

# S3KReport



A Publication of the S3K Synagogue Studies Institute

[www.synagogue3000.org](http://www.synagogue3000.org)

April 2011 Number 10

*Professors Steven M. Cohen and Lawrence A Hoffman*

## Different Growth for Different Folks: The ND Pilot Sites in Action

Between the fall of 2009 and the summer of 2010, Synagogue 3000's *Next Dor* initiative inaugurated four experiments in engaging congregationally unaffiliated adults Jews in their 20s and 30s. They were set in widely scattered locations across the United States (Washington, DC; St. Louis; Marin County, CA; and Miami Beach). All four adhered to the *Next Dor* philosophy of providing relational engagement rather than just a series of unrelated programs; but they differed significantly from one another. This report briefly follows each one's trajectory. It analyzes the demographic characteristics of each site's appeal, demonstrates significant Jewish growth in all four instances, and urges an expansion of the relational approach as a successful means of long-term engagement.

In Washington DC, Rabbi Esther Lederman anchored, "Next Dor DC," a person-to-person engagement effort centered around Temple Micah which hired her as an assistant rabbi assigned specifically to establish a *Next Dor* effort. At Temple Beth Sholom in Miami Beach, Marc Hurwitz was brought on to direct "The Tribe" – an atypical programming initiative that had begun a few years prior. Central Synagogue In St. Louis charged

Yoni Sarason, a 20-something ND professional organizer, to build, "Next Dor STL" – now a community of several hundred people in his age cohort, focused on an actual building that Central

Synagogue bought and refurbished for the project. And at Temple Rodef Sholom in San Raphael, California ( just north of San Francisco), Rabbi Noa Kushner reached out beyond the synagogue that employed her to engage scores of young families in her own age cohort (she had just turned 40) to establish Nita (Hebrew for "planting"). In all, the four sites reached over 1,100 young Jewish adults – people who met individually with the organizers or attended events during the course of the year.

The four initiatives shared many features. Each boasted a highly motivated organizer, with strong institutional support at home, and support/supervision from *Next Dor* National. The degree of connection with the home congregation however, ranged from loose to distant. All were peer driven, and supplemented by strong personal relationships with iconoclastic marketing, and unconventional community activities.

Each site appealed to people of somewhat different makeup, both demographically and what we will call psychographically (see below) but all succeeded in reaching people who had little, if any, formal connection to a congregation and who were, in many cases, seemingly unlikely ever to do so. Organizing followed *Next Dor*'s stipulated emphasis on being relationship-based, and the events and activities that resulted bore little resemblance to the standard fare offered in most congregations. All produced impressive records of individual and collective Jewish growth, as borne out by the quantitative data reported below.

Yet, notwithstanding these common features, each of the four initiatives reached its own distinctive constituency; each used different approaches to relationship-building and community-organizing; and each produced

### Contents

|                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Introduction .....             | 1 |
| Next Dor DC.....               | 2 |
| Next Dor St. Louis.....        | 3 |
| Marin County's Nita.....       | 4 |
| Miami Beach: The Tribe.....    | 4 |
| Conclusion.....                | 5 |
| The 2010 Next Dor Survey ..... | 7 |

### Sidebars

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| About the Authors.....      | 2 |
| Synagogue 3000 Team .....   | 5 |
| S3K Board of Directors..... | 5 |

## About the Author

**Professor Steven M. Cohen**, a sociologist of American Jewry, is Research Professor of Jewish Social Policy at HUC-JIR and Director of the Berman Jewish Policy Archive at NYU Wagner. He is also the Director of Research for Synagogue 3000. In 1992, he made aliyah and taught for 14 years at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. With Arnold Eisen, he wrote *The Jew Within*, and with Charles Liebman he wrote *Two Worlds of Judaism: The Israeli and American Experiences*. Cohen's earlier books include *American Modernity & Jewish Identity* and *American Assimilation or Jewish Revival?* He is a co-author of *Sacred Strategies: Becoming a Visionary Congregation*, which won the National Jewish Book Award. In recent months, Steven was named to the Forward 50, received the Marshall Sklare Award from the Association for the Social Scientific Study of Jewry, and was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies.

**Dr. Lawrence A. Hoffman** was ordained as a rabbi in 1969, received his Ph.D. in 1973, and has taught since then at the Hebrew Union College -Jewish Institute of Religion in New York. From 1984 to 1987, he directed its School of Sacred Music as well. In 1994, he co-founded Synagogue 2000 (now Synagogue 3000). Larry is Co-President of S3K. In 2003, he was named the first Barbara and Stephen Friedman Professor of Liturgy, Worship and Ritual. Rabbi Hoffman has written or edited 34 books, including *My People's Prayer Book* (Jewish Lights Publishing), a ten-volume edition of the Siddur with modern commentaries, which was named a National Jewish Book Award winner for 2007. A follow-up, *My Peoples Passover Haggadah*, appeared in February 2008. He is most recently a co-author of *Sacred Strategies: Becoming a Visionary Congregation*, winner of the National Jewish Book Award.

a different Jewish identity “output.” In part, these differences reflect their respective regional cultures (DC, Miami Beach, St. Louis, and Marin County are hardly cut from the same cloth). But in part also, each site mirrors the personality, interests, and life-cycle stage (correlated loosely with age) of its organizer. This is a true example of niche-organizing and relationship-building.

These inferences emerge from an analysis of responses to an opt-in survey of participants in the four *Next Dor* endeavors conducted in the fall of 2010. The results, point to very different contours, methods, and outcomes. Each site – *Next Dor* DC, *Next Dor* STL, Nita in California and the Tribe in Miami – deserves closer scrutiny on its own.

We begin with a consideration of the *intensity of Jewish socialization*, as indicated by such things as having attended day school (rather than public school), Jewish camps, and youth groups; and making trips to Israel. Those raised with low intensities of Jewish socialization are more likely to interact socially with non-Jews and, therefore, to intermarry. As adults, they are more likely to raise their own children with low intensities of Jewish socialization.

## Next Dor DC

As compared with the young people at the other three sites, participants at *Next Dor* DC are distinguished by low intensities of Jewish socialization. They included relatively high numbers raised by mixed-married parents (20%; as against, say, only 5% in Miami), and small numbers who were raised Conservative or Orthodox (22%, vs., for example, 41% in Miami, the site with the highest such number), the two more traditional denominational identities that are loosely indicative of more intensive Jewish socialization. As adults, these Washington participants were more likely to claim identity as Reform (76%, vs. only 50% in St. Louis, the site with the fewest Reform identifiers). Consistent with their relatively lower intensities of childhood Jewish socialization, fully 42% of DC participants report that their current spouses or partners are non-Jewish (as compared with just 5% in St. Louis, which records the fewest mixed couples among all four sites). Very few of them (16%) have mostly Jewish friends – as contrasted with almost half the *Next Dor* participants in St. Louis and Miami.

