

Request for Applications

The AR Health Ventures Accelerator (ARHVA) is pleased to announce this Request for Applications (RFA) to solicit proposals for innovative therapeutic development projects. ARHVA aims to facilitate and accelerate the translation of scientific discoveries into therapies to improve the health and safety of Arkansans and patient care. Through this RFA, ARHVA intends to identify and support projects that bridge the gap between investigator-driven research and commercialization.

Background:

The mission of BioVentures is to foster commercial investment in inventions, discoveries, and work products arising from research at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS), Arkansas Children's Hospital, and the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System. These institutions receive research funding with the aim of advancing biomedical discoveries, innovating therapeutic strategies, and improving the health and well-being of Arkansans. However, advancing hypothesis-driven research to the development of clinically useful products presents a significant challenge. The ARHVA program seeks to address this gap by providing consultancy, guidance, and resources to accelerate therapeutics and drug discovery from target identification to commercialization.

Objectives:

The primary objectives of the AR Health Ventures Accelerator program are:

1. Accelerate scientific discoveries from concept to a position where the drug or therapeutic can be commercialized.
2. Cultivate the next generation of Arkansas biotechnology workers and entrepreneurs through pioneering training programs and biotechnology experiences.
3. Enhance the Little Rock and Arkansas biotechnology ecosystem by fostering academic, government, and industry collaborations.

ARHVA Innovative Approach to Therapeutic Development:

The AR Health Ventures Accelerator program employs the following approaches to drive therapeutic development:

- a) *Consultancy and guidance:* ARHVA provides extensive biotechnology experience to assist investigators/inventors in advancing their therapeutic ideas.
- b) *External advisory committee:* ARHVA's external advisory committee is made up of patent lawyers, basic scientists, and clinicians with biotechnology management/consulting experience. The committee offers independent advice and expertise to guide therapeutic projects.
- c) *ARHVA Projects:* Projects are selected through a competitive process by the external advisory committee. **ARHVA oversees project execution, expenditure, and progress tracking.** Regular feedback on project milestones is provided to investigators/inventors, BioVentures, and the ARHVA External Advisory Committee.
- d) *Infrastructure utilization:* ARHVA leverages existing facilities, infrastructure, and resources at BioVentures, UAMS, Arkansas academic institutions, and biotechnology companies to execute projects.
- e) *De-risking discoveries:* ARHVA's approach focuses on de-risking and increasing the commercial value of health-enhancing and disease-targeted therapeutics by addressing critical developmental steps. This process continues until sufficient data, information, and value are achieved for licensing, partnering, or launching a startup.

Eligibility Criteria:

All UAMS employees are eligible to apply for an ARHVA award. This includes trainees and postdoctoral fellows. This award is not open to individuals who are not employed by UAMS.

Application Process:

Interested investigators/inventors are invited to submit project proposals aligned with the goals and approaches of the ARHVA program. The application should include the following information:

- Project title and summary (max 300 words)
- Investigator/inventor(s) information:
 - a. Name and title
 - b. Department
 - c. Email
- Project description, objectives, and anticipated impact and alignment with the goals of the ARHVA program (max of 1 page)
- Expected outcomes and milestones (max of 1 page)
- Budget breakdown, including requested funds and potential external funding sources. Max of \$50,000 provided from ARHVA
- Timeline for project execution

Applications must be submitted electronically to skennonmcgill@uams.edu by 5 PM, September 30th, 2024. Late applications will not be considered.

Review and Selection Process:

- All applications will undergo a rigorous review process by the ARHVA External Advisory Committee. Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:
 - Scientific merit and feasibility
 - Alignment with the goals and approaches of the ARHVA program
 - Potential for commercialization and impact on patient care
 - Budget justification and potential for external funding
- Top applicants will be selected to present a brief, 15-minute talk to the Advisory Committee
- The highest-scoring proposals will be recommended for funding, considering the available budget. The final selection will be made by ARHVA leadership.

Important Dates:

- RFA release date: August 26th, 2024
- Application submission deadline: 5 PM, September 30, 2024
- Funding decision announcement: November 29th, 2024

Contact Information:

For questions or further information regarding this RFA, please contact:

Name: Stefanie Kennon-McGill, Ph.D.

Email: skennonmcgill@uams.edu

We look forward to receiving your innovative project proposals that will contribute to the acceleration of therapeutic development and improve patient care.

Sincerely,

John Imig, Ph.D.

Chair of Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences

UAMS College of Pharmacy

**AR Health Ventures Accelerator (ARHVA)
Frequently Asked Questions**

General:

1. What is the AR Health Ventures Accelerator?

ARHVA's mission is to facilitate and accelerate therapeutics and drug discovery from identification of disease targets through development, and subsequently bridge the gap to commercialization.

