

to ensure that access to the AFP shall be given to consumers regardless of type of disability, age, income level, location of residence in the State, or type of AT device or AT service for which financing is requested through the program; and (3) A procedure to ensure consumer-controlled oversight of the program (Section 305).

Grantees must submit the administrative policies and procedures required in this assurance within six months of the start of the grant.

(10) *Data Collection:* An assurance that the State will collect the following: (1) Information on the type of alternative financing mechanisms used by the State and the community-based organization with which each State entered into a contract, under the program (Section 307); (2) the amount of assistance given to consumers through the program (who shall be classified by age, type of disability, type of AT device or AT service financed through the program, geographic distribution within the State, gender, and whether the consumers are part of an underrepresented population or rural population) (Section 307); and (3) information on the program's short-term and long-term goals.

Grantees must enter the data requested in this assurance, and other data the Secretary may require, in the system developed by the Secretary. The Technical Assistance provider has developed a (voluntary) web-based data collection instrument to assist the AFP grantees for this purpose. For more information on the data collection system, products, and reports, see <http://www.resna.org/AFTAP/loan/index.html>. Grantees must enter the data elements contained in this form as well as specific information (to be determined) pertaining to the short-term and long-term goals.

Through the analysis of data collected under the following reporting requirements, the Secretary will assess grantee success in meeting the program's overall goals of: (1) Increasing access to alternative financing programs for the purchases of AT for individuals with disabilities; and (2) establishing a nationwide network of permanent State AFPs that promote independence and choice.

Performance measures used to determine whether the goals have been accomplished will include: (1) Number of loan applications; (2) number of loans; (3) amount and terms of each loan; (4) number of loan applications denied and the reasons for the denials; (5) number of individuals with disabilities who obtained AT; (6) purpose and type of the AT purchased;

(7) default rate and net losses; (8) number of States that have established new loan program or expanded existing loan programs; and (9) State loan capacity.

Grantee evaluation systems must be capable of collecting and analyzing this and any additional required information.

Proposed Priority 2: Access to Telework Fund

Eligibility for a Telework Grant

State agencies from the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the United States Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, are eligible for a Telework grant. For the purposes of this document, these entities will be referred to as States.

Governing bodies of American Indian tribes located on Federal and State reservations (and consortia of those governing bodies) consistent with section 7(19)(B) of the Rehab Act are also eligible for a Telework grant.

More than one agency within a State or tribe may receive a Telework grant, but there must be coordination and communication between these grantees.

Background

In February of 2001, the President introduced his *New Freedom Initiative* to help individuals with disabilities by increasing access to assistive technologies, expanding educational opportunities, increasing the ability of individuals with disabilities to integrate into the workforce, and promoting increased access into daily community life. In order to increase the participation of individuals with disabilities in the workforce, Telework was proposed as part of this initiative. Telework provides support for alternative financing mechanisms with the goal of expanding telework opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Through the availability of telework and other alternative work options, barriers to employment such as inadequate transportation, fatigue, inaccessible work environments, and the need for personal assistance experienced by individuals with disabilities can be reduced or eliminated. While Telework does not relieve covered employers from their obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), it will provide individuals with disabilities an alternative mechanism to access computers and other needed equipment

not provided by an employer to enable them to establish telework and other alternative work environments. These work options will provide employment opportunities to many Americans who want or need a flexible work environment.

While computer technology and the Internet have tremendous potential to broaden telework options, including home-based self-employment, the computer and Internet revolution has not reached as many people with disabilities as the population without disabilities. Only 25 percent of individuals with disabilities own a computer, compared with 66 percent of U.S. adults without disabilities, and only 20 percent of individuals with disabilities have access to the Internet, compared with 40 percent of U.S. adults. The primary barrier to wider access to computer equipment is cost.

It is often very difficult for individuals with disabilities to save enough money to purchase computer and adaptive technology (e.g., screen readers, voice synthesizers, adaptive keyboards, and specialized software). Cash benefit programs do not provide sufficient funds for both living expenses and savings, and income support programs limit the amount of assets a person can accumulate. For a number of reasons, individuals with disabilities often find it difficult to access loans as a method to purchase necessary equipment. For example, they may have insufficient cash or collateral, lack an appropriate credit rating, or face attitudinal barriers. Telework addresses these barriers by assisting individuals with disabilities to obtain financing for computers and other equipment, so that they may work from home or other telework sites.

For the purposes of the proposed Telework priority, the term "telework" encompasses work that can be performed effectively from home or from other remote sites away from the office, such as work on the road or at a telework center. Successful applicants will develop programs that will enable individuals with disabilities to obtain computers and other equipment so that they can work as an employee or contractor or to become self-employed on a full-time or part-time basis from home or other remote sites.

On December 26, 2002 RSA published a notice of proposed priority and proposed application requirements in the **Federal Register** for Telework (67 Fed. Reg. 78790). RSA received 24 comments by the deadline. Twelve of the 24 commenters suggested allowing State grantees to jointly administer AFP and Telework, and six other