

2026 American Heart Association Career Development Award

[Application Instructions \(PDF\)](#)

[Required Application Documents](#)

[Supporting Sudden Cardiac Arrest Research](#)

[ProposalCentral](#)

Key Dates

RFP posted	April 4, 2025
ProposalCentral open:	Oct. 1, 2025
Proposal deadline:	Tues., Dec. 2, 2025
Award notification:	March 2026
Award start:	April 1, 2026

Important Notes

- Proposals must be received no later than **3 p.m. Central Time** on the deadline date. Early submission is encouraged.
- Before beginning an application, see the [AHA Application Resources](#) page for requirements that apply to all AHA research awards. Also view AHA's research [Policies and Statements](#).
- Proposals must be [submitted electronically via ProposalCentral](#). The system will open eight weeks prior to the application deadline to complete the proposal and upload required documents. Applicant can create required documents in advance; refer to the [AHA Application Instructions \(PDF\)](#). **All submissions require the signature of a designated institutional representative.**
- Applicants must be [AHA Professional Members](#) at the time of proposal submission. [Join or renew](#) when preparing an application in ProposalCentral, or by phone at [+1-888-242-2453](#) or [972-349-5803](#). Membership processing may take 3-5 days; do not wait until the application deadline to renew or join. The AHA expects all mentors associated with training/mentored research awards to maintain active AHA membership, as well.

Purpose

This grant supports highly promising healthcare and academic professionals, in the early years of one's first professional appointment, to explore innovative questions or pilot studies that will provide preliminary data and training necessary to assure the applicant's future success as a research scientist.

The award will develop the research skills to support and greatly enhance the awardee's chances to obtain and retain a high-quality career position.

Within this award, additional collaboration money has been designated through the [California Walnut Commission](#) and the [AHA/VIVA Physician Research Award](#). See co-funded opportunities [details](#).

Eligibility

At the time of application, the applicant must hold an MD, PhD, DO, DVM, DDS, or equivalent post-baccalaureate doctoral degree.

- Postdoctoral fellows are eligible to apply but must have attained faculty appointment by the time of award activation.
- Investigators who have been awarded NIH K99/R00 or R01 grants are not eligible to apply.
- The AHA will permit a Career Development Awardee to concurrently hold an NIH K award (other than K99/R00) if there is no budgetary overlap.
- The awardee must devote at least 10% effort to the Career Development Award.
- AHA 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.
- Applicants must have one of the following designations **at the time of proposal submission – not award start date**, depending on career stage and each individual's situation. An awardee must maintain one of the designations listed below throughout the duration of the award. Please consult with your institution's grant officer.
 - U.S. citizen
 - Permanent resident
 - Pending permanent resident (must have filed Form I-485 for permanent resident status and obtained an I-797C Notice of Action that the application has been received by USCIS and case is pending)
 - E-3 Visa - specialty occupation worker
 - F-1 Visa – student (for predoctoral and postdoctoral fellows only)
 - G-4 Visa - family member of an international organization employee
 - H1-B Visa - temporary worker in a specialty occupation
 - J-1 Visa - exchange visitor (pre- and postdoctoral fellowships only; all other awardees must obtain an H-1B or equivalent by the award activation date)
 - O-1 Visa - temporary worker with extraordinary abilities in the sciences
 - TN Visa - NAFTA Professional
 - DACA - Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals

At the time of award activation:

- An awardee **must hold a faculty/staff position** up to and including the rank of assistant professor (or equivalent).
- Within the requisite Department Head letter, the Department Head must affirm clearly that should an applicant not currently hold a faculty position, **the applicant will hold the required position by start date of the award**. Proposals will not be accepted with the intent to delay the award start date to accommodate the faculty appointment. It must be guaranteed by the award start date and stated explicitly by the Department in the requisite letter.
- No more than six years may have elapsed since the first faculty/staff appointment (after receipt of doctoral degree) at the assistant professor level or equivalent (including, but not

limited to, instructor, research assistant professor, research scientist, staff scientist, etc.). If the candidate held the title of instructor during postdoctoral fellowship or residency years due to clinical or teaching responsibilities, that period of time does not count against the eligibility period for applying for the Career Development Award. The AHA will consider interruptions of work experience due to extenuating circumstances and clinical training.

- The applicant must demonstrate that adequate time will be devoted to ensuring the successful completion of the project.

