



# **Association of Jewish Libraries**

## **Strategic Plan 2021-2025**

***The Leading Authority on Judaic Librarianship***

Finalized on December 16, 2021

Approved by AJL Council on December 28, 2021

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## Executive Summary

The Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL), the leading authority on Judaic librarianship, was established in January 1966 with the merging of the Jewish Librarians Association and the Jewish Library Association. AJL is a volunteer-run not for profit professional organization.

AJL members include individuals and libraries, library workers, and library supporters, whose unique energies, skills, and enthusiasm contribute to the vitality and the relevance of the Association. The organization has two divisions: RAS (Research Libraries, Archives, and Special Collections) and SSCPL (Schools, Synagogues, Centers, and Public Libraries). AJL was established to promote Judaica librarianship, raise professional standards, encourage the establishment of new Jewish libraries and collections, and promote the publication of Judaic literature for children and adults.

In the summer of 2020, the AJL Council voted to create an updated AJL Strategic Plan. The changes experienced during the COVID pandemic in both librarianship and the larger world presented several amazing new opportunities that the AJL leadership wanted to ensure were properly institutionalized. The committee was led by Sean Patrick Boyle and included Jackie Ben-Efraim, Kathleen Bloomfield, Rachel Greenblatt, Michelle Margolis, Makena Mezistrano, Joanna Sussman, and Alba Toscano.

The AJL Board and Council both voted to keep the AJL Mission and Vision, so the process consisted of an AJL Member Survey, a SOAR<sup>1</sup> (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results) analysis, and then performing an Analytic Hierarchy Process to help with creating the most effective initiatives and actions. Details of the process used can be found in Appendix A.

The results of the AJL Member Survey (Appendix B) concerning AJL programs and services were overall quite positive. No major concerns on the part of AJL members regarding AJL programs and services, combined with a lack of competition from other professional library/librarian organizations, led the committee to conduct a SOAR analysis as an opportunity to add additional innovative programming and services to further support AJL as the leading authority on Judaic librarianship.

SOAR analysis results (Appendix C), specifically the Aspirations<sup>2</sup> helped with creating inspiring Goals and SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) Objectives that perfectly complement AJL member requirements from AJL.

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<sup>1</sup> "SOAR is a strategic planning framework with an approach that focuses on strengths and seeks to understand the whole system by including the voices of the relevant stakeholders. SOAR conversations center on what an organization is doing right, what skills should be enhanced, and what is compelling to those who have a 'stake' in the organization's success." (Stavros, J. & Hinrichs, G. (2009). The thin book of SOAR: Building strengths-based strategy.)

<sup>2</sup> The Aspirations as outlined in the plan are: (1) To truly MEAN being "The leading authority in Judaica librarianship"; (2) AJL members are passionate professionals who share the best of Judaic literature, history, and culture in all of its formats with the community at large; (3) Every member has a clear path, with the highest quality support, to become impassioned professionals confident in their abilities to provide the best services and programming; and (4) AJL and all members are properly funded and respected.

From the AJL Member Survey along with the Analytic Hierarchy Process (Appendix D) it was determined that AJL Members most desire to create a community and meet with peers face-to-face; next is a desire to have online access to professional resources; and finally a desire for live Professional Development programs. The initiatives and actions in the Action Plan (Appendix E) follow these priorities and ensure success in achieving 100% of all Goals and Objectives. Initiatives and actions are assigned to either committee chairs or council member positions, rather than individuals by name, to ensure accountability and proper support will be provided across the multiple planned years.

The committee developed four goals:

1. Increase AJL 'brand awareness'
2. Foster outside partnerships and collaborations at the Association as well as the individual library levels
3. Instill pride in membership and cultivate a communal environment
4. Create a process for membership to demonstrate a mastery in professional Judaic librarianship skills

The following sections provide a brief history of AJL and its activities, the Mission, Vision, and Values and Goals of AJL, and the objectives for achieving each goal. Additionally, the appendices include a detailed description of the process used, AJL Member Survey Results – Programs and Services, the SOAR Analysis Results, a graphic showing the AJL Priorities Analysis results, and then the detailed Action Plan, which will be a living document under the responsibility of the AJL Vice-President/President-Elect.

