

THE HOPE STUDY

WHAT JEWISH PROFESSIONALS TOLD US
ABOUT HOPE IN A TIME OF CRISIS

m²

SUMMARY

In the fall of 2025 the Hope Study finds that Jewish community professionals are experiencing a crisis of hope, at the same time as they exhibit strong expressions of resilience, bolstered by the restorative power of community belonging and meaningful work. They express a clear need for principled leadership, authentic peer community and practical tools to navigate threats, particularly internal community divisions.

INTRODUCTION

The Hope Study, a survey of nearly 950 Jewish communal professionals across North America was conducted in summer of 2025 by M²: The Institute for Experiential Jewish Education. The study sought to examine the sources that sustain - or detract from - hope among Jewish professionals during the period of sustained crisis that began on October 7, 2023. The findings provide a portrait of Jewish professionals at a particular moment in time, dealing with unprecedented and pervasive pressures that undermine feelings of hope and challenge resilience. Our intention was to delve deeply into the lived experiences of those who serve the Jewish community at this difficult time, listening to their voices and gaining valuable insights. This report outlines the main findings, identifies distinct patterns of professional experience, and provides data-driven recommendations for supporting those in communal professional roles.

WHO FILLED OUT THE SURVEY?

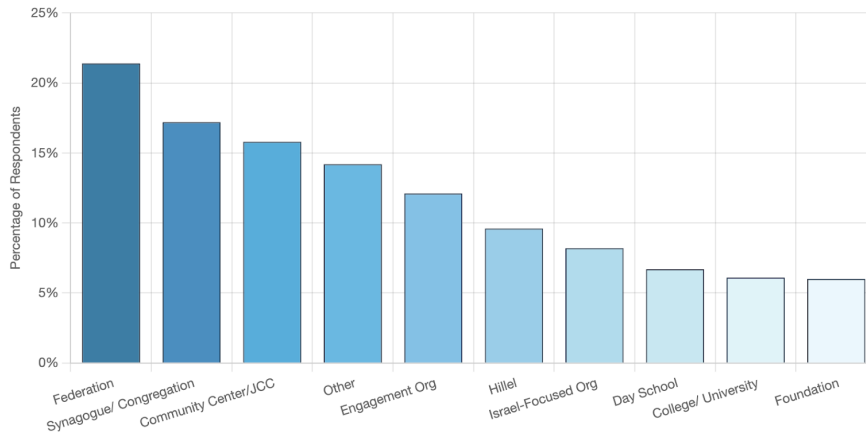
The survey was fielded in July and August 2025, with responses collected following the twelve-day Iran-Israel War (June 13–24, 2025) and just before major international media outlets began running headline reports of famine and starvation in Gaza. It captured a wide cross-section of the field of Jewish community professionals, ensuring the findings are representative of a broad professional landscape. Respondents were predominantly women, who comprised 78% of the sample. A majority, 60%, hold management or executive positions, indicating a wealth of experience. The age distribution of respondents skews towards mid-career professionals, with over half (55.3%) aged between 30 and 49. The denominational landscape was also varied, including Reform/Progressive (35%), Conservative (25%), and secular/cultural (25%) professionals, with 13% identifying as Orthodox.

Organizationally, the field's diversity was reflected with representation from many types of community organizations, including Federations (21%), Synagogues (17%), and JCCs (16%). It is noteworthy, however,

that day school professionals appear underrepresented at only 7%. This is due to the fact that the survey was fielded during the summer vacation, making it harder to reach teachers and school administrators.

