



**autism  
speaks<sup>®</sup>**  
university  
GUIDEBOOK

CREATING COLLEGIATE CHAPTERS • EVENT IDEAS • VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

[autismspeaks.org/u](https://autismspeaks.org/u)



## About Autism Speaks

Autism Speaks is dedicated to promoting solutions, across the spectrum and throughout the life span, for the needs of individuals with autism and their families. We do this through advocacy and support; increasing understanding and acceptance of people with autism; and advancing research into causes and better interventions for autism spectrum disorder and related conditions. Through partnerships and collaboration, we are committed to:

- *Increasing global understanding and acceptance of people with autism*
- *Being a catalyst for life-enhancing research breakthroughs*
- *Increasing early childhood screening and timely interventions*
- *Improving the transition to adulthood*
- *Ensuring access to reliable information and services throughout the life span*

## What is autism?

Autism, or **autism spectrum disorder (ASD)**, refers to a broad range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and nonverbal communication. According to the Centers for Disease Control, **autism affects an estimated 1 in 54 children and 1 in 45 adults in the United States today.**

We know that there is not one autism but many subtypes, most influenced by a combination of genetic and environmental factors. Because autism is a spectrum disorder, each person with autism has a distinct set of strengths and challenges. The ways in which people with autism learn, think and problem-solve can range from highly skilled to severely challenged. Some people with ASD may require significant support in their daily lives, while others may need less support and, in some cases, live entirely independently.

Several factors may influence the development of autism, and it is often accompanied by sensory sensitivities and medical issues such as gastrointestinal (GI) disorders, seizures or sleep disorders, as well as mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression and attention issues.

Indicators of autism usually appear by age 2 or 3. Some associated development delays can appear even earlier, and often, it can be diagnosed as early as 18 months. Research shows that early intervention leads to positive outcomes later in life for people with autism.

## What is Autism Speaks U?

Autism Speaks U is a program that supports students, faculty and alumni in their awareness, advocacy and fundraising efforts for Autism Speaks. Chapters are made up of students who want to make a difference in the autism community. Many chapters include students on the autism spectrum or students who have family members or friends on the spectrum.

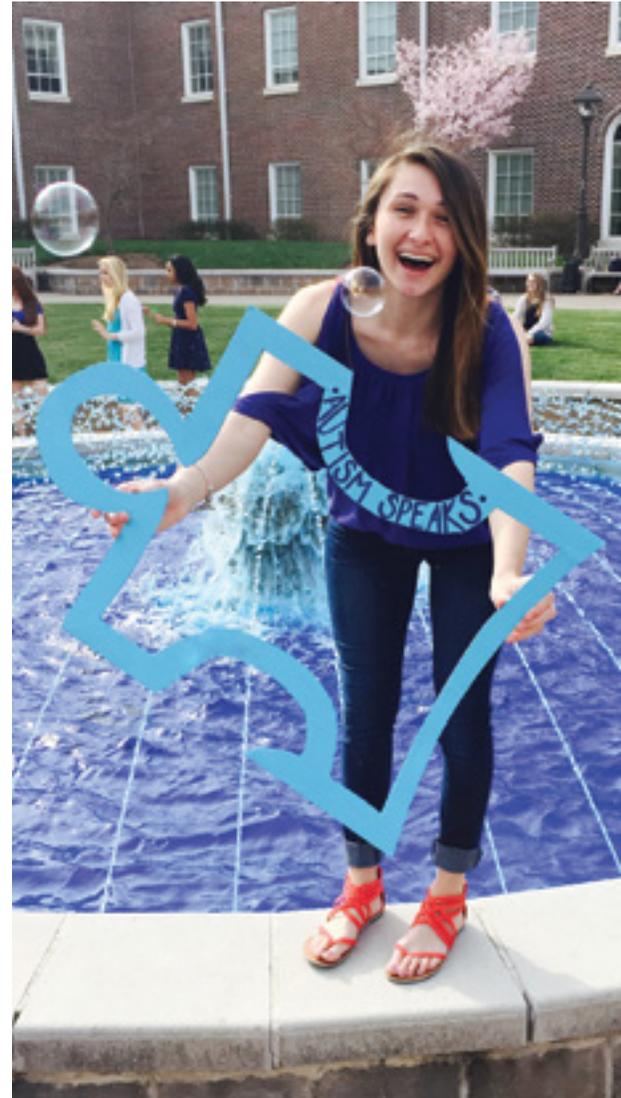
The program's inaugural event took place at Penn State University in 2006 and Autism Speaks U launched nationally in 2008. Autism Speaks U events have raised millions of dollars and Autism Speaks Walk collegiate teams have brought in millions more!

