



A Year of Radical Inclusion:

**The Disability
Inclusion Fund
Year 1 Summary**





PHOTO CREDIT: Screenshot from Detroit Disability Power's website. **IMAGE DESCRIPTION:** Diverse group of members raise their fists in the air, holding balloons and a sign that says "Interdependence is Survival" in front of a mural with the words "True Inclusion is Revolutionary"

The Disability Inclusion Fund: A Year of Radical Inclusion

The Disability Inclusion Fund (DIF) was launched in 2020 to support grassroots U.S. groups run by and for people with disabilities (PWDs) leading transformational change.

Its policies and practices are drawn from six decades of activism by PWDs to claim their full humanity and to build a society that is free of ableism and other discriminatory barriers. In this year of incredible challenges, from the COVID-19 pandemic to the uprisings for racial justice, the DIF continues to both inform and be informed by larger societal change. Recognizing that PWDs would be disproportionately affected by COVID, the disability justice community advocated for equal access to care, and the DIF started its initial grantmaking round earlier than anticipated in order to respond to critical needs.

The DIF is working toward both short- and long-term change. In the immediate, the Fund models how philanthropy can center people with disabilities who are advocating for disability justice. The Fund's vision includes both a more connected disability rights and justice field, and a significant increase in the support going

toward disability justice and organizations led by people with disabilities. DIF's first rounds of grantmaking and field building activities are already helping to grow the capacity of disability-led organizations—both individually and collectively.

Together with its partner, the [Disability and Philanthropy Forum](#), DIF is also educating funders about the issues faced by people with disabilities, thus supporting them to take meaningful steps toward full inclusion of people with disabilities at their own institutions.

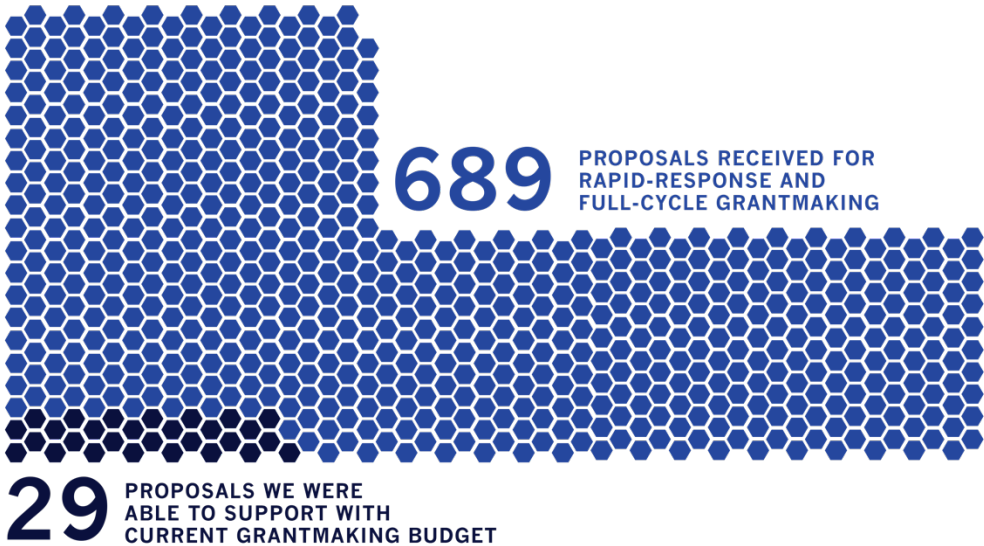
All of this builds toward more foundations understanding how including a disability lens in all of their practices advances their missions. Finally, we envision a society that PWDs have helped to make more just and humane for all people. This one-year reflection offers an overview of the work of the Disability Inclusion Fund to date, and includes:

- **By the Numbers:** *Grantmaking to Date*
- **Responding to the Pandemic:** *COVID-19 Rapid Response Funding*
- **DIF Inaugural Grantee Cohort:** *Building & Connecting the Field*
- **Nothing About Us Without Us:** *Participatory Grantmaking*
- **Engaging Funders:** *Resources for Grantmakers*

By the Numbers: Grantmaking to Date

Since its launch in 2020, the Disability Inclusion Fund:

- Made 22 general operating grants for a total of \$2.2 million
- Made 15 rapid response grants for a total of \$225,000
- Screened applications from 689 organizations

