



DECONSTRUCTING DEVELOPMENT: INCLUSION, EQUITY AND DIVERSITY – PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

The commitment of WID to inclusion for all extends to asking how, as development professionals, we can and should embrace the contributions of people with disabilities to our sector. The latest edition of **Deconstructing Development** on November 19th was a thoughtful and moving conversation amongst three women engaged in this important work.

Wanda Deschamps, Principal of Liberty Co., had a successful twenty-five year career in the philanthropic sector before receiving her autism diagnosis and becoming a public champion for inclusion. Among her many forms of activism, Wanda writes under the banner of *#InclusionRevolution*, launched in 2018 to spearhead broader thinking about disability, especially disability employment. Wanda began by informing the group that with 1.3 billion disabled people globally, disability inclusion equals diversity.

Noorain Khan, Director in the Ford Foundation's Office of the President, was a leading force in launching the Foundation's Disability Inclusion program, which aims to expand inclusion on both institutional and individual levels. Noorain shared that Ford's landmark commitment to DEI incorporated disability rights only after the Foundation was pressed to do so by activists, and that a critical mass of staff plus strong leadership are essential to actualizing true access for the disabled.

Kathy Tompkins is a Partner in Warren Enskat Group, where she spearheads a Diversity and Inclusion practice for the firm, and has been a fervent advocate for disability rights in the more than 25 years since the diagnosis of her daughter with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA). According to Kathy, for-profits and non-profits now understand that they must support the changes that make life and work more accessible to all, and that they are putting their financial resources into making those changes.



The three panelists agreed that folding disability inclusion into nonprofit DEI programs is the next step to fulfilling the promise of these efforts. Organizations that have already moved to implement greater inclusion and equity in terms of gender, race and ethnicity must bring the same intentionality to access for the disabled. Internal policies need to define basic concepts for inclusion, prioritize intersectionality, and build accountability at all levels of the organization.

These actions must be backed up by money in the budget for accommodations, training and support, and leadership must ensure that DEI policies including the disabled filter through all parts of the organization – HR, finance, program, marketing and development. The panel agreed that funders are solidly engaged in directing resources to nonprofits that intentionally include the disabled in their hiring and that serve to further disability rights. An excellent resource for learning more about this is the Presidents' Council on [Disability Inclusion in Philanthropy](#), a partnership of 16 institutional funders.

Wanda's moving description of her experience coming forth publicly with her disability, and its impact on her both personally and professionally, led to a conversation about the need for “radical inclusion.” Organizations need to go beyond mere compliance with current laws or accepted standards to a practice of support for self-disclosure by disabled staff in order to reduce stigma and nurture genuine acceptance. The goal must be a recognition of true diversity, and the building of authentic relationships that flows from that recognition, on the part of staff, Board, program partners and funders.

Progress is being made. More organizations are now bringing DEI specialists on board, and more HR staff and recruiters are being trained in DEI principles. The panelists encouraged attendees to take full advantage of this growing expertise in order to build their own capacity in this arena, and to support and further their organization’s efforts. In particular, development professionals can cultivate relationships with funders that can support their organization’s disability rights efforts; many people in all walks of life are related to someone with a disability, and fruitful connections can be made.

More information on resources suggested by the panelists is available on the [WID website](#).