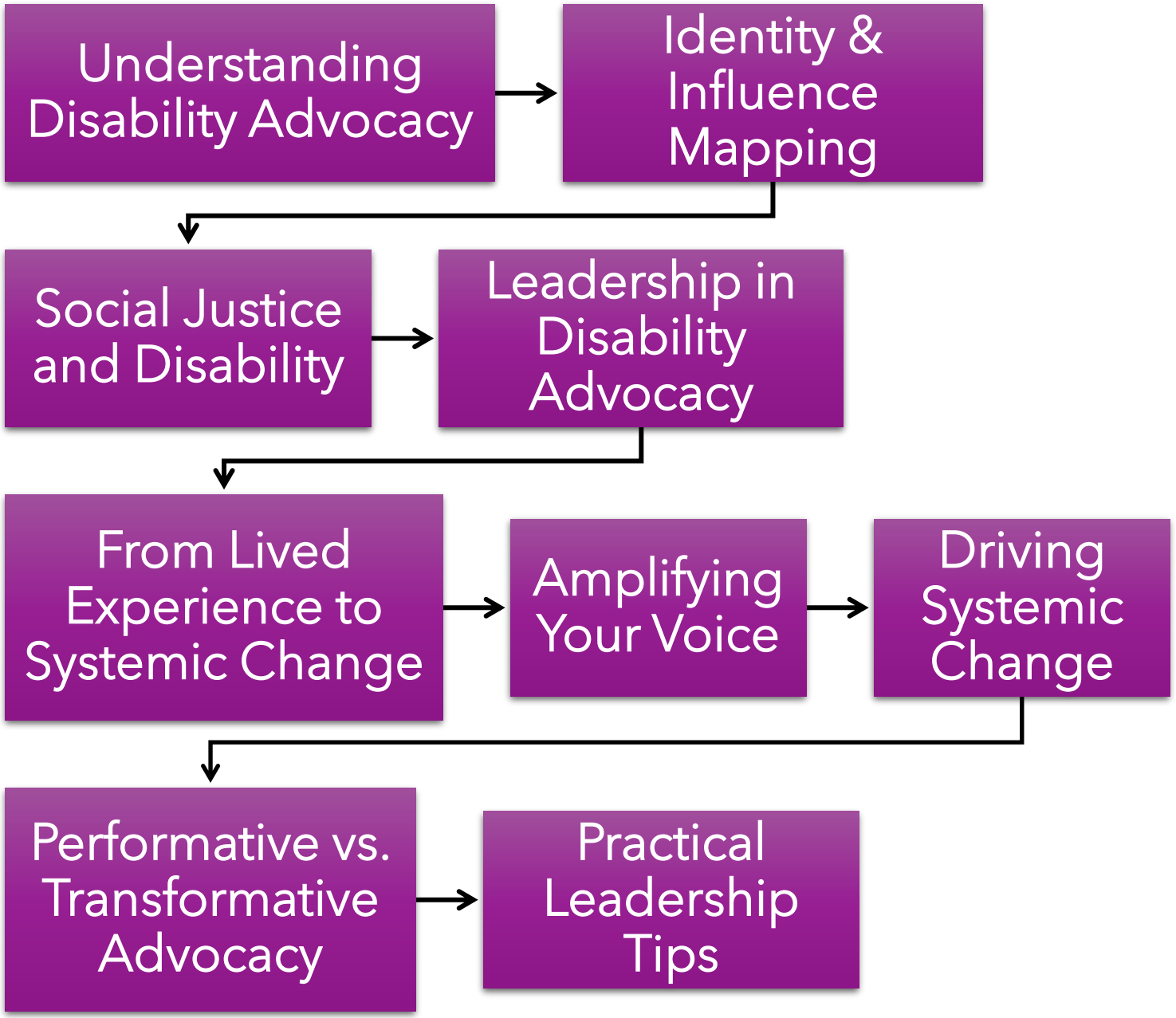
CULTIVATING LEADERSHIP IN DISABILITY ADVOCACY

