Emily Harris:

Welcome, and thank you for joining us today for today's conversation and for demonstrating your commitment to equity and social justice by signing the Disability and Inclusion Pledge. My name is Emily Harris, and I'm the Executive Director of the Disability & Philanthropy Forum. I use she/her pronouns, and I'm 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 speakers and I will each provide an audio description of ourselves. I'm a white woman with dark, curly hair, wearing a white, black, and blue turtleneck top. Behind me is a screen made of rectangles of blonde wood and white paper. 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 have had a chance to watch or rewatch the conversation my colleagues, Gail Fuller, and Emily Ladau had in May of 2021. If you didn't, we've linked it in the chat, and it includes some helpful tips in implementing disability-inclusive language throughout your work.

Today, we truly want this conversation to be a conversation among all of us. 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. If you prefer to access the captions in a separate window, a link to an external captioner is now in the chat. We will use the chat throughout this session to share links to information, and you can use it to post questions at any time. You can also send questions to communications@disabilityphilanthropy.org.

Before I turn it over to Gail, I want to highlight a few principles. First, disability is a natural part of the human experience, and there are more than 60 million of us in the US alone. Disabilities can be apparent or non-apparent, lifelong or acquired. And disability identity is only one part of each person's identity. We represent all aspects of diversity.

Second, like other forms of oppression, the barriers to full participation in our society are socially constructed and can be dismantled if we are intentional. Finally, we recognize the founding disability rights and justice principle, “nothing about us without us.” Today, you'll join this open, honest conversation about the power of disability-inclusive language with Cara Reedy, a distinguished journalist, producer, and disability advocate.

Before we turn to Gail and Cara, we are going to do a poll to jumpstart the session. On your screen, it will ask you how comfortable are you using the word disability? Very comfortable, comfortable, uncomfortable, or very uncomfortable?

Without further ado, I'm thrilled to introduce my colleague, Gail Fuller, who is the Disability & Philanthropy Forum’s Program and Communications Director. Her bio is in the chat. Again, feel free to use the chat anytime during the discussion to post your questions, and we will hold them for a Q&A period at the end. Gail, you're on.

Gail Fuller:

Thank you, Emily. I'm Gail Fuller. I am a Black woman with a non-apparent disability. I come to you from the land of the Seminoles. I live in Florida. And I am wearing my hair in a short, curly bob. I have on pink glasses, and I've decided that since this was about disability inclusive language, I would wear a t-shirt that reflects language, love, peace, soul, Black, magic, and melanin, so – and culture.

And so I am so excited today to talk to Cara. Those of you may have had a chance to hear Cara yesterday when the Ford Foundation hosted their Investments in Disability Rights during this last year, and Cara interviewed Melissa Harris-Perry and it was wonderful. So when that recording goes out, I would also encourage you to watch it, if you weren't able to attend.

I am going to turn it over to Cara to do her self-introductions, and then we'll come back to the poll. Thank you, Cara. You can go ahead and do your self-introduction.

Cara Reedy:

Hi. My name's Cara Reedy and I am on the unceded lands of the Lenape Indians. I am in New York City, in my apartment. I'm a light-skinned, African American woman with shoulder length curly hair, and I'm wearing a black button up shirt. I have artwork behind me, a gray couch, and some floral throw pillows. I'm sitting on the floor. I'm wearing gold, my new gold glasses. I'm so excited about them.

So I have been a journalist for the last 15 years. I used to work at CNN. I did a documentary for The Guardian, and I've also worked at NPR. Right now, I'm the Director of the newly formed Disabled Journalist Association. We're just in our infancy, but we're getting ready to come out with some great stuff.

I am so pleased to be here. Language is such a big thing for me because I think a lot of our oppression is wound up in language and we don't really realize it, but I'm really pleased to be here. Thank you.

Gail Fuller:

Thank you. I wanted to turn to the poll results for a moment. When it comes to using the word disability, 39% said very comfortable, 53% said comfortable, and 8% said uncomfortable. If anyone feels comfortable coming off mic and maybe explaining how they came to their conclusion of how they felt either comfortable and uncomfortable, we would love to hear from you before we start.

