



AST Research Network Career Development Grants: 2024 Fellowship Research Grant

The application deadline is 11:59 pm Pacific Standard Time on December 1, 2023. A limited number of grants are awarded each funding cycle, and the number and term of grants varies each funding cycle. To submit an application, visit www.myast.org/research-grants. If you have any questions regarding your eligibility or other grant details, please email research@myAST.org.

The purpose of AST Research Network Fellowship Research Grants is to support the research of individuals who have spent two years or less performing research in the area of solid organ transplantation (and/or immunology relating to solid organ transplant) since obtaining their last doctoral degree (PhD, MD, PharmD, or equivalent). The grant rewards a project that provides a strong training vehicle for the applicant. The Fellowship Research Grant seeks to:

1. Foster training of early career investigators who have the potential to contribute to our understanding of transplant science/immunobiology and/or treatment of transplant recipients.
2. Foster research that is of high merit.
3. Encourage high quality applicants who want to develop a career in academic transplantation.

A. General Information: Fellowship Research Grant

Grants are generally awarded in the amount of \$75,000 per year for either one year or two years, depending on AST Research Network funding levels. Please submit your research proposal planning on two years of funding. The AST Research Network strives to support a Fellowship Research Grant in each research category, provided funds are available. Research must commence on July 1, 2024 and cannot be deferred for any reason. Only grants supporting research related to solid organ transplantation will be considered.

Two grants from the same group or from the same institution with significant scientific overlap will not be funded regardless of score. The discretion as to which grant will be funded will be made by the AST Research Network Scientific Review Committee (SRC) at the time of review.

B. Research Categories

Applications are submitted in one of three categories: basic, clinical, or translational science. We accept applications on *any* research topic related to solid organ transplant. Visit www.myast.org/past-research for a list of prior funded projects.

Basic Science is defined as anything in discovery science from molecules to cells to animal models. Examples of basic science projects include but are not limited to:

- Develop and validate biomarkers of graft dysfunction and immune activation
- Validate animal modeling as relevant to current clinical challenges (graft injury, autoimmunity, infectious disease, immunological memory) that validate specific mechanisms or therapies
- Identify and study novel immune modifiers (i.e. cellular transplants including stem cells, regulatory cells, new drugs and biologics)
- Pursue systems biology approaches to study the impact of therapeutics on molecular pathways that reveal new mechanistic insights (note: purely descriptive profiling and mapping of molecular pathways by any set of technologies is not responsive to this area)
- Develop regenerative medicine approaches for generating transplantable tissues

Translational Science is defined as anything from animal models designed specifically to translate basic research to clinical application, to work with clinical human samples with clear translational impact. Examples of translational science projects include, but are not limited to:

- Studies to identify and validate surrogate markers for long-term outcomes including interventional studies designed to demonstrate the value of biomarkers in clinical transplantation
- Studies to determine the effects of cell therapies on protective immunity (e.g. does infusion of Tregs or MSC alter patient defense against microbial pathogens or cancer?)
- Studies to define predictors and/or mechanisms of disease after transplant (i.e. cardiovascular disease, recurrent GN, de novo HLA antibodies or chronic rejection)
- Identify specific molecules and/or molecular mechanisms that explain the roles of the microbiome in immunity and transplant outcomes (note: purely descriptive profiling of microbiomic changes is not responsive to this area)
- The role of epigenetics in determining transplant outcomes
- Develop new tools to study and/or visualize the human alloimmune response

Clinical Science is defined as research involving human patients, from data generation and mining to testing new protocols and therapies. Clinical science includes the following two types of research:

Clinical Trials: designed to answer specific question(s) about new therapies or new ways of using known treatments. Preference will be given to prospective studies.

Clinical Outcomes or Observational Studies: designed to better define the causes and/or consequences of pathological or biological processes in transplantation. Retrospective studies may be appropriate. However, proposals that analyze registry data (e.g. data collected by the United Network for Organ Sharing) are expected to test unique hypotheses or employ new data or methodologies.

