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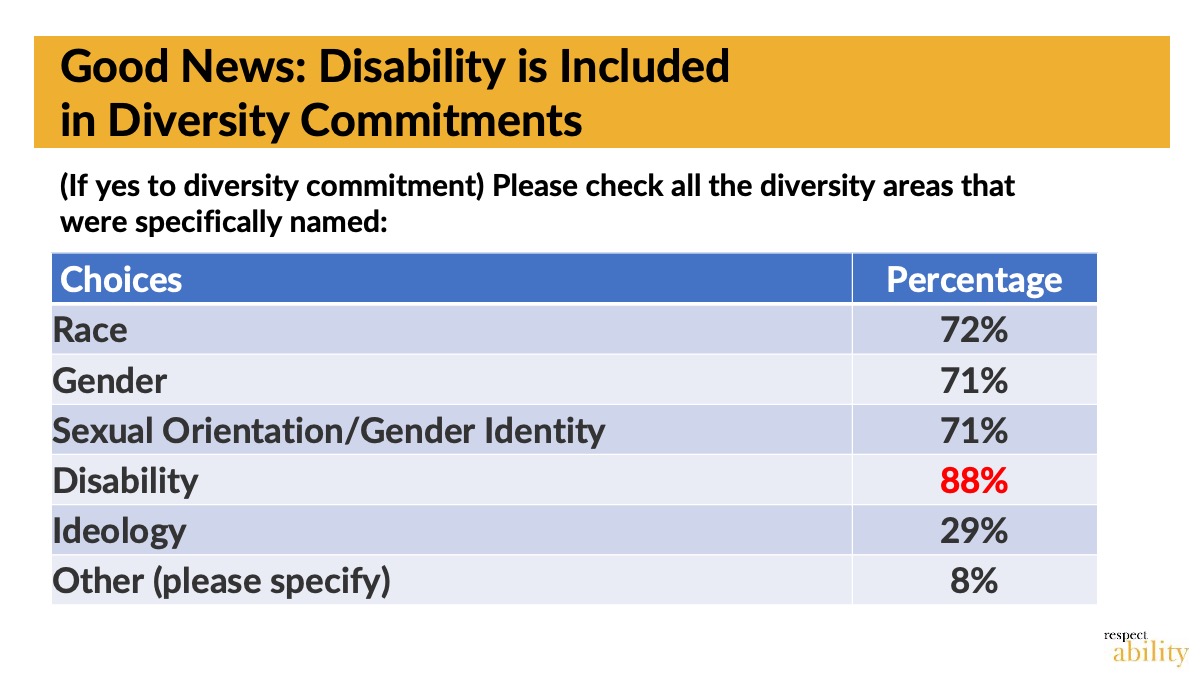
We also want to thank our generous donors, including Vivian and Raymond Bass, The David Berg Foundation, The Beverly Foundation, Shelley and Ruvan Cohen, Judith Creed and Robert Schwartz, Einstein Sim Family, Cheri Fox, Daniel Goldsmith, Aline and Leo Jacobsohn Foundation, Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles, Jewish Venture Philanthropy Fund, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies, and Ann and Andrew Tisch.

Most of all, we want to thank you! If you are using this toolkit, you have begun the critical work of opening the Jewish community to Jews with disabilities. We are excited to contemplate the mutual benefits as you welcome the one-in-five Jews with disabilities into your communities.

**For More Information:**[info@RespectAbility.org](mailto:info@RespectAbility.org)

[www.RespectAbility.org](http://www.RespectAbility.org)

# Introduction

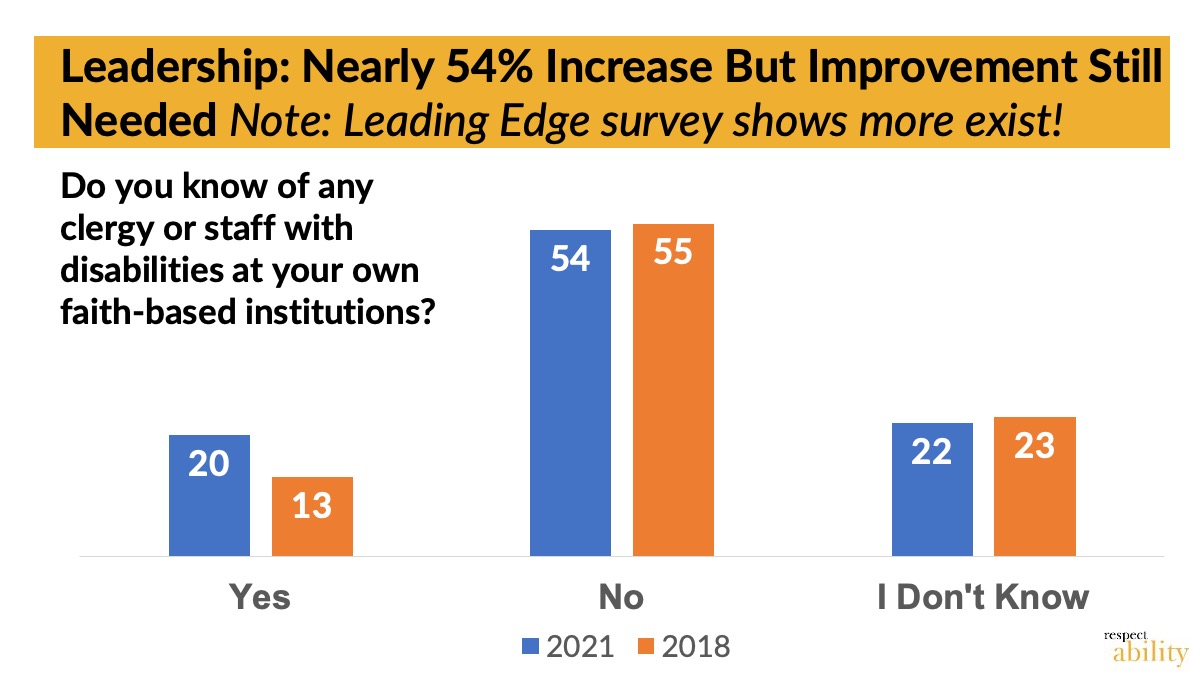
Welcome to your journey of disability inclusion! Your commitment to ensure that the one-in-five members of the Jewish community who have disabilities can bring their talents, gifts, and whole selves to our community can truly strengthen us all.

When RespectAbility was founded in 2013, there were very few disability inclusion initiatives in the Jewish community. Now, thanks to the hard work of many leaders in the community, there are several such initiatives. In fact, according to a large-scale 2021 [survey](https://www.respectability.org/2021/11/jewish-survey-results-2021/) conducted by RespectAbility, 88 percent of diversity commitments made by faith organizations specifically included disability. This represents major progress in the last decade that is worth celebrating. Respondents shared examples of success, including:

“Friendship Circle run by Chabad has made a big impact on how the Jewish community engages individuals with disabilities.”