And I am going to rely on the team if someone is raising their hands and coming off mics during this session. So if we don't have anyone, we're going to move on. When I first had the opportunity to talk to Cara, she talked about the context of language and the history of language, and it was extremely fascinating. So I thought we would start with her grounding the conversation and really taking the time to understand where do words come from, what are the history? And so, I could listen to her literally all day talk about this. So Cara, if you would go ahead and let's start the conversation.

Cara Reedy:

I guess let's talk about why we – first-person versus identity language. That's a good way to kick it off. So, first-person, “I'm a person with a disability.” Really kind of started because... Sorry, I have to kind of frame it.

All right. Eugenics has kind of just wound up in our language. And we don't really realize it. And so a lot of the words that we use just very casually in like, "Oh, I'm an idiot. You're such a moron. You're stupid." All of those words were words that scientists used to use to classify humans and their intelligence and pretty much in our society what their value was, because they would assign things like, “can do simple math problems.” It was all these kind of grading of people's abilities and ascribing them a position in society.

So when we use words like that, and because we did that... Let me back up a second. Because we have... the scientists were building the society on whose value was more. That's how we have built our systems. That's how we decide who's allowed to be paid a minimum wage. That's how we decide what a minimum wage is, and we don't really realize it. So coming out as kids, we call each other these names, but we're being sort of taught that if you are these characteristics of a moron or an idiot, that your value is lower, you should get paid lower, and no one should care about you, really.

So with all of that, some of these people were basically classified as subhuman. And so when the Disability Civil Rights Movement was happening in the early seventies, when it was starting in the early seventies, because it went on for a long time, they got a lot done. They started using words like “person with disability” to identify themselves as a person. First, “I am a person.”

So that's a very powerful way of branding and self-identifying yourself. Where identity-first has come is, like, people my generation and younger are saying, "No, you know what? I'm a dwarf." I used to say, ‘cause that's what they would teach you to say, is “person with dwarfism.” I am not my diagnosis. But identity-first is saying, “I am actually, ‘cause this is how you treat me. And so I identify with this,” because I couldn't have... I couldn't be me if I don't express my place in this world. And that doesn't mean that I believe I should be paid less. It's just, it's okay that I am a dwarf. There's a lot of great things about us.

Sorry, I feel like I'm rambling. Is that what you're looking from here?

Gail Fuller:

Yeah. When you're talking about identity-first, so when I introduced myself, I introduced myself as a Black woman with a non-apparent disability. And so I chose that instead of invisible, because as a Black woman, I never want to be invisible, but I respect those who choose to use the word invisible. So how do you deal with or how do you, when speaking to someone, when writing about someone, recognizing their language preference?

Cara Reedy:

I ask them.

Gail Fuller:

Really, it's that simple as that, right?

Cara Reedy:

I just ask them. I'm like, "How do you identify?" Because it doesn't matter to me. If you want to identify “person with a disability,” because that is where the oppression that you identify with, that's how you... then that's your choice. And I shouldn't be complaining about it because that's your choice. It's just, like, there's a lot of autistic people who like to be called “autistic people,” and who am I to have a judgment on that? That's their identity.

Gail Fuller:

Yeah. I mean that is so important because a lot of times, and I'm glad she started off with the people-first, identity-first, because a lot of times people struggle with that because, you know, there was a movement at one point where it was simply you do not use “disabled people,” you know? You had to use “people with a disability.” And one of the things for the Forum, we actually use both. And when we're talking about a specific person, we respect their decision and then refer to them in that way. But I also want to get into, when you're talking about words like “lame,” and “moron,” and stuff, and like you said, we hear that language in all the time.

Cara Reedy:

Yeah, we all use it. Like, when you're out on the playground, you're like, "You're an idiot." Yeah, but like, what are we calling each other?

Gail Fuller:

Yeah, exactly.

Cara Reedy:

People worry about the four letter words, the S-H one, the F one. People worry about those. Don't worry about that. The ones that we throw around and let our kids throw around are actually much more violent.

