Emily Harris:

Hello, everybody, welcome to today's conversation and for demonstrating your commitment to equity and social justice by signing the Disability Inclusion Pledge. My name is Emily Harris. I'm Executive Director of the Disability & Philanthropy Forum. I use she/her pronouns, and I'm proud to be part of the disability community. I'm coming to you today from the unceded land of the Council of the Three Fires, the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi Nations, now known as Chicago.

As part of our commitment to accessibility, our speakers and I will each provide audio descriptions of ourselves. I'm a white woman with dark, curly hair wearing a black and white polka dotted top. Behind me is a white and tan screen. My access needs are met today because we have CART captioning.

For those of you familiar with our panel format, we're going to forego that today. We hope that many of you had a chance to watch or re-watch the conversation our keynote speaker today, Sandy Ho, had with our colleagues Noorain Khan and Nikki Brown-Booker back in March of 2021. If you didn't, it's not too late. Simply sign in after this webinar as a member on our Disability & Philanthropy Forum website and it's the first session listed under Learning Series. We have linked it in the chat, and it includes many issues that we won't be able to address in depth with our time today.

We want today's conversation to truly be a conversation. I'm delighted to jumpstart the conversation with Sandy Ho, who will introduce herself in a moment. But before we begin, I want to share a few housekeeping items for today's session. There are two ways to access the captions today: Use the CC button at the bottom of your screen and choose subtitles or full transcript, which will pop up as a box on your screen within Zoom; or to access the captions in a separate window, see the link to the external caption viewer in the chat.

You're welcome to join the conversation at any time using one of three methods: Use the chat; raise your hand using the raise hand button in the reactions tab on Zoom and come off mute when called on; and if the chat is not accessible to you, feel free to send your questions to communications@disabilityphilanthropy.org. We already have the questions that you've sent in advance, and we'll be starting with those. Right before Sandy's introduction, let's start with a quick poll question for all of you.

And while people are answering the poll, Sandy, why don't you introduce yourself? And before you do that, I also want to wish you and our audience a very happy ADA anniversary week, and maybe you can tell people what that means.

Sandy Ho:

Yeah, absolutely. Thank you, Emily, for inviting me back to this space and also for moderating today's session. Just as an introduction, hi, everyone, my name is Sandy Ho. I am the Director of the Disability Inclusion Fund at Borealis Philanthropy. I use she/her pronouns. And by way of access, I will give an image description of myself. I am an Asian American disabled queer woman with short, dark, wavy hair. I'm wearing a button-up white shirt that has lady bugs on it. And the back of me, there's a yellow curtain.

Although I am typically based in the land of the Massachusetts people, today, I am coming to all from the land of the Anacostians, or otherwise known as DC, where I've been here for the past 48 hours, a whirlwind trip, and part of that has to do with the celebration of the 32nd anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

It seemed really not that long ago and yet a completely different time, where it was 2021, where I was having this conversation, as Emily had mentioned earlier, with Noorain Khan and the Disability Inclusion Fund Program Officer Nikki Brown-Booker back in 2021. At that time, it was prior to my role at Borealis. I would like to spend a few minutes together just kind of briefly highlighting some of the areas where I have already seen in my eight months in this role some of the incredibly exciting transformation and also where I believe there is room for continued growth from the vantage point where I am now sitting at the DIF. And that framing is really informed by and at the nexus of grassroots BIPOC disabled-led groups and philanthropy.

I'm going to highlight one area of exciting transformation and then another area of more growth to come in a learning edge where I believe all of us can continue on our own learning journeys in this area. The first is what I have seen, which is leading with and by curiosity. What do I mean by that? Well, so I think that as the Disability Inclusion Fund, the DIF, has begun to increase in our own visibility, so we are now moving into our third year of grant making, and the increased visibility and the lifting up of BIPOC and disabled-led groups that we are supporting.

Other peer funders, many of whom are in this audience today, in this ecosystem are not only coming to this work with your own questions about how you all can do inclusive grant making, but also, where does an organization even begin in its own internal shift to be more disability inclusive? Some of the questions that my colleagues, both Emily and Nikki, and I have gotten include, how is disability justice and disability rights different from one another? What are some of the resources to begin to do participatory grant making? Why is that important to disability justice and disability rights movement specifically? And it's really through these kinds of questions and wonderings and that act of showing up with humble graciousness to come to either the DIF team, or to seek out the forums, incredible collection of funder-specific resources and tools on their website, which, really, to me has begun to signal the beginning of a sea change. And so that has led to the DIF team having many one-on-one conversation with others in this space and sharing the why and the how behind resourcing the disability justice movement.

