CULTURE OF BELONGING TOOLKIT
LET’S BUILD A CULTURE OF BELONGING

We all yearn for connection and a sense that we matter...

People access our rich Jewish tradition and wisdom best through relationships and community – by being seen, asked, heard and invited to explore and co-create their own meaningful, relevant Jewish path. They need to feel that they belong and are valued, no matter their background or circumstances.

Belonging rarely happens by chance. It requires a shift in the way Jewish life is offered from delivering programs and services, to designing for human connection in order for people to explore Jewish content, feel seen, and be heard in Jewish spaces.

This digital toolkit helps you design new ways to create connection, purpose, and meaning through Jewish life, offering proven ideas and frameworks to bond groups more deeply in your boardrooms, classrooms, sanctuaries, staff meetings, lobbies, galas – wherever people gather to do Jewish.

Building a culture of belonging is one of the strategies at the core of the Federation’s Engagement Initiative seeking to expand the opportunities and pathways for youth, young adults, and families with young children, to experience Jewish life in relationship with others.
The Federation’s Culture of Belonging practice rests on 10 principles:

1. **Start with belonging as a goal.** Design anything from meetings and events to job descriptions with the intention to increase belonging, connection, and trust.

2. **Build structured practices** into group activities. Don’t rely on random chance or a friendly person to ensure that everyone feels included. Instead agree on group practices that define how we meet, celebrate, and take care of each other.

3. **Establish rituals** that build confidence and group identity through repeated, shared customs.

4. **Define common purpose** so each person plays a role in shaping and sustaining the group’s larger mission.

5. **Prioritize face-to-face interaction.** Meeting in person enables multi-dimensional connection that can’t be replicated through technology.

6. **Create fixed small groups** that gather regularly and help individuals connect to each other and the larger organization on a deeper level.

7. **Encourage multi-dimensional sharing and doing.** Structure activities for people to get to know each other on multiple levels and experience different aspects of life together.

8. **Focus on assets over needs.** Ask “what does each person have to offer?” and give each a role to play, based on their unique talents, identities, and contributions.

9. **Shift from delivering services to inviting ownership** by treating people as partners rather than customers.

10. **Cultivate group identity and pride.** Explore ways to express the group’s uniqueness. By creating a sense of pride and celebrating milestones.

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What is a Belonging Goal?

A belonging goal is a specific goal focused on designing events and programs more intentionally to ensure that a sense of belonging occurs. Setting the goal is an important and sometimes difficult step in the design process. The first of our Culture of Belonging Principles is to always start with belonging as a goal.

Start by intentionally designing gatherings to generate authentic, meaningful connections for more people. Set specific, observable, or measurable goals for your event or program and measure: not how many people attend, but who attends, how they interact with one another and the quality of those interactions (authentic rather than superficial), what they do with those connections, is it a one-time meeting or a new relationship (follow-up).

Ask yourself: What do we want participants to feel, know or do as a result of showing up?

What are the underlying assumptions that we have when we set belonging goals?

- **People want to feel that their presence matters.** It is not the logistics or decorations that move people or make them feel they belong (although these definitely can be designed to contribute to the sense of belonging), but instead, it’s how people feel, that their presence truly matters.

- **Being remembered and seen goes a long way to building a culture of connection and belonging.** Never underestimate the powerful effect of remembering others – being remembered builds trust, and is a sign that someone else sees us as valued individuals whose presence matters.
Of course, those present need to be acknowledged, but no less important is acknowledging those who aren’t present. People need to know that their absence is noted and they are missed. Setting a regular practice of connecting with people who couldn’t be there sends a powerful message throughout the group that each person, present or not, matters.

When people feel seen and heard they value the space they are in and contribute to it. Assuming people will just make their own connections when thrown in a room can backfire and undermine a sense of community. When people have a structured opportunity to be heard, they are more likely to feel they belong and are part of something.

What types of Belonging Goals are there?

When you set Belonging Goals, clarify what you are trying to achieve and what will success look like.

Types of Belonging Goals include how people:

- Connect with each other
- Contribute/help lead
- Feel they matter and belong
- Feel valued/seen for their unique assets

How can you achieve your Belonging Goals?

