

Lesson 3: Tip Sheets and Field Skills for Successful Engagement

Lesson Overview

In this lesson, we will introduce and refer to the Faith Community Engagement Tip Sheets that are available. As part of this discussion, we will present the ten field skills that are to be used to successfully engage those with differing religions and cultures.

Upon completion of this lesson, you should be able to:

- Use the tip sheets in preparing for engagement with diverse groups
- Describe the ten field skills for successful engagement
 1. Identifying religious symbols on homes and houses of worship
 2. Scheduling meetings
 3. Knowing whether there are any meeting customs or etiquette to be followed
 4. Knowing what clothing to wear
 5. Properly conducting door-to-door outreach
 6. Greeting religious leaders appropriately
 7. Appropriate physical interaction
 8. Knowing the etiquette for footwear and head covering
 9. Knowing the etiquette surrounding outreach in the context of worship services.
 10. Provision of food in a disaster setting

Faith Community Engagement Tip Sheets

To help facilitate successful engagement with faith communities, FEMA has developed several tip sheets that provide key information about the different communities such as terminology, leadership, and etiquette.

Engagement Best Practices:

- Creating an Engagement Plan
- Cultural Competency Tips
- Resources and Tools

Religious Leader Engagement Tip Sheets:

- Buddhist
- Christian
 - African American Church Protestant
 - Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon)
 - Evangelical Megachurch
 - Latino Protestant
 - Orthodox Christian
 - Protestant
 - Roman Catholic
- Hindu
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Sikh

An Important Principle to Remember

Before we take a look at the ten field skills, it is important to understand the primary principle of religious and cultural competency:

If unsure, ASK.

If you do not know or are unsure of something, remember to practice active listening and ask questions. It is better to ask than to make a mistake and offend those you are trying to help.

1. Identifying Religious Symbols

The first field skill is identifying religious symbols on homes and houses of worship. Being able to recognize these symbols will help you identify who is or was living in the home. Furthermore, identifying these symbols will provide you with a starting point for determining appropriate feeding, interaction, mass care, mass fatality management, and appropriate days of the week for engagement.

Let's begin by taking a look at the more familiar symbols.

Christianity



The most familiar Christian symbol is the Cross. The symbol is represented as the crossing of two lines at right angles, with the shorter horizontal line intersecting a longer vertical line above the midpoint

Buddhism



The most familiar Buddhist symbol is the representation of Gautama Buddha, seated in the lotus position with the legs crossed such that the feet are placed on the opposing thighs.

Judaism



The most familiar Jewish symbol is the Star of David. This symbol is the compound of two equilateral triangles.

Hinduism



The most familiar Hindu symbol is the representation of Ganesha, which is a God with the head of an elephant.

Islam



The most familiar symbol of Islam is the crescent moon with a five-pointed star.

Roman Catholicism and Christian Orthodox



The most familiar symbol of Roman Catholicism and Christian Orthodox churches is the crucifix. The crucifix is a cross with an image of Jesus attached to it.

Below are some of the less familiar symbols.

Allah



This Islamic symbol is the Arabic script of the word "Allah."

Chai



This Jewish symbol is a Hebrew word that means "life." This symbol is made of the Hebrew letters Chet and Yod.

Chi-Rho



This Christian symbol is the superimposition of the Greek Letters Chi and Rho, which are the first two letters in the Greek spelling of Christ.

Dharma Wheel



This Buddhist symbol is a chariot wheel made up of a hub, a varying number of spokes, and a rim.

Faravahar



This symbol of Zoroastrianism depicts a winged disc with a human bust on top.

Khanda



This Sikh symbol is made up of three different items: a double-edged sword in the center; a chakkar, which is circular throwing weapon; and two single-edged swords, or kirpans, which are crossed at the bottom and sit on either side of the chakkar.

Mezuzah



This Jewish symbol is a piece of parchment inscribed with specific Hebrew verses from the Torah.

Om



This symbol is used in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. The symbol itself is a syllable written in Devanagari, which is used to write Hindi, among other languages.

Gammadion Cross



This symbol, used in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, is an equilateral cross with its four legs bent at 90 degrees. It is also known as a Manji or Swastika. The symbol was in use for many years as a religious symbol before it was used by the Nazis.

Torii Gate



This Shinto symbol represents a gate with two vertical pillars with a horizontal post, usually curved upward, that stretches wider than the pillars. A second horizontal post typically appears below the first, which may or may not extend past the pillars.

