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# Religious Diversity at the Y

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**FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

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## ABOUT THIS REPORT

The YMCA of the USA recognizes that in a diverse world, we are stronger when we are inclusive and our doors are open for all. Interfaith engagement provides an opportunity for the Y to foster empathy, understanding, and awareness. This document is a summary of a collaborative project on interfaith engagement conducted by the Aspen Institute Justice & Society Program (JSP) and the YMCA of the USA (Y-USA).

Since 2012, the Aspen Institute Justice & Society Program has examined religious pluralism through its Inclusive America Project (IAP), a task force made up of distinguished individuals from five key sectors: youth development, higher education, media, religiously affiliated organizations, and government agencies. The group held full-day meetings at the Aspen Institute headquarters in December 2012 and April 2013, and published *Principled Pluralism: Report of the Inclusive America Project* in June 2013.

The YMCA of the USA, one of the nation's leading youth development organizations, has participated in IAP from its inception. Neil Nicoll, President and CEO of Y-USA, attended both panel meetings and contributed an essay to the *Principled Pluralism* report. As an outgrowth of Mr. Nicoll's involvement in the Inclusive America Project, the Aspen Institute and Y-USA worked together to examine how religious diversity affects Ys across the nation and explore potential strategies for further engagement.

The information in this report was collected from two sources: a written survey and field studies. In December 2013, JSP and the Y cooperated with other youth development and interfaith organizations to design two versions of a survey on religious diversity, one for CEOs (Appendix A) and another for staff and volunteers (Appendix B).

In March 2014, this survey was distributed via the web-based SurveyMonkey platform to Ys in ten US cities: Champaign-Urbana, IL; Columbus, OH; Estes Park, CO; Kansas City, MO; Marlborough, MA; Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN; New York, NY; San Francisco, CA; St. Louis, MO; and Seattle, WA. These Ys were selected by Y-USA's diversity and inclusion team. Three criteria were used in selecting these sites: their experience with religious diversity, willingness to participate, and geographic spread. All ten CEOs and about 175 staff and volunteers completed the surveys.

To allow for further study and dialogue, three local Ys—the YMCA of Greater St. Louis, the YMCA of the Greater Twin Cities, and the University YMCA of Champaign-Urbana—agreed to host site visits by Joseph DeMott, IAP Project Manager, during April 2014. Mr. DeMott toured each of these three Ys, conducted interviews with the CEO and other key staff, and had less formal discussions with program staff and participants. During the summer and fall of 2014, the Y-USA diversity & inclusion team worked in partnership with Mr. DeMott to consult with leadership of the three local Ys profiled in this report to facilitate a comprehensive vetting process, resulting in this culminating report.

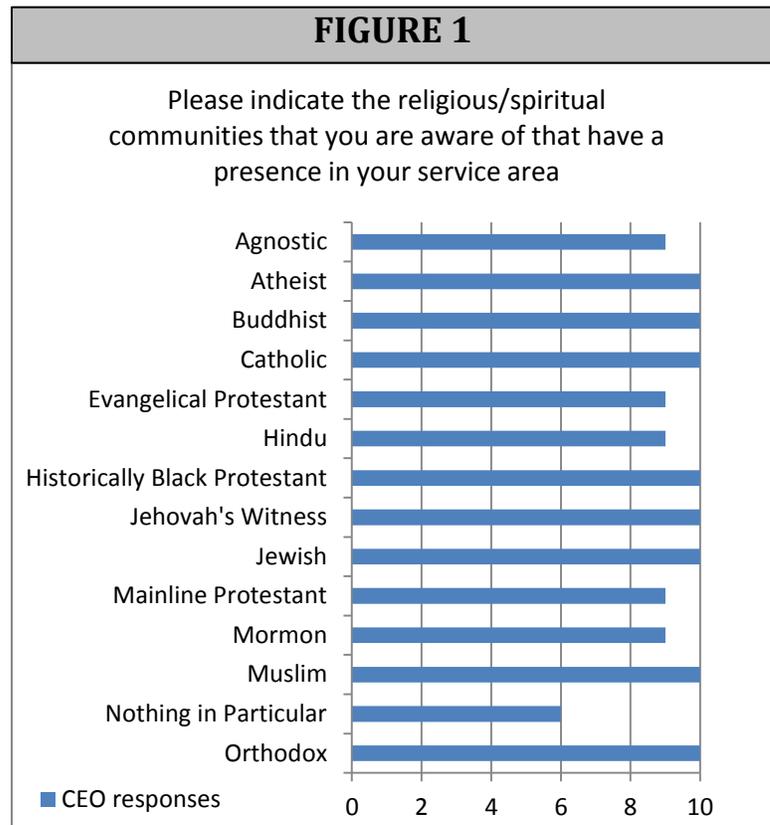
## INTRODUCTION

The United States is growing more religiously diverse in at least two important ways. The first change is driven by a demographic shift: by 2050, nearly 20% of the US population will be foreign-born, compared to about 13% in 2012, and non-Hispanic whites will represent just 47% of the population, compared to 63% in 2012 (Passel and Cohn 2008; “USA Quickfacts” 2014). This demographic shift will dramatically alter America’s religious landscape by increasing the size of religious minority communities and increasing diversity within the majority Christian faith.

