
*Limmud NY 2006:
The Event and Volunteers Who
Made It Happen*

Annette Koren
With Aviva Androphy

Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for
Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In January 2006, over 750 Jewish New Yorkers of all ages and many different backgrounds came together for the second annual Limmud NY event at Kutshers Resort in the Catskill Mountains. This diverse group of Jews celebrated their Jewish identity through a myriad of activities from serious text study to *challah* baking and rocking musical concerts. Initiated by a group of lay leaders who had attended Limmud UK, funded in part by the UJA Federation and the Picower Foundation, and organized by a group of dedicated volunteers, Limmud NY offered Jews a variety of access points to Judaism: traditional study, culture and arts, history and politics, and worship services. Much as in 2005, Limmud NY in 2006 again engaged and excited participants of all ages.

In its second year, Limmud NY asked Brandeis University's Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS) to evaluate its extended weekend in the Catskills as well as the volunteer planning leading up to it. CMJS interviewed members of the planning teams, some in leadership and some in supporting positions, observed the event, and conducted a survey of all participants. The research found that Limmud NY brought together a truly diverse group of Jews, empowered volunteers to organize and present a weekend of learning and celebration, and provided an opportunity for people to enjoy their Judaism and expand their Jewish horizons. Three-quarters of the participants were somewhat or very satisfied with their Limmud NY experience. The majority of participants found Limmud NY to be fun and a great learning experience. Most agreed that it was a more meaningful experience than most organized programs, and almost half definitely plan to return next year.

The people who came to Limmud NY 2006 were, at least in most measurable demographic and "Jewish" ways, very similar to those who came in 2005. The plurality came from the Upper West Side of Manhattan, and identified as Conservative. Two-thirds were women. Although the number of people over 80 years old went from one in 2005 to eleven in 2006, the age distribution otherwise was very much the same. As in 2005, about a third of the participants were employed professionally in the Jewish world. Most of the participants had extensive Jewish education in their youth with about a third having attended four or more years of yeshiva or day school. Most said they celebrate Shabbat or Jewish holidays with friends or family members with some regularity and attend worship services on a regular basis. The primary difference in the background of participants in 2005 and 2006 is that, in 2006, Limmud NY attracted more people who lack direct ties to "establishment" Jewish organizations or worship communities.

The 2006 participants also responded to Limmud NY in much the same ways that 2005 participants did. Almost 70% said it was "fun," two-thirds said the program was personally meaningful for them, and 75% said it had been a high-quality learning experience. Not everyone in this last group found Limmud NY intellectually challenging, but it provided them with a positive learning experience nonetheless. Participants said

that Limmud NY succeeded in welcoming diverse beliefs and practices (92%) and providing sessions that included diverse strands of Jewish thought (65%).

Most Limmud NY volunteers came away excited and enthusiastic about the program and their role in the planning effort. They expressed satisfaction and indicated that they plan to help organize Limmud NY 2007 as well. Not all volunteers were as positive as others, and this report highlights some of the issues that came up in interviews and in comments on the survey. Limmud NY may need to better define its vision and goals for planners and assure that the process feels more inclusive for everyone. Yet, despite these issues, reactions were mainly positive, and 60% of this year's group intends to help plan next year.

Participants and volunteers left Limmud NY 2006 feeling charged and energized about the event and their experience. They are eager to tell their friends about Limmud NY and plan to encourage them to attend next year. A third of the 2006 participants had attended the 2005 event. Most of them intend to become "regular" *Limmudnyks* with 60% of them already sure they will return in 2007. In the survey, a third of 2006 participants wrote about interests stimulated by Limmud NY that they are pursuing. Some of them are already involved in planning for 2007. Whether the event and the planning experience have long-term impact is a question for future research. For now, participants say it helped them make new friends and generated new interests and connections to Judaism. As this report makes clear, the excitement surrounding Limmud NY and its celebration of Jewish life continues.

INTRODUCTION

Limmud NY was established in December 2003 with support from UJA-Federation of NY through a grant from the Picower Foundation.¹ It was modeled after Limmud UK which was itself conceived out of the idea of CAJE, then known as the Conference on Alternatives in Jewish Education. CAJE, now the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education, focuses on the professional development of Jewish educators and is organized by a professional staff. Limmud UK quickly discarded the focus on Jewish educators and opened itself to the entire Jewish community. It was and continues to be led by dedicated volunteers. This structure of volunteer leadership is a crucial element of Limmud NY as well.

Limmud NY attracted over 600 people to its first annual conference in January 2005. This year, on Martin Luther King Weekend, January 12-16, 2006, Limmud NY held its second annual conference at Kutshers Country Club in the Catskill Mountains and attracted over 750 participants. Limmud NY expanded not simply the number of people it attracted. It also expanded the number of programs and the length of time available for the event. In 2006 the event started on Thursday, adding almost a full day of extra programming.

Limmud NY consists of two equally important elements. The first is the event itself—four (or five) days of all things Jewish. The other, the volunteer planning experience, engages a distinct subset of participants (81 in 2005 and 86² in 2006). These individuals expend vast amounts of time and effort to make Limmud NY happen. The event itself—the enjoyment and benefits—contributes to people’s desire to be part of the planning process. It charges them with enthusiasm and excitement that has to last the year until the next event. The quality of the experience planning Limmud NY, in turn, affects the atmosphere and the overall success of the event itself. Limmud NY, then, provides two new access points for Jews in the greater New York City area: the event and the organizing. Although most of its participants lead active, involved Jewish lives, some use Limmud NY to come back to a Judaism they had neglected. Others use Limmud NY to explore a new, more diverse, more relevant kind of Judaism, and some are approaching Jewish living and learning for the first time.

For this research, Brandeis University’s Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies conducted a post-event survey and 12 interviews with volunteer planners in order to study the people who made Limmud NY happen, the event itself, and ways in which participants have been affected by the event. Those who have attended Limmud NY appreciate that it is, in some ways, unique. This introduction explains that unique quality as well as the structure that makes Judaism accessible and enjoyable for so many.

¹ Limmud NY is also supported by the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, which provides conference scholarships for students and Jewish educators; the Alan B. Slifka Foundation; the Harold Grinspoon Foundation; the Nash Family Foundation; and numerous anonymous donors.

² These are the number of people thanked in the program book. Slightly fewer answered the survey (78).

Limmud NY: A Unique Jewish Learning Experience

Limmud is the Hebrew word for “learning” and Limmud NY strives to make learning its mission. All members of the greater New York Jewish community are invited to take part in the Limmud NY conference, an event in which Jewish learning is the goal, whether it be through the medium of textual learning, discussions, or creative expression. Conference participants are encouraged to explore their Jewish beliefs and heritage in many different ways.

Participants come to Limmud NY as a retreat. The venue is purposely too far from homes and jobs for participants to be able to leave for work or family obligations. The weekend has a specific focus – Jewish learning – and it takes place in the relaxing environment of the Catskills. Retreats are one of the proposed “Ten R’s that foster adult Jewish growth” as proposed by Schuster in her book, *Jewish Lives, Jewish Learning*. As she states, “One way for Jewish adults to come in the door of Jewish learning is through a retreat where they can congregate with other like-minded Jews.” She elaborates that retreats allow people to get away from their hectic lives, giving them “structures for reflection and new meaning-making.” (Schuster, 2003).

While Limmud NY is not the first organization to introduce Jewish educational retreats, it offers unique opportunities that are unfulfilled by similar events. CAJE, while similar in its commitment to Jewish education, diverges from Limmud NY in its mission and direction. The primary target population for CAJE conferences and events is Jewish educators. Like Limmud NY, the CAJE conference fosters discussion within an environment comprised of diverse individuals, and it moves participants towards the advancement of Jewish learning. Yet, CAJE focuses on the specific sphere of Jewish education while Limmud NY embraces and promotes all areas of Jewish life and experience.

Other programs that promote Jewish learning are not as inclusive as Limmud NY. For example, the United Jewish Communities’ Project *Limudim*, a national adult year-long Jewish learning program, holds conferences, yet individuals need to be affiliated with federations in order to participate. Limmud NY provides an opportunity in which anyone in the Jewish community can participate in Jewish learning and enhancement.

Events such as Limmud NY— large, pluralistic, intensive and extensive—are not usually planned and implemented by volunteers. In 21st century America, such events are usually professionally organized and carried out. Some events in the Jewish community, however, are volunteer organized—adult education programs in many synagogues, for example. The National Havurah Committee (NHC) runs summer institutes and three-day regional retreats. These are probably closest in concept to Limmud NY. Like Limmud NY, the NHC is “nondenominational, multigenerational, egalitarian, and volunteer-run.” The goal is to promote “a joyful grassroots Judaism.” It is founded on the labor and commitment of a core group of volunteers and it welcomes Jews of all denominational

affiliations and demographic groups. The NHC Summer Institute has both courses and workshops. While some courses are taught by rabbis and scholars, most are not led by professionals, and the only people who are paid to teach are two artists-in-residence. All teachers participate in others' sessions when they are not teaching themselves. Similar to Limmud NY, workshops are offered on a wide variety of subjects and various tefillah services are available. But the NHC Institute differs from Limmud NY in several key respects – scale, time frame, diversity of services, and the way courses and instructors are chosen. Limmud NY is larger than the NHC Institute although the latter continues to grow. The NHC Institute is a week-long event held at a university. Limmud NY is four or five days and is held at a resort. The Institute offers only egalitarian services while Limmud NY offers a full range of liberal, traditional egalitarian, and *mechitza* worship services. The NHC's Course Committee chooses courses and workshops from descriptions sent in by would-be teachers; it is selective while Limmud NY is open. While both offer a variety of programming, participants at the NHC Institute must choose a track of learning before the event and have less choice than participants at Limmud NY (Dr. Sherry Israel, personal communication, June 5, 2006).

Limmud NY also differs from other Limmud UK spin-offs (Australia, Israel, Toronto, France, Switzerland and Turkey). While Limmud NY is a four to five day program, the others are two days at most. The lack of any systematic research on Limmud UK or these events makes any but the most superficial comparisons difficult, but clearly Limmud NY is unique. It attempts to address the diversity and meet the needs of the largest Jewish metropolitan area in the world, and it endeavors to create a multiplicity of access points for its participants.

Limmud NY: A Structure for Multiple Points of Access

With the exception of two paid staff members, Abigail Dauber Sterne and Ruthie Warshenbrot, Limmud NY is completely volunteer-run. The conference itself was planned and coordinated by over 86 volunteers. Approximately 650 adults (age 18 and over) attended the event, over 115 of whom were presenters or performers. The 4-day event consisted of almost 300 sessions in 34 program blocks (usually an hour and 15 minutes in length). A program block could offer as few as three sessions (Saturday night from 11:30 PM to 12:45 AM) to as many as 16 (Sunday afternoon, 3:10 to 4:25). Individual sessions ranged from lectures and text-study sessions to cooking lessons and performances. A list of tracks with a sampling from each follows.

Special sessions for children and their parents

Sing Along: Music for Children under Two

Panel sessions

Jews and Muslims: What Now?

The Changing Role of Food in Jewish Life

The Difficulty of Davening

Women, Music, Sephardic Culture: Change and Continuity

Performance, Arts and Culture

- Tisch: Songs and Stories of the Galilee*
The Great Yiddish Writers (a three part series)
The Bittersweet Nature of Jewish Poetry
A capella Jam
Balance with Ease: Awareness through Movement
Can 'Jewish Culture' Sustain the Jewish People? Is Hip Enough?
Dancing with Pain: Transcending Chronic Pain through Dance
 "Dirty Dancing"
Party Like it's 1790: Gemischte Tisch
Streiml Envy: Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Hasidim
- History/Israel/Politics
Abraham's Vision Unity Program: The Future of Jewish-Muslim Relations
Columbia Unbecoming
Confessions of a Jewish Journalist
From Holocaust to Haven
History on Trial: My Day in Court with David Irving
Partition and Its Discontents: Next Steps in the Middle East
Liberal/Schmiberal-Conservative/Conschmervative
The Jewish World Rising to Meet Challenges of Globalization
- MLK/Freedom
Dr. King and Rabbi Heschel: A Special friendship
Make Poverty History: What Would King Do?
- Prayer services/Ritual
Fire, Faces and the Number Seven: The Menorah and the Jack-O-Lantern
Creating Personal Prayer—Text Study, Music, and Prayer Writing
Family services—Welcoming Shabbat
Kabbalat Shabbat Service: A Neo-Hassidic, Jewish Renewal Service
Moses in the Passover Haggadah: The Human Role in Redemption
The Tallit Project: Wrapping Ourselves in Ritual through Movement
Women Talk to God: Tkhines
- Social Issues
Border Crossing: Introduction to Jewish Communities Around the World
Bringing Limmud Home
Can Social Justice Save American Jewry's Soul
Embracing Life, Facing Death: A Jewish View of End of Life Care
How to be a Mensch in an Organization (a 2 part program)
How to be a Good Social Justice Advocate
Hineni: Coming Out in a Jewish High School
Raising Jewish Teens
Social Justice and Spirituality: Tikkun HaOlam & Tikkun HaMiddot
The Kabbalah of Food
- Torah/Spirituality
 "Do I Believe in God?" is the Wrong Question
Bibliodrama Workshop
Can We Talk? The Talmudic Theory and Practice of Rebuke
Debbie Friedman and Danny Messeng in Concert!

*Faults, Failures, and Imperfections: Understanding our Limits
God?*

Labor of Love: An Introspective Musical Journey through the Liturgy

The Wisdom of the Rooster: Why Should We Bless God for it Every Morning?

Torah of Money

*Varieties of Modern Orthodoxy: Do They Have Anything in Common
Worse than Stealing!*

College Students/High School recommended

Katrina and the Jewish response: Tikkun Olam at its Best

College Students Launch

Sessions ran concurrently with meals with the sole exception of Friday night dinner.

