>> Ashley Nyaley: Hello and welcome to RespectAbility's NDEAM panel during National Disability Employment Awareness Month! To begin, I am Ashley Nyaley. I'm the Senior Director of Marketing and Communications here at RespectAbility. I am a black middle-aged woman with red glasses on and a brown afro. We're so pleased that you found the NDEAM Summit and that you'll be joining us today. So for those who joined us yesterday, welcome back, and for people who are here for the first time, welcome. The NDEAM Summit is focused on Advancing Access and Equity. First we would like to participate -- we would like to ask for your participation in the Q&A chat that you'll find at the bottom of Zoom. We have three interactive panels today for you to listen in on, so please enjoy the summit. Live captioning and ASL will be provided throughout the event, and the summit will will be recorded and freely available after the live sessions. Our ASL interpreters are Joe Riviera and Rachel Groner. If you need ASL, please feel free at any point during the presentations to pin their videos with the three small dots in the corner of your video screen. To introduce our first panel, entitled "Want to Change the World? Working in Government, Public Policy, and Civic Engagement." This will be presented by our policy team here at RespectAbility, led by Stacy Cervenka, Jimmy Fregmen, Matan Koch, and moderated by Graciano Petersen. So without further ado, our first panel.

>> Graciano Petersen: Thank you so very much Ashley for introducing us. I'm gonna give -- all of our panelists a chance to make sure that they're on and ready, and then we're going to go ahead and get started today. I am Graciano Petersen. I am a black man wearing black rimmed glasses. I have a curly fro, and I'm wearing a white shirt today. And I'm so excited to have our wonderful team members here to share a little bit more about their work in public policy. So I'm going to ask each of them to introduce themselves and talk a little bit about their titles and what they do here at RespectAbility. And so I'll give Stacy a chance to do that first.

>> Stacy Cervenka: Well, hi, my name is Stacy Cervenka. My pronouns are she, her, and hers. And I am a middle-aged white woman with dark blonde hair and brown eyes. I am currently the Senior Director of Policy here at RespectAbility.

>> Graciano Petersen: Alright, thank you so much. And Jimmy, I would ask you to go next in introducing yourself and your current role.

>> Jimmy Fremgen: My name is Jimmy Fremgen. I am the Manager of State Policy here at RespectAbility, and pronouns are he/him. And I am a mid-30s white male with curly hair, a green mint-colored blazer, as my colleagues pointed out, a white shirt, and a blue flowery tie. I, as the Manager of State Policy, am in charge of all of our state lobbying efforts and working with Governors and legislators around the country.

>> Graciano Petersen: Thank you so much Jimmy. And Matan?

>> Matan Koch: Hi, I'm Matan Koch, Senior Policy Advisor here at RespectAbility. I am a middle-aged white male with a salt and pepper beard and dark brown hair, brown rimmed glasses, a blue striped shirt, sitting in a wheelchair, wearing a headset with a -- gray featureless background behind me, save for a logo that says 10th RespectAbility Anniversary. Incidentally, that backdrop appears behind all of the panelists. I have hold a number of roles here, but I'm now primarily doing special projects including some of our Medicaid reform work and some of our work on innovative employment programs.

>> Graciano Petersen: Fantastic, thank you so much for sharing. Alright, so let's get into it. I want to hear a little bit more about the work that you all are doing and how we can get all of our listeners interested in potentially getting into public policy. So what experiences, programs, or other resources helped you begin your career in public policy? And I'd like to start with Jimmy on that.

>> Jimmy Fremgen: So I actually didn't start my career in public policy. I started as a high school history and government teacher. So when I had the opportunity to move to Washington, D.C., and took the chance to go knock on some doors on Capitol Hill, I was absolutely convinced that I already knew everything I needed to know about government in order to work in government, because I had taught it, so what else could you possibly want to know? And boy was I wrong. So the absolute key thing for me was having a little bit of humility -- forced humility -- and having to set aside the book learning I had done around policy work and around government, and then take an unpaid internship on Capitol Hill. The reason I took that unpaid internship was because it became quickly and readily apparent to me that though I knew the structure and the bones of how the system worked, I didn't understand why it worked and how it worked. You may understand that an arm moves, but you don't necessarily know which tendons pull the arm, which bones make up the arm, the blood flow that's coming to the arm. And working in government as an unpaid intern was like that. I got to see the mail coming in. I got to answer phone calls. I got to run notes to the member of Congress in committee hearings. I got to sit in committee and watch how the committees actually behaved, and who was important, and who the key lobbyists were, and all of those things. And I had none of those skills or abilities before I came to work on Capitol Hill. So I would say that having a book knowledge of it was really useful, but definitely not sufficient in itself. And getting that internship was a huge help in setting me on the right path towards a longer career in working in Congress, in the legislature, and now working as an advocate.

