

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Postsecondary Education Programs for Individuals With Disabilities**

AGENCY: Department of Education.

ACTION: Notice of proposed priority.

SUMMARY: The Secretary proposes to establish an absolute priority for four Regional Centers on Postsecondary Education for Individuals who are Deaf, a program administered by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The Secretary may use this priority in Fiscal Year 1996 and subsequent years. The Secretary takes this action to focus Federal assistance on identified needs to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for postsecondary students who are deaf. The proposed priority is intended to ensure wide and effective use of program funds. The Secretary also proposes selection criteria that will be applied in evaluating applications submitted for this competition.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before April 17, 1996.

ADDRESSES: All comments concerning the proposed priority should be addressed to Ramon Rodriguez, U.S. Department of Education, 600 Independence Avenue SW., Switzer Building, Room 3125, Washington, D.C. 20202-2524.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ramon Rodriguez, U.S. Department of Education, 600 Independence Avenue SW., Switzer Building, Room 3125, Washington, D.C. 20202-2524. Telephone: (202) 205-8555. Fax: (202) 205-9252. Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the TDD number at (202) 206-9156. Internet: Ramon.Rodriguez@ed.gov

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This notice contains information on the Regional Centers on Postsecondary Education for Individuals who are Deaf under the Postsecondary Education Programs for Individuals with Disabilities, a program authorized by section 625 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The purpose of this program is to provide assistance for the development, operation, and dissemination of specially designed model programs of postsecondary, academic, vocational, technical, continuing, or adult education for individuals with disabilities.

This proposed priority would support the National Education Goal of every

adult American being literate and possessing the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy by helping students who are deaf to reach higher levels of academic achievement.

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 depend on the availability of funds, the content of the final priority, and the quality of the applications received. Further, the activities of the projects funded under this priority could be affected by the enactment of legislation reauthorizing the program. The publication of the 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

Under 34 CFR 75.105(c)(3) the Secretary proposes to give an absolute preference to applications that meet this priority. The Secretary proposes to fund under this competition only applications that meet the priority.

Proposed Absolute Priority—Regional Centers on Postsecondary Education for Individuals Who Are Deaf**Purpose**

The purpose of this proposed priority is to support projects that assist educational institutions to implement proven models, components of models, and other exemplary practices, including innovative technology, to increase and improve postsecondary opportunities for individuals who are deaf.

Background

This priority would support four regional centers on postsecondary education for individuals who are deaf that will provide technical assistance to a range of postsecondary institutions, including academic, vocational, technical, continuing, and adult education programs, to expand the array of educational opportunities within the region that are available to students who are deaf. The centers must provide technical assistance to institutions currently not serving students who are

deaf to assist them to develop services and to institutions currently serving students who are deaf to assist them to improve existing programs. In carrying out the objectives of this priority, projects must distribute technical assistance services and resources equitably, taking into account population and geographic size, within each State in its targeted geographic region.

Each regional center must:

(a) Conduct assessments of the technical assistance needs of postsecondary education institutions related to recruiting; enrolling; addressing the varying communication needs of and methods used by individuals who are deaf; and, otherwise effectively serving students who are deaf;

(b) Provide consultation, in-service training, and planning and development assistance to postsecondary education institutions and their staff to enhance the access of individuals who are deaf to postsecondary education and training;

(c) Provide technical assistance on the responsibilities of postsecondary education institutions under Federal statutes, including section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act;

(d) Develop outreach strategies and disseminate information to individuals who are deaf to enhance their awareness of available postsecondary educational opportunities;

(e) Disseminate information about financial and other resources available to students and to postsecondary institutions to help them accommodate these students;

(f) Develop training materials and disseminate information on proven models, components of models, and other exemplary practices, including innovative technology, among postsecondary educational programs to assist them in implementing effective and cost-efficient service delivery systems that foster integration of students who are deaf with other students;

(g) Encourage the use of consortia of postsecondary education institutions and other cooperative arrangements to provide services and assistance to students who are deaf, including coordination of postsecondary education options with existing public and private community services that may address the educational, remedial, support service, transitional, independent living, and employment needs of individuals who are deaf;

(h) Coordinate technical assistance and dissemination activities with

relevant information clearinghouses and organizations such as the National Clearinghouse on Postsecondary Education for Individuals with Disabilities (HEATH), National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities, National Transition Alliance, and Association of Higher Education and Disability;

(i) Coordinate material development, technical assistance, outreach, and information dissemination activities with each other to ensure that activities are not duplicative; that individuals who are deaf have information on postsecondary programs throughout the country that provide accommodations; and that information on proven models, components of models, and other exemplary practices, including innovative technology, are equally available in each of the four regions. This coordination must include carrying out collaborative activities and cross-regional initiatives, where appropriate; and

(j) Evaluate the impact, effectiveness, and results of postsecondary institutions within the region in accommodating students who are deaf.

