

National Institute on Disability,
Independent Living, and
Rehabilitation Research
TOOLKIT



ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACL	Administration for Community Living
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
ADAKTC	Americans with Disabilities Act Knowledge Translation Center
ADANN	Americans with Disabilities Act National Network
ICDR	Interagency Committee on Disability Research
KT	Knowledge translation
LRP	Long-range plan
NIDILRR	National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research
NSCISC	National Spinal Cord Injury Statistical Center
RRTC	Rehabilitation Research and Training Center
SCI	Spinal cord injury
TBI	Traumatic brain injury
TBINDSC	Traumatic Brain Injury National Data and Statistics Center

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Message from the NIDILRR Director



IT IS MY DISTINCT HONOR TO SERVE as the Director of the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) within the Administration for Community Living. I began in this role in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic in May 2021. As a researcher, my primary area of work relates to disability identity development. As a wheelchair user for over 35 years, I have been nationally and internationally recognized as a disability leader and mentor. I was named a White House Champion of Change in 2013, and the American Psychological Association awarded me the 2020 Citizen Psychologist Award for Advancing Disability as a Human Rights and Social Justice Issue. All of this to say that NIDILRR not only funds work that is relevant to and for disabled individuals, but NIDILRR also is led by a disabled person who understands the disability community.



My commitment is to ensure that NIDILRR remains a strong leader for disability research. During my time as director, I have goals to increase the representation of disabled researchers and to increase the representation disabled researchers from other underrepresented backgrounds within our existing grant mechanisms. I also aim to deepen the training that is available to marginalized researchers and to accelerate their career trajectories. Academia and research have a

long history of systemic exclusion of certain voices, and I'm working to chip away at that. In my role, I want to bolster the ways in which we involve people with disabilities across the entire research process and research enterprise. For me, it's important to be the representation that I always wanted and to ensure that other people with disabilities are a part of the entire

research enterprise—from project officers to investigators to research participants to fellows. Whether you are a researcher who hopes to be a future grantee of NIDILRR, a current grantee wanting to help share more about NIDILRR with others, or a stakeholder who does not know who NIDILRR is at all, I hope that this toolkit will be a valuable resource for you and that you will share this with others.

I strive to make our mission come to life for the 67 million Americans with disabilities and to ensure representation carries forward to the work that we fund while making sure that NIDILRR-sponsored work is relevant to the communities we care about.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anjali Forber-Pratt".

Anjali Forber-Pratt, Ph.D.

Director of NIDILRR

Purpose

THE PURPOSE OF THIS TOOLKIT is to “tell the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) story,” including NIDILRR’s history, role, framework, work, publications, and resources in a summary format. Although the information is available in detail through a variety of NIDILRR’s sources—the NIDILRR webpage, grantee websites, and several publications—this toolkit provides the information in one place in a summary format. The toolkit is intended as an educational resource primarily for stakeholders who may not know about NIDILRR but who may benefit from learning about NIDILRR and its resources, and as a communication tool for stakeholders who want to inform others about NIDILRR’s work and resources.





NIDILRR'S HISTORY AND ROLE

NIDILRR IS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S PRIMARY APPLIED DISABILITY RESEARCH ORGANIZATION and is part of the Administration for Community Living (ACL) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). NIDILRR uniquely focuses on funding applied disability and rehabilitation research that is tied closely to longer-term outcomes, such as health, independence, community participation, and employment.

First constituted in 1978 as the National Institute on Handicapped Research, NIDILRR was originally housed within the Department of Education. In 1986, the name changed to the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR). With the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act in 2014, NIDRR became NIDILRR and was transferred from the Department of Education to its current place in

ACL within HHS. ACL focuses on ensuring people with disabilities and older Americans live with dignity and participate fully in society. NIDILRR operates under Title II of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014, which states:

Disability is part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to live independently, enjoy self-determination, make choices, contribute to society, pursue meaningful careers, and enjoy full inclusion and integration in the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational mainstream of American society.

