



Supporting Partnerships in Academic Research and Knowledge (SPARK) Request for Applications

A. PURPOSE

The **SPARK Request for Applications (RFA)** has been developed to promote collaborative research programs between Macon & Joan Brock Virginia Health Sciences at Old Dominion University (VHS) and Sentara Healthcare and to advance the research missions of both organizations in clinical research. As such, the aim of **SPARK** is to assist VHS faculty and Sentara employee teams with developing collaborative research programs that address one or several of the following:

- Strengthening and/or aligning existing VHS research programs with the clinical interests of VHS and Sentara Healthcare in health disparities
- Initiating research collaboration to support approved Joint Planning Committee (JPC) clinical programs
- Creating new research capability within shared clinical programs related to health disparities
- Enhancing and/or harmonizing ongoing VHS research initiatives with the clinical priorities of VHS and Sentara Healthcare through community engagement
- Promoting collaborative research among VHS faculty and residents as well as Sentara Medical Group clinicians or programs

A competitive proposal would engage collaborative research that facilitates clinical investigations (not multi-site sponsored late stage clinical studies), studies of health disparities, community health/outcomes, and/or population health.

Special consideration will be given to proposals that have a target for seeking significant extramural funding from the NIH. Trainee (student, resident, fellow) participation is highly encouraged.

B. ELIGIBILITY

The **SPARK AWARD** is restricted to VHS full-time salaried personnel who qualify as a Principal Investigator (PI) and Sentara employees. Funding requirements for the **SPARK AWARD** are below:

- The grant award is for a 2-year period at \$40K/yr. A one-time 1-year no-cost extension may be granted. Subsequently, no further project extensions would be considered.

- One VHS employee that fulfills the qualifications of PI and one Sentara employee as Co-PI or Co-Investigator are required for each submitted project. VHS includes Eastern Virginia Medical School, EVMS School of Health Professions, Ellmer College of Health Sciences, Ellmer School of Nursing, and Joint School of Public Health.

Year 1 milestones

- Concept plan or specific aims for submission of a NIH grant, Robert Wood Johnson, DoD or other Federal/State agencies submission is required.
- A submission of a review publication citing the **SPARK AWARD** is required within the first year of the project.
- A poster presentation by trainees on the **SPARK AWARD** at VHS Research Day is required.
- Demonstration of the collection/analysis of Hypothesis/preliminary data for a peer-reviewed paper.
- Mid-year (6-month) milestone update report.
- The end-of-first-year progress report is required to include research progress and financial expenditures as well as a listing of any posters, presentations, patents, publications, or grants submitted or awarded.
- **Year 2 funding may be forfeited if the Year 1 progress report is not satisfactory.**

Year 2 milestones

- A NIH grant, Robert Wood Johnson, DoD, or the Federal/State submission in year 2 is required. NIH grant submissions are preferred.
- A peer-reviewed publication citing the **SPARK AWARD** is required by the end of year 2.
- The project PI or participants will be required to give a poster or didactic presentation at a national meeting, citing the **SPARK AWARD**.
- A poster presentation by trainees on the **SPARK AWARD** at VHS Research Day is required.
- Mid-year (6-month) milestone update report.
- The end-of-second-year progress report is required to include research progress and financial expenditures as well as a listing of any posters, presentations, patents, publications, or grants submitted or awarded.

The following are not allowed:

- Indirect costs of any kind.
- Salary support for Principal Investigator (PI) and Co-Investigator.

The following are allowed:

- Funds can be used for equipment, technical or research staff support (e.g., technician, coordinator, nurse), general expenses, supplies and pre-approved travel to present **SPARK AWARD** results at a national meeting.
- As VHS is a teaching institute, working with students, residents, and other trainees is highly encouraged, and funding can also be used in part for stipend support for such learners.

