

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

DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW PROCEDURES

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

- Concept Award
- Postdoctoral and Clinical Fellowship Award

Pre-applications (letter of intent) were received for these two PAs in August 2024.

The KCRP received applications for the Concept Award and Postdoctoral and Clinical Fellowship Award in September 2024, and they underwent peer review in November 2024. The KCRP conducted programmatic review in January 2024.

In response to the Concept Award PA, the KCRP received 81 compliant applications and recommended funding nine (11.1%) for a total of \$1.5 million (M).

In response to the Postdoctoral and Clinical Fellowship Award PA, the KCRP received 12 compliant applications and recommended funding five (41.7%) for a total of \$1.6M.

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

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

Mechanism	Compliant Applications Received	Applications Recommended for Funding (%)	Total Funds
Concept Award	81	9 (11.1%)	\$1.5M
Postdoctoral and Clinical Fellowship Award	12	5 (41.7%)	\$1.6M
Totals	94	14 (15.1%)	\$3.1M

*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 KCRP conducted a peer review online for the Concept Award in November 2024 by three panels of researchers, clinicians and consumer advocates based on the evaluation criteria specified in the PAs. Reviewers were blinded to the identity of the Principal Investigator, collaborators and their organization. Following the submission of the reviewer scores, reviewers participated in a moderated online discussion if there was discrepancy in the scoring.

The KCRP conducted a peer review online for the Postdoctoral and Clinical Fellowship Award in December 2024 utilizing a single panel of nine scientists, three consumer reviewers and a nonvoting Scientific Review Officer. Following the submission of the reviewer scores, reviewers participated in a moderated online discussion if there was discrepancy in the scoring.

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 KCRP 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 KCRP 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 kidney 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 PAs were as follows: ratings and evaluations of the scientific peer review panels, programmatic relevance, relative impact, relative innovation (Concept Award only), program portfolio composition (Postdoctoral and Clinical Fellowship Award only), alignment with FY24 KCRP Overarching Strategic Goals (Postdoctoral and Clinical Fellowship Award only) and adherence to the intent of the award mechanism. After programmatic review, the KCRP sent the applications recommended for funding to the Commanding General, USAMRDC, for approval.