



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING



**Advocating
for Inclusion
and Disability
Rights: A Toolkit
for Community
Organisations**



**ADVOCATING FOR INCLUSION
AND DISABILITY RIGHTS:
A TOOLKIT FOR COMMUNITY
ORGANISATIONS**



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to promote the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.

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The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) wishes to thank those below for their contribution to this training manual:

Kristina Smith, Author

Lesley Cameron, Editor

Terry Sunderland, Graphic Designer

COL staff:

Frances Ferreira, Senior Adviser, Women and Girls

Veronica Sudesh, Project Co-ordinator

Tahira Akbari, Project Assistant

Published by:



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

505 Burrard Street, Suite 1650, Box 5
Vancouver, British Columbia, V7X 1M6, Canada
Telephone: +1 604 775 8200
Fax: +1 604 775 8210
Web: www.col.org
Email: info@col.org

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Welcome

Welcome to *Advocating for Inclusion and Disability Rights*. This toolkit is designed to expand knowledge and understanding of disability and inclusion in the international development space and help organisations engage in advocacy in partnership with persons with disabilities. It is designed for practitioners, fieldworkers, trainers, educators, community leaders, advocates and allies who work in international development, support change at the community, national and global levels, and have a range of experience and expertise in disability and inclusion.

The toolkit describes key concepts and tools to create an advocacy strategy for disability rights and inclusion, walks users through the advocacy cycle and provides recommendations and guidance on how to create effective advocacy in partnership with persons with disabilities. Throughout the toolkit, resources and activities reinforce learning and support real-world action for advocacy. Where possible, additional resources with direct relevance to the countries of focus of the Empowering Women and Girls (EWG) project — Bangladesh, Malawi, Mozambique, Pakistan and Sri Lanka — are provided to support learning about disability in national contexts.

About This Toolkit

This toolkit can be used by individual learners or adapted for group learning through workshops or train-the-trainer sessions. It contains eight modules that move from explaining a range of disability-related concepts and terminology to outlining best practices for inclusive advocacy action.

Each module opens with an explanation of key concepts and a list of learning objectives that show learners what they should expect to know or be able to do once they have completed the module. In addition, all the modules have activities and practical tools to reinforce learning. We recommend you work through each module of this toolkit in order and complete the activities for each section as you go along.

The core content and learning objective of each module are as follows:

Module 1: Understanding Disability

This module introduces key concepts, terminology and disability models that are essential for understanding disability and inclusion.

Module 2: Centring Inclusion

This module defines and centres inclusion as a core principle for our work as advocates and explores intersectionality as it relates to gender and disability.

Module 3: Understanding Disability Rights

This module describes global frameworks and laws that enshrine rights for persons with disabilities and invites learners to explore national-level laws, policies and strategies.

Module 4: Planning for Advocacy in Partnership with Persons with Disabilities

This module highlights the importance of working in partnership with persons with disabilities and introduces the principle of Nothing About Us Without Us. It also introduces the advocacy cycle and outlines its core steps.

Module 5: Advancing Advocacy Through Meaningful Engagement

This module discusses Steps 2–4 of the advocacy cycle. It explores strategies for establishing and maintaining effective partnerships and centring the voices of persons with disabilities at the start of the advocacy cycle. It discusses some tools and strategies that can be used to define a core challenge and set an advocacy goal.

Module 6: Building Partnerships and Coalitions for Action

This module shares strategies for building partnerships and networks to enhance advocacy efforts and looks in detail at Steps 5–7 of the advocacy cycle. It lists examples of tools and resources for network mapping and action planning to move advocacy efforts into action.

Module 7: Creating Inclusive Activities for Advocacy

This module contains tips and recommendations for making advocacy activities more inclusive. It explores Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a framework to plan for inclusion and provides recommendations for creating inclusive in-person activities, online activities and communications. It also discusses Step 8 of the advocacy cycle.

Module 8: Assessing Advocacy with Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

This module focuses on best practices for collecting data to understand the impact of advocacy efforts and examines Step 9 of the advocacy cycle. It offers recommendations for collecting disability-disaggregated data and shares best practices for making data collection accessible and inclusive.

Length, Tools and Format

Each module will need approximately one to two hours of learning time plus one to four hours to complete the accompanying activities. We recommend you complete each module in order and use the learning activities and tools to support your advocacy journey. Each module contains reference lists or additional resources you can explore to deepen your learning. These are optional and may increase your learning time.



This toolkit is currently available in PDF format and can be accessed digitally or downloaded and printed. (If you print the document, note that you will need to copy the URLs in hyperlinked text from the digital version.)

Toolkit Accessibility

We have taken intentional steps to ensure this toolkit is accessible and welcoming to learners of all abilities.

To support visual learners, we use two icons to highlight learning activities and additional resources. (See Table 1.)

Table 1. Icons used in the toolkit

ICON IMAGE	ICON DESCRIPTION	PURPOSE
	Pencil	Identifies a learning activity
	Pile of books	Points to additional resources that learners can explore

All the other images in the toolkit have alt text to describe them. This improves usability for anyone who is using text-to-speech tools or screen readers.

Tables have also been formatted with accessibility in mind. They include clear, descriptive header rows that repeat across pages, and repeat when a screen reader is being used. To increase their readability, the tables have no merged or split cells and the content in all cells is left-aligned. No cells are empty.

Headings and styles have been applied consistently to clearly distinguish headings, subheadings and body text. This supports smooth keyboard navigation and ensures screen readers read the content in the correct order.

The toolkit uses a clean, readable font (Calibri) in size 12 for body text to enhance readability. Where we used colour, we chose high-contrast options for easy visibility.

Where hyperlinks have been provided in the toolkit learning content, they have been written as descriptive text, instead of raw URLs, to better support learners who are using assistive technologies. Raw URLs are used only in the reference list to reflect the citation style used for this toolkit.

Where videos are linked, we have made every effort to ensure they are publicly hosted. We selected only videos with both sound and closed captioning to allow learners to experience the video in the way that works best for them.

The PDF version of this toolkit was reviewed using the Accessibility Checks in Adobe Acrobat to confirm accessibility factors such as colour contrast, logical reading order and reading of tables.



1

Understanding Disability

Module 1: Understanding Disability

Introduction

According to the World Bank, about 15 per cent of the global population has at least one form of disability (World Bank Group, 2025). Despite its prevalence, there are still misconceptions and a lack of awareness about what it means to live with a disability. Persons with disabilities face barriers to social and economic inclusion, such as participating in community programmes, accessing education and finding employment, and often experience stigma or negative biases around their disability.

The language we use to talk about disability matters. When practitioners know about and understand key concepts and terminology relating to disability, they are better able to consciously unpack negative stigma and prejudice.

This module introduces the concept of disability and the different disability models that are used to define it. It explains how disabilities can be visible and non-visible and explores types of disabilities. In addition, it introduces person-first and identity-first language and other key disability-related terminology. A learning activity offers the opportunity to practise using these language structures.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

- Define disability and identify its complexity
- Identify different models and key terms that shape how disability is understood
- Apply person-first and identity-first language
- Explain additional terminology relating to accessibility, access, barriers, bias and stigma

Defining Disability

Defining disability is a complex task, and the language we use is continually evolving.

The complexity and range of conditions associated with disability mean there is no single definition of the term. Broadly speaking, disability refers to “an interaction between features of a person’s body and mind and features of the society in which they live” (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2022, Definition of disability). A person may be born with disability or develop one, and they may experience its effects continually or occasionally. Disability can range in severity and be physically obvious or hidden from view.

The [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) provides a global legal framework for understanding disability and the rights of persons with disabilities. It provides a starting conceptual outline, describing disability as “the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (United Nations, 2006, Preamble).

The way we define disability is also shaped by our systems, beliefs and context. Our own biases shape how we view disability in the world around us — and can sometimes create negative perceptions of it. Persons with disabilities all have their own lived experience with their disability, which shapes how they personally identify with disability overall. We cannot create a more inclusive definition of disability until we recognise how our own perspectives and experience shape how we define it.

Disability Models

The way we think about disability shapes our feelings about it. Conceptual disability models are frameworks that can help us understand how we perceive and define disability — and how we respond to it.

Medical model: The medical model presents disability as a medical problem or identity and generally focuses on “correcting” or “improving” disability with medical help. It can influence perceptions of disability as a problem to be solved or a condition to be improved. It can also reinforce biases or beliefs that prioritise or centre being fully abled. The medical model does not capture the way systems and society interact with disability.

Social model: The social model focuses on the way society is structured and how this structure affects and intersects with the lives of persons with disabilities. In this model, disability is something a person experiences, rather than a condition. It focuses on how to remove barriers and attitudes in our systems and society that may prevent persons with disabilities from fully participating in society.

Human rights model: The human rights model draws on the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), which established the fundamental rights of persons with disabilities — in essence, it enshrined equal rights and opportunities for persons with and without disabilities. This model provides a framework for understanding discrimination and barriers faced by persons with disabilities in accessing their rights. It centres the importance of ensuring persons with disabilities can access the same rights as persons without disabilities.

Charitable model: The charitable model presents persons with disabilities as being in need of support, care or charity. This model can reinforce biases that disability is something to be pitied and reduce the agency of persons with disabilities. (Adapted from Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health, 2023, Section 4; Christian Blind Mission, 2022.)

Review the models above and take a moment to reflect on how they have influenced your own perceptions of disability. It is likely that more than one model has shaped your perspective and that your understanding of disability has evolved over time. As development practitioners, identifying how these models influence us helps us to:

- better understand how communities view disability, and
- unpack potential biases and stigma.

Keep these models in mind as we continue to explore factors that inform our perceptions of disability.

Other Factors That Shape Perceptions of Disability

Many factors can influence how we perceive disability. For example, disabilities can be **visible** or **non-visible**. We can see visible disabilities, such as a physical disability, or infer them from certain signals — for example, someone whose sight is impaired might use a white cane. Non-visible disabilities such as mental health challenges, chronic pain, diabetes, dyslexia or ADHD may not be immediately obvious or readily apparent (Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health, 2023, Section 2). Even if a disability is not visible or immediately obvious, it is still valid.

Persons with disabilities may mask their disability, often because of the stigma attached to disability. Masking is when someone hides or suppresses their disability to fit in with social expectations of being fully abled (National Autistic Society, n.d.). They may use it to avoid stigma, bias or discrimination. When a person with disability masks, their disability may appear less visible or non-visible to others. Reflecting on this concept encourages us to consider our assumptions about what it means to present a disability, how visibility influences our recognition of disability in our environment and the ways in which our actions may encourage a person with a disability to mask.

A person can be born with a disability or develop one later in life. A person can also have a permanent disability, or they may experience disability temporarily (e.g., if they are injured). The **persona spectrum**, a framework rooted in the social model of disability, can help us understand and empathise with the different ways individuals may encounter barriers in their environment. It shows us that individuals can experience disability or barriers to access at different times in their life for a range of reasons and periods. For example, a person may have permanent hearing loss, they may have temporary hearing loss because of an ear infection or they may encounter a situational barrier because they are in a noisy room. All of these scenarios present unique barriers to hearing (Microsoft, 2021). (See Figure 1.)

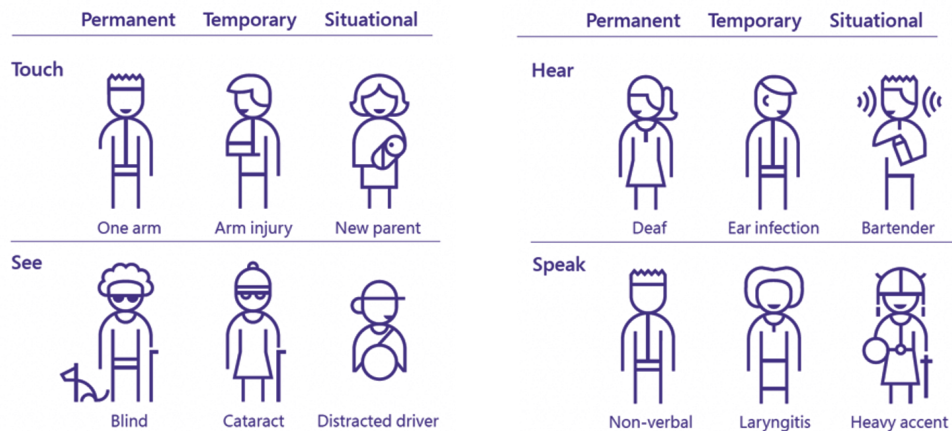


Figure 1. The persona spectrum.

Source: Microsoft, 2021, CC BY-NC-ND

Image description

The chart has four rows labelled Touch, See, Hear and Speak. Each row contains three simple icons of people that illustrate how different circumstances can affect their abilities.

Touch:

- Permanent:** A person with one arm
- Temporary:** A person with an arm in a sling
- Situational:** A person holding a baby in one arm

See:

- Permanent:** A person with a guide dog and a cane (blind)
- Temporary:** A person with cataracts
- Situational:** A person who is distracted while driving

Hear:

- Permanent:** A person who is deaf
- Temporary:** A person with an ear infection
- Situational:** A person shaking a cocktail in a noisy space

Speak:

- Permanent:** A person who is non-verbal
- Temporary:** A person who has laryngitis and has lost their voice
- Situational:** A person who has a strong accent

As we continue our journey as disability advocates, it is important to reflect on how environmental and social factors shape how we view disability. By continuing to reflect on factors such as visibility and permanence, we can cultivate a more inclusive mindset that informs how we engage, advocate and partner with persons with disabilities.

Some Key Concepts and Terminology

There are many terms and concepts relating to disability. Some of the terms used in this toolkit are described below. Note that this is not an exhaustive list.

Ableism: Conscious or unconscious thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, practices and actions that consider disability as “not normal” and reinforce discrimination against persons with a disability. Ableism reinforces perceptions of disability as negative (Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health, 2023, Section 5).

Accessibility: The ability for everyone to access, use and benefit from their environment. It involves designing environments, services or products that are fully usable and available to all (Equitas, 2019).

Accommodations: Modifications to products, services, locations and opportunities to create accessibility. Some contexts, such as workplaces, may be required by law to have certain accommodations in place (Disability & Philanthropy Forum, 2025).

Barrier(s): Disadvantages or restrictions that prevent someone from being fully included in an experience, activity, service, etc. Such restrictions can be physical, information-based or related to attitudes (Equitas, 2019).

