



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration  
Office of Research & Development

## Field Conference Call – Meeting Notes Monday, December 20, 2021 – 1:30 pm ET

Internal Teams Site: [Click Here](#)

### 1. Welcome

Rachel Ramoni, DMD, ScD

Dr. Ramoni welcomed attendees and highlighted the agenda, including the importance of informing ORD about publications and reporting inventions given VHA interest in these efforts.

### 2. ORD / Research Enterprise

Grant Huang, MPH, PhD

#### • Research Enterprise Initiatives – 2022 Preview

ORD has recently communicated various activities it has been doing recently as part of an overall effort to help with an enterprise transformation of VA research. Some efforts will be presented on this call including matters related to human resources (HR), tools/resources and cross-service activities. ORD will continue to provide information and updates on monthly calls and is excited to be able to head into 2022 with a number of things on-going and planned related to centralized HR, field support services, actively managed portfolios, and others. ORD is grateful to those from the field who are helping with various subcommittees and workgroups addressing these topics.

### 3. Importance of Invention Disclosures and Performance Measures Carolyn Clancy, MD

Assistant Undersecretary for Health, Discovery, Education and Affiliate Networks (DEAN), Dr. Clancy, joined as a special guest to highlight the importance of invention disclosures from VA investigators. She indicated the particular interest of these efforts as a measure of VA's research contribution and to ensure that VA receives proper credit for the work it does. Other VA groups including the Office of General Counsel have been working with the Technology Transfer Program (TTP) to help with ensuring that proper disclosures and other related processes are completed. The field can expect to hear more about this topic and VA is currently discussing how reporting disclosures can be properly included in performance measures for those in position to address agency priorities in this area.

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

TTP provided a few updates and data regarding invention disclosures and achievements by the field.

Dr. Huang also noted that TTP staff have also recently received several noteworthy awards from the Federal Laboratory Consortium (FLC). To provide some context, the FLC was organized in 1974 and formally chartered by the Federal Technology Transfer Act of 1986 to promote and strengthen technology transfer nationwide. Today, more than 300 federal laboratories, facilities and research centers and their parent agencies make up the FLC community. Members of the FLC community include world-renowned scientists, engineers, inventors, entrepreneurs, academia, laboratory personnel, and T2 professionals.

- Impact Award – goes to a technology with amazing impact and the team behind the technology – VA’s RightEye technology led by Mr. Stefan Susta from my staff won the FLC Impact Award. RightEye, a revolutionary technology successfully developed by a team of VA at the Richmond VA and Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) researchers, that automatically calibrates, records, and analyzes eye movement to accurately diagnose 28+ neurological diseases, traumatic brain injury, strokes, and a growing list of other disorders and medical conditions. In just a few years, over 2,200 RightEye units have been sold in all 50 states and 25 countries - and RightEye has compiled the largest database of eye movements in the world from over 3,700,000 individual exams.
- Ms. Patricia (Pattie) Cullum from TTP was selected as Rookie of the Year. Rookie of the Year recognizes the best technology transfer professional in the government with three (3) years or less working in technology transfer. Ms. Cullum joined TTP a couple of years ago and has done an outstanding job. Note: Last year, Mr. Ryan Davis won FLC Rookie of the Year so it is great to win two years in a row.
- Dr. John Kaplan won the FLC Professional of the Year. Professional of the Year recognizes the best technology transfer professional in the government. I am humbled to win; I only won because my team is absolutely incredible with accomplishments across the board.

## 5. **Research Protections & Policy**

Molly Klote, MD, PhD

### • **VAEDA (VA Electronic Determination Aid) – current status**

- There has been a soft launch at 8 facilities with more than 150 determinations in system, receiving Likert scale feedback on quality of questions and examples and making system changes. VAEDA works best when PIs (coordinators) or project owners (project coordinator) to complete this. A lot of places are having the IRB staff enter these, but this isn’t what this was created for, it needs to be the individual with the best knowledge of the project intent.
- There is interest in recruiting another 10 sites to come onboard - please contact [VAEDASupport@va.gov](mailto:VAEDASupport@va.gov) to be included.

