

Autism Speaks  
North Lea House, 66 Northfield End, Henley-on-Thames RG9 2BE



## **Call for Proposals (CFP)**

### **Pilot Project Research Grant** **2009 Cycle**

Autism Speaks is committed to supporting biomedical research that ultimately will bring benefits to individuals and families affected by autism spectrum disorders. Autism Speaks is dedicated to raising funds, and investing funds, to support high-quality peer reviewed research which focuses on determining the causes and biological basis of autism spectrum disorders; improving diagnosis; and advancing and evaluating new treatments and interventions. We are committed to ensuring that increased understanding and new scientific knowledge will improve the quality of life for all those affected by autism spectrum disorders.

#### **I. Introduction**

Autism Speaks invites grant applications from researchers in the UK to conduct biomedical pilot research studies into the causes, diagnosis, and treatment of autism spectrum disorders.

***Autism Speaks supports all areas of research that will advance its mission to use scientific biomedical research to bring about improvements in the quality of life for those affected by autism spectrum disorders. This research includes but is not limited to:*** human brain function, language, behaviour and cognition; human studies involving early detection; studies on underrepresented populations; diagnosis; developmental trajectories; behavioural, psychosocial, medical, and pharmacological treatment; genes, genetics, pathways and biomarkers; clinical and biological phenotypes; epidemiological research; translational research; neurobiology; gene-environment interactions; environmental factors; molecular and cellular physiology; laboratory models.

#### **Eligibility**

Applications will only be accepted from investigators holding appointments at academic, research or clinical institutions within the United Kingdom (see below for further details).

#### **Application process**

Applications **must** be made through the Grants Administration website of our sister charity Autism Speaks in the United States at <http://grants.autismspeaks.org/research/login.asp> (see below for further details). Applicants applying through this website for the first time will need to register and

'create an account' after which you will receive an e-mail with your login name and password.

**Autism Speaks particularly welcomes proposals from:**

- **younger Principal Investigators** (post-doctoral, less than 35 years of age) wishing to pursue a dedicated career in autism research and seeking to demonstrate the independent ability to run a pilot study.
- **established investigators** with a strong track record of expertise and experience in other (non-autism) areas of research that are relevant and will be applied directly to autism research
- those who plan to provide **infrastructure, networks or shared resources**

**Autism pilot study applications must satisfy one or more of the following requirements:**

- employ **innovative, novel and/or untested research, diagnostic or treatment approaches and/or new biomedical or clinical paradigms**, which if successful, are likely to facilitate rapid advances and/or emerging or transforming areas of research to understand the causes, biological basis, diagnosis and treatment of autism spectrum disorders
- develop **preliminary data** necessary to prepare and submit a competitive fuller research grant application to a major funding agency (e.g., MRC, ESRC, Wellcome Trust, NIHR etc.) or equivalent
- come from **younger principal investigators** with demonstrated potential for and a future commitment to autism research
- come from **established investigators** with a strong track record of expertise and experience in other (non-autism) areas of research that are relevant and will be applied directly to autism research
- relate to the development of **infrastructure, networks or shared resources** (for example development of nationwide databases as a platform for further research activities)

**Note: The relevance of the proposed research to autism spectrum disorders and to the goals of Autism Speaks must be explicitly stated.**

**II. Awards**

Autism Speaks will make a number of pilot study awards determined by its available financial resources. Each pilot study award will be for an amount up to £50,000 per year for a period of one or two years. Proposals for awards less than the maximum allowed will be considered and are encouraged. Autism Speaks does not pay for indirect costs.

**III. Eligibility**

Investigators must be in receipt of salary funding for the duration of the grant requested. Investigators holding a full-time academic or research post (or equivalent) at accredited academic, medical or research institutions within the UK are eligible to apply. If you are in doubt please contact us via e-mail as set out in section XII below.

