



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration  
Office of Research & Development

## Field Conference Call – Meeting Notes Monday, February 14, 2022 – 1:30 pm ET

Internal Teams Site: [Click Here](#)

### 1. Welcome

Rachel Ramoni, DMD, ScD

Dr. Ramoni welcomed attendees and highlighted the agenda. Items included ones related to the research enterprise transformation to be presented by leads of the respective initiatives. Additionally, program offices and services were to describe some key efforts to ensure the field had awareness of important developments.

### 2. ORD / Research Enterprise

Grant Huang, MPH, PhD

- Enterprise transformation updates

Dr. Huang followed Dr. Ramoni's introduction by highlighting activities led by Tony Laracuate related to a centralized field research resources contract and HR activities among other things. He indicated that while these activities are on-going, they have engaged several individuals from the field and the goal is to continue to have people gain greater awareness and be part of the effort to help communicate these activities to others.

- ACOS-R training program

Thanks were expressed to those who participated in providing feedback to inform the development of a training program that supports the roles of ACOS-Rs. This training is intended to focus on executive leadership skills specific to the duties of the ACOS-R. AO training and mentoring is being done through a separate effort led by Tony Laracuate.

There has been a tremendous response to the effort with 60 ACOS-Rs participating in the leadership competencies survey and 30 participating in the 1:1 hour-long interviews. ORD is appreciative of the time committed by many people.

ORD will continue with its efforts to design a program that is useful and meaningful to ACOS-Rs with a hope to launch in FY23.

- Annual ACOS-R conference

Notice was given about the Sept. 2022 ACOS-R annual meeting to be held in conjunction with the NAVREF annual meeting. A number of ACOS-Rs have volunteered to a recent call to help with developing the program and meetings will begin soon.

**3. Technology Transfer Program (TTP) updates** John Kaplan, PhD, JD, PE

During the TTP update, seven (7) technology transfer regions were discussed along with Field Technology Transfer Specialists and plans to hire additional Field Technology Transfer Specialists.

Next, ACOS/Rs and AOs were told about the record-setting royalty collection of \$2.7M recently processed by TTP.

Lastly, TTP asked the ACOS/Rs and AOs for help in receiving the missing certification forms.

The attached slides provide more details for further reference.

**4. Research Protections & Policy**

Don E. Workman, PhD  
Angela Foster  
Molly Klote, MD, PhD

• **VA Central IRB**

Two changes of note in VA Central IRB process:

- **A new process for Central ISSO review of Local Site Investigator (LSI) applications.** In their ongoing efforts to ensure the protection of VA data and Information Systems, the VHA Research Support Division (RSD) is now requiring that all LSI applications (including exempt research) submitted to the VA CIRB have their own site-specific ERDSP. It is recommended that the PI/SC complete a study-wide ERDSP and send a copy of it unsigned to the local Investigators once PI/SC approval has been obtained for the PI/SC application in order for LSI study teams to make only the modifications needed for the local site. VA CIRB staff are working with the RSD to clarify the specific questions can be retained from the PISC ERDSP and which ones need to be completed for the specific site application. If you have a PISC application currently under review, the approval letter will instruct you to initiate LSI applications and include site-specific ERDSP forms.
- **A new process has been implemented for the review of Exempt Research at the VA CIRB.** Going forward the VA CIRB will request submissions for Exempt Research follow the PI/SC and LSI model you already know from non-exempt research.

**There are some important things to note with this new process:**

1. PI/SC's will submit their Request for Exemption/Limited IRB Review Application to the VA CIRB.
2. The VA CIRB along with Central ISSO and PO, if applicable, will complete the review for the PI/SC application.
3. The VA CIRB will either make an **Exempt Determination** *or* **Approve as Exempt with Limited IRB Review** utilizing an expedited review procedure.
4. After the PI/SC review is complete, we will require submission of the LSI exempt applications (**this is new!**). The LSI application will require an abbreviated review which is outlined below:
  - The LSI application will be administratively reviewed by the VA CIRB only for purposes of tracking the project in IRBNet and collecting data in the Wizards.
  - The Manager will ensure the documents submitted are in alignment with the PI/SC application.
    - NOTE: The LSI application requires fewer documents which are listed in the attached Researcher Instructions.
  - The Manager will facilitate ISSO review of the site-specific ERDSP which will be required for each LSI.
  - The Manager will facilitate the review which can occur one of two ways:
    - An IRB Member can conduct the administrative review.
    - or**
    - A Manager can conduct the administrative review given that they have been trained to do these reviews and are designated for doing them by the CO-Chairs in writing.

