

## NAVIGATING SPEAKERS AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Hillels are often asked by students, campus organizations or outside groups to bring speakers to campus. Speakers can provide a wonderful opportunity to engage a variety of viewpoints. And, as we know, and as recent events have demonstrated, if not managed well, outside speakers can also pose challenges not only for your Hillel, but ones that reverberate across the movement.

It's important to be proactive in both **vetting** and deciding **whether** and **how** to bring a speaker. These are decisions that need to be made by senior staff, and all Hillel professionals and student leaders should understand the process for approving programs.

Hillel's Israel Action Program team has developed the [Hinenu Resource Guide](#) with recommended and vetted speakers, but the list is not comprehensive, as new speaker opportunities arise regularly. The Israel Action Program team (IAP) can also work with partners to research potential speakers and help campuses develop a full year of Israel programming.

Hillel International's Communications Department can provide support before, during and after scheduling speakers who may garner external attention, but can be most beneficial when brought in early.

We are available for support when reviewing and planning controversial speakers:

- For managing speakers and programs that may get attention from media or external actors, please contact **Matt Berger** ([mberger@hillel.org](mailto:mberger@hillel.org))
- For vetting and reviewing Israel speakers, please contact your IAP regional director, or contact **Anna Langer** ([alanger@hillel.org](mailto:alanger@hillel.org))
- For planning controversial programs and engaging stakeholders, please contact your Campus Success Director or **Hal Ossman** ([hossman@hillel.org](mailto:hossman@hillel.org))

Here are key steps to help you proactively set your Hillel up for a successful speaker event:

### BEFORE YOU DECIDE TO HOST A SPEAKER/PROGRAM

- **Be deliberate and seek guidance from colleagues and SIC.** Take nothing for granted. If you don't know the program or the speaker, be cautious and do your research before approving. Most often you are not the first campus to deal with a particular program or speaker. Find out how others have handled it before you make a decision.
- **Cancelling/changing programs is always problematic.** Make sure you know what you are agreeing to on the front end. Ensure senior staffers are approving all controversial programs,

including all Israel-related programs, and that processes are clear and followed by all staff on your team. Research and verify all programs and speakers before approving.

- **Understand the full program.** Ensure all aspects of the program have been agreed to, including moderators, other panelists, co-sponsoring organizations, etc. We have seen programs be changed during the planning process to become problematic, and attention needs to be paid to ensure the final product is in line with what was originally agreed to.
- **Know how to say no.** There are many legitimate reasons to turn down a program: too expensive, lack of student interest, not in line with your programming priorities. Make sure your rationale is clearly articulated so others can not presume ulterior motives.

## ANTICIPATE REACTIONS TO THE SPEAKER AND BE PROACTIVE

Speakers have increasingly become used as a tool by others to raise criticism of Hillel or different points of view. Anticipate that others may challenge your programs. For example, SJP and JVP have repeatedly raised “safety concerns” to push universities to cancel events, and others have threatened to protest. Determine how you will address safety concerns if they arise.

Also, how will you respond if Hillel students start a petition to cancel your program? Or threaten to hold a protest rally outside the event? Engage your students from various political perspectives to understand how the program will be received and make contingencies for possible scenarios.

## MAKE A PLAN TO ADDRESS CONCERNS AND CREATE TALKING POINTS TO STAND BEHIND YOUR DECISION TO HOST THE PROGRAM/SPEAKER

- Expect everything you say publicly, including to student leaders, could be used in the media.
- You’re either part of it or not, there’s no middle ground. Any program you host in your building, promote on social media or provide funding for will be assumed by the public to be supported by Hillel. If you are not part of the program, do not promote or otherwise associate with it publicly.
- Consider the “unintended consequences”. Remember that Hillels are being followed closely by the media. Assess how your decision will be seen by those with varying points of view and be ready to defend decisions.
- Assume any stakeholder asking questions might go to the media or chronicle their experience in a blog or social media post. Be deliberate in how you respond and seek help in crafting messages from the Hillel International Communications Department.
- Be proactive and communicate with stakeholders before, during and after the event takes place. Board members, university officials and community members who learn details from you, and not from the media or external sources, are more likely to defend your decision and validate your work.