

# AI PROJECT GRANT

## Introduction

- Wings for Life (WfL) is launching a new initiative that harnesses artificial intelligence and data science. Through a collaboration with [Microsoft Health/AI-for-Good Lab](#), we seek to advance progress and discovery in the spinal cord injury field. In a new grant format, WfL offers funding for project associated costs, and Microsoft offers access to specialized AI tools, including advanced language models and enhanced processing capabilities, alongside dedicated support from 'AI for Good Lab' data scientists.

## Objective

- Enhance Research Capabilities: Leverage AI and data science to uncover new insights into spinal cord injury mechanisms and treatment options.
- Accelerate Innovation: Propel rapid advancements in spinal cord injury research with targeted funding and technological support.
- Long-term Impact: Lay the groundwork for future innovations and potential cures for spinal cord injuries.

## Grant Structure

- **Funding WfL:** Provide up to 300,000 € annually for three years, totalling 900,000 €.
- **In-Kind Support Microsoft Health/AI for Good lab:** Offer AI tools and expertise in a 1:1 ratio (i.e. in the value of up to 900,000 € over 3 years), enhancing research capabilities to analyze complex data sets and accelerate discoveries. This will be provided through access to advanced Microsoft Azure Credits and collaboration with data science experts. For more information on Azure credits see here: <https://azure.microsoft.com/en-us/pricing/calculator/>
- **Eligibility:** Open to institutions conducting spinal cord injury research, encouraging (interdisciplinary) collaboration between multiple investigators within a single institution or multiple institutions. One Principal Investigator (PI) must be selected. WfL welcomes applications from all across the world. WfL does not offer this grant funding to any for-profit entities or consulting companies.

Submitting an LOI to the AI Project Grant does not preclude the PI from submitting an LOI for a Project Grant/Individual Grant.

Recipients of AI Project Grants may also hold another WfL Grant at the same time.

## Putative applicability

- The exclusive aim of WfL is to promote basic and clinical research related to spinal cord injury with the perspective to improve outcomes, see [here](#), including e.g.
  - Kinematic assessment of recovery (delineate finer but still robust aspects of motor recovery)

- Modelling: Identification (& new validation strategies) of FDA-approved drugs for repurposing testing in SCI
- ODC (improving reproducibility, predictive value of animal data)
- SCI-Imaging ((bio)markers of predicted recovery, in analogy to predicted cancer...)
- New Biomarkers
- Refined outcome prediction (e.g. recursive partitioning-based) to improve sensitivity to detect smaller effects reliably (reducing patients needed to detect smaller effects (Optimizing clinical trial design protocols)

### Application Process & General information

- **Language** of application is English.
- **Executive Summary:** Initial step of application -> guidelines see below
- **Selection for Full Grant Application:** Based on the [funding focus](#) of WfL, and the technical feasibility (determined by Microsoft Health/AI for Good lab), a portion of applications will be invited to submit a full grant application. -> guidelines see below
- **Review process:** All proposals will undergo a review process. Proposals will be distributed to at least two final reviewers. The reviewers will evaluate the proposal applying the criteria listed below and recommend or advise against its funding.
- **Funding decision:** The Scientific Advisory Board and the internal Board of Directors of WfL will then give final approval/disapproval. All research proposals will be evaluated by the following criteria:
  - WfL priorities
  - Scientific merit
  - Preliminary data
  - Feasibility of the project (good commitment of state-of-the-art research and theory)
  - Adequacy of environment: facilities/equipment and available expertise
  - Qualifications of the Principal Investigator and team
  - Adequacy of methods and
  - Any other factor that will potentially increase the success of the research program.

However, WfL is entirely free to accept or reject proposals at its full discretion.
- **Agreement:** Successful applicants will be offered a written research contract. Until such contract has been signed, WfL is not committed or obliged. If your project is selected, you'll collaborate with WfL on the agreement regarding project funding. Moreover, you will also directly collaborate with the team at Microsoft's AI for Good Lab to define the details of the support. You will also enter into a direct contract with Microsoft for this assistance.
- Even if a particular research project is designed to last for a period of more than two years, the research contract will be concluded for a two-year period, only. At the end of the second year, WfL will decide at its own discretion whether to renew the contract for the remaining period of one year. This decision will be based upon the evaluation of an interim report/grant extension

application 3 month before the end of the financial year. This document will contain additional information like for example the predicted budget allowance for the third year.

