



ONWARD ISRAEL COHORT V

A DEEP DIVE INTO

ONWARD'S IMPACT,

THREE YEARS LATER

INTRODUCTION

Since its launch in 2012, Onward Israel has brought nearly 10,000 Jewish young adults to Israel for resume-building experiences during the summer months. Over this period of time, our team at Rosov Consulting has partnered with Onward Israel to explore the program's immediate and longer-term impact with regard to participants' engagement with Israel and Jewish life, as well as their professional and personal growth. This year, for the second time, we engaged in a three-year longitudinal study of Onward participants. Two years ago, we focused on Cohort III; this time, we focus on Cohort V, individuals who participated in the program in summer 2016. We have followed these individuals over the course of three years, checking in with them at multiple intervals to better understand how their experience on Onward has contributed to their personal and professional trajectories. Our analysis probes the extent to which Onward's immediate impact has been maintained over time, particularly after most alumni have graduated from college and entered the working world. In addition, since this is the second time we've engaged in this kind of research with Onward participants, there is an opportunity to assess the validity of our previous findings and explore similarities and differences between the two cohorts.

METHODOLOGY

The findings discussed in this report are based on a synthesis of two sources of data:

Quantitative Survey Data: Cohort V's North American contingent consisted of 1,134 participants. We surveyed these individuals two weeks before their Onward program, two weeks after the program's end, and ten months after the program's end. There were 299 respondents who completed all three surveys. We then distributed the three-year post-program survey to these individuals and received 73 responses. The quantitative findings included in this report are based on the data we collected from these 73 alumni who responded at all four time intervals. The survey instrument included similar items to those from previous surveys in order to assess the extent of change or stability over time. As in the past, the statistical technique of factor analysis was used to identify key dimensions ("factors") in relation to which Onward's impact could be assessed.¹ The data were analyzed using SPSS quantitative analysis software.

Qualitative Interview Data: In-depth interviews were conducted with 14 Cohort V alumni who had volunteered to take part in a further conversation. The interview questions focused on alumni's professional and communal involvement, current engagement with Israel and Jewish life, and reflections on if and how Onward has contributed to where they are today in these respects. The sample of interviewees was intentionally designed to include alumni who participated in different types of Onward programs and who currently are involved in a range of professions and outside interests. Interview data were analyzed using NVivo qualitative analysis software.

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¹Factor analysis is a statistical technique that reduces a large number of variables into a smaller set of variables ("factors"), making the data more manageable and easier to understand. Each factor is composed of variables exhibiting similar response patterns. A list of the factors generated by the analysis and the items of which they are comprised is included in Appendix A. A repeated measures ANOVA statistical test was used to compare and assess significant change between factor scores from four time intervals: two weeks pre-program, two weeks post-program, ten months post-program, and three years post-program.

CHARACTERISTICS OF COHORT V ALUMNI

Exhibit 1 displays various characteristics of the 73 alumni included in our analysis. As depicted in the table, these alumni are 23 years old (on average). More than two-thirds of them are working full-time or close to full-time. Most of the survey respondents identify as Conservative or Reform, and less than half had previously attended Jewish day school. Additionally, more female alumni completed the survey than male alumni. For the most part, these characteristics were found to be statistically similar to the larger sample of those who had completed the pre-program survey (n = 1,119), with the one exception being that the sample of respondents to the pre-program survey had been more gender balanced.

On the whole, the characteristic composition of these Cohort V alumni is fairly similar to that of the Cohort III alumni involved in the previous three-year post-program study. A side-by-side comparison of the two groups is included in Appendix B.