Instructions and flowcharts are now included in the VA Central IRB Administration library in "Documents for Researchers."

- **VAIRRS**

- Training Opportunities - The **next VAIRRS monthly** webinar will be held next week on Tuesday, the 22<sup>nd</sup>. The topic of this month's webinar is Central IRB Continuing Review, and our presenter is Mary Eckart, CIRB Manager. The training announcement with registration link will be distributed by tomorrow.
- VAIRRS Enhancements - The contracting process for the financial **COI and RCO workspaces** is progressing. We are on track to deploy the new functions by May of this year. Stakeholder workgroups will be established to assist with configuring each of the workspaces. Each site will receive IRBNet hosted training during the deployment. If you any questions related to VAIRRS, please email [VAIRRS@va.gov](mailto:VAIRRS@va.gov).

- **Enterprise Clinical Trial Management System**

The SaaS Approval Memo for the enterprise CTMS was granted in January. We have begun discussions with OIT to modify the existing Salesforce Enterprise Licensing Agreement to include the CloudByz CTMS app. We expect to have an implementation plan drafted in the next two weeks. If you have any questions related to the CTMS, feel free to email me or Dr. Kousick Biswas. You can find both of us in the GAL.

- **VA Electronic Determination Aid**

Thanks to those facilities that have already volunteered for the VAEDA soft launch. We now have 15 facilities enrolled. A new Site Admin feature will be deployed in the next week to provide one individual at each facility access to all completed determinations from that facility. Instructions will be sent to the points of contact prior to deployment. The soft launch will continue through March. Please email [VAEDASupport@va.gov](mailto:VAEDASupport@va.gov) if your facility is interested in participating.

## **5. Finance Updates**

Matthew Verna

- **Continuing Resolution Update**

- The current CR funding is set to end this Friday, February 18<sup>th</sup>
- Legislation has been introduced to fund the government through March 11
- This will afford more time to Congress to complete its bipartisan negotiations on the FY22 budget.
- Bipartisan leaders have signaled that the short-term funding measure will pass and have expressed optimism over a larger funding bill.

- **Passback Update**

- OMB passback was received on 2/2/22 and efforts are ongoing concerning the FY23 Budget.
- As you probably know, the FY23 budget deliberations are embargoed by the administration until the actual budget goes to print, so there is not much information to be shared at this time.
- However, once the budget is finalized, I look forward to sharing the administration priorities with all of you. Until then, we will just continue to work with OMB as directed.

- **PY Carryover Results**

- Back in October 2021, there was over \$94M in unobligated prior year funding. As of today, that balance is down to \$14.4M, an almost \$80M year over year improvement.

- Based on that success, this initiative will likely continue in the years to come, and so because of that we will be holding a Webinar on Monday Feb 28th at 3PM EST. The Webinar titled “Finance: Lessons Learned from the Sweep and FY22 Guidance” has already been distributed so it should be in your inbox already.
- This training will highlight the actions taken to reduce the carryover, identify the best practices and focus on lessons learned.

## 6. ORD Field Update

- IT Updates

Carl Grunfeld, MD, PhD

There have been multiple requests for more server space. While we are working on how to go forward to accommodate more such space, in the interim IT wants me to remind you that OneDrive now allows each PC to have 1 TB of storage and documents on that can be shared for joint work. Therefore each researcher can pull their PC storage off of the R or W or other such drives freeing up space. The R and W should be reserved for larger group sharing. I will send out the guidance again.

- Updates on Section 209

Tony Laracuent

Mr. Laracuent recapped the issues discussed during the webinar held on February 9 and reminded the field that the slides will be posted this week at [ORPP&E Webinar Archive \(va.gov\)](#)

- Summary of issues:
  - The Department of Justice has provided guidance to VA OGC Ethics Specialty Team (EST) clarifying interpretation of 18 U.S.C. § 209 when VA employees are receiving compensation from a non-Federal entity for VA Research.
  - Multiple VA studies are conducted by VA employees who have compensated appointments and who also conduct VA Research outside their VA tour of duty at the VA Facility on WOC appointments.
  - VA research is defined in ORD policy as research that is conducted by VA investigators (serving on VA compensated, WOC, or IPA appointments) while on VA time (acting in their VA capacity) or on VA property.
  - Reference: VHA Directive 1200.01(1): Research and Development Committee, Paragraph 5.f.
  - Thus, a **VA compensated employee** who conducts VA Research outside his or her VA tour of duty and holds a separate WOC appointment cannot be compensated by a non-Federal entity to work on VA research unless the State Treasury exception applies even if they hold a separate WOC appointment.
- Next Steps:

- Research Leadership should determine if the affiliate administering the awards and compensating the investigator is a state entity then submit to Christopher. [Britt@va.gov](mailto:Britt@va.gov) for vetting.
- If the affiliate is not a state entity:
  - Develop a process to review all projects administered by VA NPC or Affiliate
  - Begin the systematic review of projects
  - Determine if any salary is paid to the PI and/or research team
  - If yes, determine if PI or research team members also hold a VA compensated appointment
  - If yes, you will have to review options to increase effort and reimburse VA.

