

9 Bad High Holiday Survey Questions and How to Make them Better (and other survey tips)

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What you need to know to start measuring your programs' success and impact and learn from the experience. This includes sample survey questions and things to know when preparing a survey. Read ahead for [9 Bad High Holiday Survey Questions and How to Make Them Better](#)

Table of Contents

[#1 Takeaway: When thinking about what you want to measure, know your goals.](#)

[General Survey Tips](#)

[9 Bad High Holiday Survey Questions and How to Make Them Better](#)

[Technology Measurement Tools](#)

[#1 Takeaway: When thinking about what you want to measure, know your goals.](#)

1. Identify The What - the mission of your organization or the mission, more broadly, of Judaism. These are the 10,000 foot level ideas and questions that you are hoping people will do as a result of being in your community.
 - a. Example: To foster a sense of belonging and to motivate people to increase a sense of belonging for others in their community.
 - b. Example from Chabad: To increase the number of mitzvot performed in the world.
2. Identify The How - what are we doing to get people's attention to help them accomplish that mission. Sometimes we focus on this too much when measuring Jewish communal work.
 - a. Example: Number of people who are members of a particular institution
 - b. Example: Number of butts in seats at a service/event
3. Call to Action in a way that allows people to achieve the goals of the mission. What are the actions you want to measure for? Are they one-time things or ongoing practices?
 - a. Example: Joining a committee
 - b. Example: Participating in ongoing social justice or volunteer activities
 - c. Example: Seeking out forgiveness or seeking to live life in a different way in 5781
 - d. Example: Performing certain mitzvot

Can use this scheme to think about what you want to measure:

- Mission (The What)
- Attention (The How)
- Call to Action (The Metric)

*Note: This comes from a Youtube Channel called [ProChurch Tools](#) which focuses on how churches can take advantage of 21st century technology and evaluation tools to learn about their work and do a better job of achieving their mission.

General Survey Tips

- 1. Only spend time measuring what you care to know more about and can do something about.**
 - a. Assume that members of your community are busy. Asking them to fill out a too-long questionnaire is counterproductive. It is important that their experience of data collection be positive, so that the data will be useful in the end.
 - b. That means you should have a clear set of goals in mind for your offerings and programs, and only ask questions that help you learn about the achievement of those goals.
 - i. Example: If you want to elicit a certain attitude among your community, like a motivation to seek out forgiveness or a commitment to working on improving an important social issue, then ask about that specifically. Don't waste time asking more generic questions about satisfaction with individual elements of the service or program. Some of these attitudes only play out in the long-term, so follow up with congregants or participants throughout 5781 to see if they maintain these attitudes.
 - ii. Example: If you want people to feel a connection to the community during these socially distant High Holidays, then ask them which moments helped them experience a sense of togetherness. This question will indicate if you have been effective, rather than questions that only get at the individual level, like the number of attendees.
 - c. Consider asking a specific set of questions about reactions to your offerings during pandemic that you suspect may need some tweaking or attention.
 - i. Example: You may want to know about how your audience reacts differently to live streamed versus pre-recorded material. Knowing which mode comes closer to accomplishing your goals for your community can help you decide what to offer in the future.
- 2. Be aware of how people think when they respond to surveys**
 - a. People respond based on context clues and how they interpret the meaning of the question.

- i. Example: The spy put out the torch as the signal to attack. People interpret the meaning differently (extinguish vs displaying the torch) depending on whether it was preceded by a picture of someone blowing out a birthday cake or a picture of a hanukkiyah outside a train station
- b. Clarify meaning of ambiguous words in survey questions.
 - i. Example: Synagogue - may be interpreted as the physical space or as the institution itself including online
 - ii. Example: Hebrew words that may be interpreted
- c. Respondents' judgments are usually based on the information that comes to mind most easily while other potentially relevant information that is less accessible in memory is unlikely to be considered.
- d. Respondents may edit their response before they communicate it because of social desirability and situational factors

3. Make sure the attitudes you're measuring are clearly specified. 3 categories

- a. Cognitive (beliefs about something) - Ask you to share your beliefs about the thing under examination. Example for High Holidays - How did the service make you feel? What new ideas did it give you?
- b. Evaluative (is the something good or bad, do you like it or not) - Measure if someone thinks something is good or bad or if they are likely or unlikely to recommend it.
- c. Behavioral (what will you do with/about the thing) - Measure how a person might act towards the thing in the future. Example for High Holidays - how frequently might someone come to a service in the future?
 - i. *Note: People have a difficult time predicting future behavior. Can reframe "How many times will you X in the coming year?" to "How many times do you intend to participate in X in the coming year?"
 - ii. Surveys can become self-fulfilling prophecies! Asking about intent can increase the likelihood that someone does something. But beware! If you keep asking intent questions to people who initially answered low, they will become even less likely to act on that intent.

