



Survey on Emerging Spiritual Communities' Interfaith Inclusion Policies and Practices

Executive Summary

The Center for Radically Inclusive Judaism (CFRIJ) conducted a survey of emerging spiritual communities' interfaith inclusion policies and practices in November and December 2020. Responses to the survey were received from 44 communities, representing 61% of the 72 that were invited to participate. Key findings include:

Recognition and Equal Treatment

- 64% of communities said that they do not draw any distinctions in terms of leadership and governance, ritual participation, or otherwise, between Jews and partners from different faith backgrounds; 36% said they draw some distinctions.
- 70% of communities said they recognize patrilineal Jews (those who identify as Jews, have a Jewish father but not a Jewish mother, and have not converted) as Jews for all purposes; 23% recognize them for some but not all purposes; 7% do not recognize them as Jews, but have specific ways to include patrilineal children.
- 75% of communities celebrate partners from different faith backgrounds, for example by offering special blessings for them or their relatives at lifecycle events; 25% do not.

Membership and Leadership

- In 84% of communities with bylaws, partners from different faith backgrounds count as full voting members; in between 76% and 84%, they are permitted to hold leadership positions. In 56% of communities without bylaws, the custom or practice is to count partners from different faith backgrounds as full voting members; in between 44% and 50%, they are permitted to hold leadership positions.
- Of communities that have officers, a board and committees, 40% have members from different faith backgrounds serving as such board members, 37% as committee chairs, and 27% as officers; in 57%, none are currently serving in those roles.
- Between 88% and 92% of communities permit partners from different faith backgrounds to serve as teachers and leaders of groups. Currently, between 46% and 52% have such teachers and group leaders, while 40% have neither.

Ritual Participation

• In 68% of communities that gather to celebrate Shabbat and holidays, partners from different faith backgrounds are permitted to lead candle lighting and kiddush.

- In 81% of communities in which baby namings and britot take place, parents from different faith backgrounds are permitted to recite all blessings that refer to entry into the covenant; in 88%, family members of that parent are permitted to take all roles (kvaterin, kvater, sandek).
- In 41% of communities in which b'nai mitzvot take place, parents from different faith backgrounds are allowed to have, by themselves, an Aliyah/recite the blessings before and after the Torah is read; 79% allow such parents to join with Jewish parents in an Aliyah; 90% allow them to recite a prayer.
- In 90% of communities in which b'nai mitzvot take place and a Torah is passed during the service, it is passed to the b'nai mitzvah child by relatives including those from different faith backgrounds; in 10%, only by Jewish relatives.
- In between 91% and 95% of communities, the rabbi or spiritual leader will officiate at a funeral for and lead a shiva minyan for a partner from a different faith background.

Dual Education

• 82% of communities allow children who are receiving formal religious education in another religion to participate in their education programs; 7% currently have such children in their programs, 37% do not, and 56% do not know.

Wedding Officiation

• In 74% of communities, the rabbi or spiritual leader will officiate at weddings of interfaith couples; in 29% they will co-officiate or officiate, in 45% officiate but not co-officiate. In communities that have weddings in their worship space, 72% permit weddings of interfaith couples to take place there.

Messaging, Programming and Training

- The websites of 34% of communities have a section that addresses interfaith families; only 5% publish their policies and practices with regard to interfaith families in terms of leadership, governance and ritual participation.
- 39% of communities offer programs that address issues that relate particularly to interfaith couples; 14% have an affinity group for interfaith families; 7% have a committee that specifically addresses interfaith families; 50% do not have these groups or programs.
- 77% of communities advertise outside of their community that they welcome interfaith families. The mission statements of 43% of communities refer to their approach to interfaith family inclusion.
- Between 11% and 16% percent of communities provide trainings for their professional staff and lay leaders on how to serve the specific needs of interfaith families.
- 23% have done a community organizing or listening campaign specifically involving interfaith families to better understand their needs and how their community can serve them.

