

2022

**Disabili+y Lead**  
Power. Influence. Change.



**DISABILITY LEAD**

# *Impact Report*



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DISABILITY LEAD

# Who we are

**Disability Lead is a network of people with disabilities using our power to create an equitable and inclusive society**

## **Our Vision**

People with disabilities will lead with power and influence for full participation and equal opportunity as a vital part of the civic fabric in the Chicago region.

## **Our Mission**

To increase civic engagement and diverse leadership in the Chicago region by developing and building a network of leaders with disabilities — consistent with the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

## **Our Programs**

**Institute:** Emerging leaders explore leadership skills, disability identity, and leadership goals in our year-long Fellowship program.

**Network:** More than 200 Fellows and Members have access to events, mentors, exclusive professional development opportunities, and more.

**Connections:** Linking our Network to professional and civic opportunities, ensuring tables of power shape a more inclusive, just, and equitable society



A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND BOARD CHAIR

# Emily Blum & Ann Manikas

Dear Friends,

Welcome to our 2022 Impact Report, where we reflect on the past year, celebrate accomplishments, and share plans for the year ahead.

We begin this reflection with an expression of gratitude. Your participation as Members, partners, investors and supporters drives our mission: *to increase civic engagement and diverse leadership in the Chicago region by developing and building a network of leaders with disabilities, consistent with the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act.* The progress we make towards realizing our vision — that people with disabilities will lead with power and influence for full participation and equal opportunity as a vital part of the civic fabric in the Chicago region — is made possible because of you. Thank you.

In the following pages, we highlight two Disability Lead Members, **Claire McNorton** and **Keidra Chaney**, and a new funding partner, **FISA Foundation**, who demonstrate that by opening pathways for leaders with disabilities to sit at tables of influence, we can build more inclusive and equitable communities for all. At a time when reproductive rights are under threat, Claire and Keidra are bringing a needed disability perspective to developing practices and policies for reproductive healthcare access and equity. FISA Foundation, similarly, is committed to developing

a pipeline of intersectional leaders with disabilities to fill roles in civic, corporate and nonprofit spaces to strengthen the communities they serve.

Along with highlighting these incredible Member and Funder partners, Disability Lead is proud to share several exciting achievements in 2022, all of which position us to expand our mission in 2023.

## Connections +

Disability Lead identified and made connections to 230+ opportunities for our Members with 75+ successful connections. Some highlights include:

- [C. Richards Costes](#) was appointed to the Illinois Commission on Equity and Inclusion. Ben Salentine was also named to the Commission in 2023
- Two dozen Disability Lead Members were named to Crain's Notable Lists including Notable Black Leaders and Executives, Notable Nonprofit Board Leaders and Notable Leaders in Sustainability, Community Development, Sports, and Health Care
- [Risa Jaz Rifkind](#) was appointed to National Council on Disability by President Biden

With advancements like these and others over the course of the year, Disability Lead is addressing the problem of underrepresentation of individuals with disabilities in civic and professional leadership positions. Every day, our Members, in the spheres where they have chosen to lead, are influencing policy and decision-making impacting the lives of thousands in the Chicago region.

## Institute +

On December 15th, Disability Lead announced its class of 16 Fellows for our 2023 Institute! We are deliberate and intentional in our recruiting efforts, seeking to develop a Network that closely reflects the diversity of our region in all ways. We're proud to report that this is one of the most diverse Fellows cohorts in Disability Lead's history, bringing forward authentic intersectional leadership. Sixty percent of Fellows are people of color, and the diversity in disability identity celebrates that most disabilities are invisible.

