

# **Disability Justice: An Audit Tool**

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**“We Are Our Best Strategy To Win”**

**- Stacey Park Milbern**

In honor of Stacey Park Milbern, May 19, 1987- May 19, 2020

# Table of Contents

An Origin Story	3
What This Tool Is and Why We Made It	6
How To Use This Tool	9
<b>Section 1: What is Disability Justice?</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Section 2: Political Vision</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Section 3: Doing an Internal Audit: Taking Stock and Getting Real</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Section 4: 10 Principles of DJ Discussion Questions</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Section 5: Access Tools</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Section 6: Four Stories about Organizations Bringing Disability Justice to their Work</b>	<b>33</b>
Thank Yous	49

# An Origin Story

## Fall 2018, a phone conversation:

**Stacey:** Hey, we have to work on that proposal for Northwest Health Foundation's second wave of disability justice programming. What do you think we should do?

**Leah:** Well, we could have trainings to help mostly abled BIPOC orgs build their skill levels and think about DJ and anti-ableism...

**Stacey:** and we could do coaching and mentoring to emerging disabled BIPOC leaders about all the little things that no one tells you about when you're a disabled organizer trying to do things on your own

**Leah:** and yeah... ok...

**Both:** What if we had a disability justice audit?!

**Leah:** Holy shit!

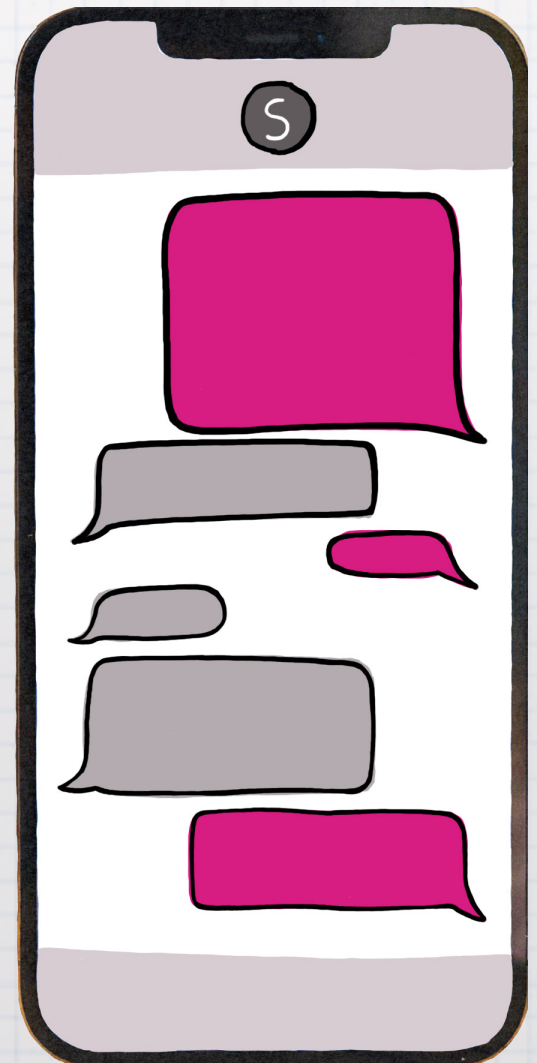
**Stacey:** I know, right?

**Leah:** Tell me more?

**Stacey:** Well, it could be something orgs could use if they want to try and figure out if they're doing DJ, like Black and brown orgs that really want to ask themselves if they're practicing DJ. Because not everyone can get a workshop and one workshop can only do so much...

**Leah:** ...and so much of this stuff is things people need to think through on their own and multiple times because it's personal, they need privacy, it means being really honest, you have to come back to it over and over again

**Stacey:** This could super build the capacity of our movements! I love it! OK, let's do it!



## The Backstory

My friend and comrade, the great Stacey Park Milbern, asked me to work with her on Northwest Health Foundation's disability justice programming in 2016. She told me there was this foundation in Portland that seemed to be interested in disability justice, and did I want to do a disability justice 101 speaking gig at their annual convening? I was suspicious, because I don't trust most foundations and couldn't believe this one was for real. She said, *Leah, organizations never give money to disabled BIPOC, and they seem to be into it. Let's see what happens.*

Over the next four years, we co-created NWHF's Disability Justice Leaders Collaborative (DJLC), and a lot of amazing things happened. The DJLC brought together rising disabled BIPOC organizers from Oregon and Southwest Washington for a year-long organizing project that was a chance to build disability justice knowledge and organizing skills and do leadership development, including becoming more confident in the leadership they already had (i.e., undoing internalized ableism). The DJLC created and released a report with a series of recommendations for advancing disability justice in Oregon and SW Washington. By 2020, there was a base of disabled BIPOC organizers running for office, creating organizations and collectives, hosting conferences and building disability justice principles into many community-based initiatives.

As part of this work, Stacey and I also created and developed trainings and mentorship cohorts for BIPOC-led social justice community organizations who wanted to learn more about disability justice and integrate it into their work, becoming accomplices and unpacking ableism in their workplaces. As demand for our work grew, we dreamed up a DJ Audit tool that organizations, boards of directors, communities, etc. could use to assess their knowledge of disability justice and build it.

Then Stacey died suddenly from post-surgical complications on her 33rd birthday on May 19, 2020, in part due to COVID-19-related delays on a cancer surgery she had been waiting a year to receive. The world and the disability justice movement lost our friend and one of our greatest organizers and teachers. I lost my work wife, cherished friend and comrade in the past 11 years of DJ movement building.

Stacey died before we could start work on this tool, and I wish so much that she was here to work on it with me. However, creating and editing this audit tool the way we did it—collaboratively, at the pace of our bodies and minds, taking in feedback and learning from the bumps—is very much in keeping with the way Stacey practiced disability justice organizing.

May your use of this tool be part of the generational shift to end ableism and transform your work through disabled wisdom.



# What This Tool Is and Why We Made It

## What is the Disability Justice Audit Tool?

This is a tool aimed at helping Black, Indigenous and POC-led organizations (that are not primarily focused around disability) examine where they're at in practicing disability justice, and where they want to learn and grow. A few reasons for this tool's existence:

- Interest in disability justice has bloomed in many racial, economic and gender justice organizations led by Black, Indigenous and/or people of color, but trainings about how to put disability justice into practice, besides one-off workshops, are rare.
- Many organizations want to put disability justice into practice and are looking for tools to assess where they have been and where they want to go.
- Organizations are sometimes confused about the difference between disability rights and disability justice. They may lack ongoing political education and development tools they can use to deepen their skills, knowledge and practice.
- Many existing "Disability 101" trainings still come from a white disability rights perspective.
- Many organizations have access to (at best) an ADA compliance checklist to assess whether basic access is happening. These checklists use a legal, compliance-based framework that leaves out a lot of forms of access, as well as other elements that are at the heart of disability justice: examining our relationships, histories, internal policies and practices.

That's where this disability justice audit tool comes in. Rather than being an "ADA checklist," this toolkit is formulated as a series of questions you can use to examine to what degree your organization is centering disability justice politics, practices and leadership. You can start where you are and return to these questions over and over again.

## Why did we make this tool?

Disability and ableism show up in BIPOC-led and culturally specific organizations in different ways. Sometimes we're doing disability justice even when we don't know it: providing food, ASL and wheelchair accessible spaces at meetings; driving to pick up elders and sick folks; using the local library or community center to meet because it's free and already wheelchair accessible. Sometimes we shy away from using the word "disabled," but we're still talking about and working on disabled issues.

