2024 APPLICATION GUIDE
SCI RESEARCH ON THE TRANSLATIONAL SPECTRUM

Craig H. Neilsen Foundation

This guide provides information on the Spinal Cord Injury Research on the Translational Spectrum (SCIRTS) grants. It is the Principal Investigator (PI)/Fellow/Applicant's responsibility to carefully review and adhere to *the current* application guide.

IMPORTANT DATES AND DEADLINES	
June 9, 2023 **5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time)**	Letter of Intent (LOI) Due via ProposalCentral
September 2023	Notification of LOI Results
November 10, 2023 **5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time)**	Full Grant Application (FGA) Due via ProposalCentral
March 2024	Notification of FGA Reviews
May 2024	Grant Awards Announced
July 2024	Awarded Grants to be Funded

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART 1: NEILSEN FOUNDATION OVERVIEW

A. About the Neilsen Foundation

The Craig H. Neilsen Foundation is the largest private funder of spinal cord injury research, rehabilitation, clinical training, and programmatic support in the United States and Canada. The Neilsen Foundation partners with scientific, charitable, and educational organizations conducting spinal cord injury research, training in spinal cord medicine, and supports grassroots organizations providing services to assist individuals affected by spinal cord injury. The Neilsen Foundation values diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility and is dedicated to improving the world for persons with spinal cord injury.

Vision
Individuals with spinal cord injuries, and those who care for them, live full and productive lives as active participants in their communities.

Mission
Craig H. Neilsen Foundation's funding is dedicated to supporting both programs and scientific research to improve the quality of life for those affected by and living with spinal cord injury.

Values
Our values are inspired by our Founder, Craig Neilsen, who overcame barriers during his lifetime, empowered others to do the same, and created this organization to impact the field today and expand solutions for tomorrow. These are foundational to what we are and aspire to be: Leadership, Inclusion, Excellence, Creativity, and Collaboration.

ABOUT OUR FOUNDER

Craig H. Neilsen was an American entrepreneur well known for his attention to detail, uncompromising demand for excellence, and an ability to inspire those around him. In his personal life, he was also known for his generosity and led by example with his charitable giving. In 1985, a collision with a semi-truck left Craig with a severe spinal cord injury (SCI), and in 2002, he applied his entrepreneurial spirit to his charitable pursuits and established the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation to improve the quality of life for people living with SCI.

NEILSEN FOUNDATION STANDING PORTFOLIOS

The Neilsen Foundation supports research grants, programmatic grants, and education grants. For information about these standing portfolios, please visit the Neilsen Foundation website at www.chnfoundation.org for application guides and deadlines.

Research Grants:
- Spinal Cord Injury Research on the Translational Spectrum (SCIRTS)
- Psychosocial Research (PSR)

Programmatic Grants:
- Creating Opportunity & Independence (CO&I)

Education Grants:
- Spinal Cord Injury Medicine Fellowships (SCIMF)
- Neilsen Scholarship Program (NSP)

B. SCIRTS Portfolio

The SCIRTS Portfolio advances novel approaches to improving function and developing curative therapies after SCI. This research is designed to improve understanding and advance the treatment of acute and chronic SCI and includes mechanistic, preclinical, translational and/or clinical studies.

PORTFOLIO OBJECTIVES

This portfolio emphasizes SCI (vs. diseases or disorders that secondarily affect the spinal cord) and is intended to fill gaps in the field and to further develop new strategies to restore function resulting from SCI. The Neilsen Foundation does not intend to provide continuous funding to individual labs but to fund novel research throughout the translational spectrum.

SCIRTS Grants support research projects that include, but are not limited to, the following areas:

Mechanistic Research, including the development of novel strategies aimed at:

- Neuroprotection and/or elucidation of the pathological mechanisms that occur after SCI;

- Pathophysiology of the injured spinal cord;

- Promotion of neuronal survival, axonal regeneration, synaptogenesis, myelination, and functional connectivity after SCI;

- Transplantation strategies for SCI recovery;

- Pharmacological therapies to improve function after SCI;

- Bioengineering solutions to improve function in persons with SCI; and

- Chronic SCI treatment and issues related to aging with SCI.

Preclinical, Translational Research that will enable future clinical trials, such as:

- The effects of SCI and novel interventions on sensory and motor function;

- Use of preclinical models of SCI to develop interventions to alleviate complications of SCI including bowel, bladder, sexual and other autonomic dysfunctions, respiratory dysfunction, neuropathic pain, pressure sores, osteoporosis and the effects of aging with SCI; and

- Trial-enabling studies, e.g., to confirm the mechanism of action for novel therapeutics, dosing, toxicity, etc.

Clinical Research, such as:

- Studies to establish the natural history and progression of functional outcomes over time after SCI;

- Efforts to develop and validate outcome measures needed to facilitate definitive clinical trials in SCI populations; and

- Testing of innovative rehabilitation strategies and devices in persons with SCI.

NOTE: Early phase clinical trials of novel investigational drug or cell/biologic interventions under regulation by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration are limited to the Senior Grant category. Postdoctoral fellows may participate in an approved trial supported by the mentor's other funding.

This Application Guide is intended specifically for the following grant funding categories:
- SCIRTS Postdoctoral Fellowships
- SCIRTS Pilot Research Grants
- SCIRTS Senior Research Grants

C. Eligibility and Other Requirements

ELIGIBILITY

The following applies to all funding categories:

- Applicants must have a doctoral degree or an equivalent terminal professional degree (e.g., PhD, MD, DVM). Non-fellowship applicants must demonstrate appropriate experience to serve as an independent Principal Investigator (PI). The Neilsen Foundation encourages submissions from eligible PIs who represent a wide range of disciplines; however, it is required that **relevant SCI expertise** is represented on the proposed research project team.

- The grantee must be a nonprofit academic/research institution or rehabilitation facility located in the United States or Canada with the capability to conduct grant-funded research.

- The Applicant is not required to be a citizen of the United States or Canada; however, the Applicant must be employed by an eligible grantee institution.

- Neilsen Foundation grants are not awarded to individuals, private foundations, or non-functionally integrated Type III supporting organizations.

- The Applicant named in a grant application must be deemed eligible by the grantee organization to apply for a grant and is expected to be responsible for conduct of the research. Each application must include the appropriate endorsement of an institutional official who is responsible for the administration of grant funds (hereafter known as the "Grants Administrator").

- A PI may submit only one application in a given cycle in this portfolio (see CONCURRENT GRANTS section under PART 2, SECTION F., below).

- The Neilsen Foundation does not allow Co-Principal Investigators on its research grants. If two or more investigators are working together on a research project, one must serve as the PI; the other(s) should be listed as collaborator(s). Collaborators and/or consultants do not need to be affiliated with the same institution as the PI; a subcontract may be used to support a domestic or international collaborator or consultant.

- Multiple PIs from an institution may submit concurrent, independent applications in a given grant cycle. In such cases, each project must be distinct, with non-overlapping Aims.

