



RUDERMAN SYNAGOGUE INCLUSION PROJECT



SYNAGOGUE INCLUSION INVENTORY

All of us at the Ruderman Synagogue Inclusion Project (RSIP) are so pleased that your congregation is committed to creating a more inclusive, welcoming Jewish community. We are here to help you along the way, and to disseminate helpful information, advice and achievements throughout our diverse synagogue communities.

The following Inclusion Inventory is designed to help your synagogue benchmark progress and provide ideas for new areas of exploration and growth. Don't be discouraged if your congregation still has many aspects that are not fully accessible; this work takes time, thought and dedication.

Please use the following form to evaluate a wide range of physical characteristics, practices and attitudes that can make your synagogue community a welcoming place for people with disabilities and support their full inclusion in synagogue life. We strongly urge you to include members with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities in the process of completing this inventory.

The open response format is designed to encourage you to think beyond simple "yes" or "no" answers. It's much better to record and explain partial accessibility than to simply say "no." Below we've provided some recommendations for preparing to complete your Inclusion Inventory.

BEST PRACTICES FOR TAKING AN INCLUSION INVENTORY

Seek out varied sources of information, use different methods of communication.

In order to give the most complete answers to the Inventory questions, we recommend including many types of information, including direct observation, documents and interviews with stakeholders, including people with disabilities and their families.

Consider seeking feedback in multiple ways, including via email, telephone or face-to-face interviews. Respecting an individual's preferred method for providing feedback is one way of practicing inclusion.

Collaborate with others in order to get the most complete Inventory.

This form is designed to allow you to share the work and allows more than one respondent to add content. Consider dividing your organization's responses to the topics below between committee members, administrators and lay leaders who have the most experience in each area. Gather relevant documents and printed materials to help you answer as completely as possible.

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WHAT’S NEXT?

Your congregation’s Inclusion Inventory can serve several purposes. Primarily, it is a good source of information that you can share with congregational leaders and members. It can also be used as a benchmark to show your progress to date, and a guide that can help you develop a plan for addressing your priority work areas. Report your results to your Board and the entire congregation.

DATE

CONGREGATION

ADDRESS

EMAIL

PHONE

PARTICIPATING RESPONDENTS (PROVIDE EACH NAME, EMAIL AND PHONE)

PART 1: PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY

Does your organization's physical environment welcome people with disabilities? Does it say "We want you here, you belong?"

Exterior of Facilities

- 1) Does your organization provide accessible parking spaces reserved for people with mobility limitation? Are they in good repair and usefully located?

- 2) Are building entrances accessible for people using wheelchairs? If only some entrances are accessible, does exterior signage clearly indicate their location? Are the accessible entrances kept unlocked? If not, when and how are they unlocked?

- 3) Can people with physical limitations open the exterior doors of your facilities without assistance? If not, is there a doorbell or some other effective way to call for assistance?

- 4) Are sidewalks and exterior spaces (patios, gardens, etc.) navigable by people with mobility limitations?

- 5) Is your synagogue served by accessible public transportation? If yes, do you make information regarding the transportation available on your website or through other communication? Do the transit schedules change in the evenings and weekends?

Interior of Facilities

Features for People with Physical Limitations

- 1) Can people with physical limitations open interior doors at your organization's facilities without assistance?

- 2) Is every area of the building accessible to people who cannot use stairs? Is the *bimah* accessible for people with mobility limitations? Is your Torah table accessible to people with physical limitations?

- 3) Are floors free of potential tripping hazards or barriers for people using walkers or wheelchairs (e.g. raised thresholds, deep carpets, or abrupt changes in flooring surface)?

- 4) Are light switches low enough to be reachable by people using wheelchairs and people of short stature?

- 5) Do seating configurations (in the sanctuary, classrooms and social spaces) accommodate people using wheelchairs?

- 6) Are halls and doorways of sufficient width (minimum 30 inches, preferably 32 inches) to allow wheelchair access?

- 7) Does your organization have wheelchair accessible restrooms? Are they typically locked or used as storage facilities for cleaning supplies? Can wheelchair accessible restrooms be accessed easily from any area in the synagogue? Are there companion restrooms so that a spouse, parent or PCA can assist someone of the opposite sex?

- 8) What areas of the building are not accessible? Think broadly, and include things like kitchens and administrative offices, which can be as important as sanctuaries and the *bimah*. Is there a social hall, or a space used only rarely, like a porch for the sukkah? Remember the questions above and think about access in terms of not just stairs, but doors, passageways and other features.

Accessibility Features

Features for People with Visual Impairment

- 1) Is lighting steady, glare-free and sufficiently bright for reading throughout the building?

- 2) Are large print and Braille *siddurim* readily available for those who need them?

Features for People Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- 1) Are assistive listening devices provided for all who need them at all activities, including services, special events and educational programs? Where are they? How often are the batteries checked and who does the checking? Who knows how they work and are these people routinely available at synagogue events?

