Office of Research and Development
Career Development Program

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

I. By Facility

II. By Associate Chief of Staff for Research and Development (ACOS/R)

III. By Mentor

IV. By Applicant

I. Facility Questions and Answers

1Q: **Who can participate** in the Career Development program?
A: *Scientists, both M.D. and Ph.D., who have the appropriate experience and training by level as stated in the eligibility section of the Handbook.*

2Q: Do the nominees have to be **current VA employees**?
A: *No, following the review process, successful awardees can be hired as new VA employees.*

3Q: What **appointments** should be given to the awardees requesting salary from this program?
A: *Physicians and other clinicians should be hired on temporary, time-limited Title 38 appointments on the research payroll. Physicians may choose to continue in their current medical care roles with 25% to 50% effort to clinical care. Non-clinicians should be hired as Title 5, time-limited, Schedule B appointments on the research payroll.*

4Q: Once the **awards are over**, what happens to the awardees?
A: *Successful awardees are expected to continue VA research activities as VA employees. Awardees may apply for VA research funding and may compete for the next level of Career Development or may compete for independent (non-mentored) funding. **Clinicians** should be retained on the medical care payroll following Career Development awards. N**on-clinicians** may compete for independent funding as VA research employees, obtaining salary from the research appropriation.*

5Q: Can **non-citizens** participate in the Career Development program?
A: *Participants must be U.S. citizens*

6Q: Will awardees be included in **the new pay system** for clinicians?
A: *Title 38 physicians will receive salary support as determined at the local facility and are included in the new pay system with the exception of awardees at the CDA-1 level, for whom the appointment category is Associate Investigator and as such they are ineligible for market pay; see VA Handbook 5007, Part 1X, 3.d.*

II. Associate Chief of Staff for Research and Development (ACOS/R) Questions and Answers

1Q: How do we ensure that an applicant is **eligible** to apply for the program?
A*: Eligibility requirements are described in the program Guidance available at http://www.research.va.gov/funding/CDP.cfm. However if an applicant is not sure which level is appropriate, you can either submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) or contact the Central Office program manager to ask a specific question:*

Biomedical Laboratory Research & Development Service *(10P9B)*
Kera P. Lawson, PhD
vhacadereview@va.gov

Clinical Science Research & Development Service (*10P9C)*
Kera P. Lawson, PhD
vhacadereview@va.gov

Rehabilitation Research & Development Service *(10P9R)*
Patricia A. Dorn, PhD
patricia.dorn@va.gov
(202) 443-5756

Health Services Research and Development Service *(10P9H)*
Robert Small
robert.small@va.gov
(202) 461-1515

2Q: How can I tell which **level** an applicant is eligible for?
A: *Propose the level you believe is most appropriate based on the applicant's background. It will be administratively reviewed during the LOI stage and also during proposal review. The Central Office staff or review panel may make adjustments based on their perceptions of the candidate's training and research proficiency.*

3Q: What is being **evaluated** in the LOI?
A: *Eligibility of the applicant to make sure each is appropriately placed in the program and at a specific level; eligibility of the proposed mentor(s); appropriateness of the expertise match between the mentor/s and the applicant; relevance of the proposed work to the healthcare of veterans and ORD service priorities.*

4Q: An application has been approved for funding, what is the **start date**?
A: *Once an application has been reviewed and approved for funding, the local VA research office will receive a notice along with an indication of any administrative issues (including Just-in-Time compliance) that must be completed prior to funding. After any Just-in-Time/administrative issues are resolved, the program can begin funding.*

5Q: An applicant has not been approved for funding, who can I speak to about the **reviews**?
A: *The program manager is the best contact in ORD; however, we also encourage the applicant to discuss the reviews in detail with the ACOS/R and mentors to plan for possible resubmission.*

6Q: The applicant has received approval for both the VA Career Development Award and **another non-VA training award** – what should we do?

A: *The VA Career Development Program was developed to attract, train, and retain investigators in the VA system. As it was comprehensively planned to encompass both the research development and clinical responsibilities, we do not envision a scenario where one individual can hold training awards from two funding sources. We do hope that an applicant approved for funding from multiple training programs will seriously consider the advantages of remaining in the VA system. The ACOS/R must inform the appropriate Central Office career development program manager of a second award and the applicant's decision regarding which award will be accepted.*

7Q: What will be evaluated by the ACOS in the **annual progress report** to ORD?

A: *The ACOS/R should review the research career development progress, as well as the awardee's other responsibilities to assess whether the individual is progressing according to the Career Development Program. The ACOS/R should also make sure that VA is appropriately cited in all published work.*

III. Mentors' Questions and Answers

1Q: Do I need to be a VA employee to mentor a Career Development awardee?
A: BLR&D and CSR&D require that one of the mentors be a current VA-funded investigator with a scientific role in the proposed research and training components of the application. RR&D requires that the primary mentor be a VA employee, but a mentoring team may also include non-VA scientists as co-mentors.

