

**On Working with Boys:  
Intriguing Practices from Program Directors in the Field**

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## Introduction

The literature review conducted in tandem with this research supports anecdotal evidence that boys are less involved and less engaged in Jewish life than their female peers. On the one hand, research suggests that there is nothing uniquely Jewish about this dynamic; boys and men are less involved in most religions. We recognize also that the implications of this gender dynamics are open to interpretation. For example, is this a problem that must be solved? A fact of life simply to be noted? A key into understanding some historical trend?

As professional Jewish educators, we see this dynamic as representing—at the very least—a challenge. If our purpose is to ensure that the next generation of Jews remains connected and committed to Judaism, and that Judaism is available to help boys become healthy men, then this gender differential merits some disciplined attention. How can the Jewish community be more effective in enrolling and engaging adolescent boys? Why do the boys who currently show up choose to show up? Across both secular and Jewish youth organizations, what are intriguing practices related to working with boys?

With this component of our research, we set out to find some answers to these questions.

For this research, we interviewed directors or experienced program staff from nine different youth programs. Our criteria for inclusion in this study were as follows:

- 1) *Works with Boys*: The program works with adolescent boys anywhere in the range of grades 6 to 12, either exclusively or in a coeducational context.

- 2) *High Quality*: According to other educators in the field, the program has a reputation for quality educational practices in general
- 3) *Diversity*: For the sample as a whole, we selected a group of programs that could provide insight into a diverse array of philosophies and educational contexts (for example, Jewish and secular, boys-only and co-ed, national and local, residential and non-residential, etc).
- 4) *Convenience*: We had to be able to schedule and conduct a phone interview with a staff member during the time we were conducting this research.

Before presenting the list of interviewees and programs included in this study, some clarifications are appropriate. We cannot claim that our sample is in any way representative of a national population of education programs. We did not use a scientific sampling method to arrive at this group of programs, and there are surely valuable programs that are not included on this list. Nor can we claim that the programs presented here are the “best” at engaging boys by some objective, quantifiable standard.

We can claim, however, that our sample includes an array of programs carefully selected to provide meaningful insights related to intriguing practices in working with boys. Each of these programs had a compelling reason to be included in our sample, and our interviewees all brought years—often decades—of educational experience to bear on the responses they provided. We are confident that our sample brings together a group of experienced, informed voices. Collectively, they illuminate the challenges, opportunities, and intriguing practices related to working with boys.

The list of both interviewees and organizations included in this research is as follows:

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Description</b>
1) Matt Grossman (Executive Director)	B'nai B'rith Youth Organization (BBYO)	Jewish	National (and international) youth movement with 18,000 members in 40 communities across the country. BBYO is organized by gender, with boys participating in AZA programming and girls participating in BBG programming.
2) K'vod Wiener (Executive Director)	B'nai Tzedek	Jewish	Educational non-profit that teaches youth philanthropy to young adults in Western Massachusetts
3) Miriam Stein (Director)	Panim el Panim	Jewish	Educational program that brings Jewish adolescents from across the country to Washington, DC for 4-5 day seminars exploring the connection between Jewish values and civic engagement
4) Marjorie Berkowitz (Executive Director)	Prozdor	Jewish	Boston-based "complementary" Hebrew high school, affiliated with Hebrew College, currently working with 950 students from the greater Boston region
5) Bobby Harris (Camp Director)	URJ Camp Coleman	Jewish	Georgia-based summer camp, run by the reform movement, that hosts 800 young people each summer
6) Peter Sterrett (Assistant Scout Executive in Massachusetts)	Boy Scouts of America	Secular	National non-profit, founded in 1910, focused on citizenship education and character development for boys ages 5-18 for nearly a century
7) Jim Cox (Senior Strategist)	Boys and Girls Clubs of America	Secular	National nonprofit that runs activities and afterschool programs via 4,000 clubs across the country
8) Keith Fairmont (Executive Director)	Men's Leadership Alliance	Secular	Colorado-based non-profit organization, affiliated with the men's movement, that runs experiential programming for boys and men.
9) Kay Brennan (Training Coordinator)	Peaceful Posse	Secular	Philadelphia-based educational non-profit that runs anti-violence programming for urban adolescent boys and girls

Each of interviewee was contacted by the researcher and presented with the background and purpose of this study. We then scheduled a time for a phone interview. Phone interviews lasted from 30-60 minutes, and involved working through our 31-questions interview protocol (see Appendix A). Responses were recorded by hand (either in writing or typed directly into MS Word), and were not taped.

### **Interview Summaries**

#### **1) B'nai Brith Youth Organization (BBYO)**

Interviewee: Matt Grossman, Executive Director

##### *Basic Information:*

BBYO is an 83-year-old organization that calls itself “the largest and most effective provider of identity-building and leadership development programs for Jewish teens”<sup>1</sup>. According to the website, membership includes 18,000 teens located in 40 regions across the U.S. as well as numerous countries internationally. The organization is divided into two single-sex programs: Aleph Zadik Aleph (AZA) for boys, and B'nai Brith Girls (BBG) for girls. Both groups involve leadership development programs for teens ages 14-18.

Matt Grossman has served as the Executive Director for the last two years.

##### *Program Background and Overview:*

Grossman notes that the BBYO has undertaken significant changes over the years. For most of its existence, the organization was committed to supporting AZA and BBG

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<sup>1</sup> [www.bbyo.org](http://www.bbyo.org)

as youth-run communities. In recent years, however, BBYO has refocused itself as an outreach organization. Grossman explains that the organization's new motto is "more Jewish teens, more meaningful Jewish experiences." To that end, BBYO has expanded beyond supporting its two foundational programs.

Grossman explains that BBYO conducted an extensive review of research exploring the interests of today's teens. The result of this review was a list of four key areas of interest:

- 1) Technology
- 2) College Entrance
- 3) Community Service
- 4) Traveling

The organization is currently focused on major initiatives addressing each of these four areas of interest. For example, BBYO recently launched *www.b-linked.org*, a social-networking site similar to Friendster and Myspace. The site reportedly has 5,500 members. They also created *www.b-admitted.org*, another website that provides tips and resources related to the college application process. BBYO also runs college tours, and provides a 10% discount on Princeton Review SAT courses. The organization runs numerous service programs that meet the requirements of most schools for community service hours, and each summer 2,000 teens travel to various destinations through BBYO travel programs.

Grossman makes it clear that the focus of these initiatives is outreach. The hope is to connect more unaffiliated teens with meaningful Jewish experiences.

*BBYO and boys:*

BBYO is fairly unique in the landscape of Jewish youth education because its programming is divided by gender. Boys participate in AZA, while girls participate in BBG. The programs have similar structures, and the two groups frequently interact socially, but the gender division is a central component of the BBYO experience.

Grossman reports that AZA has a membership of approximately 7500 boys, while BBG has 8500 girls, a near-even ratio of 47% boys to 53% girls.

When asked about intriguing practices in recruitment, Grossman highlights the organization's overarching focus on effective recruitment. The research review and the subsequent programming related to the four interests represent a thoughtful, strategic effort to effectively reach out to both boys and girls.

