

# Best Practices for Addressing Antisemitism Within Professional Academic Associations<sup>1</sup>



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Academic associations play a vital role in fostering scholarly exchange, advancing knowledge, and upholding professional integrity. As leaders within these organizations, it is essential to ensure that all members feel respected, safe, and included—regardless of their identity or background. In recent years, concerns about antisemitism within academic spaces have grown, including instances of exclusion, bias, and politicization that target Jewish, Israeli and Zionist individuals. This guide offers best practices for identifying, addressing, and preventing antisemitism within professional associations, while promoting open dialogue, intellectual pluralism, and inclusive scholarship. This guide is not intended and should not be interpreted to provide legal advice.

## Background

Antisemitism has increased<sup>2</sup> by over 200% from October 7, 2023 to the end of September 2024 and by 893%<sup>3</sup> over the past 10 years, and professional academic associations and scholarly societies are not immune. There has also been a marked increase in anti-Israel bias and hostility within these forums. For example, members of the American Historical Association voting<sup>4</sup> recently in support of a resolution<sup>5</sup> that demonized and delegitimized Israel; the American Anthropological Association's recent adoption of an academic boycott against Israel; and the American Association of University Professors' (AAUP) decision to end its nearly 20-year-old opposition to academic boycotts reflect a growing trend in U.S.-based professional associations to isolate Jewish, Zionist and Israeli researchers from the international community of scholars.<sup>6</sup>

This exclusion of Jewish, Zionist, and Israeli academics from international intellectual communities undermines the integrity and credibility of professional associations, while also severely impacting scholarly exchange and collaboration. By ensuring that their organizations operate in a non-biased and inclusive manner, the leadership of these associations not only uphold academic freedom but they also strengthen their reputation, impact, and ability to serve all members fairly.

It is critical that the leadership of professional academic organizations ensure that they remain focused on their core mission of advancing knowledge in the disciplines and fields of study that they represent. Since the production of knowledge requires open inquiry and unfettered intellectual exchange, professional associations must also foster spaces that are inclusive for all their members.<sup>7</sup>

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the Academic Engagement Network (AEN) urge the leadership of professional academic associations to address antisemitism and anti-Israel bias by adopting the best practices described below.

## How We Engage Professional Academic Associations

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the Academic Engagement Network (AEN) are able to provide support and assistance to the leadership of professional academic associations as they embark on the important and necessary efforts to address antisemitism and better support their Jewish members.

### Assessment of Professional Academic Associations

ADL, through its Center to Combat Antisemitism in Education (CCAIE) and the Ratings and Assessments Institute (RAI), is dedicated to researching antisemitism within professional academic associations. We work to provide resources to support association members and leadership in confronting antisemitism and the exclusion of Israeli academia. Later this year, ADL's RAI will evaluate professional and academic associations, analyzing their policies, practices, and overall commitment to addressing antisemitism, including anti-Zionism. The findings will be presented in a comprehensive report highlighting key trends, challenges, and best practices to help associations build more inclusive and equitable professional spaces.

### Faculty Engagement at Professional Academic Associations

The Academic Engagement Network (AEN) is comprised of faculty members across every rank and discipline on over 325 campuses nationwide who are committed to countering antisemitism on their campuses and within their professional academic associations. AEN provides support to faculty members for both proactive work and rapid response to ensure a robust and rigorous discourse about Jewish and Zionist identity, the Jewish experience, and Israel that is free of hate and bias. AEN supports the activities of its members at professional academic association conferences, convenings, programs, and within association journals and other outlets, such as online forum and discussion boards. AEN faculty members are a valuable

resource to the leadership of professional academic associations as they seek to create more welcoming and inclusive environments for all, including Jewish and other members.<sup>9</sup>

