

**PROGRAM GUIDE: REHABILITATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
SCIENTIFIC REVIEW PROGRAM**



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
OFFICE OF RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT
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REHABILITATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
SCIENTIFIC REVIEW PROGRAM

As of February 13, 2017, the Rehabilitation Research and Development Scientific Review Program Handbook (VHA Handbook 1203.01) has been replaced with this Program Guide. This Program Guide replaces all prior official ORD guidance for the Rehabilitation Research and Development Scientific Review Program.

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1. PURPOSE

This Office of Research & Development (ORD) Program Guide provides guidelines for the Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D) Scientific Review Program. This Program Guide replaces prior “Handbooks”. Other relevant documents for the RR&D Scientific Review Program may include VA-ORD Application Guide SF424 (R&R), Funding Opportunity Announcements/Requests for Applications (FOA/RFAs), Frequently Asked Questions etc., available on VA-ORD Internet and Intranet websites.

2. BACKGROUND

RR&D builds the foundation upon which the VA fulfills President Lincoln's promise “To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan” by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans. Recently separated Veterans are coming to the VA with an increasing number and complexity of disability claims. The prevalence of age-related disabilities also are rising with the increase in proportion of Veterans over 65 receiving care in the VA. RR&D funds research with the ultimate goal of generating evidence-based practice to prevent, eliminate, or reduce motor, sensory, and psychological disabilities among our Nation's Veterans allowing them to live full and productive lives.

RR&D research areas of emphasis are broad and expansive and include preclinical, clinical and applied rehabilitation research with strong implications for translation into clinical practice to advance the rehabilitative healthcare of Veterans. RR&D priority areas of research align with disabilities affecting Veterans and include: traumatic brain, spinal cord, and other nerve injuries; neuromusculoskeletal disorders and pain; prosthetic and orthotic devices and wheelchairs; regeneration and restoration of motor and sensory function; disorders of the sensory and communication systems including tinnitus; disabilities as a consequence of aging; neurodegenerative and psychiatric disorders; and community reintegration.

3. SCOPE

The RR&D Scientific Review Program is a system of peer review based on the tenets of scientific rigor, integrity, confidentiality, and impartiality and is the principal mechanism through which RR&D ensures it supports the best science most relevant to Veterans.

Applications submitted in response to FOA/RFAs are evaluated for scientific and technical merit by a multidisciplinary group of experts from inside and outside VA who constitute the Scientific Merit Review Board. The recommendation of a review subcommittee, in the form of narrative comments and an assigned scientific priority score, guide the funding decisions of VA research administrators.

The Scientific Review Program also provides the foundation for effective communication with applicants for RR&D research support. Reviewers' assessments and suggestions are shared with applicants to help them understand the subcommittee's recommendation, to improve already strong projects, and to assist applicants eligible to revise and resubmit their application.

4. AWARD PROGRAMS

RR&D employs the Scientific Review Program for the research programs described in the Rehabilitation Research and Development Directive 1203 <http://www.rehab.research.va.gov/guid/handbook/1203.pdf>. Subcommittees of the Scientific Merit Review Board review applications submitted in response to all FOA/RFA types including RR&D Merit Review Awards (I01), Small Projects in Rehabilitation Research (SPiRE, I21), and Career Development Awards (IK1, IK2), Centers (I50), and Research Enhancement Award Programs (REAP, I50). FOA/RFAs are posted in advance of each application deadline on the ORD intranet at <http://vaww.research.va.gov/funding/rfa.cfm#rrd>. The RR&D Research Career Scientist (RCS, IK6) award program also uses scientific peer review. The ORD RCS Program Guide 1200.20 is available on the ORD internet at <http://www.research.va.gov/resources/policies/ProgramGuideRCS-1200-20.pdf>.

5. FUNDING

Funds available and anticipated number of awards are described in each FOA/RFA. RR&D will limit the maximum total project budget, funding per project year, and the number of years funding that may be requested. Project Director/Principal Investigators (PD/PI) should submit project budgets that are well-justified, appropriate to conduct the proposed work, and sufficiently detailed. Guidelines on authorized use of research funds and how to prepare a project budget are provided in the VA-ORD Application Guide SF424 (R&R) <http://vaww.research.va.gov/funding/electronic-submission.cfm> with additional guidance found in specific FOA/RFAs. RR&D does not guarantee that a project will be funded at the level requested.

6. ELIGIBILITY

RR&D will announce in the FOA/RFA eligible PD/PIs and Institutions/Organizations that may submit an application. The number of applications accepted for review or funded from a PD/PI or site may also be specified in the FOA/RFA.

Exceptions to requirements such as PD/PI eligibility, use of non-VA space, or exceeding limits on project duration or budget may be requested in the form of a waiver. Instructions on the preparation and submission of waiver requests are described in the

FOA/RFA and on the ORD/RR&D website

<http://www.research.va.gov/resources/policies/default.cfm>.

