

FRANK J. TUSA PILOT AWARD FOR RESEARCH IN HEPATIC ENCEPHALOPATHY 2026 REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

Issued August 15, 2025

AASLD Foundation's Mission:

The American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD) Foundation invests in innovative hepatology research and in the people who study and treat liver disease.

Grant Overview:

The purpose of this award is to support new, highly innovative research ideas that focus on interventions to improve outcomes for persons living with Hepatic Encephalopathy (HE) from liver diseases. Responsive projects will address highly innovative research ideas that have a clear potential to produce high-impact results, but that have little or no preliminary data to successfully compete for funding from other sources. This award is not intended to support ongoing research in the applicant's laboratory, but rather support new ideas or approaches that have not previously been studied.

Who Can Apply: [Early-Stage Investigators](#) (as defined by the NIH) to Associate Professor Level Faculty
Type: Clinical, Translational, and Outcomes Research
Award Term: July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027 (1 Year)
Award Amount: \$50,000

The application deadline for this award is **11:59 pm Eastern time, December 8, 2025**. Applications received after the deadline will not be reviewed.

Funding for this award is made possible through the Frank J. Tusa Fund.

Key Dates:

| | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| RFA Posted | Aug 15, 2025 |
| Application Deadline | Dec 8, 2025 |
| Peer Review | Dec 2025 – Mar 2026 |
| Earliest Notification Date | Apr 1, 2026 |
| Earliest Funding Start Date | Jul 1, 2026 |

Research Objectives and Selection Criteria:

AASLD Foundation is soliciting innovative, small-scale exploratory research grant proposals focused interventions to improve outcomes for persons living with Hepatic Encephalopathy (HE) from liver diseases. Funding is meant to allow investigators to test new ideas or methods to gather sufficient data to apply for longer-term grants. Projects must include direct clinical interaction (clinical), patient clinical data (outcomes), or patient samples (translational). Proposed research may include pragmatic studies.

Applicants will be evaluated based upon their background, their commitment to a career in hepatology research, the scientific merit of their research project and the environment in which they will conduct the project.

- Project feasibility, an appropriate environment to conduct the project, and relevant collaborators will strengthen the application.
- Work proposed must clearly be able to be accomplished in one year.
- Highly innovative, high-risk/high-reward projects will be prioritized.

Applications will be reviewed based on the written materials submitted. **Incomplete applications and applications that fail to adhere strictly to the instructions (including the submission deadline and page limitations) will not be reviewed.** All decisions are final.

Eligibility

In order to be eligible for this award, the applicant must adhere to the following guidelines:

1. The applicant must:

- Be an Early-Stage Investigator ([as defined by the NIH](#)) up to faculty at or below the rank of Associate Professor/equivalent.
- Be a member of the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD) at the time of award application and maintain active membership for the duration of the award period.
- Be able to devote at least 20% effort to the research project on which this application is based.
- Be sponsored by a public or private non-profit institution accredited in the United States, Canada or Mexico engaged in health care and health-related research. Individuals employed at the NIH, FDA, and CDC are not eligible to apply.
- If the applicant is below the rank of Associate Professor/equivalent, they must have a mentor or co-mentor who is an AASLD member in good standing at the time of application and for the duration of the award period. Mentors are **not** required for Associate Professor/equivalent level applicants.
- Not hold federal funding (e.g., U, P, R, K, VA Merit, VA CDA) **unless** they are able to justify the following in their application:
 - i. The project is truly completely distinct and non-overlapping from existing funding.
 - ii. The proposed work cannot be completed using existing funds.

2. The proposed project must:

- Focus on research on interventions to improve outcomes for persons living with Hepatic Encephalopathy (HE) from liver diseases.
- Be hypothesis based.
- Include only 1-2 aims that can be completed in the one-year award term.
- Include direct clinical interaction (clinical), patient clinical data (outcomes), or patient samples (translational). Proposed research may include pragmatic studies.
- Not be an established project with alternate funding.
- Be conducted at the sponsoring institution within the United States, Canada, or Mexico.

3. Application limits:

- **There is no restriction on the number of applicants an institution can sponsor each cycle, but only one applicant may be funded per distinct department within each institution in this award category.**
- Applicants may only apply for one AASLD Foundation research award per calendar year.
- Eligible applicants in this category may also apply for the AASLD Foundation Advanced/Transplant Hepatology Award in the same calendar year.

