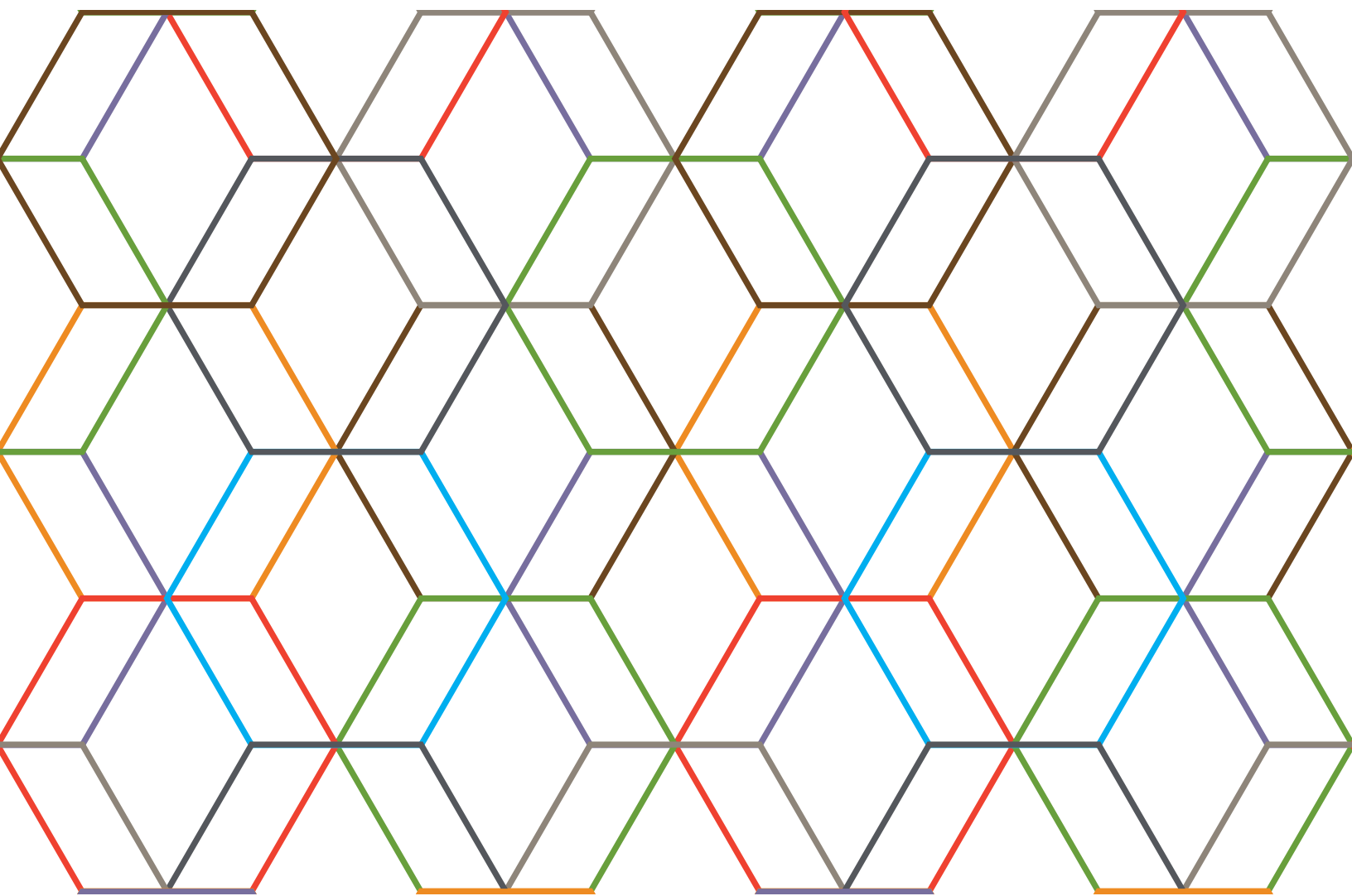


DEI LEARNING SERIES
FUNDER GUIDANCE
AND CASE STUDIES FOR
DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE
GRANTMAKING

OCTOBER 2020



INTRODUCTION

In 2015, I announced that the Ford Foundation would focus on addressing inequality in all its forms. But in our effort to call attention to a range of inequities, we initially failed to include people with disabilities. Peer donors, activists, and others educated us about why this was so problematic, and I remain humbled by the generosity of their expertise. As they rightly pointed out, people with disabilities—which include those with physical, sensory, intellectual, and psycho-social impairments or chronic illness, and more—face inequalities that are inextricably linked to those we’d long been focused on. It was a profound learning moment, but also one of realized opportunity.