Stigma: Negative attitudes, beliefs or behaviours such as discrimination, prejudice, judgement and stereotypes. Stigma around disability includes insulting language, disrespectful behaviour and negative views about disability (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2024).

Unconscious bias: Automatic assumptions, beliefs and prejudices about certain groups that affect how people perceive and interact with others (Reiners & Whitfield, 2025).

Types of Disabilities

As we continue to explore how we define disability, it can be helpful to understand different types of disability.

Remember: A broad range of conditions and circumstances can be described as a disability, and our understanding of these conditions is evolving. The list below contains some examples to help you develop your understanding of the scope of disability.

ADHD: ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects a person’s ability to focus and pay attention. Persons with ADHD can act very impulsively.

Autism: Autism is a range of conditions that affect how information is understood and stored in the brain. Persons with autism can find social interaction difficult, may experience barriers to communicating and may have sensory sensitivities (e.g., they may react to bright lighting or loud noises).

Deafness or impaired hearing: These disabilities affect the ability to hear. They range from being deaf to having partial hearing. Persons with this disability may use sign language or hearing aids to support them in communicating.

Intellectual disability: This refers to neurodevelopmental conditions that significantly limit a person's ability to acquire communication, self-care, life and social skills. The term includes a broad range of conditions, such as genetic conditions and the consequences of a severe head injury.

Learning disabilities: A range of conditions relating to neurological difficulties in perceiving and/or processing auditory, visual and other information. Dyslexia (difficulty spelling or reading words), dysgraphia (difficulty writing and arranging thoughts on paper) and dyscalculia (difficulty understanding numbers) are all examples of learning disabilities.

Medical disabilities: These include a wide range of conditions as diverse as arthritis, diabetes and seizures. Someone with a medical disability may have episodic (occasional) or chronic (long-term) experiences of disability.

Mental health issues: This is a broad category of conditions that affect the mind or brain — for example, depression, anxiety and bipolar disorder.

Mobility, flexibility and body structure disabilities: These are disabilities that can restrict the way individuals move or access their environment. They can also affect a person's dexterity and co-ordination. Someone with this type of disability may use a wheelchair or crutches, may have had a limb amputated or may have a neuromuscular disorder.

Vision/visual impairments: These disabilities affect sight, and they range from blindness to partial vision. Someone who has a visual impairment may use braille or assistive technologies to read.

Multiple disabilities: It is possible to experience more than one condition or impairment that leads to disability. In that situation, the combined experiences may increase the effect of disability. (Adapted from Australian National University Human Resources, n.d.; Government of Canada, 2025; Office of Disability Resources, University of Rochester, n.d.)

We encourage you to research and learn more about specific disabilities in the communities you work with. Remember that individuals may experience more than one type of disability, and that each person has unique needs relating to their disability and their experiences with it. Those needs may include how someone prefers to describe their disability — they may not use the expressions we have just discussed.

Person-First and Identity-First Language

The complexity and broad experience of disability mean that the language we use to describe how we see, perceive and discuss disabilities is important. When we are discussing disability and working with persons with disabilities, it is important to communicate respectfully. There are two approaches to consider: **person-first language** and **identity-first language**.

Person-first language foregrounds the person — it puts them first. For example, *person with disability* is person-first language. **Identity-first language** foregrounds the disability. For example, *a disabled person* is identity-first language (Rahman, 2019).

Although both approaches are valid, context is everything. You must consider how language can preserve a person’s dignity — or reinforce stigma. Many written communications, including this toolkit, use person-first language. However, person-first language does not work for everyone who has a disability. Although some persons with disabilities may see it as less stigmatising, others may feel it does not reflect their experience or how they perceive their disability. When you are connecting with persons with disabilities, ask about their language preferences and how they identify. Consider how to use person-first language as a starting point in your own practice — no matter which language you use to communicate — and take time to ask about, and then use, the preferences of the people you connect with.

Learning Activity

Let’s practise understanding the difference between person-first and identity-first language. Review the expressions below and decide if they are examples of person-first or identity-first language. Mark “Yes” in the appropriate column. The first row has been completed for you.

EXAMPLE	IS THIS PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE?	IS THIS IDENTITY-FIRST LANGUAGE?
Person with autism	Yes	
Wheelchair user		
Person with a visual impairment		
Blind person		
Person with Down syndrome		
Deaf person		
Person who is living with or experiencing a mental health disability		
Person with ADHD		

You can check your answers using the answer key at the end of this module (page 13).

Summary

In this module, we learned about the concept of disability by examining its complexity and broad definition, including the definition used in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We looked at different models that shape how disability is understood and defined, such as the medical model and the social model, and at various lenses that shape our own view of disability, such as visibility and permanence. The module also introduced key terms and explained different types of disability to expand our understanding and highlighted the importance of how we describe disability and persons who have a disability. We put these language concepts into practice in the learning activity.

In Module 2, we will continue to explore how to centre inclusion, look at how intersectionality is important when working with persons with disabilities and learn to apply a lens of disability-inclusive development to our practice.

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Module 1 Learning Activity: Answer Key

EXAMPLE	IS THIS PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE?	IS THIS IDENTITY-FIRST LANGUAGE?
Person with autism	Yes	
Wheelchair user		Yes
Person with a visual impairment	Yes	
Blind person		Yes
Person with Down syndrome	Yes	
Deaf person		Yes
Person who is living with or experiencing a mental health disability	Yes	
Person with ADHD	Yes	



2

Centring Inclusion

Module 2: Centring Inclusion

Introduction

This module focuses on deepening our understanding of inclusion. It explores the importance of recognising and acknowledging the effects of intersectionality when working with persons with disabilities, and provides resources and insights that can help us better understand the experiences of women and girls with disabilities. Disability-inclusive development is presented as a lens we can apply to inform our development and advocacy efforts.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

- Apply a lens of inclusion to disability advocacy
- Identify intersectionality and how it applies to women and girls with disabilities
- Reflect on disability-inclusive development and integrate the associated concepts into disability advocacy

Inclusion

Our values and beliefs about the importance of creating a more equitable world are at the heart of advocacy. **Inclusion** is a foundational principle of advocacy, as it calls for a world in which “all people participate in all aspects of civil, political, social, and economic life” (Christian Blind Mission, 2018, p. 10). “**Disability inclusion** refers to the practices and policies that ensure people with disabilities have equal opportunities to participate in all aspects of life, including employment, education, healthcare, and social activities” (Invisible Condition, n.d.).

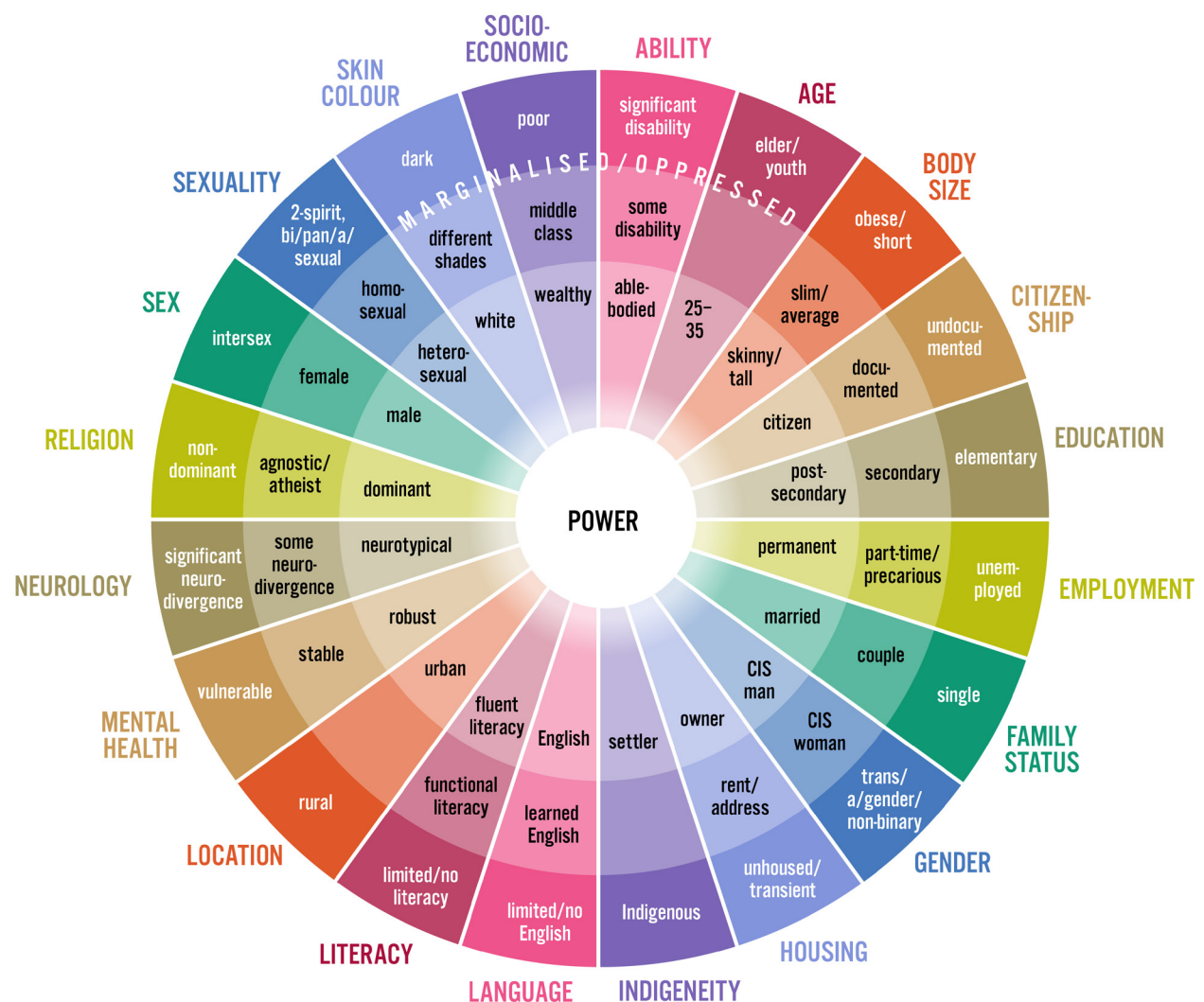
In practical terms, inclusion means removing barriers, changing attitudes or creating spaces where all individuals, including persons with disabilities, can access their full rights. For example, think of a pavement or footpath with a lowered kerb. This design allows people who use wheelchairs, walkers or canes to use the path. It creates inclusion for persons with disabilities. It also helps delivery workers and travellers with luggage move around safely and independently. This simple adjustment **removes barriers**, ensures **equal access** and shows how **inclusive design benefits everyone**.

For disability advocates, inclusion is a guiding north star for decision-making, activities and actions. Applying a lens of inclusion encourages us to pursue actions and activities that support the full participation of all, creating a world in which everyone, including persons with disabilities, is included.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality recognises the complex ways in which lived experience is shaped by identities, relationships and social factors such as age, stage of life, gender, sexual identity, race, religion, education level, disability, geography, cultural identity, indigeneity and socio-economic status. A person can experience different forms of privilege, power and oppression because of their combined identities and existing power structures, such as ableism, racism, colonialism, sexism, etc. (UN Women, 2021, p. 8).

A privilege wheel can help illustrate these concepts of power and oppression. The one pictured below (Figure 2) is by Lauren Bourdages (2021).



Source: Bourdages, 2021

Figure 2. A privilege wheel.

Image description

The image is a diagram of a wheel divided into various sections that represent different aspects of identity. The innermost circle is labelled “Power” and is surrounded by an outer circle divided into three zones. The dividing line between the two outside zones is labelled “Marginalised/Oppressed.” Each segment of the circle addresses a specific category: ability, age, body size, citizenship, education, employment, family status, gender, housing, race, indigeneity, language, literacy, location, mental health, neurology, religion, sex, sexuality, skin colour and socio-economic. Each segment radiates from the centre like a slice of pie to show which identities are associated with power and which are associated with marginalisation.

The identities closest to the centre of the wheel are closer to power, and those that are further away from the centre are closer to marginalisation and oppression. For example, for the factor of ability, “able-bodied” is closest to power, “some disability” is in the middle and “significant disability” is closest to “marginalised/oppressed.” This visual representation reflects the concept of ableism, which views full ability as ideal and disability as negative. It is important to remember that a person’s identity is composed of many of the factors in a privilege wheel, and several of them may be far from the power category.

Intersectionality helps us interpret the ways in which different factors such as age, disability and gender overlap and influence experiences of being marginalised and oppressed. Applying a lens of intersectionality allows us to reflect on the many dimensions that shape the life of a person with disability. For example, it can help us understand the ways in which gender and disability intersect and often increase discrimination and inequality.

When we are working towards creating inclusion, we must apply an intersectionality lens to help us understand the many factors that can create barriers and exclusion. The next section explores ways in which gender and disability intersect for women and girls with disabilities.

The Experience of Women and Girls with Disabilities

Globally, about 20 per cent of women live with one or more disabilities (World Bank Group, n.d., *Gender*). World Health Organization data on disability prevalence in lower-income countries show that 22.1 per cent of women reported having a disability, compared to 13.8 per cent of men (World Health Organization, 2011, p. 28). Women and girls who have one or more disabilities often face greater exclusion from society than women and girls who do not, particularly in areas such as education, employment and personal autonomy (Global Disability Summit, 2025). For example, only 20 per cent of women and girls with disabilities are employed. In contrast, 35 per cent of men with disabilities and 30 per cent of women without disabilities are employed (Browne, 2017). Women with disabilities are extremely vulnerable to gender-based violence, including physical, psychological and economic forms of violence (World Bank Group, 2019). It is estimated that women with disabilities are two to three times more likely to experience violence

compared to women overall (UN Women, n.d.). These disparities highlight how gender and disability intersect to deepen inequality. If we are to create inclusion for women and girls with disabilities, we need to examine the compounding effects of gender and disability and create programmes and advocacy efforts that tackle these systemic barriers.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Explore the resources below to learn more about women and girls with disabilities' experiences of exclusion.

- **Disability Data Hub: Gender:** World Bank data relating to disability.
- **Gender Equality, Climate Change and Persons with Disabilities Analysis:** An overview of gender, climate and disabilities in the countries of focus of the Commonwealth of Learning Empowering Women and Girls project.
- **Let Me Decide and Thrive: Global Discrimination and Exclusion of Girls and Young Women with Disabilities:** A detailed report from Plan International about experiences of exclusion among girls and women with disabilities.

