

When is the Right Time to Return to In-Person Programming

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A new survey sheds light on what Jewish families are thinking

By Karen Alpert

We've often heard the phrase that *there is nothing permanent except change*, and that's certainly the case in our COVID-19 world. As an organization grounded in delivering in-person experiences for Jewish teens, things shifted quickly for us this March when we pivoted to provide the power and impact of BBYO to Jewish teens in innovative ways via our new virtual platform, BBYO On Demand.

And yet, here we are again, contemplating what it will take to resume in-person programming this summer. When our leadership team recently met to discuss this topic, we recognized the need to better understand parent perspectives. While some families have expressed interest in resuming in-person programming, especially in states that re-opened on the earlier side, we weren't sure if this was the voice of the many or the few.

We decided to survey parents of existing BBYO members to understand what protocols and guidelines need to be in place to make them comfortable sending their teens back to in-person programming. At the same time, we were also interested in learning how families were financially impacted by COVID-19 and whether that might affect their ability to pay for programming in the future. While we asked a few specific questions on how BBYO has handled the COVID-19 situation, most of the survey questions were asked in a much broader way in the hopes that other Jewish organizations could use the results to help with their own programming decisions.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Overall, we found that 72% of parents surveyed still aren't ready for their teens to return to in-person programming – and they aren't sure when they will be. As anticipated, and based on how fast states are reopening, parents in the south were most eager to return, while those in the east were most reluctant. In addition, just over half of the families who are willing to send their children to in-person programming, are willing to host these programs in their homes because of COVID-19 health concerns. Many parents remarked in their comments that even when they do send their teens back, they would prefer programming take place in outdoor spaces only, at least in the beginning.

SAFETY MEASURES

There were four safety measures parents wanted to see in place at in-person events:

- Participants and staff required to wear their own masks
- Hand sanitizer made available
- Temperature checks conducted for participants
- Strict 6-foot social distancing guidelines maintained for all

The capacity of events was less of an issue for parents and very few felt we should require COVID-19 testing.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

A majority of families polled (54%) have been impacted financially by COVID-19 either by income reductions or because of a layoff or furlough, which will have a significant impact on families being able to afford programs, especially those with a higher price point. Nearly half of families said it is very likely or likely their financial situation would affect their ability to pay for multi-week summer experiences (~\$5,000) and 38% said it would affect their ability to pay for two-week teen program or training experiences (~\$2,000). Lower priced activities are less impacted with only 11% of families saying it would affect programs like a movie night or bowling event (~\$20). In addition, while 75% parents want BBYO to provide a variety of virtual and in-person programming, only 35% say they are willing to pay for virtual content.

LOOKING AHEAD

With nearly 1,400 parent responses to the survey, BBYO is using this feedback to help inform our reopening criteria and planning procedures. To start with, we plan to hold many of our programs outdoors and in small group settings, perform temperature checks at all of our events, provide the necessary sanitizing equipment and materials to participants, and explore new pricing models for virtual and in-person experiences to accommodate families who have been impacted financially by the current situation.

It's fair to say none of us have ever experienced anything quite like COVID-19. While we have fielded numerous surveys over the years, along with many other Jewish organizations, that aim to determine the broader aspirations parents might have for our work, our goal with this survey was to get a pulse check on the current mindset of families and their expectations for the return of our programs in person. We know these results only reflect this moment in time, and that we may need to repeat this survey over the coming months, but for now, the results have confirmed some of our assumptions and challenged others and given us a foundation on which to build our plan to re-open. We hope others find it helpful in forming their own reopening plans, as we all shift the ways in which we operate in our COVID-19 world.

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