

Autism Speaks
Sir Dennis Weatherstone Predoctoral Fellowship Program
2016 Request for Applications

Deadlines:

Letter of Intent due on or before: Thursday, November 5, 2015, 8:00 p.m. (EST)
Letter of Intent decisions: Within 10 days of the Letter of Intent due date
Recommendations due on or before: Monday, December 14, 2015, 8:00 p.m. (EST)
Application due on or before: Thursday, December 17, 2015, 8:00 p.m. (EST)

Other Important Dates (subject to change):

Peer review panels: Winter 2016
Notification: April/May 2016
Earliest Grant start date: June/July 2016

10-26-15: Abstract character limit was corrected to 1500 characters, spaces included.

Autism Speaks supports global biomedical research into the diagnosis, causes, prevention and treatment of autism. Our mission is to improve the future for all who struggle with autism spectrum disorders. In support of that mission we provide funding along the entire research continuum -- from discovery to development to dissemination -- for innovative projects that hold considerable promise for significantly improving the lives of persons with autism.

Autism Speaks invites applications from predoctoral students interested in pursuing careers in autism research. The Sir Dennis Weatherstone Fellows will work directly with mentors who are leading scientists in autism related research. This program supports the growth of a promising cadre of young scientists who will make autism research their chosen field. In order to cross-fertilize ideas and facilitate a network of collaboration, the Weatherstone program will include group interaction among the class of fellows and an annual meeting with the Weatherstone family and the Stavros Niarchos Foundation. More information about the Weatherstone program is available on the Autism Speaks website.

The primary purpose of the Weatherstone fellowship is to provide highly qualified candidates with exceptional research training opportunities broadly related to the study of Autism Spectrum Disorders. General areas of research include: behavioral, psychosocial and /or educational challenges; family issues; language / communication; environmental factors; epidemiology and public health; health services research; genetics and/or genomics; health services research; medical / psychiatric comorbidities; biomedical and/or pharmacological interventions; developmental biology; neuroscience; physiology / anatomy; and technology development.

Awards

The Autism Speaks Weatherstone Fellowship Awards will be granted to qualified predoctoral students. The **two-year fellowship** includes an annual **\$30,400** award that includes a stipend of **\$22,900 plus a \$7,500 annual allowance** for fringe benefits, research costs and supplies, professional travel and/or tuition reimbursement. Indirect costs are not allowed. Acceptance of any other award or grant that supplements research training expenses or the stipend requires approval that will be granted only in rare cases.

Eligibility and Roles

Pre-doctoral Fellows: The candidate must be an enrolled student in a program leading to a research doctorate such as a Ph.D. or Sc.D., or a combined degree such as an M.D./Ph.D., in an academic department of an accredited university or health/medical institution. The selected pre-doctoral fellow must spend at least 80% of his/her professional time engaged exclusively in their Autism Speaks'

autism research related activities for the duration of the award, and cannot simultaneously hold another fellowship award during the support period. International applications are encouraged.

Mentors: Prior to application, predoctoral candidates must have identified a mentor for their fellowship. Mentors must have a Ph.D. and/or an M.D. or equivalent degree, and be a scientific investigator with an academic or research institutional appointment (tenured, tenure-track, or equivalent position). The mentor must be affiliated with a nonprofit research institution with a research mission and administrative infrastructure. Tax-exempt status must be documented under Section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code, or similar classification outside the United States. The LOI must include a letter of commitment and the application must include a recommendation from the mentor as well as a jointly completed Individualized Development Plan. The mentor's training experience should also be documented.

Resubmissions: Candidates are allowed one resubmission of a previously denied Autism Speaks application. Resubmissions must meet the following requirements in order to be considered for review:

1. The Letter of Intent must indicate that the application is a resubmission and enter the prior ID# in the field provided. Also, it must include an Introduction describing how the resubmitted application will address the comments from the previous review, in the field provided (2500 characters, spaces included).
2. If the LOI is approved, the Introduction can be expanded (8000 characters, spaces incl.).
3. The new application research plan and other changed documents should indicate all substantive text changes. Changes should be easily identifiable using brackets, indents, or a distinguishable font. Do not underline or shade the changes. If significant portions of the original application research plan or other documents were deleted, the deletion should be explained in the Introduction. The application should also describe additional work completed since the original submission.

