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EMILY HARRIS:

Welcome to the Disability & Philanthropy Forum's Disability Equity series. My name is Emily Harris, I use she/her pronouns, and I'm a proud member of the disability community. I am executive director of the Disability & Philanthropy Forum and come to you today from the Unceded Land of the Northern and Southern Tewa, now known as Santa Fe, where I am attending a convening of the CARE Fund. 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 and glasses, wearing a black and white top. My background is a blurred hotel room today. My access needs are met 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 moderator and panelists will be on camera. You will be muted throughout the event. The webinar is being recorded and you'll 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 anytime during the session. We'll 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 at [disabilityphilanthropy.org](mailto:communications@disabilityphilanthropy.org).

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 health conditions, mental health and other conditions where society creates barriers to full participation.

We have a poll question to help set the context for our conversation today. Please answer it now via the box that just popped up on your screen, if you don't mind multitasking a bit while I speak. If the poll is not accessible to you, please feel free to email communications at [disabilityphilanthropy.org](mailto:communications@disabilityphilanthropy.org), or note in the Q&A. I will read the questions and choices now.

In the US there are at least how many LGBTQIA+ folks with disabilities? 1.3 million, 3 million, 700,000 or 2 million? To moderate our panel, I'm delighted to introduce Amoretta Morris, president of Borealis Philanthropy. Amoretta is joined on the panel by three leaders in philanthropy. You can learn more about the panelists and Amoretta from their bios that are linked in the chat. And before we start, the correct poll answer is B: 3 million LGBTQIA+ people in the US live with disabilities. Many of you got that right. You'll hear more from our panelists about the barriers facing disabled LGBTQIA+ communities. Amoretta, please take it away from here.

AMORETTA MORRIS:

Thank you, Emily, and welcome, everybody. I am so delighted to be joining you today in this virtual space. My name is Amoretta Morris. I use she/her pronouns and I am a black woman wearing a green and white top. And today I am rocking a brown Afro, gold earrings, big green glasses and bright red lipstick. As I said that out loud, I realize I've got a lot going on today, but thank you. Bear with me. I'm currently in New York, which is the Unceded Land of the Lenape people. I am normally based in on Piscataway land in DC, but I am up here traveling for a meeting. And then the last thing that I'll share is that I am the daughter of Albert and Floretta Morris and the proud fur mama of Marcus Garvey Morris. But that's actually not why I get to moderate today's conversation.

My most relevant role today is as president of Borealis Philanthropy, a national social justice intermediary. And so I'm about to ask the panelists to introduce themselves. But first, I just want to say I have been really looking forward to this conversation and I am so honored that the Forum asked me to moderate particularly this conversation, because while I've identified as queer for a long time, I have come later in life to my identity as a person with a disability. And at the risk of starting off this esteemed professional panel, sharing a little TMI, I have my last partner to thank for this evolution in my identity because she is the one who helped me understand how neurodivergence lived in me and influenced how I show up in the world. I was one of those many, many women and girls whose symptoms go undiagnosed because they didn't show up in childhood the way folks traditionally are trained to look at them or frankly, traditionally the way they show up in boys.

So I am grateful for this conversation because it reflects personally one of the many intersections that I live in, but then professionally as a leader at Borealis, where we apply an intersectional equity lens to our work. We are striving to disability conversations all the time wherever we go. So this doesn't just happen through our disability inclusion fund, but it is a charge that's spearheaded across our teams from our Black-led movement work, to our commitment to advancing equitable journalism. And so, for lack of a better word, this is the perfect conversation to be a part of. And I could not have asked for more wonderful experts and thinkers and co-journeymers in this conversation than our panel today.

So I am pleased to welcome Cory Lira, Shaena Johnson and Masen Davis. Rather than read each of their phenomenal bios, I would refer you to the chat and let's get started with abbreviated self-introductions. So let's start by asking each of you to share your names, your pronouns, your visual description, and one sentence you would like the audience to know about yourself. Cory, can we start with you and then let's follow with Shaena and Masen.

