

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research**

AGENCY: Department of Education.

ACTION: Notice of final funding priorities for fiscal year 1999 for new awards Under the Assistive Technology Act Technical Assistance Program.

SUMMARY: The Secretary announces final funding priorities for four assistive technology (AT) technical assistance (TA) activities under the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) for fiscal year 1999. The Secretary takes this action to improve the activities of AT projects that serve individuals with disabilities.

DATES: These priorities are effective August 9, 1999.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Donna Nangle, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW., 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

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

Waiver of Rulemaking

Pursuant to section 437(d)(1) of the General Education Provisions Act, the Secretary has determined that this priority is exempt from the Administrative Procedure Act (5 U.S.C. 553). Section 437(d)(1) exempts from rulemaking the first grant competition under a new or substantially revised program authority. This is NIDRR's first grant competition under the Assistive Technology Act (AT Act) of 1998, which replaces the Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1998, as amended, (Tech Act), and was signed into law on November 13, 1998.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This notice contains four final priorities under the AT Act Program. The priorities are: (1) Technical Assistance to Assistive Technology Act State Grant Program Grantees; (2) Technical Assistance to Assistive Technology Act Protection and Advocacy (P&A) Program Grantees; (3) Assistive Technology Act Data Collection Project; and (4) National Assistive Technology Internet Site.

These final priorities support the National Education Goal that calls for all Americans to possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

The authority for the Secretary to fund TA projects is contained in section 104 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998.

Note: This notice of final priorities does not solicit applications. A notice inviting applications under this competition will be published in the **Federal Register** concurrent with or following the publication of the notice of final priorities.

Assistive Technology Act*Background*

The AT Act of 1998 reaffirms the Federal role of promoting access to AT devices and services for individuals with disabilities. In 1988 Congress passed the Tech Act to assist States to identify and respond to the AT needs of individuals with disabilities. Reauthorized in 1994, the Tech Act was premised on the assumption that individuals with disabilities needed access to AT devices and services, and that Federal funds could function as a catalyst and as leverage to create permanent systemic change within State infrastructures that did, could, or should make AT devices and services more readily available to individuals with disabilities.

In addition to continuing the Assistive Technology State grant program and TA conducted under the Tech Act, the 1994 Tech Act amendments required each State grant to fund Protection and Advocacy (P&A) systems to assist individuals with disabilities access AT devices and services. The amendments also included standards of accountability to ensure that States would meet the Tech Act goals within the ten-year funding period and mandated the provision of information and TA to the AT State grant program grantees, individuals with disabilities, and other persons.

Although the AT State grant program under the Tech Act may have met many of the technology challenges related to individuals with disabilities, there is still a lack of: resources to pay for the AT devices and services; trained personnel to assist individuals with disabilities to use such devices and services; knowledge among targeted individuals about the availability and potential benefits of technology for individuals with disabilities; outreach to underrepresented and rural populations; systems that ensure timely acquisition and delivery of AT devices

and services; coordination among State human services programs, and between such programs and private entities, particularly with respect to the transition between such programs and entities; and capacity in such programs to provide the necessary technology-related assistance.

There are changes in the delivery of AT devices and services that include the increased prevalence of managed care entities as payers for these devices and services; an increased focus on universal design; the increased importance of AT in employment, as more individuals with disabilities move from public assistance to work through training and on-the-job accommodations; the role and impact that new technologies have on how individuals with disabilities will learn about, access, and participate in programs or services that will affect their lives; and the increased role that telecommunications play in education, employment, health care, and social activities.

The AT Act was passed in recognition of the technology challenges that remain for individuals with disabilities. AT State grant programs have met some of these challenges, but there is a need for continuing Federal support to assist States to address these challenges in the most appropriate way, given its resources, expertise, experience, and approaches to assisting individuals with disabilities to access AT.

Description of Assistive Technology Act Technical Assistance Program

The purpose of the AT Act Technical Assistance Program is to address issues raised by States, individuals, P&A providers, and other relevant organizations; the purpose of the AT Act Data Collection Project is to collect data that will provide information about AT devices and services that can be used to identify effective practices and formulate policies; and the purpose of the National Assistive Technology Internet Site is to provide information that will facilitate increased access to AT devices, AT services and other disability-related resources.

Priorities

Under 34 CFR 75.105(c)(3), and Section 104 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998, the Secretary gives an absolute preference to applications that meet the following priorities. The Secretary will fund under this competition only applications that meet these priorities.

