[VIDEO]

Stacy Palmer: I want to welcome you all to this terrific conversation. We have wonderful experts and we really want you to be a very big part of this conversation, so I hope you'll post your questions throughout and we'll get to as many of them as we can. You have the biographies of our panelists, but I would like them to introduce themselves and let you know what kind of disability grants they make so you can understand their particular focus. Let me start with Kym.

Kym Eisner: Ok, my name is Kym Eisner and I am the Executive Director of the Craig H Nielsen Foundation, and we support programming and scientific research to improve the quality of life for those living with and affected by spinal cord injury. So supporting individuals with disability and lived experience is at the forefront of everything we do.

Stacy Palmer: Stephanie?

Stephanie Lomibao: Hello everyone my name is Stephanie Lomibao. I'm a short filipino woman. My pronouns are she, her, hers. I just recovered from short-term disability with the birth of my second son in January of this year. My day job is as a senior vice president and philanthropy program manager for the Bank of America Charitable Foundation, where we invest philanthropic resources in 91 communities across the U.S. and 3 regions outside of the U.S. We support immediate and long-term economic resiliency and economic mobility community solutions, and our most recent example is a 1 billion dollar commitment we've made over the next four years to address racial and economic inequities exposed by COVID-19. So thank you again to the entire RespectAbility team for having me today and to my esteemed panelists and moderator. I look forward to the conversation.

Stacy Palmer: Jose?

Jose Luis Plaza: Thank you Stacy. Hello everyone. My name is Jose Plaza. My pronouns are he, him. I am wearing a dark blue shirt today and I'm excited to be part of this panel. I am a manager with the California Endowment. We are a health foundation based out of California and we work to mitigate blockages to both health access and quality affordable care. We work to represent and ensure that grantees across the state of California are doing their best to advance and build power within communities that need it the most. Excited to have this conversation with you all today.

Stacy Palmer: Lisa?

Lisa Trygg: Hi, good morning. I'm Lisa Trygg. I'm the proud mother of an awesome son who's an award-winning baker and also happens to have developmental disabilities. I'm half Lebanese and half Swedish so I'm not sure what I look like, but I'm the senior program officer for the May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trusts' adults and transitioning youth with disabilities portfolio. And our foundation's overall goal is to support and recognize people with disabilities as valuable members and contributors to our society. Our focus is on those with developmental disabilities, and those particularly with vision impairment, and hard of hearing. We do our funding through four focus areas which are community inclusion, independent living, employment, and caregiver support. We primarily fund programs and services in the 14 western states and British Columbia, with some exceptions for some national initiatives. Thank you so much.

Stacy Palmer: Because we have a panel that represents so many different viewpoints, I'm curious to hear from all of you about what you're finding your grantees are going through in the COVID economy. It's both an economic and a health crisis, obviously, but tell us a little bit more about what you're seeing and where the gaps are that it's really important for philanthropy to fill. And Stephanie, let me turn to you first.

Stephanie Lomibao: Great, thanks Stacy. So I know that it's challenging times and the challenges facing the nonprofit sector in particular are very complex. There's a confluence of many crises. There's a pandemic which has caused many of the non-profits to shutter and close operations. And then there's a need for non-profits to stay open as essential critical programs and services for those most impacted. And then we also have the confluence of the recent events with George Floyd and the need to say black lives matter and racism, structural racism and discrimination in all its forms is not acceptable anymore. So what I've seen from grantees is a lot of anxiety. And there's actually a recent article from the New York Times that I'd love for someone on the RespectAbility team to put in the chat. But it says that the nonprofit sector has been so critical at filling in the gaps or voids the government and businesses weren't able to provide in terms of social services, and yet they're probably the last ones to be thought of when it comes to some sort of stimulus or support when it comes to the economic troubles and turbulence that we're seeing today. From our grantees, they're asking us to be much more flexible with their funding, make it unrestricted, consider core operating and consider multi-year. I think even before COVID, many of our grantees, especially in the space where we're supporting communities facing extraordinary barriers to opportunities like the disability community, were already struggling, not only in terms of representation of philanthropic resources but also from an operating budget standpoint. And so, in terms of what growing needs might be, I do believe that the nonprofit sector will be significantly impacted. There are estimates of 40 to 60 percent of the nonprofits we see today will no longer exist. So collaboration will be key and not necessarily collaboration in the forms of mergers and acquisitions, but if you truly do have a common community that you care about, a common mission or north star, then how can you work together to be stronger? And the same is being asked to funders as well. As funders, how can we better work together to ensure that those nonprofits, those services we know are critical to the communities we serve, will remain even through the economic resilience and and recovery that we know will be slow to them.

Stacy Palmer: Jose, could you tell us a little bit about what you're seeing?

