

Analyzing Relationships Between Disability, Rehabilitation, and Work

Graduate Student Research Program: Information Session

Thursday, June 20, 2024

Jeffrey Hemmeter: Good afternoon. My name is Jeffrey Hemmeter, and I am the Deputy Associate Commissioner for the Office of Research, Demonstration, and Employment Support at the Social Security Administration. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Analyzing Relationships Between Disability, Rehabilitation, and Work, or ARDRAW, Graduate Student Research Program Information Session. Today, you'll hear about the opportunity to serve as a grant management organization with ARDRAW. The grant management organization will administer ARDRAW grants which will award \$15,000 stipends to graduate level students to conduct supervised, independent research, designed to foster new analyses of work, rehabilitation, and disability issues which may develop innovative and fresh perspectives on disability. Thank you for joining. Let me start with a brief background on our disability programs in our office. In addition to the Retirement and Survivors programs, SSA administers the Social Security Disability Insurance, or SSDI, and Supplement Security Income, or SSI, programs. We provide income security to roughly 8.5 million people in the SSDI program, and about 4 million working-aged people in the SSI program. While we have a restrict definition of disability, we also have policies and supports to help people who may want to work. In the research base, we have also been given the authority to conduct research to improve the administration and effectiveness of our disability programs. SSA's Office of Research, Demonstration, and Employment Support, which was responsible for leading the ARDRAW program, leads the agency's return to work efforts through policy and program support. We also conduct a range of research and demonstrations to provide evidence for disability policymakers about potential

program changes. ARDRAW fits well in this space, encouraging new researchers to address topics that are relevant to our disability program, our beneficiaries, and our employment support efforts. Additionally, the Biden Administration has issued several Executive Orders to advance racial equity, support underserved communities, and increase access to federal funding opportunities, and ARDRAW is an opportunity to help us meet these goals. One of the objectives of ARDRAW is to increase the recruitment and participation of students of color and other underrepresented populations in the areas -- the research areas of work, rehabilitation, and disability, for the purpose of fostering new and inclusive perspectives on disability research. We hope this will help us develop a new cadre of researchers reflecting a wide range of experiences and perspectives. We've taken steps to develop contacts and increase outreach to a broader range of organizations this year under this competition, including Institutions Serving Students of Color, or ISSCs, and tribes. We're happy to see that we have a diverse group of participants with us today. Before we begin, I'd like to go over a few housekeeping items. First, this event is being recorded. The recording will be posted on SSA.gov as a reference for potential applicants who could not join us today. The chat and microphone features have been disabled. And if you are dialed in, please take a moment to mute your phone now. If you would like closed captioning, please go to the MS Teams toolbar. There, you should see a three-dots icon which means "More." Select that icon, scroll down to the "Language and speech" option, then select "Turn on live captions." Please take a moment to do so now. Okay. So, if you have any questions about ARDRAW that are not answered during this webinar, please feel free to reach out to our ARDRAW team via email at SSA.ARDRAW@ssa.gov. That's SSA.ARDRAW@ssa.gov. And with that, I'll turn it over to Sharyn Dougherty. Thank you.

Sharyn Dougherty: Thank you, Jeffrey. Hi, everyone. My name is Sharyn, and I am a Social Science Research Analyst here at SSA, and I will be providing you with an overview of the ARDRAW program. Next slide. So, the request for applications is now open. We are currently accepting applications for the program management organization. The applications must be submitted through Grants.gov by 11:59 Eastern Standard Time on August 2nd. The full text of the RFA can be found on Grants.gov using the Funding Opportunity Number which would be ARDRAW, so ARDRAW-DRW-24-001. Next slide. So, the purpose of the ARDRAW Graduate Student Research Program is to fund graduate student research in academic areas related to work, rehabilitation, and disability issues. We really hope to cultivate new scholars in the field of disability research and to increase the recruitment and participation of students of color and other underrepresented populations in this field of research to foster new and inclusive perspectives on disability research. Next slide. So, the ARDRAW program has two components. The first is the component with the program management organization who will be responsible for managing the program and awarding stipends to the individual graduate students. And then there's the graduate student component for the students who will be conducting the research on these disability-related issues. This solicitation, however, is for the program management portion of the program. Next slide, please. All right. So, within the application, the organizations must identify an individual or team within the organization who will serve as the program management lead team, so these individuals, or this team, must have the relevant experience needed to coordinate and supervise a disability research program. In addition, the team will be responsible for managing the program and graduate students located at various institutions across the country. Next slide. Okay. All right. So, on this slide, you'll see a list of the tasks and deliverables for the awardee. I'm not going to go through each point, but I will highlight just a

