

# NEW JERSEY COMMISSION ON SPINAL CORD RESEARCH



## RESEARCH PROGRAM GUIDELINES

### DATES TO REMEMBER:

January 2, 2026	Research Program Guidelines Available Online
February 1, 2026	Grant Applications available on the SAGE website
May 1, 2026	Application Submission Deadline in SAGE 5:00 p.m.
November 30, 2026	Results Notification

### INTRODUCTION

Approximately 6,000 New Jersey residents live with traumatic injuries or diseases that damage the spinal cord. Approximately 300 new injuries occur each year. The economic consequences of the resulting physical disabilities are enormous. The personal toll on individuals and families with spinal cord injuries and their communities is incalculable.

Therefore, in September 1999, Governor Christine Todd Whitman signed legislation creating the New Jersey Commission on Spinal Cord Research (NJCSCR), allocating funding to the New Jersey Spinal Cord Research Fund.

The charge to the NJCSCR is:

The NJCSCR will solicit and approve support of research projects, administer the awards through research grants, and promote development of spinal cord research projects within the State of New Jersey that focus on treatments and cures. The NJCSCR will compile a research directory of all spinal cord research projects being conducted within the State and provide the Governor and the Legislature with an annual report by January 30<sup>th</sup> of each year describing the status of the NJCSCR's activities and the results of its funded research projects.

### PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The NJCSCR is committed to accelerating research to develop effective interventions and cures for paralysis and other consequences of spinal cord injury and disease. Its primary objectives are:

- To advance the field of spinal cord repair and regeneration and the New Jersey research community by encouraging established scientists to apply their expertise to the spinal cord.
- To facilitate the application of innovative ideas from other areas of science to the challenges of spinal cord injury repair.
- To foster collaborative, interdisciplinary approaches to spinal cord research.

- To nurture the next generation of spinal cord researchers through support of young scientists and postdoctoral fellows.
- To prevent or treat secondary biological conditions resulting from spinal cord injury.
- To promote dissemination of the research findings generated by those scientists supported by the NJCSCR.

NJCSCR awards are intended to promote innovative, groundbreaking research, not to provide long-term support. All applications for funding will be reviewed competitively.

## **FUNDING PRIORITIES**

The New Jersey Commission on Spinal Cord Research will fund research activities that hold promise of developing effective interventions and cures for paralysis and other consequences of spinal cord injury and disease. The areas of research listed below highlight the focus of current NJCSCR emphasis and funding:

- Studying strategies to promote neuronal growth and survival, encourage the formation of synapses, enhance appropriate myelination, restore axonal conduction, replace injured cells, or otherwise improve function after spinal cord injury.
- Evaluating efficacy of drugs and other interventions that prevent or reduce secondary neuronal injury or providing insight into the mechanisms causing progressive damage.
- Defining anatomical characteristics of spinal cord injury or disease in well-defined animal models and in the human spinal cord, specifically documenting the cellular systems vulnerable to injury or disease and the functional losses which occur as a result thereof.
- Elucidating biological or physical mechanisms underlying approaches to improve functions compromised by spinal cord injury.
- Developing strategies to prevent or treat secondary complications arising from injury or disease to the spinal cord.
- Developing innovative restorative rehabilitation strategies to promote recovery of biological function.
- Translating basic and pre-clinical findings into clinical application.
- Supporting the investigation of promising new approaches.

## **ELIGIBILITY**

The following researchers are eligible to submit proposals to the NJCSCR for research grant awards. All applicants, organizations/institutions must be located within the State of New Jersey.

- Ph.D., M.D., or other such professionals.
- Independent investigators at any stage of professional development.
- Postdoctoral fellows, Graduate fellows.

- Established investigators new to the field of spinal cord injury research.
- Young Investigators (five years' post-completion of formal training)

Collaborations between basic research scientists and clinicians with spinal cord injury experience are encouraged. Young investigators are encouraged to partner with established investigators to nurture their scientific growth.

All applicants including Principal Investigators and organizations/institutions are encouraged to collaborate with other New Jersey-based researchers as well as with researchers located out-of-state, or out of the country.

Senior scientists, young investigators, postdoctoral and graduate fellows may serve as Principal Investigator. If the applicant is a fellow, he/she must submit a letter of support from the laboratory's senior scientist, as well as two other appropriate letters of reference.

## **PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECT, ANIMAL WELFARE, AND RECOMBINANT DNA**

Compliance with National Institutes of Health regulations for the protection of human subjects, animal welfare, recombinant DNA, and inclusion of women and minorities in clinical trials is required for all grants.

It is the responsibility of the applicant as a potential recipient of a NJCSCR grant to assure that the rights and welfare of all human subjects used in any NJCSCR sponsored research are protected. Any applications involving human subjects must be reviewed and approved by the appropriate institutional review board.

It is the responsibility of the applicant as a potential recipient of a NJCSCR grant to assure proper care and treatment of all laboratory animals used in any NJCSCR sponsored research. Any applications involving laboratory animals must be reviewed and approved by the appropriate institutional review committee.

It is the responsibility of the applicant as a potential recipient of a NJCSCR grant to assure that the physical and biological containment needed for research involving any recombinant DNA molecules is within policies set out in the current "National Institutes of Health Guidelines for Research Involving Recombinant DNA Molecules." Any applications involving recombinant DNA molecules must be reviewed and approved by the appropriate institutional review board.

## **QUALIFIED RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS**

For the purpose of all NJCSCR grants, a qualifying institution is defined as any academic institution, research organization, public or private institution or other entity, located in the State of New Jersey, with a demonstrated capability to conduct grant funded research, and specifically approved by the vote of the Commission, but in no case can an individual be a qualifying research institution.