CORY LIRA:

Thank you and thanks for having me today. My name is Cory Lira and I use she and they pronouns. I am a fat, light-skinned indigenous Latina person wearing a black button-up top, and I'm wearing dangling orange earrings with brown waist-length hair pulled to the front and laying over my shoulder. And behind me is an off-white wall. And I'll just share similar to what's in my bio, but I recently joined Third Wave Fund as the new Disability Frontlines Fund program officer, and my background is in community organizing and education and I'm based out in Portland

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Oregon, which is the home of Multnomah, Kathlamet, Clackamas, Chinook, Tualatin, Kalapuya, Malala, and many other tribes along the Columbia River. And I'll pass it on.

AMORETTA MORRIS:

Shaena.

SHAENA JOHNSON:

Hi, everyone. My name is Shaena Johnson. I go by she/her/hers pronouns. I am on Choctaw Land in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I'm a masculine presenting black woman with black hair, a black shirt on with black headphones, with facial jewelry, a nose ring, and yes, that's it. I am very excited to be here on this panel. I work with the funders for LGBTQ issues as the interim project director for Out in the South. And again, very excited to be here on this panel.

AMORETTA MORRIS:

Thank you, Shaena. Masen.

MASEN DAVIS:

Hi, really wonderful to be here. Thanks so much. I'm Masen Davis. I use he/him pronouns. I'm a white guy, bald with a big beard in my 50s. How did that happen? With dark eyes and eyebrows, my beard, salt and pepper, wearing a white shirt with blue dots design on it in front of a FCAA background, which is a series of teals. I am the executive director of funders concerned about AIDS. I'm from the United States, but I actually live and work from Berlin, Germany where I live with my husband and our little dog named Rex. And I increasingly identify and more publicly identify as a person with multiple disabilities as I age, and really delighted to be here today.

AMORETTA MORRIS:

Oh, thank you, everybody. Again, I am so ready for this conversation. And so what we're going to do today is I am going to ask a series of questions, and then per the norm, we will then invite questions from the audience. And so we'll invite you to drop those in and I'll get some support in pulling those questions to bring them forth for folks. But first I'm going to ask our panel to engage in some conversation with each other, following really an arc around some initially kind of helping us all ground together and kind of what we're talking about, the nature of our conversation.

And then we want to be able to close with an opportunity for action. We're not coming... This is about not just learning, but learning in a way that allows us to do. And so we want to be able to close in a place of what can we do with this knowledge that we have. And so, as a way to ground ourselves in the conversation, I want to start by asking each of you, how has your personal story shaped how you navigate the world? How has your personal story shaped how you navigate the world? Could we maybe do the opposite of the direction that we did intros in? Masen? I mean, I'm just intrigued to know more about Berlin, but we can do that another time.

MASEN DAVIS:

Yeah, anytime. I mean, it's hard to know how this is. I would not be here today doing what I do, living where I am without a whole series of experiences in my life that led me here. So much is shaped by my personal story. I mean, I come from a long line of Methodist ministers in Missouri. I grew up in a pretty conservative land in the United States. I was supposed to be the next minister according to my family until I came out as a lesbian and then a gay trans man, which eventually took me out of the running according to my family, and have navigated a lot of what is meant to be a white person growing up in the United States and in the Midwest/really kind of the south as far as conversations around racism and what that looks like on a real day-to-day basis.

I will say I went to a school that was 95% black, and the advanced placement classes were 95% white, which tells you there's a lot of problems going on. And so I grew up with a real clear awareness of inequality, because it was so apparent where I come from. And then in my own experience coming out as in various ways, including coming of age in the 80s, and coming out in the early 90s, I was really shaped by a lot of the early gay men and lesbian and trans people who were responding to the HIV crisis. So involved in Nation and Act Up in the early nineties, that really taught me a sense of community and organizing and a sense of mutual community care that I think really continues to shape who I am and a lot of the work that I do today.

AMORETTA MORRIS:

Wow. Thank you so much, and thank you for taking us on that journey. I feel like I have a sense of part of your journey from four years that I spent in St. Louis, and so I understand your Midwest/Southern take on that state. Shaena, same question for you.

SHAENA JOHNSON:

Hey, everybody. Shaena Johnson, she/her pronouns. So I grew up in Louisiana. South Louisiana. And if we're familiar with the Mark Twain books, as Huckleberry Finn and Jim traveled down the Mississippi the worse it got. And so I'm at the end of the Mississippi River. And I think it got worse because it's more conservative here, I think is one of the most conservative parts of the country, and it's also one of the most racist parts of the country. So growing up black, I came out at the early age, I came out at 16. So growing up black, masculine, lesbian in my community, that was an experience that has definitely shaped how I show up. I also grew up at a time where we were doing uprisings. I grew up in the early 2000s, so it's a lot of uprisings happening. I joined BYP 100, which has helped to shape my worldview as well.

