
MUSEUMS RESPOND

**STRATEGIES FOR COUNTERING
ANTISEMITISM & HATE**

FIELD GUIDE TO RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

[*The U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism*](#), released in May 2023, challenged us to confront the reality that antisemitism is rising, and that it threatens not only Jewish communities, but all Americans.

In recent years, incidents of antisemitism across the U.S. have significantly shifted our [*understanding*](#) of what's at play, and what's at stake. White nationalists in Charlottesville chanted, "Jews will not replace us" in 2017. In 2018, an attacker in Pittsburgh murdered eleven people at the Tree of Life building on Shabbat. On January 6, 2021, a man wearing a "Camp Auschwitz" shirt was in the crowd that stormed the Capitol building. The following year, Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker welcomed a stranger into Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, Texas; the armed man took the rabbi and three congregants hostage for 11 hours that day. In 2023, the Anti-Defamation League [*recorded*](#) 8,873 antisemitic incidents across the United States, a large increase from prior years. The months since the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023 and the subsequent war, have presented profound challenges to our communities and our organizations.

With so many individuals across different communities afraid to participate in everyday activities—from shopping at the grocery store, to sending children to school and college, to going to work, or praying in houses of worship—the work of countering antisemitism and hate remains both urgent and important.

As part of the *National Strategy*, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and the Council of American Jewish Museums (CAJM) brought together more than 100 leaders from museums, archives, and libraries committed to making a difference across communities for the March 2024 Summit, *Museums Respond: Strategies for Countering Antisemitism and Hate*.

This resulting *Field Guide*, an outgrowth of the Summit, provides museums and educators with approaches, themes, and tools for addressing antisemitism. We hope you will find these useful as you address educational needs in your own communities of service. Thank you for your ongoing efforts as we work together to strengthen the future of our organizations, our communities, and our shared democracy.

SUMMIT INTRODUCTION VIDEO

Click here to watch highlights from the opening segment of the Summit. Topics include how IMLS supports museums in countering hate; museums as essential resources for a healthy democracy; special roles and responsibilities for culturally specific museums; and why antisemitism is a threat to us all.



INTRODUCTORY SOURCES

- For an introduction to 21st-century antisemitism, see [Antisemitism Here and Now](#) by Deborah Lipstadt—or listen to a related segment on [NPR](#).
- For a short introductory video on antisemitism, see ["Antisemitism in Our Midst"](#) by University of California, Berkeley's Center for Jewish Studies.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1

What are the key questions about antisemitism that you want to be prepared to answer?

2

What difficulties are your community members facing regarding acts of hate?

3

What impact do you want your museum to have in addressing antisemitism and other forms of hate?

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EVOLVING NARRATIVES

Museums are keepers of many stories—the ones we hold dear, the ones that inform our traditions and identities, the ones that distinguish us, the ones we present, those that cause heartache, and those we do not yet understand. Museum professionals explore the complexities of how we can tell different stories over time, and how we might use stories to open up new ideas, questions, and conversations with audiences.

Museums interpreting Jewish history cover a wide range of Jewish experiences, including incidents of antisemitism and Jewish responses to it. Yet most museum narratives around antisemitism focus on events that occurred more than 70 years ago. With antisemitism on the rise across the U.S., museums are key resources in presenting human stories as part of the narrative. They also paint a fuller picture of the diversity of Jewish life, culture, and heritage, and can help counter stereotypes and assumptions.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



How can we thoughtfully calibrate information about hate and antisemitism alongside stories of resilience, diversity, and vibrancy?



What information about hate or contemporary antisemitism can visitors find at your museum? What else might they need?



What gaps exist in public knowledge, and how can we work together to meet needs in public education?

MUSEUMS RESPOND

ONLINE RESOURCES

These resources introduce a range of American Jewish experiences:

- [*Timeline in American Jewish History*](#) by the American Jewish Archives.
- The Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History's sites for [*Openbook*](#) and [*Jewish American Heritage Month*](#).
- Oral histories by the [*Jewish Women's Archive*](#) documenting ways in which gender, class, place, and identities shape women's lives.
- Research [*studies*](#) by the Jews of Color Initiative, showing the multiracial reality of Jewish people.
- Jewtia's [*Peoplehood Papers 32*](#), on Latin-American Jewish communities.
- Lunar Collective's [*video series*](#) with stories by Asian-Jewish Americans.
- [*A Sephardi & Mizrahi Education Toolkit*](#) by JIMENA, with resources on Sephardi and Mizrahi heritage.
- A virtual [*tour*](#) of Touro Synagogue, the oldest standing synagogue in the U.S.

