

Field Conference Call – Meeting Notes
Monday, April 19, 2021 at 1:30 pm ET

1. Welcome

Rachel Ramoni, DMD, ScD

Grant Huang welcomed attendees and Dr. Ramoni thanked and highlighted several individuals in the field for their work on recent budget training and information technology (IT) activities. She commented appreciation for the field in general for its efforts in contributing toward an enterprise approach for VA research.

2. ORD Topics

Grant Huang, MPH, PhD

- COVID-19

It was noted that following today's ORD COVID-19 bi-weekly update, ORD will be moving toward a monthly field update that will include COVID-19 and other topics. Future information on opportunities and events will be included there and on the COVID-19 SharePoint Site.

- Centralized Promotions

Carol Fowler, PhD

ORD released new and improved checklists/instructions for preparing submissions for the Centralized Positions at GS-4 and above on Friday April 16th. A new ORD classification form for use by your CCU classifier and the updated local panel evaluation form (VA form 4670) were also included.

Please use the updated checklists/instructions and new, updated forms for new packets submitted to ORD after April 16, 2021. If you have packets that are in progress or that you are preparing for submission now, please contact your ORD promotions POC:

BL/CSR&D: Carol.Fowler@va.gov

HSR&D: Robert.small@va.gov

RR&D: Ricardo.Gonzalez@va.gov

Copies of these documents, FAQs and the March 17th webinar recording have been posted to the Centralized positions website at: https://www.research.va.gov/resources/centralized_positions.cfm

- Research Enterprise Spotlight -

David X. Cifu, MD

CENC-LIMBIC efforts and activities in TBI/Brain Health

Dr. Cifu presented information on a mature, federal mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI) research consortium started in 2013 and its robust infrastructure. Activities include 10 research studies have been completed with 200+ publications and 12 additional grants funded. Currently, it is supporting 8 active research studies and information was presented on them. A range of Knowledge Translation products have been developed and additional ones are underway for consumers, family, clinicians and researchers. Dr. Cifu's efforts were noted by ORD as an example of a collaborative effort with others (i.e., Department of Defense) that have an enterprise capability for organizing and advance science in mTBI.

3. Research Protections & Policy

Molly Klote, M.D., CIP

- VAIRRS

Dr. Klote reported that 97 VAMCs and the VA Central IRB are using VAIRRS. Contractors are assisting in transition and communications including a newsletter that will come out shortly. New macros are coming for reporting

- VAEDA

The results of beta test are being incorporated and a soft release is planned for early May.

- Personnel changes:

ORPPE has is hiring 3 IRB administrators. Also, a critical hire action pending for Biosafety/Biosurety Program Manager (GS-14). Soundia Duche has taken a position in Renee Oshinski's office – May 7th (last day) and Erica Aulik with contractor support will be taking on additional duties.

- Helpdesk

ORD is pleased to announce that their Biosafety Helpdesk is now active and ready to receive inquiries associated with VA research activities. Questions regarding topics that pertain to the handling and management of infectious microorganisms and hazardous biological materials can be sent to VHACCOORDBiosafety@va.gov. As a reminder, biosafety related questions should initially be addressed to the local research safety committee.

4. Finance

Allen Dunlow
John M. Verwiel

Mr. Dunlow thanked the field for the great effort they put forth to input execution data into the new module in RAFT. It was a learning experience, but all but 4 stations completed their input by the suspense date. Two of the four stations were trying to input data in

today with the approval of the ORD Director of Finance. The input, when compared to a national number, was pretty close in aggregate. Analysts will need to review individual merit data in more detail to determine funding reallocation needs.

Stations are asked to continue to focus on expending any prior year funds.

5. IT Updates

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

Dr. Grunfeld reported that the list of approved FIPS compliant flash drives and external hard drives has already changed radically since he sent out the last notice last week. Based on the recent IT announcement, if your current flash drive or external hard drive or Hard Drive is not on the list in the link below, you may be locked out if you do not ask for a waiver as below. You may also be denied a waiver. My external drives were removed from the most recent permissive list and my waiver request was refused, so I am buying a new one.

FIPS 140-2 Validated Removable Storage Devices:

<https://vaww.portal2.va.gov/sites/infosecurity/ess/Configuration%20Guidelines.aspx>

If you will be buying a new FIPS compliant flash drive or external hard drive you definitely should buy it from the new list.

6. Service Updates

• RR&D Updates

Patricia A. Dorn, Ph.D.