The slogan was Unapologetically Black, and that's how I show up since then until this day. Also learning that later on in life like Amoretta said, learning that you actually do have a disability and you weren't tripping and that things weren't actually, I'm not going to say bad, but things were different and neurodivergence is a thing. And so that has definitely shaped my empathy. It has definitely shaped the way that I show up with other folks, the way that I'm taking extra steps to make sure that folks are being cared for, especially grantees, folks who I'm doing this work within the sector. And it just gives me a stronger purview and a perspective on making sure that people's needs are met.

AMORETTA MORRIS:

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Thank you so much, each of y'all. Just so thoughtful and thank you for even the candid and vulnerable way that you're sharing with us. Cory, can you round out our extended intros as they are?

CORY LIRA:

Yeah, I would love to. So yeah, I think what I'll share today is I grew up a second generation queer person. I have queer parents, and while I didn't have the language for it to understand my family, I think we were all disabled, but just didn't really know how to name that. And also, I've been fat my whole life and that I think has really informed a lot of my experiences, as well as being an indigenous femme. And I grew up rural and poor. And so I think all these experiences on one side have really shown me the reality of the culture of disposability and how other bodies really experience living at these intersections. And also, I think it led me to where I am now, which is deeply embedded in disability justice work and abolition work and the clarity of the power of community self-determination, and what it means to have community-led resourcing of communities.

And so I think I could expand on any one of those identities and how they inform me, but I think just having all those intersections I think has really just gifted me that clarity of the work I do and knowing that I'm part of so many communities that have so many different experiences, that combined experience really provides a unique perspective moving through the world.

AMORETTA MORRIS:

Oh, Cory, lucky for you, you're about to get the chance to expand on some of those areas right now, because the next question is for you, and I couldn't turn to the next question without also doing another welcome to you. Because as you said in your introduction, you are still relatively new in your role at Third Wave. And so I am giving you an extra welcome as one of the honored people that gets to be an alum of the Third Wave board. And so that was a wonderful, wonderful... In many ways, Third Wave board service was my introduction to social justice philanthropy. And so it's wonderful to have you a part of this conversation. And so relative to the work and the way in which Third Wave has been really showing up in this space, what are some of the key issues affecting disabled LGBTQIA+ communities that the disability front lines fund grantees are working on, and why is philanthropic support important for those issues?

CORY LIRA:

Yeah, thank you for this question. And for folks who are maybe less familiar, our grant program is specifically aligned with Third Wave's funding priorities of BIPOC youth-led by and for communities of color, our program specifically for disabled communities of color. And so, what I'll speak to is just that perspective. I'm coming in from my work so far at Third Wave, but also having worked at the Northwest Health Foundation previously as well, running their advancing disability justice program, which is a BIPOC disabled grant program. First I just want to acknowledge that I think one of the key issues is really just staying alive. I think just staying alive and staying resourced and well and in community and connected. And so I don't want to jump

right into other topics without acknowledging, I think that that is the first and foremost thing that comes to mind for me when I think about key issues.

And I think it's important to acknowledge this particular moment we're in, where I think a lot of the grantees I work with are navigating the different kinds of political repression and the types of changes in how we even talk about COVID, for instance. We have Long COVID Justice is one of our grantees and still doing work to not be like we're post-COVID, right? So just these pieces around staying alive and staying well as much as possible. But I think some other pieces that I'll just name is that I think we give out multi-year grants, and so we get to see the work over a period of time. And I think one large key issue, or key trend that I'll name is just that long-term sustainability of the work. And I think that that reflects that for, I think a lot of folks who are in the queer and trans and disabled communities. We know that there's a high level of expectation to do the work if you're in that leadership role, and there's also high burnout.

And so I think that there's a lot of leadership change that's happened, a lot of people who needed to move back or move up. And so I think a lot of groups are figuring out what that means in terms of actually being in a position to do long-term work sustainably, which might look like really shifting how work has happened up to this point. And I think that there's been so much rapid response work that's happened with COVID and a lot more tension on disability justice in the last five years that I think that this is a very critical moment for a lot of groups to really grapple with what it means to continue to do this work for 5, 10, 20 more years.

