

SCI RESEARCH ON THE TRANSLATIONAL SPECTRUM 2026 APPLICATION GUIDE



This guide is intended to help you through the SCI Research on the Translational Spectrum (SCIRTS) grant application process. The Principal Investigator (PI)/Fellow/Applicant should carefully review *the current* guidelines, noting that SCIRTS grant categories have changed.

IMPORTANT DATES AND DEADLINES	
May 23, 2025 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time)	Letter of Intent (LOI) Due via ProposalCentral
September 2025	Notification of LOI Results
November 7, 2025 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time)	Full Grant Application (FGA) Due via ProposalCentral
March 2026	Notification of FGA Reviews
May 2026	Grant Awards Announced
July 2026	Awarded Grants Funded

This guide is for the following grant categories:

Translational Spectrum Grants
Postdoctoral Fellowships

Our staff invite questions relating to submission of either a LOI or FGA. Contact the Program Officers via email at tracey@chnfoundation.org and jacob@chnfoundation.org or refer to [Part 3](#) below.

To learn more about previously funded SCIRTS grants, use the *Search Funded Grants* link at the bottom of the [Neilsen Foundation homepage \(www.chnfoundation.org\)](http://www.chnfoundation.org), and enter “SCIRTS” in the search bar. To combine two related searches, use “AND” (e.g., SCIRTS AND bladder).

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PART 1: SCIRTS Portfolio

A. Overview and Objectives

The SCIRTS portfolio supports the development of new approaches to restore/enhance function and prevent or alleviate complications that arise after traumatic spinal cord injury (SCI). Research should be designed to demonstrate an improvement in function or clinical decision-making. The inclusion of individuals with SCI in the design of studies to aid the development of research that leads to an improved quality of life is encouraged.

This portfolio emphasizes SCI (vs. diseases or disorders that affect the spinal cord). It is intended to support important new research ideas or demonstrate the efficacy of interventions while accepting the risk associated with this pursuit. Study designs may be based on existing datasets, preclinical models, or human participants. SCIRTS is not intended to support basic cellular research or large-scale clinical trials. Instead, it seeks to generate initial data with clear translational significance that enable larger funding opportunities and future clinical trials. The Neilsen Foundation does not provide continuous funding to individual labs but does fund novel research with translational potential that may not be well positioned for federal funding at this time.

Fellowship opportunities are also provided to encourage early-career scientists towards specialization in SCI research.

B. Eligibility and Other Requirements

ELIGIBILITY

The following applies to all funding categories:

- Applicants must have a doctoral degree or equivalent professional degree (e.g., PhD, MD, DVM).
 - Non-fellowship applicants must demonstrate appropriate experience to serve as an independent PI. The Neilsen Foundation encourages eligible PIs who represent a wide range of disciplines to apply; however, it is required that **relevant SCI expertise** be represented on the proposed research project team.
- The grantee organization 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 named in a grant application must be employed by and deemed eligible by the grantee organization to apply for a grant and is expected to be responsible for conduct of the research. The Applicant is not required to be a citizen of the United States or Canada.
 - 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”).
- Neilsen Foundation grants are not awarded to individuals, private foundations, or non-functionally integrated Type III supporting organizations.
- A PI may submit only one application in each cycle in this portfolio (see PART 3, B. [Concurrent Grants Across Neilsen Foundation Portfolios](#)).
- The Neilsen Foundation does not recognize Co-Principal Investigators—if two or more investigators are working together on a research project, name only one as the Applicant; 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 have been provided.