COLLECTIONS AS RESOURCES

Museum collections have been central to American educational efforts to address antisemitism. From the founding of the American Jewish Historical Society in 1892 to affirm the role of Jews in American life, to early Judaica collections at the Smithsonian and the Jewish Museum (NYC) that placed Judaism alongside other religions, to the emergence of Holocaust museums that centered the stories of survivors—museums have long played a role in public understandings of Jewish life and antisemitism.

As we face new types of antisemitism and hate in our communities today, artifacts, documents, and historic photographs can be key resources for both documentation and engagement. They help us speak to multiple audiences, and encourage new understandings of our neighbors and ourselves.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



Which objects in your collection might help launch healthy conversations about antisemitism or other forms of hate?



How might museums work together through collecting campaigns, digital projects, and shared resources?



How can collections be used more actively to make connections with different communities?

ONLINE RESOURCES

- [***Artifacts Unpacked***](#), a collections exploration by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, with accompanying short videos.
- [***Your Story, Our Story***](#) by the Tenement Museum, featuring student-submitted personal objects relating to immigration.
- [***Stop the Hate***](#), digital museum tour by the Maltz Museum, using artifacts to examine the history of antisemitism.
- [***Stop AAPI Hate***](#), which documented the rise of anti-Asian racism during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- USC Shoah Foundation's [***Countering Antisemitism Through Testimony***](#) program, which records video testimonies of people whose lives have been disrupted by contemporary acts of antisemitism.
- The [***Invisible Histories Project***](#), which serves as an intermediary between communities and institutions, to build an accessible collection about LGBTQ life in the South.
- The Lillian and Albert Small Capital Jewish Museum is collecting contemporary [***materials***](#) from Jewish life in the region, including activist items and posters.

COLLECTIONS SESSION VIDEO

Click here to watch highlights from the Summit session “Collections as Evidence / Collections for Engagement,” which explored collections as a core strength of museums—in documenting experiences of persecution, in showing resilience and variety in cultures, and in providing ways to engage communities in new understandings that can bridge differences.



HOLOCAUST MUSEUMS AND MEMORIALS

Holocaust museums and memorials are key resources for public education about the Holocaust, and for remembering the millions of Jewish lives that were lost or forever changed.

Often informed by accounts and evidence from survivors, Holocaust museums preserve Holocaust histories and also lay a foundation for conversations about immigration and human rights, as well as antisemitism, homophobia, racism, and other forms of hate.

Holocaust museums and memorials build knowledge of the past, empower audiences to recognize antisemitic tropes and conspiracy theories, and help cultivate critical thinking skills and civic participation.

The rise of antisemitism in the U.S. has signaled a need for ongoing conversations, informed by historical contexts. Holocaust museums can help meet educational requirements across [*different states*](#), and also address additional needs of families, teachers, and individuals.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



In what ways is your local Holocaust museum a unique resource?



How do memorials and commemorations serve as important points for reflection and connection?



What educational programs are museums offering about issues affecting your communities that can be helpful in your work to counter hate and antisemitism?

ONLINE RESOURCES

- [*Confronting Hate*](#) toolkit, by the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center.
- The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's [*Antisemitism Explained*](#) and [*Series: Antisemitism*](#), with short videos and articles featuring artifacts, to explore antisemitism and its history.
- Holocaust Museum LA's [*augmented reality application*](#) on primary sources from a survivor of Sobibor, and [*Teacher Guides*](#).
- [*Analyzing Stereotypes and Scapegoating*](#), curriculum by the Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education.
- Video by The Jewish Museum, [*The Holocaust as History and Warning*](#), with Timothy Snyder.
- [*Trainings*](#) for teachers, students, and community groups on antisemitism, by the Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh.
- The [*Courage to Act*](#) exhibition at Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, for children age 9+, and the Museum's online [*Educator Antisemitism Resource*](#).

HOLOCAUST MUSEUMS & MEMORIALS SESSION VIDEO

Click here to watch portions of the Summit session “Holocaust Museums, Memorials, and Antisemitism,” which featured museum leaders sharing new strategies to respond to the resurgence of antisemitism in a rapidly shifting environment.



THE ARTS AND CREATIVITY

Museums have long been centers for the arts and records of human creativity, innovation, cultural expression, and variety. With their varied textures and vocabularies, the arts create a different language for understanding, and reposition our relationships to ourselves and each other.

Jewish arts express a wide range of Jewish ideas, variety, diversity, textures, and experiences—and challenge us to see “Jewish” in new ways.

With so many communities experiencing acts of hate, the arts can help bring communities together, build new understandings, and unite us against shared threats to our safety and our democracy.