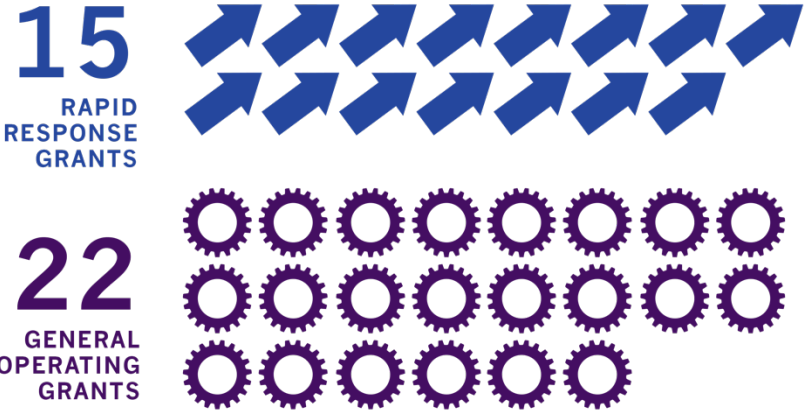


\$2.2M

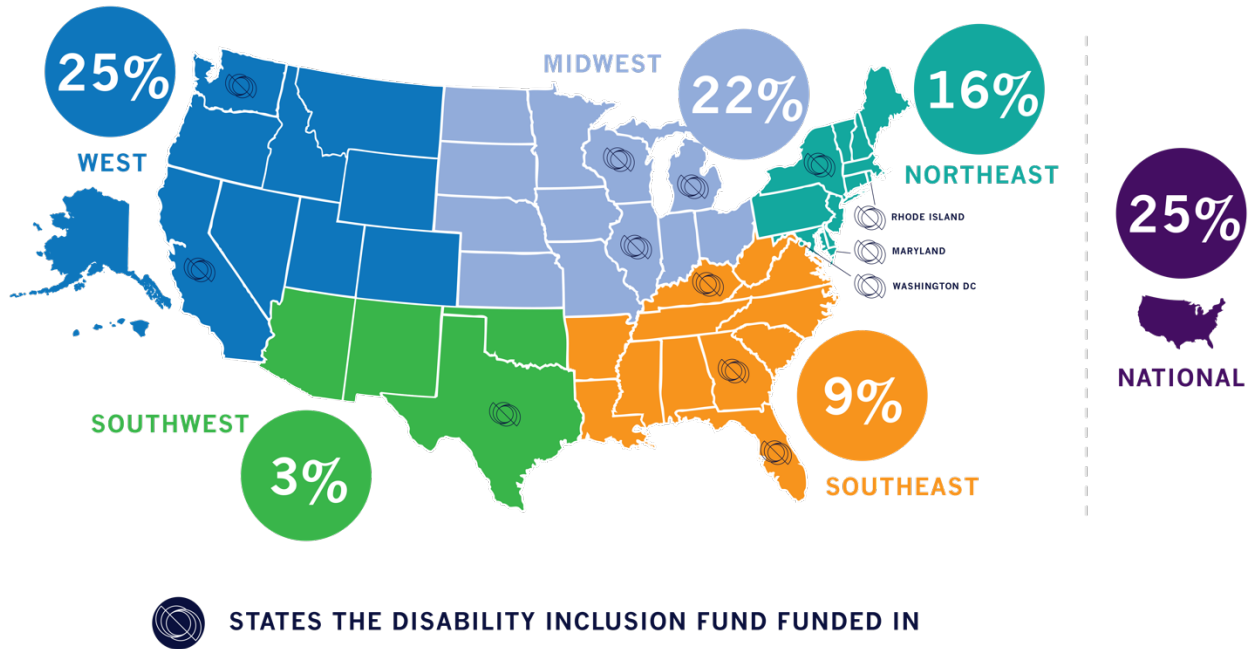
CURRENT GRANTMAKING BUDGET

\$13.7M

REQUESTED FUNDS



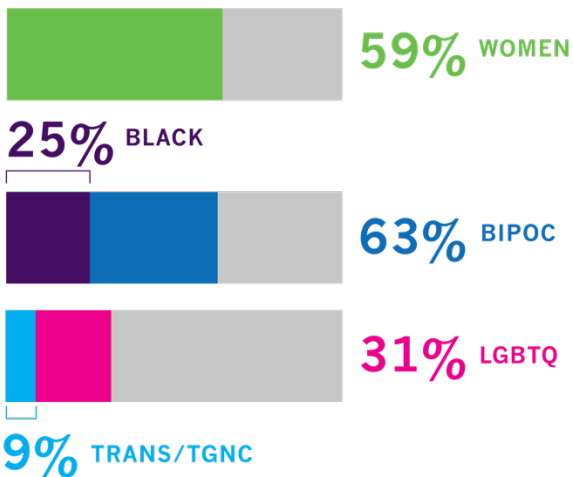
The geographic reach of the 29 combined grantees is:



100% of DIF's grantees are led by people with disabilities.

