

2014 Greater Seattle Jewish Community Study

Executive Summary

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The 2014 Greater Seattle Jewish Community Study provides an up-to-date description of the size and character of Seattle-area Jewry. It was developed in order to provide communal leaders, planners, and members with actionable information that can be used to enhance the quality of Jewish life in the Northwest and broaden the reach and effectiveness of community organizations. The study was conducted by researchers from the Cohen Center and Steinhardt Institute of Brandeis University in collaboration with the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle.

The 2014 study estimates that the Greater Seattle Jewish community is now composed of 63,400 Jewish individuals who live in 33,700 households. It is estimated that there are 49,600 Jewish adults in the community, of whom 32,700 identify as Jewish by religion and 16,900 who identify as Jewish by other criteria. An estimated 13,800 Jewish children (aged 17 and under) live with these adults. The 2014 population is 70% larger than the 2000-2001 estimate of 37,180 Jewish individuals. Some of the reported growth may be attributable to improved methodology, but unquestionably, the Greater Seattle Jewish community has grown substantially, perhaps even more rapidly than Seattle's overall population. Much of the growth has come from newcomers to the community, both families and individuals who moved to the area and children born to families already present.

The growth in the population over the last dozen years is, perhaps, the most notable feature of the socio-demographic findings, but that two-thirds (68%) of Greater Seattle Jewish adults identify as Jewish by religion (JBR) with the remaining 32% identifying as Jewish by means other than religion (JNR), such as a cultural or ethnic identity, is also notable. This is a higher proportion of JNRs than the national average.

The Jews of Greater Seattle range from those who are highly engaged to those who are completely unengaged from the Jewish community or Judaism in general. The highly affiliated, constituting slightly more than 15% of households, are connected to all parts of the organized community, belonging to synagogues, sending their children to Jewish schools and youth programs, donating to local organizations, and attending programs with regularity. Those who are partly affiliated are involved with some organizations and programs but do not participate fully in all aspects of the community. The unaffiliated, nearly 40% of households in the community, do not connect with local Jewish institutions or participate in local Jewish programming. They may be disinterested in Judaism in general or in the local Jewish community specifically.

Jewish community members appreciate the diversity and range of choices that are available to them, but they regret that coordination is often lacking across organizations and across segments of the community. The Greater Seattle Jewish community is distinctive in the emphasis across many segments of the Jewish population on social justice. For some, this is an expression of their Judaism that complements their other Jewish activities; for others, volunteering and involvement in social causes substitute for engagement with the Jewish community.

Key findings of this study include:

Demographic Estimates

- 49,600 Jewish adults and 13,800 Jewish children living in 33,700 households.
- 30% of households include children. 16% of households include only those aged 65 and older.
- Median age is 39; median age of adults only is 48.
- 61% of Jewish adults are married. Of those, 56% are intermarried.
- 66% of children are being raised Jewish only and another 10% are being raised Jewish and another religion. Only 1% are being raised solely with another religion. The remainder are being raised in no religion or the parents have not yet decided upon a religion in which to raise them.
- 41% of Jewish adults do not affiliate with a specific denomination. Of those who do, the largest denomination is Reform (28%), followed by Conservative (14%) and Orthodox (7%).
- 57% of Jewish households in Greater Seattle live in the City of Seattle, including 17% in Southeast Seattle and 15% in Northeast Seattle. Another 8% are in Bellevue, 7% in Mercer Island, and 3% in Redmond. 14% are in other locations in King County.
- 2.5% of King County's population is Jewish. The combined population of Snohomish, Pierce, Kitsap, and Island Counties is 0.5% Jewish.

Jewish Life

- 20% attend religious services at least once a month and 33% never attend religious services. 34% of all households are synagogue members.
- 19% of households light Shabbat candles usually or always; 32% follow at least some rules of kashrut.
- In two-thirds of households, at least one household member participated in some type of Jewish programs aside from religious services such as educational, social, or cultural programming. 8% of households claim membership in the Stroum JCC.
- Ties to Israel are strong. 56% have visited Israel at least once. 56% feel somewhat or very connected to Israel.
- Ties to the worldwide Jewish community are stronger than ties to the local Jewish community.
- About one-third (33%) reported antisemitic experiences in the past year.

Volunteering and Philanthropy

- Volunteering activities are high, but volunteers are more likely to engage with non-Jewish than Jewish organizations. 51% percent of respondents indicated that they had volunteered in the previous month. Of those, 15% volunteered exclusively for Jewish organizations and 48% volunteered exclusively for non-Jewish organizations.
- Charitable donations are high, but donors are more likely to contribute to non-Jewish than Jewish organizations. 92% of respondents indicated that they made charitable donations. 21% made most or all of their donations to Jewish organizations and 59% made most or all of their donations to non-Jewish organizations.

Jewish Education

- 40% of Jewish children in Greater Seattle participate in some form of formal Jewish education.
- A small number of children who are being raised with no religion have been enrolled in Jewish educational programs.
- Of age-eligible Jewish children, 32% are enrolled in Jewish preschool, 40% in supplementary school, and 5% in day school.
- Of age-eligible Jewish children, 23% participate in a Jewish youth group, 22% attend Jewish overnight camp, and 26% Jewish day camp.
- 59% of Jewish children over age 12 or 13 have had a bar or bat mitzvah.

Young Adults

- 17% of Jewish adults are between the ages of 18 and 35 and live in households without any children. Of all Jewish households, 9% are composed only of young adults.
- Young adults are much more likely to have been raised by intermarried parents (41%) compared to older adults (19%). Young adults are far more likely to have been raised in Judaism and another religion (20%) compared to older adults (4%).
- Among non-Orthodox young adults, few (20%) are married, but half (48%) of those marriages are to Jews. Young adults who are living with a significant other or partner (13%) are less likely to be with a Jewish partner (27%).
- Young adults think it is more important to raise Jewish children than to have a Jewish spouse or romantic partner. 53% say it is very important to raise Jewish children but half that number, 26%, say it is very important to marry someone Jewish.
- Young adults participate in non-Jewish programs somewhat more than Jewish programs. In the past six months, 56% of young adults have participated in a program sponsored by the Jewish community compared to 64% in non-Jewish programs. Almost all (92%) say they would be at least a little interested in becoming more involved with the local Jewish community.

Seniors

- Seniors constitute 12% of the adult Jewish population. Of all Jewish households, 16% are composed only of senior adults. About one-quarter (24%) of households have at least one household member aged 65 or older.
- About one-third (34%) of Jewish seniors live alone. Half of Jewish seniors (48%) live with other seniors and the remainder, 18%, live with younger people.
- Seniors are more confident in their ability to support themselves through retirement than are their younger peers. Households in which seniors reside are less likely to report living in poverty or near poverty (1%) than the rest of the population.
- Overall, seniors in the Greater Seattle Jewish community report being in good health, with more than half saying that they are in excellent or very good health. Another 15% consider themselves in fair or poor health.

The Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University is a multi-disciplinary research institute dedicated to the study of American Jewry and religious and cultural identity.

The Steinhardt Social Research Institute, hosted at CMJS, is committed to the development and application of innovative approaches to socio-demographic research for the study of Jewish religious and cultural identity.

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