

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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

SUMMARY: The Secretary announces 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.

EFFECTIVE DATE: These priorities take effect on May 5, 1999.

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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 final priorities under the Disability and Rehabilitation Research Projects and Centers Program for one RRTC related to rehabilitation of persons with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and two RERCs related to universal design and the built environment, and telecommunications access. The final priorities refer to NIDRR's proposed 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 final 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).

Note: This notice of final priorities does not solicit applications. A notice inviting applications is published elsewhere in this issue of the **Federal Register**.

Analysis of Comments and Changes

On January 15, 1999 the Secretary published a notice of proposed

priorities in the **Federal Register** (64 FR 2730). The Department of Education received 13 letters commenting on the notice of proposed priority by the deadline date. Technical and other minor changes—and suggested changes the Secretary is not legally authorized to make under statutory authority—are not addressed.

Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers*Priority 1: Rehabilitation of Persons with Traumatic Brain Injury.*

Comment: Two commenters suggested that the RRTC should focus exclusively on persons with mild TBI. Three additional commenters suggested that the RRTC emphasize issues related to persons with mild TBI.

Discussion: NIDRR agrees that the RRTC should be required to carry out additional research on the rehabilitation of persons with mild TBI. However, NIDRR declines to require the RRTC to focus exclusively on persons with mild TBI because it is important for the RRTC to have the additional discretion to pursue promising research related to persons with moderate and severe TBI.

Changes: The second required activity has been revised to include an emphasis on persons with mild TBI, and the fourth required activity has been revised to include persons with mild TBI.

Comment: The RRTC should address postacute rehabilitation and support trials of specific interventions at the inpatient stage of rehabilitation.

Discussion: The priority is silent on the issue of the rehabilitation setting. Applicants have the discretion to propose to address the rehabilitation setting or settings. The peer review process will evaluate the merits of the proposals.

Changes: None.

Comment: Because universal design can have a significant impact on the functioning of persons with TBI, the "Introduction" should include the discussion in NIDRR's proposed LRP Plan on the interaction between individuals and the environment.

Discussion: There are numerous references to NIDRR's proposed LRP in NIDRR's FY 1999 priorities. For the sake of consistency and brevity, and in light of the fact that the LRP is easily accessible through the Internet, NIDRR prefers to include only references to the LRP in the priorities.

Changes: None.

Comment: The third required activity to develop and evaluate innovative interventions to assist families should be revised to include the requirement to utilize the physical and informational environments as a resource to enhance functional and social abilities.

Discussion: An applicant could propose to fulfill the requirements of the third activity by utilizing the physical and informational environments as a resource to enhance functional and social abilities. The peer review process will evaluate the merits of the proposal. NIDRR has no basis to determine that all applicants should be required to utilize the physical and informational environments as a resource to enhance functional and social abilities.

Changes: None.

Comment: The RRTC should be required to coordinate with the proposed RERCs on Universal Design and the Built Environment and Telecommunications Access.

Discussion: The RRTC is required to coordinate with entities carrying out related research or training activities including NIDRR's grantees on TBI. An applicant could propose to coordinate with the RERCs on Universal Design and the Built Environment and Telecommunications Access. NIDRR has no basis to determine that all applicants should be required to coordinate with the RERCs on Universal Design and the Built Environment and Telecommunications Access.

Changes: None.

Comment: The "Introduction" and the second required activity indicate that the RRTC will address all age groups. One commenter indicated that the target population of the RRTC is overly broad, and the four required research activities of the RRTC should focus exclusively on children and adolescents. A second commenter suggested that the priority should support separate geriatric and pediatric studies.

Discussion: NIDRR agrees that requiring the RRTC to address all age groups is too broad a task. However, NIDRR believes that requiring the RRTC to focus exclusively on children and adolescents may result in the RRTC neglecting equally important adult issues that are not being addressed by other research initiatives. NIDRR prefers to provide applicants with the discretion to propose the age groups that the RRTC will address. If an applicant proposes to emphasize issues related to children and adolescents, the peer review process will evaluate the merits of this proposal.

In regard to the comment on geriatric and pediatric studies, NIDRR prefers to provide applicants with the discretion to propose whether studies involving different age groups are conducted separately or jointly. The peer review process will evaluate the merits of the proposal. NIDRR has no basis to

determine that all applicants should propose to carry out the studies separately.

