Commonwealth of Virginia

Alzheimer's and Related Diseases Research Award Fund

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING RESEARCH PROPOSALS

- 2027 -

The Alzheimer's and Related Diseases Research Award Fund (ARDRAF) was established by the Commonwealth of Virginia (Code of Virginia, Title 51.5, Section 153) to support research into the causes of Alzheimer's and related diseases, methods of treatment, ways that families may cope with the stresses of caregiving, and the impact of these diseases on the citizens of the Commonwealth. Since 1982, the state has made an annual appropriation to the Fund and private contributions are accepted, as well.

Four awards will be made on a competitive basis to scientists in Virginia and are limited to $75,000 each.

"**Alzheimer's and Related Diseases**" are defined as illnesses resulting from significant destruction of brain tissue characterized by a decline of memory and other intellectual functions. The related diseases are of special interest to the ARDRAF and include, but are not limited to, primary neurodegenerative dementias, such as dementia with Lewy Bodies and other Parkinsonian syndromes with dementia, vascular dementia, and frontotemporal dementias including Pick's Disease.

Commonwealth of Virginia

Alzheimer's and Related Diseases Research Award Fund

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING RESEARCH PROPOSALS

- 2027 -

GOALS OF THE RESEARCH AWARD FUND

Because of a commitment to program balance, the ARDRAF is intended to fund scientifically rigorous applications from a broad spectrum of disciplines that:

- Increase public understanding of Alzheimer's and related diseases and their impact on individuals, families, caregivers, and society.
- Support pilot research from a broad spectrum of scientific disciplines.
- Encourage innovative research into the causes and treatment of Alzheimer's and related diseases.
- Foster the application of knowledge about Alzheimer's and related diseases.
- Investigate the impact of Alzheimer's and related diseases on the Commonwealth of Virginia and determine appropriate public policy.

Funding will be provided only for research compliant with all applicable federal and state laws and regulations. Applications that conflict with these requirements will not be accepted.

Projects that advance the goals of the Virginia Dementia State Plan - particularly Goal V (expanding resources for dementia-specific translational research and evidence-based practices) - are encouraged to describe this alignment.

In addition, the ARDRAF encourages proposals that address the critical scientific priorities for research recommended in the ADRD report to NIH's National Advisory Neurological Disorders and Stroke Council abstracted under the Priorities ARDRAF webpage.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE FUND

The Fund is administered by the Virginia Center on Aging at Virginia Commonwealth University. The Center is responsible for developing application procedures and review criteria, establishing fiscal controls and reporting requirements, and monitoring the conduct of investigations.

Commonwealth of Virginia

Alzheimer's and Related Diseases Research Award Fund

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING RESEARCH PROPOSALS

- 2027 -

RIGOR STATEMENT

Applicants are strongly encouraged to review the Notice on enhancing the reproducibility of NIH-supported research through rigor and transparency (NOT-OD-15-103) and to incorporate appropriate features into the proposed research plans. NIH has policy guidelines for Enhancing Reproducibility through Rigor and Transparency at https://grants.nih.gov/policy/reproducibility/index.htm.

NIMH has also published guidelines for reporting elements of rigor in experimental design in applications (NOT-MH-14-004) and examples of critical elements for a well-designed study are summarized on the NIMH website.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

The applicant's home organization is fiscally responsible for the award. All applications must include the signature of an authorized official (e.g., CEO or grants administrator). DocuSign and other electronic signatures are acceptable.

VCU applicants: Applications must be prepared in **RAMS-SPOT**, routed to the **VCU Office of Sponsored Programs**, and approved **before** submission.

Commonwealth of Virginia

Alzheimer's and Related Diseases Research Award Fund

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING RESEARCH PROPOSALS

- 2027 -

ELIGIBILITY

Applicants must be affiliated with a Virginia institution of higher education, an agency of the Commonwealth of Virginia, or a Virginia-based 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. Private, non-profit organizations must include proof of tax-exempt status with the application.