**Eligibility must be demonstrated at the time of submitting the Letter Of Intent (LOI).**

- a. Applicants who do not meet the eligibility criteria above (e.g., postdoctoral fellows, clinical fellows, part-time faculty members, etc.) are eligible to apply only if clear documentation is provided by the host institution stating either that appointment to a full-time, faculty position will be in effect by the start date of the grant (with no undue delay to the start of the grant) or in the case of fixed term contracts of

employment that the contract is in place throughout the duration of the proposed research.

- b. Although the supporting documentation can be submitted with the full application, information pertaining to eligibility must be provided in the LOI.
- c. Applications will NOT be accepted from individuals or from proprietary organisations to support the research and development of products for profit.
- d. Applicants are restricted to one LOI/proposal per review cycle as Principal Investigator (PI) or Co-PI.
- e. The bulk of the proposed research must be conducted within the UK, although it is not ruled out that a proportion of the proposed research be conducted as part of an international collaboration.

#### **IV. Submission Requirements**

Electronic Proposal Submission: General Guidelines:

- a. This Call for Proposals is being made by the UK registered charity Autism Speaks [www.autismspeaks.org.uk](http://www.autismspeaks.org.uk) and the method of proposal submission is through the Grants Administration website of our sister charity Autism Speaks in the United States. Applications submitted by any other means will not be accepted.
- b. The applicant **must** apply through the Grants Administration website at <http://grants.autismspeaks.org/research/login.asp>. Letters of Intent and Proposals must be submitted electronically in order to be accepted for review and considered for funding. LOIs and Proposals submitted in any other manner (e.g., by regular mail or by email) will not be considered. The applicant will receive confirmation of a successful electronic submission via system-generated email.
- c. Investigators new to the Autism Speaks submission process:
  - i. All new investigators are encouraged to review the layout and format of the grants administration system at least one month prior to the application deadline.
  - ii. Each new applicant/investigator must first register with the grants system at [http://grants.autismspeaks.org/research/signup\\_form.asp](http://grants.autismspeaks.org/research/signup_form.asp). Please be sure to choose the role "Investigator". Please fill out the form completely.
- d. **Mandatory Letters of Intent are due no later than 19<sup>th</sup> August, 2009. Proposals are due no later than 7<sup>th</sup> October 2009. All deadlines are at 11:59 PM US Eastern Standard Time).** Autism Speaks reserves the right to return without review any Letter of Intent or Proposal found to be not in compliance with the policies, procedures, and research priorities prescribed in the CFP at any time during the application and review process. In addition, LOIs may be reviewed for scientific merit and fidelity to the intent of the current CFP (see section I above).
- e. Information and Formatting
  - i. US page sizing applies - Letter (21.59cm x 27.94cm)
  - ii. Text should be 11 point Arial, single spaced, with 1" margins.
  - iii. Applications with any sections that exceed the word or page limits will not be reviewed.
  - iv. Guidance on where to upload each of the required elements is provided in the outline below

## **V. Registering Your Letter of Intent (LOI)**

Click on "Begin New Application".

- a. Enter the title of your project (less than 128 characters, spaces included).
- b. Select "UK Pilot Study" (dropdown menu for Award Type) and choose the number of years.
- c. Choose up to two Subject Area Keywords and up to four Methodology Keywords (for a maximum of five). One keyword each is required. *Please note: If you click the 'Involves Animal Subjects' toggle, then you must have one Model Organism keyword, from the Methodologies group, indicating which kind of animal subjects.*
- d. Upload your Letter of Intent (see below for guidelines).
- e. To complete this section: Click on "Submit Pertinent Project Information" at the bottom of the page.

### **Letter of Intent Guidelines:**

The Letter of Intent must contain two parts in one file.

The first part cannot exceed 2 pages, and must include the following information. The LOI should be specific enough to be screened for scientific merit and fidelity to this CFP:

- a. A concise description of the proposed project including: specific aims, methods and expected results.
- b. A clear justification for the relevance and potential significance of the project to understanding the causes, diagnosis, and treatment of autism spectrum disorders.
- c. Names, titles and institutional affiliations of active collaborators/co-investigators in addition to and including the PI (excludes consultants, postdoctoral fellows, students and technicians)

The second part, one page maximum, must be a letter from the institution confirming the PI's eligibility. Please refer to section III above.

