Biomedical Laboratory Research & Development (BLRD)

Guidance for Submission of a Letter of Intent for a Validation Merit Award

I. Introduction

The application process for a BLRD Validation Merit Review application begins with the preparation and submission of a Letter of Intent (LOI). **The primary purpose of the LOI is to provide BLRD with the opportunity to determine whether the proposed studies fit within the purview of the validation RFA and if the proposed studies will address a critically important area of concern that is prevalent in the Veteran population**.

II. Purpose

The purpose of this RFA is to allow BLRD to fund studies which validate published results which are of high importance to Veteran health. Applications submitted to this RFA should be for validation of published studies involving animal models, human biological samples collected using minimally invasive procedures, previously acquired tissue specimens or previously acquired phenotypic and -omic data. The original study should meet a high scientific standard, must have important implications in terms of the etiology, pathogenesis, and/or genetics of service related illness and injury in or illnesses which are more common in US military Veterans, and a clear translational potential to improve the current clinical care of Veterans. Applications will also be accepted to validate unpublished omics data from one large population to another large population and to validate novel therapeutic targets from an unpublished rigorously conducted scientific study that may result in the development of new treatments for service related illness and injury.. Prior to submitting an application, investigators should submit an invention disclosure to VA-Technology Transfer Program for proposals that may result in new inventions (therapeutics, diagnostics, etc.).

Note: Clearly defined milestones and timelines with Go/No-Go criteria are required in a BLRD Drug Development Merit Review application.

Veteran related health topics responsive to this announcement include, but are not limited to:

- Long- and short-term consequences of military environmental exposures (e.g., burn pits) relevant to deployment in Iraq and Afghanistan
- Spinal cord injury (SCI)
- Traumatic brain injury (TBI)
- Polytrauma
- Post-traumatic epilepsy
- Vision and/or hearing deficits related to blast injury
- Burns

- Fracture Repair
- Chronic pain related to neurotrauma
- Wound Healing
- Mood and anxiety disorders (including depression, PTSD, acute stress disorder, etc.)

III. Studies appropriate for this RFA are studies that:

1. Replicate published findings from an animal model from a rigorously conducted study in to an alternate model, including a larger animal model, of the same disease/condition to de-risk the future decisions to proceed with additional drug development studies, IND/IDE-enabling studies, and clinical trials for an important disease/condition affecting Veteran health. Note that this RFA is not for validation of small unpublished studies or for mechanistic studies of unpublished or published findings.
2. Replicate -omic findings which are important to Veteran health (such as, identification of new diagnostic/prognostic biomarkers, novel therapeutic candidate) from one large population (such as MVP) in a second large sample. Note that this RFA does not fund the collection of -omic data but only funds studies involving existing data sets and samples.
3. Validate novel targets having a clear translational and therapeutic potential to develop new treatments for service related illness, in another model of the same human disease/conditions, to de-risk the future decisions to proceed with additional drug development studies, IND/IDE-enabling studies, and clinical trials.
4. Development and validation of a new animal model for a Veteran health condition (see the list of included conditions above) that is lacking an effective animal model, or to replace an existing primate-, canine- or feline-model for a Veteran health condition.
5. Development and Validation of tissue culture models of diseases important in the Veterans population to replace currently used animal models for Veteran health condition.

IV. Studies that are not appropriate for this RFA are studies that are:

- Hypothesis driven validation of preliminary results and studies extending findings from one disease/condition to another disease/condition are not appropriate for this RFA and can be submitted under other RFAs.
- Unable to de-risk the future decisions to proceed with additional drug development studies, IND/IDE-enabling studies, clinical trials, or clinical care Veterans.
- Merit award applications that could be submitted under other RFAs from investigators lacking BLRD eligibility.
- Merit award applications that could be submitted under other RFAs from investigators who wish to access the higher budget cap of this RFA.

V. LOI Approval Considerations

- The proposed project must fall within the BLRD purview and represents one of the five types of studies supported by this RFA as described above.
- The proposed project must have translational potential for the improvement of the healthcare of Veterans, or an individually tailored treatment that will directly improve the healthcare of Veterans.
- The proposed project must have the potential for commercial licensing and to be developed further for clinical use.
- The proposed project must address Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) investigator eligibility. Non-clinician PD/PIs are not required to apply for eligibility for this RFA only but must have a 5/8ths VA paid position at the time of application; a promise of employment after funding or WOC appointment is not a sufficient qualification to apply for this RFA.
- The proposed project provides BLRD an opportunity to plan for appropriate resources that allow for an efficient and effective review process.

VI. Components of the LOI Submission

LOIs must be submitted using the following template. Each LOI must contain the following three required components (A-C):

A. VHA Research & Development Letter of Intent Cover Page (VA Form 10-1313-13)

This form is available on the forms page of the VA Research website.

B. Completed LOI Template

The template is available on the BLRD webpage. Please clearly and succinctly address **all** of the requirements.

C. PI's Biographical Sketch

The biographical sketch template is available on the VA Research Intranet. If you cannot access the intranet, please contact your local research office.

VII. Submission of the LOI

BLRD will review and respond to submitted LOIs at any time; however, an LOI must be submitted no later than the date specified in the RFA. LOIs must be e-mailed to VHABLRD-CSRD@va.gov by the local VA facility research office. Applicants may not upload LOIs directly to the mailbox. Questions relating to the LOI preparation and submission process may also be directed to VHABLRD-CSRD@va.gov. **Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit LOIs as early as possible.**

LOIs with the following issues will be administratively withdrawn:

- Multiple submissions on behalf of the same PI;
- LOIs lacking the requisite information;
- LOIs submitted by investigators who are not eligible to receive VA funding.

LOIs meeting all of the administrative requirements are subject to disapproval if:

- Lacking in innovation/impact;
- Do not fall within the purview of BLRD and/or research priority area;
- Are overly represented by ongoing ORD-funded studies;

VIII. Approval

The LOI approval letter must be submitted with the full application package (in the Letters of Support attachment, 08b_VA_Letters.pdf). **A submitted validation application must not deviate significantly in specific aims from the original approved validation trial LOI. BLRD may administratively withdraw from review any application that substantially deviates from what was described and approved at the LOI stage.**

An approved validation application LOI is valid for a maximum of three (3) submissions of an application (initial submission and up to two resubmissions) during a period that encompasses four (4) ***consecutive*** review cycles following the initial approval of the LOI.

Effective: October 2019