



**Strategic Planning Project  
2018 – 2021**

**Research and Insights on  
National and Local Trends**

**June 2017**

## WHY READ THIS REPORT?

As part of the Strategic Planning process, the Temple Beth Am Strategic Planning Task Force undertook research to understand local and national trends in Jewish life. We deeply believe that in order to know where we want to go in creating our community of the future, we need to understand our past, our present and what is happening in our community and in our country. To make choices about how we invest and build for the future, it is important for our leaders and members to understand the context of strategic planning suggestions to make the most informed decisions possible. The Report identifies the following key themes:

### Key Themes for a Strategic Temple Beth Am

- 1. Relationships and Community** are major drivers of people's decision whether to belong to a synagogue, and which one to join, as well as of their sense of fulfillment, dedication to the organization, and engagement with meaningful and powerful Jewish experiences. We must become experts at building relationships and community.
- 2. Demographics** are changing and play a powerful role in the identity and health of our community. This includes millennials, aging boomers, diversity, and designing with more specificity for the needs of our community members.
- 3. Meaning and practice are paramount.** Powerful Jewish experiences look different for different people, and traditional forms of Jewish engagement (e.g. worship and prayer) may not be the primary Jewish practice of many (or most) in our community. Thus, creating a multitude of meaningful, powerful Jewish experiences will be important for helping our community develop their Jewish practice and find meaning and value in being part of this Jewish community.
- 4. Focus and excellence.** In a busy and loud world, with infinite opportunities and many compelling demands on our time, attention, and dollars, Temple Beth Am must know what we stand for, and excel at it. The ultimate test of this is how our members take our reputation onto the street. Our plan must set the intentions, but our success will be based on how we are known – culture, community, values and action.

## RESEARCH AND INSIGHTS WHICH INFORM THIS STRATEGIC PLAN

Trends in demographics, marriage, religious affiliation, technology, and social interaction play an increasingly significant role in how people engage – through work, play, or spirituality – with the world around them. While these tectonic changes need to be understood by any institution that wants to remain relevant and effective, they create specific challenges for a Reform synagogue trying to bridge the needs of multiple generations. If we are going to appeal to Millennials and also serve the needs of Baby Boomers, we will have to understand how each different audience wants to receive information and engage with the synagogue and with Judaism. We will have to continue to adapt: what works for today’s 65-year-old Boomers will not cut it when Millennials reach the same age. And we’ll soon have to start figuring out what the post-Millennial generations expect from us.

**A NOTE ON GENERATIONS:**

Different studies use different birth years to delineate generations. Roughly, they are:

Silent or Greatest	b. 1925-1945
Baby Boomers	b. 1945-1965
Generation X	b. 1965-1980
Millennials	b. 1980-1995
Generation Z	b. 1995-2015

In addition to listening carefully to our own community and integrating insights that we heard from Temple Beth Am members and stakeholders, we have reviewed national and local research that provides important input into our strategic priorities. We also conducted confidential interviews with a handful of congregations around the country to see how they are addressing some of these issues. Based on how our American culture and Jewish communal needs are shifting, and on how the population growth in Seattle has affected Temple Beth Am’s positioning locally, the following are key insights that we believe Temple Beth Am leadership should understand, as they play an important role for our strategic priorities over the next several years.

### National Insights

- I. **“Nones”:** Overall, the “unaffiliated” are the fastest growing religious group in America (16% to 23% from 2007 to 2014) (Pew Research Center’s [2014 Religious Landscape Study](#)). A full 78% of these people were raised in a religious tradition which they have now shed. Nearly half (49%) cite “lack of belief” as the reason; for example, trust in science means the “God and miracles” basis for religious has turned them off.

