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Who we are

Disability Lead is a network of people with disabilities who are using our power to create an equitable and inclusive society.

Our Vision
People with disabilities will lead with power and influence for full participation and equal opportunity as a vital part of the civic fabric in the Chicago region.

Our Mission
To increase civic engagement and diverse leadership in the Chicago region by developing and building a network of leaders with disabilities — consistent with the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Our Programs

Institute: Emerging leaders explore leadership skills, disability identity, and leadership goals in our year-long Fellowship program.

Network: More than 200 Fellows and Members have access to events, mentors, exclusive professional development opportunities, and more.

Connections: Linking our Network to professional and civic opportunities, ensuring tables of power shape a more inclusive, just, and equitable society.
Dear Friends,

Welcome to our Impact Report, where we reflect on our year, celebrate our accomplishments and prepare for the challenges ahead.

Our work is only made possible by our supporters and investors, so first and foremost, thank you. Your belief in our Network of positive disruptors — who are leading with their disability identities to help create equitable and inclusive communities — is what drives our organization.

2021 was undoubtedly an incredibly challenging year, but we are proud to share that we achieved:

1  **65 professional and civic advancements.**

Members have made over 350 advancements in total, including senior leadership promotions at work, election to nonprofit board service, and appointments to public service leadership roles. 100% of Members are currently serving in a civic role, and 80% have joined a new board or task force or advanced in their career since becoming a Member.
2 Internal and external advancements in social justice work.

As an organization committed to both disability leadership and disability justice, Disability Lead's work is inextricably connected to racial justice. In 2021, we launched an anti-racism transformation team, in partnership with Chicago Regional Organizing Against Racism (CROAR). And we also launched the Collab, a community of practice open to anyone interested or working in the movement of racial equity or disability justice. We invite you to join us.

3 A complete rebranding effort to become Disability Lead.

Our effort to rebrand began more than two years ago, when a committee of Members and Board Directors was assembled to guide the process and help reinvent our brand to one that is accessible, emotionally resonant, and sustainable. Along with our name change, the rebrand to Disability Lead includes a new, beautiful and accessible logo, a new video featuring integrated audio description, and a completely redesigned website that exceeds accessibility standards.

As we celebrate these accomplishments, we realize there is still much work to be done. As our Network grows, we look forward to preparing and supporting our disabled leaders, and are hopeful with their voices leading at Chicago's tables of influence and power, we will see the inclusion, access and equity that is needed.

Thank you for your belief in Disability Lead's mission and vision, and your support of our work in 2021.

With gratitude,

Emily Blum,  
Executive Director  

Ann Manikas,  
Board Chair
Azeema Akram stepped into a new role as an Administrative Law Judge at the Illinois Human Rights Commission (HRC) this past year. In the position, she not only presides over claims of unlawful discrimination but leads with her full self as a disabled woman of color.

Azeema attributes her career advancements to opportunities to connect and be mentored by other attorneys with disabilities. When Azeema was a Fellow in 2018, she was mentored by fellow Disability Lead Member, Andrés Gallegos. Andrés is a nationally respected Disability Rights Attorney who is Chair of the National Council on Disability. Azeema says of her time with her mentor, “Having a mentor who understands the challenges we face in a profession that often lacks accessibility for and visibility of people with disabilities was critical for me to both develop my goals and to take risks in advancing my career.”

After the standard interview process, Azeema joined the HRC shortly after Disability Lead Member, Jim Ferg-Cadima, stepped down from his role as Chair. “Jim was a co-Fellow in 2018 and when he told me about this opportunity to adjudicate
issues of human rights and redressing discrimination, I was eager for the opportunity.”

As the only judge on the Human Rights Commission who has a disability, is a woman, and is a person of color, Azeema finds ways to bring her full self to work. “Under the law, I have to analyze discrimination claims separate from my experiences, but they remind me of my own experiences and the lessons I’ve learned through self-education about intersectionality. The awareness I have gained on a personal level and the unique strengths I have from my disability make me a better judge,” says Azeema.

