

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**Final Priorities Notice**

AGENCY: National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Department of Education.

ACTION: Notice of final priorities.

SUMMARY: The Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services announces final priorities under the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Centers (RERCs) program for up to nine awards for the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) for fiscal years (FYs) 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.

EFFECTIVE DATE: These priorities are effective May 22, 2003.

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

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

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**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 and evaluate new or emerging technologies, products, or environments and their effectiveness and benefits; or
- (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 independence needs of individuals with severe disabilities.

Each RERC must provide training opportunities, in conjunction with institutions of higher education and nonprofit organizations, to assist individuals, including individuals with disabilities, to become rehabilitation technology researchers and practitioners.

We make awards for up to 60 months through grants or cooperative agreements to public and private agencies and organizations, including institutions of higher education, Indian tribes, and tribal organizations, to conduct research, demonstration, and training activities regarding rehabilitation technology in order to enhance opportunities for meeting the needs of, and addressing the barriers confronted by, individuals with disabilities in all aspects of their lives. An RERC must be operated by or in collaboration with an institution of higher education or a nonprofit organization.

General RERC Requirements

The following requirements apply to each RERC 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.

Each 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. Each RERC must evaluate the efficacy and safety of its new products, instrumentation, or assistive devices.

Each RERC must develop and implement in the first three months of the grant a plan that describes how the center will include, as appropriate, individuals with disabilities or their representatives in all phases of center activities including research, development, training, dissemination, and evaluation.

Each RERC must develop and implement in the first year of the grant, in consultation with the NIDRR-funded National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research (NCDDR), a plan to disseminate the RERC's research results to persons with disabilities, their representatives, disability organizations, service providers, professional journals,

manufacturers, and other interested parties.

Each RERC must develop and implement in the first year of the grant, in consultation with the NIDRR-funded RERC on Technology Transfer or other entities as appropriate, a plan for ensuring that all new and improved technologies developed by this RERC are successfully transferred to the marketplace.

Each RERC must conduct a state-of-the-science conference on its respective area of research in the third year of the grant and publish a comprehensive report on the final outcomes of the conference in the fourth year of the grant.

Each RERC will be expected to coordinate on research projects of mutual interest with relevant NIDRR-funded projects as identified through consultation with the NIDRR project officer.

Centers of Excellence

RERCs are expected to function as Centers of Excellence, which are defined by their degree of accountability, level of productivity, integrity of internal activities, and the quality and relevance of outputs and outcomes. The NIDRR Centers of Excellence Model identifies four major areas of activity; these are: (1) Excellence in administration and evaluation; (2) excellence in scientific research and development; (3) excellence in capacity building and training for research and development and practice; and (4) excellence in relevance and productivity (including dissemination). Within these areas of activity, RERCs must develop consumer and industrial partnerships to ensure the relevance and appropriateness of research directions and to transfer research-generated knowledge into commercial products. Each RERC must operate as part of a national network and extend beyond the boundaries of their programmatic objectives to become leaders in their field, attract new research dollars, and significantly impact the education of professionals, consumers, and manufacturers. For information about NIDRR's Centers of Excellence Model, applicants are invited to visit the following Web site: <http://www.cessi.net/pr/RERC/Summative/CoEmodel.html>.

Program Review

RERCs are required to participate in NIDRR's program review process. Program review is a key element in NIDRR's quality assurance, performance monitoring, and evaluation systems, providing an opportunity for staff and