Disability and Diversity Intersectionality Guidebook for CILs

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Through a project funded by the Administration for Community Living, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Independent Living Research Utilization (ILRU) conducted research examining the work CILs are engaged in around disability, diversity, and intersectionality. The research was designed and undertaken in collaboration with Public Research and Evaluation Services, Sharonlynn Harrison, Ph.D., Principal Investigator. The objective of the project was to identify effective approaches that are making a difference in diverse communities across the country. CILs demonstrating progress in services, programs, and outreach for racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse groups were nominated by their peers. A panel of reviewers selected nine of the 38 nominated CILs to participate in detailed [case studies](https://www.ilru.org/disability-diversity-and-intersectionality-centers-for-independent-living-nine-case-studies) (http://www.ilru.org/disability-diversity-and-intersectionality-centers-for-independent-living-nine-case-studies).

This guidebook is based on the findings from the case studies as well as webinars and conference presentations provided by the IL-NET. Most of the presenters, facilitators, and authors of the information were people with varied racial, ethnic, and disability identities. The guidebook is intended to provide practical ideas for your CIL to increase inclusion, involvement, and leadership of individuals with disabilities with intersecting identities from all marginalized groups.

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# Introduction

Diversity means differences in culture, ethnic or racial classification, self-identification, tribal or clan affiliation, nationality, language, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, socioeconomic status, education, religion, spirituality, physical and intellectual abilities, and other factors that distinguish one group or individual from another[[1]](#footnote-1).

Intersectionality means having multiple social group memberships and identities that expose an individual to different types of discrimination and disadvantage[[2]](#footnote-2).

This guidebook starts with the premise that your Center for Independent Living (CIL) has already begun to explore the intersection of disability and diversity. The documented injustices and trauma endured by marginalized populations are important to study, understand, and address. To provide some context, we begin with a section on [“Why Words Matter,”](http://www.ilru.org/training/why-words-matter-addressing-microaggressions-create-welcoming-environment) based on a presentation by Brooke Curtis and Stanley Holbrook (www.ilru.org/training/why-words-matter-addressing-microaggressions-create-welcoming-environment). This section examines the subtler actions that cause harm and pain for people with intersecting identities and what individuals and CILs can do to interrupt that cycle.

The section entitled “Provide Training and Support for Board, Staff, and Volunteers” goes into more detail on exercises, books, and videos that provide information on racism, White Privilege, and implicit bias. We encourage you to explore and share those resources and to provide training based on them to your staff and board.

We know that when the staff and board of your CIL understand the systems and attitudes that allow prejudice, discrimination, marginalization, denial of opportunities, and death to continue to be inflicted on individuals because of their identities, you will want to take action. The purpose of this guidebook is to help you take action, starting with examining your own systems and structures.

We're all recognizing that it's not enough to just declare that we are inclusive of everyone. CILs must be intentional in the way they organize themselves and conduct business. To reach the full community of persons with disabilities, CILs must address the overlapping or intersecting social identities of the CIL’s stakeholders. Race, disability, gender—all identities—do not and cannot exist separately from each other.

We must acknowledge our biases and limitations and take steps to overcome them. This guidebook provides examples, tips, and lessons learned from small and large CILs across the country. It is our hope that this resource will support your CIL wherever you are on your journey to becoming more welcoming, safe, and inclusive for everyone.

# Why Words Matter: Self-Identity, Labels, and Microaggressions

## Introduction

“You're pretty for a Black woman.”

“You seem so smart.”

“You’re too tall to be a Mexican/Asian, etc.”

“You speak really good English!”

“What happened to you?”

“I can’t believe that you are married.”

“You look so normal.”

“You people are so inspiring.”

“I thought my life was difficult, but I could never deal with that!”

These slights — often unintended — communicate derogatory and demeaning viewpoints. Such statements can seem complimentary on the surface, but they contain a hidden or subtle insult. They imply that people of your race, gender, sexual orientation, age, class, religion, or disability status are generally inferior, but you are the exception.

Microaggressions are words or actions, often subtle, which imply that people of color, individuals with disabilities, older adults, women, individuals who are LGBTQIA+, Muslims, or people with other marginalized characteristics are inferior. Microaggressive behavior includes slights, insults, indignities, and disrespect based on stereotypes of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, age, social/economic class, and religion.

Microaggressions towards people of color include strangers or acquaintances asking questions such as, “What are you?” or “Where are you REALLY from?” These statements imply that the person will always be an outsider, a perpetual foreigner of unknown origin, and obviously not an American. African-Americans, Latinx, Asians, Native Americans, and other non-White citizens may not be considered “real” Americans who are equally deserving of the rights and privileges of citizenship.[[3]](#footnote-3)

People with disabilities may be patted on the head like a child, endure people leaning on their wheelchair, be spoken to in a loud or childish voice, ignored completely, experience waiters asking their companions what they want to order, or be escorted somewhere when help is not needed.

A micro-aggressive statement towards someone who is transgender may be, “You’ll never be a real woman,” conveying the message that although the individual identifies as a woman, she will never be accepted by others as one.

People who belong to one or more marginalized groups are all too frequently judged, questioned, subtly or explicitly insulted, and excluded.

## Microaggressions Unpacked

Microaggressive behavior is generally targeted towards people who are marginalized because of different characteristics.

**Microaggression Themes, Examples and Messages[[4]](#footnote-4)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Theme** | **Microaggression** | **Message** |
| Ascription of intelligence | “You are really smart and articulate.” | It’s unusual for someone of  your race, social class, gender,  age or other characteristics to be  intelligent and well-spoken. |
| Color blindness | “When I look at you, I don’t see you  as Black or see color.”  “You talk White.” | Denies a person of color’s  racial/ethnic experiences. |
| Denial of individual racism | “My best friend, boyfriend,  dentist, etc. is Black.” | I’m immune or not racist  because I have friends of color. |
| Sexual orientation | “So, who’s the man  in the relationship?” | Implies that a relationship must  involve a man and a woman. |
| Disability | Without being asked, a disabled  person is helped to board the train or told, “You are such an inspiration.” “Wow, you work, even with your disability.” | Implies that a person with  disabilities cannot accomplish  everyday things or function independently. |
| Class | “That’s ghetto.” | Being poor is associated with negative/undesirable  characteristics. |

Microaggressions are a result of implicit prejudice and bias, including attitudes, stereotypes, and assumptions that most people are not even aware of. Microaggressions reflect our worldviews of inclusion/exclusion,superiority/inferiority, normality/abnormality, and desirability/undesirability.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Microaggressions promote internalized racism, which is the conscious and unconscious acceptance of oppression and racial stereotypes by those stigmatized. Frequent negative messages about a person’s abilities, status, and worth can have adverse effects.

For example, a Black college student attending a predominately White rural university was often told or made to feel that she didn’t belong there. Her new lab partner loudly asked a classmate if she did any lab work, even though they were all fellow students. Consequently, she started feeling that she was not accepted by the other students, and less likely to succeed.

A person may feel like they don’t belong or fit in at work too, based on race, gender, age, or other characteristics. A Hispanic firefighter was asked if he was an affirmative-action hire. Another co-worker remarked, “Why couldn’t a White guy get the job?” The firefighter felt increasingly isolated and that no one believed he had completed testing and been hired on his own merits.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Microaggressions can be complex and varied. Sue, et al.[[7]](#footnote-7) identified and defined classifications of micro-aggressive behavior:

* **Micro-assaults:** Conscious and intentional hostile actions or slurs, such as using racial epithets, displaying swastikas or nooses, whispering “terrorist,” or deliberately ignoring a person of color and serving a White person first in a restaurant.
* **Micro-insults:** Subtle rude and insensitive verbal and nonverbal communications that demean a person's racial heritage or other identities. An example is asking a person of color how they were hired for a job or admitted into college. This question implies that this occurred through a quota system and that the individual wasn’t the most qualified. “You are a credit to your race,” is another example.
* **Micro-invalidations:** Communications that subtly exclude, negate, or nullify the thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color or with other targeted characteristics. For instance, men ignoring or talking over a woman in a business meeting, or taking credit for her ideas.

## The Impact of Microaggressions

Micro-aggressive behavior is a form of discriminatory racism, classism, sexism, ageism, ableism, etc. ***The word “micro” refers to the subtlety, not the impact.*** Some microaggressions can cut to the bone. They have real-life physical and emotional effects on those who are the target, especially when they happen repeatedly.

A 2020 study of 101 Black U.S. adolescents examined the frequencies and psychological effects of racial discrimination and microaggressions experienced individually, vicariously, online, offline, and through teasing. Researchers found that an average of five racial discriminations were experienced daily, leading to an increase in depressive symptoms.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Dr. Roberto Montenegro[[9]](#footnote-9) writes that on one occasion he was third in line waiting to pick up his car at a nice restaurant after celebrating the completion of his Ph.D. Several customers parking their cars assumed he was the parking attendant because of his race. These customers passed the other people standing in front of him and handed him their keys. He felt invisible, shocked, confused, hurt, and angry.

Dr. Montenegro states that while these incidents may seem benign, over time being repeatedly dismissed, alienated, insulted, and invalidated reinforces the differences in power and privilege, and perpetuates racism and discrimination. These repeated detrimental encounters make a person question themselves and serve as a reminder that they may never fit in. Researchers theorize that experiencing frequent microaggressions creates constant stress and wears a person down.

