VBRN Project Award

Purpose: Project awards support multi-year research projects on a focused topic with a clearly defined hypothesis, supported by preliminary evidence of feasibility. After the conclusion of this project, PIs should be well positioned to apply for independent NIH support, e.g., R15 Award.

Project Duration: Two years

Eligibility: Faculty members who are full-time tenure track or equivalent at Vermont State University, Landmark College, Middlebury College, Norwich University, or Saint Michael's College. Research must meet the mission of NIH. Clinical trials are not allowed. To determine whether the proposed study is a clinical trial, use the NIH decision tool. NIH funding doesn't preclude further VBRN support, but in our mission supporting early investigators with no NIH history is a priority. There is no longer a limit on the number of years investigators may be funded by VBRN. For returning applicants who have received four or more years of VBRN funding, evidence of external application submission(s), a strong publication record, and undergraduate involvement in research will be important factors for additional funding. Faculty that are changing research directions are encouraged to apply for another VBRN Award.

NIH Mission: NIH is the steward of medical and behavioral research for the Nation. Its mission is to seek fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and the application of that knowledge to enhance health, lengthen life, and reduce illness and disability.

Funding Level and Allowable Expenses: Direct costs up to $75,000 per year may be requested. NIH requires that a Project Award PI spend on average 50% effort in research over the award year, which can be divided into summer and academic year time. Permitted expenses include PI salary for summer and/or academic year, technicians, supplies, small equipment, undergraduate wages, participant costs and conference travel. Use of the funds must be outlined and justified as part of the application. Exceptional projects may be invited to receive additional funding up to $125,000 per year with proper budget justification.

Review of Applications: VBRN applications now receive their initial review from a Third party service (AIBS) that contracts with experts in the specific areas of the application to produce high quality reviews that address the scientific merit of each of the submitted proposals. These experts deliver reviews organized around the NIH review criteria that make up NIH's Simplified Framework for Peer Review and exhibit the depth characteristic of the review of an R15 application.

When the third party reviews are returned to VBRN, they are reviewed by the VBRN Director, Associate Director, and Program Coordinator to determine their suitability to funding, based on available resources, program strategic imperatives*, and BPI institutional impact. Other data is also considered when making the final funding decisions, including science mentor reports, support of undergraduates in research, and if a renewal application, compliance with VBRN award conditions and impact of prior funding (e.g. publication record and proposal submissions for external grants). The applications along with external reviews and Director recommendations are forwarded to our External Advisory Committee, who make their funding recommendations. Only applications recommended for funding that involve human subjects research are submitted to the NIH for final approval. VBRN must take steps to ensure all funded research complies with government executive orders and NIH policies. VBRN will notify NIH of applications that do not include animals or human subjects research. Applications which include research with animals or human subjects are subject to NIH approval before initiation of work. VBRN's goal is to fund as many Awards as possible, but fund only meritorious applications responsive to the NIH mission..

VBRN will assess applications with respect to alignment with VBRN strategic objectives and mission. We are particularly interested in applications that foster inter-institutional collaborations and include a data science component. .

Project Award Key Dates
Grant Writing Workshop Attendance **DATE: November 7, 2025**
To be eligible for 2026–2028 Project Award funding, faculty must attend the VBRN Grant Writing Workshop on November 7, 2025. This event will be in person unless special arrangements are made in advance.
Letter of Intent **DUE: December 1, 2025**
Applicants must submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) to VBRN with a working title and key words by December 1, 2025. VBRN will distribute the LOI template to those who attended the Grant Writing Workshop.
Application Due Date **DUE: January 30, 2026**

Project Award applications are submitted online via the VBRN application site, which will be accessible beginning in early December 2025. Funding decisions are made and communicated to applicants by the end of March. Note that formatting must adhere to NIH standards as outlined on their website.

For the following application components, use the hyperlinked documents as provided. Please submit all documents in the PDF format, except for the Budget and Budget Justification, which should be submitted as Word documents.

All applicants must contact a federal Program Officer at an NIH Center or Institute to verify that the proposed research is fundable by the NIH. Project applications are not generally renewable except under extraordinary circumstances. If a Project Award renewal is contemplated, please contact the Director and Program Coordinator in advance of the deadline for permission to submit a Project Award renewal. If a Project Award renewal is granted, the applicant's current science mentor must review the proposal before submission.

Application components include:

- Face Page (submit as PDF)
    - Must be signed by BPI Coordinator and institutional grants officials (boxes 12 and 13)

- List direct costs only (boxes 7a and 8a)
    - List total costs (including Facilities and Administrative costs, boxes 7b and 8b)
    - Include eRA Commons User Name (box 3h)
    - Include NIH Center or Institute for the Research and the Name of a Program Officer
- Project Summary and Relevance (submit as PDF)
    - eRA Commons ID required for all senior/key personnel
- Budget (submit one document for each year of the Award, and both as Word documents)

  (Not to exceed one page)
    - List direct costs only
    - Fill in total amount for Facilities and Administrative costs
    - Must be reviewed by the BPI Coordinator
- Budget Justification (submit one document for each year of the Award, and both as Word documents)

  (Not to exceed three pages)
    - Must be reviewed by the BPI Coordinator
- Research Plan (submit the following as three separate PDFs in the linked form)

