

The Shift



A Discussion on Welcoming & Engaging Gen Z

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Inspiring
Jewish
Homes

THIS REPORT

Moishe House provides spaces and pathways for more than 65,000 unique Jewish young adults around the world to create meaningful and welcoming Jewish communities for themselves and their peers each year. Our entire organization is dedicated to serving and engaging with young adults ages 22-32, and those young adults are now shifting to Gen Z. Their behavior and needs have changed from those who came before, and we must understand them and adapt our own approach to be accessible for Gen Z in an authentic way.

We have experienced new challenges with this shifting demographic and are embracing the opportunity to learn how we can best engage Gen Z. Over the past 12-18 months, we have seen more difficulty in prospective residents completing their house applications, picking a home, and signing a lease. These are steps in Moishe House's application process which have run smoothly in the past. Now, we know the demand for peer-led communities is still prevalent, and we can see that our existing system needs adjusting to serve Gen Z. We've been adapting as fast and as intelligently as we can so that our approach lines up with the next generation of our community.

As we continue to learn about Gen Z, we will evolve in public and open source our thinking, including the initial findings in this report, in hopes of benefiting and collaborating with you:

- Our staff, who are members of and/or on the ground with this new generation
- Funders and partner organizations who want to serve this new generation and/or collaborate with us on this work
- All others who are interested in the shifting generational landscape

Through our own experience and review of the existing Gen Z literature, we've uncovered four core themes for engaging Gen Z in communal life.

 **AUTHENTICITY**  **AFFILIATION**  **GATHERING**  **WELLBEING**

We'll explore these themes in this report by sharing our research, our own efforts, and examples of organizations serving Gen Z in new and productive ways.

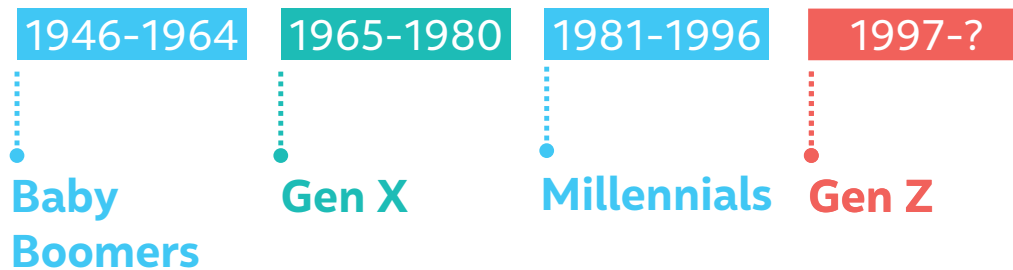
We don't have all of the answers, but we are deeply invested in this topic and invite you to connect and collaborate with us as we experiment and evolve. We close this report with actionable recommendations and open questions with the hope you will join us in supporting and empowering Gen Z.



MILLENNIALS TO GEN Z: WHAT HAS CHANGED

Generation Z, the self-secure, action-oriented, digitally native generation born after 1996 brings with it a fresh set of expectations, challenges, and opportunities.

A perfectly clear line between Gen Z and the Millennials (born 1981-96) who precede them has yet to emerge, but there are distinct differences between the two generations. To name a few: Millennials grew up with security and their worlds were rocked by 9/11 and the economic crash of 2008, while Gen Zers were born into the instability of the war on terror and the Great Recession. Millennials were raised by confident, lenient Boomers (born 1946-64), while safety-conscious Gen Xers (born 1965-80) sheltered their Gen Z children much more than prior generations. Millennials were new to social media and posted without limits, while Gen Zers are digital natives who are protective of their personal data and hyper-aware of their personal brands. Millennials are idealistic and now-focused, while Gen Zers are pragmatic and future-focused.



Gen Zers tend to be resilient, entrepreneurial, and socially conscious, but, due in part to today's "always on" technology, they struggle with stress, loneliness, and viewpoints that differ from their own.