Not long after, we announced that the foundation would integrate a disability-inclusive lens across all of our grantmaking. As with gender, race, immigration status, and LGBTQI+ identities, disability must be understood and addressed at those intersections. At the beginning, we had to take an honest look at our own capacity to do this work. Some of us had experience with disability—within our families or communities, or among the issues in which we specialize and the organizations we support. But none of us were experts. Therefore it was and remains critical for us to be open to making mistakes along the way, learning from those experiences, and sharing that learning. Guided by the disability movement’s mantra, “Nothing about us without us,” we continue to strengthen our work through close partnership with the disability community.

We understand that colleague funders who do not yet have experience with disability rights, history, and terminology might have concerns about addressing disability in their grantmaking,

chief among them: Where to start? At the beginning of our own work, many staff felt uncertain. Some felt they lacked the knowledge and experience that would enable them to make good grants, or to meaningfully engage with grantees about disability justice and inclusion. Working with experts in the field, we developed resources and tools for program staff, cultivated learning on grantmaking practice and disability, and dove in.

We quickly saw that we weren't starting from zero, but that there was much we could and needed to do to truly integrate disability into our work. Across the foundation, we inventoried our existing partnerships with organizations working on disability issues, developed concrete targets for disability grantmaking within our strategies, and incentivized this work with competitive internal matching funds. This journey is ongoing—and we invite you to join us.

Drawing upon our learning, we offer this resource as a starting point for any funder seeking to strengthen disability inclusion in their grantmaking. It includes answers to the questions we had, principles and guidance program staff have found useful, and case studies based on actual grant relationships.

Many thanks to the Ford Foundation's Office of Strategy and Learning, Rama Murali (Ford's Learning Officer), Gitta Zomorodi (consultant), Catherine Hyde Townsend (Ford's Senior Advisor, Disability Inclusion), and our disability learning group for their collaborative work to develop this guide, and for sharing their collective learning more broadly.

Darren Walker, President, Ford Foundation

USING THIS GUIDE

Drawn from Ford's capacity-building efforts with program staff, this guidance is intended to support grantmakers as they build disability portfolios and integrate a disability perspective into their work. It includes:

- Frequently asked questions;
- Guidance to support disability-inclusive grantmaking; and
- Two case studies.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “DISABILITY”?

Most of us think of disability as an “impairment.” An impairment is a medical diagnosis—the physical, biological, pathological (related to or caused by a disease) part of disability. This way of thinking, the “medical model” of disability, assumes that the individual’s disability is the main problem—and therefore, that one need only cure or fix the person to address the problem. By contrast, the “social model” recognizes that disability is rooted in society and the barriers—whether physical or attitudinal—it creates for people with disabilities.¹ It’s these barriers, not the person, that must change. Disability is also an identity and culture.

HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE DISABILITIES?

Globally, one billion people have a disability; in the United States alone, 56 million people (19 percent of the population) live with a disability.² Disability cuts across class, gender, race, and ethnicity, but disproportionately affects those living in poverty, women, and black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). A person may have physical, sensory, intellectual, or psycho-social impairments, or chronic illness, and may or may not consider themselves disabled. Someone’s likelihood of self-identifying as a person with a disability is rooted not only in their diagnosis, but the severity of the stigma and discrimination they face and the way our cultures position disability identity (i.e., as one to be celebrated or one to downplay).

1. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes that “disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”

<https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>

2. World Health Organization. *New world report shows more than 1 billion people with disabilities face substantial barriers in their daily lives.*

https://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2011/disabilities_20110609/en//

<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/miscellaneous/cb12-134.html>

HOW DO I ACCURATELY AND RESPECTFULLY REFER TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES?