If your organization or institution appears below, you do not need to submit a Qualified Research Institution Request for Approval Form. Those organizations or institutions that have not been approved, and are not listed below, must apply.

The form can be downloaded at: <https://www.nj.gov/health/spinalcord/grant-information/becoming-qualified/>

University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey  
Princeton University  
Kessler Foundation  
Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey  
Coriell Institute for Medical Research  
Stevens Institute for Technology 2/2/03  
Drew University 9/25/03  
JFK NJ Neuroscience Institute/JFK Health System 12/18/03  
Seton Hall University/School of Health & Medical Science 12/18/03  
VA NJ Health Care System & Veterans Biomedical Research Institute 6/17/04  
Wyeth Research/Pfizer 1/11/05  
Progenitor Cell Therapy, LLC 5/19/05  
New Jersey Institute of Technology 5/19/05  
Rowan University/Cooper University Hospital/Medical School & Health Systems 5/20/10  
TRIM-edicine, Inc. 12/2/10  
Hackensack University Medical Center 11/14/13  
Celvive, Inc. 6/18/15  
Montclair State University 9/17/15  
St. Joseph's University Medical Center 11/25/18  
GENERATION Biotech 11/21/19  
Neuropair, Inc. 11/10/2022

The NJCSCR reserves the right to distribute funds among the grants in all its grant programs. The NJCSCR reserves the right not to fund any grant in any of its grant programs to the maximum amount, or not to fund any grant in any grant program at all. Estimated amount of money available for all grant categories in the 2027 grant cycle is \$6.5 million. Funding estimates may vary and are subject to annual appropriations.

Before creating an application, the following documents will need to be updated within the Organization Profile prior to submission:

1. **Valid** Internal Revenue Services (IRS) 501(c) (3) tax-exempt status.
2. Statement of Total Gross Revenue and/or Annual Report
3. Tax Clearance Certificate\* is to be submitted. Application for Tax Clearance can be obtained at <http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation/busasst.shtml> (fee of \$75.00 or \$200.00).  
**\*NOTE: This document is only valid for 180 days, if it is not valid at time of submission then the grant will be disqualified from the funding cycle.**
4. NJ Charities Registration: If your organization is registered with the NJ Charities Registration, then each year a “Letter of Compliance” from the Division of Consumer Affairs MUST be obtained. **All registered charities MUST renew their registration annually.** For more information contact the Division of Consumer Affairs. Forms can be found at: <https://www.njconsumeraffairs.gov/charities/Pages/default.aspx>
5. Current list of Officers and Directors

**It is strongly recommended that all applicants review the grant writing tips provided by NIH at:**

<https://grants.nih.gov/grants-process/write-application/general-grant-writing-tips>

It is the understanding of the Commission that all proposals and supporting materials are original ideas/language proposed by the applicant and their affiliated institution. The Commission recognizes the National Institutes of Health (NIH) notice number: NOT-OD-23-149 June 23, 2023 (The Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence Technologies is Prohibited for the NIH Peer Review Process) and therefore restrict the Commission's contracted Peer Reviewer to the same standard. To paraphrase that ruling, "reviewers must be accountable and aware that uploading or sharing content or original concepts from a grant application, contract proposal, or critique to online generative AI tools violate the peer review confidentiality and integrity requirements." Essentially, to use generative AI to analyze or critique grant applications in Peer Review will be considered a breach of confidentiality.<sup>1</sup> Similarly while AI is not banned in the grant writing process itself, the Commission **strongly cautions that Principal Investigators (PI) use AI tools at their own risk.** The PI must be aware of the potential for plagiarism, fabricated citations, and falsified information that may be embedded through the use of generative AI. This would be considered research misconduct and will warrant the Commission taking steps to address non-compliance according to your institution's Research Misconduct policy.

## **RESEARCH GRANTS AVAILABLE**

The NJCSCR will offer four types of programs and the opportunity to add additional funding for training to one of the grant programs, Individual Research Grants, Exploratory Research Grants, Postdoctoral and Graduate Fellowship Grants, Techniques Travel Training Grant and the opportunity. All qualifying institutions in the State of New Jersey may apply. A Letter of Intent is not required.

### **Abstract and Lay Abstract:**

Write a succinct summary of the project (Abstract) that both a scientist and a lay person (Lay Abstract) can understand.

#### **What is a lay abstract?**

A lay abstract is a scientific summary of work that will be performed or has been performed that is targeted towards the public and non-specialists.

The lay abstract, or project summary, is a concise, clear, and brief description of the project. It should outline the problem, the objectives, expected outcomes, including significance of the project to the field being studied. The abstract is usually written in less technical language than the proposal narrative.

Your layperson summary should include (1) why the study was proposed (background) (2) the reason for conducting the study (rationale and objectives), and (3) the expected outcomes (benefits) for conducting the study.

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<sup>1</sup> McKlveen, Jessica (2023, June 29). Think Again Before Using Generative AI During Peer Review or As you Prepare an Application. <https://www.nccih.nih.gov/research/blog/think-again-before-using-generative-ai-during-peer-review-or-as-you-prepare-an-application>

- In the first sentence, state the significance of your research to the field and relevance to NJCSCR's Funding Priorities: research activities that hold promise of developing effective interventions and cures for paralysis and other consequences of spinal cord injury and disease.
- Next state the hypothesis and the innovative potential of your research.
- Then list and briefly describe the Specific Aims and long-term objectives.
- Include appropriate keywords, e.g., neuronal growth, restorative rehabilitative function.
- Do not include graphics or citations.

These sections may be small, but they're important.

- When your application is funded, NJCSCR publishes your title and Lay Abstract in a Grant Directory on the Commission's website.
- All peer reviewers read the Abstract and Narrative.