5. Be thoughtful about how you will allow people to respond. 3 ways to do so

Type of question	Pros	Cons	Examples
Open-ended questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for greater nuance • Allows people to use language that is comfortable for them • Can produce great richness and quotable material • These types of questions are essential to begin to understand a new area of work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Categorizing and analyzing responses is complicated, time consuming, and increases the probability of error • They ask much more of respondents • They typically result in a lower response rate (respondents are less likely to finish a survey with many open-ended questions) 	<p>Please describe the different emotions you felt during high holiday services this year.</p>
Rating questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to fill out • Survey software can automatically calculate results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May yield superficial responses • Can be difficult to figure out what to offer as response categories (eg. odd or even number, start with a negative number or a positive number, include the word average or not?, number of options?) 	<p>On a scale of 1-5, how strongly do you agree that your preparations for the High Holidays allow you to anticipate and plan for what is coming afterwards?</p> <p>Ease of use questions - How easy was it for you to use the technology during our High Holiday services?</p> <p>How satisfied were you with this aspect of something?</p>
Ranking questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can help understand smaller differences in preference between liked or disliked things • When you have limited resources, responses can help identify the top priority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not allow people to report equal preferences • Ranking a list of items from 1-5 does not tell you how much more liked the top ranking item is compared to the next • Results will not show big differences in preference or a tie 	<p>Of a finite list, what is your first, second, third choice? Which is most important?</p>

6. Use questions that other survey researchers have previously used. Test any new questions before using them. Pre-existing resources:

- a. [Thriving Synagogue Survey](#) - Quantitatively measures how thriving synagogue is
- b. [Responses to Covid in different Jewish communities](#) - Asks questions about online Jewish programming and feeling connected to Jewish institutions
- c. [Pew Forum study on Covid across American religious groups](#) - Asks people how they spend their time, attitudes towards houses of worship being open/closed
- d. If making your own question, test them out on a few of the people you intend to survey. What do they think of when they see those questions? Make sure what you are asking matches up with how people are interpreting the questions.

9 Bad High Holiday Survey Questions and How to Make Them Better

<i>Bad Question</i>	<i>Why It's Bad and How to Make it Better</i>	<i>Better Question</i>
What did you like about High Holiday services this year?	Think about what construct you actually want to measure for . Is it really satisfaction? Or something else? If you are measuring for satisfaction, consider using scale-type questions about aspects of the service you are most interested in knowing more about.	After high holiday services this year, how likely would you be to recommend joining the synagogue to a friend? 0-10 scale (This will get you a “Net Promoter Score”; add up the 9s and 10s, count 7-8 as 0s, and subtract anything 6 or less. Divide this number by total number of responses and multiply by 100 for a score between -100 and 100. A score over 20 is favorable and over 50 is excellent. This construct measures more than just satisfaction, but also excitement to share with others)
Did you learn something new and feel inspired to do <i>teshuvah</i> as a result of participating in High Holiday services? ~Yes ~No	Make sure your questions, especially multiple choice questions, only ask about one construct at a time . This one asks about learning something new and feeling inspired to do teshuvah. If these are two of your goals for the high holidays, consider asking about them in	(For example, if an important learning goal your shul focused on for the high holidays is to have greater appreciation of patience) How strongly do you agree with the following statements (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree, Strongly

	<p>two different questions.</p>	<p>Agree):</p> <p>I have a clearer idea of what it means to be patient.</p> <p>I feel motivated to try to be more patient in my day-to-day life.</p>
<p>How much of the Yom Kippur morning service pre-recorded video did you watch?</p> <p>~None of it ~A bit of it ~Some of it ~Much of it ~Most of it ~All of it</p>	<p>These response categories are vague and too open to interpretation. For example, it will be difficult for a respondent to interpret the difference between “a bit of it” and “some of it”. Better response categories might be none of it, less than half, about half, over half, and all of it.</p>	<p>An even better way to get this information would be to analyze audience retention statistics on YouTube, Facebook, Zoom, or whatever platform you’re using to share the video.</p>
<p>How many high holiday programs did you take part in?</p> <p>~0-2 ~2-4 ~4-9 ~9-10</p>	<p>Response categories should be mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive. These responses are neither. Notice how 2, 4, and 9 are included in two different response categories. And it’s possible you offered more than 10 programs.</p> <p>Think carefully about the range in each of the response categories. People who attended 4 vs. 9 high holiday events might be counted in the same category and you’ll miss the differences. Consider having people check off all the programs they attended.</p>	<p>How many high holiday programs did you take part in?</p> <p>Which of the following high holiday programs did someone in your family take part in?</p> <p>~Adult Rosh HaShanah services ~Family and Children’s services ~Tashlich ~Yizkor ~etc.</p>