Intensity of Jewish socialization correlates with competence in and comfort with Jewish ritual. Unsurprisingly, therefore, *Next Dor* DC participants are less likely to attend Shabbat meals as a matter of course. Intense Jewish socialization also goes along with ethnic Jewish engagement in general, by which we mean here, social bonds with other Jews – having Jewish friends, for example, and spending time with Jews rather than non-Jews, or living

in areas with many Jewish neighbors. So DC participants are less apt to engage in specifically Jewish-sponsored service pursuits and other measures of group Jewish activity. Using such measures as Jewish ritual and Jewish ethnic engagement, many members of DC Next *Dor* can even be described as only “somewhat marginally engaged” in Jewish life. Yet these measures give us only a partial picture. More than those from the other Next *Dor* sites, they read Jewish books, newspapers and magazines; more than others, they check out Jewish websites; and, more than those in the other three sites, they celebrate Jewish holidays with their friends.

Their high levels of Jewish reading and surfing may say something about life for young professionals in the nation’s capital, many of whom have only recently arrived to take up positions in government, public service, and related fields. It may also illustrate a pattern of Jewish engagement open to those Jews particularly who have had less intensive Jewish socialization as children and are not immediately competent at ritual skills like Hebrew davening, but who nonetheless seek ways to be Jewish.

The DC cohort is rich in young adult Jews who are searching for, or open to, forms of Jewish engagement that do not necessarily require high levels of Jewish ritual and ethnic competence, the skills and comfort levels that come from an intensity of Jewish socializing that they did not get growing up. Since they bridge the gap between highly competent Jews and very marginal Jews, they may bring, or come to bring, to Next *Dor* activities others who are not even especially interested in Jewish reading and surfing.

It helps to imagine the entire cohort of young Jews as a series of concentric circles, radiating out from a central flame that represents a high intensity of Jewish socialization in their youth. The innermost ring (call it A) is filled

with Jews who were raised on Jewish summer camps, intense Jewish education (like day schools), homes with Jewish ritual, trips to Israel, and so forth. One circle farther out from the flame (B) contains those with lower intensity of Jewish socialization. We might imagine a further circle (C) consisting of people with little or no childhood Jewish socialization at all, a circle that may include men and women not born Jewish, but discovering it in some fashion only as adults. Finally, outside the outermost boundary entirely (D) we find people oblivious to Judaism and to whatever draws people to it.

As a matter of course, people in any circle have ready access to the two adjacent circles on either side, but are less likely to know people more than a single circle away, and less able to engage them in matters relevant to Judaism even if they know them. The boundary

between Circle A and the others is especially thick, since A is filled with highly connected Jews who, by definition, prefer mixing with each other and meeting each other at events that are dense with Jewish meaning. All boundaries are somewhat porous, of course. Even very socially connected Jews are likely to work in offices where anyone at all may be their colleagues, and then friends. But overall, circles far away from each other are less likely to interact, at least regarding anything Jewish.

## Next Dor St. Louis

Whereas a high percentage of DC participants find themselves in Circle B and farther out, Next *Dor* St. Louis (STL) participants display very different patterns. They collectively report the greatest intensities of Jewish socialization ~ 41% have been to Israel, for example, as contrasted with just 20% to 34% in the other three sites. Over a third are now Conservative or Orthodox (more than participants in all three other locations); more also

The DC cohort is rich in young adult Jews who are searching for, or open to, forms of Jewish engagement that do not necessarily require high levels of Jewish ritual and ethnic competence, the skills and comfort levels that come from an intensity of Jewish socializing that they did not get growing up.

St. Louis epitomizes what we may call a more “natural” phenomenon than what we see in Washington. These St. Louis young people are already highly Jewishly motivated on their own.

than participants anywhere else, people in STL feel that they are knowledgeable about Jewish life, and that it’s important for them to have Jewish friends.

They score higher than all the others with respect to several measures of current engagement: participating in a Jewish learning group may be the best example. But these Jews score high also in their claims to have played a specifically Jewish leadership role, and listening to Jewish or Israeli music. They are also more likely to spend time celebrating Jewish holidays with family (possibly because of all our groups, the participants in STL Next *Dor* are the youngest ~ almost all are under 30 ~ still at the age where they are likely to be home with families of origin at Jewish festival times). Consistent with their proclivity for Jewish study is the fact that as many as half of them participate in Shabbat meals monthly or more often, and not necessarily just at the Next *Dor* STL community.

In sum, the St. Louis Next *Dor* participants come to their community with above-average Jewish resources and experiences, and when it comes to many key measures of Jewish engagement, they display above-average levels of participation. They are distant from Washington not only in terms of geography, but in terms of Jewish biography and “psychography” as well.

St. Louis epitomizes what we may call a more “natural” phenomenon than what we see in Washington. These St. Louis young people are already highly Jewishly motivated on their own. They are comfortable with Jewish ritual, Jewish learning, Jewish festivals and Jewish socializing – indeed, they feel a responsibility to keep up such things, and are proud of the times they serve as Jewish leaders for Jewish groups elsewhere. Next *Dor* became the “natural” locus for their finding each other. In St. Louis, the idea of an actual physical space that could become a Jewish home is particularly appealing, something akin to a Hillel for post-Hillel participants.

## Marin County’s Nita

Participants in Nita present yet a third configuration. Demographically, its members are the oldest in our sample, with three quarters age 40 and over; and as many as 84% with children (vs. only 10% in DC, 17% in St. Louis, and 38% in Miami). In addition, they reflect the distinctive characteristics of the Bay Area, which has long been known for its weakness of Jewish affiliation and involvement. As an example, given several ways to describe their upbringing and their current identity, relatively few report being raised Jewish in unqualified terms. Asked if they’re Jewish now, as few as 64% give the simple answer: “Yes, I’m Jewish.” Asked whether they think of themselves as Jewish in any way at all, a whopping 10% answer, “It’s complicated” – as opposed to none (!) who respond that way in Miami (the other end of the spectrum, to which we will turn in a moment). More than Jews anywhere else, Bay Area Jews also stand out in that fully 23% refrain from identifying with any Jewish denomination. Movement loyalty is weak generally among next-generation Jews, but, by comparison, the percentage of participants in our other sites who answer “No denomination” is only 10-11%.

Consistent with the Bay area’s low level of institutional Jewish affiliation, Nita participants score relatively low on intensity of Jewish socialization. Only 29% had visited Israel, for example, compared to 41% in St. Louis, even though Nita participants are, on average, more than ten years older than those in STL (and have an extra decade of adult life in which such trips might have been possible). Similarly, Nita participants score lower than all three other sites on such indicators of childhood Jewish socialization as day-school attendance, youth-group participation, and reporting that “being Jewish was very important” when they were a teenager.

