

WHY DO A MEMBER SURVEY?

Building a strong, vibrant, successful synagogue or temple is not easy. Clergy, lay leadership, and staff face many challenges. As a leader of your congregation, you know that achieving a religious community with these qualities requires hard work, collaboration, and patience. However, the task can be eased by having relevant, timely information - by knowing the characteristics, needs and desires of your membership.

A well-done survey and skilled analysis of results provides a snapshot of your membership's views - not just the views of the vocal minority. It can be invaluable in assessing the congregation's needs and in planning to enhance synagogue functioning. A member survey can help make participation in your congregation more spiritually, educationally, and socially rewarding.

Here are some questions that a congregation-wide survey can address:

General Evaluation

How are we doing as a synagogue community? Are members generally pleased, or are there areas of dissatisfaction? What are our strengths and weaknesses? How can we build on our strengths? What should be improved?

Strengthening Critical Functions

What are members' views about worship services (*T'fillah*), religious school, nursery school, community service activities (*Tikkun Olam*), charitable giving (*Tzedakah*), and feeling part of the synagogue community? What creative strategies can help?

Members' Characteristics

How well do you know your membership? What proportion is married with children? How many are retirees? How many are living alone? What type of work do they do? What are their religious backgrounds?

Recruitment and Retention

What are the synagogue's main qualities that could be communicated to attract new members? How many families and congregants have been thinking about leaving, and why? (Having a reading of this critical indicator of the organization's health can be used to help reduce attrition.)

Engagement and Participation

How much do congregants participate in synagogue activities? What are the best ways of stimulating a stronger sense of connectedness, especially among less active members, thereby increasing attendance, active engagement, and retention?

Strategic Planning, Initiatives, Expenditures, Staffing

What are members' preferences for new directions? If you are looking to fill a staff vacancy, what attributes would have the most appeal? How many members support proposed major expenditures such as building renovations or additions? (A survey can justify a policy or action by demonstrating its popularity, OR avoiding what could turn out to be unwelcome.)

Leadership - Membership Relations

Are relations between clergy/staff and members cordial and trusting? Or, do tensions exist that could emerge into serious problems if not recognized and addressed? (Survey findings can serve as an early warning system of simmering discontent.)

Communications

How much are synagogue newsletters and bulletins read? How often are the website or listserv used? In what ways are these useful? What changes might increase readership?

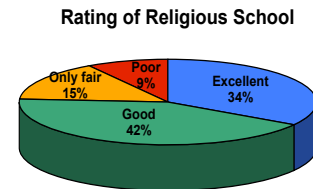
Special Needs of Member Segments

Are there groups in your synagogue whose needs are not being adequately addressed - such as teens, single adults, young families, seniors, or persons with disabilities?

Religious Beliefs and Practices, Opinions on Current "Hot Issues"

A confidential survey can profile members' beliefs about God, prayer, morality, and Jewish communal life; also, the extent of Shabbat observance, *Kashrut*, and other *Mitzvot*. It can also elicit your congregation's opinions on issues related to synagogue policies, programming, or governance?

Sample finding from a member survey:



The **Congregation Surveys** service is a professional, customized research approach tailored to the specific interests and needs of your synagogue or temple – **not** a standardized, “off-the-shelf” tool. It consists of (a) initial discussions with leadership to learn the issues and identify researchable questions, (b) design and programming of an online questionnaire which is engaging and not burdensome to complete (with accommodation for those unable to take the survey by computer), (c) a proven approach to eliciting a strong response rate, and (d) detailed analysis of the results with action recommendations.

Sid Groeneman, founder of Groeneman Research and Consulting, has conducted surveys for Jewish organizations and scholars such as:

- Albert Einstein Healthcare Network (for the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia)
- American Jewish Committee
- Charles & Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation
- Congregation Beth El (Bethesda, MD)
- Institute for Jewish & Community Research
- Simon Wiesenthal Center
- The Jewish Federations of North America
- Professor Steven M. Cohen
- Temple Sinai (Washington, DC)
- U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum
- Young Israel of Hewlett (NY)

Other clients include:

- AARP
- American Red Cross
- Corporation for Public Broadcasting
- John F. Kennedy School of Govt, Harvard
- Johns Hopkins University
- U.S. News & World Report
- United Way of America



Before establishing Groeneman Research & Consulting in 2000, Dr. Sid Groeneman was Account Group Manager with a leading international marketing research company specializing in survey studies, where he directed more than 120

research projects for corporations, government agencies, associations, philanthropies, research institutes, public relations firms and advertising agencies. He has a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Minnesota. He has co-authored (with Dr. Gary Tobin, Z"l) “*Surveying the Jewish Population in the United States*” and “*The Decline of Religious Identity in the United States.*”

In the words of Walter Arnheim, President of Congregation Beth El: *Dr. Groeneman’s survey was an integral part of our planning process for improved membership retention. The congregation enjoyed (yes, enjoyed!) completing his online questionnaire, and as a result we achieved a much higher response rate than anticipated. With his analysis of the data, the leadership of the congregation has already begun taking the first steps in implementing recommendations that flowed from the survey.*

Thanks to recent technological advances, confidential surveys can be carried out efficiently, unobtrusively, and for a fraction of what it used to cost.

Contact us for more information or to arrange a no-obligation meeting:

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Congregation Surveys: Assess Member Needs and Enhance Synagogue Functioning



**A customized service of:
Groeneman Research
& Consulting, Inc.**

Bethesda, Maryland

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