Examples of clinical science projects include but are not limited to:

- Reducing post-transplant complications
- Optimizing organ utilization (appropriate allocation and improving organ viability by interventions in the pre-transplant period including ex vivo conditioning)
- Preventing or attenuating late graft failure – cellular and humoral chronic rejection, recurrent and de novo
- Improving the patient experience and addressing the challenges of therapy adherence
- Research on transplant outcomes that test the value of transplantation for patients, transplant centers, payers and/or health care policy and costs at the State and Federal levels.
- Research on racial disparities in access to and outcomes of solid organ transplantation.

C. Application and Review Process

1. Applications must be complete and submitted online through the AST Research Network submission website.
2. The Society remains committed to a diverse and inclusive culture. The membership is encouraged to apply with an emphasis on diversity in age, gender, ethnicity, race, and other underrepresented minorities as defined by the [AAMC](#).
3. All complete applications received by the submission deadline are reviewed and scored by the AST Research Network Scientific Review Committee (SRC).
4. The review criteria include the quality of the applicant, scientific project, sponsor, and environment, with an emphasis on preparing the applicant for developing an independent research program.
5. All applicants will receive comments on the strengths and weaknesses of their grant application.
6. All applicants will be notified of the status of their application in March 2024.
7. Those awarded a grant will be notified with the amount and term length and will be asked to accept or decline the grant via email. Upon acceptance, the recipient will be asked to complete and return an official letter of agreement, signed by the applicant and the grants office.

8. Grant recipients will be recognized during the 2024 American Transplant Congress June 1-5, 2024 in Philadelphia, PA. Recipients are expected to register for and attend ATC. Registration is not included as part of the AST grant.

D. Eligibility Criteria

1. Applicant's Position

- a. The applicant (MD, PhD, PharmD, or equivalent degree) must be within the first two years of post-doctoral research training (not including clinical training) by the grant application deadline (December 1). Applicants who have worked in other fields or taken a leave of absence are eligible beyond this two-year period, but this must be directly addressed in the sponsor's letter (see section E. 7).
- b. Throughout the period of the grant, the applicant must be at a "fellowship training" level and may not hold an independent faculty level position or a salaried senior staff position (or equivalent). The AST defines an independent faculty level position as: a) Assistant Professor or equivalent; or b) regardless of title, institutional support that includes independent lab space and/or start-up funds to allow independent research.
- c. The applicant's fellowship must commence prior to or on the start of the grant term (July 1, 2024).
- d. The minimum protected time for basic or translational grants is 50% and for clinical grants is 25%.

2. Applicant's Sponsor and Institutional Support

- a. The applicant must have a sponsor. Only one AST Research Network grant will be awarded per mentor/sponsor per year (e.g. as a recipient of a Faculty Development Research Grant, recipient of an AST directed grant, or as a sponsor of a Fellowship Research Grant). If more than one grant from a given faculty member is submitted and deemed competitive, the AST will determine which grant to fund.
- b. If the applicant's sponsor departs or is planning to depart the institution prior to the commencement of the grant (July 1, 2024), the following outcomes apply:
 - i. If the sponsor's impending departure is known before the submission deadline, the applicant must notify the AST Research Network national office and the applicant will be allowed to revise their application accordingly.
 - ii. If the departure occurs after the submission deadline, the applicant will not be eligible for funding and their grant withdrawn, as an evaluation of the sponsor is part of the scoring procedure.
 - iii. If the departure occurs after a grant has been awarded and the grant has commenced, funding will be suspended. Reinstitution of the grant will be at the discretion of the AST Research Network Scientific Review Committee (SRC) Executive Committee, contingent upon satisfactory replacement of the sponsor and other factors.

3. AST Membership

- a. The applicant is not required to be an active AST member.
- b. The applicant's sponsor must be an active AST member or have submitted a completed membership application by December 1, 2023.
- c. If the applicant is awarded a grant, the sponsor's membership must be maintained throughout the term of the grant.