Changes: The "Introduction" and the second required activity have been revised to eliminate the requirement that the RRTC address all age groups. Applicants have the discretion to propose the age groups that the RRTC will address.

Comment: Several projects of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) address the epidemiology and needs of persons with mild TBI. The priority should be revised to eliminate the epidemiological studies in order to avoid duplication.

Discussion: After consulting with officials from the CDC, NIDRR agrees that the requirement to carry out epidemiological studies would duplicate CDC research.

Changes: The requirement to carry out epidemiological studies has been eliminated.

Rehabilitation Engineering Research Centers

Priority 2: Universal Design and the Built Environment

Comment: Is the objective of the second required activity to develop an anthropometric database to be used to develop new universal designs for toilet and bathing facilities, or to develop an anthropometric database and conduct research related to accessing toilet and bathing facilities?

Discussion: The purpose of the second required activity is to develop an anthropometric database on the specific issue of access and use of toileting and bathing facilities, and in the process to develop a prototype anthropometric database that can be used as a model for future databases.

Changes: None.

Comment: Two commenters suggested that the target population for the fourth required activity should be broadened to include persons with disabilities.

Discussion: NIDRR agrees the RERC should serve as a national information resource for persons with disabilities.

Changes: Persons with disabilities has been added to the target population of the fourth required activity.

Comment: Two commenters expressed concern that the priority is too narrowly focused on physical access and does not address the needs of individuals with sensory disabilities. One of the commenters indicated that the RERC should expressly integrate acoustic and visually-based accommodations into its universal design efforts.

Discussion: NIDRR expects the RERC to address the principles of universal

design as they apply to all persons with disabilities, including those with sensory disabilities. The priority does not indicate that the RERC is focused exclusively on physical access. NIDRR prefers to provide applicants with the discretion to propose the extent to which the RERC will address the needs of persons with sensory disabilities. The peer review process will evaluate the merits of the proposal.

Changes: None.

Comment: Does the RERC have to develop all the technological solutions it evaluates under the first required activity, or can the RERC evaluate solutions that industry has already developed?

Discussion: As long as the RERC engages in certain activities that include both development and evaluation, applicants have the discretion to propose to carry out additional evaluation activities.

Changes: None.

Comment: Please clarify whether the prototype anthropometric database should include persons with cognitive disabilities.

Discussion: The only requirement that is placed on the target population for the prototype anthropometric database is that it must include persons who use manual or powered wheelchairs. In addition to manual or powered wheelchair users, an applicant could propose to include persons with cognitive disabilities in the database. The peer review process will evaluate the merits of the proposal.

Changes: None.

Comment: The RERC should be required to coordinate on activities of mutual interest with the RRTCs on TBI and other RRTCs dealing with cognitive disabilities to ensure more utilization of universal design in the built environment for these individuals.

Discussion: There is a general requirement for the RERC to coordinate with other entities carrying out related research or training activities. An applicant could propose to coordinate with the RRTCs on Traumatic Brain Injury and other Centers dealing with cognitive disabilities. The peer review process will evaluate the merits of the proposal. NIDRR has no basis to determine that all applicants must coordinate with the RRTCs on Traumatic Brain Injury and other Centers dealing with cognitive disabilities.

Changes: None.

Priority 3: Telecommunications Access

Comment: The RERC should be required to address visual display access.

Discussion: NIDRR's RERC on Hearing Enhancement is currently conducting research and development in this area. However, an applicant could propose to address visual display access. The peer review process will evaluate the merits of the proposal. NIDRR has no basis to determine that all applicants should be required to propose research on visual display access.

Changes: None.

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.

Priorities

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

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.

This RRTC will emphasize, but not be limited to, the rehabilitation needs of persons with mild TBI. For the purpose of this 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).

NIDRR has a long history of support for research on TBI that has focused primarily on adults with moderate and severe injuries. This RRTC may address the needs of all, or selected, age groups including children and the elderly.

Priority

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

- (1) Develop and evaluate methodologies to assess the 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 with an emphasis on persons with mild TBI;
- (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 persons with TBI including those with mild TBI;
- (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 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 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.

