

Disability-forward Grantmaking in the Arts:

Resources for Grantmakers



Careers in the Arts Toolkit

Promoting Equity, Access, and Inclusion in the Arts for People with Disabilities

Credits

July 2023

National Endowment for the Arts
400 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20506
[arts.gov](https://www.arts.gov)

Produced by the National Endowment for the Arts' Office of Accessibility

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Acknowledgments

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Office of Accessibility and Art Beyond Sight thank the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, and collaborating organizations and individuals from the disability, artist, educator, and grant maker communities. The generous continued sharing of resources, best practices, and lived experiences contributed greatly to our research and writing and will build strong careers in the arts for disabled people.

Cover image: Deaf West's production of *Oedipus*. Photo by Craig Schwartz

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A Note About Person- and Identity-First Language:

The National Endowment for the Arts and Art Beyond Sight recognize that there are multiple preferences for the terminology to use when referring to people with disabilities. Some individuals with disabilities prefer the use of person-first language (e.g., people who are blind), emphasizing the person over their disability. Others prefer identity-first language (e.g., disabled artist, blind person) because they view their disability as an integral part of who they are. Within this toolkit, you will find intentional uses of both person-first and identity-first language.

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Resources for Grantmakers

This section of the Careers in the Arts Toolkit examines the why and how behind inclusive approaches to funding and supporting disabled artists and cultural workers, as well as creating an inclusive arts community. It provides information to grantmakers in arts, arts education, and disability/ accessibility.

In this section you will find information on:

- Equity and inclusion in grantmaking
- Disability-inclusive grantmaking practices and policies
- How to make your grant application process accessible
- Ways to support the work of disabled artists

“Even when the work we create isn’t about disability, Disabled artists bring all that we are—the art of improvisation, insights born from experience, and an outsider’s sense of empathy—to everything we do. By being 100 percent ourselves, Disabled artists not only show the world a different way forward, we also lead by example and give others permission to do the same.”

Lawrence Carter-Long
Co-Director, DisArt



Gold Lamé (2014) by Tony Heaton at the 2015 DisArt Festival in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Photo by Beth Bienvenu

Why Grantmakers Should Care About Disability Equity and Inclusion

Embracing Diversity

Grantmakers lead by example when they embrace diversity in their values and in their practice. As Sara Reisman, chief curator and director of national academician affairs at National Academy of Design, shared when she was executive and artistic director of the Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation:

“Our leadership realized the value of requiring that applicants seeking funds outline the ways they address accessibility, from fulfilling ADA requirements to articulating programmatic strategies for inclusive design. Making it a priority in our application process, we opened up a conversation about ADA compliance and engagement in a discourse that touches all of us in our work and lives.”

The philanthropic community, especially in the arts, is currently investing heavily in equity for communities that are typically underserved. However, investments in disability have yet to catch up to those made to foster the inclusion of other diverse populations. Yet disability is intersectional; it cuts across race, ethnicity, language, national or social origin, socio-economics, religion, age, sexual orientation, and gender identity. People with disabilities, therefore, comprise a sizable portion of the community you serve. Therefore, disability-focused funding can help your organization achieve its diversity and inclusion goals.

Perhaps the most convincing argument to promote disability-inclusive grantmaking is the universal nature of disability: any one of us can acquire a disability at any time.

“Inclusion is key to tackling inequality.”

Darren Walker
President, Ford Foundation

“Nothing About Us Without Us”

When you commit to disability-forward thinking, give yourself time to learn what it means to be truly disability-inclusive. The key to fostering equitable philanthropy is to include perspectives from diverse lived experiences and weave the diverse communities of people with disabilities into the fabric of your grantmaking organization. Being proactive in soliciting feedback from disabled applicants and grantees and being intentional in the employment of people with disabilities as part of your staff and advisory boards puts into practice the guiding values of equity, diversity, and inclusion. “Nothing about us without us” is a mantra of the disability community that expresses

the importance of ensuring that the needs and preferences of people with disabilities are communicated by them rather than decided solely by people without disabilities. Grantmakers can gain much-needed input from the disability community through outreach and by including people with disabilities in their own organizations and boards. The effort and training necessary to create a disability-inclusive culture and accessible programmatic and physical environment in your grantmaking institution not only helps achieve equity, but it also educates leadership about the process and the value of becoming disability-inclusive for their grantees.

Prioritizing Disability-Inclusion and Equity in All Grantmaking

Grantmakers of both public and private funds can play an important role in supporting people with disabilities pursuing careers in the arts and modeling inclusion for the cultural organizations they fund. Arts funders who care about inclusive practices can also assist in removing barriers for people with disabilities by considering the broader environment in which they are granting funds and advocating for “disability-forward” thinking. For instance, a disability-forward grantmaker could require grant recipients to ensure the accessibility of their projects by completing a checklist or assessment of their facilities and programs in the grantmaking process.

