



State of Connecticut
Department of Developmental Services

DDS

Ned Lamont
Governor

Jordan A. Scheff
Commissioner

Elisa F. Velardo
Deputy Commissioner

Date: January 31, 2024

**2024 Innovative Employment Opportunity (IEO)
Notice of Opportunity**

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 disabilities 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 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) defines competitive integrated employment (CIE) as work that is performed on a full-time or part-time basis for which an individual is:

- Paid minimum wage or greater.
- Offered the same level of benefits as employees without disabilities in similar positions.
- Located in an inclusive setting - at a location where the employee interacts with other individuals without disabilities.
- Presented with opportunities for advancement similar to other employees without disabilities in similar positions.

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 seeks

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to increase opportunities for people with disabilities to become self-employed or to engage with entrepreneurs in employment opportunities, thereby increasing their economic self-sufficiency.

Innovative Employment Opportunity (IEO)

The Innovative Employment Opportunity will consist of the following grant options:

1. Exploratory Grant (up to \$5,000)

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 \$5,000 for this grant.

The exploratory grant is limited to individuals/families of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities or entrepreneurs interested in opening a business dedicated to employment for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Provider agencies are precluded from applying for this grant.

2. Implementation/Expansion Grant (\$10,000-\$65,000)

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 opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities must be an integral component of the business concept.

Applicants may seek awarded funds of amounts between \$10,000 - \$65,000. Applicants must include an accompanying business plan and itemization for how requested funds would be spent. Examples of appropriate requests include, but are not limited to, funds for marketing, consultant fees, and development of technology systems).

This grant is limited to individuals/families of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities as well as businesses dedicated to creating competitive integrated employment opportunities for individuals with IDD. Provider agencies are precluded from applying for this grant.

The Innovative Employment Opportunity offers connections to a network of small business assistance services such as: 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:

- Guidance on writing a business plan.
- One-on -one business technical support.
- Follow-up and ongoing support.
- Business management mentoring.
- Market research mentoring.
- Financial projections mentoring.
- Financial benchmarking support.
- Entrepreneurial style development

Commitments

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. Awardees must connect to a small business assistance program for 1 year upon award of IEO funds.
4. Applications for the Implementation/Expansion grant must include a business plan and itemized list of proposed expenditures of awarded funds.

Questions regarding the Innovative Employment Opportunity can also be emailed to DDS Employment and Day services by **March 1st, 2024**. A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Document will be posted on the DDS Website by **March 8th, 2024**. Applications must be submitted electronically by **5pm EST on April 12, 2024**.

Application – Key Dates and Information

Notice of Opportunity Release:	January 31, 2024
Questions regarding the application due by:	March 1, 2024
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Document posting:	March 8, 2024
Application Submission Deadline:	April 12, 2024
Anticipated Funding Selection Date:	May 10, 2024