

Feasibility Study Executive Summary

*Touro Synagogue
New Orleans, LA
February 2021*



AT THE INTERSECTION
OF HERITAGE, FAITH,
& COMMUNITY

Partners for Sacred Places

BACKGROUND AND APPROACH

Touro Synagogue (Touro) contracted with Partners for Sacred Places (Partners) to conduct a feasibility study ahead of launching a potential capital campaign to improve its physical plant, including, but not limited to: replacing the roofs over the social hall and chapel, replacing the current HVAC system, installing an elevator in the education building, reconfiguring office space, and renovating bathrooms to become gender-neutral and family-accessible.

In the fall of 2020, Partners conducted 48 interviews to gauge opportunities in the following areas:

- Capacity of the congregation and its leadership to take on a capital campaign
- Perception of Touro Synagogue among congregants and community members
- Gift potential of interested and committed donors
- Community investment in the building and campaign

In carrying out this study, Partners conducted a series of private, confidential interviews with individuals representing a variety of congregational and community constituencies. Based on the results of these interviews, Partners developed a report to analyze the feasibility of the proposed campaign and to advise the congregation of the necessary next steps to achieve its goals.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Project Priorities

Touro's building is an incredible asset, and its potential is recognized by congregation and community members alike. Interviewees desired that the building be used "more" - maximizing its potential as a place of worship, an educational center, and a gathering place open to the broader community. Interviewees almost unanimously supported a capital campaign to make needed repairs and renovations to the building and appreciated the scale of the project. Congregation members would like for renovations to make the building more accessible and welcoming to increase usage by the congregation as well as its tenants - namely the current charter school that is incubating in the building.

Interviewees' overall love and recognition of the building's potential was obvious throughout the study. Many affectionately described the structure as "a diva," that demands constant attention and care and rewards its stewards with beauty and inspiration for all the activities that take place inside of it. Continued interpretation and contextualization of capital improvements within the larger scope of Touro's congregational life and community service initiatives will be crucial in soliciting donations within and outside the congregation and to help plan and articulate a shared, optimistic future. There is a strong desire among the interviewed community members to increase the synagogue's prominence and visibility on St. Charles Avenue and in greater New Orleans. These interviewees also recognized the value of preserving the building broadly for the immediate planned capital projects once they learned of the need. In building a larger capital fundraising strategy, Touro should continue to create opportunities for community members to see the building's spectacular interior with their own eyes.

Clergy and Lay Leadership

Touro Synagogue has been blessed in its dynamic team of clergy leaders. Interviewees described the collaboration between the rabbis and cantor as one of the greatest strengths of the synagogue and feel very lucky to have such gifted leaders on staff. Rabbi Katie Bauman was universally described as a key asset of Touro. The congregation sees her as a visionary, and she communicates that vision in such a way as to inspire and motivate people to become active participants in bringing that vision into reality. She has fostered a warm and authentic connection to the congregation, with many interviewees describing her fondly and familiarly. Touro Synagogue is a place of welcome and a place of action, and Rabbi Bauman embodies both characteristics in her leadership. Congregation members admire her experience and motivation in building interfaith initiatives with explicit goals to advance social justice initiatives. Rabbi Bauman's enthusiastic engagement with New Orleans broadly, and leadership within the Jewish community, will be a great strength for the capital campaign as faith leaders often become the de facto public face of these initiatives.

Congregation members praised Rabbi Todd Silverman's coordination of the various lifelong learning activities, especially the quick and successful pivot to digital platforms. Touro's reputation as a house of learning for all ages is broadly recognized in New Orleans, with many non-members participating in various education offerings. Rabbi Silverman's vision for Touro living into the identity of *beit midrash* has been a key strength of the synagogue; several interviewees reported being inspired by that vision towards action, volunteering, and generosity. Cantor Kevin Margolius was highly praised by interviewees for his work in leading worship and organizing music programming at Touro. Cantor Margolius's musical talents, as well as his intelligence and ability to impart knowledge to the laypeople in the congregation, were described by many interviewees. Cantor Margolius also brings the great skill of being willing and able to take on challenges and ambitious projects, organizing them into manageable objectives. This particular talent will be a great asset for the campaign, especially in interpreting building stewardship into the broader conversations of congregational life.