Autism Speaks limits the application procedure to only one predoctoral fellowship submission from either the fellow or the mentor per review cycle.

General Information

All applications must be submitted through the web-based Autism Speaks Science Grants System -

<https://science.grants.autismspeaks.org>.

Please Note:

1. The Fellowship candidate must be the applicant. If you are new to our system, register with your institutional email address. Otherwise log in to your previously established account. We recommend using the following browsers: Chrome, Firefox, Safari or IE 8 and higher (Mobile browsers and tablet-based browsers are not currently supported.) Complete your profile information. *Applicants should list their primary institution as the location where their proposed research will occur. This is especially important if the fellow is moving to a new institution for their doctoral program.*
2. It is advisable to review the LOI page and then the Application page in the grant system well in advance of any submission date.
3. Uploaded documents for LOIs and applications should be 11 point Arial font with 1-inch margins all around; single spacing is acceptable. NIH Biosketches can be submitted with their default margins and fonts. Please do not have headers or footers in submitted documents. *Applications exceeding the specified document limits will not be reviewed.*
4. Preferred file type is PDF and must not be encrypted. Movie files are not acceptable.
5. Applications received after the deadline will not be accepted unless permission has been previously granted by the Autism Speaks Grants Office and then only due to rare and unavoidable circumstance. There are no exceptions to this rule. All decisions of Autism Speaks in regard to late submissions will be final. It is the applicant's responsibility to plan around holidays or any special circumstances at their institution.
6. It is the applicant's responsibility to contact their Office of Sponsored Projects (or the equivalent) to identify the Responsible Official (RO) for this application. The Responsible Official will review and submit the final portion of the application. Their submission is their approval of the application on behalf of the institution. LOI forms are completed and submitted by the applicant. Full applications can only be submitted by the RO.
7. There are no geographic restrictions on these applications. International applicants are encouraged.

Submitting the Letter of Intent (LOI)

Log in and click “Applications” at the top of the profile page or “Go to Applications” at the bottom of the page. Choose “Start a new LOI or application” then “Weatherstone Predoctoral Fellowships 2016.” The LOI includes two web pages, the Basic Information Page and the LOI Form. The requirements for each page are as follows:

1. Basic Information Page includes:
 - a. **Title:** Enter less than 100 characters, spaces included
 - b. **Scientific Abstract:** (up to 1500 characters, spaces included) that describes the project goal(s) and/or hypothesis, specific aims, research methods, expected results and significance/relevance to Autism Speaks’ targeted research areas as stated above.
 - c. **If the application is a resubmission,** select ‘Yes’ and the previous Autism Speaks ID number from the dropdown list of eligible IDs. The Introduction should explain how the resubmission will address the reviewers’ concerns or issues from the original application. (2500 characters, spaces included).
 - d. **Brain Tissue Sources:** complete as applicable to the research project.
 - e. **Key Personnel: Mentors and consultants** (tip: start by entering the last name). It is important to enter all individuals participating in the research project. Final changes to this list can be made during completion of the application.
 - f. **Responsible Official:** Choose the Responsible Official from the PI’s institution. You must have an institutional email to add a new person.
 - g. **Keywords:** Carefully select all the relevant keywords associated with the research project. This information is used to select expert reviewers who are knowledgeable about your particular field of study.
 - h. **Note:** All this information will be available for review and editing at the application stage.
2. Letter of Intent Form includes:
 - a. **Training Plan Summary:** Short summary of the training plan and how it will contribute to the fellow’s career development. Include training activities outside of the research (courses, rotations, conferences, etc.). (up to 4000 characters, spaces included)
 - b. **Fellow Biosketch:** NIH format not to exceed 5 pages. Biosketches should only contain published or in-press manuscripts.
 - c. **Primary Mentor Biosketch:** NIH format not to exceed 5 pages
 - d. **Other mentors, if applicable:** NIH format not to exceed 5 pages per person
 - e. **Statement of commitment from the primary mentor – Describe the availability of** resources essential to achieve the specific aims and career goals of the fellow. The mentor’s training experience should be included. This should **NOT** be a letter of recommendation for the fellow.