Report

Methodology

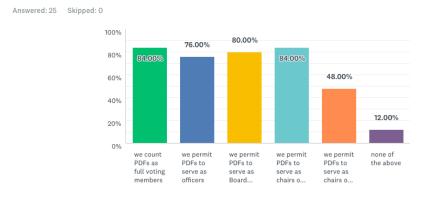
The Center for Radically Inclusive Judaism (CFRIJ) conducted a survey of emerging spiritual communities' interfaith inclusion policies and practices in November and December 2020. The Center compiled a list of 72 emerging spiritual communities with the cooperation of several national organizations. The list included organizations that have participated in the Jewish Emergent Network; organizations that have participated in the Open Dor Project; some organizations that participate in the Kenissa: Communities of Meaning Network and are categorized as in the "spiritual communities" sector; some spiritual communities in the Upstart Network; Base and Base Hillels; and additional organizations identified by the Center. The Center gratefully acknowledges the assistance provided in compiling the list. Invitations and reminders to take the survey were sent by email on November 11, 16, 22 and 29, 2020. Responses were received from 44 communities, representing 61% of the 72 that were invited to participate. A list of the communities that responded is attached as Exhibit 1.

The survey asked questions about membership and leadership; ritual participation; dual education; lifecycle officiation; and messaging, programming and training. Each section of questions included an open-ended question in which respondents could explain or comment on their answers.

Membership and Leadership Roles

Twenty-five communities answered a question about their bylaws. Of those, 84% count partners from different faith traditions as full voting members and permit them to serve as chairs of all committees; 80% permit them to serve as Board members; 76% permit them to serve as officers; 12% do not count them as full voting members or permit them to hold leadership positions.

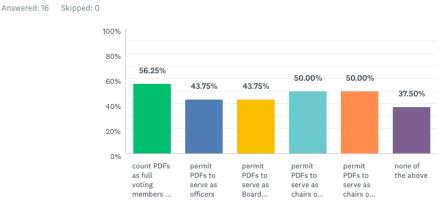




ANSWER CHOICES	▼ RESPONSES	*
▼ we count PDFs as full voting members	84.00%	21
▼ we permit PDFs to serve as officers	76.00%	19
▼ we permit PDFs to serve as Board members	80.00%	20
▼ we permit PDFs to serve as chairs of all committees	84.00%	21
▼ we permit PDFs to serve as chairs of some committees	48.00%	12
▼ none of the above	12.00%	3

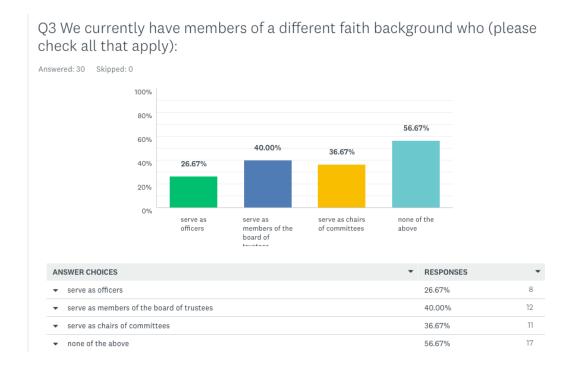
Sixteen communities responded that they did not have bylaws. Of those, it is the custom or practice of 56% to count partners from different faith traditions as full voting members, of 50% to permit them to serve as chairs of all committees, and of 44% to permit them to serve as Board members and officers; 38% do not count them as full voting members or permit them to hold leadership positions.



