



What Teens Want: Engaging Teens to Create Jewish Education They Want

December 3, 2017



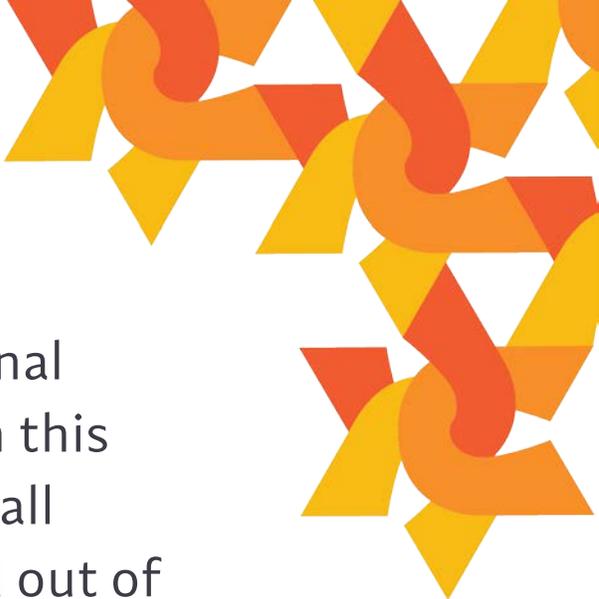


What are the issues?

- Teens are overextended, as are parents
- Teens have just been deemed Jewish adults, yet they still do not have autonomy, agency or much input in to the decisions about their continued education
- Jewish Education post-*b'nai mitzvah* is just one of many options and requirements placed on a teen's time and priorities
 - Jewish Education post-*b'nai mitzvah* needs to add value and meaning to teen life for the teens

How do we address these issues?





Ask them! Rationale

- USY is embarking on a new approach to creating and providing educational materials throughout the movement. In order to get teen investment in this project meant for them, I facilitated a session at the USY International Fall Board weekend in September to ask the teens what they wanted for and out of their USY educational programming this year. There were about 100 teens in attendance, comprised of leaders on both the regional and international levels of USY, representing all 16 regions across the United States and Canada
- Before the teens participated in an activity to gather their thoughts and ideas, I first shared with them my background and educational philosophy so that I could be as transparent and honest as possible with them as an educator, and so I could name any potential biases going into the activity





