

WE PLANT SEEDS



*A How-to Guide for Effective Jewish
Service-learning Programs*

Brought to you by Repair the World, in partnership
with AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps



MODULE 2

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

In the first module, we discussed how to plan an effective service project, which is the first element of effective facilitation. This module will explore other aspects of effective facilitation for service projects including building strong teams, general facilitation guidelines and some facilitation tips specific to the subject matter included in this guide. The module includes:

- I. Building Strong Volunteer Teams
- II. General Facilitation Tips
- III. Facilitation Tips for Difficult Conversations

I. BUILDING STRONG VOLUNTEER TEAMS

When groups of volunteers feel comfortable with one another and have developed a sense of trust, they not only serve more effectively, but they also are willing to go deeper in learning and reflecting on their experiences. Community building is essential to create strong volunteer teams. Initially, community building should focus on “breaking the ice” and allowing the group to begin to share themselves and their stories with one another. Some activities that can be used to encourage this are:

A. JEWISH AND SERVICE JOURNEY MAPPING

Purpose:

To help participants build connection and trust with one another and a deeper understanding of themselves by articulating their life journeys as they relate to Judaism and service.

Overview:

This activity is facilitated in two parts - first participants individually draw their journey based on prompts that are given, then they articulate their journey to others.

Materials Needed:

- chart paper or white 8 ½ x 11 paper
- markers, crayons and/or colored pencils
- write questions (below) on chart paper prior to session

Length of Activity:

60-90 minutes

Procedure:

1. Drawing (20 minutes)

Provide participants with a piece of paper - can be large chart paper or 8 ½ x 11 white paper - and ask them to find a comfortable spot. Ask them to close their eyes and think for a minute about their Jewish journey as well as their volunteer/service journey. Ask them to think about the following questions (and also post them on the wall):

- Did Judaism play a role for you as a child? In your family of origin? Did this

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- change over time? What about service and volunteering?
- With which Jewish organizations have you been involved? When? What about service/volunteer organizations?
 - What have been your most formative Jewish experiences? What have been your most formative experiences related to service and volunteering?
 - Have you had moments of disconnection or doubt Jewishly or in terms of service/volunteering? When were these and did anything in particular lead to them?
 - Do you have or have you had any spiritual practices? When and what are/were they?
 - Do you have any regular service or volunteering commitments? Have you at any point?
 - Do you or have you had a connection to a higher power/God? Has this changed over time?
 - Who are the people who most influenced your thinking about Judaism? About service? About the intersection between the two?

Note: It may be helpful to provide participants with scrap paper to organize their thoughts in response to these questions before they begin mapping their journeys.

Using a river as a metaphor for the journey, ask participants to take 15 minutes to illustrate their Jewish path and their service path, letting them know that they'll be asked to share their illustration with the group. Pose these questions as a guide:

- What is the source of that river?
- What course has the river taken?
- What were the tributaries, the turns it took and followed, and the turns it took and then went in another direction? The rocky patches? Where was there smooth sailing?
- Are your Jewish and service journeys separate rivers or not? If they're separate, do they intersect at some point(s)?

2. Sharing (20-70 minutes - depending on the size of the group)

Once participants have finished illustrating their journeys, ask participants to briefly articulate what they drew. This can be done in pairs, small groups, or the whole group depending on the size of your group and the time you have available.

B. STEP IN/STEP OUT

Purpose:

To help participants build connection and trust with one another by identifying shared experiences within the group.

Overview:

This activity is facilitated in two parts - first the group does the activity, then they debrief it.

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Materials Needed:

- “Potential Statements for Step In/Step Out Activity” (see Appendix A) or your own list

Length of Activity:

20 minutes

Procedure:**1. Step In/Step Out Activity (15 min)**

Ask participants to stand in a circle. Tell participants that you'll be reading a list of statements to them. If the statement applies to them, they should take a large step into the circle. If it does not apply to them, they should stay where they are. After participants step in for each statement, group members should look around at who stepped in and who didn't. The facilitator can decide whether or not to ask participants who stepped in to share further details about each statement. For potential statements, see Appendix A.

