

Closing the Inclusion Gap

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A Report on Disability and Belonging in Jewish Life



Matan

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Prepared by Matan | 2025

Executive Summary

The Jewish community stands at a crossroads. We have long championed justice and belonging – yet for too many people with disabilities, those promises remain unkept. National data underscore the urgency. Approximately one in four U.S. adults and one in six children live with a disability.¹ More than three decades after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)² and nearly fifty years since the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)³, the American Jewish community continues to lag behind in achieving full inclusion of people with disabilities. While secular institutions have advanced accessibility through policy, funding, and systemic accountability, many Jewish communal spaces – schools, synagogues, camps, and social programs – remain inconsistent in meeting even basic standards of inclusion.

Jewish communal studies suggest that individuals with disabilities and their families participate in Jewish life at significantly lower rates. Accessibility audits of Jewish institutions reveal persistent physical, programmatic, and attitudinal barriers, including limited staff training, exclusionary admissions policies, and inadequate accommodations.⁴ Despite good intentions, inclusion efforts often depend on individual leadership rather than institutional systems, leaving access uneven and unsustainable.

This gap is not only a legal and educational issue but a moral and spiritual failure. Jewish tradition commands **kavod habriyot** (honoring human dignity) and **b'tzelem elohim** (the belief that everyone is created in God's image), requiring communities to ensure that all people can participate fully in Jewish life.

Compounding matters are new federal risks to disability inclusion. As of October 2025, the U.S. Department of Education has laid off most of the staff responsible for special education oversight, and many disability-related programs across agencies face uncertainty about future funding and management. These changes will have far-reaching consequences, from early intervention and K–12 education to higher education, employment, and community services. In this shifting landscape, the Jewish community has both an opportunity and a critical and urgent role to play in sustaining consistent standards, training, and accountability.

¹ “CDC Data Shows Over 70 Million U.S. Adults Reported Having a Disability”, CDC Newsroom, <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2024/s0716-Adult-disability.html>

² “The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protects people with disabilities from discrimination,” ADA.gov U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, [ada.gov](https://www.ada.gov/)

³ “Individuals with Disabilities Education Act,” U.S. Department of Education, [ed.gov/laws-and-policy/individuals-disabilities/idea](https://www.ed.gov/laws-and-policy/individuals-disabilities/idea)

⁴ “2021 Faith Survey Responses - Jews”, Disability Belongs [.disabilitybelongs.org/faith-spirituality/2021-faith-survey-jewish](https://disabilitybelongs.org/faith-spirituality/2021-faith-survey-jewish)



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True inclusion is not optional – it is a religious and communal obligation.

The findings presented in this report draw not only from national data and trends but also from over eleven years of Matan's direct consultation with Jewish schools, synagogues, and community organizations. Through these partnerships, Matan has helped institutions identify their strengths and uncover barriers to inclusion – revealing clear, recurring patterns across the Jewish communal landscape.

This report frames the scope of the problem through data and lived experience. It examines how Jewish organizations have fallen behind broader societal norms, explores the moral imperatives rooted in Jewish values, and presents a structured analysis leading to actionable solutions. **The good news is that the gaps are solvable:** Jewish communities already demonstrate commitment, creativity, and pockets of excellence, proving that when systems align with values, meaningful and lasting inclusion is entirely within reach.

Real stories from individuals and families, together with an analysis of systemic barriers and Matan's recommendations will help build a framework for a Jewish community that aligns its practices with its deepest values. This commitment will help ensure that inclusive practices remain strong across the Jewish community, regardless of external policy fluctuations, and that individuals with disabilities are supported throughout every stage of life.

The Myths and Misunderstandings About Disability

Talking about disability inclusion is complex, as our awareness and understanding of disability is constantly evolving. Disability is too often imagined only as physical, and this narrow view overlooks the vast tapestry of experiences that shape what disability truly means. Cultural stigma and silence around disability have also contributed to the persistence of exclusion within many communities and institutions. Research on disability stigma shows that negative attitudes, prejudice, and discrimination have severe consequences for people with disabilities, impacting their social access, employment, and psychological well-being. Studies show that stigma appears in many forms, from public attitudes to self-stigma and the barriers built into systems.⁵ The impact of exclusion is far-reaching: it diminishes engagement, limits leadership opportunities, and perpetuates inequity – not just for individuals with disabilities, but for their entire family. Inclusion, by contrast, strengthens participation, cultivates diverse leadership, and fosters greater community investment – socially, spiritually, and financially.