Gail Fuller:

So, how can I, I guess, so kind of two questions. How can we be more conscious of avoiding those words? And also, when looking at phrases, I don't know how many times I've said, "Oh, that's a blind spot,” or, “You're using that as a crutch," not realizing at the time, on also just how ableist that language is. So what would you advise the attendees on that?

Cara Reedy:

So the biggest one, I think of every... I try to think of everything positive rather than I'm taking away. So, getting away from those words, “idiot,” “moron,” and all of that, I think of the best, like, two or three names that I love, that I make up, that are not ableist, like ding-dong. “Oh that's a... You ding-dong.” Because it's a doorbell. I think of three names, and then those are the three I use. It's not a, “I can't use the other ones.”

This is the psychology that I go in to think about in my head. It's, “These are the three that I love, and those are the three that I'm going to use.” And that's how I do it. I just choose. I also really like old fashioned words too. Like, my grandpa used to say dagnabbit. And so, I like language, so I'm like, "All right, let me find something really fun to do, like, to replace it with," ‘cause there's all kinds of put downs and stuff.

‘Cause I believe that we're not going to change our humor, in that, we do like to make fun of each other. I come from a family that roasts each other. That's our love language. But nobody calls anybody names. Well, we do, but not really. It's, we say things like, “You're acting like a weirdo.” But there's all these ways.

So I'm not of the mind that we're going to just stop making fun of each other. ‘Cause I think disabled people make fun of each other in the most brutal, funny ways. So that would take part of our culture away too. But we don't want that. But I think it's trying to find words that don't actually refer to another group of people. That's literally just the basic, don't use someone else's identity as a put down. That's why I say ding-dong, because ding-dong is a doorbell. “You're acting like a ding-dong,” like a ding-dong. “Hello, wake up.”

Gail Fuller:

Well, some people, I asked the audience, and “crazy” and “lame” came up. I actually find that within my family, that we'll be like, "Oh my god, why are you acting so crazy?" But that's within the family. But I realize too, for me, I have to adjust that. So when I'm speaking to people, I'm conscious of my language, but not to the point where I realize that sometimes I don't... I'm going to have to apologize for something that I said. It's part of the education process. I don't want people to think that there is no such thing as making a mistake in speaking with people, or if you're writing something.

The writing part comes easier because you get to ask the person what they refer, their preference. And, you know... Oh actually, one just came on, “triggered.” That’s interesting. And I love what you said, Cara, about, like, how do you, like... You think of other words to replace something that you're trying to get across. It has that same sentiment in a way, but isn't derogatory, because when I was little, growing up, I didn't realize that I had some mental conditions, and so it'd be like, "Oh she's just crazy like her mother," or something. And that struck me.

So what I want to get to now, before I go onto a tangent about my family, that would take us completely off rail, I want to actually also look at the framing when it comes to talking about people of disability. You'll hear things like, "Oh, they overcame,” or, “they're a victim,” or, “they're confined to." And people, it's like, "Oh my gosh, how they overcame." And people, I honestly believe that some of these people think that that is... They're actually being respectful and that's powerful and not realizing how people may take that language and that negative framing of their disability. So I'd love for you to talk more about that and what your thoughts might be on it.

Cara Reedy:

It's also a power play to be like, "Oh, look at you. You overcame this." And because then, there's no culpability in society for why they had to, why they were in such a predicament. Why were they in such a predicament in the first place? They were in such a predicament because our systems are broken.

And, so, a lot of what our language does puts it on the individual. Like, “That person is wheelchair-bound, and they also were able to get to school, look at that.” And the question is, “Why isn't that kid in the wheelchair in school? Why is our society broken that that kid can't go to school?”

That's the switch. You'll see these videos where some school engineered a walker because the kid’s family couldn't afford a walker. Why, in America, the richest country in the world, are there children that have trouble getting walkers? So that's not inspirational. That's a, "Eww, we're not doing it so great.” Have you ever… This isn't PC either, but it is... I'm going to skip this because that's not how I'm going to say that. But there's, like, just the...

Also, when you do that, and when you praise someone for overcoming a system, and you ignore the system that is holding this person back, you also don't give that person the space to complain about the system. Because then you've put this other person... "Well, that person did, why can't you?" And this is all just baked into language, and we don't think about, like, what these sentences actually mean.

