



NCEJ is a Private Foundation Funding Efforts Worldwide to Welcome New People to Judaism

For over 45 years NCEJ has given grants for programs that educate, engage, and connect new people to Judaism – including interfaith families, people interested in conversion, Jewish-adjacent individuals, and others who want to explore becoming part of the Jewish community.

NCEJ provides grants to established Jewish organizations, including synagogues, JCCs/Federations, regional consortiums, and national networks. One of our primary priorities is marketing – we want our grantees to promote their programs using a variety of methods to widen their audience and bring in new people.

Advice from NCEJ Grantees

**Offering Conversion Classes, Introduction to Judaism Courses, and Related Programs
Fostering a Welcoming and Educational Pathway to Judaism**



Sutton Place Synagogue, Living Judaism program

FOLLOWING ARE SOME OF THE TIPS AND LESSONS FROM GRANTEES LEARNED OVER THE YEARS.

Course Structure:

Additional sessions:

- Adding “field trips” to the established curriculum to enhance the experience, such as an outing to a mikveh or a kosher market.
- Including Shabbat dinners and holiday celebrations as part of the class.
- Adding holiday “practicum” opportunities - having students meet together before going to the festival celebrations with the entire community, so that they are prepared in advance.



Format

Hybrid / Online / In-person:

- Some organizations prefer in-person only because of the relationships that develop during breaks and discussions. Others offer online also, but at a separate time, rather than hybrid, because of the challenges inherent in the hybrid format.
- **Innovative Idea for a Hybrid Format:** The administrator of a small congregation located near a university hired a college student to handle the online elements of a hybrid Intro course, freeing the rabbi to teach and work directly with the participants.

Teaching Staffs

- Some of the classes are taught by a mix of teachers or a combination of a teacher/guest speakers (particularly when the class is sponsored by a collaboration of local synagogues). Students enjoy the varied teaching styles.

The Value of a Mentoring Program

Mentoring programs have become increasingly popular, a way of guiding students going through the conversion process and strengthening the connections to the sponsoring congregation.

WHAT WORKS WELL:

- If possible, having mentors who are also Jews-by-choice
- Matching single mentors with single students, and couples with couples
- Providing funds for coffee/tea dates to help develop relationships

Helping Students Celebrate Holidays

- Many groups have found that holiday kits containing ritual items, blessings, recipes, and related materials made it easier for students to observe holidays at home. On feedback forms attendees noted that receiving practical items reinforced the classroom learning.
- **In one Intro class students made Havdalah kits**, something they were unlikely to receive as gifts. It was a way for students to learn in a hands-on way about the holiday, while also giving students the chance to talk among themselves and build relationships.



PJ Library & JCC Syracuse

How Sampling Traditional Foods Enhances the Classroom Experience

- Some groups provide food each session tied to the topic being discussed, such as hummus when Israel is the topic. Sometimes the food is provided by volunteers and other times it is purchased. Participants enjoy trying unfamiliar foods, and it helps them feel part of a community.



Connecting Participants to Judaism and the Congregation

Here are some ways grantees have connected class participants to Judaism.

- Giving conversion students holiday celebration kits, or “Intro to Judaism” kits. One congregation gives out a small Seder plate and a haggadah. Our website has examples and photos.
- Giving each student a mug with “Shalom” written on it as a visual reminder of the class.
- Offering opportunities for continued learning, including holiday workshops.
- Providing special invitations to Shabbat services/dinners so that students can practice what they’ve learned and engage with the congregation. This can make participants feel “extra-welcome”.

Building a Jewish Library

- Some groups provide a list of recommended books to read, so that students can start building their own Jewish library.
- Another idea is to give out a list of online Judaic resources so that people have a vetted source of reliable Jewish sites.



Sutton Place Synagogue, Living Judaism program

Apply now for funding for conversion classes connecting new people to Judaism

NCEJ accepts applications throughout the year — apply anytime! Grantees may receive more than one grant per year. Apply now and hear back within 30 days. For more details see our website: ncejudaism.org

Have an idea for a program but not sure it meets our guidelines? Questions? Please contact Ellen Gerecht, Executive Director, at ellen@ncejudaism.org or call **301-802-4254**.

Check Out Our Resource Pages

Our program profile pages are chock-full of examples of recently-funded projects, ranging from Judaism 101 classes to holiday workshops for interfaith families. Scroll through for program ideas, marketing suggestions, and advice on what worked well. To get ideas that you can use in your community see our profile pages on our website: ncejudaism.org

Introduction to Jewish Traditions

*Fostering a Welcoming & Educational
Pathway to Judaism*

Holiday Programming

*Celebrating and Connecting
Newcomers to Jewish Life*

Interfaith/Intercultural Engagement

*Connecting Interfaith
Families to Judaism*