



**Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs
and
Women's League for Conservative Judaism**

Inclusion Resource Guidebook
**How Clubs/Affiliates Can Bring Inclusionary Practices
to Their Clubs/Affiliates and Synagogues**

Contributing Authors

Aaron Altman
Eric Beser
Denise Brand
Jerry Brodsky, Phase 2 Co-chair
Alan Budman, Phase 1 Chair
Dr. Elliot Burns
Ariana Burrows
Marc Cohen
Bruce Fagan
Nancy Goldberg
Greg Gore

Fran Hildebrandt
Jerry Jacobs
Dr. Gary Katz
Steven Mandel, MD
Marty Melnick
Larry Nathanson
Jerilynn Payne
Stephe Sturman
Bob Watts
Karen Winer, Phase 2 Co-chair

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Inclusion Resource Guidebook

Executive Summary

Mission Statement

We believe that all individuals are made in God's image, B'tzelem Elohim.

Our goal is that Men's Clubs, Women's League Affiliates, and synagogues will create an environment that makes all **underserved communities** feel welcomed and embraced in the Jewish community. Our core targets are the Men's Clubs, Women's League Affiliates, clergy, and synagogue leaders whom we want to applaud for their work and encourage to improve their adoption of **inclusion** practices and policies.

Definitions

INCLUSION: The process, practice, or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized; a commitment to welcoming, respecting, accepting, institutionally supporting, and valuing diverse identities and communities of people.

DIVERSITY: Describes differences and similarities of age, gender, race, nationality, education, socio-economic status, ability/disability, and sexual orientation. Inclusion seeks out the value of the diverse community, respecting and appreciating the differences where everyone can perform to their full potential in congregational life.

MARGINALIZATION: The treatment of a person, group, or culture as secondary, unimportant, inferior, or abnormal compared with those who are in the dominant group.

UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES:

- a. Individuals with mental and/or physical health challenges
- b. Jews of Color
- c. LGBTQIA+ individuals
- d. Non-traditional families

Steps to Changing Conservative Judaism: One Men's Club, Women's League Affiliate and Synagogue at a Time

1. Work with or establish a Diversity and Inclusion Committee and identify a chairperson for each local Men's Club and Women's League Affiliate to expand inclusion opportunities in areas that we have identified as underserved community priorities.
2. Seek rabbinic support, such as:
 - a. a public statement of support from clergy.
 - b. an inclusion-themed sermon during High Holidays.
 - c. identifying to all that *Mi Sheberach* prayers are for **all** needing healing, more than *body and soul*. In other words, we should consider mental and physical healing needs as a part of our regular *Mi Sheberach* prayers.

3. Place welcoming language on synagogue websites, preferably on the home page.
4. Identify existing inclusionary practices at our Men's Clubs, Women's League Affiliates, and synagogues, keeping in mind that our identified underserved communities may have already created their own infrastructure and organizations and may be searching for cooperation and partnership to fight larger problems, such as racism, antisemitism, and misogyny, for example.
5. Meet with clergy and lay leadership at the synagogue and club level to discuss Inclusion.
6. Inform FJMC and WLCJ, along with the region leadership of both, about activities so new and better ideas can be distributed to local Clubs/Affiliates.
7. Review written materials and bylaws, for example, of Men's Clubs, Women's League Affiliates, and synagogues to ensure they contain inclusionary, gender-neutral verbiage.
8. Write and implement a policy statement for Men's Clubs, Women's League Affiliates and synagogues to be inclusive in club and synagogue membership and activities.
9. Submit applications for inclusion for Torch Award, Quality Inclusion Club Award, Jewels in the Crown Awards, etc. for recognition of your work in this area.
10. Publicize inclusion positions and activities in the general and Jewish local media and in social media.
11. Engage the entire synagogue membership in dialogue that improves the connection between members in need of support and synagogue life.
12. Train our Men's Clubs, Women's League Affiliates and synagogue members to be leaders about the nature of inclusion and welcoming people, including diversity and sensitivity training from outside organizations, identifying already available resources for this purpose.
13. Support, on behalf of the Men's Clubs and Women's League Affiliates, B'nai Mitzvah for children with learning and other disabilities by reaching out to their families to welcome them within their comfort level into the synagogue's regular program or alternative options and connect them to parents who have already been through the experience.
14. Campaign for the inclusion of young people with mental or physical challenges into religious school, social events, and youth groups.
15. Integrate children and adults with special physical and mental challenges into the regular service as much as possible.

Programs

1. Conduct HMV (Hearing Men's Voices) sessions on inclusion of one or more of the communities we have identified, such as mental and physical wellness modules, including addiction, discussing our own challenges and those of others we know.
2. Create a brunch/event to describe the purpose of this inclusion effort; discuss the various communities on which we are focusing.
3. Create a unique Club/Affiliate inclusion program and inform others.
4. Create inclusionary practices for religious activities.
5. Create inclusionary practices for other activities.
6. Invite an outside inspirational rabbi, who has personal or aligned experience with any of the identified communities or an author/speaker to address the issues of our identified underserved communities; provide access to other Men's Clubs, Women's League Affiliates and synagogues via a national Zoom or similar broadcast arranged for this purpose.
7. Encourage ourselves to conduct, at our synagogues, special Shabbatot addressing each of our identified underserved communities; for instance, identify a weekend and have a congregant speak Friday night, the rabbi on Saturday morning, and a support group at *Havdalah*.
8. Integrate Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance, and Inclusion Month (JDAIM; February), Juneteenth, Pride Month; add meaningful volunteer programs on MLK Day and other recognition events onto your calendars and run appropriate programs celebrating these events.
9. Meet with clergy, lay and educational leaders and synagogue staff for the purpose of designing specific strategies that have a strong likelihood of success for members of our identified underserved communities.
10. Involve USY Chapters in inclusion activities.
11. Ensure that Men's Clubs' or Affiliates' Shabbatot create the opportunity to teach about welcoming and embracing underserved communities.
12. Establish programs to create dialogue with underserved communities.

Final Thought

Keep in Mind – Our goal is to change the culture of our synagogues to create an environment that makes all of us, no matter our unique identities and needs, feel welcomed and embraced in our Jewish Community.

Inclusion Resource Guidebook

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Definitions

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MARGINALIZATION: The treatment of a person, group, or culture as secondary, unimportant, inferior or abnormal compared with those who are in the dominant group.

UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES:

a. Individuals with mental and/or physical health challenges.

For the purposes of this document, we are defining individuals with mental and/or physical challenges as those individuals with a mental or physical condition that has had some impact on their ability to work, interact with others, experience happiness by engaging in preferred activities, or successfully navigate the challenges that people face in their day-to-day existence.

Other groups and governmental agencies have defined disabilities in similar language. Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a United States federal law that protects individuals with disabilities from discrimination, a qualified person with a disability is defined as:

“...persons with a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities. People who have a history of, or who are regarded as having a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, are also covered. Major life activities

include caring for one's self, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, working, performing manual tasks, and learning. Some examples of impairments that may substantially limit major life activities, even with the help of medication or aids/devices, are: AIDS, alcoholism, blindness or visual impairment, cancer, deafness or hearing impairment, diabetes, drug addiction, heart disease, and mental illness."

Note that both the Inclusion Committee definition and the United States federal government's include the concept of disability to embrace those who are regarded as having physical or mental health challenges regardless of their diagnostic or evaluation status. We also consider individuals who experience a major impact to any of their life activities to fall under our definition.

b. Jews of Color

Jews are a multicultural people who have lived around the world for thousands of years. Jews of Color include Jews who are Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian, and North African or Middle Eastern. They may be biracial, mixed, or multiracial. Some were raised Jewish, some have at least one Jewish parent, and some converted to Judaism. Researchers estimate that Jews of Color represent at least 12-15% of American Jews or about 1,000,000 of the United States' 7,200,000 Jews. If population trend follows the same lines as the U.S. Census, then some decades from now, Jews of Color may become the majority of U.S. Jews.

Jews of Color join the Jewish community in a variety of ways, including birth, transracial/transnational adoption, and conversion. Many join through interfaith marriage, but retain their own faith identity.

