



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration  
Office of Research & Development

## Field Conference Call – Meeting Notes Monday, July 18, 2022 – 1:30 pm ET

Internal Teams Site: [Click Here](#)

### 1. Welcome

Grant Huang, MPH, PhD

Dr. Huang welcomed attendees and highlighted the agenda as Dr. Ramoni prepared for an upcoming Press Conference with the Secretary on the Cancer Moonshot and VA's efforts in cancer research. Items

### 2. ORD / Research Enterprise

Grant Huang, MPH, PhD

- Field Webinar on ORD Re-alignment

A Field Webinar will be held on July 21 to provide an overview of the ORD realignment. The link for registering was sent and it will be recorded for those unable to join.

Questions, concerns, or feedback about the SharePoint, the Research Enterprise can be submitted through the feedback form and email address. Any feedback submitted through the feedback form will be anonymous while messages sent through the email will enable us to respond to your questions and concerns directly. The anonymous feedback form is available at: <https://tinyurl.com/ResearchEnterpriseFeedback>. The feedback email address is: [VHAORDResearchEntFb@va.gov](mailto:VHAORDResearchEntFb@va.gov).

- ACOS-R Annual Meeting

A reminder was given that the NAVREF/ACOS-R Annual Meeting will be held from Sept 11-14. ACOS-Rs are encouraged to register and obtain the multiple registrant discount through their non-profit corporation. Those interested in attending but needing support should contact Dr. Huang.

- Defensive Counterintelligence Program (DCIP)

Stefanie D. Mitchell

Ms. Mitchell provided an overview of the new Defensive Counterintelligence Program, and the group of analysts funded by ORD and overseen by the VA Office of National Security Services, located in Washington DC. The team has been tasked by the ORD Leadership, Rachel Ramoni and Grant Huang, to compile data leading to vulnerability assessments, and the creation of our education, assistance and reporting programs.

This effort is a response to newly issued White House directives calling for the protection of federal research against Foreign Interference and exploitation (Executive Order 13587, National Security Presidential Memorandum 33, and VHA Directive 1058.02).

Currently, the group is in the midst of contacting leadership at key ORD equities, in order to familiarize them with their mission and begin the collection the program information needed to accomplish their task. Primarily, their initial aim is to compile the architecture and operating picture of the ORD equities they are tasked to cover and ensure they are tracking all the relevant facilities, personnel and programs.

Calls have been held with the HSR&D Director, Dr. Atkins, and BLR&D Director Dr. Christopher Bever, who are supportive of efforts to proceed; the group is now beginning our calls with the ACOS-Rs, Facility and Program Director levels. Introduction calls will continue down to the program staff PI & LSI levels and want to ensure stakeholders are fully aware the group's purpose and intent.

- **Update on the Use of Sensitive Species in VA Research** (also refer to slides) George W. Lathrop, Jr., DVM

#### Requirements to use sensitive species

- After October 1, 2019, no new research studies involving Sensitive Species may begin until the studies are reviewed and approved by the VA Secretary per provisions that are included in annual appropriations legislation since FY 2020. Sections 247(b)(1) and (b)(2) of Act state:
  - (b)(1) The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may approve the conduct of research commencing on or after October 1, 2019, using canines, felines, or non-human primates if the Secretary determines that—
    - (A) the scientific objectives of the research can only be met by using such canines, felines, or non-human primates;
    - (B) such scientific objectives are directly related to an illness or injury that is combat-related; and
    - (C) the research is consistent with the revised Department of Veterans Affairs canine research policy document dated December 15, 2017, including any subsequent revisions to such document.
  - (2) The Secretary may not delegate the authority under this subsection.

#### Key points

- It is critically important to contact the office of the CVMO as soon as possible when a new research project proposing the use of a sensitive species is being planned. The office of the CVMO will provide detailed consultation and support in preparing the documents necessary for review.
- Work with sensitive species, regardless of funding source, is not permitted to begin until Secretarial approval has been documented in writing.
- It is illegal to spend VA funds on sensitive species (including purchase and housing) before written Secretarial approval has been granted.
- Details of how the reviews are conducted by the Office of Research and Development (ORD) have been established, contact the office of the CVMO for an updated copy of this document.