“We raised money to build a ramp up to the bimah so it would be accessible to anyone in a wheelchair or with mobility issues.”

“My synagogue began incorporating visual descriptions into all virtual events to support low-vision congregants.”

“Accommodations have been regularly accessible on Zoom programming via subtitles, sharing screens to make notes available in real time, and other great technological means of inclusion.”

But there is still room for growth. While a Leading Edge survey of over 11,000 Jewish professionals showed more than 800 people with disabilities work for Jewish organizations, only 20 percent of respondents to the RespectAbility survey said they knew any clergy or staff with disabilities at their own faith-based institutions.

This gap implies that people with disabilities are not comfortable enough in the Jewish community to self-disclose. And in response to the question, “have you or another person with a disability in your household ever been turned away from an activity at an organization in your faith community because of its inability or unwillingness to make a reasonable accommodation?” 22 percent of respondents said yes. Respondents shared painful experiences of exclusion, including:

“My son was welcome at synagogue preschool but only if we hired / provided a 1:1 support person for him (doubling the cost of his attending) and only if his inclusion did not negatively affect the experience of other kids and teachers.”

“Both my husband and I have been excluded, because my autism and his anxiety disorder made other congregants/club members feel uncomfortable. Some said we are ‘too complicated’ needing ‘always’ special accommodation.”  
“Online programs that do not include closed captioning or similar, holiday celebrations and event that did not factor in the needs and access of those with disabilities – those accommodations need to be considered essential, NOT optional / nice to have.”

Beyond these anecdotes, we surveyed the community to see where there was the most access and where there were the most challenges. These are their responses:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Segment of Jewish Community** | **Best Access** | **Most Challenging** |
| Jewish Federation | 5% | 3% |
| Jewish Day Schools | 4% | 12% |
| Jewish Summer Camps | 9% | 5% |
| Synagogues | 21% | 18% |
| Social Organizations such as Pop-Up Shabbat, Chavurahs | 3% | 5% |
| Jewish Human Services Organizations | 14% | 1% |
| Jewish Social Justice/Civic Engagement/Advocacy Groups | 5% | 2% |
| I Don’t Know | 32% | 50% |
| Other (please specify) | 7% | 4% |

In addition to questions of access within the programming of the general Jewish community, there is a further issue that while a great number Jewish inclusion programs are set up for people with intellectual disabilities, most people with disabilities do not have an intellectual disability. Below, you can see the disabilities of the survey respondents:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Disability** | **Percentage** | **Number** |
| On The Autism Spectrum | 13.35% | 243 |
| Learning Disability | 15.44% | 281 |
| Developmental Disability | 8.52% | 155 |
| Cognitive Disability | 7.36% | 134 |
| Intellectual Disability | 5.49% | 100 |
| Speech Or Language Disability | 6.98% | 127 |
| Mental Health | 20.88% | 380 |
| Orthopedic Disability | 11.92% | 217 |
| Hard Of Hearing/Hearing Loss | 14.01% | 255 |
| Deafness | 2.75% | 50 |
| Blindness Or Low Vision | 3.46% | 63 |
| Traumatic Brain Injury | 2.25% | 41 |
| Neuromuscular Disability | 5.60% | 102 |
| Neurological Disability | 7.86% | 143 |
| Immuno-Deficiency | 4.07% | 74 |
| Auto-Immune | 10.11% | 184 |
| Chronic Pain | 15.11% | 275 |
| Other (please specify) | 11.87% | 216 |

Major [studies](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0963721417738825) have found that people with disabilities are often viewed through the lens of what they cannot do, instead of what they can achieve. But an [Accenture study](https://www.accenture.com/_acnmedia/pdf-89/accenture-disability-inclusion-research-report.pdf) showed that hiring disabled employees actually makes companies more successful. The same is true of Jewish organizations.

This toolkit will provide a wealth of knowledge on how to be more inclusive. It starts by recognizing that creating a truly inclusive organization is more than any one practice. For it to truly take root in your organization, leadership at all levels need to communicate, publicly and repeatedly, the idea that all types of people, including individuals with disabilities, are of equal value. Accessibility needs to be built into all diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, programming, human resource systems, and communications. From a practical perspective, this is not nearly as hard as it may sound, and this toolkit will guide you. It all starts with a values-based commitment.

The good news is that this value encompasses both justice and benefit, and this is well known to the Jewish community. 57% of the over 2300 respondents to our survey found that the most convincing reason why inclusion of people with disabilities should be a more important priority for the Jewish community is because “we are a stronger community when we are welcoming, diverse, and respect one another. Everyone should feel that their presence and participation is welcome and meaningful.”

We will benefit when our children, parents, grandparents, and friends with disabilities have an equal opportunity to fully participate in our community. And we know that problems are best solved by working with people who have experienced them firsthand and who understand the solutions that work. This means that the more Jews with disabilities sit at decision making tables, the easier we will find it to include even more.

Throughout this guide, there are resources for people of all ages. We address topics including Jewish education, Jewish values, prayers & services, hosting accessible in-person, virtual, and hybrid events, appropriate language, disability etiquette, and more. Not all the materials offered are specific to Jewish environments, but all are important to them. Where possible, we have modified this content to address specific considerations of Jewish law and practice. Of course, you should always consult your religious authority on what is permitted, but if you find that you are having trouble resolving an apparent conflict between Jewish law and the guidance within this toolkit, please don’t hesitate to email [info@respectability.org](mailto:info@respectability.org) in case we can help clarify strategies for success.

# Inclusion 101

## Basic Inclusion Tips

People with disabilities bring a lot to the table. However, they must actually be invited and have ways to get there! Here are some tips on how to include people with disabilities in your services, religious schools, or other related Jewish events and organizations:

**Ensure people with disabilities are part of the solution.** People with disabilities are ready to contribute their lived experiences to problem-solving and deserve a seat at decision-making tables. Research shows that giving them that seat is a key component to doing better on disability issues across the board. People with disabilities have valuable insights and experience to share as it pertains to disability inclusion (as well as to every other issue apart from disability). This is similar to when organizations take on issues that affect people of different racial, ethnic, or other backgrounds.

**Recognize the talents of people with disabilities.** Major studies have found that the public largely views people with disabilities as warm and kind, but not necessarily competent. Indeed, people with disabilities are largely viewed through the lens of what they CANNOT do, instead of what they can achieve. However, people with disabilities can be exceptionally talented. After all, actress Marlee Matlin, violinist Itzhak Perlman, and disability rights activist Judith Heumann are all recognized as top talents in the Jewish disability and wider communities. Entrepreneur Elon Musk, poet Amanda Gorman, climate activist Greta Thunberg, and gymnast Simone Biles are all at the top of their professions – and all have disabilities. As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us, every organization needs people who are experts in resiliency and innovation. People with disabilities fit the bill!