- The Neilsen Foundation discourages Postdoctoral Fellows and their mentor(s) from submitting concurrent applications *with overlapping Aims* to multiple funding categories within this portfolio.

- It may not be necessary to provide preliminary data. Neilsen Foundation funding may be sought to allow the Applicant to obtain data to establish a line of research if the proposal provides strong rationale (i.e., support from the literature or use in an indication other than SCI) that justifies testing the hypotheses with the proposed experimental design. However, if feasibility issues add an unacceptable risk of failure, reviewers may note that preliminary data to address this risk should be provided.

OTHER REQUIREMENTS

- All application materials and communications (including IRB/IACUC approvals, where applicable) must be in English and budgets must be in U.S. dollars.

- Grantees are expected to apply diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) practices across all programs and promote DEIA within their organization and the communities they serve.

Proposals that highlight expansion of DEIA as part of the proposed work and/or within their organization's practices will be noted (in review).

- Applicants should carefully review key information and requirements specific to each funding category (listed below) to ensure they meet the relevant requirements before submitting either a Letter of Intent (LOI) or Full Grant Application (FGA).

- Grants from the Neilsen Foundation may be multi-year awards. Funding for each subsequent year will be contingent on a favorable review of annual progress and expenditure reports. Approval of final research and final expenditure reports will be required at the end of the grant term to receive final payment.

- Perceived or real conflicts of interest (e.g., shareholder in a company providing a device for a study or program) must be disclosed in all stages of the application process.

- The grantee organization will retain title to Intellectual Property developed through the study or program/project.

- Human interventional studies funded by the Neilsen Foundation are required to register on ClinicalTrials.gov.

- The Neilsen Foundation strongly encourages data sharing consistent with FAIR Data Principles and open access. Grantees are asked to make all scientific reports openly accessible (through the journal website or PubMed Central) no later than one year after publication.

- Childcare cost reimbursement should adhere to the Grantee's institutional guidelines or, in the absence of such guidance, may include expenses for care of children up to age 13, or children up to age 18 who are physically or mentally incapable of self-care. The Neilsen Foundation does not review the eligibility of dependents or caregivers.

SCIRTS POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS – KEY INFORMATION

Overview:

- This funding is designed to encourage specialization in the field of SCI; Fellowships are intended to provide mentored training in SCI research to early-career investigators. The Fellowship Applicant (Fellow) should be mentored (or co-mentored) by an investigator experienced in SCI research.

- Fellows must have attained their doctoral degree or an equivalent terminal professional degree by the LOI submission deadline and have held that degree no longer than five years before the FGA submission deadline. For Fellows with an MD, the five-year eligibility period begins after completion of the residency program.

- Key criteria for Fellowships include qualifications of the Fellow, how the training plan and environment provided by the mentor(s) will enhance the Fellow's research career, scientific merit of the proposal, and relevance of the project to the Neilsen Foundation and the SCIRTS portfolio.

- A two-page Training Plan is required when submitting a FGA.

- Funding for each year of the two-year project is up to $100,000 for a maximum total cost of $200,000.

Details for This Funding Category:

- Postdoctoral Fellowships are intended to directly support the Fellow. The proposal should be written by the Fellow, with input from the mentor(s).

- Personnel Costs: Fellowship budgets should cover 100% of the salary and fringe support for the Fellow. No funding for other personnel (e.g., technical staff) is allowed.

- Non-Personnel Costs: The purpose of allowing non-personnel costs in this category is to support the advancement of the Fellow's career in SCI research. The Neilsen Foundation will allow up to $35,000 over the course of the two-year grant for non-personnel costs, provided the Fellow's salary and fringe are fully covered and total costs do not exceed $100,000 per year. It is expected that the mentor(s) will make available necessary general office equipment and supplies; however, funds can be expended in the categories listed below.

  - Travel: Funds may be used for professional development-related travel for the Fellow. Travel for other personnel is not allowed.

  - Training/Education: Appropriate educational expenses for the Fellow, such as relevant coursework and SCI professional memberships, can be included.

  - Publications: Publication costs are allowed where the Fellow is a contributing author. Allowable costs include open-access fees; all publications resulting from Neilsen Foundation grant funding should be publicly available.

  - Supplies: All items (e.g., glassware, chemicals, animal costs, electrodes, etc.) other than those described below in Equipment are allowed. A computing device or computer software is considered a supply if the acquisition cost is less than $5,000, regardless of the length of its useful life.

  - Equipment: An item having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost of $5,000 or more per unit is considered equipment. Requests are expected not to exceed $10,000 for the two-year project. All requests must be justified by including a description of how the piece of equipment will support the advancement of the Fellow's career.

  - Other Costs: Refer to Budget instructions in ProposalCentral and list under "Other:"

    - Childcare costs are allowable, up to $2,500 per year.

    - Budget may include accommodations for a Fellow with a disability. Accommodation expenses are not subject to the limit on non-personnel costs.

- Indirect Costs: The Neilsen Foundation does not allow indirect costs (i.e., administrative, overhead, per capita infrastructure costs, etc.) on its Postdoctoral Fellowships.

SCIRTS PILOT RESEARCH GRANTS – KEY INFORMATION

Overview:

- This funding is intended to support pilot studies that lay essential groundwork, allow either junior or established PIs to test the feasibility of novel methods and procedures and/or collect new data that can lead to or enhance larger-scale studies.

- PIs must be independent investigators, actively employed at the grantee institution at the time of FGA submission and can be at any stage of their research career.

- Key criteria include the scientific merit of the project, the importance and innovative nature of the proposed direction of study, and the likelihood that success will move the area of SCI research forward.
- Funding for each year of the two-year project is up to $200,000 for a maximum total cost of $400,000.

Details for This Funding Category:

- Applicants must hold an independent faculty position (i.e., Instructor, Assistant Professor or equivalent research position) at the time of the FGA submission.

- Established investigators' proposals should demonstrate taking a direction in their SCI research where the elevated risk of failure is balanced by high potential impact. While new directions may be explored in both Pilot and Senior categories, when feasibility of the approach or initial establishment of a mechanism, target, or intervention is being tested, a Pilot grant is the appropriate category.

- Junior investigators should demonstrate evidence of a strong research background that is relevant to the proposed study. For investigators who are not in a tenure track position (e.g., Instructor, Research Assistant), a Letter of Assurance from the institution's Director or Department Chair is recommended at the LOI and FGA stage. The letter should indicate that the applicant is an independent investigator, and that necessary space and equipment are available for this research.

Allowable budget categories include:

- <u>PI Salary:</u> The amount requested for the PI's support (salary plus fringe benefits) may be up to 30% of the total yearly cost of the grant.

