



ACCESSIBILITYWORKS

Abilities Connect Fund

Application Guide

An initiative of



1500-180 Dundas Street West
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Abilities Connect Fund

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OVERVIEW

The Abilities Connect Fund is an employer focused initiative that will:

- raise awareness among small and medium enterprises (SMEs) about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities;
- assist SMEs to integrate people with disabilities seamlessly into the workplace;
- provide workplace experience for persons with a disability. Preference will be given to applicants that hire students/recent graduates with a disability; and
- assist people with disabilities to improve their employment outcomes and career trajectory.

The Abilities Connect Fund has two funding streams

1. **Valuing Ability Employment:** Supports the hiring and training of persons with a disability. Although not a mandatory requirement, preference will be given to college/university students or recent graduates with a disability.
2. **Valuing Ability Workplace Solutions:** Supports the purchase of assistive devices, training, and assessments for employees with a disability.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR BOTH FUNDING STREAMS

- Businesses (for-profit sector) and organizations (not-for-profit)
- Public sector and broader public sector organizations are not eligible
- Have between 5 and 500 employees
- Currently 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, Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), WSIB, etc.)
- Not receiving any other contributions from public funds or another source towards the requests contained in the funding application

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STREAM 1: VALUING ABILITY EMPLOYMENT

The **Valuing Ability Employment** stream provides assistance to employers towards the hiring and training of persons with a disability. Although, not a mandatory requirement, preference will be given to college/university students or recent graduates (within 4 years of graduation) with disabilities. Employers can receive funding for training support (up to eight weeks) and up to four employees or Co-operative Education Program (CO-OP) students under the program. The position must provide meaningful work experience (i.e. perform work functions that are a regular requirement of the organization); personal services are not eligible. Employees/co-op students self-identify as having a disability. Eligible employment is for a minimum of four months.

To be eligible for this stream, employers:

- will be responsible for recruiting their own employee, with support from the OCC, post-secondary institutions, and other organizations; and
- will require a reference from one of the following sources:
 - an accredited post-secondary institution, Employment Ontario, Ontario Business Advisory Services, Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) Employment Supports service providers, or Regional Innovation Centres (RICs).

A Co-operative Education Program is one that formally integrates a student's academic studies with work experience. The usual plan is for the student to alternate periods of experience in career-related fields according to the following criteria:

- Each work situation is approved by the Co-operative Education institution as a suitable learning situation;
- The Co-operative Education student is engaged in productive work rather than merely observing;
- The Co-operative Education student receives remuneration for the work performed;
- The Co-operative Education student's progress on the job is monitored by the Co-operative Education institution; and,
- The Co-operative Education student's performance on the job is supervised and evaluated by the student's employer.

Funding

This stream provides support for the salary and specialised training of employees for up to eight weeks on the following cost share basis: 90% for not-for-profits and 75% for for-private organizations for the externally incurred training costs. The maximum grant a company can receive is \$20,000 for up to four employees.

The employee cannot start the position prior to approval and an application is closed if the employee is not hired within 60 days of approval. Prior to submitting an application, applicants must have identified the employee they wish to hire.

Payment

Payment will be provided in two stages and only paid based on proof of payments made to the employee or for external training costs. The first payment will be made within 60 days of project deliverables and upon submission of an Interim Report. The Expense Report will detail the actual amount being paid to the employee. Payment will only be made upon receipt of proof of payment to the employee through payroll documents and/or T4 Slips. External training costs must be supported by invoices and proof of payment (if applicable). Actual training expenses are those expenses directly incurred by the applicant and must be supported by receipts, invoices, and proof of payment (i.e. cancelled cheques, credit card statements. Please note this proof does not include cash payments, credit memos, in contra, bartering and other forms of non-directly verifiable transactions).

The second payment will be made upon receipt of the Final Report. The Final Report must be submitted within 60 days of the project Completion Date. This report will include qualitative information from the employer and employee as well as proof of payment of the wages paid directly to the employee by the applicant through payroll documents and/or T4 Slips (if applicable).

The total of both payments will not exceed the amount stipulated in the approval contract and may, depending on the information contained in the Interim Report and/or Final Report, be less than the award amount.

Application requirements

All applicants are required to submit a complete online application that includes:

- A rationale for hiring the employee;
- Identification of the potential candidate (i.e. employees self-identify as having a disability);
- Potential candidate's roles and responsibilities;
- A supervision plan;
- A reference from an accredited post-secondary institution, Employment Ontario, Ontario Business Advisory Services, Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) Employment Supports service providers, or Regional Innovation Centres (RICs);
- Salary associated with the position;
- Most recent financial statement (i.e. Notice to Reader, Review Engagement, or Full Audited statements) reviewed by an external third party Canadian designated accountant;
- An insurance certificate indicating the organization has \$2 Million of Commercial General Liability Insurance; and,
- An outline of the training program (if applicable).

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STREAM 2: VALUING ABILITY WORKPLACE SOLUTIONS

The **Valuing Ability Workplace Solutions** stream of the Abilities Connect Fund provides assistance to companies for the purchase of workplace assistive devices, specialized training and support assessments. Employees self-identify as having a disability. Only devices and tools that are required to support workplace activity are eligible.

