Funding Equity: Disability Inclusion in Grantmaking

A *Fundamentals of Family Philanthropy* webinar recorded on May 13, 2025.

NATIONAL CENTER FOR
FAMILY PHILANTHROPY

Featuring:

Jeanine Alpert
May & Stanley Smith
Charitable Trust

Ryan Easterly
WITH Foundation

Gail Fuller
Disability & Philanthropy
Forum

Sandy Ho
Disability & Philanthropy
Forum

Transcript of the *Fundamentals of Family Philanthropy* Webinar, Funding Equity: Disability Inclusion in Grantmaking, Recorded on May 13, 2025

Britt Benavidez

Welcome, everyone. My name is Britt Benavidez. I'm the Senior Manager of Programs at NCFP. I use she/her pronouns, and I'm a white and Latina woman with short brown hair pulled back. I'm wearing brown glasses, a white button-down shirt, and I have a Zoom background behind me of a living room. Thank you for joining us today for our monthly Fundamentals of Family Philanthropy webinar. This webinar series provides guidance on the core tenets of effective family philanthropy, from motivations and values to governance, grantmaking, and succession. The series is designed to equip giving families with the latest information on evergreen topics in the donor life cycle through practical takeaways and diverse family stories that illustrate important practices.

Before we begin, let me briefly share about our webinar technology. We're using Zoom's webinar platform and your controls are located along the bottom of your screen. Closed captioning has been enabled and you can turn captions on and off by clicking the caption or CC icon at the bottom of your screen. We want this webinar to be interactive, so please submit your questions for the panelists as they come to you. To ask a question, please use the question box with the Q&A icon at the bottom of your screen. And when sending in a question, if you wish to remain anonymous, please indicate that by checking the box to submit anonymously. As a reminder, this webinar is being recorded and a replay will be made available to all attendees. If you experience any technical issues, please reconnect to the technology or email me for assistance. I'll place my email in the chat in just a moment. As always, you're welcome to chat with us on Twitter during today's webinar using the hashtag #ncfpweb.

Today's program is Funding Equity: Disability Inclusion and Grantmaking. Whether you're newer to philanthropy or seasoned, or a family member or a staff member, we hope that you'll leave today's webinar with insights you can apply to your work. Our goals for today's program are that you understand the importance of including disability in your funding and how it is intersectional. Learn how to invest in disability-led programs that align with your mission and vision, and gain insights for how to center the insights and experiences of the disability community in your funding approach.

So that we can best tailor today's discussion, we'd love to know who's in the room. If you could please respond to the poll questions that I've launched. We have, what is your role or affiliation with Family Philanthropy? Does your organization's grantmaking currently include funding for disability? And what are you hoping to learn during today's presentation? I'll leave the poll up for a few more seconds, we'll get some more responses here. It looks like a majority of family foundation staff, we have some advisors and board members also joining. Most of you currently include grantmaking, funding for disability, and all right, a few more coming in here, a few more seconds. All right, we have critical mass here, so I'm going to go ahead and share the results. Thank you so much everyone, this is really helpful for us.

Now I'm honored to introduce our panelists to you. Joining us today are Jeanine Alpert, Senior Program Officer for Adults and Transitioning Youth with Disabilities at the May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust. Ryan Easterly, Executive Director of the WITH Foundation. Gail Fuller, Senior Director of Programs and Communication with the Disability and Philanthropy Forum. And Sandy Ho, Executive Director of the Disability and Philanthropy Forum. So I invite all our panelists to join us on camera, and I'll now turn it over to Gail to provide some framing and then moderate our panel. Thanks so much, Gail.

Gail Fuller

Thank you Britt, and good afternoon, everyone. I'm Gail Fuller, and in the spirit of inclusion, I'm going to provide a visual description of myself. I am a black woman. What is not apparent is that I am a black woman with a non-apparent disability and chronic illnesses. My hair is in a bob with bangs with some brown highlights. For a change, I'm wearing my red and not my purple glasses, and I have on a blue and black sleeve blouse, black slacks. And behind me is a colorful painting, four young black boys are laughing, and for me it's just the essence of black boy joy at its peak.

On the 20th anniversary, the start of my career in philanthropy, which began with the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, another family foundation. It is my pleasure to moderate this session with an amazing group of panelists. I'm a little biased because I know them all quite well, including Sandy, who is our Executive Director of the Disability and Philanthropy Forum, and I did not have to twist her arm for her to say yes. She immediately wanted to be a part of this conversation, which is wonderful.