- **HR Centralization**

The field was updated on the current status of HR Centralization which is in the final negotiation stages. Mr. Laracuate asked for anyone who has a WOC onboarding process to send the SOP or workflow to him or [Sharon.Jacky@va.gov](mailto:Sharon.Jacky@va.gov).

- **Field Enterprise Research Support Services Contract**

The field was informed that a webinar will be held in early March regarding the use of FERRS.

- **Sam.Gov**

A reminder that Sam.Gov seemed to have wiped out the administrators in the site profile and to review the email sent on Friday 2/11.

Ms. Swinton ([ellen.swinton@va.gov](mailto:ellen.swinton@va.gov)) is now the person responsible for managing the SAM.Gov accounts, but there are a few things that the research offices need to understand and do.

- If you were the previous administrator, you more than likely do not have that access. This is especially true if your Account is tied to VHA
- You need to track the expiration dates so that the profiles do not expire and contact Ms. Swinton 30 days prior to the expiration to make sure that things are in order.
- The transition from DUNS to UEI is happening (please see email from Joshua Nixon to determine your UEI #)
- All SAMS registrations have been extended 6 months due to the transition.

Understanding these points, we are asking you to go in and check your SAM.Gov expiration date. If it is due to expire by May 31, 2022, please email [Tiffany.Asqueri@va.gov](mailto:Tiffany.Asqueri@va.gov) and [Antonio.laracuate03@va.gov](mailto:Antonio.laracuate03@va.gov) the following information.

Site  
Duns Number  
Expiration Date

A Contact name and email in the research office for Ms. Swinton to communicate with

**IF YOUR SAM.GOV EXPIRES IN THE NEXT TWO WEEKS**, please email the same information to [Ellen.swinton@va.gov](mailto:Ellen.swinton@va.gov) as well so that she can verify your status and work with you to extend as needed.

- **ACOS/AO Handbook**

A rewrite of the handbook has begun. Mr. Laracuate asked the field to provide comments of areas that are incorrect, missing or just need updating.

- **Mentorship program**

A request was made for anyone interested in becoming a Research Administration mentor to contact Mr. Laracuate.

## 7. **Cross services updates and announcements**

Wendy Tenhula, PhD

- **eRA Commons JIT**

- VA-ORD has officially started using eRA Commons for Just in Time (JIT) beginning with applications to the BLRD/CSRD Fall 2021 review cycle. Help documents (training video and reference guide), JIT guidance documents and templates/format pages have been placed on the ORD website at <https://www.research.va.gov/funding/jit.cfm>.
- As a reminder, applications for which JIT was initiated in the VA JIT Document Manager will complete JIT using that system.

- **Program Announcement for Research Supplements to Promote Diversity**

Carol Fowler, PhD

- The ORD Diversity Equity and Inclusion Working group (DEIWG) received a total of 14 applications for the Mentored Research supplements to promote Diversity on February 1, 2022. Review is underway with the review meeting in March and funding decisions currently scheduled to follow by April 1, 2022.
- The DEIWG is also currently finalizing a Research Supplement for VA Merit funded PIs to request funds for collaborative projects with Investigators from other institutions such as Minority Serving Institutions. The announcement and informational webinar will follow in coming weeks.
- Questions about either opportunity may be directed to [carol.fowler@va.gov](mailto:carol.fowler@va.gov).

- **RR&D Updates**

Patricia A. Dorn, PhD

- Awards

Congratulations Leigh R. Hochberg, MD, PhD, 2022  
Paul B. Magnuson Awardee



Leigh R. Hochberg, MD, PhD



Participant using BrainGate system, with wireless patient cable system (2 black headstages attached to percutaneous connectors), to control cursor on their own personal computer

The Magnuson Award is for outstanding achievement in rehabilitation research and development. Dr. Hochberg is a leader in brain-computer-interface with BrainGate to provide independence and function to those who have lost abilities from neurologic disease or injury such as ALS and SCI. BrainGate involves a cortically implanted device, part of a system that uses neural encoding to turn the users thought into action: manipulate prosthetic arm/hand, operate computer, communication, mobility, etc. This cutting-edge research to develop and translate the technology to Veterans and the Nation represents major breakthroughs in restoring function and independence.

