



State of Connecticut
Department of Developmental Services

DDS

Ned Lamont
Governor

Jordan A. Scheff
Commissioner

Elisa F. Velardo
Deputy Commissioner

**Innovative Employment Opportunity
2022 Grant Program**
*(Formally the Intellectual Disability Partnership
Innovative Employment Outcomes Pilot Program)*

Under the leadership of Commissioner Scheff, the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) and the Intellectual Disability Partnership (IDP) is relaunching the Innovative Employment Opportunity (IEO) grant program. This opportunity was established to provide support and resources for the creation or expansion of business ventures that integrate individuals with intellectual disability into their communities through meaningful employment.

DDS is an Employment First agency with a goal of increasing opportunities for people with disabilities based on their skills and interests to find and retain employment in the general workforce that is equivalent to Competitive Integrated Employment ("CIE"). The general workforce includes typical jobs available to all job seekers in typical work settings including self-employment, working side-by-side with people of all abilities, earning industry standard wages and benefits and contributing to the labor force of society.

This grant program is intended to support innovative business ideas that will increase meaningful employment for people with intellectual disability that aligns with DDS' commitment to Competitive Integrated Employment for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Nationally, individuals with developmental disabilities are disproportionately unemployed, underemployed, and living in poverty. DDS, an Employment First Agency, realizes that meaningful employment can be a cornerstone of any individual's successful participation in their community. The Innovative Employment Opportunity increases opportunities for people with disabilities to become self-employed or to engage with entrepreneurs in employment opportunities, thereby increasing their economic self-sufficiency.

The Innovative Employment Opportunity is offering two types of grants:

Exploratory Grant

This grant will provide funding for business ideas that need an opportunity to explore the development of a viable business plan. The creation of competitive integrated employment opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities must be an integral component of the business concept. DDS will award up to \$4,000 for this grant.

Implementation/Expansion Grant

This grant is for applicants who have a business, product or service; targeted market; and/or business goals; and are already in development and ready to implement or expand. The creation of competitive integrated employment

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opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities must be an integral component of the business concept. DDS will award grants in three brackets for this type of grant: \$10,000; \$25,000; or \$50,000. Examples of appropriate requests include, but are not limited to, funds for marketing, consultant fees, procurement of equipment and assistive technology, and development of technology systems).

The Innovative Employment Opportunity offers connections to a network of small business assistance services such as the CT Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), and University of Hartford Entrepreneurial Center to help build and improve business knowledge for eligible grantees in the following areas:

1. Guidance on writing a business plan.
2. One-on-one business technical support.
3. Follow-up and ongoing support.
4. Business management mentoring.
5. Market research mentoring.
6. Financial projections mentoring.
7. Financial benchmarking support.
8. Entrepreneurial style development

Awardees must commit to:

1. 12 months of quarterly reporting to DDS, as well as targeted program evaluation, data sharing, and routine quality monitoring and improvement practices.
2. Completion of a yearly report for fiscal years 2024 and 2025.
3. Return to DDS any grant monies that have not been exhausted by the end of the current fiscal year on June 30, 2023.
4. Connection to a small business assistance program for 1 year upon awarding of IEO funds.

The Innovative Employment Opportunity application period begins on October 3, 2022.

Applications, including business plans, must be submitted electronically to the DDS Employment & Day Services Division at (dds.employment-dayservices@ct.gov) by November 10, 2022

All questions regarding the application must be received by the DDS Employment & Day Services Division (dds.employment-dayservices@ct.gov) in writing by October 23, 2022. Answers will be posted to the DDS website in a Frequently Asked Questions document by October 31, 2022. DDS will select grantees up to the total program funding cap.

Key Dates

Application Start Date: October 3, 2022

Application Submission Deadline: November 10, 2022

All questions regarding the applications need to be sent by October 23, 2022

Responses to questions to be posted by: October 31, 2022

Anticipated Funding Selection Date: December 9, 2022

Anticipated Award Date: December 30, 2022