

# SYNERGY



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## Greening Synagogues: Lessons from the Jewish Greening Fellowship

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# Letter from UJA-Federation of New York

In 2008 UJA-Federation of New York leaders began to consider how to respond to growing concerns about climate change. They also explored emerging perspectives about how environmental, social, and political aspects of sustainability will impact the Jewish community in the future.

One response was The Jewish Greening Fellowship (JGF), which was launched in 2009. UJA-Federation's Commission on Jewish Identity and Renewal (COJIR) recognized the opportunity to catalyze caring, connection, and inspiration with people who would be engaged in environmental stewardship. COJIR also recognized "greening" as a way for Jewish organizations to provide leadership to Jewish communities that were interested in taking on the challenges of climate change and sustainability.

This report reflects UJA-Federation's commitment to sharing innovations and strategies that help synagogues thrive. Greening a synagogue's operations provides meaningful opportunities for members to use their expertise and become involved in this area. Taking action on climate change and sustainability provides a direct way for the congregation to make its vision and values matter. The experience of synagogues participating in the JGF demonstrates that greening is also good for the bottom line. Steps that congregations take to reduce energy consumption and waste also reduce expenses and free up funds for other, more important purposes.

From the beginning, UJA-Federation of New York anticipated that the organizations participating in the JGF would be well positioned to provide leadership in mobilizing the wider Jewish community to practical responses to climate change and sustainability. This report is intended to help synagogues prepare for a future in which issues of climate change and sustainability are sure to become more and more prominent in the news, in the minds of members of the Jewish community, and particularly for younger members of our communities.

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# Introduction – Landscape and Opportunity

Your congregants live and work in a world in which concern for climate change and sustainability is everywhere. Although we go about our daily lives as if not much has changed, climate change is causing major transformations of our physical, economic, political, and social environment. A recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the official body responsible for advising the world's governments, warns that action must be taken to reduce carbon emissions in the next 15 years to avert the worst predictions about the future.

In October, 2012, Superstorm Sandy, which devastated coastal communities in New York and New Jersey, brought home the message that climate change is not a remote threat. In its aftermath, regular activities in New York's Jewish community came to a halt as every organization was engaged in recovery or assisting relief efforts. Awareness grew that Jewish organizations with missions as varied as poverty alleviation, care for the elderly, and protecting children were already, or soon would be, challenged by climate change. Additionally, increased conflict over water in the Middle East and increased migration from drought-stricken countries will affect organizations focused on the needs of Jews overseas.

As Jewish communities and synagogues are specifically called to respond to the moral challenges of climate change, we know we are commanded “to till and to tend” the earth and to “love our neighbor as ourselves.” The people who suffer most, as we saw when Hurricane Sandy pummeled the New York area, are those who are already disenfranchised. When we view the problems caused by climate change through this lens, it is clear that it fits squarely within Judaism's traditional concerns about social justice and environmental stewardship.

UJA-Federation of New York has adopted the term “greening” to describe a broad agenda that includes climate change as well as many related issues. In fact, it may be more accurate to use the term “sustainability.” This less familiar term can help clarify the connection between religion and environmental concerns. Sustainability incorporates the understanding that “a sustainable society is one that integrates social, environmental, and economic concerns of health and justice, and can both sustain itself over time, living up to responsibilities to future generations, as well as sustain and nourish its members, materially and spiritually, in the present and in the future.” (Jeremy Benstein, *The Way Into Judaism and the Environment*) Climate change is one manifestation of the multifaceted environmental crisis. Environmentalism refers to the movement working for a better

world in which human beings will use natural resources in a sustainable and equitable way. And finally, environmental stewardship is a term commonly used by faith communities to describe the ethical responsibility of human beings to care for creation. For the purposes of this report, we will use the term “greening” to refer to the activities, attitudes, and choices synagogues make as a way of expressing their Jewish values of caring for the world we live in.

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**“Jewish communities and synagogues are specifically called to respond to the moral challenges of climate change.”**

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Synagogues, along with other faith communities, have a critical role in the movement toward a sustainable world, which many people believe will require fundamental shifts in worldviews. Interfaith efforts to advocate for protection of the environment and address environmental injustice are becoming very common.

Whatever the orientation of your synagogue, teaching about and taking action on sustainability is compatible with it. Rabbis from the Conservative, Orthodox, Reconstructionist, Reform and Renewal movements, and other communal leaders signed the Jewish Energy Covenant Campaign, committing to reduce their communities' energy use. Rabbis and scholars of Judaism apply central Jewish teachings to the new challenges of sustainability, including gratitude for the miracle of creation, the necessity of rest on Shabbat, respect for the dignity of every human being, and the imperative to love your neighbor as yourself. New halachic (legal codes) literature is developing in response to these new challenges. And Jewish rituals that cultivate mindfulness about the use of natural resources are being revived and reinterpreted.

In this context, it is not surprising that when the Green Team was formed at Kane Street Synagogue, the response from members was, “We've been trying to do this for years. Now finally something is happening.” This is likely to be the response in your congregation too. Today every synagogue has members with environmental interests. And if the members are not personally involved, their children and grandchildren are certainly volunteering on organic farms, majoring in sustainable development, and working in environmentally oriented jobs. So your main task will be channeling the energy of passionate people toward projects that will most benefit your synagogue.

# The Jewish Greening Fellowship

The Jewish Greening Fellowship (JGF) is a program implemented by the Hazon/Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center\* – a UJA-Federation beneficiary agency. JGF was funded by UJA's Commission on Jewish Identity and Renewal (COJIR) between 2009 and 2014. COJIR recognized the opportunity to catalyze caring, connection, and inspiration as people engaged in environmental stewardship. They also recognized greening as a way for Jewish organizations to provide leadership for Jewish communities eager to take on the challenges of climate change and sustainability.

