



Beth Jacob

Community Conversations Analysis -

Full Report with Appendices

Facilitated by Barb Curchack:

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As co-chairs of the 2024 Beth Jacob Community Conversation Project, we are so pleased to share with you this analysis and report of these efforts. The thank you's for this project are extensive. It literally could not have been completed without the participation of the congregation in the conversations and the follow-up feedback forums.

First, we want to express our appreciation to the committee who agreed to help shape, plan, and execute the conversations. They helped line up hosts, facilitators, and notetakers; they assisted with developing the communications to the congregations; and they helped to ensure that we considered past conversations. The members of the committee are: Jonathan Ehrlich, Laurie Fink, Ryan Lohr, Brian Milberg, Susie Minsberg, Nina Samuels, Ben Silbergliitt, Aaron Silver, and Erin Webb.

We also want to acknowledge the hosts, facilitators, and notetakers. The hosts opened up their homes – sometimes multiple times—and made people feel welcome. The notetakers carefully recorded what was said while honoring anonymity, and the facilitators made the magic happen! We heard so many times how much people enjoyed the conversations and getting to connect and sometimes reconnect with each other. We have noticed a positive difference in the way congregants interact with each other since the start of the conversations. We acknowledge that some people were unable to attend a conversation, due to scheduling conflicts. We look forward to their ongoing participation as we move forward.

Hosts (in order of session): Jessica Nordell & Andrew Cholakian; Sharon Press & Barry Kantrowitz; Wendy Schwartz; Barbie Levine & Sara Lynn Newberger; Susan & Neil Moses-Zirkes; Kate Cavett; Susie & Mickey Minsberg; Nina Samuels & Earl Schwartz; Amalia & Drake Prohofsky; Brian & Laura Milberg; Geoff Marshall & Laurie Radovsky; Erin Webb; Keven & Frances Fischer; Gordon & Carol Altshuler; Amy and Dan Rogovin; Laurie & Joel Goldsmith; Leslie Morris; Steve Ukes; Orit Ackerman; Holly Brod Farber & Stephanie Levine

Facilitators: EB Barnard, Joanathan Ehrlich, Mike Keller, Laurie Fink, Laura Honan, Barbie Levine, Sharon Press, Amalia Prohofsky, Kate Sandweiss, Ben Silbergliitt, and Rosanne Zaidenweber,

Notetakers: Arielle Ehrlich, Mari Forbush, Miriam Krause, Barry Kantrowitz, Mike Keller, Brian Millberg, Mira Miller, Leslie Morris, Sharon Press, Laurie Radovsky, and Lydia Schultz

We also want to acknowledge with appreciation Rabbi David Teutsch, who consulted with us on how to set up the conversations and conducted the training for the facilitators and notetakers; Rabbi Tamar, who inspired us to take on this task and supported us in the undertaking; and Sonya Rapport for working with us to get communications out to the community in a timely and efficient manner.

This project is a testament to the incredible community we are lucky to be a part of here at Beth Jacob. Our last thank you goes to Barb Curchack and the amazing data team: Arielle Ehrlich, Jonathan Ehrlich, Matthew Leichter, Brian Millberg, Laura Millberg and Lydia Schultz (who also

took on the role of lead writer). We are so fortunate to have the expertise and commitment within our community to complete this type of analysis.

The next step is implementation. We remain committed to working with the Board to see that all of the contributions made by everyone who participated in any way are recognized by action.

This report comes to you shortly after the High Holidays, a time when we took stock of ourselves and considered what steps we might take to do better in the coming year. We have just begun the month of Cheshvan, a month with no holidays. This month gives us time, without the interruption of special days, to begin to work on those things we learned, planned, prayed for and hoped for during the High Holidays. This report gives us the opportunity to do that as a community: to reflect on where we are and to assess what steps we can take to be the best version of Beth Jacob that we can be.

Wishing you and our community a Shanah Tovah (a good year)!

Sharon Press, Leslie Morris and Sara Lynn Newberger

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Executive Summary

In late 2023 and early 2024, volunteer note takers and facilitators held 19 community conversations with approximately 160 congregants. The sponsors of the community conversations project sought the following:

1. To learn themes, the big picture, of how the shul understands itself, encapsulating the range of what was expressed, including those who do not feel included in our community.
2. To identify and share actionable information and recommendations, including low hanging fruit
3. To create a way to be transparent with the community with the results and recommendations of the community conversation project,

The data team adapted Participatory Action Research methods to identify themes and recommendations. They held two live feedback forums, one of which was recorded for later viewing for those who could not attend. During the forums, the data team learned which themes resonated, which could be clarified, which might be missing, and which potential recommendations made the most sense. Ninety community members responded to the Community Conversation Feedback Form. Overall, congregants found the themes clear, and over half of the congregants resonated with each theme.

Based on the preliminary themes and community feedback, the team identified seven themes. A brief description of each follows, with the full report providing more depth, context, and quotes.

1. Welcoming: Inclusion and Accessibility: Congregants aspire to be welcoming and inclusive, where we are egalitarian, warm, haimish, and it “feels like family.” They feel that their aspirations have, at times, fallen short, sharing stories of feeling on the outside, whether due to not being Jewish, having less knowledge of Hebrew, living far away from synagogue, not being asked to participate, or having families without children or spouses. Separate from welcoming, congregants showed commitment to providing an environment accessible for those with medical conditions and disabilities.
2. Education: We thrive on education across the lifespan: Congregants see Beth Jacob’s leadership in youth education as a way to reinvigorate the congregation, build new membership, and increase engagement. They see adult education as a basic community need that can occur in person, on Zoom, and with other organizations. They recognize the need for resources and staff to build our education programming, and they want the topics to be engaging to the community.
3. Creating and Finding our Community: We want to connect more, both in and out of services: Congregants want more ways to connect and build relationships, mostly in shared values in observance. They are also interested in connecting in strongly Jewish ways not tied to observance (e.g., Israeli Dance), and they want to connect around hobbies and with the larger Jewish community. They are particularly interested in the revitalization of our commitment to social action.

4. How We Do Prayer and Services: The Beth Jacob community appreciated that we offer a variety of egalitarian, participatory, lay-led services (e.g., morning minyan, Shabbat, holidays). They expressed hope for more regular Kabbalat Shabbat (Friday night) services, and some wondered if there could be a learners' minyan for people to better understand the composition of services. People wished for greater spirit (ruach), prayerful energy (kavanah), possibly leading to greater musicality. Congregants also expressed concern for how to better include those who are less Hebrew literate and for non-Jewish family members. Many wanted to have the synagogue offer classes to expand the pool of service leaders and Torah readers. The feedback forums revealed that some congregants question whether we need to continue to be Conservative while others feel firmly grounded in the Conservative tradition. By becoming clear about where and how we align with the Conservative movement, we get clearer about the choices we make related to all of the themes.
5. Stability and Growth: Congregants wanted stability or growth in:
 - Financial Sustainability: Congregants expressed concern over whether the synagogue can afford to do the programming it wants, hire the staff it needs, keep lay leaders/volunteers from burning out, and have resources to build community and take care of our building and grounds. Solving this issue was a primary focus expressed by congregants.
 - Membership: Congregants want a "thriving community" with "diverse members." Many see having a larger paying membership as key to financial stability. They worry that they are seeing fewer congregants during Shabbat services.
 - A Healthy Volunteer Pool So We Don't Burn Out: Congregants feel more dependent on a volunteer pool perceived to be "thin" and declining, leading to burnout. They are concerned that volunteers can not meet the synagogue's needs, and they want to figure out how to revitalize our volunteer pool. Suggestions included bringing back "opt-out" practices, and inviting people personally to participate.
 - Lay-Leaders: Congregants love that we have lay leaders and hope to make them stronger through leadership development opportunities for board members and committee chairs. The most important leadership skill mentioned was the ability to facilitate discussion of difficult topics.
 - Personnel: Congregants are craving stability in personnel so that we can have consistency within the office staff without causing them to burn out. There was strong spontaneous support for Rabbi Tamar to be our next leader, with positive comments also towards Rabbi Justin and Sonya.
 - Building and Grounds, including Space Utilization, Kitchen, and Security: Congregants want to improve the physical appearance, comfort, and accessibility of our synagogue so it is more desirable to be together. To grow our sense of community, congregants crave a Kiddush that fosters spending time together. While not discussed often, when security was discussed, there were strong feelings and concerns that our current security operations drain our resources and reduce our inclusivity.
 - Transparent Communication: Congregants seek consistent, transparent communication about events, processes, policies, and finances. They want responses to emails. As one

member said, we want “explanations and not rumors.” They want follow-through related to the community conversations.

6. **Difficult Conversations: Israel, COVID Policy, Feeling Excluded, and Talking About Money:** Multiple critical, complicated, complex subjects arose during the community conversations: Israel, our COVID Policy, feeling excluded, and talking about shul finances. Thus, the data team expanded the theme to focus on increasing our ability to have difficult conversations, both with other congregants and with synagogue staff.
7. **It's up to all of us to move forward in this difficult, beloved work.** Congregants love Beth Jacob. It is family. They recognize that if they want Beth Jacob stronger and more vibrant, they must step up and work toward that goal. They want to be a part of the solution. Sometimes they might not know how to ask how to help. Some might be looking towards going back to an idealized past as a solution, with more congregants recognizing the need to let go of the past in order to move forward. And volunteerism and a “can do” attitude is core to this theme.

After the feedback sessions, recommendations were tallied based on frequency of endorsement and conceptual overlap, thus explaining what congregants prioritized. The most frequent recommendations were related to:

- **Personnel stability**, especially keeping the rabbis currently affiliated with the congregation. Keeping Beth Jacob’s acting senior rabbi was the most frequent recommendation on the entire list.
- **Inclusion and retention of our members.** To improve the new member experience, congregants recommended new member orientation, matching new / prospective members with an established household, welcoming new members after services, and creating memberships for teenagers and college students. To retain members, congregants recommended more social events that don’t necessarily meet at shul, exit interviews for people who resign or leave, check ins for congregants whose attendance drops off, and formalizing how we notice when people are no longer attending services.
- **Increased transparency.** Congregants asked for increased transparency on the shul’s formal and informal governance structure and committee structure. They asked for open communication about how people are asked to join the Board of Trustees, and more transparency from the Board and committees in the form of minutes and bylaws and less formal updates.
- **Education.** Congregants wanted to help each other build Hebrew skill, specifically through learner’s minyans. Congregants also wanted to build their own skills in having difficult conversations and accepting the diverse views of all congregants.
- **Building a Sustainable Financial Model.** Congregants wondered if there were ways to build a more sustainable financial model, be it through revision of our current process or exploring grant opportunities.

The data team encourages the project organizers and synagogue leaders to review all of the recommendations (presented in order of decreasing frequency), decide how they will follow up on these recommendations, and decide how they will keep the community aware of how they are following up. Directions for how to identify low-hanging fruit are presented in the analysis of recommendations on page 26.

Beth Jacob is not committed to adopt any of the recommendations made by congregants during the feedback sessions. Congregants expect future surveys and opportunities to provide feedback, and they seek transparent communication as to how the results of the community

conversations have been and will be used.

Goals and Process

Goals:

An initial meeting was held with the project sponsors to clarify what they would like to see from a possible analysis of the community conversations.

The sponsors of the community conversations project asked for the following:

1. To learn themes, the big picture, of how the shul understands itself, encapsulating the range of what was expressed, including those who do not feel included in our community.
2. To identify and share actionable information and recommendations, including low hanging fruit.
3. To create a way to be transparent with the community.

Process Summary.

The themes and recommendations identified in this report were generated using Rapid Assessment Process, a form of Participatory Action Research (PAR), in which a group of committed individuals analyzes qualitative data to create knowledge collaboratively that has the potential to effect social change. PAR treats the community as the experts; its goals are egalitarian and emancipatory, designed to give voice to those with the least amount of power with the potential to break out of past patterns into new practices that better the community. A more detailed description of the procedure is in Appendix A.

True to the methods of PAR, a small team systematically looked at multiple pieces of evidence (called artifacts) from multiple viewpoints. The team analyzed the artifacts through a process called triangulation, in which ideas generated from one source are verified by two or more sources. The team also looked for cross checks and insights by searching for single voices that speak with passion, often in different ways than the majority speaks. Comments from these community members often help reveal counterpoints and complexity in what might seem relatively straightforward issues.

The data team progressively identified themes to be shared with the community by systematically reading different sets of artifacts, identifying hypothetical codes, creating concept maps (visual representations with what we were reading), and returning to the conversations until preliminary themes repeated themselves with no new information. Each team member wrote up one or two paragraphs to describe the themes as we understood them, and two team members led the compilation of the report. All team members had access to the report and offered suggestions, including other ways to organize the themes or possible missing themes. Community members were able to provide feedback through an online or paper feedback form.

Because PAR is egalitarian and gives voice to those who have least power, the team created a list of every actionable item and recommendation written down by a community conversation notetaker. Recommendations with similar meaning were grouped together. Once the team identified the preliminary themes to share with the congregation, they coded each recommendation, creating a checklist that could be shared at the community conversation forums to better understand which recommendations were commonly seen as actionable. The team created a disclaimer to clearly state that synagogue leadership did not need to act on any recommendation in the checklist.

A final requirement of PAR is that the data team come back to the congregation to find out if they are on track, where the themes are unclear, what might be missing, and how the congregation wants to move forward. In preparation, the team co-wrote a concise summary, feedback form and powerpoint, and with synagogue leadership and project sponsors, created three opportunities for the congregation to provide feedback. The data team presented the project and themes via Zoom, in-person, and in recorded form. Over 100 people attended the live forums, and ninety congregants provided feedback. Images of the paper copies of the preliminary themes and feedback form are presented in Appendices B and C, respectively. The data team met and decided that the themes could be slightly refined based on the feedback. They created overall frequency distributions and grouped the most commonly endorsed recommendations together for ease of understanding. They also created frequency distributions for recommendations based on the initial themes, and they organized any additional recommendations and feedback for the project organizers, described in the Recommendations section and supplementary appendices.

Community Themes

Based on the preliminary themes and community feedback, the team identified seven themes:

1. Welcoming: Inclusion and Accessibility
2. Education: We thrive on education across the lifespan
3. Creating and Finding our Community: We want to connect more, both in and out of services
4. How We Do Prayer and Services
5. Stability and Growth (Financial, Membership, Volunteer, Leadership, Personnel, Operations, and Communication)
6. Difficult Conversations: Israel, COVID Policy, Feeling Excluded, and How we talk about money
7. It's up to *all* of us to move forward in this difficult, beloved work

Theme #1: Welcoming: Inclusion and Accessibility

Of all the attributes exhibited by Beth Jacob Congregation that were discussed in the conversations, the congregation's aspiration to be welcoming and inclusive resonated most during the conversations and at the forums. We aspire to be egalitarian, warm, and haimish (Yiddish for "homey" or "unpretentious"), celebrating our diversity in age, Jewish practice, sexual orientation, gender identities, family structures, ability to pay, and interfaith relationships. We try to include everyone who enters our spaces, virtually and in person. We want to be an inclusive congregation that "feels like family," and "nobody feels like an outsider." Numerous congregants spoke of the welcome they received at their very first visit to the synagogue, in stark contrast to their experiences at other Twin Cities congregations. At almost every meeting, one or more people touched on some aspect of appreciating the mix of ages at Beth Jacob and the interaction between the youngest and oldest members of our conversations. Expressions such as "it feels like home," "it feels like family," "kindness and acceptance," "where nobody feels like an outsider," and "feels like where I belong" were common statements collected by notetakers during community conversations. In general, people felt that they had a place at Beth Jacob regardless of their politics, age, sexual orientation, degree of Jewish practice, place of birth, and frequency of attending services. Several people listed the many ways that members can access the community, not just by attending shabbat services, that gave them a feeling of belonging. Some found their sense of place on Zoom, others at morning minyan.

Congregants shared that our aspirations have, at times, fallen short. While many of our members are proud of the welcome they extend to new members, out-of-town visitors, and members who do not attend services regularly, a core group of individuals shared stories of not feeling included. Specific concerns related to:

- longtime members feeling like outsiders and people feeling on the outside of an in-group. For example, "My family and I hope to stop feeling like outsiders in a congregation where our heritage goes back to the 1950s at Sons of Jacob." An undercurrent of this inclusion relates to perceived "cliques." As one member shared, "Welcoming and including all is important; however, over my many years being a member, there have been many instances when my family and I have experienced missteps. Greeters and gabbais need to approach people they do not recognize differently. When I am a longstanding member, but treated as a newcomer, I feel invisible and insignificant. When I sit with a friend of the opposite gender, we have been embarrassingly misidentified as a couple. Cliques have been one reason I do not come more often. It is also important to realize that meeting everyone's needs is impossible. I

have often felt that some of the initiatives to include more people end up excluding others."

- how we treat non-Jewish members of families who can not participate in some aspects of services. People from interfaith families where a partner or children were not Jewish due to birth parents felt excluded from synagogue activities, especially from educational programming.
- congregants with less knowledge of Hebrew feeling excluded because our transliterated prayer books do not follow our full service or do not know words that are used in conversations.
- helping people who live far away be able to participate because they are not on a bus line or can not or do not wish to drive.
- what to do when not asked to be a part of something (from kitchen duty to cliques to leading services to the board). As one member wrote in the context of our membership, "...Some members are welcoming, some are not. This is just how people are. Name tags might help, easier to say hello when you can read their name. Shir Tikvah does this pretty well. There are cool cliques: the Early L'Chaim group, the Hall minyan; for both of us it feels uncomfortable, like barging in, to try to join these conversations." Some congregants experienced kiddush as a time where people always sit with the same people, or will pull chairs up to a full table of their friends at kiddush instead of staying at a table where they do not know people very well.
- some who did not have children or spouses feeling left out when our primary focus is on life-cycle events that are outside of their experience. There were also concerns raised as to how to engage post-b'nai mitzvah parents, new b'nai mitzvah congregants, empty nesters, and single parents and those who have not had children.

A separate but related aspect of providing an inclusive environment is providing an accessible environment, one that allows individuals with medical conditions and disabilities to access our synagogue and programming. Congregants noted inaccessible bathrooms, pointing out the lack of automatic doors. They reinforced policies and options for increasing access for people at high risk of complications from respiratory illness. We heard from congregants who are hard of hearing not having enough working headphones. They noted that the large-print prayer books, often used by older adults, are too heavy to lift while standing. They paid attention to not forcing individuals with hidden disabilities to need to disclose that to the group. For example, "people with hearing loss, trauma, autism, etc. may need to sit in specific spots within a room [and] should not be forced to disclose. They wanted ways to ensure that people with food allergies can eat at all events.

Theme #2: We thrive on education across the lifespan

Congregants focused on both youth and adult education over 80 times in the conversations, and only three found the theme unclear during the forums. Many grieved the loss of the Talmud Torah afternoon school and look to new, intentional ways to re-envision and commit to educating Jewish children including education about Israel. A strong educational program was seen as a way to build new membership and engagement. Conversations discussed education across the lifespan - from young children to coming of age (b'nei mitzvah) training to post-b'nei mitzvah learning to adult education. A sample comment that captured our focus on education is, "Education. I think it can be an important part of all of the other themes! With robust educational programs and events, we can make current members more comfortable and involved, attract and retain young families, and just generally strengthen the ties between members across generations and with interfaith families."

Youth education

Many participants referenced the period of transition in the ending of the TTSP afternoon school as both a point of sadness for the gap being created and for the loss of its past function, and also as an opportunity to re-envision and commit to Jewish education for children. Many comments and conversations referenced the need for intentionality in creating a new program, to go beyond what's been possible in the Saturday morning program, and to have intentionality about the educational goals and quality of the program. Many see youth education both as a stand-alone value, as well as a way to build membership and engagement. There was support and appreciation for Rabbi Held. The need for resources and staff to support a quality youth education program was frequently mentioned. Early childhood education, post-b'nei mitzvah education, and vague references to a nursery school came up several times.

Adult education

Comments about adult education stressed its importance as a basic community need with great value. Sample suggested adult education topics include how to have difficult conversations, how to talk to family and community about the Israel/Gaza war, foundational education about Judaism, Jewish and Israeli history, Jewish spirituality, building synagogue skills, and understanding Zionism and antisemitism. Venues for education included more post-kiddush learning, Zoom learning during the week, additional in-person opportunities, collaborations with other Jewish organizations and community experts, and learning that could be accessed if congregants work during the day. One community member noted that when planning educational programming, "a key is to connect a learning topic with a learner's interest and existing level of knowledge... Sometimes we hit it right and had lively sessions, and sometimes [we] struggled to get six people to show up."

