

Guide to Hosting Interfaith Friendly Events

Being an interfaith leader doesn't mean you need to know everything about every tradition, but you do need to be mindful of certain considerations when planning an inclusive event. The interfaith movement intentionally represents and brings together diverse students across many different religious and ethical identities. By creating a safe and welcoming space for all worldviews you both showcase the value of these identities and empower yourself and your fellow students to make interfaith cooperation a reality on your campus.

Here are some helpful tips to keep in mind when organizing your event:

Calendar & Holidays

Classes ... athletic events ... concerts ... extracurricular activities ... naptime—all of these are important times for the typical college student. When planning an interfaith event, the timing is similarly important. Looking at the big picture, avoid scheduling events that conflict with religious holidays for students such as Rosh Hashanah, Easter, or Diwali. On a weekly basis, be aware of scheduling conflicts that might leave some students out, and make sure you ask the relevant student organizations on your campus for times that don't work well for their groups. Events on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday should pay particular attention to time of day so your event doesn't conflict with a religious service. Here is a handy interfaith calendar to refer to in your planning: <http://www.interfaith-calendar.org>.

Food

If there's one thing that unites college students, it's a love of food. Interfaith work is no different and being aware of dietary requirements is crucial to making sure your events are inclusive. When providing food at an event, be conscious of religious obligations— such as keeping kosher for Jews, following halal for Muslims, or eating vegetarian for many Jains, Buddhists, and Hindus. Also, some students restrict their diet during certain times and holidays. Scheduling a 5K Interfaith Run during Ramadan and asking the Muslim Student Association to participate is not the greatest idea in the world, for instance.

Social Setting

"Setting the mood" does not just describe lighting scented candles and playing soft music. A good phrase to think about when designing interfaith activities. Will the event allow students

to dress modestly, while being comfortable? Will physical contact be necessary between students of different genders? Will time be allowed, if needed, for prayer and other daily rituals? You might not have solidly affirmative or negative answers to these questions, but thinking ahead about them is helpful to effective planning. Proactively scheduling time and space for prayer, reflection, and certain rituals conveys respect for the needs of all students.

Inclusive of Faith and Non-Faith Identities

Part of what makes interfaith work so exciting is that it intentionally brings together people of different religious and non-religious backgrounds. As you're planning your event, think about the following: will it be inherently welcoming to students of all faith identities? Would a secular humanist, agnostic, or atheist student feel included and comfortable? Think about how you can make sure everyone feels welcome and can participate. And if you have any questions about what a particular group might or might not be comfortable with, just ask!

There's no tool out there that can tell you everything you want to know about every tradition. You'll inevitably run into something you don't know about, and when that happens, the best policy is just to be honest about that and ask a lot of questions. Still, you may want to do some research on your own.

Here are some great outside sources to check out for further information on interfaith work:

- **Interfaith America:** www.ifyc.org/interfaith-america - Interfaith America, IFYC's digital publication, broadcasts news and stories of interfaith cooperation across the U.S.
- **The Pluralism Project:** www.pluralism.org - The Pluralism Project has put together great guides and internet resources about all different faiths within the United States.
- **Interfaith Literacy Quiz:** www.ifyc.org/quiz - Take IFYC's fun quiz to test your own knowledge of interfaith history.
- **Patheos: Faith Channels:** www.patheos.com - Patheos highlights different blogs by student and youth leaders across faith and philosophical traditions.
- **State of Formation:** www.stateofformation.org/ - State of Formation collects the works of young scholars around issues relating to current interfaith work.

ifyc.org / info@ifyc.org / (312) 573-8825