- **VAIRRS – coversheet completion efforts and CITI integration**

- Full CITI integration has been completed and it was more work than anticipated. TMS will be the next to complete integration. Please continue to provide feedback on the system, we are putting more resources towards groups that are struggling or need further education on it. Please contact [VAIRRS@va.gov](mailto:VAIRRS@va.gov) to request any education or additional resources your site needs to be successful.
- We have only a 42% completion rate for project cover sheets, far from the goal. Please continue to get the word out to your investigators.
  - In the chat it was noted that a number of investigators received an email last week. It does not have enough information (e.g., project title, number, etc.) to act on. The email the PI's are receiving doesn't list which project it's about, so PIs are confused as to what needs to be done – is it a closed project, active project, which project (when they have several).
    - Dr. Klote indicated that if projects are closed there is no need to complete the coversheet. Every active project needs a coversheet completed. The coversheet information drives our metrics and dashboards.
  - The field also noted that cover sheets are also not easy to complete for projects that are not new and have already been reviewed/approved. E.g., the form requires additional documents be uploaded, but is that for new studies only or existing studies, and if the project had some of those documents, but that part of the project is over, are those documents still needed? Will send Molly an email with examples.
    - Dr Klote communicated that there is a coversheet completion guide that is being released.

Dr. Klote reports that she attended the OI&T Integration Board meeting, this is the board that sits above all of the capabilities management boards for OI&T. We are a member of the research and education capabilities management board, which includes Research, OAA, Innovations and EES (Enterprise Education Services) – discussing the ability to leverage research dollars for scientific computing, but not for cloud storage, but Jackie Bridges corrected me and said we were approved for cloud storage. If this is true, this will relieve a lot of issues. Will provide more details as they become available.

A new update is that ORD is also approved to purchase storage as a service with research dollars. We cannot buy hardware with research dollars, but the VAEC cloud storage space can be purchased. More to come as a process is developed to price this service and develop a mechanism to access it and track it.

## 6. Finance Updates

John M. Verwiel

Prior Year unobligated balances were mentioned to be at \$40M. Continuing resolution efforts continue to be monitored and impact on current year distribution amounts and obligation rate.

- **Announcement - Mr. Matthew Verna as the new Director of Finance**

We are thrilled to welcome Mr. Matthew Verna as the new Director of Finance of the Office of Research and Development (ORD) and thankful to Mr. John Verwiel for serving as the Acting Director in the interim. Mr. Verna has a financial background exceeding 25 years. Prior to coming to ORD, Mr. Verna served as the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) for the VA Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS) at Baltimore for the past 2 years. He was previously worked in the Office of Research & Development (ORD) as a Budget Analyst in the Finance Department, supporting the Cooperative Studies Program for 10 years. In addition to working for the Department of Veterans Affairs, Mr. Verna served in the United States Marine Corps (USMC) and worked for several private sector companies such as PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC), Northrop Grumman, and AECOM. Mr. Verna holds a Bachelor's degree in Accounting from Strayer University, and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Business Administration (MBA). Mr. Verna is originally from Rochester, NY and some of his favorite pastimes are taking family trips to the beach and participating in outdoor activities such as boating and nature walks.

## 7. ORD Field Update

Mitch Mirkin

- **Overview of VA Research Communications**

- ORD newsletter portal page at [VA ORD Newsletters](#) and attention was brought on the opportunity to click and subscribe to a variety of newsletters, including the relatively new internal newsletter *ORD Field Update*.
- [Special Interest Groups page](#) on the HSR&D website was discussed and it was noted that an effort is underway to create a similar landing page on the ORD website for SIGs encompassing all types of research represented across the VA Research enterprise, not just health services research.
- A new process is being piloted for publication notifications, based on VAIRRS (IRBNet). The pilot is underway at 16 sites, and feedback will be evaluated before the effort is expanded to additional pilot sites or rolled out nationwide. For the time-being, sites not involved in the pilot should continue to use the existing PubTracker process outlined at [Publication Notification \(va.gov\)](#).
- Share your news with us, for potential features, briefs, newsletter items, etc. (Email [mitch.mirkin@va.gov](mailto:mitch.mirkin@va.gov))

- **Centralized HR and Central Services Contract Update**

Tony Laracuenta

Research Classification – Research Coordinator – GS 11 601 health science specialist

