Request for Proposals: AST Research Network / Natera Fellowship: Innovative Lines of Investigation in Transplantation

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

The application deadline is 11:59 pm Pacific Standard Time on February 25, 2022.

A. Overview
The American Society of Transplantation (AST) and Natera are collaborating to provide an individual fellowship research grant to support transplantation and immunology research on innovative lines of investigation in transplantation.

About Natera
Natera is a global leader in cell-free DNA testing. The mission of the company is to change the management of disease worldwide with a focus on reproductive health, oncology, and organ transplantation. Natera operates an ISO 13485-certified and CAP-accredited laboratory certified under the Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) in San Carlos, Calif. It offers a host of proprietary genetic testing services to inform physicians who care for pregnant women, oncologists, and cancer researchers, including biopharmaceutical companies, and genetic laboratories through its cloud-based software platform.

B. General Information:
One grant will be awarded. The grant is for one year at $50,000. Please submit your proposal planning on one year of funding. Research must commence on July 1, 2022 and end on June 30, 2023. 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 in annual installments. The recipient will report to the AST Research Network.

C. Research Focus
This fellowship is directed to supporting a one-year term of research in transplantation science on a basic, translational, or clinical focused topic in kidney, heart, or lung transplantation.

Applicants should consider the following when preparing their proposal: Background of the proposed work and the specific question to be addressed followed by a specific hypothesis and one or two aims that will be performed to test the hypothesis and finally, a discussion of anticipated results, statistical considerations and potential contribution and impact of the results to the field.

This RFA is not intended to support projects performing head-to-head comparison between the different cfDNA tests or other technologies to detect rejection.
D. Application and Review Process: Fellowship Research Grant

1. Applications must be complete and submitted online through the AST Research Network submission website, www.myast.org/research-grants.
2. Funding decisions will be made by an expert review committee that will include members of AST.
3. Grants will be scored and awarded on the basis of novelty, research approach, feasibility of obtaining relevant data, and prior work, as well as other factors.
4. All applicants will receive comments on the strengths and weaknesses of their grant application.
5. All applicants will be notified of the status of their application in April 2022.
6. 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.
   a. Upon acceptance, the recipient will be asked to complete and return an official letter of agreement, signed by the applicant and the grants office.
7. Grant awards will be officially announced during the 2022 American Transplant Congress (ATC), June 4-8, 2022 in Boston, MA. For the individual selected, the term of the grant will begin July 1, 2022.
   a. Recipients are expected to register for and attend ATC. Registration is not included as part of the AST grant.

E. Eligibility Criteria

1. Academic Appointment and Institutional Resources:
   a. The applicant (MD, PhD, PharmD, or equivalent degree) must be within the first three years of post-doctoral research training (not including clinical training) focused on solid organ transplantation or immune response by the grant application deadline, February 25, 2022. Applicants who have worked in other fields or taken a leave of absence are eligible beyond this three-year period, but this must be directly addressed in the sponsor narrative (see section F.8.).
   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, 2022.
   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. If the applicant’s sponsor departs or is planning to depart the institution prior to the commencement of the grant July 1, 2022, 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 February 25, 2022.

4. Previous AST Funding/Funding from Other Sources
   a. The applicant may currently hold other independent research awards.
   b. Faculty may only hold one new AST grant per year: as a PI of a concurrent AST directed grant, as a PI of a Faculty Development Research Grant, or as mentor/sponsor of a Fellowship Research Grant. If more than one grant from a given faculty member (as PI or mentor) is submitted and deemed competitive for funding, the AST will determine which grant to fund.
   c. 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 this 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 application.
   c. Applicants who have a substantial relationship with Natera 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 submitting an application.
   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.

F. Application Process and Requirements:
Applications must be completed in full by February 25, 2022 in order to be reviewed. Applications that do not conform to these guidelines will be denied without review.
   1. Name, title, and institution of principal 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 [RESEARCH TOPIC]. It should describe the long-term objectives and specific aims, research design, and methods for achieving these goals.
   3. Applicant’s NIH biosketch: This document may not exceed five (5) pages.
   4. Sponsor’s NIH biosketch: This document may not exceed five (5) pages.
   5. The biosketch of additional personnel to be named on the grant (i.e. whoever would ultimately be listed at publication).
   6. Complete proposed research plan: The research plan should be a maximum of six pages, not including 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. Statistical approach and methods should be stated. 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
      e. Outline of specific milestones / deliverables expected for the first year of the project.
7. 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.

8. 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. A guarantee of minimum protected time.

9. Budget
   a. The grant is intended to provide salary support for the researcher, supplies/materials,
      and a maximum of 5% institutional overhead. No other costs are permitted.

10. 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.

G. Funding Guidelines & Terms of Agreement

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

1. Research must begin on July 1, 2022 and end by June 30, 2023; the research start date and
   end 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 recipient’s sponsor must maintain AST membership throughout the term of the grant.

5. The grant is intended to provide only salary support for the researcher, supplies/materials, and a
   maximum of 5% institutional overhead. No other costs are permitted.

6. The grant is paid in annual installments to the recipient’s institution.

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).

8. 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 the American Society of Transplantation Research Network and
    Natera.” Copies of such publications must be submitted to the AST National Office.

9. 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.
10. Reports and letters from the sponsor summarizing their observations of the recipient are required at the following intervals, and continuation of funding is contingent upon completion of these reports:
   b. Final report within 30 days of the conclusion of the grant term.
      i. A final report is required even if the grant is surrendered for any reason prior to
         the conclusion of the grant term.
11. 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 and Natera, contingent upon satisfactory replacement of the sponsor and other factors.
12. 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.

Offering and administering a research grant with this partner does not represent an AST endorsement of the use of the partner's products.