I want to take just a brief moment to ground the conversation. For those of you who were in Atlanta for our session at the National Forum on Family Philanthropy, you may remember we focused on disability. And one of the things I even said there was, while there's no checklist when it comes to embedding disability into your grantmaking practices and your operations, and that's why we're having this conversation, because the best way you can learn is by speaking with people to have these type of conversations. So, we're so pleased to be here.

Britt has shared or will share two resources that we recommend. And in many ways too, this is going to be a conversation about power and solidarity, because whether you're a foundation donor and those of us who are on the flip side of being part of the philanthropic organization, at the end of the day, our missions are really quite the same on what we're trying to do within our work. So I'm going to stop talking and I'm actually going to have the panelists introduce themselves. Ryan, why don't we start with you.

Ryan Easterly

Hi, everyone. My name is Ryan Easterly. My pronouns are he and him. I'm a black man with some hair, with some black facial hair that has a lot of gray in it. I'm wearing a black dress shirt, and I'm sitting in front of a virtual background that includes a gray wall and a copy of the foundation's logo in the upper part. As far as a little something about me, I would consider myself a leader with passion.

Jeanine Alpert

Hi, I'm Jeanine Alpert, she/her are my pronouns. And I am a mature white woman with gray hair, with kind of brownish-pinkish glasses. And I have a brown jacket on with a denim top underneath, and I am in front of a blurred panel, so you just see a blurred background. And the thing about myself is, I'd like to share that although I'm not a person with disabilities, I am a family member of those with disabilities, and have that connection with the community.

Sandy Ho

Hi, everyone, my name is Sandy Ho, and as a visual description, I am a disabled woman with short, dark, wavy hair, and I'm wearing a blue and white striped button-up shirt, and I am Asian American. And then behind me, my background is also blurred. A little bit about me that's not already in my bio. Since moving to the Bay Area, I have taken up birding. Over to you, Gail.

Gail Fuller

I'm looking forward to being in the Bay Area soon. So, I can't start this conversation without looking at where we are today in these unprecedented times. So, give me one, maybe one word, one sentence of how you're showing up today for this conversation.

Ryan Easterly

I'll start, and I think my one word would be resolute, in this moment.

Jeanine Alpert

Along with Ryan, I would say I'm determined.

Sandy Ho

And for me, I am hopeful.

Gail Fuller

Great, all right. So, just because of part of my disability, I'm going to make sure I look at these questions so I don't miss a question. So you're going to see me look down at least for a moment on this one. Sandy, I would like for you to set the stage of where we are today and what that means for individuals with disabilities and the role of advocacy for family foundations and donors.

Sandy Ho

Thank you, Gail, for starting us off with that question. And there's a lot to cover, so I'm going to try to be succinct with my response. But as many of us know, the current administration's approach to policy on civil society and the outright attacks on civil rights, I just want to reemphasize, and even though it may seem obvious to most of us, that these are all ultimately attacks on people, on families, on our day-to-day lives.

And how I'm considering this moment in the context of the work that we do over at the Disability and Philanthropy forum is that a lot of times we think of disability in the sector as the add-on, as the last thing that gets thought of and is included. But particularly in this moment, we have a role in not just reminding funders that your grantmaking strategies and approaches are already having an impact on disability communities, it is more so and necessary to emphasize that today.

In the context of family philanthropy in particular, one statement that we often use is, for disability communities, the personal is political. And so even if you're not thinking of yourselves in this way, it's already happening and will continue to happen. And I think one thing that we also can reflect on of what has already happened in the past 100 or so days, is among the first communities that were particularly targeted were people with disabilities. And that is not a coincidence, that is very much intentional. And as we have learned in other times in history, this is a moment to stay organized, to stay resilient, and to stay determined and hopeful.

Gail Fuller

Thank you, Sandy. Ryan, what do you want to get across to foundations about the urgency, the fierce urgency of now? And yes, I took that from Martin Luther King Jr.

Ryan Easterly

I think as Sandy has alluded to, there are 61 million reasons in this moment, because there are around 61 million Americans with disabilities. But we also know that many of the things that support and enable people with disabilities to survive and thrive, benefit everyone. So I would start there.

But then I would also say, as someone who has spent over 25 years as an advocate and over 15 in philanthropy, I know that sometimes in philanthropy we wait until we can do things perfectly before we incorporate them into our work or we announce initiatives. And at the WITH Foundation, we were established in 2002, we've used a community participatory approach since 2014. There's no way to do this work perfectly. So I would say if you're at a funder that you're waiting to be sure to get it right, no one gets it right. With this considered, kind of a pioneer, an example, but there are ways that we continue to evolve and continue to improve our work every day. So start the journey now.