few. So, because we are interested in having a very diverse cohort of graduate students, we are very interested in the awardee developing benchmarks to increase the diversity of our applicants across minority-serving institutions in the U.S. We also want to ensure that there is support offered to the graduate students from the beginning of the application process through their time in the program if they are selected to receive a stipend. We also hope that the awardee will be responsible for monitoring progress on the student projects and providing any support that may be needed to overcome challenges that may arise. The awardee will be responsible for developing research report guidelines for the students to submit their proposals, quarterly progress reports, and their final reports. And finally, we are very interested in the grantee collecting data for program evaluation purposes, [inaudible] they will be responsible for submitting an evaluation report each year. Next slide. Okay, so this award falls under the cooperative agreement. And so, a cooperative agreement is a legal instrument of financial assistance between the Federal awarding agency or a pass-through entity, and a non-Federal entity, and it's used to enter into the relationship for the principal purpose of which is to transfer anything of value from the Federal awarding agency to the non-Federal entity carrying out the purpose authorized by the law of the United States. So, a cooperative agreement differs from a grant in that it provides substantial involvement between the Federal agency and the awardee. So, the awardee will work very closely with us to ensure that everything goes smoothly with the program. And so under this cooperative agreement, the program management organization will make sub-awards to the graduate students. Next slide, please. So, this award is for a 5-year project; however, we will provide the funding for this grant on a yearly basis. Each year, the grantee will be responsible for submitting a non-competing continuation application for each of the four additional years, which will be subject to review and approval by SSA. And the awards

are contingent on availability of funds. Next slide, please. So, the annual funding for this grant award will be \$900,000, which includes funding for the grant management organization and the graduate student stipends. So each year, \$375,000 of the \$900,000 award must be used towards activities for awarded student researchers. So, the student stipends are set at \$15,000 each. And the grantee must budget to award up to 25 scholars per year. Next slide, please. So, cost sharing of at least 5% is required for the program management component of the award. The total approved cost of the project is the sum of the Federal share and the non-Federal share. The non-Federal share may be cash or in-kind contributions. There is an 8% cap on Facilities and Administration for this program. The grantee may use the unpaid portion of Facilities and Administration to fulfill the cost share requirement under this grant. Next slide, please. So, only organizations in the United States are eligible to apply. This includes research organizations; colleges and universities; University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities; Leadership Education in Neurodevelopment Disability programs; intellectual and developmental disability research centers, and other similar programs; and associations of research organizations and universities. Next slide, please. In addition, Institutions Serving Students of Color who have the Federal designations are also eligible to apply, so that includes: HBCUs; Tribal Colleges and Universities; Hispanic-Serving Institutions; Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving institutions; Predominantly Black Institutions; Alaska Native-serving institutions and Native Hawaiian-serving institutions; and Native American-serving nontribal institutions. Next slide, please. So, the proposal application has five components which include: The project narrative; the attachments to the project narrative; the "Application for Federal Assistance;" the "Budget Information Form;" and the "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," if that applies. The applications lacking any of the five parts will be

