

# WHERE ARE WE NOW?

## Funding for Disability Rights & Social Justice

Disability is part of diversity and celebrated by many of the world's 1 billion disabled people as an identity, community, and culture.

**Yet, our societies are shaped by ableism.**

As highlighted in this brief, philanthropy too often perpetuates ableism by ignoring disability. The philanthropic sector urgently needs to invest in strategies advocated by disabled leaders. Disabled people are an essential part of equitable solutions for our collective future.

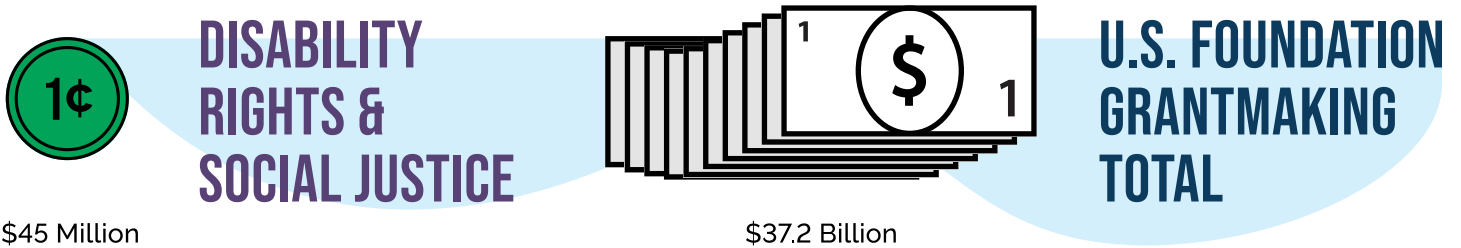
People with disabilities are:

**1 IN 7** people in the world

**1 IN 4** adult Americans

Disability is a social, cultural, political, and personal identity that cuts across all identity groups. It can be apparent or non-apparent and can be acquired at any point in a person's life.

**One billion people with disabilities,<sup>1</sup> only one penny for every \$10 of grantmaking.**



That is how little U.S. foundations are investing in disability rights and social justice. Data from 2019 analyzed in the [Foundation Giving for Disability: An Overview of Priorities and Trends](#) report<sup>2</sup> provides a baseline for expansion of investment.

1 WHO and World Bank, World Report on Disability, 2010. The U.S. Census records one in every four Americans as disabled.

2 The review looked at 2016 and 2019 giving of 1,000 of the largest U.S. foundations whose giving is tracked by Candid, including their grants of \$5,000 or more. These foundations account for 45% of overall foundation giving annually. The dataset includes a few disability funders such as Disability Rights Fund and FISA Foundation that are not included in the Foundation 1,000.

# Gaps in U.S. and Global Funding

While funders increasingly understand the role of systemic injustices among populations marginalized because of their identities,<sup>3</sup> disability funding is still predominantly going to services and support.

## What is funding for disability rights and social justice?

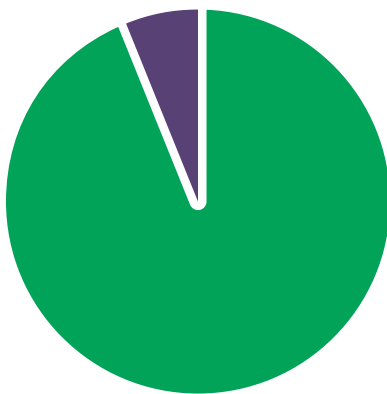
Funding for disability rights and social justice recognizes that disability is a facet of identity and addresses systems-level change to remove physical and attitudinal barriers to full participation in society.

## What is funding for disability justice?

Based on recognition of compounding systems of oppression (e.g., racism, heterosexism and ableism), this funding centers the leadership of historically excluded disabled people and supports disability-led organizations.

## Exceedingly Low Investment

Overall funding for disability is dismally low (\$755.1 million out of \$37.2 billion). A mere 6% (\$45.8 million) of it goes to disability rights and social justice. And although 80% of people with disabilities live in the developing world, only 10% (\$74 million) of disability funding focuses outside the United States.



