



BUILDING A VERY NARROW BRIDGE

Roadmap to Accountability I: Survivors' Needs

ליקוטי מוהר"ן, תנינא מ"ח:ב'ז'
ידע, שְהָאָדָם צָרִיף לַעֲבֹר עַל גֶּשֶׁר צָר מְאֹד מְאֹד, וְהַכֵּלֵל יְהַעֲקֹר – שְׁלֹא יִתְפַחַד בְּכֹל

“Know, too! a person must cross a very, very narrow bridge. The main rule is: Do not be frightened at all!” (Likutei Moharan, Part II 48:2:7)

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Introduction

In February 2022, URJ shared the [Debevoise and Plimpton investigation](#) into sexual harassment, abuse, and misconduct experienced or witnessed at Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) workplaces, summer camps and programming, including those involving youth. Two of the recommendations made in that report are related to accountability. Specifically, it was recommended that the **URJ consider engaging in “a restorative process that focuses on the needs of survivors”** and that the **URJ work with movement partners to “examine the role of Teshuva” for religious leaders**. Because of these recommendations, in September 2022, the URJ announced the '[Building a Very Narrow Bridge Restorative Justice Project](#)' to be led by Dr. Alissa Ackerman and Dr. Guila Benchimol. Their goal would be to work in the interests of restorative justice and its framework, while keeping survivors at the center, to create meaningful outcomes and processes for all. An additional goal was to provide the URJ with relevant education so they can engage in restorative justice processes with those who have been harmed within the URJ where appropriate.

This roadmap is based on the results of the first phase of the project; the Listening Phase. (Subsequent phases are discussed in the Conclusion.) It involved **listening to individuals harmed in the URJ who chose to engage with us, and listening to various URJ leaders and members, to focus on understanding: a. the harms caused, b. the needs of survivors, and c. opportunities for the URJ to actively engage in teshuva and repair**. This roadmap outlines the needs of those who were harmed and includes recommendations for healing, teshuva, and repair based on those needs. The URJ was also provided with a thematic analysis and demographic breakdown of the primary and secondary harms and harmdoers we heard about so that they can better understand the needs outlined in this report. At the culmination of Phase I, we amassed over 90 pages of notes that we then coded for overarching themes to create this roadmap. To this end, direct quotes are italicized and appear throughout this report.

This project represents a survivor-centered approach to accountability and repair and is at the heart of institutional teshuva. This roadmap differs from the Debevoise and Plimpton Investigation. For starters, we did not conduct an investigation, nor did we take official reports of harm. We offered people who were harmed an opportunity to share their lived experiences, while spending most of our time listening to them talk about their needs, wants, and goals for healing and how the URJ may meet them. It is our sincerest hope that each person we spoke with sees some reflection of their healing needs in these pages. We also asked the URJ Ethics Accountability Task Force and related Working Groups to offer their thoughts on the harm, the URJ's responsibility to take accountability, and how they were hoping to do so through their work. We credit the URJ for its institutional courage in broadening the scope of the project to include all forms of harm, abuse, and misconduct.

Our approach seeks to **build bridges between those who experienced harm to each other, to community, and to the URJ**. It further seeks to **bridge the often-siloed Reform Movement entities, in order to facilitate Movement wide accountability**. For some, this project may be the bridge between them and the willingness, ability, and the learning required of the URJ to meet their basic healing needs. Some were hopeful that this restorative effort would *“lead to real change”* and appreciate and are *“proud”* that the URJ is engaging in this work. Some discussed their desire for the *“Reform movement to come out of this dark chapter.”* There were, however, those that do not believe, even with this effort, that the URJ will be able to meet the needs of those who were harmed or that they will *“put in the work”* to do so.

This roadmap does not address the needs of those who spoke to us in relation to specific primary and secondary wrongdoers. Where specific people were named with a desire to speak directly to them, we will work to facilitate those

conversations as part of Phase II. **We will be in touch directly with URJ leadership and those who spoke with us in Phase I to address specific people or requests in 2023.**

A word on language:

- We recognize that individuals who've been harmed may prefer or reject various terms to refer to themselves regarding their experiences. Common terms may include victim, survivor, person who was harmed, and more. This roadmap uses these terms interchangeably to respect the various terms people told us they prefer.
- Restorative justice does not generally use the terms perpetrator or offender. Therefore, this report uses the terms 'harm-doer' or 'wrongdoer' to refer to those who caused harm.
- Primary or direct harm refers to the initial act of harm caused to those who experienced it by the direct harm-doer. Secondary or indirect harm refers to the poor response to the disclosure of direct harm, such as victim blaming and non-reporting, or the continuation of harm by others who look away or allow it to continue. This is caused by secondary or indirect harm-doers. These harms and harm-doers are often linked as this report will explain.
- We heard about harms that occurred in URJ spaces as well as those that occurred in other Reform Movement spaces. Those who were harmed often discussed 'the Movement' and some named other Reform Movement spaces as sites of harm. This is reflected in these pages.

We want to acknowledge the trust that people who experienced harm and URJ Leaders put in us. Each took risks in this process. People who were harmed opened themselves to another sharing of their experiences. Disclosures of traumatic experiences can be distressing and involve significant emotional labor. People spoke with us at the risk of asking for their needs to be met and having them denied. The URJ also took risks in engaging in this project altogether, something we have rarely seen. We credit the URJ for funding a project that shines new light and offers a roadmap for how to respond to harms in ways that are meaningful for those who have been harmed, even if much of this report is difficult to read. ***This Roadmap to Accountability is not the end of the project. It is only the beginning.***

Who we Listened to

Often, when investigations occur, those who have been harmed are asked to share the stories of what they were made to endure. Decisions are then made without ever listening to their needs. Our listening sessions with those who were harmed were an attempt at putting their needs front and center.