Many Jews of Color say they have experienced discrimination in Jewish settings. In some cases, they say they are ignored. In other cases, they are questioned about their race and ethnicity. They say that white Jews will sometimes presume a need to educate them about Jewish rituals or assume they are present in synagogues or schools as nannies and security guards rather than community members. We strive to make all people feel welcome in our synagogues and not made to feel like they don't belong or are different from others.

c. LGBTQIA+ individuals

According to the non-profit organization Keshet, which works for the full equality of all LGBTQIA+ Jews and their families in Jewish life, LGBTQIA+ terms and definitions fall into three categories: sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation. These three categories describe distinct areas of identity, and each functions independently of the other two. See the three categories on the Keshet website - <https://www.keshetonline.org/resources/lgbtq-terminology/>.

d. Non-traditional Families

Families that are non-traditional may refer to a person's relationship with a significant other. For our purposes, we would like to focus our discussion on those

individuals who are not married in a legally and/or religiously sanctioned manner (with one exception that we will define.) This would include those congregants who are single, separated, divorced, widowed, or living with a partner that is not interested in being part of a Jewish community. Many families involve a parent-and-child relationship. To simplify, this includes any congregant who is taking care of a child and is legally responsible and committed to a child who is under age 18. What makes this trickier is that all the underserved communities we are discussing may in some way be part of this group as well. We may be creating programs for an individual who might be a single parent and Jew of Color or be an LGBTQIA+ parent with a child who has mental/health challenges. Or we could be creating welcoming communities for congregants who have recently lost a partner through death or divorce. The possibilities are endless. Our goal (YOUR goal) is to assess the needs of the synagogue community and create programs and groups that will strengthen the congregant and synagogue community's commitment to each other.

Steps for Changing Conservative Judaism:

One Men's Club, Women's League Affiliate and Synagogue at a Time

- 1. Work with an existing, or establish a, Diversity and Inclusion Committee and identify a chairperson for each local Men's Club and Women's League Affiliate to expand inclusion opportunities in areas that we have identified as underserved community priorities.**

Leadership development is both an art and a science. Developing a representative committee chair or delegate to an established Diversity/Inclusion effort is even more challenging. Folks who participate are passionate and sometimes skeptical based on previous experience of being marginalized in the synagogue or Jewish community.

There are two options for leadership development. One is to appoint a chair(s) for a Men's Club/Women's League free-standing or jointly represented committee. Another is to appoint a delegate(s) to the currently established synagogue-wide committee who will also promote efforts as part of the Men's Club/Women's League Affiliate. Each synagogue Inclusion Diversity committee is different, unified by promoting awareness and a welcoming attitude. Some committees narrowly focus on Inclusion of Individuals with Disabilities, for example. Others have a broader perspective, often with a social action focus through outreach to underrepresented groups such as the LGBTQIA+ community or Jews of Color. Perhaps outreach to those who consider themselves single is managed by another effort. There is often a rabbi whose portfolio includes reaching out to them.

The free-standing chair(s) will work to develop a Men's Club/Women's League committee. The nature of the committee's scope will depend on the current chair. The best way to learn how to chair or represent our efforts is through a series of interactive training efforts in Leadership Development. Training modules that utilize interactive learning may be requested using the Speakers Bureau Request Form at the end of this Guidebook.

2. Seek rabbinic support, such as:

- a. a public statement of support from clergy.
- b. an inclusion themed sermon during High Holidays.
- c. Identifying to all that *Mi Sheberach* prayers are for all needing healing, more than *body and soul*. In other words, we should consider mental and physical healing needs as a part of our regular *Mi Sheberach* prayers.

Picture a 27-year-old African American man entering your synagogue for a Friday night service. The usher and then security guard walk up to the man and ask him: Who he is here with? This man is Jewish and, as a result of the interrogation, feels denigrated and rejected.

B'tzelem Elohim – God created humans in God's own image. We want to welcome and be inclusive of all races, cultural backgrounds, and sexual orientations. It is estimated that 12-15% of Jews in the US are Jews of Color. Our Jewish cultural influences over time have led us to celebrate our Jewish practices in different ways that include food, prayer, and customs.

We should listen to those who feel disconnected so we can achieve a shared and inclusive community. Jewish diversity is our Jewish identity. For those whom we have identified as members of underserved communities, we want to welcome them as neighbors and build up social engagement.

Actions:

- The rabbi could use the unique opportunity of the High Holidays, when more of the community is present than at any other time, to open the eyes of the congregation about the need for diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Diversity includes differences among members, such as race, gender, disabilities, and cultural backgrounds. Inclusion means having respect for all members and encouraging them to participate in all synagogue activities. Equity means sharing authority, including leadership, responsibility, and influence upon the wider synagogue community. People of color and those of the LGBTQIA+ communities, as well as those with disabilities, may feel a lack of acceptance by the mainstream Jewish community. They may feel socially isolated.
- In order to create a model of an inclusive and diverse synagogue community, the rabbi and lay leaders should want to reach out to individuals and families and personally connect with them on an ongoing basis.
- Examples of inclusion-themed rabbinic talks can be found [here](#).

3. Place welcoming language on the synagogue website, preferably on the home page.

- Look at your synagogue's website from the point of view of someone who is non-binary, LGBTQIA+, a single parent, a Jew of Color, Jewish by choice, an intermarried couple or someone with physical or mental health issues. Does the language and presentation on your website speak to them? [Here](#) is an example.
- Create a diversity page on your synagogue and Club/Affiliate websites. Include links to [FJMC](#), [WLCJ](#) and local resources. Make sure your synagogue website splash page includes a link to this page.

- Post welcoming messages on your synagogue's and Club/Affiliate's social media sites such as [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Pinterest](#). Create and maintain a presence for your congregation on those sites and other social media outlets. Maintain a regular schedule of posts. Check out apps like [Hootsuite](#) or [Buffer](#) that will automatically post on several platforms at once.
- Create a monthly blog about diversity using sites like [Blogger](#), [Wix](#) or [WordPress](#). The search engines love blogs, and blogs pull traffic (including journalists) to your website.
- Pictures are worth a thousand words. Placing pictures on the website and marketing materials of a visually diverse group (race, gender, age, ability, etc.) will speak volumes. When people see someone who reflects their own image, they are more likely to feel included, valued and respected.

4. Identify existing inclusionary practices at our Men's Clubs, Women's League Affiliates, and synagogues, keeping in mind that our identified underserved communities may have already created their own infrastructure and organizations and may be searching for cooperation and partnership to fight larger problems, such as racism, antisemitism, and misogyny, for example.

Inclusionary initiatives at synagogues and clubs generally have the same purpose – to make their community open to all and accepted by all. The target groups for these initiatives range from LGBTQIA+, Jews of Color, and individuals with any form of disability to non-traditional families. There may be others that are not yet listed but could be included in this initiative. Many clubs/affiliates/synagogues of all traditions participate with the hope that many more will follow.

Establish working relationships with these organizations that may have formed to support underserved communities and the issues they face. Setting up meetings with these formal or informal groups helps to foster understanding and mutual respect.

The core theme may be:

We intentionally work to create an environment where all Jews feel welcome and celebrated for who they are.

We embrace the entire spectrum of our Jewish community, including interfaith families and members of any age, race, background, ethnicity, ability, marital or family status, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression.

Though the theme is universal, clubs/affiliates/synagogues differ in their practices of how they communicate their communities' outreach to these targeted groups – as per the following: Be aware that inclusionary practices can take many forms, including:

- The clergy preaches inclusion, but either no written policy exists, or the policy is vague.
- The clubs/affiliates/synagogue's constitution and bylaws mention highlighting inclusion as part of their outreach. Usually, a committee is set up to promote this goal.
- Creation of lectures speaking to different forms of groups vis-à-vis inclusion. For example:

Difference. Awareness. Acceptance. Understanding.

... we realize our intentions – communal and personal – about inclusion and social equality for people of all abilities...Beth Steinberg is the co-founder and

director of Shutaf Inclusion Programs in Jerusalem, which offer year-round...people with and without disabilities. Shutaf believes in inclusion for people of all abilities, regardless of labels ...