Exhibit 1: Characteristics of Cohort V alumni (n = 73)

Average Current Age		23
Gender	Female	67%
	Male	33%
Employment Status	Working full-time	68%
	Working part-time	18%
	Not working	14%
Visited Israel before Onward		86%
Prior Participation in Jewish Education Experiences	Supplementary school	64%
	Youth group	63%
	Overnight camp	54%
	Day school	45%
Jewish Denomination	Conservative	34%
	Reform	31%
	"Just Jewish"	23%
	Orthodox/Modern Orthodox	12%

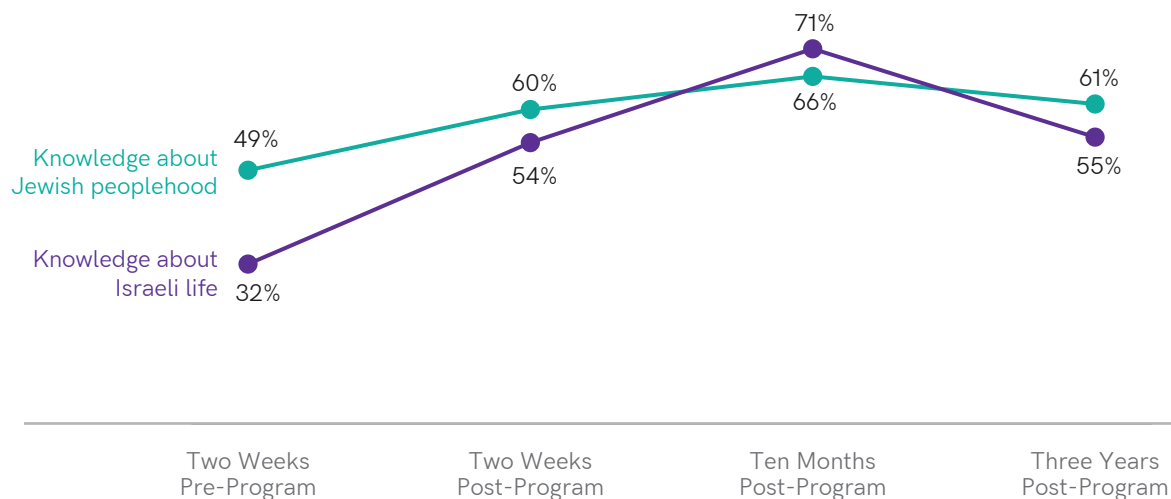
FINDINGS

Engaging with Israel and Jewish Life

As with our previous studies, we tend to consider Onward’s impact on participants’ engagement with Israel and Jewish life according to three dimensions: the acquisition of knowledge, development of attitudes, and formation of behaviors. We presume, in line with a well-established social-psychological principle, that people’s ideas (what they know) shift first, followed by their attitudes, and then the ways in which they behave. These three outcomes build on one another when part of a process of change.²

When it comes to Cohort V alumni’s knowledge about Israeli life and Jewish peoplehood, the survey data in Exhibit 2 show that Onward’s immediate impact is maintained three years after the program. In each of these domains, more than half of alumni see themselves as having had a deeper understanding of Israeli life or Jewish peoplehood shortly after their Onward experience, and this remains true three years later.

Exhibit 2: Alumni with “high” level of knowledge about Israeli life and Jewish peoplehood³



When it comes to Onward’s impact on attitudes—either in terms of alumni’s emotional attachment to Israel or connection to Jewish identity—the survey results are less notable, as depicted in Exhibit 3. First, we observe somewhat of an anomaly with regard to alumni’s emotional attachment to Israel. With previous cohorts, we tended to see a significant increase in alumni’s emotional attachment to Israel immediately following the program, but in the case of Cohort V, alumni’s scores are stable both shortly after the program as well as three years later. As illustrated in Exhibit 3, slightly more than half of respondents begin Onward with a strong connection to Israel, and this is maintained three years later.

