



**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
OFFICE OF RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT**

PROGRAM GUIDE 1200.03

CENTRALIZED POSITIONS OF RESEARCH SCIENTISTS, GS-14 AND ABOVE

As of October 15, 2020, Handbook 1200.03 has been replaced with this Program Guide. This Program Guide replaces all prior official ORD guidance.

ISSUANCE DATE: October 15, 2020

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1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Program Guide defines the information required by the Office of Research and Development (ORD) to evaluate research scientist positions funded by ORD for assignment at General Schedule (GS)-14 and above. This Program Guide refers to Title 5 research scientists working in Biomedical Laboratory Research and Development Service (BLR&D), Clinical Sciences Research and Development Service (CSR&D), Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D), Health Services Research and Development Service (HSR&D), and the Cooperative Studies Program (CSP). **AUTHORITY:** Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) § 7301(b), 7303.

2. SCOPE

a. This Program Guide applies to nonsupervisory professional research work at the GS-14 and above level funded by ORD and meets the criteria in the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Research Grade Evaluation Guide (RGEG) published in September 2006. Positions typically eligible for consideration are those whose primary function is scientific investigation in basic or applied research in biology, medicine, health, veterinary medicine, psychology, computer science, social sciences (including economics), mathematical sciences (including statistics), engineering, and industrial design.

b. ORD, at the request of Human Resources Management Service, assesses nominations for assignment at GS-14 and GS-15 for select positions costed out to the medical care appropriation, provided that those positions include scientific investigation as a significant duty. If ORD recommends that such an incumbent be promoted, the promotion may only be affected with the approvals of the local VA medical facility Director and Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) Director within allocated medical care ceilings.

3. PROCEDURE

a. VA Medical Facilities.

(1) The local VA medical facility writes a position description in four factor format mirroring the RGEG including the introduction, major duties and describes the scope and impact of the specific research being performed (see RGEG). The position description describes the field of research being pursued, the nature and scope of research projects, anticipated results, the specific researcher's background and qualifications, and the impact of the work on the state of the art in their research field and the healthcare mission of VA.

(2) The VA medical facility HR Office completes the top half of the OF-8, Position Description form, items 1 through 18. Local HR Classifier or VISN Consolidated Classification Unit (CCU) Classifier reviews and initials item 15d. on the OF-8. The first line supervisor, generally the Associate Chief of Staff for Research or equivalent, and

the second line supervisor, generally the Chief of Staff, signs items 20a. and 20b. respectively.

(3) The initiating VA medical facility VISN CCU evaluates and rates each GS-14 and GS-15 nomination package using procedures outlined in the RGEN. For positions not covered by the RGEN such as engineering systems developers and economists, VA medical facilities may use a comparable classification approach.

(4) The nominating VA medical facility convenes a promotion review panel that includes a minimum of three scientific reviewers (at a grade equal to or higher than that requested for the nominee) to serve as subject matter experts and a human resources specialist serving as a technical advisor. The panel reviews the nominee's work, qualifications and professional development, specifically evaluating the nominee's professional achievements, publications, and presentations before professional organizations. **NOTE:** *VA personnel from other VA medical facilities may be on the panel when there is an insufficient pool of scientists at the requesting VA medical facility.*

(5) Each panel member prepares and signs a separate evaluation worksheet (VA Form 4670) and the HR classifier prepares and signs a classification evaluation report. The completed package is sent to the VA medical facility research office for signature and submission to ORD.

(6) The VA medical facility research office prepares the request for promotion package for submission to ORD according to the Instructions for Preparation and Submission of Nominations for Centralized Positions of Research Scientists found on the ORD Web site (https://www.research.va.gov/resources/centralized_positions.cfm).

b. VHA Office of Research and Development (ORD).

(1) ORD receives the promotion package request and reviews for completeness. If the request package is incomplete, ORD returns the package to the local VA medical facility noting the materials or revisions needed prior to conducting a central evaluation. **NOTE:** *Positions for consideration are nonsupervisory professional research work at the GS-14 and above level funded by ORD and meets the criteria in the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Research Grade Evaluation Guide (RGEN) published in September 2006. Positions typically eligible for consideration are those whose primary function is scientific investigation in basic or applied research in the Natural Resources Management and Biological Sciences, Medical and Healthcare, Engineering and Architecture, and Mathematical Sciences group series, excluding Title 38 and Hybrid occupations.*

(2) ORD convenes a promotion review panel that includes a minimum of three scientific reviewers to serve as subject matter experts (excluding the CRADO, Deputy CRADOs, or ORD Service Directors) and a Human Resources (HR) technical advisor.

(3) The panel reviews the nominee's work using the four factors in the RGEN plus the following VA specific criteria:

(a) A minimum of 5/8ths time commitment to VA, evidenced by a 5/8ths VA-salaried appointment unless there is a waiver to this requirement (see [ORD Program Guide 1200.15, Eligibility for VA Research Support](#)).

(b) A record of successful past and current VA research support or successful competition as a principal investigator for significant, extra-VA research funding from a national program that utilizes a standard of scientific merit review equivalent to that of VA, or both.

