



Steal This!

**Innovative Ideas and
Approaches to Civic
Learning in Jewish Spaces**

A MORE The Jewish
PERFECT Partnership
UNION for Democracy

Dear Friends,

At A More Perfect Union: The Jewish Partnership for Democracy, we know that a strong and robust democracy is essential to a thriving Jewish community in the United States.

But what does a strong and robust democracy look like? Among other things, it includes an educated and engaged populace, prepared with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be well-informed and hopeful participants in civic and democratic life. We call this “civic learning.”

In this spirit, and with gratitude to our remarkable partners, we’ve put together this booklet of “Steal This!” concepts. The goals behind “Steal This!” are simple: to ignite a spark of creativity and passion for civic learning within Jewish spaces and to foster connections among our partners

Inside this booklet, you’ll find a treasure trove of ideas and approaches, all shared by diverse Jewish partners within our growing network. Whether you’re a synagogue, a community center, an advocacy organization, a summer camp, a social service agency, or any kind of organization supporting the Jewish community, there’s something in this booklet for everyone. And while each concept is unique to its origins, every one is designed to be adaptable to a wide range of contexts and challenges. We hope these ideas empower and inspire you to embrace civic learning in your own Jewish spaces.

So go ahead, steal these ideas, remix them, make them your own – and feel free to reach out to their creators to learn more! You can help make the Jewish community a laboratory and catalyst for building a more engaged, informed, and vibrant democratic society.

Thank you for your interest, attention, and willingness to explore these civic learning possibilities with us. Together, we can build a stronger, more resilient democracy – today and for generations to come.



Warm regards,

Aaron Dorfman

Executive Director

A More Perfect Union: The Jewish Partnership for Democracy

PS - If you have any questions or need further assistance, please don't hesitate to reach out to us at info@jewishdemocracy.org. We're here to support you every step of the way.

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FUELED BY THE INNOVATIVE TEAM AT BEYOND100K THAT CREATED THE STEAL THIS! CONCEPT.

TITLE

An Accidental Incident Worth Emulating

PARTNER Civic Spirit

THE HEADLINE

This lesson about a footnote in American history shows that words matter in civil society, and that speaking up can make a difference.

THE CHALLENGE

The state of civil discourse today motivated this exploration of past moments of conflict that were resolved peacefully, respectfully, and constructively. Civic Spirit harbors hope that the road to strengthening American democracy will be paved through constructive efforts including education, conversation, and collaboration.

THE CONCEPT

This lesson explores the historical moment after President Harrison unexpectedly dies in 1841 and John Tyler becomes the first Vice President to assume the presidency. Riddled with mishaps and mistakes, Tyler's administration launches with several accidents from which we can learn. His legacy also teaches about rising to the occasion when history changes in a heartbeat.

THE TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Words matter.
- 2 Speaking up is a civic responsibility.
- 3 Acknowledging mistakes is a sign of strength when building community.

More Info:

A Peaceful Transfer of Power – John Tyler and the Accidental Presidency (Video)

TITLE

Fusion Learning: Designing Interdisciplinary Civic Lessons

PARTNER Civic Spirit

THE HEADLINE

Imagine a world where the luster of ideas belonging to disparate domains are woven together to produce an artful tapestry of increased depth, understanding, and civic connections and cultivate a holistic appreciation of the complexities of our society.

THE CHALLENGE

Civic education extends beyond the parameters of individual disciplines; they are naturally expansive and find resonance in a variety of disciplines. How can one weave the lessons of one sphere into another? This “Steal This!” concept offers a template that can be replicated and adapted to meet the creative needs of your community and curricular goals. Elements of this model include identifying a civic theme and template for plugging in sources across discipline divides and for pairing ideas from disparate fields to highlight targeted points for learning and analysis. It will provide a list of questions and skills that can be utilized with various civic ideas and applied to an array of topics and themes of your choice.

THE CONCEPT

Fusing ideas across disciplines hinges on identifying commonalities across differences. This essential principle underlies the essence of the civics domain and can be used to bring ideas to life in ways that integrate distinct fields in a manner that adds dimension, nuance, meaning, and approaches. I enjoy the art of crafting thematic bridges that unite concepts from unique realms.

Selecting a civic theme and examining the value of raising this particular area of focus is a compelling starting point because it propels one to unearth the intended aims and key objectives. Possible themes such as: Civility and Civic Virtue, Civic Rights and Civic Responsibilities, Inclusion and Community, Civic Voice, and Change, Spectrums or Firm Lines, Social and Personal Responsibility can serve as catalysts for in-depth analysis.

I am enthused by unearthing where the ideas diverge and where they are in concert. Furthermore, inserting historical, sociological, and political lenses into the discussion allows ideas to meander in artful ways and adds many layers of depth to consider. I personally love a buffet of ideas and unraveling the thread that connects them. In addition, application items to the learning exercise with reflection questions and application tools for the classroom allow this learning technique to expand beyond the realm of the abstract

to the sphere of cultivating meaningful connections with individual learners and the unique takeaways that they extrapolate from exploring ideas that have courted each other and together add greater meaning than their independent entities.