- <u>Collaborator(s):</u> A collaborator is an individual who will make a significant contribution or play a significant role in the conduct of the research project. In most cases, the collaborator provides a certain expertise, such as a specific type of SCI research experience. Collaborators do not need to be affiliated with the same institution as the PI; a subcontract may be used to support a collaborator at a different institution. Collaborators named in the proposal may be paid or unpaid. If paid, the total amount requested for each collaborator's support (salary plus fringe benefits) should not exceed 25% of the total yearly cost of the grant. Support for collaborators beyond this limit may be requested, with strong justification.

- <u>Other Personnel:</u> This category includes other key project staff (e.g., project coordinator, statistician, community interviewer) who will contribute directly and substantively to the project. There is no restriction on the percentage of salary support for other positions. Fringe benefit rates exceeding 50% of salary must be fully explained and may not be fully funded. The Neilsen Foundation does not fund graduate student tuition or fees; however, stipends/salaries for graduate students can be included.

- <u>Consultants:</u> Consultants are generally independent contractors who offer advice or work on specific aspects of a project for a limited period of time. The Neilsen Foundation supports the use of [Knowledge Translation Guiding Principles](#) for the conduct of SCI research partnerships. Including persons with lived experience and/or knowledge translation expertise to research teams is encouraged.

- Subcontracts: A subcontract may be established by the grantee institution with another site to carry out selected activities of the proposed project. If a subcontract is included in the grant, the combined indirect cost amount for the PI's institution *and* the subcontractor's institution may not exceed 10% of the total cost of the grant.
- Supplies: All project-related items (e.g., glassware, chemicals, animal costs, electrodes) other than those described below in Equipment are allowed. A computing device or computer software is considered a supply if the acquisition cost is less than $5,000, regardless of the length of its useful life.
- Equipment: An item having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost of $5,000 or more per unit is considered equipment. Requests must be justified and are expected not to exceed $10,000 for the two-year project. If equipment needs exceed this amount, a compelling explanation must be provided.
- Travel: Support for conference travel is limited to $10,000 during the grant term. Adequate justification is required for any additional project-related travel support (e.g., research participant travel, travel to a collaborating site).
- Publications: Up to $10,000 is allowed during the grant term for publication costs, including open-access fees, high-resolution and color figures.
- Other Costs: Refer to Budget instructions in ProposalCentral and list under "Other:"
    - Accommodations for people with disabilities.
    - Childcare costs up to $2,500 per PI/staff person, per year.
    - Data sharing/curation costs (See Application Requirements: Publication and Data Sharing section, below).
- Indirect Costs: The maximum amount allowed for indirect costs (i.e., administrative, overhead, per capita infrastructure costs, etc.) is 10% of the total cost of the grant. Indirect costs are not allowed on individual pieces of equipment costing $5,000 or more.
- Per Capita Infrastructure Costs: These costs cannot be charged as direct costs (e.g., IT, network, communications, or other charges not specific to the research Aims); indirect costs may be used to defray these charges, subject to the 10% total indirect cost cap.

SCIRTS SENIOR RESEARCH GRANTS – KEY INFORMATION

Overview:
- This funding is intended to encourage pursuit of new avenues, enable paradigm shifts, or support decisive translational steps in developing SCI treatments.
- This category is for individuals who are established, independent investigators in a position equivalent to Associate Professor or above, employed at the grantee institution at the time of the FGA submission.
- Key criteria include the importance of the proposed research and likelihood that success will move the field forward, the PI's history of productivity and contributions to their field, and whether this research is a new direction for the established investigator. Applicants should carefully consider their qualifications and the relevance of their proposal to the Senior versus Pilot Research Grant category before submitting an application.
- Funding is for up to three years for a maximum total cost of $800,000. The budget for any year of the grant cannot exceed $300,000.

Details for This Funding Category:

- The goal is not to substitute for federal funding, but to use Neilsen Foundation funds to foster cutting-edge ideas and approaches that have great potential, despite inherent risk. This grant category focuses on transformative projects, exploring new areas of SCI research, or filling important gaps in the SCI field.

Allowable budget categories include:

- PI Salary: The amount requested for the PI's support (salary plus fringe benefits) may be up to 20% of the total yearly cost of the grant.

- Collaborator(s): A collaborator is an individual who will make a significant contribution or play a significant role in the conduct of the research project. In most cases, the collaborator provides certain expertise, such as a specific type of SCI research experience. Collaborators do not need to be affiliated with the same institution as the PI; a subcontract may be used to support a collaborator at a different institution. Collaborators named in the proposal may be paid or unpaid. If paid, the total amount requested for each collaborator's support (salary plus fringe benefits) should not exceed 20% of the total yearly cost of the grant. Support for collaborators beyond this limit may be requested, with strong justification.

- Other Personnel: This category includes other key project staff (e.g., project coordinator, statistician, community interviewer) who will contribute directly and substantively to the project. There is no restriction on the percentage of salary support for other positions. Fringe benefit rates exceeding 50% of salary must be fully explained and may not be fully funded. The Neilsen Foundation *does not* fund graduate student tuition or fees; however, stipends/salaries for graduate students can be included.

- Consultants: Consultants are generally independent contractors who offer advice or work on specific aspects of a project for a limited period of time. The Neilsen Foundation supports the integration of Knowledge Translation Guiding Principles for the conduct of SCI research partnerships. Including persons with lived experience and/or knowledge translation expertise to research teams is encouraged.

- Subcontracts: A subcontract may be established by the grantee institution with another site to carry out selected activities of the proposed project. If a subcontract is included in the grant, the combined indirect cost amount for the PI's institution *and* the subcontractor's institution may not exceed 10% of the total cost of the grant.

- Supplies: All project-related items (e.g., glassware, chemicals, animal costs, electrodes) other than those described below in Equipment are allowed. A computing device or computer software is considered a supply if the acquisition cost is less than $5,000, regardless of the length of its useful life.

- Equipment: An item having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost of $5,000 or more per unit is considered equipment. Requests must be justified and are expected not to exceed $10,000 for the three-year project. If equipment needs exceed this amount, a compelling explanation must be provided.

- Travel: Support for conference travel is limited to $15,000 during the grant term. Adequate justification is required for any additional project-related travel support (e.g., research participant travel, travel to a collaborating site).

- Publications: Up to $10,000 is allowed during the grant term for publication costs, including open-access fees, high-resolution and color figures.
- Other Costs: Refer to Budget instructions in ProposalCentral and list under "Other:"
  - Accommodations for people with disabilities.
  - Childcare costs up to $2,500 per PI/staff person, per year.
  - Data sharing/curation costs (See Application Requirements: Publication and Data Sharing section, below).
- Indirect Costs: The maximum amount allowed for indirect costs (i.e., administrative, overhead, per capita infrastructure costs, etc.) is 10% of the total cost of the grant. Indirect costs are not allowed on individual pieces of equipment costing $5,000 or more.
- Per Capita Infrastructure Costs: These costs cannot be charged as direct costs (e.g., IT, network, communications, or other charges not specific to the research Aims); indirect costs may be used to defray these charges, subject to the 10% total indirect cost cap.

