

Four Surprises from the JPRO Poll

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JPRO Network asked professionals how we can best add value to their networking and career development. The response was phenomenal and we are eager to share what we learned.

How can an organization re-envision how to best meet the needs of a large and diverse audience? By asking!

JPRO Network is in the early stages of reimagining our work with and for the thousands of people who work in Jewish organizations in North America. JPRO connects professionals who work in North American Jewish organizations to one another, advances careers, and builds the field.

As we began exploring how to open our next chapter, we had many exciting ideas to choose from. But where to start? We did not have the resources for a strategic planning process. Instead, through over 200 conversations, we developed a short-list of initiatives that could jump-start our new work. We then fielded a poll to ask professionals what would be of most value to them, their colleagues, and their organizations. **We heard from 1,020 professionals** in a wide range of sub-sectors, from Jewish education to social justice to Federations. We got what we needed - useful feedback on which programs to pilot. We were also surprised and delighted to receive so much positive and constructive feedback.

Much of what we learned will be helpful to others so we have gathered some key data in [this infographic](#) and are sharing our four key insights:

- 1. Members of the field want to connect even more than we expected.**

Responses to our poll came from professionals in 36 states and 6 provinces - from British Columbia to Nova Scotia; from Maine to Texas to Oregon. We heard the same message over and over: professionals are looking for more opportunities to connect with one another. We expected this to some degree, since one of JPRO's core beliefs is that our sector will be strongest if we come together across geographic and organizational diversity. Many professionals' networks are deep but not wide-ranging; the camp folks know other camp folks, the Federation professionals know other Federation professionals, and so on. We also tend not to know enough people who work in communities of different sizes. There is so much to be learned by branching out. When

professionals in different communities and segments of the field have avenues for interaction and opportunities for cross-pollination, we increase learning, collaboration, career advancement (for individuals) and recruitment (for employers). The data from our poll showed that while the desire for this kind of connection is echoed across the field, the need is largely unmet. In addition, lack of access to existing opportunities based on cost and geographic barriers came up often in respondents' comments.

- 2. Professionals of different age cohorts want to connect with one another.** In the six months since I assumed my role as JPRO's Executive Director, I have heard repeatedly about cross-generational conflicts. Some younger professionals speak of senior leaders who talk *about* Millennials instead of *with* them. Some older professionals speak of a lack of commitment to the sector and a lack of preparation for the work among younger professionals. Because of this, we expected the poll to show different preferences and priorities by age segment. The results were just the opposite: there was no meaningful variation by age. At least in the initiatives that they would like to see from JPRO, professionals in their 20s and 60s, and all those in between, are aligned! In addition, in the open comments section of the poll, many people requested opportunities to connect with more experienced professionals and many seasoned professionals offered to help, which suggests that there is an appetite for more "cross-generational" networking, learning, and mentoring.
- 3. Every segment wants more support - especially mid-career professionals.** We have anecdotal evidence that there is a gap in professional development for those at the mid-career stage. The poll highlighted the particular unmet needs of mid-career professionals in our sector. More than half of our respondents are in "middle management" positions. We heard from every age segment and career stage asking for more support, but there was a preponderance of requests for mid-career interventions. For example:

"I would love to see more offerings for mid-career folks - a lot of professional development seems to be targeted to new professionals, or very senior professionals."

"As someone who wants to eventually be an executive in the Jewish community, I can't access the networks and professional development to keep me from moving laterally."

While JPRO seeks to serve all people working in our sector, our early hypothesis is that we will continue to field particular need and interest from mid-career professionals.

4. **We have a critical mass of colleagues who are excited about working in our sector and ready to roll up their sleeves to make positive change.** In the open comments section, there were many offers to help and enthusiastic, constructive suggestions. This positive tenor was thrilling for us for two reasons: First, JPRO is “by and for” professionals in the Jewish nonprofit sector. Having our respondents raise their hands to offer to help – before even being asked! – was both a wonderful surprise and a confirmation that there is a strong appetite for an inclusive, participatory organization that crosses the diversity of our sector. Second, there is sometimes a note of frustration and dissatisfaction among professionals who work in Jewish organizations. While we absolutely support the value of being direct about challenges and the open airing of concerns, the hundreds of comments we receive skewed strongly positive. Fewer than 10% of comments could be categorized as “concern/complaint” and over 80% were “offers of help/suggestions” (the remainder were questions or could not be categorized). The spirit that the JPRO Board brings to its work is the same that we heard from the field. It’s a can-do attitude, dedicated to pitching in to harness our best assets and address our weaknesses. The JPRO Board and staff are thrilled to hear that same energy emanating from our colleagues in the field.

These were four ways that the poll surprised us and these insights will help to direct our work. We also had a clear response to the question that was the original purpose for the poll: Which of the potential initiatives that JPRO might pilot would be of greatest value to professionals in the field? Given the four observations above, it is no surprise that Pro to Pro Career Advising and Communities of Practice were among the most popular initiatives; both speak directly to the desire to connect with other professionals across organizational boundaries, geographic regions, and generations.

Other popular initiatives included our online series ideas such as *The Tough Stuff* and *Thought Leaders on the Hot Seat*; Master Classes (skills-based trainings); and discounts for members. Over the next two years, JPRO will pilot these initiatives, which we will announce in our newsletter. In the meantime, we will repeat this process regularly – developing hypotheses and then turning to you to help us design opportunities that will make a difference for your work, your network, and your career. Have an idea already? [Let us know](#), and let the connecting begin.