



SCI ARTIST- INNOVATOR FUND

2023 GUIDELINES

Updated May 24, 2023

The SCI Artist-Innovator Fund will offer ten grants of up to \$8,500, for a total of \$85,000, to individual artist-entrepreneurs with spinal cord injuries who are inspired to innovate by the possibilities and benefits that are offered through the experience of pursuing a creative practice and living with spinal cord injury.

Center for Cultural Innovation (CCI) recognizes that having the unique perspective of living with challenging circumstances and applying a creative practice can yield meaningful solutions not only for the innovator but also for the benefit of society. This opportunity to recognize the powerful combination of spinal cord injury (SCI) populations, craftsmanship and creative practice, and positive social impact is made possible by the [Craig H. Neilsen Foundation](#), whose founder lived with SCI and whose legacy is as an entrepreneur.

This is the third round of the SCI Artist-Innovator Fund, which was first offered in 2019 and has since awarded \$150,000 to 20 grantees with SCI. The 2023 funding round has increased the total award amount to \$8,500 from \$7,500. In addition, CCI has partnered with the [Minneapolis College of Art & Design's Entrepreneurial Studies](#) program to provide SCI Artist-Innovator Fund grantees with opportunities to test their ideas, build their networks, and seek guidance from practitioners and peers. Grantees may participate in individual and group online coaching sessions with Minneapolis College of Art & Design (MCAD) faculty to address specific business needs and questions around their developing project. Grantees may also present their projects and solicit feedback/ideas from MCAD faculty and students from Entrepreneurial Studies (and potentially other programs). Participation is optional.

BACKGROUND

The SCI community is abundant with out-of-the-box thinkers, hackers, problem solvers, and individuals creatively tackling challenges. CCI's SCI Artist-Innovator Fund offers artists, innovators, inventors, makers, and entrepreneurs with SCI the kind of financial capital that can

launch or propel artist-driven social enterprises. This is the third round of the SCI Artist-Innovator Fund.

Recent statistics show that self-employment rates in the United States are higher among disabled people than non-disabled people (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). However, there is limited funding dedicated to developing the entrepreneurial capabilities of disabled innovators that would provide pathways for financial independence. In addition, many of these available programs assume that people with disabilities are driven to become entrepreneurs primarily due to barriers in other sections of the workforce. CCI challenges these assumptions and recognizes that the SCI experience brings a unique perspective to innovation, which can be a force for good when driven by artists and all those with creative practices and cultural self-expression.

CCI is one of the country's few re-grantors for individual artists of all types—studio practitioners, creative social entrepreneurs, cultural producers, and community-based artists, and we know firsthand the multiplier effects that funding and validation can have on the grantee, their social-impact cause, and the communities they represent. We encourage all those who fit the eligibility criteria to apply. This is an opportunity to introduce yourself to CCI, our funders, and panelists while helping CCI make a case for why more funding needs to flow to artists with disabilities in opportunity-based ways.

We acknowledge that it takes time and energy to apply to these opportunities. For those serious about pursuing their innovation, we have structured the grant proposal requirements to help you articulate your value proposition, business plan, and financials. For those who have submitted other proposals, feel free to copy and paste existing copy (where relevant); for those in the early stages of their innovation, use the materials prepared for this submission to apply for more opportunities!

ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for consideration, applicants must:

- be an individual living with spinal cord injury (*We use criteria set by the Craig H. Nielsen Foundation, which considers those with SCI to be individuals with neurological and functional impairment due to traumatic SCI, degenerative disease primary to the spinal cord [transverse myelitis], or damage to the spinal cord due to tumors and surgery. Individuals with spinal dysfunction, paralysis, or pain syndromes caused by other disorders are not eligible [e.g., multiple sclerosis, ALS, Chiari malformation and other developmental disorders, primary orthopedic disorders, and peripheral nerve injury.]);*
- live and work in the United States or its territories;
- self-define as an artist, maker, creative, or culture bearer, *or* whose project demonstrates deep and sustained refining that reflects a craft, cultural, or artistic practice; and
- SCI applicants may be part of a team, but only if the applicant is the primary owner and lead.

Eligible projects:

- are a product, service, or innovation inspired by your SCI experience;
- can be in the “idea phase” ready to come to life, or a work-in-progress needing funding to move forward;
- have the potential to develop into self-sustaining revenue-generating activities;
- enable the applicant to deepen an artistic, creative, artisanal, or cultural practice; and
- have a positive social impact upon a specified place-based and/or identity-based community or population.

Entrepreneurs with a demonstrated need for capital, compelling projects backed by feasible business plans, and clear intentions for popularizing their innovation will be given priority. The program also prioritizes projects that hold promise for improving the applicant’s financial sustainability; artistic, creative, or cultural practice; and social or end-user impacts. As a secondary-level consideration, we will also consider how projects may hold promise for shifting popular perception of those with disabilities positively.

Who can apply:

- Artists (a person who practices any of the various creative arts such as visual artists, musicians, dancers, media artists, sculptors, filmmakers, etc.);
- Cultural practitioners (one who is continuing to keep a cultural identity and/or tradition alive);
- Makers (creators of new devices or reimagining existing ones, DIYers, self-made life hackers in fields ranging from food to crafts to technology); or
- Someone who does not self-define as an artist but whose innovation reflects sustained refining much like a craft or artistic practice would and whose practices are a form of creative self-expression.

Funds are not eligible for:

- Organizations or nonprofits.
- Enterprise development or businesses without a social impact purpose.
- Anyone living and working outside the United States and its territories.

REVIEW PROCESS & EVALUATION CRITERIA

Panelists with various backgrounds and expertise will review applications. They will reflect diverse cultural, gender, and experiential backgrounds, such as an artist with SCI; creative, social, and business entrepreneur; investor; or someone with community development expertise. The panel will assess proposals by asking:

- Is the project innovative?
- Does the project reflect or further the applicant’s artistic, creative, craft, or cultural practice?
- Does the project have a feasible business plan?
- Does the project have the potential to develop into self-sustaining revenue?
- Will the project have a positive social impact?

TIMELINE

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| Application Opens | April 4, 2023 at 9 a.m. PT |
| Application Webinar | April 12, 2023 at 12 p.m. PT <i>A recording of the webinar will be made available on CCI's website</i> |
| Application Deadline | Deadline Extended! June 6, 2023 June 13, 2023 at 12 p.m. PT (Noon) |
| Funding Notifications | August 1, 2023 by 5 p.m. PT |
| Grant Period of Support | August 1, 2023 - July 30, 2024 |
| Grantee Virtual Gathering | Early September 2023 |

APPLICATION

The online application collects contact information, narrative responses, a project budget ([sample template provided here](#)), contracting and award processing information, optional demographic survey responses, and the following attachments:

- Short Video (required and limited to 90 seconds, see [Video Tips](#) for helpful hints)
- Business Plan Matrix (required - [use the provided template](#) - and limit to 1 page)
- Letters of Support (optional, no more than 2)
- Supplemental Materials (optional, maximum of 4 pages total)

Through CCI's partnership with the Minneapolis College of Art & Design's [Entrepreneurial Studies](#) program, 2023 SCI Artist-Innovator Fund grantees will have the opportunity to test their ideas, build their networks, and seek guidance from practitioners and peers through one-on-one and group coaching sessions, and student and faculty presentations. To help CCI and MCAD to coordinate the post-award engagement activities, applicants may complete an optional intake survey. This section will be concealed from panelists and, therefore, will not affect the application's review.

Please review the [Application Preview](#) for complete instructions about each application section, including the attachments.

HOW TO APPLY

Applicants who meet the program eligibility must submit an online application by **Tuesday, June 13, 2023, by 12:00 p.m. PT**. We will not make any exceptions. In addition, incomplete applications and those with missing or inaccessible information will be ineligible for funding consideration.

The SCI Artist-Innovator Fund online application is available at:
www.centerforculturalinnovation.submittable.com

Applications will be accepted online **ONLY** through CCI's Submittable platform, and applicants **MUST** create an account in Submittable before they are able to access the grant application.

If you require an alternative format for the application process, please contact us at grants@cciarts.org.

If you need technical assistance (e.g., password or upload issues), request support at: <https://www.submittable.com/help/submitter/>. Submittable's business hours are 9 am – 5 pm MT. They aim to respond within 24 business hours.

AWARDS

CCI will award ten grants of up to \$8,500 to individual artist-entrepreneurs with spinal cord injuries that meet eligibility criteria for \$85,000 awarded nationally.

NOTE: This funding may be taxable. Grantees are advised to consult with an accountant or tax expert. We understand that fund disbursement may impact disability-related community support, and CCI is willing to work with grantees individually to determine the best options. Unless otherwise agreed upon, CCI will distribute awards as follows: 90% upon execution of the grant agreement and the remaining 10% upon satisfactory submission of final deliverables.

GRANTEE REQUIREMENTS

SCI Artist-Innovator Fund grantees are required to attend a virtual gathering in early September 2023. The gathering will be an opportunity to meet other grantees, share information about each other's projects, and build a national network of fellow artist-innovators with SCI. In addition, upon completion of the support period, grantees will prepare and submit a final report detailing the use and impact of the funds. Reports will be due July 30, 2024, through the Submittable platform. Reporting components will include:

- Narrative report detailing the use of funding, your next step at the conclusion of this grant, and any unexpected outcomes or challenges.
- Final financial accounting of how you used the funds.
- High-resolution photographs in JPEG form and links to any online videos or press documenting the impact of your project as a result of CCI's SCI Artist-Innovator support.

SUPPORT

CCI staff are here to help! For questions related to the grant guidelines or application, email us at grants@cciarts.org or give us a call at 415.288.0530 during our office hours on Wednesdays and Fridays from 10 am to 2 pm. (Office hour appointments are not required but encouraged! Find a time slot [here](#).)

If you need technical assistance (e.g., password or upload issues), request support at: <https://www.submittable.com/help/submitter/>. Submittable’s business hours are 9 am – 5 pm MT. They aim to respond within 24 business hours.

Additionally, applicants can refer to the program’s [Frequently Asked Questions](#) on our [website](#). For information about past grantees, see the [SCI Artist-Innovator Fund 2021 Press Release](#). Examples of competitive applicants are available [here](#).

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The SCI Artist-Innovator Fund is generously supported by:



The 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.

CCI also wishes to thank program partner, the Minneapolis College of Art & Design.

