



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration  
Office of Research & Development

**Field Conference Call – Meeting Notes**  
**Monday, March 15, 2021 at 1:30 pm ET**  
**Attachments are found on the [ORD Teams Site](#)**

**1. Welcome**

Rachel Ramoni, DMD, ScD

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

**2. ORD Topics**

Grant Huang, MPH, Ph.D.

- VA Counterintelligence and Research Update Terry Clyburn

An update was provided highlighting the importance to remain vigilant about efforts by China that have already been publicized regarding efforts regarding intellectual property and data.

- Enterprise Research Data Security Plan DuJuan Williams  
Role-Based Training for Information System  
Security officers

The Research Support Division who has partnered with ORD in helping with information security reviews presented on an Enterprise Research Data Security Plan. Additionally, they will be conducting an upcoming training on this plan for Information System Security Officers and Information System Security Managers.

- Research Enterprise Spotlight – Center for Evaluation and Implementation Resources Nick Bowersox, Ph.D.

A presentation on CEIR was provided to help the field learn more about implementation science resources and activities supported by QUERI. Contact information and a website were provided for more details.

**3. Research Protections & Policy**

Molly Klote, M.D., CIP

**• DocuSign:**

- a. We are finalizing negotiations for 100,000 envelopes from new IAM contract. These will be centralized purchased and managed for ORD funded studies. 50,000 will be 21 CFR 11 compliant for studies subject to FDA

requirements. We will also be purchasing support to prepare the documents in the DocuSign environment and train the study teams.

b. DocuSign request portal – SharePoint. Standing up by Friday 3/19.

- **VAIRRS** – 79 facilities currently live – VA CIRB went live this morning.
- **VA Electronic Determination Aid** – A demo was presented last Friday and it is currently in beta-testing.

#### **4. Finance**

Allen Dunlow

Mr. Dunlow reminded the field of the recent changes to RAFT which enable and will require stations enter quarterly execution data at the merit / project level. Training will occur for this new module in RAFT on March 24<sup>th</sup> and March 31<sup>st</sup>. Shortly after training, RAFT will be open from 1 April to 14 April for stations to input execution through 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter into the system. Staff were highly encouraged to attend one or both of the training sessions being offered.

Mr. Dunlow again talked about the emphasis on budget execution and the attempt to minimize carryover. He will review with the FRAC on Wednesday the obligation rates of the stations. Almost half the year has elapsed and straight-line execution would be at 50%. Though the research program does not obligate on a straight-line basis, stations should review their execution levels to make sure they are not significantly below this level.

#### **5. IT Updates**

Carl Grunfeld, M.D., Ph.D.

The IT efforts are part of Rachel's Research Enterprise approach. It was reported that efforts with national OIT have been positive and they have been working hard to support Research.

In addition to DuJuan Williams who spoke earlier, VA OIT has now approved our summary of how to use OneDrive. More than 2/3rds of VA computers have now had OneDrive activated. OneDrive is for PC files and not for complicated group sharing. At this time people can share single files via for joint use within the VA from OneDrive. Files on OneDrive are backed up, saving space on research and medical center servers. Individual accounts get 1TB of storage and PHI/PII allowed.

#### **6. Budget training**

Tony Laracuente

Two budget trainings have been held and the field was acknowledged for their participation. ORD is offering a 3<sup>rd</sup> training on March 25<sup>th</sup> focusing on Reimbursables, EWs, among other topics.

In addition, a workgroup is being set up to look at RMS. RMS is a field-based program assisting facilities in managing funds. If interested, please contact Tony Laracuate.

7. Million Veteran Program –

Jennifer Moser, Ph.D.

A summary of a recent announcement on the availability of MVP data in support of merit review submissions was provided. Details were sent in an email to the field.

8. **Service Updates**

• **BLR&D Updates**

Christopher T. Bever, Jr., MD, MBA

- Sara Clark has completed about 50% of the planned BLRD Merit Award budget reductions which amount to roughly 5% of the other than PI salary budget. CDAs are not subject to the reductions.
- Dr. Bever is continuing town hall meetings with BLRD investigators on the fourth Friday of the month. The March call will be with investigators in the central time zone. The calls are primarily intended to allow the service to better understand investigator needs.
- BLRD is increasing support for the development of intellectual property through the drug and biologicals development and validation RFAs and through the training and mentoring center at the Cleveland VAMC (a joint initiative with the Technology Transfer Program). Please direct any questions to either your tech transfer specialist or to Dr. Arun Sharma.
- BLRD is supporting the ORD-wide expansion of data science with a new RFA specifically for data scientists. Please direct any questions to Dr. Ying-Yee Kong.

