

Some Theories and Best Practices of Attracting and Retaining Members

Thriving Communities Leadership Call March 2024

Attracting New Members

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Be You, Boldly.

- ▶ Celebrate who you are. Do you -- proudly and confidently. Those who want to be a part of it will take notice and join.

Keep Evolving

- ▶ Pay attention to what people are asking for when they come in contact with your congregation.
 - Do they have needs that you aren't currently able to meet? Are their patterns in what folks are looking for?
 - Are there ways you can shift your offerings, over time, to be responsive?
- ▶ It is natural and reasonable that the things that draw Jews and their fellow travelers to congregational life will shift and evolve over time.

Keep Learning from Your People

- ▶ **Learn from your successes.**
 - ▶ **Why have new members joined your community? What drew them? What convinced them to join? What was distinctive about your community that appealed to them?**
- ▶ **Learn from your departures.**
 - ▶ **Conduct non-judgemental exit interviews with people when they leave the congregation**

Set realistic membership goals

- ▶ Study the current demographics and population trends of your area.
 - Who currently lives nearby and what are they looking for in a synagogue
- ▶ What demographics does your community primarily serve, today? How would the culture and offerings of the community be impacted with a dramatic increase of new demographics?

Lower Barriers to Membership



Ask More of New Members

Grow Your Visibility Outside the Walls of the Synagogue

▶ Online

- ▶ Build a strong, functional website.
- ▶ Keep your calendar up to date.
- ▶ Make sure someone promptly answers general inquiries.
- ▶ Build and sustain a consistent, interactive, social media presence.

Grow Your Visibility Outside the Walls of the Synagogue

▶ In Person

- ▶ Host a table at the pride parade
- ▶ Sponsor the Jewish film festival
- ▶ Show up to marches and rallies with banners for your synagogue
- ▶ Go to interfaith breakfasts and gatherings
- ▶ Co-sponsor programs at the local university
- ▶ Share your physical space with like-minded community groups
- ▶ Host a farmers market in your parking lot.
- ▶ Co-host programming with other progressive congregations or schools in your area.

▶ Train Congregational Ambassadors

- ▶ Prepare members to be spokespeople for the congregation.

Broaden Your Entry Points to Congregational Life

- ▶ Invite non-members to things other than services: volunteer programs, music, book clubs, cultural events, meals, education series. Etc.

Build Pathways from Engagement to Membership

- ▶ Good outreach is about inviting people into your community, fostering relationships, and helping them feel connected.
- ▶ **Create (and execute) a game plan for following up with first time guests. aka prospective members.**
 - This is particular important for the moments you consistently reach new people - high holidays, community seders, etc.
- ▶ **Preschool and religious school pipelines**
 - ▶ Extend regular invitations to participate in congregational life
 - ▶ Offer discounts for membership. (Or, requirements)
 - ▶ Have rabbi be very visible and involved- building relationships with parents.

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Create a culture of New Member Celebrations

- ▶ host regular new member gatherings
- ▶ create new member mentor opportunities with existing members

Retaining Members



Co-create a culture of an engaged congregation

The 12 Items of Engagement

1. As a member of my congregation I know what is expected of me.
2. In my congregation my spiritual needs are met.
3. In my congregation, I regularly have opportunities to do what I do best.
4. In the last month, I have received recognition or praise from someone in my congregation.
5. The spiritual leaders in my congregation seem to care about me as a person.
6. There is someone in my congregation who encourages my spiritual development.
7. As a member of my congregation, my opinions seem to count.
8. The mission or purpose of my congregation makes me feel my participation is important.
9. The other members of my congregation are committed to spiritual growth.
10. Aside from family members, I have a best friend in my congregation.
11. In the last six months, someone in my congregation has talked to me about the progress of my spiritual growth.
12. In my congregation, I have opportunities to learn and grow.

**Increase opportunities for belonging
and investment in the community.**

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Don't neglect inreach as you focus energy on outreach.

Everything you do to make people feel welcome in the community will help everyone, old and new alike.

Show Gratitude for Members, often

- ▶ Thank your members - for donations, volunteering, leading services, teaching etc.