Theme #3 Creating and Finding our Community: We want to connect more, both in and out of services

Community members consistently asked for more opportunities to connect with other members, both in and out of services. None found the theme unclear. When congregants talked about community, they talked about the connections with other congregants. One said, "It is vital for our membership to be able to connect with fellow members." Another wrote, "my experience at Beth Jacob is that when we get to know other members, we benefit from our friendships. Beth Jacob congregants are down to earth and caring." A sense of community is key to feeling included. For example, "...community is strengthened when we can get to know and support one another." While most congregants looked towards shared values in observance, others wanted to be included in a community that identified as Jewish in non-religious, but strongly Jewish ways:

I have found feeling included [to be] spotty. I enjoy Shabbat services, however I am not religious or observant. Most who show up are although they say they are not and of course I fit. The reality is I do not do Shabbat dinner - but will have people over (I don't even know all of the parts of Shabbat dinner), I observe holidays but not literally, and would love to create community with those who identify strongly as Jewish - as a way of living, as a religion but not necessarily religious, as a people as a community - not sure Beth Jacob has been consistently up for that.

To connect more, congregants suggested building on successful Beth Jacob traditions and activities that have worked at other synagogues. At Beth Jacob, they mentioned activities like the Rosh Hashanah picnic (Tashlich), the Sci-Fi group, and Purim gift baskets (mishloach manot). They observed that social/study groups (havurot) and study partners (chevruta) have worked at other institutions. Developing affinity groups was seen as a tool to build community: young parents to meet at a park, a group riding bikes together on Shabbat, or congregants meeting to explore a shared hobby (arts, food, music, bowling, etc.). Participants were especially enthusiastic about creating a system to get to know each other better at Shabbat dinners, either hosted in people's homes or at regular (maybe monthly) potlucks at synagogue.

Congregants expressed enthusiasm about working with the larger Jewish community to host larger events, like Israeli dancing and music, which could develop a sense of belonging within the broader Jewish community, and participants asked for more ways to connect with other social organizations to improve our communities, much like we do at Dorothy Day. We could develop a communal Chevra Kadisha. We could meet across synagogue "borders" for Shabbat dinners and programs. If we offer more types of activities, we would have more entry points for new members and would be able to see ourselves as part of something bigger.

Congregants wanted revitalization of our social action out to the community around us. One member shared the following story:

Beth Jacob used to be an organization that made me feel aspirational and ambitious, striving to be a force for good change in the world. That spark doesn't feel as present to me recently. The world has changed a lot, and that is probably part of it. But I think the spirit of striving and working toward being our best possible selves and building our best possible world is something that I would like to feel more of in this community.

Many people mentioned Beth Jacob's partnership with Dorothy Day and explained that they would like similar opportunities to advocate for justice in a deeper and more far-ranging fashion. In the past, we have helped with the resettlement of Soviet Jews, and more recently with the Afghan family circle. Some participants wanted to apply our core Jewish values to current topics, like politics, as well as a desire to work with secular organizations to tackle issues such as homelessness and hunger.

Theme #4: How We Do Prayer and Services

The Beth Jacob community found value in our variety of services (e.g., morning minyan, Shabbat, holidays), the fact that they are lay-led (no cantor), and they are egalitarian. As one congregant shared, "Oddly enough, I have found community both in zoom daily services and on Sat morning in person." Many hoped that Friday night (Kabbalat Shabbat) services would be reintroduced as a regular and more intimate option. Regardless of service, congregants resonated with the suggestion to better include those who are less Hebrew literate or are non-Jewish family members. Some suggestions included teaching more about the composition of the services (Learners' Minyan), striving for more balance between Hebrew and English, and publicizing the accessibility tools available (e.g., large-print and transliterated prayer book).

Shabbat Morning In general, most participants of the Community Conversations appreciated much about Beth Jacob's Shabbat morning services. They liked that the services were lay-led, participatory, and egalitarian. They hoped to expand the number of people who led services and to have children spend more time in the sanctuary. Many wanted the synagogue to offer classes to expand the pool of service leaders and Torah readers, and some specifically requested that teens be regularly asked to lead. More asked for the full Torah portion than the triennial cycle by far. One community member shared the following:

I am delighted with the range of people who are able to lead services. Personally, I am not interested in being a service leader or torah reader. I am drawn more by spirit than liturgy - quiet among the words. I am comfortable at services and can chant many of the prayers. I especially enjoy congregational chanting when there is harmony.

People wished for greater spirit (*ruach*), prayerful energy (*kavanah*), and musicality. One congregant found the term *musicality* unclear. Another offered, "Sometimes the melodies feel, as someone remarked to me years ago, like a dirge. Maybe quicken the pace?" A variety of suggestions were made on how we might improve the morning Shabbat services: by making them shorter, by implementing a variety of innovations (such as moving outside or to a park occasionally). Many expressed interest in offering different types of simultaneous Shabbat services, such as those that highlighted spirituality or music, as an alternative to the traditional service. Many comments implied that congregants expected that there is considerable variability in opinion of if and how services should be changed.

To make services more inclusive and meaningful for all, participants proposed providing classes for aspiring Torah and Haftarah readers as well as for daveners (service leaders). They felt we needed to publicize more the accessibility tools available, such as large-print and transliterated siddurim, headphones, quiet room, etc. Finally, a number of people thought we should make a more concerted effort to help non-Jewish family members and less-fluent Hebrew readers feel included in the services.

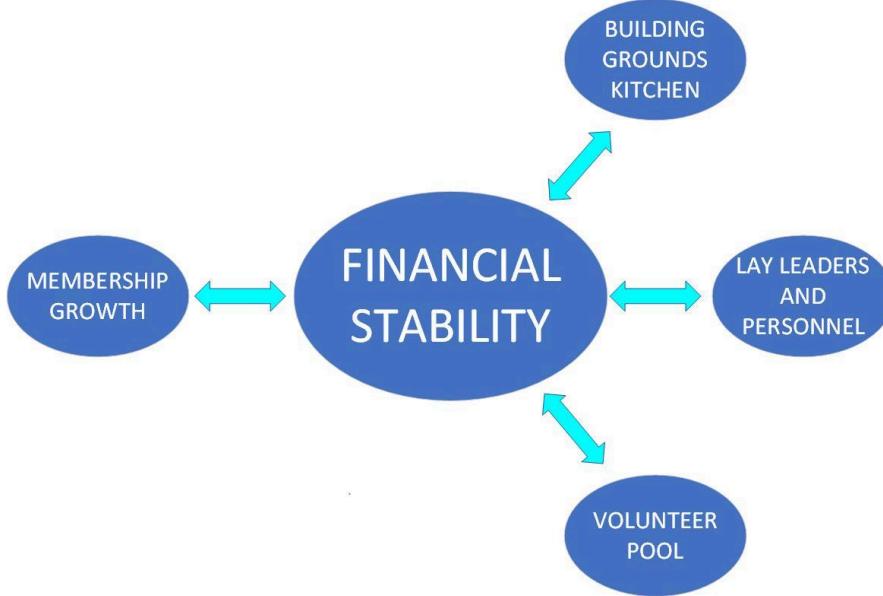
Those attending community conversations and providing community feedback also pondered about how the congregation labels itself. Are we Conservative, Traditional and Modern, leaning Reform or "Conservadox", or post-denominational? Shifting labels, as some observed, may open up different opportunities. Others observed that we have to be clear about our values related to prayer in order to maintain a sense of community. For example:

We should be welcoming to all but we also need to know what Beth Jacob stands for, its values, and its vision. I would hope that the foundation of Beth Jacob is one of Klal Yisroel. Therefore, all Jews should be made to feel welcomed regardless of their other identities and be provided the opportunities for deeper connections to the congregation. This is how a congregation is responsive to the "me" centered congregant. However, it ...[It] is also important to have expectations which reflect the values and vision of the congregation. That is how a congregation becomes "we" centered. Sometimes, what is the "good" for the whole may not be seen as [sic] the "good" for the specific congregant. For example, how do we make the non-Jewish partner of an interfaith family feel welcomed? How are they different and how should they be seen/treated differently than a congregant who made the decision to convert to Judaism? How do we meet the needs of those who are not as familiar with Hebrew, ritual, services, or other aspects of Judaism? What opportunities can we "raise one up" in their knowledge, comfortability, and involvement rather than "dumbing down" to meet a congregant's specific needs.

This quote shows the dynamic relationship between understanding our values as Conservative Jews, desiring to include all individuals, and choosing how we educate our community as pertains not only to prayer but to all aspects of congregational life. By becoming more clear about where and how we align with the Conservative movement, we get clearer about the choices we make related to all of the themes.

Theme #5: Stability and Growth

At least one person in every community conversation expressed concern about stability in meeting the basic needs of the synagogue. This was verified in the community feedback sessions, with three or fewer congregants finding any of the below categories unclear. This theme was presented as a concept map:



Transparent Communication Across All Areas

Related words observed were sustainability and consistency. As one notetaker captured, I “hope it doesn’t always feel like it’s a struggle / in turmoil / needy (budget, enough people, have a rabbi, need greeters/kitchen volunteers etc).” The data team understood this to be a desire for stability across six interrelated aspects of the shul. Specifically community members wanted stability or growth in:

- Financial Sustainability:

Congregants expressed concern over whether the synagogue can afford to do the programming it wants, hire the staff it needs to maintain the shul without burning people out, provide the financial resources needed to build community, and take care of our building and grounds. Solving this issue was a primary focus expressed by congregants. While members appreciated the financial egalitarianism and lack of financial barriers that have been part of Beth Jacob’s history, some also thought that the current annual sustaining contribution (ASC) system needed updating. One congregant put it clearly: “Financial stability needs to be addressed. Pay what you want is not a business plan.”

- Membership:

Congregants want a “thriving community” with “diverse members.” Many see having a larger paying membership as key to financial stability and would be happy with “growth

in community and not necessarily numbers." Members identified specific threats to our membership including a "demographic cliff," the declining number of young Jewish people interested in joining synagogues, people having fewer children, and those having children waiting until they are older. Congregants often brought up the worry that fewer people are coming to Shabbat services. At the same time, they noticed that young families are joining and that we need to continue to notice where growth is occurring and plan different ways to grow the community if the Jewish population is shrinking.

People in nearly all conversations had ideas about how to stabilize our membership through attracting new members and retaining current ones. Congregants suggested matching new members to existing members, inviting them often to dinners, making the shul more appealing to younger congregants, and creating a new member orientation process to familiarize congregants with the shul and to explain the benefits of joining. Others wanted the membership process simplified. Some wished that teens could become a new category of synagogue member.

Concerning retention, we "need to be checking in with people not attending services and do exit interviews when we know people leave our shul." We could also have more outreach to lapsed members.

- A Healthy Volunteer Pool So We Don't Burn Out:

Congregants saw increased dependence on volunteers combined with the numbers of volunteers as "thin" and declining, leading to concern that volunteers might not meet the synagogue's needs. A sample comment was, "People need to volunteer to take the burden off the core group."

Conversations revolved around how to revitalize our volunteer pool. In particular, one member suggested providing a hotline to the office if people have time to volunteer. Others suggested linking volunteer hours to one's ASC; if members could not afford their ASC share, they could make it up in volunteering, which could stabilize needs for funds to pay people to do shul functions. One wondered what volunteers could do so that paid staff can focus on other responsibilities.

Community members desired bringing back "opt-out" practices rather than "opt-in" for activities such as kitchen duty. They liked the past practice of emailing congregants with the date they were expected to help with the kitchen and if they could not attend that day to find a replacement, which would force them to engage with the community. Other participants recommended that the shul do a better job of asking congregants who are not helping to increase their participation. They said that they would be more likely to participate if they received a personal request rather than having to motivate themselves to sign up on a spreadsheet or in a form.

The concept of burnout appeared in just over 1/3 of the community conversations and again in the feedback forms. Community members conveyed concern that our volunteers would burn out, especially because of the perception that the same people were being asked to volunteer. A congregant shared the following anecdotes that aligns with the theme: "I have enjoyed volunteering for many years in the kitchen and in other capacities. It has allowed me to meet many members I would not have been able to

otherwise. I do worry about exhausting volunteers. It seems as if it is the same people doing the greeting and kitchen duty each Shabbat."

Community members wanted lay leaders and regular volunteers to receive more recognition ("looking at who is in the room, not just who isn't"), and they want responsibilities taken off them. One congregant recommended a sabbatical or retreat to renew volunteer congregants.

- Lay-Leaders:

The term "lay leadership" was used in a variety of ways in the community conversations - sometimes lay leaders meant the people who lead services: we "love that we have lay service leaders with no cantor." Other times, "lay leaders" meant board members (e.g. we need to "work on our lay leadership structure: see a more functional board and have a greater understanding of [the relationship] between the rabbi and the board") or committee chairs. At other times, "lay leaders" referred to the people who were preparing food. Because this term was used in many ways, it was often hard to know exactly who was meant by lay leaders. People hoped for a culture in which we appreciated lay leadership more and provided more recognition.

Regardless of how they used the term, congregants liked that we are lay-led. And they asked for stronger lay leadership and leadership development opportunities for board members and committee chairs. They hoped to find ways to get younger members involved with board leadership but didn't know how processes worked to make this happen. They hoped for more vision and clarity from leadership. Congregants often asked for greater understanding of our leadership processes, which might lead towards greater engagement and willingness to attract new leaders. One asked for a leadership ladder to prepare members for future leadership roles. Many focused on creating greater variety in people who lead. As another said, a "lay leadership bench doesn't just happen. [We need to] teach non-profit leadership."

The most important leadership skill mentioned was the ability to facilitate discussion of difficult topics. One member wanted, "...a strong leader that tackles difficult issues." Another wanted to reduce tensions about the clergy that emerged after the rabbinic transitions. Others said they want to engage over more topics that might be controversial for the shul but which they feel are being sidelined, for example, intermarriage and Beth Jacob's accommodations for non-Jewish family members.

- Personnel:

We are craving stability in our personnel, with spontaneous support for Rabbi Tamar to be our next leader. A symbolic comment was, "We need stability and security in rabbinical leadership. I think this will help membership retention and attraction." Comments for Rabbi Justin and Sonya were similar in positivity.

Of the congregants who came to the community conversations and decided to say something about it, there was overwhelming support for Rabbi Tamar to be our next leader. Forty-six of 49 comments about Rabbi Tamar were in direct support of her continuing as our senior rabbi, with two wondering about our process for determining rabbinic leadership, and one expressing criticism. "I like the direction she is taking and the leadership she provides." Another said, Rabbi Tamar "embodies everything I love

about BJ - brilliant teacher, spiritual, courageous leader in nonviolence." She has "brought us back to our foundation." At least one person in every conversation expressed support for Rabbi Tamar. The second most common comment related to the rabbinate was a desire and need for rabbinic stability. Comments for Rabbi Justin were similar in positivity but less frequent. While feedback forums came to the same overall conclusion, a core group of congregants expressed discomfort with being asked to comment on the question of keeping current staff.

In addition to rabbinic stability, there was a desire to have consistency within the office staff. This emerged in the conversations as a desire to have adequate staff to handle the synagogue's needs, while neither burning out the professionals nor losing the *hamish* and approachable feeling people have come to expect. One theme that surfaced frequently was a need to have a permanent kitchen manager to help with consistency, to manage finances effectively, and to relieve the burden on volunteers.

- Building and Grounds, including Space Utilization, Kitchen, and Security:

We would like to improve the physical appearance, comfort, accessibility, food, and security of our synagogue so it is more desirable to be together.

Space Utilization. Congregants wanted to improve the physical appearance and comfort of the building to make the synagogue a more desirable place to bring people together. At the same time, there were comments about gathering away from the synagogue grounds for groups to meet, such as parks or coffee shops. This reflected a sense of community being both grounded in place and also bigger than a single site.

Kitchen. Many people noted that meals are a critical part of life at the synagogue and that they appreciate kiddush. Many said a substantial kiddush is integral to building community, although there were also those who wanted to reduce kiddush when not sponsored to ease synagogue finances. While there were differing opinions about how best to manage the kitchen – either more commitment from volunteers to participate in kiddush preparation, set up, and cleaning (e.g., kitchen duty), or more paid staff to perform the role – there was a consistent view that the current kitchen situation is not meeting the needs of the community.

Security. Security was a topic that did not come up in many conversations, but in those where it did, there were strong feelings. There was gratitude for the effort the synagogue is making to provide a strong security staff and to train volunteers. There were some who thought that a greater investment was needed. At the same time, there was a recognition that the cost of security was significant, both in financial commitment and in making people feel uncomfortable or making the synagogue seem unwelcoming. There was also concern about the potential for disproportionately making Jews of Color or others who do not "look" like they belong at a synagogue feel unwelcome.

- Transparent Communication:

Congregants want consistent, transparent communication about events, processes, policies, and finances. They feel ignored when emails aren't returned. They want "explanations and not rumors."

Community members pointed out that they wanted more of the kinds of communication that has gone well, "person to person, leader to leader, and leadership to community." For example, they complimented follow through, like the rabbis' responses to community members' questions. They also complimented transparency, such as the 2023 annual sustaining contribution letter, which disclosed the average ASC each household needed to contribute. Congregants asked for more follow-up from emails to lay leaders and more transparency as to the goings-on of the shul.

Conversations about Beth Jacob's communication with congregants focused on how to consistently communicate, follow up, and be more transparent in shul processes. Participants asked for responses to their emails to the lay leadership, better messaging via the *Kol Yaakov* mailers, and more information about the shul's finances. Participants want to know more about the shul's governance structure and how people become members of the congregation.

Related to how Beth Jacob communicates with the congregation, many conversations discussed wanting greater transparency from the lay leadership. Participants wanted better communication between the committees and the executive committee and a better understanding of collaboration between the rabbi and the board. Congregants wanted a better understanding of the synagogue's governance structure.

Theme 6. Difficult Conversations: Israel, COVID Policy, Feeling Excluded, and Talking About Money

When discussing Israel, the closest that community members came to consensus was that it is hard to talk about Israel, and that we should recognize this diversity of opinion and strive to talk about Israel in an inclusive and accepting fashion: "We need to be willing to listen with compassion to a spectrum of opinions." As another congregant said, "I suggest putting Israel in a slightly different light- not that it's not a focus but rather that it is a complex subject that needs to be addressed, and that how to do that was not addressed in these conversations." Indeed, multiple complicated, complex subjects came up during the community conversations: Israel, our COVID Policy, Feeling Excluded, and Talking About Shul Finances. Thus, the data team revised the theme to focus on our ability to have difficult conversations, both with other congregants and with synagogue staff.

Case Study - Israel:

Nearly all of the Israel-related comments from the community conversations focused in one way or another on how we talk about Israel. While Israel wasn't a subject of the community conversation questions, the emotionally-charged reaction to Israel as a subject during the community conversation forums and feedback suggest just how important Israel is to our community. The discomfort talking about Israel was highlighted in the anonymous feedback form. Many were concerned about the topic's divisiveness: "it's more important not to be clear so as not to ostracize anyone," "need to be encouraging people to keep coming even if upset about what is going on in the war," "nervous about even talking about Israel," and "wanting to discuss Israel in a collaborative manner rather than adversarial". Fewer asked for a clear position of strong rabbinic support for Israel. One saw an opportunity to attract new members if we clearly stated that we welcome individuals with a variety of attitudes towards Israel. Another wrote, "I'm glad to have a Jewish space that doesn't require a specific view on Israel." Overall, there was no consensus on how to approach the issue, and the congregation is craving for ways to better their communication skill.

And Beyond:

The team identified additional areas in which congregants are struggling to have difficult conversations:

1. Continuance of the Covid Policy. One of the less endorsed recommendations by the community was to end masking policies on Shabbat. This is in stark contrast to individuals who are at great risk for developing respiratory conditions. As one member shared, "...Covid has changed how we are willing to interact in person. While many are accustomed to shmoozing during services either in the sanctuary or in the halls (or at "early kiddush"), my primary venue for connecting with others was during actual kiddush after services concluded. I have been unwilling to completely unmask to eat indoors. Honestly, I don't know how to get around this. Events not involving food (a revolutionary concept) would help - for those willing and able to participate...Unknown how many others are similarly impaired." With such disparate opinions on this topic, people are not sure how to proceed.