*Implication for Temple Beth Am:*

- *Our understanding of what it means to be a synagogue should explicitly be more than religious services, and we should explicitly invite a diversity of understandings of “God.”*

#### Unaffiliated Make Up Growing Share Across Generations

*% of each generation that identifies current religion as atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular*

	2007	2014	Change
Silent generation (b. 1928-1945)	9	11	+2
Baby Boomers (b.1946-1964)	14	17	+3
Generation X (b. 1965-1980)	19	23	+4
Older Millennials (b. 1981-1989)	25	34	+9
Younger Millennials (b. 1990-1996)	n/a	36	n/a

2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014. All changes are statistically significant.

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## 2. Generations:

A. **Millennials** (born 1980-) are the largest generation in America and “are about to become the most important customers your business has ever seen” according to [Forbes](#). While Baby Boomers have been a generation that supports and values organizations, Millennials are a much more “do it yourself” generation and tend to be more skeptical of institutions and “membership” more generally. They are an incredibly social generation, both in real life (IRL) and digitally – and they don’t draw sharp distinctions between these two modes. They make decisions (purchases, life changes, whether to join a synagogue, etc.) based on friends and social input. They act socially – connecting with friends is at the heart of everything they do, from shopping to recreating – and seek adventure and “boutique” experiences. They collaborate and cooperate, having had the digital tools to do so from day one. Most important for us, Millennials are a highly values-driven generation – specifically values that the Pew study authors call “civic” values: those that relate to good citizenship – and they have a truly global identity.

### *Implications for Temple Beth Am:*

- *This generation has always had technology that simply works, so ours should. Technology should be simple, intuitive, convenient, mobile, and tailored to personal interests.*
- *Integrate social connections into everything – from social marketing, to making transparent who is coming to events, to “designing for social” in every program.*
- *DIY+collaboration means this group can be a powerful force for designing and running their own programs and being active participants in our volunteering. We need to learn how to authentically empower and activate younger members of our community.*
- *Adventure and “boutique” drive their excitement – experiment with programs that are evaluated by quality over quantity of participation.*
- *Amplify connections between Jewish values and civic values, and position Temple Beth Am as an organizing force for these values in our local community and beyond.*

B. **Boomers** (born 1946-1964). The American Administration on Aging predicts that by 2040, the number of Americans age 65 or older will be over 80 million, [more than double](#) the number at the turn of the millennium. By then, this cohort will likely constitute more than 20 percent of the American population. In the Jewish community, the numbers are even starker.

As baby boomers hit their 50s and 60s, the United States as a whole has gotten older, but Jews have seen an especially notable demographic shift. By the turn of the millennium, the median age of American Jews was 42—far [older](#) than the overall American median age of 35. In 2007, 18 percent of American Jews were [65 or older](#), compared to just 12 percent of all Americans. And thanks to factors like [delayed parenting](#), a record-low [birth rate](#), and the aging of baby boomers,

Americans in general – and American Jews in particular – will see these trends continue for years to come.

But Jewish boomers are not just a statistic. They represent a wide variety of interests, background, and religious beliefs. And with their extensive professional and volunteer experience, they can strengthen the Jewish community. But if they are to remain connected, they need to be actively engaged in a meaningful way. While boomers have traditionally been a generation that joins and supports institutions, if their needs are not being met in one institution, they are likely to opt for another.

The Boomer generation also represents an [unprecedented potential transfer of wealth](#) in the coming years. Charitable giving increases with age, and higher engagement with the Jewish community [correlates with higher levels of charitable giving](#) to both Jewish and non-Jewish causes.

