US ARMY MEDICAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT COMMAND (USAMRDC) CONGRESSIONALLY DIRECTED MEDICAL RESEARCH PROGRAMS (CDMRP) FISCAL YEAR 2024 (FY24) PANCREATIC CANCER RESEARCH PROGRAM (PCARP)

DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW PROCEDURES

The FY24 PCARP called for applications in response to program announcements (PAs) for four award mechanisms released in April 2024:

- Focused Pilot Award (FPTA)
- Idea Development Award (IDA)
- Idea Development Award – Early Career Investigator Option (IDA-ECI)
- Translational Research Partnership Award (TRPA)

The PCARP received pre-applications for the IDA, IDA-ECI and TRPA PAs in June 2024 and screened them in August 2024. The screening followed the pre-application evaluation criteria specified in the PAs to determine which investigators to invite to submit full applications. The PCARP received applications in October 2024, and they underwent peer review in December 2024. The PCARP conducted programmatic review in February 2025.

The PCARP received applications for the FPTA in October 2024, and they underwent peer review in December 2024. The PCARP conducted programmatic review in February 2025.

In response to the IDA PA, the PCARP received 185 pre-applications and invited 45 of these to submit a full application. The PCARP received 42 compliant applications and recommended funding six (14.29%) for a total of $4.65 million (M).

In response to the IDA – ECI PA, the PCARP received 39 pre-applications and invited 15 of these to submit a full application. The PCARP received 12 compliant applications and recommended funding four (33.33%) for a total of $4.24M.

In response to the TRPA PA, the PCARP received 74 pre-applications and invited 23 of these to submit a full application. The PCARP received 20 compliant applications and recommended funding three (15.0%) for a total of $3.47M.

In response to the FPTA PA, the PCARP received 13 compliant applications and recommended funding three (23.10%) for a total of $0.91M.

Table 1 shows submission and award data summarized for the FY24 PCARP.

Table 1. Submission/Award Data for the FY24 PCARP[*]

Mechanism	Pre-Applications Received	Pre-Applications Invited (%)	Compliant Applications Received	Applications Recommended for Funding (%)	Total Funds
IDA	185	45 (24%)	42	6 (14%)	$4.65M
IDA-ECI[†]	39	15 (38%)	12	4 (33%)	$4.24M
TRPA[≠]	74	23 (31%)	20	3 (15%)	$3.47M
Total	**298**	**83 (28%)**	**74**	**13 (18%)**	**$12.36M**

[*]These data reflect funding recommendations only. Pending FY24 award negotiations, final numbers will be available after September 30, 2025.
[†]Individual projects recommended for funding for the IDA-ECI totaled 4, representing 8 awards.
[≠]Individual projects recommended for funding for the TRPA totaled 3, representing 6 awards.

Table 2. Submission/Award Data for the FY24 PCARP[*]

Mechanism	Compliant Applications Received	Applications Recommended for Funding (%)	Total Funds
FPTA†	13	3 (23%)	$0.91M
Totals	**13**	**3 (23%)**	**$0.91M**

†This mechanism only required an LOI for the pre-application. Applicants for this mechanism did not require invitations to submit full proposals.

THE TWO-TIER REVIEW SYSTEM

The USAMRDC developed a review model based on recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences report *Strategies for Managing the Breast Cancer Research Program: A Report to the Army Medical Research and Development Command*. The report recommended a two-tier review process that reflects not only the traditional strengths of existing peer review systems but is also tailored to accommodate program goals. The Command adheres to this proven approach for evaluating competitive applications. An application must be favorably reviewed by both levels of the two-tier review system to be funded.

THE FIRST TIER—Scientific Peer Review

The PCARP conducted peer review of the Focused Pilot Award, Idea Development Award and Translational Research Partnership Award applications in December 2024 utilizing five panels of researchers, clinicians and consumer advocates. The panel members based their evaluations on the criteria specified in the PAs.

Each peer review panel included a Chair, an average of nine scientific reviewers, an average of two consumer reviewers, and a nonvoting Scientific Review Officer. The panelists' primary responsibility was to review the technical merit of each application based upon the evaluation criteria specified in the relevant PA.

Individual Peer Review Panels

The Chair for each panel presided over the deliberations. The panels discussed each individual application. The Chair called on the assigned reviewers for an assessment of the merits of each application using the evaluation criteria published in the appropriate PA. Following a panel discussion, the Chair summarized the strengths and weaknesses of each application, and the panel members then rated the applications confidentially.

Application Scoring

Evaluation Criteria Scores: Panel members rated each application based on the peer review evaluation criteria published in the appropriate PA. The panel members used a scale of 10 to 1, with 10 representing the highest merit and 1 the lowest merit, using whole numbers only. The purpose of obtaining the criteria ratings was to (1) place emphasis on the published evaluation criteria and provide guidance to reviewers in determining an appropriate overall score and (2) provide the applicant, the Programmatic Panel and the Command with an informed measure of the quality regarding the strengths and weaknesses of each application. The evaluation criteria scores were not averaged or mathematically manipulated in any manner to connect them to the global or percentile scores.

Overall Score: To obtain an overall score, panel members used a range of 1.0 to 5.0 (1.0 representing the highest merit and 5.0 the lowest merit), with scoring permitted in 0.1 increments. The PCARP averaged the panel member scores and rounded them to arrive at a two-digit number (1.2, 1.9, 2.7, etc.) that corresponds to the following adjectival equivalents used to guide reviewers: Outstanding (1.0–1.5), Excellent (1.6–2.0), Good (2.1–2.5), Fair (2.6–3.5) and Deficient (3.6–5.0).

Summary Statements: The Scientific Review Officer on each panel was responsible for preparing a Summary Statement reporting the results of the peer review for each application. The Summary Statements included the evaluation criteria and overall scores, peer reviewers' written comments, and the essence of panel discussions. The PCARP staff used this document to report the peer review results to the Programmatic Panel. In accordance with USAMRDC policy, Summary Statements are available to each applicant after completion of the review process.

THE SECOND TIER—Programmatic Review

The FY24 Programmatic Panel conducted programmatic review in February 2025. The panel included a diverse group of basic and clinical scientists and consumer advocates, each of whom contributed special expertise or interest in pancreatic cancer. Programmatic review is a comparison-based process that considers scientific evaluations across all disciplines and specialty areas. Programmatic Panel members do not automatically recommend funding applications that received high scores in the technical merit review process; rather, they closely examine the eligible applications to allocate as wisely as possible the limited funds available. The programmatic review criteria published in the PAs were as follows: ratings and evaluations of the scientific peer review panels, programmatic relevance (IDA and TRPA only), relative impact, relative innovation (IDA and FPTA only), partnership and synergy (TRPA only),

program relevance to the focus areas (TRPA and IDA only), portfolio balance, adherence to the intent of the funding opportunity, program portfolio composition (Focused Pilot Award only) and adherence to the intent of the award mechanism. After programmatic review, the PCARP sent the applications recommended for funding to the Commanding General, USAMRDC, for approval.