

Support—and a Prayer—for LGBTQ+ Travelers

Guidelines for Jewish Organizations Navigating Conferences and Gatherings across State Lines

In preparation for a long trip, our Jewish tradition offers us this Traveler's Prayer:

May it be Your will, God and God of our ancestors, that You lead us in peace and direct our steps in peace, and guide us in peace, and support us in peace, and cause us to reach our destination in life, joy, and peace. Save us from every enemy and ambush, from robbers and wild beasts on the trip, and from all kinds of punishments that rage and come to the world. May You confer blessing upon the work of our hands and grant me grace, kindness, and mercy in Your eyes and in the eyes of all who see us, and bestow upon us abundant kindness and hear our prayer, for You hear the prayers of all. Blessed are You God, who hears prayers.

This prayer is stunning. It's also heartwrenching. It comes from a place of fear, of knowing that we do not all make it to our destinations without encountering danger. Unfortunately, this danger is alive today for many travelers in our country, including LGBTQ+ people. But, consistent with our Jewish value of mutual responsibility, *Kol Areivim Zeh BaZeh*, there are steps we must take to try and protect one another and mitigate harm.

We are thinking in particular about instances in which Jewish organizations host conferences and events in states with anti-LGBTQ+ and other regressive laws; laws that make it difficult—and impossible for some—to safely use a public restroom, laws that criminalize those seeking life-saving abortion or gender-affirming care, laws that do not protect LGBTQ+ people or other marginalized groups from discrimination or harassment in public spaces. **The following guidelines aim to provide insights and strategies for navigating these challenging and dangerous environments.**

1

Research Local Laws and Policies

Before planning any event, organizations should **conduct thorough research on the local laws and policies of the state where their event will take place.** Be aware of discriminatory legislation such as "Don't Say Gay" laws, bans on trans healthcare, the outlawing of DEI programs, and bans and restrictions on abortion care. Understanding the legal context on a state-by-state basis will help in making informed decisions.

Ensuring attendees are safe and cared for is paramount. Organizations should dedicate additional staff capacity to providing assistance for participants who may encounter barriers in travel and at the gathering itself. Employers should not require trans/nonbinary staff to travel to places where they wouldn't be able to use the restroom or otherwise be at personal risk. Be sure to provide the option of virtual participation.

It is also important to keep in mind that it's not a binary choice: "hosting the conference in a regressive state is bad and moving it to another is good." Low wage and hourly workers are directly impacted by such decisions and their challenges are compounded when business halts. States are not monolithic; there are always those who are fighting against regressive laws. Finding ways to support those efforts in some way can be encouraging and beneficial to advocates on the ground.

If the legal landscape poses insurmountable challenges, consider hosting the event in a different location that aligns more closely with your organization's values. This may involve additional logistical considerations, but it can send a powerful message of solidarity and commitment to your constituents' safety.

2

Ensuring Diverse Leadership

Ensure that your event leadership and programming reflect diversity and include perspectives that address the complexities of intersectional experiences. Your organization should elevate the voices of LGBTQ+ people, people of color, and people with disabilities in order to foster more inclusive and representative dialogue and decision-making. By doing so in the face of regressive legal realities, your event can become a powerful alternative platform for cultivating understanding and respect across different identities.

3

Advocate for and Publicize Inclusive Policies at the Event

Organizations can also express commitment to safety for all by advocating for inclusivity and equality within your organization and at the event. You can do so by gathering access needs from participants well ahead of time. Organizations should also communicate a commitment to diversity and belonging—as well as no tolerance for discrimination and harassment—in event materials and public statements about the gathering.

Take advantage of the event platform by creating space for constructive dialogue around the issues at hand and making space to uplift all voices. Include sessions that address the impact of discriminatory laws and offer participants opportunities to advocate for change, if appropriate. If you would like guidance on how participants can take action for LGBTQ+ rights in any state, contact Keshet's Community Mobilization team at cm@kwshetonline.org for more information.

4

Choose Inclusive Venues

Select venues that align with your organization's values. Seek out facilities that have explicit anti-discrimination policies (for instance, that will allow you to mark off gender-neutral bathrooms) and are supportive of diverse communities despite discriminatory laws in the state. Engage in open dialogue with potential venues to ensure they share your commitment to creating an environment that honors the safety and dignity of all.

5

Provide Resources and Support

It is important to recognize the potential challenges attendees may face due to discriminatory laws and provide resources to support them. You can do so by creating opportunities to form affinity spaces so different groups (e.g. LGBTQ+ participants, participants of color) can connect and process the experience with one another. Setting aside a dedicated space for group-processing, as well as one where people can retreat to recharge on their own, will help people feel supported.

Offer information on local LGBTQ+-friendly businesses, healthcare providers, and legal resources. Additionally, consider partnering with local LGBTQ+ organizations to provide on-the-ground support and resources.

Attending an in-person event may not be feasible or safe for everyone. To reiterate, **it is crucial for organizations to provide virtual participation options**, which would allow individuals who are unable to travel for a variety of reasons to engage with the content remotely. This ensures that your event remains accessible and inclusive, regardless of the legal landscape.

Conclusion

Navigating conferences and gatherings in states with harmful laws requires careful consideration. By proactively addressing potential challenges, advocating for change, and creating a supportive environment, Jewish organizations can create safer spaces for their employees and others, and demonstrate a commitment to, as the Traveler's Prayer states, all of us reaching our destinations in life, joy, and peace.