But they are not particularly inactive either~ because so many are married with children, a later stage in the life cycle of young adults which we have begun calling CHIPS

Consistent with the Bay area’s low level of institutional Jewish affiliation, Nita participants score relatively low on intensity of Jewish socialization.

(Children in the Picture). We know from numerous studies that the presence of children spurs even relatively unengaged parents to higher rates of Jewish activity of all sorts (parallel findings characterize American Christians. Significantly, even though Nita participants exceed other sites (by far) in having children home, their rates of participation in Jewish life are not much different than those found elsewhere. In other words, despite the Jewish identity-raising “benefit” of children home, Nita participants are not particularly active in Jewish life, at least as compared with their younger, and largely childless, counterparts in St. Louis, DC, and Miami.

## Miami Beach: The Tribe

In Miami, we confront yet a fourth pattern. Members of The Tribe generally range from the late-20s to the late 30s in age, somewhat older than St. Louis but younger than Washington and Nita. Only a third are married or partnered and a third also have children, making them overall a cross-section of the population in terms of age and life-cycle status. The Tribe cuts across this large age- and life-cycle spectrum, because it grew out of a pair of synagogue programs already under way that were intended to address a wider swath of Jews than just young 20s and 30s.

Participants in The Tribe report the strongest intensities of childhood Jewish socialization, with a third having attended day school, as compared with just 6% in the Bay area, 9% in DC, and 21% in St. Louis. Consistent with that education, 41% were raised in Orthodox and Conservative

The patterns of self-identification in The Tribe are, therefore, more conventional than our other groups. More than all others, for example, they identify with a denomination, and consider themselves Jewish in an unqualified way.

homes. As many as three-quarters participated in a Jewish youth group, and almost half said that being Jewish was very important to them as teenagers – exceeding all other Next Dor groups in both respects. This is explainable, in part, by the Jewish makeup of Miami, a bastion of east-coast Jewish emigrants, who retained a relatively high level of Jewish

ethnic bonds – just the opposite of Jews who moved west, especially to the San Francisco area, where we get Nita, at just the opposite extreme.

The patterns of self-identification in The Tribe are, therefore, more conventional than our other groups. More than all others, for example, they identify with a denomination, and consider themselves Jewish in an unqualified way – the very opposite of Nita and of DC. Of those married, large numbers are in-married, and almost half report having mostly Jewish friends.

## Synagogue 3000 Team

### Merri Lovinger Arian

Director of Music and  
S3K Consultant on Liturgical Arts

### Professor Steven M. Cohen

Director of Research

### Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman

Co-President

### Rabbi Jill Perlman

Engagement Communications Consultant

### Rabbi Aaron Spiegel

Chief Executive Officer

### Dr. Ron Wolfson

Co-President

### Rabbi Jessica Zimmerman

Director of Congregational Engagement

## S3K Board of Directors

Rabbi Aaron Spiegel, Chair

Terry Rosenberg, Vice Chair

Rabbi Marion Blumenthal

Larry Cooley

Rabbi Rachel Cowan

Cantor Sharona Feller

Bill Firestone

Don Friend

David Gottlieb

Rabbi Richard Jacobs

Forrest Krutter, Secretary

Mark Schlesinger

Laurence Smith

Melanie Sturm

Beryl Weiner, Treasurer

Bruce F. Whizin



Perhaps influenced by overall Miami patterns of leisure activity and Jewish engagement, Tribe participants are more likely than others to engage in Jewish-sponsored service work, but less likely than others to read Jewish books and periodicals. DC respondents exhibit precisely the reverse pattern.

## Conclusion

Our four groups all attract unaffiliated young Jewish adults, but with different demographic and psychographic profiles. Regardless of profile, between 2009 when they began and 2010 when this survey was taken, they all grew in significant Jewish ways. Our survey delineated ten Jewish activities (like Shabbat meals, Jewish service activity, and visiting Jewish websites). We then asked if participants had engaged in them in 2008-9 (pre-*Next Dor*); and if they had engaged in them in 2009-10 (during their connection with *Next Dor*). In 39 of 40 instances of then-now comparisons (i.e., ten measures for four sites), participants reported increased activity, the one case of “no change” being the Tribe’s participation in Jewish learning groups. The level of change (this year’s level minus last year’s level) ranged from a very tiny two percentage points to as much as a 34% increase, the latter coming (again) in the Tribe, this time regarding participation in Jewish service activities. The table provides the growth rates in each of our ten activities for each of the four sites.

We also analyzed the change in Jewish activity experienced by individuals (not just aggregate groups), and found a strong correlation with the level of personal participation in the *Next Dor* sites. The more participation in the group, the more Jewish growth the individual experienced. Overall, those with low levels of involvement in their sites reported only a ten percentage point increase in Jewish activities, on average. By contrast, those who went most regularly to *Next Dor* events reported more than twice as large an average on Jewish growth rates.

What are we to make of this correlation? No doubt, two processes were occurring simultaneously. First, those already on an upward personal Jewish growth path found their way to the *Next Dor* programs, and their participation in *Next Dor* activities permitted them to experience the intensified Jewish engagement that they sought.

But at the same time, we saw that many participants came to *Next Dor* with low intensities of Jewish socialization. They had not been to Jewish camps or day schools; they were intermarried; they had non-Jewish friends, and the like. Here is where the *Next Dor* philosophy of engagement came in. Potential participants were approached using one-on-one organizational ways of thinking. The field workers in all four sites took a genuine interest in the people they met, striking up relationships, and inviting participation personally. At the same time, members of specific circles of engagement had their own network of contacts, sometimes in adjacent circles farther out, whom they invited personally as well. Had the *Next Dor* Jewish offerings not been of the quality they were, and had the relationships not deepened as a result of quality time spent together, invitees would not have returned. But return they did. The more they returned, the more positive time they spent Jewishly, and the more positive time they spent Jewishly, the more they widened their Jewish involvement, acquired still newer Jewish friends, learned of opportunities for Jewish engagement even outside of *Next Dor*, and then brought friends made there to *Next Dor* as an obvious next step.

