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AUTISMSCIENCEFOUNDATION.ORG

**Request for Applications:  
2016 Pre- and Postdoctoral Training Awards &  
Medical Student Gap Year Research Training Awards**

**RFA Released: Thursday July 23, 2015  
Applications Due: Friday, November 13, 2015**

**Informational Conference Call: Thursday September 10, 12:00pm ET**

**I. Introduction**

The Autism Science Foundation invites applications for its Pre- and Postdoctoral Training Awards from graduate students, medical students and postdoctoral fellows interested in pursuing careers in basic and clinical research relevant to autism spectrum disorders.

The proposed training should be scientifically linked to autism but may be broadened to include training in a closely related area of scientific research. Autism Science Foundation will consider all areas of related basic and clinical research including but not limited to: human behavior across the lifespan (language, learning, behavior, communication, social function, motor skills & planning, epilepsy, sleep, repetitive disorders), neurobiology (anatomy, development, neuroimaging), pharmacology, neuropathology, genetics and gene/environment interactions, epigenetics, genomics, epigenomics, immunology, molecular and cellular mechanisms, studies employing model organisms and systems, and studies of treatment and service delivery.

***Special consideration will be given to projects focusing on gender issues in autism. This includes studies examining the female protective effect, neurobiological and neuroanatomical examination of the female autism brain, diagnostic differences and challenges in females, the female phenotype, and health and lifespan issues including vocational services and employment. ASF also invites studies focused on unaffected siblings and recurrence risk in the offspring of unaffected siblings.***

**II. Awards**

Autism Science Foundation will make a number of awards determined by its available financial resources. The term of the award will be a period of one year and will include:

For predoctoral and medical students:	\$25,000
For postdoctoral students:	\$35,000

This award cannot be used to cover tuition payments. No portion of these funds shall be used to cover indirect university costs.

### **III. Eligibility:**

#### Applicant:

- Applicants for predoctoral awards must be enrolled students in good standing in a program leading to a research doctorate such as a Ph.D. or Sc.D. or a dual degree such as an M.D./Ph.D. in an academic department at an accredited university or health/medical institution.
- Applicants for Medical School Gap Year Research Training Awards should be enrolled at an accredited university medical school. Medical school applicants must apply prior to graduation from medical school but the gap year may be taken immediately after graduation.
- Applicants for postdoctoral awards must have completed their doctoral or medical degree and have been accepted as a postdoctoral fellow in good standing in a program in the United States as of the award start date (July-Sept 2016).

Pre- and postdoctoral applicants may apply at any point during their training. The selected awardee must spend 80% of his/her professional time engaged exclusively in the autism research activities stipulated in the application for the duration of the award, and cannot simultaneously hold another fellowship award during the support period.

U.S. citizens enrolled in universities inside or outside of the United States are eligible to apply. Non-US citizens enrolled in US-based universities are also eligible to apply.

#### Mentor:

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. Each mentor may sponsor only one candidate (either one predoctoral candidate OR one postdoctoral candidate OR one medical school gap year candidate). Each candidate may select only one mentor.

#### Advisor:

The candidate may also have an advisor in addition to the mentor, but only the mentor's qualifications will be considered in the scoring process. We recommend that the faculty member with more autism experience serve as the mentor. The advisor's name should be included on the title page, and his/her role in the training of the fellow should be

explicitly stated in the training plan. An advisor is not necessary for a successful application.

#### **IV. 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 and is not dependent on ASF funding. Proposals without proper documentation will be returned without review.

#### **V. Resubmissions**

Proposals reviewed from a previous cycle may be resubmitted for consideration. In addition to the proposal, the applicant should provide a single page letter addressing the changes made in response to the reviewer's comments. Only previous ASF submissions will be considered a resubmission to ASF. The one page letter will not be included in the page limit but it should only contain information relevant to the reviewer's previous comments and suggestions provided by the reviewers.