## Leadership Responsibility and Best Practices for Combating Antisemitism

### **Understand and respect the fiduciary responsibility to the association.**

- While governing boards and other elected councils and committees act as a body, individual board members typically have fiduciary duties. Board members are obligated to meet these responsibilities, and there can be legal, financial and reputational consequences for failing to do so.
- There are three essential fiduciary duties that individual board members may hold. Duty of Care requires making informed and carefully considered decisions in the best interest of the association or organization. Duty of Loyalty requires acting in the best interest of the association or organization, despite any board member's personal interests. Duty of Obedience obligates board members to ensure that the organization is adhering to its mission, bylaws and is acting in compliance with the law.
- Understanding and respecting fiduciary responsibility means acting in the best interest of the association and its members, which includes protecting the organization from reputational, legal, and ethical risks. While fiduciary responsibility includes an obligation to responsibly manage the association's financial resources, it also includes protecting the association from other risks such as legal and reputational risk. Failing to address antisemitism—whether through action or inaction—can expose associations to public backlash, loss of trust, and potential liability, undermining their mission and long-term sustainability.
- Governing boards and elected leaders and staff should be familiar with the association's bylaws, including those that pertain to proposing and passing resolutions and policies.

### **Ensure that organizational policy stipulates that publicly released statements are aligned with the mission of the association.**

- An argument can be made to connect almost any claim or cause to a scholarly society's mission. As public statements and resolutions are considered, it is important to be honest about the parameters of the professional context. Consider whether the position being advocated reflects a consensus within the membership based on shared professional commitments and if it aligns with the association's overall mission. Put differently, is the advocacy genuinely rooted in the mission, or is it promoting a particular cause regardless of broader member agreement? Also weigh the potentially debilitating effect on the association's ability to carry out its mission if officials are sidetracked by the complications and

fallout of overreaching advocacy. This does not mean that professional associations cannot commit to a set of ethical values. Rather, it is a way of enacting the principles of free inquiry and intellectual exchange, and supporting the right of individual members to freely advocate personally for their ideological positions.

- If divisive political statements have been made in the past, leadership should not hesitate to move in a different direction. It is never too late to change policy or to reverse course in order to remain consistent with the organization's mission and bylaws. This should not be construed as hypocrisy; it is rather an instance of commendable organizational learning. Professional academic associations may suffer reputational and financial damage if they are viewed as overly partisan and politicized; it is therefore in their best interest that they be perceived as unbiased.

### **Establish and uphold clear codes of ethics, non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, and codes of conduct to guide organizational behavior and accountability.**

- Add clauses prohibiting discrimination and harassment of Jewish members of the association, including those for whom Zionism is a central component of their faith identity, into relevant association commitments (e.g., diversity statements, codes of ethics, non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, and codes of conduct for meetings and conferences) and clearly convey and enforce these policies without exception.<sup>9</sup>
- Ensure that members are aware of these policies. Members should agree to follow such policies when they join the association, and reaffirm their commitment upon membership renewal.
- Encourage educational programs that explain the multifaceted nature of antisemitism. Ideally such programming would cover historical context, contemporary realities, and practical examples that are relevant to the association.
- Provide antisemitism awareness training for all association staff as part of anti-bias, anti-discrimination and anti-harassment training. Offer professional development opportunities to elected leadership to become better informed about antisemitism and the needs and concerns of Jewish, Zionist and Israeli members of the association.

### **Ensure that there are clear and easy processes for reporting antisemitic rhetoric and activity in the association. This includes committing to investigate and respond to reports in a timely, transparent, and serious manner.**

- Be prepared to take tangible action to address antisemitic rhetoric and activity wherever it occurs, including at in-person meetings and conferences and in online fora, such as discussion boards and email listservs. Actions can range from public condemnation to sanctions and revised organizational

policy. Consult with affected members regarding potential organizational responses.

- » Implement a transparent procedure for handling complaints, including holding hearings when appropriate and following a structured decision-making process aligned with organizational policies.
  - » Consider forming a committee responsible for reviewing complaints in a fair, consistent, and timely manner.
- Any antisemitic remark and activity or harassing and bigoted mistreatment of Jewish members, including on account of their real or perceived ethnic ancestry and heritage or Zionist beliefs, should be publicly condemned. Communicate transparently with members about what has happened, why it is deeply offensive and troubling, and what steps the association is taking to support those negatively impacted and to ensure that it does not happen again.