### **CONGRESSIONAL LIMITS ON SENSITIVE SPECIES STUDIES**

<b>Requirement</b>	<b>FY2018 Section 254, PL 115-141</b>	<b>FY2019 Section 247, PL 115-244</b>	<b>FY2020 Section 249, PL 116-94</b>	<b>FY2021 Section 247, PL 116-260</b>	<b>FY2022 (Cont.)</b>
Applies to canine studies	X	X	X	X	Cont.
Applies to feline and non-human primate studies			X	X	Cont.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪Scientific objectives can only be met by research with that species</li> <li>▪Study has been directly approved by SecVA</li> <li>▪Study is consistent with VA policy document AR2017-001</li> </ul>	X	X	X	X	Cont.
Scientific objectives are directly related to an illness or injury that is combat-related			X	X	Cont.
After Secretarial approval and at least 30 days before the study starts, Congress must be notified			X	X	Cont.
Report on status of sensitive species studies	Annual	Annual	Semi-annual	Semi-annual	Semi-annual
Plan must be submitted by end of year to reduce or eliminate sensitive species research within 5 years of passage of P.L. 116-94			X	X	Year 2

**Office of the CVMO Contacts**

Dr. George W. Lathrop, Jr., CVMO (George.Lathrop@va.gov)  
 Dr. Alice Huang (alice.huang@va.gov)

[Currently Approved VA Protocols for Research with Canines, Felines, and NHPs](#)

## [Frequently Asked Questions about VA Animal Research](#)

### [VA Animal Research Program](#)

#### **3. Research Protections & Policy**

- [VAIRRS Coversheet/Information sheet Completion rate update](#)

Molly Klote, MD, CIP

The VA Innovation and Research Review System (VAIRRS) is VA's online submission, committee management, and review system, the enterprise instance of IRBNet.

- VAIRRS is required to be used by all VA medical centers with research programs. It provides an enterprise platform to support the management of research oversight and support committees. It is positioned to be the authoritative data set for evidence-based decision-making regarding portfolios.
- The system assists VA facilities in conducting the initial and ongoing review of VA research. It can withstand the changing pressures of research needs, including oversight needs of research programs and institutions, collaborative needs of appointed VHA investigators, and regulatory changes.
- The system's priorities also include enterprise data set integrity, ongoing training, expanded ORD dashboards, real-time reporting, continued process alignment, and more.

#### Also used by:

OGC, ORO, Privacy, ROTC-D (Central ISSO team), DEAN – Sec VA travel, ORD - Congressional Inquiries, EHRM – transition team (OSIRES), Academic Promotions, BLRD Investigator eligibility

#### Current Statistics

- **Project Coversheet: 69.4%**
  - 2 sites with <10% completion
    - 1 site with 1% completion
  - 3 sites 10-20% completion
  - 14 sites 33-50% completion
- **IRB Information Sheet: 60.1%**
  - 3 sites with <10% completion
    - 1 site with 2.4% completion
  - 6 sites 10-20% completion
  - 10 sites 33-50% completion

Assistance to complete project coversheets and IRB information sheets is available through the VAIRRS office. Any questions or issues can be addressed to the [VAIRRS@va.gov](mailto:VAIRRS@va.gov) inbox.

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

The following topics were discussed:

- Patents as of 13<sup>th</sup> July 2022
- Licenses Executed (FY22)
- License Obligations and Payments (Royalty)
- Missing or Incomplete VA Certification Forms 06 July 2022
  
- Personnel Updates
  - Mr. Ryan Davis – Deputy Director
  - Dr. Terri Hunter – Regional Technology Transfer Specialist for Mid-West Region
  - Mr. Richard Vermillion – Field Technology Transfer Specialist in Charleston, SC

**5. Finance Updates** John Verwiel

*Fund Execution, RAFT, Budget*

- PY balance in the Field is \$8M. Pulling back starting August 1<sup>st</sup>.
- CY balance is \$389M Unobligated or 44% of the Budget.
- 3Q RAFT Execution report is 99.5% complete and will be using it to pull back funds from the field.
- Goal is to pull back \$40M from programs in the 4Q.
- FY23 Budget is \$916M or a 3.8% increase from FY22.

**6. ORD Field Update**

- **Updates from Field Operations** Tony Laracuente

*ePROMISE Changes*

Last spring, ORD notified the field that we were implementing changes to ePROMISE as part of the transition to VAIRSS. As Molly Klote mentioned, this is part of the transition to making VAIRSS the authoritative data source. Effective July 1, the following changes were incorporated:

*ePromise streamlining*

1. Remove Species Tab - Done

2. Remove ACORP Tab -Done
3. Remove Drugs Tab – Done
4. Remove Annual PDS update – Done
5. Remove Annual Animal Update – Done
6. Remove Annual Human Update – Done
7. Remove Continuing Review on Protocols – Done
8. Remove Committee Menu – Done

*Upcoming changes include Abstract Requirements only for Initial and final*

9. On main tab, ORD kept JIT, R&D Approval Date, Animal & Human checkbox, IACUC Date & IRB Date. – **To be Done**
10. Remove eRA Appl ID from main section and add Appl ID on funding code line for VA fund codes (Just like Service ID but Appl ID field will be text field). So a project can have more than one eRA Appl ID corresponding to each VA Funding category – **To be Done**
11. Keywords (Keep existing and give an option to type in 1 or 2 keyword that they want). So Keywords search is a list of picking existing keywords and freeform typing of 2 additional search terms. – **To be Done**

In addition, ORD made a major RAFT change where the field can download multiple Pink Sheets. This is now available as well.