PART 2: APPLICATION PROCESS

A. Submission Requirements

For each cycle, the application process begins with a LOI. FGAs will only be accepted from Applicants invited through the most recent LOI competition.

The Neilsen Foundation uses the web-based grants system, ProposalCentral (https://ProposalCentral.altum.com), to review and manage its grants.

ON-TIME SUBMISSION

All application deadlines, dates, and times are strictly enforced. The online system, ProposalCentral, will automatically close at the cycle's stated deadline date and time. We strongly recommend that you begin the application process in ProposalCentral well in advance of all deadlines. *Late submissions will not be considered.*

NOTE: Do not wait until the last day to submit your grant application and any required documentation. Technical difficulties will not be accepted as an explanation for late submissions.

NEILSEN FOUNDATION TEMPLATES

Applicants must use the most recent templates provided in ProposalCentral for the LOI and FGA processes. *It is important to note that Applicants may not modify any Neilsen Foundation template.* For example, Applicants should not change margins, delete template text (including instructions), or change font sizes on the form, etc.). Modifications may lead to disqualification.

APPLICANT CONTACT INFORMATION

Contact information entered in ProposalCentral must include a current email address for the Applicant. The Neilsen Foundation relies on the contact information in ProposalCentral to contact its Applicants and grantees. Be sure that the Applicant name entered in ProposalCentral is consistent with the name listed on the application template.

To ensure all important updates are received, it is the Applicant and grantee organization's responsibility to keep their ProposalCentral contact information up to date, along with that of the organization's grants administrator, signing official, and financial officer. If the contact information in ProposalCentral is outdated and we are unable to contact the Applicant, we will assume that they are no longer interested in funding from the Neilsen Foundation.

Applicants are advised to check the "Auto Notify" box in the "Enable Other Users to Access this Proposal" section in ProposalCentral, for at least one other contact at the organization. The "Permissions" access level for other contacts can be set as view, edit or administrator.

INFORMATION CONSISTENCY AND ACCURACY

- Respond to all sections of the templates. If a section or question does not apply to the application, enter "N/A."
- It is suggested that the Applicant carefully proofread all sections of the LOI or FGA materials for consistency and accuracy before submitting in ProposalCentral.
- The Applicant must verify that all PDF documents are legible.
- Inaccurate or incomplete submissions will be disqualified.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

For technical questions regarding the online submission process, contact ProposalCentral Customer Service at (800) 875-2562 or via email at pcsupport@altum.com, during business hours, Monday–Friday, 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time). *There is no technical support available on weekends or holidays.*

ProposalCentral has a tutorial section on its website that may be helpful in completing the application: https://ProposalCentral.altum.com/help.asp. The "ProposalCentral Tutorials" link can also be found by selecting the "Contact Us" link located in the "Help" dropdown menu.

B. Letter of Intent (LOI) Submission and Review

ENSURE YOUR APPLICATION IS UPLOADED ON TIME

Refer to page one of this Application Guide for the LOI deadline. The ProposalCentral online submission system will automatically close at 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time) on the due date. *Late submissions will not be considered.*

ProposalCentral will not allow a LOI to be submitted until all required information and files are provided. To check for any missing information or files before submitting, click on the "Validate" button located in the "Validate" section.

FORMAT

LOI applications must be submitted online, via ProposalCentral. The current template in ProposalCentral (https://ProposalCentral.altum.com) must be used. Additional instructions are provided on the template and in ProposalCentral under Proposal Sections (located in the navigation bar). **All original text and formatting must remain on the submitted LOI.**

REQUIRED INFORMATION TO INCLUDE IN THE LOI APPLICATION

- Hypotheses and project Aim(s).

- Overview of the experimental design/methods.

- Relevance to the Neilsen Foundation.

- Brief preliminary budget for the entire project period. At the LOI stage, the budget should be broadly categorized. Eligible project costs, such as personnel, supplies, equipment, travel, etc., should directly support the project Aims.

- The Neilsen Foundation accepts submissions from eligible individuals across a wide range of disciplines; however, it is strongly encouraged that relevant SCI, and technical expertise are represented on the project team.

- The PI must submit a Biosketch as described in the FGA section below. For Postdoctoral Fellowships, Biosketches are required for both the PI and mentor(s). Biosketches from any major collaborator who provides essential expertise are not required at the LOI stage, but are encouraged. Each Biosketch should be provided as a separate PDF.

- Resubmissions: Applicants are allowed one resubmission of a previously reviewed but not funded FGA. Up to a half-page of additional text may be included at the end of the LOI to respond to reviewer comments; this half-page does not count in the three-page limit.

- A bibliography is not required at the LOI stage. If the PI chooses to provide references, these can be included as a single page appended at the end of the completed LOI template, in one PDF file.

EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR LOI

LOIs will be reviewed based on relevance of the proposed Aims to the Neilsen Foundation, potential impact on the field of SCI research, innovation, and specific requirements of the funding category.

See Appendix 1 for a full list of LOI review criteria.

NOTIFICATION OF LOI RESULTS

Applicants will be notified via email whether they are invited to submit a FGA, or if the LOI has been declined. Only Applicants invited to apply through the current cycle's LOI process may submit a FGA.

C. Full Grant Application (FGA) Submission and Review

Only Applicants invited to apply through the current cycle's LOI process may submit a FGA, via ProposalCentral. Refer to page one of this Application Guide for the FGA deadline. The ProposalCentral online submission system will automatically close at 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time) on the due date. *Late submissions will not be considered.*

ProposalCentral will not allow a FGA to be submitted until all required information and files are provided. To check for any missing information or files before submitting, click on the "Validate" button located in the "Validate" section.

FORMAT

FGAs must be submitted online, via ProposalCentral. The current FGA template in ProposalCentral (https://ProposalCentral.altum.com) must be used. Additional instructions are provided on the FGA templates and in ProposalCentral under Proposal Sections (located in the navigation bar). **All original text and formatting must remain on the submitted FGA.**

IMPORTANT NOTICE FOR FGAS

In ProposalCentral under Proposal Sections, select "Print Signature Pages" (located in the navigation bar), press the "Print Signature Pages" button, and ***print only page one (Grant Application) of the PDF file.*** The Neilsen Foundation accepts either _ink or secure, dated e-signatures_ (e.g., DocuSign). Signatures that are "typed in" (e.g., in Word or Adobe) using special fonts are _not acceptable._ When two signatures are required, ***both must be provided.*** Once this page is signed by the PI/Applicant AND the Signing Official, upload the PDF in the "Proposal Narrative & Other Attachments" section.

It is important that the Applicant view the uploaded documents to ensure all PDFs are legible. In the online Proposal Sections, return to "Print Signature Pages" and click on the "Print Signature Pages with Attachments" button to view the uploads.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

It is strongly advised that Applicants review additional instructions under Proposal Sections (located in the navigation bar) and templates provided in ProposalCentral. Note the following:

Postdoctoral Fellowships

At the FGA stage, Postdoctoral Fellowship applicants must provide the following: 1) research plan; 2) Biosketch for the Fellow; 3) Biosketch for the mentor(s); 4) training plan; 5) letter of recommendation from the mentor(s); and 6) two additional recommendation letters.

