CREATING COMMUNITIES OF BELONGING:

How to Assemble a Diverse Group, Committee, and/or Taskforce

Being a part of and cultivating diverse groups, committees, and taskforces (including, but not limited to your board, hiring/membership committees, etc.) is an essential component to our belonging work. Though it may seem obvious to some, creating and curating groups/ committees/taskforces that reflect the actual diversity of the Jewish community (which is only becoming more diverse in many ways, see below) is an anti-oppressive practice in and of itself. We encourage you to consider the questions below and think about how you can reconsider some of the normalized practices around group formation in your community.

- **Interfaith/Intermarried couples & families**. Since 2000, 71% of non-orthodox Jewish marriages in the US are interfaith.
- **Jews with Disabilities.** Account for 20% of our communities.
- **Jews of Color & multiracial families.** At least 12-15% of US Jews identify as JOC & 10% of US Jews are Mizrahi or Sephardic heritage.
- **LGBTQ+ Jews.** At least 10% of North American Jews openly identify as LGBTQ+ and up to 20% of those ages 18-29.

Why do we need to ensure that our committees are made up of people from diverse backgrounds?

Cultivating and curating committees that are representative of the actual diversity of our Jewish community is essential to creating communities that affirm Jews and Jewish Adjacent people of all backgrounds. Only when our decision makers and leaders reflect our actual diversity (with respect to race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, marital and relationship status, body size, and other identities), can we start to become confident that the "right people" have been consulted and provided the input we need to design culturally relevant programs and policies for our communities.

As we engage in any important work, we must abide by the phrase, "Nothing about us without us." We must ensure that individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds are included every step of the way. Anything less leads to plans, programs, and solutions that don't reflect the needs of the most marginalized in our community, and often eclipses the opportunity to incorporate the voices of people who are often underrepresented in organized Jewish life. By ensuring your group reflects diversity with regards to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability,

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socioeconomic status, etc., you're investing in the entirety of your community, and therefore equipped to accurately take different needs and experiences into consideration.

We put together committees/taskforces all the time, is this *that* different?

While your community might have years of experience assembling groups and committees, we are asking you to let go of former processes and to assemble your groups in a potentially different way than you might have done previously. Please keep in mind, the suggestions below were designed to maximize the chance that people from a wide variety of backgrounds and lived experiences participate in every step of your group, from beginning to end.

What do you mean when you refer to a "diverse group"? What identities should I be thinking about?

When considering group makeup, ensure you are thinking about identities such as race, gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, body size, etc. In addition to those identities, you also want to include people with various levels of community involvement. While you will of course want to include some proven or obvious up-and-coming leaders, you may also want to make room for folks who have no leadership role at all (and may never) in your community. Examples include single people who only come to your community a couple of times a year, a "Jewish adjacent" family member/partner (people who are not Jewish but are in families or relationships with Jewish people) whom you see sometimes but have yet to hear about their experiences within your community, or maybe even a busy parent in your school, provided that the timing can be worked out. These are all just examples to caution you against overlooking a "lesser connected" individual with valuable insight from being a part of your group. These individuals are likely to bring refreshingly new perspectives that can help shape your committees' goals.

What should I keep in mind when starting to think about creating more diverse groups, committees, and taskforces?

Often, people wonder how they can create a "diverse" group if they are not in close relationships with people from various backgrounds. It's a good question! In some ways, it's like the difference between inviting people to a formal dinner party versus inviting people to a potluck. When it comes to forming a diverse committee, we are recommending the potluck style. With a potluck, the success of the gathering and meal itself doesn't rely on the planning of a single host, but rather the collective participation of an entire group.

When you invite people to a dinner party, you often have a specific number and list of people you want to invite, the menu is set by you, and you usually have an existing relationship with everyone who comes. Maybe someone brings a dessert, or a new partner, but largely there isn't too much wiggle room. With a potluck, there is much more flexibility. Maybe you tell people to bring a main dish or a dessert, but you'll likely try dishes that you may have never tried before, because people are bringing *their* favorite dish to the table, rather than only trying yours

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(i.e., maybe a new committee member shares a great new program idea or has a recommendation re accessibility based on their experience, and this is the first time they've felt comfortable sharing/the first time they've actively been invited to share).

Due to the informal nature of a potluck, the invitation itself may be less formal; a spontaneous invite in passing or asking others to invite someone they think would be a great addition. Keep this in mind when putting together your group. While you might have a set number of people you'd like to include, and you don't want to invite "anyone and everyone" prior to forming your committee, we urge you to be flexible to allow for last-minute invitations and to invite people from your community that you may not have had the opportunity to work with yet.

How do I invite someone to join?

While we should not tokenize anyone (i.e., inviting someone with a marginalized identity to a committee/role for the sake of having "diversity" but not actually valuing their opinion), we must acknowledge when a group isn't comprised of people from a variety of backgrounds and is missing input from people with important lived experiences. If there are people in your community who you are interested in working with and who have been open about their experience/identities, most of the time it will be ok to approach them, acknowledge their openness about their background/identity and ask them if they have any interest in being involved. You can also ask them if they have any other suggestions for people who might be interested.

Another great way to involve people from various backgrounds is to create a short letter, specifically stating something along the lines of, "We are specifically interested in garnering input and participation from a wide variety of people, including those of us that identify as LGBTQ+, Jews of Color, people with disabilities, working-class people, singles, people who have gone through divorce, those who are 'Jewish adjacent', interfaith families and couples, etc." and asking, "Are you interested?".

We understand you may be fearful to approach individuals you don't know. However, in our experience, if you ask respectfully and in a way that doesn't expect individuals to represent an entire group (i.e., acknowledging those of us who are LGBTQ+ do not speak for or reflect the views of all LGBTQ+ individuals), people are usually honored to be asked to participate, as long as they know they can say "no" without any hard feelings.

Anything else I should consider when thinking about participation and this committee/taskforce/group?

In addition to casting a wide net for participants, we also want you to think about the *ways* members of this group should engage with one another. While it makes sense that you would want at least a couple of "leaders" (i.e., staff and/or clergy) to commit to sustaining your group efforts over time, we also want to give permission to allow members (particularly those from marginalized backgrounds) to participate for a finite amount of time. Perhaps there are people

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who cannot attend all of the meetings but would agree to attend for a certain number of them to provide invaluable feedback and perspective that you would not otherwise garner. For example, if your staff, clergy, and current lay leaders are a homogonous group (i.e., all white, all cisgender, etc.), finding ways for people with other identities to provide perspective is important. As long as all group members read and agree

to a set of Shared Agreements for the group, there can be flexibility to your group configuration. The flexibility mentioned above will allow for more voices, and in turn, a greater sense of understanding.

What about once we have the group established… anything else we might want to consider doing differently?

We can't stress enough the words 'process' and 'relationship.' By taking time in the early days of our meetings to build relationships, by acknowledging the dominant culture we function in day in and day out, and by ensuring we invite people from non-dominant groups to participate, our committee will stand a better chance at producing meaningful and reliable outcomes. Setting Shared Agreements at the start of your committee (as well as in existing groups, you can incorporate shared agreements at any point in any of your committees!) is a great way to combat dominant norms that typically make their way into our group dynamics.
And remember, while there are many aspects of our work that are important, if we have pulled together and actively engaged a group of people from a wide variety of backgrounds that might never have had the chance to intersect otherwise, we are making meaningful strides towards disrupting oppression and furthering our commitment to creating communities of belonging.