

**RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST PROGRAM HANDBOOK
BIOMEDICAL LABORATORY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICE
(BLR&D) AND CLINICAL SCIENCE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICE
(CSR&D)**

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook clarifies policy and establishes procedures for the Research Career Scientist Program.
- 2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES:** The major changes are:
 - a. The Medical Research Entry Program (MREP) has been phased out.
 - b. Applicants are asked to put their current email addresses on their curricula vitae (Appendix B).
 - c. Applications and Midterm Progress Reports are to be transmitted by email to RCS Program Mailbox (Appendices A and C).
- 3. RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VHA Directive 1202, to be issued.
- 4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The VHA Office of Research and Development is responsible for the contents of this VHA Handbook.
- 5. RESCISSION:** This VHA Handbook rescinds VHA Notice 98-02 dated April 27, 1998.
- 6. RECERTIFICATION:** This document is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working date of March 2012.

Michael J. Kussman, MD, MS, MACP
Under Secretary for Health

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RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST PROGRAM

BIOMEDICAL LABORATORY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICE (BLR&D) AND CLINICAL SCIENCE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICE (CSR&D)

1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration Handbook provides policy and guidelines related to the Research Career Scientist Program and instructions for applying for the designation of Research Career Scientist for the Biomedical Laboratory Research and Development (BLR&D) and Clinical Sciences Research and Development (CSR&D) Services, including the Cooperative Studies program (CSP).

2. BACKGROUND

Biomedical Laboratory Research and Development Service (BLR&D) and Clinical Science Research and Development Service (CSR&D) recognize the important contributions of non-clinician Ph.D. scientists to the Veterans Affairs (VA) research program. As principal investigators of BLR&D and CSR&D research programs, they make valuable contributions to our knowledge of disorders important to the U.S. veteran population. In addition to research efforts, however, the intramural nature of the VA research program requires that principal investigators have a primary professional commitment to the VA. Scientists show this commitment by appropriately acknowledging VA employment and support, participating in committee work, directing core facilities, teaching, mentoring, supervising shared resources, and other important research-related activities. In recognition of the contributions and professional commitment to the VA, BLR&D and CSR&D support a career track for the non-clinician Ph.D. scientist. This Handbook describes the non-clinician scientist career track leading to the Research Career Scientist Program for BLR&D and CSR&D.

3. SCOPE

There are three designated levels in the career track for non-clinician scientists at BLR&D and CSR&D: (a) Research Scientist; (b) Research Career Scientist (RCS); and (c) Senior Research Career Scientist (SRCS). The designation of Research Scientist is conferred to non-clinician principal investigators upon funding of their VA Merit Review Award Program (MERIT). The designations of RCS and SRCS are conferred to non-clinician scientists by appointment in recognition of outstanding achievements and contributions to VA research. The appointment provides salary support from BLR&D or CSR&D for the term of the award and is indefinitely renewable: five years for RCS, seven years for SRCS.

4. RESEARCH SCIENTIST

Independent non-clinician Ph.D. scientists may apply to the Merit Review program for research and salary support, once they have received permission to submit a proposal (See VHA Handbook 1202.1). Salary support must be requested in the budget per instructions in the VHA

Handbook 1202.1. The Research Scientist designation is conferred on the principal investigator of a funded MERIT for the term of the program and will continue as long as the scientist receives VA peer-reviewed research support. Salary support may be extended for up to one year following termination of research support, provided the Research Scientist continues to apply for MERIT funding and provides service to VA research.

5. RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST

a. This designation is awarded to established, independent investigators who have distinguished themselves through scientific achievement and contribution to the VA research program via training; mentoring junior VA scientists (clinician and non-clinician); functioning as a resource for the research community; serving on VA research or other local/national committees; directing a core facility; and/or collaborating with clinician scientists.

b. It is expected that RCS applicants would have the qualifications to be eligible for a GS-14 appointment within the Federal government, and the title of Associate Professor at the affiliated university. The RCS Evaluation Committee will review the RCS applications.

c. RCS appointments provide five years of salary support and are renewable indefinitely.

d. Renewal is competitive and contingent upon availability of funds and continuation of:

(1) peer-reviewed research support

(2) contribution to VA research service, and

(3) scientific distinction.

