

Congregation Beth Israel
B'nei Mitzvah Handbook



Congregation Beth Israel
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Welcome to the B'nei Mitzvah Program

We are delighted that you have chosen to celebrate your child becoming a bar/bat mitzvah with us here at Congregation Beth Israel. This booklet has been written to provide you with streamlined, easily accessible, and up-to-date-information regarding this significant life cycle event in your child's Jewish journey.

It is our hope that every family who participates in our b'nei mitzvah program feels confident about the process. Of course if you have any questions or concerns that are not addressed in the pages that follow please contact us.

A Brief History

The phrases "bar mitzvah" and "bat mitzvah" are **titles** (such as Doctor or Rabbi) bestowed upon any Jew on the occasion of their 13th birthday. The meaning of the title is "One Who Is Subject to the Commandments." Bar and bat mitzvah does not refer to a service or other event. In other words, turning 13 in Judaism is not unlike turning 18 in the American legal system. It is the point at which one becomes responsible for all the sacred duties and privileges of Jewish life. Thus, a person does not "get bar mitzvahed" or "have a bar mitzvah." Rather, a person becomes a bat mitzvah, similar to the expression "he became a doctor" or "she became a Hall of Famer."

In Jewish tradition, it is only after becoming a bar or bat mitzvah that you are entitled to receive certain public honors in congregational worship. These include responsibilities and privileges like being called to the Torah for an Aliyah, counting as a member of the prayer community (the *minyan*), and teaching a public lesson about the week's Torah portion. Doing these things in public serves as a kind of announcement to the community that you are now willing and able to participate in this way. "Able" of course implies acquiring the necessary skills.

Since the title 'bar mitzvah' or 'bat mitzvah' belongs to you for the rest of your life, our hope is that you will return often to participate in the prayer life of the community and help to lead the service. At Congregation Beth Israel we empower recent b'nei mitzvah students to contribute to the community by inviting them to read/chant Torah on the anniversary of their Torah portion, during the summer time and also during the High Holy Day season.

Program Philosophy

Here at Congregation Beth Israel we look forward to fostering young Jewish adults who feel confident in their studies, at home in their synagogue, and pride in their achievements. We see all our students as the individuals they are and do our very best to accommodate all of their unique learning styles.

Our staff-intensive program provides the opportunity for our students to form strong, lasting, personal relationships with their teachers, including members of the Clergy Team. These personal connections reinforce our students' desire to continue their Jewish education with us beyond their b'nei mitzvah studies to include Confirmation and Post-Confirmation. This continuation of their formal Jewish education is an expectation of our program.

An important part of becoming a Jewish adult is embracing community through prayer. We look forward to greeting our students at Shabbat services, both evening and morning, especially in the year leading up to their celebration.

Tikkun Olam (repairing the world), is also an integral part of our program. We look forward to working with our students as they carry out mitzvah projects that they find meaningful.

Lastly, we do encourage our students to share their date with a partner. Sometimes, partners were friends prior to beginning their studies and other times warm, lasting friendships have been formed as a result of working together. Additionally, by having a partner, much of the pressure is taken off of the individual student because leadership of the prayer service is shared. Both students learn all of the liturgy, read torah and haftarah and give a d'var torah (speech related to the torah portion.)

The Date Selection Process: Guidelines and Considerations

Date Selection

- Dates are chosen by means of an online survey tool. Parents are invited to take the survey three years prior to the dates for which the child is eligible. Parents receive an e-mail with a link to the survey. They are asked to rank three possible dates, in order of preference.
- We do not offer bar/bat mitzvah dates on Thanksgiving weekend OR during the month of July.
- More information regarding date selection is given in the fall of 5th grade.

Partners

You can request someone to be your child's partner or you may allow a partner to be assigned to you. If you have selected a partner, then you want to make sure that you and the partner request the same dates, in the same order of preference, when you take the survey.

Can a partner be added to my date?

Due to the amount of lead time that it takes to prepare, a new student will not be added to a date later than ten months before the service. Should another family become interested in a date after receiving confirmation of the date being assigned to your family, Sarah Avner will reach out to you to begin the conversation regarding sharing.

Friday night participation

Participating on Friday night is not required, but we highly recommend it. It tends to help students work out some of their nervousness before the big day and gives them a taste of being on the bimah with a full sanctuary. If your family is planning on attending the Friday evening service, regardless of student participation, then parents are invited to lead the blessings over the candles and wine on that evening.

