

The Inclusive Healthy Communities Grant Program: An Introduction

Video transcript

[Peri Nearon] The Inclusive Healthy Communities grant program, or IHC, was founded in 2021 by the New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Disability Services, and it provides funding opportunities to local government and nonprofit organizations in New Jersey to undertake initiatives that support the health and well-being of individuals with disabilities in the communities where they live.

The IHC Grant Program focuses on policies, systems, and environmental change and really ensuring that people with disabilities are involved in meaningful ways in the projects that we support.

[Rebecca Martin] When we think about health in IHC, we really think about the broader health umbrella. We think about wellness of the whole person in sort of an integrated way, which includes social belonging. It includes our access to all of the supports of health and community that we all need in terms of access to healthy food and healthy environments and nature and you know, access to medical care where you are treated respectfully and you have time with your doctor to address your concerns. All of these sorts of things come together to build the health that we all expect in community. What we're trying to do is really create systems that are going to support the health and well-being of the whole person in community.

One thing that's really important to us is that these projects take place in an integrated way in communities. So we're not looking to fund projects that would offer a separate but segregated service that duplicates something that's happening in the community already. So we're not looking to do, like, a yoga class for people with disabilities. We want to see people with disabilities being supported through adaptive programming within the community yoga class.

[Peri Nearon] Let me give you an example from one of our actual grant recipients. An environmental organization called The Pinelands Preservation Alliance wanted to improve access to nature for people with disabilities. Part of their IHC initiative involved practical measures like resurfacing trails so they were easier to use for people with mobility differences. But their initiative went way beyond fixing trails. They also advocated for changing the policies around how parkland is managed, and they developed inclusive programming that enables people with disabilities to enjoy the outdoors with their non-disabled friends and family.

Initiatives like this go beyond providing a single or separate service or facility for people with disabilities. They seek to fundamentally shift the way things are done in a way that is sustainable over the long term and can serve as a model for other organizations and can be expanded over time. This is what we mean when we talk about policy, systems, and environmental change, and it's an essential part of any successful IHC initiative.

[Rebecca Martin] We really want people with disabilities to be driving the way that these projects are designed, to be advising in really meaningful ways so that the projects are really reflective of the knowledge and wisdom that people have gained through lived experiences.

Your organization doesn't necessarily need to have any sort of experience with disability to apply for the IHC grant program. In fact, we think it really enriches the community when we have people who come from inside the disability community and other organizations that come from outside. It's part of the magic of IHC, in my opinion.

[Peri Nearon] An organization that has had no experience working with people with disabilities can absolutely apply, and some of our most successful grantees have been organizations that have not had that experience. But they have partnered with other organizations locally and have been very open to listening to the voices of people with lived experience.

[Rebecca Martin] The things that are most important when you are looking to apply would be first and foremost to read through and make sure that you understand the full RFP and all of the pieces. We have an opportunity for open questions. We have some meetings where you can come to get a better understanding, and I really recommend that everybody look at all the resources that become available. It really can help you put together a good application. Secondly, there's a lot of attachments and things. Every piece has to be administratively complete in order for your application to go through. So it's a silly thing to say, but please make sure that every piece is checked, checked off on your checklist before you submit your application. Third, you want to make sure that you have a really cohesive narrative that is very clearly laid out exactly what it is that you want to do, and that it ties really nicely to the data that you're kind of pinning it to. And that it has a very logical plan from what you're saying the problem is to what you're saying your potential solution is. And we understand that sometimes things will evolve as you start working with the people with disabilities in your community who are going to influence your project. And that's okay. But we want to see basically that you have a strong concept and you can communicate that clearly to us. That's the most important part.

[Peri Nearon] This program embraces the notion that we are all better off when we include everyone. Our communities are a better place for it, and our people are healthier when they're engaged in a vibrant, diverse community.

[Rebecca Martin] What we're really trying to do is to give people the opportunity to be in community and access all of the same types of supports for health and well-being regardless of the ways that they do that, and to make sure that we are embracing the changes that need to be made to support the most inclusive and healthy communities we can in New Jersey.