



AFFIRMING FAITH WORKBOOK

Egale

 Rainbow Faith
and Freedom

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge that our work takes place on the traditional territories of diverse Indigenous Peoples, who have stewarded these lands for millennia. These lands, now known as Canada, are home to a rich tapestry of Indigenous cultures, languages, and traditions.

We acknowledge the enduring presence and contributions of the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples to this land, and recognize their deep connection to the territories, waters, and resources.

We acknowledge the painful history of colonization, forced displacement, and cultural suppression that Indigenous Peoples have endured, and the ongoing impacts of these injustices.

We commit to honouring Indigenous rights, supporting reconciliation efforts, and fostering meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities based on mutual respect, understanding, and partnership.

May we all work together towards healing, justice, and a future where Indigenous Peoples are empowered to thrive and flourish across Turtle Island.



ABOUT

Egale Canada

Egale is Canada's national 2SLGBTQI organization working to improve the lives of 2SLGBTQI people in Canada and to enhance the global response to 2SLGBTQI issues. Egale achieves this by informing public policy, inspiring cultural change, and promoting human rights and inclusion through research, education, awareness, and legal advocacy. Our vision is a Canada, and ultimately a world, without homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and all forms of oppression so that every person can achieve their full potential, free from hatred and bias.

Rainbow Faith and Freedom

Rainbow Faith and Freedom (RFF) is a global movement to confront religious-based LGBTI Discrimination and improve the human and equality rights of LGBTI people everywhere. Decreasing and lessening the effects of religious-based LGBTI discrimination can, and will, make changing punitive laws easier and improve the lives of LGBTI people so they can be who they are, love who they want, and find safe and accepting places to practice their faith (worship).



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1.0



Faith + 2SLGBTQI Identity



1. WELCOME

In 2021, nearly two-thirds of people living in Canada reported having a religious affiliation. While Christianity remains the most prevalent religion in Canada, the proportion of Canada’s population that identifies as Muslim, Hindu, or Sikh has more than doubled since 2001. Even among Canadians who do not report being affiliated with a particular religion, 1 in 16 feel that spiritual beliefs are important in shaping how they live their lives.¹

Among the people living in Canada that belong to a faith community, many also identify as Two Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, or intersex (2SLGBTQI). And yet, the voices and experiences of 2SLGBTQI people of faith remain largely under-heard, under-valued, and marginalized by both religious and 2SLGBTQI communities today.

2SLGBTQI community-serving organizations have long understood the critical importance of recognizing the dynamic and intersecting ways in which power, oppression, and identity can impact individuals and communities.² As a colonial nation, Canadian institutions and workplace structures continue to be deeply influenced by 19th -century Euro-Christian values and traditions, leaving much room for inequities to manifest for 21st- century service users and staff alike.

1 Statistics Canada (2022). The Canadian census: A rich portrait of the country’s religious and ethnocultural diversity. The Daily. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221026/dq221026b-eng.htm>

2 The term “intersectionality” is often used to describe this dynamic and the resulting inequities these confluences produce. Coined by theorist Kimberle Crenshaw, the term recognizes how a person’s experience is influenced by the interplay of multiple, interconnected systems of privilege and oppression rather than by any single system or component of their identity.



For 2SLGBTQI-focused organizations seeking to foster anti-oppressive spaces and services, this includes critically reflecting on how systemic bias and workplace practices may be marginalizing 2SLGBTQI people of various faith orientations in our communities.

To address this gap, Egale and RFF convened a committee of 2SLGBTQI faith leaders representing six of the world's largest religious communities (listed in alphabetic order): Christianity, Hinduism, Indigenous spirituality, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism. The committee was tasked with exploring the question of what a faith-positive 2SLGBTQI community space looks like and how community organizations could be more welcoming, inclusive, and affirming of 2SLGBTQI people of faith. This workbook is the result of those consultations.

The notion that religiosity and 2SLGBTQI identity are incompatible is a myth – and a dangerous one at that. For many people, including 2SLGBTQI people, faith is a source of resilience, identity, community, heritage, values, sense of purpose, and pride.³ Faith is a personal resource that can support positive mental health, healing, and well-being. It is an aspect of personal identity that should be valued. However, there are obvious historical reasons why 2SLGBTQI people may be suspicious, hesitant, or even hostile toward religious organizations.

While it is true that several of the world's major religions share painful histories when it comes to the treatment of 2SLGBTQI people, it would be incorrect to paint all faith communities today with the same brush.⁴ Some queer people have also discovered ways to reconcile the painful histories of their religion with

3 Ortigo, K., PhD. (2015, June 19). How faith and religion affect the LGBT community's mental health. Anxiety.org. <https://www.anxiety.org/lgbt-religion-faith-anxiety>.

4 Molina, A. (2022). New academic journal will challenge notion that religions hate queer and trans people. Religion News Service. <https://religionnews.com/2022/02/11/new-academic-journal-to-explore-how-trans-and-queer-people-create-their-own-religious-spaces/>.



their personal faith and queer identities.⁵ The resources in this workbook aim to clarify for readers the rich diversity both within and across religions in terms of where they stand on 2SLGBTQI issues and in how 2SLGBTQI people approach faith and religion today.

This workbook aims to help 2SLGBTQI community organizations to better understand the historical and ongoing challenges facing queer people of faith and to support the development of community programs, public spaces, and places of work that are sensitized to and inclusive of people of faith. We also hope this workbook will inspire 2SLGBTQI community organizations to seek ways to foster dialogue, knowledge exchange, and relationships with faith-based communities.

5 Olivares, X. (2018, May 3). Religion and Queerness Can Coexist – LGBTQ+ People of Faith Tell All. Them. <https://www.them.us/story/queer-and-religious>.



1.1 Introduction

For centuries, religion has been weaponized to justify homophobia and transphobia. The exploitation of sacred texts to legitimize discrimination has created conflict and tension between 2SLGBTQI and religious communities across the globe. The condemnation of 2SLGBTQI people, often amplified by powerful religious leaders and institutions, has created an all-too-common perception that 2SLGBTQI identity is fundamentally incompatible with religious practice.

For their part, 2SLGBTQI communities to date have not been able to do a great deal to counter this harmful narrative. The fight for 2SLGBTQI rights and cultural inclusion has tended to avoid directly confronting religion-based homophobia and transphobia and instead sought to make the world safer by focusing on changing laws and policies. Though parts of the world today are, without a doubt, much safer for 2SLGBTQI people than they used to be, equality under the law has not resulted in equality in lived experience. Anti-2SLGBTQI discrimination in Canada continues to exist despite progressive legislation. Online and media-fuelled hate targeting 2SLGBTQI communities continues to rise. And while religion is not the sole cause of violence against 2SLGBTQI people, perpetrators of violence often call upon it to justify or excuse their behaviours.

Religion and religiosity can be an uncomfortable topic within queer spaces. As queer people, we understand well what it means to feel unsafe, treated differently, and excluded simply for being who we are. And yet, because of enduring misgivings between religious and queer communities, queer community spaces themselves are all too often experienced as unsafe and



unwelcoming for people of faith – including 2SLGBTQI people of faith.^{6,7,8}

But it doesn't have to be this way.

At the end of the day, both 2SLGBTQI activism and religious practice are about *people*. Sacred texts are not axiomatic but are the basis for interpretation. This means that *people* can interpret them to be inclusive of 2SLGBTQI people and their allies. Indeed, many religious leaders, institutions, and communities today are actively working toward 2SLGBTQI inclusion, as we will see later in this workbook. Meanwhile, the reclamation of Indigenous Two Spirit identities and traditions has shown us that queerness and spirituality are far from incompatible but instead are worthy of celebration. Change is possible.

By adopting deliberate strategies for fostering understanding and inclusion for queer people of faith within community spaces, we are creating a world that is safer for all 2SLGBTQI people.

6 LOTL Staff. (2021, May 29). Safe Spaces? Being Muslim in the Queer Community. Lesbians On The Loose. <https://www.lotl.com/lifestyle/religion-spirituality/safe-spaces-being-muslim-in-the-queer-community/>

7 Flayton, B. (2020, February 27). The Gay Rights Movement Has an Anti-Semitism Problem. Jewish Journal. https://jewishjournal.com/culture/first_person/311160/the-gay-rights-movement-has-an-anti-semitism-problem/

8 Cooperman, A. (2016, April 15). Many Americans don't argue about religion – or even talk about it. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2016/04/15/many-americans-dont-argue-about-religion-or-even-talk-about-it/>



1.2 Who is this workbook for?



The **Centre in a Box** workbooks are designed with a range of prospective users in mind, including executives, volunteer board, and volunteer leaders, administration, program designers, and frontline staff of 2SLGBTQI community service organizations across Canada.

This **Faith and 2SLGBTQI Workbook** offers foundational concepts, guiding principles, and promising practices to support anyone seeking to create more inclusive programming and services. It aims to provide readers with foundational knowledge on Canada's major faith groups, considerations for supporting 2SLGBTQI people of faith, and strategies for creating respectful and tolerant workplaces and community spaces.