## A Brief History of AJL

The Jewish Librarians Association, founded in 1946, was composed of academic, archival, and research institutions. The Jewish Library Association, founded in 1962, emphasized work in synagogue, school, and community center libraries. These two associations merged in 1966 and became the Association of Jewish Libraries. We are currently composed of two divisions: Schools, Synagogues, Centers and Public Libraries (SSCPL), and Research, Archive, and Special libraries (RAS).

Over the past 55 years the AJL has sought to fulfill its mission by offering unique publications, mentoring, and assisting its members, and through its annual conferences. The first national conference of AJL was held at Gratz College in Philadelphia in 1966. In successive years 55 conferences have been held throughout the USA, Canada, and in Israel. In addition, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, AJL has hosted two virtual conferences - in 2020 and 2021.

For over half a century the presidents and board members have followed in the footsteps of the first President, the Librarian of the Hebrew Union College Library system, Herb Zafren, by representing AJL on the American National Standards Institute's Committee on Library and Information Science and related publishing practices, the Council for Archives and Research Libraries in Jewish Studies, the Jewish Book Council, the former Coalition for Alternatives in Jewish Education (CAJE) and current NewCAJE, the American Library Association, the Association for Jewish Studies, and the Church and Synagogue Library Association.

AJL recognizes excellent publications in its annual conferences. The Sydney Taylor Book Award, generously funded by Jo Taylor Marshall, is presented to outstanding books for children and teens that authentically portray the Jewish experience; the AJL Judaica Reference Award, funded by Dr. Greta Silver of New York City, established to encourage the publication of outstanding Judaica reference books; and the AJL Judaica Bibliography Award, funded by Eric Chaim Kline of Los Angeles, established to encourage the publication of outstanding Judaica bibliographies.

AJL is the leading authority on Judaic librarianship. AJL has always been a vibrant volunteer-run non-profit organization that relies on its members' energy and enthusiasm. Our membership includes libraries in synagogues, Jewish Community Centers, day schools, yeshivot, universities, Holocaust and general history museums,, archives, national libraries, and public libraries. Many of our members are not librarians. We provide professional advocacy and development to our members via a supportive worldwide network. We communicate and discuss issues over our listserv (Hasafran) and through our online News and Reviews, which contains information about us and book and media reviews. Our annual conferences serve as vital meeting places for our members and supporters, providing opportunities for informal networking as well as forums and panels discussing a variety of professional, lay-led and academic topics and best practices. Our individual members represent North America and beyond, including Aruba, Barbados, China, the Czech Republic, Germany, Holland, Israel, Italy, Panama, South Africa, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. We do not discriminate based on race, color, age, sex, gender, or religion.

## Our Vision

A world where reliable resources are made available in all formats and at all levels to anyone who seeks to study and understand the Jewish experience.

## Our Mission

The Association of Jewish Libraries is an international professional organization that fosters access to information and research in all forms of media relating to all things Jewish. The Association promotes Jewish literacy and scholarship and provides a community for peer support and professional development.

## Values and AJL Goals

- Maintain high professional standards for Judaica librarians and recruit-qualified individuals into the profession.
- Facilitate communication and exchange of information on a global scale.
- Encourage quality publication in all formats and media, print, digital, etc.; stimulate publication of high-quality literature for children and adults.
- Facilitate and encourage the establishment of Judaica library collections.
- Enhance information access for all through the application of advanced technologies.
- Publicize the organization and its activities in all relevant venues.
- Stimulate awareness of Judaica library services among the public at large.
- Promote recognition of Judaica librarianship to the broader library profession.
- Encourage recognition of Judaica library services by other organizations and related occupations.
- Ensure continuity of the Association through sound management, financial security, effective governance, and active membership.

## Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives

### Goal 1: Increase AJL 'Brand' awareness

#### Objectives:

- 1.1 By June 2022, create and post on the AJL website a strategic communications/marketing plan, including a style guide, that will be used in all AJL products.
- 1.2 By January 2023, define and post on the AJL website the 'AJL standards' for quality Judaic Library programming and services.
- 1.3 By January 2023, create a yearly program that highlights and showcases at least 5 members and their libraries that exemplify AJL standards.
- 1.4 By July 2022, actively promote on the AJL website model library programs and services with photos, videos, and links to their websites and catalogs.
- 1.5 AJL understands it has a commitment to Judaic librarianship now and in the future. Therefore, by January 2027 AJL will raise through donations enough money for its Endowment Fund to enable it to disperse 5%, in perpetuity, of the funds annually to meet the AJL book award costs.

### Goal 2: Foster outside partnerships and collaborations at the Association as well as the individual library levels

#### Objectives:

- 2.1 By July 2022, create a plan to recruit at least 8 authors a year to participate in AJL Presents sessions or other online events with individual member libraries.
- 2.2 By January 2023, create a plan and host at least 3 online Focus Groups a year for stakeholders (authors, publishers, researchers, etc.) using AJL members or their library's patrons.
- 2.3 By July 2023, create and implement a plan to rotate the promotion of books on AJL's different lists, but not to exceed the promotion level for Sydney Taylor Book Award and other AJL Book Award winners.
- 2.4 By January 2023, create a process that measures the level of diversification for all varieties of Jews in AJL book lists, that will include an annual report to the AJL Council. By July 2023 have at least one quality book representing each variety of Judaism on each list, and if none are available then work with authors and publishers to ensure proper representation.
- 2.5 By January 2024, identify and receive funds from at least 2 multi-year grants and other foundation funders for continued sustainment of AJL as well as individual library programs (Avi Chai type programs)

### Goal 3: Instill pride in membership and cultivate a communal environment

#### Objectives:

- 3.1 By July 2022 have in place a process to promote and publicly advertise Model Programs to their local and or regional Jewish community.
- 3.2 Creation of at least 2 International Chapters by June 2023, with full AJL "Main Office" support to enable the chapter members to meet at times that work for their geographic location.
- 3.3 By July 2022, create and promote multiple ways for AJL members' Institution's leadership to publicly acknowledge workers accomplishment. By July 2023 have at least 60% of library accreditations, basic Judaic Librarian certification awardees, and cohort members publicly recognized by their Institution's leadership.
- 3.4 By July 2023 have verbiage in library Advanced Accreditation checklists that states that AJL takes into serious consideration if library workers are paid or not, and that for institutions over a certain size with holdings over a set level, that paid workers would be a requirement.
- 3.5 By July 2024 develop leadership training sessions as part of the Intermediate and Advanced Cohort programs that prepare members for leadership positions at their local institutions (Intermediate) as well as in AJL and regional affiliates (Advanced).
- 3.6 Create an AJL Master Librarian/Archivist group by June 2022 that is made up of past AJL leadership that helps to establish and sustain AJL standards. AJL Master Librarian/Archivist members will be mentors for the basic Judaic Librarian certification program, Intermediate and Advanced Cohorts, as well as annually sponsoring a Conference session or Roundtable discussion.

### Goal 4: Create a process for membership to demonstrate a mastery in professional Judaic Librarianship skills

#### Objectives:

- 4.1 By July 2022, list the requirements to attain a basic Judaic Librarian certification and by July 2024 establish a program to achieve certification with participants demonstrating proficiency in the form of a poster or e-portfolio presented at the AJL Annual Conference.
- 4.2 By July 2023, establish Intermediate and Advanced level Cohorts. Intermediate cohorts will work on a project that will create a new service or program at their library and Advanced cohorts will accomplish a project that will directly benefit either AJL or a regional affiliate. At the end of their projects, cohort members will be required to present a paper at Annual conference; or an article published in *Judaica Librarianship*; or lead a Roundtable detailing local library project or AJL committee project.

