

**OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES FOR ACTIVITIES SPONSORED BY THE HEALTH
SERVICES RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICE (HSR&D)**

1. REASON FOR ISSUE. This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook provides specific guidance for activities sponsored by Health Services Research and Development (HSR&D) Service including procedures related to: communication with Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Central Office; financial operations, including funding decisions and investigator travel; investigator eligibility; monitoring of HSR&D projects and programs; investigators' reporting obligations and requests for modifications to approved projects. **NOTE:** *This Handbook supplements VHA Handbook 1200.2.*

2. SUMMARY OF CHANGES. The major change in this revision is the addition of paragraph 9, that describes HSR&D support of conferences.

3. RELATED DIRECTIVES. VHA Directive 1204 and VHA Handbooks 1204.1, 1204.3, 1200.2, 1200.4, 1200.15, 1200.18, and 1200.19.

4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE. The Health Services Research and Development Service (124) is responsible for the contents of this VHA Handbook. Questions may be referred to (202) 461-1500, or by facsimile at (202) 254-0461.

5. RESCISSIONS. VHA Handbook 1204.05, dated September 11, 2008, is rescinded.

6. RECERTIFICATION. This Handbook is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working date of May 2015.

Robert A. Petzel, M.D.
Under Secretary for Health

DISTRIBUTION: E-mailed to the VHA Publications Distribution List 5/13/2010

CONTENTS**OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES FOR ACTIVITIES SPONSORED BY THE HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICE (HSR&D)**

PARAGRAPH	PAGE
1. Purpose	1
2. Communication with HSR&D Central Office	1
3. Financial Operations	2
4. Eligibility for HSR&D Support	4
5. Facility Research and Development Office Responsibility... ..	4
6. HSR&D Reporting Requirements	5
7. Required Notification Regarding Publication or Presentation of Research Findings	5
8. Project Modifications	6
9. HSR&D-Sponsored Conferences	6

OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES FOR ACTIVITIES SPONSORED BY THE HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICE (HSR&D)

1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook provides specific guidance for activities sponsored by Health Services Research and Development (HSR&D) Service including procedures related to: communication with Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Central Office; financial operations, including funding decisions and investigator travel; investigator eligibility; monitoring of HSR&D projects and programs; investigators' reporting obligations and requests for modifications to approved projects. **NOTE:** *This Handbook supplements VHA Handbook 1200.2.*

2. COMMUNICATION WITH HSR&D CENTRAL OFFICE

a. General Rule

(1) Field-initiated written communication with VA Central Office regarding any HSR&D activity needs to be signed by the medical center Director or Chief Executive Officer, and addressed to the appropriate person within HSR&D (see VHA Handbook 1200.2). In addition to requirements of the Office of Research and Development (ORD) for routing written communications through the facility Associate Chief of Staff (ACOS) for Research and Development (R&D), correspondence to HSR&D VA Central Office from a site where there is a co-located HSR&D Center (Center of Excellence (CoE), Research Enhancement Award Program (REAP), or Resource Center) needs to be routed through that HSR&D Center's Principal Investigator (PI). All formal communications are to be sent to the primary addressee using United States (U.S.) mail or commercial delivery, unless communication by e-mail has been requested by HSR&D.

(2) In limited circumstances, investigators may initiate contact with HSR&D VA Central Office staff. Advice needs to be sought first from the facility ACOS for R&D, the Administrative Officer (AO) for R&D or the HSR&D Center PI, if the investigator is at a site with a co-located HSR&D Center. Investigator-initiated contact with HSR&D VA Central Office staff is appropriate when the matter concerns professional or scientific issues.

b. Circumstances Requiring Formal Communication

(1) Requests for all types of R&D program or project support require concurrence by the facility ACOS for R&D and the signature of the medical center Director. Formal written communication includes, but is not limited to:

- (a) Requests for supplemental project funding,
- (b) Requests for bridge or other supplemental funding,
- (c) Requests to transfer funding from one site to another,

- (d) Requests to transfer a project from one site to another,
- (e) Requests for a change in PI,
- (f) Requests for major changes in project objectives,
- (g) Requests for no-cost extensions affecting award termination date, and
- (h) Appeals of decisions affecting resources.