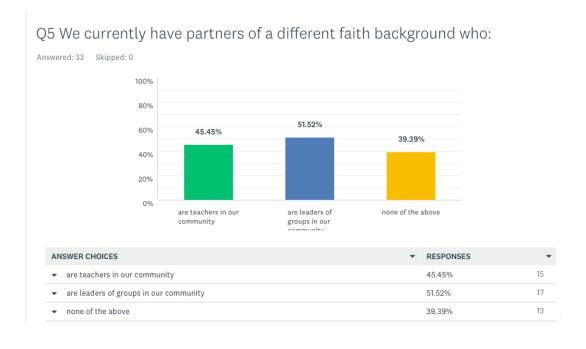


▼ count PDFs as full voting members of our community56.25%9▼ permit PDFs to serve as officers43.75%7▼ permit PDFs to serve as Board members43.75%7▼ permit PDFs to serve as chairs of all committees50.00%8▼ permit PDFs to serve as chairs of some committees50.00%8▼ none of the above37.50%6	ANSWER CHOICES	•	RESPONSES	*
▼ permit PDFs to serve as Board members 43.75% 7 ▼ permit PDFs to serve as chairs of all committees 50.00% 8 ▼ permit PDFs to serve as chairs of some committees 50.00% 8	▼ count PDFs as full voting members of our community		56.25%	9
▼ permit PDFs to serve as chairs of all committees 50.00% 8 ▼ permit PDFs to serve as chairs of some committees 50.00% 8	▼ permit PDFs to serve as officers		43.75%	7
▼ permit PDFs to serve as chairs of some committees 50.00% 8	▼ permit PDFs to serve as Board members		43.75%	7
	▼ permit PDFs to serve as chairs of all committees		50.00%	8
▼ none of the above 37.50% 6	▼ permit PDFs to serve as chairs of some committees		50.00%	8
	▼ none of the above		37.50%	6

Thirty communities indicated that they have officers, a board, and committees (14 said they did not). Of those, 57% do not currently have members of a different faith background serving in leadership positions; 40% have them serving as board members, 37% as chairs of committees, and 27% as officers.



Thirty-four communities responded to a question about having teachers and leaders of groups (10 said they did not). Of those, 92% permit partners from different faith backgrounds to be teachers and 88% leaders of groups; none prohibited both. Thirty-three communities responded to a question about currently having partners of different faith backgrounds serving as teachers (46% said they did) or leaders of groups (52% said they did); 40% did not have either.



There were 14 responses to an open-ended question asking for explanations of the answers about leadership and governance that were positive about inclusion of partners from different faith backgrounds.

- Four comments were to the effect that the communities' bylaws did not mention faith or faith backgrounds as a qualification; one said that was "because it is accepted and understood that all can participate."
- Two were to the effect that the communities did not have restrictions or rules and that "you do not have to Jewish to lead or participate."
- Three comments were to the effect that "people of all faiths are considered full members in every way."
- One said, "We are currently working to develop our governance structure and, when we
 do, all members of our community regardless of faith will be invited to vote and hold
 positions."
- One said, "We have had non-Jewish board members, board chair, and teachers in the past. These individuals would still need to be mission-aligned and see themselves as wanting to build 'meaningful Jewish community."
- One comment said that their only restriction was that the president had to be Jewish.

Ritual Participation

Of the 40 communities that indicated they gather to celebrate Shabbat and holidays, 68% permit partners from different faith backgrounds to lead the lighting of Shabbat and holiday candles and to lead kiddush; 33% do not.

Of the 37 communities that indicated that baby namings or britot take place in their communities, 81% permit parents from a different faith background to recite all blessings that refer to entry into the covenant, while 19% do not; 88% permit family members of that parent to take all roles (kvaterin, kvater, sandek), while 12% do not.

Twenty-nine communities responded to a question about b'nai mitzvot that take place in their communities. Of those, 41% allow a parent from a different faith background to have, by themselves, an Aliyah/recite the blessings before and after the Torah is read; 79% allow such parents to join with a Jewish parent in an Aliyah; 90% allow such parents to recite a prayer from the bimah; 3% permit none of these forms of participation. In addition, in 66% of those communities in which b'nai mitzvot take place, a Torah is passed to the b'nai mitzvah child; in 90% of those, it is passed by relatives including relatives from different faith backgrounds, but by only Jewish relatives in 10%.





