



**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
OFFICE OF RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT**

**PROGRAM GUIDE 1200.03**

**CENTRALIZED POSITIONS OF RESEARCH SCIENTISTS, GS-14 AND ABOVE**

As of October 15, 2020, Handbook 1200.03 has been replaced with this Program Guide. This Program Guide replaces all prior official ORD guidance.

**ISSUANCE DATE: September 1, 2023**

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## 1. SUMMARY OF CHANGES

- a. Please see current submission instructions and checklist at: ([https://www.research.va.gov/resources/centralized\\_positions.cfm](https://www.research.va.gov/resources/centralized_positions.cfm)).
- b. Classification review of Optional Form (OF)-8 and position description (PD) evaluation by local Human Resources (HR) or VISN Consolidated Classification Unit (CCU) is no longer required.
- c. This guide can be used for both non-supervisory research investigators or supervisory research investigators serving in a significant research leadership role.

## 2. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Program Guide defines the information required by the Office of Research and Development (ORD) to evaluate research scientist positions funded by ORD for assignment at General Schedule (GS)-14 and above. This Program Guide refers to Title 5 research scientists working in Biomedical Laboratory Research and Development Service (BLR&D), Clinical Sciences Research and Development Service (CSR&D), Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D), Health Services Research and Development Service (HSR&D), and the Cooperative Studies Program (CSP). **AUTHORITY:** Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) § 7301(b), 7303. **NOTE:** *This Program Guide does not refer to the Research Career Scientist (RCS) Program. More information on RCS awards may be found at: [https://www.hsrp.research.va.gov/cdp/res\\_career\\_scientist.cfm](https://www.hsrp.research.va.gov/cdp/res_career_scientist.cfm). See also [ORD Program Guide 1200.20, Research Career Scientist Program](#).*

## 3. SCOPE

- a. This Program Guide applies to professional research work at the GS-14 and above level funded by ORD and meets the criteria in the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Research Grade Evaluation Guide (RGEG) published in September 2006. Positions typically eligible for consideration are those whose primary function is scientific investigation in basic or applied research in biology, medicine, health, veterinary medicine, psychology, computer science, social sciences (including economics), mathematical sciences (including statistics), and industrial design. This guide can be used for both non-supervisory research investigators or supervisory research investigators serving in a significant research leadership role.
- b. ORD, at the request of HR Management Service, assesses nominations for assignment at GS-14 and GS-15 for select positions costed out to the medical care appropriation, provided that those positions include scientific investigation as a significant duty. If ORD recommends that such an incumbent be appointed at the GS-14 or 15 level, the appointment may only be affected with the approvals of the local VA Medical Center (VAMC) Director and Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) Director within allocated medical care ceilings.

## 4. PROCEDURE

a. **VAMC Facilities.**

(1) The local VAMC writes the PD in the four-factor format mirroring the RGEG including the introduction, major duties and describes the scope and impact of the specific research being performed (see link to RGEG in references). The PD describes the field of research being pursued, the nature and scope of research projects, anticipated results, the specific researcher's background and qualifications, and the impact of the work on the state of the art in their research field and the healthcare mission of VA.

(2) The VAMC Research and Development (R&D) Service completes the top half of the OF-8, PD, items 2 through 14, item 15e, and items 16 through 18. The first line supervisor, generally the Associate Chief of Staff for Research or equivalent, signs item 20a. Optional: second line supervisor, generally the Chief of Staff, signs item 20b. **NOTE:** *Local HR or VISN CCU classification review of OF-8 and position description is no longer required.*

(3) The nominating VA medical facility convenes a local position review panel that includes a minimum of three scientific reviewers (at a grade equal to or higher than that requested for the nominee) to serve as subject matter experts. No panel member should have a conflict of interest with the nominee (i.e. collaborations within last 3 years, or a mentoring or supervisory relationship). The panel reviews the nominee's work, qualifications, and professional development, specifically evaluating the nominee's professional achievements, publications, and presentations before professional organizations. The panel reviews the nominee's work using the four factors in the RGEG. **NOTE:** *VA personnel from other VA medical facilities may be on the panel when there is an insufficient pool of scientists at the requesting VA medical facility.*

(4) Each local panel member prepares and signs a separate evaluation worksheet (VA Form 4670). The completed package is sent to the VA medical facility research office for signature and submission to ORD.

(5) The VAMC R&D Service prepares the request for centralized position package for submission to ORD according to the Instructions for Preparation and Submission of Nominations for Centralized Positions of Research Scientists found on the ORD website ([https://www.research.va.gov/resources/centralized\\_positions.cfm](https://www.research.va.gov/resources/centralized_positions.cfm)). Required documents typically include: 1) Centralized Positions Cover Sheet (IRBNet Smart form) with nominee and position information, research impact statement, and current VA funding; 2) non-VA funding and funding history; 3) Letter from VAMC; 4) Curriculum Vitae; 5) Three letters of Support; 6) Two reprints as an example of nominee's best work; 7) fully editable OF-8; 8) PD in word; and 9) Signed Organizational Chart.

b. **VHA Office of Research and Development**

(1) ORD receives the Centralized Positions package request and reviews for completeness. If the package is incomplete, ORD returns the package to the local VAMC, noting materials or revisions needed prior to conducting the ORD panel review. **NOTE:** *Positions for consideration are for Title 5 professional research work at the GS-14 and above level funded by ORD and meets the criteria in the OPM RGEG published in September 2006. Positions typically eligible for consideration are those whose primary function is scientific investigation (25% or more of major duties) in basic or applied research in the Natural Resources Management and Biological Sciences, Medical and Healthcare, Engineering and Architecture, and Mathematical Sciences group series, excluding Title 38 and Hybrid occupations, which have separate processes for qualification and ORD review.*

(2) ORD convenes a review panel that includes a minimum of three scientific reviewers to serve as subject matter experts (excluding the CRADO, Deputy CRADOs, or ORD Service Directors) and a HR technical advisor.

