

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Disability and Rehabilitation Research Projects (DRRP) Program; Notice of Final Priority

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

ACTION: Notice of final priority.

SUMMARY: The Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services announces a final priority on Capacity Building, Coordination, and Collaboration projects under the Disability and Rehabilitation Research Projects (DRRP) Program of the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR). The Assistant Secretary may use this priority for competitions in fiscal year 2003 (FY) and later years. We take this action to focus research attention on an identified national need. We intend this priority to improve rehabilitation services and outcomes for individuals with disabilities from traditionally underserved racial and ethnic populations.

EFFECTIVE DATE: This priority is effective February 18, 2003.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Donna Nangle, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW., room 3412, Switzer Building, Washington, DC 20202-2645. Telephone: (202) 205-5880 or via the Internet: donna.nangle@ed.gov.

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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:

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).

Section 21

Section 21(b)(2)(A) of the Act authorizes NIDRR to make awards to

minority entities and Indian tribes to carry out activities authorized under title II of the Act. A minority entity is defined as a historically black college or university (a Part B institution, as defined in section 322(2) of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended), a Hispanic-serving institution of higher education, an American Indian tribal college or university, or another institution of higher education whose minority student enrollment is at least 50 percent. Consistent with section 21(b)(2)(A), eligibility is limited to minority entities and Indian tribes.

New Freedom Initiative and the NIDRR Long-Range Plan

This priority reflects issues discussed in the New Freedom Initiative (NFI) and NIDRR's Long-Range Plan (the Plan). The NFI can be accessed on the Internet at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/freedominitiative/freedominitiative.html>.

The Plan can be accessed on the Internet at: <http://www.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 of integrating research and practice; and (6) disseminate findings.

Analysis of Comments and Changes

There are no differences between the notice of proposed priority (NPP) and this notice of final priority (NFP).

In response to our invitation in the NPP, three parties submitted comments on the proposed priority. An analysis of the comments and of any changes in the priorities since publication of the NPP follows.

Comment: One commenter suggested that issues of minority-focused capacity building and rehabilitation research should be a shared responsibility across all NIDRR funded projects and activities. The commenter communicated that a more equitable sharing of this responsibility will improve research outcomes and provide greater educational opportunities for qualified minority students. It was further suggested that a collaborative model proposed under the priority for addressing underserved populations might be more effective if research area four of the priority was made mandatory

or the wording in the first bullet following the proposed priorities was revised to identify non-minority institutions specifically.

Discussion: NIDRR continues to encourage collaboration between minority and non-minority entities across the NIDRR research agenda. The suggested activities specified in the published priority emphasize the need for applicants to propose and establish collaborative efforts with minority and non-minority entities, especially partnerships among minority entities and Indian Tribes for the purpose of capacity building, and particularly with a focus on establishing partnerships with non-minority entities. An applicant is required to demonstrate in its application for funding how it will address the requirement to collaborate. The peer review process will evaluate the merits of the proposed approach in establishing such collaborative efforts.

Change: None.

Comment: One commenter welcomed approaches that would improve the public rehabilitation system by increasing its capacity to address the needs of all individuals with disabilities. The commenter suggested that the availability of such approaches could assist in identifying staff training needs and strategies for use in responding to these needs.

Discussion: NIDRR intends that the proposed priority recognizes the need for research focused on achieving improved understanding of the needs of all individuals with disabilities, including individuals from diverse racial and ethnic groups, cultures, and backgrounds. This DRRP is being established for the purpose of fostering activities that will improve service delivery, the availability of appropriate support systems, training and dissemination of research information, and facilitating collaborative partnerships that can ensure and enhance capacity to address the needs of all individuals with disabilities.

Changes: None.

Comment: One commenter noted that drug and alcohol abuse, as well as mental health issues, affect the Native American population disproportionately in comparison to the non-Native population. It was also suggested that when this factor is compounded with the special issues of disability and the unavailability of local services, the problem becomes severe. The commenter noted that increased assistance is needed by way of services, input from the individual and tribe, discussions by all parties involved, communication, and oversight.