



**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
**OFFICE OF RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT**  
**PROGRAM GUIDE 1203.00**  
**REHABILITATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICE**

As of May 14, 2020, the Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D) Directive 1203.00, have been replaced with this Program Guide. This Program Guide replaces all prior official ORD guidance to the RR&D Program.

**ISSUANCE DATE: May 14, 2020**

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## 1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Program Guide provides an overview of policy for programs of the Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D) and serves as a guide to additional sources for program-specific information and procedures.

## 2. BACKGROUND

a. RR&D in VHA is an intramural program administered by the Office of Research and Development (ORD) and conducted at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities nationwide under the authority of Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.), 7303.

b. RR&D's mission is to advance scientific knowledge and foster innovations to maximize Veterans' functional independence, quality of life and participation in their lives and community. RR&D also invests in building rehabilitation research capacity and developing the next generation of VA rehabilitation researchers.

c. RR&D integrates clinical, preclinical, and applied rehabilitation research to enable translation into clinical practice to improve the health and wellbeing of Veterans and the nation. To meet the RR&D mission, rehabilitation research may restore, replace, or return Veterans' function to improve their quality of life:

(1) Restore the structure and function of body tissues impaired by injury or disease through pioneering research to maximize Veterans' physical, psychological, and social function.

(2) Replace damaged body tissues and functions with innovative approaches to allow Veterans to achieve the best quality of life possible.

(3) Return Veterans with disabling conditions to full and productive lives by moving discoveries into health care practice.

## 3. POLICY

It is VHA policy that ORD allocate appropriated research funds to VA medical facilities for scientifically meritorious research related to the high priority health care needs of Veterans to be conducted by VA employees. The requirements of any policies and operational procedures formulated in conjunction with this Program Guide apply to all RR&D activities conducted at VA facilities and/or by VA investigators, whether funded by VA or by other sources, or unfunded. See VHA Directive 1200 and VHA 1200 series Directives for further guidance.

## 4. PROCEDURE

a. Proposals submitted to RR&D may include clinical, preclinical or applied rehabilitation research to enable translation into clinical practice to maximize Veterans'

functional independence, quality of life and participation in their lives and community. Proposals are reviewed by Subcommittees called Scientific Review Groups (SRGs) <https://www.rehab.research.va.gov/guid/meritreview.html>.

b. ORD makes research awards to its investigators. ORD does not have the statutory authority to make research grants to colleges and universities, cities and states, or any other non-VA entities. Contracts may be awarded for R&D purposes when the VA medical facility's R&D program cannot provide the services needed in order to accomplish specific R&D goals and objectives. See VHA Directive 1200.02.

NOTE: Information regarding submission process, review process and general award information will be posted and updated as necessary at [www.rehab.research.va.gov](http://www.rehab.research.va.gov).

## 5. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. **Chief Research and Development Officer.** The Chief Research and Development Officer (CRADO) is responsible for the overall policy, planning, coordination, and direction of all Research and Development (R&D) activities within VHA. See VHA Directive 1200.00.

b. **Director, RR&D.** The Director, RR&D, has overall authority and responsibility to direct, plan, and manage the ongoing operations of the Service and is responsible to the CRADO, through the Deputy CRADO, for maximizing the physical and social autonomy of Veterans and ultimately the general population through innovative research that enables translation into clinical practice to improve the health and wellbeing of Veterans and the nation.

c. **VA Medical Facility Director.** The VA Medical Facility Director is responsible for all aspects of the research program and ensuring the R&D Committee, the Associate Chief of Staff (ACOS) for R&D or Coordinator for R&D (C for R&D), Administrative Officer (AO) for R&D, and the Veterinary Medical Officer follow the policies and procedures defined in VHA Directive 1200.02. NOTE: The term VA medical facility Director includes medical center Director and Chief Executive Officer or other equivalent titles.

d. **Associate Chief of Staff (ACOS) for R&D.** The ACOS/R&D is responsible for the day-to-day activities of the facility-based research program and reports through the COS to the VA medical facility Director. The ACOS/R&D also serves as the Executive Secretary of the R&D Committee. NOTE: In small programs lacking an ACOS/R&D, the C for R&D assumes these responsibilities.

e. **Principal Investigator (PI).** The PI is responsible for research integrity, specifically, accepted standards of rational experimental research design, accurate data recording, unbiased reporting of data, respect for the intellectual property of other investigators, adherence to established ethical codes, legal standards for the protection of human and animal subjects, and proper management of research funds, also acknowledging VA research support (see VHA Directive 1200.19, Presentation of

Research Results), compliance with VA policies regarding intellectual property disclosure obligations and Federal Government ownership rights resulting from the proposed work (see VHA Directive 1200.18, Determination of Rights for Inventions and Discoveries), and compliance with requirements related to submission of annual progress reports, Research Performance Progress Reports (RPPRs), final RPPRs, clinical trials registration and results reporting.

