Science Translation and Innovative Research (STAIR™) Grant Program: Request for Proposals (FY 2016-17)

Program Overview

The UC Davis Science Translation and Innovative Research (STAIR) Grant Program, now in its fourth year (FY 2016-17), is funded by the Office of Research and managed by Venture Catalyst.

The objective of the STAIR Grant Program is to provide targeted funding to support translational science and innovative research performed by UC Davis researchers, with the intent of demonstrating commercial potential, proof-of-concept, or other outcomes that improve or clarify the commercialization risk profile, for technologies being developed at UC Davis. Examples of outcomes that might be realized from availability of such research results include, but are not limited to, development of research or commercial prototypes, generation of translational data or research results whose development would not have been funded by traditional research grants, patent claims enablement, and enablement of more competitive SBIR/STTR grant applications by a subsequent startup that benefits from license or other intellectual property rights to the underlying technologies.

In addition to enabling outcomes such as those listed above, the program also seeks to indirectly stimulate entrepreneurial activity in Davis and the surrounding region, powered by technological advances made at UC Davis.

Eligibility Requirements

Eligible Projects

Projects eligible for STAIR funding will feature an early-stage technology that meets one or more of the following criteria:

- Has advanced beyond the fundamental research stage, but requires early proof-of-concept data to demonstrate commercial potential
- Has demonstrated successful results in the research environment and is poised for commercialization pending a specific, targeted demonstration, test result, or prototype
- Has reached a critical stage of technology development, whereby specific questions pertaining to commercialization feasibility can be answered within the resource constraints of the program

Intellectual Property Conditions

- Grant applicants must have disclosed potentially patentable IP associated with the project technology to UC Davis’ technology transfer office, InnovationAccess², via the Record of Invention (ROI) process, by the STAIR Grant proposal deadline
- All potentially patentable IP developed under a STAIR Grant project will be assigned to the University of California

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¹ STAIR is a trademark of The Regents of the University of California.
² See http://research.ucdavis.edu/industry/ia/researchers/submit/ for more information.
Any technology that is the subject of a STAIR Grant proposal that is covered by a patent or patent application that has been optioned or licensed to a company is not eligible to receive STAIR funding.

You are encouraged to contact InnovationAccess concerning IP-related eligibility.

Funding Conditions

- The total amount of requested funding support cannot exceed a total of $50,000, and the project objectives must be achievable with these funds within the grant term (one year from funds disbursement).
- Achievement of project objectives described in the grant application must not be contingent on funds that do not currently exist or that will not be covered by the allowable budget request.

Eligible Applicants

- Anyone with Principal Investigator (PI) eligibility at UC Davis is eligible to apply as a PI.
- Postdoctoral scholars and university staff researchers are eligible to submit applications as Co-PI with an eligible PI.
- One or more of the PI, Co-PI and key personnel will have participated in, or will commit to participate in, an upcoming Entrepreneurship Academy administered by the UC Davis Mike and Renee Child Institute for Innovation & Entrepreneurship (IIE) (more information at http://gsm.ucdavis.edu/entrepreneurship-academies).
- The project team will be required to participate in a commercialization and entrepreneurship-related training program – structured as up to four, two-hour clinics scheduled throughout the grant period – to be run and managed by the Institute for Innovation & Entrepreneurship.

Grant Terms and Amounts

Up to $250,000 is available for the STAIR Grant Program in Fiscal Year 2016-2017. Approved projects may be eligible for up to $50,000. Grants are for a single 12-month period from the date of grant funds disbursement. All submitted proposals must be limited in scope of work and budget, such that work can be completed within that 12-month period. Funds may be released to an awardee in one or more tranches, based on the work plan of the awardee and at the discretion of the STAIR Grant Review Committee and the Vice Chancellor of Research. The number of STAIR Grants awarded will depend on funds available in the fiscal year, the quality of the proposals received, and the discretion of the Vice Chancellor of Research.

Allowable Costs

Activities that are eligible for STAIR funding include direct costs only. Examples of direct costs that may be included in the grant request are supplies, reagents, and minor (non-capitalized) equipment.

In the 2016-17 award year, based on one-time support enabled by the State of California’s AB-2664 legislative initiative, managed by UC Davis Venture Catalyst, the STAIR program will include a pilot program which will allow a portion of STAIR awards to be used for salary support for hiring graduate
students to work on STAIR projects. Clear justification must be provided to show why the requested salary support is essential for the proposed project and is not available from existing funding sources. The PI responsible for supervising the education, training, or thesis-directed research or related activities of participating graduate student(s) must certify that participation of student(s) in the program will not adversely impact the education, training, or thesis directed activities of the student(s). Additionally, PI will agree to release such student(s) to participate in a commercialization and entrepreneurship-related training program – structured as up to four, two-hour clinics scheduled throughout the grant period – to be run and managed by the Institute for Innovation & Entrepreneurship.