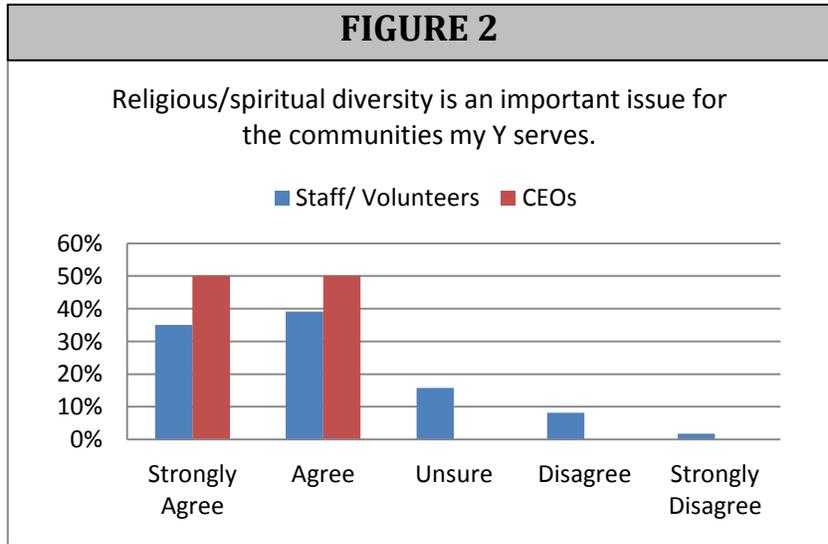
The second change reflects a cultural shift: the percentage of Americans who profess no religious affiliation has increased rapidly over the past two decades, and now totals 20% of the overall population and more than 30% of adults under 30 years of age (Pew Forum 2012). Christianity remains the most common American religion—Evangelical Protestants (26%), Catholics (24%), Mainline Protestants (18%), and Historically Black Protestants (7%) are the four largest American religious groups (Pew Forum 2008, 12)—yet the influx of other religious communities through immigration and the steady rise in the number of Americans who do not consider themselves affiliated with a specific religious denomination represents a major change for the United States.

As a result, Ys across the nation find themselves serving increasingly diverse constituents. As **Figure 1** shows, the ten YMCA CEOs surveyed for this study tell of remarkable diversity within the communities they serve. At the YMCA of the Greater Twin Cities,

CEO Glen Gunderson explains, “We have one of, if not the largest Somali population outside of Africa, the largest Liberian population outside of Africa, and one of the largest Hmong populations. We’re continuing to see growth in the Muslim population and some growth in the Hindu population. As we project out what the Twin Cities will look like in the next 15-20 years, it’s critically important that we figure out how to embrace this diversity.” An employee of the YMCA of Greater Seattle reports, “Our Y community serves one of the most diverse zip codes in America. We serve people who are Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, agnostic and atheist.” At the YMCA of Greater New York, which serves all five boroughs of New York City, CEO Jack Lund puts it simply: “You name it, we have it.”



An overwhelming majority of staff and volunteers within these ten Ys view religious diversity as an important issue for their communities. As **Figure 2** indicates, about 75% of the nearly 175 staff and volunteers who responded to the survey—representing the YMCAs of Central Massachusetts, Central Ohio, Kansas City, the Rockies, San Francisco, Seattle, and the Twin Cities—agree or strongly agree with the statement, “Religious/spiritual diversity is an important issue for the communities my Y serves.”



Fifteen percent are unsure and only 10% disagree. All ten of the CEOs surveyed agree with the statement, and five of them agree strongly.

**Recognizing that interfaith engagement is an important topic for many Ys across the nation and for the YMCA movement as a whole, this summary:**

- Illuminates an internal conversation within the YMCA movement about the organization’s historically Christian mission, including a perceived tension in some areas between the “Christian principles” and “for all” elements of the current Y-USA mission statement.
- Examines three different approaches to religious diversity at the Y and describes a unique set of challenges for each approach.
- Suggests opportunities for further engagement and support in this area by the Y of the USA based on results of the surveys and site visits.

## THE Y'S CHRISTIAN HERITAGE

America's growing diversity presents opportunities for growth in reach and impact for many national youth serving organizations, but religious diversity is particularly relevant to the YMCA movement because of its historical ties to Christianity. Founded in London in 1841 as the Young Men's Christian Association, the YMCA originally offered "a refuge of Bible study and prayer for young men seeking escape from the hazards of life on the streets" ("The Y: History – Founding"). Today, the YMCA operates in 119 countries around the world. Many of these national YMCA organizations retain a strong connection to evangelical Christianity, although a few, such as the YMCA in Canada, have become largely secular.

The first American YMCA was founded in 1851 in Boston, and the movement quickly spread to other major US cities. Originally focused on providing safe, wholesome housing for vulnerable men pouring into urban areas, the organization has evolved over the years to address the needs of local and national communities—e.g., physical fitness, education, and youth activities. The Y has expanded its reach far beyond its original target demographic of young Christian men, and membership is open to all, regardless of age, religion, or gender. Today, Y-USA serves as the national resource office for over 900 Ys across America and the 20,000 full-time staff and 500,000 volunteers they employ. All Ys are required by the movement's national constitution to pay annual dues, refrain from discrimination, adhere to certification and membership standards, and support the Y's mission, but local Ys enjoy a high degree of autonomy that enables them to reflect and serve their unique communities.

