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Editorials

# Brain Mappers of Tomorrow: An international multilingual initiative for neuroscience dissemination

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The initiative "Brain Mappers of Tomorrow" coordinated by the Organization for Human Brain Mapping (OHBM) Diversity and Inclusivity Committee (DIC) aims to make neuroscience accessible to children worldwide, particularly those from historically underrepresented backgrounds. Over the past several years, this successful initiative has grown and evolved, offering live reviews of scientific papers tailored for children in multiple languages. These live review events have seen exponential growth, engaging over 1,000 children in 2023 alone. Through partnerships and innovative strategies, the initiative has successfully reached diverse audiences, fostering curiosity and critical thinking in young minds. Although some challenges remain, including recruiting scientists and participants from underprivileged communities, ongoing efforts strive to overcome these barriers. The success of "Brain Mappers of Tomorrow" demonstrates the potential for similar initiatives across scientific disciplines, emphasizing the importance of diversity and inclusivity in science education and outreach. Such efforts can foster positive impacts at multiple levels, from individuals (children and presenters) to global society. This editorial highlights the benefits and challenges of such initiatives, shares experiences and resources to assist other scientific communities in launching similar endeavors, and discusses future directions.

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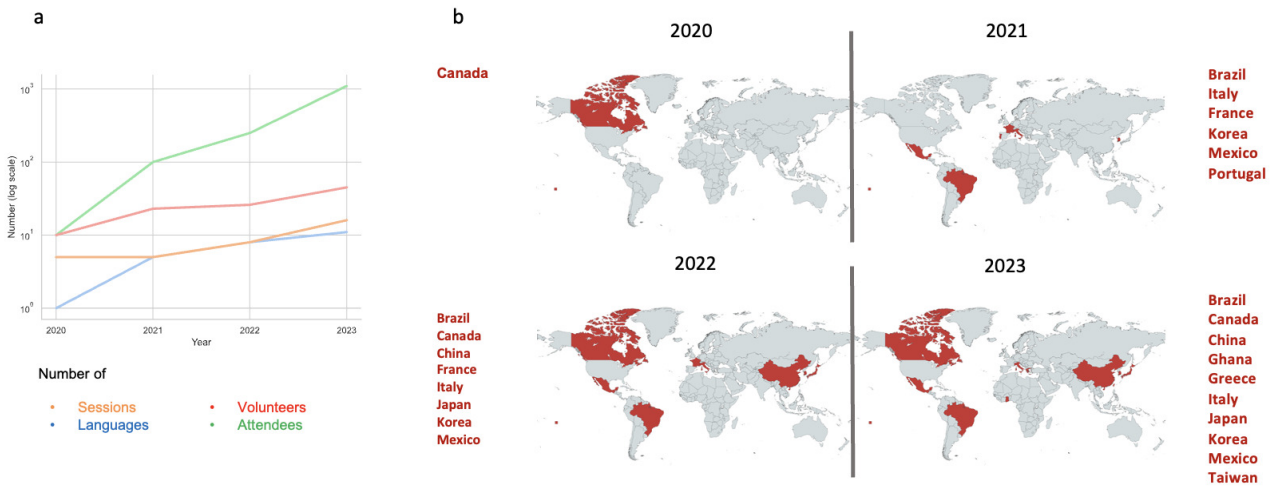


**Figure 1. Expansion of the annual OHBM Brain Mappers of Tomorrow events over the years.**

(a) Log scale representation of the number of languages, sessions, volunteers, and attendees. Estimated numbers were provided by local organizers. (b) World map with the participating countries colored in red. The world map was prepared with https://www.mapchart.net/world.html.