Gen Zers have instant access to all the world's information, but they are getting stuck in internet echo chambers. Gen Zers are obsessed with cultivating their individual, layered, fluid identities, but they often hide their authentic selves online. They are connected to others via social media but feel isolated in real life; they want to make true friends, not just followers. They want to be comforted and reassured and to feel stable and protected. They are scared of being in debt, of mass shootings, of sexual harassment, and of global instability. They want to feel like they are a part of something bigger than themselves.

Today's leadership and institutions have a lot of catching up to do to serve Gen Z. Those who are already innovating offer Gen Z organizational vulnerability and transparency, collaboration and shared decision-making,

"Gen Zers tend to be resilient, entrepreneurial, and socially conscious."

meaningful and trust-building in-person interactions, and support systems for personal development and health and wellness. They are helping Gen Zers improve themselves, their communities, and the world.

This may be a lot to digest. We invite you to push past that discomfort and to see yourselves as an essential, valuable part of this seismic cultural shift and as key resources for the rising generation.

The wisdom and resources of existing institutions can benefit us all: how to have meaningful conversations; how to build committed community; how to unplug and enjoy the natural world; how to resolve conflict; how to explore one's self. The challenge: dusting off what's stale, getting unstuck, and delivering those assets in a relevant, inclusive and accessible way in partnership with the next generation.

Let us embrace the opportunity to support and guide Gen Z and shape a more united, healthy Jewish community and world in the process.



THE THEMES

Our research, from articles and books to interviews with Gen Zers, experts, and our own staff, revealed four key themes that may inform the efforts of the organizations and people at the center of this generational shift:



AUTHENTICITY

Clarification and accurate communication of organizational identity and values, along with increased organizational vulnerability, earn trust



AFFILIATION

New ways to understand loyalty and structure membership are essential for creating a modern sense of belonging



GATHERING

Immersive, in-person gatherings and spaces curated for wellbeing that nurture relationships, meaning, and growth for attendees



WELLBEING

Cultivation of emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical wellbeing builds self esteem, combats stress and depression, and fosters healthy communities

We illustrate the way these themes are at play via our own work, plus that of others in and outside of the Jewish institutional landscape. We raise up the successes, as well as highlight the gaps and opportunities. We invite you to consider these approaches for yourself.



AUTHENTICITY

Gen Z is curious and used to having access to information, and they'll look for it. Before spending their time or money, they want to know what a brand or organization stands for, who the humans are behind it, and what the exact ROI of spending their resources on that offering is. Gen Zers want to get what is advertised and won't tolerate bait and switch offers. Gen Zers won't blindly follow orders. They want to challenge themselves and those around them to innovate and push boundaries. They don't need hand-holding, but they value coaching and clear paths to success and expect to communicate directly and regularly with organizational leaders so they can ask questions and voice their opinions. Gen Z's voracious appetite for information is about building mutual trust, and they depend on influencers and their peers for candid reviews. Gen Zers seek transparency, authenticity, vulnerability, and inclusion, and when they get it from organizations, that paves

the way for Gen Zers to feel a meaningful sense of belonging and a stronger sense of accountability to those organizations, as well as increased social capital and effectiveness for those organizations.

EXAMPLES

Moishe House

- At the annual Moishe House North American Training Conference, the CEO invites all participants to a candid discussion about the organizational budget. The participants learn about budgeting, gain an understanding of Moishe House's financial decision-making, and leave feeling confident in the value of Moishe House's offerings. In fact, the trust-building transparency of these sessions has motivated Moishe House participants to increase their own fundraising efforts for the organization. Participants have requested similar deep dives into Moishe House's partnerships and policies, so Moishe House has decreased the ratio of Regional Managers to houses and dedicated more time and effort to including participants in key strategic decision making.

