

**PEARL: Providing Education and Resources for Leadership**

# **Boards That Work: Building and Sustaining an Effective Governance Structure**

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**Jewish Reconstructionist Federation**

***Transformative Judaism for the 21st Century***

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## **Ten Primary Responsibilities of a Non-Profit Board**

Carol Feder, Organization Development Consultant  
and Co-President of JRF congregation Adat Shalom

1. Determine the organization's mission and purpose
  - understand the organization's reasons for existing
  - adopt and constantly review the mission statement
2. Select the chief executive(s)
  - answer: who is the chief executive, chief staff officer or top elected volunteer officer or a combination
  - approve and make final decision about hiring and firing chief staff
3. Support and evaluate the chief executive(s)
  - may assign to an executive or personnel committee or officer(s)
  - approve purpose and process of review
  - help the incumbent(s) perform effectively
4. Ensure effective planning
  - state mission or purpose for each program/service
  - review of governance structure
  - cost-benefit ratios for each current program/service
  - identify need for financial reserves
  - ensure adequate staffing
5. Ensure adequate resources
  - take responsibility for securing adequate financial support
  - each board member should contribute to annual and special campaigns to the best of each person's ability
  - participate in fund raising efforts (work) and ask others to give
6. Manage resources effectively
  - develop, approve, understand annual budget and financial structure
  - oversee proper expenditure
  - have regular independent audit
  - ensure proper investment of restricted funds
7. Determine and monitor programs and services
  - make sure current programs are consistent with mission as they meet the needs of constituents
  - work with staff to implement plans and programs
  - monitor constituent satisfaction

8. Enhance the public image of the organization
  - serve as link between staff or volunteers and members
  - speak favorably in public about the organization (be an ambassador)
  - inform and communicate to members about the organization
  
9. Serve as court of appeal
  - resolve disputes not otherwise managed by chief executive(s)
  
10. Assess its own performance
  - review board performance and structure
  - provide appropriate self discipline
  - determine selection process (nominations process)
  - recruit and train new leadership

## **Our Community: Who Does What?** Rabbi Shawn Zevit and Rabbi Shira Stutman

Jewish Communal Leadership and Congregational Governance:  
A Resource Manual for Training and Developing Effective Boards and Committees (p. 37)  
Available from the Reconstructionist Press – <http://www.jrf.org/pub/cat-congregations.html>

### Membership

- Helps determine mission and values of the community;
- Helps to create long-range direction;
- Approves major initiatives (building campaign, initial hiring of rabbi);
- May approve annual budget; and
- Provides input to and participates in policy deliberations.

### Board

- Sets yearly and long-range goals;
- Sets annual budget and approves major spending initiatives;
- Determines policy;
- Establishes and empowers committees;
- Approves rabbi's contract;
- Initiates programs and projects in keeping with community mission and vision; and
- Initiates long-range planning process.

### Executive Committee

- Manages the functioning of board and committees;
- Vets proposals to the board (checks to see if proper research has been done, that the proposals are presented in an appropriate manner, that relevant committees have been consulted);
- Sets board agenda;
- Supervises committee structure; and
- Makes urgent and necessary decisions between board meetings.

### Committees

- Develop strategy to meet goals determined by board;
- Plan programming/events/meetings as appropriate;
- Develop proposals for consideration by board;
- Communicate with board via executive committee; and
- Recruit and integrate new members into leadership.

## The Role of the Executive Committee

Adapted from the UAHC Presidents' Manual

The Executive Committee:

1. Sets agenda for Board meetings\*\*
2. Transacts business between meetings of the Board of Directors
3. Coordinates long-range planning strategies developed by individual committees
4. Handles such business as referred to it by the Board
5. Reviews congregational bylaws
6. Maintains a two-way communications system with committee chairs
7. Acts as a sounding board for sensitive issues which may come up in the congregation
8. May serve as a kind of "kitchen cabinet" for the president and the rabbi

\*\*The Executive Committee reviews reports by committees before the reports go to the entire Board for policy discussion. In its capacity of setting the agenda for the Board meeting, the Executive Committee determines if an issue is ready to come before the full Board or if it needs to be returned to the committee for specific questions to be resolved or if more information must be gathered before the matter goes to the Board. In this way, the Executive Committee can ensure that when new business comes before the Board, the topic is ready for discussion at the Board level. In addition, the Executive Committee may research, investigate and make recommendations to the Board on issues not within the jurisdiction of another committee or can help to ensure that the work of various committees is congruent and not replicative.