>> Graciano Petersen: Thank you for that, Jimmy. That's a very visceral metaphor that you make of our federal government being a body part. That's -- thank you for that. [laughs] Matan, how about you? Could you tell us a little bit more about how you got your career started?

>> Matan Koch: Sure! [crosstalk] Sorry, I didn't mean to cut you off --

>> Graciano Petersen: Totally fine, you know where we're going. [laughs]

>> Matan Koch: But I -- my path was a little different than Jimmy's, which is to say first I had to actually decide that policy was where I wanted to be, right? Believe it or not, for most of my young days I wanted to be a nuclear physicist. I wanted to change the world by inventing, like, faster than light travel or replication or something. But then I went to a high school leadership summit that taught me a little bit about how policy professionals can change the world, can fix, can help to make our systems work better. And so I got bit by the bug, as it were. But that doesn't mean that as a late teenager with significant disabilities, I knew how to get into policy. But then -- in my school, the office of career services did a very hard push to see if there was anyone who wanted help getting an internship. And I made an appointment with the Dean of Career Services and I said, you know, my challenges are a bit unique, probably, from what you're used to dealing with. For those who don't know, I am a quad, I require 24-hour personal care. And I said "are you willing to help me figure out how to get an internship?" And he said yes, and he helped me figure out a budget, he helped me fundraise for that budget. But even then I didn't quite know what I wanted to do. So the first thing I did was call the late great Judy Heumann, and she would have given me a job working for her at the Department of Ed where she was at the time, and I kind of had that in my back pocket, but then to raise my last few thousand dollars, I reached out to UCP and they said -- that's United Cerebral Palsy -- and they said we will fund you but only if you come to work in our policy department. So I -- for the summer. So I went to work in their policy department. They had me on the hill almost every day. They had me at coalition meetings of all kinds. And I met people and I made connections. But then I went off to law school, practiced law for a while. But then when President Obama was elected, some of those connections reached out to me and said, "the President is looking for folks with disabilities to serve in the government. Might you be interested?" And I was interested, I was confirmed by the Senate, and when I got out of government, I said I want to stay in this space. And so that was sort of my entree into being a policy professional. It all started with taking an internship, meeting people, building connections, mobilizing support, and following that path.

>> Graciano Petersen: Fantastic, thanks so much Matan. So so far we've heard that learning and learning is super important, making connections. So Stacy, how about for you? What experiences, programs, or other resources helped you to begin your career in public policy?

>> Stacy Cervenka: My road toward public policy began the summer after I graduated from high school, when I attended a convention of the National Federation of the Blind and became involved in their student division the National Association of Blind Students. And through them, I had the opportunity to go to Washington, D.C. to meet with my senators and congressmen, and speak with them about issues that affected me as a blind student. And one thing that was really interesting was this was my freshman year in college at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, which is right on the border of Minnesota and North Dakota. And I learned that there was no one at all from North Dakota going to D.C. And so -- I offered to be the North Dakota affiliate, because they had literally no one going. And it really made an impression on me that as a 19-year-old college student, I could at the time fax our -- in North Dakota we only have one -- only had one Congressman -- my congressman and my two senators and set up appointments with them. And I did this from my College admissions office. So it made an impression on me, like, why are these guys going to want to meet with me? And yet they did, and I had the opportunity to speak with them about issues that impacted me and my friends and other blind people I knew. And through the National Association of Blind Students, I had these opportunities to lobby and then to kind of develop some leadership skills and, like, learn how to run a meeting, learn Robert's Rules of Order, learn, you know, some of that. And about kind of how the public policy system works. And it was through the National Association of Blind Students listserv that I got information about the American Association of People with Disabilities' Congressional internship program, which is a program that provides students with disabilities the opportunity to intern in Washington, D.C. for their elected officials -- or not necessarily their elected officials, I mean it could be an official from -- a senator or congressman from any state depending on -- where your interests lie. And so through the AAPD Congressional internship, I had the chance to go to Washington, D.C. and spend a summer living in the dorms at George Washington University with -- I think it was actually 25 other college students with disabilities. I interned in the office of Senator Sam Brownback from Kansas. And it -- you know, I really enjoyed it, and we felt like it was a good fit. And so after I graduated a year later from college, I went to work for Senator Brownback and worked for him full-time as a -- or as a -- first as a staff assistant and then running the correspondent shop and then as a Legislative Assistant for five years. And so for me, what was most important was in college really getting involved in the disability advocacy community. And I would certainly encourage people to get involved in both organizations that represent your particular disability, but also cross disability organizations. In a way, it's really great to get involved in, you know, your disability --organizations that impact your disability, because then when you -- if you should ever work, or work with a cross disability organization, you're not just bringing your experience as, for example, a blind person, but you also have a better understanding of the experiences of other people who are blind, because of course, it's a really large cross-section of humanity. And so -- it's good to know the issues that really affect not just you, but that affect your entire -- the entire community of people who share your disability. And so getting involved in those advocacy organizations in college is a really great opportunity to learn about -- you know, lobbying days, internships, apprenticeships, fellowships, scholarships. So that would be probably my primary piece of advice for early in your career.