Rather than using euphemisms, like “special needs” or “differently abled,” it’s best to use the word “disability.” Ford uses the terms “disabled people” and “people with disabilities” interchangeably. Globally, the most preferred term is “person with a disability” or “people with disabilities.” This is the language used in the international standard-setting United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. As the Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion notes, “People-first language emphasizes the individuality, equality, and dignity of people with disabilities. Rather than defining people primarily by their disability, people-first language conveys respect by emphasizing the fact that people with disabilities are first and foremost just that—people.”³

Some people, especially younger people in the United States, prefer to use “identity-first” language, such as “autistic” or “disabled,” that highlights the pride and power many disabled people have in their disability identity. In different countries and among different cultures, the disability community may have other preferred terms—the best thing to do is to reach out to local groups led by people with disabilities to understand what terms they prefer.

THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY OFTEN REFERS TO “ABLEISM” OR “ABLEIST” ASSUMPTIONS. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Ableism is a set of stereotypes and practices that devalue and discriminate against people with disabilities. It’s “a system that places value on people’s bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence, excellence, and productivity.”⁴ It assumes non-disabled people are the “default” and is linked to other forms of oppression.

Ableism can be seen in all aspects of our work as funders. For example, few grantmakers have made their grantmaking systems or proposals accessible to people who are blind and use screen readers. The underlying assumption is that all users are non-disabled. Similarly, funders rarely include people

3. <https://askearn.org/topics/retention-advancement/disability-etiquette/people-first-language/>

4. Working definition from Talila A. Lewis. <https://www.talilalewis.com/blog/ableism-2020-an-updated-definition>

with disabilities when featuring grantee leaders in their communications or on their websites. Until the Covid-19 pandemic forced many to work from home, ableism also showed up in employment practices, requiring people with disabilities to endure exhausting commutes when working from home was always a possibility. As a young woman with a chronic illness noted, “These accommodations have always been possible, but acknowledging that requires acknowledging the ableism behind their denial.”

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO INCLUDE DISABILITY IN MY SOCIAL JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS GRANTMAKING?

Promoting disability rights and disability justice means supporting efforts to address the structural barriers and inequalities that people with disabilities face in law, policy, and norms. This work often takes the form of advocacy, rights education, community organizing, power-building, civic participation, research, litigation, and accessibility efforts to ensure the rights of all people with disabilities.

Disability-inclusive grantmaking seeks to ensure that people with disabilities are considered in grantees’ programs and operations. This means understanding how grantees see a problem or issue affecting people with disabilities. For example, if you make grants to organizations promoting sexual and reproductive health, you could ask whether women and girls with disabilities face particular barriers in accessing information and services, and how the organization might address those barriers. Do the organizations you support hire people with disabilities or partner with disabled persons organizations to carry out this work?

Disability-inclusive grants can be disability-specific, with a focus on people with disabilities—for example, a grant to a Mexican human rights organization to advance access to justice for people with disabilities. Or a disability-inclusive grant could seek to “mainstream” people with disabilities into broader efforts—as would be the case with a grant to a West African organization focused on natural resource rights, enabling them to begin including disabled persons organizations in its advocacy.

WHAT IS A DISABLED PERSONS ORGANIZATION (DPO)?

DPOs are representative, membership organizations run by people with disabilities. DPOs advocate for the rights of people with disabilities and may also provide direct services. For too long, non-disabled people have spoken for people with disabilities, so it's critical that DPOs inform disability efforts.

GUIDANCE FOR DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE GRANTMAKING

Ford program staff wanted to get this work “right,” and their worries were reflected in the concerns they voiced. What follows are some of the main concerns we heard, and the guidance that enabled staff to take steps to make their grantmaking more disability-inclusive.

“I DON'T KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT HOW DISABILITY RELATES TO THE ISSUES I WORK ON.”

There are lots of ways to learn:

- Identify and consult with disability leaders who are focused on the issues you support. Ask them to share their work, along with the challenges they confront and the opportunities they see.
- Commission desk research to understand how disability intersects with your focus areas.
- Join a collaborative fund that promotes the rights of disabled people.
- Foster peer learning by launching a community of practice, made up of colleagues who are interested in and/or knowledgeable about disability.

“I’M STILL LEARNING ABOUT DISABILITY INCLUSION. I CAN’T IMPOSE THIS EXPECTATION ON GRANTEES.”

Be transparent about your own learning process, and invite grantees to explore the issue alongside you. Recognize that while disability may be a new area for some, others may already have related experience or connections.