- Structure the chairs in the room in a way that promotes connection – where everyone sees each other or sits around small round tables, or perhaps get rid of the tables altogether.
- Eliminate random seating at luncheons/dinners – assigned seating is an opportunity to help people make new connections.
- Regularly open up with a “Shacharit” prompt to deepen acquaintance and enable others to learn something meaningful about someone else (see Shacharit and Arvit Guide).
- Have people work in small groups to enable connection and an opportunity to talk.
- Ask others to take part in the design and leadership of an event or program; set up committees in which people can contribute their time and skills.
- Incorporate activities that identify similarities and encourage deeper connection.
- Support staff and volunteers to identify and encourage guests to connect.
- Recognize first-time participants or significant events that have happened in people’s lives.

This practice is a mindset shift that requires building new habits, discipline, and skills. It’s like putting on “belonging glasses,” once you wear them, nothing will look the same again.

What are some examples of Belonging Goals?

- Increase the number of participants involved in the design and planning of the event
- Each participant has at least one opportunity to share or speak up during the meeting
- Every participant makes at least one new connection
- Participants learn something meaningful or personal about someone else
- Participants are recognized for their unique selves
- Participants return and bring their friends
THE OPENING AND CLOSING RITUALS OF A GATHERING – SHACHARIT AND ARVIT

What are Shacharit and Arvit?

In Judaism, Shacharit refers to the first prayer of the day, from the Hebrew “Shachar” or dawn. We borrowed the term Shacharit to refer to the opening prompt or exercise of a gathering that enables sharing and supports the goals of the meeting.

Arvit is the evening prayer from the Hebrew “Erev” or evening. Likewise, Arvit refers to a moment of connection at the end of the gathering that brings participants back to the larger shared purpose of the group. This closing ritual ensures that the meeting leaves everyone feeling more connected to each other and the purpose of the group.

Together, Shacharit and Arvit are the bonding and connecting “bookends” for any gathering, intended as a regular practice for groups that come together one time or repeatedly.

Building trust, shared purpose and group identity

The goals of a Shacharit activity are to build trust, to create connections among the participants and on an interpersonal level allowing for each person to be seen and known in a multi-dimensional way (i.e. I am not only a Marketing Manager, but also an avid hiker). Arvit ensures that the meeting leaves everyone feeling more connected to each other and the purpose of the group.
Designing Shacharit and Arvit Rituals

Shacharit is a simple prompt question, asked at the beginning of a gathering, that invites personal sharing related to the goals or context of the gathering. Shacharit and Arvit are best used for groups that meet repeatedly as a bonding ritual to build trust, safety and a higher common purpose. However, they can also be incorporated into stand-alone events to cultivate connection.

To decide whether and how to use Shacharit and Arvit, it’s important to articulate clear goals for your gathering (more on this can be found in our tool for Transformative Meetings).

Ask yourself:
• What do you need to accomplish?
• Who will be there and what do you want people to experience and do?
• What’s the culture and purpose of this group?
• What would success look like?

Depending on the size of the group and timing, this can be done in the full group, small groups or pairs. You may want to give a minute for people to think and jot down their thoughts before opening up for sharing so they can actively listen.

What are the key principles of a Shacharit?

Choose topics and activities that fit the group
• Keep in mind the size, previous acquaintance and your goals.
• For example, if people don’t know each other well or you’re in a formal work setting, choose less personal topics; if it’s a bonded group that has built trust over time, you can go deeper.

Connect to the topic of the meeting or event:
• Services for seniors, you might ask participants to talk about an older person who inspired them.
• Building a work plan, ask for one thing you are excited about for the coming year.

Focus on something larger going on in the organization (changes, big launch, etc.):
• Challenges in internal communication, ask them to think of an excellent communicator and share why they are so effective.
• Building relationships with donors, you might ask participants to share a significant relationship they had with a donor.
• Survey results, you might ask, if you had a magic wand and could change anything in the organization, what would it be?

Create a prompt that encourages a deeper acquaintance (assuming that supports the goal of the meeting).
• What’s rocking your world this month? What do you give a damn about? Can you share one thing about you that no one here knows?

