

numbers of the Center Director; and (4) the identities of the key personnel and participating institutions. The letter of intent is not required, is not binding, and does not enter into the review process of a subsequent application. The sole purpose of the letter of intent is to allow SSA staff to estimate the potential review workload and avoid conflicts of interest in the review. The letter of intent should be sent to: RRC Letter of Intent, Division of Policy Evaluation, Office of Research, Evaluation and Statistics, Social Security Administration, 500 E St., SW., ITC Room 936, Washington, DC 20254-0001.

Part II—Establishment of a Research Consortium—Responsibilities of the Center and the Federal Government

A. Center Responsibilities

a. Priority Research Areas (PRAs)

The successful applicant shall develop and conduct a research and evaluation program that also appropriately balances training and dissemination activities directed toward understanding retirement policy. SSA has identified six priority research areas within the realm of retirement income policy on which applicants should focus and applications will be scored. Reviewers will score applications that feature high quality research projects addressing solvency and reform across the priority areas favorably. The priority research areas are:

1. Social Security and Retirement: This area focuses on how Social Security's programs influence the nature and timing of retirement and the claiming of benefits. It also includes how changes in Social Security program rules affect Trust Fund solvency. Examples of research topics for this area include the labor supply and Trust Fund implications of changes in the Social Security retirement ages or implementation of Personal Accounts.

2. Macroeconomic Analyses of Social Security: This area covers the macroeconomic and financial effects of Social Security and changes in policy on national saving, investment, and economic growth. It includes, but is not limited to, the intertemporal effects on capital formation, retirement savings, and the unified budget.

3. Wealth and Retirement Income: This area considers the role of Social Security in retirement income and wealth accumulation. It also includes analyses of other sources of retirement income and private savings such as employer-provided pensions, individual assets, earnings from continued employment, etc. Examples of research

topics from this area include the impact of matching rates on 401(k) contributions and the distribution of retirement income sources among subgroups of interest.

4. Program Interactions: This area covers interactions between Social Security and other public or private programs. It includes the impact of Social Security reform on public programs like the Disability Insurance, Supplemental Security Income, and Medicare, as well as private pension plans and personal saving. Examples of research topics from this area include analyses of the effect implementation of Personal Accounts on contributions to 401(k) accounts or how changes in the Social Security retirement ages might influence applications to the DI or SSI programs.

5. International Research: This area includes cross-country comparisons of social, demographic, and institutional differences and highlights the lessons to be learned from other countries' social insurance experiences. Examples of topics include cross-national comparisons of social security reform and well being in retirement.

6. Demographic Research: This area includes changes in mortality, fertility, marital status, immigration, health, and labor force participation and their implications for retirement policy.

Each Center will develop a strategy to disseminate its findings on these issues. SSA realizes competent analysis of all priority research areas may be beyond the capacity of any one Center and thus each Center may wish to focus their individual resources and expertise on a subset of the areas listed above. Similarly, a Center may choose to concentrate on a few aspects of the priority research areas more strongly than others. The goal of the Consortium is to find Centers that, as a whole, will address the range of objectives discussed above without compromising the overall quality of research in the separate priority areas.

b. Tasks

Each Center will perform the following tasks:

1. Research, evaluation, and data development. Each Center will be expected to plan, initiate, and maintain a research program of high caliber. It must meet the tests of social science rigor and objectivity. The research will use state-of-the-art research methodology and have practical application to timely retirement policy issues.

The research program should include supporting the work of members of the RRC staff and other affiliated

researchers. Joint research between Consortium and SSA researchers is encouraged, as is collaboration with other organizations interested in retirement income policy. SSA will consider and fund up to \$250,000 of worthwhile collaborations annually. Federal employees can not receive any funding support for collaborations. Planning and execution of the research program shall always consider the policy implications of research findings. However, it also is appropriate, for example, to engage in activities to make advances in research techniques, where they are needed for or related to primary objectives of the Consortium.

SSA recognizes the value of high quality comprehensive microdata for conducting policy research. The RRC should work to facilitate the development of microdata sources as well as provide researchers with opportunities to use SSA administrative records for research purposes under secure conditions. Such efforts must adhere to clear privacy protection requirements. Examples of data improvement efforts include improving the quality of existing data sources and their documentation; aiding researchers in obtaining administrative extracts for policy relevant research projects; developing sophisticated statistical techniques to mask micro data; and developing new sources of data for retirement policy analysis. In addition, it is SSA's goal to increase the sites at which outside researchers can use administrative data. The Centers are expected to work in conjunction with SSA and other Federal agencies and appropriate organizations to help develop mechanisms that enable researchers, who agree to specific privacy regulations, access to restricted-use data files.

In order to insure the policy relevance, utility, and scope of the Centers' research, evaluation, and data development goals, a group of nationally recognized scholars and practitioners (*See Part II, Joint Responsibilities*) shall periodically review the Center's activities.

2. Dissemination. Making knowledge and information available to the academic and policy communities as well as the public is another important feature of each Center's responsibilities. The RRC will facilitate the process of translating basic behavioral and social research theories and findings into practical policy alternatives. The Centers will be expected to maintain a dissemination system of quarterly newsletters, research papers, and policy briefs. These products should be accessible to the public via the Internet