## **Appendix A: Description of Process Used**

In late Summer 2020, the AJL Board voted to create a Strategic Planning Committee. Sean Boyle was selected to Chair the committee and recruit members that equally represented RAS and SSCPL and was as representative as possible of the general AJL membership.

The Strategic Planning Committee held its first Zoom meeting on November 11, 2020 with three RAS representative members and three SSCPL representative members with AJL President and Vice-President attending as well.

The Committee reviewed the AJL 2017 Strategic Plan and decided they would not use an outside consulting team as was used during the last planning process. An AJL Membership Survey was chosen as the way to determine members' level of satisfaction and rate, in order of importance, AJL current programming and services. It was decided to conduct a new AJL membership survey, since one last was conducted in 2010, and that results from the member survey -- as well as from other information gathering processes -- would drive the new Strategic Plan, and that it would not be a continuation of the 2014-2017 Strategic Plan. AJL Board and Council both voted to keep the AJL Mission and Vision the same from the 2014-2017 Strategic Plan.

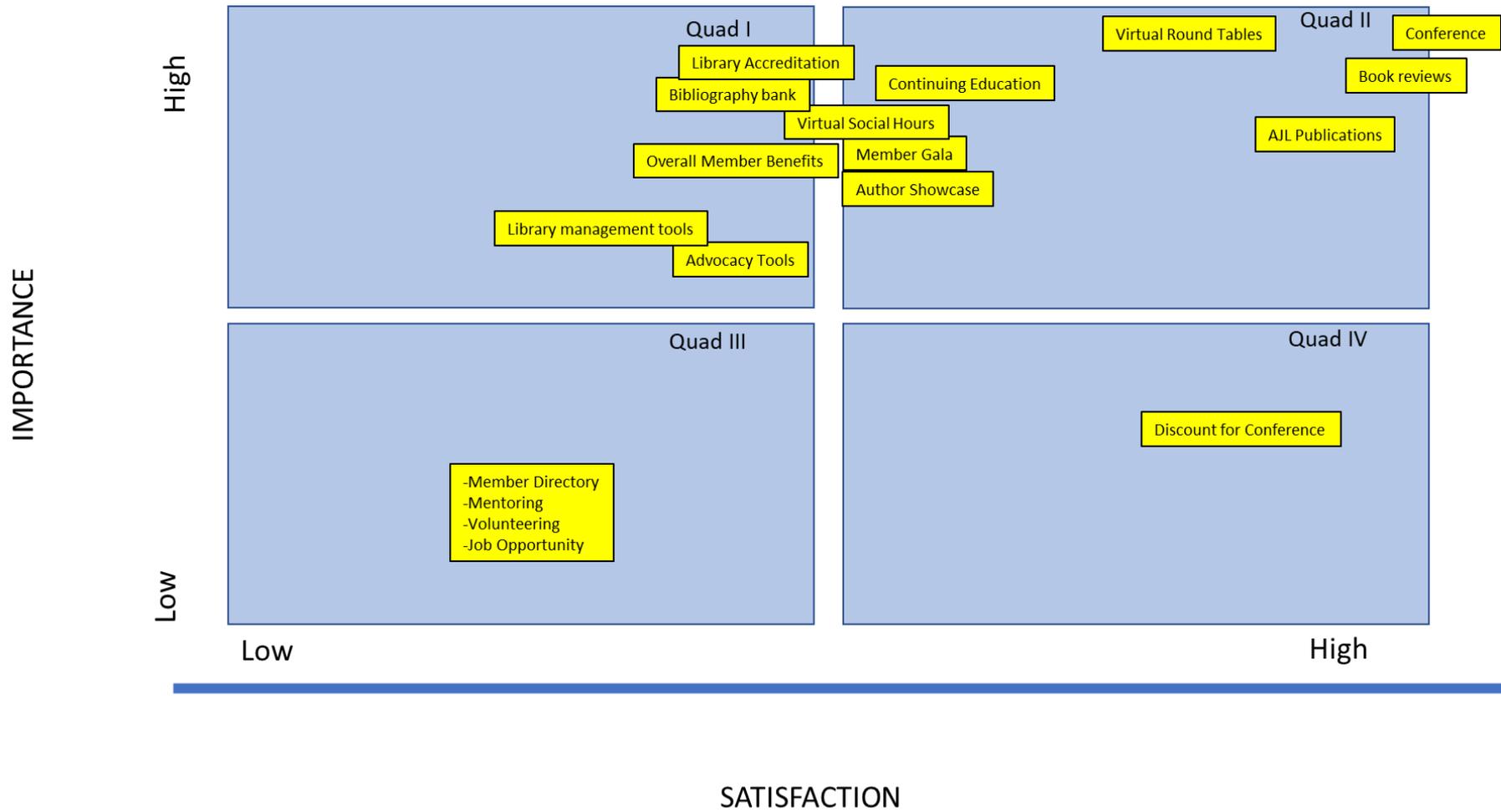
The 2020 AJL Membership Survey was conducted from December 2020 to early January 2021, using questions from the 2010 AJL survey, and new ones, to clarify members' views on AJL Programs and Services. The survey was conducted using Google Forms instead of a subscription survey service, due to the free ability to preserve the questions used and membership response date for future survey comparison. Participants could request to be placed in either of two raffles: a gift-card to bookshop.org, or a pack of newly released Kar-Ben books. The Kar-Ben books were a generous donation from Kar-Ben Publishing. Appendix B shows survey results for memberships' opinion of AJL programming and services in a Satisfaction/Importance graph. Overall AJL members gave fairly high scores for AJL programming and services. The graph in Appendix B is a high/low scale that attempts to show variation from the narrow band of response scores, and overall positive satisfaction by members.