- Survey your grantees to learn what disability-inclusive work they are already engaged in.
- Discuss with grantees how their diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts consider disability (or don’t), and how that intersects with ways other identity groups are considered. Be open about why this issue is important to you and your institution, and share your excitement about its possibilities.

“I DON’T HAVE ENOUGH KNOWLEDGE OR EXPERIENCE TO HELP GRANTEES BECOME MORE DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE.”

You don’t have to be an expert to support grantee learning. You can:

- Organize and fund convenings, networking, and learning between disabled persons organizations and mainstream groups that you fund. An example might be support for a convening to build understanding and deepen trust, focused on how disability plays out in a specific field, such as reproductive rights.
- Provide capacity-building support to help grantees become more disability-inclusive. Engaging another organization or consultant to provide an introduction to disability rights or disability justice and ableism can be a good place to start.
- Encourage grantees to reach out to the disability rights community. For example, a grantee focused on criminal justice reform could ask several experts to talk about how people with disabilities experience police violence, or to discuss the overrepresentation of people with disabilities in criminal justice systems.

- Support programs and projects that cut across issues, and work to make connections between people with disabilities and mainstream organizations. For example, you might fund a voting rights project between a disabled persons organization and an NGO focused on civic education.

“I DON’T KNOW WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN MAKING DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE GRANTS.”

You don’t have to do this work alone. Discuss potential grants with your colleagues. Consider establishing a disability advisory board made up of people with disabilities to provide guidance, expertise, and lived experience.

When seeking to understand how a grantee or prospective grantee considers disability in its work, we suggest focusing on the following areas:

Examine how the organization understands disability. Many organizations may not have an explicit approach to disability, so it is important to consider how their understanding and interest aligns with your priorities and values. Ford, for example, seeks to advance disability rights and justice—so program staff look for proposals that center the most marginalized people with disabilities and identify societal attitudes and systematic discrimination as the main barriers for people with disabilities. In general, watch out for medical or charity approaches, which often perpetuate negative stereotypes about disabled people by assuming that the “problem” is a person’s individual medical condition or that people with disabilities need “help.”

Look at how the organization demonstrates its commitment to disability. The level of organizational commitment to disability is a key driver of success. Ideally, this comes from the board of directors and/or CEO, but often, disability champions within an organization lead the work. The more support any such champion has from senior leadership or their peers, the greater the commitment the organization has made to disability inclusion. Historically, some organizations may have encountered a lack of donor interest in

(or even resistance to) disability work. This means donors are in a position to empower champions, strengthening their internal influence and in turn, deepening the organization's commitment.

Ask: What is driving the organization's work on disability? What knowledge, history of work, or relationships does the organization possess that will enable it to advance disability inclusion? How is a commitment to disability reflected in staffing or policies?

Check if and how people with disabilities are included in the organization's programs. The strongest projects and organizations involve people with disabilities at the highest levels and not simply as constituencies to be targeted (though the latter is often a way to start and learn when done respectfully and in consultation). When people with disabilities lead the work, and contribute to agenda-setting, this embodies the mantra of the disability rights movement: "Nothing about us with us." Leadership by people with disabilities provides technical expertise and legitimacy, and often fosters attitudinal change.

Ask: Are people with disabilities involved in decision-making, and designing and implementing projects? How is the work accountable to disabled people? How will they benefit from the programs? Are activities accessible, and has the organization budgeted specifically for this?

Assess the organization's approach to research and data. Too often people with disabilities are left out of programs because baseline surveys and research fail to address disability or disaggregate data based on disability. As the saying goes, "what gets counted counts," so disaggregation of data and inclusion of disabled people in baseline research (even when not disability-specific) is an urgent need. Disaggregating data by disability often catalyzes learning and generates evidence about the importance of an intentional focus on disability. DPOs can be a valuable resource and partner in this process, providing guidance on data collection and methodology.

Ask: Has the organization gathered information on the prevalence, impact, or lived experience of disability as relates to its programs? Can

data on the results of the project show how persons with disabilities have benefitted?

Looking for more resources? A great space for peer learning is the Disability and Philanthropy Forum, a learning hub about disability inclusion in philanthropy. Below are several key resources, but we encourage you to explore the entire site, which includes information on disability history, culture and identity, accessible operations, and inclusive grantmaking.