When barriers are removed and access is intentional, everyone benefits.

⁵ "Public stigma and the perception of rights: Differences between intellectual and physical disabilities," Science Direct, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0891422214005447>

While inclusion generally means making sure that everyone can participate fully in programs, activities and vocational opportunities, we must also define, understand and develop a common language for discussing disability. Disability is a physical, cognitive, and/or emotional impairment that require(s) one or more accommodations or modifications in order to meaningfully participate in activities together with non-disabled individuals.⁶ It is important to recognize the diversity of disability; disabilities can be visible or invisible, something a person is born with or has acquired at later in life. When we talk about disability, we must remember that this includes, but is in no way limited to, mental health challenges, chronic illnesses, intellectual disabilities, and hearing and vision loss. Many individuals acquire a disability or illness later in life, experiencing a sudden or gradual shift towards new limitations. Many seniors demonstrate this as well, as they experience physical or cognitive decline and are no longer able to do the things they once did. Unlike most other minority identities, disability is one that nearly all of us will encounter eventually.

Myths	Facts
Disability = Physical	Disability includes neurodiversity, mental health, chronic illness, aging
Inclusion = Accomodation	Inclusion = Belonging and access for all
Disability = “Other”	Disability is part of every community and life stage

Data and Testimonials

Surveys have found that less than one in five American Jews with disabilities felt Jewish institutions were doing “very well” or “extremely well” in including disabled people in community activities; more than 20% report being turned away from Jewish community activities due to lack of accommodations; nearly 20% identify synagogues as having the most challenges regarding accessibility; only 15% of Jews with disabilities can name a disabled leader in their faith institutions.⁷ In addition, individuals with disabilities are twice as likely to experience poverty as their nondisabled peers.⁸ These economic disparities exacerbate barriers to participation in Jewish life, where engagement frequently depends on membership dues, tuition, and program fees.

Over the past 11 years, Matan has studied Jewish communities across North America through our Inclusion Community Assessment, Planning & Strategy (I-CAPS). The I-CAPS is a structured evaluation and planning process that helps Jewish communities identify their current inclusion practices, uncover gaps, and build

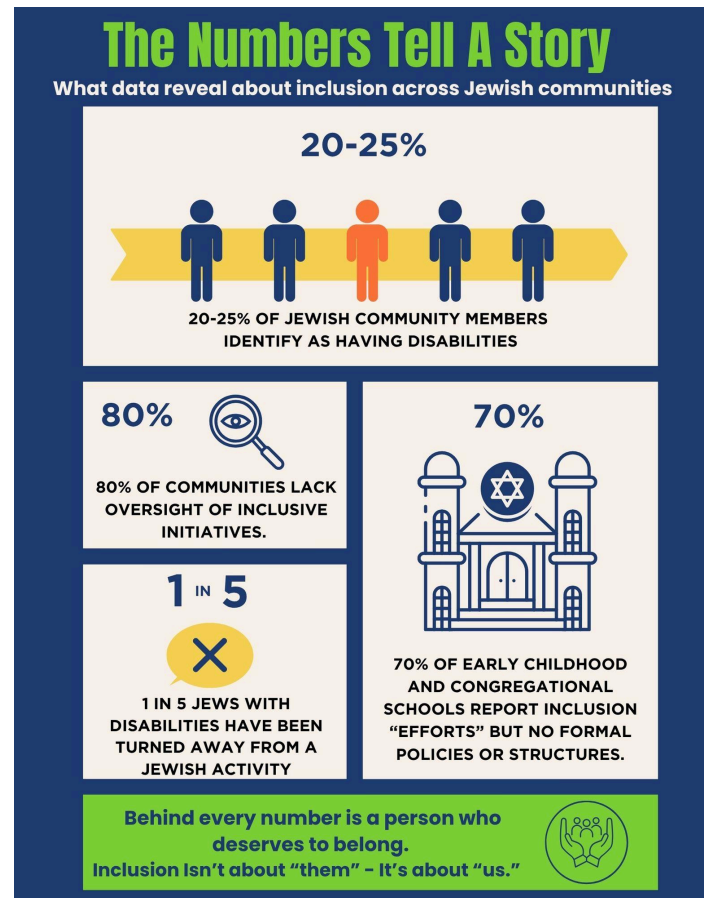
⁶ “Section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973”, US Department of Labor, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasam/centers-offices/civil-rights-center/statutes/section-504-rehabilitation-act-of-1973>

