



ACCESSIBILITYWORKS

Abilities Connect Fund



ontario
chamber of
commerce

Overview

The Abilities Connect Fund is a grant program seeking to:

- Raise awareness among small and medium enterprises (SMEs) about the benefits of hiring persons with disabilities;
- Assist SMEs to integrate people with disabilities seamlessly into their workplace;
- Provide early workplace experience for students/graduates with a disability; and,
- Assist people with disabilities to improve their employment outcomes and career trajectory.

The Abilities Connect Fund has three funding streams:

1. **Valuing Ability Employment**: provide employment opportunities for persons with a disability. Although not a mandatory requirement, preference will be given to college/university student or recent graduates with a disability.
2. **Valuing Ability Workplace Solutions**: supports employers in building inclusive workplaces by providing eligible workplace solutions, device-specific training, assessments and other device/technologies for employees or new hires with a disability.
3. **Valuing Ability Champions Network**: promote best practices and success stories through OCC's communications network, including HR strategies and capacity building.



Eligibility

Employer Applicants

- Businesses and organizations (for profit, not-for-profit, private sector)² that:
 - have at least 5 to 500 employees; (employers with less than 5 employees may be considered based on the merits of their application);
 - are established and operating in Ontario;
 - registered (federally/provincially) for minimum of 2 years;
 - in full compliance with all government laws and regulations (i.e., labour laws, AODA, WSIB, etc) – with a Declaration signed to indicate compliance; and,
 - are not receiving any other contributions from public funds towards the activities contained in the funding application (declaration signed to indicate compliance).

Stream 1: Valuing Ability Employment

Description

- This is an employer driven program. Employers will provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities to gain work experience and/or employment. Preference will be given to employers who hire college/university students or recent graduates (within four years of graduation) with a disability.
- Employers can submit applications for training support (up to 8 weeks) for employment opportunities lasting at least 4 months.

Objectives

- Encourage and support employers to leverage an untapped pool of talent.
- Support the hiring and training of people with disabilities and provide early workplace experience to improve their employment outcomes and career trajectory.
- Improve employer awareness of how to better integrate and value the abilities of people with disabilities.

Matching

- The OCC will market to and source interested employers through the Chamber network, post secondary institutions, Employment Ontario, Ontario Business Advisory Services, Regional Innovation Centres, and the Ontario Disabilities Support Program (ODSP).
 - Employers will require a reference/third party support from one of the organizations listed above to verify their suitability for the program. This reference will provide comments on the capacity of the employer to provide a positive experience for the employee.
- Eligible employers will also be responsible for recruiting.
 - The OCC will help facilitate the recruitment process, if needed, by connecting employers to post secondary institution disability/career service offices, Employment Ontario, the Ontario Disabilities Support Program (ODSP), and other service providers (e.g., the Magnet Network) to facilitate the talent match.

Stream 1: Valuing Ability Employment

Funding

- Grant will fund up to 90% of eligible costs for not-for-profits and up to 75% for private businesses for the:
 - externally incurred training costs;
 - wages of the employee during training period (up to 8 weeks); and
 - retentions support.
- To be eligible for the program the individual must be hired for a minimum of 4 months.
- Employers can receive funding for up to 4 employees, up to a maximum of a \$20,000 grant.
- Costs cannot be incurred prior to approval.
- Application will be closed if employee is not hired within 60 days of approval.

Stream 1: Valuing Ability Employment

Employment Criteria

- The employment opportunity must provide meaningful work experience (i.e. perform work functions that are a regular requirement of the organization); personal services not eligible.
- The employer must hire, for a minimum of 4 months, persons with a disability. Although not a mandatory requirement, preference will be given to college/university student or recent graduates with a disability.
- Provide appropriate worker accommodation, support and protections (i.e., supervision, workplace safety) where required.

Stream 2: Valuing Ability Workplace Solutions

Description

- The program will fund the purchase of assistive devices, technologies, support assessments and specialized training associated with the device to support independence of employees with disabilities, and improve organizational productivity overall.
- Only devices and tools that are required to support workplace activity are eligible (N.B. modifications required as per the *Accessibility for Ontarians Act* will not be covered).

Objectives

- To assist people with disabilities become more self-reliant in the workplace.
- Encourage employers in becoming more accommodating and inclusive.
- To assist people with disabilities become better integrated into the Ontario labour market.

Funding

- \$3,000 maximum per application.
- An application can include more than one assistive device/technology and or training services.
- Grant may cover up to 90% of eligible costs for not-for-profits and 60% for private businesses
- Device/technology or related-training services may be purchased only after application is approved; and remains the property of the employer.
- Application will be closed if expense report is not received within 90 days of approval.

Stream 2: Valuing Ability Workplace Solutions

Eligibility & Criteria

Eligible Costs

- Teleworking IT; Visual and Graphic Organizers; Writing Aids; Optical Character Recognition software; Magnification Software; Screen Reading Software; Speech Recognition and Dictation software; Voice-Activated Telephones and TTY Telephones; Computer Keyboard Adaptations ; Mouth-Sticks; Modified Workplace Furniture; Adapted Keyboards; Alternative Mouse Products; Assistive Listening Device.
- External specialized skills training (e.g., tools, equipment, computers, software, etc).
- Cost of assessments to a maximum of \$500.
- Employers can apply for devices or supports not listed, however they must provide full device description, its purpose, and business case of why it is needed.

Non-Eligible Costs

- Structural changes, modifications to physical plants; job-shadowing; costs associated with compliance with AODA standards; renovating, retrofitting or constructing workplaces; retrofitting motor vehicles and other modes of transportation; equipment not solely required for the workplace; items not listed under eligible equipment.

Thank You

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