Priority 1: Technical Assistance to Assistive Technology Act State Grant Program Grantees

The Secretary will establish a TA project that will provide assistance to the AT Act State Grant Program grantees to reduce barriers and increase access to AT devices and services for consumers with disabilities of all ages. The TA project will also provide TA to AT Act State Grant Program grantees in areas related to universal design, State procurement actions, and funding of AT. Consistent with statutory requirements, the project must:

- (a) Respond to grantees' requests for and disseminate information about current Federal, State, and local laws, regulations, policies, practices, procedures, and organizational structures that increase access to AT devices and services;
- (b) Identify and disseminate information to grantees about exemplary Federal-State coordination of programs related to improving funding for and access to AT devices and services;
- (c) Identify and disseminate information to grantees about effective approaches to the development of consumer-controlled systems that increase access to, funding for, and awareness of AT devices and services; and
- (d) Provide TA to grantees to help them develop corrective action plans if the Secretary determines that the grantee has failed to comply with the requirements of the AT Act.

In addition to the statutory requirements, the TA project must:

- (e) Provide TA to grantees to assist with their implementation of the mandates of the AT Act;
- (f) Develop and disseminate strategies that can be used to assist grantees to promote: (1) Universal design principles in the State's infrastructure in the built environment and the telecommunications and transportation environments; (2) compliance with section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, as amended; (3) improvement of State policies for the financing of AT through public or private health insurance providers; and (4) modification of State revenue policy to increase the resource base for funding AT;
- (g) Assist grantees to identify weaknesses within their individual State programs and provide programmatic solutions to the problems;
- (h) Develop and maintain an accessible website that can be used by grantees to obtain, share, and disseminate information;
- (i) Coordinate and share resources with the TA project to AT Act P&A

Program grantees, the AT Act Data Collection project, and the National Assistive Technology Internet Site project about activities of mutual interest; and

- (j) Develop and implement a self-assessment instrument to determine the effectiveness of this TA project.

Priority 2: Technical Assistance to Assistive Technology Act Protection and Advocacy Program Grantees

The Secretary will establish a TA project that will provide assistance to AT Act P&A Program grantees to assist individuals with disabilities of all ages in acquiring, utilizing, or maintaining AT devices or services. The TA project will also provide TA to the AT Act P&A Program grantees in areas related to participation by individuals with disabilities in informal advocacy and formal representation activities. Consistent with statutory requirements, the TA project must:

- (a) Respond to grantees' requests for and disseminate information about current policies, practices, procedures, regulations, administrative hearing decisions or legal actions that can enhance access to and funding for AT devices and services; and
- (b) Provide TA to grantees to help them develop corrective action plans if the Secretary determines that the grantee has failed to comply with the requirements of the AT Act.

In addition to the statutory requirements, the TA project must:

- (c) Provide TA to grantees to identify weaknesses within their P&A programs and provide programmatic solutions to the problems;
- (d) Develop and disseminate strategies to grantees to assist them to: (1) coordinate activities with P&A services funded through sources other than Section 102 of the AT Act; (2) participate in formal representation to assist individuals with disabilities in securing systems change and in increasing access to assistive technology devices and services; (3) participate in formal and informal advocacy to assist individuals with disabilities in securing AT devices and services; and (4) develop long-term abilities of individuals with disabilities and their family members, guardians, advocates and authorized representatives to advocate for the provision of AT devices and services to which the individuals with disabilities are entitled under laws other than the AT Act;
- (e) Develop and maintain an accessible website that can be used by grantees to obtain, share and disseminate information;

(f) Coordinate and share resources with the TA project to AT Act State Grant Program Grantees, the AT Act Data Collection Project and the National Assistive Technology Internet Site Project about activities of mutual interest; and

- (g) Develop and implement a self-assessment instrument to determine the effectiveness of this TA project.

Priority 3: Assistive Technology Act Data Collection Project

The Secretary will establish a Data Collection Project for the purpose of collecting data from the AT Act State Grant Program grantees and the AT Act P&A Program grantees that can provide policy-relevant information to Federal, State and local decision makers about the availability, use and reliability of AT devices and services and exemplary practices to improving access to AT services and devices. The data collection project must:

- (a) Develop and implement a process for producing performance standards for the assessment of AT State Program grantees;
- (b) Design a web-based data collection and analysis system, including a data collection instrument, to collect data required to assess performance;
- (c) Train entities funded under the AT Act in the use of the data collection system;
- (d) Generate evaluative reports from the data and prepare an annual report on performance;
- (e) Identify and evaluate model approaches to increased access to AT;
- (f) Conduct one or more evaluation studies on specific aspects of the use of AT by persons with disabilities;
- (g) Coordinate and share resources with the TA projects to the AT Act State Grant Program grantees, the AT Act P&A Program grantees and the National Assistive Technology Internet Site about activities of mutual interest; and
- (h) Develop and implement a self-assessment instrument that will be used to determine the effectiveness of the data collection project.

Priority 4: National Assistive Technology Internet Site

The Secretary will establish a National Assistive Technology Internet Site for the purpose of providing to individuals with disabilities and the general public TA and information that will increase access to AT devices, AT services, and other disability-related resources. Consistent with statutory requirements, the Internet site must:

- (a) Develop, implement and maintain an accessible public Internet site that incorporates an innovative automated

intelligent agent to assist users in problem definition and selection of appropriate AT devices and services resources;

(b) Provide Internet access to a comprehensive, accessible library (i.e. database) of information on AT and rehabilitation equipment, such as ABLEDATA, available for all environments including home, workplace, and transportation;

(c) Identify and maintain electronic links to appropriate and accessible public and private resources and information related to all types of disabilities, including low-level reading skills, all funded AT Act Programs, the National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research, and the National Rehabilitation Information Center; and

(d) Identify and maintain electronic links to programs of excellence in areas such as information and referral, outreach, coordination, capacity building, public awareness, training, data collection, consumer control, funding and demonstrations sites.

In addition to the statutory requirements, the Internet site must:

(e) Provide TA to AT Act State Grant Program grantees and other entities funded under the AT Act, as appropriate, on accessible website development;

(f) Coordinate and share resources with the TA projects to the AT Act State Grant Program grantees and AT Act P&A Program grantees, the AT Act Data Collection Project, and NIDRR-funded Dissemination and Utilization projects about activities of mutual interest; and

(g) Develop and implement a self-assessment instrument that will be used to determine the effectiveness of the Internet site.

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<http://ocfo.ed.gov/fedreg.htm>
<http://www.ed.gov/news.html>

To use the PDF you must have the Adobe Acrobat Reader Program with Search, which is available free at either of the previous sites. If you have questions about using the PDF, call the

U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO) toll free at 1-888-293-6498; or in the Washington, D.C., area at (202) 512-1530.

Note: The official version of this document is the document published in the **Federal Register**. Free Internet access to the official edition of the **Federal Register** and the Code of Federal Regulations is available on GPO access at:

<http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/index.html>

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number 84.224B, Assistive Technology Act Technical Assistance Program)

Program Authority: 29 U.S.C. 3001.

Dated: June 30, 1999.

Judith E. Heumann,

Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

[CFDA No.: 84.224B]

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research; Notice Inviting Applications and Pre-Application Meeting for New Awards Under the Assistive Technology Act Technical Assistance Program for Fiscal Year 1999

Note to Applicants: This notice is a complete application package. Together with the statute authorizing the programs and applicable regulations governing the programs, including the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR), this notice contains information, application forms, and instructions needed to apply for a grant under these competitions.

This program supports the National Education Goal that calls for all Americans to possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

The estimated funding levels in this notice do not bind the Department of Education to make awards in any of these categories, or to any specific number of awards or funding levels, unless otherwise specified in statute.

Applicable Regulations: The Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR),

34 CFR Parts 74, 75, 77, 80, 81, 82, 85, and 86.

Program Title: Assistive Technology Act (AT Act) Technical Assistance Program.

CFDA Number: 84.224B.

Purpose of Program: The purpose of the AT Act Technical Assistance Program is to address issues raised by States, individuals, Protection and Advocacy providers, and other relevant organizations; collect data that will provide information about assistive technology devices and services that can be used for determining policy; provide information on increased access to assistive technology devices, assistive technology services and other disability-related resources.

Eligible Applicants: Parties eligible to apply for technical assistance grants shall have documented experience with and expertise in assistive technology service delivery or systems, interagency coordination, and capacity building and advocacy activities.

Parties eligible to apply for a grant under priorities 1, 2, and 3 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.

Parties eligible to apply for a grant under priority 4, the National Assistive Technology Internet Site, are institutions of higher education that emphasize research and engineering, have a multidisciplinary research center, and have demonstrated expertise in working with assistive technology and intelligent agent interactive information dissemination systems; managing libraries of assistive technology and disability-related resources; delivering education, information, and referral services to individuals with disabilities, including technology-based curriculum development services for adults with low-level reading skills; developing cooperative partnerships with the private sector, particularly with private sector computer software, hardware, and Internet services entities; and developing and designing advanced Internet sites.

APPLICATION NOTICE FOR FISCAL YEAR 1999 AT ACT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, CFDA NO. 84.224B

Funding priority	Deadline for transmittal of applications	Estimated number of awards	Maximum award amount (per fiscal year)*	Project period (months)
84.224B-1, Technical Assistance to AT Act State Grant Program Grantees.	9/7/99	1	FY 1999, \$638,000; FY 2000, \$600,000; FY 2001, \$600,000.	36