Overall, this approach not only enriches understanding but also cultivates a deeper appreciation for the interconnectedness of ideas, fostering a more holistic approach to learning and engagement.

THE TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Craft thematic workshops and learning modules.
- 2 Create cross-disciplinary projects.
- 3 Host community events that highlight diverse vantage points on a given civic issue.

More Info:

- [Civic Spirit's Insights Landing Page](#)
- [Project Zero's "Interdisciplinary Learning: A Cognitive-Epistemological Foundation"](#)

TITLE

There Oughta Be a Law!

PARTNER IKAR

THE HEADLINE

We successfully advocated for a new state law to overcome a problem we confronted in our effort to build affordable housing on our property.

THE CHALLENGE

Our Jewish community is working to include an affordable housing development on our campus as we plan to build a new home for ourselves. Our city zoning laws required us to build more parking than we wanted to have for our congregants. The extra cost to do that also drove up the amount of money we needed to get from our affordable housing development partner for the use of our land. We know that our state and city need more affordable housing and that this parking requirement was one of many zoning regulations that increased costs to build it. Knowing that the parking requirement was a burden on us and others who sought to build affordable housing and lower costs, we began to explore how we might change the law.

THE CONCEPT

As longtime legislative advocates, we have partners in the advocacy community and relationships with state and local legislators and their staffs. We reached out to our partners to ask what we would have to do to change the zoning law and what level of government would be most receptive to making this change. We held research meetings with those partners and asked questions. Based on their input, we reached out to the state assembly housing committee chair, who had written an earlier bill that our proposal built on, and she agreed to become the bill's sponsor. We worked with her staff to draft the bill and then worked with our network of fellow advocacy organizations and faith communities to advocate for the bill. We were able to walk with our community through the entire process of proposing an idea as a bill and seeing it through to getting it signed into law by the governor. For our community, participating in this process was educational and affirming that we can make a difference.

One thing we learned in the process is that when you have a good idea that is not terribly polarizing and doesn't cost a lot, it's actually not as hard as you might think to change the law. We also learned that choosing the right level of government to work through and finding the right partners is key to success. We know our law is one small piece of the much larger and more complicated puzzle of housing affordability in our state. We are continuing to wrestle with how we can overcome the barriers that remain to our own

housing development project and how we can support legislative change that will make it easier and less expensive for everyone who is trying to build housing to serve the needs of our communities.

THE TAKEAWAYS

- 1 You can successfully propose a law and you don't need to be a lawyer to write it.
- 2 Building relationships with your elected representatives gives you the power you need to be heard.
- 3 Participating in writing legislation can help build your community's confidence that the government can work effectively.

More Info

- ["How Laws are Made" Webpage](#)
- [MyReps Website](#)
- [California Assembly Bill 2244](#)

TITLE

Know Your Reps

PARTNER IKAR

THE HEADLINE

Build relationships with your elected officials by inviting them for public conversations where you can effectively communicate your values, priorities, and concerns, and so you can know what issues your elected officials are prioritizing.

THE CHALLENGE

Many people and most Jewish communities feel alienated from the democratic process and their elected officials. When we want our government to act or act differently, we don't have the strong underlying relationships that are necessary to be heard and to make change. Many citizens do not know what the different levels of government do or which officials are responsible for which issues. This lack of relationship and disengagement are demotivating. They lead citizens to feel frustrated and helpless, when in fact we are capable of harnessing our collective power effectively, if we learn how to use it.

THE CONCEPT

At IKAR, we hold frequent conversations with local, state and federal elected officials on Shabbat over lunch or after Kabbalat Shabbat services. These conversations, usually moderated by one of our rabbis, are designed to build strong relationships between our elected officials and our community. We begin by sharing some framing about the Jewish values of commitment to concern for our broader community that undergird our civic engagement and advocacy work. Our questions for the elected officials are always rooted in the issues that our congregational community organizing team is working on, and our purpose is to invite the elected officials to share their story of connection to those issues and to find our shared values that will deepen and inform that work for policy change.

We have found that building these relationships is tremendously helpful when we advocate for specific legislation or raise concerns with our elected officials about issues of concern to us. When an elected official is running for re-election or for another office, we work to make sure that our conversations with them are non-partisan and not a part of their campaign, but stay focused on their role as representatives.

THE TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Build relationships with your elected officials by inviting them to public conversations about your values and priorities.
- 2 Follow up with them after the public meetings on any specific legislation you are interested in supporting.
- 3 Community members value the opportunity to get to know their officials as part of their Jewish communal experience. People want to take action together.