Disability-Inclusive Development

Disability-inclusive development offers a lens to consider disability meaningfully in international development policy and programmes. Development involves exploring and using various mechanisms to improve the economic and social livelihoods of individuals in a sustainable way, with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainability being key development goals. Disability-inclusive development emphasises that persons with disabilities must be recognised as equal members of society with the same rights as persons without disability. It also calls for persons with disabilities to be equally and actively engaged in all stages of development processes. This approach ensures that persons with disabilities are at the table to represent their own voices and can participate in and benefit from development efforts such as inclusive education, health services, access to employment and social protection (Division for Social Policy Development et al., 2017). As practitioners, applying a lens of disability-inclusive development can help us to work effectively with persons with disabilities and to design and run better community programmes, development initiatives and more.

Learning Activity

Let's connect the concepts of inclusion and disability-inclusive development.

First, watch the TEDx Talk *Why It Is Time to Make Inclusive Development Inclusive* by Charlotte McClain-Nhlapo.

After you have watched the video, read the question below. Take some time to think about it before you write your response. Consider writing your thoughts in a Word document or on paper before you write your final response.

McClain-Nhlapo shares five building blocks for inclusion: strong legislative frameworks, inclusive and accessible spaces, reliable data and research, shifting social norms, and amplifying the voices of persons with disabilities. What is one way these building blocks can be applied to development or advocacy initiatives, such as community programmes or advocacy work, you have encountered or worked on?

Why These Concepts Matter

The concepts of inclusion, intersectionality and disability-inclusive development can help ground our efforts to support, advocate for and partner with persons with disabilities. In the TEDx Talk, McClain-Nhlapo highlights that exclusion is rarely about a person's disability itself. Instead, it stems from systems and structures that were not designed with diversity in mind. This is where inclusion and intersectionality come into play. As we develop our role as advocates for disability rights, we must begin placing inclusion and intersectionality at the centre of our programmes, advocacy efforts and decisions to ensure everyone is part of the change. McClain-Nhlapo's five building blocks offer tangible ways to create and maintain inclusive development programmes and advocacy efforts. You will find direct and indirect references to them throughout this toolkit.

Summary

In this module, we learned about various lenses and concepts we can apply in our work as advocates in the disability rights space. In particular, we learned about the concept of inclusion and the importance of creating a society in which all persons can participate fully. We then learned about intersectionality and explored the importance of reflecting on the ways gender and disability intersect to create additional barriers to inclusion for women and girls with disabilities. Finally, we learned about the concept of disability-inclusive development and completed a learning activity to connect these topics with our personal experience as practitioners.

The next module looks in more depth at one of the core building blocks for inclusive development highlighted in the TEDx Talk: legislative frameworks. It presents an overview of current global frameworks on disability rights and national-level frameworks in the countries of focus of the Empowering Women and Girls project.

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3

**Disability
Rights**

Module 3: Disability Rights

Introduction

Legal frameworks, laws, policies and strategies play an important role in defining disability and advancing inclusion. Legal frameworks in the context of disability are structures that promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities, advance change and act as building blocks for a more inclusive society. Laws establish a system of rules that set out expectations and behaviours. Policies and strategies interconnect by promoting commitments or advancements to these legal rights. When they are all combined, they can create a system that advances rights for persons with disabilities.

This module explores global legal frameworks and strategies that promote disability rights. It contains examples of resources and tools you can use to explore the national-level legal frameworks of the countries of focus for the Empowering Women and Girls project.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

- Identify important global laws, frameworks and policies that advance rights for persons with disabilities
- Analyse national policies, laws and frameworks in the Empowering Women and Girls project countries of focus

Global Frameworks

The United Nations has a long history of introducing policies, declarations and frameworks to advance the fundamental rights of persons with disabilities. For example, it proclaimed 1981 the International Year of Disabled Persons; and in 1982, it announced that 1983–1992 would be the Decade of Disabled Persons. In the 1990s, it introduced the [Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities](#), which provided guidelines for policymaking in this space (United Nations, n.d.).



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [70 Years of Development in 70 Seconds: Disability](#): A short video about the history of UN efforts to promote the rights of persons with disabilities.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

A significant milestone was reached in 2006 when the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) was adopted. This international treaty promotes, protects and enshrines core human rights and fundamental freedoms for all persons with disabilities, and makes clear that persons with disabilities have the same human rights as persons without disabilities, as established in the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#). Its core principles are respect for dignity, non-

discrimination, full and effective participation, respect for differences and acceptance, equality of opportunity, accessibility, equality between men and women, and respect for the rights of children with disabilities. To date, 193 countries have ratified it (United Nations, n.d.a).

The convention also acknowledges that persons with disabilities face barriers and discrimination that limit their fundamental rights. In Article 2, it defines discrimination based on disability as

distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. (United Nations, 2006, Article 2)

It emphasises the right to access to education, health, work, justice and participation in community and political life, and the right to live independently with full inclusion in society for all persons with disabilities.

Article 6 of the convention specifically highlights women and girls with disabilities. It acknowledges that women and girls with disabilities are likely to experience multiple discriminations, and that there is a need for structures and systems that support all women and girls, including those with disabilities. This connects to the lenses of intersectionality and inclusion we learned about in Module 2 by calling for specific strategies and measures to support the unique lived experiences of women and girls with disabilities.

Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Established in 2015, the [SDGs](#) are 17 global goals adopted by the United Nations. This universal framework provides a way to measure and track progress towards the achievement of a more prosperous, peaceful world for all individuals. Several of the SDGs have specific outcomes and targets to support persons with disabilities. Table 2 summarises how the SDGs promote disability rights and inclusion.

Table 2. The Sustainable Development Goals and disability rights

SDG ICON	SDG TITLE AND OFFICIAL DESCRIPTION	HOW DOES THIS SDG PROMOTE DISABILITY RIGHTS AND INCLUSION?
	<p>SDG 1. No Poverty End poverty in all its forms everywhere.</p>	<p>Persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected by poverty compared to those without disabilities (United Nations, 2017). Efforts to end poverty for all must address the social and structural barriers that limit economic inclusion for persons with disabilities. This SDG includes targets that focus on reducing poverty for all individuals. Target 1.3.1, which examines the proportion of the population covered by social protection systems, specifically highlights persons with disabilities as a subset to be considered.</p>
	<p>SDG 4. Quality Education Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.</p>	<p>Target 4.5 of this SDG calls for the elimination of gender disparities and for equal access to all levels of education and vocational training, including for persons with disabilities. It also calls for child-, disability- and gender-sensitive educational facilities (4a).</p>
	<p>SDG 8. Decent Work and Economic Growth Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.</p>	<p>This SDG focuses on inclusive employment opportunities. It has a specific target (8.5) that looks to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including those with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.</p>
	<p>SDG 10. Reduced Inequalities Reduce inequality within and among countries.</p>	<p>SDG 10 provides an important link to intersectionality, highlighting the way different lived experiences connect to inequality. Target 10.2 calls for social, economic and political inclusion for all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status, and for universal empowerment.</p>
	<p>SDG 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.</p>	<p>Persons with disabilities face many barriers to fully accessing their lived environment. This SDG calls for initiatives to promote accessibility. Target 11.2 calls for access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, including persons with disabilities. Target 11.7 calls for universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible green and public spaces, including for persons with disabilities.</p>
	<p>SDG 16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.</p>	<p>This SDG highlights important actions to facilitate including and working with persons with disabilities in governance and decision-making. Specifically, Target 16.7 calls for responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels, and highlights that a portion of decision-making roles should be filled by persons with disabilities. It also has a target to enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development that will affirm the fundamental rights of persons with disabilities.</p>



SDG 17. Partnerships for the Goals

Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

This SDG highlights important grounding work for better understanding intersectionality through data. Specifically, Target 17.8 calls for enhanced capacity-building support for developing countries to increase the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by dimensions such as age, race, ethnicity and disability. Disability-disaggregated data are often not readily available, which can make it challenging for policymakers and governments to support inclusion.

Other Global-Level Activities and Policies

Global bodies such as the United Nations and World Health Organization play an ongoing leading role in supporting disability inclusion on the global stage. They focus on promoting equal rights, accessibility and participation for persons with disabilities in all areas of life. Overall, the global community has developed policies, strategies, connection points, events and activities to expand and strengthen inclusion.

You can find out about some of these key activities by reviewing the resources below.

POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

- **International Principles and Guidelines on Access to Justice for Persons with Disabilities:** This United Nations report outlines recommendations and protocols to ensure persons with disability have access to justice systems.
- **UN Disability Inclusion Strategy:** Launched in 2019, this plan provides concrete actions to support disability inclusion in the UN's work. It is built on four pillars: leadership, strategic planning and management; inclusiveness; programming; and organisational culture.
- **World Health Organization Policy on Disability:** Published in 2021, this policy outlines strategic goals to make the World Health Organization more inclusive. Its four core areas of focus are the same as the pillars of the UN's disability inclusion strategy: leadership, strategic planning and management; inclusiveness; programming; and organisational culture.

MEMBER STATES, COMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS

- **UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD):** A body of independent subject experts who monitor the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- **World Health Organization Disability Health Equity Initiative:** Launched in 2025 as an action item promoted at the Global Disability Summit, this is a global network whose aim is to close the health gaps between persons with disabilities and the broader population. Applications to join the network are scheduled to open in 2026.

EVENTS

- **Global Disability Summit:** Hosted every three years, this summit brings together stakeholders from around the world to promote and encourage disability inclusion. The **most recent one was in 2025**.
- **International Day of Persons with Disabilities:** Observed annually on 3 December, this day promotes awareness of disability rights, encourages advocacy in this area and provides a space where voices can be heard.

PUBLICATIONS

- **World Health Organization/World Bank, World Report on Disability:** The first world report on health outcomes and disability was published in 2011.
- **UN, Disability and Development Report 2024:** The 2024 flagship report notes that persons with disabilities are not benefiting from the same progress towards achieving the SDGs as persons without disabilities.

Regional and National Frameworks on Disability Rights

To further understand disability rights, we must understand the regional and national frameworks that entrench them. Individual regions often have an interwoven framework of laws, policies and strategies that provide protections and direction for disability inclusion.

Laws establish a system of rules that set out expectations and behaviours. Policies and strategies interconnect by promoting commitments or advancements to those legal rights (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UN ESCAP], 2022).

When we understand the complex ecosystem in which rights for persons with disabilities are being advanced and upheld, we can use it for guidance and support when we are advocating for disability rights and inclusion. Reviewing the existing laws and frameworks that apply in our context can help us see where there are gaps in protections and rights for persons with disabilities.

Research the strategies, laws and frameworks on disability rights for the regions and countries of focus of the Empowering Women and Girls project in the list of additional resources below.

 **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES****Africa**

- African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1981
- Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa, 2018
- The African Model Law on Disability, 2019
- Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Citizens to Social Protection and Social Security, 2022

Malawi

- National Policy on Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, 2006
- National Disability Mainstreaming Strategy and Implementation Plan (NDMS&IP), 2018–2023
- Persons with Disabilities Act, 2024 and Booklet for Persons with Disabilities Act

Mozambique

- Constitution of Mozambique (Articles 15, 16 37, 124, 125), 2004
- Plano Nacional da Área da Deficiência —PNAD II 2012–2019 (National Action Plan, 2012–2019)
- Law on the Protection and Respect for the Fundamental Rights and Freedoms of People with Disabilities, 2024

Asia

- Incheon Strategy, 2012
- Jakarta Declaration on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2023–2032

Bangladesh

- Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013
- Persons with Neurodevelopmental Disabilities Protection Trust Act, 2013
- National Strategy on Neurodevelopmental Disorders, 2016–2021
- Rehabilitation Council Act, 2018

Pakistan

- Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Ordinance 1981 and Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Amendment Act, 2015
- National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2002
- Accessibility Code of Pakistan, 2006
- National Plan of Action to Implement the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2006
- ICT Rights of Persons with Disability Act, 2020

Sri Lanka

- Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 1996
- Ministry of Social Welfare, National Policy on Disability for Sri Lanka, 2003
- Disabled Persons (Accessibility) Regulations No. 1, 2006

(Adapted from Cabinet Division and General Economics Division [GED] of Bangladesh Planning Commission, 2024; Division for Social Policy Development, 2017; Global Disability Fund [GDF] Technical Secretariat, 2025; STEP [Special Talent Exchange Program], 2017)

Learning Activity

To help you better understand disability rights frameworks at a national level, review three national-level resources that are relevant to your context, using the resources in the list above. As you review the documents, reflect on the following questions in the context of each law/policy you review. Consider writing your reflections in a Word document or on paper before you write your actual response.

- What disability rights are enshrined in this law/policy?
- How does this law/policy support persons with disabilities in your context?
- What gaps, if any, are there in this law/policy?
- Where could the rights of persons with disabilities be strengthened in your context?

Why Laws Matter: Disability Mainstreaming

Now that we have solidified our understanding of disability rights, it is time to reflect on how our future advocacy work can affirm the rights of persons with disabilities. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) defines **disability mainstreaming** as “the process of adjusting laws, policies, services and programmes so they are fully accessible for and inclusive of persons with disabilities” (2022, p. 25). Disability mainstreaming can help move efforts from policy statements to concrete actions by promoting inclusion and accessibility in new initiatives and calling for actions and steps to reduce barriers that exclude persons with disabilities from full social participation (Jones & Webster, 2006). We must therefore reflect on how we can be champions of disability mainstreaming.

Summary

In this module we explored some of the global and national frameworks that support the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities. We looked at the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, which is a core global blueprint for enshrining the fundamental rights of persons with disabilities, and the **SDGs** and how they support inclusive development for all, including persons with disabilities. We then looked at **national policies and frameworks** on disability, and used a learning activity to explore how these can connect with our work. Finally, we were introduced to the concept of disability mainstreaming, which calls for us to take action and make laws, policies, services and programmes more inclusive.

The next module will expand our knowledge and understanding of the building blocks of inclusion. It introduces the advocacy cycle and connects it with the core block of amplifying the voices of persons with disabilities.

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4

Planning for Advocacy in Partnership with Persons with Disabilities

Module 4: Planning for Advocacy in Partnership with Persons with Disabilities

Introduction

Persons with disabilities face barriers, including stigma, to participating fully in society — and the advocacy work designed to support them can also create barriers and stigma.

