

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research; Proposed Funding Priorities for Fiscal Years 1999–2000 for Certain Centers

AGENCY: Department of Education.

ACTION: Notice of Proposed Funding Priorities for Fiscal Years 1999–2000 for Certain Centers.

SUMMARY: The Secretary proposes funding priorities for one Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) and two Rehabilitation Engineering Research Centers (RERCs) under the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) for fiscal years 1999–2000. The Secretary takes this action to focus research attention on areas of national need. These priorities are intended to improve rehabilitation services and outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before February 16, 1999.

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

You must include the term "Research Centers" in the subject line of your 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) 205–9136. Internet: Donna_Nangle@ed.gov.

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

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This notice contains proposed priorities under the Disability and Rehabilitation Research Projects and Centers Program for one RRTC related to rehabilitation of persons with traumatic brain injury and two RERCs related to universal design and the built environment, and telecommunications access. There are references in the proposed priorities to NIDRR's Long-Range Plan (LRP). The LRP can be accessed on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/announcements/1998-4/102698a.html>.

These proposed priorities support the National Education Goal that calls for

every adult American to possess the skills necessary to compete in a global economy.

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. 762(g) and 764).

The Secretary will announce the final priorities in a notice in the **Federal Register**. The final priorities 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 these proposed priorities does not preclude the Secretary from proposing additional priorities, nor does it limit the Secretary to funding only these priorities, subject to meeting applicable rulemaking requirements.

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

Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers

Authority for the RRTC program of NIDRR is contained in section 204(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 U.S.C. 764(b)(2)). Under this program the Secretary makes awards to public and private organizations, including institutions of higher education and Indian tribes or tribal organizations for coordinated research and training activities. These entities must be of sufficient size, scope, and quality to effectively carry out the activities of the Center in an efficient manner consistent with appropriate State and Federal laws. They must demonstrate the ability to carry out the training activities either directly or through another entity that can provide that training.

The Secretary may make awards for up to 60 months through grants or cooperative agreements. The purpose of the awards is for planning and conducting research, training, demonstrations, and related activities leading to the development of methods, procedures, and devices that will benefit individuals with disabilities, especially those with the most severe disabilities.

Description of Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers

RRTCs are operated in collaboration with institutions of higher education or providers of rehabilitation services or other appropriate services. RRTCs serve as centers of national excellence and national or regional resources for providers and individuals with disabilities and the parents, family members, guardians, advocates or authorized representatives of the individuals.

RRTCs conduct coordinated, integrated, and advanced programs of research in rehabilitation targeted toward the production of new knowledge to improve rehabilitation methodology and service delivery systems, to alleviate or stabilize disabling conditions, and to promote maximum social and economic independence of individuals with disabilities.

RRTCs provide training, including graduate, pre-service, and in-service training, to assist individuals to more effectively provide rehabilitation services. They also provide training including graduate, pre-service, and in-service training, for rehabilitation research personnel and other rehabilitation personnel.

RRTCs serve as informational and technical assistance resources to providers, individuals with disabilities, and the parents, family members, guardians, advocates, or authorized representatives of these individuals through conferences, workshops, public education programs, in-service training programs and similar activities.

RRTCs disseminate materials in alternate formats to ensure that they are accessible to individuals with a range of disabling conditions.

NIDRR encourages all Centers to involve individuals with disabilities and individuals from minority backgrounds as recipients of research training, as well as clinical training.

The Department is particularly interested in ensuring that the expenditure of public funds is justified by the execution of intended activities and the advancement of knowledge and, thus, has built this accountability into the selection criteria. Not later than three years after the establishment of any RRTC, NIDRR will conduct one or more reviews of the activities and achievements of the Center. In accordance with the provisions of 34 CFR 75.253(a), continued funding depends at all times on satisfactory performance and accomplishment.

