

POSITIONING B'NAI

"Only when a just social order prevails throughout the world can the Jewish people find peace, and Jewish civilization thrive."

Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, *The Future of the American Jew*, 1948

1. Anyone who is part of B'nai – our Rabbi, *havurah*, individual member – can ask that B'nai Havurah take a public position on an issue.
2. 'Taking a public position' may be anything from holding up the B'nai banner at a rally, demonstration or parade, to using B'nai's name in joining a coalition on an issue, to signing a public statement or asking others to sign a public position paper. (Requests to use B'nai Havurah banner may be expedited, see No. 8.)
3. Things to consider when B'nai is asked to take a position:
 - a. Does it fit with B'nai's Mission and Vision – go to <https://www.bnaihavurah.org/whoweare?>
 - b. Does it fit with positions the Reconstructionist Movement has taken? <https://jewishrecon.org/news> , <http://www.jewishrecon.org/tikkun-olam>
 - c. Does it fit with Jewish principles as found in traditional and/or modern texts?
 - d. Is it consistent with our tax-exempt status? (Doesn't mean it can't be political, but we can't endorse a candidate or party; some lobbying is allowed.)
 - e. Will it elicit strong, maybe divisive feelings – and if so, are the issue and the position important enough to work through those feelings as a community?
 - f. Does our Rabbi agree with the position?

None of the above either preempts or requires taking a position, but they merit consideration.

4. Two things are needed to get a request for a position moving: write it down, and meet with someone on the Tikkun Olam Committee who is tasked with looking at position requests. Either step can come first.
 - a. *Write it down.* Include the issue, the position, and the proposed action, e.g., put a statement on the B'nai web site, testify for or against a bill in the legislature, join a demonstration. Short is good. You may use the form that goes with this Process. If you don't use it, make sure you include all the information asked.
 - b. *Meet with someone.* Arrange a time to meet with one or two people in the Vad Tzedek (Justice Group). Vad Tzedek is a subgroup in the Tikkun Olam committee who have agreed to help with this process. Meeting with Vad Tzedek at the beginning of the process clarifies what B'nai is being asked to do, and helps proponent explore what will be needed to educate our community and figure out if the community supports the action that is requested.
5. Educating the B'nai community will take a fair amount of work so it is best if the request comes from a group. That also shows Vad Tzedek that the issue interests more than one person.
6. Educating the B'nai community will usually include:
 - a. Sending the request to members, together with dates and places of discussions/meetings (*What's Nu*, e-mail blast, etc.).

- b. Holding at least three informational meetings – one after Saturday services, one during or after Sunday School, and one during the week – or a similar discussion schedule that encourages broad and diverse member participation. In addition, presentations may be made to *havurot*. Meetings focus first on listening to concerns and positions, then on education. Meetings are best when they open with how the issue reflects Jewish values, and point to sources. Educational imagination is encouraged.
 - c. Inviting comment by e-mail/US-mail (but not at expense of face-to-face gatherings).
 - d. Using tools like e-polling, e.g., Survey Monkey, and petitions, especially if there is doubt or controversy about the sense of the congregation.
 - e. Involving people with different views on the issue or the position.
 - f. Vad Tzedek (Justice Group) may have useful ideas for any or all of these pieces.
7. Limited staff support is available:
- a. Staff will help schedule the meetings and list them in *What's Nu*.
 - b. Staff will explain what supplies we have, how to make them available for meetings, how to operate the copier, simple things like that.
 - c. Staff cannot design materials, supply food for meetings, operate e-sites.
 - d. Most of the cost (copying, mailing, cleaning) and most of the work will fall to those asking B'nai to take a position on an issue.
8. Expedited positions:
- a. When the request is that B'nai Havurah endorse a position already taken by Jewish Reconstructionist Communities (Jewish Recon), the movement at a national level, the Tikkun Olam committee has discretion to take the question directly to the Executive Council. The Council may recommend that the Board approve, or ask for an educational process.
 Examples: (1) Jewish Recon is affiliated with Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. <http://www.jewishrecon.org/resource/affiliations-reconstructionist-movement>. A request that B'nai Havurah affiliate with the Colorado Coalition for Reproductive Choice might be expedited. (2) Jewish Recon supports Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence. <http://www.jewishrecon.org/tikkun-olam>. A request that B'nai support Colorado Faith Communities to End Gun Violence by allowing it to use our name as a member congregation and by putting our support on our own web site might be expedited.
 - b. When the request is to do something that has been done before, e.g., march with the B'nai banner in a particular parade, the request does not need to be made again.
 - c. In these paragraph 8 circumstances, the burden is on opponents, if any, to use the educational process to explain why precedent or national position should not be followed.
 - d. Requests to use the B'nai banner for events at which it has not been used before may be expedited by asking Vad Tzedek. If they agree that the request is consistent with B'nai's mission and vision, it should be passed on to the Executive Committee of the Board for a quick decision and then to the Board.
9. When the process feels done to those asking that a position be taken, they should:
- a. Give Vad Tzedek a written summary of the educational process (see the Checklist for what needs to be included in this summary).
 - b. Meet again with one or two members of Vad Tzedek to discuss what's been done and how confident they are that the membership supports the position. Support does not mean perfect

consensus. It does mean that a substantial majority agree. Vad Tzedek should pass the results of the meeting to Tikkun Olam as a whole.

- c. If a substantial number of congregants or Tikkun Olam strongly disagree, each backed by credible Jewish authority, each able to say that its understanding matches the considerations in No. 3, B'nai may not be able to take a public position on the issue.
10. The Tikkun Olam Committee will make a preliminary decision whether the request is ripe to go to the Board. Along with determining whether a request has been adequately vetted and *at its own discretion*, Tikkun Olam may include its recommendation to the Board regarding adoption of the request. Staff will put the Tikkun Olam decision (and recommendation, if any) in *What's Nu*. If the request goes to the Board, *What's Nu* will tell members when the request is on the Board agenda and staff will make sure the proponents know the date.
11. Final authority is with the Board. For any request about which Tikkun Olam is able to say the necessary educational work has been done and strong agreement is evident, Tikkun Olam will recommend that those who've asked for the position should be placed on the Board's agenda without delay. Proponents should have time to present the results of their work to the Board, as should those in opposition. All should be prepared to answer the questions in No. 3 and the Board's additional questions.
12. Nothing prevents a member from asking to be on the Board agenda for a position request, but if the Tikkun Olam Committee has not been persuaded, success is less likely and the time allocated, if any, may be short.
13. B'nai will take a public position if, after receiving special notice that the issue will be on the Board agenda, two-thirds of the members present approve. If a quorum is not present, the issue will be carried over to the next meeting at which a quorum is present.
14. The Board's decision and the reports given to it should be put on B'nai Havurah's web site. If a position and action are approved, that should be on the site.
15. Final thoughts – if one asks B'nai to take a position on something that will be decided within the next week, it's too late. But we often know that issues are coming up, sometimes year after year. If there are strong feelings that B'nai should join coalitions working an issue, the time to start educating is now.