Gail Fuller:

Yeah. And you know –

Cara Reedy:

And we don’t, like, the news, like, this is…’Cause I'm a journalist, so, like, I think about all the stories that aren't being told. So, people do think that's, like…The fact that the news is not reporting on all of our broken systems, but they're being like, "Look at this guy. He got past all the broken systems, and succeeded," but they don't say anything about the systems. It's expected that we are supposed to live in poverty.

Gail Fuller:

I am going to read a message from one of the attendees. I'd love for you to respond. “I think it's important to know that just because someone refers to themselves as something, does not mean it's okay for you to call them that. Communications is everything. Take the words used by rap stars and the like.” How would you respond?

Cara Reedy:

I would agree. Like, there are words that are in culture. So crip for us is not a word for y'all. Like, if you aren’t... Here's the other thing, the disability community is so big. I'm a dwarf with ADD. I can't call myself something that a group has taken back, like, of autistic people, or of wheelchair users. I can't use any of those, because I don't... I am not part of that group. And so it just goes for everybody. If you're not part of that group, you can't use that. And that's the rule.

Gail Fuller:

I was also going to add too, we talk about language, but how you communicate through the written word and through the visual. And, you know, one of the things that we see a lot when... People once again are thinking that they're doing the right thing is what, you know, when it comes to imaging, you know, disability porn, you know, where you see, for example... and I should have had two prepared, where you see a person, we'll use a person in wheelchair, because that seems to be usually what people tend to gravitate towards when they're showing a person with a disability. Showing someone in a disability, walking down the street with friends, it shows their independence. Seeing someone in a wheelchair that is being lifted up or helped, where it's clear that it’s, like, that's not what they're asking for. How do you tie in and talk about... Talk a little bit more about imaging too and why that's important. So like, as a journalist, if you're doing a story, you know, and thinking through both the language and the visuals, if you're doing a story on disability, how do you kind of go through that process?

Cara Reedy:

Well, I'll use myself as an example. So when I was…I took a lot of time off in between CNN and doing other things. And so, when I left CNN, a video came out, and all of a sudden, all this attention came on me. And so, because that happened, all of the reality shows, “Little Women: LA,” all of the “Little Women” reality shows started calling. I don't even know how they got my phone number, and like, and emailing and everything. And I had always had this revulsion to them, to the shows. I'd never watched them, but I had it.

So I said no. But they kept calling and I said, "You know what? Sit down, watch all of these shows, and see why you don't like them." So I watched them and I realized that, number one, they had no producers that were little people. Number two, the camera angles were always from someone else's point of view, it was never... They didn't have any little people cameramen.

So they would do things like go to shows or go... Not go to shows, go to stores or restaurants, and there'd be an entire restaurant full of low tops, and then two rows of high tops, and there's no one in the restaurant, and they point the group of four foot under women to climb up on a table that's over five feet high, and point the cameras at their butts while they're getting up on the chairs.

And I say all that to say, like, that, that’s spectacle. That's not you trying to understand what's happening. That's spectacle. Because here's the thing, if I'm in a restaurant in my normal life, I'm never going to pick a high top. I'm always going to go over to the low tops. I will argue with someone before I get up on that one, ‘cause why am I going to climb to go to dinner? And when I have to go to the bathroom, I have to climb? I'm not going to do that.

So that's for average height people's gaze. And that's kind of how you have to think about imagery is, is it something that you want to see because this is what you've been taught to see? Should you maybe ask someone from that community to help you with that imagery so that it's a true picture? And…’Cause you don't really know what it's like. So a lot of…That's why it's so serious too, is a lot of what happens is even with your best efforts, you are still... we all are still swimming in this sort of ableist soup. But people who are from this identity, or whichever identity you're looking at, understand the power dynamics better than you do.

And that's why you just always have to listen. And also, sometimes just give the reins too, ‘cause maybe it's too complicated. And it doesn't mean you're, you know, it doesn’t mean that you’re not smart enough to do it. It means that it's just... we're still figuring it out. And so for you to come in with less information and be the director of it, I mean that's not the best idea. And I don't know, that's-

Gail Fuller:

We have some audience questions coming in, and they're going to come off mic. So Lori, if you want to come off mic please. Thank you.

