

**The Tiyuv טיוב Initiative: A Model for Culturally Responsive Evaluation of
Jewish Community Racial Justice Programs**

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Abstract

The Jewish community is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, and there is rapid growth in the number of programs and initiatives to serve Jews who are also People of Color as well as racially and ethnically diverse Jewish families. The Tiyuv טייב Initiative is a hub for culturally responsive, Jews of Color (JOC)-led evaluation work in the Jewish community, with an emphasis on evaluation of Jewish community diversity and racial justice initiatives. The impetus for creating Tiyuv טייב is discussed, along with description of components of the effort: creating and revising a model, engagement with a group of early adopter organizations, a fellows program to develop new Jewish Evaluators of Color, and work with philanthropic entities. The authors share initial results, implications, and goals for further work.

Introduction

Since ancient times the Jewish people have been a diverse, multiracial, multi-ethnic community; this diversity persists until today, and is increasing. The *Jewish Americans in 2020* study by the Pew Research Center found that 15% of U.S. Jews under 30 identify as Hispanic, Black, Asian, other race, or multiracial. A 2019 analysis of Jewish population studies commissioned by the Jews of Color Initiative (JOCI) estimated the number of Jews of Color (JOCs) in the United States at one million. These studies also found that US Jewish community life can be unwelcoming of racial and ethnic diversity. “Racism pushes Jews of Color away and we seek our refuge elsewhere,” shares Ilana Kaufman of JOCI (Belzer, et al., 2021).

As diversity in the Jewish community is growing, so is the field of programs, initiatives, and organizations to serve a more diverse Jewish community. Jews of Color should be at the forefront in evaluating these efforts. Indeed, Jews of Color are uniquely positioned to direct, inform, and evaluate diversity and racial justice work in synagogues, organizations, and other Jewish community spaces. However, only a few Jews of Color are currently working as trained professional evaluators, and more generally, there is a persistent need for Jews of Color in positions of leadership and influence.

Tiyuv תיוב (“improvement” in Hebrew) is a new effort led by two Jewish Women of Color who are also professional evaluators, Ramona Tenorio, Ph.D., and Shahanna McKinney-Baldon, M.Ed. The initiative has established a hub for bringing the work of culturally responsive and equity-enabling evaluation to the Jewish Community. Tiyuv תיוב was conceived during one of the most critical moments in the American history of recent memory--in the midst of an international outcry against the police murder of George Floyd, worldwide protests against anti-Black racism, and increasing awareness in the wider community of inequities for those with

minoritized racial and ethnic identities. This increase in awareness also occurred within the Jewish community, prompting renewed discussions and action around the ways that racism also can impact the Jewish community experiences of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Sephardi, and Mizrahi Jewish community members.

The cultural importance of better understanding and improving the extent to which Jewish community spaces fully welcome and include people of all backgrounds, including Jews who are also People of Color, cannot be overstated. Appropriately and thoughtfully navigating contemporary and historical issues related to American racism and its effects on the Jewish community is key to living Jewish values such as *Betzelem Elohim* בצלם אלקים (all humans are created in God's image), *Veahavta Lere'echa Kamocha* ואהבת לרעך כמוך (love your neighbor as yourself), and the prohibition against *Sin 'at Chinam* שנאת חנם (baseless hatred).

Overview and Activities

During the launch phase of Tiyuv טיוב, the team has created an organizational model as well as an evaluation model for the initiative; a group of early adopter organizations has been convened to work with the evaluation model and help improve it; a fellowship program has been established to train new Jewish Evaluators of Color; and the initiative has developed a network of funders to support the work.

