



The Journey Toward Accessibility

Unitarian Universalist congregations are opening their hearts, minds, and doors to people with disabilities and to older adults, recognizing their unique needs while appreciating their gifts and talents. This chart represents the journey toward accessibility. You will notice that each level of the journey, beginning with “Awareness” and “Internal Advocacy”, represents a greater commitment by your congregation toward the goal of full participation and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities.

This self-assessment is a learning tool created by the National Organization on Disability as part of their campaign “ACCESS: It Begins in the Heart”. For more information about this interfaith campaign, visit the NOD website, www.nod.org, and look in the section labeled “Religious Participation.” As you read each item, ask yourself where your congregation is, and put a circle around:

(1) not started; (2) getting started; (3) well on our way; (4) we’re there!

AWARENESS (1) (2) (3) (4)
Recognition by some congregation members and/or the minister(s) that there are barriers preventing children and/or adults with physical, sensory, psychiatric, or intellectual disabilities from full participation in congregational activities.

INTERNAL ADVOCACY (1) (2) (3) (4)
Growing advocacy within the congregation to welcome people with disabilities as full participants and to remove barriers (architecture, communications, attitudes) to this participation.

DISCUSSIONS (1) (2) (3) (4)
Concerns raised regarding ability of the congregation to meet the challenges (e.g. will people with disabilities be comfortable joining after barriers have been removed?) and then solutions identified – with input from people with disabilities and other experts,

PLANS (1) (2) (3) (4)
Invitation of people with disabilities to join the congregation as full members, action plans devised to achieve barrier-removing goals, and formal commitment made to welcome people with disabilities.

ACCOMMODATIONS (1) (2) (3) (4)
Accommodations made to improve opportunities for participation of people with disabilities (e.g. large print orders of service; trained ushers; improved lighting; ramps and pew cuts; trained RE teachers)



WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT (1) (2) (3) (4)
Appreciation expressed for the changes being made and friendships extended to people with disabilities and their family members by increasing numbers within the congregation.

HURDLES (1) (2) (3) (4)
Identification of architectural (e.g. elevator, accessible restroom, ramp to chancel), communications (e.g. sign language interpreter, alternative formats for printed materials), financial, or other barriers and ways found to move forward in spite of them.

INCLUSION (1) (2) (3) (4)
Increased participation of people with disabilities in worship, study, service, and leadership, as well as increased comfort level of members with a more diverse congregation.

OUTREACH (1) (2) (3) (4)
Options explored and action plans formulated for partnership opportunities with local agencies serving people with disabilities and with organizations of people with disabilities.

LEADERSHIP (1) (2) (3) (4)
Recruitment of people with disabilities for lay leadership roles in the congregation and a willingness demonstrated to accept and accommodate religious leaders with disabilities.

NEW CONSCIOUSNESS (1) (2) (3) (4)
Resistant barriers of attitude within the congregation toward people with disabilities addressed (e.g. through adult education forums, consciousness raising by congregational leaders)

TRANSFORMATION (1) (2) (3) (4)
Ongoing transformation of the congregation into a place where children and adults with disabilities are welcomed, fully included, and treated with respect.

EXTERNAL ADVOCACY (1) (2) (3) (4)
An expanded advocacy role for the congregation regarding the social justice issues, rights, and needs of people with disabilities in the community-at-large.

OUTREACH (1) (2) (3) (4)
Successful strategies, insights, and effective practices compiled and shared with other congregations and communities.

SHARING THE STORY (1) (2) (3) (4)
The story of the transformation of the congregation is publicized through articles, presentations, and/or media events.