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2019 UNFUNDED LIST HONOREE:

Respectability

Organization Website:

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

Honoree Proposal Description:

RespectAbility is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that understands we are a stronger community when we live up to our values - when we are welcoming, diverse, moral and respect one another. RespectAbility fights stigmas and advances opportunities so that people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of community.

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YOUR ORGANIZATION

Question 2: About Your Organization

Describe your organization's mission/goals. What skills and experience does your team have that is relevant to this proposal?

RespectAbility's mission is to fight stigmas and advance opportunity for people with disabilities. We are a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that understands we will have a stronger economy when we live up to our values – when we are welcoming, diverse, moral and respectful.

RespectAbility partners with self-advocates, employers, policy makers, the workforce system, nonprofits and others. We co-chair a task force that sets the agenda on employment policy for a national coalition of 120+ disability organizations. We educate and advocate for best practices, so the 1-in-5 people with disabilities can succeed.

Our values are “nothing about us without us.” Our diverse team includes talented and diverse people who are blind, deaf, use wheelchairs, have autism, learning disabilities, mental health disorders, brain injuries, and other disabilities.

We focus on systems change, best practices and what people with disabilities CAN do. We have met 1-on-1 with 46 governors on jobs for people with disabilities; testified in every state; helped create an Emmy-winning TV series that showcases entrepreneurs with disabilities; and published toolkits, webinars, and articles on best practices. RespectAbility educates, advocates, partners and “trains the trainers” nationwide in disability employment.

We have substantial capacity to broadcast success stories and best practices through strategic communications. We have comprehensive press lists for all 50 states, nationwide audience of more than 100,000 email subscribers, 59,639 Facebook fans and 7,202 Twitter followers. We are an active voice in the policy world with extensive outreach, through nonpartisan questionnaires, to public officials at the local, state and national levels.

Question 3: Tell Us About Your Entrepreneurs

Who are they? What barriers do they face? What are they especially good at? Please share something surprising about your entrepreneurs or something you have learned from your work in supporting entrepreneurs.

RespectAbility advocates for the 6 million students with disabilities and 22 million working age (18-64) people with disabilities in our nation. Studies show that 70% of people with disabilities *want* to work. However, only one in three has a job. The poverty rate for people with disabilities is twice that of people without disabilities.

Many people with disabilities have found that their best option is either the gig economy or starting their own companies. Data shows that “10 percent of individuals with disabilities in the labor force” are self-employed. For example, Em's Coffee Company is a disability owned business in Independence, Iowa (<https://bit.ly/2D6U01V>). Disabled entrepreneurs are

succeeding in everything from agriculture (<https://bit.ly/2Spf5hX>) to the restaurant industry (<https://bit.ly/2Dp1Oj7>).

In terms of super star entrepreneurs, many people are surprised to find out that Richard Branson, Charles Schwab and Daymond John all have disabilities. Likewise, Arthur Young, co-founder of financial giant EY was deaf and had low vision.

People with disabilities and their families need to see – in the news, on TV, and with their own eyes – the grit, innovation, talents and loyalty that they can bring to entrepreneurship. With the right training and skills, entrepreneurs with disabilities can succeed.

Direct-service providers and employers that help people with barriers to entrepreneurship can achieve better outcomes when they are accessible and use best practices. RespectAbility offers resources and “trains the trainers.” We are now ready to bring our experience to entrepreneurship.

Question 4: Pick a Project Focus Area

While we have several focus areas in which we hope to encourage applications, we are accepting applications from all focus areas and anticipate funding a variety of projects. All applications for all focus areas will be subject to the same criteria.

Solutions Focused on Inclusive & Equitable Ecosystems and Communities for Entrepreneurs

- **Policy solutions and activity to strengthen inclusive ecosystems**

YOUR ORGANIZATION, CONT.

Question 5: About the Project

Explain the proposed project, how it was developed, its purpose, and the beneficiaries (who will benefit, geographic areas affected). Please tell us how this proposed idea demonstrates the solution you chose and makes it easier for entrepreneurs to start and grow new businesses.

Much of the disability community’s advocacy is focused the social safety net. None of the 120+ members of the Consortium of Citizens with Disabilities (CCD), the main coalition of disability groups, have entrepreneurship as a goal. Likewise, state agencies and entrepreneur support organizations (ESOs) have never really looked at people with disabilities as potential entrepreneurs.

With your support, we will hire a new full-time employee to add disability and entrepreneurship across our work including fighting stigmas, workforce advocacy work, political outreach through candidate questionnaires, as well as to our work in Hollywood. We will showcase successful entrepreneurs with disabilities.

In 2017, there was a fourfold improvement in new jobs for people with disabilities. This was not an instant success but the result of years of collective effort to make the workforce system and employers more accessible by implementing new best practices, often through CCD members. We believe similar success can be achieved in terms of disability and entrepreneurship.

More people with disabilities will become entrepreneurs when stigmas are reduced and several connections are made. First, that local programs must be accessible, understand the unique financial challenges of living with a disability and that people with disabilities can successfully run businesses. We can reach that audience through resources and tools such as TV shows, film, media, in-person training events, webinar programs, presentations at national conferences as well as new, free toolkits. Out of this work, we will collect best practices and provide free access to these resources.

State governments need to understand both best practices for supporting entrepreneurs with disabilities and to make positive, public commitments to making that support a reality. We can achieve that through further research and with our state-level leaders, including Governors. These lessons learned will be collected in a new report.

