

Jewish Life

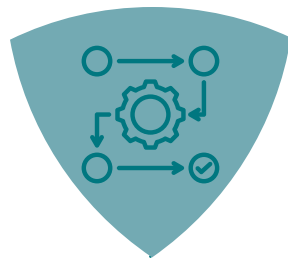


**PERSPECTIVES ON THE ORANGE COUNTY
JEWISH COMMUNITY**

Insights from the Orange County Jewish Demographic Study »



Samueli
FOUNDATION



A FEW NOTES ON HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

The findings presented draw on both quantitative and qualitative survey responses.* We've integrated them to offer a more complete and nuanced understanding of the community, but please note that the qualitative insights do not carry the same statistical significance as the quantitative results do.

All percentages in these reports are rounded to the nearest whole number. As a result, totals in some tables and figures may not equal exactly 100 percent.

Throughout the reports, we reference different population groups. Readers should note the population being referenced when interpreting each statistic. In each data chart, we will indicate the reference population in italicized text beneath the title:

- "OC Jewish households": OC households with at least one Jewish member
- "OC Jewish adults": OC individuals ages 18+ who identify as Jewish
- "Younger OC adults": OC individuals ages 22–44
- "U.S. Jewish population": data on the national Jewish population
- "OC general population": data on the OC general population, including but not specific to the Jewish population

We also use a few terms that are defined in line in specific sections. For reference, we've included them here as well:

- "Financially struggling households": Households that responded they cannot make ends meet or are just managing to make ends meet when asked to describe their household's financial situation
- "Mixed-faith families": Families in which a Jewish individual is partnered with a non-Jewish individual
- "Newcomers": Jewish adults who have been residence in Orange County for less than ten years
- "Religious institutions": Brick-and-mortar synagogues, Chabads, and other congregations—Orange County is home to roughly 30 such institutions
- "Communal institutions": Brick-and-mortar communal organizations, including JCCs, day schools, and other non-religious institutions—Orange County is home to roughly 20 such institutions

Refer to the **Overview** report for additional context on the study design, goals, and approach.

*The following two open-response questions were asked at the end of the survey: "What are the strengths and gaps of the Orange County Jewish community?" & "What should be the priorities of the Orange County Jewish community?" In addition, some questions had open-response options when an "Other" category was indicated.



[Our priority should be] creating a sense of connection to Jewish identity, bringing Jews together, and making it fun to be Jewish in community.

— Community member



Section Overview

Orange County is home to a large and varied Jewish community—nearly 93,500 Jewish individuals across 56,600 households—whose Jewish lives take many forms.

Some participate through ritual practice and synagogue life, others through participation in community organizations and programming, and many express their Jewish identity through interpersonal relationships, culture, and learning. These diverse pathways reflect both the richness and the complexity of what Jewish life looks like in Orange County today.

There’s also significant variation in the extent to which people participate in Jewish life both religiously and secularly, despite

widespread feelings of the importance of being Jewish. The data indicates a small, highly engaged core group of participants; a much larger group with limited or intermittent involvement; and specific populations participating at noticeably lower rates. Young adults, mixed-faith households, and single adults are less connected communally (e.g., fewer Jewish friendships, weaker feelings of belonging) and institutionally (e.g., lower rates of program participation). These dynamics reinforce one another: structural barriers like cost, distance, and limited program

offerings hinder participation; and lower participation, in turn, deepens social barriers like difficulty connecting socially and not feeling reflected in existing institutions. For many, Jewish life feels meaningful—but not fully accessible.

Across various methods and levels of engagement, we also see an aspiration gap: many community members—regardless of current participation—express a desire for deeper Jewish connection than they currently experience. As Rabbi Harold Kushner taught, "Jews don't pray for, Jews pray with"—in other words, Judaism is an inherently communal religion, understood as something lived in relationship with others. Members of the Orange County Jewish community wish to be more deeply rooted in this principle. And this gap between interest and opportunity represents one of the most important challenges revealed by the study.

Taken together, these findings offer a clear call to action. The community’s existing organizational ecosystem is not

yet fully meeting the breadth of needs and preferences expressed by Orange County Jewish individuals. While many people value their synagogues, schools, and local Jewish organizations, too many do not see a place for themselves within them.

Other thriving Jewish communities have addressed similar gaps by learning from one another and adapting proven programs and practices from elsewhere. Orange County has the capacity to do the same: its Jewish expression is diverse but the desire for connection is present, widespread, and strong.

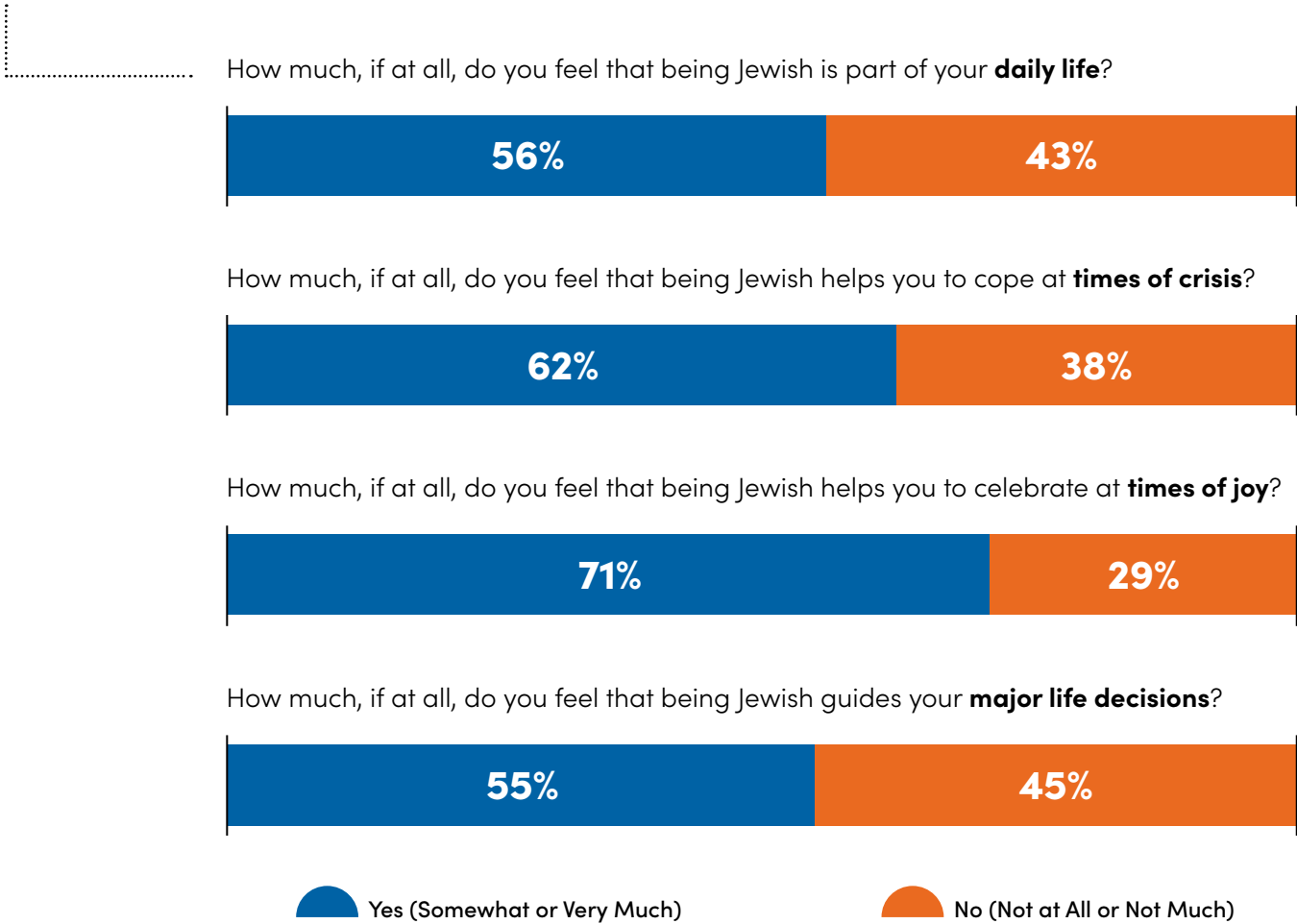
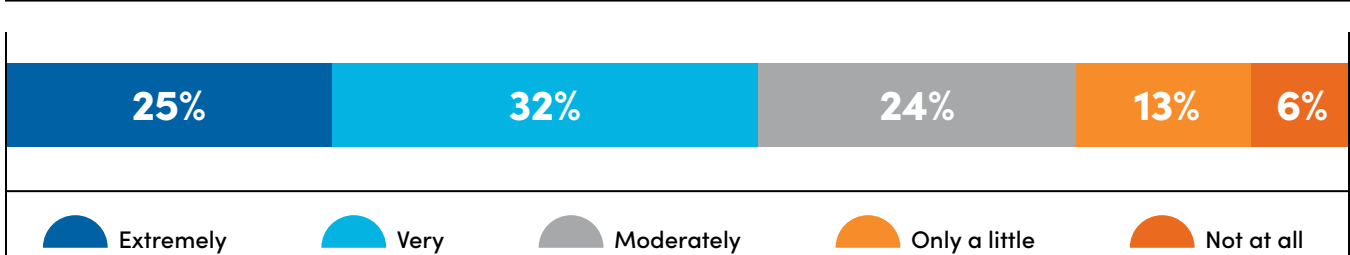
With intentional design, broader outreach, and strategic investment, Orange County can grow into a place where every Jewish household—no matter its background, structure, beliefs, or level of knowledge—can find meaningful ways to connect, participate, and belong.

Identity & Community

Judaism holds broad importance for OC Jewish adults, even as its meaning and expression vary widely.

81% A majority of OC Jewish adults (81%) indicated that being Jewish is at least somewhat important in their lives.

