

OVERVIEW

Federal Agency: Social Security Administration, Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics

Title: Retirement and Disability Research Consortium

Announcement Type: New Announcement

Funding Opportunity Number: RDRC-RDRC-23-01

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: CFDA 96.007, SSA Research and Demonstration. SSA announces the solicitation of competitive applications for cooperative agreements to establish a Retirement and Disability Research Consortium (RDRC). SSA seeks applications in support of the RDRC that will continue to serve as a national resource fostering high quality research, communication, and education on matters related to retirement and disability policy. The RDRC may consist of one or more research “centers.” These centers may be universities or other organizations or associations of multiple universities and/or other organizations in the United States. The RDRC’s purpose is to benefit the public through research, evaluation, and data development; dissemination; and training and education on topics relevant to Social Security.

Deadlines:

Application Deadline: The opening date of this announcement is the date of publication. The closing date for receipt of cooperative agreement applications under this announcement is 5:00 pm Eastern Standard Time on Friday, May 12, 2023.

Letter of Intent Deadline: Prospective applicants are asked to submit by Friday, April 21, 2023, a letter of intent that includes (1) the funding opportunity number and title; (2) a brief description of the proposed center or centers; (3) the name, postal and e-mail addresses, and the telephone and fax numbers of each center’s director(s); and (4) the identities of the key personnel and participating institutions. The letter of intent is not required, is not binding, and does not enter into the review process of a subsequent application. The purpose of the letter of intent is limited to allowing SSA staff to estimate the potential review workload and avoid conflicts of interest in the review. The letter of intent should be sent to: Grants.Team@ssa.gov, Attn. Matt Messel, Office of Retirement and Disability Policy.

Frequently Asked Questions: We will be posting a running list of questions and answers on the web at <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/rdrc/faq.html>. Submit questions to Grants.Team@ssa.gov. All potential applicants should monitor the website frequently to ensure that they have the latest updates and answers.

NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

A. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

1. Purpose

As authorized under section 1110 of the Social Security Act, SSA announces the solicitation of competitive applications for cooperative agreements to establish a Retirement and Disability Research Consortium (RDRC). SSA seeks applications in support of the RDRC that will continue to serve as a national resource fostering high quality research on matters related to retirement and disability policy. The RDRC may consist of one or more research “centers” (see section C.1. Eligible Applicants). The RDRC’s program purpose is to benefit the public through the following activities:

- a. *Research, evaluation, and data development.* SSA expects the RDRC to plan, initiate, and maintain a high-quality, multi-disciplinary research program that will cover issues related to Social Security programs in addition to broader retirement and disability policy. To facilitate the production of research, the RDRC can conduct data development activities including both the development of and expanded access to research data.
- b. *Dissemination.* The RDRC will disseminate policy research findings using a variety of media to inform the academic community, policymakers, stakeholders in community-based organizations, and the public.
- c. *Training.* The RDRC will train and provide funding support for undergraduate students, graduate students, and postgraduates to conduct research on retirement and disability policy related matters.

2. Scope of Work

The role of the centers is to build and strengthen SSA's capacity to undertake a broad range of research, evaluation, and policy analysis for the Old-Age and Survivors Insurance (OASI), Disability Insurance (DI), and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs. The centers must develop research, training, and dissemination plans designed to provide Social Security, disability, and retirement policy information to assist policymakers, the public, community stakeholders, and the media in understanding Social Security, retirement, and disability policy issues. Research should help improve the administration, effectiveness, and equity of programs carried on or assisted under the Social Security Act and related programs.

All research and other activities must fall within the scope described below. This scope is in place for the duration of any cooperative awards made under this announcement. Because specific research needs may evolve over time, SSA will provide a list of focal areas of research that may change each year: focal areas are specific topics within the scope of this RFA that SSA may add or remove over the duration of the cooperative awards. In each year of the cooperative award, SSA will be making awards consistent with the goal of balancing research that provides a foundation for current and future policy analysis needs with the immediate requests for research described in a memo presenting annual focal areas.

At the broadest level, proposed RDRC center research and activities must be relevant to at least one of SSA’s program areas or populations. Some research may speak directly to one or two programs and the distributional, behavioral, or adequacy issues related to those programs. Other research—

including how to advance equity efforts, examine how structural barriers affect the program populations that SSA serves, and explore opportunities to reduce barriers—is foundational and may support policy evaluation for all three programs. Proposed research activities may employ a variety of approaches to contribute to the evidence base for policy, including descriptive and causal studies, simulations, qualitative and mixed-methods research, international comparisons, and community-engaged research.

Old-Age and Survivors Insurance (OASI)

OASI benefits are essential to the economic well-being of millions of aged Americans, providing benefits to retired workers, their spouses and dependents, and the survivors of deceased insured workers. Policymakers rely on research that increases understanding of this population, assesses the effects of recent or proposed policy changes, and analyzes long-term program trends.

Disability Insurance (DI)

Social Security pays DI benefits to eligible workers who can no longer work because they have a medical condition that is expected to last at least one year or result in death. The program also covers certain family members of DI-eligible workers. Research in this area may include topics such as identifying the population(s) who may be eligible for benefits but are not applying, understanding challenges faced by the population(s), and exploring ways to overcome these challenges.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

SSI provides monthly payments to individuals with low income and few assets who have a disability or are aged. Research on SSI helps us understand program trends and clarifies how work and other factors influence eligibility and welfare. Targeted research initiatives can evaluate the efficacy of specific program interventions or policy changes as well as discover possible unmet needs, barriers to program access, effectiveness of outreach efforts, and areas for program improvement.

Cross-Program Topics

None of the three SSA programs (OASI, DI, and SSI) operates in a vacuum. Some aspects of each program are unique and require dedicated research projects, but research initiatives may support cross-program knowledge building. There is significant value in supporting cross-program research because of its applicability to any or all the individual program areas.

Focal Areas for Year 1 of the Cooperative Agreement: Focal areas are more narrowly defined topics for research. In Year 1, SSA will specifically be looking for research that address six focal areas. The full list of focal area questions is located at: <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/extramural/rdrc-focal-areas-FY2024.pdf>. Focal area summaries are included below:

Focal Area 1. Disparities by race, ethnicity, and sex. SSA continues to be very interested in research on racial, ethnic, and sex equity related to Social Security. SSA is particularly interested in the structural barriers that may contribute to disparate outcomes by race, ethnicity, and sex. We expect researchers to consider such disparities when developing proposals addressing all focal areas.

Focal Area 2. Addressing Barriers to Disability Program and SSI Program Participation. For more than a decade, applications for DI and SSI benefits have been falling at a faster pace than originally projected based on actuarial models. However, the causes of this rapid decline are less well

understood. SSA encourages studies that examine the possible drivers of this decline and the impact it has had on our programs and populations. We are particularly interested in studies that identify barriers that may either keep eligible individuals from applying initially or that make it difficult for them to complete the application and appeals processes.

Focal Area 3: Economic Security of Program Applicants and Beneficiaries. SSA continues to be interested in the evolving risks to economic security and how future beneficiary cohorts will fare. Research should take a broad view, looking at all sources of economic security as well as the spectrum of resource needs to address financial risks, including long-term care. Research should also examine differences across (and within) various population subgroups (e.g., by comparing economic outcomes of women of color with those of white women).

Focal Area 4: Understanding Service Needs. In 2021, 70 million people received benefits from programs administered by SSA, of which 5.4 million were newly awarded benefits (including new entrants to the benefit rolls and persons already on the rolls who became entitled to a different benefit).¹ Given the importance of Social Security to so many people, SSA is continuously looking for ways to improve how we deliver services to the public—particularly to communities facing barriers in accessing our services—to meet their changing needs. We are interested in studies that help us identify advancements in how we deliver quality, accurate, and timely service to our customers.