• **CSR&D Updates**

Terri Gleason, Ph.D.

As mentioned previously, CSR&D is closely examining projects that have delayed their start in our JIT system. Two specific requests for the field are:

- The need for multisite commitment to complete on time. Records show that often the primary site is in fact on schedule, but LSI or other non-primary sites cause unneeded delays. CSR&D will be working on developing a communication plan around this requirement for multisite applications
- Extension requests for those projects that are not able to make the requirement to clear in 180 days must include a detailed timeline of attempts to obtain regulatory approval and anticipated date(s) for submission of remaining JIT documents. Requests without this information will be returned to the research office.
- In recent months we have seen PIs request non-Veteran enrollment waivers due to running behind on meeting recruitment targets for CSR&D projects. We

encourage PIs to think of other ways to boost recruitment – other than enrolling non-Veterans – as first next steps.

- We will remind PIs that financial responsibility for adverse events which may occur in non-Veterans is borne by CSRD.
- CSRD has updated form for non-Veteran waiver. Please use the current version on the CSRD website. The change requires more detailed justification than previously, including risk-assessment by PI in the case of studies that are greater than minimal risk.

LINK: [Non-Veteran Waiver form \(va.gov\)](#)

### **Requests for Redistribution of Funds:**

Requests for CSRD to pull back project funds for this fiscal year for redistribution in later year are welcome but need to come in as soon as possible for FY21. Based on the needs of the PI, we will either extend the end date of the project or send funds back to PI in a different FY (before last).

### **CSRD intention for FY21 supplement:**

Because of the movement in fund redistribution and close eyes on execution of dollar for this fiscal year, CSRD will be issuing a request for supplement funds that would be fully executed this year. This note is for investigators to be prepared for this potential opportunity.

**Portfolio Manager for Oncology:** A new position announcement was requested to be disseminated broadly. LINK:

<https://www.usajobs.gov/GetJob/ViewDetails/594116800>

- **HSR&D & QUERI Updates**

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

- **VA ORD Research Supplements to Promote Diversity**

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Research and Development (ORD) announces an opportunity for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities with current ORD-funded research programs to request supplementary funds to promote diversity in their workforce. These funds would be in support of a mentored research experience for qualified clinician and non-clinician scientists in the postdoctoral phase of their career (see link for more information--

<https://www.research.va.gov/funding/diversity.cfm>).

ORD is seeking to increase the applicant pool to include candidates from the under-represented groups. This research supplement is intended to provide

support for an early career candidate as they develop a proposal for a VA Career Development Award Letter of Intent (LOI) and application.

Funds for salary and fringe benefits for up to a total \$85,000 per year for the mentee, with an additional \$12,000 per year for supplies, and \$3,000 per year for the mentee to travel to scientific conferences, may be requested. This supplement is for a period of up to two years. If two years are requested, a mid-term progress report will be required. This supplement will be awarded to a PI who has an active VA merit award with at least 2 years remaining on the award at time the supplement is funded. The VA Medical Centers and the ACOS/R&D are responsible for ensuring hiring of individuals supported on the supplement.

Applications must be submitted **via email to [VHACoordDEIWG@va.gov](mailto:VHACoordDEIWG@va.gov)** and are **due June 1 with decisions released by July 1**. Only one supplement request per VA Medical Center will be accepted (per year). No appeals will be accepted for this funding opportunity.

- **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion---CHOIR Student Scholar Program (CSSP)**  
HSR&D will be working with Dr. Keith McInnes, at the CHOIR COIN, to pilot a Summer Program for Professional Development and Research Skills for medical students at Boston University School of Medicine.