That report will also reflect the financial challenges faced by entrepreneurs with disabilities. The benefits systems have stringent income requirements for paying for personal care assistants and other costs. Thus, launching a start-up which puts individuals above the income threshold but is not a guaranteed annual income can jeopardize their access to care.

Our work will have beneficiaries at the local, state and national levels. We have launched a partnership with the LA Area Chamber of Commerce and the LA Department on Disabilities to address these inequities. We will collaborate to ensure the ESOs are trained in best practices, understand accessibility issues and have resources to support potential entrepreneurs with disabilities.

At the state level, as we work with America's governors and others, we will advocate for policies that support entrepreneurship and self-employment as a viable employment strategy for people with disabilities served by state workforce systems. This advocacy will also include both educating disabled people about entrepreneurship as an employment strategy and working with states to support disability-owned businesses through supplier diversity programs. Nationally, we will make supporting entrepreneurship as a policy priority. Likewise, we will ensure that the questionnaire we collect from political candidates includes questions on entrepreneurship for people with disabilities.

Question 6: Scale or Test New Idea

How will you scale this program to additional identities and/or geographies and/or sectors?

RespectAbility's model for scaling up is market expansion to meet the increasing demand for our stigma busting and systems change work. Why expand? Because there are 22 million are working-age people with disabilities, and studies show 70% want to work. However, only 33%

are employed. Creating or expanding their own successful businesses is way to achieve independence

Our Vision of Scale requires two things – 1) to create narrative change around what people with disabilities CAN do and show it in media, TV, film2) for the workforce systems, ESOs and people with disabilities to use best practices around expanding disability entrepreneurialism. Fighting stigmas and advancing positive models around disability entrepreneurship will take systematic and prolonged efforts with ESOs and relevant public sector agencies, as well as with the news media and entertainment providers to eliminate the stigmas that reduce entrepreneurialism among people with disabilities.

Through the work of our Policy and Practice Director, RespectAbility sets the national disability employment policy agenda for the 120+ members of the Consortium of Citizens with Disabilities. This gives us the reach to establish connections across the private, public and non-profit sectors. It also gives us a platform for reaching ESOs and workforce agencies in every state. Our communications team has deep connections and impact in media and Hollywood. However, we cannot fully achieve this scope of work without further resources to expand our staff, focus our impact and transmit best practices.

Question 7: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Please explain your organization’s diversity, equity, and inclusion philosophy and how it is implemented (currently or how you are planning to do so in the future). If you work with other organizations, please explain how you build equitable relationships within your collaborations.

If your organization has adopted a diversity, equity, and inclusion framework or model and you believe it would be helpful to provide additional information, please attach a document using the upload function.

We are a “nothing about us without us” organization with intentional efforts in diversity, equity and inclusion. We reflect this policy throughout our organization: in our boards, in our staff, and with our National Leadership Program (interns called “Fellows” and volunteers). We are diverse in race, ideology, religion, sexual orientation and identity, disabilities and more. Members of our team are deaf, blind, use wheelchairs, are on the Autism spectrum, have learning, mental health and a wide range of other disabilities.

We recruit diverse leaders from guidance counselors and disability resource centers at leading colleges; public policy programs, from specialty programs in film, acting, animation; and from HBCUs, Latino and Tribal colleges. This program upskills diverse college-age and above leaders with lived disability experience.

We provide disability accommodations for our staff and Fellows with disabilities and at events. Our website and social media are screen reader accessible, our videos and webinars have captions, our live events and office are all ADA accessible, and we offer accommodations such

as American Sign Language, live captioning and others. We welcome personal care assistants and service animals. We partner with allies in the LGBTQ+, veteran, Muslim, Hispanic, African-American, Asian-American and other communities to ensure our resources and activities are inclusive of and reach all communities. We translate many of our resource guides and other materials into Spanish.

We serve as consultants for nonprofits, foundations and Hollywood studios including NBC, ABC/Disney and Pixar on diversity, equity, and inclusion to include people with disabilities.

Question 8: Evaluation and Measurement

How do you know your organization's activities are successful? What measurement and evaluation approaches do you use, including key indicators that you track over time?

Please discuss if you are currently tracking, or open to tracking, the following metrics:

- **Reducing barriers that directly impact entrepreneurs**

In the first year our main progress will be in building coalitions, sharing best practices with stakeholders, engaging in advocacy, using media and narrative change to fight stigmas. We will:

- Advance the goal of entrepreneurship through the collective work of the 120+ members of the CCD.
- Create a comprehensive policy report on disability entrepreneurship for local, state and national leaders as well as the disability community.
- Create webinars and toolkits on best practices. This includes how to reach the federal marketplace where there are incentives for using goods and services from disability-owned companies.
- Present our findings to at least 3 national workforce conferences.
- Convene conversations and training with groups promoting entrepreneurship.
- Publish at least twelve news stories or op-eds highlighting the barriers faced and overcome by successful entrepreneurs with disabilities and their families.
- Enable the positive portrayal of at least 2 entrepreneurs with disabilities on TV or film.
- Create, publish and distribute success stories on disability owned companies in our series #RespectTheAbility.
- Reach out to all presidential, Senate and Governor candidates with a nonpartisan candidate questionnaire that will include questions about disability owned business and publish responses.