



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration  
Office of Research & Development

## Field Conference Call – Meeting Notes Monday, August 15, 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 upcoming meetings.

### 2. ORD / Research Enterprise

Grant Huang, MPH, PhD

- **Special Advisor for Field Operations**

Carl Grunfeld, MD, PhD was announced as ORD Special Advisor for Field Operations. In this role, he will be supporting ORD efforts to help with VA research enterprise operations and guidance, particularly in areas related to helping ACOS-Rs succeed in their roles, advising on field research operations, and serving as a primary liaison for Field Research information technology matters. His responsibilities will place a particular emphasis on helping in activities focused on training and developing early career ACOS-Rs.

- **ACOS-R / NAVREF Annual Meeting**

A reminder was given that the NAVREF/ACOS-R Annual Meeting will be held from September 11-14. ACOS-Rs are encouraged to register and obtain the multiple registrant discount through their non-profit corporation. Information was sent previously from John Verwiell regarding use of 101 funds to support attendance. Those interested in attending but have questions should contact Dr. Huang.

- **Defensive Counterintelligence Program (DCIP)**

ORD previously 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, 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).

- **Clinical Trials Management System**

Kousick Biswas

VA's Office of Research and Development (ORD) has recently procured an Enterprise Clinical Trial Management Solution (CTMS) for efficient implementation of ORD managed (and/or sponsored) Clinical Trials. The CTMS is currently getting configured in stages and will be rolled out in iterations over the next 8 – 10 months. A soft roll out of the first iteration is planned for the end of September 2022. Once the full ATO is obtained (a temporary ATO is already in place) and the testing/validation of all the CTMS modules are complete, the production environment will "GO LIVE". Based on the progress so far, we are hoping the CTMS will be available for use by the research community in the VA by early summer of 2023.

[Note: Timelines are subjected to change as a result of delays in various workflows that are involved in configuration/testing/validation/ATO etc.]

- **Follow-up Field Webinar on ORD Re-alignment**

Grant Huang, MPH, PhD

Recently, ORD conducted a webinar to talk about the ORD realignment. A recording of this webinar was corrupted and the audio portion is not available. However, the slides and a written transcript are available at

[https://www.research.va.gov/programs/orppe/education/webinars/session\\_archive.cfm?RecordID=196825&Date07212022](https://www.research.va.gov/programs/orppe/education/webinars/session_archive.cfm?RecordID=196825&Date07212022)

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).

- **Research Protections & Policy**

Molly Klote, MD, CIP

- **VAIRRS** – please encourage your investigators to complete their VAIRRS project coversheets and IRB information sheets, as applicable. The data on the spreadsheets is needed for all VAIRRS dashboards.
- **VA Electronic Determination Aid (VAEDA)** – preparing for full launch in Sept 2022. Currently being used at 19 facilities. More than 500 determinations have been successfully made.
- **PROSPECT** – a platform available for cloud analytics for research studies. You are welcome to apply to use this platform at [Prospect application](#) Funding is available through ORD.

- **EHRM** – all implementation on hold until Jan 2023. OSIRES team is working hard to ensure the system is ready for any research site on the system and that VHA has the appropriate support staff trained to assist researchers in the new Oracle Cerner Millennium System.

### 3. **Technology Transfer Program (TTP) updates**

Ryan A. Davis, JD

Following TTP updates were mentioned (see slides):

- New Staff
  - Ms. Kristine Moes – Field Technology Transfer Specialist in Florida
  - TTP is in the process of hiring a GS-9 Program Specialist

Information was also presented on:

- On-Line Submission of Invention Disclosures and Certification Information
- Continuing work on TTP issuing Determination of Rights
- Continuing need from the field with help on outstanding Certification Forms
- Missing or Incomplete VA Certification Forms as of 9 August 2022 was discussed

### 4. **Finance Updates**

John Verwiel

The following points were highlighted from ORD Finance:

- PY balance will not be swept. Stations must complete X-ORGs asap.
- CY ORD has pulled back \$25M for redistribution. Goal of 4% for carryover is the target for all stations.
- The goal is for 38 stations (2X 2021) to get to 4% carryover
- Currently, 35% of the Budget is Unobligated.
- \$130M is current estimate for Carryover.

