

Social Inclusion for Disabled Citizens: Final Paper for Problem and Analysis

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PAHSPB-501002: Problem Solving for Social Change

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January 19, 2023

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I. Problem Overview

1. Background of the Problem

In the United States, despite nationwide protection for disabled citizens has been built through legislation, regulations, and case laws, deprivation in inclusive education settings, cultural and political participation, and lack of access to equal working opportunities still exist. The problem of disabled citizens being excluded from public life manifests itself in economic, educational, healthcare, and other civic and political arenas.

In order to avoid arbitrary assumptions, several statistics may be conducive to the subsequent discussions. According to the data provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 26% of adults in the United States have some type of disability, and disability is especially common in older adults, women, and minorities. In the healthcare field, 1 in 3 adults with disabilities does not have a usual healthcare provider (Disability and Health Protection, n.d.). Compared to the 61.8% employment rate of people without disabilities, the employment rate of people with disabilities in 2021 is 19.1%. Even across all educational attainment groups, unemployment rates for persons with disabilities were higher than those for persons without disabilities (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2022). The current state of the situation is dire, and the purpose of this study is to demonstrate how to promote social inclusion for disabled citizens through the implementation of a program designed to fulfill the theory of change.

2. Significance of the Problem

The problem is significant in terms of both theoretical complexity and practical usefulness for policymaking. Theoretically, the subject is intellectually engaging due to its complexity in principles. If society's purpose is to improve the self-sufficiency and inclusion of individuals with disabilities, how can this be accomplished? Will the principles of adequacy and equality benefit in problem-solving? If so, which one, and if not, do we have any other options? This paper will use the principle of adequacy to promote the social inclusion of individuals with disabilities - in reality, since definitions of abilities differ, claiming the entire equivalence of skills between disabled people and those without disabilities is impracticable. It is also overly simplistic to think of disability as a duality in which persons with and without impairments are absolutely divided. As a result, this paper considers its ultimate outcome realized as long as persons with disabilities exceed certain baseline standards for self-sufficiency and independence in society.

Practically, as policymakers, the problem is of great importance in government policies on growth, technology, education, and inequality. As an egalitarian society, how do we include as much as this group of people yet still maintain sustainable productivity growth? Through what methods can the public sector grapple with this difficult question and what measurement can be used in evaluating the progress as well as the impact of our policies? Although this study adopts one theory of change to advocate for policy, real-life circumstances may be substantially more nuanced.

II. Problem Analysis

1. Problem Description

- a. Problem Statement.** In the United States, all U.S. citizens with disabilities, compared to U.S. citizens without disabilities, are more susceptible to social exclusion in education, healthcare, and all other spheres of public life.

- b. Main Causes.** Several significant causes exist to generate the current problem for disabled citizens in the United States: 1) discrimination towards people with disabilities based on the notion of ableism in a meritocratic society, 2) lack of access to public transportation, 3) lack of access to and attainment of inclusive education, 4) lack of comprehensive healthcare coverage and clinic support, and 5) inadequate regulations and legislations.

For the first cause, ableism, similar to racism, is a value system used to judge the social status of individuals based on their abilities. People with disabilities, under such a system, will automatically be considered incapable, thus driving social exclusion and discrimination against these individuals. In terms of the second cause, inaccessibility to public transportation may lead to inconveniences and less participation in socio-cultural activities, education, and work. As for the third significant cause, education serves as a predictor for adult employment and earning and may have an impact on health, civic participation, interaction skills and motivation. Separate and special education that restrict children with disabilities from participating in inclusive learning environments may generate a life-long impact on their social inclusion. The fourth cause of the problem also plays an important role in the generation of the problem – due to lack of healthcare coverage, people with disabilities cannot be regularly checked in about their medical situations as well as mental health status, thus reducing their productivity in all spheres of life and making them difficult to be socially included.

- c. Intended beneficiaries.** The intended beneficiaries of this paper's research are disabled citizens with valid identities in the United States. Undocumented disabled people such as refugees, illegal immigrants, and so forth, unfortunately, do not fall into the spectrum of the discussion due to the validity of their immigration status and corresponding implications for public actors to make accommodations for them.

