Emily Harris:

Welcome to the Disability & Philanthropy Forums 2022 Webinar Series. My name is Emily Harris, and I'm executive director of the Disability & Philanthropy Forum. I use she, her pronouns and am proud to be part of the disability community. I come to you from the Unceded Land of the Council of Three Fires, the Ottawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi Nations, now known as Chicago. As part of our commitment to accessibility, our panelists and I will each provide an audio description of ourselves. I'm a white woman with dark, curly hair, wearing a black and white polka dot blacks. Behind me as a white and tan screen. My access needs are meant today because we have CART captioning.

A few housekeeping items for today's webinar. There are two ways to access our live 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. Today, only our moderators and panelists will be on camera. You will be muted throughout the event. This webinar is being recorded and you will receive a link to the recording in the next few weeks. Although we are will be using the chat to share links with you. It will not be available for you to communicate out. Instead, please use this Q&A button at the bottom of your screen to share your questions anytime during the session, and we'll have some time to share them with the panelists at the end. If the Q&A is not accessible to you, feel free to send your questions to communications@disabilityphilanthropy.org.

We'll be live tweeting today and hope that you will join us on social media using the hashtag #DisabilityPhilanthropy. You can also follow along by connecting with us on Twitter @DisPhilanthropy. Before we start today's conversation, just a short reminder of how we define disability. Disability is a natural part of the human experience. According to the CDC, one in four US adults, 61 million people have a disability that impacts major life activities. Disabilities can be apparent such as a mobility disability, but many disabilities are non apparent, including chronic illness and mental health disabilities. Disabilities can be lifelong or acquired, and we often say that we are the only minority group that anyone can join at any time. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the systemic oppression of people with disabilities and is increasing the size of the disability community. To moderate our panel, I'm delighted to introduce Miguel Santana, President and CEO of the Weingart Foundation, a private grant making foundation advancing racial, social, and economic justice in Southern California. In addition to being a leader in numerous fiscal, legislative, political, and community issues, Miguel is one of the 16 CEOs who serves on the president's council on Disability, Inclusion and Philanthropy. He is joined by three disability thought leaders who are leading the way on economic justice. You'll find the link to their bios in the chat. Take it away, Miguel.

Miguel Santana:

Thank you so much Emily, and welcome everyone. As Emily stated, my name is Miguel Santana. I'm the president and CEO of the Weingart Foundation. I am a Latino male with salt and pepper hair, and I'm wearing a gray polo and jacket. I'm in my office in Los Angeles. My pronouns are he, him, and his. I will like to acknowledge that the Weingart Foundation is headquartered in downtown Los Angeles where I'm currently at on the traditional lands of the Gabrielino-Tongva people, and I pay my respect to elders both past and present.

While I'm new to philanthropy, I'm not new to working on advancing social and racial justice in Southern California having served in executive roles at the county and city of Los Angeles in the nonprofit sector for over 30 years. I am pleased to welcome our three panelists. Mia Ives-Rublee, Director of Disability Justice Initiative, American Progress, Keith Jones, President and CEO of SoulTouchin' Experiences, and Rebecca Vallas, Senior Fellow at The Century Foundation and co-director of the Disability Economic Justice Collaborative. Rather than read the bios, I refer to you to the chat. Why don't we get started with abbreviated self introductions? Let's start by asking each of you to share your name, pronouns, visual description, and one sentence that you will like the audience who know about you. Rebecca, let's start with you, and then followed by Keith and then Mia.

Rebecca Vallas:

It's a pleasure to be with you today, Miguel, and also with Keith and with Mia. Thank you to everyone for pulling this together. My name is Rebecca Vallas. I use she, her pronouns and I am a white woman with dark, curly hair that I've pulled back to be a little more ruley today so it's out of the camera shot. And I'm usually wearing some kind of unicorn gear, so I'm wearing unicorn earrings, and I'm sitting in a leopard print chair with some art behind me.

I'm, as Miguel mentioned, a senior fellow at The Century Foundation, but with the prompt of, why have we been looking forward to this conversation? I'll say that I've been really looking forward to today's conversation because more than 32 years after the Americans with Disabilities Act became law, disability remains both a cause and a consequence of poverty in the US. And so as someone who lives with chronic illness and who has spent much of my career fighting for economic justice in the US as a legal aid lawyer, a researcher, a lobbyist, an advocate, a podcaster, an organizer, I've worn a lot of hats over the years, I'm always very excited when I'm not the only one in the room who wants to talk about how we'll never achieve true economic justice as a society if we continue to leave out people with disabilities. So that's where I'll leave my intro for now, Miguel, and I'm really looking forward to getting into this conversation.

