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Jewish Federation[®]
OF GREATER METROWEST NJ

2020 Greater MetroWest NJ **Jewish Community Study**



Community Connections

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The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS), founded in 1980, is dedicated to providing independent, high-quality research on issues related to contemporary Jewish life.

The Cohen Center is also the home of the Steinhardt Social Research Institute (SSRI). Established in 2005, SSRI uses innovative research methods to collect and analyze sociodemographic data on the Jewish community.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Introduction.....3
- Key Findings: Community Connections6
- Community Connections.....7
 - Connections to community7
 - Differences in connection.....7
- Satisfaction with Community Connection13
- Participation in Local Community Life17
 - Program participation18
 - Sources of information.....20
- Concern about Antisemitism21
- Finding Sense of Community.....22
 - Limitations to community connection.....24

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1. Feeling of connection to worldwide and local Jewish community7

Figure 2: Connections to a local Jewish community by close Jewish friends12

Figure 3. Limiting factors in connecting with the GMW Jewish community.....15

Figure 4. Concern about antisemitism...21

Table 1. Feeling of connection to local Jewish community by Jewish engagement group, region, marital status, and financial situation9

Table 2. Feeling of connection to a local Jewish community by denomination.....10

Table 3. Number of Jewish friends by Jewish engagement group, region, marital status, and financial situation11

Table 4. Satisfaction with local Jewish community connection by level of connection.....13

Table 5. Satisfaction with connection to local Jewish community by engagement, region, age, parent and marital status, and financial situation.....14

Table 6. Conditions that limit local community connections.....16

Table 7: Membership to a Jewish organization or informal Jewish group17

Table 8. Membership in Jewish organizations by feeling of connection to local community18

Table 9. Participation in Jewish activities in past year18

Table 10. Any in-person or online Jewish programs in past year19

Table 11. Program sponsor and level of attendance.....19

Table 12. Program type and level of attendance20

Table 13. Source of information about local Jewish community.....20

Table 14. Where do you find your strongest sense of Jewish community?22

INTRODUCTION

The 2020 Greater MetroWest Jewish Community Study, conducted by the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS) at Brandeis University, employed innovative state-of-the-art methods to create a comprehensive portrait of the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of the Jewish community in Greater MetroWest New Jersey (GMW). The principal goal of this study is to highlight data and findings that will be useful for the Greater MetroWest Jewish Federation and other community organizations and funders for communal planning. This study is intended to promote an understanding of the community and to aid strategic planning, program development, and policies to support and enhance Jewish life.

The study overview report¹ serves as an introduction to all of the topic reports. It provides key findings, terminology, and a summary of the methodology used in the study.

This topic report focuses on the community’s sense of connection to the Greater MetroWest Jewish community. Related reports cover:

- Finances
- Geography
- Israel
- Jewish children
- Jewish engagement
- Philanthropy/Volunteering
- Seniors/Health and disability

More details about each item are available in the report appendix and through analysis of the dataset.

Greater MetroWest Jewish Population, 2020

Total Jewish households	56,800
Total people in Jewish households	155,000
Total Jews	122,300
Adults	
Jewish	96,900
Non-Jewish	26,600
Children	
Jewish	25,400
Non-Jewish	4,300

Numbers do not add up to total due to rounding.

The present study provides a portrait of the Greater MetroWest Jewish community as it was in the fall of 2020, six months into the COVID-19 pandemic. Although some survey responses were likely

¹ View at <<https://www.brandeis.edu/cmjs/community-studies/greater-metrowest-nj-report.html>>

to be influenced by the special circumstances of the pandemic, the questions were designed to provide a demographic and attitudinal portrait of the stable characteristics of the community. The survey questionnaire was developed by CMJS in consultation with the Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest NJ. As necessary, questions were modified to account for changes in usual patterns of behavior during the pandemic.

In total, 3,295 eligible households completed surveys between October 1 and December 11, 2020. The response rate for the primary sample, which was designed to be representative of the entire community, was 33.4% (AAPOR RR4²).

Notes on this report:

- In order to extrapolate respondent data to the entire community, individual respondents were assigned a “survey weight” so that their survey responses represent the proportion of the overall community that has similar demographic characteristics. Unless otherwise specified, this report presents weighted survey data in the form of percentages or proportions. Accordingly, these data should be read not as the percentage or proportion of respondents who answered each question in a given way, but as the percentage or proportion of the population that we estimate would answer each question in that way if each member of the population had been surveyed.
- Because estimates are based on a probability survey, no one estimate should be considered an exact measurement. As a guideline, the reader should assume that all estimates have a range of plus or minus five points; therefore, reported differences between any two numbers of less than 10 percentage points may not necessarily reflect true differences in the population.
- When a percentage is between 0% and 0.5% and would otherwise round down to 0%, the number is denoted as < 1%. When there are insufficient respondents in a particular subgroup for reporting reliable information, the estimate is shown as “—”.
- Comparisons across subgroups: When there is a statistically significant difference among subgroups, we are 95% confident that at least some of the differences in estimates reflect actual differences and are not just the result of random chance. In the tables in this report, we designate these differences by shading them light gray. Findings that are not statistically significant are not shaded. Even in cases where there are statistically significant differences in a full set of responses, it is unlikely that there are statistically significant differences between every pair of numbers. As noted above, even when a table is statistically significant, differences between any two numbers of less than 10 percentage points may not reflect true differences in the population.
- When reporting qualitative or open-ended data, sample verbatim quotes from respondents appear in italics. These responses are not representative of the views of all community members but add context and depth to the representative quantitative data included in the report. Comments may have been edited for clarity and to remove any identifying information. When the number of respondents who mentioned a particular theme is shown, that number indicated the actual number of respondents and not the weighted share of the population they represent.

² American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) is a professional organization that sets standards for survey research.

- Comparisons across surveys: As part of the goal to assess trends, we made comparisons of answers to data from national studies (in particular, the CMJS/SSRI American Jewish Population Project (ajpp.brandeis.edu) and the Pew Research Center report, “Jewish Americans in 2020.”³

³ Pew Research Center, “Jewish Americans in 2020” (Washington DC: Pew Research Center, 2021). <https://www.pewforum.org/2021/05/11/jewish-americans-in-2020/>

KEY FINDINGS: COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

- Just over two thirds (68%) of Jewish adults feel some level of connection to a local Jewish community, and 17% feel strongly connected.
- The majority of Jewish adults in GMW (80%) reported that they are at least somewhat satisfied with their current level of connection to the GMW Jewish community, and about one-in-five Jewish adults (18%) said they are completely satisfied.
- One third of Jewish adults (34%) who do not feel at all connected to a local Jewish community are not satisfied with their level of connection.
- Feelings of connection to a local Jewish community are stronger among Jewish households with greater financial stability, Jewish households in Essex and Union counties, and Jewish households that include inmarried couples.
- Nearly two-in-three Jewish adults in the Immersed engagement group feel very connected to a local Jewish community, compared to only 1% of Jewish adults in the Minimally Involved group.
- Jewish adults in the Immersed engagement group and those who are financially well-off are most satisfied with their current level of connection to the local Jewish community.
- Almost all GMW Jewish adults report that at least some of their closest friends are Jewish, including 4% who say that all of their closest friends are Jewish, 31% say that most are, and 27% say that about half are Jewish.
- The COVID-19 crisis and lack of interesting activities are the most common limiting factors in developing connections with the GMW Jewish community.
- More than half of Jewish adults participated in Jewish activities in the past year, whether in person or online.
- Four percent of Jewish households belong to a JCC or Jewish Y in GMW. Membership is higher in Essex and Union counties, where the buildings are located.
- Older Jewish adults are much more likely to belong to Jewish organizations, formal and informal, compared to younger Jews.
- Jewish adults who feel strongly connected to the Jewish community are more likely to belong to local Jewish organizations.
- Most Jewish adults in GMW use the internet or social media to learn about Jewish programs. Nearly one quarter of Jewish adults report reading print editions of Jewish media, such as the *New Jersey Jewish News*.
- Jewish adults in GMW are very concerned about antisemitism. While nearly everyone is at least a little concerned about antisemitism around the world and across the United States, fewer Jewish adults feel very concerned about antisemitism in GMW. Seventeen percent of Jewish adults reported personally experiencing antisemitism in the past year.

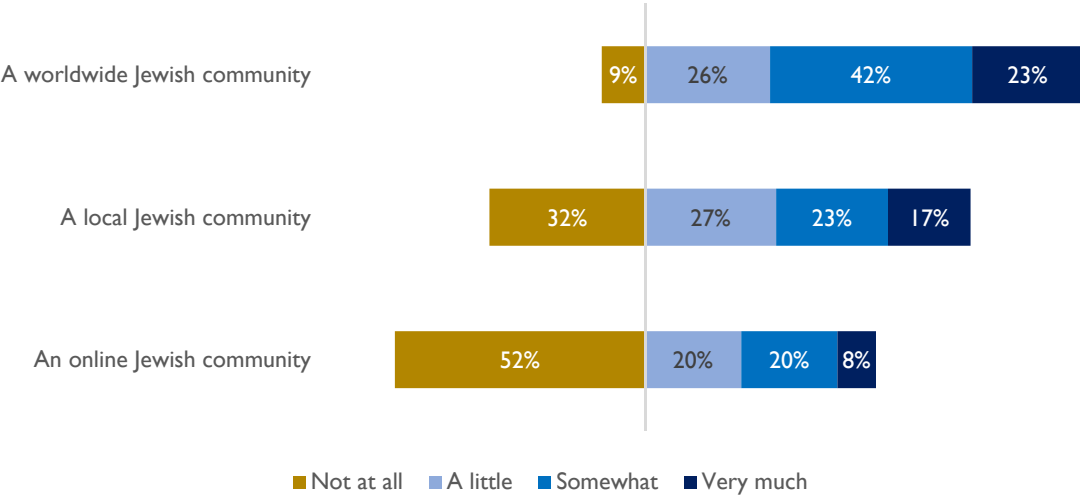
COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