The workbook can help if you are:

1. a 2SLGBTQI community organization leader or staff member seeking to make your workplace, public spaces, or services more welcoming and inclusive of people of faith
2. a board member or committee chair leading your organization's equity-related portfolio efforts
3. a leader responsible for the organization's policies and procedures
4. a people manager or supervisor responsible for leading diverse teams
5. a program manager responsible for designing or delivering the organization's programming and services
6. a frontline staff or volunteer responsible for interacting with the public
7. a community-based program designer or facilitator working within 2SLGBTQI spaces



Finally, this workbook is intended to be a living document that supports community needs. As organizations begin to use this workbook, we anticipate it to grow and evolve. We welcome feedback that helps us expand or refine the workbook and create additional resources that address the needs of people working in a particular area of the organization or providing a particular type of service.

1.3 How to use this workbook



We recognize that every community organization and program is unique. As a community leader, you may have some or no familiarity with each of the major faith traditions or with the factors that support an organization, service, or program that is inclusive of people of faith (and also people of no faith). We also recognize that fostering equity, diversity, and inclusion requires a certain nimbleness and appreciation for ongoing change, both as recommended practices evolve and as systems shift in response to our efforts.

For these reasons, rather than provide a step-by-step guide, this workbook offers readers a number of resources to support them in understanding the issues and developing solutions that reflect their own communities and contexts. We have organized the workbook into two major sections:

Faith-Inclusive Organizations explores what it means to be inclusive of people of faith and provides tips and tools to support organizations in working strategically toward a more inclusive workplace and/or community space.



Faith Community Reference Guides provides quick reference kits on Christianity, Hinduism, Indigenous spirituality, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism. Each kit includes an overview of the faith and important concepts to be aware of, how the faith community operates within Canada, historical and contemporary stances on 2SLGBTQI issues, and some common do's and don'ts to support organizations and individuals in fostering spaces and relationships that are welcoming and inclusive of queer people of faith.

Although we strongly discourage organizations from centering their inclusion efforts only around a limited number of religions, we do encourage you to tailor this workbook to your local context. For this reason, each of the included resources can stand on their own as a printable quick reference or be remixed and recombined to create a customized learning kit.

1.4 Language



Some of the vocabulary used in this workbook may be new or unfamiliar. Whenever possible, plain-language translations of faith-specific or non-English terms are included in parentheses to support reader understanding and familiarization with the terminology they may encounter when interacting with members of a particular faith community.

Learning the correct language to use is an essential part of the process of fostering welcoming and inclusive community spaces and workplaces.

Faith and Religion

Throughout this workbook, the terms faith and religion are both used to describe the belief in a divine order. Though these terms are often used interchangeably within everyday contexts, there are important differences in their meanings.



Faith is the personal belief or enactment of a spiritual life. Religion is a codified system of faith and communal worship. Thus, a person can have faith but not be religious. However, a religious person is, by definition, a person of faith. For example, a person may believe in a particular deity (faith) but not subscribe to any particular interpretation of sacred writings or worship practices toward the deity (religion).

When talking about faith and religion, it's important to remember that one doesn't have to believe in something to understand it. People can question and think deeply about religious traditions, whether they're believers or not. Many also connect with religious traditions or ceremonies without seeing themselves as religious. Learning about different beliefs, even in non-religious settings, helps us understand and get along with others from different religious and cultural backgrounds. This knowledge is key to building bridges in our diverse world.

The 2SLGBTQI acronym

In some sections of this workbook, you may notice different versions of the acronym are used. Whenever possible, we use 2SLGBTQI to encompass the spectrum of gender and sexual identities beyond heterosexual and cisgender, with the following exceptions:

- **Two Spirit (2S)** is an umbrella term specific to the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island (North America). For this reason, whenever describing identities and experiences occurring elsewhere in the world, the 2S is not included in the acronym.
- **The acronym** overall reflects White, western conceptualizations of gender, sexuality, and personal identity. These do not always have perfect correlates within a local language or cultural discourse. Using the 2SLGBTQI acronym in those contexts would risk overgeneralizing or applying a label that is inappropriate to the local context. In such cases,



we have tried to use phrasings that more closely reflect those realities, such as “individuals in same-sex relationships” or “gay and bisexual people”.

Sources and Suggested Resources

Religion vs. Faith: The Same but Different. Magnify (Blog) <https://www.magnifycollective.com/blog/2019/8/4/religion-vs-faith-the-same-but-different>

Faith leaders are taking a stand against LGBTQ+ discrimination. World Economic Forum (Website) <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/12/global-faith-leaders-lgbt-conversion-therapy-discrimination/>

Spirituality and sexuality. You can have both. TEDxToronto (YouTube) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NGB5rQKpM&t=1s>

What is the difference between faith and religion? Spirit Restoration (Website) <https://www.spiritrestoration.org/religion/difference-between-faith-and-religion/#:~:text=Faith%20and%20religion%20are%20not%20the%20same%20thing,do%E2%80%99t%20have%20to%20be%20religious%20to%20have%20faith.>

New academic journal will challenge notion that religions hate queer and trans people. Religion News Service (Website) <https://religionnews.com/2022/02/11/new-academic-journal-to-explore-how-trans-and-queer-people-create-their-own-religious-spaces/>

In 20 years, the proportions of the population who reported being Muslim, Hindu or Sikh have doubled. The Daily (Website) <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221026/cg-b002-eng.htm>

The Canadian census: A rich portrait of the country’s religious and ethnocultural diversity. The Daily (Website) <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221026/dq221026b-eng.htm>

Can you be religious and queer? Them (Website) <https://www.them.us/video/watch/can-you-be-religious-and-queer>



2. Faith-inclusive Organizations

The [*Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*](#) lists freedom of religion as a foundational principle to Canadian society.⁹ This right is echoed within several other pieces of legislation, including the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, which prohibits discrimination based on religion.¹⁰

This said, it would be an overstatement to suggest that Canada operates as a secular state or that Canadian workplaces are faith-neutral. In many ways, Canada and Canadian organizations continue to prioritize certain religious traditions while avoiding important conversations that might support the development of a more equitable society for people of all faith backgrounds.

Perhaps the most obvious example of this type of institutionalized bias can be seen in the alignment of statutory holidays with the Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter, (as well as in the widespread public observance of secularized versions of the Catholic feast days of St. Valentine's Day and St. Patrick's Day. Currently, no statutory holiday in Canada is scheduled to reflect a day of importance within another religious tradition.

9 Government of Canada, D. of J. (2022, April 5). The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Government of Canada, Department of Justice, Electronic Communications. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/rfc-dlc/ccrf-ccdl/#shr-pg0>

10 The Charter is explicit on the point that while every person has the right to practice any religion (or no religion at all), the freedom to express this right is not unlimited. Individuals are free to express their beliefs through, for example, religious attire, discussion, or demonstration. However, the expression of religious beliefs must not infringe on the rights of others, including the right to equality and freedom from discrimination based on personal characteristics, such as sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.



Provincial and national human rights commissions do assert the right for individuals of faith to have access to time off for religious ceremonies and celebrations. But in response to this mandate, most workplaces to date have adopted a minimal-action stance by offering accommodations “upon request.” While this is arguably better than offering nothing, it is a short-sighted solution that assumes many things, not least being that every individual will feel safe and comfortable seeking time off for religious observance, especially if the rest of their team is not. In fact, such approaches do little to shift the Christian status quo and instead reinforce the “othering” of anyone with needs that do not reflect Western Christian tradition.

More alarmingly, we are seeing religion-based inequities being reinforced through new legislation and case law that disproportionately impact Muslims, Sikhs, and Jews, such as *Quebec’s Act respecting the laicity of the State*, also known as Bill 21 (2019), which bans public servants in positions of authority from wearing

any clothing or accessory that reflects a particular religion. In this way, despite the Charter protections, many people in Quebec must choose whether to prioritize their career or their faith.

Religiosity is often met with a measure of skepticism by other members of the 2SLGBTQI community and frequently dismissed as old-fashioned or antithetical to living authentically as a queer person. For many queer people of faith, it can feel as though they must choose whether to prioritize their gender and/or sexuality or their faith, but cannot do both if they want to be wholeheartedly embraced by the community.

To achieve truly inclusive community spaces, 2SLGBTQI serving organizations cannot simply avoid religion or presume that it is unimportant. We must consider religious belief, as well as non-belief, as an equally important and intersecting component of a person’s identity as their gender or sexuality. Moreover, religious identity is often intimately connected to racial or ethnic identity. For many Indigenous



people, Muslims, Jews, and others, the lines between these aspects of individual and collective identity are not clear-cut. Sadly, for this same reason, individuals who experience religious discrimination often also experience racism and xenophobia in complex and compounding ways.

Thus, we must resist siloing religion and religiosity as separate or even irrelevant considerations to equity-driven community organizations.

For our communities to be experienced as faith-inclusive requires a significant shift from the historical perspective taken by most 2SLGBTQI organizations. Since the dawn of the gay liberation movement, religious conservatism has tended to pose as a strong barrier to inclusion. And, despite the allyship of some religious leaders early in the movement, there have been limited productive conversations from either side since that might have helped to foster more nuanced understandings across these communities. Over the last few decades, however, an increasing number of religious communities have taken stances in support of 2SLGBTQI people and issues. Likewise, a growing number

of 2SLGBTQI individuals are opening up about being people of faith and wanting to celebrate their faith as an important part of their life and personal identity.