2. Debrief (5 min)

Once you have completed all the desired prompts, ask the group to reflect on anything they noticed during the activity that they found interesting or that surprised them.

C. SPEED DATING

Purpose:

To help participants build connection and trust with one another by sharing answers to thought-provoking questions with one another.

Overview:

This is a one-part activity that is best done when there is ample space to form lines or a circle.

Materials Needed:

- List of questions for participants

Length of Activity:

15-45 minutes depending on number of questions

Procedure:**A. Speed Dating Round (15-45 minutes)**

Ask participants to stand in two lines facing one another or in two concentric circles with the inside circle facing the outside one. Tell participants that they'll be answering a series of questions with a series of partners to help them start to get to know one another and build relationships. One person from each pair should take 30-60 seconds to answer a question and then their partner should answer that same question. Once both partners have answered, then one line or one circle should move one space to their right so that everyone has a new partner.

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You can create your own set of questions, depending on the needs of your group. Some questions you could include are:

- Which social issue do you find yourself most passionate about? (Whether you currently do work relating to it or not.)
- Share a moment in your life that you realized that service or social justice was important to you.
- What is a hope you have for the service work we'll be doing together?
- What is a blessing in your life?
- Share a little about a memorable service experience you've had.
- Who's someone you especially admire for their service or social justice work?

D. CLOSING ACTIVITY: EXPECTATIONS AND QUESTIONS

Purpose:

This short activity can be used at the conclusion of a session to help group members learn more about each other's expectations, questions and motivations.

Overview:

This is a one-part activity completed as a group.

Materials Needed:

None

Length of Activity:

10 - 15 minutes

Procedure:

A. Close a session by posing one or more of the following questions to the group and facilitating a short group discussion:

- What are your expectations for this volunteer experience?
- Why have you come here to volunteer? Why volunteer (in general)?
- Are you nervous about anything?
- How does this experience connect with who you are as a Jew? As a human being?
- What questions do you have that you hope to answer through this learning experience?

II. GENERAL FACILITATION TIPS

Quality facilitation is key to the success of the learning components of service learning opportunities. Here are fifteen tips for effective facilitation¹:

- **GUIDE, DON'T "TEACH"** - The best facilitation is where everyone (including the facilitator) learns from one another. Facilitation differs from typical lecturer/student dynamics. The facilitator serves as a guide for participants and helps participants find value and truth in their own experiences and ideas. They do not act as the

1 Adapted from: Write Around Portland Volunteer Facilitator Handbook (www.writearound.org)

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arbiter of truth and value. Participants may naturally, however, look at you as an “expert”; one way to deflect this is to re-engage them in the conversation with a question back: “I’m not sure. What do you think?”