Jose Plaza: Definitely. So, not to belabor the challenge in terms of gaps that our communities are facing but something that I do want to open up with is really the resiliency in the communities. We understand that COVID has hit already marginalized communities extremely hard. But what we have also been seeing is how communities that are at most disadvantaged have come together, have advocated for one another. And unfortunately what COVID has done for our communities is that it has brought up the inequities that we knew existed, but it has also shown us how important it is both for philanthropy and for non-profits to have honest and real conversations of what are the immediate needs but also assess what are the long-term system changes that are needed. One of the things that I really think about is we had so many limitations around housing, on food assistance, on digital divide, and all that was put aside when COVID impacted us to ensure that we were protecting those most vulnerable. So we need to ensure that we continue that partnership. Specifically for philanthropy, I think it's important that we look at those inequities, both in our grant making and who is represented through our portfolios of grantees. We need to ensure that disability is not just an afterthought but it's something that we put front and center when it comes to grant making, and that as funders we challenge one another to do more in order to close this gap that all communities, not just disabled communities, are facing, but ensuring that we're elevating the voices of those that are disabled to ensure that they are represented. And ensuring that our grantees - existing or future grantees - are also centering the needs of those that are disabled.

Stacy Palmer: Lisa?

Lisa Trygg: I don't want to repeat what has been said, particularly with Stephanie, because there's a lot of commonalities in what we're doing, but we've made well over 200 emergency grants, and a lot of them have been for meeting basic needs, because we do fund a lot of direct service providers. So you're talking about delivery of food, addressing their increased isolation, assisting with rent payments and helping them to search for a new job. So an example is Catholic Community Services of southern Arizona. We provided additional funding for them so that they can help the individuals who are deaf and deaf-blind to access critical everyday resources such as food, rental and utility financial assistance, and medicine, and PPE for the staff to safely address client needs because they can only be delivered in person, particularly for those with deaf-blind clients. So we've been trying to meet those immediate needs while keeping our normal grant making going, and being as flexible as we can about not only the grant making, but the reports that are due.

Stacy Palmer: Kym?

Kym Eisner: Well yes, ditto to everything that the three of you have already said. One thing I would want to start with that I think will be part of a through line is disability does not discriminate. Your gender, your socioeconomic status, where you live, how you live - it can impact any of us and I think that's really important to remember because disability is all of us. It is everyone we fund, so just as a side note, the Nielsen Foundation has done a few things. Fortunately our board has been incredibly responsive and giving. They've allocated almost 10 million dollars to respond to COVID in two different primary buckets. One to address the immediate needs of our grantees and the communities they serve. The Nielsen foundation doesn't fund individuals directly, but partnering with many of our programming grantees and I really mean partnering - because they've had to think quickly and creatively and shift. We've been able to support that and help them meet the needs of their communities. Now in many of these communities, especially the smaller grassroots because we fund nationally, the service providers may be the only organization within the region to provide any service, to provide peer support. So it is more than just the specific service they provide. We had one grantee be very creative: an adaptive sports organization who wanted to keep their coaches employed, so the coaches became grocery delivery individuals. So it helps the coaches keep their jobs, and it got immediate needs to send services to the people on the ground. So that's one component of what we're doing. The other thing that I'm also really proud of that sends a message, I hope, to universities and larger institutions: we've been proactive with our research grantees and said to them we know you've had to shut down. You need to stay employed. We need to send a message to the universities and larger organizations that spinal cord injury research is important. And so we've reached out and said: what do you need, what were your losses during this time, and how can we support you? And being proactive has sent a message to those institutions that they need to pay more attention to the needs of individuals with a disability and so we're really proud of that.

Stacy Palmer: Thank you all. That really gave us a good overview of so many different things that are happening. One of the things that was a through line of what you all talked about was the interconnectedness of all of these issues, and I'm wondering - we probably have some grant makers listening to this panel who may think disability isn't part of what I do, I'm really interested in climate change or the arts or bolstering democracy. What would you say to those people who say that's what I'm focused on and, you know, I'm curious – that's why I came to this panel – but what should I be thinking when it comes to disability inclusion? What would your message be to them? And can I start with you, Lisa?

Lisa Trygg: Great opportunity, thank you so much for asking the question. I want to use an example of one of our grantees called creative growth arts center. They are the oldest and largest arts center of its kind in the world, offering artists with disabilities a professional art studio, exhibition opportunities, the ability to sell their artwork and be paid for it, and a supportive community. And their artwork has been displayed as far away as Paris and Melbourne. There are in the permanent collections of the New York museum of modern art and the Smithsonian, as well as in the senior corporate offices of Facebook. Its clients' artwork has even been displayed on the method hand soap bottles being sold in the Target stores. And it's just a model organization and it's fostered the development of over 20 similar centers for artists with disabilities in the U.S. alone. Yet traditional arts funders haven't stepped up to the plate to fund this model organization, even in the foundation-rich San Francisco bay area. So what I've encouraged creative growth to do is to refer prospective foundation funders to me, so that I can enlighten them about their amazing organization and why it makes sense to fund them as part of the arts community.