Timeline of Preparation Process

Grades 3 & 4 – Enroll in both Sunday School and Midrasha (Wednesday program). If Midrasha is not a possibility, work with Carly Cera to formulate an alternative.

Grade 5 & 6 – Enroll in Sunday school and Midrasha with Hebrew Side-by-Side learning on Sundays. If Midrasha/Side-by-Side is not possible, arrange for private tutoring through Carly Cera.

Eighteen - Twelve Months Out. Service Attendance. All students are expected to attend Shabbat worship services 18 times (14 Shabbat mornings and 4 evenings) during the eighteen months leading up to their celebration. There is a binder at the reception desk in which you can record your attendance. Not only does attending services enable students and families to connect more deeply to our community but it also provides a familiarity and comfort with the expectations of the day.

Eighteen - Twelve Months Out. Mitzvah Hours. Rabbi Tarfon said, “You are not required to complete the work, but neither are you free to abstain from it.” This quote expresses the Jewish value of working to help those who are in need. We expect b’nei mitzvah students to have completed at least 18 hours of volunteer work before the date of his/her service. We encourage students to choose “hands-on” projects that involve personal service. Please refer to the appendix for some ideas or reach out to Carly Cera for suggestions.

Twelve Months Out. Hebrew Assessment. Approximately twelve months out, Sarah Avner will meet with students in order to assess their Hebrew and prayer skills and make a recommendation regarding the start date for the prayer class and tutoring. She may also suggest individual tutoring (at the family’s expense) to bring up the Hebrew reading skills to the level necessary to begin the prayer class and Torah/Haftarah tutoring. At this meeting, the timeline and expectations will be discussed.

Eight – Twelve Months Out: Individual Tutoring for Torah/Haftarah. Approximately eight to twelve months before the bar/bat mitzvah date (depending on the results of the Hebrew assessment), all students will attend individual, weekly 30-minute study sessions with our tutor, Ellen Sable. The purpose of the tutoring will be to learn the Torah and Haftarah portions. Ellen is a wonderful teacher who is experienced in teaching many different kinds of learners. Once you receive a notice from Sarah Avner after the twelve-month Hebrew Assessment, contact Ellen Sable to schedule a mutually workable meeting time. Tutoring with Ellen is included in the bar/bat mitzvah fee. ***Please note that 24 hours’ notice is required for cancellation of lessons with Ellen. If the cancellation is made less than 24 hours in advance, an \$18 fee will be assessed. For sudden illness or emergency, please contact Ellen via text, phone or email, as soon as you know your child will not be able to attend the session.*** Also note that lessons with Ellen **do not** only follow the Religious school calendar but continue over the summer and through holiday breaks.

Eight Months Out: Prayer Class. Approximately eight months before the bar/bat mitzvah date, all students begin to attend our prayer class, which meets on Sundays from 10:00-11:00 AM.

Prayer class is led by Becca Taute, a gifted teacher who grew up in our community, and Ellen Sable, our talented b'nei mitzvah tutor. Prayer class is a wonderful way not only for our students to attain mastery of the main prayers of the worship service, it also builds community and enables students to support and encourage one another. Prayer Class tuition is included in the bar/bat Mitzvah fee. Please note that Prayer Class meets more regularly than Religious School and runs throughout the summer. Please plan on consistent attendance.

Seven to Four Months Out: Meetings with our Senior and Associate Rabbis. Our Senior Rabbi will meet with students two times before the ceremony in order to get to know the student better and to discuss the meaning of the day. Our Associate Rabbi will meet with students approximately four times before the ceremony in order to study the Torah portion and prepare the d'var torah (speech about the Torah portion). Our Executive Assistant to the clergy, will be in contact with you to schedule these meetings.

Two to Three Months Out. Invitations. Please note that it is our policy that you invite your child's **entire Religious School grade** to the service and luncheon (or *kiddush* refreshments, whichever your family chooses to provide) that follows. We strive to create *Kehila Kedosha*, sacred community, and rely on your partnership as we work toward that ideal. By supporting this policy your family will ensure that every child feels included. Additionally, the inclusion of the Religious School grade naturally provides a beautiful congregation of support for the bar/bat mitzvah at the service itself. We would like to suggest that you include your child in the discussion regarding invitations and their Sunday school class to ensure inclusion of all of their CBI friends. Some families mail a paper invitation to each of their classmates, while others send an email. Please be in touch with Sarah Jew (sjew@bethisrael.org) as you get ready to send out the invitations so she can send you an updated class list.