# Model Expansion +

Disability leadership in civic and professional spaces is needed beyond the Chicago region, and we believe Disability Lead's unique model is one that can be adapted in communities across the nation. As part of our strategic planning effort, we identified that expansion is both a goal and ongoing area of focus. Other geographies need models for convening and elevating intersectional disability leadership and leaders who can bring perspectives that span the rich diversity of lived experiences. We are excited to share that we have identified the first location for our pilot expansion in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where we are slated to begin our 12-month Planning Year in 2023. The end goal of this Planning Year is to create a solid foundation for a three-year rollout for our project to replicate our Disability Lead model in Pittsburgh.

As we celebrate these accomplishments in 2022 and look ahead with excitement to strengthening and expanding disabled leadership in 2023, we thank you for your belief in Disability Lead's mission and vision, and your support of our work. We remain focused on building the next generation of leaders with disabilities who will bring innovative solutions to meet our society's greatest challenges.

With gratitude,



Emily Blum,  
*Executive Director*



Ann Manikas,  
*Board Chair*



MEMBER HIGHLIGHT

# Claire McNorton & Keidra Chaney

## Disability Lead Members Collaborate on Disability and Reproductive Justice Advocacy

There may not be many people organizing at the intersection of disability and reproductive justice, but two Disability Lead members are working to highlight just how much these movements can — and must — learn from each other.

“Both disability and reproductive justice have similar frameworks that center bodily autonomy and self-determination,” said Keidra Chaney, the digital engagement and accessibility manager at National Network of Abortion Funds. “It’s now more important than ever that the reproductive justice movement fully incorporates a disability justice lens.”

When Claire McNorton joined Planned Parenthood Illinois Action as the program manager of advocacy and campaigns, she noticed disability wasn’t really addressed. A year later in early 2021, she approached her boss and pitched the idea of starting a disability advocacy and organizing program, to bring reproductive and disability advocacy together.

“We have seen the right to bodily autonomy and privacy eliminated in this country, so it is especially important to think about this now,” said Claire, referring to *Dobbs v. Jackson* — the 2022 Supreme Court decision that there is

no constitutional right to an abortion. “It’s going to affect disabled people more than it’s going to affect non-disabled people.”

It was through this conversation with her employer that she also learned about Disability Lead. The Institute immediately appealed to her as someone who had not spent much time in disability spaces. “I went from having no sense of community and feeling alone in my work to having a massive network of people to support me,” said Claire, who was a 2022 Fellow.

Not only did Disability Lead help give her the confidence to build out the disability advocacy program at her job, it also connected her with Keidra. The two quickly became kindred spirits and began collaborating on projects, including a panel discussion with Senator Tammy Duckworth and a webinar that explained the implications of the recent Supreme Court decision on people with disabilities.

Keidra used to think that social justice spaces and organizations would be proactive about incorporating disability justice. “But most people just aren’t making the connections between disability justice and other social justice movements,” said Keidra, who was Fellow in 2020.

Over time, she’s learned that it’s going to take disabled leaders standing up and

saying this is a priority —and it was her time at the Disability Lead Institute that helped her do it.

“My time as a Fellow really changed how I view myself. I didn’t think I could call myself an advocate, I didn’t really step into my leadership role in a formal way. Disability Lead gave me not just the tools but the community to articulate my own leadership within disability justice,” she said.

In addition to training and coaching for nonprofits and organizations around digital accessibility, Keidra has worked with Advocates for Youth, a sex education organization in Washington, DC, and she is putting together a collection of her writings to publish as a book.

Claire and her team at Planned Parenthood Illinois Action are currently working to get funding for comprehensive, developmentally appropriate sex education for all students, including those with disabilities, in the upcoming legislative session. Outside of work—and thanks to the encouragement of Member Jae Jin Pak — she is also a trainee at the University of Illinois at Chicago Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and related Disabilities program.

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**“I went from having no sense of community and feeling alone in my work to having a massive network of people to support me.”**

— Claire McNorton, *Disability Lead Member and Planned Parenthood Illinois Action Program Manager*



Members of FISA's board and staff with Disability Lead's Emily Blum and Azeema Akram.

