CREATING OPPORTUNITY & INDEPENDENCE
COMMUNITY SUPPORT GRANTS
2027 APPLICATION GUIDE

This guide is intended to help you through the application process. Creating Opportunity & Independence (CO&I) grants support nonprofit partners that provide programs and services to empower people with spinal cord injury (SCI) to achieve independent, fulfilling lives.

The Neilsen Foundation partners with and supports organizations that benefit people with SCI by having significant impact in their communities, involve people across the lifespan, and demonstrate valuable partnerships.

Submissions from the project/program leader (referred to as "Applicant") must adhere to these guidelines, as they are updated annually.

IMPORTANT DATES AND DEADLINES	
January 25, 2027 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time)	Letter of Intent (LOI) Due via ProposalCentral
Late March 2027	Notification of LOI Results
April 19, 2027 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time)	Full Grant Application (FGA) Due via ProposalCentral
September 2027	Notification of FGA Results
October 2027	Awarded Grants to be Funded

Applicants should carefully review this guide. Our Program Staff invite questions relating to submission of either a LOI or FGA—contact Darrell Musick (Program Officer) and Mackenzie Soldan (Program Associate), or refer to Part 3 below for additional contacts.

To learn more about previously funded CO&I grants, use the *Search Funded Grants* link at the bottom of the Neilsen Foundation homepage (www.chnfoundation.org), and enter "COandI" in the search bar. To combine two related searches, use "AND" (e.g., *COandI AND employment*).

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PART 1: COMMUNITY SUPPORT GRANT GUIDELINES

A. Purpose

Community Support Grants are intended to help organizations improve the lives of people with SCI in the following areas:

Community Activities (the *things* you can do)

- Initiatives that provide group or individual activities that enhance physical, emotional, or social wellbeing, where people with SCI actively engage and connect.
  - This may include but is not limited to providing recreational and competitive sports; health and wellness; arts; education; virtual and gaming activities.
  - Includes the provision of adaptive equipment in support of community activities.

Life Transitions (the things you *go through)*

- Organizations that support individuals with SCI in finding practical solutions after injury, helping them navigate through transitions, and promoting successful integration into homes, workplaces, and communities. This may include but is not limited to:
  - Home modifications and access (e.g., ramps/doorways); assistive technology; methods to improve independence in activities of daily living; financial literacy; educational resources; and employment initiatives.
  - Programs to improve life skills through mentorship and other guidance.
  - Supplementing rehabilitation programs or equipment.

Accessibility For All (the *way* things are done)

- Projects that remove barriers—physical, technological, or systemic—that prevent people with SCI from fully participating in society.
  - This may include, but is not limited to, universal design modifications for outdoor and community spaces; inclusive professional environments.
  - To be successful, applicants must demonstrate significance to individuals in the SCI community during and/or beyond the grant term.

PRIORITIES FOR COMMUNITY SUPPORT GRANTS

- Organizations that have demonstrated a commitment to people with SCI, with additional consideration given to grassroots and under-resourced organizations.
- Involvement in planning and programming by individuals living with SCI to ensure the proposed activities are significant and applicable.
- Regions or localities that have limited access to support for individuals with SCI.
- Applications that clearly identify intended outcomes, benefits, and opportunities.
- Organizations that show a commitment to inclusion and accessibility within their organization as well as in the communities they serve.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT GRANTS ARE NOT INTENDED FOR:

- Large capital construction or renovations
- Academic scholarships
- Consumer-based conferences
- Lobbying

- Provision of ongoing rehabilitation as secondary insurance
- Research to develop or test treatments for SCI or medical devices. If Institutional Review Board approval is required, contact the Program Officer before submitting.

