

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 Silberglitt, 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

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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.

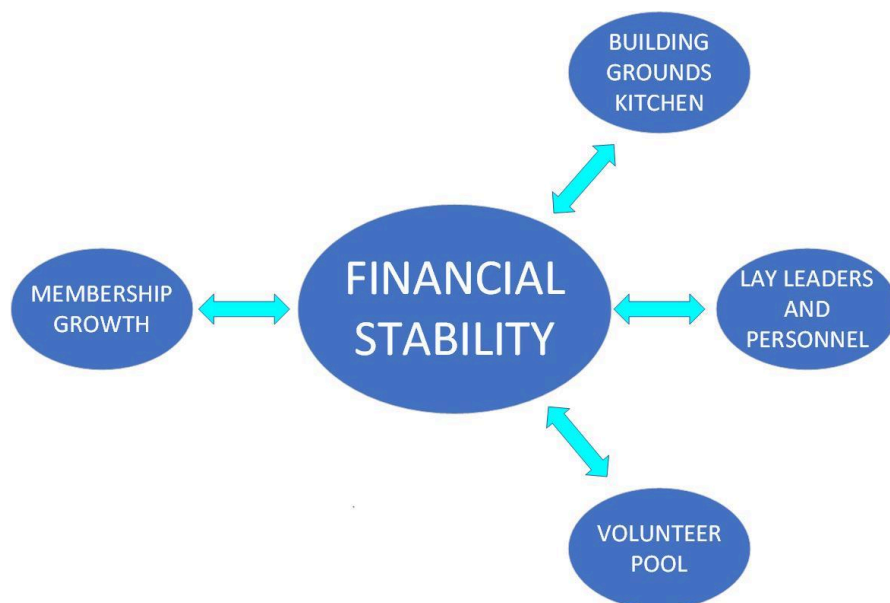
Those attending community conversations and providing community feedback also pondered about how the congregation labels itself. Are we Conservative, Traditional and Modern, leaning Reform or "Conservadox", or post-denominational? Shifting labels, as some observed, may open up different opportunities. 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 congregation. 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 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.