

Programs reports that only 57.4 percent of youth with disabilities graduate from high school with a standard diploma. In addition, the Final Report of the Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities, July 2002, estimates that only one-third of youth and young adults with disabilities receive appropriate job training and assistance. Some of the barriers to autonomy and achievement encountered by youth and young adults with disabilities include uncoordinated approaches to transition across service systems, discontinuity between schools and adult disability services, poor preparation of teens for adult life, lack of incentives or supports for early transition planning, and lack of school and community supports.

For transitioning youth and young adults with disabilities, developing positive self-confidence, resilience, and an expectation for achievement in a competitive, high-quality career must take place early in their academic career. Mentors or role models with whom students can identify, and who have shared interests, can have a positive impact that will last a lifetime. These individuals can play a vital role in eliminating barriers to autonomy, community integration, and achievement by motivating youth and young adults with disabilities to develop social competence, academic motivation, career awareness, and other appropriate skills needed for employment and independent living. Successful mentoring programs under this model demonstration program will provide appropriate supports, based on the individual's unique strengths, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice. An overall objective of the mentoring program is to encourage youth and young adults with disabilities in meeting and achieving a desired optimal career goal or postsecondary education.

Priority

Under 34 CFR 75.105(b)(2)(v) and 34 CFR 373.6(b)(2) and (c)(8), this priority supports projects that demonstrate mentoring models focusing on transitioning youth and young adults with disabilities that will be effective in increasing meaningful community integration, postsecondary education, and employment outcomes. The mentoring models developed under this program must incorporate effective, research-based mentoring methods. An external evaluation of these projects will be initiated in FY 2004. The projects must cooperate with the external

evaluator including establishing a common data system.

A. Definitions

Mentor means a more successful, experienced person with a disability, who can be most appropriately matched with the youth with a disability and who can impart advice, support, insight, and knowledge on employment and other life activities to a less experienced person. State VR agencies should match mentors and mentees using the best individualized information possible.

Mentoring means the act of a more successful, experienced person or persons with a disability, working with a less experienced youth or young adult, or a group of individuals, by providing guidance in the form of teaching and support, encouraging and motivating, assisting with career and professional development, assisting with goal achievement, and linking the less experienced youth to others who can help enhance growth and development.

Youth and young adults with disabilities, as defined in 34 CFR 373.4, means individuals with disabilities who are between the ages of 16 and 26 inclusive when entering the program.

Consumer-controlled organization is an organization that vests power and authority in individuals with disabilities and a majority of the officers and members of the board of directors are individuals with disabilities.

B. General Requirements for Applicants

These model demonstration projects must focus on research-based mentoring methods that provide appropriate supports for transition-age youth and young adults with disabilities. The projects must demonstrate research-based mentoring models that will be effective in increasing meaningful community integration, postsecondary education, and employment outcomes through collaboration between State VR agencies and consumer-controlled organizations. To meet the requirements an applicant must—

(1) Describe the manner in which mentoring will increase academic achievement, participation in postsecondary education, and high-quality employment outcomes for transitioning youth and young adults with disabilities by including information on the expected impact and outcomes of the project. More specifically, an applicant must project a goal of how many youth and young adults with disabilities will transition into postsecondary education or will achieve high-quality employment outcomes. An applicant also must be specific about what data it will collect

in order to measure project outcomes against the goal;

(2) Describe the research-based mentoring models that will be demonstrated through its project;

(3) Describe clear program goals and intended program outcomes and well-defined operational guidelines that will support these goals;

(4) Describe how the project will collaborate with consumer-controlled organizations that have in-depth knowledge of the rehabilitation process, the outreach methods used to select project participants, and the criteria by which individuals with disabilities will be recruited as mentors by the consumer-controlled organizations;

(5) Describe how the proposed project will increase self-advocacy, high-level personal and career expectations, decisionmaking, and adjustment to disability of the mentored individuals. At a minimum, the project must describe how mentors will help consumers—

(a) Navigate through service delivery systems; and

(b) develop and improve self-confidence, community integration skills, work skills, self-determination skills, advocacy, and decisionmaking;

(6) Describe the design and implementation of an internal evaluation plan for which—

(a) The methods of evaluation are thorough, feasible, and appropriate to the goals, objectives, and outcomes of the project;

(b) The methods of evaluation include the use of objective performance measures that are clearly related to the intended outcomes of the project and will produce quantitative and qualitative data to the extent possible;

(c) The methods of evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes; and

(d) The methods of evaluation will be consistent with and can support the program assessment that will be implemented by the Rehabilitation Services Administration; and

(7) Include a plan to widely disseminate the results of the project, including any mentoring methods that demonstrated positive results, so the mentoring model may be adapted, replicated, or integrated into other State VR agencies and disability organizations.

Executive Order 12866

This notice of proposed priority, definitions, and application requirements has been reviewed in accordance with Executive Order 12866.