The **School and Youth Programs** at Autism Speaks guides students through the process of starting chapters and planning events, while connecting them with their local community and college students across the country.

## Why should you join?

Joining or starting an Autism Speaks U chapter will help you learn to serve as a leader and autism advocate on campus and in the local community. Here are a few other reasons why you should join the Autism Speaks U family:

- *To help Autism Speaks create a brighter future for people on the spectrum and their families.*
- *To gain professional experience for your resume and earn volunteer hours.*
- *To acquire skills in marketing, fundraising, event planning, volunteer development and community outreach.*
- *To connect with leaders, expand your knowledge and future growth opportunities.*
- *To collaborate with other Autism Speaks U students from schools nationwide.*





# Starting a chapter

## DEVELOPING YOUR CHAPTER

Below are the steps to take in order to become an Autism Speaks U chapter. A school can register on the Autism Speaks U website anytime throughout the year.

### 1. Register on the Autism Speaks U website.

- Visit the Autism Speaks U website at [autismspeaks.org/u](https://autismspeaks.org/u) and click on the “Register” button.
- Be sure to include that you are interested in starting an Autism Speaks U chapter on your campus.

### 2. Set up a preliminary call with the *Autism Speaks School and Youth Programs*.

- Once registered on the website, you will receive an email from the *School and Youth Programs* about setting up an introductory phone call.

### 3. Take action.

- Begin working on the action items provided by the *School and Youth Programs*, including contacting your *Student Life* office and requesting a letter recognizing your status as a “*Registered Student Organization (RSO)*”.

### 4. Follow up.

- Once you have received your *RSO* letter, a follow up call will be scheduled between the chapter president, vice president and the *Autism Speaks School and Youth Coordinator* to check the chapter’s progress.

#### *Phone call agenda:*

Here are some of the things that will be reviewed on the introductory phone call:

- Tell us about yourself (your major, where you’re from, personal connection to autism, etc.).
- Why do you want to start an Autism Speaks U chapter on your campus?
- What is the “student life” like at your school?
- More information about Autism Speaks U and what steps you should take next.



## Provisional Chapter

- 1. Once all the action items are completed, the documents will be reviewed and a final call will be set up to confer “provisional” status and recognition by *Autism Speaks School and Youth Programs*.** The chapter’s community and fundraising efforts will be assessed after one year for final approval of “official” status. Official chapters will be recognized by Autism Speaks, granted their own institutional logos, and added to the Autism Speaks U website.
- 2. New chapters must adhere to this process to ensure the future of the chapter and its ability to grow and succeed.** Since student leadership changes frequently, it is essential to have a strong foundation in place for each Autism Speaks U chapter.
- 3. At the end of the first year as a “provisional chapter,”** chapters will be evaluated to determine their readiness for “official” Autism Speaks U chapter status.
- 4. Evaluation assessment is based on:**
  - Participation in Spring/Fall office hour advisement calls
  - Attendance on all webinar calls
  - World Autism Month participation (spring semester only)
  - Submitting Spring/Fall semester survey/report
  - Hosting a large-scale fundraiser

### Autism Speaks U Chapter Benefits

#### Provisional Chapters Receive:

- Chapter package that contains marketing/recruitment materials and an Autism Speaks U banner.