Up to 20% of STAIR Grant funding requested can be used for salary support, for graduate students, post-doctoral fellows and technical research staff employees only, who are employed with the university in such capacity at the time of application submission. Clear justification must be provided to show why the requested salary support is essential for the proposed project.

As an exception to the 20% cap on salaries, if the proposed project requires software development (either to enable IP disclosed by the PI or as an integral part of an IP-supported proof-of-concept proposal), up to $10,000 may be applied to salaries for project software development personnel. If the requested software development salary support is $10,000, then the project will not be eligible for any additional salary support. Salary support is restricted to post-doctoral fellows, technical research staff employees, and graduate students (subject to requirements for eligibility of graduate students for salary support).

STAIR Grant funds can be used to hire contractors for certain activities, such as prototype fabrication or medicinal chemistry services. Contact the STAIR program if you have questions about whether an activity performed by a contractor would be eligible for funding.

For clarity, STAIR Grant support is not to be used for capital equipment, market research reports, consulting expenses, maintenance agreements, etc.

The program is generally not intended to fund research directly involving human subject testing.

Only research activities specifically described in the grant proposal will be funded. Research that has already been performed or expenses that have already been incurred in any manner at the time of grant application or grant award are not eligible for funding.

**Timeline**

- Announcement release: Friday, January 27, 2017
- Application deadline: Tuesday, March 14, 2017
- Notice of award: Anticipating mid-June, 2017

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3 Salary support requests for graduate students may include tuition and fees remission, in accordance with the UC Davis Academic Personnel Manual, Appendix II-B.
How to Apply

Application forms, along with detailed instructions, can be found at the following URL: http://research.ucdavis.edu/offices/vc/stair/. Applications can be submitted at the Research Funding Opportunities website: https://researchfunding.ucdavis.edu/ (Kerberos login required; click on “UC Davis Administered Programs” on the right-hand side of the screen to locate the STAIR Grant Program).

Program Details

Program Overview

University projects seeking to establish technology development or commercialization proof of concept, though typically very early in the product development continuum, are generally not eligible for early-stage research grant funding from traditional funding sources. This funding gap creates a gulf between exciting, early, innovative research and the generation of data necessary to demonstrate commercial potential and feasibility. Projects that fall within this funding gap may be associated with the following:

- Faculty/campus researchers who intend to start up a company based wholly, or in part, on the technology that is the subject of the STAIR Grant application
- Faculty/campus researchers who have not yet received STAIR or other funding to move the technology towards commercialization
- Faculty/campus researchers who are in the early stages of developing or enabling a patent portfolio around the STAIR Grant technology and have a need for funding to enable broader or more defensible patent claims

Early-stage proof-of-concept projects not eligible for grant support from traditional funding sources (NSF, NIH, etc.) or without existing funding or support will be given priority over projects with other forms of support (e.g., angel or venture capital funding, government grants, and other proof-of-concept grants). Leveraging other forms of support – as long as there is no overlap in funded projects under a project plan – is encouraged. In such cases, it will be important to identify an IP management plan in conjunction with InnovationAccess.

Program Administration

UC Davis Venture Catalyst – in collaboration with InnovationAccess – will be responsible for the administration and implementation of the STAIR Program. These activities include developing program documentation (program announcements, proposal solicitations, policies, application forms, etc.), managing the application process, establishing the STAIR Grant Review Committee, establishing and administering a grant application review and awardee selection process, facilitating the review and decision process, and administering the awards process in conjunction with the OR Budget & Finance department.

Intellectual Property (IP)

Grant applicants must have disclosed potentially patentable IP associated with the project technology to UC Davis’ technology transfer office, InnovationAccess, via the Record of Invention (ROI) process, by the STAIR Grant proposal deadline. All potentially patentable IP developed under a STAIR Grant project will be assigned to the University of California. Any technology that is the subject of a STAIR Grant proposal that is covered by a patent or patent application that has been optioned or licensed to a
company is not eligible to receive STAIR funding. You are encouraged to contact InnovationAccess concerning IP-related eligibility.

Conflicts-of-Interest Review

Prior to a final funding decision, OR may undertake a conflict of interest review of the proposed project.

Review Process

Overview

Venture Catalyst staff will perform an initial review of all proposals for any errors in completion or other non-substantive issues. Proposals will then be provided electronically to the STAIR Grant Review Committee for assessment and scoring. The STAIR Grant Review Committee will score proposals on review criteria identified below. Based on quality of proposals received and the total budget request, the STAIR Grant Review Committee will recommend a number of applications (expected to be approximately 5, though the number may be higher or lower) for approval by the UC Davis Vice Chancellor of Research.