How important is being Jewish in your life?
OC Jewish adults

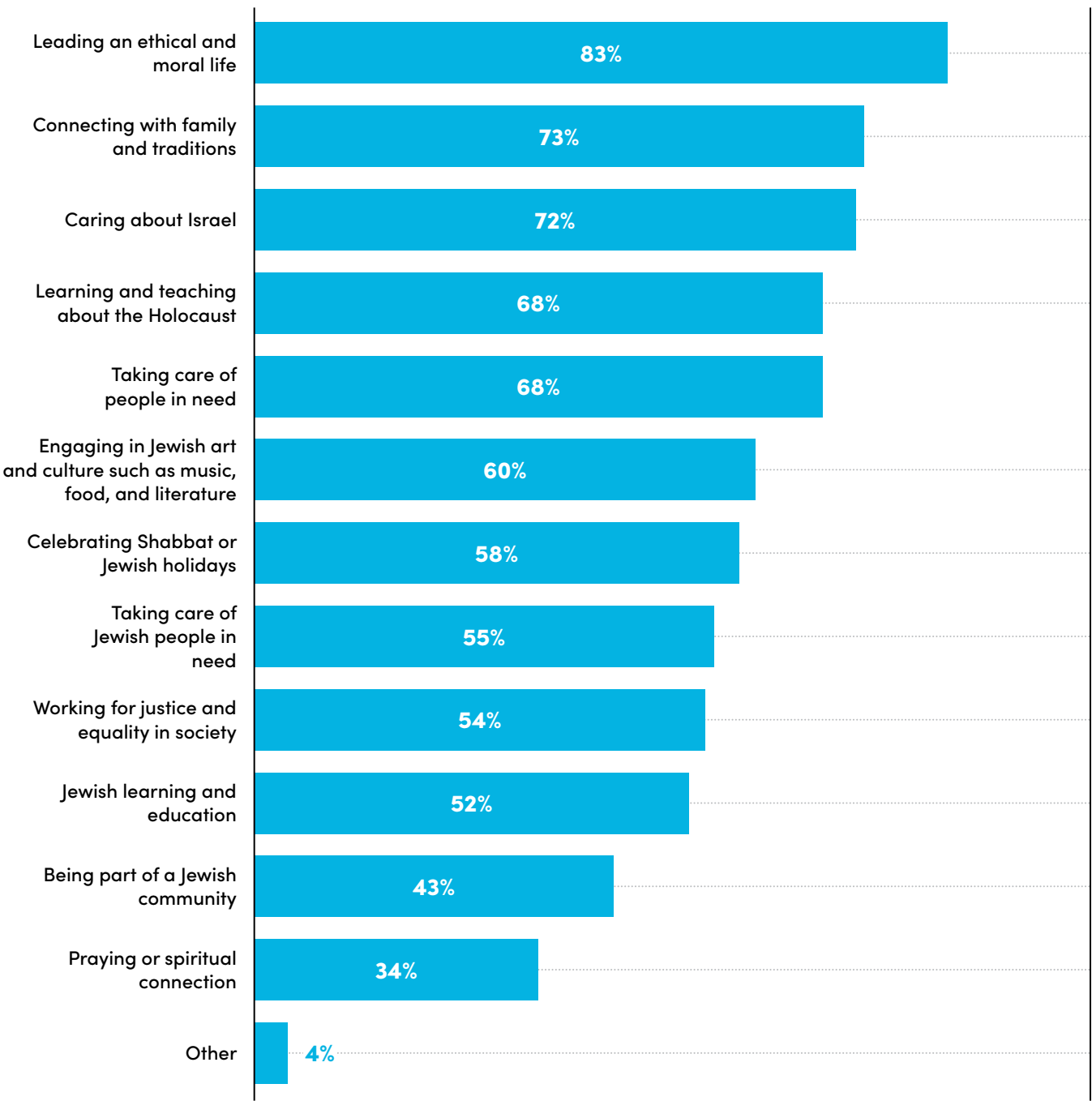


The meaning and salience of Jewish identity varies across populations.

Generally, Jewish adults who are single, in mixed-faith marriages, and/or identify as politically very liberal, liberal, or moderate, were less likely to report that being Jewish is important to their identity or life. Interestingly, younger adults (ages 22-44) were significantly more likely to say that being Jewish is a part of their daily lives than other age groups.

Essential aspects of being Jewish

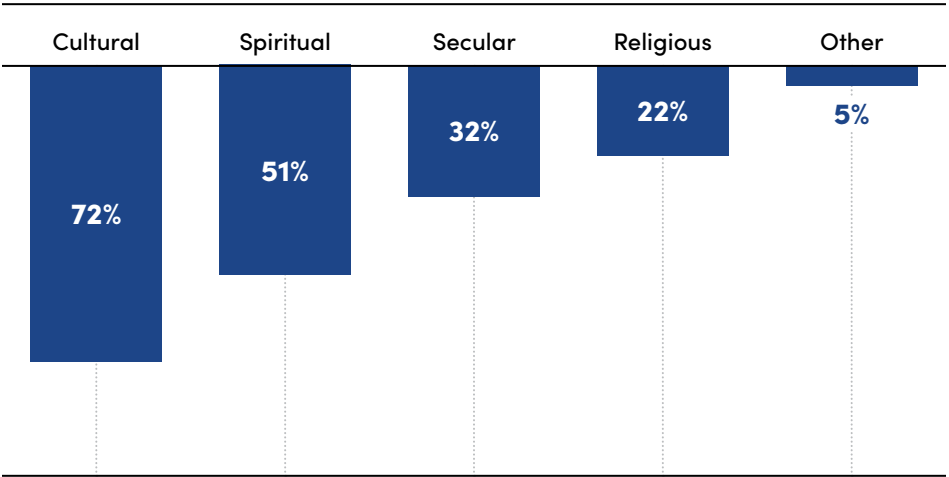
OC Jewish adults



Q: Which of the following do you consider to be essential aspects of being Jewish?

Terms used to describe Jewish identity

OC Jewish adults

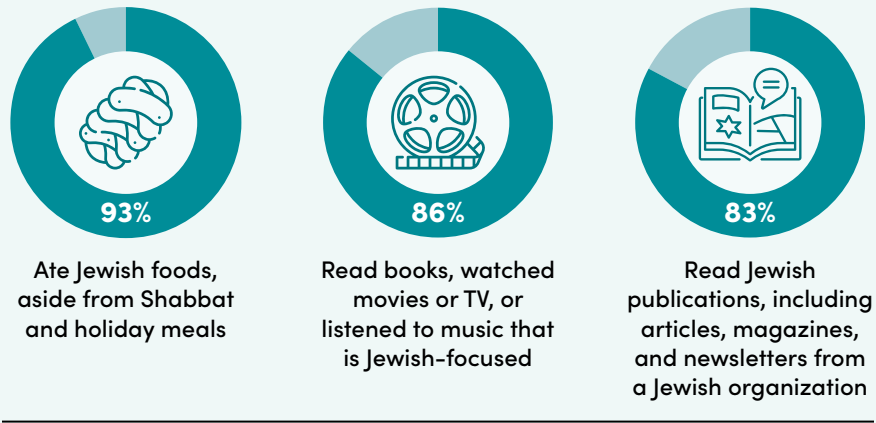


Q: There are many ways to describe your own Jewish identity. Which of the following terms would you use to describe yourself as a Jewish person? (Select all that apply)

Jewish culture—especially food and media—serves as a near-universal point of connection to Jewish identity in Orange County.

Jewish culture is widely consumed across the community.

Jewish-focused non-organizational activities in the past year
OC Jewish adults



These more independent activities are widespread, in contrast with lower rates of institutional participation (see following section).

And, several open responses included requests for more cultural offerings in the community.

“[There] should be more pleasant, enjoyable social events welcoming [the] entire Jewish community, like food, shopping, and entertainment at the fairgrounds.”

“[One gap in the community is] adult education on Jewish literature, culture, history, and philosophy.”

“More Jewish items in grocery stores [are] needed.”

Many express their Jewish values through volunteering and charitable giving.

48%

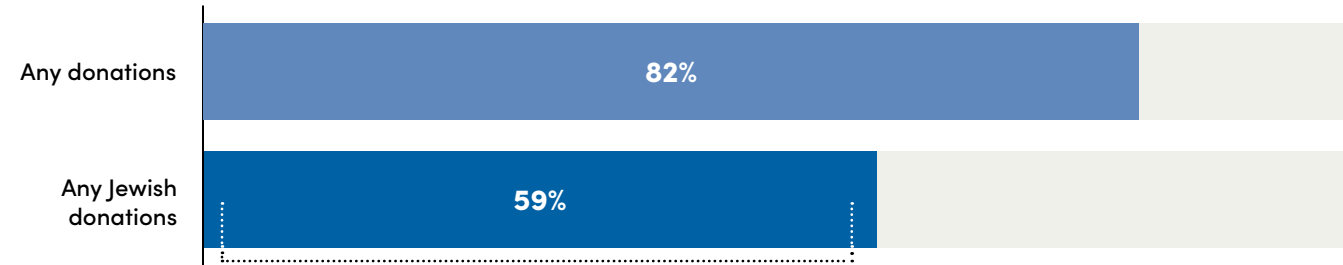
Many OC Jewish adults volunteer, including within Jewish organizations.

Forty-eight percent of OC Jewish adults volunteered in the past year, with more than one quarter (27%) volunteering for at least one Jewish organization. In addition, 13% currently work for or hold a leadership position in a local Jewish organization, indicating a smaller but meaningful group with deep institutional involvement.

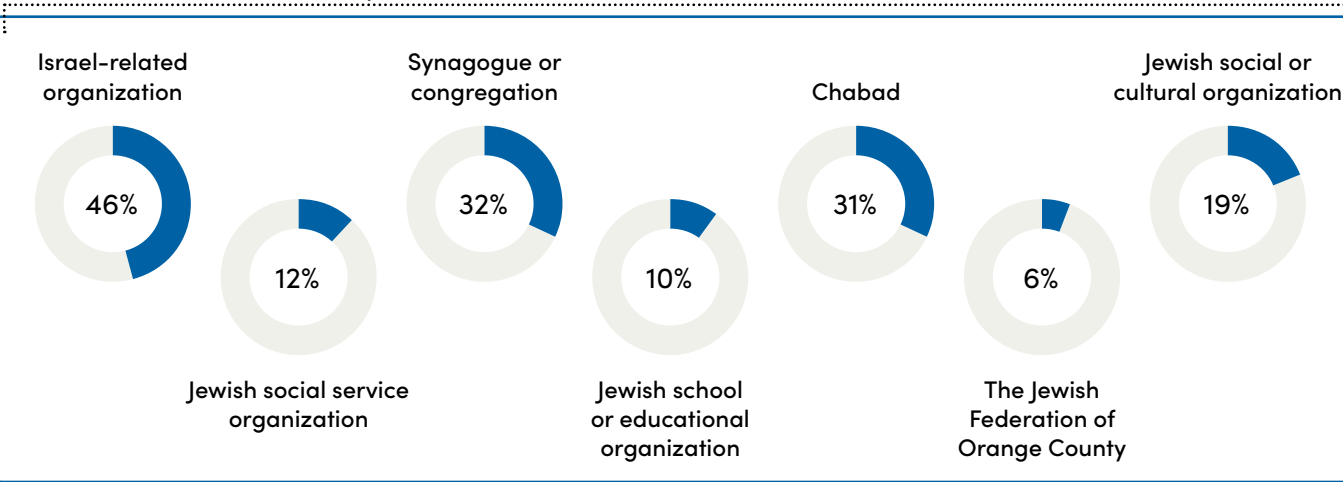
Charitable giving is nearly universal, with a majority supporting Jewish causes.

