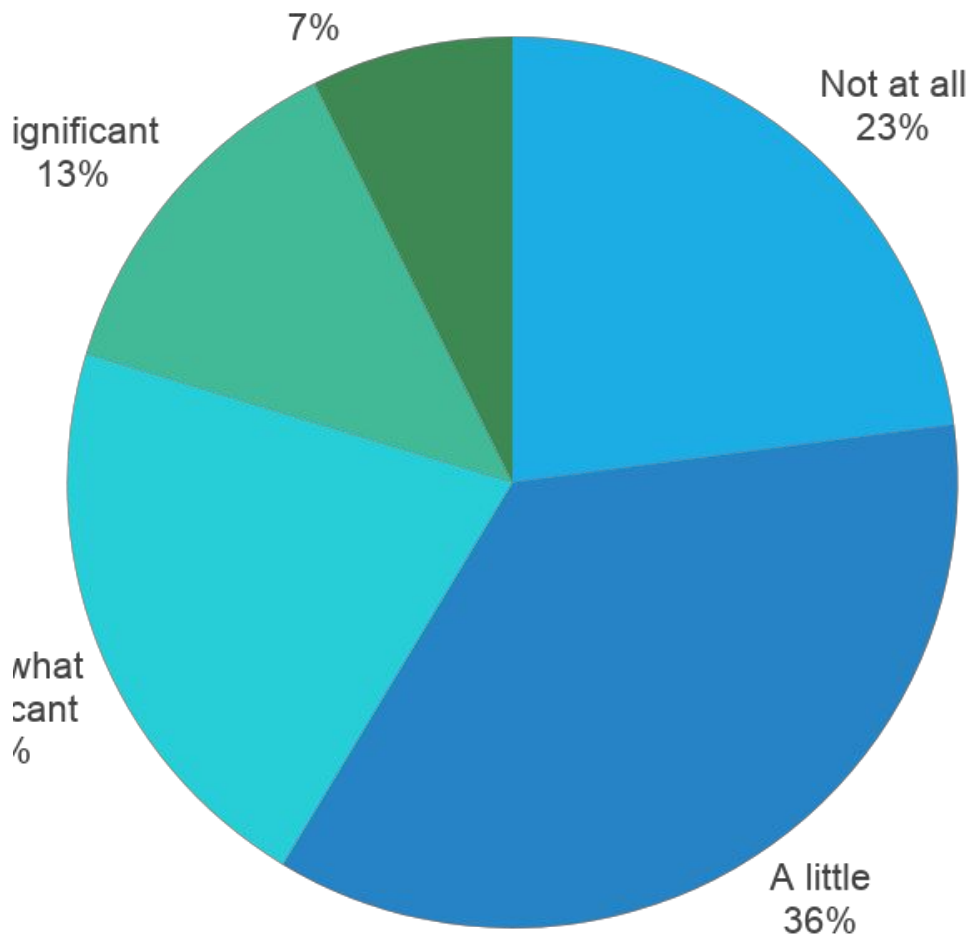
Expanding requires **fewer resources** to reach larger numbers, providing opportunities for individuals who have already found their Jewish space to:

1. Expand **their participation** in Jewish life and,
2. **Maximize** their contribution to Jewish community and the broader society.

SIGNIFICANCE OF CONTACT

with GatherDC for my Jewish Life

GATHERDC'S SIGNIFICANCE FOR MY JEWISH LIFE



We asked: "In thinking about your Jewish life in general over the past five years, how significant has the contact with GatherDC been?"

We divide the 487 respondents who report at least some contact with GatherDC in the past five years and who answered this question into three groups:

GatherDC Significance Groups

- 1. Significant:** 20% of the respondents describe their GatherDC contact as "significant" (13%) or "very significant" (7%) for their Jewish life.
- 2. Some Significance:** 57% select "somewhat" (21%) or a "little" (36%) significant.
- 3. No Significance:** 23% select "not at all" significant.

GATHERDC SIGNIFICAN CE GROUPS

This report focuses on the three GatherDC Significance Groups (see previous slide).

How are those who attribute more or less significance from GatherDC to their Jewish lives similar or different, in terms of:

1. The benefits they report from their GatherDC participation?
2. Interaction with GatherDC?
3. Trajectory of Jewish participation in the past five years?
4. Jewish backgrounds?
5. Demographic characteristics?

