

IdeaSpark Program

A collaboration between The Viscardi Center and the Hynes Institute of Entrepreneurship & Innovation at Iona University

The IdeaSpark Program engages individuals with disabilities in developing an entrepreneurial mindset. Participants will discover what it takes to be an innovator and entrepreneur by engaging in a series of activities that will let them define an entrepreneurial opportunity and explore its feasibility over a six-week period.

Embedded in the virtual program will be opportunities for participants to interact with entrepreneurs and experts in their fields, as well as partner with Iona University students serving as Peer Mentors. Participants will be given challenges that will help them develop and apply entrepreneurial skills in action. At a culminating Second Annual IdeaSpark Program Pitchfest event, they will practice presentation skills and share aspects of their personal learning experiences, while pitching their business ideas and competing for equity-free cash grants.



Program Goals

The IdeaSpark Program is a collaboration between The Viscardi Center (TVC) and the Hynes Institute of Entrepreneurship & Innovation at Iona University. With historic commitments to advancing entrepreneurship, these two institutions are partnering to advance inclusivity among budding entrepreneurs in the disability community. Leveraging their unique strengths, TVC and Iona University are introducing this program to provide a fully accessible introduction to entrepreneurship as a first step for those interested in business ownership as a viable employment pathway to financial independence.

Program Benefits

Students in this program will:

- + Foster and apply an entrepreneurial mindset
- + Develop an idea into a viable business model
- + Enhance their presentation and pitching skills
- + Learn and apply creative problem-solving skills
- + Create a professional network with like-minded individuals
- + Benefit from Peer Mentor support
- + Pitch to a panel of judges for a chance to win an equity-free cash grant

Calendar & Platform

Program sessions will be conducted on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11 am to 1 pm ET from May 14 through June 27, 2024. Orientation from 11 am to 1 pm ET on Tuesday, May 7, 2024.

Sessions will be conducted remotely via Zoom®. The Pitchfest event will be conducted on the Iona University campus in New Rochelle, New York for participants and guests who can attend in person. Others may participate and attend virtually.

In keeping with both partners' commitment to inclusivity, they will ensure a fully accessible learning environment including real-time captioning during classes and accessible digital material, i.e., PDFs, PowerPoints, videos. TVC will provide support to participants needing assistive technology and work with Iona's faculty and staff to ensure coursework is fully accessible through the Litmos® Learning Management System. Prior to the start of the program, training on the use of Litmos® will be provided.

Eligibility

Participants must meet the following eligibility criteria:

1

Be 18 years of age or older and self-identify as having a disability

2

Have a defined business concept, or are actively launching a business

3

Commit to attend all class sessions and complete assignments

4

Sign the participant agreement*

Participants are expected to have a computer that can access web-based applications as classes will be offered on Zoom® and materials will be posted on Litmos®, a web-based learning management system. The Viscardi Center will ensure materials are digitally accessible and support participants' assistive technology needs to the extent possible.

* Includes a commitment to completing assessments related to the program and signing a media release form.

How to Apply - Application Deadline is April 5, 2024

Apply at ViscardiCenter.org/IdeaSpark

Questions may be directed to entrepreneurship@viscardicenter.org

About The Viscardi Center

The Viscardi Center (TVC), a network of non-profit organizations based in Albertson, NY, provides a lifespan of services that educate, employ, and empower people with disabilities. Its programs and services include Pre-K through High School (to age 21) education, school-to-work transition services, vocational training, career counseling and placement, digital accessibility services, entrepreneurship, and workforce diversification assistance for children, adolescents, and adults with disabilities and businesses. It was founded in 1952 by Dr. Henry Viscardi, Jr. who himself wore prosthetic legs, served as disability advisor to eight U.S. Presidents, and became one of the world's leading advocates for people with disabilities. IdeaSpark builds on TVC's previous pilot program which provided two cohorts of individuals with disabilities training, mentoring and resources to achieve self-employment success.



About Iona University and the Hynes Institute for Entrepreneurship & Innovation

The Hynes Institute for Entrepreneurship & Innovation was established in 2017 through a record-setting \$15 million gift from James P. Hynes 69, 01H and Anne Marie Hynes. It is an award-winning interdisciplinary program that fosters the development of creativity, leadership and entrepreneurship skills critical for success in a global economy. The Hynes Institute offers two undergraduate majors – a Bachelor of Arts in Entrepreneurial Leadership and a Bachelor of Business Administration in Entrepreneurship, as well as an advanced certificate in Entrepreneurship & Innovation. Located at the center of campus, the Hynes Institute is housed in a 3,800-square-foot, state-of-the-art coworking space offering a modern and sustainable home for creativity on campus and beyond. In addition, the Hynes Institute operates its GaelVentures Community Incubator off campus.

