

UC Davis Science Translation and Innovative Research (STAIR™) 2024 Proof-of-Concept Grant Program: Tomorrow’s Health Care Today

Request for Proposals (FY24)

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¹STAIR is a trademark of The Regents of the University of California.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The UC Davis Science Translation and Innovative Research (STAIR™) Grant is one of the technology proof-of-concept programs managed by Venture Catalyst at UC Davis. Over the past ten annual cycles, the STAIR Program has awarded over 70 awards; core funding for the STAIR Grant was provided by the Vice Chancellor for Research with supplemental funding provided by Innovation & Technology Commercialization (Venture Catalyst and InnovationAccess) as well as campus and industry partners. **This year, in partnership with the UC Davis Health Ventures Office, the STAIR™ proof of concept program is focusing on the theme of *Tomorrow's Health Care Today* funding interdisciplinary innovations providing breakthrough solutions for problems encountered in human health.**

Early-stage technologies from university research are often perceived as too uncertain or too risky to attract funding or partners to translate into commercial products or services. The lack of accessible funding creates a gap between basic research and early-stage commercialization efforts. The STAIR™ Grant helps bridge this gap by providing funding and resources to translate basic UC Davis research with commercial potential by demonstrating proof-of-concept and establishing market viability, thus de-risking the innovation. The ultimate objective of the program is to develop technologies that attract entrepreneurs, industry, and investors willing to commercialize UC Davis technologies, resulting in societal and economic impacts aligned with our Land Grant status.

Successful projects will advance human health-focused UC Davis technologies towards commercialization by achieving specific research and development milestones. Outcomes that might be enabled by STAIR Grant funding include, but are not limited to:

- Generating translational data or research results to create more robust foundational intellectual property (IP), therefore strengthening patent claims
- Testing commercial and market feasibility
- Building a working prototype or second iteration prototype to prepare for commercialization
- Demonstrating scale-up development potential that would be compelling to external partners
- Producing results that support more competitive Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) grant applications and/or hitting a technical de-risking milestone that would make the technology more appealing to partners or investors

A key to achieving translational impact is mentoring provided by industry experts to STAIR Grant awardees and finalists. Feedback from industry experts through the review and mentoring processes has been invaluable to the program and to UC Davis researchers as they design and implement research plans to increase the commercial potential of UC Davis technology.

In addition to enabling outcomes such as those listed above, the program also helps develop an innovative and entrepreneurial culture that extends the benefits of UC Davis research activities beyond the boundaries of the university.

KEY DATES

RFP Issue Date:	February 5, 2024
RFP Closing Date:	April 1, 2024
Committee Online Application Review Begins:	April 16, 2024
Committee Review Session for Selection of Awardees:	May 22-23, 2024
Award(s) Announcement:	Mid-June, 2024
Funds Disbursement:	Early July, 2024

FOCUS AREAS

Proposed projects will be awarded based on their focus on solutions applying to at least one of this year's **six focus areas**. These categories are chosen not only because they are areas of excellence at UC Davis, but because of their interdisciplinary nature. **Applicants from all disciplines are encouraged to apply** if they have translational research in one of these areas:

1. **Food as Medicine & Metabolic Health (including Healthy Aging)**
2. **Cell and Gene Therapy**
3. **Neuroscience**
4. **Oncology**
5. **Digital Health**
6. **Clinical Imaging**

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Eligible Projects and Applicants

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

- Has advanced beyond the basic research stage, but requires early proof-of-concept data to show feasibility for 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
- Has identified milestones that would overcome a specific hurdle to commercialization, enabling a technology to become more attractive for either licensing to an existing company or enabling the formation of a startup company within 1-2 years of project completion

Anyone with Principal Investigator (PI) status at UC Davis is eligible to apply as a project PI. Postdoctoral scholars and university staff researchers are eligible to submit applications as Co-PI with an eligible PI, pending appropriate "PI-exception" paperwork to be submitted with the proposal.

Proposals may come from a PI in any discipline but must include participation of a member of UC Davis Health, the School of Medicine, or the School of Nursing.

Disclosing Funding Sources

Leveraging other funding sources is not required for this grant but is encouraged—both during and after STAIR™—as long as there is no overlap in the aims for funded projects under the project plan and the delineation from aims under other funding is explained. If the project includes leveraged funds, it will be important to identify an IP management plan through coordination with InnovationAccess (the Technology Transfer Office) and describe it in the proposal.

Intellectual Property Conditions

A project proposed in a grant application must address technology or business model innovation with potentially monetizable intellectual property (IP), including but not limited to patents, replicable best practices, and/or know-how. All potential IP developed under a STAIR Grant project will be assigned to the University of California.