### **Ensure that open inquiry, free expression, and intellectual exchange are protected**

Academic and cultural boycotts are counter to the fundamental values of free inquiry and intellectual exchange that are the foundations of professional and academic associations.

Boycotting academic institutions, for example, deprives students and faculty, as well as those who may want to collaborate with them, of educational and professional opportunities.<sup>10</sup>

- Boycott proposals often target Israeli academic and cultural institutions - which are among the most critical voices of government policy - as part of the broader call for boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS), a movement that seeks to isolate Israel politically, economically, and culturally and explicitly rejects the Jewish people's right to self-determination.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, Jewish, Zionist and Israeli members of associations considering anti-Israel boycotts often feel vilified and unfairly singled out for differential treatment.
- Adopting an academic boycott of Israel's system of higher education can also carry financial and legal risk, particularly as more than three dozen states have enacted anti-BDS legislation, executive orders, or resolutions.<sup>12</sup> Associations that endorse BDS may thus face legal challenges, contract restrictions, or financial penalties.
- Be aware that the BDS movement also encourages its supporters to "resist" educational programs and events that would "normalize" Israel, including those that support Israeli-Palestinian co-existence. Association leadership should ensure that proposals along such lines are not rejected from meetings and conferences by BDS advocates who are serving as proposal reviewers. In addition, while the BDS movement insists that only academic institutions are targeted, the reality is that those institutions are composed of, represent, and serve Israeli scholars and, as such, individual Israeli academics face shunning, ostracism, and exclusion as a result of BDS.<sup>13</sup> Association leadership should monitor submissions and acceptances to conferences and journals to ensure that Israeli members are not being subjected to discriminatory practices.

- Ensure open and transparent discussion of how academic boycotts are inimical to the principles of open inquiry, free expression, and unfettered intellectual exchange.

### **Ensure that the association's investment policy specifies that investments may not be subject to politically motivated ideologies.**

- As a fiduciary, association leadership should consider the implications of divestment for the association. If an association holds a diversified investment portfolio, over time divestment can lead to poorer performance. Implications may extend<sup>14</sup> beyond direct financial decline to the alienation of members, external reputational damage, and legal challenges.
- Association members have diverse political perspectives. As a result, politically motivated divestment will alienate some members, while gaining support from others. The absence of consensus and the ensuing divisiveness distracts from the association's core mission, violates the association's fiduciary responsibility to act in the best interests of all members of the association, and can result in lost revenue as disaffected members leave the association for other more welcoming and inclusive spaces.<sup>15</sup>
- Divestment proposals often target Israel directly or cast Israel as the sole aggressor in the complex and intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Divestment proposals are sometimes associated with the broader call for BDS. As such, they will be deeply alienating to many Jewish, Zionist and Israeli members of the association. Permitting and/or endorsing such proposals therefore risks breaching both the association's fiduciary duty to uphold the collective interests and equitable treatment of all its members and policies related to non-discrimination based on national origin and shared ancestry and heritage.

### **Develop and enforce policies to ensure safe and full participation for all attendees at association events.**

- Establish clear policies and procedures to ensure that all participants—regardless of background or viewpoint—can engage fully, safely, and respectfully in all association activities.
- Develop a policy to ensure that speakers and presenters align with the association's mission and values, and do not promote discriminatory, biased, or exclusionary rhetoric that undermines the integrity of the event or the safety of attendees. This policy should include clear guidelines, a vetting process, and accountability measures to uphold respectful and mission-aligned discourse.
- Create protocols for managing disruptions. Such protocols should provide clear guidance regarding what conduct is prohibited, followed by a series of examples (e.g. shouting down speakers, blocking entrances, etc.).
  - » While peaceful protests may be permitted in spaces adjacent to meeting activities, protesters should not be allowed to commandeer events or prevent virtual or in-person event programming from taking place. Scheduled

programming is protected by academic freedom and free expression principles, while the “heckler’s veto” is not.

