UC Davis STAIR and DIAL Grant Programs (2017-18)

Executive Summary

The Science Translation and Innovative Research (STAIR) and Data, Informatics & Application Launch (DIAL) grant programs, managed by Venture Catalyst, are 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, SBIR/STTR grant applications by subsequent startups benefiting from license rights to the underlying technologies, or development of user interfaces that enhance the commercialization potential of algorithms, software or analytical tools. These programs are 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 and DIAL Grant application period for 2017-18 opened on Tuesday, January 24, 2018 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 12, 2018. A total of 29 STAIR and 4 DIAL applications were received by the application deadline—all of which met eligibility requirements.

Following a rigorous review process involving external industry reviewers (investors, company professionals and entrepreneurs) and internal domain experts, 15 of the STAIR proposals were selected as finalists during the initial review process. Of these 15, 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 $300,000 was allocated to the STAIR program: $250,000 was provided by the Office of Research and $50,000 was provided by TechAccel, with funding capped at $50,000 per successful STAIR grant recipient. TechAccel has partnered with UC Davis and Venture Catalyst to support translational research, and is a unique investment firm with a focus on plant and animal agriculture, animal health and nutrition, food safety and quality, and crop processing. For the DIAL Grant program, $40,000 of funding was made available through funding obtained by the university from the California State legislature AB 2664 program, with a cap of $20,000 per successful DIAL grant recipient. The funding period for STAIR grants is one year and for DIAL grants, through May 2019. Over $1.5 million in total support was requested by principal investigators from over 25 different departments, representing a broad range of schools and colleges, including CA&ES (5), COE (5), CBS (3), L&S (1), SOM (15), and SVM (4). The budget requests from the 6 STAIR and 2 DIAL award recipients totaled $339,528.

A proactive mentor engagement plan has been developed, which involves assignment of industry mentors to each of the 15 STAIR finalists and all 4 DIAL applicants (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 and the Office of Corporate Relations, as necessary. Additionally, the UC Davis Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship is providing support for STAIR and DIAL grant award recipients through its Entrepreneurship Academies and commercialization clinics, the latter of which are also funded through AB 2664.

The objectives of the STAIR and DIAL programs 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.