At the same time, we may struggle to know how to talk about disability in our communities. A lot of visible disability organizing for many years was very white-dominated and single-issue, so we may look for resources and be discouraged when we encounter racism, or discover all the people doing the work are white. Some of our experiences of racialized ableism, which can include colonization, enslavement, war, genocide, bad working conditions that are disabling (like farmwork or factory or cleaning work), medical abuse, institutionalization and school and workplace discrimination, are painful to talk about. Doing so means grappling with trauma and shame and requires trust, safety and a space to be vulnerable.





We may also feel that, as Black and brown people already facing racism and other oppression, it is not safe for us to talk about our disabilities, because we are already dealing with a lot.

Disability justice organizer Mia Mingus once wrote, “Over and over I meet disabled women of color who do not identify as disabled, even though they have the lived reality of being disabled. And this is for many complicated reasons around race, ability, gender, access, etc. It can be very dangerous to identify as disabled when your survival depends on you denying it.”

There are many ways it hasn't been safe for us to talk about disability in our lives and communities. But unpacking the ways ableism has impacted our families and communities gives us incredible opportunity to heal. Our work can become more successful and powerful when we integrate disability justice. Our policy and community advocacy can be more effective and sustainable, our organization can center, not lose, the disabled leaders, staff and community that have the solutions. We can face and transform histories of ableism in our communities and organizations, heal wounds and remake the world.



# How To Use This Tool

**This tool is organized into six sections:**

## **Section 1: What is Disability Justice?**

This section introduces the basics of the disability justice movement framework.

## **Section 2: Political Vision**

This section asks question about how you're thinking about and integrating disability justice into your political organizing.

## **Section 3: Doing an Internal Audit: Taking Stock and Getting Real**

This section asks you to think about the histories of disability in your community, political work and organization.

## **Section 4: 10 Principles of Disability Justice Discussion Questions**

In this section, we ask you to move through each of the 10 Principles of Disability Justice, asking yourself how you are or are not practicing these principles in your work.

## **Section 5: Access Tools**

This section contains some incredible nuts-and-bolts tools to deepen the access you provide in your work.

## **Section 6: Four Stories about Organizations Bringing Disability Justice to their Work**

These are stories from organizations putting DJ into practice, with concrete descriptions of steps they took, attitudes and policies they changed, and how they pulled it off, as well as a story from a political campaign and an electoral campaign that integrated DJ into their work.

## **Some suggestions for using this document:**

### **Individual Journaling**

Go through the toolkit and take some time to journal your thoughts and responses to the questions. Assess yourself. Notice what comes up for you. Come back in a few months, or every year, and see where you're at and how you've changed.

### **Study Group**

The same but done as a group. Maybe you pick a section per season, meet every month and go through the questions a chunk at a time. What are the internal and external changes you could make or actions you could take from what you find?

### **Accessibility Audits**

Use the access audit templates provided and go through your org's current situation. Check out your physical space, the way you plan and throw events, your website, your policies around remote work, disability access needs of workers and members, how you organize. What are you doing well? Where could you shift?

### **Assessing Organizational History**

This could be done by a group of people or an individual. People who have worked at your organization for a while and hold a lot of history can contribute their knowledge. Maybe there are a variety of folks with different knowledge bases/entry points into this history who could all talk about what they know about the history of the organization and ableism and disability. Maybe you could send out a survey to former workers or reach out to specific disabled former staff who got screwed over and could provide important information. (Maybe this could be a form of repair.) What are three steps you could take towards enacting more disability justice practices and policies in your group?

# Section 1: What is Disability Justice?

Disability justice is a term and a movement-building framework (i.e. a way of envisioning the ways people can organize around and think about disability) that centers the lives and leadership of disabled Black, Indigenous and people of color and/or queer, trans, Two Spirit and gender non-conforming people.

To paraphrase Patty Berne, disability justice leader and co-founder of DJ performance and political collective Sins Invalid, disability justice steps into the “cliffhangers” left over from the disability rights movement.

The disability rights movement in North America, which began in the late 60s amidst other forms of social justice and radical organizing, has historically focused on a legal/civil rights framework, using laws and policy changes to get rights for disabled people. It has also had long-term challenges with centering white male leadership, racism and using a single-issue approach instead of working with other movements. Many disabled BIPOC have faced racism in the disability rights movement, or have felt like our experiences of disability were not centered.



## **Disability justice activists have organized around a wide variety of issues, like:**

- Police violence and murder of disabled and Deaf BIPOC, and prison justice for disabled and Deaf imprisoned BIPOC
- Medical abuse, denial of care and experimentation on disabled BIPOC communities, including fighting against “ICUgenics” and the denial of care and vaccines to disabled and chronically ill people during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Climate justice, surviving climate catastrophe and fighting for the rights of disabled, elder and medically vulnerable people to survive climate events, in and outside institutions
- Fighting immigrations laws like Trump’s public charge law that excludes disabled people from being able to migrate
- Fighting voter suppression of disabled people, particularly BIPOC
- Equal access to education for BIPOC disabled youth and adults, ending the special-ed-to-prison pipeline

We are also a movement full of cultural workers, community builders and educators, expressing ourselves through art, performance, zines, on-line communities, clothing, writing, music, hiphop and many forms of storytelling and creation. The community building, friendships and networks of collective care we create are as much a part of our work as big public campaigns.

# Ten Principles of Disability Justice

From Sins Invalid

## 1. Intersectionality

“We do not live single issue lives” – Audre Lorde. Ableism, coupled with white supremacy, supported by capitalism, underscored by heteropatriarchy, has rendered the vast majority of the world “invalid.”

## 2. Leadership of Those Most Impacted

“We are led by those who most know these systems” – Aurora Levins Morales.

## 3. Anti-capitalist Politic

In an economy that sees land and humans as components of profit, we are anti-capitalist by the nature of having non-conforming body/minds.

## 4. Commitment to Cross-movement Organizing

Shifting how social justice movements understand disability and contextualize ableism, disability justice lends itself to politics of alliance.

## 5. Recognizing Wholeness

People have inherent worth outside of commodity relations and capitalist notions of productivity. Each person is full of history and life experience.

## 6. Sustainability

We pace ourselves, individually and collectively, to be sustained long term. Our embodied experiences guide us toward ongoing justice and liberation.

## **7. Commitment to Cross-disability Solidarity**

We honor the insights and participation of all of our community members, knowing that isolation undermines collective liberation.

