

**U.S. ARMY MEDICAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT COMMAND (USAMRDC)  
CONGRESSIONALLY DIRECTED MEDICAL RESEARCH PROGRAMS (CDMRP)  
FISCAL YEAR 2021 (FY21) BREAST CANCER RESEARCH PROGRAM (BCRP)**

**DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW PROCEDURES**

The programmatic strategy implemented by the FY21 BCRP called for applications in response to a program announcement (PA) for the following award mechanism released in January 2021:

- Breakthrough Award Levels 1 and 2

Applications were received in March 2021 and peer reviewed in June 2021.

In response to the Breakthrough Award Levels 1 and 2 PA, 493 compliant applications were reviewed and 30 (6.1%) were recommended for funding for a total of \$37.38 million (M).

Submission and award data for the FY21 BCRP Breakthrough Award Levels 1 and 2 are summarized in the table below.

**Table 1. Submission/Award Data for the FY21 BCRP\***

<b>Mechanism</b>	<b>Compliant Applications Reviewed</b>	<b>Applications Recommended for Funding (%)</b>	<b>Total Funds</b>
Breakthrough Award – Level 1	283	17 (6.0%)	\$13,376,409
Breakthrough Award – Level 2	210	13 (6.2%)	\$24,004,067
<b>Total</b>	<b>493</b>	<b>30 (6.1%)</b>	<b>\$37,380,476</b>

\*These data reflect funding recommendations only. Pending FY21 award negotiations, final numbers will be available after September 30, 2022.

**THE TWO-TIER REVIEW SYSTEM**

The USAMRDC developed a review model based on recommendations of the 1993 Institute of Medicine (IOM) (now called the National Academy of Medicine) 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 IOM report recommended a two-tier review process and concluded that the best course would be to establish a peer review system that reflects not only the traditional strengths of existing peer review systems, but also is tailored to accommodate program goals. The Command has adhered 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**

Breakthrough Award Levels 1 and 2 applications were peer reviewed in June 2021 by 26 panels of researchers, clinicians, and consumer advocates based on the evaluation criteria specified in the PA.

Each peer review panel included a Chair, scientific reviewers, consumer reviewers, and a nonvoting Scientific Review Officer. The primary responsibility of the panelists 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. Applications were discussed individually. The Chair called upon the assigned reviewers for an assessment of the merits of each application using the evaluation criteria published in the PA. Following a panel discussion, the Chair summarized the strengths and weaknesses of each application, and panel members then rated the applications confidentially.

### **Application Scoring**

*Evaluation Criteria Scores:* Panel members were asked to rate each peer review evaluation criterion as published in the PA. A scale of 1 to 10 was used, with 1 representing the lowest merit and 10 the highest merit, using whole numbers only. The main reasons for obtaining the criteria ratings were 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, a range of 1.0 to 5.0 was used (1.0 representing the highest merit and 5.0 the lowest merit). Reviewer scoring was permitted in 0.1 increments. Panel member scores were averaged and rounded to arrive at a two-digit number (1.2, 1.9, 2.7, etc.). The following adjectival equivalents were 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. This document was used to report the peer review results to the Programmatic Panel. It is the policy of the USAMRDC to make Summary Statements available to each applicant when the review process has been completed.

### **THE SECOND TIER—Programmatic Review**

Programmatic Review of the Breakthrough Award Levels 1 and 2 was conducted in August 2021 by the FY21 Programmatic Panel and ad hoc reviewers. The Programmatic Panel and ad hoc reviewers are a diverse group of scientists, clinicians, and consumer advocates, each contributing 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 were highly rated in the technical merit review process; rather, they carefully scrutinize applications to allocate the limited funds available to support each of the award mechanisms as wisely as possible.

Programmatic review criteria published in the Breakthrough Award Levels 1 and 2 PA were as follows: ratings and evaluations of the peer reviewers; relevance to the mission of the Defense Health Program and the FY21 BCRP; and adherence to the intent of the award mechanism; program portfolio composition; relative impact and relative innovation (*Breakthrough Award Level 1 only*).

After programmatic review, the Commanding General, USAMRDC approved funding for the applications recommended during programmatic review.