AST Transplantation and Immunology Research Network (TIRN)
Career Development Grants: 2018 Fellowship Research Grant

The application deadline is 11:59 pm Pacific Standard Time on Wednesday, November 1, 2017. A limited number of grants are awarded each funding cycle, and the number of grants and the term of each grant (either one year or two years) varies each funding cycle. If you have any questions, please email TIRN@myAST.org.

The purpose of AST TIRN Fellowship Research Grants is to support individuals who have spent two years or less (at the time of the application) performing research in the area of transplantation and/or immunology since obtaining their last doctoral degree (PhD, MD, 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 new young 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 awarded in the amount of $50,000 per year for either one year or two years, depending on AST TIRN budget allowances. Please submit your research proposal planning on two years of funding. Research must commence on July 1, 2018. The research start date cannot be deferred for any reason.

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 TIRN Scientific Review Committee (SRC) at the time of review.

Fellowship Research Grant applications are submitted in one of three categories: basic, clinical, or translational science. AST TIRN strives to support a Fellowship Research Grant in each category, provided funds are available.

- **Basic Science** is defined as anything in discovery science from molecules to cells to animal models.
- **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.
- **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. The analysis, including the statistics, should be performed by the applicant and not by the data registry staff.

To submit an application, visit www.TIRN.org/funding
B. Research Priorities: Fellowship Research Grant

The following research priorities were developed by the AST Transplantation and Immunology Research Network (TIRN). These priorities are intended to provide applicants in the 2018 research grants cycle with a set of emphasis areas that will receive special consideration by reviewers. However, it is important to note that we accept applications on any research topic, as we recognize the importance of innovation in areas outside of these priorities.

Basic Science

I. Develop and validate biomarkers of graft dysfunction and immune activation

II. Validate animal modeling as relevant to current clinical challenges (donor injury, autoimmunity, infectious disease, immunological memory) that validate specific mechanisms or therapies

III. Identify and study novel immune modifiers (i.e. cellular transplants including stem cells, regulatory cells, new drugs and biologics)

IV. 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)

V. Develop new tools to study and/or visualize the human immune response

VI. Develop regenerative medicine approaches for generating transplantable tissues

Translational Science

I. Studies to identify and validate surrogate markers for long-term outcomes including interventional studies designed to demonstrate the value of biomarkers in clinical transplantation

II. 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?)

III. Studies to define predictors and/or mechanisms of disease after transplant (i.e. cardiovascular disease, recurrent GN, de novo HLA antibodies or chronic rejection)

IV. 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)

V. The role of epigenetics in determining transplant outcomes

Clinical Science

I. Reducing post-transplant complications

II. Optimizing organ utilization (appropriate allocation and improving organ viability by interventions in the pre-transplant period including ex vivo conditioning)

III. Preventing late graft failure – cellular and humoral chronic rejection, recurrent and de novo

IV. Improving the patient experience and addressing the challenges of therapy adherence

V. 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.
C. Eligibility Criteria: Fellowship Research Grant

1. Applicant’s Position
   a. The applicant must have spent two years or less (at the time of the application) performing research in the area of transplantation and/or immunology since obtaining the last doctoral degree (MD, PhD, or equivalent degree). 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 D. 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, 2018).

2. Applicant’s Sponsor and Institutional Support
   a. The applicant must have a sponsor. Only one AST TIRN grant will be awarded per mentor/sponsor, or PI, per year (e.g. as a recipient of a Faculty Development Research 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, 2018), the following outcomes apply:
      i. If the sponsor’s impending departure is known before the submission deadline of November 1, 2017, the applicant must notify the AST TIRN national office and the applicant will be allowed to revise their application accordingly.
      ii. If the departure occurs or will occur after the submission deadline (i.e. during the review/scoring period), 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 and reinstitution of the grant will be at the discretion of the AST TIRN Scientific Review Committee (SRC) Executive Committee, contingent upon satisfactory replacement of the sponsor and other factors.

3. AST Membership: Applicant and Sponsor
   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 November 1, 2017.
      i. If the sponsor’s membership application is rejected due to ineligibility for AST membership, the applicant’s grant submission will be disqualified.
   c. If the applicant is awarded a grant, the sponsor’s membership must be maintained throughout the term of the grant.