The Strategic Planning Committee then looked at conducting either a Gap, SWOT, or SOAR analysis to help with creating Goals, Objectives and help with assessing success of initiatives and actions. SOAR analysis was chosen because of emphasis on positivity and directly making the committee reflect on inspiring aspirations instead of emphasizing organization weaknesses. AJL SOAR Analysis results are presented in Appendix C.

The SOAR results, along with the findings from the AJL Membership Survey were used in the creation of the AJL Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives and will be used to help with assessing progress. For initiatives and actions in the Action Plan (Appendix E), and due to the fact AJL is constrained by limited funds and volunteers to lead programs, the Strategic Planning Committee used Dr. Thomas L. Saaty's Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) to create a prioritization to efficiently allocate limited resources the most effectively to meet AJL's Mission and Vision. The results of the AHP are found in Appendix D and were validated from the AJL Membership Survey results. The three main priorities are: 1) for members to build a sense of community through face-to-face interactions; 2) to have access to online resources; and 3) to have face-to-face education opportunities taught by fellow members.

## Appendix B: AJL member survey results





## **Appendix C: SOAR Analysis results**

### **SOAR – Strengths**

Tightly knit and responsive professional community

- Membership is professionally rewarding (Conference Presenting, committee membership, leadership roles, etc.)
- Members are a ready and quality resource for all aspects of Judaic Librarianship
  - Collaborations
  - Answering questions
  - Providing useful resources
  - Personal relationships are formed as well as professional
- AJL was able to switch quickly to all-digital meetings, with actual gain in effectiveness to reach membership and meet needs

Support and advocate for all forms of Judaica Librarianship

- Small organization with a lot of different kinds of librarians who can learn from each other – ex. Synagogue Archives or H.S./College Roundtable – bringing together synagogue librarians and archivists or school and academic librarians could not happen like this in a bigger organization
- Every size of library, denomination, library work experience, and level of formal library science education is accepted with an active openness

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Strong relationships with Judaic publishers, book sellers, authors, and researchers

- Book sellers, publishers, authors, and researchers are all welcomed and have ready access to the larger AJL organization, members, and resources (AJL and or individual libraries)
- Symbiotic relationships formed from the recognition of the special niche market
- Many personal relationships have been created beyond just business partnerships