While the clergy leaders deserve a good deal of credit for the vitality of the congregation, Touro's great strength lies in its uniquely capable and energetic lay leadership. Touro is blessed with a dedicated and talented group of leaders serving on the Board of Directors and various committees. Unlike many congregations that are similar in size and demography, Touro has implemented an effective and far-sighted vision for leadership development among its members. It is thus well-situated to recruit a strong group of leaders for campaign leadership (the steering committee). Ideally, campaign steering committee members would either be recruited from congregation members that do not currently hold demanding leadership roles, or existing leaders will be able to hand off one of their roles to someone else in order to focus on the campaign. Touro Synagogue has a strong group of congregation members who could be tapped to serve on a campaign steering committee and/or campaign task forces to great success, including those in the philanthropic, architectural, and political worlds. These individuals should be approached to serve on the steering committee and campaign task forces.

Communication

The congregation of Touro Synagogue is generally well-informed about events and activities associated with congregational life, such as worship, religious education, and fellowship events. The congregation also seems to be well-informed about the need for specific capital improvement projects and the timeline for a potential capital campaign. Broad clarity of campaign goals and process is unusual for congregations of Touro's size, and further affirms the synagogue's capacity to develop and implement a successful campaign. Given the sophistication of Touro's organizational structure, leadership will need to clarify the role of Touro Synagogue Foundation in the capital campaign. While Partners does not see this as a significant obstacle for immediate fundraising initiatives, it could become a challenge in the future as its financial resources grow. Partners recommends that Touro clearly define the role that Touro Synagogue Foundation has in the upcoming capital campaign and in stewarding funds for ongoing capital improvement projects. Touro's leadership should also regularly communicate the purpose and parameters of the monies that the foundation stewards.

Touro Synagogue has very much established a unique presence in New Orleans. Through its years of service to the wider Jewish community and its dedication to warmth and welcome, Touro has already made a very convincing argument for its significance in New Orleans and compelling reasons for the larger Jewish community to support its continued vitality. Touro's membership is professionally diverse, and many congregants serve in prominent political, social, and cultural positions in the city. While this is an informal representation of Touro in greater New Orleans society, it is nevertheless extremely important in the promotion and visibility of the Jewish community in the city.

While Touro has established a unique identity in the New Orleans Jewish community, outsiders might find it difficult to "place" Touro in their knowledge of the city; some interviewees with weak ties to Touro expressed that they found it hard to distinguish Touro Synagogue and Temple Sinai. Touro Synagogue has also opened its doors to

the non-Jewish community during two of New Orleans' most popular events – Jazz Fest and Mardi Gras. As Touro seeks to engage an increased number of external donors and future partners for a successful capital campaign, the congregation will need to define a clear, practical, and attractive communication strategy for individuals who are not formal members or attend the religious school.

Gift and Funding Potential

Touro's membership, though not exceedingly large, is very generous. This generosity is largely attributed to Touro's strategy of Voluntary Annual Support vs. traditional membership dues, which was described by many congregation members in the interview process. Interviewees who are newer to Touro said that they had not seen another synagogue take this approach, and that it was another indicator of Touro's culture of hospitality and warmth. Although Touro has adopted a Voluntary Annual Support structure, the synagogue also provides a good deal of guidance for how households might discern what a faithful contribution might be, including a breakout of "tiers" in giving levels. Several interviewees greatly appreciate this guidance and hope to see something similar for the capital campaign – it provides a measure of accountability as well as inspiration for individual donors. Successful capital campaigns have very similar messaging and strategies; Touro has laid the groundwork for high levels of participation among its members.

Interviewees were overwhelmingly in support of a capital campaign. Many interviewees had already considered a gift amount to the campaign, and others stated that the amount they might give would be contingent on a better understanding the concrete goals of the renovation project, specifically the financial scope of the planned renovations and the strategies for soliciting donations. During the Feasibility Study, Partners identified over \$400,000 in potential gifts (38% of interviewees volunteered a potential gift amount). Not every interviewee was prepared to discuss the amount they might contribute to a campaign, but almost all expressed a desire to give. Achieving universal commitment to give among membership is rare but profoundly important to the success of a congregation's fundraising efforts. Such a commitment would allow Touro Synagogue to approach the wider community with the knowledge that its efforts are fully supported by the congregation. As Partners is confident that high-capacity donors will give significant gifts and that Touro will achieve the goal of 100% member participation, Partners is recommending a campaign fundraising goal of \$2,300,000 - \$2,500,000.

