**RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST PROGRAM HANDBOOK
BIOMEDICAL LABORATORY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (BLR&D)
SERVICE AND CLINICAL SCIENCE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (CSR&D)
SERVICE**

1. REASON FOR ISSUE. This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook establishes procedures for the Research Career Scientist (RCS) Program.

2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES. The major changes are:

  a. The Medical Research Entry Program (MREP) has been phased out.

  b. Applicants are asked to put their current email addresses on their curricula vitae (see App. B).

  c. Applications and Mid-term Progress Reports are to be transmitted by email to RCS Program Mailbox (see App. A and App. C).

3. RELATED DIRECTIVE. VHA Directive 1202 (to be issued).

4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE. The VHA Office of Research and Development is responsible for the contents of this VHA Handbook. Questions may be referred to 202-254-0482.

5. RESCISSION. This VHA Handbook rescinds VHA Handbook 1202.4 dated May 22, 2003.

6. RECERTIFICATION. This VHA Handbook is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working date of May 2013.

Michael J. Kussman, MD, MS, MACP
Under Secretary for Health

DISTRIBUTION   CO: E-mailed 5/20/08
                           FLD: VISN, MA, DO, OC, OCRO, and 200 – E-mailed 5/20/08

CONTENTS

RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST PROGRAM HANDBOOK
BIOMEDICAL LABORATORY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (BLR&D)
SERVICE AND CLINICAL SCIENCE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (CSR&D)
SERVICE

RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST PROGRAM HANDBOOK
BIOMEDICAL LABORATORY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (BLR&D)
SERVICE AND CLINICAL SCIENCE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (CSR&D)
SERVICE

1. PURPOSE

   This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook provides policy and guidelines related to the Research Career Scientist Program and instructions for applying for the designation of Research Career Scientist for the Biomedical Laboratory Research and Development (BLR&D) and Clinical Sciences Research and Development (CSR&D) Services, including the Cooperative Studies Program (CSP).

2. BACKGROUND

   BLR&D and CSR&D recognize the important contributions of non-clinician Ph.D. scientists to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) research program. As principal investigators of BLR&D and CSR&D research programs, they make valuable contributions to our knowledge of disorders important to the United States (U.S.) veteran population. In addition to research efforts, however, the intramural nature of the VA research program requires that principal investigators have a primary professional commitment to VA. Scientists show this commitment by appropriately acknowledging VA employment and support, participating in committee work, directing core facilities, teaching, mentoring, supervising shared resources, and other important research-related activities. In recognition of the contributions and professional commitment to the VA, BLR&D and CSR&D support a career track for the non-clinician Ph.D. scientist. This Handbook describes the non-clinician scientist career track leading to the RCS Program for BLR&D and CSR&D.

3. SCOPE

   a. There are three designated levels in the career track for non-clinician scientists at BLR&D and CSR&D:

   (1) Research Scientist;

   (2) Research Career Scientist (RCS); and

   (3) Senior Research Career Scientist (SRCS).

   b. The designation of Research Scientist is conferred to non-clinician principal investigators upon funding of their VA Merit Review Award Program.

   c. The designations of RCS and SRCS are conferred to non-clinician scientists by appointment in recognition of outstanding achievements and contributions to VA research.

   d. The appointment provides salary support from BLR&D or CSR&D for the term of the award and is renewable: 5 years for RCS, 7 years for SRCS.

4. RESEARCH SCIENTIST

Independent non-clinician Ph.D. scientists may apply to the Merit Review program for research and salary support, once they have received permission to submit a proposal. Salary support must be requested in the budget. The Research Scientist designation is conferred on the principal investigator of a funded merit award for the term of the program and will continue as long as the scientist receives VA peer-reviewed research support. Salary support may be extended for up to 1 year following termination of research support, provided the Research Scientist continues to apply for merit award funding and provides service to VA research.

5. RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST

a. This designation is awarded to established, independent investigators who have distinguished themselves through scientific achievement and contribution to the VA research program via training, mentoring junior VA scientists (clinician and non-clinician), functioning as a resource for the research community, serving on VA research or other local or national committees, directing a core facility, and collaborating with clinician scientists.

b. It is expected that RCS applicants have the qualifications to be eligible for a General Schedule (GS)-14 appointment within the Federal Government, and the title of Associate Professor at the affiliated university. The RCS Evaluation Committee reviews the RCS applications.

c. RCS appointments provide 5 years of salary support and are renewable.

d. Renewal is competitive and contingent upon availability of funds and continuation of:

(1) Peer-reviewed research support

(2) Contribution to VA research service, and

(3) Scientific distinction.