deemed incomplete and may be disqualified prior to the technical review process. There is more detailed information within the RFA that you can access on Grants.gov. Next slide, please. So, within the project narrative, there are a few components. So, the project design, which is the Project Plan, which I'll get into a little bit later. There is the Organizational Capacity and Quality of Key Personnel, and the Organizational Experience and Partnerships. You can also use this outline as section headers within your project narrative. Next slide, please. So, the project plan will provide you with the space to describe the activities and budget for the period of performance. Include a detailed timeline. Include metrics for student engagement and outreach. And you will be able to describe the strategy for self-monitoring, risk management, and continuous quality improvement. Next slide, please. Within the Organizational Capacity section, you will be able to share how the organization can effectively manage and carry out the programmatic, fiscal, administrative, and independent evaluation-related activities. Within the Key Personnel section under that section, you must identify a Program Management Lead, an Outreach Coordinator, and a Leadership Team. And the resumés of these individuals must be included as attachments to the project narrative. Next slide, please. So, Organizational Experience and Partnerships. This section will allow for you to share how your organization has relevant experience operating a similar project of the same size -- or similar size and complexity. And then you will provide any documentation for sub-awardees and that would, you know, outline their substantial commitment and active involvement. Next slide, please. So, the next section will be the required attachments for the Project Narrative. So, this includes the Project Logic Model, information related to staffing, so that would include one-page resumés as well as an organization chart, and Indirect Cost Rate Agreements if you are requesting indirect costs higher than 10%. Next slide, please. So, the final step before submitting the complete application

would be to submit a Letter of Intent to Apply. So, we strongly encourage any interested organizations to submit a Letter of Intent. This should be submitted via an email to SSA.ARDRAW@ssa.gov on or prior to July 8, 2024. Please use "Intent to Apply" in the subject line. And within the letter, you should disclose, you know, your name and address, identify any project partners, the total anticipated budget, and just a general overview of your program plan. You can also see page 9 in the RFA for more information about the Letter of Intent. And again, the application is due on August 2, 2024. With that, I will now turn it over to our Grant Officer, Dionne Mitchell.

Dionne Mitchell: Next slide, please. Next slide, please. Okay. Thank you, Sharyn. My name is Dionne Mitchell. And on behalf of the Office of Acquisition and Grants, let me say thank you for attending this session. I am a Grants Officer in OAG, where we're responsible for the business management aspects of grants and cooperative agreements such as ARDRAW. Today, I'd like to discuss some technical aspects of the application process. We will look at key systems, forms, and policies. Okay, so, if you are here, I'm guessing you already are familiar with one system, and that system is Grants.gov. You knew to save a search using SSA or ARDRAW as your key word and you found the ARDRAW application. I encourage you to continue to use SSA searches so that you will be alerted about future grant programs at SSA. Also, as a Grant Officer, sometimes I have to go in and update the current solicitation, so you'll also be notified via Grants.gov. Now that you've found us, if you've applied before, the first thing you'll notice is our new look. At SSA, we are updating all grant application packages to make them easier to read and to assure that you submit exactly what we need. This is our first attempt at updating the ARDRAW application package and we hope to make our applications even more user-friendly in the months to come. Grants.gov is the website used by all Federal agencies to inform and allow

eligible applicants to apply for grants. Not only will you find current and past solicitations, the site has other helpful grant-writing resources. For example, the "How-To Blog," and the "Grant Writing Basics." If you're not familiar with Federal grants, these are wonderful aids. Just as we're updating our applications and websites, so is Grants.gov. So be sure to familiarize yourself with that site and watch as many of their training videos as you can. We will make the application process -- this will make the application process run more smoothly. Please turn to the next slide.

All right, great. Registering in Grants.gov has many steps. First, you'll need to obtain a Login.gov account. Several government software platforms use Login.gov as a secure, private way to access online services. It protects user accounts via heightened security measures. You will also need to get your organization's UEI number from SAM.gov. I'll talk about SAM.gov more later. Next slide, please. All right. How to Apply. You must use the Workspace in Grants.gov to complete your application. So please register early. Workspace can be a little difficult for some to navigate. You cannot go on one hour before the grant is due and think that you'll be able to apply. That's just not going to happen. Workspace mirrors the pieces of the application. Sharyn talked about the 424 -- that's the face sheet, the project narrative, budget narrative. And it also allows grant teams to simultaneously access and edit these different forms within the application. You can see videos on Grants.gov for more information, and please, please, please, register early in the application process. And if you run into problems, there is a 24-hour support desk available at Support@grants.gov. They also have a phone number -- 1-800-518-4726. Next slide, please. Good ol' SAM.gov. SAM.gov is the official website of the federal government, and it is free. When you register with SAM.gov, you are assigned a UEI, or a Unique Entity Identifier. It tells us that you're authorized to do business with the federal government. To register, you will need to report your legal business name and physical address.

