

# 2021 AHA Postdoctoral Fellowship

## Program Description and Eligibility

### Purpose

To enhance the training of postdoctoral applicants who are not yet independent. The applicant must be embedded in an appropriate investigative group with the mentorship, support, and relevant scientific guidance of a research sponsor.

Recognizing the unique challenges that clinicians, in particular, experience in balancing research and clinical activity, this award mechanism aims to be as flexible as possible to enable applicants to develop academic careers in research alongside fulfilling clinical service commitments.

### Science Focus

The AHA funds basic, clinical, behavioral, translational and population research, bioengineering/biotechnology and public health problems broadly related to fulfilling our mission to be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives.

### Disciplines

AHA awards are open to the array of academic and health professionals. This includes but is not limited to all academic disciplines (biology, chemistry, mathematics, technology, physics, etc.) and all health-related professions (physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, pharmacists, dentists, physical and occupational therapists, statisticians, nutritionists, etc.).

Clinical, translational, population, and basic scientists are encouraged to apply. AHA maintains dedicated Peer Review Committees by science type and subject.

AHA believes diversity and inclusion is an essential component to driving its mission and strongly encourages applications by women, underrepresented racial and ethnic groups in the sciences, military veterans, people with disabilities, members of the LGBTQ community, and those who have experienced varied and non-traditional career trajectories.

### Eligibility

- At the time of award activation, the applicant must hold a post-baccalaureate Ph.D. degree or equivalent, or a doctoral-level clinical degree, such as M.D., D.O., D.V.M., Pharm.D., D.D.S., Dr.Ph, Ph.D. in nursing, public health, or other clinical health science., or equivalent clinical health science doctoral student who seeks research training with a sponsor prior to embarking upon a research career.
- At the time of award activation, the awardee may not be pursuing a doctoral degree.
- At the time of award activation, the applicant may have no more than five years of research training or experience since obtaining a post-baccalaureate doctoral-level degree (excluding clinical training).
- The awardee will be expected to devote at least 80 percent of full-time work either to research or to activities pursuant to independent research (instead of administrative, clinical duties that are not an integral part of the research training program, or teaching responsibilities).
- This award is not intended for individuals of faculty rank.

#### **Exceptions:**

- M.D. or M.D./Ph.D. with clinical responsibilities who needs instructor or similar title to see patients, but who will devote at least 80% full-time to research training.
- R.N./Ph.D. with clinical appointment. Awardee will be expected to devote his/her time to research or activities directly related to the development into an independent researcher. All other eligibility criteria apply.

## Sponsor

It is imperative that the fellow receive counsel and direction from a sponsor who is an established investigator (as outlined in the peer review criteria for the sponsor/training plan below) invested in the progress of the project.

A fellow must have primary responsibility for the writing and the preparation of the application, understanding the sponsor will play a significant part in providing guidance to the applicant.

AHA does not require but strongly encourages institutions to develop and use Individual Development Plans (IDPs) for AHA training programs. IDPs provide a structure for the identification and achievement of career goals.

The trainee's career goals, as stated in "Part A - Personal Statement" of the fellow's biosketch, and the sponsor's training plan must be complementary to one another and focused specifically on the individual. A standardized training plan will not be viewed favorably.

## Citizenship

Awardees must have one of the following designations:

- U.S. citizen
- Permanent resident
- Pending permanent resident  
(must have filed Form I-485 for permanent resident status and obtained a I-797C Notice of Action that the application has been received by USCIS and case is pending)
- E-3 Visa - specialty occupation worker
- F-1 Visa – student (predoctoral and postdoctoral fellows only)
- G-4 Visa - family member of employee of international organizations
- H1-B Visa - temporary worker in a specialty occupation
- J-1 Visa - exchange visitor (for non-training awards, you must have obtained an H-1B or equivalent by the award activation date)
- O-1 Visa - temporary worker with extraordinary abilities in the sciences
- TN Visa – NAFTA Professional
- DACA - Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. Requires additional AHA approval to apply. Send an email to [Apply@Heart.org](mailto:Apply@Heart.org) with an explanation of your status and a statement of support from your sponsor.

Trainees are not required to reside in the United States for any period before applying for American Heart Association funding. Trainees must maintain one of the designations listed above throughout the duration of the award.

One of the designations listed above must be maintained throughout duration of the award.

