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# **Feds Building Businesses: Tips for Disabled Entrepreneurs Starting a Business During or After Federal Employment**

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Tiffany Meehan, Full Circle Access  
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# Agenda



- Who are we?
- What are our businesses?
- How did we get started?
- Key parts of going from fed to entrepreneur
- Resources
- Questions and answers

Please hold questions until the end!

We are speaking in our personal capacity and not as federal employees.

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# About Tiffany

Event and accessibility entrepreneur reimagining live entertainment experiences

- Founder & CEO of Full Circle Access, the first platform personalizing live events; tech that bridges the gap between what venues offer and what guests prefer
  - Former VP Marketing at Series A tech startup focused on accessible hiring technology and products
  - Current Disability Policy Advisor at US Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy
  - Latina tech leader and wheelchair user bringing lived disability experience to event industry
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# About Full Circle Access

Full Circle Access is the personalization platform for live entertainment. We centralize scattered venue information across 250+ attributes into one searchable platform where guests create profiles based on how they prefer to experience events—discover parking details, food options, step-free entrances, amenities, and more to plan with confidence.

Think Netflix for live events: guests get personalized venue matches, venues get guest preference data to prepare operations and increase revenue. **We're building the technology that makes concerts, sports, festivals, and conferences personal for every single guest, every single time.**

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## About Jonathan



- Accessibility professional with over a decade of experience
    - Specialized in digital accessibility, cognitive accessibility, and service/program accessibility
    - Published research and work on cognitive access, dementia, and restrooms
    - Loves the “everyday poetry” of accessibility
  - NYC, Montgomery County, Prince George’s County governments
  - Freelancer experience
  - Former Policy Advisor at US Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy
  - Autistic/OCD
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# About Opossum House Accessibility



- Solo consultancy
  - Single-person LLC in Maryland
  - Helping with resourceful accessibility (hence the name!)
  - Jonathan provides the following services:
    - Accessibility audits and action plans
    - Training in the customer's contexts
    - Product review and revision
    - Process review and revision
    - Accessible event planning support
    - Custom accessibility services
  - Current clients include non-profits, community colleges, and local government agencies
  - Fun fact: logo designed by NDI partner Heather Lawver!
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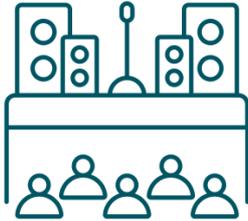
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# Getting Started

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# How Tiffany got started



Based on years in marketing and live entertainment – and needing to create something of my own:

- Produced concerts at 9:30 Club, IMP Productions, and GWU venues
  - Madison Square Garden concert crystallized the guest experience problem I'd observed for years in the event industry
  - Hired at ODEP January 2025, faced DOGE cuts February 2025
  - Started incorporating FCA in February 2025 during uncertainty – combining venue experience with lived disability perspective
  - Took DRP in April 2025, returned September 2025, currently furloughed
  - Bootstrapped development while building team with industry leaders
  - Validated the event problem and currently raising Friends & Family round funding
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## Tiffany's goals



- Launch with 25K+ pilot users and 2-4 founding partner venues by end of 2026
  - Show venues they're leaving money on the table by not knowing guest preferences—and give them the tools to capture it
  - Make live entertainment as personalized as Netflix made streaming—where preferences drive everything
  - Build the platform where step-free routes, quiet spaces, and sensory features naturally blend with parking, dining, and VIP options—all just preferences people want
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# How Jonathan got started



- Based on experience in accessibility and missing “the technical work”
  - Started planning in September 2024 - original plan to launch in 2027
  - Broadened focus from initial local government goal
  - Accelerated timeline after the election
    - Used DRP payments and savings for initial capital
  - Networking with entrepreneurs and other solo consultants
    - Both accessibility consultants and other solo entrepreneurs
  - Support from Maryland SBDC
  - Incorporated April 2025, launch in June and July 2025, first clients July 2025
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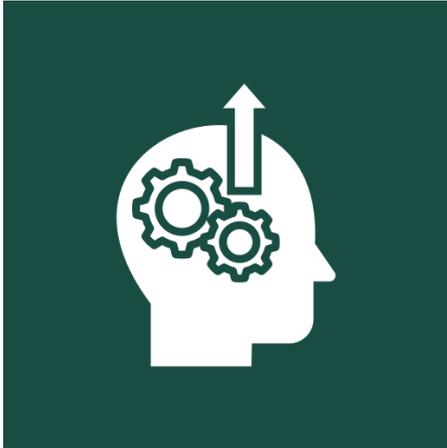
## Jonathan's goals