- Letters of Recommendation

  A letter of recommendation from the Fellow's mentor is required. If the Applicant has co-mentors, one letter of recommendation should be provided and signed by both mentors. Two other letters of recommendation must be submitted with the application. ProposalCentral will allow an application to be submitted with only one letter uploaded; however, the Neilsen Foundation will not review an application without all three reference letters. It is the Fellow's responsibility to ensure that the letters of recommendation are submitted by the deadline. The Neilsen Foundation recommends that the Fellow notify their references of the deadline and follow up to ensure that the letters are submitted before the deadline.

- Postdoctoral Fellowship Training Plan

  All postdoctoral applications MUST include a two-page Training Plan designed to enhance the postdoctoral experience through a program of structured activities focused on acquiring, expanding, and/or enhancing knowledge and expertise in SCI. The plan should delineate activities, opportunities, and experiences that align with the Fellow's long-term career goals. The Fellow's contribution to the mentor's research program(s) should also be addressed. Additional Training Plan Instructions are provided in ProposalCentral as a downloadable PDF document in the "Download Templates & Instructions" section. The plan should be developed collaboratively by the Fellow and mentor(s). The Training Plan document must be signed by

both the Fellow and mentor; if co-mentors are listed, their signatures or a letter indicating agreement should also be included. It is the Fellow's responsibility to ensure that this document is **signed and submitted by the deadline.**

Biosketch(es)
The PI must submit a Biosketch using the NIH Biosketch format; no other Biosketch templates are allowed. Use of the personal statement to circumvent page limits by adding specific information on the proposed research plan is not allowed. **For Postdoctoral Fellowships**, the mentor(s) also **must** provide a Biosketch.

Biosketches for all collaborators and other key personnel must be submitted with the FGA. Key personnel are defined as the PI, collaborators, and other individuals who contribute to the scientific development or execution of a project in a substantive, measurable way, whether or not salary or compensation is requested.

Each Biosketch must be provided as a separate PDF.

Subcontracts
If the proposed research requires work to be carried out by another institution, the relationship must be disclosed in the Proposal Narrative and Budget sections of the application.

Other Research Support
The PI must provide information for all current and pending grants. **For Postdoctoral Fellowships**, both the Fellow *and* the mentor(s) must provide this information. Other key personnel are not required to provide other research support information.

After submitting an application, the PI is required to immediately notify the Neilsen Foundation if an application to another funding source is submitted or notification is received from another funding source that a substantially similar application has been **conditionally approved** for funding. **Failure to report other funding applications, pending or approved, will jeopardize the Applicant's current Neilsen Foundation grant application status**.

Publication and Data Sharing
The PI is expected to ensure that publications resulting from the grant are publicly available, e.g., through open-access journals or PubMed Central. It is expected that data generated from the funding will be shared according to [FAIR Data Principles](#) (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Re-useable) on a curated open platform; contribution of datasets to the Open Data Commons for SCI (https://odc-sci.org) is strongly encouraged. Summary results of clinical trials also should be reported on [ClinicalTrials.gov](#). Sharing costs should be listed as "Other Expenses" in the Budget Summary and explained under Additional Justification.

EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR FGA

FGAs are peer-reviewed by members of the Neilsen Foundation's Review Board. The critique and evaluation of a FGA will be based on scientific merit, innovation, and relevance to the Neilsen Foundation. Reviewer comments and a summary statement, if applicable, will be available to the Applicant after the current grant cycle results are announced.

See Appendix 2, 3, and 4 for a list of FGA review criteria.

D. Notification of FGA Results and Award Process

Applicants will be notified via email whether the application has been approved or declined for funding, approximately five months after the FGA deadline.

Applicants whose FGA is approved for funding will be required to submit additional documentation before grant funds are issued, including but not limited to: 1) signed Research Grant Agreement; 2) Notice of Other Funding & Conflict of Interest; and 3) IRB/IACUC Approval (see below). Instructions for executing the additional documentation will be included in the award notification.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)/INSTITUTIONAL ANIMAL CARE AND USE COMMITTEE (IACUC) APPROVALS

Prior to receiving funding for an award, the PI must provide documentation of IRB/IACUC approval for use of human or animal subjects. For multi-center clinical studies, use of a single IRB of record or a central IRB is strongly encouraged.

> Important: The IRB/IACUC approval notification must be in English or with an English translation provided. The approval notification must be sent from the IRB or IACUC committee and list the expiration date of the approval, the PI's or other key personnel name(s), and include the Neilsen Foundation project title. If the IRB/IACUC approval is for a broader protocol and the title on the approval notification differs from the Neilsen Foundation title, the notification must mention that the approval also covers the project funded by the Neilsen Foundation. If multiple IRB/IACUC approvals are required from multiple institutions, PIs must provide each approval notification as a separate PDF file.

NEILSEN FOUNDATION DUE DILIGENCE

Per the United States Pension Protection Act of 2006, private non-operating foundations are required to verify the nonprofit status of all prospective grantees. When applying, the PI/Applicant will also need to provide the following:

United States-based organizations:
- A copy of the U.S. IRS Determination letter, which proves the entity's 501(c)(3) designation or tax-exempt status under Internal Revenue Code Section 170(c)(1).
- *An organization classified as a public charity under Section 509(a)(3) must refer to IRS Notice 2006-109, "Interim Guidance Regarding Supporting Organizations and Donor Advised Funds," and its subsequent modification in IRS Notice 2014-4. The entity will be required to provide the required documentation specified in Section 3.01 of IRS Notice 2006-109. The Neilsen Foundation does not fund entities that are classified as non-functionally integrated Type III supporting organizations.*

Canada-based organizations:
- The Neilsen Foundation prefers to make grants to (i) a Canadian organization that holds a U.S. IRS Determination letter, or (ii) a Canadian organization's U.S.-based "friends of" charity, which holds a U.S. IRS Determination letter. *If a Canadian organization can satisfy either of these requirements, it must provide a copy of the U.S. IRS Determination letter for such entity.*

- A Canadian organization that cannot satisfy either of the above requirements must be a "registered charity" with the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) and provide a copy of the entity's CRA registration page. *If a grant is approved for funding, the Neilsen Foundation will require additional information to determine that the Canadian organization is the equivalent of a U.S. public charity.*

Do not upload copies of tax returns, EIN letters, W-9s, internal documents noting the organization's nonprofit status, etc., in lieu of, OR in addition to, the U.S. IRS Determination letter. Only copies of the official U.S. IRS Determination letter will be accepted.

DISBURSEMENT OF GRANT FUNDS

Once the required documentation is accepted by the Neilsen Foundation and our due diligence process is complete, funds will be disbursed to the grantee organization.

