

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

DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW PROCEDURES

The FY24 PCRP called for applications in response to program announcements (PAs) for two award mechanisms released in May 2024:

- Exploration – Hypothesis Development Award (EHDA)
- Idea Development Award (IDA)

The PCRP received applications for the EHDA and IDA in July 2024, and they underwent peer review in August and September 2024. The PCRP conducted programmatic review in November 2024.

In response to the EHDA PA, the PCRP received 138 compliant applications and recommended funding 11 (8.0%) for a total of \$2.7 million (M).

In response to the IDA PA, the PCRP received 249 compliant applications and recommended funding 29 (11.6%) for a total of \$51.9M.

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

Table 1. Submission/Award Data for the FY24 PCRP*

Mechanism	Compliant Applications Received	Applications Recommended for Funding (%)	Total Funds
EHDA	138	11 (8.0%)	\$2.7M
IDA	249	29 (11.6%)	\$51.9M
Totals	387	40 (10.3%)	\$54.5M

*These data reflect funding recommendations only. Pending FY24 award negotiations, final numbers will be available after September 30, 2025.

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 PCRCP conducted peer review of EHDA and IDA applications in August and September 2024 utilizing 18 panels of researchers, clinicians and consumer advocates. The panel members based their evaluations on the criteria specified in the PAs.

The PCRCP conducted a peer review via teleconference for the EHDA utilizing four panels (36 scientists and 12 consumer reviewers) and for the IDA utilizing 14 panels (105 scientists and 25 consumer reviewers).

Each peer review panel included a Chair, an average of eight 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 PCRCP 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 PCRCP 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 November 2024. The panel included a diverse group of basic and clinical scientists and consumer advocates, each of whom contributed special expertise or interest in prostate 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 Exploration Hypothesis Development PA were as follows: ratings and evaluations of the scientific peer review panels, adherence to the intent of the funding opportunity, program portfolio composition, programmatic relevance to the FY24 PCRP Overarching Challenges and relative innovation and impact.

The programmatic review criteria published in the Idea Development PA were as follows: ratings and evaluations of the scientific peer review panels, adherence to the intent of the funding opportunity, program portfolio composition with consideration for New and Established Investigators, programmatic relevance to the FY24 PCRP Overarching Challenges and relative innovation and impact.

After programmatic review, the PCRP sent the applications recommended for funding to the Commanding General, USAMRDC, for approval.