More Info

■ [MyReps Website](#)

■ [“The Do’s and Don’ts of Civic Engagement Work: Rules for Non-Profits”](#)

TITLE

Peaceful Protest/Democratic Engagement

PARTNER Habonim Dror Camp Galil, Ottsville, PA

THE HEADLINE

Use peaceful protests to teach younger kids how to practice healthy dissent and build capacity for disagreement within a community.

THE CHALLENGE

We wanted to give our campers the opportunity to voice their opinions, and specifically, to be able to dissent/disagree with one another (or their counselors) in a way that didn't cause them to lose faith in their community and relationships. For some, a civil society - a peaceful community - means a shared way of thinking, which leaves no room for dissent. However, we can hold space for multiple perspectives/opinions/ideas, and it is through mutual understanding/respect, and sometimes compromise, that we build a shared community together.

It also provides an opportunity for younger campers to work together towards a shared goal and affect positive change in their community.

THE CONCEPT

In this activity, our counselors work with our youngest campers to identify an area of shared concern/dissent/injustice (at camp for this age, often it's the desire for a later bedtime), and create a shared desire to bring about a change. In this scenario, they'll identify their arguments and plan and prepare a protest to camp leadership to make a change. They'll make signs and have a debate with camp leadership. Usually, camp leadership will relent and compromise and they can stay up 30 minutes later. Happy results, and they unpack this experience with the following questions:

- What was your initial reaction to the issue? What did you want to do?
- How does it feel to take action/speak up?
- Do you feel accomplished?
- Do you think it would have been successful if it had been just one person?
- Do you understand why there was a compromise?
- Do you think the compromise was worth it?

Through these guided questions, we talk about working towards shared goals, affecting positive change, leaving space for disagreements, and still being a community together in the end.

In subsequent summers, we can build on this with more complex topics. This is geared towards younger kids, so it's easily manageable. Easy compromise and quick and easy solutions. We don't, however, address when compromise isn't possible, or when change doesn't happen. We do leave that for a future summer, as we build on our shared learnings here.

One challenge we face with this concept is that going right to the protest stage can be a bit adversarial (we're working with a 90 minute timeframe here), and sometimes I worry that we skip over the 'conversation' phase too quickly. However, it's important to remind ourselves that this is simply a teachable moment.

THE TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Reflect with your community on the opportunities for dissent, evaluate how that dissent is expressed, and identify opportunities for healthier debate.
- 2 After a disagreement, unpack the experience and highlight the lessons learned with your community.
- 3 Provide pre-planned structured opportunities for community members to express strong opinions, and encourage them to articulate and advocate for specific changes they'd like to see.

TITLE

Putting the VOTE in Mitzvot

PARTNER Hillel International

THE HEADLINE Connecting Jewish values and Jewish education to empower Civic engagement.

THE CHALLENGE

Many Jewish students on college campuses don't see a connection between Jewish education, Jewish community, and civic engagement. Many Jewish students believe that part of their Jewish practice includes working for a better world. Jewish students are looking for opportunities to connect important parts of their identity and their values. Jewish students crave Jewish community that offers them opportunities to connect Judaism and work for a better world. Creating opportunities for learning that explicitly connect these important values, and that give Jewish students a strong cultural and/or religious understanding, allows the students to become much more engaged, Jewishly and civically.

THE CONCEPT

Jewish students come to Hillel looking for Jewish education and Jewish practice. Hillel International created a curriculum that focuses on Jewish cultural, historical, and religious obligations and understanding around civic engagement. This curriculum was made available to all campus Hillels, and Hillel International staff led training to ensure campus Hillel staff understood and could implement the curriculum. Hillel International also created Shabbat and holiday civic engagement resources for campus Hillels. By offering Jewish education looking at ancient and modern understandings and teachers, we meet the need that Jewish students are asking for regarding Jewish education, and we also help them root their commitment to civic engagement in their Jewish values and Jewish practice.

Making resources available as stand alone sessions, 4-part series, and Shabbat and holiday supplements, campuses are able to tailor their Jewish civic education to meet the needs and interests of their students. Students come to Hillel looking for Jewish practice and Jewish education, and they are able to get that Jewish learning and practice while also learning about civic engagement. In addition to providing Jewish education and Jewish community, campus Hillels offer a critical opportunity for young Jewish adults to discover and practice putting their values into practice. By offering students Jewish education that includes civic education, we give students the capacity to effectively engage civically and we put the Vote into MitzVote.

THE TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Find the values that your constituents are motivated by, and give them opportunities to connect those values to action.
- 2 Partner! There are a lot of resources available, build strong partnerships so you can have a bigger impact.
- 3 Amplify existing resources before creating new ones. Share this with college students in your networks so they can get involved in MitzVote at Hillel!

More Info:

■ [MitzVote Landing Page](#)

TITLE

Host a Candidate Forum

PARTNER JCRC of the Jewish Federation of San Antonio

THE HEADLINE

We hosted a Candidate Forum, inviting the two candidates running for our County Judge position to a forum at the Jewish Campus.

THE CHALLENGE

How do we engage the Jewish community in important local elections?