## DIVERSE INTERPRETATIONS

Despite the many changes that the YMCA movement has undergone over the decades, both locally and nationally, its Christian roots are still referenced in the Y-USA mission statement: "To put Christian principles into practice through programs that build a healthy spirit, mind and body for all." In religiously diverse settings, the word "Christian" is welcomed by some, but gives others pause. According to one Y CEO, Christian is "the only word [in the mission statement] that brings any measure of controversy or question." Due to the Y's size and geographic spread, and the relative freedom that individual Ys have to define their own style of operation and to determine what programs to offer, there are a wide variety of ways in which Ys across the US interpret the phrase "Christian principles." Generally, these approaches can be grouped into the following three categories:

### **Strong Christian Identity**

Many Ys in the United States, especially in the South and the Midwest, retain a strong evangelical Christian identity. In addition to promoting youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility in their communities, these Ys employ Protestant chaplains and offer explicitly Christian programming. For example, a group of twelve Ys from across the country recently launched an initiative called National Mission Advancement, the purpose of which is "to lift up the message of Jesus Christ and the work of Christian ministry in and through the YMCA across the country."<sup>1</sup> The initiative encourages Ys to "provide a menu of options... that gives opportunity for staff, constituents, and community members to learn and grow in their understanding of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, and the scriptural guidelines for genuine discipleship for those who choose to follow him." Ys with a strong Christian identity may offer services such as Bible studies, faith-based counseling services, Christian financial planning

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<sup>1</sup> The following YMCA organizations have made a financial commitment to the National Mission Advancement project: YMCA of Greater Twin Cities; YMCA of Greater Kansas City; YMCA of Greater Richmond, VA; YMCA of Greater Indianapolis; YMCA of the Triangle Area (NC); Manatee County Family YMCA (FL); YMCA of the Greater Houston Area; YMCA of Middle Tennessee; YMCA of Greater Charlotte; YMCA of Akron Ohio Inc.; YMCA of Tacoma/Pierce Counties (WA); the YMCA Of Orange County, CA, and the YMCA of Columbia-Willamette.

seminars, prayer groups, religious newsletters, bereavement ministries, and mission trips. Some add “Faith” or “Faith in God” as a fifth core value (in addition to Caring, Honesty, Respect, and Responsibility) and provide Bible verses alongside these principles to illustrate their basis in Christian scripture.

### **Limited Christian Identity**

Other Ys use the Y-USA mission statement but do not offer explicitly Christian programming and have a more flexible interpretation of the Y’s Christian principles. These associations tend to equate the “Christian principles” mentioned in the Y-USA mission statement with the movement’s core values of Caring, Honesty, Respect, and Responsibility. Some local Y leaders initially (and currently) identify these principles as being rooted in Christianity, but they are also major tenets of many diverse faith and belief systems practiced today. Concurrently, the lens through which the four core values were created, according to key Y leaders, was intended to be fully inclusive from the outset. Ys with a limited Christian identity tend to emphasize the universal nature of the Y’s core principles; Christians can engage them as Christian principles, but Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, and secular humanists can engage them through the lens of their respective traditions. This approach attempts to maintain a link to the Y’s Christian heritage while avoiding content that may make Catholics and non-Christians feel unwelcome or excluded.

### **Secular Identity**

Despite the movement’s origins, there are some who envision the contemporary Y as a secular organization. Some Ys have elected to omit the “Christian principles” part of the Y-USA mission statement. Others choose not to adopt Y-USA’s mission statement at all, opting instead for alternative language that does not directly reference Christianity. For example, before its 2011 merger with the YMCA of Greater St. Paul, the YMCA of Metropolitan Minneapolis described its mission as “develop[ing] the total person—spirit, mind, body—through character-development programs that build strong kids, strong families, and strong communities.” As mentioned above, this approach has been adopted by the national Canadian YMCA organization. The YMCA in Canada defines its purpose as “the growth of all persons in spirit, mind and body, and to their sense of responsibility to each other and the global community.”

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

For each of these three interpretations, there is a unique set of challenges and opportunities:

### Strong Christian Identity

Ys that have a strong Christian identity may find that non-Christians are uncomfortable with explicitly Christian language, imagery, and activities. Proselytism is an especially sensitive issue. Survey respondents commented:

- *“I often receive calls from parents who have an interest in whether or not the YMCA camp overtly teaches any particular religion. These are usually parents who want to make sure that we don't teach a religious doctrine.”*
- *“Many of our participants do not like the Christian symbols found at some Y camps; some camper families are uncomfortable with some of the Christian graces and songs that we sing.”*

On the other hand, Ys with a strong Christian identity may find that some Christian members and staff are concerned that interfaith activities, outreach to religious minority communities, and inclusion of the nonreligious may conflict with their Christian mission.

- *“Staff members were uncomfortable with a program focusing on outreach to the Islamic Community.”*
- *“I have difficulty with people who don't have any sort of faith or disagree with the Y having a Christian emphasis.”*

### Limited Christian Identity

Ys that portray the organization's Christian principles as values that are shared by multiple faith and belief systems may create ambiguity about whether or not the Y is a Christian organization. Using the language of “Christian principles” leaves room for some to contend that it is (and to advocate for more robustly Christian programming), but defining Christian principles as universal principles that are found in most belief systems may allow others to claim that the Y has become secular (and that the language is simply a reflection of the Y's Christian origins). The answer to this question varies greatly from Y to Y across the country.

Ys that define their “Christian principles” as a set of generally accepted values and do not offer specifically Christian programming may face criticism from Christians who believe that this is tantamount to removing the essence of the Y's Christian identity. One might ask, “If there is nothing uniquely Christian about the values a Y promotes, and it does not offer any specifically Christian programs, is it truly accurate to say that it seeks to put Christian principles into practice?”