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 1: Rehabilitation of Persons With Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Introduction

Chapter Four of NIDRR's proposed Long-Range Plan (63 FR 57204) addresses research on trauma rehabilitation, including brain injury. A 1998 draft National Institute of Health's Consensus Development Conference Statement on Rehabilitation of Persons with TBI identifies emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and physical symptoms of TBI that affect the individuals with TBI, family, friends, community, and society. The report raises important research issues related to children, the elderly, and persons who experience mild TBI symptoms.

NIDRR has a long history of support for research on TBI that has focused primarily on adults with moderate and severe injuries. This RRTC will address the needs of all age groups including children and the elderly. In addition, the RRTC will expand its focus to include persons with mild TBI. For the purpose of this proposed priority, mild TBI is defined using the definition developed in 1991 by the Mild TBI Committee of the Head Injury Interdisciplinary Special Interest Group of the American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine definition (see Esselman, P. and Uomoto, J., "Classification of the Spectrum of Mild Traumatic Brain Injury," *Brain Injury*, Vol. 9, No. 4, pgs. 417-424, 1995).

Proposed Priority

The Secretary proposes to establish an RRTC for the purpose of developing interventions to improve the functional abilities and promote the independence of persons with TBI. The RRTC shall:

- (1) Develop and evaluate methodologies to assess the epidemiology and long term consequences of mild TBI and identify interventions for rehabilitation;
- (2) Develop and evaluate innovative methods of diagnosis and treatment of the medical, psychological, and neurobehavioral sequelae of TBI across all age groups;
- (3) Develop and evaluate innovative interventions to assist families;
- (4) Develop and test prognostic indicators of rehabilitation outcomes

including early predictors of functional outcomes for all age groups;

(5) Provide training on research methodology and applied research experience, and training on knowledge gained from the Center's research activities to persons with disabilities and their families, service providers, and other appropriate parties;

(6) Develop and disseminate informational materials based on knowledge gained from the Center's research activities, and disseminate the materials to persons with disabilities, their representatives, service providers, and other interested parties;

(7) Involve individuals with disabilities and, if appropriate, their representatives, in planning and implementing its research, training, and dissemination activities, and in evaluating the Center;

(8) Conduct a state-of-the-science conference and publish a comprehensive report on the final outcomes of the conference. The report must be published in the fourth year of the grant; and

(9) Coordinate with other entities carrying out related research or training activities including NIDRR's grantees on TBI.

Description of Rehabilitation Engineering Research Centers

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 of cost-effective rehabilitation technology services, and (2) other scientific research to assist in meeting the employment and independent 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 organizations.

The Department is particularly interested in ensuring that the expenditure of public funds is justified by the execution of intended activities and the advancement of knowledge and, thus, has built this accountability into the selection criteria. Not later than three years after the establishment of any RERC, NIDRR will conduct one or more reviews of the activities and achievements of the Center. In accordance with the provisions of 34 CFR 75.253(a), continued funding depends at all times on satisfactory performance and accomplishment.

Proposed General RERC Requirements

The Secretary proposes that the following requirements apply to these RERCs pursuant to these absolute priorities unless noted otherwise. An applicant's proposal to fulfill these proposed requirements will be assessed using applicable selection criteria in the peer review process. The Secretary is interested in receiving comments on these proposed requirements:

The RERC must have the capability to design, build, and test prototype devices and assist in the transfer of successful solutions to relevant production and service delivery settings. The RERC must evaluate the efficacy and safety of its new products, instrumentation, or assistive devices.

The RERC must disseminate research results and other knowledge gained from the Center's research and development activities to persons with disabilities, their representatives, disability organizations, businesses, manufacturers, professional journals, service providers, and other interested parties.

The RERC must develop and carry out utilization activities to successfully transfer all new and improved technologies developed by the RERC to the marketplace.

The RERC must involve individuals with disabilities and, if appropriate, their representatives, in planning and implementing its research, development, training, and dissemination activities, and in evaluating the Center.

The RERC must conduct a state-of-the-science conference and publish a comprehensive report on the final outcomes of the conference. The report must be published in the fourth year of the grant.

The RERC must coordinate with other entities carrying out related research or training activities.

