



2025 Merit Award

Key Dates

RFP posted:	June 17, 2024
ProposalCentral open:	July 1, 2024
Letter of Intent deadline:	Tues., Sept. 10, 2024
Proposal Deadline (invitees only):	Nov. 14, 2024
Award notification:	March 2025
Award start:	April 1, 2025

Purpose

To fund investigators with stellar track records of accomplishment, demonstrated by federal or equivalent funding [NIH, AHRQ, HRSA, etc.] from multiple sources and excellent publication records with substantial impact, who have the potential to move a field of science forward with creative approaches that are aligned with the mission of the American Heart Association: To be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives.

This award supports exceptional scientists with established track records of success, who propose novel approaches to major research challenges in the areas of cardiovascular disease and cerebrovascular disease that have the potential to produce unusually high impact. This competition will enable AHA to further develop and strengthen the community of cardiovascular and cerebrovascular researchers and bring innovative approaches to basic, clinical, population and translational studies through funding a variety of disciplines. Applications are encouraged from all basic disciplines as well as epidemiological, behavioral, community and clinical investigations that bear on cardiovascular and stroke problems and must describe the capacity of the investigator's work to transform fundamental scientific understanding, clinical practice, and/or public health policy.

Awarded investigators are expected to demonstrate a combination of the following attributes that distinguish them from other highly competent scientists in their field:

- Likelihood of transforming and advancing the future of cardiovascular disease and cerebrovascular disease science.
- Potential to move their research into emerging and/or difficult areas of inquiry, being consistently at its forefront.

- Ability to develop new tools and methods that support creative experimental approaches to questions, encompassing concepts or techniques from other disciplines.
- Capacity to forge links between disparate disciplines.
- Strong track record of collaboration with other distinguished scientists across disciplines.
- Consistent with AHA's commitment to fostering growth of new and developing investigators, all applicants MUST incorporate the naming of at least one full-time fellow (predoctoral or postdoctoral) for the duration of the award term. Additionally, applicants must name at least one early-career faculty member (up to and including assistant professor) whose career should be meaningfully enhanced by their inclusion in the proposed studies.
- Evidence of original and innovative contributions to science.
- Demonstrated commitment to the mission of the American Heart Association and to advancing the ideals and guiding principles through volunteer service.

AHA Merit Awardees are considered to be AHA ambassadors in terms of strong scientific achievement, and also in terms of positive advocacy, volunteer service and commitment to AHA's science and mission related activities. This advocacy maybe demonstrated by:

- Active involvement in local or national level AHA committees and activities
- Consistent championing of AHA's mission to be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives
- Vision to assist the AHA in becoming a catalyst to achieve maximum impact in equitable health and wellbeing

The research does not need to be described in the detail that would be expected in an NIH R0-1, since the track record and expectations of continued excellence of the investigator are the primary award criteria. The application must include a summary of the applicant's proposed work in terms that can be readily understood by lay members of the review panel.

This investigator competition places no restrictions on the number of applications from any eligible institution. It is anticipated that the competition for these awards will be extremely keen.

Candidates with outstanding records who have shown evidence of significant originality and accomplishments are encouraged to apply.

AHA seeks and strongly encourages applications from women and members of minority groups that are under-represented in biomedical sciences.

Eligibility

It is anticipated this award will be given to applicants with the following or equivalent credentials:

- PhD and/or MD (or the equivalent).
- Tenured or tenure-track professor (exceptional associate professors may be considered) at an eligible nonprofit U.S. institution or, if at an eligible institution that has no tenure track, hold an appointment that reflects a significant institutional commitment at the time of the application deadline. (Federal government employees are not eligible.)
- Principal investigator on multiple active, national peer-reviewed research awards of at least three years' duration, such as an NIH R01 grant, at the time of application. Mentored awards, career development and training grants do not qualify.

