



The 2024 Santa Clara County Jewish Community Study **Building Communal Identity and Developing Strategic Initiatives**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

March 2024

Funded by
Chai House, Inc.

Commissioned by
Jewish Silicon Valley

Conducted by
Rosov Consulting

The Santa Clara County Jewish Community Study, funded by Chai House, Inc. and commissioned by Jewish Silicon Valley, is the first study designed to catalyze Jewish communal partnerships and collective action across the entire county. While the county's Jewish community has traditionally been divided between areas in and around San Jose and areas to the north around Palo Alto and Los Altos, this study has deliberately taken a broader view. It has sought to transcend the traditional divide and begin, instead, to build a Santa Clara County Jewish communal identity and set the foundation for initiating county-wide strategic initiatives, collaborative partnerships, and learning networks.

The study process, which began in the second half of 2022, comprised several distinct components. It started with a series of engagement sessions designed to discover what key communal stakeholders—both professionals and volunteers from various communal organizations—wanted to learn from the study. Following that, three modes of data collection were employed, including an opt-in community-wide survey, focus groups/interviews, and an organizational inventory; maps of the community's physical assets were also developed. The collected data were synthesized, analyzed, and shared through a series of “shareback” sessions with key stakeholders, a process that surfaced a set of fourteen strategic issues that are the focus of this report.

The community-wide survey and organizational inventories were conducted before the October 7, 2023, attacks against Israel and the subsequent Israel-Hamas war. While October 7th and its aftermath are watershed events in Israel and for the United States Jewish community, the study's key findings remain valid and valuable in the post-October 7 world for several reasons. First, the majority of the data collected in the study concern long-standing local issues and structural patterns in the community unrelated to Israel in general and to October 7 specifically, and those issues and patterns will not have changed. Second, while answers to survey questions on antisemitism and Israel might have been different had they been asked after October 7, the study shows that concerns about safety, security, and antisemitism were already evident in the community well before October 7. Third, most of the focus groups and one-on-one interviews were conducted after October 7. The attacks and subsequent events were acknowledged at the beginning of the focus groups and interviews, and they were occasionally mentioned during them, but they were not central to the discussions, again reflecting the fact that the study focused for the most part on local communal issues. Fourth, and perhaps most important, the Jewish community's trajectory is toward greater collaboration and stronger partnerships to address the communal challenges and opportunities the study identified. October 7th and its aftermath made that trajectory more salient than ever, and amplified the need to build on the

communal momentum that the study has set in motion, as we reflect on the community's past, process its present, and turn to shape its future.

The fourteen strategic issues that emerged as the most important from the Santa Clara County Jewish Community Study are divided into two categories: those that focus on specific topics and those that focus on specific groups within the community. In each section, the study revealed where opportunities exist to address challenges.

The topics include:

- Safety and security
- Human service needs
- Community Funding and Programming Priorities
- Barriers to Connection and Participation
- Leadership Pipeline
- Jewish organizations, and
- Israel.

The groups include:

- Children and Teenagers
- Young adults
- Older adults
- Newcomers to Santa Clara County
- Diverse Identity Groups
- Immigrants, and
- The Economically Vulnerable.

Safety and Security: Even before the October 7 attacks on Israel, safety and security loomed large for the Santa Clara County Jewish community, much of it driven by concerns over antisemitism. A very strong majority of Jewish organizations, 91%, reported that they already had security policies in place. When survey respondents were asked how important it is for the Jewish community to fund a series of 29 communal initiatives, combating antisemitism and ensuring the safety and security of local Jewish institutions landed number one and number two, respectively.

Where opportunities exist: convening organizational conversations about safety and security, and addressing parent and teenager concerns about college campus antisemitism.

