

VA Office of Research and Development (ORD)

Research Programs and Funding Mechanisms

The Department of Veterans Affairs ORD is headquartered in Washington, D.C. and overseen by a Chief Research and Development Officer (CRADO).

ORD internet/intranet - <http://www.research.va.gov/> or <http://vaww.research.va.gov/>

Research Services (Programs)

Biomedical Laboratory Research and Development Service (BLR&D)

Basic science or bench research. Pre-clinical evaluations of the biology and/or physiology of disease processes. Can use tissue, blood, cell lines, or other biologic specimens. Also one of the two services that includes animal research models.

Clinical Science Research and Development Service (CSR&D)

Human subject research. Primarily involved in clinical trials but also manage epidemiologic studies.

Cooperative Studies Program (CSP)

Subsidiary of CSR&D. This is the service that conducts large multi-center clinical trials. Studies funded by CSP are often multi-million dollar studies. Can include industry or other Federal (e.g., NIH) co-sponsors. Has a very well organized research management infrastructure with statistical/data management coordinating centers, a pharmacy center, and data safety monitoring boards (DSMBs).

Investigator structure includes a “Principal Proponent” who is/are the investigator(s) that developed or designed the protocol. “Site investigators” serve as local PI’s at each participating VA facility involved in the multi-site trial.

Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D)

Hybrid service. Primarily involved in human subject research related to issues such as spinal cord injury, traumatic brain injury, prostheses, etc. Includes clinical trials. Has also developed a basic science focus and is the other service that can include animal models in research protocols.

Health Services Research and Development Service (HSR&D)

Covers the spectrum of veterans' healthcare to include clinical trials, database research, economic analyses, healthcare delivery assessments, comparative effectiveness, quality of care interventions, etc. In general, research that tries to find a better way to deliver healthcare or to evaluate current methods of healthcare delivery.

Funding Issues Common to all Services

- Each of these four services develops its own Research Funding Announcements (RFAs).
- RFAs and application materials are only available on the VA INTRANet site.
- VA Research is an intramural research program (available only to VA employees).
- Uses the same grant submission mechanism (grants.gov or SAM/eraCommons) as do NIH proposals.
- 24 page limits with three review attempts.
- Uses the 1-5 scoring system (but may go to the NIH 9-point system in the future).
- Research proposals must be relevant to veteran healthcare.

Types of VA Funding (and their NIH Equivalents)

Merit Review (NIH equivalent – R01)

- Primary mechanism of investigator funding. Typically, are three to five year grants with varying budget caps usually \$500,000 – \$1,000,000(+) range.
- Each service has **parent** awards (responsive to the overall goals of the service).
- Each service also has **special solicitations** responsive to a particular topic or population. *Current examples are “BLR&D Merit Review Award for Traumatic Brain Injury Research,” and “HSR&D Award for Deployment Health Research (OEF/OIF).”*

Career Development Awards (NIH equivalent – K series awards)

Career Development Award (CDA-2)

- Mentored award for clinicians and non-clinicians.
- Non-clinicians can be no more than five years beyond their PhD or doctoral equivalent. Clinicians can be no more than five years beyond terminal training (residency, fellowship).
- No prior funding requirement but should have published in content area with one first author publication.
- Mentoring team is the **major** part of a successful application.
- Funds salary and sometimes project support for 3-5 years.
- Awardee has 75% protected research time.

Career Development Enhancement Award (CDEA)

- For established research scientists to learn new skills at a unique facility for up to one year.
- Open to clinicians and non-clinicians.
- 100% of time dedicated to research.

Pilot Projects (NIH equivalent – R03 awards)

- The services announce pilot projects from time to time.
- Typically 1-2 year projects at approximately \$100,000 per project in available funds.

Centers (NIH equivalent – P50)

- Centers are undergoing a transition in the VA.
- Generally fund infrastructure costs for administrative, scientific, and statistical support for a particular research program (e.g., HSR&D Center)

Program Projects (NIH equivalent – P01)

- These may be phasing out in the VA.
- A 3-5 project grouping in a particular content area.

Durham VA Research Entities

Research Service (General Medical Research)

- Oversees the overall operation, compliance, and management of the research program at the DVAMC.
- Manages the research committees (IRB, IACUC, etc.).
- Provides administrative support for application distribution, grant instructions, and submission (no grant writers or similar support).
- Covers BLR&D, some CSR&D, and RR&D applications.

Geriatric Research, Education, and Clinical Center (GRECC)

- A clinical, educational, and research entity.
- Includes basic and clinical scientists.
- Has a fellowship program for clinician investigators
- No core funding for research.

Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center (MIRECC)

- A clinical, education, and research entity.
- No core funding for research.

HSR&D Center of Excellence

- Covers HSR&D research and grant submissions.
- A research entity comprised of clinicians and non-clinicians.
- Has a fellowship program for clinician investigators.

Durham Epidemiologic Research and Information Center

- Part of the Cooperative Studies Program but also aligned with HSR&D
- Varied portfolio
- Involved with large scale multi-site studies, data and specimen repositories, and epidemiologic studies

VA Eligibility

- An **intramural** program for VA employees for projects with relevance to the VA population.
- Must be a U.S. citizen to compete for VA funds (with rare exceptions).
- VA time is proportioned into “eighths” such that $1/8^{\text{th}} = 5$ hours of a 40 hour federal workweek.
- Must be willing to accept at least a 5/8ths (25 hour) VA appointment to accept VA research funds (unless a waiver is granted).
- Can apply as an unpaid employee but must be willing (and the VA must be able) to provide a 5/8ths appointment if funded.
- Normally would have at least a “Without Compensation” (WOC) appointment at the application stage, but often hold a 1/8ths or higher appointment at application.
- VA research is meant to be conducted on VA sites.
- Partial, and in rare cases complete, off site waivers may be granted to conduct some/all of the research off-site. This request must be approved by VA in Washington, D.C.
- International research requires a waiver from VA in Washington, D.C. that is not often granted.
- Non-veterans can be included in VA research studies but a compelling reason, primarily an inadequate number of potential veteran subjects, must be approved by the IRB.
- Veteran caregiver studies and similar projects can include non-veterans (with IRB approval).

Non-profit Research and Education Corporations

- VA has established affiliated non-profit corporations as a “flexible funding mechanism” to support VA research and education.
- Are state incorporated non-profit 501(c)(3) organizations but must be linked to a VA facility.
- Money is not federal and can be banked.
- Durham VA’s non-profit corporation is the **Institute for Medical Research, Incorporated (IMR)**.
- The IMR can administer any funding source with the exception of VA funds.
- Historically foundations have been the means of administering industry sponsored studies but many non-profit corporations also administer federal research funds (e.g., NIH, DoD, etc.).
- Investigators can use residual funds in support of VA research and/or education.
- IMR, in some cases, is a source of research funding. They may sponsor small grant awards for VA investigators.