



Inclusive App ACCELERATOR

2026 Call for Applications

*Accelerating innovation of inclusive apps for persons with disabilities
to support health/function, participation, or employment needs*

The Inclusive App Accelerator (IAA) seeks to fund the development of mobile applications (apps) for smartphones for persons with disabilities to support health and function, community living and participation, or employment. For more details, visit the [program website](#). The program is supported by a grant from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR grant number 90DPGE0021) within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Please note that the content of this initiative does not necessarily represent the policies of NIDILRR, ACL, or HHS, and should not be interpreted as an endorsement by the Federal Government.

Who Should Apply?

U.S.-based organizations and individuals with innovative ideas for mobile apps designed for use among persons with disabilities are invited to submit an application for their app idea.

- Eligible applicants include non-profit organizations, academic institutions, industry professionals, persons with disabilities, family members, clinicians, and others committed to using inclusive design processes in collaboration with persons with disabilities and IAA. (See Awardee Responsibilities on page 3 of this announcement)
- Proposed apps must be designed for direct use by persons with disabilities to support their health and function, community living and participation, or employment. Apps designed solely for caregiver or service provider use are not eligible.
- Coding experience is not required. Applications may apply with only an idea. Our IAA development partner will lead accessible, user-centered app design and development, including the use of no-code/low-code tools where appropriate.
- Applicants with internal development resources are also welcome to apply. These teams may complete some or all development work themselves and may receive support from the IAA development partner for UX/UI design, accessibility review, usability feedback, or technical guidance.
- All awardees, whether using IAA development support or internal developers, must participate in IAA-led accessibility, user-testing, and inclusive design activities to ensure consistency across projects.
- If the proposed app relies on machine learning or AI algorithms, these models must be already validated and ready for integration at the time of submission, as the project timeline may not allow time for model development.

What is the App Development Process?

Selected applicants, referred to as "**Awardees**", will receive support from two dedicated teams: the **App Development Team**, which will manage or support the technical aspects of development, and the **Business Support Team**, which will assist with commercialization and sustainability. Awardees will also collaborate directly with target consumers with disabilities to create user-centered solutions. Awardees will collaborate with the App Development Team and Business Support Team to publish their app within one year following their admission to the program. Throughout each stage of the process, you will work closely with both teams to ensure effective app development and deployment. The stages are as follows:

- **Stage 1: Define the Minimum Viable Product (MVP)**

During this stage, the Awardee, with support from the two teams, will define their app's MVP, incorporating feedback and insights from individuals with disabilities. This process may involve creating a mock design and determining key features without building a functional prototype. The goal is to validate the app concept by gathering initial feedback from the target consumer group.

Participation in required business development activities, including the assigned coursework Idea 2 IMPACT coursework, scheduled check-ins with the Business Support Team, and development of a pitch deck, is mandatory during this stage to ensure the Awardee is prepared for downstream sustainability and funding requirements.

- **Stage 2: Build, Test, & Refine the MVP**

The App Development Team will work closely with the Awardee to build and refine the MVP through a rigorous process of refinement. This includes comprehensive accessibility testing and audit coordinated by the App Development Team, and usability testing coordinated by the Awardee and the team. These efforts ensure the app meets the needs of target consumers with disabilities and adheres to standards for inclusive and user-friendly design.

Awardees must remain actively engaged with the Business Support Team during this stage, including participation in business coaching sessions, sustainability and customer development, pitch deck and progress reviews, and completion of early business model development tasks.

- **Stage 3: Launch and Marketing**

The finalized app will be officially launched and deployed to the Apple and Google App Stores. The Awardee will collaborate closely with the Business Support Team to develop and implement a targeted marketing strategy focused on engaging consumers with disabilities. This strategy will leverage app utilization metrics to promote adoption and encourage sustained use among the target audience.

Awardees are required to implement the marketing and sustainability strategies developed during the coaching session. They must complete all associated deliverables through ongoing collaboration with the Business Support Team, including app adoption planning and post-launch tracking. Ongoing participation in business support activities remains mandatory in this stage.