## **8. Interdependence**

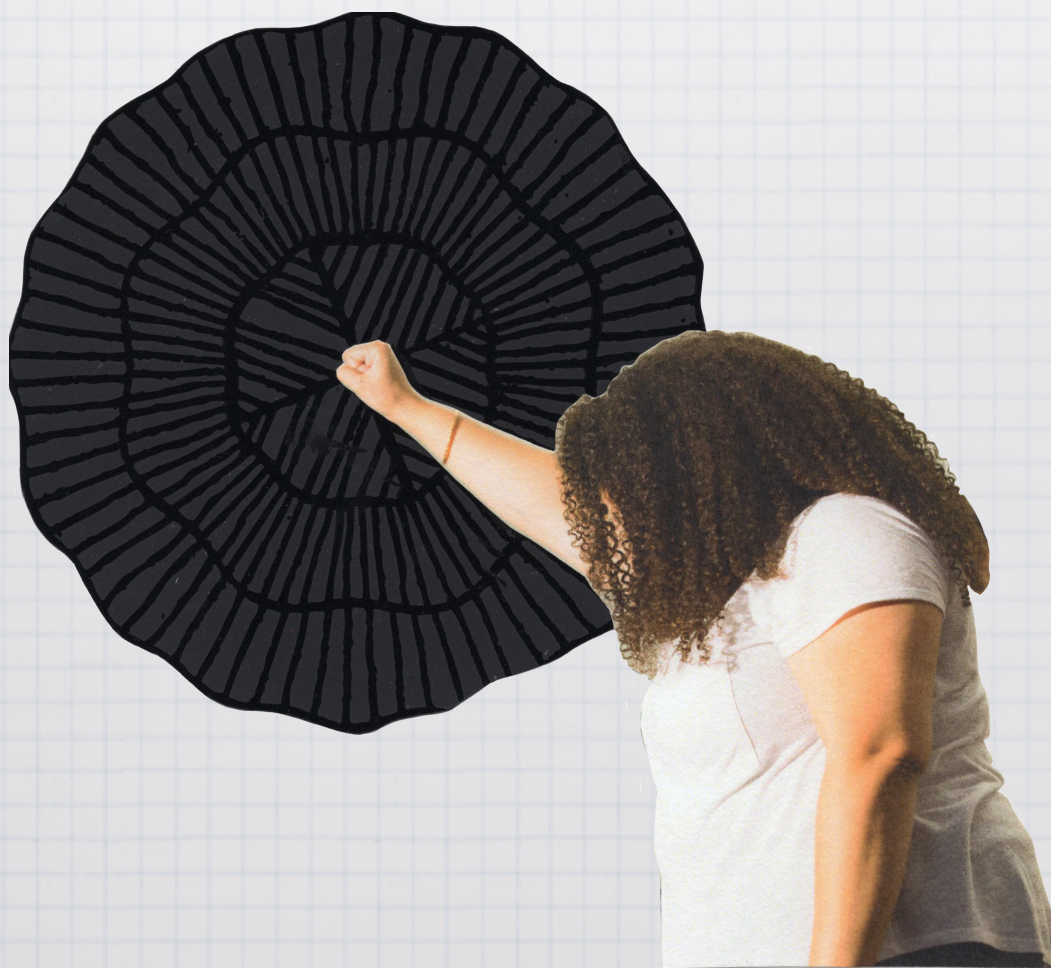
We meet each others' needs as we build toward liberation, knowing that state solutions inevitably extend into further control over lives.

## **9. Collective Access**

As brown, black and queer-bodied disabled people we bring flexibility and creative nuance that go beyond able-bodied/minded normativity, to be in community with each other.

## **10. Collective Liberation**

No body or mind can be left behind—only mobbing together can we accomplish the revolution we require.



## Section 2: Political Vision

Many organizations that are in the early stages of bringing disability justice into their work start by adding in some access—making sure meeting spaces are wheelchair accessible, hiring ASL interpreters, etc.—and hoping disabled and Deaf people show up. This isn't wrong or a bad thing, but disability justice is about more than adding access. It is also about shifting **power**. What these organizations don't often ask is:

- How is disability justice influencing our politics and practices?
- When we plan a campaign or action, how are we thinking about disabled people and issues as we do our work? Are we thinking about disability from the beginning or going “oops” and remembering it at the end?
- Are we thinking of disabled people as leaders and members of our organization, or just as clients to be served?
- How are we addressing and mending histories of ableism in our organization and building with disabled communities and organizations?

All of these are questions you can bring to your meetings, planning sessions and hangouts. You can ask them as you create campaigns and projects and community spaces. And you can use the following questions to examine where disability justice is (or is not) in the work you're doing.

### History

- Are disability justice and disability talked about in your organization or community? How?
- What are the specific histories of disability in your community or the communities your organization works with?



- Are there incidents of ableism in your organization's history that you need to examine? Are there needs for accountability or repair? (If you think there are none, don't be so sure. You may need to talk to people, be curious, ask questions, figure out what people need to feel safe disclosing.)
- Is disability or disability justice a topic within the coalitions or networks that you are a member of? How so? Could you bring it up if not?

## **Relationships**

- Do you have knowledge of and relationships with disabled activists, organizations, communities? What's your sense of what the landscape is like currently for disabled/Deaf/neurodivergent people and activism in your communit(ies)?
- What are those relationships like currently? How healthy are they? Where could they be built deeper and strengthened? Is there any repair needed?
- What do you need to do to build deeper relationships with disabled activists, community members and communities?
- What can your organization do to support disabled organizers, collectives, communities and organizations in the work they are already doing? What are the resources you can share? Where and how can you share a platform, money, funding, equipment?

## **Knowledge**

- What do you know about the disability justice movement? Who and where did you learn it from?

- Do you have a sense of how disability justice is different from the disability rights movement?
- Who are disabled leaders and thinkers you respect and have learned (are learning) from?
- What disability justice issues do you think you need to learn more about? How are you learning about them? Do you have a plan for ongoing political education about DJ?
- What are the specific histories of disability in your community or the communities your organization works with?
- What are the disabled issues in your community or the community you work with right now?
- Are there specific communities of disabled people (i.e. Deaf people, autistic folks, etc.) whose histories, issues, organizing and current issues you want to deepen your knowledge of?

## **Politics**

- How long has your organization been doing DJ or disability work?
- How is disability talked about in your organization or community?
- Who and what are the disabled people, leaders, issues and organizing strategies in the current campaigns or organizational work you're doing?
- Do you ask for, and pay, for the expertise of disabled people to help shape your policy perspectives?
- What are the strategic goals you have for the next one, two, five or ten years to advance disability justice?

- Have you considered the intended and unintended impacts on disability communities if you achieve your policy win?
- Are disability justice and DJ issues a perspective/topic within the coalitions that you are a member of? If not, how can you bring them in?



# Section 3: Doing an Internal Audit: Taking Stock and Getting Real

## Procedures and Structures

- Do you create budgets that recognize the need for access supports? (e.g. ASL, interpretation, childcare, support staff, etc.)
- Do you maintain a list of access support vendors (i.e. CART and ASL interpreters, people to do access audits, web designers who practice accessible design, chemical-safe cleaners, caterers who cook for specific food access needs)? If not, can you start making one and working with those vendors now so they're ready to go when you are planning an event?
- Do you have a protocol checklist or access rider for ensuring access happens during events?
- Do you have standard emails you send to people orienting them towards access requests before a meeting or event? (e.g. an existing protocol for ensuring presenters get their scripts to ASL interpreters a week before the event, existing language around fragrance free requests, etc.)
- Do you have an existing list of accessible venues to use for events?

## People

- How many disabled people are working in your organization? How do you know this?
- How many of those folks are in leadership? Do you know how they feel about the ways they are supported in their disabled and access needs? Is there a method for checking in about this regularly?

- How many of the disabled, Deaf, and neurodivergent people in your organization (including you) are involved in disability organizing, culture, community, etc?
- Is there a history of disabled people being forced to leave your organization, actively or passively? What happened? What were the elements that pushed them out? How have you worked towards repairing this?

## Policy

- What is your policy around disability, sick or caregiving access requests?
- What kind of documentation do you require in order for someone to get access needs approved? How much gatekeeping, assumptions that people are lying/hustling the system, or medical approval do you require?
- What is your policy around sick time/disability time/paid medical leave? If someone needs to take off more than a short period of time for disability, chronic illness or mental health-related needs, how do you deal with that?
- Do you have strategies for making it work when a disabled worker gets sick, is late, or can't make it to a venue because of an access failure? How do you build in backups, rest time and low-stimulation time?
- How do you assess "achievement" in an anti-ableist way? How do you view things like "intelligence," "reliability" and other metrics often used to assess people that can often be ableist?

