

## Congregation Surveys: Research to Benefit Your Synagogue Community



A customized service of:

**Groeneman Research  
& Consulting, Inc.**

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### **WHY DO A MEMBER SURVEY?**

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.

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.

*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? How are members distributed residentially? 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**

What are members' preferences for new directions? How many 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? (What about among various member segments?) 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 do members read synagogue newsletters and bulletins? How often do they use its website or listserv? In what ways are these useful? What changes might increase readership or participation?

### **Special Needs of Member Segments**

Are there groups in your synagogue whose special needs are not being adequately addressed - such as teens, single adults, young families, seniors, or persons with disabilities? What types of programming would be best received?

### **Religious Beliefs and Practices**

A confidential, carefully constructed and conducted survey can profile members' beliefs about God, prayer, morality, and Jewish communal life; also, the extent of Shabbat observance, *Kashrut*, and other *Mitzvot*.

### **Opinions on Current "Hot Issues"**

What are your congregation's opinions on issues that might be related to synagogue policies, pronouncements, programming, or governance?

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 non-profit groups and other clients for 27 years, including many Jewish organizations:

- American Jewish Committee
- B'nai B'rith Women (renamed: Jewish Women International)
- Congregation Beth El (Bethesda, MD)
- Institute for Jewish & Community Research
- Simon Wiesenthal Center
- Steven M. Cohen, Professor of Sociology, Hebrew Union College
- U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum

Other clients include:

- AARP
- American Red Cross
- Aspen Institute
- Corporation for Public Broadcasting
- John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University
- 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 holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Minnesota. He has co-authored (with Dr. Gary Tobin) “*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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