At the time of application, must have one of the following designations:

- U.S. citizen
- Permanent resident
- Pending permanent resident. Applicant must have applied for permanent residency and have filed form I-485 with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and have received authorization to legally remain in the U.S. (having filed an Application for Employment form I765)
- H1-B Visa - temporary worker in a specialty occupation
- J-1 Visa - Note: You must have an H1B or equivalent by the award activation date. If the H1B or equivalent is not received by the award activation date, the award must be relinquished.
- O-1 Visa - temporary worker with extraordinary abilities in the sciences
- G-4 Visa - employee of international organizations and NATO family member
- TN Visa - NAFTA Professional
- E-3 Visa - specialty occupation worker

Awardee must meet American Heart Association citizenship criteria throughout the 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.

Letter of Intent (required)

Applicants are required to submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) for the AHA Merit Award on or before **Tuesday, September 10, 2024, at 3 p.m. CT.** Letters of Intent must be submitted via ProposalCentral.

Each applicant must be an AHA Professional Member.

Applications must be received no later than 3:00 p.m. CDT on the deadline date. The system will shut down at 3 p.m. CDT. Early submission is encouraged. Your institutional Grants Officer (GO) has the final responsibility of submitting your completed application to the American Heart Association. It is important that you check with your GO for his/her internal deadline. All submissions require a signature from a designated institutional representative.

Please note: Only applicants who submit a LOI **and** are INVITED to apply may submit a full application. AHA will contact applicants regarding their status after LOI review.

Before beginning the LOI, it is very important to review the program description, noting especially the sections describing the purpose, target/eligibility, peer review criteria, and important conditions. LOI review will focus on adherence to the program description and these instructions.

Log on to ProposalCentral and navigate as follows:

Create New Proposal > Filter by Grant Maker
Select "American Heart Association"
Locate "Merit Award" and click "Apply Now"

Section 1: Project Title

Enter Title and resubmission information (if relevant)

Section 2: Download Templates and Instructions

Section 3: Enable Other Users to Access this Proposal

This screen allows you to give other users access to this application. If electronic signatures are required for submission, signatories will need at least Edit access on this screen. To facilitate the process, the system grants that access automatically when the contact is added to the Application.

Section 4: Accept Program Requirements

In this section, you will acknowledge you have read and understand all program requirements for the Merit Award.

Section 5: Additional Questions

The following questions must be answered directly in ProposalCentral with respect to AHA Ambassadorship. Please list the following experience:

1. Are you a fellow of the American Heart Association? Y/N
2. Past and current AHA Professional Council Memberships.
3. Past and current AHA peer review committee service.
4. History of your involvement with the AHA at the local, regional, or national level.
5. Any awarded AHA Honors.
6. Past and current involvement with AHA Journals.
7. Any AHA research awards.
8. Please address your specific AHA Ambassadorship. AHA Ambassadorship is defined as positive advocacy, volunteer service, and commitment to AHA's science and mission-related activities. This advocacy may be demonstrated by:
 - a. Active involvement in local or national level AHA committees and activities
 - b. Consistent championing of AHA's mission to be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives
 - c. Vision to assist the AHA in becoming a catalyst to achieve maximum impact in equitable health and wellbeing.
9. Consistent with AHA's commitment to fostering growth of new and developing investigators, all applicants MUST incorporate the naming of at least one full-time fellow (predoctoral or postdoctoral) for the duration of the award term. Additionally, applicants must name at least one early-career faculty member (up to and including assistant professor) whose career should be meaningfully enhanced by their substantive inclusion in the proposed studies. Please address these in this section.

Sections 6 and 7: Applicant/PI and PI Demographics

In this section of the application, you will provide information about yourself, your academic career, effort and professional time, demographics, citizenship, location of work for the research project and college degrees. Save each section as you complete it.

Section 8: Institution and Personnel

Provide information about your institution, including the Grants Officer, Fiscal Officer, and Technology Officer.

These Officers must be selected from the list of registered users. Contact your institution's grants office if you are unsure of which person to select from the list. It is important to select the correct grants officer, as they are responsible for the final submission of your LOI to the AHA.

Section 9: Project Summary & Non-Scientist Summaries, Classifications

Complete the Project Summary

Write a concise description or abstract describing the work proposed. This should be as brief as possible, since you also will be required to upload a separate LOI document. Note: This field will not accept any special characters or keystrokes (e.g., β , π , etc.).