And so what does that actually mean in terms of the work itself? Well, for me so far, it has meant the difference between still having to have a conversation about needing to prove why we need to fund disability work in disability communities and still having to make the case that disability justice is integral to all forms of justice versus the conversation, which I find to be really exciting and where the transformational work is happening, about actually rolling up our sleeves and really exploring what kinds of grants do actually support disability-led groups? What are the internal organizational policies that need to happen to help support this work, both internally and outward-facing and in the grant making? So what are the opportunities to run, for example, disability at the intersections of other social justice movement? What would it mean, really, for philanthropy to actually have a generational strategy on disability justice in the same way that this sector has responded to other areas of civil rights? And so leading by curiosity really signals that shift in understanding this work, what is the infrastructure and resources that are actually needed, the really bold and necessary momentum that then drives the impact grants can have on the communities, and in particular, the overlooked and too often under-resourced grassroots disability justice groups.

So that's an area where a lot of the excitement has been happening so far. So another area where I think there is a learning edge for us is disability justice rights and inclusion really must continue to build upon, facilitate, and drive power into the hands of folks with lived experiences, including those who know firsthand the consequences of ableism and other forms of exclusion and discrimination. And so I think just in my initial eight months or so of observing and being in conversations with colleagues and likeminded people... In philanthropy, in this space, sometimes it can be so easy to almost forget what is that shared North Star for this work, both internally within our organization and outward-facing when it comes to grant making dollars? So resourcing, and building relationships with disability advocates and grassroots leaders. When we are in really deep into our strategic planning, reflecting on new funding priorities, or launching a new hiring initiative or a leadership role, all of these activities should address and integrate disability inclusion in some way, not only because it is mandatory, but also-

Emily Harris:

Sandy?

Sandy Ho:

Yeah.

Emily Harris:

We have an access issue, so just one second.

Sandy Ho:

Oh.

Emily Harris:

For some reason, the Zoom captions have disappeared but the external captioner is still working. So Anjalie, if you could put the closed captioning link in the chat one more time? If anybody requires captions for now, you'll have to look at them outside the Zoom screen, and we will be working to bring them back into Zoom. Thank you. Go ahead, Sandy, sorry to interrupt.

Sandy Ho:

No, not at all. I think that was just an example of modeling access as a priority. So thank you, Emily, for that. What I was saying was sometimes when our own foundation work and the tendency of siloing disability inclusion or justice funding can happen when we are deep into our strategic planning, they're reflecting on the new upcoming funding priority, or launching a new hiring initiative or leadership role, all of this should address and integrate disability inclusion in some way, right? Not because it is mandatory by law, like by the ADA, which has been the law of the land for over three decades, and because it is part of best practices, but because, actually, people with disabilities are active contributors to a more equitable and just society. So it builds upon the existing commitments of the work that we are already doing.

And so the DIF is proud to support only a very small, tiny slice of those movement leaders and some of these strategies. But also internally and in the way that our fund operates, it's intentional that the team is helmed by disabled, Black, and people of color, who have come up through disability justice organizing and other community advocacy roles. So what I'm saying is, in other words, doing this work really must be about the both/and strategy, rather than what I sometimes see in the sector making the choice that is more, quote, unquote," impactful" but might not be the goal, or the impact isn't defined by disabled people who are closest to the issues that we are resourcing. And so the way that this work is made stronger is when the work that is actually happening internally is continued to be anchored by that North Star of building power, dismantling barriers to access to funding, undoing ableist policies, just because that's the way things have always been done.

So I know that I've said a lot there, but I hope that just those two points that I've made can begin to serve as fodder for our discussion and the question to come. And really want to emphasize what Emily was saying earlier, showing up with curiosity. We hope that you will be engaging in this conversation with us. And I will just quickly end by saying that I come to this work as first and foremost a disability justice community organizer. This is my first role in philanthropy, but the organizing principles that disability justice offers remain the same in this space. And so I look forward to continuing to welcome and re-welcoming people into this work and at whatever place and point along the continuum of the learning journey that you are at. So I'm going to turn it over to Emily to moderate the rest of the time.

