

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services and Office of Special Education Programs; Grant Award for FY 1999

AGENCY: Department of Education.

ACTION: Notice inviting applications for a new award for one Regional Resource Center in Region I for Fiscal Year 1999.

SUMMARY: On February 24, 1998, a notice was published in the **Federal Register** (63 FR 9376) inviting applications for a new FY 1998 award for six Regional Resource Centers (RRCs) to help States improve their special education programs. Five of the six RRCs were funded. An approvable application was not received from Region I.

The purpose of this notice is to invite applications for a Regional Resource Center in Region I (the Center) which will become a key component of OSEP's expanded systems change efforts, serving not only in its traditional capacity as a technical assistance provider and as a resource for information requests from all States within the region, but also as a broker of technical assistance for SEAs, LEAs and their partners.

This notice provides the closing date and other information regarding the transmittal of applications for a fiscal year 1999 competition under one program authorized by IDEA, as amended: Special Education—Technical Assistance and Dissemination to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities.

This notice supports the National Education Goals by helping to improve results for children with disabilities.

Waiver of Rulemaking

It is generally the practice of the Secretary to offer interested parties the opportunity to comment on proposed priorities. However, section 661(e)(2) of IDEA makes the Administrative Procedure Act (5 U.S.C. 553) inapplicable to the priority in this notice. In order to make awards on a timely basis, the Secretary has decided to publish this priority in final under the authority of section 661(e)(2).

General Requirements

(a) The project funded under this notice must make positive efforts to employ and advance in employment qualified individuals with disabilities in project activities (see section 606 of IDEA);

(b) Applicants and the grant recipient funded under this notice must involve

individuals with disabilities or parents of individuals with disabilities in planning, implementing, and evaluating the project (see section 661(f)(1)(A) of IDEA); and

(c) The project funded under this priority must budget for a two-day Project Directors' meeting in Washington, DC during each year of the project.

Note: The Department of Education is not bound by any estimates in this notice.

Special Education—Technical Assistance and Dissemination to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities

Purpose of Program: The purpose of this program is to provide technical assistance and information through such mechanisms as institutes, regional resource centers, clearinghouses and programs that support States and local entities in building capacity, to improve early intervention, educational, and transitional services and results for children with disabilities and their families, and address systemic-change goals and priorities.

Eligible Applicants: State and local educational agencies, institutions of higher education, other public agencies, private nonprofit organizations, freely associated States, and Indian tribes or tribal organizations, the Region I as defined in the following section.

Geographic Regions: The RRC funded under this priority shall serve the following States (referred to as Region I): Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont.

Applicable Regulations: (a) The Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 74, 75, 77, 79, 80, 81, 82, 85, and 86; and (b) The selection criteria for this competition are drawn from the EDGAR menu—TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE program area.

Note: The regulations in 34 CFR part 86 apply to institutions of higher education only.

Priority: Under section 685 and 34 CFR 75.105(c) (3), the Secretary gives an absolute preference to applications that meet the following priority. The Secretary funds under this competition only those applications that meet this absolute priority:

Absolute Priority—Regional Resource Center in Region I (84.326R)**Background**

State educational agencies (SEAs) are increasingly being asked to make changes to their systems for providing early intervention, special education,

and transition services to improve results for children with disabilities and their families. Recent findings on educational change suggest that in order to create successful and lasting "systemic change": (1) Decisions should be data-based; (2) multiple aspects of the system should be considered, including policies and practices at national, State, district, classroom, teacher, and student levels; (3) change should be driven from both the top-down and the bottom-up; (4) barriers to systemic change, such as fragmented policies and complicated administrative requirements should be eliminated; and (5) changes to one sector of the system should be directly linked to changes in all other system sectors (for example, personnel development and teacher certification must be linked to curriculum content and student outcomes). Furthermore, SEAs striving for such complex transformations will be required to establish new partnerships, translate validated research findings into practice, and provide personnel with specialized knowledge and skills.

In order to help States improve their special education programs, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has supported Regional Resource Centers (RRCs) which employ a variety of strategies, including needs assessment, staff training, policy and product development, and information dissemination. Historically, these strategies, although requested and well received by SEAs, have focused primarily on specific policy or program issues. They have seldom addressed the SEA's systemic needs.

