



Evaluation of the Ford Foundation's Disability Inclusion Initiative Executive Summary

In 2016, the Ford Foundation, responding to a challenge from disability rights activists, launched the Disability Inclusion Initiative to change how Ford operates internally and advances equality externally. The Disability Inclusion Initiative sought to address inequalities experienced by persons with disabilities through grantmaking and influencing others in social justice movements and the broader world of philanthropy.

This evaluation of the Disability Inclusion Initiative assessed how change happened. It describes progress and generates lessons for Ford's future approach and strategy development. This evaluation focused on internal changes; Impel did not evaluate the impact of grantmaking or Ford's impact on philanthropy or social justice movements.

Ford has made significant progress toward disability inclusion

Overall, this evaluation finds that Ford has made considerable progress toward disability inclusion in its grantmaking, operations and communications. Some achievements are quantifiable in the form of funds allocated. Other notable advances include the renovations to the New York office, improvements to the accessibility of external communications and the work of the Center for Social Justice Events Team. Staff convey acceptance of the Disability Inclusion Initiative and are motivated to be engaged in this work.

The Disability Inclusion Initiative fits well with Ford's original Theory of Change

Ford's original Theory of Change for advancing disability inclusion aligns well with its initial problem statement. When Ford began working on disability inclusion, they wanted to tackle three problems – that its programs had not historically addressed disability, that staff lacked technical capacity and lived experiences and that its operations were not fully inclusive or accessible. Ford built the Disability Inclusion Initiative around targeted funding, specific training and awareness-raising and specialist technical support to impact grantmaking practice, operations and learning. Externally, the Disability Inclusion Initiative focused attention on grantmaking and influencing the philanthropic sector and social justice movements to be more disability-inclusive. Ford set grantmaking benchmarks in dollar amounts and tracked progress over time; other areas relied on qualitative progress reports rather than quantifiable measures.

Placing the Disability Inclusion Initiative within the Office of the President gave it visibility and credibility

The launch of the Disability Inclusion Initiative within the Office of the President gave disability inclusion high visibility and credibility and had a profound and positive effect on grantmaking. It signaled to staff and the broader community the importance Ford placed on disability inclusion and provided a launchpad (with the Presidents' Council on Disability Inclusion in Philanthropy and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation) to engage in advocacy to influence the philanthropic sector.

Staff praised the resourcing for the Disability Inclusion Initiative, but the growing ambition requires more resources

Early investment in resources for the Disability Inclusion Initiative enabled the organization to progress its agenda relatively quickly. The readiness to bring in technical expertise signaled a willingness to invest in disability inclusion. Ford recognized the need for specialist skills and hired some key thought leaders. The financial incentives and minimum target spend expectations encouraged teams to focus on disability. The Reserves Matching Funds from the Office of the President raised awareness and generated grantmaking that was more disability-inclusive.

An annual disability spend of 5-10% of total grant spend is a substantial commitment

Ford is now one of the largest funders for disability initiatives globally, having tripled its spending in this area from 2018 to 2021. From the start of the Disability Inclusion Initiative in 2016 through to 2021, Ford has allocated more than US \$294 million on disability-inclusive grants. Ford's annual disability spend of between 5 – 10% of total allocation marks a significant investment to advance disability inclusion and considerable influencing power. This spend does not capture Ford's significant investments in its operations, events, communications and commitment beyond specific grants.

Good grantmaking practices involve partner-led approaches

Where Programs and Regional offices have included disability across existing work, utilizing existing partnerships and broadening them to be inclusive of disability rights agendas, they have been more effective at mainstreaming. More technical assistance is needed to guide Programs and Regional Offices, especially about working directly with Organizations of Disabled Persons. The Grantmakers' Guide for Disability Inclusion is a useful resource, but it needs to be updated and shared on a regular basis.

Training, especially the Disability 101 training, has helped normalize discussions on disability

Disability training has helped to shift mindsets, especially around the need for, and benefits of, attention to disability inclusion. There is still appetite and need for more training and growing demand for specialized context-specific sessions. This is placing a heavy demand on Ford's Senior Disability Advisor.

A significant proportion (5.5-6.9%) of staff self-identify as persons with disabilities

People and Culture have taken clear steps to provide reasonable accommodations to staff who request them. More actions are recommended to ensure all staff know what reasonable accommodation means and can be open about making requests. More staff may benefit from accommodations than indicated by the number of applications to date. Greater communications around the availability of reasonable accommodations may provide staff with a better understanding of resources and willingness to access such accommodations.

Impel developed a framework of ten elements of a disability-inclusive organization to analyze how Ford could further address disability inequality within its core practices. Findings indicate:

Key element	Key observations
Leadership commitment	<p>The Office of The President provided strong leadership on disability inclusion from the start.</p> <p>The Executive Leadership Team and Program Leadership Team should continue to signal a broad commitment to disability inclusion (verbally and by allocating resources).</p>
Policy and practice	<p>Grantmaking processes defined, supported and incentivized disability-inclusive and disability-specific grants. Examination of the effectiveness and impact of grants would provide valuable lessons.</p> <p>The Ford Foundation could aspire to make all grants, not just ten percent, disability-inclusive.</p>
Strategic planning	<p>The Theory of Change requires updating, with more benchmarks and targets, noting the specific needs of different teams.</p> <p>Staff interest has moved from questioning what disability inclusion means to how the Ford Foundation can advance disability inclusion in all its operations.</p>
Human resources management	<p>There is less confidence and awareness around employing staff with disabilities.</p> <p>A simpler and more centralized reasonable accommodations procedure is recommended, as well as efforts to raise awareness of the availability of reasonable accommodations.</p>
Programs and services	<p>Impel commends the Ford Foundation for centering its work on strengthening social justice movements.</p> <p>The Ford Foundation should continue to track and share successful team approaches across the Foundation.</p>
Staff culture, capability and motivation	<p>Despite learning efforts, a more medical model of disability (focusing on impairments) persists; a minority of staff can articulate a rights-based understanding of disability.</p> <p>An opportunity exists for Regional Offices to drive innovation and partnerships to advance disability justice.</p>
Accessibility	<p>The New York office has undergone extensive renovation, but this has not been a focus for Regional Offices.</p>
Budgeting and finance	<p>The Ford Foundation recognizes the need for improved coordination across operations and programs, especially for budgeting for accessibility in communications and regarding provision of reasonable accommodation, events, programming and facilities.</p>
Community engagement	<p>Ford Foundation policies and guidance do not sufficiently emphasize partnerships with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities.</p>
Communications	<p>Outward-facing communications have excelled at highlighting the importance of disability inclusion. Ford Foundation’s communication products present information in a compelling and persuasive manner.</p>



To strengthen the Disability Inclusion Initiative, Impel identified three actions Ford should consider going forward.

1

Craft a new Theory of Change with measurable indicators and sufficient resources for its implementation.

2

Strengthen internal systems including recruitment, enhancing the provision of reasonable accommodations, adding responsibilities for disability inclusion work in job descriptions and facilitating follow-on disability inclusion training and technical support.

3

Assess the impact of disability-inclusive and disability-specific grants and create guidance and incentives to advance context-specific disability objectives within Programs and Regional Offices.