#### Official Chapters Receive:

- Listing as “Official Chapter” on the Autism Speaks U website.
- Custom Autism Speaks U chapter banner with school name (used year round).
- Approval to have a Facebook and Twitter account for the chapter that will be created by the Autism Speaks U national office. DO NOT create a Facebook or Twitter account on your own.
- Custom chapter logos to be used on marketing materials and social media sites.

# Setting Up an Executive Board

## EXECUTIVE BOARD POSITIONS

Whether your chapter has a status of provisional or official, it is imperative to have an e-board of at least five members. These members are responsible for organizing and planning events, having general chapter meetings at least once a month as well as separate e-board meetings, and ensuring the chapter's overall success. Once official status is gained and more members are acquired, consider adding in additional positions (secretary, recruitment chair, greek liaison chair, etc.). Larger chapters should add "assistant" positions to train future officers who will be succeeding them (finance assistant; events assistant; marketing & membership assistant, etc.).

### President

Oversees chapter logistics and all e-board positions; organizes, plans and runs meetings; acts as point of contact for Autism Speaks U national office as well as for the chapter and school; in charge of submitting paper work to Autism Speaks U national office; attends all advisement calls, webinars and other scheduled meetings (if possible); can act as second signature on bank accounts; hosts elections in November for a January-December term.

### Vice President

Supports the chapter president; runs meetings if the president is unable to attend; 2nd point of contact for Autism Speaks U national office and school; assists vice president of finance in securing rooms and venues for chapter meetings/events; can act as second signature on bank accounts.

### Vice President of Finance

Establishes and maintains chapter's bank account (when applicable); keeps record of expenses and deposits; prepares annual/large event budgets; processes reimbursements; deposits all funds raised and sends quarterly/semester check plus accounting spreadsheets to the Autism Speaks U national office.

### Vice President of Events

Plans and executes all of the chapter's fundraising events; contacts clubs and organizations to partner on events; selects chapter members to serve on fundraising committee for large events, conducts meetings for those events and delegates tasks and roles to those members (tasks include gaining connections and vendors).

### Vice President of Marketing & Membership

Creates plan for how the chapter will get promoted on campus and in the community; posts 2-3 times a week on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (once official); designs advertising materials and submits all designs to Autism Speaks U national office for approval; engages students who express interest in joining and informs students of upcoming meetings and events; executes a strategic plan to promote chapter to potential new members.



## Provisional Chapter Maintenance

There are many ways to be considered a successful Autism Speaks U chapter. Successful provisional chapters will reach – or surpass – their fundraising goals, meet the minimum requirements of local volunteering, have a good rapport with the school, attend important semester events held by the *Autism Speaks School and Youth Programs* and submit any important documents to *School and Youth Programs*. See below for a broader explanation.

### 1. Membership Goals

- Aim to secure 10-20 active members by the end of the year. An active member is someone who attends at least 50% of the meetings and 75% of the chapter's events.
- Aim to secure 30-50 total members by the end of the year. A general member is on the chapter's mailing list and shows up occasionally throughout the semester.

### 2. Local Volunteering Goals

- It is very important to maintain a strong relationship with the local community. Chapters should volunteer at least 3 times per semester.
  - *Plan in August for September-November.*
  - *Plan in January for February-April.*
  - *NOTE: Tri-semester schools should still plan during their first month of the new semester.*

### 3. Fundraising Goals

- Chapters should aim to fundraise a minimum of \$1,500-\$2,000 in their first year.

### 4. Webinars

- Three webinars will be held each semester. Webinar dates and times will be emailed to officers at the beginning of each semester.

### 5. Semester Survey/Report

- Make sure the chapter is submitting their semester survey/report on time.

### 6. Office Hour Advisement Calls

- These calls happen twice a year and are to prepare for the upcoming semester and school year. A link to schedule these calls will be sent via email.
  - *Fall Advisement Calls occur from August 15th-September 15th.*
  - *Spring Advisement Calls occur from January 15th-February 15th.*



## Official Chapter Maintenance

To maintain official status and continued success, official chapters will gradually increase their fund-raising goals, meet the minimum requirements of local volunteering, have a good rapport with the school, attend important semester events held by the *Autism Speaks School and Youth Programs* and submit any important documents to the *School and Youth Programs*. See below for a broader explanation.

