

DISABILITY & DEMOCRACY

What Nonprofits and Funders Need to Know




Democracy is not just about having the ability to vote and make an informed choice, but it's also knowing that everyone...deserves that opportunity and that right. Therefore it's up to [all of us] to ensure that we bring everyone to the table and that everyone has a voice.

— Marlene Sallo, Executive Director, National Disability Rights Network



In the United States, it's estimated that 1 in 4 adults have a disability—a number that continues to grow due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. People with disabilities are not a niche demographic, as disability cuts across all identity groups. This means every societal issue is a disability issue, because every issue impacts disabled people. **That's why disabled people must have seats at the table** in all efforts to uphold a democratic society.



Climate Change **VOTING** Incarceration
Employment Housing Poverty Education
Transportation Healthcare Home and Community Based Services

Funders must urgently support the call of activists who are pushing back against the attitudinal, systemic, and legislative barriers that disabled people encounter in trying to exercise their right to participate in U.S. democracy.

- A survey on disability and civic engagement found that 57% percent of disabled people experienced barriers to participate in civic engagement.¹
- In 2021, more than 400 anti-voter measures were introduced by states across the country, largely impacting people of color and voters with disabilities.²

1 [Civic Engagement and People with Disabilities: A Way Forward Through Cross-Movement Building](#), Brandeis University and Ford Foundation (PDF)

2 [Voting With a Disability: Breaking Down Barriers to the Ballot](#), American Civil Liberties Union

- 17.7 million people with disabilities reported voting in the November 2020 elections. Even though there are five federal laws protecting voting access for people with disabilities, 11% of disabled voters—a total of 1.95 million—had some type of difficulty voting in 2020.³
- People with disabilities voted at a 7% lower rate than people without disabilities of the same age in the 2020 election, pointing toward a continuing gap in voter turnout.⁴
- Disabled people are significantly underrepresented among elected officials. Only an estimated 3,793 of the 36,779 elected officials in the U.S. have a disability. That's only 10.3%, compared to the 25% of U.S. adults who are disabled.⁵

Participation and representation matters! What can funders do?

- Fund voting and civil rights organizations that recognize that disability rights are civil rights.⁶
- Fund disability-led civic engagement and voting rights initiatives.
- Fund both narrative and policy change efforts that support the civic participation of disabled people.
- Fund intersectional, cross-movement coalition-building efforts.

3 [Fact sheet: Disability and Voting Access Policies in 2020](#), Rutgers University (PDF)

4 U.S. Election Assistance Commission releases [study on disability and voting accessibility](#) in the 2020 elections, Election Assistance Commission

5 [Report: 1 in 10 Politicians Has a Disability. That's a Gap in Representation.](#), Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations

6 [Why the movements for voting rights and disability rights are strongest together](#), Ford Foundation

**Join us on the
journey to a more
disability-inclusive
philanthropic sector.**

Join the Disability & Philanthropy Forum's community of leaders committed to centering the perspectives of disabled people. Together, we are on a collective journey to advance disability inclusion as key to social justice. Learn more and sign up for membership at DisabilityPhilanthropy.org