

Request for Proposals: AST Research Network / CareDx Directed Fellowship Research Grant: Utility of Donor Derived Cell Free DNA

If you have any questions, please email research@myAST.org.

The application deadline is 11:59 pm Pacific Standard Time on June 19, 2020.

A. Overview:

CareDx is collaborating with the AST Research Network to support an individual who has spent two years or less performing research in solid organ transplantation (and/or immunology relating to solid organ transplant) since obtaining their last doctoral degree (PhD, MD, PharmD, or equivalent). The grant focuses on transplantation and immunology research that continues to build the evidence and utility of donor-derived cell-free DNA (dd-cfDNA), peripheral blood and urine gene expression profiling (GEP) as well as a project associated around bioinformatics and artificial intelligence in transplantation.

About CareDx, Inc.

CareDx, Inc. is dedicated to improving the lives of organ transplant patients by developing precision medicine tools. By combining the latest advances in genomics and bioinformatics technology, with a commitment to generating high quality clinical evidence through trials and registries, CareDx is at the forefront of organ transplant surveillance and pre-transplant HLA typing solutions.

B. General Information:

The grant provides one research grant for one year at \$50,000. Please submit your research proposal for the 2020 AST/CareDx fellowship grant planning on one year of funding. Research must commence on October 1, 2020 and conclude on September 30, 2021. The research start date cannot be deferred for any reason.

The recipient will sign a letter of agreement with the AST Research Network. Payments will be issued to the recipient's institution by the AST Research Network, and the recipient will report to the AST Research Network.

C. Research Focus:

The 2020 AST/CareDx grant will fund research that continues to build the evidence and utility of donor-derived cell-free DNA (dd-cfDNA), peripheral blood and urine gene expression profiling (GEP), as well as a project associated around bioinformatics and artificial intelligence in transplantation.

Although rates of acute rejection have declined after solid organ transplantation, there is an unmet need to better define the molecular phenotype of rejection and provide non-invasive, precision medicine tools to better detect rejection. The standard-of-care for detecting allograft rejection is pathology-read biopsy, which suffers from sampling error, interobserver variability, and artefacts that result in often subjective and varying diagnoses of allograft rejection. Genomic medicine, including biomarkers such as donor-derived cell-free DNA, permit non-invasive and earlier detection of allograft injury and rejection, allow for quantitative serial monitoring of graft health, and response to rejection treatment. Another genomic medicine technique for monitoring allograft function is gene expression profiling (GEP) of peripheral blood (and possibly urine). GEP characterizes changes in gene expression (upregulation and downregulation of genes) that identify pathologic states.

GEP and dd-cfDNA, separately and in combination, show utility for monitoring allograft health and identifying graft injury sooner and more accurately than the standard-of-care. We seek investigators who can build on existing clinical evidence to demonstrate the value of GEP and dd-cfDNA for allograft surveillance through improved outcomes, reduction in mortality and morbidity to patients, increased graft survival, improved quality of life, and reduced costs to the health system. There is also scope for genomic medicine tools to guide immunosuppression and rejection treatment. Proposals that aim to show dd-cfDNA and/or GEP can improve outcomes through immunomodulation or guiding rejection treatment are also encouraged.

Artificial intelligence in transplantation is a nascent concept; however, shows strong potential for augmenting clinical decision-making and improving care. Recent work showed the validity of a machine-learned algorithm for predicting allograft survival after kidney transplantation. We seek proposals for research that demonstrates the clinical utility of artificial intelligence in transplantation, including the use of existing algorithms (e.g. iBox) to guide clinical care and improve outcomes or increase efficiencies for the health system. We also seek new artificial intelligence projects in any area of transplant care, including pre-transplant optimization of care, donor and recipient selection, peri-operative and post-operative care, and long-term management of patients.

D. Eligibility Criteria:

1. Applicant's Position

- a. The applicant (MD, PhD, PharmD, or equivalent degree) must be within the first two years of research in solid organ transplantation or immunology related to solid organ transplant since their post-doctoral training by the grant application deadline (April 24, 2020). 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 F.6).
- 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 (October 1, 2020).
- 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.
- b. Only one AST Research Network grant will be awarded per 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.
- c. If the applicant's sponsor departs or is planning to depart the institution prior to the commencement of the grant (October 1, 2020), the following outcomes apply:
 - i. 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.
 - ii. 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, contingent upon satisfactory replacement of the sponsor and other factors.