(c) A record of significant publications in peer-reviewed scientific and professional journals widely read within the nominee's field, particularly as the first or senior author.

(d) History of invitations to speak or chair sessions at national or international scientific meetings.

(e) Membership on national scientific advisory, merit review committees, or editorial boards of scientific or professional journals.

(f) Recognition by peers as a leader in the nominee's field of research evidenced by letters of recommendation or other award(s).

(g) An active role or record of training junior scientists and teaching at the VA medical facility or the academic affiliate.

(4) Each panel member prepares and signs a separate evaluation worksheet (VA Form 4670, Position Classification Worksheet for Research Positions) and ORD prepares a memorandum stating the score and recommendation.

(5) The panel forwards a recommendation on the nomination to the appropriate ORD Service Director for concurrence.

(6) ORD submits the approved promotion package to the VHACO Servicing Human Resources Office (VSHO) Classification unit, Human Resources Operations Office (HROO), Office of Workforce Management & Consulting (WMC), for the final classification of the position description.

(7) The CRADO signs the approval for the research GS-14 promotion packages. ORD submits the research GS-15 promotion packages to the Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Discovery, Education, and Affiliate Networks for final approval. ORD staff sends the signed packages to the local VA Research office for final processing and notification of the applicant. Promotion packages under the medical appropriation are sent to the VA medical facility for VA medical facility Director and VISN Director signature.

4. NEW APPOINTMENTS

a. Senior research scientists may be appointed to a GS-14 or GS-15 position if they meet the criteria in the RGEG.

b. The local VA medical facility processes the request using the procedures outlined in paragraph 3, convening a new appointment review panel. **NOTE: Review the Instructions for Preparation and Submission of Nominations for Centralized Positions of Research Scientists found on the ORD Web site.**

c. ORD reviews the package for completeness and convenes a review panel to evaluate the written position description. The panel reviews the nominee's qualifications using the four factors in the RGEN plus the following VA specific criteria:

(1) A record of successful past and current national peer-reviewed (e.g., National Institutes of Health (NIH)) research support as a principal investigator.

(2) A record of significant publications in peer-reviewed scientific and professional journals widely read within the nominee's field, particularly as the first or senior author.

(3) History of invitations to speak or chair sessions at national or international scientific meetings.

(4) Membership on national scientific advisory, VA merit or other grant review committees, or editorial boards of scientific or professional journals.

(5) Recognition by peers as a leader in the nominee's field of research evidenced by letters of recommendation or other awards.

(6) An active role or record of training junior scientists and teaching at the VA medical facility or academic affiliate.

d. ORD submits the appointment package to the HR&SS classification unit for evaluation.

e. The CRADO signs the approval for research GS-14 appointment packages. ORD submits research GS-15 appointment packages to the Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Discovery, Education, and Affiliate Networks for final approval. ORD staff sends the signed packages to the local VA Research office for final processing and notification of the applicant. Appointment packages under the medical appropriation are sent to the VA medical facility for facility Director and VISN Director signature.

5. REFERENCES

a. 38 U.S.C. § 7303.

b. OPM Research Grade Evaluation Guide (RGEN), <http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/classification-qualifications/classifying-general-schedule-positions/functional-guides/gresch.pdf>. **NOTE: This linked document is outside of VA control and may or may not be conformant with Section 508 of the Americans with Disabilities Act.**

- c. Human Resources Management Letter No. 05-07-02, <http://vaww.va.gov/ohrm/HRLibrary/HRMLs/HRML05-07-02.pdf>. **NOTE:** *This is an internal VA Web site and is not available to the public.*
- d. [Human Resources Management Letter No. 05-13-06, http://vaww.va.gov/OHRM/HRLibrary/HRMLs/HRML2013/HRML-05-13-06.pdf](http://vaww.va.gov/OHRM/HRLibrary/HRMLs/HRML2013/HRML-05-13-06.pdf). **NOTE:** *This is an internal VA Web site and is not available to the public.*
- e. [Program Guide 1200.15, Eligibility for VA Research Support, https://www.research.va.gov/resources/policies/handbooks.cfm](https://www.research.va.gov/resources/policies/handbooks.cfm)
- f. Standard Operating Procedures - Using Schedule B and Title 38 Medical Support Authorities. https://www.research.va.gov/resources/policies/general_admin.cfm
- g. VA Directive 5005, Staffing, Part II, Chapter 3, Section G <http://vaww.va.gov/OHRM/Directives-Handbooks/Documents/5005.pdf>. **NOTE:** *This is an internal VA Web site and is not available to the public.*
- h. VA Directive 5001, System of VA Human Resources Management Directives and Handbooks General Introduction and Administration, Part II, Appendix B <https://vaww.va.gov/OHRM/Directives-Handbooks/Documents/5001.pdf>. NOTE: This is an internal VA Web site and is not available to the public.
- i. VA Directive 5003, Position Classification, Job Grading and Position Management. <http://vaww.va.gov/OHRM/Directives-Handbooks/Documents/5003.pdf> NOTE: This is an internal VA Web site and is not available to the public.