



## The Belonging Forum

# 2026 Samuel Fellows in Belonging Program

Partner Organization:

Partners in Health Liberia



Project Title:

Beyond Access: Co-Creating Belonging in  
Healthcare for Persons with Disabilities in Rural  
Liberia

## 2026 Samuel Fellows in Belonging Program: Project Proposal

**Partner Organization:** Partners In Health Liberia

Partners In Health (PIH) is a global health and social justice organization founded in 1987 with the mission of ensuring that quality health care is a human right. PIH began working in Liberia in 2014 at the request of the Government of Liberia during the Ebola epidemic, supporting emergency response efforts and helping rebuild the national health system. Since then, PIH Liberia has established a long-term partnership with the Ministry of Health, focusing on strengthening rural health systems in Maryland County in the Southeastern part of the country.

PIH Liberia envisions a health system where all people, especially those most marginalized, can access quality, dignified, equitable, and comprehensive care. Its programs take a community-based approach whereby trained and paid community health workers link patients to functional health care services that include but not limited to maternal and child health, mental health, NCDs, HIV and tuberculosis care, surgery and trauma services, and community health. In addition to clinical service delivery, PIH collaborates with academic institutions to engage in medical education and research to generate evidence to guide policy and advocacy to advance inclusive, diversified and equitable people-centered care in the company of governments to foster leadership and governance.

Learn more at: [www.pih.org](http://www.pih.org)

### **Location of the Project:**

**Primary Location:** Maryland County, rural southeastern Liberia

**Fellow Location:** *Hybrid model.* The project welcomes both in-country and remote Fellows, with a **strong preference for in-person engagement in Maryland County** to support meaningful community participation, co-creation workshops, and facility-level observation. Physical presence is important for building trust with persons with disabilities, community health workers, and facility staff, and for fostering a sense of belonging and place-

based learning. A designated PIH Liberia team member will provide on-site support, supervision and mentorship for fellowship activities.

## **PROJECT INFORMATION**

### **Section 1: Description of the Project**

This project seeks to examine and elevate the experiences, needs, and agency of persons with disabilities within the health care system in Maryland County, rural Liberia. Building on findings from PIH Liberia's recent Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) Assessment, which included focus group discussions with vulnerable groups, the project will explore how physical inaccessibility, negative provider attitudes, communication barriers, and financial barriers and social exclusion shape access to care across the full continuum of care, from community-level linkages to facility-based services.

Using a participatory and co-creation model, the Samuel Scholar will work alongside persons with disabilities, local Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), community health workers, and health facility staff to conduct a disability-informed facility accessibility audit. The audit will include an audit of physical spaces as well as assess facility service providers' knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) related to disability inclusion.

The project will center belonging as both a process and an outcome, ensuring that people with lived experience are not only research participants, but also co-designers of the questions, methods, and outputs. The ultimate goal is to generate practical, locally grounded evidence that can inform quality improvement interventions, including low-cost infrastructure modifications, targeted health worker training, and inclusive service delivery models. The project will also produce advocacy and creative outputs that amplify disability voices and strengthen accountability mechanisms within county and facility-level health governance structures.

### **Section 2: Goals of the Project**

The primary goal of this project is to generate actionable evidence that advances equitable access, non-discrimination, and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities across PIH-supported facilities in rural Liberia. Grounded in PIH's social justice mission, the project centers social connectedness and belonging as essential components of quality health care, recognizing that physical access alone is insufficient if patients experience stigma, exclusion, or invisibility within care spaces.

Using a "4P" framework, People, Place, Power, and Purpose, the project will combine research, evaluation, advocacy, and creative engagement. First, it will evaluate provider knowledge, attitudes, and practices to inform training and supervision reforms (People). Second, it will conduct disability-informed accessibility audits to identify low-cost infrastructure and reasonable accommodation improvements that foster dignity and navigability (Place). Third, it will elevate the voices of persons with disabilities through participatory research methods, strengthening representation in facility-level decision-making and accountability processes (Power). Finally, it will co-create research outputs and multimedia advocacy tools, such as policy briefs, facility scorecards, and participatory storytelling or art-based dissemination, to build shared understanding and community dialogue (Purpose).

By integrating academic research, program evaluation, policy advocacy, and multimedia community engagement, the project supports PIH Liberia's mission to advance health as a human right while strengthening social connectedness and belonging within rural health systems.

### **Section 3: Guiding Questions**

This project will be guided by the following core questions:

- Do PIH-supported health facilities in Maryland County meet basic accessibility standards for reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities?
- Which low-cost infrastructure modifications would yield the greatest immediate and dignified impact on access to care?
- What are health workers' current knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding disability inclusion, communication, and consent?

- How do these factors shape experiences of belonging, trust, and power for persons with disabilities across the community-to-facility continuum of care?
- What are existing policies and national frameworks, and how are they being implemented?

