

June 25, 2020

To: Ilan Wagner, President and CEO, Onward Israel

From: The Rosov Consulting Team

Subject: Onward Israel Cohort VII, 10 Months Later: Reviewing Alumni and Comparison Group Data

Overview

Over the past eight years, our team at Rosov Consulting has partnered with Onward Israel in both short-term and long-term evaluation work, exploring the program's impact on participants' relationship to Israel and Jewish life, professional development, and personal growth. Our long-term research has included surveying and/or interviewing alumni at various intervals following the program, including 10 months, three years, and five years later. In particular, our work with Cohort VII—individuals who participated in Onward Israel in Summer 2018—included an unprecedented dimension: surveying a comparison group and following them over time.

While the data collected over the years demonstrate that Onward's impact on participants is maintained with the passage of time, until this point we have not had a point of comparison in relation to which we can determine the true contribution of the program. Our work with Cohort VII and its comparison group (individuals who applied to the program but chose not to participate) has now afforded this opportunity.

Methodology

Cohort VII consisted of 2,208 participants. There were an additional 1,274 individuals who had applied to take part in the program but then withdrew their application. During May–June 2018, we distributed a pre-program survey to participants, exploring their demographic profiles and knowledge; attitudes; and behaviors related to Israel, Jewish life, and professional interests and capacities. We then distributed this survey (with slight modifications as needed) to the group of individuals who had withdrawn their application, turning to them as a “comparison group.” We received 1,803 responses from participants (82% response rate) and 213 responses from the comparison group (17% response rate; a fair proportion considering their lack of obligation to Onward).

Cohort VII participants received a post-program survey in August–September 2018, which garnered 1,043 responses (47% response rate). Of these participants, 953 had also completed the pre-program survey. During June–July 2019, we distributed a 10-month post-program survey to these individuals and a similar survey to the 213 comparison group members. We received 227 responses from Onward alumni (24% response rate) and 58 responses from the comparison group (27% response rate).

Our analysis is based on the data we collected from these 227 alumni and 58 comparison group members. Using the statistical technique of factor analysis, we were able to identify and explore key outcomes areas (or “factors”).¹ Given the small size of the comparison group—both in absolute terms and relative to the sample of alumni—we are limited in drawing statistically significant conclusions about the comparison group’s change over time. Therefore, when interpreting the data, we have found greater value in focusing on the trends being observed (i.e., noticeable increases or decreases over time) in order to understand the relationship between the two groups, rather than to solely rely on significance testing.

Characteristics of the Survey Respondents

Ahead of assessing the extent of change over time among Cohort VII alumni and the comparison group, it is important to understand their respective profiles in terms of general demographics and Jewish background. A breakdown of these characteristics is displayed in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1: Characteristics of the Survey Respondents

		Cohort VII Alumni (n=227)	Comparison Group (n=58)
Gender	Female	66%	72%
	Male	34%	28%
Class year at the time of applying to Onward	Freshmen	21%	25%
	Sophomores	42%	32%
	Juniors	22%	27%
	Seniors	11%	5%
	Post-Grads	4%	11%
Identifying as Jewish		97%	95%
Jewish denomination*	Conservative	32%	29%
	Reform	29%	15%
	Just Jewish	18%	20%
	Orthodox	17%	29%
	Other	4%	7%
Visited Israel prior to applying to Onward*		84%	95%
Prior participation in Jewish educational experiences*	More Participation	26%	46%
	Less Participation	74%	54%

* Denotes areas of significant difference between the two groups

¹ Factor 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 composed is included in the Appendix. A repeated measures ANOVA statistical test was used to compare and assess significant change between factor scores between each of the relevant time intervals, $p < 0.05$.

The following summary highlights similarities and differences between the two groups:

Gender: Within both groups, approximately two-thirds of respondents identify as female. This is consistent with our previous studies of Onward alumni.

Class year: As we have observed in the past, most Onward participants apply to the program during their sophomore or junior year of college. Individuals who are nearing the end of their college career—or have already completed college—are less interested in the program. We generally observe this, too, among the comparison group, although it seems that the comparison group tends to consist of slightly older applicants. (More than 10% of the comparison group had already completed college at the time of applying to the program. This may have been a reason for ultimately withdrawing their application, if they had felt that the program was geared more toward those who are still mid-college.)