MOVING FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION

AGENDA


Understanding Disability Advocacy
Identity & Influence Mapping
Social Justice and Disability
Leadership in Disability Advocacy
From Lived Experience to Systemic Change
Amplifying Your Voice
Driving Systemic Change
Performative vs. Transformative Advocacy
Practical Leadership Tips

IMPORTANCE OF DISABILITY ADVOCACY

Inaccessible and Inequitable Systems	• Systems are inequitable for disabled individuals
Community-Driven Change	• Change starts within communities, not institutions • Community involvement is crucial for meaningful change
Need for Disabled Leaders	• More disabled leaders are needed to shape the future
Disability as a Major Minority Group	• Disability is the largest minority group but often the most overlooked group in society

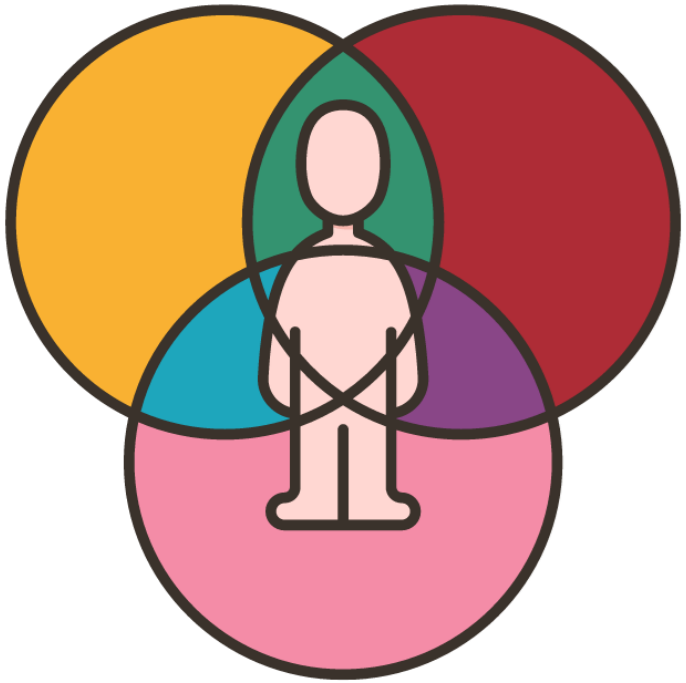
CULTIVATING LEADERSHIP

- Impact of Disability on Systems
  - Disability affects every system
  - Disabled voices are often missing in decision-making
- Need for Cultivating Leadership
  - Importance of having leaders with lived experience
  - Not just representation, but leadership

WHO YOU ARE MATTERS

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

- "The Many Whos I am"
  - Turn to the person next to you / grab a partner
  - Partner A speaks for **one uninterrupted minute** using only sentences that start with "I am…"
  - Then Partner B takes their turn to do the same.