Most OC Jewish adults (82%) donated to at least one charitable organization in the past year, and nearly six in 10 (59%) donated to at least one Jewish organization. Jewish charitable donations were directed to a wide variety of organizations, with the largest shares going to Israel-related organizations, synagogues and congregations, and Chabad. Notably, only 6% of Jewish charitable donations in Orange County went to the Jewish Federation of Orange County.

Charitable donations, past year
OC Jewish households



Of households making Jewish donations, percent supporting each (type of) organization



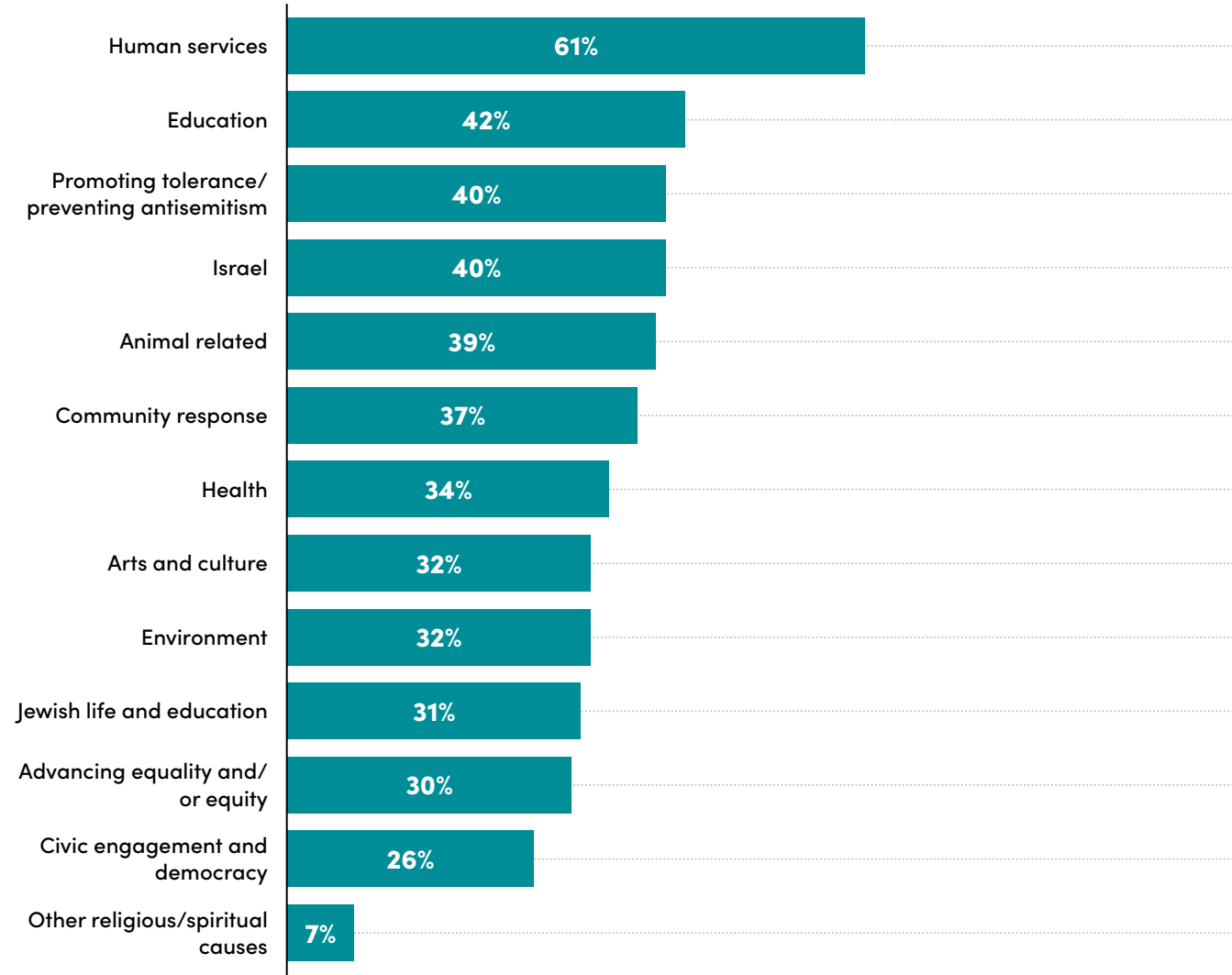
Charitable giving increases with financial security.

Among well-off households (the highest financial status option), nearly all (98%) make charitable contributions, though their rate of donating specifically to Jewish organizations is somewhat lower than that of households with “enough” or “extra” money.

OC Jewish adults support a wide variety of Jewish and non-Jewish causes.

Organizations that provide direct, basic services receive the broadest support overall.

Causes of interest
OC Jewish adults

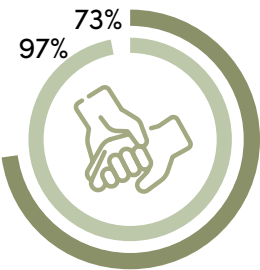


Q: Thinking about the causes that you might volunteer for or donate to, which of the following are most important to you?

For many, community is central to Jewish identity.

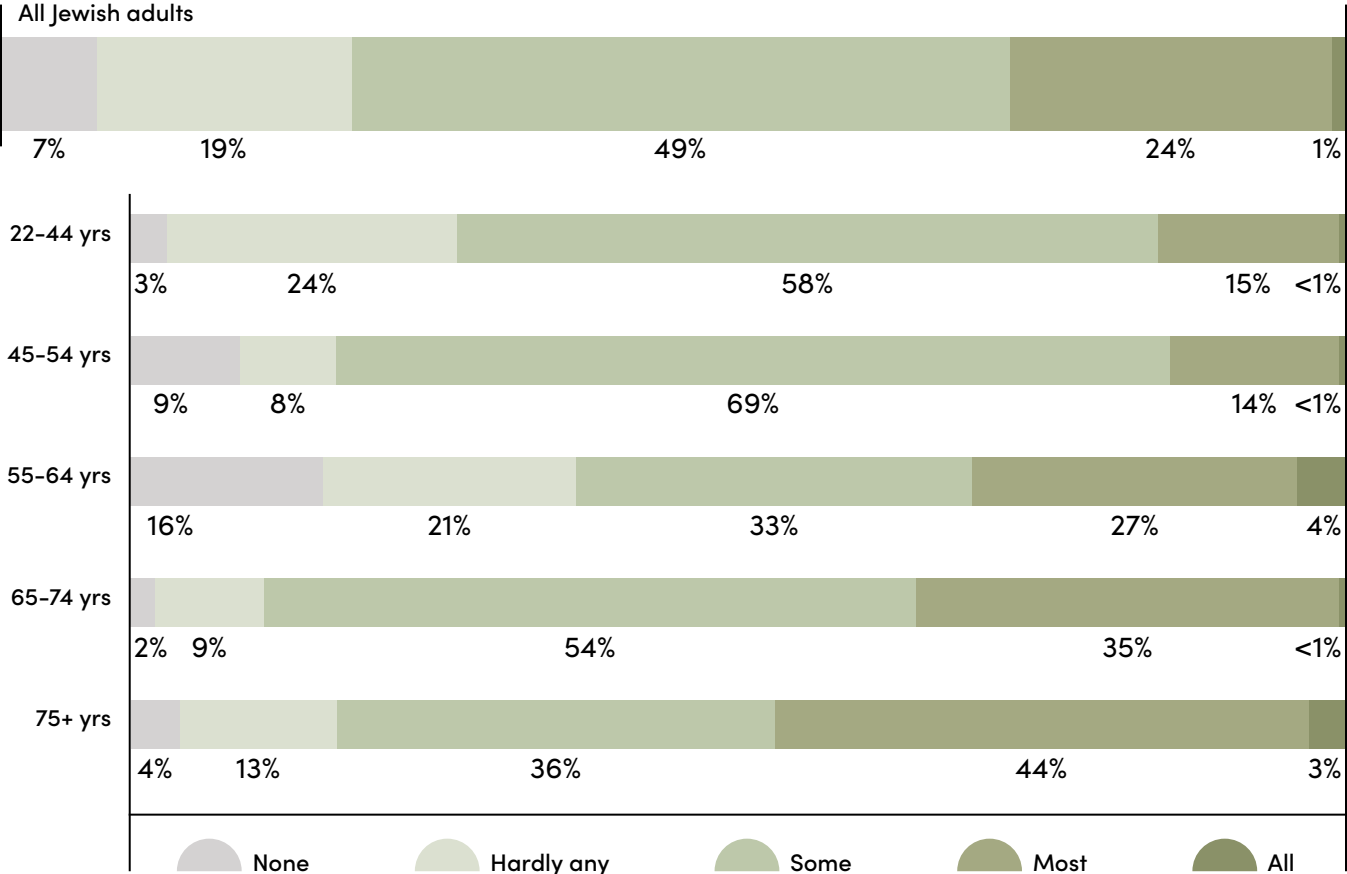
Personal relationships are core sources of Jewish connection.

In Orange County, nearly three in four Jewish adults report having at least some close Jewish friends, and, as previously shown, 73% identify family as an essential aspect of being Jewish. Consistent with this emphasis on relationships, almost all Jewish adults (97%) talked with family or friends about Jewish topics, underscoring the central role of informal, relationship-based engagement in Jewish life.



