

February 8, 2001

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT LETTER

SOLICITATION OF PROPOSALS FOR REHABILITATION RESEARCH DISABILITY
SUPPLEMENT (RRDS)

1. This Information Letter announces the opportunity for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities to compete for support to assist qualified people with disabilities to participate in the Rehabilitation Research and Development (RR&D) Service sponsored research programs. This opportunity is open to all principal investigators with current RR&D Merit Review or VA RR&D Center funding. Instructions for submitting applications are attached (Attachment A).
2. **Background:** It is important that rehabilitation research and development programs support scientists and physicians with disabilities so that Veterans can benefit from their skills and abilities and also their special appreciation for the need of disabled people. Disabled researchers, in order to participate, may need specialized equipment and or facilities in order to participate in research activities. Existing RR&D Center, as well as individual Merit Review program investigators are encouraged to include people with disabilities on their staff. To support this effort, the RR&D Service will provide additional funds, through supplements to existing Center or Merit Review programs
3. **Goals of RR&D Service**
 - a. Each funded RR&D Service is expected to:
 - (1) Provide an accessible research environment for people with disabilities;
 - (2) Enhance local capacities to support rehabilitation research and development training and career development activities;
 - b. The RR&D Service program will:
 - (1) Provide salary support to hire a disabled scientist or physician to participate in the ongoing research program of the Principal Investigator.
 - (2) Provide funds to support the additional research activities to be conducted by the disabled investigator.
 - (3) Provide funds to purchase special equipment needed to allow the disabled investigator to work in the research laboratory.

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4. **Eligibility to Apply**

a. **Principal Investigator.** The Principal Investigator (PI) must have a currently supported Merit Review or Center program. The term of the RRDS can not exceed the award period of the major VA funding source.

b. **Local VAMC Support.** The VA medical center must endorse the RR&D Service application and provide appropriate Americans with a Disability Act (ADA) compliant space and related facility support.

c. **Research or Development Plans for the MRDS Investigator.** Applicants are expected to present research plans describing the contributions the RR&D Service investigator will make to the ongoing research program.

d. **Investigator.** The proposed disabled investigator must be eligible to become a VA employee. The investigator's disability must fall within the definition of disabled, according to the Americans with a Disability Act. The investigator must, at the time of award, hold an earned doctorate degree in a field related to the research proposal. Participants early in their career will follow the appropriate VA Associate Investigator or Career Development employment policies. Established investigators may be hired and supported at a level appropriate for their years of service and their accomplishments. All employment decisions will be made at the local level.

5. **Expected Annual Budget.** The RR&D Service supplemental award will be up to \$75,000 annually. This includes salary, supplies and regular research equipment. Additional funds may be requested to modify or adapt research-related equipment for use by the Investigator.

6. **RR&D Service Funding.**

a. **Merit Review.** All applications will be reviewed for scientific merit by a special ad hoc advisory group (using the criteria outlined in paragraph 9b).

b. **Anticipated Awards and Funding Period.** The RR&D may approve up to three awards per Center grant and one RRDS per Merit Review program. In all cases the funding decisions will be based upon scientific merit and programmatic needs. Funding will be for the period of the Merit Review or Center programs, but not exceed three years for a single award.

7. **Annual Reporting Requirements.** Annual (noncompeting) progress reports will be reviewed administratively by RR&D to ensure that the RRDS performance meets expectations.

8. **Evaluation Criteria.** Applications will be evaluated on the basis of the following major criteria.

a. **Administrative Review Criteria.** Applicants are expected to meet the following administrative review criteria to be considered for scientific merit review:

- (1) Eligibility requirements (paragraph 4 above);
- (2) Application endorsed by medical center director;

(3) No more than three RR&D Service awards per Center or more than one R&RD Service award per Merit Review program.

(4) There is no limit to the number of RR&D Service awards that a PI may have as long as these criteria are met. The specific Merit Review or Center program must be identified with each application.

(5) The Center or Merit Review support must be committed for one or more years beyond the proposed start of this supplement award.

b. Scientific Review Criteria. Scientific merit reviewers will be asked to evaluate applications in terms of the following criteria.

(1) Quality, appropriateness and feasibility of the proposed research and how well it fits within the major VA "parent" research program.

(2) Facilities and other resources: The actual VA facilities available and plans for adapting the laboratory to accommodate use by the disabled scientist or physician; Research Experience: Overall assessment of the value of the proposed research experience.

c. Funding Decisions: Scientific reviewers will recommend proposals they deem to have the most potential based on review of written applications in terms of the identified evaluation criteria. Funding decisions made by the Director, RR&D, will be designed to select the proposal(s) expected to make the greatest contribution to RR&D and the Veterans Health Administration (VHA).

9. General Guidelines

a. Notification of Intent to Apply: No formal letter of intent is required for this solicitation. Proposals will be accepted on a rolling-basis with those received by the end of a fiscal quarter to be reviewed by an ad hoc committee within 60 days of receipt of the completed application by RR&D. A funding decision will be made by the Director, RR&D within 30 days of receiving the funding recommendation of the ad hoc review committee.

b. Application Information. Attachment A contains instructions for full proposal submission.

10. Questions may be directed to: David A. Wolff, Ph.D., Special Assistant to Director, Disability Supplement Program, Rehabilitation Research and Development Service, at 202-408-3686.

John R. Feussner, M.D., M.P.H.
Chief Research and Development Officer

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Attachment

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Attachment A

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS
FOR A REHABILITATION RESEARCH DISABILITY SUPPLEMENT**

1. **General.** The application should be complete and comprehensive. Applications will be returned without review if they are illegible, fail to follow instructions, or if the material presented is insufficient to permit an adequate review. Applicants should follow the prescribed instructions and format so that all pertinent information is available and easily accessible to reviewers, to allow for equitable comparative review.

2. **Format:**

a. **Forms Required.** Use VA Merit Review Application forms, follow the standard Merit Review instructions for printing and assembly.

b. When completing the application, limit the Narrative section to **no more than five pages!** In the appendix section, use **no more than 3 pages to describe the alteration of facilities by the VAMC and/or equipment, needed to meet the needs of the disabled investigator to participate in the research program.**

3. **Submission.** Submit (by mail) the original application plus five copies of the proposal to:

Disability Supplement Program
Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (122)
VA Headquarters
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

4. **Due Date.** Proposals will be accepted on a rolling-basis. Those received by the first day of each fiscal quarter will be considered for funding at the beginning of the next quarter. This funding plan will be contingent on the availability of funds each quarter.