Creating the Model: The first step in establishing Tiyuv טיוב was creating a model for Jews of Color-led, culturally responsive evaluation (CRE) of Jewish community racial justice initiatives. Heretofore, no such model had existed for evaluation work in the Jewish community. Evaluation itself has traditionally been a tool of maintaining oppressive norms because a) the profession is predominantly white; b) the inherent framework, questions, and approach have not reflected a diverse and culturally responsive worldview, resulting in a mismatch between “the

needs and cultural parameters of those who are being served relative to the implementation of a program and its outcomes” (Hood, Hopson, & Kirkhart, 2015). However, evaluation leaders from various minoritized groups, for example Indigenous American nations, have developed robust, culturally responsive, equitable models on how to conduct evaluations of programs that are designed to benefit their communities (Bowman, 2018, Mamaril, Cox, & Vaughan, 2018, Shepherd & Graham, 2020). Tiyuv טִיּוּב takes inspiration from these types of evaluation approaches in the work to build an evaluation model that speaks to the values and traditions of a diverse Jewish People. Ancestral wisdom, the centering of cultural iconography, and current research have been central to the model creation process.

JOCs embody a diversity of communities, cultures, ancestral wisdom, traditions, languages, and identities. A key value across our heritages is the centering of ancestral wisdom. Therefore, ancestral wisdom from across our communities has been key to helping guide and inform the design of the Tiyuv טִיּוּב model. Through individual and group sessions with academics as well as rabbis, mentors, elders, sages, and family, we have reached to center ancestral wisdom in our work.

The centering of cultural iconography has also been important to the creation of our model. As such, the טִיּוּב model overlays a schema for culturally responsive evaluation onto the Kabbalistic “Tree of Life” *Etz Chaim* עֵץ חַיִּים model. *Kabbalah* קַבָּלָה is an esoteric method, discipline, and school of thought in Jewish mysticism that emerged in 13th century Spain with the writing of a text titled the *Zohar* זוהר (My Jewish Learning, n.d.). The word Kabbalah means “tradition” or “to receive” (Abraham & Waxman, 2003). Rabbi Azriel Abraham, in the book *Kabbalah Simply Stated* (2003), describes that the goal of Kabbalah is to “help you understand the hidden meanings of the Bible and the concealed mysteries of the Universe.” The study of

Kabbalah was traditionally restricted to Jewish males above the age of 40 who had dedicated themselves to Torah and Talmud (the written oral tradition) (Telushkin, 1991). Today many Jews from diverse denominations and traditions find meaning in Kabbalistic wisdom and study (Samuel, 2007).

A central symbol in Kabbalah is the Tree of Life or *Etz Chaim* עץ חיים. The Etz Chaim is a set of ideas that is represented in a geometric form connected by 10 nodes called ספירות *sephirot* (spheres, gates). The Etz Chaim visually represents the link between the visible and invisible, the revealed and yet to be revealed. The Tiyuv method maps the 9 steps of CRE (Frierson, Hood, Hughes, & Thomas, 2010) onto the *Etz Chaim*.

According to Rabbi Azriel Abraham, the Etz Chaim can be “used to ‘map-out’ just about any subject you can think of” (Abraham & Waxman, 2003). For Tiyuv טיוב, that subject is culturally responsive evaluation. Below follows a more detailed of the alignment between

