Position description

Program Officer – Innovation

The Judith Neilson Foundation is seeking to recruit a Program Officer to support the Foundation's global Innovation Portfolio.

Role	Program Officer – Innovation
Type	Permanent, full time
Location	Kenya based, working remotely from a well connected city in Kenya.
Salary	US$85,000 gross annual salary
Reporting to	Program Director – Innovation
Closing date	9am, 23 November 2026 (EAT)

Applicants must already have the right to work in Kenya. The Foundation cannot support relocation or visa sponsorship.

About the Judith Neilson Foundation

The Judith Neilson Foundation is an Australian private philanthropic foundation backing long term solutions that strengthen communities and address inequality. We work through funding partnerships with organisations, supporting their work in the communities they serve. Our work spans three portfolios: Africa, Australia and innovation. Our Africa Portfolio invests in public health systems, inclusive economic growth and leadership. In Australia, we fund partnerships advancing equity for women and girls. The global Innovation Portfolio is focused on urban futures.

Role description

This role supports the delivery and development of the Foundation's Innovation Portfolio. The Program Officer works closely with the Program Director – Innovation to assess funding opportunities, onboard and manage partnerships and contribute to initiatives aligned with the Foundation's 2030 strategy.

Our Innovation Portfolio has a global remit and funds innovation to make cities more liveable, inclusive, resilient and joyful. We support innovations that boost visionary civic leadership and ambitious grassroots innovators, as well as initiatives that respond to rapid change, opportunity and inequity in city spaces and systems. Across a range of urban sectors, we back initiatives that test, adapt and scale practical solutions shaped by the needs and knowledge of the communities they serve. The heart of our portfolio is in Africa, with a small footprint in Asia and Latin America. You can read more about our approach to innovation here, and about some of our partnerships here.

The role spans the full grant and partnership cycle, from pipeline development and proposal assessment through to monitoring, reporting and relationship management. It also includes active engagement with the broader sector, maintaining awareness of key actors, trends and opportunities, and positioning the Foundation within relevant networks and discussions. The role requires strong analytical judgement, clear writing and the ability to work effectively across countries and time zones as part of a distributed team with an international portfolio.

Key responsibilities

Grant assessment and analysis

- Identify and engage with potential innovation partners across multiple countries to develop and assess pipeline opportunities.
- Assess expressions of interest and funding proposals.
- Contribute to due diligence, including financial, governance and strategic review.
- Prepare clear, structured briefings and recommendations for internal decision making.

Program management

- Coordinate grant administration, contracting, payment processes, reporting schedules and record keeping, including maintaining accurate records in the Foundation's Grant Management System.
- Review partner reports and monitoring data, track performance and identify and escalate material risks.
- Coordinate meetings, workshops, site visits, travel and other portfolio activities.
- Maintain constructive relationships with partners, monitor progress and help resolve emerging issues.
- Contribute to internal briefings, strategy papers and board materials.

Ecosystem engagement and strategic positioning

- Build and maintain relationships with partners and key actors across the innovation ecosystem internationally.
- Maintain awareness of policy, funding and sector trends across relevant countries and sectors.
- Identify opportunities for the Foundation to add value within innovation systems.
- Represent the Foundation in meetings, consultations and convenings.
- Conduct targeted research and landscape analysis to inform ongoing strategy and program development.

Key skills and attributes

- Strong understanding of innovation, innovation management and innovation ecosystems.
- Ability to work remotely and independently, exercising sound judgement and initiative.
- Strong analytical and written communication skills with excellent attention to detail.
- Experience reviewing budgets and financial documentation, including due diligence.
- Experience across the full program cycle, from assessment through to partnership management.
- Strong interpersonal and organisational skills, including the ability to work collaboratively and manage competing deadlines.
- Fluency in English required; additional regional languages (e.g. French or Swahili) desirable.

Qualifications and experience

- Experience in a relevant field, including meaningful, multi-year experience working on innovation and scaling issues within development contexts is required, preferably in Africa.
- Knowledge of innovation ecosystems, actors and resource flows within development contexts, preferably in Africa.
- Experience working with NGOs, foundations, governments or civil society organisations.
- Academic background is flexible and will be considered alongside relevant experience.

Other information

- The successful candidate will be employed through the Foundation's Kenyan employer of record and work remotely as part of the Sydney-based Foundation team.
- Occasional international travel may be required.
- Flexibility is required to work across time zones.

Application requirements

Please submit a single PDF to jobs@judithneilsonfoundation.org by 9am, 23 November 2026 (EAT), containing the following:

- Curriculum Vitae (maximum 2 pages)
- A response to the selection criteria below (maximum 2 pages)
- How you heard about the role
- Your current location and confirmation that you already have the right to work in Kenya.

Selection criteria

In no more than two pages, please address the following:

1. *Why are you interested in this role, and how do your experience and skills position you to contribute to the Judith Neilson Foundation's Innovation Portfolio?*
2. *What experience do you have delivering innovation initiatives, including supporting different innovation types, scaling pathways and processes?*
3. *What experience do you have managing grants, partnerships or programs? In your response, describe how you have approached project management and administration, relationship management and internal communication.*

We encourage applicants to review our website and 2030 Strategy to learn more about the Foundation and our work. If you have any questions, please contact us at jobs@judithneilsonfoundation.org.