

## Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation

### Request for Proposal: Implementation Assessment

The Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) is soliciting proposals for research that identifies federal and state laws, regulations and/or policies that are hindering state vocational rehabilitation agencies (SVRAs) from fully accessing and using their federal allotments, recommends necessary changes to eliminate or reduce these barriers, and identifies and shares strategies and practices that SVRAs who are successfully accessing and managing their full allotment are employing. The study should also identify federal and/or state requirements that are similar in nature to other Workforce Programs but place a higher burden on SVRAs.

#### Background

#### *About CSAVR:*

CSAVR is composed of the chief administrators of the public rehabilitation agencies serving individuals with physical and mental disabilities in the States, District of Columbia, and the territories. These agencies constitute the state partners in the state/federal program of rehabilitation services provided under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. The Council's members supervise the provision of vocational rehabilitation services that assist over 800,000 persons with disabilities annually to retain or obtain competitive integrated employment.

CSAVR's mission is to maintain and enhance a strong, effective, and efficient national program of public vocational rehabilitation (VR) which, in partnership with education, business, and the workforce system, empowers individuals with disabilities to achieve employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence, inclusion, and integration into communities.

#### Among other responsibilities CSAVR:

- Conducts, supports, and participates in research and demonstration leading to improvement of vocational and other rehabilitation services to persons with disabilities, and,

- Advocates for the enhancement of the national public program of vocational rehabilitation services.

### *About the Project*

The public VR program is a state/federal program. Approximately 80% of the funding comes from the federal government and 20% from states or territories. There is a funding formula used to determine each state's allotment. It is a mandatorily funded program, so every year there are increases. The program is administered by the Rehabilitation Services Administration in the U.S. Department of Education.

Every year at the beginning of the fiscal year's (FY) 3<sup>rd</sup> third quarter, states that cannot match or use all of their federal allotment can relinquish that money so that other states who have the money to match over and above their allotment can claim that relinquished money for use in their state/territory.

There are several federal fiscal requirements which states must meet in addition to the match requirement. These include:

- Period of performance timelines, obligations and requirements as defined in 2 CFR 200.1, and,
- Maintenance of Effort (MOE) pursuant to Section 111(a)(2)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act and 34 CFR 361.62(a).

With the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), new set asides came into being. These include a new requirement that at least 15% of the funds be reserved for pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities to transition from school to work and post-secondary. Managing this can be very challenging and even more so for some SVRA Directors who do not always have the authority to manage the funds per 34 CFR 361.13 and/or the trained fiscal staff to assist them.

Over the past three years, more and more states and territories have struggled to utilize substantial amounts of federal dollars after re-allotment. In FY 2021 approximately \$176 million was left unmatched. In FY 2022 \$268 million was left unmatched. Over this period the number of SVRAs

relinquishing federal dollars increased with 22 of 78 SVRAs relinquishing dollars this past FY.

### *Research Goals, Users, and Questions*

The purpose of this study is to identify legal, regulatory, programmatic, systemic and structural barriers that prevent states from accessing, matching, and expending all available federal funds to effectively serve their customers. The research should generate recommended changes to eliminate or reduce these barriers as well as identify and share strategies and practices that SVRAs who are successfully accessing and managing their full allotment are employing. Finally, the study should also identify federal and/or state requirements that are similar in nature to other Workforce Programs but place a higher burden on SVRAs. This study is designed to provide evidence at the earliest possible time to be presented to policymakers. Thus, applicants should prioritize timeliness and real-world applications.

The stakeholders and potential participants in this research include a wide variety of knowledgeable policymakers and practitioners, including Congress and congressional staff, key personnel in the U.S. Department of Education and the Rehabilitation Services Administration, state legislatures, SVRA Directors, SVRA CFOs, State Rehabilitation Council members, Community Rehabilitation Program directors that vend to SVRAs, SVRA customers and others.