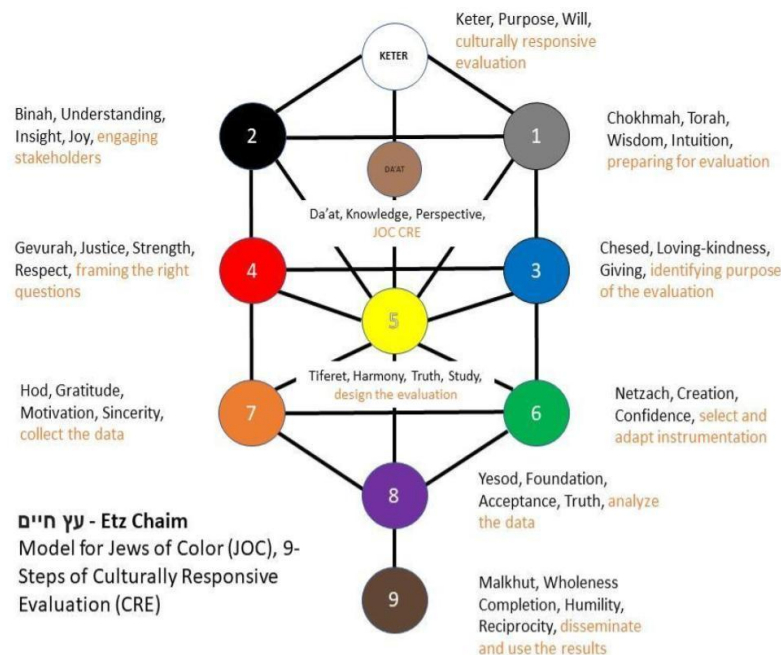


Figure 1 Tiyuv Eitz Chaim

Frierson, Hod, Hughes, & Thomas’s 9 CRE steps and the Etz Chaim model.

The model begins at the top with the first node, *Keter* (crown), which represents *purpose*. For Tiyuv טיוב, this means the intention for the evaluation, and the intention to do the work in a culturally responsive and equitable manner. It is our higher purpose,

driven by our Jewish value of *Tikkun Olam* תיקון עולם, or repairing the world. Next, we move to the next node which is also the first “step” for the model—*Chokhmah* חכמה (Torah, Wisdom, Intuition). For us, this is preparing for the evaluation. One by one, we move along the nodes and the 9 CRE steps, through *Binah* בינה, *Chesed* חסד, *Gevurah* גבורה, *Tiferet* תפארת, *Netzach* נצח, *Hod* יסוד, *Yesod* יסוד and finally *Malkhut* מלכות (Wholeness, Competition, Humility, and Reciprocity)—the work to disseminate and use the results of the evaluation in service of our community. Notably, this sense of “social responsibility” is central to CRE evaluators (Hood, Hopson, & Kirkhart, 2015). Finally, as JOC professional evaluators we bring our voice, our *Da’at* דעת (Knowledge, Perspective) from both our professional and personal lived experiences to this work.

As with any evaluation process, the *Etz Chaim* עץ חיים path is not linear but iterative, and the transecting lines and paths reveal multidirectional movement among the model’s nodes and the steps, which are driven by our relationships and engagement with stakeholders, with our communities, and with our heritages.

Current research has been central to the creation of the Tiyuv טייב model. In addition to the foundational research on CRE (Tachine, Yellow Bird, & Cabrera, 2016), the work coming from Culturally Responsive Indigenous Evaluation (Bowman, Francis, & Tyndall, 2015, Bowman, 2018, Hood, Frierson, & Hopson, 2005, McBride, 2011), with its centering of culturally and spiritually meaningful elder voices, traditional knowledge, and participatory process, has been particularly informative. Our *Etz Chaim* עץ חיים model draws inspiration from the Indigenous medicine wheel evaluation framework which incorporates colors, images, language, history, and indigenous wisdom and values in a manner that is relevant and

recognizable to the community (Atlantic Council for International Cooperation, 2017, Martin, Rogers, et al., 2022).

Additionally, the *Beyond the Count* study on Jews of Color provides recommendations for creating an inclusive American Jewish community, several of which have become central to the Tiyuv טיוב model creation process: These recommendations have become especially resonant: “Support organizations and initiatives led by and serving JOC,” “Prioritize creating spaces and places for discourse and dialog with and among JOC,” and “Promote further research by and about JOC.” (Belzer, et al., 2021).

