

Prepared for: **Shalom Hartman Institute of North America**



Studying Shalom Hartman Institute of North America's Impact Final Evaluation Report Executive Summary

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Introduction

Over the past two years, Rosov Consulting has partnered with the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America (SHI NA) to learn how a selection of SHI NA’s signature Fellowships and community-based programs have impacted their participants, who include Jewish leaders and educators within day schools, Hillels, universities, Jewish communal organizations, and the broader Jewish community. By helping these leaders grasp new conceptual models for understanding and communicating about critical issues for today’s North American Jewish community—related to Israel, Jewish peoplehood and identity, and pluralism—SHI NA works toward its goal of being the “central address for influential Jewish leaders who seek content and conversation partners in grappling with the big challenges facing Jewish life,” in order to achieve the broader mission of “creating a vibrant Judaism of meaning and purpose.”

The evaluation has studied how SHI NA is achieving these goals by using qualitative and quantitative methodologies to explore the following research questions:¹

1. How do SHI NA programs strengthen participants’ ability to be thought leaders and change agents in their communities and/or nationally by providing more nuanced frameworks for understanding significant Jewish ideas related to Jewish identity, Israel, and Jewish peoplehood, and increasing their confidence to lead and participate in important communal conversations around these topics?
2. How do various components of SHI NA programs—such as content and pedagogy, the cohort experience, intensive study in Israel, and participants’ own contexts and expectations—influence the strength and nature of these impacts?
3. How can SHI NA’s programs become even more effective at creating the impacts described above?

Key Findings

1. *SHI NA’s teaching and scholarship help participants across programs view Israel through more nuanced and complex lenses.*

Interviewees highlighted SHI NA’s ability to address the critical and often polarizing topic of Israel with nuance and complexity by offering frameworks that move conversations beyond the binary of pro- or anti-Israel polemics. This is reinforced by data from surveys of two of SHI NA’s core learner populations—community professionals and volunteer leaders in the Bay Area and Detroit, and professionals working on college campuses. Eight in 10 community leaders agreed that they “gained valuable models and ideas from SHI NA for understanding issues related to Israel,” and an equal percentage of campus professionals said that the program strengthened their “understanding of a broader range of perspectives about Israel.” The programs’ impact is heightened for participants who have the opportunity to absorb these perspectives while at the Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, making them feel even more immediate and visceral.

¹ In total, evaluation data were gathered from 128 participant interviews and 200 survey responses across five signature SHI NA initiatives: the David Hartman Center Fellowship, the New York Day School Fellowship, the Campus Professional Fellowship, and Community Programming in the San Francisco Bay Area and Detroit, MI.

2. *SHI NA program participants gain new frameworks for understanding Jewish peoplehood and identity.*

In the survey of community leaders, 84% agreed that they “gained valuable models and ideas from SHI NA for understanding issues related to Jewish peoplehood.” Several participants in the Detroit Community Leadership Program appreciated the models shared for understanding the divides within the American Jewish community regarding Israel, such as the concept of the “troubled committed,” who are dismayed by some of Israel’s actions but steadfastly support its survival. Other peoplehood frameworks that resonated with participants across programs included the “being and becoming” models of Jewish identity, the concept that diaspora Jews have gone from being a people with “no home” to one with “two homes,” and understanding chosenness as a label that conveys being “exceptional but not egotistical.”

3. *SHI NA helps participants navigate issues of pluralism within the Jewish community, both through the frameworks it teaches and by modeling the exploration of “big Jewish questions” from multiple perspectives.*

Among SHI NA participants, Bay Area leaders and campus professionals highlighted pluralism most frequently in interviews, perhaps because these conversations are particularly prevalent in these communities and settings. About eight in 10 community leaders in both the Bay Area and Detroit said that they “gained valuable models and ideas from SHI NA for understanding issues related to pluralism in the Jewish community.” Participants reported that these ideas and frameworks have helped them lead diverse communities and organizations and share the value of pluralism with others. Learners also noted that encountering diverse perspectives from different SHI NA faculty and sources reinforces the idea that multiple viewpoints are valid and valuable. Finally, a number of campus professionals said that SHI NA’s values-based approach has helped them navigate divisions and polarization within their campus communities by illustrating how one can find connection even in the midst of disagreement.