- The *Insights Into Inclusive Philanthropy* series includes interviews with funders about best practices for disability-inclusive grantmaking.
- *Catalyze Disability Inclusion in Your Grantmaking* suggests ways to make your portfolio more disability-inclusive without spending money (or much money).
- *Disability inclusion menu*: A variety of ways donors can explore and strengthen disability inclusion in their grantmaking, operations, and organizational culture.

DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE GRANTMAKING CASE STUDIES

The following case studies represent common situations grantmakers may encounter as they begin to incorporate disability into their grantmaking, and are designed to raise some of the key issues grantmakers may face. The first case study looks at how to encourage an organization that has not previously considered disability in its work to take concrete, exploratory steps. The second focuses on how to support an organization that was previously strong on disability to build back this capacity. Both are based loosely on real-life cases, but many elements—including the names of organizations, locations, and the issues they work on—have been fictionalized to preserve anonymity.

These case studies can work well as a classroom-based learning and discussion tool, whether virtual or in person.

SUPPORTING A GRANTEE TO BRING DISABILITY INTO ITS WORK

BACKGROUND

Labor for the Future (LF) is a network of labor rights organizations working in Southeast Asia. Through its member organizations, LF focuses on organizing workers to secure fair and gender-equitable compensation, ensure safe working conditions, and strengthen wage security and benefits. While LF has a small staff team, it is governed by an operating council made up of elected leaders from among its member organizations. The operating council plays a lead role in determining the network's vision and priorities.

The Ford Foundation had been supporting LF for several years with general support grants. The program officer (PO) stewarding the grant relationship had close and trusting relationships with LF's staff leadership as well as members of the operating council.

LF's team had a strong history of working at the intersection of movements, and knowledge of how to help bring movements together—by, for example, making connections between labor rights and feminist movements. This approach enabled LF to bring a stronger gender lens into the analyses and advocacy priorities of its members and to strengthen women's leadership in the operating council.

PART ONE

As Ford began to explore ways to integrate disability justice into its grantmaking in more meaningful ways, the PO began asking grantees working on labor rights about their knowledge and experience related to disability rights. When the PO broached the topic in a meeting with LF, the network's director admitted that the organization had not thought much about disability. He said that LF had done some advocacy regarding paid maternity leave and compensation for workers injured on the job, but the network had not been applying a disability lens to their work in any systematic or intentional way.

The PO was open about Ford's strong commitment to disability and the need for her program team to explore some form of disability grantmaking. She emphasized her interest and desire to learn alongside LF. She was curious how a disability lens might advance the labor rights movement and reflect its commitment to diversity and inclusion. And she wanted to know whether LF's members saw intersections between disability and labor rights that could advance both movements.

LF's director was cautious about pushing an agenda onto the network, but said he was willing to survey the operating council's members. Because they play such a vital role in LF's strategies, the director wanted to ensure that LF was not engaging in a top-down way, but staying true to its value of being member-led. He was surprised when the majority of operating council members expressed interest in the links between disability and labor rights. At the same time, they said they had limited connections with the disability rights movement, were unsure about how to integrate disability into their work, and needed to learn more.

Discussion Questions

1. As a PO, how might you start this kind of conversation with an organization that does not work on disability? With LF, what questions might you ask to get at their understanding of disability and how it relates to their work?
2. If a grantee pushed back on exploring the issue, saying that it wasn't relevant for their work, how might you respond? For example, what if LF's operating council members had said it was not a priority?

PART TWO

The Ford PO suggested taking an exploratory approach. She encouraged LF to submit a proposal that would enable them to learn about disability issues and how they intersect with labor rights. The PO reiterated that she was interested in learning together with LF, as it would help inform her own approach to integrating disability in her grantmaking.

In its proposal, LF laid out a series of activities. It would: 1) conduct a desk review of labor standards related to disability, 2) survey its network members about whether they included people with disabilities in their organizing and what kind of disability-related protections member organizations thought LF should advocate for, and 3) begin designing a campaign to ensure compensation for workers who became permanently disabled as a result of workplace injuries.

To the PO, it wasn't clear how LF had arrived at these activities. The proposal failed to provide a strong rationale for this approach.

Discussion Questions

1. As a PO, how would you react to LF's proposal? What questions might you ask?
2. How might you support LF to think through an approach to learning about disability that would be right for them?