⁷ “2021 Faith Survey Responses - Jews”, Disability Belongs disabilitybelongs.org/faith-spirituality/2021-faith-survey-jewish

⁸ “Financial Inequality: Disability, Race and Poverty in America”, National Disability Institute, <https://www.nationaldisabilityinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/disability-race-poverty-in-america.pdf>

strategies for improvement. Matan's assessments of diverse Jewish communities, small, medium and large, reveal striking uniformity:

- In every region studied, 20-25% of people have identified disabilities including, but not limited to, learning, developmental, and mental health challenges, mirroring national averages.
- Fewer than one-third of Jewish schools employ a dedicated inclusion coordinator or learning specialist.
- Upwards of 70% of early childhood and congregational schools report inclusion "efforts" but no formal policies or structures.
- 70% of communities rely on external service providers or temporary paraprofessional support rather than building long-term internal capacity.
- Family feedback highlights ongoing attrition - families leaving Jewish institutions because their needs cannot be met.
- 80% of the Jewish communities studied do not have centralized oversight of inclusive initiatives.



Across thousands of interviews with Jewish professionals, lay leaders, parents and individuals with disabilities, it is impossible to forget that these are not just numbers. These statistics represent people turned away, professionals overwhelmed, and families drifting from Jewish life.

Parents of children with disabilities

"When we lose out on engagement with the Jewish community, it stings."

"Raised religiously, I thought I'd raise my kids that way. And then I had a kid with profound disabilities and that just wasn't a concern anymore."

"Families are being pushed out of the Jewish community."

"Tolerated and accommodated is not the same as being included."

"There is a lack of community effort to support families and children with disabilities."

"I was told, 'Students with special needs' are not who we cater to. We don't have the resources."

"My dream is that every synagogue would be ready to handle kids like my son."

"If you're not a parent who advocates, your kid can fall through the cracks."

"There are so many different steps that you have to take - there is no guidance... [and] so many disconnects - if you as a parent are not chipping away [every day], your child is not going to get the services they need."

"We need to... create access to spaces, make events inclusive... We need to stop saying no."

Individuals with Disabilities



"I've never met so many people who are unaware of equal access... I couldn't even find out if the Jewish 'special needs' programs were appropriate for my son. [I'm deaf]... they wouldn't provide an interpreter."

"I get lost easily, feel anxious going somewhere I have not been."

"Being a part of a community that does not make me feel different is really important."

"Zoom has opened my life."

"It was very hard for me to connect to Jewish life. My dad is a Rabbi. I went to youth group at our temple, but I did not have any friends there."

"Autistic people like ritual. Judaism is all about ritual."

Lay Leaders



"We've (the Jewish community) been spending a lot of time figuring out how to bring back Jewish families who have had negative experiences in the Jewish community. We're missing the boat - how can we make sure they don't have negative experiences to begin with? By making all of our programs more inclusive and accessible from the start."

"It's cost prohibitive to be inclusive within the Jewish community."

"There's no point-person overseeing inclusion anywhere. There's no concise plan. Anyone who would oversee inclusion would need to be very well-versed in various aspects of inclusion - education, legal entitlements, clinicians, etc."

"The default in our community is not inclusive. This is not intentional; it's just habitual; this is how it's always been done. This creates 'otherness'."