Jewish identity: Nearly all of the alumni and comparison group respondents identify as Jewish. More than half of the alumni identify as Conservative or Reform, with less than a fifth identifying as Orthodox. In contrast, less than half of the comparison group identify as Conservative or Reform, while close to a third identify as Orthodox. This difference was found to be statistically significant.

Prior visits to Israel: This is also an area of significant difference between alumni and the comparison group. While the vast majority of alumni (84%) had visited Israel prior to Onward, an even higher proportion of the comparison group had done so, with nearly all respondents (95%) having visited Israel ahead of applying to the program.

Prior participation in Jewish educational experiences: When we assess respondents' prior participation in Jewish day school, overnight camp, youth group, and supplementary school, we observe the most significant difference between alumni and the comparison group. Nearly half of the comparison group had taken part in these kinds of educational experiences—Jewish day school in particular—for a few years, while only a quarter of alumni had done so. (This, too, could have been a reason for individuals in the comparison group withdrawing their application. Having come from a more Jewishly engaged background, perhaps they had been more interested in a program with a heavier focus on Jewish content.)

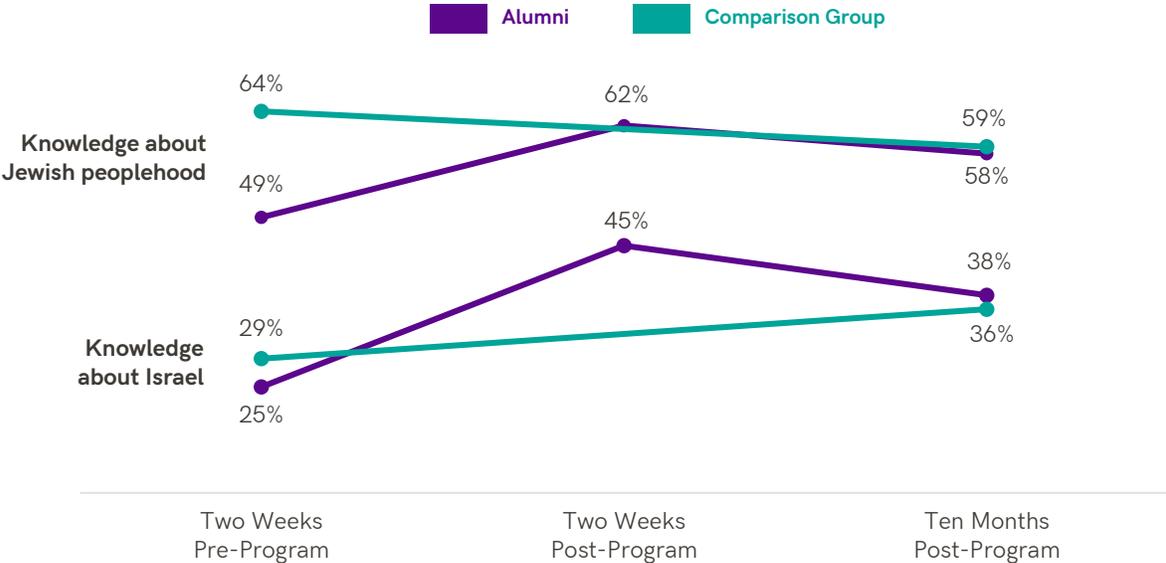
Taken together, these data demonstrate that while the alumni and comparison group are mostly similar in regard to gender and age, the comparison group clearly had more Jewishly intense backgrounds, with more years of Jewish schooling and time in Israel under their belts. This finding has important implications when interpreting and comparing the data from the two groups.²

² It is worth noting that in an ideal world, the comparison group would be characteristically similar to the primary group being studied. While the fact that comparison group members come from a significantly more engaged background does position them as less than ideal for “true” comparison, it is still valuable to see how the alumni’s data measure up, particularly over time.

