

City of Portland

Disability Leadership Academy



2017 Report



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Jan Campbell & Barbara Dirks, Disability Rights & Justice Movements
Kiel Moses & Todd Ray, Structural Barriers Within & Without
Rene Bove & Keela Johnson, Conflict Resolution; Equity
Celeste Carey & Jeri Jimenez, Making the City Work for You; Organizing
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Ronault (Polo) Catalani, New Portlander Program
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Ashley Horne, Citywide Public Involvement Best Practices Program
Jeri Jimenez, Diversity and Civic Leadership Program
Paul Leistner, Neighborhood Program
Andrea Marquez, Multnomah Youth Commission Program
Marco Mejia, Community Engagement and Graffiti Abatement Program
Patrick Philpott, Disability Program

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What is Disability Leadership Academy?

Uncovering our Power as People with Disabilities

Our 2017 Disability Leadership Academy provided training and practical experience to 15 people with disabilities in affecting public policy and creating social change within communities.

Members of Disability Leadership Academy were selected through a competitive application and interview process. They brought a range of previous engagement and community building experience, leadership skills, and cross-disability, multiracial, cross-cultural, and cross-generational lived experience.



What We Did

Our Disability Leadership Academy was 10 sessions on alternating Saturdays between February 18th and June 17th. Each session ran from 10am to 3pm and included:

1. **Training Sessions**
2. **Community Engagement Project**

During our **training sessions**, Disability Leadership Academy members learned from community members with disabilities about disability identity, U.S. disability rights & justice movements, internalized and institutional oppression, navigating city government, organizing & power mapping, conflict resolution, and equity.

During our **community engagement project** work, members explored multiple decision-making models and agreed to use a consensus-based model to choose one

disability community issue to engage in, and work towards creating systems change around that issue.

They were given the following guidelines. The issue should:

1. Work towards changing a law, policy, or procedure
 2. Be disability-related
 3. Engage individuals that are most impacted by the issue
-

Important note: *The Community Engagement Project centers around supporting members to identify and become engaged in a common issue while gaining a practical, hands-on experience in collaborating to effect change. It is not about a finished product.*

The skills and knowledge from this experience will provide members a foundation to effectively engage in local and regional policy, educate their communities about how to create change, and maintain a deep belief in the power of community engagement.





Place & Space

Accommodations

Disability Leadership Academy intentionally focused creating an environment that was welcoming, inclusive, and striving for equity. A variety of transportation and childcare accommodations eliminated barriers to participation. Lunch and snacks were provided to support equitable access to food. Disability and cultural accommodations created opportunities for every member to fully participate. Two members used both American Sign Language (ASL) and language/cultural interpreters. For the first session, all interpreters were contracted from Passport to Languages, Inc. For the remaining sessions, at the request of both members using interpretation, the language interpreter was contracted from PKS International, LLC, CELs program. The facilitator regularly invited group members to request new or additional accommodations and to meet their own needs (for breaks, moving around, eating, etc.) within the group.

Attendance

Because of the limited duration of Academy and nature of the group experience, there was a strong emphasis on attending all Disability Leadership Academy sessions and on accountability for following through on commitments to each other between sessions. Accommodations were made to attendance requirements as needed.

Location

We met in three community spaces as well as City Hall. The community spaces were Independent Living Resources, Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO), and Latino Network. In this way, members were in spaces that uplifted multiple aspects of identity and community, and they traveled to different geographic locations in Portland during their Academy. Prior to securing space for the Academy sessions, the Disability Program Coordinator visited each space and visually assessed it for basic physical accessibility. During the course of Academy, we found that each space presented variations in accessibility and convenience to each member.



Observations from Within Academy and Beyond

Trainings

As part of Disability Leadership Academy, trainings were offered in disability identity, U.S. disability rights & justice movements, internalized and institutional oppression, navigating city government, organizing & power mapping, conflict resolution, and equity. All trainings were facilitated by community members with disabilities who were sharing their experience with these topics. Members frequently shared with the Disability Program Coordinator that they found the trainings valuable, and they often reached out to request contact information for the contributors. During the trainings, the Disability Program Coordinator observed passionate discussions, enthusiastic participation in activities, and exploration of complex questions. The trainings on Disability rights & justice movements, navigating city government, organizing and power mapping, and equity were particularly popular. These topics catalyzed many robust conversations both during and after the Academy sessions where they occurred.



Community Engagement Project

Disability Leadership Academy members placed a premium on designing and implementing an inclusive, fair process by which they would choose their community engagement project. Thus, many engagement project work sessions were devoted to exploring the group's definition of respectful interaction, experiences, priorities, values, and members' understanding, and the implications, of various decision-making models. This lengthy exploration period and a commitment to a consensus-based process lead a cohort of 14 people to unanimously choose to work on advancing Disability Equity Goals, similar to the *Citywide Racial Equity Goals & Strategies* adopted as binding city policy by resolution of City Council in 2015.

Because of the limited time available for project work, and the consensus-based process used to choose the topic of the project, members were only beginning to plan how this effort might be advanced when Academy ended. However, members remain deeply committed to staying involved in this effort. See the next section for more information on their plans for continued involvement.



Increased Engagement Beyond Academy

It is also important to note that, during the course of Disability Leadership Academy, members also increased their engagement in their communities beyond any requirements of Disability Leadership Academy. Examples include: beginning to regularly attend the Portland Commission on Disability (PCOD), requesting a meeting with local community based organization (CBO) leaders to advocate for more inclusive programming and staff training, attending trainings offered by Resolutions Northwest,

engaging with local architects to advocate for enhanced accessibility on planned projects, and attending Legislative Day in Salem.