Similarly, if a committee has a sub-committee working under its auspices (for instance, if Adult Education is structured as a sub-committee of the Education committee), that committee goes through a similar procedure with regards to its sub-committee before submitting its recommendations to the Executive Committee.

## **Seven Responsibilities of a Board Member**

Fisher Howe

Adapted from Welcome to the Board: Your Guide to Effective Participation  
San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1995

1. **Attendance:** attending board meetings regularly and participating in committee work
2. **Involvement:** defining the mission and participating periodically in strategic planning to review purposes, programs, priorities, funding needs, and targets of achievement.
3. **Supervision of clergy and professional staff:** approving the selection, compensation and, if necessary, dismissal of key clergy and staff and assuring regular evaluation of their performance.
4. **Financial oversight:** assuring financial responsibility by reviewing and approving the annual budget, overseeing adherence to it, contracting for an independent audit, controlling the investment policies, or managing capital or reserve funds.
5. **Program oversight and support:** overseeing and evaluation all programs, supporting the staff, and advocating for the synagogue's programs in the community.
6. **Fund raising:** contributing personally and annually and participating in the identification, cultivation, and solicitation of prospective supporters.
7. **Board oversight:** assuring that the board fulfills the foregoing governance responsibilities and maintains effective organization, procedures and recruitment.

## **Sample Job Description: President** Kehillat Israel (Pacific Palisades, CA)

From [A Sacred Trust: A Values-Based Approach to Jewish Communal Leadership and Congregational Governance \(A JRF Resource Book\)](#) – Available from the Reconstructionist Press  
<http://63.115.67.94/cong/devseminars-workbooks.html>

### **PURPOSE:**

Assumes the ethical and legal responsibility to exercise the powers of the Kehillat Israel Congregation by overseeing the financial, real estate, programmatic and administrative integrity of Kehillat Israel within the limits of California law and Kehillat Israel's Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws

### **BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- Actively participates in monthly meetings of the Board to conduct the business of Kehillat Israel and to promote the welfare of the congregation
- Sets policies and goals
- Assures the financial well-being of the congregation through participation in budgeting, monitoring of expenses and participation in fundraising: both giving and getting
- Participates in the religious life of the congregation
- Monitors the congregation's performance of its commitment to its members and the community, as well as ongoing planning for the future of the congregation
- Develops leadership within the congregation
- Prepares bi-monthly reports for the Board of Directors
- Prepares annual report for the Annual Meeting

**OFFICER RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- Writes bulletin article monthly
- Ex-officio member of committees
- Preside at all meetings of Congregation, Board of Directors and Executive Committee
- Sets agenda for meetings
- Supervises all officers, directors and agents of the congregation
- Appoints committees

**TIME REQUIRED:**

- One board meeting per month
- Executive Committee meetings
- Personnel Committee meetings
- Board Installation
- Board Retreat
- Annual Meeting
- Greeter at two services per year
- Rosh Hashanah Eve Service (Board blessing)
- Attendance at synagogue events
- Periodic member outreach

**STAFF LIAISON:**

Rabbi / Executive Director

**QUALIFICATIONS:**

- Desire to serve as part of the leadership of Kehillat Israel
- Ability to work cooperatively with other leaders
- Willingness to contribute time and financial resources
- Previous participation on a Board committee or Task Force

## **Sample Job Description: Financial Vice President** JRC (Evanston, IL)

From [A Sacred Trust: A Values-Based Approach to Jewish Communal Leadership and Congregational Governance \(A JRF Resource Book\)](#) – Available from the Reconstructionist Press  
<http://63.115.67.94/cong/devseminars-workbooks.html>

The Financial Vice President shall be a member of the Board of Directors and the Executive Committee. This position shall monitor and supervise the activities of the persons involved in annual budget preparation (ad hoc committee) as well as the Financial Development Committee. The Financial Vice President serves as a liaison between the Financial Development Committee and the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors.

