



In This Issue

[President's Message...p1](#)

[Legislative Update...p3](#)

[DEIA Committee...p4](#)

[2025 Annual Conference...p5](#)

[2024 Conference Recap...p6](#)

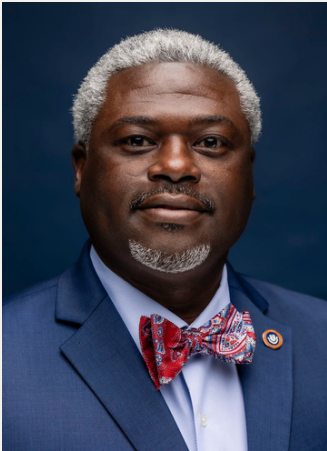
[Member Spotlight...p7](#)

[KT World Cafe...p8](#)

[Best Paper/Poster...p10](#)

[Awards...p11](#)

President's Message



Andre L. Washington, PhD, CRC
President, NARRTC Executive
Committee

Langston University
Rehabilitation Research and
Training Center (RRTC) on
Research and Capacity Building
for Minority Entities

8

Langston University RRTC on
Advancing Employment Equity
for Multiply Marginalized People
with Disabilities

Dr. Washington is a Research
Associate Professor and
Training and Technical
Assistance Director

langston.edu/capacitybuilding-rtc

Dear NARRTC Community,

I want to take a moment to reflect on the exciting developments shaping our field and our upcoming conference. Central to our mission is our commitment to enhancing the lives of individuals with disabilities, and we are particularly energized by the current National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) Long Range Plan.

The NIDILRR Long Range Plan outlines an ambitious vision for advancing research and innovation in the realm of disability. It emphasizes the importance of integrating community, health, and employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. This holistic approach resonates deeply with our NARRTC community, as we recognize that true empowerment and independence stem from a comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting the lives of those we serve (e.g., disability [ableism], race/ethnicity [racism], and other intersecting marginalized positions [i.e., LGBTQIA+ status, poverty status, rural locale, religion, immigration status]).

As we delve into the NIDILRR's priorities, we see a call to action for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers alike. The emphasis on community engagement and the necessity of participatory research models are crucial for ensuring that the voices of individuals with disabilities are at the forefront of our efforts. This aligns seamlessly with our own values at NARRTC, where we strive to foster collaborative partnerships that bridge gaps between research and real-world application.

Registration is Open - [2025 Annual Conference and Business Meeting](#)

**Minding our Methods: Enhancing Community, Health, and
Employment Outcomes with People with Disabilities**

April 22-23, 2025, Embassy Suites Alexandria Old Town, VA

With this in mind, I am excited to announce the theme for our upcoming 2025 conference: **“Minding our Methods: Enhancing Community, Health, and Employment Outcomes with People with Disabilities.”** This theme not only reflects the NIDILRR’s objectives but also invites us to critically evaluate and innovate our methodologies in serving our communities. The conference will feature a diverse array of sessions and workshops aimed at equipping attendees with the latest evidence-based practices, research insights, and practical tools. We will explore a range of topics, from community-driven research initiatives to innovative approaches in health care and employment support. Our aim is to foster an environment where ideas can flourish and where we can learn from one another’s experiences.

In this spirit, we are particularly keen to highlight the role of interdisciplinary collaboration in our efforts. The challenges faced by individuals with disabilities are multifaceted and require a concerted effort from various fields—including health care, education, social services, and technology. Our conference will provide a platform for cross-sector dialogue, allowing us to share successful models and strategies that can be adapted to different contexts.

Furthermore, we recognize the importance of technology in enhancing outcomes for individuals with disabilities. From telehealth services to assistive technologies, we are witnessing a transformative era that has the potential to redefine accessibility and independence. Our conference will delve into these advancements, offering insights on how to leverage technology effectively while keeping the needs and preferences of the individuals we serve at the forefront.

As we prepare for the conference, I encourage each of you to engage actively—whether through submitting your research, participating in discussions, or simply attending sessions that spark your interest. Your involvement is essential in driving the momentum of our collective efforts.

In closing, I want to express my gratitude to each of you for your unwavering dedication to improving the lives of people with disabilities. Together, we can make a profound impact, aligning our methods with the goals set forth in the NIDILRR Long Range Plan. Let us move forward with purpose, innovation, and a shared commitment to enhancing community, health, and employment outcomes for all.

