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EMILY HARRIS:

Welcome to the Disability And Philanthropy Forum's Learning Series. My name is Emily Harris. I use she/her pronouns, and I'm proud to be part of the disability community. I'm executive director of the Disability and Philanthropy Forum and come to you from the unceded land of the Council of Three Fires, the Odawa, 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 glasses, and a multicolored shirt over a white turtleneck. Behind me is a white and tan screen. My access needs are met today because we have captioning.

A few housekeeping items. There are two ways to access our live captions today. Use the CC button at the bottom of your screen 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. The webinar is being recorded and you will receive a link to the recording in the next few weeks. Although we will be using the chat to share links with you, it will not be available for you to communicate out. Instead, please use the Q&A button at the bottom of your screen to share your questions any time during the session. We will try to integrate them into the discussion as they come in and we will also make time for questions at the end. If the Q&A is not accessible to you, feel free to send your questions to communications@disabilityphilanthropy.org. We will be live tweeting today and hope that you will join us on social media using the #DisabilityPhilanthropy. You can also follow along by connecting with us on Twitter, @DisPhilanthropy.

Before we start today's conversation, just a short reminder that disability is a natural part of the human experience. One in four adults, 61 million people and one billion people worldwide have disabilities. Our community continues to grow as the population ages and as people contract long COVID, other chronic illnesses, mental health, and other conditions where society creates barriers to full participation. Today, we'll examine foundation giving data to illuminate why philanthropy cannot ignore funding for disability rights and justice. We have a poll question that we will look at later in the conversation, please answer it now. The question is, of the Foundation 1000 grantmakers, how many provide funding for disability rights and social justice? 242, 107 or 83? If the poll is not accessible to you, please feel free to email communications@disabilityphilanthropy.org and we'll repeat those questions or note it in the Q&A.

I'm thrilled to have this conversation today and I've been looking forward to it because one of the Forum's key goals is to increase grantmaking for disability inclusion, rights and justice. In fact, that is the mandate we hear from the disability community. After a year of painstaking research, we are finally ready to release the first ever benchmarking of U.S. foundation grantmaking for disability, and I'm excited to talk with three philanthropic leaders about what exists now and what's possible Tomorrow.

I'm pleased to welcome Amoretta Morris, CEO of Borealis Philanthropy, our research consultant Steven Lawrence and Jen Bokoff who is here representing Disability Rights Fund executive director Catalina Devandas, who unfortunately is ill today. Rather than read bios, which are linked in the chat, can you all please share a brief introduction of yourselves, sharing one thing that you want our audience to know about the perspective you bring to this conversation? Amoretta, let's start with you, followed by Steven and then Jen.

AMORETTA MORRIS:

Sure. Thank you Emily and thank you to the Forum for inviting us into this conversation, inviting me and Borealis into this conversation. I am honored to be here and to share a space with you all. My name again is Amoretta Morris. I use she/her pronouns. I am calling in from my home in Northwest Washington D.C., otherwise also known as Piscataway Land. I am a black woman with medium brown skin. Today, I'm wearing dark brown braids. I'm also wearing my new favorite blue glasses and a fuchsia shirt. Behind me is a bookcase and a sign that reads, "Joy is an act of resistance."

I really come to this work as a funder committed to liberation for all and prior to being a funder, as a youth and community organizer who work towards that same goal. Over the past few years, I've worked in various parts of the social change ecosystem on the nonprofit side, in local government, and now in philanthropy, including stints in D.C. public schools, the D.C. Mayor's Office, and the Annie Casey Foundation.

But today, I am really proud to be here representing Borealis Philanthropy. Borealis is a national philanthropic intermediary. By intermediary, I simply mean that we are both a grantmaker and a grant seeker. We receive dollars and then we also redistribute dollars to the field. And Borealis houses the Disability Inclusion Fund, along with eight other values aligned collaborative funds. And so I think the summary of all of that is to say that the perspective that I bring to this conversation is one of an intersectional organizer. I'm also joining this conversation as a lifelong learner, and I mean, I'll say more about that as we get into the conversation, but that posture has been one really, really important to me in this conversation about disability justice.

EMILY HARRIS:

Thank you. Is there a problem with the captions? I just saw a note from Jen.

1SOURCE EVENTS:

Yeah, they are accessible via the external link. We are working with the caption to get them back in Zoom, but the external link is accessible. Olivia just sent it in chat again.

