

**PROGRAM GUIDE: REHABILITATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
CENTERS AND REAPs**



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
OFFICE OF RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT
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REHABILITATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
CENTERS AND RESEARCH ENHANCEMENT AWARD PROGRAMS (REAPs)

As of February 13, 2017, the Rehabilitation Research and Development Centers Handbook (VHA Handbook 1203.04) has been replaced with this Program Guide. This Program Guide replaces all prior official VA-ORD guidance for Rehabilitation Research and Development Center Awards and Research Enhancement Award Programs.

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1. PURPOSE

This Office of Research & Development (VA-ORD) Program Guide provides guidelines for the Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D) Centers and Research Enhancement Award Programs (REAPs). This Program Guide replaces prior “Handbooks”. Other relevant documents for the Center and REAP Programs may include Funding Opportunity Announcement/Request for Applications (FOA/RFAs), Frequently Asked Questions, etc., available on the VA-ORD Intranet website.

2. BACKGROUND

RR&D builds the foundation upon which the VA fulfills President Lincoln's promise “To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan” by serving and honoring the men and women who are America’s Veterans. Recently separated Veterans are coming to the VA with an increasing number and complexity of disability claims. The prevalence of age-related disabilities also are rising with the increase in proportion of Veterans over 65 receiving care in the VA. RR&D funds research with the ultimate goal of generating evidence-based practice to prevent, eliminate, or reduce motor, sensory, and psychological disabilities among our Nation’s Veterans allowing them to live full and productive lives.

RR&D research areas of emphasis are broad and expansive and include preclinical, clinical and applied rehabilitation research with strong implications for translation into clinical practice to advance the rehabilitative healthcare of Veterans. RR&D priority areas of research align with disabilities affecting Veterans and include: traumatic brain, spinal cord, and other nerve injuries; neuromusculoskeletal disorders and pain; prosthetic and orthotic devices and wheelchairs; regeneration and restoration of motor and sensory function; disorders of the sensory and communication systems including tinnitus; disabilities as a consequence of aging; neurodegenerative and psychiatric disorders; and community reintegration.

To support this mission, RR&D Centers and REAPs are organized around an integrated thematic core as a unifying focus of their rehabilitation research activities. Centers and REAPs are expected to provide cutting edge rehabilitation solutions to allow Veterans to live full and productive lives, serving as a valued resource for Veterans, their host VA healthcare facility, and the rehabilitation community at large.

3. SCOPE

RR&D Center and REAP awards are an intramural funding mechanism for RR&D to establish and cultivate a community of VA clinical scientists and scholars within the VA healthcare system for the purpose of pursuing specific short- and long-term research objectives within a rehabilitation translational framework in accordance with well-

reasoned five-year plans. In service of these goals, RR&D Center and REAP awards provide relatively stable core funding that enable a critical mass of investigators to develop programs of research and to mentor new investigators.

4. AWARD TYPES

a. Centers. RR&D Centers receive a higher level of annual funding than REAPs in recognition of more expansive Center expectations which include:

- i. Become nationally recognized in a selected area of rehabilitation research relevant to Veterans with disabilities.
- ii. Successfully leverage core support funding through nationally-competed and scientifically reviewed funding vehicles, such as: VA investigator-initiated programs, Federal granting agency programs, private foundation awards, and collaborations with commercial partners.
- iii. Mentor and support early career stage investigators, both clinician and non-clinician scientists, through pre- and post-doctoral programs and recruit them into VA.
- iv. Nurture strong interactive relationships with the appropriate VA medical facility clinical service providers engaged in rehabilitation and long-term management of disabling conditions to improve overall quality of life.
- v. Maintain collaborative partnerships of mutual benefit to VA, the VA medical facility, and the supporting community institutions (e.g., schools of medicine, allied health sciences, and engineering, as applicable to research focus).
- vi. Engage in effective information dissemination to a broad spectrum of stakeholders (e.g., Veterans, their caregivers, clinicians, researchers, and administrators).
- vii. Develop goal-oriented rehabilitation-translational frameworks to foster the use and integration of research findings into clinical trials and clinical practice throughout the VA healthcare delivery system.
- viii. Actively participate in the national consortium of RR&D Centers to strengthen natural collaborative bonds and advance RR&D in the scientific community and national consciousness.

b. REAPs. RR&D REAPs receive a lower level of annual funding than Centers in recognition of their smaller size and more limited expectations compared to Centers:

- i. Conduct nationally recognized research relevant to Veterans with disabilities.

- ii. Successfully leverage core support funding through nationally competed and scientifically reviewed funding vehicles, including VA investigator-initiated programs, Federal granting agency programs, private foundation awards, and collaborations with commercial partners.
- iii. Mentor and support early career stage/level investigators, both clinician and non-clinician scientists, through pre-and post-doctoral programs and recruit them into VA.
- iv. Nurture strong interactive relationships with the appropriate VA medical facility clinical service providers engaged in rehabilitation, long-term management of impairment, and overall quality of life issues.

