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EMILY HARRIS:

Welcome to the Disability & 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 & 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 our accessibility, our panelists and I will each provide an audio description of ourselves. I'm a white woman with dark, curly hair, wearing rectangular glasses, and a black and white top. Behind me is a white and tan screen. My access needs are met today because we have CART 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'll be muted throughout the event. This webinar is being recorded and you will receive a link to the recording in the next few weeks. Although we'll 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 anytime 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](mailto:communications@disabilityphilanthropy.org). We'll be live tweeting today and hope you will join us on social media using the hashtag #DisabilityPhilanthropy. You can also follow along by connecting with us on Twitter @DisPhilanthropy. Before we start today's conversation, just a short reminder that disability is a natural part of the human experience. One in four US adults, 61 million people have disabilities, and 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 will engage the lived experiences of poor disabled people of color, to explore the intersections of race, culture, and disability. We have a poll question that we will look at in a moment. Please answer it now. How many black women have a disability in the United States? The choices are 2.8 million, 5.6 million, 3.5 million, or 1.2 million. To moderate our panel today, I'm delighted to introduce Ryan Easterly, executive director of WITH Foundation, a private foundation that promotes comprehensive healthcare for adults with developmental disabilities in the United States.

Ryan is one of the 16 CEOs of foundations who serve on the President's Council on Disability Inclusion in Philanthropy. The foundation CEO affinity group that founded and continues to be part of the Disability & Philanthropy Forum. I'm thrilled to also announce today that Ryan is the President's Council incoming co-chair and will officially assume this role serving with Rich Besser of Robert Wood Johnson Foundation on July 1st, 2023. Thank you for taking that leadership on, Ryan.

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Before I introduce Ryan to our panelists, let's take a look at the poll results. Kayla, could you bring those up? Well, we did pretty well. The correct answer is 3.5 million that comes from a report from the Center on American Progress about how to make policies work for black women with disabilities. So those of you, we had an equal 39% each of you for 5.6 and 3.5 million. Few, 21% of you've got 2.8 million. And those of you who guessed 1.2 million were in the vast minority at 1%. So we have a fairly educated audience, I think.

Ryan, I'm thrilled to turn this over to you to introduce our panel of three disability thought leaders and advocates. And you can learn more about the panelists from their bios that are linked in the chat.

RYAN EASTERLY:

Thank you, Emily, and thank you for everyone who's taken time to attend this important conversation today. My name is Ryan. My pronouns are he and him. As far as the description, I'm a light-skinned black man with black hair, a black beard with some gray in it. I'm wearing clear glasses, a gray dress shirt, and a black blazer, and I'm sitting in front of a white wall with a diploma on it. I come to you today from the unceded land of the Ohlone people, now known as Redwood City, California.

I am privileged to be able to work and live at the intersections of race, disability, and sexual orientation. I appreciate this discussion because I appreciate any opportunity where people and communities of color can come together and share their experiences. In order to foster equity for all, we must be intentional in addressing the experiences of BIPOC people with disabilities and uplifting the leadership of BIPOC leaders with disabilities. So I am pleased to be joined by the following outstanding leaders. Jennifer Lee, who is founder of The Asian Americans with Disabilities Initiative, Katherine Pérez, director of the Coelho Center for Disability Law, Policy and Innovation, and Heather Watkins, disability advocate, author and speaker.

Rather than read their bios, as you've heard, the bios are available in the chat, but they will provide a brief introduction. Heather, if I can ask you to start.

HEATHER WATKINS:

Sure. Good afternoon everyone. My name is Heather Watkins. I'm chiming in from Boston, Massachusetts. I use she/her pronouns. And I am a light complected black disabled woman. And I'm wearing a green cardigan, black and white blouse, tortoise frame shell readers, and I have lipstick on, pinkish purplish lipstick, and a black turban, and I'm sitting up atop my bed with a blurred background. So I'm happy to be in conversation here today. Thank you.

RYAN EASTERLY:

Thank you. Katherine?

KATHERINE PÉREZ:

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Hi everyone. I'm Katherine Pérez and I'm a light-skinned Latina woman with long, light brown hair, and I'm also wearing glasses and have red lipstick on. I'm wearing a black turtleneck and I'm in a hotel room right now attending the tenBroek conference today. So there's a bed behind me and a photo frame and stuff. Thanks for having me.