Other

- **Patagonia** is fully transparent about its supply chain and put its values into action by donating the \$10M it saved from tax cuts to environmental groups
- **Aerie's** non-photoshopped, body-inclusive lingerie ads lead the way for inclusivity in fashion, and their #AExME Spring campaign surrendered creative control to 10 Gen Z influencers, recognizing their potential for impact and desire to be heard
- The visual content and real-time sharing on **Snapchat**, the app Gen Zers consider their social home, are the ultimate evidence of transparent (although not always authentic) living

"It was very interesting getting to dive into Moishe House's budget, and I definitely have a new appreciation for how budget decisions are made. It's pretty amazing that MoHo is so transparent with this stuff."

- Moishe House National Training Conference attendee



AFFILIATION

Gen Z is on track to be the most diverse generation yet, from race and ethnicity to gender identity. Gen Zers' identities are fluid and constantly evolving, and they reject binary norms. Overt brand association and traditional membership can be too stark for Gen Zers. They want to have a grounded sense of home, but they are more likely to align themselves with a variety of convenient experiences that reaffirm their developing identities rather than one. Gen Zers want to feel like they are co-creating something greater than themselves. Like Millennials, Gen Z continues to shift the focus away from paid dues and dedicated membership and is

prompting a new definition of loyalty, moving towards flexible belonging and becoming. They will give time and money, though, as long as they know where their resources are going and the cause matters to them, people they trust and respect are also giving to that cause or organization, and the donation process is easy.

“Who you affiliate with, not what you affiliate with, is the new name of the game.”

- Fred, 21, Hillel student leader

“In your 20s, the path for Jewish life (and really, all of life) is uncharted. Moishe House has changed that, helping us create rituals, innovate within our urban spaces, and open our homes to enable all Jews to come as they are and flourish among friends.”

- Stefanie, 28, Moishe House participant and WE ARE campaign donor

EXAMPLES

Moishe House

- In 2011, we launched our annual resident-driven WE ARE campaign, a platform for Moishe House leaders in their 20s to contribute and ask their peers and families to give. By learning and adapting each year, this campaign continues to succeed – giving has increased from roughly \$10K in its first year to \$100K this past year. Because donors can designate their gifts for programs in their specific locations, local houses have unique ownership to plan their campaigns in authentic ways (including post-campaign donor celebration events to thank their communities), the campaign time period is short and well-defined to inspire action and avoid burnout, and all campaign activities are organized on an online platform that allows residents to customize their own landing pages and easily share their campaign with peers on social media. WE ARE provides agency and a sense of belonging to Moishe House participants without locking them into traditional annual dues or membership fees.

Other

- Members of **ClassPass**, a subscription-based fitness app, gain access to thousands of exercise classes around the country without having to join a specific gym
- **YR Media** is a national network of young journalists and artists who collaborate with their peers around the country and top media professionals to create content that matters
- A variety of gender-neutral clothing brands are emerging, rejecting the gender binary and creating pieces for everyone
- **OneTable** makes it easy for anyone to host or join a Shabbat dinner at home, providing an accessible entry point for young people to feel a sense of belonging in the Jewish community and to develop their own sustainable and valuable ritual practice



GATHERING

Gen Zers seek experiences that facilitate meaningful, deep relationship building and offer a retreat from their “always on,” technology-heavy environments. That said, Gen Zers want the in-person gatherings they attend to be Instagram-worthy and to incorporate experience-enhancing technology. They will attend unique, thoughtfully

EXAMPLES

Moishe House

- Moishe House gatherings occur in intimate homes, not in large institutional buildings, and are designed by the people who will be attending them. Moishe House asks of its participants, “What does your community need and how can we help you build it?” rather than impose prescribed plans. Moishe House’s most popular Jewish learning retreat is called Retreatology, which trains participants on facilitation and the art of retreat-making. These trainings began as an experiment with low attendance; participation doubled when we transformed the workshops into multi-day, in-depth experiences and, as a result there are now 100 Peer-Led Retreats taking place in over 35 countries around the world.