Prepare your Non-Scientist Summary

Enter a description of your project that is written to be understood by non-scientists. This information may be reviewed by people who do not have scientific or medical backgrounds. Please be clear and avoid technical and scientific terms, when possible. When formulating your lay summary, it might help to imagine that you are explaining your work to a new acquaintance who does not work in the science field.

NOTE: It is incumbent upon the applicant to make a clear link between the project and the mission of the AHA. The lay summary will be assessed in terms of potential impact on the AHA mission; this will be factored into the overall priority score as noted in the peer review criteria.

o Research Classification Type: Select the Research Type that best fits the research being conducted in your lab (basic, clinical, or population).

o Science Classification: Choose BOTH a Primary Classification and a Secondary Classification.

Section 10: Alternative and Overlapping Funding

Enter details for active and pending research support that is available to you..

Section 11: Upload Attachments:

- Your **Letter of Intent** as a PDF document (3-page limit)

The LOI should briefly describe why the AHA should invest in your proposed vision for the future in terms of:

- o Likelihood of transforming and advancing the future of cardiovascular disease and cerebrovascular disease science
- o Potential to move your research into emerging and/or difficult areas of inquiry, being consistently at its forefront.

- Ability to develop new tools and methods that support creative experimental approaches to questions, encompassing concepts or techniques from other disciplines.
- Capacity to forge links between disparate disciplines.
- Strong track record of collaboration with other distinguished scientists across disciplines.
- Consistent with AHA's commitment to fostering growth of new and developing investigators, all applicants **MUST** incorporate the naming of at least one full-time fellow (predoctoral or postdoctoral) for the duration of the award term. Additionally, applicants must name at least one early-career faculty member (up to and including assistant professor) whose career should be meaningfully enhanced by their substantive inclusion in the proposed studies.
- Evidence of great promise for future original and innovative contributions.
- Demonstrated commitment to the mission of the American Heart Association and to advancing the ideals and guiding principles through volunteer service.
- List of your **15 best, most impactful and/or foundational publications** that are relevant to the proposed research focus or this program as a pdf document. When selecting, consider those which are foundational papers that support your research program; those that are most cited; and for more recent publications, those in the most high-impact journals or that you predict will elicit the most citations. (2-page limit)
- Your biosketch (5-page limit) - Address the following AHA requirements in the Personal Statement section of the biosketch.
 - **Data Sharing** - If public sharing of your research outputs such as data, code, or material led to scientific advances by others, you are encouraged to detail this.
 - Explicitly state how you contribute to a **safe, inclusive, and diverse work environment**.

In addition, mentors of fellows, Career Development Awardees, and fellows funded through the AHA Research Supplement to Promote Diversity in Science should complete recognized training specific to sexual and gender-based harassment.

Sections 12-14: Validate, Signature Page(s), and Submit

No reference letters are to be supplied with the initial LOI. Two references will be required from those selected to submit a full application.

Format/Type Requirements

You must comply exactly with the AHA's format/type requirements and page limits. Failure to comply will result in the administrative withdrawal (disqualification) of the application.

- Document must be single-spaced.
- No more than 15 characters per inch (cpi) or an average of no more than 15 cpi (cpi includes symbols, punctuation, and spaces).
- NHTMLO less than ¾" page margins on all four sides.
- Maximum of 50 lines per page.
- Arial Font style, 12-point font size for Windows users; Helvetica Font style, 12-point font size for Macintosh users.
- Only Portable Document Format (PDF) files are accepted.

It is not necessary to number your pages or to put your name on every page.

Note: The ProposalCentral electronic system will reject a document that exceeds the page limit.

Internet website addresses (URLs) may not be used to provide information necessary to the review because reviewers are under no obligation to view the Internet sites. Moreover, AHA reviewers are cautioned not to directly access an Internet site, as it could compromise their anonymity. The only place a URL may be used is in the biographical sketch as described in the instructions for that form.

The American Heart Association permits the use of a large language model (LLM – e.g. ChatGPT) or an artificial intelligence tool to generate and/or edit content in research proposals submitted for funding. This information must be disclosed at the time of submission. Disclosure of this information does not impact peer review. Should this information not be disclosed accurately, and use of these tools is identified, the proposal may be administratively withdrawn.