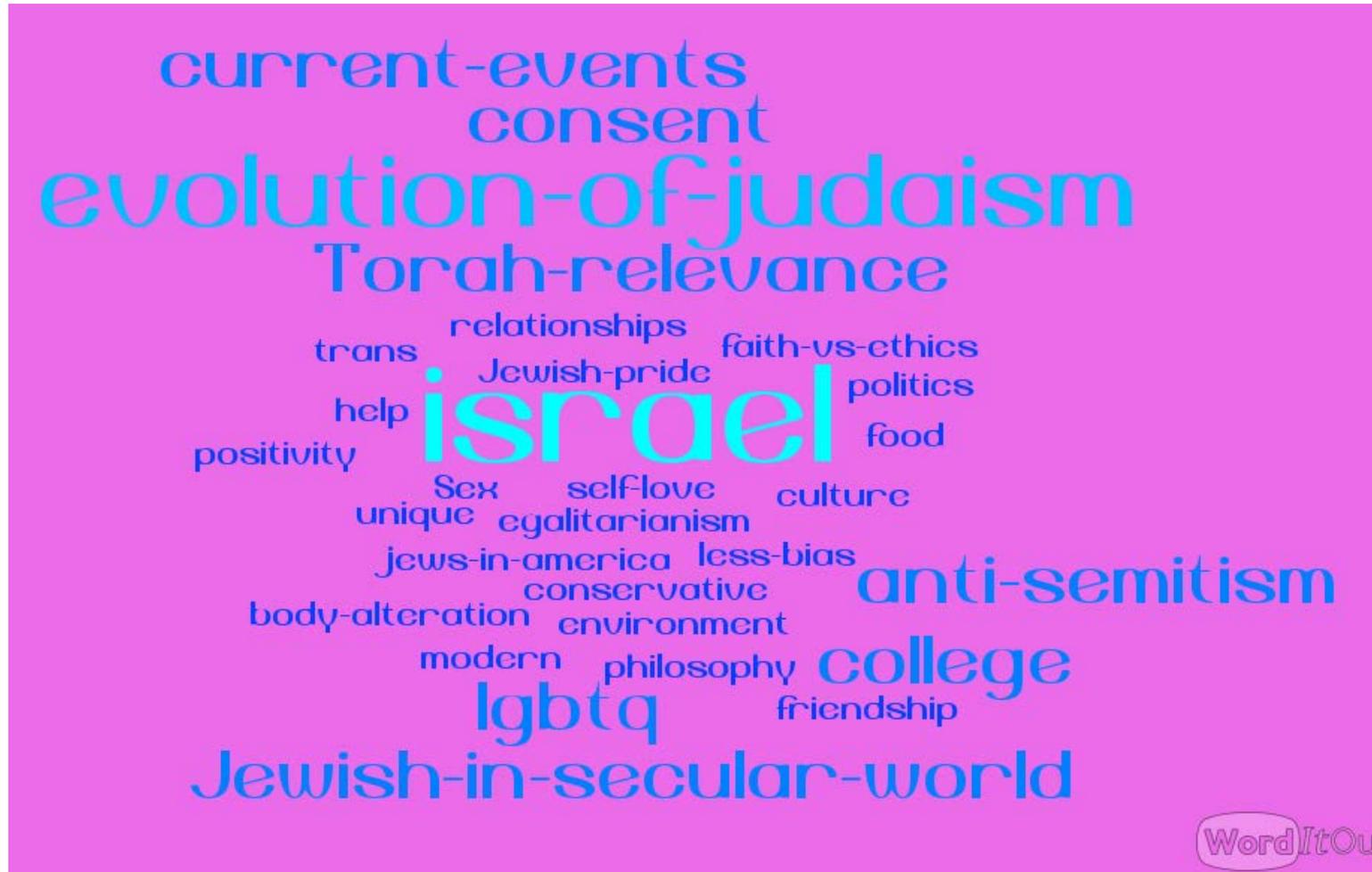
Ask them! Method

- The data gathering was in the form of “silent conversations” – large sticky notes with prompt questions were placed around the room and the teens were given writing implements. The teens were to respond to the prompts on a first go around, and then react and interact with their peers’ responses on a second time around
- Here are the seven questions that the teens were asked to respond to:
 - What are the things you want to address in *sichot/limmud/kitot* this year?
 - What are the things you think should be addressed in *sichot/limmud/kitot* this year?
 - What are the things you think “average” USYers want to discuss in *sichot/limmud/kitot* this year?
 - What do you already love about education in USY?
 - What is missing that you think USY could offer (topics, modes, methods, etc.)?
 - What organizations do you think we should partner with in order to do this, regional or national?
 - What are other ways we can expand “Continental Conversations” between USYers?



**Take a look at what they
said!**

What are the things you want to address?



What do “average” USYers want to address?



What do you love about USY education?



What is missing from USY education?





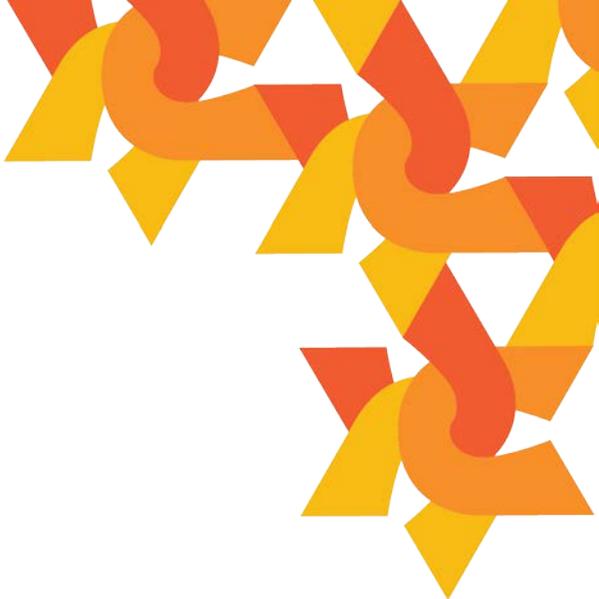
What does this show?

- The top things teens were interested in: Israel, current events and being Jewish in a secular world
 - These are all topics that have relevancy and meaning in the here & now – these themes affect teens on a daily basis – from what they experience in the news cycle, to what they engage with in school with peers and adults
 - These topics are also relevant to their immediate futures as they move onto college campuses – encounters with a multitude of views on Israel, the BDS movement, being Jewish away from home and their known communities for the first time



What does this mean?

- Teens are looking to engage with the real world in real ways and are looking for opportunities to do so
- In order to engage teens, we need to work with them to identify the elements of Jewish learning and wisdom that are relevant to their needs and desires
- Jewish literacy and teen desires are not mutually exclusive in this endeavor – they can serve each other if the definition of Jewish literacy can be flexible and be seen as a launch point on the continuing path of Jewish literacy

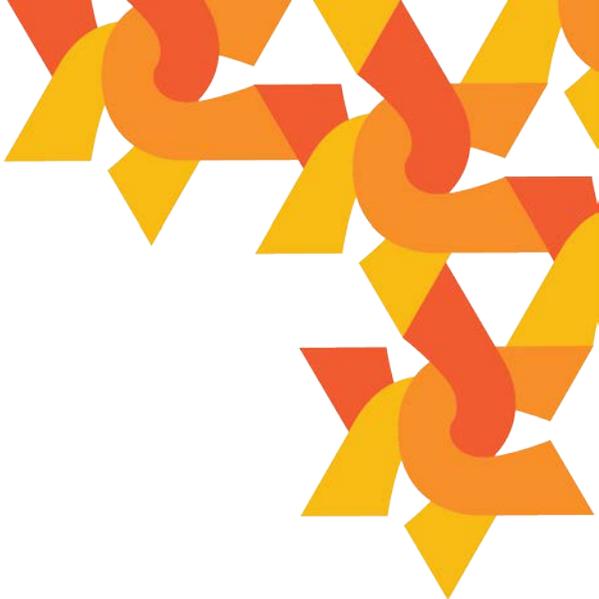


Where/how do we start?

- Create an action plan:
 - How do you identify teens to reach out to?
 - How do you reach out to teens to get their input and buy in?
 - What setting might you have this meeting in?
 - What questions might you ask the teens in order to get honest feedback, but also the types of results that you need?
 - What kind of follow up do you do with the teens after?
 - What small steps might you take with the information you gather from the teens?
 - What longer term actions might you begin to think about with this information?

In small groups, brainstorm and plan how your kehilla might address engaging teens in their Jewish education





Wrapping up

- What questions do you still have?
- How can USY and the Teen Engagement Department help?
 - My contact: kerbel@uscj.org
- What is one action step you will take moving forward from this convention?



Thank you!