



Social Innovator Accelerator Applicant Guide

DEADLINE EXTENDED: ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS UNTIL WEDNESDAY, JULY 26

The Social Innovator Accelerator helps nonprofit organizations gain visibility, expand their networks, and connect with philanthropic and in-kind resources to accelerate their work.

This guide includes information about the Social Innovation Forum, our flagship program, the Social Innovator Accelerator, and the Application Process for the Accelerator.

- **How to Apply to the Social Innovator Accelerator program**
 - **Step 1:** Review this Applicant Guide to confirm eligibility
 - **Step 2:** Attend an information session and/or set up a call with our Program team
 - Info Session #1 on Wednesday, June 28 from 10:00-11:30 am
 - [Zoom Registration Link](#)
 - Info Session #2 on Tuesday, July 11 from 12:00-1:30 pm
 - [Zoom Registration Link](#)
 - **Step 3:** Complete an application by creating an account [here](#).
 - If you'd like to review the Application Questions they can be found [here](#)

Eligibility Requirements

The Social Innovator Accelerator is open to programs and organizations that:

- Are a registered 501(c)(3) or use a fiscal agent that is a 501(c)(3)
- Address a specific social need as described in at least one of our [social issue tracks](#) and bring their own perspective and innovation to the topic
- Are working in Eastern Massachusetts, unless otherwise noted in the track description. We define Eastern MA broadly. In the past, we've worked with organizations in surrounding cities like Worcester, Lowell, Lawrence, New Bedford, and Fall River.



- Have been delivering programs or services for at least 3 years
- Have a minimum of 1.5 paid FTEs (full-time equivalents—counting full and part-time staff, not volunteers)
- Have an annual operating budget of \$100,000–\$2 million

Social Innovator Profile

We refer to organizations that are selected to and go through the Accelerator program as “Social Innovators.” Typically a strong Social Innovator applicant:

- Uses an **innovative approach**. As we define it at the Social Innovation Forum, social innovation is the process of finding, testing, and honing impactful and potentially transformative approaches that are responsive to the needs of community members, disrupt systems, and bring about systemic change.
- Has a **long-term vision** and has goals, ideas, and/or plans for moving toward its long-term vision.
- Is at a point in its trajectory where it is **seeking to engage in capacity building** to deepen, shift, and/or expand its work and has interest and capacity to participate in the Accelerator program.
- **Works collaboratively** with community partners and stakeholders
- Engages in reflection and **continuous quality improvement**.
- Leadership and decision-making **reflect and are accountable** to the community served.
- Leaders are **open to new ideas** and coaching.
- Has or is working towards having a **fundraising strategy** and has the organizational capacity to take advantage of SIF’s fundraising supports, including network-building.



For our 2024 Social Innovator Accelerator, we'll be selecting one nonprofit on each social issue track, except for the Youth and Education track on which *three* Innovators will be selected.

2024 SOCIAL ISSUE TRACKS AND TRACK PARTNERS

Advancing Educational/Workforce Pathways and Supports for Adolescents and Young Adults

Track Partner: *Youth & Education Collaborative*
Funding Partners: *(Jim and Lisa Valone, Move the World Foundation, and Wellington Management Foundation)*

Building Financial Resilience

Track Partner: *MassMutual Foundation*

Disrupting Cycles of Harm and Building Pathways to Healing

Track Partner: *Anonymous*

Holistic Approaches to Mental Health and Physical Wellbeing in Historically Excluded Communities (BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, Disability)

Track Partner: *James B. Boskey Memorial Foundation*

Pathways to Climate Resiliency

Track Partner: *Liberty Mutual Foundation*

Strengthening Democracy through Civic Engagement and Community Empowerment

Track Partner: *Jamport Charitable Trust*



Application Process and Timeline

- **Applications Due:** Wednesday, July 26
 - **Site Visit Invites Issued:** Week of September 18
 - **Site Visits:** October 10 - November 10
 - **Selections Made:** Week of November 20
 - **Program Begins:** Mid-December
-
- To complete an application you'll need to create an account [here](#).
 - Application Questions can be found [here](#)

Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis until **Wednesday, July 26, at 5:00 pm**; however, early submissions are highly encouraged.

- We will select eight nonprofit organizations to join the Social Innovator Accelerator program. **We'll be selecting one nonprofit on each track except for the Youth and Education track on which *three Innovators* will be selected.** The Accelerator selection process is very competitive, and demand far outpaces available resources. On average, we receive 60 applications and select eight Social Innovators.

Information Sessions

We will be hosting two virtual Information Sessions:

- Info Session #1 on Wednesday, June 28 from 10:00-11:30 am
 - [Zoom Registration Link](#)
- Info Session #2 on Tuesday, July 11 from 12:00-1:30 pm
 - [Zoom Registration Link](#)



Benefits to Social Innovators

Each Social Innovator receives access to the following resources and services:

Six months of consulting services focused on enhancing the organization's ability to articulate the social problem it is addressing, its innovative approach, and its social impact. The consulting engagement culminates in the development of the following materials designed for funder/investor audiences:

- Written investment prospectus
- Five-minute pitch (with PowerPoint slides)
- Model Graphic - tool used to illustrate programming
- **Graphic design services and presentation coaching**
- An opportunity to **connect with investors and funders** by presenting the work of the organization at the annual Social Innovator Showcase - to be held in May 2024 for this cohort
- Opportunity to **be in a cohort of grassroots nonprofit leaders** with diverse experiences, working in different social issue areas in Eastern MA
- **Networking and relationship-building support** to expand the organization's access to external funding and support
- Five months of **executive coaching to focus on promoting professional growth** for the leadership team
- **\$30,000 cash** upon completion of the consulting engagement
- Additional **support from SIF's in-kind partners** (e.g., legal, graphic design, PR, technology)
- **Ongoing support** through the [Social Innovator Accelerator Alumni program](#)

Who Would be Involved?