### 1. Membership Goals

- Once official status is gained, we ask that the chapter:
  - *Secure or maintain 20-30 active members by the end of your first year.*
  - *Secure or maintain 50-80 total members by the end of your first year.*

### 2. Local Autism Community Goals

- It is very important to maintain a strong relationship with the local community. Chapters should volunteer at least 3 times per semester.
  - *Plan in August for September-November.*
  - *Plan in January for February-April.*
  - *NOTE: Tri-semester schools should still plan during their first month of the new semester.*

### 3. Fundraising Goals

- Chapters should aim to raise more than \$3,000 every year.

### 4. Webinars

- Three webinars will be held each semester. Webinar dates and times will be emailed to officers at the beginning of each semester.

### 5. Semester Survey/Report

- Make sure the chapter is submitting their semester survey/report on time.

### 6. Office Hour Advisement Calls

- These calls happen twice a year and are to prepare for the upcoming semester and school year. A link to schedule these calls will be sent via email.
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## Chapter Finances

As the vice president of finance, it is important to know how to properly manage the chapter's bank account and budget.

### Vice President of Finance Responsibilities

1. **If your chapter would like to open a bank account**, you must set up a call with the *School and Youth Programs* office at Autism Speaks to make sure the account is opened correctly.
2. **Creating a budget for chapter events and keeping event expenses under 8%-10%** of what is raised for Autism Speaks.
  - *If your projected event revenue is \$1,000, the event expenses should NOT exceed \$80-\$100.*
3. **Submitting all funds raised to the Autism Speaks U national office** at the end of spring and fall semester or quarter (before leaving for break). Send funds in the form of check or money order. **DO NOT SEND CASH.**

### Chapter Bank Account

1. **If your chapter would like to open up a bank account**, you must set up a call with the *School and Youth Programs* office at Autism Speaks to make sure the account is opened correctly.
2. **When opening up a bank account for your Autism Speaks U chapter, try getting an account through the school** by going to your student activities office (a lot of schools offer it this way).
3. **If the school does not offer an on-campus banking solution, the next option is opening a bank account at an on-campus bank** or the closest bank to campus.
  - *NOTE: The chapter's bank account is your local student group's bank account not an official Autism Speaks bank account.*
  - *Look for a bank account that offers free checking so you don't get hit with fees!*
4. **Have two people on the account** (the vice president of finance and president or vice president) and have all checks require dual signatures.
5. **When the vice president of finance's tenure is up**, make sure to put the successor's name on the bank account along with the second name and remove the current names on it.

# Events & Fundraising

Chapters are required to host one small-scale fundraising event each month and two large-scale fundraising events per year.

## Fundraising

- Small-scale fundraisers can be marketed and promoted two to three weeks prior to the event, by tabling on campus, posting flyers around school and sharing to social.
- Large-scale fundraisers take long-term planning, requiring the full semester to plan and execute.
- We encourage chapters to create event fundraising sites for their large-scale fundraisers and do online fundraising. [Click here](#) to request an event fundraising site. Easier to access. Easier to promote. Easier, period!

### Tier 1: Examples of Small-Scale Fundraisers

**Coffee and Sweet treats:** Hold a bake sale (or purchase large containers of coffee and donuts, cupcakes, etc.) in a busy part of campus and sell items for \$1-\$3 depending on purchase cost.

