

VISN 6 2025 Request for Proposals: Research Career Develop Awards

1. The VISN 6 Career Development Award (CDA) program supports the identification and development of qualified investigators in VISN 6 VA facilities. These investigators are intended to conduct research that directly addresses health care needs in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). While CDA's are open for all research areas, preference will be given to scientifically sound projects addressing VHA and VISN 6 priorities and proposals for clinical research, rehabilitation research, health services research, and/or translational research with strong clinical relevance.
2. Eligibility criteria for VISN 6 CDA awards (one or more):
 - a. Early career investigators within 8 years from their terminal degree who would be competitive for CDA track or Merit Award.
 - b. Clinician investigator who warrants protected time to become competitive for VA Merit Award.
 - c. Non-clinician investigators with current appointment at an Affiliate University proposing research relevant to VA research priorities who desires a VA research career.
3. Non-VA applicants with an appointment at the Affiliate University of the sponsoring VAMC should clearly express their intent of pursuing VA research careers as well as a program of research focused on translational science, health services, or clinical research relevant to VA.
4. In conjunction with the facility's ACOS-R, the applicant must identify an appropriate mentorship team. This should include at least one primary VA mentor who will serve as the applicant's VA mentor. It is preferred that the primary mentor has a successful record mentoring junior scientists or extensive knowledge navigating onboarding of professional staff into VA research employment. In addition, at least one of the mentors must be a Scientist with expertise in the CDA applicant's area of study. If the scientific mentor does not have a VA appointment, there must be a research administrative mentor with a VA appointment.
5. Each VISN 6 Medical Center that is FWA-licensed/currently approved for research and performing medical research is encouraged to submit at least one candidate per cycle, **but no more than two candidates per medical center for large research facilities (e.g. Durham and Richmond) and three candidates per medical center for the small research facilities (e.g. Asheville, Hampton, Salem, Salisbury)**. The candidate(s) should be selected based on the review and approval by the local ACOS-R and R&D Committee Chair. A scoring/selection guide is provided to the ACOS of R's.
6. Timeframes for submissions:
 - **CDA Announcement:** Jan 14, 2025
 - **Applicants notify ACOS of R:** Feb 03, 2025
 - **Applications Due to local VA:** Mar 10, 2025
 - **Local submissions to VISN:** Apr 07, 2025
 - **VISN Peer Review Due:** May 07, 2025
 - **VISN CMO Leadership Review:** May 16, 2025
 - **VISN Final Award Decision:** May 23, 2025
 - **VISN Announcement of winners:** May 27, 2025
 - **Funding Begins:** July 01, 2025

7. Candidates submit the CDA submission packet to local ACOS or R. The local ACOS of R / Research office submits the locally-selected packages (at most 2 per station) on behalf of candidates to the VISN Research office in Salisbury. Link for submission site has been shared with the ACOS of R offices.

All candidate applications that violate page limit rules will be triaged and not scored/reviewed.

All candidates must be able to start accepting direct VA salary funding on July 01, 2025.

The packet must include:

- a) Research Plan (**up to 6 pages**; Arial 11-point font). This should include: 1) Specific Aims (**1 page**), 2) Background and clinical significance, 3) research design and methods (Section 2 and 3 should be maximum **5 pages**).
- b) References (**1 page**).
- c) Budget and justification (**template + 1 page justification**)
- d) Potential impact for Veteran health care (**1 page**)
- e) Human Subjects or Vertebrate Animals Section (if applicable)
- f) Applicant career plan in narrative (**2 pages**); This section should clearly outline the applicant's career goals as they relate to VA, current qualifications, and a clear strategy to submit/secure federal funding that impacts the VA medical center.
- g) Mentor Training Plan (up to **3 pages**): This should describe the mentoring plan in depth and provide a timeline with deliverables.
- h) Biosketch for all key personnel (Applicant, Primary Mentor, and Co-Mentor(s).
- i) Letter of support from the Medical Center Director indicating commitment of dedicated research space and a 5/8th VA appointment (if applicable).
- j) Letter of support from ACOS-R and R&D Committee Chair (joint letter is acceptable).
- k) Letter of support from the Primary Mentor (and Co-Mentors, if applicable).
- l) Statement indicating resources and/or financial support dedicated for the conduct of the CDA awardee research from the Medical Center, VA-affiliated Non-profit corporation/foundation, university affiliate, and/or other source that is available to strengthen the CDA career plan success. (Consult the local ACOS-R).