2. Feeling Excluded. Stories from the conversations and feedback forms spoke of feeling excluded. Particular themes surrounded bad feelings about not being asked to be a part of certain initiatives, committees, or the board. Others felt hurt for not being asked to lead services. How do we teach people to respectfully advocate for themselves when they feel their needs are not being met?
3. Our Financial Situation. We saw a disconnect between the wants and needs of our community and with the value of having no financial barrier to membership. How can we do the things congregants want when we do not have the funds to do it? How do we develop a sustainable financial model and have discussions about what we can and can not do because there is no charge or fee?

Theme #7: It's up to all of us to move forward in this difficult, beloved work

The community members who attended the conversations demonstrated overwhelming care about, and even love for, the BJC community and its members, both living and deceased. Some conversations reported a sense of loss, with nostalgic memories of Beth Jacob in an ideal past. Most felt a need to move forward, to build better engagement with community members, and to improve participation in Beth Jacob's services and activities. Congregants especially welcomed the opportunity to engage in the community conversations and feedback opportunities, recognizing that if we want to make Beth Jacob stronger and more vibrant, we need to step up and work toward that goal. "As we can, members who have room to accept more volunteer work with BJ need to step up, even in little ways, to help share the load." "Congregants need to step up to make this the kind of shul they want."

Community members see their engagement as crucial to the solution. "The future of BJ belongs to those who show up." "We need to focus on us owning the shul, because no rabbinic leadership is enough." :We "need to own the change you want...There's no better time to start something than right now." "Getting someone engaged helps them feel ownership in the shul. We are the congregation." "There isn't a 'they' out there that will do it for us." The congregation is anticipating next steps from this process, and they want to be involved in the change. As one community member said, we are in a "...huge transitional moment for this congregation." To be prepared, a deeper understanding of how we view the past and present can inform our success in making change in the future.

Moving Away From An Idealized Past

When members of Beth Jacob remembered the past during the conversations, it was largely through a lens of wistfulness, nostalgia, loss, and grief. As one community member said, "Not having Beth Jacob [would be] a huge hole". Community members are grieving the loss of those who have died, left, and retired. They feel the loss of the Talmud Torah. There was also a sense of loss/melancholy of losing the last of our members who survived the Shoah, and the passing of many members who were active in the shul since its creation. Some were searching for an atmosphere from 20-30 years ago, unable to articulate what it was. Many felt their family history is inextricably tied to the synagogue. One community member said, "Beth Jacob was such a special place, but it's hard to tease out whether it was the shul or the 'golden time' in my life when my kids were growing up, and nothing will feel that way again."

More often, community members recognized the need to let go of the past in order to move forward. As a congregant shared, it's "hard to find a balance between people who feel safe in the familiarity of constancy and people who need change." Another shared, "..Saying we ever got it right would be overstating. [It's] still worth trying. [We] could make it even harder for ourselves if we believe we've done it perfectly in the past. [We] need to do better and [we] need not compare ourselves to the myth even if it's what we've been striving for." Even those very few who wrote about feeling a vacuum since Rabbi Allen left are looking to fill it and move forward. And others said that rabbinic leadership should be "forward-looking and not bringing up the past all the time."

Volunteerism and a "can do" attitude is core to our community

Beth Jacob has always been a lay-led congregation, with a minimal office staff. The expectation since the congregation's inception was for volunteers to provide the workforce for much of the synagogue's weekly activities. Every week the congregation depends on volunteer gabbais, service leaders, torah readers, sanctuary greeters, kitchen crew, kitchen mashgiachs, and security door greeters. In addition, the Board of Trustees members and the myriad of committee members at Beth Jacob are all volunteer positions.

Many positive comments were given stating how volunteering builds relationships between members, and how it is a core part of the egalitarian nature of our congregation. One comment summed up the advantages of relying on volunteers for most of the work at Beth Jacob: "I like that we're a hands-on shul. Being that type of group helps us be more welcoming."

Another conveyed the currency of this "all hands" attitude: "I've been a member less than a year and engaged in volunteer work because the ask came from folks who eagerly welcomed me and connected me to the community. I wouldn't have jumped into painting the nursery or signing up for kitchen duty without friends who said we're doing this. Can you help us?"

While volunteerism has been a cornerstone value since the start of Beth Jacob, the comments generated at the meetings make it obvious that members have noticed that our volunteer needs have grown while our volunteer core has dwindled down to the point of not meeting the needs of the synagogue. Sample comments included:

- "[There's a] thinness of lay people participating."
- "People need to volunteer to take the burden off the core group."
- "[We need] less mitzvah creep. E.g. asking the same people over and over to volunteer, which has a risk of burnout."
- "[We] need to grow the volunteer base."

The energy of the congregation appeared to be tied to this theme. Several mentioned feeling a reduced level of energy in the congregation. "What's missing for me is a bit of 'um pah pah' energy. That we have a thing we want to do and a drive to do it." This reduction in energy was related to more than just volunteerism: "Beth Jacob used to be an organization that made me feel aspirational and ambitious, striving to be a force for good change in the world. That spark doesn't feel as present to me recently. The world has changed a lot, and that is probably part of it. But I think the spirit of striving and working toward being our best possible selves and building our best possible world is something that I would like to feel more of in this community." Still

other comments revolved around the reduced energy we have for our children's education. Some found energy when children interacted with older members of the congregation. Members shared fond memories of Grandma Zelda and other deceased members reaching out to the children, as well as appreciating children running around the bima during Adon Olam.

Congregants had many ideas of ways to increase and stabilize our volunteer base. "BJ has always, by necessity, [been] a shul of volunteers. I gather that volunteers often are recruited when something must be done, at the last minute. But what if a stable of volunteers were established and tasks were set up so that people had more time to gear up to do the work?" To increase the number of people willing to step up and make this key practice more effective and efficient, congregants suggested: (a) better ways for the paid synagogue staff to get more people to be put on volunteer lists and how to notify those people when they are needed, (b) Resetting of members' understanding that volunteering is a core requirement of being a member at Beth Jacob, (c) making individual requests instead of blanket statements that more volunteers are needed, (d) finding out what individual members are most excited about, (e) following up on people who have told us they want to help, and (f) teaching congregants how to ask to participate rather than relying on others to ask them. An example of a quote that encapsulated much of this theme is as follows:

I resonate with almost all the themes. Beth Jacob for me has been a huge source of community and friendship and personal growth. Something that I noticed is common across a lot of the listed recommendations is that many of these are things that people can do without needing shul leadership to initiate. It can be hard to initiate or feel like you have the knowledge to do things, but like theme 7 gets at, who's going to do it besides us? I think we need to find a way to encourage more people to take ownership of our community and our ritual and feel confident starting and doing things without it having to come from top down leadership.

The congregants who attended the conversations and participated in the feedback opportunities demonstrated overwhelming care about the community. Most felt increased connection. A few felt increased unease associated with instability and turnover, shrinking and shifting demographics, and difficulty being able to imagine the future. Some said that the conversations were the best things they've done at BJC thus far. They appreciated hearing each other's ideas, felt love and good will towards the community. Some felt inspiration, others felt heard.

Analysis of Recommendations:

Ninety people responded to the 134-item recommendation checklist. The frequency distribution of all recommendations is presented in Table 1, below, and a distribution of each theme's recommendations are presented in Appendix D.

Table 1. Percent of Respondents (n=90) who Endorsed Recommendations

Percent of Respondents Endorsing	Recommendation
82%	Keep Rabbi Tamar
73%	Exit interview for people who resign or congregants who leave
73%	Keep Rabbi Justin
73%	Keep Sonya
73%	Transparency on shul's governance structure (both formal and informal)
72%	Check in on congregants whose attendance drops off
66%	Match new or prospective members with an established household
64%	Hire reliable permanent staff (executive director, kitchen manager, program manager, director of community engagement, musician in residence, education staff)
64%	Better transparency about committee structure and increased communication from committees.
63%	Host learner's minyans so people can build skills
63%	New Member Orientation
62%	Increase opportunities for congregants with less Hebrew skills to participate
61%	Welcome new members after services, not just out-of-towners
61%	Teach us how to have difficult conversations (e.g., finances, Israel, Social Justice)
61%	Open communication about how people are asked to join the Board of Trustees
60%	Teach us how to be more accepting of the many views our congregation has
60%	Welcome all new members no matter their views on Israel
59%	Remind congregation that board meetings are usually open to the congregation
57%	Leadership development for the board
57%	Formalize how we notice when people no longer attend services.
57%	Types of synagogue membership for teenagers and college students.
56%	More social events that don't necessarily meet at shul on Shabbat, e.g., book clubs, bowling, women's groups, men's clubs
54%	Build sustainable financial model (Annual Sustaining Contribution)
54%	More transparency from the Board - minutes, bylaws

53%	Provide inclusive events for community members who do not have children
52%	Leadership development for committee chairs
51%	Reach out to get more people involved
51%	Increase opportunities for non-Jewish family members or congregants to participate in services
51%	Learn how to lead services
51%	Explore grant opportunities
50%	Friday night dinners with intergenerational mixing
49%	Keep full Torah reading
49%	Create more pathways to leadership so it can be self-generating
49%	Bring back assigned kitchen duty
48%	Learn how to read torah (leyn)
48%	Develop the ability to lead difficult conversations
48%	Develop a strategic plan for gaining new members and maintaining current membership, marketing, "Honeymoon Israel" model
48%	Investigate what other shuls are doing to attract new members.
48%	Use education as a way to introduce BJC to prospective members.
47%	Development of professional staff
47%	Development of volunteer leaders
47%	Create formal ways for people to be involved in volunteering
44%	Endow a kiddush fund
44%	Improve the sound system, especially in the sanctuary
44%	Better communication with members (Kol Yaakov, lay leadership)
43%	Find ways for more seniors to be involved
43%	Revise/dynamize the Shabbat morning service
43%	Develop a larger and more stable pool of teachers
43%	Leadership that looks to the future more than the past
43%	Teach the congregation what it means to be lay leadership
43%	Better online presence to attract members.
42%	More service opportunities not at BJC, e.g., Dorothy Day
42%	More sessions like community conversations
42%	More Friday Evening Kabbalat Shabbat potlucks
42%	Explore other avenues to fundraising
42%	Strategic visioning for the congregation
41%	Express Jewish values as practices (keeping kosher, lulav/etrog), including to new members
41%	Mechanical tefillah (prayer) instruction (when to bow, when to wrap/unwrap tzitzit for shema)
40%	Membership applications at lobby w/ QR code

39%	Have people wear name tags
39%	Rideshare/shuttle/bike group or other ways for members who live far away to attend events
39%	Community conversations for teens.
39%	Facilitate more singing (music director or monthly chazan or choir, playlists to spread new tunes)
39%	Ask people individually to help rather than on-bimah pleas
38%	Define all Hebrew terms so congregants can learn them
38%	Plan events so that we expect people of all ages to attend and participate fully
38%	Develop leaders to be focused on welcoming prospective members
38%	Teach leaders not to act in vengeful/sniping ways.
38%	Build a patio outside the social hall
37%	Large-print prayer books
37%	Teach leaders how to be stronger, more consistent communicators.
37%	Link volunteer hours to Annual Sustaining Contribution (ASC), especially if people can not afford ASC dues
37%	More recognition for lay leadership
36%	Find ways for more people to become leaders
34%	Improve the bathrooms including their accessibility
33%	Have Havdalah bonfires when the timing is right
33%	Funding for leadership training and seminars.
33%	Create "holiday committees," where groups of individuals are responsible for certain events, like the Purim Carnival
33%	Playground for kids
32%	Recognize our widows and widowers
32%	Social justice outreach to communities outside BJC
32%	Consistently scheduled fundraiser, esp. not in winter
31%	Shorten the Shabbat morning service
31%	Improve the building
30%	Adult b'nai mitzvot classes
30%	Make environmental improvements (e.g., charging station, solar panels, trees, turf grass)
30%	Better data collection, maintenance, security (Shulcloud)
29%	More post-kiddush speakers
29%	Modernize/shorten High Holiday services
29%	Provide transliterated prayer book
29%	Hotline people can call if they want to volunteer (e.g., office phone)
28%	More conversations about inclusion
28%	Start a program where young families visit elders

28%	Start a traditional afternoon Hebrew school
28%	A retreat offsite for congregants
28%	Connect to Jewish Community Action programs
28%	Host shul events at congregants' houses, e.g., Talmud class not at the shul
28%	Topic tables after meals
27%	Restart delivering Purim gift baskets (mischloach manot)
27%	Increase transparency and communication about all of the details and timing of bnei mitzvah training.
26%	Alternate services for people who want to connect spiritually
26%	Assess for mold
24%	Outdoor davening, davening at a park?
24%	Saturday evening (Havdalah) services with intergenerational mixing
24%	Strong leadership when the community is having a "golden calf moment" ... to lead people back
24%	Maximize use of shulcloud (accessibility section on website)
23%	No moving chairs to full tables - sit with someone who is alone instead.
23%	Teach non-profit leadership
23%	Keep the security guard but unlock the front doors
21%	Switch to a triennial Torah reading cycle (1/3 of the reading each week)
21%	Basketball hoop
21%	More in-person meetings
20%	Leadership development for singers
20%	Better food
19%	Clearer vision from Rabbi
19%	Attract new immigrants (e.g., Russian) to be members.
19%	Bring back assigned greeter duty
18%	Help us find a key to sing in
18%	Fewer requests for money from members
18%	Add a community garden
18%	Rebuild the kitchen
17%	End masking policies on Shabbat
17%	Consistent musical leadership
16%	Monthly youth service
14%	Improve nursery
11%	Randomized seating at meals after services (oneg/kiddush)
11%	Get external help with fundraisers
9%	Minimize the kiddush lunch
8%	Add an afternoon service (mincha) option on Shabbat
8%	Have an additional service with more English on Shabbat

4%	Give up the building to afford more staff/programming
2%	Build a climbing wall outside
1%	No more fundraisers

What follows is an analysis based on frequency of endorsement and conceptual overlap. This analysis in no way compels or serves as a recommendation of the data team. This section explains what congregants prioritized, and the team leaves it to synagogue leadership to make the decisions as to what is feasible and implementable.

The most frequent recommendations were related to **personnel stability**, with 74 people recommending that we keep Rabbi Tamar, and 66 people recommending that we keep Rabbi Justin and Sonya. Fifty-eight people asked for increased stability in our permanent staff (executive director, kitchen manager, etc.). Of note, the recommendation to keep Rabbi Tamar was the most frequent recommendation of the entire list.

The next most frequent recommendations surrounded **inclusion and and retention of our members**, with the highest recommendations being the following:

- Conducting exit interviews for people who resign or leave (n=66)
- Checking in on congregants whose attendance drops off (65).
- Matching new or prospective members with an established household (n=59)
- Hosting New Member Orientation (n=57)
- Welcome all new members no matter their views on Israel (n=54)
- Welcoming new members after services, not just out of towners (n=53)
- Formalizing how we notice when people no longer attend services. (n=51)
- Creating types of synagogue membership for teenagers and college students. (n=51)

Congregants asked for **increased transparency** with high frequency. The top five recommendations were:

- Transparency on shul's governance structure (both formal and informal; n=66)
- Better transparency about committee structure and increased communication from committees (n=58)
- Open communication about how people are asked to join the Board of Trustees (n=55)
- Remind congregation that board meetings are usually open to the congregation (n=53)
- More transparency from the Board - minutes, bylaws (n=49)

Two **educational** recommendations were commonly endorsed. First, congregants seemed to want to help their fellow congregants build Hebrew skill and have those with reduced skill in Hebrew feel included. They wanted increased opportunities to participate for those who have less Hebrew skill (n=56), with many asking for learner's minyans (n=57) or learning how to lead services (n=46). Second, congregants wanted to build their own skills in having difficult conversations (e.g., finances, Israel, social justice; n=55) and to learn how to be more accepting of the many views our congregation has (n=54)

Two **financial sustainability** recommendations are of note:

- Build sustainable financial model (Annual Sustaining Contribution; n=49)
- Explore grant opportunities (n=46)

Regarding **low hanging fruit**, the team recommends that the project organizers use the above table to determine low hanging fruit; as a team, we were unsure how feasible various recommendations would be. For example, implementing name tags seems like an easy enough thing to do on the surface, but once we consider how few staff we have and that there can be no writing on shabbat, it makes the process much more difficult. We recommend considering the suggestions related to personnel stability, membership, transparency, inclusion, education, and financial stability first. Then, leaders may wish to scan the entire list in Table 1, above, for ideas

that are endorsed by over a third of the respondents (33%) that would be easy to implement. Finally, leaders are encouraged to review the new recommendations identified in Appendix D, as well as associated comments, which can help contextualize the readiness of the congregation for such changes.

Appendices

Appendix A. Procedure

Identification of Initial Themes.

There were 20 Initial sets of data analyzed by the PAR team:

1. Initial community conversations (1 - 17)
2. Final two community conversations and emails sent to the executive team.

Before the team read the conversations, one team member scrubbed the data of identifying information and organized the conversations two ways - by conversation, and by question. The note takers had different ways of capturing their conversations; some listed key words and tallied how often community members said the words. Others wrote verbatim what their community members said during their conversations. Others provided an analysis or summary of the community conversations. Five members of the team read different subsets of the first 17 interviews. Each member read 10 interviews to start. They each used a systematic process that was idiosyncratic to themselves:

Team member #1 printed out each conversation, cut every comment into a strip and sorted the strips. There were 495 comments (about 50 comments per session). T#1 started looking for thematic groupings and how many strips fit into each, including tallies taken by the notetakers. They ranked them and also pulled individual comments that might be important to talk about.

Team member #2 read all of the conversations by question, and stepped away, letting the comments settle for an hour or two. Then they started jotting down all of the topics that stuck out. After jotting down key topics, T#2 read the conversations from last to first, reading them by conversation, not by question. Then they refined the topics and wrote key phrases that fit with them and noted a few comments that might be outliers. T#2 noticed a lot of recommendations, which they ignored because the team would identify them later.

Team member #3 went through the documents one at a time by comment and tried to organize by comment. They didn't try to count, as some words were heavily used but without definition, like "community." T#3 tried to identify the universe of things that people were talking about. They also noticed the variability in note taking - some notetakers took a lot, some took a little. Some were parsimonious in how they were responding. They decided whether things were the same. T#3 was fascinated by the topics that came up repeatedly, noting that there was great variability in attitudes towards the topics, with opposite opinions often expressed. T#3 wanted to be a fly on the wall at the conversations!

Team member #4 read conversation by conversation and used an electronic system of coding each response. They started coming up with themes and organized it by sections based on the community conversations questions (appreciate, hope, focus). T#4 noted that sometimes one comment could fit in multiple categories. T#4 didn't look at the takeaways at that stage.