3. AST Membership
 - a. The applicant's sponsor must be an active member of the AST or have submitted a completed membership application by June 19, 2020.
4. Previous AST Funding/Funding from Other Sources
 - a. There are no restrictions on past or current funding.
 - i. The applicant may be a past or current recipient of an AST Research Network Fellowship or Faculty Development research grant.
 - ii. The applicant may currently hold career development awards, mentoring awards, NIH or other independent research awards.
 - b. If the applicant is currently receiving funding for a project similar to the topics described in this RFA, the applicant should explain how the funds of the CareDx grant would not overlap with the funds of the other research support.
5. Miscellaneous
 - a. The proposed work is to be performed in a North American laboratory.
 - b. Education: The applicant must have completed post-graduate training at the time of the application.
 - c. Applicants who have a substantial relationship with CareDx that would present a real or perceived conflict of interest if awarded this grant must first contact the AST Research Network to declare the conflict before applying.
 - d. 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. Application Process and Requirements:

Applications must be completed in full by June 19, 2020 in order to be reviewed.

F. Specific Application Requirements:

Applications that do not conform to these guidelines will be returned without review.

1. Name, title, and institution of principle investigator, co-investigator, and/or key co-collaborator(s)
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 biosketch (five-page format) to include all usual and pertinent information, particularly describing other past and current research funding and prior published work.
4. The biosketch of additional personnel to be named on the grant (i.e. whoever would ultimately be listed at publication)
5. Complete proposed research plan: This document should be between three and five pages; the page limit does not include references. 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 (if any): 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. 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.
 - i. Research plan should include a description of relevant facilities/capabilities
6. Sponsor narrative: should not exceed three 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.
 - 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 in preparing the application. A significant role 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. The sponsor's evaluation 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 or a change in research field).
 - h. The sponsor must specify whether he/she is a recipient or sponsor of another AST Research Network research grant.
 - i. A guarantee of minimum protected time.
7. Budget
- a. The grant is intended to provide salary support for the researcher and supplies/materials (includes equipment specifically to support donor-derived cell free DNA development). No other costs are permitted, including institutional overhead.

G. Review Process and Notification:

1. Proposals are due by June 19, 2020.
2. Funding decisions will be made by an expert review committee from the AST Research Network with input from CareDx. Grants will be scored on the basis of novelty, research approach, feasibility of obtaining relevant data, prior work, and sponsor, as well as other factors.
3. All applicants will be notified of their application status in August 2020.
4. For the selected individuals, the term of the grant will begin October 1, 2020.

H. Funding Guidelines and Terms of Agreement:

Please review these guidelines and terms prior to completing your application. If you are ultimately awarded a grant, you will sign a letter of agreement (LOA) stating that you agree to these funding guidelines and terms, and the LOA will be co-signed by your institution's grant/research office and the LOA will be co-signed by your sponsor.

1. Research must begin on October 1, 2020 and end by September 30, 2021. The research start date cannot be deferred.
2. Funding in the amount of \$50,000 will be provided for one year of research.
3. Funding will not be released until visa status is confirmed (if applicable).
4. The grant is intended to provide only salary support for the researcher and supplies/materials. No other costs are permitted, including institutional overhead.
5. The grant is paid in quarterly installments to the recipient's institution.
6. Prior to receiving each quarterly payment, the applicant is required to verify that he/she is still at the same institution, still meets the above-stated eligibility criteria, and continues to perform the research as outlined in the original application.
 - a. 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 below.
7. The applicant must acknowledge the grant as a funding source in all manuscripts and presentations derived from the funded research using the following statement: "This work was supported by a grant from CareDx and the American Society of Transplantation Research Network." Copies of such publications must be submitted to the AST National Office.

8. 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.
9. Reports and letters from the sponsor are required at the following intervals depending on the term of the grant, and continuation of funding is contingent upon completion of these reports:
 - a. Six-month progress report due March 31, 2021.
 - b. Final report within 30 days of the conclusion of the grant term of September 30, 2021.
A letter from the sponsor must also be submitted summarizing their observations of the recipient during the term of the grant.
 - i. A final report is required 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 reinstatement of the grant will be at the discretion of the AST Research Network and CareDx, contingent upon satisfactory replacement of the sponsor and other factors.
11. If the grantee accepts a faculty position 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.