

# SYNERGY: Innovations and Strategies for Synagogues

## How to Plan in Uncertain Times?

We can all agree that we are living in uncertain times. There is no crystal ball to inform us what the next several months will bring and/or how we will adapt to the new environment. While there is a certain level of discomfort, we also believe that there is great opportunity in dreaming about new scenarios and/or ways to engage in Jewish life.

The question of the moment is how and when to re-open your synagogues. We recognize that this is a decision that each synagogue will need to determine for itself, based on your community's values, the current state/local DOH guidelines, and the real implications of reopening each area of synagogue life. The purpose of this guide is to provide leaders with a framework for creating a scenario plan(s) that will help you consider the impact of different scenarios as well as a side-by-side look at the pros and cons of each approach. Each congregation will have to go through its own process to determine the ideal time and ways in which to physically re-open, and this may change based on new information and on-the-ground experience of reopening.

### Before You Start: Review Federal, State and Local Guidelines:

JCRC-NY developed a guide to re-opening synagogues to explore all issues related to security, HR, and facilities. Refer to this resource and most importantly, monitor the most current instructions of federal, state and local officials to comply with

their mandates and recommendations. Members of the CSI security team will be able to address any questions you have as you move forward with re-opening. You can find a copy of the JCRC webinar recording and a downloadable link to the resource guide [here](#).

### Getting Started:

Planning can be a challenge for synagogue leaders when there is so much uncertainty about the short-, medium- or long-term future. Leaders may consider how various scenarios will impact their ability to offer activities and services that are key parts of synagogue life. Using this guide will help you examine different scenarios and their impacts as well as to consider the possible pros and cons of each.

Who is responsible for scenario planning? If you have not already done so, the board should convene a task force that will use this guide to develop their reopening scenarios.

### Role of the Board:

1. Assign individuals to Synagogue Re-Opening Task Force\*
2. Provide information as needed to the task force
3. Inform stakeholders and synagogue members of task force work
4. Develop timeline for scenario building work
5. Upon completion, review recommendations of the task force, pros and cons of each approach, and decide how and when to move forward
6. Communicate with congregation throughout the process. When decisions are made, provide the rationale including articulation of synagogue values which may have served as a guide

### \*Composition of the Task Force:

The task force can be comprised of members of the clergy team, senior staff, and executive and lay leadership. It is for each leadership group to determine the right structure of oversight for planning purposes, but you may want to consider the optimal composition (size and membership) to enable you to be nimble given the ever-changing landscape. As this work is for the short to mid-term, the fewer layers of complexity, the better.

### Role of the Task Force:

1. Gather necessary information from the board/department chairs/professional staff from each of the programmatic areas.
2. Be aware of and stay updated on state and local DOH guidelines regarding re-opening of synagogue buildings and in-person spiritual gatherings
3. Meet virtually as needed to complete the scenario planning matrix
4. Make recommendations to the board for their decision making
5. Keep stakeholders apprised of your work

### Timeline for Scenario Planning:

Over the coming weeks and months, guidelines for re-opening of synagogue buildings and gatherings will change. We suggest you refer to your local and state guidelines for what is most current. This guide was created for short/medium term planning purposes as your congregation begins its phased reopening of the institution. While you may begin referring to one scenario, having all three completed will more fully prepare you for any unexpected changes.

### Determine the Possible Scenarios:

After reviewing the re-opening guidelines, consider if these scenarios (fully virtual, hybrid, and/or in-person) are possible for your consideration. You will want to ensure that you have the capacity to re-open and/or have the resources necessary as mandated. For optimal preparation, planning across multiple scenarios is ideal as the situation is fluid and could change quickly. You may also determine that various scenarios will play out concurrently for different areas of synagogue life. Included in this guide is a comparison grid where you can see side-by-side scenarios.

For the purpose of this guide we are providing the following three scenarios:

- Hybrid – Partially virtual/partially in person
- In-Person — this may be small, medium or large group gatherings depending on regulations
- Fully Virtual — No in-person gatherings

### Scenario Building: Areas of Synagogue Life:

There are many areas of synagogue life where scenario planning would be useful – consider utilizing this matrix to plan within one or all of them. In appendix A, we have provided an example of the scenario building matrix for Shabbat morning services, but we encourage you to customize this for your congregation. We will also provide you with blank worksheets (as an additional document) to replicate for other priority areas.

We recognize that for each denomination, there will be varying ritual guidelines that will pre-determine which scenario is possible, and for which area of synagogue life.

- High Holidays
- Worship - Shabbat
- Worship - Weekday
- Religious School/Early Childhood Center
- Membership Dues
- Fundraising
- Adult Education/Community Engagement
- Youth Group
- Life Cycle Events
- Synagogue Trips

Within each of these areas, depending on the scenario, there will be impacts on the following realms:

- Programmatic – how might this impact the program aspect of this area?
- Operations – how might this impact the operations (facility, communications, IT, security) of this area?
- Revenue – what revenue sources will be impacted? In what way? What new revenue opportunities should be considered?
- Expenses – what will it cost to offer this service?

