

Hollis Hills Jewish Center: Strategic Analysis and Plan for Our Future

Executive Summary

Our Strategic Planning Committee has engaged in meetings over the past year to evaluate our synagogue community and identify our problems and opportunities with the goal of creating a vision for our congregation and a series of initiatives and guidelines to assist our leadership in working towards our vision.

Our committee has reviewed our demographic composition, our past programming, our existing skills and assets, and identified the threats facing our congregation. The tools we have employed have included a SWOT (Strength – Weakness – Opportunities and Threats) exercise with a cross section of our leadership and the circulation of a survey to the entire congregational community. Task forces were created in the areas of Chesed, Welcoming-Engagement, Spirituality and Financial Sustainability to focus on these crucial areas of congregational life and well-being.

Our plan is a road map for our future. How can we describe who we are, what we have accomplished and how we relate to our greater communities – both Jewish and secular? But most importantly where do we want to go? How do we best employ our resources? What is our vision for the future? What strategic initiatives should be pursued so we can move from where we are to where we dream of becoming?

The Core Value of Relational Judaism

There has been a wealth of material written focusing on the relationship of the synagogue and congregant. What is our need to be part of a synagogue and how must synagogue's transform to continue to be relevant. Historically the synagogue in America became a central institution for the Jewish community to provide not only religious but also social support. The synagogue became a Jewish and Community Center. Membership was as much about the gym or pool as it was about reinforcing and affirming one's Jewish religious life. In the golden age of Conservative Judaism in Queens, congregational size was so large that how effectively individuals engaged was overshadowed by the fact that any program had acceptable participation rates.

But what also was happening was that people became members for specific purposes and would leave when that end was served. An example was what was often described as a B'nai mitzvah mill, where families would leave after they had their party.

People can come for programs but they stay and connect through relationships. As Ron Wolfson has noted there is nothing wrong with programs, but if program designers have given no thought to how the experience will offer participants a deeper connection with each other, with the community and with their Judaism then it has no lasting impact. Relationships are the fiber that connects and sustains our existence and defines us as a congregation. Without building relationships and elevating the connection between us we are merely a building with services but not a Jewish congregation. We spend too much time on

programs as a service provider proving consumable activities without using programs to build a congregation. What do we do to deepen our congregants' relationship to the community, to HHJC and to each other? As Ron Wolfson has further noted, it is time to shift the shape of Jewish engagement ... What's the goal? The goal of Jewish institutions is not self-preservation, it is to engage Jews with Judaism. It about people, not programs. It's about deep relationships, not fee for service transactions. We begin with engaging our congregants in a personal relationship with their fellow Jews and their Judaism and then program events for them.

We recommend to the leadership of this congregation that its future viability depends on how effective we become in elevating the personal relationship between the congregation and each congregant and therefore between congregant and congregant. Each program or activity should be benchmarked by how it incorporates and facilitates connections between our congregants. While we are no longer a congregation of multiple hundreds of members, our size is our present advantage if we choose to build a truly engaged community – engaged with each other in our common Jewish values.

Who Are We

The reach out has demographically identified that we have been successful in retaining older, long time congregants. The congregants have expressed general satisfaction with their relationship but the feedback evidenced a lack of enthusiasm. Our survey was marked by answers in the satisfied column but not strongly agreeing or satisfied. We have been unsuccessful in attracting a broad spectrum of new congregants, obviously a product of the changing demographics in our immediate community. It has been unsuccessful in attracting a broad spectrum of new congregants. At the same time we have disconnected with many in our community, who are now among the ranks of former members.