### *Research Questions*

What federal laws, regulations and/or polices are preventing SVRAs from fully matching and using their allotments?

What state laws, regulations and/or polices are preventing SVRAs from fully matching and using their allotments?

What local or state level context impede SVRAs from successfully achieving full match?

Are there fiscal requirements imposed on the public VR program that are more onerous than similar provisions imposed on other programs?

What is required for SVRAs to successfully achieve full match?

What is required for SVRAs to successfully use their federal allotment within the required period of performance?

What changes are recommended or needed to eliminate legal, regulatory, programmatic, or systemic constraints that impede the full utilization of federal funding available to states?

### *Approach/Methodology*

Applicants are encouraged to use the methodology(ies) that they believe will best yield the answers and information sought. Researchers are encouraged to propose a methodological approach that they believe will yield the answers to the questions above. This may include desk and primary research, including qualitative and quantitative methods. CSAVR will work closely with the successful applicant to refine and approve its proposed methodology.

### *Deliverables*

The selected research team must complete the work described and outlined in the proposal within the proposed timeframe.

1. Project management, including a Quality Assurance Plan, weekly progress reports, and regular communication with CSAVR.
2. A literature review of peer-reviewed and reputable gray literature.
3. A detailed design and data collection plan to be approved by CSAVR prior to any data collection.
4. All research instruments required by the plan.
  - a. IRB approval, if proposed
5. Data collection, including outreach to research subjects.
6. An interim report of findings midway through data collection.
7. A comprehensive research reports that includes an executive summary, introduction to the topic, summary of the literature review,
8. summary and analysis of the findings including key datapoints and/or supporting quotes, and recommendations for CSAVR and its members.

9. Final briefings with up to six distinct key stakeholder audiences, including tailored slide decks.

CSAVR will provide contact information for relevant stakeholders, access to its members, and historical data concerning matching of federal dollars and reallocation.

### *Key Personnel*

Applicants should specify the key personnel, which includes the proposed Principal Investigator with experience leading similar studies and relevant topical expertise.

Other research team members should also support data collection and reporting as needed based on the applicant's proposal.

### *Period of Performance*

A draft report with recommendations is due November 15, 2023, with the final report submitted by no later than December 15, 2023.

### *Submission Guidelines*

Applicants must provide a proposal that demonstrates their understanding of this issue and describes the activities that they would implement to meet the research goals. The proposal must not exceed the pages and must include specific methodological approaches, research subjects, projected timelines, and a management approach with mitigation strategies for overcoming likely difficulties and limitations in the study. Cover page and table of contents are not included in the page limit.

Applicants must also include the following appendices (not included in the 10-page limit):

- Professional biographies of proposed key personnel (not to exceed one page)
- References, if any.

A separate pricing volume should detail the project budget, including assumptions and any accompanying justification that is consistent with the scope of work described here. The pricing must include fully loaded labor of the research team as well as the other costs associated with the study such as travel, research honoraria (if any), transcription costs, and software.

Questions about this RFP should be submitted via email to John Connelly at [jconnelly@csavr.org](mailto:jconnelly@csavr.org)

Respondents should send their proposals to CSAVR CEO Stephen Wooderson electronically via email at [swooderson@csavr.org](mailto:swooderson@csavr.org). Proposals must be received by December 30, 2022, at 11:59 PM ET.

### *Review and Selection Process*

Applicants should show demonstrated expertise in state and federal government, fiscal/financial policy analysis, and programmatic policy analysis, as well as research methodology and applied research. A knowledge of and expertise concerning WIOA, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended, and the public VR Program is preferred. The researcher/organization should have demonstrated background in delivering and conducting this kind of study.

The selection and notification process will be completed on or around late January 2023, with the award period commencing immediately thereafter. Proposals will undergo a review by a panel of CSAVR members and staff evaluating for research design and approach, applicant qualifications and expertise, proposed deliverables, and cost.