Other

- The **Houseparty** app aims to connect people in the most meaningful way when they are physically apart
- **Daybreaker** is an alcohol-free morning dance party designed to help its participants start their day with energy and intention. Daybreaker advertises its woman-owned status and the fact that it buys carbon offsets. This gathering speaks directly to Gen Z’s risk-averse behavior and concern for the environment and personal wellbeing
- In the aftermath of #MeToo, **Junto** hosts weekend experiences and curates the best events for men who are curious about personal transformation and modern masculinity. These events nurture the identity exploration and deep relationship building that Gen Zers crave and builds on Gen Zers’ desire to help others and improve the world
- **JDC Entwine Insider Trips** provide globally-minded, curious young adults with cultural immersion, dynamic conversations around the value of global Jewish responsibility, and unparalleled access to the work of the world’s largest Jewish humanitarian aid organization

curated events that speak to their personal interests and allow for customization. They expect “safe spaces” that welcome all identities and are free of judgment and risk of physical or emotional harm. Gen Zers rely on recommendations from trusted friends and influencers before attending gatherings.

“Everyone who comes is fun, smart, creative, kind, and, most of all, Jewish in their own unique way. I am proud to foster a community that allows individuals to interact with each other and be themselves.”

– Brandon, 26, Moishe House participant





WELLBEING

Gen Z needs care and cultivation. The American Psychology Association's 2018 Stress in America survey showed that more Gen Z individuals than adults in other generations thought their mental health was fair or poor. Today's teens want help managing anxiety or depression, coping with academic pressure, responding to self-esteem issues, and processing setbacks and disappointment. Social media can provide a feeling of support for Gen Zers, but it also makes them feel judged and isolated. Despite that tension and the stress that world events cause among Gen Z, 75% of the overall participants in the APA's survey said they feel hopeful about their future. Gen Zers are cutting back on alcohol consumption and embracing a holistic approach to physical and mental wellbeing. There is a growing body of research that shows that lifestyle changes like close relationships, exercise and time outdoors, and spiritual expression can combat many of the wellbeing issues discussed above.

"Now more than ever, [Moishe House Regional] Managers are seeing residents struggle with mental health. Most of the time it can be daunting for us to deal with as the majority of us are not trained social workers...It was so helpful to have a session last week that taught us how to recognize signs of distress."

- Michele, 26, Moishe House staff



EXAMPLES

Moishe House

- In the past couple of years, Moishe House has learned of an increasing number of participants requesting quiet, calm, restorative spaces. Moishe House now offers a popular restoration room filled with candles, coloring books, and yoga mats at its North American training conferences; hosts well-attended mindfulness retreats; and, through a partnership with Jewish Family Services, offers trainings on mental health and an on-call social worker to support staff.

Other

- **Hillel International** is spending \$1M over the next couple of years on mental health and wellbeing initiatives, including mental health training for staff members and Wellness Labs for developing wellbeing programs on campus, largely centered around community forums and relationship building
- **Talkspace** is a digital therapy company whose users have access to licensed therapists through the website or mobile app, including a dedicated Talkspace for Teens product which offers affordable pricing and unlimited messaging
- Some college students and young grads are replacing their smartphones for the privacy, price, and productivity of flip phones
- Gen Zers are drinking less, committing to "Dry January," alcohol abstinence in the first month of the new year, and 100% organic, gluten-free, dairy-free, nut-free, fair-trade, non-GMO, booze-free craft cocktails like **Curious Elixirs**.

RECOMMENDATIONS & OPEN QUESTIONS

Gen Z is just emerging into adulthood, with the youngest members of the generation barely out of diapers, so what we've presented here is neither definitive nor universal; what we know about Gen Zers will develop as they mature. We are learning how to serve and partner with this generation right alongside you. Below, we suggest a series of takeaways based on our current understanding of Gen Z, as well as questions to ponder. We hope you'll actively join us in this ongoing exploration.