Twenty-six communities responded to a question whether they had situations where their clergy counseled parents and relatives from different faith backgrounds not to participate in rituals although the community had inclusive policies to allow such participation; 3, or 12%, said they did have such situations, while 23, or 88%, said they did not.

In 33 communities where conversions take place, in 94% the conversions are celebrated publicly, in 6% they are not.

Only two of the 44 responding communities have or control a section of a cemetery; in one, a partner of a different faith background can be buried alongside their Jewish partner anywhere in the cemetery, in the other, in a section of the cemetery designated for interfaith families. Of all 44 responding communities, in 91% the rabbi or spiritual leader will officiate at a funeral for a partner from a different faith background, and in 95% lead a shiva minyan service for that partner.

Of the open-ended comments to the ritual participation questions, one said, "non-Jewish family members [who] are invited to come up during an Aliyah, they don't do the Hebrew but have beautiful English readings to do, I explain they need one Jew in the Crew to do the Hebrew." Another said they generally would want a Jewish person to recite the Torah blessings with them and "also would discourage their wearing of tallit because they haven't taken responsibility for the commandments on their shoulders." Another said, "if there are relatives – Jewish or non-Jewish – who are being considered for an Aliyah we ask the family to ensure that the relatives know the prayer and want to say it with sincerity." Finally, one rabbi said, "many of these situations have not yet come up... I am open in certain ways."

Recognition and Equal Treatment

All 44 responding communities answered three questions about recognition and equal treatment:

- 64% said that they do not draw any distinctions in terms of leadership and governance, ritual participation, or otherwise, between Jews and partners from different faith backgrounds; 36% said they draw some distinctions.
- 70% said they recognize patrilineal Jews (those who identify as Jews, have a Jewish father but not a Jewish mother, and have not converted) as Jews for all purposes; 23% recognize them for some but not all purposes; 7% do not recognize them as Jews, but have specific ways to include patrilineal children.
- 75% celebrate partners from different faith backgrounds, for example by offering special blessings for them or their relatives at lifecycle events; 25% do not.

Only nineteen of the communities that said they do not draw any distinctions have b'nai mitzvot take place in their communities. Given their answer that they do not draw distinctions, one would expect that they would allow parents from a different faith background to have, by themselves, an Aliyah at their childrens' b'nai mitzvot. In fact, however, only 58% do -42% do not.

Open-ended comments to these questions included the following:

- "We treat everyone the same for the most part, except leading tefillah betzibbur."
- "Children with Jewish fathers may participate in religious education. In order to participate ritually, mikvah and, if applicable, hatafat dam brit is required."
- "When we held minyan, we did not count patrilineal Jews on the minyan, and I was thinking about how to include them."
- "We talk about the difference between Jewish identity and legal status we would never tell someone they aren't Jewish; we would talk about legal status and how our congregation defines that (in a traditional/Conservative way)."
- Broadly, [we are] open to anyone who is interested in being part of a Jewish community, and we draw relatively few boundaries. That said, I tend to follow the lead of the

individuals involved, and the sub-groups within the broader [community]; so, for example, I might present mikvah as an option to parents of a patrilineally Jewish child – not as a requirement but rather so that they can make an informed decision."

Dual Education

Of the 22 communities that responded, 82% allow children who are receiving formal religious education in another religion to participate in their education programs; 18% do not. Of the 27 communities that responded, 7% said they have children in their education programs who are receiving formal religious education in another religion, 37% said they do not, and 56% said they do not know.

Open-ended comments to these questions included the following:

- "All who want to learn with us and build our community are welcome."
- "They are with us to study Torah, not proselytize, and we welcome their presence."
- "We don't ask this question of families. We make it clear that our programs are grounded in Jewish tradition and open to all who are interested."

