How to Apply for Research Funding
VA Office of Research and Development (VA-ORD)
Investigators, Scientific Review, and Management (ISRM) Portfolios

Purpose: VA-ORD has reorganized its Research Services into Broad Portfolios (BPs), Actively Managed Portfolios (AMPs) and Programs. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to field investigators and research office staff on how to apply for ISRM research awards.

Key Documents

Notices of Special Interest (NOSIs). NOSIs describe the topics the portfolios are interested in supporting. A NOSI can be supported by a single portfolio or multiple portfolios (a cross-portfolio NOSI). The portfolio(s) supporting a NOSI are listed as Participating VA-ORD Research Portfolios in the NOSI. NOSIs published by the BPs will tend to solicit a broad range of research topics while NOSIs published by AMPs and Programs will tend to solicit very specific research topics. NOSIs also list the Requests for Applications (RFAs) that can be applied to through that NOSI. Some NOSIs support research applications for a wide variety of RFAs while others only solicit for a limited number of RFAs.

Requests for Applications (RFAs). RFAs define the type of the award (Merit Review Award, Pilot Project, Career Development, etc.), application requirements, budget cap, duration, review criteria, and submission deadlines. RFAs do not define the research topics being solicited – these are described in the NOSIs. There are two types of RFAs, Pre-application RFAs and full research application RFAs. Pre-application RFAs replace previous Letters of Intent (LOI) and Intent to Submit (ITS) requirements. Pre-applications are reviewed by program staff to ensure the proposed project fits the purview(s) of the NOSI, portfolio, and Scientific Review Group (SRG) requested. Waiver requests (eligibility, budget cap/duration, full-offsite) must be submitted with the Pre-application. Some Pre-application RFAs have submission due dates approximately six (6) weeks before the full research application submission due date, while other Pre-applications have due dates approximately three (3) months before the full research application due date. Carefully check the Deadline, Review and Award Dates table in each RFA to confirm due dates before submitting an application. All full research applications must be preceded by an approved Pre-application and the Pre-application notice of approval included in the full research application as an appendix.

ISRM Scientific Review Group (SRG) Purviews and Review Cycles. This document describes the purview of each SRG, which BP each SRG is organized under, and the review cycles (Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall) during which each SRG convenes. Each Pre-application asks for the applicant's SRG preference, defined by the research topic of the application and the purview of the SRG. The SRG selected will in turn define the cycle(s) when the application can be submitted. For example, if an investigator requests RRD1 as their SRG then they must submit for the Winter or Summer cycles as that is when the SRG meets. If an investigator requests NURC as their SRG then they must submit in the Spring or Fall cycles.

VA-ORD Application Guide SF 424 (R&R). This document provides detailed instructions on how to apply to ISRM RFAs. While the VA-ORD SF 424 has not been updated to reflect the change from services to portfolios, the mechanics of submitting an application are largely unchanged. Until the VA-ORD SF 424 is

updated, instructions in the RFAs supersede instructions in the VA-ORD SF 424 and include any additional instructions necessary to apply through a portfolio NOSI.

Selecting the Appropriate NOSI, RFA, Portfolio, and SRG for an ISRM Award Application

When developing an ISRM research award application, investigators need to determine which NOSI, RFA, and portfolio to apply to as well as their SRG request. Figure 1 outlines a suggested order of operations for making these decisions.

Figure 1. Selecting the appropriate NOSI, RFA, Portfolio, and SRG.

The following is a detailed description of each step:

1. **Select NOSI.** Review the published NOSIs to determine if your research topic falls within the purview of one or more of these notices.
2. **Select RFA**. Each NOSI lists the RFAs that can be applied to through that NOSI. Some funding opportunities are not available through all NOSIs. For example, the CDA2 RFA is not available through most AMP NOSIs. If the NOSI selected in Step 1 does not support the RFA the applicant is interested in, then they should find another NOSI that fits their purview and supports the activity code they are interested in. There is some overlap between NOSI purviews, generally, at least one of the BP NOSI purviews will include any research topic with Veteran relevance.
3. **Select Portfolio.** NOSIs can have one or more participating portfolios. The portfolios participating in each NOSI are listed under "Participating ORD Research Portfolio(s)" in the NOSI documents. When applying to a cross-portfolio NOSI (one that lists multiple participating portfolios) you will have to indicate which portfolio you are applying to in the Pre-application. Use the portfolio purview statements (see below) to determine which portfolio best fits your research topic. You can only apply to one (1) NOSI in an application.
4. **Select SRG.** Review the ISRM SRG Purviews and Review Cycles document. Using the SRG purview statements, determine which SRG would be best qualified to review the full research application. Even though SRGs are organized under BPs, the choice of SRG is independent from the NOSI and portfolio choices. It is possible that an application responding to the Rehabilitation Research, Development and Translation (NOT-RD-01-RDT) NOSI could be reviewed by a SRG organized under the Brain, Behavioral and Mental Health (BMH) portfolio (for example NURC). *This is the key selection that determines the review* **cycles** *the application can be submitted.*

Submitting an ISRM Award Application

The process for submitting an ISRM award application is outlined below. Pre-applications have replaced previous ITS and LOI requirements. If a project has a previously approved ITS or LOI, a Pre-application is still required. Previously approved waivers will be honored. Waiver approval memos must be included in the Pre-application attachment and in the Letters of Support attachment of the full research application. Applications, including resubmissions, must adhere to the budget, duration, eligibility, and all other requirements in the ISRM RFAs - previous budget caps, including salary support for the PI(s), will not be

grandfathered in. Applications requiring budgets above cap must submit a budget waiver request with the Pre-application.

