History:
In 2015 with the leadership of the Chicago Community Trust, Chicago celebrated the 25th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by looking forward to the next frontier of disability inclusion and civil rights. ADA 25 Advancing Leadership, the nation’s first disability inclusion initiative focused on civic and professional advancement, emerged as a legacy.

Vision:
People with disabilities will lead with power and influence for full participation and equal opportunity.

Mission:
To build a pipeline and network of leaders with disabilities deeply engaged in the civic life of the Chicago region and advancing in their careers — consistent with the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Guiding Principles:
- Disability is a natural part of the human experience.
- Despite the passing of the ADA in 1990, people with disabilities continue to have higher poverty rates, lower educational outcomes and lower employment rates than the general population. ADA 25 Advancing Leadership is dedicated to overcoming these disparities and fulfilling the ADA’s promise of: Equal Opportunity, Independent Living, Economic Self Sufficiency, and Full Participation.

Goal
In 2020, we will see more than 300 people with disabilities in 500 civic and professional leadership positions, exercising their influence to impact communities throughout the Chicago region.¹

Strategies
1. Identify, educate and empower emerging leaders with disabilities through an annual Leadership Institute. By 2020, 16 Fellows per year will be connected with mentors and advancement opportunities.

2. Build a robust Members Network of established leaders with disabilities working to increase civic engagement, professional growth, and influence. By 2020, the network will grow from 75 to 200 members.

3. Connect leaders with disabilities to opportunities to build their power and influence through our Civic Connections project. By 2020, civic and professional advancements will grow from 45 to 200.

¹ There is no good current data, but current number of positions filled by people with disabilities serving on non-profit and public sector boards, commissions, task forces and committees is estimated at 300 in 2017
Executive and Program Committees

A. Executive Committee

Co-Chairs
- Paulette Jagers, Vice President, Talent, Learning and Inclusion, BMO
- Karen Tamley, Commissioner, Mayors Office for People with Disabilities

Members:
- Mark Ishaug, CEO Thresholds
- Kenton Klaus, Principal, Deloitte
- ___________________, Chicago Community Trust
- Steve Solomon, Vice President Corporate Relations, Exelon Corporation
- Shelley Stern Grach Director - Civic Engagement Chicago, Microsoft
- Manika Turnbull, Vice President & Chief Diversity Officer, Health Care Health Service Corporation, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois

B. Program Committee

Co-Chairs
- Ann Manikas, Director, Organizational Development and Learning, American Medical Association
- Karen Tamley, Commissioner, Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities

Members
- Laurie Dittman, Senior Policy Analyst, City of Chicago
- Bridget Evans, Patient Safety Analyst, Ann and Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago, 2015 Advancing Leadership Fellow
- Daisy Feidt, Executive Vice President, Access Living
- Joanie Friedman, Director of Civic Partnerships, University of Chicago – Office of Civic Engagement
- Tsehaye Hebert, Playwright, 2017 Advancing Leadership Fellow
- Sarah Helm, Manager, Diversity and Inclusion, Talent Management, Discover Financial Services
- Sam Knight, Community Organizer, Wil Grundy Center for Independent Living, 2015 Advancing Leadership Fellow
- Tony Martinez, Director of Development, The Chicago Community Trust
- Randall Owen, Clinical Assistant Professor, Department of Disability and Human Development (DHD), University of Illinois at Chicago, Associate Director, Institute on Disability and Human Development, 2015 Fellow
- Melissa Reishus, President, Seaglass Group
**Testimonials**

**Civic Connections Project**

“To make our regional land conservation organization’s work truly inclusive, we know that we need volunteers with disabilities to serve on our board, committees and other capacities. We are delighted to learn that Advancing Leadership can help connect us to members who share our passion for nature conservation, and know that this nationally unique organization will be a great resource for building our diversity.”

Jerry Adelmann, President and CEO, Openlands

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**Annual Leadership Institute**

- More than just one weekend, the experience is about something much bigger than the classes. It is about community, connection, network and opportunity. It is about being seen as a leader and being able to draw strength from others. This is only the beginning.

- Of the highest value. It was an opportunity to revisit leadership principles and to connect with leaders in the greater Chicago area for whom disability is a more than a word, an obstacle, or an initiative.

- People are empowered to share their leadership skills with an organization when they feel their work is important and impactful. The Leadership Institute re-established the value of my contribution.

- The Leadership Institute helped me build relationships and new skills that have had an immediate positive impact on my career and personal goals. Now, I have a plan for how I can make a difference in the Chicago community -- something I've always wanted to do more actively, but I didn't know quite how to begin.

- The Leadership Institute gave me a tremendous opportunity to put my disability – and indeed my life – in perspective. It reinvigorated my leadership style so that I now want to take a prominent role in civic engagements.

- I was able to articulate long-held perspectives on disability; consider and adopt new perspectives; validate and inform my perspectives through dialogue with my peers; and strengthen my confidence in the leadership choices I make.

- A worthy investment of time and resources that has resulted in deep reflection and an urgency to take action.

- It is the single most important leadership experience that I have had in my life.
Civic Connections Project

Since December 2015, as a result of the Civic Connections project members and fellows have been appointed to new civic roles - with more pending. A few examples of the 50 connections made to date are:

- New Board member of AIDS Foundation of Chicago
- New Board member of Erie House
- New Board member of Center for Disability and Elder Law
- New Board member of Near North Health Service Corporation
- New Board member of Open Communities
- New Board member of Openlands
- New Board member of Red Theater
- New member of Chicagoland Business Leaders Network Advisory Board
- New member of Chicago Hearing Society Advisory Board
- New member of Disabilities Fund Advisory Board, Chicago Community Trust
- New member of PACE ADA Advisory Committee
- New member of Access Living Young Professionals Council, Finance Committee, and Program Committee
- New member of Chicago Mayors Office for Persons with Disabilities Accessible Taxi Committee
- New Member of CMAP/Metropolitan Planning Council Committee on Inclusive Growth
- Two new members of Illinois Human Rights Task Force on inclusion
- Mission Accessible Task Force, Museum of Science & Industry