Priorities

Under 34 CFR 75.105(c)(3), the Secretary proposes to give an absolute preference to applications that meet the following priorities. The Secretary proposes to fund under this competition only applications that meet one of these absolute priorities.

Proposed Priority 2: Universal Design and the Built Environment Introduction

Chapter 5 of NIDRR's Long-Range Plan (63 FR 57207) discusses the importance of improving access to the built environment through universal design. Universal design is a process whereby environments and products are designed with built-in flexibility so they are usable by all people, regardless of age and ability, at no additional cost to the user. For the purpose of this priority, the built environment includes public and private buildings, houses, landscapes, and tools and objects of daily use (e.g., door openers, environmental control systems, and appliances).

In order to create environments that are universal in nature, it is necessary to have a database of physical measurements of the human body (i.e., anthropometric data) that includes persons with disabilities. There is a need for more anthropometric data on persons with disabilities. A 1996 report from the U.S. Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (Access Board) concluded that research was needed regarding how people with disabilities access toilet and bathing facilities. NIDRR expects this RERC to develop a prototype anthropometric database that can be used to create universally designed toileting facilities and adapted for the development of other anthropometric databases for persons with disabilities.

Proposed Priority

The Secretary proposes to establish an RERC on universal design and the built environment to advance the field of universal design and improve the accessibility of the built environment. The RERC must:

(1) Develop and evaluate universally designed plans and products for the built environment;

(2) Develop a prototype anthropometric database, both static and dynamic, of persons with disabilities, including those who use manual or powered wheelchairs, to access and use toilet and bathing facilities;

(3) Identify, develop and evaluate strategies for promoting adoption of universal design in the building and product manufacturing industries, and design and architecture curricula; and

(4) Serve as a national information resource on universal design standards, plans, building products, funding sources, and performance evaluations for designers, builders and manufacturers.

In carrying out these purposes, the RERC must coordinate on activities of mutual interest with the RERCs on Telecommunications Access and Information Technologies Access, and the Access Board.

Proposed Priority 3: Telecommunications Access

Introduction

Chapter 5 of NIDRR's Long-Range Plan (63 FR 57207) discusses the importance of telecommunications accessibility and the need for continued research and development. For the purpose of this priority, telecommunications systems and products include, but are not limited to, wireless communication technologies, networks, multimedia conferencing systems, and software supporting these technologies, products, and systems.

The RERC on Telecommunications Access faces the challenge of promoting access to a highly dynamic field. In order to keep pace with developments in the field, NIDRR expects this RERC to undertake its research and development activities in close collaboration with private industry as well as with public entities that regulate the telecommunications industry. NIDRR expects this RERC to contribute to improving the employment status of persons with disabilities by providing employers with technical assistance and by providing persons with disabilities with information to make them better consumers.

Proposed Priority

The Secretary proposes to establish an RERC on telecommunications access for the purpose of developing technological solutions and promoting access for persons with disabilities to current and emerging telecommunications systems and products. The RERC must:

(1) Develop and evaluate in collaboration with industry technological solutions to promote accessibility and universal design at the outset of the development of telecommunications systems and products;

(2) Develop and disseminate strategies for integrating current accessibility

features into newer generations of telecommunications systems and products;

(3) Provide technical assistance to public and private organizations responsible for developing policies, guidelines, and standards that affect the accessibility of telecommunications technology products and systems, including the Access Board and the Federal Communications Commission; and

(4) Provide technical assistance and guidance to individuals with disabilities and employers on accessibility issues affecting current telecommunications systems and products.

In carrying out these purposes, the RERC must coordinate on activities of mutual interest with the RERCs on Information Technology Access, Telerehabilitation, Hearing Enhancement, Blindness and Low Vision, and Universal Design and the Built Environment.

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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 Part 350.

Program Authority: 29 U.S.C. 760-762.
(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance
Number 84.133B, Rehabilitation Research
and Training Centers and 84.133E,
Rehabilitation Engineering Research Centers)

Dated: January 11, 1999.

Curtis L. Richards,

*Acting Assistant Secretary for Special
Education and Rehabilitative Services.*

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