The Field of Muslim-Jewish Engagement

A report on the field of Muslim-Jewish engagement based on surveys conducted by the Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement

CMJE: "A partnership between Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the Omar Ibn Al Khatib Foundation, and USC's Center for Religion and Civic Culture at the College of Letters, Arts and Sciences"
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THE DEEPEST CHANGE THAT STUDENTS OF MUSLIM/JEWISH ENGAGEMENT EXPERIENCE IS IN THEIR OWN SELF-UNDERSTANDING.

-REUVEN FIRESTONE,
FOUNDING CO-DIRECTOR
CENTER FOR MUSLIM-JEWISH ENGAGEMENT
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Executive Summary

The field of Muslim-Jewish engagement in the United States consists of a combination of groups and organizations dedicated specifically to Muslim-Jewish engagement, sustained partnerships between Muslim and Jewish organizations, groups housed in organizations with a broader mission, and events between existing Muslim and Jewish organizations.

Under eight years old, the field continues to expand. Interest in strengthening relationships between the Muslim and Jewish communities in the United States remains high. Yet Muslim/Jewish groups generally lack infrastructure. A significant portion have no legal status, no staff and no formalized budget. Groups rely heavily on a core of dedicated volunteers to carry out their missions.

Additionally, the field needs access to programmatic and educational resources. Groups often run social programming in lieu of formal dialogue, text study, or civic engagement projects because resources for the latter are not readily available at a reasonable cost. The field is highly tech-savvy and communicates primarily through online vehicles. Largely because of this predisposition toward use of technology, the field of Muslim-Jewish engagement is poised for further expansion and increasing success in overcoming the obstacles that it faces.

To accommodate both the strengths and weaknesses of the field of Muslim-Jewish engagement, CMJE offers a number of recommendations to the field and those interested in supporting its work including:

- The development of pre-packaged programs and other resources available online for groups to use
- Investment in the basic infrastructure of organizations, particularly in staff and website development
- The creation of centralized online forums for collaboration among practitioners in the field.
Description of the Project

The Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement (CMJE) launched two separate surveys in November of 2009 to better understand the field of Muslim-Jewish Engagement in the United States. One was sent to American groups and organizations with missions specifically dedicated to Muslim-Jewish engagement as well as to organizations with broader missions that devote a subset of their efforts to Muslim-Jewish engagement. The other survey, designed and distributed in conjunction with the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding (FFEU), was sent to participants in FFEU’s Second Annual Weekend of Twinning™. These recipients consisted primarily of mosque and synagogue partnerships.

For the general field survey, groups were largely identified through CMJE’s existing database and internet research. University-based student groups were identified through Hillel professional email networks.

Size of the interviewed groups for the general field survey varied considerably from the Jewish-Muslim Women’s Baking Circle of Atlanta: “an informal gathering of women who meet from time to time to bake and talk” to the Interfaith Youth Core: a Chicago-based youth group that has become an international movement. The survey inquired about history, structure, programming, finances, needs, and difficulties in order for CMJE to determine the most effective means to serve the field in the years ahead.

When multiple contacts were available within a group, CMJE sent each contact a survey to increase organizational rates of response (54 surveys were sent to 44 organizations and groups). If CMJE received multiple responses from a single entity, it condensed the responses into one survey so as
not to give disproportionate representation to a single organization or group. Using this methodology, 45% of groups responded to CMJE’s field survey. Narrative answers that varied significantly within a single entity were retained.

The field of Muslim-Jewish engagement is emerging and not yet large enough to derive significant technical statistical analysis. However, the analysis in this report provides information on expected trends in the coming years as Muslim/Jewish engagement continues to grow.

For the Second Annual Weekend of Twinning survey, questions were developed not only to inquire about the history, structure, etc., but also to serve as an evaluation tool for FFEU. Of 155 distributed surveys, there were 54 total respondents (a 35% rate of response). 6 Canadian respondents were included. All other respondents carried out their programming within the United States.

TO GROW THE FIELD OF MUSLIM/JEWISH ENGAGEMENT, WE FIRST NEED TO UNDERSTAND IT.

-DAFER DAKHIL
FOUNDING CO-DIRECTOR
CENTER FOR MUSLIM-JEWISH ENGAGEMENT
History and Structure of the Field

The field of Muslim-Jewish engagement is largely under 8 years old. 72% of groups responding to the general field survey have existed for fewer than eight years, indicating a notable increase in Jewish-Muslim engagement after 2001. Yet two-thirds of respondents do not link the founding of their groups to external events. Of those that do see themselves as motivated by external events, few noted any connection to politics or world events. Most were inspired by a conference or a successful program. Others articulated the need to combat tensions resulting from local or international political issues. The field shows continuing expansion as nearly half of the groups founded after 2001 were founded within the last 24 months. Most notable is the 2008 founding of the Weekend of Twinning initiative by the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding. In its inaugural year, the program partnered nearly 100 mosques and synagogues. By its second year, the program nearly doubled in size.