### Research HR

HR offices should be receiving a copy of the latest centrally classified PD for Committee Managers. Please note that the series is 671 not 301 but there is no scientific degree requirement. You can use this PD to multi-encumber the position if you have more than one committee. At this point ORD prefers that you use this PD to recruit or promote into. If you have higher graded positions managing committees, you do not have to move those folks into this PD. If you want higher or lower graded personnel then you can write PDs that supervise or PDs that lead up to this PD. Please contact me with questions.

Currently work is being done on Biological Lab Techs GS 7 and 9 and Data Analyst/Statisticians 13 and 14. More information on centralized PDs can be found on the ORD web page under ORD Policies and Guidance then Human Resources. [Human Resources/Personnel \(va.gov\)](#)

### Other Updates

The FERSS initiative is fully under way and we are adding additional sites each week. There is a flyer on the resources available and how to get them. Please disseminate to your investigators.

Additional guidance will be provided regarding the 209 issue. Be on the lookout for an email in the next week or so.

## 7. Cross services updates and announcements

- **eRA Commons Reminders**

Tiffany Asqueri

*Application Form Version:*

VA-ORD has received notification from NIH that by the end of August 2022 application form versions containing the DUNS as an organizational identifier are being retired. The result is that ASSIST will no longer be able to transfer information from an application prepared with a retired form set to an active RFA.

The new form version that includes the UEI as an organizational identifier (FORMS-G) was implemented in Spring 2022 for BLRD, CSRD and RRD, and in Summer 2022 for HSRD. If applicants expect to need to copy information from an application prepared prior to the transition to an active RFA, then they must complete the action by the end of August 2022.

See [NOT-OD-22-182](#) issued July 15, 2022.

*eRA Just-in-Time (JIT), Research Performance Progress Report (RPPR) and Final RPPR:*

JIT documents, RPPRs and Final RPPRs can only be submitted to VA-ORD by the VA research office Signing Official (SO). SOs should check regularly for items uploaded/initiated by the PI for review and submission. VA-ORD cannot access these items until/unless the SO has completed the steps to submit the information to us.

Helpful resources (step-by-step instructions from the online help)\*

- Steps for an SO and/or PI to [Upload & Save JIT Information](#)
- Steps for an SO to [Submit JIT Information](#)
- Steps for a PI to [Initiate an RPPR](#)
- Steps for an SO to [Submit an RPPR](#)
- Steps for an SO to [Delegate Submission of an RPPR](#)

\* You must be logged into [eRA Commons](#) with appropriate role(s) to complete these activities.

- **ORD Research Supplements to promote Diversity and Collaborations**

Carol Fowler, Ph.D.

Two RFAs for ORD-wide Research Supplements were released on April 27, 2022 and applications are due no later than August 1, 2022.

- RD-22-029 - [Research Supplements to Promote Diversity \(I01, Type 3\)](#) – mentored research supplements for early career scientists from underrepresented populations.
- RD-22-030 - [Research Supplements to Promote Collaborations to Enhance Diversity in VA Research \(I01, Type 3\)](#) – intended to support collaborations between VA Investigators and investigators at non-VA institutions, including, but not limited to Minority Serving Institutions.

These will be offered as Type 3 supplements to active VA Merits funded by BLRD, CSRD, HSRD, and RRD. Due dates and budgets for both supplements:

- **Budget:** \$100,000/yr for up to 2 years
- **Due date for both opportunities: August 1, 2022.**
- **Earliest Start date: October 1, 2022**
- **Applications will only be accepted through grants.gov/NIH Assist and reviewed via eRA commons.**

An informational webinar and Q&A on this supplement opportunity was given on Wednesday, May 11, 2022. The webinar recording, webinar slides and a link to the RFA is posted at: <https://www.research.va.gov/funding/diversity.cfm>

*e-Submission warnings:*

Some users have experienced the following warning when validating/submitted applications for RD-22-029 and RD-22-030.