Microaggressions are traumatizing. The psychological consequences of repeated microaggressions include feeling anxious, depressed, angry, hypervigilant, and helpless, with diminished confidence and self-esteem. These are the brain’s response to trauma.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Dr. Sachin Pavithran, who is blind and a person of color, was purposely tripped down a flight of stairs in a college dorm. As he was falling, he heard two or three guys laughing. Because he couldn’t see who it was, there were no consequences for the perpetrators. Another time he was called a desert n\*\*\*\*r as he was walking to class. “It was not something I expected to hear on campus,” he said, “I thought people walking around a university would be more tolerant. People can say being name called isn’t brutal, but it does push fear into you.” Dr. Pavithran said he experiences high anxiety when traveling frequently by himself, primarily because of the intersectionality of being a person of color and blind. “It hasn’t stopped me – I can’t let it control my life, but that doesn’t mean I’m over it.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

Both overt racism and more subtle microaggressions impact the well-being and health of targeted people of color.[[12]](#footnote-12) It has been well documented that racial and ethnic minorities experience health disparities. Stress caused by racism has been linked to heart disease for African Americans.[[13]](#footnote-13) Depressive symptoms were the link in the relationship between racial microaggressions and thoughts of suicide in a study of 405 undergraduate students.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Microaggressions create a lack of trust in healthcare and service providers and caregivers, which can prevent people from seeking adequate care.[[15]](#footnote-15),[[16]](#footnote-16)

## Dealing with Microaggressions

It is imperative that we begin the process of disarming, disrupting, diminishing, and dismantling continual microaggressions.[[17]](#footnote-17)

The following sections will discuss what to do when you are inadvertently the aggressor, when someone else is the target, and when you are the target. The last segment will provide guidelines specifically on what CILs can do.

### When You Are the Microaggressor

It’s important to recognize that no matter how hard we try, all of us may unintentionally say something that offends another person. It doesn’t mean that we are a racist or a bad person, just perhaps uninformed and a product of our environment. Sometimes we are not aware of our actions until we notice a negative reaction or someone points out the meaning to us.

#### Tips on What to Do When You Offend Someone:

* Sincerely apologize, acknowledge the hurt, and accept responsibility.
* Minimize defensiveness as much as possible.
* Listen and seek more understanding.
* Don’t get angry at the victim.
* Don’t dismiss the microaggression as an isolated incident.

Reflect on the reason for your actions and how you might act differently in the future.[[18]](#footnote-18)

### When You Are the Target

Microaggressions often take a person by surprise. Researchers found that people of color do not respond to microaggressions over half of the time.[[19]](#footnote-19) When a person is surprised and taken aback by a statement or action, they generally are slower to react. They may need time to make sense of what just happened. Often the incident is over by the time the person has decided what to do and thought about a suitable response.

#### **S**uggested Tactics When You Are the Target:

* Analyze the situation.
* Give the benefit of the doubt when motives are unclear.
* Ask the person to clarify, explain or say more about what they meant; or restate what was said and ask if that is correct.
* Speak up without anger to educate/inform about how it made you feel.
* Criticize the microaggression, not the person, but only if it’s safe.
* Develop your own strategy to handle microaggressions.
* Seek support from friends, family or professionals.
* Take good care of yourself – cultivate healthy habits and a positive self-image.

Only respond when you feel it is safe to do so. The social costs can be too risky and high for a Black person to point out racial discrimination or microaggressions. A Black individual or person of color may be afraid that responding will result in being questioned, dismissed, criticized, or experiencing hostility or aggression. It is also possible that the target will become even more upset by well-meaning but hurtful responses, or that trouble will follow, as it often does, if they make a fuss.[[20]](#footnote-20)

### Strategies for Bystanders and Allies

People who witness a microaggression can be affected by it, even when the target person(s) doesn’t seem to be. Addressing microaggressions should not necessarily be the responsibility of the marginalized individual or group targeted. Sometimes it is simply too dangerous for a targeted person to respond. The target may also be too shocked or stunned to have time to formulate an appropriate response.

When a person in a work, community, social, family, or any other setting experiences microaggression, you can choose to intervene and be an ally. Sometimes the voice of allies can be more powerful and influential, as the microaggressor may be more likely to listen to a peer. It’s best to speak for yourself, not the targeted person, as to why you are offended, hurt, or upset.[[21]](#footnote-21)

#### Suggested Microaggression Responses

* Make the “invisible” visible (ask for clarification and challenge the stereotype).
* Disarm the microaggression (express disagreement, state values and set limits, describe what is happening, interrupt and redirect).
* Educate the offender (discuss commonalities, differentiate between intent and impact, appeal to their values and principles, and promote empathy).
* Allies can also experience pushback and hostility. Seek external support when needed (alert authorities or report the act when applicable, seek therapy/counseling, seek support through community or religious resources, set up a buddy system, and attend support groups).[[22]](#footnote-22)

## Suggested Steps for CILs to Address Microaggressions

Centers for Independent Living leadership and staff can take the following steps to effectively reduce microaggressions and show people with intersecting identities that they belong:

* Start with educating leadership, staff, and volunteers about microaggressions.
* Arrange for both regular formalized training and informal discussions.
* Acknowledge that privilege and intersectionality exist and start (or continue) to have conversations on these topics, even though the conversations and topics might be uncomfortable.
* Ask people how they prefer to be addressed and communicate.
* Create an organizational culture that people with intersecting identities can own and participate in.
* Build a foundation of accountability and personal responsibility.
* Avoid committing microaggressions and immediately address any that occur.
* Discuss the frequency, impact, and appropriate responses to microaggressions. Immediately address any microaggressions and derogatory comments, emails, or jokes. Update or create policies that address microaggressions.
* Do not name buildings solely after White, heterosexual, upper class males.
* Advocate for and be an example of fair treatment and justice.

Continually learn about, connect with, and put yourself in the shoes of the people we serve. Stand up and advocate for fair treatment and justice so that we may cherish and respect our unique contributions to society as much as we do our common ground.[[23]](#footnote-23)

## ***Additional Resources***

[More examples of disability, racial and gender microaggressions](https://chronicle-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/5/items/biz/pdf/Microaggressions.pdf) can be found at https://chronicle-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/5/items/biz/pdf/Microaggressions.pdf

[Examples of transgender microaggression](https://www.glaad.org/blog/glaad-launches-trans-microaggressions-photo-project-transwk) can be found at https://www.glaad.org/blog/glaad-launches-trans-microaggressions-photo-project-transwk

[More information on different types of microaggressions and appropriate ways to respond](https://advancingjustice-la.org/sites/default/files/ELAMICRO%20A_Guide_to_Responding_to_Microaggressions.pdf) can be found at <https://advancingjustice-la.org/sites/default/files/ELAMICRO%20A_Guide_to_Responding_to_Microaggressions.pdf>

Dr. Derald Wing Sue, author of *Microaggressions in Everyday Life* and *Microaggressions and Marginality* has posted a [short YouTube video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJL2P0JsAS4) with explanations, video examples, and quick suggestions to combat microaggressions at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJL2P0JsAS4>

[Microaggressions Don't Just 'Hurt Your Feelings,'](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/02/28/what-microaggressions-small-slights-serious-consequences/362754002) a USA Today article on the serious effects of microaggressions, can be found at https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/02/28/what-microaggressions-small-slights-serious-consequences/362754002/

[More information about the effects of racial discrimination on health outcomes](https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2009-1100E): Kathy Sanders-Phillips, Beverlyn Settles-Reaves, Doren Walker and Janeese Brownlow. Pediatrics November 2009,124(Supplement 3) S176-S186;DOI: https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2009-1100E

# Make the Commitment and Move Forward Together

## Intersectional Issues Are Disability Issues

Access Living (Chicago’s CIL) staff said that at one time, if an issue was primarily centered on race, they didn’t recognize it as falling into their circle of influence. They have an entirely different view now.

The institutional component of racism includes the systematic distribution of resources, power, and opportunities to primarily benefit people who are White and exclude people of color. Institutional racism includes disparities in political power, education, employment, income, health care, housing, criminal justice, and more. People are often not aware of how racism is an integral aspect of these widespread institutional systems.

It's important for CILs as agents of transformation to understand that the foundations of racism still play a pivotal role in the work that we do and affect many of our constituents. This isn't just an issue for Black people. It's an issue for all people of color and our centers as allies and service providers.

Creating a culture where intersectional issues are disability issues requires a lot of work and does not happen overnight. Access Living and other CILs with noteworthy practices in this area consider their efforts a “work in progress.” They do not have all of the answers, and sometimes they get distracted, but they continually assess where they are, set goals, and are ready to explore additional intersections with disability, such as religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status.

## Organizational Culture Change from the Top Down Is a Priority

Racism includes a component of power. There's a frequently used formula that says prejudice plus power equals racism. Stokely Carmichael states, "If a White man wants to lynch me, that's his problem. If he’s got the power to lynch me, that's my problem. Racism isn't a question of attitude; it's a question of power."[[24]](#footnote-24) Who holds the power is vitally important when discussing racism, and sharing that power is crucial to creating an inclusive and equitable organizational culture.

With the acknowledgement and understanding of racism, many White people will feel cognitive dissonance, realizing that they have been upholding the institution of White supremacy, whether intentionally or not. At that point, there will be a level of discomfort. That awkward feeling means we're progressing and can start to change. We can now move forward, working through the lens of anti-racism and social justice.

### A Unified Vision

The first step in moving forward is to create a unifying vision statement. This ensures that everyone understands the importance of this initiative and is moving in the same direction. Achieving organizational culture change works best if it starts with your board, managers, and leaders. They can model behavior and work on creating change in every aspect of your CIL. Working from the top down demonstrates that diversifying your CIL is a priority. It's especially important to initiate changes if your staff, leadership, and board are mostly White. Including diversity in the bylaws, hiring procedures and other policies and procedures codifies the commitment and ensures continued diversity.

### Be Open to Doing the Work

CILs that participated in the ILRU project agree that you have to make a commitment to diversifying the CIL at every organizational level (governance, operations, services, community involvement) and with every stakeholder (board, staff, volunteers, consumers, community partners). No one else is providing the needed CIL services guided by independent living philosophy. The CILs realized they had to make this effort a priority and be willing to commit time and resources to it.

Take an inventory and assess where you are and where you want to be. The checklist below can get you started on your self-assessment. This checklist is based on materials developed by the International LGBTQ Youth and Student Organisation (ILYSO), Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland (sparqs), National Union of Students Scotland Women (NUS Scotland Women), and AdvanceHE[[25]](#footnote-25), and modified with permission by staff and consultants at ILRU.

