



New Jersey Autism Center for Excellence (NJACE) Seed Grant Request for Applications (RFA) 2024

Important dates:

February 5th, 2024	Letter of Intent Due (Required)
March 29th, 2024	Application Due
June 28th, 2024	Notice of Seed Grant Award

Program overview (NJACE)

The NJACE grant was awarded to Children's Specialized Hospital (PI: Wayne Fisher) in July, 2023, with Rutgers University and Autism New Jersey as collaborating institutions. The goals of the NJACE are to improve health outcomes of New Jersey residents at all life stages with a focus on community-oriented research tailored to the autism community and their needs. Core activities include using data to drive measurable health improvements, identifying and targeting vulnerable populations for interventions to eliminate health disparities, and promote collaboration across disciplines to develop relevant public policies and achieve health equity. The NJACE prioritizes research and training focusing on: (a) transitions to adulthood, including health care, educational pursuits, and employment; (b) developmental support services (e.g., early identification, co-occurring ID); (c) use of data to drive measurable health improvements; (d) identifying and targeting vulnerable populations for interventions to address health disparities; and (e) promotion of collaboration across sectors to develop health policies and achieve health equity.

One of the specific aims of the NJACE is to create a seed grant program that will promote interdisciplinary research and training that complements the existing grant program provided by the Council. We will address this specific aim (i.e., develop enduring basic, applied, and science-to-practice research on autism) by developing a seed grant program to facilitate the development of competitive federal research grant applications focused on interdisciplinary research, such as an Autism Center of Excellence (P50) grant application. Second, we will create another seed grant program to address our second specific aim (i.e., develop enduring autism training programs) that will facilitate the development of competitive federal training grants (e.g., NIH T32 grants) focused on interdisciplinary basic, translation, clinical, or dissemination research.

Successful applications for these research and training seed grants are expected to describe how the proposed work will make impactful and innovative contributions to understanding ASD and ultimately lead to improved outcomes for individuals with ASD and their families/caregivers, even if improved outcomes are not an immediate product of the project. For example, if an application for a research seed grant is proposing basic research with the short term goal of better understanding the neurobiology of repetitive behavior, the application also should articulate how achieving that short term goal could also further the long term goal of improving outcome for individuals with ASD and their families/caregivers.

Grant Information

Developing a robust and experimentally sound federal research or training grant application can require many hours of work and the collaboration of many parties. However, successful federally funded grants have produced meaningful research projects, scientific advancements, fruitful training programs, and supported making medically necessary services more accessible to vulnerable populations. The NJACE seed grants are aimed at aiding faculty in developing robust and impactful research projects or training programs in pursuit of federal funding. Specifically, the NJACE is interested in providing seed grants to faculty in pursuit of federal research or training grants that will address the any of the following critical areas of need areas: (a) transition to adulthood, including health care, educational pursuits, and employment; (b) developmental

support services (e.g., early identification, co-occurring ID); (c) use of data to drive measurable health improvements; (d) identifying and targeting vulnerable populations for interventions to address health disparities; and (e) promotion of collaboration across sectors to develop health policies and achieve health equity.

Training seed grants are meant to assist in pursuing federal training grants (e.g., T32 NIH training grants). The NJACE would like to see: (a) creative and effective methods of fostering communication across disciplines; (b) opportunities for junior researchers to partner with and be mentored by more senior researchers; (c) methods to disseminate up-to-date information on the latest research on best practices in autism; (d) raise awareness on the critical areas of need as identified by stakeholders in the autism community; (e) encourage and foster the development of innovative research into the causes, diagnosis, early detection, prevention, and management of autism; and (f) organize a multidisciplinary team with plans to continue to facilitate feedback and input from other interest groups and stakeholders (e.g., autism self-advocates). Funding from the seed grants and future obtained federal training grants can be used by awardees in many ways, including but not limited to stipends, training funds, tuitions, trainee travel costs, or training related expenses. Applications should include (a) identification of a future funding source that best fits the goals of the training program; (b) a set of clear and compelling goals and objectives for the program and how each concept aligns with those of the funding source and the proposed NJACE; and (c) a comprehensive and practical plan for evaluating the effectiveness and impact of the training program over time, with plans set in place for continued improvement.

Additionally, applications should describe some of the following aspects in their proposal: (a) creative and flexible learning opportunities for trainees (e.g., simulation-based training), (b) on-the-job training, (c) programs that prioritize the development of meaningful research, and (d) programs that target vulnerable communities in an effort to close the gap in access to services.

Research seed grants are meant to assist in pursuing federal research grants (e.g., P50 NIH grants). The NJACE would like to see research proposals that support the critical areas of need outlined above. Applications should describe: (a) how the proposed research project will improve the literature base on the causes, diagnosis, early detection, prevention, and management of autism; (b) a future funding source that best fits the research project; (c) a clear and achievable research protocol; (d) the literature base supporting the procedures and the need for the proposed research study; and (d) a comprehensive and practical plan for pursuing future federal funding.