Focal Area 5: Understanding Communication Needs. Effective communication and outreach about Social Security is critical to enable the public to make informed decisions about their own benefits and to make them aware of benefits to which they may be entitled. Communications from SSA also affect the public’s understanding of Social Security more broadly, including the program’s long-term future and the effects of potential policy changes. We are interested in research that examines—and identifies areas of improvement—the efficacy of agency communications (including the *Social Security Statement*, *my Social Security*, and other notices²) and outreach efforts. Generally, we are interested in studies that address Question 4 in the [SSA Learning Agenda](#), “What are the effects of changes to our communication methods on customer satisfaction, program integrity, and administrative efficiency?”

Focal Area 6: Addressing Employment Barriers for People with Disabilities. The DI program includes a set of work incentives, which are special rules, intended to help beneficiaries enter, re-enter, or continue their engagement in the workforce by protecting their eligibility for cash payments and health care coverage until their work allows them to be self-sufficient. As we look to increase the number of beneficiaries who return to work, we seek evidence on successful models for providing employment services and on barriers to employment. Studies could examine this topic both in terms of labor demand and labor supply.

3. The Role of the Centers

The role of the centers is to build and strengthen research and evaluation for the OASI, DI, and SSI programs. Each center must develop research, training, and dissemination plans designed to provide Social Security, disability, and retirement information to assist policymakers, the public, and the media in understanding Social Security, retirement, and disability policy issues.

¹ See https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/chartbooks/fast_facts/2022/fast_facts22.pdf

² See <https://www.socialsecurity.gov/ssi/text-notice-ussi.htm>

Each center has the primary and lead responsibility to define research objectives and approaches; organize a network of researchers, not confined to the institutions that constitute the center; plan research, conduct studies, and analyze data; and publish results, interpretations, and conclusions of their work. In general, SSA seeks centers with a capacity for providing quality policy research and training and for working with a broad range of stakeholders (including community-based organizations) in the development and dissemination of research.

a. Research, Evaluation, and Data Development

Each center must plan, initiate, and maintain a research program that meets the highest standards of rigor and objectivity. Centers' research plans must be specific about long-term research themes and projects. They must include detailed descriptions of individual research projects that they expect to complete in the center's first year of operation. Research plans must include complete discussions of the expected significance of proposed analysis, data, methods, investigator qualifications, and complementarity or overlap with existing or ongoing research. An application that contains an ad hoc, unstructured set of research projects, rather than a set of projects that strike coherent themes, will be scored unfavorably.

While planning and execution of research activities shall always consider the program implications of research findings, SSA also considers it appropriate to engage in activities to make advances in research techniques, where these are related to the primary objectives of the Consortium.

SSA recognizes the value of high-quality comprehensive data for conducting policy research. To facilitate the production of research, the RDRC can conduct data development activities including both the development of and expanded access to research data. Examples of data improvement efforts include enhancing the quality of existing data sources and their documentation; developing sophisticated statistical techniques to mask micro-data; and developing new sources of data for policy analysis. Such efforts must adhere to relevant privacy protection requirements that are consistent with applicable law, which protect the micro-data from unauthorized access, use, and disclosure. Where available, access may be granted through a secure data site, like those administered by the U.S. Census Bureau or the National Center for Health Statistics, subject to the rules and restrictions of those sites.

Joint research between Consortium centers and SSA researchers is encouraged, as is collaboration with other organizations interested in retirement and disability policy. Federal employees cannot receive any funding support for collaborations. To ensure the policy relevance, utility, and scope of the centers' research, evaluation, and data development goals, a group of nationally recognized scholars and practitioners (See Section A.4, The Role of the Agency) will periodically review RDRC activities and provide recommendations to SSA and the centers for the purpose of enhancing RDRC activities.

Quick Turnaround Projects: Occasionally, SSA will propose Quick Turnaround Project (QTP) topics to address SSA's research needs that develop throughout the year. These topics may involve commenting on SSA research plans, providing critical commentary on research products, composing policy briefs, performing statistical policy analyses, and other activities designed to inform SSA's research, evaluation, and policy analysis function. While centers have discretion in whether they will submit a proposal for a given QTP topic, funding for QTPs must be included in the budget narrative at a level of \$100,000. The agency can raise the ceiling above \$100,000 for quick turnaround projects if both need and funds exist.

Focal Area Meeting: At SSA's discretion, there will be a meeting to discuss research needs for the upcoming budget period. SSA will be responsible for coordinating the meeting time, location (including virtual), and agenda. Each center is responsible for participating with their director(s) and up to three key researchers or staff.

b. Dissemination Plan

Another important feature of each center's responsibilities is making knowledge and information available to the academic and policy communities, the public, and community stakeholders. The RDRC will translate research findings into practical knowledge. The centers will be expected to maintain a dissemination system of quarterly newsletters, research papers, policy briefs, or other research products. These products must be accessible to the public via the Internet on a center-maintained website. The Consortium will hold an annual conference presenting findings from research completed during the year.

SSA encourages applicants to propose creative methods of disseminating data and information. Applications should show sensitivity to alternative dissemination strategies that may be appropriate for different audiences, such as policymakers, practitioners, the public, stakeholders in community-engaged research, advocates, and academics. The research and dissemination will be nonpartisan and of value to all levels of policymaking. SSA reserves the right to review and approve or disapprove all research products, including publications, created using SSA funding through the Consortium, based on the review terms below.

Audience: Centers are responsible for providing a plan to disseminate research and findings to Social Security stakeholders, including policymakers at SSA and other government entities in the executive and legislative branches, researchers in academia and at think tanks, advocates in the retirement and disability communities, the media, the public, and community stakeholders.

Plain Language: While research papers may be aimed at a scientifically literate audience, they must be supplemented by plain language materials targeted to a broader audience. These materials must be written in a way that allows community stakeholders in the research to use the information and to make informed decisions at a collective or individual level. Proposals and paper abstracts must communicate, in a clear and jargon-free way, why the research is relevant to Social Security, how the research was or will be done, and the main findings of a completed project.

Review: SSA reserves the right to review and approve or disapprove all research products, including but not limited to newsletters, publications, policy briefs, and research papers, created using SSA funding through the Consortium, prior to dissemination beyond the center conducting the research. Specifically, SSA reviews for any inaccurate descriptions of agency policy or procedure, inaccurate data content, privacy and disclosure concerns, and any instances of policy advocacy/lobbying. SSA's review is not intended to be a technical peer review; investigators' interpretations and conclusions are their own.

Accessibility: Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a law that requires federal agencies to make sure the technology we use is accessible to a person who has a disability. The law applies to:

- all electronic content we post to the web (including web pages, documents, videos, surveys, etc.)
- all software and mainframe applications that have screens

- all hardware (including computers, servers, printers, copiers, fax machines, etc.)
- all stand alone devices (for example: field office kiosks)
- all telecommunications systems (including desktop phones, cell phones, internet-based phone systems, etc.)
- technology services associated with installing, configuring, supporting, maintaining, and providing training and electronic documentation for information technology.

As recipients of federal assistance, center websites are required to be accessible. Although Section 508 only applies to federal agencies, other laws impose similar requirements on recipients of federal assistance (e.g., RDRC centers). For example, under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, center websites are required to be accessible. SSA requires all RDRC center websites/dissemination products to be accessible and websites consistent with the standards set forth in Section 508. Please see Section508.gov for accessibility standards.

Any form of documentation provided by the selected centers (e.g., training manuals, user guides, embedded documents), including any documentation deliverables required in the request for applications, shall be provided in a fully accessible format. The documents shall be provided in one of the following formats: Text, RTF, Microsoft Word or HTML format, or properly “tagged” PDF. Properly tagged PDFs can be verified by using Adobe Acrobat’s Accessibility Checker.