Participants who arrived on Thursday evening went through a simple registration process and received a room key and a bag of goodies, the program book, and a light blue backpack with 'Limmud NY' on it. Few participants were seen during the course of the weekend without the bag, a visible sign of 'membership' in the Limmud NY event.

Kutshers Country Club is a vast building with many wings added on at different times. It is a challenge to navigate.³ Although handicapped accessible, the distances between session rooms and the lobby or the dining room were far and especially difficult for people who had difficulty walking. Volunteers were still putting up signage on Thursday evening, but they were eager to help newcomers find their rooms even if they weren't quite sure themselves where the rooms were. One exhibit was already up in the long hallway leading from the main lobby to the "Launching Pad" section of the building. It was a colorful exhibit of pictures from the "Children of Abraham," an organization promoting dialogue between Jews and Muslims. A Muslim woman and Israeli man representing the organization greeted people and explained the exhibit's purpose.

People gathered in the lobby areas to eat their box dinners, and many struck up conversations with participants they might not have known. There was time to explore, get to know new people, or volunteer to help before sessions started at 9:30 pm. Participants could study text or discuss social issues, or relax in an open bar. A film (*Dirty Dancing*) was shown from 11:00 to 12:15 am to get everyone in the mood for the Catskills.

Starting Friday morning, services were available for *Shacharit, Mincha, and Ma'ariv* every day of the conference. Sessions on Friday morning included *Jewish Families Redefined: A Sociological Perspective* and *Playing Dice with the Universe: Rabbinic Literature, Quantum Mechanics, and Indeterminacy*. Six or Seven sessions ran at the same time during the three morning program blocks. Buses began arriving midday. At 3:30, Danny Messeng led an opening Mega-event for everyone with singing and Elliot Dorff led a text study. Lisa Sacks, the Conference Chair, greeted participants. The event

³ Kutshers is also decrepit, poorly heated, and at least one of the rooms leaked during a session this researcher attended. The only consistent complaint among participants was about the accommodations. Some participants said they would not attend in 2007 if the event is held there again.

set the tone for the weekend: lively, celebrational, fun, but at the same time infused with Jewish ideas.

Candle lighting followed, and the schedule allowed time for people to change clothes if they desired and prepare for Shabbat. At 5:00 pm participants could choose between a study session and Kabbalat Shabbat services. Limmud NY offered seven different worship and cultural opportunities: a family service, a learner's service, a "musical Kabbalat Shabbat," a "Neo-Hasidic Jewish Renewal Service," a traditional egalitarian service and a traditional *mechitza* service.

Shabbat dinner was the only meal at Limmud NY with anything remotely like assigned seating. Participants had different colored dots on their badges which indicated the area of the dining room in which they were supposed to sit. Within the area, they had their choice of 6-8 tables. As in 2005, the dining room was large and noisy. Some participants had difficulty making conversation across the tables and the assigned table captains had varying degrees of success in helping everyone to feel welcome. Judging by comments on the survey, Shabbat dinner succeeded for some people but not for others. One participant described it as "a great disappointment." A woman who came alone said, "Friday night dinner, I couldn't find a place to sit, and it felt very lonely." Yet another who was a table captain called it "socially difficult," but someone else described it as "really a joy." At some tables participants recited *birkat hamazon* and sang *zmirot* together. At other tables, some individuals chose to pray by themselves while other table members left as soon as they were done eating. Certainly Shabbat dinner received fewer negative comments this year than last, but it is an area that still needs work. Friday night dinner was followed by ice breakers and then at 10:20 by another block of sessions. The college students wrapped up the evening with an *oneg* at 11:45.

Saturday morning opened with a "late" breakfast (8:00 am). Throughout the morning, participants had their choice between worship services and sessions. One could study the Holocaust, listen to a talk about Israel or Yiddish writers or attend a session on yoga. One could also attend a discussion of the Torah portion of the week or attend a musical service, family service or traditional Shabbat service. Lunch overlapped with sessions on Bibliodrama, *Queer Matters*, and the changing role of food in Jewish life. A session entitled *The Binding of Who?* presented Muslim and Jewish versions of the *Akeda*. A 2:30-3:00 break was built into the schedule to allow for *Mincha services*, but the pace picked up again at 3:00. *Ma'ariv* took place at 5:50—again Limmud NY offered choices—and *Havdalah* at 6:15.

Although this report is not about individual presenters, Ruth Gruber's session must be noted. Late Shabbat afternoon, without a microphone, Gruber held the attention of participants of all ages in a vastly overcrowded room. Young and old sat at her feet, and many stood for the entire session—absolutely silently—to hear the soft voice of a 94-year-old woman as she told of her experiences covering the displaced persons camps of Germany immediately after World War II. At meals, in the lobby, between sessions, people talked about this amazing woman and the treasure of hearing her speak.

Over the four-day program, teaching modalities and styles varied. Some presenters stood in front of participants and lectured. Others arranged chairs in a circle for discussion. Some distributed texts, some simply talked. Still others passed out materials promoting organizations they represented. Some presenters were extremely popular with participants. An Israeli who was unknown to most at the beginning of the event became extremely popular and his sessions had to be relocated to larger rooms. Participants chose whatever sessions they wanted to attend, and some walked in and out from one to another. Rarely was this disruptive. Unlike a formal class, participants did not have to struggle to stay focused or awake. If they didn't like a session, they were free to move on to another. If they were tired, they could go back to their rooms and catch up on some sleep. As a result, participants in the sessions appeared highly engaged.

In the evenings other than Shabbat, Limmud NY provided an open bar. Participants bought tickets and redeemed them for drinks. Sunday evening, Limmud NY staged another Mega-event for all participants with music, comedy, and the honoring of volunteer planners. Some participants found the comedy inappropriate, but many participants appeared to enjoy it. Sessions ran until midday on Monday. Few people left before late Monday morning, although many appeared to be getting ready to go. People waiting in the lobby for cars or busses hugged each other, promised to keep in touch, and agreed that they would see each other next year at Limmud NY 2007.

This report presents the accomplishments and challenges of Limmud NY 2006—the reasons people look forward to returning in 2007 as well as the barriers that may prevent a small minority from sharing their enthusiasm. The organizers set out to attract a diverse group of Jews and to celebrate that diversity. They hoped to empower the volunteer planning group to create an event while building a community of engaged Jews passionate about planning and implementing Limmud NY. They wanted that event to be fun and exciting while at the same time producing authentic Jewish growth. And they hoped to create a community of Jews to carry on their work and expand in numbers, scope and creativity. The first section of the report describes the people who came to Limmud NY; the second section discusses the people who helped plan it and their feelings about their experiences. The following sections present the event and its impact on the people who attended. Finally, the report offers conclusions and recommendations for an even more successful event in 2007.

DIVERSITY

[Limmud NY] is one of the few places I've been to where there is genuine effort at creating a pluralistic community--not where everyone agrees and gets along necessarily, but where everyone has a place to be. I loved all of Limmud, but remain moved by that piece of it.

-Limmud NY participant-

We are a conference, a festival, a gathering of hundreds of Jews from all walks of life, all Jewish backgrounds, all lifestyles, and all ages.

-Limmud NY Website-

Demographics

Limmud NY 2006, as compared to Limmud NY 2005, took place in a different location with different presenters and a different program, but it attracted many of the same people. In fact, almost 30% were participants returning from the 2005 event. Women again in 2006 outnumbered men three to two, singles attended in disproportionate numbers, and the age distribution of participants was much the same as last year. The Upper West Side dominance of 2005 (36%) was somewhat less (28%) with more people coming from elsewhere in the U.S.--most notably Pennsylvania, California, and upstate New York.⁴ The number of attendees from the Upper West Side appears to have decreased (from 236 to 210), but it is possible that some of the other Manhattan addresses are business addresses for people living elsewhere, possibly the Upper West Side. For example, only five participants had midtown zip codes in 2005 while 42 had midtown zip codes in 2006. Of the midtown addresses, almost half (19) are for Jewish organizations (Bikkurim, Pardes, The Jewish Week and the American Jewish Committee).

Table 1: Geographic Distribution of Limmud NY Participants

(Based on registration data)

<i>Area</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>
Upper West Side	36%	28%
Other Manhattan	15%	17%
Brooklyn	6%	7%
Other Boroughs	4%	4%
Long Island	6%	5%
Westchester	5%	4%
Other U.S.	23%	30%
Outside U.S.	4%	6%
Total	100%	100%

⁴ The majority of attendees from Pennsylvania were students at the University of Pennsylvania, and many of the attendees from California were part of a delegation interested in creating a Limmud experience in Los Angeles.

The age distribution of Limmud NY participants in 2006 was very similar to 2005 with the greatest increase in young adults age 18-24. This group went from 61 to 102 participants—from 9% to 14% of the Limmud NY total population. The number of attendees aged 80+ increased from one attendee in 2005 to 11 in 2006. The only age group that did not grow was the 50-64 year old cohort. It went from 19% of the population to 17%. The gender ratio at Limmud NY remains about the same as it was last year at almost two-thirds female. As in 2005, the gender ratio continued to be skewed (67% female) for young adults aged 18-34.

The gender imbalance applies to participants and planners alike. The only real difference is among invited presenters—slightly more than half of them are male.

Table 2: Gender of Participants and Presenters

(Based on registration data for participants over age 18)

	<i>Participants (excluding presenters)</i>	<i>Presenters (invited)</i>	<i>Presenters (other)</i>
Female	64%	47%	60%
Male	36%	53%	40%
Total	100%	100%	100%

This gender imbalance is not unusual for Jewish educational programs but a disproportionate number of the women who attend Limmud NY are single. Among women 25 years old and older, slightly more than half (54%) are single, separated, divorced or widowed. Among men in the same age group, 39% classify themselves in those categories. These percentages are very similar to last year's findings.

Table 3: Marital Status of Participants 25 years of age and older

	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Total</i>
Married	43%	59%	48%
Living together, have a partner	5%	4%	4%
Separated	2%	2%	2%
Divorced	4%	4%	4%
Widowed	4%	1%	3%
Never married (single)	43%	30%	39%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Limmud NY has made a policy of seeking diversity, including a diversity of sexual identity. This year's survey, therefore, asked about sexual identity, but the number of people who identified as gay or lesbian (3%), bisexual (2%), or uncertain (1%) was very small (26 people). Ninety-four percent of participants who answered the survey said they are heterosexual. One person was offended that 'transgendered' was not a gender option on the survey. Given the effort Limmud NY's Marketing Team expended on attracting GLBT Jews, one might have hoped for higher numbers.

Limmud NY also sought to attract families, and the Children’s Programming Team planned extensive activities for them. Slightly more than a hundred children under age 18 attended the weekend. These children represent 62 families, a little more than half of whom came with only one child.

The denominational affiliation of Limmud NY participants in 2006 is similar to that of 2005. Jews who consider themselves Orthodox represent a slightly smaller percentage, and Jews who consider themselves Conservative represent a slightly higher percentage. In contrast to the denominational breakdown for the UJA-Federation catchment area,⁵ Reform Jews have much less presence at Limmud NY and people who identify themselves as “Just Jewish” or “Other,” taken together, have a much larger presence. (See Table 4.)

Table 4: Denomination of Limmud NY Participants and NY 2002 Population Study

<i>Denomination</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>NY 2002*</i>
Reform	10%	10%	29%
Orthodox	17%	14%	19%
Conservative	35%	38%	26%
Just Jewish	16%	17%	15%
Other⁶	22%	21%	11%
Total	100%	100%	100%

People who selected the “other” category defined themselves in a wide variety of ways. Eleven said they are “Conservadox.” Some indicated that they are “*halakhic*” or traditional but also egalitarian. Five identified with Jewish “renewal.” Three called themselves “post-denominational” although one of them added “Conservative” in parenthesis. One person said he was somewhere between Reform and Conservative, and another said he was somewhere between Conservative and Orthodox. Some of the other responses to the question on denominations:

- *Our affiliations are with observant Conservative and Modern Orthodox communities, but we don't easily fit a label. If "Other" were not a choice, I would have chosen "Just Jewish"*
- *Re-re-conserva-dox*
- *Born Episcopalian, believer in all life*
- *Ideologically reform, ritually conservative*
- *Flexodox*
- *Even "Just Jewish" is a label. I'm Jewish.*
- *I daven in many places from Reform to Renewal to Orthodox*

⁵ These data are not, strictly speaking, comparable. The UJA-Federation data is for 2002, Limmud NY for 2005 and 2006, and the UJA-Federation study was conducted with random-digit dialing which captures the elderly and jobless in higher numbers than may be accurate. The magnitude of the denominational difference, however, suggests that it is worth noting.

⁶ Two percent of respondents (13 people) said they were Reconstructionist. They are included in “Other” in this table.

- *Just Jewish in terms of social inclusion of all Jews, but happily observant when it comes to personal practice*
- *Traditional/post-orthodox/egalitarian*
- *All of the above except for "not Jewish"*
- *Would be conservative if they would ordain gays!*
- *I'm still looking for my tribe. I'm a wanderer [sic] Jew.*
- *Liberal Jew, halakhically selective*
- *Reformativist? Post denominational?*
- *Reconstructionist with a strong secular/socialist background*

Limmud NY brought together a mix of people with various ways of defining their Jewish beliefs and practices. In one of the sessions a participant noted the porousness of denominational boundaries among Limmud NY participants as opposed to movement leadership and suggested that the rejection of firm denominational delineation may be the wave of the future among young Jews who desire more than labels from their Judaism. A man from New Jersey said that as result of Limmud NY ...