Responsibilities for each party

The **App Development Team**, is a professional software company specializing in inclusive app development. They will be responsible for or consulted on the following tasks:

- Providing coaching and feedback to help the Awardees define their app's MVP
- Offering UX (User Experience)/UI (User Interface) support
- Developing the MVP by collaborating with the Awardee
- Assisting the Awardee in conducting testing of the app with target consumers with disabilities, fixing bugs, and providing feedback on the feasibility of identified areas of improvement and additional features.
- Coordinating with a third-party provider to conduct a comprehensive accessibility audit and resolving identified accessibility issues
- Coordinating with a third-party provider to assess app accessibility and usability with persons who use different assistive devices for phone access, and fixing any critical issues found during the remediation period. Other issues, like suggestions or improvements, can be addressed by the Awardees in future updates to the app
- Providing coding support for each app for 1-year post-launch, focusing exclusively on operating system updates. Awardees have the option to enter separate contracts with App Development Team for further support or continuous feature development

The **Business Support Team**, from the University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) will be responsible for the following tasks:

- Serving as the project manager to ensure smooth communication and collaboration between the App Development Team and Awardees
- Assisting Awardees in defining their app's MVP by introducing the Lean Startup Model and discovery workshops engaging with target consumers with disabilities throughout the customer development process
- Conducting required scheduled check-ins with Awardees throughout all stages of development. The check-ins are mandatory and designed to proactively support progress, identify challenges, and ensure program alignment for the app's success.
- Providing guidance to support Awardees in developing and refining a business plan to ensure the app's long-term feasibility and sustainability by providing relevant resources and one-on-one consultation
- Providing support on conducting app testing among target consumers with disabilities and interpreting results at various stages of development as needed
- Assisting Awardees in developing and implementing a comprehensive marketing strategy to maximize visibility, app adoption, and engagement among target consumers with disabilities
- Collaborating with Awardees to develop and implement an app adoption assessment plan, monitoring key metrics such as downloads, user retention, and reviews to evaluate the app's impact and determine necessary strategic adjustments or refinements

Awardees will be responsible for the following tasks with the support of the two teams:

- Completing “[Idea 2 IMPACT: An Introduction to Translating Assistive Health Technologies and Other Products](#)” on Coursera from NIDILRR’s IMPACT Center within 1st month of entering the program if not completed during the application process. This course is mandatory for all Awardees and forms the foundation for the required pitch deck. Completion within the designated timeline is necessary to maintain program eligibility.
- Gathering and analyzing user requirements to guide the collaborative definition of the MVP with the target consumers with disabilities, the App Development Team, and the Business Support Team
- Testing of app prototypes with target consumers with disabilities to assess functionality and usability then providing feedback to the App Development Team for improvements.
- Developing and refining an app business plan to ensure the app's long-term feasibility and sustainability. Participation in business planning activities, guided by the Business Support Team, is mandatory. Awardees must complete the required worksheets, planning tools, and assigned tasks.
- Developing and implementing a comprehensive marketing strategy to maximize visibility, app adoption, and user engagement. Awardees must participate fully in Business Support Team-led marketing and adoption planning sessions and complete required deliverables as part of continued program participation.
- Monitoring and reporting key usage metrics such as downloads, user retention, and user reviews to assess the app’s impact and make necessary strategic adjustments or refinements. These metrics will be reported annually post-launch through August 2029. *(It is a requirement from the federal funding agency that we keep track of the app usage data for all apps funded through this mechanism. Reports for subsequent years are about usage statistics, which could be annual and brief.)*
- Acknowledging support from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) and the Inclusive App Accelerator in the app's description on relevant marketplaces and within the app itself
- Creating and managing your own Apple App Store and Google Play Store developer accounts
- Participation in the Inclusive App Accelerator requires engagement in both technical development and business development activities. Awardees must attend scheduled check-ins, complete required coursework, and submit business and marketing deliverables on time.

Budget Guidelines

Applicants may request up to \$10,000 to support project activities beyond core app development. This may include:

- Time and effort for gathering user feedback and conducting user testing at various stages
- Business planning, marketing, and outreach
- Costs associated with participant or advisory reimbursements
- Ongoing app operating expenses

Key Dates

Application Deadline	February 15, 2026, by 23:59:59 EST
Notification to Awardees	April 1, 2026
Anticipated IAA Program Start Date	May 1, 2026

Any questions regarding the application and eligibility can be emailed to info@inclusiveapps.com.

