

**The United Synagogue of
Conservative Judaism**



**The 2009
Solomon Schechter
Awards
for Synagogue Excellence**
GUIDELINES and CRITERIA
for
Worship and Ritual

*to be presented at the
Biennial Convention
December 6-10, 2009*

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Solomon Schechter Award Guidelines

Please review and follow these guidelines when applying for a Solomon Schechter award. Entries must be in our hands by the deadline of 5:00 pm Eastern time, Monday, **April 17, 2009**.

1. United Synagogue's Solomon Schechter Awards program recognizes congregations, not subgroups or affiliates. Therefore, please be sure that all entries are submitted by the congregation. We do not accept submissions from separate departments, programs, or people from the congregation.
2. Multiple entries are allowed but only one entry per award category. Please choose the category for each entry based on the printed guidelines and criteria, and indicate that category on the application.
3. You may put more than one entry in a box, but each entry must have its own application. You may copy the application form [or download the application from www.uscj.org] if you need more application forms.
4. Entries are accepted and judged based on your responses to the guidelines and criteria in each of the award category. We provide guidelines and criteria to simplify the application process and to help the judges to evaluate entries. *You need not respond to every item in the guidelines.* You may describe your entry in narrative form; be sure to include samples of all supporting materials. We encourage materials be submitted in *green formats*. Provide as much in electronic [CD or DVD] media as possible. The web site awards must be submitted in electronic form.
5. **Only congregations in good financial standing as of JUNE 30, 2009 are eligible to receive an award.**
6. Each entry must meet the basic criteria stipulated for its award category. To win an award, an entry must demonstrate extraordinary characteristics or unusual and outstanding aspects that go beyond the expected norms. Entries within award and congregational size categories are compared to each other.
7. We plan to award one gold and one silver award for each congregational size division for each category.
8. **Please note: Materials submitted will not be returned.** All submissions become the property of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism for its use. United Synagogue reserves the right to use materials from the submissions, in whole or in part, with appropriate credit, in materials to be produced or distributed by United Synagogue
9. Award-winning entries will be on display at United Synagogue's biennial convention in December 2009. We strongly encourage representatives from the award-winning congregations to attend the convention to accept the awards and to share information about the programs.
10. Applications **must** include an executive summary (**with a maximum of 2-3 brief paragraphs**) on the summary form sheet on the reverse side of the application.
11. The application must be signed as indicated on the application form.
12. Applications and supporting materials must be shipped by delivery services that allow for package tracking (such as Federal Express, USPS Priority Mail or UPS). Materials **MUST** be in our possession by the deadline of **April 17, 2009**. Entries, which include application, supporting material and summary, must be sent to:
Solomon Schechter Awards - The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
Rapaport House – 10th Floor
820 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017

For additional or clarifying information, please talk to our staff consultant, **Aaron L. Kischel**,
at the New England office of United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
Phone: 617-964-8210 e-mail: kischel@uscj.org

V. WORSHIP AND RITUAL

The criteria listed below are to serve as guidelines for evaluating unique or innovative approaches to Worship and Ritual. They in no way constitute endorsement of any specific halachic approach.

Worship:

1. Creative and significant ways in which beliefs, values, and tradition are highlighted through ritual with regard to: God, God and Humanity, Torah, The Jewish People, Israel
2. Creative handling of special ceremonies and worship occasions, including:
National Crisis, Israel emergencies, Significant American holidays, Secular commemorations, Personal crisis
3. The use of design, furnishings, etc. to enhance the prayer atmosphere.
4. Special translations and/or adaptations of prayers which serve to enhance and enrich the prayer function, including meaningful presentation of prayers, and preparation of original prayers, and/or the utilization of the Siddur.
5. Original efforts to stimulate involvement in the following areas:
 - a) "Kavanah"
 - b) Regularity of the worship experience
 - c) Use of Hazzanut and music
 - d) Private and personal meditation
6. Encouragement of prayer at home for individuals and the family.
7. Training for lay involvement as service leaders.
8. Is the congregation a participatory "singing" congregation? How are new melodies introduced? How is balance maintained between new and familiar melodies?
9. Innovative efforts in the following areas:
 - a) Daily minyanim
 - b) Shabbat
 - c) High Holidays
 - d) Fast days
 - e) The other holidays

Ritual:

1. "The Life Cycle" and provision for meaningful experiences:
 - a) Ceremonies attending birth
Ceremonies relevant to child development including education, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, commemorating advancement of education
 - c) Preparations for married life and wedding service
 - d) Funerals, death and mourning

The following questions can also be addressed:

2. To what degree and frequency are congregants, either as individuals or through committees, involved in the planning of and participation in worship and ritual experiences?
3. What are the congregation's goals for achieving optimal worship experiences and to what degree are laymen trained and involved in these decisions?
4. What measures were used to maintain continuity, particularly during the past two years, for expressions of worship and ritual?
5. Describe how worship and ritual experiences include all members of the congregation.(including younger children through senior citizens. What is the role of the various organizational arms of the congregation including the Sisterhood, Men's Club, USY, and graduates of summer programs including Camp Ramah and various pilgrimage groups?