## 6. DEFINITIONS

a. **Career Development Program.** The RR&D Research Career Development (RCD) Program is an award series under which both clinically and non-clinically trained researchers may gain mentored research and protected time intended to advance awardees toward independence as funded VA investigators. The fundamental objective of the RR&D RCD Program is to attract, develop, and retain talented researchers. This will build RR&D's capacity to conduct research in areas of high relevance to the VHA healthcare system and fulfill its primary mission of patient care, supported by appropriate research and education. See ORD Program Guide 1200.04 for further guidance.

b. **Merit Review Program.** The RR&D Investigator Initiated Research (IIR) Merit Review Program relies on a system of peer review based on the tenets of scientific rigor, integrity, confidentiality, and impartiality and is the principal mechanism through which RR&D ensures it supports the best science most relevant to Veterans. The recommendation of a review subcommittee, in the form of narrative comments and an assigned scientific priority score, guide the funding decisions of VA research administrators. The RR&D IIR Review Program also provides the foundation for effective communication with applicants for RR&D research support. Reviewers' assessments and suggestions are shared with applicants to help them understand the subcommittee's recommendation, to improve already strong projects, and to assist applicants eligible to revise and resubmit their application. See RR&D Program Guide 1203.01 for further guidance.

c. **Research Career Scientist Program.** The RR&D Research Career Scientist (RCS) Program is a highly selective program designed to sustain and enhance the research careers of established non-clinician scientists who have demonstrated commitment to VA rehabilitation research. The program is intended to provide recognition and research support for non-clinician scientists in VA. Non-clinician scientists contribute to the VA research programs by sharing scientific knowledge, as well as serving as mentors for clinician and non-clinician investigators. They provide important expertise that complements the research programs of the clinical staff. See ORD Program Guide 1200.20 for further guidance.

d. **Research Enhancement Award Program.** Funds provided under this program are for maintaining or creating a core program of investigators to support and facilitate the development of RR&D research projects and the training and mentoring of early career stage/level RR&D investigators. The goal of this program is to increase RR&D's capacity by assisting VA sites that show promise, as demonstrated by a history of

RR&D peer reviewed research and career development funding but do not have a co-located RR&D Center with similar research objectives. See RR&D Program Guide 1203.04 for further guidance.

e. **Centers.** Centers are established in VA medical facilities to conduct R&D in areas of special relevance to the rehabilitative health care needs of Veterans. It is anticipated that Centers will establish and cultivate a community of VA clinical scientists and scholars within the VA healthcare system for the purpose of pursuing specific research objectives in accordance with a well-reasoned 5-year plan. They are selected competitively, based upon scientific review and the specific criteria and procedures outlined in the solicitation for proposals. Centers are intended to be a resource, first, for the Veterans served by VA and, second, for the rehabilitation community at large. They are expected to provide cutting edge solutions to the issues of chronic impairment. See RR&D Program Guide 1203.04 for further guidance.

f. **Small Projects in Rehabilitation Research Program.** Small Projects in Rehabilitation Research (SPiRE) Awards are RR&D's mechanism for funding research that is smaller in scope (i.e., less time and resource intensive). These projects may have high risk, but high potential impact and may include applications from early career stage/level investigators (i.e., an investigator who has not previously competed successfully for a nationally peer-reviewed research award other than a career development or small research award), or senior investigators seeking to explore new research approaches in areas where they have not previously been funded or published. The intent of this award mechanism is for SPiRE projects to ultimately lead to full Merit award application submissions. Preference is given to scientifically sound applications from early career stage investigators. Preliminary data are not a prerequisite for submission. See RR&D Program Guide 1203.01 for further guidance.

g. **Magnuson Award.** Paul B. Magnuson, M.D., was a bone and joint surgeon who continuously sought new treatments and devices for assisting his patients as they faced unique situations presented by their disability. The Magnuson award was established in 1998 in recognition of the importance of rehabilitation research within the VA healthcare system. It is the highest honor for VA rehabilitation investigators. It consists of a one-time cash award to the recipient, supplemental funding for ongoing peer-reviewed research, and a celebratory plaque. The 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 is presented by the RR&D Director or designee at an appropriate scientific meeting or event. See RR&D Program Guide 1203.06 for further guidance.