

# Planning Welcoming Gatherings

LiNK Jewish Buffalo's Belonging Initiative invites you to explore how to make your organization's events more welcoming to all. This work can be difficult but you are not alone. This will be less difficult and cumbersome as relationships are created between new participants and current participants. Meeting new people prior to a gathering and/or speaking with newcomers will further the comfort level of all.

Here are some guidelines we have developed to ensure your gatherings are welcoming to all:

## 1. Commit to the Work

- a. Take time to build an organizational commitment to the work of designing events and gatherings that are welcoming to all.
- b. Assign a responsible professional/volunteer leader whose work is to ensure the gathering is welcoming to all.

## 2. "Nothing About Us Without Us"

- a. Make all decisions with the input of those you want to include.
- b. Put others' comfort ahead of your own.

## 3. Plan Ahead

- a. Ask what accommodations participants need in order to fully participate and plan accordingly.
- b. Plan for different food related accommodations (e.g.. gluten free, pureed).
- c. Budget for accommodations to ensure inclusive participation.
- d. Reach out to members/participants who are in the relevant cohort, but may be shy about requesting a needed accommodation, to encourage their participation.

## 4. Design for Access and Inclusion

- a. Select venues that do not pose physical barriers to participation.
- b. Select venues that have plentiful access to restrooms.
- c. Always use a microphone, close caption videos.

## 5. Adopt Inclusive Language

- a. Do not ask a person's gender or use gendered language. Share your personal pronouns and ask participants for their personal pronouns.
- b. Translate Hebrew or other jargon.
- c. Use person-first language.
- d. Give credit where credit is due.

## 6. Design Around the User Experience

- a. Do this exercise for every event: walk into the space and imagine that you know no one, know nothing about Judaism, and need accommodations in order to fully participate, based on this experience, make tweaks/ changes.
- b. Take and share photos that represent diversity in Jewish population.

## 7. Read the room

- a. Plan ahead but oftentimes challenges present themselves in the moment so be prepared for the unexpected.
- b. Work to understand the thoughts, emotions and needs of the people at your gathering and constantly reassess and fine-tune.

## 8. Ask for Help

- a. You are not alone.
- b. LiNK Jewish Buffalo has professionals, volunteer leaders, and access to experts at the ready to help.

## 9. Safe Space

- a. Ensure a safe environment for all participants to raise questions, fears or issues, regardless of gender, racial/ethnic background, or level of Jewish knowledge.
- b. Work to have courageous conversations about this work with your colleagues and volunteer leadership.
- c. Be open to feedback and criticism.

If you have any questions as you engage in this process, contact Mike Steklof, Ed.D., Director of Jewish Experience at [mike@buffalojewishfederation.org](mailto:mike@buffalojewishfederation.org).