The Arc of the United States

Access, Equity, and Inclusion Report:
The Arc of the United States
About This Report

This report contains information about The Arc of the United States’ work on diversity, access, equity, and inclusion (AEI) from 2019.

It is organized in four sections:

1) Letter From our CEO
2) Reimagining our Work
3) 2019 AEI Highlights
4) What’s Next for AEI?

Following each section, there is a brief plain language summary.

There may be some terms used in this report that are unfamiliar. Check out these resources for definitions and to learn more:

Equity in the Center
Human Rights Campaign

Would you like a copy of the report in an alternative format? Please email your request to inclusion@thearc.org

COVER ARTIST

Madeline Buffill is an artist, singer, and dancer in Brooklyn, New York. Madeline enjoys arts and crafts, designing cards, and decorating. Madeline is served by AHRC New York City.

Madeline’s artwork has blossomed during the pandemic with the support of a day program staff member, who is also a professional artist and dancer.

Painting makes Madeline feel beautiful. Her artistic ability even impresses herself, prompting her to sometimes say “wow” when she looks at her work. Madeline hopes that all people find the beauty and meaning in her art.
Letter From Our CEO

Dear friends and colleagues,

The Arc is on a journey. The destination: a diverse organization and movement that is fully accessible, equitable, and inclusive. Our journey reached an important milestone in 2015, when The Arc of the United States released its Diversity Strategic Action Plan (2016-2020)—a set of guiding principles designed to help The Arc’s entire network become more diverse and culturally competent. We made a commitment then to improve our staff’s racial and ethnic diversity and our outreach to many diverse communities. Since that time, we have made some significant strides, but there is much more work to be done.

As we look to the future and reflect back on 2019, we celebrate the progress we have made, and we renew our commitment to equity. We are keenly aware that to continue our progress, we must center the voices and experiences of those who live at the margins of society. Our community is more than disability; it is about all of the identities that come together to make us who we are.

At the end of 2019, The Arc invested in new partnerships and created a dynamic Access, Equity, and Inclusion Team. The Team includes dedicated staff members from across the national office, from Operations to Programs to Advocacy. I am proud to work alongside my colleagues to ensure that access, equity, and inclusion define who we are as a human and civil rights organization fighting for the rights of all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

We are dedicated to moving ahead on this journey together with our chapters and the broader disability rights movement. We are committed to learning from one another how best to achieve true access, equity, and inclusion. We still have much work to do. We call on you to join us.

Sincerely,

Peter Berns
Chief Executive Officer
The Arc of the United States
Equity Journey Timeline:
Recent Milestones

1990s: The Arc’s Board of Directors begins including self-advocate members (people with IDD who advocate for themselves and others).

1992: Chapter Delegates call on The Arc to pay attention to “increasing diversity within our country that needs to be reflected in our organization.”

2000: The Arc adds Diversity to its list of Core Values.

2008 – 2010: The Arc participates in a collaborative effort with TASH and the National Center for Cultural Competence to explore issues of diversity and cultural competence within the disability community.

2012: The Arc’s Board of Directors creates the Board Diversity Committee, and The Arc creates a National Council of Self-Advocates to help guide the organization’s work.

2013: The Arc creates a new staff position: Manager, Diversity and Cultural Competence.

2014: The Arc expands staffing to include a Diversity and Cultural Competence Team.

2015: The Arc releases its five-year Diversity Strategic Action Plan, with a focus on improving the racial and ethnic diversity of our staff and improving outreach by our chapters.

2019: The Arc reimagines its diversity work and expands staffing for an Access, Equity, and Inclusion Team, with expertise and insight from across the organization.

SUMMARY

- The Arc is focused on being more accessible, equitable, and inclusive.
- We have worked on diversity since 1992.
- The Arc’s Board created a new Diversity Committee in 2012.
- We formed the National Council of Self-Advocates in 2012.
- We hired a person to lead diversity work in 2013.
- We built a larger team to work on diversity in 2014.
- We released our Diversity Strategic Action Plan in 2015.
- At the end of 2019, we created a new Access, Equity, and Inclusion Team.
- This report is about The Arc’s work in 2019.
Despite its promise, **the disability rights movement has not always been inclusive**. The movement, like society as a whole, has been influenced in many ways by racism, white privilege, classism, and many other systems of oppression.

To end systems of oppression, we must start within our own organization and network. We must reflect critically on where we are in our equity journey and how much farther we need to go to. To reach this ultimate goal, **we are building on our foundation of diversity work to incorporate the powerful, intersectional, and strategic lenses of Access, Equity, and Inclusion.**

**Diversity**

*Who is in the room?*

We started our journey by focusing on diversity: the social, psychological, and physical differences among individuals, including race, ethnicity, education, religion, age, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender, and disability. We need to better understand who we are and who may be missing from our work. We will continue our outreach to diverse communities, building toward a network that is fully representative of the communities we serve.

But diversity alone is not enough. We have to understand the barriers that prevent people from coming into the room and being able to fully engage.