This chapter illustrates the connections that Jewish adults in GMW have to the Jewish community and describes who feels more and less connected, who is satisfied with their connection, and which factors limit connections to the Jewish community. The chapter also explores how Jews in GMW participate with local Jewish organizations and programs, in-person and online, and with the Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest New Jersey in particular. The chapter also discusses the extent to which Jews feel concerned about antisemitism.

Connections to community

About two thirds of Jewish adults (67%) feel some level of connection to a local Jewish community (Figure 1), but even more (91%) feel connected to the worldwide Jewish community. In contrast, less than half of Jewish adults (48%) feel some level of connection to online or virtual Jewish communities.

Figure 1. Feeling of connection to worldwide and local Jewish community



Differences in connection

Which groups in GMW feel connected to the local Jewish community, and how do they express those connections? Feelings of connection differ across types of Jewish engagement, marital status, financial situation, and geographic region.

The Index of Jewish Engagement uses ritual, personal, individual, and communal behaviors to classify patterns of Jewish engagement in Greater MetroWest (see Jewish Engagement report for details). This typology reveals that those who more deeply and broadly participate in Jewish life are

also more likely to report feeling connected to a local Jewish community. Nearly two-in-three Jewish adults in the Immersed group (64%) feel very connected to a local Jewish community, compared to only 1% of Jewish adults in the Minimally Involved group (Table 1).

There are also regional differences in feelings of connection to the local Jewish community. A greater share of Jewish adults in Essex and Union counties feel very connected to the local Jewish community (24% and 23%, respectively), compared to those in East Morris (13%) and Western GMW (9%).

There are no significant differences in feelings of connection by age or parent status. However, inmarried Jewish adults feel much more connected to the local Jewish community than do intermarried or single Jews. More than one quarter of inmarried Jewish adults (27%) feel very connected to the local Jewish community, compared to only 4% of intermarried Jewish adults and 10% of single adults.

Feelings of connection to a local Jewish community are also related to financial situation. Well-off individuals feel a stronger sense of connection (25% very connected) compared to the groups with less secure finances (13% to 18% very connected). Over one third of adults in each of the middle financial groups feel no connection to the local Jewish community.

Table I. Feeling of connection to local Jewish community by Jewish engagement group, region, marital status, and financial situation

	Not at all (%)	A little (%)	Somewhat (%)	Very much (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	32	27	24	17	100
Jewish engagement					
Minimally involved	73	14	13	1	100
Familial	50	32	14	4	100
Personal	23	35	30	12	100
Involved	6	26	40	27	100
Immersed	1	6	30	64	100
Region					
Essex	27	25	24	24	100
Union	28	26	24	23	100
East Morris	37	20	30	13	100
Western GMW	39	34	18	9	100
Age					
18-34	23	29	29	19	100
35-49	29	23	26	22	100
50-64	37	23	25	15	100
65-74	36	26	20	18	100
75+	28	29	24	20	100
Parent status					
Parent of minor child	27	24	28	21	100
Not parent of minor child	34	26	23	17	100
Marital status					
Inmarried	18	25	29	27	100
Intermarried	53	29	14	4	100
Not married	42	21	27	10	100
Financial situation					
Struggling	25	34	28	13	100
Enough	34	24	25	16	100
Extra	41	18	23	18	100
Well off	21	29	25	25	100

Feelings of connection also correspond with Jewish denomination affiliation. The majority of Orthodox Jews feel very connected to a local Jewish community (71%) compared to less than one third of Conservative and Reform Jews (27% and 19%, respectively), and 7% of those with no denomination (Table 2). However, almost half (46%) of Jewish adults with no denomination, 78% of Reform Jews and 89% of Conservative Jews feel at least some level of connection to a local Jewish community.

Table 2. Feeling of connection to a local Jewish community by denomination

	Not at all (%)	A little (%)	Somewhat (%)	Very much (%)	Total (%)
Orthodox	3	5	21	71	100
Conservative	11	30	31	27	100
Reform	22	26	32	20	100
Other denom.	32	10	39	18	100
No denom.	54	25	14	7	100

Another dimension of community connection is on the personal level – having Jewish friends. Almost all GMW Jewish adults report that at least some of their closest friends are Jewish, including 4% who say that all of their closest friends are Jewish, 31% say that most are, and 27% say that about half are Jewish (Table 3). In comparison, among all US Jews, 29% say that all or most of their close friends are Jewish.

