

AUCD-NIDILRR Research Grant Program Overview  
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>> MODERATOR: Hello. And welcome to national institute on disability, independent living, and rehabilitation research: Opportunities and resources. My name is Anna Costalas, and I am the resource and dissemination manager here at AUCD. I'd like to thank you all for joining us today. Before we begin, I would like to address a few logistical details. Because of the number of participants, your audio lines will be muted throughout the presentation. However, we will unmute your audio lines one at a time during the Q&A at the end. You can also submit questions at any point during the presentation via the chat box on your webinar console. You may send a chat to the whole audience or to the presenters only. We'll compile your questions throughout the webinar and address them at the end. Please note that we may not be able to address every question and may combine some questions.

This webinar is being recorded and will be available on AUCD's webinar library. There will also be an evaluation survey at the close of the webinar. We invite you --

>> Your microphone has been turned on.

>> MODERATOR: We invite you to provide feedback on the webinar and also to provide suggestions for future topics. Please join me in welcoming today's speaker, AUCD's acting executive director, John Tschida. John has spent more than 20 years using data and research to drive change and service development for individuals with disabilities. Before joining AUCD, John, he was appointed -- sorry. All right. For folks joining us, please mute your speakers and your mics. Not just speakers. Sorry. Let me continue. Before joining AUCD, he was appointed as the director of the national institute on disability, independent living and rehabilitation research at the U.S. department Of Health and Human Services. NIDILRR is the federal government's premier applied research agency impacting individuals with disabilities. I will now pass the mic over to John Tschida. John?

>> JOHN TSCHIDA: Thanks, Anna, and thanks, everyone, for joining us this afternoon. Looking forward to what I hope will be an interesting discussion after the presentation. As Anna mentioned, I did serve as the director of NIDILRR for

three years. And there are a number of AUCD network members that are grantees, but I've always thought that there should be more. There are some excellent opportunities within the agency, especially given their focus, increased focus, on community living for people with disabilities. So why don't we jump right into it. Next slide, please, Dawn.

So what are we going to be talking about today? I'll give a little bit of a background on the mission and history of NIDILRR. Then talk about areas of funding and focus. What is it exactly that they fund in which major domain areas, some of which is dictated by statute, some of which is historical, and something that the agency continues to do. The distinct funding mechanisms. This is where we'll spend the bulk of our time on these next two agenda items. One are the different specific funding mechanisms and programs that NIDILRR has where there's opportunity for members of the AUCD network. And then we'll talk specifically about what priorities the agency has already published for this year to get very specific and detailed on what opportunities exist out there today.

Finally, I'll talk a little bit about the peer-review process which is different than the rest of the peer-review processes within the administration for community living in particular and also very different from other peer-review processes that you may be familiar with at NIH and other government agencies.

And finally, with my last few slides, I do have a number of resources that I hope you'll find helpful in looking for greater detail after this introductory conversation. Next slide.

So the NIDILRR mission, which is dictated by The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 really is twofold. It's to generate new knowledge and promote its effective use to improve the abilities of individuals with disabilities to perform activities of their choice in the community, and to expand society's capacity to provide full opportunities and accommodations for its citizens with disabilities. So there's a research and development generation of new knowledge function, not just for its sake, but to increase social participation for people with disabilities, and there's this broader societal obligation, capacity building, if you will, that you'll see reflected in the funding mechanisms and priorities that we'll talk about in a little bit.

Next slide. So the agency does have a long history. Officially it was founded in 1978 within the Department of Education. It lived within the OCRs division which is the office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services with its roots really in Post-world War II returning veterans and a history of funding in that part of the department with both medical and vocational rehabilitation. So NIDILRR really had its roots in research focused on jobs and employment, but also on medical leave rehabilitation, even though it was seated within the Department of Education, which back at that time also had health and welfare as a part of its mission.

As I mentioned, the agency is authorized under title II of the Rehabilitation Act of 173. Interestingly, it is also tasked with focusing on individuals with the most significant disabilities, so you'll see when we get to the specific funding opportunities that have been allotted for fiscal year '20, you'll see some distinct subpopulations that do focus on individuals with those more severe disabilities.