Developmental Disabilities Association

THE FOUR PILLARS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

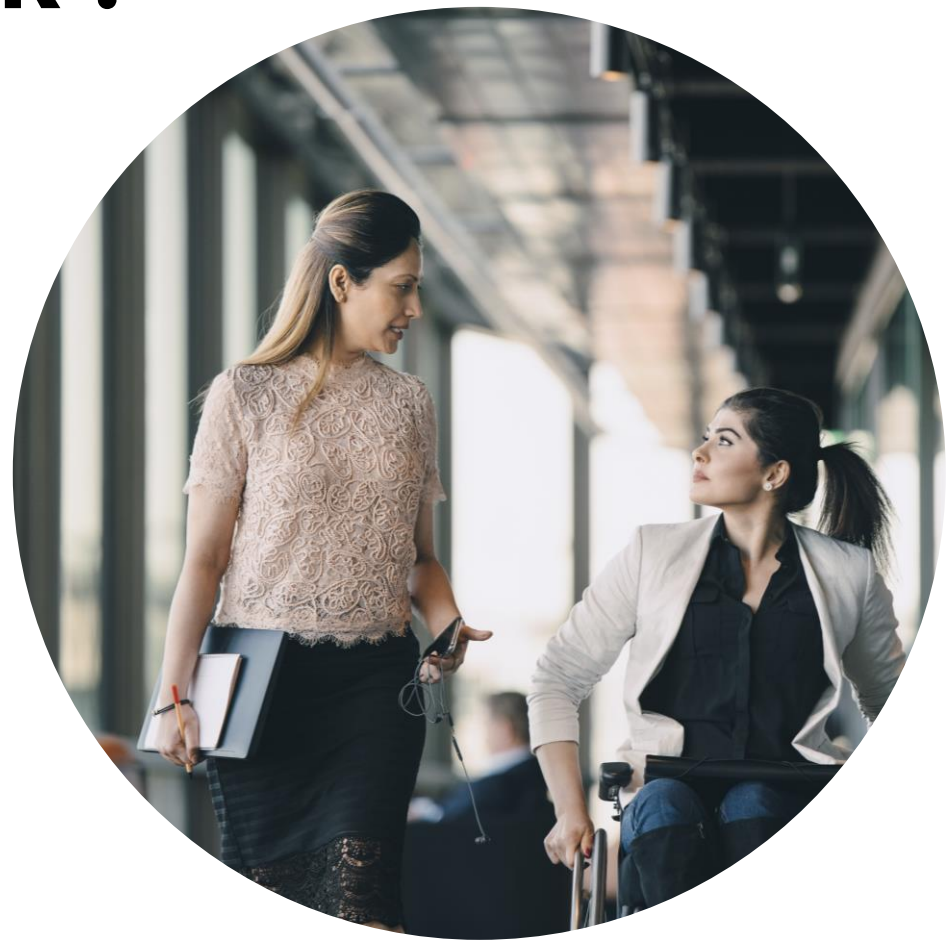
- **Access**
  - Availability of resources
  - Ability to enter and utilize services
- **Participation**
  - Inclusion in decision-making
  - Representation in leadership roles
- **Equity**
  - Accommodations to level the playing field
  - Ensuring fairness and justice
- **Rights**
  - Honoring freedoms
  - Protecting individual protections

FRAMEWORK FOR ADVOCACY

- Framework for Disability Justice
  - More than just physical accessibility
  - Focus on full participation
- Fighting for Fairness
  - Ensuring equal rights
  - Addressing often denied rights

WHO CAN BE A LEADER?

- Leadership is not about perfection or position
- Potential Leaders
  - Parents and caregivers
  - Youth and students
  - Activists and organizers



TRAITS OF EFFECTIVE LEADERS

- Essence of Leadership
  - Caring enough to start
  - Not needing to know everything

Many Whos I am … again!
(this time with a new partner)

- Common Misconceptions
  - Leaders are often thought to be experts
  - Leaders are often seen as extroverts
- Real Leadership Traits
  - Showing up and speaking out
  - Centering justice
  - Acting despite nervousness

TYPES OF ADVOCACY

Individual Advocacy

Taking action regarding specific issues on behalf of, for, and/or with another individual

Self-Advocacy

Taking action about specific issues on your own behalf (personal advocacy)

Developing self-respect is key

Recognizing that you have worth as a person – as a PWD

Systems/Collective Advocacy

Action by and/or on behalf of a group/class of people to create comprehensive, systemic change

Collective/Activism

Type of collective advocacy that involves direct action (or inaction)

May employ tactics such as boycotts and nonviolent civil disobedience

Awareness

You may well ask: 'Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?' You are quite right in calling, for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored.