Requirements

Mentoring Team: The award requires, at a minimum, a primary mentor and a secondary mentor who will provide counsel and direction and scholarship oversight. Up to two additional mentors may be named to the mentoring team. A mentoring team approach with a committed lead mentor is an essential piece. Applicants should clearly define each person's role as part of the mentoring team.

The primary and secondary mentors should have, most importantly, prior history of successfully mentoring early career investigators to independence, track records of high-quality investigation, academic accomplishment, and should be invested in the career progress of the early career scientist. The mentors' primary function is to work with the applicant to develop the application and training plan, make necessary arrangements with the institution to conduct the proposed research work, enforce the appropriate timelines for accomplishing the work, and guide the awardee toward a productive career in his/her chosen field.

- One individual must be identified as the primary mentor who will assist in the coordination of the candidate's research. The primary mentor should be an active investigator in the area of the proposed research and be committed both to the applicant's career development and the applicant's research. The mentors must document the availability of dedicated sufficient research support (e.g., time and effort) and facilities for high-quality research.
- At least one mentor must be from outside of the applicant's department, division or institution.
- One mentor should be committed to guiding the applicant's future grant writing endeavors (such as, how to write an R01 or equivalent).
- Please note: Only letters of support required from members of the mentoring team will be accepted. No other reference reports/letters are required or accepted.

Career Development Plan (3 pages maximum): The applicant is required to submit a comprehensive career development plan that includes:

- Primary career intention – AHA does not require this to be a traditional academic research or health profession track. For example, an applicant might wish to pursue a career in industry, technology, teaching, or public health, etc.
ong-term professional goals (such as positions desired or other specific professional goals, such as 'write a book').
- Explicit short-term goals that contribute to long-term interests and the most important anticipated challenges that must be mitigated/overcome to reach these goals.
- Timeline and 2-3 metrics that will define success in reaching each goal.
- Describe training or experiences you will develop to contribute to and ensure that long term goals are achieved.

- Which aspects of your current work/job will be delegated to others in order to accomplish the early career training and tasks necessary to achieve your goals?
Identify additional skills, knowledge or experience you will need to acquire that may directly or indirectly help you in your current job or future positions, and how you plan to ensure that this occurs.
- Specifically delineate when and how progress assessments/checkpoints will occur, particularly with each member of your mentoring team (e.g., memos, phone calls, meetings) and what developmental activities will be completed or discussed at these times.
- Provide letters of support from each mentoring team member that indicate they understand their roles and commitment to you as the early career investigator.

Resources: While AHA does not endorse a particular resource, the following are offered for applicants' reference:

[How and Why to Write a Career Development Plan](#) | Robert Half
[Guide to Writing a Career Development Plan](#)

Budget

\$77,000 per year, including 10% institutional indirect costs.

The award may be used for salary and fringe benefits of the principal investigator, collaborating investigator(s), mentoring team members, and other participants with faculty appointments, consistent with percent effort, and for project-related expenses, such as salaries of technical personnel essential to the conduct of the project, supplies, equipment, computers/electronics, travel (including international travel), volunteer subject costs, data management, and publication costs, etc.

AHA does **not** require use of the NIH salary cap.

Award Duration: Three years. non-renewable

Total Award Amount: \$231,000

Restrictions

- The applicant may submit only one Career Development Award application per deadline.
- The applicant may not be a current or prior recipient of an AHA Career Development Award or AHA Scientist Development Grant (affiliate or association-wide).
- The applicant may submit the same or similar application three times (the original plus two resubmissions). The same or similar application submitted the fourth time will be administratively withdrawn.
- Hyperlinks to data/figures/additional information are not permitted in the Research Plan nor any other proposal documents. This includes use of the Precision Medicine Platform for applications and peer review purposes.
- A Career Development Award applicant holding a J-1 Visa (exchange visitor) at the time of application must obtain an H-1B or equivalent by the award activation date.
- Strategically Focused Research Network personnel may hold individual AHA awards.
- In limited cases, a delay of the award start date may be allowable up to six months.

- A Career Development awardee may also hold an AHA Collaborative Sciences Award, Innovative Project Award, Transformational Project Award, and may be the program director or sponsor on an AHA Institutional Award for Undergraduate Training.
- 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.

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.