6. SENIOR RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST

a. At the time of RCS renewal, each RCS will be evaluated for the SRCS appointment by the RCS Evaluation Committee. The SRCS appointment is made only by nomination from the RCS Evaluation Committee to the Director, BLR&D or CSR&D. The highest standards will be applied when considering nominations to SRCS. Scientists nominated for SRCS are highly productive, international leaders in their fields who have achieved wide recognition of their accomplishments. At the same time, their contributions to the local and national VA programs through training and research service are exemplary.

b. It is expected that SRCS applicants would have the qualifications to be eligible for a GS-15 appointment within the Federal government and the title of Professor at the affiliated university. Scientists selected for the SRCS appointment must have previously held a RCS appointment for a minimum period of five years.

c. The SRCS level provides seven years of salary support to the most accomplished VA research scientists. Renewal is competitive and contingent upon availability of funds and continuation of:

- (1) peer-reviewed research support
- (2) contribution to VA research service, and
- (3) scientific distinction.

7. SALARY

RCS and SRCS receive VA salary support for the term of the appointment and therefore they should not request salary support when applying for other VA research programs. Research Scientists must request salary support on the MERIT proposal according to program instructions. VA salary support for the RCS and SRCS will be reduced commensurate with the reduction of research time available if the investigator holds significant administrative positions at the VA or university affiliate.

8. ELIGIBILITY

An individual VA Medical Center may submit a total of two new or revised RCS applications each fiscal year. This limit does not include renewal applications. Potential applicants should consider the source of their VA funding to determine the most appropriate ORD service (BLR&D/CSR&D, Rehabilitation Research and Development, or Health Services Research and Development) to review the application. Scientists paid by the Medical Care appropriation are not eligible for an RCS appointment, unless they officially terminate their career appointments. The following criteria define the eligibility requirements for a new RCS applicant:

NOTE: Applications will be administratively withdrawn if any of the eligibility criteria have not been met.

- a. A minimum 5/8th VA-paid appointment at the time of application.
- b. A competitively funded BLR&D or CSR&D MERIT or service as a biostatistician or pharmacist on an active CSP protocol, at the time of application.
- c. An active research program performed in a VA designated laboratory and office for at least the previous three years.
- d. National peer-reviewed research support (VA, NIH, NSF) as a principal investigator (not as co-investigator) for at least a total of six years.

NOTE: This does not have to be six consecutive years.

9. EVALUATION

Appointment as RCS and SRCS is highly competitive. The RCS Evaluation Committee will review new and renewal applications and recommend appointments to the Directors, BLR&D and CSR&D. Decisions made by the Directors are not subject to appeal. Evaluations are based on performance and track record of the applicant in the following areas:

a. **Collaborations**. RCS applicants are evaluated for collaborations with VA and non-VA scientists and clinicians as evidenced by their joint peer-reviewed publications, sharing research techniques and/or special procedures, obtaining grants together, etc.

b. **Mentoring and Training**. In addition to mentoring and training undergraduate/graduate students, post-doctoral fellows and junior VA scientists, RCS applicants are specifically evaluated for their contributions to clinical scientists' efforts in successfully obtaining grants, peer-reviewed publications, sharing special research techniques etc. Applicants are also evaluated for their participation in teaching rounds for fellows, residents, and interns; providing updates on relevant topics to scientists; teaching at the affiliated university; and training investigators in special techniques.

c. **Administrative service**. Both local and national research administration is evaluated including local VA Medical Center committee service, service at the affiliated University; national service such as ad hoc or regular membership on MERIT subcommittees, NIH study sections, etc.

NOTE: Service to the local VA research program is considered essential.

d. **Research**. RCS applicants' contributions to research are evaluated by considering their history of publishing peer-reviewed research papers in high quality journals; peer-reviewed research funding; funding record as principal investigator; membership on editorial or advisory boards for journals, etc. Publications with clinician scientists are valued.

e. **Letters of recommendation**. Letters of recommendation from national and international leaders in the applicant's field are evaluated to determine the applicant's achievements and contributions in research, collaborating, mentoring, training, and service.

