MERIT REVIEW CRITIQUE GUIDELINES

Please follow these guidelines when preparing your critiques for your assigned applications. The goal of VA-supported research is to advance health care for our Veterans. Therefore, your written critiques should highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the application using the criteria outlined below. **NOTE:** Your written critique should not bear personal identifiers because unaltered comments will be sent to the investigator.

Pl’s Name: Please indicate the last name of the PI for this application.

CRITIQUE: Your ultimate task is to assess the likelihood that the proposed research will have a substantial impact on meeting VA research goals. Thus, the first assessment should be “Is it worthwhile to carry out the proposed study?” And only then “Can the investigators carry out the proposed research?” Please address, in individual sections, the strengths and weaknesses for each criterion listed below.

- **Significance:** Does the proposed study address an important problem or critical knowledge gap in the field? How do the research concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or interventions advance the field? If successful, what is the likely impact of the proposed studies on the field?

- **Innovation:** Does the application challenge existing paradigms, explore new concepts, methodologies, technologies or otherwise exhibit significant creativity? To what degree does the proposed study represent more than an incremental advance on the published literature?

- **Approach:** Do not simply summarize the proposed work. How well do the logical reasoning, critical review of the literature, and preliminary data support the rationale and the feasibility of the project? Are the hypotheses, aims, experimental design, methods, and analyses (including statistics) well developed? Are potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success presented?

- **Feasibility:** Is there sufficient evidence to determine that the proposed studies can be successfully completed? If applicable, is there sufficient evidence for successful recruitment and enrollment of subjects? Can the required animal models or samples be attained? Can the proposed study be completed within the duration of the award?

- **Investigators:** Do the PD/PI(s) and other key personnel have the expertise, experience, and record of accomplishments to enable successful completion of the proposed research? If applicable (Multiple PI/PD), how well are the efforts of the investigators and/or research teams integrated and is the collaboration synergistic or complementary? For Renewal applications, has the applicant been productive and shown research progress in the last funding period?

- **Multiple PD/PI Leadership Plan (if applicable):** For applications designating multiple PD/PIs, a “Multiple PD/PI Leadership Plan” must be included. To what degree are the organizational plan, leadership approach, and roles and responsibilities of the PIs/PD appropriate with regard to expertise, resources, and commitment to ensure the completion of the project?

- **Environment:** Do the scientific environment, facilities, and resources support the research requirements so as to enable success of the project? Is there evidence of institutional support reflecting space, equipment, and other unique resources including availability of, and access to, populations adequate for the project proposed and/or to facilitate collaborative arrangements?

**Overall Evaluation:** Summarize the factors that informed or influenced your overall evaluation. This summary is not intended to restate the strengths and weaknesses outlined in the critique above. Rather, this summary should succinctly inform the reader (e.g., the applicant, review staff, and program staff) the underlying rationale for the Overall Impact score in consideration with the individual review criteria.

**Ethical/Safety Issues:** Are there any ethical, human subject, animal use, or biohazard concerns?

**OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** These comments are useful to VA Research and Development

*Updated on February 27, 2014*
MERIT REVIEW SCORING GUIDELINES

Each application will be assigned a preliminary priority score on a 1.0 - 5.0 scale prior to the review meeting and a final priority score following the panel's discussion. Each member's final priority score should reflect his/her overall evaluation of the project in its entirety, rather than an arithmetic formula applied to the reviewer's evaluation of each criterion (significance, innovation, approach, feasibility, investigators, and environment). The final priority score (100-500) for each discussed application will be calculated by multiplying the arithmetic average of all the panel members' scores by 100. Abstaining members, those not present for the discussion, and members with a conflict of interest will not assign an application a final priority score.

In the text of your review, please avoid mentioning the score, explicit descriptions of your level of enthusiasm, or whether or not you believe the proposal should be funded.

1.0-1.5 EXCELLENT The proposed research addresses an important problem or critical knowledge gap in the field. The logical reasoning, critical review of the literature, and preliminary data support the rationale and the feasibility of the project. The hypothesis(es), objectives, aims, experimental design, methods, analyses (including statistical analyses), and concepts are clearly stated, well integrated, and fully developed. The research is innovative, explores new concepts, methods, technologies or is otherwise significantly creative and represents more than an incremental advance on current knowledge. Potential outcomes will have a significant impact on the research field. The evidence presented suggests feasibility and a very high probability of the project's completion.

1.6-2.2 VERY GOOD The proposed research addresses an important scientific area. The logical reasoning, critical review of the literature, and preliminary data support the rationale and the feasibility of the project. The hypothesis(es), objectives, aims, experimental design, methods, analyses (including statistical analyses), and concepts are clearly stated, well integrated, and developed, with a few minor exceptions. Potential outcomes will have an impact on the research field. The evidence presented suggests feasibility and a high probability of the project’s completion.

2.3-2.8 GOOD The proposed research addresses a valid area of investigation. The hypothesis(es), objectives, and aims are clearly stated, but the experimental design, methods, analyses (including statistical analyses), concepts or clinical framework contain key flaws that should be corrected. Innovation is limited. Potential findings may contribute to the research field but impact is modest. The evidence presented suggests the project may be completed.

2.9-3.4 FAIR The proposed research requires further conceptual development and/or preliminary data to warrant investigation. The hypothesis(es), objectives, aims, experimental design, methods, analyses (including statistical analyses), and concepts are not clear and contain significant flaws. It is not clear how potential findings would significantly contribute to the research field therefore innovation and impact are limited. It is unclear whether the evidence presented is sufficient to ensure project completion.

3.5-5.0 POOR The proposed research does not appear to address an important scientific question or area. The hypothesis(es), objectives, or aims are not clearly stated, and are not sufficiently developed or lacks logical reasoning. The research experimental design, methods, analyses (including statistical analyses), concepts or clinical framework have fatal flaws or are inappropriate for what is proposed. The limitations of the proposed research limit any significant conclusions that would contribute to the field in general. The evidence presented does not suggest that the project will be completed.

Updated on February 27, 2014