Co-Investigators must meet the same institutional eligibility requirements as the Principal Investigator.

Established scientists transitioning into Alzheimer's and related diseases research, as well as new investigators entering the field, are strongly encouraged to apply.

Multiple applications from the same institution are permitted, but Principal Investigators should submit only one application, and only one award may be made per primary or co-investigator. **Priority will be given to diversifying funding across institutions.**

Personnel currently supported by ARDRAF funds are not eligible to receive additional ARDRAF funding. Past ARDRAF recipients who have completed their projects and submitted their final reports may submit a proposal for a new project.

The ARDRAF encourages community-academic partnerships, especially those that address community needs or support participatory research and those that promote interprofessional and inter-departmental collaboration. Collaborating entities or consultants do not need to meet eligibility requirements when their involvement is minimal.

Commonwealth of Virginia

Alzheimer's and Related Diseases Research Award Fund

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING RESEARCH PROPOSALS

- 2027 -

SCHEDULE

LETTER OF INTENT (LOI)

- Applicants should submit a **non-binding LOI by December 1, 2026**.
- Failure to include all required elements will result in the LOI being marked as incomplete.

LOI GUIDELINES

- Maximum length: **two pages**
- Must be on the applicant's **organizational letterhead**
- **Must include clearly labelled:**
    - Project title
    - Names of personnel and participating institutions
    - Non-technical abstract
    - A brief (4–5 sentence) plain-language project description
    - Applicant's signature
- Upload LOIs in **PDF format** to **ARDRAF LOI**.
- Once all LOIs have been reviewed, those whose LOIs have been approved will receive an **invitation to apply** with a link to the application form.

APPLICATIONS

Completed applications must be uploaded to the **ARDRAF Application form by 11:59 PM on February 1, 2027**. Late applications will not be considered for funding.

Commonwealth of Virginia

Alzheimer's and Related Diseases Research Award Fund

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING RESEARCH PROPOSALS

- 2027 -

APPLICATION PROCEDURES

Applicants should review their materials carefully to ensure full compliance with all specifications in these guidelines and those on the **VCU ARDRAF application form**.

The application form includes a checklist of required elements. Applicants must complete and sign this checklist and attach it as the final page of the application.

Applications should be submitted as **one or two PDF files**. If the application is submitted in two parts, the submission should be as follows:

- **File 1:** The application form
- **File 2:** All remaining sections, combined and ordered according to the checklist

FORMAT

The project description is limited to nine single-spaced (or 18 double-spaced), 8½" x 11" typewritten pages (not including references, initial application pages, vitae, or appendix material).

- All application **pages should be numbered** consecutively.
- The type must be standard size (11 points or larger; type density must be no more than 15 characters per inch including characters and spaces).
- All margins must be at least 1/2".

Applications not meeting these requirements and incomplete applications may be administratively withdrawn from further consideration for funding.

Awards support **research projects only**. Projects must be distinct activities that can be completed within **one year**.

- Training grants, conferences, educational programs, multi-year research plans, or supplements to larger ongoing projects are not eligible.

Applicants with questions about these limits should consult the program administrator.

Commonwealth of Virginia

Alzheimer's and Related Diseases Research Award Fund

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING RESEARCH PROPOSALS

- 2027 -

RESEARCH WITH HUMAN OR ANIMAL SUBJECTS, OR BIOHAZARDOUS MATERIALS

Applicants seeking support for clinical or psychosocial research projects should include plans for recruiting subjects from both genders and all racial and ethnic groups (and subgroups) unless there is a clear and compelling reason why inclusion would be inappropriate with respect to the health of the subjects or the purpose of the research.

The ARDRAF is also committed to supporting research that aims to reduce or eliminate health disparities. There are differences in the prevalence of Alzheimer's and related diseases among ethnic groups. In addition, risk factors, diagnosis, response to treatment, caregiving, and overall quality of life may each be affected by aspects such as ethnicity and gender, as well as class and geographic location. Research that focuses on these aspects is also encouraged.