## INTERSECTIONALITY CHECKLIST

1. **STRONGLY DISAGREE 4. AGREE**
2. **DISAGREE 5. STRONGLY AGREE**
3. **SOMEWHAT AGREE**

**OR**

1. **Do not know 4. Always**
2. **Sometimes 5. A strength of our center**
3. **Frequently**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Think about your center and rate it based on the following statements.** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
| Consumers |  |  |  |  |  |
| The CIL uses racially and ethnically appropriate recruitment activities and materials. |  |  |  |  |  |
| The CIL uses census and other population data and statistics to inform outreach activities. |  |  |  |  |  |
| The CIL has cultural guides to assist in reaching unserved and underserved groups. |  |  |  |  |  |
| There is a range of racial and ethnic identities among those who are consumers at the CIL. |  |  |  |  |  |
| No single racial or ethnic group makes up the majority of the consumers at the CIL. |  |  |  |  |  |
| The consumers the CIL serves represent the racial and ethnic diversity of our catchment area. |  |  |  |  |  |
| The voices of racially and ethnically diverse consumers are heard and valued at the CIL. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Board, Staff, and Training |  |  |  |  |  |
| There is a range of racial/ethnic identities represented on the board of the CIL. |  |  |  |  |  |
| There is a range of racial/ethnic identities represented by the director and senior staff at the CIL. |  |  |  |  |  |
| The CIL has strategies for recruiting, hiring, and supporting staff who are culturally and linguistically diverse. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Racial and ethnic identities are regularly discussed and considered as part of our work at the CIL. |  |  |  |  |  |
| The CIL has policies and procedures that specifically address the inclusion of consumers who are racially and ethnically diverse. |  |  |  |  |  |
| The CIL utilizes a variety of training methods and opportunities to assist the staff in working with racial and ethnically diverse consumers. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Partner Organizations |  |  |  |  |  |
| The CIL actively partners with racial/ethnic serving organizations. |  |  |  |  |  |
| The CIL routinely supports racial/ethnic serving organizations through a variety of means such as being members, serving on their boards, committees, and workgroups, attending events, and serving joint consumers. |  |  |  |  |  |
| The CIL uses outreach strategies with racial/ethnic serving partners for engaging consumers, staff, potential board members, and volunteers in diverse communities. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Environment and Programs |  |  |  |  |  |
| The environment in our CIL is welcoming to racial and ethnic consumers. |  |  |  |  |  |
| The CIL’s programs and services are designed to meet the needs of diverse racial and ethnic consumers. |  |  |  |  |  |
| At the CIL, we can communicate effectively with linguistically diverse consumers. |  |  |  |  |  |
| The CIL is a safe place where racially and ethnically diverse consumers do not face common mainstream stereotypes and marginalization. |  |  |  |  |  |
| **[Add your own items here]** |  |  |  |  |  |

Create your own checklist which reflects the makeup of your local community(ies) and use it to assess the CIL’s engagement with any underserved or underrepresented group of people with disabilities.

## Strategic Planning Focused on Diversity, Intersectionality, and Inclusion

Even if you haven't done strategic planning before, the process can be a great tool for engaging the board and staff and getting everybody on the same page. Strategic planning provides an opportunity to refresh values, vision, and mission. It gives key people in the organization permission to focus on diversity and intersectionality.

Strategic planning often involves doing a consumer survey of needs, which can be prioritized around intersectionality.

A strategic plan keeps the organization focused on priorities and provides a means of measuring progress. Establish goals around—

* increasing board and staff diversity to match your service area,
* increasing outreach to an underserved community,
* creating partnerships with organizations that serve specific underserved constituencies, and
* becoming a model employer to attract a diverse workforce.

Make sure that your goals are SMART goals:

* **S**pecific
* **M**easurable
* **A**chievable
* **R**elevant
* **T**ime-based.

Access Living's strategic planning resulted in several specific actions on intersectionality. One is a program for people who are Latinx with disabilities focused on immigration issues. They also hired a community organizer to work primarily on racial justice issues. Their board is now much more racially inclusive. All these changes were the direct result of goals in their strategic plan.

Consider putting an internal committee together to address intersectionality issues, especially if you have people of color as non‑managers. Create actionable goals with accountability mechanisms and make sure this is a priority for key people in the organization. These goals could be around broadening representation on your board and staff that reflect the demographics of your CIL location. You could conduct town hall meetings on the intersection of disability and race.

One of Access Living’s strategic plan action items for the staff‑led racial justice council was to increase the racial representation on their board. Access Living realized that it was problematic to have a board of mostly White people, and set targets to match the makeup of Chicago. Key board members attended trainings on how to increase board diversity. The nominating committee chair developed clear guidelines on increasing board diversity, which were then approved by the full board. These guidelines ensured that everybody was on the same page and working towards achieving this goal.

Consider hiring a consultant with documented experience in addressing racial and ethnic diversity, especially if your CIL board and management are not diverse. This might be an area where you need outside help to do well. There are a number of experienced consultants that you might choose from. Check with your networks and other organizations and agencies, such as the United Way, Center for Non-Profit Management or Small Business Association, for recommendations of consultants who might be willing to work within your CIL’s budget.

## Strategies for Increasing Board and CIL Diversity

It's much simpler to create an intersectional organization when people in leadership positions are themselves from groups that you want to include more substantially. It's not impossible to do when you're working with a non‑intersectional leadership team. However, when the people in these roles have personal experiences with intersectionality, there is a noticeable difference. The difference is leaders who are living and thinking about intersectionality 24/7 as opposed to individuals who are thinking about it primarily in regard to policies and outreach.

Recruiting board members from different racial/ethnic groups who are reflective of the community is important and often challenging. You do not want to create the impression that the only reason you want someone on your board is because of their race. In other words, you do not want to appear to be scrambling to insert tokenized people into board positions.

When recruiting board members, be explicit about who you're looking for, why, and what you want them to do. You're not going to get the dedicated people you want if you're not clear about whom you want and the reasons they would be good for the CIL.

Individuals who are experienced in governance are highly sought after, which makes it hard to get them to join your cause instead of others’. When recruiting these individuals, Reyma McCoy McDeid, Executive Director of Central Iowa Center for Independent Living (CICIL), emphasizes the importance of helping members of diverse communities to become culturally competent in regard to people with disabilities. Asian Americans, African Americans, Native Americans, and every other ethnic group experience disability within their community. Reyma’s selling point is their serving on the CIL’s board is a great opportunity to give a voice to the disabled people in that community. “By sitting on this board, you will be able to facilitate conversations on behalf of yourself or people with disabilities in your community that have not occurred anywhere in Iowa before.” That prospect continues to be exciting to people.

Use available resources, which of course depend on the size of the area where your organization is located. Some places have specific services to address building the diversity of the board. Check out resources that might be available in your area.

Recruiting is easier if your CIL works with a variety of community organizations. The more you are involved, the better you can reach and work with diverse groups. Expand your networks and get to know more people. Those connections will have a ripple effect and enable you to find and recruit a wider variety of individuals.

Continue networking throughout the year to make sure that you're not missing opportunities to recruit a more diverse board of directors. This becomes easier once you have a critical mass of folks with intersecting identities on the board who can help you recruit other people.

For those without access to a network of people from diverse backgrounds, Reyma suggests using the “six degrees” method. “If you have an acquaintance or colleague who is not necessarily involved in the disability rights movement, but is a member of an underrepresented group, don't be afraid to be honest and say something like, ‘I have a commitment to diversifying the disability rights movement in my area. I am at this organization. We really want to diversify our board. Are you aware of any professionals in your networking realm that might have an interest in this work or might know somebody who has an interest in this work?’ Don't be afraid to ask your friends, acquaintances, and colleagues. As long as it's framed from that vantage point as opposed to, ‘Hey I really need to find a Black guy to join the board,’ which would be a highly offensive manner of recruiting people for the board. We're certainly not looking to tokenize people.”

## Recruiting and Hiring More Diverse Staff

Review and revise recruitment practices to ensure that you can reach the audiences you’re trying to attract. When positions become available, make a point to list them as bilingual. The University of Southern California Price School of Public Policy recommends using neutral pronouns and plain, straightforward language to make job descriptions more inclusive. The Price School also recommends testing job descriptions before you publish them using a tool such as [Textio](https://textio.com/) (https://textio.com/), which examines the language for bias.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Supplement the type of advertising and outreach that you have traditionally done. Go into different target communities to let them know that you’re hiring individuals with disabilities who are reflective of the community. Advertise to a wider audience statewide so that more people from different populations apply.

Be conscious of where you're hiring from. If you typically just put ads on the job board, find out if the population you want to attract usually looks at the job board. Are you reaching out to different colleges? Are you contacting Latinx, African American, Asian, Native American, and other ethnic and cultural communities? Are you communicating with different religious communities? Are you reaching out to LGBTQIA+ communities? What will you do to reach those communities?

One of the common threads in American democracy is pulling yourself up by your bootstraps. That's not the reality for many people of color. People are often hired through word of mouth, because of who they know, their interpersonal community connections. Do not just hire your friend's daughter. There are often local Black colleges, churches, cultural centers, ethnic offices, etc. where you can advertise to find people of color and those from immigrant backgrounds.

Access Living contacted some local companies experienced with diversity, including McDonald's. Their diversity inclusion professionals provided pro bono support and shared their recruitment practices, which were helpful and relevant. In interviews with prospective staff, Access Living now focuses on determining whether the individual is a good match for the inclusive culture of the CIL and ensuring that the prospect understands that intersectionality is an important tenet.

The applicant with preferred qualifications that you hope to hire may not show up right away. You may need to go through many different resumes and applications to find the right person. It can sometimes take a long time to get the right staff to meet the needs of the people you serve. The staff and the board may push back if they think that someone is needed immediately and that waiting is not an option. While it is good to move quickly, it is more important to wait for the person who will be the right fit and will be able to effectively serve your community's needs.

For example, Community Resources for Independent Living (CRIL) in Hayward, California, had a job opening in their Fremont site. Roughly 55% of residents in their catchment area are from Asian backgrounds. They wanted to reach out to that group, but CRIL didn't have anyone who spoke any of the languages. They designed a job posting, indicating that bilingual qualifications were preferred, and encouraged people from diverse backgrounds to apply. It took eight months, but they found someone who was an excellent match for the position who was already connected with the Afghan community. Since then, their services in the Fremont area have expanded considerably and they have exceeded their goals.

