Avant-Garde Award: Frequently Asked Questions

Why has the NIDA Director established the Avant-Garde Award?

Dr. Nora D. Volkow, Director, National Institute on Drug Abuse, has a strong commitment to enhancing NIDA's HIV/AIDS research program. The Avant-Garde Award is designed to support novel, innovative, high risk-high payoff research on drug abuse and HIV/AIDS.

What distinguishes the NIDA Avant-Garde Award from other programs?

The NIDA Avant-Garde Award is conceptually similar to the NIH Pioneer Award Program but focuses on drug abuse and HIV/AIDS. It differs from other programs in several ways. It is designed to support people with uniquely creative ideas, rather than projects. The award will provide up to $500,000 direct costs per year for five years to a select two or three exceptionally creative investigators, to pursue innovative, cutting edge research on drug abuse and HIV/AIDS. The research must be relevant to the Trans-NIH Plan for HIV Related Research (http://www.oar.nih.gov/public/public.htm. The information required in the application is highly abbreviated, and turnaround is accelerated through use of a tailored review process.

Do Avant-Garde Awards include indirect costs?

The institutional indirect costs will be paid in addition to the award. Indirect (facilities and administrative) costs will be determined at the time the award is made.

How much time/effort are recipients expected to devote?

Awardees are expected to commit the major portion (at least 51 percent) of their *research* time/effort to activities supported by the Avant-Garde Award. Investigators should not apply if they are unable to commit this amount of effort to the project.

If 50% of my time is devoted to clinical and/or teaching duties, and only 50% to research, how much time/effort would I be expected to devote to Avant-Garde Award activities?

If awardees spend 50% of their time doing research, they would be required to devote the major portion (at least 51 percent) of their *research* time, or 26% of the total time, to Avant-Garde Award activities.

What post-award requirements must I fulfill?

You will be required to submit an annual report of your activities during the year, and you may be contacted periodically for at least five years and asked to report on your latest research efforts.

May two or more scientists apply as a team for the Avant-Garde Award?

Since the Avant-Garde Awards are meant to support a person, not a specific project, applications must come from individual investigators, not from teams of investigators.

From which disciplines does NIDA wish to draw applicants for the Avant-Garde Award?

NIDA encourages applications from scientists from all disciplines. Research concepts must be relevant to the drug abuse and HIV/AIDS.

Are these awards renewable?

No. These awards are intended to jump-start or redirect an individual's research program. Awardees are expected to seek future support through traditional routes.

Are women and members of underrepresented minority groups encouraged to apply?

Yes. Many minority groups are overrepresented among those living with HIV/AIDS, and there are increasing numbers of infections in women. Outstanding and highly innovative women scientists, as well as outstanding scientists who are members of minority groups underrepresented in biomedical or behavioral research, are strongly encouraged to apply.

Will the Avant-Garde Award program be repeated in FY09?

Yes, it is anticipated that this program will continue in FY09. A new RFA describing the FY09 program will be issued.

Eligibility

Are individuals at all stages of their careers eligible?

Yes, individuals at all career stages are eligible to apply. Those at early to middle stages of their careers, and women and members of groups underrepresented in biomedical or behavioral research are especially encouraged to apply.

Are foreign scientists eligible?

Yes. However, they must apply from a U.S. institution; non-domestic (foreign) institutions are not eligible.

Are individuals employed by government agencies, non-academic, and/or for-profit organizations eligible?

Individuals from all organizations that can otherwise apply to the NIH for funding and are willing to abide by the terms and conditions that NIH requires are eligible for this award.

Are scientists in the NIH Intramural Program eligible?

No. Because intramural scientists may not receive extramural NIH grants, they may not apply for an Avant-Garde Award.

Are individuals who have other support eligible? If so, may the awardee remain as principal investigator on his/her grant(s)?

Individuals who have other support are eligible for this award and may continue as principal investigator on other grants. However, awardees are expected to devote at least 51 percent of their research time/effort to this work. Since the Avant-Garde Award is expected to support distinctly new research, awards will not be made simply to enable investigators to expand research projects that are ongoing.

I am currently a postdoctoral fellow. Am I eligible to apply for an Avant-Garde Award?

Applicants must be able to show concrete evidence for their claim of innovativeness. This could be very difficult for a postdoctoral fellow who has never conducted independent research. In addition, like all NIH grants, the Avant-Garde Awards will be made to institutions on behalf of investigators. Because most institutions will only authorize grant applications from individuals who are independent investigators, this could present an administrative barrier to applying.