In addition:

DIF Grantees Are:



Organizational Size & Budget:



Meeting the Moment: COVID-19 Rapid Response Funding

Early in the pandemic, the Disability Inclusion Fund understood that people with disabilities, particularly people of color with disabilities, would be disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

PWDs were widely excluded from responses, from receiving proper care and supports, to policy discussions that directly impacted their daily lives and well-being.

To address this urgent need, the Fund decided to make its first grantmaking round in the form of rapid response grants. The DIF released \$225,000 in COVID-related rapid response funding to 15 organizations providing mutual aid and advocacy across the country:

- [Al Otro Lado](#)
- [Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network](#)
- [Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York](#)
- [Chainless Change, Inc.](#)
- [Community Ready Corps / Disability Justice Culture Club](#)
- [Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Association of New York State](#)
- [Detroit Disability Power](#)
- [Fireweed Collective \(formerly Icarus Project\)](#)
- [Gathering Strength](#)
- [Health Justice Commons](#)
- [National Council on Independent Living](#)
- [People First of Washington](#)
- [People First Wisconsin](#)
- [Regional Access & Mobilization Project, Inc.](#)
- [San Francisco Senior and Disability Action](#)

The COVID-19 pandemic illustrates one of the disability rights movement's essential truths: when society provides reasonable accommodations, it benefits a broad cross-section of people, not just those with disabilities. Case in point: for years, PWDs have asserted that many jobs could be done remotely via technological aids, expanding opportunities for people with limited mobility. But employers have been slow to embrace more inclusive hiring practices because of concerns about cost, productivity, staff cohesion or simply resistance to change.

As we witnessed, virtually overnight, whole industries and job categories converted to remote or virtual work in early 2020. A year later, many non-disabled employers and employees have experienced the benefits of this accommodation in the form of lower transportation costs and better work/life balance. Many don't wish to return to full-time in-person work when the pandemic is over.

What we learned is that, yes, it would be possible to consider PWDs for myriad jobs because their disability is not an inherent barrier to performing work-related duties. The barrier, rather, was the untested assumption that all employees must perform their jobs in exactly the same way. This late-to-the-game insight has already impacted many adults with disabilities, only four in ten of whom are employed.¹

What if we listened to people with disabilities about how to structure other aspects of public and private life to be more inclusive? How much would quality of life for all improve if we did that?

¹ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2018/07/25/only-four-out-of-ten-working-age-adults-with-disabilities-are-employed/>

Inaugural Grantee Cohort: Building & Connecting the Field

The first cohort of DIF grantees, which were announced in December 2020, is made up of 22 disability-led organizations. They include artists, advocates, and organizers working on a range of issues affecting the lives of people with disabilities. Their work is critical, and—together—underscores a critical fact: To live with a disability is not to be defined through one single prism.

The inaugural groups received a total of \$2.2 million in funding, or \$100,000 per group, greatly increasing the internal capacity of most organizations. (Approximately 60% of grantees have less than five paid staff members, with an average total organizational budget of \$365,000.) DIF's inaugural grantee organizations are led by people with disabilities, and the majority are BIPOC-led organizations. All 22 organizations are working in the disability rights world, and a majority of them are also doing disability justice work.