JDAIM: Jewish Disabilities Awareness Acceptance and Inclusion Month is observed every February... we realize our intentions – communal and personal – about inclusion and social equality for people of all abilities.

- Communicating their clubs/affiliates/synagogues' message on their website and establishing committees, for example:

Temple Bet Anonymous is open to members of the LGBTQIA+ community and allies committed to fostering a vibrant and inclusive environment. Our meetings provide an opportunity to network, share experiences, socialize, participate in community and social justice activities, and promote greater LGBTQIA+ visibility within the larger community.

This group is for those who identify as Jews of Color. In our regular meetings, we come together to form a community and safe space for our shared experience; study and discuss related readings; and spearhead programming to further the interests and visibility of Jews of Color in the greater community, both on our own and in conjunction with our allies.

- Hiring of clergy whose mission is to foster strong inclusionary practices, programs, and congregational communication – for example, one synagogue has a full-time rabbi designated as Rabbi, Director of Congregational Engagement.
- Reinforcing the synagogue's inclusionary experiences by publishing actual quotes from members.

We have found the Anshe Emet Community to be thoughtful, caring, and truly committed to the highest ideals and ethical traditions of Judaism. It is a house of worship with kavanah and joy, and a house of learning with inquisitive minds, a place for comfort and solace, and a place for celebration and play. It is also a place where all families are not only welcomed but embraced. We are proud to be members of the Anshe Emet Community! Anshe Emet is our home. The perfect place to raise our family.

Members of the congregation will speak from the bimah during Kabbalat Shabbat to share their personal experiences with mental health issues, addiction, and suicide.

Visibility and Inclusion Efforts might include:

- Partnering with [Keshet](#), a national organization working for full LGBTQIA+ equality in Jewish life, to ensure our commitment to full LGBTQIA+ inclusion is reflected in our actions, programming, rituals, personnel, and physical space.
- Periodic training for clergy, staff, and lay leaders on LGBTQIA+ inclusion.
- Specific LGBTQIA+ programming, events, and groups.

- Openly LGBTQIA+ people are involved in the synagogue as leaders, members, students, parents, and staff.
- Inclusive language on all membership forms.
- All-gender/unisex bathroom.

Rituals and Life-cycle Events

- Same-sex weddings or commitment ceremonies performed in or outside synagogue
- Aufrufs and aliyot for both members of a same-sex couple
- Adoption and baby-naming ceremonies
- Naming ceremonies for those undergoing gender transitions
- Gender-neutral aliyot

5. Meet with clergy and lay leadership at the synagogue and club level to discuss Inclusion.

As simple as the statement seems, there's more to *meeting with clergy and lay leadership to discuss inclusion* than simply meeting with them and saying the purpose is to discuss Inclusion.

First, one should determine whether in each case it is better to get on the agenda when all the clergy and lay leadership ordinarily meet, whether to ask them to meet together at a meeting called for just this purpose, or in the alternative whether to meet with them individually.

Second, who is the best person (or people) to deliver the inclusion message itself? The message deliverer(s) should be known, trusted, fair-minded congregants and those who can express the message of this document and the strategies included in a clear, effective manner.

Some tips to consider:

- a. Don't go into any meeting for this purpose unprepared. Anticipate what and how you want to present the inclusion goals and suggested strategies, and prepare responses to the questions you're likely to get from your clergy and lay leadership.
- b. You may not know the likely reaction you're going to get from those to whom you're presenting. If that's the case, stay in overview mode until you sense they want more. Don't start with details, but rather start with the general intent of our work here. When they ask for details, be prepared to provide them.
- c. Start with goals you feel are going to be easily accepted and work towards the ones that might elicit some resistance.
- d. We tend to be cheerleaders and long-winded about topics we feel strongly about for good reason. Try to be succinct and wait for questions or requests for more information. Pause periodically and give clergy and lay leadership an opportunity to process and ask for clarification. You may be talking to people who need very little motivation to move forward on inclusion, but you may find the people you are talking with either have a gap between their experiences and the information you're presenting, or they have stronger feelings than you expected about being change agents for inclusion.

- e. Allow people time to digest what you're telling them. Remember that some people innately welcome change while others innately resist change. Keep in mind that just because people resist change when first presented new information, many of those people simply need time to process the information. The next time you speak with them, they may have worked out many of their concerns and may be more in agreement with you than they originally communicated.

Finally, before ending your meeting, review the overall goals again and try to summarize the next steps that would support the inclusion you and the others envision for your synagogue and/or its clubs/affiliates.

6. Inform FJMC and WLCJ along with regional leadership of activities, so new and better ideas can be distributed to local clubs/affiliates.

When your club/affiliate has a new idea, TELL US! In that way, we can share great ideas among all the clubs and affiliates!

It is important to promote and publicize this new program. The goal is to engage regions as well as local Clubs and Affiliates to promote and disseminate programs and activities of inclusion. Contact the International FJMC and WLCJ Education/Program Chairs (and International Presidents) to request a meeting, at which time you can present programs and activities that are part of this initiative. Capture their interest. Encourage them to publicize the information. Explain the importance of this program and how it will benefit their membership. Once you have their interest, it will be necessary to produce a plan for disseminating the information. You will want to research and explore how programs are promoted in your organization and use systems that are already in place.

For example:

Use the digital resources that apply to your organization. Publicize the programs in the international and region newsletters that are published online weekly. In this way, all members who are receiving the WL Week and the FJMC newsletter will receive the information quickly. Typically, this information can then be published in the regions' newsletters, and individual clubs and affiliates will be encouraged to develop and publicize these programs and activities in their synagogue bulletins and websites. You can also utilize formats already in place to "talk up" programs taking place in your organization on every level – international, regional, and local. For example: Clubs could publicize programs at their annual Program Fair. Affiliates and regions could present programs/ideas at meetings. Remember that members can't attend a program if they don't know about it. Be that ambassador to provide the bridge between the program and participants.

7. Review written materials and bylaws, for example, of Men's Clubs, Women's League Affiliates, and synagogues to ensure they contain inclusionary, gender-neutral verbiage.

A review of FJMC, WLCJ and synagogue written materials and bylaws shows that the FJMC language is gender neutral, although some clubs continue to specify that members must be men. The FJMC guidance may need to be emphasized more to regions and clubs. USCJ and individual synagogue language on inclusion does not address gender, although

many have inclusionary language for all groups in their mission statements or bylaws. Compare and contrast that with WLCJ language below.

FJMC Guidance

The comprehensive sample FJMC Men's Club/Brotherhood bylaws, linked from the [How to Form a Men's Club](#) page, states:

Article III – MEMBERSHIP

Full Membership – Members of the Jewish community being [INSERT NUMBER HERE] years of age or over, meeting the criteria of the bylaws of this Men's Club.

NOTE: This broad clause is necessary in order to assure that membership criteria remain inclusive and consistent with Conservative Movement and synagogue policy. Note that this clause does not limit membership to men, Jews, or synagogue members.

A very small sample of Men's Club/Brotherhood Bylaws shows mixed implementation of this guidance:

Bylaws of Olam Tikvah Men's Club, Fairfax, VA: Full Membership – Members of the Jewish community being 18 years of age or over, meeting the criteria of the bylaws of this Men's Club. *NOTE: Membership criteria are inclusive and consistent with Conservative Movement and synagogue policy. Note that this clause does not limit membership to men, Jews, or synagogue members.*

Bylaws of Congregation Beth El Men's Club, Norfolk, VA: Our current bylaws state that club membership "shall be limited to male members of Congregation Beth El above age 17 who pay dues." The club is planning to discuss a possible change to this provision and was not aware that it is not consistent with the FJMC Model, nor fully inclusive until informed of this.

Women's League Guidance

Women's League Region Bylaws template:

The membership of the _____ Region shall include:

1. All members of League affiliates located within the geographic boundaries of the region.
2. Anyone identifying as a woman, who has her per capita paid to the League, resides within the geographic boundaries of the region, and is an individual member in accordance with the League policy.

Women's League Affiliate template:

Option #1: Anyone **identifying as a woman**, who is Jewish, agreeing to the above mission is eligible to become a member upon payment of dues.

Option #2: Anyone **identifying as a woman** agreeing to the above mission is eligible to become a member upon the payment of dues.