"Our children with the most significant needs are paired with people that are the least trained."

"There are very inconsistent levels of training with regard to inclusion. Teachers are in need of much more Professional Development."

"What concerns me is the people who are not walking through the door to our synagogue; those that assume they won't be able to participate."

"As a community we don't advertise being Inclusive like we do with [other things]. People think interfaith when they hear inclusion, but how do we let people know about disabilities?"

"We approach things piece-meal. It's not an effective way for a community to offer resources to its members."

"We want to be a welcoming and inclusive community for all, but I don't think we're all on the same page about what that means. We don't have benchmarks for accessibility."

"If there was an inclusion strategy, there would be people willing to support it."

"I would love it if there was somebody that I could call and say, 'I'm planning this event. Am I addressing accessibility issues? I want to try to do the right thing and sometimes I need guidance on that.'"

"Every organization should ask questions before programs so they are better prepared for [people with] disabilities. We don't do this now."

"I would love to have the support in place so we could give more employment opportunities to more people with cognitive disabilities."

"Develop a sense of belonging. We hear a lot of 'I don't have a friend.'"

Analysis

Matan's inclusion assessments, conducted across Jewish communities nationwide over more than a decade, reveal a pronounced and consistent pattern: good intentions without the systems to sustain them. The data show that while many communities express deep commitment to the value of inclusion, implementation often remains ad hoc, fragmented, and dependent on the passion of a relatively small number of individuals rather than the strength of institutional structures.



Disability Inclusion is Siloed

The first major barrier that emerges is fragmented responsibility across the Jewish communal ecosystem. Too often, inclusion is viewed as the job of a single professional – when such a role even exists – rather than a shared, systemic commitment woven throughout an organization’s culture and operations. In organizations or schools fortunate enough to have an “inclusion specialist,” responsibility for meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities frequently rests entirely with that person. As a result, inclusion can become siloed: a program or position rather than a communal value.

When inclusion depends on one staff member, it rarely becomes embedded in the practices of classroom teachers, clergy, administrators, or lay leaders. Once that individual moves on or funding for the position lapses, progress often dissipates. In communities without such a role, inclusion becomes even more diffuse – something everyone might believe in theoretically, but no one owns in practice. The absence of clear systems and accountability means that inclusion is inconsistently implemented and vulnerable to turnover, budget cuts, or shifting communal and institutional priorities.

This dynamic results in uneven experiences for families. An individual who receives strong support in one program may encounter barriers in another, not because of differing values, but because the structures that would ensure continuity simply do not exist. Professionals report a desire to “do the right thing” but uncertainty about what that looks like in their setting, leading to frustration and burnout. True systemic inclusion requires shifting from a model of isolated expertise to one of communal responsibility, where every educator, leader, and volunteer understands their role in creating environments of belonging.

Disability Inclusion Is Siloed ➡ Lack of Training ➡ Poor Implementation ➡ People Excluded ➡ Need for Systemic Change

Lack of Consistent Training and Shared Data

The second major barrier identified is the absence of consistent training and shared data across the Jewish community. Many educators, clergy, and program staff express willingness and desire to support individuals with disabilities but acknowledge that they lack the necessary knowledge and tools. Professional development on inclusion is often optional, inconsistent, or limited to one-time workshops. Without ongoing learning and skill-building, communities cannot ensure that inclusive practices become embedded norms rather than isolated efforts.

Equally significant is the lack of shared data and communication systems. Information about an individual’s needs, strengths, and accommodations frequently remains siloed within a single institution. When families move from one program to another, there is often no formal process for transferring relevant information or coordinating support. This breakdown not only burdens families – who must repeatedly advocate and re-explain their needs – but also limits institutions’ ability to learn from one another and to identify communal trends or gaps.

The absence of data-sharing also has broader implications for communal planning. Without consistent metrics or shared understanding of who is being served – and who is not – it becomes difficult to measure progress or to allocate resources strategically. In a field that aspires to reflect both Jewish values and educational and programmatic best practice, the lack of infrastructure for continuous learning and evaluation is a significant obstacle.