Documentation delivered in a manner that is interactive (e.g., table of contents, index, search) shall be keyboard navigable, move focus to selected items (or have a keyboard alternative), and be comparable in keyboard access to mouse usage. All images (especially screenshots and technical diagrams that are the sole means for conveying instructions) must include alternative text explaining the image so that a person who is blind would understand the screenshot, chart, figure, etc. Documentation shall include information on the accessibility features of the product. If keyboard shortcuts are provided to allow access to program functionality, a list of the keyboard shortcuts shall be provided. Documentation that is delivered in a video or multimedia publication shall comply with the Section 508 requirements detailed in 36 C.F.R. Part 1194, Appendix D (section D1194.24) and the functional performance criteria detailed in 36 C.F.R. Part 1194, Appendix C. In addition, SSA requires conformance to SSA’s Accessibility Requirements for all video and multimedia deliverables. SSA does not accept text equivalents used to replace speech and requires captions to be synchronized with speech. See <https://access-board.gov/ict/> for additional information on accessibility and the Section 508 requirements.

Executive Order 13166 directs each agency providing federal financial assistance to issue guidance to recipients of such assistance on their legal obligations to take reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access for people with limited English proficiency (LEP) under the national origin nondiscrimination provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and implementing regulations (see http://www.lep.gov/13166/AG_021711_EO_13166_Memo_to_Agencies_with_Supplement.pdf). Applicants should reference the LEP policy guidance for HHS recipients at <https://www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/for-individuals/special-topics/limited-english-proficiency/guidance-federal-financial-assistance-recipients-title-vi/index.html>. While designed to be a flexible and fact-dependent standard, the starting point is an individualized assessment that balances the following four factors: (1) The number or proportion of people with LEP eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by the program or awardee; (2) the frequency with which people with LEP come in contact with the program; (3) the nature and importance of the program, activity,

or service provided to people's lives; and (4) the resources available to the awardee/recipient and costs. A recipient may conclude that different language assistance measures are sufficient for the different types of programs or activities in which it engages, or that, in certain circumstances, recipient-provided language services are not necessary. Applications should include plans for accommodating people with LEP considering these four factors.

1. Center Websites

Each research center must host a website that is publicly accessible without requiring registration, containing at a minimum the following:

- a. A landing page for each approved project, completed or in progress, containing the abstract (see above) and links to all completed documents for that project (with alternative accessible format, if needed). Abstracts for newly funded projects are to be posted within 30 days of award. Research products are to be posted within 30 days of final SSA review approval, along with updated abstracts.
- b. All completed research products that have passed SSA review.
- c. Easy navigation and search of research products by authors and keywords.
- d. A privacy policy describing the center's information collection practices through the website.
- e. Information about the Research Consortium and its objectives in addition to links to the SSA Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics RDRC site and the other RDRC centers.

2. Newsletters

Each research center must distribute a free opt-in e-mail newsletter informing subscribers of the availability of completed research products.

- a. At a minimum, the newsletter should be quarterly and include the plain-language abstracts of completed research projects. The organization is not required to be chronological: the project abstracts may be distributed over the year to even out the number of projects per issue. Thematic grouping is encouraged.
- b. Newsletters must include an unsubscribe link.
- c. Centers must protect any personal information about individuals that it collects as part of its newsletter subscriptions from unauthorized access, use, and disclosure.
- d. Centers may additionally propose to produce regular newsletters and/or blogs with articles synthesizing multiple research projects from all the centers. Issues or articles could focus on completed and upcoming research about one theme. Newsletter proposals should indicate which areas they will focus on (e.g., retirement, disability, all Social Security policy) and which audience they will target (general public, community stakeholders, policymakers, etc.).

3. Annual Meeting

The Consortium centers will take part in an annual conference on issues related to Social Security policy. The conference will be held in Washington, D.C., virtually as needed, or in a hybrid format. The primary responsibility for setting the agenda for the annual meeting will rotate across centers.

SSA will designate the rotation order. However, a cross-center and SSA panel must approve the final agenda.

One center will be selected by SSA to arrange the logistics of the annual meeting. Logistics include: arranging the most cost-effective venue; providing lunch for attendees; hosting a registration web page; and preparing and distributing a bound volume of summaries of conference papers and related materials to conference participants.

When selecting the venue for the RDRC annual meetings, the following conditions must be met:

- a. 2 C.F.R. §§ 200.318 (General Procurement Standards) and 200.432 (Conferences)
- b. Competitive sourcing: Prior to signing a contract for a venue, documentation of the procedure for competitive selection of the venue must be submitted to SSA for approval by SSA grants and program officials.
- c. Location: Washington, D.C., virtual, or hybrid. If in Washington, D.C., the meeting site should be located near Capitol Hill and easily accessible from public transportation, preferably near a Metro rail station. Total travel time should not exceed 30 minutes between the Hill and the venue. Hotel facilities should also be nearby for presenters traveling to the meeting; transportation time and expense should be accounted for when considering hotel-venue distance.
- d. Dates: The annual meeting will occur on two consecutive weekdays during the first half of August. The first Thursday-Friday of August is preferred. The second Thursday-Friday of August is SSA's second choice. SSA reserves the right to alter these dates, based on participant feedback.
- e. Size: Unless instructed otherwise by SSA Program Officials prior to the start of the competitive selection process, the venue should be able to accommodate a minimum of 350 attendees at table seating.
- f. Press accessible: The venue should have facilities available for the press to use and be able to accommodate television and audio recording equipment.
- g. Materials distribution space: Tables for distribution of meeting materials and other displays shall also be available outside, but in the proximity of, the main meeting space (minimum 48 linear feet, e.g., 6 8' tables).
- h. Webinar capability: Any proposal should include the options for and costs of live streaming the annual meetings as a webinar, audio, and video recording by the venue.
- i. Presentation technology: We require the following equipment for effective presentation to a large audience:
 - a. microphones at lectern and for persons at head table/speakers/audio system;
 - b. projector with laptop and screen for displaying PowerPoint/PDF presentations;
 - c. additional monitors to display visual presentation;
 - d. additional lighting for presenter/head table.
- j. Food and refreshments: The venue should provide estimated costs associated with 350 persons on each day of the annual meeting, including boxed lunch with beverages, coffee/tea, and whole fruit each morning.

After all bids are received, the awardee will present their selection with a summary of their selection criteria for prior approval. If the lowest cost bidder is not selected, please provide

justification relating to the specifications enumerated in this subsection. Any scoring mechanisms used to evaluate proposals shall also be provided for all bids received.

4. Additional Dissemination Activities

Additional dissemination activities may be proposed by the centers to SSA. In reviewing, SSA will consider factors such as the effectiveness of the approach in reaching a more diverse audience in the context of the overall dissemination plan. Prior center dissemination activities have included posting on blogs or social media, operating a display booth at professional/academic conferences, and conducting research seminars or similar events.

c. Training

The RDRC is expected to train new scholars to conduct research on issues relating to retirement and disability. SSA expects each center to develop and expand a diverse corps of scholars/researchers who focus their analytical skills on research and policy issues central to the consortium's mission.

SSA expects the centers to financially support the training and research of scholars new to the field of retirement and disability research. The RDRC should allocate funding in a variety of ways. Examples include dissertation fellowships to support Ph.D. candidates writing dissertations, internships for undergraduate and graduate students conducting research, pre- and post-doctoral research fellowships, and small research grants to support postdoctoral researchers and junior scholars, and training workshops for undergraduate students, graduate students, and postgraduates. Applications solicited widely and nationally are encouraged. SSA is interested in promoting diversity among training program recipients, where diversity is defined broadly in terms of research disciplines, institutional composition, and demographic composition. In particular, centers should make an effort to include underrepresented scholars (e.g., racial and ethnic minority individuals, women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and individuals with disabilities) in training programs. Graduate students working with RDRC researchers on funded projects as research assistants will be included in the research budget, not in the training budget.

d. Post Award Reporting Requirements

a. Program Reporting:

- (1) Quarterly Performance Reports – These reports must be uploaded to SSA's online grants management system as a grant note. Upon award, a successful applicant will be given further instructions and access to that online system.