Stacy Palmer: Jose?

Jose Plaza: I think that is an excellent question and jumping off a bit off of what Kym mentioned, disability exists in every circle that we fund. It is imperative that funders don't necessarily look to fund disability issues but push grantees to have them recognize that folks that are disabled are representative in all of the work that we do. If you're a funder that focuses on immigration issues what is the role that disability and funding individuals that are disabled that also happen to be undocumented or seeking refuge – what type of funding would you be able to create and your grantees create space for them in order to fund? Regardless if it's health, if it's schools, if it's justice, disabled people will be part of that population. And so it's important that if you as a funder say disability is not part of my portfolio, that is the first thing that you need to check within yourself and within grantees to ensure that they are showing up. Because if you say that disability is not part of the portfolio that is already an issue of the problem in terms of representation when it comes to the work that you're doing. And it's also important that we also think not only of just funding but also the opportunities that as organizations we're providing to folks that are disabled. Are we employing them? Are we providing internships? Are we providing career opportunities and also pathways for disabled folks to be connected with the grantees that we work with? And so there's a couple different ways for funders to really show up, not only in funding but also in creating collaborative partnerships with other funders both for employment and opportunities to learn from one another. It is important also for funders that do disability work to elevate partners, just as Lisa did, and just as we do with RespectAbility, so that there is more knowledge and awareness of organizations that are doing this excellent work. So those are a couple ways that I would imagine that funders should step up, not only in funding, but in really bringing to light the work that's happening in communities.

Stacy Palmer: Great.

Stephanie Lomibao: Hey Stacy, can I build off what Jose said? Sorry, Kym. I wholeheartedly agree - especially that comment around partnership and collaboration. The truth of the matter is seeing, and being deliberate and intentional about being inclusive of the disability community, when it comes to other conversations about race or civil rights or social justice, is still a challenge. It's because we have to be more conscious about it. Not just we from a grant maker standpoint but also from a nonprofit sector standpoint as well. I think it's really important that both from a funder perspective but also from a community perspective that if there are intersectionalities, we need to speak up and bring those to light. And one thing that Jennife, the founder of RespectAbility, has done so eloquently and with such finesse is when there are opportunities to draw those connections, she speaks up loud and clear. And I think that's the best practice for all of us, including funders. If there's an intersectionality between black African-American males being incarcerated in the United States, and the fact that most of them have sort of a more invisible disability, we need to call that out. If there is an underlying condition that's considered a disability and those are 90 percent of the people being impacted by COVID-19, we need to call it out. It's about speaking up and bringing to attention and to light those connectedness - that's so important in order for us to see the connection between disability and some of these other funding focus areas.

Kym Eisner: Stacy, time for me? [Laughter] To build on what everyone has said - it is -- absolutely, Stephanie, we have to be intentional. And it might sound overwhelming and scary and how do I dig in, and there's all these other things that I'm supposed to be doing - baby steps. And they're not that hard! We fund nationally. Anyone could go onto our website and take a look at who we have funded - for another funder, researching where there might be crossover. We fund the arts, we fund employment, we fund advocacy - that's not our mission, but we absolutely fund it in the types of work that we do. I'm sure an arts funder and I could find overlap in grantees. So that's the start. That's the first step. Once a funder realizes, "oh, I really am funding in this area. What's next?" And just like we want our grantees to learn from each other and reach out to us and ask for help and advice in building their proposals, we as funders have the responsibility to share our information and our experiences and help each other learn more, to be better, to do more - because it's our responsibility.

Stacy Palmer: Thank you and I think that that's absolutely a critical issue and I'm sure all of the panelists will be ready to help all of you after this conversation as well. So let's continue that. One of the things that you mentioned too was the idea about supporting advocacy just now, and we're here today because we are marking a major anniversary of legislation that made a huge difference and was a result of an enormous amount of work that people did on advocacy. I'm curious what you all see from your perspective today. With all of the demands on non-profits to provide services, to worry about their finances their employees and all of those things, It's hard to take time out to also be a good advocate. But are you seeing the non-profits that work on disability issues are they doing enough to make sure that needs are paid attention to and doing advocacy, and also, are grant makers providing enough support for that kind of advocacy? So I wonder who wants to take that question first. Jose, would you like it?