# Section 4: 10 Principles of DJ

## Discussion Questions

These questions are inspired by Oakland, CA DJ activist Max Airborne, who, several years ago, began a public practice of taking one DJ principle a month, publicly examining how they were embodying it and where they needed to grow or had questions, and inviting others to do the same. We invite you to do a deep dive into each of these principles, using a similar practice and using the suggested questions as self-reflection or discussion guides.

### Intersectionality

- How are you embodying intersectionality in your disability justice work?
- How are you making sure that the BIPOC, the queer/trans folks, the not-men, and the working-class/poor are part of your DJ work?
- How do you take leadership from and support the leadership of people targeted by multiple, interlocking oppressions?

### Leadership of Those Most Impacted

- How are you embodying the leadership of those most impacted in your work?
- How are you ensuring that the people most impacted by ableism are leading?
- Are you looking to disabled people as leaders, particularly multiply marginalized crips and disabled people who are poor, who don't have fancy degrees or jobs?



## Anti-capitalist Politic

- How are you embodying an anti-capitalist politic in your work?
- How are you doing work that's not disability capitalism?
- How do you do things in a way that challenges professionalism, 501(c)3 tax status, grants, making money, and having to work on a certain timeline?
- What comes up for you here?

## **Commitment to Cross-movement Organizing**

- How do you bring DJ into your cross-movement organizing?

## **Recognizing Wholeness**

- How are you recognizing wholeness in your work, including when someone is “unproductive” or slower than what you’ve been taught is “productive?”
- How do you build with the leadership of people who are not many-degreed, super fast, full-time workers with standard CVs?
- What are your connections to disabled people who are sick, homebound, institutionalized, “weird,” without formal education and poor?

## **Sustainability**

- How are you thinking about and practicing sustainability?
- Where are your successes? Where are your challenges?
- Where do you want to grow next?
- How do you embody sustainability as an access need for everyone you interact with?

## **Commitment to Cross-disability Solidarity**

- How are you practicing cross-disability solidarity?
- Where are your successes? Where are the places you are struggling?
- Where and how can you learn and grow?



## **Interdependence**

- What does interdependence mean to you?
- What is easy, what is harder?
- How are you practicing interdependence?
- Where are your successes? Where are the places you are struggling?
- Where and how can you learn and grow?

## **Collective Access**

- How are you doing with collective access?
- Tell some stories of flexibility and creativity in creating collective access.
- Tell some stories about the struggle places.

## **Collective Liberation**

- How have you been working for collective liberation right now with disability justice at the center?
- Tell some stories of how you're working for collective liberation.
- Where do you still want to grow?

## Section 5: Access Tools

### Why is accessibility important? Why is it not the only thing we're asking about?

"Access is only the first step in movement building. People talk about access as the outcome, not the process, as if having spaces be accessible is enough to get us all free.

"Disabled people are so much more than our access needs; we can't have a movement without safety and access, and yet there is so much more still waiting for us collectively once we build this skill set of negotiating access needs with each other.

"Tonight I am taking time to appreciate and enjoy access as a communication of our deepest desires. When my new friend makes their house wheelchair accessible so I can come over, a whole new level of safety and trust opens up. When a love takes initiative to reach out to event organizers to make sure my buds and I can fully participate, that's thoughtfulness, and also political commitment in practice....

"Feeling thankful for access—and interdependence—as an opportunity for us to show up for one another... I am so hungry for us to be together. I am so ready for what is around the corner."

- Stacey Park Milbern

Accessibility is often the first place that organizations go to when they start looking at dismantling ableism in their organization. Accessibility is crucial. Without it, we can't get in the door or stay there to build power as disabled people. (Sometimes we end up building our own buildings, or meeting outside.)

Access is an area of much disabled expertise, and there are many, many access tools created by disabled people already out there. Instead of trying to reinvent the wheel, I've linked to them. As you use this guide, move through them a step at a time. You might use the RAMP physical space audit and move through your workspace with a measuring tape, answering the questions, one week. And the next week, you could take Sins Invalid's "Suggestions for a Public Protest" and think through which of their suggestions you have used in planning protests and actions, and which you could use going forward.

## **Tools**

### **HEARD's The Revolution Must Be Accessible Toolkit for Online Access**

Disabled communities have used Zoom and other online meeting platforms for years to make meetings accessible to people who have difficulty meeting in person because of access barriers, ableist transportation and lack of spoons. Since COVID-19 hit in early 2020, online meetings have boomed, including among majority-abled organizations who have never used Zoom before. This has resulted in both a boom in organizations asking for ASL and CART services, and a lack of good skills around doing online access well.

In response, HEARD (Helping Educate to Advance the Rights of Deaf communities), a cross-disability abolitionist organization, created "The Revolution Must be Accessible: A Guide For Creating Access Centered

Online Movement Education,” which is filled with tips and advice for organizers creating accessible online events, particularly with regard to ASL and CART (real time captioning). You can find it below.

**ASL:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aVBV0vUvT18&feature=youtu.be>

**English Resource:** [bit.ly/accessrevolution](http://bit.ly/accessrevolution)

**Spanish Resource:** [bit.ly/revolucionacceso](http://bit.ly/revolucionacceso)

**Text Only English & Spanish with image descriptions:**

[bit.ly/accessrevolutionTXT](http://bit.ly/accessrevolutionTXT)

**Here are some examples, taken from Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha’s access rider, which was adapted from Alice Wong of the Disability Visibility Project’s rider:**

- American Sign Language interpreters during the online event. They must be certified interpreters with experience and comfort working with online events and with queer/BIPOC/disabled/progressive material. At least 2 interpreters for an event over 1 hour.
- Live captioning during the online event by a Communication Access Realtime Translation transcriptionist (not by an app or autocaption, which are inaccurate and do not provide language equity). CART alone does not provide language equity for Deaf people for whom ASL is their first language.



- After the event if you also plan to post a video of it online, you need to include captions and a link to a transcript (see below).
- One option post-event if you cannot provide ASL/CART: upload a video of the event with captions (not auto-generated ones) on YouTube or another video platform and include a link to the text transcript with the post.
- Adequate prep time and script collection (no more than 48 hours before event does script, including run of show, get to CART and ASL interpreters).
- A rehearsal time, separate from the event, where interpreters, event organizers and volunteers are present to make sure everyone is on the same page in terms of where interpreters will be pinned, CART login/assignment being done well, and the use of chat.
- All online events will have security protocols (registration required, ability to mute participants, no screen share from participants) in order to limit the possibility of Zoom bombing and harassment.
- All online events will have at least one designated person working as an “access usher” to answer any access requests or questions from participants and troubleshoot any access problems (CART embed stops working, ASL interpreters disappear, there’s a language question from an ASL-using attendee, etc.).

Example of a YouTube video with human-generated captions (BTW, these are more accurate) and a link to transcript in the description section: [2019 Autistic Self Advocacy Network Annual Gala: Keynote by Alice Wong \(captioned\)](#)

## **Publicity/Media**

- Graphics and posts about the event should include info that ASL interpreters and captioning/CART will be provided.
- Image descriptions added as alt text on social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Instagram or Facebook)
- Inclusion of an email of a contact person if anyone has questions or accommodation requests for the event

## **Radio/Podcast**

- Include a text transcript with your post.

## **A Promise and a Practice: Carolyn Lazard's Accessibility In the Arts toolkit**

“Accessibility in the Arts: A Promise and a Practice” is an accessibility guide geared toward small-scale arts nonprofits and the potentially expansive publics these organizations serve. It details specific ways in which disabled people are excluded from cultural spaces and offers possible solutions to those barriers. Moving away from historical and juridical definitions of accessibility, this guide considers the unique capacity of small scale arts organizations to meet the needs of disabled communities. It engages principles of disability justice to think through what can urgently be done to create more equitable and accessible arts spaces.