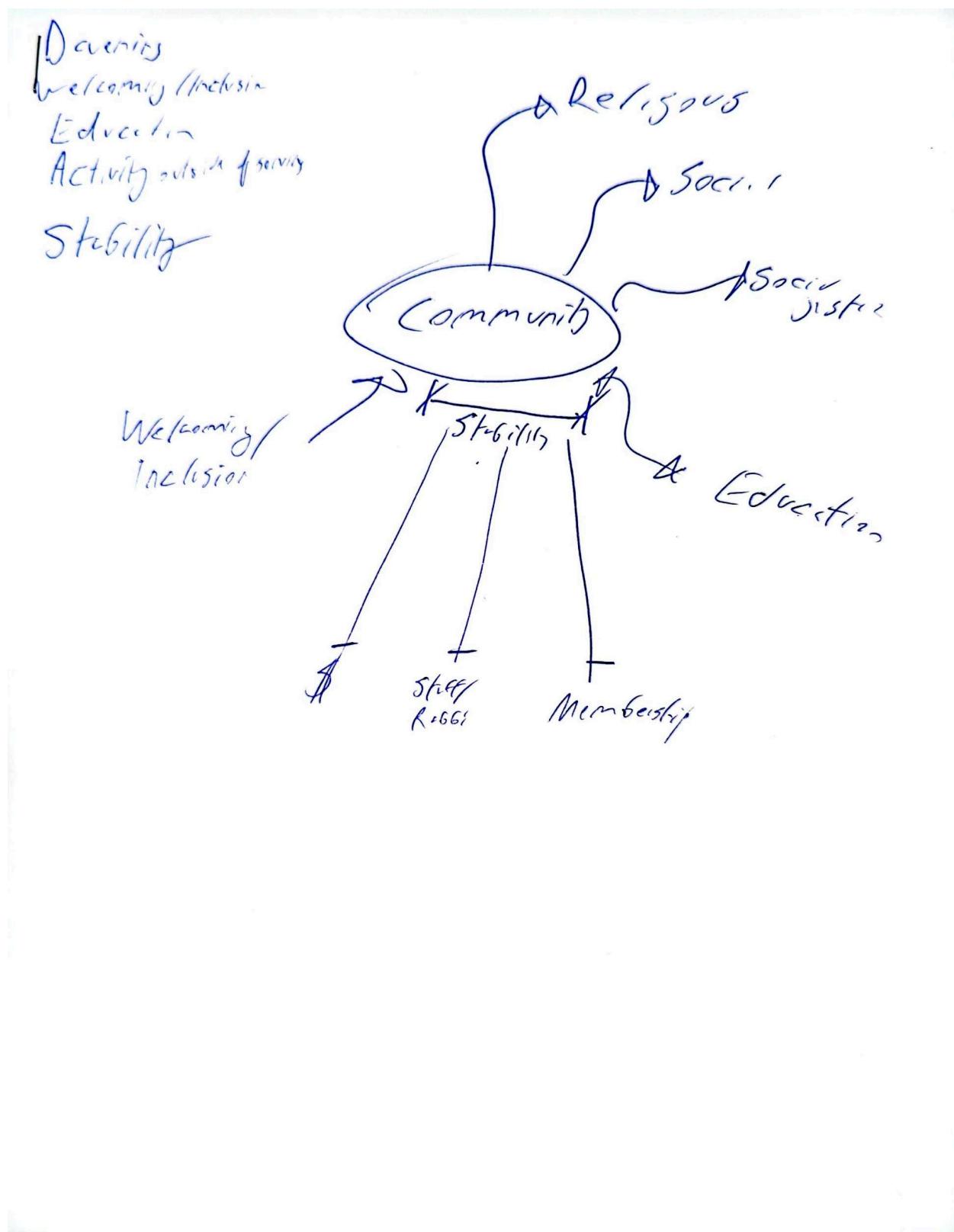
T#5 read through each "topic" (appreciate, hope, etc) and listed a new theme as soon as it was noticed. They added checks to their list when the theme showed up in a new conversation. Then, they reread the themes and grouped together similar ones, and they tried to list in order of highest to lowest frequency

At our first meeting, we each shared the themes we began seeing in the data, starting with the person with the fewest themes, and then building on them until we had everyone's way of organizing the data. This resulted in 39 potential themes. We also identified 10 statements that had negative affect associated with them that were only spoken by one individual. Because the same comments could fit into multiple themes, we decided that before the second meeting, we would crowdsource a document in which each of the readers pasted text from the conversations that supported each of the 39 themes. Each reader used a different color to add comments to the google doc.

Refinement of Themes

At the second meeting, a sixth team member joined us. The team was provided with a paper copy of each of the 39 themes with supporting text. Each team member read the comments of themes with the greatest numbers of comments (Education, Welcome/Inclusion, Values/Leadership/Volunteerism, Davening, and Activities Outside of Shul). We asked whether each theme held together on its own, whether it should be broken down into subthemes, and how themes with fewer comments related to the larger themes. In this process, we identified Stability as a key organizing principle and decided that the Values/Leadership/Volunteerism fit into other themes. We also found that emotional reactions to the work in front of us did not fit into any theme. We created two concept maps, such as this one for the entire set of preliminary themes (see Figure 1). Each member of the team agreed to write a paragraph describing one or two of the themes to be shared at our next meeting.

Figure 1. Sample Concept Map



Identification and Organization of Recommendations:

Between the first and second meeting, T#6 took the lead on identifying recommendations. They created an Excel spreadsheet that listed each recommendation and whether or not it appeared in each of the 19 community conversations. Their process was to read through each community conversation sequentially, and as they came across a recommendation, they added it to an Excel spreadsheet and marked an "x" in the corresponding column for each conversation in which the recommendation appeared.

In some instances, a recommendation would first appear in a specific form in one conversation, but subsequent conversations gave a similar recommendation more broadly. In those instances, rather than add a new recommendation it was combined with the previous, more specific one. For example, a few conversations recommended keeping Rabbi Tamar, but others recommended the broader goal of hiring a permanent rabbi. This way, anyone reading the file and the conversations can understand how groups approached similar topics. Although this adds more subjectivity to the analysis, it was helpful to see where and how frequently some recommendations emerged among the conversations.

Further Refinement of Themes, Organization and Prioritization of Recommendations, and Report of Writing Progress.

At the third meeting, each team member provided an update of their writing, work that was still needed, and whether new themes were identified. We decided that Israel as a topic was initially included in the emotional reactions, but it needed to stand on its own or be included as a dimension of a different theme. Each individual was receptive to others reading their work. We agreed that we aren't sure exactly how each theme relates to the other themes, and this will become clearer as we write. Each of us agreed to refine our writing by reading conversations 18 and 19 as well as the emails that had come in, thus providing one more opportunity for analysis.

The team lead agreed to put the themes into the format requested by the sponsors.

The second half of the third meeting was spent organizing the Excel list. We separately and then collectively categorized each of the recommendations as best as we could, and T#4 added to the Excel spreadsheet the categorization. The team also recognized that they had some recommendations to give based on the sum total of the work rather than the comments that arose from the conversations. We began to generate this list. We also tried to identify low-hanging fruit, defined as recommendations that would be easy to do and that would have little resistance from the community.

Writing was done iteratively, and the team created a brief description of each of the themes in preparation for the community check.

Community Conversation Forums: Our Community Check

We hosted two community conversation forums, one on Zoom, and one in person. The in-person forum was recorded for individuals who could not attend either forum. After introductions and a description of the process, the data team presented the seven preliminary themes. Ninety congregants filled out a feedback form that asked them (a) which themes resonate with them, (b) which themes are unclear, (c) what is missing from the themes. Congregants also received an extensive checklist with all recommendations that were mentioned in the forums (n=134), and they were given space to offer additional recommendations. The team made it clear that just because someone offered a

recommendation, there was no guarantee that the synagogue would follow it. They were also informed that additional surveys would follow this conversation, and that they would have access to the final report. Participants were able to fill out the forms in person or online. Additional forms were brought to morning minyan and left in the sanctuary to maximize the number of people who could fill out the forms.

The team collated the comments from the feedback forms by theme. The team also tabulated the number of people who responded to each recommendation. The team met one final time to review and modify the themes identified, and the final report was written iteratively. We also used some of the recommendations in our writing, such as defining all Hebrew terms.

Appendix B. Preliminary Community Conversation Themes



Preliminary Community Conversation Themes June 24 and 27, 2024

Access an electronic copy of this document by clicking the QR Code or at:
<https://tinyurl.com/bjcthemes>

Send questions about the Community Conversations to Leslie Morris, Sara Lynn Newberger, or Sharon Press

Our congregation held 19 community conversations with volunteer facilitators and notetakers. Congregants were asked:

- *One thing you appreciate about Beth Jacob*
- *What you hope or dream of when you imagine Beth Jacob in 5-10 years*
- *Three areas could Beth Jacob focus in the next 5 years to become the shul you hope for and dream of*
- *What you are taking away from this session*

Through Participatory Action Research methods, our data team identified seven preliminary themes, and we want your feedback. As you read each theme, think about what resonates with you, what's unclear, what could be refined, and what's missing. We will use your feedback in our final report to the congregation.

Summary of Preliminary Themes:

Theme #1: We strive to welcome and include everyone, especially across the generations. We aspire to be egalitarian, celebrating our diversity in age, Jewish practice, sexual orientation, gender identities, family structures, and interfaith relationships, and we try to include everyone who walks through our doors. We want to be an inclusive congregation that “feels like family,” and “nobody feels like an outsider.” At almost every meeting, one or more people touched on some aspect of appreciating the mix of ages at Beth Jacob and the interaction between the youngest and oldest members of our conversations.

Areas identified where we could do better at improving inclusivity: (a) interfaith families who can not participate fully in services, (b) perceived “cliques” at shul that might unintentionally exclude other members, (c) congregants with less knowledge of Hebrew who can’t participate, (d) helping people who live far away be able to participate, and (e) improving our accessibility, such as lighter large-print prayer books, ensuring that people with food allergies can eat at events, and accessible bathrooms.

Theme #2: We thrive on education. Congregants focused on both youth and adult education over 80 times in the conversations. Many grieve the loss of the Talmud Torah afternoon school and look to new, intentional ways to re-envision and commit to educating Jewish children. A strong educational program was seen as a way to build new membership and engagement. Conversations discussed education across the lifespan - from young children to coming of age (b’nei mitzvah) training to post-b’nei mitzvah learning to adult education. Sample adult education topics include foundational education about Judaism, building synagogue skills, more post-kiddush learning, and intellectually stimulating topics.

Theme #3: Creating and Finding our Community: We want to connect more, both in and out of services. Community members consistently asked for more opportunities to connect with other members. We suggested building on successful events, like the Rosh Hashanah picnic (Tashlich), the Sci-Fi group, Purim gift baskets (mishloach manot), and expanding social/study groups (havurot), study partners

(chevruta), and affinity groups (e.g., bike riders). Our community members were especially enthusiastic about ways to get to know each other through Shabbat dinners. Participants expressed enthusiasm about working with the larger Jewish community to host larger events, like Israeli dancing and music, which could develop a sense of belonging within the broader Jewish community. And participants asked for more ways to connect with other social organizations to improve our communities, much like we do at Dorothy Day. If we offer more types of activities, we have more entry points for new members and are able to see ourselves as part of something bigger.

Theme #4: How We Do Prayer and Services. The Beth Jacob community appreciated that we offer a variety of services and that congregants lead them (e.g., morning minyan, Shabbat, holidays). Many but not all participants wished that Shabbat and holiday services could be shortened, and also expressed a hope for greater musicality and enthusiasm from both the service leaders and from the congregation. Congregants also expressed concern for how to better include those who are less Hebrew literate and for non-Jewish family members. Many hoped that Friday night (Kabbalat Shabbat) services would be reintroduced as a regular option. Finally, many wanted to have the synagogue offer classes to expand the pool of service leaders and Torah readers.

Theme #5: Stability and Growth

At least one person in every community conversation expressed concern about stability in meeting the basic needs of the synagogue. People wanted stability or growth in:

- Financial Sustainability: Congregants expressed concern over whether the synagogue can afford to do the programming it wants, hire the staff it needs, keep lay leaders/volunteers from burning out, and have resources to build community and take care of our building and grounds. Solving this issue was a primary focus expressed by congregants.
- Membership: We want a “thriving community” with “diverse members.” Many see having a larger paying membership as key to financial stability.
- A Healthy Volunteer Pool So We Don’t Burn Out: We saw increased dependence on volunteers combined with the numbers of volunteers as “thin” and declining, and we are concerned that volunteers can meet the synagogue’s needs. A sample comment was, “People need to volunteer to take the burden off the core group.”
- Lay-Leaders: Congregants asked for stronger lay leadership and leadership development opportunities for board members and committee chairs. The most important leadership skill mentioned was the ability to facilitate discussion of difficult topics.
- Personnel: We are craving stability in our personnel, with overwhelming spontaneous support (46 participants) for Rabbi Tamar to be our next leader. Comments for Rabbi Justin and Sonya were similar in positivity.
- Building and Grounds, including Space Utilization, Kitchen, and Security: We would like to improve the physical appearance, comfort, and accessibility of our synagogue so it is more desirable to be together. Kiddush builds community, and we seek to stabilize the way that we eat on Shabbat and at events. While not discussed often, when security was discussed, there were strong feelings and concerns that our current security operations drain our resources and reduce our inclusivity.
- Transparent Communication: We seek consistent, transparent communication about events, processes, policies, finances. We value when emails get returned. We want “explanations and not rumors.”

Theme #6: Israel

Israel did not appear as a strong focus in the Community Conversations. People advocated for a variety of positions. The closest that the remarks came to consensus was that Israel was a difficult topic right now, and that we should recognize this diversity of opinion and strive to talk about Israel in an inclusive and accepting fashion.

Theme #7: It's up to us

The community members who attended the conversations demonstrated overwhelming care about the members of the BJC community, both living and deceased. Some conversations reported a sense of loss, with nostalgic memories of Beth Jacob in an ideal past. Most felt a need to move forward, to build better engagement with community members, and to improve participation in Beth Jacob's services and activities. We especially welcomed the opportunity to engage in these discussions and recognized that if we want to make Beth Jacob stronger and more vibrant, we need to step up and work toward that goal.

Appendix C. Feedback Form



Community Conversation Feedback Form

June 24 and 27, 2024

Deadline for Submission: July 2, 2024

Access an electronic copy of this feedback form by clicking the QR Code or at:
<https://tinyurl.com/bjc-feedback-e-form>

Send questions about the Community Conversations to Leslie Morris, Sara Lynn Newberger, or Sharon Press

Our congregation held 19 community conversations with volunteer facilitators and notetakers. Congregants were asked:

- *One thing you appreciate about Beth Jacob*
- *What you hope or dream of when you imagine Beth Jacob in 5-10 years*
- *Three areas to focus on in the next 5 years to become the shul you hope for and dream of*
- *What you are taking away from this session*

Through Participatory Action Research methods, our data team identified seven preliminary themes, and we want your feedback. The themes are:

#1: We strive to welcome and include everyone, especially across the generations (l'dor v'dor).

#2: We thrive on education.

#3: Creating and Finding our Community: We want to connect more, both in and out of services.

#4: How we do prayer and services

#5: Stability and Growth:

Financial Stability, Membership, Volunteer Pool, Lay-Leaders, Personnel, Building and Grounds, and Transparent Communication

#6: Israel

#7: It's up to us

You can access summaries of the preliminary themes at <https://tinyurl.com/bjcthemes>.

Feedback on Preliminary Themes. Please consider the preliminary themes found by the data team. For each preliminary theme, think about what resonates with you, what's unclear, what could be refined, and what's missing. You can answer about one or more of the themes. If you are able, please provide feedback on the electronic form (the QR code at the top of the page). Extra paper is available if you need it. Your voice matters. There are no right or wrong answers.

Your feedback will be used in our final report to the congregation.

1. Which of the themes resonate with you? How so? Please share any stories or examples from your own experience if you're willing.

2. Which themes are unclear or could be clarified or refined? How so?

3. What is missing from our themes? Remember, the questions asked during the conversations were about what you appreciate, what you value, and where BJC should put its efforts over the next 5-10 years.



Recommendations. On the next few pages, you will see all of the recommendations listed as part of our conversations. We opted for a longer list in order to be inclusive - every idea that made it into the conversation is listed below, organized by theme. Please check all that you would like Beth Jacob Leadership to consider implementing. There will be an opportunity to provide additional recommendations, as our volunteer note takers could have missed recommendations, or you might be inspired to suggest something else.

DISCLAIMER: The feedback you provide will be used to refine and expand our understanding of what community members wished the community would focus on. Your responses do not commit Beth Jacob leadership to adopt any of these recommendations. For example, some recommendations are in direct conflict with each other. Others require a longer timeline than would be feasible. As Beth Jacob leadership continues to refine these recommendations, please expect future surveys about these and other issues that will help with our planning.

We strive to welcome and include everyone, especially across the generations.

- Reach out to get more people involved.
- Randomized seating at meals and events (oneg/kiddush)
- More conversations about inclusion
- Check in on congregants whose attendance drops off
- Rideshare/shuttle/bike group or other ways for members who live far away to attend events
- Large-print prayer books
- Have people wear name tags
- Welcome new members after services, not just out-of-towners
- Increase more opportunities for non-Jewish family members to participate
- Increase opportunities for congregants to build their Hebrew skills to participate

- Friday night dinners with intergenerational mixing
- No moving chairs to full tables - sit with someone who is alone instead
- Find ways for more seniors to be involved
- Recognize our widows and widowers community
- Plan events so that people of all ages want to attend and participate fully
- Start a program where young families visit elders
- Provide inclusive events for community members who do not have children
- Define all Hebrew terms so congregants can learn them

Additional Comments and Recommendations:

We thrive on education

- Start a traditional afternoon Hebrew school
- Mechanical tefillah (prayer) instruction (when to bow, when to wrap/unwrap tzitzit for Shema)
- Learn how to read torah (leyn)
- Learn how to lead services
- Express Jewish values as practices (keeping kosher, lulav/etrog), including to new members
- More post-kiddush speakers
- Additional adult education opportunities
- Adult b'nai mitzvot classes
- Teach us how to have difficult conversations (e.g., finances, Israel, Social Justice)

We want to connect more, both in and out of services.

- More service opportunities not at BJC, e.g., Dorothy Day
- More social events that don't necessarily meet at shul on Shabbat, e.g., book clubs, bowling, women's groups, men's clubs
- Restart delivering Purim gift baskets (mishloach manot)
- Topic tables after meals
- Connect to Jewish Community Action programs
- Host shul events at congregants' houses, e.g., Talmud class not at the shul
- Social justice outreach to communities outside BJC
- More sessions like the community conversations
- Community conversations for teens
- A retreat offsite for congregants

How we do prayer and services:

- Host learner's minyans so people can build skills
- Keep full Torah reading
- Switch to triennial Torah reading cycle ($\frac{1}{3}$ of the reading each week)
- Shorten shabbat morning service
- Revise/dynamize the Shabbat morning service
- More Friday Evening (Kabbalat Shabbat) potlucks
- Add an afternoon service (mincha) on Shabbat
- Have Havdalah bonfires when the timing is right
- Saturday evening (Havdalah) services with intergenerational mixing
- Have an additional service with more English on Shabbat
- Outdoor davening, davening at a park?
- Facilitate more singing (music director or monthly chazan or choir, playlists to spread new tunes, more time introducing melodies)
- Provide transliterated prayer book
- Modernize/shorten High Holiday services
- Alternate services for people who want to connect spiritually
- Monthly youth service
- Help us find a key to sing in
- End masking policies on Shabbat

Israel

- Clearer vision from Rabbi
- Welcome all new members no matter their views on Israel
- Teach us how to be more accepting of the many views our congregation has

Financial Stability

- Fewer requests for money from members
- Consistently scheduled fundraiser, esp. not in winter
- Build sustainable financial model (Annual Sustaining Contribution)
- No more fundraisers
- Get external help with fundraisers
- Explore other avenues to fundraising
- Explore grant opportunities

Stabilize Communication and Increase

Transparency

- Transparency on shul's governance structure (both formal and informal)
- Open communication about how people are asked to join the Board of Trustees
- Explain what our membership looks like. Do we have to be larger?
- More transparency from the Board - minutes, bylaws,
- Remind congregation that most board meetings are open to all congregants.
- More in-person meetings
- Better communication with members (Kol Yaakov, lay leadership)
- Better data collection, maintenance, security (Shulcloud)
- Maximize use of shulcloud (accessibility section on website),
- Increase transparency and communication about all of the details and timing of b'nei mitzvah training.

Stabilize our volunteer pool, which could be subject to burnout.

- More recognition for lay leadership
- Bring back assigned kitchen duty
- Bring back assigned greeter duty
- Ask people individually to help rather than on-bimah pleas
- Create formal ways for people to be involved in volunteering
- Hotline people can call if they want to volunteer (e.g., office phone)
- Link volunteer hours to Annual Sustaining Contribution (ASC), especially if people can not afford dues

Stabilize and Grow Membership

- Develop a strategic plan for gaining new members and maintaining current membership, marketing, "Honeymoon Israel" model
- Exit interview for people who resign or congregants who leave
- Match new or prospective members with an established household
- Membership applications at lobby w/ QR code
- Investigate what other shuls are doing to attract new members.
- Types of synagogue membership for teenagers and college students.
- Formalize how we notice when people no longer attend services.
- New Member Orientation
- Better online presence to attract new members.
- Use education as a way to introduce BJC to prospective members.
- Attract new immigrants (e.g., Russian) to be members.