From another perspective, Ys in this category may face criticism from non-Christians who feel that, even if the Y offers no explicitly Christian programs, simply referencing “Christian principles” in the mission statement excludes non-Christians and implies that the Y's principles belong to some more than others.

- *“Several members/potential board members not of the Christian faith questioned why the Y mission includes ‘Christian principles,’ suggesting this does not make the Y feel inclusive.”*
- *“The language ‘Christian principles’ is a huge issue for our diverse community—being that the principles belong to all—and this alone turns the age group we serve away.”*

## **Secular Identity**

Ys that have a secular identity are sometimes criticized for ignoring their mandate to promote spiritual, as well as physical and mental, health. Moreover, because the words “Christian principles” are not present in their mission statement, secular Ys may be criticized for departing from the YMCA movement’s original mission.

Some Christians feel that, in the name of inclusion, certain Ys secularize to the point that they are inclusive of all *except* evangelical Christians, especially those with strong convictions.

- *“I have heard on many occasions that the Christian beliefs of some are not considered or [are] negated in the name of diversity.”*
- *“I get concerned when we eliminate religion and culture from the environment in the hope that by not recognizing anyone we will gain acceptance from all.”*

When YMCAs that do not have a strong Christian identity attempt to serve as a neutral forum for discussions about faith or interfaith events, they may face resistance from staff and members who view religion as something best left out of the workplace:

- *“[Open discussions about religion] would cross ethical boundaries with the kind of voluntary programming and services we provide to our youth.”*
- *“Religion is a private matter.”*
- *“[Certain employees] feel Y space should NOT be used for any faith based programs.”*

## **YMCA of the USA’s Challenge**

Underlying much of the conversation surrounding the Y’s mission is a perception—common among staff, members, and those outside the Y—of a potential tension, or even conflict, between “Christian principles” and the Y’s commitment to be “for all.” The assumption is that the more a Y emphasizes its Christian identity, the less inclusive it becomes; conversely, the more it emphasizes inclusion, the less Christian it becomes. From one perspective, those who envision the Y as a robustly Christian organization fear that “for all” may be used to justify secularization—removing Christian symbols, removing explicitly Christian prayer before meetings, and phasing out other explicitly Christian programming in the name of inclusion. From another perspective, those who emphasize inclusion fear that the language of “Christian principles” may make members who do not identify as Christian feel unwelcome and even prevent non-Christian religious groups from accessing the services and programs provided by the Y. **Y-USA strives to lift up the idea that the “Christian principles” and “for all” elements of the Y’s mission are not mutually exclusive.**

### **Models for Interfaith Engagement at the Y**

Several Ys are finding ways to maintain a strong Christian identity while being inclusive and welcoming toward non-Christian staff and members. For example, the YMCA of the Greater Twin Cities, under new leadership since 2012, has developed a “Living Our Mission” training program that helps staff members understand the Y’s Christian mission in an inclusive way. Over 800 full-time YMCA employees have gone through this training in the last six months, and the leadership of the YMCA of the Greater Twin Cities describes the response as “very positive” thus far.

Ys with a more limited Christian identity are also finding ways to positively engage religious diversity. The YMCA of Greater St. Louis has responded to increasing religious diversity in its region by hiring an interfaith expert who provides organizational consultation and organizes interfaith events. These events encourage young people to examine their own beliefs and values, learn about others’ belief systems, and adopt respectful, tolerant attitudes toward all. Faith is held up as something to be valued, but evangelical Christian faith is not necessarily given a privileged place.

