

VIII. PROPOSAL EVALUATION

A. REVIEW PROCESS

All proposals undergo a two-tiered review process: scientific merit review and programmatic review. Outcomes from these reviews guide the funding decisions made by TSNRP’s Executive Board of Directors. Throughout the review and decision process, confidentiality and conflict-of-interest measures are enforced.

Scientific Review

The scientific merit review is a *criteria*-based process by which individual proposals are evaluated and scored. The reviewers score proposals on a scale of 1–9 (in whole number intervals). They will be given by all voting review panel members and multiplied by 10 (so the new scores range from 10–90 in whole numbers). A proposal receives a “Zero Score” when it fails to meet established standards as determined by consensus vote of the scientific review panel. Proposals that receive a “Zero Score” will not receive a programmatic review. A proposal receiving a “No Score” meets established standards but was found to have been submitted in the wrong funding category. Proposals receiving a “No Score” will continue through the scientific and programmatic review process. The scientific review scoring scale is as follows:

Score	Descriptor	Strengths/Weaknesses
1	Exceptional	Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
2	Outstanding	Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
3	Excellent	Very strong with only some minor weaknesses
4	Very Good	Strong but with numerous minor weaknesses
5	Good	Strong but with at least one moderate weakness
6	Satisfactory	Some strengths but also some moderate weaknesses
7	Fair	Some strengths but with at least one major weakness
8	Marginal	A few strengths and a few major weaknesses
9	Poor	Very few strengths and numerous major weaknesses
0	Zero Score	Fails to meet established standards and formatting
--	No Score	Submitted in wrong funding category

Minor Weakness: An easily addressable weakness that does not substantially lessen impact.
Moderate Weakness: A weakness that lessens impact.
Major Weakness: A weakness that severely lessens impact.

Scientific Merit Review:

Each proposal is evaluated for scientific and technical merit, independent of the other proposals under consideration.

A scientific review panel (SRP), consisting of a panel chair and civilian and military nurse scientists, is responsible for reviewing, discussing, and scoring

the scientific merit of proposals. Panel members are selected from the nursing and health care communities based on their research, professional experience, and publication history. TSNRP selects two reviewers with expertise in the subject area to evaluate each proposal and provide written evaluations. During the scientific merit review, the reviewers present the proposal, their reviews, and their scores to the entire SRP. The panel discusses the proposal; each panel member then scores the proposal individually. The final score is the mean of all panel members' scores.

Military nurse scientists participate in the scientific merit review but do not score the proposals. TSNRP selects military nurse scientists from each of the three uniformed services to evaluate proposals for military relevance and research feasibility from a military perspective. The military nurse scientist considers the potential contribution of the proposed research to military nursing, the importance of the research problem to military health care, and the feasibility of a military research team conducting the proposed research.

All reviewers consider the military research team members' "time on station" and the feasibility of accessing and recruiting the proposed sample. The military nurse scientist presents his/her findings to the SRP prior to scoring the proposal. During the panel discussion, the military nurse scientists advise the SRP on military-specific concerns.

Scientific Review Criteria for All Proposals:

Active Duty PIs:

The reviewers evaluate the PI's ability to carry out the proposed research, education, research experience, content expertise, previous work in the proposed area of research, previous experience in other research areas, relevant publications, and prior funding. Additionally, the reviewers evaluate the stability of the Active Duty PI's research team at the primary performance site. Pertinent areas of interest include change of duty station, temporary duty, and end of time in service. Active Duty PIs should include a second military nurse at the primary performance site to serve as the site's contact should the PI be deployed or otherwise away from the site for more than 3 months. Details on Active Duty key personnel must be included in the Budget Justification.

Change of Research Focus:

Investigators who have changed their area of research might lack some of the key evaluation aspects previously listed. Therefore, the proposal should demonstrate adequate justification to support the PI's new direction/research area.

Applications Requiring Mentoring Plans:

The mentoring plan is evaluated on its quality, the credentials of the mentor, and convincing evidence that substantive interaction between the mentor and the protégé will be sufficiently frequent to ensure that the necessary knowledge transfer will occur.

Scientific Review Criteria for Novice Investigator; 1-, 2-, and 3-Year; Graduate; Pilot Project; Fast Track; and Feasibility Awards

Original, innovative, and applicable to military health care: Reviewers assess the originality of the nursing research problem, including use of new concepts, approaches, and methods. Reviewers assess for innovation in translation or applicability of previous findings to answer military nursing or health care problems.

Hypothesis/research question, rationale, and research strategy: Reviewers evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the study's design; the appropriateness, feasibility, and adequacy of the approach, research design, and methodology; whether the research will likely reach its stated goal; preliminary data (if applicable); and the reliability and validity of data collection instruments.