Improve our Spaces:

- Improve nursery
- Playground for kids
- Basketball hoop
- Better food
- Give up the building to afford more staff/programming
- Improve the building
- Improve the bathrooms including their accessibility
- Build a patio outside the social hall
- Build a climbing wall outside
- Make environmental improvements (e.g., charging station, solar panels, turf grass, trees)
- Add a community garden
- Assess for mold
- Improve the sound system, especially in the sanctuary
- Keep the security guard but unlock the front doors
- Minimize the kiddush lunch
- Rebuild the kitchen
- Endow a kiddush fund

Stabilize Paid Personnel, including Rabbinical Presence

- Hire reliable permanent staff (executive director, kitchen manager, program manager, director of community engagement, musician in residence, education staff)
- Keep Rabbi Tamar
- Keep Rabbi Justin
- Keep Sonya
- Create "holiday committees," where groups of individuals are responsible for certain events, like the Purim Carnival

Develop our Leaders:

- Leadership development for the board
- Leadership development for committee chairs
- Development of volunteer leaders
- Develop a larger and more stable pool of teachers
- Development of professional staff
- Develop the ability to lead difficult conversations
- Develop leaders to be focused on welcoming prospective members

- Teach the congregation what it means to be lay leadership
- Create more pathways to leadership so it can be self-generating
- Find ways for more people to become leaders
- Strategic visioning for the congregation
- Leadership development for singers
- Consistent musical leadership
- Leadership that looks to the future more than the past
- Teach leaders how to be stronger, more consistent communicators.
- Teach leaders not to act in vengeful/sniping ways.
- Strong leadership when the community is having a "golden calf moment" ... to lead people back
- Teach non-profit leadership
- Funding for leadership training and seminars.

Please provide any additional recommendations. You may continue on the back side of this paper

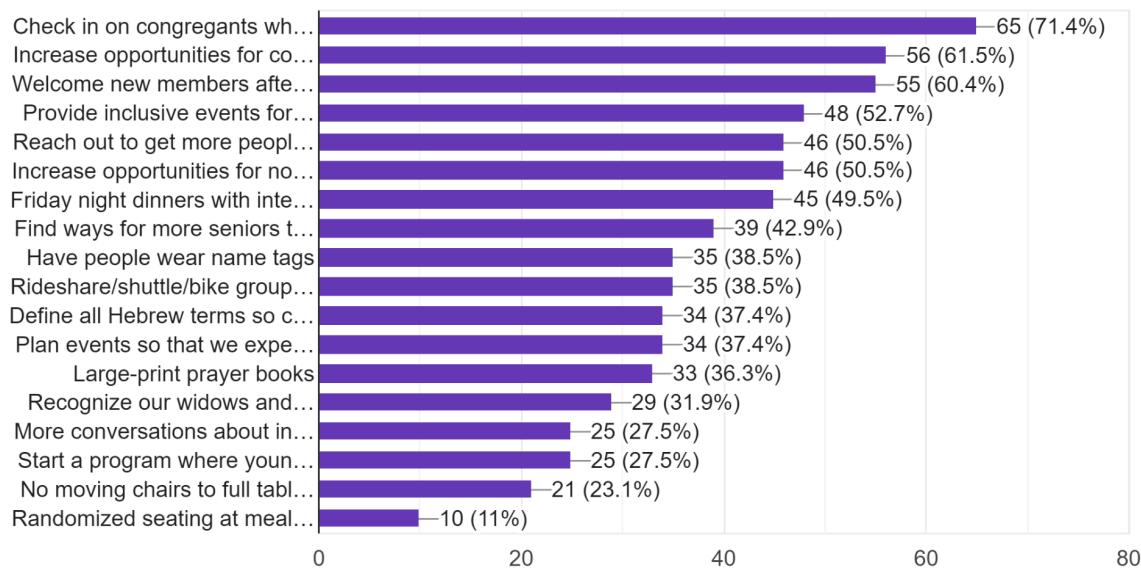
Please provide any additional information that you believe is relevant to the community conversations. Thank you.

Appendix D. Recommendations of Each Preliminary Theme: Frequency Distributions, Additional Recommendations, and Associated Comments

Please note - the percentages listed in these frequency distributions are calculated from the number of people responding to each theme, not to the entire list of recommendations. Only use percentages associated with all themes. These are in Table 1.

Recommendations for "We strive to welcome and include everyone, especially across the generations." Check all that apply.

91 responses



Additional Recommendations: Welcoming/Inclusion:

When offering an offsite event try to locate it on a transit line with frequent service.

Special readings for holidays. Recite "In Flanders Fields" on Memorial day. Recite the passage from Maccabees on Hanukkah. Sing a patriotic song on the Shabbat before July 4. These could help involve non-Jewish spouses. I recall that during lifestyle events, non-Jewish spouses, grandparents have been asked to recite one of the readings during services.

I think there could be some more thought about how to be inclusive of neurodiversity.

I think it might be helpful to think about how to address and heal from instances in which someone has had an experience that has made them feel excluded.

Seniors whose family has left town need more outreach.

BJ has not done a good job welcoming nonJewish family members in the past. That has been very hurtful. Is BJ really committed to improving the welcome to nonJewish members, especially in the b'nai mitzvah process? Are nonJewish parents allowed on the bimah for their child's bar/bat mitzvah. It wasn't possible in the past...

When encouraging people to mix up seating do it in a trauma informed way (ie ask people to do things don't force them to pick a new seat or leave their friends. People with hearing loss, trauma, autism etc may need to sit in specific spots within a room but should not be forced to disclose that to the group.)

Find ways to include people with sensory sensitivities.

Maintain options for people at high risk of complications from respiratory illnesses.

buddy system or sponsor family for those on a conversionary path to Judaism

Create more opportunities for people to volunteer in evenings and weekends. Some people would be willing to help out, but can't do so during the day.

Do we still have the Shabbat pre-kiddush kiddush? If so, eliminate it. For a congregation that wants to be inclusive, why do we have a gathering that if only for the "in-crowd?" As an outsider, it is very hurtful.

Explain what the services are about, what we are doing and why. Give context. Chabad does a great job at that. I would love to see activities, education, classes for those who are not as religious, and might want to do things outside of Shabbat - so that coming to Shul is part of their life - vs. only what they do on Shabbat. Could be spiritual retreats, women's groups, men's groups, etc.

For members with limited vision, mobility, etc., develop and provide a list of other members who are willing to provide rides to services and other BJC activities.

For prayerbook question, wrote in "LIGHTER".

For those learning Hebrew or still improving their spoken, chanted, or sung Hebrew it would be helpful to have service leaders to avoid fast chanting/singing so we can all keep up, even those of us still learning and improving our Hebrew. (I also think that all that we speak or chant or sing in services is either holy or worth mindfully directing to the prayerful in ourselves so that racing through texts, prayers is distracting me significantly from fulfilling that intention.)

Have red, blue and green cups at Kiddush with signs showing that red cups are guests, blue cups are for new members (within 1 year of joining) and green cups of "established" members or some version like this. Maybe a specific color cup for board members or those who are on the "outreach committee" so guests can identify them.

A follow-up to every guest with a personal invitation to the next Shabbat Service inviting them to sit next to them, or invitation to a Shabbat dinner, or next synagogue function. Membership development should be treated like fundraising. Identify a prospect, cultivate that prospect, invite that prospect to become a member, and then steward them throughout their membership.

I am not sure what intergenerational mixing means or what generations you are looking at. I think different generations have different interests as well as challenges. Even within generations there are challenges e.g. young singles between the ages of 25-35 and young couples with children ages 25-35. I am not sure that age in itself is as defining as stage in life.

How to feel more connected to BJ even though I live 1.5 hours (each way) out of town. Comments about streaming. While I don't do it regularly, I appreciate the opportunity to stream shabbat services. Currently the camera shows 1/3 on the bimah and 2/3 of often empty seats on the right and the left. I suspect the camera is placed where it can be most effective-still I wanted to mention this. Clearly there are more people at services-and they are sitting in places where they can hear better. Is there a way to know who else might be attending the streamed services?

I think providing name tags would be a great help in meeting and learning the names of those you do not know. As our congregation has grown this has been more of a challenge for me especially as I am not at shul as often as some.

I think some kind of programming that helps people reflect on why they may unintentionally be excluding others, and how they can notice that and act differently, would be a good way for us to grow in this area. This may include issues of racial diversity; some congregations do better than us in this regard.

I think that we might need to do more reach-out to seniors to find out what their obstacles are and how they want to participate. I think it's true that many seniors "drop out" at some time, but I'm not sure we

know why. Is it transportation, it it length of commitment and energy level, etc. Would they like to be included in celebration of haggim?
in addition to Hebrew words, remember to define all the acronyms and abbreviations! ASC, Mosh, BJUSY, PKL, Jew in the Pew and many more "BethJacobisms". Don't assume that everyone knows even if they have been members for a while :)
Increased consistent use of niggunim so everyone can join in and sing along, high energy.
Leadership development on all levels. Work to balance traditional tefilla with expanding singing, alternative ways of praying, quiet, not saying "every word". Education - text-based study, deep dives into Jewish themes (even Israel, Zionism, Jewish History, anti-Semitism.)
More activities so people meet and for community doing something together.
More music-maybe an alternative shorter service option once a month-then keep the traditional service the other 3 weeks or every week, but also offer another option to explore
Notice people who sit alone and introduce yourself Oh my heavens, don't tell people that they cannot sit with their friends after services. I find there are enough half-full tables that I can always find a group to join. As a relative newcomer, I sometimes sit with people I don't know. Most if not all have been friendly. I just have problems remembering their names when I see them again; hence, nametags.
Orientation program for new(er) members. Define BJC acronyms and jargon. Please be careful to not micro-manage or control people's behavior to try to compel people to be ostensibly more inclusive in ways that ultimately feel unnatural and contrived. Yes, it's good to create and promote a community culture where we are warm and open with new/different people, and we can do institutional and programming work to create welcoming space, but telling people that they have to sit with strangers instead of friends, or have to wear a nametag in a place that has been their home for 20 years, or translate every Hebrew word into English feels forced and artificial. Be aware that sometimes an action intended to promote inclusion can feel excluding or off-putting to others. In genuine community people have to be allowed and supported to be true to themselves. I do think that *personalized* check-ins (Someone once sent me an email when I hadn't been to shul in 6 weeks, and I was in the pew the next Shabbat) and deliberate personal relationships are helpful: inviting people to Shabbat dinner in our homes, chevruta learning relationships, volunteering together.
Review building access hours on Shabbat. It's damn cold to sit in a car for 15-20 minutes in sub-zero temperatures before you can be allowed in.
Restored emphasis on a modest aesthetic. Sometimes congregants who are not included are not "new", they are just not as included--because they don't have children, because their spouse isn't as active as they are, because they just don't "fit in" with the groups that BJ has. "Newness" isn't necessarily what excludes some congregants.
We could solve some of our volunteer burnout and build community by creating "clubs" around shul needs, especially in the kitchen. i.e. monthly of baking club, soup making, etc. Creating a club or group that meets monthly for each goal can connect people and create camaraderie and build connection.
welcome not so new members after services too--perhaps encourage people to introduce or especially to reintroduce themselves to others--don't be embarrassed to say "Remind me who you are..."
COMMENTS - Welcoming and Inclusion
All those suggestions sound good, actually, except some shouldn't be "rules" rather suggestions. People do like to sit with friends, esp if they are infrequent attendees--discouraging this might discourage attendance
This is as much a mind set and a consciousness and a set of behaviors as anything else. We need to develop our habits.

several of these things (ways for people without Hebrew skills to be involved, defining Hebrew terms, involving seniors) are already things we have available or have tried in the past, so a big question that comes up for me is what isn't working with what we're already doing that people are asking for more of it?

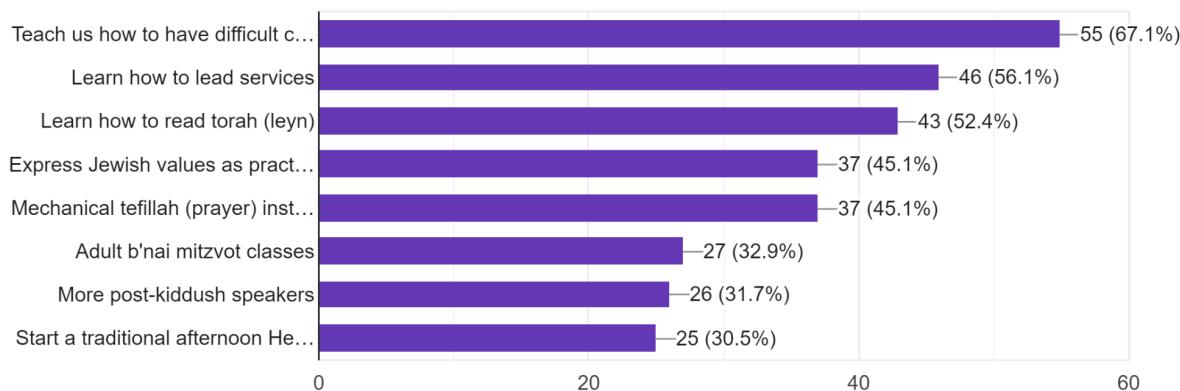
Some of these seem very hard to implement, or enforce. Eg, how could you define every Hebrew term ever used in a synagogue?! But, providing resources to support those who aren't (as) familiar with Hebrew seems good.

As someone who doesn't know Hebrew, I already feel invited to participate (others may not, I understand).

after "have people wear name tags" is written "NO". also, there is a difference between the item on this form about Increase opportunities for congregants to build their Hebrew skills to participate. The one here says "congregants with less Hebrew skills to participate."

Recommendations for "We thrive on education." Check all that apply.

82 responses



Additional Recommendations - Education

A book club focused on educational topics e.g. reading Ethics, Prayer, Jewish history, Jewish approach to death and mourning, Jewish views of God, Teaching Children About God. Shared viewing of online, Jewish-themed, speakers, programs, etc.

Beginning Hebrew classes for adults that don't know Hebrew

Create more structure so that when people do gain new skills, they receive regular invitations to use them. Especially relevant to leading services and leyning.

Education that extends beyond Judaism, maybe around how Jews see or what we would do around the major social and cultural issues of our time - or why there is a systemic need to hate - with one example being antisemitism. Difficult conversations can include how to talk about our politics, Israel, Zionism, etc. Also, maybe take a moment and explain what is going on in the service vs. assuming we all know - because some of us have no idea. We just do it because we have always done it. Spiritual teachings, and comparative religions, also could be interesting.

Encourage individuals who are members and have interesting occupations/positions to share their expertise at a post-kiddush program so we learn both about a new topic and more about these members. Ex. a lawyer who works on behalf of immigrants, a social worker who works with those homeless

Formal post b'nei mitzvah skill building to participate as service leaders and Torah and Haftorah chanters

I might be more likely to participate in different (or more) educational activities if I didn't have to worry about kid coverage. For example, planned activities for kids during post-kiddish learning.

Keep offering and Get more comfortable offering multiple options: live, live stream, zoom, even seek new members who live out of town and could join and participate on zoom

Maximize involvement in, and encouragement of cooperative, community-wide education.

More education about Zionism and Israel

More high level adult education for those who are learned. And skills based learning for those who need it in order to participate more fully.

More programs with Rabbi Ebn Leader, Joey Weisenberg, ...

more transliterated

Secular learning opportunities, creative learning opportunities, learning about other communities and faiths

Serious learning for the folks who have a background. Scholar in residence. More classes for adults of all ages and intergenerational classes, too.

The mechanics of Tefillah could be made available on our website.

videotape classes so that we all have access at some time of day or night, or a different season, to learn with the community, even if we can't be around at the appointed class time

Comments

30 years ago we had separate classes for K, 1st and 2nd graders. 1st graders were taught torah (specifically bereshit,) and with 2nd graders were taught the shachrit shabbat service, with 2nd graders leading. Now . . . ?

After "teach us how to have difficult conversations" is written, "Yes".

Be mindful of varying degrees of interest in some jewish practices, like wrapping tzitzit

checked box: "additional adult education opportunities". Emphasized: "Teach us how to have difficult conversations" box.

Continue to offer good adult education, with both daytime & some evening options, if possible.

Corrected adult "b'nai mitzvot" to "b'nai mitzvah" and wrote "need to know Hebrew [unclear]". (That word didn't look like "grammar" but that's what they meant.)

Express Jewish practices as values. (non-judgmental invitation to observance)

I would like to see more educational programming that relates jewish teaching to issues and ways of being present in the broader world. We do some of it, but I think there could be more - for learners of all ages.

I worry that the youth educational model that is moving forward will not be adaptive or innovative enough to meet families where they are at and create sustainable engagement. In one of the comments above, a "traditional afternoon Hebrew school" is mentioned. I think that rather than starting from a model that has worked in the past and adjusting, it may be necessary to step back from preconceived ideas and think about what will work best given the realities of now. I appreciate that a lot of thoughtful hard work is going into having a program to launch for the coming year. I hope that there will be flexibility and adaptability for that program to change and evolve as it moves forward.

I've been happy with the post-kiddush speaker program. Many of the above suggestions sound good. I'm not checking them because I can't commit to showing up, at least not in the coming year.

It is essential to have a generational passage of leadership, including reading Torah and leading services. How can we best enable that to happen?

Movie nights, book discussion groups - I see some education ideas overlap with the "Connect more" theme!

Next to "more post-kiddush speakers, which is checked, is "of Jewish content."

Express Jewish values as practices (keeping kosher, lulav/etrog), including to new members": I think this one needs to be done with care and tact as you might have a new member who is already machmir on kosher and learns gemara in chevruta on the regular. If you assume everyone new to BJC is new to Jewish observance you're going to end up sounding condescending to Jewishly literate new members.

Same thoughts - it's all about having the resources (eg, staff/volunteer time) to provide these. I may be in favor of them all, but we need to discern which actually have enough member demand to justify the resources.

Support and participate in our newly announced Limudim program

Teach the truth about Israel, not fairy tales. Educate about resistance in Israel by Israelis against the apartheid and the wars.

The afternoon Hebrew school does not have to be "traditional".

there is a slash through the word "difficult" in "teach us to have difficult conversations" and then, "no buzz words."

These are all great ideas, actually--but how much energy does the congregation have?

Think about timing of the classes or learning opportunities.

thriving on education doesn't always mean deep meaningful discussions, everything listed is very intimidating and makes me want to stay away from any education option

Uncomfortable addressing more traditionally conservative political perspectives. Feel congregation has moved away from these values.

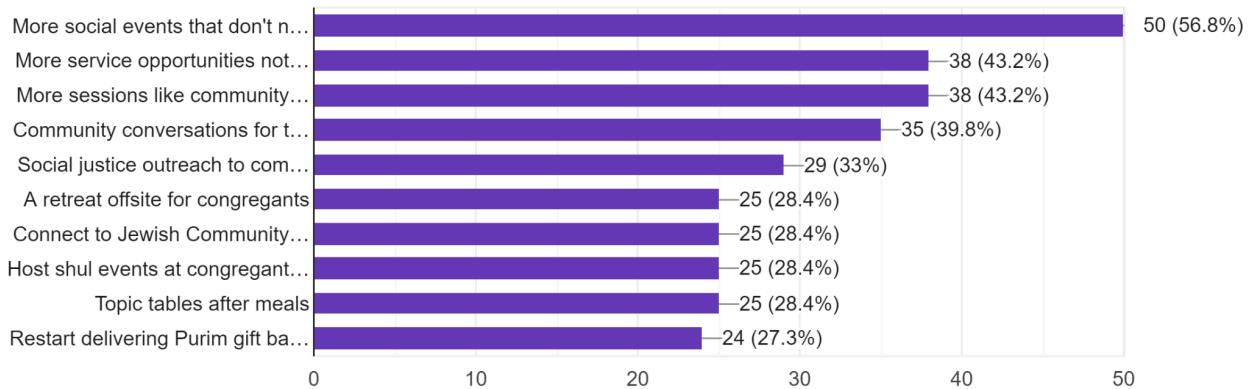
We used to have a lot more events and classes for adult learning, on weeknights and on Sundays. I don't like PKL because after 3+ hours in shul I want to go outside for a walk or home to take a nap. For adult education, I want high quality education where I will really learn something substantial and worthwhile, about Torah, or Jewish history, or Jewish ethics. I hope that these kinds of classes might be offered on Tuesday nights alongside Limudim for children/youth. It would be lovely to have the building full of people of all ages engaged in multiple learning opportunities. FWIW, I will not participate in anything on Zoom. I want in person learning only.

Why we say certain prayers. The reason for the flow of the siddur.

Re "mechanical tefillah" to learn more about why to bow, wrap tzitzit- ie spiritual reasons for these actions.

Recommendations for, "We want to connect more, both in and out of services."