Dr. Hochberg is a vascular and critical care neurologist and neuroscientist. He is the Director of the RR&D Center for Neurorestoration and Neurotechnology (CfNN) at Providence VA Medical Center; Director, Center for Neurotechnology and Neurorecovery at Massachusetts General Hospital; Professor of Engineering at Brown University.

Dr. Hochberg is an exceptional researcher and leader who is extremely dedicated to the VA mission and in providing the very best care to Veterans. His commitment and dedication towards improving and restoring Veterans with neurologic disease or injury to their optimal health and well-being fully embodies the passion and dedication to Veterans exemplified by Dr. Magnuson throughout his career.

CfNN: <https://centerforneuro.org/#:~:text=The%20VA%20RR%26D%20Center%20for,%2C%20Butler%20Hospital%2C%20Lifespan%2C%20and>  
Hochberg Link: <https://centerforneuro.org/leadership/>



## CERF Medical Engineering Prize - Congratulations to Dr. Hochberg

Dr. Hochberg is Part of the BrainGate+SoftRobotics team that was just awarded the inaugural CERF Medical Engineering Prize (Cullen Education and Research Foundation). Prize is to promote research into aspects of muscle atrophy and loss of functionality associated with motor neuron disease / amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (MND/ALS) and aims to facilitate a more normal lifestyle for people with MND/ALS while - ideally - extending life expectancy. The awards is accompanied by financial support. They will focus on combining their BrainGate technology with soft robotics that can be worn like clothing toward re-enabling the arm and hand movement of people with ALS. The first participant to try the first stages of this combined technology will be their current VA BrainGate research participant.

CERF Prize (*private family philanthropic fund*) link: <https://www.cerfprize.com/>

### ○ **RFA**

*Developing and Validating Alternatives to the Use of Canines, Felines and Non-Human Primates in VA Research (I01) RX-22-032*

- published February 10, 2022.
- The goal of this two-phased RFA is to develop and validate alternative methods to the use of sensitive species (e.g., non-human primates (NHP), canines and/or felines) in research. VA RR&D investigators currently funded to conduct sensitive species research are eligible to apply.
- VA-ORD acknowledges the need for basic and translational research relevant to Veterans' conditions in appropriate models and the parallel need to reduce or eliminate the use of sensitive species.
- The alternative methods (i.e., animal models not involving sensitive species, microphysiological systems, in vitro systems, in silico models and research involving human subjects) model should be outcome-driven, to determine successful establishment to the comparator model.
- This RFA will support initial model development (phase one) and if successful, followed by a second phase of model validation.
- To ensure their proposed area of research meets the intent of this FOA/RFA, investigators are strongly encouraged to consult RR&D program purview and portfolio descriptions on the RR&D website, and contact the listed Scientific Program Manager (SPM) relevant to their area of study.

RFA for RR&D Centers and Research Enhancement Award Programs (REAPs)

- to be published early March 2022

A Webinar speaking about the newly posted Center/REAP RFA will occur on **April 20, 2022 at noon ET.**

Purpose of the Center/REAP Webinar will describe and discuss what constitutes a Center or REAP as well as address questions from read of RFAs. For additional information email [Shirley.Groer@va.gov](mailto:Shirley.Groer@va.gov).

○ **Paul B. Magnuson Award Nominations for 2023**

The Paul B. Magnuson Award is presented annually to a VA RR&D investigator who exemplifies the entrepreneurship, humanitarianism, and dedication to veterans displayed by Dr. Magnuson during his career. The award was established in 1998 in recognition of the importance of rehabilitation research within the VA Health Care System. The award consists of a one-time \$5,000 cash award to an individual, \$50,000 per year for 3 years supplemental funding for their ongoing peer-reviewed research, and a celebratory plaque. Nominations for the 2023 Paul B. Magnuson Award are being accepted through September 1, 2022. Please refer to [Program Guide 1203.06](#) and the [Instructions for Preparing and Submitting a Nomination Packet](#).