Every three months during the award period, the awardee will produce a progress report. The awardee's quarterly progress reports should provide a concise summary of the progress the awardee makes toward completion of activities in the annual work plan. The awardee should pay particular attention to reporting on achieving any milestones set forth in the work plan, delays in achieving milestones, and the effect of delays on the final product. SSA will provide details regarding the format and due dates of quarterly progress reports in the Terms and Conditions at the time of award.

- (2) Outcome Report

Principal Investigators (PI) conducting research often continue or refine their research after they produce project findings for the cooperative agreement. Prior research supported by SSA under the RDRC often resulted in conference presentations, peer-reviewed journal publications or book chapters, sometimes years after a project is considered completed for the cooperative award. Centers are required to provide to SSA a report of outcomes for all research conducted under the RDRC including: the project identifier, names of PI(s), type of product (journal article, conference presentation, etc.), publication or conference name and date of publication or conference. SSA will provide a template for reporting this information in the Terms and Conditions of the notice of grant award.

(3) Subaward Funding Report

Following the issuance of the notice of cooperative agreement award, centers will provide a summary worksheet of subawardees. The worksheet will list a description of the activity, the funding amount, the recipient institution, the city and state of the recipient institution, and whether the recipient institution is academic, not-for-profit, or for-profit. SSA will provide a template in the Terms and Conditions of the notice of grant award.

(4) Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) Outreach Report (Attachment B)

The centers are required to submit an annual report listing goals and measurable objectives for encouraging participation by HBCUs and MSIs, programs implemented to encourage participation, total funding to HBCUs and MSIs, and highlights of noteworthy accomplishments. Executive Orders that we reference for the MSI Report and Plan:

- EO 14041: White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity through Historically Black Colleges and Universities
- EO 14049: White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Native Americans and Strengthening Tribal Colleges and Universities
- EO 14050: White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Black Americans
- EO 14031: Advancing Equity, Justice, and Opportunity for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders
- EO 14045: White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Hispanics

b. Financial Reports

(1) Federal Financial Report

SSA requires awardees to file the Federal Financial Report (SF-425) quarterly via its online grants management system. SSA will withhold future awards and fund drawdowns if financial reports are delinquent.

(2) Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006

Unless otherwise exempt, award recipients must report each action that obligates \$30,000 or more in federal funds for a subaward to an entity. See 2 C.F.R. Part 170 (<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-I/part-170>) for more information on reporting subaward and executive compensation information.

4. The Role of the Agency

SSA will be involved with the Consortium centers in jointly establishing research priorities and deliverable dates to accomplish the objectives of this announcement. SSA, or its representatives, will provide the following types of support to the centers:

1. Consultation and technical assistance in planning, operating, and evaluating the centers' activities. Once SSA selects successful RDRC applicants, SSA will review the centers' research agendas and make funding decisions to achieve research goals. This may include the addition, modification, or removal of proposed research projects. After review, each center will submit to SSA a revised research plan and budget. A center's research plan may be periodically reviewed and revised as necessary during the award period.
2. Information about SSA programs, policies, and research priorities.
3. Assistance in identifying relevant SSA program data and guidance on necessary steps to request and, when approved, obtain SSA program data for support center research activities.
4. SSA will review center activities and provide feedback to ensure that objectives and award conditions are being met. SSA will use quarterly reports and final papers to evaluate center performance. SSA may suspend or terminate any cooperative agreement completely or in part at any time before the date of expiration if the awardee materially fails to comply with the Terms and Conditions of the cooperative agreement or does not meet the technical performance requirements, or if the agency determines that it no longer wishes the project to continue. SSA will promptly notify the awardee in writing of the determination and the reasons for suspension or termination together with the effective date. SSA reserves the right to suspend funding for individual projects in process or in previously approved research areas or tasks after making awards.

Panel of Outside Scholars and Practitioners: SSA will select a panel of nationally recognized scholars and practitioners who are unaffiliated with any center for recommendations on research activities for the RDRC. While centers are encouraged to suggest scholars/practitioners, SSA will invite scholars/practitioners to participate. When choosing these scholars/practitioners, SSA will attempt to have diverse representation from academia, other federal agencies, and the practitioner/advocacy community. Funded under this agreement, the scholars/practitioners must meet once a year at an SSA-led meeting at the RDRC Annual Conference in Washington, D.C. or virtually within the weeks after the Annual Conference. Further, the centers may contact the scholars/practitioners throughout the year for suggestions regarding center activities. The SSA Program Official or representative will participate in all meetings. Parties may participate via telephone or video as needed with approval from the SSA Program Official or representative.

5. Access to SSA Data

If an awardee proposes research that requires or may benefit from access to SSA data that is not currently publicly available, the awardee must make a written request to SSA for the information using the Data Exchange Request Form (SSA-157) – see <https://www.ssa.gov/dataexchange/>. The awardee should specify on the Form that they are a current RDRC awardee and seeking data for an RDRC project. Awardees should only request from SSA the minimum amount of data needed to perform the applicable research project. The awardee must provide any follow-up information about the data access request, upon SSA’s request.

SSA will review the data access request, and any follow-up information provided by the awardee, and provide a written determination as to whether the requested data can be provided, in whole or in part, for the research described in the request, and whether and under what conditions SSA can provide the data through the awardee’s preferred method of access. SSA will only approve requests if disclosure is legally authorized under the Privacy Act of 1974 (5 U.S.C. § 552a), the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. § 1306), SSA’s privacy regulations (20 C.F.R. Part 401), and other applicable federal law. SSA will not disclose data SSA determines to be sensitive or proprietary in nature. For approved data access requests, SSA will only release the minimum amount of SSA data that is relevant and necessary for the research. When feasible, SSA will disclose de-identified records in lieu of identifiable records.

If SSA approves a data access request that involves access to SSA data that constitutes Personally Identifiable Information (PII), the awardee may only obtain access to the SSA data if (1) the awardee agrees to comply with all the federal requirements for data access, including applicable federal law, policy, and procedures identified by SSA and (2) SSA has agreed to fund the research for which the data access was approved under the award. The federal requirements for data access will include but are not limited to the need for a suitability review and clearance and compliance with limitations on use, treatment, and safeguarding of data under the Privacy Act of 1974; SSA’s privacy regulations; Office of Management and Budget guidelines related to privacy and security of federal information; the Federal Information Security Management Act of 2002 (44 U.S.C. § 3541 et seq.), as amended by the Federal Information Security Modernization Act of 2014 (Pub. L. 113-283); and related National Institute of Standards and Technology guidelines. The awardee must submit all statistical outputs (e.g., tables, regressions, etc.) produced from data that constitute PII to SSA’s Program Data Disclosure Review Board (PDDRB) for formal clearance authorizing release within the research team specific to the RDRC project (a.k.a., intermediate disclosure to grantees) or release outside of the research team (a.k.a., final release for public or other limited audience consumption). These requirements will also detail the procedures an awardee must follow in the instance of a PII breach. Specific requirements will vary depending on the method of access and will be detailed in an Onsite or Offsite Data Use Agreement between SSA and the awardee.

If SSA approves a data access request that involves access to aggregated or tabulated SSA data that does not constitute PII, SSA may provide the data if (1) SSA has issued a written approval of the awardee’s data access request; (2) SSA has agreed to fund the research for which the data access was approved under the award; and (3) SSA has received PDDRB intermediate or final clearance to release the aggregated or tabulated data to the awardee. No separate Data Use Agreement is necessary. In these instances, unless SSA has provided written notification to an awardee that the SSA data has been made publicly available, the awardee must

1. Use and access the SSA data only for the research described in SSA’s data access request approval.

2. Re-disclose the SSA data only as approved in writing by SSA.
3. Protect the SSA data from unauthorized use, access, and disclosure.

B. FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

1. Type of Award

All awards made under this program will be made in the form of a cooperative agreement. A cooperative agreement, as distinct from a grant, anticipates SSA's substantial involvement during the performance of the project. A comprehensive annual review process will allow SSA to evaluate, recommend changes to, and approve each center's activities. SSA's involvement may include collaboration or participation in the activities of the centers as determined at the time of award. The terms of award are in addition to, not in lieu of, otherwise applicable guidelines and procedures and will be issued along with the notice of award.

The awardee must apply annually to continue the cooperative agreement in order to receive funds in subsequent years of the 5-year agreement (noncompeting renewal). For the noncompeting renewal, the awardee will produce a continuation application, subject to review and approval by SSA. The continuation applications will require similar content to this initial competitive application: the applications should clearly describe a set of research, training, and dissemination activities for the upcoming year that best address the priorities of SSA. Successful applicants will be provided additional instructions on the requirements for continuation applications in the Terms and Conditions of the notice of grant award. SSA will engage in a dialogue with awardees throughout the award period regarding research topics. Based on that dialogue, SSA will provide the awardee with guidance (in writing) on the agency's research priorities for the subsequent continuation cycle.

2. Availability and Duration of Funding

- a. We anticipate that approximately \$11,990,000 will be available to fund the initial 12-month budget period of one or more five-year cooperative agreement(s) pursuant to the announcement.
- b. Applicants must include detailed budget estimates for the first year, assuming a funding level of up to \$4.75 million.
- c. The amount of funds available for the cooperative agreement in future years has not been established. Legislative support for continued funding of the RDRC cannot be guaranteed and funding is subject to future appropriations and budgetary approval.
- d. This announcement allows for the unequal division of funds among multiple chosen centers.
- e. Additional funds may become available from SSA or other federal agencies in support of RDRC projects.
- f. SSA will make initial awards pursuant to this announcement on or about September 30, 2023. The performance period will run from September 30, 2023 through September 29, 2028.

Although we anticipate one or more awards, nothing in this announcement restricts our ability to make more or fewer awards, to make an award of a lesser amount, or to add additional centers to the RDRC in the future. Further, we are not required to fund all (or any) proposed RDRC activities in any year. In addition, SSA reserves the right to implement a salary cap in the future, which would

limit the amount of salary that awardees and subawardees may charge to SSA grants and cooperative agreements. If implemented, guidance will be included in the continuation application kit. We will review all proposed activities annually.

C. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

1. Eligible Applicants

Universities and other organizations, or associations of universities and/or other organizations, in the United States are eligible to apply; a limited number of individual researchers/investigators associated with international institutions may be included as key personnel.

All awardees and subawardees (including any for-profit organization) must forgo any profit or management fee.

2. Cost Sharing or Matching

SSA will not provide a center's entire funding. Recipients of an SSA cooperative agreement are required to contribute a non-federal match of at least 5 percent toward the total approved cost of each center. The total approved cost of the project is the sum of the federal share (i.e., the portion of the total project costs paid by federal funds; maximum 95 percent), and the non-federal share (i.e., the portion of the total project costs paid by the applicant using non-federal funds; minimum of 5 percent). The non-federal share may be cash or in-kind (property or services) contributions.

3. Other

Each center director must have a demonstrated capability to organize, administer, and direct the center. The director (or co-directors) will be responsible for the organization and operation of the center and for communication with SSA on scientific and operational matters. The (co-)director(s) must also have a minimum total time commitment of 25 percent to RDRC administrative activities; these responsibilities may be allocated across a maximum of three (3) co-directors. Racial/ethnic minority individuals, women, and persons with disabilities are encouraged to apply as directors. Submission of a list of previous grants and cooperative agreements held by the (co-)director(s) is required, including the names and contact information of each grant's and cooperative agreement's administrator. In addition to the (co-)director(s), skilled personnel and institutional resources capable of providing a strong research, development and testing base in the specified priority areas must be available. The institution must show a strong commitment to the RDRC's support. Such commitment may be provided as dedicated space, salary support for investigators or key personnel, dedicated equipment, or other financial support for the proposed center.

D. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

1. Address to Request Application Package

Grants.gov: All application forms are available on Grants.gov. We require that applicants submit an electronic application for Funding Opportunity Number RDRC-RDRC-23-01. The Grants.gov "Get Registered" webpage is available to help explain the registration and application submission process. New federal cooperative agreement applicants may find resources on the Grants.gov Applicant Training page to be helpful (<https://www.grants.gov/applicants/applicant-training.html>).

If you experience problems with the steps related to registering to do business with the federal government or application submission, your first point of contact is the Grants.gov support staff at support@grants.gov, 1-800-518-4726. If your Grants.gov difficulties are not resolved, you may also contact the SSA Grants Management Team for assistance: Anita O'Brien (anita.obrien@ssa.gov), Dionne Mitchell (dionne.mitchell@ssa.gov), or Tonya Saunders (tonya.saunders@ssa.gov). Should extenuating circumstances prevent you from submitting an application through www.grants.gov, please contact Anita O'Brien for further instruction.

As questions come up regarding the programmatic content of this RFA, we will be posting a running list of Frequently Asked Questions and answers on the web at <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/rdrdc/faq.html>. Submit questions to Grants.Team@ssa.gov. All potential applicants should monitor the website frequently to ensure that they have the latest updates and answers.

2. Content and Form of Application Submission

As stated above, we require that applicants submit an electronic application through www.grants.gov for Funding Opportunity Number RDRC-RDRC-23-01.

These guidelines should be followed in submitting applications:

1. *Standard Forms*: All applicants requesting our funds for a cooperative agreement under this announcement must submit the standard forms provided in the application kit.
2. *Authorized Official*: The application must be executed by an individual authorized to act for the applicant organization and to assume for the applicant organization the obligations imposed by the Terms and Conditions of the cooperative agreement award.
3. *Length*: Applications should be as brief and concise as possible but ensure successful communication of the applicant's proposal to the reviewers. The project narrative portion of the application may not exceed 150 double-spaced pages (excluding the resume and outside funding appendices), equivalent to being typewritten on one side using standard (8 ½" x 11") size paper and 12-point font. Attachments that support the project narrative count within the 150-page limit. Attachments not applicable to the project narrative do not count toward this page limit.
4. *Attachments/Appendices*: should only be included to provide supporting documentation. See [Miscellaneous Form/Files](#) section below for file format requirements of attachments uploaded with cooperative agreement applications.
5. *Lead Organization*: On all applications developed by more than one organization, the application must identify only one institution as the lead organization and the official applicant. The other(s) can be included as subawardees.

A complete application package consists of one electronic application. It should include the following items:

Online Forms:

- *Application for Federal Assistance Version 2 (SF-424)*: The SF-424 is a required standard form used as a cover sheet for submission of all applications. Grants.gov and Grantsolutions.gov (SSA's grant management system) take information from the applicant's

profile to populate the fields on this form. Therefore, applicants must include an accurate legal name on its SF-424.

- Budget Information (SF-424A)
- Assurances – Non-Construction (SF-424B)
- Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (SF-LLL): Submit this form only if applicable (See Section F.2 on Administrative and National Policy for 20 C.F.R. Part 438 for more information).