Miguel Santana:

Thank you. Keith.

Keith Jones:

Hello. My name is Keith Jones. I'm an African American male wearing glasses in a rust colored shirt against a neutral backdrop. I want to thank you all, Miguel, Mia, Rebecca, for having me to the philanthropic just forms talking about economic justice. The one sentence I want people to leave with is that the goal of our existence is not to work, is to be human, but we cannot achieve that if there are barriers placed in our way for us to just achieve basic needs. So I'm looking forward to this conversation. I'm looking forward to the future and maybe we can shake the world up.

Miguel Santana:

Thank you so much. Mia.

Mia Ives-Rublee:

Hello, hello. My name is Mia Ives-Rublee. I am the director of the Disability Justice Initiative at the Center for American Progress. I know that's a lot to say, but the Center for American Progress is on traditional Anacostan land and Piscataway and Pamunkey. I go by she, her. And in terms of description, I am an East Asian woman, have short hair and a blue blouse on today, and there's a bunch of curtains behind me. In terms of what I like. One sentence, I've been thinking about this for a while, and the thing that I come up the most is that work does not equal worth. So work does not equal worth, which means that every human ... Just like Keith said, every human has basic rights and should have basic access to resources in their communities.

Miguel Santana:

Well, thank you so much. Why don't we start off by really grounding the conversation by reflecting on the past and how far we've come? As you stated, Rebecca, this July marked the 32nd anniversary of the Americans with Disability Act. While we've certainly seen progress, we know there are limits to the ADA. So a question for any one of the panelists. 32 years later, what is your assessment of where we are today and what are the biggest challenges moving forward, and why is this a passion of yours? Who'd like to start?

Rebecca Vallas:

Keith wants to start. I can tell.

Miguel Santana:

Okay, Keith.

Keith Jones:

No. Well, okay. Since the bus just ran over me, okay. It goes to the core of community. One of the things that we have burdens about and 32 years later after the passage of the ADA eight and being a child of 504, of the handicap education child in pre ADA and post ADA, the one thing that we have always seen is that society, particularly in America, has decided our worth based on our functionality. Are we able to do manual labor? Are we able to do things? And as a personal color coming from the Midwest in the '60s and the '70s having a disability. 32 years later, really the question is, is it about my "race" or my "disability"? No. It's about wanting to have access to that dream that everybody says we have access to.

So 32 years later, what I see is those things that have plagued for decades. It's the unwillingness of people to go to the root of the problem in order to no longer have the problem, versus, well, let's do something nice and we'll be back next year with another grand cycle. So I think where we are is at the verge of the [inaudible 00:10:56] of great potential because of what Rebecca had eluded to earlier. The pandemic has shown us there are no more excuses about we can't support you at work. You need to be in the office. You can't be productive if you're not here. All of those myths and stereotypes are gone. So where we are is still dealing with intentional ignorance as to the value and the work that the disability community hits in forming economic existence.

Miguel Santana:

Thank you. Intentional ignorance is certainly a powerful thing, unfortunately. Mia, your thoughts.

Mia Ives-Rublee:

Yeah. It's interesting because when I think of the ADA, I was five years old when it got signed. And so I'm part of the what is "the ADA generation." So I didn't have to fight for the ADA or the Rehab Act, which I count myself very lucky. But when I look back at where we came from and how far we have to go, I think about sort of who was included when we were putting together the ADA. And when we talk about disability economic justice, so often, just like the ADA, we don't think about how race or LGBTQ status or any of these other things intersect with your identity. And so much like Keith was talking about was so often it's sort of like, is this a problem with the fact that I have a disability, or is it a problem because I'm a racial minority, or is it a problem of some other kind? I think the next steps that we have to think about is how the ADA didn't address some of these intersectional issues that impact disabled people of color, impact disabled immigrants, impact disabled LGBTQ folks because unfortunately they're the ones that are going to be most impacted by the weathering changes of pandemics and even climate change.

Miguel Santana:

Thank you for that. The intersectionality of this issue is so important to really talk about. Rebecca, your perspective.

Rebecca Vallas:

Happy to tag team there and jump on what Keith and Mia have already said and to associate myself with those comments as well. A core promise of the ADA, and I feel like this is actually one of the elements of the ADA history that isn't very well known in mainstream circles. A core promise of the ADA was economic self-sufficiency for people with disabilities. And yet 32 years after the ADA became law, people with disabilities in the US face poverty rates that are twice as high as non-disabled people, food insecurity rates, meaning not being able to afford adequate food, three times higher than non-disabled people. And people with disabilities make up more than half of people in this country who turn to homeless shelters on any given night, which is not a perfect statistic for who is unhoused, but helps us have a sense of how disproportionately it is people with disabilities.