And then also, as Sandy has alluded to, especially in this moment, if you would have asked me a year ago based on my experience, who the largest funder of disability issues was, I would have said the federal government. Now, that is not the case. We've seen the federal government funding disappear or become unstable, and it's impacting education, it's impacting healthcare, it's impacting disability research, food access, any number of things. There is an incredible need. So I think now is the time not only for private philanthropy to stay the course, continue on their learning journey as it relates to disability, but private philanthropy has to do more to really address the current experiences of people with disabilities. Because ultimately, even when you're doing it through a disability lens, it will benefit everyone in this moment and help create an equitable society for everyone. So, I'll stop there.

Gail Fuller

Thank you. And Jeanine, I'm going to turn to you. We continue to witness adolescent health kind of teetering on a cliff. What inspired the May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust to establish a program focused on adults and transitioning youth with disabilities?

Jeanine Alpert

Thanks, Gail, for that question. Essentially, the May and Smith Charitable Trust, which I'll just call the trust because it's just a mouthful for me, so I'm just going to call it trust, established a disability program in 1987. But it wasn't until four years ago that really they, when I came on board, we started to explore how we were supporting the disability community, and really began to change our approach. That was really based more on inclusivity and building relationships within the disability community and those with lived experience to... So it positions us to be in this moment to really support what the disability community needs now, based on their input.

So what it required for me is really being in the room, being in the right rooms with advocates and self-advocates, listening to what they were saying, and to our partners and to those that were speaking about the needs in the disability community. And then making sure we're asking questions of our current partners about how they were serving the disability community. So, even though we had served the disability community for many, many years, we weren't really just disability justice-focused, we weren't disability-led focused. And so, as we started to ask service providers or those that were serving the disability community how they were getting input from their clients or those with disabilities, that really started to change how we were having conversations with some of our partners, and making sure that they understood that we wanted those that were affected by what was happening in the community, to be the ones telling and describing what was needed.

And then that brought me back to sharing internally with the trust staff. And from that, we really began to expand into our other portfolios. So we serve three other populations, and those program officers started to ask, "Hey, what are you doing with people with disabilities?" And sometimes we got back a whole lot of information that we didn't know was happening because we weren't asking. And I don't know about you, but grantees just like to tell you what you ask, they don't like to expound sometimes because they don't think you're interested. So we really have begun to focus more on what the disability community is telling us, and that's through listening.

So we're focusing on, we've been able to really support advocacy about Medicaid, about Administration for Community Living, and our partners that are doing that work on the ground. And that's from completely understanding what it is they need, and that's through listening. So that's really important, kind of what both Ryan and Sandy were saying of like, we were for a while, we were just sitting around determining what we thought was best and we were really missing the mark.

Gail Fuller

Thank you, thank all of you. Before I move on to the next question, I just want to remind everyone that you can put your questions into the Q&A. Part of this is a conversation, so I will be pulling questions that come through the Q&A even before the formal Q&A session.

Sandy, the next thing's not going to be news to you, because you've been on both sides when it comes to this work, including being a grantmaker with the Disability Inclusion Fund. So a few years ago, the Disability and Philanthropy Forum produced a report, and one of the things that we always hear is that when grant seekers are talking to funders is, "Oh, we don't do disability." You know? And then of course we produced the data that proves it. I'm not going to spoil it for you, because I think you can give them the punchline, but why do you believe that philanthropy cannot ignore disability justice and rights within their grantmaking?

Sandy Ho

Yeah, as Gail shared, I, previous to my current role as the Executive Director of the Disability and Philanthropy Forum, I was a Program Director at the Disability Inclusion Fund, and leading an annual grantmaking portfolio of around four million, and that was explicitly to grassroots, disabled-led organizations across the country. And that fund is housed at an intermediary at Borealis. And so when we were in conversations with many of our grantees, they would say, "Sandy, how come there are not more grantmakers that are paying attention and doing the kind of grantmaking that the disability inclusion fund is doing? Why is it not so obvious to all of the other funders?" We also got a lot of comments from our grantee partners about feeling frustrated that even as they see themselves and are living their lives and doing this work in a democracy, or doing the work around whether it's advocacy or policy development or mental health, were in meeting them and we're being told, "Sorry, you just don't fit in our portfolio," when clearly the dots were there.