Application Process

Where can I find information about the application process?

Please read the application instructions in RFA DA08-003 carefully. If you have questions, e-mail avant-garde@nida.nih.gov.

What are the dates for submission of applications?

The **Grants.gov** application may be submitted **beginning February 26, 2008** and **must** be successfully received by Grants.gov **no later than 5:00 p.m. local time (of the applicant institution/organization) on March 26, 2008**.

The **letters of reference** may be submitted **beginning February 26, 2008** and must be submitted **no later than 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time, March 26, 2008** at https://commons.era.nih.gov/commons/reference/submitRefereeInformation.jsp.

Application materials will not be accepted after that time and applications that are not complete will not be evaluated.

What must be done before I submit an application to Grants.gov?

Important: You should immediately check with your sponsored research office to determine whether your institution is registered with Grants.gov. Please note that the registration process could take up to two weeks. The institution's Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) is responsible for completing the registration process.

If your institution is not already registered, it must first register with the Central Contractor Registry (the Credential Provider) at http://www.ccr.gov/ and then with Grants.gov at http://www.grants.gov/GetStarted.

Both the institution and the applicant must also complete a one-time registration in the NIH eRA Commons in order to submit applications to NIH. Institutional officials are responsible for registering investigators in the eRA Commons. You should work with your AOR (also known as Signing Official in the eRA Commons) to determine your own institution's process for registration.

Where can I find help registering for Grants.gov?

For help with the Grants.gov registration process, contact Grants.gov customer support at 1-800-518-4726 (Toll Free), Monday–Friday, 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. (Eastern Time), or at support@grants.gov.

Where can I find help in submitting my application to Grants.gov?

For help with the technical aspects of submitting an application to Grants.gov, check the resources available on the Grants.gov website first (http://grants.gov). If you need assistance, contract Grants.gov customer support at 1-800-518-4726 (Toll Free), Monday through Friday, 7:00 a.m.–9:00 p.m. (Eastern Time), or at support@grants.gov.

Where can I find help in registering for the eRA Commons?

Step-by-step directions for registering with eRA Commons are available at http://era.nih.gov/ElectronicReceipt/files/Grantee_Registration_Process_for_Commons.pdf

For questions regarding the Commons registration process, contact the NIH eRA Commons help desk at phone: 301-402-7469 or 866-504-9552 (Toll Free); 301-451-5939 (TTY) business hours Monday–Friday, 7:00 a.m.–8:00 p.m. (Eastern Time).

Where can I find additional information about electronic submission?

There are informative frequently asked questions at http://era.nih.gov/ElectronicReceipt/faq_prepare.htm#2

Whom do I contact if I have questions about programmatic aspects of the Avant-Garde Award?

For questions of a programmatic nature, please e-mail avant-garde@nida.nih.gov.

Is there a limit to the number of applications that can be submitted by an institution?

There is no limit to the number of applications that an institution can submit. However, an investigator may submit only one application.

Grants.Gov Application Documents

What format should I use for the documents submitted with my application to Grants.gov (abstract, essay, biosketch, current research support)?

All documents must be in PDF format. Other formatting requirements are in the Application Guide (MS Word or PDF), Section 2.6, Format Specifications for Text (PDF) Attachments.

For the **biographical sketch**, use the format shown in the Application Guide (MS Word or PDF Section 4.5.2, omitting Section C, Research Support. The biographical sketch must not exceed two pages.

For the **list of current and pending support**, use the format shown in the Application Guide (MS Word or PDF)), Section 3.1.1.8.

Applications with documents that exceed page limits will be considered non-responsive and will not be evaluated.

Does the five-page essay replace the traditional "Research Plan" (with "Specific Aims") or is it to be submitted in addition to that section?

The five-page essay replaces the traditional 25-page "Research Plan" section required for most other NIH grant applications. The requirements of the Avant-Garde Award application are very different from those of most other NIH grants. Read the application instructions and review criteria in the RFA carefully.

In my essay, may I include citations to key publications? If so, what is the appropriate format?

Yes, you may include citations in the essay, as long as they fit within the three to five page limit. The citations may be in any format.

In my essay, may I include figures and illustrations?

Yes, you may include figures and illustrations in the essay, as long as they fit within the three to five page limit.

The application package that I downloaded from Grants.Gov does not include budget pages. Are detailed budgets required? Where do I indicate indirect costs?