(2) In addition, HSR&D requires a formal written request for all types of HSR&D program or project support, including CoE and investigator travel, and for any significant change in a funded project (see par. 8). All formal communication regarding HSR&D matters requires concurrence by the facility ACOS for R&D and the HSR&D Center PI (if applicable), and the signature of the medical center Director.

(3) HSR&D must be notified by the ACOS for R&D, through the facility Director, prior to research staff participation in any Congressional testimony, or other important project assignments, work group tasks, or other activities requested by VHA Central Office, the Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN), etc.

c. **Exceptions.** Requests for resources that do not require approval by the medical center Director include:

(1) Requests for supplemental funds to cover actual travel costs related to VA Central Office-directed travel; and

(2) Responses to oral inquiries initiated by ORD (see VHA Handbook 1200.2) also apply to HSR&D.

d. **Informal Communication.** Informal communication includes in-person or telephone conversations and e-mail correspondence. Facility R&D staff, or HSR&D Center administrative staff, may initiate informal contact with HSR&D's staff assistants for field operations or the appropriate HSR&D program manager for advice, technical assistance, or guidance. E-mail communications may be included as part of the project file documentation.

3. FINANCIAL OPERATIONS

a. **Project Funding.** Within approximately 8 weeks of each scientific review meeting, HSR&D notifies applicants regarding funding of projects. Decisions to fund a research project are based on the recommendations of the applicable merit review panel, the priority score, program priorities, and the availability of funds. Research may not commence nor will funds be disbursed to the field until all Just-in-Time documentation has been received by HSR&D. Multi-year activities are funded with the expectation that support will continue through the entire period approved by the review board; however, support beyond the current fiscal year is contingent upon HSR&D's future budget and on the project's satisfactory progress. The Director, HSR&D, makes all funding decisions, and all decisions are final.

(1) All funds disbursed within a given fiscal year are expected to be obligated by end of the fiscal year. If there is a delay in expending funds, HSR&D finance must be notified as soon as possible, but no later than July 1st.

(2) Project funds must be used for the purposes described in the proposal application.

b. **Travel**

(1) **Locally-Directed Travel.** HSR&D travel funds are very limited. Locally-directed travel is allocated to the VA medical center for approved, designated purposes. The medical center Director may authorize employee travel expenditures from funds allocated by HSR&D in accordance with VA policies. Authorized travel from HSR&D funds must be for:

(a) Travel essential for the conduct of a research project. Funds for travel that is necessary for the conduct of a project need to be itemized in the proposal budget and must be approved prior to allocation of funds. Travel funds are allocated based on the recommendations of the Scientific Merit Review Board or HSR&D staff.

(b) Participation in, or oversight of, multi-site research.

(c) Attendance at a professional meeting to present HSR&D data, or to participate in an organized discussion of medical, scientific, or technical subjects pertinent to the investigator's HSR&D work.

(d) Training in the use of specialized R&D equipment and techniques.

(e) Informal exchange of medical, scientific, or technical information, including training in relevant areas or equipment use.

(2) **Centrally-directed Travel.** Centrally-directed travel is provided when HSR&D requests an employee to attend a meeting, training session, or similar activity. Centrally-directed travel requires concurrence by the medical center Director before funds are provided by HSR&D. Field facilities must provide HSR&D with an estimate of the travel costs. Final adjustments to travel estimates are due in HSR&D within 30 days of completion of travel.

(3) **Travel to Present Scientific Findings.** Travel funds may be requested to present research findings at a professional meeting. A formal request must be submitted to the Director, HSR&D through appropriate channels, as described in subparagraph 2b. The request must include a clear and detailed justification and an estimate of all costs associated with the travel. The PI must present results from the investigator's currently-funded Merit Review project. Approval must be obtained prior to initiation of travel and is limited to one trip for each funded project.

(4) **Foreign Travel Requests.** Requests for foreign travel funds or authorization must follow current VA local and national policies.