Demographics of Victim-Survivors/Participants

We had pre-project calls with people who had been harmed who are also members of Accountability, Community-focused, Transparent (ACT) and Rabbi Mary Zamore from the Women's Rabbinic Network. Twenty-six people who identified as having been harmed directly or indirectly by the URJ reached out to participate in the listening phase of the project. We conducted 23 individual interviews, one focus group made up of three individuals, and follow-up conversations with several people. Additionally, we had one group conversation with nine people involved in ACT, primarily made up of those who had been harmed, but included a few advocates. A majority of those we spoke to (58% or 14/26) were neither part of the WRN or ACT. Additionally, the majority of people we spoke with had reported their harms to the URJ (n=4), Debevoise & Plimpton (n=7), or to both (n=6).

Of those we spoke to, only 2 were men. Twenty-one (91.3%) were women. Four participants identified as LGBTQIA+ and one identified as a Person of Color. We did not hear from anybody who openly identified as non-binary or transgender.

Nine participants were rabbis, including one rabbi-cantor. We did not hear from any cantors, educators, or synagogue employees who were not rabbis. The fact that we heard from so few people and the fact that several of these individuals had an element of power or privilege in the Movement, either because of their role or long history within it, cannot be understated. People who lack power and social capital are often afraid to speak up out of fear for their career prospects. Indeed, we spoke with people who had some level of power who have, nonetheless, lost positions, were dismissed entirely,

or were silenced because they spoke up about harm. **Who we interviewed and did not hear from also speaks to gaps that exist with regard to structure, hierarchy, process, and power and privilege that will be addressed throughout this roadmap.**

Our guiding questions for those who were harmed included:

- Can you tell us about the harm you experienced to the extent that you are comfortable?
- Who do you consider to be the wrongdoer?
- What does it mean for the URJ to own the harm?
- What are your needs, wants, and goals from the URJ based on the harm you experienced?
- In addition to these needs, what would be restorative and healing to you and what would justice mean?
- Who, if anyone, would you like to interface with at the URJ and what might that look like?
- What else would you like the URJ to know?

Some survivors we heard from are invested in the Movement and Judaism - Many people we heard from are or were very involved in the URJ. It was important for them that the URJ knows *“how active we are in Jewish life”* and the Reform Movement *“to combat the narrative that we walked away”* because we were harmed.

Some survivors we heard from left and took their generations with them - As one said, *“The aggressors and people not held accountable retain their community. Survivors lose. It should be reversed.”* Another put it best saying:

“Harm is inevitable in big organizations...If we radically accept that harm will be done, I think the best possible outcome of this would be continuous opportunity for healing, inside the Reform Jewish framework, led by educators, rabbis, cantors, and available for all. This would have meant that while harm would have been done, I wouldn't necessarily have felt like I had to leave the Jewish community as a protection, but rather I could have an opportunity to embrace it and allow it to be part of my healing.”

Many noted that the work the URJ needs to do with survivors is for the sake of Jewish *“continuity”* and for *“Jewish children to become Jewish adults.”* They spoke of being afraid that *“we are going to lose Jews.”* The work needs to be *“consistent, long term, and continuing,”* so that the people the URJ engages know that they and their children will be safe.

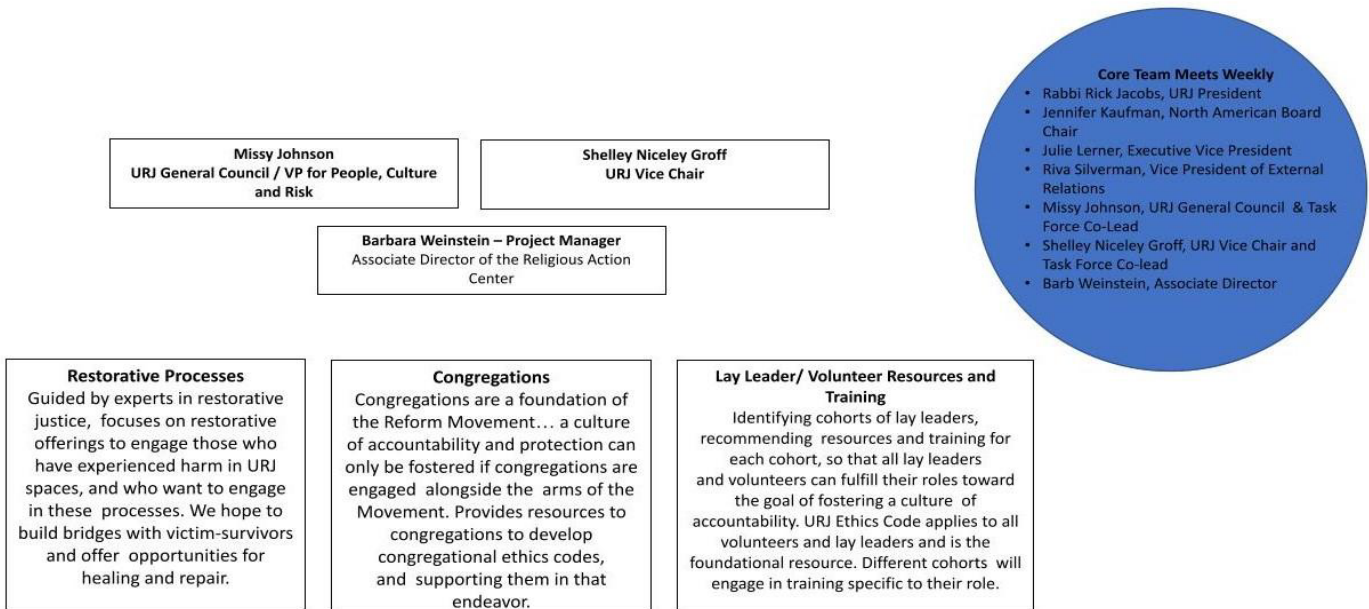
Survivors said that the **URJ needs to contend both with those they harmed who walked away and those they harmed who remained connected** - many of whom became Jewish professionals.

