Speaker 1:

The Disability and Philanthropy Forum presents Lydia X.Z. Brown, Policy Council for Privacy and Data at the Center for Democracy and Technology.

Lydia X.Z. Brown:

One of the most obvious ways that ableism shows up in philanthropy is in who is actually making decisions about where grant money goes. The vast majority of staff at foundations, at corporate giving organizations, or in any other grant making body, are not disabled people. And when disabled people are present, the vast majority of the few who are, are still coming from a place of privilege, from access to wealth, from whiteness, from heterosexuality, and from the global north, from countries like the United States and the United Kingdom. Globally, that still remains true, that philanthropy is still a force that often reinforces imperialism and modern day subtle or colonialism, in who gets money and how.

 Secondarily, another major way that ableism shows up are in the application and reporting requirements in order to receive grants. Your organization has to demonstrate a five year track record of success. Your organization has to demonstrate that you've already been able to manage a large multi-year grant. Your organization has to demonstrate that you've been able to do internal and external audits, that you've been able to balance your books, that you have access to mainstream banking services. That you've been able to keep people on payroll for certain amount of time. That you can show metrics and numbers quarter by quarter, that show improvement and measurable outcomes. And I'm literally word vomiting, because these are all the words that we are encountering.

 And the average disabled person of color, poor disabled person, disabled person in the queer and trans communities, we are literally just trying to take care of each other in our communities. And we don't have any fucking time for writing these 200 page long detailed grant reports to prove that we're really being honest. Because you know who doesn't have to prove that? Generationally wealthy people and extremely well resourced organizations, don't have to worry about where their money is coming from, don't have to worry about who they're asking for money from. And so, they have the privilege to be able to not care, whereas we have to be 100 times more scrupulous and still be concerned that we will be accused of inappropriate, questionable, or problematic financial practices, that we'll be accused of not showing stability.

 Well, why don't we have stability? Because we're not getting multi-year general operations grant funding. Why are we unstable? Because our people are more likely to be in precarious employment, working multiple jobs, caregivers of other disabled people, on top of being disabled ourselves. Because we are less likely to be able to prove according to racist, capitalist, ableist norms that we deserve a handout. And that's how we're framed. We are both shamed and guilted for asking for handouts, and yet we're also expected to beg. And that is why the vast majority of philanthropic resources continue to go to the same well-resourced established organizations that are largely not accountable to directly impact communities and to the people who have the most to loot.

 Whereas, organizations that are doing work on the front lines directly from community, are infinitely less likely to be able to access even a fraction of the same funding pools. And even in the space, and even in, especially in the space of disability philanthropy, if you're a smaller community based organization, you get really excited if a once in a decade opportunity comes up for you to compete for a single $100,000 grant. And our larger disability advocacy organizations, the ones that generally aren't led by disabled people, or are led only by white disabled people, their operating costs yearly are in the multi-millions of dollars ranges. And they get grant slip $100,000 like pudding, just constantly.

 And when you ask how this ableism is showing up, it shows up in the expectation that all disabled people understand these complex fiscal responsibilities and requirements. That we understand these cognitively inaccessible forms. That we are capable of writing according to these secret methodologies for grant writing, that people pay thousands of dollars to take classes on. And that we can just do that in all of our non-existent spare time, on top of having three jobs and multiple kids and volunteering because our organizations don't have money to pay us. This is ableism. The assumptions that everyone is on this equal level playing field, when that couldn't be farther from the truth. Philanthropy, so often claims to be addressing inequity and inequality, while reinforcing, perpetuating, and exacerbating it.

Speaker 1:

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