“R&R Cover The Revision type of application may only be used to apply for supplemental funding on an existing VA award. For new competitive applications or competing renewal applications, select the appropriate application type in block 8 of the SF 424 R&R. (001.33.3)”

We have gotten confirmation from eRA commons that marking ‘revision’ as directed by the RFAs on the R&R cover page is correct and that this e-submission warning can be safely ignored.

*For more information:* [Carol.Fowler@va.gov](mailto:Carol.Fowler@va.gov).

## **8. Services updates and announcements**

- **RR&D Updates**

Patricia A. Dorn, PhD  
Karen Lohmann Siegel

- Paul B. Magnuson Award

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 three (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](#).

- [DRIVE RFA – Evidence Review](#):

The Evidence Synthesis Program (ESP) has completed a systematic review on [Interventions to Improve Long-term Adherence to Physical Rehabilitation Among Those with Hip or Knee Osteoarthritis or Chronic Low Back Pain](#), posting a full report on the ESP VA intranet and related [Management eBrief](#) on the HSR&D website. RR&D generated the ESP topic nomination and developed the RR&D DRIVE RFA (Durability of Rehabilitation Interventions for Veterans, see [RFAs](#)) after consultation with our clinical partners. Investigators considering DRIVE applications in future review cycles are strongly encouraged to review the ESP report and make special note of the stated evidence gaps and research needs when developing their research plans.

- [Review Updates](#)

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

*Spring 2023 - Center and Research Enhancement Award Program (REAP):*

- NEW RFAs published – March 3, 2022
- Webinar – April 20, 2022, 12 noon: This webinar included an overview of the funding mechanism, what RR&D is looking for and a Q&A session. Contact Dr. Shirley Groer ([Shirley.Groer@va.gov](mailto:Shirley.Groer@va.gov)) for a link to the recording.
- A **NEW** Pre-application (I02) RFA **RX-23-101** has been published for the I50 award mechanism. Pre-application and List of Key Personnel submission deadline – September 1, 2022.
- Full award e-application submission deadline (**no changed/corrected applications after this date**) – January 11, 2023
- Biographical Sketch Format template (OMB No. 0925-0001 and 0925-0002 (**Rev. 10/2021 Approved Through 09/30/2024**)) **is required for all application submissions**
- Scientific Review – April 2023
- Scores and Summary Statements released – April/May 2023
- Administrative Review/Site Visits – May/June 2023
- Intent-to-Award notifications – Subsequent to site visit

*Fall 2022 – SPIRE:*

- Updated SPIRE RFA published – June 27, 2022

- Pre-application (LOI and waiver request) submission deadline – August 1, 2022
- Full award e-application submission deadline (**no changed/corrected applications after this date**) – September 12, 2022
  - Biographical Sketch Format template (OMB No. 0925-0001 and 0925-0002 (**Rev. 10/2021 Approved Through 09/30/2024**)) is **required**.
- Scientific Review – October 24, 2022
- Scores and Summary Statements released – November 16, 2022
- Intent-to-Award notifications – early December 2022

*Summer 2022 – Merit, Career Development and Research Career Scientist:*

- **NEW** Summer 2022 RFAs have been published for ALL award opportunities
- *Developing and Validating Alternatives to the Use of Canines, Felines and Non-Human Primates in VA Research (I01): RFA 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.
- *Durability of Rehabilitation Interventions for VETerans (DRIVE) Award (I01): RFA RX-22-012* – published March 30, 2022
- *RR&D Translational Rehabilitation Research Award: Stage 1 (TRRA-1) (IU1)* – published April 14, 2022
  - Funding mechanism to facilitate the translation of **promising** VA research discoveries in the realm of neurological, musculoskeletal and sensory systems into new treatments for **Veterans to obtain functional gains**.
  - TRRA-1 award provides administrative support for:
    - Preparatory planning for preliminary FDA interactions and early peer-review of the technical merit and feasibility of the approach.
    - An FDA regulatory consultant.
    - A Project Officer/Administrator (preparation and maintenance of a Masterfile, manages regulatory tasks, etc.)
    - Travel (if needed) for team members to meet.
  - Goal is to provide VA PD/PI with funding for services NOT provided through a standard Merit Award and to prepare PD/PI for TRRA-2 – Pre-

clinical Good Laboratory Practice testing of the product for FDA IND/IDE submission.