The perspective of this authorizing statute is continually reflected throughout all of NIDILRR's work to move the field of disability research forward with the goal of improving the lives of people with disabilities.

NIDILRR'S MISSION AND SUPPORTING WORK

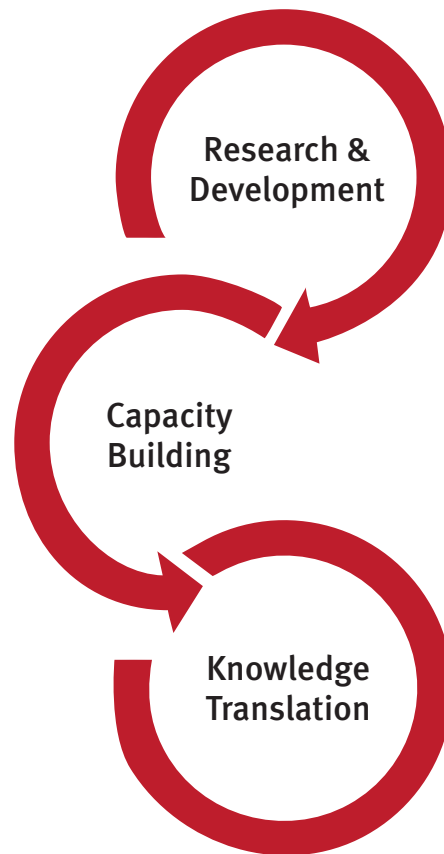
NIDILRR has an important mission: To generate new knowledge and to promote its effective use to improve the abilities of individuals with disabilities to perform activities of their choice in the community, and to expand society's capacity to provide full opportunities and accommodations for individuals with disabilities.

Through its discretionary grant-funding authorities, NIDILRR achieves this mission by

- supporting research, development, capacity-building, knowledge translation, and related activities to maximize the full inclusion and integration of individuals with disabilities of all ages into society, employment, independent living, family support, and into economic and social self-sufficiency, and
- promoting the transfer, use, and adoption of rehabilitation technology for individuals with disabilities in a timely manner.

NIDILRR-funded research studies are designed to produce new knowledge, interventions, and products, whereas knowledge translation focuses on ensuring that findings from NIDILRR-funded research studies are usable and understandable by individuals with disabilities and related stakeholders. NIDILRR grantees are expected to ensure the widespread distribution, in usable formats, of practical scientific and technological information to advance policy, practice, and services to improve outcomes for people with disabilities based on their funded work. Capacity-building is centered on grants and activities to equip the field of disability,

independent living, and rehabilitation research with highly-skilled research personnel.



TARGET POPULATIONS AND AGES

NIDILRR addresses a wide range of disabilities and impairments across populations of all ages, particularly those with the greatest support needs as mandated in Title II of the Rehabilitation Act. The Rehabilitation Act adopts the definition of disability from the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which defines a person with a disability as “any person who (i) has a physical



or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of such person’s major life activities; (ii) has a record of such an impairment; or (iii) is regarded as having such an impairment.” To meet this broad mandate, NIDILRR’s activities encompass all disability subpopulations, such as developmental, cognitive, sensory, psychiatric, and physical disabilities. Unique aspects of NIDILRR’s research portfolio are its focus on the whole person with a disability throughout the entire lifespan and its consideration of the complex interactions among person, societal, and environmental factors.

OUTCOME DOMAINS

NIDILRR’s funded activities are focused on the three interrelated domains of community living and participation, health and function, and employment. The outcome domains have had a long-standing history in guiding NIDILRR’s funding, with many programs and projects crossing more than one or even all three domains. Other areas NIDILRR invests in include technology for access and function for people with disabilities and disability demographics.