6. SENIOR RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST (SRCS)

a. At the time of RCS renewal, each RCS is evaluated for the SRCS appointment by the RCS Evaluation Committee. The SRCS appointment is made only by nomination from the RCS Evaluation Committee to the Director, BLR&D or CSR&D. The highest standards are applied when considering nominations to SRCS. Scientists nominated for SRCS are highly productive, international leaders, who have achieved wide recognition of their accomplishments, in their fields. At the same time, their contributions to the local and national VA programs through training and research service are exemplary.

b. It is expected that SRCS applicants would have the qualifications to be eligible for a GS-15 appointment within the Federal government and the title of Professor at the affiliated

university. Scientists selected for the SRCS appointment must have previously held a RCS appointment for a minimum period of 5 years.

c. The SRCS level provides 7 years of salary support to the most accomplished VA research scientists. Renewal is competitive and contingent upon availability of funds and continuation of:

(1) Peer-reviewed research support

(2) Contribution to VA research service, and

(3) Scientific distinction.

7. SALARY

RCS and SRCS receive VA salary support for the term of the appointment and therefore, they should not request salary support when applying for other VA research programs. Research Scientists must request salary support in the merit award proposal according to program instructions. VA salary support for the RCS and SRCS will be reduced commensurate with the reduction of research time available if the investigator holds significant administrative positions at the VA or university affiliate.

8. ELIGIBILITY

An individual VA Medical Center may submit a total of two new or revised RCS applications each fiscal year. This limit does not include renewal applications. Potential applicants should consider the source of their VA funding to determine the most appropriate ORD service (BLR&D and CSR&D, Rehabilitation Research and Development, or Health Services Research and Development) to review the application. Scientists paid by Medical Care appropriation are not eligible for an RCS appointment, unless they officially terminate their career appointments. The following criteria define the eligibility requirements for a new RCS applicant:

NOTE: Applications are administratively withdrawn if any of the eligibility criteria have not been met.

a. A minimum 5/8th VA-paid appointment at the time of application.

b. A competitively funded BLR&D or CSR&D merit award or service as a biostatistician or pharmacist on an active CSP protocol, at the time of application.

c. An active research program performed in a VA-designated laboratory and office for at least the previous 3 years.

d. National peer-reviewed research support (VA, National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Science Foundation (NSF)) as a principal investigator (not as co-investigator) for at least a total of 6 years. *NOTE: This does not have to be 6 consecutive years.*

9. EVALUATION

Appointment as RCS and SRCS is highly competitive. The RCS Evaluation Committee reviews new and renewal applications and recommends appointments to the Directors, BLR&D and CSR&D. Decisions made by the Directors are not subject to appeal. Evaluations are based on performance and track record of the applicant in the following areas:

a. **Collaborations.** RCS applicants are evaluated for collaborations with VA and non-VA scientists and clinicians as evidenced by their joint peer-reviewed publications, sharing research techniques and/or special procedures, obtaining grants together, etc.

b. **Mentoring and Training.** In addition to mentoring and training undergraduate/graduate students, post-doctoral fellows and junior VA scientists, RCS applicants are specifically evaluated for their contributions to clinical scientists' efforts in successfully obtaining grants, peer-reviewed publications, sharing special research techniques etc. Applicants are also evaluated for: their participation in teaching rounds for fellows, residents, and interns; providing updates on relevant topics to scientists; teaching at the affiliated university; and training investigators in special techniques.

c. **Administrative Service.** Both local and national research administration is evaluated including local VA medical center committee service, service at the affiliated university, national service, such as: ad hoc or regular membership on merit award subcommittees, NIH study sections, etc.

NOTE: Service to the local VA research program is considered essential.

d. **Research.** RCS applicants' contributions to research are evaluated by considering their history of publishing peer-reviewed research papers in high quality journals, peer-reviewed research funding, funding record as principal investigator, membership on editorial or advisory boards for journals, etc. *NOTE: Publications with clinician scientists are valued.*

e. **Letters of Recommendation.** Letters of recommendation from national and international leaders in the applicant's field are evaluated to determine the applicant's achievements and contributions in research, collaborating, mentoring, training, and service.