Jewish friendships correspond to both Jewish engagement and Jewish density. Among the immersed group, 13% say all of their close friends are Jewish and another 54% say that most of them are. In contrast, 20% of the personal group say that most or all of their closest friends are Jewish.

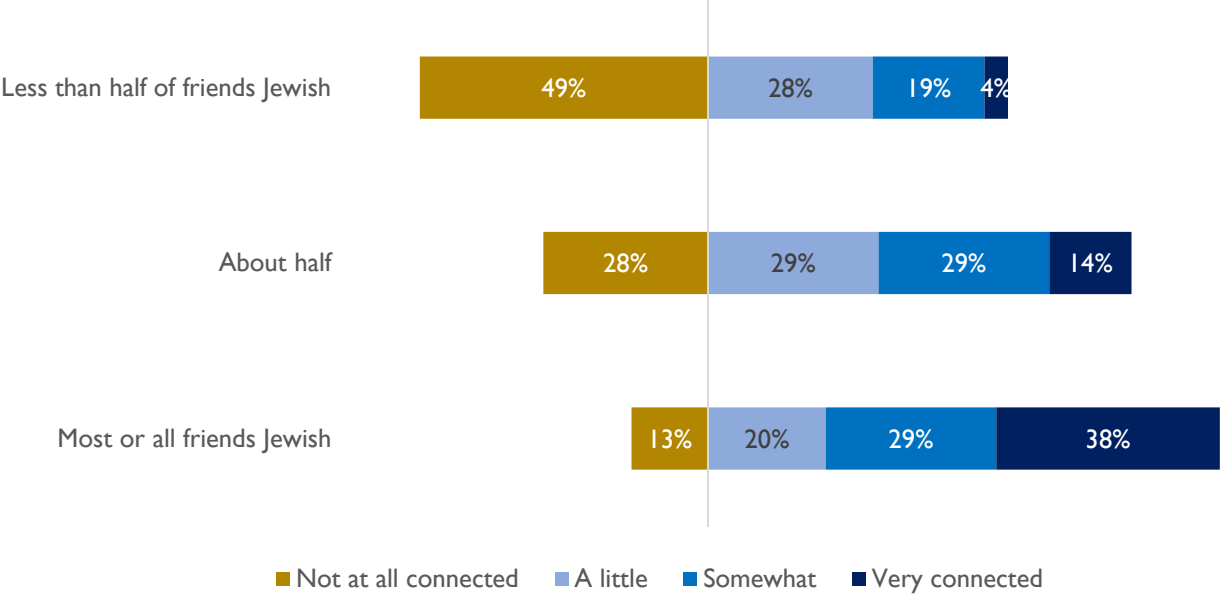
Jewish adults in Essex (41% most or all) and Union (42% most or all) have the most close Jewish friends. In comparison, 32% of Jewish adults who reside in East Morris say most or all of their closest friends are Jewish, as do 18% of those in Western GMW.

Table 3. Number of Jewish friends by Jewish engagement group, region, marital status, and financial situation

	None (%)	Less than half (%)	About half (%)	Most (%)	All (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	6	33	27	31	4	100
Jewish engagement						
Minimally involved	15	40	26	19	1	100
Familial	6	50	23	21	<1	100
Personal	5	23	34	33	5	100
Involved	2	35	28	33	2	100
Immersed	<1	8	25	54	13	100
Region						
Essex	2	26	31	35	6	100
Union	3	32	23	37	5	100
East Morris	11	30	27	30	1	100
Western GMW	6	49	26	16	2	100
Age						
18-34	6	33	38	19	5	100
35-49	5	34	28	31	3	100
50-64	6	36	28	27	3	100
65-74	3	29	25	38	4	100
75+	8	20	19	47	5	100
Parent status						
Parent of minor child	5	32	28	31	4	100
Not parent of minor child	7	34	27	30	3	100
Marital status						
Inmarried	1	19	30	44	5	100
Intermarried	12	52	24	12	<1	100
Not married	9	46	24	17	4	100
Financial situation						
Struggling	6	41	29	20	3	100
Enough	5	30	31	30	4	100
Extra	5	38	29	25	3	100
Well off	6	25	20	45	4	100

Having more Jewish friends is also a marker of feeling connected to a local Jewish community (Figure 2). Of those who say that most or all of their closest friends are Jewish, 38% feel very connected to the local Jewish community and 29% feel somewhat connected. In contrast, among Jewish adults who report that less than half of their closest friends are Jewish, just 4% are very connected to the local community and 19% feel somewhat connected. Half of them (49%) feel not at all connected.