But part of the point here is to show that it spans the age continuum, not just including people with severe disabilities, but all different subpopulations within that definition of people with disabilities.

Next slide, please. So what does NIDILRR fund exactly? And by statute, NIDILRR is required to create a five-year long-range plan. And about 15 years ago, NIDILRR really settled on these three domain areas for funding: Community living and participation, health and function, and employment. And if you break down the number of grants and the number of dollars associated with those, health and function far and away has the most dollars attached to it. Employment is second, and community living and participation is third. That is changing, again, with the renewed focus especially as the agency moved from the Department of Education to the department Of Health and Human Services, that renewed focus on community living and participation. There is more funding that's being directed in that area.

So when I was at NIDILRR, the administrator at the Administration For Community Living asked me when I was briefing her after we had just moved over from the Department of Education, I started talking about these domain funding areas, and her question to me was, so what exactly does NIDILRR not fund? I could think of just about anything that would fit into one of those three broad categories. And that is true. But -- and Anna mentioned this in the introduction and description of NIDILRR. This is applied research. This is not basic research. If you're familiar with the IDDRC part of the AUCD network funded by the National Institutes of Health, they do basic science, looking at underlying biological mechanisms and root causes for intellectual and developmental disability. This is not necessarily white lab coat science. This is applied real-world context developing technologies, developing interventions, developing policies and practices that can be applied immediately to individuals with disabilities living in the community to better improve their quality of life and social participation outcomes.

And I do have, as a part of my resources, this -- a link to the five-year long-range plan for those who are interested. Next slide, please. So these are, in addition to the three domain areas, there are investments that NIDILRR makes to support outcomes across their different domains. And these are really a statutory mandate. I've also included NIDILRR statute as a resource if you're interested in looking at this in more detail. A strong emphasis on technology, assistive technology, both in order to access the community and employment as well as improve function, disability statistics. And we have an AUCD network member who currently holds the research and training center that is mandated under this gathering of new knowledge and data around disability statistics. Also a national network to support The Americans With Disabilities Act. We'll talk a little bit more about that when we talk about the different funding mechanisms. And then there are even a few more cross-cutting investments in order to support the quality and the use of NIDILRR research. Knowledge translation, and there are increasing dollars being devoted by the agency to knowledge translation as well as capacity building. And NIDILRR, as an agency, is required, under federal law, to devote a certain percentage of its federal appropriation to underserved

and minority populations. We'll talk a little bit more about that. But that crosses all funding mechanisms, but there tends to be a majority of those what are called Section 21 funds devoted to minority-serving institutions that fall in the capacity-building area. Next slide, please.

So as I mentioned, NIDILRR now lives within the department Of Health and Human Services as a result of the workforce innovation and opportunity act that was passed in 2014. It moved from the Department of Education. The Administration For Community Living was formed two years before that and brought together the aging programs from the Older Americans Act. What was then the health and human services office of disability in addition to the intellectual disability parts of the department were then -- which were then housed at ACF to really build a cross-age, cross-disability business unit that focused specifically on community living. Truthing told, I think there are still some growing pains that are happening specifically between the aging and the disability communities. But having those in one place has fostered greater communication, has also fostered not just communication among federal employees but grantees as well, and in some cases there are specific requirements within NIDILRR funding proposals that the respondents collaborate with other funded programs across the Administration For Community Living.

What NIDILRR really brought to ACL when it came over from the Department of Education was that strong research base. ACL had a strong policy and program function. It now has research capacity, and there's some great learnings that are happening, especially between the policy development portion of ACL and NIDILRR, with the research informing their policy development and vice versa. Next slide, please.

So NIDILRR funding as it stands today, the appropriation for FY20 was almost \$112 million. This is an increase, a relatively significant increase. Three years ago the appropriation stood at about \$104 million. Just to be clear, this is not \$112 million in new grants that's going out the door every year. Many of the grants that NIDILRR funds -- in fact, most of the grants that they fund are multiyear obligations. So in any given year, you can see between 17 and \$30 million in commitments that are going out in new grant proposals anywhere between 15 and 25 different funding opportunities.