EMILY HARRIS:

Okay, thank you. We will continue in that case. Steven, do you want to give a quick introduction? And thank you, Retta.

STEVEN LAWRENCE:

Yes. So I am Steven Lawrence, the consultant on this project. I am a white male, shaved head, glasses, wearing lots of blue today because it's my favorite color and I have a picture wall behind me with family photos and art and I am speaking to you from my home outside of New Haven, Connecticut, which is the land of the Paugussett. My quick anecdote will be that it's probably getting close to 10 years ago when the predecessor of the Disability and Philanthropy Forum, the Disability Funders Network existed, that they had approached me about doing a mapping of funding for disability and the project never came together. So I will just say how excited I was when Emily and the team at the Forum had approached me about doing this work, and I hope you'll find it useful. It's been so important. And Amoretta, I was appreciating what you were saying as a lifelong learner because this has been a tremendous learning opportunity for me and I'm grateful for that, and I hope you'll find the findings interesting and useful.

JEN BOKOFF:

Thanks, Steven. This is Jen. My pronouns are she/her. For a visual description, I'm a white woman with long red hair and I'm wearing speckled glasses, a blue sweater, and in the vein of Amoretta, I have a bracelet that says joy on it. So we've got a lot of joy all around. My access needs are met today knowing that I can go off camera if I need to.

I'm really honored and also slightly nervous to be joining this conversation today because it's impossible for me to replicate Catalina's amazing experience and perspective. But for me, I come from a philanthropy background. I've worn a lot of different hats in the sector, and I'm always trying to push us to be even more thoughtful and go even deeper on the work that we're already doing. But in this conversation, I think a unique perspective that I'll bring is that I'm a disabled fundraiser and I want us to get more comfortable as a sector talking about how shifting power is inherently tied to shifting funding, which is something that is unfortunately taboo in a lot of philanthropy conversations. And I'm really glad that it's not here. So thank you for having me and excited to dig in.

EMILY HARRIS:

Wonderful. So glad to have all of you today. Steven, as we know, your comment of 10 years ago, more than 10 years ago, perhaps benchmark this. Grantmakers have told disabled leaders for far too long that they don't fund disability, and now the data that you've put together for us backs up that assertion. As the research consultant for this report, what are some of the key findings that can help ground this conversation, and were any of them surprising to you?

STEVEN LAWRENCE:

Thanks, Emily. I'll highlight three findings that I think particularly stand out for our conversation today. I'll begin by reiterating what you just said in your introductory remarks. One in four Americans are people with disabilities, roughly a billion people worldwide, yet what we found in the data for 2019 is that basically two cents of every dollar awarded by foundations in the Foundation 1000 focused on disability. But first, let me say, how did we get to that figure? How did we come up with the benchmarking report that's just been released? Well, without going into too much detail, I want to note that our research process included defining disability for the purposes of our study and in fact, even creating a working definition of disability, inclusion, rights and justice. And so in the funding, we're capturing both support for both apparent and non-apparent disabilities. I will also note we're excluding funding for medical research for the specific reason that this funding often supports training for individuals to conduct medical research who are not people with disabilities, and the medical research itself may or may not ultimately yield a benefit for the disability community.

The next phase of this work, once we had our definitions, was licensing grant level data from Candid using its Foundation 1000 data set. And for those of you who aren't familiar with it, it's a data set of 1,000 of the largest private and community foundations in the U.S. These funders, because they're the biggest ones, account for about 45%, so close to half of all foundation giving by the roughly 100,000 foundations. In addition to this set, we supplemented it with about a dozen disability focused funders that weren't included in the Foundation 1000 already, such as the Disability Rights Fund.

I'll also note that the data we looked at are for 2019 and then to provide a trend analysis, we also looked at 2016 data. Now of course, it's 2023 and you're going to say, "What? 2019? That those data are so old?" Well, in point of fact, they're still the most current data available from Candid for the Foundation 1000 until probably the end of this summer, we'll get the 2020 data. In this case, it's not Candid's fault. COVID had impacts on many things, and it very much impacted the speed at which the... Well, both foundations were filing their information returns and the IRS has been processing them. So it's unfortunately still the latest we have. Finally, I'll just note that the Forum has a research advisory group who are providing feedback and guidance throughout this process.

