

DISABILITY FUNDERS NETWORK

POSITION ANNOUNCEMENT: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Disability Funders Network (DFN), an affinity group of grantmakers drawn from across the U.S., seeks a talented executive director with a commitment to the advancement of people with disabilities and strong convictions about the value and role of responsible philanthropy.

BACKGROUND

Disability Funders Network had its origins in the Funding Partnership for People with Disabilities, a grantmakers' collaboration created in 1991 to encourage a philanthropic response to the implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. DFN was formally established as a membership organization in 1994, when a number of the grantmakers in the Funding Partnership decided that an "affinity group"¹ would have a greater chance at longevity than a collaboration and would have the added advantage of enabling its members to focus on encouraging the foundation world to become more active in hiring people with disabilities as well as supporting the advancement of people with disabilities through grants to nonprofit organizations.

For four years, DFN was operated as a volunteer organization housed in and supported by The Dole Foundation for Employment of People with Disabilities, a public foundation in Washington, D.C. well known to the national disability community. Focusing initially on raising the profile of disability funding, DFN was a major force behind a series of policy seminars co-sponsored with the Council on Foundations' special project on Philanthropy and the Public Sector and began delivering educational sessions to grantmakers at the Council's annual conferences.

When the Dole Foundation closed in the summer of 1998, DFN's board of directors took definitive action by providing the core funding and guidance needed to hire staff and create a formal organizational structure. Currently there is an organizational budget of \$337,800, a membership base of 154 with two staff persons and 9 Board members to drive the organization forward. The launching of its web site, www.disabilityfunders.org, in June 2002 expanded DFN's reach while helping to educate the foundation world about accessible electronic communications for people with disabilities. Previously housed with a fiscal agent, in 2006 the organization secured its own 501(c)(3) status.

DFN's mission of promoting awareness, support and inclusion of people with disabilities and disability issues in grantmaking programs and organizations is carried out through advocacy, electronic communications, information, publications and educational programs and networking.

Current initiatives include:

- A collaboration with the Foundation Center to improve the quality and availability of information about funding for disability-related issues and causes with the goal of making it more useful and accessible to grantmakers and grantseekers.
- A project, "Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities and Older Adults: What Grantmakers Need to Know," with the goal of educating grantmakers about how to include disability issues in their disaster-related grantmaking.

¹ A term used in organized U.S. philanthropy to indicate a group of grantmakers, usually foundations and corporate giving programs, organized around a common interest.

- The William Diaz Impact Award for Disability Grantmaking honoring grantmakers who have had a positive impact on the disability community and whose work encourages foundations to be more inclusive of disability, especially in minority communities.

The organization enjoys a positive reputation in both the philanthropic and disability communities for its leadership, political savvy, and knowledge of the field. Acknowledged as the “content expert” on disability related issues based on the knowledge and sensitivity of the founding executive director, DFN is increasingly asked to conduct internal and external research on disability issues and disability funding issues for foundations.

DFN continues to be an outward-focused, collaborative, connected organization. Partnerships and alliances have been developed and nurtured with nonprofit and public sector entities, and other relationships are sought that provide a “win-win” outcome that leverage investments and seek economies of scale.

For more information about Disability Funders Network, please go to www.disabilityfunders.org.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Disability Funders Network has educated the foundation world to include disability as part of the definition of diversity. However, like other disability-focused organizations, DFN has had a limited impact on changing the funding patterns of the larger field of mainstream, organized philanthropy – the target audience. The barriers to success are well known and substantial; they include a fear of disability, the perception that people with disabilities need to be cured and the general overload of information directed at grantmakers. This is the challenge for the next executive director – to work with the Board and to educate and involve more grantmakers in funding disability-related issues.

DFN is in a very crowded field of philanthropic infrastructure membership organizations. Differentiating DFN from other affinity groups is a marketing challenge. Creative strategies to establish a unique and valuable position for DFN will be required of the new director.

As with any nonprofit organization, Disability Funders Network has been moving through a series of life cycles. The next executive director should be prepared to work with Board, staff, and members to lead DFN through the shift that is already underway from an early stage of organizational development to the next phase of becoming an even more efficient and effective nonprofit. As part of this natural growth, the executive will have the challenges of allocating limited resources to build increased capacity at all levels and raising additional resources to meet new opportunities.

