



**Autism Speaks**  
**The Dennis Weatherstone Predoctoral Fellowship Program**  
**2012 Request for Applications**

**Deadlines:**

Letter of Intent: November 30, 2011, 8:00 p.m. (EST)  
Letters of recommendation: January 31, 2012 by 8:00 pm (EST)  
Application: January 31, 2012, 8:00 p.m. (EST)

**Other Important Dates (subject to change):**

Peer review panels: Spring 2012  
Notification: Summer 2012  
Earliest Grant start date: Fall 2012

**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 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.

**Applications addressing the following areas of research are particularly encouraged:**

1. Understand **environmental risk factors** and their interaction with genetic susceptibility to enable prevention and improve diagnosis and treatment
2. Discover **biomarkers** that can improve risk assessment and subtype stratification that will allow for an individualized approach to treatment
3. Improve quality of life through **more effective medicines, behavioral interventions, and technologies**
4. Enhance diagnosis and treatment of underserved and under-studied populations, specifically,
  - **Nonverbal** persons with ASD
  - **Ethnically-diverse** and/or low resource communities
  - **Adults**
  - Those with **medical co-morbidities**
5. **Disseminate and implement evidence-based clinical practices** to the broader community worldwide

**IMPORTANT: The relevance of the proposed research to ASD and Autism Speaks' research priority areas must be explicitly described in the Letter of Intent (LOI) and full application.**

For more information including specific examples of types of projects relevant to the above priority research areas, please see [2012 Research Priority Areas](#).

### **Awards**

The Autism Speaks Weatherstone Fellowship Awards will be granted to qualified predoctoral students. The two-year fellowship includes an annual \$28,600 award that includes a stipend of \$21,600 plus a \$7,000 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 named 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 application must include a letter of recommendation from their mentor as well as a jointly completed Individualized Development Plan. The mentor's training experience should also be documented.

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

### **Letter of Intent Submission**

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

Please Note:

1. The Fellowship candidate must be the applicant and must first send an email from their institutional email address to [grantadmin@autismspeaks.org](mailto:grantadmin@autismspeaks.org) indicating their interest to apply, including name, institution, office or lab address and phone #. A user ID, password and link to the grant system will be returned by email.
2. Uploaded documents should be 11 point Arial font with 1-inch margins all around. Please do not have headers or footers in submitted documents. *Applications exceeding the specified document limits will not be reviewed.*
3. Preferred file type is PDF.
4. 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.
5. 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 can be completed and submitted by the applicant. Full applications can only be submitted by the RO.

**Complete the LOI form.** Log in and click on Start New Application and then choose Weatherstone Fellowships 2012. The Letter of Intent page requires the following:

1. Application Title: Enter less than 100 characters, spaces included
2. Select the primary research priority your proposal will address.
3. Explain how the project addresses the chosen priority. (up to 3000 characters, spaces included)

4. 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)
5. Biosketch for the fellow, NIH format not to exceed 4 pages.
6. Biosketch for the mentor, NIH format not to exceed 4 pages.
7. Letter from the mentor providing a statement of commitment to provide resources essential to achieve the specific aims and career goals of the fellow. The mentor's training experience should be included.
8. Name and contact information for the Responsible Official from the Fellow's institution.

***The applicant will receive a notification email after Autism Speaks' staff reviews the LOI form. Applicants with approved LOI forms will be able to move to the full application. Detailed submission instructions will be included in the notification email.***

### **Complete the full application.**

1. **Autism Speaks' Priority.** Choose the primary priority addressed by the project.
2. **Priority Explanation.** Up to 3000 characters, including spaces.
3. **Scientific Abstract.** Up to 2500 characters, spaces included.
4. **Lay Abstract.** Up to 2500 characters, spaces included. Provide a lay description of the project for non-experts.
5. **Research Plan.** Not to exceed 4 pages, uploaded document. Include:
  - a. Specific aims, background and significance/relevance to autism
  - b. Preliminary data, if applicable. Note that any relevant publications, figures or other supporting material can be uploaded under Figures.
  - c. Experimental design, methodology, and timeline for achievement of specific aims.
6. **Figures.** Up to 3 relevant images or figures related to the Research Plan may be uploaded.
7. **Timeline:** Create a timeline showing the expected milestones for the research project.
8. **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 include statements addressing the planned value of the proposed fellowship experience and research training program in relation to his or her needs in preparation for a career as an independent researcher in the area of autism.
9. **Bibliography** with complete literature citations including titles and all authors. Uploaded document.
10. **Budget and Budget Justification.** The applicant must complete the budget form, and provide a written budget justification to detail each item on the budget form. Include calculation(s) used to estimate costs. Indirect costs are not allowed. Uploaded documents.
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. *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. **Letters of Collaboration** (optional). Up to two one-page letters of collaboration may be submitted describing a collaborative arrangement. Combine multiple letters for upload.
- 13. **Current and Pending Support**. Indicate funding source, total award amount, award duration (inclusive dates), and project title, both for the applicant and the mentor. Clearly explain the extent to which currently funded research projects will overlap, complement and/or contribute to the proposed research. Uploaded document.
- 14. **Biographical sketches** of the fellow, mentor, and collaborators, not to exceed four pages per individual. Please use the NIH Biographical Sketch format.
- 15. **Exhibits**. Supplemental exhibits that support the Research Plan, including publications, 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.
- 16. **Three Confidential Reference Letters, from the mentor and two other referees**, of 2 pages or less must be emailed as pdf files by the referees to Joan New at [grantadmin@autismspeaks.org](mailto:grantadmin@autismspeaks.org). Each letter should have the name of the candidate at the top and the referee's name, title and institution at the bottom. The reference letters should 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