Jose Plaza: Yes. The answer is no. We - and I will say we, both in terms of funders and organizations - we're not doing enough in terms of advocacy. I keep on reiterating the point that disability is not just visible, and so it is important that we think of this work, not just in terms of access - when it comes to access to buildings or interpretation. We need to think of advocacy around folks that are disabled and their families in terms of access to resources, access to independence, access to ensuring that there is consistent system change within the environs that we occupy. I think it's important that we look at the intersection of disability, as Stephanie has mentioned, with race, with immigration status, with language, and so advocacy can look like moving and advocating for legislation, but it also is advocacy within the school systems, within our communities, that universal targeted work that we tend to talk about. And I think it's time for organizations and funders to be bolder in the demands and the asks that we make for folks that are disabled. And with it comes also this responsibility for us to advocate for those that - I'm not a disabled person, but it's important for me to do due diligence just as I advocate for black lives matter and for the LGBT movement within my portfolio, that I ensure that black led organizations, that LGBT led organizations are centering disabled folks as well. So yes, the answer is no, we are not doing enough and it's imperative that as we celebrate this anniversary, we look at the gaps that have not been met. Everything from digital divide to the inequities that COVID has brought about.

Stacy Palmer: Lisa?

Lisa Trygg: I'm going to share some specific examples again, because I'm quite proud of some of the work that our grantees have been doing and I want to be positive about this. I look at the shining example of Arc of California, which is a membership organization of the local Arc chapters. They're phenomenal at doing training for advocacy in the community and self-advocacy of those with disabilities so that they can advocate on their own behalf. They do on the ground training. They educate key state decision makers. They organize local volunteer advocates. And they have specialized education for the volunteer advocacy leaders in the state capitol and in the communities throughout California. They've been critical to elevating not only the awareness of the needs of the disability population, but most recently in negotiating with the state proposed California state budget cuts that were supposed to happen, and we did not lose a single support mechanism or funding channel in the state of California due to their efforts. I'd also like to talk about another example about advocacy that I feel is very effective when the messaging comes for somebody who is not in the disability field. We have a unique initiative that we had started before COVID with minor league baseball charities. And it's going to pick up again when they can operate in a safe manner, but through their specific intellectual and developmental disabilities awareness and inclusion initiative that we're co-funding, they're going to be promoting community inclusion in mid-sized cities often lacking those disability resources due to their size, because that's where these teams play - the over 100 teams. So they're going to be educating the fan base, offering game day and other employment opportunities for individuals with IDD, enhancing the game day experiences for those with disabilities and providing player awareness and support for team members and family members with loved ones with IDD. And if you've ever seen some of their promotions, when they do decide to take on something that they're interested in, this is going to be a phenomenal opportunity across the country in these mid-sized cities. So I'm looking for more and more of those kinds of advocacy opportunities where there's buy-in from community members.

Stacy Palmer: Powerful examples - thank you. Kym?

Kym Eisner: Well two things I would add and I'll be brief, but I want us all to remember "nothing about us without us." We need to make sure that we're including people with disabilities in these conversations, whether it is on a grant review or designing a grant program, whatever it is that I think I might be doing to help, if I don't have an individual with lived experience informing my thought process, I haven't done enough. So that's one piece. The second - the foundation is a member of the president's council on disability inclusion, and I think it's something that everybody should be aware of. There's a great toolkit, I know they're going to post in the chat box, I believe - it will help everybody take their first step. How can you be more inclusive, what can you do? There are great resources there and I think that's a great place for people to start if they're not quite sure what the first step might be, and even if you have done step one and step two, let's be consistent together on step three and the toolkit can help with that as well.

Stacy Palmer: Stephanie?

Stephanie Lomibao: Yeah, I have four points to just build on some of the great comments from my fellow panelists. Darren Walker posted something on Twitter in commemoration of the ADA anniversary that I thought was so beautifully worded that I'm just going to read the quote to you. And he used #DisabilityDemandsJustice. He said while a major milestone, the journey to justice is far from over and we need to understand the obstacles still facing the disability community, and recognize that a truly equitable future is a vision we all share. And I think that's really how I feel, but coming from a corporation, from a corporate funder, I really ask everyone on the line: funder, community, government alike - you need to vote with your wallet. There are companies willing to do more to advocate, more to take a stand, and those are the companies that you should really support. Gone are the days where you look for those transactional relationships between a corporation and a non-profit or a funder and a foundation and a non-profit. You're really looking for partnerships. And in that spirit, the disability community really should look for allies and advocates, not just us saying that this is something important, but who are our unlikely allies who would also stand shoulder to shoulder with us to say that while we've accomplished ADA 30 years ago, there's so much more to do, and we need to build that political will. And with policy and advocacy, funders often shun away from the politics, but what is clearly nonpartisan and speaks volumes is data. So if I could say anything again and again from a community perspective, data speaks volumes. And so does storytelling. So in terms of using your voice, look for those funders, those corporations that have communication platforms. Darren Walker, for example, is followed by - I think he has a million followers, but at least a couple thousand, right? So how can he help share stories of people who've experienced what we're trying to overcome, right? It's sharing your stories - connecting the head hand and heart, and embracing differences. Promoting the fact that some of the most talented people in history are people with disabilities, and showing success so that more will follow. At Bank of America, for example, we have what's called support services. It's our own social enterprise in five locations where rather than contracting out, we employ individuals, 300, with some sort of physical or invisible disability. And we've created a playbook so it's not just what we're doing but we know it's the right thing to do, and we've created a how-to on how to be more inclusive of hiring those with diverse abilities, and so I'm asking my RespectAbility teammates to please post that link on the chat box too. It's free. If you have any questions, I'm sure my teammates from support services would love to share. But it's another way of using your voice, right? Share openly what you've learned and what best practices you have.