I think also acknowledging the particular economic limits of this moment, I think is very true for folks thinking about what kind of rapid response programs are out there now versus what were at the start of the pandemic, for instance. And also, just I think I care a lot about the workers of organizations and thinking about more and more people are just really stretched thin with the economy shifting. And then I think the other issue that feels like the most consistent one across the folks I've been working with is really wanting to move from that kind of the conversation many of us have around moving from representation into deeply embedded reflection of communities in leadership and programmatic priorities and values.

And so I think that we've seen an increase in folks talking about disability justice and talking about queer and trans communities and queer and trans disabled communities and communities of color, and how they all are impacted in this moment. And also, I think that there's this real issue of, and now what? And now what does this actually do to change both philanthropy, our organizations, the folks, our partners, so that these aren't just demographics that we're talking about, but actually reflected values? And being able to really reflect the politics of queer and trans communities and the politics of disability justice into the work.

So I know I only have a couple minutes for this question, so I'll pause there and see if there's other followup on that part. But I also wanted to talk about the support piece that you asked too, which is I think that the thing I'll name around why philanthropic support is important for these issues is that I think for so many of these communities, my communities, there's an expectation to prove something or to verify or demonstrate value in some particular way.

And I feel very proud to be at an organization that gives unrestricted funds with very little reporting that's due. And so I think lowering those barriers at the start and then also lowering the barriers when someone's in as a grantee is really, really, really important when we talk about disabled queer and trans communities. Because not only is that important generally for all folks that we work with within philanthropy, but thinking about how often my communities are asked to really demonstrate the value of the work through a project or through a particular focus as opposed to saying, your whole work holistically is of great value and you don't need to prove that.

I think that that is where I see this type of funding and this type of support as being really critical in this moment when we're talking about capacity, when we're talking about long-term sustainability is really shifting into a type of support that is more trusting. And I think that's what I would bring up in this part.

AMORETTA MORRIS:

Oh, thank you so much. I think the trust that you're naming and what that unlocks and the trust that's necessary in order to shift the power of how grant-making traditionally happened is exactly in opposition to what you named earlier about the culture of disposability. And it's like you actively have to work against that in order to move to this more relational way of engaging with each other and philanthropic relationships. So I appreciate you naming that.

And it connects very much, Masen, to what you described when you were talking about the spaces and places and people who have really informed how you show up because you said what you learned coming of age and AIDS, you learned about community, you learned about connection, you learned about showing up for one another. And so could you say a bit more for us specifically about now in your work with funders concerned about AIDS, how your long history with both LGBTQIA + rights and HIV/AIDS advocacy connect with disability, inclusion, rights and justice? How does this all come together for you?

MASEN DAVIS:

Thanks for asking. I mean, I was reflecting that, especially around talking about COVID and the situation then, I remember my first job in 1993 was at Chicago's Gay and Lesbian Center, which really was just a gay and lesbian center at the time. We weren't so great at bi and trans inclusion yet, but I learned so clearly then if you have a cold, if you think you might be sick, don't go to work. You were working besides people who have serious health conditions. And your cold could see somebody else's death. And there's a sense of community and shared responsibility for keeping each other safe. Keeping each other safe on the street, keeping each other safe at work, making sure people are safe at home. And I was really, I think, kind of heartbroken in a lot of the conversations around COVID in how hard is it to wear a darn mask if you're sick, or in a space with somebody who might have a vulnerability you don't?

And it made me really actually grateful for those early lessons I learned from queer activists and HIV and AIDS activists in the 90s, that we have a responsibility to each other. And by all the means, stay home if you're sick. The world is not going to end for you. Usually. So I think that

that feels very present for me in this conversation. I do think sometimes we have to remind people that HIV and AIDS are conditions that are covered under the ADA. And while a lot of folks living with HIV... we've had amazing progress in medication to treat people and to prevent HIV. The reality is we still have a lot of people living with HIV in the LGBT community. And for some people, it is a disabled in condition, whether temporarily because of medication change or symptoms or permanently for some people.