## FISCAL YEAR 2027 GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

### **Individual Research Grant Awards (IRG):**

The NJCSCR will fund research activities that hold the promise of developing effective interventions and cures for paralysis and other consequences of spinal cord injury disease. All qualifying institutions in the State of New Jersey may apply. Individual Research Grant awards will be awarded to independent investigators with a record of productivity, a demonstrated commitment to spinal cord research, and only for projects that will address significant questions that will advance knowledge in the field.

Maximum funding is up to \$200,000 per year including direct and indirect costs, (20% maximum for the latter). Applicants are encouraged to apply for a one-year, two-year, or three-year award. The goals of this program are (1) to encourage independent investigators to undertake research on spinal cord regeneration, recovery, and rehabilitation; (2) to encourage scientists who are well-established in other areas to transfer their efforts to spinal cord research; and (3) enable researchers with novel scientific and clinical ideas to test them and develop pilot data needed to seek larger awards from the National Institutes of Health, and other funding sources.

Multiple Principal Investigators (multiple PI/Co-PI) awards are an opportunity for multidisciplinary efforts and collaboration through a team of scientists under a single grant award.

All multiple PI/Co-PI applications are required to include a **Leadership Plan**. The purpose of the Leadership Plan is to facilitate and enhance scientific productivity and establish a decision-making process. The Plan must describe a rationale for choosing the multiple PI/Co-PI approach. The governance and organizational structure of the leadership team and the research project should be described, including communication plans, process for making decisions on scientific direction, and procedures for resolving conflicts. The roles and administrative, technical, and scientific responsibilities for the project or program should be delineated for the PI/Co-PIs, including responsibilities for human subject studies or studies with vertebrate animals as appropriate.

Principal investigators must be affiliated with a New Jersey State academic institution, research organization, public or private agency or other entity with demonstrated capability to conduct research responsibly as a Qualified Research Institution. Senior scientists, young investigators, and postdoctoral fellows may serve as principal investigator. If the applicant is a fellow, s/he must submit a letter of support from the laboratory's senior scientist, as well as two other appropriate letters of reference. Unaffiliated individuals will not be funded. Individuals of any nationality or citizenship status may apply, provided they are employed by or affiliated with a qualified New Jersey State organization/institution.

The administration of a grant not only requires adherence to the program objectives for which the grant was made but also requires that aims and objectives be accomplished in a businesslike manner. This is particularly important when the costs to applicants and the State are rising and NJCSCR funds are limited. For these reasons, applicants must establish sound and effective business management systems to ensure proper stewardship of funds and activities. Applicants are expected to exercise the same degree of prudence in the expenditure of NJCSCR funds as they use in expending their own funds.

Given the competitive nature of these grants, applicants must submit **one** well-developed and responsive application as opposed to multiple applications.

Specific information for Individual Research Grants:

- The NJCSCR will support the salary of a Principal Investigator and/or Co-Investigator up to \$15,000 maximum per year (base plus fringe).
- The NJCSCR will allow a maximum of 15% fringe on all personnel, excluding the Principal Investigator and/or Co-Investigator per year (see first bullet).
- The NJCSCR will allow the purchase of equipment with a detailed justification and quote.
- The NJCSCR will allow maximum of \$1,000 for domestic travel to 1 (one) conference or 1 (one) scientific meeting per year, **International Travel Is Not Allowed.**  
\*Grantees are required to seek prior approval and provide any documentation related to travel and must adhere to the Travel Policy (pg. 14)
- We ask all applicants to attach a full scientific narrative on the Attachments page as the text boxes do not accept any charts, graphs, scientific symbols, and/or pictures. This scientific narrative should be no more than 10 pages and include references, figures and appendices, font size should be no smaller than Times New Roman 11pt.
- **Applicants who have current Commission funding of any kind are eligible to apply for this opportunity if the funded project will be completed by November 30, 2026.**
- All non-funded applicants from any given grant cycle are eligible for resubmission. However, the applicant must revise the non-funded application based on reviewer feedback (Written Response to Reviewer Critiques page). All reapplications will be reviewed as new competing proposals.
- Applications that are triaged may only be resubmitted once, at the next application cycle and only if the applicant has substantively responded to the major criticisms of the review panel (Written Response to Reviewer Critiques page). All reapplications will be reviewed as new competing proposals.

Awards will begin on or about December 1, 2026. Three-year awards are made through one-year contracts. Each funding award within the three-year period will be contingent upon the availability of funds. Second- and third-year support for all Individual Research Grants is contingent upon submission of a Progress Report. The Progress Report must be favorably

reviewed by an independent scientific merit review panel and recommended to the NJCSCR for continued funding. A Final Narrative Report is required and must be submitted to the office within 60 days of termination of an Individual Research Grant. An Evaluation Form must be submitted to the NJCSCR office each year for two years following termination of an Individual Research Grant. All forms are available at [www.state.nj.us/health/spinalcord](http://www.state.nj.us/health/spinalcord).

## **Postdoctoral and Graduate Student Fellowship Grants Awards (FEL):**

**Postdoctoral Fellowships** are three-year awards of \$80,000 per annum. They provide an annual stipend of \$60,000, a research allowance of \$19,000, and a travel budget of \$1,000. No part of the award may be used for institutional overhead or indirect costs. Institutions may supplement stipends, but not with other full-time fellowship awards, or other NJCSCR monies. Candidates of outstanding quality must hold a Ph.D., and/or M.D., or equivalent graduate degree. Appropriate degrees must be awarded prior to activation of award. Candidates must be accepted for postdoctoral training under the supervision of an appropriate mentor at a qualifying academic research institution in New Jersey. A candidate may not apply for a NJCSCR Postdoctoral Fellowship and a NJCSCR Individual Research grant in the same grant cycle. If a first-year fellow applies for and is awarded a NJCSCR Individual Research Grant, funding will be contingent upon cancellation of the second year of the fellowship. Non-research activities, such as teaching, may not occupy more than 10% of the fellow's time. Second and third year Postdoctoral Fellowship funding is contingent upon the availability of funds and upon the submission and successful review of a Progress Report and a recommendation from the mentor. The Progress Report must be favorably reviewed by an independent scientific merit review panel and recommended to the NJCSCR for continued funding.

