BACKGROUND

About the Mind Science Foundation

The Mind Science Foundation is dedicated to funding research that advances our understanding of human consciousness and improves the human condition. In 1958, our founder Tom Slick outlined his vision to leverage the power of the scientific method to understand the “vast potential of the human mind." Today, we honor this goal by providing $100,000 in total funding annually to three early-career researchers leading exciting, high-potential projects. We are committed to finding novel ways to do so in the modern scientific landscape and specifically supporting early-career researchers.

The Mind Science Foundation is also devoted to ensuring the dissemination of the work we fund through clear, accessible communications. Our funding model - the *BrainStorm Neuroscience Pitch Competition* - supports this goal by providing early-career neuroscientists opportunities to hone their communication skills. This competition reflects our broader goals of improving the accessibility of science and bolstering the pipeline of researchers entering the field of consciousness.

About the BrainStorm Neuroscience Pitch Competition™

The Competition employs a pitch model for research funding to reward excellence in science communications and promote public participation in the scientific process.

After submitting a written research proposal (see details below), select applicants will advance to the semi-finals and will be invited to create a 5–7-minute video that describes their proposal in lay terms. This video submission will be evaluated by the Mind Science Scientific Advisory and Education Committees, in tandem with peer review of their written proposal. From this process, three finalists will be chosen, each of which are guaranteed $30,000 in funding. Finalists will be offered feedback and coaching and will have the choice to keep their existing video or submit an updated version. The final videos will be judged by online and in-person audiences to determine the winner of the Audience Choice Award, which provides an additional $10,000 in funding. For a look at previous BrainStorm winners please click here.

This Competition has a strategic goal of encouraging the development of communication skills for early-career scientists. We firmly believe that equipping researchers to effectively answer the “so what?” question about their work is a critical long-term driver of public engagement with science. 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.). Applicants who hold the title *graduate student* (M.S. or Ph.D.), *post-doctoral fellow*, or *research scientist* are eligible as long as no more than six years have elapsed

since completing their terminal degree**.** The ECR will be expected to submit the proposal and create/present the pitch video(s).

APPLICATION PROCESS

The Mind Science Foundation has hereby issued an open request for proposals (RFP) to support original research resulting in significant advancements in the science of consciousness and/or improvements in the health and well-being of humankind.

Fields of inquiry include but are not limited to: consciousness, sleep and dreaming, neurodevelopment & neurodevelopmental disorders, aging, neurodegeneration, dementia, Parkinson's Disease & other movement disorders, psychedelics, artificial intelligence, creativity, education, or cognitive performance, and may reflect basic or translational neuroscience studies, cognitive science, psychology, or experiential/subjective studies.

Submissions will be initially reviewed by the Mind Science Foundation's 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; 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 the ECR's ability to communicate complex research to the public, not production value. Excellent, creative storytelling is key to engaging voters.

The three finalists will be offered optional feedback and coaching should they wish to update their original video submission for the People's Choice Award. The final pitch video will be posted on the Mind Science website where voting by the public will determine the winner of the $10,000 Audience Choice Award. The winner of the Audience Choice award will be announced at the BrainStorm awards ceremony in San Antonio this October (exact date to be announced).

FORMAL PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Please note: the proposal should be written with 0.5" margins or larger, and font no smaller than size 12.

Project Title, Investigators, Institution and Credentials (1 page limit)
Project titles should effectively convey 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.

Project Summary for the Lay Public (1/2-page limit)
In the interest of increasing public engagement with science, proposals must include a lay summary. This section should succinctly describe any critical background information and outline the major goals of the proposed project at a level understandable by a high school student. We request that you avoid jargon and consider using appropriate analogies to help convey your message. This description should directly answer the "So What?" question: why is your research important? What problem are you trying to solve? How does it relate to consciousness and/or how could it 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 page limit)
Six-page description of the proposed research. This section should include Specific Aims (1 page), Significance/Background (1 page), Approach (~3 pages), Risks and Limitations (1/2 page), and Timeline (1/4 page).

References (no page limit)
References should be cited 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 paragraph)
Statement of deliverable product (publishable article, publicly available resource, pilot data for subsequent funding, etc.).

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.

Pitch Video
If your submission proceeds to the semi-finalist round of review, the primary ECR applicant will be asked to submit a 5-7-minute video presentation. 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.

- Presenters may include up to seven on-screen slides to supplement their video presentation. We encourage slides containing primarily visual aids (photo or video) and judicious use of text.
- Semi-finalist and finalist presentations may 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. Humor is welcome. 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 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 study of consciousness and/or advancements in 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 audiences.

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. Research funds may be used to purchase lab supplies/reagents, pay for use of core facilities, supplement investigator salaries in the absence of guaranteed funding (funds may not be used to augment existing salaries), and any other applications that directly support the completion of the proposed research. Under special circumstances related to the goals of the research, salary supplement for Principal Investigators may be approved upon request.

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

Finalists may be asked to participate in interviews and other presentations. These opportunities will be designed to provide updates 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 Friday, May 1st, 2026. Questions about eligibility, submission limit, or any other requirement should be directed to Ben Rein, PhD (brein@mindscience.org) before the submission deadline.** No email submissions will be accepted. Submission deadlines are firm.

Checklist of proposal requirements, in order

Project Title, Investigators, Institution, and Credentials (1 page)
- Project Title
- Names of the Principal Investigator(s) and Co-investigator(s)
- Institutional Affiliation
- Contact Information

Project Summary for the Lay Public (1/2 page)
Research Strategy (not to exceed 6 pages total)
- Specific Aims (1 page)
- Significance/Background (1 page)
- Approach (~3 pages)
- Risk and Limitations (1/2 page)
- Timeline (1/4 page)

References (No page limit)
Budget and Justification (1 page limit)
Deliverable Product (1 paragraph)
CV for each investigator

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.). Applicants who hold the title *graduate student* (M.S. or Ph.D.), *post-doctoral fellow*, or *research scientist* are eligible as long as no more than six years have elapsed since completing their terminal degree.
    - 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.

All studies must be conducted under the supervision of all appropriate institutional review boards.

- 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.
    - No more than one BrainStorm grant will be awarded to any laboratory or PI in consecutive years.
    - 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 – March 11, 2026
Submission deadline – May 1, 2026 11:59 pm (CDT/GMT -5)
Semi-finalists/video round notified – Late May
Peer Review – June and July 2026
Semi-finalist video submission deadline – August 12, 2026 11:59 pm (CDT/GMT -5)
Finalists announced – Late August
Finalists video pitch coaching – September
Finalist video submission deadline – September 18th, 2026 11:59 pm (CDT/GMT -5)
Public/online voting for pitch videos – September 25th – mid October
BrainStorm Neuroscience Pitch Competition Awards – mid October (date TBA)

Finalists must be able to attend the BrainStorm Awards Ceremony in San Antonio in mid-October. Travel, meals, and accommodations will be provided.

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 and expected to participate in media outreach during your stay in San Antonio.