PART THREE

In a follow up call with LF, the PO asked for more background on how the proposal was developed. It became evident that the organization had started from its own assumptions about disability and where it had experience. When the PO asked whether LF had consulted any disability rights activists or disabled people's organizations in developing its proposal, LF's director said that they didn't know who to ask.

The PO suggested that LF take a step back and focus on learning before starting to design any campaigns. She pointed out that the operating council's members had said they needed to know more about disability issues and the proposal did not seem to address this need. The director agreed that this was a priority and added that the LF staff team needed to become more knowledgeable as well. He said he would be grateful if the PO could help connect them to disability experts who could help them get started.

The PO connected LF to a few consultants based in the region who had experience in disability rights and could potentially support the network to think through its approach. LF submitted a new proposal that focused on learning about disability rights issues and movements, networking with disabled people's organizations and groups working (or with the potential to work) at the intersection of disability and labor rights, and gaining a deeper understanding of the role that people with disabilities can play in labor rights in the region. The PO discussed the proposal with her team and decided to make the one-year grant.

Discussion Questions

1. If you were in this situation, given your current level of familiarity with disability issues, what would you need to feel equipped to support a grantee like LF?
2. As a PO, how would you think about monitoring and supporting LF as it implemented the grant?

EPILOGUE

Over the course of a year, a consultant supported LF to learn about disability issues and movements, international frameworks and laws, and key points of intersection with labor rights. The consultant provided training on disability rights to LF staff and operating council members, supported step-down training for organizational members, and facilitated connections to key organizations and activists in the disability rights movement. LF held in-depth conversations with its member organizations about how people with disabilities were or were not represented in their programs and explored what connections members had to disabled people's organizations.

LF reported that it realized it had been taking a narrow approach to thinking about people with disabilities. When the team started thinking more expansively, they saw that they had overlooked disabled people within the labor rights movement and had made assumptions about what their concerns might be. In consultations with disabled people's organizations, the priorities that emerged were different from what LF's team had anticipated. They highlighted the challenges of discrimination, unemployment, and economic inactivity and the need to advocate for disabled people's inclusion in skills training, increased access to jobs, more accessible workplaces, and responsive social protection schemes.

In its renewal proposal LF committed to cultivating its relationships with disability rights groups, learning more about the priorities of disabled people already connected to its member organizations, and developing a plan of action in partnership with them. LF also realized that it needed to be more proactive about disability inclusion within its own policies, practices, and structures, just as it had previously approached strengthening gender equity within the network. LF planned to increase disabled people's representation among its staff and operating council.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE PROGRAM OFFICER RESPONSIBLE FOR THE GRANT

What did you understand to be your responsibility, or the appropriate role of a PO?

Critical to LF's culture is its network of member organizations; priorities emerge from them and their representatives on the operating council. LF depends on its operating council members' knowledge, expertise, and connections. So when a bigger funder comes with an ask for a particular issue or geography, they are cautious. Even though they were open and enthusiastic about exploring disability, it raised concerns about how much a donor should influence their decision-making. Is Ford imposing disability inclusion on LF and, in turn, asking LF to impose upon its member organizations in the field? How do we ensure that disability mainstreaming is informed from the bottom-up? LF's leadership engaged staff and operating council members to validate Ford's arguments while also identifying strategic opportunities within its current work.

Trust and honesty about the power dynamics—between funder and grantee, and between LF and its members, was key. Because of the trust between us, I was able to lay out the importance of the issue and the opportunities around it and say, “You could see this as something imposed, but why don't we partner in this exploration? I've never worked on disability rights either, so let's learn together.” I also realized that I wouldn't hesitate to bring up the importance of racial or gender equity with grantees—so why should this be different? We need to build the practice and skill of bringing up disability justice and grantmaking issues while navigating the power dynamics.

What resources did you need or wish you'd had to respond to the situation?

Grantmakers can't enter these conversations without being equipped. It's important to have a set of tools: like consultants, resources, a menu of options that we can share easily. Before I got to this point, our team had already had several conversations about our grantmaking approach to disability. An intern had developed desk research about approaches in the field, and our organization's disability inclusion adviser shared what has worked in other fields and ways to ensure success. While I had had some training on “disability 101” I wished I had felt more “expert” on the issue. On

the other hand, my willingness (and need) to learn was obvious and genuine to LF, and created a level of trust and partnership that was important.