GATHERDC CHANGED MY JEWISH LIFE

For the Significant Group, GatherDC is especially important to their Jewish lives. They report GatherDC changing the way they think about and/or live their Jewish lives.

27% of all the survey respondents stated that if they had not connected with GatherDC “something would be missing from their Jewish lives.” **Among the Significant Group the number rises to 79%.**

		GatherDC's Significance for My Jewish Life		
		Significant Group	Some Significance	No Significance
If you had not connected with GatherDC would there be something missing in your Jewish life?	Yes	79%	20%	1%
	Not sure	20%	49%	29%
	No	1%	31%	70%
	Total	100%	100%	100%

FORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

63% of the Significant Group also describe having a “powerful or formative” experience during their contact with GatherDC that shapes the way they think about Jewish Life. Of these, 59% agreed that the experience led to changes in the way they live their Jewish lives.

		GatherDC's Significance for My Jewish Life		
		Significant Group	Some Significance	No Significance
Have you ever experienced a moment(s) during your contact with GatherDC that you might describe as “powerful” or “formative” in terms of the way you think about your involvement in Jewish life?	Yes	63%	15%	0%
	Not sure	28%	38%	9%
	No	9%	47%	91%
	Total	100%	100%	100%

WHAT WOULD HAVE BEEN MISSING IN YOUR JEWISH LIFE IF YOU HAD NOT FOUND GATHERDC?

Survey respondents from the Significant Group

“I would not have many important friendships in my life, nor would I have the skills to connect and build my ritual practice.”

“A relevant, fulfilling, nurturing and inclusive Jewish community. A rich network of authentic friends and peers. A space to connect and be in community.”

“All of my DC Jewish community I met through Gather. It has given me knowledge, community, and a Jewish home in DC.”

“Understanding of the different ways to be Jewish and the importance of interpreting and tailoring it for yourself.”

“I would have missed having a community of peers who are interested in exploring their Judaism in community.”

“Modern Jewish spirituality that speaks to the millennial generation.”

MY JEWISH SPACE

Activating and Expanding

MY JEWISH SPACE

When successful, GatherDC's RBE strategy enables young adults to find their "Jewish space," which is an understanding of "where I fit Jewishly." "My Jewish space" is about feeling comfortable, cognitively and emotionally, thereby enabling participation in organized Jewish life.

"Thanks to the Beyond the Tent Retreat for getting me to think about what makes a community, I moved to DC and formed an intentional Jewish community amongst friends which led to finding Rosh Pina, a partnership minyan shul that feels more like home than shuls I have been to before. I am now learning to lead part of davening, something I never thought would be an interest of mine. The holidays have been enriched by attending classes with Rabbi Ilana and being introduced to At the Well, which led to attending friends Rosh Hodesh get togethers after. GatherDC provided introductions to many alternative Jewish events and practices that have enriched my Jewish life."

"I appreciate the accessibility to Judaism in terms of the pathways that Gather opened up for me. Gather helped me understand that while there's a shared belief system that unites Jews, Judaism itself isn't a one-size-fits-all and it's okay to not resonate with certain things and find meaning in other things that aren't important or meaningful to other people."

"I created my own Rosh Chodesh group shortly after Beyond the Tent and realized that perhaps my experience of Judaism would be very different than my husband's - and that was ok!"

FINDING A JEWISH SPACE

For the Significant Group, GatherDC plays a formative role in their Jewish life enabling them to connect to a Jewish space in which they experience meaningful participation.

90% of the Significant Group credit GatherDC, at least “to an extent” with helping find a Jewish space in which they feel that they belong. 49% credit GatherDC to a large extent or very large extent.

In contrast, for the Some Significance Group, 34% credit GatherDC to at least “an extent.” 66% state that GatherDC’s contribution to them finding a Jewish space was small (42%) to none at all (24%).

		GatherDC's Significance for My Jewish Life	
		Significant	Some Significance
To what extent has GatherDC contributed to your finding a Jewish space in which you feel that you belong?	To a very large extent	15%	2%
	A large extent	34%	6%
	An extent	40%	26%
	A small extent	9%	42%
	Not at all	1%	24%
Total		100%	100%

*The No Significance Group were not asked this question.