**Restaurant Night/Week:** Invite local restaurants to participate in fundraising days/nights and donate a percentage of proceeds to your chapter. If the restaurant has a food truck that will park on campus, even better! **\*\*allows for social distance\*\***

**Puzzle Piece Campaign:** Sell Autism Speaks puzzle piece cards for \$1-\$2 each at your school and in the local community and hang them up on campus to help raise awareness. Puzzle piece cards can be sold virtually through a fundraising event site or at an in-person tabling event. **\*\*allows for social distance\*\***

**Bingo/Game Night:** Host a bingo night with small prizes or ASU swag – bonus points for making the bingo night a theme or costume-friendly! **\*\*virtual opportunity\*\***

**Halloween “Boo” Bags / Valentine Candy Grams:** Have people sign up and pay in advance to have a goodie bag delivered to a recipient of their choosing. Students can pick up their bags at a designated time, or members can deliver to front doors. **\*\*allows for social distance\*\***

### Tier 2: Examples of Large-Scale Fundraisers

**Hero Dash 5K:** Host a *Superhero 5K* race for students, staff, faculty and the community. **\*\*virtual opportunity\*\***

**Sporting Event Tournaments:** Host a football, dodgeball or kickball tournament on campus and have teams pay an entry fee. Encourage other campus groups or Greek Life to participate.

**Dinner or Dessert Meal Kits:** Can't host a spaghetti dinner event or bake sale? Consider purchasing the items (or even better, having a sponsor purchase and donate items) packaging individually and selling as a meal kit! **\*\*allows for social distance\*\***

**Raffle Events:** Reach out to local and large-scale companies and ask if they have items they'd be willing to donate. Have friends, family and community members purchase raffle tickets. This can also be incorporated into a bingo/game night or other event. **\*\*virtual opportunity\*\***

### \$54 in 24 Collegiate Giving Day

All chapters participate in our annual **\$54 in 24 Collegiate Giving Day**, where each chapter member is asked to raise \$54 in a 24-hour period towards their ASU Walk team! **\*\*virtual opportunity\*\***



## Event Fundraising Site

Fundraising sites are websites created for a school and tailored to their specific event. Fundraising sites are typically used for larger scale fundraisers that have a minimum fundraising goal of \$500.

### 1. How Do I Request a Site?

- Chapters request a site by filling out [this form](#) and filling in the necessary event information.
- The turnaround time for site requests is two weeks.
- Once the site is ready for review it will be in “Preview” mode. *The School and Youth Programs Team* at Autism Speaks will reach out to the chapter point of contact for one round of edits.
- Once the chapter point of contact approves the site, the *School and Youth Programs Team* will make it go live.
  - *People will now be able to register and donate to the site.*

### 2. Why Should Our Chapter Use a Fundraising Site?

- Donations can be made using a credit or debit card.
- Sites are directly connected to the backend of Autism Speaks, so once a donation is made it comes right back to us.
- Can be shared on social media platforms giving you easy access toward collecting donations from friends and family across the globe.
- Donations are tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.

### 3. How Does a Site Work Once it is Live?

- Chapter members should register as an individual in order to receive their own personal fundraising page to begin peer-to-peer fundraising.
- Peer-to-peer fundraising is when you empower your members to raise funds on behalf of Autism Speaks by sharing the cause with friends and family.
- Members should post their event link and their individual page link on social media platforms and/or email it to friends and family members.
- Have a contest within your chapter and award a prize to the individual who raises the most!





Autism Speaks Walk is the world's largest event to raise awareness and funds in the autism community. Create a team with your chapter members, friends and family! Chapters should register, fundraise, and participate in the Walk closest to their school.

### Find a Walk

- You can find the closest Walk to your campus here: [autismspeakswalk.org](http://autismspeakswalk.org)

### Your Walk Team

- If your chapter is participating in a Walk, you should create a Walk team with the president or vice president being designated as the team captain.
  - *You should participate in the Walk closest to your school and Autism Speaks Data Services will be able to track any donations coming in from your chapter.*
- Share your team page with friends and family encouraging them to join your team and donate.



## Collaboration

Work with other clubs, organizations and academic departments to recruit new members, fill e-board positions and host fundraising and awareness events.

### National Philanthropic Partners

- If choosing Greek Life organizations to collaborate with, check first to see if one of Autism Speaks' national philanthropic partners, Alpha Xi Delta (AXiD, sorority) and Theta Delta Chi (TDX, fraternity), are on your campus. These organizations have adopted Autism Speaks as their national philanthropy and host fundraising and awareness events benefitting Autism Speaks.
  - *To see if an Alpha Xi Delta chapter is at your school, [click here](#).*
  - *To see if a Theta Delta Chi chapter is at your school, [click here](#).*
- We suggest communicating with AXiD and/or TDX at least once a month to let them know what events you plan on hosting and to ask for their support and participation.