Profile of URJ Ethics Accountability Taskforce

In addition to the interviews and focus groups we conducted, we also spoke with the various working groups of the Ethics Accountability Task Force, Task Force Leaders, and the Core Team.¹ We met with each working group once, the Task Force, which includes leaders of each of the three working groups, twice, the co-leads of the Task Force several times, and the Core Team once. We treated these conversations as focus groups to learn more about each group's mandate, their understanding of the direct and indirect harms, and their grasp of what survivor-centered accountability looks like. These conversations will help us design the learning goals and curriculum for the proposed Phase II of this project.

It is important to note that many, if not most, of the people who are participating in the three working groups or on the Ethics Accountability Task Force did not cause the direct or secondary harms that have led to the necessity for restorative justice and accountability work. Some of them have themselves experienced harm and genuinely care about this work, because they believe in strengthening the URJ and Reform Judaism.

¹ Figure 1 provides a breakdown of the Ethics Accountability Task Force, which was created after the dissemination of and in response to the recommendations of the Debevoise and Plimpton Investigation Report was released in early 2022.



Our guiding questions for these conversations were:

- How do you think this larger task force and the groups in it fit into this restorative justice project?
- What is your mandate as a group?
- What is your understanding of the primary harms that have been committed based on the results of the investigation?
- What is your understanding of the secondary harms that have been committed based on the results of the investigation?
- What role did you play in these harms as an organization? As individuals? How does this group think they are, or can be, responsive to the harms?
- What does accountability mean to you as individuals, as an organization, and as a taskforce?
- What role do you think you play in responding to survivors' need for accountability?

Healing Needs of Those Who Experienced Harm

When the URJ approached us, they sought to understand the needs of survivors. This is at the heart of restorative justice and accountability work, which addresses the needs of people who experienced harm. Therefore, we turn to what survivors said about their restorative justice and healing needs, wants, and goals from the URJ based on the harm they experienced. Individuals who experience harm have varied, and often unique, healing needs.

The URJ should use these needs to guide their next steps.² Based on what we heard from survivors and everything that is contained in this report, we have created a table of recommended restorative responses. We use URJ's values to outline the road to repair, accountability, teshuva, and restoration and as a way to build bridges between the URJ and those they have harmed. Included with each value is a selection of restorative justice opportunities and processes in which we hope to engage everyone interested.

² Specific and individual needs will be addressed separately from this report.

ROADMAP TO ACCOUNTABILITY: AT A GLANCE

Shared Humanity: Restorative Processes, Power-mapping, and Healing Circles

- Fund the creation and facilitation of healing circles for anyone who has experienced harm, beginning with those who participated in Phase I Listening Sessions.
- URJ Working Group restorative conversations
- Fund and co-create culminating pre-Yom Kippur in-person healing experience for those we interviewed in Phase I. This will include circle processes and spiritual ritual, including music, art, and worship as guided by those who were harmed.

Justice: Institutional Response and Processes, Information Sessions, Communications Plan, Resource Guides

- Address direct and specific requests from people who participated in Phase I Listening Sessions.
- Address financial justice component by ensuring financial resource ability and equitable accessibility for past, present, and future experiences of harm.
- Fund the creation of public storytelling platforms for those who have been harmed.
- Create/Identify resources for when survivors come forward including programmatic, therapeutic, and financial resources.
- Select URJ Leadership to participate in circle processes with those people who experienced harm.
 - URJ/Survivor Restorative Processes and Accountability Circles

Belonging: Community Building Circles, Outreach, Inclusion Work

- Fund the creation and facilitation of community building circles and spaces for people who have been harmed, URJ, and movement leaders.
- Continued engagement of relevant stakeholders across the URJ in accountability work.

Learning: Pod-mapping, Training, Curriculum, Movement-wide Survey

- Pull together URJ employees, volunteers, lay-people and clergy who will be part of restorative justice and accountability learning.
- Commit to restorative justice and accountability learning work with curriculum design based on Phase I Listening Sessions.

Evolving: Apology, Amend, Policy Development and Implementation

- Publish this report and roadmap
- Create effective communication policy that reaches people who were harmed who may now be disconnected from the URJ and its messaging.
- Full throated public amend and acknowledgement.

Israel and Jewish Peoplehood: Integrated Circle Process and Movement-wide Restorative Processes

- Bridgework to CCAR, HUC, and other Reform Movement Partners
- Use Ethics Accountability Taskforce and Working Groups to make recommendations on bridge policies and practices to the URJ.
- Bridgework to all URJ congregations, including adoption of Congregational Codes of Ethics.
- Bystander Intervention work Movement-wide to ensure the end of diffusion of responsibility.
- Integration of accountability and repair work across movement, incorporating historical and current harm.
- Commit to gather Reform Movement leadership toward discussion of creation and dissemination of Reform Movement survey to better understand depth and breadth of harms across entities.

Themes of Survivors' Needs

Table 1 offers a picture of the major themes related to needs, wants and goals. We also include a count of the times the Taskforce and Working Groups spoke about these specific themes without having yet heard about what those who were

harmed are seeking. **There is a clear disjuncture between what survivors most need and what the Task Force and Working Groups understand about those needs**, as is seen in the table and our description of our conversations below. However, these gaps are opportunities for learning. The Task Force and Working Groups are focused on policies and procedures that are future facing. The disconnects we see here will be part of a learning curriculum in which the URJ will engage. Providing a visual of this disconnect is not meant to sow conflict. It is simply to show where there are opportunities for the URJ to grow and learn.