This module introduces the concept of Nothing About Us Without Us to highlight the importance of amplifying the voices of persons with disabilities in advocacy work. It explains the advocacy cycle and its core steps and underlines the importance of centring persons with disabilities as active agents in advocacy work. It also highlights barriers to participation experienced by persons with disabilities that perpetuate cycles of exclusion in advocacy work. It ends with a selection of tips to guide us through our next steps in the advocacy cycle.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

- Apply frameworks that centre persons with disabilities as active agents in advocacy efforts
- Integrate concepts of inclusion into the advocacy cycle
- Identify barriers to participation faced by persons with disabilities
- Reflect on and explain how to be an inclusive advocate

Nothing About Us Without Us

Centring the voices of persons with disabilities is a crucial building block in the context of taking practical action for advocacy.

The phrase “Nothing About Us Without Us” was adopted by disability rights activists in the early 1990s to describe a core pillar of advocacy work (Bath & Wilson, 2025). It is a guiding principle for advocacy action, as it calls for persons with disabilities to be consulted, engaged and empowered in decision-making around policies, programmes and legislation. It is rooted in fostering the agency of persons with disabilities and captures the need to work in partnership with persons with disabilities.

Nothing About Us Without Us is paramount to advocacy work. If you think back to the disability-related concepts you learned about earlier, you will realise that the inclusion of persons with disabilities is central to all of them. Persons with disabilities must be part of the design, delivery and evaluation of community programmes and advocacy initiatives, including both initiatives tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities and initiatives for a broader population.

Advocacy and the Advocacy Cycle

Advocacy is a “set of coordinated activities to influence policies and practices, based on reliable and documented evidence, aimed at a defined audience of decision makers” (Rutgers, 2021). At its core, advocacy is about change — identifying improvements, gathering influence and implementing effective actions. In practice, it can cover a variety of activities such as awareness-raising campaigns, working with law makers and government bodies to change policies and sharing research and knowledge.

Creating a strategy and defining a specific approach to advocacy work can help us navigate complex issues and ensure our advocacy efforts are successful. The advocacy cycle offers a helpful set of steps we can follow. We must keep the principles of Nothing About Us Without Us at the heart of the entire cycle so that persons with disabilities are involved every step of the way.

Figure 3, below, shows the advocacy cycle.



Figure 3. The advocacy cycle.

Image description

The advocacy cycle steps, starting from the centre top and moving clockwise, are:
1. Reflect on your personal role; 2. Engage with persons with disabilities; 3. Understand the core challenge; 4. Set an advocacy goal; 5. Map networks and partners; 6. Build partnerships and coalitions; 7. Develop an action plan; 8. Implement the action plan; 9. Monitor, evaluate and learn. The circles overlap with each other to show that the actions of each step can overlap and that advocacy is an ongoing process.

The Steps of the Advocacy Cycle

We will now look at each step of the advocacy cycle and how to centre the voices of persons with disabilities throughout the cycle. As you embark on your own advocacy cycle, come back to this section as often as you need to.

STEP 1. REFLECT ON YOUR PERSONAL ROLE

Consider how you can centre and amplify the voices of the people whom you aim to help with your advocacy work. Identify where unconscious bias about disability may influence your behaviours. Reflect on your own personal learning journey and note what new topics or skills you want to learn. Commit to supporting accessibility and inclusion throughout the cycle.

STEP 2. ENGAGE WITH PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ensure that persons with disabilities are part of the advocacy cycle right from the very beginning. Build connections and trust with persons with disabilities. Design strategies to ensure they will be part of the advocacy cycle every step of the way. Create advisory structures, processes and places that allow persons with disabilities to share their lived experience and ideas for change, have influence and make decisions throughout the cycle.

STEP 3. UNDERSTAND THE CORE CHALLENGE

Take time to properly understand the core challenge at hand. Work with and learn from those who are experiencing the challenge directly, particularly persons with disabilities, and individuals in their networks. Use disability-disaggregated data as much as possible to understand the core challenge.

STEP 4. SET AN ADVOCACY GOAL

Co-create a goal for the advocacy work with persons with disabilities so that it is relevant and reflects real-life needs.

STEP 5. MAP NETWORKS AND PARTNERS

Take time to map out the ecosystem. This can include potential partners and collaborators who can work with you to achieve your advocacy goal, and stakeholders or groups that may need to be influenced. Be sure to engage directly with persons with disabilities to help you identify potential networks and foster partnerships.

STEP 6. BUILD PARTNERSHIPS AND COALITIONS

Advocacy means bringing more than one voice to the table. Use your network mapping to build a coalition of actors who support your advocacy goal. These partnerships should bring capacity, skills and influence to help you achieve your advocacy goal, and you should continue to centre and work with persons with disabilities.

STEP 7. DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN

Create an action plan in partnership with persons with disabilities and your other key stakeholders. Outline key activities, messages and ideas to create change and help you achieve your advocacy goal. Be sure to consult and partner with persons with disabilities to make these activities accessible and inclusive.

STEP 8. IMPLEMENT THE ACTION PLAN

Start to implement your action plan with persons with disabilities and your partners. Your activities at this point could include doing research, creating publications or running social media or lobbying campaigns. Follow best practices on how to create inclusive, accessible activities.

STEP 9. MONITOR, EVALUATE AND LEARN

As you implement your action plan, take time to understand what is working and what is not working. Plan to capture data to understand and measure change. Gather feedback directly from persons with disabilities on the action plan activities. Use the feedback to reflect, learn and adapt as needed. (Adapted from IBIS, n.d.; Make Way, 2024.)

Understanding Barriers to Participation for Persons with Disabilities

There may be times when advocacy work reinforces experiences of exclusion instead of addressing them. Understanding the barriers to participation that persons with disabilities routinely encounter is an important first step in identifying potential patterns of exclusion in the advocacy cycle. As we progress through the advocacy cycle, we need to plan and implement supports to overcome these barriers. Table 3 summarises some of the different types of barriers persons with disabilities may encounter.

Table 3. Barriers to participation

TYPE OF BARRIER	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
Attitudinal	Barriers that are rooted in perceptions, biases and harmful stereotypes relating to disability. They include stigma, prejudice and discrimination.	<p>A community that views disability as something to be ashamed of and does not encourage persons with disabilities to be seen in public.</p> <p>A support worker in a community programme uses words that express pity for a person with disabilities.</p> <p>A fellow programme participant is afraid to interact with a person with disabilities.</p>
Communication and information	Barriers that prevent someone from accessing information in physical and digital formats. They include barriers to accessing online spaces such as the Internet or technology devices.	<p>A website that does not meet accessibility standards and cannot be understood by a person using a screen reader.</p> <p>A government agency that provides only physical, written communications, such as pamphlets.</p> <p>A public lecture with no ASL interpretation.</p>
Institutional	System-wide barriers such as organisational policies, procedures or practices that exclude or prevent full participation in the legal system or education and health services, for example.	<p>A learning facility with policies that exclude children with disabilities from participating in the mainstream classroom.</p> <p>An employer that does not have policies for reasonable accommodation in the workplace.</p> <p>A hospital with medical equipment, such as an X-ray machine, that is designed for use only by a fully abled person.</p>
Physical	Physical barriers in the lived environment.	<p>A person using a wheelchair cannot access public transport to attend a conference.</p> <p>Washrooms in a school do not have accessible stalls, grab bars or accessible doors.</p> <p>A hospital has emergency alarms that use flashing lights only, making them inaccessible to persons with visual impairments.</p>
Trust and social	Trust and social barriers arise when negative past experiences, stigma or fear of discrimination affect the confidence of persons with disabilities and their families in engaging with community life.	<p>A parent decides to home-school their child to protect them from harm or stigma.</p> <p>A previous experience of backlash from a community member dissuades a person with a disability from attending a local rights march.</p>

Source: Adapted from Centre for Human Rights Equity & Diversity, n.d.; Christian Blind Mission, 2025.

It is crucial to identify where these barriers may exist in the advocacy cycle and advocacy activities. In Module 7, we will learn how to create inclusive advocacy activities and address these barriers.

The Role of Advocates

As we look to ensure our work centres persons with disabilities, we must reflect on the personal role we play in creating change. For example, we can play an active role in identifying barriers to participation and taking steps to create a more inclusive experience for persons with disabilities who engage with our organisation. When we recognise that inclusion is not only a collective effort but also a personal commitment, we are better equipped to challenge bias, champion accessibility and support the participation of persons with disabilities during every step of the advocacy cycle.

Tips for Being an Effective Advocate for Disability, Inclusion and Accessibility

The list below contains some tips to help you in your work as an advocate for disability, inclusion and accessibility.

- **Reflect on your personal values and how they connect to what you are advocating for.** Take time to reflect on the core values that are important to you — equity, collaboration, agency and belonging, for example — and how they connect with your disability advocacy work. Doing this can change how you show up as an ally and advocate.
- **Take time to learn about and acknowledge the many lived experiences of disability.** Understand that disability is a broad range of experiences. Find ways to learn about lived experience and recognise how intersectionality can shape a person's experience.
- **Treat persons with disabilities as a person first.** Avoid pity, charity or attitudes that view persons with disabilities as individuals who need to be taken care of.
- **Listen to and trust lived experience.** Be an active listener to persons with disabilities and do not make assumptions about what they need.
- **Reflect on your biases and perceptions.** We all have perceptions about disability, even if we are not aware of them. Reflect on your potential biases about or negative perceptions of disability.
- **Reflect on the language you use to describe disability.** Be sure to keep the concepts of person-first or disability-first language in mind. When you are working with persons with disabilities, be sure to ask about their language preferences. Remember that language changes and people's preferred terms may change over time.
- **Anchor the voices of persons with disabilities in decision-making.** Consider how decisions will be made during the advocacy cycle. Reflect on how you can personally include persons with disabilities in decision-making.

- **Model inclusion in your everyday actions.** Demonstrate inclusive behaviour in meetings, classrooms and community events. For example, ensure everyone has equal speaking time, create accessible materials and foster a sense of belonging.
- **Learn about, plan for and integrate accessibility.** Think about how you can make your advocacy work more accessible. This includes making physical and digital spaces accessible.
- **Use your voice to challenge stigma.** Speak up when you see stigma or ableism in action. Use your voice to raise awareness of stigma and bias around disability.
- **Continue learning and unlearning.** Disability inclusion is an ongoing process. Stay informed about new perspectives, technologies and practices that enhance accessibility and inclusion. (Adapted from Martin, 2021; Office of Disability Services, 2025.)

Learning Activity

Create a personal advocacy commitment. Review the tips above and reflect on what you are currently doing well and want to continue doing. Consider areas you may want to learn more about to improve your advocacy. Write down one to two commitments you can make as you embark on your advocacy journey — for example, taking specific actions, demonstrating inclusive behaviours or learning about a topic in more depth. You can use a word processing programme or pen and paper for this activity.

Summary

In this module we looked at ways to centre persons with disabilities as active agents in advocacy. We learned about **Nothing About Us Without Us**, the disability rights movement principle that calls for persons with disabilities to be directly involved in decision-making around policies, programmes and other factors that affect the societies they are part of. We explored the advocacy cycle, the core steps of the cycle and the importance of centring and working with persons with disabilities throughout the advocacy cycle. We also looked at common types of barriers that lead to persons with disabilities being excluded and how to use our knowledge of them to ensure persons with disabilities are fully included. Finally, we explored tips to help us advocate effectively and created a personal commitment for the journey ahead.

The next module explores Steps 2–4 of the advocacy cycle: engage with persons with disabilities, understand the core challenge and set an advocacy goal.

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5

**Advancing
Advocacy
Through
Meaningful
Engagement**

Module 5: Advancing Advocacy Through Meaningful Engagement

Introduction

Module 4 introduced the advocacy cycle, which outlines steps and actions for successful advocacy work. This module focuses on Steps 2–4 of the advocacy cycle: engage with persons with disabilities, understand the core challenge and set an advocacy goal. It highlights approaches to engaging and seeking advisory input from persons with disabilities to guide the advocacy cycle, and discusses how to leverage disability-disaggregated data and qualitative insights to help inform approaches to addressing the core challenge. It also highlights some tools and activities that can help you create an advocacy goal that centres the voices of persons with disabilities.

Before you begin, look back at the image of the advocacy cycle in Module 4 to refresh your memory of the various steps.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

- Identify methods to centre persons with disabilities from the start of advocacy efforts
- Leverage disability-inclusive data and qualitative approaches to understand core challenges
- Access tools to define an advocacy goal

Step 2: Engage Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities must be part of advocacy work from the outset, and their participation must be empowering and meaningful. Centring and elevating the voices of persons with disabilities will ensure that advocacy work truly tackles the real barriers faced by persons with disabilities and affirms the principle of Nothing About Us Without Us. At this stage in the advocacy journey, it is essential to partner directly with persons with disabilities and create advisory structures that engage them. In this section we will explore strategies to do this.

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND ORGANISATIONS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Before you can even think about seeking input or making requests relating to advocacy work, you must build relationships with persons with disabilities. This can take time, but it is crucial for building trust and understanding.

Building partnerships with **organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs)** can be an excellent way to begin establishing relationships. OPDs are organisations that are led, directed and governed by persons with disabilities who have direct connections with and knowledge of persons with disabilities in their communities (Palmer, 2019). They exist at local, regional and

national levels, and they typically have direct mandates to advocate for disability rights (Christian Blind Mission, 2022b). Building partnerships and connections with these organisations can be key to establishing successful, effective collaborations and developing stakeholders' knowledge about working with persons with disabilities.

Your organisation may already have direct connections with persons with disabilities and their caregivers, family and community members. If so, you may be able to begin establishing direct relationships and creating opportunities for persons with disabilities to engage in the advocacy work ahead. Take time to develop these personal connections, build trust and open the doors for dialogue.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The resources in the list below can help you connect with OPDs, non-profits and allies in the disability rights space at the global level and in the countries of focus of the Empowering Women and Girls project. They are organised by region of interest.