*Implications for Temple Beth Am:*

- *Ninety-one percent of TBA's current congregants are 40 and above. Boomers are currently both the volunteer and financial backbone of our synagogue. Unless we provide meaningful engagement opportunities for boomers, we risk losing them.*
- *The size of this cohort underlines the need for a legacy/planned giving program, rooted in increased engagement.*
- *Find ways to engage religious school parents so that they choose to stay involved after their children leave Religious School.*

3. Change, and the pace of change today, is unprecedented. In fields ranging from healthcare to transportation, we see new models of organizing popping up that are displacing long entrenched models – such as the shift from taxis to Uber and Lyft. The human needs aren't different, but the ways of satisfying those needs are changing rapidly. Synagogues – and other central institutional pillars of Jewish life – are not immune to this. People will always want community, spirituality, and a way to enrich and act on their values and identity; synagogues are now just one of many alternatives for Millennials and others to satisfy their needs for community, spirituality, and social justice. The model of “assumed belonging to a synagogue (institution)” and allocating significant dollars to do so is no longer a given.

*Implication for Temple Beth Am:*

- *Experimentation, nimbleness, and the ability to evolve the model – including models of financial support – will be key for our synagogue to adapt to changing needs and seize opportunities while remaining grounded in our core beliefs, values and services to the community. This means embracing principles of adaptive leadership, developing a comfort with taking thoughtful risks, and learning how to be iterative in our design and evolution of programs and initiatives. Read about Clayton Christensen’s concept of “disruptive innovation” applied to a Jewish communal context in [this article](#).*

4. Everyone is seeking community and meaning. Today’s world is fast paced, highly digital, and often transient. Young adults are moving for jobs – multiple times – and need to create a sense of community on the go. One of the hottest emerging trends is using the data-driven matching technology of online dating sites (now totally normalized for GenX and younger) for [making friends](#). Seattle’s influx of professionals coming for jobs is among the highest in the nation, exacerbating what’s already becoming a national trend. Those places and communities that are winning are those that are most effective at designing meaningful experiences where you can easily make social connections.

*Implication for Temple Beth Am:*

- *Keep the focus on “meaning” for the audiences we are seeking and engaging. Design for real social connection at every opportunity, and understand that we are marketing community, not just programs. Understand the target market and the individuals and design for greatest specificity. Content and location may look very different than it has in the past to design with such relevance for any audience. Keep in mind the diversity of audiences within our congregation, and use different strategies to engage millennials, empty nesters, and baby boomers.*

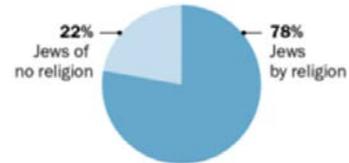
## Jewish Communal Insights

1. A 2013 Pew Study “A Portrait of Jewish Americans” provided great insight into the American Jewish community and helps us make more sense of the national Pew studies on religion in America. Most notably for our purposes, the trend from one generation to the next of identification by religion vs. by culture and ancestry is clear. Younger Jews do still have strong Jewish identity but increasingly don’t consider themselves (or their ties to Judaism) religious. Observance may be measured by attending Passover Seder and/or fasting on Yom Kippur.

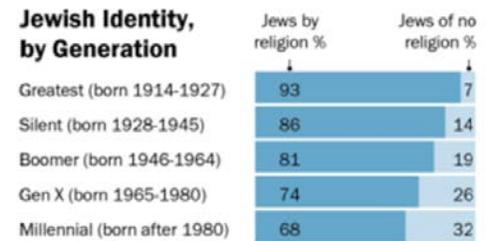
*Implication for Temple Beth Am:*

- *Position ourselves as a center of Jewish life and identity, and celebrate and validate multiple ways of identifying and practicing Judaism. Engaging all Jews (of varying “religious” identities) will be key to maintaining membership and a sustainable synagogue into the future.*

**U.S. Adult Jewish Population, 2013**



**Jewish Identity, by Generation**



Source: Pew Research Center 2013 Survey of U.S. Jews, Feb. 20-June 13, 2013. Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

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2. “Community” must be understood deeply, and designed for. This pyramid was created by Connected Congregations, an initiative of UJA-Federation of New York with Darim Online, as a way to illustrate the importance of relationships for building true community, and the need for a strong community to have a strong congregation. And of course, we need a strong congregation (group of people) to have a strong and sustainable synagogue (institution). Really “designing for community” means a number of shifts in policy, culture, practice, program design and more. Leading synagogues are exploring how to do this in a way that is authentic to who they are, while making changes that have big impact on the strength and health of their community. As illustrated by our synagogue interviews, there is no “magic bullet” for engagement; congregations are experimenting with different forms of engagement that are both designed for specific demographic groups and authentic to the character of the community.



