



RUDERMAN SYNAGOGUE INCLUSION PROJECT



GETTING STARTED: SOLICITING FEEDBACK

Betsy Closs, MSW, CJP Senior Director

Almost everyone has preferences about how they like to respond to requests for feedback. Some people will answer only if they can do so anonymously, while others will only do so in a face-to-face conversation with a caring individual. In the arena of disability, it can be particularly difficult to talk about one's own needs. Some do not want to be viewed as complainers, while others find the whole topic disheartening. Because of such personal preferences, it's best to gather information about inclusion through several avenues.

Here are some ideas to consider:

1. Establish an email address specific to the topic. Some families have reported that it is easier to reach out to an address like: inclusionconcerns@temple.org instead of directly engaging the school director or rabbi. Note: If you create a new address, make sure that the person assigned to receive such emails can promptly respond.
2. Interview individuals who you know are impacted. If you have several people who are going to conduct these interviews, establish some core questions that you will ask each interviewee. This will be a big help when it's time to report your information. As part of these interviews, be sure to ask for ideas about who else you might reach out to.
3. Consider a focus group or other public meeting. Some inclusion projects have relied on focus groups to gather crucial information, and they have reported positive results especially in opening the eyes of attendees who are not directly affected by disability. There is no doubt that a public airing of concerns can help to focus the congregation's attention on inclusion. If you host such an event, make sure that there is a facilitator capable of relieving tension when needed. It is also recommended that you provide alternative, quieter ways to encourage those who would not want to speak up in public.
4. Congregational surveys provide a valuable opportunity to receive feedback while also publicizing your effort. Formal surveys are also a way to share information with those congregation members who don't attend regularly. Details about creating such a survey can be found in Solutions.



RUDERMAN SYNAGOGUE INCLUSION PROJECT



When you let people know about these efforts, be clear about what you will do with the information. Are you simply collecting information, or will you also try to resolve complaints? What will you do if you get information about a truly urgent need or an impending crisis?

Finally, there is no need to roll out all of your listening efforts at once. It's fine to start small, perhaps arranging for a few interviews or establishing a way for people to contact you to discuss inclusion concerns. Community-wide efforts can be initiated when the time is right. Remember, the goal is not to listen for a set period of time; the goal is to foster a culture where people are increasingly comfortable asking for what they need and the congregation is proactively working to overcome barriers.