

## Thriving Synagogue Learning Tool Frequently Asked Questions

### What is a thriving synagogue?

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. The Thriving Synagogue Learning Tool (TSLT) measures the extent to which a synagogue is thriving in key areas of congregational life.

### Who developed TSLT?

UJA-Federation of New York contracted with the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University (CMJS) to develop TSLT. The Brandeis team is led by Dr. Amy L. Sales, Senior Research Scientist and Associate Director of CMJS. In her 25 years at the University, she has conducted in-depth studies in more than 100 congregations throughout the United States, focusing primarily on how synagogues evolve and change.

### What are the benefits to our synagogue?

- A report with the synagogue's *profile of thriving*.
- A data share meeting with synagogue leadership and SYNERGY professionals to understand and discuss the profile of thriving.
- A means to identify areas that merit appreciation and celebration as well as areas that call for planning and action.
- Expert coaching in applying results to plans and action.
- Analyses that show differences in the perceptions of different groups--by age, years of membership, and position (e.g., leaders versus members).

### How is thriving measured?

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 (prospective members or others who participate but are not yet members). 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.
- **The board survey** is concerned with board practices and policies. Questions for board members are embedded in the congregation survey but are 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 is *not* included in TSLT?

TSLT does not evaluate individual staff members or volunteers in your congregation, nor does it measure congregant satisfaction with particular programs.

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

It is important that as many members as possible participate in the congregation survey. The more participants, the more representative and useful the survey results. “[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.

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

There is no monetary cost. The only cost is the time and effort needed to encourage survey participation.

**How much time does TSLT take?**

As seen in the timeline below, the entire process takes about *three months*.

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.

**TSLT 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.