The Secretary anticipates funding four cooperative agreements, each for a project period of up to 60 months, subject to the requirements of 34 CFR 75.253(a) for continuation awards. In determining whether to continue a center for the fourth and fifth years of the project period, in addition to applying the requirements of 34 CFR 75.253(a), the Secretary will consider the recommendations of a review team consisting of three experts selected by the Secretary. The services of the review team, including a two-day visit to the center, are to be performed during the last half of the center's second year and must be included in that year's evaluation required under 34 CFR 75.590. Funds to cover the costs of the review team must be included in the center's budget for year two. These costs are estimated to be approximately \$4,000.

To ensure that all States benefit from these projects, the Secretary intends to support four projects which will be required to serve each State within one of the following geographic regions:

Northeast Region—Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

Southern Region—Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee,

Texas, Virginia, Virgin Islands, and West Virginia.

Midwest Region—Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

Western Region—Alaska, American Samoa, Arizona, California, Colorado, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Northern Marianas Islands, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

Selection Criteria for Evaluating Applications

The Secretary proposes to use the following weighted criteria to evaluate an application under the Regional Centers on Postsecondary Education for Individuals who are Deaf competition.

The maximum score for all the criteria is 100 points.

(a) *Plan of operation.* (20 points)

(1) The Secretary reviews each application to determine the quality of the plan of operation for the project.

(2) The Secretary considers—

(i) The extent to which the management plan will ensure proper and efficient administration of the project;

(ii) The quality of the activities proposed to accomplish the goals and objectives;

(iii) The adequacy of proposed timelines for accomplishing those activities; and

(iv) Effectiveness in the ways in which the applicant plans to use the resources and personnel to accomplish the program's goals and objectives.

(3) How the applicant will ensure that project participants who are otherwise eligible to participate are selected without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability.

(b) *Quality of key personnel.* (15 points)

(1) The Secretary reviews each application to determine the qualifications of the key personnel the applicant plans to use.

(2) The Secretary considers—

(i) The qualifications of the project director and project coordinator (if one is used);

(ii) The qualifications of each of the other key project personnel;

(iii) The time that each person referred to in paragraphs (b)(2)(i) and (ii) plans to commit to the project; and

(iv) How the applicant will ensure that personnel are selected for employment without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability.

(3) To determine personnel qualifications under (b)(2)(i) and (ii), the Secretary considers—

(i) Experience and training in fields related to the objectives of the project; and

(ii) Any other qualifications that pertain to the quality of the project.

(c) *Budget and cost effectiveness.* (10 points)

(1) The Secretary reviews each application to determine if the project has an adequate budget and is cost effective.

(2) The Secretary considers the extent to which—

(i) The budget for the project is adequate to support project activities; and

(ii) Costs are reasonable in relation to the objectives of the project.

(d) *Evaluation plan.* (10 points)

(1) The Secretary reviews each application to determine the quality of the evaluation plan for the project.

(2) The Secretary considers—

(i) The extent to which the applicant's methods of evaluation are appropriate to the project; and

(ii) To the degree possible, the extent to which the applicant's methods of evaluation are objective and produce data that are quantifiable.

(e) *Adequacy of resources.* (5 points)

(1) The Secretary reviews each application to determine if the applicant plans to devote adequate resources to the project.

(2) The Secretary considers the adequacy of the facilities and the technology, equipment, and supplies the applicant plans to use.

(f) *Project design.* (40 points)

(1) The Secretary reviews each application to evaluate the quality of the proposed technical assistance project design.

(2) The Secretary determines the extent to which—

(i) The technical assistance objectives are designed to meet the purpose of the priority and are clearly defined, measurable, and achievable; and

(ii) The proposed technical assistance addresses the needs of a range of postsecondary institutions, including academic, vocational, technical, continuing, and adult education programs.

(3) The Secretary determines the extent to which each application provides for—

(i) Use of current research findings and information on model practices;

(ii) Methods for linking postsecondary institutions in need of technical assistance;

(iii) Innovative procedures for disseminating information and imparting skills to postsecondary institutions, staff of these institutions, and postsecondary students and

potential postsecondary students who are deaf; and

(iv) Innovative procedures for collaborating and coordinating with other entities that are involved with broader technical assistance efforts.

Intergovernmental Review

This notice 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 the proposed priority.

All comments submitted in response to this notice will be available for public inspection, during and after the comment period, in Room 3125, 330 C

Street SW., Washington, D.C., between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday of each week except Federal holidays.

Program Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1424a. (Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number: Regional Postsecondary Centers for Individuals Who are Deaf, 84.078A)

Dated: March 8, 1996.

Howard R. Moses,

Acting Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

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