

Islands of Brilliance Summary Report

Information about the Applicant

Islands of Brilliance (IOB) runs project-based experiential learning workshops for autistic youth and young adults, providing the opportunity for their innate capabilities, talents, and confidence to flourish. Workshops target critical social/emotional and vocational skill-based learning, helping students elevate their perception of self, increasing the likelihood for independence and employment as an adult. Since our inception in 2012 with seven students at Discovery World in Milwaukee, we've experienced explosive growth. Annual enrollment increased 359% from 2016 - 2019. In 2020, IOB transitioned to virtual delivery, offering 502 online sessions, with 3,358 student enrollments (more than six times 2019 enrollment numbers). IOB was awarded the 2021 Force for Positive Change COVID-19 Pivot award in recognition of this significant and impactful achievement. The organization offered a total of 661 sessions across all programs in 2021, representing a total of 4,584 student enrollments, a more than 30 percent increase over 2020.

Beginning in 2022, IOB's unique intervention model will be studied by researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee through the newly established Autism Brilliance Lab for Entrepreneurship (ABLE). The National Endowment of the Arts-funded Lab will examine how creativity and arts-based intervention can serve as vehicles for preparing autistic individuals for the workforce, as well as preparing neurotypical environments for autistic employees.

Statement of Need

The rate of autism diagnoses is steadily increasing, the CDC just increased the rate of prevalence from 1 in 54 children to 1 in 44 in December 2021 (and it's very likely that this number is higher when missed diagnoses are taken into account, especially when you consider marginalized communities like Milwaukee's urban neighborhoods). This, coupled with the staggering 83% unemployment rate for young adults on the spectrum, makes early intervention critical. Traditional, state-mandated transition planning begins at age 14, which is, unfortunately, far too late to really make an impact. IOB Foundation programming begins at age 8, offering a longer runway to develop the technical skills and social emotional competencies necessary for post-secondary success. Developing pathways for employment is critical to address the adverse economic and human effects associated with autism. The current unemployment rate is not solely attributable to the expanding prevalence and limitations of the disability, but to the absence of effective transition planning and experiential learning opportunities.

Project Goals and Expected Benefits

IOB's 2023 State-Wide Outreach will build on the 2022 Pilot of Sandbox@ and will be comprised of three program offerings: (1) Sandbox@ mobile workshop sessions, (2) Sandbox Summer Camps, and (3) Brilliant Breakfast Club. This strategic approach to outreach aligns with the Wispact Foundation's priority of providing

inclusive educational programming that promotes fulfillment and edification of persons with disabilities. Goals of this outreach initiative include:

1. Expanding outreach and engaging more neurodiverse participants and families throughout the state in an effort to connect them to ongoing Sandbox and Foundation Programs, ultimately helping increase independence and post-secondary opportunities.
2. Fostering an environment of experiential inclusivity in which neurotypical individuals can see the capabilities of their neurodiverse loved ones flourish.
3. Providing autistic individuals throughout Wisconsin with a network and community that cultivates a sense of belonging, ultimately enhancing quality of life.

Project Implementation Plan

As in 2022, the 2023 execution of Sandbox@ will include a total of 12 planned stops throughout the state over the course of the year. The IOB team will lead 90-minute workshop sessions at partner locations that foster creativity and inspiration, including the John Michael Kohler Art Museum, Sherman Phoenix, and the ASGW Conference. Participants will touch on stations of Doodle Lounge, Smactivities and Natterdays (our most popular virtual programs). Each site will accommodate 10+ neurodiverse participants (ages 8 - 30+) and siblings and parents are encouraged to participate as well, fostering an environment of experiential inclusivity in which neurotypical individuals can see the capabilities of their neurodiverse loved ones flourish.

Two week-long Sandbox Camps will be offered both in Milwaukee and Sheboygan in summer 2023 as another outlet to expand outreach. Campers will enjoy a 3-hour, 4-day experience that combines art, design, storytelling, creative technologies, movement, and outdoor activities in a variety of different environments. 2022 pilot partner locations included the Milwaukee Art Museum, Lubar Entrepreneurship Center, and Urban Ecology Center. John Michael Kohler Arts Center has committed to being a partner in 2023.

Finally, we will build on the existing Brilliant Breakfast Club (BBC) to expand outreach to other parts of the state, including offering a special session at the ASGW Conference in spring, as well as at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center. BBC offers weekly video chats and monthly in-person meetings tailored to young adults 18+ interested in social experiences and peer discussions designed to foster pathways toward independence, with topics focusing on grocery shopping/cooking, nutrition, relationships, finance, transportation, and more.

Total reach of this expanded outreach is estimated at 550 - 575 attendees. Planning will be led by Chief Education Officer Margaret Fairbanks and Director of Educational Content Matt Juzenas. Dates and timing of workshops and camps will be determined in collaboration with partner locations.

Evaluation Plan

Responsibility for collection, documentation, and evaluation of the program's progress and success will be shared by the Education and Administrative Teams. A variety of measurement tools—both quantitative and qualitative—including ongoing enrollment data, post-workshop surveys, and participant evaluations will be used to collect data intended to inform the evaluation of the following measurable objectives:

1. IOB will conduct 12 Mobile Sandbox sessions, 2 Sandbox Summer Camps, and 2 state-wide outreach BBC sessions in addition to the 40 virtual sessions and monthly in-person events, reaching an estimated 550 - 575 autistic attendees, with an additional 80 - 100 neurotypical attendees engaging in the experience(s).
2. 50% of parents/caregivers will report an increase in their child's willingness to try new things and/or confidence levels, both key SEL competencies for students on the spectrum.

Budget**Budget**

<i>Revenue</i>	Earned Income - BBC (\$28,800), Sandbox (\$10,000)	\$38,800
	Individual Contributions	\$11,350
	Foundation Grants (state-wide and community foundations)	\$28,500
	Total Revenue	\$78,650
<i>Expenses</i>	Staff Wages	\$63,250
	Independent Contractors - sped support, mentors	\$ 6,875*
	Workshop Materials & Supplies	\$ 2,000*
	Marketing	\$ 2,000
	Travel	\$ 2,885*
	Facility Rentals	\$ 1,600
	Total Expenses	\$78,610

Staff Recommendation

The grant can be recommended for approval. This is building on the progress from the grant we provided last year. This budget includes elements that we cannot fund; however, many of the line items are eligible. Like last year's grant line items for independent contracts, materials, facility rentals may be considered as these will provide the direct benefit for the disabled individuals. The Wispact Grant can cover the following specific items:

Independent Contractors – sped support, mentors	\$6,875.00
Workshop Materials & Supplies	\$2,000.00
Travel	\$2,000.00
Total	\$10,875.00
Capped total	\$10,000.00