Knowledge about Israel and Jewish Peoplehood

Over the years, we have consistently seen that Onward helps participants become more knowledgeable about Israel and Jewish peoplehood. This is the case for Cohort VII, too. Immediately after the program, alumni exhibit a significant increase in their knowledge about Israel and Jewish peoplehood. Exhibit 2 shows that this increase is largely maintained 10 months later: Onward’s immediate impact is preserved. The comparison group, on the other hand, does not report any drastic increase over time. They also start out with higher scores in both of these areas, which is not surprising given their background. The fact that Onward participants—individuals who come from a lesser engaged Jewish background—“catch up” to the more engaged comparison group underscores how meaningful Onward’s impact is on participants’ knowledge about Israel and Jewish peoplehood.

Exhibit 2: Respondents with a “high” level of knowledge about Israel and Jewish peoplehood³



Connection with Israel and Jewish Peoplehood

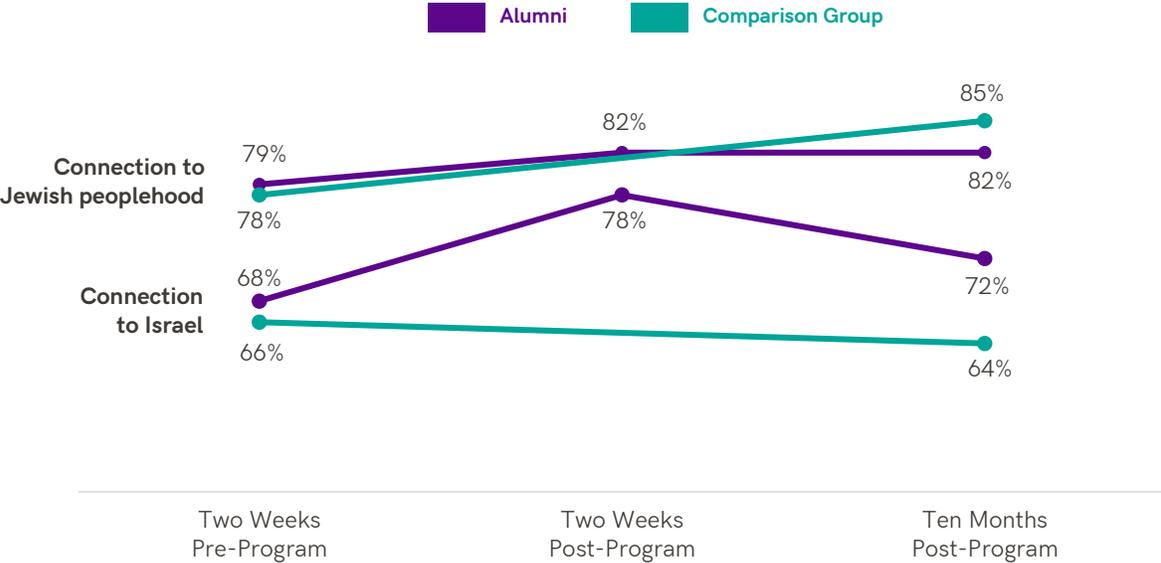
In terms of Onward’s impact on Cohort VII’s emotional connection to Israel and Jewish peoplehood, we see a somewhat different story. Exhibit 3 shows that while participants’ attachment to Israel significantly grows following the program, this growth slightly begins to fade 10 months later. Their connection to Jewish peoplehood also remains stable over time, not experiencing much change—something that we have consistently observed from cohort to cohort. The comparison group does not exhibit much notable change in either of these areas. Given the small sample size, it is hard to say whether the small increase that is observed over time in terms of “connection to Jewish peoplehood” is hinting at something substantive.

Importantly, both groups of respondents have an already established, strong connection to Israel and Jewish peoplehood at “Time 1,” a finding that is indicative of the kinds of individuals Onward attracts. As a result of

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

starting out with such high scores in each of these areas, there also is not as much room for growth over time—seemingly the opposite of what we observe in regard to knowledge about Israel and Jewish peoplehood.

Exhibit 3: Respondents with a “high” level of connection to Israel and Jewish peoplehood⁴



Involvement with Israel and Jewish Life

In terms of respondents’ involvement in Jewish and Israel-related activities, Exhibit 4 shows that there are a few types of activities that Cohort VII alumni participate in significantly more frequently in the months following Onward, relative to those before the program: having conversations about Israel or Judaism and following news about Jewish communities around the world. For the remainder of the activities listed in the table, alumni took part in these activities just as frequently after the program as they did beforehand—meaning, we didn’t observe marked slippage, which can be common among college-aged individuals and indeed is what we occasionally observe among the comparison group. It is important to note, though, that the comparison group’s data are somewhat inconclusive: in some of these activities they engage more often, in some they engage less, and in some there is no noticeable change. Cohort VII alumni, however, have a more consistent story: either their engagement grows with time or it is largely maintained.