The perspectives that 2SLGBTQI people of faith bring to an organization are assets that can help the organization become more inclusive and safer for everyone. Indeed, having 2SLGBTQI people of faith on staff can provide invaluable visibility and insight for effectively combatting anti-2SLGBTQI sentiment and attacks in the name of religion. People of faith can also support connections between community groups, fostering promising routes forward for joint community building and collaborative solution finding.

For these things to become a reality, 2SLGBTQI organizations need to be proactive in addressing organizational barriers to inclusion. This includes being familiar with faith issues and the practical concerns that may arise for people of faith in their spaces. The resources included in this workbook will be a tremendous asset for organizations seeking to make those shifts.



Sources and Suggested Resources

Religious Symbols, Liberalism, and Laïcité in Quebec (webpage)

Traversing Tradition

<https://traversingtradition.com/2022/01/24/religious-symbols-liberalism-and-laicite-in-quebec/#:~:text=In%202019%2C%20the%20law%20known%20as%20Bill%2021%2C,boards%20from%20adhering%20to%20this%20religious%20symbols%20ban.>

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Official Website)

<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/rfc-dlc/ccrf-ccd1/>

Canadian Human Rights Commission (Official Website)

<https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/en>

Religion and the Secular State in Canada (PDF, 37pgs)

[jukier_2015_religion_and_the_secular_state.pdf \(mcgill.ca\)](#)



2.1 Religious Allyship



Religiosity can be an uncomfortable topic within 2SLGBTQI spaces. But it doesn't need to be.

2SLGBTQI people understand what it means to feel unsafe, treated differently, and excluded simply for being who we are. And yet, because of enduring tensions between religious and 2SLGBTQI communities, 2SLGBTQI community spaces themselves are all too often experienced as unsafe and unwelcoming for 2SLGBTQI people of faith. Remembering and extending the principles of intersectional allyship can help us create spaces where every community member can thrive.

Being an Ally

Being an ally involves the practice of making space and proactively seeking to include 2SLGBTQI people of faith. Allyship to 2SLGBTQI people of faith is the tangible by-product of an individual and organization that is committed to embodying a worldview rooted in gratitude, mutuality, and collective flourishing. It is a relational commitment to journey alongside all members of our communities, supporting their dignity and power, which are rights for every human being.

Allyship is not simply an intention. It is an action. Remembering this, the “Three P’s” can help us deepen our commitment to this restorative posture.



The Three Ps of Allyship

Allyship is a **Practice**.

Just like any other skill, our effectiveness and proficiency at being an ally to people of faith will develop over time as we apply ourselves and create policies and habits that nurture this culture within our organizations and community spaces. By continuing to listen and learn from all members of our communities, we will continue to get better at the living practice of allyship as it evolves throughout the various seasons of our lives.

We won't be pros at this overnight – and that's okay. Within this acknowledgement is an invitation into a posture of curiosity. Curiosity keeps our minds and hearts engaged as our skills and knowledge grow. In fostering relationships with the people of faith within our communities – deepening our understanding of their lives, joys, and needs, we will discover new and unique ways to personally support them.

Allyship is **Personal**.

There is no “one size fits all” solution to embodying the principles of allyship. Depending on our unique social locations – that is, our social status, various identities, experiences, and access to power – our responsibility will take on different shapes and expressions. Ultimately, each person is invited to carefully consider how they will consciously walk the talk of their commitment to allyship. Within the recognition that allyship is personal is a reminder to bring our full selves into this work, engaging our minds, bodies, emotions, spirits, and souls. In so doing, we give permission to everyone within the organization to enjoy the concentrated benefits of this posture.



Allyship is **Practical**.

When something is damaged and in need of repair, it requires extra energy and attention. Allyship recognizes that disparity and injustice has been disproportionately experienced by equity-denied communities and seeks to invest energy into repairing the damage of oppression. Repair finds ways to intentionally funnel our privilege and power into elevating and empowering 2SLGBTQI people of faith and other communities that have been impacted. This energy exchange can take on numerous forms, including:

a. Investing in personal growth through education

The more we learn about the religion, culture, and experiences of 2SLGBTQI people of faith, the better we will be able to show empathy and compassion. Engaging with related media content, curious conversation, and relationship building are a few ways we can engage in continuous learning.

Equally important is the task of unlearning. This is the process of recognizing and changing toxic mindsets, beliefs, stereotypes, and worldviews and replacing them with perspectives that are rooted in mutuality and respect. This process is not always easy or enjoyable, but it is necessary for us to evolve and for our communities to step into their elevated potential.

b. Leveraging resources to create equity

The impacts of oppression over time have resulted in limited access to assets, opportunities, money, and platforms for marginalized communities. Finding ways to funnel energy into 2SLGBTQI people of faith and communities is a practical way to help promote flourishing.



c. Prioritizing relationship building

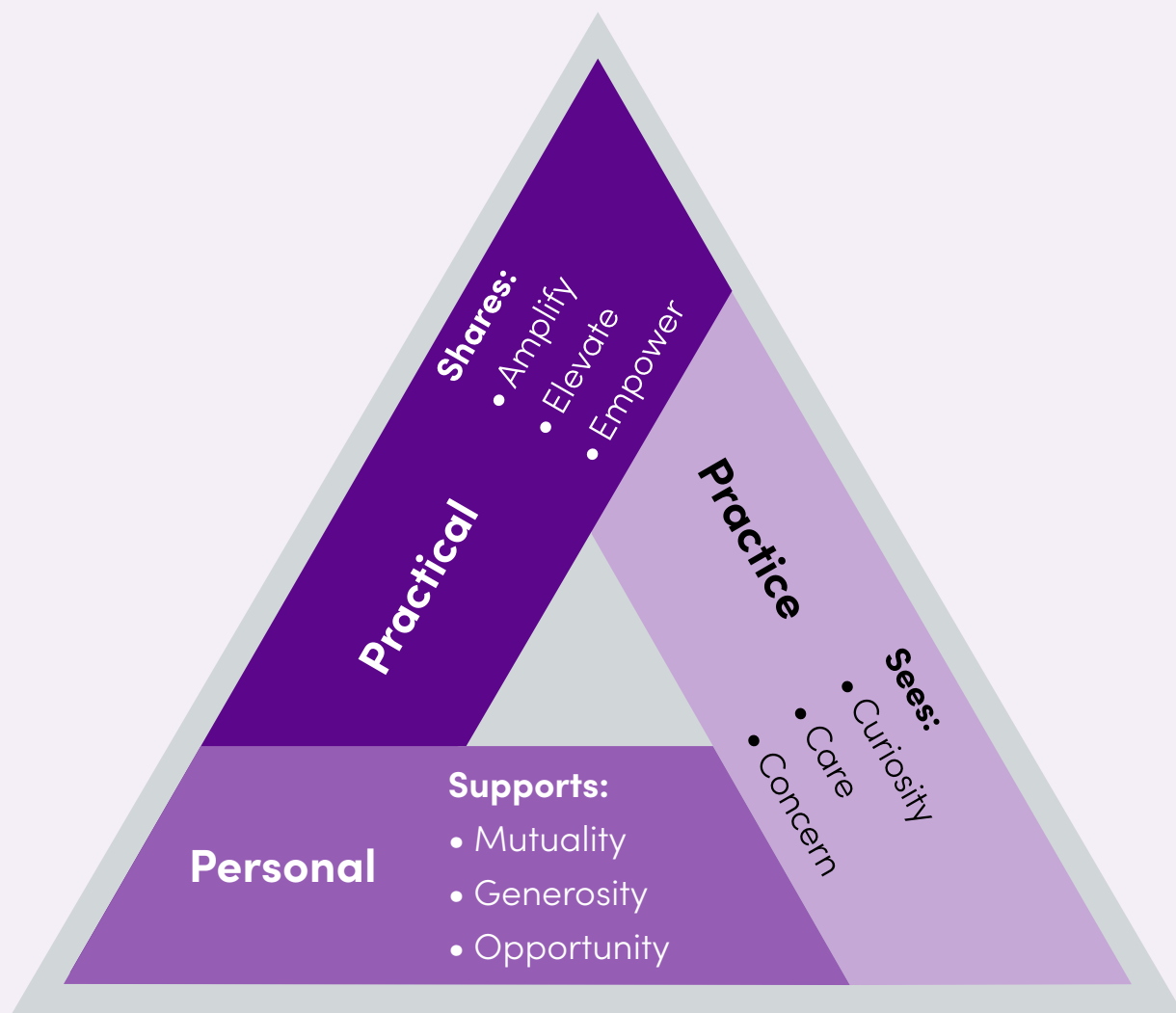
The most impactful and mutually beneficial way to grow as an ally is through relationships. Relationships create space for trust, understanding, and perspective to blossom organically. They foster rapport, honest exchange, and equitable relationships between all parties.

The more we learn and apply what we're learning, the more proficient we will become at spotting gaps and getting creative with how we can support 2SLGBTQI people of faith in our communities. When we understand that allyship is a personal practice that takes on a practical posture, the opportunities to incorporate these principles into our organizations will be endless.



Allyship sees, supports, and shares.

At the heart of allyship is celebration. Celebration is a public declaration of value. It is an energetic acknowledgement that the receiver is worthy of dignity and delight. It sees the experience, identity, and humanity of another person and validates it. Celebration bestows pride. Pride breeds empowerment. And empowerment is the birthplace of collective liberation. In its most evolved and embodied expression, allyship is a joyful celebration of difference that draws us into deeper levels of seeing, supporting, and sharing with communities that have traditionally been overlooked and excluded, like 2SLGBTQI people of faith.