10. MAINTAINING THE RCS OR SRCS APPOINTMENT

Maintaining the RCS or SRCS appointment is highly competitive and subject to periodic peer review.

a. At the mid-term of the appointment, the RCS Evaluation Committee reviews progress using a report submitted by the appointee (see App. C for instructions). The mid-term progress report provides information for the RCS Evaluation Committee to form an overall impression as to whether the appointee remains competitive.

NOTE: BLR&D or CSR&D conveys any concerns of the committee to the RCS or SRCS.

b. The applicant is responsible for submitting a timely renewal. Renewal applications are due in VA Central Office one round prior to the award end date; for example, if the award end date is September 30, 2008, the renewal application is due in VA Central Office by March 15, 2008. At the time of renewal, the RCS or SRCS is expected to have maintained a productive, funded, peer-reviewed research program and is evaluated using the same criteria as a new applicant.

c. Renewal applications are to be prepared according to the instructions in Appendix A, with the exceptions that letters of recommendation are not required and a copy of the most recent mid-term progress report must be included. However, letters of endorsement from the Associate Chief of Staff (ACOS) for R&D relating the value of the RCS or SRCS to the VA Medical Center may be included, if deemed necessary.

d. If an application for appointment renewal is not approved, the applicant may receive salary from the applicant's funded merit award. It is recommended that a non-renewed applicant wait at least 6 months before submitting a new application. *NOTE: Non-renewal decisions are not subject to appeal.*

11. APPLICATIONS

New applications are accepted twice each year and must be received in BLR&D or CSR&D by the due date. *NOTE: For application submission deadlines, refer to Appendix A.*

a. Appendix A describes submission deadlines and instructions for preparation of new and renewal applications.

b. Appendix B describes the currently required format for a Curriculum Vitae (CV).

c. Appendix C describes preparation instructions for the mid-term progress report.

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION OF NEW AND RENEWAL
APPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST DESIGNATION**

*NOTE: An individual Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center can submit a total of
two (new or revised) applications during a fiscal year.*

1. FORMAT. Applications must consist of single-spaced typed pages with 1-inch margins at
each edge. Use only letter-quality black print aerial 11 point font. The type density must be no
more than 15 characters per inch (CPI) and have no more than 6 lines of type within a vertical
inch. For proportional spacing, any representative section of text must not exceed a density of 15
CPI. Do not use photo reduction or small fonts.

2. PROPOSAL PREPARATION

  a. <u>**Cover Page.**</u> A cover page listing the following information in the order specified:

  (1) Title, which is BLR&D and CSR&D Research Career Scientist Application.

  (2) Name of nominee.

  (3) Name of VA Medical Center and indication whether this is the first or second
nomination from the VA Medical Center during the current fiscal year (October 1 – September
30).

  (4) Nominee's date of birth.

  (5) Positions currently held and proposed.

  (6) Nominee's current VA-paid appointment (in 8ths).

  (7) Number of years employed by VA as a Ph.D. scientist.

  (8) Nominee's current grade and step.

  (9) Nominee's academic title (indicate tenure status).

  (10) Location of nominee's laboratory and office.

  (11) Current VA funding including title, inclusive dates, role and amount.

  (12) Name, title, and signature of the VA Medical Center Director and the Associate Chief
of Staff.

  b. <u>**Copy of the Mid-term Evaluation**</u> (for renewal applications only)

   c. **Narrative.** Submit the information in the order specified.

   (1) A statement describing the research area of the nominee and its relevance to VA healthcare. This statement is page "1" of the application. All pages need to contain both the nominee's name and page number at the bottom (e.g., Smith-1 – Smith-20).

   (2) Statement of nominee's working relationships with other investigators and interactions at the medical center. Briefly describe collaborations with other VA and non-VA scientists and clinicians and indicate if they resulted in coauthored publications or joint grant funding.

   (3) A current Curriculum Vitae (CV) (see App. B).

   (4) Five letters of support. Each letter should provide an opinion regarding the applicant's reputation as a scientist, evaluation of standing in applicant's field of research, and capability as a mentor and collaborator. The letters need to be from recognized leaders in the applicant's research area, including internationally recognized experts.

NOTE: Do not include more than five letters. Additional letters will be disregarded. Do not include letters in renewal applications.