I am ... much more alive to the different denominations in Judaism and more curious about each even as I am ever more committed to my own status as a Conservative Jew. I feel much more a part of a larger community of Jews

About a third of the 2006 participants work professionally in the Jewish community. Over half of them (58%) are employed as Jewish educators. Some of these are invited presenters, and some are the beneficiaries of scholarships Limmud NY provides for Jewish educators who might otherwise find the cost of attending Limmud NY prohibitive. The significant proportion of Jewish communal professionals at Limmud NY 2006 is identical to the 2005 findings, and it has a noticeable impact on the demographic composition of Limmud NY. A larger percent of Jewish professionals decline to affiliate with a movement (46% are "just Jewish" or "other" as compared to 34% for all other participants).

Table 5: Denominational Affiliation by Jewish Employment Status (2006)

<i>Denomination</i>	<i>Jewish Professionals</i>	<i>Other Participants</i>
Reform	12%	9%
Orthodox	8%	17%
Conservative	33%	40%
Just Jewish	23%	15%
Other	23%	19%
Total	100%	100%

Jewish professionals represent slightly more than half of the presenters which is scarcely surprising since so many (42%) of the presenters are invited. Most surprising, perhaps, is

the large percentage of Jewish professionals among the planners of Limmud NY 2006 (43%). One might expect that they would volunteer for activities with more distance from their regular jobs in terms of responsibility and personnel, but they evidently relish working with Limmud NY. Most of the Jewish professionals, but not all (87%) define themselves as Jewish educators. Of those, half work primarily in adult education. Only three teach in Jewish preschools and six are family educators. The remainder (40%) teach grades K-12.

Limmud NY's Marketing and Outreach Team also targeted Jews of different national heritage. Again, as in 2005, their success was limited. In 2005, 17% of participants said they spoke a language other than English in their homes; this year it was 16%. Hebrew is spoken in 27 homes but this does not indicate fluency. Some said they speak it on Shabbat, others that they speak "some" Hebrew. Eleven people said they speak Spanish at home; a few speak French, some German or Italian, Portuguese or Hungarian. Only three people said they speak Russian at home. But most people who attended Limmud NY 2006 are American born and raised and, like most American Jews, their language skills are limited to English.

In all of these characteristics, Limmud NY 2006 looks very much like Limmud NY 2005. Two-thirds of the people who attended in 2005 did not return, but the people who filled their places, as a group, were similar to them in many ways: age structure, gender ratio, marital status, and denominational affiliation. They are different in two ways: fewer of them are from the Upper West Side of Manhattan, and more of them are 'unaffiliated.'

Jewish background and affiliation

Most attendees at Limmud NY (80%) belong to either a synagogue or a *havurah/minyan*, and 16% belong to both. Twenty-six students are members of college campus *minyanim*, and five people said they were affiliated with the Jewish Theological Seminary. A plurality of participants (149 of the 349 who identified the synagogue, *minyan*, or spiritual community where they usually participate) wrote in the names of congregations or worship communities on the Upper West Side of Manhattan: B'nai Jeshurun, Hadar, Ansche Chesed, Darchei Noam, Kol Zimrah, Ramath Orah and Kehillat Orach Eliezer (KOE). Eleven people came from the Park Slope *Minyan* in Brooklyn. Others came from Town & Village Synagogue and the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale. Some of these people came in groups from particular synagogues (the Hebrew Institute, for example) while others came individually or in families. Seven people came from Or Zarua on the Upper East Side, and four from Kol HaKfar, an independent *minyan* in lower Manhattan.

Last year, 11% of attendees were members of neither a *havurah* nor a synagogue. This year, that number is 20%. One might suppose that the unaffiliated are younger or perhaps they are students and therefore not members of synagogues or *minyanim* 'yet.' But on the contrary, their age distribution is very similar to those who are members. They are simply not members of organizations that provide worship services. Not surprisingly, they do not

attend worship services very often either. While 43% of all Limmud NY 2006 participants attend worship services weekly or more often, only 8% of this group does. A few of them (9) are members of political action organizations, eight are members of Jewish service organizations and nine are members of JCCs. There is very little overlap, but this still leaves 52 Limmud NY attendees over age 18 (more than 10% of respondents) who are not members of any Jewish organization—not a synagogue, *minyan*, youth group, political action group, Jewish service organization, or JCC. Nor are they active in Hillel. These are not people who skipped the question. They are people who said “no”—they do not affiliate with traditional (establishment) Jewish organizational life.

Figure 1: Congregation and Synagogue Membership 2005 and 2006

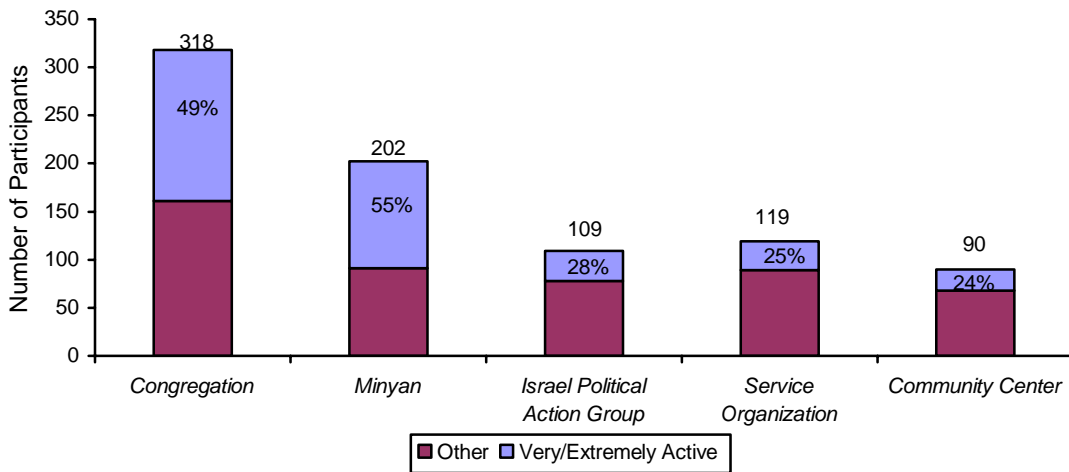
		Minyan or Havurah		Minyan or Havurah			
		2005	Yes	No	2006	Yes	No
Synagogue or Congregation	Yes		40%	37%	Yes	33%	32%
	No		12%	11%	No	16%	20%

Yet, this does not mean that these 52 people are totally uninvolved Jewishly. One is active in Hazon, one is a leader in a Jewish law students group, and one is involved in a Yiddish study group. Seven work in the Jewish community and one is a professional in a Jewish leadership program, but none of these 52 adult attendees are members of an ‘establishment’ Jewish organization.

What else do we know about the people who attended Limmud NY 2006?

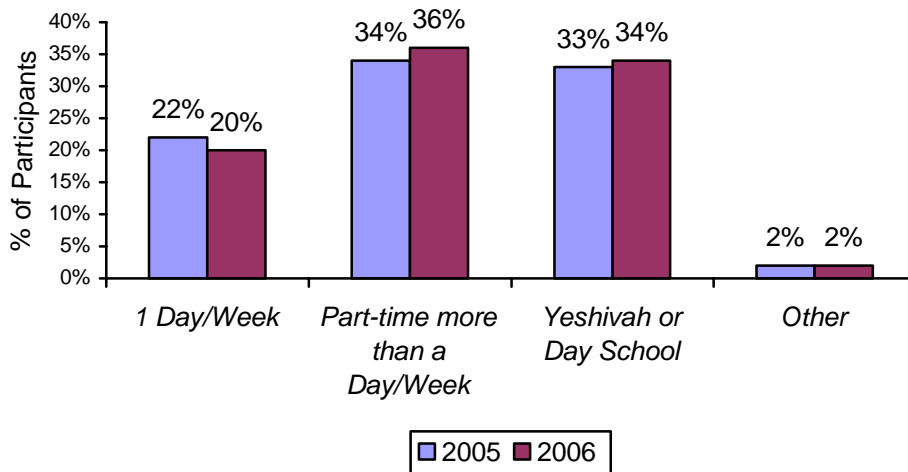
Many of those who are members of organizations consider themselves very or highly active, particularly in their congregations or *minyanim* (49% and 55% respectively). Sales found in her report on Westchester congregations that less than 20% of members consider themselves very much or to a great extent part of the congregation’s “active core.” (Sales, 2004). Limmud NY members also said they were active in other Jewish organizations. About a quarter of participants who said they were members of Israel political action groups, Jewish service organizations and community centers considered themselves very or extremely active.

Figure 2: Membership in Jewish Organizations and Percent Active



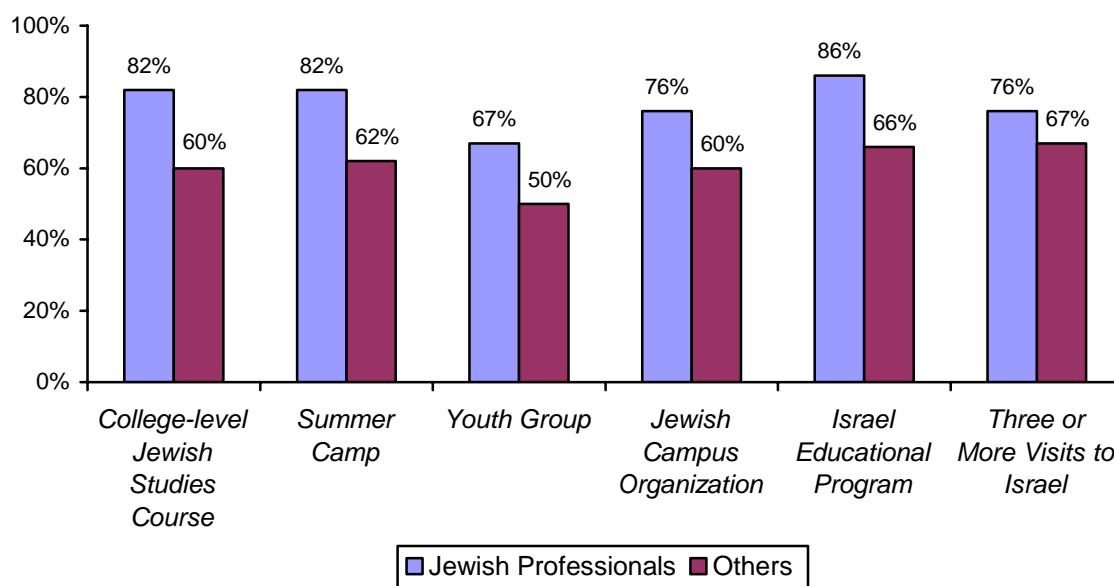
The survey also asked about the Jewish educational background of Limmud NY participants. Again, as in 2005, many participants were products of day schools and other intensive Jewish learning. The group, as a whole, looks remarkably similar to the group that attended Limmud NY last year. Two-thirds of 2006 attendees participated in college-level Jewish studies programs, almost 70% had attended or worked at a summer camp with Jewish content, over half had been members of a Jewish or Zionist youth group (56%), and two thirds had participated in Hillel or some other Jewish organization on campus. Fully 72% said they had participated in educational trips or programs in Israel, and almost 70% had been to Israel three or more times.

Figure 3: Types of Schools Attended 4 Years or More



The Jewish professionals who attended Limmud NY did not differ dramatically in their formal educational background. They have an overall average of 3690 hours (the equivalent of a little more than five years of day school) compared to 3324 for other participants (a little less than five years of day school).⁷ Jewish professionals did differ dramatically from other participants in the amount of informal Jewish education they had received. Over 80% attended Jewish summer camps and participated in educational programs in Israel. Two-thirds had been active in youth groups, three-quarters had participated in Hillel or other Jewish campus organizations. Three-quarters had been to Israel at least three times.

Figure 4: Jewish Educational Experiences—Jewish Professionals and All Others



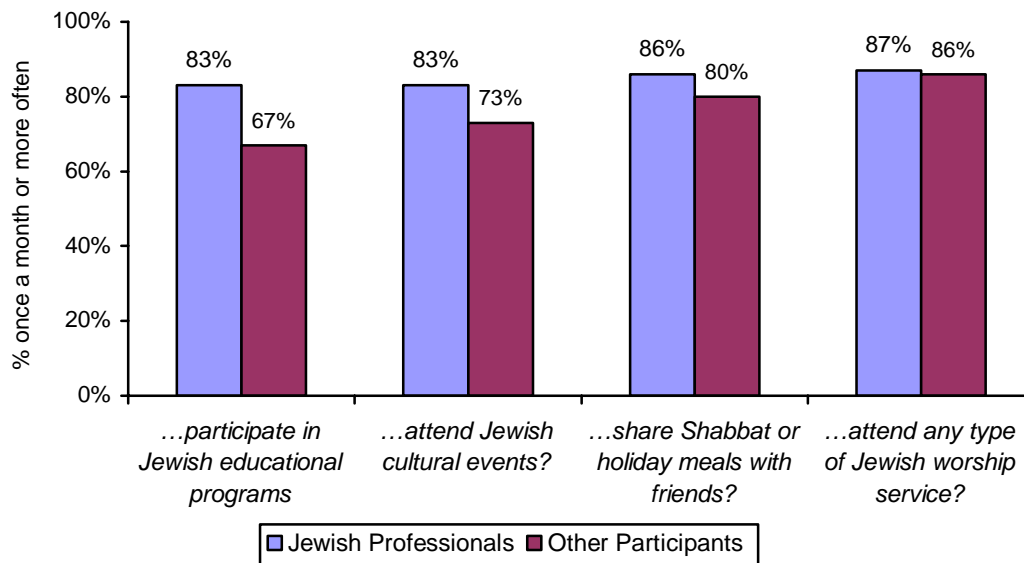
Limmud NY 2006 participants resemble their peers from 2005 in their Jewish behaviors. Most of them celebrate Shabbat with friends, attend Jewish cultural events, participate in Jewish educational programs and attend Jewish worship services on a regular basis—once a month or more frequently. For a very rough comparison, 86% of Limmud NY participants report that they attend worship services once a month or more frequently. This is almost twice the percent (45%) for Jewish New Yorkers as a whole (Ukeles, 2004). Judaism occupies a significant presence in the lives of Limmud NY participants.