I look forward to seeing you at the conference and hearing your insights as we work together to shape a brighter future.

Warm regards,
Andre L. Washington, Ph.D., CRC
President, NARRTC

Legislative Committee Update: CDOT Fines American Airlines \$50 Million for Disability Rights Violations

In a landmark decision, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) has fined American Airlines \$50 million for violations of passenger rights under the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA). This penalty follows a comprehensive investigation that found American Airlines repeatedly failed to provide safe and timely wheelchair assistance, resulting in physical injuries, delays, and distress for travelers with disabilities. Between 2019 and 2023, the DOT documented numerous instances of mishandled wheelchairs, unsafe assistance, and other violations that infringed on the rights of passengers relying on mobility devices.



Jae Kennedy, PhD
Chair, Nominating &
Legislative
Committees

This unprecedented fine is a milestone in a long-fought effort by disability rights advocates, including the Disability & Rehabilitation Research Coalition (DRRC), to secure accessible air travel. NARRTC's Legislative Committee Chair, Jae Kennedy, a former NARRTC President, has been instrumental in this movement, helping to bring about long-overdue accountability in the airline industry. Kennedy shared the following statement on this pivotal achievement:

"We applaud the U.S. Department of Transportation for taking strong action. This penalty is a big step forward in the disability community's push to make sure airlines respect the rights, dignity, and safety of passengers with disabilities. While this is a win worth celebrating, there's still more to do to make sure every traveler gets the fair treatment they deserve."

In addition to the fine, the DOT has worked alongside disability advocates, including DRRC representatives, to create the "Airline Passengers with Disabilities Bill of Rights". This practical guide empowers travelers by clearly outlining their rights under the ACAA and promoting an accessible, respectful travel experience.

NARRTC's advocacy continues, and we encourage you to help ensure airlines are held to account. If you or someone you know has encountered ACAA violations, please file a complaint with the DOT's Aviation Consumer Protection Division [[here](#)]. You can also access the *Airline Passengers with Disabilities Bill of Rights* to better understand the protections afforded to all travelers under the ACAA.

Welcome New Executive Committee Members!

Kacie Dentlegrand, Langston University

Miriam Heyman, Lurie Institute on Disability Policy

Muslimah LaForce, Georgia Tech University

DEIA Committee Update: Join the Call



Andre Washington, PhD
President,
Co-Chair, Diversity,
Equity, Inclusion, and
Access Committee



Jessica Chaiken, MLIS
Co-Chair, Diversity,
Equity, Access, and
Inclusion Committee

As we continue our journey together as a vibrant and dynamic research community, We want to take a moment to reflect on the significance of our commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA). These principles are not just words on paper; they are the foundation upon which we build our collective future. We are reaching out to you today to emphasize the importance of your involvement in our DEIA Committee and to encourage your participation.

Why DEIA Matters

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility are essential components of a thriving organization. They enrich our perspectives, foster creativity, and drive innovation. When we embrace a wide range of voices and experiences, we not only enhance our decision-making processes but also create an environment where everyone feels valued and heard. This, in turn, leads to better outcomes for our organization and the communities we serve.

As we navigate an increasingly complex world, the need for diverse perspectives has never been more critical. Each of us brings unique experiences that shape our views and understanding. By fostering an inclusive environment, we can ensure that our initiatives reflect the realities of all individuals and communities. It is our duty to challenge systemic inequities and create pathways that empower everyone to contribute meaningfully.

The Role of the DEIA Committee

Our DEIA Committee plays a pivotal role in promoting these values within NARRTC. It is a

space where ideas are shared, and strategies are developed to address challenges related to diversity and inclusion. The committee works to identify barriers that may prevent full participation in our activities and to create actionable solutions that promote equitable access to opportunities.

But for this committee to be effective, we need passionate and dedicated members. Your involvement is crucial. Whether you have extensive experience in DEIA work or are just beginning to explore these concepts, your voice and contributions are valuable.

Get Involved: How You Can Help

We urge each of you to consider how you can contribute to the DEIA Committee. General NARRTC members can serve on any committee the organization has, you do not have to be an elected board member. There are many ways to get involved, from attending meetings and participating in discussions to leading initiatives and outreach efforts. Your unique skills and insights can help us create meaningful change within NARRTC and beyond.