ACTIVATING VS. EXPANDING

Activating: For the Significant Group GatherDC offers a space that is essential or central to enabling the Jewish life they wish to lead. 80% report GatherDC providing an “important Jewish space” (61%) or their “primary Jewish space” (19%).

Expanding: For the Somewhat Significant Group GatherDC facilitates access to additional Jewish spaces expanding the Jewish experience they are also finding elsewhere. 71% view GatherDC “as one of my Jewish spaces.”

	GatherDC's Significance for My Jewish Life	
	Significant Group	Some Significance
GatherDC provides me with my primary space for Jewish participation	19%	5%
GatherDC provides me an important Jewish space, alongside others	61%	24%
GatherDC is one of my Jewish spaces	19%	71%
Total	100%	100%

*The No Significance Group were not asked this question.

CONTEXTS FOR JEWISH LIFE

Family plays a strong positive role in the Jewish life of the majority of respondents no matter the significance of GatherDC to them.

Formal institutions such as synagogues and JCCs are contexts, which approximately half cite as playing a “strong positive influence.”

Friendships and informal networks are more important for the Somewhat Significant and Significant groups, which also includes non-organizational, intimate forms of Jewish engagement such as OneTable and self-organized small group experiences.

Please select the venues and contexts that you regard as having a strong positive influence on your Jewish life in the past five years?

Column %	GatherDC's Significance for My Jewish Life			Row n
	No Significance	Some Significance	Significant	
My family (immediate and extended)	73%	71%	70%	342
At a synagogue, congregation, minyan or chavurah. Jewish Community Center (JCC)	54%	54%	49%	254
My friends	56%	69%	73%	311
Through my informal Jewish social networks	33%	46%	56%	209
OneTable	9%	28%	43%	118
Through an event or happening organized informally by a peer or acquaintance (not by an organization) or self-organized small group experience	14%	14%	27%	77
# Respondents	90	228	80	398

ENABLING ACCESS TO FORMAL INSTITUTIONS

Members of the Significant Group tell us that GatherDC played an important role in enabling them to access Jewish life and formal Jewish institutions (previous slides).

The table on this slide shows the newcomers in the Significant Group are far less likely to cite involvement in a Jewish institution. **By the time members of the Significant Group are involved with GatherDC for five or more years they are as involved in Jewish institutions as the others.**

Comparing those who have been involved with GatherDC for five or more years to those whose first contact was in 2019 or later, we learn:

- The newcomers in the Significant Group are far less likely than the other newcomers (37% compared to 59% and 50%) to cite Jewish organizations playing a positive role in their lives in the past five years.
- Amongst the veterans, the Significant Group finds positive connection to Jewish organizations at a similar level.

A Synagogue, congregation, minyan or chavurah, a Jewish Community Center (JCC) played a strong positive role in my Jewish life in the past five years.

GATHERDC SIGNIFICANCE GROUP	FIRST CONTACT WITH GATHERDC	
	2016 OR EARLIER	2019 OR LATER
Significant	65%	37%
A Little Significant	59%	59%
Not Significant	68%	50%

ENABLING PARTICIPATION WITH JEWISH LIFE

GatherDC participants report a range of contributions to their Jewish lives:

- **Significant Group:** The contribution is holistic, with a majority reporting many outcomes – including social, intellectual, practical Jewish knowledge and skills.
- **Some Significance:** GatherDC's contribution is primarily social – expanding one's ability to develop Jewish social networks and participate in Jewish community.
- **No Significance:** The contribution is selective and dependent on what the individual is looking for.

Listed below are several possible outcomes of your contact with GatherDC Which of the outcomes, if any, applies to you?

