

**OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
RESEARCH CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook describes the Office of Research and Development's Career Development Program, which is designed to streamline the research career track for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) scientists in Biomedical Laboratory, Clinical Science, Health Services, and Rehabilitation Research and Development Services. Review and administrative functions are managed by the individual services.
- 2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES:** A Minority-Serving Institution Career Development Award has been added to the Career Development Program.
- 3. RELATED ISSUES:** VA Handbook 5007.
- 4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The VHA Office of Research and Development (10P9) is responsible for the content of this Handbook. Questions may be addressed to 202-443-5600.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** VHA Handbook 1200.4, dated July 21, 2006, is rescinded.
- 6. RECERTIFICATION:** This VHA Handbook is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of July, 2019.

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- 1. PURPOSE:** The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Research and Development's (ORD) Research Career Development Program is designed to attract, develop, and retain talented Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) researchers in areas of particular importance to VA. This Handbook 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). **AUTHORITY:** 38 U.S.C. 7303.
- 2. BACKGROUND:** VA's Research 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, at the discretion of the Director of the Service, approve support for sabbatical time for established investigators who have secured educational leave from their local facilities (Career Development Enhancement Award).
- 3. SCOPE:** This handbook applies to mentored Career Development applicants, as well as established VA investigators who have secured educational leave from their local 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 personnel office. Title 38 and Title 5 employees are required to meet VA and Federal appointment hiring and citizenship requirements. Current VA employees interested in the Research 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 or benefits. The Associate Chief of Staff (ACOS) for Research & Development (R&D) or responsible VA medical 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.
- 5. TYPES OF AWARDS:** The Career Development Program comprises of several types of awards: Career Development Award-1 (CDA-1); Career Development Award-2 (CDA-2); Minority-Serving Institution (MSI) CDA-2; Career Development Transition Award (CDTA); and Career Development Enhancement Award (CDEA), each corresponding to different research and academic levels in a scientist's career. With the exception of the CDEA, candidates do not need to be VA employees to be considered for an award, but must be nominated by the VA medical facility 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, MSI CDA-2, and CDTA) 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 according to their needs. **NOTE:** *Not every type of mentored Career Development Award is offered by each of the four ORD Services (see <http://www.research.va.gov/funding/cdp.cfm>).* A candidate may not apply for two types of awards simultaneously. 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 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/or project funds to support a 3 to 5 year program of research career development and mentoring. 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 the awardees will compete for VA research funding with the intent to establish themselves as independent investigators.

c. **Minority-Serving Institution CDA-2.** This is a CDA-2 award that is focused on building partnerships with and developing research talent from minority-serving institutions. One example is the Historically Black College or University (HBCU) CDA-2, which is unique in that it requires one of the primary mentors to be affiliated with a HBCU and another primary mentor to be affiliated with a VA medical facility.

d. **CDTA.** This award provides up to 3 years of salary support for clinician scientists seeking to transition into careers as independently funded VA investigators. Nominees must demonstrate the need for mentoring but are not required to have received a CDA-1 or CDA-2 previously.

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 1 year. The R&D Services within ORD may, at the discretion of the Director, approve support for a CDEA to extend sabbatical time by matching educational leave approved by the investigator's local VA medical facility.

6. LOCATION REQUIREMENTS: VA Career Development awardees may perform work in an off-site mentor's laboratory. 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 (refer to VHA Handbook 1200.16). 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 facility through the submission of a Letter of Intent (LOI) (see <http://www.research.va.gov/funding/cdp.cfm>). A CDA application may not be submitted without an approved LOI. Nominees need to work closely with the local VA R&D Office to prepare the LOI and subsequent application. CDEA applicants should submit an LOI or an application, as directed by that R&D Service. If a CDEA applicant is considering a sabbatical that involves international travel, the applicant should consult with the appropriate R&D Service before submitting an LOI. Information on deadlines, guidance for preparing LOIs and proposals, and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) are posted on the ORD website at: <http://www.research.va.gov/funding/cdp.cfm>.

8. EVALUATION CRITERIA: Reviewers must evaluate the nominee's professional background and productivity; the appropriateness of the research and training plans presented; 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 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: Progress reports must be submitted to the appropriate R&D Service annually. Criteria of interest 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 <http://www.research.va.gov/funding/cdp.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 AWARDS: Requests for changes to an award, such as transfers or changes in mentoring commitments, should be submitted to the relevant Service Director at least 60 days in advance of the requested change. ORD may, in exceptional circumstances, approve the transfer of an award to a different VA medical facility or approve a change in mentor at the same VA medical 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, the proposed mentor(s), and the VA medical facility Director at the new VA medical facility 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 Research 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 Handbook 1200.15, Eligibility for VA Research Support.
- b. VHA Handbook 1200.16, Off-Site Research.