

**US ARMY MEDICAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT COMMAND (USAMRDC)  
CONGRESSIONALLY DIRECTED MEDICAL RESEARCH PROGRAMS  
FISCAL YEAR 2024 (FY24) ARTHRITIS RESEARCH PROGRAM (ATRP)**

**DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW PROCEDURES**

The FY24 ATRP called for applications in response to program announcements (PAs) for two award mechanisms released in August 2024.

- Clinical Research Award (CRA)
- Focused Research Award (FRA)

The ATRP received applications for these two PAs in October 2024, and they underwent peer review in January 2025. The ATRP conducted programmatic review in March 2025.

In response to the CRA PA, the ATRP received 31 compliant applications and recommended funding 2 (6.5%) for a total of \$3.0 million (M).

In response to the FRA PA, the ATRP received 88 compliant applications and recommended funding 10 (11.4%) for a total of \$5.7M.

Tables 1 and 2 show submission and award data summarized for the FY24 ATRP.

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

<b>Mechanism</b>	<b>Compliant Applications Received</b>	<b>Applications Recommended for Funding (%)</b>	<b>Total Funds</b>
Clinical Research Award	13	2 (15.4%)	\$3.0M
Clinical Research Award – Clinical Trial	18	0 (0.0%)	\$0.0M
Focused Research Award – Research Level 1	51	7 (13.7%)	\$3.5M
Focused Research Award – Research Level 2	37	3 (8.1%)	\$2.2M
<b>Totals</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>12 (10.1%)</b>	<b>\$8.7M</b>

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

**Table 2. FY24 ATRP Application Data by Focus Area**

<b>Focus Area</b>	<b>Compliant Applications Received</b>	<b>Applications Recommended for Funding (%)</b>	<b>Total Funds</b>
Diagnosis and Progression Mitigation	25	3 (12.0%)	\$2.7M
Intervention/Treatment	75	6 (8.0%)	\$3.5M
Prevention	19	3 (15.8%)	\$2.5M
<b>Totals</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>12 (10.1%)</b>	<b>\$8.7M</b>

## **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 ATRP conducted peer review of CRA and FRA applications in January 2025 utilizing nine panels of researchers, clinicians and consumer advocates. The panel members based their evaluations on the criteria specified in the PAs.

The ATRP conducted peer review via teleconference for the CRA utilizing three panels of 30 scientists and five consumer reviewers; and the FRA utilizing six panels of 39 scientists and 12 consumer reviewers.

Each peer review panel included a Chair, an average of five scientific reviewers, two clinician-scientists, two consumer reviewers and a nonvoting Scientific Review Officer. Additionally, the CRA review panels included an average of two biostatisticians, one technology transfer specialist and one bioethicist. 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 ATRP 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 ATRP 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 March 2025. The panel included a diverse group of pre-clinical and clinical scientists, clinicians, federal stakeholders, and consumer advocates, each of whom contributed special expertise or interest in arthritis. 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, adherence to the intent of the funding opportunity, program portfolio balance, and relative impact and military relevance. After programmatic review, the ATRP sent the applications recommended for funding to the Commanding General, USAMRDC, for approval.