>> Graciano Petersen: Perfect, thank you all so much. And I encourage all of our listeners to go ahead and use the Q&A function to ask any additional questions as things come up when our team members who are sharing this amazing advice. One thing that -- I did notice is that all of you mentioned in starting your careers a connection to Washington, D.C. So Stacy, I wanted to ask you, is it necessary? Do you have to use the stepping stone of Washington, D.C. to begin a career in public policy?

>> Stacy Cervenka: To begin, I would say yes. Early in your career, I would say it's pretty important. If you're only interested in working in policy on the state level, then perhaps not. Then, you know, working in your state capitol or working as an activist in your town. It really depends on what level you want to do policy. If you're going -- even though I currently live in Lincoln, Nebraska, and I -- do my job remotely with some travel. But I gained the knowledge of the legislative process, and how things actually work, and gained connections, and -- it's hard to gain that from calling in. So I would say early in your career, absolutely.

>> Graciano Petersen: Great, thank you so much. I'd like to ask maybe a different question to Matan first. Like, what challenges might a person with a disability experience when pursuing a career in public policy or civic engagement?

>> Matan Koch: Well I think the first challenge, at least coming from my own experience, is the challenge of the fact that most of the entrees are internships or fellowships or some other kind of ship, it's practically a navy out there. So I think that a lot of times it can be challenging to meet the costs associated with going to such an internship. For me, I had to fundraise for personal care, I had to fundraise to move my adaptive equipment from -- at the time I was living in Connecticut and the internship was in D.C., which is not so far, but it's a distance if you're moving a shower chair, so there's -- that moment of reality. But there's also the fact that depending on the arena in which you're working, you may not have folks that are familiar with your particular working style. If you're the -- I was working for a disability organization in my internship in my beginning space, so obviously they understood a little bit about what it meant for me to have disability needs. But if you go into a congressional office, if you go into a public policy shop that is not disability specific, you may find yourself needing to explain the different ways in which you get work done. And that certainly was a problem for me early in my law career when I transitioned over to law firms that just didn't know. So I think I'll stop with those two, and let the rest of the panelists chime in.

>> Graciano Petersen: Sounds good, yeah. So Stacy, you mentioned a little bit about your own personal disability experience in beginning your career. What other challenges might somebody pursuing a career in public policy encounter from your perspective?

>> Stacy Cervenka: I definitely think one of the biggest challenges you'll encounter is the stigma and misconceptions that often exist around disability, whether that's apparent or non-apparent disabilities. Because not only do you have to -- contest with any misconceptions that might -- that the person who's interviewing you for the job might hold, but also with your co-workers, with your supervisor, with your clients, with your constituents. So every day you're meeting new people in many types of jobs, especially public policy jobs. For example, if you're working in a Senate office, not only do I have to convince the people that hire me, but I also have to convince my co-workers, I have to convince -- to trust me, I have to convince -- each constituent group that I meet with. And when you're working in a Senate office, you meet with a new constituent group on the hour, sometimes on the half hour. And so every half hour, that's a new group of people you're encountering. And when you're from kind of a stigmatized group -- the experiences that you have can vary. And so you really have to -- I think -- it's very helpful to have a strong network of other people with disabilities in your life who you can share experiences with and gain strategies and tips and just vent, and -- I know for me, one thing that really helped me when I first started working in the Senate office was I would notice that all the other interns were being given assignments. And often -- people weren't -- staff wasn't coming to me and -- necessarily requesting an assignment, because they didn't really know what exactly I could do. And so I started going around from cubicle to cubicle, and I would ask each staff member like -- hi so and so -- is there anything I can do for you? Is there any research you'd like me to do? Or I'm happy to sort your email, or -- I'm happy to -- take notes for you at a -- subcommittee meeting or something. So I kind of like itemized for the staff as I went around, like, things I was happy to do for them. And sometimes they would say, like, oh, you can do that? Like, oh, I didn't know you could do that. And then they would tell me to do it or -- even just -- even if they didn't doubt my abilities, even just kind of listing things that I was happy to do for them, like, kind of brought it to the front of their mind, so they might think you know what, actually yeah, there is a committee meeting coming up in an hour that I'd rather not attend so -- I'll send her to take notes. So I think, like, really being assertive and proactive and -- realizing that these misconceptions exist, and realize that, like it or not, I had to deal with them and finding a way to, like assert my abilities.

>> Graciano Petersen: Thank you Stacy for sharing. Jimmy are there additional things you'd like to mention about challenges in pursuing a career in public policy as a person with a disability?