THE CONCEPT

Having a Campaign Forum for a local race helped to:

- Make the Jewish community aware of the election, the candidates, and the issues.
- Make the Jewish community more likely to vote in the election.
- Allow the Jewish community to engage with elected officials on issues important to them.
- Connect the Jewish community directly to a future elected official.

The hardest part was getting the time and date confirmed by all parties! It's also very important to set the parameters. We created the questions in advance and gave them each equal time to answer.

THE TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Carefully outline the parameters in advance—questions to be asked, the time limit for each candidate, for a smooth-running event
- 2 The location of the event matters; we hosted it at our Jewish campus, a place that is familiar and accessible to our community.
- 3 Make sure to cover issues that would be specific to the Jewish community first, such as rising antisemitism, since those are issues that would not be covered in other forums

TITLE

Helping Seniors Understand the Vote-by-Mail Process

PARTNER JCRC of the Jewish Federation of San Antonio

THE HEADLINE

Reducing barriers for entry for seniors wanting to vote.

THE CHALLENGE

How do we help seniors through the cumbersome vote-by-mail process so they can safely vote during the pandemic? The vote-by-mail process in Texas is cumbersome and confusing, and we realized most seniors were not aware that all voters 65 and over have this option. During the pandemic, without awareness of the vote-by-mail option, many seniors would have stayed home and not voted.

THE CONCEPT

- We needed to raise awareness of who was eligible to vote by mail and what the benefits were (such as not having to wait in lines and risk exposure to Covid).
- We identified our target population: seniors in the Jewish Community residing in Bexar County, whom we knew could benefit from this knowledge.
- It was important to get them this information because they were particularly vulnerable to Covid, and were also a population that would find the process to apply for a vote-by-mail ballot confusing, as it includes going to a website to print the application; filling out the application correctly; and mailing the application to the appropriate address in a stamped envelope.
- We simplified the process by mailing the seniors the application along with an explanation of how to determine if they would want to vote by mail or in person, and a simplified, step-by-step explanation of how to fill out the application.
- We also included an addressed and stamped envelope for them to mail the application should they decide to vote by mail, so they would not have to drive somewhere to purchase stamps and envelopes.
- We shared this information with other partners in the community who had senior populations that could benefit. We also dropped off packets at a nearby senior living community.

THE TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Be careful that you are following all of your state's rules about vote-by-mail.
- 2 Informing the community about the vote-by-mail option can help encourage participation in the voting process by those who are disabled or concerned about being in crowded public places such as during the pandemic.
- 3 Information to the Jewish seniors in our community from a trusted source, in this case, the local JCRC, was very appreciated by our seniors; mailing them the information made it accessible to those who did not have access to computers and printers.

TITLE

Voting as a Jewish Value

PARTNER The Jewish Education Project + RootOne

THE HEADLINE

A text study exploring the key ideas that undergird the principle that voting is a Jewish value, which exists on The Jewish Educator Portal, a source of crucial content.

THE CHALLENGE

This piece was built around the question, “Does my vote matter?” One of the most challenging narratives of the past two decades has been that, if you live in a state that is not a swing state, your vote doesn’t actually matter. This text study explores that opening question through the lens of Jewish text and lifts up the values that should help any person make that decision. Each time I teach this session, I create so much space for participants to consider their own reasons for voting, and how that is influenced by Jewish values.

THE CONCEPT

This text study is broken into three parts. First is a provocative opener that suggests that voting is useless from an economic perspective. The second part considers our relationship to our country, and whether we have a responsibility to pray for the welfare of our country and to consider what role the government has in supporting us. The third considers the importance of voting even if we believe our vote might not matter, and how modern thinkers have thought about voting.

This text study is constantly evolving: adding content, and deleting content to ensure it’s both modern and ancient, and provides many opportunities for people to find their own voice inside the text.

THE TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Do not underestimate the value of Jewish text to open up a conversation.
- 2 Keep in mind the importance of not providing premade answers, but allowing space for a variety of perspectives that don’t always agree.
- 3 Remember how important it is to share these learnings with a wider audience through tools like the Jewish Educator Portal.

More Info:

■ [Voting as a Jewish Value Source Sheet and Discussion Questions](#)

TITLE

Resources for Responding to Civic Engagement

PARTNER The Jewish Education Project + RootOne

THE HEADLINE A series of resources collected and organized for responding to civic engagement through a Jewish lens.

THE CHALLENGE

The Jewish Educator Portal is a central source for Jewish professionals who work with children and families from birth through high school graduation to explore and share quality educational resources. We've curated The Jewish Educator Portal to offer timely and relevant curricular links, podcasts, articles, themed collections, and an ever-growing set of professional development and network opportunities. It is designed to help you navigate the vast world of online materials and to effectively select the resources and opportunities that will help you reach your goals.

In response to so many of the events of the past 10 years, we have created a series of curated resources to support Jewish engagement in the space of Civic Learning.

