

Disability Rights Fund

GRANTMAKING PRIORITY-SETTING AND STRATEGY

What are your grantmaking and/or strategic priorities (in terms of geographic focus, issue, etc.)?

The Disability Rights Fund is a grantmaking collaborative that supports persons with disabilities around the world to build diverse movements, ensure inclusive development agendas, and achieve equal rights and opportunity for all.

The Disability Rights Fund has two funding rounds per year and our strategic priorities for both are updated annually. See our general grant guidelines [online](#).

Who decides the grantmaking priorities and overall strategy for the fund?

This is an iterative process that involves advisors with disabilities, staff (who also gather feedback from their work with grantees), the grantmaking committee (made up equally of advisors and donor representatives), and Board. The overall strategy for the fund is also an iterative and involves all key stakeholder groups (staff, advisors, donors, Board) contribute. Advisors are representatives from the disability movements that we fund.

What's the process by which these decisions are made?

It is a lengthy back and forth starting in June of every year, where all the key stakeholders meet in person. It culminates in November of every year with Board approval.

TYPES OF GRANTS

What kinds of grants do you provide (e.g., general, rapid response, capacity building, field-building, etc.)?

All our grants support disability rights advocacy and given only to organizations of persons with disabilities (Disabled Persons' Organizations or "DPOs"). The majority of our grants are given out from our "pooled fund," which has three funding streams: a national coalition funding stream (for three or more organizations working together at the national level); a mid-level coalition funding stream (for three or more organizations working together at the sub-national level);

and a small grant funding stream (for more marginalized, grassroots, and emergent organizations).

We also have a Special Opportunity funding stream, which provides funding to current grantees who have a political opportunity that has arisen and needs rapid response. Our Strategic Partnerships funding stream provides support to strategic partners in this work, such as the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities. Our Uganda Capacity Fund gives organizational capacity funding to Ugandan DPOs that are marginalized, emergent, grassroots, or have a capacity gap. We also have funding streams for technical assistance (addressing rights advocacy skills) and for grantee convenings.

What is the range in amount of the grants you award?

In the pooled fund, the range is between \$5,000 per year and \$100,000 for two years. Most of our grantees (70 percent) are repeat grantees who receive funding across many years.

Is the participatory decision-making process the same for all grant types and sizes? If not, why?

We use the participatory decision-making process for the pooled fund grants. It's important to note that even though other grants are decided by Board Committee, leaders with disabilities are part of our Board.

Unlike the pooled fund process, our Special Opportunity Grants require rapid turnaround so we don't use a participatory process for these. It's important to note, though, that these are only given to grantees that were already vetted and approved through our participatory process. All technical assistance and grantee convening grants only go to organizations that are vetted by our participatory process.

Do you earmark funding for a specific purpose in order to ensure diversity in who/what you're funding?

While all our grants are awarded to DPOs, we aim for 50 percent or more of our pooled fund grants be allocated to marginalized sectors of the disability community, such as women with disabilities, persons with psychosocial disabilities, persons with albinism, DeafBlind, etc.

Who determines the type and size of grants, and how?

Applicants apply for different levels of funding: small grants between \$5-20K; mid-level coalitions between \$30-40K annually (\$60-80K over two years); national coalitions between \$30-50K annually (\$60-\$100K over two years). We do not stray too far from the requested amount, though we sometimes re-direct applicants to another stream if we feel it is a better fit than the one they initially applied for. Staff determines any small changes to applicant budgets with the applicants themselves. For other funds, the amount is decided on by the organization that will be doing the work and the responsible staff personnel.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Who is eligible to apply for a grant?

Disabled Persons' Organizations (DPOs)—organizations founded and run by people with disabilities themselves—in our target countries (these change by year and cycle, see [here](#) for more information).

What kind of outreach happens to make potential grant applicants aware of your grantmaking?

We utilize our advisors and global, regional, and national networks of organizations of people with disabilities to get the word out. Once we are in a country, we also make new contacts and do outreach to particularly marginalized or grassroots groups on the ground, hold attending meetings on how to apply for our grants and what we fund.

How often do you accept applications/grant proposals?

For the pooled fund, once each year for every target country. Other grant applications occur as a result of dialogue with staff and grantees.

Can applicants get assistance in applying?

