Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) by VCTRS and VPSD Applicants

1. Can I apply for both VCTRS and VPSD?
We have streamlined the process to consider candidates for both programs through one application. With your chair’s permission, you will be considered for either or both programs based on your eligibility. VPSD is only for applicants who have an MD or other clinical doctorate. VPSD projects may be basic, translational or clinical research. VCTRS is for clinician scientists or PhDs but must be clinical or translational research.

2. How much protected time for research is required?
Both VCTRS and VPSD require a minimum of 75% protected time for research. The application must include a letter from the Chair spelling out how this will be accomplished and what activities will make up the balance of the effort.

3. When are applicants notified?
Applications are usually reviewed in the spring and applicants are notified as soon as possible after review. Funding starts with the beginning of the academic clock on July 1.

4. What if the person does not have a faculty appointment?
Both VCTRS and VPSD funding sources require that the individual be appointed to faculty and will need a letter saying they have, or have been offered, a faculty appointment.

5. Must the mentor be at Vanderbilt?
For VPSD, the mentor must be at Vanderbilt. For VCTRS, the mentor could be at Vanderbilt or Meharry.

6. Is a faculty appointment as Instructor acceptable?
For VCTRS an Instructor appointment is allowed. For VPSD, the preference is for Assistant Professor, but in some departments, junior faculty are not appointed to this level without an individual grant, and this will be taken into consideration. In this case, the Chair’s letter must state plans for appointment to Assistant Professor.

7. Where does the candidate describe career development plans?
This is usually part of the cover letter that describes the candidate’s background.

8. Can these awards run concurrently with other awards?
If someone gets an individual K award (K08, K23) or an R01, the individual comes off VCTRS or VPSD with a transition period to allow the person to make appropriate arrangements. If someone has a small award from non-NIH sources, for example a Society grant, individuals will need to check the regulations of the granting society, and may be able to keep it depending on NIH regulations. Society career development awards generally cannot be held concurrently.

9. How is it decided who is successful?
The process is competitive. Applications are reviewed, as an NIH career development grant would be. Primary and secondary reviewers discuss and score them in a panel format. The score reflects the reviewers’ judgment of the strengths of the scientific proposal, strengths of the mentor and mentoring plan, as well as the individual’s potential for a successful academic science career.
10. Does everyone need to do the MSCI and MPH?
Many researchers who are undertaking clinical and translational research enroll in these programs, but the need for this can be tailored according to the individual’s previous training and career. If someone already has overlapping expertise/training then an individualized program can be developed.

11. Is it acceptable to apply for a K23 or K08 at the same time as VCTRS or VPSD?
Yes, it is encouraged. If a scholar is successful in receiving an individual K, he or she will come off VCTRS or VPSD.

12. How many open positions are there?
The number of open positions varies each year. There are currently 8 VPSD positions and 10 VCTRS positions. Sometimes positions open when someone is awarded an individual grant, such as a K or R, and comes off VCTRS or VPSD.

13. Can I reapply?
Yes, as long as you are eligible. Candidates who have not been funded with their first application have often been funded their second time around.

14. How can I increase my chances of success?
   a. Follow the instructions
   b. Have a strong, funded mentor
   c. Have a career plan that shows you are moving forward and shows where you are going
   d. Have clear, hypothesis-driven Aims

15. Am I competitive for these grants?
There is no threshold and the competition varies from year to year. Someone with no publications and no research experience is unlikely to be successful. However, having a lot of publications doesn’t ensure success. The whole application is scored: the mentor, the science, and the applicant’s potential.

16. What is the success rate?
This varies from year to year. Average ranges have been 15% to 40% for VCTRS and 40% to 50% for VPSD.

17. I have additional questions that were not covered in the information provided.
Please email the program manager, who will respond to additional questions you may have.