Global

- [Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum Members](#)
- [Disability:IN Global Directory](#)
- [Down Syndrome International](#)
- [Inclusion International](#)
- [International Disability Alliance](#)
- [International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus](#)
- [World Federation of the Deaf](#)
- [World Blind Union](#)
- [World Network of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry](#)
- [World Federation of the Deafblind](#)

Africa

- [African Disability Forum \(ADF\)](#)

Asia

- [ASEAN Disability Forum \(ASEAN-DF\)](#)

Country-Specific

- [Bangladesh Directory of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [Disability Support NGOs in Pakistan](#)
- [Disability Support NGOs and Charities in Sri Lanka](#)
- [Federation of Disability Organizations in Malawi \(FEDOMA\) Directory](#)
- [Forum of Organizations of People with Disabilities Mozambique \(FAMOD\) Directory](#)

CREATE ENGAGEMENT STRUCTURES THAT INCLUDE PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND OPDS

To be a successful, effective advocate, you must create engagement structures that include persons with disabilities and OPDs across the advocacy cycle. These structures and roles should position persons with disabilities to give input, guide decisions and give feedback across the advocacy cycle. For example, you could create inclusion focal points, set up steering committees or working groups that bring together persons with disabilities and OPDs, or create specific advisory roles for persons with disabilities for your organisation or advocacy project.

Keep in mind that OPDs and persons with disabilities may experience barriers to their participation in an advocacy project, and resources may be limited. Be sure to create engagement that builds capacity, rather than being a burden. Remember: Participation among persons with disabilities is not simply a project output. It is a strategic practice to facilitate disability rights advocacy work that places persons with disabilities at its centre (Martire, 2023).

CO-DESIGN THE WORK

When you are building relationships and engagement structures and partnering directly with persons with disabilities and OPDs, it is important to use methods that encourage **co-design**. Co-design is a participatory approach to creating new programmes that draws on principles of human-centred design. A co-design process brings together a diverse group of individuals, including those with lived experience, to tackle a core challenge and create new ideas and solutions together (McKercher, n.d.). Its focus on respecting and valuing lived experience brings it into alignment with the principle of inclusion. When you use co-design methods such as workshops to create new ideas or small pilots to test a potential new solution, you can make your established advisory structures even more impactful. In addition, your engagement structure can shift from simply asking for feedback to actively engaging persons with disabilities and OPDs in the work.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **A Brief Introduction to Co-design:** Summarises the concept of co-design.
- **The Human-Centered Design Toolkit by IDEO:** Provides resources, tools and processes to use for co-design.

ENSURE DECISION-MAKING POWER

As you develop the guiding structures for your advocacy work, you must include decision-making opportunities for OPDs and persons with disabilities. This ensures that all persons at the table are actively shaping and designing advocacy efforts. Co-designing advocacy goals and objectives and having open voting on key decisions are two ways to ensure decision-making is shared. Building in feedback loops with advisory structures through the advocacy cycle can create opportunities for ongoing input and decision-making for persons with disabilities and OPDs.

REDUCE BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

Be sure to keep inclusion and accessibility at the centre of the set-up of your structures and processes so that persons with disabilities and OPDs can participate fully. Think back to the section on barriers to participation in Module 4. Reflect on how we can make persons with disabilities and OPDs feel supported, welcomed and empowered. For example, you could have a budget to provide accessible transportation to meetings or childcare or assistive-technology tools for participants. Consider offering honoraria for persons with disabilities in an advisory role so that their participation does not become a burden for them. Focus on creating a psychological safe space where participants can talk openly and share their personal experience, stigma and bias relating to disabilities do not come into play and everyone is heard.

SHARE STRENGTHS, LEARNINGS AND CAPACITY BUILDING

As we seek to build partnerships and advisory processes with persons with disabilities and OPDs, it is important to understand how our activities can build strategic alignment, skills-sharing and capacity building. Partnering with OPDs may involve a shift to co-shared funding models and resource-sharing to increase capacity (Christian Blind Mission, 2022a). Be sure to ask what skills persons with disabilities want to develop through their participation and look into how advisory opportunities can help them do this. You may be able to set up mentorship opportunities, establish leadership roles or offer training as part of the advocacy cycle.

CASE STUDY: PARTNERING WITH OPDS TO TRANSFORM EMERGENCY RESPONSE MEASURES

Background: The Kenya Red Cross Society took action to mainstream inclusion of persons with disabilities in its humanitarian action initiatives. It engaged initially with local OPDs, a move that resulted in an ongoing engagement process.

Core challenge: Through its engagement with OPDs, the Kenya Red Cross Society heard about core concerns among persons with disabilities during emergencies, including a lack of

information about preparedness and evacuation plans; a lack of accommodation for persons with disabilities in the plans; and poor access to both humanitarian and health services following a crisis.

Key actions: The Kenya Red Cross Society worked to expand its partnerships with OPDs by co-creating programmes and initiatives to address the identified barriers. They worked together to design emergency response measures and conduct needs assessments, and they co-hosted response activities. OPDs were established as focal points and received capacity-building training in advocacy, early warning systems, inclusive evacuation planning and first aid. They were also registered as volunteers on local flood response teams.

Key lessons: This case study highlights that it is essential to engage with OPDs and persons with disabilities for effective advocacy. Creating partnerships with OPDs allowed the Kenya Red Cross to better understand how current flood responses were not meeting the needs of persons with disabilities. Building partnerships with persons with disabilities and developing capacity among them positioned them as active leaders in emergencies. The work moved from engagement to effective programming, with OPDs being consulted and trained and eventually participating as active volunteers on the flood response team. (Adapted from Palmer, 2019.)

Step 3: Understand Core Challenges

The next step in the advocacy cycle is to understand the core challenge that we want to tackle in our advocacy efforts. This could be an overarching issue, such as a lack of accessible education for women and girls, or a more tailored issue, such as a lack of accessible learning materials in classrooms in a local community. Truly understanding the issue at hand by listening to the lived experience of persons with disabilities is crucial, as illustrated by the case study in the section above. The Kenya Red Cross Society was able to better understand existing barriers for persons with disabilities by establishing engagement processes and listening to experiences of challenges in emergency situations. In this section, we look at strategies, tools and resources to help identify core challenges.

ANALYSE DISABILITY-DISAGGREGATED DATA

Disability-disaggregated data are data and indicators that can be analysed by disability status. They can be used to better understand the current lived experience of persons with disabilities and compare the data points with those of other populations, such as persons without disabilities (Disability Data Initiative, 2021). Disability-disaggregated data can help us understand current trends and progress around social indicators such as access to education and healthcare for persons with disabilities.

There are many challenges to collecting and accessing reliable, quality disability-disaggregated data. The lack of emphasis on collecting this type of data means there are very few relevant data sets available. Traditional data collection techniques are not always accessible for persons with

disabilities, which contributes further to exclusion and a lack of data (Gould, 2022). However, where disability-disaggregated data are available, they are an excellent resource to help us understand the experience of persons with disabilities. They may be found in national censuses, government reports, surveys or open data repositories (CBM Global, 2021).



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Global data sets

- [Disability Data Initiative Databases](#)
- [UNESCO World Inequality Database on Education](#)
- [United Nations Disability Statistics](#)
- [World Bank Group Disability Data Hub](#)

National data

- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, [National Survey on Persons with Disabilities \(NSPD\) 2021](#)
- Government of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, [Disability Statistics](#)
- Malawi, [Country Brief from Disability Data Initiative](#)
- Mozambique, [IOM Disability and Inclusion Survey 2022](#)
- Sri Lanka Department of Census and Statistics, [Characteristics of Disabled Persons Census Data](#)

ANALYSE THE ROOT CAUSES OF THE CORE CHALLENGES

Before we can understand the core challenges, we must look at the policies, procedures, funding and social structures — national laws, organisational procedures, etc. — that perpetuate them. As part of this process, you could run workshops with activities designed to help participants reflect on the whole system, using the frameworks and other resources in this toolkit to help people better understand the system.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following frameworks are helpful for analysing and identifying systemic barriers and root causes of core challenges.

- **PESTLE analysis:** A framework for examining the broader Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental factors that influence a system or issue.
- **SWOT analysis:** A framework that can identify an organisation's or initiative's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.
- **TAAP process:** The Transforming Agency, Access, and Power (TAAP) process is an equity-focused approach that analyses how power dynamics shape systems and ensures marginalised groups are centred in decision-making.

USE QUALITATIVE DATA TO UNDERSTAND LIVED EXPERIENCES

Qualitative data can illuminate core challenges and provide robust context and deep insights. Collecting and using qualitative data can involve hearing directly from persons with disabilities, caregivers, community members or practitioners about their lived experience. Consider using participatory research methods such as community consultations, storytelling, focus groups and individual interviews to collect these data.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following tools and resources can help you collect robust qualitative data.

- **Participatory Research Methods:** This web page provides various activities and methods for participatory research.
- **Disability Inclusive Research: What Is It and How Can We Do It?:** Recommendations on how to conduct research in a more inclusive way.
- **Five Tips for Focus Groups for People Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision:** Best practices for creating inclusive focus groups for persons with vision impairments.
- **Making Focus Groups Accessible and Inclusive for People with Communication Disabilities: A Research Note:** Best practices for creating inclusive focus groups for persons with communication disabilities.

SYNTHESISE DATA TO DESCRIBE THE CORE CHALLENGE

Once you have data and information about a core challenge, it can be helpful to prepare a summary report or guiding document that describes the challenge. Be sure to review and refine it with the advisory structures you have put in place. Consider sharing it with the individuals you consulted to check that it accurately captures the core challenges they described. Once the core challenge has been defined, it will be used to set an advocacy goal as part of the next step of the advocacy cycle.

Step 4: Set an Advocacy Goal

Once the core challenge has been established, the next step is to collaborate with persons with disabilities to co-create a clear advocacy goal to address it. It is important to use the established advisory structures when you do this.

When you are creating your advocacy goal, use the **SMART framework**: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound. This can help you establish a goal that balances deep change with realistic expectations. When you are setting the goal, ensure it is relevant to the core challenge and feels achievable. Start to work out how you will measure your progress towards achieving it — identify potential key change actions to help you achieve the goal and ensure they have clear time definitions. Remember: You can redefine the goal based on feedback and other inputs. Treat it as a living document to guide you through the advocacy cycle.

Learning Activity

Use the guiding instructions below to identify a core challenge and create an advocacy goal for your context. You could use the questions to guide a working session with your advisory structure, colleagues and/or partners.

- What is a core challenge experienced by persons with disabilities in your context?
- Using qualitative and quantitative data, write a short definition (approximately 200 words) of it.
- What goal do you want to achieve through your advocacy efforts?
- Define an advocacy goal that seeks to address the core challenge. In one or two sentences, describe the changes you want to see that would advance or improve the experiences of individuals, community and society related to your core challenge. Think through key objectives that would support this goal. Describe each action item in one to two sentences, ensuring it is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound.
- Create the guiding document. You could create it as a Word document or PowerPoint file you can save so that you and your partners can refer to it throughout the advocacy cycle. Capture the responses to each of the questions above, summarise the core challenge and describe the advocacy goal in one or two sentences. List as many key objectives that support the advocacy goal as possible, using one or two sentences for each one. Be sure to outline potential start and end dates and measures of success.

Summary

In this module we looked in more detail at Steps 2–4 of the advocacy cycle, with a focus on engaging persons with disabilities as key partners in advocacy. We looked at strategies for building partnerships and advisory processes with persons with disabilities and OPDs to help guide an advocacy initiative. The module provided recommendations on how to identify core challenges and develop a clear, actionable advocacy goal. The importance of partnering with persons with disabilities, using co-creation and participatory methods to build inclusive and collaborative engagement, is emphasised throughout the module.

The next module looks in more detail at Steps 5–7 of the advocacy cycle: map networks and partners, build partnerships and coalitions and develop an action plan.

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6

Building Partnerships and Coalitions for Action

Module 6: Building Partnerships and Coalitions for Action

Introduction

Module 4 introduced the advocacy cycle, which outlines steps for successful advocacy work. Module 5 explained Steps 2–4 in more detail. This module looks in more detail at Steps 5–7 of the advocacy cycle: map networks and partners, build partnerships and coalitions and develop an action plan. These steps focus on identifying networks and partners and building deeper partnerships to bring about change and further amplify the voices of persons with disabilities. The module includes a case study that shows how partnerships can foster change and explains action planning, with some ideas for activities and strategies for an advocacy action plan.

Before you begin, look back at the image of the advocacy cycle in Module 4 to refresh your memory of the various steps.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

- Map stakeholders and networks to support advocacy efforts
- Identify strategies for building partnerships and coalitions for change
- Develop a tangible action plan with activities that support the established advocacy goal

Step 5: Map Networks and Partners

Once we have worked in partnership with persons with disabilities to build advisory structures, define our core challenge and set an advocacy goal, the next step is to build additional networks and partnerships to help us achieve our goal. Depending on the advocacy goal, there may be natural champions of change to partner with. There will likely be important actors you hope to convince to come on board to support your cause. Mapping can help you identify stakeholders who would bring skills, expertise and capacity to the initiative. It can also help you identify who has influence and power and who may need to be educated about the cause or persuaded that it is worth supporting. The list below describes some actors you could consider and their potential value as partners:

- **Business partners:** Private-sector and industry partners influence systems such as employment, health, technology and service delivery. Their engagement can make it possible to introduce inclusive practices in hiring or services. They can also drive and support change at an organisational level.
- **Community members:** Broader community actors, such as elders, local leaders or community groups, can drive changes in social norms, reduce stigma, create more inclusive environments and explain local contexts.

- **Government partners:** Government agencies play a central role in shaping policy, allocating resources, enforcing rights and supporting the development of social protection programmes. They are key partners for improving services, changing social protection structures and offering system-level insights.
- **Individual advocates or self-advocates:** Persons with disabilities bring essential lived experience and should be centred as leaders in advocacy. At this stage of the advocacy cycle, it can be helpful to identify networks of self-advocates who can support storytelling and change efforts.
- **Law makers and legislators:** These actors have the authority to introduce, amend and pass laws that protect and advance disability rights. Building relationships with them can help drive change focused on legal rights.
- **Media partners:** The media can amplify advocacy messages, shift public perceptions and spotlight stories that challenge bias and stigma. Media partners can help support communication and message-sharing initiatives.
- **Non-profits:** Non-profit organisations can bring technical expertise, community networks and an intersectional understanding of barriers. At this stage of the advocacy cycle, you may have identified OPDs already, but taking the time to bring together an intersectional group of non-profits can significantly enhance advocacy efforts. This would involve exploring umbrella organisations at the global and national levels and local NGOs that can provide an intersectional lens and range of skills.
- **Sector partners:** Government or public sector agencies, public actors and organisations can shape the employment, health, technology and service delivery sectors. They can also help drive change in programmes and initiatives.
- **Parents, family members and caregivers:** These individuals have direct, lived insight into the daily realities of disability and can be powerful champions for change. Their personal stories can help highlight the impact of stigma and systemic gaps that enforce and increase barriers to participation among persons with disabilities.