Figure 2: Connections to a local Jewish community by close Jewish friends



SATISFACTION WITH COMMUNITY CONNECTION

As strength and type of connection to the Jewish community vary among Jewish adults in GMW, so too does the level of satisfaction with that connection. The majority of Jewish adults in GMW reported that they are at least somewhat satisfied with their current level of connection to the GMW Jewish community, and 18% of Jewish adults said they are very satisfied (Table 3). However, 20% of Jewish adults reported that they are not at all satisfied. To best understand this finding, it is important to recall that the question was asked in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis when in-person community contact was restricted. Below we explore whether this was a driver of dissatisfaction.

Among those who are satisfied with their current level of connection, there appear to be two distinct groups. One group does not currently feel connected, or is only moderately connected, and does not wish to be more connected. For example, among those who are not all connected to the local Jewish community, 19% feel very satisfied with their current level of connection and do not wish to increase it (Table 4).

In contrast, among those who do not feel at all connected to a local Jewish community, 34% are not at all satisfied with that connection, suggesting this group may be open to more Jewish engagement.

Table 4. Satisfaction with local Jewish community connection by level of connection

	Satisfaction with community connection				Total (%)
	Not at all (%)	A little (%)	Somewhat (%)	Very much (%)	
All Jewish adults	20	28	34	18	100
Connection to a local Jewish community					
Not at all	34	22	25	19	100
A little	21	38	33	8	100
Somewhat	10	34	44	12	100
Very much	3	17	45	34	100

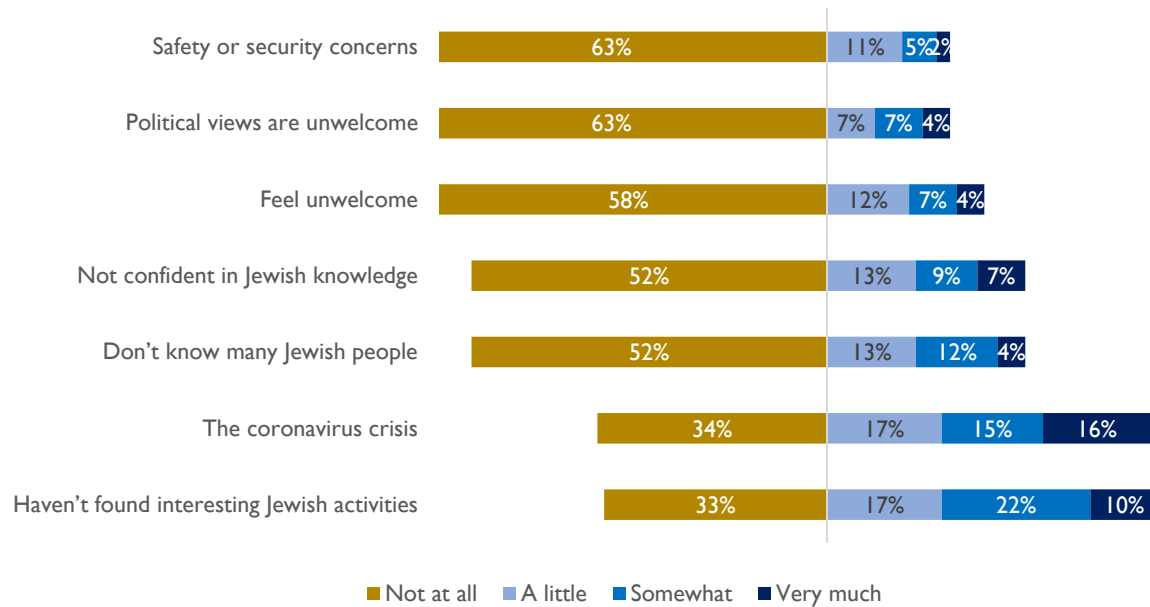
Satisfaction with local community connection varies by Jewish engagement, age, marital status, and financial situation. In an analysis of satisfaction, we focus on those who are not satisfied because their lack of satisfaction suggests that they are looking for their connection to grow. While one-in-three Jewish adults (36%) in the Minimally Involved engagement group are not at all satisfied with their current level of connection, only 6% of Jewish adults in the Immersed group are not at all satisfied (Table 5). Among those Jewish adults who describe their standard of living as having “enough money,” more than one quarter (27%) are not at all satisfied with their current level of connection.

Table 5. Satisfaction with connection to local Jewish community by engagement, region, age, parent and marital status, and financial situation

	Not at all (%)	A little (%)	Somewhat (%)	Very much (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	20	28	34	18	100
Jewish engagement					
Minimally Involved	36	20	28	17	100
Familial	22	31	24	23	100
Personal	18	33	41	8	100
Involved	13	28	38	20	100
Immersed	6	22	49	23	100
Region					
Essex	16	27	36	22	100
Union	18	24	38	20	100
East Morris	20	31	39	11	100
Western GMW	27	31	26	16	100
Age					
18-34	9	35	50	6	100
35-49	16	27	36	22	100
50-64	21	30	29	21	100
65-74	29	19	37	16	100
75 +	18	31	33	18	100
Parent status					
Parent of minor child	16	27	35	22	100
Not parent of minor child	21	29	35	15	100
Marital status					
Inmarried	15	27	41	17	100
Intermarried	26	25	27	22	100
Not married	22	34	30	13	100
Financial situation					
Struggling	14	35	38	13	100
Enough	27	32	27	14	100
Extra	13	24	44	18	100
Well off	13	21	38	27	100

Jewish adults who were not very satisfied with their current level of connection were asked which factors limited their connection with the GMW Jewish community (Figure 3). Overall, 74% of Jewish adults reported at least one condition that limited their connection to the Jewish community in some way. The COVID-19 crisis appears as a major barrier, but the lack of interesting activities is also a concern expressed by many.