The applicant will receive a notification email after Autism Speaks’ staff reviews the submitted LOI. Applicants with approved LOIs will be able to move to the full application.

Complete the full application.

1. **[ORCID profiles](#)** – Autism Speaks’ [policy](#) requires all applicants and mentors to obtain ORCID profiles. [Link to Help document](#).
 - a. **Applicants** will not be able to work on their application until they have connected their ORCID profile to their Autism Speaks profile. Links in the Autism Speaks Science Grant system will make this step easy.
 - b. **Mentors:** All mentors named on the application must also connect their ORCID profile to their Autism Speaks profile (it is not enough just to have an ORCID profile. See the [Help document](#)). **An application will not be reviewed until this is complete.** All mentors named on an application will receive an email with instructions however the applicant is encouraged to follow up with each individual. (*This is optional for consultants and non-mentor referees, but is encouraged.*)

2. **Basic Information Page:** This is the same as for the LOI (see list above). Review and edit the entries. Additionally, there will be a section for Recommendations. See information in #17 below.
3. **All of the remaining items will be found on the Application Form Page.**
4. **Research Plan.** Not to exceed 8 pages, uploaded document. Include:
 - a. Specific aims, background and significance/relevance to autism
 - b. Preliminary data, including images or figures, if applicable. Note that any relevant publications, high resolution photographs or other supporting material can be uploaded under Exhibits.
 - c. Experimental design, methodology and timeline for achievement of specific aims.
5. **Timeline:** Create a timeline showing the expected milestones for the research project.
6. **Individualized Development Plan (IDP).** Not to exceed 3 pages, uploaded document. The Weatherstone Fellowship program is dedicated to encourage promising scientists to join the autism research community as productive researchers. The mentor's role is to foster the development of the fellow's overall knowledge of autism and assist the fellow in meeting his/her career goals. Therefore, the IDP must include a description of the research and educational environment, and a statement of commitment to provide resources essential to achieve the specific aims and career goals of the fellow. The mentor must provide a tailored IDP for the applicant. The plan must list experiences that are specific and individualized which build on the fellow's previous experiences while expanding their knowledge and experience in Autism. These may include coursework, workshops, seminars and collaborative interactions with other researchers within and outside the field of primary study, in relation to the applicant's research career goals. The training should add value above and beyond previous educational and research experiences. Describe the research training environment and available resources (facilities, equipment, study populations and intellectual activities). The applicant must also relate the expected value of the proposed fellowship experience and research training program to his or her needs in preparation for a career as an independent researcher in the area of autism.
7. **Responsible Conduct of Research Plan:** Outline all previous, current and future instruction. These plans may include coursework as well as individual and/or group training sessions with faculty, and should detail the duration and frequency of instruction. The mentor's role in promoting and ensuring the responsible conduct of research must be described. Please note, participating in online courses alone will not be considered sufficient instruction in the responsible conduct of research. In addition, while training in professional ethics, ethics in clinical research, or the ethical use of vertebrate animals is commendable and recommended, these topics are not sufficient to cover all aspects of responsible research conduct. See Appendix for list of topics. 3 pages max.
8. **Bibliography** with complete literature citations including titles and all authors. Uploaded document.
9. **Budget.** The applicant must complete the online budget table showing how the research allowance will be spent. Allowable categories are Tuition Reimbursement, Fringe benefits, Research Supplies, Travel, Animal/Human Subjects Costs and Other (must be explained in the budget justification) Indirect costs are not allowed.
10. **Budget Justification.** Provide a detailed justification for each item on the budget. Include calculation(s) used. Uploaded document.
11. **Explain Inclusion of Human Subjects and/or Vertebrate Animals:** up to 5000 characters, spaces included. Applications that use human subjects or vertebrate animals must address issues of protections, addressing the applicable issues listed below. *Note that ethical approvals from the applicant organization are required before an award will be made. These approvals do not serve in lieu of the information requested below.*
 - a. **HUMAN SUBJECTS** (defined as living individuals)
 - i. Scientifically justify the involvement of human subjects in the proposed research.
 - ii. Describe in detail the plan for the involvement of human subjects in the proposed research
 - iii. Describe in details the potential risks to participants and measures to be taken to protect human subjects from those research risks.