10. MAINTAINING THE RCS/SRCS APPOINTMENT

Maintaining the RCS/SRCS appointment is highly competitive and subject to periodic peer review.

a. At the mid-term of the appointment, the RCS Evaluation Committee will review progress via a report submitted by the appointee (See Appendix C for instructions). The mid-term progress report will provide information for the RCS Evaluation Committee to form an overall impression as to whether the appointee remains competitive.

NOTE: BLR&D/CSR&D will convey any concerns of the committee to the RCS/SRCS.

b. The applicant is responsible for submitting a timely renewal. Renewal applications are due in VA Central Office one round prior to the award end date. (*For example, if the award end date is 9/30/08, the renewal application is due in VA Central Office by March 15, 2008.*) At the time of renewal, the RCS/SRCS is expected to have maintained a productive, funded, peer-reviewed research program and will be evaluated using the same criteria as a new applicant.

(Date)

*NOTE: Renewal applications should be prepared according to the instructions in Appendix A, with the exceptions that **letters of recommendation are not required, and a copy of the most recent mid-term progress report must be included.** However, letters of endorsement from the ACOS/R&D relating the value of the RCS/SRCS to the VA Medical Center may be included, if deemed necessary.*

c. If an application for appointment renewal is not approved, the applicant may receive salary from his or her funded MERIT. It is recommended that a non-renewed applicant wait at least six months before submitting a new application.

NOTE: Non-renewal decisions are not subject to appeal.

11. APPLICATIONS

New applications are accepted twice each year and must be received in BLR&D/CSR&D by the due date. For current application submission deadlines, refer to Appendix A.

a. Appendix A describes submission deadlines and instructions for preparation of new and renewal applications.

b. Appendix B describes the currently required format for a CV.

c. Appendix C describes preparation instructions for the mid-term progress report.

APPENDIX A

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION OF NEW AND RENEWAL APPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST DESIGNATION

NOTE: An individual Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center can submit a total of two (new or revised) applications during a fiscal year.

1. FORMAT. Applications must consist of single-spaced typed pages with 1-inch margins at each edge. Use only letter-quality black print aerial 11 point font. The type density must be no more than 15 characters per inch (CPI) and have no more than 6 lines of type within a vertical inch. For proportional spacing, any representative section of text must not exceed a density of 15 CPI. Do not use photo reduction or small fonts.

2. PROPOSAL PREPARATION

a. Cover Page. A cover page listing the following information in the order specified:

(1) Title: BLR&D/CSR&D Research Career Scientist Application.

(2) Name of nominee.

(3) Name of VA Medical Center and indication whether this is the first or second nomination from the VA Medical Center during the current fiscal year (October 1 – September 30).

(4) Nominee's date of birth.

(5) Positions currently held and proposed.

(6) Nominee's current VA-paid appointment (in 8ths).

(7) Number of years employed by VA as a Ph.D. scientist.

(8) Nominee's current grade and step.

(9) Nominee's academic title (indicate tenure status).

(10) Location of nominee's laboratory and office.

(11) Current VA funding including title, inclusive dates, role and amount.

(12) Name, title, and signature of the Associate Chief of Staff and the VA Medical Center Director.

b. Copy of the Mid-term Evaluation (for renewal applications only)

c. Narrative: With the information in the specified order:

APPENDIX A

(1) A statement describing the research area of the nominee and its relevance to VA healthcare. This statement is page “1” of the application. All pages should contain both the nominee’s name and page number at the bottom (e.g. Smith-1 – Smith-20).

(2) Statement of nominee’s working relationships with other investigators and interactions at the medical center. Describe briefly collaborations with other VA and non-VA scientists and clinicians and indicate if they resulted in coauthored publications and/or joint grant funding.

(3) A current CV. (See Appendix B)

(4) Five letters of support. Each letter should provide an opinion regarding the applicant’s reputation as a scientist, evaluation of standing in applicant’s field of research, and capability as a mentor and collaborator. The letters should be from recognized leaders in the applicant’s research area, including internationally recognized experts.

Note: Do not include more than five letters. Additional letters will be disregarded. Do not include letters in renewal applications.