Organizational Diversity Across Jewish Communal Life

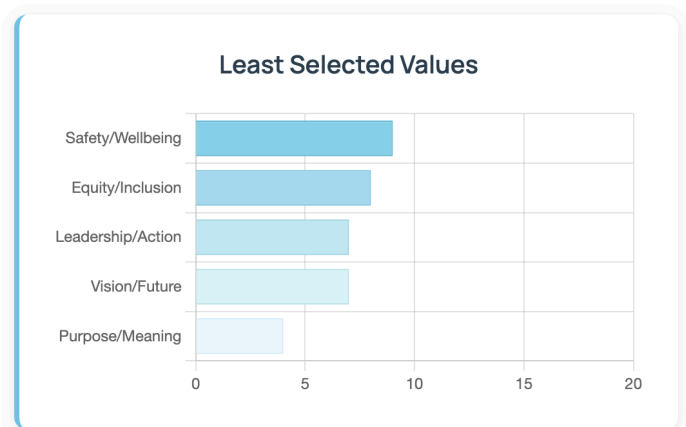
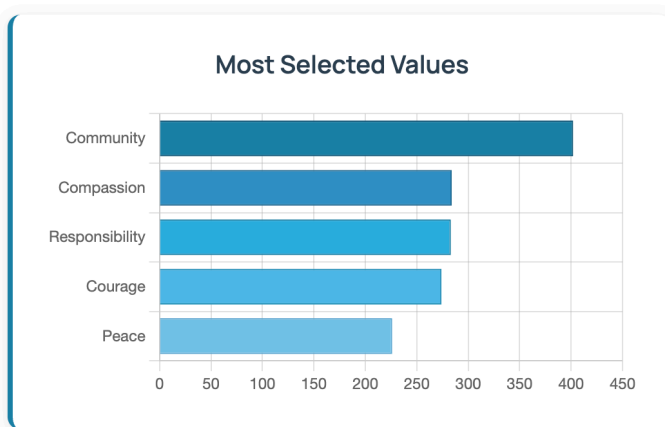
Broad representation from federations to synagogues to specialized organizations



UNDERSTANDINGS OF HOPE

Hope is a multi-faceted concept that can imply many things, and that is perhaps over-used to the point that it has lost its meaning. In order to unpack this concept with more precision, survey respondents were asked which values they associate with Hope. We discovered that professionals associate hope primarily with active, relational values rather than protective ones. "Community" was the dominant value, selected by 402 respondents (43%) as associated with Hope, nearly twice as many as the next highest value. Other highly selected values included compassion, responsibility, courage, and peace. This pattern suggests that for professionals in the field, hope emerges from feelings of belonging, active participation and contribution, rather than from feelings of being protected or included. In this context, hope is less about safety and more about active connection and responsibility.

Associations with Hope: Most vs. Least Selected Values



SOURCES OF HOPE

Professionals were asked about their sources of hope. Analysis of their answers reveals four distinct sources of hope, with professional impact standing out as the most powerful.

- 1. Professional Impact** – The strongest source of hope came from the sense that their work makes a difference. A large majority (85%) highlighted the impact of their work on others, while nearly three-quarters (73%) pointed to support from colleagues.
- 2. Social Change** – Many drew hope from witnessing acts of courage and kindness (80%) and from their own engagement in social change.
- 3. Belonging** – Hope was also rooted in feelings of belonging: connection to one’s local community, to Jewish life and to Israel.
- 4. Tradition** – Jewish learning, traditions, and personal spirituality provided another pathway to hope for many professionals.

Notably, connection to Israel emerged as a highly polarizing source of hope. While a majority (55%) described it as very important, more than a quarter (26%) rated it “not important” – the highest rejection rate of any one source – underscoring the depth of division on this issue within the professional field.

A PATHWAY TO RESILIENCE - HOPE, BELONGING AND WORK

One of the study’s most striking findings is that Jewish community professionals are, as a group, experiencing significant personal distress, with only 24% feeling hopeful about the future “often” or “very often” – a stark contrast to 82% of the general U.S. population [1]. This figure requires urgent recognition and meaningful intervention.

The findings of the Study offer us some directions for intervention; while hope scored low, a clear majority (55%) report feeling energized by their work ‘often’, and a substantial 73% feel a strong connection to the Jewish people ‘often’ or ‘very often’.

Despite these differences and the apparent contradiction they imply (that professionals have low levels of hope but higher levels of work energy and belonging), these three variables are strongly and positively correlated. This statistical association indicates that individuals who report a strong sense of belonging and high work energy are also more likely to report feeling hopeful. This may suggest a model of resilience in which a strong sense of identity and professional purpose function as protective factors that sustain hope, even as the overall percentage of highly hopeful individuals remains limited.