Close friends are Jewish, by age

OC Jewish adults



Friendship networks differ sharply by age.

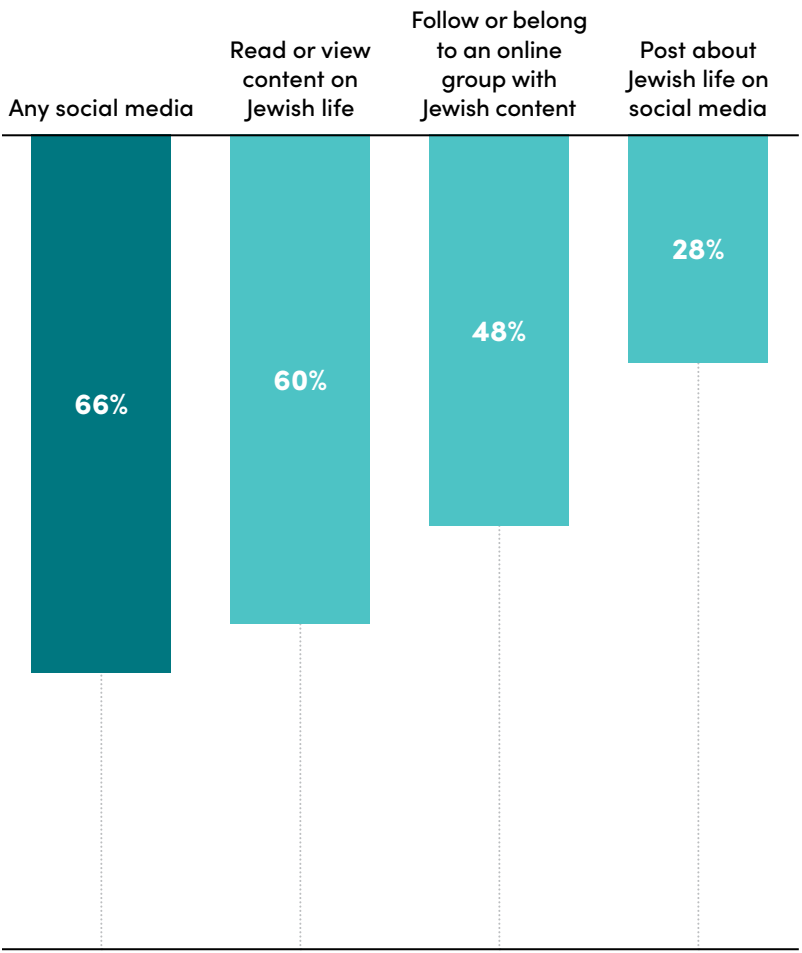
Nearly half of Jewish adults ages 75+ (47%) report that most or all of their close friends are Jewish. In contrast, only 16% of younger adults (ages 22-44) say the same. These differences in social networks may shape how Jewish community is experienced across generations.

Online spaces are becoming growing sites of Jewish life.

Two-thirds of OC Jewish adults (66%) participate in online Jewish life in some way, though the extent of that participation varies widely.

Jewish-focused social media activities

OC Jewish adults



National research suggests that digital engagement has become a durable layer of American religious life: Pew Research Center finds 27% of U.S. adults regularly watch religious services on screens—a trend largely initiated by the COVID-19 pandemic—and 30% use the internet to engage with religious information, with participation ranging from passive viewing to active posting and sharing.¹ Within the U.S. Jewish population specifically, Pew reports that 42% of Jewish adults sometimes or often seek Jewish news online.² And more broadly, the U.S. Surgeon General’s 2023 Advisory on social connection explicitly treats digital environments as part of how community and belonging are formed, highlighting that technology can help people find community and calling for “pro-connection” technologies that promote healthy social connection and safe online discourse.³

39%

Fewer than half of OC Jewish adults (39%) feel connected to a Jewish community where they live, though more (56%) feel connected to any Jewish community.

Several open-ended responses reflect this lack of connection to the local Jewish community.

“There are many Jewish families that are unaffiliated and do not feel connected—or know how to connect. We are only as strong as our numbers. How to reach these people to bring them into the fold is a big dilemma, in my opinion.”

“There is zero personal connection between all institutions and organizations and individual members of the Jewish community. None. This is embarrassing.”

“I think there are probably many people in OC who are Jewish who don’t know about the Jewish communities out there just waiting for them to get involved.”

Local community connections are significantly stronger among Jewish adults married to other Jewish individuals.

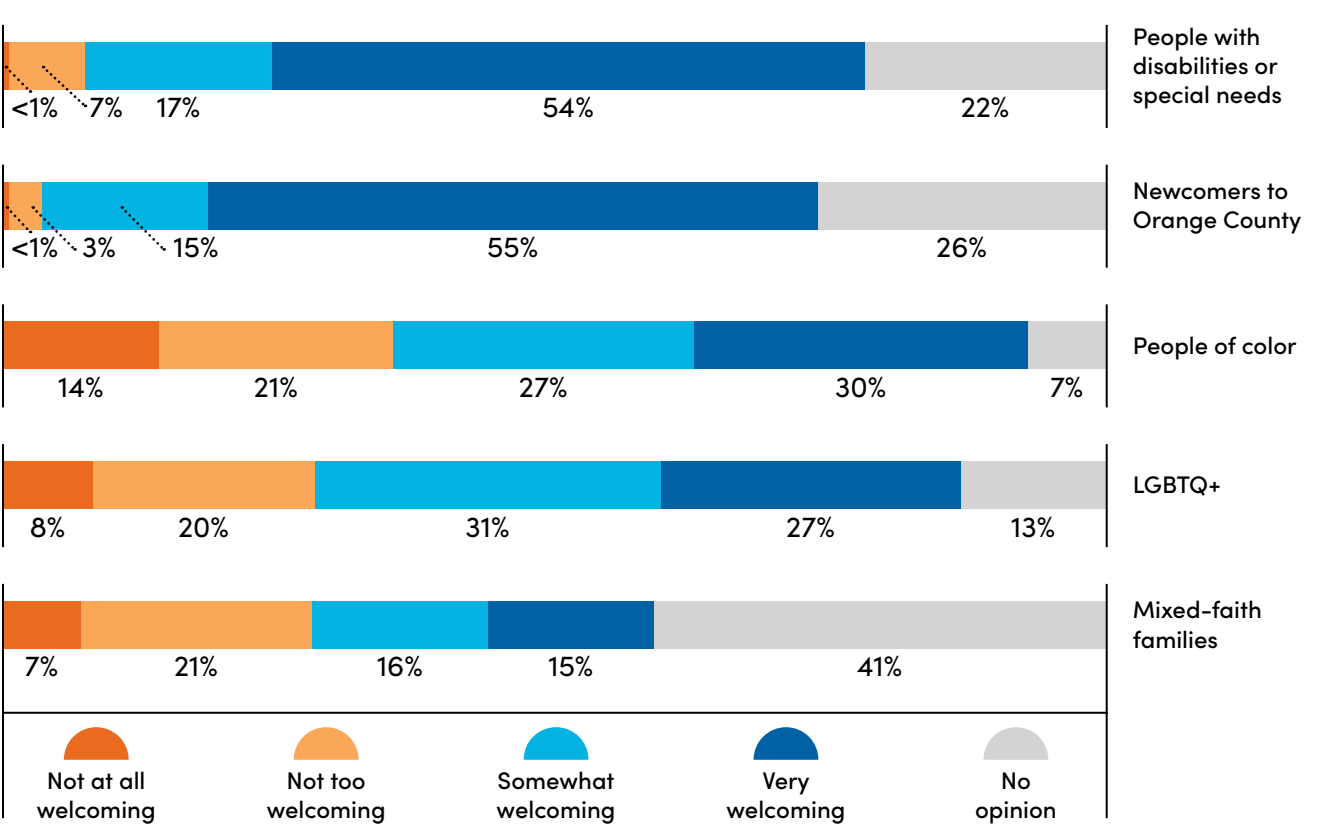
72% of unmarried adults report little or no connection to the OC Jewish community and Jewish adults in mixed-faith marriages are especially likely to feel disconnected: 63% report no connection to the OC Jewish community and 21% report little connection. Interpersonal relationships may help explain this pattern—15% of adults in mixed-faith marriages report having no close Jewish friends, and 38% say that hardly any of their close friends are Jewish.

Note: This may work in either direction—having fewer close Jewish friends may be a result of or a contributor to lower connection to the local Jewish community—or both.

Experiences of exclusion and social judgement may also undermine feelings of belonging. Some community members suggest feeling excluded or isolated within Jewish environments.

Perceptions of how welcoming Jewish organizations are to different segments of the Jewish community reveal important variation. While overall ratings are often more positive when asked in general terms, members of specific populations tend to rate organizational welcoming less favorably when evaluating their own experiences. These gaps point to ongoing challenges in ensuring that Jewish organizations are inclusive and responsive to the full diversity of OC’s Jewish community.

How welcoming are Jewish organizations to...
OC Jewish households with members of each respective sub-population group



Several open-ended responses referenced political exclusion, social judgement, and difficulty breaking into established social networks as barriers to belonging and participation.

“[Politically] conservative Jews don’t feel welcome in many congregations.”

“It’s hard to get to know people for me. Many are siloed in their shuls or existing friend groups. It’s a challenge to be the new person.”