There are many areas that are affected by such organizational growth. The staff has worked steadily to increase clarity and timeliness in financial reporting, to diversify the funding base, develop earned income and increase the membership base. However, building financial resources for DFN beyond membership is paramount. The next executive director will need to play an active role in fundraising as well as help the Board continue its strategic recruitment of new Board members, ensuring that all Directors have a keen understanding of their fundraising responsibilities and a clear grasp of the key and essential role that fundraising plays in the success of a nonprofit. The new executive also will ensure that the Board has skill-development opportunities and will assist the Board in fulfilling its roles.

The departure of a founder and long-term executive is no small matter. The Board, staff and membership recognize the challenge that stepping in after Jeanne Argoff’s 15 years of leadership represents for the next executive director. It will take familiarity and listening before thoughtful and considered progress can be implemented. As the next executive director moves DFN forward, s/he should recognize and embrace the important values of inclusiveness, appreciation of and respect for differences, and an

awareness of the full range of the potential of all individuals – values that have been nurtured from DFN’s beginning and remain core to its future operations.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The executive director of DFN is the Chief Executive Officer, reporting to the Board of Directors and working closely with the Board Chair and the Executive Committee to develop and implement organizational strategy. S/he is expected to manage the day-to-day financial and administrative functions of the organization and to develop and maintain relationships with peers, grantmakers, government policy makers and disability leaders.

The executive is expected to be inspiringly energetic, show sustained, visible commitment to DFN and its vision and to excite others around that vision. DFN is looking for an executive director who sees financial soundness as an essential part of organizational impact together with social impact and who focuses on ways to better use existing resources to deliver the highest impact possible. The executive director actively and easily builds rapport and trust with others (e.g., grantmakers, DFN members, Board of Directors, funding partners, other affinity groups, government officials) and is respected and sought-out by others for advice and counsel on disability and grantmaking issues. Additionally s/he develops and implements actions to overcome resistance to change and uses multiple approaches to get buy-in providing flexible leadership and diplomacy.

The next executive should be knowledgeable and experienced in organizational development, especially of a membership association, and in capacity building. It would be especially useful for the next executive director to have experience in moving a nonprofit from its infancy or first phase of organizational development through its adolescence and into its prime stage of organization life.

Flexible leadership and diplomacy, as well as tenacity and patience, are essential for this position as a national leader and shaper in the disability and grantmaking fields.

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

The ideal candidate will possess the following professional and personal qualities:

- A minimum of 5-10 years leadership experience in the nonprofit, private, and/or public sectors, including substantial disability community experience and skill communicating with grantmakers.
- An experienced manager with knowledge of best practices in financial management, human resource development, nonprofit fundraising, public relations and marketing, facilities and technology management.
- Experience in planning, developing and implementing programs.
- Successful experience in financial management, including financial planning, preparing, reading and analyzing financial statements, and developing/managing budgets.
- Demonstrated success in fundraising and building alternate revenue streams, especially for membership organizations:
 - experience with major donors, government, foundations and corporations;
 - success in working with a network or with multiple networks; strong networking/communication skills;
 - ability to tell the story of the organization;
 - track record of increasing membership participation.
- Track record in building and sustaining collaborations with other non-profit, for-profit and/or public sector agencies.

- Commitment to the inclusion of people with disabilities, with the ability to have conversations across differences and move to action.
- Experience with multiple forms of e-communication as a marketing and capacity building strategy.
- Bachelors Degree.

In addition, it would be helpful if the next executive director possessed any of the following:

- Understanding of and credibility with foundations and philanthropic networks.
- Experience creatively using technology to enhance the future of an organization, including efforts in effective communication, outreach and education.
- Experience in organizational development and capacity building.
- Media relations experience.
- Advanced degree.

It should be noted that the DFN offices will likely remain in the Washington, D.C. area, although flexibility of location is possible.

TO APPLY

Interested individuals should direct their resume in confidence with cover letter and salary requirements by December 18, 2006 to:

Suzanne Maas, Transition Consultant
Leadership Transitions
MaasConsulting
Box 54
Whitinsville, MA 01588
smaasconsulting@verizon.net

Electronic submission of materials is strongly encouraged.

The Disability Funders Network is an equal opportunity employer and is committed to recruiting a broadly diverse pool of qualified candidates for this position.