



2021: A Year in Review

In 2021, Detroit Disability Power turned three. Like a perennial flower moving into its third season, DDP went from “creeping” to “leaping.” We accomplished a lot in 2021 and grew in a multitude of ways. Our roots continue to deepen in community and together we bear fruit: a more educated, activated, and powerful local disability community. Last year will always be special in our history because April 2021 is when DDP became a membership organization. We are intentionally evolving into a more member-led organization that exemplifies our mission to build the organizing and political power of the disability community.

Our Theory of Change is that if we organize disabled residents and our allies on issues, while also transforming local movements to have a clear commitment to disability justice, we are stronger together and can make real change. We are explicit that we have to model the world we are trying to create while in the process of these efforts. There’s no other way to live Disability Justice! Hence, our internal motto is “The way we do the work is the work.” This is our constant reminder to take care of ourselves, take care of our relationships, act with integrity, and to “transform ourselves to transform the world,” as Grace Lee Boggs said.

Infographic with a purple-to-blue gradient background and white circles. Text includes: "BECAME A MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATION IN APRIL 2021", "DDP MEMBERS 215 AND COUNTING!", "DETROIT DISABILITY POWER ROCKING IT IN 2021!", and the Detroit Disability Power logo.

Infographic with a purple-to-blue gradient background and white circles. Text includes: "42", "DETROIT DISABILITY POWER ROCKING IT IN 2021!", "APPEARANCES IN LOCAL AND NATIONAL NEWS", and the Detroit Disability Power logo.



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Detroit Disability Power focuses our work on the “Four Levels of Oppression & Change,” which are the personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural. We seek to interrupt ableism as it happens at each of these levels. Examples of our holistic approach can be found in some of our highlights from last year:

- **As a result of our organizing, Detroit became the first city in the nation to prioritize disabled residents for vaccine distribution.** DDP received [national news](#) coverage for this effort, which included hundreds of calls and letters to Mayor Duggan and our health director. We also moved disabled people up in Macomb County and the State of Michigan’s vaccine line. We created [this document](#) that uses data to illustrate the tremendous disparity disabled people face with COVID. It has been very effective in educating decision makers.



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- We ended 2021 with **215 members!** Launching in April, our member drive was a huge success, blowing our original goal of 50 members out of the water. We had our first member meeting in September and launched **4 Action Teams** which organize on issues of healthcare, education, voting rights, and accessible/affordable housing. These member-driven teams are generative and fun, and in the not-so-distant-future, will be an organizing force to reckon with.
- We launched our [Policy Platform](#) in June, which is a compilation of dozens of policy recommendations, in 8 issue areas: criminal justice, education, employment & the economy, government services, healthcare, housing, transportation & mobility, and voting rights. These policy recommendations are relevant and needed *now*, as our community's challenges in these areas become exacerbated by the disparate impact of COVID, economic uncertainty, and [police violence on people with disabilities](#).
- In spring of 2021, the **Office of Disability Affairs (ODA) was launched** in the Civil Rights Department in the City of Detroit. This was the result of years of organizing by local disabled activists. DDP had a large part in these efforts and now collaborates with the ODA, while continuing to push the City through resident organizing. We ended 2021 entering Detroit's budget season and thus launched a campaign to increase the budget of the ODA from an ineffective \$120,000 annually to a proper \$1.4 million. Detroit's 126,000+ disabled residents deserve more as we have generations of disinvestment in infrastructure, as well as a scant history of prioritizing disabled residents in City services and programs!
- We released our [Social Justice Access Toolkit](#). This has become a great go-to resource for organizers and other movement folks who want to ensure their work is inclusive and accessible to people with a variety of disabilities.
- We also released The [Intersectional Multigenerational Fight for Voting Rights](#), which chronicles voting rights history in the US and the social justice movements behind progress. It weaves together women's suffrage and voting rights for African Americans and for disabled Americans to show similarities and differences in these movements, ending with a call to expand voting rights and access.
- For the 2021 **municipal elections, our field team contacted more than 111,000 Detroit voters** with a C3 election reminder, as well as information about polls and accessibility.



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- We offered a 3-part series of **organizing workshops** for members, as well as a 5-part Community Conversation series about the **intersection of ageism, racism, and ableism**, which was open to the public and engaged hundreds of people. We love meeting new people and continuing to **develop our members' leadership**. For example, we featured about a dozen DDP members as panelists in these virtual conversations.
- Core to our commitment to address ableism at the personal and interpersonal levels, is our arts & culture programming. In 2021, we hosted monthly **Community Care Circles, which are healing justice-focused support groups** for disabled residents and caregivers. We also offered hundreds of hours of **virtual accessible dance classes** through our **DanceAbility** program, and hosted a **Reflective Photography workshop series** for members to document and share the art and poetry of their disabled lives in a finale showcase.
- We've been working to **diversify our funding**. In addition to growing our grant support, we've also raised significant funds through membership dues, anti-ableism workshop fees, and through **Disability Access Consulting (DAC), our fee-for-service arm**. In 2021, DAC helped 14 clients dismantle ableism in their organization. Consulting services ranged from document and training review, to internal policy & program review and staff training; to accessible event planning, inclusive design advice, and built environment access auditing. Clients ranged from nonprofit and social justice organizations, academic institutions, parks and community infrastructure developers, hospitality groups, corporations and technology start-ups.
- We added three new positions to our team in 2021: a Policy Analyst, a Communications Director and a Deputy Director. We are all working remotely, but look forward, when it's safe, to moving into the soon-to-be completed **[Love Building](#), which is being designed to be the most accessible building in Detroit.**
- Detroit Disability Power received several awards in 2021 including a *Spirit of Detroit* award from Councilmember Raquel Casteneda-Lopez, a *District 1 Heroes* award from State Sen. Stephanie Chang, and the *Myra Wolfgang* award from Detroit Jews for Justice.



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2021 was a busy and productive year! Of course, we've done more than what is mentioned above. We hope you enjoyed our graphics earlier, which highlight other achievements and additional impact dismantling ableism at the personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural levels.

Looking into 2022, we are entering the year with a lot of momentum, and with a focus on continuing to expand and grow our work. Some of our goals include 100 new dues-paying members, tailored anti-ableism workshops for both media and medical professionals, and a robust and meaningful 2022 GOTV program.

Thank you for your continued support. Your commitment to inclusion, equity and access for all through DDP is important and much appreciated.

Thank you from the DDP Team!



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