#### **VI. Proposal Preparation**

Proposals should be written in 12-point Arial font and should have margins of 0.5 inch or greater. Use of smaller or difficult to read fonts may result in the proposal being returned without review. **The applicant's last name must appear in the header on every page of the application. Number the pages. All sections of the proposal must be double-spaced with the exception of the following sections: title page, proposal abstract, bibliography, applicant CV, mentor CV, letter of commitment, letter of recommendation, and the Human Subjects and Animal Welfare certifications.**

A proposal must include the following sections:

##### **A. Sections Prepared by Applicant**

###### **-Title Page**

Each proposal must include a title page with the applicant name and full contact information, mentor name and full contact information,, name of advisor(if applicable), title of the project and name of the sponsoring institution. Indicate on the title page whether the proposal is for a predoctoral, postdoctoral or medical gap year award. **Proposals without a title page may be returned without review.** In the past, applications have been rejected because of failure to include a title page.

###### **-Proposal Abstract**

*Maximum 500 words*

The abstract must be intelligible to a knowledgeable layperson or non-expert. It should indicate the proposed research and training goals and means, describe the

training environment, and stress the relevance of the research to individuals with autism and their families.

**-Research Plan**

*Maximum 5 doubled spaced pages*

The plan should describe the specific autism research project, including hypotheses to be tested, specific aims, background/preliminary studies, methods, participant characterization (if applicable), expected results and timeline for completion. Budget is not necessary.

**-Bibliography**

Include complete literature citations including titles and all authors.

**-Personal Statement**

*Maximum 2 doubled spaced pages*

The applicant should submit a personal statement describing her/his background, experience, and qualifications for this award, as well as his/her career plans in autism research. The statement should describe how the proposed project and selected mentor will foster the candidate's progress toward the stated career goal.

**-CV of Applicant**

*NIH format neither preferred nor required*

The CV should include the applicant's SAT, MCAT, and/or GRE scores as well as undergraduate and graduate GPA.

**-Appendix**

All applicants may submit a list of web links to a maximum of 5 peer-reviewed research publications on which they are an author. Postdoctoral applicants may attach up to two manuscripts under review as part of the application, indicating whether the manuscript is in press or under review and the journal.

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.

**-Budget – a budget is not required**

**-Letter of Recommendation:** The 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 and experience, and professional career goals in autism research. **Do not submit more than one letter of recommendation.**

**-Human Subjects and Animal Welfare Certifications:** These must be documented with a copy of an official letter of approval that identifies the Principal Investigator, project title and date of approval, and is signed by the Review Committee Chair or equivalent responsible institutional/government official. Prior certification for another project CANNOT be substituted, but can be officially amended to include the proposed project. **IRB and IACUC certifications are NOT**

**required to submit an application, but are required before an award will be made.**

Note: Proposals must adhere to the page limits provided. Applications with one or more sections that are longer than the page limit may be returned without review. Page limits are for double spaced sections (i.e., the personal statement should be a maximum of two double spaced pages).

## **B. Sections Prepared by Mentor**

### **-Candidate-Specific Training Plan**

The mentor should provide a thorough description of a training program that includes a clear plan of professional development for a future career in autism research *for this specific applicant*, as well as a comprehensive summary of the mentor's autism research and experience mentoring other students and postdocs. This should include exposure to both clinical and basic sciences, and should take advantage of opportunities outside the university, if available. If an advisor is included in the project, his/her expertise and role on the career development of the applicant should be described. **In past grant cycles, highly qualified applicants have been rejected due to mentors submitting inadequate, overly generic training plans.**

Mentors should also indicate current funding source(s), total award amounts, award durations (inclusive dates), and project titles and clearly explain the extent to which currently funded research projects will overlap, complement and/or contribute to the training of the Awardee. Mentors may also choose to list recent (last 3 years) as well as pending grant support relevant to autism research.

### **-CV of Mentor (NIH format required)**

**-Letter of Commitment:** The proposed mentor must provide a letter providing his/her endorsement of the applicant and stating his/her commitment that a fellowship recipient will spend 80% of his/her professional time engaged exclusively in the autism research described in the application for the duration of the award.