For the most part, we also see that the comparison group tends to participate in these kinds of activities at “Time 1” more often than Cohort VII participants. These data point to the comparison group as being more Jewishly engaged than the participants ahead of the program, likely due to their more intense Jewish background growing up.

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

Exhibit 4: Average frequency of participation in Jewish and Israel-related activities

Mean scores are tabulated on a scale of 1 to 7 where 1="Never" and 7="Very often"

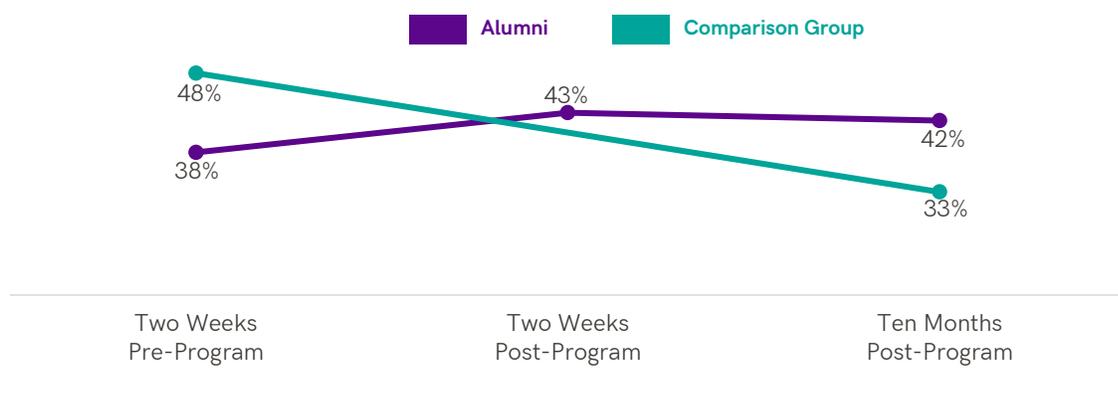
Visible Increase (>0.2) Visible Decrease (>0.2) (Statistically significant differences in darker shade)

	Alumni		Comparison Group	
	"Pre" Mean	10-Month Mean	"Pre" Mean	10-Month Mean
Participating in conversations about Israel	4.91	5.46	4.98	5.34
Participating in conversations about Judaism	5.03	5.31	5.29	5.17
Following news about Jews and Jewish communities around the world	4.34	4.69	4.58	4.90
Following news about Israel	5.04	5.20	5.19	5.23
Participating in Jewish life at home or at school	5.37	5.33	5.69	5.21
Taking a leadership role in Jewish life at home or at school	4.55	4.66	4.94	4.65
Celebrating Shabbat with family or friends	5.08	5.29	5.75	4.96
Studying traditional Jewish texts	3.11	3.40	3.83	3.60

Israel Engagement and Advocacy

Nearly a quarter (23%) of Cohort VII alumni had returned to Israel within 10 months of the program. In addition, 10 months after Onward, alumni feel just as able to advocate for Israel as they did both before and immediately after the program. In its own right, this may seem unimpressive, and also unsurprising, given that Onward does not function as an Israel advocacy training program. However, relative to the comparison group, this finding takes on new meaning, as shown in Exhibit 5. The comparison group reports a steep—and significant—decline in their ability to advocate for Israel. This may be a subtle but important difference. It indicates just how much the Onward experience is pivotal in participants developing their voice when it comes to Israel. The media’s portrayal of Israel and all-too-common anti-Israel sentiment on college campuses pose a serious challenge for individuals who seek to support and speak up for Israel; as a result, many people feel incapable of doing so. The Onward experience provides an antidote to that challenge, providing alumni with a deepened understanding of Israel and a personal, formative connection to the country that they can turn to when speaking up for Israel.