>> Jimmy Fremgen: So for me, my disability is a non-visual disability, and so -- or non-visible disability. It's also non-visual. And so I have struggled with combating the perception, as somebody who looks otherwise totally healthy and without need for accommodation, I have a piece of -- I have a medical device that I rely on that I cannot remove from my body. And so going through metal detectors has been a huge challenge for me throughout my lifetime, not just in workplaces, but also when I go to sporting events and things like that. And so I am often the first person that that police officer or security guard encounters that has -- that looks like they're young that has a pacemaker. And so I have faced that challenge throughout my career in having to advocate for myself. And in a lot of cases, that meant creating a relationship with the police department that was operating inside the capitol, or working with security guards and building relationships. And to this day when I go back to the California State Capitol, where I worked for two and a half years, the Capitol Security technicians all recognized me, because I was that guy that they all had to be aware of. And so, unfortunately it often results in having to do a little bit of advocacy for yourself to obtain your accommodations, but the key thing to remember is that you are legally entitled to go to work and be accommodated, just as anyone else is. And so in the same way that somebody who utilizes a wheelchair -- like Matan might require a wheelchair accessible point of entry into their office building, if you are somebody that has a non-visible disability, and you require an accommodation to come to work, then you should also legally be entitled to that. So don't be afraid to advocate for yourself, even if unfortunately that can sometimes be the case.

>> Graciano Petersen: You know, Jimmy, I don't think it surprises me that the local police know who you are.

>> Jimmy Fremgen: [laughs] No, boo.

>> Graciano Petersen: [laughs] No, but it's, no, but seriously, thank you for sharing and explaining that that advocacy might be -- contacting your local police officers, letting them know what you might need. But speaking of, I think it's important then to think about what programs and services might exist to help job seekers with disabilities to learn about any disability specific tools or skills training and accommodations that will help them to succeed in the workforce, right? So Stacy, would you mind starting us off with that?

>> Stacy Cervenka: The first thing that you'll definitely want to know about is your state's Vocational Rehabilitation agency. And Vocational Rehabilitation agencies exist to help people with disabilities find and maintain employment. And so they can help you to determine employment goal, if you don't have one already, and to determine what tools and services and training you need, or education you need, in order to reach that goal. And so with -- if you need adaptive technology for your computer in order to attend college, if you need independent living skills training, so that's the first thing. So registering with your state's disability -- or Vocational Rehabilitation office, and you can always find that by just Googling the name of your state and Vocational Rehabilitation. I would also recommend the organization My Employment Options, which you can find at myemploymentoptions.com -- that's all one word, no dashes. And they help people who are job ready who already have the training, have the education, and just need assistance with job placement and job searching. There's another organization called GettingHired, which again, is one word -- gettinghired.com. And they are a recruiting agency that works to connect qualified job candidates with disability with corporations and agencies that they work with. Of course, there's always the Job Accommodations Network, which you can find at askjan.org. And that's askjan.org. And that's a really useful resource, because it helps you -- if you're not sure what accommodations might be available to you, or -- you are curious about what -- accommodations might benefit you on the job. There are accommodations listed by disability, by task, so it's really helpful. The important thing I would want to say with this though is to don't feel limited by these programs. Obviously you should still take advantage of -- your college's career center, alumni networks, programs that are not just for people with disabilities. And also don't feel limited by these -- don't assume that these programs, just by enrolling in these programs that they're -- they're going to find you a job, because it's not your rehab counselor's responsibility in the end to find you a job, it's yours. Like, your rehab counselor has 150 clients, where you only have yourself. So it's extremely important -- it's extremely important that you -- do take advantage of all these services, but that you also don't just figure, okay, I registered with rehab, that's my job search.

>> Graciano Petersen: Wow thank you so much, Stacy, those are really helpful resources to share, and we'll be sure to get them out to our listeners after the the programming today as well. Matan, do you have additional things you want to add about that?

>> Matan Koch: I do, thank you Graciano. I think that an additional resource that I would offer -- and it's in some ways just an additional way to use the resources that Stacy has recommended is -- for those of you that are still in an education setting, for those of you that are still in that preparatory phase, I encourage you to take full advantage of that setting. And by that I mean several things. Number one -- it's much easier for Vocational Rehabilitation to come into your academic environment and work with you on the accommodations that will make you most successful at things like producing written work, operating computers, and computer programming, all of the sort of basic things that accommodations tend to help with, if you have the chance to sort of work with the evaluation teams that Voc Rehab has while you're in school, there's a lot more flexibility to try things out. That way you already know by the time you get to a work environment what works for you, because the same accommodation that works for someone else may not be what works for you, but there are a lot of very creative people out there who will trial with you. Leading to that, I want to suggest to people that the other way to use school as a testing ground is to make the environment as realistic as possible. I'll tell a little vignette. When I first started college, I got extensions on everything. I could not seem to make a due date and under 504, I was arguably entitled to such. However, I knew even at the time that I wanted to be a lawyer, and one day one of the Deans pulled me aside and said "you won't be able to get extensions for everything when you've -- when you're a lawyer with legal due dates, right?" The ADA doesn't necessarily set that up. And so I took that as a challenge to try to make my school environment as close to what my real work environment would be as possible, so that by the time I got to work, again, I'd worked out what supports do I need, what tools do I need to make sure that I can meet deadlines, which the law would call an essential fun of being a lawyer, right? So I think take the opportunity that school provides to learn, to do some trial and error, because at the end of the day, when we talk about disability specific tools and skills, which we're training here, they're really about disability specific tools and skills to succeed in any knowledge-based workplace, which are just transferable into the world of policy, if that makes sense.

