

Budget Neutral Optometry Residency Educational Enhancement: New Programs

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

I. PURPOSE

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Optometry Service National Program Office (11SPEC19) within the National Specialty Care Program Office (SCPO/11SPEC) under VHA Clinical Services (VHA11), in conjunction with the Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA/14AA), invites applications for the development of new optometry residency programs (hereinafter referred to as “program” or “programs”) to be submitted no later than July 1, 2022. This budget-neutral request for proposals (RFP) is not intended to expand the volume of optometry resident (hereinafter referred to as “health professions trainee” (HPT)) positions within VHA, and existing, accredited, funded programs do not need to reapply. While there are no positions that have been permanently returned to OAA that are available for reassignment, the RFP process will discern a hierarchical list of programs who desire and are prepared to start an optometry program that will then be considered during the Standards of Excellence (SoE) process with existing programs. Additionally, if funding is not available through the typical allocations process, but your facility applies through this RFP and is included on this list, your program will have an opportunity to be funded within a neutral budget if positions become available (i.e. returned to OAA).

Note: This process is required by OAA for new programs and managed by the VHA Optometry Service National Program Office (NPO) with input and participation from OAA.

II. BACKGROUND

The VHA Optometry Service NPO is responsible for ensuring excellence in optometric patient care, education and training and research to meet the ever-changing needs of the Veterans we serve. Optometry training programs promote clinical growth and excellence in Veteran-centric care. The establishment of OAA-funded programs are vital for cultivating an enlightening clinical environment and they have enabled the VA to develop, recruit and retain high quality optometry staff. The OAA leads VA’s statutory education mission to train health care professionals for VA and the Nation, enabling VA to enhance the learning environment and provide excellent care to Veterans.

III. POLICY

- A. OAA, in conjunction with the VHA Optometry Service NPO, maintains overall responsibility for administrative policies governing VA’s optometry programs.

- B. VAMCs desiring to develop a new optometry program must demonstrate the ability to provide quality training consistent with [VHA Directive 1400: Office of Academic Affiliations series](#), [VHA Handbook 1400.04, Supervision of Associated Health Trainees](#), [VHA Handbook 1400.08, Education of Associated Health Professions](#) and [VHA Directive 1121\(2\), VHA Eye and Vision Care](#). Facilities collaborating with another academic institution must follow the guidelines in [VHA Handbook 1400.03, VHA Educational Relationships](#).
- C. All positions requested must be for new, VA-sponsored, not-to-exceed (NTE) one-year full-time appointments. HPTs are expected to complete training within the one-year training program (2080 hours). Program start dates must be consistent at the agreed upon time in subsequent years to remain budget neutral. The intent of optometry programs is to prepare clinicians for roles as VA staff clinical optometrists. The strong preference is for these HPTs to complete the full program and receive their certificate of completion. Programs that fail to have the HPTs complete the 12-month program repeatedly may be at risk for non-renewal.
- D. OAA will provide approved VA medical facilities with monies for stipends, VA's share of Federal Insurance Contribution Act (FICA) contributions and VA's share of projected health insurance premiums. Continuation of funding will depend on availability of funds as well as successful implementation and accreditation of the proposed program within 2 years of matriculating its first HPT. This determination will be made via the SoE process that assists in determining the allocation plan for each academic year.

IV. FOCUS AND SCOPE

A. Clinical Experience: Optometry programs should be designed to develop clinical advanced competencies in Veteran-centric care with a minimum of 50% primary eye care experience. While this RFP focuses on one specific profession, proposed programs should include a significant interprofessional focus, such as traumatic brain injury rehabilitation, low vision and medical/ophthalmology subspecialty experience. This focus can be achieved by embedding optometry HPTs into existing interprofessional training programs, collaborating with other professions' training directors to incorporate joint rotations and ensuring that there are profession-specific and interprofessional training objectives, curriculum, didactics and competencies. The acculturation of HPTs to practice in patient-centered, team-based models of care is a central feature of this initiative.

B. Residency Program Directors (RPDs)/Supervisors Eligibility:

(1) Each proposed program must identify an optometrist who has the intent, resources and support for developing an optometry program. Support for such program development must be acknowledged by the proposed RPD and facility leadership (Designated Education Officer, Chief of Staff or Medical Center Director).

(2) RPDs must be licensed optometrists with one of the following experiences:

- Completion of an Accreditation Council on Optometric Education (ACOE)-accredited optometry residency followed by one or more years of clinical optometry experience.
- Five or more years of clinical optometry experience (if the proposed RPD has not completed an ACOE-accredited residency).

