



VHA Research Fellowship Program Application

APPLICATION 2018

This Application Package contains all the information you need to apply for a VHA Research Fellowship – including application forms, manager approval forms, and detailed information about available Fellowships, eligibility criteria, and project proposal requirements.

Call for applications open: Monday May 17th, 2018

Deadline to apply: Thursday June 22nd, 2018

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VHA RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM – Building Practice Leaders to Improve Client Care

What is the VHA Research Fellowship Program?

The VHA Research Fellowship Program is a unique annual opportunity for point-of-care-health professionals to lead **quality improvement projects** that will advance best client care while learning about leading change in a complex academic health organization.

Why a Fellowship Program for point-of-care health professionals?

Point-of-care health professionals work directly with clients and families every day. They know where we need to improve client care and how to successfully make those improvements.

The VHA-UHN Research Fellowship Program provides the **protected time** as well as the necessary **support and resources** to help healthcare professionals make those improvements.

The Program began in 2010 as the Nurses for Tomorrow (N4T) Innovation and Research Fellowship Program, and gained national recognition in 2012 by **Accreditation Canada** as an **Innovative Leading Practice**. The program has since expanded to include other health professions, as well as participants from other hospitals and other healthcare sectors.

Who can participate?

The VHA Fellowship Program is open to full-time or part-time point-of-care healthcare professionals who do not already have professional development or research time built into their roles and who are not in formal leadership positions (i.e. Managers and Supervisors).

How is the program supported?

The VHA-UHN Research Fellowship program is sponsored by the VHA Board of Directors. Funding is used to cover release time for successful Fellowship candidates. Successful candidates will receive four days of 'protected' time to focus on their quality improvement project. Fellows will be reimbursed for 28 hours/week at a rate of \$39.15/hr. Successful recipients will not hold an active caseload exceeding 1 day a week of clinical work during the 6 month fellowship program.

What types of projects do the Fellows engage in?

Fellowship projects must be **quality improvement initiatives**. Research projects are not eligible due to the short duration of the program. For more information on the difference between quality improvement and research, please see the VHA-UHN Research Fellowship Application Guide.

Some examples of previous projects :

- Enhancing physical activity in the disease self-management plan for clients living with mild

cognitive impairment, dementia and Alzheimer's Disease

- Total-pain documentation in palliative care
- Implementation of a quality improvement initiative to improve temporary restraint practices in the Emergency Department;
- Creation and implementation of an educational pathway for patients diagnosed with heart failure; and
- Creation of a return to work template for patients following cancer treatment.

For further information about the VHA Fellowship Program, please contact the Program lead Sandra McKay at smkay@vha.ca.

VHA-UHN FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Program Structure

Eligibility Selection Process

Program Time Commitment

Key Fellowship Dates 2018-19

How is the program structured?

Fellows are provided with paid, protected time (four x 7 hr days per week=28hrs/week) for 6 months.

The Fellowship education seminars will be half-days beginning at **9 AM on Tuesdays from September 18, 2018 to the week of March 19, 2019** (final project presentations). During this time the fellows will complete their quality improvement projects.

There will also be **two full paid days** (dates to be determined):

- IDEAS workshop (requires 1 day preparatory e-learning)
- Kick-off day.

How will your four days be structured?

- Fellows will attend education seminars Tuesday mornings at UHN or Sunnybrook (0.5 days/wk)
- Fellows will work independently, with the support of a mentor, on the planning, implementation and evaluation of their QI project (2.5 days/week).
- Fellows will complete and observership within VHA Research supporting ongoing VHA Research (1 day/week).

Who is eligible to participate?

- A member of any VHA health profession (Nursing or Rehab) who:
 - is curious, believes in life-long learning, is committed to best client care and is aware of a gap in their practice that needs to be addressed
 - is a direct client care provider
 - is not in a formal leadership role (i.e. Manager or Supervisor)
 - does not have any regular, protected time in their role for research, quality improvement or professional development
 - has an idea for a quality improvement initiative to improve care on their practice area (research projects are not eligible)
 - has worked at VHA for a minimum of 6 months and holds a contract equal to *at least* 0.5 FTE.