Do you have any advice to share with your fellow POs?

When I started this conversation with LF, I wasn't sure where it was going to go. Given their experience making connections across issues and movements, I thought they would be open to thinking about disability in their work, but I tried hard not to have any expectations about how they might take action. This was a different situation from responding to a specific problem—it was about being proactive and exploring an issue with LF based on principle. It wasn't just about how they might “help” people with disabilities, but how including disability could make their work on labor rights stronger. In working and learning together, I've now seen how disability inclusion could strengthen my overall grantmaking portfolio—not just this one grant. Because I had conversations with LF and other grantees about what they were learning and the contacts they were making, I was getting a better picture of the issues and what kinds of strategies were really helping grantees to pursue this work.

REBUILDING CAPACITY FOR DISABILITY INCLUSION

BACKGROUND

Based in the US, Housing Equity for All (HEA) is a national organization focused on community development and equitable access to housing. HEA promotes community-led solutions to increase access to affordable, quality housing and combat housing discrimination based on race, religion, and other factors.

For several years, HEA had a program focused specifically on housing discrimination affecting people with disabilities. Through this program, HEA worked with disability justice groups on community mobilization and policy advocacy, and had several important wins that advanced the housing rights of disabled people. In 2015, HEA restructured its work and disability was incorporated into HEA's other programs. The two people who had led the disability program left the organization soon after the restructure and, as a result, HEA's strong connection to the disability rights community faded.

PART ONE

In 2019, HEA's president reached out to the Ford Foundation. She had learned about Ford's disability inclusion efforts and commitment to devote more resources to organizations promoting disability rights and inclusion. She wondered if there were opportunities for funding since HEA was looking to reinvigorate its work on housing access for people with disabilities. Through coalition work, the Ford program officer (PO) was familiar with the organization's solid track record on housing rights and its previously strong links to the disability rights movement.

The PO asked to hear more about HEA's plans. In their conversation, the president acknowledged that the organization lost critical capacity and weakened its connection to the disability rights community when the two staff members responsible for HEA's disability program left. Moreover, she saw that the reorganization of HEA's work, intended to integrate disability across its programs, had not done so effectively. She hoped Ford would support HEA's efforts to make disability a stronger focus across its work.

The PO invited HEA to submit a concept note that would provide more details about what the organization planned to do.

PART TWO

The PO was optimistic about the prospect of partnership, but the concept note that HEA submitted raised some red flags for her. Though it clearly laid out HEA's commitment to addressing disability-related housing discrimination as an issue of inclusion and human rights, it did not explain how HEA was equipped to do so or how the organization might consult with or engage people with disabilities in its programs. HEA planned to have a current staff member (one of its Community Development team leaders) take the lead on promoting a greater focus on disability across all programs. The concept note outlined how this person would help each of HEA's teams conduct an audit of their current activities and facilitate strategy sessions with them to identify where they could promote more disability-responsive policies.

The concept note touched briefly on the difficulties of elevating disability within HEA. During the organization's restructuring five years ago, they had tried to integrate disability across HEA's programs. Over time, however, it had been sidelined or had functionally disappeared. The concept note mentioned that not all of HEA's staff saw or understood the need to bring more attention to disability-related discrimination and some were worried that it would detract from the organization's focus on racial justice. In addition, the accompanying budget HEA submitted was for general operating costs, and there was no explanation about how this specific work would be funded.

Discussion Questions

1. What questions or concerns does HEA's concept note raise for you?
2. What questions would you ask to understand if and how people with disabilities are informing and included in the organization's programming?
3. If the organization did not have a history of work on disability, would you approach things differently?

PART THREE

The PO scheduled a call with HEA's president to discuss the concept note. When the PO raised her concerns, the president explained that while they were serious about their commitment to disability, they didn't have the budget to devote specific resources to it. That's why they were adding a disability mandate to the responsibilities of a current staff member. They also wanted to rebuild their connection to the disability rights movement, but with limited resources they had to be strategic about what they could take on. That was the reasoning behind the team activity audits and strategy sessions. The reason the budget was for general support, she said, was because HEA was facing a possible funding shortfall for its core operating costs.