FUNDER HIGHLIGHT

# FISA Foundation

## FISA Foundation Invests in Bringing Disability Lead Model to Southwestern Pennsylvania

After a series of exploratory conversations, Disability Lead is excited and grateful to be partnering with FISA (Federation of Independent School Alumnae) Foundation to determine the potential to bring our model for building disabled leadership to a new geography. Serving Pennsylvania's Southwestern region, FISA Foundation champions equity, justice, safety, and inclusion for women, girls, and people with disabilities, combating systemic racism that impedes progress for these populations.

FISA has had a longstanding commitment to cultivating disability leadership and has worked with many organizations in the Greater Pittsburgh

region to increase professional, civic, and community leadership opportunities for people with disabilities.

“Despite our efforts, I knew it was possible to do more to advance disability leadership in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Having followed the impressive work of Disability Lead for many years and knowing the impact it has had in Chicago, it struck me that replicating the Disability Lead model in the Pittsburgh region was an ideal next step for our community,” noted Kristy Trautmann, FISA's Executive Director.

The timing was perfect, since as part of a recent strategic planning effort, Disability

Lead identified that expansion is both a goal and ongoing area of focus because other geographies need intersectional disability leadership, and we believe our model is one that can be well-adapted to other areas.

“When we first started talking with FISA and other disabled leaders in Pennsylvania, we heard many of the same concerns expressed there that we heard in Chicago at the time of our founding: the need to build a bench of leaders with disabilities, the lack of diverse disabled leadership in civic, corporate and nonprofit spaces, and the need for greater disability representation at tables of power and influence.” said Emily Blum, recalling initial conversations with FISA.

While FISA has focused much of its grantmaking on people with disabilities since it was founded more than 25 years ago, it recently recognized the need to put racial justice at the center of its work and rewrote its mission statement and strategic plan and shifted its grantmaking to better address racism and the resulting disparities that people of color with disabilities experience.



*Emily Blum and Azeema Akram take a selfie in Pittsburgh.*

As a profile in the Chronicle of Philanthropy explains, “FISA and Executive Director Kristy Trautmann are making the case that racial-equity movements — whether focused on housing, employment, or economic mobility — won’t succeed if they don’t consider how race and disability conspire to deepen the problems they aim to solve.”

FISA has also partnered with the Heinz Endowments and the Pittsburgh Foundation, two Pittsburgh-based funders, on a collaborative initiative to strengthen their work at the intersection of race and disability. Together these funders created the Race + Disability Webinar series to educate grantees and partners on the insidious and multiplying effects of ableism and racism and the need to prioritize people of color with disabilities in their work.

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***“FISA Foundation’s commitment to championing equity, justice, safety, and inclusion for women, girls, and people with disabilities, and to combatting systemic racism that impedes progress, deeply aligns with Disability Lead’s mission and vision, and we look forward to our partnership.”***

— Emily Blum, *Disability Lead*

With Disability Lead as a new partner, FISA Foundation is interested in furthering its commitment to diverse, disabled leadership, by exploring how Southwestern Pennsylvania can build a version of our programming, including the Connections, Network and Institute programs, adapted to the unique needs and strengths of the Pittsburgh area.

Disability Lead has been awarded a \$30,000 grant from FISA Foundation to begin a formal exploration of the replication of our model. Support from FISA will be invested in equipping the region to develop and connect diverse leaders with disabilities to opportunities for growth and strategic networking. Disability Lead will play the role of convener and educator, guiding and

offering support, tools, and resources to diverse local leaders. These local leaders will have ownership of the movement, with Disability Lead providing the framework and structure to get them started.

“FISA Foundation’s commitment to championing equity, justice, safety, and inclusion for women, girls, and people with disabilities, and to combatting systemic racism that impedes progress, deeply aligns with Disability Lead’s mission and vision, and we look forward to our partnership.”