What's Next?

Members are enthusiastic about staying engaged in both the learning they began in Disability Leadership Academy and the community engagement project they initiated.

Several members have also expressed a desire to share what they've learned about disability rights and justice movements with their communities. Ideas that have been discussed include a showing of *Lives Worth Living* in multiple locations, a panel, and providing trainings to community members with disabilities on their rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Every member expressed a desire to stay involved in the community engagement project. Members committed to creating and leading a steering committee to move forward their goals around Disability Equity. Several members are attending Portland Commission on Disability (PCOD) meetings, and they plan to collaborate with PCOD in their efforts to making progress on citywide Disability Equity goals. Members have also committed to providing research and communications support to the steering committee.

Members will continue to communicate with Disability Program staff about how we can support their efforts.





Members' Reflections & Feedback

In the pages that follow, you will find a *Final Report* written by each member, reflecting on their experiences in Disability Leadership Academy and offering their insights on effective local community engagement.

The members were offered the following questions to prompt their thinking about Disability Leadership Academy as a whole:

1. What were the most valuable parts of Disability Leadership Academy? Please share why these parts were valuable for you.
2. What parts of Leadership Academy would you change for next year? How do you think that change would improve the Leadership Academy?
3. How has your experience in Disability Leadership Academy prepared you to be more engaged in your community or communities?
4. Please tell us about any city or community rules or ways doing things that prevent you or members of your communities from being engaged in your communities or in the City of Portland?
5. What ideas or suggestions do you have to change those rules or ways of doing things? They can be suggestions for the City or for communities to implement, or both!
6. How do you plan on becoming or staying engaged in your community or communities following Disability Leadership Academy?



Executive Summary

Common themes of Members' responses to Disability Leadership Academy

Members overwhelmingly found the both the cross-disability diversity and the diversity of life experience valuable. A number of people also mentioned the opportunity to make and sustain connections during the Academy. Frequently, members referenced trainings and topics that complimented or introduced new skills and knowledge.

The recommendations for improvement were more varied among members. They include more time, more structure in the Community Engagement Project, and more requirements for assignments to be performed outside of the Academy sessions. Multiple members spoke to the need for consistent and accessible space. Members also expressed a desire for more cultural and disability diversity among future Disability Leadership Academy members.

When identifying systemic barriers to engagement and suggesting solutions, multiple members expressed a desire for more communication from the City and more information on available resources. Members also expressed a need for language and disability-related access to community organizations, and a need for housing, employment, and transportation accessibility to create more livable communities.

Regarding future engagement, members commonly shared that they felt more prepared to advocate with confidence and brought a broader perspective to engagement because of Disability Leadership Academy. Many reiterated their commitment to staying involved in the Disability Equity goals project and staying connect to other members. People also referenced continuing or seeking out leadership positions on committees, carrying out community dialogues and events, continuing to advocate for equitable services and supports, and educating their communities on disability access and culture.



Issues raised and future considerations

The overwhelming valuing of connections among members affirms the multiple-session cohort Academy design. The number of references to the diversity of members' experiences speaks to the intentional solicitation of applications from a number of Portland disability, geographic, and cultural communities. One can always develop wider and deeper relationships, however, and the Disability Program seeks to expand the diversity of all kinds among members in future academies.

Much of the feedback around structure and time management appears in context of discussing the Community Engagement Project, and it is possible that this was related to the group's decision to spend a majority of the project time on process development. It is possible that a more directive facilitation style or planned process could address the desire for more structure. Other considerations include a potential corresponding trade off in group ownership of the project, and member skill development, if the process is defined for them. Yet, members may find the project more work more exciting and valuable if the work moves quicker.

It is also important to note that assigning work outside of the group sessions would require additional time and resource commitments from members. Members may also lack equitable access to resources to complete assignments (e.g., technology, disability and language accommodations for processing text or communicating with members, transportation to additional meetings, etc.). While Disability Program staff could mitigate some of this inequity by providing additional accommodations and resources outside of sessions, it is important to note that this additional commitment may preclude participation from some community members due to personal time constraints.

Disability Program staff heard both within the sessions and the final report the request for a consistent, universally-designed space for sessions. While rotating session spaces offered excellent exposure to resources and communities in Portland, it did pose a number of logistical challenges, not least being the difficulties in planning and maintaining the most accessible space possible. Members were also concerned about getting lost and going to the wrong location, and variations in parking and transportation access. Disability Program staff will explore alternate locations for future years and strive to find a universally-designed convenient location where all sessions can be held.

Disability Program staff is dedicated to connecting community members to City information and opportunities for involvement. We recognize that City websites and outgoing communications could be more effective, attractive, useable, and multimodal.

Furthermore, we remain committed to supporting all community members to engage in and organize around issues that directly impact them, including physical and programmatic accessibility in the community, housing, employment and transportation.



Durga Bhattarai

What was most valuable?

The strongest aspect of Disability Leadership Academy was to get empowered through the video where Deaf, hard of hearing, Low vision and people with mental and physical disability organized to do good work and brought ADA into existence.

Development of disability leadership is another strong aspect of this academy.

What would you change for next year?

I think the disability program should happen 4 times a year and the participants should be given bus pass and gift cards.

How has Academy prepared you to be engaged?

I have learned to act and change the regulation for the benefit for people with disability. This was something I learned from the disability academy. I have also learned to stand up for my rights and for the rights of disabled community members. It has given me more confidence to do something for the disability community members (in my community).