Elizabeth McCormack, formerly of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, compared disability funding to the beginning years of social justice funding for other minority communities:

“Most [grantmakers] fund programs where there is an ability to demonstrate impact. The disability community does not have baseline data, which contributes to the disability community being left out of funding. In fact, the funding community needs the support of the disability community to know how to go about obtaining both baseline research, as well as impact.”

Together with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Ford Foundation has taken a leadership role in disability funding by creating the Disability Philanthropy Forum, a network of funders through the President’s Council on Disability. Equally important to creating equitable opportunities is the Ford Foundation’s internal guidance to its program officers: when “disability is not the core focus (of a project), it can be vulnerable to pressure from other priorities, making leadership support and sustainable project plans critical.”

Leadership Front and Center

The key to ensuring lasting change is for your organization’s leaders—including executives and board members—to provide support right at the start. The Mass Cultural Council’s Universal Participation Initiative, or the UP Initiative, a program designed to dramatically improve accessibility for cultural organizations across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, was founded by past executive director Anita Walker in 2014. This initiative provides resources for organizations seeking to develop inclusive and equitable tools for policy development and peer learning networks for community engagement. According to Walker:

“Leadership is essential to the success of UP. It starts at the top of an organization, which is why we require board members to pass a resolution assuring their commitment to universal participation and the work required to make both the cultural and strategic changes necessary.”

Other state arts agencies and U.S. regional arts organizations have led disability-forward grantmaking through grants, programs, grantee accessibility requirements, internal accessibility audits, and staff development initiatives designed to improve their disability equity work.



Artists and writers at the Anderson Center’s Deaf Artist Residency. Photo courtesy of Cynthia Weitzel

How to Make Your Grantmaking Disability-Inclusive and Equitable

With an understanding of the “why” when it comes to disability inclusion, the next question many grantmaking organizations ask is “how?” For the most part, opportunities to infuse disability inclusion into the grantmaking process fall into three main categories, as outlined below:

- Organizational Policies and Practices
- Grantmaking Promotion and Processes
- Effective Outreach and Strategic Partnerships

Organizational Policies and Practices

Disability-forward, inclusive grantmaking starts with an internal self-evaluation of your organization, including human resources practices, policies, diversity and equity programs, and training programs, to determine how disability is integrated into daily operations. This section will provide guidance on how to assess and improve your internal processes to be more fully inclusive.



“New funders have the advantage of being able to embed access services into every aspect of their organizations, from application systems to personnel policies, while they are forming their programs. Whether or not any stakeholder requires these services, it is important to signal that everyone is recognized, without having to ask for “special” accommodations. Creating a website that meets or exceeds accessibility standards and that juries involve Deaf and disabled panelists are also ways to ensure that our practices at every level are inclusive.”

Esther Grisham Grimm
Executive Director, 3Arts

Recreation of Frida Kahlo's *Dos Fridas* by Reveca Torres (right), Mariam Pare (left), and Tara Ahern.
Photo courtesy of Tres Fridas Project

Self-Assessment: Your Identity and Your Institution's Identity

Who are you? Who is represented in your grantmaking organization?

A first step toward inclusive grantmaking is self-reflection, both as an individual and as an organization.

Take a look at who you are:

1. Do you have experience with disability in your own life?
2. What assumptions do you have about disability?
3. Do you have disabled friends or family members?
4. Do you have first-hand knowledge of the lived experiences and barriers for people with disabilities?
5. Does anyone on your organization's board of directors and staff self-identify as having a disability?
6. Does your approach to diversity and equity specifically include disability?
7. Do you have partnerships in the disability community that help advise your funding or program decisions?

This section of the toolkit will help you consider how to address these questions in your grantmaking, and your organization.

Staff and Personnel

One important step in developing disability-forward funding is to have a workplace and work culture that embraces and includes disability, and the diverse perspectives that it can bring.

Diversify Your Staff to Include People with Disabilities

Grantmaking institutions can gain significantly from the often-untapped talent pool of people with disabilities. People with disabilities have skills and talents to contribute, and can be a vital part of your diversity efforts, but they remain underrepresented in the workplace. Recent data from the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) (as of June 2023) shows that only 24 percent of people with disabilities aged 16 or older are represented in the labor force, compared with 68.7 percent of people without disabilities.

Grantmakers can play an important role in changing this by taking proactive steps to ensure employment equity for people with disabilities. By ensuring their own organizations are disability-inclusive, grantmakers can enrich their own programs and services while helping all people participate in and contribute to the culture around them. If you care about job skills, creative approaches to problem-solving, and access to an expanded pool of talent, your organization is primed to benefit from [recruiting, accommodating, and retaining talented people with disabilities](#).

