

## **Part II. Description of Actions**

Global Diversity Leadership Exchange (GDLE) is a 501c3. As a business association, our goal is to raise awareness of the UN Global Compact and its Principles and to cultivate new participants.

GDLE serves as a catalyst for innovative ideas and solutions for business growth inspired and led by senior level executives and global thought leaders who understand the nexus between diversity and inclusion and sustainability in the global economy.

GDLE is a Leadership Development platform for C-Level executives, government officials, NGO's, academia, and direct reports in business development, corporate social responsibility, sustainability, diversity and inclusion, finance, human resources, investor relations, marketing, operations, and social media. Diversity officers, senior executives, and those on the front lines of opening new markets learned that sophistication in best practices in diversity and inclusion in the United States are not exportable to far away places wide ranging from Abu Dhabi to Zanzibar.

GDLE supports an exclusive community of global leaders with a platform for the sharing of intelligence, experience, resources and networks to support the efforts of companies that strive for global cultural competency and high road social impact to support sustainable growth with sustainable solutions.

Since its membership with the UN Global Compact, GDLE has hosted three annual forums. In 2014, GDLE became a member of the UN Global Compact and held its first Exchange at the United Nations: *Connecting Cultures and Corporate Value*. In 2015, GDLE held its second Exchange at the United Nations: *Sustainable Profitability: Triple Bottom Line*.

In 2017, inside the time period for which this report covers, GDLE held its first International People With Disabilities Conference in Los Angeles in partnership with Bezgraniz Couture and sponsored by Mercedes Benz. The following pages provide a full description of our Action that aligns with our UNGC commitment and that is related directly and indirectly to four SDGs: (8) Decent Work and Economic Growth, (9) Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, (10) Reduced Inequalities, and (11) Sustainable Cities and Communities.



**Bezgraniz Couture™**  
*International fashion  
and accessoire award*



Mercedes-Benz



**LAFW**  
LA FASHION WEEK™

**MAKER CITY LA**   
creative labs + studios + coworking

## DESIGN INNOVATION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

### A Population the Size of China

According to the World Health Organization, today there are an estimated 1.3 billion people with disabilities living on the planet. One in four American adults have a disability that impacts their major life activity. Thirty-three percent of 20-year-old workers will be disabled before reaching retirement age. In the U.S. alone, there are 3.5 million wheelchair users and that number is increasing every year. Rates of disability are increasing due to world population aging and increases in chronic health conditions.

Today, there are many solutions to help create accessible environments for people with disabilities in the offline and online world – education, work, tourism, transportation, rehabilitation equipment, internet, etc. – yet the high potential market of accessible products and services for people with disabilities in the area of fashion (clothing and accessories) is virtually nonexistent. But not for long.

For many, participating in society is a visual practice. For example, the concept of “dress for success” is a part of career entry and growth. Well, that is applicable if you’re a person with a disability too. When you get to choose how you want to show up in your day – make a bold statement about who you are, it matters.

There is an active movement of initiatives in research, education and business all over the world to design, manufacture, promote and sell lifestyle products for a target audience with certain types of disabilities. The International Fashion Weeks host special shows presenting disabled models wearing fashionable garments and introducing accessible prototypes, made especially for certain kinds of disabilities. Last but not least, there is a visible trend in fashion industry for acceptance of “other” body, beauty and age.

The Fashion Industry in the US has a unique opportunity to cultivate a viable and untapped market and build a robust and profitable international industry for wearABLE fashion and ACCESSORIES. The market is waiting for a product designed specifically to meet their unique needs. With awareness, education and showcasing innovation, we hope to inspire the industry to meet them.

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# INTERNATIONAL PWD FASHION CONFERENCE 2017

## “Fashion Without Borders”

### Los Angeles, California

#### Los Angeles Is The Gateway for Fashion Innovation

The State of California, and particularly the City of Los Angeles is recognized by the United Nations for being a leader in innovation and universal accessibility. An international center for global commerce, it is ideally suited to host The International PWD Fashion Conference, with a goal toward becoming an annual industry event. We forged new ground at the Los Angeles Fashion Week (LAFW) with support of the City of LA, LAFW and The Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising (FIDM). The Conference and Fashion Show will attract thousands of attendees for inspiration, discussion, and practical components concerning education, current design practices, market research, unification and standardization, textile and materials, wearable technologies, and industrial solutions. Topics include:



**Economy:** LA County is the largest manufacturing center in the US, and employs the largest number of apparel workers in the US and has more than \$46 billion in apparel imports.

**Fashion Industry:** LA is currently the US apparel industry’s manufacturing leader and has a robust retail and design market, paying more than \$6.4 billion in wages. LA Fashion Week’s “Innovation By Design” is a perfect frame for the activities connected to accessible fashion, a burgeoning market that promises to provide a boost in the industry with emerging talent and a new business opportunity.

**Wearable Technology:** Silicon Valley in the state of California is the home for research of new technology, including space and wearable technology. The Obama administration opened a wearable tech R&D center that has received more than \$171 million in funding. The FlexTech Alliance, an industry consortium of companies and academic institutions will focus on flexible hybrid electronics useful in wearables for PWD.



**PWD Advocacy and Support:** Over two million PWD reside in the state that promotes progressive political and social solutions. Los Angeles, in particular, has a proud history of celebrating diversity, being open to new and different ideas, and has become known as a catalyst for social change.

**Academia:** LA and Southern California is home to highly-regarded fashion design and merchandising schools - FIDM, Otis College of Art and Design, and Los Angeles Trade Tech - that will continue to serve as an ongoing resource for conference discussions and exhibitions.