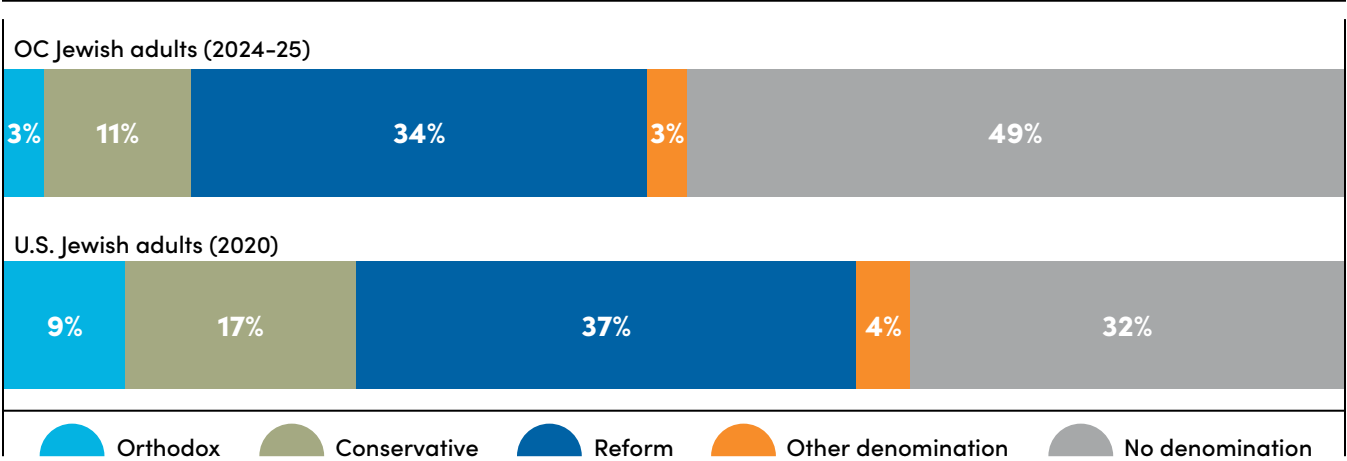
“[One gap in the community is the] lack of involvement with non-white community and little to no non-white participation in synagogue.”

Ritual & Practice

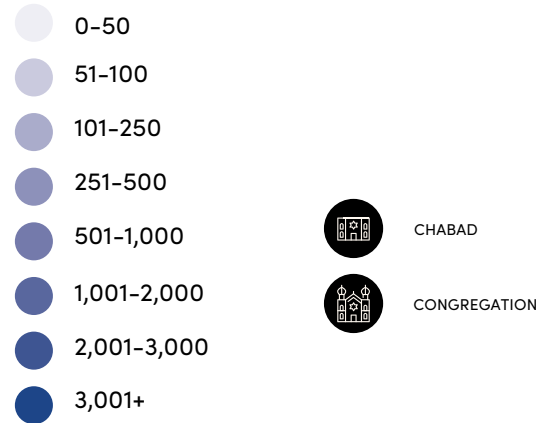
Half of OC Jewish adults (49%) have no specific denomination, significantly higher than among all U.S. Jewish adults (32%).

The largest denomination is Reform, including about one third of OC Jewish adults.

Denomination
OC Jewish adults and U.S. Jewish adults



Orange County is home to at least 30 brick-and-mortar synagogues, Chabads, and other congregations, concentrated in Irvine, Newport Beach, and Laguna Woods.



However, congregational affiliation—and formal dues-paying membership—is uncommon in Orange County.

27%

Only about one-quarter of OC Jewish households (27%) belong to a Jewish congregation,⁴ including non-dues paying members. *This household membership rate is higher than in neighboring communities—Los Angeles (21%), Long Beach (20%), and San Diego (14%)—but remains below the national rate (35%).⁵* And, as noted earlier, many OC Jewish adults say that elements commonly provided by congregations are essential to being Jewish. Between one-third and one-half of adults identify prayer (34%), Jewish community (43%), Jewish learning (52%), and celebrating holidays (58%) as essential—substantially higher than the 27% of households that include a congregational member.

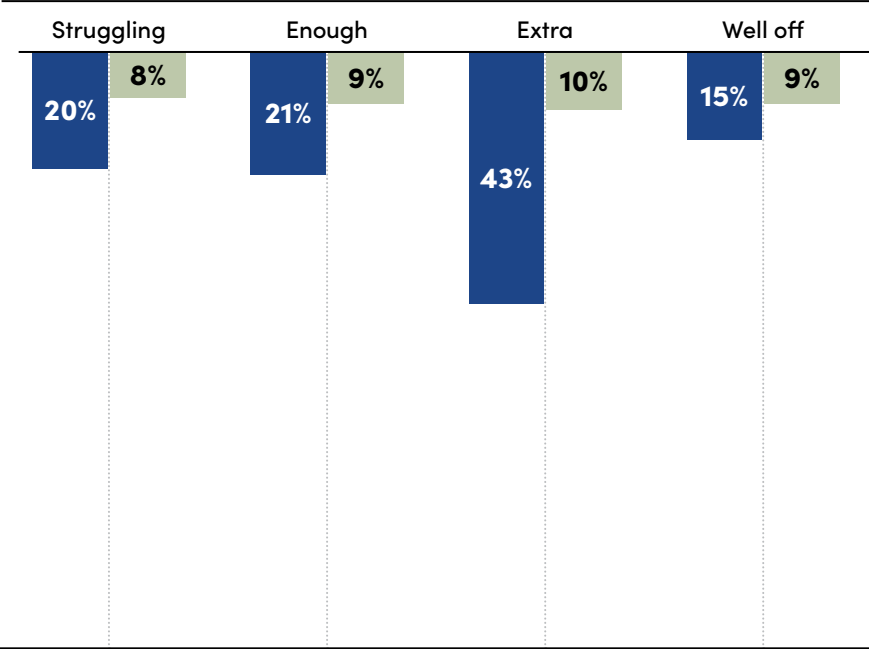
OC congregation member

Pays dues to any synagogue

And just 8% pay dues to a congregation. This gap between membership and paying dues can be explained by Chabad: 41% of congregation-member households (or 10% of all OC Jewish households) belong to Chabad, which does not operate with a traditional dues structure. *Nationally, over the past decade, there has been a shift toward more non-paying members, including through Chabad and non-brick-and-mortar congregations.⁶*

Financial situation is associated with membership—but does not fully explain trends. Households with “extra” money are the most likely to include a congregational member, while those who are struggling or have just enough to get by participate at lower rates. Dues-paying membership, however, remains relatively consistent across financial groups and, notably, well-off households (the highest financial status option) report lower overall membership, suggesting that finances are not the sole barrier.

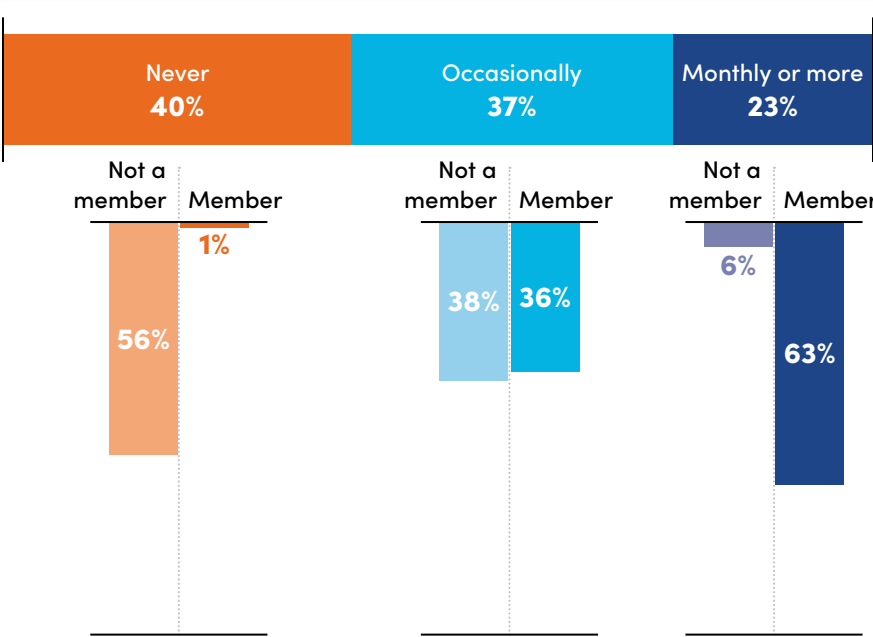
Membership in Jewish congregations by financial status
OC Jewish households



Attendance at services exceeds congregational affiliation.

Sixty percent of OC Jewish adults attended services at least once in the past year, with 41% attending High Holiday services and almost a quarter (23%) attending services monthly or more. As we would expect, nearly all congregation members attended services at least occasionally; but service attendance is a relatively common practice even among non-members.

Service attendance in the past year, by congregation membership
OC Jewish adults



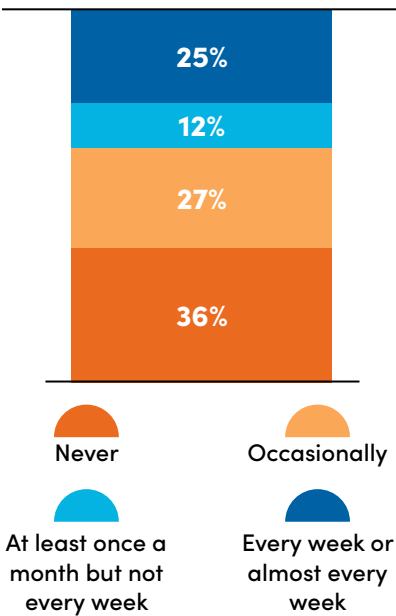
Of those who have attended services, the majority did so in formal prayer settings, at a synagogue (75%) and/or Chabad (42%). Smaller proportions of those attending services did so at a community organization (20%) and/or independent minyan (14%). One-quarter (26%) of those who attended services also did so outside of Orange County.

“The Synagogue which I attend is a very open and inclusive place. That is a strength that builds all else.”

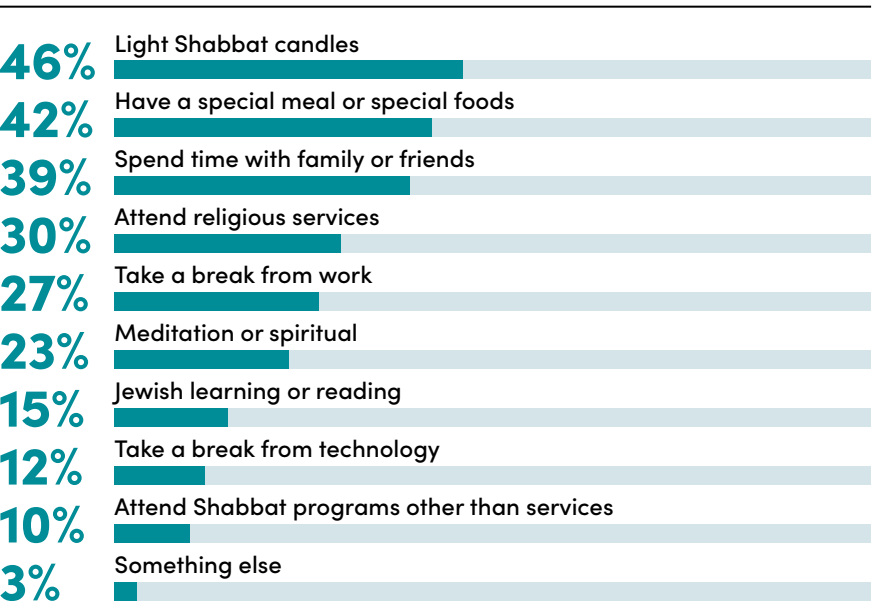
Jewish rituals and holidays are also an important part of OC Jewish adults’ religious lives.