Step 6: Build Partnerships and Coalitions

No single organisation or individual can drive deep change alone, so partnerships are a key component of effective advocacy. When advocates work together, they can pool their knowledge, resources and skills, which ultimately allows them to achieve a stronger impact.

Partnerships also help you apply a lens of intersectionality by bringing to the table diverse voices that understand the complexities of the core challenge and can offer varying perspectives on it. By building partnerships, you can also build legitimacy and buy-in for community advocacy efforts and help attract more attention or direct more eyes to the cause.

You can choose from a variety of structures for building these partner networks — for example, you could create a coalition, alliance, task force or working group, or you could plan joint activities. Whatever format you use, make sure there is a strong focus on collaboration and communication and that the voices of persons with disabilities are at the centre of all your efforts.

The following case study describes a multi-year advocacy initiative that built an extended alliance of OPDs and partnerships with government and businesses to drive change.

CASE STUDY: PARTNERING IN PAKISTAN FOR THE RATIFICATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (UNCRPD)

Background: In 2007, the UNCRPD was opened to countries for signature and ratification. Pakistan signed the UNCRPD in 2008 with a commitment to ratify the treaty, but there were barriers to the ratification process.

Core challenge: Many barriers hindered the ratification of the convention in Pakistan. They included limited knowledge and awareness of the convention among policymakers, minimal engagement of persons with disabilities and OPDs in the national-level dialogue on disability rights and prevailing social beliefs about disability that favoured the charitable model of disability rather than the human rights model. NGOs in Pakistan were keen to collaborate in their efforts to advocate for ratification of the convention.

Key actions: In Pakistan in 2009, national NGOs, Sightsavers and STEP collaborated with the Pakistan Ministry of Special Education and Telenor, a business partner, to host a leadership conference that involved 50 OPDs and key speakers. One of the key takeaways from this conference was a formal call from the OPDs for the ratification of the UNCRPD. In 2010, Sightsavers organised a trip to Thailand for government officials and STEP leaders to connect with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) and the Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability (APCD) to learn about disability mainstreaming. These meetings resulted in a plan to scale the OPD leadership conference model to a regional level.

In 2010, Pakistan hosted a regional conference that brought together government representatives, OPDs and NGO stakeholders from many South Asian countries. This conference led to the launch of the South Asia Disability Forum and reinforced a focus on inclusion across the region. That same year, the UN ESCAP hosted a regional committee on inclusion. Representatives from Sightsavers and STEP were part of the Pakistani delegation. The idea for a media campaign, Make the Right Real, was proposed, and the Pakistani delegation asked that Pakistan be the first country to launch it. In 2011, STEP and Sightsavers partnered with the national network of OPDs to launch Make the Right Real. Pakistan's cabinet called for the formal ratification of the convention, which took place in June 2011.

Key lessons: This case study highlights the success of a multi-year advocacy initiative that relied heavily on building partnerships and a strong coalition of OPDs to turn ideas into action. In the early stages, the lead NGOs connected with government and business partners for support with hosting a conference. The conference brought together OPDs from across the country, elevating the voices of persons with disabilities and paving the way for strong collaboration. This work helped to mobilise OPDs, build capacity among them and create a coalition of OPDs, which ultimately made it possible to run a national-level advocacy campaign. (Adapted from Gillani et al., 2017, p. 7.)

Learning Activity

Start planning for partners and coalitions. Using the knowledge and tools shared above, research potential partners and coalitions that could form a network to support your advocacy efforts. Reflect on your current connection to these potential partners and their expertise. Use the guiding instructions below to help you decide how you want to engage with them.

- Who can support you in your advocacy goal? What skills and expertise do they bring that you need? Make a list of potential partners who could support your advocacy efforts, and note their relevant skills and expertise.
- What partnerships should you develop? How should you engage potential partners? Use the chart below (labelled Table 4) to help you reflect on each potential partner, their expertise and the strength of your connection to them and how best to engage them.

Table 4. Assessing potential partner strengths

QUADRANT	WHAT THEY BRING	WHAT THEY NEED	HOW TO ENGAGE
Low expertise and close connection	Trust, motivation to help, personal interest	Basic information, simple tools, clear roles	Provide light training; involve in consultations, storytelling and community outreach
High expertise and close connection	Strong technical skills and a trusted relationship	Strategic collaboration opportunities	Co-design strategies, share leadership roles, co-create briefs, trainings or advocacy pieces
Low expertise and no connection	Potential new allies, fresh perspectives	Relationship-building, orientation on the issue	Begin with introductory meetings, offer simple materials, test small pilot tasks
High expertise and no connection	Technical depth, influence, credibility	Clear value proposition, trust-building	Approach with a specific ask, propose small joint activities, expand once aligned

Start planning to engage the partners. Build out your partnership with key contacts and names, and when you are ready to take the next step, start connecting with them.

Step 7: Develop an Action Plan

The next step in the advocacy cycle is to develop an action plan. Work in partnership with persons with disabilities and leverage the partnerships and coalitions you have built. It is important to co-design the action plan so that everyone is on the same level and capacity and skills are used effectively.

An action plan includes specific activities, outputs and timelines that will help drive the advocacy change you wish to see. You may find it helpful to create a **theory of change** to link the actions back to your original advocacy goal. A good action plan will have the following details:

- Defined advocacy goal
- Key objectives that support the goal
- A clear description of the activities that will help achieve each objective
- An identified owner, start date and end date, and resources needed to complete each activity
- Measurements to monitor and evaluate the success of each activity

Take time to develop your action plan. Think carefully about the different activities you will conduct to create change and how you will measure the success of these activities and the changes they create. In Module 8, we will look in more detail at monitoring, evaluation and learning for your action plan, including how to develop indicators and collect data. It is important to start planning for monitoring, evaluation and learning as you develop your action plan so that you can capture data that show advocacy progress.

Table 5 summarises some activities you could include in an action plan.

Table 5. Examples of advocacy actions

ADVOCACY GOAL	EXAMPLES OF ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES	VALUE OF THESE ACTIVITIES
Research and data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy analysis, gap studies, case documentation • Collecting lived experience testimonies • Data visualisation (infographics, dashboards) • Collecting community data disaggregated by disability 	<p>Can help tell the story of the core issue.</p> <p>New data and research can illuminate new areas for advocacy or support storytelling efforts.</p>
Education and awareness-raising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training communities and youth leaders • Providing advocacy toolkits • Facilitating workshops to raise awareness of rights • Hosting community forums • Creating webinar series to spotlight specific topics 	<p>Can be used to build knowledge and understanding of the core issue and connect with new champions.</p>
Lobbying and policy engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings with policymakers, parliamentary briefings • Writing policy briefs and position papers • Submissions to government consultations 	<p>Can bring the cause to the attention of key government officials and law makers.</p> <p>Can shape and influence changes to laws or policies.</p>
Communication and mobilisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media campaigns • Public events, exhibitions, storytelling • Media partnerships and op-eds • Global advocacy days • Creative advocacy (street theatre, art activism, digital campaigns) 	<p>Can support storytelling about the issue at hand.</p> <p>Can reach new audience members and create new champions.</p> <p>Can support dissemination of research and data.</p>

Summary

In this module, we covered the importance of building robust partnerships and networks to help us achieve our advocacy goal. Those partnerships should include NGO partners, business or sector partners, government partners and more to ensure that a diversity of voices and perspectives are heard. We also looked at tools for mapping potential partners and at how to build partnerships. A case study recounted a multi-year advocacy effort in Pakistan that illustrated the value and power of collaboration. Finally, we looked at potential advocacy action and completed an activity to practise developing an advocacy action plan. This brings us to Step 8 of the advocacy cycle: implement the action plan.

In the next module, we will cover best practices for inclusive and accessible in-person events, online activities and communications to help bring advocacy action to life.

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7

**Creating
Inclusive
Activities for
Advocacy**

Module 7: Creating Inclusive Activities for Advocacy

Introduction

Module 4 introduced the advocacy cycle, which outlines steps for successful advocacy work, and Modules 5 and 6 explained Steps 2–7. This module focuses on Step 8: implement the action plan. It connects the toolkit themes of inclusion and accessibility and offers practical suggestions on how to implement activities so that all persons, including persons with disabilities, can participate fully in them. It includes some best practices for creating in-person and digital activities and inclusive communication materials.

Before you begin, look back at the image of the advocacy cycle in Module 4 to refresh your memory of the various steps.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

- Apply Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to create inclusive advocacy activities
- Identify and use best practices for inclusive and accessible in-person advocacy activities
- Identify and use best practices for inclusive and accessible virtual (online) advocacy activities
- Identify and use best practices for inclusive and accessible digital and physical communications

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

UDL is a design approach that helps practitioners make their programmes, trainings and community initiatives more inclusive. Applying a UDL lens to our work means planning for accessibility and inclusion from the very start of a project, with a focus on the ways we deliver learning to support access for all participants (Centre for Teaching and Learning, University of Alberta, n.d.).

UDL has three core pillars:

- **Multiple means of engagement:** Create different ways for participants to engage in the content. For example, you could let learners choose to do an activity alone or as part of a group.
- **Multiple means of representation:** Plan and design learning materials that reflect diverse outlooks and perspectives. Provide learning content in different formats to accommodate different learning styles. This could involve sharing core concepts as written material, visuals and audio.

- **Multiple means of action and expression:** Plan and design for various ways for learners to share and access content. For example, ensure that learners can use assistive technologies, such as a screen reader. (Centre for Teaching and Learning, University of Alberta, n.d.)

Applying a UDL lens helps remove barriers to participation by offering and sharing content through different modes and promoting learner diversity. UDL makes it possible for all individuals, including persons with disabilities, to learn and participate effectively and in their own way. If you apply a UDL lens as you create and implement advocacy activities, especially those that have a focus on learning, awareness building and training, you will help all individuals feel supported and included.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

- **UDL at a Glance:** This video by CAST provides a helpful introduction to UDL.

Creating Inclusive Advocacy Activities

In Module 4, we learned about common barriers to participation for persons with disabilities. They included attitudinal, communication and information, institutional, physical, trust and social barriers. As we plan for advocacy activities, we must identify these barriers and take steps to address them. The next sections explain best practices for creating inclusive activities to overcome these common barriers.

Best Practices for Inclusive In-Person Activities

An advocacy action plan will likely include some in-person activities. These could be in-person consultations with persons with disabilities, a conference or meeting with government officials or an in-person community training event.

In this section we look at best practices for creating inclusive in-person activities that support all participants, including persons with disabilities. It is grouped into three phases: before the event, during the event and after the event. Review these best practices regularly as you implement your action plan.

BEFORE THE EVENT

Event design and planning

- **Embed inclusion and accessibility in the entire planning process.** Integrate inclusion and accessibility into your event design, decision-making and planning processes from the earliest stages of your planning process. Review any legal requirements or government or organisational policies relating to creating accessible programmes, events and activities.

- **Discuss the design with advisory committees, OPDs or persons with disabilities.** Connect with an advisory committee or community members in the early stages of the design and ask for input based on their lived experiences. This can help you think through the barriers to participation for persons with disabilities and identify potential solutions. Be sure to connect in a way that is respectful and prioritises the voices and agency of persons with disabilities.
- **Allocate part of the budget for accommodation requests.** Be sure to allocate part of the project budget for accommodation requests such as sign language interpretation or ramp rentals to help make the space more inclusive.
- **Prepare volunteers to assist on the day.** If you are using volunteers to help with the event, provide training in advance on how to respectfully assist persons with disabilities and respond to requests for accommodations.

Physical space

- **Visit physical spaces to assess their accessibility.** Be sure to visit the physical space where you plan to hold the event to understand what barriers it may present. Ask for information about the accessibility standards of the space, such as accessible washrooms, ramps or accessible doors. Select physical spaces that have built-in accessibility features, where possible.
- **Consider transportation access.** Think about how individuals will travel to the event, and find out if there are accessible transportation options. Does the potential location have accessible parking spots? Is it on accessible public transportation routes? Or could you organise accessible transportation, such as a shuttle, to the event site?
- **Consider the accessibility of walkways, entrances and exits.** When you visit the potential event site, walk through it with a view to how participants will enter and leave the space. What barriers does it present to participants with mobility and vision impairments? For example, will participants who use a wheelchair or work with a service dog find the space difficult to navigate? Note whether there are ramps, elevators, lifts or other supports. Assess walkways to check their width. How even is the floor? Are there any loose cables lying about that someone could trip over? Collect all the information on accessibility routes in the space in a report or a detailed map so that you can share these details with participants.
- **Consider the accessibility of seating areas.** Look at the seating area to see where there may be barriers. Spaces such as raised auditoriums, stairs to stages or high seats may not support persons with mobility impairments. If you are using a classroom for some of your activities, ask if tables, chairs and other furniture or tools, such as monitors, can be moved and adjusted.

- **Consider the lighting in the space.** View the lighting in the space and assess if it creates barriers to seeing the stage, speakers or visual presentations. If possible, see if lighting can be adjusted to accommodate individuals who are sensitive to light, have visual impairments or need to watch a sign language interpreter. Consider how to keep presenters and speakers well lit so that all participants can see them.
- **Consider the acoustics of the space.** Check the acoustics of the space. If necessary, bring in a sound system or microphone so that everyone, including persons with hearing impairments, can hear.
- **Consider access to charging stations and electrical plugs.** Confirm that people will have access to power outlets if they need to use a laptop with assistive technology, or other equipment, during the event.
- **Make sure emergency exit procedures and strategies are in place.** Ensure there are processes to support all individuals in an emergency. For example, check that there are both visual and sound alarms to accommodate persons with hearing impairments and persons with visual impairments.