2. Strategy for Impact

- a. The position taken.** This paper intends to act on behalf of the government agency, which will be the Administration for Community Living (ACL) in particular, the Office of Interagency Innovation. ACL was built on the essential tenet that persons with disabilities and older adults should be able to live where they want, with the people they choose, and be able to actively engage in their communities (ACL, n.d.). The Office of Interagency Innovation within ACL's Center for Innovation and Partnership manages the State Grant for Assistive Technology Program and the Assistive Technology National Activities supported by the Assistive Technology Act. ACL contributes to the realization of this ideal for millions of Americans by providing services and supports primarily offered through networks of community-based organizations and by investing in research, education, and innovation (ACL: Assistive Technology, n.d.). The intended program name is State Grant for Assistive Technology Program (ATP), indicating the major activity this paper decided to take to solve the problem at hand.
- b. Ultimate Outcome.** The degree of social inclusion for disabled citizens is increased, such as increased accessibility to assistive technology for disabled citizens in the U.S.
- c. Approach.**

Criteria. ATP program adopts five primary criteria to assess what kind of approach it will take, encompassing a) the degree of relevance, whether the approach meets intended beneficiaries' needs, b) optimal cost-effectiveness, c) sustainability of the program, d) the impact of negative externalities and e) feasibility of scaling.

Primary Approach. Based on the aforementioned five major criteria, ATP decides to take an economic approach to transform the disability community as a valuable consumer through government incentives and subsidies.

- d. Key Stakeholders and Influences.** Five major stakeholders exist in this problem, a) non-profits with similar aspirations, b) families of people with disabilities, c) companies that see the disabled community as an opportunity, d) companies that disvalue the policy incentives and disabled community, and e) disability community. They hold different positions, either ally or opponent, in the theory of change, and thus various influences may generate to make a difference. Non-profits with similar aspirations may be allies since they can help along with the government and families of people with disabilities to create more opportunities and increase accessibility. Families of people with disabilities will strive to help their family members and actively engage in the process, making them allies as well. Companies may be allies or opponents depending on which attitude they hold towards the disability community in general. Finally, the disability community will be an ally of the State Grant for Assistive Technology Program (ATP), because they are the direct beneficiaries of the program.

III. Theory of Change: Policy Advocacy and Plan to Influence

1. Significant Activities.

ACL and the Office of Interagency Innovation subsidize companies that aim at producing assistive products for disabled citizens. Four intermediate outcomes may appear after the initiation of the ATP program, coming from different stakeholders.

First, there will be an increase in the availability of the products and more companies will start producing products that help disabled citizens' mobility, accessibility, and any other assistive devices. Second, a change of attitude may appear. Companies will view the disability community as a valuable consumer, involving the disability community as part of relevant public discourse and decreasing the socially-constructed discrimination against disabled people. Third, there will be an increase in the accessibility of the products – the increase in supply will lead to a decrease in prices, and more disabled people can have accessibility to assistive products at a reasonable price. Lastly, with the help of non-profits that are close to the disability community, the products can be easily distributed and improved with time going by to cater more to the needs of people with disabilities.

All of these five intermediate outcomes are designed to positively contribute to the ultimate outcome, which is that the degree of social inclusion for disabled citizens is increased, such as increased accessibility to assistive technology for disabled citizens in the U.S.