- m) **For non-clinicians planning to submit for BLR&D eligibility (1 page)**. BLR&D eligibility assesses a candidate's career trajectory and seeks to recruit only the most accomplished basic scientists to apply for VA funding. These candidates should describe their projected accomplishments in the following dimensions at the time of the conclusion of the proposed CDA funding:
 - a. **Service** contributions and engagement with the local VA: This may consist of service on local VA committees, mentoring/training, meaningful collaborations with investigators/clinicians at VA, etc. For junior investigators (within 10 years of PhD or equivalent), applicant should demonstrate strong potential and commitment to a career as a VA investigator.
 - b. **Funding** history: in general, candidates who lack a history of major independent federal funding as PI will not be deemed competitive for BLR&D eligibility. For junior investigators, applicant should at least demonstrate history of local independent funding (most competitive eligibility applicants will have one national-funded award).
 - c. **Publications (Independence/Productivity)**: the most competitive applicants will have multiple publications in the years prior to eligibility submission in which

- they hold the senior author position. For junior investigators, applicant should demonstrate the transition from first author to senior/corresponding author.
- d. **Career Trajectory:** participation in local regional, or national committees and professional organizations supporting the candidate's rapidly growing stature in their field; progress towards promotion and tenure; recognitions, honors and awards. The most competitive applicant will demonstrate leadership roles and/or potential for leadership positions (junior investigators).
 - e. **Alignment with VA Mission:** proposed work has relevance to VA mission, covering VA priority areas and initiatives.
8. The completed VISN 6 CDA application, including the VAMC Director cover letter, should be uploaded by the local ACOS of R/ research service office into link given to them by the VISN Research Office. Please assemble all components into a single pdf document + the budget template (two final documents).
 9. Each application will be evaluated by a VISN 6 Scientific Peer Review Committee based on:
 - a) Applicant qualifications
 - b) Two-year career plan with clear strategy to submit/secure federal funding that impacts the VA medical center
 - c) Mentor qualifications demonstrating mentoring experience and federally funded research history
 - d) Scientific merit of the proposed research
 - e) Anticipated contribution to science/clinical care
 - f) Relevance of the research to VA, VA research priorities, and translational research for the veteran population.
 10. CDA recipients must be provided VA dedicated office/research space with the expectation that the recipient conduct the research at the VA facility (as appropriate) and spend VA time at the VA facility. Proposed research for the CDA must be conducted on-site at the VA facility and/or at an approved off-site facility (if off-site waiver held by mentor) or MOU established between the affiliate and the VA for conduct of this research.
 11. The CDA award funds 5/8ths salary (up to \$190,000/year including 25% for benefits) to protect dedicated research time for successful candidates. The award also contained study operations money to a max of \$85,000/year. The award is for a maximum of two years.
 12. VISN 6 will fund up to five CDA awards this cycle, pending VISN approval. Specifically, up to two awards will be funded from larger research program facilities (e.g. Durham and Richmond) and three awards from smaller research program facilities (Asheville, Hampton, Salem, Salisbury).
 13. A Just-In-Time in time process will be implemented to ensure that all HR and R&D subcommittee approvals are in place and R&D approval is obtained prior to funds being released to the applicant's facility. The applicant's Research Service and ACOS-R will be tasked with tracking and certifying that all JIT items are completed prior to CDA funds release.

14. CDA awards are for two years, with funding for the second-year contingent upon adequate progress during the first year. A progress report must be submitted at the end of the first year as a basis for continued funding in the second year. Adequate progress is defined as generation of pilot data, at least one publication submission to a peer reviewed journal from data gathered during the CDA, and/or submission of an LOI or eligibility application to the appropriate VA ORD research program (i.e. BLR&D, CSR&D, HSR&D, and/or RR&D). Awardees will be monitored for meeting selected research milestones and time committed to the research program.

15. For specific questions, applicants please first ask the local ACOS of R. If that doesn't answer the questions, and for medical center leadership questions, please contact Dr. Robin Hurley, VISN 6 Research Lead. Robin.Hurley@va.gov.



2025 CDA Budget
Template v2.xlsx