



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
Office of Research & Development

Field Conference Call – Meeting Notes*
Monday, February 8, 2021 at 1:30 pm ET

* Attachments are located at the [ORD Teams Site](#)

Welcome

Wendy Tenhula, Ph.D.

Dr. Wendy Tenhula welcomed attendees and highlighted ORD's efforts for VA Research to become more enterprise-oriented by pointing toward agenda items in that context.

ORD Topics

Grant Huang, MPH, Ph.D.

ORD Field Call

- The ORD Field Call has moved to Microsoft Teams. Please note that agendas and handouts will be kept in the ORD Field Call Teams folder in addition to having minutes kept on the ORD website.
- Thanks to the following for helping with testing and suggestions: Tammy Barnett, Thomas Boster, Tara Burke, David Burnaska, Margaret Covar, Robert Crawford, Marcos Delgado, Amanda Garcia, Amber Goetschius, Scott Harvill, Holly Henry, Sharon Jacky, Lynn Jernigan, William Lance, Melissa Middleton, Kari Points, Maria Rodriguez

ORD / Research Enterprise

- ORD is excited to include a few new features and sections on the call. One will include spotlighting some of the enterprise resources and capabilities from the field. ORD welcomes any comments or ideas going forward.
- The Office of Construction & Facility Management (CFM) is updating the VA Research Facility Design Standards. When completed, the new Standards will guide new research construction and lab renovation across VA. One of the project deliverables is to survey how VA research space is used. The contractor, HDR-FFE, Inc will send out the short survey this month, with a cover memo from Rachel to express her strong support, to most R&D programs with biomedical and rehab labs, and VMUs. We would appreciate your assistance in completing the survey. Please send any question relating to the survey to Alex Chiu, who is the ORD lead on the project team.
- COVID-19 Updates
 - The VA History Office is collecting artifacts from the COVID-19 pandemic experience. They have requested that artifacts from the VA research community to include materials, documents, and personal accounts be submitted to [SharePoint portal](#) by COB on 19 February. Any staff can

- submit an entry in the portal. More details are provided in the handout that also includes examples of artifacts that can be included.
- The Office of Healthcare Transformation (OHT) has contacted ORD to raise awareness of potential activities to involve mass vaccinations for COVID-19. Details will be forthcoming, but it is expected that staff will be called upon to help with various activities. Individuals qualified to administer vaccines are expected to be the highest need. Volunteers of all types will also be needed. Activities are expected to run/coordinated through VA facilities, but please inform ORD through the ORDCOVID19@va.gov email of any activities that are relevant to research.
- To follow-up from last month's call, a demonstration of the ORD COVID-19 Research Dashboard is being presented as a resource for the field to help with awareness of COVID-19 activities being done. The link is [here](#).

VA Counterintelligence Update

Lee Taylor, Acting Counterintelligence Program Manager/VACO

An update on VA counterintelligence activities was provided to raise awareness of threats to VA research. Materials shared on the call may be requested by sending an email to Dr. Huang.

Research Protections & Policy

Molly Klote, Ph.D.

- New IRB Network Director – Introduction of Don Workman, PhD
 - Returned to VA on 2/1 (see bio attached)
- Technical amendments for VHA Directives 1200.01 and 1200.05 have been released
 - Some notable amendments released to the field on 1/13 (see attached email)
 - Due to illness the webinar for 2/9 has been postponed and will be rescheduled in the near future
- COVID-19 volunteer list access
 - More than 56,000 volunteers (see attached email)

Finance

Allen Dunlow

Only first and second quarter CC101 funds have been distributed. Third quarter CC101 would probably be distributed by end of February. Fourth quarter distribution may be held and future decisions to distribute may depend on execution of funding at the station. The need to execute funding and minimize carryover will be a major focus in the coming months and rest of the year. The field is reminded that the target for station carryover remains at 4% of the total funding at the facility. ORD at the National Level does not have detailed visibility of execution in the field. To provide greater visibility of execution, RAFT will be modified to require the field enter execution data at the merit and center level. This modification will provide ORD greater granularity on execution and enable better management in the distribution of funding. The potential exist that with this visibility, ITAs for the subsequent year could be adjusted downward

to compensate for under execution. Late execution of salary and other expense transfers may contribute to funds becoming available late in the year which does not allow for adequate time to execute those dollars and may contribute to carryover. Stations should aggressively pursue expense transfers in a timely manner to maintain a better view of the status of funds.

