

Congregation Beth Israel's Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Access (IDEA) Committee Update to the Community | May 2024

In May 2023, the CBI membership amended its bylaws to form the **Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Access (IDEA) Committee**, whose mission is to create a culture of belonging by ensuring that all aspects of congregational life are attuned to the experiences and abilities of all who engage with the Beth Israel community. The Committee's focus is to enhance CBI's accessibility in our spaces and in our electronic resources, facilitate community building, and fortify CBI's commitment to anti-bias education and practices.

Our work is informed by resources developed by the Religious Action Center of the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ-RAC), the Jews of Color Initiative, and the Jewish Federation of Greater Portland's 2023 study by Brandeis University Cohen Center. The committee and our goals grew out of an intensive assessment process that several congregants, clergy and staff participated in during the spring of 2022.

Approximately 20 CBI members serve on the committee, and we collaborate closely with clergy and staff who have provided invaluable support and guidance to our work.

Progress Report

The IDEA Committee is proud of CBI's commitment to fostering a culture of belonging and to the inspiring leadership of our clergy and leaders. In the year since the committee's official launch, we have made significant progress, including:

- **Creating an Event planning guide and checklist.** Volunteers Andrea Mia and Rachel Pollin have developed a resource that will be shared with staff, committees, clergy and congregants who host events at CBI to ensure that events are inclusive and accessible.
- **Engaging website developer NetRaising to create a new CBI website.** We are collaborating with NetRaising to design a site that incorporates accessibility best practices and reflects the diversity and values of our community. Volunteers Janie Goldenberg and Aina Pinto are heading the project in coordination with CBI staff member Tracy Alifanz. Janie and Aina have spent hours auditing the current website and consulting a variety of vendors in preparation for this project.
- **Holding a "Beyond Welcoming" training session for Board, staff and clergy led by Rachel Hall of URJ-RAC.** The program emphasized that good intentions without corresponding action is not enough to have a positive experience on community members' experiences.
- **Conducting an audit of the CBI campus to identify accessibility barriers.** In light of the insights gained through the audit, staff have implemented several upgrades that create greater ease in accessing our facilities such as installing high visibility tape,

improving doorway thresholds, ensuring bathroom access and updating signage. We continue to explore and implement additional solutions for improving access to CBI facilities.

- **Raising awareness about the need to consider accessibility when planning events and programs.** While the preference is to locate events where no accessibility limitations exist, this cannot always be accomplished. When there are known barriers, CBI now shares this information in event promotion so that people can plan and make informed choices.
- **Celebrating Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance & Inclusion Month (JDAIM).** CBI held a joyful special shabbat service to commemorate JDAIM in February 2024.
- **Launching our Accommodation Stations.** Staff have assembled carts offering a variety of resources, including large-print prayerbooks and noise-isolating headphones, to help ensure greater comfort and participation at CBI.
- **Facilitating opportunities to discuss anti-bias themes.** We offered several opportunities for CBI members to explore and discuss anti-bias themes including the clergy-led Racial Equity Challenge and the IDEA Conversation Hour facilitated by volunteers Marsha Goldwasser and Shoshana Zeisman-Pereyo.
- **Offering pronoun stickers.** CBI now makes available pronoun stickers for name badges at all CBI events.

URJ-RAC staff have invited committee co-chairs Phyllis Oster and Sue Aronowitz to share CBI's progress and successes in their Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) trainings for other congregations.

If you are aware of community members who are experiencing challenges that interfere with their ability to engage fully at CBI, or if you would like to get involved in our work, please let us know by contacting Sue and Phyllis at IDEA@bethisrael-pdx.org.