

Opening the Gates: 10 Questions to Help Us Create Inclusive Synagogue Experiences during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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During this unsettling time, while we are functioning remotely, creating inclusive synagogue experiences remains a priority for the Jewish community. With the High Holidays quickly approaching, this is a time when we can take stock of how our communities continue to be inclusive and supportive of all members and reflect on where we might be able to do more. .

1. Do your remote practices match your vision and mission statements?

As a community, we have been actively working on creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for people with disabilities and their families when they visited a synagogue's website or initiated contact with a synagogue. What actions can you highlight that demonstrate how you are continuing to be inclusive, even with your physical buildings closed?

2. What roles can your inclusion committee take on while your synagogue is operating remotely?

- *Do you need different members with different skill sets? Can you recruit new members to help, such as people with technology skills? Are there people you previously counted on, who, due to this social distancing situation, cannot be available in the same way?*

3. As you have updated your website to reflect these new circumstances, is information about inclusion still prominent?

- *Most synagogues have updated their websites to reflect the wide array of offerings still available while we are physically distancing. Is information about how to get help to stay connected a part of the new messaging?*



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4. How are you doing outreach to families and people with disabilities?

- *Calling or sending personal e-mails to people with disabilities and their families to invite them to services or specific events ensures that news of your inclusion effort reaches the people you want it to reach. You can also use the outreach to ask people what supports they need and talk through any concerns people may have. This extra effort assures people with disabilities and their families that their needs are a priority within your community.*

5. What kind of training and support can you provide for your clergy, professional staff and lay leaders?

- *These are not normal circumstances and we should not assume that everyone who is representing our synagogues has the right tools and skill sets to make remote worship and learning work for everyone. Many Jewish organizations, including CJP, have offered trainings on how clergy can best support their congregants through this shared challenge.*

6. How are you ensuring that your remote services and meetings are accessible?

- *Things to consider when planning for online meetings and services include offering: (a) visual supports, (b) accommodations for those with hearing impairments such as close caption and (c) factoring in the amount of time people can stay meaningfully engaged while logging in remotely.*



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7. What supports is your congregation able to offer people in your community beyond programs such as ritual and educational activities?

- *Can your congregation provide supports to members who are now isolated or not receiving services due to the pandemic? Consider virtual check ins, socially distant visits or providing help with errands.*

8. How can a synagogue support its education director, teachers, and youth engagement specialists as we shift to online learning?

- *As we think about synagogues as employers, with a responsibility to assist its employees through this pandemic, there are many new questions and challenges educators are facing. Not every education director and teacher have the background or knowledge to make such a dramatic shift from in-person learning to remote classrooms. It's important to find out what your education team needs to continue to provide a high-quality program and to be inclusive at the same time.*

9. What are you doing to continue to plan for the future when we return to in-person gatherings?

- *Many synagogues were in the midst of making changes to increase accessibility and become more inclusive when the building closures began. While synagogue budgets are strained more than ever, committees working on plans to improve building accessibility should continue their work. At some point, we will return to our physical spaces and inclusion needs to remain a priority. Think about the message it sends your congregants if plans for improving accessibility are dropped now.*



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10. How are you eliciting feedback to know if you are meeting the needs of your diverse community?

- *You won't really know how you are doing if you do not ask: if the current supports offered are helpful, what other supports should be offered, and if each person feels he or she can access the synagogue's services and supports during this time of remote gathering.*