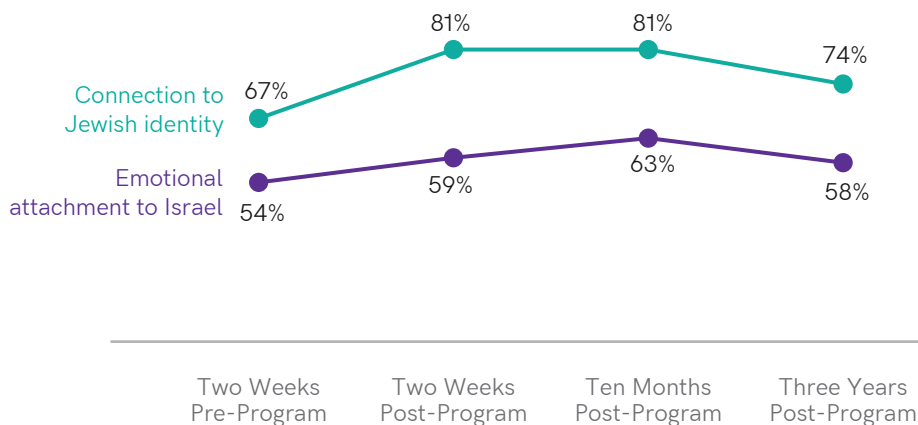
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²David Myers, *Social Psychology* (McGraw-Hill, 2013).

³Knowledge-related factor scores were classified as “high-scoring” if they were above 5 on a scale of 1 to 7.

In terms of alumni's connection to Jewish identity, we have consistently seen over the years that Onward participants begin the program with pretty high scores in this area, and as a result, there is less room—or perhaps less of a personal need or desire—to grow in this domain. While we initially see a small uptick in the percentage of alumni with a strong connection to their Jewish identity, three years later we see that the survey results are fairly consistent with those from the start.

Exhibit 3: Alumni with “high” level of connection to Israel and Jewish identity⁴



While the quantitative findings don't reveal much change with regard to alumni's connection to Israel and Jewish identity in the aggregate, qualitative data shed light on Onward's impact in more personal terms. For example, several of the alumni we interviewed shared that their Onward experience deepened their concern and love for Israel. They particularly reminisced about Onward's educational day trips (now known as Onward's "Israel Now" days) as being instrumental in shaping how they currently relate to Israel and how they perceive the country. Climbing up Masada or standing in front of the Kotel created meaningful opportunities and cultivated a more spiritual and emotional connection to Israel, while visiting the Bahai Gardens in Haifa and the Nitzana Village in the Negev prompted alumni to gain a deeper understanding of different facets of Israeli society. For alumni whose time on Onward was their first-ever Israel experience, these day trips transformed Israel from being a "mysterious" far-away land that *others* would occasionally talk about to something much more personal, tangible, and relatable. Alumni shared how valuable it is to have personal memories of this kind, and how these memories

"Before Onward, I had only been back [to Israel] once, in 8th grade, so I didn't have a lot of memories or connections—but now I have a lot of personal memories and connection that make it more real. I can talk about real humans and places, and my experiences taking transportation, living in [a specific] neighborhood and getting out of my comfort zone around that."

"I definitely would say I didn't identify as a Zionist beforehand and now it's one of the first few words I use to describe myself. Onward was the catalyst of experiencing Israel not as a tourist."

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⁴Attitudinal factor scores were classified as "high-scoring" if they were above 5.5 on a scale of 1 to 7.

play a pivotal role when they engage in conversations about Israel or encourage their peers to visit the country.

In addition to Onward's day trips, alumni emphasized their day-to-day living experience—or, "living like a local"—as a highly impactful aspect of their time in Israel. The semi-structured nature of the program, which encouraged independence and included the freedom to explore the country, laid the foundation for many alumni to develop a personal connection with Israel in a kind of coming-of-age experience. Ordinary experiences, like grocery shopping and riding the train, opened a window on Israeli life that deepened alumni's personal familiarity with the country and in some cases piqued their desire for more, wanting to spend more time in Israel.

Returning to Israel

In the three-year post-program survey, nearly half (47%) of alumni indicated that they had returned to Israel at least once since participating in Onward. This finding is very similar to what we observed with Cohort III. The most popular reasons for visiting Israel were for vacation purposes and/or to visit family or friends. Of those who had returned, approximately a quarter had participated in organized programs shorter than four months, while a fifth had participated in longer-term programs, such as Masa. Some of the alumni we interviewed shared that Onward motivated them and gave them the confidence to return to Israel to participate in a longer program, and in some cases, to even lead a program, such as Birthright. Nearly all alumni who responded to the survey (96%) indicated that they plan to visit Israel again in the future.