A Call to Action

As we move forward, let us commit to being intentional about our efforts in DEIA. Let's actively seek out opportunities for collaboration and partnership, engage in conversations that challenge our assumptions, and support each other in our growth. Change starts with each of us, and by acting within our committee and the broader organization, we can create a more inclusive and equitable environment.

We want to thank each of you for your ongoing dedication to NARRTC and our shared mission. Your commitment to DEIA is crucial not only for our organization's success but also for the communities we serve.

Join the Conference!

NARRTC Annual Conference Set for April 2025

The NARRTC conference planning for 2025 is underway! We have a date, a venue, and a theme. We are looking to our members to save the date and fully engage with this important opportunity for NIDILRR grantees. It's an excellent opportunity to form new partnerships and cultivate existing ones at this intimate gathering of our research community.

The conference dates are April 22 - 23, 2025 at the Embassy Suites, Alexandria Old Town, VA. We were there last year, and the area is fantastic, with many dinner options and great shops along The King Street Mile. Having the conference at the Embassy Suites will provide great networking opportunities for attendees at their complementary evening happy hours and breakfast buffets. NARRTC will also host lunch on both days, a session with NIDILRR staff, and a networking poster session with a cash bar on the evening of April 22nd.

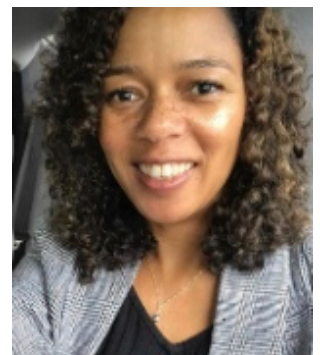
Our conference theme "**Minding our Methods, Enhancing Community, Health, and Employment Outcomes with People with Disabilities**" builds on NIDILRR's Long-Range Plan and commitment to disability-led research initiatives. Share how you are contending with AI bots and bad actors that threaten the validity of your research data. We want to know about your research and development work to advance data equity, tech equity, and accessibility. Tell us about your culturally responsive outreach and data collection methods that encourage research participation of historically underrepresented and otherwise hard-to-reach populations. We want to learn how your project's collaborations and stakeholder engagement activities include people with disabilities and intersectional identities as co-creators of research agendas. Tell us how you have been building capacity among advocates, programs, and policymakers. And we are always looking to connect mentors and mentees to join forces and build the next generation of disability researchers.

Now is the time to get your conference proposals in!

We are accepting presentation, panel, and poster submissions at <https://narrtc.org/annual-meeting/call-for-papers-and-posters/>

We look forward to a diversity of presentations and additional collaboration opportunities as we build out the full agenda.

If you want to get involved, have a great networking idea, or simply need something to pad your résumé, please reach out to Salimah LaForce, Conference Planning Chair at salimah@cacp.gatech.edu.



Salimah LaForce, M.S.
Chair, Conference
Committee

Let's shape the 2025 NARRTC Conference together!

2024 Conference Recap

The NARRTC 2024 Annual Conference took place on May 21-22, 2024, at the Embassy Suites Hotel, Alexandria Old Town. This year's theme, "**Engaging the Community - Building Capacity Through NIDILRR Projects and Partnerships**," focused on fostering collaboration and community engagement to amplify the impact of NIDILRR-funded research and projects.

The conference committee received 58 proposal submissions centered on advancing disability-related research, policy, and advocacy across NIDILRR's three domains: (1) Health and Function, (2) Employment, and (3) Community Living and Participation. The planning committee carefully curated a range of sessions to ensure diverse and relevant content for all attendees.

The final agenda featured concurrent sessions for 24 papers, 5 panels, and 3 "best" manuscripts, along with 20 poster presentations from both established and emerging scholars.

Conference registration included 80+ attendees, including several student researchers. The conference brought together a wide array of professionals, researchers, and advocates committed to building capacity and fostering partnerships that can drive meaningful change in the disability field.