Shabbat observance is widespread but varies in frequency and ways of practice.

Mark Shabbat frequency
OC Jewish adults



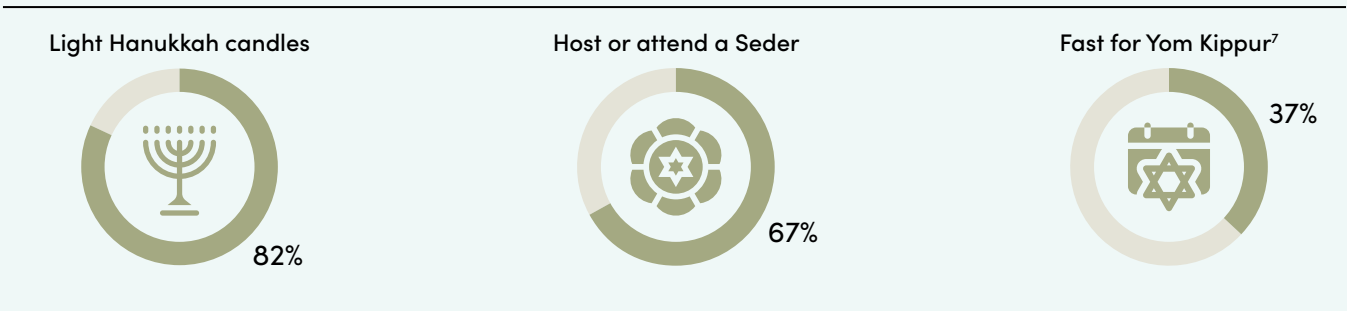
Shabbat activities, past year
OC Jewish adults



Many annual Jewish holidays also draw broad participation.

Most OC Jewish adults light Hanukkah candles and participate in a Passover Seder; smaller numbers fast on Yom Kippur.

Holiday and ritual observance
OC Jewish adults



53% Significant portions of the community devote themselves to other Jewish practice, spending time studying Jewish texts (53%) and/or following any Kosher rules (37%). For comparison, 17% of U.S. Jewish adults report keeping kosher at home.⁸

Jewish education and lifecycle events offer meaningful opportunities for children to engage with Jewish ritual and tradition but reach a minority of OC Jewish children.

Jewish preschool and daycare serve as early entry points for a small share of families.

Fifteen percent of age-eligible Jewish children are currently enrolled in a Jewish preschool or daycare program.

Bar and bat mitzvah are meaningful milestones for some Jewish youth.

Among age-eligible children, 20% have already had a bar or bat mitzvah ceremony, and an additional 12% are expected to do so in the future.

Formal Jewish education during K-12 reaches fewer than one-third of students.

Twenty-eight percent of Jewish K-12 students are enrolled in a Jewish school or receive private tutoring with Jewish content. This includes 8% enrolled in a day school or yeshiva, 12% in a part-time Jewish school, and 12% receiving tutoring or private classes.

Across each of these experiences, common barriers to participation cited by parents include affordability, availability, quality, and inclusivity:

- “I cannot fathom how we will pay for a bar or bat mitzvah.”
- “[One gap is] philanthropic support for day school attendance by families who cannot pay full tuition. [Day school] should be accessible to Jewish families of all SES backgrounds and currently is not.”
- “The cost of Jewish camp and religious school and synagogue membership and Bar/Bat Mitzvah is out of reach for many. [Participation] needs to be more affordable to all.”
- “[We need additional] programming for kids after bar/bat mitzvah to keep them engaged with the community.”
- “I feel that we need to take a more holistic approach in our religious school when teaching the kids. They hate going, most of them anyway, and that is because they have no idea why they are there. They need to be taught why religion is important... how it can help them in good times and in bad.”
- “JCC preschool... has become barely Jewish at all.”
- “[We need to] make day school [and] Jewish camps more affordable and more welcoming of disabled and neurodivergent kids.”

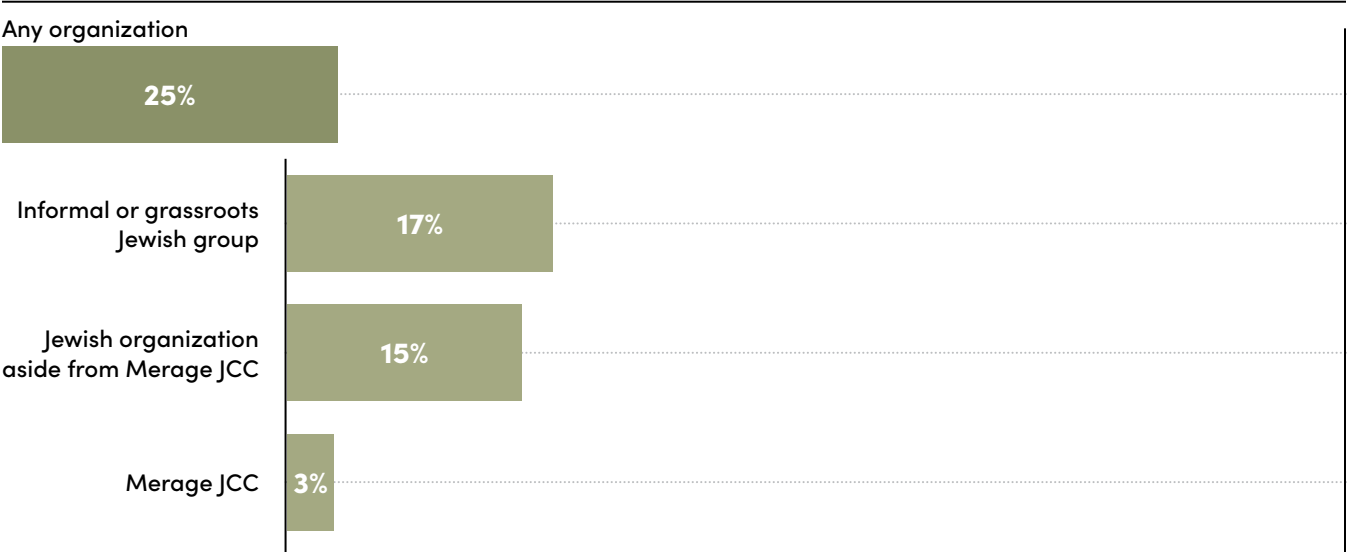
Institutional Engagement



There are about 20 other Jewish organizations in Orange County—these communal organizations, like religious institutions, see low rates of membership but higher (though varied) participation in programs.⁹

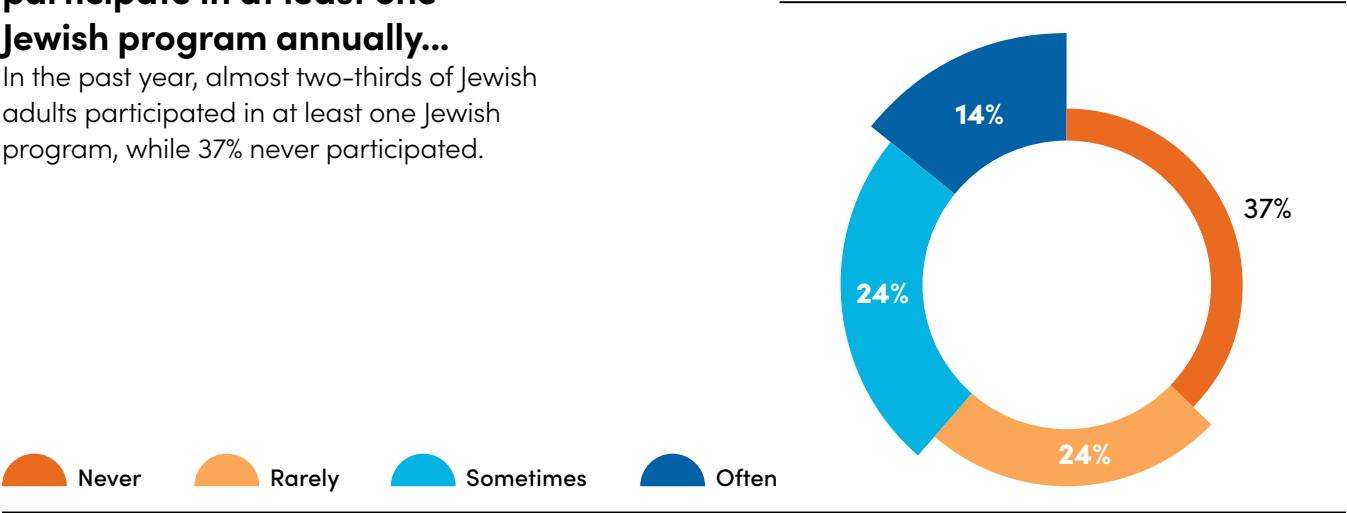
Only one in four Jewish households belong to any Jewish communal organization...
Mixed-faith families are significantly less likely to join member-based Jewish organizations—only 7% of mixed-faith households are members.

