SFARI Bridge to Independence Award
Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

The frequently asked questions (FAQs) cover topics related to the Simons Foundation Autism Research Initiative (SFARI) Bridge to Independence Award program, Simons Foundation policies and online submission on proposalCENTRAL.

If you have a question regarding the request for applications (RFA) guidelines or policies not answered below, please contact the Simons Foundation at grants@simonsfoundation.org or call 646-654-0066.

1. **I do not have a Ph.D. or M.D. yet, but I am currently pursuing one (e.g., current graduate or medical student). Am I eligible?**
   No. Applicants must hold a Ph.D., M.D. or equivalent degree. Please note that the foundation does not consider a Doctor of Psychology degree (e.g., Psy.D.) as equivalent to a Doctor of Philosophy degree (Ph.D).

2. **Are newly appointed tenure-track faculty eligible?**
   No.

3. **I have accepted a tenure-track faculty position but have not yet started. Am I still eligible?**
   No. However, with approval of your faculty institution, you are eligible to apply for SFARI Explorer, Pilot and Research Awards, as well as targeted RFA programs. For more information on these programs, please visit: https://sfari.org/funding/grants.

4. **I hold a non-tenured faculty position (e.g., assistant or adjunct professor) at my institution. Am I eligible to apply?**
   No. However, exceptions are made for clinical faculty members who do not hold an independent research faculty position (see question 8).

5. **I have a Ph.D. (or equivalent research doctorate degree) but do not have the title of ‘postdoctoral fellow.’ Am I eligible to apply?**
   You are eligible only if your institutional title is the equivalent of ‘postdoctoral fellow’ — in other words, if you are considered to be in a non-independent training position with a designated mentor. Confirmation of your training status (e.g., letter from the department chair) is required for the first-stage proposal.

6. **What is the difference between a non-independent and an independent position?**
   As modified from the National Institutes of Health K99/R00 program announcement, evidence for non-independence may include documentation that:
   - The applicant’s research is entirely funded by another investigator’s grants.
   - The applicant’s research is conducted entirely in another investigator’s assigned space.
   - According to institutional policy, the applicant is not allowed to submit an application for an NIH research grant (e.g., R01) or SFARI grant as the principal investigator.

   Conversely, independence, and therefore lack of eligibility, is indicated by any of the following:
   - The applicant has a full-time faculty position.
   - The applicant received a startup package for support of his/her independent research.
• The applicant has research space dedicated to his/her own research.
• The applicant is eligible to apply for an NIH or SFARI research grant as the principal investigator.

7. I am the recipient of a career development award with a similar budgetary scope as the SFARI Bridge to Independence Award. Am I eligible?
No. These awards include, but are not limited to:
• NIH K99/R00 (please note that other K awardees may be eligible, e.g., recipients of K01 and K08)
• Burroughs Wellcome Fund Career Award for Medical Scientists
• American Academy of Neurology Career Development Award
• Howard Hughes Medical Institute Hanna H. Gray fellowship

You are strongly encouraged to contact SFARI prior to grant submission if you believe your career development award is comparable to the BTI award but is not listed above.

8. I am a clinician (M.D., D.D.S., D.V.M. or other licensed professional) but do not have a postdoctoral fellow position. Am I eligible to apply?
A clinician who holds a faculty position in order to fulfill his/her clinical responsibilities may be eligible if and only if he/she does not hold an independent research faculty position. The foundation may require written confirmation of the distinction between the applicant’s clinical and research responsibilities. Please contact grants@simonsfoundation.org to confirm eligibility status prior to application submission.

9. My current traineeship is at a non-U.S. academic institution; am I eligible to apply?
Yes, but your faculty position must be at a U.S. institution for you to accept the grant award (see question 10).

10. Does my faculty position need to be at a U.S. institution?
Yes, your faculty position must be at a U.S. institution for you to accept the grant award. However, SFARI will approve the use of funds at non-U.S. institutions under exceptional circumstances.

11. I am not a U.S. citizen. Am I eligible to apply?
Yes. U.S. citizenship is not required.

12. It has been more than six (6) years since I earned my Ph.D. or M.D., but I have had fewer than six (6) years of actual postdoctoral training (e.g., intervening years spent in clinical training or family responsibilities). Am I still eligible?
Most likely, but your eligibility needs to be confirmed with SFARI staff before you apply. Please contact grants@simonsfoundation.org with the subject line “RFA Exemption Request” to confirm that you are eligible for exemption.

