

## NIH U24 Music Networks Pilot Research Program: Acute and Chronic Pain

### 2025 - 2027 Call for Funding of Pilot Research Applications

#### Overview

In 2023, the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) with partial co-funding support from NIH's Office of Behavior and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) and National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), funded three music research networks to promote multidisciplinary mechanistic studies of music-based interventions (MBIs) for pain. These networks are expected to develop compelling research frameworks that will effectively guide future clinical studies on MBIs in the context of pain; adopt consistent terminology and taxonomy; support interdisciplinary collaborations; and initiate 1-year pilot projects to test novel **mechanistic** hypotheses.

The purpose of this Request for Applications (RFA) is to elicit proposals for 1-year pilot studies that will generate necessary preliminary data to strengthen future NIH applications for later-stage studies aimed at better understanding **the mechanisms through which music may have a positive impact on pain**. A successful pilot study would also **facilitate multidisciplinary collaborations among neuroscientists, music therapists, musicians, and biomedical, behavioral, or social scientists**.

MBIs have been investigated for efficacy in the amelioration of acute and chronic pain. However, how music may influence pain remains unclear; little is known about the mechanisms underlying the effects of MBIs.

**Only mechanistic studies**, including mechanistic clinical trials, are eligible for this RFA. Studies that are designed to test the safety or demonstrate the efficacy/effectiveness of an intervention are expressly **not** eligible and should be submitted under the appropriate NCCIH Clinical Trial FOA. Please see [NCCIH's Clinical Trials Funding Opportunity Announcements](#) web page for further information.

#### The scientific scope of the pilot projects is limited to the following high-priority research areas:

- 1) Exploration of innovative mechanistic hypotheses of the neural systems involved in the therapeutic effect of music (e.g., sensory, motor, cognitive, emotional/affective, reward, interoceptive systems) in acute pain or chronic pain.
- 2) Examination of non-neural physiological systems and novel measures (e.g., impact on related non-neural organs, biochemical and molecular signals, epigenetic modifications) relevant to advancing mechanistic understanding of music or MBIs for acute or chronic pain.
- 3) Investigation of psychological, behavioral, and social predictors, moderators, or mediators of the effects of music or MBIs on acute or chronic pain.
- 4) Discovery of predictive biomarkers or signatures/profiles for music or MBIs in the context of acute or chronic pain.
- 5) Development and/or testing of innovative animal models to study mechanisms and biomarkers of music or MBIs in the context of acute or chronic pain.
- 6) Development and/or testing of novel technologies to measure how music or MBIs impact the brain or body, or to monitor health-related responses relevant to acute or chronic pain.
- 7) Development of large de-identified dataset(s) of music-based interventions deployed within medical centers to address mechanistic understanding of MBIs influence on acute pain.

**Important:** Primary data collection projects are appropriate, but projects must be completed within the proposed 1-year timeline. In such cases, leveraging ongoing studies by adding a study design element, measure, or using a similar approach is strongly encouraged. Secondary data analysis projects are also acceptable but must represent a novel scientific advancement. The proposals cannot include [high-risk](#)

[populations](#). No data collection for human subjects or animal research in foreign countries is permitted. All pilot applicants should be a member of at least one of the three networks at the time of submission.

**Each network anticipates funding multiple pilot proposals. Funding priorities are as follows:**

- **Music4Pain Research Network:** The Music4Pain Research Network will prioritize applications focused on research priorities #1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.
- **AudioAnalgesiA:** The AudioAnalgesiA Network will prioritize applications focused on research priorities # 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6.
- **ENSEMBLE:** The ENSEMBLE Network will prioritize applications focused on research priorities # 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7.

### **Eligibility Information**

Research scholar affiliated with an accredited University or medical center with the capacity to submit NIH grants. All key personnel must be located in the United States. Foreign consultants are allowed but subawards with foreign entities are not permitted.

Early-stage investigators are encouraged to apply. Postdoctoral scholars can serve as the PI, but they must include a letter of support from a faculty mentor. PhD candidates are eligible to serve as a PI after confirmation they have passed their dissertation defense and if they have an established investigator as a MPI.

Pilot applications **must include multidisciplinary** teams. This includes, at a minimum, two investigators who represent different scientific disciplines. Teams with more than two disciplines are strongly encouraged.

Applicants are encouraged to register as a member of the network by the time of submission (if they haven't already done so).

### **Application Materials**

An application (single-spaced, 0.5 margins, and in Arial 11 font) must include the following:

1. **Cover Page:** Include names of principal investigator and other key personnel, institution (for each), mailing address, email, and pilot study title.
2. **Proposal:** Using the required format and 6 pages maximum (excluding literature cited):
  - a) Specific Aims (1 page)
  - b) Significance and Innovation (approximate length: 1 page)
  - c) Approach/Research plan (approximate length: 2-3 pages)
  - d) Environment (approximate length: ½ page)
  - e) Potential for future NIH funding (approximate length: ½ page)
  - f) Literature cited (not included in the page limit)
  - g) Two 1-page maximum letters of support (not included in the page limit)

Applicants new to NIH proposal writing may want to consult these [guidelines](#).