Detailed, annual budgets are not required and will not be accepted. Indirect (facilities and administrative) costs will be determined at the time the award is made.

May I submit a journal article?

No, applicants are required to submit a one-page description of their most significant research accomplishment, and no publications or other work products will be accepted.

Where do I submit the various required sections of the application?

- **Abstract** – upload on Item 6, Research & Related Other Project Information Component form.
- **Essay** – upload on Item 7, Research & Related Other Project Information Component Form.
- **Biographical sketch** – upload on Senior/Key Person Profile Component where indicated.
- **List of current and pending support** – upload on Senior/Key Person Profile Component where indicated.
- **Description of my most significant accomplishment** – upload on Research & Related Other Project Information Component where indicated.

Where do I designate the area of science for my application?

You must designate your area of science by choosing one of six application packages in Grants.gov. After clicking "Apply for Grant Electronically," you will be presented with a list of six application packages, each with a separate Competition ID and Title. Each application package corresponds to one of the science areas. Download the application package that best describes your area of proposed research. You may download and submit only one of the six application packages.

What are the areas of science?

Foundational Research
       01 Natural History and Epidemiology
       02 Etiology and Pathogenesis
Prevention Research
       03 Microbicides
       04 Vaccines
       05 Behavioral and Social Science
Therapeutics
       06 Therapeutics

May I designate more than one area of science?

No, only one area of science may be designated. This is to assist in assigning applications to evaluators for review.

Should the effort commitment statement (statement confirming that if chosen to receive an award, the applicant will commit a minimum of 51% of their research efforts to Avant-Garde Award activities) be in the biographical sketch, or in the list of current and pending support?

The statement may be placed in either the biographical sketch or current and pending support.

Letters of Reference

How do my referees submit their letters in support of my application?

Letters of reference are submitted to the NIH eRA Commons at
https://commons.era.nih.gov/commons/reference/submitRefereeInformation.jsp

Letters **may** be submitted beginning February 26, 2008, and **must** be submitted no later than 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time), March 26,2008. Applicants must give their eRA Commons UserName and the Funding Opportunity Number of this Announcement, RFA-DA08-003, to their referees as this information is required for letter submission. Instructions for referees on submitting letters are available on the Avant-Garde Web site at http://drugabuse.gov/avgp.html.

How will I know if my referees have submitted their letters?

Applicants and AOR/SO's can check the status of submitted letters by logging into their Commons account and accessing the "check status" screen for this application. The names of the referees and the date and time of letter submission will be listed. The reference letters are confidential and cannot be viewed by applicants or AOR/SO's.

Applicants will receive emails confirming submission of each letter. The confirmation will contain the name of the referee and the date and time the letter was submitted. The applicant is responsible for reviewing the status of submitted letters and contacting referees to ensure that letters are submitted by the receipt deadline.

Applications with fewer than three letters may be considered non-responsive and may not be evaluated.

May a single letter of reference come from more than one individual?

No, each letter must be from only one referee.

May referees submit their letters before the applications have been received by NIH?

Yes, referees may submit their letters before the applications have been received by NIH. When this occurs, the system will hold the letters (and all the supporting information submitted by the referees) in a pending file, and when the applications are received, they will be linked with the letters.

Evaluation and Selection of Awardees

How will awardees be selected?

Applications will undergo an administrative review by NIDA staff to ensure that applications are complete and responsive to the RFA. A multidisciplinary group of outside experts will evaluate applications using the following criteria:

- **The scientific problem to be addressed:** The biomedical or behavioral significance/importance of the problem, the likelihood that, if successful, the

project will have a significant impact on HIV/AIDS, and the innovativeness of the project.

- **The investigator:** Evidence for the investigator's claim of innovativeness/creativity (innovation density), and the demonstrated ability of the investigator to devote 51% or more effort on this project.
- **The suitability for Avant-Garde mechanism:** Evidence that the proposed project is of sufficient risk/impact to make it more suitable for the Avant-Garde program than for the traditional NIH grant mechanism and that it is distinct from other research previously or currently conducted by the investigator.

All candidates will be provided with individual scores for each evaluation criterion as well as an overall score. Those candidates who are identified as the most outstanding will be invited for interviews by a distinguished panel of outside experts. The National Advisory Council on Drug Abuse will conduct the final level of review. The Director, NIDA, will make the final selection of awardees based on the evaluations by the outside experts, the recommendations of the Council, and programmatic considerations. Final selections will be publicly announced, and awards will be made, by the end of September 2008.