Observe trends and be proactive

We have seen a major shift in our prospective participants' behaviors as they shift from Millennials to Gen Zers. It has been more difficult to get them to complete their resident applications, and applicants have reported feeling overwhelmed by the group process of picking a home and signing a lease. These applicants have dropped out of the process to pursue their career paths and "do me." We acknowledged the generational shift prompting these hurdles and recognized that we would need to change our approach right away. Now, each prospective resident or group gets upfront visibility into and can customize the application process, skipping or rearranging steps based on their needs. We have also introduced Pods (two-person Moishe Houses) to serve prospective residents who might otherwise opt to move in with their parents or live alone or with a small group. It can be difficult to accept that a system that has worked for years no longer functions as it once did, and if you're noticing that this upcoming generation isn't responding well to your current processes, trust what you're experiencing and make the necessary changes.

Dedicate resources to innovation

The only constant in running an organization is the fact that status quo doesn't – can't – exist. As new technologies emerge and your constituency comes and goes, change is inevitable. Don't task an intern with figuring out how your organization should serve Gen Z just because they are closer in age, and don't relegate innovation to a time-strapped taskforce; give this generational shift the effort and resources it requires. Communicate how and why your organization is changing and give your staff and

members the chance to participate and adapt. Moishe House is building its first R&D department, co-creating this team and its initiatives with Gen Zers themselves. If your organization doesn't have the resources to build a team like this yourself, please partner with us!

Revisit your organizational mission and values and how and where they show up

Transparency is how much you share and authenticity is the truth of your words and actions. Gen Zers don't just require honesty – they also expect organizations to articulate crystal clear values that align with theirs and that are reflected in the organizations' words and actions. That said, organizations do not have to share everything all the time with everyone. How much should organizations share and when and with whom? Which issues should any organization take a public stance on and why or why not?

To successfully serve and co-create with Gen Z, our organizations must align what we think, say, and do. We must hold fast to our boundaries while also being open, vulnerable, and inclusive. If our mission or values are superficial or out of date, it's time for us to not only update them, but to also examine how they actively play out in our offices and in our work and ensure we're showing, not just telling. Not thinking about your environmental impact? Gen Z isn't interested. Have an all-white, male team or board? Gen Zers are bullish on diversity and inclusivity, so they're not having it.

Reconsider the who and how of membership

As Gen Z moves towards a more flexible type of affiliation and away from traditional paid dues and dedicated membership, ask yourself the following: What does it mean to belong to your organization? Consider what it means for someone to be affiliated with your organization, but not exclusively. How does someone become a member of your organization? Question non-customizable, steep, annual dues. How might we prioritize the quality of our relationships with Gen Zers rather than the quantity of committed members or dollars pledged? Embrace the challenge of simultaneously increasing your organization's comfort with fluid identities while also helping Gen Z improve its ability to deal with dissenting opinions. Accept the fact that no brand or community is for everyone; if your organization is authentic, it will be clear to others whether or not it's a fit for them.

Embrace their industriousness and launch their leadership

Gen Zers want to collaborate and to have control, whether they are setting app preferences or participating in your organization. Empower them to make things. Provide appropriate guidelines that offer buffers and allow for creative freedom. Support peer-driven, professional-supported initiatives and communities. When Moishe House offers micro grants to its participants, we define broad guardrails, a specific set of categories, rules that can't be broken, and otherwise let our recipients be free. Our Retreatology program, which trains Moishe House participants to create their own Peer-Led Retreats, features experiential learning led by professional educators, but once the participants have completed the training, we trust them to execute and do not send staff to monitor their retreats. This transfer of trust builds on our participants' self-guided drive and helps to build our organization and community. Give your Gen Z counterparts opportunities to weigh in and to build your organization alongside you.

Guide their spiritual development

Gen Zers are obsessed with their personal brands, and our organizations have the experience, tools, and wisdom to help them do the spiritual work that buoys those personas. An authentic brand isn't about a flawless image, it's about the underlying values that inform an aesthetic. Just as our organizations must take a stance and articulate unique, true values that guide our actions, so too do Gen Zers need a warm and welcoming place to explore who they are and how they want to be in the world.



