



Recommendations to Address Antisemitism in Higher Education Unions

Together—we can
fight hate for good.

The recommendations below are intended for three key audiences: union members, union leaders, and university administrators. While each has distinct responsibilities, all have an important role to play in preventing and addressing antisemitism and anti-Israel bias within higher education unions. Taken together, these recommendations provide practical steps that each group can take — individually and collectively — to promote inclusive union environments, strengthen accountability and ensure that unions remain representative of, and responsive to, all members.

For Union Members

Jewish and Zionist faculty and graduate students who are concerned about antisemitism within union spaces are not powerless. Unions are democratic institutions, and members have meaningful opportunities to shape governance, advocate for change, build support, and strengthen inclusive representation from within. Many of the most effective responses involve sustained engagement with union structures, processes, and leadership rather than disengagement and resignation from the union. AEN's faculty members have often been able to address antisemitism and anti-Israel bias by working within their unions to build coalitions and to field counter-campaigns and materials. ADL's [union toolkit](#) similarly emphasizes that informed and organized member participation is often the most effective way to challenge exclusionary practices and restore unions to their core representative mission.

1. Know the Union and its Processes

Effective advocacy begins with understanding how the union operates. Members should familiarize themselves with union constitutions, bylaws, committee structures, election rules, and procedures governing resolutions, endorsements, and public statements. These rules often determine where authority resides, how proposals move forward, and what opportunities exist for intervention.

It is especially important to identify where and when major decisions are actually made. Depending on the union, authority may rest primarily with executive boards, delegate assemblies, representative councils, caucuses, committees, or national conventions rather than with the general membership as a whole. Members should also pay close attention to notice requirements, voting procedures, amendment deadlines, and meeting dates and schedules, particularly where controversial resolutions involving Israel, Zionism, or antisemitism are likely to arise.

A working knowledge of procedures and governing rules can significantly improve members' ability to participate effectively, challenge procedural irregularities, and advocate for fairer processes.

2. Engage Early and Strategically

Concerns are often more effectively addressed before a vote or public action occurs than after a controversial resolution, statement, or policy has already been adopted. Members should engage early when divisive proposals emerge and encourage broader deliberation before the union adopts positions that may alienate portions of its membership.

Where appropriate, members may wish to raise process-based concerns regarding inadequate notice, rushed deliberation, lack of consultation with affected constituencies, procedural irregularities, or the appropriateness of using union resources and authority to advance highly divisive geopolitical advocacy unrelated to core workplace representation.

Arguments grounded in union process, democratic legitimacy, member cohesion, and the union's mission are often more persuasive and less polarizing than are arguments framed solely as ideological disagreements. More on the importance of process-based and union-centered advocacy, including appeals to solidarity, procedural fairness, and the union's representative responsibilities can be found in ADL's toolkit for union members [here](#).

3. Organize Internally

Individual members often face significant barriers when acting alone. Building organized networks within unions can therefore be critical to ensuring that Jewish and Zionist voices are represented consistently and effectively.

AEN members and those in ADL's networks have found it helpful to form caucuses, affinity groups, employee resource groups, or informal organizing networks focused on inclusion, antisemitism awareness, and fair representation within union spaces. These groups can help monitor resolutions, coordinate advocacy, share information, mobilize participation, support affected members, and build sustained institutional presence within union governance structures. As an example, see the impactful work opposing antisemitism and anti-Israel bias in the PSC union undertaken in recent years by the [CUNY Alliance for Inclusion](#), a faculty group spearheaded by AEN members.

Coalition-building is equally important. Long-term change is more likely when concerns about antisemitism are understood not as isolated concerns for Jewish members alone, but as issues connected to broader principles of inclusion, non-discrimination, democratic participation, and fair representation. Building relationships across ideological, religious, racial, and identity-based communities where possible can help strengthen credibility, reduce isolation, and broaden support for inclusive governance norms.

Members should also encourage broader participation in elections, meetings, and internal governance processes. Low-turnout systems are often especially vulnerable to capture by highly organized activist factions. Increased engagement by a wider cross-section of members can help produce more representative outcomes and strengthen democratic legitimacy.

4. Lead With Union Values

Advocacy is often most effective when framed in terms of the union's own stated values and responsibilities. Concerns about antisemitism, exclusion, or biased anti-Israel activism should be connected to principles such as solidarity, equal representation, inclusion, democratic accountability, and institutional cohesion.

