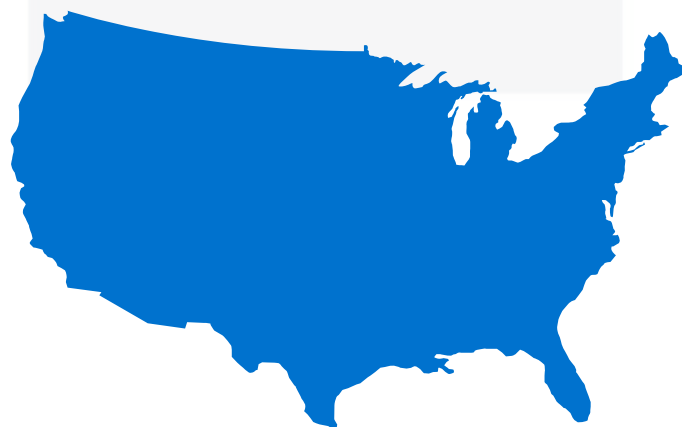


WHAT'S NEXT: THE EVOLVING LANDSCAPE OF SERVICES FOR AUTISTIC ADULTS



This Strategic Report shares data compiled from autistic-led and community organizations nationwide as part of NEXT for AUTISM's 2025 grants cycle, based on submissions from 522 organizations across all 50 states.

**A NEXT for AUTISM
Strategic Report**

November 2025

NEXT
FOR **AUTISM**



SNACK 21, A NEXT FOR AUTISM GRANTEE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Each year, NEXT for AUTISM's grantmaking process offers a unique window into the evolving landscape of services and supports for autistic adults across the United States. With more than 500 applications submitted in 2025, this process not only identifies promising projects but also reveals national trends, emerging needs, and the growing role of autistic-led organizations in shaping the future of adult services.

In 2025, 522 organizations applied for funding, representing all 50 states and a wide range of organizational sizes and service models. This breadth underscores both the national urgency and the diversity of approaches being developed to support autistic adults.

Together, these proposals projected a potential reach of more than 1 million autistic adults, a figure that highlights both the scale of unmet need and the opportunity for high-impact investment nationwide.



TEVA COMMUNITY, A NEXT FOR AUTISM GRANTEE

METHODOLOGY

This analysis is based on a full review of 522 applications submitted to NEXT for AUTISM's 2025 grant cycle. Applications were collected through an open national call using SurveyMonkey Apply and screened for eligibility according to published criteria. All eligible applications, regardless of funding outcome, were included in the dataset.

To identify trends, proposals were analyzed using a combination of structured data (e.g., funding amount requested, organizational status, and annual budget size) and qualitative review of narrative content. Applicant organizations ranged in size from grassroots efforts with annual operating budgets under \$50,000 to large institutions exceeding \$5 million. This variation reflects the full spectrum of the field and informed our interpretation of trends.

Subcategories were developed inductively, based on recurring themes observed in project descriptions rather than predefined tags. This manual categorization approach allowed for more precise clustering of initiatives by shared goal, strategy, or service model.

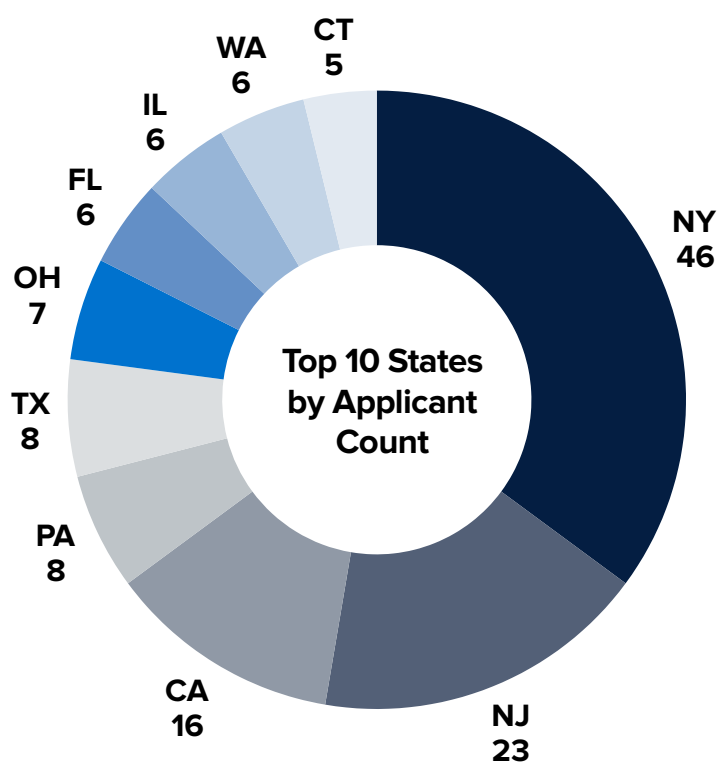
The sample size (N = 522) and its national reach (50 states represented) provide a credible snapshot of the current landscape of adult autism services. While not exhaustive, the dataset supports valid and generalizable insights into where innovation is happening, what needs are rising, and how the field is evolving.