Event registration and promotion

- **Open up registration well before the event.** Allow adequate time for individuals to learn about the event and organise any accommodations they may need to participate, such as transportation or technical assistance.
- **Ensure promotional material is accessible.** Ensure the promotional material uses large, clear fonts, is high contrast and uses alt text for images. Consider including [Universal Access Symbols](#) to indicate accessibility features of the event.
- **Ask if individuals need accommodation to participate when they register.** On the registration form, have a dedicated question or feedback area where participants can list any accommodations or specific items they need to participate. Include details about how you will follow up on this information. You could also include contact details for an event organiser so that participants can explain their needs directly to someone instead of writing them on a form.
- **Follow up directly with individuals about their accommodation needs.** Be sure to review all accommodation information in a timely manner. Contact each individual directly so that you understand what they need to participate fully in the event.
- **Book specific supports, such as sign language interpretation.** Use the accommodation information to work out what supports you will need to organise. Be sure to book them well in advance of the event.

- **Keep participants up-to-date about accessibility details and other event information.** Prior to the event, share up-to-date accessibility details with all registered attendees. For example, you could send out details about accessible parking, where information desks are located, maps of the venue, etc. Consider sharing agendas, slides or presentations in advance, when possible. For individuals who expressed specific accommodation needs, confirm with them that their accommodations will be available.

ON THE DAY OF THE EVENT

Communication and information

- **Have clear signage.** You will likely need to put up signs to direct people to the registration desk, classroom space, etc., or to provide other important information. Make sure physical signs are in a large, easy-to-read font in high-contrast colours. Keep the text short and simple so everyone can understand it. Make sure the signs can be viewed easily from different heights. Have signs in braille if any participants have indicated that they use it to read.
- **Remind attendees about accessibility on the day.** Be sure to tell all participants where they can find accessible exits, washrooms or elevators. Clearly explain any safety measures in the space.
- **Provide communication materials in alternative formats.** Make sure any printed materials use high-contrast colours and an easy-to-read font. Consider providing handouts in a range of formats, including braille and large print.

Presentation, activities and set-up

- **Check visibility and sound on the day.** Check and adjust lighting and sound on the day of the event. Ensure speakers are fully lit and visible. If speakers will be using microphones, consider using lapel microphones rather than handhelds to support speakers who may experience barriers to holding a microphone.
- **Ask all speakers to introduce themselves.** Have each speaker state their name, role and organisation before they begin their presentation. This will help everyone, especially participants who have vision impairments, know who is speaking.
- **Ask presenters to describe images, illustrations, graphs and any other visuals.** If a presenter is using a slide deck or sharing visuals on a screen, ask them to describe the image. This makes the content more inclusive for persons with visual impairments or blindness.
- **Use closed captioning for any video media.** If a speaker is using videos with sound, ensure the videos are closed-captioned. This will be particularly helpful to persons who have hearing impairments or are deaf.

- **If you are providing sign language interpreters, ensure they are visible.** Give sign language interpreters a clear space at the front of the stage where they can be seen easily and ask them if you can do anything else to make their job easier. You can introduce the interpreters as part of the presentation, but do not explain who is accessing this support. Let the speakers know if interpreters will be working in shifts so that they can allow pauses in their presentation to accommodate the switchover.
- **Consider options for live captioning.** Live captions convert audio and sound into text that is displayed on-screen in real time. You may have an individual onsite to create captions on the day. You could also use auto-captioning tools, although sometimes these are not completely accurate. This type of support may be particularly helpful for persons who have hearing impairments or who do not use the same working language as the speaker.
- **Modify any learning or engagement activities so that everyone can participate fully.** Ensure that any activities that require audience engagement offer multiple ways to participate. For example, if there is an open question and answer session, consider ways for individuals to share questions in advance, use a tool on the day to submit questions, and ask questions directly. This will allow individuals to participate in the way that works for them.
- **Let participants navigate the event at their own pace.** Let participants know they can attend to their own needs throughout the day, such as taking bathroom breaks or sitting in a quiet space for some time. Consider ways in which participants may want to move or sit in the space, and provide a range of seating options, for example.

AFTER THE EVENT

- **Gather feedback from participants.** Be sure to gather feedback about the event from the participants, including their suggestions about how you can improve for the future. If you send out a survey, ensure the survey tool is accessible for people who use screen readers or keyboard navigation aids.
- **Review the event with the planning team.** Take time to reflect on the event with everyone involved, including any volunteers. Discuss what went well and what could have been done better, and assess whether any access barriers were not considered.
- **Follow up with advisors or persons with disabilities who contributed to the event.** Contact individuals who were involved in designing, planning and organising the event and gather their feedback on the process.
- **Document lessons learned.** Use feedback to document the lessons learned for future events. Consider how you can use these lessons to start creating standard operating procedures for future events. (Adapted from Division of Human Resources, Cornell University, 2019; Mfamobani, 2024b; Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility, Government of Ontario, 2024; Office of the Vice President Equity & Community Inclusion, Toronto Metropolitan University, n.d.)

Best Practices for Inclusive Online Activities

Your advocacy action plan may include online activities such as virtual consultations with persons with disabilities, webinars or virtual community events. This section outlines some best practices for ensuring online activities are inclusive and accessible to all participants, including persons with disabilities. Many of the best practices listed above for in-person activities are also relevant to activities in online spaces.

BEFORE THE EVENT

- **Review which online tools are most appropriate for the event.** You will likely use one of the common online tools to host the event, such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Consider the participants' accessibility needs and their ability to use your chosen tool. Review the [Zoom accessibility functions](#) and [Microsoft Teams accessibility tools](#) to check which one best meets your participants' needs.
- **Explore features of the tool that can support inclusion.** Review the tool and plan how you can use it to support an inclusive experience. This can include recording sessions (audio, video or both) and then distributing the recording, or exploring and practising how to use the audience participation functions, such as the chat and polls options. You must ask the presenters and speakers if they are comfortable being recorded and with the use of polls and chats.
- **Ask participants if they need any accommodations to use the hosting tool.** On the event registration page, provide a detailed list of the features of the digital platform you are using — for example, captioning or sign-in support. Ask participants to tick all features and supports they expect they will need.
- **Organise support for participants.** Use the registration information to assess what supports you need to organise for participants. Make sure you have them in place well ahead of the event.

ON THE DAY OF THE EVENT

- **Start the event by explaining the technology.** When you start the event, explain how the platform works, focussing specifically on its accessibility functions. Describe how to use live captioning; how to view and see the speakers and participants; and how to interact, such as raising a hand, using the chat or using the Q and A function.
- **Let participants know if the session is being recorded.** Tell participants if the session is being recorded and let them know if they will be able to access the recording after the event.
- **Use the spotlight function to highlight presenters.** This makes it easier for participants to see who is speaking. If the speaker is sharing slides, the spotlight function lets participants see both the speaker and the slides.

- **If a sign language interpreter is working, be sure to spotlight them on-screen and introduce them.** This lets participants see the sign language interpreter easily. Introduce the sign language interpreter at the beginning of the activity.
- **Ensure presenters have good lighting and a clear background.** Encourage presenters to look straight to the camera, to stay clearly visible and to avoid covering their mouth. When a speaker covers their mouth, they hide their lips. That presents a barrier for persons who read lips.
- **Ask presenters and participants to mute themselves when they are not speaking.** This helps reduce background noise.
- **Read chat messages out loud.** Assign someone to read out chat messages to the group. This ensures persons with visual impairments who may not be able to view the chat can follow the conversation. It can also help presenters engage with the chat, as it can be difficult to see when presenting and sharing slides.
- **Consider using the caption function in Zoom and Teams.** It may be helpful to enable the captioning function. This allows someone to type and share the live presentation through captions on the screen. For more information on how to do this on Zoom, see [how to live caption on Zoom](#). For more information on how to do this on Microsoft Teams, see [how to live caption on Teams](#).
- **If a presenter is sharing videos, enable captions and the Share Sound function.** Use the Share Sound function to broadcast the sound in videos to all participants. Make sure videos have closed captioning turned on. This allows participants to follow the video through sound or visuals.
- **Modify any learning or engagement activities so that everyone can participate fully.** Ensure that any activities that require audience engagement offer multiple ways to participate. For example, if there is an open question and answer session, consider ways for individuals to share questions in advance, use a tool to submit questions on the day and ask questions directly. This will allow individuals to participate in the way that works for them.

AFTER THE EVENT

- **Share a recording of the event.** Consider sharing a recording of the session with participants so they can review the event at their own pace. Be sure the video has closed captioning enabled. (Adapted from George Brown College Teaching & Learning Exchange, n.d.; Government of Canada, 2025b.)

Best Practices for Inclusive Communications

Your advocacy action plan may include activities such as using social media, sharing research publications or setting up a website to raise awareness of your cause. This section outlines some examples of practical strategies you can use to ensure communication materials are accessible and inclusive for everyone, including persons with disabilities. You will see some similarities with the recommendations for in-person or online activities above.

DOCUMENTS

- **Use clear, plain language.** Plain language helps readers understand your message more easily and makes translation into other languages easier. For complex communications, such as technical reports or research, consider writing a plain language summary that shares the content in a clear, concise and easy-to-understand format. For more information on this topic, read [Preparing Plain Language Summaries: A Toolkit](#).
- **Use accessible fonts and larger type sizes.** Use a plain, clear font such as Arial or Calibri. The type size should be at least 12 for regular documents, 16 for website content and 18 for PowerPoint slides so that the text is easy to read.
- **Do not rely on colour to highlight important information.** Pay attention to how you use colour. Do not use colour alone to draw the reader's attention to specific or important information. For example, use icons as well as coloured headings to clearly indicate that information is important or to highlight helpful resources.
- **Ensure colours are high contrast.** If you are using multiple colours, make sure they contrast clearly with each other. For example, a person with visual impairments may find it difficult to distinguish between two shades of blue. [Use a contrast checker](#) to check that the colours you are using contrast enough.
- **Use formatting and style panes.** Use formatting such as Titles, Headings, Lists and Links to structure your document. This will help all readers understand your document, but it will be especially helpful to anyone who is using a screen reader or other assistive technology. For more information on how to format using Microsoft software, see [how to Customize or Create New Styles in Microsoft Word](#) and [Make PowerPoint Presentations Accessible to People with Disabilities](#). If you use Apple products, see [Intro to Paragraph Styles in Pages](#) and [Create, Rename, or Delete Paragraph Styles in Keynote](#).
- **Use alt text to describe visuals.** If you are using visuals in your document, remember to add alt text to describe them. Write a clear, concise description of the content. Aim for between one and three sentences. For more complex images, such as diagrams or detailed charts, it can be helpful to also include a longer description that covers the essential information in greater detail. In this case, create the alt text and either provide a detailed image description after the image, or explain the complex image fully in the text of the document. Mark borders and other decorative items that do not give information as decorative in the

application. Do not create alt text for them. For more information on how to create alt text, see the [Alternative Text Best Practices Guide](#). For more support with complex images, see Harvard University's [alternative-text and long description best practices](#). Microsoft has a guide called [Add Alternative Text to a Shape, Picture, Chart, SmartArt Graphic, or Other Object](#) that you may find helpful. If you use Apple software, such as Pages, you can use their [guide called Create Accessible Documents, Spreadsheets, or Presentations with Pages, Numbers, or Keynote](#).

- **Use descriptive hyperlinks.** Use text that tells readers where the link will take them when you are writing hyperlinked text. For example, instead of writing “Click here,” write “Click here to find out more about accessible hyperlinks.” This is incredibly helpful for persons who are using screen readers, as it provides more context for the information being shared at that hyperlink. Try to avoid using URLs. They can be difficult to follow for anyone using a screen reader. If you really have to use a URL, use the shortest version possible. Use a URL shortener such as [TinyURL](#) or [ShortURL](#).
- **Format tables for accessibility.** If you are using tables in a document, ensure that all tables have a header row, and that it repeats across pages. Ensure the table reads left to right, and that all cells have data. Do not use a dash in a cell to indicate that no data are available. Write “Not applicable” or “No value.” To learn more about accessible tables, watch the Microsoft video [Create Accessible Tables in Word](#). For tips for Mac users, see their [guide called Create Accessible Documents, Spreadsheets, or Presentations with Pages, Numbers, or Keynote](#).
- **Consider keyboard navigation.** Some people use their keyboard to navigate through a document. When you are finalising a document that will be made available online, test the keyboard navigation to reveal any barriers to accessibility. This can include ensuring keyboard navigation follows the logical order of text in your document. For more information on how keyboard navigation works, see the [accessiBe guide called Keyboard Navigation](#).
- **Consider screen readers or text-to-speech options.** Some people use a screen reader or text-to-speech software to access a document. These technologies convert words and other information in a document into speech to help persons with visual impairments access written material. Test your document using a screen reader or text-to-speech software. Assess if information is all read out loud, is read in the correct order and makes sense. Microsoft has a free text-to-speech function that you can explore. To find out more about it, see [Use the Speak Text-to-Speech Feature to Read Text Aloud](#).

- **Use the Accessibility Check function to improve your document.** Run the Accessibility Checker in Microsoft Word, PowerPoint or Adobe Acrobat to assess the accessibility of your document. The checker will flag the barriers to accessibility in your document and you can then fix them. For Microsoft software, see the tutorial [Improve Accessibility with the Accessibility Checker](#). For Adobe Acrobat, see the tutorial [Create and Verify PDF Accessibility \(Acrobat Pro\)](#). Currently, there are no accessibility checkers in Apple software such as Pages or Preview, so you will need to review your document manually.

VIDEO AND AUDIO

- **Use closed captions for videos.** When you create videos, be sure to plan for closed captions. This planning includes preparing text for audio descriptive captions to describe any video images with no sound shown, and considering video layout so that closed captions can be seen clearly at the bottom of the screen. After you create the video, you can have someone write the captions and then have them displayed in the video for viewing. If you are using YouTube, see the help page titled [Add Subtitles & Captions](#). To find out more about the difference between closed captions and audio descriptive captions, see the Level Access Web page [What's the Difference Between Closed Caption and Audio Descriptions?](#)
- **Use audio descriptions when you are filming.** When you are filming video, ask presenters or narrators to describe themselves to the audience before they begin speaking. This can help create a description of them for individuals who are accessing the video through sound only. If the presenter is using any type of material that can only be seen — for example, a graph or chart — have the narrator describe the image on audio as part of the video. To find out more about creating audio descriptions, see [Writing Audio Descriptions](#).
- **Provide transcripts for audio-based presentations.** This will allow people to read along while they listen to the audio.