Besides the basic symbols, people often use artifacts or other presentations to display their faiths. These may include Jhandi flags, which indicate a Hindu household, or the Shrine to St. Mary the Virgin, which indicates a Roman Catholic household.

It should be noted, however, that houses of worship may have changed denominations or faith traditions after being built. Because of this, it is important that you not make assumptions based solely on the appearance of the building.

2. Scheduling Meetings

The second field skill involves the protocols for scheduling meetings. Scheduling or pre-planning appointments whenever possible is a good practice. You can schedule time with the appropriate person, confirm the day, location, and time, and ask questions pertaining to attire, length of meeting, and any other helpful information needed for a successful engagement.

When scheduling meeting times, you should ask for meetings on days and times that are not usually designated for worship. Similarly, meetings with multiple faith communities should be scheduled on days that are free from scheduled prayer or other required gatherings. For example, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays are good days for all faith leaders. This is because Fridays through Sundays are set aside for prayers or other gatherings, and leaders typically take off on Mondays.

Periods of celebration and/or fasting, such as Pentecost and Ramadan, will also require some flexibility when scheduling meetings. The **Tip Sheets** provide important guidance regarding the best times to schedule meetings. Additional information regarding dates of celebration and/or fasting can be found on <http://www.interfaithcalendar.org/>.

In choosing a meeting space, you should select a neutral area, such as a social hall, and avoid using sacred spaces within houses of worship.

3. First Meeting Customs and Etiquette

The third field skill is knowing whether there are any meeting customs or etiquette to be followed. Many cultures engage in rituals or relationship building before discussing business, such as traditional hand washing, receiving a blessing, or even engaging in informal conversation. Not engaging in these customs may be considered rude, which will hurt your outreach efforts.

In these situations, you should follow the lead of the religious leader you are meeting with. Additionally, you should make every effort to remain for the full duration of the meeting. If you believe that you may not be able to stay the whole time, be upfront and clear about your time constraints early on in the meeting.

4. What Clothing to Wear

The fourth field skill is knowing what clothing to wear. By dressing appropriately, you can yield more successful outcomes during an engagement.

While not mandated by policy, it is good practice to wear modest or traditionally appropriate clothing when entering houses of worship. This means clothing that covers your shoulders, knees, or elbows. Additionally, many traditions expect both men and women to fully cover their legs. In other words, short-sleeve shirts and shorts would likely be considered inappropriate.

When in doubt, dress more formally. Business attire or business casual attire would be considered appropriate in most situations.

It may also be possible to observe what others are wearing and model your attire accordingly. When scheduling an appointment, it is best to ask.

5. Door-to-Door Outreach

The fifth field skill is properly conducting door-to-door outreach. When making contact at a house of worship or community organization, the person who actually answers the door may be religious leader, a staff member, or a lay community member. Do not make any assumptions based on the dress or the appearance of this initial contact. In fact, the style of dress may simply be cultural preference. Individuals who share distinct religious or cultural traditions from the same country of origin may dress similarly.

When conducting door-to-door outreach, ask to speak to the appropriate leader who can speak on behalf of the congregation or community organization. Ideally, you will want to engage the leader who can commit the congregation or its community to partnerships.

It should be noted that the leader you are seeking may or may not be a member of clergy. For example, in some communities, your best contact may be the head of the local food bank.

6. Greeting Religious or Cultural Leaders

The sixth field skill is greeting religious or cultural leaders appropriately. Properly addressing leaders is a signal to the communities that you respect their chosen leaders and traditions. In general, if you act in a respectful manner, you will be better received.

When greeting religious and/or cultural leaders, use their proper title, such as Father, Imam, Rabbi, President, etc. even if this tradition differs from your own. Showing respect in this manner does not equal endorsement or conformity to another belief system.

If you are unsure what the proper title is, simply ask, "What should I call you?" Or, "How would you like to be addressed?"

In addition to showing respect, it is also important to know the appropriate protocols when greeting religious leaders. These include both words and physical gestures. This is especially important when interacting with senior leaders or elderly community members.

It should be noted that many religious traditions have special greetings used by adherents. While your use of these greetings may be appreciated, they are not required for non-adherents.

7. Physical Interaction

The seventh field skill is appropriate physical interaction. In general, you should not initiate physical interaction. Instead, it is best to wait for the leader or adherent to initiate physical contact. This is because some religious leaders should not be touched, while other leaders can only be touched by members of their religious tradition. Also, some religious leaders cannot be touched at all by members of the opposite gender.