THE CONCEPT

By allowing people to share resources with us and through curating a collection of resources ourselves, the Jewish Education Project's Educator Portal continues to provide multiple avenues for engaging with Civic Learning. Because it's a dynamic site, we continue to add new resources to better respond.

THE TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Talk about how to provide comfort and challenge during moments of civic turmoil.
- 2 Emphasize the importance of not providing premade answers, but a variety of perspectives that don't always agree.
- 3 Understand how important it is to share these learnings with a wider audience through tools like the Jewish Educator Portal.

More Info:

- [Surviving and Thriving Through Civic and Civil Engagement](#)
- [Civic Engagement Through a Jewish Lens](#)

TITLE

Machine-Metaphor for Talking about Anti-Semitism

PARTNER Jewish Bridge Project

THE HEADLINE Language matters. Changing the way we talk about antisemitism can help Jews and all people move closer towards a more free, secure, and thriving multiracial democracy.

THE CHALLENGE

How we talk about anti-Semitism is critical — it shapes how we understand it and how we fight it. In 2020, in deep collaboration with Jewish organizing partners around the country, Bend the Arc: Jewish Action worked with Uprise to develop the Dismantling Antisemitism Message Guide as a civil learning tool to help stop the increase in antisemitism and imagine a future in which Jewish people — and all people — can live free and safe in a thriving multiracial democracy.

At this moment in history, Americans are seeing authoritarian and white nationalist ideology and rhetoric gaining power and weakening US democracy. Anti-Semitism is a key characteristic of white nationalist ideology and rhetoric. Existing language and public conversation about antisemitism as inevitable, ubiquitous, and timeless leaves Jewish people feeling increasingly afraid, isolated, and unable to imagine a future in which Jewish people can live free and safe from anti-Semitic targeting. The metaphors most commonly used are “anti-Semitism as a virus” and “anti-Semitism as water/natural element.” Both of these metaphors reinforce a flawed analysis of anti-Semitism, implying that it is a part of nature and therefore will always exist; that it was not created by humans and cannot ever truly be stopped by humans; and that it is indiscriminate, equally present and equally damaging no matter its source.

THE CONCEPT

In order to eliminate antisemitism and white nationalism, advocates need a new conversation that shows how addressing antisemitism is intrinsically connected to other movements and why it is an integral part of the struggle for collective liberation.

To avoid these pitfalls, use a machinery metaphor instead: “Anti-Semitism is part of the machinery of division and fear created and used for specific political or material gain.”

This machinery metaphor unifies and offers hope as it clarifies and highlights:

- 1 Anti-Semitism was built by people and is used by people for a specific purpose;
- 2 Anyone can fuel it, but those who built it and use it are responsible and are the ones who benefit;
- 3 We can stop it, shut it down, dismantle it; and
- 4 Anti-Semitism is part of a larger whole and addressing it is intrinsically connected to other struggles, including a thriving multiracial American democracy – this also provides a clear way for everyone to see themselves in this story, whether they usually work on anti-Semitism or not.

THE TAKEAWAYS

When we use the Machine Metaphor we:

- 1 Deflate and shield all audiences against antisemitic tropes and make the case that togetherness (instead of separateness) is the desirable strategy for Jewish people addressing anti-Semitism;
- 2 Make anti-Semitism a liability for white nationalists and their political movements while addressing Jewish audiences' fears in an increasingly violent time;
- 3 Provide a way for advocates across issues to see themselves in this fight and create a framework that makes it possible to address missteps (so that we're not torn apart when they happen).

More Info:

■ [Dismantling Antisemitism Message Guide](#)

TITLE

Lesson Plan: Political Activism as a Jewish Obligation

PARTNER JewishGPS, LLC

THE HEADLINE

JewishGPS, LLC has developed a two-hour text-exploration and dialogue program (lesson plan) geared towards high school students and adults to introduce them to the concept that political activism (a form of civic engagement) is a Jewish obligation. [Note: This lesson is free to Summit participants and offered at an 18% discount to MPU network partners.]

THE CHALLENGE

Social scientists sometimes talk about dual identities as parallel or intersected. One core educational philosophy of JewishGPS, is that Judaism is the lens with which to view all beliefs and behaviors. Instead of approaching their American lives separate from their Jewish lives, this lesson strives to educate pre-voters, potential voters and voters to view their civic engagement as a primary Jewish obligation. While many American Jews view other social action behaviors as a “mitzvah” (often translated as good deed, but actually is a commandment!), it is rare that they conceptualize voting and other forms of community involvement as an inherently Jewish act, much less an obligated one.

