Strengthening Disability Inclusion in Social Justice Organizations

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Social justice organizations are integral to addressing issues of inequality and promoting civil and human rights for all people. The key to well-informed successful grassroots mobilization for change lies in community support and involvement in these organizations.

For example, the organization, Freedom to Marry was critical in successfully organizing for the legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States (Freedom to Marry, 2017).

However, due to lack of accessibility and other barriers, community members with disabilities are often underrepresented in these efforts (Hughes, 2017).
Description of Project

1. Literature Review
2. Development of Guide
3. Stakeholder Feedback
4. Dissemination
I did not go through an IRB approval process.
This project is educational in nature and does not involve human research.
The assessment tool is meant to be used internally by the organizations. I did not directly review or collect data.
Investigation/Literature Review

- Review of published material using UNM HSC Worldcat Database and review of grey literature from Google browser internet search.

- Key terms used were “social justice” and “disability” which yielded articles from which I derived following themes to develop my project:
  - Disability awareness
  - Intersectionality and disability
  - Ableism in the social justice movement
  - Accessibility
  - ADA compliance

- Significant findings from literature review:
  - Conversations about structural oppression in the social justice community often do not include disability (Hughes, 2017).
  - People with disabilities are underrepresented in social justice groups (Hughes, 2017).
  - There is a growing voice from the disability community that is challenging ableism in the social justice movement (Zaikowski, 2017).
Development of Guide

- Considering information gained from the literature review as well as personal experiences, I felt that a very simple guide would be useful in helping local social justice organizations:
  - Internally assess inclusion and accessibility efforts;
  - have concrete tips on how to make initial steps in addressing gaps;
  - have a comprehensive resource list of community disability organizations and programs.

- I utilized the Chicago Community Trust *Renewing the Commitment: An ADA compliance Guide for Nonprofits* as a resource to adapt the assessment and tip sheet from.

- I developed an introductory cover sheet to give context to the guide.

- To complete the guide I also adapted the UNM Center for Development and Disability Information Network *Disability Websites* page to develop a resource sheet of New Mexico disability organizations and programs.
I reached out to two anonymous grassroots social justice organizations in Albuquerque and set up meetings.

I discussed the project with the organizations and reviewed the guide with them.

The guide was then left with the organizations to utilize internally.
Stakeholder Feedback: Results

- The organizational representatives I met with expressed a genuine desire to strengthen their commitment to the disability community.
- These organizations seem to be in a cycle of addressing immediate needs, with limited resources and capacity. Therefore, accessibility and inclusion are usually not given top priority as they are not typically urgent.
- Many organizations seem to be small and issue-specific. Making connections with the disability community is not always intuitive.
- There seems to be a misconception that people with disabilities have their own movement that is separate.
Next Steps, Broad Dissemination

- This guide was meant as a very basic tool to get organizations thinking about not only accessibility to their work, but about their commitment to the disability community.
- I encouraged the organizations to utilize the full Chicago Community Trust *Renewing the Commitment: An ADA compliance Guide for Nonprofits* as a more comprehensive tool to help them to strengthen their work with the disability community.
- I was asked back to present at staff meetings about the guide and give some additional background information and resources.
- I will make this tool available to other local social justice organizations.
- I hope to refine this guide and eventually make it available as a resource in the CDD Library.
Takeaways

- My initial problem statement was validated. People with disabilities are greatly underrepresented in the social justice movement. However, there has not really been much done formally to address this issue.

- There needs to be a change in movement culture to ensure that the disability community has a meaningful place at the table. The social justice organizations I met with were willing to listen. A more formal effort might plant a seed in bringing awareness to this issue.

- Understanding and including intersectional perspectives is key in making this change. Disability intersects with all identities. This is key in helping organizations understand how disability justice is not a secondary issue.

- Accessibility should not just be a concept of independence and equivalence. It should include diversity and interdependence.

- Social justice is inextricably connected to disability justice.
Works Cited