NOTE: Applications may be administratively withdrawn or projects not funded if any of the eligibility criteria are not met or required waivers not approved. Most waivers must be approved in advance of application submission.

7. APPLICATION SUBMISSION

FOA/RFAs with specific instructions on the preparation and submission of applications and other pertinent information can be found on the ORD intranet at:

<http://vaww.research.va.gov/funding/rfa.cfm>. Additional guidance on application submission can be found at: <http://vaww.research.va.gov/funding/electronic-submission.cfm>, and includes the VA-ORD Application Guide SF424 (R&R) and attachment templates which should be viewed in conjunction with the FOA/RFA.

Letters of Intent (LOIs), if applicable, and the full application are due by the deadline specified in the FOA/RFA and on the ORD submission calendar at

<http://www.research.va.gov/funding/process/submission-calendar.cfm>.

8. APPLICATION EVALUATION

a. First level of review. Review of applications is described in the relevant FOA/RFA. Typically a subcommittee of the Scientific Merit Review Board, called a Scientific Review Group (SRG) composed of scientists and clinicians with relevant expertise for each application, provides an evaluation of the scientific and technical merit using criteria described in the FOA/RFA. RR&D SRGs meet throughout the year to review proposals (see ORD submission calendar). SRG meeting dates are announced in the Federal Registry Notice of Meetings at least 15 days prior to the meeting.

b. Second level of review. The second level of review performed by RR&D considers scientific merit and feasibility of the proposed research (as judged by the SRG) and significance and importance of the proposed research to the mission of RR&D and ORD. Final funding decisions are made at the discretion, and approval, of the Director RR&D.

c. Appeals. The appeals process is intended to ensure that the scientific review of all applications is fair and equitable. It is not intended as a means to resolve differences in scientific opinion between the PD/PI and the reviewers, to adjust funding decisions, or to circumvent the peer review process. Instructions on the preparation and submission of appeals are described in the FOA/RFA and on the ORD/RR&D website <http://www.rehab.research.va.gov/>, under Guidelines for Researchers.

Submission of an appeal does not prohibit a PD/PI from resubmitting the application, if eligible.

9. NOTIFICATION OF REVIEW RESULTS

Following the review, PD/PIs receive a written Summary Statement that includes reviewers' written comments, a summary of any discussion about the application and a scientific priority score. PD/PIs are encouraged to use this information to revise applications eligible for resubmission.

If the application is under consideration for funding, RR&D will issue a "Notice of Intent to Award" to the PD/PI, the ACOS, and AO of the local VA research office. For a project to remain under consideration for funding, the recipients of the letter are expected to ensure RR&D receives all required items via the VA "Just-in-Time" (JIT) Document Manager within 180 days of the Notice of Intent to Award.

Following completion of JIT requirements, the PD/PI, ACOS, and AO will receive a "Notice of Award" confirming the project budget and start and end dates, the scientific program manager responsible for the project, and terms and conditions of the award.

Award recipients must adhere to VA research policies including VA requirements for progress reports (RPPRs); final reports; research publications; public access to data; intellectual property; and clinical trial registration and reporting required by clinicaltrials.gov, which are all described on the ORD website.

NOTE: *Unsatisfactory performance in adhering to VA research policies may result in probationary status or termination of funding.*

10. CHANGES TO FUNDED AWARDS

Awards should be carried out according to the plan presented in the reviewed and approved application. Any significant changes in project duration, budget, aims, methods, site(s) or PD/PI must be approved by RR&D. Project modifications may be requested using the ORD Project Modification Form located on the VA-ORD website at <http://www.research.va.gov/resources/policies/default.cfm>. Modification requests will undergo administrative review, and some may require additional scientific review.

11. PROGRAM CONTACTS. Inquiries about the Program should be directed to the RR&D contacts listed below.

a. Programmatic inquiries related to application submission or review should be made by the ACOS or AO of the local VA research office and directed to the Program Analysis and Review Section Administrator. Contact information is provided in the FOA/RFA and on the RR&D website <http://www.rehab.research.va.gov/staff/pars1.html>

b. PD/PIs may contact the RR&D Scientific Program Managers with questions related to scientific issues raised in the summary statement for a reviewed application or the scientific content of an application to be submitted. Contact information for RR&D staff may be found at <http://www.rehab.research.va.gov/staff/science1.html>

c. General inquiries may be directed to: rrdreviews@va.gov and additional information is also available on the RR&D website at: <http://www.rehab.research.va.gov/>

Website Note: **http://www** websites are accessible to the public. **http://vaww** websites are on the ORD intranet and are accessible only to VA investigators, as this intramural research program only funds VA investigators.

APPROVED:



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