- Build a sustainable, long-term solo consultancy
  - Work as a prime or sub-contractor on targeted accessibility projects
  - Build client base to focus on physical/digital accessibility intersection
  - Remain independent/solo
  - ~1300-1400 billable hours per year
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# Our journeys

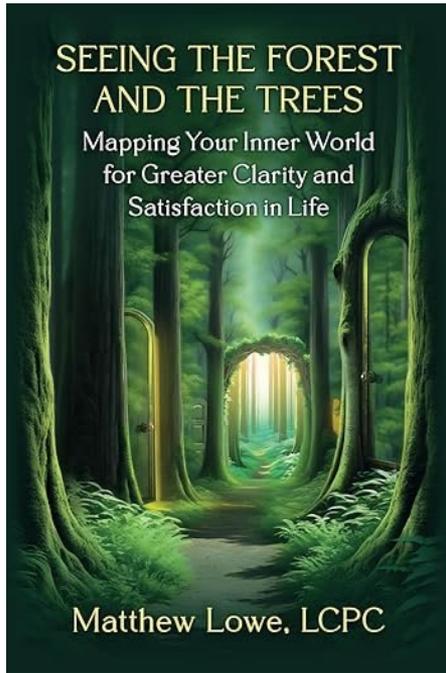


- Met as colleagues at ODEP
  - Both took the Deferred Resignation Program (DRP)
  - We have been collaborating for a year on our future plans!
  - Regular accountability meetings and strategy sessions throughout 2025
  - Shared experiences navigating federal employment changes and building something new
  - Building on our shared commitment to accessibility and creating lasting impact
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# Tips for Launching

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## You can do it!

- Each business will look different
  - Each entrepreneur will have a different journey
  - We believe that your skills as a civil servant will benefit you and your business - in any industry
  - Business ownership is hard - but you can do it!
    - “Despair is part of the process” - Matthew Lowe in [Seeing the Forest and the Trees](#) (we highly recommend his book!)
    - Cover used with Matt’s permission
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## Financing and money

- We both started with minimal investment
    - Jonathan: using savings and DRP buyout to launch
    - Tiffany: using savings and networking within disability VCs
  - Researching minority-owned angel investors, family foundations, and accelerators—building prototype first since most programs require MVP/product completed
  - We have different investment needs, and you may too:
    - Jonathan, as a solo consultant, could plan for a shorter time to start earning revenue
    - Tiffany has a longer “runway” to receive revenue on her platform
  - If you are starting a larger business, consider joining an accelerator or incubator (more to come)
  - NDI resources can help you navigate SSI, benefits, and other financial planning
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# Ethics considerations

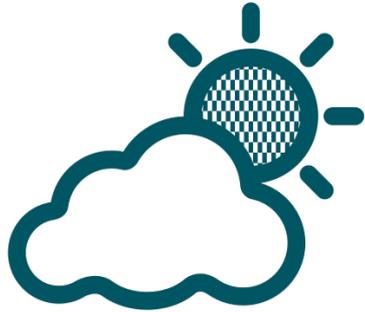
- As a federal employee, you cannot work on the business during duty time, using federal equipment, or using your federal title
  - Certain restrictions apply after federal employment:
    - Representing others to federal government on anything you enforced or policies you crafted
    - Specific rules if you worked in enforcement or procurement, including for subcontracting
  - For influencing matters you worked on while in government, the restrictions are life-long
  - Post-employment rules do not tend to apply if you do not plan to work with the federal government, or represent clients to federal agencies
  - Our recommendation: talk to your (former) agency's ethics office
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## Use your connections



