

# POWER IN DISABILITY SOLIDARITY



Disability &  
Philanthropy  
Forum

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



- Our Commitment to Disability Inclusion in Philanthropy ..... 3
- Power in Disability Solidarity ..... 6
- 2024 Fast Facts ..... 11
- The Black Disabled Liberation Project: Defending Inclusion by Funding  
Intersectional Organizing ..... 12
- Building Power to Build New Futures: Funding Organizing and Advocacy for  
Collective Liberation ..... 16
- Centering Disabled Wisdom: The Essentiality of Participatory Processes ..... 21
- On the Move: 2025 Forum Engagements ..... 24
- Peer Networks ..... 26
  - Celebrating Disability Across Philanthropy (CDAP) ..... 26
  - Presidents' Council on Disability Inclusion in Philanthropy ..... 27
  - Disability Inclusion Pledge Signatories ..... 28
- Art Tells Stories ..... 29
- Charting a Path to Disability Inclusion ..... 32
- Governance Committee ..... 36
- Advisory Committee ..... 36
- Staff ..... 36
- Credits ..... 37

# OUR COMMITMENT TO DISABILITY INCLUSION IN PHILANTHROPY

## A Message from the Presidents' Council Co-Chairs

### Introduction

From the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to the Voting Rights Act of 1965, from the 504 Sit-ins in 1973 to the Olmstead Decision of 1999, history demonstrates that in challenging times, it is crucial to strengthen our commitment and remain steadfast in our efforts to protect and advance the rights of disabled people and build a more inclusive world.

We are currently navigating a new landscape, filled with both challenges and opportunities, which reinforces our commitment to disability inclusion in philanthropy. July marks the 35th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Our journey as members of the Presidents' Council on Disability Inclusion in Philanthropy began in 2019, and while we recognize that the philanthropic sector has made some progress, there is still much work ahead to dismantle ableism in our pursuit of social justice.

We are committed to advancing disability justice, rights, and inclusion, and we understand that addressing ableism within our foundations is essential. Our goal is to support organizations shaped by disabled communities, amplify the leadership of people with disability expertise in the sector, and foster a culture of inclusion within our own foundations.

## Power in Disability Solidarity

As Peer Network members of the Disability & Philanthropy Forum, we are pleased to present its “Power in Disability Solidarity” report. It offers insights from the past year and shares stories that illustrate how we can advance our efforts. The cover story, “Power in Disability Solidarity: A Call to Action in Philanthropy,” was written by Sandy Ho, who became the Executive Director of the Disability & Philanthropy Forum in June 2024.

This report features three articles: “The Black Liberation Project: Defending Inclusion by Funding Intersectional Organizing,” “Building Power to Create New Features: Funding Organizing and Advocacy for Collective Liberation,” and “Centering Disabled Wisdom: The Importance of Participatory Processes.” These contributions come from the Disability Inclusion Fund, with which the Forum collaborates closely.

Additionally, “Power in Disability Solidarity” includes blogs from two organizations that signed the Forum's Disability Inclusion Pledge. One such blog, “Art Tells Stories” is authored by Michael Greer, President & CEO of the ArtsFund. It presents a compelling discussion about disability, the arts, storytelling, and access to employment and public spaces.

In “Beginning the Journey: Charting a Path” Pam Amundsen, Donor Services Manager of the Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation, shares her personal perspective on disability inclusion. She has a non-apparent disability and a chronic illness, and her writing reflects how the foundation utilized the Pledge to navigate its path toward greater disability inclusion. This blog offers valuable insights into the foundation's process and can help organizations uncertain about how to start their own journey toward disability inclusion.

# Unwavering Commitment

We want to express our heartfelt gratitude to Rich Besser, President and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, for his unwavering commitment to promoting disability inclusion in philanthropy. In March 2019, Rich joined Darren Walker, President of the Ford Foundation, as co-chair of the Presidents' Council.

At that time, the Council consisted of 17 foundation CEOs united by a strong commitment to disability inclusion within the philanthropic sector. Rich's leadership and vision have been instrumental in driving meaningful change and ensuring that disability remains a priority in our shared philanthropic efforts. He understands that philanthropy plays a vital role in these challenging times, and we look forward to continuing our solidarity in this important work.

Thank you to the Forum's funders, dedicated members, and Signatories of the Disability Inclusion Pledge for your unwavering support and commitment. Your engagement in advancing disability justice, championing the rights of disabled people, and fostering an inclusive environment is vital, especially during this pivotal period in our society. We look forward to enhancing our collaboration as we continue to work toward a more just and inclusive future.



## Ryan Easterly

Executive Director,  
WITH Foundation

## John Palfrey

President, John D. and  
Catherine T. MacArthur  
Foundation


# POWER IN DISABILITY SOLIDARITY

## What Role Must Philanthropy Play?

Written by **Sandy Ho**, Executive Director, Disability & Philanthropy Forum.

Cover Pattern: Half of a purple sunflower with a bright orange and yellow center. Background above of intricate circle rings that overlap in white, gray, light and mid purple, against shades of deep purple. Small half circle and petal rings around the white circles.






**Claiming space** as a disabled person in our society has always been a revolutionary act. We are witnessing unprecedented attacks on disability rights that have been fought for over many years, as well as on the essential public programs and services that disability communities depend on. What is the role of the philanthropic sector in this moment and beyond?


The clock is ticking, and philanthropy, historically, has lagged behind in its support of disability rights. The inequities in funding are clear — only one cent of every ten dollars in grantmaking goes to disability rights and social justice. During the past six years, the Disability & Philanthropy Forum has witnessed the significant actions from the 19 members of the Presidents' Council on Disability Inclusion in Philanthropy as well as from the 100 signatories of our Disability Inclusion Pledge. However, it remains evident that the philanthropic sector must allocate resources at a scale that matches the needs and challenges facing disability communities.

If we fail to rise to this moment, disabled communities risk being pushed back to a time when civil rights, public programs, and services to support living in our own communities were nonexistent, forcing many people with disabilities to live in institutions as the only viable option. Our communities might not recover from the ongoing attacks and threats they face.

Disability movement leaders have identified solutions and clear pathways forward, but without adequate resources to implement them, disability communities will continue to be unprepared for the struggles ahead. For example, the Administration on Community Living (ACL) was established under the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to ensure that older and disabled individuals can live freely in their communities with necessary support and services. Recent attacks on HHS and the ACL may lead to older and disabled individuals being excluded from society once again, forcing many back into institutional settings and further segregating communities from society.

We must fully embrace the strength that comes from disability solidarity. It's time to move beyond the typical limitations of philanthropy and the ableist practices that obstruct funding. As leaders and funders, we need to reaffirm our commitment to disability justice, ensuring that we allocate the necessary resources to support our movements to survive and thrive beyond this critical moment. We must act quickly to defend all civil rights, which necessarily includes disability rights.






