

ESHEL STRATEGIC PLAN

BRANCHING OUT

FY26 - FY28

Our Vision for Three Years of Growth





LETTER FROM CEO & CO-FOUNDER

Eshel was founded upon the conviction that every Jew should have the ability to participate fully in the religious community of their choice. Too many LGBTQ+ Orthodox Jews have been rejected or forced to leave their homes and spiritual communities, distancing them from their Yiddishkeit. Eshel works to make it possible for queer Jews to stay connected to the traditions, communities, and institutions that have raised, nourished, and enriched them.

When we began, the path forward was opaque and unclear. Over the past 15 years, we have developed numerous projects and modalities to advance Orthodox LGBTQ+ inclusion.

We build community, advocate, support, and educate. Through our work with LGBTQ+ people, their parents, Orthodox leaders, and allies, we have touched the lives of thousands. What began with a single small step towards feeling less alone has now blossomed into a movement whose impact is felt in communities across the globe.

With our latest strategic plan, Eshel is branching out even farther. In the next three years, we will be spreading our leaves to reach new parts of our community, planting seeds through our work with allies, and deepening our roots by bolstering our mental health work, staff, programs, and gatherings.

Many of you have championed us and helped us to reach our current success. I am so grateful for your support and what you have enabled us to achieve. As you read our strategic plan, we invite you to join us on our exciting journey forward. Together, we can open new and better possibilities for LGBTQ+ Jews in the Orthodox community.



Miryam Kabakov
CEO & Co-Founder

MISSION AND VISION



VISION

Eshel envisions a world where LGBTQ+ people and their families are full participants in the Orthodox community of their choice.

MISSION

Eshel's mission is to build LGBTQ+ inclusive Orthodox Jewish communities.

CURRENT LANDSCAPE



WHO WE SERVE

- 1. Orthodox+ LGBTQ+ Jews and their families**
Including those who are currently Orthodox, from Orthodox backgrounds, exploring Orthodoxy, or seeking more traditional Jewish spaces
- 2. Allies**
Orthodox community members looking to make their communities and institutions more LGBTQ+ inclusive

WHAT WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED IN THE PAST 15 YEARS

- Eshel has been a valued resource for LGBTQ+ individuals and families seeking support and community.
- The organization is recognized for having valuable leadership, impactful support groups, and warm, authentic environments. It is seen as a true partner in the Orthodox community based on understanding and quiet advocacy.
- We will continue to invest in growing, strengthening, and connecting our network to meet the needs of individuals, families, and institutions in the face of a rapidly changing world.
- We must ensure that we are equipped and communicating the relevance of Eshel throughout the journey, strengthening the work with allies, exploring opportunities for building stronger networks, and expanding the funding base and infrastructure to maintain growth.

THEORY OF CHANGE

IF ESHEL...

- 1. Builds community** for its LGBTQ+ individuals and their families so that they can break isolation, grow, and thrive
- 2. Advocates** for LGBTQ+ individuals within the larger Orthodox community so that they can be included in Orthodox communities
- 3. Supports** LGBTQ+ Orthodox Jewish individuals and families through our warmline, support groups, mentoring, and community network
- 4. Educates**, raises awareness and sensitivity amongst Rabbis, leaders, educators, and guidance counselors on how to address the needs of their LGBTQ+ members



THEN

- There will be **more Orthodox communities** where individuals are their whole, authentic selves.
- LGBTQ+ Jews will be **more likely to remain** in their Orthodox communities, or re-engage in spaces they once considered LGBTQ+-phobic.
- Eshel will be widely recognized as **the go-to resource** for Orthodox institutions, communities, individuals, and families.
- Halacha and LGBTQ+ life will be considered compatible and that authentically Orthodox communities can **fully integrate and embrace** their LGBTQ+ members.



SO THAT

LGBTQ+ people will not just be included but belong in Orthodox communities. And together we will create a stronger Orthodoxy.

WHAT WE DO



Eshel makes the CASE for LGBTQ+ Orthodox belonging.

COMMUNITY

Eshel builds community for its LGBTQ+ individuals and their families so that they can break isolation, grow, and thrive.