B. Funding Details

- The organization must be a nonprofit located in the United States or Canada. Individuals, private foundations, and non-functionally integrated Type III supporting organizations are not eligible. See "Organizational Eligibility and Due Diligence," below.
- Application materials/communications must be in English and budgets must be in U.S. dollars.
- Requested funding can be for one year (from $25,000 to $125,000) or for two years (from $50,000 to $200,000). The amount requested for any individual year cannot exceed $125,000.
  - Salary and benefits for personnel/consultants are allowed. Benefits will be supported at the organization's standard levels, up to 50% of salary for any listed personnel; organizationally defined benefit rates above this level are not supported by Neilsen Foundation grants.
  - In addition to expenditures for the proposed activities, general operating support for the organization may be requested up to 10% of the total request minus individual pieces of equipment costing $5,000 or more.
- Equipment expenditures may not exceed $100,000 total over the life of the grant. Requests for large equipment purchases should clearly indicate how they meet Neilsen Foundation priorities.
- The "Other" category may include expenses outside those listed in the template, e.g., fees, outreach, training, shipping, disability accommodation. Childcare costs can be requested up to $2,500 per year and should also be listed in this category.
- Organizations (and applicants) may submit only one CO&I application in each annual cycle and may hold only one Neilsen Foundation Community Support Grant at a time.
  - For a current grantee to be eligible to apply, all activities on the active grant must be completed and all required final reports submitted before the FGA due date. Applicants planning to complete an active Community Support Grant early to meet this deadline must notify Program Staff of their intent to submit an LOI.
- A subcontract may be established by the grantee organization with another organization to carry out selected activities. If included, describe the subcontract in the application and budget, and notify the Program Officer.
- For two-year grants, funding for the second year will be contingent on a favorable review of an annual progress update. The second installment will be made following verification of significant progress of year-one activities.
- Final project and expenditure reports are required at the end of all grants.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Focus on SCI: While it is understood that spinal cord disease/conditions may be closely linked, the Neilsen Foundation's primary area of focus is on traumatic SCI. Applicants must clearly address how the needs of people living with SCI will be served, and are encouraged to consider the following:

Impact: Refers to positive changes that improve the quality of life for people with SCI within the grant period or beyond.

Inclusion: Application of practices to break down accessibility barriers and expand opportunities to promote greater equity.

Community: *SCI Community* refers to individuals with spinal cord injuries, their families, caregivers, and SCI peer groups.

Collaboration: Refers to local and/or regional partnerships. To avoid duplication of services, demonstration of shared resources is encouraged.

Feasibility: Includes the experience and expertise needed for success. Applications should include justification of the organization's capability to undertake the proposed effort.

Evaluation: Identifies how success of the proposed effort will be judged. Applicants should clearly identify intended outcomes, benefits, and opportunities to be provided by the requested funding, particularly for people with SCI.

Expertise and Safety Measures: Describe the qualifications of personnel required to safely complete the project. Requests for medical/clinical equipment must demonstrate that appropriate medical supervision will be provided by clinically licensed staff.

- Clinical Applicants should include the organization's commitment to the program, plans for implementation, types of patients to be served, and anticipated outcomes.

Other Funding: Additional sources of funding required for the effort's success should be listed.

PART 2: APPLICATION AND AWARD PROCESSES

A. Submission Requirements

The 2027 application process begins with submission of a Letter of Intent (LOI) from an eligible organization. Successful applicants will be invited to submit a Full Grant Application (FGA).

ON-TIME SUBMISSION

All application deadlines, dates, and times are strictly enforced. The online system used to submit, review, and manage grants, ProposalCentral (https://ProposalCentral.altum.com), will automatically close at 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 or convert it to PDF, Neilsen Foundation staff are happy to help. Late submissions will not be considered, including those due to technical difficulties at the deadline.

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 Applicant must have their organization's authorization to apply for a grant and is expected to be responsible for conduct of the grant activities. The Neilsen Foundation relies on accurate ProposalCentral contact information to communicate with its applicants and grantees. The Applicant should enter accurate contact information in ProposalCentral, including a *current* email address. The Applicant and organization names entered in ProposalCentral should be consistent with those 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 the ProposalCentral 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 ProposalCentral "Enable Other Users to Access this Proposal" section, for at least one other contact at the organization. The "Permissions" access level for other contacts can be set as view, edit, or administrator.

B. Submission and Review

ENSURE YOUR APPLICATION IS UPLOADED ON TIME

Refer to Page 1 of this Application Guide for the LOI and FGA deadlines. ProposalCentral will automatically close at 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time) on the due date. *Late submissions will not be considered.*

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

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." Inaccurate or incomplete submissions may be disqualified.

- To be sure your proposal reaches us successfully, carefully proofread all sections of the LOI or FGA materials for consistency and accuracy before submitting in ProposalCentral. To verify that all PDF documents are legible, in the Proposal Sections, press the "Print Signature Pages" button and click on "Print Signature Pages with Attachments" to view the uploads.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

- If two or more individuals are directing an effort, name only one as the Applicant; the other(s) should be listed as collaborator(s).
- The grantee organization will retain title to any equipment purchased and/or Intellectual Property developed with Neilsen Foundation funding.
- Perceived or real conflicts of interest (e.g., shareholder in a company providing a device for a study or program) must be disclosed in both the LOI and FGA.

Across Neilsen Foundation Portfolios: Applicants, excluding postdoctoral fellows, may apply for one grant per portfolio described in Part 3, below (i.e., SCIRTS, CO&I, and SCIMF), and may hold up to one grant in each portfolio at a time. Such applications will be evaluated independently, according to each portfolio's timelines, guidelines, and review criteria.