RYAN EASTERLY:

Thank you for being here. And I think this deep into dealing with the COVID pandemic, we can all relate to being on travel and having to deal with unusual virtual locations sometimes. Jennifer, how about an introduction for you?

JENNIFER LEE:

Yeah. Good afternoon everyone. My name is Jennifer Lee. I use she/her pronouns. And I'm thrilled to be here with you all today. For an image description, I identify as an East Asian woman with long black hair, and today I'm wearing a black tank top, calling in from a white classroom in Princeton, New Jersey. Happy to be here on this panel.

RYAN EASTERLY:

Well, thank you all for your time today. As a way of grounding the discussion, I'd like to ask you each to share a little bit about your personal experiences and how does that inform how you navigate the world and how you navigate your work. Heather, could we start with you?

HEATHER WATKINS:

Sure, sure. I was born with a form of muscular dystrophy. I didn't always use mobility aids like I do now, like a cane, and on occasion, a manual wheelchair. I also use a ventilator to help assist my breathing at night, similar to what people might use if they had sleep apnea. So as you can probably imagine, there's an extra layer of anxiety, especially during COVID now, because my disability not only impacts my mobility, but my respiratory muscles. I am also a mother. I was a caregiver for my dad for 11 years until his passing from disability complications of having diabetes.

And so, I also was a caregiver for my nephew who came to our home by a way of DCF kinship placement, Department of Children and Family placement. And he has an intellectual disability. He's since aged out of the system. And so these are just some of the experiences I've had that help shape my experience as a person in need of care, a caregiver, and a community builder all at once. And I often tell people, if you redact any part of that bio, then you reduce our community visibility as well as our contributions. So those are just things that I use to help inform public policy and social policy in the work that I do in speaking and writing and in consultancy.

So that's the way it has shaped my, not only my self-awareness, but my advocacy skills, sharpening them in ways that I never even imagined. So yeah, that's just a snapshot of my experience.

RYAN EASTERLY:

Well, we look forward to learning more from you in this conversation. Katherine, how would you respond?

KATHERINE PÉREZ:

Hi everyone, this is Catherine. So I am someone with a number of psychiatric disabilities from a very young age. From my earliest memories, I experienced symptoms of mental illness even if I didn't have the language for it. Although now looking back, I realize the most profound experiences that shaped my childhood in terms of mental illness was something called religiosity, obsessive-compulsive disorder, also known as scrupulosity, OCD. So this on the background of being in a very Catholic Mexican family pretty much shaped my experience by the time I was in high school. And I'm sorry, I meant to give some trigger warnings of talk of taking one's life for those who want to step away for a second or roll away.

By the time I was in high school and suicidal, I remember coming out with some of my experiences related to scrupulosity or religiosity OCD and having an aunt say that perhaps I was possessed by the devil. So that religious cultural influence in terms of my psychiatric disability lived experience. So I also developed a sense of disability justice, not just from being someone with a number of psychiatric disabilities, but also I am a sibling to someone with intellectual disability and autism and now a number of psychiatric disabilities herself. Her name is Cindy.

I always have her permission to share about her. She loves when I talk about her at my work as she says. So I come from an immigrant family. My family immigrated to Los Angeles in the fifties and sixties. These were my grandparents, all from Mexico. I was the first in my immediate family to graduate from college. And then I went on to get a Juris Doctor, so I'm an attorney. And then went on to get my PhD, which I will be hopefully graduating this year. I'm finishing my dissertation currently. So all to say, I'm a forever student and I became part of a very tiny minority of Latinas with doctoral degrees.

In that experience, I couldn't possibly represent everyone with a disability or in my racial group, ethnic group, but as I became often one of the only Latinas with disabilities in certain spaces, I had the opportunity and sometimes the burden to take up that space. So during my PhD studies, I grouped together with a bunch of folks and we co-founded the National Coalition for Latinxs with Disabilities. And I was with that group from 2015 to 2019. And we did a bunch of really cool stuff at the intersection of disability and Latina there. We did a lot of work at the intersection specifically of immigration and disability.

And then in 2018, I started at The Coelho Center at Loyola Law School as its inaugural director. I'm also a professor of law at Loyola Law School. So as I was saying, being in the very minority group. I can talk forever about what it's like to also be a professor, a law professor specifically, and being one of very few Latinas, much less Latino with a disability. And one last thing I'll say as well is that I'm queer. So all of this compounded with also experiencing rejection and

adversity from members of my own family for that part of my identity as well. Thank you for having me.