THE CONCEPT

Through engaging with almost a dozen ancient texts and modern commentary, learners begin to understand the elevated importance our sages give to civic involvement. Each time this lesson has been facilitated, participants have regularly expressed that they had never known Judaism to emphasize political engagement in secular society as a fundamental value. A “Signature Pedagogy” of JewishGPS, is facilitated learning vs. frontal pontificating. This lesson allows learners to engage with each other, consider a spectrum of meaning-making related to the texts, and emerge with their own connection and take-aways. In addition to using text as a foundation for the exploration, learners are introduced to data about Jewish voters and voting in America as a way to understand trends of peers in their community. If learners can be gathered for additional time, resources are provided so that the facilitator can layer on learning about Jewish views on social responsibility, engaging in dialogue with the “other”, and peace/conflict resolution (as concept of working towards a peaceful society).

THE TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Root modern decision-making in Jewish concepts in order to make Judaism relevant to today's community.
- 2 Allow learners to create their own-meaning rather than trying to force a singular interpretation or understanding on them creates a larger impact.
- 3 Engage pre-voters in this learning in order to set the stage for their long-term civic engagement through a Jewish lens.

More Info:

■ [Jewish GPS Webpage](#)

TITLE

Taking Stock: Conducting an Inventory of Civic Learning Assets

PARTNER JewishGPS, LLC

THE HEADLINE

JewishGPS, LLC has engaged in a nation-wide survey to ascertain how Jewish organizations are defining “civic education” and to understand what assets (i.e. programs, curriculum, training) are in current use and available for collection and sharing.

THE CHALLENGE

After engaging in initial conversations with leadership at A More Perfect Union and Civic Spirit, I realized that the field of Jewish civic learning/education was not nationally mapped. A lack of asset inventory means that we are unclear as to what definition Jewish organizations are using when referring to “civic learning/education” and we also don’t know what opportunities exist for future collaboration or hosting and distribution/sharing of current content.

THE CONCEPT

The overview of the process:

- First determine as many relevant organizations and networks as possible and use my existing field colleagues to help finalize the list. This comprehensive identification would be used as a checklist to determine survey completion rates and missing data.
- Develop an on-line survey tool that will be used to collect data about each organization’s current civics education activities as well as identify a contact person within each organization who could be contacted for further inquiry.
- Using various social media platforms, email lists, and personal connections, distribute the survey. (Redistribute as needed to increase completion rate.)
- Analyze the data and develop a comprehensive report for A More Perfect Union and Civic Spirit. Facilitate a discussion with stakeholders from both organizations to determine the desire and implementation of possible web-hosting and a staff person for the content curation of materials/links that emerge from the asset map; discuss joint funding requests to build out curriculum and on-going content curation to fill in the gaps.

As of the writing of this concept description, we are currently in the first action-step of the process.

THE TAKEAWAYS

- 1 It is critically important to develop a common foundational language for a relatively new field of study and it is also imperative to map content assets.
- 2 Gathering partners around a common goal increases the impact.
- 3 Don't recreate the wheel. Encourage sharing of resources (even if for sale) to avoid the duplication of material and content creation.

More Info:

■ [Jewish GPS Webpage](#)

TITLE

Thinking Routine: Claim/Support/Question

PARTNER Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies

THE HEADLINE

The Claim/Support/Question thinking routine is a simple tool that generates thoughtful reflection, curiosity, and provides a structure for people who disagree to engage in conversation with one another.

THE CHALLENGE

Our fast-paced world often demands or expects that we form opinions quickly and that we staunchly stick to those hastily formed positions. The Claim/Support/Question thinking routine provides a simple structure that forces us to slow down, think more deeply, and reflect on our own thought process.

The Pardes Mahloket Matters project frequently facilitates professional development training for diverse groups of educators, lay leaders, and rabbis. We have found this thinking routine to be a very effective way to help participants articulate their thoughts about a challenging issue and to engage with each other from a place of curiosity, rather than suspicion.

THE CONCEPT

The Claim/Support/Question thinking routine is simple and easily adaptable. The session facilitator shares something with the group (e.g., a Jewish text, an image, a song). Each group member is asked to do three things in response to whatever has been shared: make a claim about what was shared, identify support for your own claim, raise a question about or connected to your own claim. Once those tasks have been completed, there are a whole variety of “next steps” that the facilitator can take in order to further capitalize on this exercise. For example, the facilitator might choose to pair up participants so that they can share their thoughts with one another. Or a facilitator might invite each participant to explore the question that arose for them in the last stage of this exercise.

THE TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Find a tool that ‘forces’ people to slow down when they formulate their thoughts and opinions.
- 2 Give people a structure that encourages and enables them to engage productively with those with whom they disagree.
- 3 Consider employing this thinking routine with your colleagues or constituents on a monthly basis to encourage the development of skills to effectively navigate debate and disagreement.

More Info:

■ [Claim/Support/Question Thinking Routine](#)

TITLE

Thinking Routine: Tug-of-War

PARTNER Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies

THE HEADLINE In this hyper-polarized world where individuals are rarely entering into difficult conversations with those with whom they disagree, the Tug-of-War thinking routine offers a way in to hearing the viewpoints of others, and offers a structure to help develop skills of expression and of listening openly.

