

Innovative Treatments in Disorders of Consciousness (ITDC) Grant Program

Spaulding Rehabilitation, in collaboration with the Curing Coma Campaign, announces the following funding opportunity to generate and initiate disruptive ideas in the treatment of patients with disorders of consciousness.

This award is intended to support projects that acquire pilot data and/or create infrastructure to enable prospective multicenter RCTs that evaluate biologically plausible treatments.

Apply here once LOI window has opened: <https://cimitcolab.secure-platform.com/a/solicitations/110/home>

Dates	LOI Open Date: May 18, 2026 Letter of Intent Submission Date: June 14, 2026 Letter of Intent Status Notification: August 9, 2026 Full Application Deadline: October 18, 2026 Full Application Notice of Awards: Early January
Details	Title: Innovative Treatments in Disorders of Consciousness (ITDC) Administrator: Spaulding Rehabilitation Subject Area: Disorders of Consciousness Applying for this opportunity is a two-step process. Applicants must first submit a Letter of Intent (LOI). Selected applicants will then be invited to submit a full proposal. Number of Applications Allowed Per Applicant: No limits, but applicants should ensure that each submission is sufficiently distinct.
Funds	Total Costs: Total expenses may not exceed \$200,000 per year, \$400,000 total (inclusive of max 20% indirect costs) NIH salary cap applies Maximum Project Period: 2 years Applications should describe anticipated next steps and plans for sustaining, scaling, or further developing the proposed work following the conclusion of the funding period. Anticipated Number of Awards: 2



Description **Background**

The prevalence of disorders of consciousness (DoC) in the United States (2018)¹ – including coma, vegetative state, and minimally conscious state – is estimated to be:

- up to 42,000 people in a coma and vegetative state
- up to 280,000 in a minimally conscious state.

The landscape of DoC management is fraught with challenges. Diagnosis is difficult, with no laboratory nor imaging tests to detect consciousness. Published estimates of misdiagnosis among people with DoC approximate 40% and there are no acute treatments to prevent the secondary effects of primary brain injury. The only one proven post-acute treatment proven to accelerate rate of recovery, amantadine hydrochloride, has narrow indications.

A 2020 Symposium from the Curing Coma Campaign² identified research targets within six areas: defining endotypes/phenotypes, biomarkers, proof-of-concept clinical trials, prognostication, long-term recovery, and establishing large data sets. Advances in our understanding of brain pathophysiology and biotechnology offer new avenues to improve diagnosis and treatment through research. The table below lists potential areas of exploration for applicants to consider. It is not an exhaustive list, and applicants are not limited to the below topics.

Knowledge Gap	Area of Exploration
Infrastructure for clinical trials and observational studies	Establish infrastructure such as a multicenter DoC network or Model System, focused on a specific research question
Understanding of neurobiological mechanisms underlying consciousness/DoC	Connectomics / Circuit mapping
Injury classification	Phenotyping / Endotyping
Long-term outcome	Trajectory modeling
Neuroimaging and blood-based biomarkers	Validation of diagnostic, prognostic, response biomarkers
Prognostication	Modeling, large datasets, machine learning
Treatments for neuroprotection & post-acute recovery	Innovative proof-of-concept to comparative effectiveness studies (including re-purposed drugs and novel devices.

¹Giacino et al. “Comprehensive systematic review update summary: disorders of consciousness” *Neurology*, 2018 Sept. 4; 91(10):461–470)

²Claassen J, Akbari Y, Alexander S, et al. Proceedings of the First Curing Coma Campaign NIH Symposium: Challenging the Future of Research for Coma and Disorders of Consciousness. *Neurocrit Care*. 2021;35(Suppl 1):4-23. doi:10.1007/s12028-021-01260-x

Eligibility

Domestic, non-profit organizations are eligible to receive this grant, including Higher Education Institutions, Nonprofits with 501(c)(3) IRS Status, and Nonprofits without 501(c)(3) IRS Status. Non-domestic (non-U.S.) Entities (Foreign Institutions) may participate in projects as members of consortia or as subcontractors only but **are not** eligible to apply as primary applicants.

Applications **must** include at least one team member at Mass General Brigham (MGB). Preference will be given to interprofessional, multi-institutional projects, and to teams that include at least one member from Spaulding Rehabilitation.

Projects should explicitly describe plans for engaging impacted constituency groups, with both 'patient partners' (inclusive of those with lived experience, family and caregivers, and organizations representative of the brain injury population) as well as professional partners such as clinicians, payers, administrators, and policy makers¹. Applicants should consider level of engagement, and opportunity to place those with lived personal experience in partnership and shared leadership roles with decision-making authority².

This award funds projects that create infrastructure to enable prospective multicenter RCTs (including adaptive platform trials) and/or evaluate biologically plausible treatments. Acquisition of pilot data for larger multicenter studies is a key aim of this initiative. Retrospective and meta-analyses **are not** eligible proposals.

Any individual(s) with the skills, knowledge, and resources necessary to carry out the proposed research as the Principal Investigator is invited to work with their organization to develop an application for support. Individuals from diverse backgrounds, including underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, individuals with disabilities, and women are especially encouraged to apply.

¹PCORI Engagement Rubric. PCORI (Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute) website. <http://www.pcori.org/sites/default/files/Engagement-Rubric.pdf>. Published February 4, 2014. Updated October 12, 2015. Accessed November 21, 2023.

²Carman KL, Dardess P, Maurer M, et al. Patient and family engagement: a framework for understanding the elements and developing interventions and policies. *Health Aff (Millwood)*. 2013;32(2):223-231. doi:10.1377/hlthaff.2012.1133

Application
Information

Round 1 Letter of Intent Instructions

Applicants are asked to submit a letter of intent through an online portal that includes the following information:

- Project Narrative (75-word limit) *
- Specific Aims (150-word limit) *
- Proposed Work (350-word limit) *
- Potential Impact of Proposed Work (200-word limit) *

Round 2 Full Application

Selected applicants will be asked to submit full proposals through an online portal that includes the following information:

- **Lay Abstract** (300-word limit)
 - **Project Personnel, Expertise, and Institutional Resources** (500-word limit)
Provide an overview of the team and explain how it has the requisite skills and access to the needed resources / environment to be successful. Include your plan for how to include people with lived experience.
 - **Project Narrative** [File Upload]
Maximum length of narrative is 6 pages, not including references, biosketch(es), and budget. Proposals must follow these guidelines for page restrictions:
Font size: Must be 11 points or larger. Smaller text in figures, graphs, diagrams and charts is acceptable, as long as it is legible when the page is viewed at 100%.
Type density: Must be no more than 15 characters per linear inch (including characters and spaces).
Line spacing: Must be no more than six lines per vertical inch.
Text color: No restriction.
Use paper size no larger than standard letter paper size (8 ½" x 11").
Provide at least one-half inch margins (½") – top, bottom, left, and right – for all pages. No applicant-supplied information can appear in the margins.
Narrative should include the following content:
Background & Significance
Innovation
Participant Details & Recruitment Strategy
Specific Aims
Research Design, Methods, Outcomes, & Statistical Analytic Plans
Timeline
Future Steps
 - **Budget Form**
You may use your own budget form but ensure it includes the following information: Salary support, fringe benefits, and effort; Personnel roles, and whether they are key personnel vs other personnel; Supplies, equipment, travel; Consultant, subcontracts; Indirect, direct, and total costs
 - **Budget Justification**
 - **Biosketches**
Biosketches in current NIH format should be limited to a maximum of 5 pages.
 - **References**
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Scoring
Criteria

Significance

Score _____

- Evaluate the importance of the proposed research in the context of current scientific challenges and opportunities, either for advancing knowledge within the field, or more broadly. Assess whether the application addresses an important gap in knowledge in the field, would solve a critical problem, or create a valuable conceptual or technical advance.
- Evaluate the rationale for undertaking the study, the rigor of the scientific background for the work (e.g., prior literature and/or preliminary data) and whether the scientific background justifies the proposed study.
- Evaluate the extent to which the proposed study is responsive to the mission and vision of ITDC.

Innovation

Score _____

- Evaluate the extent to which innovation influences the importance of undertaking the proposed research. Note that while technical or conceptual innovation can influence the importance of the proposed research, a project that is not applying novel concepts or approaches may be of critical importance for the field.
- Evaluate whether the proposed work applies novel concepts, methods or technologies or uses existing concepts, methods, technologies in novel ways, to enhance the overall impact of the project.

Approach

Score _____

- Evaluate the scientific quality of the proposed work. Evaluate the likelihood that compelling, reproducible findings will result (rigor) and assess whether the proposed studies can be done well and within the timeframes proposed (feasibility).
- Evaluate the likelihood that findings from the proposed study will lead to a subsequent externally funded research proposal.

Overall Impact

Score _____

Reviewers provide an overall impact score to reflect their assessment of the likelihood for the project to exert a sustained, powerful influence on the research field(s) involved, in consideration of the following review criteria and additional review criteria (as applicable for the project proposed). An application does not need to be strong in all categories to be judged likely to have major scientific impact.

Scoring Guide

Overall Impact	Score	Strengths/Weaknesses
High	1	Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
	2	Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
	3	Very strong with only minor weaknesses
Moderate	4	Strong but with numerous minor weaknesses
	5	Strong but with at least one moderate weakness
	6	Some strengths but also some moderate weaknesses
Low	7	Some strengths but with at least one major weakness
	8	A few strengths and a few major weaknesses
	9	Very few strengths and numerous major weaknesses

Grant
Contact

Shonali Gaudino
sgaudino@mgb.org
(617) 952-6509