

JVC Statement on Hands-On Volunteerism and Racial Justice

Jewish Volunteer Connection joins Jewish communities across the nation in acknowledging the profound harm caused by racial injustice, which has resulted in systemic inequality and individual suffering. As an organization committed to connecting people to hands-on volunteer service, we seek to define our place in the important mission of ending injustice and inequality. We understand that hands-on volunteerism provides urgent, critical, and life-saving services to people in need and represents an important aspect of civil society, yet it almost by definition cannot address issues of racial injustice. Rather, hands-on volunteerism in most cases addresses the results of systemic inequality caused primarily but not exclusively by racial injustice. To use a metaphor, hands-on volunteering bandages a wound that requires surgery. It provides a necessary service but does not fix the problem. We further recognize the inherent harm that is done if volunteers become complacent or self-satisfied, failing to understand the societal context that has led to the volunteer need and we commit ourselves to combatting that potential harm through innovative and accessible service learning through a Jewish lens. JVC seeks to ensure that more people understand the impact of racial injustice and become motivated to confront their own internal biases and become involved in anti-racist activism. JVC will further strengthen our commitment to meeting vital community needs by focusing on our own internal growth and learning.

JVC Framework for Action

In this moment, we are invited to consider the words of modern *musar*¹ movement leader Alan Morinis: “no more than my space, no less than my place.” His statement invites us to consider the unique place that each individual and each organization has in the larger fabric of social justice work, and to step into that place with intention and a commitment to action. In addition, it challenges us to be aware of our natural tendency to take up too much space, especially in areas where we feel passionate, and demands that we make space for experts, especially amplifying the voices of people of color that have been suppressed for too long. To fully find our place will require the engagement of the staff, board, and key stakeholders, as well as the development of new partnerships inside and outside of the Jewish community. As an organization, JVC professional and lay leadership take on these commitments:

- Staff and lay leaders will work to increase our knowledge and understanding of racism and the work of anti-racism.
- Through critical self-examination and deep learning, JVC will adapt existing processes and strengthen partnerships to ensure all work is being done through an equity lens.
- JVC will diversify its leadership at all levels and strive to model the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- JVC will build educational content to ensure that every volunteer will strive to understand the context in which they are serving and how the need they are addressing is caused or exacerbated by systemic issues. Through this work, JVC will explore the roles of *tzedek* (justice) and *hesed* (kindness) in hands-on volunteerism.
- JVC will endeavor to ensure that service learning is an integrated part of the volunteer experience for every volunteer project managed and supported by JVC. JVC will achieve this goal through the development and curation of resource guides, online materials, text sources, and resources for further exploration and activism.
- JVC will develop and implement innovative training resources to ensure that volunteer project leaders will feel motivated and empowered to lead service learning discussions. The resources will be tailored to serve VolunTeam leaders, Live With Purpose hosts, Day of Service project leaders, and Community Partner projects.
- We will seek roles as partner, convener, and connector while developing our own knowledge, skills, and personal commitment to anti-racism. To this end, JVC will build and foster partnerships with organizations that support anti-racist learning and activism, and social justice advocacy.
- JVC will maintain a commitment to our mission and our mandate to support hands-on volunteer engagement. Through partnership building, JVC will build links for people to move seamlessly from hands-on volunteer engagement to self-reflection and advocacy.

¹ The Musar movement is a Jewish ethical, educational and cultural movement that developed in 19th century Lithuania and was revitalized in the 20th Century as a spiritual practice focused on living an ethical and meaningful life.