The agency itself is relatively small. The FTE count, the allotted FTE count is, I believe, 34 FTEs. I think the current FTE count is 31. There was a hiring freeze at ACL for a number of years. They have just been allowed to fill a few project officer positions which is encouraging to see. There is, however, currently no politically appointed director, the position that I formerly held. I think it's fair to say that under the current administration, the agency has lacked strong political leadership. At the same time, there's been no adverse political intervention, which is a very good thing. There's no attempt to redirect funds or influence the agenda in any way. Something I didn't mention that was on the previous slide, NIDILRR is the largest source of discretionary dollars at ACL, meaning the director could make radical changes in funding decisions at any time. These are not formula grants that are mandated to be distributed based on eligibility category and a specific algorithm. These are all competitively awarded

research grants. So it's actually very good news that the career staff -- and I've got the two key leaders listed here -- are running the show and have complete control and influence over the funding opportunities that are going out the door.

Kristi Hill is the acting Director and really the administrative lead for the office. She's been with the agency for a number of years, used to run the small business innovation grant program many years ago for the agency, so she's got tremendous experience and is a great and seasoned leader, has tremendous personal integrity leading the agency. Director Phil Beatty really is in charge of the content and is making all of the decisions as to what the agency is funding, what the requirements of those funding opportunities are, what the amounts of those funding opportunities are, and how they are distributed. This 111 -- almost \$112 million appropriation is, as I said, relative good news. It's good to see the appropriation increasing. But it is challenging. The need is tremendous for this kind of applied research. There are programs and grants that NIDILRR funds that no other agency in the federal government does. The good news is there are a number of external advocates that are really pushing for increased funding and have been successful, including some within the AUCD network in recent years, but really for them to fund new projects in a different subject means that they're discontinuing funding for projects that have come before, which brings us to the next slide.

And that is the NIDILRR funding philosophy. There's a very strong sense of history and continuity within the agency. There are no wild swings in area of focus or shifts in dollars from year to year. The specific funding mechanisms that we'll talk about in a bit do not change. Those are static. When I talk about commitment to longitudinal programs, there are some, especially the model systems programs, which target individuals with spinal cord injury, traumatic brain injury, and burns, largely from a clinical perspective, there are databases that in some cases are going back close to 40 years where they've developed common data elements across 16 different programs across the country. They're partnering with the VA to look at those with brain and spinal injuries who are coming back from war situations and increasing that database. So there's a strong commitment to a number of historic programs. And as I said, there's no wide swings in funding or focus.

There has been, as I mentioned earlier, an increased focus on knowledge translation. There's a mandate in all grants that NIDILRR funds. Years ago we used to call it dissemination. We now know that there's a science around knowledge translation and bringing constituencies in on the front end of research and development projects to have them provide input on what's useful as to what information will be needed once the projects are completed. And there's often not enough money in the grants to do that in a meaningful and constructive way. You'll see when we get to the funded opportunities for this fiscal year, the agency five years ago began funding mini-grants to previous grantees, so a previously funded NIDILRR grant recipient could apply for additional funds to assist in this KT function. So the research has been done. It just needs to be translated and broadcast to different stakeholder groups.

New investments do occur, but this is done thoughtfully. I think a good example under the current administration, given the focus on the Secretary of HHS and the White House on opioids and the opioid crisis, we did see a couple of years ago some additional funds that were redirected at NIDILRR to address the opioid crisis. So this does occur and there are new funding opportunities that develop, but it really has been for a long time a zero-sum game where if something new is going to be funded, then something that has been previously been funded will no longer be receiving attention and further research. Next slide.