In the courtroom, Azeema finds moments to make sure she is bringing her disability identity to the forefront. During a recent case, Azeema reflected that she “admonished the employer for using the word handicapped in their briefs, and I cited the bill that changed the language of the law almost 15 years ago. That’s just one thing I can do from my position to help educate litigants and improve the legal field.”

Azeema’s advocacy and leadership goes beyond the courtroom. She serves on the Executive Board of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Bar Association, is a member of Red Clay Dance Company’s Executive Committee, serves as a Community Representative on the RTA’s Eligibility Review Board, and Co-Chairs Disability Lead’s Program Committee. She can also be seen dancing in community and cultural events throughout Chicago.

“The training of future leaders with disabilities is critically important to ensure our presence at tables where decisions are being made about us.”

— Andrés Gallegos, Disability Lead Member and Board Member
“We see Disability Lead as unique in the Chicago region because it is one of the key organizations that has an on-ramp to civic engagement in place. Through its programs, Disability Lead is lifting up disability voice to build power.”

— Sandy Ho, Disability Inclusion Fund Director

The Disability Inclusion Fund (DIF) is a donor collaborative fund housed at Borealis Philanthropy to support U.S. groups run by and for people with disabilities to lead transformational change. Launched in 2019, the DIF is a first-of-its-kind fund and one of the largest philanthropic funds investing in disability inclusion. DIF is supported by the President’s Council on Disability Inclusion in Philanthropy, which comprises foundation presidents committed to disability inclusion as part of improving diversity, equity, and inclusion. Among the President’s Council members are two additional Disability Lead project funders, the Chicago Community Trust and the MacArthur Foundation. DIF first granted Disability Lead with $100,000 in general operating support in 2020 and renewed this support with a $90,000 grant in 2021.

DIF has a participatory grantmaking process, aligning itself with disability justice values including leadership by those most impacted.
DIF’s grant review committee embodies these values by prioritizing the inclusion of disabled leaders of color in service on its grantmaking committee.

Disability Lead Members who have served (but recused themselves from Disability Lead application review) include Risa Jaz Rifkind in 2020 and Keidra Chaney and Alex Perez-Garcia in 2021.

The Disability Inclusion Fund makes general operating fund grants, prioritizing emerging Black, Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC), queer and gender non-conforming, and women disability-led organizations.

This approach represents a dramatic shift in the disability funding model, which has historically not prioritized or included disabled-led groups in decision-making.

Borealis Philanthropy’s overarching mission to resource grassroots leaders and social justice movements for transformative change has benefited Disability Lead as we seek to transform tables of power in our region, not just by providing funding, but by connecting us with other organizations in the DIF funding cohort.

Convening with leaders of organizations such as Detroit Disability Power and San Francisco Senior and Disability Action has helped Disability Lead to grow our capacity by facilitating a mutually beneficial exchange of ideas, strategies and tools.

Members reflect the diversity of disability, (inclusive of visible, invisible and acquired disabilities) and the Chicago region. 40% of Members are people of color.

“This as a disability-led grantmaker itself, DIF stands out among our funding partners. We don’t have to explain the value and importance of disability leadership to them — they practice it.”

— Emily Blum, Executive Director
Thank you to our generous funding partners who helped Disability Lead fulfill our mission to increase civic engagement and diverse leadership in the Chicago region by developing and building a network of leaders with disabilities — consistent with the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

**Corporations, Foundations, Governments & Organizations**

AARP
Albert Pick Jr. Fund
AmazonSmile Foundation
Bank of America
BMO Harris Bank
Borealis Philanthropy
Brookfield Properties
CDW Corporation
Chicago Community Trust
Debicki Foundation
Exelon Corporation
Ferro Family Foundation
General Electric Company
Henrietta Lange Burk Fund
JPMorgan Chase & Co.
MacArthur Foundation
Marshall Square Resource Network
Microsoft Corporation
We Will Chicago