- » Clearly communicate disruption protocols to event attendees in advance, and consider asking attendees to confirm during registration that they understand all rules and policies regarding appropriate and reasonable time, place and manner for protests and demonstrations.
- » Clearly communicate consequences of any violations of rules and policies (e.g., removal from program, suspension or expulsion from association, etc.)
- » If disruptions that violate the association’s policies occur, leadership should take immediate steps to condemn these actions and to hold violators accountable.

## About ADL

ADL is the leading anti-hate organization in the world. 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 Academic Engagement Network (AEN)

AEN 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.

## Acknowledgments

We thank the *ADL-AEN Faculty & Staff Working Group to Address Antisemitism and Anti-Israel Bias in U.S. Professional Academic Associations* for its helpful insights and feedback on this document.

## Disclaimer

This document does not constitute legal advice or counsel nor is it meant to contravene the existing policies and procedures of professional academic associations.

<sup>1</sup> This guide to best practices is directed toward the elected leadership of professional academic organizations, including Boards, Executive Councils and Committees, as well as salaried leaders and staff.

<sup>2</sup> ADL, "Over 10,000 Antisemitic Incidents Recorded in the U.S. since Oct. 7, 2023, According to ADL Preliminary Data" (October 6, 2024) at <https://www.adl.org/resources/press-release/over-10000-antisemitic-incidents-recorded-us-oct-7-2023-according-adl>.

<sup>3</sup> ADL, "Audit of Antisemitic Incidents 2024" (April 22, 2025) at <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/audit-antisemitic-incidents-2024>

<sup>4</sup> Greenblatt, Jonathan. (January 16, 2025). [A Letter from ADL to the American Historical Association]. Retrieved from <https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2025-01/ADL-to-President-Vinson-Proffessor-Marchand-Proffessor-Glymph-and-Dr-Grossman.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Academic Engagement Network and American Jewish Committee. (January 16, 2025). [A letter from AEN and AJC to the members of the American Historical Association Council]. Retrieved from <https://academicengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/AENAJC-Ltr-to-AHA-2025.1.16-Final.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Cynthia Saltzman, *Revisiting the Boycott Campaign at the American Anthropological Association: A Divisive and Destructive Effort to Delegitimize Israel and Undermine the University Mission* (AEN Pamphlet, November 2024) at [https://academicengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/AEN\\_Pamphlet\\_Saltzman.pdf](https://academicengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/AEN_Pamphlet_Saltzman.pdf); Academic Engagement Network, "Response to the AAUP's Statement on Academic Boycotts (August 12, 2024) at [https://academicengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/AEN-Response-to-AAUP-Statement-on-Academic-Boycotts\\_8.12.24.pdf](https://academicengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/AEN-Response-to-AAUP-Statement-on-Academic-Boycotts_8.12.24.pdf); Academic Engagement Network and Alliance for Academic Freedom, "Statement on the American Anthropological Association Resolution to Boycott Israeli Academic Institutions" (May 3, 2023) at <https://academicengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/AAF-AEN-FINAL.pdf>; Academic Engagement Network, "AEN Statement on MESA Members' Vote to Ratify BDS Resolution" (March 23, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> For a recent statement urging the leadership of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) to revisit its recent activities and stances in light of this central mission, see ADL, AEN, AJC, Hillel International, and JFNA, "Letter to AAUP over 'Scholasticide in Palestine' Webinar" (March 7, 2025) at <https://www.adl.org/resources/press-release/letter-american-association-university-professors-over-scholasticide>.

