

EXPANDING THE CIRCLE THROUGH EVALUATIVE INQUIRY GUIDE

Purpose: Use this guide to explore a leadership decision or challenge using evaluative thinking. Work with your group to identify whose voices are present, whose are missing, and what actions can help expand participation and strengthen decision-making.

How to Use This Guide:

1. Use the Case Scenario below, or a real leadership situation from your group.
2. Work through each section (1-8) together.
3. Record ideas as they emerge.

Case Scenario: Designing a New Jewish Leadership Initiative

Background

A national Jewish nonprofit organization is planning to launch a new leadership initiative intended to support emerging leaders in the community. The goal is to strengthen leadership capacity and deepen engagement across different segments of the Jewish community.

So far, planning conversations have included senior staff, board members, and several long-time national community leaders. A draft outline of the initiative has already been developed, including goals, topics, and a proposed structure.

However, some concerns have been raised that not all voices have been included in shaping the direction of the initiative. In the past, leadership programs have tended to attract participants from similar backgrounds, while newer community members, Jews of Color, younger adults, interfaith families, LGBTQ+ members, and people with varying levels of Jewish experience have participated less frequently or have not always felt fully represented.

Leadership wants this initiative to reflect the diversity of the Jewish community and foster a stronger sense of belonging. At the same time, they feel pressure to move forward quickly and are unsure how to broaden participation without slowing progress.

How to Use This Case

This case provides a snapshot of a leadership situation. It does not include every detail.

As you work through the guide, you may infer additional roles, relationships, or dynamics that are likely present but not explicitly named. Use your own leadership experience to imagine what else may be happening behind the scenes.

There is no single “correct” answer. The goal is to explore possibilities, surface assumptions, and think more deeply about whose voices are included and whose may be missing.

REFLECTIONS

1. Who's Involved? (Write down the voices currently in the conversation.)

Instructions: List the people (titles/roles) or groups who are currently involved in shaping this decision or issue. Think about who is already included in planning, discussion, or decision-making.

Examples: *Staff, leadership team, board members, funders, program leaders*

Identify: *Who holds decision-making power in this group?
Whose voices carry the most influence?*

2. Who's Affected? (List who is impacted by the decision or issue.)

Instructions: Think about who will experience the results of this decision, even if they are not currently included in conversations.

Examples: *Participants, families, community members, volunteers, partner organizations*

Identify: *Who may experience this decision differently based on identity, background, or lived experience?
Who might be most impacted, even if they are least visible?*

3. Whose Voices Are Missing? (Identify the perspectives not yet included.)

Instructions: Look at who is involved and who is affected. Consider whose experiences or perspectives are not currently being heard.

Helpful prompts:

Who has been overlooked in past decisions?

Who may not feel safe or welcomed to share their perspectives?

Who faces barriers to participation (time, language, access, trust)?

Whose knowledge or experience is often undervalued?

4. Assumptions (What assumptions might we be making about those missing voices?)

Instructions: Discuss what assumptions may exist about the missing voices. These assumptions may affect decisions without being questioned.

Helpful prompts:

What are we assuming they need or want?

What are we assuming about their availability or interest?

What cultural perspectives might we be overlooking?

What assumptions might we be making based on our own experiences?

5. Questions to Ask (Write a few open-ended questions you could ask to better understand those perspectives.)

Instructions: Develop questions that invite people to share their experiences, concerns, and ideas. Focus on open-ended questions that encourage conversation.

Helpful prompts:

What would make this effort meaningful to you?

What challenges or barriers might we not be seeing?

What does belonging look like for you in this space?

What strengths or knowledge do you bring that we may not yet see?

6. One Action Step (What is one concrete step we could take to include missing voices?)

Instructions: Identify one realistic action your group could take to engage missing voices. How will this action build trust with those who have not yet been included?

Examples:

Invite new voices into a planning meeting

Hold a listening conversation

Reach out to a specific group

Schedule time to gather input

7. What Will Success Look Like? (How will we know this step made a difference?)

Instructions: Describe how you will recognize progress. This helps turn ideas into measurable action.

Helpful prompts:

How will we know people feel heard and respected?

How will we recognize shifts in trust or participation?

What new voices will be included?

What new information will we learn?

8. What Did We Learn?

Instructions: Reflect on what became clearer through this process.

Helpful prompts:

What surprised us during this conversation?

What new perspectives changed our thinking?

What will we do differently moving forward?