RYAN EASTERLY:

Thank you for sharing that, Katherine. I think it reflects... You'll hear throughout today's discussion the complexities that many people of color with disabilities experience in their lives and in this work. Jennifer, how would you respond to how you navigate the world and navigate your work?

JENNIFER LEE:

Yeah, thank you, Ryan. This is Jennifer speaking. For me, I was diagnosed with Crohn's disease or a form of inflammatory bowel disease at age 18. This was right around the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which means that I was tackling a chronic and autoimmune disease alone. And when I was getting help from the Crohn's & Colitis Foundation and multiple other sources, I often found that I was the only Asian-American, if not the only person of color, in these rooms. Many times a majority white, and many times for support groups and for advocacy initiatives.

It was through the American Association of People with Disabilities, AAPD, that I was able to meet other disabled Asian-Americans and eventually start the Asian Americans with Disabilities Initiative or AADI. And part of our mission as the 501(c)(3) nonprofit is to amplify the voices of disabled Asian-Americans nationwide. Our mission is to equip the next generation of disabled Asian-American leaders with the tools and resources necessary to tackle anti-Asian hate as well as ableism in their local communities. For me, I want to talk about the Asian diaspora and talk about how diverse the Asian-American community is.

There is so much stigma that is rooted within the Asian-American and the Asian communities that really crosses boundaries in terms of how we are thinking about the body, how we are thinking about the east and western hemisphere in terms of medicine as well as disability and health, and how all of these conversations intersect to really create a holistic understanding of what it means to be Asian-American in the 21st century. For me, I think that the antidote to loneliness, especially the one that comes with a chronic illness diagnosis, is through community.

And I think it's so important that we have Asian-American and Pacific Islander and Desi-American representation at every table, whether it is at philanthropy or whether it is in advocacy or any conversations regarding disability and public health at large. For me today, I consider myself a translator of sorts to go across communities and to think of how we can encourage the next generation to think about how we are bringing Asian-American voices to the table and to look at the parallel narratives of resistance between the Asian-American movements as well as the disability justice movement.

RYAN EASTERLY:

Thank you, Jennifer. I'm going to pivot to a new question, and I'd like to ask Katherine, what would you like funders to understand about people of color with disabilities and understanding about equity and advancing disability inclusion, rights and justice?

KATHERINE PÉREZ:

And I know we didn't prep it this way, but I would love to hear from my co-panelists as well. So they would answer this question. But I think the first thing, especially hearing everyone's stories just reaffirms that funders need to understand, especially when they're working with groups that represent single issue or a single identity, for example, if they're working in racial justice work, that folks with intersectional lived experiences are A, exist everywhere. So in any issue, people with disabilities exist. If you don't find us at the table, then that's a problem and you need to include us.

But also that we have unique experiences. Right? So to understand our intersectional issues, you need to understand the disability part of that equation. Or you have to understand, if you're working with someone who's a disabled immigrant, you need to understand the immigrant part of that. So from my experience in working with immigrants with disabilities, I've worked with disability rights organizations, disability groups who don't understand the immigration issues completely, don't understand Latino issues. And then I've worked on the other side as well with immigration organizations who don't understand the disability justice issues or the disability rights issues.

And so when you take those two into consideration, you get different problems, you get different solutions. And so all of this complexity is just to say, we need to think about all of these issues, even if you're funding organizations that work on supposedly just one issue, just to remember that folks are complex and that our intersectional lived experiences are going to call for a deeper understanding.

RYAN EASTERLY:

I want to honor the intention of, this is a discussion. So Heather or Jennifer, is there anything you would add?

HEATHER WATKINS:

Sure. This is Heather. I just think about how, so much of what Katherine just said, how much of it overlaps and intersects with all other identities and how we are everywhere and we've always been here, and how so much of that granularity is part of the grander mosaic. And when you think about how much many of us are stabilizers in our own families, I know that's true for my family and many other disabled black women I know who live within that continuum. So I like to think of it as having this effect of, when you picture a Fibonacci scroll and how it spirals out from the person to those in proximity to the greater community, that ripple effect, once that care is being given and extended.

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So if we could think about it in more expansive ways within the community and not just this microscopic way of how we are positive in our families and in our communities, I think that really gives people a better way to widen the lens and see disabled people as comprehensive rather than this pendulum swing of pity and pedestal sadness and supercrip. We really lead these actualized self-determined lives, but we need that level of support in the way that so many of us operate interdependently and not so much focus on independence.