OTHER REQUIREMENTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

- All application materials and communications (including IRB/IACUC approvals) must be in English, and budgets must be in U.S. dollars.
- The Neilsen Foundation values inclusion and accessibility to foster equitable opportunities and diverse points of view, and encourages grantees to promote them within their organization and the communities they serve.
- Applicants should carefully review each funding category to ensure they meet the requirements before submitting a Letter of Intent (LOI).
- Annual funding for multi-year awards is contingent on acceptance of annual progress and expenditure reports. Acceptance of final research and final expenditure reports is required at the end of the grant term to receive final payment.
- Perceived or real conflicts of interest (e.g., company shareholder providing a device for a study or program) must be disclosed in both the LOI and FGA.
- The grantee organization retains title to Intellectual Property developed with this funding.
- Human interventional studies funded by the Neilsen Foundation must be registered on [ClinicalTrials.gov](https://clinicaltrials.gov).
- Rigor, transparency, and reproducibility in research are fundamental to scientific progress. Applicants are encouraged to demonstrate how the proposed experimental design, methodology, and analysis ensure well-controlled and unbiased results (see [Appendix 4](#)). Applicants should address the rigor of the research upon which the proposed study is based.
 - The Neilsen Foundation strongly encourages data sharing consistent with [FAIR Data Principles \(https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/\)](#) and open access (see PART 2, Section C., [Publication and Data Sharing](#)). Grantees should describe plans to make all reports and datasets openly accessible no later than one year after publication and will be required in any future applications to provide links to all reports and datasets from funded studies.
- Childcare cost reimbursement should adhere to the Grantee's institutional guidelines or, in the absence of such guidance, may include expenses for the 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.

TRANSLATIONAL SPECTRUM GRANTS

Overview: This funding supports a wide range of research that will lead to an improved quality of life for those living with SCI. The proposed research may target any system or function affected by SCI or its sequelae during the acute or chronic injury period. It should demonstrate novelty, high scientific merit, and the potential for substantial impact on treatment and care. The uncertainties inherent to such research should be balanced by the likelihood that success will advance the development of treatments to restore function and promote wellbeing. Meaningful incorporation of people with lived experience in the development and management of the research is encouraged.

Funding is for up to two years for preclinical studies. Human subjects research may be up to three years to allow sufficient time to recruit and follow participants.

Funding for both two- and three-year projects is up to a maximum total cost of \$400,000 over the duration of the grant. Budgets may not exceed \$200,000 in any year.

Details for this category:

- 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.
 - Applicants who do not hold a tenure track position (e.g., Instructor, Research Associate) may include, at the LOI and FGA stage, a Letter of Assurance from the institution's Director or Department Chair confirming their position as independent and affirming that needed space and equipment are available to them.

Allowable budget categories include:

- **PI Salary:** The amount requested for the PI (salary plus fringe benefits) may be up to 30% of the total yearly cost of the grant.
- **Collaborator(s):** A collaborator is an individual who will make a significant contribution in the conduct of the research, whether paid or unpaid. In most cases, the collaborator provides needed 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 for their support. If paid, the total amount requested for each collaborator's support (salary plus fringe benefits) may be up to 25% 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. The Neilsen Foundation does not fund graduate student tuition or fees; however, stipends/salaries for graduate students can be included.
- **Fringe Benefits:** These will be supported at the institution's standard levels, up to 50% of salary for any listed personnel; institutionally defined fringe rates above this level are not supported by Neilsen Foundation grants.

- **Consultants:** Consultants are generally independent contractors who offer advice or work on specific aspects of a project. The Neilsen Foundation supports [Knowledge Translation Guiding Principles](#) for the conduct of SCI research partnerships and encourages inclusion of people with lived experience and/or knowledge translation expertise on research teams.
- **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 should not exceed \$10,000 during the grant term. 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, including open-access fees; all publications resulting from Neilsen Foundation funding should be publicly available.
- **Other Costs:** Refer to Budget instructions in ProposalCentral and list under "Other:"
 - Accommodations for personnel with disabilities.
 - Childcare costs up to \$2,500 per PI/staff person, per year.
 - Data sharing/curation costs (see PART 2, Section C., [Publication and Data Sharing](#)).
- **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 POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS

Overview: This funding is for postdoctoral training specialization in the field of SCI and to prepare the fellow to move into an independent research position. Fellowships directly support the applicant (Fellow) while they are mentored (or co-mentored) by an investigator experienced in SCI research. The proposal should be written by the Fellow, with input from the mentor(s).

Key criteria include how the training and environment provided by the mentor(s) will enhance the Fellow's research career and qualifications, as well as the scientific merit of the proposal and its relevance to the Neilsen Foundation's mission.