Emily Harris:

Thank you, Sandy. That's so much, and so much great ideas and thoughts to unpack. Before we start doing that, can we see the results of the poll, please, about how much our audience is already intentionally contributing? And the good old 80/20 rule, but the 80/20 rule is on the upside this time. And I think that goes to Sandy's point that there's a sea change. And of course, all of you, as working at foundations who have signed the Disability Inclusion Pledge, are leading the way. So 80% of you are already making a concerted effort to engage with the disability community. And if anybody would like to share experiences of how that's happened for you so far, we are really delighted to hear any examples. I know that there's some of you who I might even call on later, so get ready to talk, and feel free to put your cameras on as well.

One of the things that I've noticed, and I just came back, as did, I think, some of you, from the United Philanthropy Forum Conference, and while I think you're right, Sandy, and it's certainly right in this crowd, that the recognition is completely increasing, I'd say it's philanthropy as a whole. We still have to continue to make that argument that disability justice, disability rights are completely consistent with all forms of equity and that these are intersectional systems of oppression that we're trying to work with. So I see a huge push in philanthropy widely and generally towards racial equity. And I still see the word disability absent from the list when people are saying all of the things that they want to do to create a more equitable sector. So that's my Debbie downer perspective to you, but we'll take what we can get, and we're really excited to see the momentum that is building.

Sandy, to kind of warm us up and expand a little bit on what you talked about today and that you talked about back in 2021, there were a couple things that struck me in that conversation, and one that maybe you're saying doesn't need to happen as much today, which is kind of the fire extinguisher role that people with disabilities have played. And maybe that's a little bit of what I'm talking about when I say, "Yeah, it's there and they all want to do it, but they keep saying, 'We need to not only favor heteronormative people and BIPOC people,'" and somehow the word disability isn't there, or the word ability is there but not disability. So that's one piece that I think the disability community wants to move away from that fire extinguisher role, and especially when people get called out for forgetting our community.

But the second is really that question of, how do you go beyond just saying, "We want to engage with you and we want to share power"? What does showing up authentically and sharing power mean to you?

Sandy Ho:

Yeah. Great and powerful question there. I think that could be its own webinar session by itself for sure, but I would start by saying that we as a sector have been complicit and in some ways contributing to the trends of not only under-resourcing disabled-led groups and overlooking in particular BIPOC disabled-led groups, who we have the research, we have the numbers on, who are most closest to the forms of injustice that we are talking about here. That there is a historical precedent in philanthropy around disability that has framed it, not as its own powerful disability civil rights movement that has been going on in the '60s, '70s, and prior to then, but more as a medical model, as a direct services, as the ways that we are thinking about "fixing", quote, unquote, disabled minds and bodies.

Whereas it's not to say that direct services are not needed, but there is not an equitable balance of grant making dollars of disability inclusion of disabled folks who are the civil rights leaders. And one example of this would be actually consulting with disabled people, and hiring folks not just to do the, quote, unquote, "disability inclusion work" or to serve in the accommodation part of the organization, but across and up and down the organizational structure. I think that one way we can really recognize and just a concrete practice that we can really do is if we are here to say disability's at the intersections across every justice area, then that means there should be representation. There should be understanding across every portfolio area, there is an understanding of how this is impacting disabled folks and disability communities.

Whether or not your organization is calling it that is one story, but the fact of the matter is this work is already having an impact and disabled people are likely already leading on some of this work in the communities and in the field. I think that is where the sharing of the power is and where we can really show up in solidarity with what is already happening. So to provide more access and opportunities to funding means we need to hire disabled talents and knowledge to identify and to help support the ways disability is across the intersection.

Authentically sharing power is about more than just an advisory committee, which I know is a starting place, and that is a meaningful starting place, right? But then being transparent about saying, "Hey, this is an RFP that we would love the committee of people with disabilities to help advise on." And then to help identify the gaps, to say, "We trust you to know your own network best, to know the issues best." And then to help distribute the segment and this opportunity to folks who may not otherwise have the opportunity or think about themselves in this work. And then in addition to that is, of course, paying people equitably for their work.

