

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

RIN 1820-ZA09

Rehabilitation Short-Term Training

AGENCY: Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), Department of Education.

ACTION: Notice of proposed priority for fiscal year 1997.

SUMMARY: The Secretary proposes a priority for fiscal year 1997 under the Rehabilitation Short-Term Training program. The Secretary takes this action in order to improve the leadership among top-level managers and administrators of the State Vocational Rehabilitation Services program.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before June 19, 1997.

ADDRESSES: All comments concerning this proposed priority should be addressed to Sylvia Johnson, U.S. Department of Education, 600 Independence Avenue, S.W., Room 3318, Switzer Building, Washington, D.C. 20202-2601. Comments may also be sent through the Internet to: Sylvia_Johnson@ed.gov

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Sylvia Johnson. Telephone: (202) 205-9312. Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the TDD number at (202) 205-8133. Internet: Sylvia_Johnson@ed.gov

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This notice contains a proposed priority to establish a National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute to improve the leadership skills of top-level managers and administrators of the State Vocational Rehabilitation Services program.

Goals 2000: Educate America Act

The Goals 2000: Educate America Act (Goals 2000) focuses the Nation's education reform efforts on the eight National Education Goals and provides a framework for meeting them. Goals 2000 promotes new partnerships to strengthen schools and expands the Department's capacities for helping communities to exchange ideas and obtain information needed to achieve the goals.

This proposed priority would address the National Education Goal that every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. The proposed priority would further the objectives of this Goal by focussing available funds on projects that improve

the leadership skills of top administrators of State vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies, which will improve the responsiveness of the VR system to adults with disabilities and their vocational pursuits.

The Secretary will announce the final priority in a notice in the **Federal Register**. The final priority will be determined by responses to this notice, available funds, and other considerations of the Department. Funding of particular projects depends on the availability of funds, the nature of the final priority, and the quality of the applications received. The publication of this proposed priority does not preclude the Secretary from proposing additional priorities, nor does it limit the Secretary to funding only this priority, subject to meeting applicable rulemaking requirements.

Note: This notice of proposed priority does not solicit applications. A notice inviting applications under this competition will be published in the **Federal Register** concurrent with or following publication of the notice of final priority.

Priority*Background*

Authority for the Rehabilitation Short-Term Training program is contained in section 302 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 U.S.C. 774). Under this program the Secretary makes awards to public agencies and private agencies and organizations, including institutions of higher education, Indian tribes, and tribal organizations. This program is designed for the support of special seminars, institutes, workshops, and other short-term courses in technical matters relating to the vocational, medical, social, and psychological rehabilitation programs, independent living services programs, and client assistance programs.

The State Vocational Rehabilitation Services program is undergoing significant change. In their efforts to improve the employment outcomes of the individuals they serve, State VR agencies have been changing the way they operate. For example, most State VR agencies have taken steps to streamline VR services, analyzing their practices, policies, and procedures and eliminating or modifying those that inhibit responsive service delivery. In addition, State VR agencies increasingly recognize that their success in promoting the employment of their consumers depends in part on the strength of their linkages with employers and with generic employment and training programs.

The changed environment of State VR agencies demands a different set of

skills from leaders and managers than has traditionally been required. Managers and leaders in the VR system need to develop new skills that will enable them, for example, to change their agencies' focus from processes and compliance to the achievement of high-quality outcomes and to build working relationships with organizations outside their agencies.

Elements of a VR Leadership Training Program

To have maximum utility to administrators in the State VR Services program, a leadership training program must include training in leadership skills that includes periodic reinforcement and feedback to participants, application of leadership skills to VR issues, and provision of training in a peer setting.

Many skills associated with effective leadership can be taught, given sufficient instruction, practice, and feedback on performance. Effective skills training uses a strategy of repeated practice over time with feedback on performance. In the training arena, this often translates into providing a series of training programs. The time between training programs is used for practicing newly learned skills. Subsequent events allow for feedback by instructors and peers on their efforts. For example, an institute may propose a series of short courses (several days each) over the course of a year, each building upon the other. The time between the courses would be used to try out new techniques and exercise new skills. At the next course, experiences may be discussed to allow the instructors to provide feedback. The instructors could then move along to new topics. It is a progressive learning technique that has proven effective, especially when training busy professionals such as rehabilitation administrators. There also may be a "pick and choose" series of courses from which a given administrator, in concert with a training specialist on the grantee's staff, could select to develop a "customized" program of learning. Efforts such as these have proven to be effective in programs designed for busy professionals.