<p>How many times will you participate in a social action program organized through the synagogue in the coming year?</p>	<p>Asking people to predict future behavior will not generate good data. One compromise is to ask about behavioral intentions. You may also want to add a question beforehand seeking to measure their beliefs about social action. What do they think about it? Note that asking about behavioral intentions has a small association with the person actually carrying out that behavior later.</p>	<p>How strongly do you agree with the following statements:</p> <p>Taking part in social action helps the community live up to its mission.</p> <p>I intend to participate in social action programming in 5781</p>
<p>How strongly do you agree with the following statement:</p> <p>Seeking forgiveness is an important task for helping me live a better life.</p>	<p>Questions like these will be subject to social desirability bias even if the survey is anonymous. People will feel pressure to give the “right” answer (seeking forgiveness is good) even if they might feel differently inside.</p> <p>Ways to minimize social desirability bias are: include a disclaimer in the question that there are no wrong answers and phrase the question to make judgments on <i>other people</i> rather than the respondent.</p>	<p>How strongly do you agree with the following statement (there is no right or wrong answer):</p> <p>When someone wrongs someone else, seeking forgiveness is an important task for helping the person who committed the wrong to live a better life.</p>
<p>Had we done more services on Zoom, would you have liked them better?</p>	<p>Don’t ask about counterfactuals or hypotheticals on surveys. If you’re offering Zoom, pre-recorded, and live, ask about each one separately and compare averages. Consider using a ranking question to compare people’s preferences for future offerings.</p>	<p>Rank which of the following options you’d like to see the most in 5781:</p> <p>Services on Zoom Pre-recorded services Small outdoor services Indoor services with masks</p>

<p>Please rank the following aspects of high holiday services based on what you enjoyed the most:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~Doing services from home ~The gift packages ~The sermons ~The congregational video greeting card 	<p>Ranking questions are most useful when you need to know about differences between preferences on the extremes (the most liked and least liked things) and if you have limited resources and need to make a decision. Not as good for retroactive. For these situations, use rating questions instead.</p>	<p>How satisfied were you with the following aspects of high holiday services (Very dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, Neither dissatisfied or satisfied, Satisfied, Very Satisfied)</p> <p>Doing services from home</p> <p>The gift packages</p> <p>The sermons</p> <p>The congregational video greeting card</p>
<p>Do you intend to participate in adult ed programming at the synagogue in 5781?</p>	<p>It's great to ask a behavioral intention question! But be careful about the meaning of the word synagogue. Some may interpret it as the physical space and may not be ready to come back in pandemic. Test all of your questions before sending the survey to make sure people understand them as you intended.</p>	<p>Do you intend to participate in online adult ed programming in 5781?</p> <p>Do you intend to participate in in-person adult ed programming at the synagogue in 5781 should we reopen for in-person programming?</p>

Technology Measurement Tools

One of the unexpected potential benefits of Jewish life under Covid and Jewish life happening on online platforms, is we have access to so much more automatically generated data and easy data collecting methods. Here is a review to help you take advantage of some of them.

Zoom tools - A professional account offers:

- Reports on usage can track attendance and amount of time that people spend on a call. This section will show the meetings on your Zoom account, the length of the meeting, number of participants, when a participant joined/left a meeting and the length of time they were in the meeting. It can be exported to excel.
- The chat box offers real time data collection tools. It can be used to ask participants to respond to a question about what they are learning. Example: What are you most looking forward to about the High Holidays?
- Zoom polls - To set it up, go to the meetings tab, find the name of the meeting, scroll to the bottom of the page. Click on poll and click “add” to add your own poll with a title, whether it is or is not anonymous (anonymous is recommended)
- Annotation
 - Spectrum style questions as shown in the image
 - Can save the final image for future use
 - Can use stamps and text options for greater flexibility



YouTube tools

- Go to video analytics
- Can see number of views over time, audience retention (% of people who watched your video at a particular point in time over the course of the video)
- Relative audience retention (after what viewing time, were people likely to watch the video until the end)
- Can help you to figure out how to make content more engaging so people stick around until the end
- Breakdown of age and gender of viewers
- Source of traffic for video; how did people come to find it

Facebook tools

- Demographics
- Paying Facebook to increase views