This is a widespread permanent recession that we have been seeing among the disability community in the United States. And I want to be clear, it's not only 32 years after the ADA that we're grappling with these horrible and shameful figures. This is prior to the COVID pandemic, which only exacerbated these disparities. And so I just want to acknowledge as we have today's conversation that a widespread economic crisis among Americans with disabilities is one of the many social ills that we normalized prior to the COVID pandemic. And so I want to read some words that have really stuck with me since Rebecca Cokley shared them with me. It's a quote from Sonya Renee Taylor, who is a really prophetic poet. "We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-Corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment, one that fits all of humanity and nature."

As I'm saying that and reading those words, I'm actually getting chills throughout my whole body because that I think the ... that is the message of this moment that we need to be hearing on every front. But Miguel, you asked, "What are the core challenges that we see in this moment? Why aren't we farther along?" And three of the core challenges that I see, and I'm so excited to get more deeply into this as the conversation progresses, are number one, just lack of awareness about the economic crisis facing people with disabilities in the US. We didn't check that box with the ADA. We have a lot of work still to do. Number two, that people with disabilities are treated as an afterthought when it comes to American policy making, and in particular American economic policy making. And number three, people with disabilities are dramatically underrepresented ... Excuse me. Underappreciated voting block in the United States. One in four Americans and yet not a voting block we ever hear about. And that's really something that we at the Century Foundation and the Disability economic Justice Collaborative have been really excited to work to change.

But I'll just note one statistic that comes from some polling that we did with Data For Progress through a polling operation. We've been excited to work with them to set up and actually for the first time, ask disabled people what we think. That's not been done before. And we found that three in 10, just three in 10 disabled voters believe that leaders in Washington care about people with disabilities. And that should probably come as little surprise as we get deeper into this conversation given how much the American economy just isn't working and hasn't been working for disabled people and has frankly been leaving disabled people behind. So those are some of my thoughts, Miguel, and I know we'll get into more of that.

Miguel Santana:

In the few minutes we have left on this section, it'll be helpful to of really talk about COVID. Each of you raised it as really demonstrating the real gaps that exist today. Maybe you could share your thoughts about not only the gaps, but where in the response was it done right? Who'd like to start? Keith, would you like to start?

Keith Jones:

Sure. I think when we talk about COVID, there was two things that we need to talk about, the global pandemic. It exacerbated and revealed what we have already known. Nothing we're talking about here today is new. I think in terms of what the COVID response was, the second part of your question, well, was it done right? Well, it was done right by surviving. If you made it through the pandemic and you were not dead, you did it right. Because to be quite candid, the disability community were sacrificial lambs. This is why you heard, do not resuscitate orders. This is why you have heard people in nursing homes go away. This is not new.

Every economic disaster, every natural disaster, every crisis, the last people to be saved or thought about is one out of four in this country. So I think what the pandemic afforded us, however, is the ability to see who's really true to the game. Are you really here for us or are you here for yourself? Are you here for the communities? You've known about environmental racism, healthcare racism, economic disparities, gaps in education. All of those things are underpinning the ability to raise the economic floor for the community, but yet those with the hands on the steering wheel to do it chose not to and still are choosing not to. And so where was it done right for the community is that we still take it seriously enough that we know pandemics don't end because the declaration made. Pandemics end when there's no longer people dying from those things.

If you're talking about it in the economic sense, this is an opportunity for the disability community to stop necessarily looking for traditional on ramps to employment, but talk about entrepreneurs, talk about being a sole proprietor, talk about forming economic collaborative, talking about going on a different kind of route to gain stabilization and sustainability, understanding that those things that we need in the community are extra. It's expensive to be poor, and the disability community understands that. Where can we be right in this process? Is by one, having this conversation with those people who are the first ones to be able to say, "Here is some resources to address certain issues in your community." So hopefully we will continue to build upon that.

Miguel Santana:

Thank you. Mia, your thoughts.