WEBSITES AND ONLINE PLATFORMS

- **Follow global standards to ensure website accessibility.** Use the W3C [web standards](#) and the latest [WCAG guidelines](#) to ensure websites are accessible.
- **Use clear design, alt text and colour contrast for accessibility.** Use plain language and clear, readable fonts for website text. Use contrasting colours for all website components, including headers and navigation buttons. Include alt text for all images on a website.
- **Consider keyboard navigation.** Some people use their keyboard to navigate through a website. When you are finalising your website or a document that will be made available online, test the keyboard navigation to reveal any barriers to accessibility. This can include ensuring individuals can navigate menu headings, navigate to different pages easily on your website and open any documents uploaded to the website. For more information on how keyboard navigation works, see the accessiBe guide [Keyboard Navigation](#).

- **Consider screen readers or text-to-speech options.** Some people use a screen reader or text-to-speech software to access a website. Use a screen reader or text-to-speech software and test how it interacts with the website content. Assess if information is all read, is read in the correct order and makes sense. Microsoft has a free text-to-speech function that you can explore. To find out more about it, see [Use the Speak Text-to-Speech Feature to Read Text Aloud](#). (Adapted from Accessible Libraries, 2023; Government of Canada, 2025a; Mfamobani, 2024a.)

Learning Activity

Put these best practices into action! Think of an upcoming activity you are hosting, document you are working on or online event you are hosting or planning to attend. What best practices can you put in place to make it more accessible? Thinking back to activities you have hosted or documents you have written in the past, what would you do differently this time around?

Summary

Whether your advocacy action plan includes public awareness sessions, community events or online outreach, you must ensure that all activities are inclusive and accessible, particularly for persons with disabilities. In this module, we learned practical ways of making advocacy activities accessible and inclusive. We were introduced to the benefits of using UDL for designing and creating inclusive activities. We learned best practices for hosting in-person events, facilitating online activities and creating inclusive communication and learning materials. You now have the information you need to design and deliver accessible, inclusive activities that strengthen advocacy efforts during the implementation phase.

In the next module, we will look at the last step of the advocacy cycle: monitor, evaluate and learn.

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8

Assessing Advocacy Efforts with Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

Module 8: Assessing Advocacy Efforts with Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

Introduction

Module 4 introduced the advocacy cycle, which outlines steps for successful advocacy work, and Modules 5–7 explained Steps 2–8. In this module, we will explore the final step of the advocacy cycle: monitor, evaluate and learn.

To understand any advocacy effort's impact and what change it achieved, you need a monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) strategy. We therefore explore approaches to collecting disability-disaggregated data to help us understand how much persons with disabilities are included in advocacy activities. We will also learn about best practices for applying a lens of inclusion and accessibility for data collection to support the participation of persons with disabilities. This module also contains sample data collection measures and indicators that you can use in your own data collection efforts to help assess the success of your advocacy work.

Before you begin, look back at the image of the advocacy cycle in Module 4 to refresh your memory of the various steps.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

- Collect disability-disaggregated data in a way that encourages the participation of persons with disabilities
- Use sample indicators to build surveys, questionnaires or other data collection tools

Collecting Disability-Disaggregated Data with the Washington Group Questions







In Module 5, we learned about disability-disaggregated data, data that break down statistics by disability status. These data can help us to assess if advocacy activities are reaching persons with disabilities and to generate insights into their experiences of participating in the activities. Capturing disability-disaggregated data can also help us measure if we are reaching persons with disabilities in our advocacy activities and if there are positive changes in participation. We can collect this information through registration forms, post-event surveys, focus groups or consultations.

The [Washington Group on Disability Statistics](#) is a United Nations working group that was designed to help address global challenges in collecting disability-disaggregated data. As part of its work, it has developed standard questions to collect disability-disaggregated data (The Washington Group on Disability Statistics, n.d.). The [Washington Group Short Set on Functioning \(WG-SS\)](#) questions are six questions designed to collect data across universal human functions: seeing, hearing, walking, self-care, cognition and communication. They allow for a broader interpretation of disability, one that aligns with the social model of disability. In the past, you may have collected information about disability using a binary question, to which respondents can respond only yes or no. The format created by the Washington Group allows us to capture disability as a range and can provide richer data to help us better understand disability status (The Washington Group on Disability Statistics, 2022).

EXPLORE THE WG-SS QUESTIONS

Table 6 shows the six questions that make up the WG-SS question set with their defined response options. The functional domains do not have icons in the original question set, but we have suggested an icon for each one that you could use in your own work. We have also simplified the response options for the purposes of this toolkit.

Table 6. The WG-SS questions and response options

FUNCTIONAL DOMAIN	SUGGESTED ICON	QUESTION	RESPONSE OPTIONS
Vision		Do you have difficulty seeing, even if wearing glasses?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No difficulty 2. Some difficulty 3. A lot of difficulty 4. Cannot do at all
Hearing		Do you have difficulty hearing, even if using a hearing aid?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No difficulty 2. Some difficulty 3. A lot of difficulty 4. Cannot do at all
Mobility		Do you have difficulty walking or climbing steps?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No difficulty 2. Some difficulty 3. A lot of difficulty 4. Cannot do at all
Cognition		Do you have difficulty remembering or concentrating?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No difficulty 2. Some difficulty 3. A lot of difficulty 4. Cannot do at all
Self-care		Do you have difficulty with self-care, such as washing all over or dressing?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No difficulty 2. Some difficulty 3. A lot of difficulty 4. Cannot do at all
Communication		Using your usual language, do you have difficulty communicating, for example understanding or being understood?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No difficulty 2. Some difficulty 3. A lot of difficulty 4. Cannot do at all

USING THE WG-SS QUESTIONS FOR COLLECTING AND ANALYSING DATA

The WG-SS questions use non-medical, non-technical language to identify people who experience difficulties in basic functional areas. These questions can be used in surveys or interviews to help capture information about disability status. It is recommended that you use all six questions together as a set. You could have a specific section near the end of your survey on disability status that tells participants why and how you are collecting this information. When you are explaining the purpose of the questions to respondents, emphasise that their responses are confidential and used only to improve accessibility and inclusion in advocacy efforts, and that they can choose to not answer any questions that make them uncomfortable. Whether you

are conducting surveys in person or online, give respondents enough time to think about each question before they answer it.

You can analyse the data you collect in several ways, depending on your goals. For example, you could collapse the four response categories into two groups to let you compare people with a reported disability (those who answer “some difficulty,” “a lot of difficulty” or “cannot do at all”) with those who report no disability (“no difficulty”). Or you could analyse the data by functional domain (vision, hearing, remembering, etc.) and compare patterns across locations or demographic groups. You can track changes over time to understand how accessible and inclusive activities are by comparing changes to the percentage of participants reporting disability status. You can also use the questions alongside survey questions you are using in your various activities, using disability status to disaggregate data. Analysing data by disability status and range of difficulty can help you identify themes, trends and areas for improvement.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Washington Group has developed other question sets for data collection, each with a more specific focus, such as children or employment:

- [Short Set on Functioning — Enhanced \(WG-SS Enhanced\)](#)
- [Child Functioning Module \(CFM\)](#)
- [Labor Force Survey Disability Module \(LFS-DM\)](#)
- [Extended Set on Functioning \(WG-ES\)](#)

For examples of disability-disaggregated data and how to use disability status to disaggregate and group data, you can explore the following resources:

- [Disability Statistics Database](#): A global data set from the Disability Data Initiative that gives information on disability status and allows you to disaggregate other indicators by disability status.
- [Using the Disability Data Initiative Results](#): A guide that provides further information about and examples of using disability status to disaggregate data and explore trends.

Creating Indicators to Measure Advocacy-Related Change

In addition to collecting information about disability status, we need to decide what indicators we will use to measure the change brought about by our advocacy efforts. For example, we may want to understand and measure knowledge about disability rights in local communities or identify if we have made local training opportunities more accessible to persons with disabilities. We may need to develop new indicators or adapt existing ones to capture specific information. Indicators should measure different levels of change, including project progress, knowledge, attitude and behaviour change, and long-term impacts. You could use a subject matter expert or a partner with expertise in monitoring, evaluation and learning to develop the indicators you need.

Learning Activity

Think about what indicators you could use to capture progress from your advocacy activities. Use the sample survey questions as they appear below (see Table 7) or as ideas to help you create your own indicators. They include Likert-style statements and open-ended questions that capture themes on accessibility and inclusion.

Table 7. Sample Likert-type survey questions

SAMPLES	RESPONSE: OPTION 1	RESPONSE: OPTION 2	RESPONSE: OPTION 3	RESPONSE: OPTION 4	RESPONSE: OPTION 5
I experienced barriers in physically accessing the activity.	1 – Strongly disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly agree
I experienced barriers in accessing the digital tools for this activity.	1 – Strongly disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly agree
The accommodations provided (such as interpreters, live captioning) met my needs.	1 – Strongly disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly agree
I was able to participate fully in this activity.	1 – Strongly disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly agree
The activity featured diverse voices and perspectives.	1 – Strongly disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly agree
The activity created a sense of inclusion and belonging.	1 – Strongly disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly agree
The activity showcased key needs from the community around accessibility and belonging.	1 – Strongly disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly agree
I increased my knowledge of topics relating to accessibility and inclusion due to this [activity, training, resource].	1 – Strongly disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly agree
I increased my knowledge of disability rights from this activity.	1 – Strongly disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly agree
I am confident about applying what I learned about accessibility and inclusion in my daily life from this [activity, training, resource].	1 – Strongly disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly agree
I plan on taking action in my community to improve accessibility and inclusion.	1 – Strongly disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly agree

SAMPLE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

- What could we do to make the event more accessible or inclusive in the future?
- How do you see positive change happening in our community as a result of this event?
- How can we better ensure participation of persons with disabilities?

Best Practices for Collecting Data in an Accessible Way

Once you have decided which indicators to use, you need to choose which tools and methods you will use to collect the relevant data. For example, you could collect data from a robust pre-activity and post-activity survey for participants or conduct interviews or focus groups with community members. Whatever method you choose, you must collect data in an inclusive and accessible way so that all voices are heard, especially the voices of people who have faced barriers to participation in the past. Accessible data collection requires thoughtful design, clear communication and an emphasis on creating multiple methods of participation. The list below outlines best practices for making data collection processes more accessible to people of all abilities. Whether we are conducting surveys, interviews or focus groups, these guidelines can help us create more inclusive data collection tools and support meaningful participation among diverse stakeholders.

- **Embed inclusion and accessibility throughout the planning process.** Integrate inclusion and accessibility into the data collection process from the very first to the very last stages of any initiative. Allocate part of the project budget to support accessibility, such as sign language interpretation for focus groups.
- **Remember that representation is important.** Find ways to include persons with disabilities in the data collection processes, including developing the questions asked, being part of the research process and sharing learnings and insights from the data collection process.
- **Plan multiple ways to participate.** Offer individuals different ways to participate in the data collection process. For example, you could allow people to choose between in-person and online forms, to submit handwritten or voice-recorded survey responses, or to use non-verbal data collection processes such as drawing and art. The more options there are to give feedback and data, the more individuals can participate in ways that work for them.
- **For in-person data collection, consider the physical accessibility of the location.** If you are considering hosting in-person activities, such as interviews or focus groups, ensure the physical space where you are hosting the event is accessible. Check that it has ramps, clear mobility paths, visible lighting and accessible washrooms, for example. (Review the information on venue accessibility in Module 7.)

- **For online data collection, test any digital tools for compatibility with assistive technologies.** If you are using online platforms for data collection or communication, check that they work well with screen readers and other assistive technologies. Test digital tools to make sure they work with keyboard navigation and screen readers, for example. Consider the colour contrast of the tool, such as the background or theme used. **Microsoft Forms** is one low-cost tool that has accessibility features, such as **screen-reader support**. **Google Forms** has **keyboard shortcuts** that are helpful to individuals who use keyboard navigation.
- **Consider Internet and platform accessibility.** Confirm that your prospective respondents have reliable Internet access. Check that the tools you are using are accessible and compatible with multiple technologies, such as laptops and mobile phones. Tools that use a complex or extensive sign-in process can be a barrier to people who use assistive technologies.
- **Use plain language in consent forms, surveys and interview guides.** Use clear, plain language throughout the data collection process. Make sure you explain the issue of consent to participants clearly and simply. Write questions that are simple and easy to understand.
- **Use inclusive imagery.** If you use photos or visuals, make sure they reflect a diversity of people, bodies and access and are contextually relevant.
- **Make it easy for people to explain their accommodation needs.** Think about how you can ask participants and data collectors about their accommodation needs. For example, you could include questions about accommodations in focus group registration forms or list a contact email on a digital survey for anyone who needs extra support to complete the survey.
- **Support accommodations for data collectors and participants.** Provide accommodation supports as requested. For example, for community visits to collect data, organise accessible transportation for staff, volunteers and participants.
- **Build trust.** When you are collecting data, it is important to build trust with all the individuals involved. Clearly communicate why you are collecting the data, how the data will be used and participants' rights to access the information you collect. Family members or caregivers may want to be present when you are collecting data. Ensure everyone feels comfortable with the process and that confidentiality is maintained.

- **Explain how you will keep data confidential and how you will share them.** Data on disability may include personal, medical or confidential information about participants. Explain to participants how and where the data will be stored and how you will keep them confidential and secure. Also explain how the data will be shared, including the format (such as a final report or data set), if and how data will be anonymised and whether participants will get to see the final report or data set before it is made publicly available. (Adapted from CBM Global, 2021; Inclusive Research, 2021; Roy, n.d.)

By following these best practices, you increase the likelihood that your data will be robust and that more individuals will be able to participate in the data collection process.

Summary

In this module, we explored the final step of the advocacy cycle: monitor, evaluate and learn. We examined key recommendations for collecting disability-disaggregated data and learned how to apply an inclusion and accessibility lens at every stage of the data collection process. We also looked at practical examples of data collection measures and indicators that you can adapt and use in your own work. Collecting disability-disaggregated data can generate meaningful insights, help us better understand if persons with disabilities are participating in advocacy efforts, and guide evidence-based improvements for the future. By integrating these approaches into your advocacy work, you will be better equipped to assess progress, strengthen your advocacy efforts and ensure your work includes persons with disabilities in a meaningful way.

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505 Burrard Street, Suite 1650, Box 5
Vancouver, BC V7X 1M6 Canada
Phone + 1 604 775 8200 / Fax + 1 604 775 8210

 info@col.org

 www.col.org

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