

Scoring Criteria for Year 2 RDRC Project Selection

External reviewers will consider the following factors when evaluating the scientific soundness and potential research and policy contributions of individual projects. Each category has a maximum of 5 points, with a total maximum of 55 points.

- A. Scientific Significance: Does the project address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the field? Is there a strong scientific premise for the project? If the aims of the project are achieved, how will scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice be improved? How will successful completion of the aims change the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or interventions that drive this field?

Scoring guidance	Points
The proposal fails to address the questions above or any other factors a reviewer believes contributes to scientific significance.	1
Addressed only a few of the factors mentioned above.	2
The scientific premise is strong, but the project does not explain the benefits of successful completion, doesn't address an important problem, or some other major aspect of significance.	3
The project's scientific significance falls short in a manner that the reviewers can document and justify giving less than full points.	4
Maximum scientific significance: couldn't address this metric any better.	5

- B. Practicality/Policy Relevance: Does the research lend itself to practical applications rather than theoretical studies? Does it illuminate what is causing what we observe, and explain what is driving observable data? How closely is it related to the agency's focal areas?

Scoring guidance	Points
The proposal fails to address any aspect of practicality or policy relevance, is entirely theoretical, etc.	1
It addresses only one aspect: for example, it mentions an agency focal area but has no practical application or seeks to addresses causes of a phenomenon but does not connect it to policy or agency interests.	2
It addresses multiple aspects but falls short in major ways on other aspects.	3
The project's practicality/policy relevance falls short in a manner that the reviewers can document and justify giving less than full points.	4
Fully addresses this metric with no deficiencies	5

- C. Approach/Methodology: Are the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project? Have the investigators presented strategies to ensure a robust and unbiased approach, as appropriate for the work proposed? Are potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success presented? Are the concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions novel to one field of research or novel in a broad sense? If the project is in the early stages of development, will the strategy establish feasibility, and will particularly risky aspects be managed?

Scoring guidance	Points
The proposal has major, critical gaps in its methodology.	1

It addresses only one aspect: for example, it may stress a novel approach but fails to include benchmarks for success, or the approach may not be appropriate for the aims.	2
It addresses multiple aspects well but falls short in major ways on the other aspects. For example, it may not ensure a robust and unbiased approach, or address risky aspects that should be apparent.	3
The project's approach has a documentable deficiency that justifies giving it less than full points.	4
Fully addresses this metric with no deficiencies	5

- D. Mixed Methods: Does the project utilize mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative analysis)? This could involve using one method to inform the use of another method or using methods from multiple disciplines. For instance, is a quantitative analysis further illuminated by qualitative studies, is quantitative data collection guided by qualitative testing of the collection instruments, are focus groups informed by quantitative analyses, etc.?

Scoring guidance	Points
The proposal only uses one method and does not address or recognize any others at all.	1
It uses only one method but at least acknowledges prior research that used other methods or uses findings from other methods to inform the project's methodology.	2
It incorporates mixed methods, but one method drives most of the work or the methods may as well be separate unconnected studies.	3
It has a mixed methods approach, and the methods inform/interact with one another, but they could be better integrated with one another.	4
Fully addresses this metric with no deficiencies	5

- E. Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR): Does the project include a plan for input and feedback from the communities being studied? Does that involvement include input on the design and execution of the research, including data collection and interpretation of the findings? Is there a plan to disseminate results to the communities studied and to gather their feedback to inform future research?

Scoring guidance	Points
The proposal fails to mention a CBPR plan at all.	1
The CBPR plan is vague, aspirational, or minimal in scope.	2
The CBPR plan provides details, but there are questions about feasibility, or it covers only one phase, such as dissemination.	3
The CBPR is relatively comprehensive and is integral to designing, conducting the research, and interpreting findings, but it has a documentable deficiency that justifies not awarding full points.	4
Fully addresses this metric with no deficiencies	5

- F. Timeliness: Can the project (or this stage of a multi-year project) be completed in a year, taking into consideration all aspects of the project? If the project is in the early stages of development, will the strategy establish feasibility, and will particularly risky aspects be managed?

Scoring guidance	Points
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The project has little to no chance of being completed in a year.	1
The project has a plan for being completed but makes overly optimistic assumptions on key aspects.	2
The project seems likely to be completed on time, but the proposal should explain in more detail about managing risks and/or feasibility.	3
The project appears very likely to be completed on time or addresses risky aspects but there are documentable concerns or deficiencies about timeliness that prevent awarding full points.	4
Fully addresses this metric with no deficiencies	5

- G. Investigator(s) Research Qualifications: Are the PIs, collaborators, and other researchers well suited to the project? Do they have appropriate experience and training? Do they demonstrate an ongoing record of accomplishments that have advanced their field(s)? Does the project include researchers new to the RDRC, such as junior researchers or those new to the field of retirement and disability policy included who can bring different methodological expertise, new subject matter expertise, lived experience, new perspectives, or other unique contributions?