**Open hearts and minds to see ableism all around us.** When you enter a building that does not have a doorway or bathroom accessible to someone who uses a wheelchair, do you recognize it and take actions to correct it? When a virtual public meeting is happening on Zoom without free instant captioning turned on – so people who are Deaf and/or Hard of Hearing can participate – do you ask them to stop and click on the button to enable accessibility? When organizations post photos of large groups at events without a single person with a visible disability, do you ask why not? Once you look for ableism, you will realize it is everywhere. Recognizing it is the first step to stopping it.

**Use accessible facilities and/or update facilities to make them more welcoming to people with disabilities.** Facilities should accommodate people with disabilities. Important action items include adding ramps, widening doorways, ensuring accessible bathrooms, and adding automatic openers to main office doors. If you are renting a facility, some landlords will install accessible features, such as electronic door openers and accessible bathrooms, for free or low cost. Events should only be held in accessible locations.

**Create an inclusion committee and bring in experts on disability access and inclusion.** It is critical that disabled people are on your access and inclusion team. At the same time, avoid tokenism. Invite people to participate who have expertise in the area. A point person should ensure that when disability inclusion and access standards are set, they are truly met. Outside experts could include trainers for lunch-and-learns on Disability 101 and specialists who can conduct an inclusion audit and help you create a go-forward plan to ensure access and inclusion. [RespectAbility](https://www.respectability.org/speakers-bureau) offers a wide range of Jewish speakers with disabilities who you can find [at our website](https://www.respectability.org/speakers-bureau/). You can also reach out to other organizations, such as your regional [ADA center](https://adata.org/find-your-region) and other disability groups.

**Add disability to all demographic tracking and performance metrics.** Not everyone realizes what counts as a disability. Thus, all tracking should start by clearly stating what a disability is so that people can properly answer. We suggest the following question: “*A disability can be a physical, cognitive, sensory, mental health, chronic pain or another condition that is a substantial barrier to everyday living. In describing your connection to disability, please check all that apply:*

* + I have a disability
  + I have a close friend or family member with a disability
  + I do not have a disability.

I prefer not to disclose.

Once you have that data, you can see if people with and without disabilities are experiencing Jewish life and community in the same ways. Studies so far have found that more Jews with disabilities are being included to some extent in the Jewish community, but they are still treated like second class citizens and are experiencing Judaism very differently due to multiple barriers that this guide – and hopefully your future actions – will help address. Through data collection, you can track if disabled people are participating in your work. Use feedback loops to gauge how they feel about the experience compared to others without a disability. This will identify any challenges that need solving. For example, a recent major study by Leading Edge showed that there are more than 800 employees with disabilities in Jewish organizations. Many of them are young and relatively new to working in Jewish organizations. They are ready to take on more challenges and increase their impact. On the other hand, the same study shows us that there is room for growth in equipping them to shine at these organizations. It is very important to understand these opportunities at your own organization to assess whether people feel that they can be accepted and respected if they bring their authentic full selves to work. In some cases, that means they need to have disability accommodations. The national data is below:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Question** | **Disabled Respondents** | **All Respondents** | **Difference** |
| Our systems and processes generally support us in getting our work done effectively (feel free to leave specific examples and suggestions in the comments) | 52% | 62% | -10% |
| Workloads are divided fairly within my team/department | 52% | 61% | -9% |
| I have the resources that I need to do my job effectively | 68% | 76% | -9% |
| I believe my workload is reasonable for my role | 59% | 68% | -9% |
| Most days I feel that I am making progress with my work | 70% | 78% | -8% |
| I have access to the information that I need to do my job effectively | 78% | 84% | -6% |
| I have enough autonomy to do my job effectively | 84% | 88% | -4% |
| My organization provides the necessary disability accommodations that allow me to succeed in my work | 54% | 53% | 1% |

* **Conduct a formal audit of your disability equity, access, and inclusion practices.** This includes a review of:
  + Your facilities and events – using only accessible spaces and practices and promoting universal design
  + Your online presence – ensuring websites and social media comply with the Web Accessibility Initiative’s [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/) so people with disabilities can benefit and participate in your work and success
  + Your employment and volunteer practices – encompassing but not limited to accommodations, talent recruitment, and retention policies
  + Your grantmaking and other processes and systems, both for external (grantee) and internal (staff) users – ensure they are fully accessible. For example, Jewish Federations and funders can put into their grant agreements that all their grantees should report on disability data and have a specific and measurable plan and budget to ensure that they are accessible to people with disabilities.
  + Your decision-making processes – ensure that people with disabilities are centered when addressing issues that impact them.

**Set S.M.A.R.T. (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) disability access and inclusion goals**. Key goals can include using free accessibility tools and practices to ensure online events are screen reader accessible and have captions. An easy-to-meet goal is ensuring that all in-person events are held in fully accessible facilities, noting that in the invitation and inviting participants to request accommodations. It is also important to enable virtual work and offer health care and wellness programs.

**Celebrate and Share Best Practices and Self-Advocates:** Form an employee resource groups for people with disabilities and their families​. Make sure that people in your community know what accommodations are and how to request and receive them. Create a PR campaign around successful lay leaders/volunteers and staff with disabilities to lift up role models​.

## Using the Appropriate Lexicon

We all know of the power of words, and we probably realize that the use of certain words or phrases, regardless of intent, can express bias. The pointers below will help you ensure that you do not inadvertently express bias that you do not actually feel.

**Person First Language Versus Identity First Language: Ask the Person.** While many professionals within the disability community push person-first language (person with a disability, or a person who uses a wheelchair), some individuals with disabilities prefer identity-first (disabled person, or Autistic). Ask the person what language they prefer and abide by their wishes.

**Think about other language that you use.** What is considered acceptable language regarding disabilities has changed over time. Many terms that were once widely used are now considered offensive. Some of these terms are taken to imply inferiority or have other negative connotations. Others are outdated medical or colloquial terms. Avoid terms like “wheelchair-bound” and “suffers from.” “Accessible bathrooms and parking spaces” should not be referred to as “handicap bathrooms and parking spaces.” People with disabilities do not want to be referred to as “victims” or with other negative terms.

**People with disabilities should not be described as “inspirational” or “courageous” just because they have a disability.** Inspiration porn is when people with disabilities are called inspirational or brave for doing something as simple as exercising or being invited to a prom. Inspiration porn assumes that anyone with a disability is inherently worse off than nondisabled people, which further stigmatizes people with disabilities.