The Jewish professionals also differed from other participants in the frequency of their participation in some Jewish activities. Among Jewish professionals, the percent attending Jewish educational programs and cultural events once a month or more often is significantly higher than among other participants. This reflects the large percentage of Jewish professionals who are educators, artists and performers and therefore attend Jewish learning programs and cultural events as part of their job obligations. There is no

⁷ Total years of Jewish education was calculated using Himmelfarb's estimates for yearly hours of Jewish education by type of schooling. These are 120 hours/year for supplementary school or private tutoring, 320 hours/year for multi-day supplementary school, and 680 hours of Judaic education/year for day school.

significant difference in frequency of sharing Shabbat or holiday meals or attending worship services.

Figure 5: Jewish Activities—Jewish Professionals and Other Participants



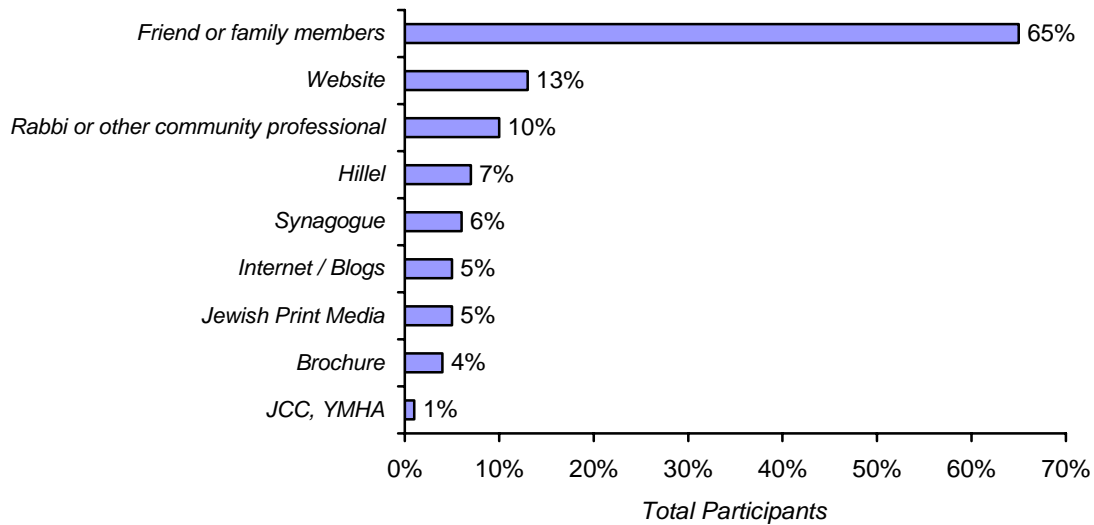
Marketing and Publicity

Most participants found out about Limmud NY from their friends and family members. Other forms of communication made relatively little impact. As was the case last year, the message spread by word-of-mouth. Sixty-five percent (308) of respondents said they heard that way, and many who checked “other” wrote in the names of specific people. Some people (83) heard in more than one way, most of them from family and friends as well as the Limmud NY Website or their rabbis or other community professionals. Few learned about Limmud NY through the Jewish print media or Internet or blogs. Significantly, a greater percentage of men (21%) than women (9%) picked up on Limmud NY through the Website. But the major mode of communication about Limmud NY continues to be word-of-mouth. This communication among friends and family members is evidence of the powerful network that exists among Jews in the New York City area. That the program attracted well over 700 participants predominantly through word-of-mouth speaks to the strength of the community, but it also speaks to the difficulty of going beyond the “usual suspects”—the “heavy users” of Jewish educational and cultural activities.

Respondents based their decision to come to Limmud NY primarily on the opportunity for educational experiences. For 83%, the educational experience was very or extremely important. The opportunity for being part of a community (62%), meeting new people

(52%) and being exposed to different types of Judaism (43%) were also important to people in making their decision to attend. On the other hand, few respondents said the opportunity for artistic expression or volunteerism affected their choice. Spiritual exploration attracted only 38%. As will be shown below, participants tended to get what they came for from Limmud NY. People who came for learning felt they had a positive learning experience, and the same can be said for community, spirituality, and diversity.

Figure 6: Ways in which Participants Heard about Limmud NY 2006



In summary, most people who attended Limmud NY are already heavily involved in Jewish organizations and Jewish life. Most, but not all, belong to a synagogue or *minyan*, they are active in Jewish organizations, and a third are employed professionally in the Jewish world. These are people with extensive childhood Jewish education and ongoing interest in Jewish learning. In most respects, participants in 2006 look very much like participants in Limmud NY 2005 even though less than a third attended in 2005. They have the same pattern of denominational affiliation, age distribution, and gender. They are active in organizations in about the same percentages as last year's attendees. Limmud NY 2006 successfully attracted a slightly larger percentage of participants from beyond the Upper West Side of Manhattan and a larger percent of Jewish young adults (age 18-25). Limmud NY also attracted a larger percent of Jews unaffiliated with any worship organization. This diverse group of Jews came together to experience Jewish learning in a celebratory environment, and, as will be seen below, they enjoyed themselves. The next section of the report describes the people who made that possible—the volunteer planners. It describes the planning experiences leading up to the event, their reactions, and their reasons for continuing or not continuing their volunteer efforts in the future.

COMMUNITY OF VOLUNTEERS

Limmud helped me gain new leadership skills which I had not envisioned. The experience of planning and organizing throughout the year prior was exciting and meaningful.

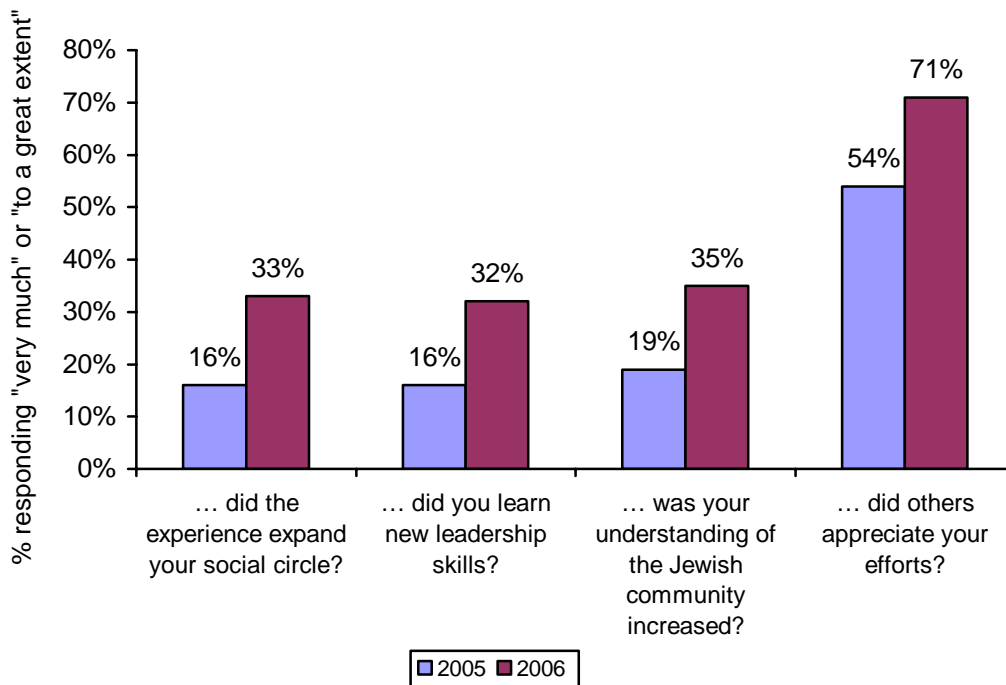
-Limmud NY Volunteer-

Limmud is four days of lectures, workshops, text-study sessions, discussions, exhibits, performances and much more – all planned by a community of volunteers.

-Limmud NY Website-

Last year's research on the volunteer experience indicated a need for making the work of volunteers "more meaningful, satisfying and appreciated." (Koren and Sales, 2005) Although volunteers continued to express their concerns and frustrations with aspects of the planning process and the organizational structure, most 2006 volunteer planners reported more gratification and a greater sense of appreciation in their volunteer roles than did their counterparts in 2005.

Figure 7: Responses to Limmud NY Planning Experience 2005 and 2006



The volunteer experience of Limmud NY is almost exclusively associated with the planning effort. Participants are all asked and encouraged to volunteer as part of the event itself, but not all do, and those who do volunteer do not necessarily spend a lot of time on volunteer tasks. As one participant from the UK said, comparing Limmud NY

unfavorably to Limmud UK, “Limmud NY has a way to go before it touches on the volunteer values of its namesake in UK. ... Too many people are consumers rather than contributors.” Limmud NY organizers would like their event to generate the kind of volunteerism that typifies Limmud UK, but they recognize that their audience is different and that Americans expect to be treated more as if they are on vacation. A disproportionate number of professionals in the Jewish community serve as Limmud NY volunteer planners, but at least one professional explained why she would not:

I don't attend Limmud to volunteer. It is one of the few times during the year I can participate in Judaism instead of working for Judaism. I know it's not in the spirit of the event but I don't volunteer during this, it is sort of my way to recharge back for the work I do with Jewish organizations during the year.

One of the interviewees questioned, “Should we be saying to registrants: one of our communal expectations is that you'll do something to help the greater whole? Is it a dialogue, or is it an assignment?” More than half of the presenters are volunteers (as opposed to invited, unpaid presenters), but otherwise, people involved in the planning of Limmud NY also spearhead the operation of the event itself with little help from others. Most participants come to attend sessions and enjoy the event, not to volunteer.

Limmud NY has two professionals: a director and a program coordinator. The volunteer organization for 2006 is described in Appendix B.⁸ Most Board members in 2006 also served on the Steering committee which included the leaders of the various teams. Limmud NY leaders recruited volunteers for the planning of the 2006 event at the 2005 event and immediately following. They succeeded in attracting a group of people who reflect the diversity of the participants as a whole.

Women comprised two-thirds of the planning organization. The notable exception is the board, which in 2006 had a higher representation of men. Individual teams within the planning structure had more or less skewed gender ratios (see Table 6), and team members remarked on this in interviews. A man who was interviewed for the research said:

Religion and Judaism is more of a woman's thing. Women may also be more likely to work in jobs that enable them to go to a conference like this. Women do things in groups more ... They tell their friends to join them. Guys don't say “all the guys are going to be there”—you tell your friend and hope they'll come. Married men don't have a lot of social friends on their own, whereas women do. That hinders recruitment of men.

A woman who led a different team said that the gender issue

definitely had an effect. Our team had a few men join and drop out. Personally I think just by nature they're less interested in organizing things like this. More men were involved in areas like programming. I don't know why the men dropped out - even the ones in our group didn't come to meetings - I think men aren't as interested in getting together as much as women are.

⁸ This is changing somewhat for the planning of 2007. See the Limmud NY website.

On a more personal note, she added “I was hoping to meet people of both sexes and that was a disappointment.”

Table 6: Gender Composition of Select Planning Teams (Number of Volunteers)

	<i>Planners (all)</i>	<i>Marketing</i>	<i>Children’s Programming</i>	<i>Participant Care</i>	<i>Programming</i>	<i>Steering Committee</i>
Female	56	13	6	9	15	8
Male	28	3	0	3	12	7

Planners also commented on the age distribution among volunteers. More than half of planners were thirty or younger, while only a third of other participants were in the age category. But there were volunteers in all age groupings. Some volunteers, however, *perceived* the group to be different from themselves. A volunteer over 50 said that most volunteers seemed to be younger. On the other hand, a woman in her late 20s or early 30s expressed some disappointment that she had not been able to make new friends her own age because “in the meetings it’s mostly people in their forties. That’s great for Limmud NY, but they’re not the sort of people I’m going to be hanging around with socially.”

One participant also viewed planners and organizers as less diverse than the overall group. Perhaps the younger members of the planning organization were more front and center during the event. Some of the members of the Steering Committee are young and some have a ‘hipness’ that makes them appear much younger than they are. This may explain a Westchester woman’s comment:

I would have loved to volunteer and/or help plan, but I am 48 years old and have children in their early 20s. Most of the planners or people running it seemed to be in their 20s (which is good!) but I would have felt like their mother/grandmother, probably not been able to "bond" during planning, not understanding jokes, etc. So - I was not interested in this aspect.

Limmud NY planners differed from other Limmud NY participants in another respect—they were more apt to be unmarried and un-partnered. Single people may have more time or they may be more motivated to help with planning in order to make new friends or to find potential partners.