Field Operations

Tony Laracuenta

We will be hosting two webinar sessions regarding budget management. The session will be 2/18 and 2/25 at 2PM EST. Session 1 will be more general information including expectations. Session 2 will be more hands on allocation and expenditure management.

A survey went out to stations using WinRMS. We are trying to gauge use and training needs. With the move to iFAMS we want to stay ahead of the curve.

ORD Diversity Supplement

Carol B. Fowler

ORD Research Supplements to Promote Diversity

- a. The funding announcement was sent out to the field on January 26, 2021.
- b. This is a supplement to **VA Merit Awards with at least 2 years remaining** in the award period at the time of supplement award. Participating services: HSR&D, RR&D, BLR&D, & CSR&D.
- c. Supports mentored research experiences for early career scientists from populations that reflect the wide diversity of the Veterans we serve (i.e. underrepresented populations).
- d. Applications due June 1. Funding decisions expected in July 2021.
- e. An informational webinar is planned for February 17th; the announcement will be forthcoming.
- f. Contact Carol.fowler@va.gov for more information or see announcement at: <https://www.research.va.gov/funding/ORD-Diversity-Supplement.docx>

Service Updates

BLR&D Updates

Holly Krull, Ph.D.

- Last month BLRD announced a 9% budget cut, however, there has been some restoration of funds to BLRD. BLRD is now hoping to decrease cut to 6%.
- Please help BLRD and VA ORD manage the VA research enterprise money—BLRD encourages you to treat money sent out as 1-year money.

Upcoming Schedule for BLRD Town Halls

- Feb 26 at 1:30 PM EST (WebEx) intended for staff in the eastern time zone.
- March 26 meeting will be for the central time zone staff. Invite to follow.

Centralized Positions: GS-14 & Above

- BL/CSR&D will continue to accept submissions on a rolling basis to a new address: VHACOBLCSPromotions@va.gov
- Committee review of complete applications will be on a bi-monthly basis, beginning in early April 2021.
- The cutoff date for receiving complete, correct submissions will be 30 days before scheduled meeting dates for inclusion in that meeting.
- Contact Carol.fowler@va.gov for more information or VHACOBLCSPromotions@va.gov

Eligibility

BLR&D received 54 nominations for the non-clinician entry program in the December cycle. The peer-review panel met Jan 29. BLR&D will release memos of acceptance this week (week of Feb 8). Disapprovals will be sent the week of Feb 15.

Interagency TBI Resource Center

The Request for Applications (RFA) Number: BX-21-061 Interagency Preclinical TBI Resource Center (IRC) (I50) has been updated.

- The budget cap was increased to \$750,000 per year
- Deadline for applications was extended to April 1

The RFA may be found on the Requests for Applications and Program Announcements page: <https://vaww.research.va.gov/funding/rfa.cfm>

Translational Research Mentoring and Educational Center (TaRMEC)

Last summer, BLRD announced a request for application to establish a standing Translational Research Mentoring and Educational Center (TaRMEC) that will provide VA investigators centralized resources to propel their discoveries into products that will improve the clinical care of Veterans. The primary objectives of this RFA were to increase the translational research culture within VA and provide mentoring and guided education support to move the late-stage research discoveries into clinical practice. BLRD selected an application from Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center, VA Translational Education and Mentoring Center (VA-TEAM), submitted by Dr. Andrew Cornwell, PI, and Drs. Robert Kirsch and Robert Bonomo as MPI. We look forward to their contribution to the VA research enterprise.

Spring 2021 Submission Deadlines

Deadline to submit to Grants.gov (After this date the	March 8
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full two-day correction window cannot be used.)	
Last Possible Submission Date (to Grants.gov)	March 10 6:00 pm local time

Translational Education and Mentoring (VA-TEAM) Center Andrew Cornwell

Dr. Cornwell presented on a newly funded BLRD center as a field resource to help with translation activities. Slides provide more details.

CSR&D Updates

Terri Gleason, Ph.D.

From the Fall 2020 round of review, our results in terms of funding approvals are very low – In fact the lowest I can personally recall with only 16 Merits and only 5 career development awards being approved. We have seen increase in number of applications, an increase in the number of applications with multiple sites, continued increase in cost of clinical research, e.g., personnel/salaries, and of course impacts from COVID as factors. Our philosophy is to try to avoid an across the board cut; much of CSR&D budget is going to study related personnel, and cutting that means challenges.

Nonetheless we are trying to move productively forward in the scenario of lower funding rates overall. Strategies include tools like:

JIT Management

CSR&D will restate the JIT requirements that projects complete start up activities within 180 days. Right now this means attending to any project in JIT that has gone past those and consider if Intent To Fund notices will be rescinded (except for extraordinary circumstances) past 180 days. Going forward, we will be working with investigators/stations to ensure that projects start on time. everyone is well aware that we are still in a place where we do not know the full impact of COVID-related research impacts and associated costs.

CSR&D have examined the list of to be funded projects and crosswalked with stations that have been or remain on hold to ensure we are not placing studies at sites that will have longer range covid related research holds.

CSR&D will continue to carefully review cost extension requests, as the impact from one approval has downstream affects on others.

Because of the Continuing Resolutions and our focus on multi-site trials which require more administrative setting up of station transfers, we will re-examine our budget limits again and revisit funding decisions about whether any

possibility exists to go deeper on our list before the next deadline of March 15 for our Spring Merit Review round.

CSRD is also reexamining our priority statement for our CSRD RFAs to make clear what our priorities are, as whether a project is addressing a priority does make a difference as it moves down their funding list using priority score and percentile.

CSRD CADE Updates

Recently CSRD has been conducting individual calls with its Career Development awardees, and I am so proud to hear of their progress despite the circumstances they find themselves in as they start their research careers. I have heard stories of success including best papers at major (virtual) scientific meetings, success with modifications with virtual assessments or enrollment practices that increased both enrollment and retention, etc. We have discussed mitigation strategies in these calls, and ask that career development awardees work closely with their SPM to make sure all of their questions are answered related to delays and extensions, and good records are kept via annual RPPRs so we have written details of delays.

New CSRD Portfolio Manager Opportunity

CSRD will also have a new announcement for an SPM for oncology – please disseminate the announcement widely to get on folks radar for consideration. Please email questions to Theresa.gleason@va.gov

HSR&D & QUERI Updates

Naomi Tomoyasu, Ph.D.,
David Atkins, M.D.,
Amy M. Kilbourne, Ph.D., MPH

Update on COVID Funding opportunities

- i. Vaccine acceptance, messaging and implementation – Proposals were due January 21.
- ii. We are launching a new initiative on the impacts of deferred care during the pandemic. This has 3 prongs:
 - ✓ An opportunity for research supplements – applications are being reviewed now with funding decision early March.
 - ✓ A solicitation to be released this week for a national mortality study and a coordinating Center to manage further projects on deferred and disrupted care.
 - ✓ A Service Directed Research solicitation for individual projects looking at the impacts of deferred/disrupted care on Mental Health, Acute Care and Chronic Care outcomes.
- iii. Long-term impacts: Concept papers have been selected and teams are developing proposals.

Strategic Plan

HSRD will be sharing the first draft of an HSRD strategic plan with its COIN Directors at their annual meeting this week. The 4 goals identified relate to Setting Research Priorities, Increasing Research Impact, Promoting Research Efficiency and Productivity and Building the HSR Workforce.

Recruitment to backfill a Health Science Officer/Scientific Program Manager

A position vacated by George Fitzelle who retired at the end of December will be open. Anyone interested is asked to email Liza Catucci at liza.catucci@va.gov for information and details about applying for the position. Please see below attached for more information.

2020 HSR&D Field Awards

- HSRD received following number of applications/nominations:
 - Best Research Paper of the Year = **13**
 - Health System Impact = **10**
 - Daniel Deykin Outstanding Mentor = **9**
- Reviews have been scheduled for the first 2 weeks of February, 2021.