## Eligible Sponsoring Institution

American Heart Association research awards are limited to U.S.-based non-profit institutions, including medical, osteopathic and dental schools, veterinary schools, schools of public health, pharmacy schools, nursing schools, universities and colleges, public and voluntary hospitals and others that can demonstrate the ability to conduct the proposed research.

Applications will not be accepted for work with funding to be administered through any federal institution or work to be performed by a federal employee, except for Veterans Administrations employees.

## Budget

AHA does not pay indirect costs on fellowships.

**Annual Stipend** - Matches NIH sliding scale in effect at the time the AHA publishes its RFA.

Stipend for AHA 2021 Postdoctoral Fellowships are as follows:

Years of Experience	Stipend
0	\$52,704
1	\$53,076
2	\$53,460
3	\$55,596
4	\$57,456
5	\$59,580
6	\$61,800
7 or More	\$64,008

+ \$10,850 per year for health insurance.

Note: Stipend may be used to further supplement health insurance cost, however, the health insurance allowance may not be used for any other purpose.

### Project Support

\$3,000 per year, in addition to the stipend.

No limit on any line item (travel, computer, equipment, etc.).

At least \$1,500 of the annual project support must be spent on travel to a national conference (attendance of AHA Scientific Sessions is strongly encouraged). International travel is permitted and does not require prior AHA approval.

### Award Duration

One or two years. May apply for a second two-year award. All eligibility criteria apply.

Maximum of four years of Association postdoctoral fellowship support per individual.

If applying for only one year of support, select the ONE YEAR form for this program before beginning the application in Grants@Heart.

### Total Award Amount

Not to exceed \$77,858 - \$155,716 total

## Restrictions

- An applicant may submit only one AHA Postdoctoral Fellowship application per deadline.
- An AHA Postdoctoral Fellowship awardee may hold only one AHA award at a time.
- The awardee must resign the award if promoted to a staff or faculty position. However, an awardee with a faculty position remains eligible for this award if that awardee maintains clinical responsibilities under the supervision of an instructor.

- An AHA Postdoctoral Fellow may not hold another AHA award concurrently. However, the awardee may submit an application for a subsequent AHA award during the last year of the project and must resign the Postdoctoral Fellowship if another AHA award is activated.
- The awardee may not hold a comparable award as a source of supplementation. AHA does allow supplementation from other sources to meet the sponsoring institution's stipend and benefit levels.
- An applicant who receives AHA funding, but has an ongoing training grant from another source, may defer the start of the AHA award up to six months to complete the existing fellowship. Prior AHA approval is required.
- The sponsor may supervise no more than four AHA-funded fellows (pre-doctoral and/or postdoctoral) at the same time. This restriction does not apply to co-sponsors. Fellows who are part of an AHA Strategically Focused Research Network are excluded.

Submission of an application to the AHA with identical or significantly similar content as a submission by another investigator is prohibited. Also, the submission of an application to the AHA with identical or significantly similar content from a sponsor to a grant program and his/her fellow to fellowship program is prohibited. In such cases, both applications may be removed from funding consideration. If a grant application is submitted by the sponsor of a fellowship application, both applications may be funded if there is no duplication of aims.

## Supporting Documentation

### Applicant

- Research Plan (5 pages)
- Biographical Sketch (5 pages)
- Literature Cited (4 pages)
- Vertebrate Animal Subjects (no page limit)
- Resubmission Modifications (if applicable, 2 pages)

### Third Party Personnel

- Biographical Sketch of Sponsor (5 pages)
- Biographical Sketch of Co-Sponsor, if one has been named (5 pages)

**\*\* For the following three items, AHA now requires one document from the sponsor that also includes information for the co-sponsor, if one has been named. \*\***

- Sponsor's and Co-Sponsor's Past and Current Trainees (3 pages per sponsor)
- Training Plan of Sponsor and Co-Sponsor (3 pages)
- Research Project Environment of Sponsor and Co-Sponsor (no page limit)

**Optional third-party personnel: Collaborating Investigator's Biographical Sketch (5 pages)**

- Collaborating Investigator's Letter (5 pages)
- Consultant's Letter (5 pages)
- Reference Report (3 count, 4 pages each)

## Peer Review Criteria

*An applicant is prohibited from contacting AHA peer reviewers. This is a form of scientific misconduct and will result in removal of the application from funding consideration and institutional notification of misconduct.*

AHA reserves the right to an initial triage, whereby a minimum of half of the submissions may be triaged.