Applicants should seek approval from the appropriate compliance committees (**IRB**, **IACUC**, **IBC**) **before** submitting their ARDRAF application.

- **Human subjects:** Applicants must demonstrate full protections for participants. Evidence of approval to begin enrollment is strongly recommended by **April 1, 2027**.
- **Animal research:** Applicants must provide assurance of humane treatment.
- **Biohazardous materials:** Applicants must submit the relevant biosafety registration or authorization documents.

ARDRAF applications should be submitted **alongside** IRB/IACUC/IBC protocols, and copies of these protocols should accompany the ARDRAF application.

For review purposes, applicants are expected to forward any submitted or approved compliance documents by **April 1, 2027**, especially for projects requiring summer salary support or full-year timelines. Feasibility is a key review criterion.

BUDGET

Awards may not exceed **$75,000**. Because ARDRAF funding is state-appropriated, applicants must **waive indirect costs**. Budgets should reflect a balanced spending plan and may include personnel, fringe benefits, supplies, laboratory expenses, and similar project-related costs.

- **Equipment costs** cover the purchase of durable items that will remain in use beyond the project period and are limited to 10% of the total budget.
- **Supply costs** cover consumable items that will be used up during the course of the project.
- **Software is generally considered a supply** unless ARDRAF funding will be used to support its maintenance beyond the project period.
- **Travel for dissemination** at professional meetings may not exceed **$1,000**.
- Matching or in-kind funds are **not required**, but applicants should present a budget—combining requested and contributed resources - that fully covers the costs of the proposed work.

The **budget justification** must clearly explain all requested and contributed resources, describe why each cost is necessary, and show how each line item was calculated. A **separate budget and justification** is required for any subcontract or sub-award.

Applicant organizations and collaborating entities must maintain purchasing, personnel, and business practices consistent with federal and state requirements for equal opportunity and proper accounting.

If the proposed project relates to another grant or contract, applicants must explain the relationship and clearly distinguish **ARDRAF-requested funds** from other funding. Budgets must reflect only the costs of the proposed ARDRAF project. Results attributable to ARDRAF support must be identifiable and completed within the award period, regardless of the status of any related grant.

REVIEW PROCESS

Applications are evaluated by technical reviewers from domestic and international scientific and medical communities. The Awards Committee then convenes to synthesize reviewer feedback, assign funding priority scores, and make final funding decisions.

Each proposal will be reviewed by **at least two independent technical reviewers** and **one peer reviewer** recommended by the applicant.

PEER REVIEWERS

Applicants must provide full contact information for **three** individuals who have agreed to serve as peer reviewers and explain why each is appropriate. Peer reviewers must be able to provide an objective evaluation and must meet standard conflict-of-interest requirements (see NIH guidance).

Peer reviewers must give consent **after** the release of the current call for proposals. Failure to obtain current consent will result in an **incomplete application**.

Peer reviewers may NOT:

- Be affiliated with the applicant's institution or agency
- Be a co-investigator or collaborator on any active, pending, or planned grant with the applicant or key personnel
- Be a co-author with the applicant or key personnel on any publication or manuscript in preparation within the past three years
- Have mentored or trained the applicant or key personnel within the past three years

If an applicant fails to secure prior consent or verify the absence of conflicts of interest for any named peer reviewer, the application will be **administratively withdrawn** from funding consideration.

Commonwealth of Virginia

Alzheimer's and Related Diseases Research Award Fund

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING RESEARCH PROPOSALS

- 2027 -

REVIEW CRITERIA

Proposals are evaluated on their appropriateness for ARDRAF funding (including potential for future support), the qualifications of the investigators, and the adequacy of the scientific environment. Review criteria include:

Significance

- Does the project address an important problem or barrier in the field?
- If successful, how will it advance scientific knowledge, technical capability, or clinical practice?
- Will completion of the aims change key concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventive interventions?