Column %	GatherDC's Significance for My Jewish Life			Row n
	No Significance	Some Significance	Significant	
Provided me with ways to participate in community	27%	75%	94%	287
Connected me to others who share common interests	20%	48%	84%	205
Provided me with a space in which I feel comfortable	10%	46%	77%	187
Connected me to others who are now my friends	5%	27%	70%	129
Provided me opportunities to find the Jewish space(s) most appropriate for me	10%	36%	60%	149
Helped me make sense of who I am Jewishly	1%	20%	57%	98
Learned useful Jewish knowledge and/or skills	4%	15%	44%	78
Connected me to a Jewish organization	11%	20%	27%	81
Total	92	228	80	

DYNAMIC NATURE OF JEWISH ENGAGEMENT

With Jewish Life and Community

“FINDING MY JEWISH SPACE” IS A DYNAMIC PROCESS

The dynamic nature of the process in which a young adult will seek out and find “my Jewish space” is a master theme that arose from the interviews.

Whether engaging with organized Jewish life for the first time or seeking to continue their childhood and young adult experience with Jewish community, there is a dynamic quality to the Jewish lives of these young adults.

They are not seeking a niche, or a defined place; but rather, they want the ability to create their own Jewish space. **They want the ability to figure things out** – to move back and forth between different Jewish places and social frameworks, growing and adapting until they find modes of Jewish engagement that enrich their lives.

FEELING FORCED TO CHOOSE

Prior to engaging with GatherDC the young adults we interviewed reported feeling forced to choose “a place,” such as joining a synagogue or a Jewish Community Center.

The survey data indicates that this issue is particularly relevant for the members of the Significant Group (slides 29 and 30).

From their perspective, Jewish institutions often require a financial commitment, and structure their offerings around educational, cultural, and religious services that one can either take or leave. There is little room or support for a young adult, with limited financial resources to play, to create their own Jewish space.

The young adults whom we interviewed, who actively sought to connect to Jewish life, reported feeling constricted, lacking choice, and often unable to access opportunities for meaningful Jewish engagement. Others had little interest in organized Jewish life, which they simply perceived as irrelevant, until they encountered GatherDC.

ENGAGEMENT
PATHWAY
THAT
EMPHASIZES
INDIVIDUAL
AGENCY

The young adults interviewed see GatherDC as an alternative pathway into organized Jewish life, with a focus on receiving the chance to create their own Jewish space. As one put it:

“I truly feel that Gather is one of the few organizations that doesn’t have an agenda. It is not self-serving, like the Federation, which is fund-raising motivated, or a synagogue that wants you to take membership. Gather is giving me space to be Jewish, an opportunity to find myself Jewishly.”

FACILITATING ACCESS TO JEWISH COMMUNITY

“Growing up in Seattle, the Federation played an important role in the Jewish community. So that was the first place I reached out to when I knew I was coming in DC. The response was, offering me to participate in an event at \$200 a ticket. I didn’t have any money. It was not personalized at all. There wasn’t even someone to talk to. I even asked if there are reduced tickets for students. I had to self finance everything; I was poor poor poor. So, I was really happy when I learned about Gather. Options for what works for you. They were not asking anything from me. They provided the warm welcome hospitality I was hoping to find.

Later when I was a resident at Moishe House. I saw that there is a ferociousness in the Jewish community here. Organizations won’t share or collaborate readily. Gather had a completely different spirit. They are very focused on Jewish content and enabling access to the broader community.”

TRANSFORMATIONAL EXPERIENCE

“I was trying to get into Jewish community but was not succeeding. Gather changed my life trajectory. ... I don’t think of myself as religious but am observant. Gather helped me understand that Judaism for me is an excuse to speak about things that are really important to me, providing a time and a way to discuss it. After participating in Beyond the Tent [retreat], I started a Jewish women's Rosh Chodesh group with Gather’s assistance. I love that Gather helps you do what you want to do.”

A RIPPLE EFFECT

Many young Jewish adults have a Jewish space(s) in which they feel comfortable, but they would like to expand their participation in Jewish life. They too need support to maximize their potential for participation in and contribution to Jewish community.

“Through the Gather learning cohorts, I made serious Jewish friends, some are professionals, enabling me to network. The cohorts are a place for creativity and experimentation. ... There has definitely been an impact on me personally, my Jewish knowledge, my friends, the way I live my life. And, now I am impacting others. I have chosen to become a Jewish professional and direct my personal philanthropy in a Jewish direction. Gather made a large investment in me, and now I am contributing. It’s a ripple effect!”