And so I think the ways in which I've seen some of this kind of emerge within philanthropy is, during the pandemic, for example, so many foundations and grant making practitioners have really evaluated the way that they have approached the application process, right? Like what does it mean to really get the necessary information, to not make it so burdensome, to make it more accessible, to be more nimble in rapid response funding? And I think those are practices that don't need to go away, not only because the pandemic has not gone away but because this is the way forward, about we are to be serious about making it more equitable and accessible for BIPOC and disabled-led groups.

Emily Harris:

Thank you, Sandy. And I'm realizing that we have in the audience a perfect example to illustrate another example of what you've been talking about. So I wanted to ask Stephenie Smith from Northwest Health Foundation, who apparently is in a room with three colleagues, so any of you who would like to join us and talk... Hello, Northwest Health Foundation. Others, feel free to come off camera. But you've done some amazing work in engaging consultants around disability justice and then sharing your learning, and I wonder if there's anything you'd like to share based on what Sandy just said about this. I think of you guys as a best practice.

Stephenie Smith:

Oh, thank you so much, Emily, and thank you so much, Sandy. It's been so great already learning from you and getting to spend a little bit of time together. Yeah, so honored to get a chance to speak up a little bit, because we are still learning every day. And so it's always a privilege and a little bit surprising when folks point out our work because we have done a lot and there's still so much that needs to be done on a regular basis.

So I think we've been doing this work now since, gosh, 2014, 2015? And I think our initial piece was to really engage some local disabled leaders and try and learn as much as possible. And from this, we really took in the disability justice framework and have really aligned as allies with this framework and have really put this at the forefront of our disability justice work and our disability work. We created a small grants program to try and kind of infuse money into our community and into this disability-led organization. And we also have been working with consultants around the Disability Justice Audit Tool Kit, which is an opportunity for BIPOC-led organizations to be able to really assess their practices and figure out, where are they already doing work with disability community, and where do they need to kind of strengthen that work and actually look at their own practices and their own policies and infuse that work?

Anything else you'd want to add?

Jen Matheson:

I mean, I think, yeah, this is Jen Matheson just saying, yeah, I think Stephanie definitely captured it. I mean, I think for us it's both, how can we support the leadership of disabled BIPOC movements, organizations, and people in our community? But I think we've also taken this explicit approach, as Stephanie's describing with the audit tool, to say, "How can we be in conversation with BIPOC-led organizations to say, 'Where are there opportunities for cross-movement work across reproductive justice, across immigrant justice, across movement for Black lives?' Where are those intersections with disability justice movements?" And so that's been our approach.

Emily Harris:

Sandy, do you want to say anything to respond? I know one of the things that has struck me about the way you're approaching this is that we often forget that adding this lens is going to make the other work more successful.

Sandy Ho:

Right. Right. Yeah, I mean, to what has already been said about the work of Northwest Health Foundation, I cannot recommend the Disability Justice Audit Tool enough. It was developed and created by leaders in the DJ movement, meaning Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha and our disability justice ancestor, Stacy Milbern-Park. And so I think if it hasn't been already... I think it's a resource on the Forum's website, but just to add that... I mean, I can share two examples of the work in which the Disability Inclusion Fund has begun to do this already.

One is with the technology and disability justice funding opportunities that will be coming later on this Summer, early Fall, where we convene content technology experts, who were all people with disabilities, on the issues of tech policy, on tech infrastructure, what is the role of disability rights in tech? And we asked them to create the RFP, just to tell us, what are the gaps that they have seen at the intersections of tech and disability justice? And so it has really been about trusting it and getting out of the way, quite frankly. So even though we are a fund that is led by disabled folks, we are not the experts in all of the things. And that's not what we are here to say is necessary, but it is to say trusting movement leaders who are the experts in these issues and areas is certainly an important step.

And then the other is at Borealis Philanthropy, we also have the Black-led Movement Fund, which is helmed by my colleague, Julia Beatty, and next year we will be exploring some special opportunity grants that are specific toward Black disabled-led groups. And this is an opportunity for both the DIF and the BLM Fund to do some furthering around our own political education analysis on this work that needs to course correct some of the gaps in our own funding practices and to say, "Let's improve those things that we are already doing and ways that we can be more closely aligned with movement."