Future Submission Plans: The **SPARK AWARD** is intended as a furthering of the VHS strategic plan and its collaboration with Sentara Healthcare. Thus, it is an internal initiative to promote and assist in the creation of projects that create mechanisms for future collaborations and with the strong potential for obtaining long-term external funding, particularly from NIH. As such, it is required that the investigator(s) will prepare and submit an application for an external grant, using research and data resulting from the **SPARK AWARD**.

Reporting: In order to analyze the effect of the **SPARK AWARD**, the investigators who receive the funds will be expected to submit 6-month milestone updates and annual progress reports. More information about the reports will be provided at time of award. **Noncompliant reporting may result in early project termination.**

Awardees will also be expected to present their progress every 6 months to the VHS-Sentara Joint Research Operations Committee (JROC).

C. CONTENT OF SPARK AWARD APPLICATION

All components should be assembled as a single PDF file with pages numbered. Arial font size 11, single-line spacing, minimum 0.5-inch margin all around.

SPARK AWARD Application Components	Page Limits
1. Cover page that includes the project title, amount of funds requested, and a list of research team member names, departments, and role on the project (i.e. PI, Co-I, etc.).	Page limit: 1 page
2. Chair's statement of support that includes information from the departmental chair addressing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The current funds (from all sources) available to the investigator to support the study. b. If the department is able to match or contribute some funds to support the project. Provision of matching funds from the department is encouraged. 	Page limit: 2 pages
3. Investigator statement on the impact of the proposed research on VHS and Sentara Healthcare, community engagement, or health disparities.	Page limit: 1/2 page
4. Narrative summary of the research being proposed to include (please strictly follow the following order and component requirements): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Specific Aims of the project (not to exceed 1 page) b. Background and Significance c. Approaches to achieve Specific Aims and a list of Milestones to determine the success of project progression (must include specific milestone timeline) c. A paragraph describing the new collaboration, highlighting VHS faculty and Sentara employee contributions 	Page limit: 6 pages (inclusive of figures and tables, but excluding references)

5. Budget with justification linked to defined milestones (categorizing budget under each milestone) (max budget: \$40K/year for 2 years)	Page limit: 2 pages
6. NIH Biosketch for the PI, Co-PI, and/or Co-Investigator(s)	Page limit: 5 pages each

Proposals deviating from the guidelines may be administratively rejected without further consideration.

D. SUBMISSION

SPARK AWARD applications are to be submitted as a single combined PDF to the Senior Associate Vice President for Research, via email to VHS-EVMSResearch@odu.edu no later than **12:00 noon on 10-28-2025**. Once received in the VHS Office of Research, the **SPARK AWARD** application will be reviewed for completeness by the office staff. Applications will then be reviewed by an internal review panel that includes members of the joint VHS-Sentara research committee. The panel will forward a brief written review and recommendation as to whether or not funding is merited to the Joint Planning Committee, who will make the final decision on funding.

E. CRITERIA FOR THE EVALUATION OF APPLICATIONS

Applications will be evaluated using the following criteria:

- a. The collaborative impact
- b. Alignment with clinical programs
- c. Scholarly merit, research strategy, and overall quality of the proposed program or study design
- d. Feasibility of applications to achieve goals within the anticipated timelines
- e. Appropriateness of budget use; Consideration of facility, infrastructure, and equipment available and used for the project.
- f. Funding strategy and potential of the investigator(s) to successfully obtain outside funding and/or publication and the impact on current or ongoing research at VHS and Sentara Healthcare.
- g. To encourage 1st time investigators, past productivity will not be a scoring metric (i.e. publications, meeting presentations, invited talks, etc.) as presented in the Biosketch.
- h. Preference will be given to projects with greater:
 - Alignment with clinical programs
 - Uniqueness to address a given need (i.e., improvements in care delivery, health disparities, etc.)
 - Innovation
 - Potential for return on investment
 - Leverage of existing resources

F. PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AND NOTIFICATION

The proposed program implementation timeline is shown below. In November, a written summary of the review of the application will be provided to all applicants and funded PIs will be notified of the **SPARK AWARD** reporting requirement.