So before we get into the specific funding mechanisms, just know that there really are two different opportunities. This is how NIDILRR looks at the world. There are agency-directed funding opportunities that are very specific that are targeting a specific subpopulation or a specific area. And the example here that's being funded in FY20, chronic disease management for people with traumatic brain injury. Now, there's wide variation in ideas and proposals and even subpopulations within the population of traumatic brain injury that could be considered and would be welcomed by the department, but this is distinct from the field-initiated opportunities that are made available where it's really a generic priority in a given domain area. And this disability and rehabilitation research program, which is one of the specific funding mechanisms we'll talk about in just a second, really that opportunity is just listed under the broad domain category of health and function and ideas and proposals are welcome, and the cream rises to the top, and the highest scores will be awarded the funding. So a combination of what the agency sees as priorities balanced with wanting to leave things open and really just get the best ideas from the field as to what should be funded and let the peer-review process sort that out in the case of the latter. Next slide, please.

So let's begin to talk about the funding mechanisms. And the first and largely these are in size order. So the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Centers. And I won't read it to you here, but the broad focus is on developing new technologies that will assist people with disabilities living in the community. This can be research on existing technologies. This can be the development of new technologies, proposals can combine in these funding opportunities, both research and development if that's something that they are interested in. In terms of scale, these grants are \$925,000 a year, and they run for five years. And the expectations that go with these different funding mechanisms also increase as the amount of the dollars increase. So these RERCs or Rehab Engineering Research Centers, they need to have multiple research projects. There's a training component where they are bringing doctoral students or post-docs and a mandatory training component where this capacity building that I mentioned earlier as an area of focus is incorporated into the funding mechanism. Technical assistance serving as a center of excellence and a resource to the entire country. The knowledge translation component that I mentioned before is also an integral part of the RERCs and their funding mandates. There's also a mandate to partner with people with disabilities and other stakeholder groups and to conduct a state of the state -- I'm sorry, state of

the science conference in year 4 of the five-year funded grant period. So lots of obligations. We often see in these RERCs multiple institutions that are submitting together as partners. That's not always true. But it is not uncommon to see that.

Due to, I think, the technical nature of these proposals or what can be the technical nature of these proposals, they receive, in some cases, not very many applications. So if we look at all the different funding mechanisms, the RERCs receive the fewest number of proposals submitted. So one way to look at it is your odds are greater, but the expectations are high given the technical nature of the funding category as well as the requirements involved. Next slide, please.

And I should also say those RERCs often are agency-directed rather than field-initiated initiatives. So you'll see when we get to the FY20 funding opportunities that there are a few RERCs that are not field initiated or generic opportunities. They are agency directed. That's also true for this next funding mechanism, the Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers. They are almost always agency directed and with very specific focus in mind. These are funded also for five years at \$825,000 to \$850,000 per year. And many of the same requirements that I just talked about with the rehabilitation engineering and research centers also apply here. Multiple research or development projects are expected. The training component is also expected. The technical assistance component, the knowledge translation component, partnering with people with disabilities and their representatives and other stakeholder groups also mandated as well as the state of the science conference that is held in year 4 of the grant-funded period.

The number of applications or proposals submitted really depends on the number of -- or I'm sorry, the specific content area. There are a number that are being competed this year. We do see many more submissions, have seen many more submissions historically at NIDILRR in this category than in the RERC category. Next slide, please.

And I should say there are a number of AUCD network members that have been very successful in receiving the RRTC grants. Like the RERCs, it's not uncommon to see partnering institutions or even subcontractor relationships with individuals from other institutions in a meaningful way, given the expertise of individuals and focus of the individual funding opportunity. So that's something that I would strongly suggest people consider.

The Disability and Rehabilitation Research Program is by far the most frequently used at NIDILRR. These tend to be for \$500,000 a year for five years. In terms of the expectations, there are still multiple projects requested but not nearly what's expected in the RERC or the RRTC categories. Typically you'll see one or two, sometimes three, but that's a stretch, research projects or development projects submitted as a part of a DRRP proposal, but there is an expectation for multiple projects unless it is specifically outlined that one is acceptable in a detailed funding opportunity. There is not a training component that is mandated as a part of these DRRP programs. There just aren't necessarily the dollars to do that. There's some TA that's expected but not nearly the amount in terms of serving as a resource for the broader community.