Implications

Taken together, these findings point to a critical conclusion: **goodwill alone cannot sustain inclusion**. The Jewish community's values and intentions are clear, but without systemic frameworks – policies, training pathways, data systems, and cross-institutional coordination – those intentions will continue to yield uneven and unsustainable results.

Matan's consultations and assessments demonstrate that meaningful progress is possible when communities move from isolated efforts to integrated systems. Building shared accountability structures, developing consistent professional learning across settings, and creating mechanisms for communication and data-sharing are essential steps toward a community that not only fulfills the letter of inclusion-related laws such as the ADA and IDEA, but also embodies the ethical heart of Jewish tradition: the responsibility to ensure that every person belongs.

Building the Future of Disability Inclusion: A Communal Roadmap for Sustainable Change

The findings outlined here, along with follow-up data collected from I-CAPS communities, make clear that the path forward must center on building infrastructure – human, organizational, and communal – to support inclusion at every level. And importantly, this work is already underway in several communities that are truly advancing disability inclusion, demonstrating what is possible when strong systems and shared commitment align. The following roadmap integrates the essential conditions, strategies, and systems needed for lasting transformation across Jewish life. These recommendations address the systemic barriers identified through Matan's assessments and equip Jewish organizations and communities to move from intention to implementation in the pursuit of full and enduring inclusion.

I. Foundations for Change

Analysis across over a dozen communities reveals a consistent truth: inclusion advances where there are three essential elements for change: **champions, funding, and permission to act**. Communities that cultivate all three thrive; those missing even one often stall. Together, these elements form the foundation for communities to move from intention to action.

1. **Champions:** Meaningful inclusion begins with leadership – and champions are the leaders who ensure it endures. A champion leads from a place of equity, grounded in the belief that everyone

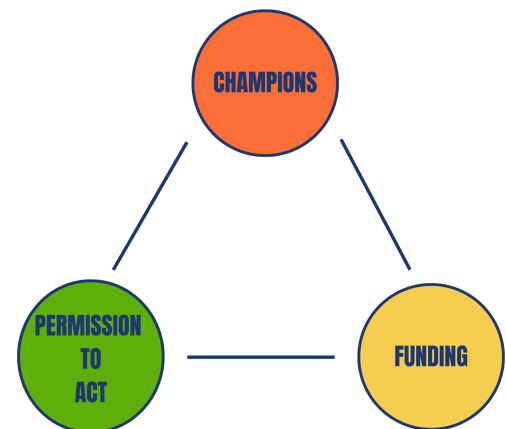
deserves to belong, and that inclusion is not a favor extended to a few but a responsibility owed to all. Champions drive change through communal and organizational systems, transforming inclusion from a peripheral initiative into a defining value.

These individuals – whether professionals, lay leaders, clergy, or funders – bring visibility and urgency to the work. They speak personally and with conviction about the needs they see, connecting the moral imperative of inclusion to the daily realities of community life. Champions take responsibility for keeping inclusion on the agenda when attention drifts elsewhere. They redirect advocacy efforts when challenges arise, ensuring that obstacles become opportunities for learning and progress, rather than excuses for stagnation.

Importantly, champions do not act alone. They build networks of allies, foster collaboration across departments and organizations, and model the shared accountability that true inclusion requires. In every story of communal transformation, a champion can be found – someone who saw potential where others saw limitation, who believed that the community could do better, and who made inclusion not only possible but expected.

In communities that don't yet have inclusion champions, there must be intentionality in cultivating them – by identifying and training individuals across stakeholder groups and creating a Jewish disability inclusion leadership network that meets regularly to align vision, share challenges, and coordinate messaging. Inclusion goals should be built into performance evaluations for senior staff and organizational leaders, signaling that this work is part of the core mission, not an optional add-on. Visibility campaigns can help lift up these leaders' stories, celebrating inclusion as a communal strength. And to sustain the movement, communities can establish cross-departmental committees that bring together educators, clergy, agency directors, and lay leaders, while pairing emerging inclusion advocates with seasoned mentors who can guide their growth.