2. Graphic Description

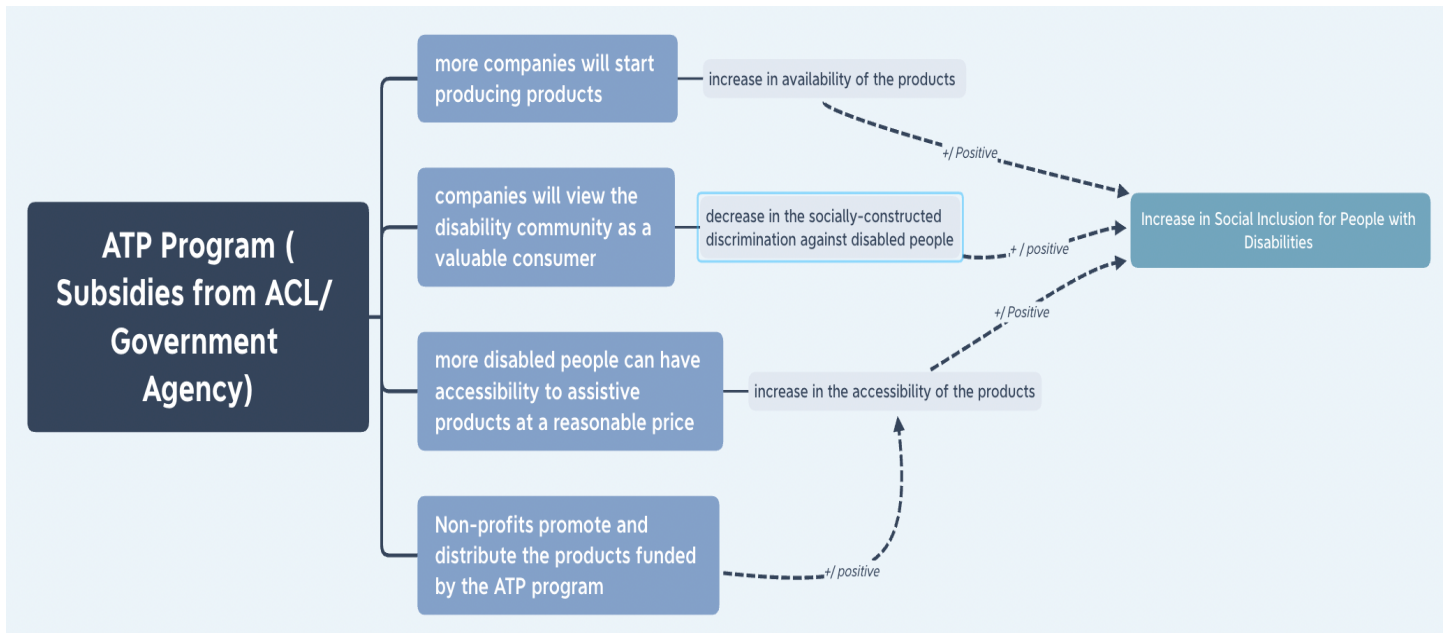


Figure 1. Theory of Change

IV. Behavioral Aspect of Solution

1. Target Behaviors

- Non-profits that are closely related to the disability community.** In order to guarantee that the disability community gets access to the items, non-profits' primary behavior will be to assist businesses in identifying the requirements of people with disabilities and distributing the products they make.
- Companies that produce assistive products for disabled people.** More businesses entering the market for assistive technology is the target behavior of firms that provide products for persons with disabilities.
- Disabled people purchasing the products.** The target behavior of people with disabilities should be that they are eager to buy various goods produced by businesses and consider the goods useful in enhancing their accessibility.

2. Behavior Barriers and Mitigation Methods

- Barriers and Mitigation Methods for Non-profits closely related to the disability community.** Non-profits may have limited scope of impact and lack sustainability in operating itself. To mitigate this barrier, non-profits could recruit disabled individuals as employees and host fundraisers for charitable organizations, government agencies, and philanthropists.
- Barriers and Mitigation Methods for Companies that produce assistive products for disabled people.** If more companies enter the market for assistive technology, competition will increase exponentially, and the prospect of generating revenue and establishing a foothold in the market appears increasingly bleak. With the addition of oppressive government regulations, many businesses may find it

unappealing to compete in this industry. Firms must do market research on the requirements of disabled individuals to achieve a successful market entry. Furthermore, the government should reduce taxes to simplify businesses' development of items for disability communities. For example, if a firm creates a piece of high-priced assistive equipment as a result of the government's planned tax, customers may opt to buy from another company that also manufactures such a product. Companies that begin segmenting their target audiences and manufacturing assistive goods oriented toward a more particular niche may be able to counteract diminishing demand as accessibility and availability for assistive products improve.