(5) A letter of support from the R&D Committee (required for both new and renewal applications).

(6) For current VA funded research, completed:

(a) VA Form 10-1313-2, MERIT Application – Summary Description of Program/Project;

(b) VA Form 10-1313-3, MERIT Application – Current Funds and First Year Request for Program/Project

(c) VA Form 10-1313-4, MERIT Application – Estimated Expenses of Program/Project;

(d) VA Form 10-1313-8, MERIT Application – Investigator’s Total Current and Pending VA and Non-VA Research/Development Support.

(e) CSP biostatisticians and pharmacists who do not have current VA MERIT funding may submit the Executive Summary, Planning Committee membership listing the biostatistician/pharmacist and budget page for current CSP protocol. In addition, a VA Form 10-1313-8 (<http://www1.va.gov/resdev/funding/process/forms.cfm>) briefly describing investigator’s current and pending total VA and non-VA Research/development support should be included.

(7) For current non-VA funded research, include budget page and abstract.

(8) Two publications chosen by the nominee as being representative of his or her work.

3. DUE DATE: Applications will be reviewed semi-annually. Deadlines for receipt of applications are March 15 and September 15. Timelines for review and awards are indicated in the table below.

	<u>Spring Round</u>	<u>Fall Round</u>
RCS Application (new and renewal) due date	March 15	September 15
RCS Review	June/July	December/January
Award Notification	August	February
Award Start Date	October 1	April 1

- 4. SUBMISSION:** Convert the completed application package including publications and CV into **one Portable Document File (PDF) file** and transmit by email to the RCS Program Mailbox: **racs.materials@va.gov**.

*Note: Free or low cost PDF conversion programs are listed (at the end) on VA intranet:
<http://vaww.research.va.gov/funding/electronic-submission.cfm>*

APPENDIX B

FORMAT FOR CURRICULUM VITAE FOR RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST APPLICATION

Do NOT include Social Security Number. List inclusive dates wherever appropriate.

1. PERSONAL DATA

- a. Name
- b. Current Mailing Address
- c. Telephone and Fax Numbers and Email Address
- d. Professional Facilities: Office and Laboratory Locations

2. EDUCATION

- a. Baccalaureate
- b. Graduate
- c. Postgraduate

3. POSTDOCTORAL TRAINING

4. APPOINTMENTS

- a. VA appointments (indicate grade/step)
- b. University appointments (indicate tenured status)
- c. Other professional employment

5. Professional affiliations and membership in scientific societies including any offices held (local, national, international)

6. SERVICE TO LOCAL VA MEDICAL CENTER

7. SERVICE TO NATIONAL VA

8. SERVICE TO AFFILIATED UNIVERSITY

9. **SERVICE TO PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:** Service to professional organizations including national advisory committees, editorships, peer review activities, etc.

10. PROFESSIONAL AWARDS AND HONORS

11. **FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS:** List funded research projects (current and past, VA and non-VA) in spreadsheet form with the following information.

Source of Funding Grant Number Title of Project Role Dates Annual Direct Amount

NOTE: For renewal applications, limit to the past ten years.

12. TRAINING AND MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

a. List specific teaching assignments, past and current with inclusive dates, at the affiliate and/or at other institutions. Include participation in teaching rounds for fellows, residents, and interns; providing updates on relevant topics to scientists and training investigators in special techniques.

b. List past and current undergraduate and graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and faculty mentored. Include names, level of trainee, inclusive dates and trainees' current position in the spreadsheet format shown below.

NOTE: For renewals, limit this entire section to the past ten years.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Trainee Status</u>	<u>Inclusive Dates</u>	<u>VA or non-VA</u>	<u>Clinician or Non-clinician</u>	<u>Current Position</u>
	Undergraduate Graduate or Post-doctoral Other (describe)				

c. Provide evidence of successful mentoring of fellows or junior scientists, VA and non-VA, in terms of their transition to independence, e.g., obtaining independent research grants and/or advancement in their academic position.

13. EXTRAMURAL ACTIVITIES: Extramural invited presentations and seminars (include dates and limit to the past ten years).