5. FUNDING

The initial project period and annual funding for a VA RR&D Center or REAP award is determined by the RR&D Director and will be specified in the FOA/RFA (usually 5 years). Awards can be renewed by competitive application for additional project periods.

6. ELIGIBILITY

a. Institutions. RR&D will announce an FOA/RFA that identifies the VA healthcare facilities (or consortium of VA healthcare facilities) that are eligible to apply. Eligible sites typically demonstrate significant rehabilitation research capacity with well-established academic partnerships. Usually this means that VA RR&D Centers and REAPs are housed within a VA healthcare facility space in clear juxtaposition to related clinical care. This makes evident to Veterans receiving care that research related to their needs is being carried out and that they have access to state-of-the-art care resulting from such research.

b. Individuals. The Principal Directors/Principal Investigators (PD/Pis) of RR&D Center applications must be a Director and Associate Director. Either the Director or Associate Director must be a clinician supported by the VA Medical Center. The PD/PI of REAPs are a minimum of 3 VA funded investigators with one named as the Director. Leadership Team members for both Centers and REAPs must hold a doctoral degree and at least a 5/8 VA appointment, and eligibility must be established prior to submission of the application. **NOTE:** *Applications may be administratively withdrawn if any of the eligibility criteria are not met.*

7. APPLICATION PROCESS

Instructions on the preparation and submission of Center/REAP applications, application deadlines, Letter of Intent (LOI) requirements (if applicable), and other pertinent information can be found in the relevant FOA/RFA. Additional guidance on application submission can be found on the ORD intranet at: <http://vaww.research.va.gov/funding/electronic-submission.cfm>, and includes the VA-ORD Application Guide SF424 (R&R) and attachment templates which should be viewed in conjunction with the FOA/RFA.

Each RR&D Center/REAP is selected competitively, based upon scientific review and the specific criteria and procedures outlined in the FOA/RFA. Center and REAP awards provide research infrastructure support for the term of the award and can be renewed by competitive application, usually in the penultimate year of the funding period. Scientifically approved applications require administrative site visits in advance of making definitive funding determinations.

8. EVALUATION CRITERIA

a. First level of review. The application is evaluated by a Scientific Review Group (SRG) composed of scientists and clinicians with expertise in the Center/REAP research area(s) and in large infrastructure awards. The purpose of the SRG is to provide peer-reviewed evaluation of the scientific, technical, clinical applicability, and organizational merits of the application to objectively determine capability of the Center/REAP to meet intended short- and long-term goals of the proposed research and training program. Specific evaluation criteria for Centers and REAPs include:

- i. Strength of Proposed Research Focus.
- ii. Effectiveness of Operating Plan.
- iii. Adequacy of Resources.
- iv. Budget and Cost Effectiveness.

b. Second level of review. The second level of review performed by RR&D considers scientific merit (as judged by the SRG) and relevance of the application to the mission, programs, and priorities of VA-ORD and RR&D. Scientifically approved applications will require administrative site visits in advance of making definitive funding determinations. **NOTE:** *Final funding decisions are made at the discretion, and approval, of the Director RR&D.*

9. MAINTAINING THE AWARD

Centers and REAPs are required to submit annual (non-competing) reports to monitor their progress toward meeting RR&D's mission to advance optimal rehabilitative healthcare for Veterans. Specific information regarding report format, number of copies, and submission deadlines are available from RR&D, and reports typically require accounting of VA and non-VA funding and research productivity. RR&D will review reports administratively to monitor performance against stated program plans. **NOTE:** *Unsatisfactory performance may result in probationary status or termination of funding.*

10. CHANGES TO FUNDED AWARDS

Requests for changes in Center/REAP Associate/Director or VA award percentage (eighths), sabbatical requests, and other administrative changes likely to impact the implementation of the Center/REAP's 5-year plan should be submitted to RR&D at least 90 calendar days in advance of the requested change.

11. PROGRAM CONTACTS. Inquiries about the Center and REAP Program should be directed to RR&D contacts listed below.

a. General questions: rrdreviews@va.gov

b. Contacts for specific programmatic areas will be provided in the Center/REAP FOA/RFA and contact information for RR&D staff may be found at <http://www.rehab.research.va.gov/staff/science1.html>

A list of current Centers and REAPs is available on the ORD website at: <http://www.research.va.gov/programs/default.cfm#rrd-ctr>

Website Note: **http://www** websites are accessible to the public. **http://vaww** websites are on the ORD intranet and are accessible only to VA investigators, as this intramural research program only funds VA investigators.

APPROVED:



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