Thirteen congregations in New York City, Long Island, and Westchester participated in the JGF during the five-year funding cycle. These congregations joined another 42 Jewish community centers, camps, schools, and social service organizations in three JGF cohorts. Over the course of five years, UJA-Federation invested \$2 million in this effort, constituting the largest investment by a North American Jewish federation in a program to address climate change and sustainability. As a result of the JGF, 600 people participated in Green Teams, 33,000 participated in education programs, and more than 175,000 were touched through communication efforts. Over the next 10 years, JGF organizations are projected to save an estimated \$8.3 million by cutting energy use, switching to renewable energy sources, and reducing waste in operations. JGF organizations have attracted more than \$3.6 million in donations and government funding for greening upgrades. The network of 55 participating organizations and 70 fellows remains active under Hazon's leadership and continues to further education and action on sustainability in the Jewish community in New York City, Westchester, and Long Island

Each synagogue that applied to participate in the JGF made a commitment to devote time and resources to implement projects in three areas: Jewish environmental education; sustainable operations; and energy efficiency and renewable energy. Once selected, synagogues received extensive support to help them achieve the goals they set for themselves. Important elements of the JGF included:

- The JGF, with the support of UJA-Federation, provided a general grant to support each synagogue's projects or to offset the cost of staff time. The synagogue could also apply for a matching grant for an energy-efficiency project after completing an energy audit, and for a grant to support a Jewish environmental program.

## Congregations and Fellows Participating in the JGF 2009 – 2014

Community Synagogue of Rye, Rye, NY  
Congregation Ansche Chesed, Manhattan  
Congregation Beth Elohim, Brooklyn  
Greenburgh Hebrew Center, Dobbs Ferry, NY  
Kane Street Synagogue, Brooklyn  
Mt. Sinai Congregation Jewish Center, Manhattan  
North Shore Synagogue, Syosset, NY  
Reconstructionist Synagogue of the North Shore  
Plandome, NY  
Reform Temple of Forest Hills, Queens  
Shelter Rock Jewish Center, Roslyn, NY  
Temple Israel Center of White Plains, White Plains, NY  
Temple Shaaray Tefila, Bedford, NY  
Tribeca Synagogue, Manhattan

- Each synagogue convened a Green Team of members and staff who selected and implemented projects in one of the three aforementioned project areas.
- Each synagogue appointed a staff member and a lay leader, preferably a board member, to lead the effort as "fellows." Staff members participated in two retreats and monthly education sessions, and were expected to devote 8-10 hours per week to greening. Lay leaders were invited to attend as many monthly sessions as they could. The lay leaders also participated in a series of webinars.
- Each synagogue received two site visits from the JGF Director to allow for individualized support and consultation. The visits included meeting with clergy and other staff as well as with the Green Team.
- Synagogues participated over the course of 18 months beginning in February. This included planning over the summer before a year of intense work.

\*Hazon ("Vision") – A UJA-Federation of New York beneficiary agency committed to creating healthier and more sustainable communities in the Jewish world and beyond, effecting change in the world through transformative experience, thought leadership, and capacity building.

The retreats, monthly education sessions, and webinars were essential to the success of the fellows and their congregations in achieving the goals of the JGF. Three areas were addressed: Jewish outdoor, food, farming & environmental education (JOFEE)\*; environmental issues; and organizational change management. There were many opportunities to meet with experts and representatives of organizations offering resources for congregations. Field trips were a highlight of the program. For example, the fellows visited a rain-catchment installation in a community garden, green housing built for low-income tenants, and a green roof. They met environmental justice leaders and visited neighborhoods in Harlem and the South Bronx affected

by disproportionate concentration of polluting facilities. The fellows toured a neighborhood affected by Superstorm Sandy and visited a green jobs training center to learn about green facility maintenance.

The JGF's structure as a cohort-based program was very important. The fellows benefitted greatly from the opportunities they had to learn from, inspire, and support each other. It was reassuring to synagogue board members to know that other congregations were making similar changes. Fellows, board members, and congregants could see that their small actions were contributing to something bigger.

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## Why Greening is Good for Congregations

Integrating a commitment to being green into your congregation's mission is easier than you might think. This is because what you do to be green will also help your congregation thrive. There are many ways greening benefits congregations. For example:

- Members are proud to belong to a community with **vision** that acts on its values.
- Members of all ages discover new avenues for **Jewish learning** and spiritual renewal.
- Members find new opportunities to **get involved and make connections** with others.
- Congregations develop relationships with **new organizations** in the community.
- Greening operations and facilities offers opportunities for **financial savings**.

### Vision and Values

Members are proud to belong to a community with vision that acts on its values. Research by UJA-Federation of New York\*\* has found that key drivers of synagogue member satisfaction are vision and values that resonate with members. Greening your synagogue demonstrates that you believe Judaism has something to offer in response to some of the most challenging issues of our time. It shows that you are ready to provide moral and practical leadership, offering your members hope, faith, and opportunities to take meaningful action.

\*[hazon.org/transformational-experiences/jofee/](http://hazon.org/transformational-experiences/jofee/)

\*\*UJA-Federation of New York, *Vision and Data: Essential Building Blocks for Synagogue Change* (New York: UJA-Federation of New York, 2012).

### Jewish Learning

Helping your members understand your green vision and values takes education. Learning about Jewish environmental teachings, and participating in Jewish rituals that embody them, will introduce members to new ideas about religious practice and changing forms of Jewish expression. There are so many ways to enrich the Jewish lives of congregants with Jewish outdoor, food, farming & environmental education (JOFEE). For example, Community Synagogue of Rye took their celebration of Havdalah outdoors, to the beach. At Kane Street Synagogue, members studied the Shmita (sabbatical) year, and considered how to apply this ancient concept to contemporary challenges. (See more about Kane Street Synagogue's education efforts in *Voices from the Field* on page 12.)

### Engagement and Connection

Greening offers opportunities for members to strengthen their personal connection to the congregation and with each other. Getting out of the meeting room and into the garden breaks down barriers, builds relationships, and provides ways for members to contribute their passion and knowledge to the congregation. At the Greenburgh Hebrew Center, the Green Team initiated a community-supported agriculture (CSA) location. Every week during the growing season, participating members organized and picked up their share of fruits and vegetables – reinforcing a sense of community with each other and helping to support local farmers.