For over a decade, OSEP has supported State system change efforts through a number of discretionary projects. These projects, although successful, were limited in number and scope, focusing specifically on secondary transition and the education of children with severe disabilities. The IDEA Amendments of 1997 specifically authorize technical assistance on assisting SEAs and their partners in planning and implementing systemic change. In this regard, the following priority would require the Center to assist SEAs and LEAs in including general educators in systems change efforts designed to improve results for children with disabilities.

The Center will become a key component of OSEP's expanded systems change efforts, serving not only in their traditional capacity as technical assistance providers, but also as brokers of technical assistance for SEAs, LEAs, and their partners. This new role would require the Center to serve as a link

between SEAs and appropriate technical assistance providers at national, State, and local levels that can assist States in achieving systemic change and improving results for children with disabilities and their families.

Consistent with the Regional Resource Centers' central mission of helping States improve their special education programs, the following priority requires the Center to address the general technical assistance needs of SEAs and their partners related to the development and implementation of State Improvement Plans under the new State Program Improvement Grants for Children with Disabilities (or SIG program). The SIG program supports competitive grants designed to assist State educational agencies and their partners in reforming and improving their systems for providing educational, early intervention, and transitional services, including their systems for professional development, technical assistance, and dissemination of knowledge about best practices, in order to improve results for children with disabilities. Because the Center is funded to provide technical assistance and to serve as a resource for information requests from all States within Region I, and must do so on an equitable basis across those States, the Center is prohibited from helping a State draft its SIG application, providing technical assistance on what to include in the application or how to draft the application contents, or performing any other function that could be viewed as providing a competitive advantage to one potential SIG program applicant over another. On the other hand, helping States, for example, with needs assessments, project implementation, and evaluation, and other activities related to the State improvement plan are consistent with the Center's general role and are authorized under the following priority.

Priority

The Secretary establishes an absolute priority for the purpose of supporting a Regional Resource Center in Region I. The Regional Resource Center, through written technical assistance agreements with SEAs, LEAs, and other entities must—

(a) Increase the depth and utility of information in on-going and emerging areas of priority needs as identified by States, local educational agencies, and participants in the new State Program Improvement Grant (SIG) partnerships that are in the process of making systemic changes. To expand information depth and utility, the Regional Resource Center must, for

example, cooperate with the Federal Resource Center in collecting and sharing information on current practices, policies, and programs relevant to State implementation of IDEA.

(b) Promote change through a multi-State or regional framework that benefits States, local educational agencies, and participants in SIG partnerships pursuing systemic-changes. To promote change, the Regional Resource Center must conduct activities such as—

(1) Identifying general and special education technical assistance providers funded by the Department of Education at national, State, and local levels, and linking them with SEAs to help them achieve systemic change and improved results for children with disabilities and their families.

(2) Collaborating with other Department-funded programs that address special needs related to school-based reform (e.g., school-wide and other programs under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act).

(3) Participating in Department of Education program coordinated reviews whose purpose is to ensure that technical assistance activities of all the Regional Resource Centers are coordinated with those of other technical assistance providers to meet State identified needs in a comprehensive and efficient manner. The program coordinated reviews conducted by the Department focus on areas in which technical assistance is needed across programs such as standards and assessments, parent involvement, professional development, transition from school to work, and education reform.

(c) Promote communication and information exchange among States, local educational agencies, and participants in SIG partnerships based on the needs, concerns, emerging issues, and trends identified by these agencies and participants. Such bases may include, for example:

(1) Persistent problems that arise as States comply with IDEA requirements (e.g., identifying appropriate settings for infants and toddlers, transition issues, shortages of related service personnel, alternate assessment strategies, or determining appropriate uses of technology).

(2) Issues faced by local, regional, and State entities in implementing systemic reform, (e.g., placement issues, training and support for teachers, developing useful curricular materials based on sound instructional principles, managing children who exhibit challenging behaviors).

(3) Variance in practices, procedures, and policies of States, local educational agencies, and participants in SIG partnerships.

(4) Accountability of States, local educational agencies and participants in SIG partnerships for improved early intervention, educational, and transitional results for children with disabilities.

