Hersen STICHTING

# Grant Program

## Targeting the Brain with Innovative Technology

2026

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## 1. Mission of the Brain Foundation

The Brain Foundation is dedicated to ensuring healthy brains for everyone. For over 30 years, the foundation has linked different types of brain disorders, recognizing that learning about one condition can help with others. To achieve this, we collaborate with scientists, healthcare professionals, experts, patients, and the public. Together, we find solutions to keep brains healthy, treat brain disorders more effectively, and help individuals with brain conditions participate fully in society.

## 2. Problem definition

Despite increasing knowledge about the brain regions and networks involved in various brain disorders, treatment options remain limited for many patients. Safely and precisely intervening in the brain is highly complex. As a result, a growing number of brain disorders are being addressed using new or improved neuromodulation and neurosurgical techniques. These approaches may include invasive, minimally invasive, or non-invasive technologies that directly target the underlying disease processes in the brain. While these techniques are promising, substantial improvements are still needed in terms of effectiveness, precision, personalization, and predictability. In addition, these treatments are often associated with side effects or place a considerable burden on patients. As a result, their broad implementation across different patient groups and disease indications remains limited. Consequently, effective and accessible treatment options for people with brain disorders are still insufficiently available, despite the profound impact these conditions have on daily functioning—physically, mentally, and socially.

## 3. Aim of the Grant Program

The aim of this grant program is to further develop neuromodulation or neurosurgical technologies to restore dysregulated brain activity and/or influence underlying disease processes. This call emphasizes technologies that can identify, monitor, or modulate specific brain networks or circuits, with a focus on translational research. Projects should clearly describe which brain network or circuit is targeted and how this relates to the underlying disease process. Projects that identify new network- or circuit-based targets, apply existing technologies to new indications, or intervene in fundamentally different ways on brain activity are explicitly encouraged. Projects are expected to demonstrate a clear and substantial degree of innovation compared to existing neuromodulation or neurosurgical approaches. Incremental optimizations or minor technical improvements without new mechanistic or clinical insights fall outside the primary focus of this call. The proposed approach should demonstrably contribute to significant advances in treatment options, with the aim of reducing symptoms and slowing, halting, or potentially curing brain disorders.

The use of these technologies enables:

- More effective application of existing technological treatments through improved and controlled delivery.
- The development and application of new, promising treatments.
- The expansion of treatable indications across a wider range of brain disorders.
- A sustainable solution to a fundamental challenge that current and future brain therapies are likely to face.

It is essential that these technologies can be applied safely and in a controlled manner, with an acceptable burden for the patient. They must also be affordable and practically implementable

within healthcare, ensuring broad accessibility for patients. Innovations that contribute to more efficient care processes and cost savings are encouraged. For technologies close to clinical application, projects are expected to address implementation requirements such as scaling up, integration into existing care pathways, and practical applicability in healthcare settings.

# 4. Exclusion

The focus of this grant program is on technologies within neuromodulation and neurosurgery that improve applications in diagnosis, monitoring, and/or intervention, rather than on pharmacotherapeutic interventions. Technologies aimed at opening the blood–brain barrier (BBB) to enable safer and more efficient drug delivery fall outside the scope of this call. This topic is addressed within the BRAINS funding program, which includes a dedicated theme focused on overcoming these barriers. If a project focuses primarily on modulating brain activity, and any effects on the blood-brain barrier are only secondary, it may still be considered within the scope of this funding call.

# 5. Requirements

## *5.1. Need-driven*

The grant application must be based on the needs of the target group. Involve the target group both in developing the project idea and later in the project application. The target group includes patient representatives, such as (former) patients and/or their relatives. (see “11.1 Project idea”).

## *5.2. Brain Disorders*

- The Brain Foundation's scope includes the brain; the part of the central nervous system located within the skull. The meninges, pituitary gland, and pineal gland are also considered part of the brain. The spinal cord and eyes, as well as the skull itself, are excluded.
- The project should focus on a brain disorder with a primary cause in the brain. Conditions with (primarily) a primary cause in the spinal cord, peripheral nervous system, or muscle diseases fall outside the scope of the Brain Foundation.

