

UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK THRIVING SYNAGOGUE LEARNING TOOL

Thriving Synagogue Learning Tool Frequently Asked Questions

What is a thriving synagogue?

A thriving synagogue is vital and alive. It is imbued with a sense of purpose, activity, and energy. Members and participants feel a commitment to and affection for the congregational community, the synagogue, and the Jewish life and learning it fosters. The Thriving Synagogue Learning Tool (TSLT) measures the extent to which a synagogue is thriving in key areas of congregational life.

Who developed the Thriving Synagogue Learning Tool?

UJA-Federation of New York works with the [Social Research Lab \(SRL\) at the University of Northern Colorado](#) to administer the Thriving Synagogue Learning Tool. Led by Dr. Josh Packard, the team at SRL has extensive experience in research, data and project coordination for faith-based organizations. The TSLT was initially developed by UJA-Federation in collaboration with the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University.

What are the benefits to our synagogue?

- A report with the synagogue's profile of thriving.
- A data share meeting with synagogue leadership and UJA-Federation professionals to understand and discuss the profile of thriving.
- A means to identify areas that merit appreciation and celebration as well as areas that call for planning and action.
- Expert coaching in applying results to plans and action.
- Analyses that show differences in the perceptions of different groups — by age, years of membership, and position (e.g., leaders versus members).

How is thriving measured?

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 (prospective members or others who participate but are not yet members). 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. Questions for board members are embedded in the congregation survey but are 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 is *not* included in the TSLT?

TSLT does not evaluate individual staff members or volunteers in your congregation, nor does it measure congregant satisfaction with particular programs.

How do we encourage members of our congregation to participate?

It is important that as many members as possible participate in the congregation survey. The more participants, the more representative and useful the survey results. Create Buzz is a resource for the Survey Leadership Team that offers scores of techniques and ideas for motivating response. 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.

What are the costs to our synagogue?

There is no monetary cost. The only cost is the time and effort needed to encourage survey participation.

How much time does the TSLT take?

As seen in the timeline below, the entire process takes approximately four months.

The Survey 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.

TSLT Timeline

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

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 collection of the data and stores them in a secure database. These data are treated as confidential. Only UJA-Federation staff, the Social Research Lab team, and the synagogue's survey Leadership Team see these data.