2. **Funding:** Sustainable inclusion requires intentional investment. Dedicated financial resources for disability inclusion make it possible for organizations and communities to move from aspiration to action. Funding provides the foundation for training, accessible design, staffing, and program adaptation – ensuring that inclusion is not dependent on individual generosity or one-time grants. Strategic financial commitment signals that inclusion is a communal priority, not a discretionary expense.



Just as champions lead from conviction, funding reflects the values of a community in concrete terms. In the communities studied, grantmakers have both the ability and influence to significantly impact the Jewish communal agenda through clarifying how funding considerations and priorities will be established. By emphasizing disability inclusion, there would be a clear message that this is a worthy investment and a shared priority of the entire community.

When organizational, synagogue and school budgets include line items for accessibility, professional development, and accommodations, they communicate that every person's participation is a matter of equity and belonging. Inclusion thrives when it is planned for – not when it must be justified each year. Sustainable funding also allows for innovation, supporting pilot initiatives that can be scaled and shared across the communal network. In short, while much of inclusion is impacted simply by mindset, meaningful progress does also require financial frameworks that are as strong and enduring as the values they represent.

3. **Permission to Act:** Inclusion cannot thrive without institutional and communal endorsement of innovation and adaptive models. "Permission to act" means more than compliance or verbal support – it reflects a culture where professionals are trusted to experiment, make changes, and learn from the process. When leadership explicitly grants this permission, inclusion moves from an optional ideal to an operational expectation.

Empowered educators, clergy, and organizational leaders are more likely to pilot new approaches, challenge outdated norms, and collaborate across departments when they know their efforts will be supported rather than scrutinized. This requires leaders at every level – executive directors, board chairs, rabbis, and funders – to articulate not just why inclusion matters, but to model how it is lived in decision-making and resource allocation.

Permission to act also includes tolerance for imperfection. Progress demands flexibility: space to test ideas, evaluate results, and adapt systems in response. When organizations communicate that inclusion is both a shared value and a shared responsibility, professionals feel authorized to lead boldly within their spheres of influence. In such environments, where there is a feedback loop (surveys, focus groups 1:1 conversations) that includes the experiences of people with disabilities, innovation flourishes – and inclusion becomes embedded in the very fabric of communal life.

Across the community, shared policies and expectations that signal a permission to act may include ensuring that language around inclusion and belonging is paramount in all written, spoken and electronic forms of communication, including mission statements. An inclusion network or subcommittee can plan community-wide, cultural events around the topic of disability inclusion, in which lay and professional representation spans all of the Jewish organizations/institutions and

denominations. Aspirationally, organizations that receive community funding should agree to certain disability inclusion parameters that can and should be integral to receiving monetary support.

Each of these elements represents a pillar of sustainable change. Champions ensure vision and accountability. Funding ensures that inclusion is not reliant on goodwill alone. Permission to act ensures that leaders and professionals at all levels feel empowered to innovate and adapt. Without all three, inclusion remains aspirational; with all three, it becomes achievable and enduring.

II. Operationalizing Inclusion Across Communities

Once these foundations are in place, communities can turn shared values into coordinated systems of practice. The next phase focuses on scaling the infrastructure that sustains inclusive practice across the Jewish ecosystem.

Jewish communities must build on the evidence gathered over the past 25 years, transforming proven models into a scalable national system of **leadership, accountability, and learning**. When organizations align priorities and invest in people, inclusion becomes not an aspiration but an operational reality.