USCJ Language

Standard V – Membership: USCJ supports every affiliated kehilla in developing its own criteria for membership. USCJ, as a valued and trusted partner, is committed to assisting welcoming, vibrant, and caring Jewish communities to fully engage the spiritual gifts of all community members. We celebrate the diversity among and within our kehillot and encourage the engagement of all those who seek a spiritual and communal home in an authentic and dynamic Jewish setting. We call on all of our kehillot to open their doors wide to all who want to enter. Let us strive to make the words of Isaiah a reality in our time: “My House will be called a house of prayer for all people” (Isaiah 56:7).

Individual Congregation Statements/Policies

Park Avenue Synagogue: “**Kavod/Honor:** Celebrating cultural and ethnic diversity within our evolving community, including individuals who are differently abled, people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, and all families of all different structures.”

Congregation Agudas Achim, Austin, TX: Inclusion —

- of intermarried families – see more about our interfaith efforts by [clicking here](#)
- of all community members, regardless of abilities – see more about our inclusion efforts by [clicking here](#)
- of the newcomer
- Also listed in the Keshet Equality directory

8. Write and implement a policy statement for Men’s Clubs, Women’s League Affiliates, and synagogues to be inclusive in club, synagogue membership and activities.

When constructing your Policy Statement, you will want to define what inclusion means. You may want to use the language presented under Definitions, above, or customize the definition specifically to your organization. Lay out your key commitments. What are your priorities, and what do you want to achieve? This could include your commitment to implementing and upholding inclusion and diversity policies.

How will these policies be implemented? Lay out a set of guidelines to be followed for accommodating special physical or social needs of different groups that need special consideration. Who are you seeking to include? You can make a blanket statement of inclusion or be more specific regarding diversity and disabilities. For instance, that you are a safe and welcoming place for people of all ages, abilities, genders, cultures, or marital or socio-economic status.

Define how you will go about your work to improve how you provide inclusivity. Set up an action plan. Have a concise inclusion Policy Mission Statement for your website.

Why have an Inclusion Policy Statement? It lets people know you are a welcoming, accessible, and safe place, regardless of anything that differentiates them. It provides a reminder for all and creates accountability. It makes your organization more welcoming to those who may otherwise face discrimination, barriers or disadvantages elsewhere. It makes you more attractive to other community organizations with similar values. Organizations with an Inclusion Commitment Policy Statement may be more attractive to funding and grant agencies.

What should you include in your Policy statement? Make it as detailed or simple as you see necessary, as long as it represents your goals as an organization. Begin with your Inclusionary Mission Statement. In addition to the Mission Statement at the beginning of this Inclusion Resource Guidebook, some corporate examples are included below. Decide what inclusion means to your organization and spell it out, referring to your core values and how inclusion relates to them. Show that you are part of the bigger picture. Spotlight your alignment with other organizations, movements or practices that promote these same values. This will show that you are not just acting alone, but are part of a larger movement.

Some corporate and organizational inclusionary Mission Statements are linked here:

- [USCJ - Challenges; LGBTQIA+, Interfaith Families](#)
- [IBM](#)
- [Gusto](#)
- [Deloitte](#)
- [Google](#)
- [10 Examples of Awesome Inclusion Statements](#)

9. Submit applications for Inclusion Torch Award, Quality Inclusion Club Award, Jewels in the Crown Awards, etc. for recognition of your work in this area.

We know how much work it is to have award-winning programming. Getting recognized for a program always adds a degree of satisfaction for everyone involved. At the same time, your award serves a broader purpose, allowing others to see a model of programming worthy of duplication in some form for their synagogue, club or affiliate. This enables other clubs/affiliates to learn new techniques and methods of accomplishing our shared goals.

Strive for diversity on all committees submitting applications and a diverse group of initiatives for each category. FJMC and WLCJ provide opportunities to both be awarded **and** share programming with others.

FJMC

Torch Awards are given every two years by the FJMC for programming worthy of recognition. They are posted on the FJMC website as examples for others interested in providing similar opportunities to model.

FJMC's **Quality Club Award**: includes a mandatory requirement with one of its three options being:

5c. Inclusion activities intended to welcome all or any of the identified groups into the Jewish community by establishing or continuing at least 5 items from the Inclusion Committee's Inclusion Resource Guidebook.

An example of a worthy activity might be, for instance, traveling somewhere virtually, thus allowing individuals with mental or physical health challenges an opportunity to be on the bus and tour a city without actually having to be on a bus or staying at a hotel or maneuvering through the city's sidewalks or crossing busy streets. An award-winning program that does this can be found [here](#).

Having the rabbi give a sermon on a Shabbat that encourages Inclusion activities is another example of an item from this guide that could be included as a Quality Club criterion. But even words during a b'nai mitzvah that recognize one's inclusion can be meaningful and impactful on others. One such moment can be found [here](#), where Rabbi Hal Rudin-Luria, B'nai Jeshurun Congregation (Cleveland, OH), found the moment and words to promote inclusivity.

WLCJ

Jewels in the Crown Award: The WLCJ awards committee is setting up special criteria for the 2023 Convention. At this point, it appears that among the special criteria for the award will be language that an inclusion event will be optional or can act as a substitute. The current idea is additional language on inclusion will be added after the 2023 convention, to make the goals more specific for the 2026 convention and other future awards.

10. Publicize inclusion positions and activities in the general and Jewish local media and in social media.

Place a series of yard signs on your synagogue street front and inform your local media. Here is a sample of language for a series of seven signs:

You are welcome here...

If you're older or younger ... You are welcome here.

If you're married or single ... You are welcome here.

If you're Jewish by birth, by marriage, by choice ... You are welcome here.

Whether you're able or challenged in any way ... You are welcome here.

Whatever your gender ... You are welcome here.

We're all different ... We are ALL welcome here.

Create a one-page press release template for inclusion events you are hosting. Then simply fill in the blanks and email it to your local media outlets. Be sure to include someone's name, address, phone, text and email for additional information.

Send event press releases to your local newspapers. Some free shoppers' guides also run press releases. Don't ignore the small locals and freebies. They are more likely to include your release.

Email photos to your local newspapers and post them on the synagogue website and in social media. Make sure you get permission from everyone in the photo. Include a photo

caption of a few sentences identifying the photo subject and any upcoming program information.

Write letters to the editor and op-ed columns for local and regional publications. Always adhere to their length limit and submit the author's photo and bio.

Pitch a story to your local newspapers. While pitching it, suggest other sources reporters can contact who you know would agree to be interviewed, along with contact information. This makes the media's job easy.

Use email and physical flyers to promote upcoming events. Many libraries, supermarkets, community centers and township buildings have a bulletin board for local activities. And don't forget neighboring synagogues. Electronic versions should go to your synagogue website and all related social media platforms.

Contact your local cable provider for information on submitting program information to their local public access channel. Many cable companies will send you a grid to fill in.

Use Google Alerts to find out which local media outlets are reporting on topics associated with Judaism, interfaith outreach, or religion. Then pitch ideas to those media outlets or respond to the stories.

11. Engage the entire synagogue membership in dialogue that improves the connection between members in need of support and synagogue life

This can be done in several ways by:

- ensuring your Board understands and agrees to move forward on initiatives that promote the concept.

- making the rabbi an integral part of the program. A brief message on inclusion, as minimal as a single sentence, can be made from the Bima each week, reminding congregants of the importance of reaching out to those in need of support

- adding alternating messages to the Shabbat announcements each week or the monthly congregational mailing.

- inviting congregants to town hall meetings/presentations where light refreshments can be served to engage them in discussion on inclusion practices and how they can be a part of the process. These can also be done via Zoom or similar technology. A guest speaker or a panel event may be a good kickoff event for this type of initiative. Promotion of this type of event could also attract more diversity to the synagogue in general. Marginalized and underrepresented communities within the outside community may begin to associate this synagogue with diversity and inclusion.

- having a brief *lunch and learn* program presented after Shabbat services.

- placing inspirational signs in the lobby and other areas of the synagogue where people will see them as reminders, or in the Shabbat announcements. For example, *"The best exercise for the heart is to help someone else up."*

You may be surprised by how many questions and how much positive dialogue people will have once the conversation starts.