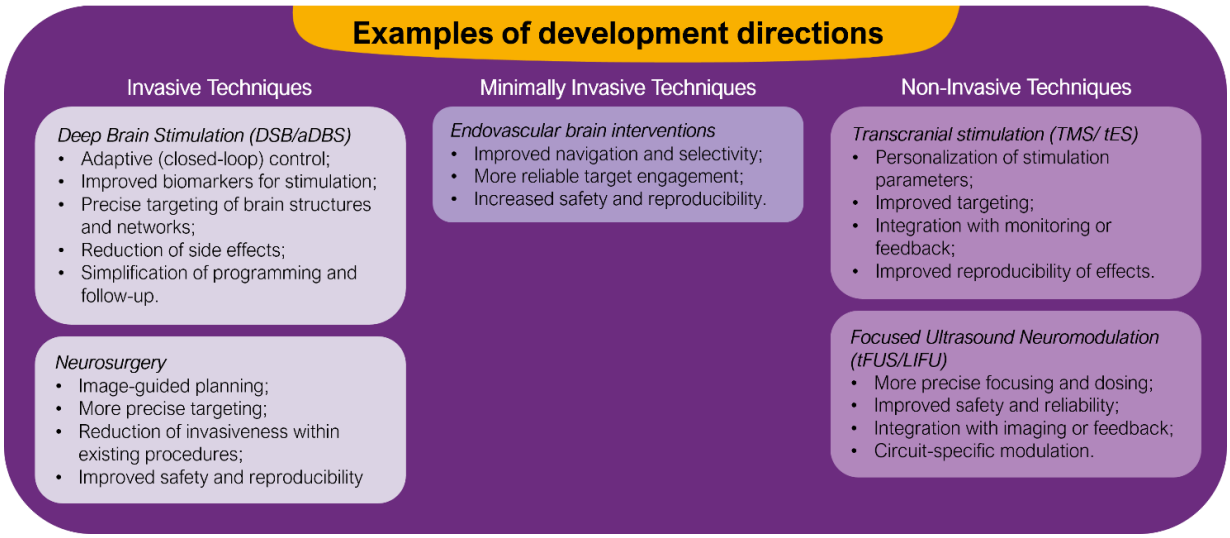
We recommend contacting us early if you are unsure whether the condition for which you wish to submit a project idea falls within the Brain Foundation's scope.

## *5.3. Technologies*

The following technologies fall within the scope of this funding call:

- Invasive techniques: methods that directly intervene in the brain.
- Minimally invasive techniques: interventions performed through small or limited access points.
- Non-invasive techniques: technologies that influence or measure brain activity without direct penetration.

Innovative projects that combine neuromodulation with monitoring, biomarker-guided control, real-time feedback, or integration with imaging, data analysis, or artificial intelligence are within the scope of this funding call. Projects that focus solely on incremental optimization of existing techniques, without generating new mechanistic or clinical insights, are not suitable for this call. The figure below provides illustrative examples of development directions that meet these criteria. These examples are not exhaustive. If you are unsure about the suitability of your technology or project idea, please contact aanvraag@hersenstichting.nl.




### 5.4. *Targeting the Disease Course*

- Techniques are being developed or advanced that reduce symptoms and/or improve functioning. Techniques may also aim to slow, halt, or even cure brain disorders.
- The underlying biological, psychological, or physiological target on which the technology is based has been identified and is preferably linked to the relevant brain networks or circuits. The application should clearly describe how this target relates to the disease process and be supported by a plausible scientific rationale.

### 5.5. *Development Stage*

- This grant program primarily focuses on translational research. Examples include feasibility studies, pilot studies, or other forms of research that advance technologies toward patient application.
- Applications should preferably involve human-based research, focusing on patients, patient-derived materials, or models, data, or systems derived from them.
- If animal experimental research is included in the application, it must be clearly justified in terms of its relevance to the human situation and its contribution to the objectives of this funding program. Such research will only be funded if it is a necessary step in the development of a treatment.
- Preference is given to research that considers societal diversity (sex, gender, age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background), ensuring that results are broadly applicable and relevant to different groups.