City or community rules preventing engagement?

They also need to know about the path and ways (street and direction) in the city. I would also like to show the “video” (on ADA) to my community members. I would like to show them the disability related video as well.

What ideas or suggestions do you have to eliminate barriers to engagement?

I think if there is a ESOL classes at library, then a lot of the members in my community can benefit. This would help community go out of their sphere and be able to see the world.

How do you plan on staying engaged?

My quest in my community is to be able to show people new places, have them play during summer and enjoy their time with the family even with their disability.

I would also like to show the “video” (on ADA) to my community members. I would like to show them the disability related video as well.



Melissa Chavez

What was most valuable?

Disability Leadership Academy brings together people from different backgrounds to discuss shared ways we've overcome factors to live and thrive with a disability. Understanding differences in resources and services available to various communities helps us see where there are gaps that need to be addressed, and that helped influence what we decided to concentrate on for our project.

Having open discussions about issues that matter to us, and having those discussions

lead to action plans and realizing we are more alike than different, and that we collectively have a strong voice.

What would you change for next year?

For future academies, one thing I would suggest changing is having more structure around the project. Getting 15 people to agree on something is tough enough without also having them decide everything from scratch. Creating a process — and analyzing that process — was meant to be as inclusive as possible, but, given the timeframe, took up a majority of the sessions that could have been devoted to working out the specifics and wording of the project. I'd like to see a rotation of academy students facilitate the post-lunch discussion each week. (Volunteer or chosen at random, but no one can repeat until everyone has gone.) One of the biggest worries from the group was that not everyone's voice was being heard, and having different pairs lead the discussion would go a long way in ensuring everyone is heard, and ensures that everyone gets an extra experience leading the group.

Setting aside the afternoons for the project was great, but adding a directive — saying the group will discuss common shared goals, or what we want to advocate for, or would make the most day-to-difference, etc. — about what would be the focus of the session's discussion, would drive that project time forward and hopefully better direct the group to a resolution.

How has Academy prepared you to be engaged?

Thinking about the project got me to put together a wish list of things I'd like to see change in my community and got me talking to others about what steps we can do short-term and long-term to fix them. And, because I work in the tech industry, I also

started mentioning to more people that I'd like to work on organizing an accessibility conference. And have topics that include how to make a workplace more welcoming to people with disabilities; accessible design; and user testing by people with disabilities, to make sure the people using products are put first, and not as an afterthought.

City or community rules preventing engagement?

Nothing was really preventing me or my community other than ignorance of what resources exist. This academy answered a lot of questions and shared a lot of resources that I hadn't previously been aware of, and that now I can utilize for some of the work I do.

What ideas or suggestions do you have to eliminate barriers to engagement?

I found out about ONI through Twitter. From mayoral candidates and certain public services posting about info sessions or retweeting announcements. That's where I get a lot of my community news. If there was a better way to filter information or a specific profile/handle to follow to get more of this news or learn about resources, I would love to follow it and promote it.

How do you plan on staying engaged?

I plan on staying involved with my fellow academy members to help ensure our project moves forward — with language we can agree on — and see it get submitted to the Portland City Council.

Additionally, I agreed to co-chair a tech conference this summer because I wanted to put accessibility and inclusive planning at the forefront of everyone's thinking. During the conference, there will be work sprints that will benefit organizations who work with underserved communities, like OutsideIn. We want to help empower communities by getting them better/more access to technology, too.

And, I very much want to organize an accessibility conference. After the academy is over, I will be gathering a planning team to see how we can make this happen.



Larry Cross

What was most valuable?

I learned unexpected ranges of disability that I hadn't considered before. That allowed me to further open my eyes to others and expand my empathy.

The PDLA gave me the opportunity to become far more assertive by developing a very strong offensive strategy to create changes that I seek, but NOT being offensive. This has provided me with greater self-

confidence and made me realize that I can effectively advocate.

What would you change for next year?

The meetings' locations need to be improved. The City Hall room was very difficult to navigate. Only one of the venues (to date) had accessible rest rooms.

I rarely ate the provided food. I really enjoyed the Lebanese food: delicious and easy to eat.

I wish that Initially it had been made clearer that the project's process is far more important than the end result.

Somehow, select members who would participate more fully. I realize that some individuals are quieter, but that's not helpful, as a group, to learn from each other.

How has Academy prepared you to be engaged?

The PDLA helped me Increase my confidence regarding my ideas and my ability to express these ideas. Group involvement and interactions also increased my flexibility and patience relating to others' ideas.

What City or community rules are preventing engagement?

I perceive a need to expand physical accessibility in (too) many public spaces. I believe that there is an unfortunate reality and reliance on "ADA compliant" as the benchmark of "good design."

What ideas or suggestions do you have to eliminate barriers to engagement?

I seek to work with City agencies and departments to exceed “ADA compliance” by changing/modifying building codes.

How do you plan on staying engaged?

I’ve already begun to change established ways of doing things, e.g., Multnomah County Courthouse restrooms’ accessibility and wayfinding improvements. I believe that first establishing precedents that create in-place justifications for changing the rules/procedures can also accomplish changing rules and procedures.

I will continue to be a member of the Portland Commission on Disability. I strive to continue to locate and meet people who make decisions.

I seek to continue to be acknowledged and respected by others because of my current knowledge and experience, and my willingness to learn from others’ ideas, points of view, and experiences.



Richard Detwiler

What was most valuable?