Mia Ives-Rublee:

I think having spent so much time yelling at the CDC, I have a lot of thoughts. But I would say the first thing I think about, and it's something that sort just has been echoing in my head for years now, is that poverty is really a policy choice. And the biggest thing that we have learned particularly during this pandemic is that we can choose to take care of our communities. We can choose to create policies that are more accessible to wider communities, particularly multi-marginalized communities. And that we as a society have chosen the steps that we have taken in getting where we have gotten to. So you saw during the beginning of the pandemic people taking it rather seriously. We saw several legislative bills that came out, some universal payment that came out that really significantly decreased poverty in this country. We saw things like the Child Tax Credit, which significantly reduced child poverty. We saw Medicaid expansion, we saw funds going into communities to boost food pantries, we saw a wide variety of mutual aid programs, et cetera, we saw a stoppage of evictions. All of this help to contribute to ensuring that we weren't valuing people based on their ability to work, but just based on the fact that they were people, like human beings and that they were breathing.

And then we have seen a sudden reversal of a lot of those programs, particularly recently. And we've seen a lot of folks who pretend to be public health experts demand people go back to work, demand that people get off of these social programs, demand X, Y, and Z. And we've seen poverty rates going back up again. We've seen hits due to inflation rates, et cetera. All of these are policy choices that we have made. And so I think what this pandemic and what many other emergencies have shown is that we can make certain policy choices to help alleviate the most in need and we choose not to. So I think that's something that we need to keep in mind when people continuously say, "We don't have money for X. We don't have money for Y." We do. We just choose not to use it.

Miguel Santana:

Thank you. Those are all choices indeed. So Rebecca, why don't we transition? If you wouldn't mind sort of grounding us in the concept and what is meant by disability economic justice. And how does it play itself out in policy issues that we just heard from Mia and from Keith?

Rebecca Vallas:

Yeah. Absolutely. And I just want to pull on the COVID thread just one brief moment more as I make that transition. And I'll just say because we really can't have this conversation today without saying it very explicitly. We are currently in the middle of not just a pandemic that has not ended, and this feels like a very important week to acknowledge that, particularly given that COVID is still the number one cause of death for people with down syndrome and the average age of death is 19 years old. So let's just grapple with that. We're still in a pandemic. It also feels really important to say we are living through a mass disabling event in the form of long COVID. And what we have already seen, and we don't even have any kind of sense of what the numbers are going to be at the end of the day, is that people with long COVID now Mark the largest influx of new entrance to the disability community in modern history. That is just a thing we need to get out there that is the grounding I think for this entire conversation.

The economic crisis facing Americans with disabilities long predates the COVID pandemic, but that what I've just said adds yet additional complexity and also urgency to where we are. So Miguel, you asked what is disability economic justice? And I really appreciate you asking that question in that way because the place that we are, we've said the numbers, is that one in four people in the United States, that's a little over 61 million people, now live with disabilities, A number that is steadily growing, especially with long COVID. When those are the numbers, I would hope we can all agree, that every policy is a disability policy. That people with disabilities are part of the us when we think about who the we is that are served by the policies that are made by our leaders. But unfortunately, particularly what it comes to economic policy, that isn't how it's actually worked and that is not how policy making in the United States has been happening.

So unfortunately what we've seen is actually that people with disabilities and even the notion of a disability lens, it's really ... it's an afterthought in economic policy making. We're lucky if folks say, "Hey, we were about to roll this bill out. Do you have any thoughts?" Right in the days before it gets introduced. And I can say that from my think tank career, having had the privilege of being at some really powerful institutions that didn't think about disability in this way.

And so what is disability economic justice? Well, I said it before and I'm going to say it again. When disability is a cause and a consequence of poverty at the scale that it is in this country, we're never going to achieve economic justice if we continue to leave people with disabilities out. And so what disability economic justice is the notion that if we center disabled people across the broad swath of economic and social policy areas, things like civil rights, like housing, like transportation, like independent and community living, like healthcare, like racial justice and gender justice, and LGBTQIA+ justice, and food, and education, and employment, and financial security, and savings and wealth building, and civic participation, and voting, and criminal justice, and emergency and disaster planning, and technology, and, and, and. All of that policy making gets better because all of a sudden what we've done is we've centered a really important and left behind in marginalized group in our policy making from the beginning rather than continuing to say, "Oh, but isn't that all handled by disability policy?"

So in prepping for this conversation and because of my role in having founded the Disability Economic Justice Collaborative and now being one of the co-directors of it, and I want to acknowledge the Ford Foundation for being a really important partner and also the CAP Disability Justice Initiative for being a really important partner. Some of what we've been reckoning with is, okay, well, how do we know when we've gotten there? What does disability economic justice look like? Because it's certainly not going to be a percentage point decrease in poverty when we know we're not even measuring poverty in this country in a way that captures a realistic standard of living. And so what we've started to do is to build out a disability economic justice policy framework. And it's not public yet, but I was asked to preview just a few items from it. And so I will do that to give folks a sense of what we mean when we're all talking about valuing us for our humanity and actually closing these gaps.