- Possible Collaborations/Partnerships – are there opportunities for collaborations or partnerships within this area? Should this activity be outsourced to another provider?
- Stakeholder Considerations – who is the primary consumer in this area? What are their considerations?
- Pros/Cons of Approach – within each scenario, what are the top pros/cons that emerge? And how might that impact your direction?

Transparency:

As many of your members are wondering (either expressed or not), when/if they will be able to attend high holiday services, send their child to religious school in the fall, hold their child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah, and/or attend kiddush again, it's important that you share with your community that you are working through these questions and welcome their input and feedback. The more they feel their opinions are heard, they will, in turn, continue to feel that they are valued members of the community.

*This scenario planning matrix was adapted from the [American Camp Association Contingency Graph](#) by UJA-Federation of New York in consultation with the Jewish Education Project, Orthodox Union, Reconstructing Judaism, Union for Reform Judaism, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, and Colin Weil, Executive Director of B'nai Jeshurun.*

## Appendix A - Sample Guiding Questions

<b>Fully Virtual: Shabbat Morning Worship</b>	
<b>Programmatic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What alternative experiences will we provide if virtual Shabbat services are not part of our practice?</li> <li>• What are the ritual components that will be permissible without an in-person minyan?</li> <li>• How can we modify Shabbat morning worship to be maximally engaging virtually?</li> </ul>
<b>Operations (IT, Facility, Communications)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What technology support do you need to assist those who are less technologically capable?</li> <li>• How are you communicating to ensure that members and guests are aware of your virtual services?</li> </ul>
<b>Revenue Opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will members continue to value membership and pay dues if fully virtual?</li> </ul>
<b>Expenses Associated</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the expenses associated with providing quality services online?</li> </ul>
<b>Possible Collaborations /Partnerships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What opportunities for collaboration exist that will enrich your offerings and/or provide relief for your staff?</li> <li>• Which synagogues are potential partners for online collaborations?</li> </ul>
<b>Who are the stakeholders and what are their concerns?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholders: congregants (regulars and episodic), “walk-ins”, bar mitzvah guests</li> <li>• What are they seeking? What are their concerns?</li> </ul>
<b>Pros/Cons of this approach?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have participation numbers increased or decreased since services went virtual?</li> <li>• How does being online impact the experience positively or negatively?</li> </ul>

# Hybrid: Shabbat Morning Worship

<b>Programmatic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which programs would be optimized for in person vs. virtual experience?</li> <li>• What limitations exist in person gatherings currently?</li> </ul>
<b>Operations (IT, Facility, Communications)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are you staffed/do you have the technology to provide both virtual and in person simultaneously?</li> <li>• What virtual alternatives, if any, will be provided others who aren't able to attend an in-person service?</li> </ul>
<b>Revenue Opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you charge differently for in person vs. virtual?</li> </ul>
<b>Expenses Associated</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What additional expensed will you incur by accommodating both virtual and in person? And is it "worth it"?</li> </ul>
<b>Possible Collaborations /Partnerships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If some are meeting in-person for a service, can there be joint online-services with another congregation?</li> </ul>
<b>Who are the stakeholders and what are their concerns?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholders: congregants (regulars and episodic), "walk-ins", bar mitzvah guests</li> <li>• What are they seeking? What are their concerns?</li> </ul>
<b>Pros/Cons of this approach?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What will be the impact on the community if you hold both virtual and in person services?</li> </ul>

# In-Person: Shabbat Morning Worship

<b>Programmatic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What aspects of the service will you need to modify given the state/local guidelines?</li> </ul>
<b>Operations (IT, Facility, Communications)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you need to do to prepare your facility for in-person gathering?</li> <li>• What is your policy around accountability related to enforcing the state/local guidelines?</li> </ul>
<b>Revenue Opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What will be the impact on dues collection/fundraising/rental revenue with the resumption of in person worship?</li> </ul>
<b>Expenses Associated</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What expenses will there be when starting to meet in-person? Building? PPE? Security?</li> </ul>
<b>Possible Collaborations /Partnerships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you work with surrounding synagogues on a coordinated re-opening strategy?</li> </ul>
<b>Who are the stakeholders and what are their concerns?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholders: congregants (regulars and episodic), “walk-ins”, bar mitzvah guests</li> <li>• What are they seeking? What are their concerns?</li> </ul>
<b>Pros/Cons of this approach?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What will be lost/gained if you are no longer offering virtual shabbat programming?</li> </ul>

# Scenario Planning Summary

## Shabbat Morning Worship

	Fully Virtual	Hybrid	In-Person
Programmatic			
Operations (IT, Facility, Communications)			
Revenue Opportunities			
Expenses Associated			
Possible Collaborations/ Partnerships			
Who are the stakeholders and what are their concerns?			
Pros/Cons of this approach?			