### 5.6. *Multidisciplinary Collaboration*

- Multidisciplinary collaboration across relevant disciplines and areas of expertise is encouraged when it contributes to the project. All disciplines necessary for the research, technology, and brain disorder should be directly involved.
- Where relevant for the project, collaboration with external parties is allowed, such as private partners (e.g. bio- and/or medtech companies) and healthcare institutions (e.g. regional hospitals, rehabilitation centres, or nursing homes). Involvement of private partners is permitted, provided that these parties demonstrably contribute financially or in kind to the scientific and/or societal objectives of the project. If there is an imbalance in the project concept between the private contribution and the potential (commercial) benefit, additional

conditions may be imposed at the full proposal stage, such as a mandatory cash or in-kind contribution proportionate to the anticipated benefit.
- International collaborations are permitted; however, project leadership must be held by a Dutch institution.
- Multicenter collaboration: cooperation between multiple centers is preferred, as this increases the likelihood of implementation and scalability.

## 6. Assessment Criteria

### *6.1. Relevance*

- Alignment of the research question with the needs and knowledge agendas of the target group
- Contribution to a significant medical and/or societal unmet need
- Application focus and clear implementation perspective with stakeholder involvement

### *6.2. Patient Participation and Involvement*

- Early and continuous involvement of the target group
- Clearly defined and realistic user groups
- Representativeness and inclusiveness of the patient groups
- Feasibility and acceptable burden for participants, including clear communication

### *6.3. Scientific Quality*

- Clear, testable hypothesis appropriate for the research stage
- The underlying target of the technology has been clearly identified.
- Adequate theoretical and/or empirical justification
- Appropriate study design and methodology
- Well-supported selection of the study population

### *6.4. Feasibility*

- Realistic timeline, milestones, and expected outcomes
- Appropriate expertise within the project team
- Realistic inclusion and implementation (if applicable)
- Clear risk analysis and realistic mitigation strategies

### *6.5. Innovation and Potential Impact*

- Degree of innovation and distinction compared to existing approaches
- Potential to develop new treatment concepts
- Expected scientific and clinical impact

## 7. Who Can Apply?

Grants are awarded to academic and research institutions, not to individuals. Applications can be submitted jointly by multiple parties, provided the following conditions are met:

- Lead Applicant: Must have a permanent position at a knowledge institution, such as a Dutch university, academic hospital, or university of applied sciences and is responsible for the administrative and financial management of the project.

- **Scientific lead:** The lead applicant is also the scientific lead and provides overall scientific direction for the project. This person will be evaluated based on experience, expertise, and the ability to effectively lead a multidisciplinary project throughout the entire project duration.
- **Co-applicants:** Can be employed at knowledge institutions, healthcare institutions, companies, or act as experts.
- **Number of Applications:** One application can be submitted as a lead applicant or co-applicant.
- **Companies:** Can only receive grants for material costs. No profit margins, overhead, or markup percentages will be reimbursed.
- **Previously rejected applications:** Project ideas that were previously rejected may be resubmitted, provided that the resubmission clearly demonstrates substantial improvements.

## 8. Budget

A maximum of €500,000 per project can be requested for a project with a duration of 2 to 4 years. The requested budget must be proportionate to the project plans. If there are more fundable project applications than available financial resources, the Brain Foundation may consider, in collaboration with the applicants, organizing fundraising activities to secure additional resources. No guarantees are provided for this.

## 9. Budgeting

The budget must provide a clear overview and explanation of all project income and expenditures. Costs can be divided into:

- **Personnel:** The grant can be used for scientific and support staff.
- **Bench fee:** A maximum of €5,000 for PhD students and senior researchers for PhD-related costs and conference attendance.
- **Materials and consumables:** Only direct material costs will be reimbursed.
- **Implementation costs:** Reserve up to 5% of the budget for METC/CCD approval, implementation of results, involvement of experts, and other required consultations. For certain projects, a positive opinion from the METC or a CCD permit is required. You can budget up to €2,500 for an application.

### *9.1. What is not covered?*

- Salary/costs of applicants with a permanent position at a knowledge institution.
- Overhead costs.
- Infrastructure costs.
- Purchase of new equipment.
- TrAVEl and accommodation costs for conferences.
- Training costs.