FUNDS ALL STAGES OF RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT

NIDILRR promotes concepts of stages of research and development across its portfolio to emphasize its role as an applied research agency. NIDILRR sponsors research across all four research stages, which are: (1) exploration and discovery, (2) intervention develop-

Community Living and Participation



Health and Function



Employment



ment, (3) intervention efficacy, and (4) scale-up evaluation. NIDILRR also funds development across all three development stages, which are (1) proof of concept, (2) proof of product, and (3) proof of adoption.



NIDILRR's Work

INVESTMENTS AND REACH

Each year, NIDILRR funds more than 200 grants totaling over 100 million dollars, supports more than 1,400 unique projects, and reviews over 400 proposals. NIDILRR grantees produce an assortment of output types, from peer-reviewed publications to technological devices, prototypes, specialized software, measurement tools, and audiovisual materials and curricula. ACL's investments in research, development, knowledge translation, and capacity-building activities are carried out through the following 11 discretionary grant-funding mechanisms:

- **Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers (RRTCs)** conduct advanced research and training on a wide variety of health, rehabilitation, employment, and community living topics.
- **Rehabilitation Engineering Research Centers (RERCs)** conduct rehabilitation engineering research and development toward technological solutions to rehabilitation problems or environmental barriers.
- **Disability and Rehabilitation Research Projects (DRRPs)** conduct research, development, technical assistance, training, and utilization activities on health, rehabilitation, employment, and community living topics.
- **Americans with Disabilities Act National Network (ADANN)** projects conduct research and provide information, training, and technical assistance to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) stakeholders.
- **Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR)** projects support small businesses to explore feasibility and develop or evaluate the commercialization potential of new technology products for people with disabilities.
- **Knowledge Translation (KT)** projects promote the use of research-based knowledge among NIDILRR's community of stakeholders.



- **Field-Initiated Projects (FIPs)** conduct studies on topics proposed by applicants to address disability and rehabilitation issues in promising and innovative ways.
- **Model Systems** programs in spinal cord injury (SCI), traumatic brain injury (TBI), and burn injury conduct research on rehabilitation and long-term outcomes of individuals with these conditions. Research in these programs includes collaborative, multisite research and collection and analysis of longitudinal data.
- **Advanced Rehabilitation Research Training (ARRT)** projects support institutions of higher education to provide advanced interdisciplinary research training to postdoctoral fellows.
- **Research Fellowship Programs, or Mary E. Switzer Fellowships**, are awarded to qualified individuals to conduct independent research projects.
- **Section 21** projects focus on research capacity-building for minority-serving institutions (MSI), including historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) and other institutions with significant racial/ethnic minority student populations.

NIDILRR applies a rigorous peer review process, as required by Title II of the Rehabilitation Act and NIDILRR's Program Regulations (45 CFR 1330). Subject matter experts with the appropriate credentials and content knowledge evaluate the scientific, technical, and management aspects of proposals submitted in response to NIDILRR funding opportunity announcements.

Throughout its history, NIDILRR has engaged in a variety of collaborations across federal institutions to conduct cosponsored research, identify best practices, and address shared goals. NIDILRR has

several well-established partnerships, both within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and across other federal agencies. Several key working partnerships NIDILRR has are with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the National Institutes of Standards and Technology (NIST), the Department of Transportation (DOT), the U.S. Access Board, and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).



INTERAGENCY COMMITTEE ON
DISABILITY RESEARCH

Another way NIDILRR collaborates is through its leadership role in the Interagency Committee on Disability Research (ICDR). The ICDR, authorized by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended, was established to promote coordination and collaboration among federal departments and agencies conducting disability, independent living, and rehabilitation research programs, including programs related to assistive technology research and research that incorporates the principles of universal design. NIDILRR's director serves as the chair of the ICDR and, through this leadership role, expands collaborations with a variety of stakeholders, including federal partners, researchers, developers, and the disability community.



