

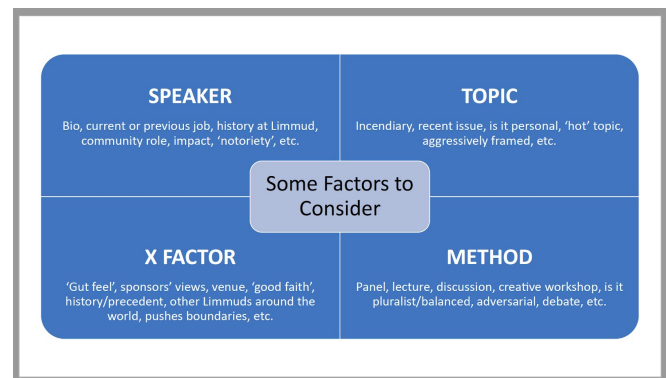
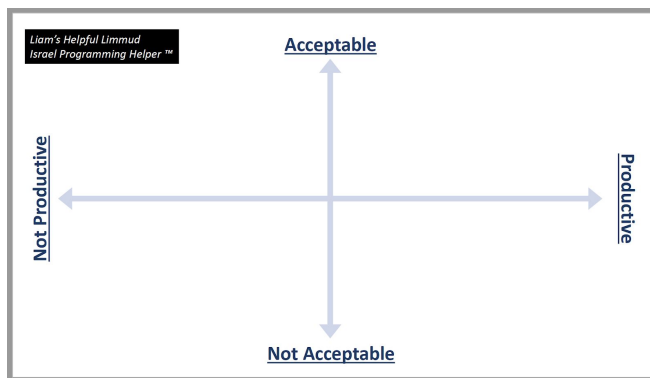
A Proposed Framework to Assist with Israel Programming at Limmud Conferences

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Context: Programming topics related Israel, particularly when it comes to 'political' issues – for example, issues related Israel's 'identity', religious issues, multiple narratives, NGOs and civil society, peace and conflict, security and more – can be tricky. As the director of NIF Australia, I've been part of many conversations about these issues.

This framework aims to provide some context and assistance to volunteers when considering Israel sessions at Limmud. There is no magic bullet to the issue and each Limmud conference (and the community it is in) is different, as is the volunteer make up of each conference.

Purpose: To allow volunteers to discuss proposed sessions before programming in the context of their community and avoid friction between community members, organisations and others. It could also be useful in the creation of more robust policies where they don't exist or could be expanded.



At the framework's core are considerations along two axes: 'Acceptable' and 'Productive'. There are two important questions to ask about any session:

1. **How 'acceptable' is the session?** Does the session contravene any of the Limmud values? Is it being suggested in good faith?
2. **How 'productive' is this session?** Will it contribute positively or negatively to the overall Limmud experience, for volunteers, presenters and participants? Are the session participants 'good Limmud citizens'?

Answering these questions – using the guiding questions below, as well as others as appropriate – volunteers should be able to place the proposed session in one of the four quadrants. There may be ways to re-frame the session to make it more 'productive' or more acceptable' and therefore worthy of being included.

There are a number of factors worth considering (the list is by no means exhaustive) in plotting the session on the above axes:

- **Speaker:**
 - What is the speaker's bio? Are they prominent members of the Jewish or wider community? Have they held elected office? If so, their position and experience may provide a unique or interesting perspective that is worth programming and may be influential. For example, a senior parliamentarian who some consider 'anti-Israel' or Islamophobic, or someone who has served in the IDF. Programming this speaker may not be particularly 'palatable', but does providing the individual with a platform in a responsible way – see 'method' and 'topic' below – bring an issue out in the open and give what may be the only opportunity to air the issue in the community?
 - Are they employed by a Jewish organisation? Have they (or a representative of their organisation) spoken at this Limmud before, or another Limmud conference around the world?
 - Are they a member of the community? If they come from within the community, and have been/are a member of significant other institutions, it may be appropriate to program.
- **Topic:**
 - Is the topic designed to be deliberately incendiary? Does it attack another person or organisation? If so, it may be appropriate to keep the same speaker(s), but re-frame it in a more neutral way that doesn't pre-suppose an outcome. Or, it may be that it is conceived in an aggressive way that, even if re-framed, would not contribute positively to a Limmud's culture.
 - Is it a 'hot' topic, something that has been in the news, or is an issue of particular importance or relevance to the community? If so, it may be 'productive' for the community to discuss the issue and get it out in the open.
- **Method:**
 - How is issue going to be presented? Will it be a panel of experts?
 - Will the speakers be from a diverse or homogenous background? Will this contribute positively to a participant's experience? This can go in a number of ways: A one-sided panel discourages people to have their views challenged, while a deliberately adversarial debate can push people further into their corners and encourage a troubling atmosphere during the session.
 - Is the session going to be well moderated?
 - Will it offer opportunities for participants to engage with each other, or just with presenters? Will this be done as an exchange of ideas, or with the power dynamic of a Q&A on a stage?
- **X Factor:**
 - This can be the hardest to describe. It is hard to know what questions to ask. Experienced Limmud volunteers may 'know it when they see it'.
 - Does the speaker or topic push boundaries (this can be a positive and negative influence)? Does it make the case for programming the session or not? (Or doing so using a particular method.)
 - Can you look to other Limmud conferences around the world to seek precedent?
 - Is the session likely to draw a cross-communal and inter-generational audience? If so, then programming it could be 'productive'.
 - There are some other factors that, while contributing a lot of 'noise', should be considered carefully before weighing on the decision. A Limmud conference should be created and programmed by its volunteers and regular participants. Obviously the context of the wider community can't, and shouldn't, be ignored; but, ultimately, it must be 'owned' by the Limmud team. Questions like:
 - Are donors telling the committee they 'must' or 'cannot' program a speaker, or else they will withdraw funding?
 - Is the venue dictating which sessions can/cannot take place on its campus?
 - Are people writing letters to a local Jewish paper, recommending boycotting Limmud, suggesting picketing the event, or proposing to hold an alternative event? If so, are these people part of the 'core' Limmud community? Have they attended before?