Last week an email was sent to both facility Directors and Human Resource Officers implementing the use of a nationally classified GS-11 position. There are FAQs which provide guidelines on how to implement the position at each facility. Note that the position does not need classification or a new number. Please utilize the OF8 with the PD number on it and have the ACOS or designee sign. The position can be multi-encumbered. This position is mandated for any new hires of research coordinators that meet the qualifications outlined in the PD. You are encouraged to move existing coordinators to the new PD. Currently for a GS 9 research coordinator to be converted to a new appointment using the GS 11 PD, firstly verify that your project has enough funding to cover the cost since funds have already been allocated to support that project. New project submissions are encouraged to budget appropriately and use the new PD to recruit. The position information is posted at [Human Resources/Personnel \(va.gov\)](https://www.research.va.gov/humanresources/personnel). Questions can be directed to [Antonio.laracuenta03@va.gov](mailto:Antonio.laracuenta03@va.gov)

- **IT Updates**

Carl Grunfeld, MD

In the last year, there have been advances in IT driven by research that have benefited clinical and education. OAA has been a great partner in this area.

If you want Guest Wireless/EDUROAM and have not contacted me, please do so. Phase 3 is being scheduled, but it may be months away due to the chip shortage.

If you have ancient devices that run on 3G cellular, all cellular providers are disabling 3G and your device may not work. Cellular is often a backup for WiFi, so you will lose backup unless you upgrade.

Research-related Software continues to be pulled by OIT, often for contract or security reasons. For example, NVivo due to SQL versioning issues and C++. If you need such software for current, ongoing work, just file a POAM request on IT Service Now. Please keep me informed of similar software problems.

Computers are being re-named as research. Mine got changed to SFC-RL. Will allow assignment to prevent interruption of calculations or machine runs at time of security fixes and software upgrades. This is a major plus for research.

In the future, sensitive animal research data will be restricted mostly to images of animals in procedure categories D and E. That means derived data like blots will no longer be considered sensitive data. Stay tuned.

## **8. Service Funding Opportunities, Reviews and Updates**

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

Carol Fowler, PhD

The revised RFA (RD-22-029) for the 2022 ORD-wide Research Supplements to Promote Diversity was posted on December 14, 2021 and is available at <https://vaww.research.va.gov/funding/rfa.cfm>. The intent of these supplements is to

provide mentored research experiences for early career scientists from underrepresented populations. These will be offered as Type 3 supplements to active VA Merits funded by BLRD, CSRD, HSRD, and RRD, with at least two (2) years of funding remaining on the award at the time the supplement is funded.

- **Budget:** \$100,000/yr for up to 2 years
- **Due: February 1, 2022.** One application/yr from each VAMC.
- **Start date: April 1, 2022**
- **Applications will only be accepted through grants.gov and reviewed via eRA commons.**

An informational webinar and Q&A on this supplement opportunity was given on Thursday, December 16, 2021. The webinar recording, webinar slides and a link to the RFA is posted at: <https://www.research.va.gov/funding/diversity.cfm>  
For more information: [Carol.Fowler@va.gov](mailto:Carol.Fowler@va.gov).

- **Summer Research Program (SRP)**

ORD is pleased to announce an opportunity for VAMCs or VA-approved sites to pilot a Summer Research Program (SRP). The purpose of the Summer Research Program is to enhance the diversity of the biomedical, behavioral, clinical, health services and rehabilitative research workforce by providing research experiences and related opportunities that can enrich the pool of individuals from diverse backgrounds, including nationally underrepresented groups, veterans, children of veterans, and disabled individuals who will be available to compete for future research opportunities in the mission areas of importance to the VA.

#### LOI Submission Instructions

Please submit a letter of intent as an email to [vhacoorddeiwg@va.gov](mailto:vhacoorddeiwg@va.gov) by January 6, 2022. The LOI should include the PI's name, station, and approximate start date for your program. No additional details are required for the LOI.

#### Proposal Submission Instructions

Please submit the full proposal as a single PDF document from the ACOS/R to ORD Diversity Equity and Inclusion Working Group [vhacoorddeiwg@va.gov](mailto:vhacoorddeiwg@va.gov) by COB on **January 31, 2022**. Applications will be reviewed administratively to determine whether they meet the stated program intent in order to support the proposed program.

