

Summary of potential costs and benefits: The potential cost associated with this proposed priority is minimal while the benefits are significant. Grantees may anticipate costs associated with completing the application process in terms of staff time, copying, and mailing or delivery. The use of e-Application technology reduces mailing and copying costs significantly.

The benefits of the research infrastructure capacity building projects have been well established over the years in that similar projects have been completed. This proposed priority will generate new knowledge through a dissemination, utilization, training, and technical assistance project.

The benefit of this proposed priority and proposed applications and project requirements will be the establishment of a new DRRP projects that generates, disseminates, and promotes the use of new information that will improve the options for disable individuals to perform regular activities in the community.

Applicable Program Regulations: 34 CFR part 350.

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(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number 84.133A, Disability Rehabilitation Research Project.)

Program Authority: 29 U.S.C. 762(g) and 764(a).

Dated: May 6, 2003.

Robert H. Pasternack,

Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

RIN 1820-ZA23

National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research

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

ACTION: Notice of proposed priorities.

SUMMARY: The Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services proposes priorities for up to seven awards under the Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers (RRTC) Program under the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR). The Assistant Secretary may use these priorities for competition in fiscal year (FY) 2003 and later years. We take this action to focus research attention on areas of national need. We intend these priorities to improve the rehabilitation services and outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

DATES: We must receive your comments on or before June 9, 2003.

ADDRESSES: Address all comments about these proposed priorities to Donna Nangle, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW., room 3412, Switzer Building, Washington, DC 20202-2645. If you prefer to send your comments through the Internet, use the following address: donna.nangle@ed.gov.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Donna Nangle. Telephone: (202) 205-5880.

If you use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD), you may call the TDD number at (202) 205-4475 or via the Internet: donna.nangle@ed.gov.

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 these proposed priorities.

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 these proposed priorities. 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 these priorities in Room 3412, 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 these proposed priorities. If you want to schedule an appointment for this type of aid, please contact the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**.

We will announce the final priorities in a notice in the **Federal Register**. We will determine the final priorities 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 these proposed priorities, we invite applications through a notice published in the **Federal Register**. When inviting applications we designate each 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 competitive priority over an application of comparable merit that does not meet the competitive 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)).

Note: NIDRR supports the goals of President Bush's New Freedom Initiative (NFI). The NFI can be accessed on the Internet at the following site: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/freedominitiative/freedominitiative.html>.

These proposed priorities are in concert with NIDRR's Long-Range Plan (the Plan). The Plan is comprehensive

and integrates many issues relating to disability and rehabilitation research topics. While applicants will find many sections throughout the Plan that support potential research to be conducted under these proposed priorities, a specific reference is included for the topic presented in this notice. The Plan can be accessed on the Internet at the following site: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/NIDRR/Products>.

Through the implementation of the Plan, NIDRR seeks to: (1) Improve the quality and utility of disability and rehabilitation research; (2) foster an exchange of expertise, information, and training to facilitate the advancement of knowledge and understanding of the unique needs of traditionally underserved populations; (3) determine best strategies and programs to improve rehabilitation outcomes for underserved populations; (4) identify research gaps; (5) identify mechanisms of integrating research and practice; and (6) disseminate findings.

Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers

We may make awards for up to 60 months to institutions of higher education or providers of rehabilitation or other appropriate services. RRTCs conduct coordinated and integrated advanced programs of research targeted toward the production of new knowledge to improve rehabilitation methodology and service delivery systems, alleviate or stabilize disability conditions, or promote maximum social and economic independence for persons with disabilities. Additional information on the RRTC program can be found at: http://www.ed.gov/officers/OSERS/NIDRR/Programs/res_program.html#RRTC.

General Requirements of Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers

RRTCs must:

- Carry out coordinated advanced programs of rehabilitation research;
- Provide training, including graduate, pre-service, and in-service training to help rehabilitation personnel more effectively provide rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities;
- Provide technical assistance to individuals with disabilities, their representatives, providers, and other interested parties;
- Disseminate informational materials to individuals with disabilities, their representatives, providers, and other interested parties;
- Serve as centers for national excellence in rehabilitation research for individuals with disabilities, their

representatives, providers, and other interested parties; and

- Involve individuals with disabilities and individuals from minority backgrounds as recipients of research as well as 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

Background

The following categories represent areas of NIDRR interest based on prior investment, recommendations from constituencies, and opportunities for continued advancement in rehabilitation treatment and support of community integration efforts. Basic incidence and prevalence data are provided for each of the proposed Health and Function RRTCs.