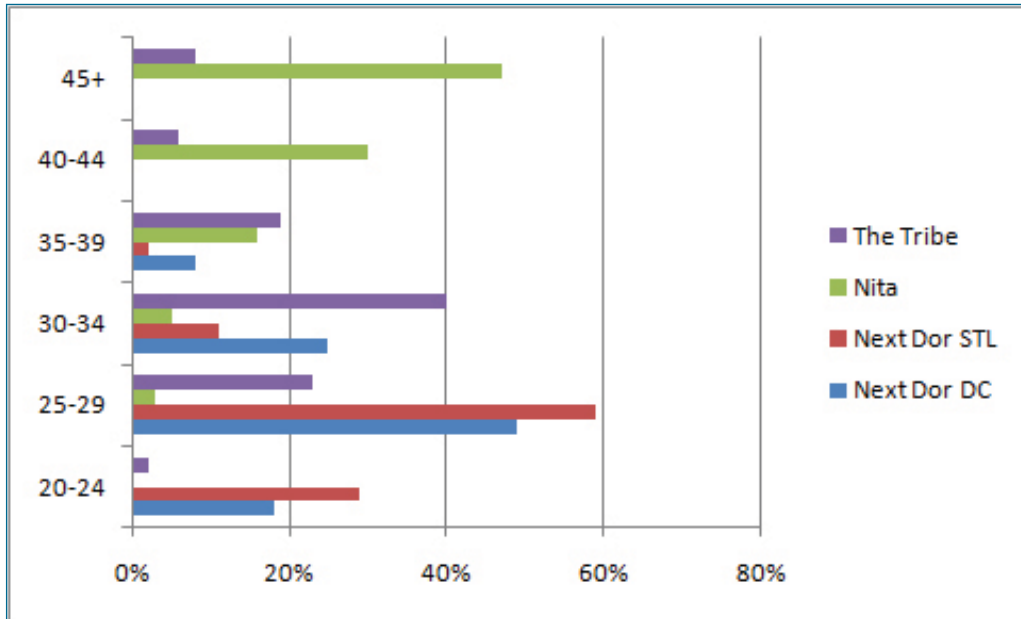
In a retrospective survey, cause and effect are impossible to disentangle with certainty. But the data are sufficient for us to show that one way or another, *Next Dor* played an important role in the Jewish journeys of large numbers of its participants. Participants reported more Jewish activities of all sorts this year as opposed to last year. And those who participated most in their respective *Next Dor* communities, reported the most change from last year to this.

Thus, notwithstanding all the variations in demography, in Jewish background, in current Jewish involvement, and in the extent and nature of change, one inference does seem to characterize all four *Next Dor* initiatives: Jewish involvement increases in measurable amounts in most ways that active involvement can be measured.

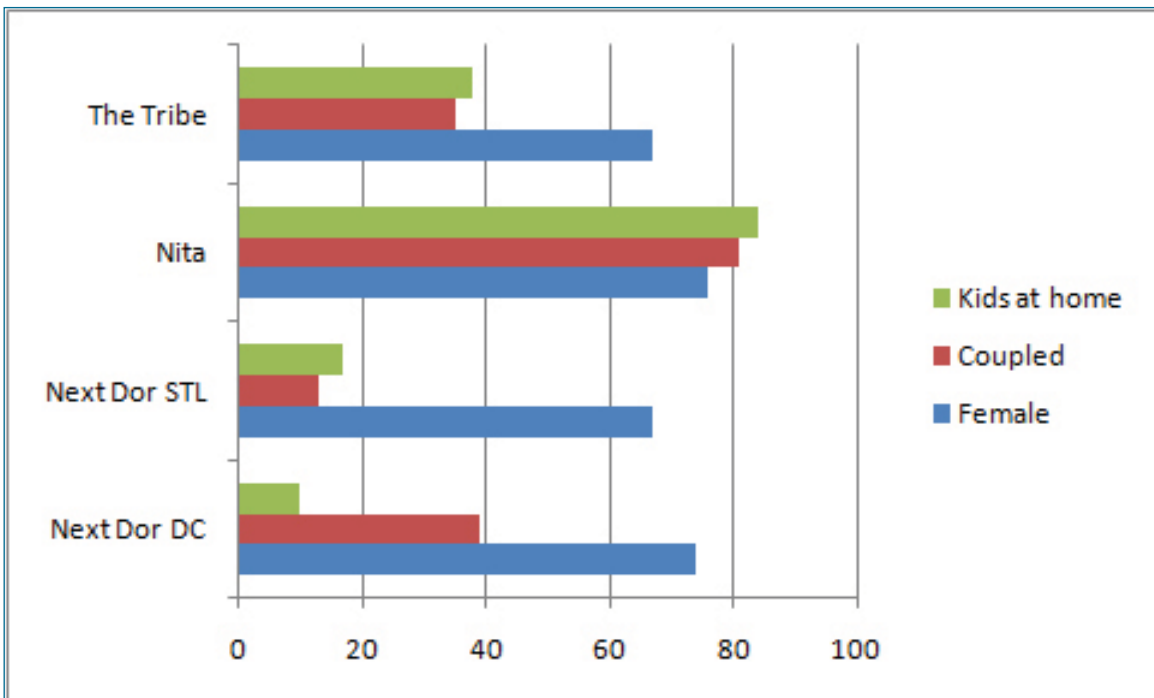
# The 2010 Next Dor Survey

Distinctive Features in Washington, St. Louis, Marin & Miami

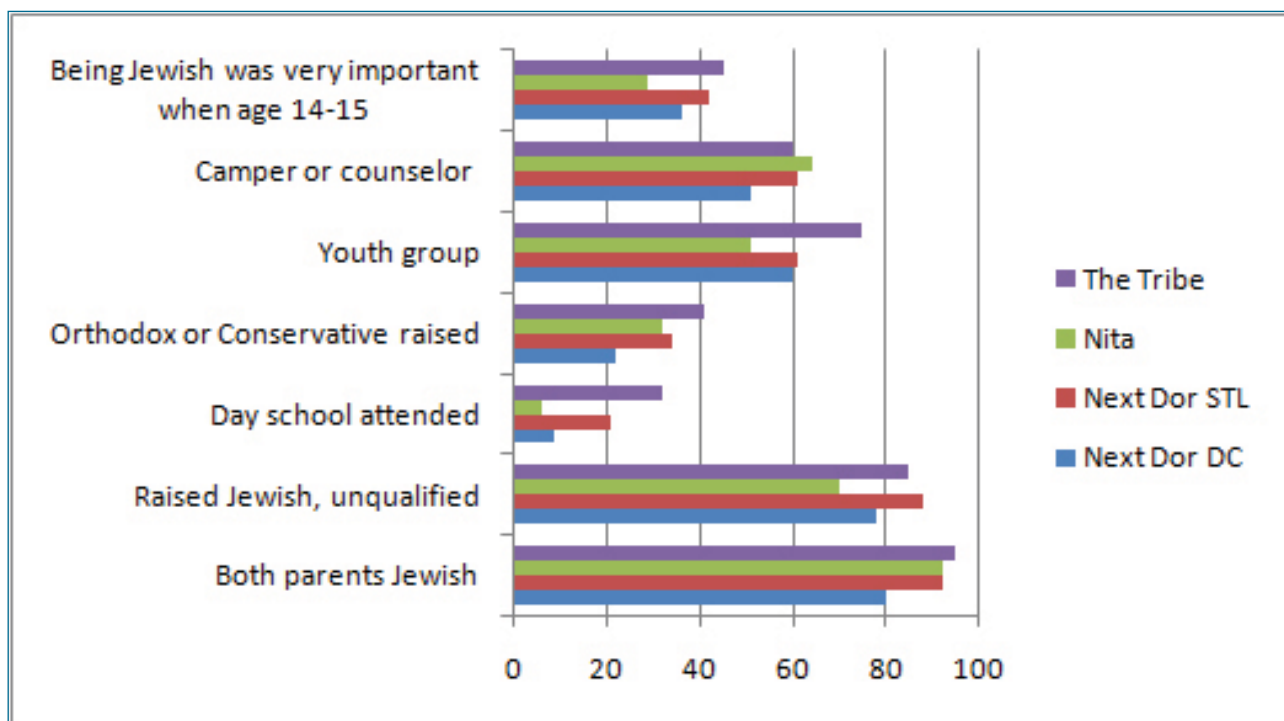
Age distributions: Young STL, older in DC & Miami, & oldest in Marin