For those who cannot or should not be touched, offering a handshake would be inappropriate. Instead, you should be prepared to offer an alternate greeting, such as placing your right hand over your heart when being introduced.

When interacting with different faith and cultural communities, it is important to understand how they perceive physical contact. Depending on doctrine, theology, or culture, touch can be seen as a friendly gesture, invasive, or even taboo.

What may seem odd in Western culture may be commonplace in other cultures, including handholding by individuals of the same gender, and standing in close proximity. Another example is the use of the left hand in Hinduism and Islam. These religions see the left hand as "unclean;" only the right hand is to be used when eating, offering or receiving something, or shaking hands.

8. Footwear and Head Covering Etiquette

The eighth field skill is the etiquette for footwear and head covering. Different religions and cultures have different expectations regarding footwear and head coverings when homes and houses of worship. Let's look at some examples.

Footwear

- In gurdwaras, mosques, and temples, it is expected that you remove your shoes to respect the way community members treat their space.

Head Covering

- In Jewish and Sikh houses of worship, men should offer to cover their heads.
- In the prayer space of a mosque, women must cover their hair (they can leave their hair uncovered in other areas of the mosque)

When entering a church, and many other houses of worship, you would be expected to remove your hat.

9. Outreach in the Context of Worship Services

The ninth field skill involves the etiquette involved with outreach in the context of worship services. While conducting outreach, you may be asked to attend worship services. You may politely decline participation and follow up after the service. Keep in mind that you are there as a guest to observe, not participate.

If you do decide to attend, you should keep the following in mind:

- If you are not going to stay for the entire service, let them know beforehand that you are going to leave early.
- Ask before participating in worship or prayer services, such as candle lighting or incense burning.
- Avoid touching religious items or books unless you are asked to do so.
- Keep any sacred books off the ground.

In some cases, ushers may be available to provide guidance for seating worship participation, and other customs and protocols.

10. Provision of Food in a Disaster Setting

The final field skill involves the provision of food in a disaster setting. Religious leaders and people of faith often follow dietary laws or choose to follow specific diets that they will want to continue to follow in the midst of a disaster. These include:

- Halal
- Kosher
- Vegetarian or Vegan

In extremely dire circumstances, there may be a decision made by their religious leaders to allow for the ingestion of foods that does not meet the strict dietary law. However, every effort should be made to provide appropriate food sources.

One way to get ahead of the curve on these issues is to have partners in your disaster community who are experts in the provision of food to certain populations. In all cases, you should ask before bringing non-kosher food into a synagogue, non-halal food into a mosque, or non-vegetarian food into a Gurdwara, Buddhist temple, or Hindu temple.

Let's take a closer look at these diets.

Halal

There are dietary laws written in the Quran that are followed by many Muslims. These laws categorize foods as **halal** meaning "permitted," and haram, meaning "sinful."

Halal food sources include those meats that have been ritually slaughtered. However, certain meats, such as pork, are considered to be haram. Similarly, alcoholic drinks and other intoxicants are considered to be haram.

When providing food to Muslims, it is important to understand that they will prefer to eat food from halal sources, including caterers, purveyors, and Meals Ready to Eat (MREs).

Kosher

Most Orthodox Jews, Conservative Jews, and some Reform Jews follow **Kosher** dietary laws in accordance with Jewish Law, known as *Halakha*.

Kosher dietary laws include the type of food, how the animal is slaughtered, how the food is prepared, and how the food is served. Kosher animals include cows, sheep, goats, chickens, turkeys, ducks, and most fish. Shellfish and bottom-feeding fish, however, are not considered to be kosher.

When serving kosher food, milk and meat must be kept separate. They must be served at different times, on separate dishes, and using separate utensils.

Most Orthodox Jews and many Conservative Jews will prefer to eat food that has been certified by a nationally recognized Kosher Certification Organization. However, not all kosher certifications are universally accepted. You will need to check with local Rabbis to determine which certifications are acceptable.

Vegetarian or Vegan

Many Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, Seventh-day Adventist, and Sikh adherents choose to follow a **vegetarian or vegan** diet. For Hindus and Jains, vegetarianism is based on the principle of non-violence.

Foods that are eaten by these groups cannot contain gelatin, meat, meat byproducts, or lard. In fact, Jains and some Hindus will also avoid root vegetables, onion, garlic, and other vegetables that involve uprooting the plant in order to consume it.

When providing food to these groups, it is important to understand that they may only eat food from trusted vegetarian or vegan sources, including caterers, purveyors, and Meals Ready to Eat (MREs).

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