

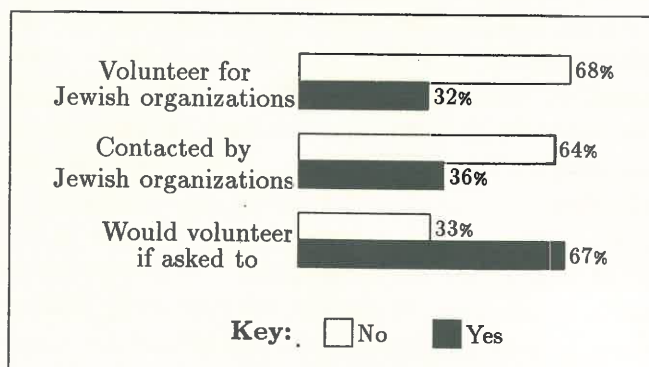
## research notes

### Can We Increase American Jewish Volunteering?

This second *Research Note* on Jewish volunteering focuses on two crucial issues. We examine the prospects of increasing the level of volunteering among Jews, and we assess the relative importance of different factors on volunteering for Jewish organizations.

The previous *Research Note* explored patterns of voluntarism in six Jewish communities. The analysis presented in this *Research Note* uses data collected in the *Jewish Community Study of Greater Dallas*<sup>1</sup> in 1988 as a case study. Obviously, since this case study is based on data from only one Jewish community, the findings should be regarded as preliminary. Future research studies using additional representative samples of other local Jewish communities should test the validity of this study's findings. However, despite these limitations, the implications derived from the Dallas case study are highly suggestive and can provide useful insights for Jewish communal institutions.

**Figure 1**  
**Volunteering, Outreach Efforts, and Attitudes Towards Volunteering**



Recent research on volunteering in the United States<sup>2</sup> suggests that there is an untapped potential number of volunteers in American society. A key problem in increasing the level of volunteering is that potential volunteers are not appropriately mobilized to become active volunteers. The *Dallas Jewish*

*Population Study* allows us to examine this issue in the context of one Jewish community.

### Voluntarism and Recruitment

Figure 1, which presents the percentages of those who volunteer time for Jewish organizations, those who have been contacted to volunteer by a Jewish organization, and those who expressed willingness to volunteer if asked, shows that only one-third of the respondents in Dallas indicated that they had been contacted by a Jewish organization to engage in volunteer activities during the previous year. Additional analysis reveals that among those who had been contacted, two-thirds actually volunteered for Jewish organizations, while among those not contacted, only 14% volunteered. The connection between having been asked to volunteer and actual volunteering seems evident. This relationship may seem obvious to some readers, but it acquires its real dimension when it is put into the context of contemporary pessimistic assessments of organized Jewish life. Many are concerned about the prospects for Jewish involvement in the face of demographic changes confronting the American Jewish community that erode Jewish identification. Simply put, *the level of Jewish volunteering might be increased if outreach efforts on the part of Jewish organizations were more intense.*

Figure 2 examines the relationship between belonging to a synagogue or to any Jewish organization and having been contacted to volunteer time for them. About a half of the synagogue members and over a half of the members of Jewish organizations were asked to volunteer, meaning that almost half of those affiliated with a Jewish institution were not contacted to participate in volunteer activities. This supports our assertion that Jewish institutions could increase their number of volunteers if they increased their volunteer opportunities and their outreach efforts.

In addition, Figure 1 shows that almost two-thirds of respondents agreed with the statement that they would volunteer if they were asked to do so.

been contacted by a Jewish organization, volunteering for non-Jewish causes, contributing to Jewish philanthropies, generation in the United States, membership in Jewish organizations, and frequency of synagogue attendance. Other variables included in the analysis did not show a significant independent effect (or in other words their effect does not seem to be different from zero).

In simple terms, *individuals who have been contacted by Jewish organizations to volunteer, who volunteer time for non-Jewish organizations, who attend religious services more often, who contribute money to Jewish organizations, who belong to Jewish organizations, and who belong to third or fourth generations in the United States are more likely to be volunteers*, regardless of their characteristics in the other variables examined. These findings only demonstrate which variables are important in analyzing Jewish voluntarism. They do not indicate, however, the presence of a linear relationship between the significant predictor variables and Jewish volunteering. In fact, logit analysis assumes a non-linear relationship between independent variables and the probability of an event, choice or behavior of interest, and as a consequence, the final effect of a particular variable will depend on the value taken by the other variables in the model.

Interestingly, in our previous *Research Note* we had shown that volunteering for Jewish organizations and giving to Jewish philanthropies have a positive correlation, but we suggested that this association could evaporate when controlling for the effects of other variables, such as income or occupation. This multivariate analysis shows that giving to Jewish charities does indeed have a significant independent effect on the likelihood of volunteering after the effects of other variables are taken into account. In other words, when holding all other variables constant, *Jews who make contributions to Jewish charities are more likely to volunteer for Jewish organizations than those who do not contribute*. Moreover, our findings confirm previous studies regarding the independent effect of frequency of synagogue attendance on the likelihood of volunteering, and the importance of religious involvement in fostering voluntary behavior. In addition, this study strengthens the argument that *volunteering for Jewish organizations and non-Jewish organizations are indeed related behaviors*. Finally, generation in the United States is the only socio-demographic variable that holds an independent effect on

the probability of Jewish volunteering, suggesting, contrary to our expectations, that volunteering for Jewish organizations increases with distance from the immigrant generation. Beyond their meaning in the context of the sociological analysis of Jews, perhaps the most interesting finding relates to the impact of outreach efforts on the probability of volunteering for Jewish organizations. To be contacted by a Jewish organization to volunteer is the most important predictor of volunteering activities in our study. The principal policy implication to be drawn from these findings is that Jewish institutions can increase the level of volunteering if they devote sufficient time, energy, and creativity to that mission.

There are a number of issues that this study has not addressed and that are worthy of future exploration. For example, should expressive, material, and ideological incentives be used to attract different groups to volunteer for Jewish organizations? What is the potential for attracting volunteers to provide direct services in an age of shrinking public support for human services? Should volunteer tasks be oriented towards providing direct services for Jews or for non-Jews? A related area of future research should explore questions such as what are the obstacles that inhibit synagogues and Jewish organizations from requesting their members to get actively involved in volunteer tasks? Do Jewish institutions consider as part of their mission to engage as many volunteers as possible? Do they encourage the development of grass-root efforts or do they prefer to rely on organizational processes to address new issues? Do they have the organizational capacity to recruit, retain, and track additional numbers of volunteers? The Jewish community as a whole can only benefit by beginning to respond to some of these fundamental questions.

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2. Hodgkinson, Virginia A. and Murray S. Weitzmann, *Giving and Volunteering in the United States*, Findings from a National Study, Independent Sector, 1988.