



YIMBY OR NIMBY?

[YES IN MY BACKYARD OR NO IN MY BACKYARD]

PREP FOR THE SESSION

Overview

This resource unpacks the issue of **Environment and Infrastructure** through the value of **Community**.

At-a-Glance:

This resource encourages us to think about the choices we make when we build new and necessary infrastructure – where does it go? Who makes the decisions? Am I okay with it being in my backyard or not? How does it connect with the concept of private and public spaces? What does this all mean for how we understand “community”? It engages with a Jewish legal text to help us think about these categories more personally. Through a group scenario and activity, it gets us to think about the conflicts of building necessary infrastructure in one’s own backyard [YIMBY] v. on the other side of town [NIMBY], and how those conflicts may play out in our own lives. It concludes with an opportunity to think about the value of community and identify cases of where we might give up something for the “greater good of the community” and to consider why that might be hard.



Time Estimate:
50-60 minutes



Materials Needed:

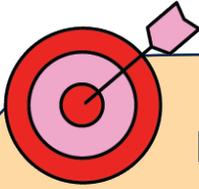
- Pens, paper, markers for activity and take action sections
- Digital device for “further exploration” section



Best Uses:

- For older teens, young adults and adults
- For a mixture of text study and self-assessment activities
- For an opportunity to take hypothetical cases and make them real

LET'S GET STARTED



FRAME THE ISSUE

Read the passage below and consider the following scenario:

A Composting Conundrum:

Meet Alex, a passionate environmentalist who has recently moved to a suburban neighborhood with dreams of living a sustainable lifestyle. One of Alex's main goals is to promote composting in the community as a way to reduce waste and nourish the soil, thus minimizing the environmental impact. However, little does Alex know that the neighborhood is divided into two distinct groups: YIMBYs (Yes In My Backyard) and NIMBYs (Not In My Backyard) when it comes to composting.

Excited about the prospect of fostering a green movement in the neighborhood, Alex sets up a small composting bin in their backyard. They attend community meetings and propose composting workshops, hoping to inspire others to join the eco-friendly cause. Some people do join, recognizing the potential benefits and are eager to participate in the workshops. On the other hand, a group of neighbors staunchly opposes the idea of composting in the neighborhood. They express concerns about potential odors, pests, and the fear of attracting unwanted wildlife. They are worried that composting might ruin the aesthetics of their well-manicured gardens and decrease property values.

Tensions and divisions in the community grow, with Alex working tirelessly to bridge the gap.



Facilitator prompts the group:

- Share your initial reaction after reading the scenario above.
- Where we locate industry or infrastructure and how we deal with the boundaries of private and public space are things that impact our homes and communities. Can you think of any examples of infrastructure projects that have impacted you or people you know? Share with the group.

7 min



***Continue reading to deepen the framing and conflict:***

Often, less desirable and more dangerous infrastructure gets put in communities that have less political power. As we move to a greener, more climate resilient future, we need to build infrastructure, and as we do, decisions have to be made.

Some questions to think about and consider as part of this process include *(not to be answered now, just think about them)*:

- How do we decide where these projects get built and who 'suffers'?
- Who is going to live next door to a bicycle factory or green electrical substation?
- What are the values that guide the decision-making process? Who makes them?
- How are fairness and justice applied and expressed in public decision making processes?

Facilitator prompts the group:

- If this issue comes up in your community would you be a NIMBY (not in my backyard) or a YIMBY (yes in my backyard)?



EXPLORE THE VALUE/ACTIVITY

Read the passage below:

The questions and considerations above can be explored through the value of community. While communities can take many different forms, at its core a community can be defined as a unified body of individuals, with common interests or characteristics, living together within a larger society.

But what are the boundaries of our communities? And how do we protect the world from the dangers of climate change while at the same time minimizing disruptions and inconvenience to individual communities? And finally, how as a society do we provide clean energy for all and at the same time fairly distribute the costs of burdens of public infrastructure projects?

The following activity will get us to engage with these conflicts:

12 min



Facilitator reads the following scenario to the group to consider:

You and your family own a house and are comfortably settled in your neighborhood, schools, and places of work. In order to distribute more clean, carbon-free electricity, your Boston suburb city council is looking for a site for a new electrical substation. The substation will allow for more solar and wind energy to reach residences and businesses in your town.