INCLUSION ENABLES CONTRIBUTION

“I am a highly engaged Jew but feel like ‘the other’ in many Jewish contexts. I am a queer black man. I often get asked: ‘Oh are you Jewish?’ ... The whole community piece. Gather speaks to it. What does community even mean. They helped me to understand community better. I now have a richer language and ability to talk about community and to facilitate it myself. I started a queer Jewish group. At first it was just to have Shabbat dinner together but has now evolved into a broader mission. How do we allow people to care about each other and are not focused on orchestrated, formal gatherings. We want to create a platform for broader energies.”

PATHWAYS INTO JEWISH LIFE

Providing the Ability to Play and Develop

HOLISTIC JEWISH ENGAGEMENT NT

A Holistic Experience: GatherDC's RBE is holistic by design. As a result of contact with GatherDC those interviewed report:

1. **Social:** Developing a sense of social comfort, desire and confidence to interact with other Jews, including making friends and expanding their Jewish social network.
2. **Intellectual:** Discovering modes of Jewish engagement that are relevant to their lives and interesting.
3. **Professional:** A positive experience connecting with a GatherDC professional(s) whom they feel deeply care about them as individuals.

In combination these experiences feed a desire to intensify one's personal involvement in Jewish community. Underlying all three is the **development of an emotional connection** to Jewish life. Jewish spaces are now seen as an opportunity to experience intimacy, trust, and feeling seen, known and cared for.

PROVIDING A HOLISTIC JEWISH EXPERIENCE

The holistic experience described on the previous slide is enabled through formal opportunities for mentorship, social, ritual, and intellectual experience. These take place through:

- (1) **One-on-one meetings with GatherDC staff**
Receiving guidance and mentoring for participation in Jewish life.
- (2) **Peer led initiatives and activities**
Examples given in the interviews include a woman's giving circle, a Jewish queer support group, a women's rosh chodesh group.
- (3) **Immersive experiences – *Beyond the Tent* retreat**
- (4) **Cohort learning groups**
Mini Gatherings and Deep Dives
- (5) **One-off and/or socially focused events**
Happy hours, hanging out or participating in programming at the GatherDC Town House, and alternative Yom Kippur services.
- (6) **External events**
Accessing information about Jewish engagement opportunities through GatherDC website and social media.
- (7) **Leadership**
Taking a leadership position, helping with fundraising, donating.

In which of the following ways have you ever been in contact with GatherDC?

INTERACTION WITH GATHERDC

Primarily Social: For the No Significance and Somewhat Significant Groups, GatherDC extends their Jewish social life. The GatherDC newsletter, website and social events are their primary points of interaction.

Intellectual and Social: For the Significant Group interaction with GatherDC is holistic including a range of social and learning focused activity.

1 to 1 meetings with GatherDC staff serve all three groups, with a majority of the Significant and Somewhat Significant Groups reporting such meetings.

Column %	GatherDC's Significance for My Jewish Life			Row Total
	No Significance	Some Significance	Significant	
The Gather DC newsletter (Jewish people of the week, promoted events, blog)	42%	68%	87%	280
Social event(s) (i.e. a happy hour)	56%	73%	74%	292
1:1 meeting with GatherDC Staff	33%	61%	73%	242
The GatherDC website (calendar, job & housing board, blog)	46%	59%	65%	243
Cohort/group learning series (Mini Gatherings, Giving Circle, High Holiday Deep Dive)	8%	31%	60%	135
I made a donation to GatherDC	2%	13%	51%	78
Retreat	0%	11%	43%	63
Learning event(s)	11%	18%	41%	90
A peer led experience (Camping Trip, Article Club, Rosh Chodesh etc.)	5%	5%	24%	39
Column Total	92	228	80	

STAFF'S ROLE

Significant Group: Almost all report contact with GatherDC staff, with a majority reporting a range of interactions including staff serving as a resource, connector, friend and facilitator.

Some Significance: 84% report contact, although that contact is less intensive in all areas.

In thinking about your contact with GatherDC staff, which of the following describe your relationship with them? Select all that apply.

Column %	GatherDC's Significance for My Jewish Life	
	Some Significance	Significant
Connector	35%	65%
Friend	32%	64%
Resource, source of information	41%	62%
Facilitator	25%	55%
Teacher	9%	39%
Mentor / Guide	13%	26%
I have not had any contact with GatherDC staff	14%	2%
# Respondents	237	85

*The No Significance Group were not asked this question.

