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The Business of Hiring and Getting Hired at Jewish Nonprofits

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**A job fair organized by the Jewish Federations of North America
in 2013; photo by Bob Cumins.**

by Alina Dain Sharon

JNS.org

It has been six years since the economy crashed in 2008, and while finding employment has been a challenge, the tide may be taking a turn for the better – particularly in the nonprofit sector. But where do Jewish nonprofits fall within the current landscape, from the perspective of both job-seekers and employers?

Broadly speaking, employment continues to be “a buyer’s market,” says Linda Wolfe, director of career development and placement at JVS Chicago, an affiliate agency of the International Association of Jewish Vocational Services (IAJVS).

“Employers are like kids in a candy store,” she tells JNS.org. “They have their choice [among] hundreds and hundreds of candidates.”

Yet when it comes to nonprofits, data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) shows a clear upward trend in “industries in the Religious, Grantmaking, Civic, Professional, and Similar Organizations subsector group establishments” since about 2011.

Seasonally adjusted employment in these industries totaled 2,925,300 employees in June 2014, down from 2,964,600 in 2008. But with some fluctuation, the number of employees has been slightly rising since 2011. The unemployment rate for these industries was 4.9 percent in June 2014, up from 3.5 in 2008 but down from 2011.

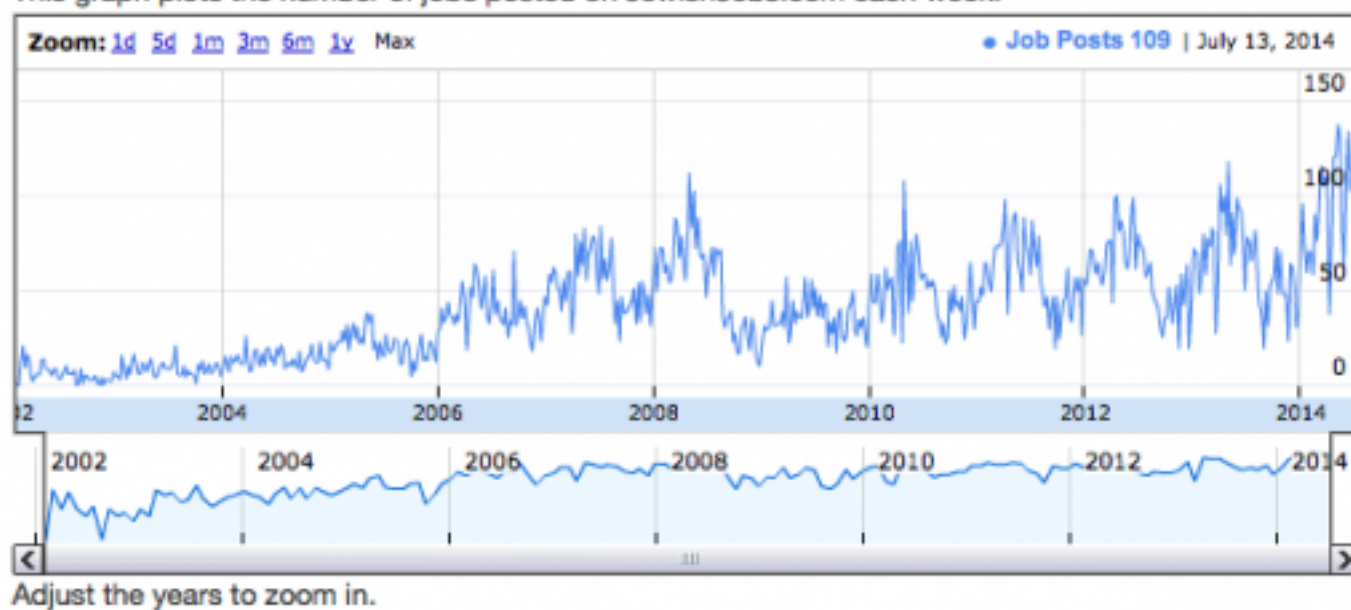
Statistics also show that employees in these industries are earning more per hour and working fewer hours. In May 2014, employees in this sector earned about \$25.90 an hour, a significant rise from \$19.57 in 2008. They also worked 30.7 hours per week this May, down from 33 hours in 2008.

These findings underscore the wider growth in part-time jobs across the country. As *The Wall Street Journal* reported this month, while full-time jobs last plunged by 523,000 in May, part-time jobs grew by about 800,000 that month. Just 47.7 percent of adults in

the U.S. are currently working full-time.

Job Posting Trends

This graph plots the number of jobs posted on JewishJobs.com each week.



The pictured graph shows that 2014 has so far seen the highest number of jobs-per-week advertised on the JewishJobs.com since the site was founded in 2001; courtesy JewishJobs.com.

When it comes to Jewish nonprofit jobs, the job-posting website JewishJobs.com currently lists about 800 openings. A graph created by the service shows that 2014 has so far seen the highest number of jobs-per-week advertised on the site since its inception. The number of weekly job advertisements has been on the upswing since about 2010, says Benjamin Brown, the founder and director of JewishJobs.com.

Brown founded the site in 2001 while studying towards a graduate degree in American Jewish history and looking to find a job at a Jewish organization. The site eventually became a major job searching and posting resource for the Jewish community. As such, Brown emphasizes, the growth in the number of jobs advertised as shown in the graph could also be influenced by Jewish organizations' growing awareness about the site.

Nonetheless, the graph is still telling.

“In 2009, when the economy took a hit, the stock market suffered and various other industries suffered, [and] the Jewish job market was no exception,” Brown tells JNS.org. He says that in 2009, “there was no heartbeat, the economy was dead... this [trend] just generally reflects the whole economy.”

On *JewishJobs.com*, organizations advertising employment tend to be Jewish federations, Jewish schools from child day care centers to preschools to high schools, Jewish community centers, American fundraising arms of overseas Jewish nonprofits, local nonprofits, and major advocacy organizations.

About 6,000 organizations have been using the job-posting site since it was launched. When it comes to job applicants, other than graduating college students, the candidates applying for positions through the site tend to be “what I would call second career changers,” Brown says.

The economy does have an effect on decisions to transition to a career in the Jewish nonprofit sector, but many job-seekers also simply decide to do something they are more passionate about.

Some former employees of for-profit organizations “were [laid] off by their work or the whole department was eliminated,” and some “get burned out with the for-profit work schedule,” Brown suggests.

The job market has also seen a growth in the number of applicants per opening – a trend that is evident in the Jewish nonprofit sector, indicates the Joel Paul Group, a 29-year-old New York-based executive search and recruiting firm conducting national searches for entities with 501c3 nonprofit status in fields such as health and human services organizations. Eighty-five percent of the agency’s work is with Jewish organizations, with searches primarily focusing on middle to upper level executives.

“From 2008 to now, there has been an increase in the number of jobs available to job-seekers. But the numbers of candidates are increasing as well,” William Hochman, CEO and owner of the Joel Paul Group, tells *JNS.org*. But these days, “there are still more applicants than there are jobs out there,” he says.

Hochman also points to a fallout that resulted from the recession, which forced for-profit workers like lawyers or accountants whose jobs got downsized to rebrand their skills for jobs at nonprofit organizations.

“One thing the recession did that might not be evident... is that while the nonprofit

[organizations] got decimated because donors weren't giving as much due to recession issues, new candidates [came] into the nonprofits who in the past would have gone to accounting, finance, [or] Wall Street," he says.

"Let's say that [before the recession] there were 20 applicants for a certain job, now there can be 35, because there are transitional candidates added to the pool," Hochman adds.

On the CEO hiring level, Hochman explains that "traditionally the nonprofit organizations have taken leaders from the nonprofit sector," but in the past few years, many nonprofits "have [also] hired lay leaders... people who have day jobs in the for-profit sector and are now going to be CEO of organizations such as the UJA-Federation of NY, Birthright, JFNA (Jewish Federations of North America), or the Orthodox Union."

Non-Jewish candidates are also applying for, and getting, jobs at Jewish nonprofits. Stephen Moran of Malden, Mass., who is not Jewish, is currently seeking employment after he was laid off in 2011 from his position as a senior analyst at a bank. Moran has visited Israel several times and is interested in Judaism and its traditions. He is applying to jobs of different levels at a variety of organizations, including Jewish ones.

"You need to reinvent yourself to earn a living if you aren't getting [your needs met with] what you were doing before," he tells *JNS.org*.

The Joel Paul Group has helped its Jewish organizational clients hire non-Jewish candidates. "If the organization is monikered as Jewish," says Hochman, people such as the CEO or the fundraiser will most likely be Jewish. But if someone is performing strictly internal job functions such as the head of accounting, the CFO, or the head of IT, their religion is not relevant, Hochman explains.

"You want diversity," he says. "You're hiring people for their skill sets, except in the cases [like the CEO or fundraiser] I described."

According to Meryl Kanner, the supervisor of career counseling and placement services at JVS in New Jersey, another affiliate of IAJVS, at "Jewish [nonprofit] organizations, as [is the case] at non-Jewish organizations, the most popular job that gets posted is [a]

development/fundraising” position.

This trend is echoed by JVS Chicago’s Wolfe, who says fundraising/development positions are significant to nonprofit organizations because they struggle more than for-profit organizations to stay financially afloat, especially in a tough economy.

A prime example of that phenomenon is at federations, where candidates for fundraising jobs “are the ones in greatest demand” by the organization, says Rea Kurzweil, the managing director of talent acquisition services at the Jewish federation umbrella’s Mandel Center for Leadership Excellence.

“It’s all about bringing in dollars and helping nonprofits survive, and the Jewish federations are no different than any other nonprofit,” she says.

Wolfe also sees workers from the corporate world realizing that nonprofit social service is something that they can contribute their skills to.

“What we’ve learned at JVS is that a lot of senior and mid-level people that come from the corporate world, [who] have found their way to Jewish communal service, really want to give back at a certain point in their lives,” she says.

Many employers, however, fear hiring candidates who are often considered “overqualified.” Wolfe believes that if a candidate “comes from the corporate world and is willing and able, and has the skills to take a job in a smaller nonprofit, and lend those skills,” then it is “foolish for an employer to pass that person up.”

At the same time, she says, job-seekers are realizing “that you can’t always assume that you’re going to get the exact position that you came from, so there’s a scaling down of expectations.”

The Jewish federations in particular, according to Kurzweil, are not necessarily looking for candidates with specific degrees or job histories.

“There’s a tremendous move in the federations towards bringing in people who are risk-takers, who are innovators,” she says.

Wolfe says candidates need to take initiative to show potential employers that they understand the organization, and to explain how they intend to solve the organization's problems. But along with that, she says they need to be prepared for a reality in which 50-year-old candidates are often being interviewed – and subsequently managed – by much younger supervisors.

“Jewish communal service is obviously a little different, there's more of a heart involved in it, but it's still a business,” says Wolfe.

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ALAN GOLDBERG says
July 28, 2014 at 4:03 pm

I read with interest the statistics on jobs, especially in the Jewish community and the changing numbers of positions available in the Jewish Community. We at the Jewish Community Centers of North America have seen a significant increase in posting for positions in the past 3 years. In 2009, our site <http://www.jccworks.com> offered 90 positions around North America, today our site lists more than 300 job openings.

Part of the increase in open positions is the growth in the Jewish Community Center world in the past three years. We have seen a 43% growth in job openings and a much greater growth in the number of applicants per job. Why?

There are many individuals, Jewish and non Jewish who are interested in the Jewish Community Center world. We now find candidates through our cross listing on a number of other sites and driving a population that never thought about a JCC career.

We have to continue to find ways for members of the Jewish community to find positions in the Jewish world that they never thought about or for that matter knew existed.

Alan Goldberg

Vice President, Professional Leadership

JCC Association

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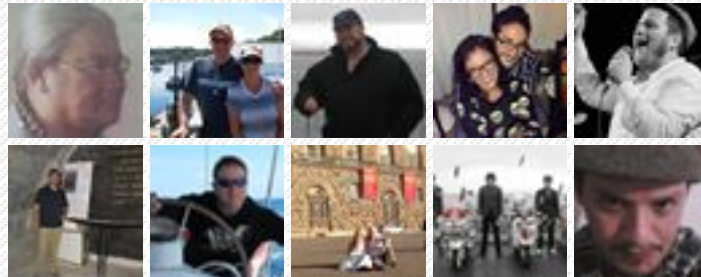
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