The Leading Authority on Judaic Librarianship

- Sets the standards for what it means to be a Judaic Library (SSCPL)
- Helps to define the standards of what makes a Judaic resource a quality Judaic resource

## **SOAR - Opportunities**

Highlight accomplishments and work of amazing membership

- Produce ways to show off work done by members
- Publicize specialized collections
- Help foster collaborations

Unlimited scope of access to world-wide members and resources by expanding digital opportunities

- Digital meetings, roundtables, AJL Presents, and Conference allows participation from large percentage of members, especially volunteer and international members
- Digital resources available for free to members and their libraries (Library management tools, LibGuides, as well as consortium eBook/databases/films for libraries' usage)
- Digital training and education opportunities give greater access

Creating a certificate in Judaic librarianship for both SSCPL and RAS

- Provide 'certifications' similar to Society of American Archivists
- Partnering- tailor classes to AJL 'needs'
- Professional development, with membership discount?
- Formalize training elements

Central hub for creating member to member collaborations and drawing in outside resources and groups for external partnerships

- List grants and requirements members can apply for that are unique to international, librarianship, Judaica
- Consortiums to help share costs across libraries
- Highlight collaborations between members and libraries
- Help authors and publishers by identifying 'holes' in collections, as well as publicizing demands for types of content from library users; AJL/libraries host focus groups

Advocate as the "Authority" for diversification of Jewish Literature and resources

- Racial and LGBTQ+
- Denominations
- Jewish ethnicity representation
- International

## **SOAR - Aspirations**

To truly MEAN being "The leading authority in Judaica librarianship."

AJL members are passionate professionals who share the best of Judaic literature, history, and culture in all of its formats with the community at large.

Every member has a clear path, with the highest quality support, to become impassioned professionals confident in their abilities to provide the best services and programming

AJL and all members are properly funded and respected

## **SOAR - Results**

To truly MEAN being “The leading authority in Judaica librarianship.”

- We set the standard and outside organizations recognize the value of the AJL ‘Brand’ and actively seek it out.
  - AJL ‘brand’ is sought out as representing the highest quality
  - Authors and Publishers see being placed on an AJL ‘list’ as a high honor and an AJL award as the pinnacle
  - Institutions actively seek out AJL members for employment or make it a requirement for continued employment
  - Funding sources see it as a valued investment, not a charity (AJL and all members are properly funded and respected)

AJL members are passionate professionals who share the best of Judaic literature, history, and culture in all of its formats with the community at large.

- AJL members actively work with professional peers to ensure they are always providing the best and highest quality services and programming
- AJL members are active in supporting and promoting fellow members and readily volunteer to fill AJL leadership, education, and resource management roles

Every member has a clear path, with the highest quality support, to become impassioned professionals confident in their abilities to provide the best services and programming

- Anyone can join AJL and receive the required support and education to become a professional “AJL Judaic Librarian/Archivist”