How are program participants selected?

- Potential candidates must submit an application and proposal for a **quality improvement project** related to the strategic priorities of VHA (see *VHA-UHN Fellowship Application Guide* for details).
- Blinded project proposals are peer-reviewed by a selection committee made up of members of research & quality team members, client representatives, and other key stakeholders.
- Successful applicants are selected based on the **strength of their project proposals**, their **link to strategic priority areas**, and their **feasibility**.
- Successful applicants and their managers will be notified by Friday July 6th, 2018.

What is the time commitment for successful applicants?

- Fellowships are six months in length; project activities must begin the week of September 18th 2018, and be completed by the week of March 19st, 2019. There will also be two full day workshops (dates to be determined) you will be expected to attend. See the timeline on the next page for key program dates for 2018-19.
- Please note that each successful applicant will be assigned to a Tuesday seminar group. This means that one of the four protected Fellowship days per week must always fall on a Tuesday. If the successful applicant would like to carry a small clinical caseload – not to exceed 1 day of work (0.2 FTE) – **all clinical work must be scheduled around the protected Fellowship days**.
- Participants must attend a **minimum of 80%** of scheduled weekly seminars for the duration of the Research Fellowship Program. Participants will also be required to meet with their VHA mentor on a monthly basis to update them on their projects.

Key Fellowship Dates 2018-19



SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND CRITERIA

Submission Requirements

All application documents must be submitted via email to smckay@vha.ca by **June 22, 2018 4pm.**

Important: Late or Incomplete Applications will not be considered.

Application Checklist

1. Fellowship Application Form
2. Manager Reference and Approval Form (attach a signed copy)
3. Project Proposal (complete and do not include your name)

General VHA-UHN Fellowship Criteria

1. Alignment with Strategic Priority Areas
2. Informed by the Client Perspective

VHA-UHN Fellowship 2018-19 Guidelines for Completing the Project Proposal

1. Candidate Application Form
2. Manager Reference and Approval Form
3. 250 Word Synopsis
4. Project Proposal following SBAR

General VHA Fellowship Criteria

All submissions must be for **quality improvement projects** (research projects are not eligible – See VHA-UHN Fellowship Application guide for details).

All submission must also meet the following two **VHA Research Fellowship criteria**:

1. **Aligned with strategic priority area(s):** All Fellowship project proposals must be related to **one or more** of the following strategic priority areas identified in VHA’s Strategic Plan (Accessible at www.vha.ca/strategic-plan)
 - **Improved Client Experience:** Engage clients and family caregivers – effectively, meaningfully and appropriately – in all we do to improve the care experience.
 - **Specialized Care and Growing Expertise with:**
 - Children with complex medical needs
 - People with cognitive impairment
 - **Continuous Quality Improvement:** Keep relentless focus on continuous quality improvement for everything we do in client safety, care delivery and evidenced-based practice.
 - **Self-Management of Chronic Disease:** Further develop self-management approaches and integrated service models that create more independence for those living with chronic diseases.

Projects that do not address one of the strategic priority areas listed above, but are consistent with VHA’s other priorities (e.g. Palliative care, maintaining independence and safety in the community), may also be acceptable. Please contact smckay@vha.ca with any specific questions about project ideas.

2. **Informed by the client perspective:** All proposals must include a description of how the client perspective will be used to inform your project work. Specifically, your proposal should address: How you have determined client need for your project idea (talking to clients and family caregivers, client satisfaction/experience surveys, incident reports etc.), and if/how you will seek client and caregiver input, and if/how clients and caregivers will be involved in your project.