APPLICANT PROFILE

Total Applicants: 522 organizations
Geographic Reach: All 50 U.S. states

Autistic-led Organizations:
145 met NEXT for AUTISM's definition of autistic-led, with the remainder evaluated in the community-based category

Returning vs. New Applicants:
54 organizations were previously funded grantees (eligible for \$25,000 awards), while the majority were new applicants (eligible for \$10,000 awards)

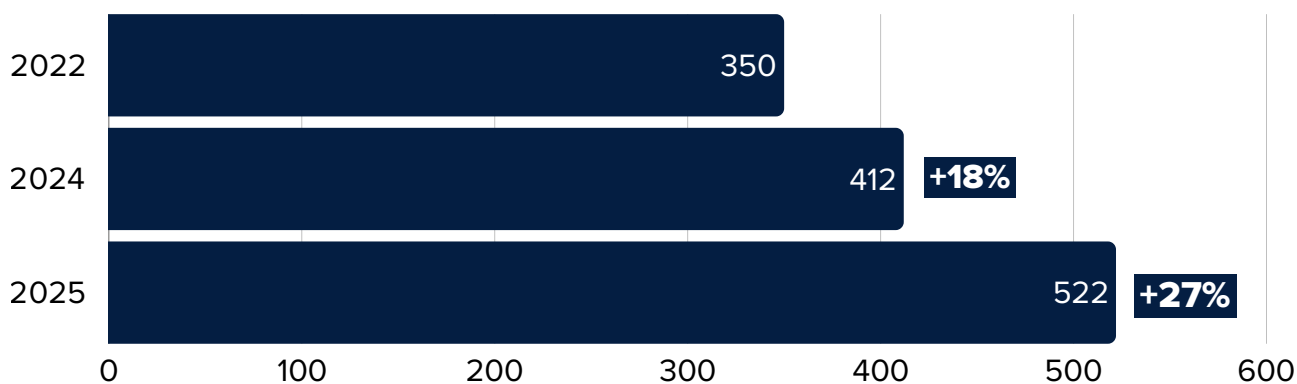


YEAR-OVER-YEAR GROWTH

NEXT for AUTISM's grant program has seen significant growth in applications over the past few years. In 2022, the program received 350 applications. In 2023, the cycle was limited to autistic-led organizations, drawing 54 applicants. In 2024, the program included both autistic-led and community-based categories, yielding 412 applications. By 2025, the applicant pool grew again to 522 organizations, a 27% increase year-over-year.

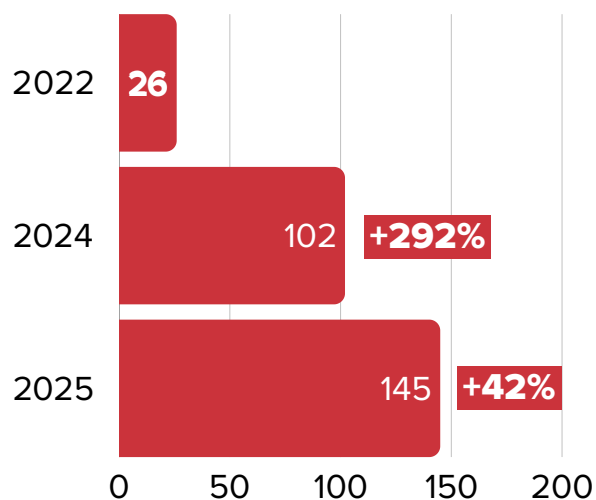
Total Applicants: 49% Growth, 2022-2025

(Note: 2023 Grants Cycle Dedicated Exclusively to Autistic-Led Organization; 54 Applicants)

