



## 2025 BrainStorm Neuroscience Pitch Competition™ Proposal Requirements

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### BACKGROUND

#### About Mind Science

In 1958, our founder Tom Slick created the Mind Science Foundation to leverage the power of the scientific method to comprehend what he called the “vast potential of the human mind.” We believe the best way to honor his vision is by funding research on human consciousness that can produce improvements in the health and well-being of humankind. We are committed to finding novel ways in which to do so, funding research on the neuroscience of consciousness since 2004.

Our current funding model focuses on supporting early-career neuroscientists, with a broader goal of bolstering the pipeline of researchers entering the field of consciousness. **We strongly believe that providing career support for budding researchers, along with opportunities to hone their communications skills, is critical to the advancement of science.**

#### About Brainstorm Neuroscience Pitch Competition™

We employ a pitch model for research funding to reward excellence in science communications and promote public participation in the scientific process. Select applicants who submit a written proposal will advance to the semi-finals and will be invited to create a 5–7-minute video to be evaluated by the Mind Science Scientific Advisory and Education Committees, in tandem with peer review of their written proposal. From this process, **3 finalists will be chosen, who are guaranteed \$30,000 in funding.** Finalists will be offered feedback and coaching based on the review process and will have the choice to keep their existing video for the finals (online voting for Audience Choice Award) or submit an updated version. The winner of the Audience Choice Award receives an **additional \$10,000** in funding. For a look at previous BrainStorm Competitions please click [here](#).

The Competition has an additional strategic goal of incentivizing the development of public communication skills for early-career scientists. We firmly believe that one key to supporting science literacy in the lay public is equipping researchers to effectively answer the “so what” question about their work and translate their complex neuroscience for a general audience. This enables a direct connection between their research and the potential for solutions to some of the most intractable problems facing our species.

**Because of the strategic goals for BrainStorm, proposals MUST include the participation of an early-career researcher (ECR). ECRs are defined as individuals who are within six (6) years of completing their terminal degree (e.g., Ph.D.), or who hold the position of post-doctoral fellow or research scientist. The ECR will be expected to submit the proposal and create/present the pitch video(s).**

## APPLICATION PROCESS

Mind Science has issued an open RFP for research proposals focused on original research, or the meaningful compilation and interpretation of existing research data, resulting in significant advancements in the science of consciousness and improvements in the health and well-being of humankind.

Fields of inquiry include but are not limited to: basic and translational neuroscience, cognitive science, psychology, biology, artificial intelligence, sleep and dream research, creativity, and learning.

Formal submissions are initially reviewed by the Mind Science Scientific Advisory Committee to determine scientific merit and fit for our funding priorities. **Proposals advancing to the semi-finals** will be sent for formal peer review, and the applicant will be asked to submit a short video presentation (5-7 minutes; you may include up to 7 slides). This video must be prepared by the primary applicant, who must be an ECR. The Mind Science Scientific Advisory and Program Committees will evaluate to assess the presenter's skills in verbally translating their work for a layperson. **This video does not need to be highly produced. Videos are evaluated on content quality and your ability to communicate complex research to the public, not production value.**

**Proposals reaching the finals** will receive feedback on presentation and optional coaching should you wish to update your original video submission for the final pitch video. The final pitch video is posted on the Mind Science website where voting by the public determines the winner of the \$10,000 Audience Choice Award. Please remember: the final pitch video should be 5-7 minutes in length (7-minute limit strictly enforced) and can include up to 7 slides. The winner of the Audience Choice award will be announced at the BrainStorm awards party in San Antonio this October (exact date will be announced soon). **Excellent, creative storytelling is key to engaging voters.**

### FORMAL PROPOSAL requirements

#### **Project Title for the Lay Public, Investigators, Institution and Credentials (1 page limit)**

A project title for the lay public should effectively convey your research goals to a non-scientist audience. First and last names of the Principal Investigator(s) and any Co-investigator(s) should be listed with institutional affiliation and contact information. If your proposal is chosen as a finalist, we will request a one-paragraph summary of your credentials including links to biographical websites, social media profiles, awards, and previous talks for use in Mind Science communications.

#### **Investigator CVs (no page limit)**

A curriculum vitae should be provided for each investigator. CVs should be included **at the end** of your submission, in the order that the investigators are listed on the cover page.