Table 7: Planners’ Marital Status

	<i>Planners</i>	<i>Other Participants</i>	<i>Total</i>
Married or living together, have a partner	33%	48%	45%
Separated, divorced, or widowed	5%	8%	8%
Never married (single)	62%	44%	47%
Total	100%	100%	100%

People volunteered for Limmud NY 2006 because they wanted a volunteer experience coupled with a sense of community and learning. Two-thirds of the planners said that the

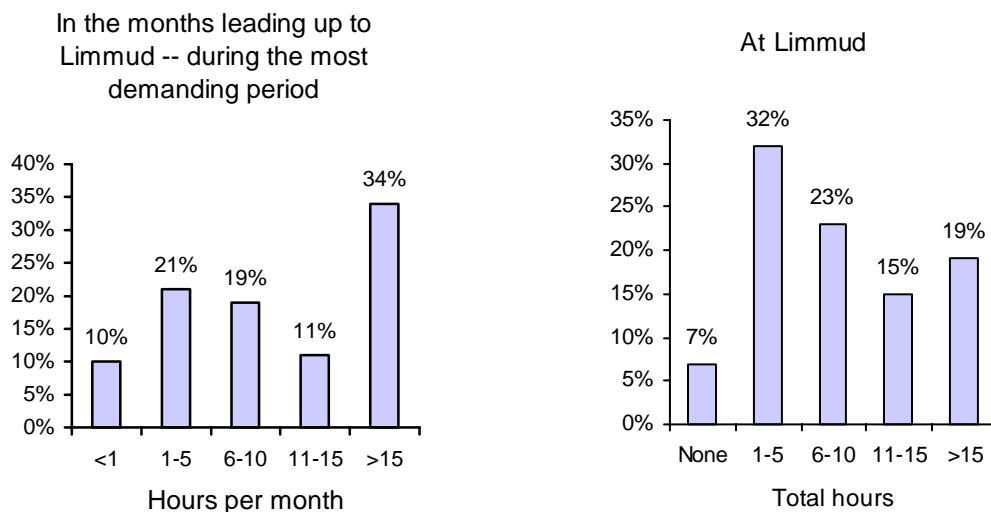
opportunity to meet people was very or extremely important to them in making their decision to volunteer. This was the most important reason for most of the planners. Also important, however, was the opportunity to volunteer seemingly for its own sake, as well as to create and be part of an educational experience.

The survey asked volunteer planners to estimate the amount of time they put into Limmud NY during the busiest period leading up to the event and, again, at the event itself. About a third of the planners said they worked more than 15 hours a month. This corresponds roughly to the number of volunteers Limmud NY professionals categorized as “very active” in a December list. Others had been active early on in the planning but had since dropped out. At Limmud NY itself, less than 20% contributed more than 15 hours, although it appeared to some participants that they were working very hard and spending a great deal of time trying to make people feel comfortable. In comments and interviews, some said they would have liked more time at the conference to attend sessions.

I was only able to attend two-thirds of the sessions because my volunteer role required me to be in other places. I had hoped to attend more workshops, but I understood that as a ... volunteer, that was not entirely possible.

Enabling the planners to have the time to attend sessions would necessitate having more participants at the event agree to help out. If Limmud NY can find a way to transition them ‘from consumers to contributors’ as organizers would like, the burden on existing volunteers could be reduced.

Figure 8: Time Spent Volunteering for Limmud NY



New volunteers replaced the volunteers from 2005 who did not continue their volunteer work. Many of the 2006 volunteers (37%) had not even attended the event in 2006. But the total number of volunteers in 2006 was only slightly higher than in 2005 despite an expansion of the event and a sizable increase in the number of participants. More

participants meant more work: more programming demands, more rooms to assign, more meals to plan and more special circumstances to attend to. Limmud NY had few additional people to help with the additional responsibilities.

Figure 9: Feelings about the Limmud NY Volunteer Experience

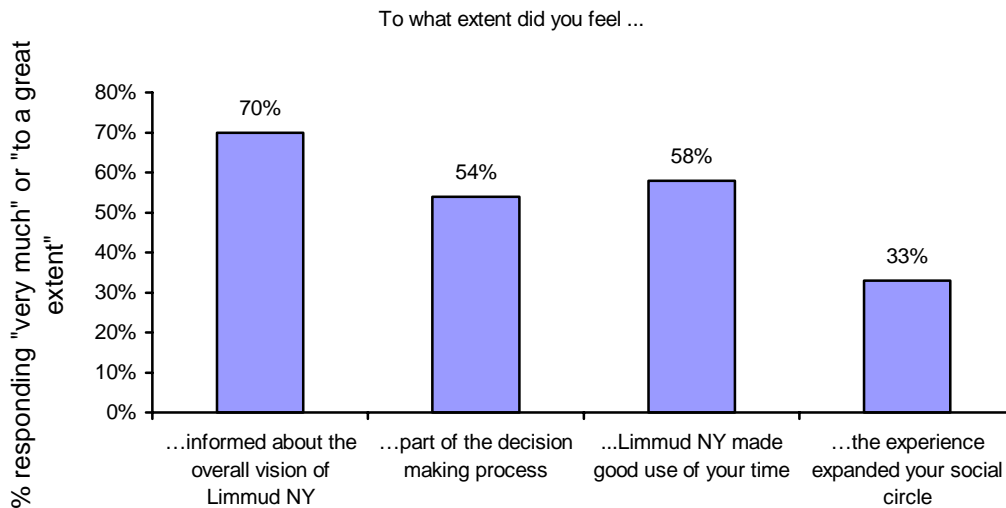


Figure 9 shows that most volunteers did feel informed about the vision, but only a little over half felt involved in decision making. More than half (58%) said that Limmud NY made good use of their time. Despite the fact that 62% said they came with the expectation of meeting new people, and most did, only a third felt the experience expanded their social circle. For some this was a source of real concern. "I felt as if everyone was in cliques," an older woman said, "and therefore I was left out because I did not fit into the formula. So my friends and I kept to ourselves." This was not the only comment of this nature from volunteers, but most volunteers said they developed a sense of community and did meet new people. In general, volunteer planners said they enjoyed volunteering, will probably do it again, and will encourage others to volunteer for planning Limmud NY 2007, but they also voiced concerns about the process and suggestions for making the experience more positive.

Overall satisfaction with the volunteer experience was unrelated to the decision to become involved, nor was it related to the number of hours involved either in the months leading up to Limmud NY or in the event itself. It was related to feeling part of the whole, being informed about the vision, and participating in the decision making process.

Of the 86 volunteer planners thanked in the program book, 25 returned from volunteering last year. Based on 81 volunteers in 2005, Limmud NY volunteers have a retention rate of about 30% (very similar to the overall retention of all participants from 2005). Unfortunately, Limmud UK has not collected information on the number of planners it retains from one year to another so there is no way to know whether Limmud NY's retention numbers are strong or weak. Last year, CMJS administered the survey five

months after the event in order to assure that people had time to reflect on their experiences. Of the 2005 volunteers, 49% said they planned to volunteer again for 2006. Fewer, in fact, did. Of the 2006 planners, 69% said they are very or extremely likely to volunteer again next year. This is a higher percentage than last year, but this year's survey was administered closer to the event and the enthusiasm and excitement it generated.⁹

In late 2005, Limmud NY provided CMJS with a list of 142 volunteers for Limmud NY 2006. The number changed over the period leading up to the event. Initially, some people were included based on their previous involvement in the 2005 event planning or because they had expressed interest in volunteering for Limmud NY 2006 at an early stage. Many of these people (56) dropped out of the volunteer effort. Some did so for personal reasons unrelated to the experience of planning Limmud NY (for example, changing professional work obligations or moving away). Others dropped out because they realized they would be away or otherwise unable to attend the event itself. Fortunately, in 2006, others took their places. This poses a trade-off. On the one hand, the seemingly low retention rate suggests potential difficulty building a knowledge-base or in creating a sense of year-round community through continuity. On the other hand, the new people who came into the planning process (the other 63%) brought new excitement and ideas. Their presence suggests the potential for enlarging the number of future leaders and generating a new pool of active Jews in greater New York.

Planners in 2005, when asked to comment about the volunteer experience, tended to focus on what they thought of as an unfair distribution of the work. In 2006, volunteers who complained did so about the lack of communication and interpersonal issues. Some said that no one had taken the time to help them understand the overall mission of what they were supposed to do. Others said they were not part of the decision making process. One volunteer defined the communication problem:

I think the leadership needs to develop their overall vision for the connection between teams and volunteers. There was not much knowledge sharing between teams, and I think that hurt the overall success of Limmud NY.

Another volunteer commented on the need for more inter-team communication. "I wish there was a little more interaction between teams," one woman said. "If you are not on the Steering Committee you really don't have a feel for what is happening on the other teams." One volunteer said there was "not enough group time." Another said, "People wanted to communicate by email and work on their own, I'd rather meet. I'd like to be with other people when I volunteer." But email provided some with access and a valid way to get to know others, and planners appreciated the efficiency it offered. Some of the planning teams used email to brainstorm, exchange ideas and, in at least one instance, to vote on recommendations.

Still others said the process had not fostered community except for those in leadership positions. They complained of feeling like outsiders. "Strictly on a social level, there was

⁹ This is an important caveat. Volunteer intentions a month or a month and a half after the event cannot be fairly compared to responses five months after the event.

separation between Steering Committee and everyone else. It would have been interesting to have seen more mixing.”

Volunteers had suggestions for improving the process for 2007:

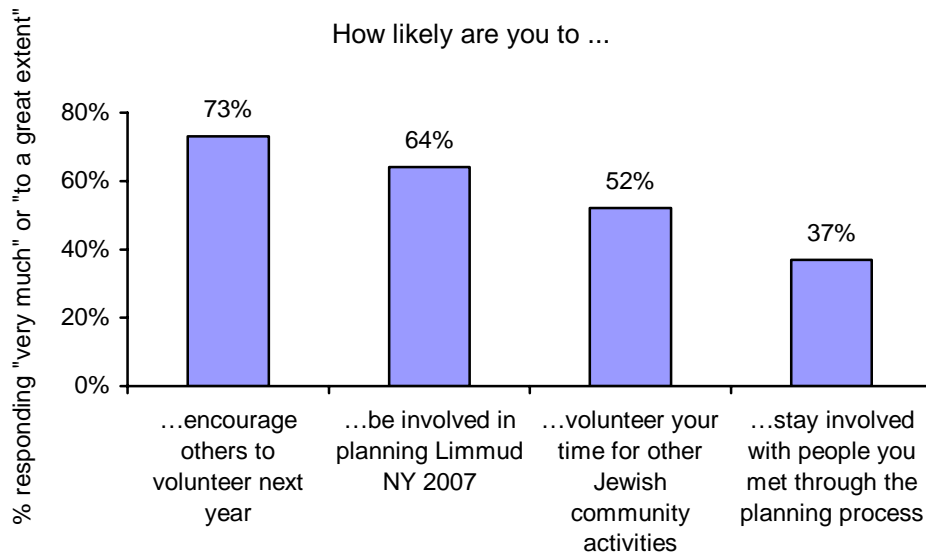
- The closing gala needed a tad more planning; ditto for Shabbat meals.
- I hope that we can work on recruiting more volunteers so that core volunteers feel less tired after the conference
- There needs to be a better cross training of volunteers, primarily, because others may not understand how demanding different roles are, secondly, to more easily provide back up.
- If a central part of the experience is volunteering and you expect 25% of 800 people to volunteer – you need a help desk for the volunteers as much as you need it for everyone else.
- Steering committee members should each take on a piece of the pie. They should each find and build their own subcommittee. You don't need a layer [of volunteer development.].

A planner who participated in 2005 said, “I think we did a much better job of managing volunteers this year but there is still room for improvement. We need to be clearer in setting expectations and deadlines.” But suggestions and comments notwithstanding, volunteers in interviews and the survey leave a very positive impression of their experience and the personal gratification of having created Limmud NY 2006.

- I loved being part of the Marketing/Outreach team. The group was very motivated and very welcoming. Participation gave me the opportunity to use my talents for an endeavor that I'm enthusiastic about, and I had a strong feeling of involvement and appreciation.
- I felt that my efforts led to a successful program. It was so great to watch such a big event come together so well and to see the attendees enjoying themselves. Also, I met so many wonderful people planning Limmud NY in addition to becoming closer to friends.

Overall, three-quarters of the volunteers who responded to the survey were satisfied with the experience and 43% were very satisfied. They said they would volunteer again, and that process is already well underway. Almost three-quarters said they would encourage others to volunteer for 2007, and more than half will volunteer time for other Jewish community activities. The planners appear invested in both the process and product of Limmud NY. The report now turns to the event itself, the outcome of their dedication and enthusiasm.

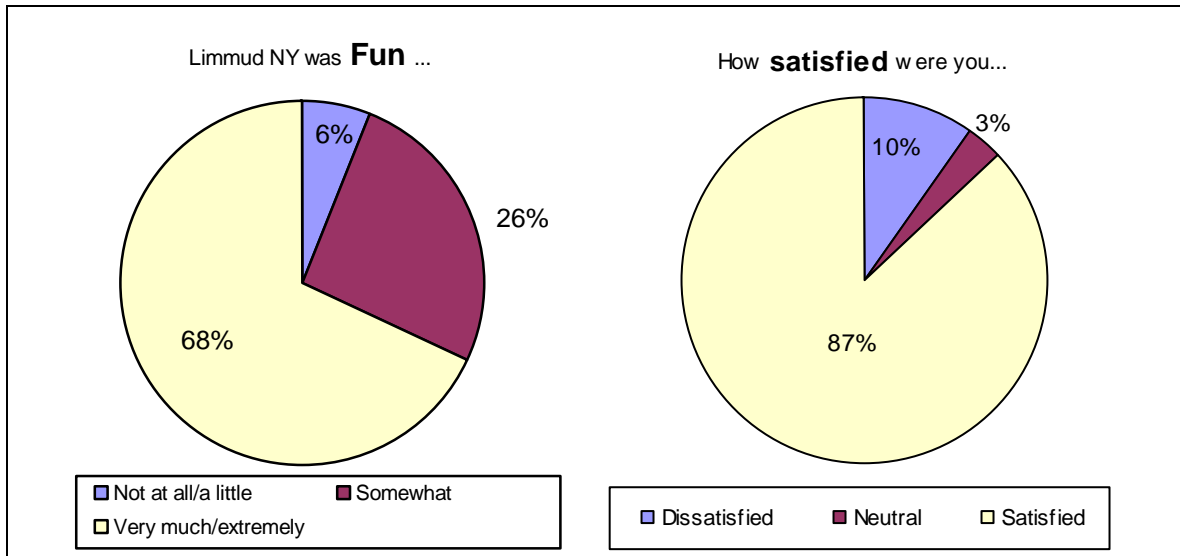
Figure 10: Volunteer Plans for Limmud NY 2007



LIMMUD NY 2006: THE EVENT

Limmud NY participants, with very few exceptions, felt that the event this year was fun and full of opportunities. Most expressed overall satisfaction and most intend to return in 2007. On almost every dimension that attracted people to Limmud NY, the event received high marks. It met participants' needs for Jewish learning, and most participants said they had conversations stimulated by the sessions they attended. Again, as in 2005, Limmud NY was less successful in creating a sense of community, and was not able to satisfy the needs for spirituality for most attendees, but this did not stand in the way of people's enjoyment or appreciation of the event. And most participants (60%) agreed that Limmud NY created a more meaningful Jewish experience than most other organized programs.

