

# Western States Affiliate Predoctoral Fellowship Program Description

Award Activation: January 1, 2012

## Program Description, Eligibility and Peer Review Criteria

### **Objective**

To help students initiate careers in cardiovascular and stroke research by providing research assistance and training.

### **Science Focus**

Research broadly related to cardiovascular function and disease and stroke, or to related clinical, basic science, bioengineering or biotechnology, and public health problems, including multidisciplinary efforts.

### **Disciplines**

Proposals are encouraged from all disciplines, as well as epidemiological, behavioral, community and clinical investigations that bear on cardiovascular and stroke problems.

### **Target Audience**

- Post baccalaureate, predoctoral M.D., Ph.D., D.O., D.V.M. (or equivalent) students who seek research training with a sponsor//mentor prior to embarking on a research career.
- Full-time students working towards their degrees. Predoctoral fellowships are not to support individuals while they are completing their course work or studying for their qualifying examination or for individuals who already have a science-based Ph.D.

### **Sponsor**

It's important for the new fellow to receive wise counsel and direction from an established investigator interested in the conduct and progress of the research project during the research-training period. Each fellow must have a sponsor.

### **Citizenship**

At the time of application, the applicant 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 I-765)
- E-3 Visa - specialty occupation worker
- H1-B Visa - temporary worker in a specialty occupation
- F-1 - Student Visa - temporary worker in a specialty occupation
- J-1 Visa - exchange visitor
- O-1 Visa - temporary worker with extraordinary abilities in the sciences
- TN Visa - NAFTA Professional

Awardee must meet American Heart Association citizenship criteria throughout the duration of the award.

Applicants are not required to reside in the United States for any period before applying for American Heart Association funding.

### **Location of Work**

The award may be completed at any accredited institution in Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah or Washington.

American Heart Association research awards are limited to 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 Administration employees.

Funding is prohibited for awards at non-U.S. institutions.

### **Budget/Annual Award Amount**

**Trainee Stipend/Salary:** \$22,000; institution may supplement stipend

**Fringe Benefit:** \$3,000 annual departmental allowance to help defray the fellow's training-related expenses, such as medical insurance, travel to scientific meetings, and the fellow's research supplies and equipment.

**Project Support:** Funds may not be used to pay tuition or dependent allowance (for training-related expenses such as medical insurance, travel to scientific meetings, and supplies/equipment)

**Indirect:** Not allowed

**Total Annual Award Amount:** \$22,000 stipend plus \$3,000 annual departmental allowance = \$25,000 award maximum per year)

**Award Duration:** One or two years; may submit an application to compete for a third year of funding, if eligible.

Fellows who wish to compete for a third year of fellowship support and meet the eligibility criteria must submit a new fellowship application according to the program guidelines. New applications are allowed in the final year only. This is a new, competitive application, not an application for renewal.

Renewal is possible for a maximum of three years of predoctoral fellowship support from the American Heart Association. Awardees are encouraged to reapply for continued funding but must undergo competitive application and peer review processes, and must also have demonstrated satisfactory progress during the current award.

## **Peer Review Criteria**

To judge the merit of the application, reviewers will comment on the following criteria. Please be sure to address these in your proposal. Each criterion will account for 1/3 of the overall score.

### **Criterion 1 - Evaluation of the Investigator**

Does the trainee have potential for a research career?

1. Are the trainee's career plans specified in the application?
2. Is this supported by the trainee's academic record and the assessment provided by the three letters of reference?
3. Does the trainee have prior research experience and/or publications?
4. Is there a clear rationale supporting the need for the proposed training?
5. What is the sponsor's assessment of the applicant?

## Criterion 2 - Sponsor/Training Plan and Environment

### Sponsor/Training Plan

1. Is the mentor an independent investigator?
2. Does the mentor have the experience to direct the proposed research training, as evidenced by their track record regarding productivity, funding and prior trainees?
3. Does the mentor have adequate current funding to support the fellow's project?
4. Does the mentor provide a comprehensive training plan that will facilitate the applicant's progress towards his/her research career goals?

### Environment

1. Does the scientific environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success for the training experience?
2. Is there evidence of institutional commitment?

## Criterion 3 - Evaluation of the Proposal

1. **Significance:** Does this study address an important problem broadly related to cardiovascular disease or stroke? What will be the effect of these studies on the concepts, methods and technologies that drive this field?
2. **Approach:** A new fellow may not have had adequate time to generate preliminary data. Applicants can 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.  
Are the conceptual framework, design, methods and analyses adequately developed, well integrated, well reasoned, feasible (as determined by preliminary data or the expertise available in the mentor's and/or collaborator's laboratories) and appropriate to the aims of the project? Does the applicant acknowledge potential problem areas and consider alternative tactics?
3. **Innovation:** Is the project original?

Applicants should never contact reviewers regarding their applications. Discussing scientific content of an application or attempting to influence review outcome will constitute a conflict of interest in the review. Reviewers must notify the AHA if an applicant contacts them.

### Restrictions

- This award is not intended for individuals of faculty/staff rank.
- An investigator may not hold more than one AHA award concurrently. Exception(s): an investigator may hold two AHA grants (affiliate and national) concurrently if all three apply:
  - 1) There will be no more than six months remaining on the initial award.
  - 2) The projects have no overlap in specific aims.
  - 3) There is no budgetary overlap between the two projects.
- An applicant may submit only one affiliate application per deadline. If eligible, an applicant may simultaneously submit an application to an affiliate and to the national award program. The proposed research plan may need to be adjusted based upon different length of award and dollars available. The deadline dates may be different for each submission. If both are funded, the applicant must choose one award.
- Awardee must devote a minimum of 75% full-time effort to research or activities directly related to their development into independent researchers, as opposed to patient care or teaching responsibilities.
- Predoctoral fellowships are not to support individuals while they are completing their course work or studying for their qualifying examination or for individuals who already have a science-based Ph.D.
- The fellow cannot hold a comparable award as a source of supplementation.
- Western States Affiliate allows two years of AHA pre-doctoral fellowship support per individual. However, in certain circumstances an additional year can be applied for if the predoctoral student is still eligible. New applications are allowed in the final year only. This is a new, competitive application, not an application for renewal.
- Western States Affiliate sponsor may have no more than two AHA-funded predoctoral fellows at any time.
- An applicant who is unsuccessful in a competition may resubmit the same or similar application three times (the original plus two resubmissions). The same or similar application submitted for the fourth time will be administratively withdrawn.