Allyship



2.2 Days of Religious Importance and Cultural Celebrations

A practical way to be an ally at work is to recognize that faith groups observe and value sacred celebrations throughout the year.

Most faiths observe important days throughout the year. But on which days should organizations anticipate people needing to be away or avoid booking events? For which days is it appropriate to offer holiday greetings?

Community organizations may feel daunted trying to navigate these questions due to just how many days of the year are considered important across all religions and faith groups. To make matters more complicated, there is also often variation between the sects or denominations of a given religion as to which dates are to be observed and in which ways. So, rather than trying to find a singular, standardized solution that would work for every organization, let's look at some of the factors leaders should consider when coming up with a solution that works within their unique local context.

What to Consider

Who is in your community?

Every community – and every community organization – is different. Local demographics, organizational relationships, and service/programming focus should all be used to help inform the organization's approach to acknowledging days of religious importance. Develop relationships and consult with people of the faith (including staff, volunteers, and members of the community) to find out which dates are



definitely to be avoided and which ones there may be some flexibility around, which ones would warrant organizational or interpersonal acknowledgement and which ones wouldn't.

Are more generalized messages of goodwill appropriate?

There are mixed stances on inclusive “Happy Holidays” expressions at the end of the year. While this approach can certainly help simplify seasonal greetings, it can also risk homogenizing those traditions, invisibilizing the individual faiths that have celebrations during December and what those celebrations are. Building close relationships with your community members can help you to personalize your well-wishes to the particular celebrations that are important to them. Remember also that not all faith communities have major celebrations during December, so if you acknowledge those holidays, you should offer similar forms of acknowledgement for the major celebrations of those faiths that fall during other times of the year.

How are your practices contributing to the visibility and affirmation of 2SLGBTQI people of faith?

To avoid prioritizing one faith over another, some organizations choose not to acknowledge any day of religious significance publicly. While this may sound like a fair solution on the surface, shutting down acknowledgment of any kind can, in fact, act to further marginalize people of faith within the 2SLGBTQI community, reinforcing the notion that 2SLGBTQI and faith communities must exist apart. Even in the absence of formal messages or dedicated events around Christmas, Easter, or even secularized Christian dates, by virtue of office closures and visual cues within the organization's spaces, Christian heritage and days of importance tend to remain prioritized. Reflecting on this practice requires a review of your existing policies, programs, processes, and



practices, and consideration of how to establish practical allyship, as described in the previous section.

If you do something for one holiday within a religion, do you need to do it for all holidays?

Generally, no. Not all days of religious significance require the same level of public recognition. Most religions have a very small handful of dates throughout the year that are of utmost importance and which warrant special greetings or comments. Other dates can carry obligations for the individual faith practitioner but do not require organizational acknowledgement. Community organizations and leaders are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the key days of importance within each of the major religious communities and to use that knowledge to inform the organization's activities. Descriptions of key days of importance within each religion are included in Section 3. You can also check out the Interfaith Calendar in the appendix to understand where each religion's days of importance land in relation to one another across the Gregorian calendar year.

How is the date typically observed by people of that faith?

Some days of significance are observed primarily by religious institutions but do not require special observance by individual members of the faith. Others are actively commemorated by all members of the faith and may or may not be accompanied by special greetings. Avoid relying on blanket "Happy ____" greetings, as some days may have a more sombre nature. Leading up to the day, do some personal research to find out how the date is typically acknowledged and what would be welcomed by people of that faith. Also, keep in mind how the obligations associated with the day might impact a person's availability or ability to contribute their full energy to



a task. For example, during fasting days, a person may not appreciate having to attend a catered event or may not perform at their best due to an empty stomach. For this reason, organizations and community programs must work closely with staff, volunteers, and community members to understand their needs and consider religious observance practices when scheduling work shifts, meetings, or hosting events on those dates.

Interfaith Reference Calendar

Many religious calendars are based on lunar or lunisolar cycles. For this reason, the date that a particular celebration or day of observance falls on can often vary in the Gregorian calendar from year to year.

To support community organizations in anticipating and scheduling around days of religious significance, we've provided a sample Interfaith Calendar. While not exhaustive, it includes several important holidays and celebrations within each religion that staff or guests may observe and for which they may require time away or not be available.

Organizations are encouraged to reference this calendar, or a similar one, when planning events and work/vacation schedules to avoid creating barriers for people of a particular religion or faith group.

Religion-specific Online Calendars

For a detailed list of the days of importance within a particular religion, check out the following online calendars:

- **CalendarLabs** (Multiple Religious Calendars)
<https://www.calendarlabs.com/holidays/religious/>



- **DrikPanchang** (Hindu Calendar)
<https://www.drikpanchang.com/calendars/hindu/hinducalendar.html>
- **Jcal** (Jewish Calendar)
<https://jcal.com>
- **Timeanddate.com** (Islamic Calendar)
<https://www.timeanddate.com/calendar/islamic-calendar.html>

Cultural Observance Time Away Policies

In addition to variations between sects or denominations of a given religion as to which dates are considered sacred or of importance, differences may also exist at the individual or family level and can impact which dates a person may seek time off for.

In the absence of other options, people of faith may be forced to use paid vacation days to support their observance of days of religious importance. This solution represents a significant inequity for people of faith whose time away needs don't align with standard federal or local statutory holidays.

There are two main ways that organizations can support their staff and volunteers when it comes to time away for cultural or religious observance.

Accommodations-based approaches provide the opportunity for an individual and the organization to agree on either a one-time or an ongoing adjustment related to how and/or when they complete their job duties. Access to accommodations related to religion/faith is a recognized right within federal and provincial/territorial human rights legislation. **This could include things like:**



- Adjusting the employee/volunteer's shifts in the schedule;
- Allowing them to adjust their start/end time or make up for an early departure on another day;
- Adding hours to their shifts during the days leading up to the day of significance to allow them to accrue lieu time;
- Shift swapping;
- Allowing them to work on a paid public holiday when the workplace is in operation and to take their holiday on a day of their choosing (subject to the provisions of the provincial employment standards legislation).

While accommodations-based approaches can feel quicker to implement or manage for well-established organizations, there are certain caveats that need to be mentioned. Implicit within the accommodations-based approach is the supposition that the default practice is the superior and most desirable solution. By demanding that people of faith request special adjustments to their work, it automatically "others" them by sending a clear message that their needs are subordinate, optional, and different from the majority. Further, there can be a real or perceived risk that a request for accommodation may be denied. For these reasons, we must recognize that accommodations-based approaches are, at best, a temporary solution that is acting to preserve systemic inequities. As such, they should not be considered an appropriate long-term solution.

Equity-based approaches focus on how existing practices produce inequity and exclusion and seek to replace them with new processes that support equity for everyone. **This could include things like:**

- Offering all staff/volunteers a set number of floating days they can use as they wish, no questions asked;
- Offering flexible start/end times as the organizational standard.



To support organizations seeking to adopt an equity-based approach to time away that supports people of faith, as well as others, we have included a list of considerations for inclusive workplace policies in the appendix. Organizational leaders are encouraged to refer to this document to support their discussions and think about what an appropriate solution would look like within their own spaces and contexts.

Regardless of which approach an organization takes, it is imperative that equity-seeking solutions related to religion and faith not be treated as a special privilege that can be denied or withheld. To create a work culture that is inclusive of 2SLGBTQI and religious people, it needs to be clear to everyone in the organization that such discussions are supported and, indeed, welcomed.

This section has focused on two approaches to policy change. However, we must remember that organizations might promote an inclusive work environment in many additional ways. Inclusivity must be exhibited to all organization members at every point in the employee lifecycle, starting from recruitment, during onboarding, and throughout employment. It must be reflected in both the organization's practices and everyday communications and engagement.



Sources and Suggested Resources

Duty to Accommodate Frequently Asked Questions and Answers. Ground-specific Issues: Religion (PDF, 28pgs)

Canadian Human Rights Commission

https://www.chs.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/duty_to_accommodate_frequently_questions.pdf

Manitoba Human Rights Commission - Reasonable Accommodation: Religious Belief (policy, 3 pgs)

<http://www.manitobahumanrights.ca/education/pdf/board-of-commissioner-policies/g-3.pdf>

Observe & Report: How to Take Time Off for Religious Reasons (Article)

Ashley Faus, The Muse

<https://www.themuse.com/advice/observe-report-how-to-take-time-off-for-religious-reasons>

Policy on creed and the accommodation of religious observances (PDF, 19pgs)

Ontario Human Rights Commission

https://www.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/Policy_on_creed_and_the_accommodation_of_religious_observances.pdf

Reflections on the Scope and limits of the Duty of Reasonable Accommodation in the Field of Religion (PDF, 18pgs)

https://www.cdpedj.qc.ca/storage/app/media/publications/religion_accommodation_opinion.pdf

Religious Holidays and Accommodation (Article)

Curtis Armstrong, Canadian HR Reporter

<https://www.hrreporter.com/focus-areas/employment-law/religious-holidays-and-accommodation/318669>

Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission: A Guide to Application Forms & Interviews (PDF, 4pgs)

<https://saskatchewanhumanrights.ca/for-employees/resources/>



2.3 Common Questions



Q

A colleague or community member made an unwelcoming remark related to 2SLGBTQI people and faith communities. How do I approach this situation?

