



STRENGTHENING PLURALISM IN MISSION-DRIVEN ORGANIZATIONS

Project Shema's Ideal Learning Approach

In polarized times, mission-driven organizations are asked to respond quickly and decisively to issues beyond the core focus of their work. Yet urgency can crowd out nuance, and moral certainty can unintentionally narrow the space for empathy and pluralism internally. In our highly polarized environment, **organizations committed to inclusion may struggle to navigate differences within their own teams, and leaders need support to strengthen culture or repair and rebuild from internal fractures.**

Project Shema partners with organizations through deep listening and collaborative design, helping teams navigate moments of tension with clarity and care. While our work is grounded in confronting anti-Jewish harm and strengthening Jewish inclusion, the frameworks we bring support broader efforts to sustain pluralism, strengthen internal cultures by deepening understanding across difference, support principled decision-making in polarized times, and build more resilient movements for progress.

*"Project Shema was absolutely wonderful in guiding our team through difficult terrain - both in the world in general and within our group. **Their expertise, patience, and commitment to fostering understanding are truly commendable.** These conversations can be emotionally charged and complex. Their ability to create a brave space for dialogue allowed us to explore differing perspectives, ask difficult questions, and engage in meaningful, empathy building exchanges." —NGO Leader, San Diego*

THE LEARNING ARC OVERVIEW



Our learning arc is designed to move from alignment and shared understanding → to building depolarization skills → to applying those tools in real organizational decisions under strain.

Session 1 **Why This Matters Now: Leadership Alignment** (2hr)

- **Purpose in the arc:** By clarifying shared principles, naming tensions openly, leadership establishes the conditions for trust, voluntary participation, and meaningful dialogue across the organization. Facilitated by Project Shema leadership alongside an organizational psychologist when needed. This conversation is designed to surface underlying assumptions, reduce defensiveness, and ensure our engagement is grounded in clarity.
- Leadership will:
 - Reflect on the emotional landscape inside the organization
 - Identify shared values that anchor decision-making under pressure
 - Align on the “why” for staff that will help buy-in and motivation
 - Determine any needs for staff listening session *prior* to training

Session 2 **Breaking the Binary in Mission-Driven Organizations** (2hr)

- **Purpose in the arc:** Create shared norms and skills that enable the universally applicable skill of empathetic, humanizing exploration of emotionally charged concepts in advance of diving deeper into the highly polarized discourse around Israel and Palestine.
- Participants will:
 - Explore how binary thinking closes space for empathy
 - Explore how binary thinking can weaken institutions and movements
 - Build active listening and dialogue skills
 - Build the muscle for active listening and effective dialogue that nurtures understanding and empathy and establish depolarization as a relational norm anchoring the work

Session 3 **Understanding Jewish Identity & Antisemitism** (90min)

- **Purpose in the arc:** Build shared foundational understanding of the context of Jewish identity and how that fits into our understanding of inclusion efforts. The session provides a comprehensive introduction and sets the foundation for deeper applied learning.
- **NOTE:** As part of this process, a similar length Islamophobia *and* anti-Palestinian racism training should also be included. While we don't offer this, we have trusted partners who approach this work in a similar way that we can refer organizations to.
- Participants will:
 - Understand the complexity of Jewish identity
 - Understand what contemporary antisemitism is and how it works
 - Understand how antisemitism undermines Jewish inclusion and safety and healthy pluralistic institutions and societies
 - Understand how anti-Jewish ideas show up throughout history

Session 4 **Exploring Anti-Jewish Harm in Israel-Palestine Discourse** (2hr)

- **Purpose in the arc:** Participants explore common rhetoric that comes up around Israel and Palestine. This session enables participants to ask the hard questions and explore the various meanings of contested rhetoric, including and how some ideas may, regardless of intent, undermine Jewish inclusion and safety.
- Participants will:
 - Participants review a framework for understanding how conversations about Israel and Palestine can undermine Jewish inclusion and safety
 - Participants engage in a depolarized approach to exploring common rhetoric around Israel and Palestine
 - Participants practice practical tools and strategies for supporting Jewish students and/or colleagues on campus and beyond

Session 5 **Beyond the Binary: Dialogue across Divide** (2 hrs)

- **Purpose in the arc:** This program models a different path forward by giving participants a chance to hear from a Jewish educator and Palestinian educator in conversation together, exploring what it means to stay in a relationship across disagreement. These two leaders will model how dialogue can function as a form of safety; creating a space where identity, grief, and complexity can coexist without dehumanization.
- Participants will:
 - Observe how curiosity and empathy can coexist with deep differences
 - Hear dual narratives side by side in ways that don't seek to negate the other
 - Recognize the distinction between disagreement and dehumanization
 - Learn practical strategies for dialogue as a practice that strengthens safety and pluralism and improves internal culture

Session 6 **Practical Application for Mission-Driven Organizations** (2hr)

- **Purpose in the arc:** Finally, we take intentional time to translate learning into practical application. This program is designed to help participants apply newfound understanding and context to real life situations, ensuring the new ideas explored in the previous sessions can become institutional guides to improve inclusion and safety. Further, we help participants create shared agreements for how to engage on this issue internally moving forward in ways that are inclusive, empathetic, and humanizing to strengthen internal cultures and support the broader mission.
- Participants will:
 - Apply frameworks to real organizational scenarios
 - Distinguish discomfort from harm
 - Identify and develop shared norms for internal engagement to reduce future strain

AFTER THE ARC

Lasting change and meaningful progress require impact and intentionality. We close with a shared purpose, **creating space to reflect, plan, and build for sustainability**. Together, we determine how the work continues, identifying the actions, tools, and resources that will sustain its momentum. This equips leaders with tangible impact data, actionable plans, and practical resources to drive enduring change.

What we bring to this closeout:

- Data and feedback to assess progress and insights for how you move forward
- Takeaways and practical applications for action planning post training
- Resources to support the administration
- How we can provide support moving forward based on the process up to that point