Eligibility

Full-time Faculty or Qualified Research Institutions in New Jersey: Only those employed by entities credentialed as a public and/or private non-profit organization in the State of New Jersey may apply for a seed grant. The institution must be a New Jersey academic institution, New Jersey research organization, or New Jersey public or private non-profit entity with a demonstrated capability to conduct grant-funded activities that have obtained a Council/NJDOH research credential status. The research-credentialed entity must have established procedures to receive and administer Federal and State grants and adhere to procedures for the protection of

human subjects as regulated by NIH. The research-credentialed entity must also have an Institutional Review Board (IRB) that will approve the proposed research activities.

Number of grants available

For this funding period, one research and one training seed grant will be awarded. Each grant will support up to \$75,000 a year for two years (\$150,000 total per grant).

Letter of Intent

A letter of intent is required prior to submission of the application. The letter of intent will be a short document, not to exceed one single-spaced page, describing the project and PI.

Seed Grant Applications

- Except for the page limit (see below) format and document requirements are identical to those specified for NIH applications. Please see the SF424 guide for details.
- Font: Arial 11 point. (A smaller type size may be used for figures and graphs but must be legible.)
- Margins: Use at least one-half inch margins (top, bottom, left and right) for all pages.
- Proposal must be submitted to Hnorris@childrens-specialized.org as a single PDF file and titled: LastName_FirstName_[Type of Grant]_NJACE2024.pdf
- Format and order of documents must be strictly adhered to. Submissions that do not meet the following guidelines, will be returned without review.
- Submissions must include
 - **Table of Key Personnel**
 - Include Name, Title, Role in the project, and Department
 - **NIH Biosketch for PI and key personnel**
 - Use format currently required by NIH.
 - Include Other Support
 - List all external and internal research support regardless of relevance to this application, including pending applications. Give grant number, title, duration, amount for current year, total value of award, and source of support.
 - **Abstract**
 - Limited to 250 words
 - Make sure your abstract is understandable to a scientist not familiar with your specific field of investigation.
 - **Specific Aims**
 - Limited to one page
 - **Proposed Funding Source (e.g., NIH, PCORI)**
 - **Research (or Training) Strategy**
 - Limited to 4 pages (not including references, budget, and budget justification)
 - Sections include (See for detailed suggestions)
 - Significance
 - Innovation

- Approach (include expected outcomes & measurement)
- **Literature Cited**
- **Protection of Human Subjects**
- **Budget**
 - Funds cannot be used for faculty salary, memberships, travel to meetings of professional societies, food, drink, or lodging, or for the purchase of books or subscriptions.
- **Budget Justification**
 - As per NIH guidelines for a detailed budget

Budget preparation

Budgets must include fringe rate calculations and personnel costs/justifications for full-time and part-time employees/consultants where applicable. Direct and indirect costs for the duration of the grant must be detailed. Maximum indirect cost is 10% (e.g., \$15,000 of the available \$150,000).

Review process

All applications will be reviewed in accordance with the process described below. The determination of awards will be made through a two-step process:

1. Administrative review:

Upon receipt, all grant applications will be reviewed by the NJACE administrative team for compliance with the outlined regulations in this RFA, and to ensure completeness and accuracy. If the grant application needs correction due to a budgetary issue, the applicant will be contacted to provide a revised budget. If the NJACE administrative team determines that the application does not meet the administrative requirements, the application will be denied and will not be forwarded to the next phase, independent scientific review.

2. Independent scientific review:

The NJACE will identify a committee of reviewers based on the number of grant applications and the content of those applications. The review committees will be tasked with determining the relevance of all applications to the priorities of the NJACE, before evaluating the applications on the significance of the application to critical areas of need and feasibility. Based on these reviews, the committee will make funding recommendations to the NJACE administrative team.

The NJACE administrative team will receive the applications triaged by the review committees along with their recommendations. The NJACE will make the final funding decisions, considering the mission, priorities, and critical areas of need.

Research seed grant applications will be reviewed according to the following criteria:

1. Significance of the proposed research and hypothesis.
2. Innovation.

3. Scientific evidence supporting the hypothesis to be tested.
4. Feasibility and adequacy of the procedures to be used in the research.
5. Evidence of research experience of the PI and staff in the proposed research area.
6. Reasonableness of the budget in relation to the objectives, methods, approach, procedures, and data analysis proposed.
7. Likelihood that the project will lead to future outside funding.

Training seed grant applications will be reviewed according to the following criteria:

1. Significance of the proposed training program and goals.
2. Innovation.
3. Feasibility and adequacy of the procedures to be used in developing the training program.
4. Evidence of experience of the PI and staff in the proposed training area.
5. Reasonableness of the budget in relation to the objectives, methods, approach, and training procedures proposed.
6. Likelihood that the project will lead to future outside funding.

Post-award reporting

At the conclusion of the review process, all applicants will be formally notified of the outcome of their application as soon as possible but no later than June 28th, 2024 via a letter of intent to fund or a letter of denial.

Questions

For any questions, reach out to Halle Norris, program manager, at Hnorris@childrens-specialized.org.