(5) **Other Travel Requests.** Travel requested by an employee for any other purpose (not previously described) intrinsic to the HSR&D program requires prior approval by the Director, HSR&D. This category includes travel for certain committee meetings and for permanent transfer station of HSR&D employees. The request, approved by the medical center Director, must include the reason for travel, mode of travel, dates of travel, estimated cost for per diem and expenses, and transportation costs. Requests must be directed to the Director, HSR&D, through appropriate channels at least 30 days prior to the travel date. Any adjustment to estimated cost is due in VA Central Office within 30 days of completion of travel.

NOTE: *HSR&D follows ORD policy and procedures regarding employee travel, outlined in VHA Handbook 1200.2.*

c. **Information Technology.** Information and guidance regarding current policies and procedures for information technology purchases and leasing are disseminated by ORD's finance office or VHA's Office of Information Technology. Information technology purchases and leasing include: hardware, software, telecommunications, supplies and materials, and personnel. Information technology expenditures must be used for the items described in the proposal budget.

4. ELIGIBILITY FOR HSR&D SUPPORT

HSR&D implements the eligibility policy and procedures presented in VHA Handbook 1200.15. Exceptions to the basic requirement that all PIs hold at least a 5/8ths VA appointment are very rare, and in no case, is an exception made without approval of the Chief R&D Officer.

NOTE: *Questions may be directed to HSR&D's Eligibility Coordinator.*

5. FACILITY R&D OFFICE RESPONSIBILITY

HSR&D expects all the research projects and activities it sponsors to be carried out according to the plan presented in the approved proposal. The facility R&D Office is responsible for:

- a. Assisting VA Central Office in this goal by monitoring investigators' progress and by ensuring compliance with HSR&D and ORD policies and procedures.
- b. Monitoring funded research projects to ensure that problems that threaten adherence to the approved research plan or completion within the approved time and budget are identified early and VA Central Office is notified immediately of potential problems.
- c. Assisting investigators in resolving issues that threaten the successful completion of the funded research.
- d. Obligating Funds. All funds dispersed within a given fiscal year are expected to be obligated by end of the fiscal year. If there is a delay in expending funds, HSR&D finance must be notified as soon as possible, but no later than July 1st.
- e. Adhering to approved budget. Project funds must be used for the purposes described in the proposal application.

6. HSR&D REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

a. **Project Abstract.** The PI for each project funded by HSR&D is responsible for submitting a brief initial, annual, and final progress report (Project Abstract). Initial Project Abstracts are due at the time of funding; annual Project Abstracts are due on the funding anniversary date; final Project Abstracts are due with the final report. Abstracts are published on the HSR&D web site and serve as a source of information for VA Central Office responses to Congressional and other inquiries. **NOTE:** *Current HSR&D guidance regarding content, format, and the process for submitting Project Abstracts is available on HSR&D's Web site at: <http://www.hsr.d.research.va.gov>*

b. **Final Report.** The PI for each project funded by HSR&D is responsible for submitting a Final Report for the project. The Final Report is due to the Director, HSR&D within 90 days following the project's official completion date. Current instructions on required format and content for the Final Report can be found at HSR&D's Web site at: <http://www.hsr.d.research.va.gov>. A PI who has not submitted a Final Report by the deadline will not receive funding for any new HSR&D project until the Final Report has been received. In addition, new proposals will not be accepted for Merit Review until the Final Report has been received.

c. **HSR&D Center Annual Report.** The PI of each HSR&D Center is responsible for submitting an annual report to HSR&D each November. The report describes the resources, activities, and accomplishments of the center for the prior fiscal year and outlines plans for the current fiscal year. HSR&D Center Annual Reports are submitted electronically using HSR&D's information management system and must conform to the format and content guidance provided as part of the submission process.

d. **Career Development Awardee Annual Progress Report.** The progress of each Research Career Development awardee must be reviewed annually by the awardee's mentor, with concurrence of the CoE PI, if applicable, and the ACOS for R&D. In addition, each awardee must submit a brief summary of accomplishments during the year. This report must be sent to the Director, HSR&D, in specified format, within 30 days of the awards start date anniversary. In addition, awardees need to submit a recent photograph and updated biosketch, for inclusion on the HSR&D web site and the annual yearbook. **NOTE:** *Specific instructions regarding content and format for these items are issued each year.*

e. **Sanctions.** Sanctions may be imposed on investigators or centers if they fail to submit required reports in a timely and accurate manner.

