

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research; Notice of Proposed Funding Priority for Fiscal Years 1998–1999 for a Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center

AGENCY: Department of Education.

ACTION: Notice of Proposed Funding Priority for Fiscal Years 1998–1999 for a Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center.

SUMMARY: The Secretary proposes a funding priority for a Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center (RERC) under the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) for fiscal years 1998–1999. The Secretary takes this action to focus research attention on problems that are significant to disabled persons and to the research community. This priority is intended to improve rehabilitation services and outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before February 26, 1998.

ADDRESSES: All comments concerning this proposed priority should be addressed to Donna Nangle, U.S. Department of Education, 600 Maryland Avenue, SW., room 3418, Switzer Building, Washington, DC 20202–2645. Comments may also be sent through the Internet: comments@ed.gov.

You must include the term "Engineering Research Centers" in the electronic message.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Donna Nangle. Telephone: (202) 205–5880. Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the TDD number at (202) 205–2742. Internet: Donna_Nangle@ed.gov.

Individuals with disabilities may obtain this document in an alternate format (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, or computer diskette) on request to the contact person listed in the preceding paragraph.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This notice contains a proposed priority under the Disability and Rehabilitation Research Projects and Centers program for an RERC focused on the development of rehabilitation technology devices, particularly low-cost prosthetic and orthotic devices, to meet the rehabilitation needs of land mine survivors.

The authority for RERCs is contained in section 204(b)(3) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 U.S.C. 762(b)(3)). Under this program the Secretary makes awards to public and

private agencies and organizations, including institutions of higher education, Indian tribes, and tribal organizations, to conduct research, demonstration, and training activities regarding rehabilitation technology in order to enhance opportunities for meeting the needs of, and addressing the barriers confronted by, individuals with disabilities in all aspects of their lives. An RERC must be operated by or in collaboration with an institution of higher education or a nonprofit organization. NIDRR is authorized, under Section 204(b)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act, to provide support for a program of international rehabilitation research, demonstration, and training.

The authority for the Secretary to establish research priorities by reserving funds to support particular research activities is contained in sections 202(g) and 204 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 U.S.C. 761a(g) and 762).

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 a particular project depends on the final priority, the availability of funds, 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 the notice of final priority.

Description of the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center Program

RERCs carry out research or demonstration activities by:

(a) Developing and disseminating innovative methods of applying advanced technology, scientific achievement, and psychological and social knowledge to (1) solve rehabilitation problems and remove environmental barriers, and (2) study new or emerging technologies, products, or environments;

(b) Demonstrating and disseminating (1) innovative models for the delivery of cost-effective rehabilitation technology services to rural and urban areas, and (2) other scientific research to assist in meeting the employment and independent living needs of individuals with severe disabilities; or

(c) Facilitating service delivery systems change through (1) the development, evaluation, and dissemination of consumer-responsive and individual and family centered innovative models for the delivery to both rural and urban areas of innovative cost-effective rehabilitation technology services, and (2) other scientific research to assist in meeting the employment and independent living needs of individuals with severe disabilities.

Each RERC must provide training opportunities to individuals, including individuals with disabilities, to become researchers of rehabilitation technology and practitioners of rehabilitation technology in conjunction with institutions of higher education and nonprofit organization.

Priority

Under 34 CFR 75.105(c)(3), 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.

*Proposed Priority: Improved Technology Access for Land Mine Survivors***Background**

In the House Report accompanying the appropriations for the Department of Education:

The Committee has included up to \$850,000 * * * for NIDRR to establish, through a competitive award, a rehabilitation engineering research center dealing with the unique needs of land mine survivors. The center is to operate in cooperation with an institution of higher education involved in both rehabilitation medicine and engineering research, training and service and is to focus on the unique rehabilitation needs of the victims of land mine injuries. Specifically, the center is to focus on the development of inexpensive replacement limbs; the development and dissemination of educational materials on prosthetics, and other appropriate prosthetic, orthotic, or assistive technology devices; and the training of health care providers in effective methods of assistance to this population.

In response to this report language, the Secretary is proposing the following priority. Both the Congress and NIDRR are aware of the historic significance of periods of international conflict in stimulating the science of rehabilitation to develop solutions to the impairments caused by sustained large-scale violence. Most recently, survivors of landmine injuries in dozens of nations in Latin America, Europe, Africa, and Asia are in need of innovative solutions to address the loss of limbs and other

conditions such as sensory impairments, communication impairments, burns, and other conditions caused by anti-personnel land mines. The Secretary is particularly interested in receiving comments about the feasibility of addressing, to some extent, land mine injuries that do not involve missing limbs, such as vision, hearing, and other types of impairments within the scope of this RERC.