And so it just is at that intersection of LGBT rights, disability, justice, and HIV. And I think we've gone too far in separating the LGBT movement and the HIV movement. They used to be one. And then at some point when it was... To be honest, as I've been talking to people, more folks of color getting HIV, the LGBT community kind of stepped away, "Oh, that's not us. We have a separate movement." And we really need to challenge that as we look at who's most impacted and how we can be stronger together. And I think we know that folks with disabilities are at higher risk of HIV in part because of stigma, suggesting that folks depending on disability, oh, they're not that sexual, or they don't need prevention, or no one needs to talk to them about PrEP, because we're not going to talk to them about as think of them as sexual beings.

So there are real risks there, I think as a result that we need to really challenge politically and in our own day-to-day lives. And then I'll just say for myself, as a trans person who does have disabilities, I'm super conscious of the fact that it's my ability to do work is very much impacted by my health status. And in some ways I have led a number of LGBT, especially trans groups over the years. And in some ways my decision to come to a Philanthropic Service Organization and FCAA was partly my own step towards self-care, because I realized that with my own trauma background in this moment while all the attacks against trans people, I needed to do something a little bit different.

So HIV is not easy. There's still trauma, but it's not the same tapping into my brain trauma, if that makes sense. So it's work I can continue to contribute in a moment when I'm not psychologically able to be on the front lines of the trans movement today. I'll go back, but I needed to take a break. And I think that that's a message for all of us. What do we need to do to contribute and how do we do this for many decades in a way that can do good work, but also take care of our hearts and ourselves?

AMORETTA MORRIS:

Y'all have put so much out there. Thank you, Masen for... I mean, there's a bit of career coaching in that last conversation as we think about how to continue to make our contribution in a way that fits where we are in our life, where we are in our health. So thank you so much for that. And as we think about the different ways that we make our contribution and the different places that we've been as we make our contribution, Shaena, I am interested to turn to you. I really appreciated your harkening back to the river and Huck headed down the river as somebody who grew up in Texas, but I was born in Alabama, I can absolutely appreciate that. As goes the south, so goes the nation, but also there are things that some of my friends who grew up in the north take for granted that I absolutely did not have access to in the South. And so my question to you is how does Out in the South create a welcoming and accessible environment for disabled and LGBTQIA-led intermediaries?

SHAENA JOHNSON:

Amoretta, thank you so much for that question. So Out in the South is a fund that is dedicated to supporting the infrastructure and capacity of community intermediaries in the deep south. And so we support the intermediaries by providing one-on-one capacity building and accompaniment work. So all of the grantees have access to either talk to me or a consultant that we might have about their grant making, how to better streamline their processes. I went through a lot of our grantees grant-making strategies with them to talk about how to make it more accessible. As someone who has ADHD and social anxiety I was able to take those experiences and work with those intermediaries to shift their application processes.

And so a lot of folks have shifted from requiring written applications, which has been a barrier for a lot of folks, which has kind of been a barrier for me in the past as well. Also, they have shifted the reading level of their LOIs, and so they made the LOIs a lot more accessible, just changing the language and making it better, easier to understand. And using cultural language, language that reflects communities that they serve. Other ways that we have worked together have been talking about the needs of convening, how to convene, ways to really work with folks who wouldn't even feel comfortable in a conference setting.

Again, as someone who has high social anxiety, conferences are painful for me, and I have to exert a whole lot more energy than a lot of folks just to be able to show up in a way that doesn't make me look any different from anyone else. And so keeping that in mind with folks about our grantees, any convening that we have, we have an option to dip out. We have the option for folks to just take care of themselves. We provide healing and mindfulness options that are convenient as well. And we encourage our grantees if they convene to hold those options for their grantees as well. And so yeah, those are some ways that we have tried to make this work more accessible.

Again, it's about the people. It's not necessarily about the paperwork. We don't require written applications, we don't require written reports. All of that can be done through a phone call. And I think the only written thing that we require, I think is people signing their grant agreement. I think that's the only writing that we require outside of them sharing data about their grant making. And that's also not mandatory. So I think we have made good strides with Out in the South to really support not just our grantees, but their communities as well, and really show that grant-making does not have to be the Strickonian theme. It can be accessible for all.