So every disabled person should be able to live free from disability-based discrimination as well as discrimination based on multiply marginalized and intersecting identities like race and gender and sexual orientation and beyond. Every disabled person, this manifesto continues in draft form, has accessible, affordable, stable, safe, and quality housing. Every disabled person has access to reliable, affordable, and accessible transportation to the healthcare they need when they need it, has access to adequate nutritious and culturally appropriate food, is provided a high quality equitable education in an inclusive educational setting from early childhood to post-secondary education including an affordable higher education. It goes on and it lifts up these key elements.

But Miguel, I really appreciate you grounding the conversation there because I think the through line is and the work of the Disability Economic Justice Collaborative is to advance a collective commitment to apply a disability lens across all economic and social policy making in the United States. And that is an ambitious goal that we can achieve because we're not talking about banging on the wall from the outside anymore saying, "Let us in. Give us some power. Share some power." It's about rebuilding the table and centering the people who have been left behind at that table, and that's a huge part of what I'm so excited about this collaborative. Bringing groups together like the Urban Institute, and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, and CAP together with disability leaders who have previously been in those afterthought stakeholders who need to be driving the train along with the economic leaders who have all of that privilege.

So there's so much more, Miguel, that we could say. And I'm seeing in the chat, "Will this "manifesto" be circulated?" It's going to be published next month for the National Disability Employment Awareness Month, NDEAM. So look out for it when we publish it from The Century Foundation and from the Disability Economic Justice Collaborative. The work really is about centering disabled people across all of these policy areas. So Miguel, back to you. I know there's lots more we could say. So I feel terrible cutting that short.

Miguel Santana:

Thank you so much, Rebecca. And we all look forward to seeing the manifesto. Keith, now let's transition to philanthropy. We have a lot of folks who work in philanthropy listening and watching. How is philanthropy doing and really folding in and using that disability lens across all issues? Where are we doing it and where do we still have some work to do?

Keith Jones:

So I will answer this question with a little bit attack. There are some places that are doing exceptional work. We won't single out any particular person. I think philanthropy itself as a notion, this noble and grand effort absolutely is needed and necessary. I think where we're doing it right is you're having this discussion, you are talking about economic and disability justice. I think what can happen is that we need to understand that the people who have the money and the people who need the money don't necessarily run in the same circles. And the people who have access to the money are not necessarily interested in the people who need the money. There is a nonprofit industry. The question about this movement is where are we moving to? This should not be a perpetual ongoing thing there. When you talk about economic policy, you talk about philanthropy. The hope is that those people who are making the decisions are using their intelligence versus their emotion in terms of saying how can we address any issue that we know is systemic?

We have understood poverty and segregation of people with disabilities and mostly marginalized communities is foundational to this country. Philanthropy has the ability to do some things on the margins. What we can do is underpin the fact that some of these issues are money making. For some people who are very interested in making money, they are not here to stop disabled people from being homeless, or undereducated, or underhoused, or underemployed. So philanthropy has the beautiful opportunity to say, "Okay. We're going to take new nontraditional and avoid the ways of getting this money to those communities who can actually use them and go on about their reasons." Nobody wants to be in a perpetual state where they have to constantly come back because we have just enough to do something, but not enough to [inaudible 00:33:59].

So how can philanthropy elevate itself again is understanding how this economy works. We have not been a manufacturing-based economy for almost 40 years. We are a service-based and information-based economy. That means that these 60 million people who are disabled or those large parts of the community who can participate with some minor accommodations can actually assist themselves in the philanthropic of the community in elevating those things in which they're funding. So the opportunity is, again, to be innovative in how you dispense money, how you give money, how long you give money. It is like, "Oh, we gave you $10,000." To do what and for what? $10,000 is nice. $10,000, I have to pay rent, pay a staff person, get transportation, get the community to come out because they don't trust us, and feed them because clearly we understand what the issues are. $10,000 is a one hour event for one community in one place to do one thing. And so we have to be real about the cost, real about the mechanics of it, real about what it really takes to build an infrastructure. Not to sustain the ability to continue to write grants, but to sustain the ability to get these communities out of poverty onto an economic and social footing in which they deem their quality alike best. Not that it is subjective from our standpoint, but objective from their standpoint.