Conduct Staff Training

Conduct regular training for staff to ensure a stronger understanding of disability issues and the disability community. Training should include disability etiquette and awareness, accessibility laws and best practices, disability history, current policy issues, and current practice in disability arts and art by people with disabilities. Bring in local disability advocates and trainers, as well as disabled artists, to conduct the training sessions.

Develop an Internal Working Group on disability, accessibility, and the arts to monitor and advise on internal disability awareness and program/grantmaking policies.

You can find more information on recruiting, employing, and accommodating people with disabilities in the [employer section of the toolkit](#).

Where to Learn More

- [ADA National Network](#)
- [Job Accommodation Network](#)
- [EARN's Guide to Reasonable Accommodations](#)
- [U.S. Department of Labor Job Accommodations Resources](#)
- [Disability and Philanthropy Forum: Disability History and Culture](#)
- [Disability and Philanthropy Forum: Accessible and Inclusive Operations](#)
- [Disability and Philanthropy Forum: Disability-Inclusive Grantmaking](#)

Note: Some of the guidance in this section of the toolkit is shared from the U.S. Department of Labor's [Office of Disability Employment Policy \(ODEP\)](#), the [Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion \(EARN\)](#), and the [Campaign for Disability Employment](#).

Grantmaking Promotion and Processes

Once you have assessed and improved your internal policies and procedures, you should examine your organization's approach to grantmaking to make sure that it is fully accessible, that you are engaging in effective outreach to the disability community and other key stakeholders,

and that the playing field is leveled for everyone. This section will help you ensure that your grant opportunity promotion and processes are accessible and welcoming of people with disabilities.

Assess your Grantmaking Processes, Procedures, and Policies

Before you take any other steps, look at your entire grantmaking process, including program conception and development, grant opportunity marketing and promotion, guidelines and application procedures, panel recruitment and procedures, and decision-making about awards.

- Do you have people with disabilities involved in these processes?
- Are you conducting outreach to the disability community and disabled artists?
- Is the grant application process accessible?
- Do you include people with disabilities in your targeting of diverse groups and individuals?
- Do you have any grants that are targeted toward people with disabilities or disability-oriented organizations?
- Do you require your applicants to indicate how they will make their projects accessible to people with disabilities?
- Do you list people with disabilities in your lists of potential target audiences for funded projects?

The following section will help with this process.

Community Engagement

Form an Advisory Group

Forming an advisory group made up of people with disabilities will help make your grantmaking fully inclusive and disability-forward by ensuring that your decisions are informed by their perspectives. Consider the following steps:

- ensure representation from diverse types of disabilities and those who reflect other intersectional identities;
- ensure representation from different art forms and types of cultural work;
- reach out to disability service organizations and disability arts organizations in your community to find individuals with disabilities; and
- ask for their input and feedback as part of your decision making for new policies and programs, and by participating in grant review panels.

Assess Your Communications Materials for Accessibility and Disability Representation

Ensure that your website and promotional information are accessible to people using adaptive technologies, such as making images accessible through “alt-tags” for screen-reading software and access accommodations such as captioning. Provide print materials in alternate formats including large-print and braille upon request. Use web accessibility tools such as the [Web Accessibility Initiative \(WAI\) tool](#) or an online web accessibility checker such as the [Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool \(WAVE\)](#) to assess your website accessibility. In addition, be sure to include representation of disabled people in visuals, stories, and grantmaking impact.

Conduct Community Outreach to Build Awareness of Grant Opportunities

How do you conduct your outreach and advertise your funding opportunities? You must be sure to conduct outreach to the disability community within your funding area such as local disability service organizations, local disability arts organizations, local networks of young professionals with disabilities, and national disability and disability arts networks.

Genuine Welcome and Inclusion for People with Disabilities

For in-person events and meetings, educate all staff with information and ready-to-use wording about accessible building entrances, building navigation, restrooms, and service animals, as well as your commitment and policies for hosting accessible, inclusive meetings and events. Include the same information for access to virtual events, including the use of captions, sign-language interpretation, and visual description.



Dancer Jerron Herman. Photo by Mengwen Cao

Ensure that Your Application Process is Accessible

Accessibility in the grant application process includes both the technical side and the overall approach to grantmaking. In today's funding environment, the shift from paper applications to electronic application systems has made application processing and review much more efficient and effective. However, funders must be aware of the barriers these systems can pose in ensuring equitable grantmaking. While many, if not most, nonprofit organizations have digital capacity and computer literacy, small organizations and individual artists may have difficulty accessing electronic application systems due to limited access to high-speed internet or computer equipment or lack of computer literacy.

Just as importantly, electronic systems can pose barriers for applicants with disabilities, including people who use screen-reading software or people who cannot use a keyboard. Application systems need to be developed with screen reader capability built in from the start, and developers need to be aware of these requirements.