Emily Harris:

So thank you. And thank you, Northwest Health Foundation for joining us. And I'm really eager to hear from others. We'd love to hear your questions either about what you need from us, the Disability & Philanthropy Forum, our partners at the Disability Inclusion Fund, and from each other. This is a really wonderful community of people all trying to figure this out.

And I want to mention that some of you are probably at the even earlier part of the learning journey. We have some of you who are doing so much to engage already, like the Northwest Health Foundation, WITH Foundation, and others that are on this call. And then some who are just beginning this process and may feel like, "Whoa, disability justice? Wait, I just need to meet somebody who works in my local community." So please, come off mute, raise your hand, let us know what your questions are and how we can make this a valuable conversation for you. I'm going to pause for a minute, one of those uncomfortable moments where we wait and see if anybody's going to raise their hand, and then I do have one question that was submitted in advance.

Sindy Escobar-Alvarez from Doris Duke Community Foundation, thank you.

Sindy Escobar-Alvarez:

Hi, nice to see you, and sorry to keep my video off, I'm a bit under the weather. But I just wanted to chime in to say that one of the many ways in which the DIF has been very helpful to us is by helping us establish connections. So those connections that we don't have to the community. We've had a couple of discussions with Sandy, and Sandy, you've been so helpful in introducing us to who is doing what, who is based where, and I think just keeping that discussion and just learning about what we are both working on, or all working on, has been very helpful to identify who we need to be including or, who are we excluding?

Emily Harris:

Thank you, Sindy. And I know you've done some great work to make sure that people with disabilities are included in your panels as you're reviewing. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Sindy Escobar-Alvarez:

I am not sure can talk about that, only because we haven't done it directly in my team, I know that we have done it to gain input. So we have done [inaudible 00:32:36]. Let me take a step back. So we have done actually some work, not related to grant making, but some of the work that the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation does through one of its organizations, Duke Farms, is we [inaudible 00:32:51] by hand is we serve the public and they are a centers for environmental stewardship. And they have consulted my colleagues with a disability community to make sure that the grounds and the facility is accessible, and not just accessible but that all of the activities, from gardening, their raised beds, I think that without the input of the disability community maybe wouldn't have thought, "Oh, of course, we know this is something that we can do to make sure everybody can garden," and so on. I would say in terms of our brand making, we are really eager to learn more how we can better engage in starting to do that really by conversations so far.

Emily Harris:

Great. Thank you. Let's put up our second poll to get people warmed up here a little bit.

And that question, does your organization have a disability advisory group?

It looks like we're 80/20 the other way, so about 20% of our groups do. And we'll allow that to keep going while we go to William Wilson's question. William, please introduce yourself and where you're from.

William Wilson:

Hi, I'm William Wilson. I work at the Duke Farms, the property that Sindy was speaking of, under the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.

Emily Harris:

Wonderful.

William Wilson:

It's nice to see everyone. And just to continue on the point being made, we are an environmental center here in New Jersey, and we can host anywhere between 150,000 to 200,000 visitors a year. And accessibility is one of our main emphasis, as Sindy said earlier. And I think we have just partnered with, over the past few years, the Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living. They're one of our main collaborators in looking at everything, and they had just done their most recent site visit last week for the first time in five years.

And the first time they were here, they assisted us with looking at increasing access to our indoor greenhouse, to make sure we have buttons in the right locations, and making sure different things in our buildings that are most visited, that was the first project they worked with us on about five years ago. This part now that we're working on as of last week was looking at more of the trails.

So it come to our attention that 90% of our park benches were not accessible. So they were on wood chips, they were on grass, they were in areas that were too steep. We were using different features in our restrooms, where soap dispensers were located, and the types of paper towel dispensers were in areas that weren't necessarily accessible. All up to ADA code, but ones that were not really taking into account just trying to make our property as universally accessible as possible. We even have the accessible garden plots that we put in, but the gate to get to them, the resistance needed to push the buttons down was beyond what should be for it to be as accessible as it can be. And so we are doing everything we can to make sure that we're engaging as many different groups as possible to get that feedback. And we, too, had talked about putting together an ad hoc visitor group that can get together and kind of go through the property with us and see the things that we are not able to see.

