

SOCIETY FOR HUMANISTIC JUDAISM (SHJ) VISION PROJECT COMMITTEE REPORT FROM OCTOBER 2015 MEETING

Where we are in the process

We are asking the question – where is SHJ now? The online survey, about a dozen personal interviews, and the results of the Focus Group are providing information on who we are and what we think is important. On October 24, Alan Levy of Goaltrac presented preliminary results to the national SHJ board. A brief summary is below.

Further analysis will be done with a final report due in December. The final report will include Goaltrac's evaluation of the SHJ's Environmental Challenges and a Comparable Institutions' analysis. The Vision Project Committee (VPC) will hold a teleconference meeting with the SHJ Board of Directors in January 2016 to review the final report. A transition team will be formed and will work with the VPC to develop recommendations to be presented to the Board.

Preliminary Survey Results

A total of 1,094 respondents answered the survey. The response rate, which was about twenty-five percent, is considered a good response rate and will provide useful information in moving ahead. Respondents included 501 community members, 65 individual members, 331 former members and 197 perspective members.

More than fifty percent of the respondents rated a belief in the philosophy of Secular Humanistic Judaism as most positive. Most respondents agreed that the SHJ was important to the movement. There were two clusters of support for SHJ programs; ethical action and educational pursuits. Many people joined because of their interest in ethical issues. The Board, during an exercise responding to the survey results, indicated that outreach was one of the most important issues.

Former members left most often because of life circumstances. This was followed by the cost of membership and the value of programs and services. Leaving after the B'nai Mitzvah celebration followed as an additional reason. Prospective members are interested in SHJ but overall do not consider joining. While most of our members want to be in a community of like-minded people, prospects are more interested in being part of a small informal group.

Preliminary SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

Strengths and Weaknesses are the current internal attributes reflected by the survey results. Some of our strengths include members' passion for the movement and a strong willingness to support our various organizations. The mission and vision continue to be meaningful. Weaknesses include that our philosophy is hard to market, our declining funding is primarily dues-based, and the congregational model only works for some.

Opportunities and Threats are external and future oriented. Fundraising could be focused on Planned Giving or Wills since most of the membership is older and relatively well-off. Targeting our marketing efforts toward various popular social media is another opportunity. The importance of social action to our members is an opportunity to engage our members more fully. Threats include our aging membership, a belief that national dues are not worth it, and our volunteer based national and local organizations are stretched thin. We also need to consider the decline in organized religion and that the congregational model does not work for everyone.

*Submitted by SHJ Board Member, Mary Raskin
November 2015*