Funders can consider allowing alternate means of submitting applications, such as via email, in-person submission, U.S. Postal Service, messenger delivery, oral submission by phone or in person, or video to help ensure a more even playing field. However, for organizations that can only require electronic submissions, they must work with their web and software developers to ensure that their application portal is fully accessible for users who are blind or have low-vision and other disabilities.

The following are some steps to take in the development and use of your digital application process:

- Communicate accessibility requirements to website and application portal developers and ensure that these requirements are included in any requests for proposals for the development of websites and application portals, or consult with web developers specializing in accessibility. Seek out third-party software that is accessible.
- Provide contact information in your application materials, including a phone number and email address, and be prepared to provide technical assistance to those needing help with the portal when submitting applications.
- Provide alternative formats when requested such as large print, braille, audio-recorded text, or sign language video.
- Provide guidelines for application questions in a downloadable document to allow applicants to work offline. This helps people who work with an aide or who need to work outside the portal using speech-to-text software and other adaptive technologies prior to uploading their final text into the system.

- Allow information and materials to be saved throughout the process so an applicant can enter data in multiple sessions if needed.
- Strongly encourage applicants to submit materials well before the deadline to ensure that they have time to address any problems.
- Allow an applicant to verify that the correct documents were uploaded.
- Where possible, provide alternative means of submitting applications for those unable to use the electronic system.

Resources

- [Assess your website's general accessibility](#)
- [Web AIM website accessibility tool](#)
- [Creating accessible documents](#)
- [W3 standards](#)

Accessibility Requirements for Grantees

The best disability-forward funding requires that the projects themselves are fully inclusive and accessible. Funders may include requirements for accessibility in their funding guidelines, such as compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Applicants and/or recommended awardees should be asked to indicate how they will make their project accessible through a question in the grant application, a required accessibility checklist, or a full accessibility assessment. These requirements can be a part of the application process and/or part of the post-award process. Encourage applicants to include costs for accessibility/accommodations in their project budgets.

The National Endowment for the Arts requires that all grantees comply with non-discrimination requirements under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. All applicants see the following information and are required to complete a checklist if the project is recommended for funding:

Federal regulations require that all NEA-funded projects be accessible to people with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities may be audiences, visitors, artists, performers, teaching artists, students, staff, and volunteers. Funded activities should be held in a physically accessible venue, and program access and effective communication should be provided for participants and audience members with disabilities. If your project is recommended for funding, you will be asked to provide [detailed information](#) describing how you will make your project physically and programmatically accessible to people with disabilities.

Application process - Funders can require an accessibility checklist or questionnaire as part of the application. Simply asking how applicants will make their project accessible to people with disabilities can help ensure that the needs of people with disabilities are included in the project. Below is some possible language:

- Describe the accessibility at your facility, or, if you use borrowed or rented space, please demonstrate how you ensure access.
- Describe how you will make your project accessible to people with disabilities, including physical access and programmatic access.

See the [Arts Endowment's Questionnaire](#) for additional language.

Sample Language from the Ohio Arts Council:

"The Ohio Arts Council requires applicants to consider physical and programmatic accessibility for people with disabilities as an integral part of each organization's planning and budgeting process. In the box below, briefly state: 1) one example of how your organization's current programs/activities are accessible to people with disabilities, and 2) one example of a new accessibility goal for people with disabilities you will implement during this grant period."

Post-Award Process - Funders can require a checklist or questionnaire as part of the post-award process before the awardees can receive their funding. Some state arts agencies require a full accessibility audit for the recipients of operating support. The National Endowment for the Arts requires each recommended grant recipient to complete an accessibility questionnaire before receiving funds, and to complete a full self-assessment to keep on file. The Ohio Arts Council requires that applicants complete the Arts Endowment's [brief accessibility checklist](#).

The following are examples of checklists and questionnaires that address requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 including physical, programmatic, and electronic accessibility:

- [National Endowment for the Arts Brief Accessibility Checklist](#)
- [National Endowment for the Arts 504 Workbook Self-Evaluation Workbook](#)
- [New Jersey Theatre Alliance Self-Assessment tool](#)
- [ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities](#)

Reporting Process

When gathering demographic information from grant applicants, funders should incorporate disability as a reporting category, including how many

people with disabilities are served as audience members, participants, or artists. Be aware that data gathering may have restrictions, since it is reliant on people with disabilities self-identifying in the reporting process, but it is a step in the right direction.

Grant Review Processes

Include people with disabilities in your grant review panels:

Just as with any other diversity effort, including people with disabilities on grant review panels helps ensure that the projects you fund will be inclusive and welcoming to all. Panelists with disabilities will likely provide new and alternative perspectives on the applications. Disabled panelists may be more likely to raise issues related to accessibility and have a unique insight into applications for projects that serve people with disabilities or feature disabled artists. Connect with the disability community and the disability arts field to find qualified panelists with disabilities.