### **Both parts must be combined in one PDF file for uploading!!**

Shortly after submitting the Letter of Intent, the applicant will receive a confirmation e-mail. Applicants will be notified by email of the acceptance or denial of the LOI. The subsequent proposal cannot deviate significantly from the project description in its approved Letter of Intent.

## **VI. Uploading Your Proposal**

At the prescribed time, you will be able to begin your proposal. Log in and select your application. You will now have more menu options (note each section should be uploaded separately).

- A. Scientific Abstract (250 words max)
  - i. The abstract must describe the project goal(s) and/or hypothesis, specific aims, research methods, expected results and significance/relevance.
  - ii. This is uploaded in the system under "Keywords and Abstract".
- B. Layperson Abstract (250 words max)
  - i. The layperson abstract must be easily intelligible to a knowledgeable lay person or non-expert.
  - ii. This is uploaded in the grant system under "Keywords and Abstract"
- C. Research Plan (10 pages max). See review criteria for these sections in section IX below.

- i. **Impact and Relevance**
- ii. **Innovation**
- iii. **Research Strategy**
- iv. **Investigators' Qualifications** –briefly describe (Biosketches must be provided – in the Other Attachments section - see J below).
- v. **Environment** – briefly describe (greater detail should be included in G described below).
- vi. **Progress** – a short description should be included of what can be expected as progress in Year 1 for a one year proposal and in Years 1 and 2 for a two year proposal.

The research plan should address the evaluation criteria in section VIII. This should be one document, uploaded to "Experimental Plan and Methods" under "Research Plan".

You may include a maximum of two pages of relevant images, figures and graphics, using two of the additional upload fields below "Experimental Plan". Images uploaded in these fields will not be counted towards the 10 page maximum limit.

D. Bibliography with complete literature citations including titles and all authors. This is uploaded under "Literature Cited - Bibliography".

E. Detailed budget for each year. *Please note – every cell in the budget table must have something entered. If a category is not used, enter a zero in the amount and 'n/a' in the description.*

**Applicants should ensure that their budget is in accordance with the CFP. Budgets which exceed the maximum amount will not be accepted by the grants system. Note the Grants submission system is US based, *do not convert* your budget to US\$ (ignore the \$ sign and treat as British pounds).**

**As a UK charity, Autism Speaks in the UK does not pay for indirect costs.**

The budget may include:

- i. Personnel Costs (not to exceed the percent effort committed to the proposed project)
- ii. Directly incurred salary costs for research staff (research assistants and/or technicians or other staff) dedicated to the project commensurate with the host Institution's pay scales
- iii. Post-graduate student stipend NOTE: Tuition reimbursement and PhD registration fees are not allowed.
- iv. Research supplies, services and related expenses
- v. Essential equipment not to exceed £5000 in total. A vendor estimate is required for any single item of equipment costing more than £2500.
- vi. Travel to professional meetings
- vii. Publication and data analysis costs
- viii. Collaborations: If you are collaborating with a second site, put its total amount in "Other" and upload its line-item budget under "Budget Subcontract".
- ix. Note: All budget fields must be filled in. If a line item does not apply, please write "0" in the amount, and "N/A" in the description field.

F. Budget Justification (4 pages max)

- i. The budget justification should detail each category requested for each year.
- ii. The budget justification is uploaded in the "Budget" section.

- iii. If your justification document covers all years requested in the budget, you can upload it once.

G. Resources and research environment (1 page max)

- i. Describe the resources and environment that will support the successful completion of the project.
- ii. If the project will be utilising existing samples and/or collecting samples, it should be specified how and when they will be used and shared with the autism community following the end of the project.
- iii. This should be uploaded under "Facilities & Resources".

H. Letters of Collaboration, if needed. These are uploaded under "Collaborative Arrangements", under the "Other Attachments" section.

For younger Principal Investigators, who may want to strengthen their proposed research by support from an experienced mentor throughout the course of the award, then this should be formalised by including a letter of support from the mentor outlining the mentor's commitment and the added value to the proposed research.