At the outset, for those who believe that there is an overriding apathy and disinterest, the congregational survey had 114 responses, a statistically significant return. The gender breakdown was equal. Reflecting the obvious change in our demographics the respondents were primarily age 50 or older and length of membership was weighted towards the +19 year categories. The reasons for those who have stayed connected focused primarily on a sense of community. But while these respondents evidenced an interest in the synagogue by responding to the survey, they also responded in great part that they are only somewhat or minimally involved in synagogue life. Notably the majority indicated that they valued maintaining tradition while allowing for change. These respondents also reflected a lack of knowledge of what volunteer opportunities existed in our congregation as well as a belief that the leadership does not know congregant talents, and most significantly a lack of a sense of excitement. The highest rate issue was making our congregation a place where everyone feels welcome, providing inspiring worship services, increasing participation in synagogue life and providing our members with a sense of vision and purpose.

Our greatest threat, as with so many synagogues, is financial – creating financial sustainability in the midst of a changing demographic and aging facility with repeated demands for repairs and improvements.

a. Strengths

- Functioning Daily Minyan
- Fairly constant Shabbat service attendance

- Vibrant Friday night Service
- Nursery School
- Debt Free Building
- Established and Renown Cantor
- Teaching Rabbi
- Existing Small group learning
- Passionate Lay Leaders
- Ongoing Adult Education
- Caring Community
 - Outreach during Shiva
- Children are welcome in our Sanctuary
- We are a small congregation - able to be flexible and experiment
- Strong commitment to tradition

b. Weaknesses

- Leadership is overtaxed with very little injection of “new blood”
- Membership doesn’t match infrastructure costs
- Detachment of a sense of ownership by synagogue community
- Lack of marketing to unaffiliated community
- Lack of younger families
- Our Physical plant is aging
- Parking
- Need better driving engine financially including the need to stimulate fundraising activity
- Limited financial core
- While we honor tradition there has not been sufficiently flexibility in our ritual to match direction of movement
 - Are we too Inflexible in experimentation

c. Opportunities

- Nursery school as magnet
- Large unaffiliated population in area
- Terrific neighborhood for young Jewish Members
 - Jewish community, schools, hospitals
- Retrenchment and consolidation of Congregations
 - Competing with fewer congregations

d. Threats

- Competing nursery schools in area
- Other synagogues compete for our members
- Changing Demographics
 - Few Ashkenazi families
- Less general interest in affiliation – Changing affiliation patterns
- Cost of living and cost of alternatives

A Vision Statement for HHJC

As we worked to draft a vision statement for our congregation we focused on six areas of our congregational life – Torah and Learning, Chesed, Engagement, Worship/Spirituality and Financial Sustainability

Torah/learning

- We dream to be a community where Jews of all ages find entry points to engage with meaningful explorations of Torah, Jewish Thought, ritual and worship and find meaning and sustenance in their daily contemporary life.
- We dream to provide a framework for members to learn as a community, in small affinity groups and individually, forging relationships with each other, bonding with our traditions.
- We dream to encourage and marshal resources of Jewish knowledge and passion from within the membership and from the vast talent in the Jewish community to teach and share such knowledge and passion.

Chesed/Tzedakah

- We dream to be responsive across our generations to the needs of those within our congregational community
- We dream to create relationships with the larger community and work towards the universal aspirations for tzedek and tikkun, justice and repair of the broken places in this world.
- We dream to build on Torah inspired values of love and charity, caring for and serving the interests of all of our members..

Community/Welcoming

- We dream to build a community of relationships in which each member feels a deep connection to others in the congregation.
- We dream to create a congregation that is a welcoming center of activity for all Jews, regardless of language or ethnicity.
- We dream to be known as a magnet community for Jews outside our geographic area through our outreach and relationship-building.

Financial Sustainability

- We dream to create bonds within our community to inspire our members to invest in the financial health of our congregation according to each member's abilities..
- We dream to expand our income by developing relationships with foundations that see in us visionary ideas and action plans.

- We dream to explore new fiscal models for the synagogue of the 21st century.

Leadership

- We dream to create a system for the cultivation of new and future leaders, ensuring that leaders can grow into positions and develop leadership skills.
- We dream to enhance the sense of value of leadership positions on all levels of the organizational chart.
- We dream to provide excellent leadership development opportunities for current and future leaders.