1. Human Flourishing Lab (2024). Hope in America: Visions of the Future. <https://humanflourishinglab.org/hope-in-america-2024/>

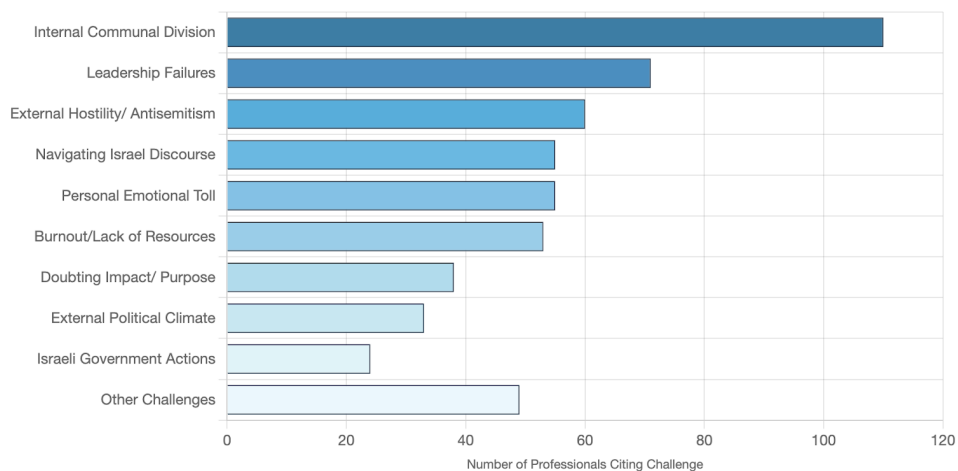
THE REAL CHALLENGE - INTERNAL DIVISIONS VS EXTERNAL THREATS

When professionals identified their greatest professional challenges a striking pattern emerged; the biggest threats aren't coming from outside the Jewish community, they are emerging from within it. "Internal communal division" dominated the answers, with 100 mentions (20%), nearly twice as many as other concerns. In their own words, professionals describe feeling "caught between competing factions", "unable to navigate constituency expectations", and "watching our community tear itself apart". Leadership failures ranked as the second most common challenge (13%), while external threats such as antisemitism ranked only third (11%), despite the unprecedented rise in antisemitic incidents.

This suggests that while external antisemitism creates personal distress, most professionals have found ways to continue functioning despite these pressures. Internal community divisions, however, directly interfere with their ability to work effectively and are their biggest challenge to feeling hopeful.

Internal Communal Division as the Overwhelming Challenge

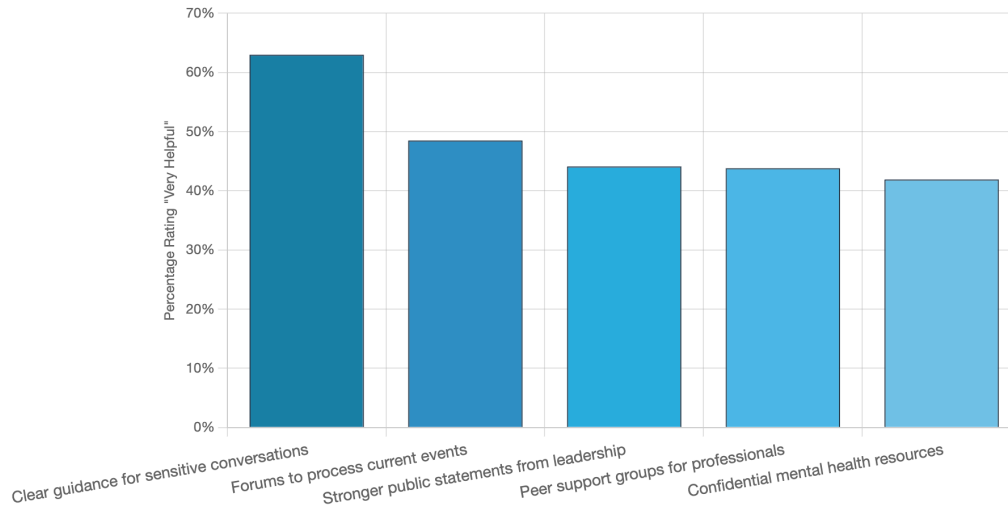
Most frequently cited challenges to professional hope and purpose