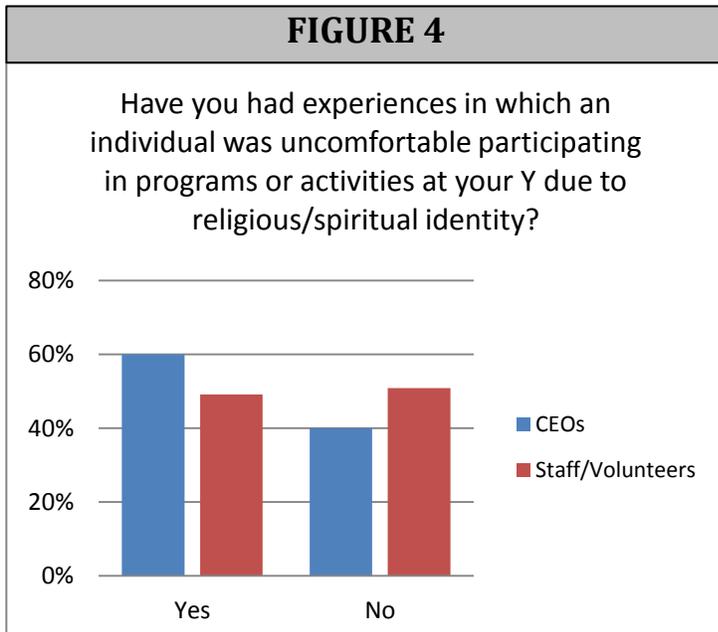
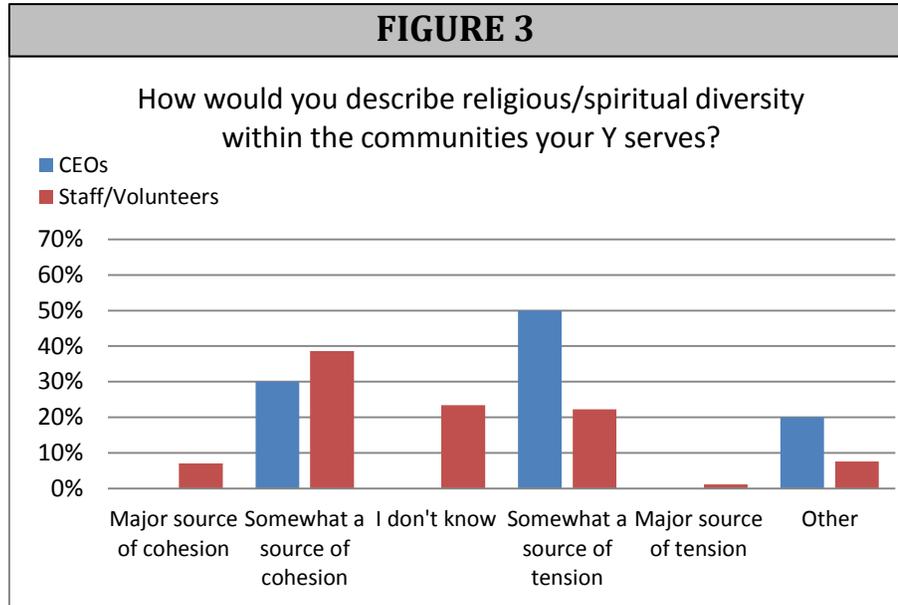
Just because a Y does not identify itself as Christian does not mean that it must ignore the important role that spirituality plays in the lives of many of its constituents. The University YMCA of Champaign-Urbana, which does not reference Christianity in its mission statement and considers itself a nonsectarian Y, frames its mission around the ethical principles of social and environmental justice. The University YMCA has a strong interfaith identity, and its Faith & Justice Program actively engages religious diversity by serving as a neutral community forum for interfaith activities such as service projects, educational events, and conversations about religious approaches to contemporary social issues.

## ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

Opportunities for further support and engagement across the nation exist, but individual Ys are at various stages of readiness and desire to move forward. Five of the ten CEOs and nearly one quarter of the staff and volunteers surveyed described religious diversity as “somewhat a source of tension” within the communities their Ys serve (**Figure 3**). Six of the ten CEOs and nearly half of the staff and volunteers surveyed reported having had “experiences in which an individual was uncomfortable participating in programs or activities at the Y due to religious/spiritual identity” (**Figure 4**).

Many of the uncomfortable incidents described by employees stem from differing interpretations about the mission among Y staff. For example, several survey respondents express discomfort with colleagues offering Christian prayers or reading Bible verses during the “mission moments” that begin Y staff meetings, yet others defend this practice as completely appropriate in what they see as a Christian organization.

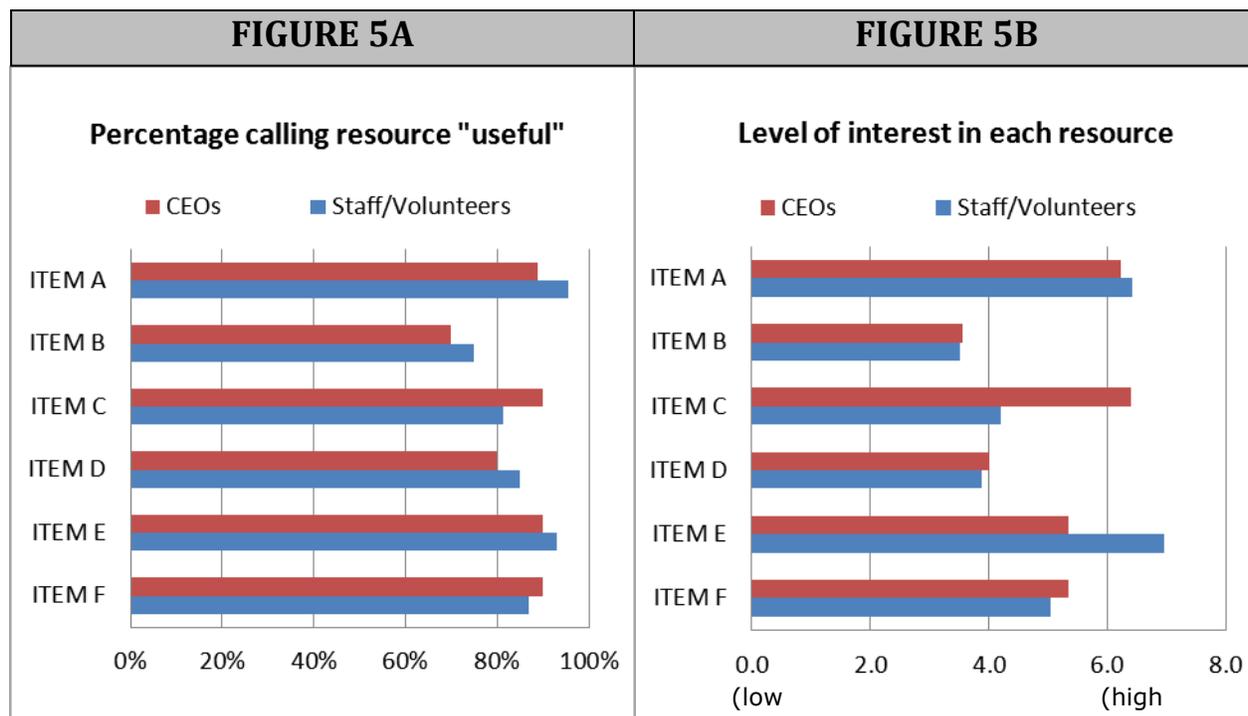
Some staff members believe that endorsing or celebrating GLBT individuals or communities conflicts with the organization’s Christian principles, while others feel strongly that this is part of the organization’s mission to be “for all.”