Specific Responsibilities Include:

1. Responsible for setting revenue and expense goals of the Congregation and determining methods of meeting those goals.
2. Supervises preparation of the annual budget, which shall include the analysis, evaluation, and recommendation of membership dues structures.
3. Preparing periodic financial reports for the Board of Directors, persons with principal responsibility for managing major expense categories (e.g., Administrative, Religious School, etc.), and the annual meeting of the Congregation members.
4. Participating in meetings required with the Directors of the JRC Foundation.
5. Have check co-signing authority with the President, Administrative Vice President, Treasurer and Executive Director for payment of operating and capital expenses of the Congregation.
6. Acting as a resource to the chairperson of the committees of responsibility.
7. Ensuring an accurate accounting of income, expenses, assets, and liabilities as maintained.\*

\* The administrative duties described in #7 may be delegated to professional staff, however the ultimate responsibility shall remain with the Financial Vice President.

The Financial Vice President should be knowledgeable of and informed of activities and issues that impact on following committees of responsibility. The Financial Vice President should be in communication with the Committee Chairs.

Committees of Responsibility:

- a. Financial Development Committee
- b. Budget Preparation Committee

## Checklist for Synagogue Committee Chairs

Adapted from [A Sacred Trust: Board Trainer's Manual](#)  
Available from the Reconstructionist Press – <http://jrf.org/pub/cat-main.html>

The role of the committee chair is 20% doing the work of the committee and 80% managing the committee.

- Be involved in the life of the synagogue, be visible at functions pertaining to committee
- Schedule meetings for the entire year – committees may meet more or less often, but they must meet regularly.
- Review mandate from board and set yearly goals and strategy accordingly.
- Circulate phone and e-mail list of all committee members for the purpose of communication.
- Create timed meeting agendas and distribute them by e-mail one week before meeting.
- Stick to the agenda in order to create an upbeat, productive, and positive experience.
- Recruit new members and volunteers: use the recruitment systems set up by the board and follow through with personal phone calls. Keep an eye on committee diversity.
- Most committees work best with between 5 – 8 people.
- Recruit and train successor. (STARTING ON DAY 1)
- Committee chairs should create conditions for success, give members autonomy, allow them to make decisions within mandates, create a safe atmosphere for asking questions, develop expertise and become empowered.
- Begin meetings with brief Torah study to keep the learning and sacred element in the work.
- Committee chairs should submit reports to their board liaison (written or oral) in advance of all board meetings. There should also be monthly updates on the progress of a committee.
- Follow all congregational policies for meetings (kashrut, Torah study, etc.)
- Hold committee members accountable with gentle and kind reminders, if you see that a task is being neglected, offer help, a co-chair or partner in the task, and finally an offer to relieve a member of the task before it crashes.
- Make it enjoyable, fulfilling, rewarding. Think of how precious your own time is and work to create an environment and set of tasks that are worthy of people giving of their time.
- Ask for help before small problems turn into big ones.

## **Committees: Roles and Responsibilities**

Most of the work of the congregation is done through its committees, which recommend policies and programs to the Board of Directors via the Executive Committee.

