

## 2020 SFARI Collaboration on Sex Differences in Autism — Request for Applications

SFARI Collaborations are a new funding mechanism that will provide substantive and stable funding support to multidisciplinary teams of investigators tackling critical issues in the autism research field. Collaborations will be led by a director who oversees interdisciplinary, synergistic research efforts across multiple laboratories. Investigative groups within a Collaboration will focus on the same conceptually unified topic but will incorporate different scientific disciplines, multiple levels of analysis, and will include a robust data-sharing infrastructure.

SFARI Collaborations have a maximum budget of up to \$8,000,000, including 20 percent indirect costs, over an initial period of four years, with a possible three-year extension.

For our first Collaboration RFA, SFARI solicits applications to investigate sex differences in autism.

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[Policies and Procedures](#)

Letter of Intent Deadline  
April 21, 2020



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[RFA](#)   [How To Apply](#)   [FAQ](#)

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## 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 from scientific teams who will conduct bold and rigorous research.

## Background

There is growing recognition that synergistic efforts across scientific disciplines will contribute to addressing the most critical questions in ASD research and accelerate progress on the development of therapeutics. SFARI Collaborations are a new funding mechanism that will provide substantive and stable funding support to multidisciplinary teams of investigators tackling critical issues in the autism research field. A proposal must address how the impact of a given Collaboration will be greater than the sum of what would be possible through awards to individual laboratories.

Collaborations will be led by a director who oversees interdisciplinary, synergistic research efforts across multiple laboratories. Investigative groups within a Collaboration will focus on the same conceptually unified topic but will incorporate different scientific disciplines and multiple levels of analysis, and will include a robust data-sharing infrastructure.

For our first Collaboration RFA, SFARI solicits applications to investigate sex differences in autism. SFARI expects to announce additional Collaboration RFAs in the future.

## Objective

Although females may be underdiagnosed because of differences in presentation and/or diagnostic bias, there appears to be a substantial and consistent male bias in ASD prevalence that reflects differences between the sexes in susceptibility<sup>1-4</sup>. Among many potential explanations, female resilience could reflect a genetic buffering effect<sup>2, 5-7</sup>, or differences in hormone exposure<sup>8</sup>. Either of these possibilities could result in differences in cellular and/or circuit function between the sexes<sup>9-12</sup>. Considering the rapidly expanding knowledge of genetic and other risk factors in ASD, the stage seems set for significant advances in enhancing our understanding of the impact of sex on ASD risk and manifestations.

For this SFARI Collaboration, we welcome proposals that will use an array of modern technologies to examine sex differences in brain function, within and across species, including humans, to identify key differences in gene, cell and circuit function that account for the observed differential sensitivities of the two sexes to ASD. A successful Collaboration must enhance our understanding of the biological bases for sex-specific differences in ASD and set the stage for development of novel interventions.

## Level and Duration of Funding

SFARI Collaborations have a maximum budget of \$8,000,000, including 20 percent indirect costs, over an initial period of four years, with a possible three-year extension. We also welcome applications from groups of investigators whose combined efforts do not require the maximum budget.

The financial structure is intended to accelerate progress by providing substantial flexibility in funding. Recognizing that different stages of a Collaboration may have different personnel and financial requirements, a Collaboration director may adjust principal investigator (PI) membership and funding levels to reflect scientific needs.

## Collaboration Structure

The Collaboration director is expected to determine the scientific agenda, coordinate the scientific activities of the other members, and manage the overall functioning of the Collaboration through administrative and data management teams. The director will be SFARI's main point of contact for the activities of the collaboration and will be responsible for monitoring and reporting on the overall progress of the research effort and of the individual projects.

Principal investigators (PIs) are expected to conduct research that advances the goals of the Collaboration. Since inclusion of diverse viewpoints is critical for scientific advancement, SFARI strongly encourages the inclusion of researchers who span institutions, career stages and groups historically underrepresented in science.

SFARI's scientific team will participate in annual meetings of the Collaboration at the Simons Foundation and will interact with the director and PIs to facilitate success of the Collaboration. Continued support for the Collaboration will be contingent upon progress toward the proposed aims as determined by SFARI.

## Application and Review Process

The selection process will occur in three stages:

1. Letter of Intent (LOI)
1. Full application
1. In-person team presentation to SFARI

Letter of Intent (LOI):

- **Proposal Narrative:** Four-page narrative describing scientific aims and how the results of the Collaboration will uniquely and synergistically contribute to our understanding of sex differences in autism. Collaboration objectives must be justified as major scientific milestones, and a timeline of activities should also be included. The project should have clearly defined initial activities and goals by which progress and success can be measured. Support from the Foundation should be seen as critical to achieving the objectives of the Collaboration. Applicants should include a brief description of how the project will be managed, including explicit efforts to facilitate collaboration among its members and how data will be shared within and beyond the Collaboration. Applicants are encouraged to utilize SFARI-generated [resources](#), when appropriate, to advance the research goals.
- **Team Summary:** For the director, principal investigators and other key personnel, a description of their roles in the Collaboration, as well as a summary of the expertise, resources, collaboration history and the open-science practices they bring to the Collaboration should be provided.
- **Biosketches:** Biosketches for key personnel listed in the overview should be included.
- **Budget Overview:** For each proposed investigative site, a summary of major budgetary categories, including personnel, equipment and other essential resources, should be included.

The proposed Collaboration director will submit one LOI on behalf of the entire investigative team. The main criteria for evaluation will be the Collaboration's potential scientific and translational impact, excellence of scientific leadership and investigative teams, and level of synergy and integration among the subprojects.

LOIs will be evaluated by the SFARI science team, and a subset of LOI applicants will be invited to submit full applications. Detailed instructions for full applications will be provided accordingly but, in brief, will include expanded descriptions of all subprojects, along with detailed budgetary information.

Full applications will be evaluated by an external review panel, and a subset of investigative teams will be invited to present their Collaboration proposal to the SFARI science team and invited scientists.

SFARI expects to award one or two Collaborations in response to this Sex Differences in Autism RFA.

## 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 Collaborations Award. For assistance, please call 800-875-2562 or email [pcsupport@altum.com](mailto:pcsupport@altum.com).

Details concerning application requirements and submission can be found in [our instructions](#) or on [proposalCENTRAL](#). If you have other questions, please review our [FAQ](#).

## References

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