And then just my last point is I think that the part we are still lacking is just trying to find those right communities to engage with. I think that we will get organizations that will find us when you get as many visitors as we do. We're not really advertising, "Come here," because on a busy Saturday, we can get two to 3,000 people in one day, but just making sure we are letting as many organizations know that we're here and we want to be one of the most accessible outdoor spaces that you can go to. So thank you for your time.

Emily Harris:

Thank you. And I think just when you advertise that you are accessible and you're asking if somebody needs an accommodation to come to an event or something like that, you're doing an amazing, like, "Spread the word, we are welcoming," kind of advertisement. Sandy, more to suggest to the question of how to make sure that you're really tapping and reaching all groups?

Sandy Ho:

Yeah, I think what I really appreciate and am delighted to hear, as William was just... Hearing this program, was that it is a part of the public space, and [inaudible 00:37:59] recognizing that people with disability, as part of the public community, also then have access to this. And in that sense, I think the way we can think about providing equitable access and all the different forms of access, as somebody who has a lifelong disability and has been in the disability community, we are not ever going to, I don't think, and maybe this is a little bit of the pessimist in me, but to be able to meet every single access accommodation need, right?

But that being said, it is also helpful to be transparent about what we're not able to provide. That is also just as much of an accessibility accommodation. So that then visitors who do come can plan for themselves like, "Oh, okay. So that means I'm going to have to maybe come to visit with an attendant," or, "This might be a way in which I'm going to have to rearrange transportation." Whatever it might be, I think there is still this hesitancy or this tendency to perceive access accommodations as an etiquette as like, "Oh, I can't get this wrong." And I'm here to say you can get it wrong and then learn from it, and then we can improve. So thank you for sharing that.

Emily Harris:

That's a great point. I love that, and I hope it helps take some of the fear out for everybody because, yeah, we do get it wrong and there are times that we just can't fix something that's external to our organization.

I'm going to turn to a couple other questions. And thank you again, William and Cindy, for leading this. Everybody should feel free to show your faces if you're comfortable. Christy Troutman asks, "We have a commitment to paying people with disabilities as advisors, and we're doing that more and more but we struggle a bit with how to be fair and equitable in our payments." So she's curious if others have developed guidelines and parameters around payment. Does anybody want to share any guidelines or parameters they might have developed around paying advisors?

And I can share that the Disability & Philanthropy Forum at least has set kind of a schedule internally, and I'm not going to quote the numbers because I frankly don't remember them. But we have a couple of advisory groups that we base payment on an annual basis, assuming that the advisors attend all the meetings, and then we're clear about how we will reduce that if they're unable to attend. And then we have a sort of basic scale for writers, for webinar speakers, for speakers who come to a longer conference and might be spending a day rather than an hour. So we've tried to at least set a scale that we adjust, and we frankly have had to thank some people who we wish would agree to serve in certain ways, but they have set their own rates that just are beyond and wouldn't be equitable for what we're able to do. But do others have parameters for that? And Sandy, anything you would want to add?

Sandy Ho:

Yeah. So for the Disability Inclusion Fund, I am not sure that I would call it a guideline or protocol necessarily, but I would say just as a practice. For example, when we do invite the participatory grant making committee consultants or advisory committees, as a practice, we do see very clearly that we recognize for some folks with disabilities who are on Medicaid or other means tested programs that are life sustaining, that are life giving, sometimes accepting a, what we would call, competitive honoraria or a stipend can jeopardize their access to basic healthcare. And that is a system and infrastructure policy that needs to be modernized. That is also not separate from this issue though, but there are ways. And I would encourage folks to learn how their own accounting or payments can work around and be more accommodating to this reality, whether that's through gift cards, and a check, or whatever that person's preference, and always asking first, would be my general advice.

Emily Harris:

Our wonderful tech person is noticing, Ryan Easterly, you've unmuted a couple times. And I know that you are a strong advocate for this topic, is there something you'd like to share?