Stacy Palmer: Stephanie, you made a point, as had several of the other panelists throughout the conversation, about the things grant makers can do that really make a difference that aren't about writing a check. And I want to be clear: in this environment, writing a check is hugely important, so it has to be "and," but I'm curious - what have you found especially in these challenging times, I think so much has been turned on its head, the things that we thought made sense sometimes don't as much in the COVID world. What are the things that grant makers can do that you have found truly make a difference and that you'd like to encourage other people to do that do go beyond writing the check? Lisa, do you want to start on that?

Lisa Trygg: I'm the consummate matchmaker. I do relationships well. I take it upon myself that even when somebody calls or contacts me and we're unable to fund them for some reason, that I'm matching them up with other contacts and resources, be it in their geographic area or their focus area. And I like to think that that's helping in some way, so I haven't just said no. And that's really important to me, to make sure that I've done something to further them along. The other thing is that program officers in particular have lots of contacts and resources. And when somebody calls asking for a referral or whatever, that it's important to take the time to do that, even if it doesn't mean writing a check. And I spend a good part of my time doing that, particularly with grants that could have been closely aligned but that we have limited resources and can't fund everybody. Also, there are examples of grantees, I want to take Michael's learning center - that most people haven't heard about in Los Angeles serves a very underprivileged area. But he's developed - that organization developed several innovative sustainable social enterprises, including a bakery that supplies SpaceX in normal days with over twenty thousand cookies a week because these guys get the munchies, and over 20 other major local corporations with cookies and goodies and connecting him, and he's willing to do it, with other grantees so they can learn from his experience of how he set up a successful social enterprise. So we really encourage our grantees, and it's one thing we look for when they apply is that they're willing to share their knowledge and resources, because we can't fund everybody.

Stacy Palmer: That's great. I think every program officer should add matchmaker on their cards- that's a wonderful description. Jose, what do you think?

Jose Plaza: All that. I think it's important, everything that Lisa mentioned. We need to serve a role not only as a convener, as a matchmaker but it is important that, in not just cutting checks, that we're also asking grantees what are the specific needs that they have that they're not asking of us. Something that will happen often in philanthropy is that - The California Endowment, we're a health foundation, so folks will come to us with health specific asks, and might not necessarily ask us for assistance around mentoring, around immigration issues, around education or whatnot. And so it is important for funders to also ask for that intersection in the work that our grantees and our funders do. I think Kym and the work that Kym does is a great example of how you can be intersectional and bring about change in the disability world through a different and complete lens, so it's important that in funding and in having these conversations with grantees, we challenge ourselves but also challenge grantees to make asks outside of our public mission and scope because intersection is important. And that is one way that we need to start doing so, as well.

Stacy Palmer: That's great, and our time is getting a little short and I want to make sure we get questions and answers so I'm gonna go to that, and I hope we can come back on this other topic and I'm sorry I didn't get to everybody on that. But let me read the first question. If 20 percent of the population has a disability, is this reflected in the personnel and boards of nonprofits and philanthropists? And then this person also wanted to know more about the arts organization that Lisa Trygg spoke about, and I think that may be in the chat box already. Who wants to take that question about the representation at nonprofits and in foundations? And I'm not sure how many of you have that broad perspective - does anybody have - Kym, you might from your role in the president's council have the answer to that, so can I do that?

Kym Eisner: We can but Lisa did you wanna, you raised your hand so I can --

Lisa Trygg: I just wanted to say that maybe I would refocus that question because in our foundation, we believe that the lived experience is really important. And so the - the initial decision making is left to the senior program officers who are deciding which proposals, LOIs to take a look at and I give myself as an example. Not only do I have an adult son with developmental disabilities, my daughter is a job coach for adults with disabilities in a nonprofit, and I volunteer in the community with disability organizations, so that lived experience, our trustees feel, is very important for us to be bringing a very valuable assessment of the proposals before it even reaches their plate.

Kym Eisner: And I guess I would just add quickly, where - we are focused on disability - spinal cord injury specific - and even we don't do it well enough. We can do more. It's not 20 percent. It should be. So if we're struggling, it's okay to struggle. We have people with disabilities and spinal cord injury on every review process represented, but it's not 20 percent, and how can we do more, and how can we be better? So I would put that out there because I think everybody needs to have it at the forefront of their mind whether they are doing it now or want to be doing it - we can all do more and we can all be more educated. And again, I said it before, it is our responsibility to do so.