Optional:

3. **Enhances Employee/Service Provider Health, Wellness, and/or Engagement:** All proposals may also include a description of how the project will contribute to the enhancement of employee/service provider health and wellness and/or engagement, if it is relevant to your proposed project.

VHA Fellowship 2018-19 Guidelines for Completing the Project Proposal

1. Ensure the proposal is clear and concise (2-4 pages maximum) and is written in a way that can be understood by a broad audience (e.g. patient representatives without a healthcare background).
2. Must be “blinded” without the name of the candidate, manager or mentor or other identifiers. (Note: names will be included on other application forms).
3. 250 Word Synopsis or Executive Summary must be submitted along with your proposal.
4. Use the SBAR format to design your proposal and refer to the VHA-UHN Fellowship Criteria.
 - a. Situation:
 1. Describe what is occurring and why your project is of value.
What is the current gap in practice or what opportunity exists to improve practice?
 2. Include a paragraph of why you are ready to undertake this quality improvement project and what you can contribute.
 - b. Background:
 1. Summarize 1-3 relevant research articles that support your project.
 2. Describe how your clinical practice has led to this project idea.
 3. Patient feedback (e.g. perspectives, values, preferences, goals).
 4. What data is readily available as a baseline measure and for measuring the impact of changes implemented? (This could include incident reports, patient satisfaction surveys etc.).
 5. Does your proposed project link to another project underway?
 - c. Assessment:

Provide a written response as to how your project meets the identified VHA-UHN Research Fellowship criteria found on the previous page.
 - d. Recommendation:

Why is it the right time to undertake this quality improvement project?
Are there any potential risks of delaying this project?
Why have you chosen your specific mentor(s)?
How will they help guide your project?
5. Length: **2 to 4 double-spaced pages (maximum)**
6. Use *Microsoft Word* to prepare and format your proposal:
 - a. **Title** your project (at the top of each page)
 - b. Use **12- point** font (Times New Roman or Arial)

- c. Margins must be 1 inch (all sides)
- d. All pages are **numbered**
- e. Save as Microsoft **Word file**.
- f. A helpful link for **APA** formatting resources:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>)

Assistance with Submission

Assistance with identifying ideas, completing the application, and developing project proposals is *happily* available. If you would like assistance please contact Sandra McKay at smckay@vha.ca

Approval Process

All applications will be peer-reviewed by a selection committee made up of members of the research & quality team, client representatives, and key stakeholders.

The peer-review process for project proposal selection will be **blinded** – that is, project proposals will be anonymous during the review process to ensure fairness and eliminate bias.

Successful applicants will be chosen based on the strength of their project proposals, their link to strategic priority areas, and their feasibility.

Scoring of each proposal will be done using the above noted criteria.

Notification of the outcome of applications will be provided **by email** by **Friday July 6th, 2018**.

CANDIDATE APPLICATION FORM

Please complete all sections of this **TWO-PAGE** form and submit it along with your project proposal and other application materials (see *VHA-UHN Fellowship Criteria and Submission Requirements* for details).

Your name:	
Profession:	
Employment Status (full-time or part-time):	
Currently Receiving Benefits? (Y/N)	
VHA Email Address:	
Preferred Phone Number:	
Your Manager's Name:	
Your proposed project title :	
<p>In the space below, please write a <u>brief</u> (approx. 50 words) biography of yourself, including a</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • summary of your work experience, areas of expertise • description of projects/initiatives/ committees etc. in which you have been involved 	

*Please note – A University degree is NOT required to participate in the VHA-UHN Research Fellowship Program. If you have questions, please contact Sandra McKay at smckay@vha.ca.

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CANDIDATE APPLICATION FORM (page 2)

Please write a short response (about one paragraph) to each of the following questions:

These questions explore your professional readiness for undertaking a quality improvement project at this point in your career. Please note that prior experience with quality improvement or leading a project are not prerequisites for participation in the Fellowship program.