Lori Grubstein:

Oh yes. Hi, everyone. Lori Grubstein with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. I just had a question about some terms that I think came about because of people's discomfort with verbiage related to disabilities. So almost to, like, euphemize terms related to disabilities.

So, my son has disabilities. And a lot of the other parents that I know that also have children with disabilities refer to their children as “special needs kids,” or “having special needs.” Another one that comes to mind is some people, instead of saying disabled, say “differently abled.” So I just was wondering if you could speak to that phenomenon and what... I mean, I'm sure there's arguments to be made for and against, but just be curious, just given what you were saying about the power of language, what your thoughts are on that?

Cara Reedy:

Yeah, I think it's more of that, like, “He's differently abled.” It's more of that kind of... Instead of just using the word “disabled,” he's disabled. Because disabled is a word, right? Like, why do we need a new word? And there's nothing wrong with disabled. We, in our culture, ascribe things to disability less than, you know, all of these things. So we're uncomfortable using it even though it is the correct word. So then we euphemize it with “differently abled,” “special needs,” and we're still not dealing with why we're uncomfortable with using the word “disabled.” We make up other words because we just don't want to deal with our feelings about it. And if we're not going to talk about that... And that's why disabled people get so annoyed with people using these other words because again, you're not seeing me and seeing what I'm going through, or you are seeing it, but you don't want to talk about it, so you make up another word.

Gail Fuller:

Thank you. We have another question from Kevin Lewin.

Kevin Lewin:

Hey, guys. My name's Kevin Lewin. I'm currently coming to you from unceded Chumash lands in Southern California. I'm a white, middle-aged English man, but I'm an American citizen. I've got dark hair, a white goatee, and I'm wearing glasses. My background is hazy. I'm coming to you from my office.

Cara, I'm just wondering. Like you, I'm a former journalist, I'm now in communications. I spent 30 years as an entertainment journalist. I was wondering if you've ever been forced to use the word “disabled” instead of “living with a disability” for flow in a news piece? And have you ever had conflict with art versus correct language?

Cara Reedy:

I'm always arguing to use “disabled” rather “person with a disability.” So I have had that argument but in the reverse. I have had arguments about whether to use “dwarf” or “little person.” I like dwarf, and a lot of people like to use little person because that's what the main largest organization for dwarfs is called, is Little People of America.

But language changes so much. Like, people my parents' age would all use little people. My parents aren't dwarfs, but the other parents in Little People of America, at the same time my parents who were dwarfs, called themselves little people.

We like to be called dwarfs. A lot of us now my age, I'm forties, we like to be called dwarf. But yes, I have had arguments with editors about what to use about my myself, and when I'm writing a piece.

So, I work, I teach newsrooms how to talk about disability, how to report on disability. I find there's a skepticism. I mean, because all journalists are skeptical ‘cause that's what makes us good. But they're skeptical of even me as a journalist who will have facts and prove why. They'll still say to me, "Well, I don't think that's a thing,” or, “I'm not sure you're right."

And it's weird to have someone tell you that they're not sure I'm right about myself, but that happens all the time. And it's also weird when you're a... It's weird, in general. So, like, if you have an interview subject and you are telling them, "I'm not sure you're calling yourself the correct thing," that's weird. But then if you are a journalist working with your coworker, and your coworker says to you, "I don't think you call yourself the right thing." You're like, "So you don’t think I'm as good of as you? Like, that I would be diligent enough to research my own identity."

Gail Fuller:

I mean that's probably one of... I mean it is one of the most frustrating things. And to get that repeatedly said to you, like you said, I don't know my identity. We have another question. Kristy Trautmann, if you would like to come off?

Kristy Trautmann:

Gail and Cara, it's so great to be here today. I'm so glad that the Forum does these series to help us all continue to do better in disability inclusion.

So, I'm with a foundation in Pittsburgh, FISA Foundation, that does a lot of work in this area. And one of the things the Disability Inclusion Pledge really helped us to take a look at, is that I think we had good practices in place. Some of what you were talking about, Gail, with using both person-first language and disability identity-first language. But we didn't have anything written down, and that was real organizational flaw for us.