**Use the word “disability.” Terms like “physically challenged,” “special” and “differently-abled” can be seen as patronizing.** Saying "differently-abled" or "special," for instance, may seem on the surface to convey that someone with a disability has positive qualities about him, her, or them. However, terms like these tend to be euphemistic, and frequently are not used by the people to whom they refer. Many people with disabilities have taken on the word “disability” as a label of pride. In addition, people with disabilities are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act. People with “special needs” are not.

**People without disabilities are not “normal.” Saying “normal” implies that people with disabilities are “abnormal.”** While people without disabilities often are referred to as “able-bodied,” some members of the disability community oppose its use because it implies that all people living with disabilities lack “able bodies.” Instead, use the term “nondisabled,” “does not have a disability” or “is not living with a disability.”

## Avoiding Pitfalls When Interacting with People with Disabilities

Before you read about some common mistakes people make when interacting with disabled people, we direct you to a [humorous video, less than four minutes long,](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gv1aDEFlXq8) from the [D.C. Office of Disability Rights](https://odr.dc.gov/), which entertains while making several important points. Here are a few key ones to remember:

**People with disabilities are human.** Acknowledge disabled individuals’ differences as you would acknowledge anyone else’s uniqueness and treat them as you would treat anyone else. Do not talk down to them. Interact with them in the same way you would interact with anyone else. Please resist the temptation to ask “curious” questions about the disability; they may not be appropriate.

**Speak directly to a person with a disability,** not to their companion or sign language interpreter. A lack of immediate response does not indicate that the person can’t or won’t respond. It is important to make eye contact with the individual when speaking to them, not their personal assistant/attendant, interpreter, or people around them.

**Adults with disabilities are adults and deserve to be treated and spoken to as adults.** Do not make decisions for adults with disabilities. Do not tell people what to do or use baby talk. Provide individuals with disabilities every option you provide those without disabilities. If the option they choose presents a difficulty concerning their disability, discuss ways things could be modified, or adapt the choice.

**When in doubt, ask!** Just because someone has a disability, do not assume they need help. Do not give assistance without asking first if they want it. Respect someone’s choice even if it looks like they’re struggling. If there is a dangerous situation, help just as you would help someone without a disability.

**A person’s mobility equipment, such as a wheelchair, scooter, or cane, is part of his or her personal space.** Do not touch or move the mobility devices of a person with a disability, even if the person puts it down or chooses to leave it somewhere. Leaning on someone’s wheelchair is like leaning on their shoulder. Putting something in someone’s carry basket is like putting something in their backpack. It is vital that an individual with a disability knows where their equipment is at all times.

**Listen attentively when you are talking with a person who has difficulty speaking.** Be patient and wait for an individual to finish speaking, rather than correcting or speaking for that person. If necessary, ask short or close-ended questions that require short answers, a nod, or shake of the head. Never pretend to understand an individual if there is difficulty understanding what was said. Instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond.

**There are visible disabilities as well as nonvisible disabilities, meaning not all disabilities are apparent.** A person may make a request or act in a way that seems different than what someone may be used to. That request or behavior may be disability related. For example, someone may give seemingly direct verbal directions to an individual, but the person with a disability may ask for the information to be written down. They may have a learning disability that makes written communication easier. Even though these disabilities are not visible, they are real.

**People who are neurodivergent and/or have psychiatric disabilities may have varying personalities and different ways of coping with their disability.** Some may have trouble picking up on social cues; others may be highly sensitive. One person may be very high energy, while someone else may appear sluggish. Treat each person as the individual they are. Ask what will make him, her, or them most comfortable and respect his, her, or their needs to the maximum extent possible.

**Please note it is considered highly offensive to pretend to have a disability,** and disability simulation experiences should be done for design/navigational purposes only. Pretending to have a disability is highly offensive to those who navigate life with disabilities every day.

Learn more by reading the United Spinal Association’s Disability Etiquette booklet: <https://unitedspinal.org/disability-etiquette/>.

## Resources on Jewish Values

Jewish values have a strong emphasis on inclusion, especially those of Kehillah (community), Kavod (respect), and Tikkun Olam (repairing the world). The sources below can help you explore how these, and other Jewish values, play out in the disability sphere:

* [Disability and Judaism: Our Fates are Linked](https://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/disability-and-judaism-our-fates-are-linked/): An article from the New York Jewish Week shares the perspective of the spouse of a Jewish person with disabilities.
* [Guide to Jewish Values and Disability Rights](http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/jfn/legacy_url/493/guide_to_jewish_values_and_disability_rights-16-5-23.pdf?1486740983): Jewish Funders Network’s comprehensive 48-page resource addresses the importance of disability rights in the context of different Jewish values. Articles cover such topics as stigma, responsibility, and social justice.
* [Hineinu: Jewish Texts on Disability Inclusion](https://rac.org/hineinu-jewish-texts-disability-inclusion): Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism shares Jewish texts on the value of inclusion.
* [Inclusion as a Jewish Value](https://www.respectability.org/2020/06/inclusion-is-a-jewish-value/): This was RespectAbility’s training to incorporate Judaism into everyday work life.
* [Jewish Values & Disability Rights](https://www.rac.org/jewish-values-and-disability-rights): This is Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism’s round-up of sources in the Jewish tradition which teach of our obligation to ensure equal access and full participation of everyone
* [Teachings Archives - Lauren Tuchman](https://rabbituchman.com/category/teachings/): Rabbi Lauren Tuchman is a Jewish Spiritual Educator and blind Rabbi. Rabbi Tuchman’s content is wonderful for gaining a better understanding of Jewish values with a disability perspective.
* [Finding A Model of Inclusion in The Talmud [Word Document]](https://www.respectability.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Finding-A-Model-of-Inclusion-in-the-Talmud.docx)
* [Created in the Image of God: A Jewish Exploration of People with Disabilities [Word Document]](https://www.respectability.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Created-in-the-Image-of-God.docx)
* [A Text Study on Deafness [Word Document]](https://www.respectability.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/A-Text-Study-on-Deafness.docx)
* [The Talmudic Approach to Accommodating Different Learning Styles [Word Document]](https://www.respectability.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/The-Talmudic-Approach-to-Accommodating-Different-Learning-Styles.docx)
* ["Disability Inclusion in Jewish Spaces" featuring Matan Koch and Rabbi David Kasher](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRG82gDsUiE): This one hour and 15-minute video was part of IKAR's Featured Speakers Series 2021 on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.
* ["Inclusivity in the Jewish Tradition”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6g2jBRR6Fh0&t=16s): Howard Blas’ 17-minute video teaching of Jewish inclusion texts, as part of Limmud’s Global Day of Jewish Learning, 2021.

