

# An Impact Assessment of KidneyCure's Transition to Independence Grants Program Final Impact Assessment Report

Prepared for

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December 19, 2025



## Executive Summary

The American Society of Nephrology's (ASN's) Transition to Independence Grants (TIG) program is a key initiative of KidneyCure, supporting early-career nephrology researchers since 1996.

To verify that the TIG program is achieving its objectives, of (1) strengthening the pipeline of nephrology researchers, (2) enhancing the workforce committed to advancing the understanding of kidney biology and diseases, and (3) accelerating and sustaining research that drives innovation in nephrology and improves patient outcomes, ASN engaged RTI International to conduct an external assessment of the program. By developing metrics and using program records, external databases, and alumni interviews, RTI examined how the TIG program contributes to ASN and to awardees' career advancement, research outputs, funding, technology development, and ongoing engagement in kidney research. The assessment provides insights on the TIG program's impact across three key dimensions: individual awardees, broader nephrology field, and ASN as an organization.

### Transition to Independence Grants

From 1996 to 2025, ASN awarded 246 grants worth \$48.5 million to early-career faculty in 100 institutions across 31 states through the KidneyCure TIG program for kidney research.

## Findings

### Impact to the Awardee

#### TIG awards supported long-term research careers

The TIG award is aimed to support the transition to independent researcher. For many, ASN support during this time was seen as vital for career progression and confidence-building.

The analysis of a sample of grantees showed that half of those grantees who were assistant professors at the time of award attained tenure within 5 years of completing the TIG award, and 100% were tenured after 10 years. Grantees interviewed asserted that, had they not received the TIG award, their careers would have progressed more slowly, or they might have shifted away from nephrology entirely.

#### TIG awards empowered researchers to pursue original ideas

Interviewees communicated that the TIG award served as the pivotal bridge that allowed them to establish independence, resist pressure from senior faculty, and pursue their own scientific ideas. Awardees interviewed described the TIG award as validation. Several alumni emphasized that the TIG award gave researchers the freedom to explore high-impact research questions that

### TIG Awardee Career Advancement

50% of tenured-track awardees were tenured within 5 years of the end of the TIG award, and 100% of TIG awardees were tenured after 10 years.

might otherwise have been discouraged by their institutions. Interviews show that the TIG program often supports research areas ahead of their time.

### **TIG awardees secured follow-on NIH funding**

TIG alumni obtained 648 National Institutes of Health (NIH) awards totaling \$1.2 billion following their TIG award, more than 24 times the TIG award funding over the same period. Thirty-seven percent of first R01 awards were obtained within 3 years of the TIG award, and 84% of awardees who ultimately received an R01 did so within 9 years.

### **Follow-On Funding**

Follow-on funding for TIG awardees totaled \$1.2 billion across all NIH mechanisms. R01 grants accounted for \$638 million (53%) of the total.

## **Impact on the Field of Nephrology**

### **Expanded nephrology research to improve patient outcomes**

From 1998–2025, 218 TIG awardees produced 12,018 peer-reviewed publications. Of these, 1,202 publications appeared in ASN journals. Across all publications, TIG grantees' work received 830,595 citations, including 91,232 citations in ASN journals.

Ninety-three awardees (39%) published highly cited papers, 16 of which were published in ASN journals and contributed 4,724 citations. TIG awardees also appeared as authors on more than 298 conference abstracts, indicating broad participation in scientific meetings. About 15% of these conference abstracts were presented at ASN's annual Kidney Week.

These contributions demonstrate that TIG awardees generate high-impact science with the potential to have an impact on patient care and lead to improved patient outcomes. Since receiving TIG awards, alumni have contributed to technology development through 91 NIH-funded clinical trials, focused on neonatal intensive care and pediatric and adult kidney disease management.

Alumni were granted 68 U.S. patents, covering imaging technologies, biomedical devices, diagnostics, and therapeutic approaches, including biomarkers and methods for diagnosing or treating kidney disease.