Many interviewees stated that the expectation for Jews in New Orleans was to contribute to Jewish institutions, whether they were formally connected to those institutions or not. Thus, Touro can expect to receive a portion of funds from non-members who value the synagogue's presence and prominence in the city. Touro has had a great impact on its immediate neighborhood and the wider community of New Orleans, though the congregation may not have a full understanding of that impact. Touro should not be shy in promoting its impact in the larger Jewish community or in creating opportunities for non-members to express their appreciation for Touro's contributions by making financial gifts. Additionally, Touro has many connections to family foundations whose Board of

Directors include members of the synagogue. Although Touro has the capacity currently to reach an ambitious fundraising goal from its members and the New Orleans Jewish community, the synagogue should not waste the opportunity to build relationships and establish itself as a cause worthy of broad and diverse support.

Touro's Role in New Orleans

A capital campaign highlights the role of a congregation's physical plant and of its presence in its surrounding community. Data from Partners' past campaigns indicates that approximately 39 percent of funding in community-wide capital campaigns for historic sacred places comes from individuals, foundations, and other entities outside the congregation. Touro's role is one that is outsized; a synagogue that touches thousands of lives through its work as an institution and the work of its individual members. Touro Synagogue is very well situated to receive significant support for the campaign from external stakeholders if it is willing to step outside of its comfort zone in outreach and engagement.

Touro Synagogue's current building has served as a landmark for St. Charles Avenue, the surrounding neighborhoods, and greater New Orleans for over 110 years. It has prominent visibility and has the distinction of being one of the oldest Jewish worshipping community outside of the original 13 Colonies in the United States. Many interviewees, with an interest in the celebration of Southern Jewish identity, described Touro as an important player in that narrative as well. Touro's connections to the Institute for Southern Jewish Life and the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience create great potential for the synagogue to raise its profile both in New Orleans and nationally.

Through formal partnerships, volunteering, and advocacy initiatives, Touro has developed and strengthened a reputation of being a welcoming and social-justice minded neighbor in New Orleans. Touro was one of the first houses of worship to march in New Orleans' annual Pride Parade - proclaiming its acceptance and affirmation of the LGBTQ community and demonstrating that they were welcome within the Jewish faith. Every year, Touro provides access to a balcony for children with disabilities and their families to enjoy the Mardi Gras parade through its "Krewe of VIPs" initiative; this ensures that these children can participate in the Mardi Gras festivities that are central to New Orleans culture and identity. Through Jazz Fest Shabbat, put on every year during New Orleans annual Jazz & Heritage Festival (Jazz Fest), Touro participates in the citywide celebration of local arts and culture.

Touro has also expanded its mission and vision priorities, perhaps unintentionally, outside of its walls - specifically in the realm of education. Several interviewees mentioned the past partnership forged with Sophie B. Wright School. The partnership between Touro and Sophie B. Wright became more formalized and impressive over the years - recognized by a University of Notre Dame research team as unique and inspirational. Rooted School, a new charter school plant in the city, uses Touro's building as an educational facility during the week. Rooted School is not the first charter school to incubate at Touro. This initiative to incubate charter schools is another unique

characteristic of Touro's. While Touro does not have as formal a connection to its neighboring universities, the congregation has nevertheless had an influence on the quality of experience and education for those students as well. Through various informal and formal activities, Touro Synagogue has played a significant role in the lives of hundreds – if not thousands – of university students and faculty.

Throughout the interview process, Partners heard a specific worry in many interviews: the Jewish community in New Orleans is small, and therefore Touro's capacity to raise money outside of its membership is severely limited. The findings of the report have helped to reveal the outsized impact that Touro has had in the city of New Orleans for both Jews and Gentiles. There is ample evidence that Touro takes an active role in the lives of New Orleanians, and that its presence and participation have made the city a better place for its residents. With that knowledge, Partners hopes that Touro will be inspired to intentionally reflect on its previous work in the city and claim its role as a partner, advocate, and friend.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen Community Engagement

As Touro Synagogue looks to build support externally for its work, renovation, and prominence in New Orleans (inside and outside the broader Jewish community), Partners recommends that the congregation promote its unique assets and already sizeable impact. A capital campaign provides an excellent opportunity to deepen existing relationships with civic institutions and stakeholders, while identifying and articulating a clear vision of Touro Synagogue's unique place in, and contribution to its broader communities in New Orleans.

