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How Associations Can be a Catalyst for Change

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May 21, 2025

How Associations Can be a Catalyst for Change

As hubs of influence, education, and leadership, associations are uniquely positioned to be champions of accessibility and disability inclusion. From member education and policy influence on workforce development and community impact, associations can play a transformative role in creating a world where everyone, regardless of ability, can participate, contribute, and thrive.

One story that underscores the life-changing power of accessibility is that of Robert Dittman, a blind professional who made history by becoming the first blind person to pass the Nationally Registered Medical Responder (EMR) exam.

Robert's journey began with a desire to better understand the work of his team at Texas Public Safety and Investigations, where he serves as Chief of the Internal Affairs Division. Though he had an impressive 12-year career in criminal defense law, Robert questioned whether a security leadership role was within reach for someone who was blind. But driven by passion and purpose, he took a leap—and with the right accessible study materials, he was able to reach his goal.

To earn his EMR certification, Robert needed study materials that could be read using a screen reader, an assistive technology that converts text and web components to speech. That's when he turned to Pocket Prep, an exam preparation application. Pocket Prep understood the need for all users to access their training materials, so they partnered with us at Ablr to ensure the accessibility of their mobile applications, which provided Robert with the tools he needed to succeed in breaking barriers and redefining what's possible.

Robert's success is more than a personal achievement; it's a testament to what's possible when accessibility is integrated into design from the start.

So, what does this mean for associations?

It means there's an opportunity—and a responsibility—to lead. Associations are trusted by their members. They set industry standards, provide continuing education, organize conferences, and often serve as a voice for an entire profession. By embedding accessibility and disability inclusion into these core functions, associations can significantly have an impact on the lives of people with disabilities and the organizations they serve.

Here's how:

1. Ensure Digital Accessibility Across All Platforms

Whether it's a member portal, conference registration page, professional certification program, or training materials, digital content must be accessible.

Associations can lead by example — showing their members and partners what accessible digital experiences look like. That includes, but not limited to, ensuring screen reader compatibility, captioned videos, and alt text for images.

Accessible content isn't just the right thing to do—it also protects organizations legally, increases engagement, and broadens audience reach.

2. Educate and Empower Members to Practice Inclusion

Associations are in a powerful position to educate their members on best practices in accessibility and disability inclusion. Whether through webinars, toolkits, conference sessions, or publications, associations can demystify accessibility and normalize inclusive practices.

Offering self-paced disability inclusion training for leaders, HR professionals, co-workers, and teams across organizations help ensure that people with disabilities are set up for success from the start—whether as employees, clients, students, or members. When associations include disability inclusion training in their professional development programs, they help raise the standard for accessibility and equity across entire industries.

3. Lead the Way in Disability Employment

In recent years, we've seen a growing trend: associations not only want to be accessible, but they also want to be inclusive workplaces, too. And that means hiring people with disabilities.

By prioritizing disability employment in their own organizations, associations can model inclusive hiring practices and advocate for similar efforts among their member organizations. The disability community is a highly skilled, resilient, and loyal talent pool—one that's too often overlooked.

4. Include Lived Experience in Everything

Accessibility is most effective when people with disabilities are at the table. At Ablr, we live the famous disability mantra, “Nothing about us, without us,” that’s why all our accessibility audits include native users of assistive technology. Their insights help ensure that digital platforms are not only compliant but truly usable.

Associations can follow this lead by including people with disabilities in focus groups, committees, board leadership, and speaker lineups. Inclusion means more than inviting someone in—it means valuing their voice and perspective in shaping policies, programming, and strategy.

Disability inclusion shouldn’t be a side initiative; it should be woven into the DNA of every association. From governance and communications to hiring and programming, accessibility and inclusion should be core values.

Because when we prioritize accessibility, we don’t just remove barriers—we open doors. We open doors for people like Robert Dittman. We open doors for members who want to do the right thing but need a roadmap. We open doors for future employees, conference attendees, and learners of all abilities.

And we open the door to a better, more inclusive future—one where everyone can thrive.

As an association leader, you have the influence to make meaningful changes. By embracing accessibility, hiring inclusively, educating your members, and embedding disability perspectives in your work, you can be a catalyst for progress—not just for your organization, but for your entire industry.

Let’s work together to make accessibility the norm, not the exception. Because when we remove barriers, we create possibilities—for everyone.

About the author:

At [Ablr](#), our mission is simple yet powerful: to remove barriers for people with disabilities in all aspects of life. We believe that accessibility isn’t about compliance, but rather about human experiences. And when organizations create environments that are truly inclusive, they don’t just follow the rules, they lead the way for their employees and customers.

At [Ablr](#), we know the value of employing people with disabilities all too well, and that’s why we’re helping others identify great talent through our workforce development program, which trains people who are blind to build the skills and confidence needed to thrive in today’s job market. With disability employment rates still far too low, our program is designed to create real impact—and associations can be a powerful part of that change by supporting inclusive hiring pipelines and helping connect their networks to trained, job-ready talent.

[John Samuel](#) is the author of “Don’t Ask the Blind Guy for Directions” and Cofounder & CEO of [Ablr](#), where he focuses on helping organizations be more inclusive by removing the barriers that have hindered people with disabilities from accessing education, retail, entertainment, and employment. John’s passion for his work is very personal as he is blind and wants to make sure the obstacles he has faced are removed for others. Over the past two decades, John has held leadership roles domestically and internationally. While launching and serving as the CEO for Aster Cameroon, a global telecom infrastructure Joint Venture, he built a \$45 million business bringing internet access across Africa. Afterward, he became an early member of Homestrings, a USAID backed crowdfunding platform, where he helped raise capital for startups in emerging markets. John holds his MBA from George Washington University and BS in Accounting from North Carolina State University.

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