There is an expectation that funded projects coordinate with other like-funded projects if those projects exist, and those will be identified by the funding officer, the project officer at NIDILRR after the project is awarded. This expectation of partnering with people with disabilities and stakeholder groups as well as the knowledge, translation, expectation applies across all funding categories. And, again, given the dollars associated, there's no expectation of any kind of state of the science conference that's associated with the specific funding mechanism. Next slide, please.

The ADA National Network -- and, again, this is something that's mandated by federal statute, federal code. There are ten regional centers across the country and at least one of those is housed at a current AUCD network site in the Midwest. These grants run for five years. They're a million dollars, and really these are technical assistance and training grants to implement successfully the Americans With Disabilities Act. There also in recent years has been a research expectation placed on the national network so that -- and those ideas are left to the respondents to determine. So the requirements that need to be met to become an ADA National Network member are agency directed, but the research projects within the priority are field initiated. So those can be determined and created by the respondents themselves.

There is some turnover but little turnover in these national network grants that happens with every five-year cycle. They also function as a network and get together twice a year to have project director meetings and share knowledge and meet with program staff at ACL to ensure that they're meeting expectations and deliverables consistent with what the agency is looking for. But these regional sites, they serve employers. They serve governments. They serve individuals, small businesses, giving advice on both the rights and responsibilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Next slide, please.

So I've briefly mentioned the Model Systems Programs. Already there's a strong agency commitment to these, occurring in the spinal cord, traumatic brain injury, and burn diagnoses categories. There's an interest in the part -- on the part of the agency to increase the number of burn sites. Currently there are just four compared to the 16 traumatic brain injury centers and 14 spinal cord injury model centers. While there's an identified need for it, the dollars just aren't there right now in order to do that. Again, these systems meet together, have a governance structure, and do a very good job of coordinating and sharing knowledge between and among their projects. Next slide, please.

Switzer Fellowships. And those funding levels, by the way, range from between \$430,000 to about \$480,000 for the model systems. So moving into the capacity-building space with specific-funded projects, the Switzer Fellowships are designed for those who have terminal degrees or equivalents that qualify for merit fellowship, post-doc fellowship of \$70,000 per year. They do run for a period of one year. They can be extended, if need be, for a number of months. There's also a distinguished Switzer Fellowship funded at \$80,000. Those are for early career professionals who have, I believe, at least seven years functioning as a researcher, but really the goal here is to build the bench at an individual level. These are awarded to individuals in order to fund research



projects, independent research projects, that they might have. There is a requirement that you not receive any additional federal funding while you are a recipient of these fellowships, if you're thinking about that for yourself or for others at your institution. Next slide, please.

So the Advanced Rehabilitation Research Training Program, again, falls under capacity building, although these are awarded to institutions. They are \$200,000 a year grants, and they run for five years. It is not uncommon to see a recipient of a research and training center grant that we talked about earlier also applied for and receive advanced rehabilitation research training program dollars in order to capitalize on the work that's being done in that research and training center. Next slide, please.

Small Business Innovation Program. I realize this doesn't really apply to the AUCD Network, but there are two phases of grants here. And in order to qualify, you need to qualify as a small business under the Small Business Administration Regulations and Guidelines. There are small grants that are awarded in phase 1. And this year there are six-month grants of \$100,000 that are being awarded. Phase 2 grants are much larger, can run to \$500,000 per year for multiyear grants. But proof of concept is needed and success in phase 1 needs to be demonstrated before you can move on to phase II.

When I was director, we were seeing a lot of new apps that were being developed and proposed under this program. I think what frustrated me was the developers were not always including individuals with disabilities as a part of their projects to both determine need and to use people with disabilities throughout the process to evaluate the usefulness and effectiveness of the projects, although I'm told that that has since started to improve. Next slide, please.