And so, we were looking for resources that would help us codify some of the good practices and use it as ready reference if we had new employees or other things. So I'm gonna post in the chat the handout that we were able to find on the Disability Philanthropy Forum about language with some very clear dos and don'ts.

So we just talked to our board about this in September as part of our meeting, and some of our board members are, you know, deep in the world of disability advocacy, and others are new to this space. And so having a clear, "Say this. Don't say that," was a really helpful resource. And, so, I just wanted to point it out and see if... I know that probably a lot of folks on this call are the designated advocate within their organization, right? But we have to help the organizations come along in having good practices in place that everybody can follow.

So, I just wanted to give a shout out to that resource and to find out if there were other things on the Forum website that's really so rich with resources that you all would recommend in kind of a similar tools. Thanks so much.

Gail Fuller:

Thank you, Kristy. And I did not ask Kristy to promote the Forum resources but thank you so much. Our colleague, Emily Ladau, has done a great job of really curating those resources. And Cara, we'd love to hear from you anything else that you would recommend too.

Cara Reedy:

So I didn't review your resources. I didn't know I was supposed to. Sorry I didn't.

Gail Fuller:

Oh no, you weren't. But after this, I'm going to send you tons. No.

Cara Reedy:

Okay.

Gail Fuller:

Yeah, but I want to follow up... Go ahead.

Cara Reedy:

Yeah. I think that resources are great and you should have them for guidelines, but I also think sometimes we also have to go a little deeper, and we have to start explaining what's actually happening, what's the story behind it. And I'm not saying you guys have to act like journalists or anything like that, but when talking about creating an environment that's safe, inclusive, sometime having these discussions is really important because it helps people connect the dots. But I would love to go over and see if I can find... But Emily is so great at that. You really did kind of get the master at-

Gail Fuller:

Oh, yes. I was looking at her book, too, Demystifying Disability is a wonderful resource.

Cara Reedy:

Absolutely.

Gail Fuller:

So we have another question, and I'm going to read this. Thank you, Brian. "When we aren't necessarily speaking about a particular person or a particular disability, is there a best practice for such writing?"

Cara Reedy:

So if you're just saying, like, disabled people?

Gail Fuller:

Yeah, exactly.

Gail Fuller:

In fact, let me actually start... Just before that question, that might actually place even greater context. He is adding to Kristy's question, and he says, "But in our case, we do want to acknowledge disabilities in our public-facing communications, and so when you aren't necessarily speaking about a particular person,” this once again goes to the identity-first versus people-first, it seems.

Cara Reedy:

Okay. So can you repeat the question again? I'm trying to-

Gail Fuller:

Yeah. Yep. For sure. And actually, I'm going to try to look directly at my screen this time. I was turning my head from my other screen. So, "I would add to Kristy's question which is also about writing. But in our case, we do not..." Oh, Brian, I know you were working on your house.

Cara Reedy:

Oh I see him.

Brian:

I'm going to make it quick. So I do have some work going on. Thank you. Specifically, I'm thinking about, so in our public-facing communications, like websites and such, where we do want to acknowledge disability, ‘cause I think naming that is important. But when sort of talking about disabilities in a generic sense, as opposed to, “I'm not interacting with you, so I can't ask you, ‘How do you want to be referred?’” Like, are there best practices when thinking about how we write in generic terms?

Cara Reedy:

So, “the disability community” is always a real safe one, because you're talking about disability, you've got community as people. So things you avoid or... I always like rules. So, like, “the disabled,” you always want to have a community behind it, right? Anything that kind of otherizes. So, “the disability community,” “disabled people,” “people with disabilities,” any of those four, you're safe.

I don't think you need to go anywhere past one of those four. So it's, “the disability community,” “disabled people,” “people with disabilities,” that's three. And avoid “the disabled” anything, and “the disabled” and ending it. It's, like, my mother always gets on us when we end sentences with “at,” like "Where you at?" My mom's like, "You're behind the at. Where are you?" So, it's just, make sure you have that word behind it.