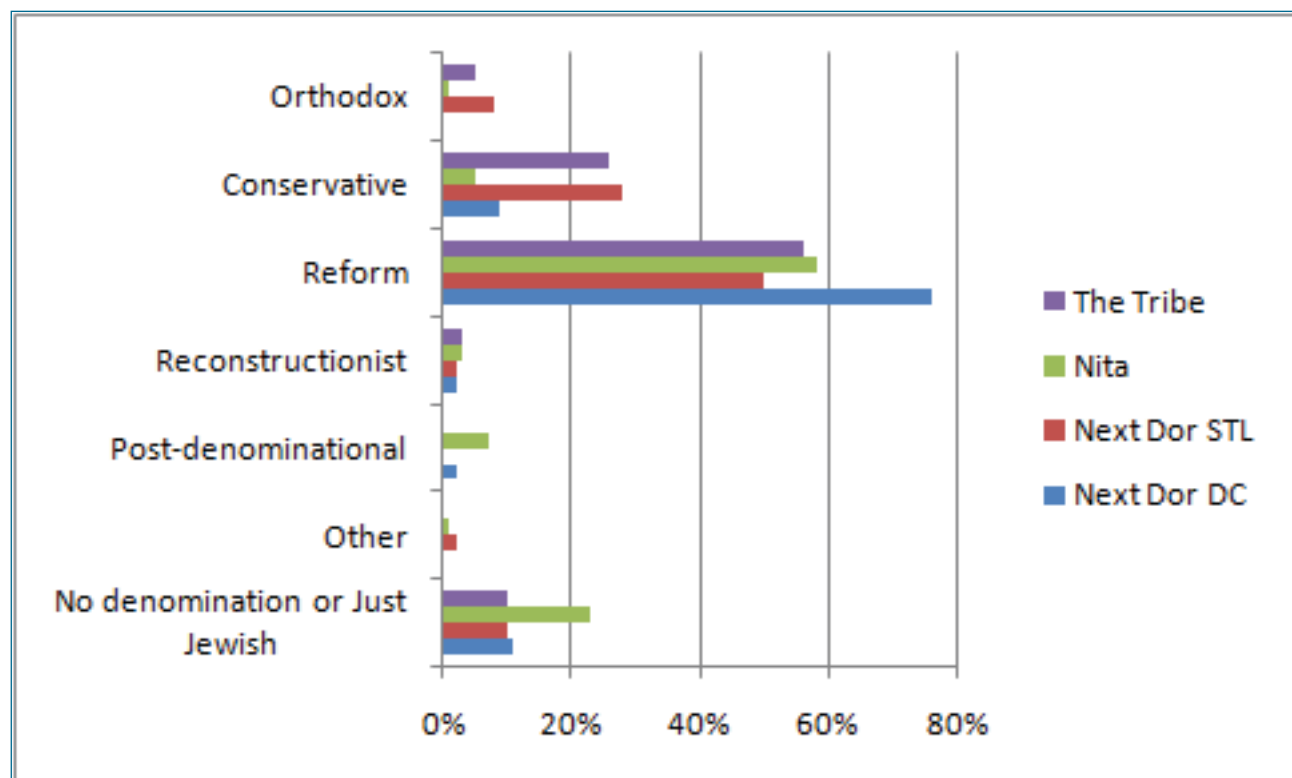
Most participants are women. Nita distinguished by higher rates of couples and children home; few coupled in STL.



