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## UNFUNDED LIST

### HONOREE: Respectability

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#### *Honoree Proposal Description:*

Respectability is an organization that supports the differently abled by fighting stigma, educating leaders and advancing opportunities for people with disabilities.

*Learn more about this winning funding proposal and then submit your own social change idea to [Unfunded List!](http://www.unfundedlist.com)*

#### *Organization Website:*

<https://www.respectability.org/>

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## WHY APPLY TO UNFUNDED LIST?

**WE HELP YOU CHANGE THE WORLD**

[The Unfunded List](#) identifies and promotes great social change ideas that have not yet secured funding using a rigorous proposal evaluation process. 2x year, social change-makers around the world send us their best unfunded grant proposals and our committee provides candid feedback to each applicant. All proposals submitted receive helpful feedback, but only those earning the highest evaluations make the twice annual Unfunded List. The enclosed proposal is one of the featured honoree organizations named to The Unfunded List!

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## Proposal

### “The National Leadership Program at Respectability”

Email: [jenniferm@respectability.org](mailto:jenniferm@respectability.org)

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#### **Respectability: What We Do and Who We Are**

A national, nonpartisan advocacy and education organization founded in 2013, Respectability fights stigma and advances opportunities for people with disabilities. We are unique in our national focus on enabling people with disabilities to get the education, skills, and opportunities they need to attain an education and secure a job. Our nation was founded on the principle that anyone who works hard should be able to get ahead in life. People with disabilities deserve the opportunity to get an education, earn an income, and achieve independence, just like anyone else.

Respectability is on the front lines in the battle to advance education, skills, and economic opportunities in the open job market for youth with disabilities and the 22 million working-age people with disabilities. We do not lobby; we educate and advocate. We foster collaboration among multiple communities of practice from foundations to other disabilities organizations, from governors to mayors, from Hollywood producers to New York City media executives. We train the next generation of self-advocates in our National Leadership Program. All these efforts are designed to create equitable economic opportunities for people with a variety of disabilities who can and want to work. We deepen knowledge about the employment of people with disabilities through technical toolkits, interviews and surveys, polls and focus groups, media campaigns, webinars, social media, professional advising, and white papers.

We have provided testimony in [all 50 states](#) on disability employment, meeting one-on-one with 44 governors, and published [more than 100 articles on disability issues, including pieces in major papers such as the Washington Post and the New York Times](#). We have seen transformative results when we have helped leaders adopt successful employment models. At the state level, we have collaborated closely with Governor Walker in Wisconsin and Governor Wolf in Pennsylvania. We are a national clearinghouse for disability employment toolkits, webinars, and nationally televised training seminars (<http://cs.pn/2ugcVnH>) that are available online for free. Respectability reaches 60,000 people through social media, webinars, and our website: [www.respectability.org](http://www.respectability.org). Respectability publishes annually “The Best and Worst States” that compiles data on employment rates for people with disabilities. And each year, we have an annual conference that attracts experts on workforce development.

**Nothing about Us without Us:** Our team includes people with disabilities. Respectability's founding CEO, Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, has served as a volunteer CEO since 2013. She has dyslexia and knows what it means to parent a child with multiple disabilities. Our team has included people with autism, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, and polio, as well as people with hearing and vision impairments. Our diverse Board of Directors is led by a graduate of Morehouse College and Brandeis University. Respectability's Board members include a congressional coauthor of the Americans with Disabilities Act; an inventor of reality television; a former presidential appointee in charge of disability programs; and leaders in philanthropy, disability, communications, and business. We currently have 2 people with disabilities on the staff and 13 people with disabilities on our Board and Advisory Board

### **The Problem:**

According to the United States Census Bureau, one in five American has a disability. Fully 22 million people with disabilities are working age (18 to 64), but only one in three has a job. The unemployment rate for people with disabilities is close to 72% in the United States although the employment participation rate varies from state to state. Thus, there is a tremendous amount of human talent being overlooked and excluded from the national economy.

People with disabilities include people with multi-minority identities (people of color, women, English-as-second-language learners, Latinos, and LGBTQ individuals). For example, there are 4,869,400 Latinos living with a disability in the United States. But only 37% of Latinos with disabilities are employed compared to 73.9% of Latinos without disabilities. According to the Kessler Foundation study, 68% of people with disabilities are striving to secure a job. The lack of jobs for people with disabilities leads to poverty, poor health, and often prison.

Moreover, the theory of intersectionality states that we cannot eliminate sexism without addressing racism, and we cannot eliminate racial inequality if we ignore stigma and prejudice against people with disabilities. If you are blocked from employment because you are Latino or Black, you are doubly blocked if you are Latino or Black and disabled.

Many funders view people with disabilities with pity rather than as an opportunity for talented and loyal people to enter the economy. With one out of five Americans having a disability, the focus needs to broaden from safety nets and government benefits (which are important) to reducing stigma and discrimination and increasing education and employment opportunities.

The all-important stakeholder for improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities is the employer. Employers are often afraid to hire people with disabilities and have no idea how to recruit, train, accommodate, and retain employees with disabilities. Employers want to be taught about accommodations in the workplace, federal laws and financial incentives for hiring people with disabilities, work-based training, transportation, and accessibility. For example Section 503 is a law that has an aspirational goal for federal contractors to have at least 7% of their workforce be people with disabilities. Yet a new study shows that only 12% of employers include people with disabilities in their diversity programs. Often small changes in the workplace will enable an employer to recruit and hire qualified people with disabilities. Most importantly, employers need to be inspired by positive examples: that first hiring of a

person with disabilities who turns out to be the most loyal, conscientious, and grateful employee in the shop or office.