<sup>8</sup> For recent faculty initiatives to expose antisemitism and anti-Israel bias within professional academic associations, see for example Sally Satel, "American Psychological Association Slammed for 'Virulent' Jew Hate," *The Free Press* (February 25, 2025) at <https://www.thefp.com/p/american-psychological-association-antisemitism-complaint> and Academic Engagement Network, "AEN Section for Women Faculty Statement to the National Women Studies Association," (December 14, 2023) at [https://academicengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/AEN\\_Section-Statement-on-the-NWSA\\_12.14.23.pdf](https://academicengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/AEN_Section-Statement-on-the-NWSA_12.14.23.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Antisemitism is the marginalization and oppression of people who are Jewish, based on the belief in stereotypes, myths and disinformation about Jewish people, Judaism and Israel. Anti-Zionism rejects Israel as a legitimate member of the community of nations and denies the right for Jews to self-determination and to establish a state in the land of Israel. As such, anti-Zionism is distinct from criticism of the policies or actions of the government of Israel. Anti-Zionism is also often experienced as antisemitism when it invokes anti-Jewish tropes; is used to disenfranchise, demonize, disparage, or punish Jews and/or those who feel a connection to Israel; exploits Jewish trauma by invoking the Holocaust in order to position Jews as akin to Nazis; or renders Jews less worthy of nationhood and self-determination than other peoples. See Raeeza Z. Shams, "Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism," in *Antisemitism, Jewish Identity, and Freedom of Expression on Campus: A Guide and Resource Book for Faculty and University Leaders* (Academic

Engagement Network, January 2022) at <https://academicengagement.org/resources/>; ADL, "What is... Antisemitism, Anti-Zionism, Anti-Israel Bias?" (October 12, 2022) at <https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/what-antisemitism-anti-zionism-anti-israel-bias>; Robert Wistrich, "Anti-Zionism and Anti-Semitism," *Jewish Political Studies Review*, vol. 16, no. 3/4, (Fall 2004): pp. 27-31 at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25834602>; Michael Walzer, "Anti-Zionism and Anti-Semitism," *Fathom* (October 2019) at <https://fathomjournal.org/anti-zionism-and-anti-semitism/>; Eunice G. Pollack, editor. *From Antisemitism to Anti-Zionism: The Past & Present of a Lethal Ideology* (Academic Studies Press, 2017); Alvin H. Rosenfeld, editor. *Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism: The Dynamics of Delegitimization* (Indiana University Press, 2019); Kenneth L. Marcus, "Anti-Zionism and Anti-Semitism" in Kenneth L. Marcus, *The Definition of Anti-Semitism* (Academic Studies Press, 2015), pp. 146-190; David Patterson, "Anti-Zionist Anti-Semitism" in David Patterson, *Anti-Semitism and Its Metaphysical Origins* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 194-221.

<sup>10</sup> Michal B. Atkins and Miriam F. Elman, "BDS as a Threat to Academic Freedom and Campus Free Speech in the United States," *Michigan State International Law Review*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (2021): 213-59 at <https://aenetwork.app.box.com/s/ssqr3clwp7zz8l8ner5salgdizy6tcd9>.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, David Hirsh, *Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) and Antisemitism* (AEN Pamphlet, December 2016) at <https://academicengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/David-Hirsh-pamphlet.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> For more on the states that have enacted such legislation, see: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/anti-bds-legislation>.

<sup>13</sup> Academic Engagement Network, "AEN Rallies Global Academia to Condemn University Boycotts of Israel" (July 22, 2024) at <https://academicengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/AEN-Rallies-Global-Academia-to-Condemn-University-Boycotts-of-Israel.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Israel Academia Monitor, "The Modern Language Association Attempts to Boycott Israel" (January 8, 2025) at <https://israel-academia-monitor.com/2025/01/08/the-modern-language-association-attempts-to-boycott-israel/>.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Pessin, *Anti-Israel Divestment Campaigns on U.S. Campuses After October 7* (AEN Research Paper Series, No. 5, 2024) at [https://academicengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/AEN\\_Research-5\\_Final-Web-2.pdf](https://academicengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/AEN_Research-5_Final-Web-2.pdf).