The AHA has the responsibility to make final determination of conformance to format requirements and the authority to withdraw applications. This decision is final and not subject to appeal.

Budget

- Awards are for a five-year period
- \$200,000 annually for 5 years = \$1,000,000 per award
- Budget can cover costs such as PI salary/fringe; salaries/fringe of lab personnel; other expenses such as laboratory costs; animal costs;

human subject recruitment/reimbursement; travel; publication costs, etc.

- Indirect costs are limited to 10 percent of the annual award total

Additional Requirements & Considerations

- Awarded investigators are required to devote at least 75% of their total effort to research. An appropriate effort must be devoted to the work related to this award. Applicants with administrative responsibilities or other duties inconsistent with this time commitment may apply but must reduce those other commitments to be appointed.
- At the time of the submission deadline, applicants must hold a qualifying position at the institution where the research will be conducted.
- Awarded investigators will be expected to participate in various AHA events, including (but not limited to) Scientific Sessions and other scientific conferences, as well as speaking engagements, local activities, etc.
- Consistent with AHA's commitment to fostering growth of new and developing investigators, all applicants **MUST** incorporate the naming of at least one full-time fellow (predoctoral or postdoctoral) for the duration of the award term. Additionally, applicants must name at least one early-career faculty member (up to and including assistant professor) whose career should be meaningfully enhanced by their substantive inclusion in the proposed studies. Please address these in this section.
- Strategically Focused Research Network personnel may hold individual AHA awards.

Invited, Full Application Instructions

Deadline for invited applications: Thursday, November 14, 2024, 3 pm Central

Applications must be submitted via ProposalCentral by the institution's Grants Officer.

Applications must be received no later than 3:00 p.m. CDT on the deadline date. The system will shut down at 3 p.m. CDT. Early submission is encouraged. Your institutional Grants Officer (GO) has the final responsibility of submitting your completed application to the American Heart Association. It is important that you check with your GO for his/her internal deadline. All submissions require a signature from a designated institutional representative.

Log on to ProposalCentral and navigate as follows:
HOME: Proposals Due -- Your Merit Award application will be listed on the screen.
Click the Proposal ID number to complete all required sections

Document Uploads Required for Invited Applicants

Applications will be reviewed by scientists and lay stakeholders. Content should be written so that it is understandable to non-scientists, as well as to scientists who may not have specific expertise within the proposed topic area. The research does not need to be described in the detail that would be expected in an NIH R01, since the track record and promise of the investigator are the primary award criteria.

The application must include the following documents:

1. A summary of the applicant's major research achievements. This should be written so that a non-scientist reviewer can readily understand the summary. (1-page limit)
2. A summary of the applicant's ongoing and planned research program and a statement of why the AHA should support the applicant's vision. (8-page limit; up to 1 page of figures is permitted and counts toward the 8-page limit.)

This section should build upon the letter of intent by focusing on how the applicant's past accomplishments and future vision would:

- Transform and advance the future of approaches to cardiovascular and cerebrovascular disease.
- Move into emerging and/or difficult areas of inquiry, being consistently at its forefront.
- Support creative approaches to questions, encompassing concepts from other disciplines.
- Forge links between disparate disciplines.
- Allow for collaboration with other distinguished scientists across disciplines.
- Consistent with AHA's commitment to fostering growth of new and developing investigators, all applicants MUST incorporate the naming of at least one full-time fellow (predoctoral or postdoctoral) for the duration of the award term. Additionally, applicants must name at least one early-career faculty member (up to and including assistant professor) whose career should be meaningfully enhanced by their substantive inclusion in the proposed studies.
- Generate original and innovative contributions.
- Assist the AHA in becoming a catalyst to achieving maximum impact in equitable health and well-being.

3. Literature Cited (4-page limit)

4. Two Reference Letters (4-page limit for each)

This is a confidential communication, to be completed by the person providing a reference. The applicant will invite referees through ProposalCentral. Each referee will receive an email message with instructions on how to complete the process and upload their reference letter in PDF format. Each letter is limited to four pages. Reference letters are due by 3 p.m. CST on the proposal deadline date.