4. Other Funding

- a. Fellows who currently are PI on a K-series grant or hold other individual fellowships, career development awards, or other grants awarded in their name that support their salary are not eligible to apply for an AST Research Network Fellowship Research Grant.
- b. Applicants can apply for an AST Fellowship Research Grant at the same time as applying as primary investigator on a K-series, individual fellowships, career development awards, or other grants that support their salary. However, the AST grant cannot be accepted in

- conjunction with another fellowship award. An AST grant recipient who is awarded another fellowship grant(s) will need to determine which to accept and which to decline.
- c. Individuals who previously received an AST Fellowship Research Grant are not eligible to apply again. Applicants who previously applied for but did not receive an AST Fellowship Research Grant may apply if they meet other eligibility criteria.
 - d. Applicants with concurrent smaller awards and prizes must report these awards, and the application will be adjudicated by the reviewers.
5. Miscellaneous
- a. Location: The proposed work is to be performed in a North American research setting.
 - b. Education: The applicant must have an MD, DO, PhD, DVM, PharmD or equivalent graduate degree at the time of the application.
 - c. Citizenship: The applicant must be either: a) a U.S., Canadian, or Mexican citizen; b) a lawfully admitted permanent resident foreign national of the U.S., Canada, or Mexico with a valid visa during the awarded period; or c) a foreign national admitted lawfully for residence in the U.S., Canada, or Mexico during the awarded period. J1 and H1B visa holders are eligible to apply.

E. Specific Application Requirements

1. Title
2. Abstract of the proposed research plan: This document should concisely summarize the project in 400 words or less. The abstract should introduce the project and note its relevance to transplantation. It should describe the long-term objectives and specific aims, research design, and methods for achieving these goals.
3. Applicant's NIH-type biosketch: This document may not exceed five (5) pages.
4. Sponsor's NIH-type biosketch. This document may not exceed five (5) pages.
5. Statement of career goals: explaining the applicant's short- and long-term career goals and how the grant will enhance these plans. This document may not exceed one (1) page.
6. Complete proposed research plan: This document cannot exceed six (6) pages; the page limit does not include references. It should summarize the proposed research project as well as any simultaneous training that will be obtained during the period of grant support. The applicant and the sponsor may jointly write the proposed research plan, and the participation must be detailed in the separate sponsor narrative (section E.7.e). The following sections must be included:
 - a. Aims: Include the key questions posed or hypotheses to be tested
 - b. Introduction: provide the rationale for the research
 - c. Preliminary Results: show preliminary results supporting the research plan
 - d. Research Plan: explain how the questions or hypothesis will be studied, with emphasis on experimental design over the details of the specific methods to be used. Include a description of the statistical methods. Anticipated results and potential pitfalls and alternative approaches should be briefly discussed. Specific research (and, if applicable, training) goals to be reached at the end of the grant should also be provided.
 - e. Timeline: explain the feasibility of accomplishing the stated goals within the time frame of the proposal.
 - f. For resubmissions only: provide a concise one-page summary of how the project has been modified in response to prior reviewer feedback. This summary is an additional page and is not counted toward the six-page limit.
7. Sponsor narrative: should not exceed three (3) pages and should include:
 - a. A concise description of the overall research plan
 - b. A description of the training program in addition to lab research (e.g., courses, conferences, outside interactions, etc.)
 - c. A description of the sponsor's background in supervising the research and training of students and postdoctoral fellows
 - d. The role of the applicant in the project

- e. A description of the role of the applicant vs. the sponsor in preparing this application. A significant role for the applicant in writing the application is highly encouraged, although input from the sponsor is expected. For international applicants not yet in the lab, it is understood that the PI will play a large role in writing the application.
 - f. An evaluation by the sponsor of the applicant's experience and performance, future potential, and the degree of previous interaction with the applicant.
 - g. An explanation of any mitigating or additional factors that need to be considered in terms of eligibility (e.g. account of extra years in education or a change in research field).
 - h. The sponsor must specify whether he/she is a PI/recipient on an AST Research Network Faculty Development Research Grant or the sponsor of another AST Research Network Fellowship Research Grant.
 - i. A guarantee of minimum protected time.
 - j. For re-submissions only: provide a concise one-page summary in addition to the sponsor narrative of how the applicant's proposal has been modified in response to prior reviewer feedback.
8. Overall project budget
 - a. The grant is intended to support the recipient's salary and/or research costs. The following expenses are not permitted: institution overhead, capital equipment, or travel costs.
 9. Two (2) letters of recommendation: from two senior scientists other than the sponsor who are familiar with the applicant's potential as an investigator. Electronic copies with original signatures on institutional letterhead.