So I just really like to hone in on that expansive lens, and I really like philanthropy and leadership to understand that when you zero in on a particular concern, that fracture has fissures. So there's all these different ways it impacts other parts of who we are that really affects the whole. So that's probably the biggest message I want people to get and understand. And I'll leave that there and throw the ball over to Jennifer.

JENNIFER LEE:

This is Jennifer speaking. I wanted to absolutely just amplify what Katherine and Heather said. I completely agree on the notion of having an expansive view for this kind of conversation. And at least from my own lived experiences, I think one thing that I would want funders to know is that Asian-Americans are not a monolith, meaning that there is an incredible amount of diversity and ethnic minorities even within that one broad term. Which means that to avoid tokenization, funders and philanthropists should be having conversations with diverse sectors of the Asian-American community, recognizing that our experiences are not all the same.

I think dismantling language barriers as well as cultural barriers around stigma is a much broader struggle that philanthropists and funders can take part in. And it's only when we shed light on these issues and tackle them head on that we're able to really give them credit and even acknowledge them as even existing. And having these conversations, even with loved ones, can be the hardest, but the first and most important step to take.

KATHERINE PÉREZ:

Can I add a couple of things as well before we go to the next question? Sorry.

RYAN EASTERLY:

Of course.

KATHERINE PÉREZ:

I'll say them hopefully quickly, and then maybe folks in the Q&A can ask for more detailed explanation. But two more things that occurred to me in terms of funders. While we are not a monolith, there definitely is a disability rights movement, a disability justice movement. And I think undergirding both the disability rights movement and disability justice movement is a philosophy on how we think about and identify as people with disabilities. Right? And we reject the medical model approach, which is like there's something intrinsically wrong with us. So the



solution has to be that we need to fix the individual and we take it to more of a social structural oppression and inequity approach, where there's something structurally wrong.

So these are basic definitions. But as you're looking for folks to do disability work, I hope that you're interacting with folks who resonate with a disability justice message, with a disability rights message. That's one. And then the second one is leadership development. And one of you alluded to this, so it made me think as well. We need to develop more leadership of disabled Latinos, disabled immigrants, disabled black women, disabled Asian women. We can't just be an add-on to your organizations like, "Oh, we need to do disability work within this Latinx organization." So we need to be there up in the leadership. And if you're looking and you think, "Oh, we don't have anyone to promote to that leadership," then we need to do leadership development. We need to invest in the disability community in order to get our voices be heard at those upper levels.

RYAN EASTERLY:

Thank you for raising that. I completely agree. I am going to pivot to the next question, and we're going to try to respond even quicker because we do want to also get to audience questions. But Heather, I'm hoping you could touch on, we often hear the term resiliency, so I'm curious to hear from you, how do you thought, how do you define resilience, and are there other traits that you feel should be uplifted as a black woman with disabilities? Are there other traits that you feel should be uplifted about black women with disabilities in these conversations?

HEATHER WATKINS:

This is a good question. In terms of resiliency, I always think about how our response to something that's adversarial or trauma-based and then your ability to rebound. But when I thought about it a little further, I'm like, a beautiful scar is still a scar. It's still something you carry with you. And so many black women are tasked with that trope, the stereotype of strong black women. But we break too. And we're not everybody's mule for movements. We're not tasked for saving everyone. And we take the cape off. We need consolation, we need that self-care.

And often, we have to pull from reserves that end up depleting us so much. And I'm mindful of my grandmother, my paternal grandmother, who hailed from Greenwood, Mississippi, grew up during the Jim Crow era south, as well as my father. And then they migrated up in the 1970s here to Boston. And she had 10 children, eight survived. And she was totally a powerhouse who short-circuited at 68 years old from diabetic complications. So I just think if she'd had have had that support in getting care and respite, how much longer she would've lived and lived with joy.

So I just always think about how we are not being given the proper support systems to live a really comprehensive life that is not just a narrative filled with trauma and showing up all the time for everyone else but ourselves. So to me, that's the story really, is to really show our lives in this really 360 degree way and not just show up last minute at the end when we're haggard and tired and given up to everyone else but ourselves. So that's how I'll answer that, and I hope that captures it. Thank you for that question.