The most valuable part of the Disability Leadership Academy for me has been the broader understanding of the many types of disabilities and a greater empathy for the people facing their individual challenges. Until I started experiencing my diminishing vision somewhat late in my life I had no idea of the extreme frustration that came with that loss of clear sight. Things that I took for granted like driving a car, reading a book, watching grandchildren play a sport or perform a dance all became difficult and in some situations not at all possible. I have learned to be more tolerant and less judgmental. Through this experience I have come to appreciate people with disabilities much greater than mine who seem to handle their lives with determination, dignity, and grace.

What would you change for next year?

After making these observations, going forward I would like to have each of us share more about the obstacles we face due to our disability, the coping skills we have used to overcome, and what programs, services, or devices would improve our individual lives. As a person with low vision I can articulate what affects me and many with similar issues. I do not, however, have as good of an appreciation for what people who cannot walk, hear, or speak without difficulty experience. With a deeper and more personal knowledge I could be a more effective advocate.

How has Academy prepared you to be engaged?

The Disability Leadership Academy has shown me examples of people taking action and getting results. Throughout my training with the Oregon Commission for the Blind (OCB) I heard many concerns about traffic signals and pedestrian safety while navigating intersections. I encountered a situation myself, contacted the State of Oregon Director of Transportation with a well-written letter and got the problem resolved within a month. An additional benefit of this action was that instructors at OCB now have the names and contact information for people who can address and correct pedestrian safety concerns.

What City or community rules are preventing engagement?

To me the greatest obstacle for getting a rule or way of doing business changed, is not knowing who to contact regarding an issue. Many people are intimidated by what they perceive as an impenetrable or uncaring government bureaucracy. There are wonderful web sites with lots of information for people with computer capability and google search savvy but many do not have this access and suffer in silence.

What ideas or suggestions do you have to eliminate barriers to engagement?

Possibly well-constructed television and radio public service announcements could reach more people in need of services.

How do you plan on staying engaged?

The very work that the 14 of us are doing in to get a binding resolution on disability equity before City Council is a method for changing the way things are done. In the process of doing this we are all learning what works and what does not in bringing about change. If there are individual concerns not met with this binding resolution, we all have the right and duty to pursue those concerns as private citizens. The ripple effect of what has been learned through the Disability Leadership Academy experience could have an impact well beyond the City of Portland with other local governments, community organizations, and businesses.

In closing I would like to express my sincere gratitude for being chosen as a participant in the inaugural Disability Leadership Academy. I have had more than 50 years of work with both non-profits and in the private sector. A little more than 10 years ago when my vision started to deteriorate I felt I had little to contribute to worthwhile endeavors anymore. Then came the exceptional training from the Oregon Commission for the Blind. More recently I have had an enlightening work experience with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at the US Fish and Wildlife Service where I have witnessed dedicated professionals who strive to recruit talented individuals with disabilities, assure EEO compliance, and make sure there is reasonable accommodation in the workplace for all. The most rewarding experience of all has been the Disability Leadership. I have been inspired by my fellow participants who take what others may consider obstacles and turn them in to causes for the common good. I am honored to be part of this group.



Eli Ettinger

What was most valuable?

For me the most valuable parts of Disability Leadership Academy were the session about equity facilitated by Renee Bove and Keela Johnson. I love anything to do with diversity. Everyone can see my wheelchair but what they can't see is that I'm half Jewish, Catholic, and Italian. I also liked that the other people who were chosen to participate in the Disability Leadership Academy had a wide range of backgrounds and disabilities.

What would you change for next year?

One aspect of Leadership Academy that I would change for next year is the length of time. There is so much to learn and discuss within each session as well as The Community Engagement Project. I feel that learning these skills and information and working together as a group on The Community Engagement Project is really valuable. It might work better to meet twice during a week instead of once. One session can be focused on The Community Engagement Project and the other session can be focused on learning new skills and information.

How has Academy prepared you to be engaged?

Participating in Leadership Academy has prepared me to be a better advocate not only for myself but also for other people with disabilities in the community. The session about conflict resolution taught me a lot of beneficial skills in this area.

What City or community rules are preventing engagement?

When rules are being drafted they often do not include the perspective of individuals with disabilities. For example, with all the housing being built how many units are wheelchair accessible? Why can't a percentage of the increased housing have universal design?

What ideas or suggestions do you have to eliminate barriers to engagement?

The way to remedy this would be to have paid representation of individuals with disabilities on all public boards (Trimet, university system, etc).

How do you plan on staying engaged?

In the future, I am planning on serving on the State Rehabilitation Council, Disability Services Advisory Council, and the Oregon Disabilities Commission.



Kevin Fitts

What was most valuable?

I particularly enjoyed the 2 trainings. The history of disability, and empathetic understanding. I wasn't aware of such history before the 20th century. Also understanding connection and emotional reactivity in regards to empathetic understanding is very helpful in my advocacy work and personal relationships

What would you change for next year?

I would have the 10 meetings in one location for the entire academy. I would start at 11am instead of 10am. I would also have trainings from behavioral health consumers/advocates included in the trainings.

How has Academy prepared you to be engaged?

It has broadened my experience of individuals living with disabilities. It has also helped me make new connections with other activists to help create larger coalitions and cross platform unity and solidarity.

What City or community rules are preventing engagement?

The idea of stipend is very helpful, I wish that next year that alternative forms of stipend payment could be included, like a gift card instead of cash payment.

What ideas or suggestions do you have to eliminate barriers to engagement?