Table 1: Survivor Needs, Wants, and Goals for Healing: Broad Themes

	Victim/Survivor Comment Count	Task Force Comments Count
Ownership and understanding/Acknowledgment of Harm / Apology/ Full-throated confession/ On-going Accountability/ Feeling seen and heard	31	13
Processes/Policies to create safer, healthier, equitable Jewish spaces	14	11
Healing Conversation/Process with others who experienced harm	12	1
Responsibility to the overall movement	8	8
Positive Jewish Role Models/ Stop celebrating harm doers/rabbinic temperament	7	3
For the URJ to be responsive to reports of abuse with training	6	7
Community, Belonging and Spiritual Engagement	6	1
A platform to share writing/storytelling	5	0
Healing Conversation/Process with URJ Leadership	5	1
Sharing of information/ better communication/ transparency	4	5
Financial Restitution	4	1
Resources	4	1

This subsection focuses on the broad themes of ownership and acknowledgement addressed by those with whom we spoke, as it was the most common need.

Ownership and accountability according to survivors

Because we heard from the URJ that they were unclear on what survivors wanted to see in terms of ownership, and because we heard survivors say that they wanted the URJ to honestly own these harms, we asked what ownership means or looks like. **There are institutional and individual levels of accountability and ownership. Here is some of what we heard:**

- **Ownership is about proper and transparent communication and real outreach to those who were harmed to share information. Listen to survivors.** People spoke about their disappointment in the URJ and the lack of response to survivors and advocates. They feel the URJ could show greater leadership *“by calling the people they have harmed and by acknowledging the harm.”* They also feel that someone in a URJ leadership position *“should have reached out to”* them more directly, especially those that the URJ knew were harmed in the past, rather than waiting for victims and survivors to reach out to the URJ. *“Ownership looks like that no one who was harmed should find out about stuff”* by Googling it. It includes being transparent about how the URJ conducted their investigation and related decision making rather than acting like *“a secret society.”* This allows survivors to feel seen and heard and honors their basic humanity that has been dishonored. Any accountability work the URJ commits to should be authentic, real, and centered on the needs of those who experienced harm. Importantly, they want the URJ to be *“listening to survivors”* as they do this work of repair and responding to investigation and

the harms they have been learning about. Survivors are greatly pained that they have had to repeat themselves over and over to the URJ.

- **Accountability is acknowledging what has happened** using clear and “stronger language” and owning that the URJ had a role in creating environments where harm was able to occur and persist. This acknowledgement must name “the systemic, political problems” and take “accountability for their location in it.” It needs to include the fact that these harms “happen in communities” that are spiritual and are not isolated between clergy and congregants, but among congregants as well. It also needs to acknowledge the “harm done by waiting so long to restore justice.” “To legitimize their community is to take accountability.”
 - **Individuals at the URJ should also acknowledge the personal harm** they created in people’s stories, such as by giving “bad advice” and the clear steps they will take the next time someone who is harmed comes forward to them or who they will send them to.
 - For many, a **public acknowledgment** is an important piece to ownership because the URJ “need[s] to make visible what happened to [those who have been harmed] because it’s been invisible all this time.” Included should be the steps at repair they are taking with policies and more. “Any small step they take to make amends should be blasted from the rooftops and every person should know.” They should be “loud in the public square - we have done serious harm and this is what we are doing” next. Owning it, then, means **explaining how and what the URJ has learned from the harm they have caused.**
 - It is important to note that there are those for whom an apology is too late because they won’t “trust” it. One who is seeking financial restitution said, “I’m a Jew, I want action, not words.”
- **Ownership means acknowledging failures** - They want the URJ to hear them and acknowledge how they “failed” them, especially those harmed as minors. However, acknowledging failures and making change, as several noted the URJ has, “doesn’t erase what happened to us.” Even with the changes, many see harm as “an active problem” - not just about men in the 1970’s - and want the URJ to “get real about it.”
- **Ownership means integrating accountability and repair into the agenda of the URJ** - People want the work of addressing, responding to, and repairing harm to be put on the agenda of the URJ and for the president to acknowledge “the work we need to do to ensure our movement is not toxic.” Integration means making it as “part of [their] history” and using it to “rewrite [their] narrative moving forward.”
- **Ownership means working with survivors and giving them resources** - The URJ should have a **process that offers various kinds of support** to those who come forward. These include programmatic, therapeutic, and financial support, even if the URJ has to outsource some of these resources.
 - For some, having access to a **record of the harm they experienced or knowing whether it exists** is part of accountability.
- **Accountability means that there are the same expectations and consequences of people** - This should apply to people “on all levels, whether custodian to executive suite.” Who your parents are or how much money you’ve given will not impact how you’re treated in the Movement. As one said, “There should not be ambiguity about what behavior is permitted or how to report unacceptable behavior. No one should feel unsafe in any URJ building or event.” This should be “communicated to all congregants, campers, staff, youth group members, volunteers, etc.”
 - For some, owning it means removing harm-doers from all Reform entities and/or doing accountability work with those who caused harm. For others, owning it doesn’t necessarily mean that people, like rabbis and leaders, who cause harm get kicked out or lose their role – depending on what they did – but it *does* mean that they apologize for what they did wrong.
- **Owning it has to do with conversations.** The URJ should fund and set aside space for facilitated conversations so those who have been harmed can talk with each other, can be safe, heard and believed, get support, and heal. This should be a place where the many harms, including traumatic invalidation and minority stress, will be addressed. “Bringing survivors into community [is] really important and we don’t see it in the Jewish community enough,” one said. We learned that ACT has facilitated such conversations, however these conversations should not be the burden of those who have been harmed.
 - **Resources, guides, and conversation starters should also be created for victims and survivors.** They should address how difficult harm is “to talk about with the people we are close to and how we don’t want to tarnish the places we treasure.” This is especially true for those who were harmed, but feel unable to discuss it with peers who were there at the time.