And A, it's disheartening. It is effectively what I view as discrimination. Right? If you are saying that you are not going to be supportive or that you don't see yourselves as doing disability grantmaking, what that translates into to folks that we work with is that you're saying you're comfortable with ableism, that you're comfortable with this system of discrimination and oppression that values certain types of bodies and these ideas of norms over others. And one thing that this data and this report that Gail had referred to, pointed out in terms of just clear numbers, is that 1/10th of every dollar, so 1/10th of every $1 in grantmaking goes to social justice and disability work currently in the field. And as Ryan had kicked us off with, there are 65 million folks in the country who identify as an adult with disability.

And so when we take this into the context of philanthropy and in this moment, one thing that I just want to highlight for folks in the audience is that the work of disability justice, rights and inclusion is not just the work of the present, but we're also involved in the work of the future. And so by that I mean, it is increasingly a privilege and a right to grow old and to become disabled in this country. And how you do that and how you manage to do that, is a lot of it is based off of socioeconomic status. And that is not the disability justice rights or future that the communities that we are from believe in. And so, that's kind of what I would really strongly urge and encourage funders in this space to reflect on in this moment.

Gail Fuller

Thank you. Ryan, I'm going to turn to you, but as Sandy was talking, something that she's spoken about before, is the fact that claiming space in this world shouldn't have to be a revolutionary act for people with disabilities. And you've created a system within the WITH Foundation on how you do your grantmaking. And I'd love for you to really kind of talk through that.

Ryan Easterly

Well, at the WITH Foundation, we incorporate community participatory grantmaking into our practices, meaning that we have an advisory committee that are co-decision makers in all of our grantmaking. So these are adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities that live across the country that are co-decision makers in our grantmaking.

I do want to acknowledge that WITH Foundation, as a family foundation, when I'm talking with my peers, their first question is usually, "How did you get started on this path?" And I want to acknowledge that with my donor family and specifically, Lynne O'Hara, when she established the foundation in 2002, she innately understood the need to have community perspective at the board level. So I know not every family foundation had the same starting place, as WITH did, but Lynne innately knew, I want to give to disability issues, but I don't share that perspective, my family doesn't have that perspective, but it's needed within leadership.

And then from there, I think it was the fact that there were community slots. My initial involvement with the foundation was in one of those community member slots. It was through that approach that led to us ultimately continuing to evolve and continuing to where we are now, using a community participatory approach. And I want to acknowledge that I spoke of earlier that, don't wait for the ability to do everything perfectly. I think in WITH's case, our journey as it relates to using a community participatory approach also reflects that. We started using a model in 2014 that is not the current model that we are using this day.

In 2014, we started using a model that was really spearheaded by a former board member who's no longer with us, Stacey Milbern. And in that model, we brought together the committee members in person and really said, "Give us your feedback on these proposals on this docket." But it was heavy on extracting just their lived experience and their perspective. And it was a little bit, just frank, all business, no fun. Where currently the model we've used since 2015, 2016, it is a much better model and we feel has been much more effective, and that's because we moved to having the advisory committee be virtual.

And rather than just asking them about our dockets and for them to share their perspectives, we also provide them with training and supports on things that they are interested in. So we routinely ask them, "What would you like to know more about? What would help you in your advocacy? What resources can we connect with you?" So it's as much as it can be, an equal exchange. So we're also, not only are they able to help us strengthen our grantmaking, but we're helping prepare them be on boards of other foundations. We're supporting them in their own advocacy goals in the ways that they're showing up in their communities.

I'd also say that from my donor family's perspective, even though they're not here today, I do feel like Lynne would want me to say to you, if you're debating incorporating a community participatory approach, know that from her perspective, she feels very strongly that it's when we incorporated the community participatory approach, that really, our grantmaking got better. And really, the work has been much stronger, and that we've been able to have much more of an impact in our work than when we did not have a community participatory perspective.

But again, there are still ways in which the advisory committee continue to shape and impact our work. There are ways that the advisory committee continues to challenge me and my leadership and help us, as Sandy alluded to, not only meet the needs of now, but also see the needs of the future and support the future of the community. So, I will stop there.

Gail Fuller

Thank you. I'm actually going to turn to a question we received from one of the attendees, and this is going to be a question open to all, so whoever wants to jump in and answer first. What are some... wait, what are some ways you would recommend incorporating disability inclusion into grant programs that aren't specifically focused on disability?