Wedding Officiation

Of 42 responses on wedding officiation, 74% of communities said that some or all of their clergy officiate at weddings of interfaith couples; 45% will only officiate, while 29% will co-officiate as well as officiate; 26% do neither.

Of 18 communities that have weddings in their worship space, 72% permit weddings of interfaith couples to take place there, 28% do not.

Open-ended comments included:

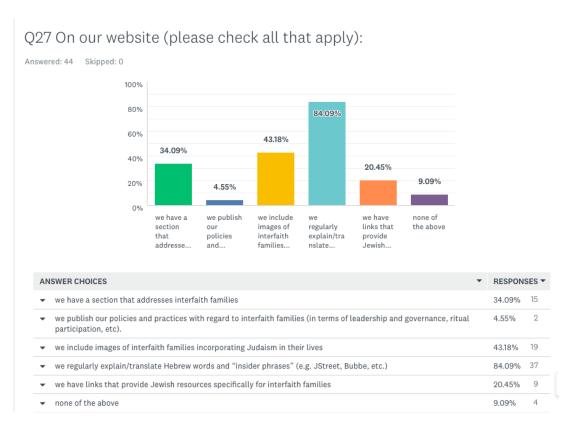
- "Our clergy team does not officiate interfaith weddings, and happily refers to colleagues who do when we are approached. We have numerous interfaith couples in our community, currently we have 2 separate interfaith couples leading cohorts, and our clergy are called on to perform many of the baby naming ceremonies and conversions."
- "[I] modify the Jewish wedding ceremony if needed so that it makes sense/has integrity for the couple."
- "The [spiritual leaders] is not permitted to participate because she is a member of the Cantors Assembly."
- "I take it on a case-by-case basis."
- "It is a Conservative synagogue, so even if I was willing to officiate for interfaith couples, I wouldn't be allowed to."

Messaging, Programming and Training

All 44 communities responded to a series of questions about messaging, programming and training.

On their websites:

- 84% regularly explain/translate Hebrew words and "insider phrases"
- 43% include images of interfaith families incorporating Judaism in their lives
- 34% have a section that addresses interfaith families
- 20% have links that provide Jewish resources specifically for interfaith families
- 5% publish their policies and practices with regard to interfaith families (in terms of leadership and governance, ritual participation, etc.)



Thirty-nine percent of communities offer programs that address issues that relate particularly to interfaith couples; 27% have had speakers about issues facing interfaith families in Jewish communities and Jewish life; 14% have an affinity group for interfaith families; 7% have a committee that specifically addresses interfaith families; 50% do not have these groups or programs.

Seventy-seven percent advertise outside of their community that they welcome interfaith families; 23% do not.

Sixteen percent of communities provide trainings for their professional staff on how to serve the specific needs of interfaith families; 11% provide such trainings for their lay leaders; 84% do not provide such trainings.

Twenty-three percent have done a community organizing or listening campaign specifically involving interfaith families to better understand their needs and how their community can serve them; 77% have not.

The mission statements of 43% of communities refer to their approach to interfaith family inclusion; those of 57% do not.

Open-ended comments indicated different approaches to statements about inclusion. One said, "We welcome interfaith families but do not address them specifically. We are inclusive and use that term to welcome all." Three communities said their websites say words to the effect that they welcome all regardless of faith or participants of all backgrounds. Two said that welcoming interfaith families was explicitly mentioned on their websites. One said, "we include 'fellow-travelers' in our description of who we are as a community. And we list as a goal to actively reach out to interfaith families." One said, "we use different language that works for our community." One said, "we are a small community... interfaith is simply a given."

One comment said, "We try to make our programs as accessible and inclusive as possible – translating/transliteration, explaining blessings what they mean, why we make them – in ways that will feel meaningful to Jews/non-Jews/those who don't 'believe in' God, etc." Another said, "the team assumes always that we are holding multi-faith events that are in the context of a Jewish sacred gathering."

