

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

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook establishes procedures for evaluating research scientist positions at General Schedule (GS)-14 and above funded by the Office of Research and Development (ORD).
- 2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES:** This updates existing policy including:
 - a. Paragraph 3 was re-written to clarify responsibilities for ORD and local Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities.
 - b. Appendices A and B were deleted and the information previously contained in the appendices are available on the ORD Web site.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** ORD (10P9) is responsible for the contents of this VHA Handbook. Questions may be addressed to 202-443-5600.
- 4. RELATED ISSUE:** VA Handbook 5005.
- 5. RESCISSION:** VHA Handbook 1200.03, dated July 22, 2009, is rescinded.
- 6. RECERTIFICATION:** This VHA Handbook is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working date of September 2020.

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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 including appointments 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).

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2. SCOPE

a. This Handbook applies to nonsupervisory 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), engineering, and industrial design.

b. ORD, at the request of Human Resources 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 promoted, the promotion may only be effected with the approvals of the local VA medical facility Director and Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) Director within allocated medical care ceilings.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. **VHA Central Office.** VHA Central Office is responsible for the following duties regarding promotions:

(1) ORD receives the promotion package request and reviews for completeness. If the request package is incomplete, ORD returns the package to the local VA medical facility noting the materials or revisions needed prior to conducting a central evaluation.

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

(3) The panel reviews the nominee's work using the four factors in the RGEF 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 VHA Handbook 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 VA medical facility or the academic affiliate.

(4) Each panel member prepares 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 approval or disapproval.

(6) ORD submits the approved promotion request package to the Human Resources and Staffing Service's (HR&SS) classification unit, VHA Servicing Human Resource Office, for classification of the position description.

(7) The CRADO signs the approval for the research GS-14 promotion packages. ORD submits the research GS-15 promotion packages to the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Policy and Services for final approval. ORD staff sends the signed packages to the local VA Research office for final processing and notification of the applicant. Promotion packages under the medical appropriation are sent to the VA medical facility for facility Director and VISN Director signature.

b. **VA Medical Facilities.** VA medical facilities are responsible for the following duties regarding promotions:

(1) The local VA medical facility writes a position description in four factor format mirroring the RGEN or other appropriate classification standard specific to the employee and describes the scope and impact of the specific research being performed (see RGEN). The position description describes the field of research being pursued, the nature and scope of research projects, anticipated results, the 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 VA medical facility HR Office completes the top half of the OF-8, Position Description form, items 1 through 18. Local HR Classifier or VISN Consolidated Classification Unit (CCU) Classifier reviews and initials item 15d. on the OF-8. The first line supervisor, generally the Associate Chief of Staff for Research or equivalent, and the second line supervisor, generally the Chief of Staff, signs items 20a. and 20b. respectively.

(3) The initiating VA medical facility evaluates and rates each GS-14 and GS-15 nomination package using procedures outlined in the RGEN. For positions not covered by the RGEN such as engineering systems developers and economists, VA medical facilities may use a comparable classification approach.

(4) The nominating VA medical facility convenes a promotion 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 and a human resources specialist serving as a technical advisor. The panel reviews the nominee's work, qualifications and professional development, specifically evaluating the nominee's professional achievements, publications, and presentations before professional organizations. **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.*

(5) Each panel member prepares a separate evaluation worksheet (VA Form 4670) and the HR classifier prepares a classification evaluation report. The completed package is sent to the VA medical facility research office for signature and submission to ORD.

(6) The VA facility research office prepares the request for promotion 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 Web site (<http://www.research.va.gov/resources/policies/default.cfm>).

4. NEW APPOINTMENTS

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

b. The local VA medical facility processes the request using the procedures outlined in paragraph 3, convening a new appointment review panel. **NOTE:** *Review the Instructions for Preparation and Submission of Nominations for Centralized Positions of Research Scientists found on the ORD Web site.*

c. ORD reviews the package for completeness and convenes a review panel to evaluate the written position description. 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 (NIH)) 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 VA medical facility 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 Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Policy and Services for final approval. ORD staff sends the signed packages to the local VA Research office for final processing and notification of the applicant. Promotion packages under the medical appropriation are sent to the VA medical facility for facility Director and VISN Director signature.

5. REFERENCES

a. 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.

b. Human Resources Management Letter No. 05-07-02, <http://vaww.va.gov/ohrm/HRLibrary/HRMLs/HRML05-07-02.pdf>. **NOTE:** This is an internal VA Web site and is not available to the public.

c. Human Resources Management Letter No. 05-13-06, <http://vaww.va.gov/OHRM/HRLibrary/HRMLs/HRML2013/HRML-05-13-06.pdf>. **NOTE:** This is an internal VA Web site and is not available to the public.

d. Standard Operating Procedures - Using Schedule B and Title 38 Medical Support Authorities. <http://www.research.va.gov/resources/policies/default.cfm>.

e. VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, Part II, Chapter 3, Section G
<http://vaww.va.gov/OHRM/Directives-Handbooks/Documents/5005.pdf>. **NOTE:** *This is an internal VA Web site and is not available to the public.*