Given the competitive nature of these grants, applicants must submit **one** well-developed and responsive application as opposed to multiple applications.

Specific information for Postdoctoral Research Grants:

- Reference letters should be emailed directly to the NJCSCR office at [njcscr@doh.nj.gov](mailto:njcscr@doh.nj.gov)  
All reference letters are due to the NJCSCR office May 18, 2026.
- We ask all applicants to attach a full scientific narrative on the Attachments page as the text boxes do not accept any charts, graphs, scientific symbols, and/or pictures. This scientific narrative should be no more than 10 pages to include references, figures and appendices, font size should be no smaller than Times New Roman 11pt.
- The NJCSCR will allow maximum of \$1,000 for domestic travel to 1 (one) conference or 1 (one) scientific meeting per year, **International Travel Is Not Allowed**.  
\*Grantees are required to seek prior approval and provide any documentation related to travel and must adhere to the Travel Policy (pg. 14)
- **Applicants who have current Commission funding of any kind are eligible to apply for this opportunity if the funded project will be completed by November 30, 2026.**
- All non-funded applicants from any given grant cycle are eligible for resubmission. However, the applicant must revise the non-funded application based on reviewer feedback (Written Response to Reviewer Critiques page). All reapplications will be reviewed as new competing proposals.
- Applications that are triaged may only be resubmitted once, at the next application cycle and only if the applicant has substantively responded to the major criticisms of the review panel (Written Response to Reviewer Critiques page). All reapplications will be reviewed as new competing proposals.

The administration of a grant not only requires adherence to the program objectives for which the grant was made but also requires that aims and objectives be accomplished in a businesslike manner. This is particularly important when the costs to applicants and the State are rising and NJCSCR funds are limited. For these reasons, applicants must establish sound and effective business management systems to ensure proper stewardship of funds and activities. Applicants are expected to exercise the same degree of prudence in the expenditure of NJCSCR funds as they use in expending their own funds.

**Graduate Student Fellowships** are two-year awards of \$50,000 per annum. They provide an annual stipend of \$40,000, a research allowance of \$9,000, and a travel budget of \$1,000. No part of this award may be used for institutional overhead, or indirect costs, or for tuition. Institutions may supplement stipends, but not with other full-time fellowship awards or other NJCSCR monies. Applicants must be full-time graduate students in residence in a proposed course of study directly related to regeneration and repair of the damaged spinal cord. Students must begin study in the semester following activation unless special permission is received prior to activation date. The NJCSCR prefers to support graduate student candidates who have completed the first year of graduate study and are concentrating on research projects at least 80% of their time. Applicants may serve as teaching assistants while holding a NJCSCR Graduate Student Fellowship without special permission. Second-year Graduate Student Fellowship funding is contingent upon the availability of funds and upon the submission and successful review of a Progress Report and a recommendation from the mentor. The Progress Report must be favorably reviewed by an independent scientific merit review panel and recommended to the NJCSCR for continued funding.

Given the competitive nature of these grants, applicants must submit **one** well-developed and responsive application as opposed to multiple applications.

Specific information for Graduate Student Fellowship Grants:

- Reference letters should be emailed directly to the NJCSCR office at [njcscr@doh.nj.gov](mailto:njcscr@doh.nj.gov). All reference letters are due to the NJCSCR office May 18, 2026.
- The NJCSCR will allow maximum of \$1,000 for domestic travel to 1 (one) conference or 1 (one) scientific meeting per year, **International Travel Is Not Allowed**.  
\*Grantees are required to seek prior approval and provide any documentation related to travel and must adhere to the Travel Policy (pg. 14)
- We ask all applicants to attach a full scientific narrative on the Attachments page as the text boxes do not accept any charts, graphs, scientific symbols, and/or pictures. This scientific narrative should be no more than 10 pages to include references, figures and appendices, font size should be no smaller than Times New Roman 11pt.
- **Applicants who have current Commission funding of any kind are eligible to apply for this opportunity if the funded project will be completed by November 30, 2026.**
- All non-funded applicants from any given grant cycle are eligible for resubmission. However, the applicant must revise the non-funded application based on reviewer feedback (Written Response to Reviewer Critiques page). All reapplications will be reviewed as new competing proposals.
- Applications that are triaged may only be resubmitted once, at the next application cycle and only if the applicant has substantively responded to the major criticisms of the review panel (Written Response to Reviewer Critiques page). All reapplications will be reviewed as new competing proposals.

The administration of a grant not only requires adherence to the program objectives for which the grant was made but also requires that aims and objectives be accomplished in a businesslike manner. This is particularly important when the costs to applicants and the State are rising and NJCSCR funds are limited. For these reasons, applicants must establish sound and effective business management systems to ensure proper stewardship of funds and activities. Applicants are expected to exercise the same degree of prudence in the expenditure of NJCSCR funds as they use in expending their own funds.

Postdoctoral and Graduate Student Fellowship awards will begin on or about December 1, 2026. Second year and third-year fellowship funding is contingent upon the successful review of a comprehensive progress report and a recommendation from the mentor. A Final Narrative Report is required and must be submitted to the office within 60 days of termination of a Fellowship Research Grant. An Evaluation Form must be submitted to the NJCSCR office each year for two years following termination of a Fellowship Research Grant. All forms are available at [www.state.nj.us/health/spinalcord](http://www.state.nj.us/health/spinalcord).