AMORETTA MORRIS:

Oh, thank you. I want to ask a couple more questions, and then we're going to shift to questions from the audience. But as I'm making that transition, and so just again, this is another reminder for folks in the audience, so please drop your questions in the Q&A. I see them coming in and I really appreciate that. We are going to jump to those in a few. I also just want to, again, honor all three of you and the way in which you've talked about the work. The clear way that you've talked about the work and the journey, and it's one that resonates because for me and for Borealis, with this work, as with all of our work, we absolutely are committed to being in this from a learning posture and being here as a fellow journeyer on this road with you.

And so earlier when I was saying we're out here trying to queer disability conversations, and it's not just, and that's kind of across the organization, that is a commitment of ours, and it is about growing and learning and skill-building for all of our staff internally. And it's leading to innovation. For example, just recently we announced the launch of the Black Disabled Liberation Project, which is a co-funding initiative that resource is organizing that's happening at the intersection of disability and blackness. That is something that came about because of the collaboration between the teams internally at Borealis that support the disability inclusion fund and the teams that support the black-led movement fund. And those two teams building together, working together, learning together, and identifying gaps in the field, identifying gaps in the sector.

And from what we know, this is the first of its kind right of an initiative doing here and with this particular focus. And so I really, really again, find myself as a colleague to you all similar to the ways in which you all are leading this really innovative, groundbreaking work in your respective places. Shaena, I want to turn back to you because I loved how you gave some really great examples of how you are able to use your own lived experience as you are helping intermediaries understand how to create more accessible processes and how to create more inclusive spaces. I just want to ask you, are there any other barriers that you would want to share with us that you faced as a person with disabilities working in philanthropies? How would you like philanthropy to change?

SHAENA JOHNSON:

Thank you for that question, and I'll be a little candid. I'll just ask another question. Why do we need so many conferences? And I understand that these are learning spaces. I think that a lot of conferences are very important to convene people and bring people together, especially folks who otherwise wouldn't be able to convene outside of that. So I do understand the importance of convenings. However, for those of us who really have a hard time presenting on stage and really have a hard time in large crowds of people, that is so painful. And it's been difficult to show up. I know that folks tell me all the time like, "Hey, Shaena, you didn't seem nervous." And I'm like, "You have no idea how exhausted I am right now because I had to make sure that I did not seem nervous," which is ableism. It is ableism all the way.

Yeah. So that's been a barrier. And you can't really do this work without going to convenience. You can't really have your work be visible without showing up in these spaces. And another barrier is our ways of communication. So emails, text message, Slacks, Asana, all of those things happening at once, and you're getting a million messages at the same time. For anyone with anxiety, that will shoot you through the roof. And it has taken time for me to understand what was going on. And then also working with my colleagues to help them understand, "Hey, this is a little bit off-putting to get an email on top of a text message, on top of a phone call on top of a Slack message. That's a little much for someone with anxiety." And those communication barriers have been prevalent.

But again, I have had great coaches, I have had great mentors who have definitely helped out. I think some of my coaches didn't realize I had a disability, but they don't also realize that they helped me push through. So it all worked out. So yeah, it just takes time. It takes support to be able to move through these spaces and navigate through those barriers. And yeah, I wouldn't be

here if it was not for my circle. How would I like philanthropy to change? Just be more cognizant of people's needs. Language barriers are not the only barriers in communication and in philanthropy. And yeah, it's just really be mindful.

AMORETTA MORRIS:

Thank you. I'm going to bounce around a little bit. And so I'm going to... First, I'm going to go to a couple of questions that we've brought in from the audience, and then I also want to make sure... And so I'm going to mea culpa now, because I know folks are going to be upset that we're not going to get to all the questions. But the only reason that... a good reason that I would bring that part of the question to a close is because I want to make sure that I give you each a chance before we close, to provide your call to action to philanthropy. I don't want us to get off the phone or the zoom without our participants knowing something that they can do. We've been talking about contributions at the right space in the right way. But what is your call to action for us in philanthropy as we think about this very critical and often overlooked intersection?

But for now, I want to ask and jump into a couple of the questions that we have from the audience. And our first one is about somebody has asked, "How can I make connections to folks and organizations doing this work? Suggestions for folks that they're saying, "Look, I'm interested. It's isolating. How can I make connections to folks who are at the nexus here in this work?" Cory, you look like you wanted to say something.

