

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

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE.** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook replaces VHA policy defining information required by the Office of Research and Development (ORD) to evaluate research scientist positions funded by ORD for classification at General Schedule (GS)-14 and above.
- 2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES.** This updates existing policy including contact numbers and the submission process.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE.** The Office of Research and Development (12) is responsible for the contents of this VHA Handbook. Questions may be addressed to (202) 461-1700.
- 4. RESCISSION.** VHA Handbook 1200.3, dated May 14, 2001 is rescinded.
- 5. RECERTIFICATION.** This VHA Handbook is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working date of July 2014.

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GS-14 AND ABOVE HANDBOOK**

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CENTRALIZED POSITIONS OF RESEARCH SCIENTISTS, GS-14 AND ABOVE

1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook 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 Handbook refers to Title 5 and Title 38 hybrid research scientists in ORD. Included are appointments to: Biomedical Laboratory Research and Development and Clinical Sciences Research and Development Services (BLR&D and CSR&D), Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D), Health Services Research and Development Service (HSR&D), and the Cooperative Studies Program (CSP).

2. SCOPE

a. Positions typically eligible for consideration are those whose primary function is scientific investigation in basic or applied research in the biological, medical, health, physical, veterinary medical, computer, social (including economics), or mathematical (including statistics) sciences; engineering; industrial design; and psychology.

b. ORD at the request of Human Resources Management Service (05), assess 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 promoted, the promotion may only be effected with the approvals of the local medical center Director and Network Director within allocated medical care ceilings.

3. LOCAL REVIEW

a. Each nomination for position assignment at GS-14 and GS-15 is initially evaluated and rated by the nominating Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical center using procedures outlined in the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Research Grade Evaluation Guide (hereafter referred to as the Guide), published in September 2006 for Title 5 positions, and for Title 38 hybrid positions, by reference to the appropriate qualifications standard. In lieu of the Guide, VA facilities may use a comparable classification approach for positions not covered by the Guide, such as engineering systems development positions and economists.

b. As prescribed by the Guide, the nominating VA facility must constitute a promotion review panel consisting of several researchers who serve as subject matter specialists with knowledge of the degree of novelty and complexity of the nominee's research projects and the contributions and professional stature of the nominee, and a human resource specialist to collaborate and build consensus for the grade level determination. In addition to reviewing the nominee's position description and/or functional statement, the panel reviews the nominee's qualifications and

professional development, specifically appraising the nominee's professional achievements, publications, presentations before professional organizations, and reviews of the nominee's work. *NOTE: It is recommended that the panel members meet face-to-face to discuss the nomination.*

c. All subject matter specialist members of the panel must record their individual appraisals of the nominee on VA Form 4670, Position Classification Worksheet for Research Positions. The Human Resources Specialist subsequently uses VA Form 3963, Position Report, to record the classification analysis and evaluation of the position for Title 5 positions. A similar analysis will be done for Title 38 hybrid functional statements. These written evaluations must be included in the nomination application to be submitted to VHA Central Office, as described in Appendix B.

4. CENTRAL OFFICE REVIEW

a. Nominations for assignment at GS-14 and GS-15 are submitted to the appropriate VHA Central Office research service (BLR&D, CSR&D, RR&D, HSR&D, or CSP). Central Research Scientist Evaluation Committees constituted by the research services review nominations for scientific merit using guidelines which provide a systematic approach to the consideration of credentials. The Guide describes criteria 1-4 used in the review process.

b. In addition to the criteria described in the Guide, VA specific criteria to be used in evaluating the nominations include, but will not be limited to, the following:

(1) A minimum of 5/8ths time commitment to VA, evidenced by a 5/8ths VA-salaried appointment or an approved eligibility waiver (see Handbook 1200.15).

(2) 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.

(3) Publications in peer-reviewed scientific and professional journals widely read within the nominee's field, particularly as the first or senior author.

(4) Invitations to speak or chair sessions at national or international scientific meetings.

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

(6) Recognition by peers as a leader in a research field.

(7) Interaction with clinicians, researchers, and managers in support of the patient care and research and development programs.

(8) An active role in the training of young scientists and in formal teaching.

c. The reviewing Research Scientist Evaluation Committee forwards a recommendation for action on the nomination to the appropriate Research Service Director for acceptance or rejection, who in turn forwards the recommendations to the Chief Research and Development Officer (CRADO) for concurrence and Human Resources Management for approval or disapproval.

5. INQUIRIES

Information regarding points of contact for issues related to this Handbook is contained in Appendix A.

CONTACT INFORMATION

1. PHONE INQUIRIES. Inquiries regarding centralized positions of research scientists, general schedule, GS-14 and GS-15 should be directed to:

- a. BLR&D and CSR&D (121E) 202-461-1688
- b. RR&D (122) 202-461-1750
- c. HSR&D (124D) 202-461-1515
- d. CSP (125) 202-461-1676

2. WEB SITE INQUIRIES. Contact information may also be found at the following Web site:
<http://www.research.va.gov>

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION OF NOMINATIONS
FOR REQUEST FOR EVALUATION OF RESEARCH
SCIENTISTS FOR CENTRALIZED POSITIONS**

1. FORMAT. Applications must consist of single-spaced typed pages. Use only letter-quality print. Do not use photo reduction or fonts less than 11 point.