## New Collaborations

Greening often requires synagogues to collaborate with other organizations. You may find yourself reaching out to the sanitation department for help with setting up a composting program, the nature center for information about installing a green roof, or a local environmental advocacy group for guidance on contacting your legislators about toxic chemicals in children's products. New collaborations bring fresh ideas and opportunities for renewal. For example, Reconstructionist Synagogue of the North Shore used to hold the annual member retreat at a camp several hours drive from the community. The congregation decided to move the retreat to the Long Island Science Center, a nearby nature center with extensive grounds, to reduce carbon emissions from driving. In addition to reducing their carbon footprint, the switch increased participation by making the retreat more convenient, and led to additional programs at the nature center. (For more examples of how collaboration benefits synagogues, see *Voices from the Field: Congregation Ansche Chesed* on page 13.)

## Financial Savings

Many changes that are good for the environment are also good for your synagogue's bottom line. Taking concrete actions that demonstrate a serious commitment to the values the congregation espouses can have a financial benefit. Congregations can then reinvest these savings in further facility upgrades, or put the funds aside to support education programs that have a financial cost. Here are a few examples of money-saving projects undertaken by JGF congregations.

- North Shore Synagogue reduced the frequency of printed newsletters from 12 to 6 per year for savings of \$15,000 per year.
- Tribeca Synagogue upgraded to energy-efficient lighting and a new freezer for savings of \$5,000 per year.
- Greenburgh Hebrew Center installed a solar energy system at no cost, for savings of \$4,000 per year.
- Temple Shaaray Tefila's upgraded energy control system and efficient lighting is saving \$17,500 per year.
- Learn how Mt. Sinai Jewish Center installed a solar energy system in *Voices from the Field*.
- Learn more about the process of greening synagogue operations from Temple Shaaray Tefila in *Voices from the Field*.

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Of course, cost savings may not be the only consideration in pursuing greening projects. Synagogue budgets are also a reflection of the community's spiritual values, and greening provides an opportunity to bring those values into action. For example, in many synagogues, the religious school may run a deficit, but the congregation has made a choice to invest in children's education. Likewise, investing in a greener choice may sometimes carry a higher price tag, but can deliver larger benefits that embody values core to the synagogue community. Incorporating green living tactics should be evaluated according to the same criteria as other congregational decisions.

Keep in mind that there are congregants who care about this issue and will support your efforts to green your facility. Congregation Beth Elohim secured a \$10,000 donation to purchase an energy-efficient dishwasher. A lighting upgrade at the Tribeca Synagogue cost \$788 after incentives from Con Edison and a grant from the JGF. The cost was recouped in months. Members were so impressed with the results that they offered to donate funds to upgrade the synagogue's remaining lighting.

Although the benefits to the synagogue may be obvious to you, and to some members, don't be surprised if other members question the necessity of bringing environmental concerns into the synagogue. Depending on the perspective of your congregation, you will face different challenges. If your members are environmentally inclined but not very knowledgeable about Judaism, you may need to help them appreciate the value of applying Jewish concepts and values to contemporary challenges. On the other hand, if your members are immersed in Jewish learning and practice, they may not realize how much Jewish texts and traditions have to say about sustainability. Be persistent and remember that they will get on board as they become familiar with these new ideas and see that others are enthusiastic.



# Greening Your Congregation

Although you may not have the opportunity to participate in a formal program such as the JGF, you can still bring the benefits of greening to your congregation. There are five key building blocks of change that helped the congregations that participated in the JGF to integrate greening into their mission and activities. These building blocks are:

- Building a team and empowering champions
- Identifying the sweet spots
- Engaging members
- Joining with other communities
- Gaining strategies for organizational change

Put these blocks in place to engage your members in meaningful Jewish learning and growth and put Jewish values into action.

## Build a Team and Empower Champions

No one can do this alone. Introducing any new priority to your congregation is a challenge. Greening is especially complicated because it requires the collaboration of people with different expertise and perspectives.

Leadership is the first key ingredient in the recipe for change. Who will lead your effort? Best practice suggests building a lay-pro team that includes a staff member and a volunteer to champion the greening effort. Depending on your staffing structure, a selected staff member might be the executive director, rabbi, education director, and/or administrators. For lay partners, the congregations could tap members with communal influence and interest or expertise related to greening to work side by side with the staff member.

Ideally, the Green Team will have someone from each area of congregational life. This includes faculty and parents from the preschool and religious school, facility staff, representatives of groups such as *havurot*, sisterhood and brotherhood, building committee, ritual committee, and youth group. It is crucial that the congregation give the champions time to work on greening and the authority to engage others.

It's important to engage your clergy, staff, and board members right from the beginning. Even though the Green Team may do most of the work, you will need their support. While clergy may not have much time for meetings, they are a critical source of

inspiration. They can make a big difference by reaching out to members who might be interested in getting involved and by incorporating Jewish environmental ideas in their teaching. And, of course, board members must support the new initiatives and be ready to commit funds.

Your Green Team will be most effective if meetings include opportunities to learn. Joelle Novey, director of Greater Washington Interfaith Power & Light, says that you should find ways to “get in touch with your own Jewish motivation for greening.” Spend a few minutes tasting carob for Tu B'Shevat or discussing a text about rain from the Mishnah. Deepen your understanding of environmental issues by watching a video clip from an environmental film such as “Gasland” or “Blue Vinyl”. Invite a guest from the Sierra Club or Department of Sanitation to brief you on local issues.

Some congregations find that it is difficult to find time for the Green Team to meet, so it sometimes works better for individual members to take on projects in collaboration with the staff member. Even if you don't have regular Green Team meetings, be sure to find opportunities to get together to recognize each person's contributions, support each other, and celebrate your accomplishments. Make sure greening is a pleasure and a source of satisfaction, not a burden.