Additional Information to be Submitted:

These documents must be uploaded in the system, as there are no online forms for the following:

- Project Abstract/Summary (not to exceed three pages)
- Table of Contents
- Budget Detail Worksheet: A sample is attached that applicants may use as a guide to assist in the preparation of the budget and budget narrative (Attachment A - Budget Detail Worksheet)
- Program Budget Summary: A sample is included on a separate worksheet contained in the attached Budget Detail Worksheet. Applicants must include a program-specific budget summary worksheet using the exact column headers provided
- Indirect Cost Rate Agreement: Copy of the applicant's approved indirect cost rate agreement
- Project Narrative: The project narrative should be organized in five sections

Sections a. through e. below are not to exceed 150 pages in total length.

a. Background Analysis. A brief (not more than 20 pages) background analysis of the key retirement and disability policy issues and trends with a focus on the primary research themes of the proposed center. The analysis should discuss concisely, but comprehensively, important priority research issues and demonstrate the applicant's grasp of the policy and research significance of recent and future social, economic, political, health, and demographic issues.

The analysis should include an equity framework, drawing from SSA's [Equity Action Plan](#) and [Fiscal Years 2022-2026 Learning Agenda](#). Specifically, the analysis should discuss the relationship between structural barriers and the equity of Social Security-related outcomes (e.g., benefit levels, access to benefits) and other economic and health-related outcomes relevant to Social Security, by race and ethnicity and other characteristics (e.g., sex, LGBTQIA+ status, disability status, rural residence).

b. Research, Evaluation, and Data Development Prospectus. A research and evaluation prospectus for a five-year research agenda, outlining the major research themes to be investigated over the next five years. In particular, the prospectus will describe the activities planned for the focal areas and other additional research topics within the scope proposed by the applicant. The prospectus should discuss the kind of research activities that are needed to both address current retirement and disability issues and anticipate future policy debates. The prospectus should follow from the background analysis section. It may also discuss research areas and issues that were not mentioned in the analysis if the author(s) of the application feels there have been gaps in past research, or that new factors have begun to affect or will soon begin to affect national retirement or disability policy. If a center intends to enhance data for research purposes, the prospectus should include a

discussion of the technical expertise of center staff and proposed mechanisms to facilitate data sharing.

In addition to the discussion of the five-year research agenda, the prospectus shall include detailed descriptions of individual research projects that are expected to be completed in the center's first year of operation.

The prospectus should be specific about long-term research themes and projects. The lines of research described in the prospectus should be concrete enough that project descriptions in subsequent research plan amendments can be viewed as articulating a research theme discussed in the prospectus. An application that contains an ad hoc, unstructured set of research projects, rather than a set of projects that strike coherent themes, will be scored unfavorably.

Building on the discussion of equity-related topics in the background analysis, the prospectus should incorporate equity analyses in both the five-year research agenda and into first-year research project proposals. A successful prospectus will propose equity analyses using a diverse set of methodological approaches, such as qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, and community-engaged research. (As outlined in SSA's [Equity Action Plan](#), community-engaged research asks for the inclusion of people from the most affected communities in the development of research design, data collection, analysis, and publishing of findings.) When presenting findings on disparities in outcomes experienced by communities facing structural barriers, the strengths of these communities should also be emphasized.

Descriptions of individual research projects expected to be completed in the center's first year of operation should not exceed five pages and should use the following format:

Proposal Number:

Title: Provide a concise title for the project that describes the analysis

Focal and Program Areas: Identify the relevant program and focal area (if applicable) from Section A. 2 – Program Description, Scope of Work.

Keywords:

Abstract/Specific Aims: The abstract will be posted publicly and should be written so that a non-technical audience can understand the relevance to Social Security and retirement or disability policy. This serves as a summary of your overall proposal and should be at most one page. You will expound on the individual points you make here in the body of the proposal, so you do not need to go into detail supporting your agenda in this section. A typical set of aims uses the following order:

The first paragraph should state the issue your proposal will address and its importance. Think of this as a scope statement that places your work in the context of Section A. 2 – Program Description, Scope of Work.

The second paragraph should briefly summarize the “gap” this project will fill. In the case of research, this might be a gap or shortcoming in the existing literature that you will address. For data or microsimulation, it could be developing new opportunities for analysis.

The third paragraph should explain how you intend to complete the work. First, summarize in a paragraph what you need to do to complete the project “deliverable” (e.g., a research manuscript, a

data set, a microsimulation model, etc.). Then list the pieces of the project that will lead to the completion of the deliverable in bullet format. Each bullet should have a descriptive title and a brief explanation (if necessary). The pieces can include items such as literature reviews, production of analytical data files, analysis on specific elements of a proposal, expert meetings, extramural requirements (RFP, SOW development, etc.), production of manuscripts, etc. The list will be the basis of your project timeline.

Significance: Use this section to both restate and elaborate on the first and second paragraphs of the specific aims. You should mention the significance of the question to SSA and the field of relevance. *Why is this an important topic for SSA and how will completing the project have an impact? Does the project relate to specific ongoing SSA/government challenges/objectives? What are the shortcomings of existing analyses/data that you will overcome through this project (innovation)? Are you applying novel techniques?* Cite literature to support your claims. This should not exceed two pages.

Data: Indicate the data source(s) and any necessary data agreements or collaboration or assistance from SSA.

Methods: Explain the tasks/activities you will conduct to complete the project. Describe the data and techniques you will use paying attention to features of your analysis cited in the significance section (e.g., if you note that a gap in the literature is the absence of data or a flawed technique, take time to explain how you will address the gap in your methods). This description should provide the supporting information to your timeline, which will conclude this section. The timeline should include significant analytical milestones (e.g., complete literature review; develop analytical file; complete various stages of analysis) and process milestones (e.g., submit manuscript for SSA review) that conclude with a “deliverable.” The description of your approach (excluding the timeline) should not exceed three pages.

Statement of Complementarity or Overlap: Include funding from federal and non-federal sources.

Timeline: The timeline should be in a tabular format with completion of tasks coinciding with dates.

Project Timeline	
Activity	Completion Date
Develop analysis data file	December 2023
...	...
Submit RDRC working paper	September 2024

Include a cover chart with proposal number, title, PI(s) and their institutional affiliation(s), and focal area for all proposed research projects. For each PI, submit a biosketch (not exceeding one page) describing project relevant experience and/or a CV. Include budget details in the overall

Budget Detail Worksheet and Narrative. Where consultants and contractors are used, please include all costs under that category. In cases where the researcher is an employee of the applicant organization, include all relevant salary, fringe, travel etc. information in the overall budget with references to the appropriate project.

Note: Once a successful RDRC applicant center has been selected, SSA will review the center's proposed research activities and based on technical merit and research priorities, may add, request modification of, or remove proposed research activities. After review, each center will submit to SSA a revised research plan and budget. The research plan may be periodically reviewed and revised as necessary during the award period. The application should discuss how the center selects research projects to propose, including the involvement of SSA and other advisors and participants in the RDRC.

In addition to the research agenda and first-year projects, the prospectus should include the applicant's strategy to build and maintain a diverse network of researchers in terms of research disciplines, institutional composition, geographic location, and demographic composition. SSA is particularly interested in the applicant's plan to develop sustained research networks including: (1) scholars from HBCUs and other MSIs; and (2) underrepresented scholars (e.g., racial and ethnic minority individuals, women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and individuals with disabilities).

c. Dissemination Prospectus. A prospectus for dissemination, including ways to reach a broad audience of researchers, policymakers, the public, as well as stakeholders in community-engaged research projects. Innovative and cost-effective mechanisms to reach a broad audience are encouraged. Metrics for determining and documenting the effectiveness of dissemination activities must be included as part of the prospectus.

The prospectus should discuss how the applicant will incorporate a community-engaged approach to dissemination by sharing research findings in plain-language to the communities most affected by research topics. SSA is particularly interested in the applicant's relationships with communities facing structural barriers, efforts that the applicant will take to build relationships with these communities, and how the applicant will leverage these relationships into its research dissemination plan. Among others, communities facing structural barriers include low-income urban areas, rural areas, Tribal Nations, and other predominantly racial and ethnic minority communities.