12. Train our Men's Clubs, Women's League Affiliates and synagogue members to be leaders about the nature of inclusion and welcoming people, including diversity and sensitivity training from outside organizations, identifying already available resources for this purpose.

So . . . you have people in place who are interested in promoting diversity and inclusion. Now what? It's important to make sure they feel qualified, confident, and comfortable facilitating programs. Training is a must, either on Zoom or similar technology or in person, for everyone involved. Leadership must be encouraged to participate in the training along with them.

The first thing you might do is survey what resources you already have. Are there people in your organization who are qualified and willing to lead training? If not, are there other organizations outside your group who offer training and could be contacted to conduct training? Depending on what your needs are and what is already available, you may want to present more than one training opportunity. You might want to partner with another club, affiliate, or synagogue.

It is vital to the success of the program that the training be consistent with your goals – thoughtful, progressive, and tailored to the needs of your group. Support and assistance also need to be parts of the training program(s) you create. In this way, program facilitators can be more successful if they have resources to turn to when they need support, and it will encourage them to feel confident, comfortable, and qualified to facilitate a program.

Training should encompass all aspects of leadership development, such as caring, listening, delegating, empowering, etc. FJMC and Women's League have established procedures and people with the experience to offer club/affiliate/synagogue trainees a worthwhile training experience, which they would find valuable for working on inclusion as well as simply for themselves in their daily lives.

For more information about training FJMC and WLCJ can arrange with you, please contact them at: international@fjmc.org or info@wlcj.org

13. Support, on behalf of the Men's Clubs and Women's League Affiliates, B'nai Mitzvah for children with learning and other disabilities by reaching out to their families to welcome them within their comfort level into the synagogue's regular program or alternative options, and connect them to parents who have already been through the experience.

One of the key Jewish life passages are adolescents' b'nai mitzvah preparation and celebration. The b'nai mitzvah celebrates the transition from childhood to emerging Jewish adulthood. The preparation can be extensive as the student learns to read from sacred Judaic texts including, for many students, the Torah and writings of the prophets (Haftarah). In addition, the adolescent must adjust to speaking in front of the congregation, including their friends and families. Also, many congregations ask their b'nai mitzvah students to complete a mitzvah project to help others in the community. The entire b'nai mitzvah preparation and celebration is generally seen as a hands-on learning tool that helps adolescents grow in terms of their social skills, academic preparation, Jewish literacy, public speaking, and community service. Many of these skills are also crucially needed in emerging adults who have mental health concerns and their families; however,

despite most synagogues having the best of intentions, these underserved children often do not complete large portions of the b'nai mitzvah preparation and celebration.

For adolescents with special needs or developmental concerns, many synagogues realize that the b'nai mitzvah process is a stressor on families. Clergy and religious school staff should be eager to help minimize this stress by decreasing or altering the expectations. As we've noted, one expectation of b'nai mitzvah teens in many synagogues is requiring the teen to develop a mitzvah project. Often a teen with special needs requires extensive family help to develop and implement this project.

To help these teens and families we are proposing an innovative approach, we suggest an adult volunteer develop a relationship with the teen to work together on a mitzvah project. This adult would be identified, trained, and supported by the synagogue. Having an adult volunteer from a Women's League Affiliate or Men's Club for this project would also serve as a much-needed break for the family. This project likely requires a 6–9-month commitment. One example might be to support the teens as they train to join a mountain bike race for charity. Another example might be to help implement an electronics recycling project.

Developing appropriate mitzvah projects with volunteer adults assisting the teens helps the teen give back to the community, increases the teen's self-confidence, gives the family a break, and is a Tikkun Olam opportunity for the adult volunteer as well as the teen.

14. Campaign for inclusion of young people with mental or physical challenges into religious school, social events, and youth groups.

When dealing with a situation in which some congregants are a bit resistant to the concepts of inclusion, it is important to keep the issue on a personal level. Relate your own connection to those who would be aided by inclusion to your club/affiliate/synagogue leadership, so they understand that being inclusive in our daily congregational life affects so many of our members.

If there is resistance, reach out to those families most affected by challenges and make them your lobbying force. Use them for letter writing campaigns, direct approaches to the lay leadership and clergy, etc. The club/affiliate/synagogue leadership should know this initiative is supported not only by you, but by a large segment of the community.

The Religious School, Early Childhood and Youth Coordinators should be contacted so that the importance of inclusion may be explained to them and their Boards. This guide may be used to enlighten them to possible programming they can use and the leadership they might want to develop and exhibit to help with implementation.

If children's challenges keep them from fully participating, it is vital that both staff and volunteers be aware of how each child's abilities may be utilized and accepted. This engenders a wonderful feeling on the part of those assisted and those doing the assisting. Often, we find leaders who want to do the right thing but are unaware of how to address the challenge. The answer is to approach the situation head on; ask the parents and/or child what's possible and don't hesitate to fully include the child in the experience.

At a recent FJMC World Wide Wrap, a parent asked a Men's Club leader to assist their physically challenged child in wrapping *tefillin*. The leader did so enthusiastically by

showing the child how to wrap, giving the child a chance to do as much as he was able. Everyone, the child, parents, leader and staff benefitted from the experience. The child and parents were so proud to be included in the group activity that the Men's Club and synagogue leaders were asked to pose for a family photograph showing their son's accomplishment.

At social events, it is common for young people to be more accepting of children who don't look or act like them than adults would expect. Some young people feel uncomfortable being around children who don't look or act like them. Sometimes, *others* are ostracized and shunted aside. It is imperative that the youth leader or coordinator reach out to both the accepting children and the uncomfortable ones to ensure all children are treated in the same accepting manner. One way to accomplish this is for the youth leader to reach out to a few young people before the event to explain the need for them to be leaders, by example, in this area and make others feel welcome. If some young people take this initiative, it becomes an accepted way of doing things, leading to the best outcome. And we know how powerful it is for all children to be accepted by their peers.

Be sure to analyze existing barriers to inclusion. Is programming available to someone who has a visual or auditory impairment? Are there volunteers who are familiar with autism or learning and behavioral disabilities? If not, this may be an opportunity to give a junior leadership role to a parent of a child with a disability or a community member who has expertise with the challenges that young people with disabilities may face. If the most common group events are exclusive by nature, you may want to create an alternative youth group for students with disabilities, allowing them to establish community among themselves to make up for activities they choose to opt out of because of their ability status.

15. Integrate children and adults with special physical and mental challenges into the regular service as much as possible.

A personal story from one of our members: Our grandson Sam was 12. He is severely autistic - no language skills, cannot look people in the eye, can't be touched, dislikes being in a crowded space, and is generally nonverbal. As Sam's grandparents, we were a traditionally Conservative family. We wanted Sam to have a Bar Mitzvah at a public service, saying what he could say by being prompted. On the one hand, we knew that the special invitation list could be limited to family and friends or, on the other hand, members of the congregation could be invited to the public service. It was decided to have a Havdalah Service as that was more family-oriented and less formal. There was a great risk of Sam's feeling uncomfortable and shutting down.

Sam's parents contacted the clergy, and they all had a *can-do*, compassionate attitude. After many hours of coaching and prompting and much repetition, we were as ready as we could be. The evening Havdalah service was in the social hall, and there were over 200 in attendance. Family members were holding their breath as Sam was at the bimah being given his tallit. He turned to the podium, between his Mom and Dad, and with some prompting he said, somewhat softly but recognizably, mumbling the familiar words with great hesitation, the opening prayers for the aliyah. The entire congregation sat with bated breath, each holding their siddurim up to their face, tears rolling down their cheeks witnessing Sam chanting those words. It was an unforgettable evening! When Sam was done with the second part of his aliyah, the Rabbi and Cantor, parents and family, and the whole congregation, joined together in a long line, dancing around the room in celebration singing "Siman Tov u'Mazal Tov"! A truly unforgettable service!

The lesson – seek out those parents of children who need to be included, who need to be a part of the synagogue community. Your congregation will be a much better community for having been involved in this extraordinarily bonding, extended family experience. Don't hide a child's disability. Rather, include parents and children in this significant congregational experience!