Jeanine Alpert

I can add to that. It was kind of where I was going to go, in terms of the trust in disability inclusion. But really, as the trust began to be on more of a trust-based philanthropy, it all started about four years ago, and then really got involved with the Disability and Philanthropy Forum, which has been a lifesaver for me. And we actually did sign the disability inclusion pledge about a year and a half ago. It really has enabled us to open up conversations, and that's internally but also externally. And not just me, although I'm the one that is centering, I say it's a lot of centering disability in a lot of our conversation with the... Remember that affects, I'm sorry, LGBTQ+ issues. Oh, that affects people with disabilities, what's happening there? And so it's allowed the program officers in other areas to begin to have conversations with existing grantees that maybe don't think they serve people with disabilities, but they actually are. And that has been a learning curve for not just me, but the whole organization.

So, that's been key to our disability inclusion grantmaking is that yes, we have a portfolio and my job is to make sure that we're making an impact that benefits the disability community the way that they say they need the help and the support. But it's also educating and turning around and helping other people within the agency to have conversations. And it's really about curiosity, because if they're working with an organization that say doesn't, we don't serve that, kind of what Sandy was talking about, then the next kind of curious question is, well, who does? And so then we can find out who is serving the disability community, older adults, or LGBTQ or wherever that intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality happens, that we as an organization say we want to help. That means the disability is there too, and so it's kind of upon us to ask the right questions.

And that's part of as we move to disability justice, that question was starting to be, and I started to ask in my relationship buildings, what are you doing to eliminate barriers? Because our partners were doing things, we just weren't asking that question, so we didn't know. And so that's really, it's more about just learning and asking the right questions and then listening.

We had to give up, and I say this with all kindness in my heart to the family, we had to do a lot of educating and maybe give up a little bit of that, well, not a little bit, some of that charity mindset of, well, we're helping people and so we're doing good. And really, get into, yes, but what's the impact and what are we really trying to accomplish here? What does the family want to do? So, and I think this is ongoing. So I'm not going to be able to sit back and be like, oh, I know all there is to know because I've spoken to Sandy and I've spoken to Ryan, I know all there is to know. That's not how it is. It is constant, continual, where am I missing things? Again, asking connections.

What I have found is within the disability community, and it's maybe within other communities, what I have found within the disability community is that there is a respect and a connection that happens when you truly are wanting to learn and listen. And they welcome, the population welcomes that. I'm not coming in telling what I think, they're telling me what they think. So, I hope that answers the person's question, it's kind of woven in there. But our partners are already serving people with disabilities, we just need to find out how.

Gail Fuller

Thank you, that was wonderful. So Sandy, Jeanine just mentioned intersectionality. A lot of people tend to think of us as a monolith. They think of us as, I am a black woman with a disability, but they don't think about everything else that makes up who we are or the fact of the issues. I've often heard that, I know one foundation, they're like, "We don't do disability." I'm like, "You do mental health. That is a disability." I hear people say, "Oh, well, we're focused on climate change." Well, climate change, who's one of the biggest populations that are impacted by climate change, by the fires and the hurricanes that we've seen? Are people with disabilities. I'd love for you to talk a little bit more about that understanding between who we are and the issues.

Sandy Ho

Yeah, absolutely. So one thing that always comes to mind is, even among our most "progressive and forward-thinking" and funders who are thinking ahead and to many in the field may be doing groundbreaking grantmaking practices, are still not necessarily understanding how their work is directly related to disability justice, rights and inclusion. And so when we think about intersectionality and how that frame fits within the analysis of the work that we do, it is about the power and privilege of some experiencing ableism in more ways than others.

We all have various positionality in relationship to ableism. I am a wheelchair user, and so for me, it's when I travel to conferences in the sector, I have to do a lot of the prep and there's a lot of anxiety related to, what's going to happen to my wheelchair by the time I land in whatever state I'm going to? Will I even be able to get to that conference? And that's not an experience that most executive directors in my position in this field have to even think about. They walk right onto that plane and hop right into that cab, but then there are other times when my disability allow me access to certain conversations and experiences that maybe other people who may be blind or experience other types of disabilities have different experiences.

So, what I hope that folks are getting away, taking away from this is A, we are not here to pit one group or one community against another. But in, Gail, your earlier comment about yes, disability, we are not a monolithic community. We all have different experiences and relationships to our disability lived experiences. However, when grantmakers are communicating their strategies around racial justice, around climate justice, around [inaudible 00:37:07]. The question then is, what learning and what kind of models can we take from that and apply it to our land and power analysis around ableism? So, it is not people with disabilities or disability itself as the problem, it is ableism. And in that way, we all have a role in dismantling it, and that is essentially the work of the Disability Philanthropy Forum.

Gail Fuller

Thank you. Okay, I'm going to switch it up on you guys. Let's talk about what actually brings you joy in this work. And I'm going to go to you, Ryan, first.