– Martin Luther King, Jr., Letter From Birmingham Jail

ADVOCACY

Purpose and Passion

Planning & Preparation

Persuasion

Partnering/participation

Perseverance/Persistence

GRASSROOTS MOVEMENTS – BRIDGE TO SOCIAL CHANGE

OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

CALL TO ACTION

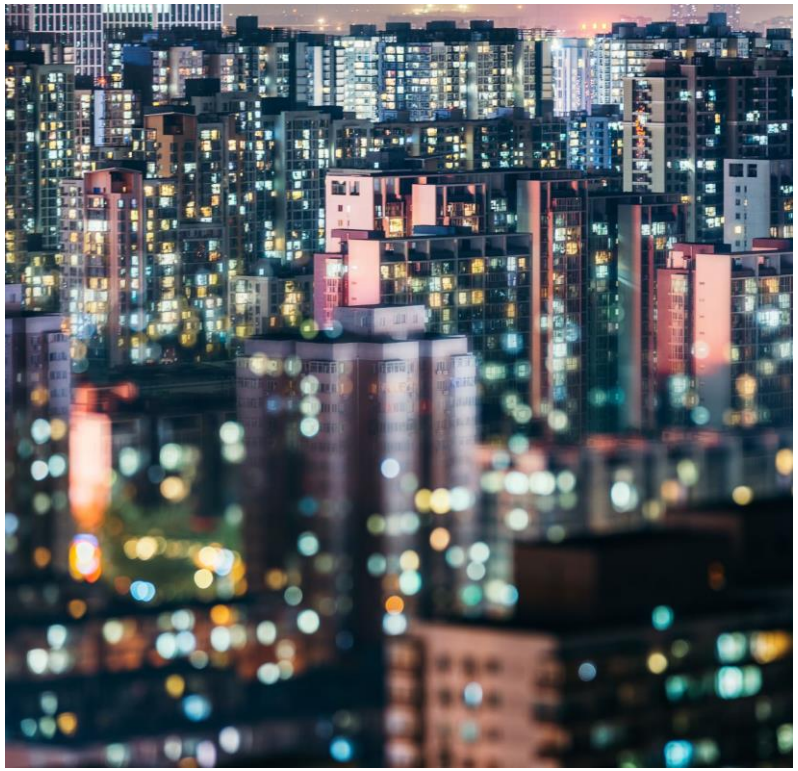
COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

CAMPAIGN FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

SOCIAL MOVEMENT

POWER OF PERSONAL STORIES

- Your story as an advocacy tool
  - Personal experiences can challenge stigma
- Impact of lived experience
  - Individual change contributes to broader movements
- Reflect on your advocacy journey
  - Identify a key experience that shaped your advocacy



SHARE WHAT COMES TO MIND & WHAT HOLDS YOU BACK

TAILORING YOUR MESSAGE

Know your role

Who are you in relation to the cause?

