

REHABILITATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTERS

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE.** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook announces programmatic changes to the Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D) Centers.
- 2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES.** This revised Handbook deletes the emphasis areas list of priorities and deletes all program information with temporary, expiration or rescission dates. *NOTE: RR&D program priority areas and documents with temporary, expiration or rescission dates will be updated as necessary, and are available electronically, at www.rehab.research.va.gov.*
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE.** The Office of Research and Development (12) is responsible for the contents of this Handbook. Questions may be addressed to (202) 461-1470.
- 4. RESCISSION.** VHA Handbook 1203.4 dated March 19, 2002.
- 5. RECERTIFICATION.** This VHA Handbook is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working date of February 2014.

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REHABILITATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTERS

1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook establishes procedures for and defines responsibilities of Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D) Centers. **NOTE:** *RR&D Center program documents with temporary, expiration or rescission dates are updated as necessary, and are available electronically, at: www.rehab.research.va.gov.*

2. BACKGROUND

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) RR&D Centers are intended to be a resource: first for the veterans served by VA, especially by the host VA health care facility and second for the rehabilitation community at large. They are expected to provide cutting edge solutions to the issues of chronic impairment. RR&D Centers will establish and cultivate a community of VA clinical scientists and scholars within the VA health care system for the purpose of pursuing specific research objectives in accordance with well-reasoned five-year plans. RR&D Centers are to develop an integrated thematic research core as a unifying focus of research activities. In the service of these goals, the RR&D Centers Program provides relatively stable core funding, enabling a critical mass of investigators to leverage that support and develop long-term programs of research. Each RR&D Center is selected competitively, based upon scientific review and the specific criteria and procedures outlined in the solicitation for proposals. RR&D Centers are expected to:

- a. Become nationally recognized "Centers of Excellence" in a selected area of research relevant to Veterans with disabilities.
- b. 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.
- c. Mentor and support new junior investigators, both clinician and non-clinician scientists, through pre-and post-doctoral programs and recruit them into VA.
- d. Nurture a strong interface with the appropriate VA medical facility clinical services engaged in rehabilitation, long-term management of impairment, and overall quality of life issues.
- e. Maintain collaborative partnerships of mutual benefit to VA, the VA health care facility, and the supporting community institutions (e.g., schools of medicine, allied health sciences or engineering, as applicable to research focus).
- f. Facilitate effective information dissemination for a broad spectrum of audiences.
- g. Foster the integration of research findings into clinical practice throughout the health care delivery system.

h. Actively participate in the national consortium of VA RR&D Centers to strengthen collaborative bonds and advance VA RR&D in the scientific community and national consciousness.

3. DEFINITIONS

a. **Site.** VA RR&D Centers must be housed within a VA health care facility. Space needs to be in clear juxtaposition to related clinical care. It needs to be 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. **Award Duration.** VA RR&D Center awards are for a period of five years. Each award is re-competed in its fourth year. In addition, RR&D Centers are reviewed annually and are subject to probation status in cases of deficient performance (see par. 6).

c. **Annual Funding.** RR&D Center awards of core funding level are determined by the National RR&D Director.

d. **Facility Eligibility.** Any VA health care facility (or consortium of VA health care facilities) with significant rehabilitation research capacity and with well-established academic partnerships is encouraged to apply. Consortium applicants must identify a lead site with a well-established academic partnership. Organizational relationships and responsibilities of consortia are to be clearly delineated.

e. **Leadership.** Each RR&D Center must have a Director and Associate Director for Research, each with a doctoral degree and at least a 5/8 VA appointment. Either the Director or Associate Director must be a clinician. Leadership Team eligibility must be established prior to submission of the proposal. The RR&D Center medical and scientific leadership team is expected to:

(1) Identify research goals and objectives within a given focus area and direct research plans towards achievement of specified goals and objectives. Research plans need to include collaborative activities.

(2) Create a five-year program plan for research with specific outcomes aimed at discovering new knowledge, processes, and assistive technology that directly influence clinical practice.

(3) Achieve maximum administrative efficiencies, control and reporting capabilities, project monitoring, and leveraging of limited core support funds at the local and the national levels.

(4) Support the growth and enhancement of a vigorous and creative "learning environment."

(5) Maintain information dissemination activities that promote communication of findings from VA RR&D Centers.