## INTRODUCTION

Jiyeon, Isabela, and Marco, three 8-year-old children from Korea, Brazil and Italy, respectively, will probably never meet. Yet, they already share something rather unique: they have witnessed firsthand neuroscientists from the Organization for Human Brain Mapping (OHBM) sharing their passion for brain mapping. For the past four years, members of the OHBM Diversity and Inclusivity Committee (DIC[1,2]) have devoted substantial effort towards outreach initiatives aimed at improving the quality of experience of the annual meeting for families, as well as towards the promotion of scientific values and the dissemination of neuroscientific findings across the globe. Engaging in science dissemination for children and, importantly, for those from historically underrepresented backgrounds, is a crucial endeavor for OHBM. Children represent the future stewards of scientific progress, and early exposure to neuroscience fosters curiosity, critical thinking, and a passion for learning about human brain mapping.[3-5] By effectively communicating complex concepts in an accessible manner, scientists can inspire the next generation of researchers and thought leaders. Moreover, exposing neuroscience to children from underrepresented backgrounds is imperative for fostering diversity in the scientific community. Providing equitable access to scientific knowledge ensures that a broader spectrum of perspectives is brought to the table, enriching the scientific landscape with fresh insights and innovations. The engagement of neuroscientists in science dissemination to children, especially those facing systemic barriers, contributes not only to scientific literacy but also to the promotion of inclusivity and diversity within all facets of neuroscience and beyond.[6,7] Despite these advantages, science dissemination efforts are often undervalued within the scientific community.[8] Moreover, currently available programs are typically geared towards English-speaking countries, with a few notable exceptions: Skype-A-Scientist is now available in English and Spanish[9] and Letters-to-a-pre-scientist,[10] covering the U.S., has been implemented in Italy as well.[11]

This editorial aims to shed light on the importance of initiatives like Brain Mappers of Tomorrow (BMT), sharing experiences and resources to assist other scientific communities in launching similar endeavors. Furthermore, this article discusses the future of science dissemination, advocating for diversity, inclusivity, and equity in all scientific facets, starting already at a young age.

## THE OHBM BRAIN MAPPERS OF TOMORROW

Within OHBM, several initiatives have aimed to make scientific research accessible to children and adolescents over the years (Fig. 1).

In 2020, the OHBM DIC collaborated with Frontiers for Young Minds (FYM[12]) to introduce its first live review for children, aligning with FYM's ethos of *"Science for kids, edited by kids"*.[13] Since then, young reviewers aged 8-15, under the guidance of scientist mentors, have reviewed scientific papers written for children during live events at OHBM annual meetings.[14-18] Despite the shift to virtual meetings in 2020 due to the pandemic, the inaugural event received enthusiastic responses from young reviewers, scientists, and the wider OHBM community.

Building on this success and to engage children from historically underrepresented and non-English speaking backgrounds, the DIC expanded to a multilingual live review format in 2021. Recognizing the lack of multilingual resources, OHBM DIC developed new infrastructure, including flyers in different languages, and pre-recorded research presentations in corresponding YouTube playlists with bilingual subtitles.[19] These efforts led to significant participation growth, with events conducted in multiple languages, reaching over 250 children in 2022.

In 2023, the initiative saw an exponential growth, with 16 local sessions held in 11 languages, engaging over 1,000 children in 10 different countries.[20] These sessions covered diverse topics, and local organizers incorporated unique activities to enhance engagement, such as brain-related artcraft activities, games and behavioral experiments. In addition, an in-person live event was held in Montreal, featuring bilingual French and English presentations, in collaboration with FYM.[21] In collaboration with the OHBM BrainArt Special Interest Group,[22,23] the live event further included a short arts and craft activity, and received the support of a local outreach program, BrainReach Canada[24] to recruit children participants in Montreal. Social media was used to advertise these events and to ensure that the local organizers' volunteer efforts were recognized by the OHBM community and beyond. Post-event surveys were conducted to gather feedback for future improvements. Additionally, interviews with local organizers provided insights into the benefits of participation for early-career researchers (e.g. graduate students, postdoctoral trainees and assistant professors) and directions for future endeavors.[25]

In 2024, the infrastructure supporting the event has been upgraded with the addition of three dedicated officers within the OHBM DIC: event communication officer (webpage & media), graphic design officer (flyers, video thumbnail, logo, homepage graphics, etc) and FYM communication officer (articles, in-person event collaboration). Figure 2 outlines a summary of the event preparation steps and anticipated timeline, and Figure 3 delineates recommended formats for prospective organizers to contemplate when structuring team organization, live event arrangements, participant categories, preparation steps, and program content. To learn more and participate, visit the Brain Mappers of Tomorrow section on the OHBM-DIC website at https://ohbm-dic.github.io/kidsreview/.

