

ORDE "KNOW YOUR AGENCY" SERIES: AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION

AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION (AHA)

<http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG>

(Click on Healthcare/Research link at top)

OVERVIEW

Founded as a professional society in 1924, the American Heart Association's six founders – all cardiologists – were determined to use AHA to help demystify heart health and disease. AHA transitioned to voluntary health organization status in 1948 and began their research grant program in 1949. Consolidation of regional and local affiliates into a single corporation and creation of the American Stroke Association Division occurred in 1997. AHA's mission is "Building healthier lives, free of cardiovascular diseases and stroke" and three outreach activities are emphasized: professional and public education, public health policy development and scientific research funding.

Approach

AHA supports basic, clinical, translational, population health and outcomes research related to cardiovascular function, disability and stroke. Within these broad areas, AHA considers projects in many areas including aging, health disparities, diabetes, emergency cardiac care, epidemiology, genetics, nutrition, obesity and women's health.

AGENCY ORGANIZATION

AHA leadership includes a Chief Executive Officer, President and Chairman of the Board of Directors. The Board consists of medical professionals, legal and financial experts and lay people. AHA's assets reported for the 2011-12 Fiscal Year totaled over \$1 billion. AHA spent more than \$128 million on research in that fiscal year, accounting for almost 21% of total expenses. (Source: AHA Annual Report 2011-12)

GRANT INFORMATION

This agency is second only to the US government in terms of cardiovascular research funding, having provided over \$3.5 billion in research funding since 1949 and counts 13 Nobel Prize winners among its awardees. Funding programs are offered by both the National Center, located

in Dallas, and each of the seven regional Affiliates. Applicants from across the US may apply for National Center offerings but Affiliate funding is restricted to applicants within the specific Affiliate (Colorado is in the SouthWest Affiliate). The agency indicates a major funding priority is to provide research support for early career investigators, and for the 2011-12 fiscal year 41% of all award dollars were dedicated to programs open to faculty at the instructor or assistant professor levels. AHA requires that applicants pay a \$100 fee per application to help defray review costs; however, application fees for AHA members are waived. There are two funding cycles per year – January and July. Programs directed to faculty are listed below.

1) National Center Grant Programs

- a) Scientist Development Grant (funds research for those who hold positions up to assistant professor for 4 years or less; \$231,000 maximum award for 3 years)
- b) Collaborative Science Award (encourages two investigators in different disciplines to collaborate on a project that will be advanced through these differing perspectives; \$750,000 award over 3 years)
- c) Innovation Research Grant (supports high-risk, high-reward research proposed by investigators at any level; 2-year awards for \$150,000)

2) SouthWest Affiliate Grant Programs

- a) Beginning Grant-in-Aid (for investigators who hold terminal degrees, have held the rank of assistant professor for no more than 7 years and are US citizens, permanent residents or hold an appropriate visa; provides \$140,000 over 2 years)
- b) Grant-in-Aid (research grants for faculty at any rank; provides \$140,000 for 2 years)
- c) Mentored Clinical & Population Research Award (for healthcare professionals with masters or terminal degree; supports pilot studies)

Additional Funding Mechanisms:

AHA also has funding programs at the undergraduate, predoctoral and postdoctoral levels. Specialized funding opportunities involving partnerships with foundations, industry and others are available as well.

Success Rates:

For Fiscal Year 2011-12, AHA received 5,661 applications and funded 972 projects for a 17% success rate.

Contact with AHA Program Staff:

Applicants are encouraged to talk with research staff at the National Center. AHA team members monitor incoming emails pertaining to administrative or technical application issues sent to apply@heart.org, and transmit them to appropriate AHA personnel for action. Applicants may also contact AHA staff by telephone (214-360-6107).