Through "living like a local," several alumni noted that Onward provided an opportunity for them to encounter Jewish life—and specifically Jewish rituals—in a new way. By comparing and contrasting themselves with others, alumni broadened their understanding of what it means to be Jewish. For many alumni, Onward allowed for them to experience Shabbat, prayer, and kosher food for the first time. They had conversations with their peers about religion, and, through living together, they were exposed to different ways in which others express their Judaism. In addition, alumni were taken by how

"Onward gave me a much more in-depth view of what daily life in Israel looks like. Having to wait in line or take care of errands—the reality of living there was really important in forming my relationship. It's given me a much deeper appreciation of the country."

"It gave me more confidence to live and work in Israel. I'm hoping to do research in the Technion next year, working with an Israeli professor there and speaking Hebrew. The confidence and desire to do that really stems from Onward—because now I've done it once before. It's a lot less scary to think of moving to Haifa and studying AI and speaking Hebrew... If before Onward I had a desire to work and partner with Israel, I now have the tools to think how to do that and what that might look like [because of Onward]."

Jewish life manifests itself so differently in Israel, compared to back home; they were struck, for example, by the extent to which Jewish culture and ritual are organically part of Israeli day-to-day life. In particular, alumni shared how inspired they were that the calendar year in Israel is built around the Jewish holidays, as opposed to the US, where these days often clash with university classes or work commitments. This kind of realization has encouraged alumni, over time, to be more intentional about how they approach Shabbat and Jewish holidays, and to consider how to incorporate Jewish rituals into their general routine.

GETTING INVOLVED

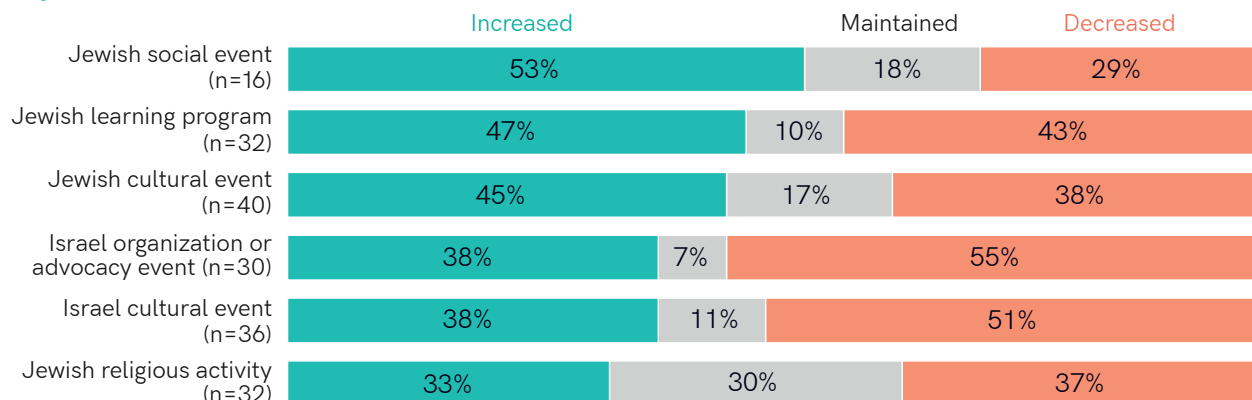
When we explore the kinds of Jewish or Israel-related activities that alumni are involved in three years after Onward, we see an important distinction between involvement that is more public or collective in nature and that which is more individual or private in nature. The survey tends to focus on the former, asking alumni whether they are involved in Jewish communal or Israel-related organizations, and asking how often they attend certain kinds of events (e.g., Jewish learning programs, Jewish social events, Israel advocacy events). The interviews complement this through focusing on how alumni have been personally engaging with Israel and Jewish life in their own time or from the comfort of their own homes.