2Q: Do I have to have an active VA Merit Review project to serve as a mentor to a Career Development awardee?
A: For BLR&D and CSR&D, one of the mentors must have VA Merit Review funding. You should have at least one VA project in your funding history as a principal investigator.

3Q: Can I mentor a Career Development awardee at another site?
A: Long-distance mentoring is not recommended. An exceptional justification would be required for ORD to approve such an arrangement.

4Q: How many mentors can be on the mentoring team?
A: A formal mentoring team typically is composed of one to four mentors; although additional scientists may provide supplementary expertise as collaborators. Each mentor's role and how they would fulfill their role (i.e., nature and degree of interaction with the awardee) should be clearly specified. The overall application, especially the mentoring plan, should reflect a cohesive effort, and mentors should be sure to take the time to review proposals prior to submission.

5Q: How intensive is the mentoring expected to be? Are there reporting requirements?
A: Awardees and mentors need to interact regularly and determine on a case-by-case basis what is required to ensure that the awardee develops into an independent investigator. Clear objectives and a timeline for meeting them should be described, including benchmarks for productivity and milestones for growth. Mentors are required to participate in awardees' annual progress reviews.

6Q: How much input do I as a mentor need to put into the applicant's Career Development proposal?
A: The entire application should reflect a high level of mentor input and review. When grantsmanship issues are noted by reviewers, they often raise concerns about mentoring commitments and roles.

7Q: Can I co-author papers with a career development awardee?
A: Certainly; however you should work together so the awardee may become primary author.

8Q: How much time can a VA Career Development awardee contribute to my projects?
A: The goal is for the awardee to work toward developing an independent line of research and a VA Merit Review project. Awardees should only be working in support of other researchers, including their mentors, to the extent they are gaining knowledge and skills directly linked to their independent research and career goals.

9Q: Is there a limit to the number of Career Development awardees I can mentor? A: *In evaluating the mentoring plan, mentor burden is of interest to reviewers who consider several factors including mentor commitments, the candidate's level of training and experience, and the complexity of the work proposed.*

10Q: I'm a senior VA scientist with an interest in health services research (or, biomedical, clinical or rehabilitation R&D), although that's not my primary area of expertise--can I serve as primary mentor to an awardee in this area?
A: *Primary mentors should be recognized experts in a field commensurate with the ORD service funding the Career Development award, although secondary and content mentors may come from a wide range of fields. All Career Development awardees should have at least one mentor who is a senior scientist in an area considered within the portfolio of the ORD service administering the award.*

IV. Applicant Questions and Answers

1Q: **How many** Career Development Award (CDA) levels are there?
A: *Three: The CDA-1, CDA-2, and Career Development Enhancement Award (CDEA).*

2Q: Do these programs **replace the current Research Career Scientist programs?**
A: *No. The current Research Career Scientist programs in each of the VA research services remain the same.*

3Q: What individuals are **eligible** to apply for the new Career Development awards?
A: Detailed qualifications on eligibility can be obtained on the R&D Website at
http://www.research.va.gov/funding/CDP.cfm. Briefly, clinician and doctoral-level non-clinicians are eligible to apply for the CDA-1 and CDA-2 awards. The CDEA is reserved for established VA clinician or non-clinician scientists seeking educational leave.

4Q: Do I have to be a **VA employee** to apply?
A: *No. You are not required to be a VA employee at the time of application, but a VA appointment must be in place by the start date of funding.*

5Q: Do I have to be **a U.S. Citizen?**
A: Yes.

6Q: Are the **eligibility requirements** the same for all three levels?
A: No. Each award has its own eligibility requirements. Visit the R&D Website at
http://www.research.va.gov/funding/CDP.cfm for specific requirements for each level.

7Q: What opportunities exist to **advance from one level to the next**?
A: *CDA-1 awardees may have the opportunity to advance to a CDA-2 award.*

8Q: Who decides **which award program** I am most qualified for?
A: *Candidates are matched to the award level that best corresponds to their training and research proficiency. The level at which a candidate is considered and potentially funded is that deemed appropriate after peer review and may not match the level for which the candidate initially applied.*

9Q: Do my **mentor(s)** need to be VA employees?
A: *BLR&D and CSR&D require that one of the mentors be a current VA-funded investigator with a scientific role in the proposed research and training components of the application. RR&D requires that your primary mentor be a VA employee, but they are not required to have current VA Merit funding; you are allowed to have non-VA mentors as well.*

10Q: Does my research have to be conducted **at the VAMC?**
A: BLR&D, CSR&D, and RR&D allow some of the work to be performed in a non-VA mentor's lab. Career Development awardees are not allowed to establish an independent off-site lab.