CORY LIRA:

Well, to clarify, I don't know if they mean within philanthropy or within community, but I think I'll try to touch on both a little bit. I think within philanthropy, the beauty of this convening is that we're hosted by a group that really does bring people to connect people. So I'll just name that. And then I think within community, something that I think is also an important layer here is that so often there are disabled folks in spaces we're in, but we haven't created the safety for folks to name that. And so I just want to also acknowledge that sometimes we don't actually have to look very far to find those connection points. It's more like have we created spaces where folks can be comfortable to share about their queer and trans and disabled experiences in the spaces we're in? And I think sometimes starting where you're at is one of the most powerful things you can do instead of viewing it as, I need to go out and find this special place where that has all the answers.

So I just want to push back a little bit on that. And then I think there's just so many really amazing disabled-led organizations out there, and I encourage maybe checking out the grantees with Third Wave or Borealis and just at start of some of the groups right now that are on the ground doing some of the work.

AMORETTA MORRIS:

Oh, thank you. I'm going to move to our next question. And it's a compound question. The broadest theme is how can we encourage everyone to see disability issues as part of their work? And then more specifically, the participant asked, how can we get your message of intersectionality and access to mainstream funders at a time of retrenchment and fear that is

impacting philanthropy, government, and corporations? We know very well we're in this time when racial equity and the attacks on anything that is about the liberation of oppressed people we're seeing a backlash against. And so y'all have thoughts on how we get more folks to see disability issues as part of their work, and how we get this critical intersectional lens more broadly taken up in philanthropy. Masen, you look like you were adjusting in your seat to say something.

MASEN DAVIS:

No, I was just thinking it's a really good question. And I mean, I think this is part of it. I think we all need to be telling our stories with each other about our real experiences and the barriers we really experience and see, because I think, to be honest, way too much is invisible. And so we've got to figure out how do we cross our silos too? Because I'm really frustrated right now, I'll be honest with like, oh, I'm an LGBT funder. I'm a disability rights funder, I'm an environmental justice funder. I'm a racial justice funder. I'm an HIV funder.

The truth is, these are all people that are experiencing all of this at the same time, and we are bigger than the silos. And so I think we've got to really challenge some of these and encourage us to be working across and realize that if folks aren't living with a disability today, they probably will be before they die. Most people are just temporarily abled. And so if we can really get people to realize this has got to be a critical lens, regardless what area of funding they focus on, we'd be in a much better shape, I think.

AMORETTA MORRIS:

Oh, absolutely. Thank you. Thank you so much for that frame. Shaena, one of our participants, they explicitly wanted to thank you for naming that many of the convenings are super inaccessible spaces, and they prevent meaningful engagement of disabled people, not only by their costs, but by other practices of inaccessibility. And so the question is how do we change this in philanthropic spaces that are not led by working class people and tend to cater to high net worth individuals? So if we see this, and you had many people agreeing with you like, "Ooh, yes," right? But how do we change this knowing that the folks that are for the most part setting these tables are not coming from working class communities?

SHAENA JOHNSON:

Yes. That is a great question. I think that having that conversation with folks, I found with working with high net worth individuals, they're not some mythical creatures that are off in nowhere land, they're people too. And so having the conversation with them just starting off I think is very important. I think that even talking about the audience for these convenings, what is the purpose for the convening? Even having that conversation ahead of time I think is really helpful. And also really naming the fact that having a disability is not a class thing. It's not a class issue. It's an issue across classes. I know personally, some of our highest net worth donors in this particular sector also have disabilities, and their offices are accessible. Their places of work are very accessible. And it can be done. You just have to have the conversation. I think we've just been really afraid to name the elephant in the room.

AMORETTA MORRIS:

Thank you. So true. I love that. I mean that they're not mythical creatures. They are people. What does it look like to have those conversations? But more so when we understand where Emily started us with the one in four people have a disability, know that many of the donors that you're talking about and thinking about and wanting to shift, is a person with a disability as well. And so when we think about it from this space. It is not an othering space. What does that allow and what new strategies are made possible? And so this is not all of the questions that we receive, but I did caution you that I wanted to make sure we had time before we close, for you all to share a call to action for philanthropy, right?

I mean, Shaena, you just talked about... You were just imploring people to have the conversations. Masen, you invited us to tell our stories, that this was part of how we help to advance this work. But I also wanted to give you all a chance, as part of your closing thoughts, for us to be able to leave us with a call to action. What would you like us to do leaving this conversation. Cory?