RYAN EASTERLY:

Thank you. Thank you. I'll pivot to the next question. Jennifer, could you give us a little deeper insight into when you were discussing the previous point? Could you share a little bit more about in navigating the Asian diaspora and the stigma around disability, what parallels have you found that you want us as funders to understand more about?

JENNIFER LEE:

Yeah, absolutely. Thank you, Ryan. This is Jennifer speaking. And I'm so happy to be talking about these two movements side by side, because it's a conversation that I don't think enough advocates are having right now in today's day and age. I think, for some context, I want to bring us back to the spike in anti-Asian hate. And when I use that term where I talk about racially motivated violence and discrimination against Asian-Americans, which really was tracing back to a former president's commentary about COVID-19 as the "Chinese virus" or the kung flu.

But it would be a mistake to also think that anti-Asian hate and violence started only in 2020, when in reality, racially motivated violence has been a reality for multiple decades and centuries since immigration, and since we talked about what it means to assimilate into the American project. I think when we think about racially motivated violence and brutality today, we should think about how our bodies move in this world, and particularly, how bodies become disabled under the weight of structural injustices.

I think here, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the model minority stereotype, which refers to the notion that Asian-Americans are culturally hardworking and superior as a means to explain their upward mobility. And this is a harmful stereotype that is rooted in anti-blackness and white supremacy that is meant to act as a wedge in between black and Asian communities. The limited academic research available shows that disabled Asian-Americans in particular are the least likely to disclose a disability in the workplace or the classroom.

And a lot of the cultural stigmas within both of these communities compound, meaning that they're the least likely to seek help and to ask for assistance or to even apply for accommodations even when they are entitled to it. I think, in the same way, within our nonprofit The Asian Americans with Disabilities Initiative, last year in January, 2022, we published our first resource guide for disabled Asian-Americans. But the majority of the comments and the remarks we received were completely anonymized. The large portion of our community is finding our resources helpful, but is still unwilling to identify as disabled themselves. They're rejecting the terms chronically ill. And it goes back to what it means for a larger cultural movement to tackle ableism and the kind of stigmas that exist in our communities and outside our communities.

When I mentioned the parallel narratives of resistance, part of what I refer to is recognizing that our battles are not the same. These injustices are certainly different between the Asian-American and the disabled community. But what we can do is recognize the intersectional

nature of what it means to be caught in both threads and what it means to create space in a meaningful manner for disabled Asian-Americans for decades to come.

RYAN EASTERLY:

Thank you. Your comments help bring so much clarity. I can't help, but I do have the habit of, I think it's critical that when groups of advocates of color like us get in a room, I think the theme of self-care and conversations around self-care come up. So I do want to touch on, we know this journey and this work, and our lives are complex and tiring, and the work of disciplinary inclusion, disciplinary rights and disciplinary justice is long and complex. So are there any messages you'd like to share about self-care, and are there any tips you'd like to provide others who are a part of this conversation today about self-care?

JENNIFER LEE:

I think to kick things off, this is Jennifer speaking again. I just wanted to say, I think as a student and as someone who has recently been embraced by the disability community and really just learning more from all the activists who have come before me, one statement and one philosophy that I like to really share with others is the notion of rest as resistance. I think as an undergraduate, as an incoming law student, I've been thinking a lot about what it means to set boundaries.

And I think, for me, being able to treat self-care as a really radical act of maintenance and also caring for one's self but also one's community, is one of the best ways to show and really foster interdependence among others. And I think as someone who likes to say yes to opportunities, part of the ways that I've been able to show myself grace has been to reduce friction in my lifestyle and to make sure that I am making the work that I'm doing as simple and as accessible as possible in my day-to-day life as well as for the communities around me.

HEATHER WATKINS:

This is Heather. I'd say, piggybacking on that idea, just to have your own self-determined metrics of success throughout society's ideas of that, because it's going to be a very customized way of living and doing things that it is going to determine how you move forward. And that may change on a daily basis because disability and how you move and navigate the world changes. It hinges on sleep, nutrition, weather, hormones, stress. And so, it may look very different from day-to-day in people with the same kinds of disabilities.

So I think comparison is just so evil and so self injurious that you have to really take stock of where you are in your life and the trajectory of where you are going. And I also just want to say, as someone who didn't learn about disabled icons, cultural icons in grade school, or even as a young adult, I didn't really learn about a lot of disabled figures until I got involved in the active disability rights community. So I think about how learning about cultural icons like Fannie Lou Hamer, Sojourner Truth, Brad Lomax, just to name a few, how that might have impacted my budding self-awareness at such a young age and even as a young person, and how that might be beneficial to our newly disabled persons.