Of course, different people have different skills and abilities. Some are able to take a more active role in the regular service, some, not so much. But whatever the person's skills and ability, they should have an opportunity to use those to the maximum - to be encouraged to try and be supported no matter the outcome. Michael Jordan said it best: *Never say never, because limits, like fears, are often just an illusion.* And Wayne Gretzky: *You miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take.*

As a Jewish people, we must never stop encouraging everyone to reach their full potential, no matter what obstacles may stand in the way. We must constantly and vigilantly search for ways to ease those obstacles and give everyone in our community a fair chance to succeed.

Suggested Programs

- 1. Conduct HMV sessions on inclusion of one or more of the communities we have identified, such as mental and physical wellness modules, including addiction, discussing our own challenges and those of others we know.**

The Federation of Jewish Men's Club's Hearing Men's Voices program (HMV) is a unique program that engages Jewish men in Jewish life, enabling deeper connections and better relationships among its members. Trained leaders facilitate HMV sessions, encouraging men to talk and engage in rich and meaningful dialogues about common issues using materials developed by the FJMC, themselves, and other clubs and leaders.

The FJMC and its HMV committee have prepared wonderful, turnkey materials to help clubs implement, facilitate and manage HMV groups. These resources include a range of program models, as well as books, outlines, instruction sheets, and guides. For Information about HMV, [click here](#).

For a calendar of diversity awareness events, click here: [Diversity Awareness Calendar](#).

Here are some ways you may approach each area of focus for inclusion:

- Individuals with mental and/or physical health challenges.
- The FJMC "Imagine Life" [webpage](#) includes several guides for HMV sessions: Positive Psychology, Caregiving, Healthy Aging, Addressing Trauma and Dealing with Addictions are coming soon.

- Does your congregation have members who are alcohol and drug counselors, psychologists, or others working in the mental health field? Invite them to facilitate a discussion, be part of a panel, or speak to your group. Maybe they can offer suggestions for other people or organizations.

- Contact social service and community organizations that might offer discussion facilitators, speakers or other resources to spark dialogue. Some examples are:
 - Your local Jewish Family Service
 - [Families for Depression Awareness](#)
 - [HelpGuide](#)
 - [National Alliance on Mental Health \(NAMI\)](#)
 - [No Stigmas Network](#)
 - [Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#)
 - [Alcoholics Anonymous](#)
 - [Narcotics Anonymous](#)
 - [Al-Anon](#)
 - [Jews of Color](#)
- Event-based programming for:
 - Martin Luther King Jr. Day – 3rd Monday in January: www.drmartinlutherking.net
 - African-American History Month – Feb: www.africanamericanhistorymonth.gov
 - Loving Day – June 12th: www.lovingday.org
 - Juneteenth – June 19th: www.juneteenth.com
 - Diversity Shabbat: [Jewish Diversity Awareness and Inclusion Month](#)
- Promoting awareness of Jews of Color:
 - [Anti-Defamation League \(ADL\)](#)
 - [Be'chol Lashon](#)
 - [Black Jews, Israelites.....and Our Friends](#)
 - [Jewish Multiracial Network](#)
 - [Jews of All Hues](#)
 - [Jews of Color Initiative](#)
 - [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People \(NAACP\)](#)
- Bring in a guest speaker, panel, film and/or discussion
- Develop a music, art and/or poetry event. The above organizations or even your local Jewish Federation might be able to help you put together a program or help you connect with a Black synagogue in your area.
- Individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+
 - [GLAAD](#)
 - [HRC – Human Rights Campaign](#)
 - [Keshet](#)
 - [Lambda Legal](#)
 - [LGBT Foundation](#) (United Kingdom)
 - [PFFlag.org](#)
- Programming for:
 - [Pride Month](#) – June
 - Pride Day – June 28th
- Resources for single, single-parent, divorced or widowed individuals in the community:
 - [Parents Without Partners](#)
 - [Single Parent Support Network](#)

2. Create a brunch/event to describe the purpose of this inclusion effort; discuss the various communities on which we are focusing.

What type of event should you do?

First and foremost, you will most likely have better attendance if food in some form is involved. There are many ways this event can be done:

- Lunch & Learn after Shabbat services, with foods like bagels, lox, tuna & egg salad.
- A Sunday brunch event with a variety of soups and sandwiches.
- An early evening Nosh & Scotch, serving a variety of appetizers and snacks, along with adult beverages and soft drinks.
- A BBQ, serving burgers, chicken, hot dogs and salads.
- Incorporate cuisines, music and traditions that reflect the diversity in the global Jewish community.
- A dessert event consisting of different desserts with hot and cold beverages.
- Or it can be as simple as cookies or donuts and coffee.

How elaborate or simple you make it will depend on your budget and available workforce, but do consider a food event of some kind to ensure better turnout.

Who to invite?

Open it to the community, not just your synagogue. Send invitations to other houses of worship in your community, as well as organizations. Invite representatives, as well, from organizations working with some of the groups you are looking to better serve through your inclusionary practices. Advertising this event to a broader range of people will increase the attendance, while illustrating you are part of a larger picture. Ask for RSVPs in advance so you have an idea how many will be attending for room setup and food preparation.

Set a reasonable time frame.

While you want to give people enough time to enjoy whatever food or refreshment you serve without seeming rushed, dragging it out too long can also have a negative effect. For lighter refreshment or simple fare, 1 to 1-1/4 hours is a sufficient period for people to enjoy what you serve while allowing enough time to make your presentations without going so long that people lose interest. For events with more food service, you will need a bit more time for the food, but use your time wisely. Always leave some time for Q & A as well.

What to include in your presentation?

Try to keep your presentation and information as concise as possible. You'll want to let people know:

- Why is your synagogue doing this?
- What does INCLUSION mean to you/your organization? One definition is:
The process, practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized. A commitment to welcoming, respecting, accepting, institutionally supporting and valuing diverse identities and communities of people.
- Whose needs are you looking to recognize/address with this program?
People with physical/mental disabilities? The LGBTQIA+ community?

People of varying socio-economic backgrounds? Single parents?
Various races? Point out these needs to attendees.

- What practices are you planning to institute?
- What can they do to help and be a part of this movement?

You may want to invite one or two members of some of the communities that will be positively impacted by this program to share what it means to them to have their specific needs recognized and addressed.

Say Thank You!

Always be sure to thank people for taking time out of their day to be there, and let them know what they can do moving forward to promote this program and be aware of the special needs of so many around us.

Hold a raffle?

At some point, a 50/50 or other type of raffle could be held, either to help defray the cost of the event, or to donate the proceeds to an organization benefiting one of the groups this program will recognize, which again might be selected by a drawing of those represented.

3. Create a unique club/affiliate inclusion program and inform others.

We're giving you many ideas you can use to bring inclusion to your club/affiliate/synagogue. For instance:

Perhaps your membership can suggest a new program. You can sponsor a contest to see who thinks of the best new idea and give a nominal gift to the winner.

There are many other groups engaged in inclusion activities. Don't hesitate to go outside your own organization to get fresh ideas. If you're not sure if something will work, give it a try! You may be able to project your event's success just by seeing how many people volunteer to help and how many people plan to attend.

The internet and social media are great sources of material. Search for inclusion programs, and you will find many available sites.

Many young people are involved in inclusion. Don't hesitate to ask them for ideas and involve them in the planning and execution of anything that sounds worthwhile.

Both FJMC and WLCJ offer resources and awards for new quality programs.

4. Create inclusionary practices for religious activities.

Congregations should recognize a number of improvements that can make their spaces accessible for individuals with disabilities that are visible and others that are subtle but needed.

Making the sanctuary ritually accessible:

- A. Provide a ramp to an elevated bimah.
- B. Move the reading table to the ground level.
- C. Have an adjustable reading table that lowers for individuals in wheelchairs or who cannot stand for long periods, as well as for those taller and shorter individuals.
- D. Ensure lighting at the reading table is sufficient for individuals who need more focused lighting to read.
- E. Ensure lighting is adequate for lip readers in the congregation.