Tefillah/Spirituality

- We dream to be a community that is fully engaged in worship and that is invested in building the skills to become active participants in public ritual.
- We dream to explore a variety of methods to meet the spiritual needs of worshippers while retaining the core values of traditional Jewish prayer.
- We dream to cultivate a laity that is conversant with the core meaning of Jewish liturgy, sensitive to the interaction between individual and communal spiritual needs.

Guidelines for Our Strategic Initiatives

It is easier to keep current congregants than recruit new congregants. We must meet the needs of our present congregants but we must also imbue within our congregants a sense of participation and a relationship to the congregation and to each other.

Membership and Leadership Issues

- Get new congregants involved from day one of their association with HHJC – ensure that new congregants become long term congregants
- Maximize the use of the congregation's leadership to ensure the development of new leaders
- Move away from the approach that programs on their own provide the purpose and incentive for being a congregant
- Emphasize in all activities and programs that ours is a congregation of relationships by creating programs that incorporate opportunities for attendees to connect and relate, avoiding the "Y" or College approach to programs
- Identify segments of community and create connections
- Increase awareness of existing activities
- Expand the ways in which we can reach our congregants

Financial

- We must Increase a sense of ownership within the congregation and move away from a membership perspective removing terms like dues and membership from the community's vocabulary
- We must improve communication on ways to donate and contribute to the congregation
- We must focus on augmenting our avenues of revenue for the congregation.
- We must insure that those who do contribute are acknowledged by the clergy and leadership to underscore that donations are appreciated rather than expected.

Spirituality

- Pursue the focus group or individual interview to complete the spirituality survey.
- Insure that our services emphasize interaction between those in attendance – to create and foster a community feeling.
- Experiment with various ways to conduct our services and provide a mix of various modes during a month
- Recognizing that the Conservative congregation is marked by a great many congregants who have no sense of obligation for ritual. We should undertake a program to explore and explain the meaning and purpose of prayer and our liturgy to create a purposeful meaning for participation.
 - Use of the website – continue and expand the Davening for Dummies
 - Add programming to the Adult Education menu
 - Create an opportunity during services for an explanation regarding why certain prayers are recited.

Chesed

- Build on our sense of community and relationships by creating the activity and services to brand our congregation as a “caring” community

Financial Strategies

Our congregation does have a tradition of coming through in times of need. However, as with all synagogues we have allowed ourselves to remain in the minds of our congregants as a Jewish Center and an institution that services our “members” as a distinct entity that they view as a service organization rather than as a co-op – a jointly created and sustained community. This lack of ownership translates to a limited view of their need to contribute both in time and financially to the lifeblood of the institution. The first step in developing a financial strategy that can sustain the congregation into the future is to change the culture of the institution and the way in which our congregants perceive their relationship to HHJC. Remodeling our “dues” structure cannot occur until the culture and connection between congregant and synagogue has changed. Ultimately the need is for both creating and maintaining basic obligations of contributions from each congregant or family unit as well as establishing an incentive to add contributions based on an individual ability to extend beyond the minimum. While the basic is established as an equitable allocation that represents a minimum reasonable cost per congregant, the additional need should prompt the additional contributions needed to meet the full budgetary needs of the congregation. Moreover, we need to formulate, institutionalize and publicize other avenues for making the needed contributions.

- Full transparency - Need to report to our congregants on the financial strength of the institution annual report
 - It is important to communicate to each congregant what the cost of operation is and focus on how much each has contributed in the past and how that matches the per capita cost of operation.
- Re-evaluate our model for revenue from our congregation – “our dues model”
 - Consider the various options developed in the synagogue world – traditional, fair share (voluntary commitment model) and hybrids – use Synergy and USCJ white papers as guide for analysis
 - Create a mix of a donor structure based on both a minimum donation and ability to pay
 - Consider the hybrid model that establishes a base donation or “Minimum Sustaining Donation” and then suggest higher levels of donations with titles for the level of participation.
 - Consider whether some levels include certain benefits – tickets for certain events, or reception with Rabbi or Cantor.
 - This would permit better financial planning if it incorporated likely donations that occur during the year including attendance at events.
 - Always provide members with profile of what they have contributed in past years or year so that they appreciate that the lump sum going forward can be as high as various donor levels may suggest.
- Priority of funding of projects and activities – realistic expenses directed to most needed areas of activity