Three months Out. Coordinate with our Executive Assistant in the clergy suite, your family's sponsorship of the Oneg Shabbat.

Six Weeks Out. Mentor Rehearsals. Students will be paired with a volunteer adult mentor from our community, with whom they will meet once per week, on the bimah in the sanctuary, 3-4 times during the six weeks leading up to the ceremony. This program is not only a wonderful way to rehearse the service; it also creates a bond between the student and a caring member of our community. During the mentoring sessions students will practice reading from the torah, reciting their speech and become familiar with the choreography of the service. Please note that our mentors are volunteers who devote significant time to this process. Ellen Sable, with Sarah Avner's assistance, will match each student to a mentor and will be in touch as to the mentor's contact information.

Two Weeks Out. Please send your Honors Sheet, which can be found on our website (<http://www.bethisrael.org/index.php/learning/bnei-mitzvah>), to our Executive Assistant to the clergy and email our associate Rabbi a copy of your parent's prayer for review.

One and one-half Weeks Out. Final Rehearsal. On the Thursday afternoon one and one-half weeks before the ceremony, the student and their parent(s) will meet with Sarah Avner to run through the key points of the service. This rehearsal enables students to feel comfortable leading

the service with our clergy, and to get out any last-minute questions or nervousness that they have. Our Executive Assistant to the clergy will be in touch to solidify the time of the rehearsal.

The Big Day. Please have all family members arrive by 9:50 AM on the morning of the ceremony to meet the Rabbi in the sanctuary for a final practice of the choreography. Have a great day! You have earned it.

Supporting your Child in Preparation

The most helpful things you can do include:

- Regular participation in our education programs on both Sundays and Wednesdays. We expect at least 80% participation from third grade through the ceremony (and afterwards through Confirmation as well).
- Bringing your child to Shabbat services. *The more your child hears and sings along with the prayers, the easier it will be for him or her to prepare for the big day. It is hard to overemphasize how **important** this is!*
- Practicing with your child at home. Even the best teacher cannot prepare a child unless the student puts in time outside of his/her lessons at the synagogue.
- Parents don't need to be able read Hebrew in order to listen to their students practice. You can certainly make sure your student practices reading Hebrew aloud – whether or not you understand the Hebrew.
- Encourage your child along the way letting them know that their hard work has not gone unnoticed.
- Stay on top of the timelines and schedules. Kids always feel safe when they know their parents know what is going on.
- Consider lightening your child's extracurricular activities, at least for the six months prior to your child's celebration.
- Be members in good standing of Congregation Beth Israel: All temple financial obligations must be current or appropriate arrangements made, at least three months prior to the service.

Parent and Family Roles During the Service

Service Participation

Each family completes an Honors Form detailing the honors that you may give to family and friends. You may obtain this from the temple's website (<https://bethisrael.org/bnei-mitzvah/>). Please consult the Honors Form for more specific information, and do not hesitate to reach out to Sarah Avner if you have specific questions.

Passing of the Torah Through the Generations

At the beginning of the Torah Service Rabbi Folberg will invite up family members to pass the Torah from the ark to the bar/bat mitzvah. This honor is reserved for grandparents and parents, but aunts and uncles are welcome as well.

Parent's Blessing

Parents are invited on the morning of their child's celebration to give their child a blessing just before they hand the Torah to their child. Feel free to speak to your child from the heart in a way that is prayerful, reverent, and that gives members of the congregation an opportunity to say "amen" at the end. For the sake of time and the flow of the service we ask that this blessing be brief. If you would like to see some examples of Parent blessings, please see CBI's website: <https://bethisrael.org/bnei-mitzvah/>

We ask that parents who choose to compose an original prayer or blessing share a draft with Rabbi Levy no later than two weeks prior to the service. Of course, your private celebration affords the opportunity to speak at greater length about your child's personal history and accomplishments if you so wish.

