

Lead the Vision Forward on Financial Inclusion for People with Disabilities:

Four strategies municipalities can use to build financial inclusion for all

The economic health of cities, and their communities, depends on the financial well-being and stability of all residents, including residents with disabilities.

National Disability Institute's (NDI) [analysis of data](#) from the FINRA Investor Education Foundation's National Financial Capability Study provides compelling evidence pointing to the need for solutions that advance financial stability and capability for people with disabilities. As one of the largest minority groups in the United States, more than 50 million people live with a disability, and one in four households include a child or an adult with a disability.

As a group, people with disabilities experience high rates of poverty. Twenty-six percent of working-age people with disabilities live in poverty, compared with 11 percent of those without disabilities. Disability is both a cause and a consequence of poverty. Poverty and disability reinforce each other.

People with disability also face low educational attainment, limited income and some of the highest out-of-pocket expenses of all population groups. Any substantial shock to the financial stability of this population can make them even more vulnerable.¹

Municipalities have a unique ability to lead, convene and build economic fairness and inclusion for people with and without disabilities – and their families.

1 <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol28/iss1/10/>

Empowered Cities is a landmark initiative to advance financial inclusion and economic opportunity for lower-income people with disabilities. Empowered Cities catalyzes municipal efforts to advance economic opportunity for people with disabilities.

This brief contributes to the second pillar in the 4-step framework NDI uses to support municipal and community leaders as they explore, establish and expand their efforts to include people with disabilities across a spectrum of financial empowerment initiatives.

Learn about the
Needs of People
with Disabilities

Learn about
Implementation
Models

Take Action

Ensure
Sustainability
and Impact

➔ Visit our website: empoweredcities.com

These materials were supported by Citi Community Development.

 **citi**

 **ndi** NATIONAL
DISABILITY
INSTITUTE

This brief outlines four strategies municipalities can utilize to build financial inclusion for all, as well as action steps that can be taken without additional funding by utilizing existing resources and connections.

Strategies:

Locate Municipal Champions and Complementary Resources

Encourage and Convene Community Partners

Align and Coordinate Efforts and Activities

Develop and Build Capacity and Sustainability

Strategy #1:

Locate Municipal Champions and Complementary Resources – Promote and Highlight Intentionality

Start from within your municipal offices to identify departments, such as the Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD), Economic Development Offices or Offices of Financial Empowerment, and align efforts and resources to further expand financial inclusion opportunities. Many service-related municipal departments serve similar populations, including people with disabilities. Explore and identify where these crossover activities occur, convene key representatives to help develop strategies and effective ways to collaborate.

Then work to identify concrete steps that can be taken to fully integrate people with disabilities into financial empowerment strategies across different municipal programs.

Financial empowerment strategies that can be assessed to ensure they are inclusive of people with disabilities can include: a micro-enterprise program, housing and education supports, workforce development, small business loans, financial capability and asset-building services, Bank On initiatives and Children Savings Accounts or Opportunity Accounts, among others. By doing so, you create a culture where the financial stability of

all residents is paramount to the economic fabric of your city. Other ways to lead the vision forward include establishing accessibility policies and procedures that address inclusive messaging and accessibility measures.

It is also important to integrate universal design principles to ensure all services and resources are accessible to as many people as possible, not just people with disabilities. Universal design is the design of buildings, products, initiatives or environments to make them accessible to all people, regardless of age or disability.

Incorporating universal design into the way initiatives are implemented may include, for example, incorporating ABLÉ accounts within Children’s Savings or Opportunity Account programs to ensure they are accessible to people with disabilities or incorporating, into the training financial counselors receive, information on disability awareness, the disability service system, disability-specific public benefit programs and ABLÉ accounts.

A tax-free Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) account lets people with disabilities save for their future without affecting their benefits.



