



## An FAQ for Jewish Employees considering forming an Employee Resource Group (ERG)

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### 1 Why are Jews in other organizations forming ERGs?

ERGs provide many benefits for Jewish employees. First, in a time of rising antisemitism, the community provides support and strength. Second, this recognition by the organization can go a long way to helping combat antisemitism by demonstrating a commitment to ensure all of our communities are valued and supported. Third, many Jews have shared that, prior to seeing an ERG form at their company, they had hidden their identity and finally feel like they can show up fully as themselves at work. Fourth, ERGs help create community and connection. We spend so much time at work and this is a beautiful and fun way to create community and celebrate our shared heritage with old and new friends. Finally, many people at work want to be allies to our community, and ERGs can help facilitate that.

### 2 But we have been told that we don't have ERGs for religious groups?

As you know, Jews aren't simply a religious community. The primary identity for most Jews is as a people or an ethnic group. Jews have had a collective or national identity for millennia, regardless of whether someone is religious. While some Jews are religious, others may be atheists. All of us are still part of the Jewish people. That's why Jewish ERGs should be in the same bucket as other ethnic ERGs. However, most of our non-Jewish peers, including most DEIB professionals, don't know that. Project Shema can help with this part of the process.

### 3 Is that distinction really important?

Yes. We can't uphold the values of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) work and deny a community the right to identify how they identify. Moreover, because most people misdefine what it means to be Jewish, they also likely misunderstand what antisemitism is, which means antisemitism can go unnoticed and unchecked in our workplaces more easily. This increases risks for Jews while decreasing real/perceived safety. In other words, this is critical to make sure people understand what antisemitism is.



### 4 How do we form an ERG?

This process varies from organization to organization, but here are some tips:

- Ask your HR/DEIB professional **what the process and requirements are** for forming an ERG.
- Figure out how this ERG will **add value to the business** and be prepared to discuss the business case for its formation.
  - When employees feel safe, heard, seen, and valued they're more productive.
  - When employees feel a deeper sense of connection to their colleagues and their employer, they deliver better results.
- **Be patient.**
  - This will take time, especially in organizations that have, or are forming, standard operating procedures for this. Oftentimes, you may start off as an affinity group or club but not a fully recognized ERG. Maintain your Jewish Club status until you reach ERG status.
- **Be collaborative.**
  - Your DEIB team wants to make sure all employees feel seen, heard, and safe. They also have to navigate internal processes and there will be questions along the way, especially given the confusion about Jewish identity discussed above.
  - Approach this process collaboratively with them as partners. In most cases, they will be your advocates. And, Project Shema is here to support that process, including helping to educate your DEIB team and/or other internal stakeholders.
- **Form a mission statement** that aligns with your values, company values, and company goals.
  - You may wish to survey other ERGs and how they came up with their mission statements and other operating procedures.
- **Establish your leadership team**, which may be made up of Jews and allies, and determine how you plan to lead together.
- Gather as many interested Jews and allies as possible and form a "slack" type channel, email list, or group (request permission because this may be the first time people are acknowledging their Jewish identity at work).
  - Ensure that you are seeking out the **full representation of our community** (Mizrahi, Sephardic, Ashkenazi, Multi-ethnic, LGBTQ+, disabled, neuroatypical, Orthodox to Atheist, Jews from different places if global, and others).
- If there's an Interfaith ERG, ensure that there is still Jewish representation in that group.

**Reach out to Project Shema early and often to help in the process. We want to help.**



### **5 The Jewish community has very diverse opinions and perspectives, including on challenging topics like Israel and Palestine. How do we know what is the “right” way to engage?**

The diversity of our community, like all communities, is part of its beauty. As we think about how to respond to events, or concerns of antisemitism, we should be careful not to let loud, unrepresentative voices that may not represent the community at large dominate discussions. Please reach out to us should this become an issue. We also offer training in this area. In general, your ERG should be a place that celebrates our culture and community and is welcoming of all perspectives.

### **6 How should we deal with complicated areas where members of our community may not even agree?**

Civil discourse, and healthy debate that treats others in a humane and respectful way, is central to what Judaism teaches. We are commanded to “wrestle” with complex ideas and deeply care about respectful debate. Again, this is an area that Project Shema can help support with our training for Jewish ERGs.

### **7 We want to be sensitive to Palestinians and/or Muslims in our organization. Should people explore all these questions together?**

All of our communities deserve support, recognition, and an opportunity to share more about our culture, history, and concerns. Unless leaders of the various ERGs want to do partnership programming, it’s important that independent space and time for education is afforded to all. Purposely positioning events in opposition, or requiring any group to explore the concerns of others as a price to have their own voices heard is counterproductive to the spirit of DEIB work. We should learn about others and ask others to learn about us.

**Are there any questions we missed?**

**Please let us know any other questions you have. It's our pleasure to partner with you on this important work.**