# Hosting Accessible In-Person, Virtual, and Hybrid Events

## Before The Service or Event

There are many things to consider before an accessible service or event begins – in fact, preparation must begin before invitations are even sent. Here are pre-event “tips and tricks” to consider:

**Creating and Sending Invitations:** Use this checklist as a guide for making accessible invitations:

* Does the invitation clearly indicate that people with disabilities are welcome?
* Do appropriate icons appear (i.e., physical access, sign language interpreter available)?
* Is the writing clear, in an easily legible font and size?
* Is the invitation screen-reader accessible?
* Is the information embedded in an email as well as an attachment?
* Do the images feature people with disabilities? While not every invitation “must” include images of people with disabilities, remember that “a picture is worth a thousand words.” People who see an image that features a person with a disability will assume that the event and the organization are inclusive and accommodating.
* Is the notification of the event on your website as well as in hard copy?
* Have you included a contact name and number for inquiries regarding accommodations?

**Ensuring Accessible Documents:** If you are using documents or a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation for your online event, distribute it to your attendees in advance. That way, attendees who are blind or have low vision can use screen reader software to familiarize themselves with the materials being presented. PowerPoint has a built-in tool to check accessibility issues in your slide deck and gives you instructions on how to fix them. For Word documents, we recommend having a text-only version for people who request one.

When doing a virtual event, send out the reading ahead of time. This will help people who use screen readers to familiarize themselves with the material. Remember that screen readers do not work with screen sharing on Zoom or other virtual event platforms.

**Ensuring a Physically Accessible Location:** Here are some free or low-cost steps to take that will make a difference:

* Ensure that there is a formal way for guests to share what accommodations they may need before the event begins.
* Keep interior spaces neat and organized so people with mobility disabilities can navigate through the space. There should be a five-foot circle or T-shaped area within the space for people using a wheelchair to reverse direction.
* Space for wheelchairs should be distributed throughout the venue with companion seats nearby.
* Ensure that seating is available during all parts of the event, including parts when most people typically stand. Have a plan in place to support those who may have difficulty carrying plates and utensils. Consider having assistive listening devices available.
* Floors should be 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. Oftentimes items can be moved or rearranged to increase equal access.
* Pay attention to floor surfaces. The carpet should be no more than a half-inch high, with edges securely attached.
* Ensure that lighting is even, glare-free and bright throughout the building to facilitate lip-reading and reading in general.
* Light switches should be moved low enough to be reachable by people using wheelchairs and people of short stature.
* Plan for appropriate workspaces. Adding adjustable workspaces for those who use wheelchairs/scooters or need to sit while working also can be beneficial.
* Provide unscented/hypoallergenic cleaning products, candles, soaps and air fresheners for those with various chemical sensitivities.

These steps are more long-term, but will make a big difference:

* Install automatic door openers so people with physical disabilities can open interior doors without assistance. The criteria are that the door handle is not higher than 48 inches, and the maximum force needed to open the door is five pounds.
* Have a route of travel that is at least 36 inches wide without any stairs throughout the building for a person using a wheelchair.
* Ensure that all staircases have continuous rails.
* Have an elevator or lift if stairs are unavoidable.
* Ensure that there are accessible restrooms and wheelchair-accessible water fountains.
* Have someone who uses a larger power wheelchair check the physical accessibility of your offices and program spaces.

**How do I ensure my exterior space is accessible physically?**

Ensure that sidewalks and exterior spaces are accessible for all by keeping them clear and plowed including during inclement weather. Reserve ample parking spaces close to the entrance for those with accessible parking permits. Signage should welcome everyone and direct guests to the building entrance. Curbs at parking and drop-off areas should have curb cuts. Is there a welcoming, accessible entrance that can be used independently by individuals with disabilities? Can people with physical disabilities open exterior doors without assistance? Everyone should be able to enter through the same main doorway. If this is not possible, ensure the accessible entrance is a door with dignity–not in the back of the building near the trash receptacle.

**What signage do I need to be more accessible?**

Consider adding signs for accessible entrances, exits and restrooms. Bold decals can be used to mark glass doors, so no one runs into them. Explore alternative communication methods for individuals with specific needs or hearing impairments (MD Relay, text, email, phone with TTD to call in about inclement weather). Interior signs should be mounted with a centerline 60 inches from the floor with bold, high contrast, raised characters and Braille text.

## During the Service or Event

The event itself is the most important part. This resource gives suggestions for allowing maximum participation of all people.

**Ensuring Everyone Can Participate, Including Those Who are Blind, Have Cognitive Disabilities, and/or are Nonverbal:** During events where multiple people are speaking, the best practice is for each person to say their name every time they begin speaking. This helps people with a variety of disabilities, including people who are blind or have low vision, as well as individuals with cognitive disabilities.

If guests will have an opportunity to ask questions or participate, it is important to offer options for those who do not communicate with speech. If the event is in person, make sure the individual unable to communicate with speech has opportunities to communicate in whatever way is most comfortable. This may include augmentative communications, interpreters, or other strategies.

In a virtual format, the moderator or host should explain at the start of the event that he or she will read aloud any comments made in the chat box.

Depending on the length of the event, consider having breaks so people can process information, have a drink or snack, use the restroom, etc. The rule of thumb is to offer a 10-minute break every hour.

If a PowerPoint or other visual is used, the speaker should always describe what is on the screen. Even if the PowerPoint is accessible, an individual who is blind or has low vision cannot use a screen reader on a shared screen. If video clips that do not include audio description are played during a presentation, the speaker should explain the visuals before the video begins.

**Live Captioning:** The gold standard of captioning is Communication Access Realtime Translation or CART, where a live transcriber types what is spoken in real time. Please see the appendix for a resource list of captioning services. On Zoom, this can be inserted within the video feed. In person, this is usually accomplished by aid of a screen or monitor visible to the room on which the text appears. Automatic captioning on Zoom can help in situations where an organization lacks the budget to hire a live transcriber. Learn how to turn on automatic captioning in Zoom on the [Zoom support website](https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/207279736-Managing-closed-captioning-and-live-transcription).

**ASL Interpreters:** Remember that live captioning is a somewhat limited solution. For meetings and events where participants are actively engaged in interactive discussions, Deaf/Hard of Hearing individuals might prefer having an ASL interpreter, or some other way to share their ideas. In addition, for events that involve complex subject matter, technical terms, or industry-specific terminology, viewers may find that automatic captioning or even live-captioning struggle to maintain a reasonable level of quality and accuracy for the user. At the same time, since ASL is its own language, captions by definition are asking native speakers to work in translation. Please see the appendix for a resource list of ASL Interpreters.

## After the Service or Event

Once the service or event is completed, you may choose to make the recording available. To ensure that people with disabilities can view and enjoy the program, it is important that certain steps are taken. This resource suggests ways to make a recorded program as accessible as possible.