### Center For Students with Disabilities

- Reach out to your school's *Center for Students with Disabilities Office* and ask if they can send out an email announcing the chapter being established.
- For chapters already established, reach out to your school's *Center for Students with Disabilities Office* asking them to send out emails announcing when the next chapter meeting and/or event is.

### Student Clubs/Organizations/Academic Departments

- Social, professional and service fraternities and sororities
- National Student Speech Language Hearing Association (NSSLHA)
- Best Buddies Program
- Clubs in education/special education, neurology, psychology, marketing and communication
- Sports Teams
- Academic Departments
  - *Sports, education, marketing, speech and hearing, communications, etc.*



## World Autism Month

*April is World Autism Month and April 2 is World Autism Awareness Day.* Autism Speaks kicks off the month on April 2. Getting involved is fun and easy, join us to increase understanding and acceptance of people with autism.

### Shine a Light on Autism

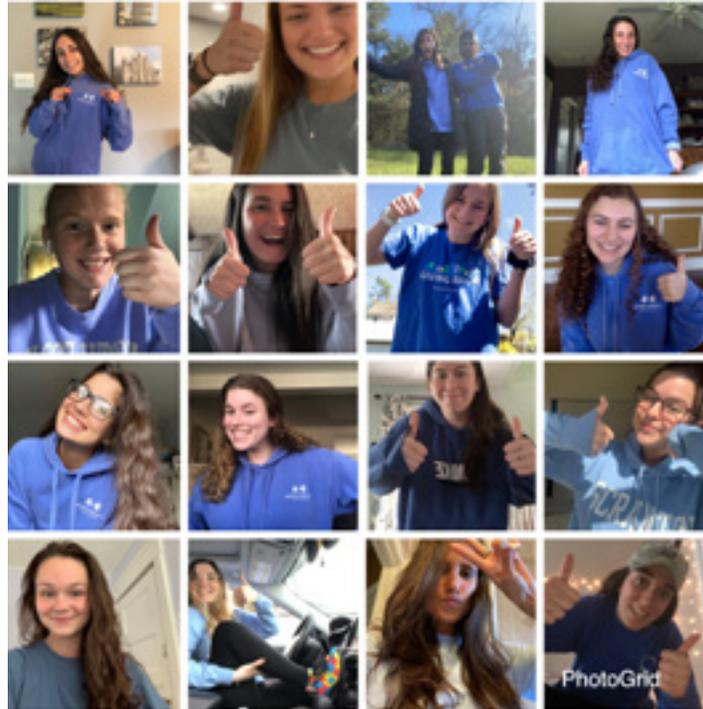
All chapters should participate in *World Autism Month* activities. During this time, prominent buildings and monuments across the world light up blue to show their support for people with autism. By participating, the chapter will gain exposure on campus and increase understanding and acceptance of people with autism throughout the school and the community.

### Tips to Participate in World Autism Month

- **Start Early!** Contact the *Student Activities Office* and school president/chancellor during the first week in January. This gives the school four months to acquire supplies in order to illuminate buildings blue.
- Inform the school that **changing a building's lights blue is as easy as buying blue light bulbs or placing a blue filter/gel around the existing bulbs** (note: Autism Speaks has a provider that sells the blue gels).
- **Get media coverage** by contacting the local newspaper letting them know what the chapter is trying to accomplish. They can run a story about the chapter's efforts and encourage the school and community to participate.
- **Make sure to check if there is a Home Depot near you** as they have partnered with Autism Speaks since 2011 to sell blue light bulbs starting in March.

### Contest

- Each year we have our annual *Light It Up Blue Photo Contest* where the top three winners by Facebook "likes" are announced. Light up buildings, monuments, fountains, dorms, fraternity/sorority houses blue, or even deck out the school mascot, the president of the school and faculty members in blue!