A

If someone makes an unwelcoming remark, whether directed at an individual or as a general comment, it must be addressed. We are all entitled to our personal beliefs and values, but we are not entitled to harm others with those beliefs. Remind the person of your organization/event policies or space; refer to prior agreements related to inclusion, safety, respect, and anti-discrimination. Do not entertain debate over personal beliefs and values. Instead, focus on the comment's human impact and remind them that intent does not negate consequence. Appeal to shared values, such as mutual respect and universal human dignity. If appropriate, share the details with your team and/or management afterwards so you can discuss a solution that you can all use going forward. This will help create a work environment that is respectful of all people for yourself and other clients and community members.

If the remarks were directed at a particular individual, assess the situation with the goal of curtailing harm as swiftly as possible. Do not take agency away from the targeted individual if they wish to address the situation themselves. Let them know that you are a witness to the events and be ready to step in if needed. Always check in with the person afterward to find out how they are doing. Listen to and validate their experiences. Let them know what you or the organization are doing in response to the incident and remind them that their identities are valued and that you are available for additional support if they need it. You can also direct them to services that can support them. In this situation, it is important to care for the individual and yourself.



Refer them to appropriate support, e.g., your leadership or resources your leadership may have compiled in advance, if you are not equipped to offer additional support.



Some of our event staff and volunteers wear visible symbols of their faith. How can I respond to a guest or community member who expresses feeling uncomfortable attending our events as a result?



Community organizations that value equity and inclusion know the importance of supporting every person in bringing forward their whole selves, including their identities, values, and faith.

They also understand that people may have complex relationships with religion that can elicit strong feelings when faced with people of faith, especially if they are in positions of power.

It is imperative that you navigate diversity conflict in a way that is trauma-informed, non-judgmental, and not seen as putting one person's identities, beliefs, values, or mindsets over and above another. To minimize discomfort, meet with the person who has expressed discomfort one-on-one to listen to their concerns and reassure them that as allies and/or members of 2SLGBTQI communities themselves, all event personnel have a shared commitment to fostering a safe and welcoming environment for all attendees. Correct any anti-religious bias rooted in basic misunderstandings of the faith, including assumptions that an individual's personal perspective must necessarily be anti-2SLGBTQI and that all religions are a monolith, rather than the reality that one member of a community is simply one member of a larger community.



Q

What if a team member or guest shares with me that they don't agree with the organization's approach to inclusive space management or diversity conflict?

A

Staff, volunteers, and guests may, from time to time, disagree with a particular policy or practice, but it is not acceptable to express those feelings in any manner that creates an environment that is not safe or inclusive. Feedback on existing practices and suggestions for improvement offered in the spirit of genuine goodwill and interest in equity, inclusion, and safety for all should always be welcomed. Let the person know that you will bring forward their comments to the key decision-makers.

If you are an organizational leader or key decision-maker, stay open and receptive to feedback that can help you understand how others are experiencing the space or event. You do not have to act on every complaint, but you do have a responsibility to ensure your spaces and services are not fostering inequity or discrimination. Thank the person for sharing their perspective and remind them of your and your organization's commitment to all members of the community when it comes to equity and inclusion.

If you are an organizational leader or key decision-maker, stay open and receptive to feedback that can help you understand how others are experiencing the space or event. You do not have to act on every complaint, but you do have a responsibility to ensure your spaces and services are not fostering inequity or discrimination. Thank the person for sharing their perspective and remind them of your and your organization's commitment to all members of the community when it comes to equity and inclusion.



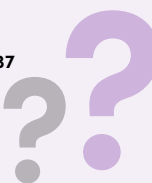
Q

What if I face a lot of pushback when I first begin to implement these changes?

A

Change takes time. Consider taking one small step at a time that is relevant and applicable to your organizational environment and context. Be realistic and ensure you share this workbook and knowledge with others on your team. This ensures a team effort in making change so that organizational culture can change across many avenues at the same time.

Change takes time. Consider taking one small step at a time that is relevant and applicable to your organizational environment and context. Be realistic and ensure you share this workbook and knowledge with others on your team. This ensures a team effort in making change so that organizational culture can change across many avenues at the same time.



2.4 Next Steps



Just as the intersections of one person's identities are personal and complex, so too are their relationships to their religion or faith – or lack thereof. Every individual and organizational context is unique. Thus, there is no universal solution for making every community space inclusive of 2SLGBTQI people of faith. However, as we have seen throughout this workbook, some foundational principles and practices can help organizational leaders develop solutions tailored to their local contexts.

Further, this workbook has considered just a handful of the world's most prominent religions. There is so much more to say for helping 2SLGBTQI community organizations be more affirming and inclusive of people of all faith backgrounds. As such, it represents but a first step toward building a comprehensive knowledge base on how community organizations can foster welcoming and faith-inclusive 2SLGBTQI spaces.

We hope this workbook helps you better understand the evolving and often nuanced positions of religious institutions and individual people of faith regarding 2SLGBTQI identities and experiences, including the historical and ongoing challenges facing queer people of faith.

No matter the size or scope of your organization, we also hope that this workbook has inspired you to:

- ▶ continue learning about the individuals in your communities
- ▶ seek out ways to foster dialogue, knowledge exchange, and relationships with your local faith communities
- ▶ create strategies for directly confronting religious-based homophobia and transphobia in your communities
- ▶ engage in individual and organizational reflection on the



interconnections between faith, culture, and ethnicity and how these must inform the design and delivery of your programs

- ▶ develop community programs, public spaces, and places of work that are sensitized, inclusive, and affirming of people of faith

- ▶ adopt deliberate strategies for fostering understanding and inclusion for 2SLGBTQI people faith within community spaces and service delivery, and
- ▶ build welcoming spaces for all members of the community.

As a community, none of us is free and safe until all of us are free and safe. Until we can express our authentic selves fully and completely in our communities, we must continue to challenge the systems that make the world unsafe.



3. Faith Community Reference Guides

What exactly do each of the world's major faith traditions have to say about gender and sexual diversity? What possibilities exist for dialogue and exchange across queer and faith communities? How can organizations make their spaces safer and more inclusive of people of diverse faith backgrounds?

To help answer these questions, we have compiled a series of printable quick-reference documents related to six faith communities: Indigenous spirituality, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism. For each faith, we include four resources that organizations can use to support acting in allyship, inform policy reviews, strategic planning, program design and other inclusion efforts:

1. Overview of the faith tradition
2. History and structure of the faith in Canada
3. Historical and current stances on 2SLGBTQI identities
4. Do's and don'ts for culturally sensitive interactions and organizations

Organizations are also invited to remix and recombine these resources to support ongoing or just-in-time learning for their teams.



3.1 Indigenous Spirituality

- a. Overview of the faith tradition
- b. History and structure of the faith in Canada
- c. Historic and current stances on 2SLGBTQI identities
- d. Do's and Don'ts

3.2 Christianity

- a. Overview of the faith tradition
- b. History and structure of the faith in Canada
- c. Historic and current stances on 2SLGBTQI identities
- d. Do's and Don'ts

3.3 Hinduism

- a. Overview of the faith tradition
- b. History and structure of the faith in Canada
- c. Historic and current stances on 2SLGBTQI identities
- d. Do's and Don'ts

3.4 Islam

- a. Overview of the faith tradition
- b. History and structure of the faith in Canada
- c. Historic and current stances on 2SLGBTQI identities
- d. Do's and Don'ts

3.5 Judaism

- a. Overview of the faith tradition
- b. History and structure of the faith in Canada
- c. Historic and current stances on 2SLGBTQI identities
- d. Do's and Don'ts

3.6 Sikhism

- a. Overview of the faith tradition
- b. History and structure of the faith in Canada
- c. Historic and current stances on 2SLGBTQI identities
- d. Do's and Don'ts



CONTRIBUTORS

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Mita Hans is an East African-, Sikh-born transplant currently living in the Indigenous territory of Tkaronto, where she and her 2-Spirit life partner co-parent three young adults and a rescued sled dog.

Mita is a writer, editor, educator, activist, community builder and container gardening enthusiast who currently works as a disability support worker. She has edited two books on Sikh diasporic history and is in the process of editing two more on ancient Sikh music. She is the founder of CareMongering, an international mutual aid group spanning over 100 countries. She also serves as the admin for Drag Storytime Guardians, an online community uniting over 800 individuals dedicated to ensuring physical safety for children and performers attending Drag Storytimes in Ontario.

Mita can be found wherever there is a need for the amplification of the voices of the most vulnerable, marginalized people in our communities.

El-Farouk Khaki (he/him)

El-Farouk Khaki is a refugee & immigration lawyer focused on refugee claims based on sexual orientation, gender, gender identity/expression & HIV. He is an intersectional human rights and dignity activist, public speaker, writer, author & media commentator on Islam, LGBTIQ/human rights, spiritual/religious trauma, refugees, politics, racism, HIV, & queer Parenting.

Winner of varied awards from Legal, Human Rights, and LGBT/HIV organizations, El-Farouk is the founder of Salaam: Queer Muslim Community (1991) and co-founder & imam of el-Tawhid Juma Circle: The Unity Mosque (2009). He is featured in a biopic [The Accidental Activist](#), by the Canadian Race



Relations Foundation and is a [TedX speaker](#).

