

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 or 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.

Priority

Background

Policymakers, researchers, consumers, and advocates use information about the prevalence of disabilities for many purposes. Information about demographics and distribution of individuals with disabilities is essential in program planning and assessing performance. Data are key to evidence-based decisionmaking about the need for, costs of, and outcomes of assisting individuals with disabilities. Reliable and valid measures are necessary for evaluating disability policies, services, and outcomes.

The dynamic nature of disability challenges accurate measurement. Environmental and individual interactions complicate analysis. Causes and patterns of disability change constantly, straining the capacity of demographics to describe new populations and their impact on service systems. Immigrants, for example, especially those who are not legal residents, present unique challenges to the rehabilitation system. Emergent disabilities such as multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS), chronic fatigue immune deficiency syndrome (CFIDS), and fibromyalgia are examples where definitional factors complicate diagnosis, reporting, and analysis necessary to address policy and service issues. Population surveys on health and disability frequently lack an adequate number of low prevalence but potentially highly disabling cases necessary for statistical analyses.

Policymakers and program administrators need continual, rigorous improvement in data methods to identify and respond to disability trends. Decisionmakers and citizens must know the costs and benefits of services and policies for individuals with disabilities at home, in the community, and when learning or working. Measures and indicators of supports such as technology, personal assistance services, health insurance, and accommodations are needed in assessing factors that lead to high quality outcomes such as successful employment, community living, and educational success of people of all ages.

Lack of standard definitions, terminology, coding, classification, and measurement of disability and functioning often limits generalization of research findings. Extending use of research findings or population trends to inform policy or clinical interventions is limited due to the difficulty of extrapolating knowledge about disabilities that is gathered from a disparate range of data sources, classification and coding systems, and measures of disability. For example, it is important to estimate future potential demands on rehabilitation systems, but existing population data sources do not adequately provide for planning, development, and evaluation of rehabilitation services and population trends. The International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) is a coding system that allows one to assess disability as a dynamic interaction between the person and the environment. The ICF can assist with generating evidence-based policy, research, programs, and services. To extend the use of the ICF within the United States, a variety of measurement tools and data systems must be examined in addition to further evaluation of the implications of the classification system for U.S. populations. To better serve consumers, NIDRR intends to support the development, evaluation, and improvement of the ICF as it applies to participation of individuals with disabilities in society and the environments, systems, and policies that have the potential to affect their lives.

Letters of Intent

To assist with selection of reviewers for 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: David Keer, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW., room 3431, Switzer Building, Washington, DC 20202-2645. With prior approval, an email or facsimile copy of a LOI will be accepted by NIDRR as meeting the four-week deadline. However, in these cases, NIDRR must receive a signed original no later than one week after the date the e-mail or facsimile copy was sent. For further information regarding the LOI requirement, contact David Keer at (202) 205-5633 or by e-mail at: david.keer@ed.gov.

Proposed Priority

The Assistant Secretary proposes to fund one RRTC on disability demographics and statistics. The purpose of the RRTC is to support rigorous collaborative research to generate new knowledge that advances evidence-based decisionmaking to improve the lives of persons with disabilities. The references for this topic can be found in the Plan, Chapter 2, Dimensions of Disability: Age, Gender, Education, Income, and Geography; Chapter 7, Associated Disability Areas: Disability Statistics. The RRTC must:

- (1) Conduct analyses using a variety of data sources, including those that assess facilitators and barriers to participation in society, to address the status and understanding of the population of individuals with disabilities;

- (2) Identify, develop as necessary, and validate a series of best-practice