Overall, the applications should be written in a focused manner that addresses one or two questions. The work proposed should be feasible for the period of the grant award. In a similar vein, the budget requested should be appropriate to perform all of the work proposed.

DISCLAIMER: The AST will not assume responsibility for any clinical study funded by the AST. Such proposals must be IRB-approved. Any responsibility will be assumed by the PI and the funded institution.

F. Funding Guidelines and Terms of Agreement: Fellowship Research Grant

Review these guidelines and terms prior to completing your application. If you are awarded a grant, you and your institution's grant office will sign a formal letter of agreement (LOA) agreeing to these funding guidelines and terms, and the LOA will be co-signed by your sponsor.

1. The grant is intended to support the recipient's salary and/or research costs. The following expenses are not permitted: institution overhead, capital equipment, or travel costs.
2. Funding will not be released until visa status is confirmed.
3. Research must begin on July 1, 2024; the research start date cannot be deferred.
4. The grant is paid in annual installments to the recipient's institution.
5. The recipient and the sponsor must continue to meet all above stated eligibility criteria and the recipient must perform the research as outlined in the original application.
6. Pursuant to regulations of the federal Physician Payment Sunshine Act (included in the Affordable Care Act), NPI numbers will be collected from grant recipients (if applicable) and tax ID numbers collected from the recipients' institutions (if applicable). All payments will be reported to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Open Payments system, as payments from AST represent indirect transfers of value from the funding pharmaceutical company.
7. Grant funding is not transferable from one recipient to another. If the grantee relocates, the AST will determine if the grant can be transferred to the recipient's new location, or if the grant must be surrendered and any remaining funds returned (if the grant is surrendered, a final report will still be required; see item 9).
8. The recipient must acknowledge the grant as a funding source in all manuscripts and presentations derived from the funded research by using the following statement: "This work was supported by a grant from the American Society of Transplantation Research Network." Copies of such publications must be submitted to the AST National Office.

9. Reports from the recipient and letters from the sponsor are required at the following intervals, and continuation of current grant funding and eligibility for future AST funding is contingent upon completion of these items:
 - a. Recipients must submit a status report on six-month intervals. One-year grants and two-year grants must submit a status report by December 31, 2024. Two-year grants must also submit a status report by December 31, 2025.
 - b. Recipients of one-year grants and two-year grants must provide a final report within 30 days of the conclusion of the grant term. A letter from the sponsor must also be submitted summarizing their observations of the recipient during the term of the grant.
 - c. Recipients of two-year grants must provide a mid-term progress report 11 months from the start of the grant term. The progress report will be due May 31, 2025. The AST Research Network SRC will review the progress report in June 2025 to determine if the second year of funding can proceed in July 2025. A letter from the sponsor must also be submitted indicating continued support of the recipient's activities.
 - d. All grant recipients must submit a final report, even if the grant is surrendered for any reason prior to the conclusion of the grant term.
10. If the recipient's sponsor departs during the term of the grant, funding will be suspended and reinstitution of the grant will be at the discretion of the AST Research Network Scientific Review Committee (SRC) Executive Committee, contingent upon satisfactory replacement of the sponsor and other factors.
11. If the recipient accepts a faculty position that begins during the term of the grant, he/she must notify the AST, surrender the grant, and return any remaining funds. A final report will still be required; see item 9.
12. During the term of the research grant, there can be no concurrent fellowship funding. Concurrent smaller awards and prizes must be reported for adjudication.