## Jewish background items by Next Dor Site: Higher levels at The Tribe, Lower at Nita

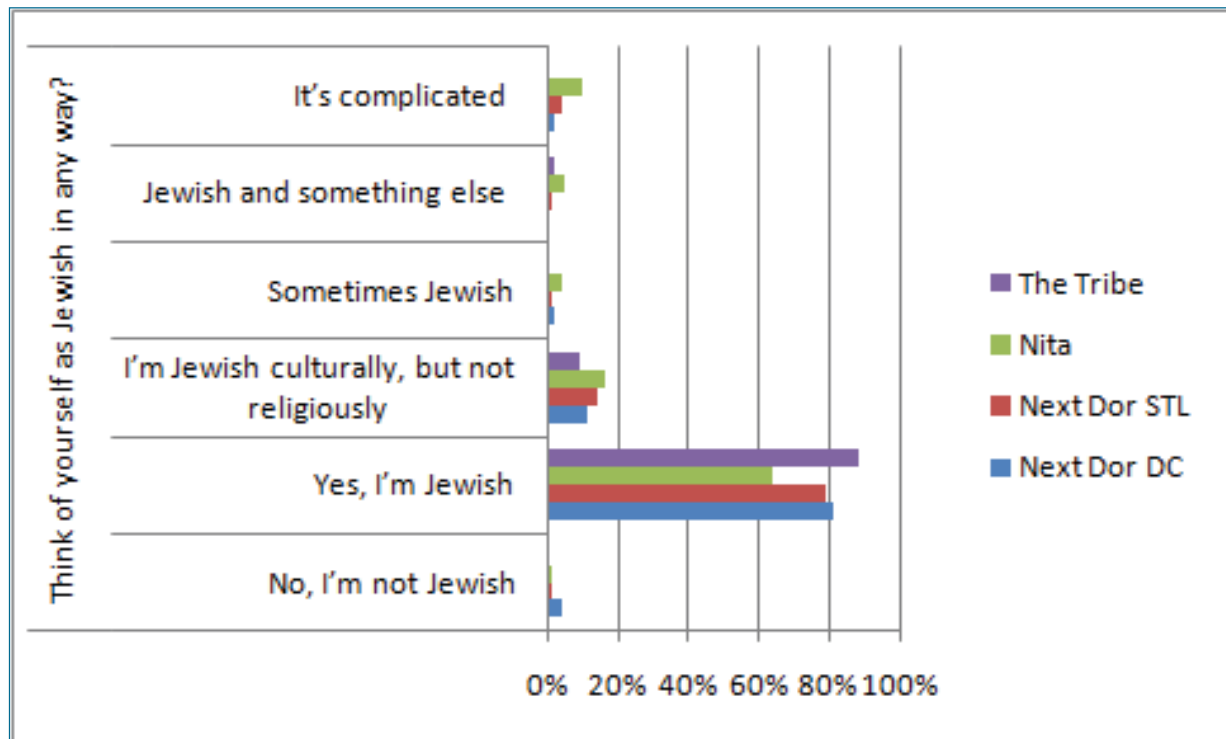


## Current Denominational identity by Next Dor Site

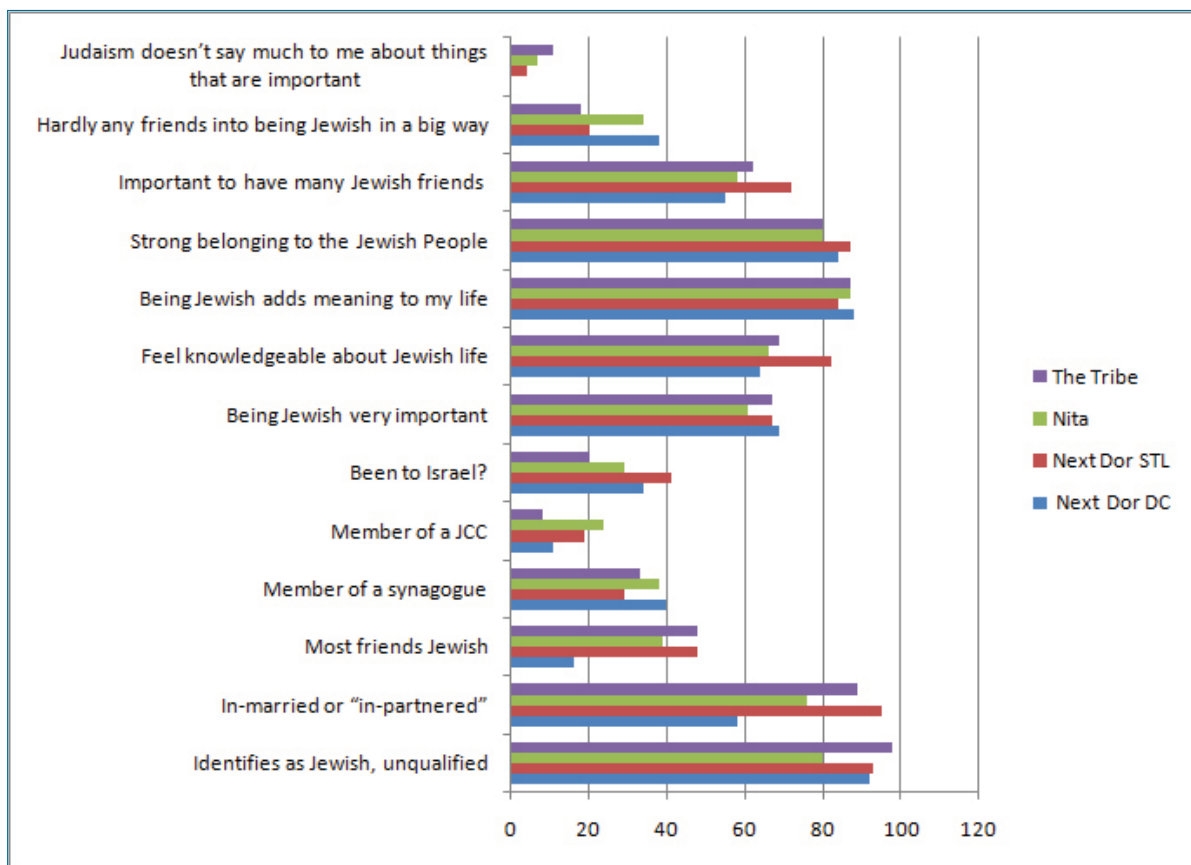




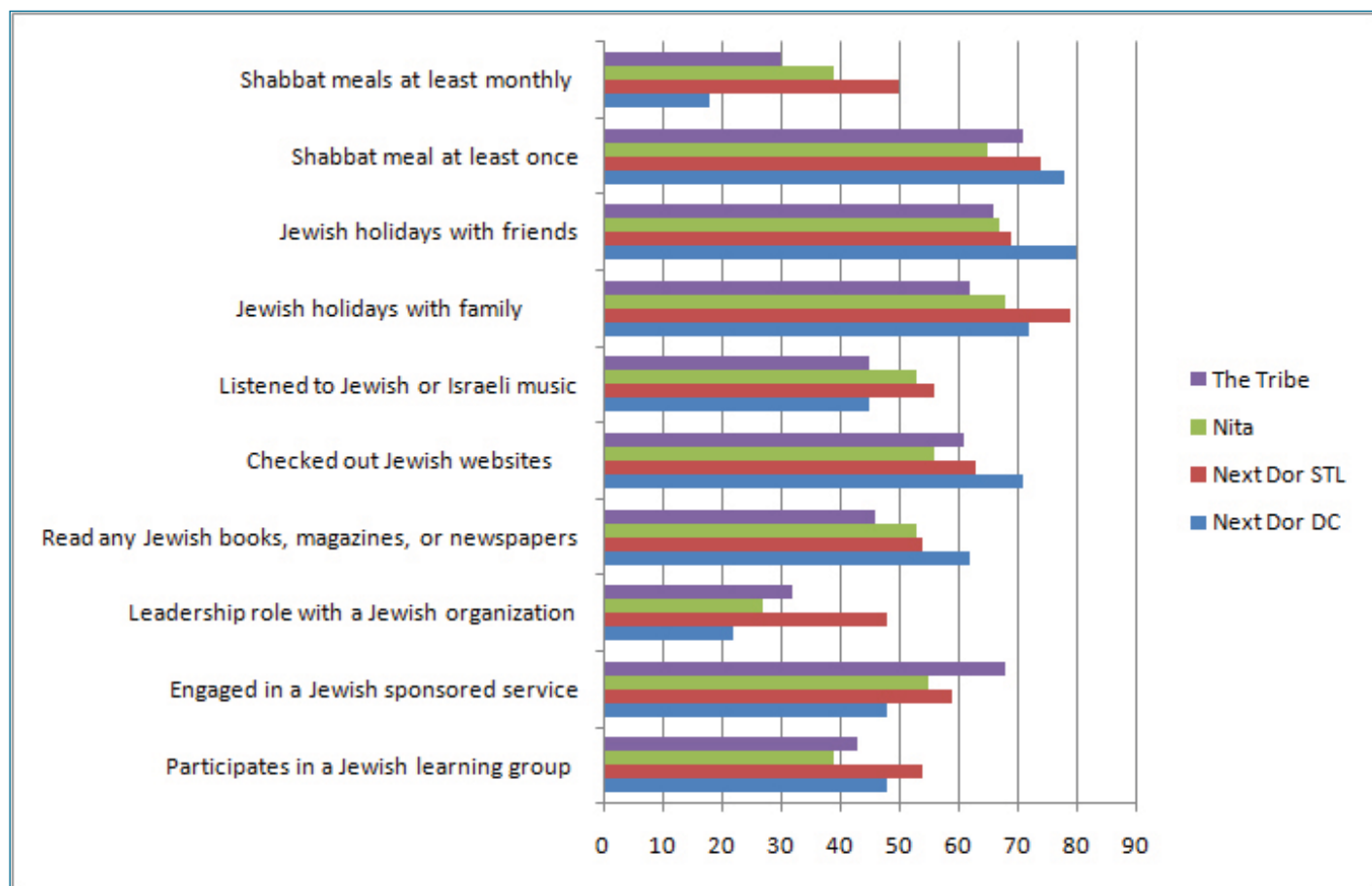
## Think of yourself as Jewish in any way by Next Dor Site



