

NARRATOR:

The Disability & Philanthropy Forum presents Katherine Pérez, Director of the Coelho Center for Disability Law, Policy, and Innovation.

KATHERINE PÉREZ:

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.

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.

NARRATOR: To continue your learning journey, visit DisabilityPhilanthropy.org.