- Change of Vocabulary to that of “donor” relationships with congregants
- Increase ways to donate to the congregation – dedication of rooms, leafs on tribute or honor boards, bricks in sidewalks, seminar sponsorship;
- Create a committee to look at web site and local shopping commissions to augment other fundraising – increase visibility and information on available options; booklet or regular column in Dateline.
- Explore alternative revenue generated for building use – can we sustain the use of the facility on our own – create a working committee to review the relationship between the present and future and our physical plant
- Do we have enough of size and sustained programming to bear the freight
- Alumni reach out for support

Chesed: Creating a Caring Community

If our core value is represented by the concept of relational Judaism and our goal is to nourish our congregational community we must elevate as a congregational value the need to care about and support each other. **Therefore we need to set a goal to develop strategies and initiatives that mark us as a “caring community.”** Each of us should ask the question “when did I appreciate the experience of being involved in my synagogue community?” What should follow from that answer is the next vital questions – How can that experience help me engage others more deeply in congregational life?” For many it is the time of loss that has underscored how important it is to have a community to fall back upon for support. From this realization we must strive to nourish the strength that comes from caring and support for others in discrete areas of our communal lives and expand it to all areas to create a complete and supportive community.

Our Chesed work must build on this sense of community and relationships by creating and publicizing activities and services that “brand” our congregation as a “caring community.”

What Do We Presently Do

- List of members willing to provide transportation for those in need
- Bereavement group
- Visits to hospitalized members
- Shiva meals

Expand Activities

- Work with our membership / engagement groups to insure that our directory is updated but expand it to include member’s professions/skills. (Include members on a voluntary basis.)
- Sell ads to cover the directory cost and show resources in the community; advertisers would need references to be included
- Starting with the Directory, develop an “Angie’s List” type of resource list.
- When the resource list is in place, develop a warm line, “Hollis Hills Helps” – where people can call with all types of questions and needs, leave a message on the warm line, and the assigned person will call back within twenty-four hours.

Communicate

- Establish a bulletin board in the HHJC with parallel listings of what people need and what services or items people want to give.
 - Connect those in need with those who can provide guidance within our community.

- Must formulate ongoing publicity, stating “This is what we do, and this is what we want to do.” This includes informing members of what we do already through Dateline, emails, the website, a flier, and brochures Send regular publicity releases to major and local papers and to Cable One News and Queens TV – plus the Bayside Times, and Lotus Hsu’s HH Civic Assn publication. She is the editor.
- Items of interest and people of interest need to be in Dateline, and on Facebook. There is a need to update the HHJC Facebook account and include information about how to get help and how to volunteer.
- Use the telephone Gabbai to let people know that we help is needed on a regular basis.
- Work with other community partners and other religious groups.

Recommended Initiatives to Proceed With

- **Create “Hollis Hills Cares,” with highlights of some good things that were done each week and needs we can fill. Provide this as a weekly handout at services and near the office. Email the information as part of Hollis Hills Happenings Include this and other relevant information in a New Members’ Packet.**
- **Sunday morning workshops: Perhaps four topics during the year. Coffee, Cake and Caring Workshops – an opportunity to talk about things that matter to our community. Topics could include: Eldercare, parenting, life transitions, pregnancy and children, CPR for young children. Also: What to do in times of trouble in the house: How to prepare for an emergency, what to do when the lights go out, the toilet doesn’t work, etc.**

Engagement

Engagement of and with our congregants is necessary to create and sustain a community of congregants. It is not enough to be welcoming it is crucial that we **engage** congregants or existing or new. This can and should become a core goal and “brand” of our community.