- No ban on working with people who you met through federal government
  - You may know folks from across the country that are potential:
    - Clients or links to clients
    - Links to financing
    - New advisors
  - This applies to your external network too
  - Word of mouth is the most reliable marketing tool
  - Similar to learning about opportunities, projects, and initiatives during your federal career
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## Day-to-day

- No supervisor - so you have freedom, but no safety net
  - You have to build systems for yourself
    - Time goes faster!
    - We will recommend some tools that have helped us
  - More flexibility to attend to disability-related needs or use things that work for you
    - Tiffany: Can schedule around energy levels—intense work when sharp, meetings when social battery is full, rest when needed without asking permission
    - Jonathan: easy to avoid sensory triggers
  - You can see your direct impact right away
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## Transferable skills

- Planning projects
  - Communicating with people from a range of backgrounds and communities
  - Patience - and knowing how to work with a long project
  - Managing many moving parts
  - Working with lots of documents, numbers, and trackers
  - Doing a lot with limited resources
  - Navigating complicated systems
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**Remember to ask for help  
early and often**

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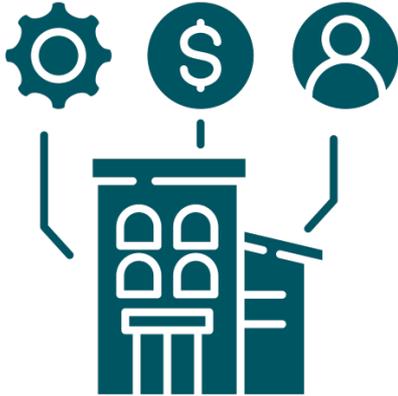
# Resources

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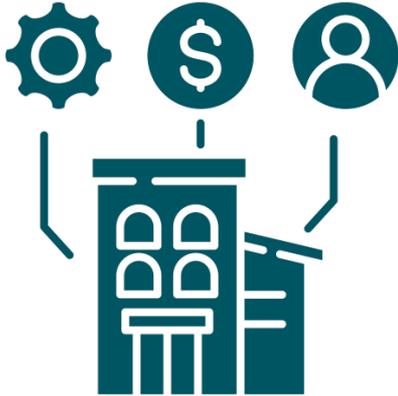
# Funding and mentorship resources

- NDI Small Business Hub
- America's SBDC - and your local Small Business Development Center (SBDC)
- SCORE
- Local government business offices - mentorship, assistance, and incubators
  - Montgomery County
  - Prince George's County
  - Loudoun County Economic Development
  - New York City government



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## Funding and mentorship resources cont.



- Enable Ventures
  - Chambers of Commerce
  - Disability:IN Disability-Owned Business Enterprise Program
  - SBIR/STTR grants from the federal government
  - State VR self-employment programs
  - State extension services
  - Foundation grants (e.g. Kessler, Nielsen)
  - Pitch contests for disabled founders
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**Ask your friends and family for  
help!**

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## Make it accessible for you

- Do things that help you keep/gain spoons
    - Jonathan cooks!
    - Tiffany spends time with her dog!
  - Block time for your personal needs
    - Jonathan tracks his time to help him turn off each day
    - Tiffany time blocks work and has days set for just meetings
  - Build accommodations, automation, and anything else that helps you into your business model
    - Jonathan: strict no-work-on-Saturday rule
    - Tiffany: always asks if people prefer phone or video meetings
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## Tools We Use to Help Us Manage

- Jonathan: Google Workspace, Kiksasa, QuickBooks, LinkedIn, and an old-fashioned pile of notebooks
  - Tiffany: Motion app to help with scheduling and time blocking, Quickbooks with receipt scanning, Slack channels for industry news/notes/future ideas
  - Remember to not grow too dependent on any one tool!
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# Questions and answers

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## Contribute to NDI, Tiffany, and Jonathan's efforts



We have a living Google Document of things we have found helpful - we will send out a link for you to add things!

NDI has incredible resources and compiles them too - let NDI know if you have ideas for them.

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**Thank you! Stay in touch.**

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