

# Study says Jews volunteer, but not because of 'Jewish' values

by [Lauren Markoe](#)

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(RNS) Young Jewish Americans volunteer enthusiastically for a multitude of causes, but the vast majority do not connect their service to their Jewish identity, Jewish institutions or Israel.

These findings, from a survey released Thursday (June 23), both hearten and concern Jewish leaders.

"The good news is that this is an idealistic, motivated population," said Jon Rosenberg, CEO of Repair the World, the New York non-profit that sponsored the study and promotes Jewish volunteerism. Rosenberg billed the report as the most comprehensive to date on young Jews and volunteerism.

Seventy percent of the 951 young adults surveyed said they had volunteered at least once in the past year, though much of that service was episodic, with 40 percent of respondents serving less than once a month.

Rosenberg and other Jewish leaders said they want to motivate young Jewish Americans to volunteer more regularly, but they also worry about the disconnect between young Jewish volunteers and their Jewish faith.

Only 27 percent of respondents said they volunteered based on their Jewish values, and only 10 percent indicated that their primary volunteer commitment was organized by a Jewish group. Just 3 percent said the primary focus of their volunteer efforts was a cause related to Israel.

The findings point to the need to teach young Jews how their service reflects their heritage, said Ruth W. Messinger, president of American

Jewish World Service, which sends about 350 young Jews abroad each year to help poor non-Jews in the developing world.

"You don't have to learn the whole canon of Torah and commentary to learn how your service reflects Jewish values," she said, offering her organization as a model. "Our work is done with a set of Jewish teachings on why the work is Jewish work."

Rosenberg said the survey should push more synagogues and Jewish schools to emphasize service as an important part of Jewish life. "There are windows of opportunity from childhood through young adulthood when the connection can be made between who you are as a Jew and who you are as a global citizen," he said.

The survey also showed that service was closely linked to gender and religious observance, with Orthodox Jews showing the highest levels of volunteerism, at 83 percent. Of those surveyed, 78 percent of women said they had volunteered in the past year, compared to 63 percent of men.

The respondents ranged in age from 18 to 35.

The survey was conducted as a joint effort between the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University and Gerstein-Agne Strategic Communications. Its sample was culled in part from a list of applicants to Taglit-Birthright Israel, the organization that gives young Jews free trips to Israel.