#### ORD Summer Research Program Question and Answer Webinar

*Date:* Tuesday, December 21, 2021

*Time:* 2:00 – 2:50PM EST

*Presenters:* Drs. Cendrine Robinson and Mark Roltsch, Scientific Program Managers, VA ORD, Co-Chairs ORD Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Working Group

*Target Audience:* VAMC R&D Service staff, VA PIs, and VA Administrators with an interest in this opportunity

## 9. Cross services announcements

Wendy Tenhula, PhD

- New Biographical Sketch

There is an updated version of the Biographical Sketch (OMB No. 0925-0001 and 0925-0002 (Rev. 10/2021 Approved Through 09/30/2024)) that will be **required for application submissions starting January 25, 2022.**

Investigators are encouraged to consider using the SciENcv application in My NCBI to develop and format your biosketch for NIH and VA application submissions. See [SciENcv - My NCBI Help - NCBI Bookshelf \(nih.gov\)](#).

- R&R Senior/Key Person Profile

All Senior/Key Personnel listed on the R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded) form on an application must enter a valid eRA Commons username (Commons ID) in the “Credential, e.g. agency login” field. **For application submission due dates on or after January 25, 2022, applicants will receive an error** that must be corrected in order to successfully submit the application. For details, see [NOT-OD-21-109](#).

- eRA Commons JIT

VA-ORD is moving to eRA Commons for Just in Time (JIT) effective January 1, 2022. Any application for which JIT has been initiated in the VA JIT Document Manager will complete JIT using that system. Awards that have compliance document requirements later in the project period (i.e., phased awards), will have terms and conditions, or milestones added to the eRA notice of award. Documentation for later phases can be uploaded through eRA Commons to the Grant Folder which also holds the documentation submitted through the JIT system.

Following an intent to award notification from eRA, VA-ORD will indicate the applicable JIT areas for the application in the eRA Commons JIT module. When JIT is released, a notification will then be sent to the applicant, who will be able to upload the necessary information in eRA Commons as a PDF, Word, Excel or one of several other allowable formats. Individuals with the Signing Official (SO) role can also upload documents and are the only individuals who can submit documents to VA-ORD on behalf of the research office and the applicant.

All JIT documents must be submitted within 180 days of the initial notification. The system will document all steps in the JIT review process and notify the applicant and SO by e-mail whenever there is a change in JIT area status or whenever the overall application status has changed. Reminder emails will be sent to the applicants at 90 days and 150 days after the initial notification.

We have arranged two (2) live training sessions with eRA for VA applicants and SOs. Please disseminate the below meeting information to your investigators and staff as appropriate. A recording from one of the sessions will also be made available. Please direct any questions to the VHA CO RDO ERA Mailbox.

### Training Sessions

**Wednesday, January 5, 2022 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM EST**

**Tuesday, January 11, 2022 2:30 AM – 3:30 PM EST**

### Ongoing Reminders Regarding eRA:

- All users will be required to switch by early 2022. For details, see Two-Factor Authentication: Accessing eRA Modules via login.gov.
- Federal-wide Unique Entity Identifier Implementation Update NOT-OD-21-170.

### • **BLR&D Updates**

Christopher T. Bever, Jr., MD

### FY 2022 RFAs

A reminder that RFAs for FY2022 were released on October 4.

### Fall Review Round

The fall round of review meetings have been completed. The stations are reminded that they and their investigators should not contact the Scientific Portfolio Managers about applications but should direct any questions to the Review Manager, Dr. Michael Burgio.

### Laboratory Animal Major (LAM) Equipment for FY22

BLR&D will accept request for Laboratory Animal Major (LAM) equipment for FY22 until **Jan 3, 2022**. All requests must be submitted to the mailbox, VACOInfrastructure@va.gov. Please refer to BLR&D webpage for information or write to Alex Chiu, alex.chiu@va.gov

### 2022 Middleton Award

Nominations – deadline **February 1, 2022**.

The Middleton award is BLR&D's highest honor for outstanding scientific achievement. We are looking for VA scientists whose research program has had a substantial real-world impact on the healthcare of Veterans. The nominee should stand head and shoulders above his/her peers in terms their impact on a research field of prime important to VA's mission.

All nomination packages must be submitted to the VHABLRD-CSR@va.gov mailbox by the research office before **February 1, 2022**.

The nomination instructions can be found on the Middleton website.



