



**Kehillah Kedoshah:  
Building Sacred Community**

*“Every Voice Matters”*

JRF NY/NJ Keruv Grant to Support Congregational  
Outreach and Growth

**Steps in Congregational Outreach**

Prepared by Rabbi Hannah Greenstein, 2009



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## **Steps in Congregational Outreach**

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### **How To Increase Outreach Efforts In Your Congregation,**

The following guide reflects knowledge gained from a two-year grant from the UJA-Federation of New York to the New York New Jersey Region of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation to increase outreach efforts. Over the course of two years, six pilot congregations, with guidance from outside consultants and the project’s outreach coordinator, designed and implemented outreach strategies. All 13 regional congregations participated in outreach training sessions over the two-year period as well as a regional High Holidays effort, Open Seats, to invite unaffiliated to holiday services.

#### **Step 1:**

#### **Reflect on What Your Congregation Uniquely Offers to the Community**

Before embarking on any outreach effort, it is important to reflect on what makes your congregation unique among other congregations in your area. Reconstructionist congregations offer a different approach to Judaism, and it is this approach that should be incorporated into any outreach plan. Reconstructionist Judaism is not for everyone, but for the people to whom it speaks, it serves as a true spiritual home within Judaism. For more information on Reconstructionist Judaism, please visit our website: [www.jrf.org](http://www.jrf.org).

#### **Step 2:**

#### **Assess Outreach Resources**

**(Includes a Description of Necessary Volunteer Tasks)**

The first step in increasing outreach efforts is assessing whether or not you have the necessary staff and volunteers. For successful outreach, you must have:

- Dedicated, helpful, and friendly staff or volunteers to answer prospective member phone and email inquiries and record information about prospective members. In the NY-NJ region's experience, dedicated staff displayed more consistency with this task. Volunteers who performed this task at the same level as a dedicated staff person were those volunteers with long-term commitment to their congregations. Information recorded can include name, address, phone number, email, congregational interests, and how prospective members learned about the congregation. See the [Congregational/Reconstructionist Judaism Information #3 SAJ Phone Form](#) for an organized way to record prospective members' information.
- An outreach committee chair who will coordinate the activities of volunteers and staff and keep records of prospective members and their involvement over time. The ideal time commitment from a committee chair is two years: the amount of time a prospective member should be tracked with regular follow-up phone calls. If two years is too long a commitment for a volunteer, a good second option is to have two committee co-chairs with one of them more focused on year one and the other more focused on year two.
- A cadre of volunteers to welcome prospective members to synagogue programs and services. The size of the cadre will depend on the amount of congregational programs and services. The goal is to have at least one volunteer at every service and program whose responsibility includes recognizing and welcoming prospective members and connecting them to someone with whom they share areas of congregational interest. This volunteer is also responsible for sharing information gathered on the prospective member with the outreach committee chair. The time commitment from these volunteers need only be as long as one event plus the communication with the committee chair afterwards, although a commitment larger than one event is of greater service to the community.
- A cadre of volunteers to follow-up with prospective members who have expressed interest in the community, either through contacting the synagogue or attending a synagogue event. The ideal period of time for volunteers to commit is at least one year. This allows relationships between volunteers and prospective members to develop naturally over time. During this year,

volunteers should be prepared to make phone calls to assigned prospective members every three to four months.

In congregations that are clergy-driven, it is essential that outreach is part of the clergy agenda. Some examples of the work involved in a coordinated outreach strategy can be found in the following keruv website resources:

- [Bnai Keshet, New Member Welcoming Process,](#)
- [String of Pearls New and Prospective Member Tracking Methodology](#)
- [West End Synagogue New Member Retention Strategy](#)

For a more in-depth assessment of outreach capabilities, please refer to the [Outreach Readiness Assessment](#).

### **Step 3:**

#### **Recruit the Right Volunteers for the Job**

Outreach is about relationship building. The volunteers selected for welcoming prospective members must be able to listen to and connect with people. It is also helpful for outreach volunteers to be able to connect people to each other. For example, if they hear that a prospective member has young children, they should connect them to someone else in the community with young children. The relationships that develop between the prospective member and other members of the community are the reasons a prospective member will return.