- iv. For clinical trials, describe plans for data and safety monitoring, including the description of a data and safety monitoring board if necessary.
- v. If the project proposes no involvement of human subjects but uses existing human data or biological specimens, justify the claim of non-involvement of human subjects.

b. VERTEBRATE ANIMALS

- i. Describe in detail the proposed use of the animals, including species, strains, ages, sex and number to be used
- ii. Justify the use of animals, choice of species and numbers to be used
- iii. Provide information on the veterinary care of the animals
- iv. Describe procedures for ensuring discomfort, distress, pain and injury is minimized. Please include the method of euthanasia and the reasons for its selection.

c. Please state if no Human or vertebrate animals will be utilized in the project.

12. **Consent forms** (if applicable). If this project will be working with human subjects, upload the consent forms which will be used with the participants. Please note if they have not yet been approved by IRB.
13. **Letters of Collaboration** (optional). Up to two one-page letters of collaboration may be submitted describing a collaborative arrangement. Combine multiple letters for upload.
14. **Biographical sketches** of all key personnel, not to exceed five pages per individual. Please use the NIH Biographical Sketch format. There are individual upload slots for the fellow and primary mentor. All other bios should be combined into one document for upload, organized in alphabetical order by last name. Consultant biosketches are not required but strongly suggested. Biosketches should indicate all active and recently completed public and private funding, including source, total award amount, award duration (inclusive dates), and project title, both for the applicant and the primary mentor. Clearly explain the extent to which currently funded research projects will overlap, complement and/or contribute to the proposed research. Uploaded document.
15. **Publications**. Up to two publications which support the project can be uploaded. These do not have to be authored by the fellow or the mentor. The files MUST NOT be locked or secured in any way.
16. **Exhibits**. Supplemental exhibits that support the Research Plan can be submitted. Multiple items should be combined into one file. Items uploaded in this section will be reviewed at the discretion of the reviewer.
17. **Three Confidential Recommendations (minimum)** must be submitted in the Autism Speaks Science Grants System by each mentor and at least one non-mentor referee. Instructions for applicants and responsible officials can be downloaded [HERE](#). Instructions for referees can be downloaded [HERE](#). The recommendations will be completed in the Autism Speaks Science Grants System and will address the following information about the candidate:
 - i. commitment to a career focusing on autism-oriented research
 - ii. potential for conducting research
 - iii. adequacy of scientific and academic background with specific reference to the candidate's academic and research endeavors, including any publications, to date
 - iv. evidence of originality
 - v. specific areas of further research training that would benefit the candidate
 - vi. any additional related comments that the referee may wish to provide

***It is the responsibility of the fellow to make sure each referee has the above instructions.
These letters must be received on or before the deadline listed on page 1.***

Submit the Application

When the application is complete, the applicant will click 'Ready for RO Approval' on the application form page. **This can be done without all the recommendation letters submitted, however the Responsible Official will not be able to submit the application unless all letters are submitted.** It is the responsibility of the applicant to contact their Responsible Official who must complete the submission.

Applications must be submitted electronically using the Autism Speaks Science Grants System. Applications that are late, incomplete, exceed the document limitations, or do not adhere to the required format will not be reviewed. Applications that are faxed or emailed will also not be reviewed.