NIDILRR's Publications

NIDILRR PRODUCES SEVERAL AGENCY-LEVEL PUBLICATIONS that are publicly available on the NIDILRR website. The NIDILRR long-range plan (LRP) and the logic model are two documents that inform and guide NIDILRR's planning efforts. The Annual Report to Congress is the only report produced annually as mandated by statute. NIDILRR's organizational highlights report provides significant achievements of NIDILRR grantees and is produced every 2 years.

LONG-RANGE PLAN

The NIDILRR LRP presents a 5-year agenda to advance applied disability, independent living, and rehabilitation research. The LRP is intended to emphasize consumer relevance and scientific rigor, to present an agenda that is scientifically sound and accountable, and, as a result, to contribute to the refinement of national policy affecting people with disabilities.

Each LRP builds on the work of the previous plan while simultaneously responding to new developments in the disability, independent living, and rehabilitation research field and in government. The LRP highlights NIDILRR's significant role as a research institute in the public interest, carrying out a scientific research agenda to meet the diverse needs of people with disabilities. Every NIDILRR LRP includes themes that emerge through public input, the state of people with disabilities in the United States, federal research planning, and key accomplishments of NIDILRR grantees since the last LRP.

LOGIC MODEL

The logic model can serve as a tool for outcomes planning and performance management that graphically depicts the order of events, a means of communicating program goals and guiding program improvement and



evaluation, and a graphic representation of the key elements of a program and the ways these elements will work to address identified problems.

In 2005, NIDILRR developed its logic model to provide a way to visualize NIDILRR's short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes. It also presents a framework for NIDILRR's LRPs and guides its performance assessment and outcomes evaluation processes. The complete description of the full logic model can be found on the NIDILRR website. NIDILRR and its grantees are primarily responsible for developing new knowledge, but we work hard to make sure that this new knowledge is used to improve policies, practices, behaviors, and systems that impact the lives of people with disabilities. Ultimately, NIDILRR aims to translate these short-term and intermediate outcomes into elimination of disparities between people with and without disabilities.

- Short-term outcomes: Advances in understanding, knowledge, skills, and learning
- Intermediate outcomes: Adoption and use of new knowledge leading to changes and improvements in policy, practice, behavior, and system capacity
- Long-term outcomes: Changes in overall conditions, including the elimination of disparities—in employment, participation and community living, and health and function—between people with disabilities and the general population

ANNUAL REPORT TO CONGRESS

As mandated by statute, NIDILRR produces an Annual Report to Congress that describes the activities and accomplishments of the prior fiscal year. The report includes a summary of NIDILRR's history, a description of its funding process and fiscal allocations, descriptions of programmatic outcomes that impact the community, and descriptions of ongoing NIDILRR initiatives. Other information in the Annual Report to Congress includes the breakdown of grant projects by outcomes domain, the number of grantee outputs by product type, data on the reach of the ADANN, and a list of Switzer Fellow project titles.

ORGANIZATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS REPORT

Every 2 years, NIDILRR publishes an organizational highlights report, a document that provides an overview of NIDILRR accomplishments from the prior 2 fiscal years in a newsletter-style format. The document provides general information on who NIDILRR is, how NIDILRR funding is used, and how NIDILRR is making a difference for people with disabilities. The report features grantee accomplishments organized across NIDILRR's 11 funding mechanisms and three outcome domains. It also describes accomplishments and updates from former NIDILRR grantees and provides information on several key NIDILRR collaborations across the federal government.



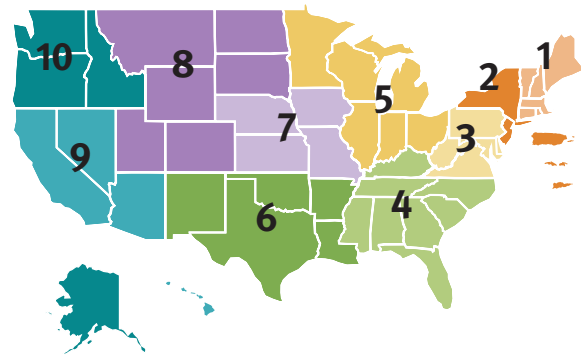
NIDILRR Resources

NIDILRR PROVIDES AND FUNDS SEVERAL RESOURCES FOR ITS STAKEHOLDERS, including researchers, agencies, businesses, and individuals. Key resources include 10 regional ADA centers, the National Rehabilitation Information Center (NARIC), NIDILRR Knowledge Translation Centers, and Model Systems statistics centers.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT NATIONAL NETWORK