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

Details for this category:

- 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 a MD, the five-year eligibility period begins after completion of the residency program.
- A two-page Training Plan is required when submitting a FGA.

Allowable budget categories include:

- Personnel Costs: Fellowship budgets should cover 100% of the Fellow's salary, plus fringe benefits up to 50% of salary. No funding for other personnel (e.g., technical staff) is allowed.
- Non-Personnel Costs: The purpose of allowing non-personnel costs 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 (as noted above) 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 for travel, publication costs, supplies, and/or equipment 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 funding should be publicly available.
 - Supplies: All 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 should not exceed \$10,000 for the two-year project. All requests must be justified and include a description of how the 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.

PART 2: APPLICATION AND AWARD PROCESSES

A. Submission Requirements

The 2026 application process begins with the submission of a LOI from an eligible organization.

ON-TIME SUBMISSION

All application deadlines, dates, and times are strictly enforced. The online system used to review and manage grants, [ProposalCentral \(https://proposalcentral.altum.com/\)](https://proposalcentral.altum.com/), will automatically close at 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time) on the deadline listed on Page 1. We strongly recommend that you complete the ProposalCentral application process well in advance of all deadlines.

If you need assistance as you prepare the application, contact Neilsen Foundation staff and they will be happy to assist you. Late submissions will not be considered, including those due to technical difficulties at the deadline.

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

APPLICATION TEMPLATES

Applicants are required to use the templates provided in [ProposalCentral](#) for the current LOI and FGA processes. *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 template. Modifications may lead to disqualification.

Completed LOI and FGA applications must be submitted online, via ProposalCentral. Additional instructions are provided on the templates and in ProposalCentral under Proposal Sections (located in the navigation bar).

APPLICANT INFORMATION

The Neilsen Foundation relies on accurate ProposalCentral contact information to communicate with its applicants and grantees. The Applicant must enter accurate information in ProposalCentral, including a *current* email address. The name entered in ProposalCentral should be consistent with the name listed on the application template.

To ensure receipt of important information, the Applicant and other organization contacts (e.g., grants administrator, signing official, financial officer) must keep their ProposalCentral information up to date. If contact information is not current 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 template sections. If a section/question does not apply, enter “N/A.”
- The Applicant should carefully proofread all sections of the LOI or FGA materials for consistency and accuracy before submitting in ProposalCentral and 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 during business hours, Monday–Friday, 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time), or via email at pcsupport@altum.com. *There is no technical support available on weekends or holidays.*

ProposalCentral has a "[Grant Applicant Tutorials](https://ProposalCentral.altum.com/help.asp)" section on its website (<https://ProposalCentral.altum.com/help.asp>) that may be helpful in completing the application. The tutorials link can also be found by selecting “Contact Us” located in the “Help” dropdown menu.

B. Letter of Intent (LOI) Content and Review

REQUIRED INFORMATION TO INCLUDE IN THE LOI

- 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.
- Submissions are accepted from PIs in 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 Fellow 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.
- A Letter of Assurance confirming the independence of an Applicant who does not hold a tenure track position (e.g., Instructor, Research Assistant), if applicable, should be included in the biosketch PDF and uploaded as a single document at the LOI stage.
- Letters of support from collaborators, while not required, can be included in the collaborator’s biosketch PDF and uploaded as a single document at the LOI stage.
- 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.

LOI EVALUATION CRITERIA

LOIs are reviewed based on the relevance of proposed Aims to the Neilsen Foundation, potential impact on the field of SCI research, creativity, 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

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

FGAs are only accepted from Applicants invited through the most recent LOI competition.

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

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 an application is submitted, the PI is required to immediately notify the Neilsen Foundation if a similar application to another funding source is submitted or if 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 \(Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Re-useable\)](https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/) (<https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/>) on a curated open platform; contribution of datasets to the [Open Data Commons for SCI](https://odc-sci.org/) (<https://odc-sci.org/>) is strongly encouraged. Summary results of clinical trials also should be reported on [ClinicalTrials.gov](https://clinicaltrials.gov). Sharing costs should be listed as "Other Expenses" in the Budget Period Detail and explained under Additional Justification in the Budget Summary section. PIs who received prior Neilsen Foundation research funding must provide openly accessible links to any papers and datasets resulting from that funding during the current submission process.

