

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

DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW PROCEDURES

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

- Clinical Research Extension Award
- Era of Hope Scholar Award

The BCRP received applications for these two PAs in June 2024, and they underwent peer review in August 2024. The BCRP conducted programmatic review (*Stage 1 for Era of Hope Scholar Award*) in October 2024.

In response to the Clinical Research Extension Award PA, the BCRP received eight compliant applications, representing 16 potential awards, and recommended funding two applications (representing four potential awards, 25.0%) for a total of \$15.6 million (M).

In response to the Era of Hope Scholar Award PA, the BCRP received nine compliant applications and recommended inviting two (22.2%) to Stage 2 programmatic review (oral presentation).

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

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

Mechanism	Compliant Applications Received	Applications Recommended for Funding (%)	Total Funds
Clinical Research Extension Award	8	2 [‡] (25.0%)	\$15.6M

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

‡ Two applications recommended for funding representing four potential awards.

Table 2. Submission/Award Data for the FY24 BCRP from Stage 1 Programmatic Review

Mechanism	Compliant Applications Received	Applications Recommended for Stage 2 Programmatic Review (%)
Era of Hope Scholar Award	9	2 (22.2%)

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 BCRP conducted peer review of Clinical Research Extension Award and Era of Hope Scholar Award applications in August 2024 utilizing two 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 six 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 (Clinical Research Extension Award): 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 (Clinical Research Extension Award): 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 BCRP 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).

In contrast to the typical technical merit review process, no criteria or overall scores were assigned to the Era of Hope Scholar Award applications. Instead, reviewers were asked to address specific questions pertaining to the applicant's qualifications, accomplishments, research goals or ideas, and leadership skills. Each reviewer then voted confidentially on an overall level of enthusiasm (High, Medium, or Low).

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 BCRP 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 October 2024. The panel included a diverse group of basic and clinical scientists and consumer advocates, each of whom contributed special expertise or interest in breast 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 Clinical Research Extension Award PA were as follows: ratings and evaluations of the peer reviewers; adherence to the intent of the award mechanism; program portfolio composition; and relative impact.

The programmatic review criteria published in the Era of Hope Scholar Award PA for Stage 1 were as follows: ratings and evaluations of the peer reviewers; relative innovation; and adherence to the intent of the award mechanism. For Stage 2, the criteria are: understanding of barriers in breast cancer; articulation of a realistic vision with a high potential to impact breast cancer; and leadership skills to develop a vision for preventing and treating breast cancer beyond the Principal Investigator's laboratory and institution.

After programmatic review, the BCRP sent the Clinical Research Extension Award applications recommended for funding to the Commanding General, USAMRDC, for approval. After Stage 2 programmatic review, if Era of Hope Scholar Award applications are recommended for funding, the BCRP will send the application(s) recommended for funding to the Commanding General, USAMRDC, for approval.