This station will occupy half a city block, produce a constant low buzzing sound, and will be surrounded by a ten-foot tall security fence. The substation will either be built:

- Two blocks from the house your family owns and lives in, or [YIMBY]
- Fifteen blocks away in a poorer neighborhood where most of the residents are people of color. [NIMBY]

Facilitator divides the group into two and assigns each group a position. One group is charged with representing the YIMBY position, and one with the NIMBY position. Each group is “invited” to speak at a Town Hall Public Forum.

- As a group, prepare your speaking points for the position you have been assigned. What do you say at the town meeting? How do you rally others to your side?
- Make a poster and slogan for your side.
- In this situation what other solutions could you imagine?

Participants re-group and facilitator invites individuals to share their speaking points, slogans and alternative solutions.



ANCHOR IN JEWISH WISDOM

Read the following for context:

In thinking about individual rights in the public sphere, the United States has historically put a strong legal and cultural priority on the ownership of private property, individual rights and has a much less developed emphasis on public space and common good than many places in the world.

And yet, many of our environmental and social justice challenges require that we think of public and communal good rather than individual rights, private gain and private property.

Our ancestors in Jewish texts and traditions struggled with negotiating the balance between individual and communal needs and raised some great questions getting us to think about lines and limits of our obligations to the community.

Facilitator prompts the group and leads a discussion:

- Think of a community that you are a part of. What is it? What are your obligations to that community and where do they end?
- How much are you willing to sacrifice in terms of your own peace and comfort for the good of that larger community?

In havruta/pairs read the following text from the Talmud and answer the questions below:

תלמוד בבלי, בבא קמא נ:

ת"ר: לא יסקל אדם מרשותו לרה"ר. מעשה באדם אחד שהיה מסקל מרשותו לרה"ר, ומצאו חסיד אחד, אמר לו: ריקה, מפני מה אתה מסקל מרשות שאינה שלך לרשות שלך?! לגלג עליו. לימים נצרך למכור שדהו, והיה מהלך באותו רה"ר ונכשל באותן אבנים, אמר: יפה אמר לי אותו חסיד מפני מה אתה מסקל מרשות שאינה שלך לרשות שלך.

12 min



***Talmud Bava Kamma 50b:***

Our masters taught: One should not clear stones out of one's own domain and throw them into the public domain. There is a story of a man who was clearing stones out of his own domain and throwing them into the public domain. A pious man, seeing him, said to him, "Wretch, why do you remove stones from a domain that is not yours to a domain that is yours?" The man just laughed at him. After a time, the man needed to sell his field, and, walking on that very public domain, he stumbled over the stones he had thrown. He said, "How well that pious man put it: 'Why do you remove stones from a domain that is not yours to a domain that is yours?'"

[Note: He finally understood the pious man's meaning: the public domain belongs to all of us, and we are all responsible for its maintenance.]

Facilitator prompts the group and leads a discussion:

- In what way is an individual also an owner of public space? Where do you experience this in your own life?
- How does dumping stones into public land hurt the dumper? What are the other options available to him?



PROMPT ACTION



Facilitator prompts the group in the following exercise:

For each of the questions below, spend two minutes journaling/free-writing your responses:

- How are you thinking about issues of community in your life? How do these values show up for you?
- Where and how do you experience the public domain in your life? Where does it come into conflict with your needs?

Now, identify one “greater good for community” that you are willing to give up something for. What is it?

On the spectrum below, plot yourself in terms of how much you would be willing to give up for it. (1, not a lot, 10, a lot).



- Why did you plot yourself where you did?
- What is one thing can you do to make yourself move a bit further towards 10?

8 min





CLOSE WITH INTENTION

5 min



In this exploration we deepened our understanding of the value of community and had the chance to think about the many different issues that go into building new infrastructure, and how those impact community building. Through the activity and Jewish anchor we had the chance to test out where we stand on living by our values, and to consider the relationship between private rights and property and how those might bump against the public, common good. We ended with an opportunity to identify a “greater good” that we might be willing to give something up for, and how far we’d be willing to go.



Facilitator prompts the group:

- After engaging in the conversation above, what is one place where you can give – in either time or money – to a public good or common space in your community?