Use of Funds:

Total Award Amount: \$50,000

- Award funds of \$50,000 will be provided in a single payment upon grant initiation.

Funds are unrestricted for direct project expenditures, except that equipment acquisition of \$5,000 or greater requires prior written approval from AASLD Foundation.

PIs will receive complimentary registration for The Liver Meeting during their one-year grant term.

No indirect costs, registration fees, or travel expenses are allowed.

How Award funds are allocated to allowable costs is at the discretion of the sponsoring institution. For example, while this award requires a minimum of 20% effort toward the funded research project, it is not required that PI salary must be directly supported by Foundation Award funds.

Unexpended funds at the end of the Award term must be promptly returned to AASLD Foundation.

Reporting Requirements:

All reports to be provided by the PI for this award shall be in writing and acceptable to the Foundation as to the type of content and format. Failure by the PI to provide Research Progress or Fiscal Accountability Reports could jeopardize both the PI's and Institution's future eligibility to receive Foundation awards funding for other projects.

| Written Report Type(s) | Reporting Period | Due to Foundation |
|---|----------------------------|-------------------|
| Final Research Progress Report and Fiscal Accountability Report | Jul 1, 2026 – Jun 30, 2027 | Aug 31, 2027 |

PIs are further required to attend virtual meetings to present information on their funded project to representatives of the Frank J. Tusa Fund as follows:

| Virtual Presentation | Meeting Timeframe |
|---|----------------------------|
| Introductory Meeting and Project Overview | Aug 1, 2026 – Sep 30, 2026 |
| Final Progress Report | Aug 1, 2027 – Sep 30, 2027 |

PIs will be responsible for promptly responding to requests from the Foundation for updates on their scientific accomplishments and participate in all efforts to track outcomes associated with this funding, including responding to annual post-award impact update surveys for up to five years following completion of their award.

PIs must also provide the Foundation with a digital copy of any published report of research sponsored in part or in full by the Foundation within one year of publication.

Intellectual Property:

Applications for patents related to discoveries or inventions resulting from research during the award period will be subject to the policies of the Institution where the work is performed. However, the PI must notify the Foundation in advance of the intent to file such an application.

Application Resources:

AASLD Foundation Research Award Glossary: www.aasldfoundation.org/glossary

Applicant FAQ: <http://www.aasldfoundation.org/awardsFAQ>

Previous Funding Programs Eligibility List: <http://www.aasldfoundation.org/eligibility>

NIH Biosketch Format: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/biosketch.htm>

NIH Other Support Format: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/othersupport.htm>

NIH PHS 398 Detailed Initial Budget Period Form: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/phs398.html>

Application Submission and Formatting:

1. Assemble your application package in the order listed in the required documents section below.
 - Type responses where prompted and provide all requested signatures.
 - Include a header at the upper right corner of each page with your name (last name, first name) and award name.
 - Use half-inch margins. Do not use lettering smaller than 10 point.
 - Adhere to page limits and complete all sections.

Applications that do not meet the requirements, in content or format, will not be reviewed.

2. The completed application, letters of support or commitment, and other documents as applicable must be combined in the order listed in the Required Documents section below and submitted as one PDF document. Name the PDF file as follows: 2026 Tusa_Last name, First name (Example: 2026 Tusa_Smith, Jane)
3. Submit your application at www.liverresearchawards.org. You will be sent an email confirmation that the application was received. If an email confirmation is not received in two (2) business days, please contact awards@aasld.org to confirm receipt.

Required Documents:

| Submit only the documents listed below. Any additional documents (including letters of collaboration, additional letters of recommendation, or documents that exceed the stated page limitations) will be removed from consideration. | | |
|--|--|--|
| 1 | Cover Pages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use pages 6-7 of this document as your application's cover pages. Complete all information and include all required signatures. Signatures may be digital, electronic, or "wet." |
| 2 | Abstract | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide your project's abstract using page 8 of this document. |
| 3 | Resubmission Information and Original Reviewer Comments (if applicable) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete page 9 of this document and include this with the cover pages. If this application is a resubmission: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the provided form to briefly describe how your resubmission responds to the issues and criticisms raised by reviewers in the original application. Also briefly describe any major additions, deletions, or changes to the application. Include the original application's reviewer comments document. |
| 4 | Biosketches | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limit five pages each Provide a Biosketch in NIH format for the applicant, mentor, and any other key personnel or other significant contributors/collaborators. |
| 5 | Specific Aims | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limit one page State the proposed project's overall research hypothesis, objectives, specific aims, and impact of the results. |
| 6 | Research Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limit three pages, not including references Prepare according to NIH guidelines: background, significance, innovation, and approach. The section on previous work should highlight the candidate's previous studies and their contribution to knowledge in this field. (Appendices should not be included.) Inclusion of preliminary data is not required. This award is not intended to support ongoing research in the applicant's laboratory, but rather support new ideas or approaches that have not previously been studied. Be specific with regard to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why this project is novel and distinct from other ongoing work. The applicant's plan to translate the Pilot Study into future federally funded grant applications. Proposed work should be well defined and feasible within the fiduciary and temporal limitations of the award (\$50,000 and 1 year respectively). |
| 7 | Budget and Justification | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using the NIH PHS 398 Detailed Initial Budget Period Form, show proposed budget for use of \$50,000 AASLD Foundation Pilot funding during the one-year award term. Equipment costs of \$5,000 or greater require specific justification. No additional or indirect costs, registration fees, or travel expenses are allowed. Provide a budget justification narrative to support the proposed budget. |

| | | |
|----|---|--|
| 8 | Research Facilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit three pages • The research environment should be described, including access to patients, laboratory space (if applicable), consultants and technical (including computer) resources. |
| 9 | Research Support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an accounting of all other institutional, federal and non-federal support using the NIH "Other Support" form (link goes to direct download). • Include all funding available from collaborators and sponsors. |
| 10 | Letter(s) of Collaboration/Support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit one page each • If applicable, letters of collaborative or mentoring arrangements that are significant to the proposal may be included. • Biosketches for significant contributors/collaborators should be included as part of required documents section 4. |
| 11 | Candidate's Statement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit two pages • Statement should clearly describe the candidate's background, interest in HE research and how HE-related investigation is or will be represented in their overall research portfolio and impact on research career. |
| 12 | Letter of Commitment from Department Chair | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit one page • The Department Chair's letter should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Explicitly confirm the percent of available time that will be devoted to research activities on which this application is based during the award (minimum 20%). ○ Confirm and describe the institution's support of the candidate and commitment to their research success. |
| 13 | Letter of Recommendation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One letter, limit one page • If the applicant is below the rank of Associate Professor, the letter of recommendation should be written by the applicant's mentor and should explicitly confirm that the mentor has reviewed the full research proposal prior to submission. • Letter should attest to the candidate's qualifications, commitment to research and quality of scientific work, and the importance/potential impact of the project. • If the mentor is also the department chair, the mentor can opt to submit separate letters for required documents 12 and 13 or submit one combined letter (2 page maximum) that clearly indicates dual role and addresses points requested for both these required documents. |
| 14 | Institutional Review Board (IRB) or IACUC Approval | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use page 10 of this document to verify if IRB or IACUC approval is needed for this project. • If human or animal subjects are to be used, verification of IRB or IACUC approval of the proposed research in the applicant's institution should be provided prior to the award being granted. • IRB/IACUC approval (if necessary) must be applied for at the time of application. |

The following pages contain forms that must be included in **all** applications. Please refer to the list of required documents above when assembling your final application package.

2026 FRANK J. TUSA PILOT AWARD FOR RESEARCH IN HEPATIC ENCEPHALOPATHY APPLICATION COVER PAGE

Complete the form below and include the completed page as page 1 of your application package.

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| Project Title | | |
| Applicant Name (last, first, middle initial) | | AASLD Member Number |
| Applicant Degrees(s) | | Date of Terminal Degree (MM/YYYY) |
| Applicant Current Position Title | | Appointment Date (MM/YYYY) |
| Applicant Telephone | | Applicant Email |
| Sponsoring Institution | | |
| Sponsoring Division or Department | | |
| Mentor Name (last, first, middle initial) (if applicant is below rank of Associate Prof.) | | AASLD Member Number (if applicable) |
| Mentor Title (if applicable) | | Mentor Institution (if applicable) |
| Mentor Telephone (if applicable) | | Mentor Email (if applicable) |
| Institution's Grant Administrator Name (last, first, middle initial) | | Institution Fiscal Officer Name, if different (last, first, middle initial) |
| Institution's Grant Administrator Telephone | | Institution Fiscal Officer Telephone |
| Institution's Grant Administrator Email | | Institution Fiscal Officer Email |

