

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research; Notice of a Final Funding Priority for Fiscal Years 1998–1999 for a Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center

AGENCY: Department of Education.

SUMMARY: The Secretary announces a final funding priority for a Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center (RERC) under the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) for fiscal years 1998–1999. The Secretary takes this action to focus research attention on an area of national need. This priority is intended to improve rehabilitation services and outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

EFFECTIVE DATE: This priority takes effect on April 23, 1998.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Donna Nangle. Telephone: (202) 205–5880. Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the TDD number at (202) 205–2742. Internet: Donna_Nangle@ed.gov

Individuals with disabilities may obtain this document in an alternate format (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, or computer diskette) on request to the contact person listed in the preceding paragraph.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This notice contains a final priority under the Disability and Rehabilitation Research Projects and Centers program for an RERC related to improved technology access for land mine survivors.

The authority for RERCs is contained in section 204(b)(3) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 U.S.C. 762(b)(3)). Under this program the Secretary makes awards to public and private agencies and organizations, including institutions of higher education, Indian tribes, and tribal organizations, to conduct research, demonstration, and training activities regarding rehabilitation technology in order to enhance opportunities for meeting the needs of, and addressing the barriers confronted by, individuals with disabilities in all aspects of their lives. An RERC must be operated by or in collaboration with an institution of higher education or a nonprofit organization.

The authority for the Secretary to establish research priorities by reserving funds to support particular research activities is contained in sections 202(g) and 204 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 U.S.C. 761a(g) and 762).

Note: This notice of a final priority does not solicit applications. A notice inviting applications under this competition is published in this issue of the **Federal Register**.

Analysis of Comments and Changes

On January 27, 1998, the Secretary published a notice of a proposed priority in the **Federal Register** (63 FR 4148–4150). The Department of Education received 3 letters commenting on the notice of a proposed priority by the deadline date. Technical and other minor changes—and suggested changes the Secretary is not legally authorized to make under statutory authority—are not addressed.

Comment: The fields of medicine, engineering, and prosthetics and orthotics will play critical roles in the successful completion of this project. These disciplines should be appropriately represented on the RERC's staff and the principal investigator should be recruited from one of these three disciplines.

Discussion: Individuals with backgrounds in these three disciplines are expected to make significant contributions to the completion of the project. Applicants have the discretion to propose key personnel, and an applicant could propose to have a principal investigator with a background in medicine, engineering, or prosthetics and orthotics. The peer review process will evaluate the merits of the proposed personnel.

Changes: None.

Comment: Information is needed on the various types of injuries that occur in land mine incidents. Land mine incidents almost always result in the need for lower limb amputation. However, we have insufficient information on the nature and number of incidents that also result in concomitant visual and hearing deficits, or severe facial scarring. In addition, the RERC should develop "special technical assistance" to aid survivors with disabilities in addition to lower limb amputation.

Discussion: The RERC is required to "Identify the needs of land mine survivors for other types of rehabilitation technologies which may include but need not be limited to vision, hearing and speech aids, and wheelchairs." In carrying out this activity, the RERC will address the commenter's concern regarding technical assistance and generate information on the rehabilitation needs of persons who experience concomitant visual and hearing deficits or severe facial scarring that occur in land mine incidents. The priority does not

authorize the RERC to conduct survey research on the number of such incidents because it is outside the scope of the congressional mandate and the resources allocated to this RERC.

Changes: None.

Comment: The RERC should be required to develop economically effective systems for the delivery of prosthetic services for amputees whose stump conditions require surgical or other therapeutic intervention prior to prosthetic management.

Discussion: Issues related to person or device interfaces are important in prosthetic research and development. An applicant could propose to address surgical or other interventions preliminary to prosthetic applications. The peer review process will evaluate the merits of the proposal. However, addressing surgical or other interventions preliminary to prosthetic applications is not required because there is insufficient evidence about the unique aspects of this problem related to land mine incidents to warrant requiring all applicants to conduct this study.

Changes: None.

Description of the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center Program

RERCs carry out research or demonstration activities by:

(a) Developing and disseminating innovative methods of applying advanced technology, scientific achievement, and psychological and social knowledge to (1) solve rehabilitation problems and remove environmental barriers, and (2) study new or emerging technologies, products, or environments;

(b) Demonstrating and disseminating (1) innovative models for the delivery of cost-effective rehabilitation technology services to rural and urban areas, and (2) other scientific research to assist in meeting the employment and independent living needs of individuals with severe disabilities; or

(c) Facilitating service delivery systems change through (1) the development, evaluation, and dissemination of consumer-responsive and individual and family centered innovative models for the delivery to both rural and urban areas of innovative cost-effective rehabilitation technology services, and (2) other scientific research to assist in meeting the employment and independent living needs of individuals with severe disabilities.

Each RERC must provide training opportunities to individuals, including individuals with disabilities, to become researchers of rehabilitation technology

and practitioners of rehabilitation technology in conjunction with institutions of higher education and nonprofit organizations.

Priority

Under 34 CFR 75.105(c)(3), the Secretary gives an absolute preference to applications that meet the following priority. The Secretary will fund under this competition only applications that meet this absolute priority.

Priority: Improved Technology Access for Land Mine Survivors Background

In the House Report accompanying the appropriations for the Department of Education, it is stated that:

The Committee has included up to \$850,000 within the amounts available to NIDRR to establish, through a competitive award, a rehabilitation engineering research center dealing with the unique needs of land mine survivors. The center is to operate in cooperation with an institution of higher education involved in both rehabilitation medicine and engineering research, training and service and is to focus on the unique rehabilitation needs of the victims of land mine injuries. Specifically, the center is to focus on the development of inexpensive replacement limbs; the development and dissemination of educational materials on prosthetics, and other appropriate prosthetic, orthotic, or assistive technology devices; and the training of health care providers in effective methods of assistance to this population.

In response to this directive, the Secretary is establishing the following priority. Both the Congress and NIDRR are aware of the historic significance of periods of international conflict in stimulating the science of rehabilitation to develop solutions to the impairments caused by sustained large-scale violence. Most recently, survivors of land mine injuries in dozens of nations in Latin America, Europe, Africa, and Asia are in need of innovative solutions to address the loss of limbs and other conditions such as sensory impairments, communication impairments, burns, and other conditions caused by anti-personnel land mines.

Because most of those with unmet needs are located in countries that are either not industrialized, lack infrastructures for rehabilitative services, or lack economic resources, the approaches to meeting these needs must be tailored to their particular circumstances. Solutions, which will focus on, but not be limited to, limb replacement, must be suitable for the

available materials, resources, and expertise in the relevant countries, and must also concentrate on building capacity in those nations for design and fitting, manufacture, distribution, maintenance, and provision of supports and services. This RERC will have broad scope in the development of devices through scientific methods, training of indigenous scientists, service providers, and advocates, and transferring technology to the local economies.

There are many national and international organizations that play a role in addressing the problems of land mine survivors and the Center should involve relevant organizations in appropriate roles in Center operations. Included in this group are organizations of survivors themselves; such consumer organizations are important targets of education, information, and training, particularly in the areas of self-help, maintenance of devices, and the need for accommodations, supports, and follow up care. Because so many of the victims of land mines are children, special attention must be directed toward the special needs of children who are growing and developing, and for whom most prostheses or orthoses therefore will have a limited period of utility. The Center may opt to address these problems through technological solutions where feasible, or through partnerships that will provide ongoing care and support.

The work of this RERC will have implications for the United States population as well. There is a continuing need for new and different types of prostheses and orthoses in the United States and other developed nations, with special need for prosthetic and orthotic devices and other rehabilitation technology that is suitable for different climates, low-cost, and appropriate in various cultures. New conditions of health care delivery portend limited resources for rehabilitation technologies and services and durable medical equipment; thus there will be a greater emphasis on durability, endurance, cost containment, and ease of maintenance. This Center's activities will contribute to advancing science, broadening knowledge of materials and methods, and increasing our understanding of and sensitivity to cultural and economic concerns in provision of these rehabilitation technologies.

Priority: The Secretary will establish an RERC to address the unique rehabilitation needs of land mine survivors through developing and testing appropriate innovative replacement limbs (particularly low-cost limbs suitable for developing

economies), and other prosthetic and orthotic devices; training indigenous technicians, manufacturers, and health care providers in the fabrication and fitting of appropriate devices; and educating land mine survivors and their families. The RERC shall:

(1) Develop a sound scientific process for evaluating the suitability of existing devices, assessing user needs, developing new and innovative designs, and testing inexpensive replacement limbs, prototypes of prostheses, orthoses, and other appropriate rehabilitation technology devices;

(2) Identify and evaluate existing technologies and systems used for limb replacement and related rehabilitation technology in various nations where there are extensive land mine injuries;

(3) Demonstrate the suitability of proposed devices in terms of cost-effectiveness and appropriateness to the indigenous economies, including available materials, work force capabilities, and infrastructure capacity for timely production and delivery of devices;

(4) Identify the needs of land mine survivors for other types of rehabilitation technologies which may include but need not be limited to vision, hearing and speech aids, and wheelchairs;

(5) Develop and maintain a database to track and correlate consumer needs and characteristics, device specification and performance, and outcomes and conduct a definitive evaluation of the products and procedures;

In carrying out the purposes of the priority, the RERC must:

- Address the needs of land mine survivors of all ages, with particular attention to systems for meeting the changing needs of growing children;
- Conduct, in the third year of the award, a state-of-the-science conference and provide NIDRR with a report on this conference by the end of the fourth year;
- Conduct training of health care providers in affected nations in effective methods of providing rehabilitative assistance to this population; and
- Collaborate with key international organizations and government agencies in the affected nations, with consumer organizations of land mine survivors, and with rehabilitation researchers and service providers, and other Federal agencies including the Department of Defense, the Agency for International Development, the Centers for Disease Control, and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

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Note: The official version of this document is the document published in the **Federal Register**.

Applicable Program Regulations: 34 CFR Part 350.

Program Authority: 29 U.S.C. 760-762. (Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number 84.133E, Rehabilitation Engineering Research Centers)

Dated: March 18, 1998.

Judith E. Heumann,

Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

[CFDA No.: 84.133E]

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research; Notice Inviting Applications for a New Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center for Fiscal Year 1998

Purpose of Program: Rehabilitation Engineering Research Centers (RERCs) conduct research, demonstration, and training activities regarding rehabilitation technology—including rehabilitation engineering, assistive technology devices, and assistive

technology services, in order to enhance the opportunities to better meet the needs of, and address the barriers confronted by, individuals with disabilities in all aspects of their lives.

Deadline for Transmittal of Applications: May 26, 1998.

Application Available: March 25, 1998.

Maximum Award Amount per Year: \$850,000.

Note: The Secretary will reject without consideration or evaluation any application that proposes a project funding level that exceeds the stated maximum award amount per year (See 34 CFR 75.104(b)).

Estimated Number of Awards: 1.

Note: The estimate of funding level and awards in this notice do not bind the Department of Education to a specific level of funding or number of grants.

Project Period: 60 months.

Eligible Applicants: Parties eligible to apply for grants under this program are States; public or private agencies, including for-profit agencies; public or private organizations, including for-profit organizations; institutions of higher education; and Indian tribes and tribal organizations.

Applicable Regulations: (a) The Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR), 34 CFR Parts 74, 75, 77, 80, 81, 82, 85, and 86; (b) Disability and Rehabilitation Research Projects and Centers—34 CFR Part 350, particularly *Rehabilitation Engineering Research Centers* in Subpart D; and (c) the notice of final funding priority on Improved Technology Access for Land Mine Survivors published elsewhere in this issue of the **Federal Register**.

For Applications Contact: The Grants and Contracts Service Team (GCST), Department of Education, 600 Independence Avenue S.W., Switzer Building, 3317, Washington, D.C. 20202, or call (202) 205-8207. Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the TDD number at (202) 205-9860. The preferred method for requesting information is to FAX your request to (202) 205-8717.

Individuals with disabilities may obtain a copy of the application package in an alternate format by contacting the

GCST. However, the Department is not able to reproduce in an alternate format the standard forms included in the application package.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Donna Nangle, U.S. Department of Education, 600 Maryland Avenue, S.W., room 3418, Switzer Building, Washington, D.C. 20202-2645. Telephone: (202) 205-5880. Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the TDD number at (202) 205-2742. Internet: Donna_Nangle@ed.gov

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PROGRAM AUTHORITY: 29 U.S.C. 760-762.

Dated: March 18, 1998.

Judith E. Heumann,

Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

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