



## Designing Engaging and Inclusive Workshops

By Arielle Levy and Julie Greengard

When you find yourself organizing workshops or any kind of learning sessions for adults, the last thing you want to do is unintentionally make a participant feel unwelcome or invisible, or make it hard for participants to absorb the content you're trying to teach.

There is so much literature in the field today about how to create experiences that feel inclusive for participants, and it can be hard to know where to start.

The Hillel U team, from Hillel International, creates over 70 in-person and 90 online workshops each year for a diverse population of 1,200 Hillel professionals around the globe. We've learned a lot along the way about how adults learn, and how to engage as many adults as possible in deep learning.

Moreover, applying inclusive practices doesn't just help those we think need them most. Inclusive practices benefit everyone, and will improve the quality of any session you create.

We've compiled our top 10 tips to help you plan workshops that are inclusive and engaging.

### 1. Make it interactive.

Your participants will learn the most from you if you incorporate activities such as individual reflection, small group work, role plays or paired exercises/discussions. Frontal presentations for brief portions of your session can be great, but keep in mind that after 10 minutes or so you will start to lose some of your audience.

### 2. Use the session's written description to inform your session design.

Plan your session to reflect the description and learning outcomes that participants read when signing up for your session. Participants rate sessions most highly when the session content reflects the workshop's stated description.

### 3. Use visual aids strategically.

Using visual aids such as handouts or Powerpoint presentations can be extremely helpful in ensuring participants' ability to understand and follow along. If you do plan on using Powerpoint, be sure not to let that get in the way of making your presentation interactive. Ensure that any text is large and clear enough for all to see, and, if possible, print out slides that are large enough to comfortably read, so participants can take notes.

### 4. Provide take-away materials participants can utilize back at work.

Professionals greatly appreciate hand-outs and other resources that they can take back and apply directly to their work. Consider providing pre-packaged materials that participants can easily adapt and make their own.

### 5. Use a "parking lot" to ensure that your session stays focused and on topic.

Great questions that could potentially derail the trajectory of your session but are useful to come back to as a group, should be kept in a "parking lot" (a piece of paper that can be seen by all participants). This strategy helps to ensure that you can present all your planned content, while also ensuring participants know that you hear their questions. Be sure to leave time at the end of the session to come back to and answer these questions, even if it means that you share how you will follow up with someone one-on-one if you don't have time during the session.

### 6. Use relatable examples.

While you may know something about the people in the room, you likely don't know where they're from, what identities they hold, or what life experiences they've had. For example, your session may include participants who are not native English speakers, people who aren't Jewish, who have non-apparent disabilities, whose gender expression does not reflect their gender identity, or who did not grow up in a Jewish home or family. Be mindful of assumptions you may subconsciously make about who people are, what their level of Jewish connection or understanding is, or how they might react to certain claims, ideas, or language.

Try to integrate diverse perspectives and identities into the examples you use in order to better reflect the diversity of the broader Jewish community and, potentially, of your audience. Be aware of gendered or "Ashkenormative" language you use and examples

you may cite. Don't make assumptions about participants' pre-existing knowledge, their families or upbringing.

#### 7. Know yourself.

Acknowledge how your own identity, style and perspective shapes the way you approach your presentation and how that may be perceived by your audience. Be authentic while recognizing that you can only represent what you know or have personally experienced.

#### 8. Consider different learning styles.

Strive to create an engaging learning experience that caters to a variety of learning styles and preferences. Share information in a variety of ways: auditory, visual, experiential, written. Consider using multiple formats for group discussion (pairs, large group, small group, etc.). In general, it's best to consider universal design strategies when creating a presentation and when setting up the space in which you'll teach. Adult learning best practices suggest the use of fidget items to maintain focus. If you notice participants using fidgets in your session, assume they are doing so to stay focused, not because they are distracted.

#### 9. Read the room.

Pay attention to who is participating and who isn't; who is interrupting and who is being interrupted; who is taking up a lot of "space" in the room, and who isn't. Encourage all participants to participate, and respectfully limit the participation of anyone who is overtaking discussion time. Understand that power dynamics often affect the amount of space individuals are willing to take up.

#### 10. Be open to feedback.

None of us is perfect and we can always improve! Keep the door open for feedback. Finally, be kind to yourself! Implementing these practices is a process for all of us, so please regard any "mistakes" as learning opportunities.

Did these tips work for you? We'd love to hear from you: [hillelu@hillel.org](mailto:hillelu@hillel.org).

Arielle Levy is the Associate Director for Hillel U's Center for Engagement, Inclusion and Wellness. Julie Greengard is the Assistant Director of Hillel U. Hillel U is Hillel International's

comprehensive professional development initiative serving the 1,200 Hillel professionals who support students around the world.

<https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/designing-engaging-and-inclusive-workshops>