Ryan Easterly

Of course, you are. So I want to start by, Sandy and Gail know this, when it comes to joy, I acknowledge that joy is something I struggle with. As someone who has had kind of my life journey, I get uncomfortable around the concept of joy. But what brings me joy in this moment is, I've been thinking a lot lately about my past and kind of the moment we're currently in. And there is some joy in knowing that as someone who grew up in the South who has disabilities, who didn't grow up with a lot of money, that I know that the systems have never really worked well for anyone. And I'm reminding myself that if in this moment we have to rebuild systems, that this is an opportunity to build them back for the many, instead of for the few. So there is some joy in this opportunity that is available to us to really make sure that the systems that we rely on work for as many people as possible.

I'm also very mindful of, it's conversation like these today, where I get to be in community with Sandy, with Gail, with Jeanine, and all the ways that we're all working to advance the work, all the members of the Disability and Philanthropy Forum. It brings me joy to know, we're not alone in this. At the end of the day, it brings me joy to believe in the resilience of communities. So, I'm thankful for the opportunity to participate in this conversation and to be part of this community and be part of this army, so to speak, advancing this work.

Gail Fuller

All right. Who wants to go next?

Jeanine Alpert

Okay, I'll go. I thought about this a lot. Last week we were, some of us, well, all of us actually on this panel, maybe, were in North Carolina for a conference. And I get a lot of joy from that. I am normally a very quiet person, and I have a lot of energy when I'm in community and learning, much to what Ryan said. It brings me a lot of joy to see, to be with, I guess, a group of people that have a similar desire for justice and willing to do the hard work and to learn and continue learning and allows myself to learn and become a better advocate and ally for our community. So, that gives me a lot of joy. And I had the privilege of seeing everybody in person, which is always fun. We do a lot of Zoom things, but in person is, nothing beats it, in my opinion, if we can make it work.

Sandy Ho

What's bringing me joy in this moment is, well, it is this conversation. It is folks like Gail and others in the field, including Ryan and Jeanine, who... I am new to this work still. I started in philanthropy a little over two or three years ago, but every time I enter a space, I know that I get to have the privilege of building upon the work of others. It is because of folks like Ryan who as the executive director of another foundation, where it makes my role a little bit less like I don't experience the same kinds of challenges than maybe Ryan did when he was starting out. And so there are joy in knowing that I am part of that position and that pathway in the field.

Gail Fuller

Thank you, guys. I'm actually going to take off my moderator hat just to express my joy, and I have a lot of joy for people that are attending this webinar today. That means that you are open to furthering your disability inclusion journey or just starting it. So I just want to say we appreciate you guys.

And so before we get to the Q&A, any last thoughts that you want to share? And I'm not going to pick Ryan, because you said I picked on him before, so I'm going to start with you, Jeanine.

Jeanine Alpert

Yeah, so one of the things, and I promise Sandy didn't ask me to say this, but the Disability and Philanthropy Forum has been such a resource for us and our journey at the trust and my continued learning. And the disability inclusion pledge has really helped us be accountable for the words we were saying started to match the actions that we were engaging in. And I would say that really for foundations that are interested in looking at supporting the disability community, that that is a, it is a no-brainer. And then the second is to really open up and listen and learn from those with lived experience and what it is that they say is going on. So, those are my two things that I'd like to say.

Gail Fuller

Okay, Sandy?

Sandy Ho

Yeah, I mean, I appreciate my co-panelists, because you all champion the work of the Disability and Philanthropy Forum so well. And so to that, I would just add, yeah, really emphasizing that when we ask folks to consider signing on to the disability inclusion pledge, we're not asking for you to get it right. As Ryan referred to earlier, the pledge is a commitment and an ask for you to make the commitment to just try and to continue learning, because the work of disability justice is continuously evolving.

Gail Fuller

All right, thank you. We're officially at Q&A. And Sandy, you're going to get the first question, but anyone can weigh in to this question. So the person says, "Could you talk about ableism, defining what it really means beyond textbook definition in current movements or trends to combat and disable ableism?"

Sandy Ho

Yeah, absolutely. So for that, yeah, I really want to turn to a movement leaders framing of ableism, and I really appreciate the question explicitly asking for a non-textbook definition answer. And I will also share the link to this framing into the chat for everybody. But this comes from Talila A. Lewis, "Ableism is a system of assigning value to people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, productivity, desirability, intelligence, excellence, and fitness." This next sentence in particular, I think is really important. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in eugenics, anti-blackness, misogyny, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism." And the last sentence as well, "You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism," which just as I said earlier, everybody has a role in dismantling ableism no matter what your experience to disability and proximity to the power and privilege to ableism that you might have.