# World Autism Month

## EVENT IDEAS

Below are a few ways for the chapter to raise autism awareness in April.

- “Puzzle Piece Campaign” in the main campus center building (Student Union; Student Activities Center; etc.).
- Pass out informational flyers with Autism Speaks silicone bracelets, puzzle piece stickers and/or blue candy. Consider creating goodie bags to deliver!
- Post signs on campus with facts such as “Autism affects 1 in 54 children and 1 in 37 boys.”
- Hand out blue and white puzzle pieces with autism facts attached.
- Organize a “Wear All Blue Day” where students and faculty sport blue to show their support. **\*\*virtual opportunity\*\***
- Participate in our email campaign, “Write It Up Blue.” **\*\*virtual opportunity\*\***
- Sell blue glow sticks, cotton candy, ice cream and any other blue snacks.
- Organize a panel on autism and invite college students on the spectrum, family members, local professors, clinicians, researchers and Autism Speaks staff to come speak to members of the campus community. **\*\*virtual opportunity\*\***



## Branding Guidelines

It is important that the chapter adheres to the branding guidelines listed below. Chapters are required to submit proofs of all promotional materials (ex: flyers, t-shirts, banners, posters, etc.) to the Autism Speaks U national office for approval prior to use.

### LOGOS TO USE

When the chapter has completed/handed in all of the necessary steps/documents for starting a chapter and spent one year as a "provisional Autism Speaks U chapter," it will be given custom chapter logos to use on all marketing and recruitment materials.

THESE ARE THE ONLY LOGOS THE CHAPTER SHOULD USE. See below for examples:



*Vertical Logo*



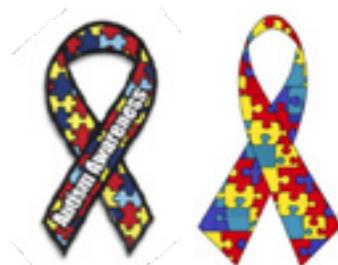
*Horizontal Logo*

### LOGOS NOT TO USE

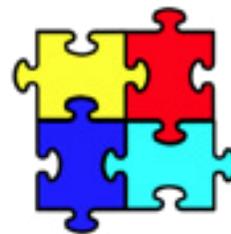
Use of the Autism Speaks corporate logo should not be used for individual student or chapter activities without written permission from Autism Speaks. In addition, chapters should refrain from the use of any other logos that are not Autism Speaks University chapter logos, whenever promoting Autism Speaks fundraising activities. Examples include:



*Autism Speaks  
Logo*



*Autism Awareness Ribbon*



*Multi Colored  
Puzzle Pieces*



## Resources

The *Autism Speaks School and Youth Programs Team* would like to thank you for your support of and dedication to Autism Speaks by starting and maintaining an Autism Speaks U chapter. We are so lucky to work with such amazing students each and every day. We hope the skills you acquire through fundraising, volunteering and leadership opportunities and the experiences you have make a meaningful impact on your professional careers and development of social responsibility in the future.

### AUTISM SPEAKS SCHOOL AND YOUTH PROGRAMS

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School & Youth Programs

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### LOCAL AUTISM SPEAKS FIELD STAFF

Each Autism Speaks U chapter is assigned a local *Autism Speaks Field Staff* contact. Your local *Field Staff* contact is an excellent resource to you and can work with your chapter on:

- Volunteer opportunities within the local autism community.
- Involvement in local Autism Speaks Walks.

To get in touch with your local Autism Speaks staff person, please email the *School and Youth Programs Team*.

### RESOURCES & TOOLKITS

We have additional resources to help our students and their chapters. If you would like any of the following, please send an email to the *School and Youth Programs Team*.

- Autism Speaks U Corporate Sponsorship Guide
- Autism Speaks U Hero Dash 5K Tool Kit
- World Autism Month Resources
- One-on-One Event Coaching
- \$54 in 24 Collegiate Giving Day Tool Kit