And so I just think when we learn about how they even govern their lives because of their disabilities, how we're all as a society can benefit from that understanding, that knowledge and how they had to pivot back and forth between self-care and figuring out the next steps. So these are just some of the things that cross my mind in terms of self-care. And just seeing ourselves in the world, worldviews and changing, and how our families and communities see disability in general, not just through the lens of limitations only would really, again, widening the lens to see the comprehensive way people with disabilities live and dine, socialize, and impact the world, whether they have a disability that's apparent, not apparent, or have chronic illness.

RYAN EASTERLY:

Thank you. Katherine. Is there something you'd like to quickly add?

KATHERINE PÉREZ:

I'm never quick about anything, sorry. But I tried to stay silenced as much as possible because self-care is really difficult for something. It's something I need to actively work at. I think I exist in so many spaces where it's very difficult to engage in self-care. Jennifer says she wants to go to law school. Well, man, oh man, as law school, especially Jennifer's going to Harvard Law. It's so difficult to be a law professor, to be a law student in these places. But also too, I was thinking about my community, the Latino community and how hardworking we are and how we're laborers and how part of our culture is to work, work, work.

So there's a lot of things we have to unlearn within our culture to be able to be kind to ourselves. And then I think of all the structural issues, again, going back to law school being so taxing and creating all these burdens. And then existing as a Latina, a queer Latino with a disability in these spaces where I feel like I have to work two, three times as hard to prove myself. So I guess all of that is complaining. And the one thing I come up with in terms of self-care, for me, it's having my hermanas, my sisters, it's my community. So I've found my peers, even if they're across the nation and international, and I talk to them all day long and they understand me even when I feel like I exist in these institutions and spaces where I feel lonely and nobody understands me.

RYAN EASTERLY:

Well, thank you for sharing that and thank you all for your tips. It never hurts to get a few extra and to be reminded of others that we need to do better putting in practice. So thank you for sharing that. I'd like to turn to Jen and ask, are there other key barriers that people of color with disabilities face that you want to elevate before we move to the end of this discussion?

JENNIFER LEE:

Yeah. I think, concisely, I would say that it comes down to language barriers and then opportunity barriers. And by that, I mean that people don't even know that these opportunities exist. I think, for a lot of disabled Asian-Americans, it's never occurred to them to apply for a philanthropy funding. It's never occurred to them that they can be celebrating their identities and

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to be working through this space. And so part of what we should be doing in order to tackle this is to meet people and compromise in terms of what is expected of both the funders, and both in terms of people who receive the funding and recognizing that even just getting the word out is half the battle.

RYAN EASTERLY:

Thank you. Katherine, I'm going to quickly turn to you and mention that the Disability & Philanthropy Forum is releasing a report on April 4th that found that for every 10 grant making dollars, only one penny goes towards disability rights and justice. From your perspective and your work, what systems of change need to occur to better address the issues faced by communities of color with disabilities?

KATHERINE PÉREZ:

I'm sorry, can you rephrase that question? What systems of change...

RYAN EASTERLY:

Need to occur, or what change needs to occur to better address the issues faced by people of color with disabilities? And thank you for asking me to repeat myself. I do have speech issues, so you-

KATHERINE PÉREZ:

Oh, no, I heard. I guess I'm not understanding the question. I'm sorry. Systems that need to be changed within philanthropy so that more dollars are being spent?

RYAN EASTERLY:

Yes. And how we can better support the needs of people of color with disabilities, or intentionally support the needs of people of color with disabilities?

KATHERINE PÉREZ:

Yeah. I mean, I don't know if this is responsive, but the first thing that comes to mind, I just had an event last Friday with a group of immigrants with disabilities. We had Know Your Rights workshop. It was really beautiful. And one thing that resonated with me as I was talking to the participants, people in my community, they're not used to being given resources, and they almost feel like they're unworthy of receiving this stuff. So I think it's a shame to hear that statistic, one cent out of every \$10.

I think funders need to more actively seek out and engage disabled communities of colors, and we need to work with the communities in terms of trying to identify what the needs are. Right? Yeah, I don't know if that's very responsive.