**Individuals**

Cynthia Aaronson
Charles Anderson
Mary Anderson
Roger Anderson
Anonymous
Corryn Antonizio*
Gary Arnold*
Adam Ballard*
Stephanie Ban*
Alex Benjamin
Allan Bergman
Matt Bivins
Marla Blair
Barbara Blum
David Blum
Emily Blum*+
Becky Brasfield*
Clare Brennan
Sarah Brindle
Adam Burke
Robin & David Burnett
Cynthia Canary
Rachael Carbone and Mary Howard
Tony Coelho
Etahn Cohen
Randy Colon*
Justin Cooper
Dessa Cosma
Karla Costa
Christine Costabile
Richard Costes*
Heather Cowan
Chandra Cramer
Jennifer Cunningham
Pat Daley*
Lemuel Day
Valerie Denney
Emily Drake
Bob Eichinger
Carrie Ellis
Bridget M Evans*
Noa/h Fields*
Anne Finch
Margaret Fink
Sally Fischell
Ann & Becky Flood
Andrés Gallegos*
Faye & Nigel Gillett
Andrea Glosser
Sandra Goldfield
Adam Goodkind
Elizabeth Granger
Robert M Green*
Christena Gunther
LaShon Gurrola*
Nora Handler
Emily Harris*
Vanessa Harris*
Jacqueline Hartz
Caleigh Havansek
Courtney Hazzard
Tsehaye Hebert*
Brian Heyburn*+
Stephen D. Hiatt-Leonard*
Scott Hoesman+
Kim Holmes
Scott Hughes
Ellen Janiec
Kenneth Jennings*
Amie Johnson
Stephanie Kardaras
Dom Kelly+
Wendy Kent and Jonathan Blum
Evelyn Keolian*
Neal Kleemann+
Kent Klaus
Kevin Knabe*
Katie Murphy
Kimberly Kuman
Beth Lange
Lora Laverty
Nafia Lee
Vanessa Lee
John Lillig
Eric Lipp
Tricia Luzadder
Ann Manikas* and David Isaacson
cRis marchioNNe
Terry Mazany
Daniella Mazzio*
Michelle McAndrew
Danyelle McClure
Margaret Rose McDonnell
Carrie McNerney
Michael McNicholas
Max McWilliams
Ambar Mentor-Truppa & Mike Truppa
Lauren Milburn
Cheryl Miller
Marquis Miller
Jess Minckley
Mary Monroy-Spampinato
Paula Morrow
Heidi Musser
Janet Myers
William Myhill
Kathleen Dillon Narko*
Annie Nash*+
Lia Niederberger
Katherine O’Connell
Barbara Padilla*
Hilesh Patel
Bradford Patrick
Aurie Pennick
Alexandra V Perez-Garcia*
Ingrid Pfau
David Pickett
Ellen Placey Wadey
10X

Increase in size of our individual donor base since we became an independent nonprofit in 2019.

* Denotes Disability Lead Member
+ Denotes Changemaker Circle recurring donor

Disability Lead makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of this listing. Please contact Anne Renna at 312-730-5883 or arenna@disabilitylead.org if your name was omitted or there was an error in your listing. Thank you.
Board of Directors

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Kenton Klaus+, Deloitte and DePaul University

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Azeema Akram,*
IL Human Rights Commission

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Natae S. Eaves,
JPMorgan Chase & Co

Andrés Gallegos*,
Robbins, Salomon & Patt, Ltd.

Kim Holmes,
Inclusion Nation

Anna Lee,
The Chicago Community Trust

Lora Laverty,
CDW Corporation

Karen Tamley*,
Access Living

* Denotes Disability Lead Member
+ Denotes Officer

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Emily Blum,
Executive Director

Tyrone Ferguson,
Communications and Engagement Coordinator

Risa Jaz Rifkind,
Director of Civic Engagement and Marketing

Robin Burnett,
Director of Education and Operations

Anne Renna,
Development Manager

Graphic Design

Sarah Sommers Design, sarahsommersdesign.com
Financials

JANUARY 1, 2021 TO DECEMBER 31, 2021

Income

$1,076,110*

Total

$769,603
Foundations

$132,252
Non-Recurring SBA
Pandemic Relief Funds

$93,410
Corporations, Corporate Foundations

$67,390
Individuals

$13,454
Program Services

*Includes $132,253 in non-recurring SBA pandemic relief funds and $350,000 in grant pledges receivable
Expenses

$617,402
Total

$491,854
Programs

$81,383
Management & General

$44,165
Fundraising