  (Not to exceed 11 pages, or 13 pages if applying for a renewal. As a general rule, VBRN does not support renewal applications (continued funding for project with same title). Under exceptional circumstances, renewal applications will only be entertained with the prior approval by the Director.)
    - Specific Aims (not to exceed one page)
    - Research Strategy (not to exceed 10 pages)
        - Research Strategy literature cited (excluding Progress Report Literature Cited - which is submitted separately below) must be submitted on this form (G.220 - R&R Other Project Information Form)
        - If this is a renewal application, a required Progress Report (not to exceed two pages) must be included in the page limits for the Research Strategy. Describe impact of prior VBRN funding, including papers, grant proposals, and support of undergraduates.
    - A Data Management and Sharing (DMS) Plan will be collected in the field called "Other Plans" on the PHS 398 Research Plan. See Writing a DMS Plan for the details on what to include in a Plan: https://sharing.nih.gov/data-management-and-sharing-policy/planning-and-budgeting-for-data-management-and-sharing/writing-a-data-management-and-sharing-plan
        - Note, any costs to support data management and sharing should be accounted for in the PHS 398 Modular Budget Form along with a brief justification of those costs. See Budgeting for DMS (https://sharing.nih.gov/data-management-and-sharing-policy/planning-and-budgeting-for-data-management-and-sharing/budgeting-for-data-management-sharing#after).
    - Progress Report (only) Literature Cited (as many pages as needed)
- Research Resources and Environment (submit as PDF)
- Biosketch (submit as PDF)
    - Submit for all senior/key personnel and other significant contributors
    - If the application features multiple PIs, include a Biosketch for each PI. Your Research Strategy should include a section with the heading "Multiple PI Management Plan" that describes the roles, responsibilities, and procedures for resolving disputes/ differences for the members of the team.
    - Not to exceed 5 pages per person
- For human subjects research, IRB approvals*
    - PHS Human Subjects and Clinical Trials Information Form (note, human subjects research is permitted, however clinical trials are no longer supported)
        - Study Record
    - Institutional IRB approval letter (with specified dates for which the research is approved)
    - The approved IRB research protocol
    - Current Human Subjects education certification for all key personnel. For more information visit Human Subjects Education FAQ.

  (Note, NIH no longer offers a course on Protecting Human Research Participants. Those seeking to fulfill the requirement for education in the protection of human research can complete the Human Research Protection Training offered by the HHS Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). Archived course content will be available for download on the NIH Research Involving Human Subjects website.)
- If applicable, complete Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee(s) (IACUC) approvals*
    - Institutional IACUC approval letter (with specified dates for which the research is approved)
    - A copy of the approved research protocol
    - Vertebrate Animals Section
- Supporting documents (as applicable; e.g. Letters of Support, Equipment Quotes, etc.)

*IRB and IACUC approvals must be submitted with the application by the due date. **A proposal will not be reviewed with a pending status**. If the institutional approval expires over the duration of the two-year award, the PI is responsible for sending an updated approval letter.

Funding Period: **July 1, 2026 - June 30, 2028**
Funding of awards is contingent upon NIH approval. Award funds must be spent in the award period; carryover of funds is not allowed
Project Award Conditions

Year One (July 1, 2026–June 30, 2027)**
Completion of the following:

- Individual Development Plan (IDP) due September 1, 2026. Incorporate feedback from your science mentor and BPI Coordinator before submitting your IDP to VBRN.

- Two telephone discussions of the IDP with the VBRN Director, the VBRN Program Coordinator, and the BPI Coordinator. These conversations are planned for September 2026 and May 2027.

- Annual VBRN survey and periodic VBRN longitudinal surveys.

- Report to VBRN citations and/or persistent identifiers for all products resulting from VBRN funding at least in part, including publications,

  presentations, and grant proposals. Compliance with NIH open access policy and data management and sharing policy is required

- VBRN Student Application for each student funded by VBRN prior to their start time in your research program.

- Progress Report submitted to the Director indicating progress made on specific aims (including publications and presentations) and whether specific aims will remain the same in year two, and if not, what major changes are envisioned.

- Submit a manuscript based on VBRN-funded research to a peer-reviewed journal by July 1, 2027.

Attendance at the following:

- Annual VBRN Faculty Retreat in Summer 2026.

- VBRN Professional Development Seminar in Winter 2027.

- Annual VBRN Career Day for students in April 2027.

- Note that while attendance at the Grant Writing Workshop is not required, attendance is strongly encouraged.

**Funding for the second year is contingent upon meeting the requirements in Year One.

Year Two (July 1, 2027–June 30, 2028)
Completion of the following:

- Individual Development Plan (IDP) due September 1, 2027. This IDP should represent an update and revision of what was filed in the previous year. Incorporate feedback from your science mentor and BPI Coordinator before submitting your IDP to VBRN.

- Two telephone discussions of the IDP with the VBRN Director, the VBRN Program Coordinator, and the BPI Coordinator. These conversations are planned for September 2027 and May 2028.

- Annual VBRN survey and periodic VBRN longitudinal surveys.

- Report to VBRN citations and/or persistent identifiers for all products resulting from VBRN funding at least in part, including publications, presentations, and grant proposals. Compliance with NIH's open access policy and data management and sharing policy is required

- VBRN Student Application for each student funded by VBRN prior to their start time in your research program.

- Have a manuscript published OR have revised and resubmitted a manuscript based on VBRN-funded research to a peer-reviewed journal by July 1, 2028.

- Submit a second manuscript based on VBRN-funded research to a peer-reviewed journal OR submit an extramural grant proposal by July 1, 2028.***

Attendance at the following:

- Annual VBRN Faculty Retreat in Summer 2027 and 2028.

- VBRN Professional Development Seminar in Winter 2028.

- Annual VBRN Career Day for students in April 2028.

***The decision to submit either a second manuscript or a grant proposal will be made by the PI, the BPI Research Coordinator and at least one member of VBRN's Professional Development and Education Team.

Any work resulting from this Award must acknowledge VBRN as a source of funding, details of which can be found on the VBRN website and in the faculty handbook. All publications from VBRN-funded research are required to meet the NIH public access policy. Details on this requirement can be found in the VBRN faculty handbook.