Miguel Santana:

Thank you so much. Mia, you were so effective in talking about how during the pandemic it appeared that progress was being made to respond to many of these issues, but in more recent ... more recently, there's seems to be a retreat and you carefully described that as choices that are being made. What role does philanthropy play in informing those choices, in advancing choices that are about issues of justice for the disabled community? What role can philanthropy play in ensuring that the more inclusive choices are indeed the ones being made by our policy makers?

Mia Ives-Rublee:

Yeah. That's a great question and much perhaps to what Keith was saying in terms of understanding what value are we putting towards some of these changes. I think first we have to understand that what is policy and to understand that everything that we do in our work in daily lives is impacted by policy. Our choices are impacted. Our choices impact and are impacted by policy, whether from the highest forms of government to the most nuanced policies in the home. Our parents create our policies that we have to abide by when we're young children. We can either choose to be proactive with our policies or reactive. And I think that's something to really understand the nuance of because I think that a lot of philanthropic organizations remain reactive, particularly around poverty. Rather than pushing for proactive policies that help most impacted communities gain a leg up, we often see organizations that are band bandaging damages made by ineffective policies because a lot of the proactive work is seen as too political or too divisive. And I would say a lot of the individuals who are giving money to a lot of these philanthropic organizations don't really want to see some of the policy changes that are going to be needed to develop really sustainable economic justice type policies. I think that the only way to create more equitable communities is to be as proactive as possible and not put bandages on ineffective policies.

One of my favorite quotes from a representative I know loves to say, "Policy is my love language." We can utilize policy to create environments that are nurturing and develop stronger communities. And philanthropy can be that leading edge by providing the funds for communities to create stronger safety nets, to build more nurturing environments. But again, as Keith said, we have to be realistic in one, how much that costs, and two, how that may interact with some of the highest funders of philanthropies and be very realistic in understanding those sort of areas or barriers to creating real change.

Miguel Santana:

Thank you. So I'm going to ask each of you. If you had a magic wand and there was one thing that you could have philanthropy do differently to prioritize disability economic justice, what would that be? Rebecca, I'll start with you.

Rebecca Vallas:

Ooh, I do love a good magic wand, Miguel. So you're asking the right girl on this one. I think the answer is to commit to bringing a disability lens across all grant making while also understanding disability as its own dedicated area for grant making. In my own opinion, that sort of both end approach is the strongest way to ensure that disabled people's perspectives and experiences are centered across the many, many areas that make up every issue is a disability issue. So I can say it wasn't that long ago that Rebecca Cokley and I ... We keep naming her, but she's an honorary member of this panel apparently. So there we go. Rebecca Cokley and I were running around back when we were still at the Center for American Progress trying to launch the Disability Justice Initiative that Mia are now amazingly leading.

We were going around to funders and having conversations. And we would talk with our friends at various foundations and we were getting funded by them to do other work in the sphere of economic justice. And we would then get into the conversation and we would bring up disability. And then every time we would be told, "Oh, but we don't fund disability." And then we would go, "But you fund healthcare, but you fund education, but you fund criminal justice reform." And they would say, "Yeah." And we would say, "But people with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by all of those areas. What do you mean you don't fund disability? You do. You just don't realize it yet and you're not being intentional and strategic about it." So I think there's a lot of gratitude I feel to the Ford Foundation in particular for really leading the way.

I think I'm building a model and Rebecca Cokley is really the one doing this. So go talk to her if you haven't already and she will share her secrets and maybe the magic wand she's hiding too. Mine is over there. But I think that the wand would be around other funders across philanthropy, centering disability as a priority in a way that's not just on its own but is also a lens. It's both. And to me that is really the way that we're going to start to not only resource the field in the way that is necessary, resource the research in the way that is necessary, but all of that then, as Mia was so wonderfully describing, becomes what we need to build the public and political will and really emphasis on the political will for the policy change that can bring so much of what we're talking about to scale. So that's my magic wand aspiration, Miguel.

Miguel Santana:

Thank you. And being intentional, so important. Keith, what's your magic wand wish for philanthropy?

Keith Jones:

Oh, my magic wand wish is that people are able to disassociate their prejudices on their desires to give because at the center of what we're talking about giving, you give because you feel altruistic. There's a feeling, you have a connection to. There's a reason you give. Well, hopefully that reason is because you are a more functional, healthy society. I don't mean you got to like everybody, but it does mean that you need to acknowledge the humanity that everybody has. So my magic wand would be one that we are using our intelligence to discuss how we can use the resources to effectively attack the problem so that it is no longer a problem and to sustain those successes secondarily. That we acknowledge that sometimes you don't like the people that you got to help, but in order for your community to be better, everybody has to be better. If you want a better world, you have to build it. So the other magic wand moment, I guess, you would call it black magic. Is to put together $100 million fund that really just goes at this. This is not complicated. So that would be my magic wand moment.