## Identify the Sweet Spots

One of the biggest challenges in greening is setting priorities. There are so many things to do! Every JGF Green Team started work with a Solid waste, Water, Energy, and Toxics (SWET) analysis. Rachel Jacoby Rosenfield, founding director, and Adam Berman, director of Hazon/Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center, adapted the well-known Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis framework to help Green Teams get focused. The purpose of this activity is to rank each proposed project according to how much it will benefit the environment, how quickly it can be accomplished, and how visible it will be to the congregation's members. The idea is to build momentum by starting with “low-hanging fruit,” projects that are ranked highly on all criteria.

“Low-hanging fruit” projects are different for every congregation. Praying outdoors and adding an environmental project to Mitzvah Day are easy to accomplish. Many JGF congregations found that switching to green cleaning products was a low-hanging

fruit. Green cleaning is popular with parents concerned about children's health (products are non-toxic), saving space (because cleaning products are purchased in concentrated form), and saving money (since these products are often less expensive than conventional alternatives). Green Team members at Temple Beth Elohim wanted to reduce waste at Kiddush but they didn't have an adequate dishwasher. They realized that eliminating plastic cutlery would be easier to manage, so they started with that. Community Synagogue of Rye followed the grounds management guidelines developed by the National Wildlife Federation to achieve recognition for "certified wildlife habitat."

More low-hanging fruit can also be found by building on what your congregation already does. Adding a new program for Tu B'Shevat can be stressful because you have to worry about who will come. Instead, you can tweak something you already do. Temple Israel Center was in the midst of landscaping, so native species were planted around the synagogue building. At Kane Street Synagogue, congregants already enjoyed socializing at Kiddush. So the Green Team prepared delicious recipes using local and organic ingredients to educate them about taking care of the land. Mt. Sinai Congregation raised funds every year by selling mishloach manot for Purim. To align this effort with the Congregation's new priorities, the Green Team purchased healthy treats instead of junk food, switched to baskets made of natural materials, and contracted with a sheltered workshop for disabled adults to assemble the gifts.

As you learn more, you can begin to find your congregation's "sweet spot." This is the place where greening relates to your congregation's mission and current priorities. It is a project that is meaningful for your congregation and can become a signature effort. For example, Tribeca Synagogue was looking for ways to engage teens. The Congregation created a summer internship and tasked the teen participants with managing the congregation's garden. Similarly, teen interns at the Community Synagogue of Rye created a nature trail inspired by Jewish teachings on the congregation's grounds. Temple Israel Center of White Plains installed a solar powered Ner Tamid to make a visible statement of commitment to sustainability. After some setbacks – the layout of the sanctuary and the height of the ceiling made it impossible to install the needed wiring – the Ner Tamid was installed in the chapel used for daily minyan.

## Engage the Membership

Educating your congregation on the issues takes effort. Be aware that people may not jump on board at the first mention of the issue, no matter how passionate the green team may be. Be consistent. With time, greening will become part of your congregation's self-image and your members will be proud to belong to a community that acts consistently with its values. In the words of Miriam Massen, executive director of Temple Israel Center of White Plains, your members will recognize that "environmental consciousness is fundamental to living a concerned Jewish life."

### Here are five key takeaways to keep in mind as you work to engage your members:

#### Make Efforts Visible

Many greening efforts take place behind the scenes. Make sure what you are doing is visible to members. Visibility is what generates buzz about your congregation's vision and values. Here are a few examples of how JGF congregations made their efforts visible to members:

- The Green Team at Temple Shaaray Tefila wore buttons to High Holiday services. At Community Synagogue of Rye, the Team received green T shirts to wear.
- At the first meeting of the year, board members at Temple Israel Center of White Plains enjoyed organic Israeli wines to raise their awareness about the congregation's greening efforts.
- Reform Temple of Forest Hills created a logo to identify all their greening efforts.
- The Green Team at Congregation Ansche Chesed set up an email address for member suggestions: [greenideas@anschecheded.org](mailto:greenideas@anschecheded.org).
- North Shore Synagogue added "Green Tips" to the synagogue newsletter tailored to members' interests, including one about greening your golf game. (Find sample green tips at [Greenfaith.org](http://Greenfaith.org).)
- Consider creating an "eco-mezuzah" – a visible statement of commitment that members and visitors will see as they enter your building. This could be a bulletin board describing your greening efforts, a recycling center, or a living plant.

## Emphasize the Positive

Don't make people feel guilty. Instead, give them something to do so they can feel proud. Be aware that people are motivated by a positive message. Climate change and other challenges to sustainability can feel overwhelming. Members are more likely to support your efforts if they feel inspired learning about progress instead of dwelling on the extent of the problem. If you introduce a problem, always provide an opportunity to take action to address it. Show your members that they can have more impact as members of the congregation than as individuals. Remind them that, "as individuals what we can do is a drop in the bucket. As a community we can fill the bucket."

## Share Your Enthusiasm Face to Face

Don't rely on newsletter articles and emails. Remember that the most powerful message is delivered face to face. Research on social norms demonstrates that people are most likely to change their behavior because of what they see their peers doing. Congregation Ansche Chesed used this approach to get members on board with separating recyclables and organic waste at Kiddush. Instead of just posting signs, Green Team members stood next to the collection bins to demonstrate proper sorting. Since the average person is connected to more than 2,000 people within two degrees, you have tremendous potential to influence others through your own social network. Just talking about your activities with other members of the congregation is a great way to influence the social norms in your community. Find your own ways to share your enthusiasm face to face.

## Integrate Greening Into the Ongoing Life of Your Congregation

While it is tempting to come up with new programs, it is much easier to incorporate a green twist into the successful work that your congregation is already doing. To have a lasting impact, it is important to integrate concern for sustainability into the ongoing business of your congregation. Over time, small changes can add up to a big shift in the culture of your congregation. Take a look at things you are already doing and imagine how you could do them a little differently to better align with your values:

- For many years, The Reconstructionist Synagogue of the North Shore (RSNS) religious school students sold chocolate for Hanukkah. The congregation switched to a supplier of Fair Trade chocolate and added education about the impact of buying Fair Trade products to its annual campaign.