I would like to change laws regarding excluded income for individuals receiving stipends who are involved in public policy boards.

How do you plan on staying engaged?

I plan on continuing my work in behavioral health policy advocacy. I also plan to build and develop my new friendships with fellow academy members.



Bhakta Gurung

What was most valuable?

Disability group. How we can work together. We can only win if we are together. I feel happy to be able to discuss about disability rights. If we are together we can talk with leaders in our communities and fight for our rights. I have a small family and have my own problems. I cannot go out and talk about disability in refugee community on my own capacity. This group empowers me.

What would you change for next year?

Participate more people and also have them interact with people in power. We also need to work for resolution in addition to talk about people. We also need to have a support group.

How has Academy prepared you to be engaged?

I can advocate for my community. I have more allies now. I think government should reach out to more disabled people.

What City or community rules are preventing engagement?

Language. If police don't understand the people, they arrested them. The person is more likely to be prosecuted. We do not have standby interpreters of government and we do not know how to access any government office. I try to learn but I cannot go to school because of lack of money and time. (I have two kids.)

What ideas or suggestions do you have to eliminate barriers to engagement?

We need help. Our benefits cannot pay rent. We do not have information on any of these things. I have growing kids and even though many social services help me they cannot help in my housing.

How do you plan on staying engaged?

Language. I can tell people about their right. I would like to advocate for disability people—want to advocate for ASL. I also would like to work with community members who do not want to go out of their home and learn them sign language.



Saara Hirsi

What was most valuable?

The Disability Leadership Academy was a valuable experience for me. First, I met people who have different disabilities. Everyone has a unique background, and they have natural talents. Some of the disabled people I met have experience with policy changes and community engagement. Second, the trainings were great experiences, particularly the conflict resolution training. This was a most valuable training for me and I enjoyed it.

Also during the training I learned to understand the value of advocacy.

What would you change for next year?

It would be great to see more a more diverse community involved. Refugee and immigrant communities are struggling to overcome many problems.

They are facing lack of education and employment. This leadership will give opportunity to overcome their challenges.

How has Academy prepared you to be engaged?

This training gave me the opportunity to engage with my community. I am preparing to start a dialog with individuals with disabilities, community leaders, parents, public schools, and organizations working with the immigrant and refugee community. Immigrants and refugees with disabilities are ready to get an education and employment. We would like to be part of society. This training helped me understand where communication should start to help the disabled. I will speak up more because I have learned the skills to help change attitudes and beliefs about the disabled community.

What City or community rules are preventing engagement?

The refugees with disabilities would like to have more training leadership. We are missing the leadership skills. We would like to learn how to advocate our self and make change our community.

Sometimes, those who are working hard to get an education cannot get jobs. We feel hopeless.

What ideas or suggestions do you have to eliminate barriers to engagement?

I think it will be great the city to hear the voice from refugees with disabilities. We have a lot of issues. Most refugees with disabilities are isolated in their home. They would like to learn English, become independent, go to school and get jobs. We are fighting to overcome our own challenges, family challenges and internal community issues. We would also like to help educate community leaders. Most refugees with disabilities came from places where they did not have laws to help or protect them. Now, we sometimes feel the city is listening to people who do not understand our challenges. We would like to change that and we hope the city will listen to our suggestions and opinions.

How do you plan on staying engaged?

I will now have contact with our Disability Leadership Academy team. I have their email and I will ask for their phone numbers so I can continue to have relationships with them. I would like to know when they are doing activities or advocacy work so that I can participate with them. They are wonderful people and this was a lifetime opportunity for me. I gained knowledge and am grateful for this leadership training. I also appreciate Joanne, who makes everyone feel valuable. She is a good listener and respects each individual's values and needs. I felt that she listened to me and gave the accommodation that I needed. She is great facilitator. I am thankful to have had this opportunity and look forward to future similar Disability Leadership training.



Abdi Mohamed

What was most valuable?

I like every part of the Disability Leadership Academy, but the most valuable part of Disability Leadership Academy that I liked most was the trainings that have been provided by some of the guest speakers. During the last 7 sessions, we had a couple of trainings from professionals who are already doing advocacy job in the community. I see that those training are the most valuable part of the Disability Leadership Academy because I have learned a lot from those professionals who are doing the training. Our second session, we had Disability

History & Advocacy training by *Jan Campbell & Barbara Dirks*. In that training, we have watched a history documentary which shows how people had struggled in those days before the ADA approved. I have learned a lot for that training and other similar trainings we had.

What would you change for next year?

The Leadership Academic for this year is very good, and it brings together for people with all kinds of disabilities. However, for the next year, I would like to see more *people* from a variety of cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds. This year we have two Nepalis and two Somali including myself. We have shares stories and experiences that refugees and immigrants with disability face when they arrive here, and those who has been living here before. So having more people from other cultures will benefit from the group, and it will help many underrepresented communities to get a training. One other thing I would like to see change in next year's Leadership Academy is to get big room for the training. This year, we have been moving in different places, but some of places and the rooms were not very accessible for the wheelchair users like myself. When there are too many tables and chairs in the room, it was not easy for the wheelchair users to move around.

How has Academy prepared you to be engaged?

This was my first time to participate this kind of training where many people with all kinds of disability come together. The knowledge and experience I learned from the Disability Leadership Academy will help me to engage more with my community. I have learned some advocacy skills in the Leadership Academy, and I will use those skills to advocate myself and my community.

What City or community rules are preventing engagement?

