

**US ARMY MEDICAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT COMMAND (USAMRDC)  
CONGRESSIONALLY DIRECTED MEDICAL RESEARCH PROGRAMS  
FISCAL YEAR 2024 (FY24) SPINAL CORD INJURY RESEARCH PROGRAM (SCIRP)**

**DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW PROCEDURES**

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

- Clinical Trial Award (CTA)
- Clinical Translation Research Award (CTRA)
- Translational Research Award (TRA)
- Investigator-Initiated Research Award (IIRA)

The SCIRP received pre-applications for the CTA, CTRA, TRA and IIRA in May 2024 and screened them in June 2024. The screening followed the pre-application evaluation criteria specified in the PAs to determine which investigators to invite to submit full applications. The SCIRP received applications in August 2024, and they underwent peer review in October 2024. The SCIRP conducted programmatic review in January 2025.

In response to the CTA PA, the SCIRP received 34 pre-applications and invited 21 of these to submit a full application. The SCIRP received 19 compliant applications and recommended funding 4 representing 5 awards (21.1%) for a total of \$14.3 million (M).

In response to the CTRA PA, the SCIRP received 28 pre-applications and invited 21 of these to submit a full application. The SCIRP received 17 compliant applications and recommended funding 5 representing 8 awards (29.4%) for a total of \$8.6 million (M).

In response to the TRA PA, the SCIRP received 43 pre-applications and invited 32 of these to submit a full application. The SCIRP received 27 compliant applications and recommended funding 5 representing 6 awards (18.5%) for a total of \$7.3 million (M).

In response to the IIRA PA, the SCIRP received 101 pre-applications and invited 57 of these to submit a full application. The SCIRP received 53 compliant applications and recommended funding 6 representing 7 awards (11.3%) for a total of \$4.6 million (M).

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

**Table 1. Submission/Award Data for the FY24 SCIRP\***

<b>Mechanism</b>	<b>Pre-Applications Received</b>	<b>Pre-Applications Invited (%)</b>	<b>Compliant Applications Received</b>	<b>Applications Recommended for Funding (%)</b>	<b>Total Funds</b>
CTA	34	21 (61.8%)	19	4 applications representing 5 potential awards (21.1%)	\$14.3M
CTRA	28	21 (75.8%)	17	5 applications representing 8 potential awards (29.4%)	\$8.6M
TRA	43	32 (74.4%)	27	5 applications representing 6 potential awards (18.5%)	\$7.3M
IIRA	101	57 (56.4%)	53	6 applications representing 7 potential awards (11.3%)	\$4.6M
<b>Total</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>131 (63.6%)</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>20 applications representing 26 potential awards (17.2%)</b>	<b>\$34.8M</b>

\*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 SCIRP conducted peer review of CTA, CTRA, TRA and IIRA applications in October 2024 utilizing eight 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 SCIRP 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 SCIRP 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 January 2025. The panel included a diverse group of basic and clinical scientists and consumer advocates, each of whom contributed special expertise or interest in spinal cord injuries. 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; relevance to the mission of the Defense Health Program and FY24 SCIRP as evidenced by relevance to military health, relative impact, program portfolio composition, and adherence to the intent of the award mechanism. Programmatic review criteria specific to the TRA and CTRA were translation potential and clinical translation potential respectively. After programmatic review, the SCIRP sent the applications recommended for funding to the Commanding General, USAMRDC, for approval.