- The daily minyan at Shelter Rock Jewish Center includes breakfast. Switching from disposable food service items to china and silverware was a great way to begin reducing waste and raising awareness. A congregant even donated an attractive set of china.
- Dinner in the sukkah is a highlight of the year at Community Synagogue of Rye. The Green Team and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) group joined forces to host a dinner featuring local foods and an opportunity to "meet the farmer."
- Temple Israel Center of White Plains stopped printing the annual dinner dance journal and switched to an electronic journal.

## Celebrate Every Accomplishment

To maximize the impact of your efforts, make sure to celebrate every accomplishment. Tell your members what's been done so they can feel proud, too. And remember that once is not enough! It takes a lot of hoopla to get members' attention. Expect to have to share your good news repeatedly to make an impact.

- When recycling bins were installed at Reform Temple of Forest Hills, the congregation recited the shehechyanu prayer for special occasions as the members made their first deposits of scraps of paper.
- Greenburgh Hebrew Center's rooftop solar system dedication included a performance of songs about the sun by children in the religious school, greetings from local politicians, and flipping a symbolic switch.
- At the annual benefit dinner, Congregation Ansche Chesed honored Josh Hanft, executive director, for his greening work.

## Join with Other Communities

The JGF fellows felt the support they received by participating in a cohort of synagogues dedicated to similar goals was essential to their success, indicating that other congregations might increase their chance for successful implementation by working with others.

Look for a group your congregation can join in your area. For example, Hazon maintains a network of congregations that host Community Supported Agriculture groups you can join. Another good place to start is your state chapter of Interfaith Power & Light, which is a network of congregations of all faiths. There may be a local group you can join. For example, Temple Shaaray Tefila is an active participant in Bedford 2020.

## Gain Strategies for Organizational Change

The Jewish Greening Fellows met monthly for training about organizational change, environmental issues, and Jewish environmental learning. Gaining strategies for organizational change is essential because greening is not a one-time program or a single decision. It requires new knowledge, new ways of thinking, and ongoing commitment and resources from your board, staff, and members. A good way to get started is to think about other big changes that your congregation has made. What did you do that made those changes successful and long-lasting? Can you employ some of the same strategies now?

While everyone knows something about environmental issues from science class and the daily news, there is so much more to know. Connecting with nature, learning about local environmental problems, and meeting people in your community who are addressing these problems will give you new ideas about what your congregation can do far beyond recycling and gardening. For example, as part of learning about environmental injustices suffered by communities of color, JGF Fellows sought out an environmental justice organization in their own community and arranged a meeting to get acquainted.

Research has demonstrated that organizational change initiatives like becoming a green congregation often fail for lack of a sense of urgency. Since climate change and environmental

sustainability may not feel very urgent to your congregation, you'll need to cultivate this feeling. The JGF helped the Fellows develop a sense of urgency about climate change by combining emotional experiences and intellectual exploration of sustainability. "Seeing is believing" is one of the JGF's guiding principles, so instead of just talking about the changing climate, Fellows toured lower Manhattan to see the impact of Hurricane Sandy, visited a recycling plant, and toured the green roof on top of the Bronx County Courthouse.

Once the focusing event or window of opportunity has been opened, your congregation can seek to catalyze the sense of urgency by looking to our Jewish values. Finding inspiration and direction in Jewish teachings, ethics, rituals, and culture can transform a congregational commitment to greening from a one-time activity into a spiritual practice. The wisdom of our tradition is full of resources that guide us in how to respond.

Education and support from the JGF provided the participating fellows with the resources to lead on greening. How can you provide some of this education and inspiration for yourself and other leaders in your congregation?

Finally, be patient. Change takes time. After 18 months of work, the congregations that participated in the JGF felt they were just getting started. But with consistent effort, greening will become part of your congregation's identity. Expressing your green values will become a source of pleasure and pride.

# Getting Started

As you embark on this journey, remember there are many resources available. Collaboration is a key strategy for gaining inspiration, discovering new opportunities, and increasing the vitality of your community as a hub of Jewish life.

## Education

Education is central to greening your congregation. It is also the easiest and most fun way to get started. Inspire your Green Team and board by watching a video about the JGF. Enrich your Green Team meetings by reading relevant books together and discussing them. Ask your rabbi to speak about sustainability. Ask members to speak about issues they care about. Take your Religious School students outdoors. There are many curricular resources available. Start with the education resources available on Hazon's website and the materials listed in the Appendix.

## Audit

Auditing your current practices to find out what you already do, and discovering opportunities for greening, is a great way to launch your Green Team. Reform Temple of Forest Hills gave religious school children copies of the original plans for the synagogue and asked them to inspect the building to identify opportunities to reduce waste and protect the environment. Some helpful tools are the Hazon Food Audit and Greenfaith's Stewardship Resources. A fun kickoff activity for your Green Team is to assess your personal carbon footprints.

Reducing your synagogue's energy use is one of the most important steps you can take to reduce your facility's impact on the environment. Since your energy use comes from fossil fuels, it is a concrete way to contribute to the solution to climate change. Although some investment may be required, reducing energy use saves money. The first step in reducing energy use is to obtain an energy audit. Contact your utilities to find out if they offer free audits. You can also check the Database of State Incentives for Renewables and Efficiency ([www.dsireusa.org/](http://www.dsireusa.org/)) website to find out about energy efficiency incentives available in your state.

## Local Relationships

The best resources are the ones nearby. People and organizations in your community have local knowledge. If you reach out, you will meet people who care about the same issues you care about and can provide encouragement and support.

For example, JGF congregations all took advantage of our extensive relationship with Solar One, a local environmental education organization that guided congregations through the energy audit process and advised about solar energy. The Reconstructionist Synagogue of the North Shore collaborates with Power Up, a local green education and training organization, to offer energy audits to congregants. The audits are conducted by unemployed community members who are trained for new green careers. Kane Street Synagogue joins with the Gowanus Canal Conservancy to promote composting. Temple Shaaray Tefila participates in Bedford 2020, a grassroots alliance, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 20% by the year 2020 in the town of Bedford, NY.

