



ק"ק עדת - ישראל

NSCI Strategic Direction

This document reconfirms the broad scope of North Shore Congregation Israel's activities and purpose, and acknowledges its Congregational values. The document also identifies key directions that will help (i) define who we are as a congregation; (ii) establish an identity and reputation for NSCI in our community, and nationally; and (iii) establish principles that will guide us for the next several years.

Preamble

North Shore Congregation Israel is established, in the spirit of Reform Judaism, as a house of worship, study, and assembly in the service of God, of Torah and of the People Israel. We are committed to expressing our Jewish values by promoting active participation in all areas of congregational life, and reclaiming spirituality within an evolving Jewish tradition.

In accordance with that purpose, NSCI is dedicated to the spiritual fulfillment of its congregants and those within its broader community. We value religious observance enhanced by tikkun olam (our obligation to repair the world), intellectual challenge, lifelong Jewish learning, and inspiring worship. Our welcoming community nurtures personal connections through Judaism, Jewish engagement and active participation in vibrant synagogue life. NSCI continues to define itself by the core values that have sustained us through our long history.

As a flagship synagogue of the Chicagoland area, we continue to optimize our reach within and outside our walls, in both traditional and innovative ways. For those who believe in, or are interested in exploring, the importance of Jewish values and being part of a congregation, North Shore Congregation Israel is the synagogue that offers enriched and inspired Jewish experiences and connections, inviting each congregant and community member to join in Jewish life in ways that are innovative, impactful and memorable, redefining the Jewish experience of the individual and the community for the 21st Century.

Throughout the ages, the synagogue has served as the anchor and, in many ways, the center and sustainer of Jewish life. At this critical juncture, not only in our own synagogue's life, but in the shifting reality of Jewish identity and practice among the mainstream Jewish population in America, we at NSCI intend to continue to fulfill our mission, not only maintaining our important role as a vital and strong synagogue, but to optimize our reach, both within our established community and outside our walls, in both traditional and innovative ways.

While remaining true to our historic purpose, mission, and core values, we have determined that four key directions will help set our course and direct our decisions:

1. Connect with and engage members
2. Be a resource to the community
3. Optimize use of our space; develop strategic and synergistic partnerships
4. Align budget, funding, staffing, governance and programs with our mission and vision

In order to fully understand and develop this course, each of the four key directions requires continuous review and re-evaluation. Some of our plans to implement the four key directions will, by necessity, be aspirational and will need to be tested (and, as necessary, modified) through experimentation and evolution. Others will be more practical and operational. In all cases, we intend to be nimble, creative, and flexible in making, reviewing, revising, and implementing policies and plans and, perhaps most critically, identifying and having in place, the necessary human and financial resources for success.

Each of the key directions builds on and relates to the other, in no particular order, and are intended, as a group, to be a unified whole. It is our expectation to review and periodically update and revise the key directions to reflect the then current state of NSCI.

1. Connect With and Engage Congregants

At NSCI we believe that “spiritual needs” extend beyond a traditional definition limited to “religious learning and practice” and into all aspects of a person’s life, their interests, struggles, talents, occupations, families, etc. We also believe that the spiritual needs of each individual are unique and can change throughout one’s life. In order to assist us in meeting the spiritual needs of our congregants, NSCI has adopted a “people” focused, “relational” approach to engagement, directed towards getting to better know our congregants; evaluating, creating or continuing programs as reflections of our congregants’ needs and desires; and, through that process, connecting congregants with Judaism and the larger mission, vision, and values of our community.

As a result, our expectations are that NSCI’s staff and lay leadership will engage families in meaningful connections and relationships, as well as in meaningful Jewish opportunities through their participation and involvement with NSCI. That approach to connectivity and engagement will deepen our congregants’ commitments to the values of our community and will allow us to better identify and acknowledge our congregants’ skills and talents, and inspire and create new and empowered leaders. Ultimately, we hope and intend that every congregant will feel “at home” at NSCI and see themselves as a stakeholder in our community.

We recognize that connectivity and engagement does not begin and end with activities at 1185 Sheridan Road. It is our intent to connect and engage with our congregants, and those who may be interested in establishing a relationship with NSCI, both within and outside our physical structure.

We will regularly and continually operationalize our connecting with and engaging congregants in a number of ways. We acknowledge that any of those ways will require resources, time, and commitment. We further acknowledge that “connecting” and establishing relationships is not, in and of itself, the goal. The goal is to use the relational Judaism model, and iterations of it, to further our existing mission and values.