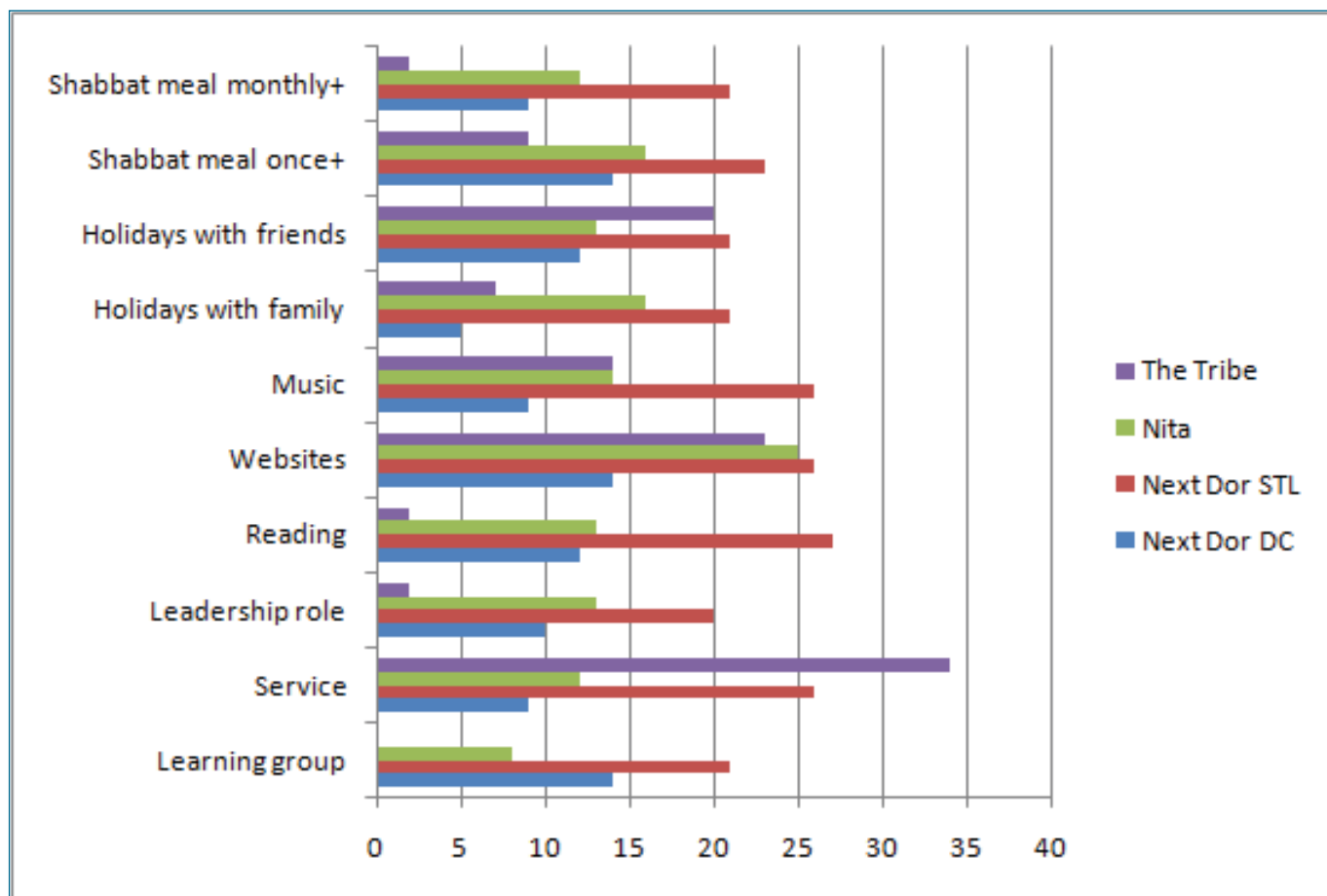
## Jewish identity characteristics by Next Dor Site: High levels at STL



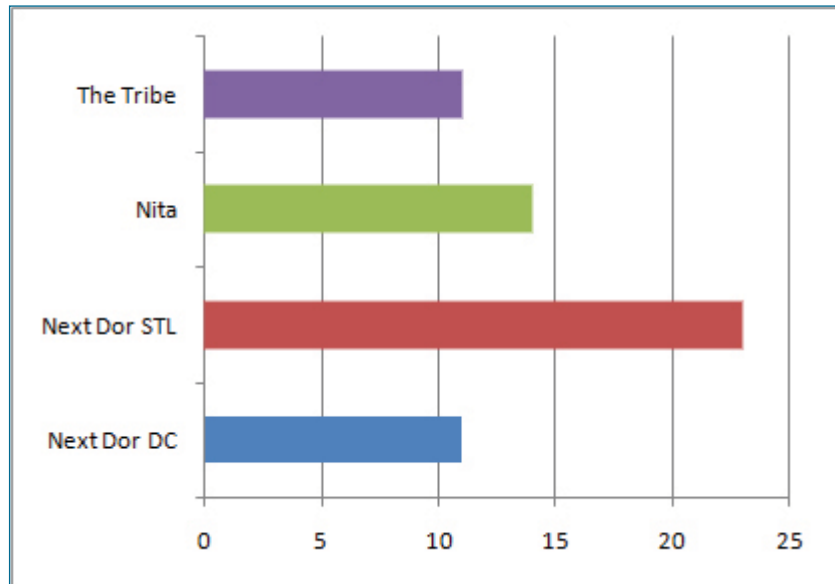
## Current Jewish activities by Next Dor Site: High levels at STL