### **Research Productivity and Visibility**

TIG awardees produced 12,018 peer-reviewed publications, 298 papers at conferences, and over 830,595 citations.

Their collective research portfolio includes 91 clinical trials, 68 patents, and 6 biomarkers.

### **Strengthened kidney-related research infrastructure**

Research infrastructure refers to physical resources, human capital, and mentoring and training. Across interviews, TIG awardees noted that ASN funding allowed them to build critical research

infrastructure, including physical infrastructure and human capital, that would become the backbone of their scientific programs.

The TIG program provided funds to create labs that became training grounds for future nephrologists, basic scientists, and physician-scientists. Several alumni emphasized that it was the only mechanism available to help them stay in the field.

TIG awardees noted that KidneyCure funding allowed them to build research infrastructure that would become the backbone of their scientific programs.

### **Increased the pipeline of nephrology researchers**

As evidence of the grantees remaining in the nephrology workforce after their TIG award, the assessment provides evidence from publications 10 years after the end of the award and NIH grants received after the award. Ten years after the end of the TIG award, 82% of the TIG alumni (1996–2015) continued to publish nephrology-related research. Similarly, 40% of TIG awardees received at least one NIH grant after their TIG award end date, and 14% received at least one NIH grant 10 or more years after their TIG award, most (70%) for kidney-related research.

TIG-supported investigators consistently mentor new scientists, some of whom have obtained ASN grants themselves. This growing pipeline ensures the sustainability and innovation of kidney-related research.

## **Impact on ASN**

### **Strengthened ASN as a community**

The TIG program strengthens ASN by cultivating an engaged community of researchers who remain active contributors to ASN's mission long after their award period ends. Awardees described ASN as their “professional home,” “the community that believed in [them] and took a chance,” and “the sole reason [they] stayed in kidney research.” This connection translates into sustained participation and long-term involvement in the ASN community.

88% of TIG awardees have participated in one or more ASN meetings or programs since receiving their award.

Awardees remained engaged with ASN after the end of their award as evidenced by the 88% of TIG awardees who have participated in one or more ASN meetings or programs (i.e., Kidney Week) since receiving their award. Beyond just participating in ASN community events, over 50% of TIG awardees served as Kidney Week program chairs, moderators, or invited speakers.

### **Integrated new and diverse voices to the kidney research community**

Many interviewees emphasized that the TIG award was their entry point into the nephrology community, particularly for groups that do not have access or feel overlooked by traditional NIH pathways.

### **Created a pipeline of future ASN leaders**

Awardees frequently spoke about wanting to give back to ASN. Alumni now serve as grant reviewers, editorial board members, Kidney Week faculty, and committee leaders. Several awardees explicitly connected their ongoing service to ASN with their gratitude for having been funded at a pivotal moment. "ASN supported me, [and now] I owe it to the community to support the next generation," one noted.

TIG alumni showed pride in becoming lifelong contributors as leaders, reviewers, mentors, and ambassadors whose deep engagement was shaped at a critical moment in their careers by ASN's early support.

A similar number, 47%, also serve in leadership positions within ASN. Similarly, nearly half of all awardees have served on at least one ASN committee, and more than half of them have participated in two or more committees. Their contributions span editorial boards, educational committees, scientific review, and program development groups.

Alumni served on 56 distinct ASN committees, with higher concentrations on editorial boards, Kidney Week Education and Program Committees, and the Grants Review Committee.

### **Conclusions**

Overall, the assessment finds that the TIG program is achieving ASN's mission to strengthen the nephrology research pipeline, advance scientific understanding of kidney biology and diseases, and support research that could ultimately improve patient outcomes. TIG awardees progress rapidly to research independence, securing substantial follow-on funding from NIH and sustaining long-term engagement in kidney-focused research. Their collective contributions include high-impact publications, patents, clinical trials, independent laboratories, and training or mentorship of future kidney investigators, and they demonstrate meaningful and lasting impact in the field.