### *9.2. Personnel*

It is possible to use the grant to hire both scientific and non-scientific staff. This may include support staff, such as technical or support personnel, and healthcare personnel directly involved in executing the study. For personnel costs, the agreement allows reimbursement for the duration of the research to hire researchers and/or support staff. Salary costs for scientific personnel will

be calculated based on the 2008 agreement 'Funding of Scientific Research' with the Universities of the Netherlands (UvN), with the ZonMw addendum for UMCs. There is a distinction between UvN institutions (e.g., universities) and NFU institutions (e.g., UMCs).

For UvN institutions, the following functions apply: PhD student, Senior scientific staff, Non-scientific staff (MBO), Non-scientific staff (HBO), and Non-scientific staff (Academic).

- Salaristabel Nederlandse Universiteiten 2025

For NFU institutions, the following functions apply: PhD student, Postdoc, (Medical) researcher, Non-scientific staff (MBO), Non-scientific staff (HBO), and Non-scientific staff (Academic).

- Salaristabel Nederlandse UMC's 2025

(If newer salary tables are available, they may be applied.)

For the reimbursement of other functions, the actual salary component will be used, provided the necessity for the role in the project is well justified in the project application and supported by referees. Such personnel costs include:

- Actual salary costs per year of the personnel directly involved in the project; specify the salary scale, the level of placement, and the working hours factor, and calculate twelve times the gross monthly salary.
- A 40% surcharge on salary costs to cover additional personnel costs. This includes social security contributions, year-end bonuses, a 13th-month salary, vacation pay, unemployment benefits, sickness risk, advertising and recruitment costs, commuting expenses, parental leAVE and allowances, other leAVE costs, training costs, HR support, bonuses, domestic business trAVEl, death benefits, social activities, relocation and installation costs, health insurance allowances, and project termination costs.
- If the placement level of the involved personnel is not yet known, the salary costs will be calculated at the midpoint of the scale. If the level is known, the actual placement will be used.
- In project budgets, an annual salary increase of no more than one step and an inflation adjustment of 2% per year should be assumed. Final accounting will consider actual costs incurred, within the maximum grant amount. Significant deviations due to unpredictable inflation may lead to further consultation.

### *9.3. Personal Bench Fee*

PhD students (based on a four-year appointment) and senior scientific staff (based on a two-year appointment) will receive a personal bench fee of €5,000 for the entire project duration. For shorter appointments, the bench fee will be proportionally allocated. The bench fee is intended for PhD-related costs and (international) conference attendance. The bench fee is allocated to the project executor but made available through the project leader. The executor is entitled to the bench fee. The use of the bench fee must be agreed upon between the project leader and the executor. For PhD students, this includes the printing costs for the dissertation, so they are not eligible for separate printing cost reimbursement. The bench fee can be used as deemed necessary by the project leader and executor.

### *9.4. Materials, Equipment, and Consumables (specified)*

Material costs are reimbursed according to the amounts awarded in the grant. Only direct material costs, as requested and approved, are reimbursed. Infrastructure costs (housing, office automation) and overhead are not covered. Applications for new equipment purchases are not granted, but usage costs for equipment may be included.

### 9.5. *Implementation Costs (specified)*

You must reserve part of the budget for the additional requirements we set for project execution (the guideline is a maximum of 5%). These costs must be proportionate and may include:

- METC/CCD (see positive opinion METC/CDD section).
- Implementation/embedding of results.
- Involvement of experts, including compensation for their expenses.
- Meetings of one (or more) user committees.
- Consultations with regulators.

### 9.6. *Positive Opinion METC/CCD*

For certain projects, a positive opinion from a recognized medical ethics committee (METC) or a project permit from the Central Committee for Animal Experiments (CCD) is required. You can find relevant questions in the project application form. It is advisable to check whether a positive opinion is required for your project. According to our grant conditions, a project requiring such approval cannot begin participant or animal inclusion without providing a copy of the approval. For the application of the METC statement or a CCD permit, you can budget up to €2,500, substantiated by applicable rates. Reassessment costs cannot be charged and are at your own expense. You can find more information about the METC at the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (CCMO). Information about animal testing permits can be found on the CCD website.

## 10. Co-financing

Co-financing (in addition to the portion of the grant provided by the Brain Foundation) by partners contributing to the project is permitted and must be declared in the application. Expenses that are not covered by the Brain Foundation's requested budget but are still necessary for the project are listed as 'Other Financing' in the budget. For contributions from co-financiers (in-kind/in cash), you are required to provide written confirmation from the co-financier for the relevant budget item. Co-financing is not mandatory unless the budget requires it.