94%

Disability Services & Support  
**\$710 Million**

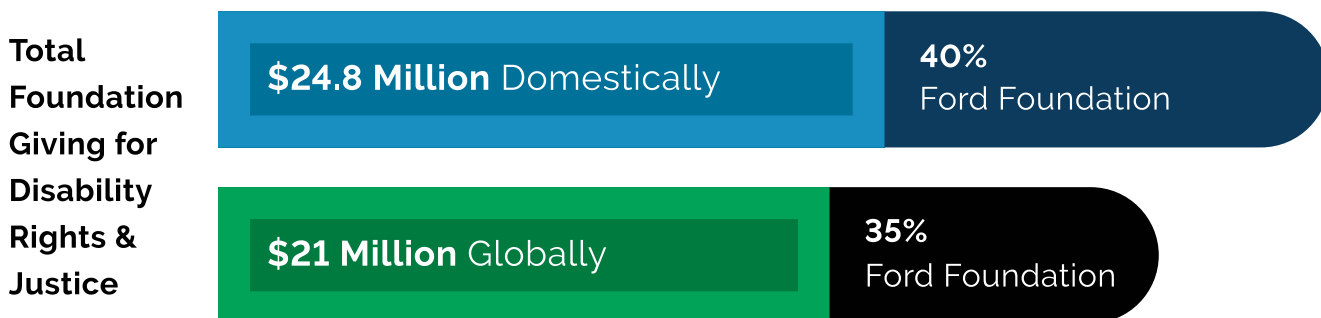
6%

Disability Rights & Social Justice  
**\$45.8 Million**

<sup>3</sup> Though not directly comparable, a [Candid review of funding for racial equity in the U.S.](#) found that 66% of that funding employed policy, advocacy, and systems reform as a strategic approach to racial equity work.

## Lack of Diversified Funding

A few large funders account for the bulk of the funding. Ford Foundation alone gives 35-40% of domestic and global funding for disability rights and social justice. Just 80 of the 757 U.S. foundations are giving grants for disability rights and social justice domestically, and just 18 globally.



The majority of recipients are getting a grant from only one of the Foundation 1000 funders. Median grant amounts are \$50,000 or less.

## Missing Focus on Intersecting Identities

Most disability rights and social justice funding focuses on the disability community overall. One-third or fewer disability grants address racial & ethnic minorities, women and girls, or LGBTQIA+ populations. There is a missing analysis of the disproportionate impacts of systemic injustice on disabled people with multiple intersecting historically-excluded identities. Further, most grantmaking does not address the connection of poverty to disability and other overlapping historically excluded identities.<sup>4</sup>

## Openings to Build On

### New Funders Can Have a Huge Impact

Among the 18 funders making disability rights and social justice grants globally in 2019, the [Disability Rights Fund](#) (DRF) is making more than half (53.4%) of all grants. DRF's grantees are organizations of persons with disabilities in the Global South, and 50% of funding goes to groups marginalized within the disability movement.

<sup>4</sup> [Disability, Race, and Poverty in America PDF](#) (National Disability Institute).

This includes people with overlapping marginalized identities, such as women and indigenous people with disabilities as well as populations not well-represented in the movement, like deafblind people and people with psychosocial disabilities.

DRF and Ford Foundation — both relatively new global disability funders — together account for 65% of the global funding on disability rights and social justice. With their influence, funding for disability rights and social justice is 28% of total global disability funding. This is **seven times** the percentage domestically; only 4% of total disability funding in the U.S. addresses rights and social justice.

## BUT CHANGE IS HAPPENING...

Only one U.S. grant could be identified in 2019 data to have a focus on disability justice. But that year also saw 11 funders who convened as the Presidents' Council on Disability Inclusion in Philanthropy make \$5.2 million in grants to establish the [Disability Inclusion Fund \(DIF\) at Borealis](#) to "lead transformational change" in the U.S. around disability justice. Without the Fund, domestic funding for disability rights and social justice would be at least 21% lower. Since 2019, DIF has raised additional funds and made more than \$6 million in grants to more than 50 organizations led by persons with disabilities who have been historically excluded within the U.S.

### Relatively Small Grants Can Make a Difference

Because the median grant is \$50,000 or less, and most organizations currently only receive one grant, additional funding can make a huge difference.

