



**Request for Applications:
2027 Post-Doctoral Save Our Scientists (SOS) Grant Program**

RFA Released: July 29, 2026
Applications Due: October 15, 2026, 5PM
Notification of Awards: March, 2027

Introduction

ASF is releasing a request for applications - the Post-Doctoral “Save Our Scientists” award - in response to changing conditions regarding federal support for autism research. ASF is committed to supporting Post-Doctoral autism researchers whose work aims to improve the lives of people with autism. This mechanism is designed to provide existing Post-Doctoral fellows with additional flexible support to ensure their continued success as early career autism researchers. New and existing Post-Doctoral fellows are encouraged to apply.

Funds should be used to support research costs, travel, training opportunities, supplies, data access, research participant support, and other direct expenses. It is not intended to serve as a full Post-Doctoral stipend. Funds may be transferred to a different institution when a fellow is promoted to a tenure track position or moves institutions. Applicants should be specific about what funding was lost, cut or otherwise suspended that makes this mechanism necessary for their career development.

The Post-Doctoral fellow’s research must be scientifically linked to autism. Autism Science Foundation will consider all areas of basic and clinical research including but not limited to: human behavior across the lifespan (language, learning, communication, social function, epilepsy, sleep, self-injurious behavior, catatonia), neurobiology (anatomy, development, neuro-imaging), pharmacology, neuropathology, human genetics, genomics, genetic medicines, epigenetics, epigenomics, immunology, molecular and cellular mechanisms, studies employing model organisms, organoids and systems, and studies of treatment, service delivery, policy and employment. Priority will be given to studies that focus on profound autism and/or include participants with profound autism.

Award Information

The Autism Science Foundation will make a number of awards based on available financial resources. Awards of up to \$25,000 will be made directly to the institution sponsoring the research to support specific direct expenses as described in the application budget. Post-Doctoral fellows may apply for renewal of the grant each year that they are working as a Post-Doctoral fellow. They will need to submit a new application to do so but are not ineligible because previous funding was received.

These funds are designed to be used flexibly, as we recognize that each Post-Doctoral fellow's situation is unique. Funds are not to be used to supplement a stipend, but rather to support research and career development. Funds will be attached to the Post-Doctoral fellow (not the mentor's lab) and may be transferred to another institution if the awardee changes labs.

Awards will be paid directly to the university sponsoring the research at the start of the award period. Payment will be contingent upon acceptance (by an official authorized to act for the institution receiving the award) of the Autism Science Foundation award terms and conditions without amendment (provided at the time of the award) and receipt by ASF of all required certifications.

Eligibility

Applicants must be a current Post-Doctoral fellow with an accredited college or university, or be in a Post-Doctoral fellowship at the time the funding begins. **Individuals from both outside and within the United States are eligible to apply, regardless of where their research is being conducted.** Post-Doctoral fellows do not need to be US citizens. Payment is made in Canadian dollars for projects being conducted in Canada; for all other research sites, payment is made in US dollars.

A Post-Doctoral fellowship is a continuation of a training opportunity, and therefore, an application must name a mentor who will oversee the training experience. The proposed mentor must hold a tenured or tenure-track faculty appointment (or equivalent) at an accredited institution of higher education or health/medical/research institution, and must be an established and active investigator in some aspect of autism research. A mentor should only be named on ONE SOS application.

The application requires a letter of recommendation from someone **other** than the mentor.

Applicants are encouraged, but not required, to engage an advisor on the project. An advisor offers guidance on issues that the mentor may not have as much experience with or knowledge about or who provides additional levels of knowledge or background. They can provide mentoring, networking, educational and technical expertise. The advisor's name and email should be on the title page and their CV should be included in the application even if their contribution is not supported by the budget.

Proposal Guidelines:

Formatting Requirements

The entire proposal, excluding the letter of recommendation and biosketches, must be submitted in 12-point Arial font, 1.5 spacing and should have margins of 0.5 inch or greater. The applicant's last name must appear in the header on every page of the application. Number the pages as indicated. In order to provide continuity to reviewers, if pages are not used, the words "page intentionally left blank" must appear as a watermark on that page. *For example, if the research plan calls for 4 pages but you only need three pages, the 4th page should be numbered and watermarked with "page intentionally left blank."* Proposals must adhere to the page limits provided.

Proposal Preparation

A proposal **must include the following sections:**

Page 1: Title Page

Each proposal must include a title page with the applicant's name and full contact information **(including both a current and a permanent, non-institutional affiliated email address like a gmail, hotmail or yahoo account)**, mentor name and full contact information, ***title of the project*** and name of the sponsoring institution (where the research is taking place). Proposals without a title page may be returned without review.