All right, so let's get to the second big headline. From my perspective, what was surprising and important is that most foundation support focuses on a medical or charity model of disability, which prioritizes fixing or curing disability. So of the 755 million, we tracked for 2019 in disability focused funding, 94% funded disability services and supports. For example, funding for organizations serving individuals with specific disabilities, such as the Muscular Dystrophy Association, funding for substance abuse treatment programs, recreational programs and camps for children with disabilities. Just 6% of funds supported disability rights and social justice. This works out to one cent for every $10 the Foundation 1000 funders awarded focused on disability.

So Kayla, if you will please close the poll. All right, so basically if you look at that bottom bar, 28% of you got the answer right. It's 83 funders that provided this support. Why is the disability rights and social justice funding important? Well, it's because this is consistent with a social model of disability, which believes that society places physical and attitudinal barriers in front of disabled people, preventing them from full participation in society. For example, it includes funding for systems change work, such as support for disability rights advocate, or I'll give you another grant example. A grant to the Southern Black Policy and Advocacy Network, and its HIV/AIDS leadership and capacity building initiative focused on the U.S. South.

What's the third headline? Well, the third headline is simply while we saw 83 funders for disability rights and social justice, three out of four funders included in the Foundation 1000 made at least one grant consistent with our definition of disability broadly. That certainly seems like a strong place to begin in terms of growing support.

EMILY HARRIS:

Thank you, Steven. I just got to repeat that number. One cent on every $10 of grantmaking by the Foundation 1000. I know when we first saw that number, we were struggling with how to say it, and that's what sticks in my mind.

Retta, we know that the great news is that funders are starting and involved with disability funding to begin with, but that this small percentage of disability rights and social justice funding means that we're ignoring a whole set of social justice issues. How can we help our colleagues in philanthropy to understand that disability grantmaking overlaps with multiple issues in populations and how ableism is a system of oppression itself that overlaps with racism and the many other systems of oppression that they hope to dismantle?

AMORETTA MORRIS:

Thanks for that question, Emily. I'll answer this on a couple different levels. I'll start with personally, not just as a funder and grantmaker, but as a lifelong social justice activist. I've been organizing in community since I was 16 years old growing up in Texas. And so I'm a person that you would consider pretty grounded in movements, pretty grounded in social justice and isms. I remember in college first reading Kimberlé Crenshaw and really understanding and embracing the term intersectionality and thinking, "Finally, somebody who is really understanding my lived experience as a black queer woman." It's not just about blackness, it's not just about my womaness, it's not just about my queerness, but how do these things intersect and layer into my identities and the various structural barriers that I faced as I'm moving through my life?

And so I'm 46, and so that was 20 some years ago of having that awareness and continuing to grow in my own political analysis. People have heard me say in the last five years that one of my biggest growing edges was understanding and having a better appreciation for how ableism and ableist ideas and tropes really are part of the system and structures of repression that I also need to be working to dismantle. And I'm somebody who considers myself pretty actively engaged. As I said earlier, I'm a lifelong learner. And so to be in this place, and for me to say, and this was prior to my engagement with Borealis, for me to say, "Oh wow, as I'm continuing to push myself as an organizer, as an activist, as a leader, where am I growing edges? Where are the places that I need to... "

So that was something that I identified and I was just lucky enough that the universe also said a few years after I had that realization, "I want you to take this role at Borealis." And so now I'm in this place where I get to be alongside some of the most incredible leaders and thinkers and radical organizers, where I get to learn. And I say all of that really because we are in a moment in philanthropy. Part of this is coming out of the 2020 uprisings and the way in which our sector did some introspection in its own awakening in philanthropy. And we are in a place where because of the pandemic, because of climate crises, that our sector is really looking and understanding we cannot continue to do business as usual, and this is an opportunity for us to also push, I mean, in the same way that I am aware of my own learnings, it's been incredible to come alongside other philanthropic leaders who are having those same aha moments for themselves. Having those same aha moments about ableism, having those same aha moments.

Another example that I would name for you in terms of again, my own learning around how these things and how intersectionality really came to bear and became a firmer lesson for me around issues of disability justice and climate change and understanding that climate crises are mass disabling events. And so when we talk about typical philanthropic efforts that are very siloed like, "This is the issue that I work on. I fund climate, I don't fund disability. I can see your data and I don't know how to get into that." Or, "I fund education, I fund here, I fund here."

