

Universal Design for Jewish Nonprofits

Designing Organizations that Work for More People

Universal Design* is not just about accessibility.

It is a leadership approach to designing systems, programs, and cultures that work for the widest range of people from the start.

This applies to both:

How we run our organizations

- Staff
- Culture
- Systems

How we serve our communities

- Programs
- Participants
- Partners

1. Equitable Use

Design so people can participate in the same way whenever possible—without being singled out or needing a separate solution.

Examples:

- Instead of ad hoc requests, establish flexible work policies that apply to all staff.
- Offer one inclusive program format or set of materials, rather than a “standard” version and a separate “accessible” version.
- Assign clear roles and deadlines so all staff know what’s expected without needing to ask for clarification.
- Standardize internal processes so staff who struggle with pacing or clarity get the same support as everyone else.
- Ask staff if there is anything that would help them participate more fully or effectively.
- Budget for ASL interpreters and have braille available at events.

*** The 7 Principles of Universal Design were developed in 1997 by a working group of architects, product designers, engineers and environmental design researchers, led by the late Ronald Mace in the North Carolina State University.**

2. Flexibility in Use

Offer different ways to participate so people can choose what works best for them.

Examples:

- Offer multiple ways to contribute in meetings (speaking, chat, written follow-up).
- Offer multiple ways to engage: in-person, online, recorded, or asynchronous participation.
- Provide a suite of technology and support tools to all staff, so they can easily use those that will be most helpful to them.
- Create programming and experiences with built-in options instead of having everyone do the same thing at the same time.
- Give donors options for giving: online, by mail, or in person, with clear instructions for each method.

3. Simple and Intuitive Use

Make things easy to understand, regardless of experience or background.

Examples:

- Establish and document clear role definitions, priorities, and decision-making processes.
- Check program descriptions and directions to ensure that they clearly explain what to expect and what to do, without insider language.
- Design event registration forms that are short, intuitive, and visually clear.

4. Perceptible Information

Ensure important information is communicated clearly and in ways people can access.

Examples:

- Share decisions in writing after meetings, not just verbally.
- Provide materials in multiple formats (audio, large print, braille, digital text).
- Share information in various ways (email, website, printed materials, audio).
- Use visuals or color-coded trackers to indicate priorities and deadlines.
- Ask on registration forms, “Do you require any accommodations to fully participate?” (e.g., ASL interpretation, large print materials, dietary restrictions) so you can build into your system meeting those needs.



5. Tolerance for Error

Design systems that reduce the risk of mistakes and make them easy to recover from.

Examples:

- Creating a culture where staff can test ideas without fear of failure.
- Create easy registration corrections, flexible deadlines, or rescheduling options.
- Enable donors to edit their giving or registration information easily.
- Make event sign-ups flexible so families can change their participation without hassle.

6. Low Physical Effort

Make participation possible without unnecessary strain, effort, or fatigue.

Examples:

- Streamline systems that reduce redundant work or unnecessary approvals.
- Use technology and support tools to organize and simplify the work.
- Reduce steps required to register or access programs.
- Use a shared platform for all project or campaign assets so staff don't duplicate work or hunt for files.
- Create the norm of a break during long meetings.

7. Size and Space for Approach and Use

Ensure people can physically and practically access and navigate spaces and systems.

Examples:

- Meeting formats that allow all staff to participate (e.g., hybrid accessibility, clear agendas).
- Check yourself if you are creating a false urgency, and provide enough time and tools for staff to complete tasks comfortably, avoiding overload.
- Design event spaces (physical or virtual) so all participants can move, view, and engage comfortably.
- Ensure materials (handouts, signage, websites) are clear and accessible regardless of screen size, seating, or assistive devices.