Ryan Easterly:

Yes, and I'm sorry I'm not able to be on video right now. I too am feeling a little bit under the weather. But as far as WITH Foundation, and I can only echo everything everyone has just shared, especially about in the case of WITH Foundation, we, too, allow for alternative forms of compensation, specifically for the reasons Sandy mentioned. But as far as our guidelines, as a floor for compensation for our guidelines, we've established that all individuals with lived experience of disability must receive a minimum of $100 or at least $25 an hour. So that is our floor. And like Emily alluded to, we do have a sliding scale that the more involved they are with the project, the higher we expect that compensation to be. But our floor is that every individual receives at least $100 or $25 an hour, whichever formula results in the highest level of compensation, and that's our floor.

And we are constantly adjusting that. And one of the ways we benefit from our advisory committee is we are frequently discussing different scenarios with our advisory committee to see how they feel and what they feel would be a livable wage given the scope of work and the type of work we're asking individuals to do or our grantees are asking individuals to do in their projects. So I hope that's helpful.

Emily Harris:

Great. Thank you, Ryan. And while you're unmuted, let me ask you to go a little further and talk a little bit about your experience with advisory committees. And to the 78% of our participants today who have not yet set one up, what advice would you have about getting started?

Ryan Easterly:

Well, I would say start the journey sooner rather than later. Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good. WITH Foundation has had an advisory committee since 2015. In that time, we've had two different models. So that's a nice way of saying we made a few mistakes in the beginning, we revamped, and now we're much happier with the current model that we use. And what are the differences between the first model and the current model that we used? We moved to an entirely virtual model, so all of our meetings are conducted virtually. We also enhanced our compensation piece for advisory committee members. We also added an education component. So not only are they advising us on our grant making, but they're also receiving training on how to be board members of other foundations, trustees of foundations. So they are receiving kind of additional education, additional training that will benefit them as they're working with other organizations in their communities.

And I think ultimately, as Sandy has said earlier in today's session, I do view the use of advisory committees as an and proposition. So in the case of WITH Foundation, we also have individuals with disabilities on our board of directors as well as within our leadership within our vendor groups. But really, the advisory committee helps enhance our work because, as we've also discussed today, no one person, no one organization can know everything about the totality of the disability experience. And our advisory committee really helps hold our feet to the fire, really helps educate us on various aspects of disability and various issues within the community. So even though I myself have lived experience of disability, there are ways in which they continue to help challenge my perceptions of disability, the work we're doing, and help evolve it to better meet the needs of the community.

So I would just say start the journey now. Please reach out to the DIF, reach out to Emily to help connect you to folks. There are some things that I would be comfortable sharing in a peer-to-peer conversation that we can't necessarily share on a recorded webinar, but I know that Emily and Sandy will help connect you to the right folks and we can have a lot of those peer-to-peer conversations to help you get started. But please, start the journey; it really does help strengthen your grant making.

Emily Harris:

Thank you, Ryan. And thank you so much for offering yourself up as a resource, we all continue to learn a lot from you and all the great work of WITH Foundation.

I want to go to the other question that was brought in the chat and kind of relates to where Ryan talked about the sort of both/and. And so Katie Pellesier asks how to create a safe environment for staff to disclose disabilities, and comments further, "I'm sure we have a lot of internal expertise and lived experience that we aren't tapping into because we haven't created a space where staff feel comfortable sharing. Curious to know how to be most supportive of that internal culture shift. And as we socialize a broader definition of disability within our team, maybe some folks are realizing for the first time they'd fall under the definition of disability."

And I want to tag onto that, Katie, thank you so much for that question, a question that came in earlier from Joni Schwager via the registration form, although she is not, I believe, on the webinar today. She's with Staunton Farms Foundation and asked about how we prioritize behavioral health disabilities. That may be a good example of the kind of disability that people often don't include themselves in that list of the community.

I'll just say my own disability is hearing loss. I acquired that disability 25 years ago, and it took me until seven years ago when I really started working in the disability movement to self-identify and to recognize that this is a community that is incredibly welcoming and has taught me so much about how to ask for my own rights and how to empower myself to make sure that I can fully participate and bring all that I can to my work and to my communities. Sandy, do you want to talk a little bit about this question of how to create a comfortable environment where people start to self-disclose?