Key strategies include:

1. **Integrate Inclusion Across All Institutions:** Formalize collaboration between educational, social-service, and cultural organizations to reduce duplication and ensure families have a clear, accessible entry point to Jewish life; pair inclusion training with organizational and communal planning, helping leaders understand not only what to do, but how to build systems that last.
2. **Establish a centralized professional position, such as a Community Inclusion Navigator:** This offers communities a more comprehensive approach to Jewish disability inclusion across the lifespan. Communities across the country differ in what agencies are set up to do which type of work. In some cases, it makes sense for the Navigator to be “housed” at a Federation; in other cases, a JCC or JFS is the better option. Regardless of where the position sits, the Navigator would work closely with other agencies in the community’s Jewish ecosystem, serve as a central resource and referral contact, work together with community partners on inclusive communal events, and collaborate with lay leaders, congregations and agencies to strengthen and implement new inclusive opportunities for individuals with disabilities and their families.
3. **Align organizational strategic plans** around a common inclusion framework, with measurable objectives. During each organization’s strategic planning cycle, require an inclusion review to ensure goals, objectives, and action steps reflect the shared framework. Ensure budgets reflect inclusion goals, with dedicated funding lines for training, accommodations, and infrastructure improvements.

Add inclusion objectives to each department's plan – education, communications, facilities, HR, and programs – so responsibility is distributed rather than siloed. Include language such as:

- a. "Ensure all programs and spaces are accessible to participants with diverse needs"
- b. "Increase leadership roles held by people with disabilities."
- c. Review all public-facing materials for inclusive language and accessibility compliance.

4. **Align grantmaking criteria and funding opportunities with inclusion benchmarks**, so financial incentives reinforce strategic priorities. Funders can develop clear, practical benchmarks (e.g., accessibility of physical spaces and digital platforms, staff training completion, representation of people with disabilities in leadership, inclusive communication practices). Add required questions to RFP's such as:

- a. "How does your organization ensure accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities?"
- b. "How are individuals with disabilities represented in program design and leadership?"
- c. Require grantees to report annually on inclusion outcomes (e.g., number of staff trained, accessibility improvements completed, participants with disabilities engaged). Consider offering capacity-building mini-grants to help applicants strengthen inclusion efforts, and using consistent reporting templates to allow for communal data aggregation. Offer tiered expectations based on organizational size and type, so inclusion remains attainable for both small and large institutions.

5. **Train Every Professional and Volunteer:** Provide tiered, ongoing inclusion training – relevant for educators, clergy, administrators, program staff, and lay leaders – so that inclusive thinking becomes a community-wide skill set, not the responsibility of a select few. This will further build consistent language and practice across organizational types. Set a goal for year 1, year 2, year 3, etc. by which there will be organized training opportunities for the various types of Jewish professionals (Jewish day school professionals, religious school educators, community organizations, etc.). Make inclusion training a requirement for staff onboarding and renewal of contracts in education and community settings; tie completion to professional development credit or recognition through national networks; encourage boards and funders to ask for staff participation data as part of grant or membership reporting.

6. **Fund for the Future:** Shift investment from temporary fixes to long-term capacity building. Prioritize sustained funding for leadership roles, professional learning, and the infrastructure that embeds inclusion in daily practice. Incentivize shared staffing models across small institutions (e.g., one inclusion professional serving a network of synagogues or early childhood centers). Where possible, create communal inclusion endowments managed by federations or foundations to ensure permanent funding streams for inclusion initiatives. Launch a multi-year inclusion sustainability campaign inviting major donors to seed endowment funds and planned gifts; designate a

percentage of all communal or foundation grantmaking (e.g., 2–5%) for inclusion-related capacity building. Build annual funding into communal budgets for ongoing inclusion training (to support #5 above); fund communities of practice where professionals exchange strategies, troubleshoot challenges, and scale effective models.

7. **Center Families:** Develop unified referral systems, shared language, and transparent processes so that families never have to navigate alone. Partner with federations, JCCs, and social service agencies to map all inclusion-related services and keep listings updated annually. Ensure all websites and printed materials include accessibility and inclusion information (contact person, process); develop transition protocols between early childhood, school-age, teen, and adult programs to ensure continuity of inclusion supports.

Together, these strategies create a communal ecosystem where inclusion is shared, supported, and sustained across generations.

III. Sustaining Systemic Transformation

Even as local efforts take root, true transformation requires a national framework that embeds inclusion within the very fabric of Jewish communal life. The next frontier of this work is about moving from awareness to accountability—ensuring that inclusion is not dependent on individuals but built into the policies, competencies, and leadership structures of every organization.