El-Farouk's writings include a children's book titled [Moondragon in the Mosque Garden](#) co-authored with Troy Jackson, and a chapter on Muslim Chaplaincy and LGBTIQ+ Muslims in [Mantle of Mercy: Islamic Chaplaincy in North America](#). He is currently working on a book exploring Islam, intersectional identities, global issues, sexuality, refugees, social justice and spirituality.

David Lewis-Peart (He/Him)

David Lewis-Peart was co-founder and former coordinator of the spiritual arts community Sunset Service Toronto Fellowship that, between 2012 and 2019, committed to building bridges, initiating dialogues, and creating safe spaces for people of all faiths and no faith through the arts. It was honoured by Canadian Race Relations Foundation in 2014 and again in 2016. In 2015, NOW Magazine Readers Choice Awards recognized it as Best Activist Religious Group - Runner-up. In 2017 David was appointed by the Chicago-based Parliament of the World Religions as Co-Chair of the Next Generation Task Force; and in 2018 was a recipient of the inaugural Walden New Thought Awards recognizing socially conscious leaders making change globally. No longer active in religious leadership, David had previously received instruction in New Thought Christianity, Religious Science (Science of Mind), and the study of A Course in Miracles (ACIM), the spiritual tradition in which he was ordained.

Albert McLeod (Fabulous Animate Being)

Albert McLeod is a Status Indian with ancestry from Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation and the Metis communities of Cross Lake and Norway House in northern Manitoba. Albert has over thirty years of experience as a human rights activist and was one of the founders of the 2-Spirited People of Manitoba.

Albert began Two Spirit advocacy in Winnipeg in 1986 and became an HIV/AIDS activist in 1987, working as the director of the Manitoba Aboriginal AIDS Task



Force from 1991 to 2001. In 2018, Albert received an Honorary Doctorate of Law from the University of Winnipeg. Fabulous Animate Being was also a member of the sub-working group that produced the MMIWG - 2SLGBTQQIA+ National Action Plan Report in 2020-2021.

Albert lives in Winnipeg, and works as a consultant specializing in Indigenous peoples, Two Spirit history and identity, cultural reclamation, and cross-cultural training.

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Cantor Shira Stanford-Asiyo is a Reconstructionist cantor, Jewish educator, and the co-founder of Hamakom, a community that centers the voices and experiences of marginalized Jews based in the Lower Mainland in British Columbia on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and Səlilwətaʔ/Səlílwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. She previously worked on the [Union for Reform Judaism's](#) Audacious Hospitality team, the Reform Jewish Movement's focused effort on Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion work and as the former executive director of [JYCA-Jewish Youth for Community Action](#), a youth-led social justice education organization.

Haran Vijayanathan (He/Him)

Haran Vijayanathan has been an HIV and 2SLGBTQ educator/trainer over the last 17 years. He prides himself on raising awareness and creating understanding through education and dialogue to ensure we have a more inclusive and supportive society. Haran was honoured with the title of Grand Marshal in 2018 of the Toronto Pride Parade. Haran is the founder of My House: Rainbow Resources of York Region, the first LGBTQ Resource Centre in York Region and was Executive Director at the Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention. He continues to be engaged with the Independent Review of Missing Persons in Toronto. Since moving back to his hometown of Winnipeg he has worked as the Program Manager at the Wiisocotatiwin Assertive



Community Treatment Program at Mount Carmel Clinic and will be joining the Canadian Museum of Human Rights as the Director of Equity and Strategic Initiatives.



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1.1

Eleven Dos for 2SLGBTQI Faith Community Inclusion



Below are some general guidelines that can be applied to foster welcoming spaces for 2SLGBTQI individuals of any religious background. For additional tips specific to each faith community, [check out the individual faith workbooks in Section 3](#).

1. **Do interrupt anti-religious bias** within your organization and the broader 2SLGBTQI community. Discrimination among and against people of faith is not uncommon. Call out generalizations and discriminatory remarks, even if they aren't aimed at a specific individual. Have a clear and simple process for reporting and addressing incidents of discrimination within your organization. Be prepared to support and foster equity-based understandings among staff and space users.

2. **Do send a clear message that 2SLGBTQI people of faith are welcome** within the organization. These messages should begin before the recruitment of volunteers and staff and be regularly reinforced through organizational statements and activities that confirm the organization's commitment to eradicating all forms of oppression, including on the basis of religion.

3. **Do invite staff and volunteers to let you know any needs they have** by explaining that your organization offers religious accommodation. Discussing the type of support your organization offers can be a way to invite employees to ask about time away for days of significance/cultural ceremonies or any food and kitchen use restrictions. When they begin to share, ask if there are any other religious practices that the organization can be supportive of.

4. **Do engage 2SLGBTQI people of faith to understand their unique experiences and perspectives.** Do not make assumptions about what they may need or want for your services or spaces to be experienced as safer or more welcoming, and do not assume that your spaces are being experienced as faith-neutral. Avoid assumptions and judgements about how affirming or tolerant their



family and immediate community may be. Not everyone is comfortable discussing their faith and culture, so ensure that you are engaging with the person you're talking to on their own terms. Also, recognize that speaking with one 2SLGBTQI person of faith is simply speaking to one person. No faith is a monolith, and every lived experience is different.

5. Do sensitize your staff and volunteers on the intersection of 2SLGBTQI

issues and faith through ongoing professional development and by creating space for open, safe, and brave discussion on these topics. Utilize resources like the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development's Sharing Different Faith Traditions discussion guide and Rainbow Faith and Freedom's Resource Portal.

6. Do check in with folks if your organization or community has

experienced a religiously motivated attack. Be vigilant to how it may be affecting 2SLGBTQI people of faith and their interactions with others; as

2SLGBTQI community members are impacted when attacks are made towards the 2SLGBTQI community, members of religious groups are impacted when their religious community is attacked. Denounce the event publicly but avoid placing additional stress on any individual by calling attention to their faith. Instead, seek out a private moment to check on their wellbeing and find out if there are any supports they need.

7. Do consult a multifaith calendar before finalizing the date of any office or community event.

Make a concerted effort to avoid scheduling events on sacred days. If you cannot avoid a particular day, make it easy for staff and volunteers to opt out of the event without ramifications.

8. Do consider how observances of holidays at work, such as Christmas and Easter, may be impacting non-Christian staff.

Engage non-Christian staff and guests in conversation about what might feel inclusive to them around these holidays and develop a



coordinated, community-informed strategy for holiday inclusion. Including small symbols of other religious traditions amongst large Christmas displays, for example, may only feel further tokenizing. Alternatively, do not be quick to assume that non-Christian staff do not enjoy celebrating Christian holidays. Some may see it as a cultural and social gathering with friends and colleagues.

9. **Do review your paid days off policies and the processes** for requesting time away for religious or community days of significance. Have a clear and equitable policy regarding organizational closures, statutory holidays, and time away related to religious observances/cultural ceremonies. Since holidays may occur early in the start of a new job or community program, make sure these processes are reviewed during onboarding/orientation and are quick, simple, and applied consistently.

10. **Do be vocal and transparent about what the organization is doing to support anti-oppression** and what each person can do to support people of faith accessing the organization's spaces. Reassure staff and service users that there remains, as always, zero room for discrimination or proselytization by any person and encourage all staff to reflect on their bias and assumptions surrounding religious outlooks on sexuality and gender.

11. **Do increase your level of religious literacy overall in order to learn more about others and assess your own potential level of bias.** The Centre for Civic Religious Literacy describes civic religious literacy as:

1. Understanding the internal diversity within worldview groups;
2. Understanding the external diversity across worldview groups;
3. Recognizing the influence that



socio-cultural, political, and economic aspects of society have on worldview groups, and vice versa, in the past and present;

4. Recognizing the need to include religious, spiritual, and non-religious worldviews in the full conversation;
5. Recognizing that worldviews hold a significant personal meaning to the religious, spiritual, and non-religiously affiliated individuals.

This leads us to discuss these worldviews from an individual or community's distinct lens and not from the worldview of another person/group and know that individuals who share the same worldview may have diverse beliefs, expressions, interpretations, and terminology to describe it based on a number of factors (such as personal circumstance, place, political context, etc.).

Developing civic religious literacy can empower individuals and organizations to engage better with members of their society.





1.2

Civic Religious Literacy in Canada



Religious literacy is a way of understanding that helps people engage with religious, spiritual, and non-religious people, beliefs, cultures, organizations, and institutions in an academic way. It helps an individual observe, ask questions, and listen without having to agree or disagree with what a specific faith teaches. In this way, religious literacy can help people engage, live, and work better together.

The [Centre for Civic Religious Literacy](#) explains that religious literacy includes five principles:

1.

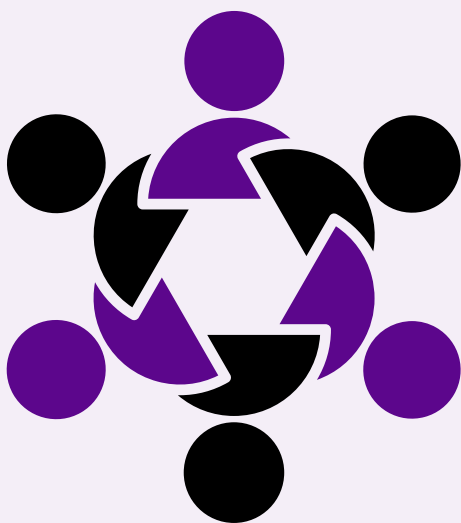
Understanding that there is internal diversity within every faith group.