- Some want a **conversation with URJ's president or other leaders**, for themselves or those they know who were harmed but have not felt comfortable coming forward. A group conversation may feel safer and more supportive, and healing would come from knowing URJ leaders want to learn about their experiences. This was especially true for rabbis hoping the URJ wanted to know about their experiences in synagogues.
- Owning it also means implementing more **honest conversations with parents and teens around what a healthy culture looks like** and what will happen when it is breached.
- **Ownership means addressing the gap when it comes to congregations and lay leaders** - Congregations suffer from harms committed within, whether the dispute is among rabbis, board members, congregants, or among a mix of these parties. Additionally, people felt strongly that congregations should have policies around equity, including paying unemployment and family leave. Congregations also need a robust process for managing hiring processes and to ensure they are equitable, non-racist, and non-discriminatory. The person who deals with issues of abuse in congregations must be *"independent from their system"* and not the same person who manages hiring.
 - **Change must involve lay leaders, including those in congregations.** Lay leaders must understand and be told that giving money to the URJ or the synagogue *"does not entitle you to treat [people] how you want or ask them to do whatever you want"* because there's *"definitely a sense of entitlement"* among lay leaders. Congregational boards also need oversight with check-ins and policies as well, and the URJ should play a role when things go wrong.
- **Ownership means understanding and addressing gaps across the entire Reform Movement** - In discussing the interconnectedness of the harms in the wider Reform movement, one person said, *"There's so many levels where the structures are problematic."* One described *"feeling like a battered woman. There's this abusive institution that we keep coming back to."* She is one of several people who talked about how the primary and secondary harms and lack of response can extend across the Reform ecosystem and include other entities like Hebrew Union College (HUC) and the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), which were both mentioned by participants of our listening sessions. When addressing abuses and harms, one suggested there be a *"point person"* to better communicate and *"coordinate between the CCAR, URJ, or HUC"* and other Movement partners and survivors. They should also provide support for staff holding things down, as well as the lay leaders, as these stories of harm trickle out, who are often left unsure of how to respond to questions they receive.

Ownership and accountability according to the URJ Ethics Accountability Task Force and Working Groups

We listened to understand what Task Force and Working Group members understood ownership, accountability, and teshuva to mean. While they understood ownership to mean offering an apology, it was unclear that they recognized that there first needs to be an acknowledgement of the specific harms that occurred, and a statement about what specific actions are taking place to address those harms. Even so, the groups offered insights into what ownership and accountability *could* look like. Some talked about working to **create a shift in culture at the URJ** including the toxic culture more generally, and about **fostering a culture of accountability** through a culture of reporting. This was important because the mandates of each working group were initially more focused on policy change rather than cultural shifts. However, as noted further in this report, toxic culture is at the core of the direct and indirect harms and we recommended that making this shift should be at the center of the task force's work. Several went on to say that institutions are managed by people and that **individual people need to commit to individual, collective and cultural change** if overall credibility and trust can ever be established again.

There was also a shift in understanding the need to address the accountability gap, which one called a *"black hole,"* between the URJ and congregations because of the harms that have occurred there. While their initial sentiments were that congregations are not within the legal purview of the URJ, they acknowledged that **the current structure was created by people and can be changed by people, too**. Some were frustrated that the URJ lacks the power to do anything about the toxic culture reported within synagogues. They discussed the work of the Congregations Task Force which will guide congregations on creating codes of ethics, though they are unsure and unclear on whether it will have teeth.

In sum, Task force and Working Group members identified three major themes around accountability: **awareness, consequences, and transparent communication across the wider Reform Movement**. Firstly, every single person within the URJ should have a degree of awareness and know that they must act on what they see, hear, or have a bad feeling about. The Task Force is charged with understanding and clarifying the actions that then need to be taken. Secondly, they identified the need for **consequences for direct behaviors and indirect harms**. They stated that training and codes of ethics alone are ineffective if they have no teeth and that there must be consequences for doing nothing. As the flagship organization of the broader Reform Movement, Task Force members understand that **it is up to the URJ to bring all interested Reform Movement partners to the table**. They were encouraged by past efforts at collaborative cultural change in the Reform Movement and cited the 'Reform Pay Equity Initiative' as an example. Finally, they understand that **ownership and accountability require broad communication, throughout the Movement and beyond**, that explains what the harms were (and are), what the URJ is doing to address the harms, to be accountable, and to provide opportunities for healing, while also communicating in ways that build partnerships with other branches of the Movement.

To understand *why* this is what ownership and accountability mean to those who experienced harm, we must understand the long-lasting impact that harm has had on individual lives.

Impacts of Harm

While we did not ask participants directly about how their experiences of harm impacted them, they nevertheless were spoken about in every session we had. Even sharing their experiences was *"retraumatizing"* for several people and many were emotional during their interviews. The impacts of harm affected them in a myriad of ways. **Nobody spoke about being impacted in only one way and it is clear that the harms experienced had multiple serious consequences on lives and sometimes on Jewish generations**. In general, research shows that harm and victimization have short and long-term effects, including physical, psychological, emotional, and relational impacts. When harm occurs in faith communities - especially when committed by faith leaders or role models - there may also be spiritual impacts. We found this to be very true here. Additionally, some spoke about the financial impacts of harm. We noticed that all impacts of harm were very much alive, and often continuing, for people. One noted how the harm *"changed the course of her life."*