Yes. First, program team members (staff) on the ground hold outreach meetings with potential applicants explaining what we fund and do not fund, how our funding cycle works, and our application process. Once organizations have applied, program team members work with applicants who meet our basic eligibility criteria to ensure that their applications are complete and their proposed projects are presented as strongly as possible.

What type of information is collected from applicants, and who has access to this information?

See our [Requests for Proposals for 2018](#), or visit our [website](#) to learn more about what information we request

from applicants. Our program team, grants manager, and executive director have access to all the information. Other stakeholders receive summarized information in the form of a recommendation that pulls from both the application and conversations with the applicants. The final recommendation includes the organization's name, country, funding stream, amount requested, and a summary of the organization and proposed project.

INITIAL VETTING/SCREENING/DUE DILIGENCE

Are applications initially screened or vetted to ensure eligibility?

Yes.

How and by whom is this done?

Program team members and the Program Director.

If more than one person is involved, how do you ensure that the same criteria has been considered in all cases?

We have clear eligibility requirements, and the Program Director oversees all selections across the program team members.

GRANTMAKING DECISION PROCESS AND PANEL

Who comprises your grantmaking selection panel(s)?

Our Grantmaking Committee—which is a Committee of our Board—comprises four of our global advisors who are activists with disabilities and four of our institutional donor representatives. The advisors have four-year terms, which helps create space for new perspectives and members and ensure inclusion and diversity.

How are they selected (e.g., by nomination, application, etc.)?

Advisors are nominated to our Global Advisory Panel by the [International Disability Alliance](#) – a global membership network of global and regional membership networks of organizations of persons with disabilities.

How do you think about representation of specific population groups or geographies?

We request nominations of candidates with specific characteristics (region, gender, age, impairment type) to ensure that we have diversity. Sometimes, if we are not sent a diverse enough group of nominations, we go outside of IDA (with their permission) to search for representatives from extremely marginalized groups.

What, if any, is the term limit for members of the selection panel? Why?

It is four years for advisors; donors are members for as long as they are contributing to Disability Rights Fund /Disability Rights Advocacy Fund.

We do this because we can ensure diverse representation over time and as many activists with disabilities as possible get the chance to understand grantmaking processes, participate in decision-making, and sit at the same table with donors.

What is the process by which the selection panel determines grant decisions?

They review updated country contextual documents, which explain progress and obstacles towards disability rights; an overview of monies available and last year's grantmaking in each target country; and the docket of prospective grants for each country. They then complete an online survey that gives them the opportunity to agree/disagree/comment/question each grant, as well as to provide strategic insight for the whole docket. Based on responses, we design the subsequent Grantmaking Committee meeting to address grant denials and strategic questions. We also provide a comprehensive document to all members addressing questions on individual grants in cases where the grant was approved but more detail was requested, or suggestions were made. Decisions on the docket are made at the meeting.

What considerations are taken into account to ensure inclusive and streamlined decisionmaking processes?

Our documents and processes (survey, teleconferences, physical meetings) are made accessible to persons with a variety of impairments. For teleconferences, we use remote CART (Computer Assisted Real-Time Translations) providers and/or online or individual sign language interpreters for deaf advisors. For electronic documents, we use WORD that is screen-reader friendly for visually-impaired advisors. Face-to-face meetings are held in a physically accessible space, and we give our advisors the option to bring personal assistants or sign language interpreters with them (and we pay for the costs). Every year, we ask how to make our processes more accessible and streamlined, and we change our processes accordingly.

Can decision-makers on grantmaking selection panels be applicants?

Yes.

If so, are there any special processes or a conflict of interest policy tied to this occurrence?

We have a conflict of interest document that must be reviewed and re-signed every year. We also ask any member whose organization or network applies to recuse themselves from decision-making on that potential grant.

What happens if there is disagreement among the decision-making committee? How is this resolved? (e.g., consensus, voting, etc.)

Even if only one member of the Committee indicates through the online survey that a grant should not be made, we bring that grant discussion to the face-to-face meeting.

Program team members who know the applicant address concerns in the meeting then a discussion is held to try to reach consensus decision. If consensus cannot be reached, we use majority vote.

How are selection panel members trained and supported?