One comment suggested that the items in question 28, which asked about committees and affinity groups and programs and speakers all focused on or addressing interfaith families, "would ostracize families that consider themselves a regular part of our community."

Discussion

This survey is modeled on the Center's December 2019 <u>Survey on Reform Synagogue Interfaith Inclusion Policies and Practices</u>. As stated in the report on that survey:

Interpretation of the significance of the data yielded by this survey depends to a large extent on the interpreter's perspective with respect to inclusion of interfaith families. The same data can be stated in ways that emphasize permission or restriction; for example, 40% of congregations permit X, or, 60% of congregations do not permit X. In turn, whether or not it is appropriate or advisable to permit or not permit X depends on one's fundamental views: about Judaism – whether it is a system for those who *are* Jewish or also those who *do* Jewish; about the relative importance of maintaining boundaries, on the one hand, and engaging interfaith families in Jewish life, on the other; and about whether restriction or permission will lead to interfaith family engagement.

It is also important to note that the communities participating in the survey ranged from well-established communities with years of experience and hundreds of participants, to those just starting out. The open-ended responses included comments that "your questions presuppose conditions not reflected in our practices" and "some of these questions are hard to answer because the categories don't map neatly to our approach." One said, "We are still pretty small, and a lot of these items are things we plan to do in the future but are not applicable currently."

With those caveats in mind, it is striking that almost two-thirds of emerging spiritual communities (64%) said that they do not draw any distinctions in terms of leadership and governance, ritual participation, or otherwise, between Jews and partners from different faith backgrounds. From a maximalist inclusion perspective, that is a heartening statistic, as is the

finding that 70% recognize patrilineal Jews as Jews for all purposes, and 23% as Jews for some but not all purposes, with only 7% not recognizing them as Jews.

However, only 41% of communities in which b'nai mitvah services take place allow parents from different faith background to have, by themselves, an Aliyah – a statistic which is not consistent with 64% of communities saying that they draw no distinctions. Moreover, of the nineteen communities that said they do not draw any distinctions and have b'nai mitzvot in their communities, 42% do not allow parents from a different faith background to have, by themselves, an Aliyah, raising a question about whether they do in fact treat Jews and their partners equally.

In terms of membership and leadership, the emerging spiritual communities that have bylaws are somewhat more inclusive than Reform synagogues in terms of counting partners from different faith backgrounds as voting members (84%, compared to 79% of Reform synagogues). They are even more inclusive in terms of permitting partners from different faith backgrounds to hold leadership positions; 80% permit them to serve as board members and 76% as officers, compared to 43% and 21%, respectively, of Reform synagogues. The emerging spiritual communities also have more partners from different faith backgrounds serving as board members (40%) and officers (27%) than Reform synagogues (24% and 13%, respectively).

For reasons which are not clear and could be explored further, the custom or practice of emerging spiritual communities that do not have bylaws are not as inclusive, with only 56% counting partners from different faith backgrounds as voting members, and 44% permitting them to serve as board members and officers.

In the Reform synagogue survey report, we said, "From a maximalist inclusion perspective, while it is heartening that 68% of congregations allow members of a different faith to lead candle lighting, it is disheartening that 32% do not." The same comment can be made about the emerging spiritual communities, where the data are identical, 68% and 32%. In communities where a Torah is passed during b'nai mitzvah services, however, 90% of the communities allow relatives from different faith backgrounds to pass the Torah, compared to 78% or Reform synagogues.

That 80%+ of communities in which baby namings and britot take place fully include parents and relatives from different faith backgrounds, and 90%+ of rabbis/spiritual leaders will officiate at funerals and conduct shiva minyans for them, are also positive indicators of inclusion, as is the fact that 82% of communities allow children who are receiving formal religious education in another religion to participate in their education programs.