Figure 11: Fun and Satisfaction: Perceptions of Limmud NY



Participants tended to associate the highest level of satisfaction with those aspects of Limmud NY that drew them there. In other words, people got what they came for. For example, most participants came to Limmud NY for the learning experience (83% said the opportunity for having an educational experience was very or extremely important in helping them make the decision to attend.) *Of those*, 73% said Limmud NY “very much” or “to a great extent” met their needs for Jewish learning. Of those who came looking for spirituality, two-thirds said their spiritual needs were met. Indices developed to combine various measures of learning, community, and spirituality were all highly correlated with their related variable measuring motivation to attend.

Learning

*In Hebrew, Limmud means “learning” – and that’s what it’s about. An opportunity to craft your own Jewish world. Explore your connection to Jewish ideas and tradition.
(Limmud NY Website)*

*Incredibly stimulating course offerings, but it was just too intense. Although the multitude of options was wonderful, one often felt torn as to where to go next.
(Limmud NY Participant)*

*One of the liveliest and most illuminating Jewish conferences-events I’ve ever attended. The energy was wonderful, and it was good to see serious people from all walks of life and sectarian persuasions doing different things and learning and talking and listening.
(Limmud NY Participant)*

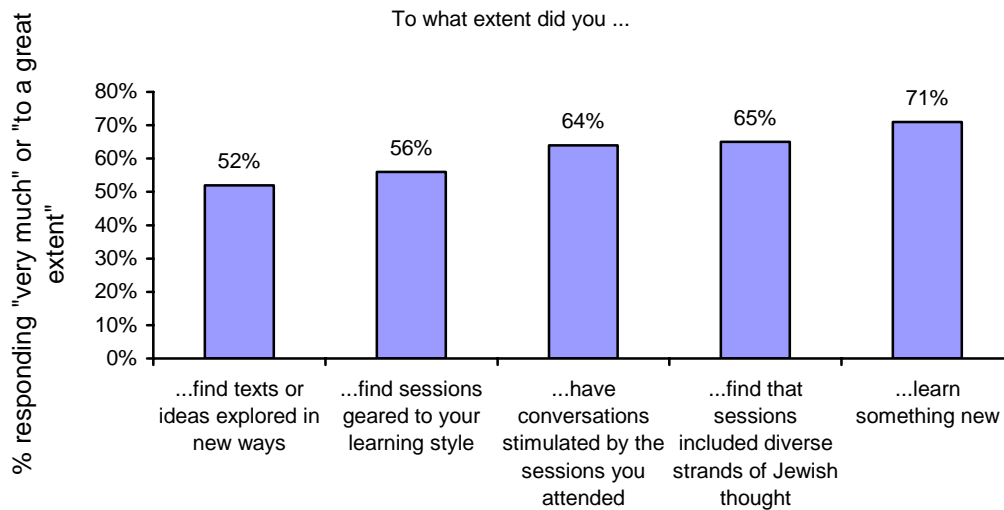
Participants lauded the learning experience at Limmud NY. Almost 70% said their needs for learning were met ‘very much’ or ‘to a great extent.’ Two-thirds found the event personally meaningful, and almost 80% agreed with the statement, “It was a high quality learning experience for me.” Most (64%) found themselves having conversations stimulated by the sessions they attended. There was something for everybody. A single woman in her 30s liked the programs linking the mind and body.

I loved the variety and diversity of programs. The dance one was a great contrast to the other learning sessions. I enjoy the emphasis on programs that address the mind-body connection, and I would love to see more.

A woman in her 50s enthused about the musical offerings.

I think it is a stellar effort to get together as many people as you did. The scholars were great. Debbie Friedman and Danny Maseng were fantastic. The idea of getting together this many Jews for learning is fantastic.

Others spoke of the “great scholars” or the joy of being able to learn about Jews and Judaism they had not known about before.

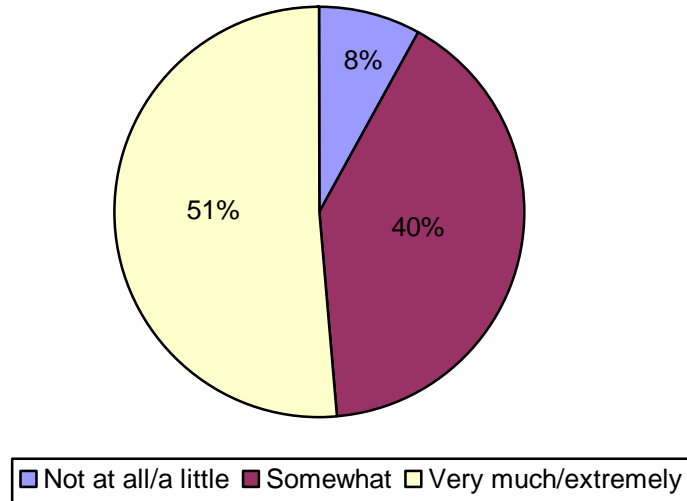
Figure 12: Learning and Text Study

The overwhelming message on the learning at Limmud NY is positive, but participants did express concerns and suggestions to improve the program. Although most Jewish educators consider text study a critical component of Jewish learning, many participants who came to learn said that their needs for text study were not met. Fewer than half had their needs met for text study (very much or to a great extent) and only slightly more than half said they found texts studied in new ways. As one participant pointed out, “you can bring together people of different ages, backgrounds and religious observance for meaningful action, but in textual study it can present challenges.” In an attempt to give text greater salience at Limmud NY, planners organized a time slot devoted solely to text study. This was arranged after the program book went to print, so it is not clear to what extent participants saw it as a special text study period. Many of the rooms at Kutshers, unfortunately, were far from conducive to *hevrutah* style learning, and there was no specific text study track. Some presenters gave sessions that were specifically text study, and many Torah/Spirituality track topics may have used text but not everyone would classify all of the sessions (for example, Kabbalistic Palm Reading) in the Torah/Spirituality track as the study of text.

Limmud NY attracted renowned and powerful teachers, both invited and volunteers. Although slightly more than half of survey respondents said Limmud NY was intellectually challenging, some (22%) were concerned that the level was too easy. Limmud NY was a “great overall experience”, in the words of a participant, “but I was looking for more serious, intellectual sessions with high level learning, which I felt was lacking.” Less than one percent said the level was too advanced; 77% said it was “just about right.” Participants’ responses to these questions about challenge and level of learning, not surprisingly, were correlated.

Figure 13: The Intellectual Challenge of Limmud NY

Overall, did you find Limmud NY intellectually challenging? ...



Feeling that the level of learning was too easy or finding intellectual challenge lacking did not necessarily get in the way of learning something new or enjoying Limmud NY. More than 71% of participants said they had learned something new.

I would have liked more intensive learning on specific topics because I felt that in short sessions the learning tends to be cursory, but it was a great experience and I have encouraged my *bubbe* to come with me next year!

Another expressed no problem with the level of learning, just overall enthusiasm and support.

As chair of adult education programming at my synagogue, my extreme satisfaction with the learning opportunities, both formal and informal, induce me to promote Limmud at my *shul*. It is also a fabulous opportunity to 'audition' different teachers before inviting them to present at our synagogue. Limmud should be promoted to adult education chairs in Synagogues for this reason as well as to use them as conduits to promote Limmud in their communities.

Children's programming did not meet with the same success as adult learning. Half of parents with young children said children's programming failed to meet their needs, and the response to family programming was the same. A woman with young children said:

Children's programming is our make-or-break issue. We came in 06 because in 05 our children were stimulated, taken seriously as learners, and in consequence made friends with other children who wanted to participate in a real substantive experience. This year they had childcare, and although I know from talking to ... others that a lot of thought did go into it, honestly you couldn't tell from looking at it. It felt under-programmed, perfunctory, content-less and boring.

Other participants had similar comments. One couple enjoyed Limmud NY very much but “had the children's programming problem.” Another simply said that the problem needed to be addressed. Nine people said they would not return to Limmud NY next year because of the children's programming. If Limmud NY organizers consider families with children an important part of their constituency, this area will require more effort.

Aside from complaints about programming for children and families, however, the response to the learning at Limmud NY was overwhelmingly positive, and at least one man found the children's programming satisfying. His comments on his own learning articulate the sentiments of many participants.

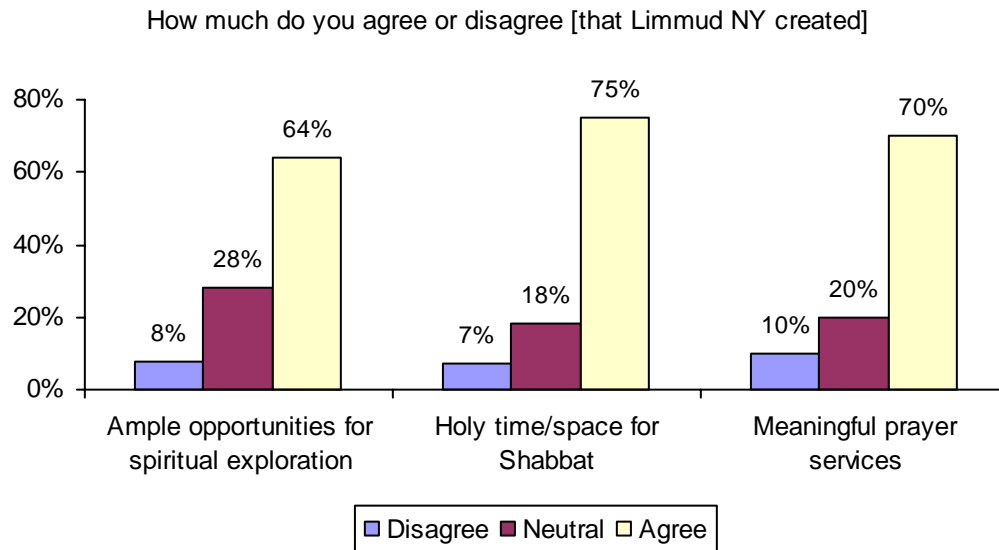
Limmud NY had amazing programming for my children and a range of experiences from performance to text study from traditional text to kabbalistic texts. There were not enough advanced learning opportunities, and the advanced opportunities were often not so reliant on the Hebrew or Aramaic, but given the crowd it was a fine mix. ... The ability to move from text to performance to social action to theology was wonderful, and my only frustration was that I missed the session on spiritual *hevrutah* because I was at a social action/art project with my 6 year-old daughter. I should always have such struggles.

Spirituality

*I think it's hard to have meaningful spiritual experiences in such a large group.
-Limmud NY Participant-*

*The most important thing beyond having good teaching was to have good davening options and strong creative alternatives to traditional davening options—some new spiritual practices to take home with them that's accessible to people who don't want to daven. For 800 people you can't have 3 options—it's not intimate, it doesn't work.
-Limmud NY Volunteer Planner-*

Limmud NY organizers do not advertise the program as a source of spiritual awakening, and only 38% of respondents said that the opportunity for spiritual exploration (e.g. prayer, meditation, mysticism) was very or extremely important in their decision to attend. Of that 38%, two-thirds said their needs were met. Participants may not come for spirituality, but they have needs nonetheless, and overall, less than half (46%) felt those needs were met. Other questions in the survey shed light on that response.

Figure 14: Spiritual Experience at Limmud NY

While most participants agreed that Limmud NY provided ample opportunities for spiritual exploration, a holy time and space for Shabbat, and meaningful prayer services, they did not necessarily feel that it was a spiritually fulfilling experience. They came to learn about all aspects of Jewish learning, politics, behaviors, social action opportunities, and, perhaps, *about* spirituality. But most did not come for spiritual fulfillment.

One participant from England, who called herself a secular Jew, complained that there was too much programming on spirituality, and as a result “I found there weren't enough history/culture sessions that would have kept me busy over the course of the 4 days.” Another participant said she had not attended the sessions that were spiritual in nature. She preferred those about the situation in Israel. But those that came for a spiritual experience found Limmud NY spiritually enriching. As one participant commented:

Overall I loved it. It felt comfortable, people were friendly. I liked the fact there was an openness to all kinds of Judaism and room for many learning styles. It was enjoyable and upbeat while being stimulating intellectually and spiritually.

Community

Meet people who share your curiosity and enthusiasm. Relax, reflect, and celebrate.

-Limmud NY Website-

Limmud NY provides an opportunity to build community and have an impact on that community through innovation and initiative of its volunteers.

-Limmud NY Participant-

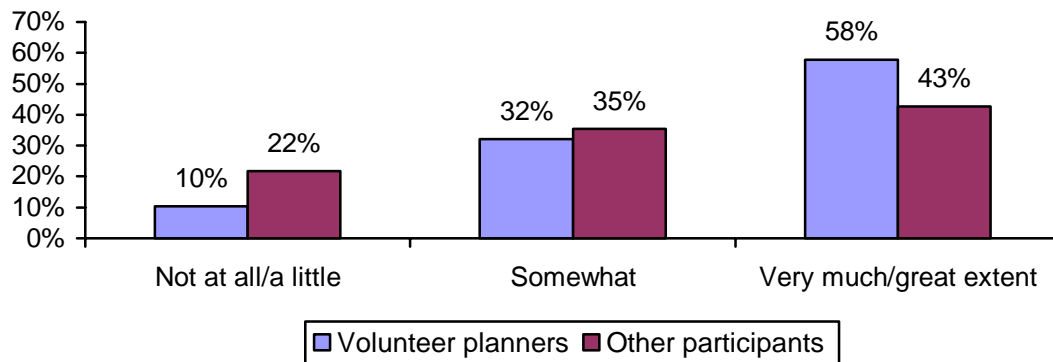
I loved the variety and diversity of programs. The services were wonderful—rejuvenating. The people I met, however, were the best part of the Limmud experience.