PROFESSIONAL NEEDS - A CALL FOR GUIDANCE AND PRACTICAL TOOLS

When asked how their organizations can best support them, professionals showed a clear and pragmatic preference for collective, skill-building resources over individual therapeutic interventions, with the desire for practical tools significantly outperforming other options. The top priority identified was "clear guidance on navigating sensitive conversations" (63%). Next were requests for collective processing opportunities, such as "forums to process current events with colleagues" (48%) and "peer support groups" (44%). In contrast, "confidential mental health resources" was ranked lowest among the four options presented (42%). The 21-point gap between the highest and lowest priorities suggests that the primary organizational response to professional stress should focus on building internal support systems, such as clear leadership communication and structured peer conversations, rather than primarily referring employees to individualized mental health services.

Guidance for sensitive conversations is the greatest need



FIVE DISTINCT PROFESSIONAL PROFILES

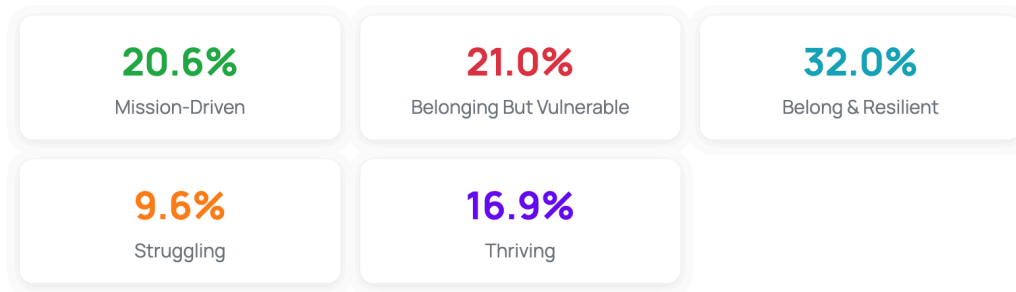
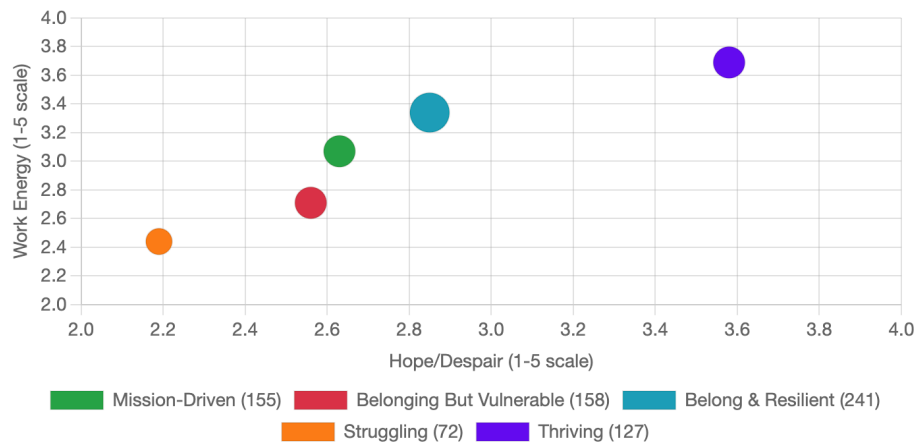
Jewish community professionals do not share a single experience of hope or work energy. Statistical analysis of the survey data revealed five distinct professional profiles, ranging from those who are thriving to those who are deeply struggling. This spread shows both the potential for strength and the depth of vulnerability across the field.