Please write a short response (one paragraph) to each question:

- 1. Why are you interested in participating in the Fellowship Program?**
- 2. What personal or professional goals do you aim to achieve?**
- 3. Tell us about your experience leading a project.**
- 4. What do you know about Quality Improvement?**
Example: have you designed AIM statements and PDSA cycles to test change(s)?
- 5. What are your strengths (knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviors) that will facilitate carrying out a project from the planning phase through to implementation?**
- 6. What are your future career goals?**
What role or position do you hope to be performing in 3 to 5 years?

If you have questions, please contact Sandra McKay at smckay@vha.ca or 416-489-2500 x2208.

VHA MANAGER APPROVAL FORM

All Fellowship applicants must have their supervisor or manager complete the form below acknowledging that they are aware you are applying to the Research Fellowship program.

Fellowship Applicants: Please ask your manager to read and sign the following document.

Supervisor/ Manager Approval (to be completed by applicant's current manager or supervisor): Please read the VHA-UHN Fellowship Program information below and if you agree, please sign in the space provided.

- I understand that _____ (please print applicant's name) is applying for a VHA-UHN Research Fellowship, which will last from September 17, 2018 to March 31, 2019.
- I understand that if s/he is successful, s/he will be required to be released from his/her team for four 7- hour days per week in order to complete the VHA Research Fellowship Program, and that this time will be part of her/his overall total worked hours.
- I agree to accommodate any necessary changes, without penalty or bias to facilitate the applicant's participation in the VHA Research Fellowship Program.

Manager's Signature

Print Name

Date

If you have questions, please contact Sandra McKay at smckay@vha.ca.

INDEX OF FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. I have an idea for a research project. Would this be appropriate for the VHA-UHN Fellowship Program?

No. Unfortunately research projects are not eligible for the VHA Fellowship Program. This is due to the six month time frame of the program which is too short for completion of a research study. In addition, the Fellowship curriculum is focused on the principles of quality improvement and would not provide you with the information required to complete a research study.

2. What if I have a really good idea but I am not yet sure of all the details about how to implement it?

Ideas do not have to be fully developed to be submitted. You won't necessarily know exactly how you will address this issue until your project starts and you complete a needs assessment. Often, your project activities would include a needs assessment including a root cause analysis and conversations with your colleagues and key stakeholders to determine the best approach. Your proposal can include as much detail as you have, and you can include your thoughts on how you *might* address the issue. This could include broad change concepts such as improving workflow; changes to the work environment etc. (see <http://www.ihi.org/resources/pages/changes/usingchangeconceptsforimprovement.aspx> for more information).

If you need help with this, try any or all of the following:

- Talk with your colleagues about how you might further develop your plan; they may have some good ideas, and you may want to engage them once you do get your project off the ground – this would be a great way to start!
- Consult the literature on your topic area – how have others successfully addressed this issue in the past?
- Share your idea with your supervisor or manager and ask if s/he has any ideas about how you might develop your plan.
- Seek assistance from a mentor.
- Talk your idea over with other leaders (e.g. clinical lead) to see if they have any suggestions for you.

If you still need assistance with your proposal development, send an email to smckay@vha.ca.

3. I have several ideas for projects, but I'm not sure which one would be the best. What should I do?

First of all, it is wonderful that you have so many ideas! Narrowing them down can be a challenge. There are several possibilities: First, remember that if you are chosen for a Fellowship, you will have four days per week for approximately six months – so choose a project that you think you will be able to accomplish in that time. Second, think about your ideas and see whether any of them can be combined in some way; perhaps you can think of one project that

will accomplish several of your goals. Third, talk your ideas over with your colleagues, your manager, your clinical lead, or other leaders to see which of your ideas inspires the most energy, which one you are most excited about, which is the most feasible, and where you might get the most help and support. Finally, if you are still unsure, contact Sandra McKay at smckay@vha.ca. Sandra would be happy to talk through your ideas with you.