(3) The panel reviews the nominee's work using the four factors in the RGEG plus the following VA specific criteria:

(a) A minimum of 5/8ths time commitment to VA, evidenced by a 5/8ths VA-salaried appointment unless there is a waiver to this requirement (see [ORD Program Guide 1200.15, Eligibility for VA Research Support](#)).

(b) A record of successful past and current VA research support or successful competition as a principal investigator for significant, extra-VA research funding from a national program that utilizes a standard of scientific merit review equivalent to that of VA, or both.

(c) A record of significant publications in peer-reviewed scientific and professional journals widely read within the nominee's field, particularly as the first or senior author.

(d) History of invitations to speak or chair sessions at national or international scientific meetings.

(e) Membership on national scientific advisory, merit review committees, or editorial boards of scientific or professional journals.

(f) Recognition by peers as a leader in the nominee's field of research evidenced by letters of recommendation or other award(s).

(g) An active role or record of training junior scientists and teaching at the VAMC or the academic affiliate.

(4) Each panel member prepares and signs a separate evaluation worksheet (VA Form 4670, Position Classification Worksheet for Research Positions) and ORD prepares a memorandum stating the score and recommendation.

(5) The panel forwards a recommendation on the nomination to the appropriate ORD Service Director for concurrence.

(6) ORD submits the approved position package to the Classification Shared Services Unit, HR Operations Office, Office of Workforce Management & Consulting for the final classification of the position description.

(7) The CRADO signs the approval for the research GS-14 position packages. ORD submits the research GS-15 position packages to the Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Discovery, Education, and Affiliate Networks for final approval. ORD staff sends the signed packages to the local VA Research office for final processing and notification of the applicant. Position packages under the medical appropriation are sent to the VAMC for VAMC Director and VISN Director signature.

(8) Upon notification by ORD, the requesting VAMC Research and Development Office should submit the approved position package along with any relevant documents ([Human Resources/Personnel, va.gov](https://www.humanresources/personnel.va.gov)) to their servicing HR Office requesting a conversion to a new appointment or a recruitment utilizing the Medical Support Authority for Research (full time) or Schedule B (part time).

## **5. NEW APPOINTMENTS**

a. Senior research scientists may be appointed to a GS-14 or GS-15 position if they meet the criteria in the RGEG.

b. The local VAMC processes the request using the procedures outlined in paragraph 4a. **NOTE:** *Review the Instructions for Preparation and Submission of Nominations for Centralized Positions of Research Scientists found on the ORD website.*

c. ORD reviews the package for completeness and convenes a review panel to evaluate the written PD. The panel reviews the nominee's qualifications using the four factors in the RGEG plus the following VA specific criteria:

(1) A record of successful past and current national peer-reviewed (e.g., National Institutes of Health research support as a principal investigator.

(2) A record of significant publications in peer-reviewed scientific and professional journals widely read within the nominee's field, particularly as the first or senior author.

(3) History of invitations to speak or chair sessions at national or international scientific meetings.

(4) Membership on national scientific advisory, VA merit or other grant review committees, or editorial boards of scientific or professional journals.

(5) Recognition by peers as a leader in the nominee's field of research evidenced by letters of recommendation or other awards.

(6) An active role or record of training junior scientists and teaching at the VAMC or academic affiliate.

d. ORD submits the appointment package to the HR&SS classification unit for evaluation.

e. The CRADO signs the approval for research GS-14 appointment packages. ORD submits research GS-15 appointment packages to the Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Discovery, Education, and Affiliate Networks for final approval. ORD staff sends the signed packages to the local VAMC R&D Service for final processing and notification of the applicant. Appointment packages under the medical appropriation are sent to the VAMC for VAMC Director and VISN Director signature.

f. The appointment will be made effective by the responsible HR Management Officer on the first day of the pay period following the date of approval of the centralized position by the approving official, but in no case earlier than the date on which all administrative requirements are met.

## **6. REFERENCES**

a. 38 U.S.C. § 7303.

b. OPM Research Grade Evaluation Guide (RGEG), <http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/classification-qualifications/classifying-general-schedule-positions/functional-guides/gresch.pdf>. **NOTE:** *This linked document is outside of VA control and may or may not be conformant with Section 508 of the Americans with Disabilities Act.*

c. Program Guide 1200.15, Eligibility for VA Research Support, <https://www.research.va.gov/resources/policies/ProgramGuide-1200-15-Eligibility-for-VA-Research-Support.pdf>

d. Standard Operating Procedures - Using Schedule B and Title 38 Medical Support Authorities. <https://www.research.va.gov/resources/policies/guidance/SOP-ScheduleB-MSA.docx>

e. VA Directive 5005, Staffing, Part II, Chapter 3, Section G <https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/OCHCO/SitePages/D5005.aspx> **NOTE:** *This is an internal VA site and is not available to the public.*

f. VA Directive 5001, System of VA Human Resources Management Directives and Handbooks General Introduction and Administration, Part II, Appendix B <https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/OCHCO/SitePages/D5001.aspx>. **NOTE:** *This is an internal VA site and is not available to the public.*

g. *VA Directive 5003, Position Classification, Job Grading and Position Management.* <https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/OCHCO/SitePages/D5003.aspx>

**NOTE:** *This is an internal VA website and is not available to the public.*

APPROVED:

**RACHEL RAMONI**  Digitally signed by RACHEL  
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Date: 2023.08.31 21:06:40 -04'00'

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Rachel Ramoni, DMD, ScD  
Chief Research and Development Officer