Grossman explains that AZA is run like a fraternity, a model with clear intriguing practices in engaging boys. He states, "Brotherhood is in!" and that "Guys like to be around guys," and notes that the AZA model is carefully crafted to foster a sense of brotherhood and belonging. The local groups are youth-led, creating a leadership development process that appeals to boys. He states,

"So, your freshman year you start participating in your local chapter with about 20 kids; suddenly you're hanging out with Junior and Seniors and they're cool—you want to be like them. Your sophomore year you can begin running for offices in the chapter, and before you know it, you are one of those cool Juniors, and the younger kids are looking up to you!"

He also notes that AZA includes special cheers and handshakes, and are supervised by male adults. The result is a male-only space that is focused on providing the experience of brotherhood and fraternity in a context founded in Jewish values. The



combination of leadership opportunities and meaningful male bonding represents the AZA's intriguing practices in engaging adolescent boys.

Grossman had less to say about intriguing practices keeping boys connected to the program. BBYO does have an alumni program, but he felt that the organizations intriguing practice in keeping boys connected was the fact that there is often a very thin line between BBYO and a participant's closest group of friends. This rich social network ensures that participants continue to stay connected with the organization for a long time.

Grossman feels that the greatest challenge in working with boys is the fact that they are incredibly over-programmed. "Just getting on their dance card is a huge challenge," he states.

He feels that the great opportunity in working with boys is their endless curiosity about the world, and their desire for meaning. He states,

"Technology has changed their lives more than ever before. The internet makes them want to explore the world, and they can instantly learn about things like September 11<sup>th</sup> and Hurricane Katrina. Their natural curiosity about these events leads to questions that are essentially spiritual: Why is there suffering in the world? Why is there hate? We get to create an opportunity for them to search for answers to those questions in a Jewish environment."

## **2) Prozdor**

Interviewee: Marjorie Berkowitz, Executive Director

### *Basic Information*

Prozdor is a transdenominational, complementary Jewish high school. It is affiliated with Hebrew College in Newton, MA, and runs classes in eight communities in the greater Boston region. Currently, the program involves 950 young people coming from 80 different towns around Boston. 75% of the students are affiliated with the

Conservative movement. The program runs from 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grade, with an option of participating in a year-long leadership development program in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

Marjorie Berkowitz has been the Executive Director of Prozdor for the last eight years.

### *Program Background and Overview*

Prozdor opened its doors nearly 80 years ago; not surprisingly, it has gone through many changes over the course of its long history. It began as a five-day-a-week program, taught fully in Hebrew, with entrance exams and a rigorous academic curriculum. Over the years, the hours were reduced, Hebrew was removed from the curriculum for several years, and the number of students dwindled. When Berkowitz stepped in as Executive Director eight years ago, there were 175 students. In recent years, the population of students has doubled annually.

With 950 students and a stellar faculty (all the teachers have at least Master's degrees), Prozdor is currently a thriving program that has found ways to make supplemental Jewish education academically rigorous and highly appealing to teens.

### *Prozdor and Boys:*

According to Berkowitz, Prozdor has slightly more girls than boys (55% girls and 45% boys). Asked why she thinks boys show up, she claims that the teens see Prozdor as a cool place to be for several reasons. She states,

“We offer something meaningful academically. Students have a lot of autonomy over their choices; they really own their own Jewish education. Our non-formal program is first class as well. We've run trips to Spain, Israel, Montreal, and London, as well as grade-level day trips. Plus we go away for shabbaton! Also, the social component is very important. Our girls

our gorgeous! We had our prom last night and everybody commented on it! And boys are equally represented in all these things.”

When asked about intriguing practices in recruiting, engaging, and keeping boys connected to the program, Berkowitz has little to say. She makes it clear that the program does nothing exclusively for boys. Prozdor even opted not to run Rosh Hodesh programming out of a commitment to not creating gender-separate experiences. She says that the organization has no particular philosophy related to working with boys. She does note that the program does seem to lose a disproportionate number of boys after the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, so they are working on trying to engage those students as early as possible. But in general, the program makes no distinctions for boys or girls in its recruitment and educational efforts.

The story, however, is not really that simple. When asked what about the greatest opportunities in working with boys, Berkowitz highlights some efforts she’s made that surely represent a set of intriguing practices. She notes that she is the only female on the senior staff of the school, and all the other senior administrators are male. Also, she goes out of her way to make sure the faculty is evenly balanced between male and female. She states,

“I’m VERY conscious of including men on staff... At our year end gathering, many of our boys thanked different men on our staff. It thrilled me because the kids were saying, ‘You showed me a different way of being Jewish, and you’re a man.’...I think the reason Prozdor is attractive to boys is because it offers different models of being Jewish. Boys tend to connect with a teacher or administrator; girls tend to connect with each other, but boys tend to find a teacher. It’s unique for them, to have an array of male faculty is new, and provides them with opportunities to see new role models.”

Prozdor, then, provides an experience that is rare in the landscape of Jewish education. Boys entering the program encounter an organization where men are visible

and accessible in both the administration and the faculty. Berkowitz notes that the teachers cover the spectrum from Lubovitch to secular Israeli, and everything in between. The result is a diverse community of adults—evenly balanced between male and female—providing insight and guidance into different ways of being Jewish. Berkowitz could highlight no particular programs or initiatives focused specifically on boys, but this commitment to recruiting a gender-balanced faculty and administration clearly results in an environment that is attractive and engaging for boys.

### **3) B'nai Tzedek**

Interviewee: K'vod Wieder, Executive Director

#### *Basic Information*

B'nai Tzedek is a teen philanthropy program based in Western Massachusetts that has been in operation for eight years. It's mission is to “help Jewish teenagers create an authentic relationship to lifelong giving”. It is a program of the Harold Greenspoon Foundation, an organization that is committed to “helping to create vibrant Jewish community in Western Mass and beyond.”

The program has two elements. The first is a local educational initiative, involving young people (both boys and girls) ages 13-17 in youth philanthropy programming. Youth meet about eight times each year to learn how to operate a foundation, raise and distribute funds. There is also an annual weekend retreat, involving approximately 60 kids.

The second element is a national initiative to promote youth philanthropy programs around the country. As director of the program, K'vod Wieder works with

young people, funders, parents and professionals who want to start similar programs in their communities.

The two programs have contact with 200-250 young people annually. K'vod Wieder has been the director of the program for the past three years.

### *Program Background and Overview*

In its original form, B'nai Tzedek was primarily a financial structure that allowed young people to start and manage their own endowment funds, and there was a once-annual banquet that brought teens and their parents together to celebrate their experience. When Wieder arrived as director three years ago, he added an educational component to the program, creating opportunities for participants to come together to learn about financial management, philanthropic giving, and Jewish values in a more in-depth and comprehensive manner.

### *B'nai Tzedek and Boys*

According to Wieder, B'nai Tzedek has a very close to 50-50 boy-girl ratio. Participants at both the educational sessions and the annual banquet are split evenly along gender lines. When asked why he thinks boys show up for this program, he states,

“I think that there are two reasons. One is the fact that it has to do with money. In boy's growing up in our society, they have certain avenues that are cool to explore, and money is a part of that. I think there is another overall piece which has to do with an aspect of social action and really feeling like you can a make a difference in the world. It's not just about exploring yourself; it's about action in the world—getting stuff done. There is a way that boys feel that they can be powerful in this program.”

When asked about intriguing practices in recruiting boys, Wieder is quick to make it clear that the program does not make any effort to market specifically to boys. He

notes, however, that the general message about being empowered with money and making a difference in the world does have a natural appeal to boys.