While this toolkit was developed specifically for art and cultural spaces, it is an INCREDIBLY thorough and comprehensive resource for access, providing best practices, requirements and hacks for all kinds of access in its “Accommodations” section. It also contains equally important info about how to list access info on promotional materials, and most important of all, how to budget for access, including a comprehensive list of free or low cost access tools, apps and programs.

## **Website accessibility checker:**

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/fundamentals/accessibility-intro/>

**Accessibility: A checklist** by Stacey Park Milbern from the book *Don't Leave Your Friends Behind* from 2011 that still holds up. Has info about food, gender neutral bathrooms, wheelchair access and a whole lot more.

## **Office space access audit: RAMP Vancouver Access Audit**

The Radical Access Mapping Project is a Vancouver-based disability justice blog and organizing project, part of which focuses on auditing different community spaces in Vancouver and publishing their audits online as a community resource. Their audit templates and more about the project can be found below. We encourage you to use it to move through your space and witness what's there and what's missing.

<https://radicalaccessiblecommunities.wordpress.com/the-radical-access-mapping-project/radical-access-mapping-project-vancouver/>

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1HKw\\_g2NDxoZAc7otQUOIE-q17CZskLK7EB5afDYHmt1E/edit](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1HKw_g2NDxoZAc7otQUOIE-q17CZskLK7EB5afDYHmt1E/edit)

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1AUXwgl5chH-3fE7Kv67wuuLn-9ooGRHU3KxBUnr-\\_p9A/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1AUXwgl5chH-3fE7Kv67wuuLn-9ooGRHU3KxBUnr-_p9A/edit)

## **Suggestions and Questions for Public Protests and Rallies**

**Some questions to ask yourself before you start planning and along the way:**

- What are your goals, values and strategy?
- How is disability justice a part of your goals and strategies?

- Are you thinking of actions in a way that's accessible to disabled, immune compromised, neurodivergent and Deaf people?
- What are some ways of doing actions that are not "big rally outside with chanting and speeches?"

Sins Invalid's "Suggestions for a public event" are a great place to start in thinking through your march/rally planning: <https://www.sinsinvalid.org/news-1/2020/6/8/access-suggestions-for-mobilizations>

### Some initial questions to ask yourself:

- How long is your action? What is the distance of the march route?
- How much time will the action take?
- If it's a rally with speakers, can you bring folding chairs for people? These can be useful for many people, including parents, elders, sick and disabled folks.
- Do you have ASL and ESL access? Interpreters need to be booked in advance. Also, not all ASL interpreters are the same.





- Do you have water and snacks?
- What about bringing a folding wheelchair for if folks get tired and need the support?
- Disabled people often get pushed and shoved around in marches. Can you have volunteers help walking people get out of the way?

### **“Crippling the Resistance: No Revolution Without Us.”**

This is an essay by the author of this toolkit, written out of the 2020 summer rebellions against anti-Black police violence, containing a number of suggestions for accessible protests.

**“26 Ways To Be In the Struggle, Beyond the Streets,”** by Ejeris Dixon, Piper Anderson, Kay Ulanday Barrett, Ro Garrido, Emi Kane, Bhavana Nancherla, Deesha Narichania, Sabelo Narasimhan, Amir Rabiyah and Meejin Richart, is an amazing toolkit that lifts up ways we can organize without being in the streets, through teaching, making art, posting, fundraising and educating.

### **Plain Language**

Plain language is a key need by many communities, including developmentally and intellectually disabled communities, to understand information. **A great 101 guide to plain language can be found here.**

# Section 6: Four Stories about Organizations Bringing Disability Justice to their Work

As we worked on this tool, beta readers consistently asked us if we could include some stories that showed how Black and brown-led, social justice-focused organizations and communities that weren't already focused around disability had integrated disability justice into their work. What were the steps? What were the moments they stumbled and learned from? How did this look in real life? One person said, "The questions are great, but without stories of how organizations put the work into practice, I'm kind of left with 'Okay, there are two disabled people in our organization. Now what?'"

This opened up to us the truth that there are very few movement stories out there of how communities, organizations, workplaces, tribes or campaigns have moved to see the DJ work they are already doing, and to deepen it even further. We asked if people had stories they wanted to share about how their org made DJ changes, in real life, and they came through!



## Block Build Be

Build Block Be (BBB) is a project of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, based in Oakland, California, one of the only Buddhist organizations led by BIPOC and/or queer/trans people in North America, where many visible Buddhist organizations, meditation societies or temples are majority white, with an explicit focus on using Buddhism as a form of social justice. While BPF has one or two disabled people doing disability work in their organization, BPF was not primarily focused on disability issues.



The Buddhist Peace Fellowship created BBB as an annual and monthly space where people from different social justice movements come together to learn political organizing skills and about each other's work in a wide variety of communities and movements, including racial and economic justice, Black liberation, healing justice, labor, immigrant rights, Indigenous sovereignty, prison abolition, queer and trans and gender justice, feminism, Tibetan freedom, environmental justice, anti-Islamophobia, anti-sexual violence, children's rights, housing justice, anti-fascism and more.

BBB is named after peace activist Joanna Macy's ideas of three necessary modes of action as we work to create justice and liberation:

**Block:** resisting harm and injustice

**Build:** cultivating relationships, communities and new structures

**Be:** contemplative practices for resilience and liberation

After BBB held a first retreat that felt only marginally accessible, member Max Airborne, a disabled white genderqueer person, trained the BBB retreat's ten-person facilitation team in disability justice principles over a couple of meetings.

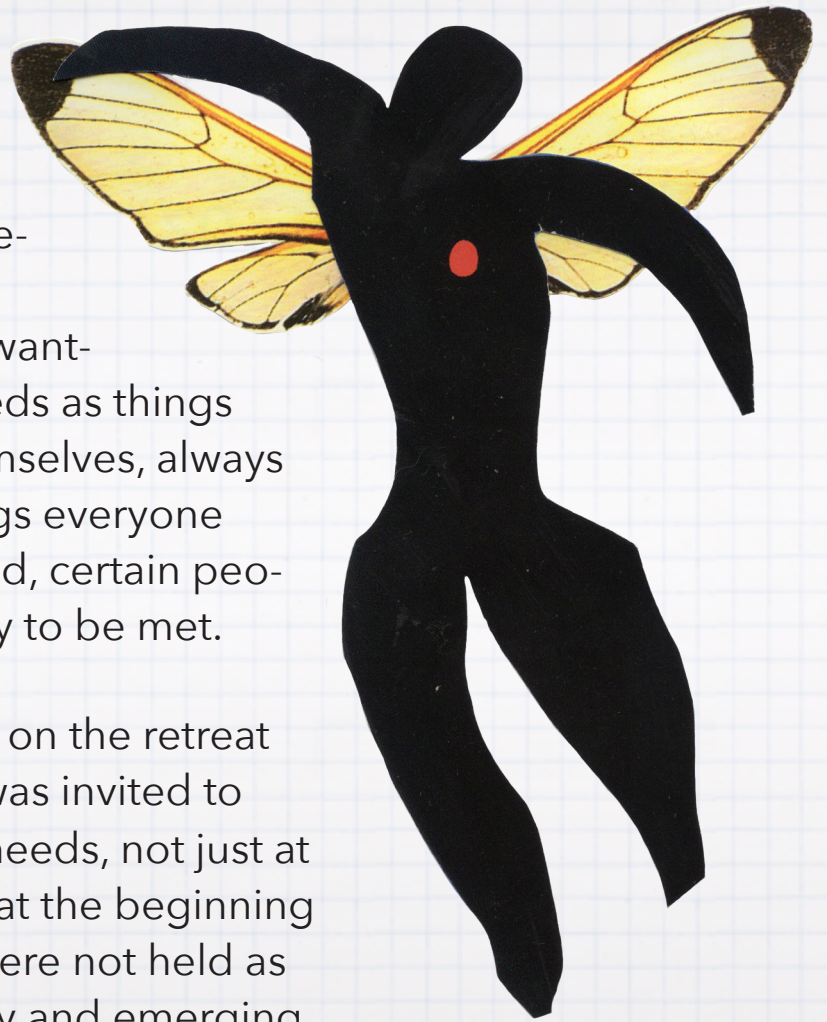
Max Airborne says about this experience of bringing DJ to the BBB retreat: "When they invited me on to the team, I knew there was potential for this to be a community that could support integrating disability justice, even though it is not a community primarily for disabled folks.