The primary audiences for this work include PIH Liberia program and policy teams, the Ministry of Health, county and facility leadership, local Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), and community members.

### **Section 4: Research Methods & Dissemination Approach: The 3 Streams**

Within the Samuel Fellows in Belonging Program, we propose three research streams:

- **Creative**
- **Advocacy**
- **Academic**

The tracks are designed to articulate the possibilities of diverse scholarship on belonging. The program recognizes that creative methods, advocacy-focused research, and academic research are all scholarly. All three tracks have the potential to address similar topics. We encourage Fellows and Partners to explore different ways of asking questions and sharing knowledge that instills belonging for the researcher and participants.

The project will integrate Creative, Advocacy, and Academic research streams to ensure that both process and product foster belonging.

**Academic Stream:** The Fellow will conduct a mixed-methods study including disability-informed facility accessibility audits, structured surveys and interviews with health workers to assess knowledge, attitudes, and practices, and participatory focus groups with persons with disabilities. Findings will be analyzed to identify patterns across gender, impairment type, and location, and to generate evidence-based recommendations for health system improvements.

**Advocacy Stream:** In collaboration with local disability organizations and PIH Liberia's policy team, the Fellow will translate findings into practical

advocacy tools such as policy briefs, facility scorecards, and recommendations for inclusive governance mechanisms. These outputs will support engagement with county health teams and the Ministry of Health to promote accountability and policy reform.

**Creative Stream:** The project will employ participatory storytelling, photo journaling, or community art sessions to document lived experiences of navigating health care spaces. These creative outputs will serve as both a method of data collection and a dissemination tool to humanize the research, strengthen community dialogue, and build empathy among providers and decision-makers.

Across all streams, ethical, trauma-informed, and inclusive practices will be prioritized, including informed consent, accessible communication formats, and opportunities for participants to shape how their stories and data are shared.

## Section 5: Key Deliverables

Standard program deliverables will include:

- **Work Plan:** A co-created, phased work plan outlining research activities, community engagement, and dissemination of milestones.
- **Blog Post (500–1,000 words):** A reflective piece highlighting the role of belonging and disability inclusion in health systems strengthening in rural Liberia.
- **A Final Output:** A comprehensive research and advocacy package, such as a 15–30 page research report that includes specific recommendations on facility upgrade modifications, and training needs accompanied by a policy brief and facility accessibility toolkit, or a creative-advocacy product (e.g., photo journal or community exhibition) with an analytical companion paper.
- **Final Presentation:** A presentation to the Samuel Fellows cohort and PIH Liberia stakeholders to share findings, community perspectives, and actionable recommendations.

## **APPLICANT INFORMATION**

## [About the Program/What the Program Offers](#)

The Samuel Fellows in Belonging Program empowers young people, recent graduates, and people with lived experience to engage in meaningful research and community action. At the Belonging Forum, our mission is to build connectedness within and between communities through partnerships, research, programming, learning initiatives, and advocacy. At the Belonging Forum, fostering belonging is central to our work. The Belonging Forum approaches the definition of belonging as connection to **the 4 Ps: people, place, power, and purpose**.

This is to say that belonging comes through our **relationships** with other people as well as through our **rootedness in nature**, our **ability to influence** social, political and economic decision-making, and our **capacity to find shared meaning and purpose** in our lives. The program offers a unique opportunity to apply the lens of belonging to issues that matter, to think intersectionally and holistically about the problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – while working alongside experts and community leaders.

This is a paid opportunity from June 2026 – February 2027. Fellows will carry out the research part-time on a schedule agreed between the Fellow, the partner, and the Belonging Forum. The Fellow will receive a bursary to support their work.

The Program offers:

- A flexible, part-time research opportunity.
- A bursary to support your research calculated based on cost of living where the Fellow is based and number of hours committed.
- Work with national and international community partners.
- Capacity building, skills development, and mentorship.
- Network and team building opportunities.
- All works produced by the Fellows are published on the Belonging Forum website and promoted on our social media channels.

## [Equity Statement](#)

We encourage all equity-seeking groups such as immigrants, Black and Indigenous communities, people of color, women, young people, 2SLGBTQ+ community members, and people with disabilities to apply. Please let us know if you need any accommodation throughout the application and interview process and we will be happy to support you.

Thank you for your interest in the Samuel Fellows in Belonging Program. We thank all applicants for their interest, but only those selected for an interview will be contacted.

### Key Attributes and Skills in the Applicant

- Applicants should have an educational background in public health, social sciences, disability studies, international development, or a related field.
- Desired skills include qualitative and participatory research methods, strong communication and facilitation abilities, and experience working with marginalized or equity-seeking communities.
- Familiarity with accessibility, inclusive design, or health systems is an asset.
- Lived experience of disability or demonstrated engagement with disability advocacy is highly valued.
- Additional skills such as storytelling, visual documentation, or policy writing will support the project's creative and advocacy streams.
- Females with lived experiences are highly encouraged to apply.