

Biomarker Request for Applications

The Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation and Spinal Research have partnered to fund biomarker research for traumatic spinal cord injury in support of the mission of both organizations.

Request for Application (RFA) Overview

Biomarkers are increasingly important tools for advancing both preclinical and clinical spinal cord injury (SCI) research. By providing objective measures of injury biology, disease processes, recovery, and response to intervention, biomarkers can complement traditional behavioral, neurological, and functional outcomes. In preclinical research, they can strengthen injury characterization, mechanistic studies, and assessment of target engagement and therapeutic response. In clinical research, biomarkers can improve characterization of injury heterogeneity, prognosis and patient stratification, and assessment of biological and therapeutic responses. Development and validation of robust biomarkers therefore have the potential to increase the rigor, precision, and informativeness of SCI research and accelerate the development of effective therapies. Currently, there are no FDA qualified biomarkers for SCI.

Our goal is to promote the discovery, development, qualification and validation of translational biomarkers at both preclinical and clinical stages of development.

Deadlines

- RFA open: October 13, 2026
- Informational Webinar: October 21, 2026 at 11:00 am ET
- Letters of intent due: December 11, 2026, 5:00 pm EST
- Full grant application invitations: February/March, 2027 (deadline forthcoming)
- Full grant applications due: May/June 2027 (deadline forthcoming)
- Anticipated award announcement: Q4 2027
- Anticipated funding: Q4 2027



Please note: Applicants are encouraged to apply early in the event of issues with the submission process. Program staff will be unable to respond to queries in the two days prior to an application deadline; all queries must be sent prior to that time. Please do not request updates from program staff prior to timelines delineated above.

Informational Webinar

An informational webinar will be held on October 21, 2026 at 11:00 ET to clarify and explain the goals of this RFA and answer applicant questions. The webinar will be available to view on-demand after the live air date. Please register [here](#).

Biomarker RFA Description

A biomarker is defined as a characteristic that is measured as an indicator of a normal biological processes, pathogenic processes, or biological responses to an exposure or intervention, including therapeutic interventions. There are no FDA qualified biomarkers in SCI, nor any widely accepted/utilized biomarkers.

This RFA supports development and/or validation of biomarkers of any class or type. Classes of biomarkers may include but are not limited to histologic, molecular, biochemical, radiographic, physiologic and digital. Types of biomarkers relevant to SCI include prognostic, predictive, pharmacodynamic/surrogate endpoint and safety. Biomarkers may be relevant for interventions at all stages and severities of SCI, in both non-clinical and clinical studies, and in all body systems.

Potential areas of focus include biomarkers that:

- Address target engagement at preclinical and/or clinical development stages.
- Address pathways or mechanism of action.
- Are conserved across species (preclinical and clinical).
- Address any body system. Consider body systems that are important to people living with SCI but may be understudied (examples include respiratory, sensation, pain, and microbiome).

Biomarker RFA Description

Eligibility and Requirements

- The Primary Investigator (PI) must have a doctoral degree or equivalent terminal professional degree (e.g. MD, DVM) and must be beyond the postdoctoral level.
- Applications from junior faculty are encouraged.
- PIs from academic or private institutions or companies from any country may apply. Industry and academic partnerships are encouraged.
- A single PI must be identified who is responsible for the application, communications, and research conduct. Sub-investigators are allowed.
- PIs may only submit one application.
- Only one submission will be accepted from the same lab or company.
- Financial relationships of the PI with a corporate applicant must be disclosed.
- Industry and academic partnerships are encouraged.

Funding/Budget

- Duration: 1-2 years
- Amount: Up to \$250,000
- All budgets must be in USD
- Subcontracting to contract research organizations (CROs) is allowed and encouraged particularly where needed expertise is not otherwise available.

The total budget includes direct and indirect costs. Indirect costs are limited to 10% of the total budget.

Biomarker RFA Description

Data Sharing and Publication

- Open access publications are encouraged, and funds may be allocated within the budget for this purpose.
- Open data sharing of non-intellectual property is required and a plan for data sharing is part of the application process. If patent protection is being sought, investigators should explain what data may be shared at the time the grant is completed and how data will be shared after filing for patent protection to allow for both further research and the development of commercial products to advance.
- Any data repository may be used as long as FAIR (Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability, Reusability - Wilkerson et al., 2016, DOI: 10.1038/sdata.2016.18) share principals are observed. Investigators are strongly encouraged to set up data in a way that supports data sharing. The Open Data Commons for SCI (an option for data sharing) has general guidelines for preparing data for sharing, which can be applied to other data bases (<https://odc-sci.org/about/tutorials#prepare>).

Additional Requirements

- All applications must be in English with budgets in US dollars.
- Awards will be milestone based and subsequent funding will be contingent upon successful milestone completion. If awarded, communication regarding milestones will be frequent (no less than every six months) to enable problem solving (if needed) between the PI and funding agencies and their experts. Continued funding is based on successful achievement of milestones or identification of alternative strategies. However, the Reeve Foundation and Spinal Research will work with applicants and provide expert resources where possible to address challenges that may arise.
- Intellectual property will be held by the grantee/organization undertaking the research.

Biomarker Letter of Intent (LOI) Submission Process

This RFA will be a two-stage process with an initial LOI submissions and review, followed for an invitation only full grant application process.

All LOIs must be submitted through our online portal at: [Biomarker RFA online submission portal](#). We strongly encourage applicants to view the screens in the online portal system before beginning a LOI. All communications and correspondence will be sent to the identified PI.

All submissions undergo an administrative and scientific review by individuals under a confidentiality agreement. All submitted materials may be shared with our funding partners.

Applicants should ensure that submitted proposals fit the goals of the funding program, are clearly and logically written, with sufficient details to ensure that reviewers understand all critical aspects of the proposed project methods and plan. Given the length of the LOI (approximately two pages) it is not possible to provide the full scope of the methodological details but sufficient detail to assess strategy should be provided.

For questions about the letter of intent application process and the online system please contact Maria Fonseca, Grants Associate at FoundantHelp@Reeve.org. For questions about the scope of the application, please contact Linda Jones, PT, PhD, Senior Scientific Director, Reeve Research (Consultant) at LJones@Reeve.org. Please note questions must be sent no later than 48 hours prior to the submission deadline.

The following sections are included in the online LOI:

Administrative Section: Applicant details, high level information on project team, NIH biosketches for key personnel, and budget summary. See online for details.

Check Boxes to Indicate: Type and class of biomarkers, preclinical/clinical/both.

Biomarker Letter of Intent (LOI) Submission Process

Letter of Intent Summary

Please label each section in the LOI summary section (10,000-character limit) per headings below and address the requested information under each heading.

Biomarker and Intended Use

Clearly identify the biomarker(s) or biomarker signature/panel to be studied and its proposed context of use in spinal cord injury. Describe the biological process, injury characteristic, or therapeutic response the biomarker is intended to measure or reflect.

Significance and Unmet Need

Describe the scientific or clinical need the biomarker is intended to address, limitations of currently available measures, and the added value of the proposed biomarker. Explain how successful development or validation would advance SCI research or therapeutic development.

Supporting Evidence and Stage of Development

Summarize preliminary data and/or published findings supporting the biomarker and indicate its current stage of development. Identify the key evidence needed to advance the biomarker to its next stage. If relevant, indicate whether the biomarker may ultimately be a candidate for an FDA or other regulatory Biomarker Qualification Program. **Biomarkers at all stages of development are eligible.**

Proposed Study, Rigor and Feasibility

Briefly describe the proposed research, including the study population or experimental model, key methods, analyses and major milestones or decision points. Address reliability, reproducibility, sensitivity, specificity, and/or validity as appropriate to the biomarker and its stage of development. Describe access to the samples, datasets, models, populations, technologies, or other resources necessary to complete the proposed work.

Biomarker Letter of Intent (LOI) Submission Process

Relevance to SCI and Future Utility

Describe how the proposed work will improve the design, interpretation, or informativeness of preclinical and/or clinical SCI research and how successful completion will advance the biomarker toward broader research, therapeutic development, regulatory and/or clinical utility. Proposals may focus on preclinical research, clinical research, or both; cross-species applicability is not required unless relevant to the proposed biomarker and its intended use.

Review criteria for Letters of Intent include the following:

Biomarker Rational and Intended Use: Is the biomarker clearly defined with a compelling scientific rationale and a clear, relevant context of use in SCI?

Significance, Unmet Need, Potential Impact: Would successful development or validation of this biomarker address an important need and meaningfully improve SCI research or therapeutic development?

Supporting Evidence and Developmental Readiness: Is there sufficient evidence to justify the proposed next stage of biomarker development? Is the proposed work appropriate for the biomarker's current stage and does it address an important next step or evidence gap?

Proposed Study, Rigor and Feasibility: Is the proposed study scientifically sound, rigorous, and feasible? Are the methods, analyses, milestones, and relevant validation measures appropriate to the biomarker's intended use and stage of development? Are necessary resources available?

Relevance to SCI and Future Utility: Would successful completion improve preclinical and/or clinical SCI research and meaningfully advance the biomarker toward further development, validation, or use?

Team: Does the proposed team have the knowledge and ability to execute the proposed studies for biomarker development?