To sustain progress long-term, the following systemic actions are essential:

1. **Build a National Framework:** Develop shared standards and resources that equip professionals with the tools, training, and support needed to embed inclusion across every facet of communal life. This might include opportunities for affiliation, digital learning modules, and ongoing coaching to ensure deep, sustainable culture change.
2. **Develop Pathways for Inclusive Leadership:** Establish consistent expectations, mentorship, and professional pathways that connect training with practice, creating a pipeline of leaders who will carry this work forward across the community.
3. **Expand Professional Development:** Ongoing professional learning is essential to inclusion. From short workshops to year-long partnerships, accessible and scalable training opportunities should be available to Jewish professionals at all levels. Integrated learning – combining evidence-based strategies with real-world application – can strengthen inclusive practices across the community.

4. **Transform Curricula and Resources:** Inclusive education requires materials that meet the diverse needs of all learners. Curricula and lesson plans should be adaptable, developmentally appropriate, and reflective of evolving standards in disability inclusion. Resources should encompass the full lifespan, from early childhood through adulthood, ensuring that inclusion remains a constant value throughout Jewish learning.
5. **Assess and Plan for Inclusion:** Each community has unique strengths, challenges, and “personality.” Conducting regular assessments helps leaders examine policies, programs, and culture through an inclusive lens. The data gathered can serve as a roadmap – showing where inclusion efforts are thriving and where additional focus or support is needed to ensure sustained progress over time.

These systemic efforts ensure that the inclusive practices nurtured in individual communities are reinforced, scaled, and sustained nationally.

Conclusion: A Collective Commitment

As Jewish communities strengthen their own systems of inclusion, they do so against a backdrop of growing national instability and weakening disability protections. The imperative, therefore, is clear: to build a resilient, interdependent system where inclusion is not vulnerable to shifting external forces but grounded in enduring communal values.

This is not simply a matter of kindness or compliance – it is a matter of communal vitality and survival: spiritual, ethical, and institutional. When we invest in people, systems, and shared accountability, we ensure that every person – of every ability – can find belonging in Jewish life.

The data is clear: people with disabilities continue to experience exclusion from Jewish spaces and systems, not because of lack of care, but because of lack of structure. Goodwill alone cannot close the inclusion gap. It will take leadership, resources, and accountability to transform our institutions into places where belonging is the rule and not the exception.

This report shows that the tools already exist. We know what works: training that equips professionals at every level, policies that embed inclusion into strategic plans, and funding models that prioritize long-term capacity over short-term fixes. We know that progress accelerates where communities cultivate champions, sustain financial commitment, and grant permission to act boldly. The challenge before us is not actually one of innovation, but of will – to align our systems with our values, and our values with our actions.

At a time when national infrastructure for disability rights is weakening, the Jewish community has the opportunity – and the obligation – to lead. We can demonstrate that inclusion is not only possible but powerful: a force that renews Jewish life, expands leadership, and strengthens every institution it touches. When we design our communities with every person in mind, we not only fulfill the promise of accessibility – we fulfill the promise of *klal Yisrael* itself, where everyone benefits, and everyone belongs.

Appendix A. Methodology

Findings in this report are drawn from Matan’s Inclusion Community Assessments conducted between 2018–2025 and from evaluation data collected by Dr. Beth Cousens, through surveys, interviews, and focus groups with educators, leaders, and families.

Appendix B. Evaluation of Matan’s Signature Programs

An independent evaluation by Dr. Beth Cousens of Matan’s professional development programs – including the **Matan Institute for Education and Youth Directors** – provides quantitative and qualitative evidence of transformative impact:

- 90% of alumni report that their participation significantly improved their ability to support diverse learners.
- Nearly 70% use Matan’s tools and frameworks weekly or more often.
- Participants describe their experience as “professionally and personally transformative,” with measurable ripple effects across their institutions.
- Alumni-led organizations report increased accessibility, expanded staff training, and shifts in communal language about disability and diversity.

This evaluation demonstrates that targeted investment in educator training leads directly to broader institutional and cultural change across Jewish communal life.