



**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
OFFICE OF RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAM GUIDE: 1200.04
CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**

As of August 5, 2019, the Office of Research and Development Career Development Program Handbook (VHA Handbook 1200.04) has been replaced with this Program Guide. This Program Guide replaces all prior official VA-ORD guidance for the Career Development Program.

ISSUANCE DATE: August 5, 2019

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PROGRAM GUIDE: CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

1. PURPOSE

The VHA Office of Research and Development's (ORD) Career Development Program is designed to attract, develop, and retain talented Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) researchers in areas of importance to VA. This Program Guide provides the structure of this ORD program. The functional aspects of review and administration are managed independently by the Biomedical Laboratory Research and Development Service (BLR&D); the Clinical Science Research and Development Service (CSR&D); the Health Services Research and Development Service (HSR&D); and the Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D).

2. BACKGROUND

VA's Career Development Program was established to provide mentoring for junior researchers, so they can learn from renowned, experienced VA researchers. Awardees from this program have become national and international leaders in their research fields. Awards are provided in all areas of VA's research enterprise: biomedical laboratory, clinical science, health services, and rehabilitation research. A mentored Career Development Award (CDA) provides salary (and, for some types of awards, research support) to early-career investigators who commit most of their VA time to a mentored research agenda designed to lead to a career as an independent VA-funded investigator. Individual ORD Services may also approve support of sabbatical time for established investigators who have secured educational leave from their local VA facilities (Career Development Enhancement Award) and Career Development Transition Award (CDTA).

3. SCOPE

This Program Guide applies to mentored Career Development applicants and to established VA investigators who have secured educational leave from their local VA facilities.

4. ELIGIBILITY

Nominees who are not VA employees at the time of application must have a minimum of a 5/8ths VA appointment by the start date of funding. For newly recruited scientists, the employment application process needs to be coordinated through the local VA personnel office. Title 38 and Title 5 Code of Federal Regulation employees are required to meet VA and Federal appointment hiring and citizenship requirements. Current VA employees interested in the Career Development Program need to clarify with their local VA Human Resources Management the implications of CDA appointment and any potential changes to employment status and/or benefits. The Associate Chief of Staff (ACOS) for R&D, or responsible VA facility management official, ensures that awardees are appointed appropriately throughout the duration of the award. The principal point of contact for nominees throughout the application process is the local VA R&D Office. Eligibility

requirements differ by type of award which are described in the respective Requests for Applications (RFAs) available from the local VA research office.

5. TYPES OF AWARDS

The Career Development Program is comprised of several types of awards: Career Development Award-1 (CDA-1), Career Development Award-2 (CDA-2), Historically Black College and University Research Scientist Training Program (HBCU-RSTP), Career Development Transition Award (CDTA), and Career Development Enhancement Award (CDEA) - each corresponding to a different research and academic level within a scientist's career. With the exceptions of the CDTA and CDEA, candidates do not need to be VA employees to be considered for an award but must be nominated by the VA Medical Center that is to appoint them. Candidates are matched to the award type that best corresponds to their training and research proficiency. Mentored Career Development Awards (CDA-1, CDA-2, and HBCU-RSTP) target candidates who are early in their research career, without a history of independent, nationally peer-reviewed research funding as a principal investigator. The CDTA award may provide salary support for clinician scientists transitioning into a career as an independently funded VA investigator. Career Development Awards are issued by the individual R&D Services within ORD. A candidate may not apply for two types of awards simultaneously. **NOTE:** *Not every type of mentored Career Development Award is offered by each of the four ORD Services.*

For eligibility, support, and conditions for the types of awards, see <http://www.research.va.gov/funding/cdp.cfm>..

- a. **CDA-1.** This award provides an initial early mentored research experience, consisting of up to 2 years of salary support, to highly qualified scientists with demonstrated abilities in key research areas who have not benefited previously from research fellowship-level training. Nominees must express a clear commitment to a VA career and enlist the support of at least one appropriately qualified VA mentor. At the conclusion of the CDA-1 award, awardees may compete for CDA-2 or other VA funding.
- b. **CDA-2.** This award provides salary and project funds to support a 3 to 5-year program of research, career development, mentoring, and training. Nominees need to demonstrate a high degree of potential in their area of interest and a strong VA commitment. By the end of the CDA-2, it is anticipated that awardees will compete for Merit Award funding with the intent to establish themselves as independent investigators.
- c. **HBCU-RSTP.** This is a CDA-2 award that is focused on partnering with minority serving institutions, such as HBCUs, that are committed to increasing diversity within the scientific workforce through research, mentoring, and training of clinicians and non-clinician scientists to help advance health care for Veterans. The HBCU-RSTP requires one mentor to be affiliated with a HBCU or minority serving institution and another mentor to be affiliated with a local VA Medical Center.