1. **Thriving** (16.9%) – Professionals with the highest levels of both hope and work energy. They are disproportionately male and in executive roles, and suggest an alignment between professional purpose and personal outlook.
2. **Belong & Resilient** (32%) – The largest group. Their strong Jewish belonging and steady work energy sustain them through crisis, allowing them to manage stress and maintain effectiveness.
3. **Mission-Driven** (20.6%) – Professionals motivated by purpose but reporting lower hope. Their work fuels them, but without the same resilience as the thriving or resilient groups.
4. **Belong but Vulnerable** (21%) – Despite a strong Jewish connection, these professionals remain vulnerable. Their belonging does not fully translate into resilience, leaving them more exposed to stress.
5. **Struggling** (9.6%) – The smallest but most at-risk group. They report the lowest levels of both hope and work energy and with a large proportion identifying as secular/cultural Jews.

These profiles reveal a divided professional landscape. While thriving and resilient professionals can serve as models of strength, urgent attention is needed for the Belong but Vulnerable, and Struggling groups. Without targeted support for these most vulnerable professionals, the field risks long-term depletion of talent and morale at precisely the time they are most needed.

Hope and Work Energy Across Professional Types

Each type shows different combinations of hope levels and work energy



ADDITIONAL FINDINGS: DISPARITIES AND LEADERSHIP BLIND SPOTS

Beneath the overall patterns of hope and resilience, the data reveal critical disparities that cut across gender, organizational setting and leadership level. These gaps show that not all professionals are experiencing the crisis in the same way - and that inequities within the field shape how support is needed and felt:

- A significant **Gender Gap** exists, with women (78% of respondents) reporting significantly lower hope levels (average score of 2.75 on a scale from 1 to 5) than men (average score of 3.01) [2].
- **Organizational differences** are also clear: day school professionals scored highest on positive measures, while staff at social justice organizations reported some of the lowest hope levels.
- A **potential leadership blind spot** emerged, with executive-level professionals reporting higher levels of hope (average score of 2.94) than their staff (average score of 2.77) [3]. This creates a risk where resilient leaders may underestimate the support needs of their teams, reinforcing the necessity of intentional and empathetic leadership.

Taken together, these findings suggest that disparities are not peripheral but central. Gender, organizational context, and leadership roles all shape how professionals experience hope and despair. These disparities underscore that the field's resilience will depend not on averages, but on how well organizations respond to the unequal burdens carried by different groups of professionals.

2. The term 'statistically significant' means the observed difference is very unlikely to be due to random chance. Full data: Men (sample size n=164, Mean=3.01, Standard Deviation=0.77); Women (n=566, M=2.75, SD=0.74); $p < .001$.

3. Full data: Executives (sample size n=138, Mean=2.94, Standard Deviation=0.74); Non-Executives (n=622, M=2.77, SD=0.75); $p = .014$.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the Hope Study point to a clear set of actionable recommendations for organizations seeking to support their professionals. They suggest that our focus must shift from reacting to external threats to proactively building internal community infrastructure and capacity. Directions for action include:

1. **Develop principled leadership:** Address the top priority identified – clear guidance on navigating sensitive conversations – by equipping leaders to communicate with both pragmatic and moral clarity. Professionals need straightforward direction and principled communication from their leaders to feel supported in moments of uncertainty and tension.
2. **Provide dialogue & conversation training:** Nearly half of professionals asked for forums to process current events with colleagues and peer support groups. Creating these spaces – alongside tools for navigating sensitive issues – can help address the field’s primary challenge of internal communal division, turning difficult conversations into opportunities for trust and connection.
3. **Make impact visible:** Reinforce the strongest source of hope, namely “the impact of my work on others”, by implementing systems that help staff regularly see the tangible results of their contributions. Recognition, storytelling, and visible outcomes sustain morale and strengthen commitment.
4. **Strengthen Jewish identity and belonging:** Fortify the foundational component of resilience (Jewish Belonging) by deepening connection to Jewish identity and community. Shared learning, ritual, and storytelling remind professionals they are part of something larger and enduring.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the message from Jewish professionals is clear: their resilience is sustained by meaningful work and belonging, but their hope is challenged by internal divisions. They are not asking for therapy, but for tangible support in the form of leadership, community, and practical skills. By investing in this internal infrastructure, organizations have a direct and powerful opportunity to renew hope and ensure the long-term vitality of their most valuable asset—their people.