## Advocacy

There is a certain amount of greening that your congregation can accomplish by itself. But you may soon encounter obstacles because so much depends on systems that are out of your control. You can use your synagogue's clout to influence decisions about these systems. Many congregations already engage in advocacy on social justice issues and Israel that members feel strongly about, so don't feel shy about suggesting that your members get involved in environmental issues.

Start by making your congregation a safe place for people to share what they are concerned about. Then provide opportunities to learn more about the issues members care about. Congregation Beth Elohim used this approach to engage members in the issue of climate change. For months after Hurricane Sandy, members of Congregation Beth Elohim made sandwiches and delivered them to affected communities. Building on this work, CBE joined with Transportation Alternatives, The Red Hook Initiative, and Brooklyn Greenway for a bike ride exploring the connections between Hurricane Sandy and climate change to interest members in supporting citywide planning for resiliency.

Invite your elected representatives to come and speak about what they are doing to address environmental issues. For example, Temple Israel Center of White Plains organized a community forum on the impacts of fracking (a technique for oil and gas extraction) on New York State. Once they know your congregation is interested in these issues, they will let you know when you can help them. Look for a local coalition-led campaign that you can join. Nonprofit organizations, including synagogues, are allowed to participate in advocacy (in contrast to lobbying), and you can and should speak up as a community about policy issues that are relevant to your community on a nonpartisan basis.

# Voices From the Field

Each congregation that participated in the JGF has a unique story. In the statements below, JGF fellows describe what their congregations did, some of the obstacles they encountered, and how their congregations benefitted from making a commitment to environmental stewardship.

## **Greening and Education: Bringing Jewish Values to Life at Kane Street Synagogue**

**Rabbi Val Lieber**

Director of Education and Family Programming

Kane Street Synagogue is an egalitarian Conservative synagogue of 320 member families in brownstone Brooklyn. We are proud of our diverse membership and our historic sanctuary, built in 1855 as a Middle Reformed Protestant Dutch Church. We bring the wisdom and compassion of Jewish traditions to all, regardless of background. Within our community are very traditional Jews and secularists, families and singles, straight and gay. Our members include many Jews-by-choice (converts) as well as interfaith families and Jews who are returning to their roots. We are a community where any sincere person can find a place.

Education was at the heart of our efforts to green our congregation. My advice to congregations interested in greening is to start with the kids. They are the best source of energy. Then you can educate those kids' parents. That energy sustains the harder stuff.

We offered a Hebrew school elective on greening for 8 to 11-year-old children. It was our biggest and most popular elective. We had always taught about Jewish values and done service projects. What changed is that the theme of greening linked everything to a larger goal. For example, before we would teach a Jewish value like "bal tashchit," but it was not connected to anything they had learned in science and regular school. Now that same lesson became part of something larger and was linked to all they were learning. It was about slowing climate change and saving the world through Jewish values and science together.

Learning about Jewish environmental values was really engaging and it spoke to the kids. They were able to learn the theoretical idea that is expressed in Judaism, and then act on it. They planted bulbs in the fall, and they saw them appear in the spring. They were in awe of that! When they built compost windrows and cleaned beaches, they learned that acting on Jewish values and participating in the global effort to protect the environment are one and the same. They really got it.

We invited congregants who do environmental work to come and teach the kids. The husband of one of our teachers works on water quality for the EPA. An older synagogue member teaches composting to kids at the Botanical garden. A former teacher worked for an NGO doing work with the nomadic Maasai tribe. These guests had a positive experience too. I didn't realize how much they would enjoy talking to kids who were interested in what they do.

The kids who participated in the elective became passionate advocates. They took the ideas with them to their other classes. One class had to select a tzedakah project. They chose to raise money for The National Resources Defense Council. They realized that protecting the environment is a Jewish value and they could pursue it with their Jewish community.

Parents loved it too. When they participated in the service projects, it was obvious to them that the kids were having fun and finding it meaningful. It was mind-boggling to parents that the kids had such a strong sense of purpose. If I were doing it again, I would add more opportunities for parents to learn the Jewish background. They didn't get enough of that because usually they just participated in the family action projects, while we taught kids background and theory during Hebrew School.

Beyond the school we did other educational projects too. We found that the more tangible the projects were, the better. The Green Team wanted to teach congregants about food and the waste stream. We held a series of programs about the values that are expressed through the laws of Shmita (the sabbatical year), such as letting the land rest and sharing what the land provides. We cooked organic food, started using tablecloths, china, and glassware, and installed new bins for sorting waste in our social hall. Our members understood that we were backing up our values with action and putting our money where our mouth is. They loved how these steps enhanced the Shabbat atmosphere and they appreciated our efforts.

Participating in the Jewish Greening Fellowship was one of the most rewarding long-term projects I've done. It was a chance to implement ideas that impacted a variety of aspects of the congregation, from education to the physical plant. I learned how to pick projects strategically, to focus on what could be achieved, and to forge ahead. It was also a special opportunity to integrate my personal beliefs and my work, so there was a lot of wholeness to it. And our members felt that way too. Greening our congregation enabled a whole group of passionate people to direct their passion to strengthen our community.

## **Reaching Out Beyond Our Synagogue Walls at Congregation Ansche Chesed**

Josh Hanft, Executive Director

Congregation Ansche Chesed is a community that is committed to learning, study, and acts of loving kindness. Helping build a more sustainable world is part of that commitment. But, like everyone, sometimes I feel like what we are doing is a drop in the ocean. By reaching out to others in the community, we're able to have a bigger impact with our greening efforts.

We started by reaching out to our tenants. We're in an urban setting. Our multistory building is old, constantly in use, and crowded. We have a lot of challenges in maintaining it. But I was pleasantly surprised that all of our tenants jumped on board with our greening efforts. Three nursery schools rent space from us. One school purchased planters to start a garden on our roof. Another school eliminated bottled water. And all three have enthusiastically supported recycling and organic waste collection. Through them, we are helping educate hundreds of children and families.