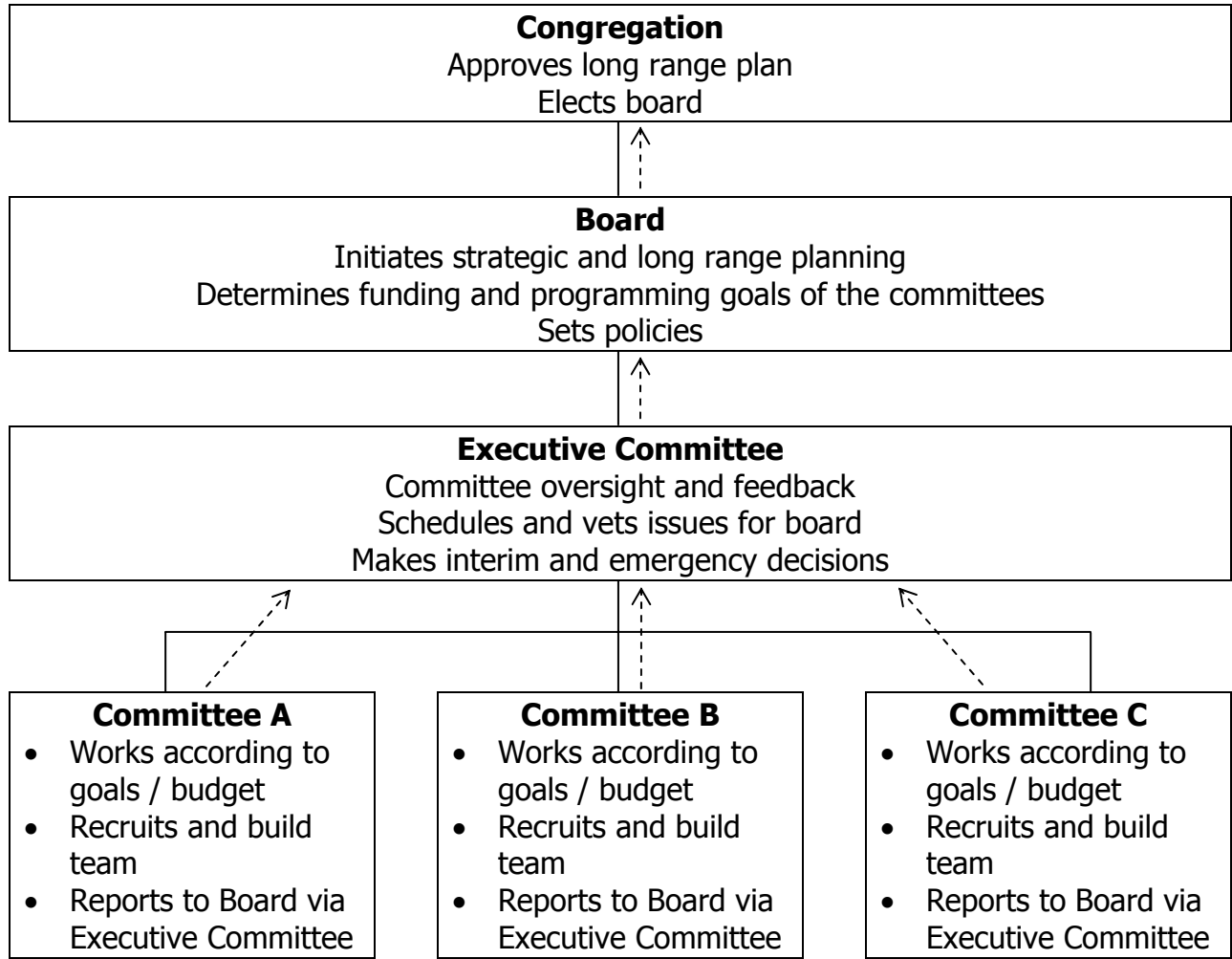
Each committee should create a mission statement and a written set of responsibilities. For example:

*Mission Statement:* The Worship Committee of *Havurat Kehillah* will serve as an advisory body to the rabbi and cantor with regards to the worship life of the synagogue community.

The Worship committee's responsibilities include the following:

1. All worship aspects of Shabbat, holiday and festival services, including both liturgical and musical choices
2. All worship aspects of services for life cycle events such as B'nai Mitzvah, weddings and memorial services
3. All worship aspects of "constituency-specific" worship services such as Tot Shabbat, grade-level Shabbat services, spiritual healing services
4. Maintaining the Usher Corps schedule and the Board members' Bima schedule
5. Coordinating all aspects of High Holy Day services (including working with other committees as appropriate)

### Congregational Organization



**The work of congregations is done in committees.**

Typically, the rabbi and president serve as ex-officio members on all committees.

## **Structuring and Managing Your Board**

Adapted from the UAHC Presidents' Manual

The Board should be a representative body, its members coming from all economic levels, social strata, age groups, and other demographic segments of the synagogue community.

Board members are people who demonstrate:

1. A record of committee service and an interest and participation in education, worship, and congregational social and cultural activity (typically, not all Board members will be involved in all aspects of synagogue life, but they must be connected in one or more ways as outlined above).
2. An understanding of the goals and mission of the congregation
3. Dedication to Jewish knowledge and a concern for Jewish peoplehood
4. Good judgment, skills, and experience in business, professional or communal life
5. A commitment to attend meetings, serve on committees and to be constructive participants in the group process
6. A working knowledge of values-based decision making.
7. The ability to see beyond their own "constituencies" and to work broadly for the benefit of the entire congregation
8. Financial support of the congregation commensurate with his or her means

## Mordecai Kaplan on Systems Theory

The Future of the American Jew, p. 148

"...the human being is not a self-contained atom, but is the product of the biological, historical and social forces that operate in the group to which he belongs.... What has been said of words in relation to their context is true of human beings in relation to their communities; they are not 'pebbles in juxtaposition'; they have only a communal existence; the meaning of each interpenetrates the others."