   (5) A letter of support from the Research and Development (R&D) Committee (required for both new and renewal applications).

   (6) For current VA funded research, a completed:

   (a) VA Form 10-1313-2, Research and Development Program, Summary Description of Program/Project;

   (b) VA Form 10-1313-3, Research and Development Program, Current Funds and First Year Request for Program/Project

   (c) VA Form 10-1313-4, Research and Development Program, Estimated Expenses of Program/Project;

   (d) VA Form 10-1313-8, Investigator's Total Current and Pending VA and Non-VA Research/Development Support.

   (e) CSP biostatisticians and pharmacists who do not have current VA merit funding may submit the Executive Summary, Planning Committee membership listing the biostatistician/pharmacist and budget page for current CSP protocol. In addition, a VA Form 10-1313-8 (http://www.research.va.gov/funding/process/forms.cfm) briefly describing investigator's current and pending total VA and non-VA Research/development support should be included.

   (7) For current non-VA funded research, include budget page and abstract.

   (8) Two publications chosen by the nominee as being representative of the nominee's work.

3. DUE DATE. Applications are reviewed semi-annually. Deadlines for receipt of applications are March 15, and September 15. Timelines for review and awards are indicated in the following table.

	<u>Spring Round</u>	<u>Fall Round</u>
RCS Application (new and renewal) due date	March 15	September 15
RCS Review	June and July	December and January
Award Notification	August	February
Award Start Date	October 1	April 1

4. SUBMISSION. Convert the completed application package including publications and CV into <u>one Portable Document File (PDF) file</u> and transmit by email to the RCS Program Mailbox: rcs.materials@va.gov

NOTE: Free or low cost PDF conversion programs are listed (at the end) on VA intranet: http://vaww.research.va.gov/funding/electronic-submission.cfm

**FORMAT FOR CURRICULUM VITAE FOR RESEARCH CAREER SCIENTIST
APPLICATION**

Do <u>not</u> include Social Security Number. List inclusive dates wherever appropriate.

1. PERSONAL DATA

    a. Name.

    b. Current Mailing Address.

    c. Telephone and Fax Numbers and Email Address.

    d. Professional Facilities: Office and Laboratory Locations.

2. EDUCATION

    a. Baccalaureate.

    b. Graduate.

    c. Postgraduate.

3. POSTDOCTORAL TRAINING

4. APPOINTMENTS

    a. VA appointments (indicate grade and step).

    b. University appointments (indicate tenured status).

    c. Other professional employment.

**5. PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS AND MEMBERSHIP IN SCIENTIFIC
SOCIETIES.** Professional affiliations and membership in scientific societies including any offices held (local, national, international)

6. SERVICE TO LOCAL VA MEDICAL CENTER

7. SERVICE TO NATIONAL VA

8. SERVICE TO AFFILIATED UNIVERSITY

9. SERVICE TO PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS. Service to professional organizations including national advisory committees, editorships, peer review activities, etc.

10. PROFESSIONAL AWARDS AND HONORS

11. FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS. List funded research projects (current and past, VA and non-VA) in spreadsheet form with the following information.

Source of Funding   Grant Number   Title of Project   Role Dates   Annual Direct Amount

NOTE: For renewal applications, limit to the past 10 years.

12. TRAINING AND MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

    a. List specific teaching assignments, past and current with inclusive dates, at the affiliate or at other institutions. Include participation in teaching rounds for fellows, residents, and interns; providing updates on relevant topics to scientists and training investigators in special techniques.

    b. List past and current undergraduate and graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and faculty mentored. Include names, level of trainee, inclusive dates and trainees' current position in the following spreadsheet format.

NOTE: For renewals, limit this entire section to the past 10 years.

Name	Trainee Status	Inclusive Dates	VA or non-VA	Clinician or Non-clinician	Current Position
	Undergraduate Graduate or Post-doctoral Other (describe)				

    c. Provide evidence of successful mentoring of fellows or junior scientists, VA and non-VA, in terms of their transitions to independence, e.g., obtaining independent research grants or advancement in their academic positions.

13. EXTRAMURAL ACTIVITIES. Extramural invited presentations and seminars (include dates and limit to the past 10 years).

14. BIBLIOGRAPHY.: Numbered bibliography in the following order. Highlight nominee's name. *NOTE: Do not include abstracts, papers submitted or in preparation. For renewal applications, limit listing to the past 10 years.*

    a. Papers published or in press in peer-reviewed journals.

    b. Published invited papers in proceedings or in other non-peer reviewed journals.

    c. Review articles.

    d. Books and book chapters.