ADVOCACY

Eshel advocates for LGBTQ+ individuals within the larger Orthodox community so that they can be included in Orthodox communities.



SUPPORT

Eshel supports LGBTQ+ Orthodox Jewish individuals and families through our warmline, support groups, mentoring, and community network.

EDUCATION

Eshel raises awareness and sensitivity amongst Rabbis, leaders, educators, and guidance counselors on how to address the needs of their LGBTQ+ members.



LOOKING FORWARD

STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL GOALS

This plan will build on the successes of the last few years to fortify our Eshel roots and continue to branch out, grow, and expand with the community through the following 5 priorities.

The 2025-2028 Strategic Plan has 5 priorities.

By the end of 2028, we will:

1



Expand and mobilize our allies network

2



Advance community building and geographic reach

3



Create an accessible resource library

4



Grow the Welcoming Communities initiative

5



Invest in capacity-building

STRATEGIC PRIORITY ONE



EXPAND AND MOBILIZE OUR ALLIES NETWORK

Continuing to build a strong network of allies is critical to Eshel’s vision of an Orthodoxy that can grasp human diversity, sexuality and gender, and create belonging for everyone within it.

EXPAND AND MOBILIZE OUR ALLIES NETWORK (CONT)

STRATEGY

- Expand the reach of Eshel’s Orthodox Allies Trainings in Orthodox spaces and on campuses
- Increase opportunities for allies to connect, building a broad network
- Social media campaign geared towards allies

DESIRED OUTCOMES BY 2028

- Launch and develop campus initiative
- Conduct 12 allies trainings (4/year)
- Increase educational resources and programming
- Successful marketing campaign
- Training and evaluations to demonstrate levels of understanding of Orthodox allyship and the role of allies.

FALL 2025

- Develop the COAT (College Orthodox Allies Training) content
- Recruit and train fellows across 3 campuses
- Host 2 OAT (Orthodox Ally Trainings)

SPRING 2026

- Fellows conduct allies training on 3 college campuses
- In person celebration for all COAT participants
- Conduct 3 allies trainings (OAT)
- Increase allies newsletter distribution

YEAR TWO

- 2-3 additional COAT campuses
- Engage Campus Fellow alumni
- Conduct 3-5 allies trainings (OAT)
- Launch social media campaign

YEAR THREE

- 3 additional COAT campuses
- Conduct 3-5 allies trainings (OAT)
- Large-scale day-long ally gathering
- Evaluate success of the ‘26-27 COAT and OAT programs

STRATEGIC PRIORITY TWO



ADVANCE COMMUNITY BUILDING IN ALIGNMENT WITH EVOLVING NEEDS

A key ingredient for fulfilling Eshel’s mission is building community. This plan seeks to utilize our different models of engagement to further Eshel’s geographic reach and provide opportunities that appeal to diverse audiences.

ADVANCE COMMUNITY BUILDING IN ALIGNMENT WITH EVOLVING NEEDS (CONT)

STRATEGY

- Focus on community building model for New York
- Grow in-person retreats
- Geographic expansion through tiered approach to in-person programming (see page 21)
- Expand Program Director role, hire retreat and operations associate

DESIRED OUTCOMES BY 2028

- Robust and expanded NYC community
- 5 Tier 1 cities will have regular Eshel programming. 12 additional cities reached.
- 2-3 new regional Shabbatonim
- Retreat for queer Orthodox families

FALL 2025

- Pilot community building initiatives in NYC, host 6 events
- Develop growing chapters with visits and volunteer-led meetups

SPRING 2026

- Expand NYC community programming, including Shabbat dinners
- NEW: Parent Shabbaton in Israel
- Determine scope of possible microgrants and set up pilot

YEAR TWO

- Retreat for queer families
- Launch parent engagement in NYC
- Host local retreat on West coast
- Launch micro-grant applications and process

YEAR THREE

- Reflect and assess NYC impact
- Host 2 local Shabbatonim and 3 annual retreats
- Continue to actively cultivate in chapters and hubs

STRATEGIC PRIORITY THREE



CREATE ACCESSIBLE RESOURCE LIBRARY

Eshel is developing a robust resource library to ensure that high-quality, relevant resources, texts, and shiurim are easily accessible to a broad audience. This effort involves both curating existing materials and producing new resources on LGBTQ+ and Orthodox topics.