Discomfort may also stem from specific religious beliefs and practices. For example, a handful of survey respondents mentioned that their religious dietary needs are sometimes overlooked. Members of certain religious communities, including some Orthodox Jewish and Muslim groups, are not comfortable participating in mixed-gender swimming and fitness classes. Celebrations of religious holidays can also be an issue; some feel that it is perfectly natural to celebrate Christmas and Easter at the Y, while others say that even singing a secular Christmas song such as “Santa Claus is Coming to Town” can make those who don’t celebrate Christian holidays feel excluded.

## THE WAY FORWARD

The surveys completed by nearly 200 staff and CEOs from ten Ys in March and April 2014 asked respondents to rate the usefulness of six proposed tools that could help Y staff more effectively engage religious diversity. **Figures 5a** and **5b** show the percentage of CEOs and employees who called each resource “useful” and the average level of interest expressed in each one.



**Q: What type(s) of resources would be useful to staff/volunteers who work directly with religious/spiritually diverse groups of young people (ages 12-18)?**

**Key**

- Item A:** Age-appropriate programs to help young people and staff increase empathy, combat prejudice and grow intergroup cohesion
- Item B:** Age-appropriate educational materials to help young people explore how the U.S. became a religiously diverse, free, and tolerant society, and why that is important today
- Item C:** A 20-page guidebook for program staff/volunteers with practical strategies for engaging participants from diverse religious/spiritual communities
- Item D:** Case studies highlighting effective and relevant program models and engagement strategies at other Ys that serve diverse religious/spiritual communities
- Item E:** Staff/volunteer training that fosters interfaith understanding through discussion, engagement and self-reflection
- Item F:** Tools to help staff/volunteers organize events that engage diverse religious/spiritual communities around the shared goal of strengthening community

The survey revealed that Y employees have a very high level of interest in training that “fosters interfaith understanding through discussion, engagement and self-reflection” (Item E). Respondents gave this item the highest rating of any of the six suggested resources, with 93% percent saying that such training would be useful.

This result is particularly striking when considered in the context of **Figure 2** (p. 4): a strong majority of staff and volunteers, as well as all ten CEOs, view religious diversity as “an important issue” for their Ys, *and* are interested in receiving training to help them positively engage it. This suggests an appetite for the sort of resources offered by Project Interfaith, Interfaith Youth Core, and the Anti-Defamation League, which help people learn about religious differences, develop respectful attitudes, and build relationships across faith lines.

Staff and volunteers also expressed a very high level of interest in Item A, “programs to help young people and staff increase empathy, combat prejudice and grow intergroup cohesion.” It received the second highest rating from both CEOs and staff, and the highest percentage of all respondents (95%) called it “useful.” CEOs expressed a higher level of interest only in “a 20-page guidebook... with practical strategies for engaging participants from diverse religious/spiritual communities” (Item C). Staff members were much less enthusiastic about this item, however. The suggestion of case studies showcasing Ys that model effective engagement of religious diversity also received relatively low ratings.

Respondents in site visit interviews echoed this lack of enthusiasm for informational resources or written guides, expressing a strong preference for in-person interactions and facilitated conversations. Those with significant experience with interfaith programs at the Y urged that a nuanced understanding of the complex, deeply personal issue of religious identity cannot be achieved without face-to-face discussions. Respondents also pointed out that interfaith relationships, which some consider the most important benefit of interfaith engagement, are impossible to forge using only a guidebook or report.

Several of those interviewed cautioned against starting interfaith programming without careful preparation, on the grounds that interfaith encounters without intentional and proper framing and reflection can be more hurtful than doing nothing at all. They recommended that Ys that want to facilitate interfaith activities—whether among staff, with youth, or in the broader community—designate a trained professional to take the lead.

Two of the Ys that served as site visit locations, the YMCA of Greater St. Louis and the University YMCA of Champaign-Urbana, have had great success using this approach. Interviewees at several branches of the St. Louis Y praise interfaith consultant Beth Damsgaard-Rodriguez for organizing youth activities that foster interfaith learning, relationships, and joint action toward common goals.

At the University YMCA, Faith & Justice Program Director Ann Rasmus has built relationships with diverse faith leaders in the Champaign-Urbana community. Under Ann’s leadership, the Y collaborates with local organizations to provide opportunities for college students and adults to learn about diverse religions and cultures. The substantive, balanced discussions held at the Y would not be possible without Ann’s expertise and the trust that she has built with the diverse faith communities that make up Champaign-Urbana.

Through participation in this collaborative project, Y-USA and the Aspen Institute were able to develop a strong connection that benefited both organizations and the communities and stakeholders they serve. Y-USA’s diversity and inclusion team will continue to utilize the findings identified through this report to guide future direction around interfaith dialogue and engagement.

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## APPENDIX A: RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY SURVEY, CEO VERSION

At the Y, we believe that our communities are strongest when people from diverse backgrounds work together to nurture the potential of youth, promote healthy living, and foster social responsibility. This survey will help Y-USA assess needs and potential support for interfaith engagement across the nation. Please note that when we use the term "religious/spiritual," we are including individuals who practice all types of religions, faiths, spiritualities, and belief systems.