2. Be a Resource to the Community

We will continue to regularly assess, and establish a uniform and clear understanding of, what it means to be a congregant. We will promote the concept of congregational participation as an important value, and something that we hope to further in everyone’s relationship with NSCI. Nevertheless, we also recognize that Jews and their families understand or engage in synagogue life, or in Jewish life, or wish to do so, in a myriad of ways. “Membership” may be a point along a path that begins (or, possibly, ends) with a less obtrusive, “softer” commitment of participation. As such, we intend to be more inclusive about who we are and who is “in” our community beyond traditional membership alone. We understand that Jewish institutions are critical to sustaining a Jewish people/community, and seek values driven, financially responsible ways to make our synagogue a place of open doors and accessibility to all who seek Jewish touchpoints. We recognize that to do so, we must be open, and will be open, to reaching out and meeting people outside the confines of our building. At the same time, we are committed to continuing to promote the importance, need and benefits associated with active participation, engagement, and “being a congregant.” As such, we intend to actively engage with our broader community and involve them in NSCI activities, wherever they may occur.

In doing so, we will exercise care in implementing specific programs to assure that: (i) we do not undermine the role, and importance, that we place on being a congregant; (ii) we remain sensitive to the interests and perception of our long-standing congregants to avoid alienating them; and, (iii) we recognize the need for an evolving, responsible and sustainable revenue model to support the work of our congregation. We intend to maintain various fees for participation in NSCI activities - - for those who establish a congregant relationship with NSCI and for those who don’t, or are not yet ready to do so. In all our endeavors, we will remain sensitive to maintaining the financial health and viability of NSCI. In whatever way we operationalize being a resource to the community, we must do so in a fiscally responsible manner.

3. Optimize Use of Space; Develop Strategic and Synergistic Partnerships

North Shore Congregation Israel has one of the most iconic, beautiful synagogue campuses in the United States. Our facilities are expansive and versatile. At the same time, some perceive our physical space to be “cold” as exemplified by the absence of one central entrance and foyer to provide an atmosphere of “welcoming.” Keeping those strengths and weaknesses in mind, and in keeping with our mission to engage both our congregants as well as the broader community in meaningful ways while being fiscally responsible, we intend to optimize the way we use our space, as well as how we engage in strategic and synergistic partnerships to further realize our goals.

Doing so will have the benefit of (i) maximizing the use of an underutilized asset (both our building and its surrounding grounds); (ii) generating non-dues revenue; (iii) increasing our exposure to a broader public (which we hope will help overcome any negative perceptions of our space and our congregation); and (iv) developing partnerships with other organizations that share our values and through which we can further achieve our mission. We recognize that any increased use of our space will both create increased wear and tear and place demands on our staff. We also recognize that our space needs to be constantly and properly maintained and that certain modifications or enhancements may be needed to make it suitable to a broader range of users and uses. Thus, we are committed to maintaining our existing physical plant, will continue to explore means to upgrade it, and will implement programs with care to assure that we do not over-tax our resources.

4. Align Budget, Funding, Staffing, Governance with Our Mission and Vision

As a relational, values driven and fiscally responsible community, we are committed to aligning our governance structure, staffing (clergy, professional and administrative), lay leadership, financial resources and budget process with our core values and assuring that they are transparent and functional. That is an on-going process that must be regularly reviewed and updated as changing times and circumstances require.

We intend to maintain a relational, partnership based model of human resources at NSCI (BOT and officers, committees, clergy, senior staff, administrative and maintenance staff, education and youth staff) where formal and informal lines of communication are open and expected.

We are committed to maintaining a budget form and process that aligns with our programs and values and that promotes transparency, clarity and serves as a tool for helping fulfill our mission and implement our vision. We also are committed to (i) having a staffing model that aligns with our programs, priorities, values, and budget; (ii) identifying necessary lay leadership training and needs; (iii) assessing potential changes and improvements to NSCI’s governance structure; and (iv) identifying opportunities to improve communications and the exchange of information and knowledge between the professional staff and leaders, between the leaders and members, and among and between members.

Further, we are focused on our long-term future and assuring the viability of our Congregation for our next 100 years. To that end, we are committed to strengthening our finances through both endowment gifts and legacy planning.

Conclusion

We want to have a clearly understood vision of our identity and mission as a Reform Congregation in the 21st Century, and communicate that vision widely within our broader community. The four key directions described above, in conjunction with our historic core values and underlying mission, will help guide us in our programs and activities. As we continue to discuss, test, evaluate, and implement new and existing programs, the four key directions and our over-arching values and mission, will help us define who we are, who we want to be, and how we are perceived -- and they will help maintain NSCI's position as the leading Reform Congregation on the north shore, and beyond, and as an innovative role model for others.

Adopted February 27, 2018