○ **Review Updates**

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

*Winter 2022 - Merit, Career Development and Research Career Scientist:*

- NEW RFAs published – October 1, 2021
  - NOTE: An updated VA Application Guide SF 424 (R&R) was published October 1
- LOI and Waiver Request deadline – November 1, 2021
- Last possible application submission deadline (no changed/corrected applications after this date) – December 10, 2021
  - NOTE: Biographical Sketch Format (OMB No. 0925-0001 and 0925-0002 (Rev. 12/2020 Approved Through 02/28/2023) must be used)
- Scientific Review – February 22 thru March 2, 2022
- Scores released – March 4, 2022
- Summary Statements released – March 25, 2022
- Intent-to-Award notifications – by early April 2022

*Spring 2022 – SPiRE:*

- NEW RFA published – December 17, 2021
- Pre-application (LOI and waiver request) deadline – February 1, 2022
- Last possible award application submission deadline (no changed/corrected applications after this date) – March 10, 2022

- An updated version of the Biographical Sketch Format template (OMB No. 0925-0001 and 0925-0002 (**Rev. 10/2021** Approved Through 09/30/2024)) will be **required for application submissions starting January 25, 2022**
- Scientific Review – April 20, 2022
- Scores and Summary Statements released – May 12, 2022
- Intent-to-Award notifications – Late May 2022

- **HSR&D Updates**

David Atkins, MD

- Emergency Medicine SOTA Closing plenary will be on Feb. 17. Meeting will be recorded for later viewing, and will be used to help identify new research priorities in geriatric emergency care, mental health emergency care, and coordination of emergency care in the community. For questions, please contact Dr. David Atkins
- Rural Health agenda planning meeting (with ORH, PCS, etc.) is planned for March 28-29 (virtual). This will also help inform a future RFA on rural health. For questions, please contact Dr. Laura Zimmerman or Naomi Tomoyasu
- ORD received 15 LOIS for the cross-service collaborative research programs on post-COVID conditions. Decisions will be made by end of next week. For questions, please contact Dr. David Atkins or Dr. Maciej Gonek.
- Diane Murphy from Dublin, GA will begin as ORD's newest budget analyst supporting HSRD on 3/12/2022.  
HSRD staff would like to thank Mr. John Verwiel from Finance who has been supporting health services in the interim, to keep our financial/budgetary activities and commitments moving.

- **BLR&D Updates**

Christopher T. Bever, Jr., MD

- **Spring Review Round**

The first day to submit for the BLCS Spring Round was February 1. The deadline for submissions is March 10. Application packages should be available on Grants.gov.

- **New Funding Opportunity**

BX-22-032 Developing and Validating Alternatives to the Use of Canines, Felines and Non-Human Primates in VA Research (I01) has been posted. Submission deadline for the Spring Round is March 10, our standard submission date.

- **Middleton Award deadline extended**

The Middleton Award deadline has been extended to Feb 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022 because we received just one nomination. The nomination instructions can be found on the Middleton website: [William S. Middleton Award \(va.gov\)](http://www.va.gov/middletonaward) and the nomination packages must be submitted to the [VHABLRD-CSR@va.gov](mailto:VHABLRD-CSR@va.gov) mailbox by the research office by **February 28, 2022** (new deadline). Please feel free to contact Kimberlee Potter, PhD ([Kimberlee.Potter@va.gov](mailto:Kimberlee.Potter@va.gov)) if you have any questions.

- 3D Biofabrication Symposium

Dr. Potter wanted to notify the field of the upcoming Biofabrication Symposium on May 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>, 2022 involving multiple stakeholder groups.

- CSR&D Updates

Miriam Smyth, PhD

Following Terri Gleason's retirement two weeks ago, Miriam Smyth is Acting Director/CSR&D.

- Submission opportunity

Next CSR&D submission opportunity: Spring 2022 round. The deadline for submissions is March 10, 2022.

- Efforts on Suicide Prevention

CSR&D has posted a new Suicide prevention RFA for a Suicide Prevention Research Clinical Resource Center (S-CRC) that will serve suicide prevention investigators by providing critical research resources to facilitate programmatic and scientific needs. The S-CRC will focus on accelerating clinical science (observational, interventional, epidemiological) in suicide prevention and assist in translation of this research into evidence-based prevention and intervention approaches to reduce Veteran suicide.

The S-CRC will be closely associated with the established HSRD-funded [Suicide Prevention Research Impact Network \(SPRINT\)](#).

CSR&D is hosting a webinar on February 23, 2022 at noon (ET) to answer questions about the RFA. Link was sent in an email to ACOS/AO email group on Feb 7 from Joe Constans, Ph.D, Senior Program Manager for Suicide Prevention.

This funding opportunity requires an approved LOI for submission of a full proposal. LOIs are due April 1 and the grants.gov deadline for submission of full proposals for the S-CRC is July 13.

Queries regarding the S-CRC may be addressed to Joe Constans, PhD [Joseph.Constans@va.gov](mailto:Joseph.Constans@va.gov)