

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SUBMITTING A LETTER OF INTENT TO REHABILITATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICE FOR A MERIT REVIEW

1. POLICY

All applicants for research support through the Rehabilitation Research and Development (RR&D) Service are required to submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) each review cycle, including resubmissions and revisions. A description of the proposed project in terms of its objectives, rationale, methods, participants, resource requirements, expected outcomes, technology transfer implications and the impact on the health care delivery system for Veterans should be included. Each application submission must be preceded by an LOI. Applicants may submit more than one LOI per review cycle.

2. PURPOSE

- a. Confirms that each application forwarded to RR&D falls within the announced priority research areas or in those areas cited in subsequent special RFA solicitations. *NOTE: The Associate Chief of Staff (ACOS) for Research and Development should carefully review the mission of each Service within Research and Development (R&D) to ensure that applications are sent to the most appropriate Service for review.*
- b. Confirms that each application forwarded to RR&D has the potential to add to and improve the knowledge base in specific research areas.
- c. Identifies and resolves major problem areas such as Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) investigator eligibility and VA off-site research issues prior to the submission of a full application.
- d. Provides RR&D an opportunity to plan for appropriate resources that allow for an efficient and effective review process.
- e. Special Solicitations or Requests for Application (RFAs). An RFA can be announced at any time and will contain special requirements and due dates. RFAs are posted on the ORD Intranet at <http://vaww.research.va.gov/funding/rfa.cfm>. *NOTE: Refer to specific solicitation number and instructions for submission information.*
- f. Due Date. The LOI process was designed to provide a systematic and defined approach to enhance the development of successful applications for RR&D funding, to allow investigators as much time as possible to develop and fine tune applications and to permit adequate time for required reviews and approvals at the facility level. Please refer to the ORD Submission Calendar at <http://vaww.research.va.gov/funding/process/submission-calendar.cfm> for submission deadlines.
- g. Review Process. LOI's will be reviewed for scientific merit, relevance to Veterans' needs, RR&D Service priority areas, and whether the proposed research advances the knowledge base of rehabilitation research. Email notification of receipt will be issued to the submitting VA facility. If any issue(s) arise with the LOI, a Scientific Program Manager (SPM) will contact the station to attempt to resolve the

issue(s). If the issue(s) cannot be resolved, then the LOI will be disapproved and an email to that effect will be sent. Contact to the station will be made at least two weeks prior to the application submission deadline. If the station is not contacted by a RR&D SPM, then the LOI has been accepted.

- h. **Off-Site Research.** VHA policy mandates that VA-funded research be performed within VA medical centers or in VA leased space, except when off-site facilities provide unique research opportunities. Off-site waiver requests must be submitted to the Director, RR&D Service at least 60 days prior to the due date for receipt of applications. Applications for off-site research submitted without an approved off-site waiver will be returned without review (see VHA Handbook 1200.16).
- i. **Eligibility.** All applicants (i.e., all persons assigned the PI role) for VA research funds must hold a minimum 5/8 VA salaried position before a research project can be funded (see VHA Handbook 1200.15). Eligibility waiver requests should be submitted to the Director, RR&D Service (rrdreviews@va.gov) at least 60 days prior to the due date for receipt of applications to allow sufficient time for processing. Applications for research submitted without an approved eligibility waiver will be returned without review.

3. **FORMAT**

- a. Type all pages single-spaced, with at least 1-inch margins on all sides. Use Arial 11-point font to ensure the document is easy to read. Any LOI using low quality or small print will be returned without review. Use bold type for all major section headings, and separate major sections with a double space.
- b. Number all pages consecutively, in the bottom right-hand margin, starting with the first page following the LOI Cover Page (VA Form 10-1313-13) and ending with the last page. Include the applicant's name and page number (e.g., Jones-1 to Jones-22).

4. **CONTENT**

- a. An LOI Cover Sheet (VA Form 10-1313-13) is required. Check applicable categories in each box and type in all requested information. **NOTE: LOI numbers are no longer issued. Use the previous grant number in Box 2 for resubmissions.** Check the appropriate program and level in Box 3. For Pilot Projects mark *Other* and type in "Pilot". If the application is responsive to a specific RFA, please provide the RFA number under *Response to Specific Announcement*.
- b. An LOI is limited to three pages of text, one page of cited references, and one page describing the PI's experience in the proposed research area.
 - (1) **Text Pages (not to exceed three pages).** In the following order, state:
 - (a) **Purpose.** List the goals and specific objectives of the proposed research; clearly state the question to be addressed, hypothesis to be tested, methods, concepts, systems, or devices to be developed or evaluated.
 - (b) **Background.** State the scientific rationale for the proposed research and its relationship to other major research findings. Explain how this research will advance knowledge in rehabilitation research. Describe the significance of the research and how it relates to RR&D priority areas. Indicate how this

research directly benefits Veterans and how it contributes to the quality of services provided by VA.

- (c) **Methods and Research Plan.** Outline the proposed study design and methods. Identify (VA) patient population, sample size, power analysis, and rationale for inclusion or exclusion of population served; (it is expected that women and members of diverse ethnic and racial groups will be recruited, unless contraindicated due to the study's aims). Identify key issues that may have an impact on the success of the proposed project, such as: patient recruitment, participation of specialized personnel, orphan companies, space, and budget. Specify if the proposed research will involve animals and, if so, the time frame to clinical application. Indicate implications for technology transfer and potential for replication.
- (d) **Participants.** Identify PI(s), co-investigators, and collaborators, and state their areas of expertise.
- (e) **Resource and Budget.** Provide full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing and other resources needed for the study with associated costs.

- (1) Merit/IIR Projects can be from 1 – 4 years. The budget cap is \$275,000 per project year.

- 1 year = \$275,000 max
 - 2 years = \$550,000 max
 - 3 years = \$825,000 max
 - 4 years = \$1.1 Million

The annual maximum of \$275,000 may be increased to \$350,000 in a single project year, as long as the overall budget cap (based on years requested) is maintained.

- (2) Pilot Projects can be from 1-2 years with a maximum of \$100,000 in any given year.

- (f) **Project History.** Indicate whether this study is new, a continuation of an existing project (include years funded), or related to a previously unfunded project. Indicate the project number, title, and date of the previous related submission.
- (g) **Research Site.** State the name of the lead facility where the research (patient and laboratory work) will take place. In addition to the lead site, if this is a multi-site project, also list how many additional sites you are proposing.

- (2) Cited References (not to exceed one page).

- (3) PI's Experience (not to exceed one page). Describe the PI's experience in the proposed research area.

5. SUBMITTING THE LOI

The LOI must be saved as a single PDF file. Name the file as follows: principal

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investigator's last name_station number_LOI (e.g., Jones_122_LOI). Submit the application electronically to rrdreviews@va.gov. Use the following text in the email "Subject:" line: [insert PI last name] LOI for [insert review cycle] Merit Review. PAPER COPIES WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.

- a. Signatures. The LOI must be signed by the ACOS or R&D Coordinator, or the appropriate designee. LOIs will not be accepted without being processed through the appropriate research office.
- b. Deadlines. The signed LOI must be received by 11:59 p.m. ET on the submission due date to receive consideration. Please refer to the ORD Submission Calendar at <http://vaww.research.va.gov/funding/process/submission-calendar.cfm> for submission deadlines.

4. INQUIRIES AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Inquiries may be directed to RR&D Service, Program Analysis and Review Section (PARS) at (202) 443-5600. Please refer also to the RR&D website at <http://www.rehab.research.va.gov/>.