REQUIRED SIGNATURES

NOTE: By signing below, you are certifying that the information in this application is accurate and that you understand that Foundation guidelines do not allow for any indirect costs (e.g., facilities management and utilities; general-purpose equipment, capital equipment except as noted; travel, memberships and dues; subscriptions/books/periodicals; etc.).

| | | |
|---|----------------|------|
| Applicant Signature | Name (Printed) | Date |
| | | |
| Mentor Signature (if applicant is below Associate Prof. Rank) | Name (Printed) | Date |
| | | |
| Department / Division Chair Signature | Name (Printed) | Date |
| | | |
| Institution's Grant Administrator Signature | Name (Printed) | Date |

2026 FRANK J. TUSA PILOT AWARD FOR RESEARCH IN HEPATIC ENCEPHALOPATHY ELIGIBILITY CHECKLIST

Complete the eligibility checklist below and include the completed page as page 2 of your application package.

1. The applicant (select one):

- ☐ Is at the Associate Professor/equivalent rank.
- ☐ Has a faculty appointment below the Associate Professor/equivalent level.
- ☐ Does not have a faculty appointment and is an Early State Investigator ([as defined by the NIH](#))
ESI: Date of terminal research degree or end of post-graduate clinical training (whichever is later)

2. The applicant confirms that (select all that apply):

- ☐ They are a member of the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD) at the time of award application and will maintain active membership for the duration of the award period.
- ☐ They will be able to devote at least 20% effort to the research project on which this application is based.
- ☐ They are sponsored by a public or private non-profit institution accredited in the United States, Canada or Mexico engaged in health care and health-related research.
- ☐ The proposed project will be conducted at the sponsoring institution within the United States, Canada or Mexico.
- ☐ If they are below the rank of Associate Professor, they have a mentor or co-mentor who is an AASLD member in good standing at the time of application and for the duration of the award period.

3. Projects with aims already funded by other awards will not be considered.

The applicant confirms that:

- ☐ They **have not** held nor currently hold any awards for the project aims described in this proposal.
- ☐ They **have** held or currently hold an award for the project aims described in this proposal.

4. Applicants cannot hold federal funding (e.g. U, P, R, K, VA Merit, or VA CDA) unless they are able to confirm that:

- ☐ The project is truly completely distinct and non-overlapping from existing funding;
- ☐ The proposed work cannot be completed using existing funds.

ABSTRACT OF PROPOSED RESEARCH

In the box below, briefly describe the research project, technical approach and anticipated results. Include this page as page 3 of your application package.

RESEARCH INFORMATION

Current Percent Effort:

Research

Administration

Clinical Activities

Teaching

100%=Total

Projected Under This Award:

Research (this project)

Research (other)

Administration

Clinical Activities

Teaching

100%=Total

RESUBMISSION INFORMATION

Complete and include as page 4 of your application package.

Is this application a resubmission to the AASLD Foundation awards program?

- ☐ No.
- ☐ Yes. If yes, briefly describe how your resubmission responds to the issues and criticisms raised by reviewers in the original application in the box below. Also briefly describe any major additions, deletions, or changes to the application. Attach the original reviewer comments following this page.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)/ANIMAL CARE AND USE COMMITTEE (IACUC)

Complete this page and include it at the end of your application, with appropriate supporting documentation.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

A. Does the proposed study require Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval? ☐ Yes ☐ No

B. If the proposed study requires IRB approval, has the documentation verifying approval been obtained and included in the award application? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If the proposed study has been approved, please provide documentation of verification with your application **(limit 2 pages)**.

If IRB approval is not necessary or not attached, please state why below:

ANIMAL EXPERIMENTATION

A. Does your proposed study involve the care and use of animals? ☐ Yes ☐ No

B. If the proposed study involves the care and use of animals, has the proposed study been approved by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) of the applicant's institution and do they follow the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Guidelines on the care and use of laboratory animals? ☐ Yes ☐ No

C. If the proposed study requires (IACUC) approval, has the documentation verifying approval been obtained and included in the award application? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If the proposed study involves the care and use of animals and has been approved by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, please provide documentation of verification with your application **(limit 2 pages)**.

If approval by the Animal Care and Use Committee of the applicant's institution is not necessary or not attached, please state why below: