

# UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK THRIVING SYNAGOGUE LEARNING TOOL

## Thriving Synagogue Learning Tool Frequently Asked Questions Post-Agreement

### OVERALL

#### What does the Learning Tool measure?

The Thriving Synagogue Learning Tool (TSLT) measures the extent to which a synagogue is thriving overall and on specific dimensions. Overall, thriving synagogues are alive and vital *today* and they show promise of a strong *future*. They also get high ratings on various dimensions of thriving: sense of belonging, intentional leadership, sacred purpose, connected community, and sound operations.

#### How does the Learning Tool measure thriving?

TSLT has three components: congregation survey, board survey, and synagogue factsheet.

- **The congregation survey** draws a portrait of your synagogue from the point of view of your members and participants. Internal comparisons show how different groups of people view the synagogue. For example, results may compare perceptions of leaders with those of congregants or the views of longtime members with those of newer members.
- **The board survey** is concerned with board practices and policies. When someone indicates he/she is a board member, specific questions are then added into the survey. These additional questions can be seen only by current board members.
- **The synagogue factsheet** asks about synagogue operations and includes questions about membership, budget, staff, and synagogue practices. It is filled out by one or more leaders in the congregation (e.g., executive director, bookkeeper, head of budget committee, president) who can access the required information.

#### What are the costs to our synagogue?

There is no monetary cost. The only cost is the time and effort needed to organize information about the synagogue, to encourage survey participation, and to share the results with the congregation.

#### How much time does the Learning Tool take?

As seen in the timeline below, the entire process takes *three to four months* depending on how your synagogue does its part.

- The Leadership Team needs to be involved from beginning to end. At that point, new leadership may be selected to carry the work forward. Depending on how the team is organized, the time commitment for any one member may be *one or two hours a week*.
- Members of the congregation will need about *15 minutes* to fill out their survey. This is best done in one sitting. Board members will need an additional *10 minutes* to complete the board survey.

## Thriving Synagogue Learning Tool Timeline

Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Synagogue submits signed letter of agreement to UJA-Federation</li> <li>• Synagogue selects Survey Leadership Team</li> <li>• Leadership Team develops plan for “creating buzz” about the TSLT</li> </ul>
Week 2-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership Team completes Survey Setup Form</li> <li>• Leadership Team and/or others implement plan for “creating buzz”</li> </ul>
Week 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congregation survey launches</li> </ul>
Week 4-7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership Team continues efforts to enhance survey response rate</li> <li>• Leadership Team and/or others complete Factsheet</li> </ul>
Week 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congregation survey closes</li> </ul>
Week 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Synagogue leaders and UJA-Federation professionals hold data share meeting to review Profile of Thriving report</li> </ul>
Week 12-16+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Synagogue leaders meet with UJA-Federation coach to understand results and develop plans for action</li> <li>• Results are shared with congregation</li> <li>• Synagogue continues to use results to inform plans for action</li> </ul>

### Who will have access to our data?

- **Individual survey data:** Responses to the congregation and board survey are anonymous and confidential. They are stored on secure servers maintained by the Social Research Lab at the University of Northern Colorado. Access to the raw data is restricted to members of the Social Research Lab team. Only aggregated data from many survey respondents will be used to create the Profile of Thriving for your synagogue. Your synagogue will not have access to individual level data.
- **Synagogue data:** Data about the synagogue’s demographics, operations and practices are collected via a web-based factsheet. Information from the factsheet appears in the synagogue’s Profile of Thriving report. UJA-Federation manages data collection, stores them in a secure database, and treats them as confidential. Only SYNERGY staff, the Social Research Lab team, and the synagogue’s TSLT Leadership Team see these data.

## CONGREGATION SURVEY

### Can the congregation survey be customized for our synagogue?

Here is what is possible:

- In the survey Setup Form, the synagogue indicates if it has clergy, professional staff, and/or a permanent meeting location. Where “no” is indicated, relevant questions are automatically removed from the synagogue’s congregation survey.
- In the survey Setup Form, the synagogue provides its abbreviated name (“nickname”) and the language it uses to refer to dues. This terminology is then used throughout the synagogue’s congregation survey.
- In addition to the breakout of results by age, years of membership, and level of involvement, the synagogue can request results by marriage type (single, in-married, intermarried).

At this time, synagogues cannot add custom questions to the survey. In order to understand your synagogue's results in the context of the New York synagogue community, the survey questions must be uniform. Without standardized questions, there is no way to benchmark each congregation.

### **Who distributes the survey?**

Once you have completed your survey Setup Form, the designated liaison from your Leadership Team will receive an email from the Social Research Lab with a link to the synagogue's survey. The survey link is customized to your congregation and is open access, meaning anyone can access the survey through the same link. The Leadership Team is responsible for sending the survey link to everyone with an email address, posting the link on your synagogue website, including it in the synagogue bulletin, and promoting the survey wherever possible.