Most groups lack legal status but are likely to have relationships with existing organizations. 55% of groups responding to the general field survey do not have legal status as a 501(c)(3), though they are likely to be housed under an organization that does. In university settings, Muslim-Jewish groups are most likely to be partnerships between existing political or religious groups on campus.

Some groups that do not fall under the auspices of an organization or organizational partnership note tangential relationships with existing Jewish and Muslim organizations. For instance, participants in the Muslim-Jewish group may also be members of another organization, but the Muslim-Jewish group has no formal association with that organization.
Approximately half of groups responding to the general field survey have no full time or part-time staff, indicating the important role of volunteers. All groups, regardless of structure and size rely on volunteer help. 86% of 501(c)(3) organizations report having 3 or more volunteers who give 4+ hours a month. 75% of groups without legal status report a core of 2 or more volunteers who give 4+ hours a month to sustain their work.

Groups rely on relatively small core membership. Nearly two-thirds of responding groups have fewer than 50 core members (see chart below).
However, outreach does appear to be a significant goal of many groups as 55% report reaching more than 100 people through programming over the course of a calendar year. 28% report reaching over 500 people.

The majority of respondents note that time or money were significant roadblocks to the work that they are doing, an unsurprising fact given the field’s reliance on volunteer efforts.

“BECAUSE WE ARE VOLUNTEERS, IT IS HARD TO DEVOTE THE NECESSARY TIME TO FOLLOW THROUGH AND MARK CONTINUITY. “

-SURVEY RESPONDENT

Groups rely on membership, programming fees and individual donors. Those with 501(c)(3) status also receive support through foundation grants.

Half of groups responding to the general field survey have no formalized budget. Given the lack of legal status of the majority of these groups, the lack of formal budget is expected.

Nevertheless, even groups that lack legal structure still obtain funds. When housed under another organization, they report that funding comes primarily from their umbrella organization. 50% of groups also report more than $250 in membership or programming fees annually. 56% report more than $250 from individual donors.

Organizations with 501(c)(3) status are also able to elicit high cumulative totals from individual donors. 63% of 501(c)(3) organizations report receiving more than
$10,000 from individual donors. 501(c)(3) organizations are also highly likely to obtain support from foundations. 71% of organizations with 501(c)(3) status receive more than $10,000 from foundations.

Corporate sponsorship is less popular than either foundation grants or individual donors. Only 19% of all groups (3 of 16) report receiving corporate sponsorship totaling over $250. However, such sponsors yielded more than $5000 in all three cases. Government grants are not a significant source of support for Muslim-Jewish engagement. Only one organization indicated receiving such a grant.

Muslim-Jewish groups communicate largely by electronic means. Nearly two-thirds of groups responding to the general survey possess a website. 94% utilize an electronic mailing list; 41% have over 500 people on that mailing list. Approximately three-quarters of respondents no longer even utilize a paper mailing list.

**Muslim-Jewish Engagement groups rely heavily on internet technology.**
A disconnect between objectives and programming reflects need for more resources

88% of responding groups run one program a month or fewer. Group objectives most heavily emphasize relationship-building and social justice. (see chart below).
Many of the mission statements reflect the multi-faceted agendas indicated by the statistics. Formal Dialogue, social action, and social programming were the most popular formats for groups to utilize (see chart below).

Groups indicated that formal dialogue and social action programming were the two most effective means of achieving their objectives.

Notably, even though social programming enjoys popularity in practice, no group believes that social encounters are the best means of reaching their objectives. Social programming likely enjoys its popularity for the limited effort it requires rather than on account of its perceived value. A better resourced field would enable groups to better tailor their programming to meet their objectives.
When asked to mark their top priority of non-monetary support, groups were equally divided between educational resources and dialogue facilitation/leadership training at 32% each. 19% of responding groups requested programming resources.

Of those seeking educational resources, culture-based materials were most strongly preferred followed by comparative sacred texts. 86% of respondents prefer to access these resources online.

If your Muslim-Jewish organization/program/initiative is seeking educational resources, what type(s) would you prefer? Please mark all that apply.

- Culture-based: 64.3%
- Comparative sacred texts: 50.0%
- History-based: 35.7%
- Holiday/Liturgical/Lifecycle-based: 28.6%
- Mid-East conflict-based: 28.6%
- Other: 14.3%
Of those seeking program resources, the vast majority prefer pre-packaged programs that can be easily replicated. Approximately half are interested in a universal program bank.

Little consensus existed among those seeking help in dialogue facilitation. Text instructions were slightly favored at 55% above conference calls, fellowships and online video tutorials. While desire exists in the field for such resources, practitioners are unsure of the most effective means of accessing the materials.

Jews and Muslims must be consistently engaged in such projects… whether it is programs that educate each other on their respective religious practices or partnering to provide help for the most disadvantaged among us.