ONLINE RESOURCES

- The Jewish Museum’s [*Object Lessons*](#), illustrating Jewish rituals and holidays with art objects.
- Educational [*resources*](#) by the Contemporary Jewish Museum, using arts to explore antisemitism, Jewish culture, and diversity across Jewish life.
- The [*Dwelling in a Time of Plagues*](#) public art project, a Jewish creative response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with online resources curated by CANVAS.
- [*The Jewish Book Council*](#) website, foregrounding Jewish literature, including writings about antisemitism, October 7, and wide-ranging Jewish ideas.
- [*Be the Change*](#) art initiative by the Jewish Arts Collaborative, which invites public engagement and social change.
- [*The Musician’s Inclusive Practice Toolkit*](#), by the Western States Center which offers ways for musicians to work towards a more inclusive democracy.
- [*LA vs Hate’s*](#) outdoor [*murals*](#), showing cultural diversity and distinctiveness across the county’s five districts.
- Educational [*resources*](#) by the Skirball Cultural Center, with art-making activities.
- Educational and community building [*programs*](#) by Theatre Dybbuk.
- [*Projects*](#) by The Workshop, an arts fellowship for Jews of Color, Jewish-Indigenous, Sephardi, and Mizrahi culture makers.
- [*Artists for Understanding*](#), a national initiative that promotes the arts and humanities as crucial in bridging divides through their capacity to foster dialogue, connection, empathy, and changemaking in communities.

THE ARTS & CREATIVITY SESSION VIDEO

Click here to watch highlights from the Summit evening program on “Jewish Arts and Creative Expression,” which explored opportunities the arts open up for museums in showing complexity and variety, building cultural fluency and understanding, and in awakening a different sense of ourselves and others.



COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN

Museums play a critical role in educating our children—serving schools and teachers, supporting families and caregivers, and encouraging individual exploration in welcoming environments. Museums also create exhibitions that help young children explore their differences and similarities to one other, often alongside each other in galleries.

With many schools caught in contemporary debates about history, culture, identity, and information—museums and libraries have become essential centers for learning and ideas.

Museums are important public centers that familiarize young children with different cultural stories, and prepare them to counter antisemitism and other forms of hate.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



How can your museum present culturally specific material in a way that builds familiarity and empathy?



How is your museum responding to new school needs and requests, or debates around curricula?



What museum have you visited with children that made a lasting impression, and why?

RESOURCES FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

- [*XOXO: The Healing Power of Love and Forgiveness*](#) traveling exhibition by the Children's Museum Pittsburgh, which was updated to be a rapid-response resource following the 2018 murders at the Tree of Life building.
- [*Museum Resources for Talking about Racism with Children*](#) by the Association of Children's Museums.
- The Association of Jewish Libraries' [*Love Your Neighbor*](#) booklists, plus its [*guide*](#) to evaluating Jewish representation in children's literature to assist practitioners in navigating content while centering Jewish stories and avoiding stereotypes.
- [*The Book of Life Podcast*](#), about resources for fighting antisemitism.
- The Yiddish Book Center's [*Teach Great Jewish Books*](#), with resources on immigration, Jewish content, the Holocaust, gender, Yiddish theater and literature.
- [*Mini documentaries*](#) by the Wing Luke Museum for educators, and [*reading lists*](#) on Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander histories and stories.
- [*Books Matter, Children's & Young Adult Literature*](#), the Anti-Defamation League's online bibliography of books about bias, bullying, diversity, and social justice.
- [*Recommended Reading: For Children*](#), by the American Library Association.
- Booklists and [*recommendations*](#) from PJ Library for talking to children about antisemitism.

COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN SESSION VIDEO

Click here to watch segments of the Summit session “Communicating with Children,” which explored how museums can better serve families and children by illustrating Jewish culture, building empathy between communities, and countering antisemitism—using new exhibition techniques, partnerships, shared resources, and experimentation.



PARTNERSHIPS

Museum partnerships are more important than ever. They help us see contemporary and historical events from multiple perspectives, build understandings of one another, and incubate new possibilities across communities. Relationships between communities—fostered over time, through consistent engagement—also help build up our defenses against hate and strengthen our abilities to assist one another.

The work of building and maintaining partnerships across communities and cultures has become increasingly complex in a rapidly shifting and highly charged environment. The following tips and resources can help museums and other educational institutions build and re-build relationships, foster a greater sense of trust, and work together towards positive change.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



What have been your most successful, longstanding partnerships, and why?



What has been most helpful in building and sustaining trust and building understanding?



How have your partnerships helped support or protect communities?

PARTNERSHIPS SESSION VIDEO

Click [here](#) to watch portions of the Summit session “Building and Sustaining Long-term Partnerships,” which discussed opportunities and challenges in forging cross-cultural alliances, as museums and libraries work to illuminate history from multiple perspectives, build trust, and incubate new possibilities in a shared society.



BETTER TOGETHER

PARTNERSHIP TIPS BY MARSHA L. SEMMEL

1

KNOW THYSELF!

What are you trying to accomplish, and what are you equipped to take on?

2

HOW CAN ONE + ONE = THREE?