While nearly two-thirds (63%) of alumni indicated in the survey that they are currently involved with Jewish or Israel-related communal organizations in some way, our interviews revealed that the extent of involvement can vary greatly from membership, to attending events a few times a year, to actively planning events. Many alumni shared that they had become increasingly involved in Jewish life on campus (e.g., Hillel) upon returning from Onward, but that their engagement had dwindled since graduating—both as a result of there being less opportunities available to them (and therefore needing to expend more time and effort to seek out such opportunities), and due to the time constraints associated with being young professionals who are trying to prove themselves in the working world. Indeed, the survey data show that on the whole, alumni's involvement in various public-facing Jewish and Israel events tends to decline over time. However, there is a subset of alumni—those who had been minimally involved in Jewish life prior to Onward—of which between a third and a half had become more involved over time, as shown in Exhibit 5. Given that Onward aspires to attract individuals who come from lesser-engaged backgrounds, these data carry some promising potential.

Exhibit 4: Onward's contribution to alumni's involvement in Jewish and Israel-related organizations



Exhibit 5: Lesser-engaged alumni’s involvement in Jewish and Israel-related activities, 3 years after Onward⁵

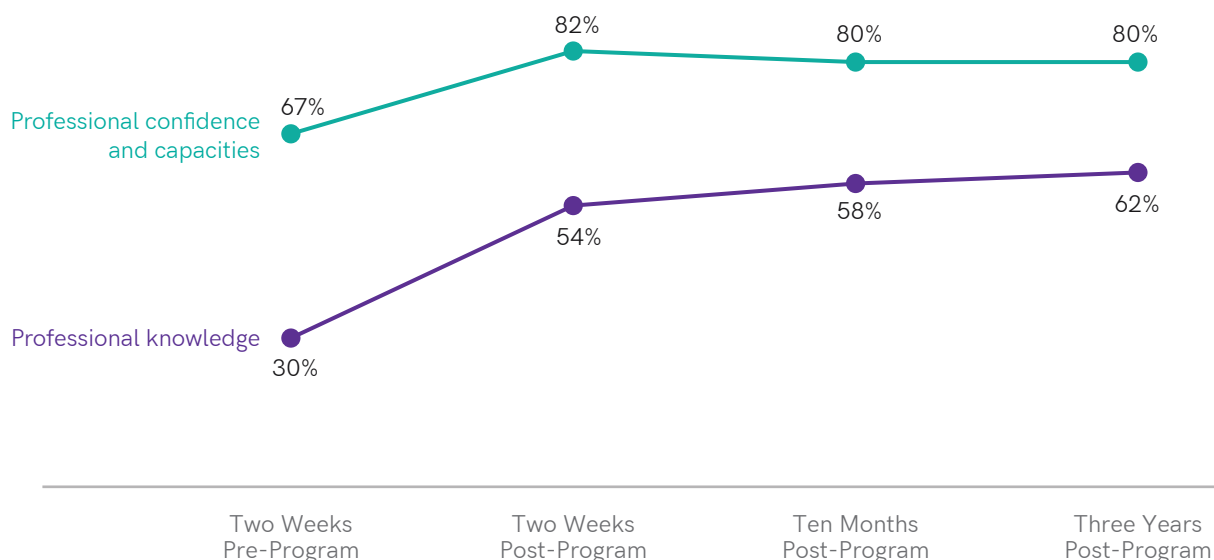


While alumni shared that it can be challenging to find meaningful ways to be involved with Israel or Jewish communal life as a young professional, a number of them pointed to more personal ways of being involved. Some spoke about organizing a Shabbat dinner for their peers, taking part in conversations about Israel with their friends or family, or following news about Israel—in fact, with regard to this latter point, more than half (58%) of alumni in the survey reported that they follow news about Israel in social media. These data points demonstrate that alumni are building upon the deepened knowledge and sense of connection that they cultivated on Onward in their own individual ways.