I. Biographical Sketches of the Principal Investigator and named Co-Investigators (4 pages max each)

- i. Indicate education, complete citations (including title) of publications relevant to the proposed research and briefly describe currently funded research projects.
- ii. Submit these under the "Biographical Sketches" section of "Other Attachments"

J. Current grants held and pending

- i. Indicate funding source, total award amount, award duration (inclusive dates) and project title; clearly explain any overlap with the proposed research including the extent to which the projects are redundant or complementary.
- ii. Submit in "Current and Pending Support" under "Other Attachments".

K. Exhibits or Appendices

- i. Publications or other supporting files that are relevant to the application must be referenced in the research plan and may be uploaded to "Exhibits" in the "Other Attachments" section.
- ii. A maximum of 2 peer reviewed research publications (including manuscripts accepted for publication) will be accepted; however, manuscripts not yet accepted for review, review articles, book chapters, popular press articles and meeting abstracts will NOT be accepted. Upload these in the "Publication reprints" in the "Other Attachments" section.
- iii. Appendix publications are provided as a courtesy to the reviewers who are under no obligation to read or consult them in evaluating a proposal.

## **VII. Endorsing & Submitting the Proposal**

Before the proposal can be submitted online, it needs to be endorsed by your institution.

- i. Enter a Responsible Official in "Institutional Info & Contacts". A Responsible Official (RO) is someone at the applicant organisation, other than the applicant/PI, who can endorse the proposal. On the RO line, click "View". Enter in the contact's email address and click "Look Up E-mail". If they are not already in the system, click on Save Selected Contact and fill out their information.
- ii. Once you have finished uploading files for your proposal, click on "E-Mail Responsible Official" in "Approvals & Status". The RO will receive an email notification with instructions on endorsing your proposal. It is recommended you call or email this person to ensure they received this notification.

- iii. The RO will be instructed to review the budget and proposal, and endorse in "Approvals & Status". You will receive an email that endorsement is complete.
- iv. You must now go into "Preview and Submit Proposal" to complete your submission

### **VIII. Updates & Additional Materials**

One update up to two pages in length (e.g. to cite a paper very recently accepted for publication) will be accepted on or before 16<sup>th</sup> October, 2009. This document may not redesign the application in any way. The document must be emailed to Jenny Longmore, jenny.longmore@autismspeaks.org.uk

### **IX. Review Process and Evaluation Criteria**

Autism Speaks is committed to efficient, fair and expert review and funding of meritorious proposals. For each proposal the review of scientific merit will be provided by highly accomplished researchers acting as external reviewers and then the proposal, together with the comments from the external reviewers, will be discussed and ranked by a scientific advisory panel convened by Autism Speaks.

#### ***Proposals will be evaluated using the following criteria:***

##### **Impact and Relevance**

Does the pilot study address an important autism-specific problem? Are the outcomes of the pilot study likely to lead to funding of a larger proposal by a major funding agency? If successful, is the pilot study likely to eventually lead to new knowledge or methods that will advance the goal(s) of understanding the causes, diagnosis, and treatment of autism spectrum disorders?

##### **Innovation**

Does the pilot study develop and/or use innovative and creative ideas or methods of research, diagnosis or treatment? Does the project propose to develop or employ novel concepts, approaches or methodologies, tools, or technologies for this area? Does the proposal challenge an existing paradigm or practice?

##### **Research Strategy**

Are the experimental design, methods and analyses likely to achieve the desired aim(s) of the pilot study, including the development of essential preliminary data and/or the establishment of "proof of concept" for a larger study? Are the overall strategy, milestones, and timeline well-reasoned, realistic, and appropriate to the aims of the proposed project? Are potential problem areas acknowledged, alternative tactics considered, and benchmarks for success presented?

