

Guide to Preparing an IBNS Travel Award Application

From the IBNS Education and Training Committee

This Guide serves as a resource for trainees applying for an IBNS Travel Award. The goal of this Guide is to assist applicants in effectively addressing the criteria used by reviewers when evaluating Travel Award applications (view the evaluation rubric [here](#)). We strongly encourage applicants to share this Guide with their mentor who is writing their Letter of Support. Mentors should review section #9 below, which provides tips for useful information to include in the Letter.

IBNS Travel Award applications are scored by reviewers according to the 9 criteria listed below. Each criterion is worth a maximum of 5 points (1 = minimum score; 5 = maximum score). Criteria 1 – 5 reference the Abstract and criteria 6 – 9 reference each of the additional documents required for the application (e.g., CV, Personal Statement, Diversity and Inclusion Statement, Letter of Recommendation). Tips for each criterion are found below the headings.

- 1. Description of research question and how it fills a gap that is understandable by a universal audience and contains relevant information**
 - a. Provide a clear and detailed description of the rationale for your study
 - b. Describe the research question and why it's an important question to answer
 - c. Descriptions should not be vague, unclear, or indirect
 - d. Avoid jargon, excessive use of acronyms, and assumptions of knowledge
 - e. Only include information that is essential

- 2. Research methods are briefly discussed**
 - a. Briefly describe your research methods so that reviewers from a broad behavioral neuroscience background can understand what you did
 - b. Be clear about why the approach used in your study is appropriate for answering the research question
 - c. Describe relevant variables, such as the sex and/or age of the subjects used in your study. Experimental design should be clear from the description.

- 3. Results, interpretation, and implications of the research are clearly stated**
 - a. Description of results, interpretation, and implications of the work are clear and easy to follow
 - b. Interpretation of results should follow the data. Results should be interpreted in the context of the model system and the scientific question being asked
 - c. Vague statements of pending results should be avoided
 - d. It should be clear if the results being described are statistically significant

- 4. The innovative nature of the presented work, and its impact on the field, is briefly described**
 - a. Make an argument for why the scientific question and/or results are conceptually innovative and how this work advances the field
 - b. Reviewers should be able to easily understand how the research is innovative and significant

- c. If unexpected results were obtained, how might these findings impact current thinking in the field and how does this influence your future research directions?
- d. It may not be essential for a project to be innovative to advance a field; clearly state the gap in knowledge your study addresses and how this work moves the field forward

5. Incorporation of behavior

- a. Behavior should be a key component of the study
- b. The behavioral task should be clearly described and accurately presented. Even well-known tasks should have an explanation of how they are performed and what behavioral and neural processes they engage
- c. The behavioral manipulation should directly address the research question
 - i. For animal studies, be clear as to why the selected behavioral task is appropriate for addressing the scientific question
 - ii. Avoid making unsubstantiated comparisons between animal behaviors and complex human thoughts, feelings, and/or clinical diagnoses
 - iii. Explain how the research relates to and/or improves our understanding of the neurobiology of behavior

6. Evidence of success (CV and Research Productivity Considerations)

- a. Work should be published, presented, or recognized by the professional community *in a manner that is commensurate with the trainee's career level and training environment*
 - i. For trainees at more junior stages (e.g., undergraduate), explain how you intellectually contributed to the research project or overall research program and whether these contributions will lead to *eventual* authorship/co-authorship
 - ii. For trainees at Primarily Undergraduate Institutions (PUIs), Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs), or Universities from underrepresented countries within the IBNS membership that may have limited resources or opportunities as compared to research intensive institutions: be sure to highlight your engagement in teaching and mentoring, describe specific hardships you've faced in competitive balance, and how you've overcome these challenges in the Research Productivity Considerations statement of the application
- b. Provide evidence of continued engagement in original research throughout your scientific career
- c. Provide evidence of active scientific outreach. Be specific in descriptions of scientific outreach you've been involved in such as mentoring, volunteering, science communication, social media, etc.

7. Personal Statement

- a. Provide specific examples of how the Travel Award will benefit your training and education goals. For example:
 - i. How will it provide personal and interactive access to new technology or knowledge?
 - ii. How will it enable access to future potential collaborations?

- iii. Describe how access to expert feedback on current/future projects will further your professional development
 - iv. How will the meeting enhance networking opportunities within your area of study or aid future training/professional positions?
 - v. Use the preliminary meeting program to describe how opportunities at IBNS will further your professional goals. If the program has not been announced yet, use previous programs to gauge what researchers and laboratories of interest routinely attend IBNS
 - vi. If appropriate, describe the need for financial assistance to attend the Meeting. Please note that IBNS Travel Awards offset the cost of attending the Annual Meeting, but do not provide enough funds to cover all of the costs
- b. Describe how your attendance and receipt of a Travel Award will benefit the mission of IBNS. How will it enable your continued engagement in and encouragement of research/education in behavioral neuroscience with respect to:
- i. Research
 - ii. Scientific outreach and advocacy
 - iii. Mentoring junior scientists in research
 - iv. Teaching: TAing, tutoring, or leading lab demonstrations to encourage and recruit future behavioral neuroscientists

8. Diversity Statement

- a. Provide specific examples of previous, current, and/or planned activities that promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) within the field of behavioral neuroscience. Examples below:
 - i. Participation and/or leadership in initiatives and programs to promote and retain individuals from underrepresented groups in science. Highlight any specific applicant-led initiatives/goals
 - ii. Partnering with HBCUs, PUIs, and similar institutions to enhance research and education opportunities
 - iii. Collaborating with individuals from underrepresented groups
 - iv. Mentoring experience (teaching, lab research)
 - v. Outreach and/or advocacy engagement with the broader public
- b. Explain how these examples promote DEIA within the field of behavioral neuroscience
- c. For trainees at more junior stages, focus on future efforts as long as the statement includes examples of *actionable* goals and initiatives

9. Mentor's Letter of Support

Applicants should share these guidelines with mentors!

- a. Letter describes the role trainee played in research and identifies how this research relates to trainee's ongoing work and career progression
 - i. Include important milestones reached
 - 1. Abstracts and publications, where they were presented/published
 - 2. For trainees at more junior stages, how their contributions fit into larger research program

- ii. Describe the developments, skills, and/or perspectives the trainee brings to the overall research program
 - iii. Describe the trainee's future goals and training milestones (i.e., preparing the trainee for advancing to candidacy, thesis defense, and/or where they intend to go following their current training stage)
- b. Demonstrate enthusiasm about the trainee and explain why the trainee is recommended for the award
 - i. Describe the progress the trainee has made in the lab, how they learn/acquire new skills, ways in which they've become a stronger scientist through this project, etc.
 - ii. Describe what sets the trainee apart from others
 - iii. Avoid language that may be gender biased when describing the applicant. Click [here](#) for tips on avoiding unconscious gender biases
- c. Provide specific examples of how the trainee will take full advantage of this award at the meeting. See section #7 above and the following examples:
 - i. Outline specific networking opportunities that will be a good fit for the trainee to participate in and detail how direct personal interactions will benefit the trainee
 - ii. Provide examples of specific feedback the trainee may solicit from specific experts within their field of study
 - iii. Highlight new technology or knowledge presented at the meeting that can be brought back to the lab and used toward future goals