SFARI

2019 Research Award – Request for Applications

Grants awarded through this RFA are intended to provide support for the investigation of key unresolved research questions in autism, particularly those that connect etiology to brain function and behavior. Unlike SFARI Pilot Awards, risk and novelty are welcome but are not required criteria for the proposal to be considered meritorious. Competitive applications will have preliminary data or other relevant groundwork that justifies substantial investment on the proposed topic.

The maximum budget is $1,300,000, including indirect costs, over a period of up to four years.

Policies and Procedures
Application Deadline
January 11, 2019

RFA | How To Apply | FAQ | Awardees

SFARI Mission

The mission of the Simons Foundation Autism Research Initiative (SFARI) is to improve the understanding, diagnosis and treatment of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) by funding innovative research of the highest quality and relevance.

To this end, we solicit applications for SFARI Research Awards from individuals who will conduct bold and rigorous research.

Objectives and Areas of Focus

The goal of the Research Award is to provide support for investigation of key unresolved research questions in autism, particularly those that connect genetic etiologies to brain function and behavior. Unlike the SFARI Pilot Award, the Research Award welcomes risk and novelty, but these are not required criteria for a proposal to be considered meritorious. Competitive applications will have preliminary data or other relevant groundwork that justifies substantial investment in the proposed topic. In some cases, projects may include those focusing on a central hypothesis where success depends on close collaboration between two or more labs.

While SFARI remains open to persuasive arguments for the relevance of any particular project, below are a few examples of the types of research questions that address SFARI's overarching goal:

- Biological convergence: Given the ever-growing list of genetic risk factors for ASD, it will be important to explore whether biological convergence occurs at the molecular, cellular, circuit or behavioral level. When convergence is observed, how do we separate pathophysiology from epiphenomena?

- Developmentally sensitive periods: What are the critical time points, and do they differ by biological mechanism or genetic etiology? How do we separate cause from consequence and home in on the best windows for intervention?

- Major hypotheses: Examples include excitatory-inhibitory neural imbalance[1]; dysregulation of the innate immune system[2]; or etiological roles for sensory dysfunction in the development of social phenotypes in autism[3, 4]. Additionally, a project might address possible causative roles of certain cell types or brain areas, such as the mid-fetal glutamatergic cortical neurons[5, 6] or the striatum[7], which may offer mechanistic insight into classic postmortem studies of altered cortical patterning and neuronal number[8].

- Additional important questions: These include projects to explain the sex bias in autism prevalence[9], to understand how differences in the genetics of ASD in the presence or absence of intellectual disability impact observed differences in biology and behavior[10, 11], or to understand the possible therapeutic role of fever in autism symptomatology[12].

The above-mentioned topics are neither exhaustive nor exclusionary but are illustrative of key research issues in autism that may be appropriate for investigation through a Research Award. For additional information, see SFARI's scientific perspectives and a summary of SFARI's recent changes in grant award mechanisms. We strongly advise applicants to familiarize themselves with SFARI's currently funded projects and resources in order to think about how a proposal might complement other efforts already receiving funding.

Budget and Grant Duration

The maximum budget of a Research Award is $1,300,000, including 20 percent indirect costs, over a period of up to four (4) years. We encourage investigators to take advantage of the flexibility in budget and duration to tailor the scope of the award as appropriate for their specific aims. For projects that propose four years of research, progress will be critically evaluated at the end of year two before support for the remaining two years will be approved.

As with all SFARI funding, proposed budgets will be assessed on the appropriateness for the scope of work and merit of commitment. Larger budgets invite heightened scrutiny and will raise the bar for funding. Overlap of the proposed project with funding from other sources should be avoided and, if unavoidable, must be carefully explained and justified. Moreover, an investigator's track record of scientific accomplishment will be especially relevant to our decisions on Research Awards.

Eligibility

All applicants and key collaborators must hold a Ph.D., M.D. or equivalent degree and have a faculty position or the equivalent at a college, university, medical school or other research facility. In addition, eligible applicants must have independent lab space at their institution.

Applications may be submitted by domestic and foreign nonprofit organizations; public and private institutions, such as colleges, universities, hospitals, laboratories, and units of state and local government; and eligible agencies of the federal government. There are no citizenship or country requirements.

Current recipients of SFARI Research Awards may apply for new funding, but please note that we generally prioritize new grant applications and provide only limited renewal funding, especially for projects considered to be appropriate for National Institutes of Health R01 award funding. To be considered competitive for a SFARI renewal, projects should demonstrate substantial progress on the original award; focus on a topic of continued high importance for SFARI; and be deemed unlikely to obtain funding from the NIH or other organizations.

Instructions for Submission

Applications must be completed electronically and submitted using forms provided at proposalCENTRAL. Please log in as an applicant, go to the "Grant Opportunities" tab, scroll to Simons Foundation, and click "Apply Now" for the SFARI Research Award program. For assistance, please call 800-875-2562 or email pcsupport@altum.com.

Details concerning application requirements and submission can be found in our instructions or on proposalCENTRAL. If you have other questions, please review our FAQ.

References

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