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d. **CDTA**. This award provides up to 5 years of salary support for clinician scientists seeking to transition into careers as independently funded VA investigators. The duration of the award is determined by the Service.

e. **CDEA**. This non-mentored award provides an opportunity for the most accomplished VA scientists to learn new research skills at a unique facility for a period of up to one year. The Service may approve support for a CDEA to extend sabbatical time by matching educational leave approved by the investigator's local VA facility.

6. LOCATION REQUIREMENTS

VA Career Development awardees typically work in their VA mentors approved VA space. They may also perform work in an off-site mentor's laboratory; however, they may not establish new off-site laboratories. An off-site waiver is not required if the off-site mentor is not a VA investigator. If the off-site laboratory space is controlled by a VA mentor, the mentor must have an approved off-site waiver in accordance to VHA Program Guide 1200.16 Off-site Research. Work performed in an off-site Core facility may not require an off-site waiver, as determined by the approving R&D Service.

7. APPLICATION PROCESS

Potential candidates (clinicians and non-clinicians) for a mentored CDA must be nominated by a VA Medical Center facility through the submission of a Letter of Intent (LOI). A CDA application may not be submitted without an approved LOI. Nominees need to work closely with their local VA R&D Office to prepare the LOI and subsequent application. CDEA applicants should submit an LOI or an application, as directed by the relevant R&D Service. If a CDEA applicant is considering a sabbatical that involves international travel, the applicant should obtain approval for foreign travel while in a duty status (travel or authorized absence) consult with the appropriate R&D Service before submitting an LOI. Information on deadlines, guidance for preparing LOIs and proposals, and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are posted on the ORD website at: <http://www.research.va.gov/funding/cdp.cfm>.

8. EVALUATION CRITERIA

Reviewers will evaluate:

- the nominee's professional background and history of research productivity;
- the appropriateness of the research and training plans;
- the suitability of the proposed mentors in relation to the nominee's goals;
- the relevance of the planned research to VA;
- the nominee's commitment to a VA career;
- the sponsoring site's commitment to the nominee;
- the feasibility and merit of the planned research; and

- the anticipated long-term contributions to VA.

Awardees are encouraged to develop research proposals in areas of particular importance to Veterans' health care and that represent unique opportunities or particularly promising future lines of VA research.

9. ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORTS AND METHOD OF EVALUATION

Annual and final progress reports are required. Review criteria include R&D progress, publishing productivity, scientific presentations, and VA and non-VA time commitments. Instructions and FAQs regarding annual progress reports are posted on the ORD website at <https://www.research.va.gov/resources/RPPR.cfm>.

Awardees or their local research offices are required to notify VHA Research Communications of all scientific publications or presentations, upon acceptance (see Publication Notification Process for VA Investigators, http://www.research.va.gov/resources/policies/pub_notice.cfm). Publications must acknowledge VA support (Career Development Award number).

10. CHANGES TO FUNDED MENTORED AWARDS

Requests for changes to an award, should be submitted to the relevant Service Director at least 60 days in advance of the requested change. ORD Service may, in exceptional circumstances, approve the transfer of an award to a different facility or approve a change in mentor at the same facility. Such approval will only be given if the request confirms that it is to satisfy the awardee's training needs and is in the best interest of VA. The R&D Committee at the receiving station, the proposed mentor(s), and the new VA medical facility Director are required to endorse the transfer and ensure that sufficient VA space and support will be available for the successful completion of the transferee's award. A letter of support from the proposed primary mentor, including a description of the proposed training plan, must be submitted with the request. Additional research funds will not be provided to cover any moving or relocation expenses.

11. PROGRAM CONTACTS AND MAILING ADDRESS

Inquiries about the Career Development Program should be directed to the appropriate ORD Service contact listed on the VA Research and Development website at <http://www.research.va.gov/funding/cdp.cfm>.

12. REFERENCES

- a. VHA Program Guide 1200.15, Eligibility for VA Research Support.
- b. VHA Program Guide 1200.16, Off-Site Research.

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APPROVED:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rachel Ramoni".

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