7. REQUIRED NOTIFICATION REGARDING PUBLICATION OR PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

All HSR&D-supported PIs are responsible for notifying VA Central Office when a paper has been accepted for publication, regardless of the source of funding for the project. A copy of the accepted manuscript must also be provided. In addition, PIs are responsible for notifying VA Central Office when a major scientific presentation is planned, regardless of the funding source for the investigator's salary or the research project. **NOTE:** *Detailed information on the*

notification process can be found at HSR&D's Web site at: <http://www.hsr.d.research.va.gov>. VHA Handbook 1200.19 provides general guidelines on notification of publications or presentation of research findings.

8. PROJECT MODIFICATIONS

a. Once HSR&D funding is initiated, investigators must obtain formal approval from the Director, HSR&D, for any significant change in: the approved project research plan, objectives, methods, budget, time, key personnel, or site(s). HSR&D will consider only one modification request during the study period.

b. All requests for project modifications must be submitted by the medical center Director, through the ACOS for R&D and the HSR&D Center PI (if applicable) to the Director, HSR&D. To permit careful review, all modification requests must be submitted as soon as the need becomes apparent and, in all cases, at least 3 months prior to the effective date of the proposed change.

(1) Justification for the requested modification must be clear, detailed, and contain appropriate supporting documentation, including revised budgets, timelines, letters of support, etc., as applicable. **NOTE:** *Current instructions on required format and content for requesting Project Modifications can be found at HSR&D's Web site at: <http://www.hsr.d.research.va.gov>.*

(2) If additional information is required, the PI has 30 days from the date of communication to respond to the request; if this deadline is not met, the request may be disapproved. Unusual or extraordinary circumstances that preclude a response by the deadline must be discussed with the Scientific Program Manager for the project.

9. HSR&D-SPONSORED CONFERENCES

HSR&D sponsors VA conferences to facilitate communication, collaboration, strategic planning, and rapid dissemination of research findings. Centers and investigators are expected to use existing forums (e.g., HSR&D's national scientific meeting, HSR&D "state-of-the-art" conferences, conferences sponsored by other Federal agencies and organizations, e-mail groups, etc.) to exchange scientific information.

a. **National Scientific Conference.** HSR&D's major conference activity is its national scientific meeting which is open to all VA investigators, as well as health services researchers from outside VA. Responsibility for selecting a conference theme and planning scientific sessions for the national scientific meeting rotates among HSR&D's CoEs.

(1) In conjunction with the National meeting, HSR&D sponsors an invitational session for those scientists who hold a current Career Development Award.

(2) To facilitate attendance, HSR&D pays expenses for scientists with a current Career Development Award and for those individuals selected to present their research at the National Scientific Meeting.

b. **HSR&D Central Office-Initiated Conference Support.** HSR&D Central Office may initiate VA conferences or meetings to meet both HSR&D and ORD strategic planning goals.

c. **Field-Initiated Conference Support.** In select cases, consideration is given to requests from field-based researchers or administrators for limited HSR&D support of conferences on topics of importance to VA, ORD, and HSR&D.

(1) In order to qualify for consideration, the proposed conference is expected to have wide applicability and import throughout the VA system or the health services research community and have a significant product or result.

(2) The organizers of the conference must:

(a) Acknowledge that VHA and HSR&D is the sponsor (or co-sponsor),

(b) Include VA researchers on the planning committee, and

(c) Provide in-kind or financial co-sponsorship.

(3) Requests for conference support must be submitted to the Director, HSR&D (124). Each request must contain clear and comprehensive information regarding the conference goals, agenda, audience, and logistics, with sufficient detail to permit critical review.

(4) When seeking non-VA co-sponsorship, guidance must be sought from the Director, HSR&D (124).