I remember a couple years ago, it was my first time, I said I run Borealis, it was my first time signing off on Rapid Response Grants coming out of our Disability Inclusion Fund. These were Rapid Response Grants that were moving. I don't know if people remember, but a couple winters ago, there were just winter storms that just ran amuck through Texas and Arkansas and kind of the freezing weather. It knocked out the power grids in Texas and did all sorts of damage across the South. We were rushing Rapid Response dollars to some of our grantees there. Literally, at the same time that I'm managing signing off on these and our organization is processing these, in my personal life, I'm also texting back and forth with my sister who has a chronic illness and was driving back across country from my parents' house back to her house in Vegas, and she got trapped in the storm.

So she's trapped. She needs to be back for medical appointments, can't get back, can't get out because of the power, because of the... And so I'm having this moment of these things are not isolated. Kind of how we understand our infrastructure, how we understand what is happening with climate, how we're understanding how major weather events have disproportion effects on disabled and chronically ill individuals has to be front and center and present for all of us. And That is just one small example of why we cannot fund in a way that is this siloed.

Folks know that I stand for Audre Lorde. And so one of my favorite, favorite quotes from Audre Lorde is that, "There is no thing as a single issue struggle because we do not live single issue lives." And so that is what I would invite my fellow funders to hold from Audre is this knowing that none of us live single issue lives, our grantees, our partners, the communities that we're seeking to serve. So as we are thinking about our portfolios, as we are thinking about our funds' focus, we have to be able to see people as whole people, communities as whole communities and be able to fund holistically accordingly.

EMILY HARRIS:

Thank you. I took a break because I was writing down all your quotes. You exude both joy and brilliance and channel people like Audre Lorde. So thank you for all of that. We're starting to get all kinds of nodding heads in the Q&A, somebody who says, "Just after Hurricane Dorian and COVID-19, we have been struggling in The Bahamas to gain access to rapid response, climate change, or disaster and emergency funding for our disabled community." So everywhere we are in the line of fire and thank you for making that so clear.

Jen, Amoretta talked about ableism and I know that you have spoken to us so many times about how it is a core barrier to diversity, equity, and inclusion and how you've seen that play out in philanthropy. And maybe you could start us off with just a very quick definition of the word ableism so we're all on the same page.

JEN BOKOFF:

Yes, sure. Thanks for that, Emily. This is Jen. Ableism is when the structures around us are not set up for us as disabled folks to succeed. There are better definitions out there and I don't have them written in front of me, I'm sorry. But the way that I experience ableism in the world is when I show up somewhere and I can't fully participate. And I have to remember that that's not about me, that's about the place that I'm showing up to.

As a starting place to answer your question, I want to start just super, super personal because it's really easy to blame the sector for its ableism. We are an ableist sector period, that is true. But we are also the humans that make up the sector and I think it's really important to look inward and say, how are we contributing to ableism in the sector? And so personally, I've had to do a ton of unlearning about my own ableism over the years, both as it relates to what I am setting up in philanthropy that has domino effects for other people, and also about even how I think about my own disability and chronic illnesses.

Just to name some examples, if this helps trigger thinking for other people. Some of the ways where I've been part of ableist gatekeeping in philanthropy include hosting inaccessible events, both virtual and in person. I have done both. Designing strategies and research that do not hold disability justice as a value. It doesn't have to be a disability justice initiative, but holding that as a value is critical. And I've implemented technology, like grants management software and communication software without once thinking of access needs.

Now on the other side, I've also been frustrated by ableism in philanthropy through my lived experience. Just as an example, the go, go, go design of some philanthropy spaces and not using microphones has not honored what my body has needed and has not allowed me to fully participate at different times. And so there's a lot I could build on from what you said Retta, just really powerful comments. I think I want to name a few more ways that I've seen ableism play out and then give one space where I'm particularly fired up about it.

Some of the things that I see a lot, when we have disabled talent in our organizations, and spoiler alert, you do, you might not know that you do, but you do, how are we retaining and promoting that talent and making sure that they are in decision-making roles and that their voices are really being heard to shape initiatives? How are we integrating accessible technology and meetings? How are funders doing the homework so that when a potential grantee, an organization that focuses on disability justice comes to you to talk about their work, they're not doing basic education with you? How are we seeing disability as a separate issue? Which is what a lot of foundations do. So they say, "We don't do that issue," versus thinking of it as an intersection with probably everything else that you do.