At the Disability & Philanthropy Forum, we firmly believe that disabled people and disability organizations should take up space at every level in the philanthropic sector. Our work involves educating our partners about their role in dismantling ableism and encouraging them to take bolder actions to be more accountable, inclusive, and accessible for disabled communities.

In my first six months as executive director of the Disability & Philanthropy Forum, I emphasized the importance and necessity of disability solidarity during this pivotal time. Solidarity asserts that our people are yours, and your people are ours. In that spirit, our team has been building relationships with our peers in this sector, learning from and alongside our shared advocacy efforts and programming.



Acts of solidarity may not always be visible, and we are mindful of the immense privilege that philanthropy has to protect itself and those that work in this sector. It is often said that the work surrounding disability and collective liberation from ableism is both personal and political. I want to take a moment to acknowledge the many individuals who routinely show-up at our Celebrating Disability Across Philanthropy virtual meetings. These gatherings provide space for those who self-identify as a person with a disability and/or champions of disability inclusion in our sector to come together, seek out allies, and engage in meaningful dialogue.

The Disability & Philanthropy Forum is staying the course alongside our funders and partners as we work together to advance our shared values of disability justice, rights, and inclusion. This, among many other reasons, is why we will not be moving away from how we refer to people with disabilities, disabled-led and serving organizations, disability communities, and disabled leaders. We understand that our commitment can only be effective if accompanied with accountability practices. As such, in 2025 we will relaunch the Disability Inclusion Pledge survey to gather data on disability demographics and funding initiatives within our sector. As access to public data on disability populations is at risk, we recognize the importance of sharing the stories behind these statistics.

Staying the course does not mean we have all of the answers. There continues to be a full throttle attack across every area of civic and public life. More importantly, we are open to hearing from our partners and disability-led organizations about the impacts these issues have had on them. One aspect highlighted in this report is how philanthropy approaches its work is just as important as what areas we








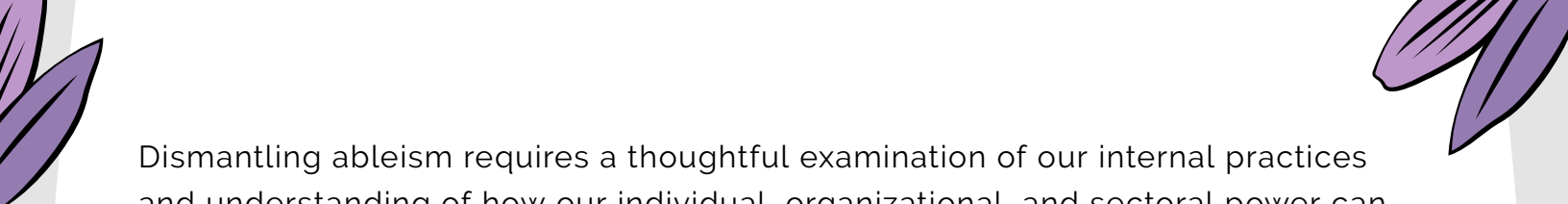
are focusing on. Internally, as a team, we have been deepening our relationship-building practice and embedding our values into our work by implementing a new customer relationship management (CRM) system, finalizing an organizational logic model, and developing evaluation processes.

Disabled leaders have consistently held onto a vision of a future worth advocating for, rooted in the principles of the disability-led movement. A prime example is the 1990 “Capitol Crawl” which significantly influenced the eventual passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Additionally, the disability-led efforts to save Medicaid in 2017 highlighted the importance of advocacy. Disability-led movements have always needed to build their own spaces for civic engagement, allowing them to tell their stories, document their histories, and celebrate their culture. They know that pushing our democracy forward is a worthwhile endeavor. In light of the current attacks on disabled communities, it is crucial for the philanthropic sector to recognize the opportunities for action that arise from advocacy. We can, and should, heed the wisdom of disability-led movements and work together to build a better future for the generations of disabled people, communities, and disability-led organizations to come.

Funding disability-led and serving organizations is not a revolutionary act. In this moment, philanthropy must do the essential work required to change the conditions in our country, fostering a more resilient public infrastructure. This change is critical for better defending our civil rights and protecting the many programs and services that enable disabled people to live more freely. Philanthropy has a responsibility to listen to advocates and change the environment so that disabled people and communities continue the revolutionaries who fully wield their power and pursue self-determined, joyful lives. For many organizations, this effort may need to start internally, but it is important to start somewhere.

At the Disability & Philanthropy Forum, we are committed to supporting this journey through our team’s training, Disability Inclusion Pledge, member workshops, and public webinars. We often ask our partners “What is your goal in this work, and how can we support you in getting there?” Our role is not to define the finish line, but to guide funders, instill best practices, provide frameworks, and offer tools to dismantle ableism. More importantly, we connect networks of people across the sector on this journey together, whether they are family foundations, arts funders, public health grantmakers, or philanthropy-serving organizations.





