

**Disability
Inclusion
Fund**

Disability Justice is Every Kind of Justice

MAY 2022



IMAGE DESCRIPTION:

Overhead shot of six disabled people of color at a rooftop deck party. An Indigenous Two-Spirit person with a prosthetic leg smiles directly at the camera and gives a thumbs up while everyone else is engaged in conversation. *Photo courtesy of [Disabled and Here](#).*

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INTRODUCTION

We're looking forward to seeing you in a few weeks at the 2022 Meeting of the Presidents' Council on Disability Inclusion in Philanthropy, where we'll gather to discuss and envision the work ahead at the intersection of disability, economic justice, and community engagement. We're also excited for you to be in community and conversation with Borealis Philanthropy's President, Amoretta Morris, who will speak to how these intersections manifest in Borealis' and the Disability Inclusion Fund's (DIF) work.

In the meantime, we're thrilled for the opportunity to share what the DIF has been up to—from growing our team to our deepened investment in the capacity of grantee partners.

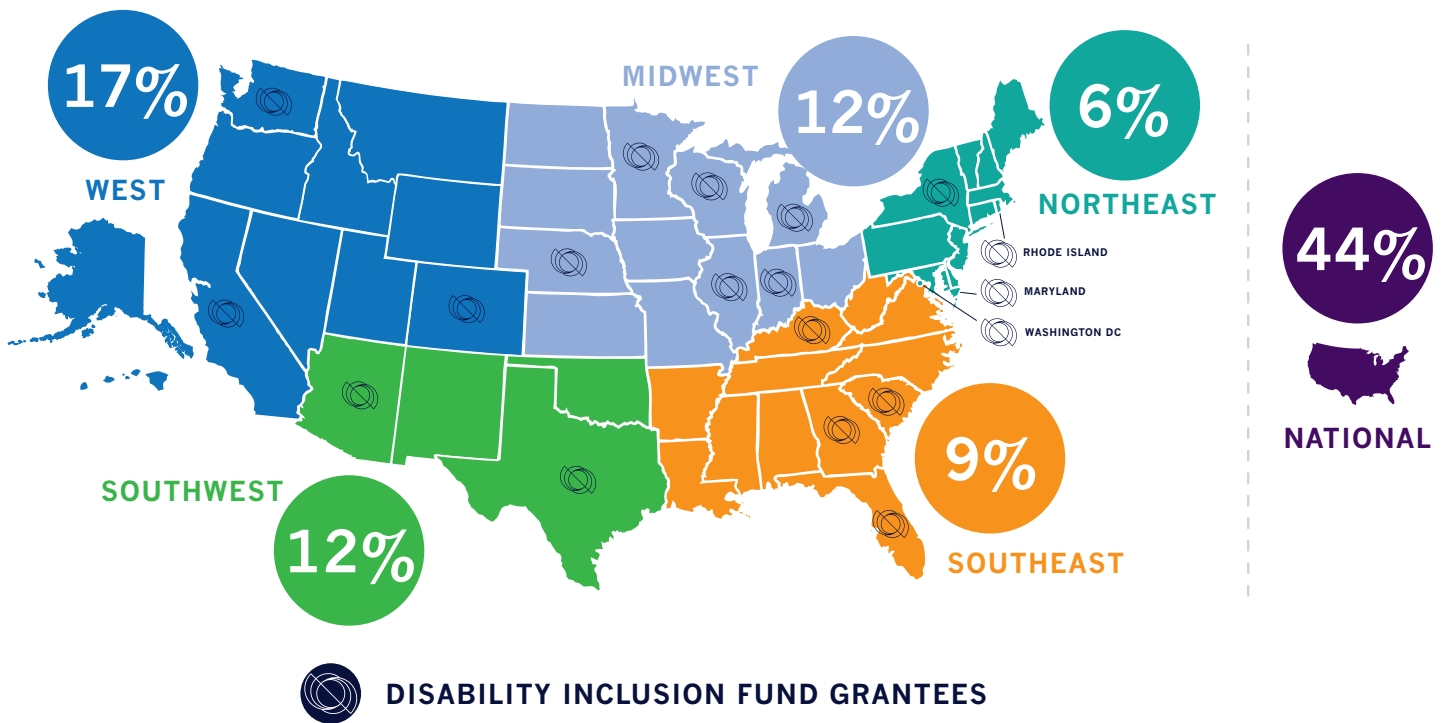
Since we last convened, the DIF has been working to broaden our reach and impact, and using our voice to encourage grantmaking practices, systems, and structures rooted in disability justice across the sector. Most recently, we released the [2022 Request for Grantee Partner Proposals \(RFP\)](#) for the Fund's third year of grantmaking, which we'd appreciate your help in sharing widely. This RFP—along with our learnings and reflections—will also be included in our post-convening newsletter. (If you have not already received our first newsletter [please sign up here.](#))

The context shared in the pages to follow will help guide and inform the conversations we'll have with each other and our grantee partners when we meet. We have included an overview of the Fund's general work, information on the grantee partners we've invited to join us, framing of key learnings from the last two years, and what we envision as the future of this work we continue in together.