Unions are strongest when all members believe they are represented fairly and can participate meaningfully without fear of hostility, intimidation, or marginalization. Efforts to single out, exclude, or alienate Jewish or Zionist members undermine solidarity and weaken trust in union leadership and governance.

Arguments grounded in the union's core workplace mission may also resonate more broadly across the membership. Many members who do not share identical political views may nonetheless agree that unions function best when they remain focused on workplace representation, member welfare, academic freedom, and fair governance rather than divisive geopolitical activism that fractures membership cohesion.

5. Document and Escalate Thoughtfully

Members who experience or observe antisemitic conduct, such as exclusionary practices, retaliation, or procedural irregularities, should preserve relevant communications, meeting materials, resolutions, public statements, and social media activity where appropriate. Accurate documentation can be important both for internal advocacy and for potential follow-up institutional, legal, or public accountability efforts.

Where available, members may choose to utilize internal complaint procedures, ethics processes, non-discrimination policies, or governance review mechanisms. In some circumstances, outside legal guidance, advocacy support, or consultation with civil rights organizations may also be appropriate.

In cases involving particularly serious exclusionary conduct, harassment, or misuse of institutional authority, members may also ask academic institutions themselves to speak publicly or intervene appropriately, particularly where union activity affects campus climate, equal participation, or institutional non-discrimination obligations.

To report an incident to the ADL, please visit: <https://www.adl.org/report-incident>. If you are interested in accessing legal services, you can file a report via our Legal Action Network, a free national rapid-response system: <https://www.adl.org/adl-legal-action>.

Experiencing hostility within a union can lead to feelings of alienation and isolation and the need to seek out a like-minded network or community. Faculty and advanced graduate students can reach out to the Academic Engagement Network (AEN): <https://academicengagement.org/contact/>

6. Seek Representation and Long-Term Institutional Change

One of the most effective ways to influence union culture and decision-making is sustained participation in union governance itself. Members should consider running for union office, serving as delegates, joining committees, participating in caucuses, and helping shape leadership pipelines over time.

Increased engagement can also create opportunities for constructive relationship-building across institutions and communities, including stronger professional and academic connections with Israeli scholars, universities, labor organizations, and academic institutions. Personal narratives from Jewish and Zionist faculty and graduate students regarding the real-world impact of hostility, exclusion, or antisemitism within union spaces can also play an important role in changing perceptions and broadening understanding among colleagues.¹

¹ See for example: <https://www.algemeiner.com/2025/01/29/judenrein-cuny-professors-blast-faculty-union-passing-antisemitic-bds-resolution/>

For Union Leadership

Union leadership bears a particular responsibility to ensure that unions remain representative, inclusive, and focused on the fair treatment of all members. Leadership decisions, governance practices, public statements, and institutional priorities all shape whether Jewish, Israeli, and Zionist members feel fully represented within union life or increasingly marginalized from it.

1. Recommit to Representing All Members

Union leaders should recognize that membership is ideologically, politically, and culturally diverse. Highly contentious positions on Israel, Zionism, or related geopolitical issues should not automatically be treated as reflecting broad member consensus, particularly where participation levels are low or substantial disagreement exists within the membership.

Leaders should take seriously the concerns of Jewish and Zionist members who report exclusion, hostility, intimidation, or discriminatory treatment within union spaces. This includes ensuring that members are meaningfully heard during internal deliberations and that standards governing harassment, civility, and inclusion are applied consistently across all identity groups and political viewpoints.

A union cannot credibly claim to represent all members equally if some members believe they must remain silent, disengage, or conceal aspects of their identity in order to participate safely and meaningfully in union life.

2. Improve Governance Practices

Union legitimacy depends not only on outcomes, but also on the fairness and transparency of internal processes. Leadership should therefore ensure meaningful notice periods for major resolutions, particularly on highly divisive geopolitical issues that may significantly affect union cohesion and member participation.

Procedures for debate, amendment, and voting should be transparent, orderly, and accessible to the broader membership. Rushed votes, surprise resolutions, procedural confusion, or highly polarized meeting environments can undermine confidence in union governance and create perceptions that outcomes are predetermined or unrepresentative.

Leadership should also avoid scheduling major votes or meetings on the Jewish Sabbath or Jewish religious holidays and should consider whether procedural practices unintentionally exclude observant Jewish members or other constituencies from meaningful participation.

Neutral facilitation practices and consistent enforcement of civility standards are especially important during contentious debates. Members across viewpoints should be able to participate without fear of intimidation, personal attacks, retaliation, or public targeting.