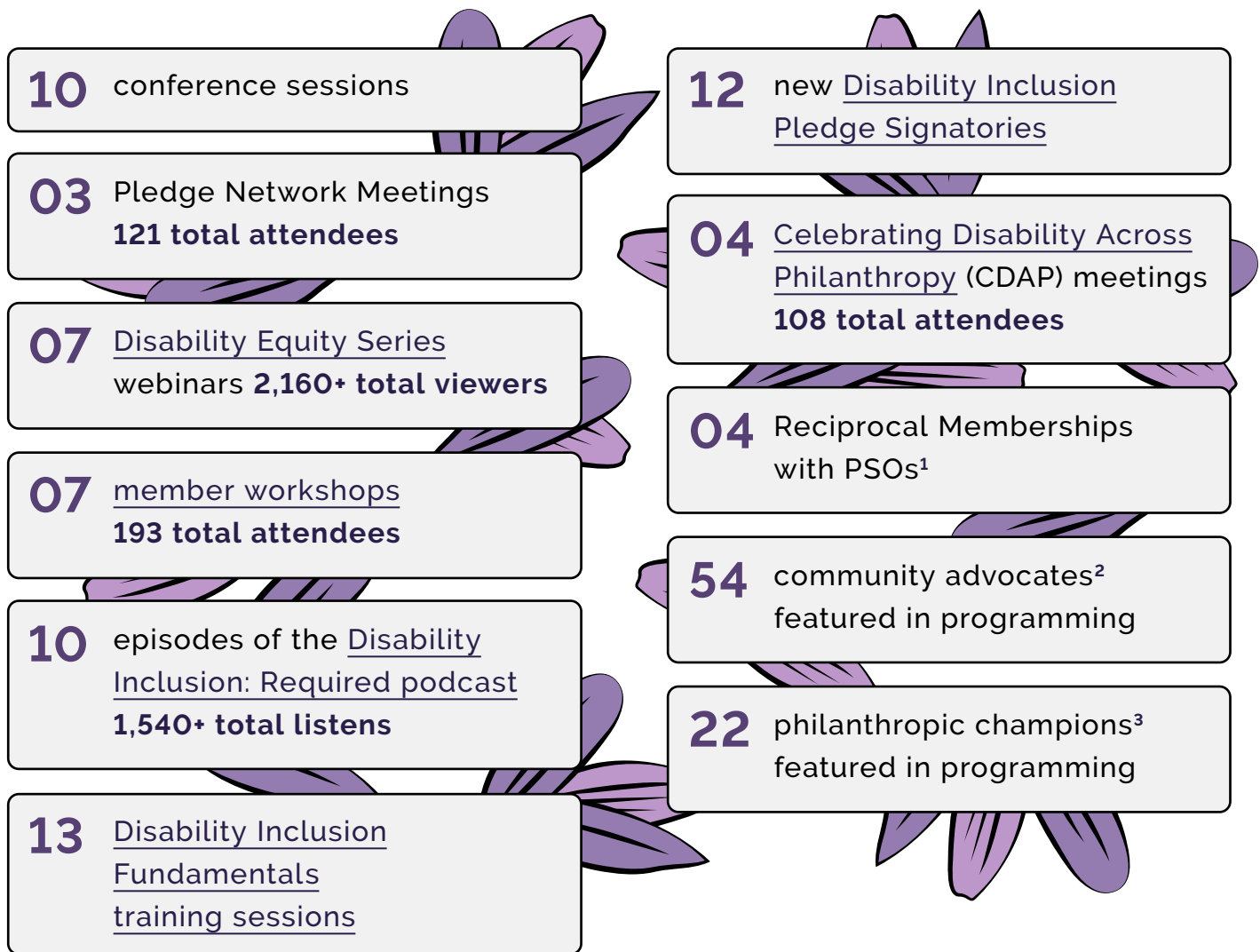
Dismantling ableism requires a thoughtful examination of our internal practices and understanding of how our individual, organizational, and sectoral power can influence change. No amount of wealth will shield any individual or organization from ableism and from experiencing disability. As challenges persist and new headlines prompt a flurry of public statements with few solutions, there remains much that the philanthropic sector can and should do. The work of the Disability & Philanthropy Forum demonstrates that when we unite as a community in solidarity, we can effectively dismantle ableism, benefiting the social justice movements in the process. This is a crucial moment to model solidarity and work toward lasting systemic change.

Our partners featured in this report demonstrate the power in disability solidarity. We appreciate the honor of sharing your work and the privilege of learning from your leadership.



# 2024 FAST FACTS

2024 was a year of exciting growth for the Forum! Our all-disabled team welcomed Sandy Ho as the new executive director and named Justice Shorter as the new host of the Disability Inclusion: Required podcast. We also launched Pledge Network Meetings to facilitate community learning for signatories of the Disability Inclusion Pledge, and introduced our first dedicated member-exclusive workshop series for interactive training on issues related to disability inclusion, rights, and justice. And The James Irvine Foundation joined the [Presidents' Council on Disability Inclusion](#) in Philanthropy. Below are a few more highlights from 2024:

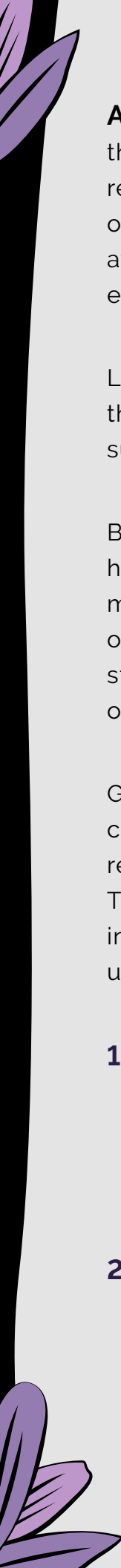


1. Philanthropy-serving organizations.
2. People with disabilities who do not work in the philanthropic sector.
3. People working in the philanthropic sector, including those who self-identify as disabled.

# THE BLACK DISABLED LIBERATION PROJECT: DEFENDING INCLUSION BY FUNDING INTERSECTIONAL ORGANIZING

Written by **Nikki Brown-Booker**, Program Director, Borealis Philanthropy's Disability Inclusion Fund and **Ashley Crawford-Starck**, Interim Program Director, Borealis Philanthropy's Black-Led Movement Fund.

Cover Pattern: Overlapping rings in black, gray, light and dark purple, cover sunflower petals. Between the rings is a pop of orange at the center of the sunflower.




**At Borealis Philanthropy**, we organize our work around a fundamental truth: that systems of oppression are not only interconnected, but *interdependent*. As recent and rising attacks on the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion illustrate, our adversaries know this well. And it is for this reason that we mobilize resources at the intersections of identities and movements, where unmatched brilliance exists and true liberation lies.


Last year, Borealis' Disability Inclusion Fund (DIF) joined forces with our sibling, the Black-Led Movement Fund, to make an explicit and expansive commitment to such resourcing via a new initiative: [The Black Disabled Liberation Project](#).

Black disabled folks live at an intersection of identities that carry the weight of historical othering, a ranking of bodies, and individual and systemic violence. But more importantly, they belong to a lineage of resistance, hold a deep tradition of communal care, and possess an inherent and informed understanding of the steps we must take to arrive at a truly inclusive future. And yet, Black disabled organizers' efforts remain severely underfunded.

Guided by disability justice principles, the 10 groups that comprise our inaugural cohort are reimagining (or organizing to dismantle) systems and environments that reify and evoke anti-Blackness, carceral violence, eugenics, and systemic racism. Through their work in the areas of arts and culture, mental health, movement infrastructure, community organizing, and healing justice, these groups are leading us closer to greater care, visibility, and belonging for all.

- 1. [Black Deaf Project](#):** a Deaf and hearing Black collaborative nonprofit, which creates educational materials, experiences, and trainings rooted in Black Deaf cultures in solidarity with other communities of color to build relationships, increase cultural understanding, promote respect, and create pathways to joy and liberation.
- 2. [Black Lives Matter Phoenix Metro](#):** a Black, Queer, and Femme-led organization that works towards Black Liberation through two wings of work: tearing down the old world, and building a new world by working to defund carceral systems, advocating for policies that reduce harm, supporting Black reproductive justice, fostering community engagement, creating art, and cultivating healing and Black joy.