Human Service Needs: Providing for the human service needs of community members is a critical function of Jewish communal agencies. Survey respondents recognized the importance of this communal responsibility. In the survey question on the importance of funding 29 communal initiatives, human service needs placed fourth, after only combating antisemitism, ensuring the safety and security of local Jewish institutions, and providing programs for Jewish families with young children. Mental health services—for adults and children—were cited far and away as the most common human service need. Looking forward, the most common needs where respondents indicated a desire for Jewish organizational help in the future were for older adult services, including independent living facilities, assisted living facilities, and services to prevent social isolation.

Where opportunities exist: closing gaps in service provision for those in need now; strengthening communication about human service provision in the Jewish community; and providing even more robust older adult services in the future.

Community Funding and Programming Priorities: As noted, combating antisemitism, ensuring the safety and security of local Jewish institutions, supporting Jewish families with young children, and providing human services score highest among survey respondents' funding priorities. A majority of respondents also support programs for several other groups—older adults, teenagers, newcomers to the county, and people with disabilities—as well Jewish childcare, preschool, and early childhood education, and social, recreational and cultural programming. Jewish food and cooking, social and entertainment events, and programming for teenagers (among the parents of teenagers) top the survey respondents' programming interests.

Where opportunities exist: meeting the funding and programming priorities of diverse demographic and identity groups, and attracting more communal participation.

Barriers to Connection and Participation: The two most commonly cited barriers to connection among the survey respondents are a lack of time and finding no appealing programs, events, or activities. A second tier of barriers includes difficulty finding information about Jewish organizations, programs, events, and activities; programs, events, and activities feeling too religious; the cost of joining and participating; and a perceived low value proposition of membership and participation. Focus group participants pointed to other barriers. Those in interfaith relationships or mixed heritage backgrounds cited feelings of not being “Jewish enough” as keeping them from more fully participating in the community. LGBTQ+ participants pointed to discomfort in some more traditional Jewish settings, while participants who identify as Persons of Color noted that even one experience of feeling unwelcome can be a powerful deterrent to future participation. For people with disabilities, both visible and not, physical and social-emotional-behavioral barriers exist. And while cost in and of itself is a barrier for the economically vulnerable, so too are perceived class differences and feelings of being out of place in upscale buildings and facilities.

Where opportunities exist: building a centralized online information portal; introducing concierge services for individualized information; and promoting a culture of welcoming for diverse community members.

Leadership Pipeline: the issue of the leadership pipeline reflects communal concerns over leadership development specifically and, more generally, over communal norms around volunteering and donating to Jewish causes. Survey data seem to corroborate the concerns. Only one-third of survey respondents agreed there is a strong sense that community members should donate to Jewish organizations and causes, and just one-fifth agreed there is a strong sense they should volunteer for Jewish organizations and causes. Similarly, only one-fifth of respondents agreed that there is a clear and understandable way to get involved in community leadership. Among young adults themselves (age 40 and younger), the survey numbers are similar. In a shareback session, emerging community leaders emphasized that many young single adults do not perceive the community as serving their interests or needs. Starting to address those needs and interests, they said, must come before asking them to take on volunteer and philanthropic leadership roles.

Where opportunities exist: addressing the interests and needs of young adults, and developing and implementing leadership development programs.

Jewish Organizations: Santa Clara County Jewish organizations are diverse in terms of budgets, staff, and constituents. Organizations rely on numerous sources for revenue and have multiple

expenditure obligations. Looking at all organizations combined, the top revenue sources include membership and program fees, tuition, fundraising, and philanthropic grants; rent, endowment income, and government funding are much less common. Not surprisingly, the top expenditure is staff compensation (salaries and benefits). A second tier of expenditures includes direct program expenses; facilities maintenance; mortgage or rent payments; and financial assistance and scholarships for members and participants.

Among the top challenges facing Jewish organizations is staff recruitment and retention. More than three-quarters of the organizations said it is challenging to identify and recruit qualified staff, and more than half said it is challenging to retain qualified staff. Recruitment and retention challenges are reflected in half the organizations reporting they are understaffed. Fewer than half of organizations have implemented formal strategic priorities or policies that address DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) for various stakeholder groups.

