

CBST Strategic Plan

Preamble

Congregation Beit Simchat Torah has entered a new stage in its growth and development. With the opening of our new home in April 2016 and the significant change in the external political environment, both in the US and abroad, the synagogue's value to its members as well as to the larger Jewish and LGBTQ communities has been increasingly recognized. That recognition has resulted in a surge in new members, including families with children; a significant increase in Friday night Shabbat service attendance; and the growth, visibility, and maturation of our social justice programs.

The previous strategic plan, approved in 2014, called for completing construction of the new building, including raising the capital funding needed, as well as a number of new efforts, such as strengthening our leadership pipeline. It also contained numerous objectives that underscored our need to continue to provide high quality programs and worship.

In the two and a half years since we occupied our new home and confronted a new political reality, CBST has risen to the occasion, fulfilling some long-term needs and taking advantage of new opportunities. We engaged a full-time Cantor and a principal for our children's education program, Limmud. We have gained international recognition for our partnership with the local Islamic community and have brought on our first Scholar-in-Residence to focus on trans and queer Jewish studies. We initiated a teen program and expanded opportunities for travel study.

At the same time, this growth and increased visibility has led to some new challenges, needs, and opportunities for CBST. Among these is a gap in our capacity to provide for congregants in need of additional attention and support—seniors (especially those who live alone), people living with a range of disabilities, and members experiencing health-related challenges. Also, there is a need to strengthen aspects of our infrastructure and processes in order to keep pace with our members' growing desire for a range of programs and activities. Specifically, CBST will need to turn its focus to improving both internal and external communications and developing clear and user-friendly processes for congregants who are active in our many Congregational Teams and communities to engage with CBST. The renewed vitality and growth of the synagogue also means new opportunities for members to step up, becoming more actively involved in governing various aspects of the synagogue's activities and assisting our congregants in need of additional attention and support. To do this well, CBST will need to articulate clearer paths and processes that can empower members while respecting the important roles of our staff, clergy, and Board.

Accordingly, CBST's clergy, staff, and Board have identified a number of strategic priorities for the next three to five years that will require the leadership of clergy, staff and lay leadership working together. While these strategic priorities will guide us over the next three to five years, we have also put together an implementation plan that contains specific actions, resources (space, personnel, and funding), and timelines for enacting these priorities. We will revisit and update the implementation plan periodically - and at least once per year - to chart our progress and determine whether any of our strategic priorities needs to be reconsidered. Finally, we have identified our Enduring Priorities, informed by our mission statement, that guide CBST every day.

Enduring Priorities

CBST will continue to:

- Maintain the high level of quality and satisfaction with worship, including Friday night, Shabbat morning, High Holy Days, and other holiday services.
- Maintain the high level of quality and satisfaction with the music program, including the chorus and the leadership provided by the Cantor and the Music Director.
- Ensure that CBST remains an intergenerational synagogue comfortable for all family structures.
- Ensure that our members feel welcomed, supported, and inspired.
- Provide learning opportunities for children and adults that deepen members' connection to CBST, Judaism, and queer life.
- Demonstrate the unique role and value of CBST as a leader of queer, Jewish, and social justice identity.
- Ensure that CBST adequately accommodates and serves the needs of our members.

Strategic Priorities

1. Strengthen Congregant Engagement

Because CBST is a vibrant spiritual community whose congregants are eager to worship, study, socialize, and support each other inside and outside the synagogue, we will:

- a. Better define the benefits of membership and study alternative membership/dues models for CBST.
- b. Strengthen congregant engagement by improving the way that our members and Congregational Teams interact with CBST, including by clearly articulating policies and procedures for program proposals and member involvement.
- c. Continue welcoming new members into our community through the work of the Engagement Committee.
- d. Renew our attention to caring for populations requiring additional attention and support, such as aging, disabled, sick, and grieving members.
- e. Ensure the future vitality of our congregation by supporting younger members.
- f. Assess our children's education program and establish a PTA for Limmud to facilitate communication between parents and staff.
- g. Assess our adult education program and advisory group for Lehrhaus.
- h. Examine the objectives and structure of Saturday morning services to determine whether and how these services can meet our members' spiritual needs.