5. Top 15 Bibliography - You may upload the same Top 15 Bibliography that you submitted for your Letter of Intent or you may upload a revised list.

6. Your biosketch (5-page limit) - Address the following AHA requirements in the Personal Statement section of the biosketch.

- **Data Sharing** - If public sharing of your research outputs such as data, code, or material led to scientific advances by others, you are encouraged to detail this.
- Explicitly state how you contribute to a **safe, inclusive, and diverse work environment**.

In addition, mentors of fellows, Career Development Awardees, and fellows funded through the AHA Research Supplement to Promote Diversity in Science should complete recognized training specific to sexual and gender-based harassment.

Third-party Personnel (if identified in proposal)

See and share links below for documents required from people listed as third-party personnel.

- Collaborating Investigator Biosketch (5 page limit)
- Collaborating Investigator Letter (5 page limit)
- Consultant Letter (5 page limit)

Format/Type Requirements

Most required documents may be prepared prior to creating the application in ProposalCentral. Adherence is mandatory to the page limits and format requirements below. No applicant should have an advantage over other applicants by providing more content in his/her application by using smaller, denser type.

Applications may be administratively withdrawn by AHA if the proposal does not comply with format requirements (type size/characters per inch, lines per page, and page limitations).

- Document must be single-spaced.
- No more than 15 characters per inch (cpi) or an average of no more than 15 cpi (cpi includes symbols, punctuation, and spaces).
- No less than ¾" page margins on all four sides.
- Maximum of 50 lines per page.
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The AHA has the responsibility to make final determination of conformance to format requirements and the authority to withdraw applications. This decision is final and not subject to appeal.

Required documents for each program can be found on the Required Application Documents page. Content cannot be modified or changed once an application is submitted to AHA. Only the required documents for submission will be accepted. Additional or supplemental documents will not be accepted.

Peer Review Criteria

Since this award mechanism is intended to fund individuals rather than specific projects, peer review criteria focus primarily on the investigator, their record of accomplishments, and potential to transform and advance the future of cardiovascular and/or cerebrovascular disciplines that support the mission and strategic values of the AHA.

Impact on AHA Mission

How effectively does the applicant describe for an audience without a science background how this proposal will impact the AHA's mission to be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives? Do past involvement and

future plans support the applicant's description? Is the proposed research of high impact to the mission of AHA? How will the applicant assist the American Heart Association in becoming a catalyst to achieving maximum impact in equitable health and wellbeing?

Consider the AHA's Strategic Value Proposition that includes addressing overall health and wellbeing, anchored in cardiovascular and cerebrovascular health. This might encompass; focusing on breakthrough science and technology; changes in systems and policy; and engaging with individuals to transform communities. Evaluation of this criterion will be influenced by the lay summary section of the application.

Scientific Rigor and Collaboration

Does the applicant's vision challenge existing paradigms or critical barriers to progress in the field? Does the candidate propose approaches to major challenges in the fields of cardiovascular and/or cerebrovascular diseases that have the potential to produce an unusually high impact? Does the applicant describe the ability to develop tools and methods that support creative approaches to questions, encompassing concepts from other disciplines? Does the investigator have the capacity to forge links between disparate disciplines? Does the candidate have a strong track record of collaboration with other distinguished scientists across disciplines?

Investigator

Does the candidate have a history of volunteer service and commitment to the American Heart Association, across the breadth of volunteer opportunities? Is the candidate established as an accomplished investigator in the fields of cardiovascular and/or cerebrovascular science? How does his/her record of accomplishment (including funding and publications) demonstrate the future ability to transform the field? Does the candidate have a strong track record of collaboration with other distinguished scientists across disciplines?

Reverse Site Visit

A third stage of the review will be conducted with only the highest ranked applications and will include a "reverse site-visit" presentation to the AHA review group.

Contacting AHA peer reviewers concerning your application is deemed a form of scientific misconduct and will result in the removal of your application from funding consideration and institutional notification of ethical concerns.