In terms of engaging boys educationally, Wieder suggests that keeping things active is key in working with boys. He states,

“I think that good education in general is interactive, but my observation is that boys have even less patience than girls to be talked at. So activities where there is movement—where there is a game aspect. Any activity where there is a goal to be accomplished—rules guiding what can and can’t be done to achieve your goal—those kinds of activities really engage boys. On the other hand, talking at them—any kind of full-frontal learning in the area of Jewish education tends to be not so successful”

Wieder also feels that the leadership element of the program serves to effectively engage boys. The teens themselves have primary responsibility for directing the program. For example, B’nai Tzedek has a youth board that plans events and activities and makes meaningful decisions about the program. This element naturally integrates with the program’s focus on making decisions about raising and distributing funds, creating multiple opportunities for young people to make a meaningful contribution to the direction and content of the program.

Finally, Wieder believes that the clear focus he and other staff place on creating and maintaining meaningful relationships with the participants is best practice. The adult leadership regularly lets the teens know that their involvement is valued and important. These connections keep teens engaged in the learning that occurs through the program.

Wieder is articulate in his discussion of the challenges and opportunities in working with boys. He states,

I think the greatest challenge is drawing out their thoughts and feelings. It’s creating a safe space where they feel like they can share what they think

about. I think part of that is connected to the way boys are raised...Boys are used to putting themselves down. There is a sense of 'Who can take it more'...so boys in general feel like it is less safe in the world to share their thoughts about what really matters in the world. So the challenge is to create a space where boys feel like they can share, where they are not going to be ridiculed or made fun of."

Not surprisingly, Wieder believes that successfully creating that space has valuable benefits for boys. He states,

"One of the greatest opportunities is watching boys open up like a flower...you know watching them embrace a whole part of themselves. A lot of it has to do for me is watching boys open up to who they are. To see self reflection happen, to see them be able to articulate what is meaningful to them, to be real about that and see them be connected to community in deep ways. Not in superficial ways...That's very rewarding."

Although B'nai Tzedek does not have a formally articulated philosophy guiding its work with boys, Wieder shares his thoughts about why this program succeeds in attracting and engaging young people in general. He states,

"Our philosophy around youth in general is that engaging youth is empowering youth. Just really that in order for youth to prioritize Jewish educational experiences above the incredible demands and pulls on their time from the secular and consumer culture, it needs to offer something that the secular and consumer culture doesn't offer, and that is really to involve youth as participants in the wider community. As Jewish youth are discovering who they are and what matters to them, I think one of their big questions is "What does my life matter in the world"... programs that specifically demonstrate that youths lives matter in concrete and specific ways are not only empowering, but will also engage them."

#### **4) Panim el Panim**

Interviewee: Miriam Stein

##### *Basic Information:*

*Panim el Panim* (Hebrew for "Face to Face") is a five-day residential program for Jewish high school students, grades 10-12, occurring multiple times each year in

Washington, DC. The program is run by PANIM: The Institute for Jewish Leadership and Values, an educational organization based in Washington, DC. The organization is non-denominational religiously and non-partisan politically. *Panim el Panim* has direct contact with 1200-1300 students annually through its residential education program. In addition, PANIM engages another 5000 teens through programs like J-Serve (a nation-wide Jewish service day).

Miriam Stein has served as Director of *Panim el Panim* for the last three years.

*Program Overview and Background:*

*Panim el Panim* is a four-day residential program run multiple times each year in Washington DC. The program brings together 60-70 teens from communities across the nation for an intense exploration of the connection between civic engagement and Jewish values. Through the program, young people participate in service programs, meet their congressional representatives, speak with activists and lobbyists, and engage in many discussions and exercises exploring the connection between civic involvement, pressing social problems, and Jewish values. According to research conducted in 1992, alumni of the program are both more civically involved than a control group of peers, and more likely to see Jewish values as relevant to the work of social change and civic engagement.

Originally, *Panim el Panim* was the only educational program run by the Washington Institute for Jewish Leadership and Values. Over the years, however, a classroom-based curriculum (the Jewish Civics Initiative), and a four-week residential summer experience (Summer JAM) have been added to the roster of educational programs.



*Panim el Panim and Boys:*

According to Stein, this past year, participants in the Panim el Panim program included 469 boys and 620 girls, a 43% to 57% ratio. The program has no recruitment or educational policies specifically related to boys. In addition, the program has only a limited ability to influence recruitment efforts. Participants arrive at the program in groups from day schools or supplemental high schools around the country, so recruitment is mostly the responsibility of those numerous local programs. In that sense, Panim reflects general trends in the communities that sponsor trips to Panim.

When asked why boys choose to attend Panim, Stein is unsure. She recognizes that it would be ideal if they attended out of a genuine commitment to learning about the political process, but more likely they attend because it is requirement for school or class, or because it sounds like a fun social experience.

In terms of engaging boys educationally, Stein notes that frontal learning is not appealing for teens in general, and boys in particular. Panim works hard to create numerous opportunities for participants to take leadership positions and participate in active exercises and discussions. They try continually to split the group into different formations for discussions, to keep things active and ensure that people are constantly meeting and engaging in discussions with different members of the group.

Because the experience is brief (only a few days), there is a focus on rapidly creating relationships and making sure that no voices dominate or intimidate others. Stein states, “We try to ensure that there is no cliqueness among both the boys and girls.”

When asked about the greatest challenge in working with boys, Stein’s response reflects this focus on building positive relationships throughout the entire group. She

says she makes a point of learning every participants name within the first day or two, since it “puts that dorky kid on the same level as the cool kid when I call them both by their names.” She continues,

A lot of people think I’m crazy to work with 16 year old boys, but I really try to respect them and treat them as adults, and I find that it is not that challenging. If a boy is really immature you just kind of have to go with it. But anecdotally, the biggest challenge with engaging guys is that the social coolness factor is just a huge obstacle. For girls, if their excitement is infectious it’s OK: ‘Oh my god it was so fun you should come next time!’ You can do that if you’re a girl, but it’s not as easy if you’re a guy. Being cool when you’re a guy means being distant and standoffish. Being cool when you’re a girl means being very involved and having lots friends.

Stein believes that the greatest opportunity in working with boys involves breaking through that wall of distance and getting boys genuinely involved. She states,

“Especially for those guys who are natural leaders, trying to channel that energy towards societal good is a huge opportunity. And its fun also...Also, not to sound cheesy, but learning from them is also really cool. These kids...especially the sophisticated thinkers really have creative ideas about things. They have great ideas about technology, about a lot of things. So it’s another opportunity that I feel lucky to have working with them.

## **5) URJ Camp Coleman**

Interviewee: Bobby Harris, Camp Director

### *Basic Information:*

Camp Coleman is a Jewish summer camp affiliated with the Reform movement. It is located in Cleveland, Georgia, and has been in operation since 1964. It hosts approximately 800 campers each summer, ages 8-17. Although the camp does not have a mission statement, it does have very clear set of four core values: K’vod (Honor), Chessed (Kindness), Shalom (Peace), Kehilla (Community); these values are integrated into every aspect of life at camp. While the camp does offer activities like sports and the

arts, its primary focus is on creating a meaningful, welcoming Jewish experience for its campers.

Bobby Harris has been the Camp Director at Camp Coleman for 15 years.

*Program Background and Overview:*

Camp Coleman is, in many ways a typical Jewish summer camp. It brings together kids and staff for a summer of communal living, Jewish activities, and camp fun. It is included in our sample because we heard that Coleman integrates programs focused specifically on boys and manhood into its schedule of activities. Harris has chosen to build this focus into the summer experience for both staff and campers; our interview with him allowed us to explore how this programming works in a camp setting.

*Camp Coleman and Boys:*

According to Harris, Camp Coleman attracts an even number of girls and boys.

When asked why boys choose to attend, he offers a list of reasons:

“Their friends come here, they heard that its fun, they have feelings of belonging in a group. Their parents want their kids to be in a Jewish camp. We have a good reputation. Kids think it’s cool. It’s a place where we make Judaism fun and cool. We’ve got guys who play guitar, do sports, but we’re not really a sports camp... I think that all our kids think it’s a fun, inclusive, cool, Jewish, artsy, spiritual place.”

Harris has a lot to say about intriguing practices in engaging boys educationally. A key element, he believes, involves making every effort to live and model the four core values. He states,

“We talk a lot about integrity. What does that mean? A life that is value-based and consistent. For example, a kid sneaks out at night and breaks the covenant...I’ll ask ‘Did you have a bar mitzvah? What did that mean?’ I ask

them to live up to their highest aspirations. I call them out if they are not being that. There is a lot of talk about living up to a code.”

Harris also highlights the programming that is conducted specifically for boys that focused on integrity, manhood, and relationships. Although the exact details of the programming change from year to year, he is sure to include this element in the staff training and camper experience. He explains that this year, all the male counselors were brought together during one night of their training for a session focused on manhood. He states,

“This year we talked about heroes. Four guys were shoulder tapped to talk about who their heroes were, and they spoke from their gut. One guy just stood up and starting talking...about his dad who died eight months ago. Another talked about an eight-year- old girl he knew who was blind but overcame every obstacle. Another talked about a grandfather who was an ordinary citizen but a good father, a good brother, a good friend. Another told a story about how he used to be a really fat kid who couldn’t read. Today he’s looked up to as a very powerful figure in camp...It was a very powerful story. He talked about this woman who taught him how to read, and how years later he met her, and she still remembered the book she gave him...These are the role models of the camp opening up. Then we had a guided discussion focused on the question of “What is a hero?” Our point is that counselors have the potential to be heroes for future generations, for the campers they work with this summer.”

Harris believes this type of program makes the camp a safer, kinder environment. He believes that the inability to express one’s true self can lead to frustration and violence. He explains,

“The program is intended to reduce bullying in camp. If counselors really think about who they want to be, then they will have this inner drive to live up to that. When we’re not talking about these things, there is a lot of alpha-male pecking-order dynamics that go on. I feel this levels the playing field...If we get to know people and respect each other and make a safe space, then we can create a much safer climate.”

Harris also describes a boy's-only campfire that occurred last summer. The structure of the program was essentially the same: in a boys-only environment, respected staff members share personal experiences related to manhood and responsibility. Once the staff have modeled that kind of openness, the discussion is opened up to all participants.

Harris also notes that he has run similar exercises outside the camp environment. For example, he led a similar event at a NFTY convention that was well received. Harris sees this work as a sort of mission. He explains,

“If we could get men to speak about their inner life honestly at younger and younger ages, to realize that it's OK to have the feelings they have, and that its OK to be a different way. Young men in our culture need to know that it's OK to be real. To really talk about human relationships.”

Harris recognizes that not everybody responds favorably to these efforts. While most staff feel strongly that these discussions are a valuable contribution to their training, a few feel that the exercises are unnecessary or problematic. For example, one counselor felt the exercises represent Camp Coleman forcibly telling staff how to be men. Harris states that his intent was just the opposite, but he struggles to find ways to honor these complaints while preserving a program he feels is valuable.

When asked about the biggest challenges in working with boys, Harris echoes an increasingly familiar sentiment. He states,

“There is what I call the ‘tyranny of the cool’... as a young person—for both male and female—the most important thing is to be cool...so people will exclude others before getting excluded themselves. You gotta be in the in-group and you'll do whatever you can. The fear of not being cool is really strong...Also, a young boy will abandon his true interests...Coleman works hard to not have this happen. So for instance, if I like botany and everyone else is hanging out being cool, then the question becomes ‘do I stay with the group or pursue my own interests?’ What's really cool is when people can

share their interests with the group and still be cool. There's a lot of positive things that happen then."

By creating the sorts of boys-only, emotionally open spaces he describes he, Harris says he hopes to combat the 'tyranny of the cool', and create an opportunity for authenticity and vulnerability, in a environment in which every boy is called to live up to his own highest values and those of the community in which he lives.

## **5) Boy Scouts of America**

*Interviewee: Peter Sterrett*

*Basic Information:*

The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) is a national organization dedicated to promoting character development and civic engagement in boys. Founded in 1910, the Boy Scouts are nearly a century old, and works at a scale that dwarfs most of the programs on our list. According to the website, nearly three million young people were involved in scouting programs in 2005. The organization claims that 15-20% of all boys in the nation, or one in four of all boys ages 8-10, is a scout.

The organization claims to be "nation's foremost youth program of character development and values-based leadership training." The mission of the program and the values it espouses are captured in the Scout Oath and Scout Law, both of which have remained unchanged for decades:

### ***Scout Oath:***

*On my honor I will do my best  
To do my duty to God and my country  
and to obey the Scout Law;  
To help other people at all times;  
To keep myself physically strong,*

*mentally awake, and morally straight.*

***Scout Law:***

*A Scout is:*

<i>Trustworthy</i>	<i>Obedient</i>
<i>Loyal</i>	<i>Cheerful</i>
<i>Helpful</i>	<i>Thrifty</i>
<i>Friendly</i>	<i>Brave</i>
<i>Courteous</i>	<i>Clean</i>
<i>Kind</i>	<i>Reverent</i>

*Program Overview and Background:*

The Boy Scouts of America run programs for boys ages 7 to 18 years old. The programs are arranged into a developmental continuum, beginning with the Tiger Cub program for first grade boys. From the ages of 8-11, boys participate in Cub Scouts, and from 11-18 move on to the Boy Scout program. Typically, scouts gather weekly in a small group known as a Den (including 6-8 boys). Once a month, they get together as a pack (including 3-10 Dens), where scouts are recognized for their accomplishments that month. Scouts also spend time at a scouting camp in the summer, and make regular excursions to the outdoors throughout the year.

In addition to these flagship programs, BSA also runs an in-school program called “Learning for Life” that teaches the scout values in the classroom (this program works with both boys and girls), as well as a co-ed wilderness-based program called “Venturing”, that teaches outdoor skills to young adults.

Peter Sterrett, our interviewee for this program, is currently an Assistant Scout Executive in Massachusetts. He has been involved in Scouting for more than 20 years. Sterrett makes clear that the Boy Scouts are a heavily volunteer-driven organization. Just in his council, a full-time staff of 13 oversees more than 2,800 volunteers in the field.