Where opportunities exist: fostering greater organizational collaboration across shared services, shared spaces, and safety and security; encouraging organizations to share experiences and guidance around strategic planning, governance, and DEI policies.

Israel: General support for and connections to Israel are strong across numerous survey items, including concern about Israel's security; recognition of Israel's vital role in the Jewish people's future; and pride in Israel's accomplishment. However, support and connections are complicated by concerns about some policies of the Israeli government, Israel's upholding its human rights values, and the rejection of the term "Zionist" by many community members. Talking about Israel can be complicated, too: just two-fifths of respondents feel safe all or most of the time expressing opinions about Israel to other Jews in the county.

Where opportunities exist: creating safe spaces for communal conversations about Israel, and strengthening ties to Israel through community trips.

Children and Teenagers: The organizational landscape serving children and teenagers in Santa Clara County is robust. Twelve of the organizations in the inventory are youth-serving organizations (YSOs) specifically, and more than three-quarters of all organizations serve children or teens in some way. Approximately half of all survey respondents enroll their children in formal Jewish educational experiences. For those who do, the top factor in their decision-making is the overall quality of the program. The Jewish content and Jewish environment are important to a strong majority of parents, but they are less important than other factors. For many people, cost is a constant consideration, both for early childhood education and later when it comes to full-time school. In focus groups, both parents of teenagers and teenagers themselves emphasized

the need to offer many shorter opportunities for Jewish engagement that can accommodate teenagers' busy schedules and that Jewish teens can bring their non-Jewish friends to.

Where opportunities exist: supporting teenagers through programming that is inclusive, nonjudgmental and is open to non-Jewish friends, and that integrates volunteer hours, work experience, and internships.

Young Adults: Community members ages 18-34 face a set of distinctive challenges. Compared to older respondents, young adults are the least likely to feel very or somewhat connected to a Jewish community in Santa Clara County. Top barriers to feeling more connected include difficulty finding information, time, lack of appealing programs, and costs. Participants in the shareback session with emerging young leaders noted their feelings that they are often invisible to communal organizations, especially when they are not married or partnered and/or do not have children. Young adults are also much more likely than others to report personal experiences with antisemitism and to report needs for mental health services. Despite these challenges, or perhaps because of them, young adults are the most likely to express an interest in being more connected to a Jewish community, with a strong preference for in-person rather than online engagement.

Where opportunities exist: creating opportunities for connections especially for those who are not married or partnered and/or do not have children, and addressing heightened experiences with antisemitism and mental health challenges.

Older Adults: Community members prioritize the well-being of older adults. Older adults are among the top groups that survey respondents support for communal funding. In addition, the top three services that respondents want Jewish organizations to provide should they or someone they care for need them are all related to older adult services: independent living facilities, assisted living facilities, and services to prevent social isolation for older adults. In turn, older adult survey respondents, defined as those ages 65 and older, feel more connected to a Jewish community in Santa Clara County and are more likely to donate to Jewish causes and to serve on boards, committees, and task forces than their younger counterparts. About ten percent of all respondents reported older adult service needs, either for themselves or someone they care for, in the year before the survey. Human service needs become substantially more common at ages 80 and older, a population that may need additional resources from the community to age with dignity and as much independence as possible.

Where opportunities exist: providing offsite and satellite programming, and increasing human service provision to adults ages 80 and older.

Newcomers to Santa Clara County: Like young adults, newcomers face a distinct set of challenges related to settling into a new area and community. Not surprisingly, newcomers in the survey report feeling less strongly connected to a Jewish community than others, and a smaller share of them than others belong to synagogues and donate and volunteer for Jewish causes. They are also less likely to have simply heard about most Jewish organizations in Santa Clara County. Among the top barriers newcomers cited to greater communal connections are time, cost, lack of information, and being new to the area. Newcomers to the county also disproportionately report they have been economically vulnerable in the past three years and have needs around financial issues, including employment, affordable housing, financial planning, and short-term financial support.