**Ensuring Accessible Videos for Websites and Social Media:** Forty-one percent of videos are incomprehensible without sound or captions. In fact, 80 percent of viewers react negatively to videos auto playing with sound. Nowadays, many social media outlets auto-play videos on silent. Therefore, if you record your event and plan on sharing the video, it is crucial that you have accurate captions.

Please consider these key differences between subtitles and captions:

* Subtitles only reflect what is being spoken.
* Captions go a step further by also including non-spoken information including [laughter], [applause] and [music], as well as environmental sounds.

**A Note About Instagram:** If you are posting content on Instagram, stories and videos can easily be made more accessible with captions. For Instagram Stories, captions can be added in two ways: by downloading and utilizing a free app like Clipomatic or recording the video and manually typing what is being said using the add text option.

**Evaluation Forms:** At the conclusion of your event, you should send out an evaluation form to all attendees. Ask them if they requested accommodations, and if their accommodation needs were met. This data is important to ensuring that you can improve for future events.

## Additional Resources for Services and Events

This toolkit has given you some advice on how to make your events accessible, and these resources can help you take the next step.

[Blindness & Low-Vision: Inclusion Recommendations for Synagogues](https://cdn.fedweb.org/fed-34/2/14015_RSIP_HighHolidayLowVision%2520-AN17.pdf): There are many ways to ensure that people with low vision or who are blind can participate in prayer services. It is important that those accommodations are made so every member of the congregation can participate.

[Welcoming A Person Who Is Deaf Or Hard Of Hearing](https://cdn.fedweb.org/fed-34/2/15523_RSIP_AN18_WelcomingDeaf-HardofHearing.pdf): This resource offers accommodations to assist those who are deaf or hard of hearing, include projecting page numbers, providing an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter at services and adding free captions to videos.

[How to Ensure Accessible Events: Both Live and Virtual Across All Platforms](https://www.respectability.org/2020/07/training-how-to-ensure-accessible-events/): Making an event accessible is much easier and lower cost than you think, and this webinar reviews ways that you can make it happen!

# Holidays

It’s important that all people, regardless of their disabilities, are included in Jewish services. As events are beginning to happen in-person again, it is crucial that synagogues accommodate all members and their needs. They range from physically accessible spaces for those who have mobility challenges, to those who are hard of hearing or deaf and require captioning or an interpreter. Below are resources for synagogues to use to ensure that all members’ needs are met:

**Daily or weekly prayer services:**

[Language and Intent, Part 3 of 3: The Quiet Power of Inclusive Language](http://www.matankoch.com/blog/2014/10/31/language-and-intent-part-3-of-3-the-quiet-power-of-inclusive-language): As Moriah Benjoseph suggests in the work, "*Please Rise... but What If I Can't Stand During Prayer?*” when calling people to prayer, instead of simply saying, “please rise,” say “please rise if you are able.” Some of your congregants may not be able to stand due to disability, fatigue, and/or pain. You want to include everyone in your call to worship.

**High Holiday(s):**

* [High Holiday Jewish Inclusion Guide](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3590096/jewish/High-Holiday-Jewish-Inclusion-Guide.htm): Chabad created a guide to inclusion during the High Holidays which includes different ideas such as what any given person in a congregation can do to ensure that all people feel included and sermon ideas for a Rabbi who wants to speak on the idea of inclusion. Chabad’s guide gives a more orthodox approach to inclusion.

[Free High Holiday Resources for Children - Jewish Special Education | Gateways](https://www.jgateways.org/Resources/High-Holiday): This resource has everything from High Holiday Bingo to stories about why children do not fast on Yom Kippur, to what is considered appropriate behavior in synagogues.

**Other holiday resources:**

* [Sukkot, Ushpizin, and Disability Inclusion](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4142803/jewish/Sukkot-Ushpizin-and-Disability-Inclusion.htm): This Chabad resource offers ways to ensure that our sukkahs and sukkot meals are inclusive.
* [The National Braille Press](https://www.nbp.org/ic/nbp/business/brailleprinting.html): If someone is requesting a Machzor (High Holidays prayer book) or Siddur (Sabbath or weekdays prayer book) in Braille, The National Braille Press can help. Please request in advance, as it can take up to 20 days to meet your request.
* [Computer Sciences for the Blind](https://www.computersciences.org/): This is another company that individuals can order Braille machzorim and siddurim from.

[“Access, Belonging and Life Enrichment for People with Disabilities and their Families”](https://www.jfedgmw.org/community/get-support/disability-services/): Resources from Greater MetroWest ABLE (NJ)

# Bar and Bat Mitzvahs

Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a highly anticipated experience and time in an adolescent’s life where they are becoming a Jewish adult. For young adults with disabilities, this experience should also be a meaningful, joyous experience. Planning the “right” bar or bat mitzvah, and the actual teaching, may require some creativity and out of the box thinking.

A passage in the Talmud offers an important example of Rabbi Perida who modeled great persistence and perseverance to assure that a student with learning difficulties mastered the material the rabbi was teaching. According to Eruvin 54b, Rabbi Perida had a student he needed to teach the material 400 times to before the student understood it. Rabbi Perida assured the student that he would not leave him, even to go to another gathering, until he has fully mastered the lesson. This type of approach to learning is imperative to helping a child be successful, especially when it comes to a matter as important as learning their Torah portion for their Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

The resources below address ways to make Bar and Bat Mitzvahs meaningful and joyous for people with disabilities.

* [Gateways Inclusive B’nei Mitzvah Resources](https://jgateways.org/programs/inclusive-bnei-mitzvah-resources/): Create deeply meaningful b’nei mitzvah paths for students with diverse learning needs, using tools, curricula, and resources from Gateways.
* [Practical Ideas for Inclusive Bar and Bat Mitzvahs](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3784611/jewish/Practical-Ideas-for-Inclusive-Bar-and-Bat-Mitzvahs.htm): From Ruderman Chabad Inclusion Initiative.
* [URJ (Reform Movement) Bar and Bat Mitzvah Guide](https://reformjudaism.org/bar-and-bat-mitzvah): A short practical guide addressing basics of bar and bat mitzvah including meaning, origin, the service, and celebrations.
* [Howard Blas’ B’nai Mitzvah Resources](https://howardblas.com/about-me/webinars-talks-conference-presentations/): Howard Blas has been preparing students with disabilities with disabilities for over 35 years. He also works with families, clergy and educators to help envision and create meaningful services.
* [Whole Community Inclusion’s B’nai Mitzvah Training](https://jewishlearningventure.org/wci-bnai-mitzvah-training/): Gabby Kaplan-Mayer’s regularly run two-day trainings for clergy and educators on accommodations and modifications.