Compared to other programs we've researched, the scope and scale of BSA is staggering. Consider the statistics from just one council in Massachusetts:

- 4,000 Cub Scouts
- 2,000 Boy Scouts
- 7,000 young adults in the Venturing program
- 6,000 youth involved in the Learning for Life program

There are 304 councils nationwide, which gives you some sense of the number of young people involved in this program.

#### *Boy Scouts of America and Boys:*

For anyone interested in exploring intriguing practices in working with boys, the Boy Scouts is something of a gold mine. For nearly a century, this program has managed to recruit, engage, and maintain connections to boys in incredible numbers. For obvious reasons, their methods and philosophy merit some disciplined attention.

The Boy Scouts use several methods to recruit boys. Their favorite is peer-to-peer recruitment, in which a current scout invites a friend to join. They also send volunteers into elementary school classrooms to give presentations about the program and invite boys to attend. Finally, they run events designed to attract uninvolved boys. For example, they'll run a fishing derby at one of their three camp facilities in New England; anyone can attend, and hopefully the experience will introduce some new boys to scouting.

In terms of intriguing practices engaging boys educationally, the Scouts have a variety of practices that are deeply integrated into the scouting experience. Most prominent is the highly sophisticated advancement system that is at the core of the



scouting program. Sterrett explains, “The first priority is to have fun, but with everything we do boys get to learn things and advance.” For almost any activity, there is a related merit badge or award that recognizes a boys efforts. Most Americans are familiar with merit badges awarded for learning to build a fire or tie a knot. However, the advancement system goes far beyond these basic skills. There are merit badges for learning how to sail, drive, or organize meetings. Scouts gain recognition for achievement in sports and academics. Jewish Scouts can get merit badges for demonstrating knowledge of Jewish holidays and history. The opportunity to gain this formal recognition for skills and accomplishments is ubiquitous in the scouts.

In addition, the Scouts have a standardized uniform. Sterrett says that the uniform is a major attraction for the youngest scouts, who are thrilled to wear it; as they grow older, enthusiasm for the uniform diminishes. But at every age, the uniform serves to create a sense of belonging and responsibility, and to showcase the various skills and levels a Boy Scout has mastered over the years.

Another key element of the Boy Scout program is regular adventures in the outdoors. The organization feels that the wilderness is particularly effective at capturing the attention and fascination of boys, so scouts have constant opportunities to take day trips into the woods or spend a week at a BSA camping facility. Many of the tasks and responsibilities associated with time in the wilderness are recognized through the advancement program.

Boy Scouts also have numerous opportunities to assume leadership positions within the organization. Just as there is a sophisticated advancement system in place, there is also a comprehensive youth governance structure. Boys can begin in the position

of assistant patrol leader, and can move up to become a senior patrol leader and beyond; they can run a particular den meeting or be given responsibility for managing some aspect of a weekend hike.

Another element contributing to the success of the program is the level of involvement of the parents. They are encouraged to attend meetings, chaperone trips, and contribute to the program in a variety of ways. Sterrett states, “How many fathers are heading out with their sons on Friday night to hike the White mountains? Boy Scouts makes those experiences happen.”

The deep integration of values and patriotism into the experience also represents a intriguing practice. Each meeting begins with a pledge of allegiance to the flag, and a recitation of the scout oath and law. Activities like learning how to build a fire become opportunities to learn about responsibility, cooperation, respect, and teamwork. According to Sterrett, the constant repetition of these values is designed to instill values in young people and prepare them to make ethical decisions throughout their lives.

The Boy Scouts also face some challenges in their efforts to engage boys. Sterrett notes that the scouts have a 20% annual attrition rate. He suggests that boys tend to leave the program when they are part of dens that are not following the program guidelines. If a volunteer is not putting the time into planning regular meetings and trips, the boys lose interest and leave the program.

When asked about the greatest challenge in working with boys, Sterrett focused on this problem. The organization does a good job of recruiting and engaging boys; the real problem for the scouts, he suggests, is finding committed adult volunteers.

When asked about the opportunities of working with boys, Sterrett has a quick response:

“Being able to effect the values and ethics of boys. That’s the great value of BSA. You can learn how to tie a knot or pitch a tent anywhere, but the values and ethics a boy gets over the years in the Boy Scouts is the best thing we can do...We just think we have a good formula that attracts both boys and their parents.”

## **6) Peaceful Posse**

*Interviewee: Kay Brennan, Training Coordinator*

*Basic Information:*

Peaceful Posse is affiliated with Physicians for Social Responsibility, a Philadelphia-based non-profit. The organization is focused on reducing interpersonal violence among young people. The Peaceful Posse model involves running same-sex discussion groups once a week involving 10-12 middle school-aged teens (ages 10-14). The discussions are facilitated by an adult who has received training in the Peaceful Posse model. The program originally worked only with boys, but soon after its founding began to offer similar programming for girls.

Currently, the organization is running nine groups, all in the Philadelphia region. There are an average of 10-12 teens in each group and this year there are five girl groups and four boy groups. Brennan notes that this is the first year there are more girl groups than boy groups.

Kay Brennan has been the training coordinator for Peaceful Posse for the past two years.

*Program Overview and Background:*

Peaceful Posse was started in 1995 as a partnership between Physicians for Social Responsibility and two public housing complexes in Philadelphia. The program is based on the belief that “hurt people hurt people.” By creating a space where young people can both heal their own wounds and learn new strategies for handling conflict, the program hopes to reduce interpersonal violence.

According to the program’s website ([www.psrphila.org](http://www.psrphila.org)), the program offers the following benefits:

- Separate groups for girls and boys, ages 10-14
- Healing from the trauma of witnessing or experiencing violence.
- Attachment to an adult who models successful relationships.
- Peer support for being non-violent.
- Skills for emotional competency, empowerment and conflict resolution
- A curriculum covering gender, class and race that strengthens children's identities and helps them make healthy choices.

Brennan describes the program in the following way:

“That model says that everybody is born with great potential. In a caring relationship with others, that attachment allows others to develop to their full potential. A critical way to do that is to be with someone who can really listen to you while you process your feelings and experiences. The idea is that you can think more clearly, release your tensions, understand yourself better when someone is listening.”

Based on this model, Peaceful Posse groups meet weekly and provide participants with regular opportunities to openly discuss their experiences with violence and the challenges they face on a daily basis.

### *Peaceful Posse and Boys*

Peaceful Posse works with a different population (low SES urban youth), and has a different purpose than the other programs in our sample. However, the organization has

considerable experience with both recruiting and engaging boys, and brings a unique expertise to our survey of intriguing practices.

When asked about recruitment, Brennan explains that Peaceful Posse relies on peer recruiting and word-of-mouth. Because the adults who facilitate the discussions tend to be connected to the communities in which they work, they have a sense of who might be an appropriate fit. Potential participants are invited by the adults or current participants to join a group.

Peaceful Posse has a clear model that has proven effective in engaging their participants. First, the discussion groups occur after school, in convenient locations (school buildings, community centers, etc.). Each session begins with a brief opportunity for physical activity (a basketball game or similar athletic energy release), and ends with food (usually pizza). Both events serve to keep boys engaged in an activity that is otherwise very focused on conversation and relationship building.

