

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**Rehabilitation Training: Rehabilitation Long-Term Training—Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling**

AGENCY: Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Department of Education.

ACTION: Notice of proposed priority.

SUMMARY: The Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services proposes a priority under the Rehabilitation Training: Rehabilitation Long-Term Training program. The Assistant Secretary may use this priority for competitions in fiscal year (FY) 2003 and in later years. We take this action to focus on training in an identified area of national need. The purpose of this priority is to increase the partnership activities between rehabilitation counseling programs and State vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies and to increase the number of rehabilitation counseling programs that provide for students experiential activities, such as formal internships or practicum agreements with State VR agencies. We intend the priority to increase the pool of qualified VR counselors available for employment with State VR agencies.

DATES: We must receive your comments on or before September 18, 2002.

ADDRESSES: Address all comments about this proposed priority to Christine Marschall, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW., Switzer Building, Room 3325, Washington, DC 20202-2649. If you prefer to send your comments through the Internet, use the following address: Christine.Marschall@ed.gov.

You must include the term "Long-Term Training Program: Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling" in the subject line of your electronic message.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Christine Marschall. Telephone: (202) 205-8926 or via Internet: Christine.Marschall@ed.gov.

If you use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD), you may call the TDD number at (202) 205-8133.

Individuals with disabilities may obtain this document in an alternative format (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, or computer diskette) on request to the contact person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**Invitation To Comment**

We invite you to submit comments regarding this proposed priority. We

invite you to assist us in complying with the specific requirements of Executive Order 12866 and its overall requirement of reducing regulatory burden that might result from this proposed priority. Please let us know of any further opportunities we should take to reduce potential costs or increase potential benefits while preserving the effective and efficient administration of the program.

During and after the comment period, you may inspect all public comments about this proposed priority in room 3414, Switzer Building, 330 C Street, SW., Washington, DC, between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 4 p.m., Eastern time, Monday through Friday of each week except Federal holidays.

Assistance to Individuals With Disabilities in Reviewing the Rulemaking Record

On request, we will supply an appropriate aid, such as a reader or print magnifier, to an individual with a disability who needs assistance to review the comments or other documents in the public rulemaking record for this proposed priority. If you want to schedule an appointment for this type of aid, please contact the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**.

The Rehabilitation Long-Term Training program provides financial assistance for—

(1) Projects that provide basic or advanced training leading to an academic degree in areas of personnel shortages in rehabilitation as identified by the Secretary;

(2) Projects that provide a specified series of courses or program of study leading to award of a certificate in areas of personnel shortages in rehabilitation as identified by the Secretary; and

(3) Projects that provide support for medical residents enrolled in residency training programs in the specialty of physical medicine and rehabilitation.

We propose this priority to increase the number of rehabilitation counseling programs that provide experiential activities for students, such as formal internships, practicum agreements, and other partnership activities with State VR agencies. This proposed priority supports a close relationship between the educational institution and the State VR agency by creating or increasing ongoing collaboration in order to increase the number of graduates who seek employment in State VR agencies.

We will announce the final priority in a notice in the **Federal Register**. We will determine the final priority after considering responses to this notice and other information available to the

Department. This notice does not preclude us from proposing or funding additional priorities, subject to meeting applicable rulemaking requirements.

Note: This notice does *not* solicit applications. In any year in which we choose to use this proposed priority, we invite applications through a notice in the **Federal Register**. When inviting applications we designate the priority as absolute, competitive preference, or invitational. The effect of each type of priority follows:

Absolute priority: Under an absolute priority, we consider only applications that meet the priority (34 CFR 75.105(c)(3)).

Competitive preference priority: Under a competitive preference priority, we give competitive preference to an application by either (1) awarding additional points, depending on how well or the extent to which the application meets the priority (34 CFR 75.105(c)(2)(i)); or (2) selecting an application that meets the priority over an application of comparable merit that does not meet the priority (34 CFR 75.105(c)(2)(ii)).

Invitational priority: Under an invitational priority, we are particularly interested in applications that meet the invitational priority. However, we do not give an application that meets the priority a competitive or absolute preference over other applications (34 CFR 75.105(c)(1)).

Priority*Proposed Priority—Partnership With the State VR Agency*

Background: According to State VR agency data in the annual submission of the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) plan, a personnel survey conducted by the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), and the proceedings of the 2002 CSPD national meeting, State VR agencies throughout the nation are experiencing a personnel shortage of qualified VR counselors. Rates of retirement and attrition in State VR agencies reported in the annual CSPD plans indicate that this personnel shortage will increase. A review by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) of employment locations chosen by RSA-sponsored graduates, as reported by RSA training programs, indicates that only a small percentage of RSA graduates seek employment with State VR agencies. However, State VR agencies reported in the CSAVR survey and at the CSPD national meeting that individuals who are aware of the distinct role of the qualified VR counselor and benefits of employment

within a State VR agency are more likely to seek employment with the State.

Priority: This priority supports projects that will increase the knowledge of students of the role and responsibilities of the VR counselor and of the benefits of counseling in State VR agencies. This priority focuses attention on and intends to strengthen the unique role of rehabilitation educators and State VR agencies in the preparation of qualified VR counselors by increasing or creating ongoing collaboration between institutions of higher education and State VR agencies.

Projects funded under this priority must include within the degree program information about and experience in the State VR system. Projects must include partnering activities for students with the State VR agency including experiential activities, such as formal internship or practicum agreements. In addition, experiential activities for students with community-based rehabilitation service providers are encouraged.

Projects must include an evaluation of the impact of project activities.

Intergovernmental Review

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

This document provides early notification of our specific plans and actions for this program.

Applicable Program Regulations: 34 CFR parts 385 and 386.

Electronic Access to This Document

You may view this document, as well as all other Department of Education documents published in the **Federal Register**, in text or Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF) on the Internet at the following site: www.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister.

To use PDF you must have Adobe Acrobat Reader, which is available free at this site. If you have questions about using PDF, call the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO), toll free, at 1-888-293-6498; or in the Washington, DC, area at (202) 512-1530.

Note: The official version of this document is the document published in the **Federal Register**. Free Internet access to the official edition of the **Federal Register** and the Code of Federal Regulations is available on GPO Access at: <http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/index.html>.

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number 84.129B Rehabilitation Long-Term Training—Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling)

Program Authority: 29 U.S.C. 772.

Dated: August 14, 2002.

Robert H. Pasternack,

Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

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