I am mainly involved with the refugees and Immigrant community, and there are many disable people in that community. People with disability in the refugees and immigrant community doesn't have any voice within their community, and many of them are lacking the basic needs such as education and getting a job. Those of us who went to college and get the education, is not easy for them to get a job. The city of Portland work with refugees and immigrant organizations such IRCO, but those organizations don't help people with disability. We tried to contact with these organizations, but they told us, the programs they have are not designed for the people with disability.

What ideas or suggestions do you have to eliminate barriers to engagement?

Some of the ideas and suggestions I have is that the city of Portland has to think a way they could help this underrepresent community. The disability refugees and immigrants are fighting to get their basic needs, so the city of Portland must enforce the existence organizations to make their program inclusive to the people with disability. The employees of these organizations have no experience working with people with disability, so we need to see people who know the needs of this community. Also, the city of Portland has to listen disability refugees' community leaders who know the existence of this problems.

How do you plan on staying engaged?

Now I have more connections through the Disability Leadership Academy, and I will stay connect with those individuals and origination throughout email, phone and social media. I will become more engaged in my community by using the skills I have learned the Disability Leadership training.



Jerry Pattee

What was most valuable?

I sit on several advisory panels and boards of directors which are active at the state and national levels. In contrast, The Disability Leadership Academy gave me an opportunity to collaborate with a variety of people who share the Portland experience. Aspects of the academy which I valued the most were the interesting backgrounds, points of view, and communication styles among the attendees.

What would you change for next year?

As varied as our group was, future recruitment of additional people, who identify as experiencing intellectual disability, will bring perspectives which will enhance any group project.

How has Academy prepared you to be engaged?

My experience with the academy prepared me to be more engaged in the community by providing me information about the aspects of equity. Additionally, my listening and empathy skills have been enhanced to improve my overall communications with others.

What City or community rules are preventing engagement?

One community challenge I see, is ignorance and/or apathy (on the part of both citizens and some city workers) which create communication barriers between the public and local government. An important example of this is the “disabling” of the Portland Commission on Disability (PCOD).

What ideas or suggestions do you have to eliminate barriers to engagement?

As a primary link to the public, I urge Council to support the restoration of this vital group.

How do you plan on staying engaged?

I thank the City for sponsoring the Disability Leadership Academy and the associated stipend. This engagement initiative sets a municipal standard to be admired. With the knowledge I gained, I will look for ways that my various networks can interact with city departments and government for their mutual benefit. Consider this as taxpayer dollars well spent!



Myrlaviani Rivier

What was most valuable?

The ONI sponsored Disability Leadership Academy offers leaders within the local Portland disability network a community program designed to increase their ability to respond to policy issues. I profoundly appreciate the City of Portland's Office of Neighborhood Involvement instituting its first ever leadership academy which creates the setting and format driving community participation within the "disabled" community.

In reflection, I found the diversity of the academy members the most valuable, enlightening, and fascinating. The academy is teeming with an array of talent, vision and focus. Coming together in community gave me an opportunity to watch, learn and ask how other people overcome obstacles or framed social issues.

How has Academy prepared you to be engaged?

Whether learning more about inclusion through process, expanding awareness about historical cornerstones in disability rights and how they were achieved or becoming more experienced at policy creation, the range of subject matter approached during the academy offers participants a range of subject areas. Alternatively, the leadership academy is replicable. I can now offer the same workshop to fellow community members!

How do you plan on staying engaged?

Through my experience in the Disability Leadership Academy I became more aware about other people's needs and what I might be able to do while holding community meetings to further open opportunities for engagement. The facilitator, Joanne Johnson, did an amazing job of educating, creating, maintaining and sustaining an inclusive environment. It helped me to slow down, do a better job of listening and really connect with what was happening in a given moment. It was in those moments where community was a verb. It was a happening thing and I felt connected—I belonged.

In my view the City of Portland exemplifies community stewardship by promoting empowering community involvement programs which shunt disenfranchisement and intentionally design an inclusive process whereby typically marginalized voices are invited, recognized and valued. It was during these conversations where knowledge about what was important to different people played a pivotal role in determining next

pathways during the policy formulation phase of our project. We discussed policy effectiveness, efficiencies and equity on the whole and as we move forward with the #InclusionResolution policy proposal, it's easy to envisage deep conversations about liberty, freedoms, political/administrative/technical feasibilities.



Michael Steen

What was most valuable?

The opportunity to engage with people experiencing a broad range of disabilities provided a valuable forum to understand the hurdles that are a daily occurrence in the lives of others. Being mildly impacted with Cerebral Palsy myself, I've developed certain strategies to mitigate my unique set of challenges. Engaging with others who experience different disabilities gave me a perspective for how others approach their challenges. Additionally, I became aware of what others see as being most critical focus areas

towards fostering a more inclusive community. While the common goal is reducing barriers, some may prioritize addressing issues in the physical built environment, whereas others prioritize enhancing the effectiveness of community services.

What would you change for next year?

During each DLA session, there was always a good exchange of ideas. To build upon those discussions, I'd recommend assigning readings and/or videos, which would be discussed during the subsequent session. Regarding the community engagement project, while I appreciated the opportunity to work on a project that positively impacts the community, the time and energy could be spent elsewhere. To do it well, the Community Engagement Project is the equivalent of a graduate level capstone project. This is a significant undertaking that I feel stretches beyond the cohort's reach, considering our collective experience level and resources available. With that said, it was good to wrestle with several project ideas that met the Academy's values and become familiar with the process required to complete a project that affects a law, policy, or procedure. As an alternative to devoting time on a Community Engagement Project, time could be spent studying the steps and coalition building that were required for a prior legislative achievement. With a more developed understanding of the process and the social, financial, and political resources required, the Academy's graduates would then be equipped to be effective change agents in their community.