- 
3. Deep Space Mind 215: a mental health and wellness cooperative that provides low-barrier pathways for neighbors and workers with lived experience of mental health, neurodiversity, and/or institutionalization to gain practical skills in providing community care both in the community or within institutions.
  4. Depressed While Black: an online community that donates Black-affirming personal care items to psychiatric patients and connects people to Black therapists.
  5. Embraced Body: a Black-, queer-, and disabled-led organization focused on performance art that centers embodied Disability Justice praxis for collective healing. Its offerings include workshops, and private sessions, as well as consulting in somatics, implementing a culture and lens of Black access, and dance.
  6. Healing Justice Lineages: a body of work—gathered through community engagement, interviews, and research—that provides practices and frameworks that disrupt and push beyond the ways surveillance and policing of the medical industrial complex and public health system create harm.
  7. Loud' N Unchained Theater Co: a collective of Black & Queer, trans, non-binary, Mad, c/Krip and disabled poets, teaching artists, abolitionists, healers and playwrights whose artistry is rooted in the lived-experience of navigating the medical and psyche industrial complex while Black, mad, and in chronic pain.
  8. Shelterwood Collective: a 900-acre Indigenous, Black, Disabled, and Queer-led community forest and collective of land protectors and cultural changemakers, which heals interconnected ecosystems.
  9. PeoplesHub: a hub for movement workers to learn, connect, collaborate, and strategize in and across the disability justice and solidarity economy movements.
  10. We Were There, Too: a project led by activist Anita Cameron to highlight the contributions of Black disabled people in the disability rights movement, which often get erased by white disabled-led disability rights movement leaders.



For us, these groups represent not only the steadfast pursuit of collective liberation, but also the expansive and wraparound nature of true liberatory work. We are honored to have provided them with vital dollars—and still, we know that Black and disabled organizations and leaders, who are currently stretched thin to the point of collapse, require widespread support from across the philanthropic sector, particularly as they face antagonism, roadblocks, and setbacks as a result of the new administration.

Following decades of historic and continued underinvestment, **here's what a vital course correction from philanthropy would look like:**

- **Deep, long-term, and trusting resources** to expand the capacity and creative visioning efforts of Black disabled organizers who are leading us with urgency, love, and steadfastness towards new, more loving and inclusive futures.
- **Continued learning** and evolution of our collective intersectional analysis and approach to the work of disability justice, Black liberation, and Black disabled liberation—and a commitment to **operating in step with movements**, so that communities may see themselves reflected in our own work.
- **A new level of investment**, also, in the infrastructures required to hold and steward collective solutions, wisdoms, and insights across movements.

It is our belief that the most effective work to challenge the status quo happens on a local, grassroots level, often outside of traditional 501(c)(3) structures. For this reason, we encourage funders to identify manifold and creative ways to support grassroots groups, especially those without significant sources of support from major philanthropic partners. This includes collaborating with funds like the DIF, which supports institutional funders in forging connections with—and funneling resources to—the frontlines of movements for equity and justice, including those in tireless pursuit of Black disabled liberation and, thus, liberation for all.

# BUILDING POWER TO BUILD NEW FUTURES: FUNDING ORGANIZING AND ADVOCACY FOR COLLECTIVE LIBERATION

Written by **Nikki Brown-Booker**, Program Director, Borealis Philanthropy's Disability Inclusion Fund and **Dalia Ortiz Pon**, Senior Program Associate, Borealis Philanthropy's Disability Inclusion Fund.

Cover Pattern: Purple sunflower as the sunrise, with rings of light from white to dark purple. In front are planes of land ranging from black to light purple.







**Borealis Philanthropy's** Disability Inclusion Fund is honored to fund—among other liberatory efforts—geographically-based organizing, power building, and solidarity building work led by people with disabilities. We prioritize this work because we know that community-specific challenges require community-based and -led solutions. To meet people where they are is to resource and uplift the brilliance and efforts of those organizers and organizations that possess a learned and inherent understanding of the issues and needs of their people.

Here, we're proud to uplift some of our cohort members who are leading such efforts. Across varying regions, their work is both shared and distinct, and centered around defending and building. As our communities continue to experience rising attacks on equity and inclusion, the work of our grantee partners is more vital than ever before. By organizing the people and advocating for more, they are leading us towards the future we all deserve.

## Coalition of Texans with Disabilities

The Coalition of Texans with Disabilities works to ensure that people with disabilities may work, live, learn, and participate fully in the community of their choice. The organization accomplishes this through varied efforts, ranging from legislative advocacy to public awareness campaigns. Their work has elevated them as an expert in a number of issue areas of deep relevance to disabled folks, including accessibility, civil rights, and Medicaid.

### Project Highlight: Legislative Advocacy

The Coalition's legislative advocacy promotes policies that defend and support Texans with disabilities. Through its work with key decision makers, state agencies, and peer advocacy organizations, the Coalition has influenced efforts that have added nearly \$5 billion in state budget appropriations to support and defend people with disabilities.

## Special Sauce: Strategic Partnerships

The Coalition's work is expansive, and thus their partnerships extend to every level of their local community, from legislators to state agencies, local businesses, and organizations equally committed to protecting and empowering people with disabilities. Last year, the Coalition partnered with the American Institute of Dental Public Health to co-create a [training toolkit](#)—organized around narrative storytelling—to build the capacity of oral health professionals, people with disabilities, and other stakeholders to advocate for Medicaid dental benefits for people with disabilities.

## Detroit Disability Power

[Detroit Disability Power's](#) mission is to leverage and build the organizing and political power of the disability community to ensure the full inclusion—as well as the empowerment and celebration—of people with disabilities in the Metro-Detroit area. Their work is varied; in addition to organizing activists around social issues and hosting community building gatherings, Detroit Disability Power leads political education workshops to ensure that local entities and social change organizations are equipped to identify and dismantle ableism in their work and communities. By building the organizing and political power of disabled people and allies, this grassroots organization is advancing a society that serves everyone.

## Project Highlight: The A-Z of Effective, Inclusive Campaigns

Detroit Disability Power's [guidebook](#) provides recommendations to people running electoral campaigns on mobilizing disabled people more effectively as voters, volunteers, paid staff, and campaign leaders. This resource urges and supports campaigns to move away from the "toxic tradition of exclusionary practices" by uplifting disabled talents and perspectives, swinging elections in the process.

## Special Sauce: Narrative Framing

Critical to dismantling ableism is understanding the power of words, and the influence they have on our policies, practices, and behaviors. In the Disability & Philanthropy Forum's [webinar about the intersection of Disability and Housing](#), Dessa Cosma, Executive Director of Detroit Disability Power, explains why framing disability-accessible housing as merely “compliance” is harmful to people with disabilities and how funders can shift their views of the disability community.

