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## Moving

# The Impact of Geographic Mobility on the Jewish Community

A collaborative project of  
The Jewish Federations of North America  
National Opinion Research Center  
North American Jewish Data Bank



## Moving

# The Impact of Geographic Mobility on the Jewish Community

Summary of data presented by Laurence Kotler-Berkowitz, Ph.D.,  
Director, Research and Analysis, Jewish Federations of North America,  
at the General Assembly, November 11, 2009.

Data are based on report co-authored by Sid Groeneman, Ph.D. and  
Tom Smith, Ph.D., NORC.

## Project Partners

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- The Mandell L. and Madeleine H. Berman Foundation provided lead funding for the project. The Albert and Audrey Ratner Foundation Generous also provided generous funding.
- The Jewish Federations of North America commissioned and managed the project.
- The National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, a nationally prominent research institute, conducted the study with support from the North American Jewish Data Bank.
- Federation leadership in Atlanta, Colorado, Las Vegas, Palm Beach County, Phoenix, San Diego, San Francisco, South Palm Beach County and Washington, D.C., agreed to the use of their community data for the project.

## Goals of study

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- To assess the impact of mobility on various forms of communal and personal behavior of American Jews.
- To understand the policy and strategic implications for Jewish organizations as they attempt to minimize the negative effects of mobility and, more ambitiously, to capitalize on them in some cases.

## Methodology

- The researchers analyzed 9 recent local Jewish community studies sponsored by federations, the National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01, and the General Social Survey, a national survey conducted by NORC.
- The local studies were from communities in the South and West where migration has been common in recent years: Atlanta, Denver-Boulder, Las Vegas, Palm Beach County, Phoenix, San Diego, San Francisco, South Palm Beach County, and Washington D.C.
- The researchers also conducted four focus groups with communal leaders to discuss the findings, address the strategic implications emerging from them and develop policy recommendations.

# The scope of Jewish mobility

## In the community studies:

- one in six households (17%) moved into their current community within the past four years
- another one in six households (17%) moved in from five to nine years ago
- in sum, a third (34%) were new to their Jewish communities in the past decade.

## In NJPS:

- 40% of households moved from one residence to another in the five years before the survey.
- local moves within a Jewish community can not be separated from moves to another Jewish community due to the way NJPS asked questions.

# Characteristics of Jewish movers

## Compared to non-movers, recent movers are:

- significantly younger
- less likely to be married
- more likely to be college graduates, but have lower incomes
- slightly less likely to identify with a Jewish denomination.
- more likely to live in a household that includes a non-Jewish adult (community studies only)

## Areas of study

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Two broad areas of Jewish life were examined for their association with mobility:

- Communal behaviors: philanthropy, organizational affiliation and participation, and volunteerism.
- Private/personal behaviors: Jewish media usage, ritual behaviors, emotional attachments to Israel, and raising children to be Jewish.

**Both the local community and national data show that the strongest effects of mobility are found in communal behaviors, and much weaker or no effects are found for private behaviors.**