How has Academy prepared you to be engaged?

The DLA has prepared me for further community engagement in three ways: 1) I've gained a historical perspective of the disability movement; 2) exposure to the process involved to pass a resolution or ordinance; 3) connecting with people experiencing a different set of challenges than I do.

What City or community rules are preventing engagement?

Regarding City or community rules, I am not familiar with rules that have limited my personal involvement. As to areas that the City should prioritize, I encourage that the Mayor and City Commissioners remain committed to allocating resources that support a more livable community for everyone, which in turn benefits those experiencing disabilities.

What ideas or suggestions do you have to eliminate barriers to engagement?

Some priority areas include: 1) addressing mental health; 2) addressing physical health through a) parks and park programs; b) neighborhoods that encourage walking and biking; c) access to healthy foods through encouraging grocery stores in “food deserts” and work towards subsidizing fruits and vegetables for those with insufficient economic means; 3) affordable housing convenient to mass transit.

How do you plan on staying engaged?

As the incoming Board President of United Cerebral Palsy of Oregon, the DLA has provided me a framework for how individuals, community groups and organizations interact with the City and can collaboratively work together. Though there are multiple lenses through which social justice is addressed, by focusing on our common goals we can utilize the community’s limited resources most efficiently. The goal should be creating system changes with a comprehensive approach that lifts all boats. Because while “only” 19% of the population currently lives with a disability, many more will acquire a disability at some point during their lives or have a family member with a disability.

Thank you to the City Commissioners and the Office of Neighborhood Involvement for funding the Disability Leadership Academy. I look forward to seeing the work that we, the participants, can do in our community and seeing how the DLA evolves the next time it is offered.



Christina Weinholz

What was most valuable?

The most valuable parts about Disability Leadership Academy are the connections that I have made with my fellow academy colleagues. Throughout my life as a seeker of social justice I have found that the most powerful changes have been made because of the relationships and connections we have with one another. Great change is made in community rather than in isolation. Throughout the course of Disability Leadership Academy, we have developed trusting relationships with one another and it is

because of those relationships that I believe we will each achieve great things.

Disability Leadership Academy has also afforded me the opportunity to work with colleagues, each of whom have their own story to tell. However, I believe that there is a common thread of triumph over adversity that runs through each of our stories. This common thread has been valuable to me. For most of my childhood and adulthood I have been striving to fit in, it is through this academy that I have begun to accept my disability for what it is, which is a small part of my entire story. It has given me the confidence to stand firmly in my reality as a woman with a disability who is not defined by it. What a gift that is! Thank you Disability Leadership Academy!

What would you change for next year?

I would change the length of the academy. Four months is not a lot of time to achieve all we had hoped to achieve. I feel like we are just beginning to delve into all we can accomplish together. As I stated earlier I believe great change is accomplished through trusting relationships. Trusting relationships take a while to develop. I believe as we near the end I am just now recognizing the true potential I have through the relationships I have developed through Disability Leadership Academy!

I realize that from the city's perspective a long term academy does not make sense. I think an academic year would be sufficient. That timeframe would allow us enough time to build the relationships necessary to do effective community organizing while at the same time making some real headway on the community engagement project. I think the speakers and trainings we had were invaluable to my growth as a community organizer, so I would not change a thing about that but I wonder if it would be better to have the community engagement project time in the morning while we are freshest and the training in the afternoon.

How has Academy prepared you to be engaged?

Disability Leadership Academy has helped me accept my disability rather than regard it as something for which I needed to compensate. My cerebral palsy just “is.” I don’t have to apologize or compensate for it. I have always seen my disability as a gift to me. It has allowed for more empathy with the people I meet. All this is to say that while I have always been engaged in my community, I never have taken the opportunity to engage with others with disabilities. They were always a group I shied away from because I wanted to fit in and be seen as “just like everyone else.” What I have recognized is that there is power in a shared story. All of us together have great potential, which is potential I will never shy away from again.

What City or community rules are preventing engagement?

I think most of my concerns center around transportation. As a mom with two small children riding Tri- Met was difficult until recently. When you enter the bus you are required to take your baby out of the stroller, and place the folded stroller under the seat. This is a process that is difficult for me as a woman with cerebral palsy (especially with a very active son). The bus doesn’t have seat belts to secure my son, so every time I was on the bus I ran the risk of my son walking up and down the aisle and I didn’t have the the ability to hold him on my hip.

My solution was to call the ADA office of Tri-Met to ask if I could roll the stroller on to the bus and lock it in place in the area reserved for people with disabilities and elders. But I was told that I could not due to a risk of injury for my son. While I understand there was a risk, we as people have to take calculated risks. It seemed to me that it was a greater risk to allow my son to roam the bus without an ability to pick him up, rather than having him secure in a locked stroller right beside me!

I have come to the understanding that if Tri-Met could not accommodate my needs then consistency in application of the rule would have been appreciated. The system cannot allow other moms on the bus, who plan to roll on with their strollers. The system cannot allow people with the rolling carts to keep their cars open, as I was told all of those objects could be projectile objects just as I was told my stroller could be if we were to crash! Life is about calculating risk. In weighing the risk, there should be an accommodation for a mother with a disability to ease her burden just a little!

What ideas or suggestions do you have to eliminate barriers to engagement?