#### **Project Summary for the Lay Public (1/2 page limit)**

Mind Science has a philanthropic goal to increase the scientific literacy of the lay public and therefore requests a description of the proposed research in lay terms. This section should succinctly state any critical background information and outline the major goals of the proposed project in a way that is understandable by a wide variety of audiences. A Project Summary for the Lay Public should be written at a level understandable by an 8th grader. We request that you avoid jargon and consider using appropriate analogies to help convey your message. It is critical that the

description should directly answer the “So What?” question: why is your research important? In explaining your idea, and the problem you are trying to solve, how does it relate to consciousness and/or how will your unique approach lead to improvements to the health and well-being of humankind? It should not exceed 2-3 concise paragraphs. If your proposal makes it to the final round, this summary will be used in Mind Science communications.

### **Research Strategy (6-9 page limit)**

Six-to-nine-page description of the proposed research, in accordance with the NIH formatting guidelines. If your project includes human subjects, please include a contingency plan in case of delays due to COVID-19 or other restrictions. This section should include Specific Aims (1 page), Significance/Background (1 to 2 pages), Innovation (1/2 to 1 page), Approach (3 to 4 pages), Risks and Limitations (1/2 page), and Timeline (1/4 page).

### **References (no page limit)**

References should be listed in order of appearance.

### **Budget and Justification (1 page limit)**

This section should present and justify expenses required to achieve the project aims and objectives and indicate any other significant sources of funding. The budget is \$30,000, scalable to \$40,000. Include what you will add to your project to make it more robust if you win the Audience Choice award of \$10,000.

### **Deliverable Product (1/2 page limit)**

Statement of deliverable product (i.e., publishable article, data as the basis for a publishable book, pilot data for subsequent funding by NIH, NIMH, or similar funding entities, etc.).

### **Pitch Video**

If your submission proceeds to the semi-finalist round of review, the research team will be asked to submit a short video presentation (5-7 minutes) by the early-career member of your team. The Mind Science Scientific Advisory and Education Committees will evaluate this presentation to assess the presenter’s skills in verbally translating their work for a layperson. This video does not need to be highly produced, as the Committee will grade it on content and the ability to communicate your work to the public – not the production value. If your video proceeds to the finalist (Audience Choice Award) round, Mind Science will provide coaching from a science communications expert, should you wish to revise your original video submission before it is posted on the Mind Science website for voting by the public.

- Presenters can include on-screen slides to supplement their video presentation, but no more than seven (7), containing primarily pictures, easily understood graphics or video and judicious use of text.
- Semi-finalist and finalist presentations will be posted on Mind Science social media and YouTube channel. Please take care when deciding what pieces of your story you want to share if you have proprietary information.
- Speakers may not have a commercial agenda. Your project could result in a product to be developed but product pitches are not allowed. No political or religious agenda.
- Focus time and energy on delivery, telling your story, and engaging the audience. Avoid jargon and data-heavy slides. Use emotion to drive your story. A little humor goes a long

way. If applicable, tell a story (surprising, funny, or a unique anecdote) personalizing your journey.

### **Evaluation Criteria**

Finalists will be determined following initial review by the Mind Science Scientific Advisory Committee, subsequent rigorous peer review, with a final decision by the Mind Science Scientific Advisory and Program Committees, based equally on the scientific merit of your research proposal and the overall effectiveness of your video submission. Final determination of the \$10,000 Audience Choice award (for a total of \$40,000 in funding) will be determined following voting by the public for the finalists' pitches posted on our website. You will be evaluated on how clearly you communicate your work to a lay audience, as BrainStorm is focused on excellence in scientific communication. **Quality, originality, and relevance to the advancement of the science of consciousness and/or improvement of the health and well-being of humankind will be key factors in the evaluation process.** It is important to note that proposals will be reviewed by both scientific and non-scientific professionals. Each section of the proposal will be scored based on the NIH scoring system. All proposals and results of peer and Science/Program Committee review will be kept confidential. The content of your final pre-recorded pitch video presentation, however, will be presented on our website and YouTube channel.

### **IRB Protocol**

In the event your proposal is chosen as a finalist, an IRB or equivalent institutional approval protocol for experiments involving human or animal subjects will be required. **Please note: Funds will not be disbursed without an IRB or equivalent institutional approval protocol for experiments involving human or animal subjects.** If not uploaded at the time of project submission, IRBs must be submitted within **60 days** of being notified of finalist status.

### **Use of Funds and Restrictions**

Research funds are restricted to actual costs, with no more than 5% indirect costs. Actual costs may include lab supplies/reagents, services provided by core facilities, salaries for staff/assistants and salary supplements for Co-Investigators. Under special circumstances related to the goals of the research, salary supplement for Principal Investigators may also be appropriate.