THE CHALLENGE

In our hyper-polarized society, people are often uninterested or fearful to engage with those with whom they disagree about important issues. Additionally, people are often ill-equipped with the skills necessary to engage productively. The Tug-of-War thinking routine provides a simple and fun structure that helps develop vital skills such as deep listening, making space for the expression of multiple positions, and being open to adjusting one's opinion based on the thinking of their peers.

THE CONCEPT

The Tug-of-War thinking routine enables learners to dig into the complexity of an issue. The facilitator presents a statement or a question to the group and draws a 1-10 scale with opposing positions written on the far ends of the scale. For example, if the question under consideration is, "Do democracies grow stronger or weaker when there is disagreement among citizens?" then the word "stronger" will be written next to the number one on the scale and the word "weaker" will be written next to the number ten on the scale.

Learners are asked to consider where they stand on this issue, write their opinion and supporting evidence for it on a sticky note, and place the sticky note anywhere along the scale that reflects their viewpoint. After everyone in the group has placed their note on the scale, one person explains their position and why they chose to place their note on that particular spot on the scale. After listening to the explanation, the other group members have the opportunity to move the placement of their own notes anywhere on the scale if they have been persuaded to shift their perspective in either direction. If someone does move their note, they can explain what they found compelling about the previously explained argument. This process can be repeated as many times as the facilitator wants.

Tug-of-War may be easily adapted to account for changing variables such as the matter under discussion, the size of a group, online versus in-person, etc.

THE TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Learn to listen openly to, and appreciate the complexity of, perspectives that differ from or contradict your own
- 2 Practice sharing one's own opinions in a way that makes space for others who disagree to hear that perspective
- 3 Utilize this tool for engaging with an actively polarizing disagreement within a specific group or community

More Info:

■ [Tug-of-War Thinking Routine](#)

TITLE

Repair the World's Democracy Ballot

PARTNER Repair the World (in partnership with A More Perfect Union)

THE HEADLINE

Elections are coming, what are you going to do about it? Find your civic starting point and challenge yourself to support elections and democracy, locally and nationally!

THE CHALLENGE

Many people want to get involved with or support elections but don't know what to do, how long it will take, or how involved in a commitment they are agreeing to complete. Repair the World specializes in engaging our local communities in-person through our direct programming, but we are always trying to figure out the best way to reach a wider audience that hasn't shared that experience with us yet. It is especially important to us that, around the election cycle, everyone in our communities and across the country has access to clear civic engagement options!

THE CONCEPT

We have built a webpage that provides a menu of options for volunteers who are interested in expanding their civic engagement. The interactive online media tool will help people engage in civic actions between now and the 2024 general election, and can be used by anyone who wants to personally take action to support local and national elections. Each item gives a brief description, time commitment, and link(s) to learn more and complete the action. One of our biggest goals, and struggles, was to create a piece of content that was evergreen, relevant to anyone anywhere, and provided clear steps and impact for a variety of civic engagement entry points. Although we can track what folks are clicking on within our website, the secondary impact with some of these partners will not make it back to us. If an individual has a negative or challenging experience with any of the links provided we may not be able to address that for them directly, but hopefully provided vetted and quality options that will continue to inspire results.

THE TAKEAWAYS

- 1 **Share** the link with your community, **highlighting** an action that is personally meaningful to you, or one that you have already completed
- 2 **Personalize** your experience with the ballot – tell your peers what you did, how it felt, and what you learned/experienced/saw
- 3 **Identify** the strengths of your current offerings and the challenges to expand your work – here we focused on a wider, less engaged audience to try and show them the value that we can offer on this and many other topics

More Info:

■ [Repair the World/A More Perfect Union Democracy Ballot](#)

TITLE

Social Justice Curriculum

PARTNER Temple Emanu-El

THE HEADLINE

We created a social justice curriculum to instill Jewish values into our youngest learners. The broader goal includes using this curriculum for the entire congregation.

THE CHALLENGE

We continually heard from parents that, although their weekday education is great, it is missing the social justice perspective that Judaism focuses on. From a congregational side, we saw that the congregation needed to be brought together around the same focus of social justice. A key piece of social justice is the pillar of advocacy and organizing. In order to advocate for certain policies, we need to hold our elected officials accountable through the voting process.

THE CONCEPT

We created a social justice one-pager and a social justice curriculum for our K-9 scholars. We began by creating a one page document that combines our mission, goals, and outcomes to better articulate our information to the entire congregation. We have great material, but have had trouble including it within our already established religious school. We have begun smaller initiatives to move our goals along such as social justice field trips and grade level programming on social justice.

THE TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Create a one-page document that describes your social justice mission, your values, and your outcome for each person taking part in this work.
- 2 Use the one-page document to build a curriculum for young learners (religious school, preschool, etc.) to understand the values and outcomes in connection to the work they are already learning.
- 3 Integrate the language of your values and outcomes to the entire congregation to instill a common mission.