Provide accommodations so that panelists with disabilities can fully participate:

Be familiar with the types of accommodations you can provide for panelists to participate in the application review process and in-person or virtual panel meetings. When you first contact potential panelists, ask them to tell you if they need accommodations to access electronic or print application materials and participate in the orientation and review meetings, and be prepared to provide them. Some accommodations include:

- For people who are D/deaf or hard of hearing:
 - Ensure accessibility for the review of work samples, including video submissions, by providing captioned video, requiring applicants to ensure that all videos are captioned, or by providing sign-language interpreters to assist with work sample review.
 - Provide sign-language interpretation, video or audio relay systems, or real-time captioning for in-person, video, or telephone panel meetings.
 - Brief other panelists on procedures for speaking and giving adequate response time for interpreters or relay operators.
- For people who are blind or have low vision:
 - Require applicants to submit all documents in screen-reader-friendly formats.
 - Provide a reader to read materials aloud. (Note that this can also be an accommodation for people with dyslexia or other learning disabilities.)

- › Provide an audio describer to help review video or other visual materials.
- For people with mobility disabilities:
 - › Ensure that in-person meetings are held in accessible spaces including no-step entry, accessible paths of travel, elevators or ramps, accessible restrooms, and appropriate heights for worktables.
 - › Provide breaks for lengthier meetings and when scheduling meetings, take into account transportation needs.
- For people with speech disabilities:
 - › During in-person, video, or teleconference meetings, be sure to call on people individually and give each person a chance to speak to enable those with quiet speech or slower speech patterns time to respond and give input.
 - › Allow time during calls or meetings for those using assistive communication devices that read text aloud to enter the text and have it read aloud on calls or in meetings. Work with the individual to determine their preferred method of participating in the panel meeting.
- For people with cognitive and learning disabilities:
 - › Allow additional time for reading applications, if feasible.
 - › Provide information ahead of time to set up expectations for the nature of the work, the steps involved, the amount of screen time involved, and the overall amount of time required.
 - › Provide an assistant or reader to help panelists with reading and managing screen time.
 - › Provide sufficient breaks during long meetings.

Be sure to give panelists a deadline for requesting accommodations and plenty of time to hire accommodations personnel.

Other resources for hosting accessible meetings:

- [Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings](#)
- [Create Accessible Meetings](#)
- [Accessible Virtual Meetings](#)

Equity in Practice

Budgetary considerations:

Do your guidelines include language to reflect the added cost that accessibility might bring to a project? Be sure to allow for the cost of sign language

interpreters, audio describers, tactile models of visual art, captioning, the purchase of assistive listening equipment, and any additional costs that artists with disabilities might have, such as costs for personal assistants, specialized equipment, additional travel expenses, or the cost of additional time needed to be spent on their work. You should consider additional stipends to cover these costs when funding artist fellowships or artist residencies.



Antoine Hunter, AKA Purple Fire Crow. Photo by RJ Muna

“Please make access and inclusion a priority for the field rather than an afterthought or the last thought. Add accessibility lines to your organizational budget. Ask artists what they need and be open to learning new perspectives and cultures. Hire expert consultants in the areas you hope to learn how to support and pay them equitably. Hire BIPOC Deaf and Disabled artists into your organization. Representation is as important as providing opportunities and access.”

**Antoine Hunter, AKA Purple Fire Crow
Choreographer, Dancer, Actor, Instructor,
Speaker, Producer, and Deaf Advocate**

Giving feedback to applicants from underserved populations:

Some organizations that do not have a development professional or individual artists with disabilities may benefit from feedback from grants professionals to help level the playing field. Provide extra guidance to applicants, such as suggesting reformatting artwork to give a better presentation or suggesting ways to restructure a budget for better clarity.

Where to Learn More about Equity and Justice Grantmaking

- [Power Moves: Your Essential Philanthropy Assessment Guide for Equity and Justice](#)
- [Grantmakers in the Arts Racial Equity Resources](#)

Where to Learn More about Disability-Inclusive Arts Grantmaking:

- [Arts and Disability Funder Resources - Grantmakers in the Arts](#)
- [Disability and Philanthropy Forum](#)
- [Donor's Guide to Inclusion](#)

Explore New Funding Streams to Support Disabled Artists

Look at your current funding programs and consider how to better support artists with disabilities through grants to individual artists or to arts organizations. Some options include:

- Support for individual artists through fellowships, internships, apprenticeships, project work, professional development opportunities, portfolio development, etc.
- Support for arts education at the K-12, higher education, or community level.
- Support for arts organizations that employ/cast/curate people with disabilities, including physically integrated dance companies, artist residencies that target or support artists with disabilities, Deaf theater companies, or any type of program with integrated or concentrated work for disabled artists.
- Support for organizations to improve accessibility for their facilities and programs, to include capital improvements, purchase of equipment, or the hiring of sign language interpreters or audio describers.