3. Focus on Core Union Mission

Academic unions exist first and foremost to represent members in matters relating to wages, benefits, working conditions, academic labor protections, professional security, and workplace rights. Union leadership should carefully evaluate whether official union engagement on highly polarizing geopolitical conflicts advances these core institutional responsibilities or instead creates avoidable division within the membership.

This does not mean unions must avoid all public advocacy beyond collective bargaining issues. However, leaders should recognize that repeated engagement in divisive geopolitical activism may alienate substantial portions of the membership, weaken solidarity, and distract from the union's central representative mission.

Unions are often strongest when they focus on the workplace concerns that unite members across differing political perspectives rather than adopting positions on issues that many members view as unrelated to core labor representation.

4. Strengthen Inclusion Efforts

Antisemitism should be addressed explicitly within broader inclusion and anti-bias initiatives. Efforts to combat discrimination within union spaces should include recognition of contemporary forms of antisemitism, including those that may arise in the context of Israel- and Zionism-related discourse.

Union leadership should also establish clear, accessible pathways for members to report exclusionary conduct, harassment, retaliation, or discriminatory treatment. Complaints involving antisemitism should be treated seriously and consistently rather than dismissed reflexively as political disagreement.

When concerns arise, leaders should engage directly with affected members and constituencies rather than speaking about them without their participation. Meaningful engagement requires listening seriously to members who feel marginalized and taking concrete steps to ensure that union spaces remain inclusive, representative, and safe for all participants. As one union member stated: "Reach out to those who need support. When [my national union president] heard about the difficulties I was experiencing in my union local, she called me... to express support and ask what she could do for me. That call meant a lot to me. It raised my spirits at a time when it seemed like many, many people in my union were taking a stand against me."

For Universities

Although faculty and graduate student unions are institutionally independent organizations, universities nonetheless have important responsibilities when union activities contribute to exclusionary climates, disrupt educational environments, or affect the ability of students, faculty, and staff to participate fully in campus life.

1. Protect Campus Climate While Respecting Autonomy

Universities should respect the autonomy of unions and the rights of faculty and graduate students to organize, advocate, and engage in protected political expression. At the same time, institutions of higher education retain independent responsibilities to maintain non-discriminatory educational and workplace environments for all members of their campus communities.

University leadership should monitor situations in which union conflicts spill over into departments, classrooms, hiring processes, advising relationships, student experiences, or broader campus climate. Institutions should enforce non-discrimination and anti-harassment standards consistently, regardless of the political context in which concerns arise.

Protecting free expression and academic freedom remains essential. Universities should avoid suppressing protected expression or political disagreement merely because issues are controversial. However, institutions of higher education cannot ignore conduct that involves harassment, intimidation, retaliation, or discriminatory exclusion affecting students, faculty, or staff. Nor should universities remain silent when rhetoric is antisemitic, and thus inconsistent with institutional values, even if it may not violate a university policy or code of conduct. Universities can and must use their voice to condemn antisemitism, reaffirm expectations of inclusion and equal participation, and make clear that protected expression is not the same as expression that merits institutional endorsement.

2. Support Constructive Engagement

Universities can also play an important role in reducing polarization and encouraging constructive engagement during periods of significant campus conflict. Institutions of higher education should consider supporting mediation resources, facilitated dialogue initiatives, conflict-resolution mechanisms, and opportunities for sustained cross-community engagement.

Institutional neutrality may often be appropriate with respect to contested geopolitical topics themselves. However, institutional neutrality should not prevent

universities from speaking clearly when union activity contributes to hostile campus climates.

Where unions engage in rhetoric or conduct that reflects bias or hostility toward their Jewish or Zionist members, university leadership should be prepared to reaffirm institutional commitments to inclusion, equal participation, academic freedom, and nondiscrimination. Silence in the face of such union activities may itself contribute to perceptions that antisemitism is being minimized or treated differently from other forms of bias.

About ADL

ADL is the world's leading anti-hate organization. Founded in 1913, its timeless mission is to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all. Today, ADL continues to fight all forms of antisemitism and bias, using innovation and partnerships to drive impact. A global leader in combating antisemitism, countering extremism and battling bigotry wherever and whenever it happens, ADL works to protect democracy and ensure a just and inclusive society for all.

About AEN

AEN is a national organization that mobilizes networks of university faculty and administrators to counter antisemitism, oppose the denigration of Jewish and Zionist identities, promote academic freedom, and advance education about Israel. More at academicengagement.org/ and www.facultyagainstantisemitism.org/.

