

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

DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW PROCEDURES

The FY24 MRP called for applications in response to program announcements (PAs) for five award mechanisms released in May 2024:

- Focused Program Award – Rare Melanomas (FPA-RM)
- Idea Award (IA)
- Melanoma Academy Scholar Award (MASA)
- Survivorship Research Award (SRA)
- Team Science Award (TSA)

The MRP received full applications for all five PAs in August 2024, and they underwent peer review in November 2024. The MRP conducted programmatic review in February 2025.

In response to the FPA-RM PA, the MRP received 16 compliant applications and recommended funding *two* (12.5%) for a total of \$5.6 million (M).

In response to the IA PA, the MRP received 136 compliant applications and recommended funding *nine* (6.6%) for a total of \$5.6M.

In response to the MASA PA, the MRP received 20 compliant applications and recommended funding *three* (15.0%) for a total of \$2.3M.

In response to the SRA PA, the MRP received *six* compliant applications and recommended funding *two* (33.3%) for a total of \$2.4M.

In response to the TSA PA, the MRP received 56 compliant applications and recommended funding *eight* (14.3%) for a total of \$19.0M.

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

Table 1. Submission/Award Data for the FY24 MRP

Mechanism	Compliant Applications Received	Applications Recommended for Funding (%)	Total Funds
FPA-RM	16	2 (12.5%)	\$5,583,263
IA	136	9 (6.6%)	\$5,546,505
MASA	20	3 (15.0%)	\$2,308,119
SRA	6	2 (33.3%)	\$2,437,454
TSA	56 [†]	8 [‡] (14.3%)	\$18,958,666
Totals	234	24 (10.3%)	\$34,834,007

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

[†]56 applications representing 140 potential awards

[‡]8 applications representing 12 potential awards

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 MRP conducted a virtual peer review of the FPA-RM, IA, MASA, SRA and TSA applications in November 2024 utilizing 17 panel(s) comprised of researchers, clinicians and consumer advocates.

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 as the panel members discussed each application individually. 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: 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 overall 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 MRP 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 prepared a Summary Statement reporting the peer review results for each application. The Summary Statements included the evaluation criteria and overall scores, peer reviewers' written comments, and the essence of panel discussions. The MRP staff used this document to report the peer review results to the Programmatic Panel. In accordance with USAMRDC policy, Summary Statements are provided to each applicant after completion of the review process.

THE SECOND TIER—Programmatic Review

The FY24 Programmatic Panel conducted programmatic review in February 2025. The panel consists of basic and clinical scientists and consumer advocates who each contribute particular expertise or experience with melanoma. Programmatic review is a comparison-based process that considers scientific evaluations across all disciplines and specialty areas. Programmatic Panel members do not recommend funding applications based solely on the peer review scores; rather, they closely examine the highest scoring eligible applications and recommend applications for funding based on the programmatic review criteria listed in each PA.

Programmatic review criteria published in the FPA-RM PA were: ratings and evaluations of the peer reviewers, adherence to the intent of the award mechanism, program portfolio composition, relevance to military health and relative impact.

Programmatic review criteria published in the IA PA were: ratings and evaluations of the peer reviewers, adherence to the intent of the award mechanism, program portfolio composition, relevance to military health, relevance to at least one of the FY24 MRP focus areas, relative innovation and relative impact.

Programmatic review criteria published in the MASA PA were: ratings and evaluations of the peer reviewers, adherence to the intent of the award mechanism, program portfolio composition,

relevance to military health, relevance to at least one of the FY24 MRP focus areas, relative impact and relative career potential of the Scholar in the melanoma field.

Programmatic review criteria published in the SRA PA were: ratings and evaluations of the peer reviewers, adherence to the intent of the award mechanism, relative impact on melanoma survivorship, program portfolio composition and relevance to military health.

Programmatic review criteria published in the TSA PA were: ratings and evaluations of the peer reviewers, adherence to the intent of the award mechanism, program portfolio composition, relevance to military health, relevance to at least one of the FY24 MRP focus areas, relative synergistic potential of the collaboration and relative impact.

After programmatic review, the MRP sent the applications recommended for funding to the Commanding General, USAMRDC, for approval.