Innovation

- Does the project seek to challenge or shift current research or clinical paradigms through novel concepts, methods, instrumentation, or interventions?
- Are the proposed approaches or tools new to the field or broadly novel?
- Does the project refine, improve, or introduce new applications of existing theories, methods, or technologies?

Approach

- Are the strategy, methods, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate for the specific aims?
- Are potential problems, alternative strategies, and success benchmarks clearly described?
- For early-stage projects, does the strategy establish feasibility?
- Are high-risk elements adequately managed?

Potential for Subsequent Funding

- Does the project establish a strong foundation for future research and related studies?
- Does the project have significant potential to attract additional funding and support an extended line of research?

Commonwealth of Virginia

Alzheimer's and Related Diseases Research Award Fund

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING RESEARCH PROPOSALS

- 2027 -

REVIEW CRITERIA (Continued)

Appropriateness to the Goals of the ARDRAF

- Does the project increase public understanding of Alzheimer's disease and related disorders (ADRD)?
- Does the proposed pilot research contribute to the diversity of disciplines supported by ARDRAF?
- Are the specific aims original and innovative, or do they employ novel concepts, approaches, methods, or technologies?
- Does the project contribute to the development of new methodologies or technologies for identifying the causes or treatments of ADRD?
- Does the project examine the impact of ADRD on the Commonwealth of Virginia?
- Will the project generate information that can help inform public policies, programs, or financing for the care and support of individuals affected by ADRD?

Adequacy of the Budget Request

- Is the scope of the project appropriately scaled and not overly ambitious?
- Are the requested and contributed funds sufficient to support the proposed activities?
- Are the roles and responsibilities of key personnel clearly defined?
- Is the proposed staffing appropriate for the project approach and scope of work?
- Are consultants used appropriately and in a manner that adds necessary expertise?
- Is the budget reasonable in relation to the proposed activities and expected outcomes?
- Does the budget justification adequately describe and support the resources necessary to conduct the project?

Commonwealth of Virginia

Alzheimer's and Related Diseases Research Award Fund

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING RESEARCH PROPOSALS

- 2027 -

REVIEW CRITERIA (Continued)

Adequacy of the Investigation Team & Facilities

- Are the principal investigators, collaborators, and other key personnel well qualified to conduct the project?
- Do early-stage or new investigators have appropriate training and experience?
- Have established investigators demonstrated a strong record of accomplishments that have advanced their field?
- For collaborative projects, do the investigators provide complementary expertise, and are the leadership, governance, and organizational structure appropriate for the project?
- Will the scientific environment contribute to the project's likelihood of success?
- Are the institutional support, equipment, and other available resources adequate to support the project?
- Will the project benefit from unique aspects of the scientific environment, subject populations, or collaborative arrangements?

Applicants who are not funded may request summarized feedback from anonymous reviewers and the Awards Committee after the award decisions have been made.

Commonwealth of Virginia

Alzheimer's and Related Diseases Research Award Fund

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING RESEARCH PROPOSALS

- 2027 -

CONSIDERATIONS AND TIMELINE FOR AWARDEES

A brief **status (mid-year) report** is due **on or before February 1, 2028**.

All awarded funds must be fully expended **by June 30, 2028**.

A **final expenditure report** is due **on or before August 1, 2027**.

A **final technical report** is due **on or before September 1, 2027**. This report must include:

- A **one-page non-technical executive summary**
- A **4–5 sentence plain-language description** of project results for press release
- A **one-page infographic** summarizing the findings

After the award cycle concludes, awardees will be expected to **participate in a virtual symposium** to present their project and findings. The ARDRAF administration will contact awardees to schedule an appropriate date.

Investigators who do not submit required final reports on time may jeopardize the eligibility of future applications from their home departments.

For more information, contact the ARDRAF administrator:

Faika Zanjani, Ph.D.
Gerontology and the Virginia Center on Aging
College of Health Professions
Virginia Commonwealth University;
Box 980229 Richmond, Virginia 23298-0229
Phone: 804-828-1525
Email: fzanjani@vcu.edu