Please complete the survey no later than Wednesday, February 12th, 2014. Should you have any questions or wish to learn more, please contact Chad Nico Hiu ([chad.hiu@ymca.net](mailto:chad.hiu@ymca.net)) or Lynda Gonzales-Chavez ([lynda.gonzales@ymca.net](mailto:lynda.gonzales@ymca.net)).

**1) Your name:**

**2) Your YMCA:**

**3) Please indicate the religious/spiritual communities that you are aware of that have a presence in your service area.**

Agnostic	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mainline Protestant	<input type="checkbox"/>
Atheist	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mormon	<input type="checkbox"/>
Buddhist	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hindu	<input type="checkbox"/>
Catholic	<input type="checkbox"/>	Jewish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Evangelical Protestant	<input type="checkbox"/>	Muslim	<input type="checkbox"/>
Historically Black Protestant	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nothing in particular	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jehovah's Witness	<input type="checkbox"/>	Orthodox	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Other (list below)	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Comments:**

**4) Religious/spiritual diversity is an important issue for the communities my Y serves.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Unsure      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**Comments:**

**5) How would you describe religious/spiritual diversity within communities your Y serves?**

Major source of cohesion	Somewhat a source of cohesion	Somewhat a source of tension	Major source of tension	I don't know	Other
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**Comments:**

**6) Our membership reflects the religious/spiritual diversity of our service area.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Unsure      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**Comments:**

**7) Our staff and volunteers reflect the religious/spiritual diversity of our service area.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Unsure      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**Comments:**

**8) Staff and volunteers at our Y are adequately aware of the key beliefs and practices of the religious/spiritual communities that have a presence in our service area.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Unsure      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**Comments:**

**9) Staff and volunteers at our Y are comfortable having open conversations about religious/spiritual identity with the individuals whom they serve.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Unsure      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**Comments:**

**10) Have you had experiences in which religious/spiritual diversity was used to bring together members of your community for learning, shared growth, and/or common goals?**

Yes      No

**If yes, please explain:**

**11) Have you had experiences in which an individual was uncomfortable participating in programs or activities at your Y due to religious/spiritual identity?**

Yes      No

**If yes, please explain:**

**12) Are you aware of any incidents of young people at this Y being teased, bullied, excluded, or otherwise discriminated against because of their religion/spirituality?**

Yes- Three or more      Yes- One or two      No

**Please explain:**

**13) What type(s) of resources would be useful to staff/volunteers who work directly with religious/spiritually diverse groups of young people (ages 12-18)? Please circle yes or no, and rank the "yes" answers in order of importance.**

**USEFUL?    RANK**

Y / N    \_\_\_\_\_    Age-appropriate programs to help young people and staff increase empathy, combat prejudice, and grow intergroup cohesion

Y / N    \_\_\_\_\_    Age-appropriate educational materials to help young people explore how the U.S. became a religiously diverse, free, and tolerant society, and why that is important today

Y / N \_\_\_\_\_ A 20-page guidebook for program and activity staff/volunteers with practical strategies for engaging diverse religious and faith-based groups

Y / N \_\_\_\_\_ Case studies highlighting effective and relevant program models and engagement strategies at other Ys that serve diverse religious/spiritual communities

Y / N \_\_\_\_\_ Staff/volunteer training that fosters interfaith understanding and skills through discussion, engagement and self-reflection

Y / N \_\_\_\_\_ Tools to help staff/volunteers organize events that engage diverse religious/spiritual communities around the shared goal of strengthening the community

Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:**

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**14) Is engagement around religion/spirituality articulated in your organization's strategic plan, diversity & inclusion statement, or other guiding documents?**

Yes

No

Unsure

**Comments:**

**15) Please describe any programs or services your Y currently provides that help create a welcoming, inclusive environment for people of all religious/spiritual identities.**

## APPENDIX B: RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY SURVEY, STAFF/VOLUNTEER VERSION

At the Y, we believe that our communities are strongest when people from diverse backgrounds work together to nurture the potential of youth, promote healthy living, and foster social responsibility. This survey will help Y-USA assess needs and potential support for interfaith engagement across the nation. Please note that when we use the term "religious/spiritual," we are including individuals who practice all types of religions, faiths, spiritualities, and belief systems.

Please complete the survey no later than Wednesday, February 12th, 2014. Should you have any questions or wish to learn more, please contact Chad Nico Hiu ([chad.hiu@ymca.net](mailto:chad.hiu@ymca.net)) or Lynda Gonzales-Chavez ([lynda.gonzales@ymca.net](mailto:lynda.gonzales@ymca.net)).

### 1) Your YMCA:

#### 2) Please indicate the religious/spiritual communities that you are aware of that have a presence in your service area.

