

How to Propose a Public Stance at Temple Shir Tikvah

Tikkun Olam (repairing the world) is a core value of Temple Shir Tikvah. Our Reform Jewish heritage, our collective history of being oppressed as Jews, the long history of Jewish activism, and our shared commitment to improving the world call upon us to speak up in the public sphere.

When the temple takes a public stance, by supporting an action, public statement, or group, we will:

- Determine that there is a pressing need for our voice to be heard, whether a Jewish voice on the issue would be particularly noteworthy or because the issue has a significant impact on the temple's congregants and their communities;
- Ensure that we do not jeopardize the temple's status as a tax-exempt 501(c)3 organization; and
- Conduct due diligence on the issue, action or statement, and sponsoring organization.

The temple should only take public stances that, to the best of our knowledge, reflect the opinions and beliefs of the members of the congregation, while still respecting our diversity.

Temple Shir Tikvah embraces the opportunity to share our commitment to Tikkun Olam with our larger community.

This document explains the process, including decision-making and implementation, by which Temple Shir Tikvah takes public stances.

We define taking a public stance as attaching the temple's name to an action, public statement, or group. Examples of public stances include, but are not limited to:

- Co-sponsoring or endorsing public events such as demonstrations or benefits
- Signing or co-signing letters to the editor, op-eds, or media statements on public issues or events
- Posting under the temple's name to Facebook or on the temple website about public issues or events
- Attending marches or rallies under the temple's banner

This document does not apply to:

- Actions undertaken by individuals in their own names
- Internal temple activities undertaken by a committee where a public stance is not taken
- Educational initiatives where a public stance is not taken

It is important to note that, separate from the congregation's public stances, the Rabbi enjoys the freedom of the pulpit to voice opinions.

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Definitions used in this document

Proposal: A request that the temple take a public stance

Public Stance: Attaching the temple's name to an action, public statement, or group

Established Temple Positions: Positions that the temple Board (over time) agrees are part of our vision for the temple, or that we have historically acted on or that we know are widely supported based on current temple activities.

Endorsement: Approval of a public stance

Synagogue Representatives: A group that decides whether to approve a proposal without involving the entire Board. The Synagogue Representatives include the Board president, the Rabbi, the Cantor, the Vice President of Tikkun Olam, and a Co-chair of Shir Tzedek.

1. Where to submit a proposal

Any member, committee, or staff member can propose a public stance. If an outside person or group wants the temple to take a public stance, it must be proposed by a person or group connected to the temple. When the possibility of taking a public stance is raised (for example, to a committee chair, the Rabbi, the Cantor, or the Board president), the stance should initially be evaluated against these two criteria:

- Is the issue part of an established temple position as defined above?
- Does taking the stance require immediate action?

Taking a stance requires immediate action if a communal response to a recent event is being organized in less than a week. As an example, a proposal request for immediate action could include a rally on a town common in the aftermath of a local/national tragedy. Please note that a previously organized event for which adequate advance time could have been allowed (even if our temple member just learned about this previously planned event) is not processed as a proposal requiring immediate action. It is expected that proposals requiring immediate action would occur quite infrequently.

If the answer to one of these questions is “yes,” then a proposal should be brought to the Synagogue Representatives for evaluation. Otherwise, the issue and stance may need to be brought to the Board.

Once a proposal is submitted, the person who proposed it will be assigned a liaison from the Synagogue Representatives, who contact them weekly about the progress of the proposal, and can offer guidance on filling out the proposal form if needed .

Please note that the Synagogue Representatives and/or Board are not responsible for implementation of the public stance, which is the responsibility of the proposer or the committee that takes it on.

The proposal form is available on the temple website. It should be filled out to the best of the proposer's ability and mailed to VPtikkunolam@shir-tikvah.org

2. What to include in a proposal

The proposal form asks for the following information on the proposed public stance:

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- Background information on the proposed public stance and its sponsoring organization(s) (including who they are, what they do, how they are funded, and whether they have any activities or stances with which the temple would not want to be associated)
- Any relevant text (public statement, announcement, flyer, letter to the editor, etc.)
- Any costs entailed in taking the stance
- How the issue and stance relate to the temple's established positions and current activities and priorities

The form also asks the proposer to demonstrate that the proposed public stance meets the criteria below, which are required for the temple to take the stance, whether the proposal is brought to the Synagogue Representatives or to the Board:

- Taking the stance will not jeopardize the temple's tax exempt status. Specifically, taking the stance cannot entail supporting, opposing, or demonstrating bias for or against political candidates. It can, however, involve taking a stand on public policy issues or supporting or opposing specific legislation or ballot initiatives.
- There is sufficient level of support for the issue among the congregation. If congregation members hold opposing views, this should also be presented.
- The issue has a significant impact on the temple's congregants and their communities.
- **Evidence of one of the following:** 1) our clergy support the issue; **OR** 2) Union for Reform Judaism bodies, such as the Religious Action Center or the Commission on Social Action, support the issue; **OR** 3) Jewish values, laws, texts, or historical activities (e.g., support for civil rights) justify taking the stance.