One that popped up in my inbox yesterday, what happens when we don't communicate anything about COVID safety standards at your event? Spoiler alert, I will not be there. Maybe that's a good thing, but there are other people who you probably want there and you should communicate about that. That's all disability justice. And I think a bottom line there too is don't make leaders in disability educate you on what to do because that is inherently ableist as well. We really need funders and that is us. That is us in this room, on this webinar to do our homework, because otherwise I see a lot of extraction. That said, be an authentic community with disabled folks. Like we're here and we want to be in community and sharing.

I think the one other thing I really want to highlight is that all these foundations are talking about DEI all the time. One space where I specifically see it play out is in foundations that focus on gender or take a gender approach. What I notice is that when that gender approach doesn't carry a strategy for resourcing women with disabilities or transgender, non-binary, or gender non-conforming persons with disabilities and really including them in designing initiatives. Disability simply doesn't show up in the portfolio. That's one to really sit and think about, think about why, think about why those groups are not there. It's really unacceptable because many of the focal topics where this plays out like climate justice education, access to justice, economic mobility, gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights, the list goes on, it all affects persons with disabilities in specific and different ways than they affect women as a blanket statement. So how can justice and rights move forward when funding for rights and justice isn't for us? I think it widens this marginalization gap.

EMILY HARRIS:

Thank you so much. I'm going to combine a question from the Q&A with one that I already planned to direct to Retta. We have a question about, what advice you can give for funders who prioritize dollars for grantees that are BIPOC? How can we find fund or necessarily spark BIPOC led and centered disability rights funding? Which is something certainly the Disability Inclusion Fund is doing. And I'd love to combine that with what you've seen internally at Borealis, as you've seen that happening and setting those priorities, how those lessons or practices have influenced Borealis across its funds?

AMORETTA MORRIS:

Thanks. I was finding my mute and rereading the question, what advice do I have for funders who prioritize dollars to grantees that are BIPOC and then how can the audience find fund or if necessary, spark BIPOC led and centered disability rights giving?

Okay, I appreciate the question particularly because it's something that... Maybe I'll start by just stepping back and doing something that I skipped over a little bit, which was talking about how the Disability Inclusion Fund works. And we have a grantmaking model that intentionally centers the wisdom and experiences of disabled community members and leaders. So our funding decisions are made by a participatory grantmaking committee and that committee is comprised of both community advocates as well as some of our donor partners, and it embraces people with disabilities that are both apparent and non-apparent.

We understand, also, that disability can be both the cause of folks living in poverty and a consequence of poverty, and it's also an identity that folks can acquire at any point in their life. With that as our context, that is one strategy, that commitment to nothing about us without us including in our grantmaking decisions, that is one of our strategies for prioritizing BIPOC leadership in our funding, in our work. Because we are focused on getting the folks who are most proximate, most impacted from communities in the roles of reviewing proposals, making decisions, and not just reviewing proposals because it starts before that. It starts at where you're doing outreach, how you are constructing your criteria about who's eligible and who's not. Thinking about, it's the reflections that we do the year before after a cycle closes and our committee's able to look and say, "Oh wow, we got 300 responses. We got these many applications, and who did we not see here?"

We had a lot from the Coast and not many from the South. We understand then that kind of a disproportionate share of Black folks are living in the South. What does that mean about our outreach strategies and our comm strategies across those regions? It's being able to have folks at the table that are calling the questions, that are constantly helping us think about how are we pulling in the folks who are at the margins, how are we bringing them into the center, the center of our strategizing, the center of our decision making, the center of who is really leading the work.

That is how the Disability Inclusion Fund has been structured. And in terms of being able to help other funders who want to make these similar priorities, what we try to do is model that for folks. It's one of the reasons why it's a pleasure for us to be in longtime partnership with both the Disability and Philanthropy Forum, but also the President's Council because that is a set of foundations who are at the table committed to learning, but they're not just sitting on their hands and learning. They're saying, "We can learn and be in action at the same time." We can give dollars and we can learn as organizations, as leaders at the same time. So that's one of the things that I would also encourage funders to do is if they're not already familiar with the Council, to check out the Council and think about how they're learning and movement here might be supported. I don't know if I fully answered your question. Feel free to jump back in the-

EMILY HARRIS:

It was great.

AMORETTA MORRIS:

Feel free to jump back in the chat if I didn't.

EMILY HARRIS:

To jump on that, the President's Council is now part of the Disability and Philanthropy Forum, and it's a group of CEOs that, as Retta said, is learning together as they are investing both in the Disability Inclusion Fund and in their own work and also signing the Disability Inclusion Pledge. That pledge is open to all funders. So for the 200 or so people on the webinar today, if you work in philanthropy or if you're a grantee and you can influence your funders, check out the Disability Inclusion Pledge because it's a way to get started on that journey.

