

## Thriving Synagogue Learning Tool Frequently Asked Questions about Implementation

Now that you have signed your Agreement with UJA-Federation/SYNERGY, you are ready to begin gathering and using data about your congregation. Here are answers to questions you might have about how to proceed.

### OVERALL

#### What does the Learning Tool measure?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Thriving Synagogue Learning Tool Timeline**

Week 1	Synagogue submits signed Letter of Agreement to SYNERGY Synagogue selects Survey Leadership Team Leadership Team develops plan for “creating buzz” about the TSLT
Week 2-3	Leadership Team completes Survey Setup Form Leadership Team and/or others implement plan for “creating buzz”
Week 4	Congregation survey launches
Week 4-7	Leadership Team continues efforts to enhance survey response rate Leadership Team and/or others complete Factsheet
Week 7	Congregation survey closes
Week 11	Synagogue leaders and SYNERGY professionals hold data share meeting to review <i>Profile of Thriving</i> report
Week 12+	Synagogue leaders meet with SYNERGY coach to understand results and develop plans for action Results are shared with congregation Synagogue continues to use results to inform plans for action

**Who will have access to our data?**

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

**CONGREGATION SURVEY**

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

Here is what is possible:

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

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

**Who distributes the survey?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Create Buzz](#) is a resource for the Survey Leadership Team that offers scores of techniques and ideas for motivating response. The document offers ways to reach different segments of your congregation – from young families to elders, from nonparticipants to regulars, from the computer phobic to the computer savvy.

Also available to you is a [Checklist](#) with 26 ideas for creating buzz. We suggest that you commit to doing at least **2 of these each week before the survey launches and 2 for each week the survey is open**. As well, we invite you to add your own ideas to the end of the list.

**Does SYNERGY have turnkey materials for promoting the survey?**

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

**Do lotteries get people to participate?**

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

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

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

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

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

**SYNAGOGUE FACTSHEET****What is the purpose of the synagogue factsheet?**

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

**Where do we find the factsheet?**

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

**When is it due?**

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

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

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*The Thriving Synagogue Learning Tool, a project of SYNERGY/UJA-Federation of New York, was developed and tested by researchers at the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University. The Thriving Synagogue Learning Tool provides unique “profiles of thriving” to congregations and enables them to see, through comparative data, where they fit within the synagogue landscape. The tool is intended to be utilized as part of an ongoing process of reflection and action.*