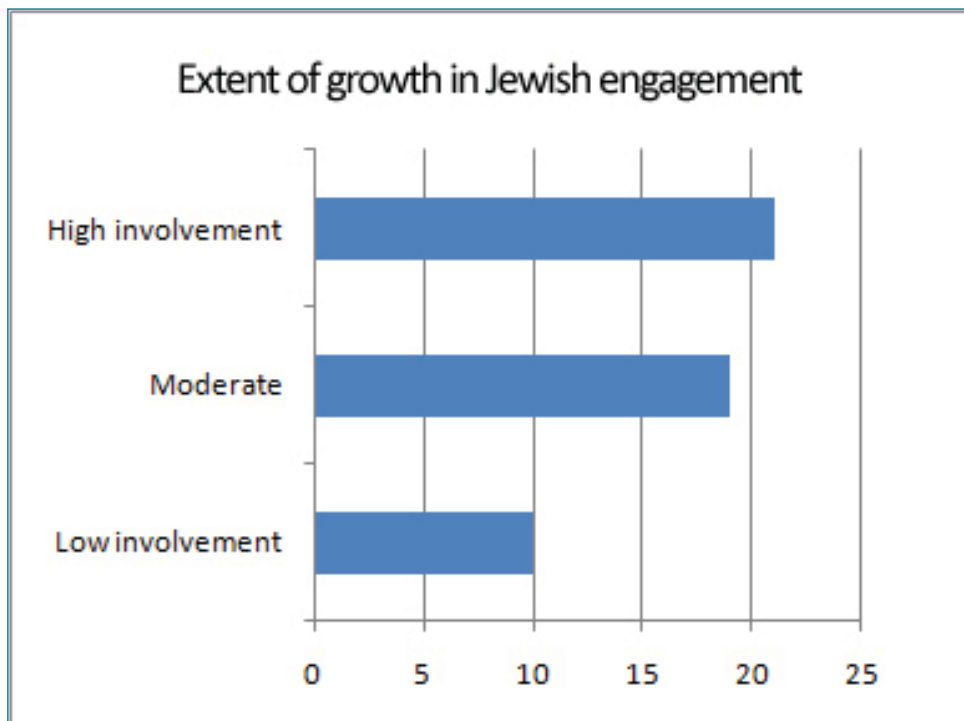
## Change from last year to this year by Next Dor site: High in STL.



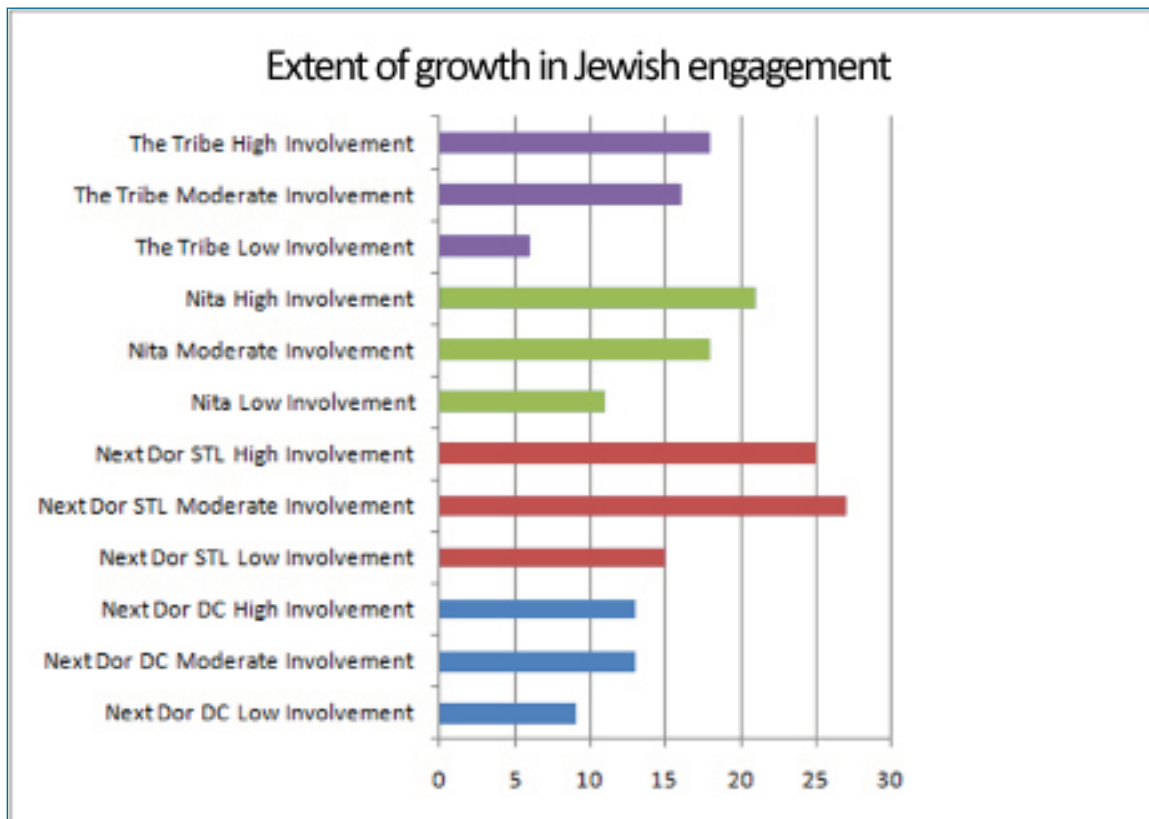
## Average change in 10 activities by Next Dor Site



Measure of change by level of involvement in Next Dor:  
More involvement => More growth



## Measure of change by level of involvement by Next Dor Site: Growth & involvement linked everywhere





## About Synagogue 3000 (S3K)

Synagogue 3000 is a catalyst for excellence, empowering congregations and communities to create synagogues that are sacred and vital centers of Jewish life. We seek to make synagogues compelling moral and spiritual centers – sacred communities – for the twenty-first century. Our offices in Los Angeles and New York direct national congregational networks and the Synagogue Studies Institute. Sacred communities are those where relationships with

God and with each other define everything the synagogue does; where ritual is engaging; where Torah suffuses all we do; where social justice is a moral imperative; and where membership is about welcoming and engaging both the committed and the unaffiliated. We wish to change the conversation about meaningful Jewish life in our time.

## Synagogue 3000

New York   Indianapolis  
One West 4th Street   1075 Broad Ripple Ave., #216  
New York, NY 10012   Indianapolis, IN 46220  
tel 646.783.1978  
fax 646.783.1957

**[www.synagogue3000.org](http://www.synagogue3000.org)**  
**[info411@synagogue3000.org](mailto:info411@synagogue3000.org)**

### S3K Synagogue Studies Institute

Synagogue 3000  
1075 Broad Ripple Ave #216  
Indianapolis IN 46220