OPTIONAL SUPPORTING MATERIAL

Supporting material may include up to two related manuscripts (submitted, in press, or published) and Animal or Human Research Approval Letter(s), if applicable and available. A Letter of Assurance confirming the independence of a PI who does not hold a tenure track position, and Letters of Support from collaborators or other stakeholders are encouraged.

These materials cannot be used as a continuation of the Proposal Narrative itself and may not include additional figures other than those in the manuscripts. All optional supporting materials must be compiled into a single PDF document.

REQUIRED SIGNATURES

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.

FGA EVALUATION CRITERIA

FGAs are peer-reviewed by members of the Neilsen Foundation’s Scientific Review Board. The critique and evaluation of a FGA will be based on scientific merit, creativity, 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](#) and [3](#) for a full list of FGA review criteria.

D. Award Process

After review is completed, the Applicants will be notified, via email, whether an application has been approved by the Neilsen Foundation Board of Directors or declined for funding approximately five months after the FGA deadline.

Applicants approved for funding will be required to submit additional documentation before a grant is issued, including but not limited to: 1) signed Research Grant Agreement; 2) Notice of Other Funding & Conflict of Interest; and 3) IRB/IACUC Approval. 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 it also covers the project funded by the Neilsen Foundation. If multiple IRB/IACUC approvals are required from multiple institutions, PIs must provide each notification as a separate PDF file.

ORGANIZATIONAL ELIGIBILITY AND DUE DILIGENCE

The grantee must be a nonprofit organization or rehabilitation facility located in the United States or Canada with the capability to conduct grant-funded programs or activities.

When applying, the Applicant must provide the following, in English:

United States-based organizations:

- A copy of the U.S. IRS Determination letter proving the entity's 501(c)(3) designation or tax-exempt status under Internal Revenue Code Section 170(c)(1).
- Organizations classified as a public charity under Section 509(a)(3) will be required to provide additional documentation (refer to IRS Notice 2006-109 and its subsequent modification in IRS Notice 2014-4). The Neilsen Foundation will request this information, when needed.

Canada-based organizations:

- If applicable, a copy of the U.S. IRS Determination letter proving the entity's 501(c)(3) designation or tax-exempt status under Internal Revenue Code Section 170(c)(1).
- Organizations that *do not* hold a U.S. IRS Determination letter must be a "registered charity" with the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) and provide a copy of the entity's CRA registration page. *Additional information will be required to determine that the Canadian organization is the equivalent of a U.S. public charity.*

Copies of tax returns, EIN letters, W-9s, or internal documents noting an organization's nonprofit status, in lieu of the U.S. IRS Determination letter are not acceptable.

DISBURSEMENT OF GRANT FUNDS

After 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 are 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. Prior to resubmission, PIs are encouraged to reach out to the Program Officers for insight into key issues that drove reviewer scores. 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.

Given the recent change in this portfolio's grant structure, if a prior submission was a Pilot Research Grant or Senior Research Grant it may be resubmitted with similar Aims and appropriate scope in the Translational Spectrum Grant category.

Aims that were unsuccessful in a resubmission may be submitted in a new grant application, 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.

PART 3: 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 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 ONGOING PORTFOLIOS

The Neilsen Foundation supports research grants, programmatic grants, and education grants. For information about our portfolios, please visit the [Craig H. Neilsen Foundation's website \(www.chnfoundation.org\)](http://www.chnfoundation.org).

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. 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 an active 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 one grant in each portfolio at any 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 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.

C. Contact 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.*
- 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, Program Officer, at tracey@chnfoundation.org AND Jacob Shreckengost, Program Officer, at jacob@chnfoundation.org.

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.