Once you’ve found a person who is the right match for a position, make sure that your orientation process helps them understand the center’s values and vision from the beginning and emphasizes diversity and intersectionality as a critical focus. If your CIL doesn’t currently have a formal orientation and training program for onboarding new staff, this is an important management practice that you should consider. Mentors and peer coaches are also helpful, as new employees may benefit from ongoing support.

For Access Living, it has been key to intentionally hire people who keep the organization accountable by pushing for changes and challenging the organization to grow. Their assertiveness was needed. Access Living staff are sure they wouldn't have made as many gains without them.

Representation matters. CICIL reports that people with disabilities in Iowa who provided input for the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) emphasized that when they sought services at a CIL, they wanted to see people who looked like them—people who had shared life experiences and an understanding of their culture. Taking the time and making the effort to hire knowledgeable and skilled individuals who represent the diversity of your community will result in more outreach and better service provision to underserved groups.

We need to do much more than hire a minimum percentage of people from diverse backgrounds. These individuals are too frequently marginalized. Our CIL needs to be an accurate reflection of the diversity of individuals that we serve. The board, administration, staff, and volunteers must be reflective of our community and different populations.

Representation alone, however, amounts to tokenism. Ensure that staff with intersectional identities participate at all levels of your CIL, have opportunities for career advancement, and that their ideas and contributions are supported and acknowledged.

## Provide Training and Support for Board, Staff, and Volunteers

After acknowledgment and understanding, the next step is working on our intention. What do we do with the knowledge that we've obtained? We must be intentional about including people of color in everything we do, including all our activities, decision-making, programs, and curriculums. Curriculums are important so that all administration and staff acquire at least a reasonable understanding of what disability history is as it pertains to people of color.

Consistent ongoing training is an essential component to increasing knowledge and changing attitudes. Some CILs even require training before someone is hired or appointed to the board of directors. For example, disABILITY LINK in Tucker, Georgia, requires that potential board members must attend training that provides information on what a CIL is and does and includes information on diversity and inclusion before they can be considered for board membership.

Provide training and regularly assign readings to the board, management, staff, and volunteers, then plan time to discussit. Reflection and processing are important aspects of adult learning.

Seek out and share information from articles, movies, YouTube videos, Ted Talks, websites, and books, such as the following:

* White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism, by Robin DiAngelo
* How to Be an Antiracist, by Ibram X. Kendi
* The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America, by Richard Rothstein
* So You Want to Talk About Race, by Ijeoma Oluo
* Between the World and Me, by Ta-Nehisi Coates
* The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, by Michelle Alexander
* Building a Movement to End the New Jim Crow: An Organizing Guide, by Daniel Hunter
* How to Be Less Stupid about Race—On Racism, White Supremacy, and the Racial Divide, by Crystal M. Fleming
* Privilege, Power, and Difference, by Allan G. Johnson

Facilitate real conversations around diversity, intersectionality, disparities, equity, White privilege, institutional racism, and LBGTQIA prejudice and discrimination. We talk about injustice all the time. Your CIL environment should encourage these conversations to happen. Urge everyone to respectfully say what is on their mind and not be afraid to push the envelope.

Make it clear that a person won't be punished because of their thoughts or beliefs. People of color may be afraid of White people’s reaction. They may think, “Will my career be over if I say the wrong thing?” Affirm to your staff and board members that they will not be penalized because of their views, but also encourage respectful and civil conversations.

White people need to ensure that they do not come off as having all the answers, or get defensive and try to shut conversations down. It may help to start off by explaining that these discussions are uncomfortable, and may get emotional, but are important to have. Think about the best way to facilitate these encounters and respectfully address every individual’s feelings.

As disability advocates we have a lot of these skills already. We know how to have sometimes uncomfortable conversations in regards to “nothing about us without us” and disability representation. If you apply an intersectional lens to that philosophy, we can more easily have these dialogues with others on a frequent basis.

Remember, however, that these are not just discussion topics but real life experiences that involve pain and trauma for some of your staff, board, and consumers. Don’t automatically appoint a staff or board member from a marginalized group to do the education of other staff and board members. Be sure you know what you’re asking of a person and the potential impact when you ask for sharing of experiences. Be prepared to provide resources and referrals for healing for staff members who might be triggered by such discussions or by current events.

If we're doing CIL work, we care a lot about disability. Many of us come from social justice backgrounds. Often it is taken for granted that we know and care about racial justice, as well. However, many people don't have a full understanding of systemic racism and the impact that has on every facet of society. Carefully designed, ongoing training and experiential learning opportunities will help ground staff in those concepts and history.

When we have grown up with power and privilege, it's easy to be unaware of racist thoughts or actions in a situation. White privilege means that you have not had a defining moment where:

* You realized that people hate you simply because of the color of your skin.
* People assume that you achieved something only because it was taken away from a White person who “deserved” it.
* Your intellectual capabilities or attendance at an elite institution were questioned based solely on your skin color.
* You grew up without positive role models reflected in school readings or the media.
* You’ve made a special effort to appear as harmless as possible to police.
* You’ve been trolled daily by racists on social media (Hutcherson, 2016).

There are activities that you can do with your staff, board, volunteers and consumers to help them recognize their privilege. For example, line everyone up at the same starting point. Ask people to walk one step forward if they are right-handed. Have participants take another step forward if English is their first language. See <https://opensource.com/open-organization/17/11/privilege-walk-exercise> for additional instructions and questions. This exercise demonstrates privilege in a visual and tactile way. Many people step forward and many others stay in the same place. Those who stay in the back tend to be people of privilege, both White and Black.

Everyone has privileges, including people of color. Just because we have disabilities, doesn't mean that we don't have privileges of our own. There are all sorts of people with disabilities. A White person with a disability may have quite different choices compared to a Black person. It's statistically proven that societal treatment for Whites is better, with more access to economic and other resources. Games like the privilege walk are a good way to begin the discussion.

## Anticipate Resistance

While most people support progress, many of us resist change. Understanding intersectionality and what it means for reaching and including all people with disabilities can be challenging.

Access Living leaders said they were a bit surprised by the pushback they got from some CIL staff in the beginning. Resistance took the form of statements such as, “We already have this area covered,” and “Why are we focusing on this versus other areas?” It's important to anticipate resistance and develop a plan to address it.

Expect resistance, too, with regard to engaging the board. Intentional shifting of a paradigm always meets with resistance, especially when the shift involves something as sensitive as diversity. Talk to some key, trusted, knowledgeable people in the organization to figure out the best way to address resistance and negativity. Another effective strategy can be engaging a couple of board members early. Ask for their assistance with helping the rest of the board to understand the significance and to support taking the CIL in this direction. This is also an area where a consultant with expertise in conflict management could be helpful. Having dealt with opposition, a consultant can guide the staff and board to useful strategies.

If people invest their time serving on the board, they care about the organization. Don’t interpret their pushback or resistance as a sign that they don't care, or that they don't have the best interests of the organization at heart. Make a commitment to invest the time needed in educating and supporting the board to make the transition, especially when working with long‑term board members who have seen the evolution of the organization over an extended period.

When CICIL committed to following federal recommendations to diversify their board, which at the time was 100% White and predominately older men, several board members departed. CICIL took the position that it is good when people move on to new opportunities where they can use their skill sets in ways that resonate for them. The transition of those departing board members was met in a respectful and honored manner. CICIL thanked them for their time and wished them the best.

## Make Diversity and Intersectionality a Focus Throughout the Year

The focus on disability and diversity intersectionality needs to be constant throughout the year. Just bringing up the subject once a year at the annual meeting will not make a difference. Incorporate the concept of intersectionality into staff and board meetings, fundraising opportunities, and everything else that you're doing. Be creative about ways to include and bring up intersectionality. Disability and diversity intersectionality must be in the forefront of people's minds for meaningful and lasting change to occur.

Access Living recommends that you not lose focus on the goal, even when the target is almost reached. When 40% of their board were people of color — which was their minimum goal — they thought it would be okay to take their eye off the ball for a little bit. But not long after, they were down in those statistics again. Keep your focus constant, even after achieving your goals.

## Build a Foundation of Accountability and Personal Responsibility

All of the changes to board and staff composition, policies and procedures, programs and the physical environment will be only cosmetic if the individuals who make up your organization do not believe that disability and diversity intersectionality matters and understand why it does matter.

Board members and staff need to be clear about their own values and biases (we all have them) in order to fully commit to creating and maintaining an inclusive organization. Resources for becoming aware of your unconscious biases are available from ILRU, [the National Center for Cultural Competence at Georgetown University](https://nccc.georgetown.edu/assessments/clcado.php) (https://nccc.georgetown.edu/assessments/clcado.php) and [the Anti-Defamation League](https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/education-outreach/Personal-Self-Assessment-of-Anti-Bias-Behavior.pdf) (https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/education-outreach/Personal-Self-Assessment-of-Anti-Bias-Behavior.pdf). Lead by example. Examine and address your own biases, letting go of assumptions and committing to continuous learning and personal growth. Support staff and board members as they undertake their own personal development.

# Organizational Infrastructure: Framework for Diversity

The organizational infrastructure, or underlying framework, of a CIL may need to be strengthened in some instances and totally overhauled in others to effectively address disability and diversity intersectionality. This starts with having policies and procedures that will guide CIL governance and operations.

## Commit to Diversity Through Policies and Procedures

Review your organization’s bylaws to see how well they support diversity and intersectionality. For example, do they address diversity on the board of directors, including recruitment and orientation and training practices? What about the CIL’s personnel policies, hiring practices, consumer outreach policies and procedures, and training and orientation for staff? Written policies and procedures should provide structure for implementing the CIL’s updated vision and mission. A review will help to identify where the gaps are, then you can more easily develop a plan to address those gaps.

When the CIL’s commitment to an authentically inclusive organization is documented in policies and procedures, it will ensure that those efforts continue regardless of changes in leadership and staff turnover.

Address anti‑harassment, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) language, and nondiscrimination in personnel policies. Create policies for dealing with microaggressions and any actions or behaviors that are disrespectful of others, including verbal comments, jokes, email and postings on the CIL’s media sites.

