

**DEFENSE HEALTH AGENCY RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT-MEDICAL
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT COMMAND (DHA R&D-MRDC)
CONGRESSIONALLY DIRECTED MEDICAL RESEARCH PROGRAMS (CDMRP)
FISCAL YEAR 2025 (FY25) MELANOMA RESEARCH PROGRAM (MRP)**

DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW PROCEDURES

The FY25 MRP called for applications in response to program announcements (PAs) for six award mechanisms released in May 2025:

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

The MRP received pre-applications for the FPA-RM, IA and TSA in June 2025 and screened them in July 2025. The screening followed the pre-application evaluation criteria specified in the PAs to determine which investigators to invite to submit full applications. The MRP did not screen pre-applications received for the MALA, MASA and SRA. The MRP received applications for all six award mechanisms in October 2025, and they underwent peer review in December 2025. The MRP conducted programmatic review in February 2026.

In response to the FPA-RM PA, the MRP received 41 pre-applications representing 98 potential awards and invited 20 of these, representing 50 potential awards, to submit a full application. The MRP received 18 compliant applications, representing 44 potential awards, and recommended funding 2 applications, representing 5 potential awards, (11.11%) for a total of \$5.58 million (M).

In response to the IA PA, the MRP received 350 pre-applications and invited 122 of these to submit a full application. The MRP received 107 compliant applications and recommended funding 10 (9.35%) for a total of \$5.60M.

In response to the MALA PA, the MRP received 1 compliant application for a Director and Deputy Director of the Melanoma Academy and recommended funding both potential awards (100%) for a total of \$1.82M.

In response to the MASA PA, the MRP received 19 compliant applications and recommended funding 2 (10.53%) for a total of \$1.54M.

In response to the SRA PA, the MRP received 16 compliant applications and recommended funding 2 (12.50%) for a total of \$2.03M.

In response to the TSA PA, the MRP received 126 pre-applications, representing 326 potential awards, and invited 66 of these, representing 169 potential awards, to submit a full application. The MRP received 58 compliant applications, representing 146 potential awards, and recommended funding 8 applications, representing 17 potential awards, (13.79%) for a total of \$16.78M.

Table 1 shows submission and award data summarized for the FY25 MRP.

Table 1. Submission/Award Data for the FY25 MRP*

Mechanism	Pre-Applications Received	Pre-Applications Invited (%)	Compliant Applications Received	Applications Recommended for Funding (%)	Total Funds
FPA-RM	41	20 (48.78%)	18 [†]	2 [‡] (11.11%)	\$5.58M
IA	350	122 (34.86%)	107	10 (9.35%)	\$5.60M
MALA	N/A	N/A	1 [§]	1 [¶] (100.0%)	\$1.82M
MASA	N/A	N/A	19	2 (10.53%)	\$1.54M
SRA	N/A	N/A	16	2 (12.50%)	\$2.03M
TSA	126	66 (52.38%)	58 [#]	8 ^{**} (13.79%)	\$16.78M
Total	517	208 (40.23%)	219	25 (11.42%)	\$33.35M

* These data reflect funding recommendations only. Pending FY25 award negotiations, final numbers will be available after September 30, 2026.

[†] 18 applications representing 44 potential awards

[‡] 2 applications representing 5 potential awards

[§] 1 application representing 2 potential awards

[¶] 1 application representing 2 potential awards

[#] 58 applications representing 146 potential awards

^{**} 8 applications representing 17 potential awards

THE TWO-TIER REVIEW SYSTEM

The CDMRP 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 CDMRP 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 FPA-RM, IA, MALA, MASA, SRA and TSA applications in December 2025 utilizing 18 panels of researchers, clinicians and consumer advocates.

Each peer review panel included a Chair, an average of seven 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: 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 CDMRP 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 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 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 MRP staff used this document to report the peer review results to the Programmatic Panel. In accordance with DHA R&D-MRDC policy, Summary Statements are available to each applicant after completion of the review process.

THE SECOND TIER—Programmatic Review

The FY25 Programmatic Panel conducted programmatic review in February 2026. The panel included basic and clinical scientists, other melanoma research funders, and consumer advocates, each of whom contributed particular expertise or experience with melanoma. Programmatic Panel members do not automatically recommend funding applications based 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 FY25 MRP focus areas, relative innovation and relative impact.

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

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 FY25 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 FY25 MRP focus areas, relative synergistic potential of the collaboration and relative impact.

After programmatic review, the MRP routed the applications recommended for funding to a designated official for review and approval.