APPENDIX 1: LETTER OF INTENT—REVIEW CRITERIA

SCI RESEARCH ON THE TRANSLATIONAL SPECTRUM

SCORING CRITERIA/APPROACH

The Letter of Intent (LOI) review process aims to identify proposals that will be invited for submission of a Full Grant Application (FGA). The primary focus of the evaluation is relevance to the Neilsen Foundation's mission and creativity in the approach to addressing priorities in SCI research. SCIRTS funding is not intended for mature projects that are well suited for federal funding. Since the LOI format does not allow for detailed methodology, reviewers are advised to avoid focusing on experimental specifics in judging scientific merit, as these will be assessed in the invited FGAs. However, significant feasibility concerns should impact the LOI's score.

RELEVANCE AND 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 address an unsolved problem/important issue, improve clinical practice, and/or quality of life for persons with SCI?
3. Is the research and approach innovative versus incremental?

APPROACH

Are hypotheses clearly stated, and does the proposed approach clearly and appropriately address those hypotheses?

1. Feasibility

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

2. Categorical Criteria

- a. **Translational Spectrum Grants:** What is the potential impact on the field, novelty, and the likelihood that success will advance the development of treatments to restore function and promote wellbeing?
- b. **Postdoctoral Fellowships:** Will the training, mentor, and project increase the skill set of the Fellow and help establish their independent career in SCI research?

RESEARCH DESIGN

1. Investigator

- a. Does the application adequately address the PI and other personnel expertise in the proposed techniques as well as issues relevant to SCI?
- b. Will this funding help establish a junior PI's research program? Or, for an established PI (i.e., Associate Professor and above), does the project have the potential for significant impact to balance risk and/or develop key preliminary data?

2. Research Plan

- a. Is the general design appropriate for solving the stated problem(s)?
- b. For clinical research: Is the scope and type of the planned study clearly described, and is it likely to be feasible within the resources provided by the grant?

PRESENTATION

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

APPENDIX 2: TRANSLATIONAL SPECTRUM GRANTS—FGA REVIEW CRITERIA SCI RESEARCH ON THE TRANSLATIONAL SPECTRUM

Translational Spectrum Grants support research that will lead to an improved quality of life for those living with SCI. The proposed research should demonstrate novelty, high scientific merit, and the potential for substantial impact on treatment and care.

OVERALL IMPACT

Considering all criteria and the intent of this grant category, summarize the application's significant strengths and weaknesses.

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 stage work justified in the context of anticipated future studies, and is the evaluation of the literature comprehensive and appropriate?
3. Does the proposal adequately identify how this line of research would be translated and/or the potential impact on individuals with SCI? Does it incorporate the perspectives of persons with lived experiences in a meaningful way?

INVESTIGATOR(S)

1. Are the PI and their team well-suited to the project, and is the relevant SCI clinical and/or technical expertise demonstrated in the application?
2. Will this help establish a junior PI's research program?
3. For an established PI (i.e., Associate Professor and above), does the project have the potential for a significant impact and/or develop key preliminary data?

CREATIVITY

1. Does the project challenge and seek to shift current research paradigms through novel approaches and/or methodologies?
2. Does it push perceived boundaries or meaningfully advance translation of an intervention that has the potential to enhance SCI care?

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 the results of the work addressed? Does the applicant have demonstrated data sharing and open access activities in their previous work?
5. If a clinical study is proposed:
 - a. Will National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke Common Data Elements be used? If not, is this justified?
 - b. Are the recruiting plan and participation requirements reasonable?
 - c. Is there a plan for incorporating a diverse participant sample that represents the overall population of individuals with SCI; if not, is a reasonable explanation provided?

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?

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. The Neilsen Foundation values diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility to foster equitable opportunities and diverse points of view. Does the application include an institutional statement or describe information about efforts to promote inclusion and accessibility?
5. COI Disclosure—Applicants must disclose any real or perceived COIs. If you have questions or concerns regarding COIs, please discuss them with a Program Officer.