2. REQUIREMENTS FOR APPLICATION. Each application is to consist of the following materials:

a. A cover sheet with the title, "Evaluation of Research Scientist for Centralized Position." The cover sheet must list the following information in the order specified:

(1) Name of applicable Research Service (BLR&D/CSR&D, RR&D, HSR&D, or CSP).

(2) Name of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical center.

(3) Nominee's name and degree.

(4) Nominee's date of birth.

(5) Position currently held (title, grade, and step) and type of position held (e.g., Title 5, Schedule B, or Title 38 hybrid).

(6) Position requested (title and grade) and type of position requested (e.g., Title 5, Schedule B, or Title 38 hybrid).

(7) Nominee's current VA employment status (in 8ths)

(8) Number of years employed by VA.

(9) Nominee's academic title (indicate tenure status), affiliation, and location.

(10) Name of departmental chairperson where nominee holds academic position.

(11) Site of nominee's research performance, e.g., laboratory or office. ***NOTE:** If this location is not at the VA medical center, the approval letter for the off-site waiver must be appended.*

b. A letter from the medical center Director formally transmitting the nomination, recommending the nomination, and specifying the type of position requested (Title 5, Schedule B for research support or Schedule B, Career, or both for medical care support or Title 38 hybrid (permanent 7401(3) or temporary 7405)).

c. A letter from the Associate Chief of Staff (ACOS) for Research and Development (R&D) containing the ACOS for R&D's assessment of the nominee and recommendation pertaining to the request.

d. A letter from the R&D Committee, that includes a recommendation pertaining to the nomination. This letter needs to include an assessment of the nominee, commentary on the nominee's independence, and description of the nominee's working relationships and interactions with other investigators at the VA medical center.

e. A statement describing the research area of the nominee and its relevance to VA health care. Include research accomplishments considered pertinent to the evaluation of the nominee, a description of the complexity of the research problems undertaken, and the guidelines and originality used in resolving research questions. *NOTE: Refer to the OPM Research Grade Evaluation Guide for additional information.*

f. A current curriculum vitae and bibliography.

g. The current VA funding (amount, title of project, role, i.e., principal or co-principal investigator) and year of last approved Merit Review or other VA research support. For currently VA-funded research, completed: VA Form 10-1313-2, Merit Review Application - Summary Description of Program/Project; VA Form 10-1313-3, Merit Review Application - Current Funds and First Year Request for Program/Project; VA Form 10-1313-4, Merit Review Application - Estimated Expenses of Program/Project; VA Form 10-1313-7, Merit Review Application - Investigator's Total VA and Non-VA Research Support (Current and Pending); and VA Form 10-1313-8, Merit Review Application - Investigator's Total VA and Non-VA Research/Development Support. *NOTE: The preceding forms are part of a set, i.e., VA Form 10-1313-1-8, Merit Review Application.*

h. The current extra-VA funding (amount, title of project, source, complete grant number, years of support, role, i.e., principal or co-principal investigator). For all current non-VA funded research, include the budget page and abstract.

i. A breakdown of research funding history, both VA and extra-VA, in spreadsheet format.

j. Five letters of support from leaders in the nominee's field of research. The letters need to provide input on the nominee's reputation as a scientist, standing in the nominee's chosen field of research, and other factors which may be relevant to the evaluation process. If the nominee holds an academic position, one letter of recommendation must be from the Departmental Chairperson.

k. Two journal publications chosen by the nominee as being representative of the nominee's best work (3 copies of each).

l. The position description and/or functional statement signed by appropriate officials, i.e., immediate supervisor and medical center Director. Optional Form 8 (OF-8, Revised 1/85), item 15.e. needs to indicate title of position and grade proposed for Title 5 positions and the functional

statement will include this information for Title 38 hybrid occupations. The original OF-8 form with original signatures must be sent to Central Office.

m. The OPM local promotion review panel evaluations and rating of assignment and incumbent, using the Research Grade Evaluation Guide or equivalent. These include VA Form 3963, Position Report, and VA Form 4670, Position Classification Worksheet for Research Positions for Title 5 and similar information for Title 38 hybrids. VA Form 4670 must be completed and signed by each member of the local evaluation panel.

3. MAILING ADDRESS. The original and 2 copies of the application need to be mailed to the address listed for the appropriate research service:

- a. **Biomedical Laboratory R&D/Clinical Sciences R&D Service**
Biomedical Laboratory R&D/Clinical Sciences R&D Service (121E)
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

NOTE: If courier or commercial overnight delivery service is used, send to:

Biomedical Laboratory R&D/Clinical Sciences R&D Service (121E)
1722 Eye Street NW
Washington, DC 20006
202-461-1688

- b. **Rehabilitation R&D Service**
Rehabilitation R&D Service (122)
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

NOTE: If courier or commercial overnight delivery service is used, send to:

Rehabilitation R&D Service (122)
1722 Eye Street NW
Washington, DC 20006
202-461-1750

- c. **Health Services Research and Development Service**
Health Services R&D Service (124D)
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420
202-461-1515

- d. **Cooperative Studies Program**

Cooperative Studies Program (125)
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420
202-461-1676

4. DUE DATE. Nominations will be reviewed semi-annually. The deadlines are March 1 and September 1 annually, to coincide with the deadlines for nominations for Research Career Scientist awards.

5. LIMITATIONS. The research services do not limit the number of nominations that they will accept from VA medical centers during a given fiscal year.