

## Foundation 5: Relationship Focused

### Religious and Cultural Observances When Designing Public Participation Opportunities

When designing public participation opportunities, especially time-sensitive ones, it is important to be aware of important religious and cultural observances in your community. Whenever possible, select dates for events that do not conflict with these observances. However, if your dates are not flexible, consider offering accommodations such as providing options for hybrid or self-paced engagement, or discuss if it is appropriate to include public participation activities as part of the observance.

Celebrating diversity can be an essential aspect of building public trust. Authentic celebrations can give community members a sense of belonging, reflect values that are important to a community, and connect communities to their history. These celebrations also build



As an organization looks to celebrate the diversity of its community, it must design culturally informed observances. Following are guidelines and resources to assist in designing public engagement that considers religious and cultural observances.

**Get to know the makeup of your community.** Review available data such as race, ethnicity, religion, language, and disability status. Invest time in developing relationships and trust with people representative of those communities. Also, consider cultural celebrations or events important to the local community.



**Review a reliable calendar for observance dates. Here are some resources:**

- Anti-Defamation League (ADL) Calendar of Observances
- Diversity Resources Online Diversity Calendar
- Williams College Multifaith Religious Holiday Calendar

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**Ask community members for guidance on meaningful and relevant observance practices.**

### Questions you may ask include:

- How is it celebrated or observed?
- Are there dietary or behavioral practices or prohibitions?
- What are the norms about how people gather?
- What is the correct vocabulary to use when talking about this observance?
- What are important customs that we should be aware of?

### What should I do when I make a mistake?

- Apologize authentically and immediately
- Seek advice or assistance from an appropriate representative (special interest group, etc.) for advice or assistance to help you with corrective actions and an apology that recognizes, affirms, and values the offended or excluded group
- Invest in the relationship with the group that felt excluded
- Make amends

As a public participation practitioner, it's important to respect the traditions and observances of communities you seek to include. You may not have the lived experience to know the traditions of every community, but that should not prevent you from conducting a thoroughly inclusive process. Humility, openness, and respect for the community are your tools to understand the community's needs and design a public participation process that honors religious and cultural observances.

For more information, see IAP2-USA's [Foundations of Public Participation](#) training.

*This resource was created by IAP2 USA's DEI committee and is provided as a resource for IAP2-USA members and all public participation practitioners. For more information or to get involved, contact [info@iap2usa.org](mailto:info@iap2usa.org).*