



## **ORGANIZATION FOR AUTISM RESEARCH**

***“Research and resources that help families today.”***

### **GRADUATE RESEARCH GRANT PROGRAM**

***Proposals due February 2, 2026 at 11:59 pm EST***

#### **Background**

In February 2004, the Organization for Autism Research (OAR) established the Graduate Research Grant Program to encourage and support students conducting research pursuant to graduate and post-graduate studies in disciplines related to assessment, intervention and support of autistic learners and their families. Since then, OAR has awarded over \$348,572 in grants to fund 203 graduate research studies on an array of topics impacting the autism community.

#### **Announcement**

OAR invites research proposals for its annual Graduate Research Grant Program. **Note that these grants are for independent research studies only.** Starting in 2025, the Graduate Research Grant Program will give priority to early-career autistic investigators. This focus reflects our commitment to supporting autistic researchers in building their careers and advancing meaningful autism research. Applicants without autism will be given full consideration, and an autism diagnosis will only be a consideration when deciding between two equally qualified candidates.

Through this competition, OAR intends to promote research in the following areas:

- The analysis, evaluation, or comparison of assessment models, treatment models, or service systems
- Applied aspects of early intervention and/or school-based education, behavioral, or communication intervention
- Adult issues such as continuing education, employment, housing models and “later intervention”
- Issues related to family support, social and community integration, and assessment and intervention with challenging behavior
- The efficacy of alternative or augmentative communication systems for autistic individuals across the lifespan
- Applied research that occurs in the *in vivo* context in which the outcome of intervention is expected to be used

OAR seeks to fund studies that will likely produce practical and clearly objective results that may aid parents, families, professionals, and autistic people to make more fully informed choices that will lead to healthier and happier lives.

**Please note that the grant period is July 1, 2026, to December 31, 2027. OAR will only make grant awards for research that will be conducted during the grant period and will not award grants for research studies that have commenced before the grant period begins.**

OAR’s Scientific Council will evaluate the proposals it receives for scientific and technical merit.

## Review Criteria

All applicants will receive full consideration. An autism diagnosis will only be taken into account when two candidates are equally qualified.

Review criteria for the evaluation include:

- **Significance.** Does the study address an important problem? How will it advance scientific knowledge in the field?
- **Approach.** Are the concepts, design, methods, and analyses adequate and appropriate? Are alternate approaches accounted for?
- **Innovation.** Does the project employ novel concepts, approaches or methods? Are its aims original? Does it challenge existing paradigms?
- **Meaningful Outcomes.** OAR places special emphasis on the research's importance to the autism community and its application to the practical challenges of autism. Thus, while a proposal's scientific merit in terms of design, methodology, and analysis are vital, the meaningfulness of its outcomes will carry great weight in the final review.

OAR's Board of Directors will make grant awards based on these evaluations and the recommendations of the Scientific Council.

## Proposal

The online proposal follows the following format. Please note that character counts *include* spaces:

- **Transmittal / Cover Letter.** Please upload a transmittal/cover letter in PDF format on department letterhead that includes an introduction of the Principal Investigator (applicant) and their faculty research advisor. This letter should state the amount of funds requested, certify that this is an independent research study, describe the intended use of the funds and identify and explain any variations from the prescribed proposal format. For example, if submitting without completed IRB approval, please note that and advise OAR when approval is expected.
- **Abstract** (up to 2,100 characters). Please include a brief abstract of the project suitable for publication and media announcement of the project.
- **Background** (up to 12,000 characters). Please include background information, including a brief analysis of relevant historical and contemporary knowledge, as well as research related to the proposed topic. Demonstrate that you have the requisite experience and resources necessary to perform the study and accurately assess its measures and outcomes.
- **Timeline** (up to 4,000 characters). Please describe the timeline of the project. Please note that the awards are for projects to be completed and evaluated within 18 months of the award (unless otherwise specified). This can be included as a one-page attachment in PDF format, if you choose.
- **Methodology and Evaluation** (8,000-12,000 characters). Please include all information regarding the proposed research design and methodology; describe the proposed evaluation/assessment measures and proposed qualitative and quantitative analyses to be performed.
- **Outcome Recommendations** (4,000-8,000 characters). Please include an overview of the study's expected outcomes and recommendations for further research.
- **Practical Relevance** (up to 4,000 characters). How relevant is the study and its outcomes to the everyday challenges posed by autism? Will it offer any practical findings? Please note that in OAR's highly competitive grant programs, this section often tips the scales in favor of one study over another. Thus, the discussion of this point carries significant weight.

- **Subject Protection.** Please upload evidence of IRB approval or exemption, if not required for the study. This should be in PDF format. If you cannot obtain IRB approval before the proposal deadline, please indicate that you are aware of the requirement and when you expect to receive the IRB's approval in the cover/transmittal letter. (OAR will consider your proposal regardless but will not award any grant funds until OAR receives proof of IRB approval.)
- **Budget.** Please use the form provided to complete an itemized budget as to how the funds, if awarded, are to be spent. Please note that OAR does not permit our funds to be used to fund the time of the graduate student, tuition reimbursement, or electronic equipment (with rare exceptions). Please see the official Funding Guidelines for more details.
- **Letter of Support.** Please upload a signed letter of support (PDF format only) from the faculty research advisor.

### **Competition**

The maximum grant awards are \$2,000.00 for Doctoral or Post-doctoral candidates and \$1,000.00 for Master's candidates. OAR will consider making up to 12 awards, for a total of \$20,000 in grants.

**OAR will accept applications until Monday, February 2, 2026, at 11:59pm EST.**

Interested applicants may apply via online application, which will be available beginning no later than September 12, 2025. Visit [www.researchautism.org](http://www.researchautism.org) for directions. Please contact OAR for questions or to report any technical difficulties encountered with the online application process.

For more information, contact Vivian Muhumuza, Grants and Programs Associate at (571) 977-5391 or send an email to [research@researchautism.org](mailto:research@researchautism.org).