

**US ARMY MEDICAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT COMMAND (USAMRDC)
CONGRESSIONALLY DIRECTED MEDICAL RESEARCH PROGRAMS (CDMRP)
FISCAL YEAR 2024 (FY24) RARE CANCERS RESEARCH PROGRAM (RCRP)**

DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW PROCEDURES

The FY24 RCRP called for applications in response to program announcements (PAs) for three award mechanisms released in April 2024:

- Concept Award (CA)
- Idea Development Award (IDA)
- Resource and Community Development Award (RCDA)

The RCRP received pre-applications for the CA PA (Letters of Intent [LOIs]) in July 2024 and for the IDA and RCDA PAs in June 2024; the IDA and RCDA pre-applications were screened in July 2024. The screening followed the pre-application evaluation criteria specified in the PAs to determine which investigators to invite to submit full applications.

The RCRP received CA full applications in August 2024, and they underwent peer review in October 2024. The RCRP received IDA and RCDA full applications in September 2024, and they underwent peer review in December 2024. The RCRP conducted programmatic review in February 2025.

In response to the CA PA, the RCRP received 176 compliant applications and recommended funding 13 (7.4%) for a total of \$2.0 million (M).

In response to the IDA PA, the RCRP received 241 pre-applications and invited 155 of these to submit a full application. The RCRP received 140 compliant applications and recommended funding 12 (8.6%) for a total of \$6.51M.

In response to the RCDA PA, the RCRP received 49 pre-applications and invited 29 of these to submit a full application. The RCRP received 26 compliant applications and recommended funding six (23.1%) for a total of \$6.85M.

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

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

Mechanism	Pre-Applications Received	Pre-Applications Invited (%)	Compliant Applications Received	Applications Recommended for Funding (%)	Total Funds
CA	208	N/A	176	13 (7.38%)	\$2.00M
IDA	241	155 (63.31%)	140	12 (8.57%)	\$6.51M
RCDA	49	29 (59.18%)	26	6 (23.08%)	\$6.85M
Total	498	184 (63.45%)[±]	342	31 (9.06%)	\$15.36M

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

[±]Excluded CAs in calculations due to LOI. Used totals for pre-applications received and invited only.

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 RCRP conducted peer review online for CA applications in October 2024 utilizing 12 panels of researchers, clinicians and consumer advocates. The RCRP conducted peer review via videoconference for the IDA and RCDA in December utilizing 11 panels of researchers, clinicians and consumer advocates. The panel members based their evaluations on the criteria specified in the PAs. Each peer review panel included a Chair, an average of 10 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 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 RCRP 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 RCRP 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 RCRP Programmatic Panel conducted programmatic review in February 2025. The panel included a diverse group of basic and clinical scientists and consumer advocates, each of whom contributed special expertise or interest in rare cancers. 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, relevance of the study to the FY24 RCRP definition of rare cancers, relative impact to the field of rare cancers, program portfolio composition and adherence to the intent of the award mechanism. After programmatic review, the RCRP sent the applications recommended for funding to the Commanding General, USAMRDC, for approval.