

documents in the public rulemaking record for these proposed priorities. If you want to schedule an appointment for this type of aid, please contact the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**.

We will announce the final priorities in a notice in the **Federal Register**. We will determine the final priorities after considering responses to this notice and other information available to the Department. This notice does not 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 these proposed priorities, 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:** NIDRR supports the goals of 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>.

These proposed priorities are in concert with NIDRR's Long-Range Plan (the Plan). The Plan is comprehensive and integrates many issues relating to disability and rehabilitation research topics. While applicants will find many sections throughout the Plan that support potential research to be conducted under these proposed priorities, a specific reference is included for the topic presented in this notice. The Plan can be accessed on the Internet at the following site: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/NIDRR/Products>.

[www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/NIDRR/Products](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/NIDRR/Products).

Through the implementation of 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.

### Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers

We may make awards for up to 60 months to institutions of higher education or providers of rehabilitation or other appropriate services. RRTCs conduct coordinated and integrated advanced programs of research targeted toward the production of new knowledge, to improve rehabilitation methodology and service delivery systems, alleviate or stabilize disability conditions, or promote maximum social and economic independence for persons with disabilities. Additional information on the RRTC program can be found at: [http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/NIDRR/Programs/res\\_program.html#RRTC](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/NIDRR/Programs/res_program.html#RRTC).

### General Requirements of Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers

RRTCs must:

- Carry out coordinated advanced programs of rehabilitation research;
- Provide training, including graduate, pre-service, and in-service training, to help rehabilitation personnel more effectively provide rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities;
- Provide technical assistance to individuals with disabilities, their representatives, providers, and other interested parties;
- Disseminate informational materials to individuals with disabilities, their 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.

### Priorities

#### Background

Community integration (CI) and independent living (IL) are at the heart of NIDRR's mission, which is to develop knowledge that will "improve substantially the options for disabled individuals to perform regular activities in the community, and the capacity of society to provide full opportunities and appropriate supports for its disabled citizens." The Plan, which articulates this mission, emphasizes that community integration is not just about being located physically in the community; it is about full participation, independence, empowerment, choice, and control.

CI and IL are critical components of the new model of disability set forth in the Plan. This model maintains that disability is a product of an interaction between individual characteristics and the characteristics of the natural, built, cultural, and social environments. It incorporates a civil-rights model of disability.

NIDRR's focus on CI follows the stated purpose of IL programs under the Rehabilitation Act. That purpose is "to promote a philosophy of independent living, including a philosophy of consumer control, peer support, self help, self determination, equal access, and individual and system advocacy, in order to maximize the leadership, empowerment, independence, and productivity of individuals with disabilities, and the integration and full inclusion of individuals with disabilities into the mainstream of American society."

The urgent need for CI of individuals with disabilities was made clear during Congressional passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Witnesses testified that when they tried to participate in community life, they experienced exclusion, derision, and a host of architectural, communication, and transportation barriers (S. Report 101-116, Committee on Labor and Human Resources report on S. 933, 101st Congress, 1989).