While attracting new congregants is important, what is more important is to address the specific needs of our current congregation. If we properly address the needs of our present congregation, the attractiveness of our congregation will lend itself for reach out since there will be something viable and concrete to publicize and act as a magnet.

- In this way we will create an attractive “package” to encourage new congregants to become associated with HHJC. We must define our “brand” and be cognizant of how such branding can be used as a basis for reaching new congregants.

It is important that we identify the segments of our community and prioritize our activities, programs and strategies for these segments based on our resources and the size of that segment. Equally we must monitor progress and success. For instance we know that our membership is weighted to baby boomers and empty nesters. We must insure that we have in place adequate programming and reach out to this segment and that there is a high rate of satisfaction. This is how core and it is important to engage them to the fullest extent possible, insure that there is no attrition and gain their support in participation and financial contribution. While growth in other areas is desirable, such growth will not happen overnight, so we must be secure in knowing that our base is strong before we undertake more significant reach out.

We recommend that our general theme be the concept of **relational Judaism** - helping to cultivate individual spiritual needs and blend the “individual” with the value and strength of interaction within a community of Jews.

Change the relationship of our congregants with the synagogue

- We need to break away from the concept of “membership” and change our vocabulary to emphasize that we are a congregation and that each involved person is a congregant – part of our community. We need to instill a sense of ownership by each congregant in our synagogue.

Communication within our Congregation

- 21st technology is crucial to communication and the use of Facebook and our website must be emphasized and made dynamic and engaging. Our communications should emphasize people, in photos and in acknowledgements and profiles. Most importantly we need to insure that our congregation knows the existence of our social media and cyberspace presence and interacts with these modes of communication.
- Profile congregants and families and leadership in Dateline
- Add to our weekly email message the names of those with birthdays or anniversaries (perhaps send out a separate email with Life Cycle News from HHJC Family)
- Messages included in billing statements about the congregation and activities.
- Create an information hotline so that a call to a number can provide updates on programs

- The use of social media is a great way to connect with each other (for example Whatsapp, group texts.) This can be used to organize activities.

Welcoming New Comers

- We need to consider how we take on the responsibility of welcoming newcomers (unfamiliar face at services)
 - How do we acknowledge and respond to newcomers to services - Should the Rabbi welcome from the bima; do we have congregants who will go to newcomers and greet them; do our congregants know who is a newcomer
 - How do we acknowledge and reach out to new congregants; who calls; how is it circulated to the community; Shabbat challah and flowers; new congregant orientation
 - Aliyahs at services for new congregants
 - New congregant orientation
 - Place new congregants immediately on a committee

Programming a Caring and Interactive Community

- Use Chesed Programming ideas for a “caring community” to help foster and build congregational relationships to foster the goals of welcoming and engaging our congregants
- Create more opportunities for social connection during religious moments within the congregational year – such as increasing the number of Shabbat and festival lunches- once/month luncheon for congregation (either sponsored or budgeted by HHJC).
 - Create greater opportunities for social gatherings on Friday nights and Shabbat afternoons.
 - Create study groups on Shabbat afternoons
- Encourage more affinity groups like the book club and underscore the need to publicize these groups as a way for congregants to extend beyond their individual zone and connect.
- Institutionalize a Progressive Dinner to foster connections
- Encourage cross inviting of congregants to Shabbat dinners at homes
- Develop strategies for inter-generational mixing of congregation.
- Leverage congregant resources – identify and publicize professional connections, skills and interests and employ these as well in the work of the congregation to engage such congregants.
- Move beyond the shiva announcement and expand our recognition and acknowledgement of our congregants’ simchas and their challenges such as illness. We can’t validate our connections and support as a community if we don’t know.

- Email appropriate information on a more regular basis such items as weddings, births, grandchildren, graduations, promotions, appropriate and tasteful notification of those who are ill. Encourage cards or provide vehicles for unobtrusive recognition and acknowledgment by congregants.