##### **Investigators' Qualifications**

Do the investigators have the appropriate training and experience to conduct the proposed research? Have they demonstrated satisfactory productivity, relative to stage of career, in terms of peer-reviewed publications and other benchmarks in the area of the proposed research? Have necessary collaborations been established and documented with letters of agreement? For younger Principal Investigators has a credible commitment and dedication to a future career in autism research been documented?

##### **Environment**

Do the performance sites where the work will be done contribute to the probability of success? Is the scientific environment conducive to the work proposed, in terms of institutional support, physical resources, and intellectual rapport? Will the proposed study benefit from unique features of the United Kingdom's scientific environment,

subject populations, or collaborative arrangements? Is the institutional support sufficient? Has access to necessary special research equipment or facilities been appropriately documented with letters of agreement? For research involving the use of animals are the research criteria based on the adoption of the 3R principles and are they as described in 'Responsibility in the use of animals in bioscience research: Expectations of the major research councils and charitable funding bodies' <http://www.mrc.ac.uk/Utilities/Documentrecord/index.htm?d=MRC001897>.

#### **X. Submission & Notification Schedule (subject to change)**

Letter of Intent due: 19<sup>th</sup> August, 2009 (applicants will be notified of the decision to invite submission of a full proposal in late August 2009)

Proposal due: 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2009

Peer review panel: December 2009

Notifications: December 2009

Grant start date: February 2010

#### **XI. Miscellaneous**

The host Institution must ensure that, before the research funded by the Grant commences and during the full Grant Period, all the necessary legal and regulatory requirements in order to conduct the research are met, and all the necessary licences and approvals have been obtained. Where any element of the research funded by the Grant is to be conducted outside the United Kingdom, such legal and regulatory requirements should include those applicable in the additional countries involved.

The host Institution must ensure that it has in place formal written procedures for managing the process for obtaining any necessary or appropriate ethical approval for the research funded by the Grant, and must accept full responsibility for ensuring that any such ethical approval is in place at all relevant times during the Grant.

Research funded by the award involving the use of animals and conducted outside the United Kingdom must, as a minimum standard, be conducted in accordance with the principles of UK legislation (Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986): [www.scienceandresearch.homeoffice.gov.uk/animal-research/legislation](http://www.scienceandresearch.homeoffice.gov.uk/animal-research/legislation).

Proposals using post mortem tissue 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. Investigators desiring to obtain tissue from the Autism Tissue Program should go to **[atpportal.org](http://atpportal.org)** for information, application instructions and due dates.

**IMPORTANT:** Research Ethics Committee certification and Home Office approval is NOT required to submit an application; however, these must be in place and the letter of confirmation by the host Institution (as detailed above) be submitted to Autism Speaks as soon as possible following official notification of an award. Autism Speaks will NOT issue the first funding increment of a grant until this confirmation is received. There should be no undue delay because the necessary legal and regulatory requirements in order to conduct the research are not in place.

The first payment will be contingent upon receipt of the countersigned grant agreement letter, acceptance of the Autism Speaks Terms and Conditions for Research and Fellowships Awards (see [www.autismspeaks.org.uk/pilotresearch/TermsandConditions.pdf](http://www.autismspeaks.org.uk/pilotresearch/TermsandConditions.pdf)) Subsequent payments on multiyear grants will be paid annually and will be contingent upon receipt and

approval of interim progress and financial reporting. Interim reports are due 10 months after the start of the grant.

Funded researchers also are required to submit or have submitted for them to the National Institutes of Health's PubMed Central database an electronic version of their final, peer-reviewed manuscripts upon acceptance for publication, to be made publicly available no later than 12 months after the official date of publication. This requirement applies to all grants made by Autism Speaks in the UK, whether Autism Speaks funds the research in whole or in part.

Autism Speaks reserves the right to make information about funded grants publicly available. Funded research projects may be subject to data and resource sharing requirements such entry of research data or biomaterials generated during the course of the award into a centralised data or biomaterials repository shared with other bona-fide researchers.

## **XII. Contacts**

Please address questions about proposal submission to Jenny Longmore, [jenny.longmore@autismspeaks.org.uk](mailto:jenny.longmore@autismspeaks.org.uk) 01491 412 311.