

SMILE Workforce Grants Criteria

Funding requests for single-year grants may start at \$15,000 and go up to \$100,000, depending on the type of program these funds would support. Multi-year grants up to three years will be considered.

Dental Assisting and Dental Hygiene Programs are eligible for the 2026 SMILE Workforce Grants. Please continue to read to learn more details.

We recognize that there is a shortage of dental assistants and dental hygienists across New Jersey and Connecticut. This dental workforce shortage is impacting dental offices and access to care across both states.

Dental assistants and dental hygienists are essential members of the dental health care team – improving the oral and overall health of children, seniors, veterans, those with special health care needs, and adults of all ages.

Our Foundation is offering 2026 SMILE Workforce Grants!

The Delta Dental Foundation seeks to support programs that:

- Are State-approved and adhere to State regulations or are in the process of seeking State approval
- Are sustainable programs that have the support and commitment from your overall organization
- Where applicable, have received approval from the Department of Education and/or Department of Labor
- **Dental Assisting programs:** follow the NELDA Model, with radiology and infection control, including the Radiation Health and Safety exam (based on NJ and/or CT regulations; In NJ: HS graduates only, minimum age of 18), Infection Control Exam, and Anatomy, Morphology and Physiology exam. *The NELDA Model is preferred, not required.*

Establish, expand, or promote dental assisting and/or dental hygiene careers by:

- Encouraging and exposing middle school and/or high school students to dental careers
- Increasing the number of dental assistants and/or dental hygienists working in a public health setting, including Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), community clinics, and hospitals
- Building a strong dental assisting and/or dental hygiene workforce in underserved communities throughout NJ and CT
- Improving access to dental care in our communities by recruiting and rebuilding depleted dental assisting and/or dental hygiene staff

Funding can be applied in several ways, including but not limited to:

- Dental assisting and/or dental hygiene student scholarships
- School-to-career programs
- Middle school and/or high school mentorship programs (promoting dental careers)
- Adults re-entering the workforce
- Dental assisting training programs
- Registered Dental Assistant (RDA) and Certified Dental Assistant (CDA)
- Expanded function dental assisting programs
- HOSA - Health Occupations Students of America
- Dental radiology
- Associate and/or bachelor's degrees in dental hygiene
- NJ and CT colleges or other educational institutions with dental assisting and/or dental hygiene programs (establishing new programs or expanding current programs)
- On-the-job training for dental assistants in public health settings
- Full or partial funding of dental assistant and/or dental hygienist salaries in public health settings to help make public health careers more competitive
- Marketing efforts around promoting dental careers to middle school and high school students or other groups, promotion of schools' dental assisting and/or dental hygiene programs, assisting with student recruitment, and raising awareness for Expanded Function Dental Assistants - EFDA (CT) and Registered Dental Assistants - RDA (NJ)

Please contact Kim Elmore with any questions relating to our Foundation and the SMILE Workforce Grants at kelmore@deltadentalnj.com

All SMILE Workforce applications are due by EOD Wednesday, November 5, 2025.