Early Adopters: Tiyuv טיוב has built a network of organizational early adopters of our model. With our early adopters, we are using the Tiyuv טיוב model to conduct evaluations as well as smaller projects (our “evaluative consultations”). We call our early adopters our *Shivat Haminim* שבטת המינים, or Seven Species, in reference to the seven species of special foods grown in the Holy Land listed in the Hebrew Bible that are a focus in Jewish traditional teachings. All of our early adopter evaluations and evaluative consultations have a focus on Jews of Color and racial justice work in the Jewish community. Our seven early adopter organizations are: Jewish Theological Seminary Davidson School, JOIN for Justice, Jewish Social Justice Roundtable, Selah Leadership Program, Project Shamash, Edot Midwest Regional Jewish Diversity and Racial Justice Collaborative, and Inside Out Wisdom in Action.

Lee and Chavis (2015) describe how evaluation strengthens communities. Borrowing the Lee and Chavis frame, we see our work with our early adopters as helping to strengthen their capacity, and also to concurrently improve the Tiyuv טיוב model, as follows:

1) Supports evaluative thinking: we are helping to build the evaluation identity and understanding of our early adopters. We are also building our own evaluative thinking, and applying that thinking to expanding the field of Jewish evaluation.

2) Generates information for decision-making: we are helping our early adopters make data-driven, values-based decisions that inform their policies and practices. Concurrently, the early adopters provide real-world application and feedback that have improved the Tiyuv טייב model.

3) Builds capacity for using data for advocacy: all of our work with early adopters has included building capacity for using data for advocacy. We hope for Tiyuv טייב to lead future meta-analysis work that will yield data for broader advocacy within the Jewish social justice field.

4) Upholds accountability: our work increases accountability for early adopters and also for our overall initiative. Early adopters receive support with making the implicit explicit—often through logic model work—and with implementing a planful approach for identifying and measuring outcomes in ways that align with their values. For Tiyuv טייב, the work with early adopters has provided insights on the practical application of the Tiyuv טייב model, which have led to updates to the model that would not have been possible without two-way communication with our early adopters.

5) Promotes and monitors progress towards social justice and equity: we are excited for the forward movement in our work, and the central role that our early adopters are playing in this advancement. Following the successful establishment of Tiyuv as a hub for Jews of Color-led, culturally responsive evaluation of Jewish community racial justice initiatives, we envision

Tiyuv טײַוּב playing an increasing role in promoting and monitoring progress toward social justice and equity, in our sector and in the wider community.

Tiyuv טײַוּב New Evaluator Training and Mentoring Fellowship Program: “To champion CRE practices, it is imperative to build a pipeline of CRE practitioners, particularly evaluators of color, to bridge communication gaps between organizations and communities being served” (Aponte-Soto, et al., 2014). To this end, we have launched the Tiyuv טײַוּב New Evaluator Training and Mentoring Fellowship Program to develop JOC evaluators who will use evaluation to address bias and racism in Jewish spaces. This effort is in line with effective programs including the Building Diversity Initiative (BDI) and current Graduate Education Diversity Internship (GEDI) Programs of the AEA (Symonette, Miller, & Barela, 2020, American Evaluation Association, n.d). Through a competitive application process that addressed multiple intelligences, diverse learning and communication styles, and language diversity, we selected a New Evaluator Training and Mentoring Fellowship Program inaugural cohort of four dynamic Jewish leaders of color.

The vision is to recruit and train new JOC evaluators each year for several years. Trainings will be conducted by Tiyuv טײַוּב leadership with support from partners. External facilitators will include leaders from Women of Color-led organizations Ubuntu Research and Evaluation and ךMilwaukee Evaluation!, the Wisconsin statewide American Evaluation Association affiliate. New Evaluator Trainees will:

- receive a training fellowship stipend to cover their time and expenses dedicated to the program over one year
- participate in theoretical as well as hands-on evaluation training, with one-on-one mentorship with evaluators and mentors from Tiyuv טײַוּב and partner institutions

- become members of the American Evaluation Association
- become members of the professional Tiyuv team upon successful program completion

The fellowship program will also include the collaborative development of community agreements for the creation of a new field of practice with new leaders.