## New Disabled South

[New Disabled South](#) leads its work with the mission of improving the lives of disabled people and building strong disability justice and rights movements in the historically under-resourced South. With efforts that span 14 states, the organization's work focuses on three priority areas, each of deep relevance to disabled folks: poverty and care; criminalization; and democracy. Across each of these areas, New Disabled South is working to ensure greater freedom, inclusivity, and sovereignty for disabled folks through varied efforts—for example, by advocating for Medicaid expansion; fighting to end subminimum wages and asset limits; organizing mutual aid efforts; partnering to abolish the criminalization of disability; investing in research solutions that make voting more accessible and much, much more.

## Project Highlight: The Plain Language Policy Dashboard

New Disabled South's [Plain Language Policy Dashboard](#) breaks down complex legislation into plain language, making it easier to understand, and thus more accessible. This dashboard aims to have plain language versions of bills in states across the Southern United States.

## Special Sauce: Elevating Intersectional Wisdom


Key to liberation is understanding that true wisdom, brilliance, and solutions are born from the lived experience of multi-marginalized disabled folks. Earlier this year, New Disabled South launched the Black Disability Institute, a think tank with the mission of initiating original research and bolstering existing advocacy efforts examining issues uniquely affecting Black people with disabilities.

By focusing on improving the conditions of disabled folks' lives; increasing disabled communities' sovereignty, power and positionality; and dismantling ableist policies, practices, and culture, disabled advocates are organizing at the local, state, and regional levels to co-create new loving and inclusive futures in which we may all thrive.

# CENTERING DISABLED WISDOM: THE ESSENTIALITY OF PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES

Written by **Nikki Brown-Booker**, Program Director,  
Borealis Philanthropy's Disability Inclusion Fund.

Cover Pattern: Overlapping rings of petals are arranged  
in a circular angle. Each layer radiates out from a yellow  
center circle. Every ring is a different shade of purple  
from dark to light gray.




**The disability rights movement's** long-held motto, *Nothing About Us Without Us*, drives our work and approach at the Disability Inclusion Fund (DIF).

It is for this reason that we employ a participatory grantmaking process, involving several members of the disability community to guide our funding decisions. Alongside select funders, our annual grantmaking committee has representation from disability inclusion, rights, and justice leaders who hold a range of perspectives and represent a diversity of identities and geographies. Together, this committee provides guidelines on the Fund's annual grantmaking focus, and works closely with our staff to determine grant recommendations for board approval.

This mixed-group approach has been designed with deep intention. By bringing together funders and grassroots leaders, our grantmaking process serves not only as a funding decision-making process, but also as a peer learning experience. Advocates gain insights into the typically elusive thinking of funders, while funders gain access to disabled brilliance and insights, as well as the process—and value—of community-led and informed decision-making.

And it is through this process—with disabled brilliance at the center—that we are able to identify emergent and aligned work, and efforts that:

- Prioritize the solutions of Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian, LGBTQ, queer and gender non-conforming, and women-led disability organizations.
- Are intersectional, cross-movement, and cross-issue work.
- Are centered in relationship and power-building, and bring other groups, leaders, movements, and communities together.
- Celebrate, create, and uplift the representation of people with disabilities in the arts, media, education, literature, and popular culture.
- Center around community organizing, advocacy, policy, and other work that moves ideas and practices of disability inclusion and disability justice forward.

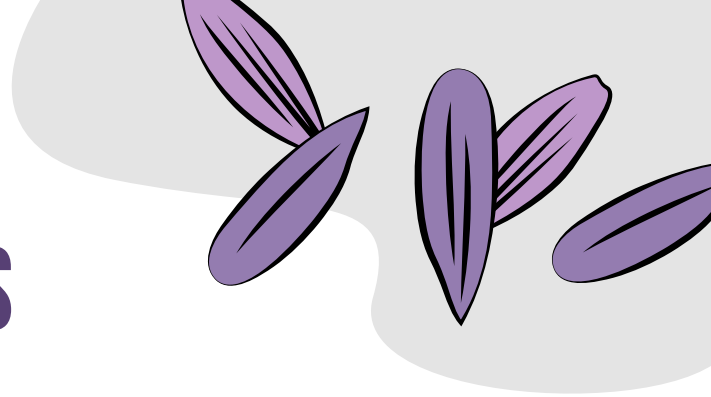


As funders committed to heeding the wisdom of those most impacted, we strongly urge the adoption of participatory grantmaking models—and are honored to share some learnings from our own processes over the past several years:

- **Expect, nurture, and build space for decision-making shifts.** Approach your conversations with loosely held opinions and beliefs, knowing things might change or need revisiting once your collective work begins.
- **The proposals that fill you with joy and possibility represent our future.** Talk about them. What excited you about these applications? What commonalities do they share? What do you see that you might bring to your work? Make space, also, to discuss groups that didn't make the cut. What resonated in these proposals? In what ways do you hope to see these groups make connections and progress in the years to come, and how might you support their growth?
- **The participatory grantmaking process requires level setting for mission and value alignment** because each of us brings our own value system, biases, and experiences to the decision-making table where difficult decisions must be made. Make early agreements on the values that will make up and inform your work at every turn.
- **Funders have a moral responsibility to use *all* the tools at their disposal to bolster the efforts of movement actors.** If you are unable to include an organization in your annual grantmaking cohort, ask yourself what it is you *can* do. Bridge the organization to another funder with greater alignment to its work? Utilize discretionary funding to offer seed support? What resources do you have to support the growth and sustainability of all values-aligned organizations in your orbit?

The work of disabled activists has proven, time and again, to lead to wins that create more just and equitable systems for us all. It is for this reason that we say: disability justice is for **everyone**. It is long overdue that philanthropy recognizes disability justice and disabled organizers as being at the heart of all justice-oriented work, and elevates their leadership in their own decision-making processes.

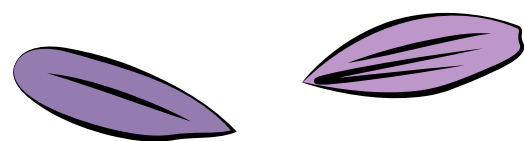
# ON THE MOVE: 2025 FORUM ENGAGEMENTS



In 2025, the Disability & Philanthropy Forum is expanding into new horizons! We'll host our first-ever Learning Institute on Climate and Disability Justice in November. This two-day virtual program will include workshops, panels, and interactive group discussions on the connections between climate justice and disability, moving philanthropic organizations to take action in support of climate and disability justice.

We'll also release six more episodes of the Disability Inclusion: Required podcast helmed by new host Justice Shorter, who will also emcee the Learning Institute. The podcast, released bimonthly, features respected leaders in the philanthropic sector and disability community engaging in a compelling mix of personal stories and practical insights. Check out some of our top-listened episodes, including [Funding the Flowers](#) with Aurora Levins Morales, [Dreaming Freedom, Finding Joy](#) with Aldita Amaru Gallardo and Rainier Miles, and our most recent episode, [Mobilizing to Protect Disability Rights and Health Equity](#) with Jalyn Radziminski and Henry Claypool.