EXPANDING OUR REACH

Housed at [Borealis Philanthropy](#), the Disability Inclusion Fund is a \$20 million fund that supports U.S. groups run by and for people with disabilities leading transformational change. We began our work as many others in disability justice do, wanting to understand, engage, and promote intersectionality and the relationship of diverse and interconnected systems of oppression. We wanted to honor the ways that previous disability rights movement had “invisibilized the lives of peoples who lived at intersecting junctures of oppression,” and center “the priorities and approaches of those most historically excluded groups, such as women, people of color, immigrants, and people who identify as LGBTQ+.” And with your support, we’ve done just that.

2021 GRANTEES

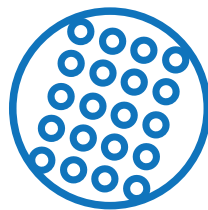


The DIF expands the capacity of the disability justice movement and supports disabled leaders working across the country in areas of advocacy, organizing, and the arts. Collectively, our grantee partners share a deep commitment to intersectionality and disability justice, which translates into powerful impacts in every facet of our society.

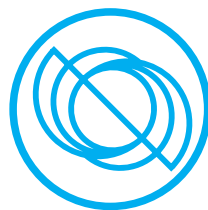
INTENTIONAL IMPACT: 2021-2022 GRANTMAKING



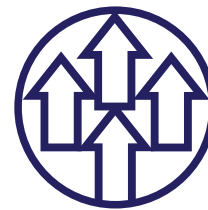
\$2.6M
TOTAL
GRANTMAKING



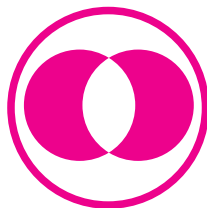
34
ORGANIZATIONS
ACROSS THE
COUNTRY



100%
DISABILITY-LED
ORGANIZATIONS



100%
OF YEAR 1 GRANTEEES
RECEIVED YEAR 2
FUNDING



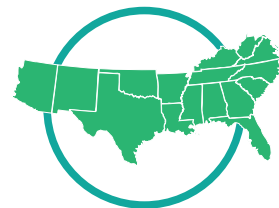
75%
OF GRANTEEES
IDENTIFY AS BOTH
DISABLED
& BIPOC-LED



64%
OF GRANTEE
PARTNERS HAVE
BUDGETS UNDER
\$500K



12
NEW GRANTEE
PARTNERS
IN 2022



9
GRANTEEES
LOCATED IN THE
SOUTH &
SOUTHWEST

The DIF is proud to support organizations and movements led by and for people with disabilities, including:

→ **Disability rights advocacy and community organizing**

- **DISABILITY LEAD** increases civic engagement and diverse leadership in the Chicago region by developing and building a network of leaders with disabilities.
- **SENIOR AND DISABILITY ACTION** mobilizes and educates seniors and people with disabilities to fight for individual rights and social justice.

→ **Emerging and underfunded work**

- **BLACK PHOENIX ORGANIZING COLLECTIVE** applies a Disability Justice framework to its abolition and reproductive justice work with Black communities in Phoenix.
- **DISABILITY JUSTICE CULTURE CLUB** is a collective of disabled and/or neurodivergent queer people of color operating out of East Oakland/ Chochenyo Ohlone land, whose organizing efforts center the lives of queer, trans, and BIPOC folks.
- SF Bay Area-based, queer and trans people of color crew **PEACOCK REBELLION** make art for collective safety, healing, and bliss.

→ **Community-led, peer-to-peer mental health support work**

- **FIREWEED COLLECTIVE** offers mental health education and mutual aid through a Healing Justice lens, centering the needs of those most marginalized by our society.
- **L&J EMPOWERMENT**, based in Arkansas, runs The Confess Project, a trusted barber shop and community hub that brings culturally-relevant mental health awareness, counseling, and support to Black men and young boys.



IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A group of disabled queer Black folks talk and laugh at a sleepover, relaxing across two large beds. Everyone is dressed in colorful t-shirts and wearing a variety of sleep scarves, bonnets, and durags. On the left, two friends sit on one bed and paint each other's nails. On the right, four people lounge on a bed: one person braids another's hair while the third friend wearing a C-PAP mask laughs, and the fourth person looks up from their book. In the center, a bedside lamp illuminates the room in warm light while pill bottles adorn an end table. *Illustration by Jonathan Soren Davidson for [Disabled And Here](#).*



IMAGE DESCRIPTION: Three Black friends sit in comfortable chairs and supportive recliners during an evening conversation. In the middle, a friend with narcolepsy falls asleep smiling while clouds drift behind her head. Her girlfriend sits to the left, holding her hand while talking to another sleepy friend across the table. This friend cups hot cocoa to their chest. Everyone is dressed in colorful t-shirts and there is cozy, warm light throughout the room. *Illustration by Jonathan Soren Davidson for [Disabled And Here](#).*

- Born from the idea that people who have lived experience with mental illness can offer unique, culturally-relevant, and accessible mental health care, **PROJECT LETS** utilizes a peer support model to provide support to mentally ill and neurodivergent students throughout their educational processes.

→ Abolition and decarceration work

- **CHAINLESS CHANGE**, based in Florida, is working to disrupt ongoing cycles of incarceration—and the lack of mental health support offered to those stuck in the carceral system—by building a justice-oriented recovery system to reduce recidivism and incarceration rates.
- **HEARD** strives towards abolition of all carceral systems, and supports resources and access for incarcerated Deaf people.

→ Cultural and narrative change work

- **SOUND THEATER COMPANY**, **VISIONARIES OF THE CREATIVE ARTS**, and **DISABILITY DANCE WORKS** address ableism and stigma in our society's conversations about disability through the arts. These grantee partners are changing disability representation by facilitating the inclusion of disabled people on stage, in front of, and behind the camera.

EXPANDING OUR INTENTION

Disability Justice “challenges the idea that our worth as individuals has to do with our ability to perform as productive members of society. Similar to sister movements like transformative, environmental, and reproductive justice, disability justice “implies a movement-building strategy and an anti-capitalist critique,” while insisting that human “worth is inherent and tied to the liberation of all beings.” Informed by, and informing the larger disability justice movement, the DIF has worked to respond to emergent movement priorities through rapid response grantmaking, in addition to providing ongoing, unrestricted grants and capacity building opportunities for grantees.

At this year’s meeting, we’re pleased to connect you with leaders from the following grantee partner organizations:



You may have heard **CHAINLESS CHANGE** Founder and CEO Marq Mitchell’s recent presentation on the Disability and Philanthropy Forum’s webinar, [Mental Health and Disability](#).

Disabili+y Lead

Many of you tuned in to learn from **DISABILITY LEAD** Director of Civic Engagement and Marketing Risa Jaz Rifkind and DIF Program Officer Nikki Brown-Booker at PEAK Grantmaking’s panel, [Centering Disability to Drive Equity](#).

Inevitable Foundation

INEVITABLE FOUNDATION’S new [“Cost” of Accommodations Report](#) examines the real consequences for disabled talent when their accommodation needs go unmet and demystifies the true financial cost of accommodations by creating the first set of budget templates and accommodation benchmarks for the industry.



L&J EMPOWERMENT'S The Confess Project
Founder and CEO Lorenzo P. Lewis [recently spoke](#)
on turning Mental Health & Media from Awareness
to Action.

JOY GRANTS

Learning from and in community with our grantee partners, the DIF's third year of grantmaking finds us leaning into more comprehensive ways of investing in the scope of relationship with each grantee partner. This July, we will release our first set of **Joy Grants**. Joy is a life-affirming experience, one which creates space and expands the capacity of disability justice groups to rest, provide introspection, and to be in community with other leaders and/or the natural environment around them. The DIF seeks to support a movement that envisions joy as necessary and central to collective liberation. Joy grants are mid-year resource infusions, ear-marked specifically for contributing to the overall health and well being of individual and organizational grantee partners, and which help us test our hypothesis that more intentional combinations of grantmaking support organizational scaffolding and staff's mental, emotional, and physical health, which in turn shift or expand our impact year over year.

ENGAGING THE FUNDING LANDSCAPE

FROM INTEREST TO UPTAKE: THE PRESIDENTS' COUNCIL'S CRUCIAL INFLUENCE

The 2019 creation of The Presidents' Council on Disability Inclusion in Philanthropy sent a powerful signal to the rest of the sector. As a result of your public commitment—and the tireless and successful efforts of disability justice movement organizers—the DIF is fielding increased requests for partnership and guidance from funders both within and outside of the Presidents' Council. We've received requests for assistance and partnership from program funders representing smaller family foundations, larger national philanthropies, and traditional disability direct services funders. We're also hearing from groups that don't explicitly or exclusively fund disability, and are developing increasing interest in applying a disability justice lens to their portfolios. For example, Borealis Philanthropy's own Black-Led Movement Fund has approached the DIF to collaborate on cross-fund learning that specifically includes and directs more resources to Black and disabled-led groups.

The two questions our team most often receives from funders beginning this work are:

- 1** How do we do disability inclusive grantmaking?
- 2** Who is involved in disability inclusive grantmaking?

