QUERI Advancing Diversity in Implementation Leadership (ADIL) Initiative
Updated 3-22-2024

Purpose: The purpose of the QUERI initiative to Advance Diversity in Implementation Leadership (ADIL) is to promote implementation, quality improvement (QI), and evaluation leadership opportunities with the ultimate goal of improving Veteran health. QUERI strives to grow a pipeline of implementation, QI, and evaluation expertise from populations that reflect the diversity of the Veterans VA serves and promote VA as a national leader in applying high-reliability, learning organization and evidence-based policy methods to improve health care, especially for underserved and marginalized populations.

These funds are intended to support a hands-on implementation, QI, or evaluation initiative and mentored experience for candidates who reflect the diversity of the Veteran population (see Eligibility) and are committed to applying implementation, QI, or evaluation science to solve VA health care challenges and improve Veteran care.

Potential candidates for this award include:
- Early career investigators (e.g., MD, DO, PharmD, PhD, DNP, or equivalent degree in their postdoctoral phase of their scientific career) who have not received and are not currently applying for independent project funding (e.g., HSRD IIR, QUERI PEC) as a principal investigator (PI)
- Staff members with a health care or health services background (e.g., MPH, MHA, MHSA, RN, MSW, MS, MPA, BA/BS with health services experience)
- Students in graduate programs who are pursuing training in health services research, health care management/policy, quality improvement, or a related field.

Background: For over 20 years, the mission of the VA Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI) has been to improve Veteran health by accelerating the uptake of effective practices into real-world settings. QUERI works with diverse groups to empower frontline providers to enhance quality of care and sustain health care program and policy improvements.

Cultivating a diverse workforce is integral to QUERI's mission and its 2021-2025 strategic goals and to QUERI's leading role in innovating on how implementation/QI and evidence-based policy are done in VA. QUERI's core strategic methodology, implementation science, is the study, application, and evaluation of strategies to promote the uptake of effective practices and policies in real-world settings. Implementation science is inter-disciplinary in nature and involves diverse groups working together to implement and sustain effective practices and policies, especially in under-resourced settings. Engagement and buy-in from end-users (e.g., Veterans, clinicians, administrators) across different treatment settings and populations, in addition to leadership support and development, are central components of QUERI implementation strategies described in the QUERI Roadmap for Implementation and Quality Improvement. The goals of this QUERI initiative reflect those articulated in the current VHA Leadership Performance Plan (e.g., recruit, retain, and develop the talent needed to achieve a high quality, diverse workforce that reflects the nation).

Mechanism: This initiative focuses on promoting implementation, QI, and evaluation science as both a career and as a leadership development opportunity. The core competencies and skills conveyed in QUERI implementation strategies are derived from principles of transformational leadership (e.g., inspire and motivate others towards organizational change). QUERI emphasizes current U.S.

Government priorities towards empowerment of the Federal workforce through career advancement for implementation "practitioners" in addition to the traditional academic pathway as a means of enhancing leadership opportunities and reducing disparities in hiring (e.g., credential inflation).

This initiative provides support for a candidate to participate in hands-on mentoring, training, and educational opportunities, including leading a non-research project (as defined by Program Guide 1200.21) that is aligned with one or more VA priorities identified by Program Office, VISN, and VAMC leadership (listed below) and is focused on improving Veteran care. For more information on Program Guide 1200.21 and how QUERI operationalizes this guidance, please check out the two Cyberseminars below.

- **Everything You Need to Know about VA Non-Research Protocols**
  A high-level overview of non-research in VA and QUERI presented January 26, 2023, with Amy Kilbourne, Melissa Braganza, Karen Jeans, Mary Klote, and Angela Foster.

- **Everything You Need to Know about QUERI Non-Research Protocols**
  A QUERI-specific follow-up, including details about QUERI non-research documentation presented March 6, 2023, with Amy Kilbourne, Melissa Braganza, Amanda Taylor, Kara Beck, and Stefanie Gidmark.

Each year, QUERI collects priorities nominated by national, VISN, and facility leaders as high-priority areas for further implementation, QI, and evaluation. The top priorities that are concurred upon by VA leadership become QUERI's funding priorities.