## BENEFITS OF INITIATIVES ENGAGING CHILDREN IN SCIENCE OUTREACH

Our post-event survey and interview with local event organizers of the BMT revealed that these events offer numerous benefits to scientists and children alike. Four broad areas were mentioned (discussed further below): 1) heightened community engagement, 2) increased visibility and dissemination, 3) improved communication skills, and 4) academic and career enhancement. The first two benefit the children attendees and society more generally, whereas 3 and 4 reflect benefits to the presenters and organizers of the sessions.

*Benefits For Society.* By effectively facilitating science outreach events worldwide in languages native to the event location, outreach events contribute to nurturing a diverse future generation of scientists through inclusive educational opportunities. Children not only learn about exciting scientific findings directly from the scientists who speak the same language as them, but they also have the opportunity to directly ask the scientists their questions about the science. We hope that this early exposure to neuroscience and brain mapping in children may ignite their curiosity and encourage critical thinking about how the brain works, inspiring them to pursue careers in this field.

Moreover, these events help increase awareness about brain health, emphasizing the significance of mental well-being and promoting the adoption of healthy lifestyle choices. Children and their families learn about topics related to brain health, including aging and seizures.[15,17,21] These outreach events can also cover the dangers of substance abuse, stress, and brain injuries, teach coping strategies, reduce stigma around mental health, and promote empathy and support in communities.[16,18] See the list of topics covered in our past BMP events in Supplementary Table 1. By promoting diverse role models of scientists, BMT can also help build an inclusive mindset, introduce diverse perspectives among children, and instill a sense of social responsibility and engagement, driving social changes.[26,27] By educating young minds about these critical issues, we aim to foster a generation that is better informed about the importance of brain health and equipped to make healthier choices throughout their lives.

The expansion of these outreach events in recent years to different languages and places across the globe is particularly meaningful for the OHBM DIC. By planting this seed early on in children worldwide, we aim to truly achieve our goal of nurturing a diverse and inclusive scientific community, contributing to the advancement of innovative and productive science, and reducing gender, geographic and societal biases. Ultimately, this can help build public trust in the scientific community, by demonstrating our commitment to education and outreach and contributing to the enrichment of society as a whole.

*Benefits For Scientists.* The participating scientists mentioned several advantages of participating in the BMT events: gaining valuable experience in addressing young audiences and the general public, improving their communication skills, as well as enhancing their academic curriculum vitae. Respondents highlighted the importance of online communication platforms such as websites and video playlists for further dissemination and future recruitment.

Participating and organizing these outreach events can benefit scientists by enhancing their ability to present complex scientific concepts to non-professional audiences in accessible language.[28] These events provide a platform to share research with possibly one of the hardest audiences to reach: children and adolescents who speak different languages. In line with the increasing emphasis on knowledge translation in the scientific community, our events offer a new way for researchers to present their findings in an engaging and easily understandable manner for children in their native language. By translating complex science concepts into accessible language for general public and young audiences, researchers, some of whom are often trainees or early career researchers, have an opportunity to improve science communication skills and to revisit the core of their science and address fundamental questions underlying their research topics. Children attending these events often pose fundamental or unexpected questions that are not directly related to the research scope. In this context, one of our past event organizers noted that discussing neu-