CORY LIRA:

Yeah, thank you. And I love any opportunity to put a call to action out there.

AMORETTA MORRIS:

The organizer in you, Cory.

CORY LIRA:

Yes, I'm going to drop a link in the chat or I'll reference it if I can't. But I do recommend any opportunity to actually look at your organization, look at your work through a DJ lens to really not just say we care about it, but actually look at your own practices and operations. Because I think that sometimes we have really good intentions and we launch things and we're like, we're going to do this. But if you're not actually integrating it or having the chance to struggle through these principles until they become really alive things, I think sometimes that actually can do a little bit of damage. So I really, really recommend doing that internal work while you're building out that external work. So I do recommend the Northwest Health Foundation's Disability Justice Audit tool. I think that's a really, really great one to bring into the work.

I think the other thing I'll say is I think to points I've already been made, how do we de-silo some of this so that we can really make sure that groups that are queer and trans and disabled and community colors in that intersection see themselves reflected in your funding priorities. See the by-and-for for piece within the actual funding out there so that there's not a question of is this for me? Because I think in the work I've seen is if that question comes up, people are very often not going to pursue it because there's that question mark that's like, I'm not even going to try and I really want to help change philanthropy to remove that question mark so that folks would be like, "I know this is for me and I'm going to pursue it." So I just really want to put that out there as something I think that we can work on.

AMORETTA MORRIS:

Thank you, Cory. Shaena. Shaena, what's your call to action for us? What would you like us to take up as a part of the expanded consciousness that we get to leave this conversation with?

SHAENA JOHNSON:

Funding, of course, first and foremost.

AMORETTA MORRIS:

Move the money. Thank you.

SHAENA JOHNSON:

Move the money. And also, I challenge folks, especially working in philanthropy, to remember that this is all made up. Every single aspect of philanthropy is made up and there is no excuse to not be able to affect change. Make up some better stuff, make up some different stuff. But this is all made up and we can do differently.

AMORETTA MORRIS:

Yeah. Thank you. Thank you, Shaena. You said, "Do not get stuck in the, we can't do it that way because we've always done it this other way." Somebody made that up. Somebody made that way up before. Thank you so much. Masen.

MASEN DAVIS:

I mean, so many really concrete recommendations that my co-panelists have put forward already. They're amazing. I would say yes, keep giving. Give more money. Encourage grantees to build in a percentage that's specifically for access, whether it's captioning or changes in their office so that they can be wheelchair-accessible. Look at travel policies. I'm feeling this recently. I had to cancel a flight, so on the way to the airport at 4:30 in the morning, and I realized physically there was no way I could be on a flight that long in my economy class seat. And so I'm having to realize I need to be able to lay down. And most of our policies will say, "Okay, economy only." Well, that may mean no travel, which is really tough if people actually need to get to these meetings or meet relationships or fundraising strategy. And it had never occurred to me how much of a barrier that was until I had to cancel a trip.

And other policies, as Cory was saying, within our organizations, that's really challenging. Are they needed? Are they accessible? And are we saving money but actually losing the power of what we're trying to accomplish in our missions with our grantees? So I'll leave it at that.

AMORETTA MORRIS:

Thank you, everybody. I am sitting with the calls that you made, the suggestions that you made. Like I said, at Borealis, we are on our own journey of continuous improvement and doing better, and living into our commitment to disability justice. And so please know that I personally am taking your calls and your suggestions and recommendations to heart. But now I want to turn it

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over to Emily, who's going to close us out and really kind of give us an opportunity to thank our tremendous panelists for your clarity, your vulnerability, and the courageous ways you've led inside your current institutions and beyond, so that we all can really see and live into the intersections of our multiple identities and the identities of our grantees and communities. So I'm going to turn it over to you, Emily.

EMILY HARRIS:

Thank you so much, Amoretta. I could not give a better thanks than that. I'm so struck by all of your empathy and strategy and calls to action. Somebody wrote in the Q&A, "This has been so powerful, affirming, and actionable." We could not ask for a better group of panelists to leave us all feeling like, let's go out there and make up some better stuff. Thank you, Shaena. Following the close of this session, you'll receive a short survey. Please help us learn from your experience by taking a few minutes to fill it out. And a link is also available in the chat. We hope that you will join us in July for our next webinar, which centers on disability, pride and joy. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.