

VA Sierra Pacific Network (VISN 21) - Early Career Award Program (ECAP) 2022 Frequently Asked Questions (check back periodically)

1. Does one need to have graduated from MD/PhD program in order to apply?

Eligible applicants can be clinicians or non-clinician doctoral staff who are VA-paid employees at 5/8ths or more in VISN21 by the start date of the ECAP award. This can be broadly interpreted to include various degrees including, but not limited to MD, DO, DPN, PhD, DrPH, DVM, PharmD.

2. Is this grant mechanism allowed to fund archival studies or new data collection? If both, is the funding preference for new data collection?

This grant mechanism is meant to support investigators that have institutional commitment and good ideas to successfully apply for VA Career Development Award or Merit funding upon completion. The program only provides investigator time support so other research expenses such as coordinator time, recruitment, etc will need to come from other sources if required.

3. For those of us submitting a CDA-1 (two-year award) application, would it be appropriate to submit a proposal for ECAP funding at this time?

Yes. However, if both are offered to you, you can accept one, but not both.

4. Are there any stipulations with respect to seniority/academic rank as a reason that an applicant would or would not be favorably considered?

There is no pre-fix requirement/stipulation for academic rank. An academic rank is not a firm requirement as this program is designed to allow for a variety of career trajectories including those who are embarking on an independent research career, as well as those who have had prior research experience, but may have moved into non-research careers, and now wanting to get back into research. The ECAP program is not intended for post-docs or established senior investigators at the time of award.

5. The application instructions state that it provides salary support up to 75% for clinicians, and in one place it states, "Awardees must be full time VA employees and maintain 75% research effort." Does this mean that 75% research effort is the only option, or can someone apply requesting less than 75% salary support?

Eligible applicants are VA-paid employees at 5/8ths or more in VISN21 by the start date of the ECAP award. Should the V21 ECAP be awarded, the applicant will spend approximately 75% of their paid VA FTE for research activities; any remaining VA salary (up to 25% of paid FTE) will be paid from another specified source. For example, say the applicant is 5/8ths at the VA (paid by the VA). If successfully awarded the ECAP, the individual would have to devote at least 75% of this time to the career development/ research activities as outlined in the application. So, for this 5/8ths employee, he or she would need to devote 18.75 hours per week (0.625 FTE X 0.75 % ECAP requirement X 40 hours/week = 18.75 hours/week).

6. How many awards are available for this year and if I apply and do not get it this year, can I reapply next year?

There are approximately 7 awards available, give or take based on applicants' budget requests. ECAP is expected to continue beyond this year, and requests for proposals are anticipated to be annual, with the start date of October 1 every year. Therefore we expect to announce a Request for Application next year, to which you can (re)-apply.

7. I am a VA employee but not a US citizen. Am I eligible to apply?

To be eligible the VA employee must be paid by the VA.

8. Will the ECAP awards be spread among the different systems, or will it simply be a matter of the top candidates being chosen based on the merits of their proposal, regardless of whether or not they cluster in a particular health care system?

The VISN 21 ECAP Program was established with notion of "A rising tide raises all ships" in mind. That being said, the review and awarding of ECAP grants will be highly dependent upon meeting high merit standards regardless of location.

9. Can you advise whether applicants to the ECAP are expected to have completed formal research training (e.g., master's degree in clinical research) before applying? For clinicians recently out of residency, would completing a master's degree in clinical research be considered acceptable as part of training component to pursue during ECAP, with the goal of building to a CDA2 submission?

If one could allocate protected time to get a Masters as part of a career development training plan under your ECAP application that would be acceptable, however there are no funds to support a Masters training program tuition (or any other non-salary expenses) under ECAP.

10. Does the applicant for ECAP have to have an academic appointment/affiliation at a university medical center? The application mentions that applicants must be "instructor" or "Assistant Professor" at the time of application.

Applicants do not have to have an academic appointment/affiliation. The main point of the instructor/assistant professor mention is that ECAP is not for postdocs or (typically) senior ranking investigators

11. What would help make an application competitive?

Major features include: a strong, coherent proposed science with high potential impact/significance for advancing knowledge and benefiting Veteran health and care; high likelihood of VA research success based on the strength and commitment of the applicant for research and for a career in VA research, team of mentors, mentored plan/'curriculum'; the applicant's home VA institution and if applicable, their academic affiliate. Having pertinent mentors and/or other types of involvement (e.g., in the conduct of the study) from multiple VISN21 VA medical centers would be viewed favorably.

12. Do applications need to focus on VISN-specific topics/programs/interventions?

No, but being aligned with VA/VISN21 priorities and high potential impact or significant advancement in knowledge and/or Veteran care would be preferred, at VISN21 and/or national VA level.

13. Is there a limit to the number of proposals that will be submitted from a single VA medical center in VISN21?

No.