The Peaceful Posse model of facilitation relies heavily on teaching and modeling listening skills. Participants are taught to actively listen and provide non-judgmental feedback. And in the boys groups, all of this discussion is facilitated by a trained adult male. Brennan explains,

“They really love the male attention, the positive male role models. The fact that they are all boys in a room. The fact that they can really let their hair down and ‘do what men do’. It’s really the relationship with the group leaders that brings them in. One thing we’ve seen is the lack of men in the boy’s lives. We try to make sure that the mentors are of the ethnic or racial persuasion of the community.”

The conversation at these sessions covers lots of ground. Brennan explains that they discuss issues of media awareness, race, sex, and power. Often, the group leaders

challenge stereotypes of what it means to be manly or successful; the participants may not always agree with the facilitators, but this is a space where the conversation can happen.

Brennan feels that the relationship building that occurs represents the key intriguing practice at Peaceful Posse. She states,

“I think that the areas around really respecting personal, emotional, and physical boundaries are critical. I think really looking at kids as having something to offer, and empowering them to be able to find a voice and use it in a group setting...Also, we really try to create a structured, safe environment where the expectations are high regarding behavior in the group.”

Brennan recognizes that there are many challenges in working with the boys who participate in this program. She notes that many boys get caught up in drugs or gangs at an early age, and don't even make it to a place where they might be invited to join this sort of group. For those who do participate, the lack of positive male role models is striking. Experiences with domestic violence are common, and violence in the community is widespread. There is no shortage of these challenges to overcome in the communities where Peaceful Posse works.

On the other hand, the opportunities are clear as well. Brennan states,

“Its really cool to see the other side of boys...the sweetness, the caring compassion they have for each other...Boys coming together creates a real bond.”

## **7) Men's Leadership Alliance**

*Interviewee: Keith Fairmont, Executive Director*

*Basic Information:*

The Men’s Leadership Alliance is a Colorado-based educational organization that runs programming for boys and men. Its mission is to “Empower men to be more authentic leaders from birth to death”, and it offers a variety of programs throughout the year related to that theme. The MLA runs father-son programs, leadership training experiences, and a camp for boys.

The organization is 20 years old, and works with approximately 35 boys, ages 9-18, every year. Keith Fairmont is the Executive Director, and has been involved with the program since its inception.

*Program Background and Overview:*

The Men’s Leadership Alliance is an organization that focuses exclusively on educational programs for men and boys. The program is affiliated with—and heavily influenced by—the men’s movement. It seeks to integrate consciousness raising, spirituality, symbolic rituals, therapeutic practices, and education into experiences designed to help men connect with their authentic selves.

Their programs for boys last from 4-8 days (never just a weekend, Fairmont makes clear), and all the programming occurs in the summer. The organization focuses on depth, as opposed to volume; the MLA seeks to create transformational, highly personal experiences for a fairly small number of participants each year.

All of the MLA’s programs involve wilderness experiences. The organization believes that the outdoors provide a uniquely powerful opportunity for personal growth, reflection, and insight. The programs are run by paid, highly trained adult males, all of

whom have been personally invited to work with the program. Often, these leaders are social workers, therapists, or educators by profession, and have considerable experience working with boys and men.

### *The Men's Leadership Alliance and Boys*

The MLA has a very clear model that guides its work with both boys and men. The organization's various programs all follow a similar structure:

Phase I involves separating from the outside world and connecting with nature and each other. Fairmont explains,

“We do some team-building experiences that get them to know each other quickly. For example, we'll get them to expose what kind of family environment they live in. Is there a lot of yelling? Laughing? What's a good day like? What's a bad day like? We'll send them out in pairs into the wilderness with a goal in mind; something that might describe how effective they are in the world.”

Phase II involves solo reflective time. The boys are given information about safety, they discuss their fears and concerns, and often are given a particular purpose or question to consider before being sent into the woods. Then they are asked to sit alone for several hours in the wilderness. This provides time for meaningful reflection, as well an opportunity to conquer fears and face a manageable challenge.

Phase III is about integration and moving forward to be more authentically themselves. Fairmont explains,

“This is a huge listening piece on our part. We listen, not try to change them or edit. That is a huge empowering piece for them. With that learning, we can help them think how to take that back in to the world. So we create a circle of support for them either with staff or friends so that they have some sort of check-in mechanism when they leave.”



Fairmont says that the organization attempts to remain connected with participants in the year following the program. Staff members call participants to check in every couple months, and organization often sends poetry or a challenge to boys at relevant times of the year (holidays, birthdays, etc).

The programming is based on the organization's philosophy that "boys need men in their lives to learn about how to be a man...they need to hear some truth from men." The experiences the MLA designs for participants seek to create this kind of emotionally open, honest, space where boys can experience the attention and authentic inner lives of older men.

## **7) Boys and Girls Clubs of America**

*Interviewee: Jim Cox, Senior Strategist*

### *Basic Information:*

The Boys and Girls Club of America is a national non-profit that runs after-school and summer programs for boys and girls ages 6-18 years old. Its formal mission is "to enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, and responsible citizens." The Boys and Girls Club represents a confederation of more than 4,000 local clubs managed by about 1,500 separate organizations. Each local club is its own independent entity; the national office provides services, technical assistance, and advocacy to this large confederation of programs. Collectively, the clubs engage more than four million young people annually.

Jim Cox is currently the Senior Strategist at the national headquarters. He has more than 25 years of experience working with the organization.

*Program Background and Overview:*

The Boys Club of America was founded in 1906 (making this is the organization's centennial year) by three women in Hartford, Connecticut who began creating programming for street urchins. Over the past century, the basic purpose of the organization has remained essentially the same. Despite a century of growth and changing social conditions, the basic mission of creating programming for young people has endured.

The organization changed its name to the Boy's and Girl's Clubs of America in 1992, at a point when many of its independent clubs had long since begun working with girls. Today, the ratio of boys to girls engaged by the program is approximately 60%-40%, a reflection of this historical focus on boys only.

The Boys and Girls Clubs of America focuses primarily on running after-school programs during the school year, and day programs during the summertime. The goal is to create safe, supportive spaces for youth at times when they may otherwise be uninvolved and disengaged. They also run outreach programs such as dances or special events designed to connect with young people not otherwise involved with the organization.

*The Boys and Girls Club and Boys:*

Clearly, the Boy's and Girls Club has a long history of working with boys. In general, however, the organization does not run gender-separate programming. The bulk

of the work they do revolves around after-school programming that includes activities like “Power Hour” (a time for homework completion and academic support right after the end of the school day), and sports like basketball. For the most part, the clubs seemed to have integrated the girls into the same types of activities that originally only included boys.

When asked why boys show up, Cox states,

Well, they show up because it is something to do after school. We provide a sense of belonging, usefulness, competence, and power. First and foremost it is a place for kids to go. That’s our basic attraction. Also, kids come because of relationships with adults at our clubs. We find that we’ve done alumni surveys, and they regularly say that people are more important than programs.

This focus on relationships is central to the organization’s success in recruiting boys as well. Cox explains,

Recruitment is done in the clubs; its pretty neighborhood based... We do have some PSA’s (public service announcements) that run nationally and locally, but those are largely aimed at supporters and donors. Otherwise, for our kids it’s a lot of word of mouth. And our activities focus on things that boys would like: sports, computers, etc.

Cox continues to highlight this focus on building strong relationships with youth to explain how the organization keeps boys connected. He believes that genuine connections in a safe and fun environment is the formula that leads to the enduring success of the Boys and Girls Clubs. Cox states,

We focus on making a connection, give them opportunities to have fun, and hold high expectations. So they know on an ongoing basis that someone knows who they are. The basis, though, is having fun. Without that, they don’t come back. They can vote with their feet. So it’s validating that so many kids do come back.