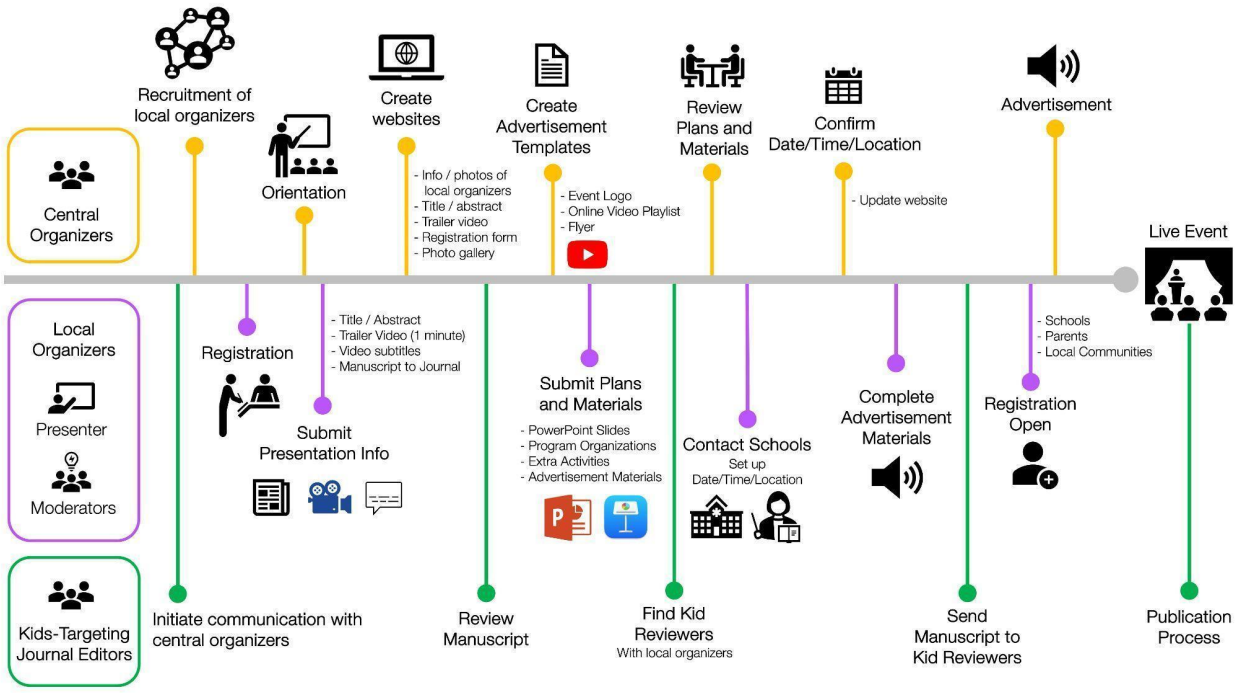


**Figure 2. Schematic visualization of the steps required to set up a kids-friendly science outreach event.**

The role of central organizers, such as the OHBM DIC, is essential to successfully executing these events. Central organizers are responsible for creating web pages for local events, which include the photos and brief information about presenters and moderators, a short introduction of the event and presentation in native language and English, and photo gallery from past events if applicable. They will create an online trailer video playlist (e.g. YouTube) for all local events, create template registration forms and advertisement materials for local organizers to adapt and revise, review presentation materials and provide suggestions, and help communication, advertisement and recognition. The central organizers will oversee the whole process in all local events. For each local event, at least 1 presenter and 2 moderators per team are required. Presentor(s) will prepare children-friendly presentation materials, manuscript (if applicable), short trailer video (1-2 minutes) with subtitles in both English and native language, while moderator(s) will coordinate date/time/location of their live event and recruit audiences from local schools, parents, communities, and outreach programs. When coordinating a live event associated with manuscript submission to a journal, it is crucial to reach out to the Journal and confirm the languages accepted for both manuscript submission and the review critiques by children reviewers.

roscience with children was an amazing experience that prompted them to rethink their research and present their work more clearly.

Such outreach activities also contribute to career development through increased interaction with local communities and broader scientific dialogue, providing opportunities to collaborate with educators and community organizers and building valuable partnerships and networks that extend beyond academia. Moreover, hosting in-person events for children during scientific conferences can support attendees who bring their children and require childcare during the meetings, maximizing the benefits that conferences offer to individual attendees.

## CHALLENGES AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

Despite these wide-ranging benefits, these outreach events are not without challenges. For instance, in the early years, when the initiative was not known, the recruitment of scientists to present their work proved to be a challenge. In light of the exponential growth due to the popularity and enthusiastic response to our events (Fig. 1), we have received increased support and notoriety from scientists around the world. Scientists have generously committed their time to presenting at the live reviews and/or to write a manuscript for Frontiers for Young Minds (Fig. 2 and 3). Another hurdle concerns recruiting children and their guardians or teachers. For example, in highly developed countries or cities, numerous resources and infrastructure related to neuroscience may be already in place. Thus, it becomes imperative to prepare more engaging materials tailored to the audience such as audiovisual materials and online resources to captivate the public's interest. Conversely, extending outreach to underprivileged communities – whether geographically, socioeconomically, or in various dimensions – presents challenges due to their limited access to advertising. Local organizers must exert additional efforts to establish connections, invite schools and persuade them to participate. For example, the OHBM DIC's support for Wi-Fi access in Ghana in 2022-23 not only facilitated increased participation but also served to bridge the gap in accessing online resources. Furthermore, while either in-person or virtual format should be available, it is essential to acknowledge that some children from underprivileged backgrounds may lack access to the internet or a physical location for in-person participation. Future initiatives may wish to consider alternative approaches for reaching out to isolated communities, for example by contacting individuals leading local childhood scouting organizations or the Ministry of Education in respective countries.