Current QUERI funding priorities are:

1. **Connect Veterans to the soonest and best care:** optimize Veteran access to care across in-person, virtual, and community care services
2. **Prevent Veteran suicide:** prevent Veteran suicide using a public health approach (e.g., outside the clinic walls, partnerships with community service organizations)
3. **Promote a culture of safety, learning, and knowledge translation:** implement and evaluate programs focused on innovation, psychological safety, zero harm, and manager/leader training
4. **Hire faster and more competitively:** improve workforce recruitment, onboarding, and retention of VA employees and trainees
5. **Serve Veterans with military and environmental exposures:** improve quality of care, including the identification and management of symptoms among Veterans with military and environmental exposures
6. **Reduce Veteran homelessness:** ensure more at-risk and underserved Veterans receive early interventions, partnerships and supportive services to avoid homelessness

Examples of initiatives eligible for this award include but are not limited to:
1. Protected time and funding to lead an implementation, QI, or evaluation initiative in the QUERI center that is aligned with a VA priority listed above and that informs improving Veteran care at the regional or national program/policy levels.
2. Support for investigators, students, or staff affiliated with a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), Tribal school or college, community or junior college, or similar organization (e.g., through IPAs or other mechanisms as appropriate)

to lead an implementation, QI, or evaluation initiative with a QUERI center that is aligned with a VA priority listed above.

3. Capacity-building and/or enhancement of QUERI Program Mentoring Core or QUERI Implementation Learning Hub to collaborate with an HBCU, HSI, or similar organization.

4. Protected time or funding for a candidate to lead implementation, QI, or evaluation capacity-building initiatives or projects with VAMCs, VISNs, and national program offices. Leveraging of existing VA or other sponsored leadership and career programs, such as the Presidential Management Fellowship, Pathways, Graduate Healthcare Administrative Training Program, National Diversity Internship Program, Health and Aging Policy Fellowship, or similar programs is highly encouraged.

The expectation at the end of this award experience is that the candidate will apply for independent project funding, an employment opportunity or promotion, or leadership training opportunity that is related to implementation or quality improvement science.

Eligibility: This QUERI funding opportunity is open to candidates who are investigators, staff, or students **currently affiliated with a QUERI center** and are from populations that reflect the diversity of the Veterans VA serves. As described by NIH and NSF, these populations include: individuals from racial and ethnic groups that have been shown to be underrepresented in the health-related sciences, Veterans, individuals with disabilities who are defined as those with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, as described in the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended, or individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g., those who are first in their family to attend a college or university or from a disadvantaged economic or educational background). Underrepresented and priority populations that are also referenced in the recent Executive Order 13985 (e.g., LGBTQ+ and related identities) are also included. These criteria are intended to increase the applicant pool but will not be used as a determinative factor in selecting participants for this initiative. The proposed candidate must be a U.S. Citizen and eligible to become a VA employee/WOC.

At least one of the proposed mentors must be a currently funded QUERI investigator, as this award will be attached to a QUERI-funded merit award. Any currently funded QUERI center (Program – QUE, VISN Partnered Implementation Initiative – PII, Evidence-based Policy Evaluation Center – EBP, Partnered Evaluation Initiative – PEC, Learning Hub – QIS) with at least 1 year left in its funding period is eligible. QUERI centers that are currently under no-cost extensions (with no operations partnered funding) are not eligible to apply. There must be at least 1 year left in the QUERI center's funding period.

Potential applicants who are not currently affiliated with a QUERI center can check out the QUERI Brochure and National Network of Centers tab on the QUERI website to find a center/mentor that has expertise and projects that align with their interests. The applicant can contact the PI directly to see if their center has bandwidth to support their mentoring experience. The candidate does not have to be located at the same site as their QUERI mentor.

There is no limit or restriction on the number of applications a QUERI center or VAMC can submit. Submission of up to two revised applications (resubmission) is allowed if the initial submission is not selected for funding.

Budget and Duration: Awards will be considered supplements to currently-funded QUERI centers, and funding is available for up to $100,000 per year for up to 2 years for salary/fringe benefits, travel, and/or other support. QUERI funds **do not** roll over between fiscal years and must be spent by the

end of each fiscal year. The number of applications selected for funding will depend on the volume of applications received and the availability of QUERI funding.

Application Format: Applications are accepted on a rolling basis and will be reviewed twice a year, based on the timeline below.

Timeline for ADIL Application Review

Application Submission Window	Notification of Review Outcome	Earliest Potential Start State
June 9 – December 8	March	April 1
December 9 – June 8	September	October 1

Use this (VA Intranet Only) link to submit your application. Applications should be single-spaced, 11-point Arial font, with at least 0.5-inch margins. **Applications should not exceed 5 pages,** excluding introduction to revised application, references, budget documents, and NIH biosketches.

Application Content: All applications should be submitted via the application link as a single PDF document that includes the following sections. **Note:** An ACOS letter of support is <u>not</u> required and should <u>not</u> be submitted as part of the application.

Submit **<u>only</u>** the materials listed below; additional items/appendices will **<u>not</u>** be accepted for **first submissions.** If a reviewer **<u>specifically</u>** requests additional item(s) (e.g., interview guide) in reviewing the first submission, then the resubmission can include the requested appendix item(s).