## **Appendix D: AJL Priorities Analysis**

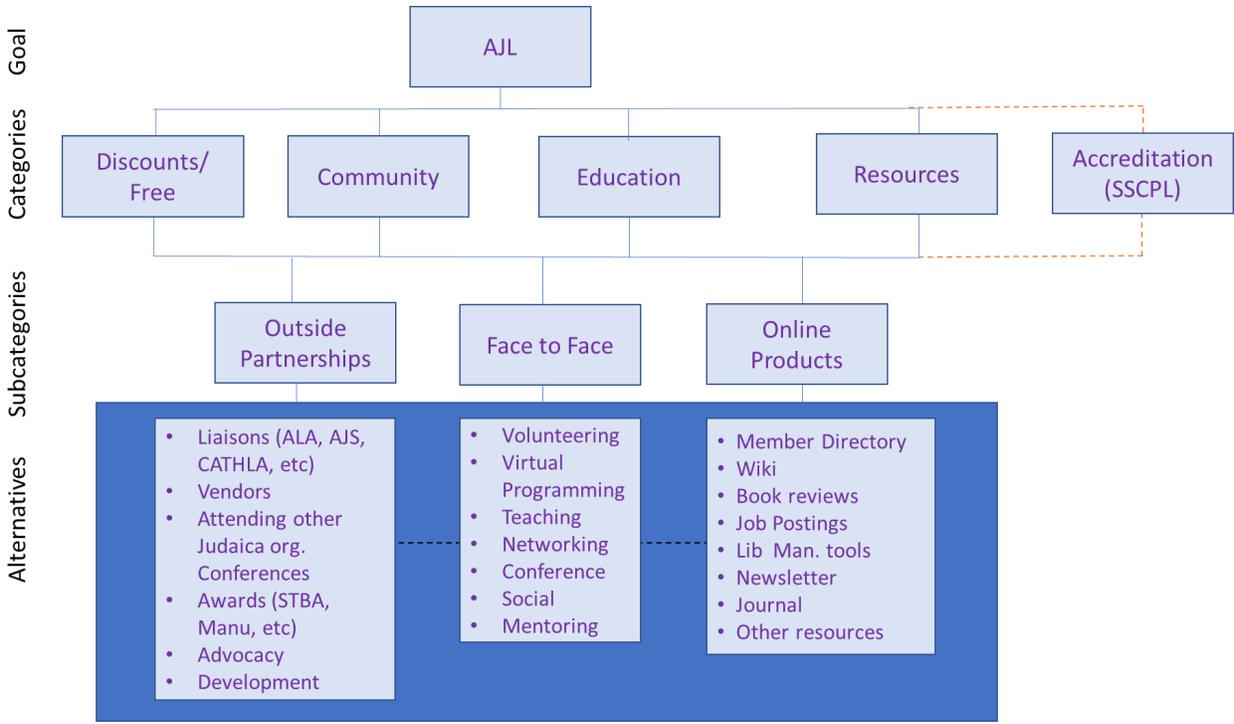
In a perfect world, with unlimited time, people, and resources, AJL would be able to provide high quality programs and services that would meet even the smallest of members' requirements to help them while achieving AJL's mission and vision. Since we do have a finite amount of available volunteers and resources, AJL is required to prioritize its efforts and direct support to the initiatives that will most effectively help the most AJL members by design instead of by chance.

The question was how to determine which efforts, including ones yet to be created, would be most effective at supporting a very diverse international membership. Everyone from non-librarian degreed volunteers in tiny remote synagogues up to PhD holding directors of internationally recognized libraries. The Strategic Planning Committee chose Prof. Thomas L. Saaty's Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) to assist in this endeavor. His book, *Decision making for leaders: the analytic hierarchy process for decisions in a complex world*, is a great resource providing many practical examples and real-world applications of the AHP.

Prof. Saaty states that all humans intuitively create weighted values for dissimilar criteria when making large decisions. Selecting a new car the criteria may be color, country of origin for maker, gas mileage, and cargo space. Selecting job proposals criteria may be salary, potential for growth, commute length, and personally rewarding. In the job proposal scenario if a job offer has a terrible commute, then maybe salary takes a higher weight over than potential for growth. Prof Saaty created a mathematical process, AHP, that helps a person assign a weight percentage to each criteria that takes emotion out of decision making. Taking the emotion out of the decision making process allows for a decision that is aligned with stated values and stands up to outside criticism or second guessing by the decision maker.

AHP has been used for decades internationally to help businesses and governments with their decision making process. AHP gives equal weight to each participating decision maker, so consensus is not required since AHP takes everyone's individual prioritizations and synthesizes a representative outcome.

The first step was to review past AJL surveys and look at current programs and services to determine common themes in members' requirements. Four major themes were identified as why members join and stay in AJL. They are: being part of a community; opportunity for targeted education; access to resources for performing their job; and ability to receive discounts or free access to programs and services. All of the AJL current programs and services were then evaluated to find common themes between them. The three main themes identified were: ability to participate in outside partners' programming and services; opportunities for face-to-face interactions either in person or remote; and having unrestricted access to resources when needed.