One of the highlights of the conference was the keynote panel, "Building an Inclusive Approach to Research," moderated by Dr. Jean Winsor from the Institute for Community Inclusion at the School for

Global Inclusion and Social Development. The panel featured distinguished speakers: Dr. Bonnielin Swenor, Director of the Johns Hopkins University Disability Health Research Center; Dr. Theresa Cruz, Director of the National Center for Medical Rehabilitation Research (NCMRR) at the National Institutes of Health; and Dr. Mark Leddy from the Division of Equity for Excellence in STEM at the National Science Foundation. The panelists shared insights on creating inclusive research environments and the importance of equitable practices in research funding and design, sparking meaningful discussions on advancing disability-inclusive research.

The NARRTC Knowledge Translation Committee hosted the "World Café on Knowledge Translation," an interactive session designed to enhance the skills and strategies of researchers and practitioners in disseminating and implementing disability research. This session was particularly well-received, with participants engaging in in-depth discussions and knowledge sharing. See page 8 for a comprehensive summary of the event and ideas for future sessions.

The "Best Paper" award was presented to Jennifer D. Brooks for her paper titled: An Accommodation for Whom? Has the COVID-19 Pandemic Changed the Landscape of Flexible and Remote Work for Workers with Disabilities? (published in the Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal). The paper provided a critical analysis of how the pandemic has influenced remote work policies and their implications for workers with disabilities. The "Best Student Poster" award was awarded to Mariana Garcia-Torres for her poster titled Hispanic Outreach for People with Disabilities in Employment in the Great Lakes ADA Area. For photos from the poster session and award presentations, see the end of this newsletter.



Catherine Ipsen, PhD Chair, 2024 Conference Committee. Dr. Ipsen recently celebrated her 32nd year at the University of Montana Rural Institute.

Continued

The conference also celebrated the outstanding contributions of several leaders in the field. Distinguished Service Awards were presented to Dr. Madan Mohan Kundu for his exemplary contributions to the field of disability research and advocacy; Dr. John Wodatch for his advocacy work around disability rights; and Dr. Jean Hall for her significant work with the National Survey on Health and Disability (NSHD), which has greatly advanced understanding of disability experiences and outcomes. Noelle Kurth was honored with a Commendation Award for her contributions to promoting equity and knowledge translation in disability research, particularly through her work with the NSHD.

As the 2024 NARRTC Conference Chair, I extend my sincere gratitude to the conference committee, the NARRTC Executive Committee, the NARRTC membership, and NIDILRR leadership for their support and contributions, which helped make this conference a success. We encourage all members to mark their calendars for the 2025 NARRTC Conference, scheduled for April 22 - 23, 2025 at the Embassy Suites, Alexandria Old Town. For registration and accommodation details, visit the NARRTC website at narrtc.org/annual-meeting. We hope to see you there!

NARRTC Member in the Spotlight

Dr. Allen W. Heinemann, PhD, ABRP, FACRM, is set to receive the **2024 Gold Key Award** from the American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine (ACRM) at their Annual Conference this November. This award, the highest honor ACRM bestows, recognizes exceptional service to the rehabilitation field. Dr. Heinemann's dedication to rehabilitation research has significantly impacted both the scientific community and the lives of individuals with disabilities.



Throughout his distinguished career, Dr. Heinemann has been a dynamic force in NARRTC, where he has served in multiple executive roles. Over the past decade, he chaired the Research Committee, playing a leading role in selecting the NARRTC Best Paper. He also served as NARRTC President from 2018 to 2020.

Dr. Heinemann's contributions to the field span almost 30 years as a principal investigator in research funded by the NIDILRR. His extensive publication record, with over 300 articles in peer-reviewed journals, showcases his dedication to advancing rehabilitation science. He also serves as Co-Editor-in-Chief of the Archives of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation, further shaping the field through editorial leadership.

For nearly 40 years, Dr. Heinemann has been a vital part of the Shirley Ryan AbilityLab (formerly the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago), where he directs the Center for Rehabilitation Outcomes Research. His leadership has driven a substantial portfolio of NIDILRR-funded projects, solidifying his legacy as a leader and innovator in rehabilitation research.

The entire NARRTC community celebrates Dr. Heinemann's achievements and remarkable contributions to the rehabilitation community not only as a recipient of the **2024 Gold Key award** but also as one of the best of us.