CHOIR Student Scholar Program (CSSP) is a summer training and career development program for medical students from underrepresented groups interested in health services research and academic medicine. It will be developed in collaboration with Boston University School of Medicine (BUSM), and modelled after their existing Evans Student Scholar Program. CHOIR will be working closely with BUSM to identify appropriate students for CSSP's first year, which will begin in the summer 2021. CSSP's pilot will identify 3-4 students who will participate in a 6-week training program from mid-June to the end of July, 2021. Subsequent cohorts may be larger. It is hoped that this pilot, if effective, may be scaled to other COINs.

- Recruitment to backfill a Health Science Officer/Scientific Program Manager position for Aging and long-term services and support, vacated by George Fitzelle who retired at the end of December will be posted shortly. Anyone interested is asked to email Liza Catucci at [liza.catucci@va.gov](mailto:liza.catucci@va.gov) for information and details about applying for the position.
- **Call for Nominations: Under Secretary's Award for Outstanding Achievement in Health Services Research**  
The deadline to submit 2020 USH Award nominations has been extended to **COB Wednesday March 31, 2021**.
  - The Under Secretary's Award for Outstanding Achievement in Health Services Research is the highest honor for VA health services

researchers. The Award confers funds for supplementing ongoing peer-reviewed research in the amount of \$50,000 per year for up to 3 years, plus a one-time cash award of \$5,000. In addition, the Awardee and the Director of the VA Medical Center in which the research is performed receive commemorative plaques, presented at an appropriate venue selected by Health Services Research & Development (HSR&D).

- **Completed nomination packets are due by close of business March 31, 2021.** For details on preparing an application, please refer to the [USH section](#) of the HSR&D website. Please feel free to contact Eric Enone with any questions at [Eric.Enone@va.gov](mailto:Eric.Enone@va.gov) or 202-443-5732.

- **SMRB Update –**

- **Winter 2021 Cycle**

- HSR&D's merit review meetings took place virtually on March 2 - 5, 2021. Scores will be released on March 10, 2021.
- Summary statements are expected to be released in **early April**. Funding decisions are expected to be made in **late April** and Notices of Intent (To-Fund or Not-To-Fund) will be sent at that time.
- A total of 33 CDAs, 13 Pilots, and 116 IIRs, for a total of 162 applications were accepted for review.

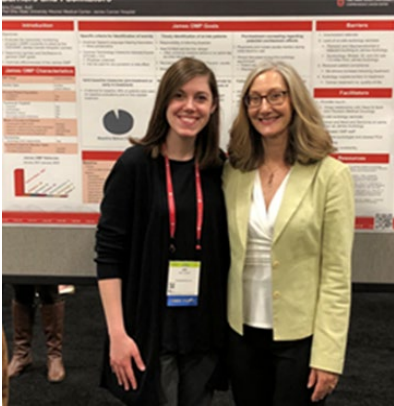
- **Summer 2021 Cycle**

- New and revised RFAs are expected to be posted by March 26, 2021 on the intranet site. Please review the RFAs thoroughly to check for any changes in requirements and to ensure compliance.
- The HSR&D Intent-to-Submit in ART will be open from **April 23 to May 7** (at 8:00 pm EST).
- The first day to submit full applications (using Grants.gov Workspace or eRA ASSIST) is May 15, 2021 and the last possible submission day is June 10, 2021.
- HSR&D's Scientific Merit Review Board and Career Development Award review meetings are both scheduled to take place virtually August 24 - 27, 2021.
- For questions regarding the review process, please contact Scientific Merit Review Program staff at [vhacoscirev@va.gov](mailto:vhacoscirev@va.gov).

- **RR&D Updates**

Patricia A. Dorn, Ph.D.

**Congratulations to Dawn Konrad-Martin, PhD!**



Dr. Konrad-Martin (R), with Amy Stewart Custer (L) former NCRAR audiology extern student

Dr. Konrad-Martin was presented with the 2021 Association of VA Audiologists (AVAA) EDUCATION AWARD. The award is given in recognition to persons who have made special contributions to VA Audiology in education or research, or who have brought recognition to VA Audiology through these venues. Dr. Konrad-Martin is Associate Director of the RR&D National Center for Rehabilitative Auditory Research (NCRAR) and is also in charge of the Center's Education and Outreach Program.

## Review Updates

**SCIENTIFIC REVIEW TIMELINES** (refer to applicable [FOARFA](#) 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 1, 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:**

- 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.