Professional Growth

Although Cohort V alumni may cite their professional work as a limiting factor in their involvement in Jewish and Israel-related communal life, for many of these alumni, their time on Onward has had a significant impact on their professional growth and has been instrumental in fueling their professional trajectories. Exhibit 6 shows that Onward’s immediate impact on alumni’s professional knowledge, confidence, and

Exhibit 6: Alumni with “high” level of professional knowledge, confidence, and capacities⁶



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⁵ Alumni were classified as “lesser engaged” if their pre-program scores for these items were under 5 on a scale of 1 to 7.

⁶ Professional knowledge scores were classified as “high” if they were above 5 on a scale of 1 to 7; professional confidence and capacity scores were classified as “high” if they were above 5.5 on a scale of 1 to 7.

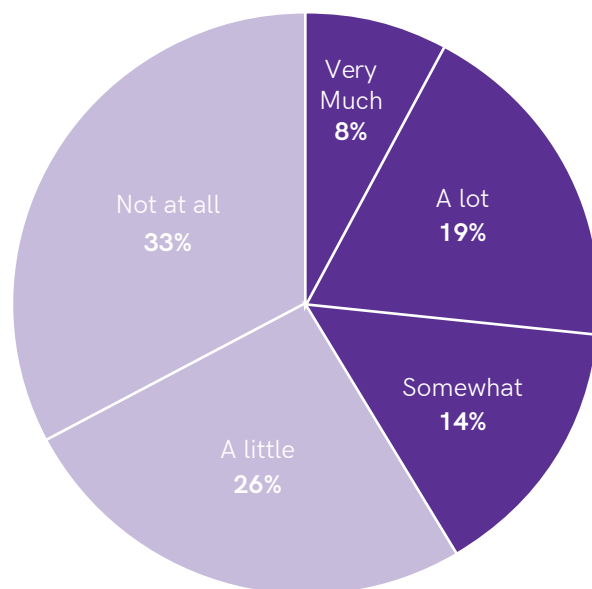
capacities has been maintained three years after the program. Three years after Onward, more than 60% of alumni see themselves as having a high level of professional knowledge, and 80% as having strong professional confidence and capacities.

The survey data indicate that the most popular field among alumni is business, with slightly more than a fifth (21%) working in the field. A close second is the arts (19%), with engineering or high-tech also popular among alumni.

As illustrated in Exhibit 7, a quarter of alumni report that their current professional work is “a lot” or “very much” tied to their Onward experience. Those working in medicine/physical health, engineering/high-tech, and Jewish communal work cited the strongest link between their current professional work and their Onward experience three years prior.

Exhibit 7: Onward’s contribution to alumni’s chosen professional fields

To what extent is your current professional work tied to your Onward Israel experience?



In our interviews with alumni, many reflected on their Onward experience as a chance to “get their hands dirty” and learn-by-doing, an invaluable addition to their time immersed in classes and lectures throughout the academic year. For some alumni, the internship confirmed the professional path they had already set out on and allowed them to further build up their resume, deepen their field-

“I went on Onward during my sophomore year of college. I wasn’t thinking of my career that much until I got to Israel. [The program] got me thinking and dreaming of where I’d want to be in the future and starting to plan that in my head. You can only learn so much back in a classroom in St Louis, but then visiting startups in Tel Aviv and hearing stories from entrepreneurs who have succeeded or from others who failed—that was really meaningful. It’s the reason I majored in entrepreneurship.”

specific knowledge, and strengthen relevant skills. For other alumni, the internship exposed them to new kinds of interests and inspired them to re-route, changing their intended career path and college major. These alumni described a certain “aha experience” that might not have occurred without the opportunities they received during Onward.

In both cases, our interviews with alumni demonstrated how much Onward served as an eye-opening introduction to what it means to conduct oneself with professionalism—how to operate in an office setting, be part of a professional community, and be held accountable for one’s work as part of a team. Furthermore, alumni shared that learning these professional skills against the backdrop of a foreign country, culture, and language added even more value and profundity to the experience.