- **BRING POSITIVE ENERGY** - Bring a positive attitude and energy to the group. The role of the facilitator is to influence the ups and downs of the group. Positive energy can be the spark that shifts participants’ attitudes and lift spirits. Give yourself time to collect your energy before walking into a room to facilitate. It is important to start each session with positive energy and approach each challenge (the bad moods of participants or even your own bad mood) as, at worst, “a wonderful chance for us to get to know each other better.”
- **BE ATTUNED TO THE GROUP’S ENERGY** - Group energy ebbs and flows. This is part of the process – nothing to take personally. If you see group energy ebbing, you may want to consider explicitly articulating that observation and either taking a break, asking participants to get up and move around, or doing something else to address it.
- **PARTICIPATE ACTIVELY** - Be present as a person and as an active thinker/co-worker. Your enthusiasm for and experiences with your subject are some of the greatest assets you can bring to facilitation. Facilitators model participants’ involvement in the group process and the subject by becoming involved themselves. Remember that you are a participant in the group as well.
- **EXTEND YOUR COMFORT ZONE** - Model taking risks in what you say and how you interact. Often as a facilitator you will ask participants to go outside their comfort zones; it is also okay for you to go outside your comfort zone. Participants will continually look to you for clues about how to act and respond; model that taking risks and thinking deeply is okay. Acknowledge that it’s okay to stammer a bit as you try to get a new idea out; or to get confused and only get half an idea out – it’s all part of learning. Sometimes taking a risk ends up falling flat. That’s okay. Sometimes it will pay off hugely. This is what makes group work so dynamic and creative.
- **MAINTAIN APPROPRIATE BOUNDARIES** - While going beyond the comfort zone, it is also important to maintain appropriate boundaries for group participants. An aspect of this is to not reveal especially personal or intimate knowledge about yourself, nor to ask this of participants. This helps to maintain a professional and appropriate boundary that does not put excessive attention on one participant above all others.
- **ORGANIZE AND COMMUNICATE THE SESSION STRUCTURE** - Give the session an easy flow and a clear structure. Share this with participants by reviewing the agenda at the beginning of the session. Participants will feel more comfortable if it is clear how one concept, exercise or session builds on another. Structure provides a space for creativity, as long as the structure is flexible enough to flow with the dynamics of the group. At the very least, try to end each session (or round of discussions) with the key points and connect these to earlier discussions as applicable.

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- **PREPARE SESSIONS IN ADVANCE** - In addition to preparing the structure and flow of a session, think about how you are going to explain something before you explain it. Find your balance between over-preparation and lack of preparation. Know yourself and what level of preparation you need to invest to be effective. People respond to clarity and preparation: if they see it matters enough to you to have put thought and attention into the session, it is important enough for them to participate in a serious way. Try to avoid over-preparation to the extent that it feels like reading a script which allows no space for discussion, deviation, or creativity. Participants will pick up on that as well.
- **COMMUNICATE PLANS AND EXPECTATIONS** - Explain why you are doing what you are doing. A key measure of successful facilitation is whether or not people feel ownership in the group. One way to achieve this is to clearly explain why you are doing what you are doing when you do it. If you need to cut feedback short, explain why. If you want to change the agenda, explain why. If you need an extra five minutes, explain why. This is one key way of making people feel safe and comfortable in the session.
- **ADAPT TO THE GROUP'S NEEDS** - Roll with what participants tell you. Come with an agenda and be prepared to adapt it or change it, depending on the needs or interests of the group, or the dynamics of the particular session. If it feels like you are struggling to pull the discussion in a particular way, then you may need to let the group go in the direction it is excited to go. Find ways to adapt the goals of your session to where the conversation is evolving. Develop multiple ideas for getting at the same point; this can be a “toolkit” to fall back on when one approach doesn't work.
- **DON'T PLAY FAVORITES** - Attention should be spread evenly around. Just as we discourage participants from seeing the facilitator as some kind of special expert, good facilitators also do not raise one group or participant above others. Spread the discussion and praise around. Note: It's natural to have favorites, but it is critical that everyone feels valued, heard and respected.
- **MANAGE TALK TIME** - Everyone appreciates and deserves to be listened to in a respectful way. Some people don't realize that their talking is taking time away from others, or from other activities that are planned. One of your roles as a facilitator is to redirect the conversation when necessary. This may mean interrupting someone, which can be hard to do. When you do need to cut someone off try to balance firmness and respect. Firm – because subtlety is lost on some people, especially when they have gained a full head of conversational steam – but always come at it from a respectful place. You can make it clear that you value what the person is saying, but that because of time constraints we need to move on.
- **USE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE** - Language is important. Even with the best intentions we may inadvertently exclude or hurt people with our language. If you use a word everyone in the room may not know, explain it. Avoid jargon, or explain it as you go along so everyone is included. Acknowledging that everyone may not know a word or acronym can put others at ease for not knowing it. Facilitators

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must watch their own use of language (e.g. swearing or references to others), and should not tolerate hateful language from anyone.