I think there could be two reasonable solutions to this problem. In the first scenario Tri-Met should adopt a completely consistent policy. No open carts or strollers should be allowed on the bus at all, unless they are needed for the passenger’s mobility. In conjunction with this consistent policy Tri-Met should give passengers a clearer

understanding as to why open strollers and carts are allowed on the MAX and not the bus. Couldn't these objects become projectile objects no matter what mode of transportation they are on if there was a crash?

A second solution may be gathering together a group of honored citizen transit riders and seeing if together with transit representatives they could come up with a reasonable accommodation that makes sense for both parties. This would include- keeping in mind the liability issues Tri-Met has to ponder while also keeping in mind that reasonable accommodations must be made for those of us who have to live with the effects of limited mobility.

How do you plan on staying engaged?

I have always been engaged in my community and I plan to remain so after disability leadership academy is over. I think what disability leadership has provided me is renewed commitment and inspiration. I plan to stay up to date with the Office of Disability programs happening and I hope to attend as many events as possible as we continue to work together to advance the needs of people with disabilities in the city of Portland. The hope is that Portland will become just a little more accessible for the people who need access the most!



Cynthia Wojack

What was most valuable?

There were soooo many valuable experiences from being a part of this year's Disability Academy. The first thing that crosses my mind was meeting the incredible people who participated. From the other members to the presenters, I was constantly impressed with the experiences, ideas and identities of others. While we didn't purposely talk about ourselves and how we got to be considered "disabled," it became evident how thoughtful, resilient and talented was each member. Kudos to our leader, Joanne. You looked to give the group a diversity that positively impacted us throughout the weeks. We heard from people whose experiences came from around the world and throughout the disability community. This was a huge part of my valuable experience. Our speakers gave use a background from which we were able to build as each week progressed. It was empowering to learn about our "disability identity." Seeing the movie about the disability and justice movement was exciting and powerful. It made me wonder: how would my own self-image as a person with a disability grow and change?

How did the ideas of our other members affect me? Our last presenter, Keila Johnson, has me still pondering the idea of anger and its usefulness. She responded to one of my own comments. And I must say that I am thinking about it to this day. Thanks.

What would you change for next year?

What parts would I change? As with many valuable experiences, our problem was time. We were constantly checking to see how much we had and what we could accomplish before 3pm.

Here are some suggestions: At the beginning of it all, I was focused on our "project." It was something I was thinking about right away and wanted to have something to present. As the weeks passed, this started to be less of importance. The process was the thing to many in the group. There are some problems with these differences of opinions. It can be frustrating for those wanting to have a finished project versus those who want to experience the various strategies that are useful in moving toward a goal. Through it all we shared our views and listened to each other with a common respect. I would suggest that we might have reached more compromises between these 2 views if more of our sessions would have allowed us to research, discuss and compose project ideas together. It was difficult to delegate and hold people responsible for working off session. If more actual work time could have been allotted for when we were together,

we might have gotten farther towards a finished report. I would also suggest that time management during sessions be more strictly followed. We did spend too much time on some things, e.g. how to communicate between meetings, touring IRCO, at the expense of our project. One suggestion for between sessions: give the group reading assignments that would help inform members about topics we've discussed or will come up in future meetings. This might have been helpful when suggesting our group project ideas. Reading examples include websites from: City of Portland, ADA, various disability groups (both local and national). Our group also had a wide range of knowledge, as it relates to Portland city government, disability-awareness topics. Occasionally, I felt that this difference made some of us reticent about being involved. Perhaps building some of the knowledge before we met would be made members feel more competent.

How has Academy prepared you to be engaged?

My experience has given me more of an "insiders" view of our how our city works for people with disabilities. Other Academy members shared their previous experiences, including successes and frustrations. It was powerful to hear members from the refugee community talk about the multiple difficulties of having a myriad of new cultures, laws, languages, etc. Note this as another powerful experience of the Disability Academy. (And inspiring, too!)

What City or community rules are preventing engagement?

At this moment in my life, I don't see much from preventing me from being engaged. However, I do see a challenge for those in our community who are impacted more from factors of culture, language, economic place and disability. Even during some of our meetings, we saw problems in accessibility and communication. People in wheelchairs could not easily access parts of our own buildings (restrooms, entrances/exits, meeting rooms). In many parts of our city, important information and engagement is difficult when people who need to communicate with City of Portland officials are prevented from participating. Are community meetings being held at places like IRCO, PCC, Latino Network and ILR? Hopefully, yes and will continue.

What ideas or suggestions do you have to eliminate barriers to engagement?

My suggestions: make sure all peoples from our diverse city communities have access to learning and participating in decision-making activities. Outreach to our many groups is critical to having an informed and active Portland. Some of our Academy members could be hired as powerful advocates.

How do you plan on staying engaged?

My plans for the future are still evolving. I am still a newly retired person. My disability has changed as I have aged. My experiences with the Disability Academy have presented me with challenges to consider and encouraged me with possibilities. Choices for me: get involved with more retired people to explore what aging does and how it keeps us from living full lives. Another idea: as someone who has often hidden having a disability, how does "embracing" it add in positive ways to our self-image?

So much to consider at 3am!

Thank you, Joanne for this fantastic opportunity!!!!!!



Thank you for journeying with us into the City of Portland's 2017 Disability Leadership Academy!

2017 Disability Leadership Academy Graduates

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Melissa Chavez	Abdi Mohamed
Larry Cross	Jerry Pattee
Richard Detwiler	Myrlaviani Rivier
Eli Ettinger	Michael Steen
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