4. Do Fellowship projects need to be service/team-specific, or do they need to be organization-wide?

Either. As long as your project is related to one of VHA's strategic priority areas, it doesn't matter whether it is specific to your team or whether it is service-wide or organization-wide. Just remember that you will have four days per week for approximately six months to complete your project – so make sure it isn't something that is bigger than you are able to accomplish in the allotted time. We do not recommend projects that are unrelated to your specific clinical areas.

5. I am an RPN and I have an idea for a project. Am I eligible to apply for a Fellowship?

Of course RPN's are eligible! As long as they are employed in a full-time or part-time position at their organization. A University degree is not a requirement – a willingness to learn and an excitement and passion about your project is a great start for all candidates.

6. I am employed/contracted on a casual part-time basis; am I eligible to apply?

Casual staff and service providers are not eligible, but part-time staff and service providers (that is, individuals who have scheduled part-time hours) can apply providing they have a contract of at least 0.5FTE and have worked for VHA for a minimum of 6 months. If you are unclear of your status, please contact your manager.

7. I am in an Advanced Practice role (e.g., Clinical Lead); am I eligible to apply?

Yes; the VHA-UHN Research Fellowship Program is available to all point-of-care providers who have the ability to flex their time to work on project activities. The VHA-UHN Research Fellowship Program provides individuals with that flexibility and protected time, by providing funds to cover their time. Individuals in a formal leadership role (e.g. Manager or Supervisor), however, are not eligible.

8. I am currently working on my degree, and will be taking a course at the same time as the Fellowship. Can I use the Fellowship to work on a project or paper or placement for school?

The VHA Research Fellowship Program is about creating opportunities for point-of-care providers to contribute to strategic priority practice areas so Fellowship projects need to be focused on these. Therefore, the Fellowship time cannot be used for completing school courses, theses, or dissertations.

9. Do I need to do a large-scale review of literature for my proposal?

A large-scale literature review is not necessary; however your proposal should include at least

some background literature. A brief review of existing literature will be useful in helping you formulate your idea and your project, and providing some background for its importance. Remember – the proposal is only 4 pages long. Previous successful proposals have included a brief literature review, with a few references to peer-reviewed journals or texts, as well as relevant organizational documents.

10. How do I incorporate literature into my proposal?

You can use articles related to your topic to support your ideas throughout the proposal. Examples of areas where you can use literature include the “introduction and significance” and “current knowledge available” sections but are not limited to these sections. Please include a full reference list at the end of your proposal.

11. How do I submit my application?

Please submit all sections of your application **by email to smkay@vha.ca by Friday June 22nd, 2018 by 4:00 pm**. Applications should include:

- a) Completed Fellowship Application Form
- b) Completed Manager Approval Form – please scan and email a signed copy
- c) Project Proposal (remember, the proposal **must be blinded** – do not include your name or any other identifying information about yourself, with the exception of your professional designation – e.g., RN, PT, etc.); also do not include the name of your manager in the proposal).

Unfortunately, applications that are late or incomplete will not be considered. See *Criteria and Requirements* for further detail on what to include and how to submit your application.

12. What is a ‘blinded proposal’ and why is it required?

A blinded proposal is one that does not include your name or any other information that would allow a proposal reviewer to identify you. This is important so that we can ensure all proposals are reviewed fairly without bias. Please do not include the name of your manager in your proposal either.

Your application form and manager approval/reference forms can all include your name – but should not be included within your proposal document.

When you save your proposal document, please name it using your project title – do not include your name.

Don’t worry - we have a process for tracking your proposal once it is submitted – so we can match your blinded proposal to your name once we complete the scoring process.

13. What if people apply for the same topic from different clinical areas/teams? Will you only choose one?

No. Applications will be selected based on the strength and quality of the proposal. However, if you are working on your proposal with someone else who is applying, make sure your applications are not identical.