What’s your happy place? Share a picture (from your phone) of a moment that brings you joy?

Relate to the time of year (big event, an upcoming holiday, season, etc.):
• Before Rosh Hashana / New Years – something you are happy to leave behind for the year, something you look forward to next year.

Delegate ownership – involve group members in designing and leading these rituals.

Additional Shacharit prompts...
• Share a time when you felt you didn’t belong, felt excluded or just different.
• What’s the best lesson you’ve ever been taught and by whom?
• Who can you call when you need encouragement?
• Describe a moment of kindness.
• Describe an experience of loss that left you changed. How are you different as a result?
• What do you dream for your community?
• When did you feel most free in your life, and most constrained?
• What would your best friend say about who you are and what makes you tick?

Sometimes structured activities can set a more playful, energetic tone – for example asking people to stand up, step in or stand along a line to identify common characteristics or differences along a spectrum; inviting small groups to find one thing they have in common; or moving around a room to find new partners to answer a prompt together.
What are the key principles of Arvit?

Arvit should be simpler and shorter than Shacharit – the goal is to give space at the end for participants to reflect on and hear each others’ personal responses to the group and gathering. A quick go-around in just one minute can unify and connect the group before departing. For example, ask for one word or a short sentence in response to a question like:

- One thing I’m taking away from today
- I now know… I now feel...
- An “aha” moment. Something I will do differently from now on
- Thank one person who changed your thinking today

Most people find setting aside time for these activities pays off immediately and over time. Shacharit and Arvit should be calibrated and designed for the goals and culture of your group (see below) and for this reason they are different from simple “ice breakers.” They don’t just “warm up” a group before moving to the real purpose, they further the purpose of the group.

Not everyone will be comfortable with Shacharit and Arvit activities – and that’s ok. You can and should take people a little (but not too far) beyond their habits and comfort zones to build trust and openness.
A GUIDE TO TRANSFORMATIVE MEETINGS

What are transformative meetings?
Transformative meetings are designed to help people feel valued and part of a larger goal; to build mutual trust and strengthen relationships; and to encourage openness and feedback. They increase creativity, risk-taking, ownership, efficiency, and effective teamwork.

- How does one lead transformative meetings?
- How can we make people feel seen and heard during meetings?
- How can we get more out of meetings and better achieve our goals?

What to consider before a meeting.
Articulate clear and specific goals—including both work outcomes and belonging goals. What would a successful meeting look like? What do we need to accomplish? What do we want people to feel, know, or do as a result? “Belonging” goals relate to people’s relationship to each other and the group.

For example: “Everyone will make a meaningful new connection, have an opportunity to contribute to the discussion, be valued for their unique skills, or be able to step up and help lead.” Once defined, design the meeting by not just listing topics, but rather format for each agenda item to accomplish the meeting goals.
Establish rituals. Keep recurring meetings at a fixed time, structure and length. Try not to move the meeting—regular meetings create a feeling of safety for group members. Furthermore, embed rituals into meetings.

Examples of meeting rituals: birthday celebrations, opening and closing activities, and other group-led “traditions.”

Choose participants carefully. Make sure the people who attend the meeting are the “necessary” people. The better you define who needs to be at the meeting, the more likely they will feel they belong and are needed there.

Design the “setting.” Decide on room set-up to support the goal of the meeting, determine the best time of day, and identify ground rules. All these affect the outcome of the meeting.

During a meeting

Cultivate ownership by inviting participants to play a role at the meeting based on their unique skills and traits, encouraging them to plan and/or lead different parts of the meeting.

Find the balance between the agenda and the immediate, unplanned issues that arise.

Encourage interaction by structuring opportunities for people to share with each other or play a role during meetings to build connections and ensure that participants feel heard and valued; include opportunities for building relationships and trust.

Let others talk, practice active listening, reflect on what’s said, make connections and build on comments.

Don’t end on a logistical note. End by bringing people back to reflecting and sharing. Keep the momentum going. Make sure that action items are clear and agreed upon. And of course, use humor and laugh often!