- **Physical Impacts** - People did not talk about physical impacts in relation to secondary harm, though some mentioned it related to the primary harms they experienced.
- **Psychological Impacts** - Psychological impacts included depression, anxiety, and panic attacks; the need to seek out therapy to deal with the impacts; diagnosed PTSD which for some was retriggered when they reported, and for others kept them from participating in the investigation; and feeling gaslighted after they reported. One person, harmed as a minor, mentioned making her parents sleep with the door open and needing to be *"pulled out of the car"* upon returning to camp the following summer.
- **Emotional Impacts** - Many participants cried during our listening sessions or had to gather themselves before or after our time together. They are tired, fearful, devastated, angry, and very pained. Some have sat with their pain for over 30 years. They spoke about having been unable to recover because of how long the harm (and harmful responses) have lasted. One person talked about his fear of *"turning into"* a harm-doer and the active steps he takes to prevent it. Another spoke about the *"traumatic invalidation linked to minority stress"* which *"has ruined her life."* Another participant, in describing her years-long and deep involvement with the URJ as a youth until today as *"a way to make the world better,"* said she found it *"deeply upsetting"* to *"find out that the whole system is based on power."* One spoke about hopelessness because of how *"deep"* the *"wound"* is which *"feels impossible to fix."* Individuals spoke about the emotional impact of having to change their behaviors juxtaposed to harm-doers not being told to make changes. Those that spoke about homophobia and LGBTQ discrimination in the URJ also mentioned the *"toll that this took on generations that lived in fear - the toll to be closeted."* One spoke about how she was impacted after speaking up about harm saying she *"felt marginalized, shushed and embarrassed like being told to shut the hell up and go away."* She described the experience of reporting as *"humiliating, degrading, shame-inducing, and one in which I was made to feel like a terrible person for raising concerns."* She also feels guilty about the sexual harm her campers experienced saying *"to this day I feel like a parent who left my kids with*

an abuser.” They also spoke about the time-consuming process and the toll that reporting had on them with one calling it *“an awful experience.”*

- **Financial impacts** - A few people spoke about the financial impact of harm and its aftermath. One spoke about having lost her financial safety net, another spoke about the financial fears and consequences of considering leaving an abusive synagogue workplace and its impact on his family’s *“quality of life.”* A third spoke about paying out of pocket to find connection with a rabbi after having left Judaism after being abused by her rabbi. Another spoke about feeling forced to take a *“small job”* because she had no other income after leaving a synagogue workplace where the more senior rabbi was committing financial crimes. She was told that if she took a settlement she *“would never work for the movement.”*
 - **Class and status** came up a few times as issues about which the URJ may not be aware. For example, some noted that URJ events, like the biennial, are not affordable. And those who lost or left their jobs because of harm spoke about the financial insecurity and exclusion from being able to participate in URJ events. Additionally, people who described themselves as *“nobodies”* felt that this made it difficult to get a hearing to discuss ethics issues. The imbalance of power has allowed the more powerful to prey on those less so, in sexual ways and more.
- **Relational Impacts** -The way in which people’s relationships were impacted by harm was profound. We heard about interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships being affected. We also heard about how people’s relationships to G-d/Judaism and the URJ were impacted which are discussed in the spiritual impacts subsection below. These are some of the bridges that were severed or left shaky due to harm within the URJ.
 - *Relationship with self* - intrapersonal - Some talked about being plagued with self-doubt, questioning their memories, and doing work to have their memories confirmed by others who were there at the time the harm took place. They also questioned their reactions to the harm until they were told they had been under, not over, reacting. People spoke about thoughts or acts of self-harm, self-blame, and self-consciousness, while others spoke about hiding themselves and a loss of identity. Some spoke about whether or not what happened to them was serious enough and wondered if they had done something wrong.
 - *Relationship to others* - interpersonal - Many spoke about how their relationships were impacted by harm. Some stopped trusting men, others stopped participating or had a difficult time in social life, and several spoke about the pain in losing community and/or collegiality, with one saying they were excluded and made to feel like *“lepers”*. They talked about witnessing the pain of those they tried to protect and how the harms have impacted their marital and familial relationships. Some spoke about choosing the wrong partner and understanding how it was linked to harm they experienced. One, whose relationship to Judaism was severed because of harm, noted that this severing impacted her relationships with family who didn’t understand the *“larger picture of [her] experience.”* Some spoke of being blamed or disbelieved by others when they disclosed the harm, which impacted their relationships and made them feel alone. Others spoke about feeling bad for the young people who were supposed to protect them, but did not know any better themselves due to their age or lack of training.
- **Spiritual Impacts** - *“Spiritual harm is so profound because it’s about your very being.”*
 - *Relationship to Judaism* - One person said that the harm happening in *“a religious community probably affected me deeper than”* if it had happened *“in a secular environment.”* Several talked about not wanting to *“participate in Jewish life,”* being unable to engage with Jewish things like reading Jewish books, marrying non-Jews so they wouldn’t have to *“participate in Jewish activities.”* and having nothing to do with Jewish organizational life. They spoke of losing their place in *“ritual life”* to the point of having nowhere to go when their loved ones passed.
 - *Relationship to the URJ or Reform Movement*³ - Some people were unsure whether talking to us would make a difference to the URJ. Many cried when describing the *“moral injury”* they suffered as individuals who were *“product[s] of the movement.”* Several talked about leaving the movement to join Orthodox or Modern Orthodox communities. Others talked about not wanting to speak up, or knowing of others who won’t, because the URJ perceives them as *“whining and complaining.”* They mentioned feeling like

³ We recognize that there is a difference between URJ spaces and other Reform Movement spaces. The people with whom we spoke recognize the difference as well. However, they were all harmed in URJ spaces and for some they were also harmed in other Reform Movement spaces.

“watchdog[s]” or “gatekeeper[s]” of the URJ as they try to ensure perpetrators are not in positions of power, while they don’t see the URJ making the same efforts. This has led several of them to “no longer support or encourage” children – their own or others – to participate in URJ summer camps or other activities. Those who were harmed by historical or current homophobia or discrimination based on their LGBTQ identity see it as the “URJs’ loss” even as they described the many ways they have lost out too. These losses include the work that could have come had LGBTQ clergy been welcomed and included years ago.

Those who have been harmed have lost trust in the URJ, their leadership, and decision-making, in part because they do not believe the URJ is living up to its values. We, therefore, now turn to URJ values and discuss their crucial role in harm and repair.