Moreover, developing the proper incentives for businesses to comply with government rules is critical. Companies are hesitant to comply with government rules because they may violate the many restrictions the government has established. Companies may be more ready to obey government policy if the government uses non-profit organizations and social media institutions to conduct research on the needs of businesses and disabled people.

c. Barriers and Mitigation Methods for Disabled people purchasing the products.

The products produced by the companies may not cater to their needs and thus they cannot enhance their accessibility and increase social inclusion through the use of assistive products. To mitigate this barrier, industry could conduct market research about the needs of the disabled people.

V. Possible Failures, Problems and Corresponding Mitigation Methods in the Theory of Change

This paper chooses to conduct a premortem to test our ATP program strategy for weak spots and four potential weaknesses exist in strategy.

1. Problem with the causal link

One potential problem with the causal link is the tendency of companies and industries that produce assistive products to take advantage of the loopholes in the government's policies and commit embezzlement to appropriate the financial incentives and grants. Since companies are mostly interest-driven in the market, they are naturally inclined to make the biggest profit within the largest parameters of the proposed policy, which often encompasses grey areas and loopholes. For the industries, the quality of those products may be of low quality even if the ATP program funds the factories.

Government oversight is the most effective approach to address this issue. Periodic evaluations will be done to determine if governmental funds have been utilized correctly, and information about the flow of funds will be made available to the public or government agencies in general.

2. Internal Problem with the implementation of the strategy

The internal challenge with project implementation is on the part of the enterprises, some of which are hesitant to comply with government rules with or without the funds provided to them. The problem is self-evident, because companies may find the incentives unattractive to enter a market where profit returns are marginal in one way or another. They

must expend significant effort, money, and time to develop assistive products that meet the needs of people with disabilities.

To address such internal issue, the government should work with non-profits and social service organizations to examine the requirements of businesses and disabled individuals in order to maximize both parties' interests.

3. External Factor Out of Control

Third, there is an uncontrollable external component, such as the effect of negative public opinion. Like any other government initiative, the ATP program may have supporters and detractors. If public opposition grows, the administration may pause the program in order to satisfy political accountability and maintain the support from the constituents. Allowing the government to promote campaigns on the social significance and positive impact of the ATP program on social media and conventional media such as TV, newspapers, and podcasts is one strategy to counteract unfavorable public perception. Meanwhile, the program may be culturally acceptable if the government invites celebrities to participate in filming or arranges commercials to promote it.

4. Unintended Adverse Outcomes

Last but not least, the unintended adverse outcomes for companies are the concentration of single product in the market and the monopoly of certain large corporations. To generate a profit, many firms are likely to create only one sort of device to aid persons with impairments, such as wheelchairs. Yet for persons with other impairments, such as intellectual disabilities, mental disabilities, and so on, addressing their disabilities or developing products to help them with their disabilities is sometimes considerably more challenging. For example, speech and language aids are highly complicated technologies, and corporations seeking to earn a profit will not devote effort in researching items for this relatively small number of people.

At the same time, the existence of a monopoly in this medical appliance market will arise owing to the existence of certain enterprises with some competitive edge. Once the monopoly is established, the company can raise the price of the product to a prohibitive degree in order to generate profits, which will restrict disabled people coming from economically disadvantaged positions from purchasing these appliances.

One strategy for mitigating these negative results is to anticipate the number and types of assistive products that can be used to treat people with disabilities, quantify the number corresponding to different groups of people with disabilities, and implement countermeasure regulations appropriately. Simultaneously, the government should actively pursue an anti-monopoly law on devices for treating people with disabilities, such that large corporations do not interfere with product prices to the greatest extent possible. Simultaneously, the government should actively pursue an anti-monopoly law on devices for treating people with disabilities, so that large corporations do not interfere with product prices to the greatest extent possible.