In recent years, with our outreach events in different languages taking place online, certain local organizers have achieved remarkable success in attracting a sizable audience comprising diverse schools and households. These achievements stem from the development of unique strate-

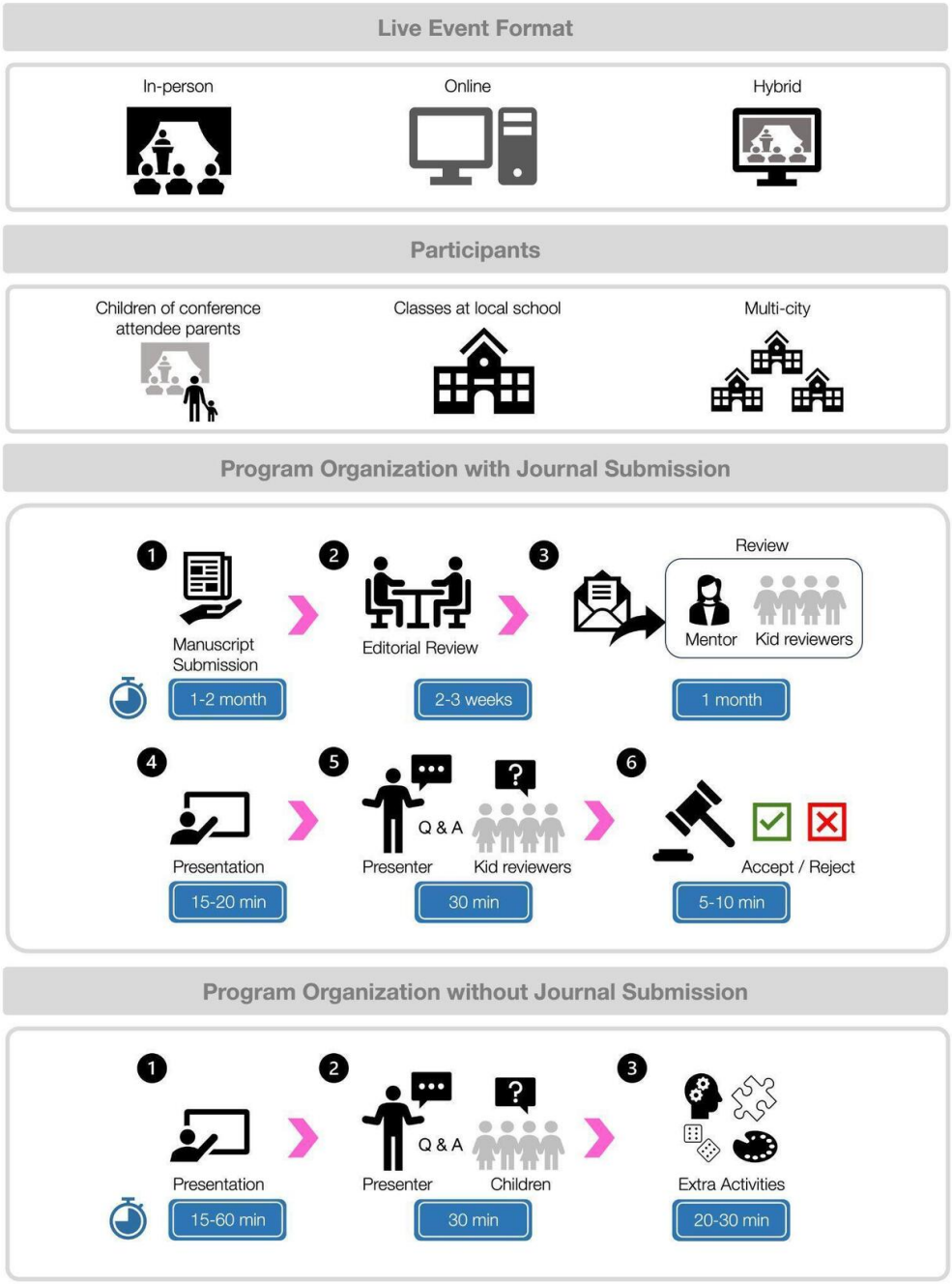


**Figure 3. Recommended formats of kids-friendly science outreach events.**

Local organizers can structure their events in different ways, in terms of live event formats, type of participants, and program contexts. If the organizers link the event to a manuscript submission (i.e. for publication in Frontiers for Young Minds), the authors can follow these steps: (1) Authors submit a manuscript to a journal, (2) Journal editors review the manuscript, (3) editors send it to children reviewers and their scientific mentors. Children reviewers and mentors can be recruited and assigned either by the presenting team, while the journal can help if the journal is domestic based. Children reviewers read the manuscript before the live event. (4) Children attend the live event and listen to the presentation, (5) Use the Question and Answer (Q&A) time to interact with the presenter, (6) Kid reviewers make decisions (Accept, Revise and Resubmit, or Reject) for publication of the manuscript. After the event, the mentors submit the children reviewers' decisions and comments to the journal. If the decision is to revise and resubmit, authors revise the manuscript and resubmit to the journal. Final decision is made by journal editors. If the organizers do not link their event to a manuscript submission, they can follow the steps described in the last row, which include optional extra activities, such as brain-related art crafts, behavioral experiments or games, research simulations, and can be introduced to improve engagement.

gies accumulated over several years of participation, taking into account local culture and education systems. Nevertheless, this remains an ongoing challenge and will require tremendous efforts from local organizers to reach out to local schools and communities. Providing organizational support for local travel, such as funding domestic transportation for in-person events, could enhance accessibility, offering children a more inclusive opportunity to engage with these events. To address the needs of children who may not participate in public education or face restricted access to our outreach activities, recording and sharing the entire event online or through alternative means can serve as a valuable resource solution. The OHBM DIC hopes to leverage the success of local organizers to develop resources that will empower future organizers in reaching a diverse audience effectively.