Touro Synagogue should work to identify, in concrete terms, the impact that it is having in its community and the tangible value of the building's vitality. Partners recommends a Halo Assessment for Touro Synagogue to identify its annual economic impact on the surrounding community. This individualized analysis will help the synagogue understand the value of its historic building in the city of New Orleans through its programs and activities.

Touro's unique physical presence along St. Charles Avenue and its breathtaking interior are important physical assets. However, many community members, especially those who do not identify as Jewish, do not recognize the extent of the building's significance. The congregation should work to build connections with the heritage, tourism, and philanthropic communities to increase awareness around the building's importance and interpret its role in New Orleans's history and culture.

Partners recommends that, when it is safe to do so, Touro Synagogue collaborate with local organizations to host a public event to gather input and support for new ideas and partnerships, as well as current ones, and to invite its neighbors and partners into a collaborative vision for Touro's future along St. Charles Avenue. Partners believes

that asset mapping - a technique developed by the Asset Based Community Development Institute (now housed at DePaul University) - would be an apt tool for facilitating this kind of dialogue.

Connect Capital Campaign to Touro's Larger Vision

The upcoming capital campaign provides Touro an opportunity to re-introduce the strategic vision to its congregation, affirming its commitment to the objectives it lists and positioning the larger capital improvement project as a necessity to support the action priorities described in the strategic vision. Partner recommends that Touro give a more detailed explanation of how the capital campaign, and the improvements that it will fund, directly lead to the achievement of these outcomes. For instance, installing an elevator in the education wing of the building makes the entire building more accessible to persons of varying mobilities. This will help to achieve the success outcome of having “a well-maintained space that reflects our mission and values, and is welcoming, accessible, secure, and efficiently utilized.” The elevator would also embody Touro’s commitment to social justice, and strengthen key initiatives of the synagogue (e.g., the Krewe of VIPs program and charter school innovation). Partners also recommends that Touro look beyond the defined success outcomes that directly relate to the building and grounds to contextualize the campaign as a primary vehicle for achieving all action priorities in the vision. By contextualizing the campaign in this way, Touro will present a convincing argument for support from the congregation and the larger Jewish community and lay the foundation for future capital improvement initiatives.

Build a collaborative capital campaign infrastructure

Touro Synagogue is in an excellent position to move forward with planning for a capital campaign and will need to begin thinking about how to structure a team to effectively steward the campaign throughout its timeline. While Touro has a dedicated and passionate core of volunteers in leadership roles, a capital campaign will require recruiting additional members to take on responsibilities. This can be an exciting opportunity for Touro to develop and grow its leadership and recruit external partners to strengthen community connections to the synagogue. Partners recommends that Rabbi Bauman take on a prominent leadership role, as she is generally responsible for interpreting all of the synagogue’s activities, responsibilities, and initiatives through a spiritual and theological lens and will be the most effective mouthpiece for the campaign. Rabbi Bauman would work with an outside consultant to advise the campaign, but primary leadership will come from the Steering Committee - a group of lay leaders responsible for determining the campaign structure, coordinating expenditures, planning and implementing solicitation strategies and activities, coordinating designated task forces, and providing oversight for all aspects of the campaign. Other volunteers and leaders will be recruited to serve on various task-forces designed to work towards the completion of a single objective necessary for the campaign’s success (e.g., drafting a case statement; identifying former members to reach out to, etc.). These task forces will provide excellent opportunities for congregation members to contribute their time, knowledge, and skills to the campaign.

Maintain a Balanced Momentum

Touro Synagogue's forward trajectory should not be wasted! The National Fund grant, feasibility study interviews, and conversations about the upcoming capital campaign have primed membership for some big steps forward. Touro Synagogue should begin to recruit volunteers to campaign leadership and activities early in 2021, as well as increase communication and drum up excitement for the project. Clarity in messaging will be key for the congregation; all members should have a general understanding of the timeline of the campaign, which should include a six- to eight-month "silent phase" of planning and initial donor solicitations before a "public launch" that solicits gifts openly from a much broader range of donors. Especially in a time when in-person gatherings are complicated (if not impossible), Touro Synagogue will need to take sufficient time to develop effective, safe, and engaging fundraising strategies to maximize participation from the congregation members and the larger community. During this time, Touro Synagogue should proudly and loudly celebrate its unique and valuable presence in the lives of its congregants and neighbors, inviting all to join in the joyful work of building stewardship.