Rebecca Vallas:

Keith, that is definitely not black magic. That is some white magic, my friend. That is a good [inaudible 00:44:19].

Miguel Santana:

I love the bold thinking. What's your one magic wand ask of philanthropy?

Mia Ives-Rublee:

Oh, gosh. I was trying to think because I would like to get to a world where we don't have to actually sustain ourselves on philanthropy, which sounds sort of reductive in terms of what I could do for philanthropy. I was just trying to think. Everything is so complicated and everything is so interconnected that fixing one thing isn't going to fix everything. That there's still going to be problems no matter what little aspect that you sort of pick. But I think that I would love to just take money out of the equation, which sounds a little weird talking about philanthropy because a lot of it has to do with finances and money, but I'd love it if there was a way to just take that out of it so that we could truly say that we don't have to have a price tag on fixing the ills of society. That we could actually make real changes that impact people in significant ways, but not have to say, "Well, it's going to cost X amount of dollars. It's going to cost y amount of dollars." So how do we fix something that we don't have to put price tags on, that we don't have to reduce ourselves to financial numbers and really, really just put the time and the effort that is needed to improve society. Yeah. I think if we're really talking about a magic wand, I think that's where I would go.

Miguel Santana:

What a beautiful thought? We're not limited by you putting a number and a financial value, but rather just do the work necessary to change for the better. So we're starting to receive questions from folks listening in. One of them kind of builds on this theme around bold action and what could be done to move economic justice forward for people with disabilities. So I want to sort of build on the idea that, Keith, you offered up the establishment of a significant fund to support this work. So now imagine the fund exists. What would it prioritize? What do you imagine being the initiatives it would support? How would it advance this work?

Keith Jones:

Well, thank you for the question. If you give me $100 million, we're going party. No. Well, it's flat, it's not complicated. I think that the complication is in dealing with people's interests versus their desires. It is their ROI. If I give you X, what do I give back with the $100 million initiative to start? But you understand what the critical infrastructures are and the barriers are to people getting employment and getting out poverty. You stabilize housing, you provide [inaudible 00:48:08] to get accessible, affordable transportation. You then underhand affordable in-home care services and supports. We keep thinking there's a magic leap frog from the bed to the office. But if there's nobody to assist me in getting up out of bed, if there's no one who can be my support person to do these things, these are barriers to employment and economic justice. So the $100 million, I would push it to a billion, but we're being [inaudible 00:48:40] starting small I guess, is to really go at the four principles that people have been talking about for 30 years.

We cannot get out of poverty if we can't work more than 20 hours. We can't get out of poverty if we become disabled, we have to divorce our loved one, we can't get out of poverty if we have $2,001 over here which disqualifies us and we don't have enough here to qualify us. It would take money to make uniform eligibility and comprehensive standards across CMS, SSA, HUD, VR. Those things where we have a standard where people are not judged on their economic income-based upon their diagnosis. So the $100 million dollars would really have political action, housing and community stabilization, economic development and employment, and job training skills. Bridging the digital divide and giving technology to entrepreneurs as well as small business training and on ramps. Those are just some small ideas.

Miguel Santana:

Great. Thank you. So there's another question here. I'll turn to Mia to help us answer it. And there's really two that are kind of related. One is, what do you believe foundation need to do to in increase inclusive giving and really to prioritize giving to advance disability justice? How can foundations who are in the business of raising dollars for great causes, what ways can they do that? And sort of tied to that is , what other things can philanthropy do now to advance disability justice? Mia.

Mia Ives-Rublee:

I think this goes for not only disability justice, but other marginalized communities. Is that when you are in a community that doesn't have access to resources, doesn't have access to a lot of things, they're already starting out two or three steps behind. And the problem with philanthropy is that it requires ... in order to be able to get those dollars, it requires significant amount of resources already. Whether it is already an established organization, or an established organization that already is funded by another organization, or even just a 501(c)(3) status. All of these requires specific resources, knowledge, et cetera, that a lot of individuals in these communities don't have access to, don't know how to have access to. So I think one of the most basic things that philanthropy groups could do is create a sort of a pipeline or even a training group or training course, et cetera, to help these organizations get off the ground that are actually led by disabled people. And not just disabled white people, but disabled people of color and other marginalized disabled people. Because I think what has happened is we've slowly begun to get more and more disability organizations that are often led by non-disabled people funded by philanthropy groups.