Application

The application must be submitted via [an online portal](#) by 23:59 EST on February 15, 2026. The application will consist of the following sections:

1. Problem & Impact:

- **Define the target population** of persons with disabilities your app is designed for (e.g., disability type, functional needs, context).
- **Define the problem** this population experiences and why it matters.
- **Explain the unmet need** in the current market or service landscape.
- **Describe the expected impact** of your app and how it will significantly benefit the target population.

2. Stakeholders & Target Audience Involvement

- **Describe any feedback or insights** you have **gathered from your target population** and explain how this input has shaped your proposed solution.
- **Explain how you will involve the target population** throughout the app development process.
- **Identify any secondary stakeholders** (e.g., caregivers, family members, healthcare providers, employers, support staff, educators, service providers, or others) who may be essential to the app's core functionality or who may influence its adoption, implementation, or sustainability.
- **Describe any feedback or insights** you have **gathered from your secondary stakeholders** and explain how this input has shaped your proposed solution.
- **Explain how you will involve the secondary stakeholders** throughout the app development process.

3. Proposed Solution, the MVP and Long-Term Vision (What You Are Building)

- **How your app addresses the problem identified earlier**
(Explain how the app works in practice (focus on the user experience and workflow, not technical specifications), describe what users will actually do with the app and how it solves their problem, and avoid simply restating the problem; focus on your solution)
- **Identify essential (must-have) features for your Year 1 MVP**
(List only the core features required for the app to function and deliver value to users, and prioritize functionality that directly addresses the problem identified in Section 1)
- **Future enhancements (Post-Year 1 Wish List)**
(List additional features you would like to add after the MVP launch which should be value-added improvements, not essential functions; Explain why these features are important, but not required for Year 1. This section help reviewers understand your long-term vision)

4. Innovation, Competition, and Market Justification (Why It Matters)

- **Describe what makes your app unique or better than existing alternatives** explain how your solution differs, improves, or fills unmet needs,
- Include direct and indirect competitors, and their strengths and weaknesses;
- Explain why the market is large enough or growing enough to support your app. This section helps demonstrate that your concept has a clear niches and competitive advantage)

5a. Feasibility, Readiness, Dependencies & Risks (Why It Will Succeed)

- **Indicate the current development stage of the proposed app by selecting one of the options below:**
 - App Concept or Discovery:** The app is at the idea or concept stage and is currently being explored or defined.
 - Initial App Prototype:** A preliminary prototype of the app has been developed.
 - Existing App Improvement or Scaling:** The app is already developed and is now in the phase of improvement or scaling.
 - Other:** Please specify

5b. Feasibility, Readiness, Dependencies & Risks (Why It Will Succeed)

- **Explain why your solution is feasible to develop and launch within one year** (Describe any existing work that has been completed to support feasibility; Comment on team readiness and available resources; If relevant, note any regulatory considerations (e.g., FDA))
- **List any third-party tools or services your app depends on** (Examples include APIs, SDKs, external databases, CMS/LMS platforms, cloud services, device integrations, or external content requirements etc.; Explain how these dependencies affect feasibility, cost, or timeline. If your app requires integration with an external system or service (e.g., a custom AI model, hospital EHR, or device API), you must confirm that the external system already exists and will be functional at the time of app development. Standard mobile backend components (e.g., databases, user accounts, cloud storage) may be developed as part of the project as long as they are feasible within the project's scope.)
- **Anticipated Challenges** (Briefly identify any challenges that may affect development or implementation and how your team plans to address them)

6. Project Team & Expertise:

- **Team composition, skills, and availability** (List the team members who will work on this project, describe their roles and relevant experience/skills, and indicate approximately how much time each member can devote to this project)
- **Past successes (if any)**
- **Inclusion of lived experience** (Describe if your team includes individuals from the target audience and described their involvement)

7. Sustainability & Business Model:

- **Potential Business Model**

(Identify your planned model, e.g., subscription, freemium, licensing, grants, partnerships etc.)

- **Who might pay for or support the app**
- **Ideas for long-term sustainability**

8. Intellectual Property:

- **Current IP status** (e.g., concept only, provisional patent filed, copyrighted materials)
- **Planned protections**

9. Support & Resources: What level of support is needed to successfully develop and launch your app successfully?

- **Resources you already have** (e.g., funding, partnerships, tools, etc.)
- **Additional support needed to complete the project** (e.g., technical expertise, funding, partnerships, specialized tools etc.)

