

*Absolute Priority 2—National Center on Dispute Resolution (84.326D)***Background**

Alternative dispute resolution processes such as mediation represent a less costly means of resolving complaints than due process hearings, can help minimize adverse effects on a child's progress in school, and are more apt to foster positive relationships between families and educators than would litigation. In 1998 the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) funded a technical assistance center on alternative dispute resolution to give States assistance on mediation and other effective dispute resolution procedures that support the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This priority follows up on the investment in this area to continue the work of the past five years. For further information on the past work in this area go to <http://www.directionservice.org/cadre>.

**Priority**

This priority will support a cooperative agreement to continue a national technical assistance center to provide technical assistance on all dispute resolution and complaint management procedures.

The Center's activities must include, but are not limited, to the following:

(a) Providing technical assistance on dispute resolution and complaint management procedures to all States, outlying areas, Freely Associated States, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and localities, as appropriate, as they implement early intervention services under Part C and educational and related services under Part B of the IDEA including, at a minimum, (1) Conducting annual needs assessments, (2) Developing technical assistance agreements for each entity, and (3) Providing focused technical assistance to States as requested by OSEP.

(b) Conducting an annual survey of States to determine the current status of due process hearings and use of mediation and alternative dispute resolution. The project must:

(i) Maintain a database for collecting and analyzing information from States on the use and outcomes of due process hearings, mediation, mediator training, and alternative dispute resolution procedures.

(ii) Analyze the data and develop reports on trends and patterns related to the use of alternative dispute resolution and other topics as requested by OSEP.

(c) Providing technical assistance to States based on needs identified in the annual needs assessments.

(d) Establishing a mechanism for assessing and synthesizing the research base on alternative dispute resolution. A team of researchers must assist the Center in the analysis and synthesis of the current and emerging research on alternative dispute resolution.

(e) Developing informational exchanges about dispute resolution procedures between the Center and other technical assistance and information dissemination systems.

(f) Coordinating with the Parent Technical Assistance Projects to provide technical assistance to all OSEP-funded parent training and information centers and community parent resource centers on dispute resolution procedures. Evidence of coordination and proposed outcomes of the coordination must be reported to the Federal project officer.

(g) Coordinating with the National Dissemination Center, which OSEP expects to fund this year, to ensure timely and accurate dissemination of dispute resolution information. Evidence of coordination and proposed outcomes of the coordination must be reported to the Federal project officer.

(h) Collaborating and communicating with other OSEP-funded projects such as the Regional Resource Centers, the IDEA Partnership Project, Project Forum, the Access Center, the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center and other projects as appropriate. Evidence of collaboration and proposed outcomes of the collaboration must be reported to the Federal project officer.

(i) Maintaining a Web site with relevant information available in both English and Spanish and accessible to individuals with disabilities.

(j) Conducting biennial symposia that identify the unique features of alternative dispute resolution procedures, the strengths of the procedures, potential application of the procedures, and related issues as requested by OSEP.

(k) Preparing and disseminating reports and documents on alternative dispute resolution and related topics as requested by OSEP.

(l) Developing partnerships with relevant programs and organizations to assist with long-term implementation of alternative dispute resolution procedures. At a minimum, partners shall include State Improvement grantees, General Supervision Enhancement grantees, and the National Center for Special Education Accountability Monitoring.

*The Center must also:*

(a) Prior to developing any new product, whether paper or electronic, submit for approval a proposal describing the content and purpose of

the product to the document review board of the National Dissemination Center.

(b) Provide OSEP-specified technical assistance to States. This effort may include the following: (1) Collaborative Web-based technical assistance activities, (2) coordination of and participation in State-to-State communities of practice, and (3) direct technical assistance to OSEP-specified States through partnerships between OSEP and selected States. The Center must plan for assistance to three OSEP identified States per year.

**Note:** Staff time and project resources dedicated to provide technical assistance to OSEP-specified States will be negotiated with OSEP as part of the cooperative agreement within 30 days of the project award (OSEP anticipates that technical assistance to OSEP-specified States could average approximately \$40,000 per year. Budgets should be developed with this in mind).

(c) Establish, maintain, and meet at least annually with an advisory group of persons with complementary expertise on alternative dispute resolution procedures to advise the Center on its technical assistance activities.

(d) Fund as project assistants three doctoral students per year who have concentrations in relevant topics such as special education or conflict resolution.

(e) Evaluate annually the impact of the Center's technical assistance system and its components relative to (1) meeting the assessed needs of States and jurisdictions, (2) meeting the needs of parents, and (3) linkages with other technical assistance and information dissemination systems. The Center must report its evaluation findings annually to the Federal project officer.

(f) Maintain communication with the Federal project officer through monthly phone conversations and e-mail communication as needed. The Center must submit annual performance reports and provide additional written materials as needed for the Federal project officer to monitor the Center's work.

(g) In addition to the 2-day Project Directors' meeting listed in the General Requirements section of this notice, budget for an additional annual 2-day project meeting to attend the Research Project Directors' meeting; two 2-day annual planning meetings; and at least eight 2-day trips annually as requested by OSEP such as Department briefings, Department-sponsored conferences, and other events.

**Fourth and Fifth Years of Project**

In deciding whether to continue this project for the fourth and fifth years, the