

Accessible Fundraising Toolkit

A guide to becoming an inclusive fundraiser.

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About the Authors



Liz Chornenki is the Annual Giving Officer at YWCA Toronto.

Liz (she/her) is a Disabled fundraiser, who spends her non-work time educating the field on ableism, accessibility, and inclusion. She believes strongly in community centred fundraising, and takes her cues from other marginalized people. Outside of fundraising she is a passionate believer in the power of camp for Disabled children, youth, and young adults to discover their true selves while surrounded by the things we're told we cannot do, and volunteers her time at an outdoor leadership program. She is also a graduate of the Humber Fundraising Management program.

Liz lives in Toronto, Ontario, which is the land of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples



Alison Hughes is the Senior Officer, Partnerships at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital Foundation.

Alison Hughes (she/her) is a Disabled fundraising professional and sits on the hospital's Accessibility Planning Advisory Committee and was part of a group that developed Holland Bloorview's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion committee many years ago. Alison graduated from the 2018–2019 AFP Fellowship in Inclusion and Philanthropy and her contributions and project focused on ableism and language, specifically in the fundraising sector. When she isn't fundraising, Alison enjoys spending time with her husband and two small kids.

Alison lives in Aurora, Ontario Aurora is part of the Anishnabee lands and are treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit, recognized through Treaty #13 as well as the Williams Treaties of 1923.

A Note from the Authors

As disabled fundraisers in Canada, we have developed this toolkit based on our experiences personally and professionally.

The tips, tools and resources we will share in this document are not exhaustive and generally relate to our experiences in Canada and North America. We encourage you to look for resources local to you as well.

Please use this guide as a place to start making your fundraising more inclusive to disabled people.

In this document, we will talk about language. Liz and Alison both prefer Identity First language (eg. disabled person) so we will use that throughout. We do not believe there is one correct way to use language, however it is our personal preference based on our lived experience.

Definitions and Context

Defining Disability:

Disability is anything that impacts a person's ability to do certain activities. This can be anything from a mobility disability, a sensory disability, a learning disability.

There are disabilities that are visible, and less visible (or invisible). Neither of these are more or less valid; cognitive disability, or a chronic illness like diabetes.

Examples: Wheelchair user, Deaf person, Dyscalculia, Downs Syndrome, or Asthma.

What is ableism?

Ableism is discrimination in favour of non-disabled folks! This can show up both at the societal level where there are systems that overtly or covertly discriminate. This can also show up at an individual level, where someone does something to a Disabled person to exclude or denigrate them.

Suggested Reading:

[Ableism 101](#)

[Ableism primer from the Centre for Disability Rights](#)

Why is Ableism a problem in fundraising?

[Alison's AFP Paper: Discussing Ableism in Fundraising](#)

[Alison's AFP Article: Breaking Down Barriers- Ableism in Fundraising](#)

[Liz's Hilborn Op-Ed: Fundraising Has an Ableism Problem](#)

[Liz's Good Partnership Podcast](#)

[Liz's Fundraising Everywhere Podcast](#)

[Sandy Ho & Jen Bokoff's Article: Time for Philanthropy to Confront Ableism](#)

Resources for Learning about Disability and Ableism

In order to understand why Ableism is important in our sector, we all must learn and unlearn what we believe to be true about Disability and the Disabled community. These are some resources we like. Please also look up advocates and activists in your community where you live and work. Please be sure to listen to disabled voices when learning about Disability.

Articles, Blogs and Websites

[Ramp Your Voice](#)

[Crutches and Spice](#)

Books

[Demystifying Disability: What to know, What to say and How to be an Ally- Emily Ladau](#)

[Disability Visibility- Alice Wong](#)

[Sitting Pretty- Rebekah Taussig](#)

Movies

[Crip Camp](#)

[ReelAbilities Film Festival](#)

Twitter

Anita Cameron [@adaptanita](#)

San Alland [@san_alland](#)

Dr. Amy Kavanagh [@BlondeHistorian](#)

Keah Brown [@Keah_Maria](#)

Jen Bokoff [@jenbo1](#)

Dom Kelly [@the_tattooedjew](#)

Haben Girma [@habengirma](#)

Language

Language is so important when it comes to fundraising and it has a big impact on how we perpetuate ableism and cause harm to disabled folks.