14. BIBLIOGRAPHY: Numbered bibliography in the following order. Highlight nominee's name.

NOTE: Do not include abstracts, papers submitted or in preparation.

NOTE: For renewal applications, limit listing to the past ten years.

- a. Papers published or in press in peer-reviewed journals.
- b. Published invited papers in proceedings or in other non-peer reviewed journals.
- c. Review articles.
- d. Books and book chapters.

APPENDIX C

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION OF RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST MID-TERM REPORT

At the mid-term of RCS/SRCS appointments, a report is due in VA Central Office, which will be reviewed by the RCS Evaluation Committee. The report consists of a cover page and accompanying documentation.

NOTE: Pay attention to the page limitations.

1. COVER PAGE: List the following information, in the order specified, on the cover page:

- a. Title: BLR&D/CSR&D Research Career Scientist; Mid-Term Progress Report
- b. Name of RCS
- c. Type of Appointment: (RCS or SRCS)
- d. Current Department of Veterans Affairs Employment: (VA paid 8ths, Grade, and Step)
- e. Academic Title (Indicate tenure status)
- f. Location of Office
- g. Location of Laboratory
- h. Date of RCS Appointment
- i. Inclusive Dates of Reporting Period
- j. Signatures: (RCS/SRCS; Associate Chief of Staff for Research (ACOS/R); VA Medical Center Director)

2. DOCUMENTATION: Provide the following information requested for the reporting period only. All publications should include percent of RCS contribution.

NOTE: Do not provide a CV or historic data of accomplishments prior to the reporting period.

- a. Collaboration. (*Limit to one page*)
 - (1) List all publications with established clinicians or other scientists, VA and non-VA.
 - (2) List all funded grants as co-investigator or collaborator with established clinicians or other scientists, VA and non-VA.
- b. Mentoring. (*Limit to one page*)

(Date)

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APPENDIX C

(1) List all publications with new scientists, VA and non-VA. A new scientist is one who has not yet received funding from a national peer-reviewed source.

(2) List all funded grants as co-investigator or collaborator with new scientists (VA and non-VA).

(3) List all Career Development Award applications on which the applicant serves as mentor, co-mentor, or collaborator.

(4) List any other mentoring activities.

c. Training. List specific teaching assignments at the affiliate and/or at other institutions. Include participation in teaching rounds for fellows, residents, and interns; providing updates on relevant topics to scientists and training investigators in special techniques. List training activities in the following spreadsheet format:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Trainee Status</u>	<u>Inclusive Dates</u>	<u>VA or non-VA</u>	<u>Clinician or Non-clinician</u>	<u>Current Position</u>
	Undergraduate Graduate or Post-doctoral Other (describe)				

d. Administration. List both local and national research contributions (committees, review boards, editorial boards, etc.) during the reporting period, and indicate whether service is VA or non-VA related. Please limit to one page and include dates of service.

e. Research Productivity.

(1) List currently funded and pending research projects (VA and non-VA) in the following spreadsheet format for the reporting period only.

Source of Funding Grant Number Title of Project Role Dates Annual Direct Amount

(2) Present a list of numbered publications in the following order for the reporting period only. Include an indication of the percent of contribution made for each work:

NOTE: Do not include abstracts, papers submitted, or in preparation.

(a) Papers published or in press in peer-reviewed journals. (Highlight RCS name)

(b) Published invited papers in proceedings or in other non-peer reviewed journals.

(c) Review articles.

(d) Books and book chapters.

f. Other. Comment, *if necessary*, upon any changes that may have affected research productivity and/or service during the reporting period. Please limit to a maximum of one page.

3. **DUE DATE:** March 15 or September 15, as appropriate for the mid-term. *For example, for an RCS appointment that begins on October 1, 2008, the RCS mid-term report is due in VA Central Office by March 15, 2011 and for a SRCS appointment that begins on the same date the mid-term report is due by March 15, 2012.*

4. **SUBMISSION:** An electronic copy of the Mid-term Progress Report fill-able form with attachments should be transmitted by email to the RCS Program Mailbox: rcs.materials@va.gov. Scanned versions of the awardee's current full CV and letter from ACOS/R may be included as separate electronic attachments or copied into the form at the end.