We see linking employers' needs to the skills of people with disabilities as the best way to overcome barriers and stigma, reduce dependence, and save tax dollars. One study asserted that for each person with disabilities who is employed, the federal and state governments save, on average, \$300,000 in benefits. RespectAbility knows that if a person with disabilities has the desire to work, that person can find the right job to match his or her abilities with the needs of the employer. Moreover, the case for employing a person with disabilities is not based on charity or pity but on good business sense: people with disabilities are loyal and trusted employees. Many businesses have already discovered the bottom-line benefit of hiring such loyal workers: Walgreens, Pepsi, AMC, Ernst & Young. Respectability wants to foster independence—not dependence.

### **A Solution: The National Leadership/Employment Program for College-Age Students and recent graduates with Disabilities**

Respectability's National Leadership Program is a semester-long fellowship that prepares diverse college students and recent college graduates to secure jobs and become future leaders to advocate for and with people with disabilities. The Fellows are get real-world training in public policy and practices, strategic communications including social media campaigns, fundraising, and effective writing strategies. The Fellows learn to interview policy makers and legislators on Capitol Hill. Respectability is a short train ride away from Washington, D.C. By the second week of the program, the National Leadership Fellows are preparing their first press releases, attending conferences on Capitol Hill, and writing PowerPoint decks to major stakeholders. Each year, the Fellows publish on our website 300 various op-ed pieces, blogs, profiles of successful employee/employer relationships, and reports on job statistics.

**Since 2013, the National Leadership Program has already trained 120 Fellows** in the skills needed to become leaders and advocates on behalf of people with disabilities. More than half of the Fellows self-disclose as having a disability. Our Leadership Program is inclusive, and we want students with and without disabilities to learn together, to eat lunch together, to socialize, and to become friends together. The Fellowship creates a personal network for life.

Our Fellows come from all over the country. We are intentional about recruiting fellows from diverse backgrounds, including individuals of multi-minority status. We recruit from Historically Black Colleges and Universities as well as other educational institutions and departments that serve minority students. Our recruiting materials are created with the intent to be accessible for people with disabilities, including being screen-reader accessible. We now have three cohorts annually, with approximately 30 Fellows trained each year.

The Fellows are taught daily by our full-time staff: the Director of Policy and Practices, the Director of Communications, and the Development Manager. Respectability's CEO works daily with the Fellows. And to the best of our knowledge, the National Leadership Program is the only Fellowship in the United States that includes a personal writing coach for all the Fellows. Every week for sixteen weeks, the Fellows interact with invited guest speakers who come to our

offices to talk about policy; the Disabilities field; journalism; and disabilities in TV, film, and video games. Guest speakers have included actors with disabilities, CEOs of foundations such as California Endowment, and the CEOs of major consortiums and policy groups such as Concerned Citizens for Disabilities and the National Association of Developmental Disabilities Councils.

## **The Goals and Measurable Outcome**

The goals of the National Leadership Program are to:

1. Provide diverse and distinguished college students as well as recent graduates the skills, professional networks, and experience necessary to enter careers in public policy, media, journalism, development, or advocacy or gain acceptance to graduate school.
2. Prepare diverse Fellows in solving disability issues and becoming confident leaders and/or self-advocates as they enter and move up their professional careers in media, public policy or advocacy.
3. Serve as positive role models in the workplace, the employed Fellows will reduce stigma and discrimination that often prevents the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace.

These goals are attained by maintaining a diversity table of the Fellows enrolled, testing their knowledge and confidence in a weekly class, and giving writing assignments that test their ability to persuade and advocate for people with disabilities. By spending 16 weeks in an office environment, the Fellows learn the norms of business etiquette and behavior, which is crucial for our Fellows on the autism spectrum.

## **What is Success?**

Our most important outcome and our definition of success is how many Fellows secure full-time jobs or how many Fellows continue their graduate studies. **Our success rate is 90%. Ninety percent of the 120 Fellows trained since 2013 are either working or in graduate school.** Their success reflects RespectAbility's commitment to expanding jobs for people with multiple disabilities. Our Fellows have secured jobs at such diverse places as AmeriCorps; the National Disability Institute; Easter Seals; the White House; the World Bank; the Departments of Treasury, Education and Defense; and the Veterans Administration.

## **Annual Program Budget:**

\$1,079,462 for 30 Fellows annually, which includes cost of travel for Fellows from home to DC, salaries of \$15 per hour for all the Fellows, daily lunches, transportation to Capitol Hill, speaker fees, and a percentage of salary for staff time (4 staff teachers).

## **Other Funders Supporting the Program**

The National Leadership Program is Partially Funded by:

**Ford Foundation:** \$250,000 for 2018 and 2019: total of \$500,000

**California Endowment:** \$100,000 for one year (for 2018 only)

**Anonymous donor** \$114,000 annually for 2018 and 2019: total of \$228,000

**Internal Equity Contribution and from General Operating Grants** of \$100,000 from Respectability's reserves

**In-Kind Contribution of volunteer CEO's salary:** \$100,000

**Fundraising Gap: Approximately \$350,000 annually.**

**The Funding Opportunity: 1:1 Matching Funds from Other Funders**

RespectAbility offers a one-to-one matching leverage to any Funder. In other words, for every dollar we receive, we pledge to raise one additional dollar from new funders or from existing funders. Thus, we are offering leverage of 1:1 to any new funder for our National Leadership Program