Middleton Website: [William S. Middleton Award \(va.gov\)](#)

Questions about the Middleton Award contact: [Kimberlee.potter@va.gov](mailto:Kimberlee.potter@va.gov)

### Clinician Scientist Investigator (CSI) Award

Nominations – deadline **January 5, 2022**

BLRD would like to invite clinician scientists with a competing renewal of their **BLRD Merit** under review for the Fall 2021 cycle to consider applying for a Clinician Scientist Investigator (CSI) Award. The CSI Award will allow for a Merit award extension of up to 2 additional years (for a total of 6 years) and up to 4 additional years (for a total of 8 years) for a Senior Clinician Scientist Investigator (SCSI) Award. All nomination packages must be submitted to the [VHABLRD-CSR@va.gov](mailto:VHABLRD-CSR@va.gov) mailbox by the research office before **January 5, 2022**.

The nomination instructions can be found on the CSI website.

CSI Website: <https://www.research.va.gov/services/blrd/csi.cfm>

Question about the CSI program contact: [Kimberlee.potter@va.gov](mailto:Kimberlee.potter@va.gov)

- **RR&D Updates**

Patricia A. Dorn, PhD

### Dr. Melissa Papesh featured on National Public Radio



National Public Radio's "All Things Considered" host Jon Hamilton interviewed Melissa Papesh, PhD, AuD, from RR&D National Center for Rehabilitative Auditory Research at Portland VA, and Northwestern University Researcher, Dr. Nina Kraus. The segment highlighted auditory processing problems that may occur after military exposures, such as blast or traumatic brain injury and the research conducted to evaluate these auditory problems.

To hear the interview: [Concussions don't necessarily affect ears — but they can affect the ability to hear : NPR](#)

### Documentary Series on Showtime

RR&D Advanced Platform Technology Center at Cleveland VA featured on Showtime VICE Documentary Series on Showtime (S2, E13, aired Dec 12, 2021) featured the motor and sensory neuroprosthesis programs at the Cleveland VAMC. The segment is called *Merging with Machines*, where VICE reporter Alice Hines meets cyborgs, neuroscientists

and tech pioneers to explore the rapidly blurring line between biology and technology and what it all means for humanity 2.0. If you have access to Showtime, check it out.

### Review Updates

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

#### *Fall 2021 – SPiRE:*

- NEW RFA published – June 30, 2021
- Pre-application (LOI and waiver request) deadline – August 2, 2021
- Last possible award application submission deadline (no changed/corrected applications after this date) – September 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 – October 22, 2021
- Scores and Summary Statements released – November 15, 2021
- Intent-to-Fund notifications – December 6, 2021

#### *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-Fund 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-Fund notifications – Late May 2022

- **CSR&D Updates**

Terri Gleason, PhD

Just-In-Time (JIT) Reminders

As there is a transition to managing JIT requirements in 2022 with eRA JIT, it is critical that projects in VA JIT (from Spring 2021 and older projects in VA JIT) needs to clear. There are 32 CSR&D projects (across cycles Spring 2021, Fall 202, Spring 2020) with action still needed from the station. This includes steps that can be taken to meet requirements even before the final assurance document is submitted, including the PI Assurance, Other Support documents, Miscellaneous documents can be completed and uploaded for ORD approval while other regulatory documents (IRB etc.) are still pending Committee Review. Please take a look now to see what else can be cleared by your JIT submissions.

Requirements for Clinicaltrials.gov Registrations

Help is requested from Research Offices in reminding all investigators who are managing clinical trials with clinicaltrials.gov registrations, that there are time limited deadlines that must be adhered to, including posting results. While we can work with you in managing the timing of final report of results, every registration, by law, must be closed out at the conclusion of the trial, even when the trial is terminated early. These registration requirements are dictated by law, and thus, should an investigator not complete timely requirements, notices will be issued that the individual may not submit for funding to any ORD research service if the requirements are not met. We support all clinicaltrials.gov efforts with reminders, pleas, and other communication so we do not have to take drastic step of disallowing submission of applications for funding. Thank you all in advance for meeting this important requirement.

New Staff

Ryan Schumacher began formally with CSR&D on 12/20/21. Ryan comes via the Minneapolis VA Research Office, where he gained much experience in research administration. Ryan had previously detailed with CSR&D, when he established the first CSR&D Newsletter and email distribution list. We look forward to great contributions from Ryan, and with thanks to Minneapolis as well!