-Imam Mohammad Shamsi Ali and Rabbi Marc Schneier
Mosque/Synagogue Partnerships

Participants generally meet their goals for relationship-building between their communities.

The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding’s Weekend of Twinning\textsuperscript{sm} represents the largest coordinated effort of partnering mosques and synagogues in the United States, Canada and beyond. Data from the survey of Weekend of Twinning\textsuperscript{sm} participants provides insight into the greater field of engagement between mosques and synagogues. 70% of responding religious institutions who participated in the 2009 Weekend of Twinning\textsuperscript{sm} report having an existing relationship that extends beyond the weekend of programming itself.

80% of respondents identified “building personal relationship between members of Muslim and Jewish communities” as one of their objectives in participating in the Second Annual Weekend of Twinning\textsuperscript{sm} (see chart on page 15). Based on narrative feedback, the program proved quite successful in meeting these relational objectives.

IT IS SUCH A WORTHWHILE INITIATIVE FOR CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS FOR THE BETTER. OUR BASIC OBJECTIVE WAS TO BRING TOGETHER PEOPLE WHO MIGHT NOT OTHERWISE KNOW A LOT ABOUT EACH OTHER’S PRACTICES, BELIEFS OR VALUES.

-Survey Respondent
While 80% of respondents indicated that they had educational objectives “to inform members of the Jewish and Muslim communities about the practices/religion/history and culture of each other” (see chart above) few respondents identified education as an area of success or achievement.

Indeed, educational resources were the most heavily desired of the non-monetary means of support suggested. 42% of respondents listed educational resources as a top priority followed by 31.7% desiring dialogue/facilitation training and 22% desiring program assistance.

Of those interested in receiving educational materials, 70% of respondents indicated interest in receiving comparative sacred text materials. 50% indicated interest in culture-based materials and 36% in history-based materials.
Partnerships will continue to expand programming in civic engagement

While participants were encouraged by the FFEU to pursue programming in immigration reform, environmental activism, fighting poverty, or combating Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, there was clear consensus about shared priorities. Participating congregations programmed around fighting poverty and combating Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.
Assessing the Field

Many Muslim-Jewish engagement groups lack structure and resources, creating a need for pre-existing educational, programmatic, and dialogue facilitation resources. In spite of their limitations, these groups are largely tech-savvy—connecting to audiences through websites and email. This inclination implies that web-based access to resources is likely to enhance program quality.

The field of Muslim-Jewish engagement needs resources, increased structure, and forums for collaboration to expand.

Web-based resources ought to be supplemented by online forums for collaboration and interaction among practitioners in the field. 46% of groups indicated that a stronger support network or greater societal commitment to Muslim-Jewish engagement is the key to the success of the field.

The development of downloadable resources combined with online collaborative forums will best serve the educational needs of the field of Muslim-Jewish engagement and enable its expansion.

“[WE NEED] GUIDELINES AND OTHER HOW-TO EXAMPLES IN VIDEO AND AUDIO OF SUCCESSFUL LISTENING AND EXCELLENT COMMUNICATION INCLUDING SOURCES ON THE WEB... AND OFFERED BY EXISTING DIALOGUE GROUPS.”

-SURVEY RESPONDENT
Recommendations for the Field

CMJE recommends that the practitioners in the field of Muslim-Jewish Engagement consider the following to enhance their work:

- Identify existing organizations in the community that may be interested in partnering. A number of groups responding to the survey emerged from relationships established between people connected to Jewish or Muslim organizations rather than unaffiliated individuals. Groups need not necessarily partner with these organizations but may use them to identify people interested in Muslim-Jewish engagement.

- Create a website for your group. It can be a useful tool both to inform existing members of events, to publicize the existence of your group to the community, and to increase visibility of the field of Muslim-Jewish engagement. While an initial time commitment is necessary to create a website, upkeep is usually minimal and manageable for volunteers.

- Build online networks with those engaged in similar work to share best practices, program ideas and other resources. A database of Muslim-Jewish groups may be found at www.usc.edu/cmje under “Resources”.

- Supplement existing social programming with content that increases knowledge about Judaism and Islam. Programmatic and educational resources can be found online. The Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement is currently in the process of producing such resources.
Recommendations for the Donor

The lack of organizational structure among Muslim-Jewish engagement groups impedes their ability to carry out successful and sustainable programming. There is a need to build the basic organizational infrastructure of these groups in order for them to attain their programmatic and educational goals.

To advance the field of Muslim-Jewish engagement as a whole, special attention needs to be directed to the online presence of these groups.

CMJE recommends that foundations and individual donors who support the field of Muslim-Jewish Engagement consider the following to make best use of their investment:

- Invest in personnel and other general operating expenses.

- When specifying funds for individual projects, designate a portion specifically to staff time and development to enhance the professionalism of the field.

- Encourage recipients of your support to fully utilize internet technology and collaboration.

- Encourage recipients to post the resources they develop online. This will expand the impact of the gift by making it available to other groups in the field of Muslim-Jewish Engagement.