C. Proposal Submission: Only complete proposals containing the required documents delineated in the application instructions (Appendix B) will be considered. Proposals should be submitted via email by the VAMC Designated Education Officer (DEO) or Associate Chief of Staff for Education (ACOS/E) to the Executive Director, VHA Optometry Service (scott.slagle@va.gov) with a carbon copy email to the Administrative Officer for VHA Optometry Service (kathleen.gernhart@va.gov) no later than July 1, 2022. VA health care systems with multiple sites/campuses that have one shared DEO may submit **one** proposal per anticipated accredited program. Funding decisions will be based primarily on the quality of the proposals submitted and on their congruence with VA strategic initiatives.

V. REVIEW PROCESS

A. Review Committee and process:

(1) An ad hoc interprofessional review committee designated by the Executive Director, VHA Optometry Service NPO, in collaboration with OAA, will assess the merits of applications. Reviewers will have demonstrated expertise and leadership in education and patient care. The Executive Director, VHA Optometry Service NPO may, at their discretion, create subsets of applications for special review according to considerations such as rurality, site complexity and other needs consistent with VA goals, initiatives and missions. Each proposed new program will be scored by the ad hoc review committee according to the review criteria identified below. That score will be integrated into the optometry program funding algorithm used by the NPO. This algorithm combines values from established programs who are requesting additional positions through the SoE process along with the new program proposals from this RFP. Consequently, a stratified list containing both new and established programs will be submitted as recommendations to the OAA where program funding decisions will be made.

(2) Programs that apply through this RFP will receive an initial notification on whether the proposal is acceptable to be considered in the allocation process. For those with acceptable proposals, the programs will receive a final decision notification from VHA Optometry Service aligned with the OAA's announcement of their Approved Allocation Plan for Associated Health and Nursing Trainee Positions in Fall 2022 to begin in Academic Year 2023-24. If your program is not selected for funding but included on

the final peer reviewed list, your facility will have an opportunity to be considered for funding if positions are returned to OAA for reassignment.

B. Review Criteria: Applications will be scored on the five criteria listed below with a maximum of 5 points per criterion for a total of 25 potential points. These will be incorporated in the optometry program allocation recommendation algorithm to determine final recommendations to OAA.

I. PROGRAM MISSION, VISION, AND TEACHING PHILOSOPHY
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide a mission statement and evidence of a clear understanding of the program's goals and objectives that align with ACOE accreditation standards, including dedication to training in integrated, evidence-based practice.• Discuss how this program benefits Veterans.
II. LEADERSHIP SUPPORT, RESOURCES, AND SUSTAINABILITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrate commitment from the local facility, including support for the optometry program and its accreditation requirements.• Demonstrate readiness for establishing an optometry program. Include the intent to allow protected time (recommended minimum of 25%) for the Optometry RPD.• Describe the clinic space and equipment available for the program.• Describe other available infrastructure and resources such as support staff, office space, and library support.
III. PROGRAM STAFF AND INTERPROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe the number and qualifications of current eye clinic staff to serve as faculty and identify their anticipated interaction with the proposed program.• Submit the proposed RPD's curriculum vitae.• Describe the degree of interprofessional team functioning that currently operates at the facility, including evidence of collaboration in patient care, education, administrative and/or research efforts.• Describe academic affiliate and collaborators (if any) and nature of the partnership (e.g., grand rounds, off-site rotation, affiliate faculty appointed in VA, etc.)• Describe any existing training opportunities for pre-degree optometry students at your facility.• Submit a copy of the proposed program primary faculty's clinical privileges.
IV. CURRICULUM AND CLINICAL EXPERIENCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe the type of presenting clinical conditions and environments to which HPTs will be exposed during the training year (e.g., array of ocular pathologies, ophthalmic emergent care, low vision rehabilitation, polytrauma/traumatic brain injury rehabilitation, ocular subspecialties, etc.).• Describe the features and strengths of the proposed curriculum, including potential to achieve the primary objective of training HPTs with specific advanced skills and to obtain program accreditation. Curriculum development must demonstrate evidence of review of the ACOE accreditation standards and requirements.• Describe profession-specific competency skills to be developed by HPTs, with an emphasis on how evidence-based care will be taught. This discussion should include

modalities of treatment, staff consultation and interprofessional treatment team participation.

- Present current relevant clinical statistics to include the number of eye care encounters and unique eye care visits conducted by the optometry clinic. Inclusion of statistics on procedures relevant to the proposed program program would also be valuable.

V. PROGRAM EVALUATION AND OUTCOMES (Appendix B)

- Describe proposed outcomes of the training program.
- Specify how the training program's effectiveness for meeting its training goals and objectives will be evaluated and how you will use those outcomes to improve your program.