11Q: Can my **primary mentor be off-site** or university?
A: *BLR&D and CSR&D require that one of the mentors be a current VA-funded investigator. HSR&D requires that the primary mentor is on-site.*
12Q: **How many mentors** do I need?
A: At least one appropriately qualified VA mentor with overlapping interests.

13Q: What do I do **if my primary mentor leaves** during the award?
A: *You must submit a request for changes to an award to the relevant ORD service director at least 60 days in advance of the requested change. ORD may, in exceptional circumstances, approve a change in mentor at the same facility.*

14Q: Can another **Career Development awardee serve as my mentor?**
A: *Approval would be required at the LOI stage.*

15Q: What are the **deadlines** for the Career Development Program?
A: *Letters of intent are due April 15 and October 15 for Health Services R&D; May 1 and November 1 for Rehabilitation R&D, Biomedical Laboratory R&D, and Clinical Science R&D. Proposal submission deadlines for each service are posted on the R&D Web site at http://www.research.va.gov/funding/CDP.cfm and can be found in the RFAs issued by each R&D Service.*

16Q: Who do I contact if I have **questions or need assistance** with completing my application?
A: *The local VA research office is your primary contact. If necessary, you may contact Central Office, per the R&D Web site at http://www.research.va.gov/funding/CDP.cfm.*

17Q: Is the application **process the same for all four services?**
A: Yes.

18Q: Are **Letters of Intent (LOIs) required** as part of the application process?
A: *Yes. You must have an approved LOI on file before a full CDA proposal may be submitted for review. Information on deadlines, guidelines for preparing LOIs and proposals are posted on the R&D Web site at http://www.research.va.gov/funding/CDP.cfm.*

19Q: **Where do I submit** my application?
A: *The local VA research office will assist with LOI and application submission. Applications should be submitted to the individual services (Biomedical Laboratory, Clinical Science, Health Services, and Rehabilitation Research and Development) to the specific mailing addresses. Details for each service are posted on the R&D Web site at http://www.research.va.gov/funding/CDP.cfm. Current contacts also are listed below.*

Biomedical Laboratory Research & Development Service *(10P9B)*
Kera P. Lawson, PhD
vhacadereview@va.gov

Clinical Science Research & Development Service *(10P9C)*
Kera P. Lawson, PhD
vhacadereview@va.gov

Rehabilitation Research & Development Service (10P9R)
Patricia A. Dorn, PhD
patricia.dorn@va.gov
(202) 443-5756

Health Services Research and Development Service (10P9H)
Robert Small
robert.small@va.gov
(202) 461-1515

20Q: How will my application be **reviewed?**
A: *Reviewers will evaluate the applicant's background and productivity, the feasibility of the plans presented and suitability of the proposed mentors in relation to the applicant's goals, the VA relevance and commitment articulated throughout the proposal, the feasibility and merit of the planned research, the institutional commitment and support for the applicant's VA research career, and the anticipated long-term contributions to VA.*

21Q: **My application was not approved for funding - who should I talk with?**
A: *You should first discuss the critiques with your mentors and ACOS/R.*

22Q: **My application was approved for funding – what should I do next?**
A: *Approximately two to three weeks after the review, you should receive detailed information from the appropriate service about how to proceed.*

23Q: **I am in the midst of my CDA-1 award** and **have experienced unforeseen events** (e.g., extended equipment failure, inability to acquire pharmaceutical) that have delayed my research progress such that I will not be able to submit a CDA-2 application in time to (potentially) maintain continuous career development funding. What can I do?
A: *A formal request for an additional year on the CDA-1 award may be submitted by your ACOS/R to the research service funding your award . If approved, you may then request up to four years on the CDA-2 award, not five years.*

24Q: **If I transfer to another site, does my Career Development Award transfer with me?**
A: *A request to transfer a Career Development Award is considered a project modification and should be requested at least 60 days prior to the intended effective date (start date at the new facility). The request must be initiated by the administrative office at the site to which the awardee plans to transfer, must include the effective date of the transfer, and must include all of the institutional letters of endorsement described in the CDA proposal instructions, as well as letters from all of the mentors and consultants who would be involved through the remaining duration of the award. In addition, the awardee should include a statement describing how the move will affect the Career Development Award plans as originally proposed, and this should also be addressed in the mentor letters. If major changes will be required, including the transfer of any VA merit review projects on which the awardee is PI, these should be articulated in the transfer request and may require separate approval from the scientific program manager in the research service funding the merit review award (for HSR&D-funded investigators, see detailed instructions in VHA HB 1204.5, 2.d.(1)-(3)(b), at http://www.hsrd.research.va.gov/for_researchers/policies/1204-5_Appendix_A.doc).*