After a meeting

Summarize and share outcomes. Send a summary after meetings to ensure that everyone is on the same page and next steps are clear. Remember to include everyone, as well as those who had to leave early or could not attend.

Making people feel valued during a meeting is also your goal!

Involve others:
- Invite people to lead different parts of the meetings
- Share ownership
- Fewer updates and presentations, much more sharing, reflecting, problem solving

Acknowledge that what people say matters:
- Make eye contact
- Listen attentively
- Acknowledge ideas (even if you don’t adopt them)
- Give credit to those who deserve it

Create a safe space for the group by being vulnerable yourself and leading by example.

Honor people’s presence even when they are absent:
- Put a chair out for them
- Share with others where they are (if it’s not confidential)
- Establish a practice of inviting participants to reach out to someone who was absent to let them know they were missed and bring them up to speed
- Acknowledge their presence when they return

Create strong shared experiences that build connections and trust.

Other opportunities for sharing such as breakout sessions; work in pairs or small groups.
Results

Participants feeling that they matter

An opportunity to create bonds and connection

Strengthen community and team identity

Improved outcomes
What is a Culture of Belonging Makeover?

A culture of belonging makeover is a structured process for groups to analyze a challenge, design creative solutions, and reflect on existing programs or processes using a Culture of Belonging lens. For example, we might harness the power of the group through this process to explore how might we:

- Reach new people?
- Engage more families?
- Design a gathering for a more meaningful experience?
- Encourage people to come back, stay or bring others?
- Build a more cohesive, effective team or board?

Why conduct a makeover?

This process enables the group to:

- Think more deeply about a dilemma or opportunity, challenge their assumptions, and rethink some aspect of their practices.
- Contribute and influence the outcomes of any situation.
- Gain multiple perspectives while using a structured format.
How to conduct a makeover - step by step guide

Makeovers work best in small groups of 3-5 people, with one facilitator to lead and time the process. The specific structure can be adapted or simplified, but it must follow a strictly timed format with clear instructions for each component. One group member is the presenter, bringing a carefully framed challenge or question for the group to work on—the more specific the better. The presenter should consider what they hope to gain from the process, and how to define the issue and context.

1. Presenter shares the question, challenge or opportunity (5 min)
   - What is the current situation? What is the desired outcome?
   - What is preventing you from getting there?
   - How is it impacting the organization?
   - Why is this an issue? Who is involved?

2. The group asks clarifying questions and gives brief/factual answers (4 min)
   - Is this what you said...? Did I hear you say...?
   - Did I understand you when you said...?
   - Did I paraphrase what you said correctly?
   - If you’d give me an example of... so I can be sure I understand?
   - So, are you suggesting that...? Tell me what you mean when you say...
   - Tell me how that idea is like/different from...

3. The group asks powerful questions to clarify and expands the thinking about the issue (6 min)
   - Why do you think this is the case?
   - What would you have to change in order for...?
   - What do you feel is right in your heart?
   - What do you wish...?
   - What is another way you might...?
   - How was... different from...?
   - When have you done/experienced something like this before? What happened then?
   - What do you assume to be true about...?
   - Why is this a dilemma for you?
   - How might your assumptions about... have influenced how you are thinking about...?
   - What if time, money, etc. were not an issue?
   - Who (else) could help you with this? How? Why?
   - What is the best outcome in this situation?

4. Discussion – group with the presenter listening but not speaking, talks about the challenge and REFRAINS from solutions! (7 min)
   - What did we hear that might be relevant?
   - What assumptions seem to be operating?
   - What questions does the challenge raise for us?
   - What do we think about the challenge?
   - What might we do or try if faced with a similar issue? What have we done in similar situations?