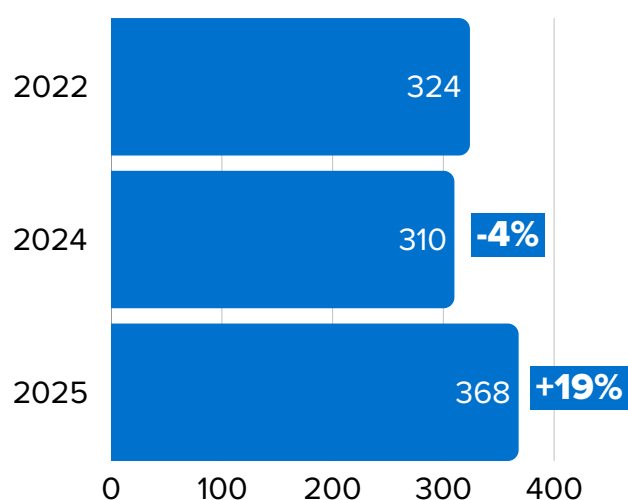


Within this overall growth, autistic-led applications rose from 54 in 2023 to 102 in 2024, and to 145 in 2025, nearly tripling in just two years. Community-based organizations also showed expansion, from 310 in 2024 to 368 in 2025. These trends suggest both heightened demand for funding opportunities and a growing presence of autistic-led organizations in the national landscape.

Autistic-Led Applicants: +458% Growth, 2022-2025



Community-Based Applicants: 14% Growth, 2022-2025



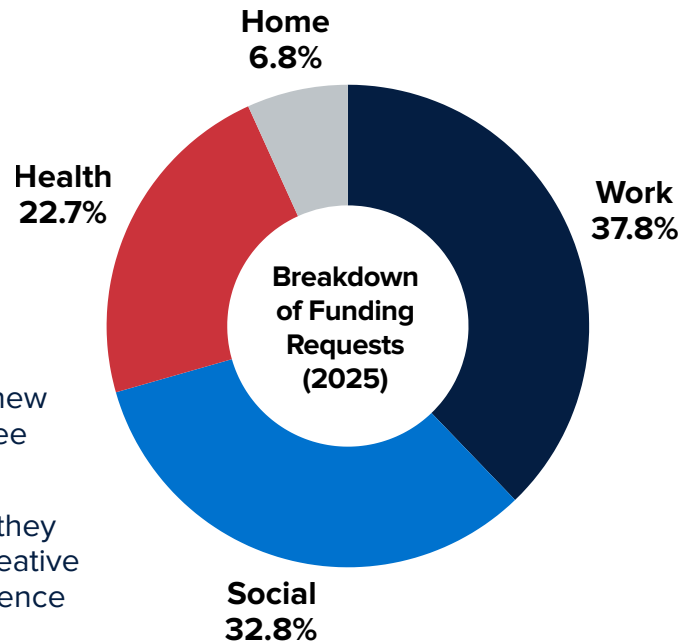
WHERE THE FIELD IS INVESTING

In 2025, NEXT for AUTISM received over \$5.7 million in funding requests from more than 500 organizations across four key categories:

- **Work / Employment: \$2.17M**
- **Social / Community: \$1.88M**
- **Health / Well-Being: \$1.30M**
- **Home / Housing: \$389K**

These four categories have long shaped our approach to funding. But this year, something new emerged: within each category, we began to see clear patterns and recurring themes.

Organizations weren't just proposing projects; they were converging around shared challenges, creative models, and promising solutions. That convergence caught our attention.



NEXT is deepening its investment not just by funding, but with connection. Through our **NEXT COLLABORATES** initiative, we're beginning to link organizations doing similar work across the country. Our goal is to help them share resources, co-create tools, and learn from one another, whether they're running a job coaching program, launching a sensory-friendly recreation series, or scaling a peer-led mental health model.

As a first step, we analyzed common subcategories mentioned across all 2025 applications. The list below reflects the most prominent themes, each one representing a cluster of momentum within the field.

- **Vocational Training – 88 orgs | \$1,100,701 requested**
- **Social Meet-Ups – 62 orgs | \$662,528 requested**
- **Creative Arts – 30 orgs | \$332,500 requested**
- **College Access & Transition – 28 orgs | \$295,026 requested**
- **Entrepreneurship – 24 orgs | \$263,840 requested**
- **Fitness & Recreation – 25 orgs | \$248,596 requested**
- **Life & Daily Living Skills – 19 orgs | \$218,500 requested**
- **Pet Services & Therapy Animals – 15 orgs | \$147,998 requested**
- **Sensory Supports – 14 orgs | \$122,370 requested**
- **Mental Health – 12 orgs | \$147,200 requested**
- **Culinary Training – 12 orgs | \$116,600 requested**
- **Mentorship & Peer Support – 11 orgs | \$149,841 requested**
- **Health Services – 11 orgs | \$102,110 requested**
- **Technology Training – 10 orgs | \$129,563 requested**
- **Camp & Retreat Programs – 9 orgs | \$95,000 requested**
- **Performing Arts – 9 orgs | \$93,000 requested**
- **New Housing Development – 8 orgs | \$90,000 requested**
- **New Tech – 5 orgs | \$65,000 requested**
- **Other – 125 orgs | \$1,301,895 requested**

Subcategories were defined based on application content and manual review, not preset options, giving us an authentic read on how organizations describe their work.