Funder Development: We have designed Tiyuv טייב such that grants from private philanthropic foundations subsidize our operations, therefore allowing us to make our evaluation work affordable for small nonprofits with small budgets. However, our work centering anti-racism has been politicized and is often out of sync with mainstream philanthropy. The juncture between philanthropy and evaluation poses a unique challenge. Indeed, the traditional framework, questions, approach, design, and decision-making of both philanthropy and evaluation have been used to perpetuate racism and inequity (Potapchuk, Leiderman, Bivens, & Major, 2005). “Racial bias—both personal and institutional, conscious and unconscious—creeps into all parts of the philanthropic and grantmaking process. The result is that nonprofit organizations led by people of color receive less money than those led by whites, and philanthropy ends up reinforcing the very social ills it says it is trying to overcome” (Dorsey, Kim, Daniels, Sakaue, & Savage, 2020). We have encountered implicit and explicit resistance to our work, resulting in exclusions to funds, opportunities, and resources. We were told by a major funder in the Midwest that because our work centers on investing in the leadership and professional development of JOCs, it would be hard to fund. This family foundation, like others within the wider philanthropic ecosystem, associate our work with identity politics and Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), which have become dog whistle terms on the political right. Research suggests that BIPOC-led organizations are often underfunded or awarded with “strings attached” (Barge, et al., 2020, LeRoux & Medina, 2022, Rendon, 2020). “Jews of Color”

has been cast by the political right as divisive and problematic. At the same time, being a *Jewish* social justice-focused organization dedicated to the eradication of racism adds complexities in our efforts to secure funding from outside the Jewish community.

Our identity as Jews of Color is not divisive, but rather a reflection of our historically and beautifully diverse Jewish community. Furthermore, deliberate use of the term Jews of Color continues to be a tool that “can help people think about how some Jews have been targeted by racism both outside and within the Jewish community” (McKinney, 2001).

Discussion and Implications for Further Work

There are many themes in the feedback we are receiving from across the Jewish nonprofit sector and beyond. Colleagues from large and small organizations are excited for the work of Tiyuv טיוב, and are eager to be trained in our method. They want to be a part of the forward momentum that has been created. There has been a strong call from non-BIPOC community members for opportunities to engage with us. We plan to create community-wide opportunities for BIPOC and non-BIPOC Jewish evaluators, including general training and updates open to the full community.

We have heard a specific call from our early adopters for guidance developing and implementing professional development and leadership programs that focus on racial equity in the Jewish community. Currently, there is no systematic, JOC-led community of practice for the developers and implementers of such programs. We would like to complete a meta-analysis of data from four of the Tiyuv early adopters’ leadership programs. This meta-analysis would result in information to inform best practices and policies for professional development and other programs.

Another hope is to align our training program with a partner entity, in order to provide our fellows access to academic and cultural resources such as library databases and cultural and historical texts and archives. Such alignment could also provide our students with an additional certificate or credential, while providing the partner entity with access to Tiyuv טײַב resources through engagement with our team and fellows, evaluation consultation, and opportunities to learn with and from Tiyuv טײַב.

Tiyuv טײַב is bringing the world of CRE to the Jewish community, and is doing so in a way that centers the leadership of Jews who are also People of Color. The current, rapid growth in the number of programs and initiatives to serve Jews who are also People of Color as well as racially diverse Jewish families creates a new sense of urgency for this work. In its first phase, Tiyuv טײַב has created and revised a model, engaged with a group of early adopter organizations, launched a fellows program to develop new Jewish Evaluators of Color, developed philanthropic support for the work, and helped increase accountability for Jewish organizations to their stated racial justice goals as well as to the communities they serve. We look forward to the next phase of Tiyuv, which will see an increase in the number of Tiyuv טײַב evaluations and consultations, the growth of a network of Jewish Evaluators of Color, and Tiyuv טײַב education and engagement across communities.

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