-Limmud NY Participant-

Half of the people who decided to attend Limmud NY (52%) said they were attracted—very much or extremely—by the opportunity to meet new people. Of these people, most (57%) said Limmud NY satisfied their need to get to know new people, but among all participants, 46% said their needs had been met in regard to meeting new people. And, again, among all participants, fewer than half (41%) said they felt very much or to a great extent part of an overall Limmud NY community. How does this compare? In Westchester synagogues studied by Sales, 64% of members said they felt part of the community formed by their congregations (Sales, 2004). Of course, these are on-going associations so a better comparison might be made between synagogue members and volunteer planners who spent countless hours together during the year planning the event, and then, only after some years elapse.

No demographic characteristics or Jewish background measures are related to the development of feelings of community at Limmud NY. Whether grouped by age, denomination, or marital status the percent breakdown of the development of community was about the same. Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals and people who were uncertain of their sexuality accounted for only 26 of Limmud NY respondents, but they also felt part of the community in roughly the same percentage as the rest of the community. Half of participants who checked one of these categories for sexual orientation felt very much/great extent part of the community created by Limmud NY.

Only those who served as volunteer planners had a significantly higher percentage responding positively to the questions about meeting people and forming community. Indeed, their desire to meet new people was one of the primary motivations to volunteer. They spent more time together leading up to the event and shared a common sense of purpose in their desire to create a meaningful, celebratory weekend. Among them, 58% said they felt part of the community.

Figure 15: Feeling Part of the Community

Participants and planners alike spoke of their concern about creating community at Limmud NY. One of the volunteers said she thought there was “a clique-ness among the volunteers.”

This is my second year as a volunteer, and despite knowing many people in Limmud, I do not work year round in the Jewish community, and many of them do, thus I do feel somewhat “out of it.”

A single young woman found that many people already knew each other making it difficult to make new friends, but she came away, nonetheless, with a “strong feeling of community.”

I loved knowing that everyone around me was Jewish. It gave me a strong feeling of community and the knowledge that different types of Jews can get together and find something in common. However, there weren't that many programs geared towards bringing together different types of people. Everyone pretty much stayed with their own and, for me, it made it harder to hold conversations and make friends. Having people in the same place for 5 days does not guarantee integration. I cannot wait until Limmud 2007 and I would love to see some changes made to the programs so that more people can get to know each other.

One of the problems associated with trying to create a sense of community at Limmud NY is the existence of sub-communities of friends who come together or who know each other from the Jewish professional world or from their congregations. This has positive as well as negative aspects. The community spirit of these smaller groups can either infuse the whole event with warmth and intimacy, or it can appear exclusive. A man from the Upper West Side said:

I had the opportunity to spend time with people I do know but do not see enough, and to share Shabbat with strong friends who we would easily have had over to our apartment that evening had we not been at Limmud. A high percentage of my core community attended, as did many people from circles that overlap with mine but that I don't spend as much time in.

Other participants might have viewed his circle as a clique and felt left out. This presents a continuing challenge for Limmud NY.

Many participants commented favorably on the diversity of people brought together: young and old and of many different denominations, but the few people with physical disabilities struggled to navigate Kutshers' distances and convoluted design. One person with a "mobility disability" said it felt "a little insensitive." Another participant said:

I was surprised that there were almost no people present with special needs -- nor did there seem to be accommodations for them. This is a key part of the Jewish community missing!

No programs were geared to people with special learning needs, nor did any grapple with the importance of the issue in the Jewish community. If being inclusive means attracting and providing opportunities for Jews with disabilities, Limmud NY organizers should try to recruit someone with sensitivity to those needs to check out the facilities before the event and to think creatively about programming for their needs.

Educators and community organizers find it difficult to create programs designed solely to build community. Programs that are effective usually focus on the interests of their target audiences and build community through those interests. 'Ice breakers' outside of a context—a reason for people to get to know each other—have little impact. For that reason, introductions within sessions (or in the case of the volunteer planners, within their own teams) and organized, small conversations around particular issues of interest related to the sessions at Limmud NY may serve better to link participants to each other. Roundtables having little to do with Jewish topics, random table assignments (even within a larger carefully selected group) for Friday night, and even the best lectures without follow-up opportunity for discussion will not generate the feeling of community that some participants seek.

Summing up his enthusiasm for the diversity and intergenerational composition of Limmud NY, a man in his 40s said:

I think Limmud fosters a sense of community, inclusion and diversity that I have not found anywhere else in the NY community and rarely in other Jewish settings.

A man who identified denominationally as a "wandering Jew, still looking for my tribe" compared Limmud NY to what he perceived as its opposite, life in the Brazil of Terry Gilliam's 1985 film:

Imagine you live in a country far away on another continent. To be Jewish for you and to live according to your identity. It's like living in *Brazil* by Terry Gilliam. At Limmud NY I felt a community with all the characters and all the diversity and at the same time, all the identity. *Brazil* became Shangri-la.

LIMMUD NY 2006: THE IMPACT

Limmud encouraged me to make a regular hevruta with a friend of mine and to push the organization I work with to do more on the crisis in Darfur.

-Limmud NY Participant-

I am more determined than ever to learn to read Hebrew (I actually have a small vocabulary); certainly will continue with learning and attending Jewish-themed events.

-Limmud NY Participant-

I don't know if it's Limmud NY but a few sessions I really liked, and they changed my views, for example, Ruth Messinger and her explanation of homelessness. Now when I see a homeless person on the street I think about her and do what she suggested.

-Limmud NY Participant-

Researchers run into difficulty when they try to measure the impact of educational interventions. The best studies are experimental or at least longitudinal in design. This study is based on the observations of the research team and self-reporting by participants in one post-event survey. That being understood, the report now turns to outcomes: ways in which participants said Limmud NY affected them, new activities they are planning or have already undertaken, and their intention to return to Limmud NY next year.

The survey asked participants about any new Jewish learning or new volunteer activities in which they are involved as a result of their Limmud NY experience. It also asked how much time they had spent with friends made at Limmud NY. The survey was conducted one month after the event, and this fact creates two difficulties for interpreting the results. A high level of enthusiasm and intent to pursue Limmud NY-like activities could represent a 'high' from the momentum of the event which may or may not carry forward. In contrast, participants could be recovering from the exhaustion of non-stop Jewish study and activities for four days. The one month may not have been enough time for them to reflect on the experience and decide how to move forward. Ideally, the impact participants describe should be investigated six months to a year later to see whether participants really follow through on their intentions and whether other ideas and behaviors come out of their Limmud NY experience.

A third of Limmud NY 2006 participants were either looking into or trying new Jewish learning (27%) or looking into or volunteering for an organization they had not been involved with in the past (15%). The total 158 people who were thinking about or actively exploring something new (34%) reflects the overlap in the two groups. Most of these people had memberships in synagogues, *minyanim* or other Jewish organizations, but some (20) did not. They were exploring, perhaps, for the first time. The settings for these explorations varied.

Table 8: Venues for Participants' Activities Post-Limmud NY

<i>Setting</i>	<i>Number of Participants</i>
JCC/YMHA/YWHA	17
Synagogue	28
Minyan/havurah	31
School or university	13
Hillel or other campus organization	13
Jewish service organization	10
Jewish political organization	12
Other	49
Total	128*

* These numbers do not total since many participants selected more than one setting

Almost a hundred participants wrote details about their plans. Half involved study: Talmud, Hebrew, Torah reading, informal and formal classes (some in the *beit midrash* of Hadar or Hazon, some in synagogue adult education programs). Two women were joining *rosh hodesh* groups. Several people said they were reading books they had heard about at Limmud NY. Two people are attending Me'ah at their synagogues, but it is not clear that this was the result of Limmud NY 2006. One woman said, "I will attend my synagogue's Women's retreat for the first time and have also attended a new study group for Jewish women in my town." Another woman became a member of the Jewish Community Center and is taking classes with Makom. She also became a student of Alan Brill (one of the Limmud NY Presenters). Participants also expanded into political activism. One was attending an AIPAC policy conference; others were getting involved in service organizations. Twelve were exploring Judaism through art or music (the Jewish Film Festival, a choral group, storytelling).

Four people wrote about changing their ritual observance. A Conservative woman wrote about becoming more "*shomer shabbas*," and a Reconstructionist woman with a Workmen's Circle education said she was "modestly" increasing her Shabbat observance as well. An actively Reform young woman said she was exploring *kashrut*, while a young man from a Reform background said, "I have tried to understand what rituals are important to me personally and what I can do to create my own rituals." Fourteen other participants said they were looking into new prayer opportunities (Kol Zimrah, "community *minyan*"). For most of them it meant attending a worship service that was new to them, but no one was attending prayer services for the first time.

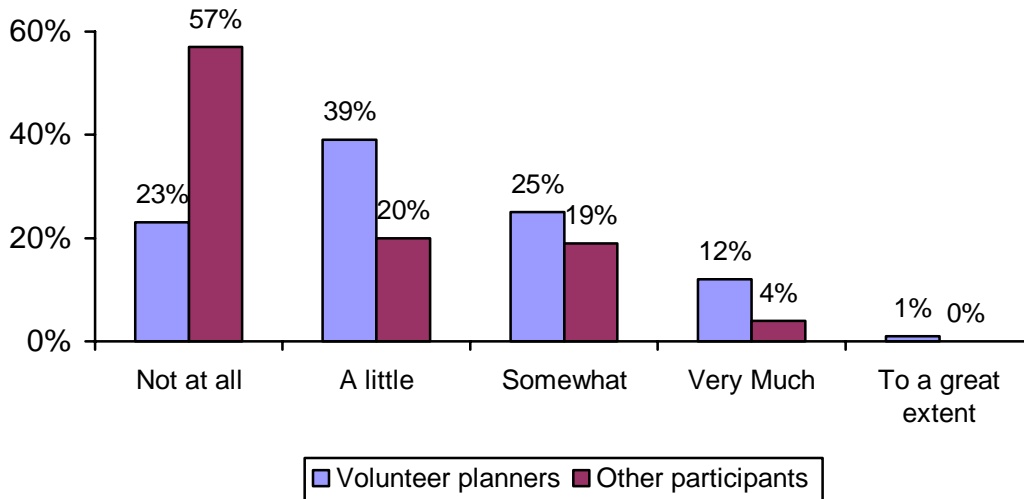
I have tried the Kol Zimrah service in NYC again because Limmud opened me up to other ways of praying and I met some people who attend Kol Zimrah regularly.

A separate question asked participants about any volunteer activities they had become involved in as a result of Limmud NY. Seventeen people said they intended to volunteer for Limmud NY and four planned to volunteer for Limmud in other settings. Five planned to volunteer for Hazon. One person joined a UJA Wall Street Division, another

was volunteering at Gift of Life. Two people became involved in Children of Abraham, an organization promoting dialogue, and another two in Abraham's Vision (a similar organization). At least two have gotten involved in hurricane disaster relief in New Orleans—one a student and another, an adult. Three people became involved in AIPAC, and three people became involved in programs related to Darfur. One participant said that he and his family members had volunteered to paint their *shul*'s basement. Ayecha, Ansche Chesed's homeless shelter, American Jewish World Service and the Jewish Fund for Justice also attracted volunteers from among Limmud NY's participants.

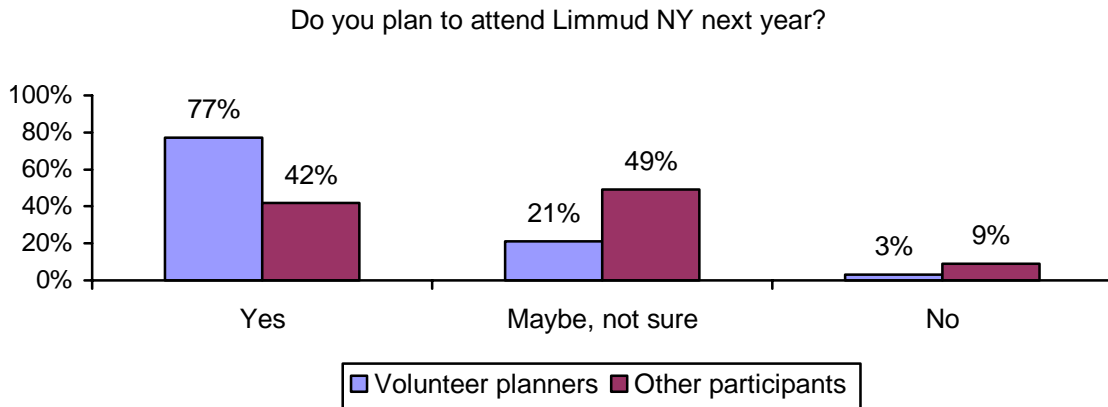
Participants from Limmud NY also said they spent time with friends they made at Limmud NY in the month after the event, although not frequently. Volunteers spent more time with people they met at Limmud NY or through their volunteer efforts as can be seen below.