>> Graciano Petersen: Yes, I think that makes perfect sense Matan, thank you for sharing all of that. I don't think -- I hope I captured everything, I was taking copious notes, so hopefully everybody else was able to capture all of that great advice. I think that's really comprehensive advice that you both have given us. I don't think, Jimmy, was there anything you wanted to add? Alright great, I appreciate that. Let's -- I'm gonna give Jimmy another question then to answer for us. So Jimmy, what technical skills -- or soft or potentially relational skills might a person who wants to work in public policy or civic engagement want to acquire or cultivate?

>> Jimmy Fremgen: So the skills that you're going to see on any job posting are going to be strong writing ability, interpersonal skills, relationship building, the understanding of how legislation is created and drafted, especially if you're looking to work in Congress or in a state legislature or for a Governor. Beyond that, it's how do you put those tools into -- or how do you implement those tools effectively. So government is pretty outdated, so knowing the ins and outs of Microsoft Office is going to be key, because you won't find anything more sophisticated than that in government. You're going to see Outlook, and you're going to be using Microsoft Word and PowerPoint, and the things that you thought you would leave behind when you left Academia to go into government to change the world are going to be -- you're going to find the software version that's, like, three or four cycles back in your government job. You're going to want to be familiar with how to network. Especially if you're working, again, in legislative work, one of the biggest ways that you are going to accomplish anything is through relationships. I worked for the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee in the US House of Representatives. It's the most powerful -- investigative Committee in Congress. And I launched and ran a national investigation into potentially unlawful practices in Federal higher education around student aid, and that all came out of a conversation that I had after a think tank panel discussion at a reception. And because of that opportunity, because I showed up to that place and talked to that specific panelist, we helped change a policy that impacted hundreds of thousands of prospective college students that year. So you cannot underestimate -- or you cannot overstate the importance of putting yourself in the room, going to places where people are talking about the things that you're interested in, and practicing. Everybody is awkward when they try to network. There is nobody that it comes easily to. I have friends that have told me that it looks so easy when they watch me network, and they don't realize that the entire time I'm incredibly nervous, I am fearful, I don't know what I'm going to do, and I just power through and fake it till you make it. And it turns out that that works just as well. So I'd encourage you to practice -- some of those writing skills. If you're in school or if you have the opportunity to engage locally, get yourself into the school newspaper or into your local newspaper with letters to the editor or opinion pieces. Build out a writing portfolio so if somebody asks you for a sample you can have one. Find opportunities to become comfortable with public speaking, whether that's at your next family reunion where somebody has to announce what the plan is for the day, or if you are standing up in front of a community group. And then make sure that you take the time to get to know the people around you and you practice just being a friendly human out in your daily life, because that will serve you and go a long way.

>> Graciano Petersen: Alright, thanks for that Jimmy. Yes we -- those are all essential and transferable skills -- writing, public speaking, and those interrelational skills are super helpful in any position, but -- they are very essential to the work that you're thinking about doing in public policy and civic engagement. Matan do you have any other technical skills or soft skills you'd like to mention?

>> Matan Koch: I do and I think this one is critical and often overlooked. It's to develop the skill of listening. Listening is a skill. It's actually a fairly difficult skill. It's about putting aside the million things that you're thinking about and what you want to say, and really hearing and focusing on what the other person is trying to say, what is motivating them, what their needs are. And as important as that is in every part of life, it's critical when you're a policy advocate. And you might say well, why, it's all about bringing the best argument to the table, right? But the answer is no, because the best argument -- that concept is a fallacy. The best way to bring someone on board about a policy is to show them how that policy addresses their concern, but you can't do that, you can't connect with them on that level until you've actually taken the time to understand what motivates them, to understand what their concerns are, to understand what -- in an earlier stage we used to call what their pain point is, how can you make something better for them by what you are advocating for? I don't actually like that expression, I think sometimes it can be their passion point, not their pain point, but the fact is that you can't get any of it without learning how to listen. And to be clear, when I say developing listening skills, I do not mean just trying to listen harder. I mean actually taking classes or courses, there lots of free ones in active listening, and really developing the skill which you will find will serve you well in just about everything, from your interpersonal relationships, to getting that internship in policy, to being an effective advocate in the policy world, so there you go.

>> Graciano Petersen: Alright, thanks Matan. I believe what I heard you saying is that we need to become more active listeners and take courses towards building up our listening skills, is that right?