- Pre-application (LOI and waiver request) submission deadline – May 2, 2022 (as May 1 falls on a Sunday)
- Full award e-application submission deadline **(no changed/corrected applications after this date)** – June 10, 2022
- Biographical Sketch Format template (OMB No. 0925-0001 and 0925-0002 **(Rev. 10/2021 Approved Through 09/30/2024)**) **is required for all application submissions**
- Scientific Review – August 8-16, 2022
- Scores released – August 18, 2022
- Summary Statements released – September 9, 2022
- Intent-to-Award notifications – late September 2022

- **BLR&D Updates**

Christopher T. Bever, Jr., MD

- Spring Review Round

The Spring round margin meeting was on 7/13 so intent to fund notices should be going out this week.

- 2022 Middleton Award Winners

BLRD is pleased to announce two winners for the 2022 Middleton Award, Dr. Judith M. Ford, of the San Francisco VA Health Care System, and Dr. Amy C. Justice, of the VA Connecticut Healthcare System.

Dr. Ford is recognized for her basic to translational research in biological psychiatry which has transformed the treatment of psychotic illnesses in Veterans. Dr. Ford is credited with elucidating the basic neural mechanism that enables animals to distinguish between self and other-generated sensations. This finding provided the basis for Dr. Ford's seminal clinical research where she reported that people with schizophrenia “have less attenuation of cortical responses” to “self” generated sounds, which led to a series of demonstrations of similar deficits in other psychotic bipolar disorders. Dr. Ford, using state-of-the-art techniques, reported that this “poor” suppression may be due to the altered integrity of white matter tracks connecting speech production and reception areas. Her work has provided fundamental insights into the biological basis of schizo-effective disorders and potential treatment approaches.

Dr. Justice is recognized for her rigorous clinical epidemiology studies of predictors of the natural history of HIV infection. Dr. Justice developed many large national cohorts based on data from the Veterans Affairs Electronic Medical Record (HER). She is the national expert in the processes required to clean, validate, and standardize raw electronic medical record data and in its analysis using standard statistical methods, machine learning techniques, and cross-cohort validations. She is among the first in VA to identify the mediators of outcomes in HIV infection to design appropriate intervention

trials to improve patient outcomes among Veterans with HIV infection. Her innovative framework has been used to understand the medical and psychiatric co-morbid behaviors and conditions, effects of aging, and drug toxicity among Veterans living with HIV.

To date, a total of 5 women scientists have been awarded the Middleton since its inception in 1960 (1960 Yarrow, 2014 Taché, 2016 Richmond, and 2022 Ford and Justice).

- **CSR&D Updates**

Miriam Smyth, PhD

CSR&D margin meeting was held on July 14, and we expect intent to fund notices to go out this Friday, July 22<sup>nd</sup>.

- Career Development (CADE) Symposium:

BLR&D and CSR&D will be hosting our annual Career Development Symposium on July 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>. Investigators with BL or CS Career Development awards with start dates in Calendar Year 2019 or Calendar Year 2021 will be participating.

Mark Roltsch & Eric Schwinder have put together a superb program. Looking forward to this opportunity to hear research updates from our early-career investigators, introduce them to various ORD stakeholders, answer questions and continue to build a sense of community within the cohort.

Cover for Jana Drgonova, PhD.

Portfolios: Preclinical mental health, pain, substance abuse/addiction. MHBA, NURP, and NURA.

Please use the shared mailbox (VHA BLRD-CSR&D@va.gov) for questions related to these portfolios. Questions will be triaged by staff to appropriate staff members.

- **HSRD Updates**

David Atkins, MD, MPH

*Under Secretary's Award for Outstanding Achievement in Health Services Research* - Keith N. Humphreys, PhD, has earned the 2021 Under Secretary's Award for Outstanding Achievement in Health Services Research – the highest honor for a VA health services researcher.

Dr. Humphreys is an HSR&D [Senior Research Career Scientist](#), investigator with HSR&D's Center for Innovation to Implementation ([Ci2i](#)) in Palo Alto, CA, and the inaugural holder of an endowed chair at Stanford Medicine, the [Esther Ting Memorial Professorship](#) in addiction medicine. The award recognizes a distinguished career of

research on the care of addictive disorders, a career that included over 350 publications and stints in the White House and serving as an advisor to several states and to international bodies details on his award are available on the HSRD website [Awards & Honors \(va.gov\)](#).

*Funding meeting* - The funding meeting for proposal submitted under the Cross-service Collaborative Projects on Long COVID will be held this week, with announcements next week.

*Concept papers for a Practice Based Research Network on Long COVID* - A solicitation for concept papers for a Practice Based Research Network on Long COVID will be released on Tuesday July 19 with responses due August 29. Applicants must be from a location that has an established Long COVID clinic.

*Staff update* - Liza Catucci has returned from her detail in ORD to assume role of Acting Deputy Director to HSRD (formerly Naomi Tomoyasu).