You may also need to show articles of incorporation, bylaws, bank statements, or tax documents. Again, registration with SAM.gov is free. Please do not be fooled by paying a scam artist. You must maintain your SAM.gov registration on an annual basis, and just like Grants.gov, it could take a few days to complete this step, so start early. The good thing about SAM is that it contains centralized information about grant recipients. Thus, all agencies can learn about your organization in one place and see any changes that you make immediately. Next slide, please. All right! On the right side of your screen, you see Financial Assistance Award registrations. When you register in SAM.gov, please click “Yes” here under Financial Award heading. This is a little confusing for some applicants because they're not used to the word "financial assistance," but when we say financial assistance, we mean a grant or a cooperative agreement. This may not make sense to you right now, but hopefully by me mentioning it, it'll save time in the future. All grants and cooperative agreements are considered financial assistance. So click “Yes.” Notice you may have fewer items to submit when applying for financial assistance versus a contract. As you can see, the list of required sections to register for a contract is much longer. Next slide, please. All right, let's talk about some key forms. Every federal agency uses pretty much the same body of forms. They call them “family.” Sharyn talked a little bit about them. Let's go in a little bit more detail. So the 424 is the face sheet, and that's your Application for Federal Assistance. There is where you tell us your name, your address, the authorized official, which is the person who can bind your organization to the terms and conditions of your award. As Sharyn so eloquently explained, it is a legal document. Then you have a space in Workspace to upload your program narrative. Next, you have the 424A, which is merely a summary of your budget. Your application will include backup documentation to this budget summary. I have had people just submit the summary, and with no backup. So please don't do that. The spreadsheet can be an

Excel spreadsheet. The next form you may or may not see -- the Assurances and certifications. As we in the federal government are trying to streamline processes and eliminate extra steps, SAM.gov recently started collecting this information. So, like I said, click "Yes" when you register for SAM.gov, and that will capture your assurances and certifications. And what those basically are, are you telling us that you will follow a broad range of federal regulations, such as: You will not use our funds for human trafficking; you will maintain a drug-free workplace; you'll follow civil rights laws; you will not text and drive while performing work on the program. So it's an interesting list of certifications, so I encourage you to look at that. The next form is the Risk Analysis Questionnaire. This tells us a bit about your ability to manage funds, your past performance, and your accounting system. That's pretty self-explanatory. So the next form is also self-explanatory. Do you lobby? Even if you don't, you need to fill this out. And don't leave it blank because the system will not allow you to submit. So you have to put N/A in the required spots on this form. It also captures your name, your address, the type of award, whether you're applying for a contract, or even a loan. So all federal agencies use this, so loans, contracts, grants. In box two of the Lobbying form, the status will be a federal action. That's, you know, once you go to the form, you'll see what I'm talking about. The type, you tell, it's a report type. This is initial filing. Again, it's pretty self-explanatory. Next slide, please. All righty. We've looked at some systems and forms. Now let's talk about grants policy. Most of what you'll need to know to stay out of trouble can be found by doing a quick search in 2 CFR 200. It is broken down into: Definitions; Provisions; Pre-Award Requirements; Cost Principles; and all the information requirements. You may have heard that OMB recently updated this. Those updates will go into effect October 1 of 2024. Some of the updates include increasing the definition of equipment from \$5,000 to \$10,000. The de minimis used to be -- well, it's still, until