FINAL REPORTS

At the end of the grant term, Grantees will be required to report on final progress and expenditures. Applicable templates are available in the Deliverables section in ProposalCentral. Grantees that do not comply with this requirement, or submit unsatisfactory reports, will not be eligible for future Neilsen Foundation funding until receipt of acceptable required report(s).

E. Resubmission

Applicants are permitted one resubmission of a revised FGA that was favorably reviewed but not funded in a prior grant cycle. A new LOI is required for the resubmission but does not guarantee that the LOI will be invited to submit a revised FGA. The LOI must briefly indicate how the PI plans to respond to the previous critiques. Up to a half-page of text is allowed and is not counted in the standard LOI page limit.

If the original submission was a SCIRTS Pilot Research Grant, it *cannot* be "re-submitted" as a Senior Research Grant, which would require significant modification and expansion of the Aims and scope of the work. If the original submission was in the Senior Research Grant category, it *may* be "re-submitted" as a Pilot grant, with similar Aims but decreased scope.

Aims that were unsuccessful in a resubmission may be submitted in a *new* grant application in a subsequent cycle, using the standard template (i.e., no response to reviewer comments). A new LOI is required and previous acceptance of similar Aims does not guarantee approval for invitation as a FGA.

F. Concurrent Grants Across Neilsen Foundation Portfolios

Applicants may hold only one Neilsen Foundation grant within any portfolio at one time. To be eligible for the current cycle, a grantee must fulfill the obligations of a current grant (i.e., submission of the Final Report and Final Expenditure Report) before the FGA deadline noted on page one.

- **All Neilsen Foundation portfolios:** Non-trainee Applicants may apply for one grant per cycle per portfolio (i.e., SCIRTS, PSR, and CO&I), and may hold up to one grant in each of the three portfolios at a time. Such applications will be evaluated independently, according to each program's timelines, guidelines, and review criteria.

- **Fellowship/Training grants:** Postdoctoral Fellows _may not apply_ for a non-training Neilsen Foundation grant. Fellowship budgets are intended to cover 100% of the salary and fringe support for the Fellow so they may focus on a defined training program specific to the needs of their research interests. Postdoctoral Fellows _may not hold_ multiple concurrent grants in different Neilsen Foundation portfolios; however, funded Fellows may be listed as participants on other grants, within or outside the Neilsen Foundation, without salary or fringe support on those grants.

G. Additional Information

APPLICATION SUBMISSION CONTACTS

- For technical questions regarding the online submission process, contact ProposalCentral Customer Service at (800) 875-2562 or via email at pcsupport@altum.com during business hours, Monday–Friday, 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time). *There is no technical support available on weekends or holidays.*

- ProposalCentral has a tutorial section on its website that may be helpful in completing the application: https://ProposalCentral.altum.com/help.asp. The "ProposalCentral Tutorials" link can also be found by selecting the "Contact Us" link located in the "Help" dropdown menu.

- For questions regarding an application's submission status, contact Ehrica Hernandez, Grants Management Associate, at ehrica@chnfoundation.org.

- For questions regarding the SCIRTS portfolio, contact both
    - Tracey Wheeler, Ph.D., SCIRTS Program Officer at tracey@chnfoundation.org.
    - Jacob Shreckengost, Ph.D., SCIRTS Program Officer at jacob@chnfoundation.org.

- For information about all Neilsen Foundation portfolios, visit our website, www.chnfoundation.org.

Note: Applicants are strongly discouraged from contacting Neilsen Foundation Review Board members during the application process. Such contact will result in disqualification of the LOI or FGA.

Optional supporting material may be uploaded as a single PDF file, separate from the Proposal Narrative and other required application materials. Supporting material cannot be used as a continuation of the Proposal Narrative itself (e.g., do not include additional preliminary data, figures, diagrams, tables, or respond to questions posed in the Proposal Narrative template).

Inclusion of URLs in the Proposal Narrative or supporting materials to provide additional information is prohibited. It can confer an unfair competitive advantage and enable tracking that could compromise the confidentiality of reviews.

All optional supporting materials must be compiled into a <u>single</u> PDF document, which may include:

- Up to two related manuscripts that are submitted, in press, or published
  Note: Figures included in these manuscripts are allowed.

- Animal or Human Research Approval Letter(s), if applicable and available
  Note: Institutional animal or human research approval is **not** required at the time of submission.

- Letter(s) of support, such as:
  - Assurance from the institution's Director or Department Chair to confirm investigator independence for non-tenure track faculty (Pilot)
  - Support letter(s) from a collaborator or other stakeholder
  - Statement of commitment from those providing products or services for the research, including in-kind contributions or discounts

APPENDIX 1: LETTER OF INTENT REVIEW CRITERIA
SCI RESEARCH ON THE TRANSLATIONAL SPECTRUM

Craig H. Neilsen Foundation

SCORING CRITERIA/APPROACH

This review process is intended to identify LOIs that will be invited to submit a full grant application (FGA). To that end, we look at general criteria that apply to all LOIs, specific criteria relevant to each category of applicant (Postdoctoral, Pilot, and Senior) and, to a limited extent, scientific merit. Evaluation of an LOI is based primarily on relevance to the Neilsen Foundation and the SCIRTS portfolio. Innovative approaches and addressing gaps in the field of spinal cord injury (SCI) are prioritized over mature projects that appear to be competitive for federal funding. Review does not focus on experimental detail, which will be evaluated in the invited FGAs; however, notable feasibility issues can affect LOI scoring.

GENERAL ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

1. The proposed research must be within the scope of the SCIRTS portfolio, which covers mechanistic research applied to SCI, pre-clinical and translational research, and clinical research. The portfolio is further defined in the Application Guide.

    Research that focuses on the interrelation of behavioral, social and other psychological factors that influence participation, health practice, lifestyle, and support systems in community and clinical settings, is better suited to the Psychosocial Research (PSR) portfolio and may not be accepted in the SCIRTS competition.

2. LOIs with modified template text, expanded margins, or those that exceed space limits will be rejected. The maximum allowable length includes the template cover page and two pages of LOI text, excluding COI statement and references. An additional half-page, specifically for responding to reviewer concerns, is allowed for an application that is a resubmission of a previously reviewed but unfunded FGA.

3. Applicants must have a doctoral degree or an equivalent terminal professional degree at the time of the LOI submission. Undergraduates and predoctoral candidates are not eligible. Non-fellowship applicants must demonstrate appropriate experience to serve as an independent Principal Investigator (PI). The Neilsen Foundation encourages submissions from eligible PIs who represent a wide range of disciplines; however, it requires that relevant SCI expertise is represented on the proposed research team.

4. Applications must be from a nonprofit organization located in the U.S. or Canada. If there are any questions about an organization's status, contact Kim Cerise, Director of Grants Management (kim@chnfoundation.org).

