

**US ARMY MEDICAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT COMMAND (USAMRDC)
 CONGRESSIONALLY DIRECTED MEDICAL RESEARCH PROGRAMS (CDMRP)
 FISCAL YEAR 2019 (FY19) PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH/TRAUMATIC BRAIN
 INJURY RESEARCH PROGRAM (PH/TBIRP)
 JOINT PROGRAM COMMITTEE 5 (JPC-5)/MILITARY OPERATIONAL MEDICINE
 RESEARCH PROGRAM (MOMRP)**

DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW PROCEDURES

The programmatic strategy implemented by the FY19 PH/TBIRP JPC-5/MOMRP called for applications in response to a program announcement (PA) for one award mechanism released in March 2019:

- Prevention Research to Reduce Sexual Assault and/or Understand Adjustment Disorders Investigator-Initiated Focused Research Award (PSAAD-IIFRA)

Pre-applications (Letters of Intent) were received for the PSAAD-IIFRA PA in September 2019.

Applications were received for this PA in October 2019 and peer reviewed in December 2019. Programmatic review was conducted in February 2020.

In response to the PSAAD-IIFRA PA, 33 pre-applications were received, and all of the Principal Investigators were invited to submit a full application. Twenty-five (25) compliant applications were received, and 8 (32%) were recommended for funding, for a total of \$ \$7,237,734.

Submission and award data for the FY19 PH/TBIRP JPC-5/MOMRP are summarized in the table below.

Table 1. Submission/Award Data for the FY19 PH/TBIRP JPC-5/MOMRP*

Mechanism	Pre-Applications Received	Compliant Applications Received	Applications Recommended for Funding (%)	Total Funds
PSAAD-IIFRA	33	25	8 (32%)	\$7,237,734

*These data reflect funding recommendations only. Pending FY19 award negotiations, final numbers will be available after September 30, 2020.

THE TWO-TIER REVIEW SYSTEM

The USAMRDC developed a review model based on recommendations of the 1993 Institute of Medicine (IOM) 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 not only reflects 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

PSAAD-IIFRA applications were peer reviewed via on site in December 2019 by a single panel consisting of a Chair, eight scientists, one clinician, three consumer reviewers, three biostatisticians, three bioethicist and a nonvoting Scientific Review Officer (SRO).

The primary responsibility of the panelists was to review the technical merit of each application based upon the evaluation criteria specified in the PSAAD-IIFRA PA.

Individual Peer Review Panels

The Chair 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 PSAAD-IIFRA 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 PSAAD-IIFRA 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 SRO 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 applicants' abstracts, the evaluation criteria and overall scores, the peer reviewers' written comments, and the essence of the panel discussions. This document was used to report the peer review results to the programmatic reviewers. 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 was conducted in February 2020 by the FY19 Programmatic review panel, which is comprised of a diverse group of basic and clinical scientists, each contributing special expertise or interest. Programmatic review is a comparison-based process that considers scientific evaluations across all disciplines and specialty areas. Programmatic review panels do not automatically recommend funding applications that were highly rated in the technical merit review process; rather, they carefully weigh all applications to develop recommendations for allocation of the limited funds available. The programmatic review criteria published in the PSAAD-IIFRA PA were as follows: ratings and evaluations of the scientific peer review panels; programmatic relevance; adherence to the intent of the award mechanism; program portfolio composition; relative impact and innovation. After programmatic review, the Commanding General, USAMRDC, and the Director of the Defense Health Agency J9, Research and Development Directorate, approved funding for the applications recommended during programmatic review.