Clearly, the organization has developed programming that has passed the test of time and enabled them to engage a remarkable number of youth annually. However, the story of creating programming for boys is not really so simple. Cox explains that in the mid-1990's, he began hearing from many clubs that they were losing their boys. The front-line staff had many story of boys transitioning in to their teen years who were suddenly disruptive, getting into trouble with the law, and dropping out of clubs after years of involvement. The problem grew significant enough that he decided to convene a panel of professionals to explore how the situation might be addressed. He states,

“We met for a couple days... We realized you can't deal with all the issues, but decided to focus on what successful boys managed to deal with... We came up with a bunch of those issues... Also, we were not character neutral. We wanted to say 'This is what's right and this is what's wrong.' So we talked about responsibility, truthfulness, etc. We presented it as choices that boys could make. And we made it fun, interactive, communal.”

The result of this process was a program called “Passport to Manhood”. It took the form of a curriculum, developed by the national office working in close partnership with professionals from across the country, that could be offered at any local club.

Passport to Manhood is a small-group program, designed to include 12-15 boys. The program lasts for 14 sessions, and local clubs can decide whether to meet once or twice a week. The experience begins with activities that turn a random selection of participants into a cohesive group: creation of a group name, designing a group coat-of-arms, and writing a group code of ethics. The code of ethics becomes a living document that the boys add to and edit over the course of the experience.

The 14-session program addresses a list of issues relevant to the lives of boys: health, wellness, substance abuse, relationships with authority, relationships with girls,

how to be a good friend, and what it means to be a good man and a good father. The groups also do a community project, to highlight the importance of giving back and focusing on causes greater than oneself.

The program was explicitly designed to suggest a journey. Boys in the program are issued a passport, and each page addresses a different topic. When the topic has been explored, participants get their passports signed. Boys who complete the program participate in a graduation, designed to serve as a rite of passage into manhood. Cox states,

We try to get them to internalize ideas of character, community, self-esteem. So we talk about self-esteem and image...A good group leader will create norms that 'we can talk about anything'.

Although Cox does not know exactly how many of the groups are currently running, he says that he believes there are currently hundreds of Passport to Manhood programs run each year. He believes that the program is effective because too many boys lack positive male role models; this program offers positive adult role models, and a safe space in which boys can discuss important issues.

Cox speaks eloquently about the challenge of working with boys. He states,

There is the challenge of role models... boys can easily go through the whole elementary school experience with no male teachers. They don't get to see someone who resolves conflict and is male. Someone once told me "Fish teach the fish to swim; birds teach birds to fly." So it is helpful to have a man teach how to be a man; that role modeling is very important. In addition, there are so many images targeted to boys---gangster, pimp, etc. Boys receive that, so they think that is what it means to be a man. They are at an age at school where they cease to be cute, and start to be frightening, and start encountering a lot of people who are simply afraid of them.

While the challenges are considerable, however, the rewards are equally significant. Cox explains:

I think boys are thirsting for someone to come and work for them. I ran a club, and the boys there...it was like pied pipers. They had all this energy and creativity and they were waiting for someone to come along and do something for them. They just want to talk, get feedback, hear how you think about stuff...I think that now we are at a critical juncture... al indicators suggest boys are falling behind on many indicators. At one point we saw that girls were falling behind, so we set out to help them. Now perhaps more urgently, boys are falling behind...particularly black boys. So we need to figure out what to do to remediate the situation. And importantly, I think it can be done. And if we don't do it, the consequences will be dire.

## Analysis

For the analysis section of this research, we carefully reviewed the transcripts from these interviews to generate a list of intriguing practices related to work with boys. In the chart that follows, we present the resulting list of intriguing practices, a description of each practice, and an example from a program that exemplifies this best practice. In total, we identified 20 distinct intriguing practices. The list is as follows:

<b>Intriguing Practice</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>1) Research-Driven Focus on Teen Interests</b>	<i>Effort to base programming on research related to teen interests</i>	BBYO focus on technology, college, service, and travel
<b>2) Boy’s-Only Programming</b>	<i>Activities designed for male-only staff and participants</i>	AZA at BBYO; boys-only campfires at Camp Coleman; boys retreats at MLA, Passport to Manhood
<b>3) Youth in Governance</b>	<i>Youth participants have meaningful roles, voice in governance of the program</i>	Opportunity to be in staff with programs such as BBYO, Boy Scouts, B’nai Tzedek
<b>4) Leadership Opportunities</b>	<i>Chances to lead discussions or specific activities (in this case, a different practice than providing roles in program governance)</i>	Panim el Panim’s focus on creating multiple opportunities to lead discussions or activities
<b>5) Multi-Year Continuum of Involvement</b>	<i>Opportunities to advance through higher levels of involvement over multiple years</i>	Progression through leadership roles over years of involvement at BBYO; Tiger Cubs-Cub Scouts-Boy Scouts progression at BSA
<b>6) Focus on brotherhood</b>	<i>Explicit emphasis on promoting a fraternal bond</i>	Handshakes, cheers at AZA, group name at Passport to Manhood
<b>7) Presenting a “Diversity of Jewish Manhood”</b>	<i>Male participants encounter a broad range of Jewish male role models on staff</i>	Prozdor’s focus on a balanced faculty
<b>8) Fun</b>	<i>Focus on making all activities enjoyable</i>	Boy Scout activities, Prozdor prom, etc.
<b>9) Culturally masculine program topics</b>	<i>Designing experiences around archetypically male interests</i>	B’nai Tzedek focus on money
<b>10) Interactive Pedagogy</b>	<i>Educational experiences</i>	Panim’s focus on group

	<i>that require action and active participation (the opposite of frontal lectures)</i>	discussions, B'nai Tzedek's focus on interactive educational exercises
<b>11) Meaningful Relationship with Staff</b>	<i>Clear focus on building strong, authentic staff-participant relationships</i>	"Hero" Discussion at Camp Coleman, programming at Men's Leadership Alliance
<b>12) Breaking through the "Tyranny of Cool"</b>	<i>Getting past superficial relationships to explore honest, authentic feelings</i>	"Hero" discussion at Camp Coleman, Opening exercises at MLA, Passport to Manhood discussions
<b>13) Guarding against clique formation</b>	<i>Actively intervening to keep social dynamics inclusive of all participants</i>	Panim's constant switching up small groups; Camp Coleman focus on core values
<b>14) Modeling of emotional openness by male staff</b>	<i>Creating opportunities for male staff to express the vulnerabilities and inner life</i>	"Hero" discussion at Camp Coleman
<b>15) Clear code of conduct</b>	<i>Presentation of a clearly-articulated community-wide code of conduct</i>	Scouting Oath; Core Values at Camp Coleman
<b>16) Emphasis on living up to highest values</b>	<i>Programming attempts to keep participants accountable to living up to their ideals</i>	Scouting Oath, opportunities for reflection at MLA
<b>17) Wilderness Experiences</b>	<i>Programming that involves outdoor expeditions</i>	Boy Scout outings; MLA programming, Camp Coleman campfires
<b>18) Advancement and Merit System</b>	<i>Numerous opportunities for participants to move accomplish tasks in order to gain recognition and advance through a program of learning or merit</i>	Boy Scout use of merit badges
<b>19) Uniforms</b>	<i>Special clothing for involvement in a program</i>	Boy Scout Uniform
<b>20) Reflective discussions on meaningful topics at the right moments</b>	<i>Time devoted to personal reflection is carefully integrated into the program</i>	Men's Leadership Alliance solo trip into the woods
<b>20) Right of Passage Rituals</b>	<i>Experiences designed to honor moments of transition or coming-of-age</i>	Passport to Manhood focus on passport, graduation
<b>21) Experiential mix of activities</b>	<i>The program offers a balance of action &amp; reflection, work &amp; downtime</i>	Boy Scout mix of weekend outings and monthly meetings dedicated to handing out merit badges



## Discussion

In our analysis section, we present a sizeable list of intriguing practices that emerged from this research. In this section, we go a step further to highlight issues that we believe merit particular consideration. For educators seeking to more effectively recruit, engage, and remain connected to boys, these are practices that we believe stand out from the rest.