2. How does this differ from a traditional grant or award?

Projects are chosen by an independent advisory committee through a competitive process. The process includes a brief application and 15-minute presentation (if chosen as a finalist). Unlike many traditional research grants and awards, ARHVA takes responsibility of spending funds, executing projects, and keeping projects on schedule, rather than relying on the investigator to spend the funds and perform the necessary research duties. Periodic feedback on progress toward therapeutic project milestones is provided to investigators/inventors, BioVentures, and the ARHVA External Advisory Committee. Funding for the project can be continued through additional cycles based on progress.

3. Is this the same thing as the BioVentures award?

No. BioVentures award funds are distributed directly to faculty members once they have presented to the Patent and Copyright Committee and are chosen for a BioVentures award. ARHVA funds and projects are managed by the ARHVA team instead of being distributed directly to awardees. However, funds may be provided for work done in the awardee's laboratory, although these funds will still be managed by the ARHVA team. In short, the BioVentures awards are self-managed by the investigators/inventors, whereas the ARHVA awards are managed by the ARHVA team.

4. How does ARHVA support projects in their journey to commercialization?

ARHVA provides hands-on project management, budget allocation, and progress tracking. This support helps inventors focus on research while ensuring the project stays on schedule and meets milestones critical for commercialization.

5. How will this help me?

ARHVA's approach is to de-risk and increase the value of therapeutics for commercialization by answering the next critical steps in therapeutic development. This process continues until there is enough data, information, and value for a therapeutic to be licensed, partner with a biotechnology company, or launch a startup. By using a funding mechanism that does not require the investigator/inventor to manage the budget and work, this allows for forward momentum and acceleration of an inventor's discoveries without adding additional financial and time burdens on the inventors.

6. What qualifies as a "therapeutic" discovery, and are there other categories of inventions/discoveries that you will consider?

Therapeutics is defined with a broad scope. Broadly, therapeutics entails comprehensive care and support to patients, encompassing both disease prevention and the management of specific health issues. Thus, therapeutics includes drugs, diagnostics, devices, and other means preventing or treating patients.

7. What happens after a project successfully reaches its milestones and is ready for commercialization?

Upon reaching significant milestones, the ARHVA team will work with inventors to explore avenues for commercialization, which could include licensing agreements, partnerships with biotechnology companies, or the creation of startups.

Eligibility:

1. Who is eligible for the ARHVA award?

All UAMS employees are eligible.

2. *Do I need to submit a disclosure to BioVentures before I apply?*

Although not required, it is highly recommended that applicants get advice from ARHVA or BioVentures on whether a disclosure is needed.

3. *Do I need to be faculty, or can I apply if I am a trainee?*

The award is not limited to faculty. Any UAMS employee may apply.

4. *Can external researchers or institutions collaborate with ARHVA?*

Currently, ARHVA is focused on projects involving UAMS employees. However, collaboration opportunities may be explored in the future to enhance innovation and accelerate progress.

5. *Can projects that have received funding from other sources apply for ARHVA awards?*

Yes, projects that have received funding from other sources can still apply for ARHVA awards, if the project aligns with the goals and criteria of ARHVA.

Award Mechanism:

1. *How much money is awarded?*

The estimated budget for individual projects is up to \$50,000. The exact amount awarded for each project will be determined by ARHVA based on the scope of work needed to successfully accomplish the stated goals.

2. *How many awards are you planning to distribute?*

ARHVA plans to fund 2-4 awards per funding cycle.

3. *What is the timeline after I receive an award?*

Projects will begin approximately 2-3 months after the funding decision.

4. *Do I need to report on my progress once I receive an award?*

Progress will be continuously monitored by ARHVA to ensure milestones are met. A 1- to –3-page report will be submitted at the end of the award cycle. This report will be created in conjunction with ARHVA members.

5. *How is the money distributed?*

ARHVA will manage the funds for the project. Funds will not be distributed directly to the investigators or college, unless it is determined that the work required to complete the project should be completed by the investigator. However, ARHVA will remain in control of the budget management and distribution.

6. *Can the awarded funds be used for salaries or stipends for project contributors?*

ARHVA funds are primarily allocated to project-related expenses, such as supplies, equipment, and services necessary for achieving project milestones. In exceptional cases, a portion of the funds may be approved for personnel-related costs if essential for project success.

7. *How is data sharing and confidentiality managed in the context of ARHVA projects?*

Data sharing and confidentiality will be addressed on a case-by-case basis, considering the nature of the project and any agreements that need to be established between parties involved. Protection of sensitive information is a priority.

8. *How do I apply?*

Instructions for applying are provided in the Request for Applications.

9. *What is the due date and when can I expect to find out if I have been selected?*

Applications are due by 5 PM on September 30, 2024. Selection will be completed by the end of November and announced at that time.