- F. Ensure there is adequate space to accommodate individuals in wheelchairs in the sanctuary.
- G. Provide portable individual reading tables for large books.
- H. Provide large print and Braille siddurim and chumashim.
- I. Provide plastic magnifying sheets for use with siddurim and chumashim. They can be sewn into book covers in such a way as to overlay the pages of the book.
- J. Ensure that microphones work and individuals who speak away from microphones on the reading table have lanyard microphones.
- K. Ensure there are assisted hearing devices available.
- L. Place a second mezuzah at wheelchair height on doorways throughout the synagogue.
- M. Lower the/a box of kippot and basket of women's head-coverings so they can be reached by everyone, including people who use wheelchairs.
- N. Provide ASL (American Sign Language) interpreters.
- O. Avoid using disability metaphors when speaking.
- P. Train greeters to welcome individuals with disabilities to services, ensuring everyone, regardless of challenges, is greeted warmly.
- Q. Provide transportation for congregants who need rides to services.
- R. Incorporate streaming for congregants who are unable to come to services; provide closed captioning.

Prayer:

When the *Shaliach Tzibur* asks the congregation to rise, she or he should say "Rise if you are able" or "Rise in body or spirit."

Mi Sheberach prayer should be inclusive of all illnesses and conditions, visible and not visible.

Other items to consider:

- a. Have a quiet or low sensory room to accommodate individuals with a variety of disabilities, particularly on Purim and Simchat Torah.
- b. Ensure that restrooms are wheelchair accessible.
- c. Have non-fragrant soaps in restrooms.
- d. Mount a cup dispenser next to your water fountain as opposed to repositioning the entire fountain. Make sure the dispenser is mounted at a height convenient for use by people in wheelchairs. It is also important that cups be maintained in the dispenser.
- e. Ensure accessible parking is marked clearly with a symbol.
- f. Ensure doors and hallways are clear of obstructions.
- g. Ensure the synagogue website is accessible to individuals with visual and auditory disabilities.
- h. Consider creating adult education opportunities concerning disabilities. What do Jewish texts say about disabilities?

5. Create inclusionary practices for other activities.

You know the member who says, "I don't really connect with going to services so much, but I belong because I love getting together with everyone at that annual (steak dinner or poker night or ball game or golf outing) event and (Sunday breakfasts or book group or lunch-n-learns or...).".

Typically our clubs/affiliates/synagogues organize non-religious focused activities that provide members and potential members opportunities to interact in programming that supplements traditional religious activities to build community and unite members.

In so doing, we commonly plan and implement annual events (i.e., a golf outing, steak dinner, or poker night) and meetings/activities periodically placed throughout the year. And when we market these, we commonly announce them formally through our regular written communications and informally – to the usual participants. We talk about trying to get more participation, but we typically fall into the same marketing pattern and for the most part get the same participants.

We recommend three ways to add participants and at the same time be more inclusive with non-religious activity programming:

- a. Plan events and accommodations for events that will encourage new participants, especially those from the underserved groups we have identified in this document. The best way to involve new people is to ask them what activities they want to have or lead; then, have them attend or lead them.
- b. In marketing the events, include direct solicitation of underserved groups and individuals by contacting them directly and explaining both the event and accommodations in day, time, venue, implementation, program preparation and follow-up.
- c. As you decide to put a program onto your organization's calendar, ask:
 - i. Does this program, on its face, also attract members or potential members who are single or have a different family structure? Jews of Color? Individuals with mental and/or physical health challenges? LGBTQIA+ members? Or should we develop new programming that does so?
 - ii. Are there ways we can do this event that accommodate individuals in these communities in a way that provides them incentive to participate, comfortable inclusion, and a satisfying experience?

Examples of this type of programming include:

golf outings, book groups, investment clubs, Sunday breakfasts, sporting events, author talks, virtual speakers, collectibles shows, game/cards/mahjong/poker nights, Lunch-n-Learns

Involving Families

Scenario: Two parents are members of a synagogue, and their 7-year-old son attends Religious School. The parents attend services only on the High Holidays. They do not regularly participate in synagogue programs.

Questions: What family activities will engage them in the synagogue community? The Men's Club/Women's League Affiliate can establish programs to maintain and form new friendships and support commitment to Jewish values.

These family activities could include:

1. Social justice such as food and blood drives, charity events, and marches.
2. Physical and mental health and self-care.
3. Recreational activities like arts, music and sports.
4. Israel and Zionism – Dealing with antisemitism.
5. Affinity group participation – Click [here](#) for opportunities.
6. Support groups for single and divorced parents, parents and teenagers, and the bereaved.
7. Multi-generational programs for seniors and young families.
8. Guest speakers and book events.
9. Writing groups.
10. Retreats (within the synagogue or at other venues).

Programs may be virtual or in-person; limited to the Men's Club/Women's League Affiliate, the synagogue or the wider community; and be marketed using social media. You might want

to send out a survey questionnaire to ask about interest and priorities and at the same time reach out to prospective new members.

- 6. Invite an outside inspirational rabbi, who has personal or aligned experience with any of the identified communities or an author/speaker to address the issues of our identified underserved communities; provide access to other Men's Clubs, Women's League Affiliates and synagogues via a national Zoom or similar broadcast arranged for this purpose.**

In our synagogues, rabbis and other clergy are inspiring and motivating teachers who move us to improve ourselves and learn the lessons of Torah. As we begin our project, one of the best ways is to identify an outside inspirational rabbi who has personal or family experience in one or more categories of marginalized people. Use those religious leaders to move ourselves forward in the topic of inclusion. (Please see #7 below for developing a Shabbaton).

As our outreach has expanded, several rabbis have led inspiring and creative two-day weekend learning events. Two very different rabbis spoke numerous times in Boston at Temple Emanuel and for the Combined Jewish Philanthropies, creating great enthusiasm for the new Ruderman RSIP inclusion projects in Boston. Rabbi Brad Artson from the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at the American Jewish University in Los Angeles and Rabbi Julia Watts Belser, Professor of Jewish Studies at Georgetown University, and a long-time advocate for disability and gender justice, are inspirational and helpful in moving people forward.

Rabbi Artson is a Professor at the Ziegler School and Vice President of the American Jewish University. Brad skillfully and honestly told of his family's experience with attempts at mainstreaming his autistic child. Rabbi Artson was inspired by this experience to write a book and develop a new stream of theology. As he is in demand and commands a significant speaking fee, Rabbi Artson is probably best used for large organizations such as a joint effort of FJMC/WLCJ or other large groups with the ability to fund his engagement.

Rabbi Julia Watts Belser, an international women's and human rights activist, also spoke to us. She is in a wheelchair and inspired us with her innovative Torah and role modeling. One speech included a reference to the vision of Ezekiel's wheel as inspired by a wheelchair. An enlightening experience was the need to consider the challenges of transporting her with her wheelchair. As you might expect, she was most gracious about our concerns and easily demonstrated her flexibility and inspiration not to let a seemingly difficult barrier get in her way while teaching us to not see others by their gender or disability. The last day of her teaching was devoted to inspiring gender questioning and disability activists to be involved with their local committee, as well as the multi-synagogue effort in Boston.

Our experience in Boston taught us these rabbis' presentations and other similar programs serve a dual purpose. They have resonance for our target groups as well as those simply eager to learn from an internationally renowned rabbi.

One barrier we sometimes identify is program cost: honoraria along with travel and hotel expenses. Virtual programming reduces travel and hotel expenses, although prominent presenters' fees can still be significant. But don't let the initial fee quote stop your pursuit

of these amazing speakers/teachers. Often fees are reduced for programming the speakers want to support, something meaningful to them personally.

In addition, you may identify more local, respected clergy that fit your needs. Many communities have inspirational, knowledgeable clergy in their midst. And the use of those clergy typically is more easily arranged and afforded, in person or virtual.

The benefit of being in person, of course, is the ability to make individual connections with a scholar, highlighting and expanding on their inspiration. To promote such speakers, we need our own clergy and leadership to understand the ability of bringing in outside clergy and topical leaders to raise inclusion awareness and inclusion efforts.

7. Encourage ourselves to conduct special Shabbatot at our synagogues, addressing each of our identified underserved communities; for instance, identify a weekend and have a congregant speak Friday night, the rabbi on Saturday morning, and a support group at *Havdalah*.