Non-Jewish Family Participation

The Constitution of Congregation Beth Israel provides that "opportunities for participation on the bimah will be provided for our non-Jewish members." In this spirit, we are happy to provide appropriate avenues of participation for non-Jewish family members of our b'nei mitzvah. We ask that you consult directly with Rabbi Folberg, Rabbi Levy or Sarah Avner if you have questions about these honors. They will be most happy to work with you.

Event and Facility Information

Bimah Decorations

Some options:

- Based on your child's mitzvah project, you can create baskets highlighting what they have done or put donations in a basket.
- CBI has silk plants and flower arrangements that can be used at no charge.
- Purchase cut, **unscented**, flowers from a florist to create a bouquet

Please contact the administrative staff for more details or assistance.

Photography and Videography (including cell phones):

Hand-held camera devices are NOT permitted during services. However, you may set up a video recording device on a tripod in the balcony of the Sanctuary if you wish to record your

child's service. If you choose to record your child's service, the video camera must be ready to go no later than 10:15 am.

You may schedule still photography at the following times: the Friday morning or afternoon prior to your family's celebration, the morning of the service (finished by 9:50 am when service participants will meet with a member of the clergy team) when there is NOT something else scheduled to be in the sanctuary at the same time, or after the service.

There might be other times throughout the week when the sanctuary is available, as well. If you would like members of our clergy to be a part of your pictures, please contact our Executive Assistant in the clergy suite to help with scheduling. Once the rabbis are reserved, please contact the administrative staff to reserve time in the sanctuary for photography.

Oneg Shabbat

An oneg with coffee, water, and sweets is held after the service on Friday evening. Challah and wine will be provided for Kiddush on Friday evening.

All families are expected to sponsor the oneg on the Shabbat of their services even if the family is not planning on attending the Friday evening. Please coordinate with Pam Hanna (phanna@bethisrael.org) to pay your \$100 sponsorship three months before your date.

Luncheon

We ask all our families to sponsor the Kiddush on Saturday morning following the service. Minimally, this consists of wine, Challah and some cookies or sweets. You may bring them yourself, or, the staff can provide it for a fee. The fee will depend on the number of attendees. CBI does not have staff to be able to provide anything other than a Kiddush similar to an oneg.

If you choose to sponsor a luncheon in addition to the Kiddush, please note that is our custom that anyone who attends services that morning is welcome to come and have lunch after services. For our regular attendees we ask that you figure in 20-25 people. This does not include the class and their families.

- For all luncheons following a simcha, a \$72 kitchen use fee will be charged.
 - If you require additional set up from the CBI staff or assistance with service, there is an additional charge for staff.
 - The kitchen use fee includes coffee, lemonade, Kiddush wine and challah. It will also cover general wear and tear of the kitchen.
- We will use a standard buffet set up for all luncheons, unless requested otherwise. The caterers will set up the tables and chairs and dress them with linens, unless you request otherwise.
- If the luncheon is a party following the simcha and lasts longer than 2:30, then it is \$72 per hour to cover staffing for that time. We request that an afternoon party conclude no later than 4:30 pm.

Caterers

You are not restricted to any particular caterer, but there are several local caterers that our members seem to like. Please contact Jennifer Smith (jsmith@bethisrael.org) for a list of caterers familiar with the CBI kitchens and policies. **If you choose a caterer that has not served**

at a luncheon at CBI before, they must meet with Jennifer Smith at least four weeks prior to the luncheon.

Food and Alcohol Policies

- Wine and beer may be served. It cannot be sold. If other alcohol is served, a TABC certified bartender must serve it.
- Although we do not have a strictly kosher kitchen, we do observe certain Jewish dietary guidelines. Biblically prohibited foods (chiefly, pork and shellfish, although please ask if you have questions) are not served at the synagogue. Additionally, as a courtesy to our members and guests who do observe some level of kashrut, we recommend that you not mix meat and dairy products in the same dish, although they may be served at the same occasion.
- Since your meal is going to be open to the entire community, we ask that you construct your menu in such a way that someone who does not eat meat or has food allergies (especially to gluten or nuts) is able to eat a reasonably balanced meal.
- Please ask if you have further questions.