### **Exploratory Research Grant Awards (ERG):**

The purpose of the Exploratory Research Grant award is to enable independent investigators to apply their specific expertise to spinal cord research. The award is designed to provide the resources necessary to acquire preliminary data that will allow the successful applicant to obtain continued support from the NJCSCR, NIH, and/or other funding agencies. It is specifically intended to facilitate the application of innovative ideas from other areas of science to the challenges of spinal cord injury and repair.

In addition to scientific merit and relevance, consideration will be given to collaborative proposals that are inter-institutional and/or inter-state in nature. Priority will also be given to investigators outside the field who bring their expertise into spinal cord injury research. Successful applicants will have familiarized themselves with state-of-the-art knowledge necessary to put the proposed study into the appropriate spinal cord context.

In the field of spinal cord injury research, as elsewhere in the biomedical sciences, a constant infusion of new ideas, techniques, and points of view is essential to maintain its vitality, foster discovery and stimulate innovation. Inherent in the concept of innovation is the departure from current thinking or practice. Innovative projects are unlikely to be supported by substantial preliminary data, and for that and other reasons will necessarily be more speculative than conventional projects. These are high-risk, high reward projects that may lead to breakthroughs, the development of novel techniques, agents, methodologies, models or applications, or other insights that could have major impact on the field of spinal cord injury research.

The Exploratory Research Grant Program is intended to provide support for the early and conceptual stages of such investigations. Through the use of the Exploratory Research Grant Program, the NJCSCR will encourage the pursuit of novel scientific ideas, model systems, tools, agents, targets and technologies that have the potential to substantially advance spinal cord injury research and open new areas of inquiry.

Multiple Principal Investigators (multiple PI/Co-PI) awards are an opportunity for multidisciplinary efforts and collaboration through a team of scientists under a single grant award.

All multiple PI/Co-PI applications are required to include a **Leadership Plan**. The purpose of the Leadership Plan is to facilitate and enhance scientific productivity and establish a decision-

making process. The Plan must describe a rationale for choosing the multiple PI/Co-PI approach. The governance and organizational structure of the leadership team and the research project should be described, including communication plans, process for making decisions on scientific direction, and procedures for resolving conflicts. The roles and administrative, technical, and scientific responsibilities for the project or program should be delineated for the PI/Co-PIs, including responsibilities for human subject studies or studies with vertebrate animals as appropriate.

Applications for Exploratory Research Grant awards should describe projects that are exploratory and novel and are clearly distinct from projects typically supported through more traditional mechanisms. These studies should break new ground or extend previous discoveries toward new directions or applications. Appropriate justification for the proposed work can be provided through literature citations, data from other sources, or, when available, from investigator-generated data.

Two-year non-renewable awards are offered to applicants at a maximum funding level of up to \$100,000 per year including direct and indirect costs, (10% maximum for the latter). All awards are made through one-year contracts.

Given the competitive nature of these grants, applicants must submit **one** well-developed and responsive application as opposed to multiple applications.

Specific information for Exploratory Research Grants:

- The NJCSCR will support the salary of a Principal Investigator and/or Co-Investigator up to \$10,000 maximum per year (base plus fringe).
- The NJCSCR will allow a maximum of 15% fringe on all personnel, excluding the Principal Investigator and/or Co-Investigator per year (see first bullet).
- The NJCSCR will allow the purchase of equipment with a detailed justification and quote.
- The NJCSCR will allow maximum of \$1,000 for domestic travel to 1 (one) conference or 1 (one) scientific meeting per year, **International Travel Is Not Allowed.**  
\*Grantees are required to seek prior approval and provide any documentation related to travel and must adhere to the Travel Policy (pg. 14)
- We ask all applicants to attach a full scientific narrative on the Attachments page as the text boxes do not accept any charts, graphs, scientific symbols, and/or pictures. This scientific narrative should be no more than 10 pages to include references, figures and appendices, font size should be no smaller than Times New Roman 11pt.
- **Applicants who have current Commission funding of any kind are eligible to apply for this opportunity if the funded project will be completed by November 30, 2026.**
- All non-funded applicants from any given grant cycle are eligible for resubmission. However, the applicant must revise the non-funded application based on reviewer feedback (Written Response to Reviewer Critiques page). All reapplications will be reviewed as new competing proposals.
- Applications that are triaged may only be resubmitted once, at the next application cycle and only if the applicant has substantively responded to the major criticisms of the review panel (Written Response to Reviewer Critiques page). All reapplications will be reviewed as new competing proposals.

The administration of a grant not only requires adherence to the program objectives for which the grant was made but also requires that aims and objectives be accomplished in a businesslike

manner. This is particularly important when the costs to applicants and the State are rising and NJCSCR funds are limited. For these reasons, applicants must establish sound and effective business management systems to ensure proper stewardship of funds and activities. Applicants are expected to exercise the same degree of prudence in the expenditure of NJCSCR funds as they use in expending their own funds.

Each funding award within the two-year period will be contingent upon the availability of funds. Second year support for all Exploratory Research Grants is contingent upon the submission and successful review of a Progress Report. The Progress Report must be favorably reviewed by an independent scientific merit review panel and recommended to the NJCSCR for continued funding. Awards will begin on or about December 1, 2026. A Final Narrative Report is required and must be submitted to the office within 60 days of termination of an Exploratory Research Grant. An Evaluation Form must be submitted to the NJCSCR office each year for two years following termination of an Exploratory Research grant. All forms are available at [www.state.nj.us/health/spinalcord](http://www.state.nj.us/health/spinalcord).