### 5. **ORD Field Update**

#### • **IT Updates**

Carl Grunfeld, MD, PhD

Dr. Grunfeld expressed his delight at continuing to help all in the field, and asked for patience on slow responses to the number of inquiries submitted. He wanted to remind the field that he is located West Coast and to consider that detail for when he may receive emails. Over 100 important e-mails have been received on various inquiries.

Wireless and EDUROAM is progressing. Slow due to supply chain issues. There is no need to contact him about this matter.

### 6. **Service Funding Opportunities, Review and Updates**

#### • **PACT Act & Military Exposures Research Program**

Karen L. Block, PhD

- On August 10, 2022, the President signed into law the *Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act of 2022*.
  - The PACT Act is the largest health and benefit expansions in American history.
  - It recognizes toxic exposure as a “cost of war” by addressing the full range of issues impacting toxic-exposed Veterans, ensuring generations of Veterans who suffer from toxic exposure-related conditions get the benefits and care they’ve earned.
  - This new law also expands and extends eligibility for VA health care for Veterans with toxic exposures and Veterans of the Vietnam era, Gulf War era, and Post-9/11 era.
- Generating high-quality evidence through military exposures research is a high visibility, high priority topic for ORD.
- ORD is launching a Military Exposures Research Program (MERP).
- The MERP is building enterprise-level core capabilities to support funded investigator studies needing exposure assessment, data/survey tools and analysis, biospecimen collection, storage and analysis.
- Requests for Applications (RFA) will be developed and released broadly to support key gap portfolio areas. Expected Spring 2023.

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

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

Carol Fowler, PhD

To address organizational DEI objectives, the Office of Research and Development (ORD) is soliciting applications for an assessment of the current activities related to VA-funded research involving racial and ethnic minorities. A comprehensive examination of these DEI research activities will provide valuable information in developing ORD strategies that will improve and expand: 1) a diverse scientific workforce through training and funding opportunities, 2) research focused on minority health and reducing health disparities, and 3) a culture of inclusion within ORD.

Applicants can request up to \$350,000 to support a project coordinator, health science specialist, and personnel or contracts to facilitate data collection and analysis. All funds must be expended by September 30, 2023.

Applications must be submitted to the mailbox [VHACOORDDEIWG@va.gov](mailto:VHACOORDDEIWG@va.gov) with the subject line “Diversity Equity and Inclusion Portfolio Analysis” by **August 30, 2022**. For more information, please see the funding opportunity announcement at: <https://www.research.va.gov/funding/diversity.cfm>.

- **RR&D Updates**

Patricia A. Dorn, PhD  
Karen Lohmann Siegel

Please Join Me In Welcoming Ms. Tiffany Asqueri  
To Her New Position As RR&D Administrative Officer!

Tiffany Asqueri, MBA, BSH, has over 20 years' experience in Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system administration.

As a health systems specialist with DoD, Tiffany's experience ranged from credentialing and privileging of healthcare providers to evaluating performance, efficiency, productivity and cost effectiveness of health care systems and programs to identify resource sharing opportunities with the Managed Care Support Contractor and VA. Her most notable work was spearheading the data collection, analysis and development of the business case that resulted in the joint DoD/VA clinic in Pensacola FL.

She began her VA career in the Office of Research and Development (ORD), Health Services Research and Development Service in 2007 as a program specialist, supporting their scientific review program. In 2009, Tiffany transitioned to the Rehabilitation Research and Development Service Program Analysis and Review Section as the administrator of program and review activities. She also serves as the VA ORD lead member and agency liaison for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Electronic Research Administration (eRA) systems team.

