

## A Funder Opportunity

Private funders need not develop a new specialty or even add a new kind of project to their portfolios; it is enough to include a disability dimension in the kinds of activities they already fund. The goal is not sexual rights projects to help sexual minorities with disabilities, the goal is sexual rights projects to help all sexual minorities, including people with disabilities.

Disability has not yet been mainstreamed into sexual rights programs. Relatively modest outlays that include a disability dimension could result in significant improvements in the full and effective inclusion of sexual minorities with disabilities in society and also, with due attention to evaluation, in important lessons learned.



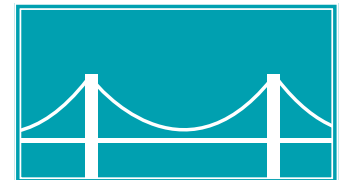
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Astraea Lesbian  
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## Disability Funders Network

DFN was established in 1994 to create a new understanding of how private funders can integrate disability concerns into their philanthropic programs. You are invited to take full advantage of DFN's resources and expertise.

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# Sexuality and Disability: Combating Multiple Discrimination



**DISABILITY FUNDERS NETWORK**

The Social Justice Movement of the 21st Century ...  
Building a Bridge Between Disability and Community Philanthropy

# Sexuality & Disability: A Human Rights Issue

## The Disability Dimension

Historically, discourse and programming around issues of sexuality and disability have been limited to issues of sexual health and sexual functioning. Furthermore, focus has tended to fall on issues of particular relevance to heterosexual men who have lost sexual function as a consequence of traumatic injury. Such medical approaches have ignored the unique experiences of women with disabilities; sexual minorities such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or transsexual people with disabilities; and those disabled from a young age.

In addition, the sexual rights discourse has rarely included the voices of people with disabilities in a meaningful way, further compounding the exclusion of people with disabilities from this important life area. The result is that disability and sexuality has not been framed as a social justice or human rights issue, and many people with disabilities – especially sexual minorities – continue to face multiple discrimination on the basis of disability, sexual preference and other grounds such as gender and/or race.

While the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and increasing attention to the needs of people with disabilities in combating HIV/AIDS are raising the profile of disability, much remains to be done to ensure that all people with disabilities - including sexual minorities - can express their sexuality freely and safely on an equal basis with others in society.

Therefore, many opportunities exist for human rights funders to contribute to advancing the sexual rights of people with disabilities and combating the multiple discrimination that ultimately limits the enjoyment of human rights by all.

## Sexual Minorities and Disability

Discrimination is often compounded for people with disabilities who are members of a sexual minority. For example, a woman with a disability who is also a lesbian is likely to face bias and exclusion based on her gender, her disability, and her sexual preference. Moreover, these bases for exclusion often interact to exacerbate the societal marginalization she faces. For instance, stereotyping of people with disabilities as asexual or hypersexual may inhibit her ability to self-identify as a lesbian or to confront discrimination on the basis of her sexual preference, and may also increase her exposure to violence.

Many people with disabilities are denied the basic right to exercise their autonomy, make decisions and exercise preferences regarding even basic aspects of their daily lives, such as what to wear or eat. Such discrimination can seriously hinder

the ability of sexual minorities with disabilities to experience and express their sexuality. For example a gay man who also has an intellectual disability may be denied the opportunity to consent to a same-sex relationship because of paternalistic attitudes regarding his right to make decisions. Even where autonomy per se is not an issue, attitudinal, physical, information and communication barriers can deny sexual minorities with disabilities access to educational materials, services and opportunities to meet others.

Peer support and mentoring can be especially important for youth with disabilities who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or transsexual. These human rights issues can be meaningfully addressed in existing sexual rights programming if staff are willing to commit to the issue and engage people with disabilities.

### *Funders should design sexual minorities programs to explicitly consider disability*

	<b>Today's Barriers</b>	<b>Tomorrow's Opportunities</b>
<b>Outreach</b>	Sexual minorities with disabilities have limited access to information about programs addressing sexuality and human rights.	Develop public information campaigns readily available to sexual minorities using a variety of accessible media and languages.
<b>Accessibility</b>	Physical barriers exclude people with disabilities from locations, programs and services intended for use by sexual minorities.	Remove or avoid physical barriers through implementation of universal design principles and provision of specific accommodations where needed.
<b>Stigma</b>	Attitudes often form the greatest barriers to inclusion of sexual minorities with disabilities as full members of society. Such attitudes may invoke fear or shame.	Create programs and policies intended to raise awareness and overcome stigma, stereotyping and prejudice against sexual minorities with disabilities.
<b>Evaluation</b>	People with disabilities and disability perspectives are often left out of program evaluation processes, even when the objectives seek to reach marginalized populations.	Ensure that evaluation processes capture the efficacy of programs in benefiting sexual minorities with disabilities, and that lessons learned also extend to people with disabilities.