CREATE ACCESSIBLE RESOURCE LIBRARY (CONT)

STRATEGY

- Update and organize existing resources to increase accessibility for all audiences
- Determine purpose, content, and audiences for new education resources
- Develop key resources for each audience based on internal assessment and collaboration with the field
- Market and train school and adult educators (along with communal leaders) to employ the various resources

DESIRED OUTCOMES BY 2028

- Eshel is the go-to address for LGBTQ+ Jewish resources for lifecycle events, religious guidance, responsa literature, etc.
- LGBTQ+ members, parents, and allies, have a place to get knowledge and skills and understand how to apply these resources

FALL 2025

- Develop existing and new resources for updated website
- Gather 5 teshuvot to put on website

SPRING 2026

- Partner with Teshuva project with YCT
- Develop a plan for disseminating resources

YEAR TWO

- Strengthen partnership and resources available through Sefaria
- Plan and execute online education and resource training sessions.

YEAR THREE

- Anthology of parent voices
- Reevaluate the current resources in terms of usefulness and outcome
- NEW: Host Yom Iyun



STRATEGIC PRIORITY FOUR



GROW WELCOMING COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

Eshel’s Welcoming Shuls and Schools project has shown tremendous impact. We are excited to name the “Welcoming Communities” work to demonstrate the value of moving communities towards inclusion, not just in one institution, but all community spaces.

EXPAND WELCOMING COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE (CONT)

STRATEGY

- Increase opportunities for people to learn about Welcoming Communities
- Build library of resources and assessment tools for communities
- Increase ability to use data and evaluate the success of the program
- Increase Eshel’s role as a resource for school personnel

DESIRED OUTCOMES BY 2028

- Host multiple webinars highlighting the results and successes of the WCP
- Reach 75 new shuls (25/yr)
- Design evaluation that demonstrates evidence of moving the needle
- Create criteria for Welcoming Schools and expand our work with educators.

FALL 2025

- Finalize criteria for evaluating Welcoming Shuls
- Develop additional educator resources for “Make Space for Difference”

SPRING 2026

- Develop a tool for annual assessment
- Implement evaluation and success measurement tool
- Recruit 50 new educators to Make Space for Difference project
- NEW: Welcoming Communities Zoom event

YEAR TWO

- Create accessible information about Welcoming Communities
- 2 Welcoming Communities Zoom events
- Invite day school educators to zoom event
- Present at Jewish day school conference

YEAR THREE

- Develop criteria and list of Welcoming Schools
- Establish educator training and drop-in group



STRATEGIC PRIORITY FIVE



OPERATIONAL CAPACITY TO SUPPORT GROWTH

Enhance Eshel’s organizational infrastructure and operational processes to empower staff in advancing our mission and realizing strategic priorities.

1. INVEST IN STAFF

- Formalize Eshel policies and procedures to compile and complete employee handbook
- Update data collection processes and tracking for evaluations
- Create new roles in programming, mental health, and administrative assistance

2. REVENUE GENERATION

- Cultivate foundation relationships towards multi-year gifts. Identify new foundation partnerships for income
- Expand major donor support, including annual visionaries circle, in-person cultivation and stewardship opportunities, and leveraging existing relationships
- Plan and execute 18 year anniversary gala

3. COMMUNICATIONS

- Invest in marketing and branding to gain credibility and raise awareness
- Deepen partnerships with aligned organizations

DESIRED OUTCOMES BY 2028

- Enable existing staff to transition some functions and tasks, and invest in executing the strategic plan
- Eshel’s staff will be equipped with structures and opportunities that support their growth
- Eshel’s database will comprehensively represent Eshel’s work in a way that is easy to analyze, quantify, and report out to others
- Increased awareness of Eshel’s existence, mission and core programs in Orthodox communities, including a recognition that Eshel provides opportunities for engagement at different points in a person’s journey

OPERATIONAL CAPACITY TO SUPPORT GROWTH (CONT.)