– Emily Blum, Disability Lead

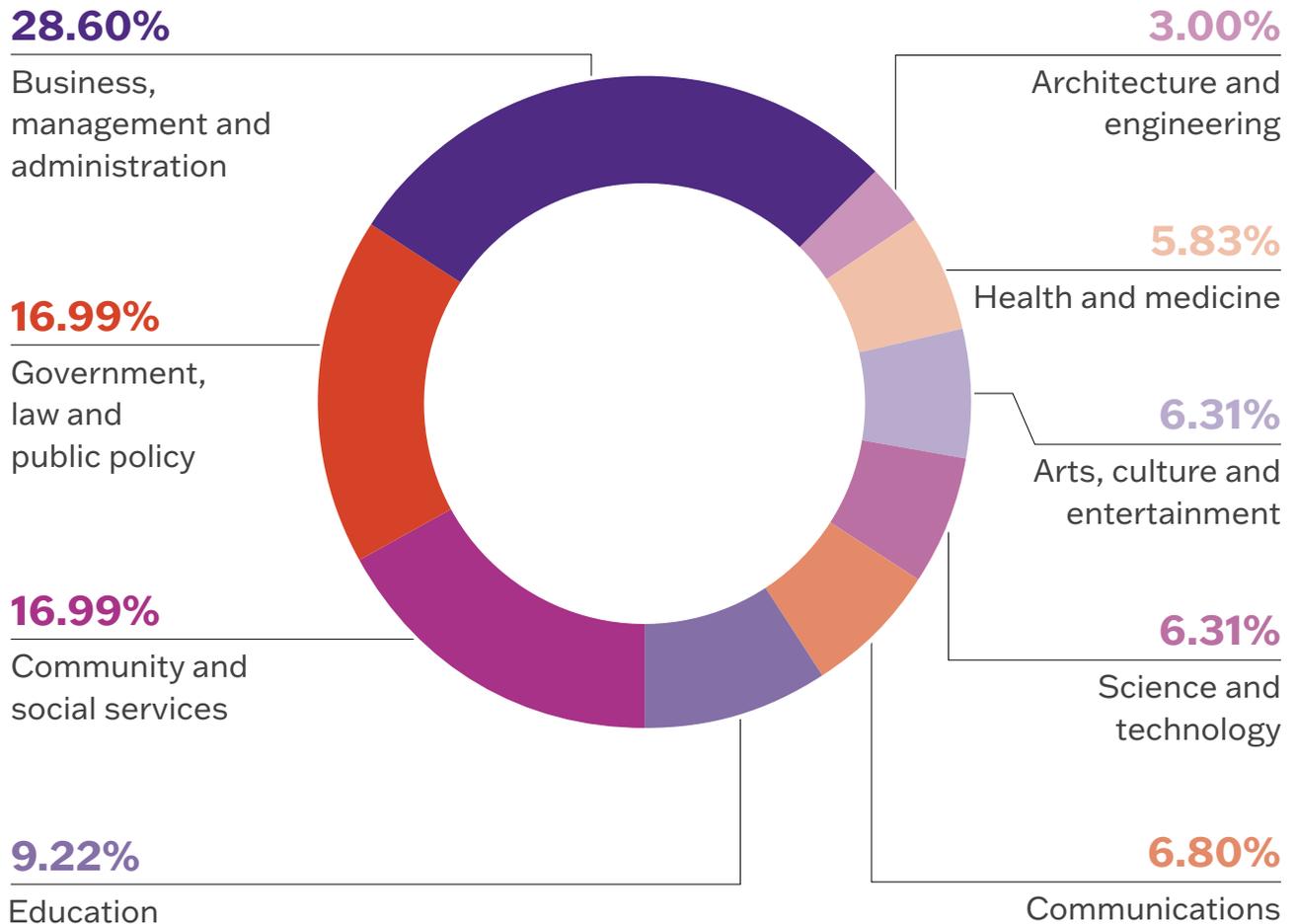
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**“If we want to create a future that is more just, humane, and equitable, we need diverse leaders to inform solutions and that includes people with disabilities. Disability Lead offers a model to build disability power and influence so that our communities are more inclusive and accessible for everyone.”**