Smith Rental/Party

- For CBI members in good standing, it is \$1200 to rent Smith for four hours of party time.
 - This cost includes use of all tables and chairs, the kitchen, a staff person at CBI in case of emergencies or questions, and security.
 - There is no additional fee for set up/clean up time, unless you require CBI staff to do so.
- Security for events is provided by the Travis County Sheriff Department. If there will be more than 200 people at your event, two officers will be provided and an additional \$150 fee will be charged to cover the additional officer.
- The party is limited to Smith Auditorium. If there is evidence that guests were outside Smith Auditorium, a minimum fee of \$200 will be required, in addition to any cleaning or repair costs.
- Please ensure that there will be enough adults to chaperone a kids' party. If you would like help finding additional chaperones, contact the administrative staff.

Decorations

- No confetti or confetti type table decoration may be used.
- Candles can only be used if tea lights or within a glass container as decoration.
- Only Painters' Tape (blue tape) must be used to put anything on the walls.
- We have white cloths for the round tables and white or black for the rectangular tables that can be rented for \$6 per tablecloth.

- We also have black chair covers available to rent:
 - \$50 for 100 chair covers
 - \$75 for 150 chair covers
 - \$100 for 200 chair covers
 - If you require the CBI staff to put the chair covers on, it is an additional \$75. If you require the CBI staff to remove the chair covers, it is an addition \$50.

Clean up

- All rented space, including the kitchen, must be cleaned and all people must vacate the building by midnight.
- Nothing can be left behind, including garbage. If additional clean-up in the kitchen or Smith Auditorium is required after your party, you will be charged \$200 to cover the additional costs.
- Please notify Jennifer Smith or Pam Hanna in advance if extra custodial help is needed. The hourly rate for custodial staff is \$15.

Staff: We are here to help!

Administrative Staff

Pam Hanna, Member Services Director: phanna@bethisrael.org ; (512) 454-6806 x203

- Pam is your contact for temple membership and finances. All b'nei mitzvah associated fees will be handled through her office.

Clergy Suite

Executive Assistant to the Clergy, (512) 454-6806 x214

- This individual handles the appointment scheduling for bar/bat mitzvah tutorial lessons with members of the Clergy Team, gathers information about honors and prepares the Shabbat morning program.

Rabbi Steven Folberg, Senior Rabbi: sfolberg@bethisrael.org

- Rabbi Folberg meets in a small group setting with all our students, exploring the meaning of the bat mitzvah and bar mitzvah rite of passage. You will receive an email from the Executive Assistant to the clergy for your child to attend these meetings.

Rabbi Kelly Levy, Assistant Rabbi: klevy@bethisrael.org

- Through group meetings with study partners and private meetings, Rabbi Levy helps students' study and understand their Torah portions, while also looking at various commentaries, and subsequently crafting a d'var Torah (lesson or sermonette) based on what they have learned. Rabbi Levy requires that at least **one parent** attend the first meeting as she lays out expectations for the writing process and parents are welcome to attend all follow-up meetings.

Sarah Avner, Cantorial Soloist: savner@bethisrael.org

- Beginning with date selection to the twelve-month Hebrew check-in to the dress rehearsal Sarah is involved in every step of the service leading/Torah reading part of the process.

Ellen Sable, B'nei Mitzvah Tutor: ellenrose.sable@gmail.com; (512) 913-8245

- Ellen meets with all our students on a one-on-one basis teaching the chanting of both Torah and Haftarah portions as well as reviewing the learning of prayers. She is also one of the teachers of our B'nei Mitzvah Prayer Class. Ellen and Sarah Avner communicate regularly regarding student progress and Ellen is an integral part of the b'nei mitzvah process. She will also be your contact person when it is time for your student to begin working with a volunteer mentor.

Education Office

Carly Cera, Director of Education and Youth Engagement: ccera@bethisrael.org ; (512) 454-1589

- Carly guides the educational journey leading up to and after your child becomes bar/bat mitzvah. She also oversees the completion of mitzvah hours and will check in with you throughout the year. If needed, she can help your student create a passion project or explore many organizations who benefit from volunteers.

Sarah Jew, Education Coordinator: sjew@bethisrael.org; 512-454-1589

- Sarah is your point person for all questions regarding registration for religious school, midrasha and Hebrew Side-by-Side learning. She is also your direct contact for the most up-to-date class list when it comes time to prepare invitations.