HEATHER WATKINS:

This is Heather. I just want to add to that. Maybe they can't identify because they're not being better informed by the community that's being impacted and targeted. I mean, if you had more people who are of color on your teams from the top down, bottom up, and throughout, and even reviewing applications, we might be able to identify more people in need because I can tell from experience that there were a lot of non-disabled people who, there are things that might not make their radar in terms of how they're picking up people who are applying or how the reach out methods are to the particular communities that they're targeting.

So you need to have a team that's informed by first person sources, and just maybe these numbers will pick up, because you'll be much better informed. So that's just my experience.

RYAN EASTERLY:

Well, in talking more about changes needed within philanthropy, Heather, could you share, far too often we hear in philanthropy, and disability leaders have heard, "We don't do disability," or they hear from funders, "We can't do disability right now because we're prioritizing racial equity." So what would you say to comments like that?

HEATHER WATKINS:

It's just so odd to me, because as a black disabled woman, I can't untangle that thread that how my lens has been cultivated. And it's weaved all up and through my community. I mean, if you think of the numbers of the disability community as what, 25% of the population, black people are 13%. So at that nexus, it's going to be a really high population of disabled folks. So to say that to someone like me who is of those particular identities, I just think is ridiculous. And I don't think that you have to just focus on one thing when the disability community is huge with BIPOC folks.

So I would say to, again, expand that lens, become informed by disabled BIPOC folks who can really educate you in really profound ways. You really should have people of that particular group, again, on your teams informing you so that you don't make these kinds of errors 32 plus years after the Americans with Disabilities Act has been signed. So it's been a hurry up and wait game for many years. And that's just been the name of the game within the disability communities and racial justice communities, is we're always waiting, now is not the time, we need to have these people in place and we need to have do this.

And so it's just really, to me, very violent way of doing things when you could really just have people talking to you and educating and informing you of ways to have this become a lot less like a game of hopscotch and more like a conveyor belt to access and accessibility. So yeah.

RYAN EASTERLY:

I can only say I agree. And before we transition into the questions that we've received from attendees, I do want to give you each the opportunity to share. If you had a call to action for the funders in the room today or a call to action for philanthropy in general, what would it be? Jennifer, if I can start with you.

JENNIFER LEE:

Yeah, absolutely. I think, for me, if I could leave funders with one message, it would be that there are absolutely disabled people of color doing the work on the ground right now. I think there's no doubt about it. It's just a matter of finding them and being able to support them where they are. And once we reach out to disabled people of color and share these opportunities, if funders commit to uplifting disabled people of color, we will be there and we will get the work done. But I don't think it'll happen overnight. I think funders need to meet disabled people of color halfway, meaning that by reaching out to our organizations directly, tapping into grassroots networks and communities, only then will we be able to truly reflect the diverse populations that are doing the work at the front lines.

RYAN EASTERLY:

Katherine, is there a call to action that you would add?

KATHERINE PÉREZ:

Yeah. If you don't know about the disability rights movement, about our beautiful shared history, culture identity, if you don't know about the disability justice movement, I suggest looking into it. If you like binge-watching, if you like turning on Netflix, there's a beautiful movie named, a documentary named Crip Camp, which talks about the disability rights movement. And as you're looking into this literature and our history, and if you're not seeing disabled people of color, just remember that we exist. And if you can't find stuff on us, it's because our stories have yet to be written.

RYAN EASTERLY:

And Heather, we'll close it out with you. Is there anything you would add to the call to action?

HEATHER WATKINS:

Yeah. I agree wholeheartedly with everything that Katherine and Jennifer have said. Follow disabled BIPOC leaders and speakers and writers. Alice Wong has Disability Visibility Project, the book. I mean, there's various stories from the disability community, from people who are of color. So those are just some very small ways you can begin seeing our stories, hearing our stories, listening to us talk about our lives and our entirety, and start expanding that lens again that I keep talking about. So those are just some very small ways.

RYAN EASTERLY:

And I'll, again, just say amen and echo everything that y'all just shared. I do want to transition into some questions that we have from attendees. An attendee ask, "If there is one question that a funder could ask on their grant applications to illuminate the potential grantees understanding around disability and other historically marginalized identities, how could this information be actionable in committee decision making?" So I guess, in terms of this question, I

would say, what do you think that question should be? And then how do you think funders should use that information to inform their decision making? Is there anyone who wants to volunteer to take that on?