RESUBMISSIONS

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

APPENDIX 3: POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS—FGA REVIEW CRITERIA SCI RESEARCH ON THE TRANSLATIONAL SPECTRUM

This category focuses on providing mentored postdoctoral training in SCI research. The main goals are to encourage specialization in the field of SCI and support the advancement of the Fellow's research career. The Fellow should be mentored or co-mentored by an experienced investigator in SCI research. Reviewers will focus on 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 SCIRTS portfolio.

OVERALL IMPACT

Considering all criteria, summarize the significant strengths and weaknesses of the application and its relationship to the 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?
3. Does the study design/team incorporate the perspectives of persons with lived experience in a meaningful way?
4. Is the evaluation of the literature comprehensive and appropriate?

INVESTIGATOR(S)

1. Are the Fellow and mentor(s) well-suited to the project, and a good match for the Fellow's research goals?
2. Does the *Fellow* have the potential to develop as an independent and productive SCI researcher?
3. Does the Training Plan provide the Fellow with the requisite individualized and supervised experiences to develop their research skills and serve as a foundation for a productive career?
4. Are the *mentor(s)*'s commitment, SCI research qualifications, including research support and track record of mentoring, appropriate for the proposed Fellowship?

CREATIVITY

1. Does the inclusion of the Fellow on the project enhance the study by leveraging the Fellow's knowledge, skills, or background in a creative way?
2. Does this application apply concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions from another field of research to SCI?

APPROACH

1. Is the research plan of high scientific quality and does it relate well to the Fellow's training goals?
2. Are the scope, strategies, methodologies, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project?
3. Are potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success presented?
4. Are data sharing and open access to the results of the work addressed? Does the applicant/mentor have demonstrated data sharing and open access activities in their previous work?
5. If participation in a clinical study is proposed:
 - a. Are the recruiting plan, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and participation requirements reasonable and representative?
 - b. Is use of National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke Common Data Elements addressed?

ENVIRONMENT

1. 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?
2. Will the Fellow and project benefit from unique features of the scientific environment, subject populations, or collaborative arrangements? Are persons with lived experience meaningfully incorporated into the research design or management?

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. The Neilsen Foundation values diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility to foster equitable opportunities and diverse points of view. Does the application include an institutional statement or describe information about efforts to promote inclusion and accessibility?
5. COI Disclosure—Applicants must disclose any real or perceived COIs. If you have questions or concerns regarding COIs, please discuss them with a Program Officer.

RESUBMISSIONS

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

APPENDIX 4: RIGOR, TRANSPARENCY, AND REPRODUCIBILITY SCI RESEARCH ON THE TRANSLATIONAL SPECTRUM

Rigor, transparency, and reproducibility are essential for scientific progress. Applicants should demonstrate how their experimental design, methodology, and analysis will ensure well-controlled and unbiased results. These principles should guide both the study design and the reporting of data at the conclusion of the research.

Applicants are encouraged to provide a clear rationale and justification for the chosen preclinical model or patient population in the research design and data analysis plan. Applicants should also detail blinding, randomization, and stratification of animals or subjects. If these methods cannot be used, a justification should be provided. When outlining statistical methods, applicants should explain the appropriateness of the chosen tests, as well as the sample size and measures of uncertainty.

In preparing your application, addressing the following points is strongly recommended:

1. A clear rationale should be provided for the selected models and endpoints.
2. Adequate control or comparison groups should be used and clearly defined.
3. Appropriate statistical methods should be used in the analysis and interpretation of results, including adjustments for multiple comparisons.
4. Authors should discuss sample sizes (with power analysis), along with a valid measure of uncertainty (e.g., standard deviation or standard error of the mean).
5. Methods of blinding should be presented for all relevant assays. If blinding is not feasible, a rationale should be provided to explain why.
6. Strategies for randomization and/or stratification of animals/subjects should be described.
7. Criteria and rationale for inclusion or exclusion of samples from proposed experiments or analyses should be clear.

Condensed from:

Landis SC, et al. A call for transparent reporting to optimize the predictive value of preclinical research. *Nature*. 2012 Oct 11;490(7419):187-91. doi: 10.1038/nature11556. PMID: 23060188; PMCID: PMC3511845.