>> Matan Koch: That is correct, and you just modeled for us one of the techniques of active listening, which is to verify your understanding of what the other person has said by parroting it back to them, very well done, Graciano.

>> Graciano Petersen: I do what I can, do what I can. [laughs] Stacy, are there other skills you wanted to highlight for us?

>> Stacy Cervenka: I think the two most critical skills from a technical perspective are researching and writing, because whether you're writing a speech, writing talking points, writing recommendations for your boss, thinking about -- just making vote recommendations for your boss, no matter what you're going to be doing, you're going to be doing researching. So all that stuff that you learn about in college, it definitely doesn't end on graduation day, you're going to be using it all the time. Again, writing -- everything you do is going to involve writing to some extent or other. So trying to develop that that skill and becoming a good writer is important. As far as soft skills, I think both of them touched on them nicely. I think the important thing is in public policy, in a way, is how to be winsome and persuasive, but also how to stand your ground. And some of it can really only be learned -- some of these -- soft or relational skills, in a way they're so unique to policy that in a way -- once you begin your internships you'll begin learning them. And as Matan said, sometimes it's not about who makes the best argument. In fact it's rarely about that. If that was the case, who makes the best argument, we'd be living in a very different world. So it's not like debate team in high school, where the person in the meeting who, like, stumps the other guy wins. There's often -- a hundred other factors going on behind the scenes. And so I think a lot of the the types of soft skills and learning. One of the best pieces of advice I remember learning in public policy is -- or when being a lobbyist, they said your first job as a lobbyist is to make them like you. Your second job as a lobbyist is to make them like the organization you're working for. And then also tell them something about the issues you're there for if you have the time. And although that's a little bit oversimplifying it, I think it's -- very -- it's not wrong.

>> Graciano Petersen: Excellent, thank you so much, I really appreciate that. Yeah and I think -- this has been really helpful to sort of learn some of those skills, learn about those disability specific tools, but I think I wanted to transition into some of the career-specific opportunities you all might consider that people should pursue. But before I get into that, I had a question from the audience. So Eric would like to know what Apprenticeship program or other suggestions on how to get their foot in the door in either federal or state legislative office. I will give you the additional context that Eric has been struggling to find employment. They are deaf, but they have an M.A. in public policy, they -- are a paralegal, and they have a Capitol Hill staff training certificate. Anybody have any particular advice they want to share with Eric? Stacy, go ahead.

>> Stacy Cervenka: Well again, I want to reiterate the AAPD Congressional internship. It's unique in that it does offer -- financial assistance. The year I did it, it offered travel, housing, and a stipend. Each year it's slightly different but it is a paid internship. And so I would highly recommend the AAPD Congressional internship. That's how I got my foot in the door. I interned for an office and then I learned about jobs that were available and then took them. I also -- I'm sure Matan is going to talk about our RespectAbility Fellows program, which I think would be another great opportunity for this person.

>> Graciano Petersen: Yeah absolutely, Matan?

>> Matan Koch: Was that perhaps teeing me up? I think it was. So I have the joy of serving in both our policy department and our Leadership and Workforce Department. Of course, the flagship program of our Leadership and Workforce Department is the National Leadership Program. The National Leadership Program, which we colloquially refer to as our Fellowship, is a program where we bring people into each of our programmatic departments, and our development department, and sometimes Comms, I think, for six months to do an on the job learning and earning, learning and skills training for six months. And the policy department has one. We tend to have anywhere from two to four policy Fellows per cohort. It is a competitive program, but we are always excited to receive strong applications. And our graduates of our program have gone on to work for Public Policy organizations, for Capitol Hill, for other nonprofits, so it really is a great foot in the door. We're accepting applications right now. Graciano, what is the link for applying to our Fellowship program?

>> Graciano Petersen: Yeah, so I believe the link will be shared a a little bit later today. If -- our behind the scenes moderators happen to have that link ready, please feel free to share it in the chat with the audience, but it is live and ready. And to Matan's point, the application is open and the priority deadline is November 13th. That is Monday, November 13th. So yeah be sure to make sure you're thinking about filling in one of those Fellowship applications. All the details are there and have been shared in the chat, thank you so much.

>> Matan Koch: And I'll note that November 13th is my 42nd birthday, so your application will be my birthday present. Send it right in.

>> Graciano Petersen: Yes this is -- this keeps me from having to get Matan anything this year, so please make sure you are sending in quality applications.

>> Stacy Cervenka: A good one. [laughter]

>> Matan Koch: Absolutely. [laughter]

>> Graciano Petersen: All right. So Jimmy, yeah, what programs and services exist to help job seekers with disabilities gain the career specific opportunities and skills they need to succeed in the workforce?