There are increasing numbers of individuals aging with disability in the United States. As reported in Chapter Six of Healthy People 2010, from 1990 to 1994, disability rates increased in youth under the age of 18 as well as in the age group between 18 and 44. Advances in medical science, technology, rehabilitation treatment, public health, and consumer education have resulted in increased life expectancies for individuals with significant physical disabilities. In addition, the absolute number of persons aged 65 or older living with disabilities also increased.

There are approximately 10,000 new cases of spinal cord injury (SCI) each year; the prevalence of SCI is estimated to be between 183,000 and 230,000. Although medical advances have improved the probability of surviving SCI, the life expectancy of individuals with SCI is lower than that of the general population. People living with SCI continue to be at higher risk than the general population for secondary disabilities such as pressure ulcers, respiratory complications, urinary tract infections (UTIs), pain, depression, and obesity.

An estimated 5.3 million Americans currently live with disabilities resulting from traumatic brain injury (TBI). The

Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimate that approximately 80,000 Americans experience the onset of disabilities resulting from TBI each year. As stated in the 1998 National Institute of Health (NIH) Consensus Conference Proceedings, "TBI may result in lifelong impairment of an individual's physical, cognitive, and psychosocial functioning." Among children up to age 14, TBI results annually in an estimated 3,000 deaths, 29,000 hospitalizations, and 400,000 emergency department visits. The long-term consequences of these occurrences are not well documented. A working group convened by the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control at the CDC in October, 2000, called for more research on patterns of recovery, secondary conditions, effectiveness of treatment, and issues of measurement for this population.

Neuromuscular diseases affect approximately 400,000 children and adults in the U.S. Neuromuscular disease is a classification category that describes diseases of the peripheral neuromuscular system, both acquired and hereditary. This category encompasses diseases such as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, post-polio, Guillan-Barre, muscular dystrophy, myasthenia gravis, and other muscular atrophies and myopathies. Conditions associated with these disorders include progressive weakness, limb contractures, spine deformity, and impaired pulmonary function.

New or recurrent stroke affects approximately 600,000 people each year in the U.S., the majority of whom (72 percent) are 65 or older. Approximately 84 percent of these events are first attacks, while the remaining 16 percent are recurrent episodes. Stroke is the leading diagnosis for individuals treated in medical rehabilitation facilities in the U.S. In addition, there are approximately 4.4 million stroke survivors living in the U.S.

Arthritis affects approximately 43 million Americans, which is about 1 of every 6 people, making it one of the most common disease groups in the U.S. In addition, as the U.S. population ages, the number of Americans with arthritis is expected to increase to 60 million persons by 2020. Arthritis is also the leading cause of disability among adults in America, with more than 7 million persons in our population reporting daily limitations in their activities due to arthritis.

Approximately 300,000 individuals in the U.S. have multiple sclerosis (MS), an autoimmune disease that affects the central nervous system when the white matter protecting the nerve fibers is

damaged. The age of onset peaks between 20 and 30 years. Almost 70 percent of persons exhibit symptoms between the ages of 21 and 40. The life expectancy of persons with MS is essentially normal; however, there may be progressive or recurring and relapsing incidences of symptoms and disability over the life course. Recent pharmacological treatments reduce the progression or frequency of attacks of the symptoms for some people with MS, and other treatments are effective for some manifestations of the disease.

Letters of Intent

Due to the open nature of this competition, NIDRR is requiring all potential applicants to submit a Letter of Intent (LOI). Each LOI must be limited to a maximum of four pages and must include the following information: (1) The title of the proposed RRTC, the name of the host institution, the name of the Principal Investigator (PI), and the names of partner institutions and entities; (2) a brief statement of the vision, goals, and objectives of the proposed RRTC and a description of its research and development activities at a sufficient level of detail to allow NIDRR to select potential peer reviewers; (3) a list of proposed RRTC staff including the center Director and key personnel; and (4) a list of individuals whose selection as a peer reviewer might constitute a conflict of interest due to involvement in proposal development, selection as an advisory board member, co-PI relationships, etc.

