

Israel Religious Expression Platform (iRep)

2023 Allocations

The Israel Religious Expression Platform (iRep) is a coalition of Jewish Federations and foundations that work together to advance legitimacy and support for diverse Jewish expression in Israel. Since 2016 iRep has allocated over \$2.5 million in support of more than 30 civil society organizations working on the ground to promote religious diversity in Israel.

Thirty four Federations and one Jewish foundation are members of iRep: Ann Arbor, The Berkshires, Boston, Broward County, Buffalo, Charleston, Charlotte, Chicago, Cincinnati, Colorado, Greater Metro West, Greensboro, El Paso, Houston, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Louisville, Madison, Miami, Milwaukee, Nashville, New York, Northeast Florida, Northeastern New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Princeton-Mercer-Bucks, Rochester, San Diego, San Francisco, Southern New Jersey, St. Louis, St. Paul, Western Massachusetts and Gorlin Family Foundation.

iRep's goal is to ensure that every Israeli can exercise choice and self-determination around his/her own Jewish identity and practice. We believe these choices should be publicly legitimized and receive meaningful support at both the national and local level. To this end, iRep invests annually in grassroots projects run by Israeli civil society organizations that focus on increasing accessibility to diverse ways of celebrating life-cycle ceremonies and Jewish holidays as well as projects advocating for government and municipal support for diverse Jewish programming.

For more information on iRep and to learn how your Federation can join, please contact [Einat Hurvitz](#), director of iRep.

In September 2023, the iRep committee approved its eighth round of allocations. Please see below for descriptions of the projects that were awarded funding.

Marriage Freedom

iRep Goal: to promote public awareness about alternative Jewish wedding options outside the religious establishment and to encourage legitimacy of choice for these marriage ceremonies.

Israel Hofsheet (Be Free Israel) (<http://bfree.org.il/english>)

Israel Hofsheet will promote and advocate for secular Jewish wedding ceremonies, with a special focus on the Russian-speaking population many of whom face specific challenges marrying in Israel. They will also advocate that companies offer services to their employees that streamline the recognition of couples wed in such services as “common law married.”

Chuppot (<https://chuppot.org.il/en/>)

Chuppot challenges the monopoly of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel through the provision of private *Halachic* wedding ceremonies. With this grant, they will promote and advocate the vision that marriage outside of the Rabbinate is a legitimate and viable Jewish option. Chuppot also advocates for the legitimacy of this option among Orthodox Rabbis, to increase acceptance of choice in marriage by greater parts of the Religious Zionist community.

Hillel Israel (<https://www.hillelIsrael.org/>)

Hillel Israel works to acquaint Israeli young adults with the richness, diversity, and beauty of Jewish life, and to connect them to Jewish peoplehood. Hillel Israel will hold a series of local events in different universities that will expose students to various options for marriage outside the auspices of the Chief Rabbinate. The events will facilitate informal conversations with pluralistic Jewish Israeli spiritual leaders who conduct wedding ceremonies, from Orthodox to secular, Reform, Conservative and non-denominational. These events will also include practical legal information on the status of these ceremonies.

Tmura -Israel - IISHJ-Israel (<https://www.israeli-judaism.org.il/about-tmura>)

Tmura will build a WhatsApp-based digital community for raising awareness, knowledge, and motivation for action around marriage options outside the Rabbinate, in cooperation with the Mehazkim organization, which specializes in online communities. The main activity will be the building and maintaining of WhatsApp groups of thousands of Israelis which will facilitate conversations on the options for marriage outside the Rabbinate and encourage personal choice in the type of wedding ceremony.

Meaningful Options to Celebrate Jewish Holidays

iRep Goal: *to promote greater awareness about different approaches to celebrating Jewish holidays by all streams of Jewish culture and tradition and to legitimize choice in Jewish practice.*

Shitim - Machon Hachagim (<https://www.eng.chagim.org.il/>)

Machon Hachagim will develop 20+ new lesson plans specifically for the secular public school system. These will include high-quality, diverse, and rich Jewish content from a non-observant point of view consistent with the identities of the children in this school system. These plans will be added to the over 40 lesson plans the Machon produced with a prior iRep grant. This final grant will enable completion of an online Master Guide to Jewish Holidays with comprehensive lesson plans for all holidays celebrated in the Israeli public school system specifically designed for grades 1-10. This year the additional holidays that will be added are Hanukkah, Tu B'shvat, Passover, and Shabbat. Machon Hachagim will actively promote the materials to over 90 public schools to increase usage.

Working with Decision Makers to Promote Jewish Diversity

iRep Goal: *to create sustainable means of public support for diverse Jewish practice and choices through working with Israeli decision makers to ensure they have access and information on all the possible diverse Jewish lifecycle events available to Israelis.*

Panim (<http://www.panim.org.il/en/>)

Panim will work with government ministries to update their funding criteria and other administrative guidelines to match the needs of pluralistic organizations. Special emphasis will be placed to secure existing avenues of support, to ensure they are not blocked, and to access the significant new budgets allocated under the 37th government toward Jewish identity programs. Panim will also train and support pluralistic civil society organizations in their application processes.

Ne`emanei Torah Va`Avodah (<https://toravoda.org.il/en/>)

Ne`emanei Torah Va`Avodah (NTA) will work with government ministries to develop criteria that will enable greater support for open and more pluralistic Orthodox services. NTA will monitor budgets allocated to Jewish identity programs to safeguard their distribution in a fair and legal manner, and to ensure that public funds are not allocated to organizations that work against Jewish diversity, equality, and democracy.

The Shalom Hartman Institute - Judaism and State Policy Center

(<https://www.hartman.org.il/program/center-for-judaism-and-state-policy/#about-1>)

The Shalom Hartman Institute's Judaism and State Policy Center will empower newly elected municipal officials and leaders (following the October 2023 municipal elections) with the resources, information, policy suggestions, and guidance to adopt effective policies on core issues of religion and state in their cities. During the grant period, Hartman will focus on providing municipal leaders with tools on the issues of Shabbat in the public sphere and marriage at the municipal level.

Israel Movement for Reform and Progressive Judaism (IMPJ) (<https://reform.org.il/en/>) &

Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC) (<https://www.irac.org/>)

IMPJ and IRAC will jointly build local action groups based on Reform congregations around Israel to work with their local municipality to increase support for pluralistic Jewish expression, develop Shabbat activities that match secular-traditional Jewish identity and increase the choices for Jewish expression available to residents in those municipalities.

Leadership Training on Religious Diversity and Freedom for Social Activists

iRep's goal: *Israel has seen the emergence of many new initiatives and social leaders from across the political spectrum over the past few months. iRep aims to train these new activists on the issues of religious diversity and religious freedom to make them allies of the effort to expand*

Jewish diversity, religious freedom, and equality for marginalized groups, in particular LGBTQ+ persons and women.

Tzedek Centers (<https://merkazim.org/en/>)

Tzedek Centers will lead a three-month training program for emerging social activists in all 10 Tzedek Centers across Israel, building local action groups that promote liberal values and policies, including a strong focus on local religious-secular and pluralism issues. The participants will learn about the issues, develop awareness of potential partners in their municipality, and build a cohort of engaged residents committed to promoting greater freedom of religion and religious diversity.

Kolech (<https://www.kolech.org.il/en/>)

Kolech will hold a series of training seminars for emerging religious activists who define themselves as "Religious Zionist Democrats" to provide them with language and conceptual tools around religious diversity, and to engage them with the issues of liberal Orthodoxy, so they can apply the values of religious tolerance and pluralism in their communities.