The American Heart Association DOES NOT permit the use of a large language model (LLM – e.g. ChatGPT) or an artificial intelligence tool to generate and/or edit content in peer review critiques. Uploading of any portion of a research proposal into a large language model (LLM – e.g. ChatGPT) or an artificial intelligence tool to assist in writing a critique of the proposal is explicitly prohibited as it is a violation of the [AHA's Peer Reviewer Certification Statement](#) (to include confidentiality, non-disclosure, and conflict of interest).

The AHA reserves the right to an initial triage, whereby a minimum of half of the submissions may be triaged.

To judge the merit of the application, reviewers will comment on the following criteria. Fully address these in your proposal.

Non-Scientist Summary - 5% of score

AHA Mission: To be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives.

- How well written is the Non-Scientist Summary in explaining to a non-scientist audience the research proposed and its importance?
- Does the Non-Scientist Summary adequately explain the major health problem being addressed by this study?
- Does it provide specific questions and how the projects will address them?
- Does it provide information on the overall impact of this work and the potential advances in the field?
- Does it relay how the proposal supports the mission of the AHA?

Mentorship and Career Development

Mentoring Team

- Do the mentors have the experience to direct the proposed research training, as evidenced by a track record regarding productivity, funding and prior trainees?

- Does the primary mentor demonstrate familiarity with the applicant's career and developmental goals and provide a comprehensive training plan that supports the applicant's progress towards his/her career development plan?
- Does the mentoring team include at least one mentor from outside the applicant's department, division, or institution and at least one mentor committed to guiding the applicant's future grant writing endeavors?
- Is an appropriate level of time, effort, funding, and involvement proposed for the mentoring component?
- Is there a contingency plan for mentors, if they cannot fulfill their contract for mentorship to the early career investigator?

Career Development Plan

- Is the candidate's career development plan, both during the award and afterward, of high quality and sufficient feasibility?
- Do the structured activities meet the applicant's long- and short-term career goals?
- Are appropriate timelines and metrics of success planned for the candidate's progress?
- Is there a mitigation plan if timelines and metrics are not fulfilled on time?
- Is there a satisfactory and appropriate relationship of the proposal to the career development goals and the candidate's previous experience?

Investigator and Environment

Investigator (applicant): Is the investigator appropriately trained, productive, and well suited to carry out this work? Is the work proposed appropriate to the experience level of the principal investigator (applicant) and other researchers? Does the investigative team bring complementary and integrated expertise to the project (if applicable)? Does the Investigator have a record of diligence, commitment, and productivity that warrant support as an early career investigator?

Environment: Does the environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success? Does the proposal benefit from unique features of the investigative environment, or subject populations, or employ useful collaborative arrangements? Is there evidence of institutional support as demonstrated in the department head letter? Does the mentoring team have experience and success mentoring early career investigators to independence?

All applicants (excluding fellows) are to include a statement in the Personal Statement section of their biographical sketch that explicitly states how they contribute to a safe and inclusive work environment. In addition, mentors on Fellowships, Career Development Awards, and Research Supplements should complete recognized training specific to sexual and gender-based harassment.

Research Plan (8 page limit)

Significance: Does this study address an important problem that is a barrier to a world of longer, healthier lives? Does the science accelerate the discovery, interpretation, and application of scientific knowledge to enhance and treat cardiovascular and brain health? If the aims of the application are achieved, how will scientific knowledge or clinical practice be advanced? What will be the effect of these studies on the concepts, methods and technologies that drive this field? How will the acquisition and analysis of data during this early career award facilitate the successful transition to independence of the early career investigator toward successful future funding and

independence?

Approach: Are the conceptual framework, design, methods, and analyses adequately developed, well-integrated, well-reasoned and feasible (as determined by preliminary data) and appropriate to the aims of the proposal? The assessment of preliminary data should be put into perspective so that bold new ideas and risk-taking by beginning investigators are encouraged rather than stymied. Does the applicant acknowledge potential challenges and problem areas and consider alternative tactics and mitigation? Will the training and experience attained during this mentored project support and promote a pathway to becoming an independent investigator?

For all applications that include vertebrate animals or human subjects, applicants must explain how relevant biological variables, such as sex and age, 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 or a specific age group.

Innovation: Is the proposal original and innovative? For example: Does the proposal challenge existing paradigms and address an innovative hypothesis or critical barrier to progress in the field? Does the proposal develop or employ novel concepts, approaches, methodologies, tools, or technologies for this area?

Impact: How does the training and experience supported by this award ensure that the early career investigator will progress to success in funding and independence as a career research investigator?