- Congratulations Tiffany Asqueri & Kristy Benton-Grover: Recognition by Tanya Bradsher, Chief of Staff VA, March 2021, for Exemplary Service & Commitment



Tiffany Asqueri, MBA
PARS Administrator



Kristy Benton-Grover, BFA, CGMP
PARS Management Analyst

The VA Chief of Staff recognized Ms. Asqueri and Ms. Benton-Grover for their exemplary service and commitment to the advisory committee they service. Specifically, the Chief was pleased to honor Tiffany Asqueri and Kristy Benton-Grover for their outstanding work as Designated Federal Officer and Alternate Designated Federal Officer for the Rehabilitation Research and Development Service Scientific Merit Review Board.

The Certificate of Appreciation is in recognition of their exceptional service and commitment as Designated (Asqueri)/Alternate (Benton-Grover) Federal Officers to VA Federal Advisory Committees. Their steadfast engagement and dedication to the Federal Advisory Committee Act rose above and beyond normal FACA support requirements and provided immense value to both their Advisory Committee, as well as other committees. The Advisory Committee Management Office appreciates the exemplary service they provided to instill the FACA mission in everything they do while serving their Committee and VA's public stakeholders. VA, the Veterans, and their families, whom we are privileged to serve, offer our greatest appreciation for a job well done.

- Congratulations David X. Cifu, MD: 2021 Paul B. Magnuson Awardee!



Office of Research and Development, Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D) 2021 Paul B. Magnuson Award for outstanding achievement in rehabilitation research and development. This is the highest honor RR&D bestows upon a rehabilitation researcher.

Dr. Cifu is being honored for his exceptional VA research career in Rehabilitation of Traumatic Brain Injury, Polytrauma and Neurodegenerative Disease. As Director of the VA-DoD Chronic Effects of Neurotrauma Consortia/ Long-Term Impact of Military-relevant Brain Injury Consortia, Dr. Cifu is leading the way in understanding, diagnosing, and treating Veterans with brain injury. His commitment towards improving and restoring Veterans to their optimal health and well-being is exceptional. Dr. Cifu truly embodies the passion and dedication to Veterans exemplified by Dr. Magnuson throughout his career.

Dr. Cifu is the Veterans Health Administration National Director Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation (PM&R), Chief of PM&R for the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Healthcare System, and Executive Director of the VCU Center for Rehabilitation Sciences and Engineering. He is based at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System - McGuire VA Medical Center, Richmond, VA

- New Special Emphasis Area: Related to Military Exposure

Studies of Veterans with limitations in cardiac and/or pulmonary function with a history of burn pit exposure during military service, including impact of cardiopulmonary conditions on Veterans' daily activities and efficacy of existing or new rehabilitation interventions on reducing Veterans' functional limitations and disabilities.

- In the most recent Parent RFA for Summer Review Cycle it has same year/budget parameters

- Funding Letters – Updated to help with carry-over/prior year dollars

Sample Funding Letter: see yellow highlights:

Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D) is pleased to inform you that your application [number], “[title],” has been recommended for funding.

It is RR&D's expectation, and the PI's responsibility to move forward with the completion of just-in-time (JIT) items (e.g., response to conditions, IRB/IACUC Committee approval, required training for human/animal research, R&D Committee approval, etc.) to bring this award into compliance as quickly as possible, but not later than 180 days of this communication.

RR&D issues award start dates on the first of each month; the **latest possible start date** for this award is **November 1, 2021**.

Upon receipt of this email *reply all* to:

- 1) Acknowledge timing of completion of JIT (within 180 days of this communication);
- 2) Acknowledge latest possible start date (November 1, 2021);
- 3) Indicate if RR&D can provide project funds at this time to ensure a successful start by October 1, 2021 (e.g., to-be-hired, contracts, purchases, items and actions that do not involve compliance committee approval).

To help eliminate carryover of prior year funds, RR&D needs your budget based on FY, not calendar year. Upon completion of JIT and based upon your requested start date:

- 1) Convert your approved e-application/JIT annual budget to FY budget.
- 2) Include in the current FY any project funds RR&D provided in advance of the official start date (per #3 above).
- 3) Consider carefully, the funds needed each FY to execute the research with no anticipated carryover.
- 4) Attach the FY budget to the email sent to RR&D (rrdreviews@va.gov) requesting a start date.

Please direct any questions regarding your application to [SPM name], Scientific Program Manager, RR&D at [phone number] or [email address].

Congratulations!

- Call for 2022 Paul B. Magnuson Award Nominations:

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 2022 Paul B. Magnuson Award are being accepted through September 1, 2021. Please refer to [Program Guide 1203.06](#) and the [Instructions for Preparing and Submitting a Nomination Packet](#).

- New Funding Opportunity

RR&D announced *Supplements for VA Investigators with Active RR&D Merit Awards to Curate Computable Phenotypes and Submit to the VA Phenomics Library – CIPHER* (attached below) on April 14, 2021.

