

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES
REHABILITATION SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM
RSA-IM-02-22
DATE: July 9, 2002

ADDRESSEES: STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCIES (GENERAL)
STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCIES (BLIND)
STATE REHABILITATION COUNCILS
REGIONAL REHABILITATION CONTINUING EDUCATION
PROGRAMS
CONSUMER ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS
CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS
PROTECTION & ADVOCACY OF INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS
PROGRAMS
AMERICAN INDIAN VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION
PROGRAMS
RSA SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM
CONSUMER ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS

SUBJECT: Request for Nominations for the Twenty-Ninth Institute on Rehabilitation
Issues Primary Study Groups

CONTENT: The purpose of this Information Memorandum (IM) is to request
nominations for persons to serve as chairpersons and members on the
following two Twenty-Ninth Institute on Rehabilitation Issues (IRI)
primary study groups (PSG):

1. Promoting Consumer Empowerment through Professional Vocational
Rehabilitation Counseling:
The university coordinator is Ms. Jeanne Miller, the director of
RRCEP VI at the University of Arkansas. The RSA Representatives
are Ms. Kris Cox, Mr. Allen Kropp, and Ms. Therese Mandarino. The
first two meetings of the PSG will be held in Chicago.
2. Teaching Orientation & Mobility Professionals:
Non-Traditional Approaches to Meet Critical Staffing Shortages

The university coordinator is Dr. Donald Dew, the director of RRCEP III
at The George Washington University. The RSA Representatives are Mr.

Joe Cordova and Dr. Edna Johnson. The first two meetings of the PSG will be held in Philadelphia.

The deadline for receipt of the nominations is August 15, 2002.

Descriptions of the two IRI topics are attached to this memorandum.

Nominees for chairpersons for the PSGs must be current State VR agency directors, or designees, who have demonstrated leadership qualities, an ability to facilitate group discussions, good writing and editorial skills, and who have served on previous IRI PSGs. Both the chairpersons and the PSG members make a commitment to attend three meetings for two to three days each, during which the topical issues are discussed and debated in great detail.

The PSG will be primarily made up of representatives from State VR agencies and will include a total of approximately 10-12 persons, including individuals who are recognized authorities on the issue under study and/or represent important consumer perspectives. The PSG members define the issues in their topical area and write drafts of assigned chapters or sections. Their only compensation is reimbursement of travel and per diem expenses at the host university rate.

In submitting nominations, we encourage you to review the attached "IRI Primary Study Groups - Roles and Responsibilities" with each nominee before submitting his/her name. In addition, the Nomination Form, including a brief justification in support of the nominee's participation, must be submitted. We also ask that you ensure that each nominee requests his/her supervisor's approval prior to submitting a Nomination Form. Self-nomination is also encouraged. Our goal is to select a representative sample of persons knowledgeable of the topics from both inside and outside the State-Federal VR program, and to ensure participation of persons from minority backgrounds and persons with disabilities.

During the 29th IRI Forum to be held in Washington, DC from May 5-6, 2003, the PSG chairpersons and members present their draft publications to a larger study group for review and comment, and are honored for their contribution to the field of rehabilitation literature.

We appreciate your continued support of the IRI. Please provide the names of nominees for chairpersons and members of the IRI PSGs by August 15, 2002, to:

Mr. Charles Sadler
RSA IRI Coordinator
Rehabilitation Services Administration
330 C Street, SW, Room 3216 Washington, DC 20202-2735

E-MAIL: charles.sadler@ed.gov
TELEPHONE: (202) 205-9286
FAX: (202) 205-9340
TTY: (202) 205-9295

Joanne Wilson
Commissioner

Attachments: IRI Primary Study Groups – Roles and Responsibilities
Nomination Form
Descriptions of the 29th IRI Topics

cc: Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation
National Association of Rehabilitation Partners

IRI PRIMARY STUDY GROUPS - ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The following information is provided to persons who are either interested in nominating an individual to serve as a member or chairperson of an IRI PSG, or who are considering whether or not they are willing and able to be nominated to serve on an IRI PSG.

Persons nominating individuals to participate in the IRI should ensure that the nominees are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities. In order to avoid misunderstandings, please review the information contained herein with each nominee before submitting the Nomination Form.

PURPOSE: To research, write and publish an IRI publication that provides a foundation for quality state-of-the-art training on a specific topic. RSA annually funds two grantees at the University of Arkansas and The George Washington University to serve as university coordinators for two IRI PSGs, and to convene the National IRI Forum in Washington. The IRI is not original research; the document is comprised of existent research applied to contemporary issues and challenges in the field of VR. Approximately 2500 to 3500 copies of each IRI publication are disseminated nationally to an audience of VR counselors, consumers, advocates, administrators, educators, researchers, and trainers. The publications are also placed on the two university coordinators' web sites with numerous links to other rehabilitation partners.