Living up to URJ Values

We believe that teshuva, accountability, and restorative justice, where appropriate, are Jewish values. Furthermore, those who have been harmed, as well as members of the Ethics Accountability Task Force and its Working Groups, invoked Jewish and URJ values when talking about harms or efforts at repair. As one survivor said, *“how we act and what we preach need to match.”*

We heard five main themes of institutional harm committed against both minors and adults by a wide array of people (primarily men) within the URJ and Reform Movement spaces. They include (1) toxic and unsafe culture permitted by the URJ or Reform Movement, (2) a lack of clear reporting channels or appropriate responses to disclosures, (3) the upholding and celebrating of harmdoers, (4) systemic gaps across the Reform Movement and in congregations, and (5) hypocrisy. These themes are expanded upon in the thematic analysis provided to the URJ and will be included as part of a comprehensive restorative justice curriculum in Phase II.

Again and again, we heard that the most harmful institutional betrayal is the disjuncture between the direct and indirect harms that occurred despite the stated values the URJ seeks to uphold. One said, *“You don’t practice what we preach”* and another noted that the URJ should be responding to these harms with *“Jewish values.”* Reviewing URJ’s [stated](#) values, vision, and mission highlights two of the key themes of spiritual harm and hypocrisy that emerged in the listening sessions. As one survivor noted, *“The URJ holds itself up on paper as an institution that upholds Jewish values, but it does not.”*

URJ’s values are about *“the moral and ethical imperatives that undergird everything”* they do. However, the table in this section, and this entire roadmap, outline the many ways in which survivors feel the URJ did not - and does not - always live up to its values, mission, and vision. It outlines how some of the secondary harms people experienced are in contrast to the values of the URJ. The URJ acknowledged this when Rabbi Rick Jacobs and Jennifer Brodkey Kaufman, in their message accompanying the release of the Ethics Investigation Report, [wrote](#), *“In every respect, the identified abuses represent conduct that is antithetical to Reform Jewish values and the core values of the URJ.”* And, in fact, the Task Force and Working Groups were created to bring URJ Jewish values to life in their responses to the harm. **We believe that there is a *tikkun*, or repair, in the fact that many of the reasons for sitting on the Ethics Accountability Task Force and Working Groups align with URJ values.**

The table here also notes that we found - and were amazed by - the reasons that many people who were harmed gave for talking to us. In analyzing their reasons, we found that they align with URJ’s values. Also the very people harmed by and in the URJ are doing the hard work of upholding its values. They are also taking active steps to protect others, as one victim spoke about the policy work she is doing since no one else was, and another individual spoke about how he and his rabbinical school classmates hold each other accountable and check in with one another.

Table 2. Living Up to URJ Values

Value	URJ Secondary Harm	Survivors' Reasons for Coming Forward	Task Force Reasons for their Work
<p>Shared Humanity</p> <p>בְּצֵלֶם אֱלֹהִים <i>B'tzelem elohim (Genesis 1:27)</i> "In the image of God."</p> <p>We see everyone as created in the divine image and, as such, treat everyone with respect, dignity, and kindness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"Treating everyone as if they really are creating in G-d's image and like they matter and is not a standard URJ lived up to at all."</i> • Dehumanization; favoritism; cronyism; demeaning behavior; indignities • Victim blaming • Gender-based discrimination and dynamics, microaggressions • Harmful power dynamics • Homophobia and LGBTQ discrimination • Yelling at those who were harmed in public and private • Cruel responses to survivors • Imbalance of Power 	<p><i>"You're not less holy if you're bringing things up."</i></p>	<p><i>We "need to follow up, make sure things happen, and that people are taken care of."</i></p> <p><i>"We are committed to the process no matter how many people come forward."</i></p> <p>I see <i>"how little we ever looked at anything from the victims' perspectives. I know that and own that."</i></p>
<p>Justice</p> <p>דִּרְשׁוּ מִשְׁפָּט <i>Dirshu mishpat (Isaiah 1:17)</i> "Seek justice."</p> <p>We seek justice for all people throughout the world.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of reporting or responding • Responding when people threatened to take their case to the media • Disbelieved by HR • Brushing off reports of sexual harm as 'jokes' • Acting like the URJ investigation is ownership • Board leaders not responding to harms • Retaliation against those who report or raise red flags 	<p><i>"Felt compelled to speak up"</i></p> <p><i>"There's no statute of limitations on morality and ethics."</i></p> <p><i>"To validate what others reported."</i></p>	<p>We need a new culture where <i>"victims believe that there will be investigations, adjudication, and restoration that will honor that."</i></p>
<p>Belonging</p> <p>אַתֶּם נִצְבִּים הַיּוֹם כְּלֶכֶם <i>Atem nitzavim hayom kulchem (Deuteronomy 29:9)</i> "You stand today, ALL of you."</p> <p>We build, connect, and enrich communities – congregations, camps, programs, social justice work, and more – where youth and adults across all identities, generations, and lived experiences feel a deep sense of belonging.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only responding to reports who came from people with power, those heavily invested in the URJ, or when they threatened to withdraw from the URJ • <i>"I'm a Reform movement poster child ...and it's like, you can still be thrown out with the bathwater. There's no measure of care and concern."</i> • <i>"There's no making up for the absence of collegiality and being part of the movement."</i> 	<p>Deeply invested in the movement.</p> <p><i>"I would like some Jewish community."</i></p>	<p>We need to be <i>"setting up those guardrails before the next thing happens - and it's across our movement - with our partners, not just the URJ."</i></p> <p><i>"We need to bring our partners in the movement together" to do this work.</i></p>
<p>Learning</p> <p>וְתִלְמַד תּוֹרָה בְּגֵד כְּלָם <i>Talmud Torah k'neged kulam (Mishnah Peah 1:1)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeating harmful responses and patterns • Sweeping the reports they get under the rug • <i>"How a group of organizational leaders in 2022 could receive all this as if it's a revelation"</i> 	<p><i>"To share the hard stuff."</i></p>	<p><i>"A primary harm is that the URJ had not established the proper culture to receive information or process it."</i></p>