Program initiatives or strategies for connection

- Create a Buddy system;
 - Photobook of congregation: wall of photos in lobby
 - Leadership phone calls to congregation;
 - New congregants should be placed on committees;
 - Shabbat breakfasts:
 - Review of membership application and make more effective use of information to connect
 - Invites to homes such as coffee circles
 - Adult bar/bat mitzvah
 - Volunteer corps
 - Elder care
 - Support for extended family (aging parents and adult children);
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- For Retirees (including those with fixed income)
 - Affordable relationship with congregation – being a donor without guilt
 - Daytime activities
 - Identify talents and create opportunities to use those talents and skills
 - Help channel time for meaningful chesed and educational pursuits
 - Craft fair
 - Shiva minyan
 - Sick and visiting
 - Phone squad
 - Safety seminar
 - Scams fraud prevention
 - Financial planning
 - Estate planning
 - Day trips
 - Card games and place to go during day
 - Retreats
 - Home repairs
 - Adopt a grandparent

Consider programming for other segments

- Divorced Single parents
 - Create welcoming and non-judgmental environment
 - Connect similar families and individuals

- Young families
 - Latch key
 - Babysitting co-op
 - Parent child activities
 - Stress reduction classes
 - Time management seminars
 - Shabbat dinner co-op
 - Toy exchange – fair
 - How to make most of limited time commitment
 - Day care and child care
- Families affected by Inter-marriage
 - Intro to other couples;
 - Basic Jewish education for nonaffiliated spouse;
 - Creating an accepting atmosphere;
 - Community support for instilling Jewish values in children
- Families with teenagers
 - Party planning fair
 - Substance abuse seminar
 - Inter-dating seminar
 - Trips to Israel
 - Hebrew high school
 - College fair planning with Hillel
 - Savings plans
 - Bar/bat mitzvah planning

Reach out

- “Come Back to HHJC” program of reach out to those in our community who were once congregants
 - Coffee meetings
 - Rabbi invites
- Consider expanding the reach of HHJC by developing satellite groups in other Queens communities
- Break away from the demographics of the limited geographical area of Hollis Hills. We can be a magnet for families in Northeast Queens – consider advertising to that end.

Spirituality

We must create innovative approaches to services and insure that as a congregation we come together as a connected congregation. We need to ensure that our services fulfill the role of a minyan as community prayer meaning that we blend individual needs for private spiritual moments and insure that our congregants equally engage with each other as part of the prayer experience.

We also need to understand and communicate to our congregants how the liturgy can be meaningful to them in their own spiritual journey. Today so many of us ask questions and seek purpose and relevancy to what we do and what we try to achieve through faith and the ritual that reinforces that faith. This persistent questioning and asking may lie at the heart of the diminishment in participation in services. And while our core traditional approach to liturgy and practice reflects who we have been and who many of our core congregants are – we need to appreciate that there are many doors or avenues in which segments of our congregants may look to or want. Our efforts should be made to educate the whys as well as merely provide the tools itself through learner's minyanim.

We must stay connected with our congregants and understand their personal connection to Judaism and ritual. The spirituality survey should be conducted throughout the congregation by the ritual committee and additional focus groups should be created to explore these issues.

- Ritual Committee should undertake role of coordinating survey of congregants spirituality and also coordinate special education and reach out to congregation.
- Engage through study as part of prayer
- Engage through music – provide programming to explain the history and meaning of music to augment kavannah.
- Focus on ways to make services more personal and connect congregants to each other – expand use of the post service Kiddush for connection – identification of new members – or new visitors
- Consider ways to contract, if not physically, then virtually, the physical size of the sanctuary to meet the size of the congregation at a service so that people can feel connected.
- Shabbat lunches or Shabbat breakfasts – Hagim meals as well
 - Breakfasts prior to services - available coffee and Danish.
 - Fostering community to breaking bread on all Shabbats.
- Publicizing service innovations to community
- Shabbat handouts or flyers about upcoming services
- Welcoming new congregants or attendees
- Programs – live or online that provide an understanding of the liturgy and why we do what we do as opposed to only providing tools to use (how to daven – how to read Hebrew – and understanding the mechanical structure of the service). “Why” is as important as “how” for many of our congregants.
 - Davening for Dummies on line
 - Incorporate explanation of liturgy during the service