4. *Both volunteer and professional community leaders gain confidence in speaking about issues related to Jewish peoplehood and new perspectives or knowledge that help them lead in the Jewish community.*

Lay leaders are more likely to share new ideas from SHI NA with friends and family, while professionals are more likely to share them in their work. The strongest outcomes of SHI NA programs for lay leaders are sharing models and ideas with friends and family (84%); gaining new perspectives or knowledge that help them lead in Jewish communal contexts (78%); feeling more confident speaking about issues related to Jewish peoplehood (73%); and feeling better equipped to respond to polarization in the Jewish community (67%). The strongest impacts for professionals are sharing models and ideas in professional roles (76%); feeling more connected to other professionals in the Jewish community (69%); gaining new perspectives or knowledge that help them lead in Jewish communal contexts (62%); and feeling more confident speaking about issues related to Jewish peoplehood (61%). The most striking contrast between lay leaders and professionals is that while only 49% of lay leaders said they had “shared models and ideas in my professional/volunteer roles,” more than three-quarters of professionals said they had done so. (Some implications of this will be explored in the Recommendations section below.)

5. *Campus professionals and day school leaders were most likely to cite their cohort as a highlight of their SHI NA experiences.*

Three-quarters of the campus professionals surveyed said that the Fellowship gave them “a cohort of similarly situated professionals to learn and connect with.” Interviewees from Cohorts 7 and 8 (who were not part of the survey) also cited the cohort as one of the most valuable benefits of the Fellowship, providing a supportive group of peer colleagues, thought partners to brainstorm with about challenges on campus and draw upon for resources, and a safe space to have challenging conversations about Israel and Jewish pluralism that might be difficult in other Hillel contexts. Cohort bonding was facilitated by SHI NA through providing unstructured “white space” during programs when participants could connect, and “keeping the conversation going” after the immersive experience through technologies like WhatsApp and Zoom. Heads of school who participated in the New York Day School Fellowship similarly valued the opportunity to engage with colleagues around important issues in Jewish life, which contrasted with their typical collaboration around practical issues or emergencies. The diversity of the day schools represented made the cohort experience especially rich, since school leaders rarely have opportunities to connect across denominational and ideological lines.

6. *Many day school educators wish that their Fellowship offered more tools and resources directly applicable to their classroom teaching.*

The New York Day School Fellowship experience was generally not as satisfying for educators as it was for school leaders, which offers important insights about how this pilot program worked for different populations. As last year’s evaluation explored, many day school educators have a “mental model” for professional development that emphasizes clear applicability within the classroom. While some of the educators interviewed this year found the learning in the Fellowship to be personally enjoyable and enriching, the large majority wished that the content was more immediately relevant for their teaching, with more practical Israel education tools and resources to use in their classrooms and content that is more relevant for multiple grades of students.

7. *Program directors and other SHI NA professionals continue to play a meaningful role in program success.*

Directors provide support and resources, facilitate community-building and program “flow,” and develop and cultivate trusting relationships with partner communities and institutions. The Year One Evaluation Report noted that the community program directors in Detroit and the Bay Area made meaningful and positive contributions to participants’ experiences by offering additional opportunities for discussion and reflection, coordinating SHI NA’s outreach in the community, and building relationships with community leaders that evolved into ongoing consultations and partnerships. A number of interviewees from these communities shared similar feedback this year, as did participants in the Campus Fellowship and New York Day School Fellowship. Participants value program directors and other SHI NA professionals for their support and community-building with both individuals and cohorts, their accessibility and responsiveness when issues arise, their enrichment of the learning by providing additional materials and ensuring cohesion and “flow” between sessions, and their overall dedication to SHI NA’s work and mission, which deepens the meaning of the experience for participants.

8. *While online programs can serve as a low-barrier entry point to SHI NA, participants across programs agreed that for ongoing learning, being in person is significantly more engaging and impactful.*

The two-year time frame of this evaluation led to an unintended “natural experiment” due to the contrast between the year of virtual learning in 2021 with the return to in-person learning in 2022.

Unsurprisingly, the overall consensus among participants is that being in person with colleagues and fellow community members creates a level of camaraderie and intellectual engagement that Zoom sessions simply can’t match. However, online learning also offers unique benefits in terms of accessibility and convenience, creating connections across geographic distance, and providing a low-barrier entry point to new experiences. A number of community program participants reported that their introduction to SHI NA came through online programs or podcasts that then sparked their desire to deepen their engagement with SHI NA learning.

9. *Nearly all participants who learn at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem identified these seminars as a pinnacle of their SHI NA programs and, for many, a unique opportunity to understand and experience the broader context of SHI NA’s work.*

More than 90% of Campus Professional Fellowship Alumni Survey respondents said that their time in Israel was critical for their growth and learning in the Fellowship. Interviewees from the Campus Professional, New York Day School, and David Hartman Center Fellowships, as well as members of the Detroit Community Leadership Program who traveled to Israel (about one-third of the group), similarly felt that being at the Institute significantly enhanced their SHI NA learning and amplified their program’s impacts. The power of the experience was attributed to a number of factors, including being immersed in study and discussion far from the day-to-day concerns of home, the unique opportunity to learn and dialogue with prominent Hartman Institute scholars, being exposed to and gaining deeper understanding of the full range of Shalom Hartman Institute programs and work in Israel and North America, and traveling within Israel to interact with diverse Israeli populations and directly encounter the complexities of Israeli society and politics.