The 22 DIF grantee organizations are:

- [ADA 25 Advancing Leadership](#)
- [Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network](#)
- [Center for Self Advocacy](#)
- [Center for Sustainable Journalism](#)
- [Chainless Change](#)
- [Citizen Advocacy of Atlanta & DeKalb](#)
- [Detroit Disability Power](#)
- [Disability Dance Works](#)
- [Disability Voices United](#)
- [Disability Justice Culture Club](#)
- [Health Justice Commons](#)
- [The Keri Gray Group](#)
- [Living Hope Wheelchair Association](#)
- [People First Wisconsin](#)
- [Project LETS](#)
- [Rusted Spoke Productions](#)
- [San Francisco Senior and Disability Action](#)
- [Sins Invalid](#)
- [Sound Theatre](#)
- [United Hmong With Disabilities](#)
- [Visionaries of the Creative Arts](#)
- [Women Enabled International](#)

With the inaugural DIF grantees on board, we are preparing for our first convening this spring, which will take place over three online sessions. The convening will bring together organizations for peer learning and power building. As part of the convening, we will be holding a series of workshops focused on capacity building, including budget/finance, HR practices, board development, communications, fundraising, and grant writing. With deeper relationships and knowledge, grantees can begin to build across organizations and issue areas as a cohort that is advancing the movement of disability justice.



PHOTO CREDIT: ADA 25 Advancing Leadership. **IMAGE DESCRIPTION:** A diverse group of 12 disability justice advocates sit and stand with a combination of fists raised, flexed muscles, thumbs up and smiles, next to a banner that says "ADA25 Advancing Leadership"

Nothing About Us Without Us: Participatory Grantmaking

The Disability Inclusion Fund is guided by these core values:



Participation: Movement funding accountable to the disability rights movement. Those impacted by injustice/exclusion should be involved in strategies to advance justice/inclusion.



Radical inclusion: Deeply committed to removing barriers and ensuring access so that those most affected by intersecting identities can participate, valuing lived experience.



Intersectionality: Disability is shaped by race, gender, class, gender expression, etc.



Leadership of those most impacted: Emphasis given to organizations led by disabled people of color, queer and gender nonconforming and women with disabilities.



Cross-movement solidarity: Intentional focus on collaboration and bridge-building amongst disability justice activists and across movements.

To honor these values, the DIF is informed by advocates from across the country who come from the disability rights and justice movement and hold knowledge about their own experiences. In the fall of 2020, we held an open application process seeking advocates to join the grantmaking committee, which is comprised equally of Presidents’ Council members and community advocates. The majority of the committee members, including funders, had a disability themselves or had done extensive work within the disability community.

Living into the disability justice principle of “nothing about us, without us,” we created the structure for community grantmaking advocates because it matters who is at the decision-making table. We know there are many ways to support disability justice, and we believe that leaders who live into those connections in their everyday lives should be the ones to lead the way. We welcomed seven community advocates onto the first grantmaking committee, who are all people of color with disabilities fighting for a more inclusive future.

Participatory grantmaking has meant that funding is accountable to the disability rights and justice community. We plan to bring together a new grantmaking committee every year to allow for different advocates and funder members to have the opportunity to help shape grantmaking strategies and select grantees.



Nikki Brown-Booker, Program Officer,
Disability Inclusion Fund, Borealis Philanthropy

“As an advocate who promotes racial and disability justice, I can tell you that organizations engaged in philanthropy have a lot to learn before they can effectively serve intersectional communities. In order to make transformational change, we need people with lived experiences leading the way. We need to see their faces in leadership. We need to hear their voices directing the flow of resources. Only then can we advocate from a place of experienced insight and true empathy.”

Engaging Funders: Additional Resources for Grantmakers

Grantmakers are at different stages of their journeys toward full inclusion, including their work to support the field of disability justice. We offer the following resources and announcements from DIF and our partners in case they are helpful to learning more about our approach and the wider field.

- [Meet the Advocates on DIF's Participatory Grantmaking Committee](#)
- [Disability & Philanthropy Forum](#)
- [DIF Landscape Analysis](#)

About the Disability Inclusion Fund



The Disability Inclusion Fund (DIF) is a five year, \$12 million fund that supports U.S. groups run by and for people with disabilities to lead transformational change. **The DIF is a first-of-its-kind fund**; we are the only fund working on disability inclusion in philanthropy. The fund is supported by the [President's Council on Disability Inclusion in Philanthropy](#), which is comprised of foundation presidents who are committed to disability inclusion as part of improving diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The DIF is supported by 19 foundations: the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, The California Endowment, The California Wellness Foundation, The Chicago Community Trust, the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Heinz Endowments, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, The New York Women's Foundation, NoVo Foundation, Open Society Foundations, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Ruderman Family Foundation, the Tambourine Foundation, the Weingart Foundation, WITH Foundation, and anonymous donors.