Figure 3. Limiting factors in connecting with the GMW Jewish community



Note: Excludes 19% who were very satisfied with their current level of connection were not asked about limitations.

Although the top limiting conditions differ by Jewish engagement category and other demographic groups, nearly all Jewish adults cite lack of interesting activities as the top barrier (aside from the coronavirus crisis) (Table 6).

Table 6. Conditions that limit local community connections (somewhat or very much)

	Not very satisfied with connection (%)	No interesting activities (%)	Coronavirus crisis (%)	Don't know people (%)	Lack of Jewish knowledge (%)	Feel unwelcome (%)	Political views (%)	Safety or security (%)
All Jewish adults	81	32	31	17	16	11	11	7
Jewish engagement								
Minimally Involved	81	46	23	30	26	15	20	8
Familial	76	40	27	17	13	10	6	7
Personal	93	34	42	18	18	10	20	13
Involved	79	30	36	13	9	4	4	5
Immersed	76	26	37	5	7	10	13	5
Region								
Essex	77	35	34	7	13	7	10	8
Union	78	34	32	15	12	10	10	7
East Morris	89	41	35	20	16	13	20	7
Western GMW	83	30	34	32	21	10	12	11
Age								
18-34	93	39	55	25	22	6	6	10
35-49	77	35	30	15	9	12	8	5
50-64	79	36	24	14	15	10	17	7
65-74	83	37	36	15	15	11	16	7
75 +	80	31	41	18	14	7	13	15
Parent status								
Parent of minor child	78	38	29	14	12	11	9	5
Not parent of minor child	83	35	36	18	17	9	15	10
Marital status								
Inmarried	82	35	37	10	10	6	10	6
Intermarried	77	36	23	17	14	12	14	6
Not married	86	38	42	34	31	17	19	16
Financial situation								
Struggling	87	34	34	18	12	13	12	13
Enough	85	37	34	19	20	16	16	11
Extra	82	36	32	15	14	5	12	4
Well-off	72	38	35	12	9	4	9	5

Note: Questions were asked only of those who were not very satisfied with their current connections.

PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL COMMUNITY LIFE

Four percent of Jewish households belong to a JCC or Jewish Y in Greater MetroWest New Jersey. Membership is higher in Essex and Union counties, where the buildings are located (Table 7).

Twelve percent of Jewish households belong to a formal Jewish organization or club in GMW other than a JCC or synagogue, and 12% are part of an informal or grassroots Jewish group (such as a Jewish book club or social *havurah*). Older Jewish adults are much more likely to belong to Jewish organizations, both formal and informal, compared to younger Jews.

Table 7: Membership to a Jewish organization or informal Jewish group

	JCC or Jewish Y (%)	Jewish organization (%)	Informal Jewish group (%)
All Jewish households	4	12	12
Jewish engagement		*	*
Minimally Involved	4	8	10
Familial	4	0	3
Personal	5	16	16
Involved	4	16	12
Immersed	6	29	29
Region	*	*	*
Essex	7	17	16
Union	7	10	11
East Morris	2	9	8
Western GMW	2	6	13
Age	*	*	*
18-34	4	7	9
35-49	5	6	10
50-64	3	9	10
65-74	6	15	14
75 +	6	23	22
Child status			
Minor child in household	4	8	10
Not minor child	5	13	14
Marital status		*	
Inmarried	6	19	15
Intermarried	4	2	8
Not married	4	14	15
Financial situation			
Struggling	5	12	13
Enough	3	12	10
Extra	5	11	13
Well-off	5	14	14

Jewish households that feel strongly connected to the Jewish community are more likely to belong to local Jewish organizations (Table 8).

Table 8. Membership in Jewish organizations by feeling of connection to local community

	JCC or Jewish Y (%)	Jewish organization (%)	Informal group (%)
All Jewish households	4	12	12
Feeling of connection to local community	*	*	*
Not at all	3	3	6
A little	4	5	8
Somewhat	6	20	18
Very much	7	29	25

Program participation

More than half of Jewish adults in Greater MetroWest participated in at least one program, class, or activity in the past year, whether in person or online: 31% of Jewish adults participated between 1-3 times per year, 10% participated between 4-9 times per year, and 13% participated 10 times or more (Table 9).