Gail Fuller:

I'm following up too. We have a question from Noelle who also asks, "What about abbreviations? You're starting to see more and more abbreviations like PWD. What have your thoughts on that instead of writing out people with disabilities?"

Cara Reedy:

I think that's fine.

Gail Fuller:

Okay.

Cara Reedy:

Yeah.

Gail Fuller:

All right. And a couple more questions, and I'm just going to read this. "Could we discuss body language? I learned as a young man that it was courteous to speak to everyone at eye level. So, if you're speaking to someone who is in a wheelchair, should you kneel? Pull up the chair? What do you think? And could it be deemed wrong in any way?"

Cara Reedy:

So, I, ‘cause I'm a dwarf, so I have personal space issues. I personally hate it when people kneel and are in my face because we're not actually... you’re eye level with me, but now you've gotten so close. Whereas, if you were standing up, you'd probably be leaning back. And I suspect, and I can't fully answer for wheelchair users ‘cause I'm not one, but I suspect it's probably the same phenomenon. If you're leaning over into the chair, you're in that person's space. So I think pulling up a chair or standing, and just listening and talking. And, like, I don't mind if you have to turn, look your head down at me, I'm shorter than you. It's okay. But getting in my face is... I back up. And then there's oftentimes where I'm backing up while this person's kneeling at me. And then they're, like, walking across floors on their knees at me, and I’m like, “I'm trying to back.” So I think...

Gail Fuller:

Well, you know what I find fascinating, because my other life was working in sports with giant, you know, basketball players, like Shaq. No one stepped on a stool to try to get up to his eye level. But it seems that with people who are dwarfs, and wheelchairs, that comes up a lot of, like, what to do. And so I loved how you kind of talked about it. I think it's very helpful.

I also want to, because we've had a lot of really great questions, I'd love to ask a question of the audience, and you can simply use the reaction and raise hands, but how many of you guys actually have a style guide that includes disability language? And if you could just use the reaction to raise your hand. And if you want to come off mic and talk about how you actually created that guide, any helpful hints that you would share with others? Just come off mic, if you choose.

You know, we have a style guide and we actually share that style guide with our writers. And so, and it's kind of twofold, because the style guide reflects also the language we choose to use as a forum. So when someone had asked about people with the disabilities using the acronym PWD, and for Cara, she was fine with that. You know, for the Forum, we spell that out. We don't try to group people, like, we don't do, like, “people of color,” you know? When possible, we will take and spell out everything. And it really, really helps. And thank you, Caitlin, for saying that you actually use our resources. Shout out to PEAK Grantmaking for that. Anyone else want to come off mic? Because if not, I have a few more questions for Cara, because I also want to be cognizant of time too, but-

Cara Reedy:

I also want to put a shout out for... Sorry, I blanked on resources. Dr. Sami Schalk came out with a book about two weeks ago called “Black Disability Politics.” Get it, because it-

Gail Fuller:

I will share my copy.

Cara Reedy:

Yeah.

Gail Fuller:

Not that this was planned.

Cara Reedy:

It's super helpful for a lot of things, like a lot. Like it really explains Black disability identity, but I also think it explains, like, how identity is broken up and how it ends up in language. So it's, like, some of the lessons in it, or ideas in it, are transferable. It's a really brilliant book. And also, Alice Wong's new memoir is also really... ‘cause Alice breaks down really what it's like being disabled and Asian and American and from, you know, this northern California transplant from the Midwest. Like Alice is American and Chinese, and, like, all of these things. And so she really breaks down identity and disability in a way, in her memoir, that's so cool. So also another really good book to get.

Gail Fuller:

Okay. Austin had a similar question, but I think you have answered it. And Austin, if not, please let us know.

Austin:

You have. Yeah, I was just going to ask you if you wanted to elaborate a little bit more intersectionality, but you kind of just did. But if you have any other thoughts on intersectionality, I'd love to... It's a big topic, but I'd love to hear more thoughts on it, if you have.

Cara Reedy:

So, I believe that when we talk about intersectionality, a lot of times we don't talk about how disability intersects with everything, and how it changes our experience. So, like, white disabled people have a very different experience than Black disabled people, than Native American disabled people. And plus, also, like, gender identity.