VI. RFP SCHEDULE

April 8, 2022	VHA Optometry Service NPO distributes Program Announcement to eligible VA medical facilities, VISNs and OAA.
July 1, 2022	Full Proposals from eligible facilities are due to the Executive Director, VHA Optometry Service NPO (scott.slagle@va.gov) and the Administrative Officer for VHA Optometry Service NPO (kathleen.gernhart@va.gov) via email.
Fall 2022	A final decision notification from VHA Optometry Service NPO will be distributed at the time of OAA's announcement of their Approved Allocation Plan for Associated Health and Nursing Trainees by Profession.
July 1, 2023	Approximate date HPTs begin program (start date should coincide with recruitment materials).
Summer 2024	Receipt of ACOE accreditation status

VII. POINTS OF CONTACT

For general information concerning this program announcement and RFP submission process, contact Scott Slagle, OD, FAAO, Executive Director, VHA Optometry Service (scott.slagle@va.gov) or Kathleen Gernhart, Administrative Officer for VHA Optometry Service (kathleen.gernhart@va.gov).

APPENDIX A: COVER PAGE

Optometry Residency Programs

VA Medical Center Name: _____

Does this VAMC/Health Care system have multiple sites/campuses Yes No

If yes, name the individual sites/campuses that will be applying for a new optometry program: _____

Primary Points of Contact:

Position Title	Name/Credentials	E-Mail Address	Phone Number
Designated Education Officer (DEO)			
Proposed Residency Program Director			
Medical Center Director			

NOTE: These individuals will be contacted if additional questions arise during the review process and when award notifications are distributed. Please add any additional rows as needed.

Educational Level Requested	# of Positions Requested
Resident	

X

Designated Education Officer

X

Proposed Residency Director/Supervisor

APPENDIX B: APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

I. DEADLINE: Proposals are due no later than **11:59 pm EDT** on July 1, 2022.

B. NOTIFICATION OF DECISIONS

This request for proposals is for budget-neutral optometry allocation decisions; thus, development of new programs is not guaranteed. However, if the current budget profile permits funding of new programs, award notifications will be sent to the contacts listed on the cover page around the time of OAA's announcement of Approved Allocation Plan for Associated Health and Nursing Trainees by Profession.

C. PROPOSAL INSTRUCTIONS

Proposals must be submitted by the VAMC or healthcare system's DEO via email to the Executive Director with a carbon copy email to the Administrative Officer for the Optometry Service NPO.

The core narrative page limit **may not exceed 6 pages**. Full proposals, including letters of support and supplemental materials **may not exceed 20 pages**.

DOCUMENT 1: CORE NARRATIVE: (not to exceed 6 pages) must include these five criteria (See "Review Criteria" above for details):

- A. Program Mission, Vision and Teaching Philosophy
- B. Leadership Support, Resources and Sustainability
- C. Program Staff and Interprofessional Collaboration
- D. Curriculum and Clinical Experiences
- E. Program Evaluation and Outcomes

Important Note: All programs being proposed through this RFP must be VA-sponsored, accredited solely in VA's name. Any non-VA rotations (educational details) may not exceed one-sixth of the training year (2 months) and will require review and approval by OAA before the HPT begins any offsite rotation. Proposals that include an off-site rotation must include a justification for the rotation that is either based on an accreditation requirement or describes a clear benefit to the VA and Veterans.

(2) DOCUMENT 2: LETTER OF SUPPORT must provide assurance of local VA medical facility support. VA medical facility leadership must have a demonstrated commitment to health professions education and patient-centered practice models. **Submissions missing any letter of support will be considered incomplete and will not be reviewed.**

A minimum of two letters must be submitted:

- (1) A letter signed jointly by the Medical Center Director and Designated Education Officer (required)
- (2) A letter from the partnering academic institution (required)
- (3) A letter from any non-VA facility providing off-site rotations (if applicable)

(3) OTHER DOCUMENTS:

- Curriculum vitae for the RPD
- Clinical privileges for the primary program faculty
- Other pertinent information such as curricula rotational schedule, pertinent clinic statistics and/or calendar of didactic seminars may be added as desired.

(4) SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

Preparation of Proposals. Proposals should be a collaborative effort between all parties involved in the development of the program.

a. Font and margin sizes. Font size must be 12-point Arial or Calibri for narrative portions. Margins must be at least one inch all around (excluding headers and footers).

b. File formats. Word, Excel, PDF or TIF files formats may be used. Letters must include a signature (electronic signature preferred).

Submission of Proposals. Proposals must be submitted by the DEO or proposed RPD via email to the Executive Director, VHA Optometry Service (scott.slagle@va.gov) and the Administrative Officer for VHA Optometry Service (kathleen.gernhart@va.gov)