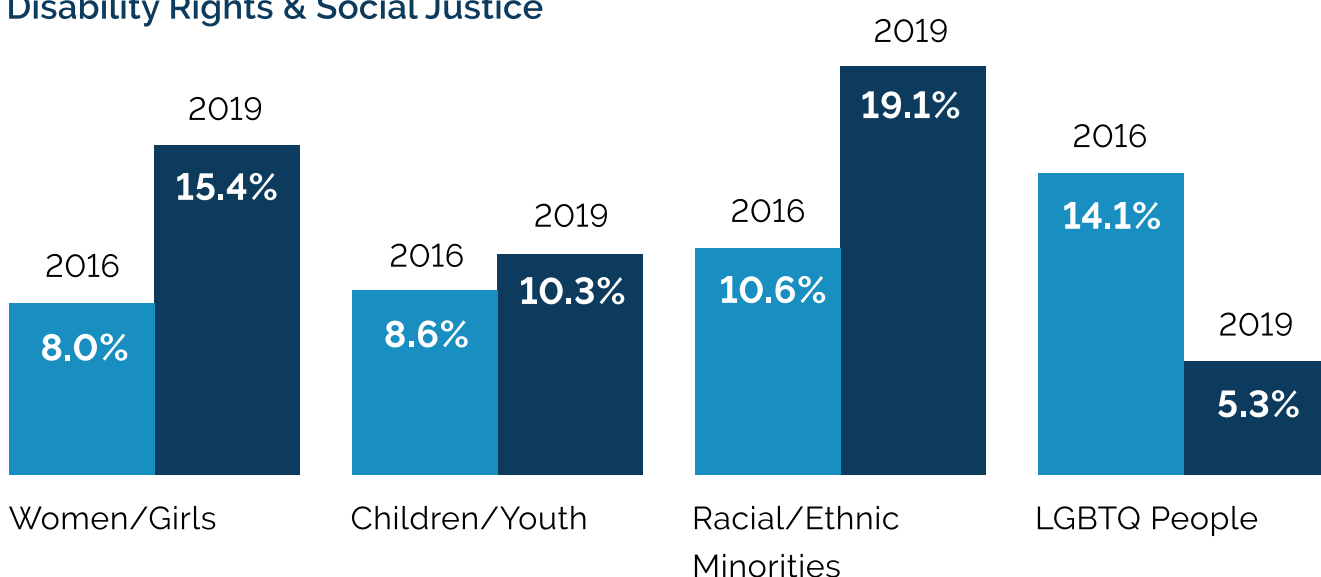
A 2021 sub-grant of \$10,000 to [Disability Rights Maryland](#) out of a larger \$189,000 grant from Open Society Institute (OSI)-Baltimore to [Baltimore Action Legal Team \(BALT\)](#) enabled participation of a disability rights attorney in the Homelessness Work Group of the [People's Commission to Decriminalize Maryland](#). The work group held listening sessions with people with lived experience, allowing the Commission to highlight for legislators how unjust arrests were made on the basis of disability (and other historically excluded identities) under Maryland's Failure to Obey Lawful Order law. A BALT-proposed Bill that has since gained legislative sponsors and is under consideration would reform this law.

## Disability Funding Can Reinforce Funding of Other Social Movements

Trends within domestic disability rights and social justice funding mirror trends generally among domestic funders. Between 2016 and 2019, shares of funding to support racial and ethnic minorities and also women and girls with disabilities increased substantially. This shift is well-aligned with the growing influence of racial and gender justice movements and U.S. funders' increasing awareness of the need to fund systems change. On the other hand, there was a troubling decline in funding for issues specific to disabled LGBTQ people.

### IDENTITY-BASED SHARES OF DOMESTIC FUNDING

#### Disability Rights & Social Justice



Globally, shares of disability rights and social justice funding for children and youth are growing fastest (from 5.4% to 14.1%). For regions of the world like Africa, where there is rapid growth in the number of children and youth among the population (Africa's youth population is predicted to grow to 35% of the global youth population by 2050<sup>5</sup>), this also aligns with increasing funder awareness about the critical importance of funding youth.

### Foundations Have Experience to Build On

Most Foundation 1000 funders (3 out of 4) are making at least one grant focused on disability. Funding for reproductive health and rights of women and girls makes

<sup>5</sup> [2017 World Population Data Sheet With Focus on Youth](#) (PRB.org).

up almost 13% of domestic disability rights and social justice funding, while global funding for women and girls with disabilities is close to 32% of global disability rights and social justice funding.

**Below is one powerful example of funding that addresses the overlap between disability and gender inequality.**

A series of grants from DRF to a coalition formed by the Indonesia Mental Health Association and Himpunan Wanita Disabilitas Indonesia (the Indonesian Association of Women with Disabilities) enabled women with disabilities to work with other women's rights activists on finalizing and supporting the 2022 passage of an Elimination of Sexual Violence Act.<sup>6</sup> DRF funding supported women with disabilities to contribute to the Bill's success by opposing an article that supported forced contraception and forced sterilization of women with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities.

<sup>6</sup> [Indonesia: Parliament Passes Sexual Violence Bill](#) (Library of Congress).

## THERE IS EXPERIENCE TO BUILD ON. WE CAN DO THIS.

To learn more about how to track disability rights and justice in your grantmaking, visit:

[DisabilityPhilanthropy.org/  
foundation-giving-for-disability](https://DisabilityPhilanthropy.org/foundation-giving-for-disability)

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All data was drawn from  
[Foundation Giving for Disability](#)  
by Steven Lawrence.



**Disability &  
Philanthropy  
Forum**