The World KT Café 2024: A Recap

NARRTC's Knowledge Translation (KT) Committee organized for the 2024 annual meeting a highly interactive "world café" focused on enduring and emergent KT issues. Conference attendees could move from one table to another as they desired, selecting one or more of three topics the small groups discussed.

- Topic 1: How to get from dissemination, training and technical assistance (TA) to measurable adoption and use.
- Topic 2: KT strategies for engaging underrepresented and underserved communities.
- Topic 3: Consider the impact on KT of the latest technologies: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR), and Social Media Platforms (e.g. Discord, Reddit).

Table hosts took notes. Often, the small groups conversations touched on all three topics, with particularly common overlap across topics 1 and 2, given high interest among all NIDILRR grantees related to Topic 2. Given the mode of the World Café, there is also cross pollination of discussion as participants move around the room. The summary below therefore synthesizes cross-table discussion themes. Germane to Topic 3 is the use of Microsoft CoPilot, an AI tool, to draft this summary.

One theme of discussion was strategies for effective KT and its implementation in various contexts. Participants noted the importance of building on existing connections. Many leverage social media for dissemination, while being cautious about its use for study recruitment due to struggles with bots or needing to vet possible study participants for authentic alignment with sample selection criteria. Another balancing act is using champions, who are often helpful in promoting a KT initiative, but this strategy can be risky if efforts are tied to specific individuals who might leave an organization. In addition to champions, involving knowledge users such as practitioners from the beginning of projects can promote buy-in and effective uptake. KT is iterative, and KT processes should begin as soon as researchers engage with the community and end users, so they can codesigning KT strategies tailored to specific populations.

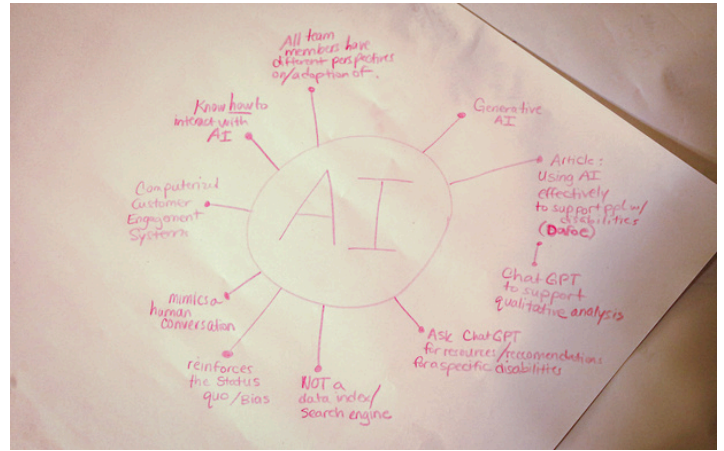
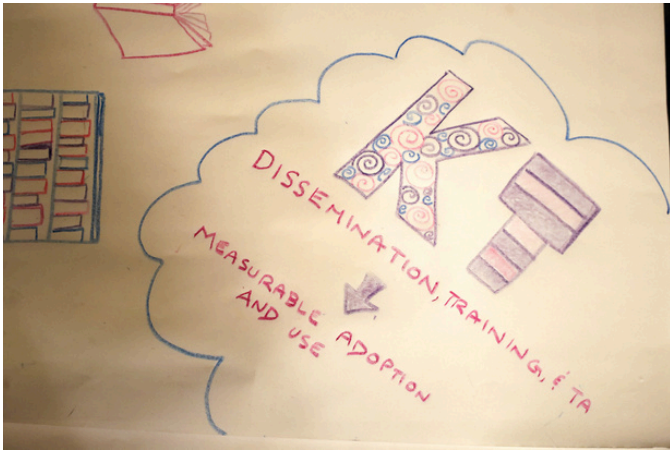


