

**US ARMY MEDICAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT COMMAND (USAMRDC)  
CONGRESSIONALLY DIRECTED MEDICAL RESEARCH PROGRAMS (CDMRP)  
FISCAL YEAR 2023 (FY23) VISION RESEARCH PROGRAM (VRP)**

**DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW PROCEDURES**

The programmatic strategy implemented by the FY22 VRP called for applications in response to program announcements (PAs) for four award mechanisms released in May 2022:

- Clinical Trial Award
- Focused Translational Team Science Award
- Translational Research Award
- Investigator-Initiated Research Award

Pre-applications were received for these four PAs in July 2022 and screened in August 2022 to determine which investigators would be invited to submit a full application. Pre-applications were screened based on the evaluation criteria specified in the PAs.

Applications were received for these four PAs in November 2022 and peer reviewed in January 2023. Programmatic review was conducted in March 2023.

In response to the Clinical Trial Award PA, eight pre-applications were received and the Principal Investigators (PIs) of three of these were invited to submit a full application. Three compliant applications were received and one (33.3%) was recommended for funding for a total of \$2.0 million (M).

In response to the Focused Translational Team Science Award PA, seven pre-applications were received and the PIs of four of these were invited to submit a full application. Three compliant applications were received and one (33.3%) were recommended for funding for a total of \$5.6M.

In response to the Translational Research Award, 11 pre-applications were received and the PIs of 8 of these were invited to submit a full application. Six compliant applications were received and two (33.3%) were recommended for funding for a total of \$3.3M.

In response to the Investigator-Initiated Research Award PA, 91 pre-applications were received and the PIs of 60 of these were invited to submit a full application. Fifty-six (56) compliant applications were received and seven (12.5%) were recommended for funding for a total of \$7.0M.

Submission and award data for the FY23 VRP are summarized in the table below.

**Table 1. Submission/Award Data for the FY22 VRP\***

<b>Mechanism</b>	<b>Pre-Applications Received</b>	<b>Pre-Applications Invited (%)</b>	<b>Compliant Applications Received</b>	<b>Applications Recommended for Funding (%)</b>	<b>Total Funds</b>
Clinical Trial Award	8	3 (38%)	3	1 (33.3%)	\$2.01
Focused Translational Team Science Award	7	4 (57%)	3	1 (33.3%)	\$5.55
Translational Research Award	11	8 (73%)	6	2 (33.3%)	\$3.29
Investigator-Initiated Research Award	91	60 (66%)	56	7 (12.5%)	\$7.02
<b>Total</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>75 (79.8%)</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>11 (16.2%)</b>	<b>\$17.87</b>

\*These data reflect funding recommendations only. Pending FY22 award negotiations, final numbers will be available after September 30, 2023.

## **THE TWO-TIER REVIEW SYSTEM**

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

Clinical Trial Award, Focused Translational Team Science Award, Translational Research Award, and Investigator-Initiated Research Award applications were peer reviewed in January 2023 by six panels of scientists, consumers, clinicians, and other subject matter experts based on the evaluation criteria specified in the PAs.

### **Individual Peer Review Panels**

The Chair for each panel 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 appropriate 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 appropriate 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 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. This document was used to report the peer review results to the Programmatic Panel. 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 March 2023 by the FY22 Programmatic Panel, comprised of a diverse group of basic and clinical scientists and consumer advocates, each contributing special expertise or interest in vision research. 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 were the most highly rated in the technical merit review process; rather, they carefully scrutinize applications to allocate the limited funds available to support each of the award mechanisms as wisely as possible. Programmatic review criteria published in the PAs were as follows: ratings and evaluations of the scientific peer review panels; programmatic relevance; relative impact; program portfolio composition; and adherence to the intent of the award mechanism. After programmatic review, the applications recommended for funding were sent to the Commanding General, USAMRDC, for approval.