Environmental and product universal design examples may include installing curb ramps that help people who are wheelchair users, but also benefit mothers with strollers and seniors with grocery carts. Holding public meetings in venues near public transportation lines can boost participation levels of people with disabilities and other groups. Demonstrating intentionality in efforts to be accessible and inclusive by asking about accessibility needs, providing materials in appropriate formats and ensuring that you use accessible meeting and event spaces serves as a model for other agencies and employers.

An important step is also to identify avenues to promote and highlight financial empowerment strategies and resources across each of these municipal offices.



Action Steps:

- Identify other departments serving people with disabilities or municipal programs that can be tailored to be inclusive of people with disabilities**
- Identify cross-department activities, strategies and opportunities to collaborate**
- Integrate universal design principles**
- Align and promote municipal resources**
- Create a culture of financial stability for all**

Strategy #2: Encourage and Convene Community Partners – Cultivate partnerships and develop a shared vision through education

Municipalities cannot do this work alone. To be impactful, municipalities must identify and cultivate partnerships, share information and leverage their influence to develop a shared vision. They can do this by creating a community-wide financial empowerment strategy that includes municipal-led initiatives and programs implemented by community partners. This strategy would be based on a comprehensive approach towards financial inclusion for all residents, including residents with disabilities.

City-led or city supported financial empowerment efforts can build collaborative relationships with nonprofits and other key stakeholders working in the disability and the financial empowerment space to broaden and maximize impact. By cultivating collaboration, organizations across sectors will be encouraged to develop new or stronger relationships and foster innovative thinking.

Educate new partners and stakeholders in the community by using data to create a better understanding of the disability community and its financial needs. Identify needed resources and develop opportunities for joint outreach, then work together to ensure that resources and services are available to this community.

Use data to take action: A study done by NDI on the Banking Status of Adults with Disabilities identified that people with disabilities were more than twice as likely to be unbanked and more likely to be underbanked as compared to people without disabilities. This kind of data can be used to create new pathways for partnering with financial institutions and community organizations to reach those who may be unbanked, underbanked or credit invisible.



Host community conversations with disability and non-disability partners and people with disabilities to develop greater understanding, promote buy-in and trust and raise awareness of efforts underway. By increasing awareness and improving understanding, municipalities can help ensure that the full inclusion of people with disabilities into financial empowerment programs goes beyond just making sure that facilities and programs are ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) accessible, but that they are inclusive to meet the financial needs of persons with disabilities as well.



Action Steps:

- Identify community partners and cultivate collaboration
- Gather and share data
- Build awareness and understanding
- Develop a shared vision



Strategy #3: Align and Coordinate Efforts and Activities – Break down silos to expand and enhance services and work toward collective impact

To align and coordinate stronger collaborations, utilize pre-existing relationships in the financial empowerment space and the disability space to expand or enhance financial empowerment-related services to people with disabilities. Breaking down silos and strengthening partnerships is key in order to bring in new stakeholders and create comprehensive and effective programs that more intentionally serve people with disabilities while developing and reinforcing the shared vision.

A municipality can demonstrate a commitment to these efforts by expanding on an existing, or establishing, a new partner network made up of an array of community-based organizations that include disability and financial empowerment providers. This structured mechanism for aligning and coordinating inclusive and accessible financial empowerment services and resources is a key step that will assist in accomplishing mutual goals. Primary functions of the network can include:

- Identify available resources and gaps (not only in services, but also in accessibility and availability)
- Create a resource map and explore new approaches to increase access to accurate information
- Develop strategies to assist people with disabilities build their financial capability
- Identify opportunities for collaboration and partnership in order to implement these strategies

As a group, this network can set standards, identify training needs, boost participation and provide support to improve program quality. Together they can develop marketing, referral and outreach materials that highlight specific services and that visually include representatives from the disability community. The partner network also can serve as an outreach channel to directly reach the disability community through trusted providers. Network members can also help promote each other's programs through their own networks to ensure that more people with disabilities are aware of them.