PROGRAMMATIC CRITERIA

RELEVANCE, IMPACT

1. To what extent is the LOI relevant to the Neilsen Foundation, the field of SCI, and the stated goals of the grant program to which it is applied?

2. What is the likelihood that the project, if successful, will make an original and significant contribution to research in SCI, such as:

   a. Does the study address an unsolved problem or important issue for persons with SCI?

   b. Does the study have the potential to improve clinical practice or quality of life for persons with SCI and/or establish novel areas of investigations in the field?

   c. Is the proposed research innovative versus incremental?

RESEARCH APPROACH

1. Are hypotheses clearly stated and does the study's conceptual framework address those hypotheses?

2. Is this a good approach to address the stated problem?

   a. Are the project's general design/Aims clear and are they appropriate?

   b. Is the scope of work feasible within the project period, given the investigators' experience and expertise, past progress, and available resources?

INVESTIGATOR(S) CAPABILITY

Does the application adequately address the PI's and other personnel's familiarity and competence with the proposed techniques, activities, and knowledge of issues relevant to SCI?

PRESENTATION

Is the application clearly written, within the page limits, and free of typographical errors? Are supporting materials (e.g., graphs, images, etc.) legibly sized and used appropriately?

BUDGET

Is the initial budget estimate appropriate to the nature and scope of the study?

RESUBMISSIONS

At the LOI stage, applicants are allowed a half-page response to reviewer comments from a previously reviewed FGA. Please note whether the applicant has adequately indicated how they will respond to reviewer comments at the FGA stage.

CATEGORY-SPECIFIC CRITERIA

POSTDOCTORAL (up to $200,000 over two years):

Key considerations include the training opportunity, qualifications/strength of applicant, environment, mentorship (with SCI research expertise), scientific merit, and Neilsen Foundation relevance.

1. Will this training period, mentor, and project increase the skill set of the Fellow to further their career path and establish independence in SCI research?

Applicants must have a doctoral degree conferred by LOI submission date, June 9, 2023, but not more than five years before the FGA deadline (not before November, 2018); MDs' eligibility on the FGA deadline is up to five years after the completion date of their residency.

2. Is the Applicant ineligible?

PILOT (up to $400,000 over two years):

Key considerations are feasibility, innovation, and impact on the field.

This funding supports pilot studies that lay essential groundwork, allow either junior or established PIs to test the feasibility of novel methods and procedures and/or collect new data that can lead to or enhance larger-scale studies. Clinical trials of novel interventional drug/biologics are not permitted in the Pilot award category.

1. Will this project help establish a junior PI's research program? If the PI is an established investigator, does the project have the potential for "high gain" to balance risk and/or develop key preliminary data?

2. If the Applicant is not in a tenure track position, do they have appropriate experience, independence, and access to needed facilities? Note: an optional letter of assurance confirming investigator status may be included in an addendum file.

SENIOR (up to $800,000 over three years):

Key considerations include the strength of investigator (history of success/productivity), feasibility, innovation, and impact on the field. This is the largest and most competitive award. Thus, LOIs in this category should represent unique opportunities to fill an important gap in the field, encourage pursuit of new avenues, enable paradigm shifts, or support decisive translational steps in developing SCI treatments.

1. Does this project propose cutting-edge ideas and/or approaches that have great potential, despite some additional risk, or a project that is critical to the field yet likely difficult to fund through other sources?

2. Applicants must be at the level of Associate Professor (at the time of the FGA) or above to be eligible. Is this Applicant eligible?

APPENDIX 2: POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS CRITERIA
SCI RESEARCH ON THE TRANSLATIONAL SPECTRUM

Craig H. Neilsen Foundation

This grant category focuses on providing mentored postdoctoral training in SCI research. The main goals are to provide training opportunities, encourage specialization in the field of SCI, and support the advancement of the Postdoctoral Fellow's research career. The Applicant (Fellow) should be mentored or co-mentored by an experienced investigator in SCI research. Funding for each year of the two-year project is up to $100,000, for a maximum total cost of $200,000.

Criteria for Fellowships emphasize the qualifications of the Fellow, how the training plan and environment provided by the mentor(s) will enhance the Fellow's research career, the scientific merit of the proposal and its relevance to the Neilsen Foundation and the SCIRTS portfolio.

OVERALL IMPACT

Considering all criteria, summarize the significant strengths and weaknesses of the application and associated training plan, then rate the likelihood that Neilsen Foundation funding would support this Fellow in becoming an independent contributor to the field of SCI research.

SIGNIFICANCE

1. If the aims of the project and training plan goals are achieved, how will the postdoctoral Fellow's scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical skills be improved?
2. Does the proposal identify an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the field of SCI?

RELEVANCE

1. How is this project relevant to the Neilsen Foundation?
2. Does the proposal identify how this work will be translated and/or the potential impact on individuals with SCI?

INVESTIGATOR(S)

1. Does the applicant have the potential to develop as an independent and productive scientist, and does the training plan provide individualized, supervised experiences and research skills to foster this development?
2. Is the Fellow's research experience of high quality?
3. Are the PI and mentor/co-mentors' expertise well-suited to the proposed SCI research and is there a good match between the interests of the Fellow and the mentor(s)?
4. Are the mentor's qualifications and commitment appropriate for the proposed fellowship, including their research support, track record of mentoring, and the training environment they will provide?

INNOVATION

1. Does the application utilize novel theoretical concepts, approaches, methodologies, or instrumentation, or are new interventional strategies being tested?
2. Is the evaluation of the literature comprehensive and appropriate?

APPROACH

1. Is the research plan of high scientific quality and does it relate well to the Fellow's training goals?
2. Are the overall strategies, methodologies, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project?
3. Are the scope of the project and proposed timeline appropriate for the duration of the award?
4. Are potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success presented?
5. Are data sharing and open access to results of the work addressed?
6. If a clinical study is proposed, will National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke Common Data Elements be used? If not, is this justified?

ENVIRONMENT

1. Is the institutional environment for the scientific development of the Fellow of high quality?
2. Are the research facilities, resources (e.g., equipment, laboratory space, computer time, subject populations), and training opportunities adequate and appropriate for the project as proposed?
3. Will the project benefit from unique features of the scientific environment, subject populations, or collaborative arrangements?

TECHNICAL ELEMENTS
(Administrative topics considered separately from the Overall Score)

1. Budget
2. Overlapping Funding
3. Ethics/Safety; protection of human subjects, including safety and data monitoring
4. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Statement – In addition to providing the required institutional DEIA statement, applicants are allowed to include additional information regarding their effort to promote DEIA.
5. COI Disclosure – Applicants must disclose any real or perceived COIs. If you have questions or concerns regarding COIs, please discuss with a Program Officer.
6. Other/Additional Comments for the Applicant
7. Resubmission – When reviewing a resubmission, evaluate the application as now presented, taking into consideration the responses to comments from the previous scientific review group and changes made to the project, but basing your final score on the overall merits of the current proposal.

