ASHI Early Career Investigator Award (ECIA) 2023

The aim of the Early Career Investigator Award (ECIA) is to support future research leaders who are committed to conducting impactful basic or translational science research. This program offers ASHI members an award of up to $40,000 for research related to histocompatibility or immunogenetics in various disciplines such as transplantation, cancer, autoimmunity, infectious disease, disease association, or pharmacogenomics.

1. Eligibility Criteria:

   Candidate:
   1. Current ASHI domestic and international members at the time of application submission; applicants may apply for membership at https://www.ashi-hla.org/page/membership
   2. Must hold an MD, PhD, or equivalent
   3. Nominee has completed his/her doctoral degree no more than 10 years prior to the award activation date and recently achieved junior faculty position or acquired postdoctoral fellowship. Candidates whose career level exceeds 10 years will be considered if they meet the Early-Stage Investigator status as described by the NIH. This extension consideration should be described in the cover letter.
   4. Candidates may not have successfully obtained an NIH (or non-US equivalent) R01 or U01 award or multi-project application (P01) as a PD/PI by the start of the funding period. However, applicants who are PIs on subawards, or listed as Co-investigators on another PI’s award, are eligible.
   5. Demonstrated ability to conduct basic research related to immunogenetics of transplantation, cancer, autoimmunity, infectious disease, disease association, allogeneic cellular therapy, or pharmacogenomics.
   6. Prior ASHI ECIA Awardees are not eligible. This award can only be received once.

Project Scope:

1. Proposals should test a clear, novel scientific hypothesis related to immunology; stem cell, organ or tissue transplantation; histocompatibility; HLA; allogeneic cellular therapy; and/or immunogenetics.
2. New assay development may be considered only if:
   1) the project will also test its clinical validity (i.e. correlation with outcomes) or the assay will be used in this project to ask a new scientific question AND
   2) the assay is not already available as a commercial kit or is an otherwise standard technique.
3. Proposals that consist of routine clinical laboratory quality activities (e.g. commercial kit validation, comparing the performance of two assays, development/improvement of a laboratory IT tool, retrospective QA/QI projects, etc.) are out of scope for this award.
4. The award is intended to support new projects or new directions for ongoing projects. Scopes of research and budget should not comprise research that is already funded. However, it is permissible to propose to perform additional analyses or studies that are based in ongoing work—for example, additional funding to increase sample size or to supplement uncovered personnel effort. In these cases, the itemized budget justification should clearly explain how this award and related current funding cover unique, nonoverlapping aspects of an ongoing project.

5. The award period is one year with possibility of non-competitive renewal for two total years, contingent on an annual progress leading to abstract and peer-reviewed publication submissions per the post-award requirements below.

2. Application process

Full application

All listed components of the Application Packet below are required.

1. First page of the application packet
2. ASHI membership number
3. A one-page cover letter that includes the details below:
   - Project title
   - Applicant name and contact information
   - Brief attestation that the applicant meets the eligibility criteria, and if applicable a statement addressing eligibility for an ESI status extension (see NIH’s notice NOT-OD-09-034)
   - Contact information for Mentor, Division Director or Department Chair
   - Signature under the participation statement.
4. Research Strategy: no more than 2 pages, at least 11-pt Arial or 12-pt Times New Roman, not less than 0.5” page margins, that provides an overview of the project, including:
   - Project aims
   - Background
   - Significance (including relevance to ASHI’s mission statement and the ECIA criteria as defined above)
   - Methods
   - Timeline (project scope must be completed within 1 year, and the candidate can describe further work if the award is renewed to 2 years)
5. References/Citations (not included in the two-page limit for the Strategy)
6. Biographical Sketch of Applicant
Please use the standard NIH biosketch form and do not exceed five pages. The NIH biosketch now includes a Personal Statement. As part of this statement, please describe how the proposed research agenda relates to and will help facilitate the investigator’s career path.