STAIR Grant Review Committee Selection Process

Proposals will be reviewed on a competitive basis by the STAIR Grant Review Committee. This committee will be composed of a core group of reviewers (Standing Committee) and may be supplemented with ad hoc members where additional domain expertise is required. The Standing Committee will include industry experts representing corporate, investor, and entrepreneurial expertise; Office of Research staff; and campus knowledge experts qualified to evaluate a combination of business and scientific translational merits of the proposals received.

Reviewers will be obligated to protect the confidentiality of proposals and will be expected to disqualify themselves in cases of conflict of interest. Venture Catalyst anticipates providing summarized anonymized reviewer comments to all applicants.

Review Criteria: Specific Elements

Applications will be scored on a scale of “1” (lowest) to “10” (highest). The criteria are as follows:

- Technical merit
  - Does the project address an unmet need?
  - Is the need clearly defined and is the end user of the technology clearly identified?
  - Does the project team have scientific or technological expertise required by the proposal?
  - Is there a reasonable likelihood of achieving project objectives, given the available financial and technical resources identified or anticipated?
  - Is the IP clearly described?
  - Have there been prior licensing events? If so, how do they affect IP strategy?
  - Are there any obvious IP-related concerns or issues with respect to the proposed work or potential commercial directions anticipated?
Commercial potential

- Has a market or market niche been defined for a successful product or service resulting from the research? If not, is there another market space for which the research described may be more applicable?
- Does the anticipated value of the product in the marketplace outweigh the costs of product development, production and marketing?
- How well has the competitive landscape been explored or described?
- How good is the fit between the project, its commercial potential, and investor interest in the space?
- Has the proposal identified potential licensees, corporate partners, or other companies with interest or commercial fit with the technology being developed?

Budget, milestones, and proof-of-concept

- Does the proposal indicate clear recognition of the steps needed to translate the project from research towards commercialization?
- Is the overall strategy well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the project?
- Are potential problems, milestones, and deliverables clearly presented?
- Does the approach contain any prior proof-of-concept findings or a target product profile?
- Does the budget align with—and is it sufficient to achieve—the proposal’s objectives?
- Is the proposed project at a stage where early proof-of-concept experiments funded by the award will result in reducing the technical risk associated with the technology?

Award Process and Post-Award Administration

Prior to award disbursement, Venture Catalyst will verify that the awardee is still eligible, based on criteria established in the RFP. (For example, IP must not be licensed or optioned at the time of the award; proposed research is not covered by alternative funding; etc.)

The amount of requested funding support cannot exceed a total of $50,000. The Office of Research reserves the right to reduce the final amount of funding approved, including salary requests, when making a final determination of grant award. The STAIR Grant Review Committee will conduct a final review of 1) proposed milestones, and 2) fit with the requested budget, prior to a final funding decision.

Funds will be disbursed only after the first meeting, to be facilitated by Venture Catalyst staff, with the assigned mentor and sign-off on the proposed project milestones. Funds awarded are to be expended within 12 months of such meeting. On a case-by-case basis, upon submission of reasonable justification by the PI and at the discretion of the Vice Chancellor of Research, a single no-cost extension, not to exceed 6 months, may be provided.

Awardees will be expected to engage with a STAIR Grant mentor or mentors on a regular basis and submit reports indicating progress towards or achievement of project milestones. Progress report content and timelines will be discussed and agreed upon prior to release of funds and at a minimum will include quarterly accounting and mid-year progress and final reports.
As a condition of the award, awardees will be expected to:

- Meet quarterly (in person or by telephone) with mentors
- Provide quarterly accounting to indicate use of funds on the project in the achievement of project milestones
- Submit a mid-year progress report that includes milestone tracking and a clear accounting of the use of granted funds in the furtherance of the project and achievement of proposed project milestones
- Participate as the entire project team (PI/Co-PI and any included graduate students, post-doctoral fellows and technical research staff employees) in a commercialization and entrepreneurship related training program – structured as up to four, two-hour clinics scheduled throughout the grant period – to be run and managed by the Institute for Innovation & Entrepreneurship
- Participate in an Entrepreneurship Academy run by the Institute for Innovation & Entrepreneurship (PI/Co-PI or key personnel)
- Participate in a mini-symposium in 2018 to present project results to-date

At its discretion (or that of the Vice Chancellor of Research), and based on review of the proposal and related budget and timelines, the STAIR Grant Review Committee may determine that funding is to be provided in tranches aligned with the proposed proof-of-concept milestones submitted.

**Contact Information**

For any questions related to the STAIR Grant process, please send email to stairgrant@ucdavis.edu.

Potential applicants should send email indicating their interest to stairgrant@ucdavis.edu, so that we may contact you to provide updates, special announcements, or other communications (e.g., upcoming information sessions).