“We began preparing among the facilitation team by talking about what it means to center access as part of our framework. While a checklist of access needs can certainly be helpful, I wanted us to get rooted in access needs as things that are constantly revealing themselves, always changing. Access needs are things everyone has, it’s just that in an ableist world, certain people’s access needs are more likely to be met.

“The way this got actualized on the retreat was so beautiful... Each person was invited to consider and share their access needs, not just at the beginning of the retreat, but at the beginning of every session. Access needs were not held as something extra, but as necessary and emerging.

“It was deeply healing to feel the whole community participating in this with such love and tenderness and vulnerability—tending to the mobility pathways in the room so everyone could get where they needed to go, taking care with how we used the microphones so everyone could hear, facing those who were supported by being able to see the lips of those speaking, and feeling their way into asking for support when needed: lowered light to avert a migraine, patience and understanding around social conventions, emotional support, help carrying stuff.

“We created a team of ‘access pixies’ whose role was to assist as needed around access issues, and they really took it on in a deeper way than I had even imagined. The team of access pixies met with each other regularly, discussed needs that were emerging, made announcements during each full-group session and invited new announcements about

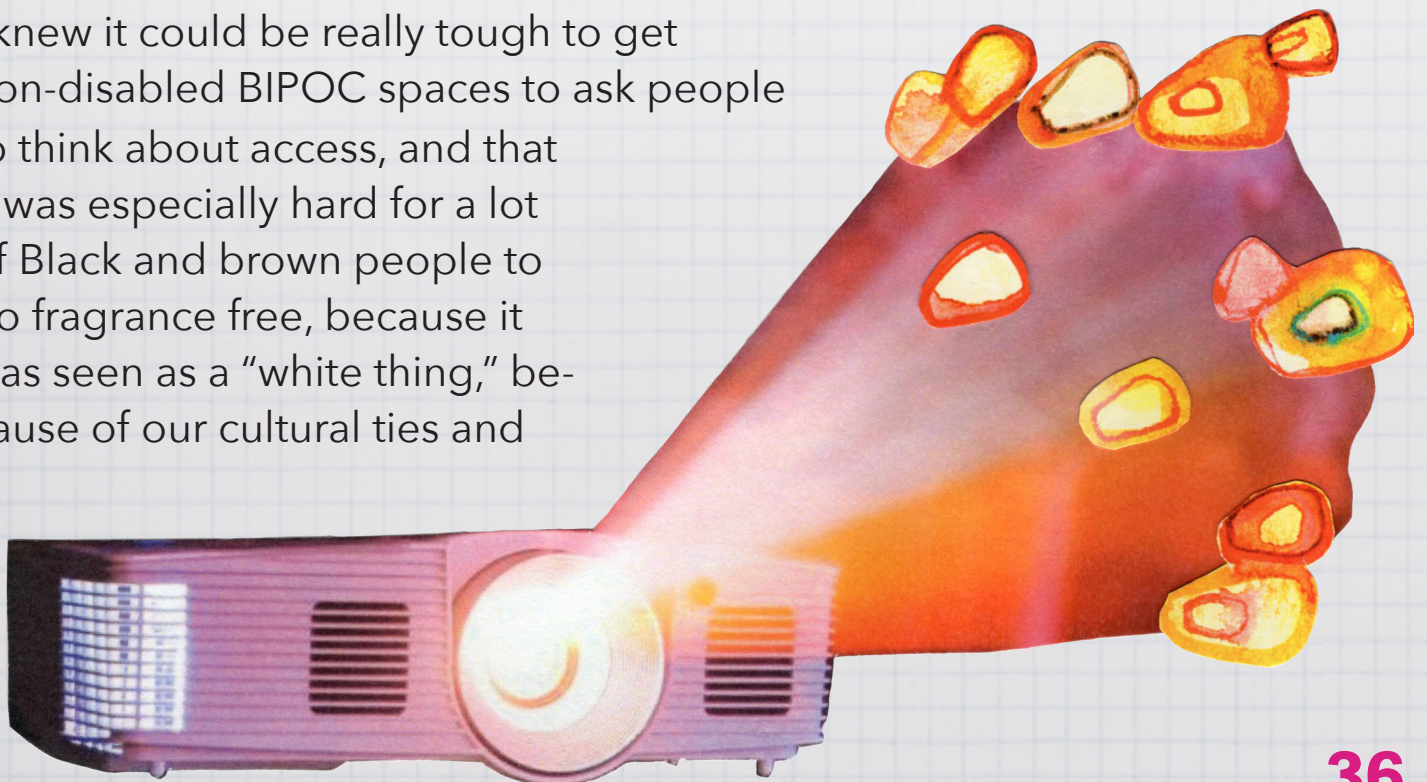


access needs each time. Their dedication was so palpable, joyful and creative. I heard from a number of them at the end how much they loved being an access pixie and learning more deeply about how to center and support access. Next year I really want to make wings for access pixies!”

## **Kebo Drew, Queer Women of Color Media Access Project**

QWOCMAP is a 25-year-old queer and trans BIPOC media-making project that trains QTBIPOC in all aspects of film and video making and throws an annual, multi-day free film festival that is the talk of the town and a hot date night. I first started attending their film festivals when I was newly living in the Bay Area in 2007 and encountered a vibrant event of 300-500 queer women of color of all ages and identities, flirting, hanging out, enjoying free desserts and spending time together. Because it was free, I saw many poor and working class folks attending. There was an atmosphere of love, welcoming, fellowship and kindness. It was not a “cool kids club.”

Around 2011, QWOCMAP drew my attention again when I noticed they were asking attendees, in a loving, down-to-earth way, to be fragrance free! I knew it could be really tough to get non-disabled BIPOC spaces to ask people to think about access, and that it was especially hard for a lot of Black and brown people to go fragrance free, because it was seen as a “white thing,” because of our cultural ties and



love for fragranced products, and because it can be hard to find and pay for fragrance-free Black and brown body and hair care products. Mix that together with the fact that many BIPOC have cultural trauma over being cautioned by our families to always smell “clean,” getting BIPOC spaces to go fragrance free was an uphill battle.

QWOCMAP’S announcement of their 10th anniversary “Season of Love” festival in 2014 read:

Dear QWOCMAP Community,

Hey, we really need your help with something.

Are you willing to learn about being Fragrance Free?