14. Can one person submit more than one proposal?

Yes, however it is not recommended. Candidates will not be favoured by the number of proposals they submit, but by the strength of their applications. Each successful applicant will only be awarded one Fellowship. The application process is time consuming and requires a lot of effort, so make sure you do not sacrifice quality for quantity; we recommend going deep with one topic rather than scratching the surface of several topics. If you are chosen for a Fellowship you will be spending a significant amount of time working on and thinking about your project, so try choosing the topic that excites you the most. What are you passionate about? Talk to your manager about your ideas and see if one idea is more feasible than another.

15. If I am accepted into the Fellowship, are the weekly seminars mandatory?

Yes. If you are accepted into the VHA-UHN Research Fellowship Program, you must attend 80% of all the seminars. You will be assigned to a weekly seminar group; each seminar takes place from 9am- 12pm on your assigned seminar day. Participants will be given four paid 7 hr. days a week for their projects. One of these days must be your assigned seminar day so you are able to attend. Participation in the seminars is one of the key success factors for Fellowship completion; you will learn valuable information, receive support and mentorship, and build an extended network through these seminars.

16. Can I apply if I've already made plans for vacation during the six months of the VHA Fellowship Program?

Yes. As long as you will be able to attend 80% of the seminar classes and complete your project, you may take vacation during the Fellowship. There will be a two week break during December.

17. There is a four -page limit. Does that include references?

The bibliography or reference list at the end of the proposal will not be included in the four-page limit.

18. Do appendices count in my four-page limit?

No. However, do **not** place any of the pre-specified heading sections within your appendices (e.g., a common mistake involves inserting the project timeline as an appendix; the project timeline should be included in the proposal itself, within the four-page limit). The appendices can be used for supporting documentation (e.g., a sample of a tool you plan to use), as long as it is described within your proposal. If you use appendices, make sure you discuss/describe them within the eight-page proposal. Do not write "see Appendix A" without a description. Remember – your eight-page proposal should be able to stand on its own and be generally understood without relying on appendices.

19. In my application, should some of the pre-specified heading sections be longer than others?

It depends on your topic. Your proposal is evaluated based on overall strength, clarity, and alignment with a strategic priority area and the content of each of the pre-specified headings contribute to that. Reviewers will be scoring each section, so make sure you have addressed all sections as indicated by the pre-specified headings.

20. How much detail should be included in the timeline?

We recognize that a detailed week-to-week or day-to-day timeline may not be clear until the project is underway. For the proposal, think of what you want to accomplish in the six months and how you will achieve it. Imagine your project is complete; what are the major steps you would have had to accomplish to get to that point? What are the key milestones that need to be achieved? It may be helpful to think of it in a month-to-month context – what are the key activities that need to happen in each of the six months?

21. If applications are being judged mostly on the strength of the proposal, why do I need a reference and approval from my manager?

Although project proposals will be the main consideration in the approval process, the selection committee will need to ensure that the applicants are able to complete the work. We also need to ensure that your manager is informed of your activities so s/he is able to provide you with the support you need.

22. Why do Fellowship participants need to meet regularly with their managers?

Regular meetings with your VHA mentor will help keep them informed about your activities, help them to better understand how to support you, and help promote your accountability to your Fellowship activities. One of the goals of the VHA Fellowship Program is to help develop point-of-care providers as leaders, and part of being a leader in a point-of-care role involves communicating and collaborating with other leaders, colleagues, and stakeholders with whom you work.

23. I am a manager with several staff/service providers who have great project ideas, and I want to support all of them. Is it possible for multiple staff/service providers from the same team or clinical area to receive Fellowships?

Yes. Fellowship proposals will be chosen based on their strength.

24. What if I have more questions that aren't covered here?

If you have more questions, please contact Sandra McKay at smckay@vha.ca, Sonia Nizzer at snizzer@vha.ca or Arlinda Ruco aruco@vha.ca