We've slowly sort gotten more and more individuals with disabilities to become leaders of these organizations, but they often have boards that are led by non-disabled people and often white people, which means that only a specific amount of policies are actually being looked at around disabilities. So it means that we're not talking about immigration, we're not talking about reproductive healthcare, we're not talking about policing, we're talking about the basics ones, which is like education, healthcare, and maybe employment, and many of these organizations. So being able to create a pipeline that specifically targets multi marginalized disabled people so that they can become their own organizations, they can build boards, they can figure out how to create an organization that is eligible for this philanthropic funding is going to be essential in building out a pipeline and building out more people who can help increase the diversity of people that receive this funding.

Miguel Santana:

Thank you so much. We have a couple more questions, but unfortunately we only have about three minutes left. So Rebecca, give me just sort the last sort of pragmatic advice for philanthropy. One question is specifically on the fact that there are so many different programs at the federal, state, and local level to support the disabled community, but unfortunately there are often complicated, they're not designed for folks who may have accessibility barriers. What role does philanthropy play to really break open those opportunities at not only in government, but in philanthropy as well?

Rebecca Vallas:

Yeah. It's such a great question. And I just want to say, I think, at a very high level, something that each of us has spoken to is really a through line throughout all of these questions in this entire conversation, which is that the status quo, it doesn't have to be that way. And so many of the, "Oh, well, we can't fix that." Or, "Oh. That's unfixable." Well, as Mia said I think very eloquently before, this pandemic has been such a moment for pulling back the curtain about what government can and can't do when it comes to actually taking bold action that is in the interest of large numbers of average Americans as opposed to wealthy donors and corporations who mostly hold the power behind the scenes. And so I'll say that in the spirit of things that don't have to be that way, programs being really hard to access, it doesn't have to be that way. We set it up that way somewhat intentionally. I say we not being part of that. I'm one of the ones who tries to highlight this as a problem. But bureaucratic disentitlement is a choice. Making it so hard to access things that we're way more than needle in a haystack pulling out with fraud and abuse. We're now making it actually access barriers. That's true across our system.

So there's been a long conversation for a long time about is there some kind of a navigator's program? Do we even try to find some kind of common benefit application across everything? These are all ongoing policy conversations, but I think the message I have to philanthropy is this is a moment where increasingly leaders across policy making are understanding that we're in a battle of imaginations. And it's a question of which imagination do we want to live in? Do we want to live in the one that was handed to us by powerful people who say only certain people are worthy and it's based on their work, as Mia and Keith have said, and that's what the line of deserving and undeserving is. Or do we want to actually build the vision that we share into the imagination we can all live in where we actually have justice and it isn't based on the color of your skin or your disability status and on and on.

So that is where philanthropy has just such an outsized role to play in resourcing the change agents who are working together to bring about what is not an inevitable, but is a possible paradigm shift in this moment leveraging the pandemic awakening moment that so many people are having to cement what it looks like for a vision of common humanity to actually show up in policy and law as tools for reality creation. So that's some of how I think about your question, Miguel.

Miguel Santana:

Thank you so much. I'll share that something that's so important is that philanthropy really support fund in unrestricted ways. Organizations that are led by the communities they're serving, that look and are represented of the communities they're serving, and really trust in their leadership, trust in their knowledge of the community, and place significant value to the lived experience as important as any other credential that they may have on their resume or their academic background. I think for philanthropy, my magic wish here is that philanthropy would really trust in our nonprofit leaders, particularly those who look, and represent, and come from, and are living the issues in their daily lives that we're all trying to confront and advance. So I want to thank our panelist, Keith, Mia, and Rebecca, for this very important conversation and reflection and really encourage all of our listeners to prioritize disability justice folded into all the work that is being done. And as was so carefully articulated, beautifully articulated, is to be intentional in this work. Thank you, all. And now I'll turn it back to you, Emily.

Emily Harris:

Wow. Thank you, all, so much. I can't say enough about how you're going to inform our work going forward. All of the questions we didn't answer are going to be informing our website, our future programs. We will be launching our 2023 webinar series in February, so stay tuned for that. And please answer the survey that will be sent to you immediately following this webinar. We also will be sending out the resources that were mentioned in the chat. Thank you so much for asking for that. And again, stay tuned for announcements about the next in this series. And thank you for this call to action and incredibly thoughtful discussion. Have a great day.