

# Federation's Disability Inclusion Planning Toolkit

## Physical Accessibility Discussion Guide

Making the physical space welcoming and inclusive for all.

This discussion guide is designed to spark conversation about the accessibility of your physical space. We encourage you to gather your colleagues and start a conversation within your organization that will increase awareness and attitudinal adjustments through exploration of accommodations that enable your organization to be fully inclusive. As with all disability inclusion work, the voices of those with disabilities are essential to this process.

Additional information about advancing disability inclusion can be found on [Federation's Community Resource website](#). Please contact Lisa Handelman at 301-230-7278 or at [lisa.handelman@shalomdc.org](mailto:lisa.handelman@shalomdc.org) for questions or to share additional resources.

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### Toolkit Legend

- W** "Welcoming" questions and comments refer to changes that may involve modification in attitude, but do not necessarily require additional funding.
- A** "Accommodating" questions and comments focus on specific accommodations that may require minimal additional resources, long-term planning and/or significant funding. Some costs are ongoing while others involve initial structural changes followed by less expensive maintenance.

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### Events

- W** **In terms of physical accessibility, what do event planners need to take into consideration?** For example, is seating provided during pre-events or standing events, is space for wheelchairs distributed throughout with companion seats nearby and is there a plan in place to support those who may have difficulty holding heavy books, or juggling plates and utensils? Is there a formal way to ask guests what accommodations they may need?
- A** **What accommodation can make your events even more physically accessible?** For example, is there a comfortable place where people can easily retreat if sitting still or staying quiet becomes difficult, are their assistive listening devices readily available? How can you remove barriers, so all individuals are able to attend and participate?

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### Interior Spaces

- W** **Do you keep interior spaces neat and organized so people with mobility limitations can navigate through the space?** For example, are floors free of potential tripping hazards or barriers so individuals with visual disabilities or those using walkers or wheelchairs can move around and find a place to sit when they have arrived at the meeting, event or service? If there are inaccessible spaces, can meetings or classes be moved to areas where all can attend? Can items be moved or rearranged to increase equal access?



- A What changes to your interior spaces can you make with minimal additional resources?** For example, can lighting be adjusted to facilitate lip reading and reading in general, are there inexpensive changes to lessen abrupt changes in floor surfacing, can light switches be moved low enough to be reachable by people using wheelchairs and people of short stature? Can you add adjustable workspace for those who use wheelchairs/scooters or need to sit while working? Can you start to switch to unscented/hypoallergenic cleaning products, candles, soaps and air fresheners?
  - A What changes to your interior space may you need to plan for?** Does your building meet ADA code? Can people with physical limitations open interior doors without assistance, is the bimah accessible to all, is there a route of travel throughout the building for a person using a wheelchair, do all staircases have continuous rails, and is there an elevator or lift if stairs are unavoidable? Are there accessible restrooms and wheelchair-accessible water fountains?
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## Exterior Spaces

- W Are sidewalks and exterior spaces kept clear, so all can navigate the exterior spaces?** Are there ample parking spaces close to the entrance reserved for those with handicapped parking permits and is there signage that welcomes all and directs guests to the building entrance? Is there a plan to keep sidewalks clear in inclement weather?
  - A Are sidewalks and exterior spaces accessible for all?** Do curbs at parking and drop-off areas have curb cuts, is there a welcoming, accessible entrance that can be used independently by individuals with disabilities, can people with physical limitations open other exterior doors without assistance? Can everyone enter through the same main doorway?
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## Emergency Planning

- W Do you have a practiced emergency plan in place to safely evacuate or shelter in place, people with disabilities?**
  - A Are all emergency exits accessible to people with physical and visual disabilities and do emergency systems have both flashing lights and audible signals?**
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## Signage & Communication

- W Communication starts by asking people what they need.** Consider adding signs indicating accessible entrances/exits and accessible restrooms. Bold decals can be used to mark glass doors, so no one runs into them. Explore alternative communication methods for individuals with communication needs or hearing impairments (MD Relay, text, email, phone with TTD to call in about inclement weather).
  - A Are your interior signs mounted with a centerline 60 inches from the floor with raised characters and braille text?**
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## Sanctuary & Religious Items

- W** Consider moving materials low enough to be reached by people using wheelchairs and people of short stature. Are your *tallitot*, *kippot*, *mezuzot* and printed materials (brochures, announcement guides) easily reachable for people using wheelchairs and walkers? Consider how to make the Torah accessible to all.
  - A** Explore purchasing items that accommodate all. For example, an adjustable Torah stand, alternative siddurim (large print, braille, lightweight copies of materials), audio amplifiers or reading stands for people who cannot hold heavy books.
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## Budget

- W** Design a strategic budgetary plan with a clear timeline to support changes needed to make your building physically accessible. Make sure the budget includes funds for new purchases and ongoing maintenance.
- A** Review your strategic budgetary plan. Make sure make sure that individuals with disabilities and their families are not asked to cover the costs of accommodations. Implement your plan so that all can access and utilize your physical spaces.