VI. Feedback and Evaluation

1. Feedback for Key Activities

With the start of the ATP program, it is crucial to keep track of the progress of the program. It is also critical to develop plans for gathering input as well as progress indicators, which may be greatly conducive to the improvement of the program and attainment of success. This paper decides to divide the key individual and institutions in the feedback into three

essential actors: companies or industries that produce assistive products for disabled people, disabled people themselves and non-profits with similar aspirations. To begin with, for enterprises or industries that manufacture assistive items for the disabled, collaborating with a market research institution to study the market landscape and suppliers' revenue is a viable approach to obtain feedback. The government could directly collect primary information from the representatives of the companies via phone or e-mail or conduct surveys for a relatively more extensive group of corporations. At the same time, it is also beneficial to make contact with manufacturer representatives and gain additional important information throughout the conversation process, which is advantageous to the improvement and progress of future projects.

Concerning disabled people, since the ATP program aims to enhance the quality of life of the disabled through economic measures, the experience and sentiments of the disabled themselves are one of the most essential factors. The product created should be targeted to their actual needs, which is why disabled people's sentiments significantly impact the program in general. Finally, non-profits with similar goals may bring practical information to the program from a professional standpoint by using their expertise to help the ATP program advance smoothly.

Companies and businesses may be more likely to adhere to the applicable regulations set by ACL to manufacture items that satisfy the actual requirements of the disabled as a result of the joint monitoring of government agencies and community workers. Later on, the ATP program can support social workers in interviewing and polling customers with disabilities to assess their happiness with the program's products and the practical beneficial impact of the products on their life. In this approach, ACL may gain an overall picture of the ATP program's success and determine whether economic measures have actually enhanced the quality of life for the disability community in general.

2. Metric for Ultimate Outcomes

Since the ultimate outcome of the ATP program will be the increase in the social inclusion of people with disabilities, the metric for the ultimate outcome will be the increase in disabled people's abilities, such as the ability to communication and information and the ability to work self-sufficiently and effectively.

3. Evaluation Technique for the Problem

Before and After is the evaluation technique used by the ATP program to assess the impact of the ATP program, and before the program begins, ACL might collaborate with non-profits to perform a poll or survey regarding the status quo. After the program has been in place for around 1 to 2 years, non-profits, researchers, and other government organizations should gather data and evaluate the program's impact based on the differences and changes that occurred. The objective of the survey is to understand the unique condition of each individual or institution involved in the project in order to establish a more instinctive comparison with the situation after the program.

Before/After will focus on how satisfied people with disabilities are with the products and the positive influence on social inclusion after the program's implementation. Prior to the launch of the ATP, ACL and other government agencies might collaborate with non-profits to interview and poll representatives of persons with various types of disabilities to gauge their access to assistive technology and the availability of these devices in their lives. The interviews or surveys should also cover their level of contentment with their lives, as well as whether or not they feel socially included. They will be polled or interviewed in a structured

manner again at the end of the program to compare with data from the early phases of the ATP program to evaluate whether there have been any positive improvements in their living standards as a result of the program.

For the Before and After evaluation technique, although the method is relatively straightforward, it has certain drawbacks in the actual process of evaluation. Other factors may exist to impact the social inclusion of people with disabilities, and the ongoing program will correspondingly become one of the several factors that affect the inclusion level for disabled people in society. The program evaluation must eliminate other affecting factors and assess the progress made.

Furthermore, the process of collecting data and conducting surveys may be long-stretched, and it will be difficult for the government to gain an updated opinion about the actual impact of the program. If the direction goes wrong, it may take time for the government agency to realize that. If ACL waits until things have proceeded that far to make adjustments, it will be significantly more difficult to implement. There are so many subjects and issues involved in the program's process that it is hard to verify that each subject can fulfill their work in an organized manner while adhering to the program's criteria.

Compared to several other basic program evaluation techniques, including Matching, Difference in Differences, and Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT), they all had certain weaknesses that impair the effective evaluation of the program's progress. Take Matching for example, though it really helps the government gather information accurately and efficiently and clearly show the progress of the project results, various similar variables exist for the government agency to consider, making it not as feasible as before/after technique. In terms of RCT, although it can logically show the results of scientific research data and promote the subsequent program research, it is more suitable for science and engineering program with a large amount of data. Moreover, RCTs are more commonly used in medicine and clinical medicine, which may not be suitable for the program at hand.

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