Explorer Awards - Request for Applications (RFA)

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 Awards from individuals who will conduct bold, imaginative, rigorous and relevant research.

Objective of the SFARI Explorer Awards
This award program is designed to enhance our existing support of autism research by providing timely resources to enable focused experiments highly relevant to our mission. A deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying autism spectrum disorders or potential therapeutic approaches will require investigation at multiple levels, including but not limited to studies focused on gene discovery, molecular mechanisms, circuits, anatomy, and cognition and behavior. We will consider proposals at all of these levels.

The maximum budget is $70,000, including indirect costs for one (1) year, non-renewable.

Explorer Awards are intended to provide resources to support exploratory experiments that will strengthen hypotheses and lead to the formulation of competitive applications for subsequent larger-scale funding by SFARI or other organizations. Innovative, high-risk/high-impact proposals are encouraged. We especially encourage applications from investigators who are new to the field of autism, but who have expertise that could be brought to bear on this complex disorder.

Receiving support for an exploratory grant does not guarantee future support from the Simons Foundation. Neither requests for supplemental funding from recipients of other SFARI grants nor travel funding requests will be entertained.

Applicants are strongly advised to familiarize themselves with the work currently supported by SFARI and to consider how their proposals might complement existing grants. We also recommend that applicants read the SFARI Blog post, SFARI 2016 grants cycle: choices, challenges, and priorities, where we discuss our funding priorities in more detail and other considerations for successful proposals.

Applicants are encouraged to use existing resources developed by SFARI. A number of mouse models of high-risk autism genes and copy number variants (CNVs) are available to the research community at minimal cost via a collaboration between SFARI and The Jackson Laboratory. Access to the Simons Simplex Collection (SSC) and the Simons Variation in Individuals Project (Simons VIP) — resources of rigorously characterized phenotypic, genetic, and imaging data, and biospecimens — are available to approved scientists through SFARI Base. Policies regarding data requests and the acquisition of biospecimens are available online. We expect Simons Investigators to share renewable reagents and data developed with SFARI funds with other qualified investigators.

Budget
SFARI will support applications for maximum of $70,000, including indirect costs, for one year, non-renewable. Indirect costs for all SFARI grant types are limited to 20 percent of the modified total direct costs [see SFARI policies]. Indirect costs paid to a subcontractor may not exceed 20 percent of the direct costs paid to the subcontractor.

There is no salary cap for principal investigators (PIs) or other faculty on a Simons Foundation grant; however, the compensation is prorated according to the individual’s percent effort on the grant. There is no minimum percent effort required for PIs or other personnel on any SFARI award type, but it is expected that the PI will commit sufficient effort to this project to provide a leading intellectual and guiding role on the project. Additionally, the PI will be expected to join the collaborative community of SFARI Investigators through
participation in conferences, workshops and symposia organized by the foundation. PIs committing less than 15 percent effort to their project should justify their effort level in detail.

SFARI funds may be used only for personnel considered employees of the grantee institution who are eligible for benefits. Funds may not be used for stipend or benefit supplementation unless specifically authorized under the terms of the program from which funds are derived. The Simons Foundation reserves the right to modify budgets when an application has been selected for an award (see SFARI policies).

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

SFARI policies
Policies have been adopted by the Simons Foundation and apply to all autism research grant awards. Investigators and their institutions must abide by all applicable laws and regulations, including those governing the conduct of research on humans or animals.

The Simons Foundation reserves the right to modify or amend its policies governing grants. You may view SFARI policies on the SFARI website.

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 EXPLORER AWARD program. For assistance, please call 800-875-2562 or email pcsupport@altum.com.

Deadlines and notification schedule
Applications are considered on a rolling basis, with a response time as early as 30 days.

Applications
Prospective applicants must submit an application using proposalCENTRAL. The application should be no more than three (3) pages long (including references and figures) and should include:

- Name, title, affiliation and contact of Principal Investigator and Key Collaborators
- Research project description, including specific aims, experimental design, significance, potential impact on autism research, novelty, milestones and preliminary data (if available; it is understood that preliminary results are not required)

Please note that applications exceeding the three (3)-page limit will not be reviewed.

Applicants must also attach the following to the application:

- Bio-sketch of Principal Investigator and Key Collaborators
- Current and pending support for Principal Investigator and Key Collaborators
- Budget and justification
- Research environment and resources
- Renewable reagents and data-sharing plan

Review of applications
The SFARI scientific team will review applications, with external ad-hoc reviewers as needed. Reviewers will consider the excellence of science, the relevance to autism, and the appropriateness of budget.

SFARI and proposalCENTRAL contacts:
Email: grants@simonsfoundation.org or pcsupport@altum.com
Phone: 800-875-2562