Agnostic	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mainline Protestant	<input type="checkbox"/>
Atheist	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mormon	<input type="checkbox"/>
Buddhist	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hindu	<input type="checkbox"/>
Catholic	<input type="checkbox"/>	Jewish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Evangelical Protestant	<input type="checkbox"/>	Muslim	<input type="checkbox"/>
Historically Black Protestant	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nothing in particular	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jehovah's Witness	<input type="checkbox"/>	Orthodox	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Other (list below)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

### 3) Religious/spiritual diversity is an important issue for the communities my Y serves.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Unsure      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

Comments:

### 4) How would you describe religious/spiritual diversity within communities your Y serves?

Major source of cohesion	Somewhat a source of cohesion	Somewhat a source of tension	Major source of tension	I don't know	Other _____
--------------------------	-------------------------------	------------------------------	-------------------------	--------------	-------------

**Comments:**

**5) I am adequately aware of the key beliefs and practices of the religious/spiritual communities that have a presence in our service area.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Unsure      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**Comments:**

**6) I am comfortable having open conversations about religious/spiritual identity with the individuals whom I serve at the Y.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Unsure      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**Comments:**

**7) Have you had experiences in which religious/spiritual diversity was used to bring together members of your community for learning, shared growth, and/or common goals?**

Yes      No

**If yes, please explain:**

**8) Have you had experiences in which an individual was uncomfortable participating in programs or activities at this Y due to religious/spiritual identity?**

Yes      No

**If yes, please explain:**

**9) Are you aware of any incidents of young people at this Y being teased, bullied, excluded, or otherwise discriminated against because of their religion/spirituality?**

Yes- Three or more      Yes- One or two      No

**Please explain:**

**10) What type(s) of resources would be useful to staff/volunteers who work directly with religious/spiritually diverse groups of young people (ages 12-18)? Please circle yes or no, and rank the "yes" answers in order of importance.**

**USEFUL?    RANK**

Y / N    \_\_\_\_\_    Age-appropriate programs to help young people and staff increase empathy, combat prejudice, and grow intergroup cohesion

Y / N    \_\_\_\_\_    Age-appropriate educational materials to help young people explore how the U.S. became a religiously diverse, free, and tolerant society, and why that is important today

Y / N \_\_\_\_\_ A 20-page guidebook for program and activity staff/volunteers with practical strategies for engaging diverse religious and faith-based groups

Y / N \_\_\_\_\_ Case studies highlighting effective and relevant program models and engagement strategies at other Ys that serve diverse religious/spiritual communities

Y / N \_\_\_\_\_ Staff/volunteer training that fosters interfaith understanding and skills through discussion, engagement and self-reflection

Y / N \_\_\_\_\_ Tools to help staff/volunteers organize events that engage diverse religious/spiritual communities around the shared goal of strengthening the community

Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:**

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**11) Which of the following best describes your religious/spiritual identity?**

- |                               |                          |                       |                          |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Agnostic                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | Mormon                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Atheist                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | Hindu                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Buddhist                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | Jewish                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Catholic                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | Muslim                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Evangelical Protestant        | <input type="checkbox"/> | Nothing in particular | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Historically Black Protestant | <input type="checkbox"/> | Orthodox              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Jehovah’s Witness             | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (list below)    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mainline Protestant           | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____                 |                          |

**Comments:**

**12) Please provide any additional comments on how religious diversity affects the community that this Y serves and any engagement strategies that you would recommend**

## ABOUT YMCA OF THE USA

YMCA of the USA (Y-USA) is the national resource office for the Y, one of the nation's leading nonprofits strengthening communities through youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. Across the U.S., 2,700 Ys engage 22 million men, women and children – regardless of age, income or background – to nurture the potential of children and teens, improve the nation's health and well-being and provide opportunities to give back and support neighbors. Anchored in more than 10,000 communities, the Y has the long-standing relationships and physical presence not just to promise, but to deliver, lasting personal and social change. Learn more at [www.ymca.net](http://www.ymca.net).

## ABOUT THE Y

The Y is the nation's leading nonprofit committed to strengthening community through youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. We believe strong communities are possible only when we invest in our kids, our health and our neighbors.

Across the country, people are concerned about the quality of life in their communities. Issues such as unemployment, chronic disease, educational disparities, poverty, negative youth behaviors and stress on families affect the strength of communities. To bring about meaningful change, individuals need ongoing support, encouragement and connections to others—all of which the Y provides in abundance.

Anchored in more than 10,000 communities, 2,700 Ys engage 22 million men, women and children each year. The Y has the long-standing track record and on-the-ground presence necessary to address the nation's most pressing social issues related to youth, health and community life. With a mission to put Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind and body for all, we work side-by-side with our neighbors to make sure everyone, regardless of age, income or background, has the opportunity to learn, grow and thrive. Learn more at [www.ymca.net](http://www.ymca.net).

## ABOUT THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

The Aspen Institute is an educational and policy studies organization based in Washington, DC. Its mission is to foster leadership based on enduring values and to provide a nonpartisan venue for dealing with critical issues. The Institute has campuses in Aspen, Colorado, and on the Wye River on Maryland's Eastern Shore. It also maintains offices in New York City and has an international network of partners.

## ABOUT THE JUSTICE & SOCIETY PROGRAM

For nearly four decades the Institute's Justice & Society Program has convened individuals from diverse backgrounds to discuss the meaning of justice and how a just society ought to balance fundamental rights with the exigencies of public policy, in order to meet contemporary social challenges and strengthen the rule of law. The annual Justice & Society Seminar, held in Aspen and co-founded by the late Supreme Court Justice Harry A. Blackmun, continues to be led by preeminent judges and law professors.

Through our public programming component—which includes the Susman Conversation on the Constitution and the Courts at Aspen, periodic roundtables at the Aspen Institute's Washington office, and presentations by leading jurists—we bring to the table public officials, established and emerging opinion leaders, and grass-roots organizers to share their perspectives in a neutral and balanced forum.

For more information, visit [www.aspeninstitute.org/jsp](http://www.aspeninstitute.org/jsp).



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