Tiffany enjoys spending time with her family and traveling.



o VHA Geriatric Mental Health Research Virtual Conference

To any investigator who is interested in Geriatric Mental Health Research, save the date Thursday October 27, 2022 from 11:00 to 4:30pm, The VISN 21 Mental Illness Research Education and Clinical Center and the Center for Innovation in Long-Term Services and Supports, in partnership with the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, Geriatric Education Center and ORD invite you to a virtual conference titled: "The role of Geriatric Mental Health Research in the VHA Learning Healthcare System".

Space is Limited! To indicate interest, go to: [VHA Geriatric Mental Health Research Conference](#)

*Vision for the Conference:*

To bring together VA mental health researchers interested in geriatrics and lifespan perspective to present "state of the science" summaries of current research findings, identify future research priorities, and develop collaborations in three areas:

- Late life suicide
- Care models for older Veterans with complex comorbidities and disruptive behaviors
- Geriatric mental health research in integrated care settings

*Definition of Veteran Geriatric Mental Health Research*

Clinical, health services or rehabilitation research regarding mental health and mental illness

- Focusing on Veterans aged 65+

- Examining age / cohort differences across all age groups of Veterans

*Target Audience:*

VA Research Leaders, VA Researchers, Junior Investigators who:

- Conducts geriatric mental health research
- Wish to expand their work in younger populations by taking a “lifespan” perspective
- Want to learn about emerging priorities for geriatric mental health research funding

- 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](#).

- Review Updates:

SCIENTIFIC REVIEW TIMELINES (refer to applicable [FOA/RFA](#) 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

- Fall Review

For the Fall review round the deadline to submit to Grants.gov (After this date the full two-day correction window cannot be used.): September 8<sup>th</sup>.

For the Fall review round the last possible submission date (to Grants.gov): September 12<sup>th</sup>

- RFAs

Note that some RFAs have been updated for the Fall review round. Investigators should use the RFAs that are currently posted on the ORD website in preparing their applications.

- **CSR&D Updates**

Miriam Smyth, PhD

- UPCOMING BL/CS SUBMISSION DEADLINES:

Deadline to submit to Grants.gov: September 8<sup>th</sup>. After this date, the full two-day correction window cannot be used.

Last Possible Submission Date (to Grants.gov): September 12<sup>th</sup>

- BL/CS JIT NOTES:

For studies selected for funding from the Spring submission cycle, JIT release occurred on August 12. However, release of 5 of the 114 studies (BL + CS) that were approved for



funding has been delayed. NIH is investigating this error in eRA and hopes to rectify ASAP. Queries may be addressed to [Chinagozi.Ugwu@va.gov](mailto:Chinagozi.Ugwu@va.gov)

Please ensure that your Signing Official (SO) submits any materials to JIT that are uploaded by the PI. Submission by the SO is required in order for ORD to review and approve the uploaded materials.

Please note that stations are not required to enter the Project ID on the PI or ACOS Assurance forms. You may choose to leave that field blank.

- **HSRD Updates**

David Atkins, MD, MPH

- Welcome Bonnie Boots-Miller, PhD to the HSR&D team as our lead program manager for the HSR&D Centers of Innovation!
- Congratulations to Keith Humphreys, PhD, Palo Alto VA, recipient of the 2021 HSR&D Under Secretary Award for Outstanding Health Services Research!
- QUERI has recently funded the Evidence, Policy, and Implementation Center (EPIC), led by Allen Gifford, MD (VA Boston), Rani Elwy, PhD (Bedford VA), and Sara Landes, PhD (Little Rock VA) to lead efforts to build capacity for implementation science research, training, and mentoring across the translation pipeline.
- ORD along with OAA and the Office of Healthcare Innovation and Learning recently published a paper describing the **VA Learning Health System training and funding ecosystem** describing how VA training and funding opportunities support the future VA research workforce: [How the VA is training the Next-Generation workforce for learning health systems \(wiley.com\)](#)