



SERVING INDIVIDUALS, STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES: LEARNINGS FROM YESOD'S FIRST THREE YEARS

WHAT IS YESOD?

Yesod is a collaborative framework focused on strengthening the future of Jewish life in Europe by investing in key individual Jewish community professionals and educators. We believe that individuals who are skilled, connected, valued and inspired by Jewish values will have the greatest potential for impact. Yesod increases the scope of opportunities for professional development and lifelong Jewish learning.

WHAT DOES YESOD DO?

Yesod provides a range of seminars, funds, and resources, including shared learning and connecting in person and online. The diversity of our initiatives enables us to be flexible and responsive in meeting the needs of community professionals at different stages of their careers and in different types of roles. We create not only our own quality trainings, but provide access to other opportunities so that funding, training in languages beyond English, geographic location of events, and time availability are not barriers to progression.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LIFELONG JEWISH LEARNING



Seminars



Funds



Resources



Multiple languages



Training



Coaching



Mentoring



Multiple locations



American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee



ROTHSCHILD FOUNDATION HANADIV EUROPE



CHARLES AND LYNN SCHUSTERMAN FAMILY FOUNDATION

As part of its development, Yesod engaged the consulting firm Weisblatt & Associés to evaluate its impact so far. The objectives of this quantitative and qualitative research were two-fold. First, to understand the extent to which engaging in Yesod activities has impacted alumni individually. Secondly, to assess what influence engagement has on participants' work within their organisation and the broader community.

This evaluation was undertaken between March and September 2019.¹ It included the following:

1. An **online survey** which ran from May 16–June 19, 2019. Of the targeted primary audience, 21.5% responded.² The survey included feedback from Yesod users regarding their level of satisfaction.
2. **Interviews with Yesod stakeholders.** In order to gain a better sense of how Yesod and its alumni have influenced the communities they serve, and to explore its potential for further impact, 14 interviews were conducted with individuals in three selected countries, Bulgaria, France and Sweden. The interviewees included presidents of communities; heads of education in community centres or synagogues; directors of youth programming; and other engaged professionals and lay leaders.
3. **A literature review.**
4. **Input from interviews with six professionals** working in the training and development field in the US and Europe.
5. **Desk research** including a review of internal Yesod documentation as well as publicly-available materials.

SOME KEY FINDINGS:

1 Participant Satisfaction is High

Participants experience high levels of satisfaction in relation to their Yesod experience. It improves their feeling of connection to European peers; helps develop a sense of Jewish purpose as a Jewish community professional or educator; and increases their professional skills and their ability to make change.

2 New Opportunities and Stronger Links

Participants identify professional resources and new opportunities for development through engagement with Yesod and feel overall that the organisation is very good at strengthening their links with the wider European Jewish professional community.

3 Yesod is Fulfilling a Need

Non-participant stakeholders lauded Yesod's tailor-made programming and initiatives; Yesod is fulfilling a need.

Drawing on the various aspects of the study, the assessors believe that Yesod is a well-organised and well-run pan-European initiative which occupies an important niche in its field. Its substantial strengths offer a solid foundation on which to refine its strategy and deepens its scope moving forward.

“

Yesod is one of the best things that has happened in the past three years. It is a project that is moving forward, the follow-up is excellent, and there is a very solid relationship between the participants and the team leading Yesod. We have sent several of our staff and they are extremely grateful and pleased with the training and opportunities that they were able to take advantage of. Step by step we will see the fruits of this labour... it takes time to understand the impact of training courses, and I'm sure we will have a fuller vision of this moving forward. But we are already delighted. ”

– A community professional, supervisor of multiple Yesod participants

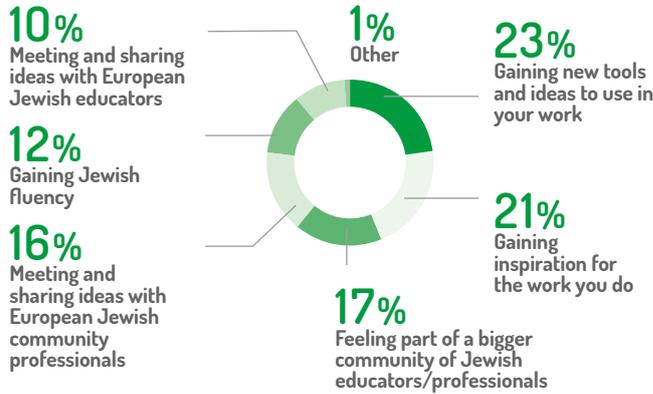
1. Given the short time-frame this assessment covers, the overall number of respondents is relatively low and therefore the quantitative results should be interpreted with caution.
2. Out of 265 engaged alumni, 57 responded. Over 1,000 regular newsletter recipients were contacted via Yesod's mailing list. The survey was GDPR-compliant.