### A Systems Perspective

The Rabbi-Congregation Relationship: A Vision for the 21st Century  
Report of the Reconstructionist Commission on the Role of the Rabbi  
January 2001 / Tevet 5761 (pp. 15-19)

Available from the Reconstructionist Press – <http://www.jrf.org/pub/cat-papers.html>

Reconstructionism has long advocated the importance of being familiar with the social as well as natural sciences and applying their insights to Jewish life. History, psychology and sociology, for example, have had significant influences on the ways in which Reconstructionism approaches the shaping of a post-modern Judaism.

When it comes to the role of the rabbi and the rabbi-congregation relationship, social scientific research and theory helps frame the discussion in innovative ways. In the past few decades an enormous amount of research has become available to organizations and their leaders regarding the nature of their identities, their work and their interaction.

Beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s, "systems theory" emerged in the field of family therapy, anthropology and communications, as well as in the business world. A systems approach looks at the totality of a social organization and the interactions within it. This approach recognizes that the parts interact organically, with the whole being greater than the sum of its parts.

Peter Steinke writes (*Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach*, Alban Institute, 1996, pp. 3-5):

Systems thinking is basically a way of thinking about life as all of a piece. It is a way of thinking about how the whole is arranged, how its parts interact, and how the relationships between the parts produce something new. A systems approach claims that any person or event stands in relationship to something. You cannot isolate anything and understand it. The parts function as they do because of the presence of the other parts. All parts interface and affect each other. Their behaviors are reciprocal to one another, mutually reinforcing. Thus change in one part produces

change in another part, even in the whole. There is a “ripple” throughout the system.

No problem can be seen in isolation. The problem is in the whole, not the part. The system is the locus of the problem. The problem is in the interaction between the parts. The same is true for solutions and corrections. With a systems approach, we “see” the *interactions* that take place, the *information* that is exchanged, and the *influence* that is reciprocally reinforced.

Dr. Nancy Post, an organizational consultant and member of JRF affiliate Mishkan Shalom in Philadelphia, provides these additional insights:

- The life of a system is evident in the interaction of its parts; as with any living organism, it is important to focus on what is dynamic and changing, not only on what is static and stable.
- A system needs to be seen within the larger system of which it is a part; a specific congregation exists within a larger pattern of congregations (for example, the Reconstructionist movement) and is influenced by, as well as having an influence on, the larger system.
- Subsystems within a system (e.g., a congregational board, the education committee, the fund-raising committee, the social action committee) are microcosms of the system as a whole and will often duplicate its patterns.

As applied to synagogue life, a systems approach sees the totality of the congregational system along with the interaction of the component parts, rather than looking only at individual roles or functions. There are significant and promising implications in this approach for understanding the role of the rabbi within a new conception of the synagogue as a system.

The systems approach provides rabbis and congregation leaders with a new approach to understanding their work, their roles, their interaction and their place in the total congregational system. This provides a new vocabulary for a common conversation that can support change.

Systems theory recognizes that what appears to be discrete and individual is in fact interconnected, dynamic and determined by a multiplicity of factors that interact in complex ways. Nothing is static; everything is in process. For Reconstructionists, this may sound familiar: what contemporary organizational theorists call systems theory is similar to what Mordecai Kaplan called the principle of organic reciprocity.

For Kaplan, organic reciprocity – meaning that the whole acts upon the part, and the part in turn acts upon the whole – is not only a way of understanding how social institutions function. It is also the foundation for contemporary Jewish ethics. Kaplan believed that we are obligated to behave ethically because everything we do affects everything else, with the responsibility for the world shared by all. Organicity for Kaplan implies responsibility. There are thus spiritual as well as organizational possibilities in using a systems approach to understand synagogue life (system) and the rabbi-congregation relationship (sub-system).

A systems approach implies new ways of thinking about the rabbi-congregation relationship. At any given moment, for example, specific individuals may be responsible for exercising leadership, but leadership is an *activity* of the congregational system, rather than only the *job* of one or more persons.

Systems theory broadens the traditional boundaries for roles, so that tasks formerly assigned to specific volunteers, committees and staff members can be redefined. Ensuring that the congregational system accomplishes its tasks, rather than monitoring how people fulfill preconceived roles, becomes a shared responsibility.

For example, a rabbi who excels in adult learning and pastoral counseling may not excel in youth work. Rather than view this as a task assigned to the rabbinic role (and consequently defining the rabbi as deficient notwithstanding her/his excellence in other areas), a congregation can hire a youth director.