FALL 2025

- Update employee handbook, policies and procedures
- Continue full website redevelopment and testing
- Build regular cadence for marketing outreach
- Hire Program Director, Campus Manager, Database Consultant

SPRING 2026

- Finalize the employee handbook and policies and procedures
- Complete full website testing and roll-out
- Enter historical data into our CRM
- Identify key areas to create new partnerships
- Evaluate effectiveness of marketing outreach

YEAR TWO

- Hire Operations Associate (Programs & Retreats)
- Evaluate the current database structure and office software
- Proactively diversify the board to ensure representation

YEAR THREE

- Hire Development & Marketing Coordinator, Senior Educator, Mental Health Manager
- Review employee policies, procedures and expectations



BUDGETARY NEEDS

YEAR 1 FY26	YEAR 2 FY27	YEAR 3 FY28
• Data input • NY Program Director • Campus Program Manager • Director of Education	• Operations Associate • Director of Operations	• Development and Marketing Associate • Mental Health Program Manager • Senior Educator
\$1 MILLION	\$1.25 MILLION	\$1.75 MILLION
• 9 Total Staff • 2 Annual Retreats • 1 Regional Shabbaton	• 10 Total Staff • 3 Annual Retreats • 2 Regional Shabbaton	• 13 Total Staff • 3 Annual Retreats • 2 Regional Shabbaton • 1 Yom Iyom Conference



GEOGRAPHIC REACH

MAP OF EVENTS BY GEOGRAPHY OVER STRATEGIC PLAN

Eshel has identified 17 Orthodox hubs around the US, Canada and Israel to engage strategically over the next 3 years. By offering allies trainings, Shabbat programming, parent programs, and more, we hope to develop the following communities towards stronger inclusion:

 TIER 1	Baltimore Boston New York City, NY DC Metro Area South Florida
 TIER 2	Atlanta Chicago Detroit Israel Metrowest, NJ Northern NJ Toronto West Coast
 TIER 3	Cleveland Denver Montreal Pittsburgh

GEOGRAPHIC REACH

To continue to expand our network, we will focus our heaviest staff investment in Tier 1 communities while partnering with volunteers, allies, and peers to reach communities in Tier 2, Tier 3, and beyond.

	TIER 1	TIER 2	TIER 3
DEFINITION	Major cities/metropolitan areas with large Orthodox Jewish populations, and demonstrated receptivity and/or need where Eshel will most heavily invest time or financial resources.	Cities with mid-sized Orthodox Jewish and LGBTQ populations but active Eshel communities interested in deeper engagement, or larger communities with less receptivity and/or need.	Cities with mid-sized to small Orthodox Jewish populations that exhibit some interest in Eshel programming
ESHEL'S COMMITMENT	• Semi-regular location for retreat/shabbaton, Shabbat dinners • OAT and COAT programs • Staff-run programming and partnerships • Actively cultivating as hubs • Proactively make efforts to be known in the community as a go-to resource	• Seek local partnerships to provide programming • Encourage chapters if strong volunteer commitment • Provide support through marketing and micro grants • Consider hosting a smaller shabbaton or ally training based on interest and local partnership • Make efforts to be known in the community as a resource	• Chapters solely driven by volunteer desire and work • Support through advice, consulting, marketing • Be responsive to local organizations to increase recognition as a resource

CONCLUSION

Over the last 15 years, Eshel has established itself as the only organization for individuals, parents, shuls, schools, and allies to work together and move Orthodoxy toward LGBTQ+ inclusion. By making LGBTQ+ people feel welcome, and giving parents and communities the tools to support them, we strengthen our communities and keep Jewish tradition alive.

Our five outlined priorities provide the foundation for Eshel's next phase of growth and impact. By connecting with allies in Orthodox hubs and on campuses, we deepen understanding of the LGBTQ+ experience across generations. As we expand programs in major cities and add another retreat, we will ensure that community and support are available to those who need them most. By creating high-quality, readily available resources, expanding Welcoming Communities, and building our internal capacity, Eshel will continue to ensure LGBTQ+ people never have to choose between their identities and their communities.

In a time when Jewish life and global challenges test us, Eshel enables our Judaism, our tradition, and our queerness to be nurtured together. From this unity we find resilience and joy, strengthening ourselves and the Jewish future.



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