- **DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS** - Never assume that everyone in the session can read or is comfortable doing so aloud. When asking for participants to read or role play, ask for volunteers. Always read instructions out loud.
- **CREATE A RESPECTFUL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT** - Respecting and learning from participants' differences builds community. Many participants come from different races, socioeconomic classes, education levels, political persuasions, etc. Sometimes there is a tendency to think that everyone thinks and feels the same; on the opposite extreme there is sometimes a tendency to only showcase our differences and separate ourselves. Facilitators should create a respectful atmosphere where people can be honest, and explore their differences, discover their similarities, and take the time to listen, reflect and truly attempt to understand. This builds trust within the group.

III. FACILITATION TIPS FOR DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

During the volunteer experience we often interact with communities that are and have been oppressed in some way. These communities wrestle daily with the impacts of racism, poverty and injustice. Therefore, some of the topics covered in this toolkit can lead to conversations that maybe be complicated and emotional for participants. Beyond the general facilitation tips above, here are some tips particularly for facilitating conversations on difficult topics like race, inequality, poverty, etc.:

- **SET GROUP GROUND RULES.** Collectively, decide on a set of rules for your discussion. These rules can be general, such as “whatever is said in this room, stays in this room” and can also include more specific rules, such as “whoever holds the spoon speaks,” or “if you agree, wave jazz hands.”
- **FACILITATE STRONGLY** - In conversations like these, it's important that the facilitator takes an active role in supporting the conversation and keeps participants accountable to any ground rules that have been set.
- **ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THIS MIGHT BE UNCOMFORTABLE FOR YOUR PARTICIPANTS TO TALK ABOUT** - These issues can be the elephant in the room, but in many cases, it helps to say out loud what others are feeling: “I know we don't usually talk about these issues, and it might make you or others feel uncomfortable, and that's ok.”
- **DO NOT TOKENIZE PEOPLE.** Individuals can only speak to their own experiences, and it puts unfair pressure on your participants to ask them to represent their cultural identity. Do not look to others to speak on behalf of their race, gender, ethnicity or other group - and intervene if participants are tokenizing one another.

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- **ENSURE THAT EVERYONE WHO WANTS TO GETS A CHANCE TO SPEAK.** Very frequently, individuals who are most comfortable expressing their opinions can dominate conversations like these. Being verbal about one's opinions isn't necessarily an indicator of how strong those opinions are. Make sure that you respectfully ask for the opinions of others if a few voices begin to dominate the conversation.
- **BE RESPECTFUL OF INTROVERTS – AND OF SILENCE.** Make sure you are noticing who is not speaking. Encourage those individuals to contribute, but do not force them. Similarly, if the conversation reaches a point of silence, do not push people to speak. Be respectful of reflection.

If the conversation becomes tense, some tips are:

- **APPROACH OFFENSIVE COMMENTS WITH A POSTURE OF CURIOSITY.** While some opinions are commonly accepted as “right” or “appropriate,” it is unproductive to cast someone's statements or beliefs as “wrong.” Instead, if a comment is not sitting well with you or the group, ask the person who made it to share more of their thinking behind their statement.
- **IF YOU'RE OFFENDED, SHARE – DON'T BLAME.** Ignorance is not animosity. American culture is steeped in racism and unjust attitudes and all of us are exposed to and internalize those unconsciously. While we all have an obligation to deepen our awareness and act against injustice, we also need to acknowledge for ourselves and others that any beliefs that we may have that are unfair or unjust are a motivation for learning not for guilt or criticism. Use the “I felt...when you...” format to discuss how their statement was perceived by you personally. For example, you could say, “I felt offended when you said that your grandfather worked himself into the middle class, and therefore anyone could achieve the American dream if they tried hard enough. I felt that you might not have thought about the impact of institutional racism on the outcomes of immigrant families and people of color.”
- **TRY NOT TO USE CHARGED LANGUAGE SUCH AS “BIGOT” OR “RACIST.”** If someone says something offensive, respond to them by focusing on their words - i.e. what they said was offensive - not who they are - i.e. they are racist. Calling someone a racist is one surefire way to make the situation a lot worse. Use the opportunity to educate.
- **PROVIDE CONTEXT.** Even though it's difficult, try to explain why you believe what you believe. Provide examples, facts, and stories to illuminate your opinions, and encourage others to do the same.