REQUIRED SIGNATURES FOR FGA

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.***

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.*** Once this page is signed by the Applicant AND the Signing Official, upload the PDF in the "Attachments" section.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

For technical questions regarding online submissions, 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 "Grant Applicant Tutorials" 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.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

LOIs are reviewed based on relevance to the Neilsen Foundation, potential impact to the SCI community, and specific requirements noted in this Application Guide. FGAs are peer-reviewed by members of the CO&I Review Board. See the Appendix for an explanation of the review criteria.

NOTIFICATION OF RESULTS

Applicants are 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 annual LOI process may submit a FGA. Feedback will be available to the Applicant after the results are announced.

C. Award Process

After review is completed, the Neilsen Foundation will notify Applicants, via email, whether an application has been approved by the Neilsen Foundation Board of Directors or declined for funding. Approved FGAs will proceed to the award process.

Applicants approved for funding will be required to submit a signed Grant Agreement before grant funds are issued. We will provide instructions in the award notification for uploading this and any other required document(s).

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL

The CO&I portfolio does not support research grants; however, some projects conducted at academic or medical institutions may require human subject protection. If the grantee organization deems that the project includes work that requires IRB oversight for use of human subjects, the Applicant must provide documentation of IRB approval no later than three months after the start date of the grant. Such Applicants must inform the Program Officer before submitting the LOI that an IRB is required.

ORGANIZATIONAL ELIGIBILITY AND DUE DILIGENCE

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

Per the U.S. Pension Protection Act of 2006, the Neilsen Foundation, a private non-operating foundation, is required to verify the nonprofit status of all prospective grantees. When applying, the Applicant must 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).
- *Organizations 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 organization will be required to provide additional documentation as specified in Section 3.01 of IRS Notice 2006-109.*
  An organization that is classified as a non-functionally integrated Type III supporting organization is not eligible for Neilsen Foundation funding.

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. A Canadian organization that satisfies either of these requirements must provide a copy of the entity's U.S. IRS Determination letter.
- 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, or internal documents noting the organization's nonprofit status, in lieu of, OR in addition to, the U.S. IRS Determination letter.

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

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 inclusion and accessibility to foster equitable communities, 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 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 website (www.chnfoundation.org).

Research Grants:

- Spinal Cord Injury Research on the Translational Spectrum (SCIRTS)

Programmatic Grants:

- Creating Opportunity & Independence (CO&I)

Education Grants:

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

B. Contact Information

APPLICATION SUBMISSION CONTACTS

- For technical questions regarding online submissions, 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.*
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NEILSEN FOUNDATION CONTACTS

- For questions regarding an application's submission status contact, Ehrica Hernandez, Grants Management Associate (ehrica@chnfoundation.org).
- For questions regarding the CO&I portfolio contact, Darrell Musick, Program Officer (darrell@chnfoundation.org) and Mackenzie Soldan, Program Associate, (mackenzie@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: FULL GRANT APPLICATION REVIEW CRITERIA

As you prepare your application, it is important to keep in mind how it will be reviewed. Reviewers are asked to identify strengths and weaknesses of proposals and, working with Neilsen Foundation staff, provide feedback based on the following review criteria.

SIGNIFICANCE

The extent to which the proposed effort, if successfully carried out, will make an important contribution.

1. Are the objectives relevant to the Neilsen Foundation's mission and do they have the potential to improve the quality of life for those living with SCI?
2. Does the requested support significantly ease transitions for individuals with SCI and foster community integration, remove barriers to enhance inclusion or access, or serve people who are commonly overlooked or reside in communities of highest need?
3. How does the proposal reflect the needs of the SCI community? Has a person with lived experience been involved in shaping the proposed effort? How will individuals with lived experience be involved in execution of the proposed effort?

FEASIBILITY

1. Provide an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed plan.
2. Is the scope of the effort suitable for the proposed timeline?
3. Does the scope of work seem reasonable based on the organization's capabilities?
4. Does the application provide sufficient expertise and appropriate safety measures for proposed activities?

GOALS

1. How will the funding maintain and/or strengthen the organization and its ability to provide services to people with SCI?
2. Does the proposal define clear goals, appropriate for the type of funding being requested?
3. Do the proposed activities provide needed services or fill a regional gap for the population that will be served?
4. Are the expected outcomes for the population served well defined?

BUDGET

1. Is the requested budget appropriate and well-justified, based on the nature and scope of the proposed efforts, to support the anticipated outcomes?

TECHNICAL ELEMENTS

1. Is the application complete, well written, and easy to follow?