3. Endorsements for proposals that need immediate action

Taking a stance requires immediate action if a communal response to a recent event is being organized in less than a week. As an example, a proposal request for immediate action could include a rally on a town common in the aftermath of a local/national tragedy. Please note that a previously organized event for which adequate advance time could have been allowed (even if our temple member just learned about this previously planned event) is **not** processed as a proposal requiring immediate action. It is expected that proposals requiring immediate action would occur quite infrequently.

For proposals that require immediate action, the following steps should be followed:

1. The person or committee raising the request submits a proposal to the Synagogue Representatives, providing all necessary information and demonstrating how the criteria are met.
2. The Synagogue Representatives evaluate the request, taking into account all information available, and take one of the following actions:
 - Approve the proposal if the criteria have been met (see Section 6, below, for implementation steps)
 - Refer to the Board, if the representatives feel a board-level decision is needed despite all of the criteria being met (this may delay the decision, which could make it impossible to take the proposed public stance)
 - Refer to an appropriate committee, if there is already a committee taking action on this position or if committee-level support is needed
 - Decline to approve the proposal

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3. The Synagogue Representatives communicate approved public stances to the congregation and Board. (*comment—I know the SR shares stances with board but isn't it the proposer's responsibility to communicate to congregation, or will this be an exception for proposals requiring immediate action*)

For a decision requiring immediate action, we strive for a 72-hour turnaround time, excluding Shabbat and clergy observed Jewish holidays or clergy vacation. The Synagogue Representatives must reach a unanimous decision for the proposal to be approved, but the decision can be made in the absence of one member, should one member be out of contact during the decision-making period

The Synagogue Representatives will maintain a log of all proposals, including their disposition (approved, declined, referred for further action). They will regularly share this log with the Board.

PLEASE NOTE: If Synagogue Representatives approve an immediate action public stance on an issue for which there is not an established temple position, the proposer must provide some kind of educational/informational communication to the congregation about the public stance (for example through an email blast, a flyer or an article in the newsletter after the event). The public stance will be presented to the Board by the VP of Tikkun Olam.

4. Endorsements for proposals involving established temple positions

For proposals involving established temple positions that do not require immediate action, the procedure outlined in the previous section should be followed, except that 1) the hoped-for turn-around time is up to 14 days, and 2) a unanimous decision is not required, but the proposal cannot be approved if more than one Synagogue Representative opposes, abstains, or fails to participate in the decision.

5. Endorsement process to add an issue to our list of established temple positions

When a proposed public stance is neither related to an established temple position, nor urgent, the issue can be brought to the board.

APPROACHING THE BOARD

The proposer asks the Board to put the issue on the agenda for a regular board meeting. The proposer should submit to the Board as much of the information and documentation required in Section 2 as possible.

It is acceptable (and most likely) for someone to bring a proposal to the attention of the Board without covering all the criteria.

AT THE BOARD MEETING

A majority vote among a quorum is required to decide whether the criteria are met. One of the following actions should be taken:

- Approve the proposal if the criteria have been met (see Section 6, below, for implementation steps)
- Communicate which criteria have not been met, and ask that additional information be brought to a future board meeting

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- Decline to approve the proposal because the issue does not meet significant criteria for endorsement, and provide alternative actions, such as working through a committee or providing educational materials to interested congregants

If the Board approves the proposal, they can also refer it to an appropriate committee, if there is already a committee taking action on this position or if committee-level support is needed. The proposer is responsible for taking action on the issue and carrying out any Board recommendations.

The decision will be communicated to the congregation.

CONGREGATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

All proposals to add an issue to the list of established temple positions require congregational engagement to determine the level of congregational support, as well as opposing perspectives. This information needs to be obtained and shared with the Board.

Engagement may be done before bringing an issue to the Board, although Board approval for engagement is recommended if it requires a significant investment in congregational time or resources.

If engagement has not already been done, the Board will connect the person or group proposing the issue to a committee or a temple vice president, who can help them bring the issue to the congregation and measure support through one or more of the activities below:

- Provide educational materials
- Bring in expert speakers or hold panels
- Publicize local opportunities in the wider community for education and engagement
- Engage congregants through measures such as small group meetings, one-to-one conversations, surveys, and all-temple meetings, as appropriate

Note: In addition to measuring congregational support, it is equally important to capture opposing views and understand the support for them. Respect diversity of opinion, and keep in mind that there is no political litmus test for congregational membership.

6. Implementation of Public Stances

Once the Board or Synagogue Representatives have approved a proposal, a public stance can be taken.

Note, however, that only the Board president can issue or sign public statements on behalf of the temple.

After the temple takes a public stance, the proposer will report back to the board at appropriate times. If the public stance involves ongoing activity, the responsible committee will keep the Vice President of Tikkun Olam informed of its activities and their results, and the Vice President of Tikkun Olam will inform the Board of notable activities.