

ABSTRACT

Project Work Opportunity through Resource and Capacity Building (WORC): Transition Age African American Youth with Emotional, Intellectual, and Behavioral Disabilities

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The Department of Rehabilitation and Disability Studies (DRDS) at Southern University (SUBR), Baton Rouge, is requesting for a three-year (2013-2016) funding of the Project WORC. This application is under the category NIDRR--Disability and Rehabilitation Research Projects and Centers Program--Minority-Serving Institution (MSI) Field-Initiated (FI) Projects (**CFDA Number: 84.133G-4 Research**). The project, being submitted by a Historically Black College and University (**HBCU**), addresses the **purpose of FIP program** by developing methods and procedures that maximize the full inclusion and integration into society, employment, independent living, family support, and economic and social self-sufficiency of African Americans with emotional, intellectual, and behavioral (EIB) disabilities. The National Longitudinal Transition Survey-2 reports that a large percentage of transition-age youth (16-24 years of age) do not complete high school, enroll in postsecondary institutions, and/or obtain meaningful employment. About 20% of the U.S. population is transition-age youth and young adults constituting one of the most ethnically diverse and fastest growing groups (Blum & Qureshi, 2011). In spite of legislative focus on employment of those with disabilities, August, 2012 employment rate for transition-age youth with disabilities was one third that of people without disabilities (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012). About 56% of those with emotional and behavioral disorders who receive special education services complete high school as compared to 70% of all youth with disabilities. African Americans make up approximately 47% of the students with emotional and behavior disorders and 57% of those with intellectual disabilities.

Two years after high school graduation, African American transition-age youth with disabilities are less likely to secure employment than Whites and Asians (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2005). Therefore, a sizable portion continues to depend on costly disability benefits (SSA, 2011). This figure will only increase if youth with disabilities do not receive transition supports coupled with vocational rehabilitation (VR) facilitating employment (Fraker, 2011). Vocational, educational, and social transitions to adulthood can be challenging for many youth. In addition to the usual issues encountered by all transition-age youth, those with disabilities report challenges related to health, social and environmental isolation, and lack of access to services and supports (Silverstein, 2009). In spite of these hindrances and their cumulative effects on the target population over their life span, there exists a severe knowledge gap on evidence-based techniques of assisting this group in their efforts to improve employment and earning opportunities in adulthood (Fraker et al., 2012). The **goal** of the project, **collaboratively designed with Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS)**, is to construct and validate a service delivery model that has the potential to enable AA transition-age youth with EIB disabilities to achieve five guideposts that can steer families, service systems, and youth through the transition processes: (1) school-based preparatory experiences, (2) career preparation and work-based learning experiences, (3) youth development and leadership, (4) connecting activities and supports such tutoring and mentoring, and (5) family or caring adult involvement. Special attention will be on issues such as, the importance of exposure to employment, development of independent living skills, and absolute necessity to provide culturally appropriate services. Project WORC is designed to improve outcome in the **domain of employment** as specified in **NIDRR's Long Range Plan 2013-2017**. Goal will be achieved via: **Objective 1:** Offering of community-based and self-determined career planning and implementation. **Objective 2:**

Provision of transition services to move youth from financial dependency to self-sufficiency.

Objective 3: Identification of modes of integrating needs of employers and youth with disabilities so that quality employment can be achieved.

A **true-experimental design** will be used to evaluate the effect of Project WORC on self-determination (SD) to work, stages of change (SOC) work participation, job-seeking self-efficacy outcome expectation, actual job seeking behaviors, and summer employment outcomes of 220 African American high school students with EIB disabilities who are LRS clients.

Hypothesis I – Students who participate in Project WORC (experimental group) will have higher levels of SD to work (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) and SOC work participation than students in the control group (business as usual group). **Hypothesis II** – The

experimental group will have higher levels of actual job seeking behaviors than students in the control group (business as usual group). **Hypothesis III** – The experimental group will have higher levels of summer employment (employment status, duration of employment, average hours worked per week, and average earnings per week) than students in the control group.

Hypothesis IV – There will be no association between gender, functional disability, SD to work (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), SOC work participation and actual job seeking behavior and summer employment outcomes. **Five interventions** for the experimental group:

comprehensive assessment via *Transition Planning Inventory - Updated Version*, community conversations and resource mapping, classroom curriculum, student rotation and job placement - career exploration, and social validity. Pre- and post-intervention **data collected measures:**

World Health Organization Disability Assessment Schedule 2.0, Behavioral Regulation of Work Motivation Questionnaire, Job Seeking Self-Efficacy Scale, Working Alliance Inventory-Short Revised, and Stages of Change–Work Participation Scale. Data analysis: Hotelling's T^2 test,

independent samples t-test, and logistic regression. Formative and summative evaluations, following **NIDRR Logic Model** and **Goal Attainment Scaling** will be conducted by an external evaluator and overseen by the Advisory Council. Data collection and analysis will address **GPRA measures** (advance knowledge through capacity building, advanced knowledge through research, and advance knowledge through translation and dissemination). The highly qualified and culturally diverse project staff possesses a total of 125 years of experience in VR education, research, and service delivery. The quality and depth of research, dissemination (transition manual), and evaluation will be augmented by the project's long standing partnerships with LRS, local school boards, and selected employers.