[“Making Bar and Bat Mitzvah Preparation More Joyful”](https://www.hiddensparks.org/wow_registrations/making-bar-and-bat-mitzvah-preparation-more-joyful/): Hidden Sparks helps educators and schools nurture the “Hidden Spark” within each student by developing and facilitating professional development programs and coaching for Jewish day school educators to deepen understanding of learning and approaches for teaching all kinds of learners. This is one of their many useful webinars.

# Education

Education is a central component to Judaism. It is important that Jewish day schools and other Jewish programs work to individualize and make educational content accessible for all students.

There are many wonderful local and national organizations working to teach all learners, and to train teachers to meet the needs of all learners. The resources below provide information on how to make education more inclusive for people with disabilities.

[Matan](https://matankids.org/resources/printable-resources-2/) offers free printable resources for holidays, rituals, Hebrew reading and more, as well as JDAIM Lesson plans and an extensive webinar library. Check out [Matan’s 2-minute tech tip](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufRxdYIMAc0).

Jewish Learning Venture offers [JKidAccess: Inclusion Resources for Families and Educators](https://jkidaccess.org/). Resources include holiday social stories, videos on values, a social story on attending bar/bat mitzvahs, multi-sensory holiday guides and more.

[Hidden Sparks](https://www.hiddensparks.org/professional-development-programs-for-meeting-the-needs-of-diverse-learners/courses-archive/) has an extensive archive of webinars on topics from instructional techniques, Jewish Studies teaching, sensory processing, social skills, executive functioning and more.

Gateways has extensive resources including [holidays resources for diverse learners](https://jgateways.org/program_categories/resources-for-diverse-learners/jewish-holiday-resources/), day school support, b’nei mitzvah preparation, disability awareness programming, and more.

[JKidLA](https://jkidla.com/category-a/links-special-needs) offers a wide variety of activities and resources, including tips for choosing religious school for children with disabilities.

RespectAbility's [Virtual Education Guide](https://www.respectability.org/virtual-education/) provides advice, resources and guidance on ensuring success for students.

# Camp

The good news is there is an accessible Jewish camp for every child with a disability. Sadly, it may not be the camp their parents or siblings went to, but there are options. View the resources below for more information.

* [Inclusion Training Guide for Jewish Summer Camps](https://jewishcamp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Disabilities-Resource-Guide_FINAL_USE_THIS_VERSION_ONLY_4.pdf): This 201-page inclusion guide for Jewish summer camps, prepared by the National Ramah Tikvah Network and the Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC), touches on all aspects of making camps more accessible for people with disabilities. The guide references behavioral strategies and what to expect, various disabilities that campers may have, as well as staff training. FJC also does an excellent job of reiterating that all behaviors and disabilities affect each individual differently, and this guide is not a “one size fits all” approach, but rather a way to help guide the experience for each camper.

[Making Camp Accessible](https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/making-camp-accessible/): In this blog post from The Times of Israel, Jeremy J. Fingerman, the CEO of the Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC), notes that parents often struggle to find a camp or activity for their child with disabilities. He refers to the Yashar Initiative to increase accessibility for campers and staff with disabilities at Jewish day and overnight camps, and to the 113-page study co-authored by Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi, *Jewish Camp for Children with Disabilities and Special Needs.*

* [Making Camp Accessible for All Families](https://jewishfed.org/news/blog/making-camp-accessible-all-families): The Jewish Community Center of San Francisco, or JCCSF launched a pilot program to include more campers with disabilities in Jewish camp programs. JCCSF illustrates the importance of having a Youth Inclusion Coordinator, as well as the positive impacts of providing accommodations and support to campers with various disabilities. This simple resource reiterates the importance of including young individuals with disabilities, and the benefits that they provide to the camp.

[Shutaf Inclusion Programs](https://shutafinclusionprograms.org/teaching-inclusion/): Shutaf Inclusion Programs in Jerusalem, Israel offers year-round activities for children, teens, and young adults, with and without disabilities. Camp Shutaf’s unique, reverse-inclusion model brings together participants with diverse developmental, physical, and learning disabilities (75% of participants) alongside participants without disabilities (25% of participants). Shutaf has developed extensive, clear, easy to use training materials in English and Hebrew which include visuals and videos on topics such as Inclusive Program Planning, Staff Training and Mentorship, Structured Flexibility, Challenges and Problem Solving and more.

# Additional Information

## Service Animals

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, [service animals](https://www.ada.gov/service_animals_2010.htm) are animals that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities. Examples of such work or tasks include guiding people who are blind, alerting people who are deaf, pulling a wheelchair, alerting and protecting a person who is having a seizure, reminding a person with mental illness to take prescribed medications, calming a person with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) during an anxiety attack, or performing other duties. Service animals are working animals, not pets. The work or task a dog has been trained to provide must be directly related to the person’s disability.

There are two things to keep in mind when interacting with an individual with a service animal:

* Interact with the individual with a service animal, not the animal.
* Always ask the handler before approaching or engaging with the dog.

To determine if an animal is a service animal, *businesses may only ask two questions*:

* Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability?
* What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?

When you see a service animal, please remember that they are performing a potentially life-saving job, and you cannot interfere with it. Yes, they are very cute, but distracting them can cost the person utilizing the service animal their safety, or even their life.

## Assistive Technology

Assistive technology increases accessibility to religious services and educational content for people with disabilities. The use and incorporation of assistive technology is crucial to the learning and educational success of students with disabilities. Some technologies you may be more familiar with are mobility aids or devices such as a cane, wheelchair, orthotic devices, and hearing aids. Here are some examples of lesser-known assistive technologies:

* **Screen readers**: Screen readers read what is on a computer screen out loud to a blind or low vision user.
* **Alternative Text or Image descriptions:** Alternative text is what allows screen readers to describe images to the user. Effective alternative text describes the purpose of the image and is concise.
* **Text-to-speech systems or Optical Character Recognition (OCR)** are essentially programs that read aloud the text. These programs and technologies can be used by those who are blind or low vision, as well as those with auditory processing conditions or those who have a hard time focusing. [Click here](https://therespectabilityreport.org/accessibility/) for more detailed instructions on how to enable these programs on your Mac or PC.
* **Speech recognition** allows someone to speak to technology and the words are typed as you dictate. Services like Amazon’s Alexa and Apple’s Siri are examples of speech recognition services.
* **Closed captioning**, sometimes referred to as CC, is text written on the screen to accompany a video that shows what people are saying, plus background noises and other sounds.
* **Audio Description tracks** narrate the visuals of a video for people who are blind or have low vision.

# Appendix A: Jewish Inclusion Webinars

Including people with disabilities is something that more than 90% of Jewish organizations say they want to do and yet a survey of the Jewish world shows that fewer than 20% of Jews can identify a single leader with a disability in Jewish communal life. This series introduces Jewish lay leaders with disabilities to topics and skills that will help them to lead as volunteers and professionals in nonprofit organizations.