- Timelines:
 - Deadline for submitting RR&D project modification requests: June 1, 2021
 - Communication of funding decisions: June 25, 2021
 - Funding start: July 1, 2021
 - Deadline for submitting end-products to CIPHER: June 30, 2022



CIPHER_RRD.pdf

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 1, 2021
- Summary Statements released – March 22, 2021
- Intent-to-Fund notifications
 - All PIs received notification of RR&D's decision via eRA on April 7, 2021
 - RR&D sent a notification to PIs whose application is under consideration for funding on April 8, 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

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

- Updated RFAs published – March 30, 2021
- LOI and Waiver Request deadline – May 3, 2021 (May 1 falls on a Saturday)
- Last possible application submission deadline (no changed/corrected applications after this date) – June 10, 2021
- Scientific Review – August 5-13, 2021
- Scores released – August 17, 2021
- Summary Statements released – September 7, 2021
- Intent-to-Fund notifications – by late September 2021

Notes regarding eRA:

- Use of Internet Explorer (IE) for eRA Modules to be Phased Out by July 19, 2021. In the wake of Microsoft discontinuing support for IE by August, eRA will phase out the use of IE for its modules by July 19, 2021 due to security concerns. Please switch to other eRA-supported browsers.
- 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.
- Users with the signing official (SO) role now have access to view summary statements and the overall impact score on the eRA Commons *Status Information* screen for VA-ORD applications.

● **BLR&D Updates**

Christopher T. Bever, Jr., MD, MBA

- Deadline for LOIs for the Career Development, Collaborative Merit, Data Science RFA, Lead Isolation and Optimization and Pre-IND studies of Drugs and Biologics, Pilot Projects, and applications to the parent RFA using MVP data are due May 1, 2021.
- **A correction of the dates given on the call:** BL will receive nominations for non-clinician entry starting May 1 to the shared mailbox VHACOBRLRDCSRDEligibility@va.gov. Nomination will close on June 1. To align with VA research properties, BL will give preference to nominations focusing on Suicidality, TBI, PTSD, Deployment Exposure, Pain management and Precision Oncology. Please direct any question to Alex.chiu@va.gov.”
- Stations are reminded to send in nomination packets for Clinician Scientist Award Extension Program nominees by the end of June.
- The Spring review cycle is underway and stations are reminded to ask investigators not to contact program managers about their proposals until after the July margin meeting.

- Tentative date and time and time for Research Week Symposium and celebration of two years of ORD Service Awards, including the Middleton Awardees, is Friday, May 21, 3 – 5:05 pm ET.

- **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** 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.

- 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 vacated by George Fitzelle who retired at the end of December. 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.



- CIDER
 - *HSRD has launched **Dimensions for VA*** is a web-based tool that will help VA researchers and their VA partners navigate the universe of published research and funded projects, find experts in relevant fields, help identify research gaps, highlight "online attention" through Altmetrics (including citations, social, and new media mentions of publications), and much more.
 - It is a database that connects over 117 million publications, 6 million awarded grants, 135 million patents, 620,000 clinical trials and 580,000 policy documents and features the ability to **filter and display VA-related data** – informing not only discovery, but making related analysis more efficient than ever for VA research.
 - For information about accessing the system, a Quick Start Guide, and other resources, please see <http://vaww.hsrdr.research.va.gov/dimensions/>.
 - For questions about *Dimensions for VA*, contact Charlie Festel, Web Program Manager, at dimensions@va.gov.

- SMRB Update

Winter 2021 Cycle

- HSR&D's merit review meetings took place virtually on March 2 - 5, 2021. Scores were released on March 10, 2021.
- Summary statements were released in **early April**. Funding decisions are expected to be made and Notices of Intent (To-Fund or Not-To-Fund) will be sent this Thursday 4/22.
- 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 were posted on 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

- **CSR&D Updates**

Terri Gleason, Ph.D.

- Meeting Announcement: CSR&D Community of Science (COSIII) for COVID19 Immunology: Understanding the nuances of COVID immunology: Host Responses from Innate to Adaptive Immunity Post-Vaccination, April 28, 2021, 12:00-2:00 pm Eastern Time, Hosted by Cleveland VA, Moderators: Drs. Carey Shive and Don Anthony
 - **Objective:** Highlight COVID immunology research, discuss developing issues, and connect VA investigators working on innate immunity, immune response to infection, and vaccine-induced immunity.
- **May 3** is the deadline for Letters of Intent for those programs with a requirement, including Career Development and Clinical Trials. For clinical trials, we continue to encourage PI's to connect with their Scientific Portfolio Manager in advance of submission deadline to discuss portfolio fit and program interest.
- Shout out and congratulations to the ORD Diversity Equity and Inclusion team who sponsored our first Application Submission Workshop for investigators who are under represented in the scientific community. Vetisha McClair lead the workshop over two days, with many engaged participants and presenters. We are grateful for everyone's efforts on every level who are working to achieve goals related to equity for ORD.