Examples of dissemination strategies aimed at stakeholders in community-engaged research may include a thank-you e-mail to a survey participant with a link to a summary report, an e-mail newsletter to local community groups, or presentation slides with community-friendly infographics.

d. Training Prospectus. A prospectus for training activities for undergraduate students, graduate students, and postgraduates in areas of research relevant to RDRC foundational and focal research topics and that makes a link between research findings and SSA program policy.

The prospectus should address how the proposed training activities will promote diversity, in terms of research disciplines, institutional composition, and the demographic composition of trainees. In particular, the prospectus should outline the efforts the center will take to include underrepresented scholars (e.g., racial and ethnic minority individuals, women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and individuals with disabilities).

e. Staffing Proposal, Including Staff Use, Background, and Organizational Experience. A staffing and organization proposal for the center, including an analysis of the types of background needed among staff members, the center's organizational structure, and linkages with the host institution and other organizations. In this section, the applicant should specify how it will assure an effective approach to research, and where appropriate, identify the necessary links to university departments, other organizations, and scholars engaged in research and government policymaking.

Evidence of past involvement in related research and the specific plans for seeking applied outcomes described in the application will be considered. Past experience with federal research grants or cooperative agreements is not required. The applicant should identify the center director and key senior research staff. Biosketches and/or CVs of these proposed staff members must be included as a separate appendix to the application. (Biosketches should include a narrative explanation of how the staff member's experience qualifies them for their proposed role and should not exceed one page.) The center's research team should contain experienced researchers with demonstrated expertise in relevant fields from behavioral and social science, such as sociology, demography, public health, public policy and administration, history, economics, and psychology. Reviewers may consider references from grant/cooperative agreement administrators on previous grants and cooperative agreements held by the proposed center director or other key personnel. The time commitment to the center and other commitments for each proposed staff member must also be included.

The application should specify how administrative arrangements would be made to minimize start-up and transition delays, so that first year research, training, and dissemination activities may proceed within the applicant's proposed timeline. Note that once the cooperative agreement has been awarded, changes in key staff will require prior approval from SSA. The kinds of administrative and employment arrangements, if any, the center proposes to make should also be discussed in this section. In addition, the authors of the application and the role that they will play in the proposed center must be specified.

This section shall discuss the financial arrangements for supporting research assistants, dissertation fellowships, affiliates, resident scholars, etc. The discussion should include the expected number and type of scholars to be supported and the level of support anticipated.

This section shall discuss the diversity of the staffing proposal of the proposed center in terms of research disciplines, institutional composition, and demographic composition. If the applicant envisions an arrangement of several universities or entities, this section should describe the specifics of the relationships, including leadership, management, and administration. The staffing proposal should pay particular attention to discussing how central points for each proposed research, dissemination, and training activity will be maintained. Applicants should also address their ability and willingness to incorporate new researchers or affiliates during the 5-year grant period to address evolving research needs.

Miscellaneous Form/Files

Any appendices/attachments -Any files uploaded or attached to the Grants.gov application must be of the following file formats and must contain a valid file format extension in the filename – Microsoft Word, Excel or PowerPoint, Corel WordPerfect, ASCII Text, Adobe PDF, or image formats (JPG, GIF, TIFF, or BMP only).

Even though Grants.gov allows applicants to attach any file format as part of their application, SSA restricts this practice and only accepts the file formats identified above. Any file submitted as part of the Grants.gov application that is not in a file format identified above, or contains password protection, will not be accepted for processing and will be excluded from the application during the review process. In addition, the use of compressed file formats such as ZIP or RAR will not be accepted. The application must be submitted in a file format that can easily be copied and read by reviewers. It is recommended that scanned copies not be submitted through Grants.gov unless the applicant confirms the clarity of the documents. Pages cannot be reduced resulting in multiple pages on a single sheet to avoid exceeding the page limitation. All documents that do not conform to the above will be excluded from the application during the review process

3. Universal Entity ID (UEI) and System for Award Management (SAM)

Requirement for UEI, or the Entity ID

The federal government transitioned from using the Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number to uniquely identify entities in April 2022. Entities that wish to do business with the federal government will need to use a UEI created in SAM.gov. All applicants for federal grant and cooperative agreement funding opportunities must have a UEI and must supply their UEI on the SF-424. The UEI uniquely identifies business entities. (See Appendix A to 2 CFR section 25.)

[1] Please see the GSA website for the most up-to-date information on this transition:
<https://www.gsa.gov/about-us/organization/federal-acquisition-service/office-of-systems-management/integrated-award-environment-iae/iae-systems-information-kit/unique-entity-identifier-update>

Each applicant (unless the applicant is an individual or federal awarding agency that is excepted from those requirements under 2 C.F.R. § 25.110(b) or (c), or has an exception approved by the federal awarding agency under 2 C.F.R. § 25.110(d)) is required to: (i) be registered in SAM before submitting its application; (ii) a UEI Number will be provided as part of the SAM registration; and (iii) continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a federal awarding agency. The Social Security Administration may not make a federal award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable SAM requirements. If an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time SSA is ready to make a federal award, SSA may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a federal award and use that determination as a basis for making a federal award to another applicant.

Note: We require that applicants submit an electronic application through www.grants.gov for Funding Opportunity Number RDRC-RDRC-23-01. Before an applicant institution/organization can submit an electronic application, please go to www.grants.gov and follow the steps under the “Get Registered” link. Please note:

1. Your organization will need to obtain a UEI number by registering with SAM/E-Biz POC as part of the Grants.gov registration process. See Section F.2-Administrative and National Policy for 2 C.F.R. Subtitle A, Chapter I, Part 25 (2 C.F.R. § 25.100 et seq.).
2. If your organization does not have a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN) or Employer Identification Number (EIN), allow for extra time. A valid TIN or EIN is necessary for SAM registration.

3. The SAM registration also validates the EIN against Internal Revenue Service records, a step that will take an additional one to two business days. See the [Miscellaneous Form/Files](#) section above for requirements of file formats of attachments uploaded with cooperative agreement applications.

Registering an account with SAM.gov is a separate process from submitting an application. Applicants are encouraged to register early. **In some cases, the registration process can take approximately two weeks to be completed.** Therefore, registration should be completed in **sufficient time** to ensure that it does not impair your ability to meet required submission deadlines.

Applicants were previously required to register with the Central Contractor Registration (CCR). However, SAM has integrated the CCR and 7 other federal procurement systems into a new, streamlined system. If an applicant has an active record in CCR, there will be an active record in SAM. Nothing more is needed unless a change in the business circumstances requires updates to the Entity record(s) in order for the applicant to be paid, receive an award, or renew the Entity prior to expiration. Please consult the SAM website listed above for additional information.

Applicants must successfully register with SAM prior to submitting an application or registering in the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act Subaward Reporting System (FSRS) as a prime awardee user. See Section D, Application and Submission Information, for more guidance on SAM registration. Prime recipients must maintain a current registration with the SAM database and may make subawards only to entities that have UEI numbers.

Organizations must report executive compensation as part of the registration profile at <https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM/> by the end of the month following the month in which this award is made, and annually thereafter (based on the reporting requirements of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA) of 2006 (Pub. L. 109-282), as amended by section 6202 of Public Law 110-252 and implemented by 2 C.F.R. Part 170). See Section F, Award Administration Information, for more information on FFATA.

If you experience problems with the steps related to registering to do business with the federal government or application submission, your first point of contact is the Grants.gov support staff at support@grants.gov, 1-800-518-4726. If your Grants.gov difficulties are not resolved, you may also contact the SSA Grants Management Team for assistance: Anita O'Brien (anita.obrien@ssa.gov), Dionne Mitchell (dionne.mitchell@ssa.gov), or Tonya Saunders (tonya.saunders@ssa.gov).