[Effective Social Media Posts: A Primer](https://www.respectability.org/2021/06/effective-social-media-posts-a-primer/)

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media platforms have become not just an important way to get out your message, but the most important way to get out your message. While everyone seems to have a Facebook page, a quick scroll through the average social media feed shows that we greatly vary in our ability to use these tools effectively and craft the messages that work. This workshop was designed to close that gap and will be useful not only to contribute to nonprofits, but in anything that you want to do.

[How Nonprofits Work](https://www.respectability.org/2021/06/how-nonprofits-work/)

Whether serving on a board or helping with programs, getting things done in the nonprofit world is immensely easier if you understand how nonprofits work. This session will give the basics of nonprofit operation, including budget, mission and purpose, the role of the board, staff and volunteers, bylaws and grant agreements, and how you can get involved.

[Development: Individual Prospects](https://www.respectability.org/2021/06/leaders-of-the-future-development-individual-prospects/)

Money makes the world go round, but relationships build lasting connections to donors and support for our organizations. This session covers forming these connections, from finding prospects, to opening dialogue, all the way to closing a gift. This session focused on individual prospects, from friends to philanthropists.

[Development: Foundations](https://www.respectability.org/2021/07/leaders-of-the-future-development-foundations/)

Foundation funding is at the core of many organizations. There is an art to every part of the process of working with a foundation. From grant proposals to program descriptions, to outcomes and aligning with funder priorities. This panel featured two leaders from the Jewish foundation world who will introduce each of these topics, explaining both how you as a volunteer can help, and how you might join the foundation world as a professional.

[Leading at the Next Level: Working in the Jewish World](https://www.respectability.org/2021/07/leaders-of-the-future-working-in-the-jewish-world/)

There are many ways to lead in Jewish organizations, from donating time and talent, to active participation. Some will take the ultimate plunge and choose to work professionally for a Jewish organization. In this session, we focused both on the types of opportunities available, and the ways to build on your network and use modern technology so that you may contribute your time and talent.

[Effective Disability Advocacy from the Inside](https://www.respectability.org/2021/07/leaders-of-the-future-effective-disability-advocacy-from-the-inside/)

One of the greatest ways that leaders with disabilities and their allies can strengthen the organizations in which they participate is by helping to move them toward greater inclusion. That said, the role of an internal advocate is fundamentally different from that of an external change agent. Learn from some successful Jews with disabilities and their allies about how they’ve made change from the inside at their organizations.

[Inclusion as a Jewish Value](https://www.respectability.org/2020/06/inclusion-is-a-jewish-value/)

If you are in the nonprofit sector, you live your values in your work every day. For many of us, those values spring deeply from our Jewish identity. We all know that the Torah calls upon us to be just, and to be charitable, but did you know that it also calls upon us to be inclusive? Join us for yet another connection between your work and your values, as you learn about how the inclusion that you already believe in as deeply Jewish roots.

[How to Advance Disability Inclusion in Jewish Education](https://www.respectability.org/2020/06/training-how-to-advance-disability-inclusion-in-jewish-education/)

From Jewish day school to Sunday school to beyond, Jewish education is a hallmark of Jewish identity. Learn from a group of amazing panelists who shared great work that the Jewish world is doing and ideas that you can replicate in order to ensure that Jews with disabilities have access to this treasured legacy, online and off.

[How to Recruit, Accommodate and Promote Jewish Leaders with Disabilities for Paid Employment and Volunteer Leadership](https://www.respectability.org/2020/07/training-how-to-recruit-accommodate-and-promote-jewish-leaders-with-disabilities/)

From Itzhak Pearlman to Marlee Matlin, we all know that there are tremendously talented Jews with disabilities, and that they can make our organizations stronger in all aspects of our mission, including inclusion. Watch this webinar if you want to learn how to attract amazing Jews with disabilities to your volunteer team, your boards, and maybe even your staff!

[How to Ensure Accessible Events: Both Live and Virtual Across All Platforms](https://www.respectability.org/2020/07/training-how-to-ensure-accessible-events/)

Making your event accessible is easier than you think. This session gave a simple accessibility checklist, as well as the processes and confidence that you need to make all your events accessible, both virtual, and in person!

[How to Ensure a Welcoming Lexicon, Accessible Websites and Social Media and Inclusive Photos](https://www.respectability.org/2020/07/training-how-to-ensure-a-welcoming-lexicon-accessible-websites-and-social-media-and-inclusive-photos/)

Today’s website is the front lobby of an organization, and social media is fast supplanting the more traditional ways that our organizations connect with the public. We can’t help you decorate your lobby, but we can make sure that it is warm and welcoming for Jews of all kinds, including Jews with disabilities. Learn from our dynamic and expert team everything you need to know to open your digital door to all!

[How to Create and Implement Successful Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives](https://www.respectability.org/2020/08/diversity-inclusion-jewish-training/)

We shared how to take your deep commitment to Diversity and Inclusion and make it a reality. Learn from some truly successful leaders as they share the secret of their Diversity and Inclusion success, exploring the successful disability initiatives of which they’ve been apart, and looking at their intersection with other initiatives in the diversity space, including LGBTQ+ and beyond.

[How to Ensure Legal Rights and Compliance Obligations](https://www.respectability.org/2020/08/legal-training-jewish/)

While our main focus is on doing inclusion right, at some point your organization may need to know little bit about its legal rights and obligations. This session covered those topics, including the special sensitivities and limitations applying to religious organizations.

# Appendix B: Live Captioning Companies

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| --- | --- | --- |
| 1CapApp | (866) 945-0250 | [www.1capapp.com](http://www.1capapp.com) |
| Carolinas Captioning Services | (704) 552-6753 | [www.abccaption.com](http://www.abccaption.com) |
| On Point Captions | (818) 279-8136 | [www.onpointcaptions.com](http://www.onpointcaptions.com) |
| StreamText | (608) 234-4759 | [www.streamtext.net](http://www.streamtext.net) |
| Transcript Star | (877) 323-4707 | [www.transcriptionstar.com](http://www.transcriptionstar.com) |
| 20/20 | (800) 870-1795 ext. 1 | [www.2020captioning.com](http://www.2020captioning.com) |

# Appendix C: ASL Interpreting Companies

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| --- | --- | --- |
| InterpretThat | (562) 400-5452 | [www.interpretthatinc.com](http://www.interpretthatinc.com) |
| Life Signs | (888) 930-7776 | [www.lifesignsinc.org](http://www.lifesignsinc.org) |
| The Sign Language Company | (818) 728-4241 | [www.signlanguageco.com](http://www.signlanguageco.com) |