These asks reflect a growing appetite within philanthropy to center disability justice and inclusion—and an overall comprehension that resourcing the disability justice movement and operationalizing disability justice values are deeply intertwined.

In proactive response, the DIF continues to use our voice to share lessons learned and inform the sector’s thinking:

- Sandy Ho recently presented the **Longmore Lecture in Disability Studies** with fellow advocates Ryan Easterly and Bridgit Antoinette Evans.
- Nikki Brown-Booker shared reflections on disability justice and inclusion with the **NY Women’s Health Foundation** during black history month.
- Nikki Brown-Booker presented at **PEAK Grantmaking’s** annual meeting panel, Centering Disability to Drive Equity.
- Sandy Ho co-authored [a call to action for philanthropy to resource, trust, and learn from disability justice activists](#) with her **Borealis Philanthropy** colleagues Julia Beatty and Ryan Li Dahlstrom.
- Sandy Ho spoke on **Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees’** conference panel, Dismantling Ableist Immigration Policies.

We are honored to continue adding our voices, experiences and perspectives to this work alongside others, like the Forum and the Presidents’ Council, who are moving philanthropy toward disability justice. And we are humbled to support our incredible grantee partners, recognizing that we have provided a small drop in the bucket of this movement’s ever-shifting scale and corresponding needs.

TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE AND THE ROAD AHEAD

Part of the DIF’s work is to connect the dots between how to support and sustain this work today, as well as into the future. The Presidents’ Council has a critical role to play in supporting and sustaining our collaborative momentum.

The Presidents’ Council and the DIF share the belief that philanthropic funding of disability justice is crucial, and together, we have the opportunity to continue modeling

what long term justice-making can look like. But the DIF cannot be the only vehicle through which philanthropy centers disability justice and inclusion. We know that comprehensive transformation using a disability justice framework requires:

→ **Continued examination.**

Every funder arrives to this work from a different starting point. Recognizing this, it's important to name where we want to arrive collectively. Moving from an understanding of justice as rights to economic empowerment to full scale self-determination requires a **commitment to change**—from every member of the Presidents' Council, and from every foundation that has not yet taken on the necessary work of rooting its processes and practice in disability justice.

→ **Continued centering and trusting.**

In order to upend the ableism embedded in funding practices at every level of philanthropy, it is imperative that the Presidents' Council continues to follow the lead of disability justice movement leaders, resourcing them to inform the priorities and areas of funding needs.

→ **Scaled support.**

In order to meet daily movement challenges, the Presidents' Council's funding must continue to grow in scope with overall movement needs, building capacity and infrastructure to support the world that under-resourced and emergent movement leaders are working to create and support movement leaders in consistent, meaningful ways, building capacity and infrastructure to turn the tide after a history of under-investment..

Through participation in this learning community—and on the DIF participatory grantmaking committee—members of the Presidents' Council are gaining a deeper understanding of what it looks like when philanthropy resources and centers disability justice and inclusion, prioritizing the comprehensive well being of the community it intends to serve. We're looking forward to hearing from you about how you're translating these lessons, implementing this work at your own organizations, and encouraging your funder colleagues to do the same!



DIF Program Director **SANDY HO** is a visionary disabled community organizer with a long standing commitment to grassroots disability activism and advocacy. She is the founder and co-organizer of the Disability & Intersectionality Summit, a biennial national conference that uplifts and celebrates the lived experiences of disabled people of color. In 2015, Sandy was recognized as a White House Champion of Change. Prior to joining Borealis Philanthropy, Sandy was the research project manager at the Community Living Policy Center at Brandeis University. She is the co-partner in the Access is Love campaign that she leads with Alice Wong and Mia Mingus. Her essay “Canfei to Canji: The Freedom of Being Loud” is included in the anthology *Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories from the Twenty-First Century* edited by Alice Wong. Sandy’s approach to movement-building is driven by a future where all justice-informed work includes dismantling the structural, systemic, and social consequences of ableism, and that a just world is one where disabled people are thriving. She identifies as a disabled queer Asian American woman.



NIKKI BROWN-BOOKER is the Program Officer for the Disability Inclusion Fund. As a person with a disability and a biracial woman, she has been interested in the intersection of disability justice and racial justice. Her mother immigrated from the Philippines and was a domestic worker and her father was a professional chef and a long term member of SEIU. She was taught at a young age that justice is a human right. She has a Masters degree in clinical psychology and is a licensed marriage and family therapist. Most recently she was the Executive Director for a nonprofit that provides emergency attendant care, wheelchair repair, and transportation for people with disabilities and seniors. She has also been doing organizing work with Hand in Hand: the Domestic Employers Network and helped pass the California Domestic Workers Bill of Rights.

If you are interested in learning more about the Disability Inclusion Fund, please contact DIF@borealisphilanthropy.org.

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