- 1 "lead" Innovator (typically Executive Director or Program Director)
- Optional: 1-3 other staff to support decision-making on materials and participate in executive coaching



Time Commitment Required of Social Innovators

In order to take full advantage of the consulting, coaching, and other services that the Social Innovator Accelerator provides, Social Innovators should expect to commit on average six to eight hours per week for six months (December 2023 to May 2024). From September 2024 to the end of 2025, we ask that the Innovators set aside a few hours per month for executive coaching sessions and quarterly check-in calls.

Please see below for an overview of the time commitment required of Social Innovators through three phases of the Accelerator Program:

- **Phase #1: Consulting Engagement + Showcase Prep**
 - December 2023 - May 2024
 - 6-8 hours *per week*
- **Phase #2: Executive Coaching**
 - September 2024 - February 2025
 - 6-8 hours *per month*
- **Phase #3: Quarterly Check-in Calls + Closing Event**
 - March 2025 – December 2025
 - 6-8 hours *per month*



Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Social Innovation Forum?

The Social Innovation Forum (SIF) brings together nonprofits, philanthropy, government, and business to support the spread of emerging social innovations in Eastern Massachusetts. SIF creates positive social change in Eastern MA by:

- Engaging and informing funders and investors so they can direct resources most effectively
- Educating and supporting leaders of nonprofit organizations so they can deliver the most effective solutions to social issues
- Making connections and building relationships across diverse communities so people can help each other generate significant social change

The Social Innovator Accelerator provides a unique opportunity for innovative nonprofit organizations to gain visibility, expand their networks, and build capacity. Each year, we partner with leading local funders to identify and support a small cohort of Social Innovators. Our search and selection process lasts six months and involves one written application, site visits, and other forms of due diligence. This process brings together a range of stakeholders, including SIF staff, track partners, and an evaluation committee made up of more than 50 business, government, and foundation leaders.

Our unique approach, working with both funders and practitioners, creates a “Social Impact Marketplace” that is informed, connected, and engaged in the pursuit of positive social change and measurable results. Thus, our direct work is leveraged to create broader impact throughout the community.

What are the Social Innovator Accelerator’s Results?

To date, the Social Innovation Forum has directed more than \$59 million in cash and in-kind services to help more than 100 social impact organizations accelerate their growth and amplify their impact.



According to recent surveys, **100% of Social Innovators** said they would recommend the Accelerator to another organization and **94% of Social Innovators** found the program extremely useful or useful for;

- Improving the organization's **ability to communicate their work externally**
- **Increasing their confidence** as a representative of the organization
- Improving their **leadership skills**
- Promoting personal and professional **growth**

88% of Social Innovators are still applying what they learned in the Accelerator on a weekly or monthly basis.

In addition to all the benefits of the Accelerator curriculum, Social Innovators also get access to SIF's expansive network of foundations, businesses, nonprofits and other stakeholders in the Eastern MA community.

How does SIF define social innovation?

We define social innovation as the process of finding, testing, and honing impactful and potentially transformative approaches that are responsive to the needs of community members, disrupt systems, and bring about systemic change. We believe that organizations that utilize and promote social innovation work collaboratively with community partners and stakeholders and their leadership and decision-making reflect and are accountable to the community served.

Is it possible to apply as a program or initiative within an organization?

Yes. Any program or initiative with an operating budget between \$100,000 and \$2 million may apply. In these cases, the Program Director as well as a representative from the parent organization must be committed to participating in Accelerator meetings and events. In addition, the entire application must refer to the program, not the parent organization (budget numbers, performance metrics, etc.).



If applying to more than one social issue track, must an organization submit more than one application?

In general, yes. Each track has its own set of evaluators who are experts on that particular social issue. While a fair amount of information may be copied and pasted from one application to the next, we ask that applicants apply to no more than two tracks and tailor their answers to some of the more thoughtful, paragraph-response questions to demonstrate their “fit” with each of those tracks. Our evaluators like to see that applicants have thought about how their organizations address specific social issues and what makes them innovators in those spaces.

What is the application process for those who applied during a previous cycle of the Social Innovator Accelerator and were not selected?

The application itself changes from year to year. In order for us to have consistent information across applicants, all applicants for this year’s cycle must complete a 2024 application. However, it is often possible to copy and paste responses from a previous application into corresponding sections of the current year’s application. To assist you, we are happy to provide copies of your past application(s) upon request.

What is the Social Innovator Showcase?

The **Social Innovator Showcase** is an event focused on highlighting the Social Innovators to potential investors, as well as sparking conversations on the best approaches to developing and spreading innovation. Each lead Innovator presents a five minute pitch, accompanied by PowerPoint slides, to an audience of more than 350 business, government, and philanthropic leaders from Eastern MA at this event. The Social Innovator Showcase will be held in May 2024 (exact date TBD).

What if I have more questions?

If you have any questions about the application process, please do not hesitate to contact our team at Social Innovation Forum, at accelerator@socialinnovationforum.org or at 978.344.2622.