Examine your values and structures through a social justice lens. Do your celebrations include holidays and events that are important to staff and consumers with intersectional identities? If those celebrations involve food, are the dietary requirements of different religious and cultural groups considered? Do your leave policies allow for flexibility around holidays?

Consult with local human resource professionals, nonprofit management centers, and diversity consultants for guidance.

CICIL’s policies specifically describe their commitment to creating a nondiscriminatory space and also require that staff capture voluntary LGBTQIA+ data when doing consumer intakes so that staff can best support individual needs and goals.

The Center for Independence of the Disabled in New York (CIDNY) created a language access policy which states that staff will not use children, family members, or neighbors to provide language translation. Consumer confidentiality is essential. If CIDNY does not have someone on staff who can communicate directly with a consumer, they find professional translators and use a language line.

CIDNY also provides translated materials in Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and other languages. They continuously review which pieces of information are most in need of translation and currently provide materials about civil rights, the CIL, and people's rights and responsibilities. Even though they have made significant progress, they want to do more.

CICIL revised the board's operational bylaws to include a commitment to a diverse board beyond the federal mandate regarding disability representation. The executive director and board members agreed that it was important to get that in writing after 25+ years of operating with no diversity. CICIL is now a community that is broadly inclusive of people with disabilities at every organizational level, especially in leadership.

They created a board application, code of conduct, nondisclosure form, and conflict of interest form. Written goals and expectations help prospective board members gain a clear understanding of the CICIL mission, services, expectations, and goals. The recruitment and selection processes were streamlined to ensure that a person interested in their board had a clear understanding of what they were getting into and wouldn't be met with surprises along the way.

## One CIL’s Experience Establishing a Racial Justice Council

Access Living in Chicago started confronting infrastructure issues around diversity and intersectionality in 2008, primarily to address two race‑related incidents. The first was a racist email that understandably caused concern. The second was building artwork depicting racism by an artist with disabilities. Both incidents brought simmering issues to the surface in a big way. When racist or discriminatory events occur, an immediate head-on response is usually the recommended strategy.

A plan was developed to take the organization through a process of learning and growing. First there was a staff discussion with a facilitator about what had happened. Conversations about race can be difficult, and a trained facilitator can keep participants focused and on task. Access Living then began trainings on the intersection of race and disability for the staff. The management team met with a consultant to further identify actions they could take to help move the organization in a positive direction. A staff retreat was held to explore what racial justice might look like in the context of Access Living.

One of the most significant outcomes was the creation of a diverse, staff‑led racial justice council. The council included interested staff of different races from all levels and departments. Their task was to discuss issues and create an action plan for improved cultural competency. This was particularly important because many people of color worked at Access Living, but very few were in management or on the leadership team, which the council pointed out. Consumer input came during the strategic planning process from surveys around intersectionality. The executive director coordinated the council, made sure things were moving forward and provided logistical support. Establishing a racial justice council comprised of all departments and staff levels using a fundamental IL “Nothing About Us Without Us” approach was critical.

The staff‑led racial justice council examined Access Living’s human resource policies through a racial justice lens, which they recommend as a key action step for other centers. As a result, several changes were made to their policies. They revised their values statements and completed strategic planning to include diversity and inclusion.

Direct input from the racial justice council led to one of the most noteworthy changes —wage and salary determinations. New procedures placed much more emphasis on people's experience coming into the organization. Candidates were no longer able to negotiate salary as much as they were before. Research revealed White people tend to negotiate salaries more often, and therefore have higher salaries. Eliminating almost all negotiation has made Access Living confident that they have wage and salary equity.

Access Living leadership also realized that they needed to understand race‑related world events and the impact they were having on staff with different racial identities. When the Charlottesville White Supremacist rally took place in 2017, Access Living put out a statement condemning it. In the past, they might not have considered what took place as a disability-related issue. Now this work is part and parcel to everything they do. When Michael Brown was murdered, they gathered staff to talk about how they were processing and dealing with it. This kind of leadership response can provide significant support to staff members from groups which are especially traumatized by such events.

## Budget for Diversity

For a diversity-intersectionality initiative to be effective, resources must be dedicated to achieving those goals. Always include those resources in your budget. Costs may include recruiting and hiring bilingual staff who represent target populations within your communities, translating materials in multiple languages, hiring different language and sign language interpreters, assigning staff to conduct outreach, and paying for staff and board members to attend diversity-related training and events. You may also consider co-sponsoring cultural events.

Budget for the possibility of hiring consultants to assist in revising policies and procedures, leading strategic planning, or providing training. These activities may require expertise not available in-house or a neutral party to facilitate discussion.

# Creating an Environment of Belonging

Centers for Independent Living are familiar with making environments accessible to people with all types of disabilities. CILs are intentional about accessibility because we want people with all types of disabilities to feel like they belong, to know that this is their place and that the people here understand and share their lived experiences.

Consumers, staff, and board know that they can expect accessible parking, pathways, desks, doorways, and technology when they come to the center. Materials in alternate formats, captioning and sign language interpreters, and scent-free policies are a given.

Unfortunately, we often fail to consider how to create that sense of belonging for people whose disability identity intersects with one of culture, ethnic or racial classification, language, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, socioeconomic status, education, religion, or spirituality.

The goal is to move beyond “welcoming” to create the feeling that consumers, staff, and board **belong**, no matter who they are. In other words, the CILs are not just “our” place where people who are different are invited in. The CIL is “their” place, too, and the physical spaces and programs should reflect that ownership. People with intersecting identities are not coming into “our” home; they are coming into “their” home.

There are a number of ways to foster that feeling. The following suggestions were collected from the nine CILs that participated in the ILRU Disability, Diversity and Intersectionality (DDI) project.

## Acknowledge Intersectional Identities

It's important to acknowledge who people are. Centers do not need to ask people to choose between their different identities and what advocates think they might need. Why not start by acknowledging who people are before finding out what they need? This simple approach may start overcoming racism and White supremacy.

## Location, Location, Location

Moving to a new place can provide an opportunity to consider what can be done from beginning to end. Locating your CIL in a racially neutral geographic location would be ideal, particularly if your city is segregated or has neighborhoods where people who share a nationality, culture, or language have settled. There may be certain parts of the city where other racial/cultural groups do not feel safe and will not generally go.

For example, several years ago IndependenceFirst in Milwaukee wanted to reach diverse customers, including Jewish Russian immigrants, African Americans, Spanish-speaking individuals, and Native Americans of all disabilities and genders. Milwaukee is known as a segregated city with various populations living in certain areas. The CIL acknowledged that reality and wanted to locate in an area where everyone would feel comfortable. Consequently, they moved their office several times and became better at developing an inclusive facility and community with each relocation.

If moving is not an option, go through and analyze how your center might create that sense of belonging.

## Moving Beyond the Walls of the CIL

Many people prefer going to a neighborhood‑based place, somewhere that feels comfortable and familiar. People want to go where they see people like themselves. CILs create this feeling of being welcomed, accepted, and belonging for many people, but not everyone may yet feel that way about your center.

CIDNY enhanced feelings of familiarity, and made it easy to find out about their services, by placing bilingual staff in other organizations within the community. People wouldn't have to come to the CIL if they wanted to learn about Independent Living or available programs.

CIDNY also found that they needed to engage with and listen to community groups. They started to work with Asian‑American groups throughout the city and joined the New York immigration coalition. They actively listen and participate when they attend coalition meetings. When it's appropriate, they share information about disability resources, but also try to learn as much as possible. They also collaborate with other organizations and groups serving specific populations, such as South Asians in Queens.

## A Sense of Belonging

Creating an environment of belonging starts at the door, which no doubt has an automatic opener. Make sure that people seeking services can locate your entrance by posting signs that convey directions in ways that are easy to read and understand, such as using pictures or arrows, as well as tactile or auditory guides.

Greeters at your front desk can help assure people that they have come to the right place and that they are important. Take the time to train greeters about center functions and community services. Ask them to invite people in and walk them to their different destinations, instead of just pointing them down the hallway. Make sure that everyone who works at the front desk understands their role in creating a sense of belonging.

Pictures, photos, signs, messages, flags, and posters reflecting the faces, interests, values, customs, and pastimes of different communities in your service area can be placed around your lobby, hallways, meeting rooms, and offices. Photos of famous people with disabilities who have intersecting ethnic and cultural identities also make a positive impression. Make sure your visuals promote civil rights and reflect all kinds of diversity, including ethnicity, income, religion, age, and sexual orientation. Such displays may start to provide consumers with a sense of feeling at home as they spend time in your office.

A front desk greeter, signs, and pictures are a great start, but if staff, board, and volunteers are not committed to inclusion, then all your efforts end at the door. It is vital to take the time to provide effective training. Please refer to the Introduction and the section above on “Provide Training and Support for Staff, Board, and Volunteers” for suggestions on training resources.

Whenever possible, employ staff who are literate in multiple languages, especially in the reception area, since that's the first contact consumers have with your center. Being able to express their needs and goals in their own language and be understood will go a long way to making people with intersecting identities feel like they belong. All program materials should also be provided in the primary languages spoken in your community.

[LanguageLine](https://www.languageline.com/) interpreting and translating services (https://www.languageline.com) and comparable instantaneous language interpreter resources are cost effective ways to provide language access when you do not have staff who speak the language.

As staff and leadership become mindful of the environment you are creating, you will begin to notice other areas that need to be addressed. For example, financial company EY (formerly Ernst & Young) provides “quiet rooms” in its offices where employees can take a break, meditate, pray, or even take medication. EY also provides a tip sheet on dietary restrictions related to different faiths and lifestyles and includes all major religious and cultural holidays on its calendar so that scheduling does not conflict with those observances.[[27]](#footnote-27) Creating an inclusive environment is an ongoing process that encompasses all domains.

## Target Learning Experiences and Programs to Different Populations

Affirmatively increasing our diversity also means intentional programming. Consider offering separate peer support groups or programs that intentionally focus on a marginalized population within our disability community.