An issue like stress is frequently understood in individual terms. A congregational board may legitimately find itself asking the following types of questions: “Why does the rabbi always complain about being overworked?” “Why have we had three different educational directors in three years?” “Why doesn’t anyone want to stay on the board?” But rather than location such types of burnout as an issue within a person or one part of the congregation, a systems approach encourages congregations to ask instead, “What in the functioning of our synagogue system creates burnout [which is manifest in the rabbi, or the staff, or the board]?”

Individuals, of course, play a role in and affect a system, as do subsystems of the congregational system. Any individual congregant or congregational subsystem can unbalance the entire system. For example, a decision of the education committee to increase the academic requirements for Bar/Bat Mitzvah will have an impact on the membership committee, the ritual committee and the synagogue board. It will affect, among others, the rabbi, the cantor, the students and parents, the Bar/Bat mitzvah tutors and the president (who is likely to get both irate and supportive phone calls).

Congregations go through various cycles; defining the role of the rabbi in a congregation is not an abstract issue but a concrete one: what is the role of *this* rabbi in *this* congregation at *this* moment in its development? Put differently: where is the

congregational system in its developmental cycle, and at what stage is the rabbi entering the system?

For example, newly formed congregations may not want to handle difficult policy issues which can become divisive before the secondary stages of stability and consolidation are reached. Veteran congregations with precedent and policy may welcome an active engagement with substantive issues that help to chart new directions. The rabbi and leaders play a primary role in the congregational system by setting the agenda in response to the congregation's circumstances.

A systems approach holds out the vision of congregational communities functioning in healthier ways. Rabbis, congregants and congregation leaders yearn for healthy congregations. But what is "health?" Peter Steinke notes (*Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach*, pp. 3-13):

From a systems approach, we look at the health of a congregation as a process. "Health" correlates with how a congregation manages its wholeness, that is, its interconnectedness. ... In "wholeness" differences are not eliminated; rather they become alive ... different parts interact and cooperate. ... As a system, a congregation influences its own health. By taking responsible action, it shapes its destiny. ... A healthy congregation is one that actively and responsibly addresses or heals its disturbances, not one with an absence of troubles.

The real work of a congregation is managing its ongoing life and continuously adapting to change, rather than focusing only on discrete problem-solving. The systems approach provides important and helpful insights for rabbis and congregations engaged in this central activity.

## FURTHER RESOURCES

### **A Sacred Trust: A Values-Based Approach to Jewish Communal Leadership and Congregational Governance**

⇒ <http://63.115.67.94/cong/res-sacred-trust-main.html>

⇒ <http://63.115.67.94/cong/res-st-further-resources.html>

### ***Sacred Trust* Seminar Workbook And Guide to Effective Boards and Committees**

A 950-page resource binder and 110 page manual on:

- Perspectives on congregational leadership and governance from classical Jewish texts and Reconstructionist literature and articles.
- Theoretical framework and practical resources for developing effective systems of congregational governance.
- Samples of by-laws, mission statements, strategic plans, Board and Committee structures, meeting agendas, Board manuals, and Board orientation materials.

⇒ The binder can be purchased for \$54 and the manual for \$18 plus shipping from the **Reconstructionist Press**. Please contact Hattie Dunbar, Reconstructionist Press Fulfillment, via e-mail to [hdunbar@jrf.org](mailto:hdunbar@jrf.org) or phone to 215-885-5601 x30.



### **Synagogue Governance as a Sacred Trust**

Rabbi Shawn Zevit (from *Reconstructionism Today*, Summer 2001)

⇒ <http://63.115.67.94/rt/sacred-trust.html>

### **A Values-Based Approach To Jewish Communal Leadership And Congregational Governance**

Rabbi Shawn Zevit

⇒ <http://www.jrf.org/showres&rid=168>

### **Congregational Systems and Leadership**

Rabbi Shawn Zevit and Rabbi Yohanna Kinberg

⇒ <http://63.115.67.94/cong/res-st-systems-leadership.html>

## **Governance Structures**

Rabbi Yohanna Kinberg, Rabbi Mordechai Liebling, and Rabbi Shawn Zevit

⇒ <http://www.jrf.org/showres&rid=164>

## **Resources On Congregational Leadership And Governance**

Rabbi Shawn Zevit

An extensive list of books and articles about many aspects of effective institutional leadership and governance.

⇒ <http://jrf.org/showres&rid=167>