

Pre-Doctoral Fellowship to Promote Diversity in Ataxia Research

FY2026 Application Instructions

National Ataxia Foundation

Introduction

The National Ataxia Foundation (NAF) is a patient-centered nonprofit organization dedicated to accelerating the development of treatments for ataxia and improving the lives of those affected by it. NAF is a global leader in driving ataxia research, fostering national and international collaboration to advance scientific discovery. As part of its commitment to identifying causes, treatments, and potential cures for ataxia, NAF offers limited, short-term financial support through its Annual Research Grant Program.

Description:

The NAF Diversity in Ataxia Research Fellowship is a competitive, merit-based, non-renewable award that provides two years of partial support for the research training of pre-doctoral students. This program is designed to enhance the diversity of the ataxia research workforce by supporting individuals from groups that are underrepresented in the field. Fellowships are awarded annually to outstanding graduate students from racial and ethnic groups underrepresented in biomedical research, individuals with disabilities, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. NAF welcomes proposals across the full spectrum of basic, translational, and clinical research, as long as the project demonstrates a clear and significant focus on improving our understanding of hereditary, sporadic, or acquired forms of ataxia.

NAF believes that diversity is essential to driving innovation, equity, and excellence in ataxia research. We are committed to fostering an inclusive scientific community that reflects a broad range of perspectives and experiences.

Funding Period and Amount:

- **Funding Period:** April 1, 2026 – March 31, 2028
- **Grant Amount:** \$50,000 total (\$25,000 per year)
- **Use of Funds:** Funds may be used for direct research expenses only.
 - *Indirect Costs/Cost Sharing:* Not allowed.
 - *Personnel Costs:* All or part of funds can be used to support the fellow's annual stipend.
- **No-Cost Extensions (NCE):** Considered only under extenuating circumstances and subject to NAF approval. See [NAF Annual Grant Program Policies](#) for more details.
- **Progress Report:** A progress report is required 11 months after the start of the grant funding term. The second year of funding is contingent on demonstration of progress by the awardee. NAF retains the right to unilaterally cancel any awards for non-compliance or non-performance.

Grant Policies

A detailed description of all NAF Annual Grant Program Policies can be found [here](#).

Important Dates: All documents due by 11:59 pm Eastern time zone on the dates listed.

Grant Submissions	Open Date	Deadline	Decision Notification
Letter of Intent	June 16, 2025	August 15, 2025	October 2025
Grant Application	Upon LOI approval	December 5, 2025	February 2026

Eligible Applicants:

At the time of application, the applicant must:

1. Have a baccalaureate degree or equivalent and be currently enrolled in a PhD or equivalent research degree program (e.g., PharmD, PsyD, ScD), a formally combined MD/PhD program, or other combined professional/clinical and research doctoral (e.g., DDS/PhD) at a not-for-profit U.S. institution of higher education at the time of application.
2. Have successfully completed their qualifying exams, or equivalent in their respective programs by the final grant due date.
3. Be a U.S. citizen, non-citizen U.S. national, U.S. permanent resident, individual granted deferred action status under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program, or individual granted Temporary Protected Status.
4. Identify as one or more of the following:
 - i. An individual from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups in the U.S., including but not limited to Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders. Individuals from racial or ethnic groups not listed here that can be demonstrated convincingly to be underrepresented by the grantee institution are also encouraged to apply.
 - ii. An individual who identifies as LGBTQIA+.
 - iii. Individuals with a disability, who are defined as those with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, as described in the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.
5. Have identified a research project, show evidence of high academic performance in the sciences, and a commitment to a career as an independent research scientist, or as an independent physician-scientist or other clinician-scientist (dual-degree training) with a specialized interest in ataxias. The primary sponsor should be an active investigator and be committed both to the candidate's research training and to direct supervision of his/her/their research.
6. Applicants who previously were awarded a NAF Pre-doctoral Fellowship award or are a recipient of another fellowship / studentship / scholarship during the grant award period are **ineligible**.
7. Only **one application** may be submitted per applicant per year; applicants should carefully select the program that best matches their career stage and research proposal.

Fellowship Funding Priorities

Applications will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

1. **Scientific Merit and Innovation:** NAF encourages graduate research projects that demonstrate originality and potential for meaningful contributions to the ataxia field. Priority areas include:
 - a. Investigating fundamental mechanisms of disease
 - b. Developing and validating disease models
 - c. Exploring novel therapeutic targets or approaches
 - d. Generating preliminary data that may inform future research directions
2. **Commitment to Ataxia Research:** Applicants should show a clear interest in ataxia through their academic focus, research goals, or collaborations. Proposals should reflect a desire to contribute to long-term advancements in ataxia research.
3. **Training Environment and Mentorship:** The application should highlight how the award will support the student's scientific training and career development. Strong mentorship, access to relevant research tools and technologies, and opportunities for skill development (e.g., scientific communication, data analysis, teamwork) will be considered favorably.

This award is intended to nurture promising graduate students and provide early exposure to impactful research in ataxia, helping to cultivate the future leaders of this field.

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

STEP 1: Create a ProposalCentral Account. NAF uses ProposalCentral for all grant submissions. New users must create an account at [ProposalCentral](#).

STEP 2: Submit Letter of Intent (LOI). Submit via ProposalCentral by **August 15, 2025 at 11:59 PM ET**. All LOIs will undergo competitive review based on alignment with NAF's mission, scientific merit and relevance to ataxia. Only the top 30–50% of LOIs will be invited to submit a full application. Notification of LOI outcomes will be sent by mid-October 2025.

LOI Components: More detailed directions can be found in the [Letter of Intent Instructions](#).

1. **Statement of Need:** (4 sentences or less) Clearly describe the specific gap in the ataxia research or clinical care landscape that your project addresses.
2. **Impact Statement:** (4 sentences or less) Describe the potential impact that your proposal may have on advancing our understanding of ataxia improving diagnosis or enhancing care and quality of life for individuals with ataxia.
3. **Specific Aims:** (1-page max)
4. **Biosketch:** (5-page max)

STEP 3: If invited, applicants must submit a complete application via ProposalCentral by December 5, 2025 at 11:59 PM ET. Full details and formatting requirements are outlined in *Grant Application Instructions*.

Full Grant Application Requirements:

1. **Scientific Abstract** (300-word limit)
2. **Lay Summary** (200-word limit)
3. **Specific Aims** (1-page max)
4. **Biosketch** (5-page max)
5. **Research Plan** (6-page max, including the following sub-sections):
 - a. Background and Significance
 - b. Preliminary Studies
 - c. Research Strategy
6. **Budget Details and Budget Justification**
7. **References**
8. **Letter of Recommendation from Mentor**

STEP 4: Funding Decisions. Applicants will be notified of funding decisions by February 2026. Please refrain from contacting NAF regarding the status of your application.

For any questions about the LOI or Grant Application Process, please contact Aimee Alcott at Aimee@ataxia.org.