— Kristy Trautman, *FISA Foundation*

# Member Reach

## Where our Members are having an impact



**“Every day, our Members influence policy and decision-making that impact the lives of thousands.”**

— Emily Blum, *Disability Lead*

# Donors

Thank you to our generous funding partners who helped Disability Lead fulfill our mission to increase civic engagement and diverse leadership in the Chicago region by developing and building a network of leaders with disabilities — consistent with the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

## Corporations, Foundations, Governments & Organizations

Albert Pick Jr. Fund	Elizabeth Morse Genius Charitable Trust	Microsoft Corporation
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## Individuals

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Matthew Reilein	Tim Temby	Elizabeth Wyman
Anne Renna	Sandy Tiana*	

\* Denotes Disability Lead Member

+ Denotes Changemaker Circle recurring donor

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Disability Lead makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of this listing. Please contact Anne Renna at 312-730-5883 or [arena@disabilitylead.org](mailto:arena@disabilitylead.org) if your name was omitted or there was an error in your listing. Thank you.

## **Board of Directors**

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\* Denotes Disability Lead Member

+ Denotes Officer

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*Executive Director*

Anne Renna,  
*Development Manager*

Robin Burnett,  
*Director of Education  
and Operations*

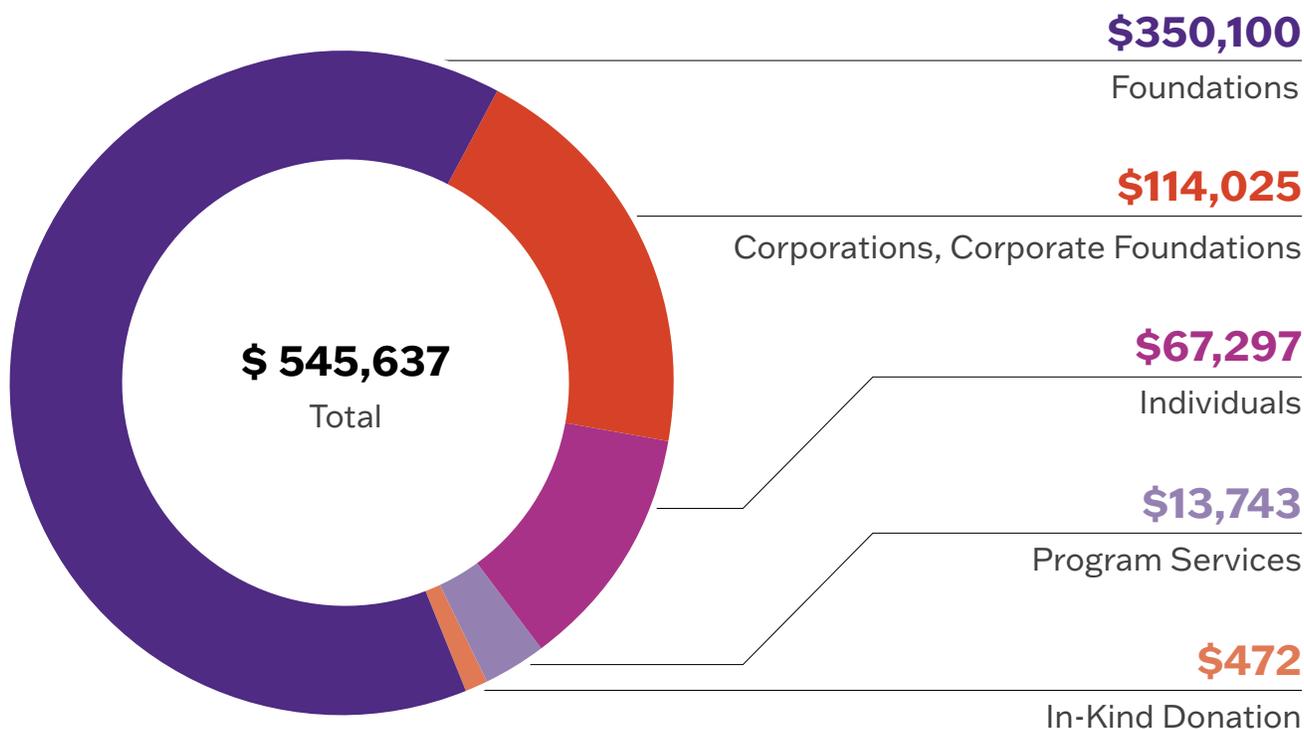
Risa Jaz Rifkind,  
*Director of Civic  
Engagement and  
Marketing*