Scientific relevance and potential contributions: Reviewers consider the strengths and weaknesses of the potential contribution to nursing and the importance of the research problem.

Qualifications of the PI and research team: The training and accomplishment records of all investigators playing a key role in the proposal are assessed. Reviewers examine qualifications for each key individual: name, degree(s), title, field of training or experience, publication record, and ability to conduct the research.

Availability of appropriate resources and an environment conducive to successful completion of the project: The institutional environment, intellectual and physical, is evaluated. Criteria include equipment, space, computers, library, germane facilities, ongoing research, opportunities for interaction with other knowledgeable colleagues, and military environment feasibility. The reviewers list apparent strengths and weaknesses in the environment.

Budget: Soundness, completeness, and accuracy and the reasonableness of requested personnel costs, equipment, and supplies are evaluated. Reviewers may recommend budget modifications.

Publications: The primary investigator's peer-reviewed publication history is considered. The presence or absence of publications weighs heavily in the assessment of repeatedly funded investigators.

Graduate students: Student evaluations include assessment of the student's research education, anticipated course work, the availability of guidance from the academic advisor, and the presence of a topic approval and support letter from the dissertation or thesis committee chair, in addition to the criteria listed above. All graduate students must provide letters from their academic chairs that indicate approval for the proposal topic.

Scientific Review Criteria for Evaluating Evidence-Based Practice Awards

EBP Conceptual Guideline Development Award:

Original, innovative, and applicable to military health care: Reviewers assess the originality of the nursing research problem, including use of new concepts, approaches, or methods to solve it. Reviewers assess for innovation in translation or the applicability of previous findings to meet military nursing or health care needs.

Hypothesis/research question, rationale, and research strategy: The reviewers determine if the PI has identified a theoretical framework and has made a clear link between that framework and the guideline to be developed. A successful proposal provides evidence that a preliminary literature review has been completed and includes a detailed plan for finding, analyzing, and synthesizing the evidence. Fully explain how current practice in the project area is assessed (i.e., what variables are measured, how they are measured, and how frequently they are assessed). Include a plan for pre-implementation data collection and tool development, with reliability and validity establishment, as applicable.

Scientific relevance and potential contributions: Reviewers assess significance and relevance to nursing and the potential contribution to the military treatment facility.

Qualifications and/or expertise of the team, prior experience with EBP, and evidence of a multidisciplinary team: Reviewers evaluate the training and accomplishment record of all investigators playing a key role in the proposal. Master's degree-level nurses MUST be actively mentored by a doctoral-level Active Duty, Reserve, retired, or Guard military EBP nursing expert or by a federal government nurse assigned to a military treatment facility. The mentor's qualifications are evaluated. Successful proposals must demonstrate inclusion of multidisciplinary stakeholders in appropriate phases of the project.

Availability of appropriate resources and an environment conducive to successful completion of the project: Reviewers evaluate evidence of institutional leadership and stakeholder buy-in for the project.

Budget: Soundness, completeness, accuracy and the reasonableness of requested personnel costs, equipment, and supplies are evaluated. Reviewers may recommend budget modifications.

Dissemination plan: There must be a dissemination plan.

EBP Implementation of Innovation Award:

Original, innovative, and applicable to military health care: Reviewers assess the originality of the nursing research problem, including use of new concepts, approaches, or methods to solve it. Reviewers look for innovation in translation or the applicability of previous findings to meet military nursing or health care needs.

Hypothesis/research question, rationale, and research strategy: The reviewers evaluate the PI's detailed strategy for implementing the evidence in practice; the evaluation plan for the implementation process and the outcomes of the project; and the plan for sustainability and long-term outcomes of the new evidence-based practices.

Evaluation of the Guideline: The reviewers evaluate how the proposed guideline was assessed and its strength, based on the use of a guideline assessment tool such as the AGREE instrument (Appendix E).

Scientific relevance and potential contributions: Reviewers consider the significance and relevance to nursing and the potential contribution to the military treatment facility.

Qualifications and/or expertise of the team, prior experience with EBP, and evidence of a multidisciplinary team: Reviewers assess the training and record of accomplishment of all investigators playing a key role in the proposal. Investigators must demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the literature related to the guideline to be implemented. Master's degree-level nurses MUST be actively mentored by a doctoral-level Active Duty, Reserve, retired, or Guard military EBP nursing expert or by a federal government nurse assigned to a military treatment facility. The mentor's qualifications are evaluated. Successful proposals must demonstrate inclusion of multidisciplinary stakeholders in appropriate phases of the project.

Availability of appropriate resources and an environment conducive to successful completion of the project: Reviewers evaluate evidence of institutional leadership and stakeholder buy-in for the project and the availability of institutional resources and an environment adequate to support the project.