For example, CRIL offered an emergency preparedness training delivered in the Persian language Farsi, which was well-received by the community. disABILITY LINK offers Tech Tuesdays for anyone to come and learn about the newest assistive technology, including apps and software. In addition, they created another class, Tech Wednesdays, focused on the Deaf population because they found out that many people were having issues with some of their technology. They also have tech classes geared for young adults because their needs and interests are different than the needs of people in the aging population.

While classes and support groups for people with specific intersecting identities meet a need, it is also possible to make integrated programs inclusive. Design programs with different learning styles in mind. Provide visual as well as audible prompts and materials. Include activities that do not require reading or writing.

CILs are accustomed to dealing with internalized prejudice related to disability and can use the same services of peer support, self-advocacy skills, and independent living skills training provided through the lens of intersectionality to help consumers succeed.

## Advocate to Change Systemic Discrimination

After improving your intentional programming, the next step is providing support and advocacy on behalf of people of color when there are situations singular to them, such as mass incarceration. People of color with disabilities are incarcerated at a higher rate than anyone else. In many communities, youth with disabilities are much more likely to end up incarcerated, due to stigma and lack of supports, accommodations, and awareness of how these individuals are impacted by their disabilities.

Reforming criminal justice and working to eliminate racist policies in that system will help people of color with and without disabilities. On a systems level, there are federal acts that may be passed, like the sentencing reform act to alleviate mandatory minimums. Changing state and federal laws and policies is an effective way to start chipping away at the number of people that are disproportionately incarcerated.

Centers can offer training and resources to their local police departments. They can also work collaboratively to advocate for first responders other than law enforcement, professionals who are better trained and equipped are to assist people in crisis.

Zero tolerance policies often mean that the teachers immediately kick a student out of the classroom for a certain level of disruption because they have unique characteristics and perspectives. It's important for centers to educate and inform our school officials and teachers about how some children and youth with disabilities may appear to be disruptive, but that's not what's going on. In addition, educating on the benefits of restorative justice, rather than a punitive system, would decrease the school to prison pipeline, which includes special education to prison.

It's important for us as a disability community to get behind this and other related social movements. Support may include marching, posting on social media, writing a letter to the editor or appropriate officials, and meeting with community leaders and legislators.

The National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) and Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL) youth caucuses are vocal about these subjects. Contact them if you have young people in your area who are looking for ways to get involved. Another place to start is with transition coordinators, special education teachers, staffers, or others working in your local schools.

It's critical for our centers to engage in changing detrimental policies. Identify these policies and hold discussions with decision makers about why these policies may further discrimination and why alternative policies may have a positive impact. Join with other groups and organizations to strengthen your voice and advocacy efforts.

# Outreach That Works: Know Your Community

## Using Data to Inform Your Outreach: CIDNY’s Experience

Data will accurately reveal the populations in your full community. Reviewing available data about who makes up the communities you serve is the best way to make sure that your center is inclusive and effectively serving all populations.

New York Connects enables people who need long‑term care and other kinds of resources to live independently in the community. Their outreach program uses zip code lists and maps to show which areas have the highest number of people with disabilities broken out by different indicators, including race and ethnicity. CIDNY followed the example of New York Connects and uses zip code data to learn more about where people with disabilities and high concentrations of different ethnicities are living in each of their cities, counties, or boroughs. After identifying a zip code with a high concentration of Latinx/Hispanics or other ethnic groups, they work with people in a respectful way by learning about the issues for that community and the resourceful people to work with.

New York Connects uses Google Maps to search for community organizations that might be partners — such as a church, laundromat, or local community nonprofit— then reaches out.

For example, a local AME church that is important in a Black community operates a soup kitchen and a food pantry. New York Connects thought that would be a great place to reach out to people with disabilities who are Black and assist with food stamps to augment their incomes and resources. They presented to that organization and now the church refers people to them who need help of all kinds with community living. The number of referrals they receive has shown that this outreach method is very effective. The more information you can gather about where you want to do outreach and who you want to contact, the better.

For CIDNY, data has resulted in better methods for community outreach, engagement with local groups, focusing resources to grow and better mirror the communities they serve, and continually improving effectiveness and the assets they bring to the table. There's no point in going into a community where the top issue is housing and talking about other non-relevant issues. CIDNY's current issues are focused on transportation, access to subway systems, housing discrimination, and people who are at risk because of flooding and natural disasters. Data has helped CIDNY continually remove barriers that result in discrimination.

## Where Your Center Can Start Using Data

Based on their experience, CIDNY recommends researching who lives in your area and what their experiences are. Then consider where you can have an impact on the issues and disparities that exist. In urban areas, Google Maps can be used to search for community organizations that might be partners using the nearby function.

Work with planners to incorporate that data in planning so that the programs will be responsive to who is in the community. Often planners don't know where or how people live or what their issues are. Consequently, they make very unwise choices about how to deploy resources or which resources to deploy.

Data from the American Community Survey is particularly helpful because it is possible to drill down to get specific local pictures.

CIDNY intervenes with data showing who lives in a community, what their key concerns are, and what the top inequalities are that need to be addressed. Planners have used this approach on a wide array of issues such as healthcare, transportation, and food access.

## Commit Time and Resources

Make it a priority to commit time and resources to conducting outreach and marketing in the community. The numbers take time to build, but they will positively change with continued, strategic effort.

Since 2002, CIDNY has targeted language‑specific media, including television and radio stations. CIDNY also advertises in local newspapers, including those that reach Chinese‑Americans. They have invited reporters from the Chinese language press to talk with their bilingual staff at public events that focus on community needs and access for people with disabilities. For example, they reached out to Asian American and Chinese American communities in their campaign on making the city comply with the ADA on curb cuts.

CIDNY visits elected officials in their offices to share resources and information. These officials learn about CIDNY services and their language capacity to help people from the top twelve language groups. Elected officials know that they can make effective referrals.

CIDNY also makes a point to have fun with celebrations. For example, CIDNY celebrated the Lunar New Year with local advocates, staff, and the people they work with.

## Matching the CIL’s Approach to the Community

Central Coast Center for Independent Living’s (CCCIL) consumer diversity statistics were not reflective of the community, and they wanted to find out why. They wanted to know if their services were addressing community needs and whether the services were being offered in a culturally appropriate manner, so they engaged community members in dialogue. They asked questions and listened carefully to the responses.

After listening to families, CCCIL discovered that there was a conflict between how the IL movement and the Latinx community view independent living. The concept and philosophy of independent living which focuses on the individual did not coincide well with family-centered Latinx culture. In the early days, the center only talked to the consumer when providing services. Working with the individual alone to develop independent living skills was not meeting with success.

CCCIL discovered that working with Latinx individuals involved making space for the whole family. Executive Director Elsa Quezada asked staff, “Can we accept and make that a part of our dialogue with the Latinx community? If we don't, the community will not come into the center. It's a conflict with their culture.” CCIL began to transform their services to better fit the community and culture in which they were working. When immigrants move to the United States, their cultural beliefs come with them. Recognize and accept their culture, even if you do not agree with their beliefs.

CCCIL also learned that it’s much easier to find your target audiences if you go to where they are likely to be rather than always waiting for them to come to your office. Listen, observe, provide information, network, and create channels for two-way communication. When you conduct outreach in this way, it demonstrates a genuine interest in people.

CCCIL staff believe that their community is their office. Staff go to the locations where people are and people in the community see that the CIL is engaged and part of the neighborhood.

The immigrant community tends to identify with who they are culturally and ethnically before identifying with the disability they live with. Let them know that our centers are a safe space, regardless of their legal status. Demonstrate that the CIL is trustworthy, welcoming, and identifies with people of color.

## Enlisting Staff in Outreach Efforts

For some staff members, being involved in outreach may require them to step out of their comfort zone. CCCIL has found that it helps to pair an inexperienced staff person with someone who has done outreach well. An experienced staff member can support a person new to outreach in overcoming their initial reluctance, introduce them to people in the community, and help them learn appropriate outreach strategies. Together they can realize quick success and outcomes.

## Reach Out to Legislators

Making a difference in our communities also means connecting to local and state policy makers. Serve on city or county councils and commissions whenever you can. Reach out to legislators to educate them about members of their constituency that they probably don’t know much about. When legislators know about your services, they may start referring individuals or families with members who have disabilities, or make connections with other groups that you didn't think about.

For CRIL, this type of outreach has positively impacted consumers, staff, and local legislators. Often after consumers complete their goals, they go back and thank their legislators. This can result in more referrals and legislators calling to say that you did a great job. Not only legislators, but other organizations will refer consumers when they know your impressive track record and excellent work.

## Assess Your Community Regularly

Every center has unique populations and cultures, whether it's rural or urban. Start with fully assessing and researching your area using census numbers and surveys to accurately identify target populations.

Make regular community assessments to ensure that your information is up-to-date. Pull up the statistics on different areas and do some comparisons. You don't have to complete an extensive community assessment, but you should determine whether you are accurately representing your community and meeting their needs where they are. If not, ask, “What can the CIL do better or differently?”

Follow up on your services with outcome surveys. Solicit comments about the quality of your services. Listen to what your consumers have to say, and note what is working and what is not. Share what you learn with staff and board members.

People and communities change. Times, technology, media, and information change. Stay current and relevant.

## All Communities Have Diverse Populations

It may be more challenging to promote diversity and inclusion when your area doesn’t seem very diverse and CILstaff are not exposed to diversity daily. Diversity might not be seen as an important issue.

Diversity exists in both rural and urban environments, but you might have to look for it. Diversity doesn't mean just race or ethnicity. Diversity relates to religion, economic status, age, gender, sexual orientation, veteran status, and other characteristics that you may not be considering.

That is why it is important to look at data, not only the government census, but other available surveys which capture the composition of your population. Also remember that the proportion of racial and ethnic groups is growing in most areas. Spending time in the community at places everyone frequents, such as the grocery store, gas station, etc., may help you identify diverse populations that the census and survey have not yet captured. Often this includes immigrant families.

Free ongoing technical assistance on how to track down data for your area and how to analyze it’s meaning is available at The University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability at 603.862.4320 or email [contact.iod@unh.edu](mailto:contact.iod@unh.edu). You will also find many resources for gathering, analyzing, and utilizing data on the ILRU website at <https://www.ilru.org/topics/gathering-analyzing-utilizing-data>.