JENNIFER LEE:

Yeah, this is Jennifer speaking. I can get us started, I think, as someone who has been applying to multiple grant cycles and has submitted applications myself. One question that I particularly appreciate answering is, "How do you incorporate intersectionality in specific ways to your nonprofit's operations and mission every single day?" I think this is one way for funders to see how we understand intersectionality on a day-to-day basis, and requires that we create space for not just disability, but other marginalized identities as well.

KATHERINE PÉREZ:

This is Katherine. I would take it a step further too, and also name explicitly how do you define disability justice or how do you include disability in your work. Because I think a lot of people are talking about intersectionality and can talk about different groups, but disability always seems to get left out of that conversation. And then again, going back to the simple notion of medical model versus social model of disability. Seen in those answers how folks conceptualize and define what disability is to them. And if it's through this medical model where it's like, oh, we need to provide resources that is finding cures, or just relegated completely the medical realm as opposed to combating structural inequity, then I think you probably don't have the right folks.

RYAN EASTERLY:

And I would just add from my perspective as the executive director of WITH Foundation, that in our process, for every applicant that advances to the final stages of consideration, we do explicitly ask how the project or how the effort explicitly addresses a disability justice framework. And we define what disability justice means and refer them to the primer that's developed by Sins Invalid. So I would say there is nothing better than being direct and intentional in asking the question.

Also from attendees, there's a question about, how can the K-12 system, which largely addresses disability using a medical model, be a better system for students with disabilities who are also students of color? And how can K-12 funders better support the education efforts for students of color with disabilities? Would anyone like to take on that question?

KATHERINE PÉREZ:

I'm trying to invoke my colleagues who work in educational justice spaces. And I'm not remembering all the lingo at the moment, but the first thing that occurs to me is, there's a lot of movement within the autistic community, and I'm not part of that community, that has a lot of issue with applied behavioral analysis, ABA. I know this is very specific. But talking about the medical model, I know ABA is used very often with NIAPs and folks in the special education realm. So if you look toward disability justice groups like the autistic ASAN, what is ASAN?



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Autistic Advocacy Network, and learn about things like their critiques of ABA, especially within a K through 12 model, special ed model, I think that that would be great work to look into.

RYAN EASTERLY:

Thank you for uplifting that. As a last question, because we are nearing the end of our time together, I do want to raise a question asked by a attendee. And they were looking for additional insight into how disability can be included into racial and gender equity conversations that funders are currently having. So do you have any advice from your perspectives and your work about how disabilities should be included in racial and gender equity conversations? Heather, if it's okay, I'm going to "volun-told" you.

HEATHER WATKINS:

Sure. Again, follow more black disabled women speakers, bringing people to talk to your companies and teach about that. I mean, a lot of times, I'm starting from 101 and I'm breaking down the word disability. I'm breaking it down to the D-I-S prefix, which is not only "not" and "un" but has a Latin and a Greek derivative meaning "duo" and "two." So hence, another way of doing and being in the world. And that seems to really be an eyeopener for people who are hesitant about even thinking about disability or disabled because they just see it as being synonymous with negativity.

A lot of people want to use cutesy euphemisms, physically challenged and special needs and things like that. So I really just... Starting, for me, it feels like one-on-one and really doing a lot of handholding, leading people to our lived experience and our lens so that they have a bit more educational insight into what it really means to live with a disability. So I'd start from there. Seeking out people who have first person knowledge and who can really shed some light on that experience is definitely a way to go.

RYAN EASTERLY:

Well, thank you so much. Thank you so much for your time today and for all the knowledge you've shared and for sharing of yourselves. I do want to thank everyone for attending today's discussion and say that, as you've heard throughout this discussion, please remember to listen to disabled BIPOC people, to fund disabled BIPOC leaders and their work, and please look to the Disability & Philanthropy Forum for more resources and more conversations around this important issue. And I'm going to quickly turn it over to Emily. And thank you so much to the Disability & Philanthropy Forum team for putting together this important conversation.

EMILY HARRIS:

Thank you, Ryan, and thank you Heather, Kat, and Jennifer. It was so rich. And I was trying to watch the questions in the chat and listening to you and my mind is exploding. So I can't wait to watch the video. And everybody here, you will receive a video in the next couple of weeks. We're sorry that we could not address all of your questions, but they will definitely inform both our resources and our future learning programs.

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Following the close of this session, you'll receive a short survey. Please help us to learn from your experience by taking a few minutes to fill it out. A link is also available in the chat. And our next webinar on April 4th centers on grant making for disability. So we hope to see you there. Thank you.