SURVEY RESPONDENTS' EXPERIENCE WITH YESOD

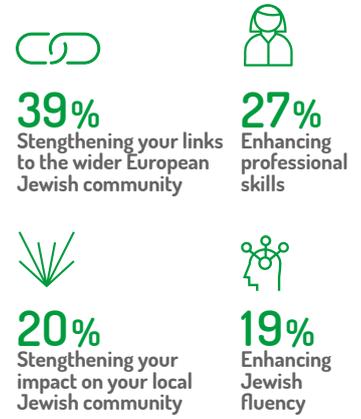
Satisfaction with Experience



Main Reasons for Participating



Yesod's Greatest Strengths



What has improved most as a result of your experience?

- 1 Feeling of connection to European peers
- 2 A sense of Jewish purpose as a Jewish community professional or educator
- 3 Ability to make change
- 4 Confidence in your abilities
- 5 A sense of being valued in your job/career

What has been the strongest personal impact of your experience?

- 1 I am interested in additional learning and development
- 2 I am aware of resources and professional development opportunities
- 3 I have colleagues and mentors with whom I can consult
- 4 I want to find opportunities to collaborate around shared projects
- 5 I am thinking about leadership differently

Most useful future initiatives

- 1 Further Skills Training
- 2 Further Jewish Content/Education
- 3 Community Forums
- 4 Database of Resources

ABOUT THE RESPONDENTS

57 respondents



21.5% of target audience



Respondents come from



18 different countries in Central, Eastern and Western Europe

Majority of respondents (72%):

26 to 45 year-olds

Average age:

38

Top 3 job role type of respondents:

23%



Executive Director

19%



Jewish Educator Non-school

14%



Community Development Worker

Gender distribution:

57% female

41% male

2% other

Yesod is a relatively new organisation serving a disparate pan-European cohort. In an effort to get a richer sense of stakeholder views, interviews were conducted in three countries, Bulgaria, France and Sweden. These communities were selected to ensure a mixture of regions, sizes and types, from the well-established to the more recently invigorated. It should be noted that assessing Yesod's impact beyond the confines of a specific organisation is a complex endeavour. Underlying structural issues, demographics, and other concerns play important roles in how change can be implemented in any particular country.

In every interview undertaken, stakeholders expressed a need for additional training. Both a lack of Jewish knowledge and professional development were noted, and Yesod was seen as one answer to this problem.

“Our employees come back with a combination of Jewish knowledge and professional skills. The way Jewish values are approached is helpful. The impact on the community is directly linked to the enhanced nature of the professionals when they come back. If they are working better – and they are – it has a direct impact on the community.”

– A community professional, supervisor of multiple Yesod participants

Individualised and international programming of the type Yesod provides is highly sought after and appreciated. Moreover, its networking element is of critical importance. People want to be amongst their peer groups and in small countries this necessarily means going beyond their borders to be able to meet with colleagues.

CONCLUSION

The Yesod project was born out of two complementary impulses—on the one hand to help individual educators, and on the other hand to enhance professional development of staff in the Jewish communities of Europe. In the assessors' view, while Yesod has only been operating for three years, it is a highly attractive organisation that has already made inroads in accomplishing its goals.

“Our staff has really benefited from seeing other people and getting new ideas from them. We implement what we can when we come back whenever possible. It is important to be part of a bigger whole.”

– A community professional, supervisor of multiple Yesod participants

Across the board, participants felt validated by their experiences with Yesod and are eager for more training and mentoring. In addition, many engaged stakeholders would like to see opportunities further extended to senior professionals and to include lay leaders.

During the interviews, one broader concern frequently cited was the lack of career trajectories for educators and professionals in Europe. Indeed, Yesod's model will ultimately yield better results when individual communities more actively engage in a process of growth and renewal.

“We need to be in a position to increase the number of jobs in the community, and these need to be interesting opportunities. This is complicated and goes well beyond the Yesod remit. But as the level improves in terms of the employability of our professionals, we have to also find creative ways of keeping them in the community. This is our challenge.”

– A community professional

Yesod acts as catalyst that stimulates development and change, strengthening both individuals and their communities. Nevertheless, as it continues to collaborate with key institutions, it will need their full support to be able to effect positive advancements. It is Yesod's hope that the communities themselves will further prioritise this kind of development and training over time.