**Access**

*Can everyone get inside the room or even the building? Can they participate?*

Access is a core value of disability rights. **It means that everyone can fully participate.** It means everyone receives information in a way they can understand and engage, including considerations of language.

We commit to making everything we do more accessible—our programs, events, resources, and services—and to helping other organizations do the same.
Equity
Who built the room? Who received an invitation? Who has power in the space?

Equity challenges us to look beyond ideas of tolerance and opportunity to uncover deeper, entrenched systems of oppression that prevent the full and fair participation of historically marginalized groups. **It calls on us to understand the inequities of how power is allocated in society and the resulting injustices.** Once we understand the role of power, we can work toward justice by shifting power from those who have more to those who have less.

**We commit to** becoming a more equitable organization, inside and out. We commit to reviewing and revitalizing internal practices and ensuring that our advocacy and programs advance what the people who are most affected want and need.

Inclusion
Does everyone in the room feel welcome? Like they truly belong?

The lens of inclusion takes us farther than access and equity to ensure we come together to create a community in which all are welcomed, respected, and valued. **Inclusion means people feel supported to bring their authentic selves into a space, knowing their differences will be embraced.**

**We commit to** inclusion, not only in the disability rights space, but in the larger social justice community. We commit to intersectional advocacy and to encouraging others to join us in the disability rights movement.

Join Us
For those disability rights organizations and activists who have long acknowledged the realities of the intersectional nature of disability, we thank you. To those who are just starting this journey, we encourage you. **Together, we can dismantle the systems that have oppressed too many for far too long.**

Send your ideas, thoughts, and questions to inclusion@thearc.org.
The disability rights movement is not always inclusive.

Many unjust systems impact disability rights organizations.

We want to become more accessible. This means sharing information in a way people can understand.

We want to become more equitable. This means treating people fairly and changing unjust systems. It also means sharing power more equally between groups.

We want to become more inclusive. This means welcoming people of all backgrounds into the disability rights movement. It also means supporting other social justice movements that impact people with disabilities.

Where Is the Demographic Data?
Several of our prior annual diversity reports included demographic information about the composition of our staff and Board of Directors. We are omitting that information in this report as we work to revamp and standardize the way we collect demographic information.

Our goal is to ensure that we report data that reflects the many identities and groups that are part of an incredibly diverse IDD community, as well as identify groups we are not reaching. Starting in 2021, we will make our staff and Board demographic data available on our website and encourage our chapters to do the same.
Access is a core value of disability rights. It means that everyone can fully participate. It means everyone receives information in a way they can understand and engage, including considerations of language.

We play a central role in the disability community, serving both as a leader in national-level advocacy efforts and as a resource for technical assistance and knowledge to our chapters and the communities we serve. We have a responsibility to make information and resources available in a way that is accessible and understandable to all of our constituents so that none are left behind.

In 2019, we made strides to improve upon our digital accessibility across the entire organization, beginning with a complete website redesign centered around usability and digital access. Our redesigned website includes the UserWay Accessibility Widget, which allows users to set their own accessibility preferences across a broad range of functions including keyboard navigation, screen reader access, text resizing, cursor size, color inversion, and more.

In tandem with our website redesign, we also endeavored to make our programs and outreach efforts more accessible to all communities:

- We worked with the U.S. Census Bureau to raise awareness of the critical importance of the disability community being counted in the 2020 Census and made all outreach materials plain language and screen-reader accessible.
- We prioritized accessibility and services at all events, such as Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation, and creating large-print programs.
Improving access in our organization went beyond advancing digital and event accessibility; it also meant bridging linguistic divides to reach communities that speak languages other than English:

- We translated many program resources into Spanish in an effort to better include individuals from Spanish-speaking communities.
- We developed Spanish-language materials on our website to help individuals and families plan for the future and developed materials in French, Chinese, and Spanish to support people with IDD in making health care decisions with their providers.
- We produced informational census videos in both English and Spanish.
- We presented ten Spanish-language disability awareness trainings to nearly 250 team members at the Advance Auto Parts distribution center in Kutztown, Pennsylvania—a predominantly Spanish-speaking workplace.
- As part of the organization’s strategic planning efforts, we created both English and Spanish stakeholder surveys.
- For the first time, we provided simultaneous English-to-Spanish interpretation for attendees at Arizona’s annual Autism & IDD Resource Conference.

ACCESS SUMMARY:

- The Arc worked on making information and resources more understandable and usable to the people we serve.
- We changed our website. It is now easier to use.
- We made our conferences and events more accessible. We offered captions, large-print programs, and American Sign Language interpretation.
- We created many resources in plain language. This included resources about the 2020 Census, how to make health care decisions, and future planning.
- We translated many resources into Spanish and a few into other languages. This included resources about how to make health care decisions, what is disability, the 2020 Census, and how The Arc was planning for the future of the organization.
Equity challenges us to look beyond ideas of tolerance and opportunity, to uncover deeper, entrenched systems of oppression that prevent the full and fair participation of historically marginalized groups. It calls on us to understand the inequities of how power is allocated in society and the resulting injustices. Once we understand the role of power, we can work toward justice by shifting power from those who have more to those who have less.