To judge the merit of the application, reviewers will comment on the following criteria. Please address these in your proposal. Each criterion will account for one-third of the overall score. The AHA uses a 1-9 score scale and [AHA Peer Review Guidance](#).

### **Criterion 1 – Evaluation of the Summary for Non-Scientists – 5%**

**To be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives.**

1. How well written is the Non-Scientist Summary in explaining to a non-scientist audience the research proposed and its importance?
2. Does the Non-Scientist Summary adequately explain the major health problem being addressed by this study?
3. Does it provide specific questions and how the projects will address them?
4. Does it provide information on the overall impact of this work and the potential advances in the field?
5. Does it relay how the proposal supports the mission of the AHA?

### **Criterion 2 - Evaluation of the Applicant – 30%**

1. Does the applicant have the potential for a research career?
2. Are the applicant's career plans specified in the application?
3. Is this supported by the applicant's academic record and the assessment provided by the three letters of reference?
4. Does the applicant have prior research experience and/or publications?
5. Is there a clear rationale supporting the need for the proposed training?
6. What is the sponsor's assessment of the applicant?

### **Criterion 3 - Sponsor/Training Plan and Environment – 35%**

Because the fellow receives only a stipend from the award, additional monetary support for the proposed work **MUST** come from the sponsor's laboratory. Therefore, the proposal will likely be related to the sponsor's currently funded work. The sponsor should clarify the role the applicant played in developing the proposal, the relationship of the proposal to ongoing work in the sponsor's laboratory, and how the proposal will contribute toward the training and career development of the applicant.

#### *Sponsor/Training Plan*

1. Is the sponsor an independent investigator?
2. Does the sponsor have the experience to direct the proposed training, as evidenced by a track record regarding productivity, funding and prior trainees?
3. Does the sponsor have adequate current funding to support the applicant's project?
4. Does the sponsor demonstrate familiarity with the applicant's career and developmental goals and provide a comprehensive plan that supports the applicant's career goals, which should be outlined in the Personal Statement section of the applicant's biosketch?
5. Is there a plan for instruction in the responsible conduct of research, considering the specific characteristics of the training program, the level of trainee experience, and the particular circumstances of the trainees? The reviewers will evaluate the adequacy of the proposed training in relation to the following: A sufficiently broad selection of subject matter, such as conflict of interest, authorship, data management, human subjects and animal use, laboratory safety, research misconduct, research ethics. **AHA does not require submission of the NIH RCR form.**

### *Environment*

Does the scientific environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of a successful learning experience? Is there evidence of institutional commitment?

### **Criterion 4 - Evaluation of the Proposal - 30%**

This section should provide a summary of the proposal no longer than five pages: A thoughtfully planned, systematic proposal aimed at clearly answering an investigative question in cardiovascular, cerebrovascular or brain health research. It should be completed in collaboration with the proposed sponsor.

Note: The proposal will be assessed on the scientific merit, but equally as an integral part of the applicant's development into a career aligned with AHA's mission.

A new fellow may not have had adequate time to generate preliminary data; therefore, applicants may present preliminary data generated by the sponsor. The assessment of preliminary data, whether generated by the sponsor or the applicant, should be put into perspective so that bold new ideas and risk taking by beginning investigators are encouraged rather than stymied.

#### 1. Is the **Proposed Work**:

- Appropriate for the applicant, given his/her academic background, experience and career interests?
- Does the proposal contain the right balance of challenge, importance of the research question, and feasibility in relation to the applicant's experience and training?

#### 2. Does the **Proposed Project**

- Include a specific hypothesis and describe the applicant's role;
- Provide a concise account of the subject matter, an overview of each part of the proposal, specific aims and the methodology;
- For all applications that include vertebrate animals or human subjects, applicants must explain how relevant biological variables, such as sex, are factored into the research design, analysis and reporting. Furthermore, strong justification from the scientific literature, preliminary data, or other relevant considerations, must be provided for applications proposing to study only one sex.

#### 3. What is the proposal's **Significance / Impact to AHA Mission**?

Consider the AHA's Strategic Value Proposition that includes

- addressing overall health and wellbeing,
- anchored in cardiovascular and brain health;
- focusing on breakthrough science and technology;
- changes in systems and policy; and
- engaging with individuals to transform communities,
- Does the science accelerate the discovery, interpretation and application of scientific knowledge to enhance and treat CVD and stroke?