- **Reporting:** Grant recipients will be required to submit annual progress reports (narrative and financial) throughout the life of the grant. It is expected that the project will result in peer-reviewed publication(s).
- **Acknowledgement:** Any publications or presentations of work resulting from this grant is to acknowledge support from WfL and Microsoft. The principal investigator is required to send WfL PDF files of all publications which result from the funded research, during and after the term of the contract.
- **Compliance:** All experiments funded by WfL need to comply with the ARRIVE and/or MIASCI guidelines. This includes not only acknowledgement in the reference section but also applying the ARRIVE reporting principles in the manuscript and reports. The ARRIVE guidelines can be downloaded here: <https://arriveguidelines.org/arrive-guidelines>
- WfL requests funded scientists to share data according to the 'FAIR-Data Principles'. This includes but is not limited to the Open Data Commons for Spinal Cord Injury. Projects including molecular screening approaches are encouraged to share data in platforms such as the Open Data Commons for Spinal Cord Injury (<http://odc-sci.org>), Regenbase (<http://regenbase.org>) or others in order to augment scientific value of the respective funded WfL projects.
- **GDPR Compliance:** Learn more about the data security and compliance with the GDPR of Microsoft Azure services [here](#), and its independent validation [here](#). A complete protection against extraterritorial legislation (e.g. Patriot and Cloud act in the US) is impossible (at present). Potential risks should be balanced against potential benefits on a case-by-case basis. You may want to determine whether a Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA) is needed and, if so, what details to include [here](#).
- **Patent:** If a patent or any other intellectual property right results from the WFL funding, WFL is to be notified without undue delay.
- **No-cost extension:** Not spent money during the agreement period is not lapsed as a no-cost extension for the project can be granted.
- **WfL Scientific Meeting:** A Grant Holder's meeting will be organised to promote dialogue between the scientist and the SCI's community. These meetings will provide opportunities to establish collaborations that may be funded through supplemental grants by the WFL foundation. Awardees are required to allocate 1.500 €/y (3.000 €/y for grantees from overseas) from their total award budget toward this meeting.

For any further questions, please contact Dr. Verena May ([verena.may@wingsforlife.com](mailto:verena.may@wingsforlife.com)) and Dr. Beatrice Sandner ([beatrice.sandner@wingsforlife.com](mailto:beatrice.sandner@wingsforlife.com)).



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## Guidelines for Executive Summary

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- Beyond basic contact information about yourself and key personnel, Executive Summaries must include the following:
- Scientific Abstract: Provide a summary of the proposed research project. The abstract should clearly detail your project's objectives, AI components, an overview of the research team, and the resources involved, ensuring reviewers have a comprehensive understanding. Please limit the abstract to 6,000 characters, including spaces, and use text only—figures, images, and graphs are not allowed. References do not have to be included, but may be listed if space permits.
- Budget (to be included in abstract): Requested total budget amount in EUR for the entire grant. A detailed budget is not required during the LOI.
- To be submitted to WfL by November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2025, via [science.wingsforlife.com/en/](https://science.wingsforlife.com/en/)  
Late submissions and extension requests are not permitted. All applicants will be notified of their status by mid-December 2025.

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## Guidelines for Full Grant proposal - upon invitation only

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### **1. Information on the Principal Investigator:**

- Please note, that you initially have to **select between Project Grant, Individual Grant, or AI Project Grant**. According to this selection, respective fields will be requested.
- Is this a collaborative project? If Co-PIs are contributing to this project, additional fields for the information on the Co-PIs will appear.
- Contact Information on the applicant and the Host Institution
- Applicant is (choose one):
  - Established investigator in spinal cord research
  - Established investigator in another field
  - Young investigator
  - Postdoctoral fellow
- Research field (choose one):
  - Fundamental research
  - Preclinical research
  - Clinical research

### **2. Proposal Information:**

- a. Title of project
- b. Key words (200 characters including spaces)
- c. Proposal hypothesis (500 characters including spaces)
- d. Scientific abstract (3200 characters including spaces)
- e. Introduction describing the state of the art in the field and the applicant's own contribution (max. 20.000 characters with spaces)
- f. Specific goals of the project, with the tested hypothesis/aims (max. 10.000 characters with spaces)
- g. Detailed research plan that should also describe the institution (internal and external) equipment/facilities/available expertise that may provide a significant support (max. 20.000 characters with spaces)
- h. AI-component: Please specify the AI-component in your application. The following points may serve as guidance (max. 5.000 characters with spaces)
  - AI Integration:
    - a. Describe any specific AI models or technologies you intend to use.
    - b. How do you plan to integrate AI tools into your research on spinal cord injury?
  - AI Objectives:
    - a. What specific problems or challenges in spinal cord research do you aim to address using AI?
    - b. How will AI enhance or transform your research outcomes?

