

**2024**

**FUNDING  
JUSTICE  
FOR DPOS**

**Analysis: The Tragedy Model vs the Social Model of  
Disability**

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# The Tragedy Model versus the Social Model of Disability

## Introduction

It's essential to understand the different ways disability can be perceived and addressed. Two primary models shape our understanding of disability: the Tragedy Model and the Social Model. These models influence how society, including grant-giving organisations, views and supports disabled people.

## The Tragedy Model of Disability (The medical model)

The Tragedy Model, also known as the Medical Model, views disability as a personal tragedy or a medical problem that resides within the individual. According to this model, a person's disability is something that needs to be fixed or cured. The focus is on the individual's limitations and what they cannot do.

### Key Characteristics of the Tragedy Model:

- Sees disability as a defect or illness.
- Emphasises medical intervention and rehabilitation.
- Views disabled people as passive recipients of care.

- Often leads to pity and charity-based responses.

This model can lead to disempowerment because it centres on what is "wrong" with the person rather than addressing the societal barriers that limit their participation.

## The Social Model of Disability

In contrast, the Social Model of Disability, developed by disabled people themselves, shifts the focus from the individual to the environment. It argues that disability is created by societal barriers and discrimination, not by the individual's impairment. According to this model, people are disabled by inaccessible environments, negative attitudes, and systemic discrimination.

### Key Characteristics of the Social Model:

- Sees disability as a result of societal barriers.
- Emphasises removing physical, attitudinal, and systemic barriers.
- Views disabled people as active participants in society.
- Promotes equality, inclusion, and rights-based responses.

This model empowers disabled people by focusing on creating an inclusive society where everyone can participate fully. Therefore, DPOs work under the social model and focus on removing these barriers—physical, attitudinal, and systemic—from society, rather than fixing the individual.

The model, from a disability justice and intersectional perspective, recognises that disability intersects with other forms of identity, such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status, highlighting how oppression, as a system, compounds with and is tied to multiple forms of marginalisation to affect all disabled people's experiences.

Disability justice is not a separate issue but intersects with movements for racial, gender, economic, and environmental justice. Therefore, the liberation of one marginalised group depends on the liberation of all marginalised communities (*see Appendix 1*).

# Why the Social Model Matters for Grant-Giving Organisations

Grant-giving organisations play a critical role in shaping societal attitudes and policies. Adopting the Social Model of Disability can significantly impact how these organisations support disabled people.

1. **Empowerment and Inclusion:** By funding projects led by disabled people and that remove systemic disablement.
2. **Sustainable Change:** Supporting initiatives that address systemic issues leads to long-term, sustainable change rather than temporary solutions.
3. **Equality and Rights:** Aligning with the Social Model promotes equality and respects the rights of disabled people, ensuring they have a voice in decisions affecting their lives.

## Conclusion

Understanding the difference between the Tragedy Model and the Social Model of Disability is crucial for grant-giving organisations. While the Tragedy Model focuses on individual impairments and fosters dependency, the Social Model highlights the importance of removing societal barriers and promoting inclusion.

By adopting the Social Model, grant-giving organisations can make a significant and lasting impact, empowering disabled people and creating a more equitable society for all.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1. The Disability Justice Principles

There are 10 Principles of Disability Justice, as outlined by the intersectional DPO and artist collective, Sins Invalid (2015). They include the following, as outlined by the organisation.

1. **“Intersectionality:** “we do not live single issue lives” –audre lorde. Ableism, coupled with white supremacy, supported by capitalism, underscored by heteropatriarchy, has rendered the vast majority of the world “invalid.”
2. **Leadership of those most impacted:** “we are led by those who most know these systems.” –aurora levins morales
3. **Anti-capitalist politic:** in an economy that sees land and humans as components of profit, we are anti-capitalist by the nature of having non-conforming body/minds.
4. **Commitment to cross-movement organising:** shifting how social justice movements understand disability and contextualise ableism, disability justice lends itself to politics of alliance.
5. **Recognising wholeness:** people have inherent worth outside of commodity relations and capitalist notions of productivity. Each person is full of history and life experience.
6. **Sustainability:** we pace ourselves, individually and collectively, to be sustained long term. Our embodied experiences guide us toward ongoing justice and liberation.
7. **Commitment to cross-disability solidarity:** we honour the insights and participation of all of our community members, knowing that isolation undermines collective liberation.

8. **Interdependence:** we meet each others' needs as we build toward liberation, knowing that state solutions inevitably extend into further control over lives.
9. **Collective access:** as brown, black and queer-bodied disabled people we bring flexibility and creative nuance that go beyond able-bodied/minded normativity, to be in community with each other.
10. **Collective liberation:** no body or mind can be left behind – only moving together can we accomplish the revolution we require.”