

Creating Inclusive Online Programs

Reform Jews strive to put our values into action by celebrating the holiness and individuality of every person and the 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 identity reflected in our congregations and communities.

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

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

***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, sexual orientation, and more. For all North American populations, including Jews, these forms of diversity are increasingly true among younger generations. It’s 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 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, etc.
- **Review language and action guidelines** at the bottom of this document.

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

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

Examples of 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. Or, have a staff person available who can 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.
We ask that all participants do your best to use your cameras so that we can see your full face, (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 of us 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.
- PowerPoint/presentations should include a wide range of representation of our diversity (for example, pictures of people should include People of Color, LGBTQ+, Interfaith and those with disabilities, without over representing the same images/people over and over again). Physical spaces of speakers should also include symbols of inclusion, such as LGBTQ+ Pride/Black Lives Matter flags or stickers.
- 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.
- Edit how your name is displayed to include your pronouns (i.e., Pam Green She/Her).
- Inform participants if the call is being recorded.

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

Examples of 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](#).
- 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 on a call with 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.)
- If breakout groups are used, separate people based on favorite color or randomly rather than by gender.

¹ <https://zoom.us/accessibility/faq>

- 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 practices:

- Speak facing the camera and ensure your mouth is always visible to allow for those of us who lip read to participate.
- Ensure that you are calling on participants who represent a diversity of backgrounds.
- Use large enough font or display settings so those of us with visual impairments can read.
- 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
- 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 below)
- Prior to your program, test your volume using both the computer microphone and a headset. Use whichever offers the clearest sound.
- Offer verbal understanding that paying attention during a video call is not always easy. Encourage the use of fidget toys or other devices.
- End sessions and programs on time.
- 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 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

² <https://www.theraspecs.com/blog/zoom-migraine-sensory-sensitivities-tips/>

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).
- Utilize inclusive language, especially regarding gender & sexuality and disabilities (see charts below).
- 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, allow them to identify themselves. 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.

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.	<i>Terms that should not be used</i>
Is so OCD/bipolar/etc.	<i>Terms that should not be used derisively</i>

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.