Keep in mind that cultural workers with disabilities may have additional costs that non-disabled people do not have, including personal assistance services, accessible transportation, adaptive equipment for personal or professional use, and extra costs for travel. Some funders of artist fellowships add funds to cover the costs of personal assistants and accommodations.

Other Considerations

Funding, Earned Income, and Disability Benefits

Many people who receive government disability benefits and health insurance, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), or Medicaid, have concerns about losing these benefits if they earn income over a certain amount, so accepting employment or selling artwork that will pay above a certain level can pose a challenge. When structuring grant opportunities for artists with disabilities, consider paying multiple smaller amounts over time rather than one large amount. Talk with your funding recipients to determine which approach is best for them, and let them know before making payments or direct deposits.

Funding Youth Programs in the Arts

Early experiences and training in the arts are crucial for success in arts careers. Support for youth arts education must ensure that programs are inclusive and welcoming of students with disabilities. For funders of youth arts programs, the [section of this toolkit](#) addressing arts experiences for

youth can help grantmakers learn what is required by schools and arts programs to become inclusive. When funding organizations that serve youth with disabilities, consider the additional costs of remodeling spaces to accommodate students with physical disabilities and provide accessibility accommodations to programming. With disability-forward thinking, funders can ensure equity in the pipeline for youth with disabilities, which will help them create the needed portfolios for arts-focused high schools, internships, college applications, and other opportunities.

Entrepreneurship

As with many people with disabilities in the workforce, many disabled artists are self-employed and use entrepreneurial approaches to selling and promoting their work. “Traditional employment for the 30 million people with disabilities of working age in America presents many barriers which lead to widespread unemployment and underemployment, no matter the level of education, disability or age. Self-employment paints a brighter picture,” John D. Kemp, President & CEO, Lakeshore Foundation.

There are a wide range of careers for independent, entrepreneurial artists, and entrepreneurship has opportunities for people with disabilities. According to the U.S. Department of Labor:

“Many individuals with disabilities are turning to the flexibility self-employment offers in assisting them to meet both professional and financial goals. Starting one’s own business can offer similar flexibility, allowing people to make a living while maintaining a lot of latitude in choices such as work hours, nature of tasks, and income.”

The [U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy](#) has a number of resources for people interested in self-employment opportunities.

What Disabled Artists and Cultural Workers Want Arts Funders to Know

In a [2017 ePolicyWorks National Online Dialogue on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities](#), co-hosted by the National Endowment for the Arts, the U.S. Department of Labor, and Art Beyond Sight, one of the top five most popular needs identified by participants was more grants for disabled artists. Participants pointed out that as more artists with disabilities enter the field, incorporating disability into emerging artist grant opportunities and guidelines would go a long way toward advancing a more inclusive field.

Participants also identified the following additional areas of need:

- Professional development for disabled artists
- The development of inclusive college and university arts programs

- Convenings and networking opportunities for disabled artists
- Certification training programs for disabled artists
- Artistic directors' time for research, development, and exploration of disability programming
- Technology enhancement and adapted equipment for artists with disabilities, and arts programs
- Provisions for personal assistants or personal care assistants in the preparation and production of artistic work
- Medical/health subsidies for a project or grant period
- Training programs for careers in production and other technical areas in the performing arts

Additional Suggestions for Funders

- Provide a quick reference for grant application requirements and application schedule.
- Offer multiple means of communication throughout the grant process.
- Be aware of how financial support will impact individuals' disability benefits, including Social Security disability benefits, housing benefits, health insurance, etc.
- Include financial guidelines on establishing trust accounts through third parties to avoid disqualification and penalties.
- Keep in mind that requesting a set number of artistic products within a grant period may not be possible for some artists due to their disability.

Effective Outreach and Strategic Partnerships

Fully inclusive, disability-forward grantmaking requires more than an analysis of internal procedures and deliberate action to ensure that grantmaking is accessible and inclusive. It also needs direct and ongoing connection with the disability community, including artists with disabilities. The phrase “nothing about us without us” has long been the slogan for the disability rights movement, but it has more recently become “nothing without us.” To be fully informed about current priorities and ideas from the disability communities, grantmakers should bring people with disabilities into decision-making, even when it isn't specifically related to disability initiatives. This section will discuss ways to foster relationships and partnerships with the disability community to ensure that your processes and funding is fully inclusive.