- a. For several years now, the URJ has been fleshing out the concept of “Audacious Hospitality.” At the outset, the concept meant ensuring that everyone who engages with the synagogue feels “seen.” Under the leadership of April Baskin, the URJ’s VP of Audacious Hospitality, it’s now defined as “a transformative spiritual practice rooted in

the belief that we will be a stronger, more vibrant Jewish community when we fully welcome and incorporate the diversity that is the reality of modern Jewish life.” The URJ is developing [resources](#) on Audacious Hospitality, including a [pilot toolkit](#), and members of Temple Beth Am have been participating in a series of webinars organized around the toolkit.

- b. Following the publication of Ron Wolfson’s [Relational Judaism](#), many synagogues began exploring the use of small groups as a way to increase engagement among their members. Drawn from Wolfson’s research at the Saddleback Church, a “megachurch” in southern California, small groups are a building block of the pyramid model above. The current work on small groups is both similar to and distinct from the *chavurah* movement that started in the 1970s and ‘80s. Small groups can be organized around age and stage in life (e.g., empty nesters), around shared interests (e.g., hiking or cooking), or centered on a specific neighborhood. They can be highly structured, or they can be allowed to function semi-autonomously – although generally the synagogue will provide a common thread that facilitates the groups coming together into a single community. Temple Beth Am is part of the [URJ’s Community of Practice: Small Groups with Meaning](#), and along with about two dozen other Reform synagogues we are studying different models of engagement.
- c. Focusing on community over institution also means developing a culture of philanthropy that is built on relationships rather than transactions. People support the community financially because they want to support a shared vision, rather than calculating how often they “use the synagogue.” The corollary to this is a trend where synagogues are moving from a dues model to a donations model. This removes a “pay before you play” barrier and speaks to a generation of “non-joiners” whom we still want to engage in synagogue life and community. “[Voluntary dues](#) is not about synagogues setting a dollar amount; it’s about members setting a value amount.” The synagogues we surveyed are thinking about different models to achieve financial sustainability that are less dependent on dues (including the provision of lifecycle services to nonmembers for a fee), and are also recognizing the need to be much more transparent with their members about synagogue finances.
- d. Community has concentric circles – from those whom I call on in times of need and celebration, to our congregation, to the Seattle Jewish Community and Seattle as a whole, to the wider Jewish community and to the nation and global community. How do

*Implication for Temple Beth Am:*

- *Learn what it means to design for community. Identify barriers (structures, policies, measurements, etc.) that detract from this, and adjust as needed. Identify new opportunities to explore (skill building, measurements, leadership positions, data management and reporting, program ideas, etc.) that invest in relationships. Think about what “community” means to us, and make it our mantra in design, discussion, and action.*

we as individuals seek and invest in the concept of community, and how can we position Temple Beth Am within that human experience?

3. Diversity in the Jewish community is real. There are many variables of [diversity within the Jewish community](#), and we do ourselves a disservice by minimizing its importance. The Jewish community is becoming more racially, ethnically and culturally diverse through intermarriage, conversion and adoption, and the community is trending towards investing heavily in inclusion. (This is a major theme of Audacious Hospitality, above.) While policy is one layer of the issue (e.g. rabbis officiating at same-sex weddings and [interfaith weddings](#)), a community that goes from being welcoming to truly being inclusive is more nuanced and subtle, and thus often harder.