APPENDIX 3: PILOT RESEARCH GRANTS CRITERIA
SCI RESEARCH ON THE TRANSLATIONAL SPECTRUM
Craig H. Neilsen Foundation

Pilot Research Grants support studies that lay essential groundwork, allow either junior or established PIs to test the feasibility of novel methods and approaches, and/or collect new data that can lead to or enhance larger-scale studies that will move the area of SCI research forward. Applicants must hold an independent faculty position at the grantee institution. A Letter of Assurance from the institution's Director or Department Chair is recommended for investigators who are not in a tenure track position. Funding is up to $200,000 per year for two years, for a maximum total cost of $400,000.

Junior investigators should demonstrate evidence of a strong research background that is relevant to the proposed study. Established investigators' proposals should reflect a change in direction in their research where the elevated risk of failure is balanced by high potential impact. When feasibility of the approach or initial establishment of a mechanism, target, or intervention is being tested, a Pilot grant is the appropriate category.

OVERALL IMPACT
Considering all criteria and the intent of this grant category, summarize the application's significant strengths and weaknesses, taking into consideration the PI's career stage.

SIGNIFICANCE
1. Does the project address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the field of SCI?
2. If the aims of the project are achieved, how will scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice improve?

RELEVANCE
1. How is this project relevant to the Neilsen Foundation?
2. Is the need for this pilot stage work justified in the context of anticipated future studies?
3. Does the proposal adequately identify how this line of research would be translated and/or the potential impact on, individuals with SCI?

INVESTIGATOR(S)
1. Are the PI, collaborators, and other researchers well-suited to the project, and is the relevant clinical and/or technical expertise demonstrated in the application?
2. If the PI is a junior investigator, do they have appropriate experience, training, and facilities to do the proposed work? Will the work facilitate the establishment of the PI's research program?

INNOVATION
1. Does the application seek to lay essential groundwork to test the feasibility of novel methods and procedures and/or collect data that can lead to or enhance larger-scale studies?

2. Is the evaluation of the literature comprehensive and appropriate?

3. For established investigators, does the proposal demonstrate taking a direction in their SCI research where the elevated risk of failure is balanced by high potential impact?

APPROACH

1. Are the overall strategies, methodologies, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project?

2. Are the scope of the project and proposed timeline appropriate for the duration of the award?

3. If the project is in the early stages of development, will the strategy establish feasibility? Are benchmarks for success provided as well as alternative strategies to address barriers that could arise?

4. Are data sharing and open access to results of the work addressed?

5. If a clinical study is proposed, will National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke Common Data Elements be used? If not, is this justified?

ENVIRONMENT

1. Are institutional support, equipment, and other physical resources available to the investigators adequate for the project proposed?

2. Will the project benefit from unique features of the scientific environment, subject populations, or collaborative arrangements?

3. For non-tenure track applicants: Does the application adequately address the PI's independence and access to necessary resources to conduct the work? (A Letter of Assurance from the institution is optional but is recommended.)

TECHNICAL ELEMENTS

(Administrative topics considered separately from the Overall Score)

1. Budget

2. Overlapping Funding

3. Ethics/Safety; protection of human subjects, including safety and data monitoring

4. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Statement – In addition to providing the required institutional DEIA statement, applicants are allowed to include additional information regarding their effort to promote DEIA.

5. COI Disclosure – Applicants must disclose any real or perceived COIs. If you have questions or concerns regarding COIs, please discuss with a Program Officer.

6. Other/Additional Comments for the Applicant

7. Resubmission – When reviewing a resubmission, evaluate the application as now presented, taking into consideration the responses to comments from the previous scientific review group and changes made to the project, but basing your final score on the overall merits of the current proposal.

APPENDIX 4: SENIOR RESEARCH GRANTS CRITERIA
SCI RESEARCH ON THE TRANSLATIONAL SPECTRUM

Craig H. Neilsen Foundation

This grant category focuses on transformative projects that fill important gaps in the SCI field. Senior Research Grants are intended to encourage pursuit of new avenues, enable paradigm shifts, or support decisive translational steps in developing SCI treatments. The goal is not to substitute for federal funding but to use Neilsen Foundation funds to foster cutting-edge ideas and approaches that have great potential, despite inherent risk. In order to be eligible for the three-year project, applicants must hold a position equivalent to Associate Professor or above at the grantee institution. Funding is for up to three years, for a maximum total cost of $800,000, and cannot exceed $300,000 in any year of the grant.

OVERALL IMPACT

Considering all criteria, summarize the application's significant strengths and weaknesses, emphasizing the importance of the proposed research, the likelihood that success of the approach will move the field forward, the PI's history of productivity and contributions to their field, and whether this research is a new direction for the established investigator, consistent with the intent of this grant category.

SIGNIFICANCE

1. Does the project address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the field of SCI?
2. If the aims of the project are achieved, how will scientific concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, preventative interventions, and/or clinical practice improve?

RELEVANCE

1. How is this project relevant to the Neilsen Foundation?
2. Does the proposal adequately identify how this work will be translated and/or the potential impact on individuals with SCI?
3. Does Neilsen Foundation support of this project represent an exceptional opportunity (compared to federal or other funding)?

INVESTIGATOR(S)

1. Is the PI an established investigator who has demonstrated an ongoing record of accomplishments that have advanced the field?
2. Are the PI, collaborators, and other researchers well-suited to the project, and is the relevant clinical and/or technical expertise demonstrated in the application?

INNOVATION

1. Does the application fill an important investigative or translational gap, or does it seek to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms?

2. Is the evaluation of the literature comprehensive and appropriate?

3. Is this a new direction for the PI and/or are they incorporating ideas from another field?

APPROACH

1. Are the overall strategies, methodologies, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project?

2. Are the scope of the project and proposed timeline appropriate for the duration of the award?

3. Are benchmarks for success provided as well as alternative strategies to address barriers that could arise?

4. Are data sharing and open access to results of the work addressed?

5. If a clinical study is proposed, will National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke Common Data Elements be used? If not, is this justified?

ENVIRONMENT

1. Are the institutional support, equipment, and other physical resources available to the investigators adequate for the project proposed?

2. Will the project benefit from unique features of the scientific environment, subject populations, or collaborative arrangements?

TECHNICAL ELEMENTS

(Administrative topics considered separately from the Overall Score)

1. Budget

2. Overlapping Funding

3. Ethics/Safety; protection of human subjects, including safety and data monitoring

4. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Statement – In addition to providing the required institutional DEIA statement, applicants are allowed to include additional information regarding their effort to promote DEIA.

5. COI Disclosure – Applicants must disclose any real or perceived COIs. If you have questions or concerns regarding COIs, please discuss with a Program Officer.

6. Other/Additional Comments for the Applicant

7. Resubmission – When reviewing a resubmission, evaluate the application as now presented, taking into consideration the responses to comments from the previous scientific review group and changes made to the project, but basing your final score on the overall merits of the current proposal.