

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

AGENCY: Department of Education.

ACTION: Notice of Final Funding Priority for Fiscal Years 1996–1997 for the Knowledge Dissemination and Utilization Program.

SUMMARY: The Secretary announces a final funding priority for the Knowledge Dissemination and Utilization (D&U) Program under the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) for fiscal years 1996–1997. The Secretary takes this action to ensure that rehabilitation knowledge generated from projects and centers funded by NIDRR and others is utilized fully to improve the lives of individuals with disabilities and their families.

EFFECTIVE DATE: This priority takes effect on January 11, 1996.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This notice contains a final priority to establish ten regional Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers.

Authority for the D&U program of NIDRR is contained in sections 202 and 204(a) and 204(b)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 U.S.C. 760–762). Under this program the Secretary makes awards to public and private agencies and organizations, including institutions of higher education and Indian tribes or tribal organizations.

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

Under the regulations for this program (see 34 CFR 355.32) the Secretary may establish research priorities by reserving funds to support particular research activities.

On July 24, 1995, the Secretary published a notice of a proposed priority in the Federal Register (59 FR 46300). The Department of Education received thirty-five letters commenting on the proposed priority. Modifications were made to the priority as a result of those comments. The comments, and the Secretary's responses, are discussed in an appendix to this notice.

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

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 program only applications that meet this absolute priority:

Priority: Regional Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers

Background: Public Law 101–336, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), enacted on July 26, 1990, prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in employment, public accommodations, transportation, State and local government, and telecommunications. Because of NIDRR's experience and support of information dissemination and technical assistance, and its support of research and demonstration efforts to promote employment and independence for individuals with disabilities, Congress directed NIDRR to use FY 1991 funds to establish a technical assistance program to further the successful implementation of the ADA. In October of 1991, NIDRR awarded grants to establish ten regional Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers (DBTACs), previously referred to as Regional Disability and Business Accommodation Centers), for five years. There is one DBTAC in each of the ten Department of Education regions. The final funding priority for the original DBTACs is contained in the Federal Register of August 13, 1991, Vol. 5, No. 156, page 40168.

Covered entities and individuals with responsibilities and rights under the ADA continue to need technical assistance on the ADA. The ADA is a complex and relatively new civil rights statute. Many covered entities may be unaware of the basic requirements of the law or unfamiliar with legal precedents or policy guidance being issued by Federal agencies. According to a recent General Accounting Office (GAO) Report, “[GAO] observed steady improvement in both accessibility and awareness during the initial 15 months that the ADA was in effect. However, enough areas of concern remain to suggest a need for continuing educational outreach and technical assistance to business and government agencies...” (U.S. General Accounting Office, *Americans with Disabilities Act:*

Effects of the Law on Access to Goods and Services (GAO/PEMD–94–14; June 21, 1994).

The DBTACs provide a wide range of technical assistance services such as referrals, consultation, and facility surveys. The DBTACs provide training to individuals and entities with responsibilities and rights under the ADA and disseminate information on the ADA through such methods as distributing materials that have been created or reviewed and approved by Federal agencies, issuing newsletters and information briefs, and participating in discussion groups on the INTERNET. In addition, the DBTACs carry out public awareness activities on the ADA and the services provided by the DBTACs and other NIDRR ADA grantees through a variety of means including, but not limited to, the use of public service announcements, radio and television appearances, presentations at conferences, and the publication of newspaper and magazine articles.

In order to tailor their efforts to State and local needs and maximize their resources, DBTACs increase the capacity of State and local organizations to provide technical assistance, disseminate information, provide training, and promote awareness of the ADA. The DBTACs have established at least one affiliate in every State. The State affiliates carry out their activities in collaboration with coalitions of organizations interested in promoting the implementation of the ADA. In addition, the DBTACs provide support to and collaborate with Centers for Independent Living (CILs) in each region to increase the capacity of CILs to promote the successful implementation of the ADA through the provision of technical assistance and training.

In FY 1994 the DBTACs fielded over 75,700 ADA-related telephone inquiries, made 13,764 referrals, distributed almost 700,000 publications, engaged in over 4,600 different types of public awareness and outreach activities such as public speeches, TV and radio appearances, newspaper interviews, and public workshops, and trained approximately 54,000 individuals with responsibilities and rights under the ADA.

The DBTACs rely to the maximum extent possible on existing Federally-approved materials, and, through a systematic process of quality control, ensure the legal sufficiency and accuracy of the information disseminated by the Centers and their affiliates. All of the materials that the DBTACs distribute are available in