October -- 10%, and it's going to go up to 15%. The single audit threshold is going to go up from \$750,000 expended to \$1 million. So that's going to lessen some grantees' burden for submitting a single audit. Just like our application packages are changing, the look of the 2 CFR 200 will start to change and incorporate more plain language. So don't be afraid of the 2 CFR. Once the changes are formally made, we will definitely let all of our grant recipients know via updating your terms and conditions of your awards, or even a bulk note. Next slide, please. All right. As a grant management officer -- and I neglected to say, the other two grant management officers are Daniel Dennis and Tonya Saunders in my office. What we do when we get applications, while Sharyn, Laura, Vince -- you may have heard these names before -- while they're looking at the program, we're looking at the budget. And we're looking to see that the items that you're requesting are necessary and reasonable for the performance of a particular program. Every program is different, but what we look at is basically the same information. First, we look for consistent policies. Does your organization normally pay for 100 days of vacation? If not, do not propose such a benefit in your application for SSA funding. You should have written policies and procedures about time and attendance, vacation, travel, et cetera. We are looking to see that you apply those policies consistently across funds, both yours and ours. After you start charging the grant, make sure you only charge allowable items, and those that occurred within the approved budget period. In other words, plan to spend funds according to what you have written in your application, what we approve, and during the time period of the program. As always, keep your records current and properly documented. Next slide, please. Okay, here are some sample -- or not sample, but these are the budget categories for any federal grant. Within your application, specifically the spreadsheet, the details -- not the summary, but the details of your budget. Under personnel, we're looking for calculations about your annual salary, the percentage

that the person will be working on this grant. We look at the package of fringe benefits, including FICA, Medicaid, Medicare, insurance. We look at the percentage for each staff. And just as a quick note, a contractor does not get fringe benefits, because they don't work for your organization. Rather, they are contracted out. So you wouldn't have their fringe benefits on this line. You would have it under the contractual line item. For travel, if you have to go to a conference specifically related to ARDRAW, you can put that in here. You must break it down to the granular level -- include ground transportation, hotel, per diem -- you can go to the GSA site to find out what the per diem is and guesstimate for a location. Equipment is rare, because as I just said, the definition is going up to \$10,000. And not many laptops cost \$10,000, so. But you can get equipment. That's an allowable expense here. Then, under supplies, we do want you to break it out. You know, don't just put "\$50,000, office supplies." Break it out. Paper, you know, postage, stuff like that. Next slide, please. While construction is allowable on some grants, it is not allowable on this grant. So please don't put that on your budget. Under "Contracts and Consultants," you would include the consultant's name, their hourly rate, and if they're, like, some mega-expert, you know, and they charge way more than your average consultant, please, you have to justify that. So justify, justify, justify. And for your contracts, whatever you have to contract out, we like to promote free and open competition. I think the new CFR 200 is going to make some changes to this. Previously, you had to follow the federal regs. But I think they may allow you to follow your own procurement regulations. But like I said, we will let you know once the changes go into effect. Other costs on your budget will include rent, reproduction, phone, janitorial expenses. If you do request funds for rent, please include square footage, the cost per square footage, the monthly rental fee, stuff like that. Indirect is allowable. It's 15% -- it will be 15% of the modified total direct cost rate once the 2 CFR goes into effect. But right now,

it's 10%. Like Sharyn said, there is a 5% match for this program. Next slide, please. All right.

We've looked at some systems. We've looked at some policies and forms. I'm going to ask Sharyn to join me again, and if you have any questions -- there you go -- you can submit them to SSA.ARDRAW@ssa.gov. Thank you for your attention.

Sharyn Dougherty: Well, thank you so much, everyone, for joining us. Again, like Dionne said, if you have questions, please submit them to SSA.ARDRAW@ssa.gov, and we will post -- any questions that are emailed to us, we will put them on the ARDRAW website so that you can have access to that as well. And with that -- oh, and we will also be posting the recording online if you need to come back and just kind of check to see -- if you need to hear more information about what we've shared today. So with that, I want to thank you all for joining us, and again, if you have any questions, just let us know, and have a great afternoon.