## Where We've Been



**February 27:** [Black Disabled Leadership: Essential Yet Overlooked](#) (Disability Equity Series Webinar).

**March 5:** Meeting of Celebrating Disability Across Philanthropy, our employee resource group.

**March 12:** Sarah Napoli (Learning Services Director) and Sandy Ho facilitated a member workshop entitled [Back to Basics: Disability Terminology and Connecting to Movement](#).

**April 2:** Sandy Ho moderated a panel on Fostering an Inclusive Workplace for LGBTQ+ Disabled People in Philanthropy at Funders' for LGBTQ Issues' [Funding Forward 2025](#).



**April 7:** Gail Fuller (Senior Program and Communications Director) and Olivia Williams (Senior Program and Communications Associate) moderated a session entitled Tired of Being Sick and Tired: Stories of Blackness and Disability Justice at ABFE's [Harambee 2025 Conference](#).

## Where We're Going



**May 5:** The Disability & Philanthropy Forum will host a pre-reception at GEO's [2025 Learning Conference](#). Additionally, the conference's welcome reception will be a joint event presented by GEO and the Forum.

**May 19 - 21:** The Disability & Philanthropy Forum will be very active at AAPIP's [35th Anniversary Conference](#). Sandy Ho will moderate a panel on Cross-Sector Partnership for Disability and Economic Justice. Sandy will also speak at the closing plenary.

**June:** Gail Fuller will moderate a panel on Race, Disability, and Poverty: Adolescent Health Transition Teetering on a Cliff at the [2025 GIH Annual Conference on Health Philanthropy](#).

**June 18:** Celebrating Disability Across Philanthropy Meeting.

**September 24:** Sarah Napoli and Cleopatra Jach Aquaye (Fundors for LGBTQ Issues) will facilitate a member workshop on [Collective Access Through Disability- and Trans-Inclusive Spaces](#).

**October 8:** Celebrating Disability Across Philanthropy Meeting.

**October 9:** [Disability Justice and Immigration with Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees](#), a Disability Equity Series webinar.

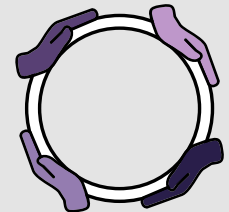
**November 12 - 13:** Climate and Disability Justice Learning Institute. [Click here to be notified when registration opens](#).

**December 3:** Celebrating Disability Across Philanthropy Meeting.

# PEER NETWORKS



## Celebrating Disability Across Philanthropy (CDAP)



The breakout groups and discussions are a nice way to engage and include folks in whatever ways they are able to show up - so appreciated.

– CDAP Participant, June 2024

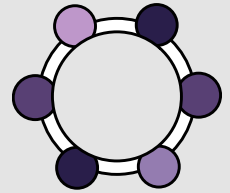


Celebrating Disability Across Philanthropy (CDAP), an employee resource group for members of the Disability & Philanthropy Forum, aims to foster a safe space for shared learning, engagement, and support among colleagues in philanthropy. Collective insights from CDAP members help to shape and inform the work of the Disability & Philanthropy Forum.

In 2024, we held four quarterly meetings: one in March on cultivating **disability-inclusive workplaces**, one in June on **finding joy** during trying times, one in September on the inclusion of disabled people in **democracy power-building**, and one in December which focused on advancing disability justice, rights, and inclusion amid **rapidly changing political systems**. CDAP welcomed three new co-chairs in early 2025: Agustina Vidal from Third Wave Fund, Cindy Downing from the James Irvine Foundation, and Dionne Thompson from PEAK Grantmaking.

[Learn more about CDAP.](#)

# Presidents' Council on Disability Inclusion in Philanthropy



Being part of the Presidents' Council has encouraged me and many other philanthropic institutions to do more to advance disability inclusion, rights, and justice.

**– John Palfrey, President of the MacArthur Foundation and Presidents' Council Co-Chair**



The Presidents' Council on Disability Inclusion is a peer community of foundation presidents who recognize that disability inclusion is essential to solving society's most critical human rights, social justice, and health equity challenges. They seek to address the inequity and injustice experienced by more than 61 million disabled Americans (25% of US adults) and one billion disabled people worldwide by disrupting ableism in philanthropy and supporting disabled-led movements. Members of the Council are committed to engaging in a shared learning journey on advancing disability inclusion within their foundations and the philanthropic sector, and deepening relationships among peer CEOs and disabled leaders.

All Council foundations must sign and take action to implement the [Disability Inclusion Pledge](#). In addition, they must make significant funding commitments to both the [Disability Inclusion Fund](#) at Borealis Philanthropy and the Disability & Philanthropy Forum. The Council is co-chaired by Ryan Easterly, Executive Director of WITH Foundation, and John Palfrey, President of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

[Learn more about the Presidents' Council.](#)

# Disability Inclusion Pledge Signatories



It's great to connect with our Forum peers like this, and it provides more opportunities to bring other staff members in.

**- Pledge Network Meeting Attendee, April 2024**



The Disability Inclusion Pledge Signatory Network is a growing community of foundations and philanthropy-serving organizations who have signed the Disability Inclusion Pledge and are committed to advancing disability inclusion across philanthropy. In 2023, the Forum launched Pledge Signatory Network meetings, which serve as a space for Signatories to learn, grow, and strategize toward their goals in community. Pledge Network Meetings have included opportunities to collectively strategize toward specific goals of the Pledge, such as fostering a disability-inclusive culture, recruiting and retaining disabled talent, and embedding disability into grantmaking.

Pledge Signatories have made a commitment to accountability. To document how Pledge Signatories are advancing in their disability inclusion journeys, the Forum conducts periodic benchmarking surveys. The inaugural survey took place in 2021, with the new 2023 survey providing a two-year update on signatories' progress toward disability inclusion. This spring, we will launch the 2025 pledge survey.