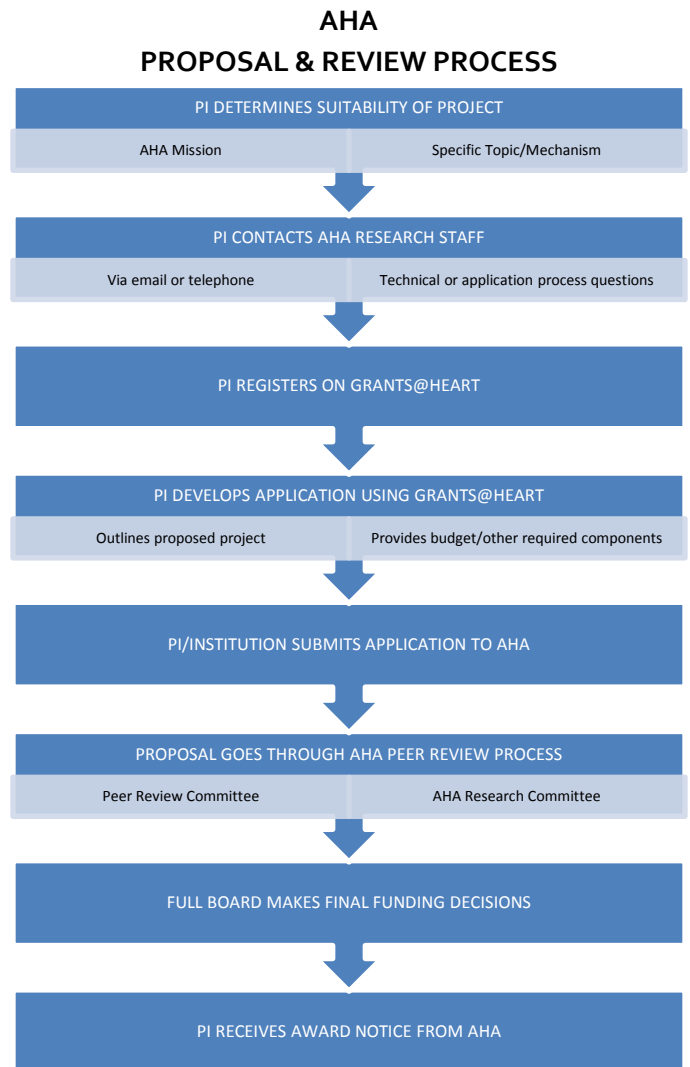
Typical AHA Proposal Process:

- 1) PI determines suitability of proposed project in relation to AHA mission, specific topic area and appropriate grant mechanism
- 2) PI contacts AHA research staff for assistance and questions about application, eligibility, etc.
- 3) If new to AHA, PI registers for AHA on-line submission system, Grants@Heart
- 4) PI develops application through Grants@Heart system and works with the University's Office of Grants and Contracts to submit
- 5) Application is assigned to AHA Peer Review Committee (PRC) for evaluation based on scientific merit and adherence to AHA mission
- 6) PRC proposal scores are transmitted to AHA Research Committees for funding allocation
- 7) AHA Research Committees make funding recommendations to AHA Board of Directors
- 8) AHA Board of Directors makes all final funding decisions
- 9) Successful PI receives first notification by email and the award activation process begins

Application Review Process:

AHA uses peer review for all programs. Applications are assigned to Peer Review Committees (PRCs) based on scientific classification. Within the PRC, two primary reviewers are assigned to each application and will provide independent in-depth reviews. A third reader acts as mediator within the process. Once review is complete, all PRC members meet to discuss scientific merit of the

applications. Every committee member then assigns scores to each application, using a 5-point scoring system (with 1 being the highest score.) Scores for all projects are provided to the AHA Research Committees who are responsible for allocating funds across all grant programs offered. Research committees are responsible for making recommendations to the AHA Board of Directors who make all final funding decisions.



What Happens Next?

PIs whose projects are selected for funding are initially notified by email and then AHA begins the award activation process. Investigators who are not funded may prepare their applications for resubmission based on reviewer comments. AHA allows an original submission and up to two resubmissions for a given project.