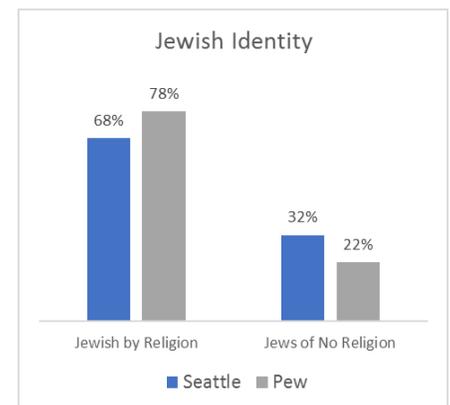
*Implications for Temple Beth Am:*

- *In a city, a community and a congregation that is philosophically and ethically geared towards inclusion, we need to take seriously the various attributes of diversity within our own community, and build a culture that celebrates our diversity and normalizes everyone’s contributions to our collective identity.*

## Local Seattle Insights

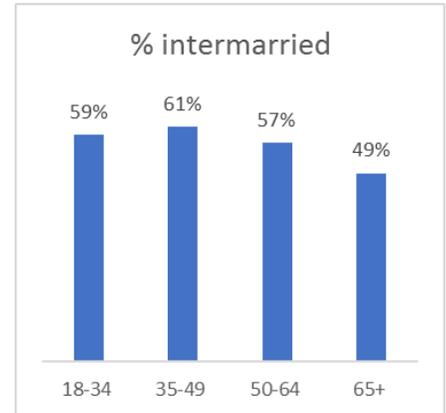
1. The [2014 Greater Seattle Jewish Communal Study](#) provided important insights into the changing demographics of our local Jewish community. Most notably, the number of Jews in our community grew by 70% over the previous 10 years (faster than the general population), and with the continued population growth, we can expect that number to continue to rise.

Compared to the national population, our community has a higher percentage of Jews who identify by culture or ethnicity (what the Pew Study refers to as “Jews of No Religion” or “JNR”): 32% in Seattle vs. 22% nationally. Among young adults (18-35) who are not living in their parents’ household, 42% identify as JNR. A full 40% of the community is unaffiliated, and 41% don’t identify as any denomination (though may belong to a synagogue).



Rates of intermarriage vary both by denomination and age. Locally, 58% of non-Orthodox Jews are intermarried, compared with 56% of all Jews. Sorted by denomination, Reform has the highest percentage of intermarriage (28%), behind only “Secularly/culturally Jewish” and “Just Jewish.” Young adults are both more likely to have been raised by intermarried parents (41%) and to be intermarried themselves.

Only 23% of Seattle Jews were born and/or raised here, which means over 75% (and likely rising) of the Jews in Seattle are building support systems from friends rather than family.

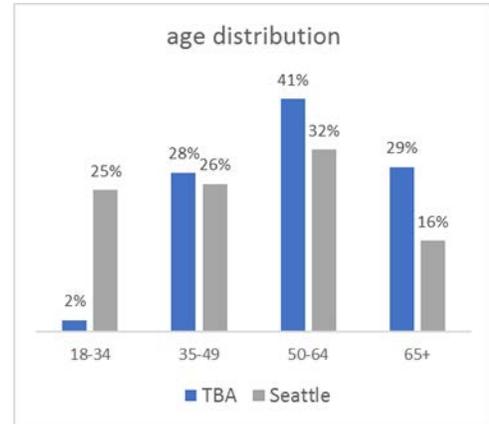


*Implications for Temple Beth Am:*

- *There is a big opportunity to engage newcomers to Seattle as a means to helping them engage Jewishly, as well as build community and friendships – but it has to be welcoming and on their terms. Temple Beth Am should position ourselves to welcome and engage newcomers, to be the “extended family” for those who don’t have family locally.*
- *Intermarriage is more than a statistic. This is the reality of our community, and we should commit to learning how to honor, appreciate and integrate intermarried families completely into our community, as well as welcome these families in our marketing.*
- *Models of “membership” and “dues” that may be familiar to Jews by birth may be entirely foreign to their non-Jewish spouses/partners and to Jews by choice. We need to be aware of when we are making implicit assumptions about “how things are done” – as well as thinking about whether we should continue doing them.*