### **NEW GRANT Techniques Training Travel Grant:**

The objective of this award is to fund a short training opportunity for young investigators and/or trainees entering the field of Spinal Cord Research who desire in-depth and hands-on training from experts in spinal cord injury research.

The goal of this opportunity to visit another group's research lab or institution to learn a specific technique and/or training. This mentorship is meant to have a positive impact in research and to establish new connections with other scientists and to set a base for other positive collaborations for future endeavors.

The grantee is encouraged to travel to another lab to learn a new technique and/or training; grantees are encouraged to visit either in or out-of-state laboratories within the domestic US, details must be provided (travel by whom, to which lab and a supporting letter from visiting lab, the purpose of the visit, and what would be gained in the process).

The funds should help to acquire new lab related research skills for the applicant's future research goals, applicants should propose a training plan that includes:

- A detailed timeline of the training to include the syllabus (must be provided).
- Who will be performing the training? (maximum of 2 applicants per host lab)
- Is there a research plan associated with the proposed technique? Is this how the technique was chosen?

These awards are meant to facilitate in-person training through a visit to the host's laboratory. Applicants may propose a budget up to \$50,000.

This budget may include a maximum of funds for the following:

Stipend of \$30,000.

Travel funds of \$5,000.

Sub-grant for the host institution of \$10,000.

Supplies of \$5,000.

This program will reimburse expenses for one future trip to learn a new technique from a research institution. It is expected that the technique is not available at the applicant's current

lab/institution. The hosting institution must be a reputable institution of higher learning and/or training institution.

Allowable costs include the following:

- The training opportunity should be related to the New Jersey Commission on Spinal Cord Research Funding Priorities.
- The training opportunity must occur within 12 months of the application submission deadline.
- While the duration of the training is flexible, our objective is to fund short training opportunities of an approximate duration of up to 3 months.
- The applicant's institution must commit to cover the remainder of the training opportunity costs which are additional to the value of the award.
- The awarded recipient may use up to \$5,000 of the grant to cover costs at the host's lab for supplies and/or material expenses associated with the training.

The grantee's institution is responsible for making all necessary travel arrangements and payments. Reimbursements will be made to those institutions who provide a letter from the host lab and expense receipts. All applicants to this grant program must first apply to the NJCSCR for consideration of funding to attend a training program. Awardees are expected to attend and present to the Commission members a final report to include future research being proposed.

Only proposals for future travel plans may be considered for this award. An applicant may not apply requesting reimbursement for travel that has taken place prior to the awarded grant.

These awards do not support the purchase of research equipment, instrumentation, or compensation for research participants. Awards are intended to support the direct costs of training with the proposed sponsor(s).

No indirect or overhead charges can be applied to grant. This grant is meant to cover travel-related expenses, (coach) meals, ground transportation, etc. This grant covers expenses for the exclusive use of the recipient only and cannot be transferred to another applicant.

- No lodging expenses will be funded under this contract for in- and out-of-state travel within 50 miles of the border of the state where the Provider Agency is located.
- Mileage reimbursement rates, meals, and incidental expenses (M&IE) may not exceed current Federal Reimbursement rates. For information regarding these rates, please visit <http://www.gsa.gov>.
- Not eligible: Conference attendance and registration, credit courses, and clinical training unrelated to Spinal Cord Research.
- International travel is not allowed, and the travel support will not be increased.

Unaffiliated individuals will not be funded. Individuals of any nationality or citizenship status may apply provided they are employed by or affiliated with a qualified New Jersey State organization/institution. This should cover expenses for the exclusive use of the recipient only and cannot be transferred to another applicant.

Awards will begin on or about December 1, 2026. Each funding award within the one-year period will be contingent upon the availability of funds. A Final Narrative Summary must be presented to the full Commission to include plans to apply for research funding after the technique training.

## **NEW AND ENHANCED Opportunity for Additional funds for Training**

The NJCSCR is providing an opportunity for applicants who may be interested in adding an additional \$5,000 to their proposal submitted during the current 2027 grant cycle. This opportunity includes all areas of research that hold promise of developing effective interventions and cures for paralysis and other consequences of spinal cord injury and disease that highlight the focus of current **NJCSCR Funding Priorities** (pg. 2)

These funds may be used for the following:

1. Travel to another lab to learn a new technique.
  - If plans are to visit either in or out-of-state laboratories, details must be provided (travel by whom, to which lab and a supporting letter from visiting lab, the purpose of the visit, and what would be gained in the process), **International Travel Is Not Allowed**.
  - The grantee must attach a letter from the laboratory at the time of submission to qualify for the additional funds. Grantee's institution is responsible for making all necessary travel arrangements and payments. Reimbursements will be made to those institutions who provide a letter from host lab and expense receipts.
2. Attendance to a workshop or seminar related to Spinal Cord Research.

Grantees are required to seek prior approval and provide any documentation related to the workshop or seminar. Successful grantees (applicant's institution) are responsible to find a workshop or seminar, for making all necessary travel and course participation arrangements and payments. Reimbursements will be made to those institutions that provide proof of attendance and expense receipts.

\*Only submissions for future travel plans may be considered for this award. An applicant may not apply requesting reimbursement for travel that has taken place prior to the awarded grant. These funds are meant to cover travel-related expenses, (coach) meals, ground transportation, etc. This should cover expenses for the exclusive use of the recipient only and cannot be transferred to another applicant.