### **Period of Performance**

The period of performance (term of the award) is 24 months, beginning with the first of the month following the date of the award. We realize that circumstances may arise which delay previously anticipated progress. In this case, awardees are encouraged to communicate with Mind Science as soon as possible to make alternate arrangements satisfactory to the researcher and Mind Science.

### **Participation in Additional Media**

To provide additional opportunities for public communication, we ask each finalist to participate as a guest in our Mind Matters webcast toward the end of the project period. This is an opportunity to give an update on your Mind Science-funded research, and to share more broadly about yourself and your overall research goals.

## Submission

Completed proposals should be submitted electronically through the Good Grants portal: <https://brainstormnpc.grantplatform.com> by 11:59 pm (CDT/GMT -5) on THURSDAY, May 15, 2025. Questions about eligibility, submission limit, or any other requirement should be directed to Ben Rein ([brein@mindscience.org](mailto:brein@mindscience.org)) before the submission deadline. No email submissions will be accepted. Submission deadlines are firm.

## Checklist of proposal requirements, in order

**Note: please format your proposal using single-spacing, font size at least 11 pt, either Arial, Helvetica, or Calibri, 1" margins**

Project Title for the Lay Public, Investigators, Institution, and Credentials (No page limit)

- Project Title for the Lay Public
- Names of the Principal Investigator(s) and Co-investigator(s)
- Institutional Affiliation
- Contact Information
- CV for each investigator

Project Summary for the Lay Public (1/2 page)

Research Strategy (not to exceed 9 pages total)

- Specific Aims (1 page)
- Significance/Background (1 to 2 pages)
- Innovation (1/2 to 1 page)
- Approach (3 to 4 pages)
- Risk and Limitations (1/2 page)
- Timeline (1/4 page)

References (No page Limit)

Budget and Justification (One page limit)

Deliverable Product (1/2-page limit)

## Limitations on Submissions

- Eligibility for Early-Career Researchers (ECRs)
  - ECRs are defined as individuals who are within six (6) years of completing their terminal degree (e.g., Ph.D.), or who hold the position of post-doctoral fellow or research scientist.
  - All applicants must be affiliated with an accredited higher-education institution; all BrainStorm-funded research projects must be conducted at the affiliate college or university and must receive approval from all applicable institutional review boards.
  - Submissions are welcome from any accredited higher education institution globally. Applications are not restricted to the United States.
  - Each ECR is limited to one submission per grant cycle.
  - ECRs who have previously received a BrainStorm award are not eligible to apply.

- BrainStorm awards are intended to support research projects that advance our understanding of consciousness, but we also welcome submissions focused on improving the health and well-being of humankind.
- Lab or PI Limit
  - No more than one BrainStorm grant will be awarded to any laboratory or PI during each funding cycle.
  - If multiple applications are submitted from one laboratory or PI, the scope of the projects must be distinct and independent. Mind Science reserves the right to reject applications based on overlapping study focus if they are from the same lab.
- Compliance and Enforcement
  - Grant applicants must confirm their eligibility and adherence to this policy during the application process.

### **Submission and Awards Calendar**

RFP issued – February 17, 2025

Submission deadline – May 15, 2025 11:59 pm (CDT/GMT -5)

Semi-finalists/video round notified – Early June 2025

Peer Review – June and July 2025

Semi-finalist video submission deadline – August 9, 2025 11:59 pm (CDT/GMT -5)

Finalists announced – Late August 2025

Finalists video pitch coaching – September 2025

Finalist video submission deadline – September 30, 2025 11:59 pm (CDT/GMT -5)

Public/online voting for pitch videos – October 6, 2025 – October 12, 2025 11:59 pm (CDT/GMT -5)

BrainStorm Neuroscience Pitch Competition Awards – October 15, 2025 7:00 pm (CDT/GMT -5)

### **Additional information for finalists**

**Finalists must be able to arrive in San Antonio by Tuesday, October 14, 2025.** Travel, meals, and accommodations will be provided for you. Please note: Flights out of San Antonio do not allow for departure the same day as BrainStorm, so please plan to for departure on Thursday, October 16, 2025.

The BrainStorm event itself includes a panel discussion with finalists and the previous year's winners, followed by the announcement of the \$10,000 Audience Choice Award.

If you are a finalist, you will be invited to and expected to participate in media outreach during your stay in San Antonio.