4. REQUEST REQUIREMENTS

Requests for RR&D Center proposals are issued using a VHA Notice. This Notice contains instructions for submitting proposals, proposal deadlines, Letter of Intent (LOI) requirements (if applicable), notification of current RR&D Center emphasis areas and areas of desired emphasis, and any pertinent funding information.

a. All appropriate facility Research & Development Committees and appropriate Human Subject, Animal Safety and Bio-Safety Subcommittees must review and approve each application prior to the submission.

b. Proposals are scientifically reviewed to determine relevance of the proposed research to the Veteran population, capability of applicant to meet intended outcome of proposed research program, potential contribution of proposed research to the field of rehabilitation, long-term management of impairment, and overall quality of life issues for Veterans with disabilities.

5. CRITERIA FOR REVIEW AND EVALUATION

Criteria for review and evaluation are:

a. **Strength of Proposed Research Focus.** This includes the:

- (1) Relevance to Veteran population;
- (2) Relationship of proposed research activities to announced research focus;
- (3) Potential of proposed research to produce new and useful information;
- (4) Clarity and achievability of research plan; and
- (5) Contribution to overall VA RR&D portfolio.

b. **Effectiveness of Operating Plan.** This includes the:

- (1) Achievability of intended research outcomes;
- (2) Workability of proposed collaborations and evidence of the benefit to VA;
- (3) Feasibility of evaluation and quality assurance methods;
- (4) Sufficient coverage of all required disciplines;
- (5) Ability to build research capacity within VA; and
- (6) Effectiveness of plan to disseminate research findings.

c. **Adequacy of Resources.** This includes the:

- (1) Scientific strength of current VA R&D Program, especially in rehabilitation research;
- (2) Vitality of rehabilitation clinical base within VA medical facilities;
- (3) Support and commitment of VA medical facility(s) and cited affiliations;
- (4) Demonstrated scientific leadership of key personnel at VA;
- (5) Evidence of VA-based core of investigators; and
- (6) Adequacy of VA facilities and equipment.

d. **Budget and Cost Effectiveness.** This includes the:

- (1) Ability to support program activities;
- (2) Reasonableness of costs; and
- (3) Appropriateness and detail of subcontract budget (if required).

6. PERFORMANCE MEASURES

To guide the Centers in meeting RR&D's mission of discovering new knowledge to advance optimal rehabilitative health care for Veterans with disabilities, the following performance measures have been developed:

a. **Impact on Clinical Care.** VA supports an applied clinical research program intended to address the questions raised in the patient care environment. All researchers need to be connected in a relevant way to their respective medical center's clinical care. RR&D Centers are expected to demonstrate educational dissemination into the patient care arena. At a local level, investigators need to actively participate in grand rounds and like activities, and provide documentation of these activities. The RR&D Center staff needs to produce at least five papers in clinical publications and five presentations to a national clinical audience per year. Participation in clinical trials is encouraged and needs to be documented.

b. **Leveraged Funding.** VA RR&D Centers are expected to leverage a minimum of \$5 of additional research funding for each \$1 of core funding. Additional funds may include indirect costs, as well as well-justified, non-research items such as education. At least 10 percent of leveraged funds need to be from sources beyond VA RR&D (such as other Federal agencies, private voluntary health organizations and foundations, as well as commercial entities). It is anticipated that this will not only serve to enhance the investment VA RR&D makes in its RR&D Centers, but will strengthen the RR&D Center's position as a key player in the national arena.

c. **Information Dissemination.** RR&D Centers need to actively disseminate findings via peer reviewed publications and presentations with significant citations within the literature. Each RR&D Center staff member needs to meet an annual goal of twenty peer-reviewed publications and presentations. Sponsored conferences and workshops, consumer education forums, transferred technology (commercialized and patented), and useful prototypes established through the RR&D Center's research also demonstrate the RR&D Center's productivity.

d. **Capacity Building.** Part of the RR&D Center program's purpose is to support the growth and training of new junior investigators. To that end, RR&D Centers are expected to have an active pre-and post-doctoral program. Programs within VA and from other agencies need to be accessed to support at least ten junior investigators or students in research career tracks each year.

e. **Service to VA and the Professional Community at the National and Local Level.** RR&D Center personnel need to actively participate on VA committees and task forces within the local VA health care community and at the national level. In addition, personnel are expected to influence their field and be VA ambassadors within their professional organizations by serving on boards and chairing meetings, and within their professional community through activities such as serving on review committees, special study sections, and advisory boards.

f. **Research Collaborations.** Each RR&D Center needs to engage in collaborative activities with other RR&D Centers, VA medical facilities, and other funded programs in pursuit of the same goals.

NOTE: Performance measures are addressed and reviewed through an annual report.

7. ANNUAL REPORT AND PROJECT REPORTS

Center Annual Report(s) and Center Project(s) Reports are required. Project reports are to include VA, other Federal funding and private funding. Specific information regarding format, number of copies, and submission deadlines are available electronically at www.rehab.research.va.gov.