### **All Grantees must adhere to the following Travel policy:**

- All travel requests must seek NJCSCR office approval PRIOR to the date of attendance at a conference, workshop and/or laboratory
- Training and/or Seminars: This category includes all regularly scheduled, training functions, conducted at a hotel, motel, convention center, residential facility, or at any educational institution or facility. Training to maintain a certification is not authorized.
- Your reasonable expenses for round trip travel – coach, will be reimbursed and the travel support will not be increased.
- No lodging expenses will be funded under this contract for in- and out-of-state travel within 50 miles of the border of the state where the Provider Agency is located.
- International travel is not allowed, to include hotel, meals, conference attendance and travel related expenses.
- Mileage reimbursement rates, meals, and incidental expenses (M&IE) may not exceed current Federal Reimbursement rates. For information regarding these rates, please visit <http://www.gsa.gov> .

- Not eligible: Dues for membership and registration fees in scientific societies or professional meetings, and/or credit courses.

## **PROPOSAL SUBMISSION**

For all grant categories, applicants must complete an online application. **Online applications must be submitted via the SAGE system no later than 5:00PM, MAY 1, 2026.** No grant applications will be accepted past this stated deadline. No exceptions will be made.

All questions related to your SAGE application (uploads, attachments, etc.) must be directed to the SAGE Help Desk Monday through Friday, 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM; (609) 376-8508 or [njdoh.grants@doh.nj.gov](mailto:njdoh.grants@doh.nj.gov).

Please attach any of the applicable documents to the Attachments page:

1. Policy on Protecting Human Subjects [HHS Office for Human Research Protections](#) or IRB
2. Policy/Animal Care and Use policy (Certification is required at time of Award)
3. Salary Policy
4. Travel Policy
5. Telephone Policy
6. Computer Security Policy
7. Procurement Standards Policy (Refer to the Terms and Conditions Manual, Subpart O – Procurement, pg. 30)
8. Subgrant (Refer to the Terms and Conditions Manual, Subpart P – Subgrants, pg. 37)
9. Any additional documents that are not listed can be uploaded in the Attachments page documents.

### **Policy on Post-Submission Materials**

Post-submission materials are those submitted after submission of the grant application, but prior to Independent Scientific Merit Peer Review. They are not intended to correct oversights or errors discovered after submission of the application but rather allow applicants the opportunity to respond to unforeseen events.

### **Allowable Post-Submission Materials**

- List of Publications
- Citations of Issued Patents
- Revised Budget Pages
- New Funding
- Adjustments Resulting from Natural Disasters
- Biographical Sketches
- Letters of Support or Collaboration
- News of Professional Promotion or Positive Tenure Decision
- News of the Addition or Removal of any Faculty Member Involved in a Training Program
- News of a Change in Mentor or other Senior/Key Personnel
- News of an Article Accepted for Publication
- Other Information Deemed Appropriate and Necessary by the Commission Office

### **Deadline for Receipt of Post-Submission Materials**

**Post-submission materials must be received by the Commission Office no later than 30 calendar days after the grant application submission deadline. Post-submission materials**

**will not be accepted after this time.** Contact the Commission's Office directly for guidance related to deadlines and submission instruction. The Commission's Office is responsible for uploading acceptable post-submission materials into the grant application.

### **Certification and Statement Regarding Institutional Responsibilities**

Upon acceptance of a grant award, the applicant's organization assumes legal and financial responsibility for awarded funds and the conduct of supported activities. It is the responsibility of the applicant's institution and Principal Investigator to assure the accuracy and validity of all fiscal, scientific, and administrative information pertaining to the awarded grant. Failure to comply with these terms may result in grant termination.

Successful applicants must abide by all programmatic and fiscal requirements of NJDOH, including:

1. Terms and Conditions for the Administration of Grants.
2. General and specific grant compliance requirements issued by the granting agency; and
3. Applicable Federal Cost Principles relating to the applicant.
4. **Immediate notification** if the grant award cannot be accepted, is canceled, or encounters any difficulties that would prevent its completion prior to the expenditure of funds. Failure to fully comply in this area may result in a charge back to the institution.
5. Publications, patents, clinical applications and/trials resulting from research supported by the Commission shall contain acknowledgment of funding source such as: "research funding provided by the New Jersey Commission on Spinal Cord Research (grant #xxxxx"). Grantees must provide 3 reprints of Commission -supported research materials to the Commission Program Management Officer.

Grant awards are not intended to cover the total cost of research described in the grant proposal. The applicant organization is expected to take responsibility for adequate facilities and basic administrative services, and a salary for the Principal Investigator. The applicant organization must carefully review the Research Program Guidelines prior to submitting budget requests.

The NJCSCR does not support:

- Building construction, maintenance, or major alterations.
- Secretarial and telephone services.
- Library services including the purchasing and binding of books and periodicals.
- Dues for membership and registration fees in scientific societies or professional meetings.
- Recruiting and relocation expenses.
- Foreign Travel.
- Furniture for laboratories, office equipment & supplies, unless otherwise noted within the specific grant program.
- Purchasing vehicles
- Food or refreshments
- Interest on loans for the acquisition and/or modernization of an existing building
- Tuition reimbursement for students

## REVIEW PROCESS

All research proposals will be reviewed for scientific merit, technical merit, research significance, and relevance to the NJCSCR priorities by an independent scientific merit review panel. The independent scientific merit review panel will forward its recommendations to the NJCSCR for final review and action. Scientists supported by the NJCSCR are expected to fully report the results of their research to the NJCSCR, and may be asked to report on their results, or work in progress, at a symposium organized by the NJCSCR. Grantees also are expected to acknowledge the support of the New Jersey Commission on Spinal Cord Research in all presentations and publications.

All grant applications must be submitted following the guidelines below. Grant applications that do not adhere to these guidelines will be returned to the applicant without further consideration. Grant applications sent by mail, fax or e-mail will NOT be accepted.

In our effort to reduce paper and speed the process by which grants are awarded, the NJCSCR utilizes an electronic grants submission and review process. All interested grant applicants must submit their applications online through the State of New Jersey System for Administering Grants Electronically (SAGE) hosting service.