This year, our 10th anniversary Festival Focus, “Re-Generation: Food, Environment & Land,” takes root in our cultural legacies of sustaining the earth, sowing seeds of resistance and cultivating justice.

As people of color, we are environmentally at-risk every day. We have less access to healthy foods, clean water, and sustainable energy. Affordable housing can be filled with pests, mold and chemicals. As workers, we deal with toxic cleaning products, artificial nail & polish fumes in salons, hair dyes and straightening relaxers. Our neighborhoods are built upon radiation and industrial pollution.

Our communities disproportionately bear the burden of environmental injustice, and this has an intense impact on our health and our bodies. From perfumes to essential oils, chem-

ical clouds of fragrance and scents do damage. As environmental injury and severe chemical sensitivity increase, it is important that we examine the intersection of environmental justice and disability justice.

For QWOCCMAP, justice is about access and equity. As queer women of color, gender nonconforming and transgender people of color, the spaces that we create need to be accessible to all of our people.

Therefore, our Queer Women of Color Film Festival:

**RESPECTS** community members who are environmentally at-risk and chemically sensitive

**OFFERS SCENT-FREE** Seating at House Right Orchestra level

**WORKS** with our venue to use fragrance free, non-toxic cleaning products and other supplies, and avoid scented products

**STRONGLY REQUESTS** that all audience members, volunteers, partners and community members **AVOID** scented-products, and

**REFRAIN** from wearing, bathing with, using on their bodies or washing their clothing with products that have fragrance

This has been QWOCCMAP policy for several years. Yet we also understand that ending ableism and creating disability justice is an ongoing process.

We are dismayed that several community members have had

to leave the Film Festival due to illness caused by scents and once again, we extend our deepest apologies to you. We thank you for letting us know and working in community with us to figure out solutions. We deeply appreciate your leadership and knowledge.

This year, we want it to be CLEAR to everyone, we need your help being FRAGRANCE FREE.

We ask not only for our larger community, but also for ourselves as QWOCCMAP staff, interns and Board members, as Film Festival volunteers. We are people with environmental injuries and chemical sensitivity.

We need a fragrance free space so that we can do our jobs, and maintain our health, while we work hard to serve you.

Audiences need a fragrance free space so that we all let our spirits soar with the combination of films and community.

As we prepare for our upcoming 10th annual Queer Women of Color Film Festival, we wanted you to understand our process. Below, there are links to becoming fragrance free. Much of the information has been written and compiled by queer and transgender people of color. Everyone from femmes with locs to divas with designer tresses is covered. We know that y'all care about community, so we're sending this email as a FYI for us all to learn more.

Email us, we're happy to answer queer queries and discuss trans\* topics at any time. Please email us, we love working in community with you!



I interviewed QWOCCMAP co-founder and co-director Kebo Drew, who identifies as a Black, Southern-raised, chronically ill/disabled queer femme, in June 2021 about QWOCCMAP's process of bringing disability justice to their work. Here are some highlights:

"There's all kinds of shenanigans with funding in the arts. So, the California Arts Council decided to take funding away from the National Arts and Disability Center, like 100k taken away. We get there and I was

like look, POC are disabled, queer and trans POC ID as being sick and disabled; there's an intersection between what we're suffering from white supremacy and ableism.

They were taken aback. They were not seeing ableism as a part of white supremacy. QWOCCMAP is deep up in it because we can offer testimony connecting all these threads.

"That's one of the places we find ourselves, one of the ways we do DJ. We all identify as disabled or neurodivergent, but we are not, in our byline, a disability org.

But, we are an org learning to embody DJ politics and practices. So we can get in that room and push people to think about DJ stuff where maybe other groups wouldn't get in the door.



"If you start from a stance that everyone's disabled rather than it's a burden, everything is different. I look at my family and I can't think of anyone who's fully abled. Diabetes, strokes, high blood pressure. Being folks of color - when my dad passed, he had cancer because of being exposed to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War. One of the stories that came out when my dad died was how his sister was working in the fields, pregnant, lost the baby, and was never able to have another child. Her reproductive health being impacted by the kinds of work, the layers of disability on both sides of my family... it's a lot. In doing DJ work as folks of color, we need to start thinking about how histories are disabling instead of 'we overcame and we're all fine now.'

"So, it's not a burden to make things accessible. Of course I want to make a space where my family can come. We have a lot of disabled people who work at QWOCCMAP who don't identify as disabled—like, "oh i'm not disabled it's just a condition, it's ok." But, wait a second! OK, let me get you in the door, show you this space that is practicing DJ and maybe your ability to talk about it will shift a little.

~ ~ ~

**"It's not a burden to make things accessible.  
Of course I want to make a space where  
my family can come."**

~ ~ ~

"We started out with ADA/Section 504 compliance and cross checking all the lists. But then we hit this point where we crossed off all the lists but we were like, is this really working? Compliance lists are a baseline! I'm looking for something better than this baseline. At QWOCCMAP, everything we do is free, people just have to show up. Everything people need is there. So we asked, why not use that same principle for disability? Where you don't have to ask, the ASL terp is just there. We have open captions on every single one of our films.

"This came out of our personal experience. Mad, who is the co-founder, is hard of hearing, but her mom has hearing aids. There's the whole process of going to the movies and there's that device you have to ask for that barely works. Another intern who is HOH was like, I can hear these things, but not these. So then we were like, let's just get transcripts!

"Then the question was, how are we going to pay for captioning everything? We got money, just for two years, but we've been absorbing the costs ever since. People are like 'We don't have money for DEI!' Well no, you have to put your money and resources in.

"It became a thing that we did. If you submit your film, it's gotta be captioned, that's it. But we made it easy for people to caption their work. We have a one-pager that explains open captions, the size of the font, etc. So when people are like, 'I don't know what to do,' we have this one pager we send them.

"One year, six or seven people got triggered at once at the festival. Even with my training as a crisis counselor, tagging people at CUAV (local queer/trans anti violence organization), we couldn't have anticipated it, but what we can anticipate is making sure someone is there for them. So we always have crisis counselors at the festival. Being aware of trauma and mental health, building it into how we do things and not being surprised by it happening is disability justice too, because PTSD and other mental health disabilities are disabilities!

"We're always moving from a place of, the three of us can't do it all. But who do we know who can help us? Who are the people and organizations we can reach out to? When it got so intense one year around issues of abuse, violence and safety, with everyone asking me to intervene, we reached out to a lot of different queer anti-violence organizations all over the country and we got support and advice.

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**“When people say, we can’t do this, about DJ, about access, I say, of course you can! You can do it if you come from a stance of learning and listening and a sense of, each year we’ve gotta make this better. ”**

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“We have an organizer mindset where people can come in from the community and directly go into leadership. People can suggest something and we’re like, as long as they’re ok with leading it, do it! That’s how we got childcare. People needed it and were like, here’s what we can do. People know what they need and are a resource, if you give them the power to make it happen.

“Things can also serve multiple needs. What do survivors need? Ok, often they need a quiet space if they get triggered. Turns out quiet space also tended to be a low sensory place that ND folks needed.

“Sometimes, with some issues, people get pissed because we were taking a long time to respond. But that was the year my dad died, three months later to the day Mad’s dad died. We need time to learn, rather than respond really quickly, and that’s working the DJ principles too.

“Once we started, we just kept improving. Every time we would go back to our values and practices document, we had volunteers who would read through the whole thing and make sure it matched up with what we were actually doing.

“So, for example, with the festival, a lot of people were bringing in service animals, but wait, they’re not hypoallergenic, and there’s also people coming who have really bad asthma. We started mapping out the seating of the theater: frag-free here, service animals here, ASL here because sight lines.