It is also important to listen to the personal information prospective members share to see where they might be able to contribute their skills, hobbies, and interests to the community. This kind of meaningful engagement could make a difference to prospective members who are looking for a congregation where they can feel at home.

Volunteers should also understand the time commitment up front. As noted above, the levels of commitment vary, but it is important that each volunteer understands the duration of their task.

### **Step 4:**

#### **Identify a Target Population**

Reaching out to different demographic populations requires different slightly different methodologies. You need to decide on a target

demographic before you develop your strategy. Here are some points to keep in mind as you decide on your target population:

- a. **Your target demographic should already have a presence in your congregation.** For example, if you decide to target young families, there must already be a group of young families in the congregation. Otherwise, prospective member young families may feel out of place when they attend synagogue programs and they are the only people with children.
- b. **Your target demographic should be a population for whom you have a track record of serving well.** When you advertise your congregation to prospective members, you are making an implicit promise that your community can serve their needs. When prospective members attend your community programming, you want to follow through on this implicit promise. For example, if your target demographic is empty nesters, your community should already provide services such as adult education, evening social events, and Shabbat and holiday celebrations that are not children-centered.
- c. **Your target demographic should reflect the demographics of the larger community in which you live.** For example, if the greater community in which you live has a growing community of retirees, and your synagogue has a large retiree presence whose needs it serves well, it would make sense that you target your outreach efforts towards retirees. Or, if you live in an area where many young families are moving in and your synagogue has young families among its membership and serves their needs well, it makes the most sense for your synagogue to target young families.

## **Step 5:**

### **Develop Your Plan**

Once you have identified your target population, develop a step-by-step plan of how you will reach this population, welcome those who come through your doors, and follow-up with people who have expressed interest in your community. Note that this process may not happen overnight. It can take years for a prospective member to feel like part of a community and/or join. Think about your own journey to synagogue membership. It may not have happened over a long span of time. If you have not done so already, take a look at some plans developed by Reconstructionist congregations in the NY-NJ region.

- [Bnai Keshet, New Member Welcoming Process,](#)

- [String of Pearls New and Prospective Member Tracking Methodology](#)
- [West End Synagogue New Member Retention Strategy](#)

An example of a more comprehensive outreach plan is as follows:

- **Market to your target population** – think about where your target population goes and what they read– for example, if your target population is young families, put program postcards and fliers in your local children’s clothing stores or on a bulletin board at a local park.

Getting the word out about your congregation can include but is not limited to any of the following:

- Event listings
- Flyers, for example [String of Pearls Open House Flyer](#)
- Print ads, for example, [Congregation Beth Hatikvah ad](#)
- Billboard ads
- Purchasing a real estate broker’s list of Jewish families in the area and sending them a mailing
- Encouraging your current membership to get the word out about the community, for example [Bring a Friend Shabbat Letter](#)

In addition to these forms of marketing, one additional way to get the word out about your congregation is through online social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter and by maximizing your synagogue’s website. The JRF of NY-NJ engaged Darim Online, an organization specializing in online activity for Jewish non-profits, to deliver webinars on how our communities can best utilize websites and Facebook in outreach work. During these sessions, Darim Online drew from actual synagogue websites and Facebook pages to show how congregations are capturing and maintaining the interest of web browsers to their website and both expanding and deepening their social networks through Facebook. [Links to these webinars can be found here.](#)

- **Capture Contact Information From Phone and Email Inquiries Track Prospective Members**

When prospective members do contact the community, capture contact information. The Society for the Advancement of Judaism in New York City created a phone form: [SAJ Phone Form](#) to fill out when prospective members contact the congregation. Information

captured on this form includes both contact information and synagogue interests.