### **Who is supposed to fill out the survey?**

The survey is for all adult members of the congregation. It is recommended that you also include adult non-member participants — those who take part in the life of the synagogue but have not (as yet) joined. Participants in the survey should be age 18 or older. It is up to the Leadership Team whether or not to include clergy and staff. We encourage you to include as many people as possible. However, this is *your* survey, and you are free to set these boundaries.

### **How do we get email addresses for each individual?**

The survey is open access, which means there is one website link used by the entire congregation. You do not need each person's email address. Rather, you need multiple ways to get the word out — including emails as just one tactic.

### **Can more than one person complete the survey from the same computer?**

Yes. The link to the survey is open access. Each adult member of the family can click on the link and enter his or her own responses to the survey. All of these will be included in the final analysis. If a home computer is shared in this way, it is strongly recommended that each person complete the survey in one sitting before another person starts the survey.

### **How do you prevent people from filling out the survey twice?**

The likelihood of someone completing the survey twice is extremely rare. Generally, the challenge is in getting people to complete the survey once, not in worrying about someone doing it twice. The advantage of having open access as a way to increase response rates outweighs the possible disadvantage of a double response. Even if someone did fill it out twice, their second responses would not affect the overall results.

### **How do we reach people without email addresses?**

For members without email addresses or without internet access at home, there are several ways to encourage them to complete the survey, since it is open access and can be completed from any computer or tablet with Internet access. You can set up a laptop in the lobby, classrooms, or library; meet members at a local coffee shop with Wi-Fi and a laptop; or have the youth group bring tablets to the homes of older adults to help them access and complete the survey.

We do not recommend printing the survey and sending it by mail to people without email addresses as there is no generic form for the survey. Having someone at the synagogue manually enter others' responses to the survey is a violation of confidentiality and takes away the anonymous nature of the Learning Tool.

Your plan to publicize the Learning Tool should identify the people without email addresses and then create a strategy to reach those members.

### **How do we encourage members of our congregation to participate?**

The greatest responsibility of the Survey Leadership Team is ensuring that as many members as possible complete the survey. **A robust response rate is the single most important factor in receiving results that are representative of your congregation and useful to your leaders in making data-informed decisions.**

*Create Buzz* is a resource for the Survey Leadership Team that offers a variety of techniques and ideas for motivating members and participants to complete the survey. The document offers ways to reach different segments of your congregation — from young families to elders, from nonparticipants to regulars, from the computer phobic to the computer savvy.

Also available to you is a checklist with 26 ideas for creating buzz. We suggest that you commit to doing at least **two of these each week before the survey launches and two for each week the survey is open.** In addition, we invite you to add your own ideas to the end of the list.

### **Does UJA-Federation have turnkey materials for promoting the survey?**

Yes. UJA-Federation has sample fliers and language for emails you can customize and use to promote the survey in your congregation. In the meantime, use your in-house talent and creativity to carry out the most dynamic and convincing campaign you can.

### **Do lotteries encourage people to participate?**

Yes. Lotteries can be very effective motivators if the following three conditions are met:

- The synagogue has a vigorous campaign for promoting the survey and the lottery is continuously publicized as part of that campaign.
- The “prize” is widely desirable (i.e., worth the effort).
- Drawing dates are clear and winners are announced.

If you want to use a lottery to motivate participation, simply let UJA-Federation know. Indicate how many prizes you will be offering and when you want winners to be selected. A question will be added to your congregation survey asking respondents if they would like to be entered into the lottery. If yes, they will have an opportunity after completing the survey to provide their email address. The Social Research Lab will randomly draw winners for your synagogue based on the schedule you provide.

### **Can the synagogue have the email list of respondents?**

No. It is the responsibility of the Social Research Lab to maintain the privacy of those who respond to the survey. Because many people have concerns about confidentiality, guarantees of privacy can help raise your response rate. Since you will not know who has and has not responded, include a blanket thank you to those who have already completed their survey when you send out reminders.

## **SYNAGOGUE FACT SHEET**

### **What is the purpose of the synagogue factsheet?**

The factsheet organizes information about your synagogue related to your Profile of Thriving. Some of the items are needed to determine the representativeness of your congregation survey. Other items are used to compare members' opinions against synagogue facts. Still other items are, in and of themselves, indicators of thriving.

### **Where do we find the factsheet?**

Once your synagogue completes its survey Setup Form, a UJA-Federation professional will send the designated person a secure custom link to your synagogue's factsheet. This individual should then share the link with your synagogue's professionals and lay leaders who will be filling out the sheet. Your synagogue's factsheet is maintained on a secure database by UJA-Federation and is shared with the researchers at the Social Research Lab solely for reporting purposes.

**When is it due?**

The factsheet should be filled out during the weeks that your congregation survey is open. It is due before your congregation survey is closed.

Please assist us in making these FAQs as helpful as possible. Let us know if any of the answers are unclear or if you have other questions that should be included.

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