INTENSITY

Significant Group: In 2019, the year prior to the Pandemic, 68% were in contact with GatherDC on a regular (49%) or frequent (19%) basis. In 2020 (during the Pandemic) 52% were in regular (29%) or frequent (23%) contact.

The other respondents report less intensive contact. 58% of the Some Significance Group report contact “once in a while” (46%) or regularly (12%).

For 35% of the No Significance group their contact is limited to the newsletter and website.

Which of the following best describe the frequency of your contact with GatherDC in 2019 (the year prior to the pandemic)?

Column %	GatherDC's Significance for My Jewish Life		
	No Significance	Some Significance	Significant
Frequently	0%	1%	19%
Regularly	0%	12%	49%
Once in a while	25%	46%	23%
Just once or twice	40%	30%	4%
Not at all	35%	11%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%
# Respondents	85	213	81

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Jewish Background and Demography

JEWISH HOUSEHOLD MATTERS

The Jewish household in which a person grows up or currently lives does influence the likelihood that a respondent will report GatherDC playing a significant role in their Jewish life.

- The Significant Group has twice as many individuals who grew up with one Jewish parent.** 29% of the Significant Group reported growing up in a household with one Jewish parent, which is double that of the No Significance Group (14%).
- Significant groups members who are partnered are more likely to report that their Partner is not Jewish.** The Significant Group are the most likely to report not having a Jewish partner (41%) in contrast to 27% of the Some Significance groups.

Other than Jewish household, no other Jewish background variables including education, denomination and friendships explain why a person will report GatherDC as more or less significant for their Jewish life.

Jewish Parents	GatherDC's Significance for My Jewish Life		
	No Significance	Some Significance	Significant
Both	81%	78%	66%
Mother or Father	14%	17%	29%
Neither	5%	5%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Jewish Partner	GatherDC's Significance for My Jewish Life		
	No Significance	Some Significance	Significant
Jewish	66%	73%	59%
Not Jewish + Other	34%	27%	41%
Total	100%	100%	100%

SIMILAR DEMOGRAPHICALLY

The following are demographic characteristics of the respondents to the survey. They provide an understanding of who GatherDC is reaching, but do not explain why a person will report GatherDC as more or less significant for their Jewish life.

- **Residence:** 56% DC, 18% Virginia, 16% Maryland, 10% live somewhere else
- **Years in the Greater DC area:** 59% five years or more, 38% two to five years, 3% are in first year.
- **Age:** Average age - 31 years old.
- **Gender** – 67% female, 31% male, 2% other.
- **Sexual orientation** – 14% identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer.
- **Race** – 10% identify as other than White.
- **Relationship Status** – 44% are single, with the remainder married (25%) or in an exclusive relationship (31%).
- **Children** - 14% have children

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

TWO DISTINCT PATHWAYS TO JEWISH PARTICIPATI ON

GatherDC provides two distinct pathways for young adults to participate in Jewish life.

1. Activating

For a minority (20% of respondents) contact with **GatherDC is transformative** for their personal connection to other Jews, Judaism and organized Jewish life. GatherDC's RBE strategy influences their lives in an intensive fashion, enabling them to "find their Jewish space." They gain the sense of comfort and confidence to participate in organized Jewish life in a manner that they feel they would not otherwise have attained.

2. Expanding

The majority (57%) already have Jewish spaces in which they are comfortable. They report GatherDC serving as a source for opportunities to expand their Jewish engagement.

- Some of the engagement opportunities are events hosted by other organizations, which GatherDC advertises.
- Others are events that GatherDC organizes, or which young adults are organizing with GatherDC's assistance. Respondents report their participation in these events as enriching, expanding their experience of Jewish community beyond the Jewish spaces in which they would otherwise participate.

23% of the respondents also interact with GatherDC as a source of information or for participating in a social event. However, they do not do so often and don't report significance for their Jewish lives.

RBE WORKS

The relationship-based engagement (RBE) strategy is flexible enough to both activate and expand Jewish participation.