Because most of those with unmet needs are located in countries that are either not industrialized, lack infrastructures for rehabilitative services, or lack economic resources, the approaches to meeting these needs must be tailored to their particular circumstances. Solutions, which will focus on, but not be limited to, limb replacement, must be suitable for the available materials, resources, and expertise in the relevant countries, and must also concentrate on building capacity in those nations for design and fitting, manufacture, distribution, maintenance, and provision of supports and services. This RERC will have broad scope in the development of devices through scientific methods, training of indigenous scientists, service providers, and advocates, and transferring technology to the local economies.

There are many national and international organizations that play a role in addressing the problems of landmine survivors and the Center should involve relevant organizations in appropriate roles in Center operations. Included in this group are organizations of survivors themselves; these consumer organizations are important targets of education, information, and training, particularly in the areas of self-help, maintenance of devices, and the need for accommodations, supports, and follow-up care. Because so many of the victims of land mines are children, special attention must be directed toward the special needs of children who are growing and developing, and for whom most prostheses or orthoses therefore will have a limited period of utility. The Center may opt to address these problems through technological solutions where feasible, or through partnerships that will provide ongoing care and support.

The work of this RERC will have implications for the United States population as well. There is a continuing need for new and different types of prostheses and orthoses in the United States and other developed nations, with special need for prosthetic and orthotic devices and other rehabilitation technology that is suitable for different climates, low-cost, and

appropriate in various cultures. New conditions of health care delivery portend limited resources for rehabilitation technologies and services and durable medical equipment; thus there will be a greater emphasis on durability, endurance, cost containment, and ease of maintenance. This Center's activities will contribute to advancing science, broadening knowledge of materials and methods, and increasing our understanding of and sensitivity to cultural and economic concerns in provision of these rehabilitation technologies.

Priority

The Secretary proposes to establish an RERC to address the unique rehabilitation needs of land mine survivors through developing and testing appropriate innovative replacement limbs (particularly low-cost limbs suitable for developing economies), and other prosthetic and orthotic devices; training indigenous technicians, manufacturers, and health care providers in the fabrication and fitting of appropriate devices; and educating land mine survivors and their families.

In carrying out the general purposes of this priority, the RERC shall:

1. Develop a sound scientific process for evaluating the suitability of existing devices, assessing user needs, developing new and innovative designs, and testing inexpensive replacement limbs, prototypes of prostheses, orthoses, and other appropriate rehabilitation technology devices.
2. Identify and evaluate existing technologies and systems used for limb replacement and related rehabilitation technology in various nations where there are extensive land mine injuries.
3. Demonstrate the suitability of proposed devices in terms of cost-effectiveness and appropriateness to the indigenous economies, including available materials, work force capabilities, and infrastructure capacity for timely production and delivery of devices.
4. Identify the needs of land mine survivors for other types of rehabilitation technologies which may include but need not be limited to vision, hearing and speech aids, and wheelchairs.
5. Develop and maintain a database to track and correlate consumer needs and characteristics, device specification and performance, and outcomes and conduct a definitive evaluation of the products and procedures.

In addition to its research functions, the RERC must:

- Address the needs of land mine survivors of all ages, with particular attention to systems for meeting the changing needs of growing children.
- Conduct, in the third year of the award, a state-of-the-science conference and provide NIDRR with a report on this conference by the end of the fourth year.
- Conduct training of health care providers in affected nations in effective methods of providing rehabilitative assistance to this population.
- Collaborate with key international organizations and Government agencies in the affected nations, with consumer organizations of land mine survivors, and with rehabilitation researchers and service providers, and other Federal agencies including the Department of Defense, Agency for International Development, Centers for Disease Control, and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

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Note: The official version of this document is the document published in the **Federal Register**.

Invitation to Comment

Interested persons are invited to submit comments and recommendations regarding these proposed priorities. All comments submitted in response to this notice will be available for public inspection, during and after the comment period, in Room 3424, Switzer Building, 330 C Street S.W., Washington, D.C., between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday of each week except Federal holidays.

Applicable Program Regulations: 34 CFR parts 350 and 353.

Program Authority: 29 U.S.C. 760-762.

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance
Number 84.133E, Rehabilitation Engineering
Research Centers)

Dated: January 22, 1998.

Judith E. Heumann,

*Assistant Secretary for Special Education and
Rehabilitative Services.*

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