

Connecticut Opportunity Project

Frequently Asked Questions | November 28, 2016

What is the Connecticut Opportunity Project?

The Connecticut Opportunity Project is a collaborative effort to unleash the untapped potential of youth who are disengaged or disconnected from high school in Connecticut. The pilot phase is an innovation challenge, soliciting ideas and strategies from individuals, non-profit organizations, and partnerships to create innovative solutions to support and empower youth of high school-age through age 24. The pilot is designed to identify partners, raise awareness, democratize innovation, and seed promising projects in urban, rural, and suburban communities across the state. In its pilot year (2017-18), the innovation challenge aims to reach at least 1,000 young people by launching a dozen small-scale projects. To learn more about the Opportunity Project, please visit: www.ctopportunityproject.org.

Who is funding the Connecticut Opportunity Project?

The Opportunity Project is created, funded, and facilitated by Barbara Dalio and the Dalio Foundation, a family foundation based in Connecticut. Barbara is the leader of the Foundation's work in public education. Over time, we hope additional funders will join in this collaborative effort.

Why pilot an innovation challenge?

An innovation challenge serves two fundamental purposes. First, it brings stakeholders together across disciplines around a central mission. Second, it generates ideas and strategies that may not be feasible in the various silos that make up our public education and youth-serving systems. What happens when you give teachers the space to work with youth development organizations? How can we think about serving students differently when school leaders are given the opportunity to collaborate with workforce development advocates? What happens when you invite everyone to the table and ask for their help in solving a big, widespread challenge? We're excited to find out.

Who is eligible to engage in the innovation challenge pilot?

We seek letters of interest from individuals, non-profit organizations, and partnerships. Applicants must have evidence-based programs, based on either existing or proposed new work, that aim to support disengaged or disconnected youth in Connecticut towards positive development, educational, and employment outcomes. Applications from organizations or partnerships must demonstrate the capacity to reach at least 75 youth over the first year of their work. Individual social entrepreneurs must show an ability to effectively engage at least 25 youth in Year 1 (2017-18). The Dalio Foundation, however, may waive these requirements if an applicant demonstrates a deeply innovative approach that serves fewer youth initially in order to innovate more quickly, with the aim of scaling in the second year. Applicants may be paired with other applicants or organizations to form strong collaborations.

Is this opportunity limited to urban areas?

No. The innovation challenge pilot aims to collaboratively engage everyone in supporting, challenging, and empowering our young people. The need is urgent and widespread in Connecticut, impacting almost every community: 113 school systems are each home to more than 50 disengaged or disconnected youth. Thus, we hope to receive letters of interest from urban, suburban, and rural communities across the state. Applicants may choose to focus their efforts in one particular neighborhood or community, or on a region within the state.

Must applicants focus exclusively on disengaged or disconnected youth?

The Opportunity Project aims to unleash the untapped potential of youth who are currently disengaged or disconnected from high school in Connecticut. Thus, applicants must propose projects that aim to meet the needs of disengaged or disconnected youth, or some combination thereof, of high school-age through age 24. Projects that aim to support disengaged youth transitioning into high school during the summer before 9th grade are acceptable. Projects are also acceptable if they have thoughtful plans to identify and recruit disengaged or disconnected youth, and then enroll and serve high school-age youth, the majority of whom are disengaged or disconnected.

Must applicants propose projects that directly benefit disengaged or disconnected youth?

Yes, the project's intended benefit should be direct and measurable. Projects that aspire to indirectly benefit disengaged or disconnected youth through systems or infrastructure building will not receive consideration through the innovation challenge pilot.

Can individual community members partake in the innovation challenge pilot?

Yes. Social entrepreneurs wishing to create or continue initiatives in response to community demand are encouraged to submit letters of interest. Individuals may be paired with other applicants or organizations before being invited to develop full proposals for grant funding consideration.

Can for-profit organizations apply?

No, for-profit organizations may not apply. However, businesses may be involved in partnerships involving groups of organizations where the lead applicant is part of a governmental unit, as described in Internal Revenue Code Section 170(c)(1), or a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, preferably with at least two years of audited financials.