Figure 16: Time Spent with Friends Made at Limmud NY since the Event



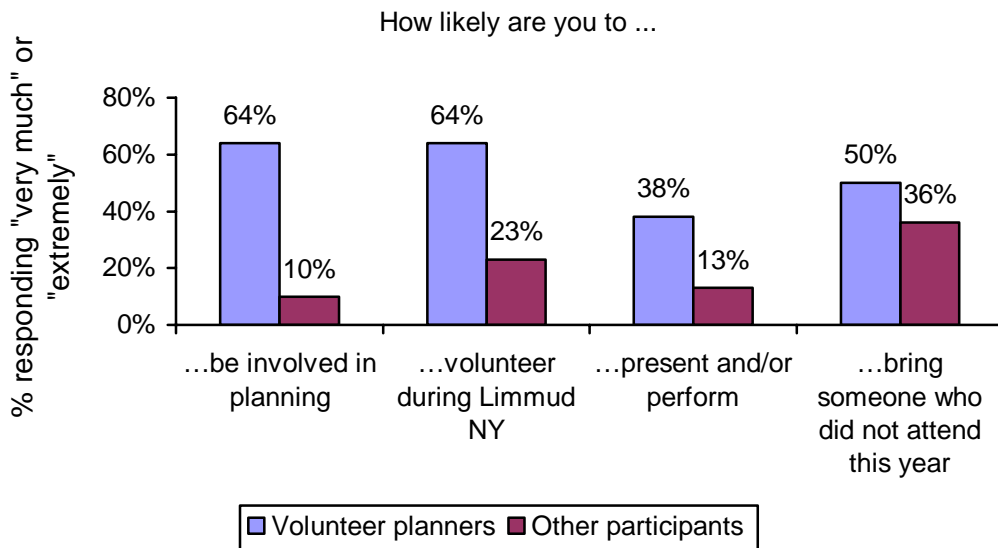
In keeping with their enthusiasm for Limmud NY, half of all participants said they definitely plan to attend again in 2007. Only 8% of respondents said they would not return. The rest are undecided. Most volunteer planners will return next year (77%) although not all in a volunteer role. Only 3% of them said they will not return.

Figure 17: Plans for Attending Limmud NY 2007—Planners and Other



Limmud NY planners differ from the rest of the participants in almost every one of the outcome variables discussed here. They spend more time with friends made through Limmud NY. A larger percent of them plan to attend the conference next year. They are more likely to be involved in planning and volunteering, presenting or performing next year, and they are more likely to bring someone to Limmud NY 2007 who did not attend in 2006.

Figure 18: Likelihood of Involvement in Limmud NY 2007

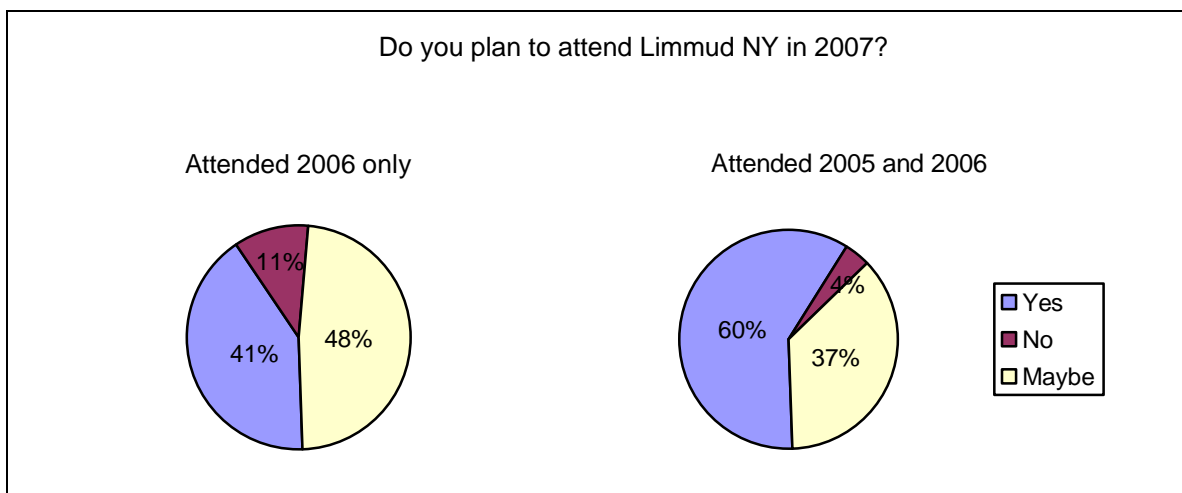


As in the case of most outcome variables for Limmud NY, no benchmarks exist. If Limmud NY could compare these numbers to Limmud UK, organizers and funders could measure how successful Limmud NY is in some context. In lieu of benchmarks, the only measurement is year to year to make sure the trend is in the right direction. Comparing

2005 and 2006 is problematic for reasons noted above, but last year's planners were less likely than other participants to say they would return to Limmud NY in 2006. Was the burnout more severe last year? Was the timing of the survey an issue? If we asked the 2006 planners now that they have had a few months to process the event, would their answers be different? This leaves assessment in the realm of theoretical questions. If Limmud NY draws more of its volunteers from the same pool from year to year, does that assure that it benefits from the learning and experience they pass on? Will it help form stronger community ties? If only a relatively small number of participants not involved in planning this year volunteer to help plan next year's program, is that adequate to bring in new ideas and stimulate creative thinking? Does continuity and community outweigh change and evolution?

One further outcome variable for Limmud NY is retention of participants from one year to the next. In this regard, the data from 2005 to 2006 point to a greater percentage of people returning for Limmud NY 2007 than returned for 2006. One-third of 2005 participants participated in 2006 and they represented about 30% of 2006 participants. Almost half of this year's participants say they will definitely attend next year. (These numbers should not be compared, and plans should not be made on the basis of these numbers, due to the change in the timing of the surveys.) The rates of intention to return next year based on whether participants attended Limmud NY 2005 or not can, however, be compared. Sixty percent of participants who came in both 2005 and 2006 plan to attend again. That suggests that the more people participate in Limmud NY, the more they will want to participate. The more they participate, the larger and stronger Limmud NY will become.

Figure 19: Plans to Attend Limmud NY 2007 by Attendance in 2005 and 2006



To summarize, about a third of Limmud NY participants have been inspired or stimulated by Limmud NY to pursue other Jewish activities. These may be additive rather than entirely new ventures, but they are new and, at least as self-reported by participants, due

to the influence of Limmud NY. Most of these activities have been in the realm of study and exploration of new venues for prayer, but *Limmudnyks* also said they are pursuing Jewish volunteerism, political activism and creative arts as a result of their participation in Limmud NY. In 2006, volunteers look forward to returning to Limmud NY 2007 and planning the program again, and they do so in significantly larger percentages than the participants who were not involved in the planning. Nonetheless, both cohorts taken together anticipate returning again next year, and those who came in 2005, even more so than those who came only in 2006.

Limmud was a revitalizing experience for me. I came away charged and motivated to be more knowledgeable and to be more conscious of how daily behavior and practice matter to me as a Jew.

-Limmud NY Participant-

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I'm deeply thankful for the generous financial aid. I'm an ... associate professor, with two kids in day school in Manhattan and a toddler in child care. My wife works from home on a commission basis and we could not have paid the full cost of participation, either what is charged or let alone the actual cost. I feel deeply grateful that it was possible for us to attend, and see such a range of Jews spend Shabbat together. I'd like to help make it happen next year.

-Limmud NY participant-

Limmud NY 2006, like Limmud NY 2005, was tremendous fun. Just through the sheer volume and variety of offerings, it opened new experiences to Jewish learning for many participants. In text, Torah, spirituality, history, art, music or social issues, Limmud NY presenters and other participants worked together to learn and explore. The range of prayer services reflected the diverse background of participants, and from the amplified instruments of more liberal services to the *mechitzot* of the more traditional, Limmud NY offered a plethora of options and opportunities.

Similar to last year, some participants from the liberal wing found too much tradition and resented the primacy of Orthodox *kashrut* in the public spaces. On the other side, more Orthodox participants felt the event lacked the warmth and authenticity they associate with traditional Judaism, and some were deeply offended by the “crude sexual performance” at Sunday evening’s Mega-event. A few participants at both ends of the spectrum of Jewish opinion felt the Conservative movement held too much prominence among presenters and participants and had too much influence on the flavor of Limmud NY. But most participants felt the level of religious observance was just about right (84%) and for the most part they reveled in the diversity of Limmud NY: denominational, generational, sexual, intellectual, and even geographic. “It was a joy,” a ‘Conservadox’ woman from Brooklyn wrote, “to see such a diverse group of people sharing an intense Jewish experience together.” This year, Limmud NY brought in more people with fewer ties to the ‘established’ Jewish world of synagogues and JCCs. One of them wrote, “It was an amazing experience for me, the first positive [experience] with organized religion I’ve had since my youth.” She is now attending a Jewish film festival and joining friends she made at Limmud NY for Shabbat dinners. She is as happy as she was surprised that Limmud NY had such an effect on her.

Participants were satisfied, but they were more than satisfied. All but a few felt they learned something new and most found the program a more meaningful Jewish experience than other organized programs in the Jewish world. This report describes the steps participants have taken to move forward on their Jewish explorations from Limmud NY. Both in areas of learning and in service to the Jewish community, Limmud NY appears to have noticeable impact on participants. Volunteers said they are eager to get started on 2007 planning. Further, participants intend to return and even more of those

who came both years assert that they will be back in 2007. Limmud NY is a phenomenon, a happening in the Jewish world, with the momentum and dynamism to make a difference. This research recognizes these achievements, but it also poses questions and suggests ideas for improvement.

Diversity

This year's Limmud NY profile appeared very similar to 2005. Limmud NY organizers will have to decide whether that is the profile they want. Part of building a core constituency and growing the core means that the profile will tend to be static. Should Limmud NY try to attract a more representative cross section of UJA-Federation area Jews, or should it try to serve specifically those people who are not reached by traditional Jewish organizations and activities? Would a narrower definition of the target audience be acceptable if it addressed the needs of people—the unaffiliated, GBLTs, Russian Jews—not usually touched by traditional institutions? Should Limmud NY focus on the committed, Jewishly active and creative participants it has attracted to date, or should it try to find more people without those advantages? A third of participants are Jewish professionals. Is this a cause for concern? Should Limmud NY focus on deepening the core or extending the circle? What, if anything, can Limmud NY do about the gender imbalance? Is this just a feature of the Jewish world that is immutable or can specific marketing and recruitment strategies bring in more men?

Learning

Limmud NY created fun and excitement and a sense that real learning pervaded the weekend, but some participants contend that the learning is not at a high enough level—that it is not adequately challenging. Respondents have suggested higher-level learning opportunities with multiple sessions, pre-enrollment, and prerequisite reading. Some text study sessions could require Hebrew, or Hebrew *hevrutot* could be set up within text study sessions. Would such changes create a hierarchy or does such a hierarchy already exist, and, if it does, could this strategy make for greater inclusivity while promoting deeper learning?

Spirituality

Less than 40% of Limmud NY respondents said they were seeking a spiritual experience at Limmud NY. Although most of those people (63%) found what they were looking for, others felt less spiritually fulfilled. Limmud NY planners continue to discuss the challenge of spirituality, and it is important to remember that respondents said there was plenty of opportunity for spiritual exploration. But exploration is not the same as fulfillment, and perhaps participants are saying that it is the *search* itself rather than the attainment which Limmud NY should and does provide.

Community

If Limmud NY organizers attempt to make community-building the principal goal of specific planning teams or program sessions, they will probably not be successful. But if they develop leadership capacity to fold community into the mission of everything Limmud NY does, they may very well succeed in creating a sense of ‘*Limmudnyk*’ identity. Some suggestions: post-session facilitated conversations to discuss the topic of the session, be it Israel, text, music or art. Many participants enjoy the lecture formats, others prefer more opportunity to process ideas with others. Such follow-up sessions could be built into specific tables at breakfast, lunch or dinner, or organized in a particular nook of the lobby with wine or coffee. Also, as part of follow-up and to create continuity with the rest of the year and to build year-round contacts, participants could sign up for listservs or *e-hevruta* to continue the discussion of particularly engaging sessions. Presenters would not have to be part of such discussions, but they could stimulate them with suggested readings and occasional questions.

Limmud NY may also want to provide more opportunities for participants to reflect on the overall Limmud NY experience and where the journey leads. Given the web-tech skills of some of the volunteer planners, perhaps they could set up a ‘blog’ of Limmud NY reflections asking participants to contribute their thoughts on what they have done and what they would like to do as a result of Limmud NY. Such communication could have the added benefit of connecting participants not only to each other but back to Limmud NY itself. It could also provide planners with a list of people with known areas of interest who could be drawn on as future volunteers.

These are some suggestions, but the research finds that Limmud NY is already a powerful event with potential to enrich the Jewish community of the New York area. It creates buzz and excitement and provides new access points for Judaism in the 21st century.

If it weren't for my mother's wedding and brother's bar mitzvah, upon which I am spending my discretionary vacation from the army, I would fly to the US just for Limmud, and pay whatever potato-peeling/rainy-guard-duty price in return.

-Limmud NY Participant-

It was great! We will definitely be back next year and, in the future, maybe we will even attend Limmud in England or Israel.

-Limmud NY Participant-

“I think Limmud NY is great. It has changed me and my connection to Judaism.”

-Limmud NY Participant-

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APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY AND RESPONSE RATES

This year's research is based on 12 interviews with volunteer planners and observation of the event: sessions, meals, and conversations in the lobby between times. It also relies on a Web-based survey of participants, conducted between February 22 and April 10, 2006. Response was high and respondents took the opportunity of open-ended questions to express their feelings, as well as their opinions, about Limmud NY.

Table A 1: Survey Response Rates

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>Response rate</i>
Presenters	115	103	90%
Planners	86	78	92%
Other Participants	446	322	72%
Total	647	472*	73%

*Thirty-one participants identified themselves as both presenters and planners.

APPENDIX B: VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION CHART