Table 9. Participation in Jewish activities in past year

	Never (%)	1-3 times (%)	4-9 times (%)	10 + times (%)	Total (%)
Participated in-person or online program	46	31	10	13	100
Served as a volunteer or in leadership role	79	11	4	6	100
Searched for Jewish resources and information	43	31	12	13	100
Communicated with Jewish groups using social media	72	12	5	11	100

Like most events in 2020, many Jewish programs took place online instead of in person. Fifteen percent of Jewish adults participated exclusively in an in-person program, 17% exclusively participated in an online program, and 22% participated in both (Table 10).

The Personal group had the largest share of individuals who attended online programs exclusively, with 42% attending, compared to 11% who attended in-person programs exclusively. Forty-five percent of the Involved group attended in-person programs exclusively, and 8% attended online programs exclusively. Those who were more Jewishly engaged were most likely to participate in both types of programs.

Table 10. Any in-person or online Jewish programs in past year

	No programs (%)	In-person program only (%)	Online program only (%)	Both in-person and online programs (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	46	15	17	22	100
Jewish engagement					
Minimally Involved	61	14	21	4	100
Familial	90	7	3	0	100
Personal	31	11	42	16	100
Involved	9	45	8	38	100
Immersed	2	6	15	76	100
Age					
18-34	30	17	31	23	100
35-49	42	20	13	26	100
50-64	50	12	17	21	100
65-74	44	10	23	23	100
75 +	43	18	22	17	100
Parent status					
Parent of minor child	42	18	14	26	100
Not parent of minor child	44	13	22	20	100
Marital status					
Inmarried	37	16	18	29	100
Intermarried	58	8	22	11	100
Not married	44	19	21	16	100
Financial situation					
Struggling	37	14	28	21	100
Enough	41	14	22	22	100
Extra	49	16	15	20	100
Well-off	44	14	17	25	100

Synagogue-based programs were the most frequently attended programs sponsored by a Jewish organization, followed by a JCC or federation in GMW, a Chabad in GMW, and a Jewish political organization (Table 11).

Table 11. Program sponsor and level of attendance

	Synagogue in GMW (%)	JCC or Jewish federation in GMW (%)	Chabad in GMW (%)	Jewish political organization (%)
Never	71	88	90	95
1-3 times	14	9	7	4
4-9 times	6	1	1	< 1
10 + times	10	1	1	1
Total	100	100	100	100

Similar shares of Jewish adults attended programs with a primary focus on educational, social, charitable, religious, or cultural issues (Table 12).

Table 12. Program type and level of attendance

	Educational (%)	Social (%)	Charitable (%)	Religious (%)	Cultural (%)
Never	78	79	79	81	83
1-3 times	16	14	17	9	15
4-9 times	4	5	2	7	2
10 + times	2	2	2	3	1
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Sources of information

Most Jewish adults (61%) use the internet or social media to learn about Jewish programs (Table 13). Nearly one quarter of Jewish adults (24%) reported reading print editions of Jewish media, such as the *New Jersey Jewish News*.

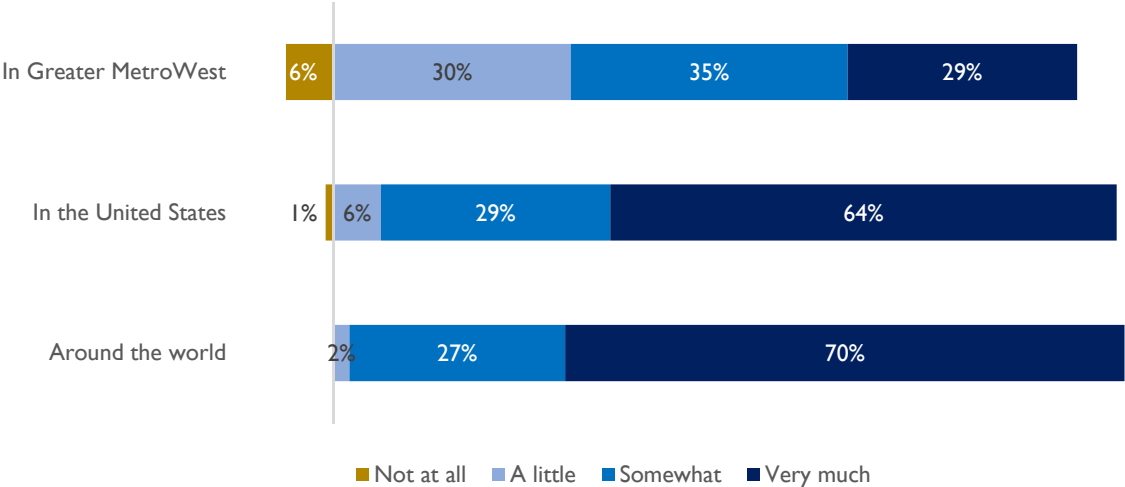
Table 13. Source of information about local Jewish community

	All Jewish adults (%)
Internet or social media	61
Digital edition of a Jewish newspaper	25
Printed Jewish newspaper like the <i>New Jersey Jewish News</i>	24

CONCERN ABOUT ANTISEMITISM

The majority of Jewish adults in GMW are very concerned about antisemitism around the world and in the United States (Figure 4). Fewer Jewish adults (29%) feel very concerned about antisemitism in GMW. Seventeen percent of Jewish adults reported personally experiencing antisemitism in the past year (not shown in figure).