- 2) Is there adequate lighting at the podium to facilitate lip reading?

- 3) Is sign language interpretation provided at services and events?

Miscellaneous Features

- 1) Are unscented/hypoallergenic cleaning products, candles, soaps and air fresheners used throughout the building?

- 2) Do you improve your synagogue's air quality by dusting woodwork, brass and other fixtures in the sanctuary, vacuuming with a HEPA filter and cleaning air conditioning filters on a regular basis?

- 3) Are there comfortable places where people can easily retreat if sitting still or staying quiet during services becomes difficult? Is the service piped in to facilitate uninterrupted inclusion in worship?

PART 2: PRACTICES AND POLICIES

Do your synagogue's practices and policies welcome people with disabilities?

Do written materials affirm your synagogue's commitment to inclusiveness?

General Policies

- 1) Does your program publicity include information about your building's accessibility and how to request reasonable accommodations? Do you include this information in the weekly bulletin, membership information and religious education packets? What information is available on your website?

- 2) Do materials that introduce your congregation to the community include a statement about disability inclusion and its benefits? Is this information on religious education materials, membership and website homepage, and included in your weekly bulletin? Does your congregation's mission statement include a commitment to disability inclusion? Is disability inclusion addressed in your strategic plan?

- 3) Do staff and lay leaders receive training on disability and inclusion? If so, describe the training briefly. Who is responsible for reviewing the training and keeping it up-to-date? How do they maintain their own expertise?

- 4) Are people with disabilities active participants in the life of the congregation? Do they attend services, oneg/Kiddush, learning opportunities, youth group, sisterhood and men's club, social events and congregational meetings?

- 5) Do people with disabilities serve in leadership roles: on committees, as worship leaders, on the board, as staff members and in all programs and services?

- 6) Does the synagogue offer transportation to services for people who need rides?

- 7) How does the synagogue pay for inclusion efforts? Is there a line item in the budget or named fund? Is financial assistance available for those people for whom cost is a barrier to attending synagogue programs whether by reason of disability or otherwise?

Outreach Practices

- 1) Do staff and/or layleaders reach out proactively to visitors or members with disabilities, and all members of the congregation (since disability is not always readily apparent) to learn if they have felt welcomed and included? Do you solicit suggestions for improvement?

- 2) If feedback is solicited, what types of responses have you received? Do people with disabilities feel welcome, comfortable and included? If not, what reasons do they identify or can you infer from their feedback? If you're not sure, you may consider contacting them directly.

Education and B'nai Mitzvot

- 1) What resources are generally available to support inclusion of children with disabilities in classrooms and other activities?

- 2) Does the synagogue provide accommodations for students with disabilities who wish to become b'nai mitzvot? Is there a policy available in writing for parents? What sorts of modifications is your synagogue prepared to make? What is the process for developing a modified bar or bat mitzvah plan?

- 3) Is your synagogue willing to work with outside professionals that can assist in preparation for b'nai mitzvot for people with disabilities? If yes, how is this information made available to such an individual?

The Prayer Service

- 1) Are ushers taught appropriate ways to greet and accommodate people with a range of disabilities? Are ushers, worship leaders and congregants prepared to respond helpfully and without judgment to disruptive behavior, including unexpected noises during worship, study or social activities?

- 2) Do people who lead services frequently announce the page numbers?

- 3) What efforts are made to ensure meaningful participation in Torah rituals for people with disabilities? For example, does your congregation ensure that those who are able are offered *aliyot*, or opportunities for *Hagbah* and *Gelilah*—the lifting and dressing of the Torah?

- 4) Does your congregation offer an adapted liturgy that uses language or pictures that can easily be understood by someone with cognitive or developmental disorders?

- 5) Does your synagogue offer meaningful alternatives to choreographic instructions which might exclude people with disabilities (for example, “For those who are able to do so, please rise.”)?

Other Programs

- 1) Does your synagogue use various methods to facilitate the participation of people with disabilities in youth activities? Does your synagogue provide clear information to parents and children that people with disabilities are welcome, and that you will work with them to understand particular needs and to jointly develop solutions?

- 2) What methods (if any) are used to assure access for adults with disabilities to adult education programs?

- 3) What accommodations are in place for people with food allergies at kiddush, community dinners or other events where food is served?

- 4) What policies are in place to make sure that people with disabilities can participate in synagogue programming held outside the synagogue? What solutions have you used to overcome unique barriers?

Remember to report your results and then share any updates with your congregation.

To share your completed Inventory with CJP, or for more information,
contact Molly Silver at mollys@cjpa.org or call 617-457-8852.

Thank you for your thoughtful responses. We look forward to working with you as you expand your inclusion efforts.

The Ruderman Synagogue Inclusion Project (RSIP) is a partnership between CJP and the Ruderman Family Foundation to support synagogues in creating communities where people of all abilities are valued equally and participate fully.
