Thriving Synagogue Learning Tool
Dimensions of Thriving

Thriving Synagogue Definition

A thriving synagogue is vital and alive. It is imbued with a sense of purpose, activity, and energy. Members and participants feel a commitment to and affection for the congregational community, the synagogue, and the Jewish life and learning it fosters.

SYNERGY/UJA-Federation’s Thriving Synagogue Learning Tool is composed of a set of instruments (congregation survey, board survey, fact sheet), a set of processes (data collection, data share meetings, follow up), and this report—which includes your synagogue’s Profile of Thriving.

The Profile of Thriving portrays where your congregation stands on a set of indicators of a thriving synagogue in addition to six dimensions associated with thriving. The dimensions were defined by SYNERGY’s theory of the thriving synagogue. Survey items were drafted to measure each element of the theory. Through a process of selection, review, feedback, and pilot testing, we arrived at the six dimensions and 74-item congregation survey that are the foundation for this report.

Indicators of Thriving

By definition, thriving synagogues are vital today and show promise of a strong future. They are alive with activity. They readily attract, involve, and retain members and participants. They are financially sound. Thriving synagogues are dynamically heading toward their future. They have a clear sense of purpose and a vision and a plan for fulfilling it. They are on the move, and members and participants are excited about the possibilities for the future of their synagogue.

Dimensions of Thriving

I. Belonging: This is MY Place
Members in thriving synagogues have a strong sense of belonging. The synagogue plays a central role in their lives, and they feel a personal responsibility to help it achieve success. Members are proud of their affiliation and would recommend the synagogue to a friend. They are comfortable and at home here and feel that this place is an excellent fit for them. They consider their dues an investment in the synagogue community.

II. Intentional Leadership
In a thriving synagogue, leadership does not belong to a closed circle of people. Rather, there is a healthy flow of new volunteers into leadership positions. Leaders perform their jobs well. They are accessible to congregants and responsive to their needs. Leaders are open to new ideas and to public discussion about important decisions. They model Jewish values and have earned the trust of the congregation.

III. Sacred Purpose
Synagogues with a sacred purpose are having a measurable impact on their members. They are fulfilling people’s spiritual needs and helping them grow as Jews. Prayer services are meaningful and attract people. Clergy articulate a vision of Jewish life that resonates with members and participants. The synagogue is understood and felt to be a sacred place.
IV. **Connected Community**
Members, clergy, and staff in a *connected community* are open, welcoming, and appreciative. Members are woven into the fabric of the congregation: They feel connected to others at the synagogue and want to be part of the life of the community. Their friendships and relationships extend beyond the walls of the synagogue. They not only want to contribute their skills and talents to the community, but a healthy percentage would also take on a formal leadership position.

V. **Sound Operations**
Thriving synagogues have *sound operations* with regard to the management of the budget, program, communications, and facilities. Things run smoothly in these synagogues. Facilities are well kept, problems are readily resolved, communications are clear and timely, and programs are of the highest quality. Management and budget not only follow good nonprofit practices but are also reflective of Jewish values and the synagogue’s mission.

VI. **Outward Facing**
Thriving synagogues are *outward facing*. They are concerned not only with matters within the congregation but also with their obligation to the larger community. They collaborate with other organizations and are well regarded for their contributions to the quality of life in the wider community.