

NARRATOR:

The Disability & Philanthropy Forum presents Shaena Johnson, Interim Out in the South Project Director at Funders for LGBTQ Issues.

SHAENA JOHNSON:

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 this Draconian theme. It can be accessible for all.

NARRATOR:

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