



USCJ Sulam for Imagineers (SFI) Action Community

Application 2024/2025

WHAT IS THE USCJ SFI Action Community?

SFI Action Community is a cohort of twelve USCJ synagogues committed to a seven-month journey of thinking creatively, developing an innovative project, and creating an implementation plan. All cohort participants are required to read *The Nonprofit Imagineers* by Ben Vorspan and complete the [study guide](#) by November 1, 2024. There is a \$1,000.00 cost for participation. Half the fee will be due upon acceptance into the program.

Our Vision: To infuse a new level of creativity into your synagogue.

Our Mission: To help our congregations dream of new ways to thrive and build capacity.

Our Goal: To learn together how to create a safe space to dream, address the problems that synagogues face when trying to think creatively, brainstorm for fresh approaches to solving problems we might not have known existed, and experiment with new ideas at our synagogues.

WHAT IS THE TIMELINE FOR PARTICIPATION?

- Applications for participation are due by **12:00 pm EST on August 15, 2024**. The selection of the participating synagogues will be completed and congregations notified by October 14, 2024.
- The first virtual training will be on **November 12, 2024** 10am PT/1pm to 12pm PT/3pm ET with the SFI coordinating team from participating synagogues.
- Training workshop dates are 1:00pm ET to 3:00 pm ET Tuesday November 12th, December 17th, February 11th, March 25th, May 13th, Final project presentations June 10th.
- Dates for office hours are 1:30 pm ET to 2:30 pm ET Wednesday December 4th, January 15th, March 5th, April 30th, June 4th

WHAT WILL YOUR SYNAGOGUE RECEIVE AS A PARTICIPANT?

If selected, your synagogue will receive tools, training, and coaching designed to enable the development of an SFI project. These supports include, but are not limited to:

- Five (5) two-hour training workshops.
- Guidance to conduct and analyze introductory projects.

- Coaching in developing an action plan and piloting and/or enhancing/expanding programs.
- Resources for study and tools adapted from the Sulam leadership programs.
- A higher profile in your community and nationally that will lead to new and more deeply engaged members.
- Monthly cohort office hours with Ben Vorspan to answer questions.

WHAT COMMITMENT MUST A SYNAGOGUE MAKE TO PARTICIPATE?

- An initial meeting with rabbinic, administrative, and lay leadership to gain their endorsement and support
- Appoint devoted staff who will serve as liaison between the cohort and the USCJ SFI Cohort Lead, and as the internal coordinator for the congregation's SFI cohort.
- Form an SFI planning and oversight committee to work with SFI staff person.
- Conduct an assessment of needs for participating in the SFI cohort.
- Develop a plan and timetable to introduce SFI to your congregation.
- Recruit members who are interested in being trained and serving on the SFI team.
- Engage at least one lay and one professional leader and have them attend cohort trainings and work on an ongoing basis to support the SFI Cohort at your synagogue.
- Provide assessment data and narrative as part of the cohort evaluation.
- Demonstrate long-term interest in building an innovative community.
- Congregational leadership will meet with USCJ SFI Cohort Lead to assess the progress and value of the cohort.
- Congregational efforts related to the SFI cohort will be shared with all members through the synagogue's newsletter, bulletin, or some other means.

PREPARATION FOR A SUCCESSFUL PROJECT

- All cohort participants should read *The Nonprofit Imagineers* and participate in conversations guided by the provided Discussion Guide.
- After completing the book and discussion guide, participants will determine goals and challenges to address during their work in the SFI.
- During the introductory session in November, each cohort participant will present their area of focus or challenges their congregation hopes to address.

(Application on next page)

Sulam for Imagineers (SFI) Action Community
APPLICATION

(due August 15, 2024)

Name of Synagogue:

City/State/Province:

Country:

Phone Number:

Name of Person Completing this Application:

Title:

Phone Number:

Email Address:

Name of Rabbi:

Email Address:

Name of Board President:

Email Address:

1. How many member units does your synagogue include?
2. Why are you interested in participating in the USCJ SFI cohort? What do you hope to gain? (Limit 100 words).
3. When you think about the term "Synagogue Innovation," what comes to mind?
4. How are professional and volunteer leadership engaged with issues of innovation? Is there a committee devoted to this work? Who will form the core leaders dedicated to this initiative? (Limit 100 words)
5. Describe your capacity to educate and engage all members of your synagogue in the journey of becoming an innovation-minded community. (Limit 100 words).

6. Please explain your congregation's commitment to continuing this work after participation in this initial 7-month effort. (Limit 100 words)
7. Describe how your committee leaders will draw upon their past experiences to encourage your committee to think outside the box and test new ideas (Limit 100 words)

Each synagogue that participates in the SFI Cohort will be represented by an **SFI Coordinating Team** including **co-chairs** that include one senior staff member (rabbi, cantor, executive director, education director, etc.), one lay leader (board member, committee chair, etc.). Please identify the professionals and lay leader who will comprise the SFI Coordinating Team for your synagogue.

Selecting your team of Synagogue Imagineers

Your team of Synagogue Imagineers should draw from a diverse array of backgrounds, experiences, and opinions, and include the following members. Some people may satisfy more than one requirement:

- At least 1 clergy member
- At least 1 senior staff member
- At least 1 board member
- At least 1 school parent (preschool, dayschool, religious school. If your synagogue doesn't have any schools, pick any parent of school-aged children)
- At least 1 person under 30 years old
- At least 2 people who are not nonprofit employees

Your team of Synagogue Imagineers will benefit from having the following members:

- Someone who recently discontinued their membership, but is interested in helping your synagogue retain people in their demographic
- Someone who is an ally to your synagogue but is not a member, and gets their Jewish communal or spiritual connection from multiple sources
- Someone who plans to be a member in the future, but is not currently
- Someone who has a reputation for pushing for changes at your synagogue
- Someone whose job responsibilities (outside of the nonprofit world) fall in the creative realm (marketing, creative direction, fiction writer, film producer/director, architect, etc)
- A youth group participant

Congregational Professional(s):

Name:

Title:

Phone Number:

Email Address:

Lay Leader(s):

Name:

Title:

Phone Number:

Email Address:

Please contact Linda Sussman at sussman@uscj.org with any questions. Email your application by August 15, 2024 to sussman@uscj.org with the Subject Line: Application for SFI

Tips for Successful Committees

Sulam cohort work is now in its 10th year. We have been privileged to work with synagogues of various sizes, with different cultures and demographics, all across North America. We have come to realize that more than any other factor, the one thing that determines success or failure in completing the planning process and reaching the implementation stage, is the leadership and commitment of the committee.

We will provide you with the materials and the staff to support you and guide you throughout the process, but ultimately, the ownership of the process, and responsibility for the completion of the project and the implementation is yours. To best support you in this process, we would like to share some thoughts on how to recruit for your committee.

Characteristics of a Successful Committee:

- A proven leader who takes the time to understand what needs to be done, and can build support to get it done.
- A leader who is willing to push the envelope, questions the norm, and is not easily intimidated.
- A leader who has the respect of his/her peers.
- Someone who can see the forest through the trees and not get lost in the details
- A person who knows how to work collaboratively as part of a team.
- Someone who will commit to the timeline of the program (approximately 7-month commitment).
- A dedicated member who has the congregation's mission, vision and interests in

mind.

We would encourage the rabbi, professional staff and lay leaders to come up with names of people who might fit the description.

We look forward to guiding you in this sacred work.

Sincerely,

Your Sulam for Imagineers Team,

Linda Sussman and Ben Vorspan