

# Local Arts Network Newsletter

## ARTS & CULTURE FOR ALL

---



I recently stumbled upon a powerful clip of writer, professor, and social commentator Roxane Gay speaking at the 2020 Community MLK celebration at the University of Virginia. It wasn't a long speech I caught—just a brief TikTok video—but in those 30 seconds, Gay said something that really stuck with me, she said “I don't really believe in allies anymore because I think that allyship allows you to separate yourself from the problems of others. I think you really have to just say, ‘you know what, your problems are my problems too, and until your problems are addressed, none of us are gonna really be whole and free.’”

The [full video](#) goes slightly deeper into how reframing our approach to shared struggles can strengthen communities, and it got me to reflect on my own journey into the world of Disability Justice.

Before joining Americans for the Arts (AFTA) in 2022, accessibility and Disability Justice weren't areas I had worked on intentionally. During my onboarding, I was introduced to the [MAARC \(Mid Atlantic Accessibility Resource Committee\)](#), a collaboration between AFTA and Mid Atlantic Arts. I consider myself lucky to have been brought into this space, which profoundly shifted my understanding of inclusion. Many people acknowledge that disability will impact all of us at some point in our lives, but until I was immersed in a space led by people from the Disability community, I hadn't fully grasped how deeply interconnected our experiences of belonging are.



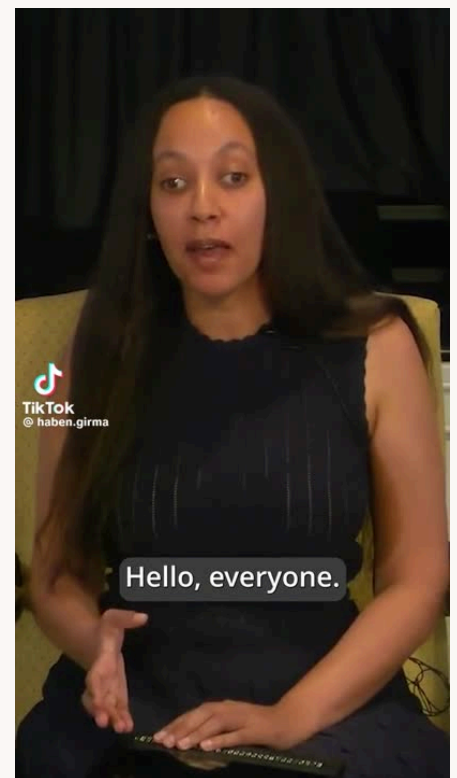
Working in professional settings that align with my personal justice values has been transformational. The framework I encountered—based on the [10 Principles of Disability Justice from Sins Invalid](#)—challenged the norms I had accepted for too long. It was no longer strange to bring my full self to work, even when that self varied from day to day.

The usual constraints of capitalist structures suddenly felt less rigid, and I experienced what it means to build a community that nurtures inclusion while allowing everyone to show up as their true selves.

My understanding of disability justice has grown significantly, and with it, my worldview has expanded. This abundance of learning has led me to figures like **Haben Girma**, the first Deafblind person to graduate from Harvard Law School. Girma is a human rights lawyer, an advocate for Disability Justice, and someone whose personality and take on teaching others makes me smile. I came across her through TikTok as well! Her conversation on Disability allyship with actress Milana Vayntrub was a moment of clarity. Recently, I've been sharing her speech from the White House Disability Pride Month convening, where she spoke about advocating for your voice; I loved the way she "lawyered" the moment by logically dismantling the nonsensical response to her request for an accommodation from her school administration—it was a sharp and necessary reminder of the persistent hurdles Deaf and Disabled people face.

Of course, this journey hasn't been without its bumps in the road. I've made mistakes and felt discomfort along the way, but I'm fortunate to have colleagues who constantly support, teach, and call me in when needed. It's through these relationships that I have grown to understand the broader, ever-changing world of Disability Justice.

Perhaps my phone is secretly the hero here, fine-tuning my algorithm to be a more thoughtful human. But whether it's my TikTok feed nudging me toward enlightenment or broadening my understanding of the world, it allows me to adapt alongside folks and move together towards a more just and inclusive future. ✨



**Image description:** Video thumbnail of Haben Girma speaking at the White House Disability Pride month convening. She is a Black woman in her 30's with long straight black hair, and hazel eyes that dance. She is wearing a blue dress and sitting in a yellow chair while using a braille transcriber resting in her lap.

# Disability Advocacy



A new bill is being considered in the U.S. Senate, the Allowing Steady Savings by Eliminating Tests Act (**ASSET Act**). This law would increase the savings Disabled people who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) can have. Please join Dance/NYC and **contact your Senators** to advocate for low income Disabled artists, dance workers, and community members.



Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF) and Disability Rights California have issued a **statement** condemning mask bans and urging lawmakers to protect disabled people's access to public life.

## AFTA's Accessibility Playlist



Mid Atlantic Arts and Americans for the Arts have been learning together about accessibility and Disability Justice. Results of the collaboration have been resources for the community. **Check out this video playlist** for some of the resources we created with the field that cover some of the beginning steps in the life-long journey of Disability Justice and other inclusion work.



In Dance Magazine, Nicole Loeffler-Gladstone interviewed Disabled artist **Kayla Hamilton** about "**disability as method and access as artistry**" in her ensemble project *How to Bend Down / How to Pick It Up* that will tour the U.S. next year. Kayla was one of the speakers in the **Intersectionality & Disability Justice resource**.



**Proclaiming Disability Arts** is an upcoming book, coming from the NYU Center for Disability Studies. **Francisco Echo Eraso**, a **Mid Atlantic Arts Resource Committee Member** is coordinating access for this book in development!

# Resources!



Luckily the learning journey on accessibility, Disability Rights, and Disability Justice is aided by magnificent advocates who create consistent, thoughtful, and motivating content! Below are some of the resources I have found helpful.

## **Crip News**

[Subscribe here](#) for a weekly roundup about Disability arts and politics by Kevin Gotkin.

Examples of past content:

- The Mill City Museum in Minneapolis, Minnesota is showing a community-led exhibition curated by [AmplifyMN called The Art of Disability Justice](#) now through November 3rd. The show “deliberately centers the narratives and leadership of individuals who have historically been most marginalized within the mainstream Disability Rights Movement, including BIPOC, queer, trans, and immigrant disabled people.”
- Sista Creatives Rising posted the [recording](#) of their 2024 Association of Writers & Writing Programs conference panel “Unmasking Grief: Writers Confront the Illusion of Post-Pandemic Recovery” featuring Amaranthia Sepia & Claire Jones, Jan Steckel, Terry Tierney, and Suchandrima Banerjee.



## **Peoples Hub**

An [online hub](#) for movement workers to learn, connect, collaborate, and strategize within and across the Disability Justice and solidarity economy movements. They host workshops, circles, clinics, and trainings for groups and collaborations.

**Next City Article** [Improving Access to the Polls For Disabled Voters Is Easier Than You Think](#)





## Resources continued

**The office of Accessibility and VSA at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts** through [resources, programs, and opportunities](#), wants to ensure the arts are accessible to all. Educators, cultural administrators, emerging and professional artists and performers with Disabilities can utilize Access/VSA's powerful professional learning webinars, trainings, and online courses, essential research, resources, lesson plans, and technical assistance and dynamic conferences.



**Office of Accessibility at the National Endowment for the Arts Blog**  
[The Push and Pull for Accessibility](#) by Beth Bienvenu October 2023.



The Regional Arts Organizations have accessibility resources on their sites. Click on the pictures below to check them out!





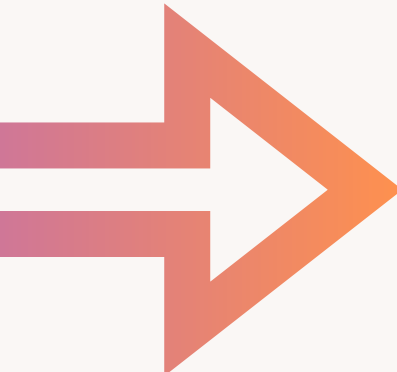
Register with  
early bird rate  
today for  
AFTACON  
2025!

Join us for AFTACON 2025 in Cincinnati, OH! On the banks of the Ohio River is a place with a view and a vibe unmistakably its own. A place where east meets west, north meets south and old meets new.

A place that comes together across bridges, regions and backgrounds, where pride is colorful and the energy contagious.

We look forward to welcoming you to Cincinnati.

Together with our local host [ArtsWave](#), we are excited for 2025 AFTACON to be an opportunity to CONvene and CONnect, and more deeply, a chance to CONsider the notion of **how** we do our work being just as important as **what** we do and **why**.



*Check out the “We are Committed to Belonging” section in the [policy and procedures](#) tab for a sneak peek at the statement of commitment to accessibility our staff have been developing. More to come on commitment in action on the AFTA website soon!*

---

REACH OUT  
FOR A CHAT

Let's chat!

GET TO KNOW  
US BETTER

---

mlyonswarren@artsusa.org • hflanagan@artsusa.org • dgigiban@artsusa.org • aharris@artsusa.org

[www.americansforthearts.org](http://www.americansforthearts.org)

---