Pages 2-3: Abstract (Max. 500 words) & Lay Abstract (Max. 250 words)

The research summary should describe your current project(s) and stress the relevance of the research to individuals with autism and their families. *(Maximum 500 words)*

The lay abstract must be intelligible to a knowledgeable layperson or non-expert. It should not include jargon and should clearly and succinctly state the goals of the project and the expected impact on people with autism. *(Maximum 250 words)*

Pages 4-7: Current Research and Role of SOS funding (Maximum 4 pages)

Describe your research, including your specific aims and objectives (which can be based on another grant application), and progress so far.

Please use a narrative format and include answers to the following questions. Do not copy and paste these questions and answers. Use these questions as a guide to describe your research, specific aims and objectives:

- What gap in funding or cut in funding will the SOS grant address?
- How does the current project fit in with your overall goals as an autism researcher and the research program itself?
- How is your salary/stipend funded?
- What is the timeline for your research plan and for your fellowship?
- What is the hypothesis of your study? Include the aims and objectives of your research project or projects. Include sample size, feasibility and central methodology
- What preliminary data have you collected and what do you expect to find in the next phase? You can refer to well-described tables and figures and images using “wrap text” in the document.
- What are the long-term goals of your research plan (1-5 years)?
- What parts of the research study are not being met by current funding sources?
- Has the study been reviewed by an IRB or animal care and use committee? Please provide documentation.
- How will de-identified data be shared with the larger scientific community? This can, but does not have to, include depositing data in the [NIH Data Archive](#).
- How will this funding be used to enrich your current research project or program?

Pages 8-9: Bibliography (Maximum 2 pages – single spaced OK)

Include complete literature citations including titles and all authors.

Page 10: Other Support Document (Maximum 2 pages – single spaced OK)

Please include the following:

Name:

Grants that applicant receives any support from, both in submission or in progress

Overlap

- *Percent effort*
- *Infrastructure costs*
- *Fees*

- *Supplies or direct costs*

At the end of the document state:

PD/PI or other senior/key personnel, certify that the statements herein are true, complete and accurate to the best of my knowledge, and accept the obligation to comply with Public Health Services terms and conditions if a grant is awarded as a result of this application. I am aware that any false, fictitious, or fraudulent statements or claims may subject me to criminal, civil, or administrative penalties.

Signature:

Date:

Page 12-13: Budget *(please use the format as shown in the table below)*

The applicant must provide a detailed budget outlining how the award funds will be used. Please refer to the 'Budget and Allowable Expenses' section below for examples of acceptable expenses. The budget should be in table format and include itemized costs and justification for inclusion. Expenses must directly support the fellow's research and/or professional development; this award is not intended to cover stipends or general living expenses. The budget may be changed during the time of the grant only with approval from the Autism Science Foundation.

We encourage applicants to consider a broad range of needs, including but not limited to travel. The diversity of the budget and how it fits into the research plan will be scored by reviewers.

Item/Cost	Purpose/Justification	Amount

Allowable Expenses

Funding should be used to support research-related activities or activities that support the Post-Doctoral fellow's research and professional development. The funds are meant to be used flexibly to accommodate individual situations of each Post-Doctoral applicant.

Allowable expenses include but are not limited to:

- Research supplies and materials
- Data access or licensing fees
- Short term (1-4 weeks) visits to other labs (housing expenses may be included) to learn a specific skill, access a new dataset, etc
- Career development activities such as training courses. Maximum of one development activity allowed.
- Conference travel and registration. A maximum of two conferences allowed and the specific plans for attendance should be stated. Conference expenses cannot exceed \$2,500/meeting (maximum of \$5,000 per budget).
- Research participant compensation or costs (honoraria, gift cards, travel reimbursement, on-site child care for research participants)
- Animals and animal costs
- Research associate or other staffing (not including the fellow's salary)
- Time on shared research equipment at the fellow's institution or another institution
- Childcare expenses for the fellow related to research activities (up to \$1,000)

We will not issue blank checks. Projected uses for these funds must be detailed in the application and budget. For example, do not write "travel," but rather explain which conference you want to attend and why, and then provide cost details.

The following expenses are NOT allowable:

- Open access fees (all ASF awardees are able to deposit manuscripts into PubMed via HRA Open);
- Salary, stipend, fringe benefits for the fellow. If lack of access to health care is preventing the applicant from completing a Post-Doctoral fellowship, please explain in the personal statement and we will consider it as part of our goal is to be flexible;
- General cost-of-living expenses (housing, personal bills, personal items, etc)
- Non-portable equipment (lab infrastructure, items that must stay with the institution if the fellow leaves);
- Institutional indirect costs
- More than two conferences or one training course

Please include a statement with specific assurance that receipt of this grant will not result in duplication of funding or reduction of support from the host institution.