Sandy Ho:

Yeah. Thank you for that question in which I agree with Emily, it's incredibly important. And I would hope that this is not a new statement that I'm about to say, but in the context of COVID as a mass disabling event, that, yes, we should expect and we'll continue to expect more people identifying as having disabilities in whatever way, whether it's COVID related or not. And part of this does also mean that some of the disabilities are not apparent, right? So I'll just kind of use myself as an example. Yes, I'm a wheelchair user. Yes, I have a hearing loss. I'm also somebody who identifies as neurodivergent, as somebody who is ADHD. And so what that has meant for me in this new role is learning to understand the pace of the work and get to know Borealis over the past eight months. It's been about also understanding how an organization where Borealis Philanthropy is completely remote, has always been remote since prior to the pandemic, right? So that means a lot of our time is through Slack, it's on Zoom, it's through all of the many, eight, channels that we can reach our colleagues.

But also it's about practicing mind-body access. It's about incorporating that principle of disability justice, of sustainability of this work. Means that we can also sustain ourselves in our own body-mind to not just value it as a productive machine to produce and to be always on, but that means, at Borealis, we don't have to have our cameras on all the time. It means that captions, as much as possible, are expected to be on during staff meetings, during one-on-ones, during team meetings. And we are encouraged to not have back-to-back meetings. That meetings, if possible, are set to 45 to 50 minutes to give people that extra 10 minutes on the hour to get to their next meeting or to make that shift. And so then we begin to see that it's not about having folks necessarily disclose because of accommodation, but it's about the collective wellbeing of the team, of the organization, of the staff to show up and do this incredibly hard work that we are in day in and day out.

And so I think another framing of disability and accommodation and access is disability justice is about love, it's about being welcoming. I think sometimes we get hung up on the specificities of 42-inch doorways and the bathroom are at certain heights. And yes, those standards are there for a reason and are important, but also to keep up with the day-to-day work of what we do, it's also about being flexible. It's about making this work more humane, not just for ourselves, but then that has an impact and contributes to the way our grantees are engaging with us.

So just one quick example, it would be, past Winter we had a worldwide Winter break. So we had that message and our automatic email responses. And when I put that up, one of our grantees said, "Hey, because we saw what you did, that gave us the permission to do the same." And so we are also modeling behaviors and ways of being together for our grantees as well.

Emily Harris:

Thank you. We have just a couple minutes left, so pleased that some of you have jumped in. And I will also say that on the disclosure issue, there's some resources on our website, some former webinars and also a guide, that, Katie, I will send you after, to how to ask the question in your surveys. Just it takes a lot of space. There are short ways to ask it. The more you can list specific disabilities and leave another line, the more people tend to recognize that they are part of this. And then to Sandy's other point, I just love that you offered joy grants to your grantees this year. I think that's just such a wonderful way to express that this is a community that we celebrate and that we all need joy in our lives, especially in this very, very difficult time.

I also want to acknowledge I feel like I've been beating on you. People, ask questions, come off camera. There are 30 of you who are here today on a virtual conversation about this important topic. And there's so many distractions not to mention Summer vacation, so we really, really, truly appreciate all of your participation. Sandy, is there like a one-word farewell you want to give? And then I will jump into our closing remarks.

Sandy Ho:

Yeah, just to say to everybody here who took the time to listen and to learn together, please feel free to reach out to either myself or Emily. A question as one is like, "Hey, we are curious about and not sure, what are the disability groups that are working in X issue area?" Happy to have that brainstorm conversation with anybody here. And just to kind of reiterate what Ryan Easterly was saying earlier, because, yeah, you need to start, but starting is the point.

Emily Harris:

Thank you, all. We are going to be sending a survey that will jump to your screen right after you close the Zoom. There's also a link that will go into the chat. We're really curious to know how we can be a community for you to help as you are moving forward on the pledge. The next webinar in this specific series for pledge signatories will be November 3rd. You'll be in for a treat to hear from my colleagues Gail Fuller and Emily Ladeau, a repeat performance. Again, there is a webinar on our website and we want you to come with questions so that we don't have to just talk ourselves. We want to hear from you. And as Ryan mentioned, we know that often these topics are hard to discuss in a big group, do feel free to reach out. And also, the survey includes some questions as to what's the best format, are you interested in a listserv or other ways of communicating? So thank you. Thank you again. And we hope to see you at future sessions.

Speaker 8:

Thank you so much, and this does conclude today's program. Have a fabulous afternoon, everyone.