Submission of a LOI is a prerequisite for eligibility to submit an application. The signed, original LOI, or with prior approval an email or facsimile copy, must be received by NIDRR no later than June 9, 2003. Applicants that submit email or facsimile copies must follow up by sending to NIDRR the signed original copy no later than one week after the date the e-mail or facsimile copy was sent. All communications pertaining to the LOI must be sent to: Ruth Brannon, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW., room 3425, Switzer Building, Washington, DC 20202-2645. For further information regarding the LOI requirement, contact Ruth Brannon at (202) 358-2971 or by e-mail at: ruth.brannon@ed.gov.

Proposed Priorities

The Assistant Secretary proposes to fund up to seven RRTCs that will focus on rehabilitation to improve the health and function of persons with disabilities and thus to improve their ability to live in the community. Each RRTC must:

(1) Identify, develop, and evaluate rehabilitation techniques to address its respective area of research and improve outcomes for its designated population group;

(2) Develop, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive plan for training critical stakeholders, e.g., consumers/family members, practitioners, service providers, researchers, and policymakers;

(3) Provide technical assistance, as appropriate, to critical stakeholders, (e.g., consumers/family members, practitioners, and service providers) to facilitate utilization of research findings in its respective area of research; and

(4) Develop a systematic plan for widespread dissemination of 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.

In addition to the activities proposed by the applicant to carry out these purposes, each RRTC must:

- Conduct a state-of-the-science conference on its respective area of research in the third year of the grant cycle and publish a comprehensive report on the final outcomes of the conference in the fourth year of the grant cycle. This conference must include materials from experts internal and external to the center;

- Coordinate on research projects of mutual interest with relevant NIDRR-funded projects as identified through consultation with the NIDRR project officer;

- Involve individuals with disabilities in planning and implementing its research, training, and dissemination activities, and in evaluating the Center;

- Demonstrate in its application how it will address, in whole or in part, the needs of individuals with disabilities from minority backgrounds; and

- Demonstrate how the RRTC project will yield measurable results for people with disabilities;

- Identify specific performance targets and propose outcome indicators, along with time lines to reach these targets; and

- Demonstrate how the RRTC project can transfer research findings to practical applications in planning, policy-making, program administration, and delivery of services to individuals with disabilities.

Each RRTC must focus on one of the following priority topic areas:

(a) *Psycho-social Factors Affecting Individuals Aging with Disability:* This Center must conduct research and

training activities that generate new knowledge regarding the psycho-social issues that affect individuals aging with disabilities and the sources of resilience used by this population to cope with or respond to these issues. In an effort to improve long-term outcomes for these individuals, the Center is encouraged to identify or develop and test the effectiveness of interventions that will prevent or minimize the impact of psycho-social issues on the health, activity, and community participation of individuals with disabilities across the life span and promote positive adjustment and improved quality of life. The reference for this topic can be found in the Plan, Chapter 4, Health and Function: Research on Aging with a Disability.

(b) *Secondary Conditions in Rehabilitation of Individuals with Spinal Cord Injury (SCI):* In an effort to improve the general health, well-being, and community integration of individuals with SCI, this Center must conduct research and training activities to enhance knowledge regarding treatment or prevention strategies or both that address the wide array of secondary conditions associated with SCI, including, but not limited to, respiratory complications, urinary tract infections, pressure ulcers, pain, obesity, and depression. The reference for this topic can be found in the Plan, Chapter 4, Health and Function: Research on Secondary Conditions.

(c) *Community Integration of Individuals With Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI):* This Center must identify, assess, and evaluate current and emerging community integration needs of individuals with TBI, including but not limited to mild TBI. The Center should consider the impact of secondary conditions on community integration outcomes as well as the role of assistive devices and other technology. In addition, this Center must develop and evaluate a comprehensive plan to facilitate the translation of new knowledge into rehabilitation practice and the delivery of community-based services. The reference for this topic can be found in the Plan, Chapter 4, Health and Function: Research on Aging with a Disability.