The wedding officiation practices of emerging spiritual communities' rabbis and spiritual leaders are roughly comparable to those of Reform rabbis: 74% will officiate for interfaith couples (compared to 88% of Reform rabbis), while 29% will co-officiate (compared to 22% of Reform rabbis); 72% of communities permit weddings of interfaith couples in their worship space (compared to 94% of Reform synagogues).

The messaging, programming and training practices of emerging spiritual communities are also very similar to those of Reform synagogues:

- 39% offer programs that address issues that relate specifically to interfaith families, compared to 40% of Reform; 14% have an affinity group for interfaith families compared to 12% of Reform; 50% do not have these programs or groups, compared to 46% of Reform.
- One open-ended comment suggested that having committees, affinity groups, programs and speakers focused on or addressing interfaith families "would ostracize families that consider themselves a regular part of our community." Similar comments were made by some Reform synagogues, espousing the belief that interfaith families do not want to be "singled out."
- 77% advertise outside of their communities that they welcome interfaith families, compared to 72% of Reform.
- Between 11% and 16% provide trainings for their professional or lay leaders on how to serve the needs of interfaith families, compared to 10% to 13% of Reform.

For reasons which are not clear and could be explored further, the emerging spiritual communities, like Reform synagogues, are not publicizing their policies and practices with regard to interfaith families on their websites – only 5% do, compared to 18% of Reform.

Finally, the open-ended responses suggested a pragmatic, inclusive approach being taken in some of the emerging spiritual communities, which allow members from different faith backgrounds who are "mission-aligned and see themselves as wanting to build meaningful Jewish community" to serve in leadership positions; which allow parents and relatives from different faith backgrounds to have an Aliyah where the family can "ensure that the relatives know the prayer and want to say it with sincerity"; and which don't ask families whether their children are being education in another religion, but "make it clear that our programs are grounded in Jewish tradition and open to all who are interested."

* * * * *

The Center will provide a link and a password to the underlying survey data, as well as a list of all communities invited to take the survey, upon request; if you are interested, please send an email requesting access to info@cfrij.com.

Exhibit 1 – Participating Communities

Ashreinu	St Louis	MO
Asiyah	Somerville	MA
Base Boston	Boston	MA
Base Harlem	New York	NY
Base Ithaca	Ithaca	NY
Congregation Mekor Shalom	Tampa	FL
Congregation Simchat HaLev	Syosset	NY
Hinenu: The Baltimore Justice Shtiebl	Baltimore	MD
IKAR	Los Angeles	CA
Jewish Studio Project	San Francisco	CA
Judaism Your Way	Denver	CO
Kanfot Ha'aretz	San Jose	CA
Kavana	Seattle	WA
Keeping It Sacred	Los Angeles	CA
Kesher Pittsburgh	Pittsburgh	PA
Kol HaLev	Boynton Beach	FL
Kol Tzedek West Philadelphia Synagogue	Philadelphia	PA
Lab/Shul	New York	NY
Makom LA	Los Angeles	CA
Makom: Creative Downtown Judaism	Toronto	ON
MakomNJ	Morristown	NJ
Malkhut	Queens	NY
Mile End Chavurah	Montreal	QΕ
Mishkan	Chicago	IL
Nefesh	Los Angeles	LA
New Synagogue Project	Washington	DC
Open Temple	Venice	CA
Romemu	New York	NY
Silverstein Base Hillel Lincoln Park	Chicago	IL
Silverstein Base Hillel Loop	Chicago	IL
Sixth & I	Washington	DC
Tasman Center for Jewish Creativity	Washington	DC
The Den Collective	Washington	DC
The Jewish Studio	Potomac	MD
The Kitchen	San Francisco	CA
The New Shul	New York	NY
The Riverway Project	Boston	MA
The Shul of New York	New York	NY

The Tribe	Miami	FL
The Well	Detroit	MI
Tidewater Chavurah	Tidewater	VA
Tribe 12	Philadelphia	PA
Wilderness Torah	Berkeley	CA
Your Jewish Bridge	Atlanta	GA