Recommendations

1. As noted above, a higher percentage of Jewish professionals than lay leaders said that after their SHI NA program they “shar[ed] models and ideas in my professional/volunteer roles.” This divergence suggests that while SHI NA’s ideas and frameworks are clearly relevant to the pressing needs of the Jewish community, lay leaders may need more guidance or scaffolding than professionals to understand how they can incorporate SHI NA teachings into their leadership, such as examples of specific follow-up actions participants could take within their communities. This could be done in partnership with other communal organizations if SHI NA does not feel that this should be the Institute’s role. In addition, when recruiting community leaders, SHI NA should ensure that expectations about SHI NA’s understandings of leadership development are clear from the outset so that potential participants will know whether this approach matches their own learning and leadership goals.

2. Heads of schools said that they would welcome additional consultation from SHI NA to help them take the next steps in translating their Fellowship experience into meaningful changes in their schools, as well as opportunities to stay connected to their cohort. One head of school also suggested that in addition to community-based Fellowships, SHI NA could consider an “RLI for Day School Heads” that would bring together day school leaders from across North America (including those in other leadership roles such as principals and division heads) for intensive learning and dialogue at the Institute in Israel.
3. While it may be that classroom educators in day schools are not the right audience for SHI NA programs due to their desire for more immediately applicable professional development, a few educators did suggest ways that SHI NA learning could be adapted to this population. These included focusing specifically on high school teachers (rather than teachers of younger grades), creating a program or curriculum that progresses from more theoretical to more concrete content (and communicating about this structure at the outset), and collaborating with specialists in Israel education pedagogy.
4. The David Hartman Center Fellowship is unique in that rather than SHI NA bringing resources and teaching into a community or cohort of learners, the DHC Fellowship brings graduate students and postdocs to explore how they can impact the Jewish community through thought leadership, scholarship, and big ideas that speak to the greatest challenges of this moment. DHC Fellows suggested that SHI NA could build on the already positive Fellowship experience by providing additional support for navigating potential paths as academics, scholars, and contributors to Jewish communal discourse. Two primary recommendations were more intentional training and mentorship around “how to be better at sharing ideas through teaching, pedagogy, writing, and/or public communication,” and a clearer sense of how they might continue their relationship with SHI NA and what the pipeline to working with or at the Institute might look like.
5. While some elements of learning at the Shalom Hartman Institute—visits to Israeli cities and neighborhoods, sessions with certain scholars and the educational leaders at the Hartman High Schools—cannot be replicated outside of Jerusalem, intensive seminars in the United States could expand the number of SHI NA participants who benefit from the unique power of immersive learning and community building. These could range from one-day events at people’s homes (as suggested by one Bay Area lay leader) to several-day or week-long retreats with visiting Shalom Hartman Institute scholars. As one day school educator noted, blocking out several days over the summer would actually be easier for many teachers than leaving the classroom for a day each month, and would let participants “follow up with speakers instead of having to rush back to school.”

Conclusion

This evaluation journey has had at its core the goal of identifying the “secret sauce” of SHI NA’s work that has allowed it to create transformational change for so many Jewish learners and leaders. While certainly any participant’s experience is shaped in part by the individual background and goals that they bring to their learning, the research has revealed a “recipe” that seems most likely to produce meaningful impacts: 1) talented scholars and faculty who model the value of pluralism and diversity by presenting a range of ideological perspectives; 2) designing programs around compelling ideas that speak to the challenges that Jewish leaders are wrestling with and help make sense of complex and often contradictory realities; 3) recruiting program participants who are comfortable in the realm of “high-level” ideas (as opposed to seeking specific and practical resources), but who can also envision how these ideas will translate to the settings they work and lead in; 4) providing intensive and immersive learning experiences (primarily at the Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, though other locations may also be viable) that include encounters with people and communities who make the concepts being studied come alive; and 5) developing cohorts of colleagues who forge deep connections and can provide ongoing resources, support, and a safe space for challenging conversations both during and after the program. This is not to say that other approaches and program models should not be part of SHI NA’s overall portfolio, such as using online and shorter programs as gateways to more intensive learning or exploring partnerships to reach and engage new learner populations. Overall, however, this evaluation has shown that numerous Jewish leaders across multiple contexts and settings are eager for the kind of learning experience—that expands and deepens understanding, elevates discourse, bridges divides, and empowers thought leadership—that SHI NA is uniquely able to provide.



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