UC Davis STAIR Grant Program (2018-19)  
Executive Summary

The Science Translation and Innovative Research (STAIR) grant program, managed by Venture Catalyst, is designed to provide funding to support translational science and innovative research performed by UC Davis researchers. The goal of the programs is to demonstrate early proof-of-concept and commercial potential or feasibility for technologies being developed with the intent of commercial translation. Examples of outcomes that might be realized from research results enabled by this funding include development of research or early commercial prototypes, generation of translational data from experiments typically not fundable by traditional research grants, enablement of patent claims, promotion of more competitive licensing opportunities or SBIR/STTR grant applications by subsequent startups benefiting from license rights to the underlying technologies. This program is one element of a suite of Venture Catalyst programs designed to stimulate translational research and facilitate early engagement by entrepreneurial researchers with campus programs that support technology commercialization, including those co-sponsored with the UC Davis Mike & Renee Child Institute for Innovation & Entrepreneurship, as well as external partners.

The STAIR Grant application period for 2018-19 opened on Wednesday, January 23, 2019 through the solicitation of a completed application form and submission of a 3-page research proposal (not including biographical sketches, budget justification, milestones, citations and references). Briefings and information sessions were organized by the Office of Research to raise awareness of the programs and answer questions regarding objectives, eligibility, and process. Applications were due on March 13, 2019. A total of 38 eligible STAIR applications were received by the application deadline.

Following a rigorous review process involving external industry reviewers (investors, company professionals and entrepreneurs) and internal domain experts, 16 of the STAIR proposals were selected as finalists during the initial review process. Of these 16, after further in-person reviewer deliberation, evaluation and ranking, 6 were selected for award based on their potential for future high-impact discoveries and innovation, as judged by their technical merit, commercial potential, and alignment of budget and milestones with translational enablement. A total of $409,005 was allocated to the STAIR program: $259,005 was provided by the Office of Research and an additional $150,000 in funding provided by the School of Veterinary Medicine ($75,000), College of Biological Sciences ($25,000), College of Engineering ($25,000), and the Innovation Institute for Food and Health ($25,000). The funding period for STAIR grants is one year through July 2019. Over $1.7 million in total support was requested by principal investigators from over 26 different departments, representing a broad range of schools and colleges, including CA&ES (10), COE (8), CBS (1), L&S (2), SOM (12), and SVM (5).

A proactive mentor engagement plan has been developed, which involves assignment of industry mentors to each of the 16 STAIR finalists (which includes mentoring award recipients on commercialization milestones and timelines), and follow-up with all applicants to provide summarized reviewer comments and facilitate access to innovation resources. The mentor engagement process will be facilitated by Venture Catalyst, in collaboration with InnovationAccess. Additionally, the UC Davis Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship is providing support for STAIR Grant award recipients through its Entrepreneurship Academies.

The objectives of the STAIR program align with major goals of the University to foster a vibrant community of learning and scholarship, drive innovation at the frontiers of knowledge, and nurture a sustainable future and propel economic vitality.