We know eliciting certain emotions and triggering hormones is part of the formula in encouraging someone to give to your organization. With disability we often see this portrayed as sadness and pity or the other side is inspiration which can be patronizing. Both sides are othering and harmful.

In the office we think of casual conversations and words that perpetuate ableism like “crazy, stupid, dumb, lame”. They roll off the tongue for many of us but they are harmful and we all need to work on omitting them from our vocabulary.

Person First Language (PFL) vs Identity First Language (IFL)

e.g. person with a disability vs disabled person

Speak how the person or group you are speaking about prefers. There is nuance and preference and there is not one right way. You will not be perfect with your language- don't let perfect be the enemy of good. Speak with Disabled folks about what language to use. Consult websites and articles written by Disabled people, not parents or caregivers.

Suggested Reading:

[Ableist Words and Terms to Avoid](#)

[Ableism in Writing and Everyday Language](#)

Creating a Culture of Anti-Ableism

If you truly want your organization to be welcoming and supportive for Disabled people, you need to build a culture of anti-ableism within your internal structures. Encouragement to use paid time off for rest and vacation that comes from the highest levels is key. Additionally, you should make sure that disability and accommodations are talked about openly, and that disability is represented at all levels of the organization.

Hiring

When hiring for a position, you need to start by looking at the job posting itself. Are there unnecessary physical requirements such as lifting, standing, walking, hearing, seeing? Are there unnecessary formal education requirements? You also need to make it clear that accommodations are available both for the interview, and the work itself.

When it comes to interviewing, there are many things you can do to make the process and experience as accessible and welcoming as possible. Tell all applicants what basic accommodations you're able to provide without request, such as accessible washrooms, virtual interviews, and breaks in longer interviews. Make sure you ask every candidate what other needs they may have for things you may need to arrange. Providing the questions to all interviewees in advance evens the playing field for folks who have disabilities that make coming up with answers on the spot difficult.

Suggested Reading:

[10 Ways to be Anti-Ableist and Promote Disability Inclusion at Work](#)

[5 Anti-Ableist Practices that Any Organization can Embrace Now!](#)

Accommodations & Training

Staff Accommodations Checklist

- ✓ Commitment to making work inclusive
- Insurance begins when the job starts
- Checking in with all new hires
- Provide meeting minutes to all staff
- Provide basic accommodations (eg. ASL, Captioning, Equipment)
- Flexible working hours and location (eg. Work from home)
- Pay a living wage
- Include anti-ableism as part of IDEA training

When hiring consultants you can search locally for disabled folks doing this work. Liz is also open to training and consulting so you can reach out to her directly.

Accessible In Person Fundraising Events

Inclusive Events Checklist

- ✓ Commitment to making events accessible
- The venue meets my local accessibility standards
- There is an option to participate virtually
- There is accessible transportation to this venue
- There is accessible parking at this venue
- There is a space for those with sensory needs (Eg. A quiet room)
- We've hired an ASL interpreter
- There will be a screen to display all speakers that will include captions
- The invitation or website include all accessibility information
- The registration form as for access needs (physical, dietary, sensory)

It can be difficult to make an event universally accessible. The most important thing is to provide the most information possible in your invitation or on your event website so that guests can make their own decisions and know what to expect.

Offer virtual access when you can

- Can you offer a virtual option? Concerts can be streamed, speakers can be streamed.

Affordability

- Is your event affordable? This is not just for Disabled folks. Also consider that in some places, you might be required to include an attendant for free.