EMERGING THEMES

The trends outlined above reflect a field in motion. They capture where organizations are investing, where autistic adults are seeking support, and where new energy is rising. Based on what we saw, four key themes deserve urgent attention.



URBAN AUTISM SOLUTIONS
A NEXT FOR AUTISM GRANTEE

EMPLOYMENT AT THE FOREFRONT

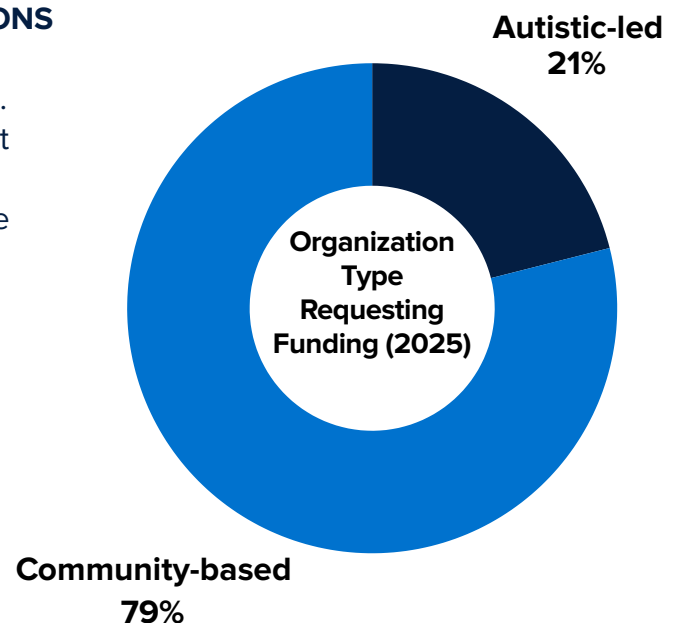
Employment and workforce initiatives remain the most requested area for funding, accounting for the largest share of requested dollars. This aligns with the national unemployment crisis experienced by autistic adults and the resulting conversations about inclusive hiring, vocational training, and long-term economic independence for autistic adults.

At the same time, many organizations reported losing staff or scaling back programs due to budget reductions. Several described rising demand for employment supports alongside shrinking resources, resulting in a mismatch that risks reversing hard-won progress.

GROWTH OF AUTISTIC-LED ORGANIZATIONS

A significant portion of applicants (145) were confirmed autistic-led organizations/projects. Their visibility and leadership in the applicant pool reflect a broader shift toward centering autistic voices in program design and service delivery.

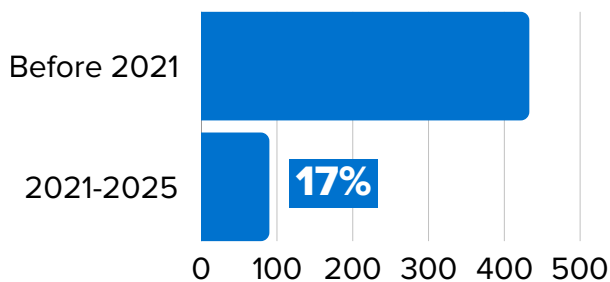
However, many of these groups operate with limited infrastructure and rely heavily on small grants or short-term funding. Sustaining autistic-led innovation will require continued investment in organizational capacity, not just project-specific support.



EMERGING THEMES, CONT.