Do applicant organizations need to be based in Connecticut?

No. Organizations from all over the country are invited to apply as long as their intended program impact occurs in Connecticut, they work in collaboration with a community or region, and they can demonstrate local demand for their programs and services.

What is the process and timeline for applying to the innovation challenge?

There are two stages to the innovation challenge pilot. First, eligible individuals, organizations, or partnerships may submit letters of interest describing the central elements of proposed projects, along with short videos, by December 15, 2016. Second, following review by a community panel, the Dalio Foundation will invite a subset of applicants in winter 2017 to develop formal proposals for grant funding consideration. Formal proposals will be due in April 2017, and final funding decisions will be made in time for project implementation to begin by summer/fall 2017. Interested applicants are encouraged to visit www.ctopportunityproject.org.

Can an applicant submit more than one letter of interest and video?

Yes, but it is highly unlikely that the Foundation would fund multiple projects from the same applicant.

Where can we submit our completed letters of interest and videos, and when is the deadline?

Completed letters of interest and "pitch" videos should be submitted by 11:59 p.m. EST on December 15, 2016. To submit materials, please visit www.ctopportunityproject.org and click the button near the bottom of the page labeled "Submit Your Proposal Here." The Opportunity Project will not consider letters of interest or videos that exceed the

specified length, are incomplete, or are submitted after the deadline. There are no specific requirements around font, spacing, or margins for the letters of interest.

Are letters of support required as part of the initial submission?

No, letters of support are not required as part of the first stage of the innovation challenge pilot.

How much grant funding is available through the innovation challenge pilot?

In its pilot year (2017-18), the Opportunity Project aims to reach at least 1,000 young people by launching a dozen small-scale projects. Annual grant sizes will vary, ranging from up to \$1,000 to \$10,000 per youth served depending on the type and scope of the project. Applicants must provide a compelling rationale for the level of funding requested relative to the number of youth served, type of initiative (e.g., mentoring, paid internships), and overall operating budget. Applicants may not request over \$500,000 per year, excluding match funding. Grant awards may be for up to two years. The Foundation will make final funding decisions. For specific budget guidance, please see pages 2-3 of the *Connecticut Opportunity Project Overview*, available at www.ctopportunityproject.org.

What are the expectations around the type, source, and timing of match funding?

Applicants applying as organizations or partnerships must secure match funding equal to at least 15% or 33%, respectively, of the total proposed project cost before a grant is awarded. Such applicants must identify secured and/or likely-to-be secured match funding sources and amounts. Ideally, matching funds should be newly secured resources to support the proposed project. While it is not necessary to secure funds prior to the initial submission of the letter of interest and “pitch” video, the perceived likelihood of an applicant ultimately securing matching funds by May 1, 2017 will factor into the Foundation’s evaluation of the proposed project.

If a partnership is awarded funding, how will the Foundation distribute the funds?

As part of the application process, partnerships must identify a lead applicant that is part of a governmental agency or non-profit organization. If a partnership is awarded funding, the Foundation will distribute funds to the lead applicant, who will then be responsible for allocating the funds according to the approved budget submitted in the second phase of the application process.

Who will be reviewing proposals for the innovation challenge pilot?

The Dalio Foundation will convene a community panel of educators, civic leaders, families, young people, and experts in various fields to evaluate letters of interest and video submissions from applicants. With input from the community panel, the Foundation will then invite select applicants to develop formal proposals for grant funding consideration. The Foundation may also function as a matchmaker, helping applicants initially applying as individuals or organizations to form strong collaborations. The Foundation will evaluate letters of interest and video submissions by applying the design principles, guidelines, and criteria described on pages 3-5 of the *Connecticut Opportunity Project Overview*. The Foundation will make final funding decisions. Please visit www.ctopportunityproject.org for more information.

How can I learn more about the Connecticut Opportunity Project and stay connected?

Visit www.ctopportunityproject.org and sign up for email updates.