Preliminary data can be included within the 6-page proposal to support the scientific premise of the study. However, preliminary data are not required, and the absence of it will not have any negative effect on the evaluation.

3. **NIH Biosketches (non-fellowship) for all key personnel.** Use of Common Forms created through SciENCv is required. See: <https://grants.nih.gov/policy-and-compliance/implementation-of-new-initiatives-and-policies/common-forms-for-biosketch>.

#### **4. Budget and Budget Justification**

One-year modular budget in increments of \$25,000 but not to exceed \$50,000 and a budget justification using the NIH R&R forms. Pilot applications with a budget over \$50,000 require prior approval.

Expenses may include salary and fringe benefits for the PI, co-Investigators and research staff, research supplies, and participant payments.

Project-related travel expenses are allowed but must occur during the 1-year pilot period.

Institutional indirect costs and publication costs are not allowed.

Budgets will need to be approved by NIH if selected for funding.

#### **Submission Instructions**

##### Step 1

Please submit your Letter of Intent (LOI), indicating your intention to apply, to Arlyne Gutierrez at [arlyneg@hs.uci.edu](mailto:arlyneg@hs.uci.edu).

The LOI is required and must include:

- 1) Principal Investigator Name and affiliation
- 2) Co- Investigator Name(s) and affiliation(s)
- 3) Title
- 4) Abstract (30 lines only)
- 5) Target Research Area (from list above)

##### Step 2

Following the submission of your LOI, you will receive an individualized link and passcode to a submission portal, in which you will upload all required documents.

##### Step 3

Notification Emails for Receipt of Proposal: A notification email indicating the receipt of all your application materials will be sent within 24 hours of submission deadline. If you have not received this confirmation, please contact Arlyne Gutierrez at [arlyneg@hs.uci.edu](mailto:arlyneg@hs.uci.edu)

#### **Resubmissions**

We welcome resubmissions. For resubmissions, please add an introductory statement with your response to major reviewer critiques (approximately ½ page). You can optionally mark your revisions in the application using highlights. We ask that research teams who plan to submit a revised application also submit an LOI by the stated deadline.

#### **Full Application Evaluation Criteria**

The review panel will evaluate the proposals based on:

##### Importance of the Research.

- Does the study address an important mechanistic question related to the effects of music on pain?
- Does the proposal include novel concepts, approaches, or methods that will advance mechanistic knowledge about music for pain?

##### Rigor and Feasibility.

- Are overall methods, study design, analyses, or planned activities appropriate, rigorous, and feasible to be completed within the award period?

**Expertise and Resources.**

- Do the principal investigator and co-investigator(s) have the background necessary to complete the project?
- Does the proposal involve collaborators from multiple disciplines?
- Will the environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success?
- Are the institutional support, equipment, and other physical resources available to the investigators adequate for the project?
- Will the project benefit from unique features of the environment, participant populations, or collaborative arrangements?

**Future potential.**

- Is the proposal likely to lead to future NIH funding, and has the applicant clearly articulated future plans stemming from this project?

**Review and Selection Process**

Applications will be reviewed by all three Music Network teams and also require approval from NIH. The selection of pilot projects will be made in consultation with the NIH Project Scientist(s) and approved by the NIH Program Officer(s). Selected pilot applications will be requested to submit additional materials for further consideration and to conform to NIH funding requirements

**Final Report.** A final report at the conclusion of the pilot study will be required.

**Key Dates**

Posted date: June 26, 2025 revised July 11 2025

LOI due dates	August 1 2025	November 1 2025	February 1 2026	May 1 2026	August 1 2026
Application due dates	Sept 1 2025	Dec 1 2025	March 1 2026	June 1 2026	Sept 1 2026
Earliest projected start date	June 2026	Sept 2026	Dec 2026	March 2027	June 2027

**Research Network Contacts**

Music4Pain Research Network  
 Joke Bradt, PhD (PI)  
 Website: [music4pain.org](http://music4pain.org)  
 Email: [music4pain@drexel.edu](mailto:music4pain@drexel.edu)

AudioAnalgesiA  
 Debra Burns, PhD (PI)  
 Website: <https://audioanalgesia.org>  
[audioanalgesia@memphis.edu](mailto:audioanalgesia@memphis.edu)

ENSEMBLE  
 Jeffery Dusek PhD (Contact PI)  
 Website: [ssih.uci.edu/research/areas-of-exploration/ensemble-network/](http://ssih.uci.edu/research/areas-of-exploration/ensemble-network/)  
 Email: [arlyneg@hs.uci.edu](mailto:arlyneg@hs.uci.edu)