Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

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Creating Inclusive Programs

Reform Jews strive to put our values into action by celebrating the holiness of every individual and the essential diversity* of the Jewish people. In pursuit of such value-driven action, we must continue to strengthen our engagement strategies to ensure that all people see their identities reflected in our congregations and communities.

Below, you will find tips to help incorporate audacious hospitality, anti-oppression, and antiracist practices into your programming (both online and in-person), strategies for incorporating and reflecting all of our diversity, and specific actions you can take, that will create a more inclusive experience for all participants.

Terms and best practices of inclusion are constantly evolving, and we encourage you and your community to continually research and update inclusive practices.

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*When we say "diversity," what do we mean?

North American Jews have always come from different backgrounds in terms of their faith, disabilities, race and ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and more. For all North American populations, including Jews, these forms of diversity are increasingly true among younger generations. It is important to ask yourself: Do our programs, media, activities, and interactions allow individuals from these and other backgrounds to participate, identify, and see themselves represented?

Demographic Trends in North American Jewish Life

- **Interfaith/intermarried couples & families**
  Since 2000, 71% of non-Orthodox Jewish marriages in the United States have been interfaith. Overall, the Jewish rate of intermarriage in the US has exceeded 50%. (Source: Pew)

- **Jews with Disabilities**
  Jews with Disabilities account for 20% of our community. (Source: Ruderman Foundation)

- **Jews of Color and multiracial families**
  At least 12-15% of Jews in the United States identify as Jews of Color of African, Latinx, Asian or mixed-race descent (Source: Counting Inconsistencies) and ~10% of US Jews are of Mizrahi or Sephardic heritage. (Source: Bechol Lashon)
- **LGBTQ+ Jews - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer Jews**
  Approximately 10% of North American Jewry identifies as part of the LGBTQ+ community and up to 20% for ages 18-29, and that doesn't count those who do not openly identify. (Source: Multiple)

Guidelines for Presenters: While creating/planning the presentation

- **Be aware of diversity of all types** (age, gender, racial, disability, religious, etc.).

- **Acknowledge your own unconscious bias (we all have them).** Consider using this resource to explore your own biases and learn how to counter against them.
- **Ensure that the images of people in your presentations represent a diverse spectrum of Jewish life,** including Jews of Color, LGBTQ+ Jews, people with disabilities, etc.
- **Review language and action guidelines** which can be found at the end of this document.
- **Be aware of the common microaggressions that occur in Jewish communities** and be prepared to interrupt them when they occur. (See the end of this document for examples)

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Below are best principles for creating inclusive communities and sample practices for actualizing them in your work.

Inclusive Space: *Create environments where everyone can fully participate and bring all of their identities to the program.*

Examples of both in-person *and* online inclusive practices:

☐ For both in-person and online: PowerPoint/presentations should include a wide range of representation of our diversity (for example, pictures of people should include People of Color, gender expansive, interfaith and those with disabilities. Avoid only using the same images/only photographing the same person over and over again). Physical spaces should also include symbols of inclusion, such as LGBTQ+ Pride/Black Lives Matter flags or stickers.

Examples of in-person inclusive practices:

☐ Restrooms: Provide accessible, all-gender restrooms with clear signage so visitors know where they are located. Prior to booking a space, inquire about their facilities.
☐ If needed, you can create an all-gender restroom using an "All Gender" sign. See [Keshet's website for printable all-gender](#) bathroom signs or create your own. Explicitly state where all elevators and handicap-accessible entrances are located and post interactive wall posters & activities at wheelchair-height.
☐ Consider allocating space for those who need a quiet space or are nursing/pumping.
☐ If using handouts, create options with large print or read out-loud opportunities. Have magnifiers, listening devices, and other tools available. If online, offer to send handouts prior to the program to ensure maximum accessibility.
☐ Ensure you have taken into account your security plan. Review [this article](#), and ensure your security plan is sifted through a REDI lens.

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Examples of online inclusive practices:

☐ Spend a minute at the beginning of the program showing participants basic Zoom capabilities such as muting/unmuting. Do not assume participants' familiarity with Zoom. Designate a staff person who can assist individuals with the technology as well as mute participants when others are speaking.

☐ If you are facilitating an interactive program, where participants will also be participating, consider utilizing the language below at the start of your session.

   o *We ask that all participants, if accessible, do your best to use your cameras so that your full face is visible, (including your mouth) during this program, and that the view of you remains clear, with no glare or single lights behind you. This will allow those who are deaf, hard of hearing, have hearing loss and/or have visual impairments to fully participate. It will also maximize the engagement experience for all.*

☐ Screensharing or using the whiteboard feature on Zoom is not accessible to those who use screen readers. If you use the screensharing function, email materials (i.e. song sheets, PowerPoint Presentations) out in advance. When using the whiteboard, describe what is being shown on screen.[1]

☐ If a program will be longer than one hour, build in time for bio-breaks and inform participants when they will occur.

☐ Edit how your name is displayed to include your pronouns (i.e., Pam Green she/her).