10. Budget: Use the provided budget template to outline how you will allocate the requested funds. Your budget should focus on personnel time, user engagement activities, marketing, testing, or other allowable expenses. Please refer to the Budget Guidelines section to ensure all requested costs comply with the program requirements.

References: If you have any references, you may provide them here.

Review Criteria and Scoring

Each criterion is evaluated on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with a maximum possible score of 45 points for the first nine areas.

1. Problem & Impact

- Clearly defines the target population of persons with disabilities.
- Clearly describes the specific problem, its importance, or consequences.
- Identifies a clear unmet need in the current market, service landscape, or available technologies.
- Describes the expected impact and meaningful benefits.

Score	Description
5	Exceptionally clear and well-defined target population, with a compelling and evidence-based description of the problem. Demonstrates a clear and significant unmet need in the current market. Articulates strong, meaningful, and measurable anticipated impact for the target population of persons with disabilities.
4	Strong definition of the target population and problem. Unmet need is apparent and impact is likely meaningful, though not fully detailed or comprehensive.
3	Adequate explanation of target population and problem, but unmet need or anticipated impact lacks clarity, depth, or strong justification.
2	Basic or vague definition of the target population. Problem is mentioned but weakly described. Limited recognition of unmet need, and anticipated impact is unclear or minimally articulated..
1	Poorly defined or missing target population. Problem description is unclear or irrelevant. Fails to identify an unmet need or meaningful impact.

2. Stakeholders & Target Audience Involvement

- Describes feedback or insights gathered from target population and how it informs solution.
- Provides a clear, actionable plan for involving target population throughout the process.
- Identifies additional relevant stakeholders.
- Explains how they will involve additional stakeholders, and how these perspectives strengthen relevance, usability and adoption of the app.

Score	Description
5	Comprehensive description of stakeholder engagement, including strong, well-documented early feedback from the target population AND a clear, multi-stage plan for their involvement. Additional stakeholders are thoroughly identified, with a compelling explanation of how their input will enhance the solution.
4	Good identification of primary and additional stakeholders with clear evidence of feedback and a solid plan for involvement, though some details may be less thorough or missing.
3	Adequate identification of stakeholders and some early input, but involvement plans lack depth, specificity, or meaningful integration of stakeholder perspectives.
2	Minimal identification of stakeholders, limited or anecdotal feedback, and vague or underdeveloped plans for ongoing involvement.
1	Little to no consideration of stakeholders, missing or unclear feedback, and no meaningful plan for stakeholder involvement.

3. Proposed Solution, the MVP and Long-Term Vision (What You Are Building)

- App addresses the problem identified earlier. Clarity of solution and user workflow.
- Identify essential (must-have) Year 1 MVP features that can be realistically be built within 1-year development timeline. Appropriateness and realism of the MVP.
- Explains future enhancements (post-year 1 wish list), their value-add. Thoughtfulness and logic of planned future enhancements.

Score	Description
5	Exceptionally clear and well-structured solution description. MVP is realistic, well-aligned with the identified problem, and future enhancements demonstrate thoughtful long-term planning.
4	Strong description of the solution and MVP or workflow. Future enhancements logical and appropriate.
3	Adequate explanation but missing detail or clarity in the MVP or workflow. Future enhancements somewhat vague or disconnected.
2	Weak or unclear solution. MVP unrealistic, poorly defined, or mismatched to the problem. Future enhancements unclear or not meaningful.
1	Very unclear solution. No realistic MVP. Future planning absent or incoherent.

4. Innovation, Competition, and Market Justification (Why It Matters)

- Identified what makes the app unique or better than existing alternatives and competition.
- Understanding of competition, clear differentiation and competitive advantage.
- Market justification. Evidence of market need or opportunity.

Score	Description
5	Outstanding understanding of competitors and alternatives. Clear, compelling differentiation and strong market justification.
4	Strong competitive analysis with clear differentiation. Good evidence of market need.
3	Adequate analysis but limited depth in differentiation or market justification.
2	Weak competitive understanding. Unclear differentiation. Market fit not well justified.
1	No meaningful competitor analysis. No clear differentiation. Unclear or nonexistent market rationale.

