

The Changing Jewish Landscape in Boston

Adapted from an article by former President of Congregation Kehillath Israel, David Williams

The 2015 CJP population study documents the re-urbanization of the Jewish population, a decline in the number of people identifying with a specific denomination, and the desire for strong engagement with the State of Israel. The study provides new insights as we flesh out our strategy, and challenges us to do our part to help shape the community of the future and to reach a larger audience.

The study's greatest innovation is an Index of Jewish Engagement, which measures concrete behaviors associated with Jewish living, including family holiday celebrations, ritual practices, cultural activities and organizational participation. These behaviors are then used to identify five different groups within the population: Immersed, Cultural, Affiliated, Familial, and Minimally Involved. The groupings are meant to be more relevant than the traditional method of describing Jews as Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist.

Key findings and insights:

- The Jewish population of Greater Boston is growing, and after decades of migration to the suburbs, a re-urbanization is occurring, especially among younger adults. That means a growing population near our location in Coolidge Corner.
- We proudly estimate that nearly 1000 people attend our larger events, such as High Holy Days. But with 250,000 Jews in Greater Boston that means we reached less than one percent of the population.
- About 44,000 households are members of synagogues, which puts our share in that category at less than one percent. That should make us feel humble, but it also demonstrates room for substantial growth.
 - Re-urbanization is occurring in Brookline, Brighton and Newton. But there is at least as much growth of the Jewish population in Cambridge, Somerville and Central Boston. These growth areas are not as well served by synagogues, and we can consciously include them in our plans, especially since they are easily reachable by public transportation and new modes such as “pop-up” shuttle services.
- People are searching for meaning rather than identifying so specifically with a single movement. This, too, is an opportunity for us to share our meaningful services and warm, unpretentious community with a wider audience.