Stacy Palmer: Jose or Stephanie, do you want to add in on that? Stephanie you had your hand up.

Stephanie Lomibao: Yeah, So I wholeheartedly agree that whether you're a foundation or a corporation, taking that introspective look and seeing how we operationalize our beliefs really helps us overcome - and the consumer or the community to overcome - what woke washing is. Right? Be wary of what's really authentic to the organization and what's just the flavor of the day. So for Bank of America, diversity equity and inclusion is part of our fabric. But how do we operationalize that? Well, we're not just looking at hiring, and we have a dedicated recruiter, but we also have support for the managers to improve retention. We don't just hire and engage teammates in a more unified approach, but we ensure that we have an employee resource group that's really committed on disability advocacy and action. And they are really the voice to our senior leaders and our executives about what accommodation means, what leadership engagement means. And that era of employee activism is so important to say, especially for community members on the line who are trying to figure out how to build partnerships with corporations in corporate foundations. It usually doesn't start with a direct grant. It starts with finding commonality, and how we can engage the stakeholders a company and organization cares about more meaningfully. And for the bank, it's our employees, right? So how is there meaningful engagement where employees can talk courageously about their lived experiences, where we can help define and create what financial tools are needed for the disability community, and then last but not least, cross-sector collaboration investing is so, so important.

Stacy Palmer: Jose, did you want to weigh in?

Jose Plaza: Yeah, so I think folks have have mentioned most of my thoughts. The one thing I will say is representation matters, and yes, folks should be represented equitably, not only on the boards but on staff. But more importantly for funders, it should be 20 percent of the work that you do, if that is a number that we want to target. And so I think it's important that we ask and demand again those bold ideas of not only representation on boards, but that organizations have a pipeline for hiring and for retaining folks with different disabilities, but also in the giving and in the work that they're asking grantees to make. So yes, representation matters, but also, let's talk the talk and walk the walk.

Stacy Palmer: We don't have a whole lot of time but I'm curious what all of you think about what's next, right? As you look ahead, are you optimistic that we're going to see many more advances on disability issues, and that philanthropy is going to come together and embrace this area? Or are you concerned that with all the competing priorities, perhaps this will not get the attention that's needed. What's your outlook and what would be the one thing you would hope everybody would take away from this panel as a next step? Who wants to start?

Jose Plaza: I can take that one.

Stacy Palmer: Great!

Jose Plaza: So I think it's important, I keep on saying is that COVID has brought about and elevated the inequities that communities are going through, be it when it comes to access to fair housing, access to labor protections, access to health and affordable health care. So it's important that as we move forward that we are careful not to turn this into an oppression olympics of who needs more, and who is the most disadvantaged, but really that, as funders and organizations, we look at systems - what is the inequity that the systems are bringing about and impacting communities, and who they are impacting the most. So I think it's important that we look less at what are the needs of specific groups, but look at the systems and how those systems are creating that environment for inequity and lack of opportunity. And targeting the system is what will be that long-term effect. Right now, rapid response is imperative in terms of rent assistance and food assistance and employment assistance, but that money will run out and some of it might run out this week, some of it will run out in six months. Those issues will persist and the lack of representation will persist. And so it's important that moving forward we look at the inequities within the systems, be it housing, labor, employment - you you can name them, rather than looking at just the immediate needs, because effective change will take time and it won't come within a week or even from this panel, as much as I like everyone.

Stacy Palmer: That's a wonderful point and I wish we could have devoted more time on the panel to that very issue because that's absolutely critical. Lisa?

Lisa Trygg: I'm going to be more direct. We all need to recognize that there is a pending train wreck that's going to happen and that is that as aging baby boomers become no longer able to care for their loved ones with disabilities living at home, we don't have a game plan in place. And right now, over 70 percent of adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities are still living at home with their parents. And our foundation is working really hard in this field by funding several initiatives to create industry standards, family education, etcetera, but we need other funders to step up to the plate. And this time it includes for-profit funders - lawyers and fiduciaries, for example, who make money off of families with disabilities through the special needs trust business. This is going to be a huge issue going forward, and there is virtually nobody else in this funding space right now, aside from our foundation. So I welcome with open arms anybody who's interested in learning more, let me know.

Stacy Palmer: Yes, I apologize that we need to end there. There's a great panel following this of terrific non-profit leaders, I hope you'll all stay and join. I want to thank all of our panelists who have been so insightful today. I wish we could have talked to them for hours. Thank you all so much for joining us and have a good rest of your day. Bye-bye.

[VIDEO]

Debbie Fink: How has the ADA impacted your life personally or professionally, Lachi, you want to take the lead there?