<p>“The study of Torah, above all.” We honor Torah; wrestle with Jewish traditions and beliefs, including God; and engage directly with the difficult questions of our age.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-serving responses to harm 		<p>“We should start looking for where and when we can start exerting some influence” in congregations.</p>
<p>Evolving</p> <p>וּבְטוּבוֹ מְחַדֵּשׁ בְּכָל־יְיוֹם תָּמִיד מִפְּשָׁה בְּרֵאשִׁית <i>U’vtuvo mechadesh b’chol yom tamid ma’aseh v’raysheet</i></p> <p>(Yotzeir Or, daily liturgy)</p> <p>“With goodness, the Holy One renews creation every day.”</p> <p>We awaken to new awareness, holding ourselves accountable for changing as we grow.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of change • Confusing structure at the URJ - who to report to, who’s in charge, who can really effect change? • “The foxes are guarding the henhouse” in ethics processes • Lack of policies used to justify no intervention 	<p>Belief that the URJ can do and be better in this area.</p> <p>“We are the reform movement not reformed, because we are constantly reforming and this category needs to be constantly reforming.”</p>	<p>“We have all played a role in not creating the culture that we need to have.”</p> <p>“We need to be counter-cultural here to include consequences and accountability.”</p> <p>“There are “multiple levels” of “complicity - “those that do the harm, perpetuate it, watch it, hear about it.”</p>
<p>Israel and Jewish Peoplehood</p> <p>כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲרֵבִים זֶה בָּזֶה <i>Kol yisrael arevim zeh ba’zeh</i> <i>(Shevuot 39a)</i></p> <p>“All of Israel and the Jewish people are responsible, one for the other.” We are committed to the safety and vitality of the Jewish people and to a secure and just state of Israel as a home – for all Jews and for all its inhabitants.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of mutual responsibility • Diffusion of responsibility among Reform movement entities like the URJ, HUC, and CCAR • No bystander intervention by people who saw the harm happening, witnessing sexual harm and doing nothing • Communal and institutional betrayal • People excusing the behavior of their colleagues and friends 	<p>Wanting to protect others.</p> <p>Worry about Reform Judaism’s continuity and credibility.</p> <p>Feeling like a watchdog and gatekeeper because URJ isn’t doing the job of protecting others.</p> <p>Watching harmful leaders or people continue to be upheld by the URJ.</p>	<p>“We have a responsibility to Reform Jews because we purport to be an umbrella of the Reform Movement.”</p> <p>“Mutual accountability means that it doesn’t rest with one body or group of people but that everyone has a responsibility to speak up.”</p>

Conclusion

This roadmap has outlined the needs of those who were harmed in the URJ, and at times beyond. It explains how they have been impacted by the harms they experienced in various ways and outlines survivor-centered ways that the URJ can begin to take real accountability and create repair. It also outlines the difficult and important work of the Ethics Accountability Task Force and Working Groups.

This report is based on the needs of those who experienced harm from the institution that harmed them or allowed them to be harmed, and the principles of restorative justice. Many of those we spoke with believe there is a path forward. One said, “there is so much they can do - like open a healing space and know some people will feel angry and not enough, and some will bring their families back”. This means that the URJ must try while also accepting that, for some, the harms may be irreparable. As one said “There is a better way, but the URJ does not determine the outcome of engaging survivors.” Another noted, “I want to see the Reform movement be better. I deeply believe that it can be, and I also think there are real challenges.”

Restorative justice, accountability, teshuva and repair must always begin by centering the needs of those who have experienced harm. These forms of repair are not just about changing or implementing new policies, they are about **addressing both the harms that have occurred and the root causes of that harm, while using survivors’ voices as a guide.**

Now that we have completed Phase I, the Listening Phase, we hope that our recommendations will guide the URJ in their future steps toward restorative justice and accountability. The roadmap outlines specific steps that may be short-term, mid to long range, and ongoing opportunities for accountability and repair. These steps are not linear, but can be generally contained within these next proposed phases:

- **March-August 2023: Phase II: Curriculum and Restorative Justice Processes Design and Learning** - Based on what we learned in Phase I, we will identify the various restorative justice modalities that would best meet victim-survivors’ needs and allow the URJ to address the harm they, and others, have caused. We will work with survivors to create experiences that are restorative and meaningful to them. We will learn together with URJ leaders and task force members about the harm caused and how to respond with accountability.
- **March-August 2023: Phase III: Restorative Justice Facilitation** - We will facilitate the various restorative justice modalities and processes identified in Phase II between victim-survivors and the URJ. Additional experts, consultants, and educators may be brought on to assist in the facilitation of processes.
- **August-September 2023: Phase IV: Culminating High Holiday Teshuva Experience** - We will design and execute a culminating event for September 2023 for everyone who participated in any of the processes over the 2022/2023 year. Other URJ leaders and/or members may be invited to attend to bear witness to the bridge-building work and to hold the space as community members who are part of restorative justice experiences.
- **September-December 2023: Wrap-Up and Debrief** - Complete individual and institutional restorative justice processes and conversations and reflect on the entire project with survivors and the URJ. Consider areas of continued work and integration into the URJ and wider Movement where possible.

We have been moved by the opportunity to listen and learn from such courageous and brave survivors and by the members of the Task Force and Working Groups who are walking in the path of institutional courage. We have watched you move each other already. It is our hope that we can all continue to have no fear as we keep walking ahead together.

ליקוטי מוהר"ן, תנינא מ"ח:ב'ז:
 וְדַע, שְׁהָאָדָם צָרִיךְ לַעֲבֹר עַל גֶּשֶׁר צָר מְאֹד מְאֹד, וְהַכֵּלל וְהַעֲקֹר – שְׁלֵא יִתְפַּחַד כָּלֵל

“Know, too! a person must cross a very, very narrow bridge. The main rule is: Do not be frightened at all!” (Likutei Moharan, Part II 48:2:7)