☐ Inform participants if the call is being recorded. Be aware of pressuring presenters to be recorded, as not everyone is or feels safe being recorded.

[1] https://zoom.us/accessibility/faq

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Program Planning: *Convene a diverse group of participants from the very beginning.*

Examples of both online *and* in-person inclusive practices:

- ☐ "Nothing about us without us." Design programs using knowledge and resources developed by or with those being represented. For example, if you are running a program about LGBTQ+ inclusion, make sure that someone who identifies as LGBTQ+ has the opportunity to partner with you in planning and that you use resources created by reputable LGBTQ+ organizations.
- ☐ Always try to represent a wide range of diversity and lived experience, even if the topic is not about "diversity". For example, a panel on "Congregational Fundraising" can benefit from including People of Color, LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, etc. as panelists.
- ☐ If discussing romantic relationships, avoid gendered or heteronormative language and assumptions of family makeup/marital status (e.g., if a cisgender woman is wearing a wedding ring, don't presume her partner is a cisgender man.) Additionally, an adult caring for a child may not be their parent, rather, they may be a caregiver, relative, or friend.
- ☐ Avoid generalizations that are based on gender expectations (e.g. "boys will be boys," "all the girls today love ___," etc.) Use this resource
- ☐ If breaking out into groups during a program, separate people based on favorite color or randomly, rather than by gender (not to be confused with affinity spaces, see below).
- ☐ When planning programs around race or racism, consider using race-based affinity spaces. For white people planning programs around race or racism, review this resource.

Facilitation Practices: *When leading/participating in a meeting or program, use language and explanations that help everyone know they are included and that their participation is valued.*

Examples of both online *and* in-person inclusive practices:

- ☐ Ensure that you are calling on participants who represent a diversity of backgrounds.
- ☐ Provide alternatives to visual references and avoid using gestures without accompanying words to allow those of us with visual disabilities to fully participate.
- ☐ If you make a mistake, such as mis-gendering or mis-identifying a participant, offer a simple "sorry," correct yourself, and move on. The best way to show that you care will be to get it right next time, *not* to explain how it happened or promise that you are an ally.
- ☐ Avoid gendered language. (See the Inclusive Language Chart at the end of this document)
- ☐ Offer verbal understanding that paying attention during a video call or in person program is not always easy. Encourage the use of (and consider providing) fidget toys or other devices.
- ☐ End sessions and programs on time.

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Examples of in-person inclusive practices:

- At large events, announce that seats in front of the presenter(s) are reserved for people who need to be close to the front to fully participate in and contribute to the session (i.e., individuals with visual, hearing, or other disabilities) and that seats near exits or aisles are reserved for people who need easy access to exits.
- Reserve spaces for wheelchair users, but not all in one location (keeping in mind wheelchair users have friends/colleagues/family who do not use wheelchairs).
- Regardless of if the speaker feels they have a loud voice, use a microphone whenever possible and require participants to do so when speaking to the group.

Examples of online inclusive practices:

- Be aware of sensory sensitivities. Aside from times when all participants are invited to verbally join-in, sing, or speak, use the mute function to keep participants muted. Use minimal background images and calming colors on PowerPoint slide or screen shares. [2]
- Prior to your program, test your volume using both the computer microphone and a headset. Use whichever offers the clearest sound.
- If you are asking participants to stand, dance, raise their hand, or move in any way, offer alternatives to physical movement such as using the "raise hand" feature on Zoom or encouraging participants to participate however is best for them.

Relationship Building: *Greet all people with openness and respect, providing a space where participants can bring their full selves.*

Examples of both online *and* in-person inclusive practices:

- Avoid assuming a person's gender. Referring to someone with their correct pronouns communicates respect and warmth. Model good pronoun etiquette by:
  - Incorporating pronouns into your displayed name and all introductions and encourage participants to do the same.
  - If asking for pronouns, ask everyone, not only the people you assume might be trans or nonbinary and do not insist a person share their pronouns if they do not want to do so.
- Assume you do not know who is in the meeting (based on family make-up, religion, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, disability, etc.) and that a variety of identities are present, even if you don't "see" them (Jews of Color, people who identify as LGBTQ+, people with disabilities, etc.)
- Assume that people are experts in their own identities and will tell you what they want you to know (and not necessarily more than that).

[2] https://www.theraspecs.com/blog/zoom-migraine-sensory-sensitivities-tips/

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- Utilize inclusive language, especially regarding gender & sexuality and disabilities (See the charts at the end of this document).
- Do not ask people "How are you Jewish?" or "Are you really Jewish?," especially Jews of Color. These questions marginalize the recipient and invalidate their Jewish identity.
- Do not instantly assume that a Person of Color whom you do not recognize is not Jewish or new to Judaism.
- Keep in mind North America includes Canada, and "outside of North America" includes Jews of every continent (not just Europe).
- Demonstrate awareness that people may have grown up in or be in relationships with people of a different faith tradition.
- Keep in mind the diversity of Jewish experience in the group. Stay away from phrases like, "You probably know this melody for 'Adon Olam.'" Do not open or close with a song that may be unfamiliar without providing transliteration, either written or on a shared screen, so others can follow along.
- Avoid presuming others have camp/Israel/youth group or any other prior Jewish experience.
- If a Jew has gone through the conversion process, refer to them simply as "Jewish". Allow them to identify themselves as anything else (common terms include "Jew by Choice" and "convert".)
- Refrain from asking questions such as, "Is your mother Jewish?" or "Did you become Bar/Bat/B'nai Mitzvah?"
- Speak to those of us with disabilities directly rather than presuming it is helpful or easier to speak with our assistants and aides.