So, some of the current movements are trying to combat or dismantle it. Again, I would just point to the work of a lot of the movement leaders, including the folks who are working in cross movements, such as Climate Justice. The Partners for Inclusive Disaster Strategies. Organizations like [inaudible 00:46:21], folks such as Alice Wong. The work of dismantling ableism, what I so appreciate about it and what I as a former community organizer coming up in this work have gotten so much from it, is that there is a place and contribution that anybody can make to it. You are valued not because of what you are doing for movement, but because you have inherent value as a member of the community.

Gail Fuller

Thank you, Sandy. The next question is actually going to go to Ryan. So the question is, we are currently spending down, and I want to learn more about aligning our goals in our last 10 years of funding.

Ryan Easterly

So I think WITH is particularly good for this question, because we announced last September, our intention to sunset by the end of 2028. And when I reflect on our process, I think for starters, there should be a commitment from all levels of your leadership to transparency in the process. So, making sure that in this time that you communicate as much as possible with your partners and grantees about where you're at, what you are prioritizing at the board level, at the staff level. Just being as transparent as you can possibly be. I also think that deep listening and accountability should be part of the process that you go through. So in our case, we had conversations with our grantees and partners to say, "As we look at these last five years, what are the things that you value most from us? What are the things that you look most to us to support you in?" So it's making sure that those became the cornerstones of what we're funding, those are reflected in our core values in these final five years.

And then I'd also say that through the conversations with our partners and grantees, it's also understanding that when you make the decision to sunset, it's not just about the name and the impact you're having in the now, but also, it's an opportunity to seed the work of the future. So in this case, we've also started a mechanism we're calling strategic partnerships, where we basically go to some of our existing and longtime grantees and say, "We're going to make a larger investment in you. What are some of the moonshots that you want to undertake? Things that you've had a harder time finding funding for? If you could have a pile of cash, what would you do with it?" And not impose what we think they should be doing on it, but giving them the opportunity as organizations that we already know, already trust, because we've been funding their work. Just give them the opportunity to do the things that they think most need to be done, in our case, to advance comprehensive healthcare for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

But it's really a combination of that transparency, deep listening, and then making sure that you're allowing for the ability to see future work whenever possible. And I would say, please look to the Disability and Philanthropy Forum if you want more resources and reach out to WITH directly if you would like to have more a peer-to-peer conversation. But hopefully, that is helpful and addresses your question.

Gail Fuller

Thank you, Ryan. Now this question could be answered by all, but I'm going to actually direct it to you, Jeanine. As a staff member, what is a strategy you've used or suggest for impressing upon leadership the importance of disability justice in grantmaking?

Jeanine Alpert

Yeah, and it's a great question. So really, I think as Sandy said something earlier that I really took to heart was, claiming space for those with disabilities should not be a revolution. And so, it's a conversation, internal conversation. And so, a lot of what I've spent doing with our trustees is educating. And when ableism in any of us rears its head, is to gently provide information as to why that is not helpful. And not necessarily using the word ableism, but really having a conversation about what I've learned and why that is important for the trust to consider what I'm hearing on the ground as a way to meet our goals or it meets our vision and how it meets our mission and making that connection. And I wouldn't say it's constant, but at the beginning it was more constant and more like a through-line with everything.

Now, some of the people, we have a very small team and a very small group, they're starting to ask me questions of, "Oh, well, is this..." So I can see that we're starting to make progress where people are starting to consider other things, but it is a continual education and sharing of information in a way that's palatable to those that are in the room. And making it and connecting it with, I guess, with the vision and the mission of the philanthropy with where I work.

And we also do, I don't know, maybe other people don't do this, but we have a newsletter we do, internal newsletter every other month. And mine is always focused on some disability topic that people need to understand. And so, whether they read that or not, but then I have now the words and the languages out there that we start to have a shared language for things. So, I won't say it's fast, but it is absolutely doable.

Gail Fuller

Thank you. Does anyone else want to weigh in on this question?

Sandy Ho

Yeah, I'll just briefly share that part of the work of the Disability and Philanthropy Forum is just exactly this question, which is, we support the internal case making and internal organizing as needed to directly make that case to whoever in your leadership or maybe to your vice president of grantmaking to consider having this being a more explicit priority. And just some concrete examples. Our staff have done like lunch and learns, if you have an ERG group internally, or maybe coming up as a hint, July is Disability Pride Month, and so I expect all of these organizations who are in attendance to be doing something because again, this is a moment where we need more joy and celebration.