To ensure that OHBM DIC can sustain and scale this initiative, we need to strengthen our connections with local entities (e.g., OHBM regional chapters[29] and local organizing committees) as well as other aligned communities such as the ALBA network[30,31] and Neuroscience Alliance.[32] OHBM DIC is considering several strategies to enhance opportunities and seek potential internal or external funding sources. For instance, financial support for local travel or extra activities (e.g., materials for brain artcraft activities) can help local organizers meet their needs when planning sessions. Additionally, offering direct financial support for participating scientists, such as full or partial coverage of conference registration or BMT awards, could encourage participation.

## CONCLUSIONS

*"Brain Mappers of Tomorrow",* the child-friendly and multilingual scientific outreach program initiated by the OHBM DIC, stands as a testament to a sustained commitment toward fostering diversity and inclusivity within the scientific community and academia. Its adaptable format presents a model that can be readily embraced by other scientific communities, catalyzing similar endeavors aimed at demystifying scientific concepts to wider audiences. For instance, the Neuromatch Conference, the premier international online gathering in computational neuroscience, now features a dedicated session for children following consultations with our team. Critically, Brain Mappers of Tomorrow distinguishes itself as the sole OHBM initiative truly open to the public, forging a direct connection between society and scientists, transcending barriers of age, culture, and language.

We don't know whether Jiyeon, Isabela, or Marco, the kids mentioned in the introduction, will become *brain mappers*, but one thing we are sure of is that they have witnessed true passion for science and that's something they won't forget.

## DATA AVAILABILITY

Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE

All authors declare no conflict of interest related to this editorial and the BMT events.

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# SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

## Supplementary Material

Download: https://apertureneuro.org/article/123400-brain-mappers-of-tomorrow-an-international-multilingual-initiative-for-neuroscience-dissemination/attachment/244814.xlsx