# Building Relationships with Community Partners

Connecting with other organizations in the community is one of the most effective ways to increase your CIL’s cultural awareness and understanding and to enhance your outreach efforts. Your CIL can provide expertise on disability, accessibility, and accommodations to cultural and social justice organizations. Those organizations likewise can share their expertise with you and connect you with individuals in their communities who can benefit from IL services.

For example, CCCIL asked to join the board of a low-income housing developer focused on providing housing for farmworkers. This was an opportunity to educate builders about how many farmworkers have disabilities and work‑related injuries, and to educate workers on accessing accommodations and benefits. CCCIL knew there were members of that community who did not identify as people with disabilities but were dealing with issues such as hypertension and psychiatric disabilities. Many did not speak English or understand how to navigate complex systems. After two years of input from CCCIL, the developer has incorporated universal design into the housing units the company builds. All units are accessible and are connected with community service programs. CCCIL is regularly invited to present to their residents.

In another example, IndependenceFirst collaborated with the United Community Center, which serves Spanish-speaking populations, to make that center’s services accessible to individuals with disabilities. That partnership resulted in an expansion of accessibility throughout the community.

Networking with community organizations is especially important for CILs serving rural areas. Often, those areas encompass large geographic areas and different communities. Having relationships with community partners can make it possible for CILs to have meetings and provide services in remote locations. Organizations such as churches, businesses, and agencies can connect CIL staff with people with disabilities whom they might not otherwise have access to.

## Identifying Partners and Strengthening Community Relationships

* Join forces with groups that focus on different populations and geographical areas, such as a language center or social club. Collaborate with organizations that don't necessarily provide disability services but concentrate on civil rights and social justice, including Black Lives Matter, NAACP, League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), United We Dream, housing coalitions and advocacy groups fighting poverty. These organizations are likely to have values and goals that are similar to yours, providing a good foundation for building a relationship. If you are unfamiliar with such organizations in your community, use data and map applications to locate them, as discussed in the previous section. Introduce yourself and schedule meetings to discuss how you can advocate and work together to benefit the people you all serve.
* Encourage staff and board members to participate on boards and committees of other organizations. CRIL started by asking staff, management, board members, and volunteers about the groups or organizations they belonged to or if they had other connections that CRIL could explore. An employee who was also a retired priest easily connected them with Catholic charities. Establishing those relationships will not only connect the CIL to the work and expertise those organizations encompass but will also ensure that disability issues are included in all aspects of your community. Where decisions are being made that affect the community — whether in regard to transportation, housing, healthcare, education, or recreation— people with disabilities should have a voice.
* Assign staff to attend community meetings, such as city council meetings. Listen, learn, and, when appropriate, share information about your services. Such events are good places to meet and connect with other nonprofits in your area. In addition, your CIL will be seen as active and involved in the community.
* Consider joining the Latinx, African-American, Asian-American, Pacific Islander and other Chamber of Commerce associations. They often offer events, provide excellent places to meet people, and can provide information. You can also share information about your programs and activities. University cultural and ethnic associations often sponsor free events.
* Offer the CIL’s facilities and resources for hosting community groups and association meetings. These could include mental health associations, lupus and spinal cord injury peer groups, and People First meetings, as well as civil rights, cultural and ethnic, and civic groups.
* Sponsoring, publicizing, and participating in cultural and ethnic celebrations are excellent ways to collaborate. Encourage staff, board members, and customers to attend events on your sponsorships. Sponsor an information table or booth at local fairs and festivals. Enter a float in local parades. disABILITY LINK was one of the key organizations that started and annually participates in the Martin Luther King Parade, as well as the Pride Parade.
* Maintain a collection for materials from other organizations in the reception area. Make sure to obtain electronic and other accessible versions. Include material from ethnic and cultural organizations as well as LGBTQIA+ organizations. Subscribe to diverse community and state newsletters, newspapers, magazines, and other publications. Read through them to stay up with events and display them in the waiting areas. Advertise your center events and activities in these publications.

It may take time to develop a relationship with a new connection. Keep going to the meetings, contribute to the discussion, and share information about IL philosophy and values. Demonstrate that you are there for the long haul, that you are willing to learn, and that you have something to offer.

Working collaboratively with other organizations spreads your influence, whether or not you are on their board. Partnering on projects will help influence good decisions and increase positive outcomes for people with disabilities.

## Reaching Rural Populations

Rural communities have their own challenges, such as higher rates of disability, little or no public transportation, fragmented healthcare delivery system, stretched and diminishing rural workforce, fewer or no resources and options of all kinds.[[28]](#footnote-28)

The Illinois Iowa Center for Independent Living’s (IICIL) service area includes six counties in two states, covering a large rural service area where public transportation is not an option for getting to services. IICIL’s Executive Director, Liz Sherwin, says that the only way to effectively serve a scattered and remote population is for CIL staff to become part of those communities. “The community that you serve has to feel that you are a part of them….People know me, see me, and trust me. It’s the same with the rest of the staff. Those are the kinds of things that validate us because we are part of the community and that’s how we are able to provide that level of service.”

Liz and Kim Gibson (disABILITY Link) emphasize additional strategies for effective outreach to diverse groups in rural areas:

* Make sure that local community agencies know about your services. Develop relationships with community leaders, schools, health departments, and other agencies that provide services.
* Participate in health and diversity fairs, community events, and festivals. Organize or cosponsor support groups. Display your brochures/flyers in vocational rehabilitation offices, senior centers, libraries, grocery stores, bookstores, churches, restaurants, cafes, and community gathering places.
* Outreach through local media. Advertise center services, groups and events through local radio stations, newsletters, and newspapers. Be active on social media.
* Offer other organizations your meeting space. New people will learn about your center when attending other organizational meetings. Develop those network links so that you can meet the consumer in the community where it's easiest for them to be included.
* Engage staff and volunteers in broadening your outreach, especially those with connections in the community or who live in rural areas. Provide training so that they are confident about the message and information you want to share.

## Maintain Relationships

Like any relationship, you get out of your relationship with a community partner what you put into it.

Demonstrate honesty, commitment, and a willingness to cultivate long‑term relationships. Their agenda may not be your agenda. Be clear about what you can and cannot do to support their efforts and about the kind of support you are asking from them.

Reflect on how to continue the partnership through changes in leadership and staff. Whenever there is a change in leadership, find out who the new person is. Be proactive in introducing yourself and center services. Both administrators and staff should take the initiative. Encourage staff to develop solid personal relationships with whomever they are working with, including colleagues from other organizations. This is a never-ending process. Embed it in your culture.

### Part as Friends When the Partnership isn’t Working

Partnerships can sometimes be rough. Consider whether there is a return on the time and effort invested, whether issues important to the CIL as well as those important to the partner are being addressed, and whether the relationship is moving forward. If the group is not moving forward or having an impact, then you may need to evaluate your best course of action. Be thoughtful. Don’t rush to end a partnership. Consider whether you have done all you can to foster the relationship and whether there are any other steps you can take. In some cases, however, you may have to accept that the relationship has come as far as it can.

How you break off from any type of partnership is important, because you don't want to create bad feelings and burn any bridges. Talk to the partners if you decide to leave. Gently and tactfully tell them why you are leaving. Don’t be critical or personal. Ask about the direction the group is moving in. If your priorities don’t match, that's fine. Wish them well and let them know that you hope to work with them in the future.

# Summary

We hope that this guidebook has opened new perspectives, sparked ideas, and validated what you are already doing in addressing the intersection of disability and diversity.

## Key Takeaways

* Continually educate your staff, volunteers, and board members. Talk about intersectionality, microaggressions, privilege, power, bias, cultural and linguistic competency, and the demographics of all the people you serve.
* Remember that these conversations around intersectionality, privilege, and diversity may be uncomfortable. Acknowledge that privilege and intersectionality exist. Education is key to increasing understanding and changing behavior.
* Recruit board members and staff from currently unrepresented and underrepresented groups. Use your networks to identify potential board members who reflect the diversity of your community. When staff positions become available, make a point to list them as bilingual. Go into different target communities to let them know that you’re hiring individuals with disabilities who are reflective of the community. Advertise in an expanded capacity statewide so that more people from different populations apply.
* Examine all your policies, values, structures, and services through an implicit bias and social justice lens. Develop and/or revise mission and vision statements, policies and procedures to reflect your commitment to disability, and ethnic and cultural intersectionality. Create an inclusive organizational culture which all staff, board and consumers can own. Build a foundation of accountability and personal responsibility. Organizational infrastructure provides the necessary framework to effectively address disability, diversity, and intersectionality.
* Create a sense of belonging for everyone, including all disabilities, ages, sexual orientations, religions, social classes, and races/ethnicities. Post welcoming photos, posters, and signs that convey diversity, inclusion, and acceptance. Those simple displays, in addition to a trained, understanding, diverse staff, may help your consumers feel at home as they spend time in your office.
* Use data to research who lives in your communities, what their key concerns are, and the inequalities that need to be addressed. Research the local groups and organizations already there that you might partner with. Data can improve community outreach, engagement with local organizations, focus resources to match community needs, and continually improve effectiveness.
* Combine stories with use of data as an excellent way to explain discrimination and other issues to legislators, policymakers, and the media. These stories help policymakers understand the inequalities that we experience as individuals with disabilities and intersecting identities.
* Find community and state partners for intersectional awareness, outreach, advocacy, and other collaborative initiatives. Develop and maintain long-term relationships. Recognize that it is impossible for you as an administrator or staff member to know about all the different aspects of diversity. That's one reason why it's so important for centers to develop relationships and form partnerships with social justice, civil rights, and other relevant organizations. These organizations can come to you for assistance with serving people with disabilities and you can go to them for insights on the groups they serve.
* Facilitate real conversations around diversity, intersectionality, disparities, White privilege, institutional racism, and LBGTQIA prejudice and discrimination. Remember that these are not just discussion topics but real life experiences that involve pain and trauma for many of your staff and consumers.
* Be persistent. It takes courage and tenacity to combat systemic discrimination. Social change takes time.
* Remember that many people may not want to disclose their intersectional identities, for good reason. They may have experienced discrimination or even assaults because of aspects of their identity. As with disability, disclosure is a personal choice.
* Finally, acknowledge who people are. Do not ask them to leave part of their identity at the door of the CIL. Make sure that you are providing effective services to all. Work to build trust between consumers and staff. Advocate for and be an example of fair treatment and justice.

