

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 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: The proposed priority supports 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>.

The proposed priority is also in concert with NIDRR's Long-Range Plan (the Plan), which can be accessed on the Internet at the following site: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/NIDRR/Products>.

Through the implementation of the NFI and 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 for integrating research and practice; and (6) disseminate findings.

Disability and Rehabilitation Research Projects (DRRP) Program

The purpose of the DRRP Program is to plan and conduct research, demonstration projects, training, and related activities that help to maximize the full inclusion and integration of individuals with disabilities into society and to improve the effectiveness of services authorized under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (the Act). An applicant for assistance under this program must demonstrate in its application how it will address, in whole or in part, the needs of individuals with disabilities from minority backgrounds (34 CFR 350.40(a)). The approaches an applicant may take to meet this requirement are found in 34 CFR 350.40(b).

General DRRP Requirements

- Involve, as appropriate, individuals with disabilities or their family members, or both, and persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented in all aspects of the research as well as in design of clinical services and dissemination activities.
- Demonstrate knowledge of culturally appropriate methods of data collection, including understanding of culturally sensitive measurement approaches.
- Collaborate with other related projects, including the other funded Traumatic Brain Injury Model Systems (TBIMS) projects.

Priority

Background

In 1987, NIDRR established the TBI Model System (TBIMS) program by funding four projects to provide comprehensive, multidisciplinary rehabilitation services to persons who experience TBI and to conduct research to foster advances in TBI rehabilitation. Most recently, in FY 2002, NIDRR funded 16 TBIMS projects. The focus of these projects is research on interventions to improve outcomes for individuals who experience TBI. Contact information and abstracts on these 16 TBI Model Systems can be found at the National Rehabilitation Information Center (NARIC), <http://www.naric.com/search/pd/browse.html>, by scrolling down to the Health and Function chapter, and clicking on the link to the TBI projects.

The TBIMS projects serve a substantial number of individuals, allowing the projects to conduct clinical and community-based research and program evaluation. In addition, TBIMS projects contribute data on model

systems patients to the TBI National Data Base maintained by the TBI National Data Center (<http://www.tbinc.org>) housed at Kessler Medical Rehabilitation Research and Education Corporation. Information is currently collected throughout the rehabilitation process, including points following discharge from the rehabilitation facility allowing for long-term follow-up of persons with TBI. There are currently over 3500 cases in this database.

As discussed, TBI model systems projects provide care to TBI survivors, contribute to the national database, and conduct focused research projects. NIDRR seeks to build upon the capacity within the model systems by providing funding to support large-scale collaborative research projects such as randomized trials or observational research that requires large sample sizes. These collaborative research efforts must include at least three existing model systems projects, but may also include non-model systems entities. You may obtain additional information about the background of this priority by contacting the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**.

Proposed Priority

The Assistant Secretary proposes to fund Traumatic Brain Injury collaborative research projects for the purpose of generating new knowledge through research to improve treatment and services delivery outcomes for persons with TBI. A collaborative research project must:

(1) Collaborate with three or more of the 16 NIDRR TBI Model Systems projects;

(2) Conduct research on questions of significance to TBI rehabilitation, using clearly identified research designs such as randomized control trials, observational research methodologies, or longitudinal studies. The research must focus on areas identified in the NFI and the Plan, ensuring that each project has sufficient sample size and methodological rigor to generate robust findings.

(3) Areas of interest include health and function, technology for function, community integration and independent living, employment, and long-term outcomes.

(4) Disseminate research findings to clinical and consumer audiences, using accessible formats.

(5) Evaluate impact of research findings on improved outcomes for persons with TBI.