Congregation Ansche Chesed has an ongoing relationship with DOROT, which serves seniors. I volunteered to teach a telephone course about environmental literature to homebound seniors. The seniors were curious about where their food comes from and where their waste goes. They asked the same questions about recycling and composting that I get at Kiddush from our members.

It's a tradition here to have a speaker about social action on Martin Luther King Day. I participated in a JGF tour of Harlem with West Harlem Environmental Action (WEACT), which raised my awareness about how the burdens of environmental damage fall heavily on people of color. Harlem is next door to us, but it can seem very far away. We wanted to extend our members' sense of community to include our neighbors in Harlem, so we decided to invite Peggy Shepard, the founder of WEACT, to be our speaker. Afterwards, members had a chance to take action by going to a senior center and talking with seniors about environmental justice.

As a result of these efforts, our congregation is viewed as a leader in greening. I have been contacted by other congregations that want to know how to do what we've done. Now we have launched a Green Action Circle with other congregations on the Upper West Side. With the help of JCC in Manhattan and Hazon, we are meeting monthly to educate ourselves and look for ways to collaborate. Recently, we met with a representative of our City Council to discuss how we can work together. Synagogues as far away as Washington, D.C. have contacted me to learn how to collect organic waste for compost at Kiddush.

I find that there is an ebb and flow of interest in various topics in the congregation. We ran out of steam for a bit after the JGF. But now congregants are asking about what we are doing next and the Green Team is back at work. We are excited about a new idea of engaging our members to reach out even further in the community. Many of our members belong to the boards of their co-op apartment buildings. We are going to train them to be ambassadors to present what they have learned and encourage their neighbors to get involved in New York City's energy-efficiency and composting programs.

As a community, we need to continually recommit to what we believe in, whether by speaking one kind word, using one less plastic spoon, or stepping up to help others get involved too.

## **Fund-saving With Energy Efficiency and Rooftop Solar at Mount Sinai Jewish Center**

Oren Hiller, Executive Director

Mount Sinai is an Orthodox congregation in Washington Heights. Our members are young, and the population is always changing because they usually move away to find more spacious housing after they get married and have children. I believe the best way to fund-raise is to fund-save. Greening offers us a lot of opportunities to do that.

We have an old building, so we are focused on constantly improving our physical plant. When we joined the Jewish Greening Fellowship, we had already received some rebates from Con Ed for upgrading to more energy-efficient lighting. They paid for us to change the ballasts in some light fixtures so we could install CFLs. We went on to replace the fixtures in our sanctuary with LEDs. The sanctuary lighting was inadequate, so this was a huge improvement welcomed by the congregation.

The JGF introduced us to more opportunities to reduce our energy use. We have changed a lot about how we heat and cool our building. As we renovated individual rooms, we have installed air conditioning units so we can cool or heat individual rooms when they are in use. When our main air conditioning unit died, we bought a high efficiency unit. Most importantly, we were able to downsize from a 100-ton to a 50-ton unit. New York City requires a \$1,000 permit and a full-time operator for the larger unit. With the smaller unit, we have eliminated those extra costs.

I'm the president of my own shul, Shomrei Torah in Fair Lawn, NJ. I've done a lot of the same things there. We just completed upgrading our lighting, HVAC, and boiler, with the help of

an incentive program from PSE&G. The entire project cost \$100,000. The synagogue paid \$25,000 and PSE&G paid \$75,000. We're seeing significant savings on our energy costs.

At Mount Sinai, solar energy was a perfect match for us. We were approached by a company and quickly learned that we had the perfect scenario to install a solar energy system. We have a big roof, it has the right exposure, and it is new. We were offered a contract called a Power Purchase Agreement that required no investment from us. Instead we pay a favorable rate for the electricity generated by the system. The contract is for 20 years and, after that, we can purchase the system at the depreciated cost. The cool part was that once we signed the contract, the company took care of everything, from obtaining New York City permits to installation.

When I first proposed the solar installation to the board, they were reluctant. They were worried that there was a catch because it sounded unbelievable that we would get "something for nothing." Some people thought we should wait longer to see if the technology would improve and we could get a better deal. But after I explained it, they realized that it was a good way to save money. Now, looking back, they are really happy because we can brag about being a green shul and save money.

When the solar system was installed, we had a big celebration and dedication ceremony on Tu B'Shevat. We tell the community about how much energy is produced and how much we save in our monthly bulletin. We remind people to look at the solar panels when they walk up the hill across the street from the shul. People are very proud, but we still have to remind them because now they take it for granted.

I'm still surprised every month when we get our electricity bills and I see how low they are. Between everything we have done we are saving \$7,000 to \$8,000 per year in energy costs. Each year, we have lowered the amount in our budget for cooling and heating. But there is still more to do.

## **Making a Positive Impact with Synagogue Operations at Temple Shaaray Tefila**

**Bob Karpel**, Synagogue Member and Board Greening Fellow

Temple Shaaray Tefila is a progressive Reform synagogue of 850 families in a suburban setting. We are committed to social justice, to being engaged with our community, and have a strong relationship with Israel. We are blessed with beautiful facilities, but these facilities also pose challenges. Our main building is an old mansion combined with a newer building. Our sanctuary

was originally a freestanding music room that was built with no consideration for comfort or cost for energy.

Greening benefitted our congregation in many ways. One of the most important is that it opened up the scope of what could be done. It made us think about what we need to do to run the synagogue. It brought up problems and opportunities. We had to consider the costs and benefits and make decisions about how we operate our facility and how we want to invest our money.

I took on the project of upgrading the energy systems. Despite my engineering background, the process was more difficult and took much longer than I thought it would. At the beginning, I got quotes from several vendors for upgrading our boiler and energy controls. The synagogue board agreed to set aside \$50,000 for a project with a 2½ year payback. But in the end we decided not to go forward, because we could not find a vendor who would guarantee the results by taking responsibility for both installing the controls and maintaining the system.