Exhibit 5: Respondents who report a "high" level of ability to advocate for Israel⁵

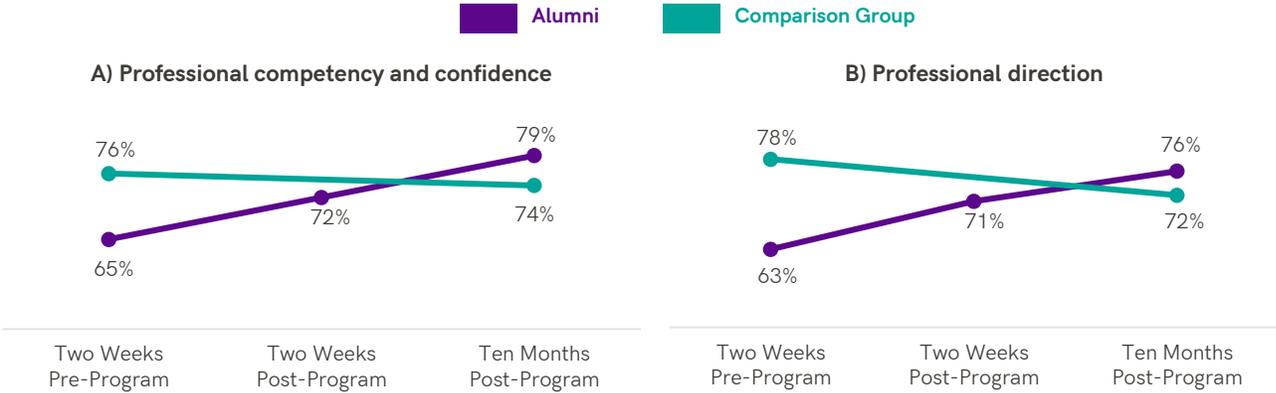


⁵ Scores were classified as "high" if they were above 5 on a scale of 1 to 7.

Professional Development

When it comes to Onward’s contribution to alumni’s professional development—strengthening their professional competencies and confidence, as well as solidifying their professional direction—Exhibit 6 illustrates that the program’s immediate impact is maintained 10 months later, and it seems to be further magnified by alumni’s experiences since the program. This is likely a result of alumni advancing in their college careers and further developing their professional ambitions. In contrast, the comparison group exhibits no significant change in either of these areas over the course of these 10 months. Notably, the comparison group’s reported level of professional competency, confidence, and overall professional direction at “Time 1” is markedly higher than that of alumni, possibly due to the comparison group being slightly older, with more than a tenth already having had graduated from college. Similar to what we observed in regard to knowledge about Israel and Jewish life, here, too, we see alumni “catch up” with the more advanced comparison group.

Exhibit 6: Respondents with a “high” level of professional competency, confidence, and direction⁶



Summary

Consistent with our previous studies of Onward alumni, our work with Cohort VII demonstrates that the immediate impact Onward has on participants’ professional growth and knowledge about Israel and Jewish life is maintained 10 months later. When it comes to alumni’s day-to-day engagement with Jewish life and Israel, 10 months after Onward, we largely see a story of stability. For the most part, alumni participate in Jewish and Israel-related activities just as often as they did before, though they are speaking with others about Judaism and Israel more often than they were before the program.

In terms of the comparison group, we are constrained in drawing strong conclusions from the data given the small size of the group and its members’ slightly older profile and more-engaged Jewish background. Nonetheless, the trends that we were able to observe revealed that the Onward experience serves as an opportunity for participants to “catch up” to their more Jewishly involved or more professionally sophisticated peers, illustrating Onward’s meaningful contribution to participants’ personal and professional identity.

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

APPENDIX: Program Outcomes - Factors and Items

Connection to Israel and Israelis	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 Israeli politics
	I know about the Israeli economy
	I know about Israel's geopolitical situation
	I know about diversity within Israeli society
	I know about Israeli culture
Connection to Jewish Peoplehood	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 the ability and knowhow to network in my professional field of interest
	I am comfortable in a cross-cultural working environment
	I feel confident in professional settings
	I feel confident in new and unfamiliar settings
	I can work well with people from different cultural backgrounds
Professional Direction	I know what working my professional field entails
	I know where I am headed professionally, or what my options are
	I have a clear sense of my academic and/or career goals
	I know about what it takes to succeed in my area of professional interest
	I have skills relevant to my professional field of interest
	I know about the day-to-day activities related to my area of professional interest