At The Arc, we work to break down the multitude of challenges that individuals with IDD and their families face to be heard, counted, and served. We also know that families living at the intersection of disability and other marginalized identities—such as Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other communities of color, the LGBTQ+ community, older adults, immigrants, and many others—face compounding discrimination and barriers. This is why we are committed to advancing equity in all that we do, from our programs to our policy advocacy.
In 2019, we made serving and supporting individuals and families living at various intersections of identities a priority.

- Through our Arizona state office, we continued our leadership role in the annual American Indian Disability Summit, a one-of-a-kind event serving Indigenous peoples from across the Southwest. It had the largest attendance since 2014.

- We partnered with Black and Latinx parent advocates to establish two new chapters of The Arc: Building Positive Lifestyles in Las Vegas, Nevada and Madres Unidas para una Mendota con Igualdad in Mendota, California.

- We partnered with the Protecting Immigrant Families campaign to sound the alarm when the Department of Homeland Security moved forward with harmful and discriminatory immigration policy changes.

- In the Presidential primary debates, we successfully advocated for the inclusion of a question on disability policy for the first time during a nationally televised debate.

  “Are there specific steps you would take to help people like Kyle to become more integrated into the workforce and into their local communities?”

- To diversify our employment talent pool across our employment initiatives, we partnered with more than 50 independent organizations serving a diverse community of people with and without disabilities.

- We represented nearly 5,000 primarily Black and African American students with disabilities in Georgia in a class action lawsuit challenging the state’s unequal and inferior segregated shadow school system for students with disability-related behaviors.
We launched an extensive nationwide search to recruit racially and ethnically diverse keynote speakers and entertainment for the 2019 National Convention.

The Board Development Committee prioritized diversity in its consideration of Board candidates and as a result, 56% of prospects had at least one diverse characteristic by age, disability, race/ethnicity, or religion.

**EQUITY SUMMARY:**

- The Arc worked to promote fairness and change unjust systems.
- We worked with immigrant rights groups for policy change.
- We partnered with many groups outside of the disability community on important issues. These issues included disability visibility, employment, and education.
- We advocated for people with disabilities who are also people of color. This included advocacy focused on education and immigration.
- We worked to make sure our speakers at the 2019 National Convention were diverse.
- We worked to make our Board more diverse.
INCLUSION

Does everyone in the room feel welcome?
Like they truly belong?

The lens of inclusion takes us further than access and equity to ensure we come together to create a community in which all are welcomed, respected, and valued. Inclusion means people feel supported to bring their authentic selves into a space, knowing their differences will be embraced.

The disability community is one of many communities advocating for change. We are dedicated to helping other social justice movements be inclusive of disability. We are also committed to learning more about the intersection of identities in our own work and how we can be an effective ally to other movements. We took big steps forward in 2019 in advancing inclusion, both within our own office and in how we deliver our programs.

▶ As part of a disability inclusion project with Advance Auto Parts, we formed cross-disability teams in six markets to create diverse and inclusive job candidate pipelines.
▶ Among the many types of organizations represented in these local markets were disability services agencies, vocational schools, re-entry programs for those previously incarcerated, homeless shelters, and many other organizations that serve a diverse array of individuals with disabilities.
▶ We updated language in our Position Statements to be more inclusive of the LGBTQ+ community.
▶ Many staff and teams across the organization committed to indicating pronouns in email signatures, staff bios, and during formal presentations.
▶ We conducted targeted outreach campaigns to the Black, African American, and Latinx communities and added more than 3,000 people to our contact database.
We changed our hiring practices at the national office to ensure robust diversity at each stage of the hiring process and strategically placed job advertisements to maximize reach to communities of color, including historically Black colleges and universities.

In our grassroots advocacy, we highlighted a diversity of perspectives within The Arc community across a wide spectrum of racial, age, and geographic diversity, as well as people with disabilities and their family members.

We piloted different strategies in some of our programs to better collect racial and gender identity demographic information.

**INCLUSION SUMMARY:**

- The Arc welcomed people of all backgrounds into the disability community.
- We worked with disability organizations outside of the IDD community. We did this work in employment and policy.
- We worked with diverse communities, including people of color and the LGBTQ+ community.
- We updated language in our Position Statements to be more inclusive.
- We shared pronouns when we communicated outside of the organization.
- We changed hiring practices and hired more diverse employees.
- We tried new ways of collecting data about who we are and who we serve.
What’s Next in AEI?

Moving into 2020, the AEI Team has plans to grow, ensuring a strong representation of perspectives and staff from all key areas of the organization: Marketing and Communications, Events, Operations, Programs, Advocacy, Chapter Relations, and Senior Leadership.

The Team will also be planning for 2021 and beyond, as The Arc’s Diversity Strategic Action Plan comes to an end, focusing on key equity priorities:

- Disability, Language, Event, and Information Access
- LGBTQ+ Equity
- Racial Equity

We are thrilled to continue on our equity journey as the national office of The Arc. We hope you will join us! To learn more and get involved, email inclusion@thearc.org.

Would you like to support The Arc’s AEI work?

Visit our donation page.