If the technology has not been previously disclosed to InnovationAccess (the Technology Transfer Office) then the applicant must submit a Record of Invention, or if the technology is too nascent, at a minimum participate in a Pre-Application Meeting with an InnovationAccess staff member before the STAIR Grant proposal deadline. If you opt to not yet file a Record of Invention, the purpose of the Pre-Application Meeting will be to provide input on alignment with STAIR Grant technology commercialization objectives so that you might propose a more competitive grant and to assess whether the proposed project may cover potentially patentable IP. To request a Pre-Application Meeting, please email stairgrant@ucdavis.edu with the following information: Name, E-mail address, Phone #, Department/College, Availability for at least 2-3 time slots.

Projects where UCD's existing IP agreements would prohibit it from attracting new entrepreneurs, industry, and investors willing to commercialize resulting inventions and know-how are not eligible to receive STAIR Grant funding unless new intellectual property created as part of the STAIR funding would be unencumbered. Applicants are encouraged to contact InnovationAccess with stairgrant@ucdavis.edu in CC regarding IP-related eligibility.

GRANT TERMS AND AMOUNTS

All submitted proposals must be limited in scope of work and budget, such that work can be completed within a 12-month period. Up to \$500,000 is available for the STAIR Grant Program for the 2024 Cycle. Approved projects may be eligible for between \$70,000-100,000 (see Review Criteria, below).

The number of STAIR Grants awarded will depend on funds available in the fiscal year, and the number of proposals will be category-agnostic (it is possible that one category could fund 2-3 strong proposals and one category could have no awards if those proposals are not competitive). Ultimately selection will be based on the quality of the proposals received, and the discretion of the UC Davis Health Ventures Office. 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, Venture Catalyst, and the UC Davis Health Ventures Office.

ALLOWABLE COSTS

As this grant is internal to UC Davis and UCDH, STAIR Grant funding may be used only to cover direct costs. Examples of direct costs that may be included in the grant request are specific types of labor, supplies, reagents, and non-capital equipment.

Up to \$50,000 of STAIR Grant funding requested may be used for salary support for post-doctoral fellows, technical research staff, and students¹ employed at 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. If the proposal includes funding for graduate students, 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 the student(s) in the program will not adversely impact their education, training, or thesis-directed activities. Additionally, PI will agree to release such employees to participate in an Entrepreneurship Academy managed by the Mike & Renee Child Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship or an equivalent structured entrepreneurial training program approved by Venture Catalyst.

As an exception, if the proposed project requires software development (either to enable IP being developed or as an integral part of an IP-supported proof-of-concept proposal), an additional \$25,000 may be eligible to be applied to salaries for project software development personnel/contracting.

STAIR Grant funds can be used to hire contractors for certain activities, such as prototype fabrication, third-party technical validation testing, or medicinal chemistry services. PIs should identify potential service providers in the proposal. Awardees must secure an effort commitment within three months of notification of award, so the team can complete all work described in the proposal within the award period.

STAIR Grant support may not be used for capital equipment (\$5,000 or more)², market research reports, business consulting expenses, maintenance agreements, or publication costs. Travel costs are generally excluded from eligibility, except in rare cases; for example, academic conferences would be ineligible but attending a patient-centric convening or industry conference *might* be permissible if a justification is provided for why it is essential for de-risking the innovation described in the project.

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.

The previous list is not exhaustive and applicants are encouraged to discuss any questions on budget items with us prior to application submission.

FUNDING CONDITIONS

1. The total amount of requested funding support cannot exceed \$100,000, and the project objectives must be achievable with awarded funds within a 12-month period following first funds disbursement. Project objectives described in the grant application must be achievable within the proposed budget request and not contingent on other funds.

¹ Salary support requests for graduate students may include tuition and fees remission, in accordance with the UC Davis Academic Personnel Manual, Appendix II-B. This counts towards the allowable salary amount.

² Defined per UC Davis Policy and Procedure Manual, Ch. 350, Section 50:
<https://ucdavispolicy.ellucid.com/documents/view/489/509/>

2. Funds may only be used for eligible expenses (see *Allowable Costs* section below). The awardee's department will be responsible for covering any expenses deemed ineligible.
3. Other post-award reporting, advising session, and training requirements are articulated further below.

HOW TO APPLY

Application form, along with detailed instructions, can be found at the following URL:

<https://itc.ucdavis.edu/stair-grant-program/>

Applications can be submitted through Office of Research's InfoReady grant application platform at (<https://ucdavis.infoready4.com/#competitionDetail/1930276>) (Kerberos login required).

Potential applicants should send an email indicating their interest to stairgrant@ucdavis.edu, so that the Proof-of-Concept & Innovation Programs Manager may contact you to provide updates, special announcements, or other communications (e.g., upcoming information sessions).

REVIEW PROCESS

Overview

Venture Catalyst staff will perform an initial review of all proposals for any errors in completion or other non-substantive issues. If errors are substantial and the proposal is generally non-responsive to the criteria below, Venture Catalyst reserves the right to not send it for further review to the external panels. If the proposals pass the initial screen and/or have submitted the minor corrections requested, Venture Catalyst will then provide proposals electronically to the STAIR Grant Review Committee for assessment and scoring. The STAIR Grant Review Committee will score proposals on review criteria identified below. Following the online review, a group of finalist proposals in each of the six Focus Areas will be identified based on the reviews. The Review Committee will further evaluate these finalist proposals at an in-person or virtual meeting.