Kathleen Murphy, PhD
Chair, Knowledge
Translation Committee

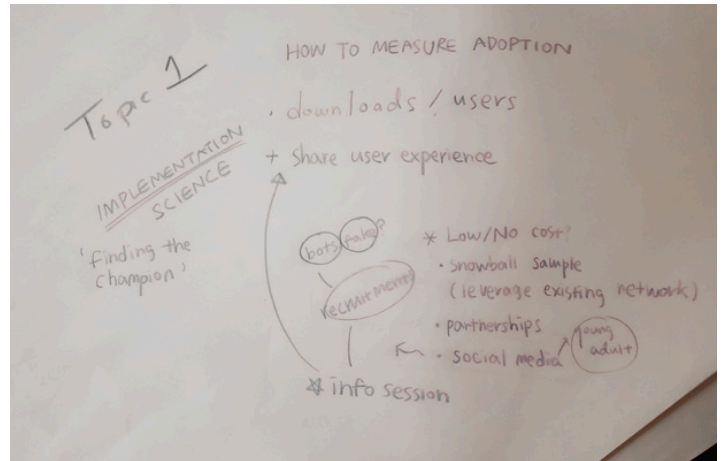
Another significant theme was the engagement of underrepresented and underserved communities in KT activities. World KT Café participants identified various approaches for identifying and engaging these groups, such as having staff who reflect the target communities, developing relationships over time, and using local leaders to bridge gaps. They also discussed challenges, including lack of trained staff, institutional barriers, and trust issues. Some practical solutions suggested were to offer internships or volunteer opportunities, and striving to integrate KT activities into a research project's design from the start with attention to ways of making the community feel valued and involved.

The possible impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on KT was another focal point. Most participants were not yet using AI in their KT work and were still becoming familiar with the possibilities. They saw that AI has potential for content creation and engagement if users are trained to interact with these technologies effectively and engineer prompts to produce useful results. The value of digital tools like AI, as well as social media platforms, depends on how well they are integrated into the KT strategies and the specific needs and preferences of the teams using them.

Some chose to use the markers and flip chart paper provided to express ideas visually.



Much appreciation to the KT Committee members who served as table hosts: Marsha Ellison, Julie Faieta, Sarah Parker Harris and KT Committee Chair Kathleen Murphy. Other table hosts were Jess Chaiken of the National Rehabilitation Information Center (NARIC), Ashley Clark-Purnell, Tonie Sadler and Amanda Seagroves from the Center on Knowledge Translation for Disability and Rehabilitation Research (Center on KTDRR), and the Center on KTDRR's colleague from the American Institutes for Research (AIR), Victoria Lennon. Cindy Cai, Marianne Farkas, Mark Harniss, Krys Standley and Michelle Zorrilla are other KT Committee members who helped to design and refine the discussion questions.



Thank You, Anjali!

Heartfelt thanks to Dr. Anjali Forber-Pratt! The NIDILRR Community is grateful for your guidance and service as NIDILRR's Director and wishes you all the best in your new journey at AAHD!

Recognizing Our Community

2024 Best papers, posters, and awards

Congratulations to the winners and finalists for Best Paper and Best Student Poster!

Best **PAPER**

Jennifer D. Brooks, An Accommodation for Whom? Has the COVID-19 Pandemic Changed the Landscape of Flexible and Remote Work for Workers with Disabilities? *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10672-023-09472-3>

Honorable **MENTIONS**

Huan Deng, Predictors at 6 and 12 Months for Social Participation Outcome at 24 Months in the Adult Burn Injury Population: A Burn Model System National Database Study. *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*, 10.1016/j.apmr.2023.06.011

Andrew Myers, "Patiently waiting": How do non-driving disabled adults get around in rural America? *Transport Policy*, 10.1016/j.tranpol.2023.10.009



Best **POSTER**

Mariana Garcia Torres. Hispanic Outreach for People with Disabilities en Employment in the Great Lakes ADA Area..

Honorable **MENTIONS**

Marissa Diaz. Voice, Disability, and "End of Life" Decision Making.

Darcy Sullivan. Unmet Healthcare Needs Among People with Pre-Existing Disability and Long COVID: An Exploratory Analysis.

NARRTC's poster sessions offer great opportunity for fellows, graduate students, and other early career researchers to share their research, connect with their colleagues in the NIDILRR community, and be recognized for their work!

2024 Distinguished Service and Commendation Awards



Madan Mohan Kundu
Distinguished Service Award



Jean P. Hall
Distinguished Service Award



John L. Wodatch
Distinguished Service Award



Noelle K. Kurth
Commendation Award

Each year, we recognize the accomplishments and contributions of our colleagues whose work supports the full participation of people with disabilities in the community. Learn how you can nominate a member of your community at narrtc.org/narrtc-awards