Microaggressions & Inclusive Language: *Be cognizant of the power of language and recognize the way certain terminology, questions, and statements can stigmatize and harm people with marginalized and/or underrepresented identities, starting with the examples listed on the following pages.*

Begin to transition to more inclusive language, encouraging others to do the same. When speaking to people, the following questions might be asked out of positive or neutral intent. However, these questions serve to make people with underrepresented and marginalized identities further alienated, unwelcome, and/or unsafe.

Continue to learn about microaggressions and be prepared/practice addressing them in the moment. The examples of microaggressions on the following page have an intersectional lens. Intersectionality is the idea that people can experience marginalization due to various forms of oppression. For example, Jewish Women of Color experience racism, sexism, and anti-Semitism simultaneously. Jews with disabilities can experience ableism and anti-Semitism. Those of us who identify as queer Jews can experience homophobia and anti-Semitism at the same time.

In addition, review this resource, which can provide you with some ideas on how to interrupt a microaggression the next time you witness one.

CCAR

The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism is the social justice office of the Union for Reform Judaism, whose more than 800 congregations across North America encompass 1.5 million Reform Jews, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, whose membership includes more than 2,000 Reform rabbis.

UNION for REFORM JUDAISM

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Examples Of Common Microaggressions & Microaggressive Experiences:

Microaggressions: Statements, actions, or incidents regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group

Microaggressive Comments & Questions

- So, *how* are you Jewish? (often said to a POC)
- Where are you from? No, where are you *really* from? (often said to a POC)
- You don't look like a lesbian.
- You're not *gay gay*.
- Are you here with your husband/wife? (often said to LGBTQ+ or single people)
- When are you going to start having babies?
- I'm surprised you know so much about Judaism/Torah. (often said to a POC)
- Who are you here with? (i.e., Why are you here?) (often said to a POC)
- You're so pretty for someone [who uses a wheelchair/who uses braces/who is Trans].
- I don't really see you as [recipient's race/gender/sexuality/disability/culture].
- Do you work here? (or other ways of assuming that a Jew of Color/person who is working class is a staff person rather than a member or guest)

Microaggressive Experiences

- Being repeatedly misgendered.
- Being asked if someone can touch your hair, or worse, someone touching without asking.
- Being confused/mistaken for other People of Color in your community.
- Being asked to speak on behalf of all Trans People/People who are LGBTQ+/Jews of Color.
- Being disproportionately and aggressively questioned by security at synagogue entrances.
- Walking into a space and feeling unsafe as the only Trans Person/Gender Expansive Person/Person of Color.

UNION for REFORM JUDAISM

Gender & Sexuality Inclusive Language Chart:

Language that Assumes	Language that Does Not Assume
Men and women	People, congregants, participants, members, supporters
Boys and girls	Children, young people, students, campers
Men, women, and children	Adults and youth
Brothers and sisters	Siblings (use on its own) or list "sisters, brothers, and siblings" (be sure to alternate the order)
Son and daughter	Child, adult child, my oldest/youngest/middle, offspring
Mothers and fathers	Parents, guardians, caretakers
Women who are pregnant or nursing	Those who are pregnant or nursing
Husband and wife	Spouse, partner, co-parent
Aunts and Uncles	My parent's sibling
Sir, Ma'am, Miss, and Ms.	Use the person's name. Say "excuse me" or "hello" to get someone's attention
Ladies and Gentlemen	All, everyone, friends
Grandmother and grandfather	Grandparents
You guys	Everyone, y'all, folks
S/he	They, the individual
Bar and/or Bat Mitzvah	B mitzvah, B'nai Mitzvah
Dear Sir or Madam	Dear Guests, members, or person's name

Jews with Disabilities Inclusive Language Chart:

Non-inclusive Language	Inclusive Language
Confined to a wheelchair/walker	Uses a wheelchair/walker
Suffers from [insert disability]	Lives with [insert disability]
Struggles with [insert disability]	Has [insert disability]
Is crazy/wacko/insane/retarded/etc.	*Terms that should not be used*
Is so OCD/bipolar/etc.	*Terms that should not be used derisively*

No matter with whom you're speaking, do not ask or expect any marginalized person in the meeting to represent or speak on behalf of all their group, such as Jews of Color, LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, etc.

It is important to take these steps now, and not to wait until "diverse identities" are reflected in your community. While your current demographic reality may not reflect a rainbow of diversity, it is important to demonstrate that you value diversity and that you are taking the steps to create a community that reflects the actual diversity of the Jewish people.