



2026 Paul G. Hearne Emerging Leader Award Frequently Asked Questions

Last Updated: October 9, 2025

You can view the [archived 2026 AAPD Paul G. Hearne Emerging Leader Webinar](#). Our [website page](#) will have more information on the award.

Below are questions asked on the informational webinar or follow-up via email. Questions may be edited for length and clarity. Please email Sarah Shaw at programs@aapd.com if any additional questions have not been addressed below.

Application Materials

Q: What if I need to make an update to my application?

A: Please email programs@aapd.com to figure out the best solution.

Q: What if I want to submit my application materials in a different format than writing?

A: Please reach out to programs@aapd.com so we can figure out an accessible solution!

Q: Can I apply if I am part of an existing nonprofit?

A: Yes.

Q: Should the letters of recommendation come from other people who will collaborate on the project?

A: It is encouraged, since they are the ones who will know your project and you best. However, it is not required.

Q: Is it okay to have an alumni of AAPD's programs provide a letter or support?

A: Yes, as long as they are not currently an AAPD staff member or Board member.

Q: Can letters of recommendation come from past AAPD Board members?



A: Yes, as long as they are not a current Board member or they are not a relative of a current Board member.

Q: If you're self-employed and a resume wouldn't be practical, what are some alternative ways I can share my experience?

A: This can include a one-pager of your work. Also any podcasts/articles, etc you've been involved in.

Q: While my org is based in the US and we do some work here, our main focus is data collection in the developing world. Is this an issue?

A: We will prioritize programs focused in the US and territories.

Project Proposal

Q: Are there specific types of projects that qualify?

A: We accept all types of project proposals. We have funded a variety of different initiatives in past years, including a children's book, awards, nonprofits, mutual aid, and more. You can view our [past Hearne Awardees' and their initiatives on our website](#).

Q: Can projects or initiatives that are in the idea phase still be eligible?

A: Yes. Your project does not need to already be in existence, have a Board or team, or any sort of incorporation status to be eligible. Past Hearne Awardees have used the funds to begin their ideas.

Q: Is the project specifically for nonprofit work or is it okay if it is a creative project?

A: Creative projects are okay! One of our past Hearne Award projects included writing a book, hosting the first disability pride parade, or an educational documentary.

Q: Is AAPD more interested in projects that have a 5-year plan or a one-time project that can be done in a year?

A: AAPD considers and has accepted both kinds of proposals. If you are proposing a five year plan, be sure to note in your application where in the five year plan your project will be happening if accepted as a Hearne Award.



Q: Can the project be focused on one segment of the disability community, such as a specific diagnosis?

A: Yes. Some of our past Hearne Awardees have focused specifically on a disability, age range, education, faith, and more.

Q: Can you share more examples on the level of specificity in the project information? Can we attach or link related documents or keep only to plain text?

A: This can vary, but we at least want to know the activities you will do in 2026. We will only look at plain text. If you have concerns about this, please email us to talk more.

Q: Can projects be related to research?

A: Yes.

Q: Does the project need to be completed within the year?

A: No.

Q: What specific resources and assistance does AAPD provide awardees with?

A: At minimum, AAPD hosts quarterly calls with each Awardee throughout the year. During the call, the Awardee will share updates in the past quarter and discuss any challenges. AAPD can help brainstorm ideas or solutions, talk through a process, find a peer mentor based on your area of interest or skill, facilitate connections, share opportunities, provide templates, and more. It is based on the Awardee's request and project. Awardees can also request additional support throughout the call. Many past Awardees have met with AAPD numerous times outside of the required quarterly calls.

Funding

Q: Would it be possible to receive the award money in someone else's name (if the applicant is on SSI and the amount would mess up their benefits?)

A: Yes. AAPD can disburse the amount to someone you designate and can also break up the amounts. The project fund of \$15,000 can be deposited all at once or up to monthly amounts starting in January 2026. The cash award of \$10,000 can be given monthly or at once in December 2026.

Q: Can the \$10,000 be used to pay ourselves for our labor on a project?

A: Usually there are other line items associated with the initiative that involve a direct cost, such as materials, equipment, vendors, recurring fees, and more. If there is a



situation where no materials or other external labor is required, AAPD will reach out with more questions to get a better understanding of your proposal.

Q: Can the funding be used to start a 501(c3) nonprofit?

A: Yes.

Q: How is the funding divided among a group?

A: The \$15,000 must be used for the project. The remaining \$10,000 is up to the discretion of the group and AAPD does not decide. Past groups have either used the remaining funds for the project or split it evenly among the number of group members.

Q: Do the funds need to be spent in full by the end of 2026?

A: This is a case by case basis, depending on your project. We have had Hearne Awardees allocate a small portion of their project funds for sustainability or if plans changed. The Hearne Award is focused on the year of 2026, so we'd like to hear how you will use the funds for 2026.

Miscellaneous Questions

Q: How many Awardees do you accept each year?

A: We will accept two Awardees. An Awardee can be an individual or group.

Q: How competitive is the application?

A: Each year, there are more and more people applying for the Hearne Award. The competitiveness is not only based on the number of applications, but the quality of applications. Regardless of the number of applications, we typically interview between 4-6 applicants.

Q: Will there be in-person interviews?

A: No. All of the interviews will be conducted via Zoom.