More Info:

■ [Temple Emanu-El Social Justice One-Pager](#)

TITLE

Issues-Based Schmoozing

PARTNER Uri L'Tzedek

THE HEADLINE

Employing the Jewish tradition of schmoozing when discussing challenging issues allows us to genuinely connect with individuals and understand the issues that matter most to them.

THE CHALLENGE

When registering people to vote oftentimes we highlight only our reasoning as to why others must act and register to vote. My approach is an issues-based approach that derives from the customs of Jewish schmoozing, where conversations are fun and easy rather than interrogative. My way lowers people's defenses and rather highlights what issues are important to them.

Uri L'Tzedek's "Let's Schmooze" program has profoundly united communities by providing a welcoming space for individuals from diverse backgrounds to engage in meaningful civic education dialogue. Through thought-provoking discussions on pressing social issues, participants are encouraged to share their perspectives, challenge assumptions, and explore solutions together. By fostering an inclusive environment that values respectful exchange and collaboration, the program empowers participants to bridge divides, build relationships, and work towards common goals. As a result, "Let's Schmooze" has become a catalyst for positive change, inspiring individuals to become informed, engaged citizens who are committed to creating a more just and equitable society for all.

THE CONCEPT

Engaging in meaningful conversations akin to the Jewish tradition of schmoozing allows us to genuinely connect with individuals and understand the issues that matter most to them. By fostering an open dialogue, we create a comfortable space for people to share their concerns and aspirations, laying the foundation for increased voter registration and civic engagement. This not only builds trust but also enables us to tailor our outreach efforts to address the specific needs of our community. Ultimately, through the powerful art of schmoozing, we can inspire individuals to actively participate in the democratic process, translating their concerns into informed and impactful civic action.

Uri L'Tzedek's "Let's Schmooze" program continues to wrestle with and wonder about how to best facilitate constructive dialogue and engagement on complex social issues within Jewish communities. We have continued to struggle with folks pushing misinformation and how we address misinformation in our spaces in a loving way.

THE TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Host inclusive events where participants can engage in respectful dialogue and exchange ideas freely is essential. (With LOTS of good food)
- 2 Host small and large gatherings both in person and on zoom
- 3 Start having personal conversations with your community leaders to have them support you in starting a schmoozing conversation programs in your community

More Info:

■ [Uri L'Tzedek Webpage](#)

TITLE

Images as Primary Sources

PARTNER Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History

THE HEADLINE How do we use material culture in our educational settings to pique curiosity, make history relatable, help learners of all ages think critically and engage in the complex stories of their own histories.

THE CHALLENGE

Since starting in my role as Director of Education at The Weitzman Museum in 2022, the question I am continuously asking myself is, How do I inspire empathy and elicit curiosity in adult learners and students of all ages? What is my hook? How do I draw in a visitor to the museum, an educator on-line, or a student in a virtual presentation who knows little to nothing about the American Jewish experience and perhaps has never met a Jewish person. How do I help them to ask good questions, what are the most open-ended and thought provoking questions I can ask, and ultimately how do I do less talking and more listening?

More specifically, we have been working to uplift the essential work for combating antisemitism, not only for the safety and wellbeing of the American Jewish community, but for the preservation of our democracy. We know that to combat antisemitism through education is to uphold and protect the democratic ideals we, as Americans, and particularly Jewish Americans hold so dear. In other words, fighting antisemitism, along with all forms of hatred and bigotry, are an essential piece of our work at The Weitzman Museum, a museum whose physical building and whose mission lies at the very intersection of Jewish America and the founding ideals of our nation. However, the question remains - how do we communicate that in a meaningful way to our diverse audiences?

THE CONCEPT

For myself and many other museum educators, the answer often lies in the museum's collection. Objects/material culture are the centerpiece of our museum because each object has a story to tell. Objects provide a low barrier entry point into history, into critical thinking, and into asking good questions. When we think of primary source material, we often think of documents, but photography, cartoons, posters, and artifacts are also fascinating primary source material that provide a window into a significant time period, an important historic event, or an everyday person's story.

When introducing a concept or time period or to humanize something, I often start with an object. Some examples include: a program from the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom; a poster of Rose Schneiderman; and a Christian Congregational Home Missionary Society Poster. The question I always start with is: “What do you see?” (Note: When working with students who are sight impaired, we provide appropriate accommodations. You can use this tool with audio and or physical objects that can be touched). There are no rights and wrongs, only equal opportunity for all to share their observations, build upon one another’s answers, and together discover the significance of the object and the story it tells.



THE TAKEAWAYS

- 1 When identifying a challenge, utilize your institution’s best assets. What are the ways that you and your organization are uniquely positioned to tackle this problem?
- 2 Use objects as entry points into stories and use stories as entry points into history.
- 3 Use See, Think, Wonder routine in your classroom with any type of object.

More Info:

The Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History
Open Book Curriculum