- Young adults who are unfamiliar with, or uncomfortable with Jewish life are enabled to participate by taking advantage of a wide range of opportunities to participate in Jewish community; including, professional mentoring and guidance.
- Those who are already comfortable are provided with opportunities to expand their Jewish participation.

RESOURCE ALLOCATION

GatherDC currently works along two distinct RBE pathways - activating and expanding Jewish participation. **In considering future growth, the optimal balance between enabling and expanding is essential.**

Each RBE pathway has implications for different target audiences, development of expertise, allocation of resources and the nature of GatherDC's impact.

- A minority of participants currently demand the greatest allocation of resources. They need all three RBE strands – social, intellectual and professional.
- Alternatively, fewer resources are needed to reach larger numbers, who are looking to expand their participation in Jewish life. They too need support to maximize their potential for participation in and contribution to Jewish community.

SEEING THE ENTIRE PERSON

Activating requires greater resources, as Jewish professionals need “to see the entire person.”

For those who are uncomfortable participating in Jewish life, GatherDC’s professionals actively engage with each young adult in a holistic manner. The aspiration is to see the entire person, in terms of their social and intellectual being; enabling the person to build on each Jewish experience figuring out what is best for them.

GATHERDC RBE ENGAGEMENT METHODOLOGY

We recommend viewing the Activating and Expanding Pathways as complementary. The Activating Pathway is a prior condition for the Expanding Pathway. Once activated a young adult finds their community, joining many others who are already involved in Jewish life who want to expand their participation and maximize their contribution.

Activating

Social relationships: Providing conditions for establishing Jewish social relationships for those who do not feel comfortable in Jewish social spaces.

Intellectual engagement: Offering meaningful Jewish experiences for those with little to no interest in Jewish life.

Professional guidance to enable individuals to find their Jewish place.

Expanding

A person has found their Jewish space:

Opportunities to expand participation in Jewish life

And **maximize their contribution** to the Jewish community and broader society.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD: THE EXPONENTIAL EFFECT

Multiplying opportunities for young adult engagement.

The outcome of the GatherDC engagement methodology is “an exponential affect.” GatherDC provides individuals with the ability to figure out what works best for them, supporting them in the process. Some of these young adults not only become involved in Jewish life, but also take on leadership roles, creating new forms of Jewish space, in which they feel comfortable, engaged and valued. The result:

- ❑ An increased range of opportunities for Jewish involvement that are of interest to young adults.
- ❑ Leading to more young adults engaging and in turn becoming leaders for communal innovation.



IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD: PROVIDING THE ABILITY TO FIGURE OUT MY JEWISH SPACE

The implications of GatherDC’s work for the broader field of Jewish communal engagement is the importance of recognizing the dynamic nature of Jewish engagement.

Feel constricted:

Prior to engaging with GatherDC the young adults we interviewed reported feeling forced to choose “a place,” such as joining a synagogue or a Jewish Community Center.

Not seeing the whole person:

There are other innovative Jewish organizations, who like GatherDC are working to engage individuals in a holistic manner. However, many veteran Jewish institutions offer little room or support for a young adult, with limited financial resources to figure out what is right for them, and to create their own Jewish space.

GatherDC approach to Jewish engagement offers a compelling case study for best practice with the goal of enabling young adults the chance to figure out the type of Jewish space that is right for them. The approach requires expertise and resources for a holistic approach to engagement that activates all the three RBE strands – social, intellectual and professional guidance.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD: CONNECTING YOUNG ADULTS WITH ORGANIZED JEWISH LIFE

Jewish Institutions: Amongst those in contact with GatherDC at least half engage with Jewish institutions such as synagogues and JCCs, which they cite as playing a “strong positive influence” in their lives.

Enabling Engagement with Jewish Institutions

- For those who are uninterested or uncomfortable engaging with Jewish institutions, friendships and informal networks are very important for their connection to Jewish life. Informal forms of engagement includes non-organizational, intimate forms of Jewish engagement such as OneTable and self-organized small group experiences.
- For these young adults GatherDC plays an important role in enabling them to figure out their Jewish space – including friendships, informal experiences and Jewish institutions.
- After five years or more of involvement with GatherDC, a young adults “activated” by GatherDC, who were previously uncomfortable participating in organized Jewish life are now as likely as their peers to report participation.