88 responses



Additional Recommendations About Connecting More

Communal Shabbat (Friday night) dinners monthly open to all

Community conversations about important topics.

Develop a structure for identifying people who would welcome shabbat dinner invitations, or can host, and bring those people together.

Form multigenerational Havurot with diverse makeup.

one-time events and/or havurot based on general neighborhoods, e.g. open sukkot, Shabbat dinners

The desire for connection could be coupled with the need for congregants to serve the community - so service projects together at shul. Like cleaning the kitchen, dusting the shelves and organizing books in the library, overall cleaning & tidying in the building, planting flowers or raking leaves, cooking & baking for kiddush.

Topic tables *during* meals. Plan the community conversations to be multi-generational. And think about how we can support families with young children so they can participate.

Women's and men's retreats, as well as co-ed

More ways for out of towners to connect with community. Perhaps more ways for those who might be interested to connect online.

Volunteer with JFS, Sholom, and other social service organizations.

Additional Comments

"yes" written after "More sessions like Community Conversations."

Again, many of these ideas sound good, but I am not checking many because I'm not able to commit to participating at this time.

as part of our activities relating to social justice we should not demonize groups who are critical of Israel.

Events at congregant's houses lead to accessibility and inclusivity issues. We have to be careful about that,

I assume mishloach manot was stopped for financial reasons? That is the appearance.

I did not check host shul events at members' houses or offsite retreats due to my concern that mobility limitations could prevent participation. In planning events, there needs to be a commitment to accessibility so that all who want to participate can do so. This applies to all BJC sponsored events and programs. Sometimes this might mean conducting the event via Zoom or offering a hybrid event although, in my experience, hybrid (onsite and online) events are problematic because in-person/onsite attendants tend to be the functioning participants with Zoom/online participants functioning mainly as observers.

I like finding other routes for people to connect with each other at/via the shul - relationships are the foundation of community.

I'm not exactly clear what the advantages/disadvantages are to having gatherings off site. If they are more accessible to more people, that's good, but it may end up creating more cliques, not fewer.

I'm not sure why the mishloach manot were stopped or who really benefits from getting them from the shul. I guess it feels like some people will get lots from their friends and don't need more. Maybe just give them to the seniors in the shul or others who are more likely to be less 'connected'? Again, I'm thinking about the resources involved.

I think there are already so many opportunities that I'm not excited about adding new many new ones. I don't know if all the events that currently take place are well attended. Perhaps BJC could evaluate to determine effectiveness or popularity of different event types.

I would want more information on possible Social Action programs and service opportunities before committing.

It's already being done, but not advertised

Make BJ richer for doing more than having services. Is there a model that can be "copied" at any other TC congregation, or any other one elsewhere out of town? Some of the Reform shuls seem to be vibrant, eg, Mt Zion, and Beth El (conservative).

Would the community be more positive about social justice outreach and service opportunities once it is a little more secure inside its own organization? When events, get-togethers, etc., are running a little more smoothly then we can look outside and offer our help.

Of course, all hinges on volunteers to organize these good recommendations.

The mishloach manot deliveries I understand were originally done for a smaller segment of the congregation, those unable to drive or the like. I would be in favor of restarting the program for those people. But not to the entire congregation. It's a lot of work to do it for the entire congregation and it uses up a lot of volunteer time.

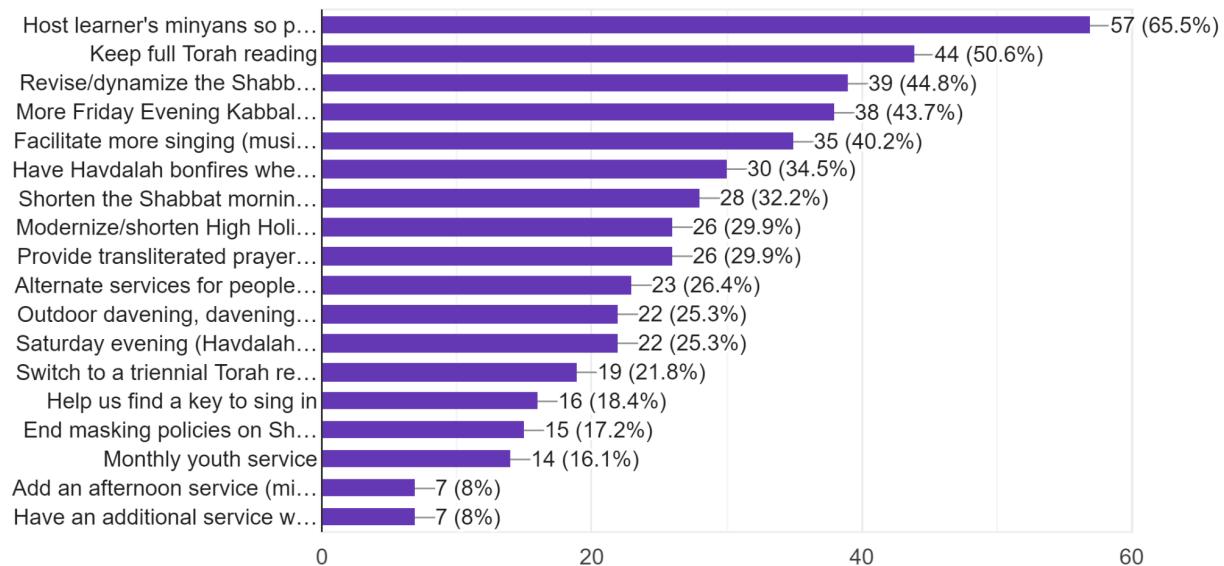
The social hall is too loud for topic tables.

there are so many options to connect in educational settings and in shul, can we find other ways to bring people together

With COVID still a serious concern for some, a lot of activities I would consider ideal for building and strengthening interpersonal ties within our community may not be attractive to those folks. Zoom and live-streaming are useful tools, but they don't solve every problem, sadly.

Recommendations for "How we do prayer and services." Please check all that apply.

87 responses



Additional Recommendations - Prayer

bring back Friday night minyan

Consider a Kabbalat Shabbat without the potluck and have it meet at Beth Jacob as it used to. Our efforts to build community are fantastic but we also might want to ask if there is still room for simply group prayer to have a place.

DON'T CHANGE THE WAY SERVICES ARE CURRENTLY RUN. Adding music or having things in English or shortening the service will diminish the service. It is GREAT THE WAY IT IS.

End Bima masking, BJC any key is the right key. I do not know music - what is a key? There are now 5 or 6 prayers before putting away the Torah. Can't we give up a few?

Find ways to improve musicality without a chazan or choir.

Keeping masking on the bima and in section A to be inclusive to people with compromised immune systems or who want added protection from illness.

Have online recordings of melodies so people can learn them at home.

Hire a cantor (there, I said it!)

Hire a cantor who can bring new and traditional melodies, lead and encourage the congregation to sing together in joy and prayer

Hybrid havdalah services. Length of services is an interesting issue. It seems that a majority of the congregation arrives at services around 10:30. What might this imply? Since I sometimes stream services, I find the beginning (psalm section) can be meaningful or boring.

Keep masking policies in safe on Shabbat (this actually doesn't really seem related to prayer and services, exactly, but I felt the need to add it in here since one of the recommendations above suggests the opposite).

Music, shorter services, Chavurah's? where we can be with people who are where we are spiritually

Please: Absolutely do not end masking policies on Shabbat. This will exclude some people. Requiring masks in one section excludes no one. (On bimah during Torah service could be more of an issue; I

would strongly prefer to see the current policy continued.) Note: one of the reasons I began attending Beth Jacob rather than Mt Zion is because of the mask policy.

My preference: If the service is shortened, start later and still end at noon. Others may wish otherwise.

Is it possible rather than to add services (e.g., service with more English), to have, say, one service per month that is different from the norm? I am concerned that additional Shabbat services could tax both rabbis and lay service leaders past what is reasonable.

Keep the outdoor tables as an option for kiddush when weather is cooperative

Oh, and we will never all agree on a key to sing in.

Providing transliterated prayer book only if there's enough demand.

rather than end masking policies on Shabbat - make masking totally optional in all areas of the sanctuary.

Re-emphasize the founding emphasis on traditional worship forms, modestly carried out, as congregational common ground.

Stop using the prayer for the State of Israel and substitute it with a prayer for ALL the people of the Land (unnamed)

The English additions to the Shabbat morning service could be shortened and/or alternated instead of doing them all every week. Divrei Torah could be shorter and thus more effective. And please, the announcements could certainly be cut! I would rather see that time used to enable people to say out loud who they are making a healing prayer for, and for introductions, or just to shorten the time.

The masking policy is good already, although maybe it can be discontinued on the bema. If a minyan wants to pray outside the main service why not encourage it once a month. Those people could be generating new methods for the main services.

The pulpit announcements and comments at the end of Shabbat services are TOO LONG! This is a time when people are ready to leave, hungry, and have had enough sitting. They should never be more than 5 minutes. Also, consider doing some announcements earlier to break them up. For example, try introducing guests and groups, giving b'nei mitzvah presentations, etc. before Musaf.

Workshops / classes for members to learn the in and outs of the service better

I'd like to see a conversation on what our values are about prayer, what kind of experience we are trying to create, what are our expectations.

Additional Comments - Prayer

This is a touchy, ongoing, and vexing issue. And, it is central to how we are together as a community. I think that Ebn Leader gave us some direction. I'd love to see us continue to work with him and continue to set direction for more dynamic/spiritual services.

I don't want a triennial Torah service, but I do want a shorter, more meaningful service. When the service is long, I lose my concentration and prayers become rote and less meaningful.

Adding/teaching music is complicated. We don't have the money for additional staff, and most people seem to not have the interest in (or are even against) a cantor. But maybe a music director is different enough to be palatable? A congregational choir seems unrealistic, even if desired, given participation for leading hakafot for Simchat Torah.

HOWEVER, I would love for more tunes and more musical services... especially singable tunes, not fancy ones that are difficult to follow & learn. Introduced slowly, over time, maybe sometimes with teaching during services (introduced as a niggun?). Or post-kiddish song sessions, maybe some for regular songs like in benches, some more chant-like [ie, Shefa Gold], or some to share/learn fun, new liturgical melodies.

After "end masking policies on Shabbat" this person wrote "NO!" and circled it.

An alternative spiritual service doesn't mean more English to me-more meditative

Do we have enough leadership, and space in the building, to regularly have both the current Shabbat service AND, in parallel, an abbreviated one? (Maybe this fits the "Have an additional service" suggestion above.) I wouldn't want us to interfere with youth education and activities, but if the logistics could be figured out, I could see continuing our current service and adding a "highlights" one, with only a selection of prayers, maybe lots more English, only 3 readings from the Torah, etc. Maybe this could also serve as the "Alternate service" idea listed above?

I don't know what "alternate services for people who want to connect spiritually" even means. I'd like to see more thought as to who gets called up to torah ... Birthdays, community accomplishments, volunteers, board members, people at bj for the first time ... and then give each person a chance to introduce themselves. Take more time here. Shorten shachrit. Pick up the tempo and the energy of the davening; add nigunim that everyone can join in on, which will raise spiritual connections. New tunes are only good if they are consistent so they can be learned ... I remember during our synagogue 2000 phase where everyone joined in on a prayer only to be stopped; the prayer was restarted with a new tune that no one knew, and wasn't introduced ... the prayer continued with zero community involvement.

I don't see why we would ever end masking. There are members of our community whose health and ability could be compromised by any number of transmissible illnesses. Masking harms almost no one and allows some who couldn't otherwise to participate.

I love the idea of revitalizing, finding space for more spirituality (broadly), and including more singing/new tunes. However, I don't think having a choir or cantor would improve these and instead they tend to make everyone else be quiet, passive.

While I think services are pretty long, I also appreciate maintaining tradition and feeling like we aren't cutting corners or becoming too 'reformed'.

I like the masking policy

I love the finding a key recommendation. It was probably earnest but I think it's hilarious (and not needed).

I realize there is no winning for everyone but part of why I am at BJC and not another shul is the Masking policy and traditional davening with full kriyah. I'm happy for there to be other options for folks who don't like those things but if they go completely away I probably do too. I'm open to changes in the masking policy if the powers that be can articulate how the ventilation in the room has been improved to mitigate viral transmission (or when a large volume of peer reviewed scientific evidence indicates improved ventilation and well fitting masks over nose & mouth while in close proximity to each other are not the best ways to interrupt the transmission of respiratory illnesses).

I thought that we already have a transliterated prayerbook.

key to sing: "good luck with that :-)"

Music is nice but I am not coming to services to be entertained. A chazan is nice if they can encourage congregants to sing but a choir seems too churchy. I grew up with a choir at my synagogue. I appreciate wanting shorter services and more English for those who are not familiar with Hebrew. I would hate to see the "dumbing down" of services. Art Scroll offers a linear transliterated prayer book with translation.

Very interested in outdoor services, as well as creative havdalah

We already have 6 copies of a transliterated siddur on the front table in the sanctuary, and Lev Shalem transliterates all parts of the service that the congregation says aloud together -- the presence of those could be announced from the bima. Absolutely, I'd love support for dynamic musicality & ruach for Shabbat & festival services. Our efforts in those areas are limited by both the need to fundraise for a paid music leader or music/davening programming and the limited capacity of volunteers to plan and execute liturgical education & programming without paid staff to do so. I don't know how we can be all things to all people though. We cannot have a full traditional service AND have more English/less Hebrew. We cannot have a shorter service AND more singing. We cannot have outdoor davening AND be fully accessible/inclusive. If we have an alternate "spiritual" service, and an alternate service with more English, and a learner's minyan with Hebrew, we'll need 3 x as many service leaders, and there won't be anyone left in the main sanctuary. I thought there already were youth services? Yes, yes, yes,

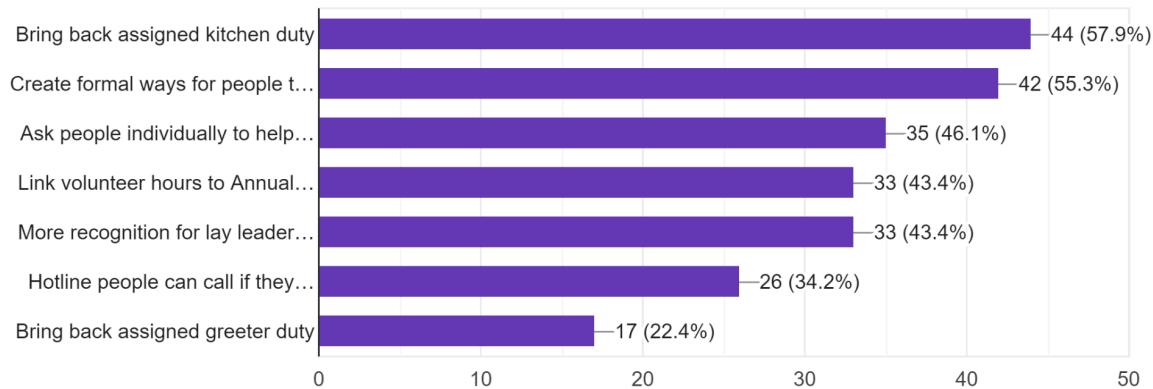
end mandatory masking on the bima!! The only mask policy should be "wear a mask if you're sick, or have had recent exposure to any ill person, or if you personally want to."

I'm not necessarily opposed to a second minyon, but I think this is something we should thoroughly discuss. As a community, I think we believe that Shabbat services are central. I know of communities where a second minyon has been very divisive.

Wrote "NO" next to "switch to triennial Torah reading."

Recommendations for "Stabilize our Volunteer Pool, which could be subject to burn out." Please check all that apply.

76 responses



Additional Recs - Volunteers

A list of committees and volunteer opportunities.

I wonder if a volunteer coordinator, or a few, would make sense (pad a volunteer position, not ironically)

Need to make clear what volunteer opportunities there are and how to sign up to help.

Phone members to request they volunteer. Some people do not volunteer unless asked.

provide lists of who to contact for different projects/committees

We should have an annual recognition for daveners and Torah readers.

Social volunteer opportunities!

Perhaps there could be outreach (could be phone call) to each household either annually or every other year to do a check-in / check-up and to raise these questions. Or it could be done in some other way if that is too labor intensive.

Assigned kitchen duty and assigned greeters works better than straight volunteering. It's a good idea to get the individual's buy-in first.

We could create a database of all the possible volunteer things that need to be done (and deadlines associated with each, if applicable) and explicitly teach an expectation and grow a communal practice of going online to sign up X times a month or Y times a year. That way, more jobs get done more consistently, our labor is egalitarian, and we build relationships by working together.

I like the idea of mandatory volunteer service, but not just kitchen & greeter duty as is

Recognize them by name and service by calling them to the torah. This also allows people to connect faces with names. Just reciting names does nothing

Also, call teachers to the torah, and introduce them to the congregation at the beginning of the year and at the end. Honor them.

Be aware of how much volunteering individual people are doing ... prevent burn-out and over usage of certain people..

Maybe such folks can be encouraged to sign up for helping at non Shabbat times to help in the kitchen with cooking, cleaning, organizing, etc.?

When I was a Board member at another shul, the Board divided up the membership list and each Board member called a segment of the congregation. Many people really appreciated that outreach.

I don't know if a hotline is the way to go, but it would be great to have a clear and easy process for volunteering, a way for people who need help with a project or an ongoing issue to announce that to people so that more people can sign up.

I really agree with the suggestion for more recognition/gratitude expressed toward volunteers and the work they do.

If you bring back assigning kitchen or greeter duty please consider allowing people to sign up before assigning them to do the thing. IE for July to December sign ups are due by May 15th if you don't sign up you will be assigned your required shifts. That way If I know I want to work with my friends we can pick a week to sign up together or I can schedule around a planned trip rather than having to find someone to switch with.

If you're assigning people to duties, provide a contact point for those duties so that people know who to ask for reasonable accommodations.

Also, if you are out of town when you are assigned, would you have a list of people that are assigned for a month so that you could call and find a switch? Just random thoughts.

I really agree with the suggestion for more recognition/gratitude expressed toward volunteers and the work they do. Recognizing someone's work should be specific in order to show that their individual contribution was noticed and valued. A broad "thank you to everyone who volunteered" doesn't let people know that they mattered individually.

We might be able to get more volunteers by just presenting them with the opportunity to go up to someone and ask "hey, do you need help with anything?"

Individual asks for volunteering are way more likely to succeed than a general call though I realize that individual asks are less likely to reach everyone in the community.

If we did a new member orientation we could get people to sign up there - to volunteer - and maybe use the annual meeting or another town hall to re-introduce the congregation to what is happening - issues, concerns, wins, changes (esp after this effort) and ask for volunteers there.

Maybe also electronically add a sign up on the weekly newsletter.

Lastly, people volunteer when asked - so maybe we need to individually reach out and ask

COMMENTS

Are you going to ask people to resign from the shul if they are no longer coming to services?

I have a lot of experience with kitchen duty. You would think I would vote for "Bring back assigned kitchen duty," but I think it's more complicated than just assigning it. A piece of this may be there are people who do not want to "work" on Shabbat and so won't be ok with assigned kitchen duty.

Assigned duty on Shabbat might not work for some (I am one of those; I volunteer at other times).

On asking people to help individually: I just met with someone from the Kesher Committee about what I want from the community / how I might volunteer. One note: if a congregant indicates an interest in, say, serving on a committee, there needs to be follow up from the committee. It's worse than nothing to ask what a member wants and then not to follow up. And yes, this is a lot of work

As to linking ASC to volunteer hours: be very, very careful with this, lest it look like if you don't have money, then you should clean the toilets. Not literally the toilets, of course, but you get what I'm saying. If you want to recognize *both* financial *and* volunteer contributions as valuable, that is great. Some people can contribute one; some people can contribute the other; some people can contribute both; and a few people are not in a position to contribute either. Everyone who can should be encouraged; no one should be shamed.

I didn't like the "assigned" duties because, too often, the date I was given conflicted with another obligation and it was a royal pain for me to call around and arrange to swap with someone else.

Especially given all the leadership reorganization that's happening, it's really hard to know who to talk to about volunteering or what volunteers would be needed for besides the obvious greeters and kitchen crew.

I don't think we need two greeters and security volunteers and sanctuary greeters at all times on Shabbat mornings. Greeting duty is a pleasure, but we are draining our volunteers.