And finally, the most popular and most competitive of the -- all of the funding mechanisms that NIDILRR has, the field-initiated projects, these are often -- the funding opportunity comes out very early in the fiscal year. It has opened and closed for this year. And in a typical year, the agency funds between 15 and 18 awards. These are \$200,000 a year for three years. The expectations that I talked about before, yes, the partnering with other organizations and other similar projects that may have been funded by NIDILRR is an expectation engaging people with disabilities and other stakeholder groups is an expectation, but none of the training and TA expectations are associated with these grants because of the small dollar amounts.

In terms of numbers of applications, it's not uncommon to see a couple hundred come in during an open call for these proposals. And also not uncommon for funding levels above 97 or 98 to be the cutoff point. As I said, they are very competitive, but I don't want that to dissuade you, especially if you have projects with pilot data that you're looking to take to the next level. It's not uncommon to see respondents or grant writers come in, get a successful field-initiated project and then move on to take that research to the next level with the \$500,000 a year for five-year drip projects or the disability rehabilitation research program funding mechanism. So, yes, the bar is high, but this is a great entry point and certainly worth doing if only for the comments that you'll get

in peer review, and we'll talk a little bit more about peer review in a second here. Next slide, please.

So the funding priorities for 2020, you can see the different funding mechanisms that I've talked about and the dollars associated with them here. The RERCs at the top and the different categories that they're asking for proposals in. And I do have a link at the end of this document so you can look at the details of specific proposals if you have interest in any of them. The rehabilitation research and training center. People who are blind or low vision that would fit into that category is defined as The Rehab Act, a more generic employment policy research and training center opportunity. Health and function of people with psychiatric disabilities. So here notice that they're combining one of the broad domain areas with a specific subpopulation. This is not uncommon. You will not see this year a focus on individuals with developmental disabilities associated with any of these funding opportunities. That doesn't mean that they don't exist. There are currently funded projects related to community living and participation as well as employment for individuals with developmental disabilities that I am aware of. And the last one here, home and community-based outcomes research and measurement, something that I funded initially when I was director, and I'm glad to see that they're re-competing it because this is desperately needed to help us define quality outcomes for people with disabilities in those community-based service categories. Next slide, please.

Again, I mentioned disability And Rehabilitation Research Program, the most commonly used funding mechanism. You can see multiple opportunities here and a mix of the generic field-initiated as well as the agency-directed. So you can see that there are four grants that they're looking to let in the community living and participation category, broadly. Health and function. Similarly, a total of four, \$500,000 each for five years. You should know that many more proposals are received in the health and function category than in the community living and participation category. So in terms of your odds of success, if you have something that is health and function related but can be described legitimately in a way that focuses on community living and participation outcomes as well as health and function outcomes, my advice would be to use that community living and participation category.

The determination as to which domain area is allocated and selected is left entirely up to the respondent or the potential grantee. There is not a rigorous evaluation at the agency level as to whether something is appropriately placed within a health and function category versus the community living and participation category. So that is left to the skill of the grant writers and the peer-review process to determine whether you have made your case or not.

Moving on to the knowledge translation -- sorry, if we can go back. My mistake. Additional knowledge translation funds here. These are those smaller grants for previously funded NIDILRR grantees to really focus on the knowledge translation piece over the next five years for them, specific knowledge translation opportunity and employment. And a couple of others here that I won't necessarily read to you. The Switzer Fellowship. There are six of them that they're looking to fund this year. Those are also categorized by the domain

areas. So if you're considering a Switzer Fellowship, know that you'll need to identify whether it's an employment health and function or a community living participation opportunity. Next slide, please.

The institution-funded capacity-building projects that we mentioned earlier. The agency is looking to do four of them. One in each of the major domain areas as well as a policy research fellowship, which I think is also needed. Very good to see. The small business innovation program as I mentioned before, ten grants of \$100,000 each for a six-month duration. And the field-initiated opportunity, the open opportunity that I mentioned has closed. I believe the minority-serving institutions, if you remember I talked about those dedicated Section 21 funds. A specific percent of the overall appropriation needs to go to historically underserved populations and minority-serving institutions, they are looking to fund two of those, one research opportunity and one development opportunity. Next slide.