A condition for co-financing is that the Brain Foundation is the main financier and approves the co-financing. Financiers whose goals conflict with those of the Brain Foundation or who damage the foundation's reputation are excluded. If a grant or other financial contribution for the same activities is requested from other parties, the lead applicant must report this in the project application, including the current status of the assessment of that application(s). If other financial sources are found for the project application at a later stage, the Brain Foundation must be informed as soon as possible, and a revised budget will be discussed.

Note: Substantially changing the originally submitted plan and budget or failing to inform the Brain Foundation on time may result in reconsideration of a (provisional) grant award.

## 11. Procedure

### 11.1. *Project Idea*

For this grant call, a pre-selection is made using a project idea form for submitting project ideas. In addition to this form, one or both of the following documents must be submitted:

- Knowledge agenda form. Check if there is a relevant knowledge agenda, developed by a patient and/or relatives' association, containing research priorities and needs that were methodically collected from their constituency. Base your project idea on this.
- Need-driven advice form. If no relevant knowledge agenda exists, consult at least three lay experts for advice on needs and relevance to form the basis of the project idea.

These project ideas with attachments are submitted to the review committee, consisting of members of the Advisory Council on Science & Innovation (AWI) and members of the Advisory Council of Experts (AVE). The goal of the project idea step is to select the most relevant, suitable, and promising ideas. Submitted project ideas must meet the established criteria and conditions. Members of the AWI and AVE from the Brain Foundation assess the project ideas on relevance and whether they meet the established conditions for project applications. The applicants with the most promising project ideas will be invited to submit a project application via our digital application system.

### *11.2. Project Application*

If invited to submit a full proposal, applicants are requested to seek advice from patient representatives on feasibility, participant burden, inclusion criteria, and ethical considerations, to ensure the study is appropriate and feasible for participants. Full proposals will be evaluated by at least two external (international) reviewers on quality, feasibility, and relevance and by patient representatives on relevance, feasibility, and usefulness for the target group. Based on the reviewers' comments, applicants will have the opportunity to submit a rebuttal. All reviews and the rebuttal will be submitted for advice to the AWI and AVE committees. The AWI assesses scientific quality, while the AVE evaluates relevance, feasibility, and usefulness for the target group. For the patient representatives, a dedicated form must be completed, written in clear and accessible language. During the proposal development phase, the Brain Foundation offers access to the EATRIS mentorship program.

### *11.3. EATRIS Mentor Program*

EATRIS is a European non-profit organization that focuses on improving and optimizing the preclinical and early clinical development of medicines, vaccines, and diagnostics, and overcoming barriers to health innovation.

During the project application writing phase, EATRIS organizes digital sessions where grant applicants receive personal advice from experts on which activities should be undertaken in the project to increase the chances that patients will ultimately benefit from the results. This may include legal regulations or intellectual property (IP) strategies.

The EATRIS mentor program supports researchers in the early identification of potential bottlenecks in the translation to clinical practice, such as regulatory requirements, intellectual property, product development, and implementation in healthcare. By taking these conditions into account during project development, projects become more realistic and feasible. The Brain Foundation uses this program to strengthen the translational potential of funded research, reduce risks, and maximize the likelihood that promising research outcomes ultimately reach patients.

Participation in the mentor program is **mandatory**. This advice is provided by the Brain Foundation to research groups to increase the chances that results find their way to patients. This mentor program is not part of the evaluation process.

### *11.4. Allocation*

Based on the evaluation by external referees, experts, and the rebuttal, the AWI and AVE will issue a final recommendation to the board of the Brain Foundation. The board will then make a decision. No objections can be filed against the outcome of the procedure.

### *11.5. Timeline*

The submission of a project application consists of the following steps:

- Step 1: Submission of a project idea

The deadline for submitting a project idea is Monday, 8 June 2026, 10:00 CET. Project ideas can be submitted via aanvraag@hersenstichting.nl. Only project ideas submitted using the template "Project Idea Form - Reaching the Brain' will be considered.

- Step 2: (by invitation) Submission of a full application

The deadline for submitting the full application is Monday, 28 September 2026, 10:00 CET. The application must be submitted via the Brain Foundation Portal.