SKILLS NEEDED BY ALL PSG MEMBERS:

- 1) Knowledge of the topic.
- 2) Writing skills. This includes the ability to discuss the issue and then create and write (outlining, developing and drafting) a section or chapter of the document.
- 3) The ability to work as part of a team.

ROLES OF PARTICIPANTS ON THE IRI STUDY GROUPS

UNIVERSITY COORDINATOR -

Arranges all facets of the PSG meetings, such as: communicating meeting times and hotel arrangements to group members; providing travel and per diem; arranging teleconferences, if necessary; duplicating and editing the draft IRI documents; publishing and disseminating the final IRI document; and, any other logistical support necessary during the course of the IRI cycle.

CHAIRPERSON -

Facilitates the PSG meetings and maintains group focus on the topical issues. Assigns writing assignments and membership to the

editorial committee that is responsible for editing the document after the national IRI Forum. Works closely with the university coordinator, and the PSG members to ensure that the IRI publication is published in a timely manner.

RSA REPRESENTATIVE - Ensures that the group fulfills the charge presented by the RSA Commissioner and that the final publication complies with Federal law, regulations and policy.

WHAT KIND OF TIME COMMITMENT IS REQUIRED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE IRI?

The IRI requires an approximately one-year time commitment that includes three meetings of approximately two and a half days. **THE FIRST TWO MEETINGS MAY ENTAIL WEEKEND TRAVEL.** The first meeting is devoted to a discussion of the topic and all the issues surrounding it. The group members are then assigned chapters to be written.

The second meeting focuses on a review and critique of the draft. Between the second and third meetings the members of the PSG rewrite and refine their respective chapters into the final draft. The third meeting occurs during the National IRI Forum in Washington, DC, during which time an expanded group of individuals reviews the final draft publication and provides feedback for further improving the document. These recommendations are considered by the PSG editorial committee, who may meet in Washington, DC immediately following the Forum. The editorial committee is usually composed of 3-7 members of the PSG, including the chairperson and the university coordinator.

IRI PSG membership is an honor. IRI PSG chairpersons and members are accorded the title of “IRI Scholars” and receive certificates of appreciation signed by the RSA Commissioner. The IRI is an opportunity to work collaboratively with consumers and professionals with knowledge and expertise on a given topic, and to develop a publication useful in training VR professionals.

Nomination Form

TWENTY-NINTH INSTITUTE ON REHABILITATION ISSUES

Nominee Information:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone/TDD: _____

Fax: _____

E-mail: _____

The nominee is an individual with a disability.

____ Yes ____ No

The following question is to assist us in assembling an IRI PSG that includes individuals from diverse backgrounds. **Answering this question is optional.**

Race/Ethnic Status (Please check the most accurate answer)

____ White

____ Black/African American

____ American Indian

____ Hispanic

____ Asian/Pacific Islander

____ Other _____

Nominator Information:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone/TDD: _____

Fax: _____

E-mail: _____

Nominator's Signature: _____

**The deadline for receipt of the nomination forms is
AUGUST 15, 2002.**

Descriptions of the 29th IRI Topics

Title of Topic 1: PROMOTING CONSUMER EMPOWERMENT THROUGH PROFESSIONAL VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELING

I. Background:

Over the past decade, federal rehabilitation legislation has attempted to guarantee consumer empowerment, self-determination, and informed choice. The Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD), contained in Section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998, requires rehabilitation counseling staff to either have or be working toward having the professional level skills and preparation needed to empower consumers.

Professional preparation of rehabilitation counselors at the master's degree level since its origins in the 1950's has emphasized the empowerment of consumers as a desired outcome of vocational rehabilitation services. A cadre of counselors professionally prepared at the master's degree level through the CSPD will automatically elevate the professional stature of the entire public VR program and have a dramatic effect on the quality of VR services in the near future. This new professionalism must be cultivated in ways that benefit the individual with a disability, the VR counselor, and the Public VR system as a whole.

The "counseling and guidance" functions of the VR counselor need to be reviewed in relation to this new professionalism, social and cultural changes in the community of individuals with disabilities, and the expansion in the range and depth of services available to persons with disabilities through non-traditional resources. As VR counselors gain more professional expertise and skill in empowering consumers through a renewed focus on the essential elements of counseling and guidance, they will ensure better consumer employment outcomes.

II. Issues to be addressed:

- A. What is a process definition of empowerment in relation to the VR counselor and consumer partnership?
- B. What are the VR counselor practices, skills, techniques, or systems that support consumer empowerment?
- C. What resources currently exist to support consumer empowerment both within Public VR and in the larger community?
- D. What are state VR agency policies and practices that do not facilitate empowerment?
- E. How does the new "counseling and guidance" skill emphasis for VR counselors more clearly define counseling and guidance as a service in VR?
- F. What are the essential elements of effective counseling and guidance? What issues does the counselor need to consider with his/her consumer?
- G. How does the counselor and/or supervisor-administrator document services, skills, or techniques that empower clients?

