



## **Request for Applications: 2026 Undergraduate Summer Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders**

**RFA Released: January 27, 2026  
Applications Due: March 6, 2026 5:00 PM EST  
Notification of Awards: late March 2026**

### **Introduction**

The Autism Science Foundation invites applications from highly qualified undergraduates interested in pursuing basic and clinical research relevant to autism spectrum disorders during the summer.

The proposed research must be scientifically linked to autism. 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, communication, social function, epilepsy, sleep, self-injurious behavior, catatonia), neurobiology (anatomy, development, neuro-imaging), pharmacology, neuropathology, human genetics, genomics, epigenetics, epigenomics, immunology, molecular and cellular mechanisms, studies employing model organisms and systems, and studies of treatment, service delivery, policy and employment. ***Priority will be given to students from traditionally under-represented groups and under-resourced communities OR to studies that focus on understanding and narrowing the diagnosis and services gap across different races, ethnicities or socioeconomic status levels. Priority will also be given to students studying profound autism. All applicants will be asked about their race and ethnicity in the application process.***

### **Awards**

The Autism Science Foundation will make a number of Awards determined by its available financial resources. Research must be conducted in a university-based laboratory or in the field under the supervision of a highly qualified mentor for a period of no less than 8 weeks.

Awards of \$4000 USD for recipients in all countries except Canada. Canadian grants will be paid in the equivalent Canadian dollars. Payment will be made directly to the university sponsoring the research. Of this, the university must pay \$3500 directly to the student as a stipend; \$500 shall be used for lab expenses and other direct costs. This award cannot be used to directly cover tuition payments. The sponsoring university is responsible for withholding any taxes required by law.

### **Eligibility**

Applicants for summer undergraduate research awards must be currently enrolled undergraduates in good standing in a program leading to a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degree. Candidates may not have a BA or BS at the time the award is started. The summer research may take place at a university other than the one where the student is enrolled as an undergraduate. The mentor should be faculty at the university where the research will take place.

The research itself may take place on or off campus (i.e. in a school, at a job site employing individuals with autism, at a summer camp, etc.) as long as it is supervised by an experienced mentor and/or advisor and a plan for how this will occur is included in the application.

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 support only one candidate per summer.

Inclusion of an advisor other than the mentor is encouraged, but not required. As examples, this could include a more senior person in the lab who will be working closely with the student, or someone who provides scientific guidance or advice on research recruitment or the conduct of research in underserved communities. It is highly suggested that applicants interested in studying under-researched communities (including profound autism) involve someone as an advisor who has previously worked with these communities if their mentor has limited experience in this area.

#### **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.

#### **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>

#### **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 and it should be based on the preference of the audience you are studying. For further guidance, you may refer to: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/aur.2876>

#### **Proposal Preparation**

Proposals will include the following.

- **Title Page:** Include title of the project, name of applicant and mentor as well as mailing address and email address of applicant and mentor. Also include race and ethnicity on the title page.
- **Project Abstract** (1000 characters max)
- **Research Plan:**
  1. Project title

2. Description of research to be conducted over the summer - 6000 characters max, approximately 1000-1750 words, no references are required.
3. Summary of activities and opportunities that the applicant will engage in (for example, weekly lab meetings, home visits, etc.), how the mentor and the advisor will participate in the project and training - 6000 characters maximum
4. Mentorship activities - how the mentor will be involved in the oversight of the training activities, even if the day to day will occur with someone other than the mentor - 2000 characters max
5. Timeline of activities. These activities may occur beyond the summer funding period.

- **Applicant's Personal Statement** - The applicant should describe their interest in autism research and how it came about, as well as their future plans, particularly as it relates to a career in autism research, medicine or services. - 5000 characters max
- **Applicant's Transcript** (unofficial transcripts are acceptable)
- **CV of applicant**
- **CV of Mentor** (NIH biosketch format is acceptable)
- **Letter of Recommendation from Mentor:** A letter of recommendation should be provided by the proposed mentor evaluating the applicant's qualifications. The mentor should describe the lab environment and resources available to the student over the summer, including opportunities for the student to meet and work with other summer student researchers, and role of the advisor (if applicable) even if outside the field of autism. **Please let your mentor know you will need a letter ASAP so that they can provide it by the deadline.**
- **Human Subjects and Animal Welfare Certifications:** Before an award is made, we must have a copy of an official letter of approval which identifies the student and mentor by name, project title and date of project approval, and is signed by the Review Committee Chair or equivalent responsible institutional/government official. Please be aware of this and begin the process ASAP. ***IRB and IACUC certifications are NOT required to submit an application, but are required if necessary before an award will be made. The project should start no later than July 6, 2026***

#### **Additional Information:**

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 and highly encourages awardees to use them. ASF also requires that all awardees register with ORCID for an ORCID ID.

#### **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](mailto:grants@autismsciencefoundation.org). The Letter of Recommendation should be sent to [grants@autismsciencefoundation.org](mailto:grants@autismsciencefoundation.org) in a different email with the name of the student in the subject line. Please send a PDF of the signed letter.

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

**\*Proposals, including letter of recommendation, are due on or before March 6th, 2026 5:00PM Eastern Time\* There are NO exceptions to this due date.**

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 of 2026. Awards must start between May 1, 2026 and July 6, 2026. While the work should be completed in the summer, a full year contract will be made to offset costs of academic and training activities outside the 8 week period.

### **Payment of Awards**

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. An award cannot be transferred to another investigator, laboratory or sponsoring institution without prior written approval from the Autism Science Foundation. Similarly, awardees cannot change mentors or advisors without prior written approval from the Autism Science Foundation.

Though the grant term will be defined as one year in the contract, students must submit an outcomes report at the end of the summer research period and no later than September 30, 2026. A template will be provided by the Autism Science Foundation for this purpose.

### **Review Process and Evaluation Criteria**

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

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](mailto:kmadgett@autismsciencefoundation.org))