Suggested Reading:

[8 Ways to Make Fundraising More Accessible for People with Disabilities](#)

Virtual Events

Inclusive Virtual Events Checklist

- ✓ Commitment to making virtual events accessible
- Chose the right platform based on the event scope
- ASL and captioning will be provided
- A recording will be available post event including the transcript
- Speaker camera on for lip read reading, participant cameras optional
- Create guidelines for using the chat function

Disabled folks are at highest risk for COVID 19 complications. Many in the community continue to mask, get boosters and avoid crowds and indoor spaces. Any notion of “returning to prepandemic” ways of working and hosting events is likely excluding disabled and chronically ill people.

We know virtual is possible so always provide that option to folks who can't or don't want to be there in person. Let's not lose this- it is accessible.

Suggested Resources:

[How Video Conferencing Apps Compare for Accessibility](#)

[Making Presentations Accessible](#)

Digital Fundraising

Website Accessibility Checklist

- ✓ Commitment to making your website accessible
- The website meets our local accessibility standards
- All images include alt-text
- No flashing images or seizure triggers
- Provide a high contrast mode
- All videos are captioned
- Everything is written in plain language
- All text has been tested for screen reader compatibility
- The invitations and website include all accessibility information
- The registration form asks for access needs

Suggested Reading:

[Testing Document Accessibility](#)

[Princeton Document Accessibility](#)

[Making the Web Accessible](#)

Social Media

Inclusive Social Media Checklist

- ✓ Commitment to making events accessible
- All images and gifs include alt-text
- Caption all videos, even if it only includes music
- Avoid flashing images or if you use them, provide warnings in advance
- Use #CamelCase for all hashtags
- Use plain language
- Limit emojis, hashtags, and images for screen readers
- Make sure your language is anti-ableist.

Social Media is a minefield for accessibility. Infographics and large chunks of text made into images should be avoided, as they are difficult to make accessible.

Video captioning is equally important- you can either use a professional captioner or do it in house.

Keep in mind that screen readers read everything, including hashtags, and emojis. Do not over use either as it gets really annoying to the user.

Inserting Image Description

It is important to describe images on the web. Below are instruction for the 3 main platforms.

Twitter:

Using image description/alt-text to describe images and gifs. You want a person who cannot see the image to have an understanding of what is in the image. To do this, when you add an image to a post, there will be a small +alt button on the image. Tap that, and then write a brief description of the image.

Facebook:

When you go to add a photo, click “edit photo” and then “alternative text”. Do not use the pre-written alt-text, write your own in the box provided for custom alt-text.

Instagram:

When you add a photo, click “advanced settings” and then “write alt-text” underneath accessibility.

Suggested Resources:

[Accessible Social](#)

Direct Mail

Inclusive Direct Mail Checklist

- ✓ Commitment to making direct mail accessible
- Font size no smaller than 12pt
- Font is easy to read, no fancy cursive
- Paper donation forms have ample space
- Tear off forms are easy to tear (use precut slip is possible)
- Avoid CAPCHA if possible online
- Use appropriate colour contrast (no white on gray!)
- Online donation pages are simple without too many click throughs
- Use accessible technology (eg. Tap options, text to donate, Apple pay, PayPal)

Anti-Ableist direct mail is as important as accessible direct mail. Don't frame your beneficiaries as helpless and unable to control their lives. Keep your language focused on possibility and self-determination.

If you're telling a person's story, make sure it is their story- have them review and edit it. Make sure to use language of your beneficiary, not their doctors, or parents. Seriously consider not using the story if the person is underage, because they may not fully understand the long term impact of it being out there, and may change their mind when older.

Don't spend too much time detailing a person's diagnosis, specific medical history, etc. Share what they enjoy, what they need help with, and how the programs and services will bring about change for them.

Suggested Resources:

[Making CAPTCHAs Accessible](#)

Thank You

We are excited that we are making progress in talking about Disability and Ableism in our sector. We hope these resources help you work towards making your work and workplace more accessible.

If you have questions or would like to get in touch, we would love to hear from you.

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