Steps to take for fully inclusive, disability-forward grantmaking:

- Designate an accessibility coordinator within your staff to handle accommodations requests from applicants and grant reviewers, handle technical assistance questions from grantees, and manage your organization's training and outreach strategy.
- Form an advisory committee comprised of people with disabilities from your community to advise on policy, new programs, funding decisions, etc. This group can convene formally or be on call for consultations and questions as they arise. Consider compensation for their time and expertise.
- Hold listening sessions within your community to assess community needs.
- Hire a consultant to assess your outreach and engagement strategies.
- Conduct internal training or hold a speaker series for staff with disability advocates and leaders, and artists with disabilities.
- Ensure that all activities, including meetings, convenings, publications, etc., are in accessible locations and access accommodations are provided. Include information on accommodations provided at your event and how to request additional accommodations.
- Include language on your website that incorporates an accessibility policy statement, information on how to request accommodations for events and/or funding opportunities, and resources. Examples of inclusive language can be found at the Maryland State Arts Council, the New England Foundation for the Arts, and the Ford Foundation.
- Establish partnerships with national or local disability service organizations.
- Recruit staff and board members who have disabilities.
- Connect with other funders of disability arts organizations, disabled artists, and cultural accessibility to share best practices and ideas for improving support for people with disabilities.
- Include representations of people with disabilities in your marketing and outreach including on your website and brochures. Consider paying local disabled artists or audience members to serve as models for your own set of "stock" images or use stock images from a source that uses disabled models, such as [The Disability Collection](#).
- Keep up to date with current disability issues:
 - › Follow social media accounts of individuals and organizations within the disability community.
 - › Read blogs by disability advocates and disabled artists.

- Subscribe to newsletters from disability organizations.
- Follow the work of disability arts organizations and disabled artists.
- Attend conferences held by disability service organizations and accessibility organizations such as the ten federally-funded [regional ADA centers](#) or the [Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disability Conference](#).

Networks for Reaching Stakeholders

The following are some examples of organizations that can help you connect with key stakeholders in the arts and disability.

Arts and Disability Organizations

- [Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disability](#)
- [VSA International Network](#)
- [National Arts and Disability Center](#)

State Arts Agencies and Regional Arts Organizations

- [State Arts Agency and Regional Arts Organization List](#)
- [State Arts Agency and Regional Arts Organization Accessibility Coordinators](#)
- [National Assembly of State Arts Agencies](#)

National Arts Organizations

- [Network of 6 U.S. regional arts organizations](#)
- [Americans for the Arts](#)
- [Association of Performing Arts Professionals](#)
- [Alliance of Artists Communities](#)
- [Performing Arts Alliance](#)

National Disability Organizations with State or Local Chapters

Additional resources for assistance include the broad range of disability organizations, both cross-disability and disability-specific, many of which have state and local chapters. Examples include the American Association of People with Disabilities, the United Spinal Association, and the National Association of the Deaf, to name just a few.

Webinars and Other Virtual Events for Outreach

Webinars are a useful tool for educating potential grantees about funding opportunities and explaining guidelines. Be sure to include disability-serving organizations and artists with disabilities when advertising your webinar

and ensure that the webinar itself is accessible. During the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations started holding their events online or on virtual platforms and continue to offer virtual options as a way to broaden engagement. The following are some guidelines to follow to make virtual events/meetings accessible.

Steps for Webinar Accessibility

- Ensure that your platform and registration process are screen-reader friendly, and that people using screen-reading software can register and access all elements of the webinar platform.
- Be sure to caption the webinars, whether using a platform feature for captions or contracting with a service that can provide captions concurrently. If you archive the webinar for future viewing on your website, make sure the captions are also archived. You can also provide a transcript using the caption file.
- If you provide your slides to audience members, ensure the file is created so screen readers can read the slide's content. Alt tag any images with brief descriptions of the images.
- Ensure that any video you show is captioned.
- Ask your presenters to speak clearly and concisely, using good quality microphones or a landline if they are calling in by phone, for the best audio quality.
- To ensure that people who are blind or have low vision can access the visual information, ask speakers to read all text and provide a brief visual description of images. When developing the slides, speakers should balance the need to provide visual information for visual learners with the need to keep the text brief and to the point.

Resources for Accessible Webinars and Other Virtual Events

- [Resources to Help Ensure Accessibility of Your Virtual Events for People with Disabilities](#)
- [Accessible Web Conferences and Webinar Best Practices](#)

Models of Inclusive and Equitable Arts Granting

The history of disability employment and inclusive arts funding provides case studies to inform future funder initiatives. Here are some models for consideration:

Funding for Disabled Artists

- [Disability Futures Fellows](#) – a program of the Ford Foundation and the Mellon Foundation
- [CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund](#)
- [Dance/NYC Disability. Dance. Artistry. Regranting Programs](#)

Funding for Facility Accessibility

Some state arts councils offer cultural facilities grants to support capital improvements and other improvements related to accessibility.