General RERC Requirements

The following requirements apply to these RERCs pursuant to these absolute priorities unless noted otherwise. An applicant's proposal to fulfill these requirements will be assessed using

applicable selection criteria in the peer review process.

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 gives an absolute preference to applications that meet the following priorities. The Secretary will fund under this competition only applications that meet one of these absolute priorities.

Priority 2: Universal Design and the Built Environment Introduction

Chapter 5 of NIDRR's proposed 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.

Priority

The Secretary will 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 persons with disabilities, 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.

Priority 3: Telecommunications Access Introduction

Chapter 5 of NIDRR's proposed 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.

Priority

The Secretary will 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**.

Applicable Program Regulations: 34 CFR Part 350.

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

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

Dated: March 29, 1999.

Judith E. Heumann,

Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

[CFDA Nos.: 84.133B and 84.133E]

National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, Notice Inviting Applications for a New Rehabilitation Research and Training Center and New Rehabilitation Engineering Research Centers for Fiscal Year 1999

Note to Applicants: This notice is a complete application package. Together with the statute authorizing the programs and applicable regulations governing the programs, including the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR), this notice contains information, application forms, and instructions needed to apply for a grant under these competitions.

These programs support the National Education Goal that calls for all Americans to possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

The estimated funding levels in this notice do not bind the Department of Education to make awards in any of these categories, or to any specific number of awards or funding levels, unless otherwise specified in statute.

Applicable Regulations: The Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR), 34 CFR Parts 74, 75, 77, 80, 81, 82, 85, and 86; and Disability and Rehabilitation Research Projects and Centers—34 CFR Part 350, particularly

Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers in Subpart C and Rehabilitation Engineering Research Centers in Subpart D.

Program Title: Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers (RRTCs).
CFDA Number: 84.133B.

Purpose of Program: RRTCs conduct coordinated and advanced programs or research on disability and rehabilitation that will produce new knowledge that will improve rehabilitation methods and service delivery systems, alleviate or stabilize disabling conditions, and promote maximum social and economic independence for individuals with disabilities. RRTCs provide training to service providers at the pre-service, in-service training, undergraduate, and graduate levels, to improve the quality and effectiveness of rehabilitation services. They also provide advanced research training to individuals with disabilities and those from minority backgrounds engaged in research on disability and rehabilitation. RRTCs serve as national and regional technical assistance resources and provide training for service providers, individuals with disabilities and families and representatives, and rehabilitation researchers.

Eligible Applicants: Parties eligible to apply for grants under this program are States, public or private agencies, including for-profit agencies, public or private organizations, including for-profit organizations, institutions of higher education, and Indian tribes and tribal organizations.

APPLICATION NOTICE FOR FISCAL YEAR 1999 REHABILITATION RESEARCH AND TRAINING CENTERS CFDA No.84-133B-10

Funding priority	Deadline for transmittal of applications	Estimated number of awards	Maximum award amount (per year)*	Project period (months)
Rehabilitation for Persons with Traumatic Brain Injury	6/03/99	1	\$650,000	60

* Note: The Secretary will reject without consideration or evaluation any application that proposes a project funding level that exceeds the stated maximum award amount per year (See 34 CFR 75.104(b)).

RRTC Selection Criteria: The Secretary uses the following selection criteria to evaluate applications for an RRTC on Rehabilitation for Persons with Traumatic Brain Injury under the RRTC program. (See section 350.54)

(a) *Importance of the problem* (9 points total).

(1) The Secretary considers the importance of the problem.

(2) In determining the importance of the problem, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(i) The extent to which the applicant clearly describes the need and target population (3 points).

(ii) The extent to which the proposed activities address a significant need of those who provide services to individuals with disabilities (3 points).

(iii) The extent to which the proposed project will have beneficial impact on the target population (3 points).

(b) *Responsiveness to an absolute or competitive priority* (4 points total).

(1) The Secretary considers the responsiveness of the application to the absolute or competitive priority published in the **Federal Register**.

(2) In determining the responsiveness of the application to the absolute or

competitive priority, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(i) The extent to which the applicant addresses all requirements of the absolute or competitive priority (2 points).

(ii) The extent to which the applicant's proposed activities are likely to achieve the purposes of the absolute or competitive priority (2 points).

(c) *Design of research activities* (35 points total).

(1) The Secretary considers the extent to which the design of research activities is likely to be effective in