

Is my research project a fit for the Robert H.N. Ho Mind, Brain, and Behavior Initiative?

Question: The Robert H.N. Ho Mind, Brain, and Behavior Initiative (MBBI) says that it supports research that is related to mind, brain, and behavior. But what counts as research related to mind, brain, and behavior?

There are three categories mentioned in Mind, Brain, and Behavior:

Mind: Research about the mind concerns common mental or psychological processes, events, states, and traits, like belief, perception, language, attention, memory, reasoning, anxiety, creativity, problem solving, and pain either through the study of systems which have minds or the investigation of devices which by implementing (parts of) these processes can teach us about minds.

Brain: Research about the brain concerns the organ itself in any organism that has one. It often takes biological, neuroscientific, chemical, or physical perspectives, studying things like biological neurons, synthetic neurons, and electrochemical processes.

Behavior: Behavior is the most vexing category as it relates to mind, brain, and behavior research. This is because we talk about the behavior of all sorts of entities. For instance, we can talk about the behavior of humans doing mindfulness practices, the behavior of a colony of ants, the behavior of an AI model given different training data, and the behavior of a gas at very cold temperatures. In general, MBBI is interested in funding projects that study the behavior of systems with minds and/or brains or systems that implement (parts of) these behaviors. So the behavior of rats given a particular drug that alters brain chemistry fits what we are looking for. The behavior of an aircraft under a certain type of atmospheric conditions does not.

Question: Does my research project need to be related to mind, brain, **and** behavior or merely one of mind, brain, **or** behavior? (MBBI has not always been consistent about this Boolean connective). Does a project have to address all three topics to be eligible for funding? Is focusing on only one sufficient?

We encourage projects that investigate issues that connect some pair or all three of mind, brain, and behavior, as well as projects that take advantage of different areas of disciplinary expertise. But we also encourage projects that deal primarily or even exclusively with either the mind or the brain. Projects that deal exclusively with behavior - even the behavior of creatures with minds and brains - are unlikely to be funded. For instance, to study the style of dance of Mikhail Baryshnikov would be to study the behavior of someone with a mind and brain, but we wouldn't fund such a project; we would, however, be very excited about projects that study the connection between behavior and the mind or behavior and the brain: for example, a project that studies the effect of depression on dancers' movements or a project that asks how dancers' movements are affected by the balance of certain chemicals in the brain.

Fit and how we choose which projects to fund: We may consider fit when making our grants in two ways. First, we may disqualify projects that do not fit our goals and mission. Second, we may use fit as a factor in deciding between proposals that fall within our mission, more broadly. However, fit is only one of many things that we consider when making our grants; the following are also important: the clarity and quality of the design and goals of the project, its expected outcomes¹, the suitability of the research team to undertake the work required, and the feasibility of completing it on time and on budget.

Funding History: Potential applicants for MBBI grants may also be interested in viewing our [funding history](#) to see which projects we have supported in the past.

Still have questions?: Feel free to email MBBI Committee Chair, Ben Lennertz: belennertz@colgate.edu

¹ Examples of expected outcomes include, but are not limited to, publishing in a journal, presenting at a conference, serving as pilot data for a grant, and/or contributing to public scholarship.