The second element of effective VR leadership training is the application of training to actual issues. This approach both helps trainees solve real problems and relates to a long-held principle of adult learning: adults learn most effectively when the content of the training is directly related to issues they face. Within VR, new policies, initiatives, and legislation will require top administrators and directors to make

major changes in procedures and practices within their agencies. Tying the content of leadership training to these types of issues makes the training in leadership skills more effective and helps solve real world problems.

The third element of effective leadership training is the provision of training in a peer setting. A well-tested management principle relates to the benefits of working in teams with others who face similar situations. Group, as opposed to individual, examination of issues often reveals a wider range of options for addressing those issues and results in better solutions.

Leadership skills, like all skills, can improve over time. Therefore, the Secretary considers progressive levels of leadership training programs, such as courses for new directors, programs for administrators and directors with various levels of experience, and seminars for seasoned administrators and directors, essential to meeting the diverse needs of VR administrators and directors.

The Secretary has determined that it is in the best interest of the State VR Services program to provide leadership skills training through one national institute. Having one institute lends consistency in the quality and content of training and better enables the Secretary to monitor the quality and relevance of the training. The Secretary intends to be involved with the grantee to provide direction and technical assistance on the content of the training.

To expand the funding base for the project and to encourage State agencies to contribute to the costs of training, the Secretary is proposing that participants be required to provide some level of contribution for training. The Secretary recognizes that State agencies have limited budgets and that some State policies limit the use of funds for tuition and related costs. However, the Secretary expects that a reasonable fee structure will not preclude the participation of State agencies.

In summary, the Secretary has determined that it is in the best interest of the State VR Services program to develop a leadership training program that focuses on leadership skills as applied to the unique issues facing State VR agencies in a peer setting. Progressive levels of training are needed to meet the varying needs of administrators and directors. One institute would ensure consistency in training and provide for better quality

control. State agencies would be required to provide some degree of support to the program.

Proposed Priority

Under 34 CFR 75.105(c)(3) and section 302(a)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, the Secretary proposes to give an absolute preference to applications that meet the following priority. The Secretary proposes to fund under this competition only applications that meet this absolute priority:

The Secretary proposes to fund one project to establish a National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute that will focus on developing the leadership skills of top-level managers and administrators in State VR agencies. The project must have plans for addressing the leadership needs in all VR agencies funded under the Act.

The project must employ a curriculum that focuses on the development of leadership skills and on the application of those skills to current challenges and issues in the VR program. The project must be capable of structuring leadership curricula around current VR issues of national significance, such as using VR standards and indicators to assess and improve agency performance, coordinating effectively with generic employment and training programs, and increasing client choice. Actual issues will be determined by the advisory committee (described later in this notice) and the Secretary.

The project must employ a curriculum that includes several levels of training to meet the needs of audiences ranging from new State administrators and directors to seasoned administrators and directors. The project's curriculum must include sequential courses that allow for repeated practice of newly learned skills over time, with performance feedback. The project must provide training in a peer setting.

The project must coordinate its training activities with activities conducted under the State VR In-Service Training program and the Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program. These programs are also charged with improving the leadership skills of State agency personnel. Therefore, collaboration and coordination are necessary.

The project must establish an advisory committee that includes RSA

central and regional office representatives, representatives of State VR agency administrators, rehabilitation counselors, VR clients, other educators and trainers of VR personnel, and others as determined to be appropriate by the grantee and RSA. This committee must provide substantial input on and direction to the training curriculum, including the specific VR issues to be incorporated.

The project must include an evaluation component based upon clear, specific performance and outcome measures. The results must be reported in its annual progress report.

The project must provide for some degree of participant contribution to training costs.

Intergovernmental Review

This program is subject to the requirements of Executive Order 12372 and the regulations in 34 CFR Part 79. The objective of the Executive order is to foster an intergovernmental partnership and a strengthened federalism by relying on processes developed by State and local governments for coordination and review of proposed Federal financial assistance.

In accordance with the order, this document is intended to provide early notification of the Department's specific plans and actions for this program.

Invitation to Comment

Interested persons are invited to submit comments and recommendations regarding this proposed priority.

All comments submitted in response to this notice will be available for public inspection, during and after the comment period, in Room 3423, Mary Switzer Building, 330 C Street S.W., Washington, D.C., between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m., Monday through Friday of each week except Federal holidays.

Applicable Program Regulations: 34 CFR Parts 385 and 390.

Authority: 29 U.S.C. 774.

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number: 84.246D, Rehabilitation Short-Term Training)

Dated: May 15, 1997.

Judith E. Heumann,
Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

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