## **Graphic Design**

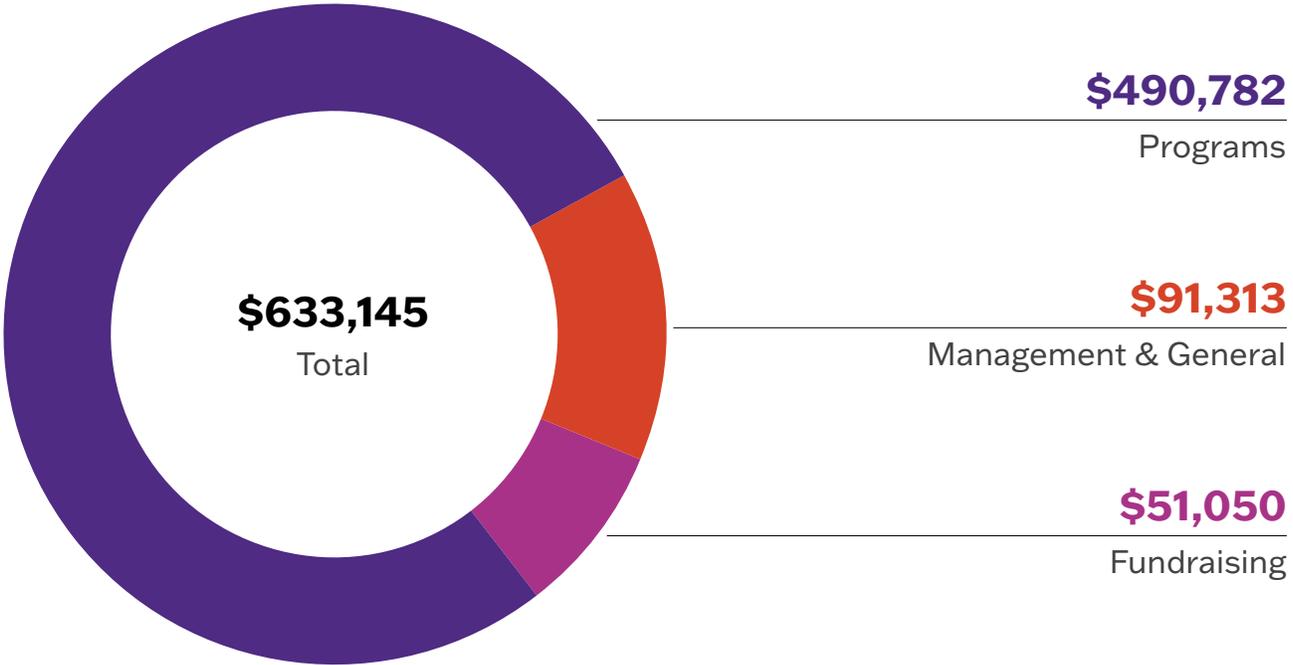
Sarah Sommers Design, [sarahsommersdesign.com](http://sarahsommersdesign.com)

# Financials

## Income



# Expenses



# Disabili+y Lead

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