

# AHA Predoctoral Fellowship

## Statement of Purpose

To enhance the integrated research and clinical training of promising students who are matriculated in pre-doctoral or clinical health professional degree training programs and who intend careers as scientists, physician-scientists or other clinician-scientists, or related careers aimed at improving global cardiovascular, cerebrovascular and brain health.

### Eligibility

At the *time of application*, the applicant must be:

- enrolled in a post-baccalaureate PhD, MD, DO, DVM, PharmD, DDS, DrPH, or PhD in nursing or equivalent clinical health science doctoral degree program, who seeks research training with a sponsor prior to embarking upon a research career.
- a full-time student working towards his/her degree.

At the *time of award activation*, the candidate must have completed initial coursework and be at the stage of the program where he/she can devote full-time effort to research or activities related to the development into an independent researcher or a related career aimed at improving global cardiovascular health.

### Sponsor/Mentor

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

A fellow must have primary responsibility for the writing and the preparation of the Fellowship application, understanding the mentor 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 student's career goals as stated in "Part A - Personal Statement" of the fellow's biosketch and the mentor's training plan must be complementary to one another and focused specifically on the individual. A standardized training plan will not be viewed favorably.

Please note: The mentor may not also serve as a referent.

## References

Each applicant must obtain three letters of reference. Those providing the references must upload them into ProposalCentral by the deadline date. The proposal cannot be submitted without the reference reports. A sponsor, co-sponsor, collaborating investigator or consultant contributing to the proposal may **not** serve as a referent.

A referent is an individual familiar with the applicant's scientific interests and abilities. Letters should be composed by the referent and should not originate from the applicant. Any appearance of substantially similar language in reference letters will be factored into the score for the Sponsor and Environment, which will impact the overall score. Please visit the [Reference Information page](#) for information about the referent upload process and to download a template of the Reference Report form.

## Budget

The AHA does not pay indirect costs on fellowships.

### **Annual Stipend**

Matches the NIH scale for predoctoral fellows at the time the AHA publishes its RFA

**2021:** \$25,320 per year, plus \$4,200 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**

\$2,000 per year, in addition to the stipend. No limit on any line item (travel, computer, equipment, etc.). International travel is permitted and does not require prior AHA approval.

### **Award Duration**

One or two years

If applying for only one year of support, select the ONE YEAR form for this program when beginning the application.

### **Total Award Amount**

\$31,520 - \$63,040

## Restrictions

- An applicant may submit only one AHA Predoctoral Fellowship application per deadline.
- An AHA Predoctoral Fellowship student may hold only one AHA award at a time.
- This award is not for individuals of faculty/staff rank.

- An AHA Predoctoral Fellowship awardee may not hold another AHA award concurrently. However, the student may apply for an AHA Postdoctoral Fellowship in the last year of the AHA Predoctoral Fellowship.
- 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.
- AHA allows supplementation from other sources to meet the sponsoring institution's stipend and benefit levels, however, the awardee may not hold a comparable award (such as another fellowship) as a source of supplementation.
- The mentor/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-mentors/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 mentor 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 mentor of a fellowship application, both applications may be funded if there is no duplication of aims.

## Peer Review Criteria

*An applicant is prohibited from contacting AHA peer reviewers. This is a form of scientific misconduct and will result in the 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. Of the remaining applications that will be peer reviewed, up to half will be triaged and will receive reviewer comments.**

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 – Summary for Non-Scientists – 5%

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

1. How well written is the lay summary in explaining to a non-scientist audience the research proposed and its importance?

2. Does the Lay 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 on 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?