NIDILRR funds 10 regional ADA centers located throughout the United States, an ADA Knowledge Translation Center, and an ADA Collaborative Research Project. Together, they make up the **ADANN**. The ADANN is one of NIDILRR's largest investments, with over \$13 million in funding per year.

The network provides information, training, and technical assistance to individuals, businesses, and



- 1 New England ADA Center
- 2 Northeast ADA Center
- 3 Mid-Atlantic ADA Center
- 4 Southeast ADA Center
- 5 Great Lakes ADA Center
- 6 Southwest ADA Center
- 7 Great Plains ADA Center
- 8 Rocky Mountain ADA Center
- 9 Pacific ADA Center
- 10 Northwest ADA Center

agencies with rights and responsibilities under the ADA. The ADANN centers also conduct research activities to develop new knowledge about barriers to ADA compliance, strategies for its effective implementa-



tion, and greater understanding of stakeholders' need for and use of ADANN services. Each year, the network responds to 15,000+ inquiries via phone, email, ADA center website, or in person. Additionally, the regional centers, in collaboration with the Americans with Disabilities Act Knowledge Translation Center (ADAKTC), develop a variety of products on timely ADA topics.

NATIONAL REHABILITATION INFORMATION CENTER

NARIC is NIDILRR's library that collects, catalogues, and disseminates the articles, reports, curricula, guides, and other publications and products of the research projects funded by NIDILRR. The following are several key NARIC resources:

- **Calendars of Events** – includes NIDILRR and NIDILRR grantee events; national observances; and conferences, webcasts, and other events in the disability and rehabilitation communities
- **Knowledge Base** – contains over 3,000 sources ranging from organizations and agencies to periodicals and web resources
- **Multimedia Collection** – contains audio and video materials developed by NIDILRR grantees
- **News and Notes from the NIDILRR Community and Beyond** – a weekly newsletter for updates on research, resources, and events from the NIDILRR community as well as disability-related resources from other federal agencies
- **Program Database** – provides information on current and completed NIDILRR-funded grant projects; includes projects from 1988 to present
- **Program Directory** – lists all NIDILRR funded projects within a specific fiscal year
- **REHABDATA** – a literature database on disability and rehabilitation that includes over 80,000 documents and has approximately 4,000 items added each year; REHABDATA-Connection: a once-per-month bibliography service to provide researchers with updates on what has been recently added to REHABDATA
- **Research in Focus** – a weekly publication that features reader-friendly summaries of the latest research from NIDILRR-funded projects
- **Tools Collection** – includes tools developed by NIDILRR grantees, such as surveys, checklists, assessments, and more designed to gather and analyze data

KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION CENTERS

NIDILRR's Knowledge Translation Center grantees produce a variety of informational products on wide ranging disability and rehabilitation topics with the aim of increasing knowledge translation.

- **ADAKTC** supports the ADANN by increasing the effectiveness and impact of the network's activities, increasing awareness and use of ADA research findings, and evaluating ADA stakeholders' need for and receipt of ADANN services.
- **Center on Knowledge Translation for Employment Research (CeKTER)** develops and tests KT strategies designed to help policy makers, professionals, persons with lived experience, family members, researchers, and industry find, understand, and use research to promote employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

Annually, the ADANN disseminates:



- 1.5 million+ bulletins, newsletters, or factsheets
- 950,000+ project publications
- 200+ journal articles
- 100,000+ video and audio tapes
- 500+ books or book chapters
- 450+ research reports and conference proceedings
- 12.2 million+ other federal documents

- **Center on Knowledge Translation for Disability and Rehabilitation Research (KTDRR)** conducts research, training, dissemination, utilization, and technical assistance activities to increase use of valid and relevant evidence-based research findings that inform decision-making and increase the understanding and application of KT principles.
- **The IMPACT Center** conducts research, training, and technical assistance and provides tools and approaches to comprehensively understand barriers

and facilitators to successful Assistive Technology Tech Transfer (ATTT), raise awareness, and increase the capacity of researchers and entrepreneurs to perform successful ATTT.