4. Previous AST Funding/Funding from Other Sources:
   a. Fellows who have other individual fellowships or grants awarded in their name that support their salary are not eligible to apply for an AST TIRN Fellowship Research Grant.
   b. Individuals who previously received an AST Fellowship Research Grant are not eligible to apply again. Applicants who previously applied for but did not receive a grant may apply if they meet the eligibility criteria.
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, 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.

D. **Specific Application Requirements: Fellowship 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 and must include:
   a. Applicant name
   b. Position/title
   c. Education/training: beginning with baccalaureate or other initial professional education, such as nursing, and include post-doctoral training; institution and location, degree, year(s) of completion, field(s) of study.
   d. Positions and honors: list in chronological order all previous positions, concluding with your present position. List any honors including present membership on any Federal Government Public Advisory Committee.
   e. Selected peer-reviewed publications (in chronological order). Do not include publications submitted or in preparation.
   f. Research Support: list all research projects ongoing or completed during the last three years, supported by federal and non-federal funds. Briefly indicate the overall goals of the projects and your role (e.g. PI, Co-Investigator, Consultant) in the research project, total amount of grant, and amount of funding to be received in the year the AST grant may be awarded. The applicant should explain any specific or budgetary overlap with the grant and in the case of pending applications, how these will be resolved in the event the funding is received from more than one agency. The final resolution of any funding conflicts will be decided by the AST.
4. **Sponsor’s NIH-type biosketch** (meeting same requirements in the D.3).
5. **Statement of career goals** (no more than one page): explaining the applicant’s short and long-term career goals and how the grant will enhance these plans.
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 this proposed research plan, which must be detailed in the separate sponsor narrative (see section D.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. 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.
7. Narrative from the sponsor: 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 specifically address whether he/she is a PI/recipient on an AST TIRN Faculty Development Research Grant or the sponsor of another AST TIRN Fellowship Research Grant.
   i. The sponsor must guarantee protected time adequate for project completion.

8. An overall project budget.

9. Two (2) letters of recommendation: from two individuals other than the sponsor who are familiar with the applicant’s potential as an investigator. Electronic copies with original signatures on institutional letterhead must be uploaded.

**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.**

E. Application and Review Process: Fellowship Research Grant

1. Applications must be completed and submitted online through the official AST TIRN submission website; applications submitted by mail or by email will not be considered.

2. All complete applications received by the submission deadline are reviewed and scored by the AST TIRN Scientific Review Committee (SRC).

3. The review criteria include the quality of the applicant, scientific project, sponsor, and institution, with an emphasis on preparing the applicant for a career as an independent investigator.

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 March 2018.

6. Those awarded a grant will be notified with the amount and term (one year or two years) of their grant, 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 recipients will be recognized at the AST Grants Ceremony during the 2018 American Transplant Congress June 2-8, 2018 in Seattle, WA. Recipients are expected to register for and attend ATC. Registration is NOT included as part of the AST grant.
Funding Guidelines and Terms of Agreement: Fellowship Research Grant

Please review these guidelines and terms prior to completing your application. If you are ultimately awarded a grant, you will need to 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 institution’s grant office and your sponsor.

1. The grant is intended to support the applicant’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, 2018; the research start date cannot be deferred.

4. The grant is paid in quarterly installments to the recipient’s institution.

5. 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.

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 below).

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 Transplantation and Immunology Research Network of the American Society of Transplantation.” 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 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.
   b. 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 requested May 1, 2019 and due May 31, 2019. The AST TIRN SRC will review the progress report in June 2019 to determine if the second year of funding can proceed in July 2019. A letter from the sponsor must also be submitted indicating continued support of the recipient’s activities.
   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. 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 TIRN Scientific Review Committee (SRC) Executive Committee, contingent upon satisfactory replacement of the sponsor and other factors.

11. Individuals accepting an AST TIRN Fellowship Research Grant are expected not to accept other fellowship grants to support their salary.

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; see item 8 above.

13. Applicants can apply for an NIH RO1, PO1 or any equivalent independent research award during the term of the AST grant. If the award is received after the initiation of their AST grant, the recipient may retain AST funding if they can justify that the projects are distinct or that the grants fund different aspects of a related project. Applicants who receive an NIH RO1, PO1 or equivalent grant are requested to send their Specific Aims from both grants to the AST office along with an explanation for how the two projects are different.