Some examples include:

- [Vermont Arts Council's Cultural Facilities Grants](#)
- [New York State Council on the Arts Capital Projects Fund](#)
- [Mass Cultural Council's Cultural Facilities Fund](#)
- [Michigan Arts and Culture Council Capital Improvement Grant](#)

Funding for Inclusive Programs

Mass Cultural Council's Universal Participation (UP) [Universal Participation Initiative Innovation Fund](#). As part of the UP Initiative, the Innovation Fund offers annual \$5,000 grants for UP Designated Organizations to plan and implement accessibility systems within their organization.

Utilizing a Fiscal Sponsor to Fund Small Organizations

Fiscal sponsors are a way for small arts organizations, organizations that do not have 501(c)3 status, and individual artists to receive funding from grantmakers. While many government funders such as the NEA are not able to fund organizations through fiscal sponsorship, fiscal sponsors can offer a way to support disabled artists and organizations that support their work. The following are helpful resources.

- [National Council of Nonprofits – Fiscal Sponsorship for Nonprofits](#)
- [National Network for Fiscal Sponsors](#)
- [Fiscal Sponsor Directory](#)

Fiscal Sponsor Examples in the Arts and Media

- [New York Foundation for the Arts](#)
- [Fractured Atlas](#)
- [Allied Media Projects Sponsored Projects Program](#)
- [International Documentary Association Fiscal Sponsorship Program](#)

Further Resources for Disability-Inclusive Grantmaking

Drawn from Ford's learning efforts with its program staff, "[Funder Guidance and Case Studies for Disability-Inclusive Grantmaking](#)" offers a starting point for any grantmaker looking to integrate a disability perspective into their work (United States and globally focused).

The [Disability & Philanthropy Forum](#) is an emerging philanthropy-serving organization created by the [Presidents' Council on Disability Inclusion in Philanthropy](#). Its mission is to center the perspectives of disabled people while engaging philanthropy on a collective journey to understand disability inclusion as key to advancing social justice. The Disability & Philanthropy Forum website offers a robust library of resources to support philanthropy's ongoing learning about disability. By shining a spotlight on the learning processes and work of foundations across the field, the Disability & Philanthropy Forum aims to influence a sector-wide movement toward a future of inclusion and equity for all. The following are some of their key resources:

- [Disability and Philanthropy Forum: Disability History and Culture](#)
- [Disability and Philanthropy Forum: Accessible and Inclusive Operations](#)
- [Disability and Philanthropy Forum: Disability-Inclusive Grantmaking](#)
- [Disability and Philanthropy Forum: Disability Inclusion Menu](#)

Disability Culture

[Road Map for Inclusion: Changing the Face of Disability in Media](#), by Judith Heumann, internationally known disability rights activist and Ford Foundation Senior Fellow, with Katherine Salinas, and Michellie Hess.

Disability Language

Language can show respect or reflect harmful stereotypes. The words used to describe people with disabilities, and the accommodations they use, can have an impact on how disability inclusion is approached and how well it is implemented. If you make it part of your mission to ensure that the language you use is not pitying, patronizing, or otherwise negative, it can lift the cultural stigmas around disability and allow for more open conversation to ensure accessibility. The chart below, used by the National Endowment for the Arts, gives some examples of what to use in place of negative language.

Try this...	Instead of...
Person with a disability, disabled person, disabled artist	Handicapped
Person without a disability, non-disabled person	Normal, able-bodied
Person with a physical disability	Crippled, lame
Person who uses a wheelchair, wheelchair user	Wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair
Person with..., person who has...	Suffers from..., victim of...
Person who is blind or has low vision	The sightless
*Deaf person, Deaf community, person who is hard of hearing	Hearing impaired, hearing loss
Person with a psychiatric disability or mental illness	Crazy, emotionally disturbed, insane
Person with a cognitive or intellectual disability	Slow, retarded, Downs, "special needs"

* The Deaf community has a strong sense of identity and uses a capital "D" for being culturally Deaf. A lowercase "d" is used for the audiological ability to hear.

There are multiple preferences for the terminology to use when referring to people with disabilities. Some individuals with disabilities prefer the use of person-first language (e.g., people who are blind), emphasizing the person over their disability. Others prefer identity-first language (e.g., disabled artist, blind person) because they view their disability as an integral part of who they are.

Resources

- [Guidelines for Writing About People with Disabilities](#) from ADA National Network
- [Reporting and Writing About Disabilities](#) from National Disability Rights Network
- [Disability Language Style Guide](#) from the National Center on Disability and Journalism

- [Disability-Inclusive Development Toolkit](#) from CBM
- [Portrayal of People with Disabilities](#) from the Association of University Centers on Disability
- [Guidelines for Writing About People with Disabilities](#) from the ADA National Network



Musician Blessing Offor. Photo courtesy of Art Beyond Sight