Autism Speaks reserves the right to return without review any fellowship application that in its judgment is not compliant with its rules and procedures for application preparation and submission, is not responsive to its research training goals, or exceeds its funding limits or available resources. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that the application is complete and conforms to the guidelines.

Notification and Announcements

Applicants will be notified by e-mail after the funding decision process is complete. All grant awards shall be posted on the Autism Speaks website.

Post Award

The recipient of any grant from Autism Speaks must use the awarded funds as specified in the approved budget. Any funds not used in the above specified manner must be returned to Autism Speaks. Payment of the awards is contingent on receiving any institutional approvals (IRB or IACUC) that may be required for the research.

Fellowships will be paid annually and payment will be contingent upon completion and submission of the appropriate documents as explained in the grant agreement. A fellowship award cannot be transferred to another mentor, laboratory or sponsoring institution without prior written approval from Autism Speaks. Fellowships cannot be transferred to another fellow.

Review Process and Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be reviewed by independent peer review panels that will include active and experienced investigators in the research areas of the applications as well as our partners in the broader autism community. Fellowship applications will be reviewed on the merit of the training plan, the proposed research, the strength of the candidate and mentor, and the relevance to advancing the mission of Autism Speaks, which is to promote research into the causes, prevention, treatments and cure for ASD.

Miscellaneous

Human Subjects and Vertebrate Animal Certifications must be documented with a copy of an official letter of approval (or equivalent for non-US applicants), which 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 (identified by project title). **IMPORTANT:** IRB, IACUC or equivalent ethical certification are **NOT required to submit an application**; however, such ethical certification must be submitted as soon as possible following official notification of an award. Autism Speaks will NOT issue any funding until appropriate certifications are received.

Projects using postmortem tissue must provide documentation that the necessary tissue is or will be available at the research site at the time of the award. Applications without proper documentation will be returned without review.

Mandatory Annual Meeting

Each fellow's research directions and progress will also be shared at the Weatherstone family/Stavros Niarchos Foundation annual meeting and other program activities. All newly awarded fellows are required to attend.

Important Contacts

Application Development and Budgets:

Paul Wang, MD, Senior VP, Medical Research, paul.wang@autismspeaks.org

Grants Administration/Online Application/Budget Questions:

Joan New, MBA, Grants Manager, 609-228-7313, jnew@autismspeaks.org

Recommendation Questions:

Naomi Jackenthal, Project Manager, 609-228-7326, naomi.jackenthal@autismspeaks.org

APPENDIX: Responsible Conduct of Research Plan

Outline all previous, current and future instruction. These plans may include coursework as well as individual and/or group training sessions with faculty, and should detail the duration and frequency of instruction. The mentor's role in promoting and ensuring the responsible conduct of research must be described.

Please note, participating in online courses alone will not be considered sufficient instruction in the responsible conduct of research. In addition, while training in professional ethics, ethics in clinical research, or the ethical use of vertebrate animals is commendable and recommended, these topics are not sufficient to cover all aspects of responsible research conduct.

Responsible Conduct of Research includes most of the professional activities that are related to a research career and specifically encompasses the following nine areas:

- a. Conflict of interest – personal, professional and financial
- b. Policies regarding human subjects, live vertebrate animal subjects in research, and safe laboratory practices
- c. Sponsor/fellow responsibilities and relationships
- d. Collaborative research including collaborations with industry
- e. Peer review, including confidentiality and disclosure of participation by anyone not directly assigned to the materials under review
- f. Data acquisition and laboratory tools; data management, sharing and ownership
- g. Research misconduct and policies for handling misconduct
- h. Responsible authorship and publication, with topics including fabrication, falsification and plagiarism
- i. The scientist as a responsible member of society, contemporary ethical issues in biomedical research and the environmental and societal impacts of scientific research

Document requirements: Word or PDF, 3 pages max, Arial 11 font, 1 inch margins, single spaced is acceptable.