“When ASL interpreters of color were like, here’s the deal: the white terps always answer the calls for ‘we need an interpreter’ first! So I employed a thing where I would hire all the POC ASL interpreters first instead! So we would develop these terp lists and relationships that makes it easier for us to make a script. Instead of making it an add-on, it became part of the whole process.

“It’s also about listening to the community. We do a lot of surveys, and we’d say, ‘This work was made with the input of hundreds of people, but if you have something to add let us know, because of course we’re gonna do it!’ So with food we had people saying hey, I’m vegan; I can’t have nuts; I have a fish allergy. Fragrances! How do we get an air filter? Now we have one. How can we do this and explain it to our people in a way they can get behind it? So we started talking about what’s in fragrance. Black people understand conspiracy. I’d be like, ‘you know they don’t have to tell people what’s in fragrance,’ and they’d be like, ‘what?!’ We got this email from an elder that the font size is too small. We get that!

“So when people say, we can’t do this, about DJ, about access, I say, of course you can! You can do it if you come from a stance of learning and listening and a sense of, each year we’ve gotta make this better. Thinking of it as, how do we make the festival be a place where people can feel nourished by it?

“We’re always asking questions: What do we need to know about autism? What do we need to know about Deaf culture? We can have conflicting needs, how do we accommodate as many people as possible so it can be better for everyone? Our response is always, we can do something about this, and empowering people so everyone is working on it. We deserve abundance. That’s hard to remember sometimes, but we do.

“We ground our DJ work as, how do we welcome people? QWOC-MAP values are all around welcoming people into the space. You can say

'respect people,' but that means something different to me being from the South, so, give people scripts. You can't just say it, you have to implement it, and you have to make it easy for folks. Like, 'If you see someone in a wheelchair, the theater says the house manager has to seat them, but ask what they feel comfortable with.'

"What a lot of people would see as a roadblock, we use the relationships we've built to innovate. We threw our first workshop specifically for sick and disabled people, and that was the year the big wildfires hit Northern California. And so many people were like, shoot, no one can leave their house with the air purifier, this is going to be a bust. Except that we were partnering with the Women's Cancer Alliance, and they had just moved into this new building, which had an air filtration system because it serves women with cancer. So in the middle of horrible fires, our workshop was a place of respite, a place where participants could hang out all day, get clean air, not have to wear their mask (this was before COVID). It was a win-win, not a loss.

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**"The world is ableist and disabling and things happen to us as POC. But at the same time it allows us to be way more brilliant than if we weren't."**

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"We have a relationship-building style versus a policing or lecturing-people style. We're working class as fuck! My people are COUNTRY, and we have this real working-class ethic. We use grandma language. If you can't explain something to your grandma, what are you doing?"

"The working-class ethic is, what can we do? Other arts organizations are like, we're gonna need this much money to do this: I'm like, there's ways to be creative with it. Let's get the food donated and use the money we would have spent on that on terps.

“The world is ableist and disabling and things happen to us as POC. But at the same time it allows us to be way more brilliant than if we weren’t. We’re moving at a pace that is real. We built the work around our bodies rather than the other way around. I can only sit in a chair for two to three hours a day at this point? Ok, no sitting in chairs. Or, everybody’s office has an ergonomic chair, everybody has a set-up so we don’t have to hurt. Reminding each other to drink water, sit down, we’re moving together. Anytime there’s a new person we have to orient them to this because it’s so different. It’s better for our organizing community. It affects how we do fundraising because we’re thinking about healthcare, retirement.

“DJ really means, I love you! How can I show you I love you? But it’s slow to build because the world isn’t set up that way.”

## **Hand In Hand**

Hand in Hand: The Domestic Employers Network is an organization that was founded by and works in partnership with the National Domestic Workers’ Alliance, linking the rights of domestic workers (which include personal care/support attendants who work with disabled people) and disabled people. “Hand in Hand is a national network of employers of nannies, housecleaners and home attendants working for dignified and respectful working conditions that benefit the employer and worker alike.”

Domestic work is crucial, skilled labor performed mostly by working class, poor, immigrant, Black and women of color. Domestic workers were excluded from the New Deal’s worker protections because of racism; they cut Black, Latinx, Asian, Indigenous and other women of color, the vast majority of people doing nannyng, PCA and other care work, out of labor rights, to perpetuate slavery conditions for Black folks in particular.

Historically, disabled people and domestic workers have often been pitted against each other. There are histories of domestic workers fighting

for an end to subminimum wage and for health insurance and safe working standards being pushed back on by disabled communities who were worried that an increase in salaries and domestic workers rights would negatively impact their ability to access care.

Hand and Hand is a groundbreaking approach, bringing together disabled people, including disabled people who are caregivers, and paid care attendants to fight for domestic workers' rights and the rights of disabled people who need care. In their ten years of existence, they have had some huge wins, from ending sub-minimum wage for care workers in many states, to being part of the Biden administration's Build Back Better program, which pushes to fully fund in-home care for disabled people and elders. They have also done cultural work, like their Communities of Care project and the Home and Community Based Stories Fellowship where caregivers and disabled people share stories about the warmth and love they find in working together, to shift the ideas of care from something people often are ashamed to need to something that everyone deserves.

Disability justice enters into their politics and policies in that they are building alliances, believing that both overlapping communities can win.

### **To learn more about Hand in Hand's work:**

<https://domesticemployers.org>

<https://domesticemployers.org/our-work/disability-justice/>

<https://www.carecantwait.org/communities>

### **Nikkita Oliver's City Council Campaign & Nikkita4Nine**

Nikkita Oliver is a Black queer and nonbinary lawyer, activist, educator and abolitionist who ran for Seattle's 9th City Council District seat in the 2021 election. They built DJ through their "[Nikkita4Nine](#)" nine planks of their platform, from talking about the need to center disabled people



in creating community-based climate disaster responses (e.g., wildfire smoke emergencies, floods, snow), to city planning, to creating abolitionist policies (recognizing sweeps of homeless encampments, arrests of people for consensual and survival sex work and drug use, and Seattle's contract with the King County Jail as disability justice issues). As part of their ongoing work in doing "participatory policy"—creating spaces where residents of the city's communities could have opportunities to shape policy—Oliver's campaign created a Disability Justice Community Listening post, saying, "We are creating a space for participatory policy-making with impacted community. We envision a City that accommodates all of its residents and their needs. Disability justice, universal design and accessibility is more than meeting minimum compliance with certain legal standards for physical spaces."



# Thank you!

Disability Justice Leaders Collaborative members Rebel Sydney Black, Saara Hirsi and Nico Serra for reviewing and giving crucial feedback.

Kebo Drew and Max Airborne for agreeing to be interviewed and sharing their organizational stories and wisdom. (For more information about work Kebo and Max are involved in: [nobodyisdisposable.org](http://nobodyisdisposable.org), [fatrose.org](http://fatrose.org), and [qwocmap.org](http://qwocmap.org).)

Participants in our 2021 focus groups.

[Laura Nash](#) for layout and design.

[Sky Cubacub](#) for allowing us to use their QueerCrip symbol on the cover.

[Disabled and Here](#), Intisar Abioto and Andrea Lonas for many of the photographs used in collages.

Northwest Health Foundation's Jen Matheson for organizational support.

[The Collins Foundation](#) and [Northwest Health Foundation](#) for funding the Advancing Disability Justice program.

**Do you have questions or want to share your  
experience using the DJ Audit Tool?**

**Email us at [djaudittool@northwesthealth.org](mailto:djaudittool@northwesthealth.org).**