

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**Office of Vocational and Adult Education; National Research Centers**

AGENCY: Department of Education.

ACTION: Notice of Intent to Compete the National Research Centers (National Centers or Centers) and Request for Public Comment on the Configuration of the National Centers.

SUMMARY: The Secretary of Education (Secretary) intends to establish one or more National Centers to carry out research, development, evaluation, demonstration, dissemination, and professional development activities designed to improve academic, vocational, and technical education in secondary and postsecondary institutions to prepare students for postsecondary education, careers, and lifelong learning.

DATES: Written comments must be submitted on or before March 31, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Written comments should be addressed to Dennis Berry, Director of the Division of National Programs, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW., (Room 4512, Mary E. Switzer Building), Washington, DC 20202-7242. Internet address: Dennis_berry@ed.gov.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ricardo Hernandez, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW., (Room 4512, Mary E. Switzer Building), Washington, DC 20202-7242. Telephone: 202-205-5977. Internet address: Ricardo_hernandez@ed.gov. Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339 between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., Eastern time, Monday through Friday.

Individuals with disabilities may obtain this notice 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:**General**

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998 (Public Law 105-332) (Act), which was enacted October 31, 1998, continues to authorize the Secretary to make one or more awards to establish one or more National Centers to carry out research and dissemination to assist State and local programs to improve the quality and effectiveness of their vocational and technical education services and

activities. The Act lists the entities that are eligible to receive an award to operate a National Center. In addition to institutions of higher education, which were eligible under the previous legislation, public or private nonprofit organizations or agencies, or consortia of such institutions, organizations, or agencies, are now eligible to compete to receive awards.

Invitation to Comment

Interested persons are invited to submit comments and recommendations regarding this notice.

All comments submitted in response to this notice will be available for public inspection, during and after the comment period, in room 4512, 330 C Street, SW, Washington, DC, between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., Eastern time, Monday through Friday of each week except Federal holidays.

On request, the Department supplies an appropriate aid, such as a reader or print magnifier, to an individual with a disability who needs assistance to review the comments. An individual with a disability who wants to schedule an appointment for this type of aid may call (202) 205-8113 or (202) 260-9895. An individual who uses a TDD may call the Federal Information Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339, between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. Eastern time, Monday through Friday.

Intent To Hold a Competition

The grants awarded to the University of California at Berkeley to operate the current National Center for Research in Vocational Education will end in December 1999. Before that time, the Secretary will designate one or more new National Centers to carry out the activities described in section 114(c)(5) of the Act. The Secretary expects that the simultaneous operation of the old and new centers for a short period will facilitate as seamless a transition as possible with a minimum disruption of services. The Secretary intends to publish a closing date notice in late spring or early summer of 1999 to announce one or more competitions for funding the National Centers.

Applicants will be given approximately 60 days, from the date the closing date notice is published in the **Federal Register**, to develop and submit applications. Through this notice of intent, the Secretary is providing early notification of the Department's plans to hold one or more competitions under the authority of section 114(c)(5) and (6) of the Act. The Secretary encourages interested institutions of higher education, public or private nonprofit organizations or agencies, or consortia

of these institutions, organizations, or agencies, to begin planning for the upcoming grant competitions.

Issues for Public Comment

The enactment of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998 marks the beginning of new opportunities in vocational and technical education. The Act recognizes that *all* students must meet challenging academic standards and be prepared for postsecondary education and lifelong learning and that *all* students must prepare for careers—not just entry-level jobs. The Act challenges the Department to provide leadership and be proactive in carrying out its vision of vocational and technical education, and thereby assist State and local programs to improve the quality and effectiveness of vocational and technical education.

The Secretary believes National Centers have a unique role that enables them to serve as effective catalysts for program improvement. In this regard, the Secretary believes that in carrying out section 114(c)(5) of the Act, National Centers should—

(a) Build a knowledge base that is critical to increasing the quality and improving the effectiveness of vocational and technical education programs;

(b) Help to redefine vocational education and spearhead conversations on reform;

(c) Conduct research that contributes significantly to both theory and practice, especially in areas that are relevant to practitioners and in emerging areas of practice that are not well defined; and

(d) Translate research into practice for teachers, counselors, administrators, and policy makers through dissemination, professional development, and technical assistance.

The Act specifically charges the Secretary with establishing one or more National Centers to—

(a) Carry out research for the purpose of developing, improving, and identifying the most successful methods for addressing the education, employment, and training needs of participants in vocational and technical education programs, including research and evaluation in such activities as—

(1) The integration of vocational and technical instruction, and academic, secondary and postsecondary instruction;

(2) Education technology and distance learning approaches and strategies that are effective with respect to vocational and technical education;

(3) "State-adjusted levels of performance" and "State levels of performance" that serve to improve

vocational and technical education programs and student achievement; and

(4) Academic knowledge and vocational and technical skills required for employment or participation in postsecondary education.

(b) Carry out research to increase the effectiveness and improve the implementation of vocational and technical education programs, including conducting research and development, and carrying out studies that provide longitudinal information or formative evaluation with respect to vocational and technical education programs and student achievement.