Figure 4. Concern about antisemitism...



FINDING SENSE OF COMMUNITY

To gather more information about the views of respondents and feelings of community, the following question was asked at the end of the survey:

Where do you find your strongest sense of Jewish community in Greater MetroWest? (e.g., among friends, family, synagogue, school, JCC, etc.)

Of the 3,295 individuals who participated in the survey, 1,797 individuals responded to the question about community. Responses were reviewed and assigned codes summarizing the main ideas expressed. Table 14 includes all of the codes used for this question, followed by select responses in order of frequency. Note that data in this section counts actual numbers of responses, not weighted percentages.

Table 14. Where do you find your strongest sense of Jewish community?

Code	# responses, unweighted
Friends/family	1,100
Synagogues	1,051
Jewish organizations (JCC)	156
Schools	79
Jewish organizations (misc.)	78
Social programs	41
Jewish organizations (Federation)	32
Education	27
Jewish culture	23
Workplace	19
Outside community area	19
Jewish heritage/tradition	15
Volunteering/charity	15
Worship	9
Leaders	8
Israel	7
Social justice/action	5
Jewish study	3
Jewish ethics	2

The largest number of respondents (1,100) mentioned friends and family as sources of community.

I find my sense of the Jewish community with my friends and family.

Family and our Jewish friends, not all of whom go to our temple but have a shared heritage and experiences.

Through our network of friends -- many of whom we met through the [JCC and our synagogue] -- as well as our small circle of relatives in NJ.

A similar number described finding community in their synagogue (1,051):

The strongest sense of Jewish community comes from my synagogue.

Our synagogue is absolutely the center of our Jewish life,

We really like our Temple and the Jewish community in our town (...) has really nice cohesion even though there are three synagogues. There is a nice sense of unity.

[I] find my Jewish community among the friends I've made through my synagogue... we have maintained those bonds outside of the synagogue environment.

I miss being able to go to services whenever I feel like it. I feel a strong sense of community whenever I am in the building.

Beyond synagogues, 266 respondents described the centrality of Jewish organizations, whether formal or informal, which included local JCC centers (156), the Federation (32), and various other organizations (78).

The JCC fitness center, which is a diverse community, not exclusive to the Jewish community.

Chai center is a model for creating Jewish community. They make it affordable and have lots of fun activities where people can get to know each other. Book clubs, games, Torah study, etc. there's something for everyone. They also organize theater trips, movies etc. (Jewish topics).

Forty-one comments specifically mentioned social programming. Some of those centered around particular activities through synagogues that foster socializing:

Temple activities and socializing—in my case, Hebrew class and a temple sponsored bridge game.

Programming such as Tot Shabbat, youth programs, social and religious participations, children's programming, adult programs at the JCC.

Twenty-seven respondents mentioned communities that developed out of Jewish educational programs and institutions:

Fellow members of educational programs, such as Hebrew and literature courses.

[My] daughter's Jewish preschool.

Through [...] Hebrew day schools.

Twenty-three respondents noted the role of Jewish cultural activities in building a sense of community.

TV programs. Written articles.

Through participating in music and culture.

Listen to AJC, WJC, Zoom presentations, lectures, read online newspapers such as Jerusalem Post, etc.

Limitations to community connection

Respondents were asked about the strengths and gaps in Greater MetroWest. Most barriers to community participation mentioned by respondents pertained to feelings of exclusion:

When I think of Greater MetroWest, I think about Federation. I feel as if it's one big clique. If you are not a big donor, volunteer, and don't work for Federation, people don't have time for you. It's not inclusive whatsoever. If someone wants to get involved, they are constantly hit up for money. This needs to change.

Only people with money matter.

Be more inclusive and welcoming. Just because you don't keep kosher doesn't make you less of a Jew. Embrace those who want to identify with Judaism and do not ostracize them.

Don't feel comfortable with the people in the Jewish community. Feel shunned by them. Some groups are cliquy and do not welcome newcomers. Oftentimes it takes longer to become an accepted part of a group.

It seems irrelevant to my day-to-day life, and really, that's all that I can focus on. It doesn't seem like something that will enrich my life, but rather [may] become an obligation or another charity asking for a donation.

2020 Greater MetroWest NJ Jewish Community Study

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