5. Suggestions and reflections – group offers ideas to try; presenter listens and takes notes but doesn’t speak or respond (6 min)

6. Presenter summarizes and reflects on what they heard, what they might adopt (4 min)

7. Group shares: How is this relevant to me? Each one shares from his/her own experiences (7 min)

Things to keep in mind:
- The question you present and are trying to solve should be very clear.
- Keep an open mind—refrain from judgments or speculations of any kind.
- Make sure everyone’s voice is heard—it’s easy for a few people to dominate.
- Listen with intent. Remain in a listening mode.
- Don’t jump to the solutions. Take time to understand the question and assumptions.
CUSTOMER TO PARTNER CONTINUUM ASSESSMENT TOOL

From Transactional to Transformative

What is the Customer to Partner Tool?
A core principle of Culture of Belonging is shifting from customer to owner/partner, from a service delivery, transactional model to a participant-owned and led culture. This assessment was designed to help you assess if your organization has a transactional relationship with its constituents, or is truly engaged with people as partners.

Why use this assessment?
We all work hard at running welcoming, inclusive places, but many of the challenges organizations experience stem from constituents feeling like customers rather than equal owners despite our best intentions. Culture of Belonging offers concrete tools to shift that dynamic, but first, we have to assess where our organizations are falling short and where they are succeeding in building partner relationships.

When should one use this assessment?
This assessment can be used when rethinking an existing program or meeting or designing a new one. This assessment can also be used to generate an organizational discussion about shifting to a Culture of Belonging and identifying areas to work on.

How to use this assessment?
• Decide on what you are assessing: The organization? A specific event? Or a meeting?
• Review the 8 questions below. For each question:
  o Assess where the organization, event or meeting is on the continuum and ask yourselves why this is.
  o Assess where the organization, event or meeting should be on the continuum and think and discuss what might support this shift.
Customer to Partner Continuum – Assessment Tool

The organization / event / meeting that you are evaluating: ________________________________________

We focus on the needs/wants of our constituents and tailor solutions to those needs/wants.  

We build on the unique assets that each person brings so that each can contribute and play a role.

Customer  

Partner

We strive to deliver excellent content/service to ensure people get their money’s worth and stay or come back.

People stay and come back because they feel a sense of ownership and help drive the content with us.

Customer  

Partner

We continuously recruit volunteers and assign them tasks based on what needs to be done.

We understand the assets of our community and invite people to contribute based on their unique strengths and skills.

Customer  

Partner

We rarely use volunteers.

Volunteers are deeply engaged and empowered by professionals to play an active role in the organization.

Customer  

Partner
We achieve our goals (enrollment, membership, fundraising, etc.) by devoting significant resources to marketing, selling and recruiting.

We achieve our goals (enrollment, membership, fundraising, etc) by strengthening the networks between people (social capital) and building belonging.

We measure success by attendance numbers and satisfaction surveys.

We measure success by new relationships formed, people bringing others, increased retention, and willingness to take ownership.

We have a culture of complaining; people demand that we solve their problems, or they vote with their feet and leave.

People see themselves as part of the solution and take responsibility for solving problems. Stronger relationships result in less complaining.

Activities are initiated from the top down (by professionals, or a small leadership group) with few opportunities for meaningful involvement.

People are included in authentic, meaningful ways at all phases of planning so they feel valued and invested.
What is Asset Mapping?

Asset Mapping is a tool that builds on the positive attributes of groups and their members by identifying the strengths that each individual brings to the whole. Mapping those strengths builds a stronger sense of community and belonging, encourages collaboration, and fosters more effective teamwork. Emphasizing assets instead of needs shifts the focus from transactional relationships, services, or programs to shared ownership.

Mapping can

• Make it easier to build upon existing assets to strengthen the group.
• Reveal the aggregated skills, strengths, and gaps of an entire team or community.
• Highlight the interconnections among its members

Why use Asset Mapping?

Within a team or organization:

• To promote understanding of diversity.
• To clarify roles and responsibilities.
• To define and identify strengths and gaps in the team’s abilities and what it has to offer as well as indicate the multiple relationships between organizations, etc.
• To deepen connection and build trust amongst team members.
• To understand and value each member’s unique gifts and draw on those assets to advance the team’s goals and support each other.
• To show interconnectedness across groups, (for example: when engaging in collaborative projects or dividing up responsibilities between groups)
Mapping Individual Assets - Step by Step

Before you start:

- Define your goal – why are you doing this and what do you hope to achieve by conducting this process?
- Define who or what are you mapping:
  - Individuals
  - Teams
- Define what you want to do with the information collected
  - Improve collaboration
  - Define roles and responsibilities
  - Allocate resources for greatest impact
  - Identify what assets you are missing
  - Encourage individuals to help each other or ask for help