13. Where do I submit the first-stage proposal?
Applications are online and must be submitted online through proposalCENTRAL. New users first need to create a user account on proposalCENTRAL (https://proposalcentral.altum.com/). For instructions on how to create a user account, please see question number 14.

For all users, log in and select “Create New Proposal” or click on the “Grant Opportunities” tab. Filter the Grant Maker by “Simons Foundation” and click on “Apply Now” next to the “Bridge to Independence Award Request for Applications” program. After all sections are completed and your
first-stage proposal PDF is uploaded, you will be able to click on the “Submit” button to send.

14. How do I create a proposalCENTRAL user account?
   Go to https://proposalcentral.altum.com/ and click “Create One Now” under “First Time Users.” Fill in the required fields, check the boxes to agree to proposalCENTRAL’s “Terms of Service and Acceptable Use Policy” and then click “Save.”

15. Can I email or mail a first-stage proposal?
   No. The Simons Foundation only accepts applications submitted online through http://proposalcentral.altum.com/.

16. What is the difference between the letter of intent (LOI) and first-stage proposal?
   For the purposes of this RFA, the terms “letter of intent (LOI)” and “first-stage proposal” are used interchangeably. When you log in to proposalCENTRAL, you will see “LOI” noted throughout the first-stage proposal.

17. Do I need to provide official documentation of my position as a mentored trainee?
   Yes. A letter from your institution (e.g., letter from department chair or grant office) officially confirming your status in a training position and specifying your designated mentor is a required document for the first-stage proposal.

18. Does the Simons Foundation require letters of recommendation?
   Yes. The foundation requires three (3) letters of recommendation from current or former mentors, or from other senior scientists who have substantial familiarity with your scientific career thus far. At least one (1) letter of recommendation must be from a current or former scientific mentor.

   Confidential letters must be submitted through proposalCENTRAL. The applicant CANNOT submit the letters of recommendation directly. Applicants will enter in the online application the name and email address of three (3) individuals who will upload recommendations on their behalf directly into proposalCENTRAL. An automated message will be sent by proposalCENTRAL to each of the referees listed with their unique log-in information. Note: Individuals submitting references are referred to as “referee” in proposalCENTRAL.

   Letters of recommendation must be submitted by Monday, 7 August 2017, 5:00 p.m Eastern, with the application. It is advised that applicants begin the online application at least four (4) weeks prior to the 7 August deadline for letters of recommendation. Applicants will not be able to submit their proposal without the required references.

19. Do I need approval from the grants office at my institution to submit my first-stage proposal?
   No. Institutional sign-off is not required.

20. Are references, figures and figure legends included in the narrative six (6)-page limit? How should they be included?
   Yes, references, figures and figure legends are included in the page limit for the research proposal. Please attach them at the end of the narrative in the same PDF file. The Simons Foundation’s preference is for figures to follow the narrative rather than be embedded in the text.
21. What can I include in the appendix?
“In-press” papers can be included as well as any papers that you consider essential for the work of the review committee (not more than three [3]). Any other material should be included, if possible, in the narrative.

If you have video attachments for your proposal, please upload them as an appendix (all file types are accepted). All appendix documents should be uploaded in the “Proposal Attachments” section of the application.

22. May SFARI funds go toward providing clinical services or conducting a clinical trial?
No. Proposals for clinical “efficacy” trials are not allowed. Funds may only be used toward a research project.

23. What is the funding period? When will funding begin?
Once the grant award letter has been sent, funding may begin on the first of the month, up to one (1) year after the award letter has been sent. The principal investigator (PI) will receive research support at a fixed rate of $150,000 per year, including 20 percent for indirect costs (see SFARI policies), for up to three (3) years. The award is administered through the institution at which the PI has a tenured faculty appointment.

24. What can funds be used for?
Funds may be used toward travel, supplies, equipment and any other necessary expenses for the fulfillment of the research project, including salary and tuition support for laboratory personnel. Funds may not be used toward the PI’s salary. Institutional startup packages may not be reduced because of SFARI funding.