So where can you find these opportunities? Go to grants.gov. The CFDA number that you can plug in is listed here. You can also just plug in NIDILRR, N-i-d-i-l-r-r in the keyword, and you'll get the current funding opportunities as well. If you want them delivered to your mailbox as they're released by the agency, you can sign up at naric.com which I also have listed in the resources after my proposal. That's the online archives of NIDILRR-funded projects. I believe it goes back almost 30 years now. Not the complete 40 of the agency's existence but close. It will give you a great idea what's been funded if you're looking for more detail on what's out there and what's been successful. Next slide.

Finally, and very briefly, the peer-review process, any of who you have been through this process know that it can be incredibly painful and all it takes is for one inaccurate comment from a reviewer who didn't really understand your proposal to throw you under the bus and out of contention for funding. At NIDILRR, it is rigorous and imperfect. They are always looking to improvement. It is governed specifically by HHS regulation. And again, I've included that process as an appendices here in the resources if you're interested in how they're approaching it, I would encourage you to look at that. It is an independent review, which is very different than any other part of ACL. It's not uncommon for other parts of ACL to have agency staff who are doing peer review. NIDILRR's is exclusively external, experts in the field, as well as individuals with disabilities, parents, those with lived experience and connection with disability, depending on the domain and the funding category and opportunity, specific opportunity. They try very hard to put together a credible panel of experts, given the ways that the proposals are divided for consideration. I found it to be a process with high integrity. You'll get very detailed comments as a result of your proposal submissions. It's not uncommon at all for people to submit multiple times, make improvements based on their comments by reviewers and to then be funded in the next cycle of opportunities.

And as I say here, the best way to understand the NIDILRR review process, they are always looking for volunteers. It's a two-day commitment. Actually, I think they've gotten it down to a day and a half. In terms of actual meetings in addition to the proposal and review time that you'll need to spend on

your own. I found it to be incredibly worthwhile when I did it many years ago. I know there are a number of our network members who do it.

To address what I often hear and I hear it every time I go to a network function, you know, the fix is in, incumbents always win. That is not true. Incumbents get busted often, and it's happening with greater regularity now than even during my time when I was director and prior talking to previous directors. The highest score does win. The cream does rise to the top. Sometimes the difference in scores is marginal. You can call it statistically insignificant. There were \$900,000 grants that were awarded and lost within a margin of .1, .2 in terms of score when I was director. So the high scores do win. The agency regulations do allow for funding out of order in specific circumstances. The career staff is incredibly reluctant to do it. I never did it. When I was director, I thought it would threaten the integrity of the process. And I don't see that happening for any reason in the near future, not under the existing career staff. Obviously I can't speak to future political appointees and what they might bring to the table. Next slide.

And I think I'll stop there. These are just resources that I've mentioned throughout the proposal. I've talked a little longer than I had intended. I apologize. If I don't get to your question, I'm happy to have a personal email exchange or conversation with you. Folks know where to find me. So Anna, why don't we throw it open for questions, and thanks for listening.

>> MODERATOR: Thanks, John. So we do have time for questions. There are three ways you can ask a question. If you are using your computer microphone, can you raise your hand, which is the little icon above the slides. And I will unmute you. If you're on the phone, press star pound and you will be unmuted. Or you can type in the chat box which is to the right of your slides, and I will read the questions out loud. I'll give it a second for folks to type. Can you put up the back -- the slide -- there you go. We're going to put it right there.

An informative presentation. Thank you.

>> JOHN TSCHIDA: And Anna, we'll make this presentation available on our website, is that right?

>> MODERATOR: Correct. This presentation, you can actually download it right now. It's below the chat box if you hit the download button, you can download it right now. It also will be on the event page where you registered along with the archive recording, which will be available probably by the end of the day tomorrow.

Can you talk a little more about NIDILRR's emphasis on research related to elderly persons?

