Research Career Scientist
Frequently Asked Questions

I. RCS PROGRAM QUESTIONS

Q. Where can I find more information about ORD's RCS program?

A. For more information about the RCS program, please refer to [ORD Program Guide 1200.20](). For updated instructions on applying for the RCS award, please refer to the appropriate service RFA posted on the VA intranet site [http://vaww.research.va.gov/funding/rfa.cfm]().

Q. What is the deadline for the receipt of RCS applications?

A. Deadlines for the receipt of RCS applications are posted on the ORD submission calendar and in the RCS RFA.

Q. I need to prepare a RCS application, where do I find the most up-to-date application information?

A. Please refer to the BL/CSRD RCS RFAs on the [VA intranet site]() for information about the electronic submission of RCS applications.

Q: How can we ensure the applicant is "eligible" for a RCS award?

A: Eligible applicants must meet the following criteria:

- Applicant must be a non-clinician with a minimum 5/8th salaried VA appointment.
- Applicant must hold a current, competitively funded BLR&D or CSR&D Merit award or is currently a S/RCS awardee.
- Applicant must have an active research program in a VA designated laboratory for at least the previous three years.
- Applicant must have served as a principal investigator (not as a co-investigator) on a nationally peer-reviewed research grant (VA, DoD, NIH, NSF, etc.) for a minimum of six years prior to submitting a RCS application.

II. RCS APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Q: What should be submitted in the budget pages for a RCS application?

A. Please complete the budget period for the 5-year RCS award period and as part of the Budget Justification, include a Budget Summary Worksheet.

Q: Is there a limit to the number of RCS applications submitted by a station during a fiscal year?

A: Each station is allowed to submit 2 (new or revised) RCS applications per service (BLRD or CSRD) during a fiscal year. This limit does not include renewal applications.

Q. What documents are required from the applicant's eRA grant application as proof of VA support? Do I need to complete VA Forms for grants which were submitted electronically?
A: For currently funded VA Merit proposals submit:

- The Specific Aims page
- The overall budget page and the budget justification
- Other Support page with the updated information about the applicant's current funding status and % effort. Please include VA and non-VA funded and pending applications on this page.

Q. What is the page limit for my Research Statement?

A. Your Research statement is limited to one page and should describe the impact of your research on the VA's healthcare mission.

Q. How do I apply for a SRCS award?

A. Consideration for a SRCS award is based on the recommendation of the RCS Review panel and is awarded at the discretion of the Service Director.

Q. If I receive a SRCS award, do I also receive a promotion to GS15?

A. No, promotions are a separate and distinct process. You must submit a promotion application for consideration for promotion to GS-14 or GS-15. Please refer to the Centralized Positions page on our website.

Q. Do letters of recommendation have to be written by VA staff, affiliated staff, or by colleagues from outside organizations?

A. RCS applicants are encouraged to request letters of recommendation from recognized leaders in the applicant's research area, including internationally recognized experts and should be generated within 6 months of the application deadline. It is preferable that letters come from outside the applicant's VA or affiliated medical school.

Q: To whom should the letters of support be addressed?

A. Letters of support should be addressed to the appropriate Service Director

III. MID-TERM PROGRESS REPORT QUESTIONS

Q. Exactly what documents are required for the mid-term progress report?

A. A completed fillable Mid-Term Progress Report Form; the awardee's current CV; and a letter of support signed by the ACOS for Research.

Q. Will I be notified when my mid-term report is due?

A. A reminder e-mail for S/RCS renewals and mid-term progress reports is sent out 60 days before the submission deadline as a courtesy to our S/RCS awardees.

Q. Do I need the Medical Center Director or Chief of Staff's signature on the RCS Mid-Term Report?

A. The only signature required on the RCS Mid-Term Report is that of the ACOS.

Q. I will be retiring when my S/RCS award ends. Do I still need to submit a mid-term progress report?

A. All S/RCS awardees are expected to submit a mid-term progress report.

IV. RCS RENEWAL QUESTIONS

Q. We are finalizing a RCS renewal application and we need to include the mid-term evaluation report. Can we request a copy of the awardee's mid-term evaluation report?

A. To request a copy of the awardee's mid-term evaluation report, send an e-mail request to the RCS mailbox: rcs.materials@va.gov and in the Subject line: Mid-Term Progress Report Request, the name of the awardee and the station.

Q. My Merit Review award ends 6 months after my RCS renewal application is due. Do you think this would hurt my chances of keeping my RCS?

A. The lack of national peer-reviewed research funding beyond the start date of the RCS award is detrimental to the success of a RCS application. The applicant is advised to secure research funding before submitting an application for a RCS award.

Q. Will I be notified if my RCS Award will be ending?

A. You can expect to receive a renewal reminder before your RCS award is due to end. Please respond to this e-mail if you will NOT be renewing your RCS award or if your station has changed.

V. EVALUATION OF RCS APPLICATIONS

Q. How are the applications for the RCS awards evaluated?

A. Each RCS application is assigned two reviewers and the reviewers provide a written critique for the following five review criteria: (1) Research Contributions; (2) Collaborations; (3) Mentoring/Training; (4) Administrative Service; and (5) Professional stature. Applications are discussed and scored by all panel members, except by those members who are in conflict. Each application receives a priority score and two votes. The first vote is to recommend the award at the RCS level. The second vote is to recommend advancement to the SRCS level.

Q. How is the overall score of an RCS application determined? Is the final score the mean or weighted sum of the different evaluation categories?

A. The overall RCS score is the combined evaluation of the applicant as a scientist as well as their VA citizenship. Weak applicants can be excellent scientists but poor VA citizens or excellent VA citizens but only moderately productive scientists.

Q. Can I submit supplemental information while my RCS application is under review?

A. The most important supplemental information you can provide is information about pending grant submissions and the status of journal publications under review when the application was submitted. Supplemental information must be submitted to the RCS mailbox: rcs.materials@va.gov by the applicant's research office.

VI. RCS AWARD TIMELINE

Q: What is the process after the panel meets and final scores are released?

A. RCS Review Panel recommendations are reviewed by the Service Directors in consultation with the Scientific Program Managers before a final funding decision is made. The research office will receive an official notification of the decision made by the Service Director, which is not subject to appeal.

Q. My RCS application was submitted at the start of the Merit Review cycle. When can I expect to hear if my RCS application will be funded?

A. The RCS Review panel is convened in November/May and determination letters are transmitted to the field in December/June.

Q: If the applicant is not selected for a RCS is some reason provided?   Is there anyone I can speak to?

A. The field notification memo provides the applicant with feedback on areas requiring improvement. For additional feedback, please contact the RCS Program Manager indicated in this memo.

Q. If I submit my S/RCS renewal early, when will the award take effect?

A. The start date of S/RCS applications received September 1/March 1 will be April 1/October 1.

VII. POST-AWARD MODIFICATIONS

Q: If I transfer to another site, does my S/RCS transfer with me?

A: Like any other ORD funded project, a station transfer must be requested using the ORD Request for Administrative Project Modification form, available on our website. The justification text must include the following information:

- Details about the PI's new research situation at the new station (including VA eights) and (if applicable) the academic rank and tenure status at the affiliated institution.

- A list of possible collaborators and opportunities for training and mentoring at the new station
- A list of the awardee's administrative activities at the new station; and
- A copy of the awardee's MOU between the new station and the academic affiliate clearly indicating the level of professional effort and their time commitment at each institution.
- If transferring a VA Merit award then the appropriate ACOS assurance documents must be attached as well as any off-site requests.