Use of hyperlinks: <u>All applications must be self-contained</u> (i.e., without the use of URLs/hyperlinks), within specified page limits. <u>The use of URLs/hyperlinks is prohibited except in the Biographical Sketch and References</u>. Any submission with URLs placed anywhere else except in the Biographical Sketch and References attachments will be withdrawn from review. Waivers are prohibited for URLs/hyperlinks.

1. **Introduction to Revised Application (for resubmission only; 2-page limit)**
   The substantial scientific changes must be marked in the text of the application by bracketing, indenting, or change of typography. A vertical bar drawn in the margin may be used as long as changes in text are also indicated by bracketing, indenting or change of typography. Do not underline or shade the changes. Deleted sections should be described but not marked as deletions. If the changes are so extensive that essentially all text would be marked, explain this in the Introduction.

2. **Proposal (5-page limit)**
   a. **Description of the Implementation, QI, or Evaluation Project (~2-3 pages)**. Describe non-research project goals and specific aims, brief background, methods, analyses, timeline (GANTT Chart), and measures of impact based on the QUERI ACTION Framework.
   b. **Description of the Candidate (~1-2 pages).** Include a personal narrative from the candidate detailing reasons for pursuing an opportunity in implementation, QI, or evaluation in the VA, prior background and experience in implementation, QI, evaluation, or other health care, clinical, or community-based research, and a description of career goals and additional training to be pursued during the award period.
   c. **Mentoring Plan (~1 page).** Provide a mentoring plan, including roles and specific responsibilities of the sponsoring QUERI investigator (VA mentor). Describe resources available within the QUERI center's sites (e.g., VAMCs) that will support the trainee's success,

as well as any proposed collaboration with external institutions or investigators. A description of the administrative resources available, including IT, educational, and HR resources, to support the project should also be included. NOTE: the local VA medical center must provide appropriate Americans with a Disability Act (ADA) compliant space and related facility support.

3. **References (NOT included in the 5-page limit).** References are not included in the page limit and can use any standard format (e.g., NLM, APA, AMA, MLA).

4. **Budget Table and Justification (NOT included in the 5-page limit).** Provide a summary budget worksheet and budget justification for the project using the QUERI budget and justification format found on the [QUERI SharePoint site](). Note: There are two tabs – an itemized and a site-level budget worksheet – in the summary budget spreadsheet; make sure to complete both worksheets. Additional funds may be requested to accommodate the needs of individuals with a disability; submit a budget cap waiver request and detailed justification of funds. The local VA medical center must also provide appropriate Americans with a Disability Act (ADA) compliant space and related facility support.

5. **NIH Biosketches of the Candidate and Sponsoring QUERI investigator (NOT included in the 5-page limit).** Complete biosketches, including education, training, relevant implementation, QI, or evaluation experience, and a list of publications should be included in both biosketches. The mentor's (sponsor's) biosketch must include a personal statement, a list of former mentees, and a description of the mentor's experience mentoring implementation, evaluation, and quality improvement scientists.

General Criteria for Review and Scoring of Applications: Applications will be reviewed and awarded based on the following criteria.
1. **Candidate:** Does the proposed candidate demonstrate commitment to the VA with clear potential to develop an independent career in implementation, QI, or evaluation science? Do they show evidence of productivity either through quality improvement or evaluation (e.g., evidence-based policy) impacts or through research scholarship? Does the candidate have the background and experience in health services research, health care management/policy, quality improvement, or a related field?
2. **Mentor (Sponsor):** Does the QUERI-funded sponsor have appropriate implementation science, QI, evaluation, or similar research and teaching credentials, and a well-documented history of successful training in implementation, QI, or evaluation science or practice? Is the sponsor's area of expertise a good match to the training needs and project plan of the candidate? Does the sponsor have the background to help the candidate to accomplish career goals, and do they have adequate time available for training and mentoring? Is there evidence of prior productivity or collaboration with the sponsor?
3. **Mentoring Plan:** Is the mentoring plan comprehensive and clearly designed to lead to the candidate's growth and development as a VA implementation, QI, or evaluation scientist? Are the training goals aligned with the proposed project?
4. **Project Plan:** Does the project have the potential to make a real-world impact in VA? Does the project meet the criteria for non-research per [Program Guide 1200.21](https://)? Are there feasibility, ethical, human subject, or other concerns? Does the project address one of the [VA priorities listed in the RFA](https://)?

[Register here](https://) for the Summer 2024 QUERI Request for Applications (RFA) informational cyberseminar, which will provide an overview of all QUERI RFAs, including the ADIL initiative.

If you would like to learn more about specific ADIL projects and get tips from current ADIL awardees, check out the "QUERI Advancing Diversity in Implementation Leadership (ADIL): Examples from the Field on Optimizing and Leveraging VA Leadership Opportunities" Cyberseminar recording here.

For more information, please contact Kara Beck, PhD, QUERI Program Manager, at kara.beck@va.gov.