For the PO, this raised questions about whether HEA was serious about re-envisioning its work in a way that meaningfully included disability justice—or if it was simply choosing something the organization had prior expertise in and that aligned with Ford's priorities, in order to fill a funding gap. The PO was also worried about buy-in from the HEA staff, especially among those who thought that more attention to disability would take away from the organization's racial justice focus. The PO brought the dilemma to her team to discuss how to proceed.

The team was torn. They knew that HEA had partnered successfully with disability justice groups in the past, and had mobilized communities to win policy victories that advanced the housing rights of disabled people. They wondered if HEA would think more expansively about its potential disability justice work if more funding were available. There were few housing organizations that addressed issues of disability, and HEA could again be a valuable ally to the disability rights movement.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you approach the situation with HEA at this point?
2. How would you try to assess the organization's commitment to disability? What factors would you look at?
3. As you think about the HEA staff who might not support a greater focus on disability, what issues come up for you?

EPILOGUE

The PO decided to have a frank conversation with HEA. She reached out to ask HEA's president: Was there a way to address the organization's concerns about operating costs while supporting HEA to strengthen its work on disability? What did HEA think about starting with some internal discussions about disability rights and reaching out to disability groups and activists about what they saw as critical needs in the housing field? The PO suggested they think on a two-year timeline, instead of one year, given the organization's sustainability concerns.

HEA's president consulted with her staff on these questions and came back with a proposal for a two-year grant that Ford was comfortable funding. In the first year, HEA would focus on internal education and renewing their connections to the disability rights movement. In consultation with disability rights activists, they would create a new staff position, with the goal of hiring a disabled person for that position by the end of the year. That person would work with the teams to build out their strategies for integrating disability, and would lead community outreach. HEA would incorporate its disability-related programming as a key part of its organizational fundraising efforts.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE PROGRAM OFFICER RESPONSIBLE FOR THE GRANT

What did you understand to be your responsibility, or the appropriate role of a PO?

It's important to us to develop relationships with our grantee partners based on trust and honesty. This value was even more important as we entered what was a new body of work for us. We did not want to fund in a way that prescribed to the field what they needed to work on, but rather to understand the needs of the field and groups working in this space, so we could make more effective and impactful grants.

When it came to HEA, we knew that they'd had really effective and expert staff working on disability in the past, and that made us optimistic that they could rebuild this capacity and their connections to the movement. But we also wanted to support them to do it differently, if that was what made sense for the organization. The hard part was figuring out how

much to push them on their vision, to make sure it was grounded in their organizational reality (taking into account their capacity and current staff attitudes) and funded at the level it needed to be.

What resources did you need or wish you'd had to respond to the situation?

We could always use more time to build our relationships and knowledge, but in this case we had time, and it was our best resource. Providing this grant allowed us to invest in the work and the relationship with the organization. We had engaged in other disability grantmaking that helped inform this grant structure, and having that knowledge and experience was useful. We also had access to colleagues with expertise in disability grantmaking who could review various proposals and advise us on ways to move forward.

What, if anything, do you wish you had done differently?

There was definitely a moment when I was not sure if we should fund this grant, given the concerns HEA's initial proposal raised. But there is always some potential risk in this work. Ultimately, we saw that the organization's leadership was committed and that they were willing to talk about the challenges they needed to address.

Do you have any advice to share with your fellow POs?

Our work in the disability rights movement has given us an opportunity to reshape the traditional funder-grantee dynamics. As funders, few of us are experts in this space. So we cannot co-opt the work and dictate how it "needs" to be or "should" be done. It was important for us to ask questions and have honest conversations, and to admit what we didn't know and wanted to learn more about. These practices have helped us build a more symbiotic relationship with grantees.

As these case studies illustrate, this work is both promising and challenging. Our journey continues, and we recognize there is much more to learn and share along the way. We are committed to continuing to develop and share our thinking, grantmaking practice, and resources on disability-inclusive grantmaking.

The Ford Foundation Office of Strategy and Learning helps program teams develop empirically grounded strategies to reduce inequality and to build evidence for how social change for good happens. We aim to share what we're learning with others in philanthropy and the social justice sector at large. Read more about what the foundation is learning at fordfoundation.org/learning

FORD FOUNDATION

320 E 43rd St

New York, NY 10017 USA

Tel. (+1) 212-573-5000

Fax. (+1) 212-351-3677

fordfoundation.org



**FORD
FOUNDATION**