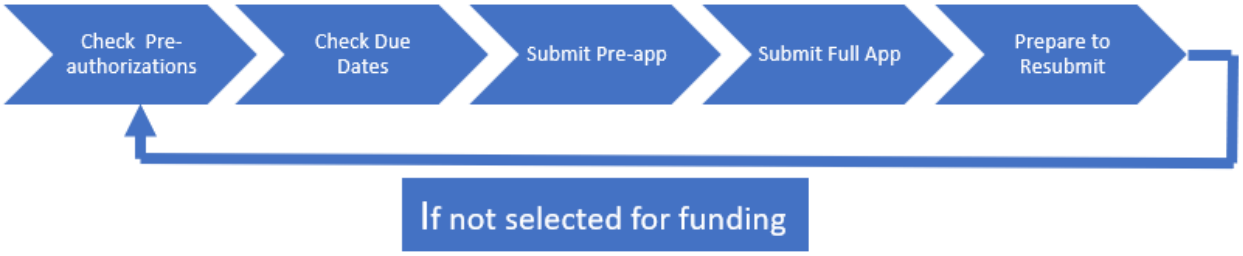

Figure 2. Major steps for submitting an ISRM award application.

The following is a detailed description of each step:

1. **Check for Pre-authorizations.** Some projects will require prior authorization before submitting a Pre-application. This includes new, non-clinician investigators submitting to the Brain, Behavioral & Mental Health and Medical Health NOSIs as well as projects proposing to utilize MVP data. Guidance can be found in the NOSIs and the Pre-application RFAs.
2. **Check Due Dates.** The Pre-application and full-research application due dates are determined by the selected SRG and RFA. Using the ISRM SRG Purviews and Review Cycles document, determine which cycles (Winter, Spring, Summer, or Fall) the SRG convenes. The Deadline, Review and Award Dates table in each RFA lists the due dates for each cycle. A helpful summary of deadlines is also provided in a Table with the SRG Purviews and Review Cycles. *NOTE: Different RFAs have different Pre-application due dates.*
3. **Submit Pre-application.** Using the instructions in the Pre-application RFA submit the Pre-application along with any applicable waiver requests. Please note that if your proposal requires MVP data use, the MVP **feasibility** request form is due one (1) month prior to the Pre-application deadline for your selected RFA (again, this will be specified in the RFA). The MVP **feasibility request** approval must be attached to the Pre-application submission. Upon receipt in eRA, program staff will review the Pre-application and waiver requests. You will be notified through an eRA system generated notice whether the Pre-application was approved or disapproved. If program determines the NOSI, portfolio, or SRG selections are not the best fit, feedback will be given on the appropriate place(s) to submit the full research application. (ISRM makes final determinations on purview based on the Specific Aims of the project.) Waiver requests will be signed by the appropriate Portfolio Director indicating approval or disapproval and will be sent to the station (AO/ACOS) via email.
4. **Submit Full Application.** Following the instructions in the full research application RFA, submit your proposal. The Pre-application approval notification as well as any signed waiver approvals must be included in the full research application as attachments. Timelines for submission, review, and earliest project start dates are noted in the RFAs.
5. **Prepare to Resubmit.** Pre-applications are required for all resubmissions. Resubmissions should include revised Cover and Text Pages if there has been a significant change in scope from the originally approved pre-application, otherwise only the Cover Page and updated Biographical Sketch for the applicant are required. For award types with Pre-application due dates approximately three (3) months before the full research application due date you may need to submit a Pre-application before scores and summary statements from the previous review are

released. (A Pre-application for a resubmission essentially notifies ISRM of your intent to resubmit if the full application is not selected for funding.)

BP, AMP, and Program Purview Statements

The following purview statements are intended to help applicants determine which participating portfolio to select when applying through a cross-portfolio NOSI. For more detailed descriptions of portfolio purviews check the NOSIs published by those portfolios.