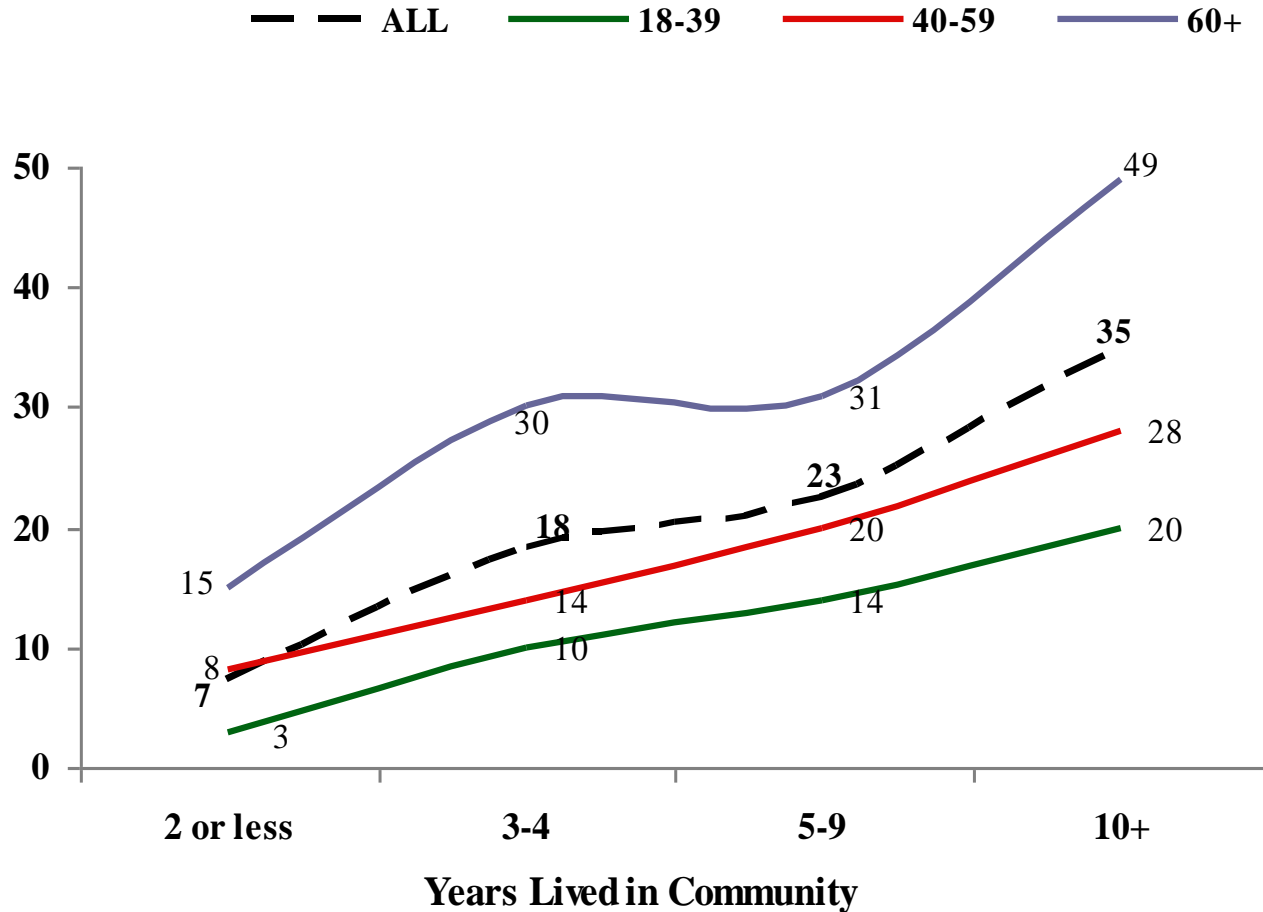
## Mobility and communal behaviors

Among communal behaviors, moving has the strongest effects on philanthropy, and within philanthropy, ***mobility has the strongest effects on the federation system.*** Specifically, mobility reduces:

- familiarity with the local Federation, giving to the Federation and being contacted by the federation
- donations and volunteering to other Jewish charities and causes
- memberships synagogues and other Jewish organizations
- having one's children enrolled in a Jewish day school or other form of Jewish education (only in national data, not in local community data)
- sense of belonging in the community
- donations and volunteering to non-Jewish causes