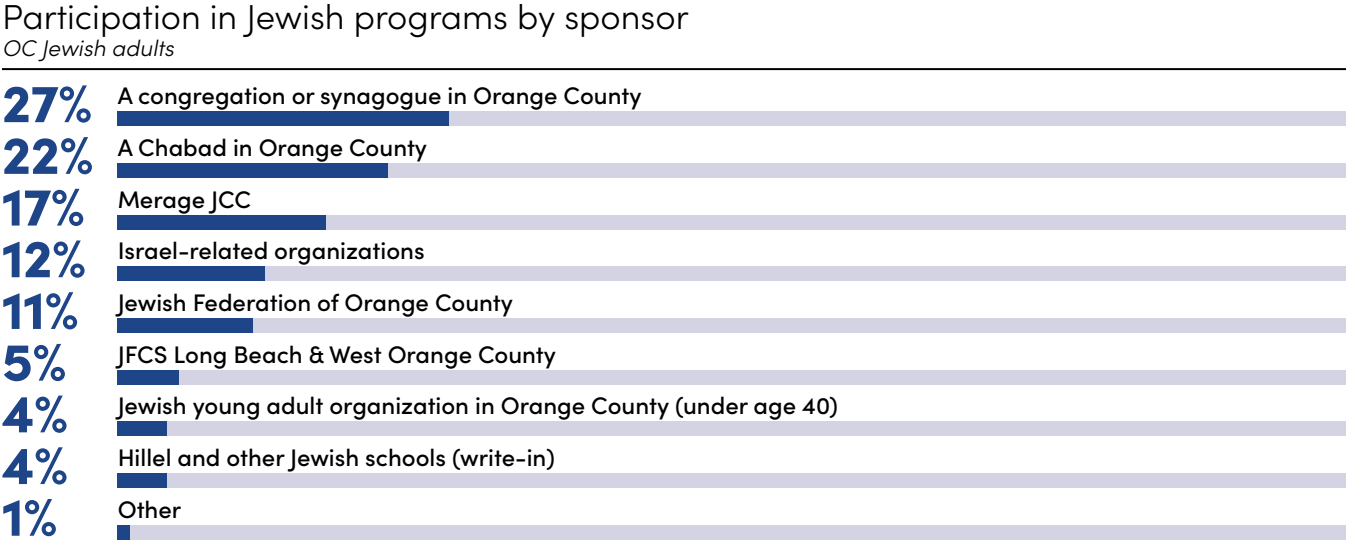
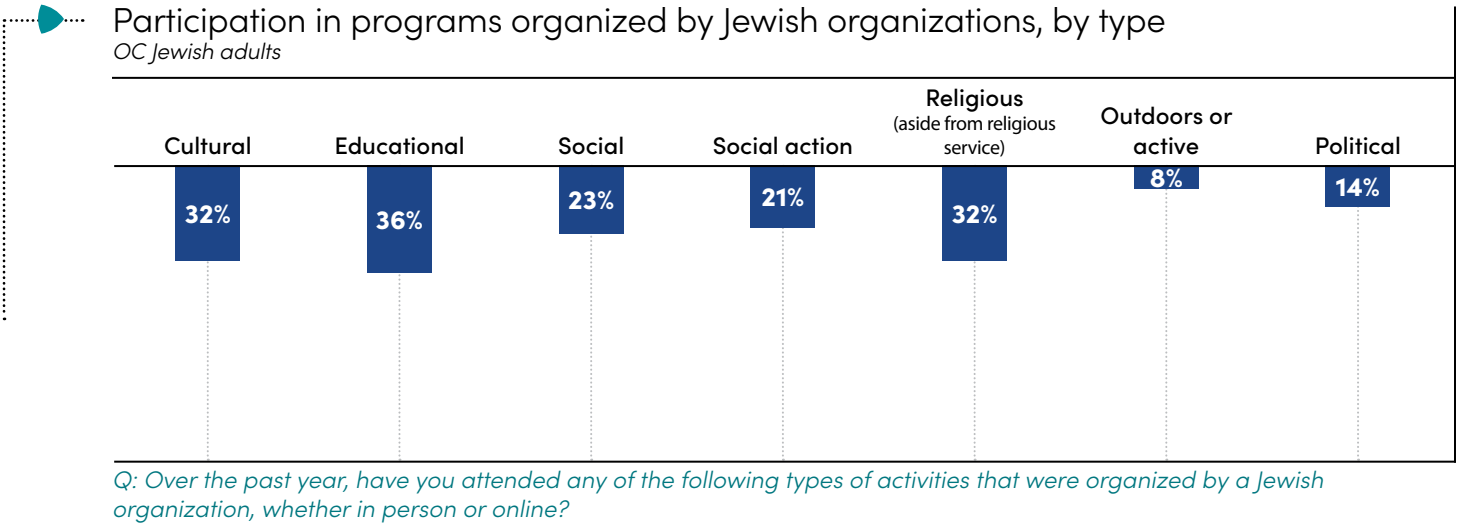
Membership in Jewish organizations
OC Jewish households — respondents could select multiple



... but most OC Jewish adults participate in at least one Jewish program annually...
In the past year, almost two-thirds of Jewish adults participated in at least one Jewish program, while 37% never participated.

Participation in Jewish programs
OC Jewish adults





... as do many OC Jewish children.

For Jewish children, participation in communal programs (in addition to the religious programming, noted previously) varies by age.

In the past year, 43% of households with at least one child age 12 or younger participated in Jewish-sponsored programming outside of school or preschool, such as Tot Shabbat, synagogue-based playgroups, or family holiday programs. Twenty percent of eligible households received books from programs like PJ Library and PJ Our Way, while 43% reported not being aware of the program.

For older youths, participation is relatively limited. Among Jewish K-12 students, 16% attended a Jewish camp in summer 2024—most in day camps (15%) and a smaller share in overnight camps (4%)—and even fewer participated in youth groups (6%) and Jewish volunteer or leadership development programs (1%). Among Jewish teens, 5% traveled to Israel with a teen program and 3% participated in a Jewish immersive program not based in Israel.

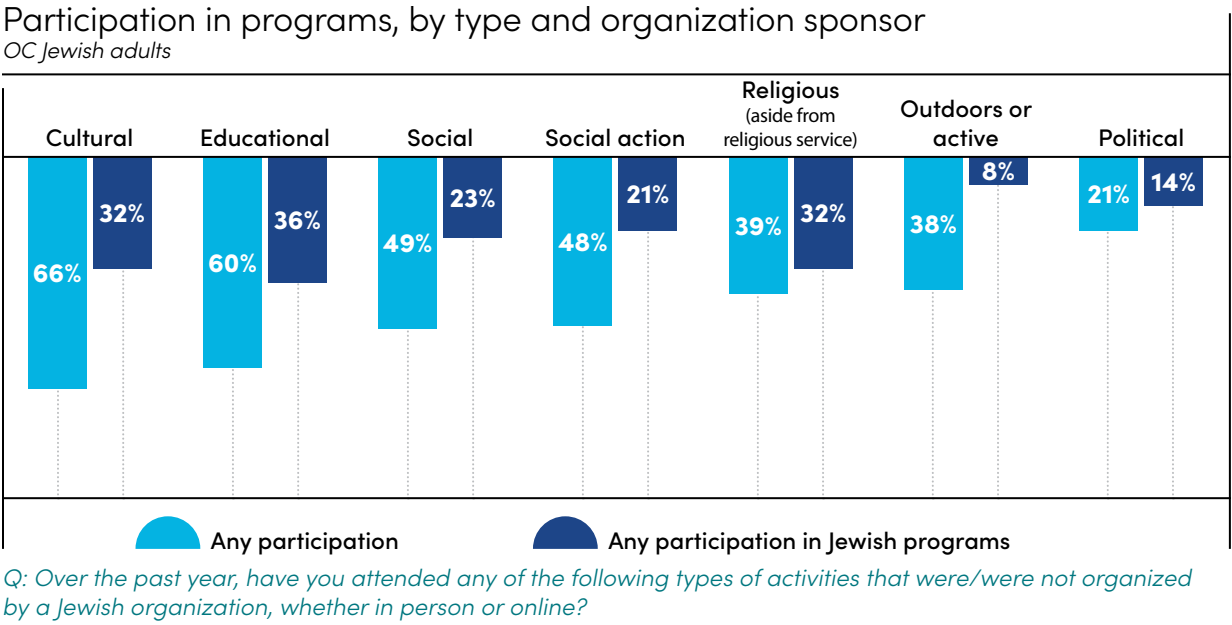


Many OC Jewish adults and families indicated a desire to increase their engagement with Jewish programs.

While a majority (58%) of OC Jewish adults were at least somewhat satisfied with their levels of participation, a sizable proportion (42%) were not, including 44% and 59% of those who never or rarely participate, respectively. Nearly 40% of nonparticipants expressed explicit interest in engaging more.

“I would like to see opportunities to cross pollinate and expand awareness and inclusiveness in our Jewish community.”

The data about participation in activities organized by non-Jewish organizations could suggest where there is room to grow.



For Jewish children and teens, survey responses reflect satisfaction with participation in programming for some and, for others, a desire to increase participation in communal programming.

“My grandchildren had an excellent Jewish experience growing up in South Orange County. They know who they are and are proud to be Jewish. They participated in the Maccabi games and were involved in their temple.”

“We have looked for programs for our children and have not found anything. More Hebrew classes and Jewish culture programs for kids and teens would be needed, especially for kids not attending [Day School] (which ours do not since the tuition is very high).”

“I’d like to see more opportunities for children to connect with a broader set of children throughout their childhood. Many young Jews feel isolated in their Judaism during sports, school, and other activities.”

“[We should have more] youth/teen groups so they can meet other Jewish kids outside of Temple.”

Despite interest, for many, participation is influenced by quality and accessibility of programs and feelings of inclusion & belonging.

Many OC Jewish adults express interest in Jewish life but report common barriers precluding their participation.

These barriers pose particular challenges for younger adults, single adults, and those in mixed-faith households.

Barriers to participation
OC Jewish adults



Program relevance and quality matters, particularly for young adults.

22% of OC Jewish adults and nearly one-third (31%) of younger adults (ages 22-44) indicated that they have not found Jewish programs that interest them. Several open-ended responses called for more targeted programming, particularly for young adults and single professionals:

"[We need] to have more programs and events for young adults, ages 21-35, to make more Jewish friends, connections, and dating opportunities. My adult kids want to date within the Orange County Jewish Community."

"[One community priority should be] providing more programming to young adults and single professionals to keep them from leaving Orange County for San Diego, Los Angeles, or out of state."

"[One community priority should be to] create a sense of unity no matter how you identify yourself to your Jewishness. We need much more in cultural non-religious celebrations and a place to just be."

Responses also point to awareness as a potential barrier.