So we put that project on hold and looked for other opportunities. While changing our control systems turned out to be difficult, it was easy to have a big impact by changing human behavior. The synagogue owns a donated van that we use for errands and to pick up congregants who don't drive and bring them to Friday night services. The van only gets 12 miles to the gallon. So I wanted to see how we were using it. I placed a clipboard in the van and asked the staff to record the mileage of their trips. No one wanted to record that they used six gallons to drive 40 miles to buy a piece of plywood. So that's all it took to reduce use of the van by 300 to 500 miles every month.

We did a lot of other things too. I worked with the executive director to create a formal purchasing system. This allows us to see what we're buying and look for opportunities to buy in bulk and choose greener alternatives. We switched from Styrofoam to paper for food service. We installed recycling bins. We expanded our garden so we can donate more food to the local soup kitchen. We stopped doing our own cleaning when we learned that it was less expensive to hire a green cleaning service that uses only non-toxic cleaning products. We tested all our faucets to find out if there was lead in the water. We found elevated levels at one sink, so we replaced the pipes.

Sharing what we do with the members is very important. We want them to feel proud – to have *naches* from their congregation. A great example is what happened with our oil tank. The tank was buried in the ground. When it failed a pressure test, we knew there was a possibility that it was leaking. Although it was costly, we decided to do the right thing and remove it immediately. But



we didn't stop there. Our rabbi taught us that when Jewish sacred books are no longer needed, it is traditional to bury them to show respect. We buried old prayer books in the hole that was left from removing the tank. Our rabbi led a ceremony and we planted trees over the books. It was meaningful to think about how what we are doing to protect the earth is part of Judaism.

Our members are getting involved in all kinds of ways. I'm now the chair of the sustainability committee of the town where I live. One of the members is on my committee. I also run the recycling center for the town. Some of the members of the synagogue make the effort to bring their recyclables when I'm there, even

though it is two towns away from where they live. I like to see them when they come. It makes me feel that what I'm doing for the synagogue is making a difference.

Now, after several years, we are going to be able to move forward on the energy control system. I'm glad we waited because new technology is being developed all the time. Honeywell has developed a system for retrofitting the controls we already have. We'll be able to use a laptop or a smartphone to adjust the boiler and temperature settings. In the end, the system may not cost us anything at all.

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## Appendix – Selected Resources

### Local Resources

- Utility companies offer resources for energy efficiency and renewable energy
- State and local governments offer resources for environmental education and reducing waste
- Local chapters of environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club offer speakers, education programs, and advocacy campaigns you can join
- The local chapter of Interfaith Power & Light can connect you with congregations of other faiths

### Resources from Hazon

You can find many educational resources and practical tools on the Hazon website. Here are just a few:

**Jewish Food Education Network** – *Fit to Eat: Food Security and Justice Resource and Action Guide* and other resources

**Jewish Greening Fellowship** – Video, case studies, and other resources

**Setting the Table: A Cooking Class for Young Families**

**Shmita (Sabbatical) Year Sourcebook**

**Green Kiddush Guide**

**How to Green Your Event**

**Starting a Green Team**

### Educational Resources for Adults

**Compendium of Sources in Halacha and the Environment**  
Canfei Nesharim

**The Jewish Energy Guide**  
Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life

**Let the Earth Teach You Torah**  
by Ellen Bernstein

**Mekor Hayyim: A Source Book on Water and Judaism**  
by Rabbi Lawrence Troster

**The Splendor of Creation**  
by Rabbi Ellen Bernstein

**The Way Into Judaism and the Environment**  
by Dr. Jeremy Benstein

### Educational Resources for Teens

**The Story of Stuff Project. Faith-based Program for Jewish Teens**

**USCJ's Caring for Creation:**  
Judaism and the Environment

**Brit Eliyahu Bein Hadorot: Elijah's Covenant Between the Generations (for Bar/Bat Mitzvah and Confirmation)**  
The Shalom Center

### Educational Resources for Children & Pre-school

**Spirit in Nature: Teaching Judaism and Ecology on the Trail**  
by Matt Biers-Ariel, Deborah Newbrun, Michal Fox Smart

**Early Childhood Jewish Garden Curriculum**  
Asheville JCC

## **Israel**

Arava Institute for Environmental Studies

Heschel Center for Sustainability

Jewish National Fund

Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel

## **Jewish & Interfaith Environmental Advocacy**

Coalition for the Environment and Jewish Life

Greenfaith: Interfaith Partners for the Environment

Interfaith Power & Light: A Religious Response to Global Warming

Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

The Shalom Center

## **Greening Facilities**

Federation of Jewish Men's Club Shomrei Ha'aretz provides information about solar kits.

National Wildlife Federation – Certified Wildlife Habitat

Going Solar – Greater Washington Interfaith Power & Light

Greenfaith Stewardship Resources

Hazon Seal of Sustainability

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We also acknowledge the significant work that Hazon has spearheaded, and continues to expand, in the field of sustainability. We thank Hazon for developing and managing the JGF over its five years, and for continuing to provide resources for synagogues and other organizations.

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**Congregation Beth Elohim, Brooklyn**

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**Greenburgh Hebrew Center, Dobbs Ferry**

Rabbi Barry Kenter, Barney Wolff

**Kane Street Synagogue, Brooklyn**

Rabbi Valerie Lieber, Ariel Krasnow

**Mt. Sinai Jewish Center, Manhattan**

Oren Hiller

**North Shore Synagogue, Syosset**

Amy Schwach

**Reconstructionist Synagogue of the North Shore, Plandome**

Cantor Eric Schulmiller

**Reform Temple of Forest Hills, Queens**

Faye Gilman, Susannah Zweighaft

**Shelter Rock Jewish Center, Roslyn**

Cantor Benjamin Matis, Jerry Berkson

**Temple Israel Center of White Plains, White Plains**

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**Temple Shaaray Tefila, Bedford**

Rabbi Jason Nevarez, Bob Karpel

**Tribeca Synagogue, Manhattan**

Leah Schonberg, Toby Turkel

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