Where opportunities exist: creating a centralized online information portal with a dedicated section for newcomers; offering help with economic challenges; and customizing programming to meet newcomer interests.

Diverse Identity Groups: Like American society generally, Jewish communities are increasingly diverse. In the Santa Clara County Jewish community survey, diverse groups of respondents—those who identify as Jews of Color, LGBTQ+, in interfaith marriages or partnerships, or as having a disability—vary across several measures of connection to Jewish community, including in how much they seek Jewish community with others who share their identities, how comfortable they feel in Jewish organizational spaces, how welcoming they perceive Jewish communities are, and whether they feel the community provides meaningful opportunities to them. Respondents who identify as Jews of Color score highest on all of these measures, while LGBTQ+ respondents score lowest on all except the desire to have Jewish community with others who share their identity. Interfaith respondents and those who identify as having a disability tend to fall in the middle on these measures.

Where opportunities exist: building a culture of welcoming to diverse identity groups, and addressing the heightened sense of feeling uncomfortable and unwelcomed among respondents who identify as LGBTQ+ and as having a disability.

Russian-speaking Jews and Israelis: respondents in these two largest Jewish immigrant groups in Santa Clara County share several similarities. About half of each group lives in the northwest part of the county. The median number of years in the county for each group is about 10 (slightly more for Israelis, slightly less for RSJs). Both groups are highly educated, with 70% of Israelis and 80% of RSJs having a college degree or more, and yet despite their high levels of education, both groups have slightly elevated rates of economic vulnerability compared to other survey respondents. There are also differences between them. More Israeli than RSJ respondents say it

is important to have a Jewish community with others who share their origin; in addition, Israelis report feeling more connected to a Jewish community than RSJs do, and Israelis are more communally involved in terms of donating, volunteering, and joining Jewish organizations as members. But not all is different between them when it comes to Jewish connections; they are similar to each other in feeling comfortable in Jewish organizational spaces and in feeling that Jewish communities in the county are welcoming to them.

Where opportunities exist: bringing both RSJs and Israelis into closer connection with communal organizations.

The Economically Vulnerable: Economic adversity has numerous negative consequences. Compared to respondents who have not faced economic distress, economically vulnerable respondents are more likely to report being unable to pay for car repairs, rent/mortgage, medical care, food, and utility bills. They assess their family life, social life, and physical health more poorly, and they have substantially larger gaps in accessing needed human services. Their Jewish communal participation also suffers: they are, for example, substantially more likely to report that financial costs have prevented them from participating in Jewish programs, joining synagogues and other Jewish organizations, traveling to Israel, purchasing kosher food, participating in holiday celebrations, and donating to Jewish causes. These negative outcomes extend to children as well. Economically vulnerable respondents are far more likely than others to report financial costs have prevented them from having their children participate in nearly every kind of Jewish educational experience during childhood, from early childhood education through teenage travel to Israel.

Where opportunities exist: meeting the needs of the economically vulnerable through financial assistance, better access to human services, and strengthening communal connections, all while maintaining the dignity of those in need.

Conclusion: This does not mark the completion of the community's work, but rather serves as a bridge to the next phase of work. As currently envisioned, the next major phase of work will entail the development of a theory of change, the design and implementation of strategic initiatives, and the selection of key progress indicators to track desired outputs and outcomes and measure impact. That process will require organizational collaboration and will contribute to the establishment of a communal learning network that is responsive to changes and growth within the community from this point onward.

In the meantime, some of the opportunities noted in the Executive Summary may already be actionable. Funders and organizations should feel empowered to use the data provided in the full report and study materials as a foundation for helping to determine funding priorities, as well as for informing their current practice and strategic planning. As they do so, we encourage them to share what they learn with professional and lay colleagues across Santa Clara County's Jewish communal sector.