As an example, a club/affiliate/synagogue might do an Inclusion Shabbat or several Inclusion Shabbatot spread out during the year in partnership with organizations on racism, LGBTQIA+, antisemitism etc. The weekend can be dedicated to individual groups or inclusion issues in general.

Kicked off with a dinner before Friday night services, where the congregants can meet with members of the community being discussed. A facilitator placed at each table could lead a discussion on pre-selected topics. Congregants can choose which topic they would like to discuss. During the Friday night service, a speaker from the community could address the congregation and engage them afterwards, at kiddush, in a general discussion.

On Saturday morning, the rabbi or guest speaker at a Scholar in Residence weekend (a speaker knowledgeable about each topic) could speak or lead a discussion, followed by discussion with a panel. Again, these can include many targeted inclusion topics or a singularly targeted individual Scholar in Residence program for each subject. Various affiliate and support groups within the synagogue can present their views and inclusive efforts during an arranged discussion or can do something different, such as sponsor a local theater group to illustrate issues that arise through reenactments.

Joint programs with Men's Club and Women's League Affiliates are good vehicles for inclusion programming. Adding local community groups with similar organizational goals or whose advocacy in targeted areas match the goals of the clubs/affiliates with respect to inclusiveness can enhance a program's effectiveness.

Program success depends significantly on prospective participants being aware of the program and being motivated to attend. Publicizing your activity in the Jewish and secular press ahead of time is certainly a good idea. Making the marketing attractive and motivating is helpful as well. Someone looking to join a particular synagogue may base their decision on how open and inclusive that synagogue is, and merely by publicizing these programs, these prospective members may feel a closer identification, feeling their uniqueness or that of others they know, would be welcome there.

8. Integrate Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month (JDAIM; February), Juneteenth, Pride Month; add meaningful volunteer programs on MLK Day and other recognition events onto your calendars and run appropriate programs celebrating these events.

There are inclusion months and days throughout the calendar year. Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month (the JDAIM implementation guide can be found [here](#)), Pride Month (click [here](#) for more information), Martin Luther King Day, and Juneteenth provide a wealth of opportunities for integrating inclusion into club/affiliate, regional and national programming. In dealing with racial diversity within the Jewish Community, Be'chol Lashon provides diversity workshops that may be offered regionally to deal with strategies for inclusion of the 12-15% of our Jewish community population that are [Jews of Color](#). During Pride month, national organizations such as [Keshet](#) offer workshops in the use of pronouns, which is an important concept in helping transgender individuals feel included and heard. Martin Luther King Day and Juneteenth provide opportunities for speakers to involve clubs, affiliates, synagogues and regions in social justice activities. Finally, during JDAIM, the simple act of involving families with children who are neuro-diverse, sharing stories of wants, needs, and successes is an opportunity to include these families in synagogue life and for these families to be seen and heard. Many speakers can provide inclusion workshops that will improve skills or fill deficit gaps in particular skills.

We know it is important that people who otherwise feel marginalized, be seen and heard. Sharing stories about coping with disabilities provides that platform.

Inclusion Shabbat may provide the opportunity for guest sermons, for teaching during Shabbat, for increasing awareness of disability issues and of people with different abilities, and for promoting support in the congregation to make improvements.

For a calendar of diversity awareness events, click [Diversity Awareness Calendar](#)

9. Meet with clergy, lay and educational leaders and synagogue staff to design specific strategies that have a strong likelihood of success for members of our identified underserved communities.

To be successful in promoting inclusion programs, it is necessary to meet with the clergy, lay and educational leaders as well as synagogue staff. If they buy into the goal to create inclusion programs, they will have a much better chance for success. They have access to all kinds of demographics and anecdotal knowledge that may be used to assess interest and knowledge of the topics. In addition, they usually are aware of who in the congregation, affiliates, clubs, school, and other groups, might be interested in taking on leadership roles for specific programs or committees, or would benefit from these programs.

Another example is the congregation president could appoint a member to become the chair of the Inclusion Committee. This would make it a permanent, ongoing group whose purpose is to present programs and promote inclusionary practices. If there are individuals within the synagogue who are uncomfortable with inclusion, the clergy could meet with them to help them overcome their concerns or at least to become more comfortable with the idea. This is not so much about producing program ideas as it is to create a welcoming and nonjudgmental atmosphere in which all members feel encouraged to participate and attend at levels that are comfortable for them.

10. Involve USY Chapters in inclusion activities.

United Synagogue Youth (USY) is a perfect avenue to effect change. Besides their youth and openness to new ideas, USY members are typically already involved in inclusion activities through their chapter, school, religious school, synagogue and community programs. Clubs and affiliates may get involved on a local level by partnering with them. Some examples are the JCC Maccabi Games® and ArtsFest®, which both provide opportunities for young people who see themselves as different (or are viewed as different) to form connections and friendships through sports and the arts. A partnership with the Special Olympics could be an opportunity for Jewish teens to connect with teens who have disabilities. In addition, you might inquire with USY about its planning for, successes in, and learnings from a 2022 pilot program for Jews of Color entering 6th-12th grades. Their aim is to build community and inclusivity and facilitate a meaningful and fun USY experience rooted in the ideology of the Conservative Movement. These are just a few examples of how clubs and affiliates may get involved on a local level with USY youngsters, synagogues, and other organizations that promote Conservative Movement values and inclusivity.

11. Ensure that men's clubs' or affiliates' Shabbatot create the opportunity to teach about welcoming and embracing underserved communities.

Men's clubs and affiliates have the opportunity to have a major impact on the topic of inclusion through their annual Shabbat programming. The Shabbat program has the opportunity to involve individuals identified as being part of an inclusion-targeted group to be asked to participate as a Torah reader, take an Aliyah, lead part of the service, give a D'var Torah, lead a Hebrew reading, be the speaker to address the congregation on a topic involving inclusion and/or be part of the planning committee. [Click here for the FJMC Men's Club Shabbat Guide](#); [Click Here for the WLCJ Shabbat Information](#)

Consider making a Shabbat-themed weekend with different topics and speakers on inclusion at Friday night services, the Saturday morning service, Havdalah and during a Sunday men's club/affiliate breakfast. Include parents in the planning to get upfront support and natural homebound follow up.

Enhance your group's Shabbat by reaching out to members of the underserved communities before a Shabbat to ascertain if they need a ride to services or any other accommodations that will encourage their participation. Make sure all communities are included in your service to the fullest extent possible.

Have the sermon address issues of inclusion. Just about any parsha can be interpreted to include these topics. Have a dialogue, either during or following services, which will serve as an introduction for those who have not considered whether their group is, in fact, inclusive. You might hand out pre-printed issue points that the congregation may use to spark discussion.

It's always helpful in this type of setting for at least the program's and organization's leaders to wear name tags that will allow any newcomers to identify leaders and address them by name.

Following up the next day with an email or call to those newcomers to gauge their thoughts on the event is always a good idea. Don't neglect your current membership. Survey them to ascertain that the message was received and if not, what changes you need to make for the next event.

12. Establish programs to create dialogue with underserved communities.

One way to promote inclusion is to establish programs that create opportunities for dialogue with underserved communities. The purpose of these programs would be to create an open and constructive dialogue between underserved communities and the wider Jewish community at which all sides will be allowed to express their views in a safe environment without judgment. By implementing such programs, the underserved community will be given an opportunity to educate the wider Jewish community about their concerns, and the wider Jewish community will be given an opportunity to share with the underserved community their desire to promote comfortable participation of all.

One such program may be to discuss various perspectives that surround the Black Lives Matter movement; how support for Palestinians can but doesn't have to be objectionable from a Jewish Israel-supportive audience; or the challenge some of us have accepting uniqueness in various forms of our identified underserved communities. The purpose of such a program would be to create dialogue where all sides could express their views and educate others about their concerns. These programs may not solve these disputes, but they certainly should make us all more sensitive to other Jews' concerns and ultimately support inclusivity for all.

Final Thought

Keep in Mind – Our goal is to change the culture of our synagogues to create an environment that makes all of us, no matter our unique identities and needs, feel welcomed and embraced in our Jewish Community.