There are many other volunteer jobs, and some things that people might be better suited to: cleaning & organizing the kitchen monthly, overall cleaning & tidying in the building weekly or monthly, an on-call crew for occasional maintenance and fix-it projects, planting flowers or raking leaves, cooking & baking for kiddush, helping in the office, helping plan and execute services and holiday events, planning and leading educational or social events. Right now, I fold and hang the tallitot attractively every week before Shabbat -- I'm the only person who does that, and if I don't do it no one else does. Can more than one person do a task? The Purim decorations have been hanging from the social hall ceiling since, well, since Purim. Items that used to be hung on the back wall of the sanctuary were taken down last Rosh Hashanah and never hung back up. Volunteers could do that! -- if there were an easily accessible well-organized list of needed volunteer tasks available for congregants to view and sign up for online.

(I'm autistic, I'll happily do extra kitchen duty but would really struggle with the social skills of being a greeter. I'm new enough I don't know who I need to contact to make that request for a reasonable adjustment to my membership duties if these become assigned duties).

I would have loved to help lead services. Being asked last minute, on the spot, doesn't work for me. If I know in advance a part of the service I might be asked to lead occasionally, I would study and practice it and not feel overwhelmed on the spot when asked, and decline.

I'm torn on the linking of ASC to volunteer hours, on the one hand I think it's a good idea but putting a burden of additional volunteer hours on our lowest income members feels like a turn off. Given the housing price point of Mendota Heights our low income members are already facing a more significant commute to shul than higher income members might. Also if one is working a low wage job they may not have the schedule autonomy to volunteer for additional time at shul. If you're without a car, the bus doesn't stop near shul so that is an additional barrier to volunteering. While I think we should welcome people with lower incomes who feel like they want to "make up" for their lack of money with volunteer time I think mandating it could quite easily turn lower income folks like me off of shul. (I'm above the Federal poverty line but below the MinnesotaCare cut off.)

If it is assigned or compensated, it's not volunteering. We need to address our real problem. We have 360 member families who are not showing up when they used to. So, what's different. We've become a culture of fear, ruled by it.

If someone is a volunteer, it implies without arm-twisting. "

insufficient knowledge; the ones I checked seemed easy to implement

Kitchen duty is tricky for people who live out of town. Lavish kiddushes and requests for funding them are uncomfortable for people who don't want to or are unable to attend services often.

Maybe include paper volunteer sign-ups at services to catch less tech-savvy people.

More transparency here would also help. What are all things we rely on volunteers to do? What things are not being done because no one has stepped forward? What things used to be done but no longer because that one volunteer left or died?

Please bring back the assigned kitchen duty, this was such a great thing as it increased connections across generations while helping in the kitchen with a specific purpose. Do not assign everyone greeting, would never show up for that, but will show up for kitchen duty.

Recruit people for specific things based on info of interests from a survey?

reduce the number of greeters - 2 for each session is too much.

Volunteer hours should not ever replace ASC but should be a part of membership.

The sweat equity idea about working off dues if not affordable: doesn't that go against the values of everyone contributing as they can and not shaming those who can't pay more. Are we going to ask poorer members to bus tables at kiddush?

This last suggestion seems meaningless. NOBODY cannot afford ASC. People can set ASC at any amount they want, including 0, and we welcome them with open arms.

this may be covered in the last point - but providing a way for membership to be a financial and/or volunteering commitment (preferably a mix of both for people when they are able?)

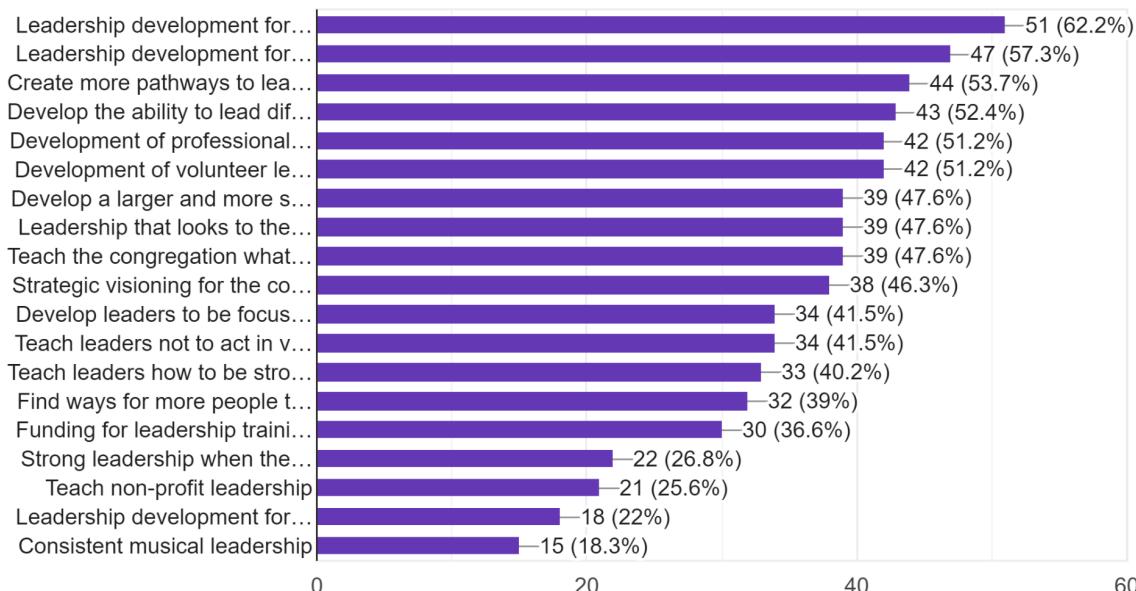
We have asked congregants to tell us what skills they have that they could share with BJC. We have that data. We never use it. We need to have a volunteer coordinator to link needs to people that are able to help.

What was "assigned kitchen duty" in the past? What did that look like? Is there an expectation for number of kitchen duties or greeter duties per member? I don't know about that history

While I was never a big fan of assigned kitchen duty, it might be time to rethink this as the same people seem to be doing all the work. However, there should be some flexibility. For example, if I am assigned to work on a certain week, could I be given the choice of which shift and which job. I really like to be in services when I come so prefer to do kitchen clean up. Standing for several hours as greeter is harder.

Recommendations for "Develop our Leaders." Please check all that apply.

82 responses



Addl Recommendation – Leadership Development

And really have board training so the board understands and can act on (however difficult it may be at times) in its governance and fiduciary roles and responsibilities

Choose a group of prospective leaders and hold classes to teach them about what leadership entails and how they can be effective as leaders.

Consider how leadership connects to our intergenerational welcoming theme. If we have a 14 year old who wants to are we ready/willing able to have them sit on a committee? Are we we willing/able to adjust committee or board meetings to allow people with disabilities to fully participate (ie captioning, meeting online or in a place with public transit access, allowing people to choose seating/standing options that meet their needs etc). If we're willing to count someone in the minyan but not allow them to participate in other facets of shul that seems like we're just using them for minyan.

Create rules of conduct which reflect the culture that the congregation wants to embrace.

develop committees and create a pipeline to bring new people onto committees and up thru leadership positions and to the board. Make sure that the Board of Trustees are all actively participating on committees and that those people are active in the community and attending services on Shabbat

Development classes on leadership, etc. can be valuable for lay leaders and appropriate classes for professional staff can make them feel valued and improve their skills.

Finding funding would be awesome. Grants? USCJ? After going through the leadership development program at BJC I helped lead more. I would be happy to help more. I still feel this way. We are certainly overdue for doing this.

help train all willing congregants in how to deal with conflict in healthy ways--that would solve so many of our problems

There are many people who lead services, but would like to learn more about doing that, and there are also those who would like to sign up in advance so they have a chance to practice.

Additional Comments

If the board members are supposed to in theory be our leaders, in practice I don't know how they got their positions or what they do. Volunteer committee chairs could certainly benefit from leadership development -- right now our volunteer model is "if you are willing to do it, you've got the job" and then they're turned loose with a "good luck" but no process for support or skill development and also no accountability.

"YES!" next to "develop the ability to lead difficult conversations. "yes" next to "Leadership development for singers."

Define leadership development. Does anyone know what this means and HOW to develop leadership? Some people do this for a living...

Frankly, a lot of the above suggestions sound weird and undoable in this lifetime. Narrow it down so it is practical.

I like the idea of "leadership that looks more like the future than the past" but what the heck does that MEAN? What I observed in the children's classes was that the TEACHERS were not able to handle the antsy kids, and the classes were not all that interesting. The kids seemed lost or not engaged well. Not surprisingly, kids dropped out. Jewish education wasn't sticking.

Frankly, I don't think BJ has the money or personnel etc. to do much of any of these suggestions so far, on all the screens I've responded to.

How to run a good and productive meeting.

I have observed sexism, ageism, and ableism in leaders over the years. Maybe they meant it, maybe they didn't. So maybe if you want to get more young members involved, the professional development of the current leaders should focus on how to cooperate and work with others.

I think this section escapes me. I think if congregants are more knowledgeable about how the shul is run, they'll be more understanding of its leadership.

Implementing a lot of the ideas in the various themes would require involvement of the community, and that means more committees, and more people to lead and serve on those committees. There's an advantage to breaking down sweeping congregational objectives into discreet, more easily "digestible" chunks - people already very busy with work, small children, etc. maybe would never consider making a two-year commitment to serve on the board, but they might feel good about volunteering to make two phone calls a month to reach out to people to ask them to be greeters or work on kitchen duty.

Let's keep the vengeful sniping! Just kidding.

More emphasis by the board on long-term vision and strategic planning, rather than being wrapped up in constant management of immediate issues that are more effectively addressed by smaller, more specialized committees or working groups.

Not sure what all of these mean. Developing leadership skills for all who have significant roles in the congregation would be wonderful. My guess is that many in these positions already have great leadership skills.

Someone once told me that it can take 10 years to develop from being a pretty rocky leader to a good one. . Lately, we've been on a cycle of churning over our leadership fairly regularly. Perhaps we need to reach for more patience as our current leaders figure things out? Sometimes leadership training courses teach you how to be a manager but not how to be a leader.

The above teach management, not leadership. We need leaders.

There is a question mark next to Leadership development for committee chairs and development of volunteer leaders.

These topics are just words without action.

This goes along with our need for volunteers in general.

This looks like a long-term project for BJC.

Wow, I have not been privy to some of the negatives that some have apparently perceived.

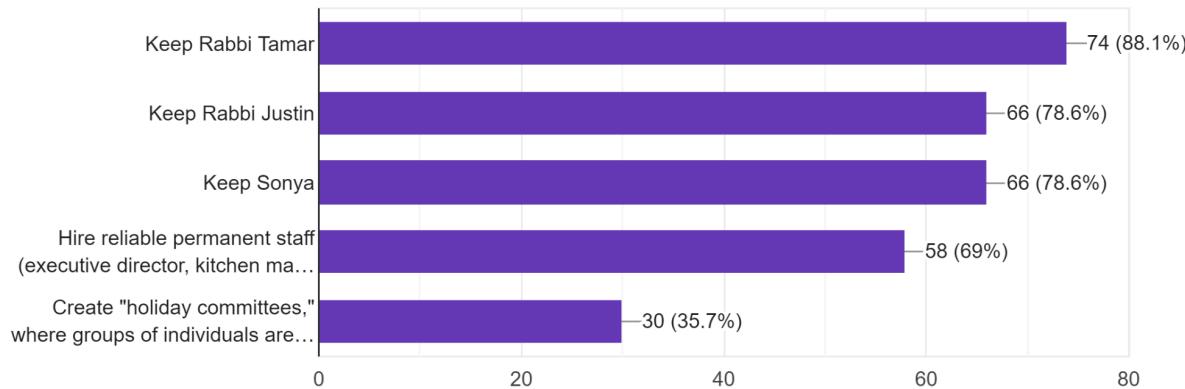
I don't feel like I am in a position to say where professional development, e.g., is needed.

I will say that musical leadership is one of those areas where some like consistency while others appreciate variety. While I have my preferred styles and vocal ranges, I am fine with the diversity that we currently have.

We can learn from the past, both successes and failures. Leaders who act in vengeful or sniping ways are not leaders, and should be removed from any leadership position. Once, there was a dvar torah that brought up sniping in the congregation. There was also a point about how the congregation is getting too old. I was shocked, and my reaction was 'ok, I can disappear and help make it younger.' Also, having someone younger than me complain about the age of the congregation was not a good plan at all. Development and training is always good, and leads to greater stability. Teach and choose high energy nigunim for shabbat services that everyone can join in on.

Recommendations for "Stabilize Paid Personnel, including Rabbinical Presence" Please check all that apply.

84 responses



Additional Recommendations – Personnel

Definitely find out why people leave. But also have scheduled meetings to give and get job feedback and let the person talk about any problems that can be solved so they do not leave.

Do better hiring for fit. It has been hard when we hire personnel who don't fit or their family does not want to be here.

Encourage the board to start the process of hiring our next rabbi permanently

hire a cantor to help lead the congregation in learning traditional and new tunes. The right cantor can encourage all of us to join in and not just sing solo from the bimah. The right cantor can teach and support lay leaders as well

Hire reliable permanent staff is a good suggestion, but at a reasonable level. Let's not staff up as if we have Adath's budget. Many of these positions are part time, and finding reliable people to fill them is difficult.

Hiring permanent staff-especially musician-in-residence (!) and kitchen manager seem essential to me. But I don't know what kind of budget we have for those people.

Invest in professional training/coaching for rabbis.

Make the jobs attractive to applicants and pay a living wage.

Please continue the traditional Jewish Shabbat and holiday services. No Friday evening guitar services.

There will always be a need for staff oversight of events, but committees could perhaps be doing more.

We need paid programming staff. As much as volunteers can do, most of us work full time and cannot provide a consistent sustained level of focus and effort necessary to plan and execute social/educational/religious events. Those events are essential for all the other things we say we want in a shul: recruiting members, meaningful congregational participation, community relationships, I want us to have a decent respected reputation in the community as a functioning shul instead of just struggling to keep our heads above water. We need to invest money in paid staff to make these things happen.

Who are the office staff? Are there opportunities to get to know them and form relationships with them? That might help retention as well as improve service.

Additional Comments – Personnel. Note - specific comments about personnel processes and individuals' job performance are excluded from the comments below, shared only with those

individuals. Five people commented that it was inappropriate to ask questions related to hiring on the feedback form.

Be sensitive to the demands of the job and transparent with the congregation how to respectfully be on a board, talk to a rabbi, exec director, other board members, embracing differences of options, growth

Hiring reliable permanent staff is great! But, are they paid enough to incentivize staying? Life happens and even the best intentions can cause someone to move on.

I only know one person, and that person is a paid person.

In general, hiring paid staff is dependent on our being financially stable, so I think it will help to determine which roles we definitely need: in my opinion, those would be rabbi, education director, executive director, and kitchen manager.

The title of Acting Senior Rabbi is a poor one. It suggests an unstable congregation and is not appealing to potential members who are shul shopping.

Why do personnel and long-term members really leave? Rumors are present, but little transparency. Very disappointing. The back story is cloudy regarding our personnel issues in the past 5 years.

I suspect some of the office staff are not paid enough to keep long term.

I thought there already were "holiday committees." isn't BJUSY responsible for the "Purim Carnival?

Keeping staff long term is ideal (no one is ever permanent).

I'm not so excited about a paid musician in residence, some of those others seem like good ideas. But, given the staff is expensive, idk how many of these positions can be filled.

It might be a good idea to not announce when office employees are leaving. It gives the sense of people bailing on the shul, but in reality, I've never met nor talked to them, so while I appreciate their contributions, they're easier to replace than a kitchen manager.

It's so important to keep our dedicated staff.

Stability of all staff is important. Stability of senior rabbi is critical.

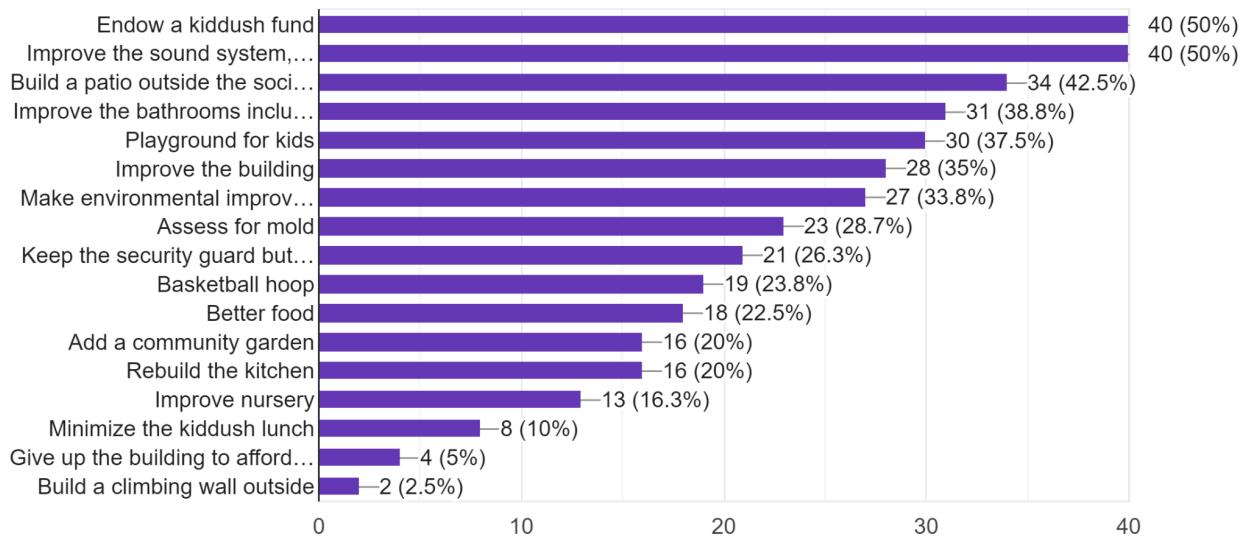
This is tricky and definitely linked to finances. Naturally we want to hire reliable permanent staff but is that realistic in the world in which we live?

We need enough office staff so they don't get too overloaded.

We SO need stability in our key staff positions, right now this is so crucial. It directly relates to the theme #5

Recommendations for "Improve our Spaces." Please check all that apply.

80 responses



Additional Recs – Improve our Spaces

"please" written in after "better food" and "yes" written in after "Keep the security guard but unlock the doors."

accessibility for bathrooms

A quiet space for keeping ds who need a break (a sensory room)

Develop a lay security team. instead of spending money on outside guards, spend money to train the congregants what to do in situations.

Have an organized fundraiser around capitol improvements.

I'd like to unlock the doors. I'm not sure about keeping a security guard.

improve air filtration in the sanctuary for health reasons

Involve the community in discussing and recommending continued use of our building: is it draining our financial resources? I am hearing concerns, but have no real knowledge so can't really enter into that conversation or even early decision processes.

Is there a way to make the security less conspicuous to make entering the building on Shabbat more welcoming?

Kitchen should be updated (some items replaced) not necessarily be rebuilt.

Maybe as a first step to improvements, we should prioritize repairs to the building itself (cracking foundation supports, plywood on the sanctuary ceiling, etc).

refresh the sanctuary - carpet, etc. update the building and social hall

Remove the armed guards.

Not mentioned is to improve the video for those watching on youtube. Let us see how many people are there. My sense is that there are very few actually attending because I see only five people at the service. I once spent considerable time during a service watching the side of the bimah ... that's what the camera was showing. Times have changed, and a poor on screen presentation results in people rejecting BJ. Also, provide zoom options for board meetings. That'll greatly improve congregational

participation and communication, perhaps attract others who'd like to be part of the board leadership training.

Unsponsored or partly sponsored kiddushim should be clearly less lavish than fully sponsored ones.

Update the carpet in the sanctuary

Utilize the space we already have instead of focusing on adding new features. For example, why waste money on a climbing wall before we have cleaned out one of our existing classrooms to make an appropriate after-services play space for 5-12 year olds?

On the other hand, we should build a gaga pit.

We need an artwork policy: what do we accept? For how long before it rotates out of our space? How do we handle objections to art in our spaces? or the lack of symbols some people want in our spaces? I guess this also relates to inclusivity and community.

We need to make sure the stuff we have works, consistently and as expected. If something is not meeting needs, research what to do about it and figure it out.

win the lottery

Additional Comments - Space utilization

1. I thought there was a Kiddush Fund already.
2. Would the Sukkah go on the patio?
3. A climbing wall is a liability.
4. What happened to the Bride's Room.