Steven, I'm going to skip to you as I know we're running out of time already. How is this happening? To talk about what are steps, knowing that you've reviewed this data and it's putting us in a great place for awareness and advocacy. Based on your experience and what you saw, are there internal practices that funders should be changing to truly recognize that disability is central to social justice?

STEVEN LAWRENCE:

Absolutely. In fact, Jen and Amoretta's comments are the perfect lead in and in fact illustrate several of the points. For those of you who haven't had a chance to peruse the report yet, in the conclusion, we include five recommendations for funders, and I'll just quickly walk through those. First is engaging the perspectives and leadership of people with disabilities. This includes both in terms of from conceptualization through making grantmaking decisions. If you want to reach the disability community, you have to have the voice of people with disability guiding you in that process. Being intentional about addressing disability, and I think in terms of the kind of conversations about intersectionality, the idea that a grant that's intended to benefit everyone is going to benefit everyone equitably, it's not realistic. Whether you're focusing on the disability community, communities of color, women, you name it, LGBTQ, unless you are intentionally seeking to reach those communities and really partnering in that way, it's not going to happen.

Recognizing the connections to disability in all other funding. I mean, I think Amoretta provided a phenomenal example around climate change and climate justice. Another that we included in the report was around voting access. For example, if you're funding voting access, thinking about just as basic as accessibility of polling places, that can be an important factor that you may not have been considering.

Fund disability inclusion, rights and justice. We've talked about disability rights and social justice, disability inclusion, ensuring that individuals providing for individual empowerment, that's also critical funding you can be doing. And then of course, as Emily just mentioned, sign on to the Disability Inclusion Pledge. It just provides a really wonderful benchmark and gauge to see how your institution is evolving and really, I mean more than anything else, just to create conversation internally to help to begin to work through all aspects from your internal policies and practices to how you do your grantmaking and how you engage community.

Finally, of course, being the data guy on the call, I will say the only way we're going to be able to track what we hope to see is substantial growth in funding focused on disability, and particularly for disability rights and social justice is for you to provide that information in your grant's data. The easiest way to do that is to add detail to your grant descriptions that really convey the intentions behind the grants. Because if you don't say it, we don't know. It may have been what you intended really kind of focused engagement with the disability community, but if it just says, "For a camp, for services, for rights work," we're not going to know. So please provide as much detail as possible.

EMILY HARRIS:

Thank you. Such an important concrete action. And we didn't say, this man looked at, how many? 26,000 grant records...

STEVEN LAWRENCE:

It was a lot of grants.

EMILY HARRIS:

... to come through on... It's a huge labor. So the more explicit you can be, the better. I am going to jump to audience questions and then we'll end when we come to the end with each of you giving your one piece of advice.

We have a comment from Global Greengrants Fund that says they've been exploring for five years anti-ableist practices in grantmaking through understanding that people with disabilities are agents of social change. At the same time, they're encouraging organizations of people with disabilities to take a proactive attitude toward climate action. And so the question for you is, "Do you have advice to improve our chances as a funder of success in the process of exploring topics that are new to organizations of people with disabilities, particularly those where people with disabilities have been systematically obliterated?" So any thoughts about how to shift the piece? We talked about participatory grantmaking, inviting people in, but how to get already disabled persons' organizations to focus on some of these broader issues?

JEN BOKOFF:

This is Jen. I want to just clarify to make sure I'm understanding the question. So how to move OPDs, organizations of persons with disabilities towards a specific focus area of climate justice, or am I missing-

EMILY HARRIS:

Towards the climate or other... My senses of the question, other areas where they are not focusing at the moment.

JEN BOKOFF:

Yeah, I can speak to this one. This is Jen. I think there's two pieces of advice I would offer. One is that obviously we really want to follow the lead of disabled activists rather than being organizations that come in and nudge in little ways toward anything. I know that that's really hard sometimes, especially when we might have a broader or more global view on certain issues. But one thing that we, at Disability Rights Fund, are super excited about and have found to really broaden perspectives a lot is that through our technical assistance strategy, we've started to host these learning exchanges, which basically takes a third party technical assistance provider out of the equation and instead brings together OPDs to dialogue across their issue areas and populations and often geographies as well to share what's on their radar, what questions do they have, what are they learning, what do they want to learn? And together, they kind of provide TA to each other.