Scoring guidance	Points
The proposal does not address investigator qualifications or leaves major questions unaddressed about the investigator'(s) ability to conduct the research.	1
The proposal includes investigator credentials but doesn't address suitability for the specific project.	2
The investigator qualifications are adequate but have important gaps.	3
The qualifications leave at least one documentable deficiency that justifies not awarding full points.	4
Fully confident that these investigators are very well-suited to this project.	5

- H. Investigator(s) Community Connections: Do the investigators have any connections, relationships, or lived experience with the communities/populations studied in this project? Will those experiences better inform the investigator about the community's issues, position them to conduct the research more effectively, and better interpret the results? (For example, a proposal to study the economic security of a Native American tribe that explains how the investigators' professional or personal connections with that tribe will aid the project would receive more points than a proposal that doesn't include that info.)

Scoring guidance	Points
The proposal does not address community connections at all.	1
Community connections can be inferred from the proposal, but they are not addressed in enough detail to know what they are why they matter.	2
The community connections are described adequately but don't explain enough how they improve the research, or the connections are vague but how they will be leveraged is well-described.	3
The community connections are strong and the importance to the research is described, but there are documentable deficiencies or concerns that prevent awarding full points.	4
The investigators have strong connections to the communities being studied and they will benefit the research project.	5

- I. Investigator(s) Institutions: Are the investigators from an HBCU or ISSC? Refer to the most recent list of HBCUs and ISSCs (formerly known as Minority Serving Institutions or MSIs). The 2022 list of ISSCs, including HBCUs, is [here](#). If so, how does the perspective and expertise of these researchers further the aims of the project?

Scoring guidance	Points
No investigators from an HBCU or ISSC.	1
At least one but less than half of the investigators are from an HBCU and/or ISSC.	2
Half or more of the investigators are from an HBCU or ISSC.	3
All investigators are from an HBCU and/or ISSC, but the proposal doesn't address how that furthers the project's aims.	4
All investigators are from an HBCU and/or ISSC and the proposal connects their expertise and perspective to the project's aims.	5

- J. Data Quality: Have the investigators clearly identified data needed for the project? Is the data appropriate to the research question? Are there limitations or advantages to using that data?

Scoring guidance	Points
The project's data needs are not addressed.	1
The data is addressed only in vague terms and there are major questions or concerns not addressed.	2
The data is identified and appropriate, but limitations and advantages leave the reviewer with a major question about data quality.	3
The data is clearly identified, appropriate to the project, but there are documentable concerns about data quality that justify not awarding full points.	4
The data needs are described in such a way that a reviewer is left with no concerns about data quality.	5

- K. Data Availability: Is the data already available to the investigators or do they have a specific plan to collect it themselves? Have they verified that availability or developed a plan to collect and/or develop new data? Have they addressed possible hurdles or obstacles and how they would address those contingencies, like using other data or changing the approach to obtain the data?

Scoring guidance	Points
Data availability is either not addressed or is aspirational ('we hope to work with someone who has access').	1
Availability is addressed but hinges on critical steps outside the investigators' control (new data agreements, gaining novel access, third parties depended on to collect data, etc.).	2
The data is available or collectable by investigators (they will conduct primary data collection themselves) but there are documentable limitations that may affect availability that preclude awarding full points.	3
The investigators already have access or make a convincing case that they can access or collect the data, but there are documentable concerns for not awarding full points.	4

The investigators not only have continuing access but have addressed contingencies if availability is threatened.	5
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- L. Total/Overall: Was there a reason to consider one factor more heavily than another in determining a total technical merit score? Sum above scores to a total that cannot exceed the max score of 55.
(Sum A-K scores with a possible maximum of 55 points)

FOR REFERENCE ONLY: RFA's Scoring Criteria

External reviewers will consider the following factors when evaluating the scientific soundness and potential research and policy contributions of individual, first-year projects, in terms of the first, scoring criterion bullet above. These factors will be considered alongside an evaluation of the broader research agenda:

- **Investigator(s):** Are the PIs, collaborators, and other researchers well suited to the project? Do they have appropriate experience and training? Do they demonstrate an ongoing record of accomplishments that have advanced their field(s)? If they are relatively junior or new to the field of retirement and disability policy, do they have attributes (e.g., methodological expertise, particular subject matter expertise, etc.) that would make them a valuable addition to the RDRC network?
- **Approach/Methodology:** Are the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project? Have the investigators presented strategies to ensure a robust and unbiased approach, as appropriate for the work proposed? Are potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success presented? Are the concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions novel to one field of research or novel in a broad sense? If the project is in the early stages of development, will the strategy establish feasibility, and will particularly risky aspects be managed?
- **Significance:** Does the project address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the field? Is there a strong scientific premise for the project? If the aims of the project are achieved, how will scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice be improved? How will successful completion of the aims change the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or interventions that drive this field?
- **Overall Impact:** Reviewers will assess the likelihood that the project will exert a sustained, powerful influence on the research and policy field(s) and communities involved, in consideration of the approach/methodology and significance criteria.