- Data Requirements:
  - a. What type of data will you require to effectively utilize AI tools?
  - b. Do you have access to these datasets? If applicable, upload the ethical approval for using the data set under section 8. Additional Information
- AI Methodology:
  - a. How will you ensure the reliability and validity of AI-generated results?
- AI Safety and AI Validation
  - a. How will you safeguard against AI hallucinations and spurious overfitting?
- Collaboration with Microsoft:
  - a. What dedicated support from Microsoft are you planning to use in the form of Azure Credits?
- Ethical Considerations:
  - a. What ethical considerations will you take into account when applying AI to spinal cord research?
  - b. How will you address issues related to data privacy and consent?
- i. References (please note: when copying references from a citation manager (EndNote, Citavit, ...), please deactivate any links and make sure that you only copy text into our online application site)

### **3. Tables and Illustrations:**

- a. Gantt chart; please upload as pdf or jpg format.
- b. Key figure summarizing the goal/hypothesis of the proposal for the wide public; as well as a legend; please upload as pdf or jpg format.
- c. Tables and Illustrations: Firstly, indicate the overall number, the respective amount of fields will then be created. Please upload as pdf or jpg format.

Before submitting, please check, if the resolution is high enough in the final pdf (see point 9.). For proper display, please make sure that individual tables or illustrations are not bigger than 1 page.

### **4. Curriculum vitae**

Upload the CV of the PI and all Co-PIs as pdf to section 8 (additional documents) including the following information (**max. 4 pages**):

- Name
- Current Position
- Education/Training (Institution/Location, Degree, Years, Field of Study)
- Position and Employment (Institution/Location, Position, Years)
- Honors and awards (Institution/Location, Position, Years)
- Editorial and Reviewing (Institution/Journal, Activity)
- Listing of best publications (last 5 years)

### **5. Institutional information**

- a. Name, address and coordinates of the institution (phone/email)

- b. Fiscal officer
- c. Coordinates for bank transfer

## **6. Listing of Other Support**

- a. Current applications for this or related projects at the laboratory of the applicant: This should include all sources of support (government, other foundations, etc...)
- b. Pending applications (WfL is able to fund topics that are already funded or will be funded by other foundations, but not on identical experiments).

## **7. Budget request**

- a. Annual amount requested from WfL and from Microsoft
- b. Predicted budget allowance and justification for the first two years. Please ONLY enter given categories (Equipment, Personnel, Products, Training, Animals and animal care, Indirect costs (max. 10% of the direct costs), Other (please specify), Travel costs to annual WfL scientific meeting (This category is mandatory: 1.500 € within Europe, 3.000 € overseas))
- c. Details on project personnel (max. 30% of the total budget can be used for each PI and/or Co-PI's salary; total sum must be equal to Personnel allowance in section 7b)
- d. Equipment (total sum must be equal to the Equipment allowance in section 7b)
- e. Microsoft AI Supplemental Questions
  - i. What Geography would you prefer Azure Services to be provisioned in? Please select all that apply. (*North America, South America, Europe, Asia-Pacific, Middle East & Africa, Australia/New Zealand*)
  - ii. Azure Credits: Provide a Euro estimate of the Azure credits requested by Microsoft using the Azure Pricing calculator <https://azure.microsoft.com/en-us/pricing/calculator/>
  - iii. Please describe the following and answer all parts of the question in 3,000 characters or less. No special characters, charts, or tables are permitted.
    - 1. How much computing support will this effort approximately require in terms of core, node, or GPU hours
    - 2. How much storage capacity do you require
    - 3. Do you expect to use any additional Azure services and compute capabilities

Maximum sum per grant is **300.000 €** - per year for project costs. Indirect costs (overhead costs) are limited to 10% of direct costs (equipment, products, animals and animal care, fringe costs, etc.).

**Additionally**, Azure Credits up to the amount of **300.000 €** per year can be requested.

The grant will be given in EUR. At the time of each payment the respective, contractual EUR amount will be converted into the respective currency at the daily rate at that time.

## **8. Additional Information**

- a. Curriculum vitae of PI and Co-PIs
- b. Additional information

- c. Non-desired reviewer (confidential, not displayed to the reviewers)
- d. How did you found out about the WfL grant (confidential, not displayed to the reviewers)
- e. Picture of Principal Investigator (confidential, not displayed to the reviewers)
- f. Additional documents
  - If human or animal subjects are involved in the project, a copy of the institution's human/animal subjects research committee approval must be enclosed. This also applies to data sets, if applicable. This approval is a funding pre-requisite. If the approval is still pending, please indicate the date of anticipated approval (the approval must then be forwarded to WfL).
  - Reprints of a maximum of **three** publications of the applicant that are directly related to the proposed project (please send as pdf documents).
  - **Postdoctoral applicant must submit a letter of support from the laboratory's senior scientist, as well as two other appropriate letters of reference.**

### **9. Final Check**

Please download the PFD of you application (you'll find the button for downloading the PDF on the right side of the application system), and check for completeness and accuracy:

- Budget (including decimals)
- Presence of all figures
- Figure resolution
- Formatting (e.g. narrative and references)

Deadline for full applications: **March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2026.**