- **Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center (MSKTC)** reviews and synthesizes current research, publishes articles and technical reports, develops knowledge translation tools, and creates patient and family resources to inform clinical practice.



STATISTICS CENTERS

NIDILRR funds several centers that have a specific data and/or statistical focus. A “data focus” means that some of the grantees collect, track, analyze, and report out data over time. A “statistical” focus means that the grantees perform statistical analyses on the data they collect.

- **RRTC on Disability Statistics and Demographics:** The purpose of this RRTC is to produce and disseminate statistical information on disability and the status of people with disabilities in American society, and to establish and monitor indicators about how conditions change over time to meet their health, housing, economic, and social needs.
- **National SCI Statistical Center (NSCISC):** The NSCISC, established in 1970, supports and directs the collection, management, and analysis of the world’s largest SCI research database. Organizationally, NSCISC is the hub of a network of 18 NIDILRR-sponsored SCI Model Systems located at major medical centers throughout the United States. In addition to maintaining the national

database, NSCISC personnel conduct ongoing, database-oriented research. Many findings of these investigative efforts have had significant impacts on the delivery and nature of medical rehabilitation services provided to people with SCI.

- **TBI National Data and Statistics Center (TBINDSC):** The primary purpose of the TBINDSC, established in 1987, is to advance medical rehabilitation by increasing the rigor and efficiency of scientific efforts to longitudinally assess the experience of individuals with TBI. The TBINDSC provides technical assistance, training, and methodological consultation to 16 TBIMS centers as they collect and analyze longitudinal data from people with TBI in their communities, and as they conduct research toward evidence-based TBI rehabilitation interventions.
- **National Data and Statistical Center for the Burn Model Systems (BMS NDSC):** The BMS NDSC, established in 1994, advances medical rehabilitation by increasing the rigor and efficiency of scientific efforts to assess the experiences and outcomes of individuals with burn injuries.



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Contact Information



WEBSITE: <https://acl.gov/NIDILRR>



PHONE: Call ACL's main number at (202) 401-4634 and select Option 5 (NIDILRR) when prompted. Your call will be routed to an NIDILRR staff person who can provide you with further information.



EMAIL: To email NIDILRR directly, send an email to NIDILRR's general email box at nidilrr-mailbox@acl.hhs.gov. When you send an email to this email address, your request is analyzed and directed to the most appropriate NIDILRR staff person for further action.



MAIL: NIDILRR's mailing address is National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research; Administration for Community Living; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 330 C Street SW, Room 1304; Washington, DC 20201.



IN-PERSON: All visits to NIDILRR's physical location must be previously arranged with ACL/NIDILRR. If you are interested in arranging an in-person visit, call (202) 401-4634. Select Option 5 (NIDILRR) when prompted. Your call will be routed to an NIDILRR staff person who will work with you to set up an in-person visit. If you do not wish to call to arrange an in-person visit, you can email NIDILRR directly at nidilrr-mailbox@acl.hhs.gov.

CONSIDER BECOMING A PEER REVIEWER!

NIDILRR is seeking peer reviewers to join members of the disability and rehabilitation research community to review grant applications. NIDILRR particularly invites people with disabilities and those from the disability advocacy community to apply. NIDILRR provides a daily honorarium payment to reviewers, including 1 day of preparation time. Review panels typically last 3 days.

Express interest and send CV/resume to: NIDILRR-Grants@acl.hhs.gov