What are your strategic reasons for joining forces with a partnering organization?
How can the partnership fulfill respective missions?

3

CONNECT BEFORE CONTENT

Build relationships over time, brainstorm possibilities, share respective goals.

4

CLEARLY DEFINE THE PARTNERSHIP

And ensure that all agree to its terms and logistics! Remember that partners can contribute different types of support and expertise.

5

IDENTIFY THE "WRANGLER"

Who will have the responsibility to manage the partnership, and do they have the time and resources?

6

GET THE RIGHT PEOPLE ON BOARD

Are the necessary people on the partnership team? Do they have what they need, and are resources distributed equitably?

7

CHANGES WILL OCCUR

Successful partnerships are complex, dynamic, and evolving. Be willing to modify your course. Be open to new opportunities and outcomes.

8

COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE

Consider the avenues of communication a successful partnership will need, for multiple stakeholders both inside and outside the organizations.

9

TAKE THE PROJECT'S PULSE

Beyond the project activities, explore partner insights, the nature of the relationships over time, and partners' learnings along the way.

10

DOCUMENT, EVALUATE, CELEBRATE

What will success look like?
How are project outcomes defined and documented
How will you mark and celebrate project milestones?!

CONVENING CONVERSATIONS

As public-facing centers that serve a wide array of visitors, museums invite exploration and conversation around their artifacts, subject matter, and exhibitions that shed light on personal and collective experiences.

In times of heightened crisis and polarized discourse, museums provide much needed historical context, well-researched information, and safe spaces. How can museums better inform and convene community dialogues, and serve as trusted forums to help us become generous listeners and informed communicators?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



What can museums bring to community discourse, especially in times of crisis?



How can we best use museum spaces to hold conversations that are safe, welcoming, and inclusive?



When relationships become strained, what conversations might start a repair?



What can museums do now, so that we are better prepared for difficult conversations in the future?

ONLINE RESOURCES

- [*Purple*](#), a short film and guide by Resetting the Table that reveals humanity beneath conflict
- [*Practicing Facilitation*](#) by the Tenement Museum.
- [*Front Page Dialogues*](#) and [*Toolkit*](#) by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, designed to move visitors beyond passive learning and access historical themes and contemporary issues.
- [*Speaking Out Against Bigoted, Dehumanizing Rhetoric: What We Can Do*](#), by the Western States Center.
- [*Let's Talk About That: Dialogue and Change in Collections Care*](#) by the Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts.
- [*DNAWORKS*](#), an arts and service organization dedicated to dialogue and healing through the arts.

CONVENING CONVERSATIONS SESSION VIDEO

Click here to watch highlights from the Summit session “Convening Conversations with Communities,” which discussed museums as safe harbors for exploration and dialog—and what they might do to expand their capacities and skills in convening community conversations, especially in times of crisis.



DIALOGIC APPROACHES

Tips excerpted from [Sharing the Well: A Resource Guide for Jewish Muslim Engagement](#) (p. 11), by The Jewish Theological Seminary, Hartford Seminary, and The Islamic Society of North America.

1

Listen to understand, rather than listening to counter what we hear.

2

Listen for strengths, rather than listening for weaknesses.

3

Speak from our own understanding and experiences, rather than speaking based on assumptions.

4

Ask questions to increase understanding, rather than asking questions to confuse.

5

Allow others to complete their communications, rather than interrupting or changing the topic.

6

Keep remarks brief and invite others into the conversation, rather than letting stronger voices dominate.

7

Concentrate on others' words and feelings, rather than focusing on your next point.

8

Accept others' experiences as real and valid for them, rather than critiquing.

9

Allow the expression of feelings for understanding, rather than expressing feelings to manipulate and deny other feelings.

10

Honor silence, rather than using silence to gain advantage.

ONLINE RESOURCES

For information and ideas on protecting different faith-based communities, see

[Allied Against Hate: A Toolkit for Faith Communities](#)

CONCLUSION

The work of the Council of American Jewish Museums and the Institute of Museum and Library Services for the *U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism* came at a critical juncture in American life. The realities of rising antisemitism and other forms of hate, amplified by the events following the attacks by Hamas on October 7 and the resulting war, placed an intense set of pressures on museums, libraries, and educational institutions.

Jewish museums and culturally specific museums are uniquely positioned to supply historical and cultural insights, make space for community conversations, and invest in long-term relationships and partnerships that build understanding. Though the work of solidarity can be complicated in times of division, our work on the *National Strategy* revealed the steadfast dedication of culture leaders working for a shared and secure future.

SUMMIT CONCLUSION VIDEO

Click here to watch segments of the Summit conclusion, “Re-charting a Shared Future,” which describes ways we can move forward together to strengthen democracy, counter antisemitism and hate, and work across differences for the sake of a stronger and healthier collective future—as well as other summative reflections.



DISCLAIMER

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