Lachi: The ADA - the Americans with Disabilities Act - has very heavily impacted my life. I mean, it's always very essential to have ink to paper when it comes to rights and regulations of certain persons, especially if you are in the margin. And because of the Americans with Disabilities Act, I've been able to have just a better footing, against my peers and - I don't want to say competitors, but, you know, colleagues, in order to just make sure that when I'm at work, I'm taken seriously when I ask for the accommodations I need. And while it's always still super scary and you always feel like oh my god it's kind of stressful, because there is ink to paper there is that boost of confidence to be like, okay, well, they sort of have to do it if I ask for it. And I think that's one of the biggest refreshers for the ADA is just allowing us to feel confident when we request the things we need and when we advocate for ourselves.

Zazel-Chavah O’Garra, MSW: I'm with the arts and education committee for the board of education. I was appointed by the former chancellor [unintelligible], and the ADA has allowed us to really provide for the students with disabilities i.e. where I am able to teach the students with disabilities dance. Before, they were unable to take dance classes because sometimes dance studios, you couldn't teach dance because dance - the classrooms are on the fifth floor. So now we are able to have accessible classrooms for students who are dancing so they're making it much more inclusive and accessible for students with disabilities within the public schools, within DC - it's called DC 75 in New York City. So that's been really wonderful.

Debbie Fink: Thank you Zazel, and I know we have another dancer on the panel perhaps we would like, Lauren, you to weigh in on how the ADA has impacted your ability to pursue your dance, as even before you were Ms. Wheelchair 2020. So take it away, Lauren.

Lauren Arena: Yes, so I've been a dancer now for about six years, but five years with the company, and with the ADA, it makes me feel - first of all the ADA to me is inclusion, so I feel very included. When I'm dancing I feel like I'm out there, my disability just is out of my mind for a little bit, I just, I feel free in a way, so – not that I don't on a regular basis it's just... And then I feel like I'm like everyone else, they don't even see my wheelchair now. I feel included and it's all thanks to ADA. I have events that I go to that are accessible to me, and I really thank the ADA.

Debbie Fink: Thank you, Lauren, that was - I have watched your videos of you dancing, and yes, I can feel your sense of freedom as you move and dance so thank you. Okay, any other panelists - would you like to talk about how the ADA has impacted your life personally or professionally? From Ms. Wheelchair 2020 New York to Ms. Wheelchair New York 2018. Take it away, Trina.

Ketrina Hazell: I'll share how the ADA impacted my life. The ADA has impacted my life in so many ways because first, my parents were born in the caribbean where disability is not visible, so that's one of the reasons why the ADA has impacted my life, because I'm allowed to see disability as visible. And it also impacted my life to be able to attend public school in New York City, although the public schools in New York City still has a lot of work to be done in terms of being accessible and including students with disabilities. And it also impacted my life in a way - I was able to go to college and recently received my Associate's degree this past June 2020. And without the accommodations of the college I don't think that would have been possible. So I'm really grateful for the ADA in that way. And I'm also grateful for the ADA because it gives me the opportunity to have access to the community, like being Ms. Wheelchair New York 2018. I was given opportunities to make local and state appearances and get my voice heard. And the last thing that the ADA has really impacted was for me to be given the opportunity to have a job at the regional workforce transformation center as the self advocacy lead for Region 4.

Debbie Fink: Thank you Trina, that was great. Two Ms. Wheelchairs heard from for New York. That's powerful information that you've shared. Abigail, I'd like to turn it over to you.

Abigail Shaw: Yeah, I just wanted to share that the ADA has given me the choice of the mobility aid I want to use to get around and as a woman who's blind, I feel the safest and most confident being able to use my guide dog. And the ADA protections to go anywhere the rest of the public is allowed to go, and that has made a dramatic difference in where I can choose to go to school, jobs that I can apply for and even just socializing with my friends and family. Being able to have that choice and access and what makes the most sense for me as a person with a disability.

Debbie Fink: Thank you Abigail, thank you for that. Dr. Nelle or Sasha, if you want to weigh in, now is your opportunity or we can move in to our next question. Okay so Dr. Nelle, this question is for you. What gives you the courage to share the things you face with your invisible disability?

Dr. Nelle Richardson: Well hi again. The courage really came from going from the doctor's office to places in the community and when people look at me it feels like I'm always rejected because people never believe that I have a disability. And I just want these individuals to know that disability doesn't come in one package. There are visible disabilities and there are invisible disabilities, one of which I do have. Having lost my memory from a traumatic brain injury back then where I had to - I work very hard and then when people see you they don't see that, you know? It's like you have to take your skin off and say well look, there's a disability inside there. So that really gave me the courage because I don't want others to have to go through that. When people look at you, I want others not to judge you just based on appearance, but as the person, so you can understand what the other individual is going through as well.

