



AST Research Network Transition to Independence Grants: 2025

The application deadline is **11:59 pm Pacific Standard Time on June 15, 2024**. Several grants are awarded each funding cycle, and the number and term of grants varies each funding cycle. To apply, visit www.myast.org/research-grants. If you have any questions regarding your eligibility or other grant details, email research@myast.org.

The purpose of the AST Research Network Transition to Independence Research Grants is to promote the careers of academic investigators whose development of an independent research program is focused on the field of basic science, translational and clinical investigation in solid organ transplantation. The grants are intended to provide support for the investigator's transition to an R-series or equivalent grant. The Transition to Independence Research Grant seeks to:

1. Foster the transition of early to mid-career scientists who are contributing to our understanding of transplant science/immunobiology and/or treatment of transplant recipients and need funding to start or strengthen work that is not yet funded by larger grants.
2. Foster research that is of high merit.
3. Encourage the continued commitment of high-quality applicants to careers in academic transplantation.

A. Funding and General Information: Transition to Independence Research Grant

Transition to Independence Research Grants are awarded in the amount of \$115,000 for two years, with \$60,000 disbursed in Year One and \$55,000 disbursed in Year Two.

Research must commence on January 1, 2025 and cannot be deferred.

B. Research Categories

Applications are submitted in one of three categories: basic, clinical, or translational science. We accept applications on *any* research topic directly 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: Transition to Independence Research Grant

1. Applications must be complete and submitted online using 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, and institution, with an emphasis on preparing the applicant for a career as an independent investigator in a field of solid organ transplantation by allowing them to expand on preliminary research findings that will become the basis for individual research from the NIH, VA, or equivalent agencies.
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 October 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 2025 World Transplant Congress August 2-6, 2025 in San Francisco, CA. Recipients are expected to register for and attend ATC. Registration is not included as part of the AST grant.

D. Eligibility Criteria: Transition to Independence Research Grant

1. Academic Appointment and Institutional Resources:
 - a. The applicant (MD, PhD, PharmD, or equivalent) must hold an academic faculty appointment and be developing an independent research program.
 - b. The applicant must have obtained an institutional commitment that is sufficient to conduct research and allow the applicant's long-term success.
2. AST Membership
 - a. The applicant must be an active member of the AST or have submitted a completed membership application by June 15, 2024.
 - b. If awarded a grant, the applicant's membership must be maintained throughout the term of the grant.
3. Other Funding
 - a. Faculty may only hold one new AST grant per year: as a PI of a concurrent AST 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.
 - b. 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.
 - c. The AST Transition to Independence Research Grant project must be distinct from that of any concurrent award. Moreover, this work should not directly overlap with funded projects of other faculty members within the same Section or Department.
 - d. Applicants who hold a career development grant (e.g., K grant) are eligible to apply.
 - e. Individuals are ineligible if they are a PI on a previous or current NIH grant to perform independent research (e.g., R01, R35, project PI on a P01 grant, R21, VA Merit award, or comparable non-mentored award).
 - f. Candidates can apply for an AST grant at the same time as applying for an NIH R01, P01 or any similar independent research award but may not retain AST funding if the other grant is awarded and the funding begins prior to the end of the AST Transition to Independence grant. In such cases, the AST sponsored grant will be rescinded at the time the NIH grant begins.
 - g. Applicants with concurrent smaller awards and prizes must report these awards, and the application will be adjudicated by the reviewers.
4. 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, and have completed post-graduate training (residencies, post-doctoral fellowships, etc.).
 - 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: Transition to Independence Research Grant

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. Statement of research goals: This document may not exceed one page, explaining how the proposed aims fit into the applicant's overall research goals and trajectory as well as how the

grant will enhance the applicant's career goals and advance their research program to be competitive for a R-type award.

5. Other Grant Support: NIH-type document listing all active and pending support for the applicant.
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 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 tested, with emphasis on experimental design over the details of the specific methods to be used. Include a description of the statistical methods. 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 anticipated to be reached at the end of the grant should also be provided. Discussion of the impact of the anticipated work in contributing new insights to the question and the transplant field should be discussed in 2-4 sentences.
 - 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. Overall project budget.
 - a. The grant is intended to support the recipient's salary, salary of personnel directly working on the project, and/or research costs. The following expenses are not permitted: institution overhead, capital equipment, or travel costs.
8. Two (2) letters of recommendation: from two senior scientists who are familiar with the applicant's potential as an investigator. Electronic copies with original signatures on institutional letterhead.
9. Additional letters of support that describe collaborations required for the project (if applicable).

Overall, the applications should be written in a focused manner that addresses one or two questions. The work proposed should be feasible for the two-year period of the grant award and 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. Such proposals must be IRB-approved prior to the release of funding. Any responsibility will be assumed by the PI and the funded institution.

F. Funding Guidelines and Terms of Agreement: Transition to Independence 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.

1. The grant is intended to support the recipient's salary, salary of personnel directly working on the project, and/or research costs. The following expenses are not permitted: institution overhead, capital equipment, or travel costs.
2. Funding will not be released until IRB approval and visa status (if applicable) is confirmed.
3. Research must begin on January 1, 2025; the research start date cannot be deferred.
4. The grant is paid in annual installments to the recipient's institution, with \$60,000 disbursed in Year One and \$55,000 disbursed in Year Two.
5. The recipient must continue to meet all above stated eligibility criteria and 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 applicant 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 are required at the following intervals, and continuation of current grant funding is contingent upon completion of these reports. Failure to submit these reports may affect future funding.
 - a. Progress reports are due in six-month intervals: June 30, 2025; December 31, 2025; June 30, 2026.
 - b. Final report within 30 days of the conclusion of the grant term (January 31, 2026).
 - c. 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. Candidates can apply for an AST grant at the same time as applying for an NIH R01, P01 or any similar research award but may not retain AST funding if the other grant is awarded may not retain AST funding if the other grant is awarded and the funding begins prior to the end of the AST Transition to Independence grant. In such cases, the AST sponsored grant will be rescinded at the time the NIH grant begins.