2. In strategic discussions over the past decades, Temple Beth Am decided to be the best at youth education and thus won a generation of young families whose primary initial driver of synagogue membership was the Religious School. In many ways, that “positive snowball” has continued to pay dividends for years, with a positive word on the street, and a critical mass that makes our youth programs attractive for social and communal benefit in addition to the educational benefit. (Ongoing engagement of parents once their children have aged out of religious school is a separate question.)

Today, the analogous demographic are the young professional millennials and young families who are moving to Seattle for their careers. This demographic is largely absent from our membership. The time to capture the attention of these audiences is when they first move, as they are building friendships and their community – which may lead them to engage in Jewish life or not. Once with an established peer group and priorities, it becomes harder to bring them into the Temple Beth Am community. Our goal should be to increase the total number of Jews engaged in Jewish communal life, and to be planning



to ensure a strong incoming younger demographic for the long term financial sustainability of the organization. According to the Seattle Jewish Community Study, more than half (57%) of young adults want to be more engaged with the Jewish community. As mentioned above, however, this age group is looking for qualitatively different ways to engage than the generations that came before. Therefore we must intentionally seek to engage young singles, couples and families.

*Implication for Temple Beth Am:*

- *Know our value proposition and clarify our market position relative to others. Create on-ramps and opportunities for young adults and newcomers to Seattle to engage with us, build relationships and find a sense of community here – while still providing meaningful engagement opportunities for other demographics.*

## SUMMARY OF KEY IMPLICATIONS FROM THIS REPORT

- *We should explicitly invite a diversity of understandings of “God.”*
- *Technology should be simple, intuitive, convenient, mobile, and tailored to personal interests.*
- *Integrate social connections into everything – from social marketing, to making transparent who is coming to events, to “designing for social” in every program.*
- *We need to learn how to authentically empower and activate younger members of our community to participate, design and run their own programs.*
- *We should experiment with programs that are evaluated by quality over quantity of participation.*
- *Amplify connections between Jewish values and civic values, and position Temple Beth Am as an organizing force for these values in our local community and beyond.*
- *While reaching out to younger members of the Jewish community, we also need to work on consciously engaging Boomers, who are the backbone of our congregation, and to keep empty nesters involved after their children leave Religious School.*
- *Legacy/planned giving, rooted in increased Boomer engagement, needs to be a focus of development.*
- *Experimentation, nimbleness, and the ability to evolve the model – including models of financial support – will be key for our synagogue to adapt to changing needs and seize opportunities while remaining grounded in our core beliefs, values and services to the community.*
- *Keep the focus on “meaning” for the audiences we are seeking and engaging. Design for real social connection at every opportunity, and understand that we are marketing community, not just programs.*
- *Position ourselves as a center of Jewish life and identity, and celebrate and validate multiple ways of identifying and practicing Judaism*
- *Learn what it means to design for social. Identify barriers (structures, policies, measurements, etc.) that detract from this, and adjust as needed. Identify new opportunities to explore (skill building, measurements, leadership positions, data management and reporting, program ideas, etc.) that invest in relationships.*
- *We need to take seriously the various attributes of diversity within our own community, and build a culture that celebrates our diversity and normalizes everyone’s contributions to our collective identity.*
- *Models of “membership” and “dues” that may be familiar to Jews by birth may be entirely foreign to their non-Jewish spouses/partners and to Jews by choice. We need to be aware of when we are making implicit assumptions about “how things are done” – as well as thinking about whether we should continue doing them.*
- *We need to understand and approach specific subgroups, such as newcomers, empty nesters, interfaith families and Jews by choice and gear our outreach to these audiences. Create opportunities for young adults and newcomers to Seattle to engage with us, build relationships and find a sense of community here.*