With new Signatories making the pledge, the network currently consists of 100 organizations. [View all Pledge Signatories.](#)

- Barr Foundation
- Council of Michigan Foundations
- Deaf Organizations Fund
- Funders for LGBTQ Issues
- Global Fund for Women
- Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees
- Grantmakers in the Arts
- Holloway Family Foundation
- Iowa Council of Foundations
- J. Walton Bissell Foundation
- Kenneth Rainin Foundation
- Kessler Foundation
- Robert W. Deutsch Foundation

# ART TELLS STORIES



## Disability Inclusion and the Importance of the Arts

By Michael Greer,  
President & CEO of  
the ArtsFund

Art tells stories. It creates narratives that support the belief systems that bind us as communities. Those stories reinforce what is right, what is wrong, what is just, and what is unjust. Stories of freedom, stories of democracy, stories of power, and stories of abuse of that power. Even in economics, it is the belief in the value of a dollar that gives it its worth. Without that agreed upon belief, our most fundamental economic systems are worthless. **It is the stories we agree upon that govern the way that we interact with each other.**

*This is why it is critical to continually investigate who is allowed to create those stories.*

In the United States, one in four individuals identifies as having a disability<sup>1</sup>. 25%. Yet when it comes to positions of decision-making, that representation is often much lower. It has been estimated that 10.3% of elected officials identify as having a disability<sup>2</sup>. It has also been reported that the median self-identification rate of employees within Fortune 500 companies is just 6%<sup>3</sup>, and according to Statistics Canada only 0.8% of Canadian executives identified as having a disability<sup>4</sup>. What about nonprofits? Data suggest that roughly 10% of those in leadership roles within

- 
1. [CDC Newsroom: CDC Data Shows Over 70 Million U.S. Adults Reported Having a Disability](#)
  2. [Report: 1 in 10 Politicians Has a Disability. That's a Gap in Representation.](#)
  3. [Fortune CHRO Daily: Only 10% of Fortune 500 companies disclose how many people with disabilities work at their organization—but employees expect more transparency](#)
  4. [CASE: Few Persons Who Experience Disability in Executive Positions](#)

nonprofit organizations identify as disabled<sup>5</sup>. And within arts nonprofits? Our data at ArtsFund, which represents over 900 organizations across Washington State, show that approximately 12% of staff and 8% of board members identified as having a disability<sup>6</sup>. This is anywhere between 13% to 17% lower than representation of the total population. This suggests that those creating the quantitative and qualitative stories that drive our communities are not fully representative of the communities that they serve. I'm not claiming that this is an intentional form of harm, but rather a combination of historical legacy, unequal access to resources, and reinforcement of negative stereotypes that already exist. The result is a perpetuation of storytelling that marginalizes people with disabilities.

## Why are the arts so important?

At ArtsFund, we work with 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations that use art as their primary form of community engagement. This includes ballet companies, symphonies, and operas, and it also includes organizations like [Path with Art](#) and [Red Eagle Soaring](#) that use art as a tool to create better outcomes for populations that have historically been most underserved. That said, in the context of this argument, art also includes pop culture representation in film, music, and media. It includes the use of art and culture in advertising and communications for major corporations as well. Think about the artistic decisions and inputs that go into commercials, branding, and media campaigns. These are all ways in which art shows up directly or indirectly in our social narratives.

**Art is a defining component of how we see ourselves and how we project that self-image to others.**

This is why access to the arts for people with disabilities is crucial. We know that participating in artistic endeavors leads to better educational outcomes, better mental and physical health, and more community engagement<sup>7</sup>, and those

---

5. [Candid](#): What do we know about nonprofit leaders and staff with disabilities?

6. This data comes from ArtsFund's 2024 [Community Accelerator Grant](#) data collection.

7. [ArtsFund](#): Social Impact Study

benefits should not be denied anyone because of lack of access, but I think it is even more important to provide that access so that those with the lived experience of disability can bring those stories into the public zeitgeist. Independent of the medium, creators attach a part of themselves to their creations. **If we want our public discourse to fully represent the totality of our community, then we need creators to have full access to the vehicles that carry that discourse.**

And when I talk about access, I am talking about physical access to spaces and tools that allow for creation, but I am also talking about access to channels of delivery. We need to allow for the lived experience of disability to be present in all of the storytelling I've talked about above. Access to those channels includes allowing space for people with disabilities to be present in artistic works, mainstream media, advertising, etc., not only as a specific call-out to raise awareness about disability culture, but as a representation of 25% of our population.

**Access is about allowing these stories to occupy a normalized space within all conversations,** not just those specifically about people with disabilities.

This is why it is important for our arts organizations and those that use art in the production of their work to focus on ensuring that people with disabilities are represented in that creation, and that their stories are normalized throughout all communications.

Significant strides have been made through legislation to make sure that access is provided in employment and in public spaces, but it is far more difficult to legislate public consciousness. **Hearts and minds are influenced by stories, and those stories are told by artists.** If we truly want communities that are accessible in every way, then we need to make sure that that is the story we are telling.

The ArtsFund made the commitment to join the disability inclusion journey by signing the [Disability Inclusion Pledge](#).

# CHARTING A PATH TO DISABILITY INCLUSION

## Modeling Our Values to Our Communities

By Pam Amundsen, Donor  
Services Manager at  
Grand Traverse Regional  
Community Foundation

Like many, our organization—the Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation—began a journey into diversity, equity, and inclusion during the racial reckoning of 2020. We released a public statement and resolved to do our own work, participating in trainings on a broad range of equity and inclusion topics and figuring out what needed to shift within our work both internally and within the community.

For some people, like me and a few of my co-workers that deal with invisible/non-apparent disabilities, **this work has also deepened our team interactions and carved out more room for everyone on our team to ask for what they need.** When we first started our work with disability inclusion, I didn't self-identify as someone with a disability, despite my health needs. I'd been working to silently accommodate my chronic illness for so long that I couldn't acknowledge the weight of that additional labor.

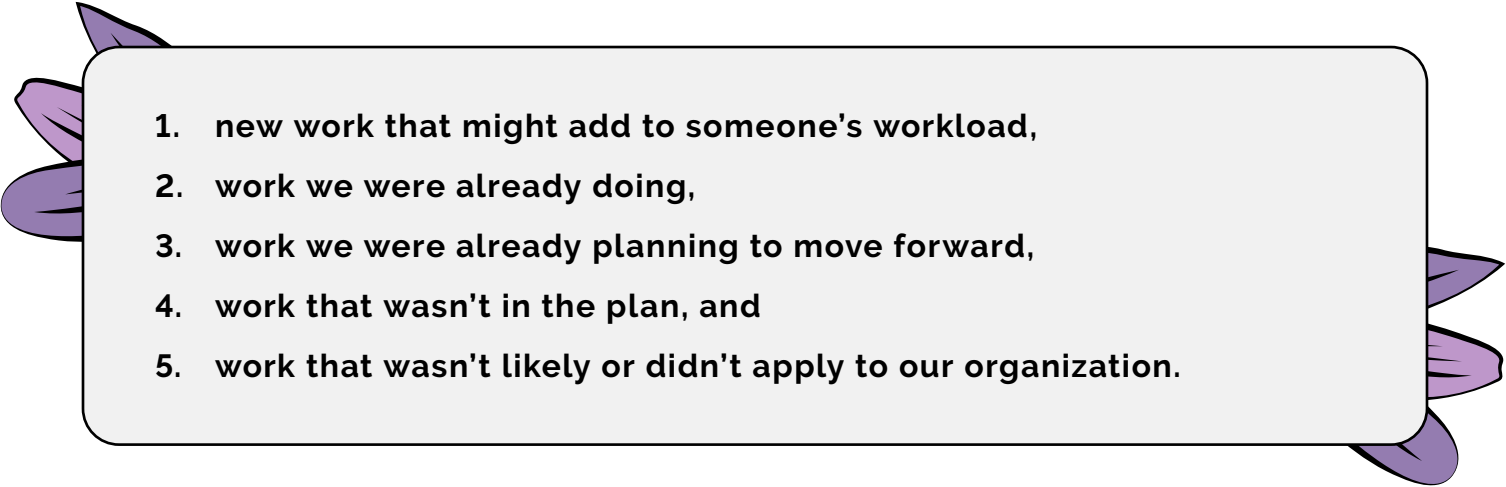
**Learning about disability inclusion as a team has helped me and my co-workers share our needs without judgment because of that new lens.** We can show up to work now without having to filter that aspect of our daily lives.