(c) Carry out research that can be used to improve professional development and learning in the vocational and technical education classroom, including—

(1) Effective in-service and pre-service teacher education that assists vocational and technical education systems; and

(2) Dissemination and training activities related to the applied research and demonstration activities described in section 114(c) of the Act, which may also include serving as a repository for information on vocational and technical skills, State academic standards, and related materials.

(d) Carry out any other research the Secretary determines appropriate to assist State and local recipients of funds under the Act.

(e) Carry out dissemination and training activities based upon the research previously described.

The Secretary may also authorize Centers to—

(a) Carry out demonstration vocational and technical education programs, to replicate model vocational and technical education programs, to disseminate best practices information, and to provide technical assistance upon request of a State, for the purposes of developing, improving, and identifying the most successful methods and techniques for providing vocational and technical education programs assisted under the Act.

(b) Carry out a demonstration partnership project involving a 4-year, accredited postsecondary institution, in cooperation with local public education organizations, volunteer groups, and private-sector business participants to provide program support, and facilities for education, training, tutoring, counseling, employment preparation, and specific skills training in emerging and established professions, and for retraining of military medical personnel, individuals displaced by corporate or military restructuring, and migrant workers, as well as other individuals who otherwise do not have access to

these services, through multi-site, multi-State distance learning technologies.

1. Structuring the National Centers

In this notice, the Secretary presents a few options for structuring these National Centers, to initiate discussion. However, comments should not be limited to or restricted by the options and questions presented.

Possible Structures

Generally, section 114(c)(5) and (6) of the Act provides for research, development, evaluation, demonstration, dissemination, and professional development activities to be carried out at the National Centers. The Act requires each National Center to carry out dissemination and training activities based on the research performed by the Center. In addition, it authorizes the Secretary to support dissemination separately, either through a demonstration program or a Center. Should the Secretary decide to support a separate Center to carry out dissemination and training activities, that Center would provide a vehicle for a more comprehensive and extensive dissemination of the research produced by the National Centers and other research or information on successful practices.

Option 1. One center would carry out all of the activities (research, development, demonstration, evaluation, comprehensive dissemination, and professional development) of the National Centers.

Option 2. One center would carry out research, development, demonstration, evaluation, dissemination and professional development for secondary education issues.

A second center would carry out research, development, demonstration, evaluation, dissemination and professional development for postsecondary education issues.

A third center would carry out comprehensive dissemination activities for both secondary and postsecondary education.

Option 3. One center would carry out research, development, and dissemination on all issues.

A second center would carry out comprehensive dissemination and professional development.

Option 4. One center would focus on long-range research allowing for longitudinal studies, evaluations, or data collections, which extend beyond a calendar year. Other long-range research might relate to comprehensive demonstrations and validating promising practices. The center would also carry out dissemination and

professional development activities that relate to its research.

A second center would focus on short-term research issues that could be completed in a year or less. The center would also carry out dissemination and professional development activities that relate to its research.

A third center would carry out comprehensive dissemination and professional development activities.

Option 5. One center would focus on academically oriented research such as testing the efficacy of various theoretical approaches, or measuring the effect of a specific educational initiative.

A second center would focus on applied research, demonstrations, developing and improving successful methods, providing technical assistance to States in developing and implementing measures of performance, and evaluating program effectiveness.

Each center would carry out dissemination and professional development activities that address its specific audiences.

Option 6. One center would focus on research (e.g., long-term, short-term, applied, theoretical, evaluation, data analysis) and demonstration issues. The center would also carry out dissemination and professional development activities that relate to its research.

A second center would focus on professional development and leadership issues, e.g., training education personnel to use the most successful methods for addressing the education, employment, and training needs of participants in vocational and technical education programs, and offering pre-service and in-service training, including internships and fellowships.

A third center would focus on comprehensive dissemination activities.

2. Questions

In addition to inviting comments on the structure of the proposed National Centers, the Secretary is also interested in receiving views in response to several questions that relate to the scope of the Centers:

(a) Are there specific research activities the Centers should undertake in order to assist State and local vocational and technical education programs?

(b) What theoretical and applied research should the Centers undertake?

(c) What are effective ways to ensure maximum coordination and synergy among the Centers if there is more than one Center?

(d) Should the National Centers provide technical assistance to State and

local programs in adopting/adapting successful practices? What types of technical assistance are needed most?

(e) To what extent should the work of the Centers inform and be informed by other similar international research institutes and Centers?

(f) How should the relevance, quality, and timeliness of a Center's work be measured in order to inform decisions on whether to continue a National Center?

3. Naming the National Centers

The Secretary is also interested in receiving views on possible names for the new National Centers. Changes in the legislation provide new opportunities. A new name for the Centers could help to emphasize the changes, opportunities and new thrusts of the Act. Previously, the National Centers were called the "National Center for Research in Vocational

Education". A possible new name could be the "National Centers for Research in Technical and Professional Education".

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electronic bulletin board of the Department. Telephone: (202) 219-1511 or, toll free, 1-800-222-4922. The documents are located under Option G-Files/Announcements, Bulletins and Press Releases.

Additionally, this notice, as well as other documents concerning the implementation of the national centers, is available on the World Wide Web at the following site: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/ncrperk111.html>.

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

Program Authority: Public Law 105-332.

Dated: February 24, 1999.

Patricia W. McNeil,

Assistant Secretary for Vocational and Adult Education.

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