## **V. Submission of Proposals**

Proposals should be submitted as a single PDF document with all materials (including those of the mentor), except the letter of recommendation, bundled together. Submit the PDF by email to [grants@autismsciencefoundation.org](mailto:grants@autismsciencefoundation.org) with the subject line (Last Name/Institution Pre/Postdoctoral/MedSchoolGapYear Application).

Example: Martin/Tulane Post Doc Fellowship Application

Letters of recommendation should be sent by the recommender directly to ASF by email to [grants@autismsciencefoundation.org](mailto:grants@autismsciencefoundation.org). Please ask your recommender to use the subject line (Applicant last name, Pre/Post Doc, Letter of Recommendation).

Example: Martin Post Doc Letter of Recommendation

Successful electronic submission of proposals and letters of recommendation will be confirmed by email notification to the sender.

**Proposals are due on or before Friday November 13, 2015 8PM EST.** Proposals will not be accepted after the due date unless prior permission is obtained, and only for exceptional circumstances. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that the proposal complies with the conditions prescribed in the RFA. Autism Science Foundation reserves the right to return without review any proposal found not to be in compliance with the conditions prescribed on the RFA, or any proposal that is not responsive to its research goals or exceeds its funding limits or available resources, at any time during the application and review process.

Autism Science Foundation reserves the right to make changes to this RFA at any time. Changes will be posted at [www.autismsciencefoundation.org/ApplyForaGrant.html](http://www.autismsciencefoundation.org/ApplyForaGrant.html). We advise applicants to check this website frequently.

Award notifications will be made in March 2016. Award projects must be started between July 1, 2016 and September 15, 2016.

## **VII. Payment of Awards**

Awards will be paid in two installments; the first within 30 days of the start date and the second at the six month point, provided we receive a satisfactory midpoint report from the applicant. 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. An award cannot be transferred to another investigator, laboratory or sponsoring institution without prior written approval from Autism Science Foundation, even if the new investigator is working with the same mentor. Similarly, awardees cannot change mentors without prior written approval from Autism Science Foundation.

A one-time, six-month no-cost extension from the termination date of the award in order to complete necessary work (including data analysis and preparation/submission of dissertation and/or manuscripts for publication) will automatically be granted upon request.

Awardees must submit written reports to the Autism Science Foundation at the midpoint and at conclusion of the award, documenting the status of the research funded. A template will be provided by the Autism Science Foundation for this purpose. Failure to provide a midterm report by the due date will result in forfeiture of funds.

### **VIII. 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. Proposals may also be reviewed by a panel of experienced laypersons (parents, individuals with autism, other advocates) who will provide input to the Scientific Advisory Board. Since the purpose of these awards is to train committed young scientists in an environment conducive to beginning a career in autism research, the following criteria will be used to evaluate how well a proposal will provide a research experience and environment suitable to training a future autism investigator:

- **Significance of the Research:** The quality of the proposed research project in terms of providing meaningful information for individuals with autism and their families and caregivers, as well as its potential to advance the scientific understanding of autism.
- **Applicant Qualifications:** Applicant's expertise and experience in autism research and his/her demonstrated commitment to autism research as a career path.
- **Mentor Qualifications:** Mentor's expertise and experience in autism research; quality and productivity of current autism research program; experience training graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.
- **Training Plan:** The quality of the proposed training plan including the proposed fellowship research project, its link to autism research and potential for development of a dedicated career path in autism research.
- **Resources and Facilities:** Evidence of sufficient research support and adequate facilities and resources to provide an appropriate training environment; institutional research programs and/or clinical assets that enhance training in the multidisciplinary complexity of autism spectrum disorders.

The Autism Science Foundation will hold an informational conference call regarding the predoctoral, postdoctoral, and medical school fellowship RFA on Thursday September 10, 2015 at 12:00pm et. The call will outline best practices for completing the application. Participation on the conference call is NOT required for application. We will not take attendance. The call in number is: 866-906-9888 and the participant code is 2574613#.

Additional questions about proposal submission, proposal content and review, or applicant eligibility should be addressed to Casey Gold, Operations Manager, Autism Science Foundation. ([cgold@autismsciencefoundation.org](mailto:cgold@autismsciencefoundation.org))