Despite the progress that has been made, there are still many misperceptions about race, racism, poverty and injustice. Here's a list of some of the most common, and some tips on how to handle them if they come up:

- **“RACE/POVERTY/INJUSTICE IS A FACT OF LIFE.”** Race is actually a social construct. No genetic, personality, or intellectual differences exist between people

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of different races. Discuss that race was developed as a category to classify people - and only within the past few hundred years. Poverty is perpetuated by many of the policies of our government and the ways in which our economy is structured. And if we believe that injustice is a fact of life and therefore not worth addressing, it will in fact become a fact of life.

- **“I’M NOT RACIST!”** Despite major progress, all white people still remain at least “a little bit racist” (to quote Avenue Q!). While most people harbor very little ill-will towards people of other races, they may continue to make assumptions about others based on race and they continue to benefit from systems that give them privileges not afforded to other races. In order to combat racism and tackle misperceptions, we first have to acknowledge that all of us who identify as white are somewhere on a spectrum of perpetuating racial prejudice. Once you take the guilt out of the word, you can have an open conversation about the issue. Acknowledge that racism is deeply embedded in our society and part of a larger system; it’s not just a dirty word that refers to things we say to one another.
- **“WE LIVE IN A POST-RACIAL SOCIETY.”** Racism is still virulent in our society, and all over the world. While our generation tends to be more open minded about race and inequality, racism is still a defining part of the American experience. Have everyone go around the table and give an example of discrimination they have faced for their religion, race, or ability. Very quickly an accurate portrait of the work yet to be done will emerge.
- **“[INSERT ISSUE] CAN BE ELIMINATED IF PEOPLE JUST ‘TRY HARDER.’”** Institutional odds are stacked against poor children and children of color from birth. Even with exceptional intelligence, a student’s odds of escaping the cycle of poverty are extremely slim without comprehensive support services - and exceptional intelligence shouldn’t be required to have the same chance at success as other children. Regardless of how “good” or “smart” a child of color is, the racism embedded in our society will still threaten their success and even their safety. Remind participants that what comes to many as a privilege of birth is systematically denied to millions across the country.

CLOSING

Building strong volunteer teams and arming yourself with key facilitation tips are important aspects of implementing effective and impactful service learning opportunities. In the following modules, we’ll explore some of the content you can use to frame those opportunities.

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APPENDIX A POTENTIAL STATEMENTS FOR STEP IN/ STEP OUT ACTIVITY

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Step into the circle if:

- You are the oldest child in your family
- You are a middle child in your family
- You are the youngest child in your family
- You grew up in the same area in which you currently live
- You have moved to where you live within the last few years
- You identify as Reform
- You identify as Conservative
- You identify as Modern Orthodox
- You identify as Orthodox
- You identify as Reconstructionist
- You identify as Renewal
- You identify as Secular
- You identify as having mixed religious heritage
- You identify as a Jew by Choice
- You identify as white
- You identify as Asian/Asian-American
- You identify as Hispanic or Latino
- You identify as Black or African-American
- You identify with another racial or ethnic group
- You have participated in at least a few other service/social justice opportunities in your lifetime
- You have participated in many other service/social justice opportunities in your lifetime
- You have a regular volunteer/service opportunity in which you participate
- You feel an obligation to take action on social issues
- You feel an obligation to take action on social issues as part of the way you understand your Jewish identity