TIPS ON PREPARING YOUR RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST APPLICATION

NEW RCS APPLICANTS

The RCS panel is looking for VA investigators who have contributed significantly to enhance the research environment at their local VA. Typically first time RCS awardees have at least one competitively renewed Merit Review application. While the RCS Program Guide 1200.20 states that the applicant must have Merit funding at the time of their application the panel would like to see that the applicant's research funding extends beyond the first year of the RCS award to ensure that the applicant will have the requisite research funds to support a very strong mid-term progress report.

APPLICATION REVIEW

Applications are competitively reviewed by a panel composed of RCS/SRCS/ACOS/clinician scientists embedded in the VA. The RCS panel is convened before the Merit Review cycle (May and November). Applicants are reminded to highlight contributions to the VA in each review category. For new RCS applications, the reviewers look at the current career trajectory. For renewal applications, reviewers are most interested in data from the previous funding cycle (5 years for RCS or 7 years for SRCS). Each application is evaluated on the following criteria: (1) Research Contributions; (2) Collaborations; (3) Mentoring/Training; (4) Administrative Service; and (5) Professional stature.

1. RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

In your 1-page research statement describe the significance of your research to the VA healthcare mission.

Federal and Non-Federal Funding
   a. Provide funding agency name, grant title, your role (e.g., PI, co-PI, Co-I), time frame of grant, budget.
   b. Specify here and in mentoring and collaboration sections, which mentees are PIs or Co-Is on your grants, e.g., highlight names.
   c. Provide information regarding pending grants

Publications
   a. Peer-reviewed publications underline applicant's name and highlight VA collaborators and mentees.
   b. Reviews, chapters, edited volumes, books
   c. Provide some index of publications' impact where possible.

2. COLLABORATIONS

Specify in your 7-page Research Plan the total number of collaborations in the following categories and the names of past and current collaborators in separate sections. Collaborations with VA clinicians and other VA scientists are highly valued.

    a. Time frame of each collaboration
    b. Specify whether new or long term collaborators
    c. Differentiate VA and Non-VA collaborations
    d. Specify whether collaborations are with local or non-local investigators
    e. For each of the people named specify research outcomes, e.g. funded grants, publications with collaborators names bolded.

3. MENTORING & TRAINING

Specify the total number of mentees according to the following categories (junior faculty, postdoctoral fellow, graduate students, residents and fellow, undergraduate students, career development awardees) with the names of each of the past and current mentees in separate sections. Mentoring of VA career development awardees is especially valued.

    a. Time frame of each mentoring relationship
    b. Specify whether new or long term mentoring relationship
    c. Differentiate VA and Non-VA mentees
    d. For each of the people named specify concrete outcomes, e.g. dissertation completed, publications, grants obtained, positions obtained, again when providing publications bold mentees' names; specify if you are the primary mentor.
    e. Specify leadership roles in training (e.g., PI of a training grant, Director of Training in GRECC)

Specify the total number of courses, lectures, and/or any educational leadership (e.g., course director) in graduate programs of any type (Ph.D., M.D., Internship, Residency Program)

    a. Provide the number of lectures per year and years of lectures provided
    b. Differentiate whether teaching at the VA or University affiliate

4. ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICE

Specify local and national research administration contributions with emphasis on the applicant's VA commitment, duration of service, and leadership roles. Sustained service to the local and national VA research program is considered essential.

Local Service:
    a. Research and Development Committee
    b. Human Studies Committee (IRB)

     c.   Animal Studies Committee (IACUC)
     d.   Research Biosafety Committee
     e.   University faculty selection committee
     f.   University rank and tenure committees

National Service:
     a.   Ad-hoc or regular membership on VA Merit Review Boards
     b.   Specialized committees for scientific or program review
     c.   Ad-hoc or regular membership on NIH study sections or councils or other national peer-review groups.

5. PROFESSIONAL STATURE

Highlight areas of scientific recognition to help reviewers with the SRCS determination, given the level has higher research productivity, leadership and national service expectations.

     a.   Peer recognition for developing an important body of work evidenced by strong national and international letters of recommendation
     b.   Invited lectures and invited reviews or commentary publications
     c.   Membership on editorial or national advisory boards
     d.   Leadership role on multidisciplinary research partnerships and consortiums
     e.   Election to scientific societies
     f.   Honor and Awards

GENERAL COMMENTS

Letters of support (for new RCS applications ONLY) should come from scientists who are NOT at your VA medical center or members of the faculty at the affiliate medical school. Letters should be from recognized leaders in your research area, including internationally recognized experts and should be generated within 6 months of the application deadline.

AWARD APPROVAL PROCESS

RCS awards are approved by the Service Directors based on the overall score and two votes. The overall score is a synthesis of scores from the five review criteria and is the combined evaluation of the applicant's scientific accomplishments and VA citizenship. The first vote is to recommend the award at the RCS level. The second vote is to recommend advancement to the SRCS level. Note: Decisions made by the Service Director are not subject to appeal.

TIMETABLE FOR SUBMISSION AND REVIEW

     a.   Deadline for receipt of applications is March and September (See RFA for Dates).
     b.   Committee review of applications will be in June and December.
     c.   Approvals will be sent out by July and January

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

The RCS program should not be confused with the Promotions process. Your S/RCS award provides salary support at your current grade level. To be promoted to GS14 and above, you must submit a promotions package to ORD (see: https://www.research.va.gov/resources/centralized_positions.cfm). A SRCS award is not a promotion to GS15, it is a recommendation by the panel that your RCS award period be extended from 5 to 7 years. When you submit a renewal application, the panel recommends the level of the award (RCS or SRCS) based on productivity during your last award period.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

As the RCS program manager, it is my job is to make sure that the accomplishments of our S/RCS awardees get highlighted in the ORD Annual report. Please do not hesitate to share exciting developments in your research program or reasons why your research productivity might be impacted. I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

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