2. Support Diverse Identities and Their Integration into the Whole of the Congregation

- a. Because CBST is a synagogue that welcomes individuals and communities sharing a widely diverse range of identities, we will improve our ability to understand and support the various identities of current and potential members of our congregation by ensuring that CBST's governance, clergy, staff, and members institutionalize incorporation of identity into our worship, education, social justice, and social programming.

- b. We seek to ensure that our members and potential members feel that their individual identities are recognized and respected and that they fit within the CBST community as a whole by enhancing social relations among our members and particularly among the demographic groups within our members. We will look at how we can best achieve these goals, including by leveraging our Scholar-in-Residence.

3. Formalize Social Justice Infrastructure and Funding

- a. CBST is a renowned leader in social justice activism, both on LGBTQ issues and on other issues of local, national, and international concern. Although we have a full-time director of social justice programming, we lack a formal infrastructure for setting, implementing, and funding our social justice priorities. We will formalize our social justice infrastructure by looking at how we set, implement, and fund our social justice priorities, including determining the key social justice issues that are core to CBST's mission. This process will include an examination of the pros and cons of establishing a separate 501c3 social justice institute.

4. Evaluate CBST's Relationship to Institutional Judaism

- a. CBST is both a non-denominational synagogue and a leading progressive Jewish voice. We will evaluate our relationship to institutional Judaism to determine whether we are doing all we can to amplify our voice. This evaluation will include an examination of the pros and cons of denominational affiliation.

5. Examine Space Opportunities and Issues

- a. CBST is a growing congregation in terms of members, clergy, and staff. Clergy and staff fully occupy our clergy and staff suites. On many Friday nights, we are at or near capacity in the main sanctuary. On Saturday mornings, our children's education occupies all of the classrooms. Given these challenges, we will look at how we accommodate each of these concerns and develop alternatives if necessary.
- b. There are times when our synagogue is not fully utilized, including on Sundays and during the day on weekdays. We will look at how we can meet certain congregant needs by improving utilization of the synagogue during these times, balancing these needs with the costs of expanding the hours when our building is open.
- c. We will address security needs of the synagogue, including physical infrastructure and emergency training.
- d. We will study ways to improve accessibility throughout the synagogue.

6. Improve Internal and External Communications

- a. Internally, CBST's members look to its website to learn about and sign up for programs, check the calendar for upcoming events, and make donations. CBST's members also seek a more interactive website where they can communicate with clergy, staff, and other members. Given how integral our website is to the efficient operation of the synagogue, we will improve the website's user experience and expand its utility as a communication tool.
- b. We will provide easier access to the Board so that congregants are better able to share their recommendations and questions.
- c. Externally, CBST has a unique faith-based voice as the world's largest Jewish LGBTQ congregation. We will develop a public relations strategy to amplify that voice locally, nationally, and internationally.
- d. We will continue to complete archiving items that we have in storage offsite, including records, cassette recordings, photos, and videos and create an effective system on and offsite for all of CBST's history.

7. Articulate Funding and Capacity Building Strategy

- a. CBST has many ambitious goals for today and seeks to secure its financial health for the future. The Board has authorized a capital reserve fund and an operating reserve fund and will develop ways to ensure their sustainability.
- b. We will look at whether we are maximizing the potential of our High Holy Days services for donations to and engagement with the synagogue, including by promoting Limmud and Lehrhaus.
- c. We will also develop ways to ensure the permanence of the cantorial position, the Limmud principal position, the social justice director position, and the Scholar-in-Residence position.
- d. We will grow unrestricted fundraising from within our community to support ongoing operations.

8. Develop Leadership Frameworks for Clergy, Staff, and Lay Leaders

We will focus on ongoing institutional health by:

- a. Documenting and updating job descriptions and organizational systems so we are not solely reliant on individuals' institutional knowledge.

- b. Educating ourselves on succession planning and search processes for senior clergy, staff, and lay leadership roles.
- c. Strengthening lay leadership development and opportunities and the volunteer experience.