Online applications for the NJCSCR will be made available for the preparation and submission of all grant applications. Forms for the various grant programs are available to applicants after they have started an online application. To start an application for a particular grant category, you will need to login as a new user at <https://dohsage.intelligrants.com/IGXLogin> .

NJCSCR Research Program Guidelines governing grants, grant deadlines, progress reports, narrative reports, final narrative reports, and other additional information on the grant program can be viewed and downloaded from the NJCSCR web site at: [www.state.nj.us/health/spinalcord](http://www.state.nj.us/health/spinalcord)

## GRANT REVIEW PROCESS

For all grant categories, the determination of grant awards will be made through a three-step review process:

**1. Administrative Review** (NJCSCR office):

Upon receipt, all grant applications will be reviewed by the NJCSCR office for compliance with all applicable New Jersey State statutes and regulations, and to ensure completeness, and accuracy. In the event a grant application needs correction due to a budgetary issue, the applicant will be contacted to provide a revised budget.

**2. Independent Relevance Review** (Appointed Panel):

Independent relevance review will be conducted by a three-person panel appointed by the NJCSCR; members will have varied expertise. The panel will determine the relevance of all applications to the NJCSCR Research Guidelines and assign scientific reviewers for each proposal.

The decision to forward an application for independent scientific merit review is based only on relevance to the NJCSCR mission, priorities, and research guidelines, and does not guarantee that an award will be made.

**3. Scientific Merit Review** (Independent Scientific Merit Review Panel):

Members of the independent scientific merit review panel will evaluate all grant applications, applying the criteria described below. This panel will assign scores to each application and make funding recommendations to the NJCSCR. If it is determined that *ad hoc* expertise is needed, additional scientific referees may be used.

The Independent Scientific Merit Review Panel will forward its recommendations to the NJCSCR for final review and action.

All grants triaged by either the Relevancy Review Panel and/or the Independent Scientific Merit Review Panel will not be submitted to the NJCSCR and will not be funded.

The authority to authorize or not authorize grants is fully vested in the NJCSCR according to New Jersey Statute N.J.S.A. 52:9E-1-10.

## CRITERIA FOR INDEPENDENT SCIENTIFIC REVIEW

Grant applications will be judged on scientific and technical merit, relevance to the NJCSCR's mission and priorities, clinical relevance, and interdisciplinary collaborations.

The independent scientific reviewers will perform two levels of review:

1. Each panel member will peer review his/her assigned proposals for scientific and technical merit and significance and determine an initial score for each proposal.
2. The panel will then convene for group discussion, final scoring, and ranking of all proposals; the panel will also recommend a cut-off point for funding.

The following topics will be addressed during the review process:

- Is the research proposal of significance to the field of spinal cord injury research?
- Is the proposed research innovative, including novel concepts, approaches, and/or methods?
- Is the research proposal relevant to NJCSCR priorities?
- Is the research proposal original in theory and application?
- Does prior research and theory provide a rational basis for the proposed research?
- Is the proposed project adequate in terms of experimental design and analyses, anticipation of potential problems, and consideration of alternative approaches?
- Does the researcher have access to appropriate facilities, equipment, expertise, and research environment either in-house and/or with collaborators or consultants?
- Does the design include interdisciplinary collaborations, and if so, is the proposed combination of disciplines both novel and likely to generate meaningful results?
- Are the qualifications, productivity, and time commitments of principal investigator and key staff commensurate with the proposed project?
- If a human model is proposed, is the availability of subjects adequate and system of education and protection of subjects appropriate?
- Is there evidence of compliance with National Institutes of Health regulations for the protection of animal welfare?
- Is the justification for procedures assessing the effects of interventions on recovery recognized, standardized, and generally accepted?
- Is the budget reasonable and justified for the project proposed? Is there evidence of institutional commitment and/or cost sharing in the proposal?
- Are there other factors both pro and con that may affect the ability of the applicant to successfully complete the research goals?
- Will the project make an original and important contribution to the field of spinal cord research and more specifically, to the mission of the NJCSCR?

- Special criteria have been developed to facilitate the review of Exploratory Research grants in light of their speculative nature.

## **RESULTS NOTIFICATION**

All applicants including Principal Investigators and organizations/institutions will be formally notified of the outcome of his/her application at the conclusion of the selection process anticipated to be no later than November 27, 2026, unless otherwise noted within the grant program description. At that time, formal notification will be made to the institutions of successful applicants and contracts will be initiated shortly thereafter.

Blinded reviews will be provided to both funded and non-funded applicants, and to the mentors of post-doctoral and graduate student fellows; no further information shall be provided.

Non-funded applicants also will be notified. There is no appeal process. All non-funded applicants in any given grant cycle who are not funded are eligible to revise their applications based on reviewer feedback and reapply, one time only, through the reapplication process. All scored-but-not-funded applications may be resubmitted at the next application cycle.

Applications that are triaged may only be resubmitted once, at the next application cycle and only if the applicant has substantively responded to the major criticisms of the review panel. All reapplications will be reviewed as new competing proposals.

## **ANTICIPATED RESULTS**

The goal of the NJCSCR is to assume a catalytic role in the worldwide movement to develop effective interventions and cures for paralysis and other consequences of spinal cord injury and disease.

Through the judicious use of funds raised through violations under Title 39 of the Revised Statute, or any other motor vehicle, or traffic violation in the State of New Jersey, the NJCSCR will encourage and support meritorious scientific research in the State of New Jersey in fulfillment of that goal.

This will benefit the State of New Jersey in savings on medical and support costs, enhance the development of the State's public and private biomedical sector, establish leadership in the field of spinal cord repair, and most importantly, help develop effective interventions for paralysis and other consequences of spinal cord injury and disease.