>> Jimmy Fremgen: So I want to give a couple kind of specific avenues for getting getting started in politics and policy. Especially -- I noticed that somebody had asked a question if there are conferences or networking events coming up for your mid-career. One of the challenges that I had when I entered politics is that I -- it wasn't quite mid-career, but I had already started a career. I was working as a teacher, and decided to take a sabatical from teaching to go work in politics and policy. And I was unbelievably frustrated by the fact that I found myself in an unpaid internship when I had a real -- I had a real job, I had a real career, I wasn't killing time over the summer as a college student. And I realized that I had the wrong perspective on it, over time, that I wasn't setting myself back, I was actually doing myself a favor. And it was -- yes, it was incredibly obnoxious to take an unpaid internship, but there are opportunities to take paid internships. In fact legally, you cannot be an unpaid intern anywhere else except in Congress, because Congress of course has done a really beautiful job exempting themselves from employment law every time they pass something they want everybody else to follow. But the Federal labor law says that you cannot use a -- an intern to supplant the work of a full-time employee, and that you can't do it -- you can't make them do it for free, unless it's in exchange for some sort of educational experience. So if you are in school and somebody's saying well -- you're going to be an unpaid intern but you're going to get credit, that's kind of like the weird little loophole. But do not be afraid to pursue fellowships or internships. And how do you find one? Figure out what you're interested in. If you have an absolute passion for minor league baseball, you can look up the -- offices of minor league baseball, and I guarantee you, there is somebody there working on public policy and lobbying. And I know this because I have met with that person, and they probably could use some help. And so if you're willing to find an organization that you're interested in, find a topic that you're interested in, do a little bit of research, and then proactively reach out and say, "I'm trying to get involved in this," I'm trying to get involved in public policy around -- I don't know, Italian soda making -- track down whoever the trade association is for beverages, and reach out and see if you can get a fellowship or internship with them. And odds are it'll be paid. It's hard to understate how important it is to actually get work inside government, and so if you have the opportunity to apply for a job inside government, I'd encourage you to do that, because most everybody in policy, if you're in an advocacy space, is going to ask you what kind of experience you had working in government. And that too can be a little bit of a labor of love, because working in government is probably the most fulfilled I've ever felt as far as my impact on people on a regular basis, but it's also the hardest I've ever worked, it's the longest I've ever worked, and it's the least I've ever been paid. And so it's something you have to do really from a place of passion. But those are two other avenues that are definitely worth looking at.

>> Graciano Petersen: Yeah absolutely, it definitely is a passion project, pursuing government work. Stacy, are there any additional career specific opportunities you wanted to mention?

>> Stacy Cervenka: I think they pretty much hit them all. I would just quickly reiterate -- your Vocational Rehabilitation agency can also help you with finding internships, apprenticeships, fellowships. They may be able to help you with job placement depending on -- what the expertise of their staff are. Again, the AAPD Congressional internship, there -- it's just an internship, but -- several AAPD interns have parlayed that into full-time jobs. My employment options which again is myemploymentoptions dot -- I believe it's com. They help with job placement and they can help you get -- the internships and such that you might need. And also gettinghired, which again, was gettinghired.com. They can also help you to get the career experience that you may need.

>> Graciano Petersen: Perfect thank you so much Stacy. All right, Matan, did we miss anything?

>> Matan Koch: Yeah, I just wanted to add two quick thoughts. One is that a lot of opportunities exist to provide funding or -- supplement funding for internships for people with disabilities. The state of California, for example, has a program for people with developmental disabilities that has about five million unspent dollars a year cause people don't know about it and people don't apply for it, so it's worth taking a look. If there's an area you want to work, let's say we're going back to Jimmy's notion of minor league baseball, because I've not touching Italian sodas with a ten-foot pole -- and they're excited about you, but they don't have a budget, it may be that you can work with them, submit an internship plan to one of your government disability arms, and they will provide funding so that you can be paid in that internship and learn. And what I will tell you is nobody's going to turn down the help. Remember in my story that I contacted UCP looking for money, and they were so excited to find someone with my skill set looking for an internship that they created an internship. I didn't go into to an existing program. They said we'll pay you but only if you come be our intern. I didn't mention that they'd never had an intern in public policy before, so it was an interesting program that they were trying to figure out what that would look like. But so -- just wanted to add in that there are ways to sort of gerry-rig it together, if you research the resources that are available in your state at your Voc Rehab, wherever else to put that together.

>> Graciano Petersen: Yeah no, that's really great advice Matan. I think also hearing that persistence is -- sort of key, right? And making sure that if you are trying to navigate and get into a space, you really should try to use all of your networks and your related network connections to get in. I'm sure it wasn't easy even, like, to think about working -- directly in the White House, and your perspective in your policy experience, but -- I'm sure that there was a lot of -- network connections that needed to be bought into there, and then taking into just the account that maybe you just have to pursue another route and do the work that you need to do, get the experience, and then hope that something comes along. Yeah.

>> Matan Koch: Absolutely.