Debbie Fink: Thank you Dr. Nelle, thank you. Abigail, I'm going to - the last question is going to be geared towards you because it's a perfect question for you. Somebody has asked, "when I encounter someone with a service dog how should I behave?"

Abigail Shaw: That's a good question. It's always good whether you see someone with an animal out in public and they are a service dog or not, a good rule of thumb is always to ask if you can interact with the dog first. And when we're specifically looking at service animals, some human partners will say no, now is not a good time to interact with my dog because it could be distracting, and if you distract the dog from what they're trained to do, it can put the person and the team in danger. So it's always great to ask. And if you see someone – if you see that that service animal is wearing a harness or a jacket that's usually a good indicator that they are indeed a trained service dog. And if the person says that it's not a good time to interact with them, don't take it personally, as I mentioned that those dogs are trained to perform tasks, and if someone else intervenes it could could put the team in jeopardy and so don't take it personally. They want to be able to go where they need to go and do it safely.

Debbie Fink: Okay, all right. Very good. So I want to thank everyone for answering the questions and now this is an opportunity for the shameless plug time. So if any of you want to take 30 seconds, a little more, to do a shameless plug and to put your info or your social media info in the chat box, have at it. Who would like to start?

Lachi: Could I just be the obvious shameless plugger of the group?

Debbie Fink: Yes, Lachi, you may! [Laughter]

Lachi: Because I mean, I could virtually see you looking at me so I was like let me just do it. [Debbie laughing] So first of all I'm very grateful to RespectAbility for having me here and being one of the women's national speakers bureau. Thanks to Debbie, thanks to everybody and all the people behind the scenes that make this happen. My name is Lachi, l-a-c-h-i. I'm a recording artist, just got featured in the New York Times! Check me out at lachimusic and I am really happy and excited to be able to inform people of disability inclusion. Thank you guys so much.

Debbie Fink: And we will be hearing more of Lachi momentarily. Zazel?

Zazel-Chavah O’Garra: Yes my name is Zazel-Chavah O’Garra. I was your lovely narrator, and I have a physically integrated dance company, ZCO dance project. I performed for the disability unite festival, it was fantastic, we had a wonderful time. Sasha Ross Becker is in my company. Yay for Sasha, she's a fabulous dancer, so please support my company - zcodanceproject.com. Thank you!

Debbie Fink: Thanks. Zazel and Lachi, please drop your info in the chat box for all if you choose. It is up to you to do that or not. Any other shameless plugs?

Dr. Nelle Richardson: Yeah so this is Dr. Nelle again, and I just want to say a special thank you to Debbie and RespectAbility and the national speakers bureau. Thank you, thank you! Thanks to everyone. And so I work with women with disabilities not only women but families also at the non-profit The Will to Win Ministry, and just check us out, because a lot of women need your support. A lot of people are hurting out there, and we just want to help one another, so thank you again.

Debbie Fink: Lauren, the floor is yours.

Lauren Arena: First of all thank you Debbie and RespectAbility for having me here today. It was wonderful. Like I said before, I'm Lauren Arena, Ms. Wheelchair New York 2020, and a dancer. If you would like to follow my journey and see more of my story, you can follow me on Facebook at Ms. Wheelchair New York 2020 Lauren Arena.

Debbie Fink: Thank you Lauren. Okay, round of applause for all of our amazing women who spoke today on the panel. What a great presentation from these outstanding leaders with disabilities. I hope that you will use what you learned and that you will open the inclusion umbrella even wider in the vital work that you do and in the vibrant life that you live. Each speaker is available to lead Disability 101 trainings for your organizations, corporations, schools or elsewhere, either virtually anywhere, or when it is safe again in person in New York City. Feel free to learn more about us, our website is in the chat box. First, experience Lachi, who was featured this week, as she said, in the New York Times, yay! As she sings one of my favorites among her originals called Duality. Stick around - her music is both moving and motivational. Lachi concludes with an on point public service announcement about self-self advocacy.

[Video]

Debbie Fink: Ah... Thank you Lachi. The power of music. Your on point messages and music get me every time. Whoo. So now as we watch Thor's trailer, keep in mind Lachi's message about self-advocacy.

[Video]

Debbie Fink: Well that brings today to a close. So powerful! It captures the significance of people with non-visible disabilities like schizophrenia and other mental illnesses or a variety of other non-visible disabilities, to allow others in to see one as a whole made up of many parts. Thank you to the artists with disabilities of all types Lachi, Thor, our fine artists, Sasha and all the others coming tomorrow. Through whatever artistic medium you translate these stories in ways that move us forward. Each of these artistic endeavors fights stigmas and advances opportunities. In this time of COVID 19 and all the mental health issues that it is bringing up in so many of us, we have much work to do. Thanks so much for sharing in today's experience with us.