And through those discussions, there's been a lot of increased awareness in different issues that might affect, for example, grantees in the Pacific more, like climate justice. And doing that exchange, you're able to build knowledge within the community without forcing any particular conversation. I think one other approach that we have also found really effective is supporting advocacy opportunities. So actually bringing disability activists to global or national level fora where they're able to sit in community with these conversations around broader issues and they will determine what their priorities and needs are that they want to move forward. I think there's a lot of issues out there that they could focus on, but one of the challenges that OPD has faced a lot is simply resourcing. It's also like if we want OPDs to take on additional types of work or shift their frame or think about issue areas that they might not be as focused on, how are we also connecting them with the resourcing to actually do those things that they want to do? Those are a few ideas from me.

EMILY HARRIS:

Great. Thank you. Retta, let's go back to talking a little bit. This relates to some questions in the chat about training, but what it's been like for you to bring a disability lens into some of the other funds at Borealis? I'm particularly interested in a new program that's going on with your Black-Led Movement Fund and Disability Inclusion Fund. But what lessons are you learning just by having the fund in-house and is it changing any practices to bring across your whole portfolio of funds?

AMORETTA MORRIS:

Yeah. The first way I'll answer that question is actually building on the answer that Jen was just providing. I was thinking, Jen, about how you started with cautioning us around trying to steer or push partners in a particular direction, because I'd say that that's one of our first lessons maybe, or just a continued lesson in this work is that as we consider ourselves as a social justice intermediary, we consider ourselves accountable to movement and accountable to movement priorities. And so for us, part of what funding for liberation means is letting communities define liberation on their own terms.

We see our role as unlocking the masses of resources that are out there. Maybe I'll tie that to lesson number two, which is just thinking big, being able to think big and to genuinely hold a posture of abundance because it is so easy for us in our communities, because of our life experiences, because of the barriers that have been placed ahead of us, to think from a place of scarcity. And part of that, and for us, many times when we're doing that is because we're us, we're used to making a dollar at 15 cent. I mean, that's one of the things we heard from the data. There's so little money going to this work. And even with that, look at what we have done.

And so we shouldn't have had to work on so little resources, but look what we've been able to do, but just because we've had to work with pennies, it's this duality of working with these fewer resources that we've been given while still pushing ourselves to maintain this notion and idea and frame of abundance. Because the other lesson about moving in philanthropy and raising money and being in these places is having to remind ourselves how much money is actually in play.

I was in a meeting the other day and being reminded that there's 234 billion, billion with a B, $234 billion in donor advised funds right now. And so that's money that folks are getting a charitable write off for because they've placed it in a donor advised fund at some financial institution, but that money doesn't actually have to move and reach communities, $234 billion. And so when a funder, or if I'm a funder thinking that somebody is going to completely eradicate ableism or eradicate ableism within the climate justice movement on a $50,000 grant, that's a problem. And so it's my job as a funder, as a grantmaker to really be able to think more broadly to figure out, how do I rightsize the resources that I'm trying to move to match the scale of the change that we hope to see? How do I give at the scale of the problem and also knowing that I can't do this alone?

At Borealis, we absolutely know that we can't do this alone. So really what giving at the scale of the problem means is collaboratively giving. It's collaboratively giving, it's creating vehicles for alignment, creating vehicles for aligned action and complimentary action. Because in order to have the resources that groups really need to be able to make big change, that takes more than just one of us. And so thinking that an organization's going to be able to do it on just that one grant that I'm able to give them or for just that one year that I'm able to give it to them for is not how change is going to happen. So just this abundance thinking and this clarity that communities must be able to define liberation on their own terms, those are two of the lessons and the ways in which we try to move in our work at Borealis.

EMILY HARRIS:

You just answered a whole bunch of questions that are popping up for the audience. Thank you for that. That's wonderful. One of the comments sort of slash question I'm seeing is nurturing and... Jen, this is maybe for you as a fundraiser who knows about this. "Nurturing and prospecting is important for many small nonprofit organizations seeking funding. Any advice for how organizations with disability led programming can build meaningful long-term relationships with funders that may either be taking baby steps or already be fully vested with disability intersectionality in their portfolios?"