## Beginning the Journey: Charting a Path

From the outset, we created a broad definition of diversity; we wanted to be as inclusive as possible. When my coworker shared the [Disability Inclusion Pledge](#) as an initiative we should consider, we were still early into equity and inclusion work. Our internal Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Work Group took time to review the Pledge before suggesting it to our full team. Our President and CEO was open to the idea, but brought up the valid concern that it might add too much additional work for our team.

We decided the best way to answer this question was to go through each Pledge item to determine where we stood and what we still needed to accomplish. **We created a chart with all the Pledge Survey questions and sorted them out into five categories:**

- 
1. new work that might add to someone's workload,
  2. work we were already doing,
  3. work we were already planning to move forward,
  4. work that wasn't in the plan, and
  5. work that wasn't likely or didn't apply to our organization.

Once we went through this exercise, we were able to report back that it wouldn't require significant additional work to become a Pledge signatory.

I want to pause here because, even if the results of the exercise showed that it would result in a heavier workload for our team, I would like to believe that we would have signed anyway. **The benefit of signing the Disability Inclusion Pledge is to model the value of disability inclusion to our community.** If you take time to review it, the Disability Inclusion Pledge does not ask if your organization is already perfect or the most inclusive.

It's simply asking you to commit to caring deeply about the disability community, to going above the minimum legal requirements, to continuing to learn, and to model to others that this work is valuable.

**The point of the Pledge is to make clear that people with disabilities matter and that you will prioritize us.**

For our organization, it was an opportunity to lean into this invitation.

## Tracking the Journey: Measuring Progress

Last year, we filled out the Pledge Survey and the Disability & Philanthropy Forum provided a report on our progress. When we received the report, we were able to celebrate our efforts, improvements, and successes as a team!

**More importantly, the Disability Inclusion Pledge has given us a new lens.** It has provided our staff and Board with a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of disability. It has also shifted the ways in which we do our work. For example, we now track demographic data using the broadest definition of disability and we've created new norms in meetings and at our events to increase accessibility.

Initially, we used the framework we created to track progress, but we now embed our diversity, equity, and inclusion goals into our organizational strategic plan. **The aspects of the Disability Inclusion Pledge that didn't directly relate to our work have pushed us to consider things we hadn't thought about,** like how we might track the demographics of our staff, board, and grant partners.

While there have been budget implications for some of the changes we've made, much of it has been shifting how we communicate and what we prioritize. For example, we prioritize having inclusive language on our event invitations, using names before starting to speak during a hybrid meeting (e.g. "This is Pam"), adding image descriptions to our social media posts, and tracking what amount of funding supports our local disability community.

## Continuing the Journey: An Invitation

Now that our organization prioritizes disability inclusion, there's more room to practice equitable flexibility and support each other as needs arise—whether that's a shifted deadline because of a flare up or because an able-bodied parent has a sick child.

**Our team is stronger because of this commitment, and we are also a better resource for our community.**

We've been able to have conversations with new and existing donor partners and community partners because of the commitment we made to disability inclusion work. Disability affects everyone, whether we experience it directly or have friends and family members who are disabled. Why not work together to envision and build a world where everyone can access the support and resources they need and be comfortable and confident in being fully themselves?

Pam Amundsen is the Donor Services Manager for the Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation. She moved to Northern Michigan over six years ago to be a part of the Foundation's work. Pam serves as Co-Chair for Emerging Practitioners in Philanthropy's (EPIP) Michigan Steering Committee and on the local Migrant Resource Council. She has an autoimmune and a chronic illness. Learning about disability inclusion has helped her be more vocal about her own limitations and be a better community advocate.





## Governance Committee

- Ryan Easterly, WITH Foundation, Co-Chair
- John Palfrey, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Co-Chair
- Rich Besser, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Sarita Gupta, Ford Foundation
- Ana L. Oliveira, New York Women's Foundation

### Senior Staff Deputies:

- Rebecca Cokley, Ford Foundation
- Patrick Cokley, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Camille Emeagwali, New York Women's Foundation
- Ada Gomero, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

## Advisory Committee

- Patrick Cokley, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Co-Chair
- Yolanda Vargas, WITH Foundation, Co-Chair
- Jen Bokoff, Disability Rights Fund
- Rebecca Cokley, Ford Foundation
- Ryan Easterly, WITH Foundation
- Michael Greer, Arts Fund
- Tanya Gulliver-Garcia, Center for Disaster Philanthropy
- Mareeha Niaz, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations
- Morénike Giwa Onaiwu, Advocacy Without Borders
- Kristy Trautmann, FISA Foundation
- Cynthia Yongvang, United Hmong with Disabilities

## Staff

- Noor Al-Ahmadi, Member Relations Manager
- Gail Fuller, Senior Program and Communications Director
- Gladis Herst, Engagement and Learning Services Associate
- Sandy Ho, Executive Director
- Sarah Napoli, Learning Services Director
- Razz Sharpless, Training and Learning Services Associate
- Olivia Williams, Senior Program and Communications Associate



Noor



Sarah



Sandy



Razz



Gail



Gladis



Olivia

# CREDITS

© April 2025, Disability & Philanthropy Forum, fiscally sponsored by Proteus Fund.

- Gail Fuller, Editor-in-Chief
- Olivia Williams, Managing Editor
- Pam Amundsen, Writer
- Nikki Brown-Booker, Writer
- Ashley Crawford-Starck, Writer
- Michael Greer, Writer
- Sandy Ho, Writer
- Dalia Ortiz Pon, Writer
- Jessica Oddi, Illustrator and Designer