And then finally, I'm just going to call upon Ryan as a Co-Chair of the President's Council on Disability and Philanthropy, alongside John Palfrey at MacArthur. This is part of our work too, is that we do have conversations with leadership as needed. Thanks.

Gail Fuller

Thank you. We actually have one minute before we move over, but we have one question that was put into during registration. Ryan, I'm going to give it to you, no pressure on time. But this person is basically wanting to know, it says, "Often in working with organizations," they say, "Often they are run by non-disabled people who are taking care of disabled people. I know the goal is to fund disability led organizations, but these are often large agencies and it's hard to tell how committed they are to disability justice. How do I evaluate these organizations?" And do you want to talk about all the wonderful organizations that are out there?

Ryan Easterly

So I would say, I admire where they are in their journey. And this is a complex question because when we think about most of the work, especially the most prominent organizations that serve the disability community, they are not disability led. And I will say, as a healthcare funder, a lot of the most prominent work is not disability led. So I think it's, from my perspective and from WITH's perspective, it's important to understand where you must champion disability led organizations and ask them specifically, "Do you have representation on your board of directors? Do you have representation on your staff?" And specifically say, "We are looking for, do they identify? Do they advocate?" Because that says something different, even if they're a family member, some family members aren't comfortable saying, "I have a family member with a disability and this impacts my work, this impacts how I address this work." But ask them specifically, "How do they identify?"

And then also understand your role as a funder in bringing organizations along. So if they're not disability led, how can you support them in saying, "How can you incorporate more community perspective?" In our case, one of the things that WITH has done is to say, as much as we can, we want to see self-advocate, meaning people with disability, advisors in all the programs we fund. Because even if there's disability in leadership, including their disability led organizations, the disability experience is not a monolith, so everyone benefits when you have more people at the table that have lived experience of disability. But for the organizations that aren't disability led, it also incorporates more of that lived experience into their process and helps them start on a journey to incorporating more disability into their leadership.

So I would say I just want to acknowledge that it is a complex question but it is a multi-prong, and please look to the Disability and Philanthropy Forum for more resources and tools about how to address this specific issue. And again, feel free to reach out directly to WITH if you want to have a more peer-to-peer conversation.

Gail Fuller

Thank you, and thank all the panelists. I'm going to turn it back to Britt.

Britt Benavidez

Thank you all, thank you so much for your time and sharing your expertise. It was a nice reminder and challenge to not only listen to community, but ask the disability community how we can best fund and serve and support them. So, thank you all for challenging us and sharing with us today.

I'd like to launch a poll just to keep us honest and make sure we've met our goals for today as we wrap up and just have some quick announcements. So we'd love to know if our attendees learn something helpful to them and/or their organization, if they have a better understanding of disability-led strategies, and any feedback, takeaways, or lingering questions that you have, please put there in the poll. So I'll leave that up for the remainder.

As you all may know, we recently released our Trends in Family Philanthropy 2025 report. This is our third national benchmark survey of Family Foundation's. Released every five years, the report tracks the leading trends in the field and includes data on asset sizes, payout rates, grantmaking, family dynamics, and much more. You can download the full Trends report on our website.

And as we get ready to sign off, we just have a few quick announcements about our upcoming programs. We always love to hear your feedback and ideas on topics that interest and resonate with you. We've taken your feedback on past programs and have developed an exciting lineup for our Fundamentals series this year. So next month's webinar is actually a community conversation, which means it is open beyond NCFP membership to the field. It features NCFP Fellow, Dimple Abichandani, and it's on her new book that she wrote as part of her NCFP fellowship. So this conversation will be, A Philanthropy for our Times: Reimagining Purpose and Practice in a New Era. So Dimple will be in conversation with NCFP CEO, Nick Tedesco. And our full Fundamentals of Family Philanthropy series can be found on our website. We hope you'll continue to join us on the second Tuesday of every month.

In addition to our webinars and other programs, NCFP is pleased to offer a range of peer networks for those interested in connecting to family philanthropy colleagues with similar objectives, challenges, and shared experiences. You can find out more about all our peer networks on our website and can email us for more information.

So again, thank you everyone for joining us today. A reminder that the webinar recording, the transcript, and a list of resources will be sent out shortly. This will include all of our panelists' information and websites to get in touch with them, as well as links to resources from the Disability and Philanthropy Forum. So we are very grateful that you all joined us, and we're grateful for the partnership that NCFP has with the Disability and Philanthropy Forum, and look forward to continuing this work together. So, thank you again, and remember to join us on June 10th for our next webinar. Take care, everyone, and we'll see you soon.