Broad Portfolios

Brain, Behavioral & Mental Health (BMH)

Executive Director: Dr. Miriam Smyth

Purview Statement: The BMH BP is focused on the etiology, pathophysiology, diagnosis, and treatment of diseases of the central and peripheral nervous systems. Behavioral health focuses on how sensory, motor and external information is processed to influence or impact the individual's behaviors (positive and negative), thoughts, emotions, health, social participation, quality of life, and well-being. Mental health/psychiatric disorders could include, but are not exclusive to, trauma and stressorrelated disorders (e.g., PTSD, vicarious trauma), bipolar and major depressive disorders, Schizophrenia-spectrum and other psychotic disorders, anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorders, moral injury, sleep disorders, dissociative disorders, gender dysphoria, eating disorders, and substance use and alcohol related disorders.

Health Systems Research (HSR)

Executive Director: Liza Catucci, MPH (Acting)

Purview Statement: The HSR BP is focused on research to discover, validate, and optimize the foundational methods necessary for sustaining learning health systems in real-world care to improve Veteran health. These methods are derived from the National Academy of Medicine and include implementation science, data science, engagement science, system science, and policy science. They also represent applied tools to improve health and health care (e.g., direct implementation), thus enabling investigators to respond to scientific research priorities with pragmatic solutions for health systems to use immediately.

Medical Health (MED)

Executive Director: Dr. Holly Krull

Purview Statement: The MED BP's mission is to improve Veterans' health and well-being by facilitating, reviewing, funding, and managing preclinical, translational, clinical, data science, epidemiological and -omics research applications and awards of disorders and diseases prevalent in the Veteran population. Research priorities include disorders of the heart and vascular system, endocrine system, bone, skeletal muscle, gastrointestinal system, kidney, lung, blood, immune system, malignancies, and infectious diseases. MED supports research on the biochemistry, biophysics, genetics, cellular senescence, or biology of aging. Med also supports the surgical aspects of medical disorders including complications of major surgery, organ failure, and reperfusion injury, physical trauma, wound healing, surgical nutrition, burn treatment, organ transplantation, and immunosuppressive therapy.

Rehabilitation Research, Development and Translation (RDT)

Executive Director: Dr. Patricia Dorn

Purview Statement: The RDT BP mission is to maximize Veterans' functional independence, quality of life, and participation in their lives and community across the lifespan. Grounded in the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) framework which supports Whole Health principles, rehabilitation research and development recognizes a person's level of functioning as a dynamic interaction between the Veteran's health conditions, environmental factors, and personal attributes. Consistent with this framework, RRDT expects study endpoints to include measures of functioning at the level of the Veteran (or animal in pre-clinical studies) and in social and environmental contexts. Important themes for rehabilitation research include primary and secondary prevention, improvement, restoration, and replacement of lost or deteriorating function (e.g., physical, behavioral, mental, sensory, and social).

AMPs and Programs

Gulf War Research (GWR) Program

Director: Dr. Karen Block

Purview Statement: The GWR Program supports studies on the condition affecting Gulf War Veterans deployed during the 1990-91 Desert Shield/Desert Storm conflict characterized by a cluster of chronic symptoms that include fatigue, headaches, joint pain, indigestion, insomnia, dizziness, respiratory disorders, skin problems, and memory impairment. VA refers to these illnesses as chronic multisymptom illness, medically unexplained illnesses, and Gulf War Veterans' illnesses—all commonly known as Gulf War illness (GWI). This program encompasses research around the understanding and treating of adverse health outcomes from serving in the Southwest Asia theater during 1990-91 Desert Shield/Desert Storm.

Military Exposures Research AMP (MER)

Director: Dr. Rudy Johnson

Purview Statement: The MER AMP supports laboratory studies related to toxic agents, exposure assessments of Service members completed post-military service, epidemiological research, and clinical and health systems studies related to military occupational and environmental exposures. MER considers health effects from a broad range of hazardous substances encountered during military service.

Precision Oncology AMP (POP)

Director: Dr. Kenute Myrie

Purview Statement: The POP AMP supports precision oncology-based approaches to translational, clinical, health services, implementation, and data science research with emphasis on studies that impact clinical practice and/or inform healthcare decision making. Studies that do not utilize a precision-based approach are outside the purview of POP AMP and should be submitted to one of the Broad Portfolios or other AMP portfolios (e.g., Medical Health, Health Systems Research, Military Exposures Research Program, etc.) as applicable.

Pain and Opioid Use AMP (POU)

Director: Dr. Audrey Kusiak (Acting)

Purview Statement: The POU AMP supports preclinical, translational, behavioral, epidemiological and health services/implementation research projects where pain, or opioid use, and the consequences of opioid use are the primary outcome(s) of the study.

Suicide Prevention Research AMP (SPR)

Director: Dr. Joe Constans

Purview Statement: The SPR AMP supports preclinical, translational, clinical, and health services/implementation studies that seek to improve the understanding of suicide and prevent suicidal behavior.

Traumatic Brain Injury AMP (TBI)

Director: Dr. Stuart Hoffman

Purview Statement: The TBI AMP supports preclinical, translational, clinical, epidemiological, and health services/implementation research where the focus is on the consequences of TBI event(s) across the lifespan and where TBI is the precipitating condition for the development of brain and mental health disorders.