7. Budget and Budget Justification as shown in the application packet: no more than 2 pages
   - Budgets are evaluated based on:
     o Whether they are within the funding limits. Projects that exceed the specified limit will not be reviewed.
     o Whether the resources are appropriate for the work proposed.
     o Projects with budget limits that are justified appropriately within the limit (e.g. a secondary analysis) may be given additional consideration.
     o Budget Justification should also include a list of current and pending Other Support, including training grants, with a statement indicating 1) “No Other Support”, 2) “No overlap” and/or 3) an explanation of how the proposed project is distinct scientifically from, or is an extension of, each currently funding project.
     o PI salary support is not permitted; however, salary and fringe for laboratory technicians or computational personnel will be considered.
     o For post-doctoral applicants, the Other Support section should indicate whether the candidate’s mentor has any duplicate funding for the proposed work, including for any requested salary.
     o Indirect and institutional overhead costs are not permitted.

8. Letters of Support (no more than 2 pages each):
   - Each submitted proposal must include a letter of support from the applicant’s primary research mentor (if post-doctoral applicant) or department chair (if junior faculty applicant), including confirmation of protected time and available resources to complete the project.
   - For post-doctoral applicants, the mentor’s letter should additionally address how the objectives of the proposal are distinct from those of the PI, and comment on the role of the trainee in preparing the proposal and degree of independence in developing and writing the aims and research strategy.
   - The letter must also indicate that the applicant’s institution is aware of and approves submission of the application.
   - Additional support letters may be included but are not required.

3. Proposal Review Criteria
   - Full proposals will be reviewed and scored according to the rubric below. Reviewers will prepare a brief summary of comments to be sent to each applicant. Funding decisions will be based on the results of the study section review.
   - Incomplete submissions and application materials that exceed the requested page limits will NOT be considered for review
1. **Significance and Innovation:**
   - Does the proposal address an important problem related to immunogenetics, transplantation, or a related field?
   - Is the importance of the problem clearly stated?
   - Does the proposed approach have a likelihood of success and high level of contribution to the histocompatibility and immunogenetics field?
   - Is the proposed project relevant to the ASHI mission statement and ECIA criteria?

2. **Candidate:**
   - Does the candidate have a track record of publication?
   - Are supporting materials clear and concise?
   - Does the candidate show outstanding promise and commitment to contribute new knowledge in the fields of histocompatibility and immunogenetics?

3. **Environment:**
   - Does the candidate have access to the necessary lab equipment, software and space to perform basic science research?
   - Is the candidate supported by the PI or institution with time and resources to carry out the proposed study?
   - Appropriate estimations of computing support and resources (data storage, expertise for data analysis) if applicable

4. **Approach:**
   - Will experimental approach answer the proposed question(s)?
   - Are the methods including statistical analyses appropriate?
   - Are appropriate controls included?
   - Are the proposed experiments feasible within 1-2 years?
   - Is there evidence of existing or intent to obtain appropriate animal or human subjects research approvals upon award activation?
   - Description and timeline for how project data and any new tools developed will be disseminated

**Conflict of Interest:**
- Any member of the review committee shall declare any direct conflict of interested with an applicant and will abstain from discussing, voting and/or scoring that application. Grading is based on the consensus of the remaining voting members.

**4. Post-Award Reporting Guidelines**
- Funding decisions are expected by email no later than September 2023, and will be presented in person at the annual ASHI Meeting.
• Attendance at the ASHI 2023 Annual Meeting for award recognition
• Awardees are responsible for obtaining and maintaining compliance with applicable human subjects (IRB), biosafety and/or animal (IACUC) oversight approvals before commencing the study
• Submission of at least one abstract to the ASHI Annual Meeting in each year of the project.
• An interim progress report at 9 months into the funding period (with consideration at this time for renewal).
• Final progress report within 3 months of completion of the funding period.
• Submission of at least 1 peer-reviewed publication within 1 year of completion of funding.
• Acknowledgement of the Award as a funding source upon presentation and publication of data
• Applicant should make project data and developed tools freely available to the research community post publication within the PI’s institutional guidelines and restrictions.