So all of these things make up this whole person, and these people who are part of these different cultures. But also it, in many ways because of the way our system is built, it defines how we're going to be treated in society and what our outcomes are going to be.

And so when we talk about the disability community, it's vast, and has many different experiences. But then also, like, when you put race and gender on top of it, it becomes even more vast. And we have to acknowledge all of those different identities, because it changes people's outcomes depending on who you are in these different intersecting identities. And so there isn't... Like, some of what I say, what I think is going to be different from what Emily does, Emily Ladau, ‘cause like Emily and I are two... we're both disabled, but we have two very different experiences.

And, you know, I have a very different experience from Johnny J who is Native American and a journalist. I don't know. It's something I get really excited to talk about. So, I'm going to stop talking ‘cause I can talk forever about that stuff, ‘cause I'm getting ready to get weird. So, I'm like, "Stop talking!"

Gail Fuller:

Well, we have another question, Coralie.

Coralie Bauduy:

Thank you, Gail. So my name is Coralie Bauduy, I'm with the MacArthur Foundation, and I just wanted to share that we do have a style guide, and it's a living document in the sense that we started as soon as the DEI Movement picked up and it was the new hot topic, we created the style guide and we had a list. It was not limited to race or gender identity, but it included everything: disabilities, economic, socioeconomic classes and all of that.

And then we had one particular instance where, in terms of race, we decided to adopt Latinx. But one of our staff members was adamant, they were absolutely vocal every time because she said that it didn't make sense, and that's not how it was. And so we dug a little bit more and there was this article, I believe in the New York Times, about instead of using Latinx, why don't we ask people what they use, “Latinos and Latinos, what do you use?” And they came up with this word Latine, or Latine. So we added that to our style guide.

And we had another instance where we had a transgender person, Dr. S, who came and gave a presentation and talked about gender identity. And people had questions about, “Are we supposed to say LGBTQIA+? Can we say LGBTQ?” And everything? And they basically said, "Well, why don't you ask the person you're talking to?” It's like the pronouns that you use. So I just wanted to share that our style guide is consistently evolving. And best practice that we've learned so far is really try to ask people how they identify, how they want to be identified, how they want to be seen.

Gail Fuller:

Thank you.

Cara Reedy:

Yeah. To me, that's the easiest way to do it, because also language changes so quickly. It can change. Like, Gen Z is saying different stuff too, like, than us. So it's hard to put hard and fast rules on anything. It's almost, like, make sure to ask, or because it changes so much, it's hard to, like... ‘cause you're going to change it all the time.

Gail Fuller:

Yeah. We find, my colleague, Anjali, did a lot of researching around our style guide, and we also realize that we as an organization then, when we're not speaking to someone and we're writing in general, what's the term that we need to use?

I wish we could go on and on. I am cognizant of time. Cara, everyone, thank you. I'm glad this was a conversation. And I'm going to turn it over to our Executive Director, Emily Harris, to close out. But Cara Reedy, thank you, thank you, thank you.

Cara Reedy:

Thank you.

Emily Harris:

Thank you so much. This has been amazing. I want to thank the people here who've contributed so much. I want this to go on all day.

So we are going to ask for your input with a survey that will pop up on your screen and we are sharing in the chat right now. That will help us learn from your experience and also will help inform our future learning series. And we're excited to be adding some new components next time, including a – next year – including a Pledge Peer Network. So you've started that today and we are off and running.

And we also will be sharing a podcast that my colleague, Emily Ladau, who's gotten a lot of press on this session, will be organizing. So stay tuned for all of that in 2023. As a reminder, our Disability & Philanthropy Forum membership is open to anyone working in philanthropy, so please invite your colleagues to join and receive invitations to more sessions. And also, as a reminder, we are eager to have more organizations sign the Disability Inclusion Pledge. So if you have colleagues who you think their organizations would join your organization, it's all at disabilityphilanthropy.org. Thank you for being here today. Thank you for your commitment to inclusion. And thank you, Cara and Gail, for a truly honest, open, and inviting conversation.