QUERI Updates

- **The QUERI Roadmap Guide for Implementation and Quality Improvement has been published!** Special thanks to CEIR for leading this effort. This is QUERI's comprehensive guide for planning an implementation research or quality improvement initiative. **Available through Pubmed at:** <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33400452/> **An e-book version will also be posted on the QUERI Website:** <https://www.queri.research.va.gov/tools/roadmap/default.cfm>
- **Winter 2021 QUERI Global RFA ITSs**
Six QUERI Global intent to submits (ITSs) were received: 3 Partnered Evaluation Initiative and 3 VISN PII startup ITSs.

CDA updates and Request for Nominations for Subject Matter Experts to Serve on Centralized GS14/15 Field Promotion Panel

- 33 CDA proposals were received for review in March.
- GS14/15 field promotions were reviewed on December 16th and have been classified by VSHO. They are on route for signature.
- The next due date for field promotion nominations is March 1, with anticipated review in May or early June.
- Career Scientist nominations will be reviewed on January 12th.
- CDA LOIs are due April 15th and will be reviewed the first or second week in May.
- An announcement will go out early this month requesting nominations from each COIN for subject matter experts to serve on the GS14/15 field promotion review panel. Thank you to the sites that responded after our last call. Please see below for more information.

CIDER –Veterans’ Perspectives: The Importance of Being There for Veterans with Depression

- **JGIM Supplement:** Opioid Safety among Veterans with Chronic Pain and Addiction
- Request for Application for Designation as Patient Safety Center of Inquiry: Proposals must be received no later than January 31, 2021.

SMRB Update

Winter 2021 Cycle

- HSRD received 33 CDAs, 13 Pilots, and 117 IIRs, for a total of 163 applications.
- HSR&D’s Scientific Merit Review Board and Career Development Award review meetings are both scheduled to take place virtually on March 2 - 5, 2021. Along with our usual panels, we will have a special panel reviewing projects related to Opioid Use and Misuse.
- For questions regarding the review process, please contact Scientific Merit Review Program staff at vhacoscirev@va.gov.

RR&D

Patricia A. Dorn, Ph.D.

Scientific Review Timelines (refer to applicable [FOA/RFA](#) for details):
Please continue to contact [RR&D](#) for guidance and to ask questions.

Winter 2021 - Merit, Career Development and Research Career Scientist:

- Updated RFAs published – September 28, 2020
- LOI and Waiver Request deadline – November 2, 2020 (Nov 1 falls on a Sunday)
- Last possible application submission deadline – December 10, 2020
- Scientific Review – February 18-26, 2021
- Scores released – March 2, 2021
- Summary Statements released – March 22, 2021
- Intent-to-Fund notifications – by mid-April 2021

Spring 2021 – SPiRE:

- **NEW** RFA published – December 22, 2020
- LOI and Waiver Request deadline – February 1, 2021
- Last possible application submission deadline (**no changed/corrected applications after this date**) – March 10, 2021
- Scientific Review – April 22, 2021
- Scores and Summary Statements released – May 12, 2021
- Intent-to-Fund notifications – by late June 2021

Notes Regarding eRA:

- An **UPDATED VA-ORD Application Guide SF424 (R&R)**, dated December 28, 2020, has been published and must be followed starting with the Spring 2021 review cycle (<http://vaww.research.va.gov/funding/electronic-submission.cfm>).
- New eRA Commons home and landing screens rolled out January 12, 2021. Reference [Guide Notice NOT-OD-21-028](#). A video tutorial is available at <https://era.nih.gov/era-training/era-videos.htm#erascreens>.
- The NIH has announced a new eRA Commons login option. All users will be required to switch by September 15, 2021. Please visit their web page [Two-Factor Authentication: Accessing eRA Modules via login.gov](#) for details.
- NIH is working to make the feature that allows users with the signing official (SO) role to view summary statements and the overall impact score on the eRA Commons *Status Information* screen available for VA-ORD applications. Timeline will likely be end of March. Reference [Guide Notice NOT-OD-20-126](#).
 - Until this feature is available, RR&D will continue to send copies of summary statements to the research offices along with the review outcome report.