(d) Provide technical assistance to State educational agencies and their partners related to State improvement plans under the SIG program. Technical assistance activities may include—

(1) Developing general models for SEAs to use in developing their State improvement plans under the SIG program (See § 653 of IDEA);

(2) Helping SEAs conduct needs assessment activities stipulated in the State improvement plan (See § 653(b) of IDEA);

(3) Helping SEAs and their partners implement systemic changes specified in the State improvement plan (See § 653(c) of IDEA);

(4) Helping to evaluate the systemic outcomes of State improvement activities (See section 653(f) of IDEA); and

(5) Serving as a technical assistance facilitator to establish mentoring relationships between SEAs that have successfully implemented State improvement activities under the SIG program and those seeking funding under the SIG program.

(e) Assist States in developing and implementing strategies to comply with IDEA requirements such as establishing performance goals and indicators under section 612(a)(16). To assist States, the Regional Resource Center may conduct activities such as—

(1) Designing LEA systems for ensuring compliance, (e.g., LEA monitoring, eligibility, complaint resolution);

(2) Developing and assisting in the implementation of corrective action plans in response to U.S. Department of Education monitoring findings; and

(3) Assisting in coordinated program reviews conducted by the U.S. Department of Education.

(f) conduct, every two years, a results-based evaluation of the technical assistance provided. Such an evaluation must be conducted by a review team consisting of three experts approved by the Secretary and must measure elements such as—

(1) The type of technical assistance provided and the perception of its quality by the target audience;

(2) The changes that occurred as a result of the technical assistance provided; and

(3) How the changes relate to State plan goals and objectives.

The services of the review team, including a two-day site visit to the Center are to be performed during the last half of the Center's second year and may be included in that year's evaluation required under 34 CFR 75.590. Costs associated with the services to be performed by the review team must also be included in the Regional Resource Center's budget for year two. These costs are estimated to be approximately \$4,000.

Applications Available: October 19, 1998.

Deadline for Transmittal of Application: November 23, 1998.

Deadline for Intergovernmental Review: January 22, 1999.

Estimated Number of Awards: 1.

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

Project Period: Up to 52 months.

The first budget period will be 4 months and the subsequent budget periods will be 12 months.

Maximum Award: \$400,000 for the first budget period; and \$1,075,000 for subsequent budget periods.

Note: The Secretary will reject without consideration or evaluation any application that proposes a project funding level that exceeds the stated maximum award amounts per budget period. The Secretary may change the maximum amounts through a notice published in the **Federal Register**.

Page limits: In Part III of the application, the application narrative is where an applicant addresses the selection criteria that are used by reviewers in evaluating an application. An applicant must limit Part III to the equivalent of no more than 40 double-spaced pages, using the following standards: (1) A "page" is 8½"×11" (on one side only) with one-inch margins (top, bottom, and sides). (2) All text in the application narrative, including titles, headings, footnotes, quotations,

references, and captions, as well as all text in charts, tables, figures, and graphs, must be double-spaced (no more than 3 lines per vertical inch). If using a proportional computer font, use no smaller than a 12-point font, and an average character density no greater than 18 characters per inch. If using a nonproportional font or a typewriter, do not use more than 12 characters to the inch.

The page limit does not apply to Part I—the cover sheet; Part II—the budget section (including the narrative budget justification); Part IV—the assurances and certifications; or the one-page abstract, resumes, bibliography, and letters of support. However, all of the application narrative must be included in Part III. If an application narrative uses a smaller print size, spacing, or margin that would make the narrative exceed the equivalent of the page limit, the application will not be considered for funding.

For Applications and General Information Contract: Requests for applications and general information should be addressed to the Grants and Contracts Services Team, 600 Independence Avenue, SW., room 3317, Switzer Building, Washington, DC, 20202-2641. The preferred method for requesting information is to FAX your request to: (202) 205-8717. Telephone: (202) 260-9182.

Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the TDD number: (202) 205-8953. Individuals with disabilities may obtain a copy of this notice or the application packages referred to in this notice in an alternate format (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotape, or computer diskette) by contacting the Department as listed above. However, the Department is not able to reproduce in an alternate format the standard forms included in the application package.

This program is approved under OMB control number 1820-0028.

Intergovernmental Review

All programs in this notice are subject to the requirements of Executive Order 12372 and the regulations in 34 CFR part 79. The objective of the Executive order is to foster an inter-governmental partnership and a strengthened federalism by relying on processes developed by State and local governments for coordination and review of proposed Federal financial assistance.

In accordance with the order, this document is intended to provide early notification of the Department's specific plans and actions for those programs.

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

Dated: October 5, 1998.

Judith E. Heumann,

Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

[FR Doc. 98-27237 Filed 10-8-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4000-01-M