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION OF RESEARCH CAREER
SCIENTIST MID-TERM REPORT**

At the mid-term of Research Career Scientist (RCS) or Senior Research Career Scientist (SRCS) appointments, a report is due in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Central Office, which will be reviewed by the RCS Evaluation Committee. The report consists of a cover page and accompanying documentation.

NOTE: Pay attention to the page limitations.

1. COVER PAGE

  a. List the following information, in the order specified, on the cover page:

  (1) Title: BLR&D or CSR&D Research Career Scientist; Mid-Term Progress Report.

  (2) Name of RCS.

  (3) Type of Appointment. (RCS or SRCS).

  (4) Current vVA Employment: (VA paid 8ths, Grade, and Step).

  (5) Academic Title (Indicate tenure status).

  (6) Location of Office.

  (7) Location of Laboratory.

  (8) Date of RCS Appointment.

  (9) Inclusive Dates of Reporting Period.

  b. Signatures. (RCS and SRCS; Associate Chief of Staff (ACOS) for Research; VA Medical Center Director)

2. DOCUMENTATION: Provide the following information requested for the reporting period only. All publications should include percent of RCS contribution.

NOTE: Do not provide a Curriculum Vitae (CV) or historic data of accomplishments prior to the reporting period.

  a. Collaboration (Limit to one page.)

  (1) List all publications with established clinicians or other scientists, VA and non-VA.

(2) List all funded grants as co-investigator or collaborator with established clinicians or other scientists, VA and non-VA.

b. <u>Mentoring</u> (Limit to one page.)

(1) List all publications with new scientists, VA and non-VA. A new scientist is one who has not yet received funding from a national peer-reviewed source.

(2) List all funded grants as co-investigator or collaborator with new scientists, VA and non-VA.

(3) List all Career Development Award applications on which the applicant serves as mentor, co-mentor, or collaborator.

(4) List any other mentoring activities.

c. <u>Training.</u> List specific teaching assignments at the affiliate or at other institutions. Include participation in teaching rounds for fellows, residents, and interns; providing updates on relevant topics to scientists and training investigators in special techniques. List training activities in the following spreadsheet format:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Trainee Status</u>	<u>Inclusive Dates</u>	<u>VA or non-VA</u>	<u>Clinician or Non-clinician</u>	<u>Current Position</u>
	Undergraduate Graduate or Post-doctoral Other (describe)				

d. <u>Administration.</u> List both local and national research contributions (committees, review boards, editorial boards, etc.) during the reporting period, and indicate whether service is VA or non-VA related. Please limit to one page and include dates of service.

e. <u>Research Productivity</u>

(1) List currently funded and pending research projects (VA and non-VA) in the following spreadsheet format for the reporting period only.

<u>Source of Funding</u> <u>Grant Number</u> <u>Title of Project</u>   <u>Role</u>   <u>Dates</u>   <u>Annual Direct Amount</u>

(2) Present a list of numbered publications in the following order <u>for the reporting period only</u>. Include an indication of the percent of contribution made for each work:

NOTE: *Do not include abstracts, papers submitted, or in preparation.*

(a) Papers published or in press in peer-reviewed journals. (Highlight RCS name.)

    (b) Published invited papers in proceedings or in other non-peer reviewed journals.

    (c) Review articles.

    (d) Books and book chapters.

    f. <u>Other.</u> Comment, if necessary, upon any changes that may have affected research productivity and/or service during the reporting period. Limit to a maximum of one page.

3. **<u>DUE DATE.</u>** March 15 or September 15, as appropriate for the mid-term. For example, for an RCS appointment that begins on October 1, 2008, the RCS mid-term report is due in VA Central Office by March 15, 2011 and for a SRCS appointment that begins on the same date the mid-term report is due by March 15, 2012.

4. <u>SUBMISSION.</u> An electronic copy of the Mid-term Progress Report fill-able form with attachments is to be transmitted by email to the RCS Program Mailbox: <u>rcs.materials@va.gov</u>. Scanned versions of the awardee's current full CV and letter from ACOS for Research may be included as separate electronic attachments or copied into the form at the end.