UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK

SYNAGOGUE INCLUSION PROJECT

Synagogue Inclusion Inventory

"For My house shall be a house of prayer for all people" - Isaiah 56:5

A congregation planning to be more inclusive of people with disabilities needs to identify any barriers to the full participation of people with disabilities that exist in their community. The congregation should assess the degree to which they are strong and identify where improvement is needed in different areas of inclusion. One advantage to conducting an initial evaluation is that it provides a means to assess the effectiveness of any changes made to improve inclusiveness over time. The initial assessment provides a baseline for which changes in inclusiveness can be compared.

The Synagogue Inclusion Inventory is a helpful tool for congregations conducting an initial assessment. This inventory aids congregations in assessing where they currently stand in the following areas: Physical Accessibility, Practices and Policies, and Awareness and Attitudes.

This Inventory is simple to use as each item on the instrument can be responded to with one of three possible responses, Yes, Some or No. There is also space provided to expand upon the three. Completing the evaluation is most effective when two (or more) individuals in different roles walk around the outside and inside of the facility and actually observe the space, particularly for the Physical Accessibility portion of the assessment. Having two individuals involved in the walk-around provides the opportunity for discussion about observations. The give-and-take process will increase the accuracy of the findings. The other two portions of the Inventory should also be completed by the same individuals, who have knowledge about the inner workings of the synagogue and have access to documents, such as policies and procedures, and knowledge of how the congregation operates.

Using this inventory, congregations can assess where they are and what work needs to be done, and can begin to develop an action plan for achieving their inclusion goals.

Synagogue Inclusion Inventory

Please use the following checklist 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/caregivers of people with disabilities in the process of completing this inventory. Rather than a simple yes or no, your answers to some questions will likely be qualified. Please take time to note exceptions, concerns, or observations relating to each question.

Part 1: Physical Accessibility

Does our physical environment welcome people with disabilities?
Does our environment say "We want you here -- you belong?"

	Yes	Some	No	Notes *(exceptions, descriptions, challenges)*
EXTERIOR				
1. Are accessible parking spaces reserved for people with mobility limitation?				
2. Are building entrances accessible to people using wheelchairs?				
3. Are clearly visible signs posted outside to indicate the location of accessible				
4. If separate from the main doors, are accessible entrances comparably welcoming and attractive?				
5. Can people with physical limitations open exterior doors without assistance?				
6. Are sidewalks and exterior spaces (patios, gardens, *etc.*) navigable by people with mobility limitations?				

	Yes	Some	No	Notes *(exceptions, descriptions, challenges)*
INTERIOR				
1. Are *mezuzot* low enough to be reached by people using wheelchairs and people of short stature?				
2. Can people with physical limitations open interior doors without assistance?				
3. Can wheelchair-accessible restrooms be accessed easily from any area in the synagogue?				
4. Is every area of the building accessible to people who cannot use stairs?				
5. Can wheelchair-accessible water fountains be reached easily from any area in the building?				
6. Is priority seating reserved for people with mobility limitations?				
7. Do seating configurations (in the sanctuary, classrooms, and social spaces) accommodate people using wheelchairs?				
8. Are floors free of potential tripping hazards or barriers for people using walkers or wheelchairs (e.g. raised thresholds, deep carpet, or abrupt changes in flooring surface)?				
9. Is lighting even, glare-free, and sufficiently bright for reading throughout the building?				
10. Are halls and doorways of sufficient width to allow wheelchair access?				
11. Are light switches low enough to be reachable by people using wheelchairs and people of short stature?				

	Yes	Some	No	Notes *(exceptions, descriptions, challenges)*
12. Are there work surfaces in the kitchen that can be used by people who use wheelchairs or who need to sit while preparing food?				
13. Is the *bimah* accessible to people who cannot use stairs?				
14. Is the Torah accessible or made accessible to people with physical challenges or of short stature?				
15. Are *tallitot* and *kippot* easily reachable for people using wheelchairs and walkers?				
16. Are large-print and Braille *siddurim* readily available for those who need them?				
17. Are assistive listening devices provided for all who need them at services, special events, and educational programs?				
18. Is sign-language interpretation provided at services and events?				
19. Does the synagogue have a TTY?				
20. Is there adequate lighting at the podium to facilitate lip reading?				
21. Are unscented/hypoallergenic cleaning products, candles, soaps, and air fresheners used throughout the building?				
22. Are there accommodations for people who cannot hold heavy books (e.g. sections provided in lightweight copies)?				
23. Are there comfortable places to which people can easily retreat during services if sitting still or staying quiet becomes difficult? Is the service piped in to facilitate uninterrupted inclusion in worship?				

Part 2: Practices and Policies

Do our synagogue's practices and policies welcome people with disabilities?
Do written materials affirm our synagogue's commitment to inclusiveness?