Eligible Costs

This stream provides support for the purchase of:

- ✓ External specialized skills training (e.g. tools, equipment, computers, software, etc.);
- ✓ Voice-Activated Telephones and TTY Telephones;
- ✓ Teleworking IT;
- ✓ Mouth-Sticks;
- ✓ Modified Workplace Furniture;
- ✓ Visual and Graphic Organizers;
- ✓ Writing Aids;
- ✓ Magnification Software;
- ✓ Screen Reading Software (e.g. screen reader, text-to-speech, aids for listening to text instead of reading it, math readers);
- ✓ Speech Recognition and Dictation software (e.g. software writes what you say, speech recognition, speech-to-text, issue voice commands for “Save,” “Open,” etc.);
- ✓ Computer Keyboard Adaptations (e.g., large keys, on-screen keyboard, macros, keyboard customization);
- ✓ Alternative Mouse Products (e.g., track ball, touch pad, mouse keys, joystick mouse, mouse features);
- ✓ Optical Character Recognition software;
- ✓ Assistive Listening Devices;
- ✓ Cost of assessments to a maximum of \$500 (assessments must conclude that a device is required); and
- ✓ Employers can apply for devices, other than those listed, however they must provide full device description, its purpose and business case of why it is needed.

The fund is not intended for:

- × Structural changes, modifications to physical plants;
- × Costs associated with compliance with *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* standards;
- × Renovating, retrofitting or constructing workplaces;
- × Retrofitting motor vehicles and other modes of transportation;
- × Equipment not solely required for the workplace (i.e. equipment for personal and/or recreational use).

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This stream provides support for the purchase of assistive devices, specialized training and assessments on the following cost share bases: 90% for not-for-profits and 60% for for-private organizations up to \$3,000 per application. Please note an applicant can only receive funding for one application. The expenses can only be incurred after the application is approved and any devices purchased remain the property of the employer.

Payment

Once approved, payment would be made based on submission of the Expense Report. This report must detail the actual amount of incurred expenses. Actual expenses are those expenses directly incurred by the applicant and must be supported by receipts, invoices, and proof of payment (i.e. cancelled cheques, credit card statements and wire transfers). Please note this proof does not include cash payments, credit memos, in contra, bartering and other forms of non-directly verifiable transactions. The total payment will not exceed the amount stipulated in the approval contract and may, depending on the information contained in the Expense Report, be less than the award amount. In addition, the employer and employee must provide information regarding the impact on workplace and the individual. The application will be closed if the Expense Report is not received within 90 days of approval.

Application requirements

All applicants are required to submit a complete application that includes:

- A rationale supporting the importance of the device(s), including description of how the device will benefit the employee(s);
- An assessment confirming the equipment being purchased meets the requirements of the employee(s) with a disability(ies);
- Quotation indicating the cost of the assessment;
- Vender's quote for assistive device and/or specialized training;
- Most recent financial statement (i.e. Notice to Reader, Review Engagement, or Full Audited statements) reviewed by an external third party Canadian designated accountant; and,
- An insurance certificate indicating the organization has \$2 Million of Commercial General Liability Insurance.

Decisions will be made, upon receipt of a complete application, within 45 business days. An application is complete when it has been submitted and all requirements have been met. The 45 business day turnaround time is not applicable if an application is incomplete.

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CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION FOR ALL ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

- ❖ Application forms must include all required information and be signed/endorsed by a senior executive of the applicant company certifying that the information is accurate and verifiable.
- ❖ Applicants are required to sign/endorse a “declaration of good corporate citizenship” or a “personal declaration” and be in compliance with all government laws and regulations.
- ❖ Application forms will become the property of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. Information provided by applicants will be made available to a review committee for the purposes of determining eligibility for funding.
- ❖ Contact information (mailing address, telephone and fax numbers, as well as e-mail and web site addresses) will be included in the Ontario Chamber of Commerce’s client management system for correspondence purposes.
- ❖ Applicants agree that the Ontario Chamber of Commerce shall have the right to make available and/or to publish in print or electronically, certain analyses, reports or studies which are based upon aggregate data which is derived from information contained in the application forms and results achieved (performance indicators) for those applications which are funded. At the OCC’s discretion, these studies and aggregated data may be released to selected groups including other government entities or to the public at large.
- ❖ Applicants agree that the OCC may publish the names and level of funding for all grant recipients.
- ❖ Once received by the OCC, all applications will be, at all times, the property of the OCC and none will be returned. The OCC will not be responsible for applications which are lost, misdirected or delayed.
- ❖ All decisions are final.
- ❖ Applicants approved for funding are required to enter into and abide by the conditions outlined in the Terms and Conditions. The Terms and Conditions will be signed/endorsed by an authorized officer of the applicant company.

EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR ALL ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

The review committee will consist of representatives from the OCC, select members of the OCC Board of Directors and external representatives. The review committee will assess applications using the following criteria:

- Eligibility of activities and expenditures for funding and linking of proposed activities to the Abilities Connect Fund’s objectives;
- Financial and management capability of the applicant to complete the proposed activities, as described, in a timely basis;
- Strength of the supervision and training plan, quality of the work experience and the likelihood of continued employment; and
- Completeness of the application.

Funding decisions will be made on an application by application basis. Factors that will be considered by decision makers may include ensuring a broad number of sectors and regions across Ontario benefit from the program.

Decisions will be made, upon receipt of a complete application, within 45 business days. An application is complete when it has been submitted and all requirements have been met. The 45 business day turnaround time is not applicable if an application is incomplete.

HOW TO SUBMIT AN APPLICATION

Steps:

1. Read the eligibility criteria and conditions for participation in this Application Guide.
2. Complete the online Application Form and press the Submit button.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit our web site at WWW.ABILITESCONNECT.CA or call us:

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