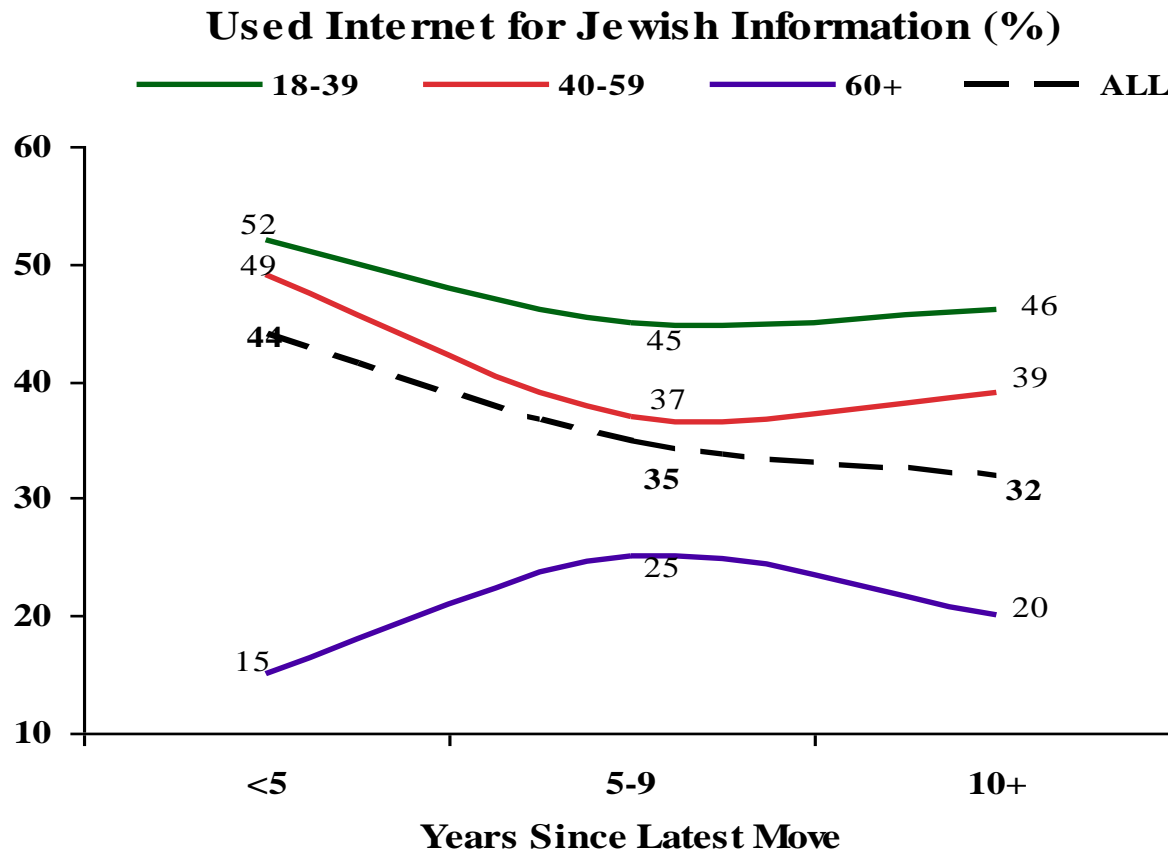
# Mobility and communal behaviors

**Gave to Local Jewish Federation in Past Year (%)**



## Mobility and Internet use

- In contrast, recent movers are *more likely* than others to use the Internet to find information about Jewish related topics. Online communication is a key tool for Jewish organizations to reach recent movers.



## Mobility and personal behaviors

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Unlike communal behaviors, mobility has very weak or no connections to personal/private behaviors and attitudes, including:

- use of Jewish media
- ritual observance
- emotional attachments to Israel
- raising children to be Jewish
- enrolling children in Jewish education (communities data only)

## Communities vs. national effects

- Although there are exceptions, the independent impacts of mobility identified in the communities analysis tend to be stronger than in the national data, specifically with respect to philanthropy, affiliations/participation and volunteering.
- This suggests that *moving to a new community* (community studies) impacts communal behaviors more than *moving per se* (national study), since moving in the national study represents a combination of local and non-local changes of address.
- The contrast could also be partly due to differences between the Jewish populations in the local communities and the Jewish population in the nation as a whole.

## Additional effects on Jewish behaviors

The findings that link mobility to reduced levels of communal engagement control for other factors that also influence Jewish communal and personal/private behaviors, including:

- Age
- Jewish denomination
- Education and income
- Marital status
- Gender
- Region
- Presence of children in the household

## General Social Survey findings

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- Defines Jews as a religious group only
- Defines mobility in terms of where survey respondents were living at the time of their interview vs. where they were raised
- When Jews move from their place of origin to another location, whether they remain Jewish or not depends to a large extent on how many other Jews are around them.
- Mobility has the potential to unmoor Jews from their religious identity, and that process can be exacerbated if relatively few other Jews are nearby or countered if relatively many other Jews are in the area.

## Strategic implications and policy recommendations

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Focus groups identified four major strategic implications and related recommendations:

- Sharing information about movers
- Understanding today's consumer orientation
- Reaching out to newcomers through marketing, communications and branding
- Identifying how national organizations can add value to local affiliates.

## Sharing information about movers

- Barriers to sharing information:
  - Organizational reluctance – and mobility exacerbates this tendency
  - Lack of tools and venues for information sharing
- Changing organizational reluctance requires a shift in communal culture, away from each organization seeing itself in competition with every other organization and toward seeing ourselves as allies in the effort to encourage and foster participation in the communal system
- Tools and venues: new initiatives to facilitate ability of federations to share information in timely and efficient ways
  - New Moves Program
  - Donor Management System



## Understanding today's consumer orientation

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- To reach other Jewish movers, organizations need to focus on what several focus group participants described as today's "consumer orientation"
- Jews (like other Americans) seek to consume, connect to and participate in organizational offerings in a flexible manner, to take part in discrete activities, events and programs *on their own terms*.
- Initiatives: concierge function, Jewish debit card

## Marketing, communications and branding

Movers who can not be individually identified have to be reached by general marketing and communication efforts.

- The Web: new arrivals in local communities use the Internet more than others to local Jewish content.
- Online social networking tools: a powerful source of connection that Jewish institutions can leverage to engage or re-engage mobile populations
- Organizational branding: especially critical for the federation system, whose local affiliates have historically operated without a national brand to unify them.
- Initiative: The Jewish Federations of North America is currently working with Federations across the continent to implement a national branding strategy, which will make it easier for movers to identify and locate federations from one community to another.

## National organizations

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At their best, national organizations validate local agency imperatives, expand local frameworks, and add value to local agency operations:

- Leveraging national resources for local use (marketing and communications, IT/online tools, donor management systems, research)
- Piloting and possibly funding innovative programs in local areas
- Helping create a movement-wide culture and expectation of information sharing among local affiliates which is ultimately beneficial to the movement as a whole

## Additional information and resources

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- Summary, full and methodology reports and these slides are available through The Jewish Federations of North America and the North American Jewish Data Bank:
  - [www.JewishFederations.org/onthemove](http://www.JewishFederations.org/onthemove)
  - [www.jewishdatabank.org](http://www.jewishdatabank.org)
- Questions or comments? Email: [research@JewishFederations.org](mailto:research@JewishFederations.org)