A SURGE OF NEW ORGANIZATIONS

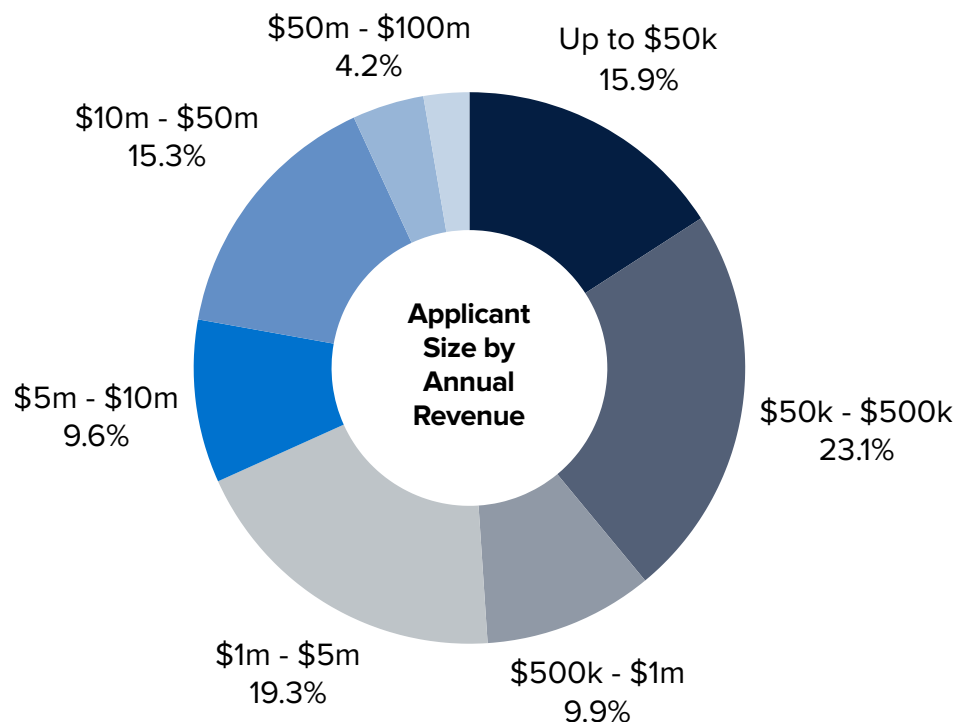
Nearly 1 in 5 applicants were founded in just the past five years. This surge suggests both grassroots energy and an urgent demand for new models, while also raising questions about long-term sustainability in today's funding climate.



WIDE RANGE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Applicants ranged from grassroots startups with annual revenues under \$50,000 to legacy institutions with budgets over \$5 million. This breadth signals that innovation is thriving across scales but also highlights inequities in stability and access to funding.

Smaller organizations often reported greater exposure to funding strain, while larger agencies described difficulty maintaining staffing levels or expanding services despite their size. Across the spectrum, providers are adapting, but nearly half of applicants experienced or anticipated reductions in resources in 2025.



WHAT THE DATA REVEALED

Across 522 applicants, 235 organizations (45%) reported being directly affected by financial challenges, including funding cuts and staff reductions, during the past year.

45%
are facing
financial
challenges

BREAKDOWN OF IMPACTS

funding cuts: 192 organizations

personnel decreases: 90 organizations

reductions in DEI programming: 67 organizations

APPLICANTS DESCRIBED BOTH IMMEDIATE AND ANTICIPATED IMPACTS:

- 36% experienced cuts that had already taken effect (e.g., layoffs or program closures).
- 10% anticipated future reductions due to pending state or Medicaid funding changes.
- 24% faced both ongoing and expected challenges.

While impacts varied regionally, every region of the country reported instability, with higher rates in the Midwest and South due to county-level program eliminations and slowed housing development.



SPECTRUM DESIGNS, A NEXT FOR AUTISM GRANTEE

CONCLUSION

The 2025 NEXT for AUTISM grant cycle highlights a field that is both dynamic and evolving.

Across the country, organizations are designing creative programs, elevating autistic leadership, and reaching new communities with fresh ideas and purpose. Employment continues to be a central focus, with many applicants developing innovative approaches to vocational training, inclusive hiring, and long-term career pathways. Autistic-led organizations, in particular, are leading with insight and authenticity, demonstrating the growing influence of lived experience in shaping effective supports.



At the same time, this year's applications reflect the realities of an environment where resources do not always keep pace with demand. Many organizations are balancing strong community engagement and innovative ideas with reduced funding and capacity. This moment invites reflection not on scarcity, but on how collaboration and shared learning can help sustain progress and strengthen impact.

Together, these findings reaffirm NEXT for AUTISM's dual role, as a funder that invests in innovation and as a convener that brings the field together to share data, strategies, and solutions. Sustaining and expanding adult autism services will require continued partnership across philanthropy, government, and community organizations, ensuring that strong ideas have the support needed to thrive.

NEXT for AUTISM remains committed to advancing this effort through its four pillars of home, work, social, and health and fostering a network of organizations that together are building opportunities, stability, and belonging for autistic adults nationwide.

WHAT'S NEXT

These vital services only continue and thrive with your support.
Be part of what's next for autism at NEXTforAUTISM.org/2025

ABOUT NEXT for AUTISM

NEXT for AUTISM is the leading national nonprofit focused on services for the more than 5.4 million autistic adults, the most underserved group in the autism community. We accomplish our work by focusing on the four pillars that help create a well-rounded life for adults on the spectrum: work, home, social, and health. Learn more at NEXTforAUTISM.org.

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