- How do we explore innovative approaches to prayer and ritual while preserving our respect for tradition? This must be constantly explored by our Ritual committee together with our clergy.
 - Move Dv'ar torah to end of service during sitdown kiddush
 - Experiment with starting time to add a coffee opening
 - Create different formats for the service even on a trial and error basis.
 - Develop of the workable formats a schedule for each within the month.
- How do we deal with length of service – predictability of length is one necessity – this is not to say that reduction and elimination is necessary but rather communication of the time of a service and its structural elements is important.

Community Learning

The goal must be to expand our reach out to all segments of the congregation to insure that they have the benefit and avenues for educational enrichment and discovery of their heritage, their faith and their spirituality. Equally all programs should underscore and serve the goal of connecting people together in the experiences provided by our programs.

- Insure that each year our programming includes history, culture, spirituality, Torah and Talmud.
- Consider changes in how lectures are offered – should HHJC break the mold of the more traditional typical lecture as a mark and brand of what can be our congregational interactive style
 - Should we move away from auditorium seating and have round tables with people sitting together rather than facing front in a formal and cold setting for interaction
 - Should we leave more time for Q&A and attendee interaction with our guests
- Is our reach out sufficient with physical meetings and programs
 - Are we adequately using cyberspace and our ability to reach individuals in our community
 - Mini lectures on line
 - Outlines and reading material online
- Enlarge the Torah service to encourage more joint study and discussion
- Move Rabbi's D'var torah or sermon to post service during Kiddush as a mini Kiddush and learn followed by social moment. Reduce length of service to backend the d'var torah and not detract from the social time.
- Create committees on Israel and Shoah that would be charged with programming learning experiences.

Leadership Development

Strategic Plan: Leadership

We should explore the potential restructuring of the Synagogue Board to create a distribution of responsibilities with a defined path to the presidency and an expanded educational component for existing and emerging leaders to build a more knowledgeable and active Board member.

Each board meeting should have a leadership component that explores synagogue life and synagogue operation. This can be a reading or roundtable discussion. Each month a component can focus on a different area of our life such as spirituality, engagement, financial etc. The committee chair or VP would be responsible to act as the leader for that month.

Board of Trustees Structure

Investigate alternative structures for the Board of Trustees where the overall synagogue administration and management, does not become the sole responsibility of the President. The commitment, pressure and responsibility makes this position seem like a volunteer Executive Director's position, and unattractive to most other officers.

Many Conservative Synagogues that function without a paid Executive Director have a Board structure that prepares officers for succession by moving up a ladder of responsibility. Over the course of a decade an elected officer would start as Secretary and then every two years, change positions to become Treasurer, move among different Vice President Portfolios until assuming an Executive Vice President title and then finally President. This arrangement becomes an in-house training program, and over the course of eight to ten years a Board member would have a full understanding of critical issues affecting the synagogue and how they have been resolved.

Mentoring New Board Members

To sustain the leadership of the congregation new Board members should be selected from congregants active in our religious services, Sisterhood, Men's Club or other synagogue programs. When a congregant agrees to join the Board, they should be matched with an existing Board member who would have the responsibility of befriending and mentoring the new person. The experienced Board member would impart some of the institutional knowledge of HHJC and shorten the learning curve to becoming an active Board member. A more comfortable new member may be more likely to participate in synagogue responsibilities in a proactive way. Mentoring would be a win-win for both participants.

Educating New Leaders

The USCJ Sulam program offers educational training programs for emerging synagogue leaders, current leaders and Presidents. These programs take place at one's synagogue and are offered on a yearly basis. Leadership training programs could make a big difference in how Board members see themselves and how to become active. A Board member who is confident in their knowledge and leadership abilities would be better prepared to take on the responsibilities of a synagogue facility.