25. Is validating my proposal the same as submitting it?
No. “Validating” the proposal checks for errors and omissions and will alert you to missing requirements of your first-stage proposal. If the application is complete, you must then click “Submit.” You will receive an email within 10 minutes and should contact pcsupport@altum.com if you do not receive confirmation and do not see your proposal in the “Submitted” tab or with the status changed to “Submitted.”

26. I get an error message citing a missing section when I try to submit.
The “Validate” button reviews your proposal for missing sections. The submission instructions list the required sections and attachments. You must complete the missing sections listed. If you are still receiving error messages after completing and saving the indicated sections, please contact pcsupport@altum.com.

27. Where is the “Submit” button?
The “Submit” button is located in the last section of the proposal. You will be unable to submit if you have not provided all the required information. If the problem persists, please contact pcsupport@altum.com.

28. Can I make changes to the first-stage proposal once it has been submitted?
You must contact the Simons Foundation prior to the 7 August 2017 deadline to un-submit your first-stage proposal. Please email grants@simonsfoundation.org or call 646-654-0066 if you would like to un-submit your proposal for any modifications.

29. Is there a confirmation email when I submit?
A confirmation email is sent upon submission of the proposal. Please contact pcsupport@altum.com.
if you submitted your proposal and have not received a confirmation email within 10 minutes. Make sure that spam filters allow emails from pcsupport@altum.com.

30. How are finalists selected?
All first-stage proposals will receive scientific review by our internal science team. Competitive proposals will receive additional review by an external scientific committee. The applicant’s potential promise as an independent investigator and commitment to autism research will be the strongest factors. However, the proposal must still outline an impactful, innovative and feasible autism study. Finalists will be chosen based on these criteria and the recommendations of our external scientific committee.

31. When will applicants be notified of their finalist status?
Applicants will be notified of their status in late November.

32. I am a finalist and have received a tenure-track faculty offer letter from a U.S. academic institution. What do I do now?
You must submit your award approval documents. To do this, the following documents must be submitted through your appointment institution, using proposalCENTRAL:

- Copy of tenure-track faculty appointment letter with confirmed research start-up package and laboratory space commitments
- Updated research proposal
- Updated biosketch for the PI
- Current and pending support for the PI
- Budget—funds may not be used toward the PI’s salary but may provide salary support for other research personnel
- Budget justification
- Research environment and resources—investigators should demonstrate access to appropriate facilities and resources for successful completion of the proposed research grant
- Data-sharing plan
- Signature page with institutional approval

33. How soon must a SFARI grant be activated once finalists receive award letters?
Within one (1) year.
SFARI glossary

Personnel definitions

Principal Investigator
The individual(s) judged by the applicant organization to have the appropriate level of authority and responsibility to direct the project or program supported by the grant—all Principal Investigators (PIs) must hold a Ph.D., M.D. or equivalent degree and have a faculty position or equivalent at a college, university, medical school or other research facility. He or she is responsible and accountable to the applicant organization and SFARI for the proper conduct of the project or activity, including the submission of all required reports. He or she will act as the main point of contact for the foundation. It is expected that the PI will join the collaborative community of SFARI Investigators, and that he or she will partake in some conferences, workshops and symposia that the foundation organizes.

Co-Investigator
An individual involved with the PI in the scientific development or execution of a project—the Co-Investigator must hold a Ph.D., M.D. or equivalent degree and be employed by or be affiliated with the applicant/grantee organization or another organization participating in the project under a consortium agreement. The designation of a Co-Investigator, if applicable, does not affect the PI’s roles and responsibilities nor is it a role implying multiple PIs.

Consultant
An individual providing professional advice or services on the basis of a written agreement—these individuals are not normally employees of the organization receiving the services. Consultants also include firms providing professional advice or services.

Postdoctoral research associate or equivalent employee position
An individual who has received a doctoral degree (or its equivalent) and is engaged in a temporary and defined period of mentored advanced training to enhance the professional skills and research independence needed to pursue his or her chosen career path—the postdoctoral research associate performs specific services in exchange for compensation, and he or she is treated as an employee of the grantee institution, with benefits.

SFARI funds may only be used for personnel who are employees of the grantee institution and who are eligible for benefits. Funds may not be used for stipend supplementation unless specifically authorized under the terms of the program from which funds are derived.