JEN BOKOFF:

Yeah, this is Jen. It's a great question and my daily challenge, so always happy to connect with other fundraisers in this work. A couple ideas. One is that there's a great community called the Community-Centric Fundraising Community. I'm sure many of you have heard of it. There is actually a disability subgroup there where we share ideas, and I find that a really wonderful group of co-conspirators and really operating with an abundance mindset of sharing resources and sharing networks. So I would encourage joining that. I would also really encourage, if you're a place-based organization, have an event and invite people in community to be there. Many of us are not place-based or are not gathering in person, which I also totally appreciate that is us for the most part. When you have a virtual event, it's really nice to find ways to connect with the different people who come before, during, and after.

I hate this advice that I'm about to give because it's one of the things I hate about philanthropy, but especially in a virtual world, I find that it's really helpful to author a thing. Whatever that thing is, whatever is authentic to you, whatever it is that represents your viewpoint, getting it online so that you have a link that you can really share with people. I find that that helps to get funders attention and really open a conversation. And then I've got a host of other ideas that we could always talk about after because I know there's more questions to get to.

EMILY HARRIS:

Yes, it's a very long list and I think I'm going to pick up on the person who said, "So to focus on the title of this webinar, where are the dollars now and in the future?" And ask you to each give your one piece of advice to philanthropy about where to grow those dollars, where to find those dollars. Does one of you want to start? If not, I'll pick on you Steven.

STEVEN LAWRENCE:

Well, I probably have the least insightful response to this question. What I think, and I mean I think this speaks to the organizations doing the fundraising is there is, as with anything, once you see a reality that's been in front of you, that you've been somewhat oblivious to, you can't unsee it. And so I think with systemic ableism, I mean, I'll be honest, I hadn't heard the term ableism before I began working with the Disability and Philanthropy Forum. And in hindsight thought, "How have I not heard this term? I've written social justice reports, human rights reports of many, many years." The world has changed.

And Emily, I think you had made the point. Back in earlier in my career in philanthropy, you could say, "I don't fund disability. That's not what I do." Now, that would be like saying I don't fund communities of color, I don't fund LGBTQ people, things you would never say. There is an opportunity to get beyond that initial moment of saying, "Okay, well, now I understand I should do this," to, "What does that really look like? What does that mean and why is that important?" And also understanding that as with anything, it's a process of learning that is going to continue. I think this is a tremendous moment. And to the extent the resources Disability and Philanthropy Forum is creating can help you leverage, can help you have those conversations.

Jen, I so appreciated the point about putting something in writing. There are now a lot of resources you can use to engage your colleagues in the field around this topic.

EMILY HARRIS:

And we did a thing, we wrote a report and you'll see on the website, Retta and I did a blog about the report. So Retta, let me turn to you and Jen, I'll give you the last word. What's one thing you want philanthropy to walk away with?

AMORETTA MORRIS:

I'll come back to this point around that I think Jen and I were unknowingly theming and embodying around and that one is about joy. I've got this sign that says, "Joy is an active resistance." She's got her band. And this past year, our Disability Inclusion Fund launched our inaugural joy grants. And so those were these mid-year infusions and they were earmarked specifically for existing grantees to support their just overall health and wellbeing. It wasn't about a project, it wasn't about a campaign, it was a little bit of extra dollars just to acknowledge it's hard out here. We're exhausted, we are tired, we are dealing with all the things, life is lifeing. While work is happening, life is lifeing. And we just wanted our grantees to be able to have a little bit of wiggle room to just be able to exhale and do whatever it is they needed to do together as a team, as individuals, have a meal, whatever, to support themselves.

And so one of the things that I would encourage for other funders who are on the call is to be able to think about what it means to support, to really be able to invest in folks' joy and not just our need. This again is this move from [inaudible 00:58:38]. And so to be able to do that, to be able do that with a spirit of abundance and how that might kind of shift how you're doing your grantmaking and what your allowing money to be moved for.

EMILY HARRIS:

Thank you. We are going to have a survey following this, and that's my final word, so I'm going to give Jen the last word as we close this as we promise, by 30 after the hour. Go ahead Jen.

JEN BOKOFF:

Okay, I'll be quick. Do not let perfect be the enemy of better. So many funders do not do this because you are scared of doing it wrong. You will get something wrong, but there is so much right and good and joyful about this work. You can start a disability advisory committee, paid of course, you can work with intermediaries like ours or Borealis. We can help you. There are so many steps you can take and take one of them. Don't just sit and worry about perfection.

EMILY HARRIS:

Thank you a million. You are all amazing. Disabilityphilanthropy.org, you can find the report and so much else. Please answer our survey and thank you again.