***These letters must be received by the deadline listed on page 1.***

**Submit the Application**

When the application is complete, 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 Online Grants Administration 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**

*Released 10/26/2011 , Revised 1/10/12*

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. The outcomes of each award will be posted after completion of the training project.

**Payment of Awards**

The recipient of any grant from Autism Speaks must use the awarded funds for the specific purpose for what they were originally intended. 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.

Awards will be paid annually and payment will be contingent upon registration in the Autism Speaks Grants Administration System of a post-award official authorized to act for the institution receiving the award, and upon acceptance of the Autism Speaks award terms and conditions, including receipt of all required certifications. A fellowship award cannot be transferred to another investigator, laboratory or sponsoring institution without prior written approval from Autism Speaks.

The second year payment will be contingent upon Autism Speaks receiving interim progress and financial reports from the investigator 10 months after the award begins. Final reports are due no more than 60 days after the grant end date. The fellow and mentor may request a one-time only, no-cost extension of up to six months if there is a hiatus in the training. Requests for no-cost extensions must be approved by Autism Speaks prior to the extension period and require submission of a progress report and financial report via the online Grants Administration System.

**Review Process and Evaluation Criteria**

Applications will be reviewed by independent peer review panels that will include members of Autism Speaks Scientific Advisory Board as well as active and experienced investigators recruited from the scientific community for their expertise in the research areas of the applications. Fellowship applications will be reviewed on the merit of 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.

**WEATHERSTONE PREDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP REVIEW CRITERIA**

<b>Overall Training Potential</b>	The mission of Autism Speaks' science program is to support research training that will provide a solid foundation for a productive research career that investigates the causes, treatment, and prevention of autism spectrum disorder. Does the proposed research training plan have the potential to provide the fellow with the requisite individualized and supervised experiences to develop into a productive researcher? Is the scientific focus of the training aligned with Autism Speaks' targeted priority research areas?
<b>Fellowship Applicant and Development Plan</b>	Considering the applicant's academic achievements and related experiences to date, does he or she appear to have the potential to develop as an independent and productive researcher? Please consider the outside references as well in evaluating this. In relation to the applicant's career goals, does the proposed development plan build familiarity with autism and enhance the fellow's previous experiences (e.g., with classes, seminars, research experiences, exposure/interaction to broader scientific approaches)? Do the mentor's and the applicant's statements suggest a good match in training needs and expectations?
<b>Mentor</b>	Are the mentor's research qualifications (including successful competition for research support) and track record of mentoring appropriate for the proposed fellowship? Is there (1) evidence of a match between the research interests of the applicant and the mentor (including an understanding of the applicant's research training needs) and (2) a demonstrated ability and commitment of the sponsor to assist in meeting these needs? Are the qualifications of any collaborator(s) and/or consultant(s), including their complementary expertise and previous experience in fostering the training of fellows, appropriate for the proposed research project?
<b>Research Training Plan</b>	Please refer to the Individual Development Plan and the proposed research experience. Is the proposed research plan of high scientific quality, and does it address the applicant's training needs? Is the training plan consistent with the candidate's stage of research

	development? Does the research plan address scientific significance, originality, and feasibility? Will the research training plan provide the applicant with individualized and supervised experiences that will develop research skills needed for a research career focused on autism spectrum disorder?
<b>Environment</b>	Is the institutional environment for the scientific development of the applicant of high quality, and is there appropriate institutional commitment to fostering the fellows' training? Are the research faculties, resources (e.g., equipment, laboratory space, computer time, subject populations), and training opportunities adequate and appropriate?

**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 a grant agreement or any form of 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. Investigators desiring to obtain tissue from the Autism Tissue Program should go to [atportal.org](http://atportal.org) for information, application instructions and due dates.

**Public Access/Dissemination:**

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 awarded after December 3, 2008, whether Autism Speaks funds the research in whole or in part. [Public Access Policy link](#)  
 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.

**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 awarded fellows are required to attend.

**Contacts**

Grants Administration/Online Application/Budget Questions:  
 Joan New, MBA, Grants Associate Manager, 609-228-7313, [jnew@autismspeaks.org](mailto:jnew@autismspeaks.org)

Application Development and Budgets  
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