Pages 14-15: Personal Statement (Maximum 2 pages)

The applicant must submit a personal statement describing their background, experience, and qualifications for this award. Please address the following questions in your personal statement:

- How did you become involved in autism research?
- How did you choose your lab and your mentor and your field of research?
- What experience do you have with people with autism, either personally or professionally?
- Are there any unique challenges you have dealt with or had to overcome?

Pages 16 – 19: CV or NIH biosketch of Applicant (NIH format preferred, single spaced OK)

Pages 20 – 23: CV of Mentor (NIH format preferred, single spaced OK) - this should be the Post-Doctoral mentor during the time of the ASF funding.

Pages 24 – 27: CV of Advisor, if applicable (NIH format preferred, single spaced OK) - this should be the Post-Doctoral advisor during the time of the ASF funding.

Page 28+: Appendix

All applicants are entitled to submit a list of web links to a maximum of 5 peer-reviewed research publications, essays, blog posts, posters, or other materials on which they are an author.

Note: Appendix links and manuscripts are provided as a courtesy to the reviewers who are under no obligation to read or consult them in evaluating a proposal.

Letter of Recommendation:

One letter of recommendation should be provided by an individual (not the mentor) who is familiar with the applicant and addresses his/her education, research training, experience, and professional career goals in autism research. **Applicants should arrange to have only one letter of recommendation submitted, and it should be submitted directly by the recommender as a PDF document on official letterhead. Do not submit a google doc and do not submit an “unsigned” letter.** Please read those sentences again. One letter sent directly by the recommender and **not** included in your application packet. Letters received as a word document will not be accepted. Letters received by anyone other than the recommender will not be reviewed. While letters of recommendation are to be sent separately, both the application and the letter of recommendation have the same due date.

Other issues to consider

Language Usage in Proposal:

ASF encourages applicants to use any and all scientific and medical terminology necessary to describe autism, autistic people and the day-to-day realities of life of people with autism.. For further guidance, you may refer to: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/aur.2876>

For Profound Autism Projects:

ASF encourages research into Profound Autism, and encourages those who are conducting research in profound autism to review ASF's "Profound Autism Strategic Plan" summary and identify which area/question is being addressed by their research:

https://autismsciencefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/ASF_25_ProfoundAutism_StrategicPlan_030524.pdf.

If you are addressing a question relating to profound autism, please use the criteria published in this publication: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s13229-026-00727-y>

For Proposals Using Post-Mortem Tissue

Proposals using post-mortem tissue for research must provide documentation that the necessary tissue is or will be available at the research site at the time of the award. Proposals without proper documentation will be returned without review.

For Proposals Using Animal Models

Animal models of neurodevelopmental disorders including autism are critical to both understanding of underlying biology and etiology, as well as pre-clinical interventions and treatments. However, they can be misunderstood or misinterpreted. A list of recommendations on how to best utilize animal models can be found here:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gbb.12803>

Submission of Proposals

All documents and files EXCEPT THE LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION should be compiled into a single PDF file and sent to grants@autismsciencefoundation.org. The Letter of Recommendation should be sent to grants@autismsciencefoundation.org in a different email directly by the recommender with the name of the applicant in the subject line. Please have your recommender send a PDF of the signed letter and not a google document.

Successful electronic submission will be confirmed by email notification to the sender.

Proposals, including letter of recommendation, are due on or before October 15, 2026 at 5PM Eastern Time

The Autism Science Foundation reserves the right to return any proposal without review and to make changes to this RFA at any time. Changes will be posted at <https://autismsciencefoundation.org/grants-awards-fellowships/>. We advise applicants to check this website frequently.

Award notifications will be made in March, 2027. Awards must start between June 1st - September 30th, 2027.

Review Process and Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be reviewed by members of Autism Science Foundation Scientific Advisory Board as well as active and experienced investigators recruited from the scientific community for their expertise in the research areas of the proposals.

Additional Information:

An informal webinar to provide background and answer questions about this funding opportunity will be held on September 15, 2026 at 1PM eastern. Register here: <https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/9B4Ow4p7RpGoLJ5wOygRug>

Open science

ASF requires open-source publication of articles, including open access as well as depositing of manuscripts in PubMed Central. ASF maintains a resource to allow open sharing of peer-reviewed manuscripts via PubMed and requires awardees to use them if other mechanisms are not available. ASF also requires that all awardees register with ORCID for an ORCID ID.

Questions

Questions about proposal submission, proposal content and review, or applicant eligibility should be addressed to Katie Madgett, Science Program Manager, Autism Science Foundation. (kmadgett@autismsciencefoundation.org)