>> JOHN TSCHIDA: Sure. Good question. And as you may or may not know, there have been historically funded projects related to aging with specific conditions, some generic research and training centers in particular on aging with a disability. We have seen a number of proposals, especially in the model systems. Some of the work that Jim Krause is doing at the University of South Carolina related to aging with a spinal cord injury I think at a higher level, there is a level of collaboration that's happening within the agency between NIDILRR and the policy staff and NIDILRR and the aging division where they are looking at

potential funding opportunities, certainly increased collaboration that's happening in terms of aging in a disability context.

The Associate Research Director who was hired shortly before I departed, her name is Sara Ruiz. She came to the agency from Newark. Her personal interests and level of expertise is at the intersection of aging and disability policy and aging and disability research. So I would encourage you to contact her, and I'd be happy to make an introduction if you wanted to learn more at a more detailed level as to exactly what's happening there within the agency and what they're thinking about for the future. I hope that answers your question.

>> MODERATOR: We have another question. How would you differentiate the NIDILRR focus from NIH? Specifically, how would you take an NIH idea, not basic science idea, but more health services and make it fit for NIDILRR specifically?

>> JOHN TSCHIDA: Good question. And I should have mentioned this during the peer-review discussion, but that's another distinction between NIH and NIDILRR where NIH has standing review panels. NIDILRR does not. NIH review panels, while certainly there are Ph.D.s in the mix, there's also a lot of MDs. The NIDILRR expert panels are overwhelmingly stacked with those who are doing applied research in a community context for people with disabilities. Some of that may be in a clinical context rather than a community living and participation context. But that is certainly true.

You know, if you haven't looked at the evaluation criteria and a specific NIDILRR funding priority versus an NIH funding priority, I would strongly encourage you to do so. I think there's a lot more flexibility within the NIDILRR funding mechanisms, especially if you're looking at something from a health and function standpoint, and I'm making an assumption there based on the question related to NIH. I think you'll find like-minded reviewers. I'd like to talk with you more about that and specifically what types of proposals you're considering and what you've submitted historically at NIH and how that might translate in a NIDILRR context. So if you'd like to follow up with me directly, I'm happy to have a deeper and broader conversation.

>> MODERATOR: There's another question in the chat box from Krys. You mentioned this topic, but could you clarify, John. Is it acceptable to become a peer reviewer for NIDILRR during the same time period you submit an application to NIDILRR?

>> JOHN TSCHIDA: Yeah. So one of the things you need to do when you submit your proposals for purposes of peer review is list any potential conflicts. So yes, it's possible to be a reviewer. Obviously you won't be reviewing your own proposals, and you probably won't be reviewing within the same funding mechanism that you submitted your proposal in, but it is certainly possible, and it does happen.

>> MODERATOR: We'll give it a second. Someone else is typing. This will be our last question.

>> JOHN TSCHIDA: And I mentioned that NIDILRR is always looking for qualified reviewers. It is a great way to learn about the process, to learn more

about the agency. Personally, as I mentioned, I found the experience invaluable and helped me to be a better grant writer.

>> MODERATOR: Last question. There seem to be a fear of RFPs in the area of employment. Do you think that reflects on NIDILRR's priority?

>> JOHN TSCHIDA: You know, I think given where they are in their funding cycles, if you look back at some previous recent funding, you'll see additional employment-related -- additional employment-related-funded projects. Again, I do think community living and participation is on the rise. I did see, during my tenure, some employment specifically VR-related centers that were discontinued, and that was an intentional decision because of some specific funding opportunities that I thought the field needed.

You can go to [naric.com](http://naric.com) and look at all of the currently funded projects. You can sort by domain area. So -- and it will -- it will tell you the total number of current projects. I think you'll see today -- well, based on FY19 grants, that health and function will be first. Community living and participation second. And employment third.

>> MODERATOR: Great. All right. Well, thank you, John, for an awesome presentation. Thank you, everyone, for attending this webinar. This webinar has been recorded, and it will be archived at the webinar library at [AUCD.org](http://AUCD.org). If you could just take a few moments to complete our survey which will pop up on your screen when I close out this webinar, we'd greatly appreciate it. Thanks again and have a great rest of your day.

>> JOHN TSCHIDA: Thanks, everybody.

[ Concluded at 5:00 P.M. ]