The four themes for why members stay in AJL became the AHP main criteria, and the three themes found in AJL programming and services became the AHP subcategories. Committee members then had to make a decision between two criteria for which one was more preferred, then express their level of preference from five levels. Then a similar comparison had to be made for preference between each subcategory in regards to its contribution to a main criteria.

How do you judge that EDUCATION is compared with RESOURCES regarding their contribution \* to Members being able to accomplish the mission and vision of AJL?

EDUCATION is preferred over RESOURCES

RESOURCES is preferred over EDUCATION

How do you judge that FACE-TO-FACE is compared with ONLINE REFERENCES regarding their \* contribution to EDUCATION?

FACE-TO-FACE is preferred over ONLINE REFERENCES

ONLINE REFERENCES is preferred over FACE-TO-FACE

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Level of Preference \*

Both are EQUALLY important

The first one is SOMEWHAT MORE important than the second one

The first one is MUCH MORE important than the second one

The first one is VERY MUCH MORE important than the second one

The first one is ABSOLUTELY MORE important than the second one

Level of Preference \*

Both are EQUALLY important

The first one is SOMEWHAT MORE important than the second one

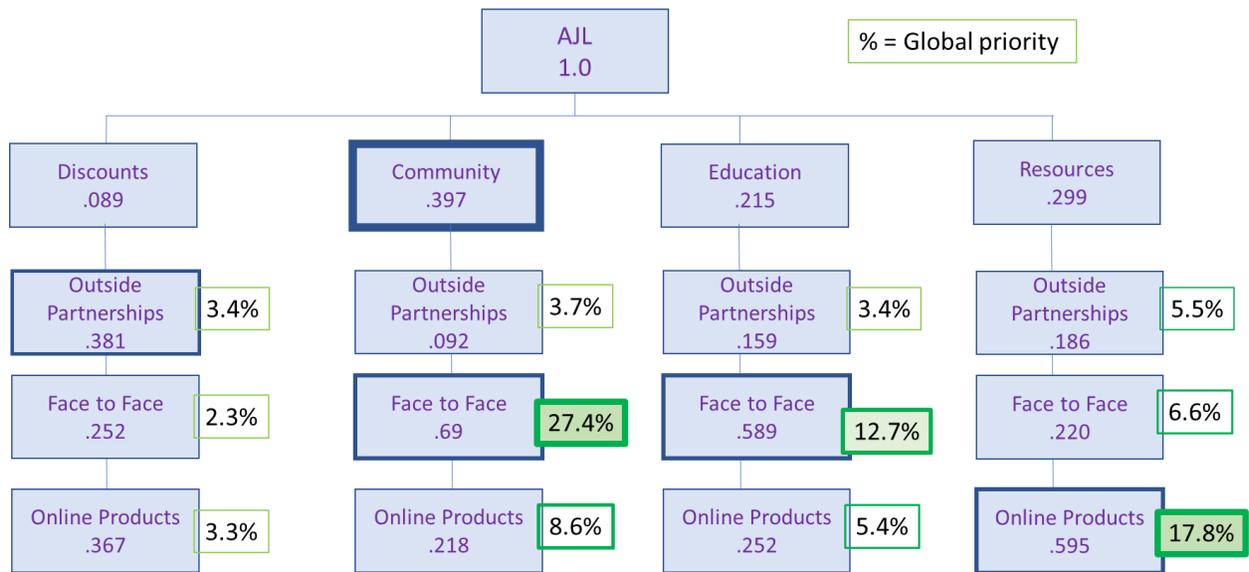
The first one is MUCH MORE important than the second one

The first one is VERY MUCH MORE important than the second one

The first one is ABSOLUTELY MORE important than the second one

Once everyone’s preferences and levels of preferences were synthesized, a prioritization was established with the top three priorities being: Face to face interactions with AJL members; access to online resources; and receiving education face to face. Therefore a highly effective AJL program would be a course led by an AJL member with other members attending live, that has resources available online.

# AHP Survey Results



## **Appendix E: Action Plan**

Living document kept as a Google Sheet. Contact AJL Vice-President for access to the latest version.