### *1) Cracking the “Tyranny of Cool”*

Although the term “Tyranny of Cool” was used only by Bobby Harris from Camp Coleman, the themes he hoped to convey with the term appear repeatedly in these interviews. Several of the experienced educators with whom we spoke suggested that getting past a superficial mask of disconnection and invulnerability was a key challenge in working with boys. They offered several practices for getting underneath this façade: male-only programming; modeling of emotional openness by respected male staff; creating a safe space for honest discussion. The Men’s Leadership Alliance made this central to their philosophy when they claimed that boys “need to hear some truth from men.”

Clearly, some contexts are more conducive to addressing this challenge than others. Conversations at a summer camp bonfire are inevitably different from conversations in and supplemental school classroom. However, our research highlights the centrality of this challenge in working with boy.

## 2) *Leadership & Governance Opportunities*

Again and again in our interviews, the presence of frequent opportunities for leadership and governance appeared as a intriguing practice. Our interviews suggest that boys will engage with a program when they are offered substantive roles in making programming decisions, and have frequent opportunities to step up as leaders of discussions and activities. This finding represents a fundamental “low hanging fruit” to be gleaned from this research.

## 3) *Offering a “Diversity of Manhood”*

Prozdor is unusual in the landscape of Jewish education because of its equal gender participation. While the program has no explicit practice or philosophy focused on connecting with boys, director Marjorie Berkowitz’s faculty recruitment policies may offer a key to this achievement. Thanks to her commitment to recruiting male staff, boys who enter Prozdor encounter a “diversity of manhood”, and find themselves with the option of exploring Judaism with a wide array of male teachers. Campers at Camp Coleman have a similar experience, as do participants in the Men’s Leadership Alliance and Peaceful Posse (to lesser degree, since everything about these last two programs is smaller in scale).

A reasonable case could be made that a reduction in male staff would result in reduced opportunities for boys to engage with these educational experiences. Further research is needed, of course, to truly understand how this phenomenon really operates, but the presence of a diverse male staff emerges from this research as a promising intriguing practice in engaging boys.

#### *4) A Developmental Continuum of Involvement*

It seems important to recognize that this practice was highlighted by two of the largest-scale programs in our study. BBYO's Matt Grossman spoke eloquently about the experience of new participants who quickly begin to look up to their older peers, who are highly knowledgeable about the program and hold positions of importance. The Boy Scouts involve three million boys annually in a spectrum of programming that begins with Tiger Cubs in first grade, continues through Cub Scouts, and ends with five years of experience with the Boy Scouts.

Young participants in these programs find themselves with clear opportunities to look forward to and older role models to emulate. Senior participants find themselves wielding genuine responsibility and enjoying constant feedback about how far they have come and how much they have accomplished. Our research suggests that this experience correlates with large-scale, long-lasting participant engagement.

#### *5) Creating a Male-Only Space*

It is worth noting that six of our nine programs make the creation of a male-only space an important component of their pedagogy. Whether in Passport to Manhood discussions, Men's Leadership Alliance wilderness experiences, Camp Coleman boys-only campfires, Boy Scout Den meetings, or AZA retreats, participants enter a space where the complexities and pressures of socializing with girls are temporarily put on hold. It is worth noting that the programs that seem most focused and effective at getting past "the tyranny of cool" do so by creating this experience for their participants.

We recognize that our sample is surely skewed toward programs with this component. After all, we set out to find organizations with an expertise in working with boys, so it is not surprising that we present numerous programs that create a male only space. Nevertheless, this practice merits some disciplined attention and further exploration.

#### 7) *Wilderness Experiences*

Another theme that appears repeatedly in our interviews is the power of the wilderness experience to attract and engage boys. The Boy Scouts make camping and hiking trips a regular part of their programming; the MLA sends boys out for hours on solo wilderness expeditions; and Camp Coleman brings boys out to the woods for boys-only campfire experiences. This is yet another finding that requires further research to truly understand, but the emergence of this insight is intriguing.

#### 8) *Using “Culturally Masculine” Themes to Address Substantive Jewish Issues*

K’vod Wieder of B’nai Tzedek spoke to this practice most directly. He believes that the reason involvement in his program is so gender-balanced is because the youth philanthropy experience focuses on money, a topic with culturally masculine overtones. Boys are attracted to the program because it aligns so clearly with cultural messages and pressures around acceptable manhood and masculinity. Once they join the program, they experience the topic as a way into exploring issues of social justice, ethics, responsibility, and social change.

The practice raises a host of questions: What other topics fit this category? Are there topics that are particularly effective at attracting boys? What are intriguing practices in keeping programming interesting and engaging to boys? As always, there is much more to be explored, but this practice represents yet another intriguing frontier for further inquiry.

## Conclusion

The nine programs included in this research represent a broad cross-section of the types of organizations that work with adolescent boys. By reviewing the sample as a whole, we gain valuable insight into the multiplicity of contexts and philosophies that inform efforts to connect with adolescent boys. The programs are quite different from each other in some obvious ways: our sample includes summer camps, supplementary Hebrew schools, youth groups, and seminars; some programs are co-ed and others are boys-only; some programs focus explicitly on teaching masculinity while others make a point of offering no gender-specific programming. Despite the diversity represented here, however, certain program attributes or activities appear to have particular potential. We believe that these should be explored further as potential program success factors:

1. Values formation and asset building,
2. Male role modeling, mentoring and brotherhood,
3. “Boy-centric” and gender-separate activities,
4. Strategic moments of reflective practice.

We hope that this research brings a new level of rigor and discipline to an important subject. We emerge from this study with a strong sense that the subject of boys is of genuine interest across the landscape of Jewish programming and education. However, the topic raises many questions, and there are few places that provide informed answers. Also, we recognize that we are hardly the only one asking the questions that inform this research: How can the Jewish community be more effective in enrolling and engaging adolescent boys? Why do the boys who currently show up choose to show up?

Across both secular and Jewish youth organizations, what are intriguing practices related to working with boys?

With this research, we have begun to present substantive, informed answers to these questions. Of course, there is much more to explore and understand, but we hope our findings prove to be helpful, informative, and provocative. We welcome hearing your thoughts and reactions, and look forward to an energetic, thoughtful, and open discussion about this important and compelling subject in the months ahead.