Based on quality of proposals received and the total budget request, the STAIR Grant Review Committee will recommend a few applications (expected to be approximately six, though the number may be higher or lower) for approval by the UC Davis Health Ventures Office.

Prior to a final funding decision, the UC Davis Health Ventures Office may undertake a conflict of interest review of the proposed project and an HR compliance / disciplinary check for the PI.

Venture Catalyst anticipates providing summarized anonymized reviewer comments to all applicants based on the review criteria.

STAIR Grant Review Committee

The STAIR Grant Review Committee will include industry representatives with corporate, investor, and entrepreneurial expertise. All reviewers will be obligated to protect the confidentiality of proposals and will disqualify themselves in cases of conflict of interest.

Review Criteria

Reviewers will score applications on a scale of “1” (lowest) to “9” (highest). Review criteria fall into five broad categories: 1) Program Fit 2) Technical Merit, 3) Commercial Potential, 4) Budget, Timelines, Milestones, and 5) Team. Applicants should be prepared to answer the following questions in their proposal:

Program Fit

Does the proposal fit with program objectives, focus areas, and eligibility?

The technology or project is at a stage where proof-of-concept funding will substantially enable next steps towards technology commercialization; and the project reflects a gap in early technology development with potential for commercial impact.

How well is the “inflection point” articulated: How a use of funds will enable specific milestones that de-risk the technology to make it more useful? Why were those milestones selected?

Technical Merit

How clearly does the proposal describe the proposed research and the anticipated results?

Does the proposal clearly describe and provide sufficient prior proof-of-concept or enabling research results to support the work proposed?

Commercial Potential

Does the proposal effectively describe the product or service that would be enabled by the proposed work and end-user served?

How well does the proposal identify a large market size, the reasons the market needs this solution, and how the product fits within the competitive landscape?

To what extent does the proposal articulate who the eventual research partners, acquirers of the technology, or buying customers could be?

How effectively does the proposal present the current intellectual property status and intellectual property strategy?

Milestones, Budget, Timelines

Did the applicant include TWO budget versions with a brief description of how milestones could be modified based on available funds:

What could be accomplished towards the aims if the proposal were funded at \$65-70,000?

What could be accomplished to de-risk the technology further if the proposal was funded at \$90-100,000?

Is there a reasonable likelihood of achieving project objectives, given the available financial and technical resources identified or anticipated?

How appropriate is the timeline presented for achieving the proposal’s objectives?

Team

Does the project team have scientific or technological expertise required by the proposal?

Does the project team demonstrate experience with, or an interest in, commercialization efforts? This might include but not be limited to industry collaborations, startups, entrepreneurially curious team members, etc.

Does the project team include at least one person from the School of Medicine, UC Davis Health, or the School of Nursing participating in at least some capacity? If they are playing a smaller supporting role, is it described?

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.

The amount of requested funding support should include 2 budget scenarios, as described in the criteria section, above. The UC Davis Health Ventures Office reserves the right to adjust 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 must only be used for eligible expenses (see *Allowable Costs* section above); the awardee's department will be responsible for covering any expenses deemed ineligible.

All awardees will be assigned industry mentors from the Review Committee to provide guidance on technology commercialization and work with the project team over the grant period. The Venture Catalyst team will select mentors based on factors such as professional background, technical expertise aligned with the project, and comments provided in the review process.

Awardees will be expected to engage with STAIR Grant mentors on a regular basis and submit brief quarterly 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 progress, and final reports.

Funds will be disbursed only after the first meeting with the assigned mentors (facilitated by Venture Catalyst staff). UC Davis Health Ventures Office may reserve the right to tranche the funding or funds may be issued in a lump sum. Funds awarded are to be expended within 12 months of release of funding from the UC Davis Health Ventures Office to the PI's department (approximately by July or August 2025). On a case-by-case basis, upon submission of reasonable justification by the PI and at the discretion of the UC Davis Health Ventures Office, a single no-cost extension of not more than 6 months may be provided.

As a condition of the award, awardees will be expected to:

- During the grant period, send at least 2 team members to the UC Entrepreneurship Academy workshops, apply to the Big Bang! competition, participate in a Regional I-Corps Method bootcamp, *or* an equivalent commercialization-focused training. PI/co-PI and key personnel (including any graduate students involved in the project) are the usual participants.
- Meet quarterly (in-person or via zoom) with mentor(s).
- Provide quarterly accounting to indicate use of funds on the project in the achievement of project milestones.

- Submit a final project report that summarizes technical achievements and discusses commercial next steps, within 2 months of the end of the grant.
- Participate in a mini-symposium in 2025 to present project results to-date and commercialization-related outcomes.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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