(d) *Rehabilitation of Individuals with Neuromuscular Diseases:* This Center must conduct research that addresses rehabilitation needs, particularly related to exercise, nutrition, and pain, of individuals with neuromuscular diseases. In doing this, the Center must identify or develop and evaluate health promotion and wellness programs to enhance recreational opportunities for individuals with neuromuscular

diseases. This Center must identify, develop as appropriate, and evaluate devices and other technology that improve employment and community integration outcomes for this population of individuals with disabilities. The reference for this topic can be found in the Plan, Chapter 4, Health and Function: Research on Progressive and Degenerative Disease Rehabilitation.

(e) *Rehabilitation of Stroke Survivors*: This Center must conduct research to develop rehabilitation interventions that improve rehabilitation, employment, and community integration outcomes of stroke survivors, including young stroke survivors. Such interventions may include robotics, complementary alternative therapies, and universal design methodologies aimed at improving the utility of workplace tools and devices. This Center must explore the cost-effectiveness of stroke rehabilitation treatments, such as group model approaches. The reference for this topic can be found in the Plan, Chapter 4, Health and Function: Research on Trauma Rehabilitation.

(f) *Rehabilitation of Individuals with Arthritis*: This Center must address national goals to reduce pain and disability, improve physical fitness and quality of life, and promote independent living and community integration for persons with arthritis of all ages in the United States. This Center must research the benefits of exercise and physical fitness; home and community-based self-management programs; and technologies available to the broad populations of persons with arthritis in the environments where they live, learn, work, and play. The reference for this topic can be found in the Plan, Chapter 4, Health and Function: Research on Progressive and Degenerative Disease Rehabilitation.

(g) *Rehabilitation of Children with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)*: This Center must identify, assess, and evaluate current and emerging rehabilitation needs for children and adolescents with TBI. In doing this, the Center must document patterns of recovery, determining the effectiveness of current outcome measures for this population. Of particular interest will be evaluation of interventions and technologies, including specialized support services, to assist families and caregivers with transition to the school and the community. This RRTC must identify or develop effective rehabilitation strategies to improve outcomes for children and adolescents with TBI at all stages of rehabilitation. The reference for this topic can be found in the Plan, Chapter 4, Health and

Function: Research on Trauma Rehabilitation.

(h) *Rehabilitation of Individuals with Multiple Sclerosis (MS)*: This Center must conduct research to maximize the participation of people with MS, including those with all levels of symptoms associated with the disease, at home, in the community, and while working or learning. In doing so, the Center must identify, develop as necessary, and evaluate interventions to enhance the independence of people with MS. Those interventions must include strategies and programs that address interactions between cognitive, psychosocial, sensory, mobility, and other manifestations of the disease across the lifespan. The Center must consider the role of assistive and universally designed technologies, strategic goals, and financial planning for persons with MS, and the role of caregivers throughout the disease course. The reference for this topic can be found in the Plan, Chapter 4, Health and Function: Research on Progressive and Degenerative Disease Rehabilitation.

Executive Order 12866

This notice of proposed priorities has been reviewed in accordance with Executive Order 12866. Under the terms of the order, we have assessed the potential costs and benefits of this regulatory action.

The potential costs associated with the notice of proposed priorities are those resulting from statutory requirements and those we have determined as necessary for administering this program effectively and efficiently.

In assessing the potential costs and benefits—both quantitative and qualitative—of this notice of proposed priorities, we have determined that the benefits of the proposed priorities justify the costs.

Summary of potential costs and benefits: The potential cost associated with these proposed priorities is minimal while the benefits are significant. Grantees may anticipate costs associated with completing the application process in terms of staff time, copying, and mailing or delivery. The use of e-Application technology reduces mailing and copying costs significantly.

The benefits of the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center Program have been well established over the years in that similar projects have been completed. These proposed priorities will generate new knowledge through a research, dissemination, utilization,

training, and technical assistance projects.

The benefit of these proposed priorities and proposed applications and project requirements will be the establishment of a new RRTCs that generate, disseminate, and promote the use of new information that will improve the options for disabled individuals to perform regular activities in the community.

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(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number: 84.133B, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center Program)

Program Authority: 29 U.S.C. 762(g) and 764(b)(2).

Dated: May 6, 2003.

Robert H. Pasternack,
Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

RIN 1820 ZA17

National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research

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

ACTION: Notice of proposed priorities.

SUMMARY: The Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services proposes priorities for one or more research projects under the Disability and Rehabilitation Research Projects (DRRP) Program under the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR). The Assistant Secretary may use these