Help them change the world

Gen Zers are determined to make an impact, and they expect brands and organizations to do the same. Gen Z expects brands to speak out and take a stand on social justice issues, so it's up to our organizations to determine which causes align most authentically with our values and how we will not only speak about them but also take action. Gen Zers don't want or need us to speak for them, though. Provide them with the tools they need to do good; nearly half of the Moishe House events attended last year had to do with social justice, community organizing, and Tikkun Olam (defined as direct service or education in the Moishe House context, often coupled with community partnerships).

Create brave spaces that feel like home

Gen Zers expect organizations to understand and protect their individual interpretations of safety, while organizations are delicately navigating new definitions of offense and micro-aggression. Address this issue directly, with candor and care, for the sake of personal growth and community building. Provide the tools and training for Gen Zers to grapple with uncomfortable ideas and understand others' perspectives. Consider introducing the idea of brave space over safe space; as Micky ScottBey Jones' poem "Invitation to Brave Space" says, "We exist in the real world. We all carry scars and we have all caused wounds...This space will not be perfect. It will not always be what we wish it to be. But, it will be our brave space together, and we will work on it side by side."

Curate physical spaces for wellbeing

As for physical structures, mesh Marie Kondo's search for joy in each object with the cozy, welcoming warmth of Meik Weiking's hygge and the familiar comfort of a haimish home. From non-gendered bathrooms to a mezuzah on the doorpost, ensure your participants feel understood and prepared to open up and connect with each other.

Partner with the people they trust

Gen Zers follow brands and join communities because the friends and influencers they respect do. Gen Zers can see right through fancy, empty marketing; they're looking for organic, authentic partnerships. Identify and highlight the people who your own audience trusts and work with them to spread the word about what you have to offer.

OUR INVITATION

This is our invitation to curiosity, creativity, action, and collaboration. For every example and suggestion we list here, we need you to offer scores more.

We are expanding our Peer-Led Retreats; offering smaller, themed Moishe Houses called Pods, e.g., a Wellness Pod, Pods for Jews of Color; prioritizing word of mouth marketing through a network of trusted and influential peers; coordinating cross-departmental teams for all new R&D projects; giving special grants to vetted Moishe House participants to help them take their community building to the next level; and more.

Who will create a fresh set of metrics to measure the quality of our relationships with our community members versus the quantity of them? Who will co-author a bold, new set of organizational values with their constituents? Who will crack the nut on creating spaces and experiences that balance radical inclusivity and acceptance with rigorous debate and respect for differing opinions?

This is a shared, ongoing journey. If you would like to partner with us in this work, please contact us directly. We would love to hear from you.

May we feel confident in the wisdom and strengths we have to offer and open to our potential for transformation as we co-create a more authentic, inclusive, flexible, connected, stable, thriving world with Gen Z and each other.



SUGGESTED READING & RESOURCES

This report was informed by a wide variety of articles, videos, interviews, and presentations. We reference our recommended reading below.

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Jordan Fruchtman is the Chief Program Officer of Moishe House, giving him the opportunity to develop its program team and the community builders they support. He is proud to have been with the Forest Foundation during the inception of Moishe House. Jordan attended the Hornstein Program at Brandeis University, graduating with an MBA and an M.A. in Jewish professional leadership. Prior to Moishe House, Jordan served as the Executive Director of Hillel in Orange County, CA, building Jewish life at UC Irvine and Chapman University. Jordan is happily married to Rachel Fruchtman, has two daughters, Ella and Lyla, and resides in beautiful North County San Diego.



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Danya is a connector at her core and loves building things from scratch. She is the founder of Arq, a media company and community that helps anyone connect with all things Jewish in a relevant, inclusive way. Danya is an On Being Fellow and a member of the ROI Community and Harvard Divinity School's invite-only cohort of spiritual innovators. She has presented globally at Wisdom 2.0, The Conference, and the University of California, Berkeley, and been featured in Bloomberg Businessweek, The Atlantic, Tablet Magazine, Thrive Global, and NPR. Danya was born and raised on the East Coast, educated in the Midwest, and lives with her husband in sunny Los Angeles.

Photo by Bethany Birnie



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