**Research:** Very little research exists in the marketplace around how consumers act relative to their disabilities. Existing research focuses on medical condition, rather than personal identity and common aspects that trigger buying behavior. Primary research shows that 25% of companies in the S&P 500 have publicly observable activity relative to PWD.

## **THE FORUM DESIGN FOR A NEW CUSTOMER FOR A NEW MARKET**



Oct. 7, Los Angeles – The first International Forum for Fashion for People With Disabilities themed “Design for a New Customer for a New Market”, was presented by Global Diversity Leadership Exchange in partnership with Bezgraniz Couture and sponsored by Mercedes Benz US on Oct. 3 at Maker City LA in

Downtown Los Angeles. The forum followed the successful premiere of Bezgraniz Couture to a SRO audience moved to rousing and sustained applause at LA Fashion Week on Oct. 2.



The full day conference of dialogue focused on the rebranding of disability with a conversation that included key representatives and experts from Australia, Canada, Russia, The Netherlands, United Kingdom, and the United States serving the fastest growing global market of an estimated 1.3 billion people with disabilities.

This one-day introductory forum was the first ever international event to discuss new design innovation and lifestyle fashion for the PWD as a lifestyle customer, as opposed to only a target for medical devices. This invitation-only event was designed to dispel myths and inform and inspire new ideas through a synergy of social, business and design interests that will help change the world of fashion and create a more inclusive and accessible world for people with disabilities.

The inaugural conference laid the groundwork for the launch of an International PWD Fashion and Design Conference. The launch event is the catalyst and instrument for creating a consumer perspective to the market for adaptive fashion and design solutions, and to identify opportunities for new functional and fashionable lifestyle brands.

**The aims and objectives of the Conference were:**

- To bring together leaders in business and experts in special fashion design, education, culture, art, research, technology, politics, business, media, PWD community and communication;
- To introduce different professional approaches in design, education, promotion and communication;
- To create a common basis of communication for all industry stakeholders.



- Discussion topics included enhanced lifestyle, economic and sociological impact, workforce inclusion and sustainable solutions for the “extreme user”, a new term to describe the customer for functional fashion to meet an active lifestyle.

**The key themes of the event were Market, Communication, Education, and Product.**

Speakers included Dr. Olivia Raynor, Director, Tarjan Center, UCLA; Professor Anthony Kent, School of Art and Design, Nottingham Trent University, UK; Ann Yoshida, member of Team USA for the 2016 Paralympics; Viktoria Modesta, multimedia bionic artist and MIT Media Lab Director’s Fellow; Barbara Alink, CEO, founder and inventor of the Alinker; Sheri Prentiss, inspirational speaker and product innovator; Kurt Yaeger, actor, athlete, and activist; Gail Williamson, talent agent at Kazarian/Measures/Ruskin & Associates; Steven James Tingus, national disability policy expert and entertainment industry consultant; Stephanie Thomas, disability fashion editor and founder of cur8able; Steve Bogna, Founder, Sidewinder Solutions; Tamara Mena, motivational speaker and model; and MaryAnne Howland, CEO and founder, Global Diversity Leadership Exchange.



**Key Influencers:**

Chris Rico, Director of the Center of Innovation, Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation gave opening remarks and called it “an important opportunity for the city of Los Angeles”, a center for fashion innovation with a workforce prepared to support a new market entry like Bezgraniz Couture.

Anahita Crawford, Diversity and Inclusion Manager for Daimler Trucks North America, said “Mercedes Benz has long recognized that there is a new customer that needs to be served which is why we have been investing in technology to develop vehicles that will provide a new freedom of mobility for our future customers.”

Ann Yoshida, first adaptive paddler on TeamUSA Canoe/Kayak for the 2016 Paralympics emphasized the need and her wish to “form a partnership to design athletic clothes specifically for the needs of Paralympic athletes.”

“We are pleased to be a part of the international movement toward inclusive fashion,” said Dr. Janina Urussowa and Tobias Reisner, the founders of Bezgraniz Couture.

“We are rebranding disability with a new visual approach. Our goal is to enhance the lives of more than 18% of the human population: people with disabilities and their families, friends and caregivers,” Urussowa added.

Candace Cable, nine-time Paralympian and Vice Chair of the Board of LA 2028, said “Innovative design for comfortable movement brings dignity to life for people living in an inaccessible society. Functional fashion is a core need that has yet to be recognized by the industry. It is exciting to participate in this conference and finally have the opportunity to talk about a really basic need.”

Barbara Alink, inventor of the Alinker, said “People with disabilities are first just people. We forget that, and too often either ignore or look away. Everyone wants to be able to express themselves and fashion and design innovation allows people to do that, to be active and engage, and make it easier for people to be more inclusive. This is a major breakthrough.”

### **Part III. Measurement of Outcomes**

Twenty-four models with physical and neural diversity walked the runway in the launch debut of Bezgraniz Couture functional fashion at LA Fashion Week that drew a SRO crowd of designers, media, and industry innovators.

Between Oct 1 and Oct 3, our social media for #disabilities and #fashionfordisabled reached over 1 million impressions on Twitter and Facebook.

News Media Coverage:

[http://billingsgazette.com/news/local/montana-man-models-at-l-a-fashion-week-show/article\\_929410fd-1f74-5bc4-a2cc-fe4d997fc567.html](http://billingsgazette.com/news/local/montana-man-models-at-l-a-fashion-week-show/article_929410fd-1f74-5bc4-a2cc-fe4d997fc567.html)

<http://wwd.com/runway/spring-ready-to-wear-2017/los-angeles/bezgraniz-couture/review/>

<http://www.newmobility.com/2016/09/bezgraniz-couture-la-fashion-week/>