Appendix 1: Mitzvah Hours

Rabbi Tarfon said, “You are not required to complete the work, but neither are you free to abstain from it.” This quote expresses the Jewish value of working to help those who are in need. We expect b’nei mitzvah students to have completed at least 18 hours of volunteer work before the date of his/her bar/bat mitzvah service. We encourage students to choose “hands-on” projects that involve personal service. Many of these organizations require parents to accompany youth volunteers.

Community Service Ideas:

Austin Animal Center is the largest municipal animal shelter in Central Texas, provides shelter to 23,000 animals annually and services to Austin/Travis County.

<http://www.austintexas.gov/page/individual-aac-volunteer>

Austin Yellow Bike Project is an all-volunteer non-profit initiative to put bicycles on the streets of Austin and Central Texas by operating community bike shops, teaching bike mechanics and maintenance, and acting as a local bike advocacy group. <http://austinyellowbike.org>

Austin Habitat for Humanity offers many ways for youth to volunteer- landscaping, planting trees, raising awareness or providing lunch for volunteers who are building.

www.austinhabitat.org/youth

Austin Parks Foundation connects people to resources and partners to develop and improve parks. Volunteers participate in activities including erosion control, mulching, tree-planting, eradicating invasive species and trash pick-up. www.austinparks.org

Austin Pets Alive! is a volunteer run non-profit animal rescue group committed to promoting and providing the resources, education and programs needed to eliminate the killing of homeless companion animals. Must be 12 to volunteer. www.austinpetsalive.org

Bake A Wish is a volunteer run non-profit organization who provide free, homemade birthday cakes to neglected, abused and/or abandoned children and also the elderly and disables who would not otherwise receive a birthday cake. Volunteers bake and deliver cakes.

www.bakeawishaustin.org

Central Texas Food Bank is the largest hunger-relief charity in Central Texas, serving more than 46,000 people each week. There are family volunteer times when youth can participate.

www.centraltexasfoodbank.org

Circle of Friends is an Alzheimer’s respite group that meets at CBI every Thursday morning from 9am-2pm. This is a great summer time, or school break idea. For information, contact Theresa Lyons at tlyons@mac.com.

Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN) is a group of religious congregations that provide food and shelter to meet the immediate needs of families in crisis. Four times a year, CBI opens our facilities to homeless families with children. Some volunteer activities are setting up classrooms as bedrooms, bringing part of a meal to CBI, providing supplies ahead of time that we need for the families, and serving meals. To volunteer, please contact Sam & Ava Spetalnick at cbihosting@gmail.com.

Jewish Family Services is the division of the JCAA that provides mental health and social services to the Austin Jewish and general community. JFS offers trained volunteer outreach to elders who live in senior residential settings to bring meaningful, interpersonal connections and Jewish programs to them where they reside. For more information, contact JFS Outreach & Volunteer Coordinator Mary Axelrud at mary.axelrud@shalomaustin.org or call 512-250-1043.

Keep Austin Beautiful provides resources and education to engage citizens in building a more beautiful community. Volunteers work on service projects, including creek and road cleanups. <http://keepaustinbeautiful.org/volunteer>

Little Helping Hands facilitates family volunteering by organizing and leading volunteer activities with various organizations. Opportunities are suitable for ages 3-17. For older kids and teens, they offer educational and leadership programs to enhance the learning that comes out of service experiences. www.littlehelpinghands.org

Meals on Wheels Central Texas-Greater Austin Area makes and delivers meals to homebound members of the community, including those age 60 and older. Volunteers deliver meals by car. www.mealsonwheelscentraltexas.org

Mobile Loaves & Fishes is a social outreach ministry for the homeless and working poor. Volunteers can help prepare and deliver meals through the St. John Neumann Commissary or work on the Community First Village homes and gardens. www.mlf.org/volunteer

Refugee Services of Texas a social service agency dedicated to providing resettlement services to refugees and other displaced persons. Youth appropriate opportunities include donation collection, apartment set-up, helping families explore Austin and child-care. Volunteers must attend a hour-long training session offered the first Tuesday of each month. <http://www.rstx.org/volunteer>

Sustainable Food Center is in charge of the SFC Farmers Market and creates opportunities for individuals to makes healthy food choices and participate in a local food system. Youth participation in volunteer opportunities will depend on the job. Volunteers must attend an hour-long orientation session. www.sustainablefoodcenter.org