- H. The primary purpose and intent of CSPD is to benefit and empower consumers of VR services through state VR agencies having a more professionally qualified workforce. How can the full benefits of graduate education for VR counselors be harnessed for the greatest benefit of both the consumer of rehabilitation services and for the organizations that provide those services?
 - I. What are the unique challenges and/or opportunities that come with universally increasing the professional levels of an entire workforce? What are the organizational ramifications of having counselors who are collectively better trained, more knowledgeable, more confident, and more autonomous than before? How can VR agencies provide an atmosphere that will enhance the utilization of these professional qualities?
 - J. How can state VR agencies minimize the inherent limits on professionalism that tend to characterize most structured organizations and bureaucracies? Research has shown that professionalism is more difficult in formal organizations and in bureaucracies that rely on close supervision. How can the public program effectively respond to these inherent challenges? How might increased professionalism change the role of the VR counselor?
 - K. As the CSPD moves beyond the ranks of the VR counselor, what opportunities and challenges will public VR and other rehabilitation programs encounter because of increased training/education and expanded levels of professionalism among their personnel?
- III. Intended audience:
- A. Administrators of state VR programs.
 - B. Mid-management and supervisory staff within VR programs.
 - C. Rehabilitation counselors.
 - D. Rehabilitation leaders at the federal, regional, and state levels including those in professional rehabilitation organizations.
 - E. Educators preparing professional rehabilitation counselors.
 - F. Consumers of rehabilitation services, their advocates, and community rehabilitation providers.
 - G. Support staff within VR programs.
 - H. Rehabilitation personnel other than counselors pursuing careers within the rehabilitation system.
- IV. Potential effects on improving services to individuals with disabilities:
- A. Increased and improved partnerships between the consumer and the counselor.
 - B. Improved decisions of counselors and consumers leading to higher quality employment outcomes achieved by consumers.
 - C. Increasingly innovative/creative approaches to the delivery of rehabilitation counseling services.
 - D. Improved consumer involvement and investment in the rehabilitation process resulting in increased consumer persistence, reduced withdrawal, and better participation with rehabilitation goals.
 - E. Increased consumer independence and more effective utilization of VR services.
 - F. Reduced need for repetitive services.

- G. Increased status of public VR professionals with other human/social service organizations, disability organizations, and the community of individuals with disabilities.

The emphasis on empowerment, self-determination and informed choice found in the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998, should serve as a catalyst to push counselor and consumer partnerships beyond informed choice in rehabilitation planning. This IRI study group will seek to describe best practices, skills, techniques, and systems that encourage professional VR counselors to engage consumers in meaningful partnerships that empower consumers and support self-determination. This topic is consistent with advances and initiatives related to consumer empowerment and includes an analysis of the role and philosophy not only of counselors and consumers, but also of supervisors and administrators of VR services.

**Title of Topic 2: Teaching Orientation & Mobility Professionals:
Non-Traditional Approaches to Meet Critical Staffing Shortages**

- I. Background:

Severe nationwide staffing shortages exist in this discipline. Many existing educational programs are still teaching with traditional approaches and turning out graduates who are not prepared to meet the challenges of today's rehabilitation customer. The traditional methods for instruction in orientation & mobility (O & M) are limited in their scope and implementation, resulting in fewer individuals receiving training and an extremely high recidivism rate among customers who are blind and visually impaired, further adding to the severe staffing shortages.
- II. Issues to be addressed:
 - A. Non-traditional approaches exist which enable professionals in the field to reach more customers, and to provide services that are more effective at the same time.
 - B. We must study what the agencies actually need in the field, and non-traditional approaches which are currently being applied effectively to meet those needs. An analysis should compare the effectiveness of the non-traditional approaches with that of the traditional model.
 - C. The study's outcome could/should lead to establishment of best practices and non-traditional approaches to orientation & mobility. A model agency internship program could be developed, to work in tandem with university programs. Both the university programs and the internship would actually target the needs of the Public VR Program.
- III. Intended Audience:
 - A. Administrators of VR agencies for the blind and combined VR agencies.
 - B. Blindness rehabilitation professionals.
 - C. Administrators of university programs offering curriculums in rehabilitation teaching and O & M.
 - D. Regional Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program Staff.

- IV. Potential effects on improving services to individuals with disabilities:
Currently, many states have long lists of customers awaiting O & M services. These same agencies have exhausted all available contractors who are able to provide these services. Establishing internship programs in this discipline, and strengthening university programs will begin to address this worsening situation and result in customers of the public rehabilitation program receiving more timely services.
- A. Exploring non-traditional approaches, and their effectiveness in meeting the needs of agencies and designing training and internship programs to better meet those needs will result in more effective training approaches, which can meet the needs of a larger number of consumers with less recidivism.
 - B. Collaboration between the Public VR Program and the university system will lead to further advancements in the field, enhance educational and training opportunities for rehabilitation professionals and begin to address the growing problem of staff shortages in these critical areas.