>> Graciano Petersen: Great. Okay, so we are getting close to time, but we do have enough time to make sure that we're answering at least this one other question here. So if you're going to narrow it down to just one piece of advice that you could give to job seekers with disabilities who have an interest in working in the policy space, what would it be? I'm going to start with Stacy -- on this one.

>> Stacy Cervenka: I would say don't give up, and be diligent in your pursuit of the employment that you want. Almost everybody who is in the workforce has experience with applying and applying and applying for jobs and not getting them. And -- don't give up -- especially now, the job market is really difficult, and it takes people months and sometimes years to find jobs. So -- if your computer is filled with resumés and cover letters and -- job applications, take heart that a lot of us have been there, and you don't have to find 20 jobs. You only have to find one. So just keep -- applying, and that one will make itself known. I often say that when you're on the job search, it's kind of like dating. You're just -- you're just like, oh my gosh, I don't know what the right guy is going to look like, but every date you go on, you're like, oh gosh, I hope he likes me. And it's kind of like that with job searching. You don't know -- which one is going to be the one, and with every interview you go on -- you're just trying to put your best foot forward. And -- sometimes rejection might be a part of your employment search, and that's normal. Don't -- just don't give up. Keep -- you only have to find one job, and just keep looking and you'll find it.

>> Graciano Petersen: Solid advice, thank you so much Stacy. Jimmy?

>> Jimmy Fremgen: I would say I would echo Stacy's advice about persistence. It's incredibly important, and that's certainly part of my story. I would -- encourage to look at the people around you that you're engaging with as people. And the reason I say that is because, especially once you get into a job or a internship, it's very easy to get used to the churn. To Stacy's point about taking constituent meetings every 30 minutes, I used to take constituent meetings every 15 minutes. And I would have 10 minutes, and then I'd have a couple seconds to kind of decompress and make a couple notes, and then I'd be on to the next one. And it's easy to get caught up in that. But -- when I talk about seeing people as people, I don't just mean empathy and compassion. I also mean understanding that they're overwhelmed too, they're busy too. It used to take lobbyists and people reaching out to me three or four times to schedule a meeting with me, because -- it wasn't out of any sort of animus towards them, or like I didn't want to meet with them, but it was just because I was getting 230 emails a day, and sometimes I needed that poke and that reminder. So understand that everyone you're engaging with is not a robot, they're not a machine, though in my case they might be part machine. But you might in fact need to be persistent with them, be understanding, be compassionate, and be kind to those you meet along your way.

>> Graciano Petersen: Yes I love it, be persistent, but be kind. Matan how about you, what is your piece of advice?

>> Matan Koch: So first I'll quickly want to answer the question that was put for me in the Q&A box, which is that the program that I'm referencing is a paid work experience program through the regional center. So if you're already a regional center client, it's something to talk to your service coordinator about. There are other programs through the Department of Rehabilitation for people who are not Regional Center eligible, but now we'll flip over to my advice. And it's something that you can see threaded through mine and Jimmy's stories, which is that neither of us actually got in the way we expected to, right? In my case, it was that I went to someone looking for money and they said only if you take a job with us. In Jimmy's case it was he went looking to be hired on day one, and he ended up taking an unpaid internship. But I'd say that both of us are pretty happy with where our careers have turned out. I mean, I don't want to speak for Jimmy, but I do work with him every day, and I think both of us are -- so one of the most important things I've learned is to be open for the fact that your vision and your opportunity may come in a different direction than the sort of idealized way that you envision it. And I know one person in the Q&A referenced looking for 14 years. First let me acknowledge how terribly painful and tough that must be, but then let me say, maybe think about trying to come at it in a completely different direction that'll still get you where you want to go, because both Jimmy and I ended up basically where we want to be in directions that we didn't intend to take to get there. So be open to that twist and turn.

>> Graciano Petersen: Yeah. Absolutely, there are definitely twists and turns on every career journey. Nothing is a straight line anymore, to the points that have already been made -- right now, there's an incredibly competitive job market, and you think that you are the only person with this number of years experience and this degree, and you are one of many. And the reality is is that you have to be persistent. You do have to use your networks. And maybe sometimes you'll take a different step and a different path than you were expecting. So I do recommend to those of you who are still in that space of job seeking and looking for opportunities and making network connections that we have the Fellowship opportunity available at RespectAbility. It has been a really great stepping stone for a lot of people. Fellowships and internships are things that we've heard from all of our panelists as ways to get into the jobs that they were seeking, and to advance their careers. So please make sure that you're pursuing that. I'd just like -- want to thank one more time our wonderful panelists here today. I really appreciate having Jimmy, Stacy, and Matan to share all of this insight and their role in public policy. So thank you all so much for that, and we will end that here. Thank you so much.

>> Matan Koch: Can we thank our moderator, Graciano Petersen for [crosstalk] doing a wonderful job moderating today?

>> Graciano Petersen: Yes, thank you all so much.