	Yes	Some	No	Notes *(exceptions, descriptions, challenges)*
1. Do the synagogue's mission statement and written descriptions include language about welcoming people with disabilities?				
2. Does the membership application ask questions regarding needs for accommodation to facilitate full inclusion in synagogue activities?				
3. Does all program publicity include a statement about inclusivity and offer information about available accommodations?				
4. Does the religious school have a special needs policy that supports full inclusion of children with disabilities?				
5. Does the synagogue have specific programs and resources to support inclusion of children with disabilities in classrooms and other activities?				
6. Does the synagogue provide accommodations for students with disabilities who wish to become b'nai mitzvah?				
7. Does the synagogue offer transportation to services for people who need rides?				

	Yes	Some	No	Notes (exceptions, descriptions, challenges)
8. Do leaders and congregants consistently use people-first language?				
9. Does the synagogue have an inclusion committee?				
10. Do staff and/or lay leaders reach out proactively to visitors or members with disabilities to solicit their feedback? (Do they feel welcome, comfortable, included? If not, why not?)				
11. Are congregants invited to stand "as they are able" during worship services?				
12. Do staff and/or lay leaders reach out proactively to visitors or members with disabilities to solicit their feedback? (Do they feel welcome, comfortable, included? If not, why not?)				
13. Are congregants invited to stand "as they are able" during worship services?				

Part 3: Awareness and Attitudes

Are our members comfortable including people with a range of disabilities in all aspects of synagogue life?
Are people with disabilities welcomed with understanding and respect in worship, study, and social settings?

	Yes	Some	No	Notes *(exceptions, descriptions, challenges)*
1. Do staff and lay leaders receive training in disabilities awareness and inclusive behavior?				
2. Are ushers taught appropriate ways to greet and accommodate people with a range of disabilities?				
3. Are ushers, worship leaders, and congregants prepared to respond helpfully and without judgment to disruptive behavior during worship, study, or social activities?				
4. Has the synagogue sponsored an inclusion awareness Shabbat or workshop?				
5. Is disabilities awareness part of the religious school curriculum?				

Part 4: Safety and Security

Are we prepared to protect and support all our members in the event of an emergency?

	Yes	Some	No	Notes *(exceptions, descriptions, challenges)*
1. Has your congregation developed a safety plan?				
2. Has your congregation developed a safety plan that includes communicating about an emergency to individuals with disabilities including vision or hearing loss?				
3. Has your congregation developed plans to safely assist and evacuate people with disabilities during an emergency?				
4. Has your congregation practiced your safety plan with members of your congregation including individuals with disabilities?				

Focus Group Guide

"All Israel is responsible for one another." - Mishnah Sanhedrin

Setting the Stage
"Today, we want to hear your opinions and experiences with inclusion of people with disabilities at your synagogue. We want to learn more about your thoughts, so there are no right or wrong answers.

By joining us today and answering questions, you are agreeing to participate in this Focus Group. While we will be using the information you provide us with further in the future, your individual responses to our questions will remain confidential. This means that your identity will be protected, and no one working for the synagogue will know specifically who you are. Finally, with your permission, we would like to record tonight's Focus Group so we can spend more time speaking with you and less time taking notes. If anyone objects to this, that is fine, and we will take notes instead. Does anyone object to recording this meeting?"

Introduction
"To begin, it would be a good idea for us to get to know each other and why we are here. Let's go around the room and please share the following:

- What is your first name?
- With whom do you live?
- What is your connection to disability?"

General Synagogue
"In this next set of questions, we would like to know more about your experiences with your congregation, in general."

- What made you choose to be part of [*name of synagogue*]?
- What draws you here?
- What keeps you here?
- Can you describe the culture/community at [*name of synagogue*]?

Awareness of Inclusion

- Do you think your synagogue is known as being inclusive of people with disabilities and their families? [ask for specific examples]
- How aware/unaware do you think members are of the efforts of the synagogue to be inclusive?

    [PROBE] If members are aware, how did they find out about these efforts (flyers, marketing, website, word of mouth, etc.)?

    [PROBE] If members are mostly unaware of these efforts, what are the major reasons?

State of Inclusion

- How would you describe the state of inclusion of people with disabilities at your synagogue?
- What do you think are the perceptions of congregants of people with disabilities? [ask for examples]
- What do you think is going right?

Barriers to Inclusion

- What do you see as the challenges to inclusion?

    [PROBE] Are the challenges systemic or just something that can be easily improved?
- What is the biggest barrier to inclusion of people with disabilities at your synagogue?

    [PROBE] How can this barrier be overcome?

Improving Inclusiveness

- What would the perfect inclusive environment look like for you?
- What are the kinds of concrete strides that could be taken to improve the areas discussed?
- Are there any interim measures you think would be important to take if the synagogue couldn't afford to change everything (perceptions, better physical access, religious school, inclusion committee, leadership)?
- Which of the following do you think would help improve inclusiveness here? (Distribute list)
    - A series of awareness-raising lectures for adults?
    - Programming for young adults?
    - More Shabbat talks from the Rabbi on being a more inclusive synagogue?
    - More parent education?
    - Social skills groups for children with disabilities?
    - More inclusive programming for children and teens?
      [PROBE] What other ideas might you have?

Conclusion

"We have really appreciated your time in discussing this important issue today.
Before we conclude, is there anything else you think we should.