Once the partner network is created and you have gained interest, establish an advisory committee of a select group of members to be the backbone that helps lead the vision forward. The advisory committee may include local, regional and national level representatives from both municipal offices and community partners, such as the FDIC, Federal Reserve Bank, Veterans Affairs, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and programs such as VITA and Bank On. As part of this group, the voices of the disability community must be included to assure that programs and services are meeting the needs of people with disabilities. The advisory committee serves in a strategic planning/leadership role to raise visibility of the shared vision and provide accountability that goals are being accomplished.



Action Steps:

- Build a partner network
- Map resources and identify gaps
- Identify areas of collaboration and strategies to improve program quality and outreach
- Establish an advisory committee

Strategy #4: Develop and Build Capacity and Sustainability – Create a common language

For this work to continue, it is important to develop and build capacity and sustainability within the partner network and beyond. Through the partner network, identify training needs and provide opportunities for learning and building awareness.

Encourage all nonprofit service providers, including those working on financial inclusion and financial empowerment initiatives, to become more educated on disability-related financial capability topics. State-level offices with a focus on disability such as Vocational Rehabilitation or the State Treasurer’s office may be able to assist. These offices employ subject matter experts and often provide free training on disability sensitivity, accessing ABLÉ accounts and the impact of employment on benefits.

Encourage disability service providers to become more familiar with financial coaching, counseling and other financial empowerment initiatives. This can help create a greater understanding of how financial empowerment strategies can be used to improve the financial stability of people with disabilities which, in turn, can help service providers achieve their own programmatic goals.

The more social service providers understand how to navigate the financial challenges people with disabilities face, the better equipped they are to guide the people they serve. This approach can help create a common language, promote a shared vision and increase confidence levels related to engaging in conversations about financial issues.



Action Steps:

- Identify training needs of partners and collaborators
- Develop training materials and resources to assist in building the capacity of partners
- Host/provide training and peer learning opportunities



Conclusion:

Municipalities recognize that the economic viability of their cities is dependent upon the financial stability of all residents. As leaders, they have a unique opportunity to lead the vision forward to build financial inclusion for all – including residents with disabilities.

The unique position municipalities are in can foster strong leadership, strengthen relationships and develop processes to fully integrate financial empowerment strategies for people with disabilities into service delivery models across a wide array of programs while encouraging others to do the same.

Municipalities are also positioned to demonstrate intentionality by leveraging their influence while working toward a common agenda, effectively communicating across sectors to achieve collective impact. Through collaboration, municipalities can help create a better understanding of how people with disabilities go about living their daily lives, the financial challenges they face and how to meet them where they are, so that their financial needs can be more effectively addressed.

There is not a one-size fits all approach for serving persons with disabilities through a financial empowerment lens but, with the right strategy and the right people at the table, a municipality can help create financial inclusion and accessibility across a community by identifying opportunities for universally designed services and supports that advance financial capability and improve positive financial behaviors for people with disabilities.

Resources

[Quick Reference Guide: Defining Disability](#)

[Quick Reference Guide: How to Use Data to Identify the Financial Needs of People with Disabilities in Local Communities](#)

[Quick Reference Guide: Identifying Disability Partners in Your Community](#)

[Creating a Resource Map for Your Community](#)



Download Quick Reference Guides and other Empowered Cities resources at **empowerdcities.com**



Review of Action Steps

Strategy #1

Locate Municipal Champions and Complementary Resources

- Identify other departments serving people with disabilities
- Identify cross-department activities, strategies and opportunities
- Integrate universal design principles
- Align and promote municipal resources
- Create a culture of financial stability for all

Strategy #2

Encourage and Convene Community Partners

- Identify community partners and cultivate collaboration
- Gather and share data
- Build awareness and understanding
- Develop a shared vision

Strategy #3

Align and Coordinate Efforts and Activities

- Build a partner network
- Map resources and gaps
- Identify areas of collaboration and strategies to improve program quality and outreach
- Establish an advisory council

Strategy #4

Develop and Build Capacity and Sustainability

- Identify training needs
- Develop training materials
- Host/provide training and peer learning opportunities



For questions about this brief or additional information on building a financial inclusion program, email ask@ndi-inc.org.