Tailor your message to their interests and needs

Know your audience

Speak to engage directly

Write to provide detailed information

Post to reach a wider audience

Testify to share personal experiences

Practice your story

Determine what you want people to feel

Identify what you want people to know

Decide what you want people to do

ADVOCACY PITCH ACTIVITY

1

Purpose of Advocacy Pitch

- Using your voice strategically
- Communicating who you are

2

Key Components

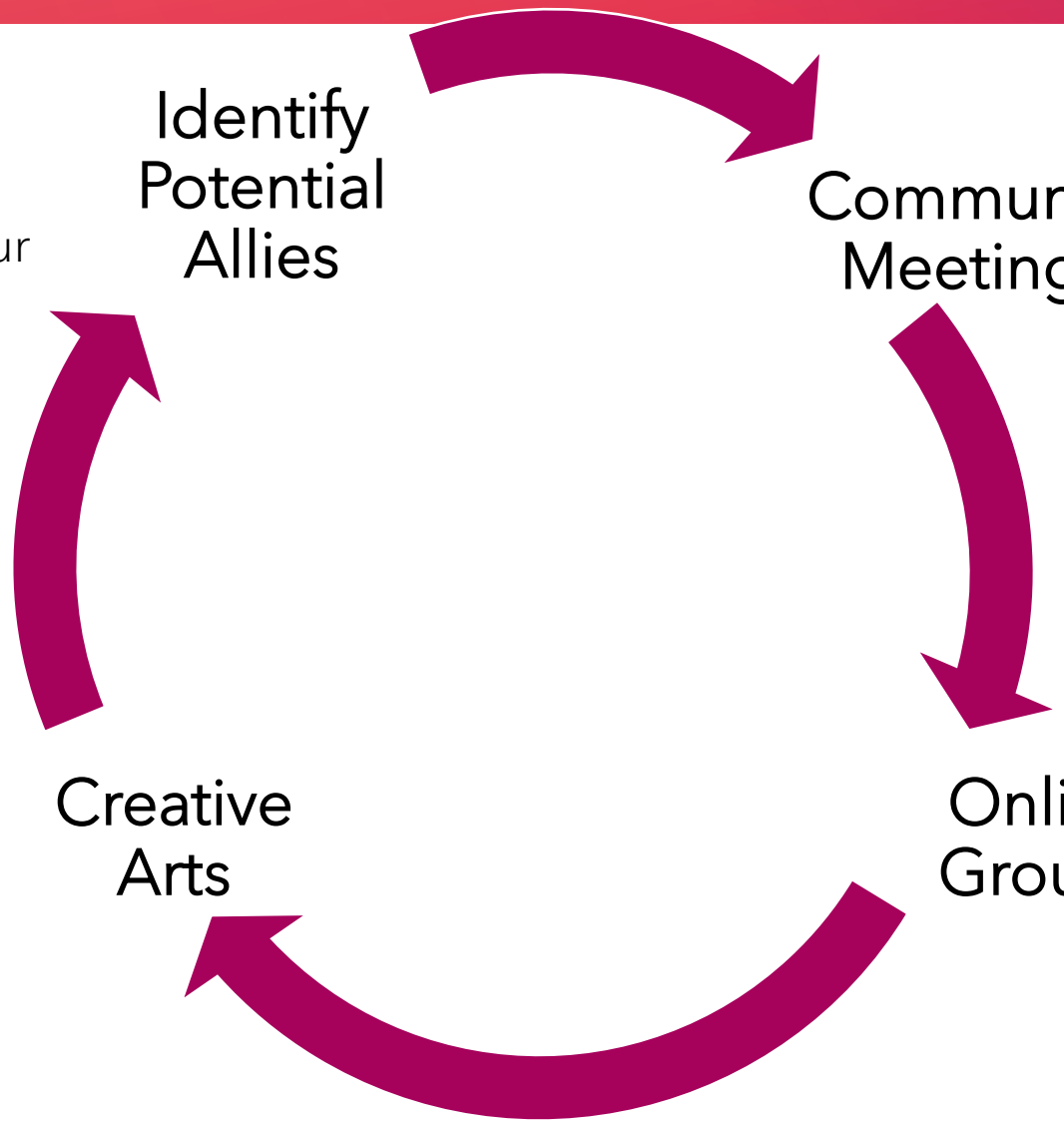
- What matters to you
- The change you want to see

3

Activity Prompt

- Draft a 1-2 sentence pitch

INCLUSIVE ADVOCACY



People who:
- share your goals
- need to hear your message

- Engage with local residents
- Share your advocacy goals

- Connect with like-minded individuals
- Expand your reach

- Use art to convey your message
- Reach diverse audiences

SKILLS AND TOOLS BRAINSTORM

- Communication
- Boundary-setting
- Self-care
- Knowledge of rights

DRIVING SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Sustainable Change

- Combines policy and systems work

Start Local

- Engage with school boards, nonprofits, and city councils

Examples of Local to National Action

- Local actions can lead to national impact

Initiating Structural Change

- Identify barriers needing structural change
- Begin with one letter, meeting, or partnership
- Local actions can create significant ripple effects

PERFORMATIVE VS. TRANSFORMATIVE ADVOCACY

Performative	Transformative
Hashtags	Awareness & Policy change
Empty statements	Lived-experience leadership
One-off events	Ongoing collaboration

PRACTICAL LEADERSHIP TIPS

Take up space even when it feels uncomfortable	• Embrace your presence and assert yourself
Build relationships, not perfection	• Focus on connections over flawless execution
You don’t need to be the loudest, but the clearest	• Communicate effectively and with clarity
You don’t need to wait to be invited. You belong here.	• Contribute to the movement with confidence, flaws and all

CLOSING ACTIVITY

- Leadership Action
  - Identify one action to take in the next 30 days
  - Write it down for accountability
  - Share with a partner
- Real Change
  - Starts with one step
  - Examples: making a call, telling your story, organizing a conversation
  - Own your action

TOOLKITS & NETWORKS

Toolkits & Frameworks

ADA National Network

Rooted in Rights

Join our network or reach out

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