5. Feasibility, Readiness, Dependencies & Risks (Why It Will Succeed)

- Feasibility to develop and launch within one year, stages of development, team readiness, and regulatory considerations if relevant.
- Third-party tools or services app depends on explained (APIs, SDKs, external data, CMS/LMS, Cloud platform, hardware integrations).
- Identifies anticipated challenges, risks affecting development or implementation, and how to address them.

Score	Description
5	Highly feasible one-year path with strong existing work, clear dependencies, realistic regulatory understanding if applicable, and excellent risk mitigation.
4	Feasible overall. Minor gaps in readiness or risk planning but still reasonable.
3	Some feasibility concerns. Unclear dependencies or weak risk planning.
2	Major feasibility issues. Unrealistic timeline. Unclear or problematic dependencies. Risks not addressed.
1	Not feasible. No clear plan or understanding of what is required for development, dependencies, or risks.

6. Project Team & Expertise

- Demonstrates relevance and strength of experience and skills.
- Appropriateness of roles and time availability.
- Shows evidence of past successes (if applicable).
- Demonstrates inclusion and involvement of individuals with lived experience.

Score	Description
5	Exceptionally strong and well-rounded team with highly relevant skills, clearly defined roles, appropriate availability, meaningful inclusion of lived experience, and strong evidence of past success or readiness.
4	Team is well-qualified with relevant experience and availability. Some inclusion of lived experience and/or evidence of past achievements, with minor gaps.
3	Adequately qualified team but may lack depth in skills, time availability, or past success. Lived experience may be limited or not clearly integrated.
2	Team has minimal relevant experience or limited availability. Roles unclear, few or no past successes, and no meaningful inclusion of lived experience.
1	Poorly qualified team with little to no relevant expertise, insufficient availability, no evidence of ability to implement the project, and no lived experience represented.

7. Sustainability & Business Model

- Describes a clear and appropriate business model.
- Demonstrates understanding of who will financially support or pay for the app.
- Feasibility of long-term sustainability ideas explained.
- Describes alignment between the business model and the nature of the app and target population(s).

Score	Description
5	Clear, well-reasoned business model with strong alignment to the target audience and use case. Demonstrates a realistic and thoughtful plan for who will pay or support the app and provides compelling ideas for long-term sustainability.
4	Solid business model and reasonable sustainability ideas with only minor gaps in clarity or detail.
3	Adequate business model but sustainability ideas are still early or lack specificity. Unclear who will ultimately support or pay for the app.
2	Weak or unclear business model with limited understanding of who would support or pay for the app. Sustainability concepts incomplete or unrealistic.
1	No clear business model, no understanding of who would pay or support the app, and no meaningful long-term sustainability plan.

8. Intellectual Property

- Describes the status of the current IP clearly.
- Planned IP protections are appropriate and realistic.
- Alignment between the app concept and the proposed IP strategy.

Score	Description
5	Clear, well-articulated IP status with strong existing protections and a detailed, realistic plan for future protection.
4	Good understanding of current IP and solid plans for protection in progress, with minor gaps.
3	Adequate understanding of IP concepts. Protections not yet secured, but some planning is evident.
2	Weak or unclear IP status with minimal or poorly defined plans for securing protection.
1	No IP protections, no apparent understanding of IP requirements, and no meaningful plan for securing protections.

9. Support & Resources

- Clearly describes the relevance of existing resources.
- Appropriateness and completeness of resource(s) needed.
- Has a realistic understanding of what is required to bring the app to launch.
- There is alignment between requested support and feasibility.

Score	Description
5	Strong resource foundation with clearly described existing assets and a realistic, well-justified understanding of what additional support is needed. Demonstrates readiness and strong likelihood of leveraging support effectively.
4	Good identification of existing resources and reasonable articulation of additional needs, with minor gaps in detail.
3	Adequate explanation of resources but lacking depth in either what is available or what is needed. Some uncertainty about feasibility.
2	Minimal existing resources identified or unclear understanding of what additional support is required. Weak alignment between needs and project scope.
1	No meaningful resources identified and no clear plan for support needs.