There may be programs that would be of interest if people knew about them.

"[One gap is] no center or clearinghouse of current Jewish information on how unaffiliated [people] or newcomers can plug into and connect with the existing Jewish community."

"[One gap is] lack of community newsletter. Our temple has a newsletter, although, and this is good."

"Even though there are a number of ways to find out what is going on within the Jewish community here, I wish there was one compilation, similar to the Federation's Community Calendar or JLife, that aggregated them all, like the Indeed website does for the job market."

Accessibility—due to cost and geographic location—presents a significant barrier for many, especially younger and financially struggling adults.

Although participation rates are similar across financial situations, the data suggest that cost is a barrier to increased participation for many—and especially those with less means.

Nineteen percent of Jewish adults cited programming being "too expensive" as a barrier. Younger adults were especially likely to cite cost as a barrier (36%).

And Jewish adults with fewer financial resources who are not currently participating in programs express greater interest in increasing their engagement.

Open-ended responses frequently referenced the need to prioritize other spending and viewing Jewish life as less financially accessible. (See "Finances" chapter report for more detail.)

"We do not have a Jewish overnight camp... many families cannot afford the many wonderful Jewish overnight camps in LA."

"[We need more] affordable programs for parents with young families."

"There is a never-ending cost associated with being an active participant which means that there is a value proposition decision that is involved. In other words, is the cost "worth it?" Especially when every organization in the community is burdened with trying to raise sufficient funds in order to continue operations."

Many households are limited by location, time, and flexibility. Nineteen percent of respondents cited "location not convenient" as a barrier to participation and several open responses emphasized the need for programs that meet people—and their calendars—where they are.

"Everything is centered in Irvine, which is too far for me."

"South County is a bit of a desert for Jewish programming. It's mostly based in Irvine."

"The Jewish Federation/JCC is not conveniently located to a good part of Orange County. [I] would really like to see satellite services and programs in several other areas of the county."

"[One gap is] providing a variety of ways to connect and meeting people where they are with their time and availability ... especially for teenagers who in today's world are busy with school, friends, and activities, programs should be flexible to let people participate as much as they are able vs. not allowing participation if they cannot do 100%."

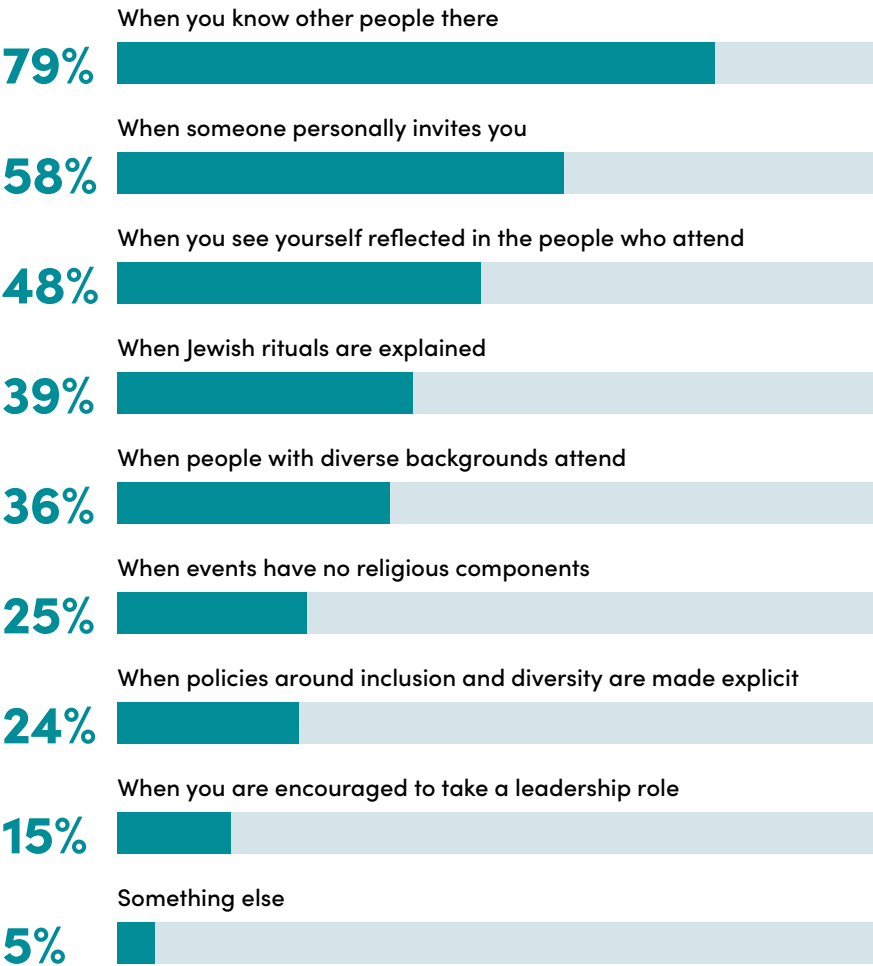
"The gap is that most of these organizations are located in Central Orange County and given the congestion of this area, it is often an obstacle to travel across the county in order to actively participate in the activities of these organizations."

Social connection is the strongest driver of participation—and its absence the most common barrier.

Personal connections are the most powerful catalyst for participation.

When asked what helps them feel welcome and comfortable at Jewish events, OC Jewish adults most frequently pointed to social familiarity—knowing others who participate, receiving a personal invitation, and seeing themselves reflected in the people who attend.

Drivers of participation
OC Jewish adults



Q: Which of the following makes you feel welcome and comfortable at Jewish events?

But many Jewish individuals in Orange County do not experience this sense of connection.

As noted above, 60% of Jewish adults do not feel a sense of belonging to the Jewish community where they live.

And social barriers to participation are especially pronounced for some groups.

Among adults in mixed-faith relationships—who report lower levels of program participation compared to adults married to other Jewish people (34% vs. 76%)—not knowing others who participate, lack of confidence in Jewish knowledge, and feeling unwelcome were among the top four barriers cited.

“There is room for growth in fostering deeper connections among different Jewish denominations and creating more inclusive spaces for young adults and interfaith families.”

“I think there could also be more support and inclusion for multi-ethnic Jewish families. A multi-faith family feels normalized here in a way that is very comforting, but I have not seen as much open-armed acceptance for multi-ethnic Jewish families (of which there are many!).”

And although participation rates are similar across age groups, younger Jewish adults (ages 22–44) cited not knowing others who participate as

a barrier to participation at significantly higher levels than other age groups (63% compared to 19–37%), as well as lack of confidence in Jewish knowledge (29% compared to 1–8%) and “feel[ing] unwelcome” (23% compared to 3–15%).

Outreach from organizations does not appear to be widespread.

Nearly one in two OC Jewish adults (47%) said they had not been engaged by a Jewish organization in the past year, whether through fundraising efforts, program invitations, or other forms of outreach. Jewish adults who are more actively engaged in Jewish programming were more likely to have received outreach of all kinds. However, from the data, causation isn’t clear: outreach may be encouraging participation, or individuals who are already engaged may be more visible to organizations for follow-up.

“[A priority should be] to be more visible and perhaps more vigilant in including & attracting Orange County Jews to the various organizations, synagogues, and Jewish life, culture, values. It’s huge when we receive an email asking to participate in a Jewish event, etc. I am a bit older and do not do Facebook, Instagram, etc. But I guess social media is great for attracting the younger generation.”

Some of these engagement patterns and barriers are reflected in people’s assessment of institutions.

When evaluating Orange County’s Jewish organizations on various measures, between half and two-thirds of OC Jewish adults were unable to rate them.

Of those that could rate them, more than two-thirds gave positive ratings for cooperation across organizations, effective use of resources, meeting community members’ needs, and creativity and fresh thinking.

“The strength in my opinion is with the Merage JCC and the multitude of programs that are offered by the staff. Aside from the gym and classes, the cultural events for all ages is the best offering anywhere. One can participate in as little or as much as desired.”

“[One strength is a] great Chabad community.”

“I feel the OC Jewish Community organizations have an outsized presence compared to the small percentage of Jewish people in the county.”

“There are many and varied opportunities to get involved in the Jewish Community. Our synagogue has so many activities to choose from, as do other Jewish organizations.”

But concerns still persist:

“Other Jewish organizations want to work together but the Federation does not and doesn’t listen to its community. It only cares about itself and making sure it gets “credit” even for things it didn’t do.”

“[Orange County has] strong organizations but [they] often seem like they work in silos, somewhat disconnected from each other. [It’s] not apparent if the clergy or the leadership of the various organizations work together.”

“The main gap is that the Jewish organizations in OC seem to compete with each other all the time, rather than working cohesively together.”

“The Jewish community lacks leadership in the Jewish Federation.”

Discussion Questions

These findings paint a complex picture of Jewish life in Orange County, marked by strong identity, varied participation, meaningful aspiration, and real barriers to belonging. As you reflect on this section, consider:

1

How is our understanding of the ways that people engage in Jewish life evolving? What do these findings suggest about the different expressions of contemporary Jewish life?

2

How do these patterns of connection, belonging, and exclusion compare to your experience of Jewish community in Orange County? Where do they align and where do they differ?

3

What might be driving the gaps between interest in Jewish life and actual involvement? What is needed to break these barriers?

4

Given the range of pathways into Jewish life—rituals, culture, relationships, volunteering, institutions, and programs—where do you see the greatest opportunities to expand access and meaning?

5

Most community members could not provide a rating for their perception of OC Jewish organizations. What does this suggest to you about the role these organizations are playing in the community? About potential areas for development?

Endnotes

¹Pew Research Center, *Online Religious Services Appeal to Many Americans, but Going in Person Remains More Popular* (2023).

²Pew Research Center, *Jewish Americans in 2020* (2021).

³The U.S. Surgeon General, *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community* (2023).

⁴Jewish congregations include a synagogue, temple, minyan, or chavurah.

⁵Pew Research Center, "Jewish Americans in 2020."

⁶Pew Research Center, "Jewish Americans in 2020.," Pew Research Center, *A Portrait of Jewish Americans* (2013).

⁷An additional 16% did not fast for medical reasons.

⁸Pew Research Center, "Jewish Americans in 2020."

⁹Not all communal organizations are membership organizations. Higher program participation may be attributed to non-membership organizations.



Samueli
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