Since advisors have usually been on our Global Advisory Panel for some time before moving to the Grantmaking Committee, they are aware of our work and how we function. Once selected for the Grantmaking Committee, they usually sit in on a meeting before active duty. We provide a guideline to explain what their role is. The executive director also meets with each new member to explain the timeline and documents they will receive and the process they will undergo. Other advisors / donors on the Committee can mentor them in the process if the new member desires.

What recourse do grants applicants have to challenge the decisions?

They can write to us, connect with program team members, and/or apply next time.

GENERAL STRUCTURE

What percentage of staff members are "peers", i.e. of the population the foundation seeks to benefit?

Currently, five out of 13.

What percentage of board members are peers?

Typically, about half of the board are also peers.

What percentage of the grantmaking decision-making committee(s) are peers?

50%

Are there other committees or operational processes that involve peers?

Our Global Advisory Panel of 12 members has nine diverse activists with disabilities from the regions of the world in which we work. The Panel reviews our work, based on the movement-building perspectives and experiences they bring to the table, and makes recommendations about our grantmaking strategy, especially the degree to which it is addressing marginalized groups or specific topics such as climate change and persons with disabilities.

How does the role of paid staff differ from that of peers?

Paid staff not only have grant review responsibilities but also those related to grants oversight, movement building, grantee support, technical assistance, and monitoring and evaluation. Some paid staff are persons with disabilities who are engaged in the movement on the ground. Advisors have the various responsibilities laid out above in regard to Global Advisory Panel and Grantmaking Committee.

Do you pay members of your panel/committee?

We only provide honorariums to advisors for their time in our Global Advisory Panel, not for their time on the Grantmaking Committee, so we can avoid conflict of interest.

REPORTING, LEARNING, AND PROCESS ITERATION

What, if any, are your reporting requirements for grantees?

We require final financial and narrative reports from all grantees. For two-tranche grantees, we require mid-term financial and narrative reports. When current grantees apply for additional funding, they must also provide a progress report about current funding in the application.

Who develops them?

The program team and grants manager.

Do you do any kind of formal evaluation?

Yes, we've had two independent evaluations completed by external monitoring and evaluation firms.

If so, what is asked of grantees and who conducts the evaluations?

The evaluations have looked at our grantmaking progress against indicators stipulated in our log frame—a tool we use

to improving the planning, management, and evaluation of projects. Indicators include relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, equity, and the extent to which our work has had helped increase rights and inclusion within the disability movement. Staff/consultants of monitoring and evaluation firms have conducted the evaluations but when on the ground, they partner with DRF staff who provide them with connections and help in addressing sensitive and accessibility issues.

How do you evaluate impact?

We assess our work against log frame outcome and output indicators on an annual basis. We also have an independent impact assessment coming up in 2020.

How do you learn about participants' experiences, both as selection panelists and applicants?

In each Grantmaking Committee meeting, we ask members to complete an evaluation. We also discuss the process and what might be changed the next time. Program team members are also continuously feeding back issues in the application process that we use to improve and simplify applications on an annual basis.

With whom do you share the results of what you learn?

On an annual basis, we share results with our key stakeholders (staff, Board, donors, advisors). Our independent evaluations are **published on our website**. In biannual grantee convenings, we check our learning and its impact on our strategy (especially at country levels) with grantees.

Have you made changes to your programs based on feedback? If so, what is an example?

Yes. With feedback from our advisors, we set a percent limit on number of grants that could be made to parent organizations in any one country. We also restrict grants to parent organizations to those focused on children with disabilities, people with intellectual disabilities, or DeafBlind people (severely marginalized groups that often do not have their own organizations and sometimes are not afforded the legal capacity to have their own organizations). In addition, we will only make a grant to a parent organization if they are committed to increasing self-advocacy by individuals with disabilities themselves.

For more information about the Disability Rights Fund, contact Diana Samarasan at dsamarasan@disabilityrightsfund.org.

This resource was developed as a companion piece to the GrantCraft guide on participatory grantmaking. This resource is part of a suite of resources that showcase the rich and varied practices of participatory grantmaking across various organizations, reducing the burden on each funder to repeatedly outline their model. The guide and companion resources give insight to the philanthropy landscape about the what, how, and why of participatory grantmaking.

Visit grantcraft.org/participatorygrantmaking to explore further.