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The Importance of Fair Compensation

Introduction: Young adults with disabilities bring irreplicable lived experience, expertise and fresh perspectives to the table. Despite this, they are often asked to work for free or for minimal compensation. This practice is not only an inequity but also overlooks the significant contributions we can make. Fair compensation is imperative in creating an inclusive environment in which young people are valued and treated equitably.

Key Points:

Lived Experience as Expertise:

- Young adults with disabilities possess unique perspectives and skills derived from their lived experiences. These are often as valuable as formal qualifications and should be recognized as such.
- Lived experience is irreplaceable and contributes significantly to the success and authenticity of any project or initiative.

Why Fair Compensation Matters:

- Historically, people with disabilities have been economically disenfranchised and not offered easy access to economic opportunities, despite equally contributing our time, effort, and skills to society. Despite this, we still have bills to pay and families to feed like anyone else.
- Fair monetary compensation is the entry-level condition to creating a respectful and equitable environment. While experience and networking can be great benefits for young adults, non-monetary benefits like these should not be considered compensation alone.
- ~~Societal and governmental systems often create an environment where people with disabilities are disproportionately likely to be un- or undercompensated for their work. Fair compensation is the most basic way to provide disabled youth the respect and dignity which is automatically granted to many groups in society.~~

See the Whole Person:

- **Lived experience is not *all* we have to offer:** Youth with disabilities do not only provide value *because* they are youth with disabilities. View them as a whole person with various strengths. Remember, youth you work with may become adults you work with - invest in them!

Challenges and Solutions:

- **Financial Constraints:** Organizations often cite budgetary limitations as a reason for not compensating young adults with disabilities. However, creative solutions, such as grants, partnerships, or stipends, can help ensure fair compensation. Alternatively, you can choose a smaller/different project to ensure you have the budget for fair compensation for all involved.
- **Navigating Benefits:** Careful consideration is needed to ensure that compensation does not negatively impact social security benefits. If a young adult chooses to involve you in these conversations, gift cards and other alternative forms of monetary compensation can be effective solutions.
- **Equity in Payment:** Compensation should be equal for all young adults doing the same work, regardless of their mode of payment (stipends, gift cards, etc.).

Conclusion:

- Fair compensation is a key element of respecting young adults with disabilities and creating inclusive, equitable environments. It recognizes their contributions and respects their expertise, as it does for any other individual. By compensating young adults fairly, we are able to benefit from their unique insights and set an example for effective youth engagement.