Example: Some 2SLGBTQI individuals are Christian, Hindu, Indigenous, Jewish, Muslim, or Sikh. Each faith also includes people from a variety of abilities, ethnicities, genders, languages, and races.

2.

Understanding that every worldview group is different, despite their similarities.

Example: Diwali is widely recognized as an important holiday for South Asian communities, but it is celebrated differently and has quite different meanings for Hindus, Jains, and Sikhs. Even within each of these religions, Diwali can be celebrated differently according to factors like ethnicity and region of provenance.



3.

Perceiving that every faith has changed in the past and the present because they are influenced by the socio-cultural, political, and economic aspects of society around them. Likewise, seeing how faiths impact these aspects of society in the past and present.

Example: Historically, some Indigenous groups welcomed diverse expressions of gender and sexuality, but that changed over history due to colonialism. Yet today, Canadians are recognizing Two Spirit individuals because some Indigenous individuals are reclaiming their Two Spirit identity.

4.

Recognizing that religious literacy is context-specific. Religious literacy in Canada needs to include religious, spiritual, and non-religious worldviews in the full conversation.

The 2021 Canadian Census shows that over 40% of Canadians in Yukon, Alberta, and BC have no religious affiliation, and the non-religious population is growing over time. Despite obstacles in tracking Neopagan followers due to stigmatization and secrecy, available data indicates a growing number of practitioners and improving public perceptions of groups like Wicca and other New religious movements in North America. Moreover, population growth among First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Peoples continues to outpace that of non-Indigenous Canadians at a rate of 9.5% to 5.3%, with many individuals expressing a desire to learn (and potentially embrace) traditional Indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices. These statistics underscore the importance of considering religious literacy in Canada from a context-specific angle.



5.

Knowing that the personal significance of faith may vary between people.

For this reason:

1. Know that people discuss their faith from their individual or community's distinct lens based on various factors, e.g., their circumstances, place, political context, etc.,
2. Be careful not to impose one way of seeing the world onto another person or group when talking about their faith.

Example: One person may refer to their belief as “faith” based on how they relate to or live out this part of their identity, while others may use the words “culture,” “philosophy,” “lifestyle,” “religion,” “spirituality,” or “worldview.” It is important not to frame your understanding of their faith based on our own worldview.

Sources and Suggested Resources

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[Recognition of context and experience: A civic-based Canadian conception of religious literacy.](#)

Journal of Beliefs and Values. DOI: [10.1080/13617672.2019.1587902](#)

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[“Can I Keep My Religious Identity and Be a Professional? Evaluating the Presence of Religious Literacy in Education, Nursing, and Social Work Professional Programs across](#)

[Canada.” Educ. Sci., 12\(8\), 543; https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12080543](#)

“What is civic religious literacy?”

[https://ccrl-clrc.ca/work/civic-religious-literacy/](#)

Explanation contributed by:

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1.3



Interfaith Calendar

Key

Bold

Major holiday
(avoid scheduling
events on these dates)

Bold Purple

2SLGBTQI Day of
Significance



Begins at sundown



Day	Group	2024	2025	2026	Notes
January					
Guru Gobind Singh's Birthday	Sikh	Jan 5	Jan 5	Jan 5	Same day each year.
Epiphany	Christian	Jan 6	Jan 6	Jan 6	Same day each year. Celebrated by many Catholics of Mediterranean and Latinx descent.
Christmas (Orthodox)	Christian	Jan 7	Jan 7	Jan 7	Same day each year.
Lohri	Sikh	Jan 14	Jan 13	Jan 13	Mid-January.
Makar Sankranti / Pongal	Hindu	Jan 15	Jan 14	Jan 14	
★ Tu B'Shevat	Jewish	Jan 24- Jan 25	Feb 12 - Feb 13	Feb 1 - Feb 2	



February

St. Valentine's Day	Christian	Feb 14	Feb 14	Feb 14	Same day each year. Christian origin but largely secular observance in Canada today.
★ Lailat al Miraj	Muslim	Feb 8	Jan 27	Jan 15 - Jan 16	
Maha Shivaratri	Hindu	Mar 8	Feb 26	Feb 15	Late February/early March.
Aromantic Spectrum Awareness Week	2SLGBTQI	Feb 18 - Feb 24	Feb 21 - Feb 27	Feb 16 - Feb 22	Occurs the third week of February.
Ash Wednesday	Christian	Feb 14	Mar 5	Feb 18	Late February/early March.



March

★ Purim	Jewish	Mar 24 - Mar 25	Mar 14 - Mar 15	Mar 2- Mar 3	Early/late March. Starts the evening of March 24, 2024, and March 14, 2025
★ Holi	Sikh, Hin- du	Mar 25	Mar 14	Mar 3	Early-/mid-March.
Hola Mohalla	Sikh	Mar 26	Mar 15	Mar 3	March.
St. Patrick's Day	Christian	Mar 17	Mar 17	Mar 17	Same day each year. Christian origin but largely secular observance in Canada today.
★ Lailat al Bara'ah	Muslim	Feb 25	Feb 14	Feb 3	Occurs two weeks before Ramadan.
Ugadi / Hindu New Year	Hindu	Apr 9	Mar 30	Mar 19	Late March/early April.
Ramadan	Muslim	Mar 10 - Apr 9	Mar 1 - Mar 30	Feb 17- Mar 18	Lasts 29-30 days. Occurs 10-12 days earlier each year.
Rama Navami	Hindu	Apr 16	Apr 5	Mar 26	Late March/early April.
Trans Day of Visibility	2SLGBTQI	Mar 31	Mar 31	Mar 31	Same day each year.



April

Palm Sunday	Christian	Mar 24	Apr 13	Mar 29	Sunday prior to Easter.
★ Passover	Jewish	Apr 22- Apr 30	Apr 12- Apr 20	Apr 1-9	Late March/early April. Lasts eight days – only days 1 and 2 and 7 and 8 are considered similar to the Shabbat with limitations on work and other activities.
International Asexuality Day	2SLGBTQI	Apr 6	Apr 6	Apr 6	Same day each year.
Good Friday	Christian	Mar 29	Apr 18	Apr 3	Friday prior to Easter.
Easter (Catholic, Protestant)	Christian	Mar 31	Apr 20	Apr 5	Late March/early April.
Easter (Orthodox)	Christian	May 5	Apr 20	Apr 12	April/early May.
Vaisakhi	Sikh, Hindu	Apr 13	Apr 14	Apr 14	Roughly the same day each year.
★ Laylat al Qadr	Muslim	Apr 6	Mar 27	Mar 16	The date may shift based on weather.
Birthday of Guru Angad Dev	Sikh	Apr 18	Apr 18	Apr 18	Same day each year.
★ Eid al-Fitr	Muslim	Apr 10	Mar 30	Mar 20	The date may shift based on weather.
Lesbian Visibility Day	2SLGBTQI	Apr 26	Apr 26	Apr 26	Same day each year.



May

Lag Ba'Omer	Jewish	May 26	May 16	May 5	
International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia	2SLGBTQI	May 17	May 17	May 17	Same day each year.
Agender Pride Day	2SLGBTQI	May 19	May 19	May 19	Same day each year.
Pansexual & Panromantic Awareness Day	2SLGBTQI	May 24	May 24	May 24	Same day each year.
★ Shavuot	Jewish	Jun 11- Jun 13	Jun 1- Jun 3	May 21- 23	Mid-May/mid-Jun. Lasts two days. Starts on the evening of June 11, 2024, and June 1, 2025
Pentecost	Christian	May 19	Jun 8	May 24	Always falls on a Sunday.



June

Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev Sahib	Sikh	Jun 16	Jun 16	Jun 16	Same day each year.
Pride Week	2SLGBTQI	Jun 24- Jun 30	Jun 23- Jun 29	Jun 29- Aug 3	Last the whole week of June.
Summer Solstice	Indigenous	Jun 20	Jun 21	Jun 21	Coincides with National Indigenous Peoples Day.
St. Jean Baptiste Day	Christian	Jun 24	Jun 24	Jun 24	Celebrated in Quebec and parts of French Canada. Same day each year. Christian origin but largely secular observance in Canada today.
Waqf al Arafa - Hajj	Muslim	Jun 15	Jun 6	May 26	
Eid-al-Adha	Muslim	Jun 16	Jun 7	May 27	



July

Sun Dance / Okan (largely AB, SK, MB)	Indigenous	varies	varies	varies	Early-/mid-summer. Dates vary by community.
Non-Binary Awareness Week	2SLGBTQI	Jul 9-Jul 15	Jul 14-Jul 20	Jul 13-19	Begins the Monday of the week of Non-binary People's Day.
Non-Binary People's Day	2SLGBTQI	Jul 14	Jul 14	Jul 14	Same day each year.
Hijra - Islamic New Year	Muslim	Jul 7	Jun 26	Jun 17	
Day of Ashura / Muharram	Muslim	Jul 17	Jul 5	Jun 26	



August

Krishna Jan-mashtami	Hindu	Aug 26	Aug 16	Sep 3	Mid-August/early September.
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September

Onam	Hindu	Sep 15	Sep 5	Aug 25-27	Late August/early September.
★ Rosh HaShanah	Jewish	Oct 2-Oct 4	Sep 22-Sep 24	Sep 11-13	Early-September/ mid-October. Lasts three days.
Bisexual Awareness Week	2SLGBTQI	Sep 16-Sep 23	Sep 16-Sep 23	Sep 16-23	Same days each year.
Ganesh Chaturthi	Hindu	Sep 7	Aug 27	Sep 15	Late August/ mid-September. Lasts ten days.
Celebrate Bisexuality Day	2SLGBTQI	Sep 23	Sep 23	Sep 23	Same day each year.