# Contributor Biographical Sketches

**Candace Coleman** is Community Organizer for Racial Justice at Access Living, Chicago’s Center for Independent Living. She identifies as a Black disabled woman from the South Side of Chicago. She works closely with disabled people affected by the justice system to organize around racial justice and disability. This work includes anti-bullying, the school-to-prison pipeline, restorative justice, police brutality, and deinstitutionalization. Candace was named the ADAPT Woman of the Year in 2018, 35 Under 35 by Chicago Scholars in 2017, and also received the Van Heck award for outstanding leadership and service in the disability community.

**Brooke Curtis** is the Program Coordinator for ILRU’s IL-NET National Training and Technical Assistance Center for Independent Living, managing training and publications. Previously, Brooke conducted recruiting, training, and retention efforts for an education company and worked for a non-profit where she played a notable role in launching a young professionals group and Junior Board. Brooke received her B.A. in Biology from DePauw University and her Master’s at the School of Biomedical Informatics at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston.

**Susan Dooha, J.D.,** is the Executive Director of the Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY). In 2017, under Susan’s leadership, CIDNY helped nearly 40,000 people take control of their own lives by offering information, education, and advice to individuals struggling with poverty, housing, barriers to health care coverage and access, nutrition, education, and work. That same year, CIDNY became the lead plaintiff in litigation seeking an accessible subway system. Susan is the recipient of many honors and identifies as a person with a disability. She obtained her law degree at Yeshiva University, Benjamin N Cardozo School of Law in 1990.

**Daisy Feidt** is the Executive Vice President of Access Living, Chicago’s Center for Independent Living. She has worked at the CIL for more than 15 years where she has gained extensive management experience in fundraising, evaluation, and program implementation. She has led Access Living through multiple strategic planning processes. She is currently a vice president on the board of BPI, a public interest law and policy center, which advances innovative solutions to social justice issues and quality of life in the Chicago region. She is also vice president of the Illinois Network of Centers for Independent Living, the state association of CILs. Daisy holds a B.A. in psychology from Lawrence University.

**Dustin Gibson** is the Director of Independent Living Services at the Center for Independent Living of South Central Pennsylvania. Dustin focuses on youth transitioning and systems change advocacy for people with disabilities. He serves on several local and national committees that aim to create change for the African-American and Disability communities. Recently, he has worked on several initiatives surrounding police/community relations. He also administers youth groups for social change and coaches high school cross country and basketball.

**Kim Gibson** accepted the position as Executive Director of disABILITY LINK and moved to Georgia from Texas in August 2013. She previously served as executive director at two other centers for independent living where she gained knowledge to expand programs with a focus on diversity and inclusion. Kim received the 2014 National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) “Women’s Caucus Hall of Fame Award” in recognition of her mentorship to other women in the world of disabilities. She serves on the board of the Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL), NCIL, and the Statewide Independent Living Council of Georgia.

**Jesse Bethke Gomez** is executive director of Metropolitan Center for Independent Living, in St. Paul, Minnesota. As an award winning CEO, he is a national speaker, a National Kellogg Fellow from the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, a published author and contributing author to [www.Forbes.com](http://www.Forbes.com) and [www.Missionbox.com](http://www.Missionbox.com). Jesse served as president of Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES), an internationally recognized non-profit agency that was recognized during his tenure as among the Top 25 Hispanic Agencies in America by a leading national business magazine. He is among 100 leaders requested by The White House to participate in the Hispanic Summit in 2011.

**Keri Gray** was the 2015-2016 Youth Transitions Fellow at the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL), working to ensure that young people with disabilities are included in educational, community, and employment opportunities. She received a Bachelor’s degree in Political Science and Communication and a Master’s degree in Communication from Abilene Christian University. Keri influences systematic change by re-constructing opportunities so that they are inclusive for individuals with multiple marginalized identities. She has led various student organizations, interned at Leader Pelosi’s office through the American Association of People with Disabilities internship program, created an internship program at the Abilene Office of Multicultural & Enrichment, created the Young Professionals Association of Abilene (YPAA), and worked as a Community Educator and Case Manager at a provider agency.

**Ron Halog** is the former executive director of Community Resources for Independent Living in Hayward, California. He has served in the disability non-profit sector for over 35 years. During his earlier position as executive director of Ala Costa Centers, the agency received recognition for quality services from Parent’s Press (3 years in a row) and the 2011 Bernie Graff Award from the Alameda County Developmental Disabilities Council. Ron was awarded a two-year fellowship from LeaderSpring, an organization that supports non-profit executive directors. He also served on the board of directors for the California Foundation for Independent Living Centers as the member-at-large and as the vice president for the Alameda County Developmental Disabilities Council.

**Megan Henly, Ph.D.** is a researcher at the Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire, focusing on employment, health, and well-being of people with disabilities. As part of her work, she responds to requests for technical assistance from CILs, local government offices, and policy agencies that serve people with disabilities, by locating and computing relevant statistics using federal population data. Dr. Henly holds an M.S. in survey methodology from the University of Maryland-College Park (2004) and a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of New Hampshire (2015). She has worked in data collection and analysis for a variety of small- and large-scale surveys in nonprofits, the federal government, and academia over the last 18 years.

**Stan Holbrook** is owner of S. A. Holbrook and Associates, a management consulting firm offering organizational development, diversity and inclusion training, strategic planning, and capacity building training. He is also executive director of the Pennsylvania Council for Independent Living. He was instrumental in developing the Diversity Initiative of the National Council on Independent Living and served as the chair of the NCIL Diversity Committee and member at large of the NCIL Board for 14 years. He was the vice-chair of the governor-appointed Statewide Independent Living Council and past president of the Pennsylvania Council for Independent Living. Stan holds a Master of Public Management degree from Heinz School of Public Policy and Management, Carnegie Mellon University.

**Judith Holt**, **Ph.D.** most recently served as the interim director of the Center for Persons with Disabilities (CPD) at Utah State University and as Co-Director for the Utah Regional Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities program at the University of Utah Medical School. Dr. Holt has served as the Interdisciplinary Training Division Director at the CPD from 2000-2016 and was Associate Director of the University Affiliated Program of Arkansas at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. Dr. Holt has extensive experience in designing, implementing, and evaluating supports and services for children, youth, and adults with disabilities and their families/support systems. She has developed numerous educational materials that focus on the key concepts of independent living.

**Andrew Houtenville, Ph.D.** is an Associate Professor of Economics in the Whittemore School of Business and Economics and the Research Director of the Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire. He is the Principal Investigator of the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Employment Policy and Measurement (EPM-RRTC), as well as, a co-Principal Investigator of the Hunter College Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Demographics and Statistics (StatsRRTC) and Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Individual Characteristics and Employment Outcomes (IC-RRTC). Dr. Houtenville received his Ph.D. in Economics from the University of New Hampshire in 1997.

**Reyma McCoy McDeid** is the Executive Director of Central Iowa Center for Independent Living in Des Moines. She has carved out a unique career in employment services, disability advocacy, and education. Reyma works to engage voters with disabilities into the political process and educate elected officials on the issues that impact Iowa’s largest minority community. She holds a Master’s degree in Nonprofit Administration with a concentration in Business. Reyma’s vocation is supporting fellow individuals on the Autism spectrum to lead independent, fulfilling lives.

**Ola Ojewumi i**s an activist, journalist, and a community organizer based in Washington, DC. She is a contributor at the Huffington Post and has founded two nonprofits. Diagnosed with mitochondrial disease and the recipient of a heart and kidney transplant, her advocacy work began in high school for accessibility. After graduating from the University of Maryland, she has held internships in the White House, Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi’s office, DNC/Democratic Party, and Congressmen Wynn’s office. She also served as Public Policy and International Affairs Fellow at the University of California, Berkeley, and a DNC Hope Fellow.

**Elsa Quezada** served as Executive Director of the Central Coast Center for Independent living (CCCIL) from 1993 to 2019. She began her career as Executive Director of the first bilingual/bicultural independent living center in California located in East Los Angeles. She has served on numerous local, state, and national advisory committees with a special interest in developing independent living services for Latinos with disabilities. She has served as the Chair of the State Independent Living Council, and served on the California Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, the Department of Rehabilitation State Rehabilitation Council, the Olmstead Committee, and the Long Term Services and Supports Advisory Committee. Her community service work has emphasized housing and community integration for unserved/underserved members of the community.

**Lee Schulz** recently retired after serving nearly 32 years as President/CEO of Independence*First* in Milwaukee. During his tenure, Independence*First* developed numerous innovative programs, such as the statewide Women and Abuse Program, Alternative Financing Program, Home Ownership Program, the Try a Gadget Resource Center, and the Personal Assistance Program. Lee served several terms on the National Council on Independent Living Board of Directors, served on the Statewide Independent Living Council, co-founded Wisconsin’s Association of Independent Living Centers, served on several research and training center advisory committees on disability related issues, and served on several local non-profit boards of directors.

**Liz Sherwin** is the Executive Director at Illinois/Iowa Independent Living Center (IICIL) where she has been employed since 1988 and became its director in 1998. Liz is a member and past president of the Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities in Illinois as well as past president of the Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL). She is the current president of the Iowa Association of Independent Living, a member of the Illinois Network of Centers for Independent Living Board, and governor appointee to the Iowa Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), the Illinois Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), as well as the IDOT Coordinating Committee on Transportation for Illinois. Locally, she is a commissioner on the Bi-State Regional Commission, Rock Island Liquor Commission, Martin Luther King Community ACTIVE Club, Housing Council Board, a member of the Rock Island County Chapter of the NAACP and Treasurer for the 11th Street Business District.

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For more information on the Disability and Diversity Intersectionality in CILs project, see <https://www.ilru.org/projects/cil-diversity>.

For additional resources on disability and diversity see <https://www.ilru.org/topics/inclusion-diversity-underserved-populations>.

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