Contact information should be used by staff, volunteers, and clergy to keep track of prospective members. On the Society for the Advancement of Judaism (SAJ) Phone Form, there is space for staff and volunteers to record what programs prospective members attend over time and what kinds of follow-up efforts are made with them. An organized effort to keep track of prospective members ensures that no one attends programs without engagement by staff and volunteers.

Information about prospective members' synagogue interests can be used to connect prospective members with current members who share those interests. This information can also help streamline synagogue information sent to prospective members. For example, if a prospective member asks for information about social action, you can send them information about social action programs, rather than sending them information that may not be of interest. Alternatively, if you choose to send them a wider variety of synagogue information, you can circle for them the social action section, as a way to show that you are keeping their interests in mind.

Capturing contact information at synagogue programming can be challenging, particularly in congregations where writing on Shabbat and holidays is prohibited. Where writing is permitted, contact information can either be collected before an event by asking that people RSVP beforehand or at an event through a sign-in table or through specifically asking outreach volunteers to collect contact information from people who they meet. In a larger program, contact information can be collected through holding a raffle and asking people to provide contact information in exchange for raffle tickets. Where writing is not permitted, provide outreach volunteers with cards with their contact information (email and phone) on it and request that prospective members email or call with contact information when the holiday is over.

- **Follow Up With Prospective Members**

Follow-up should be continual process that spans one to two years. Prospective members should be contacted about every 3-4 months over this two-year process, unless they specify otherwise.

The ideal way to follow up with a perspective member is to have a current member with whom the prospective has something in common (demographics, interest, profession) contact them or even invite them to a congregational event (see Step 2 for a description of this cadre of volunteers). If this is not possible, a current member with whom they do not have something immediate in common, or even synagogue staff member, can make the call. Following up sends the message that the community cares. See [String of Pearls New and Prospective Member Tracking Methodology](#) for examples of follow-up using a personal touch.

- **Welcome Prospective Members Who Attend Synagogue Services or Events**

Every synagogue event should have an assigned “greeter.” Organize a large cadre of volunteer greeters who can be present at synagogue functions. One note about bar/bat mitzvahs: treat bar/bat mitzvah guests as if they are prospective members. Not only will these guests become a positive mouthpiece for the congregation, prospective members who visit during a bar/bat mitzvah seem to slip through the cracks as it is not always possible to tell these two populations apart.

- **Share Information About Prospective Members With Staff and Volunteers Involved in Outreach**

Find an organized system for recording and sharing data with all staff and volunteers involved in outreach. The [Society for the Advancement of Judaism \(SAJ\) Phone form](#) provides a good way to record information. A once a month or every other month meeting to share information about prospective members helps keep everyone on the same page about prospective members. These meetings need not happen in person, they can occur via conference call. In cases where information on perspective members is collected in an online database, meetings can occur with less frequency, provided outreach volunteers and staff check the database at least once a month.

- **Invite Prospective Members Who Have Attended a Synagogue Service or Program to a Shabbat or Holiday Meal**

Once a prospective member has expressed enough interest to come to an event, it is important to help them build social

connections in the community. Ultimately, it is these social relationships that will help the prospective member feel like part of the community. This invitation should be treated as a “shiduch,” or set-up, or friendship and should come from a community member with whom the prospective member has something in common.

## **Step 6:**

### **Integrate New Members Into Your Community**

Once you implement your plan, you should end up with some new members. To make membership “stick,” new members must be integrated into the community, meaning that they must start to form relationships with other community members. Whether you use a buddy system, new member events, or a more out-of-the box idea for connecting new members to each other and to longer-term members, it is imperative that special efforts are made on behalf of new members for at least the first year of their membership.

See [Bnai Keshet, New Member Welcoming Process](#), [String of Pearls New and Prospective Member Tracking Methodology](#), [West End Synagogue New Member Retention Strategy](#) for examples of ways to integrate new members into the community.

## **Step 6:**

### **Evaluate Your Process**

After developing and implementing your plans, take a moment to reflect on the process with all members of the outreach team, and possibly some new community members. Were your efforts successful? Where is there room for improvement? How will the plan be tweaked or re-worked for the next cycle of outreach?