Formative Friendships

Beyond Onward’s impact on Cohort V alumni’s professional development and engagement with Israel and Jewish life, a key finding that emerged from our conversations with alumni was the friendships they formed while on Onward. Three years later, alumni spoke about these friendships as one of the—if not the—most meaningful, lasting elements of their Onward experience. These friendships were formed during a time when alumni were not in their familiar, comfortable environment, whether it was their first time in Israel, their first time in an office setting, or their first time living with Jewish peers. As a result, for many alumni, the connections created during this novel time period have continued to be important to this day. Some alumni even spoke about participating in Jewish or Israel-related activities with their friends from Onward following the program, suggesting that the added social value of Onward could further strengthen other areas of impact.

SUMMARY AND QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

The quantitative and qualitative data gathered from Cohort V alumni demonstrate Onward's sustained impact on their professional growth, connection to Israel, and relationship to Jewish identity three years after the program. On a practical level, Cohort V alumni's regular involvement with Israel and Jewish life decreased with time, particularly with regard to attending organized events and programs—this is similar to what we observed previously with Cohort III. This decline has resulted both from a lack of opportunity and time, as well as from alumni being somewhat reticent to seek out such experiences.

While our previous study suggested that the Jewish community at-large may want to consider how to better offer avenues for engagement that speak to this population, this time around, we wonder if Onward itself—and specifically its contribution to alumni's social capital—may provide a window of opportunity. Several alumni spoke about the meaningful connections they formed with their Onward peers—which have still remained strong three years later—and how they have gone on to participate in Jewish and Israel-related activities with these peers.

Perhaps there is an opportunity to capitalize on Onward's alumni network and the social ties among alumni in order to spread the word about communal events and encourage involvement. An example of this could be an event that includes a "Bring an Onward Friend" campaign, where registration is discounted when an Onward alum attends with other Onward alumni. It seems like the Onward alumni community could indeed serve as a comfortable, accessible entry point into the larger Jewish community for these individuals, inspiring greater engagement with Israel and Jewish life, and further building upon the initial impact created by Onward.

APPENDIX A

Program Outcomes - Factors and Items

Emotional Attachment to Israel	I feel a strong connection to Israel and Israelis
	I feel at home in Israel
	Caring about Israel is a very important part of my being a Jew
	I feel proud of Israel
	I can articulate to others what Israel means to me
	I feel a sense of responsibility to Israel and Israelis
Knowledge about Israel	I know about day-to-day life in Israel
	I know about diversity in Israel
Connection to Jewish Identity	I have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people
	I feel connected to other Jews around the world
	I feel connected to other Jews at home or at school
	I am interested in learning more about Judaism and my Jewish heritage
	I feel connected to Judaism and my Jewish heritage
Knowledge about Jewish Peoplehood	I know about different ways of being Jewish
	I know about Judaism and my Jewish heritage
	I know about Jewish communities around the world
Professional Competency and Confidence	I manage myself well in the workplace in terms of problem-solving, taking initiative, etc.
	I am confident in my ability to present myself to an employer
	I am confident in my resume
	I have skills relevant to my professional field of interest
	I have a clear sense of my academic and/or career goals
	I have the ability and know-how to network in my professional field of interest
	I am comfortable in a cross-cultural working environment
	I feel confident in professional settings
	It is important to me to succeed in my studies/career
	I can work well with people from different cultural backgrounds
Professional Knowledge	I know about what it takes to succeed in my area of professional interest
	I know about the day-to-day activities related to my area of professional interest

APPENDIX B

Characteristics of Cohort III and Cohort V Alumni

		Cohort III Alumni (n = 129)	Cohort V Alumni (n = 73)
Average Current Age		24	23
Gender	Female	63%	67%
	Male	37%	33%
Employment Status	Working full-time	69%	68%
	Working part-time	17%	18%
	Not working	14%	14%
Prior Participation in Jewish Education Experiences	Supplementary school	73%	64%
	Youth group	62%	63%
	Overnight camp	63%	54%
	Day school	42%	45%
Jewish Denomination	Conservative	39%	34%
	Reform	25%	31%
	"Just Jewish"	25%	23%
	Orthodox/Modern Orthodox	11%	12%



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