October

LGBT History Month	2SLGBTQI	Oct 1-Oct 31	Oct 1-Oct 31	Oct 1-Oct 31	The whole month of October.
Milad un Nabi	Muslim	Sep 15	Sep 4	Aug 26	Occurs 10-13 days earlier each year. Some Shiite Muslims observe this festival five days later.
National Coming Out Day	2SLGBTQI	Oct 11	Oct 11	Oct 11	Same day each year.
Navaratri	Hindu	Oct 3-Oct 12	Sep 22-Oct 1	Oct 11-Oct 19	Lasts nine days.
Genderfluid Week	2SLGBTQI	Oct 17-Oct 24	Oct 17-Oct 24	Oct 17-Oct 24	Same days each year.
Pronouns Day	2SLGBTQI	Oct 16	Oct 15	Oct 21	Third Wednesday in October.
Birth of the Guru Granth Sahib	Sikh	Oct 20	Oct 20	Oct 20	Same day each year.
Asexual Awareness Week	2SLGBTQI	Oct 21-Oct 27	Oct 20-Oct 26	Oct 19-Oct 25	Last full week in October.
Dussehra	Hindu	Oct 12	Oct 2	Oct 19	Final (9th) day of Navaratri.
Intersex Awareness Day	2SLGBTQI	Oct 26	Oct 26	Oct 26	Same day each year.



All Hallows Eve (Hallowe'en)	Christian	Oct 31	Oct 31	Oct 31	Same day each year. Largely secular observance in Canada today.
★ Yom Kippur	Jewish	Oct 11- Oct 12	Oct 1- Oct 2	Sept 20- Sept 21	Late September/ early October. Occurs ten days after the start of Rosh HaShanah. Starts the evening of Oct 11, 2024, and Oct 1, 2025
★ Sukkot	Jewish	Oct 16- Oct 23	Oct 6- Oct 13	Sept 25- Oct 2	Late September/ early October. Occurs five days after Yom Kippur. Lasts seven days. Day 1 is considered a Major holiday. Starts the evening of Oct 16, 2024, and Oct 6, 2025



November

Trans Awareness Month	2SLGBTQI	Nov 1-Nov 30	Nov 1-Nov 30	Nov 1-Nov 30	The whole month of November.
All Saints Day	Christian	Nov 1	Nov 1	Nov 1	Same day each year.
Trans Parent Day	2SLGBTQI	Nov 3	Nov 2	Nov 1	First Sunday in November.
Intersex Day of Remembrance	2SLGBTQI	Nov 8	Nov 8	Nov 8	Same day each year.
Diwali	Sikh, Hindu	Oct 29-Nov 2	Oct 19-Oct 23	Nov 8-Nov 12	Late October/Early November. Lasts for five days – Day 3 is of the highest importance.
Bandi Chhor Diwas	Sikh	Oct 31	Oct 20	Nov 8	Late October/early November.
Trans Awareness Week	2SLGBTQI	Nov 11-Nov 17	Nov 10-Nov 16	Nov 9-Nov 15	The second week of November.
Transgender Day of Remembrance	2SLGBTQI	Nov 20	Nov 20	Nov 20	Same day each year.
Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib	Sikh	Nov 24	Nov 24	Nov 24	Same day each year.
Guru Nanak Birthday	Sikh	Nov 27	Nov 27	Nov 27	Same day each year.



December

Pansexual Pride Day	2SLGBTQI	Dec 8	Dec 8	Dec 8	Same day each year.
★ Hanukkah	Jewish	Dec 25-Jan 2	Dec 13-Dec 22	Dec 4-Dec 12	Late November/December/January. Lasts for eight days. Starts the evening of Dec 25, 2024, and Dec 13, 2025
Winter Solstice	Indigenous	Dec 21	Dec 21	Dec 21	Same day each year.
Qviasukvik (Inuit)	Indigenous	Dec 24-Jan 7	Dec 24-Jan 7	Dec 24-Jan 7	Same dates each year.
Christmas (Catholic, Protestant)	Christian	Dec 25	Dec 25	Dec 25	Same day each year.





1.4

Workplace Policy Considerations

Below are some considerations for workplace policies and practices that can help foster religious and faith-based inclusion within an organization. These may be incorporated as individual policies or woven into existing policies or procedure documents. Be sure to check with an employment lawyer or human resources consultant to ensure the features you are including align with local legislation.

Policies Related to Hours Worked & Standard Leaves

Bereavement:

Offering time off to grieve chosen family and non-family not only recognizes differences in family/community make-up, but also allows employees to take time to grieve the loss of Elders or other spiritual leaders. Many religions and cultures have distinct grieving traditions that extend beyond the legal minimum bereavement allowances commonly used by workplaces. Recognizing and supporting diverse grieving traditions as an organization can take some creativity, flexibility, and importantly, trust in your employees.

Example: Facebook (now Meta) employees are provided up to 20 days of paid bereavement and up to six weeks paid leave to care for a sick relative. [Learn more about Meta's leave policies.](#)

Cultural leave:

How an organization defines “cultural leave” may vary, but it’s generally paid time off for Indigenous employees to participate in ceremonial, cultural, spiritual and/or land-based activities.



Example: The University of British Columbia defines cultural leave as: “A ceremonial, cultural or spiritual event [that] includes any event that is significant to a self-identifying Indigenous employee’s cultural practices” and provides up to two days paid leave. [Learn more about UBC’s cultural leave policy.](#)

Flexible work time:

Allowing variance in when employees start and finish their days can accommodate many different needs, including religious or spiritual practices during the workday.

Example: A flexible work policy might allow employees to work certain days of the week instead of others. For example, working Sunday to account for observing weekly Sabbath.

Holidays:

Decentering Christian holidays in the workplace may take some creativity. Common solutions include:

Floating holidays

A set number of paid days off, taken at an employee’s discretion. These can be taken for a holiday or any other important day.

Floating holidays benefit all employees while also recognizing that not every employee **observes** the same **days of significance**.

Holiday swapping

Allowing employees to trade company holidays for another day they celebrate. This could look like working a statutory holiday to take off time for Eid.



Volunteering day:

Community and giving back is often a large part of faith or spiritual practice. To honour this, organizations can offer a certain number of paid days a year for employees to volunteer on the organization's behalf in their community.

Example: Animikii, an Indigenous tech company, offers one day/year for employees to volunteer within their communities. [Learn more about Animikii's staff volunteering support.](#)

Policies Related to Dress, Grooming, and Religious Expression

Dress code:

If it's possible for a workplace to not implement a dress code, this issue is moot and protection against discrimination based on dress, grooming, and/or religious expression would fall under a workplace discrimination policy. However, if a dress code is needed, the policy should reflect the needs of people of faith backgrounds and allow for religious expression, such as facial hair, hijabs, crucifixes, and turbans.

Organizational Practices

While policies describe any formal expectations and protections for employees, it is the on-the-ground practices that demonstrate the organization's true commitment to inclusion through action. Below are some examples of practices that are inclusive of people of faith.



Dietary considerations:

An organization can demonstrate its commitment to people of faith by offering a wide range of food options at events, including vegetarian, vegan, halal, and kosher foods. It might also put in place kitchen-use rules or offering dedicated food storage spaces for people following religious-based diets.

Quiet rooms:

Also called “reflection rooms”, this is a space for prayer, relaxation, spiritual ceremonies, or reflection that’s open to all employees.

Example: CIBC headquarters in Toronto offers reflection rooms as a place for prayer or meditation and also includes places for Muslim employees to wash before prayer. [Learn more about CIBC’s reflection room amenities.](#)

Staff training and development:

Providing opportunities to build cultural competency and broaden understanding of various religions, spiritualities, and cultural practices can help employees find common values.¹¹ Education on cultural competencies can also help the organization anticipate and address differing needs, while removing the burden of education from the person of faith.

Example: In some faiths, people of different genders cannot touch and therefore may not shake hands when greeting. Some religions forbid the celebration of birthdays or participation in events such as Halloween. Training that explores these topics and offers recommended alternatives can prevent awkward or embarrassing situations for everyone involved.

11 Hasan, E. (2022). Embracing workplace religious diversity and inclusion: Key challenges and solutions.



Offering these types of ongoing learning opportunities shows a commitment to inclusion from leadership. People at all levels within the organization should be encouraged to actively participate in these opportunities.

Organizational learning goals:

Before investing time and money in a myriad of training modules, it is important to ask why you're doing these learnings. Articulating clear learning goals not only encourages greater employee commitment, but ensures the education serves a specific purpose on a learning journey.



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