The process itself:

1. On individual sticky notes, have each person in the group write down their assets (you can color code the sticky notes):
   a. Knowledge
   b. Skills
   c. Unique experiences

2. Based on the identified assets and the goals of the session, ask each participant to share:
   a. What they might be able to contribute to the team
   b. What knowledge or skill they might be missing and would like to acquire
   c. What essential skills/knowledge are needed for individual or team success

3. On a flip chart, post the sticky notes in five groups: knowledge, skills, unique experiences, what you can contribute, what you are seeking. As sticky notes are posted, the facilitator can group similar answers together.

4. Ask:
   a. What stands out most to you? Are there any surprises?
   b. What are you curious about? Where do you want to dive deeper?
   c. What are our team strengths? What might we be missing?
   d. How might we use this information (specific plans and steps related to the initial goal)?

Individual Assets

AN ASSET – is anything that improves the quality of a team or organizational life. For our purposes we will categorize and map assets according to the following:

KNOWLEDGE – a field or subject area that you have expertise or knowledge in (i.e. local Jewish history, the admissions process at a school, etc…)

SKILL – A skill used in your current role, or something you do often that you excel in (i.e. fundraising, grant writing, marketing, relationship building)

SPECIAL EXPERIENCE OR TALENT – A personal experience or ability not obviously connected to your role, but which may enhance your participation on the team (i.e. you lived in Israel, attended Jewish camp for many years, you bake challah, etc…)
Mapping Community Assets – Step by Step

When we focus on community assets (what we have), vs. our needs (what is missing), we are able to make connections between different parts of the community or organization, rather than provide services; create partnerships, rather than customer relationships; and ensure that people, not programs, are the solution to our challenges.

There are times when we want to map the strengths of an organization or network, not just the assets of the individuals that comprise a group. There are several reasons to do this:

- To clarify roles and build collaboration.
- To engage multiple actors and resources to address community-wide challenges.
- To build resilience in responding to change.

Before you start:

Define and share your goal – why are you doing this and what do you want to get out of it?

The process itself:

1. Divide into smaller groups (2-5 people)
2. Hand out large sticky notes and markers
3. Ask each participant to generate a list of the organization’s assets (you may want to have each small group focus on different types of assets: physical, organizational, social, etc.) and write each asset on a different sticky note.
4. Each participant shares with their group the assets they came up with, and the group discusses the assets and adds any others.
5. Each small group populates their section of a community map
6. All the participants come together to look at the map that was formed and asks themselves:
   a. What stands out most to you?
   b. Are there any surprises?
   c. What are you curious about? Where do you want to dive deeper?
   d. What are our strengths? What might we be missing?
   e. How might we use this information (specific plans and steps related to the initial goal)?
   f. How can the map help us position ourselves within the community?

Organizational Assets

In mapping the assets and resources of an organization or ecosystem (for example a single synagogue or network of Jewish social service agencies), we may look at these categories:

- **PHYSICAL CAPITAL** – financial resources, buildings, infrastructures and environment
- **ORGANIZATIONAL CAPITAL** – group culture, values and traditions
- **HUMAN CAPITAL** – skills, knowledge, and qualifications aggregated across all members
- **SOCIAL CAPITAL** – interpersonal relationships and the extent to which they are leveraged
Asset Map – School Example

Goal/Central question: How might we attract potential new students?

There are many ways to map out community assets, here is just one example (of a school):

- **Other assets**
  - Tzedaka Project
  - School trips
  - Our Purim celebration
  - End of year ceremony

- **Physical capital**
  - Our building
  - The playground
  - The vegetable garden

- **Organizational capital**
  - Diverse
  - Openness
  - Creative
  - Respect each individual
  - Make everyone feel they belong

- **Social capital**
  - Parent – teachers
  - Teacher – teachers
  - Teacher – students
  - Staff – parents
  - Future students
  - Alumni
  - PTO
  - Board

- **Human capital**
  - Hebrew program
  - Accreditation