Budget: Soundness, completeness, accuracy, and the reasonableness of requested personnel costs, equipment, supplies, and duration of the project in relation to the proposed project are evaluated. Reviewers may recommend budget modifications.

Dissemination plan: There must be a dissemination plan.

Scientific Review Criteria for Research Fellow Awards

Qualifications of the candidate and mentor: The candidate is evaluated for successful completion of a research study as either the principal investigator or a co-investigator. The mentor is evaluated for the appropriateness of her/his qualifications to the topic of study; the quality and extent of the proposed role in providing guidance and advice to the candidate; previous experience in fostering the development of researchers; and history of research, productivity, and support.

Mentoring plan: The career development plan is evaluated for the likelihood that it will contribute substantially to the professional development of the candidate. Reviewers pay strict attention to the appropriateness of the content and duration of the proposed training and the overall quality of the proposed training.

Availability of appropriate resources and an environment conducive to successful completion of the fellowship: Evidence must be demonstrated of the command's support for a candidate's release for training. The learning environment is evaluated on its ability to adequately support high-quality and relevant scientific and professional development, including educational opportunities appropriate to the learning objectives.

Budget: The budget is assessed for its soundness, completeness, and accuracy and for the reasonableness of requested personnel costs, equipment, supplies, and duration of the project in relation to the proposed project. Reviewers may recommend budget modifications.

Programmatic Review

The TSNRP Advisory Council, consisting of one Active Duty and one Reserve member from each service, conducts the programmatic review. The programmatic review is both a *criteria-* and *comparison-*based process in which proposals are evaluated for their relevance to the TSNRP portfolio.

The review scores proposals on a scale of 1-9 (in whole numbers). They will be given by both primary and secondary reviewers of the Advisory council, agreed upon by all members and multiplied by 10 (so the new scores range from 10-90 in whole numbers). The scoring scale is as follows:

Score	Descriptor	Strengths/Weaknesses
1	Exceptional	Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
2	Outstanding	Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
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--	No Score	Submitted in wrong funding category
<p>Minor Weakness: An easily addressable weakness that does not substantially lessen impact. Moderate Weakness: A weakness that lessens impact. Major Weakness: A weakness that severely lessens impact.</p>		

Advisory Council members review portions of the proposals and the outcomes of the scientific merit review. Each proposal receives a primary and a secondary review. The primary reviewer provides a written scored evaluation for each assigned proposal. The secondary reviewer also scores the proposal. During the programmatic review, the primary reviewer presents the proposal, the review, and the score to the entire panel; the secondary reviewer presents the proposal's score and its justification. The entire council discusses the proposal and then agrees on a final score. Proposals that receive a zero score during the scientific review do not receive a programmatic review.

Criteria Applicable Only to Previously Funded PIs

Past performance history: The PI's compliance with federal, USU, and TSNRP requirements, such as timely submission of IRB approval documents, progress reports, final reports, and other items specified by the project's terms and conditions, is considered.

Dissemination efforts: The Advisory Council reviews the PI's efforts to disseminate TSNRP-funded research findings. *TSNRP expects timely publication of findings in peer-reviewed journals.*

Programmatic Review Criteria for Novice Investigator; 1-, 2-, and 3-Year; Pilot Project; Fast Track; and Feasibility Awards

- Military uniqueness.
- Operational readiness.
- Relevance to the TSNRP portfolio.
- Military relevance.
- Strengths and stability of the investigative team.
- Potential benefit of the proposed research relative to the proposed budget.
- The investigators' education and military experience.

Programmatic Review Criteria for Evidence-Based Research Awards

- Overall scientific merit.
- Relevance to TSNRP portfolio/programmatic priority.
- Improved patient outcomes/project evaluation.
- Sustainability.
- Strength/stability of investigative team.
- Cost/benefit ratio.
- Performance history/EBP expertise.
- Support for the novice investigator/mentoring.

Programmatic Review Criteria for Graduate Research Awards

- Scientific merit.
- Feasibility and scope of study.
- Military relevance and timeliness of the topic.
- Applicant's potential to develop as a nurse researcher.
- The student's research education to date.
- Expected course work.
- The availability of guidance by the student's sponsor.
- Topic approval and support letter from the dissertation or thesis committee chair.

Graduate Research Awards are sometimes made for topics not identified as TSNRP priority areas. These decisions are made to support the student. Future research proposals must conform to the TSNRP priorities.

Criteria Used in Evaluating Research Fellow Awards

- The candidate's commitment to military nursing research.
- Significance to military nursing research.
- Consistency of the career-development plan with the candidate's career goals and prior research experience.
- Command support.

The Advisory Council makes recommendations for funding to the Executive Board of Directors based on the programmatic review.