A community garden is great if there is sufficient interest. A congregation in another state had a small group of dedicated volunteers (and a lot of open land with plenty of sun) and they donated thousands of pounds of produce to the local food shelf (and occasionally put out produce for congregants to take home).

I'm not sure what is meant by minimizing the kiddush lunch. It certainly helps foster connections between people.

A patio off the social hall (or a playground in the back) will not be well utilized or enjoyable with current mosquito situation. Not sure how to address the mosquitos, but that would need to be done first.

Community garden could really bring congregants together.

Data entry notation: There is a question mark next to "Minimize the kiddush lunch"

for me, the biggest issue is the sound system. I cannot understand why we can't get one that actually work!!!

Give up the building? Wow, that suggestion really shocks me! I think it would be BJ's demise.

I'm not particularly tied to the building, the location in Mendota Heights is the thing that most frequently makes me ask myself if I belong (as a lower income person).

If we don't have a budget for kiddush, reduce what is being served. Food is important to our shul, so invest in the kitchen. Sound system in the building needs to be fixed - either we're blown out in the sanctuary or we can't hear (I shouldn't need earplugs during services)

If we minimized the kiddush lunch, I think people would still stay and enjoy the food and conversation. How many really "need" the great lunches?

It would be optimal if we went beyond tuna, egg salad and cream cheese when kiddush is not sponsored.

No idea how to answer some of the above.

What does #5 - "give up the building to afford more staff/programming" mean?

Build a climbing wall??? Yikes. Sure, make BJ into the JCC. Really, now. Get a grip.

Not knowing the congregation's demographics, I don't know about the need for a number of these items which are focused on children. Is there currently a need or is this "if we build it, they will come" strategy?

One building cannot be everything to everyone, especially a building of our size. Focus on the interior spaces. Outdoor play spaces for children are extremely expensive and increase the shul's potential liability greatly. For Limudim to be successful, we need appropriate, properly equipped classrooms.

Personally, I am willing to give up the building to spend less money on an old, dated, not particularly attractive space and more money instead on people, programming, experiences, and relationships. I don't think we can afford the building and maintenance, I worry we're going to lose it anyway within a decade, and I think it saddles us with responsibilities that we can't sustain, and distracts us from other things that we could be doing better. But if we're going to keep the building (and can even afford to do so) then we've got to make it a lot nicer. And by nice, let's just start with it being more consistently cleaner and tidy. Every week I find some different shelf to dust or trash to throw away. Poor Rabbi Justin, good thing he's a nice humble guy, because we gave him an office that literally looks out at dumpsters, broken equipment, and trash piles. Can we be conscious and deliberate about how we put things in our spaces? Do we need to store snow shovels and plastic totes in our front entry way year round? Why is there an ever rotating selection of random extra tables and chairs in the lobby and hallway? What is that giant Noah's Ark painting on the wall to the left of the beautiful wooden Etz Chayim? It just showed up 4 years ago and got hung up in a prominent position. The social hall is so dingy and dull. Could we paint the walls not dark blue? Could we get rid of, or prune and revive, the half dead plants in the corner? When was the last time the social hall floor was really cleaned and buffed? The kitchen doesn't need to be rebuilt, but it does need badly to be reorganized for more efficient and ergonomic use of space, less storage of junk and useless things, and better inventory control. Consistently better, attractively presented, flavorful, fun, appealing food is a must. Remember when kiddush lunches used to look pretty and inviting? Remember when we weren't bullied and shamed week after week into contributing more and threatened with loss of lunch if we didn't? We want kiddush not just because we're hungry but because we want to socialize with each other. Good food shows we love each other. Yes, the sound system, a million times over, a better sound system, what else can be said about that. Yes, keep a security guard and unlock the doors!!! I hate the locked doors, it's depressing and unwelcoming. A few months ago an acquaintance said greeters had stopped her at the door because they didn't recognize her. She and her family have been members for at least 15 years, and their son was bar mitzvah here just last year. So embarrassing. Sure, a volunteer-run community garden could be very nice but it's not my top priority. No to a patio behind the social hall, absolutely not. No one wants to sit hemmed in in a narrow zone with no sunshine in between a brick wall and a weedy wooded lot that will be flooded and muddy all of spring and much of the summer. People naturally gravitate to the front of the building where we enter and exit (design should work with existing human behaviors, not against them), where kids can run around and play while parents are chatting with friends, where the elderly can wait on a bench (please keep at least 2 benches in the front!!!) while waiting for their driver. If we're going to have a patio for people who want to eat outside, put it at the side entrance where people already congregate, and then they won't have to walk through the mud.

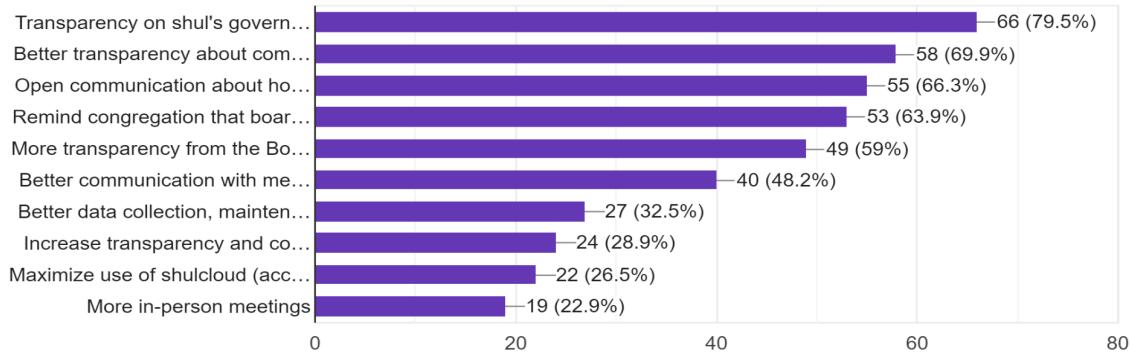
Playground for kids and basketball hoop would be nice, but where will we put them? Parking space is limited some of the time now. Please do not take away parking spaces. Would the playground be for use during services? Liability? Would parents act as supervisors? Minimize the kiddish lunch if unsponsored. Modernize the kitchen not rebuilt (new dishwasher?). Several years ago, funds were supposed to go for the bathrooms. The women's bathroom needs toilets that are higher. Was the money raised for that used for the bathrooms?

Renewing kitchen and kiddush so events can easily be held at BJ (for rent) benei mitzvah, weddings, etc and better kiddush

Some of these have already been done; sound system, improved nursery, rebuild kitchen. I thought there already was a Kiddush Fund.

Recommendations for "Stabilize Communication and Increase Transparency." Please check all that apply.

83 responses



Addl Recs – Transparent Communication

more support for security provided by congregants

A board flow chart would be very helpful. The shul's governance should also specify which committees were created by the board and which are self-creating or ad hoc advisory committees.

And, we all need to remember that saying something once is not enough :-)

Criteria for how decisions are made.Ex. Who decides the appropriate staffing for Beth Jacob?

- Definitely more standardization and communication about youth education and Bnai mitzvah expectations/procedures/planning, starting years before kid turns 13.
- More emails are fine - bite sized amounts of information with links to more information (posted on website, or full Kol Yaakov article).
- More calendar information - what's happening on Shabbat more than a couple days in advance.
- Standardize kiddish costs for sponsorship.

Financial transparency.

I think it might help members to see how the time and energy of the paid (& volunteer) staff are used, so that they can better understand the many disparate needs being attended to.

Make the "Committees" page on the website more encouraging to volunteering.

More use of zoom for people who don't live near shul.

Post recaps of board meeting minutes on the website.

Revise and modernize the website, make it more intuitive

Seriously update the website

Summary of Board Minutes in Kol Yakov. Some information MUST be sent by US mail as everyone is overwhelmed by e-mails.

Transparency has improved over time. Provide on the website what each staff member's responsibilities are (if it's not already there) since there are many changes happening. Major changes/decisions should be communicated using both verbal and written methods.

What do the different committees do, and what are they working on now.

What if lay leadership held a "here's what the board is discussing" or "here's what this committee is engaging with" table at kiddush? This only would reach people who actually attend and then would opt for that table, but it's worth a try.

Additional Comments - Communication

After "better communication with members" box, wrote, "PAPER!!!"

after "more transparency from the Board" box, wrote in "open meetings announced"

Back in the day lol, there was nothing sent out to board members in advance of the meeting. This should include all personnel reports. Don't waste board members time with "teen lounge evenings are great." Let them get to the meat of the agenda before everyone gets tired. Make sure staff hears board members and performs proper timely follow-up. Board members should also be actively looking at previous minutes to see what follow-up needs to be presented by staff.

Checked box: "Explain what our membership looks like - do we have to be larger"

explain what our membership looks like - do we have to be larger?

I attended the annual meeting and thought the communication and transparency were fine. I think that the weekly email is informative, as is the quarterly newsletter. (I joined within the past year)

I feel like the communication we have in certain areas is good - Kol Yaakov, weekly bulletins via email, etc. But I do not really understand what the Board is doing in many cases and what is happening in various committees. Often, I hear things from other members that may or may not be true. I do not feel as if I am really "in the loop" where the shul is concerned on many decisions that are made. I do not know how they come about but are just told about them. Maybe having access through email to the board minutes would help with this.

I personally feel that I have plenty of information about shul activities, so I don't know what other people are missing out on, or how to help them learn what they want to know.

I strongly believe Board meeting should be in person

IF Bd meetings are open to everyone, you must publicize when they are and what is on the agenda.

In addition to reminding the community that board meetings are open let us know how to join them.

Is there any reason that meeting agendas and minutes can't be on the website for people to read?

Israel IS complicated but we need to address, not avoid, differences.

Communication - warmth, acknowledgment of feelings and transparency, honesty.

-getting better, thanks to current synagogue employees and rabbis.

-Lay leadership needs to be better at it. There are people willing to read and edit.

Leadership development and training for board members, etc.

missing check box above was checked: Explain what our membership looks like. Do we have to be larger?

More leadership training on how to be a compassionate board member able to listen to those you disagree with respectfully and with validation even if you disagree

My children's b'nei mitzvah training was extremely haphazard and nontransparent. The parents could have been involved much much more. This is especially important to Jews who have been less religious than many/most congregants.

It raises the issue that families that have been religious all along are at an advantage compared to ones who are Jewish but more secular.

Can one be a secular Jew at BJ?

Or is BJ really serving religious Jews better?

Are religious and knowledgeable Jews at BJ "better", in some ways?

There has seemed to be a core group of people in the past, friends who were Ramah campers at the same time, and these people seemed to be in an inner circle. It doesn't matter if that was intentional or not, and even though this group contributed a lot to BJ, it still felt like an inside circle, or more valued people. That was/is the appearance/perception.

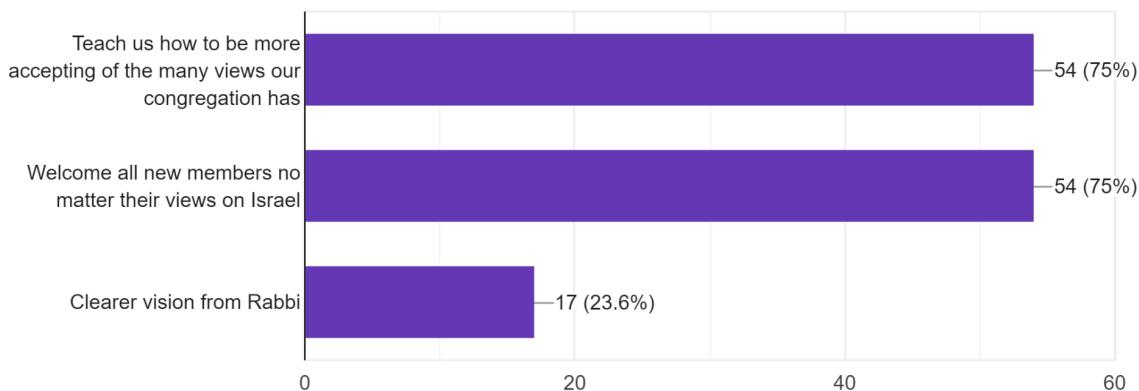
My ongoing frustration and worry is in never knowing who is in charge of what, or why that person is in charge instead of someone else. I have been a member for 18 years, and I don't know what the board members even do, or why. Why do people get put in charge of things that they don't seem to have experience in? Why are the people who are the most paranoid about COVID 4 years later still the ones setting COVID policy -- how did they get tapped to have that power and not, say, congregants with more

diverse viewpoints? Who makes decisions about hiring staff? Why do some people (staff, board) reply to emails, and with other people I'm just whistling in the dark? Is my perception true that rich donors' complaints are taken seriously and the average shlub's are cast aside? If a congregant disagreed with a decision about something, or even if they just wanted to weigh in with their particular experience or expertise, who would they talk to, and would anyone pay attention to them? Who is in charge??

Some of that transparency is there now but people would rather complain than look for it.

Recommendations for "Israel." Please check all that apply.

72 responses



Additional Recommendations - Israel

Although I support Israel, I am an American Jew. My ancestors chose to "make-it" in this country. We need to speak more of our accomplishments here. The Twin Cities should sponsor a traveling exhibit from the Weizman in Philadelphia

And teach us how to talk about Israel. We need to learn to have these conversations.

Bring Hartman scholars and/or programming on Israel

Creating a safe space, perhaps small groups (in person and zoom) for people to hear reasoned different points of view.

Culture of conversations to increase our tolerance of different viewpoints, yes, but also to increase our knowledge or perspectives on Israeli topics/issues - where people aren't made to feel uncomfortable because they aren't keeping up with the news or don't know about the history.

Discussion of how some Jewish values are in conflict with each other when thinking about the war with Hamas.

Do not take a stance on Israel. The way it has been handled since 7 Oct is good.

facilitated conversations to listen to different opinions

Good possibilities for educational programming in this area. I'd love to hear about the many views of people IN Israel, too. Another possible connection is education about what Conservative Judaism has to say about how we relate to the Tanakh: do we take the "history" it contains as literal truth, or is interpretation involved and, if we allow that fallible humans are involved, what responsibility does that place on each of us, as 21st-century individuals, to make our own interpretations?

Have explicit training in how to keep conflict healthy, such as studying and doing workshops on High Conflict, by Amanda Ripley

Have more discussions about various aspects of Israel society and learn more about the history of Zionism

Have opportunities to engage and historically accurate conversations about Israel; Learn about the history of the creation of the state of Israel, including from points of view that are not Israeli or Jewish; Opportunities to learn more about Palestine and indigenous peoples of the land of Israel; Host experts in the topic to share facts and information; Open discussion of Israel to children in a way that shared facts and truths, allowing children to form their own opinions surrounding Zionism and the state of Israel

I think classes or discussion outside services could provide information on the above topics.

I would be unhappy if the shul leadership (rabbis, staff, board) were publicly critical of Israel. Anti-Zionism is a hard and absolute no. I absolutely want the shul to remain engaged with Israel, such as through coordinated

trips (Federation, Ramah summer program, Ramah TRY, and others), Israeli shluchim, speaking openly and warmly about congregants' family and friends who live in Israel. It might be useful to engage with Israel advocacy organizations from across the political spectrum (J-Street // AIPAC) and traditional old-school and new movements (Federations & World Jewish Congress // New Israel Fund & Zioness), so that even when we disagree on specific issues or policies, we are all engaging with Israel and taking ownership for it instead of just ignoring or avoiding it.

I would like to tackle the issues up front - and learn about them through a Jewish lens. Also, to deal in fact - vs all of the misinformation. It is hurting all of us and creating a more dangerous world to navigate. We could put a group together who has been to Israel to volunteer - look at ways to help Israel - not just accepting - however, provide ways to help and support Israel. while holding that any innocent life - including Palestinians is tragic. We are all living in a world of misinformation - so helping us understand the truth and teaching us how to communicate with each other would be helpful. Honestly, if I cannot go to my shul and feel supported or heard around what I consider to be a true life-changing event in my life - then is this the place for me. So figuring out how to bring us together is impt. Other shuls are doing it. Missions to Israel, chavurah around Israel, excitement around the support of Israel would be great.

It's not only about welcoming new members regardless of their views on Israel. It's welcoming the current members as well. Can we truly be a wide accepting tent?

More supportive programming regarding the trauma/fear related to anti-semitism rising

Talk about Israel and have more learning opportunities.

The continued existence of Israel is critical to the Jewish people, but is outside the scope of this initiative to chart the course for the shul

The synagogue should announce on its web site and publications that it is open to all Jews including those who identify as non-Zionist or anti-Zionist.

While all Jews, regardless of their views, should be welcomed, Beth Jacob as an institution should have a definitive position that it supports Israel and the Israeli people. That shouldn't be any more difficult than stating that Beth Jacob believes in one G-d, in the importance of Halacha, and in the holiness of Torah even if there are individual congregants that might not believe in G-d, follow Halacha, or see the Torah as anything other than an interesting compilation of stories. If it isn't, then we should change our prayer book and omit all prayers which references the gathering of the exiles and the prayer for the State of Israel.

Work to strengthen our connections to Israel regardless of viewpoints, especially for children.

Actually, I believe there is a very clear vision regarding Israel. That said, a clear vision includes all the nuance and understanding of the complexities of Israel and the current situation.

Are we really struggling with acceptance of the many views, or is it that people pick up signals that they are not welcome or don't/wouldn't feel comfortable or fully supported for their views? These are different questions, with potentially different ways to address them.

I like the vision now, which is articulate and does a good job already of threading the needle pretty well between love of Israel without blanket acceptance of its politics.

I like the current vision.. If it seems unclear, it's probably because it avoids the extremes. Do we currently have a policy of not welcoming people based on their views on Israel???

I think current leadership has been fantastic at holding all the complexity of this issue with respect and wholeheartedness. I don't know if another Jewish leader doing it better.

I think we really need to stay clear of trying to have a central shul message around Israel because there is no way to do that in a way that won't exclude people. In October and November I was really struggling because it felt like the messaging from the shul tried to speak for everyone too much in a way that didn't align with my values and it made me feel like I might not have a place here. It's a very hard balance to strike with so many different strong opinions, but I really think the only way to maintain the diversity of our congregation is to ensure that the shul as a whole doesn't try to speak for everyone, and we encourage congregants to recognize and appreciate all that diversity of thought.

I would like to be welcoming to a broad range of members with regard to views about Israel, which may include non-Zionists, but if people are aggressively anti-Zionist and wish to use the shul as a place and platform to broadcast their hate of Israel, I really don't want our shul to become a recruiting ground for that, and it would destroy my shabbat to have to listen to that at Kiddush. I would leave if the shul became a bastion of JVP, for example.

I'm talked out over Israel. We're not out of the woods on

I am very clear that I do NOT want the rabbi to use their d'var as a political discussion of some event in Israel.

If we're no Zionist, if we're not pro-Israel, who will be? We need to lead the way while raising tough questions and be able to challenge the government when it goes off the rails.

Israel is really a challenge for me now. While I am supportive and want defeated (not sure this is possible), I am anguished at the loss of innocent civilian life. I want the hostages free and those in the military to be safe. I guess I have more problems with the government and leadership of the country now and I have for several years even before Oct 7th.

Nice thoughts among recommendations, but I'm not sure what all this would look like.

Our leaders have done an excellent job of expressing the difficulty of "taking a stand" in multiple divrei Torah. We have a diversity of opinion in this community, like it or not. In my opinion, Beth Jacob "taking a stand" on this issue is exactly the same as the Minneapolis City Council "taking a stand" on the same issue. Just as unhelpful, just as irrelevant, and just as polarizing.

Right now, I think we need to understand that we need a lot of patience in dealing with this.

The rabbi has a right to their own vision, not necessarily sharing it unless they want to. Maybe it's better to stay neutral.

The synagogue and the leadership need to understand that this is a defining moment for the Jewish People. Are we going to be passive bystanders to the genocide Israel is committing? Are we going to be apologists? Or are we going to stand by our values and denounce publicly and loudly what is being done in our name? Elie Wiesel said "Silence is complicity."

This is so difficult. I will say that if we ask for a clearer vision from our rabbi(s), we need not to attack them for their views. It is easier for some congregants to accept different ideas from other congregants than it is to hear the rabbi express views that differ from theirs. This is problematic - congregants sometimes leave congregations over differences with their rabbi. So the lay leadership needs to be careful about what we ask of the rabbi(s).