Should extenuating circumstances prevent you from submitting an application through [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov), please contact Anita O'Brien for possible prior approval to download, complete, and submit an application by mail.

4. Submission Dates and Times

Letter of Intent Deadline: Prospective applicants are asked to submit, preferably with an e-mail attachment, by April 21, 2023, an e-mail, fax, postcard or letter of intent that includes (1) the program announcement number (RDRC-RDRC-23-01) and title (Retirement and Disability Research Consortium); (2) the name of the organization that is applying and (3) the name, mailing address, e-mail address, telephone number and fax number for the organization's contact person. The letter of

intent is not required, is not binding, and does not enter into the review process of a subsequent application. The purpose of the letter of intent is to allow our staff to estimate the number of independent reviewers needed and to avoid potential conflicts of interest in the review. The letter of intent should be e-mailed to Grants.Team@ssa.gov Attn., Matt Messel, RDRC Letter of Intent.

Application Deadline: Applicants must submit applications through www.grants.gov by 11:59pm Eastern Time on Friday, May 12, 2023. To obtain an application package visit the Grants.gov website: Grants.gov. The application package includes the standard forms used to apply for SSA grants, i.e., SF-424, 424B and SF-LLL. Eligible applicants may apply via the new Grants.gov *Workspace* or by completing all necessary forms and documents offline and uploading them to the site.

5. Intergovernmental Review

Executive Order 12372 and 12416—Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs

This program is not covered by the requirements of Executive Order 12372, as amended by Executive Order 12416, relating to the federal policy for consulting with State and local elected officials on proposed federal financial assistance.

6. Funding Restrictions

The awardee must apply to continue the award to receive funds in subsequent years of the five-year award (i.e., noncompeting renewal or budget period). The awardee will produce a continuation application, subject to review and approval by SSA. The continuation applications will require similar content to this initial competitive application: the applications should clearly describe a set of research, training, and dissemination activities for the upcoming year that best address the priorities of SSA. Awards are contingent on availability of continuation funding.

As listed in Section A.3 (The Role of The Centers), at SSA's discretion, there may be a meeting to discuss focal areas for the upcoming budget period. SSA will be responsible for coordinating the meeting time, location, and agenda. Each center is responsible for sending its director(s) and up to three researchers or staff.

E. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

1. Criteria

SSA staff will conduct an initial review of applications to ensure that they adhere to the scope of this solicitation.

Technical merit scoring. Technical merit will be determined by a panel of a minimum of three reviewers external to SSA based on the strengths and weaknesses of the research proposals. These reviewers will represent national experts in retirement and disability research, the study of structural barriers and how they affect SSA program populations, and best practices in promoting the diversity of researchers and institutions in federally funded research. The evaluation criteria correspond to the outline for the development of the Project Narrative Statement of the application described above. The application should be prepared in the format indicated by the outline described in the components of a complete application.

Institutional diversity scoring. Pursuant to Executive Orders 14031, 14041, 14045, 14049, and 14050, and SSA’s [Equity Action Plan](#), SSA is strongly committed to partnering with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and other minority-serving institutions (MSIs) through the RDRC. In addition to technical merit scoring, the external review panel will assign an institutional diversity score to applicants using metrics based on the portion of the proposed budget that is directed to non-R1 HBCUs and other non-R1 MSIs.³

Applicants may score a maximum of 100 points: 80 points based on technical merit scoring and 20 points based on institutional diversity scoring. SSA will combine these scores and use the combined score as the primary factor in selecting RDRC centers. We describe each component of the technical merit and institutional diversity scores, along with their point values, in the sections below.

For technical merit scoring, a score of less than one half of the total possible points on any individual criterion may render the application unacceptable. Consequently, applicants should take care that all criteria are fully addressed in the applications.

Applications will be scored as follows:

a. Background Analysis. (10 points—technical merit score)

Applications will be scored on whether they provide a thoughtful and coherent discussion of economic, social, health, and demographic issues influencing retirement and disability policy. External reviewers will assess applicants' abilities to discuss the past, present, and future role of government programs and policies that affect these issues and how these are tied to their proposed research agenda. (5 points)

Applications will also be scored on the quality of the discussion of equity-related issues, such as those outlined in SSA’s [Equity Action Plan](#) and [Fiscal Years 2022-2026 Learning Agenda](#). It may also include a discussion of structural barriers and how they affect the populations that SSA serves, in terms of equity in SSA programs as well as economic well-being and/or health. (5 points)

b. Research, Evaluation, and Data Development Prospectus. (50 points total: 40 points—technical merit score; 10 points—institutional diversity score)

Technical merit score. Based on the overview and individual projects proposals, external reviewers will score the technical merit of the prospectus on the following bases:

- The research agenda is scientifically sound and is likely to produce significant contributions to the research and policy areas proposed in the prospectus. (Note: Evaluation of potential contributions is based on the quality of the prospectus overview)

³ R1 institutions are defined as doctoral universities with “very high research activity” and are based on the 2021 Carnegie classification listed at:

https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu/classification_descriptions/basic.php. Minority-serving institutions include historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU), Hispanic-serving institutions (HSI), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU), Alaska Native-serving institutions or Native Hawaiian-serving institutions (ANNH), Predominantly Black Institutions (PBI), Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-serving institutions (AANAPISI), and Native American-serving non-tribal institutions (NASNTI). The list of MSIs is available in the Department of Education’s 2022 Eligibility Matrix: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/ides/eligibility.html>.

and individual project descriptions. It is not based on the publication record of the applicant or its affiliated researchers.) (15 points)

- The prospectus demonstrates a commitment to research and evaluation of the priorities described in Section A.2. (10 points)
- The research agenda and first-year project descriptions include a diversity of methodological approaches (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, and community-engaged approaches across or within studies) to studying structural barriers that affect the populations that SSA serves. (5 points)
- In addition to detailed plans for research projects in the first year, the research agenda discusses how the center's research may develop over a five-year horizon in a way that builds knowledge in research and policy areas highlighted in the background analysis. (5 points)

External reviewers will consider the following factors when evaluating the scientific soundness and potential research and policy contributions of individual, first-year projects, in terms of the first, scoring criterion bullet above. These factors will be considered alongside an evaluation of the broader research agenda:

- Investigator(s): Are the PIs, collaborators, and other researchers well suited to the project? Do they have appropriate experience and training? Do they demonstrate an ongoing record of accomplishments that have advanced their field(s)? If they are relatively junior or new to the field of retirement and disability policy, do they have attributes (e.g., methodological expertise, particular subject matter expertise, etc.) that would make them a valuable addition to the RDRC network?
- Approach/Methodology: Are the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project? Have the investigators presented strategies to ensure a robust and unbiased approach, as appropriate for the work proposed? Are potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success presented? Are the concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions novel to one field of research or novel in a broad sense? If the project is in the early stages of development, will the strategy establish feasibility, and will particularly risky aspects be managed?
- Significance: Does the project address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the field? Is there a strong scientific premise for the project? If the aims of the project are achieved, how will scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice be improved? How will successful completion of the aims change the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or interventions that drive this field?
- Overall Impact: Reviewers will assess the likelihood that the project will exert a sustained, powerful influence on the research and policy field(s) and communities involved, in consideration of the approach/methodology and significance criteria.

External reviewers will also evaluate the effectiveness of the applicant's plan to include a diverse network of researchers, in terms of academic disciplines, institutional composition, and demographic composition (particularly focus on underrepresented scholars, including racial and ethnic minority individuals, women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and individuals with disabilities, among others) throughout the five-year period. Based on the application, reviewers will consider evidence

of existing relationships that the applicant has with a diverse network of researchers and how it plans to build diversity into its network over the five-year cooperative agreement. A successful application will include a specific, detailed strategy. (5 points)

Institutional diversity score. External reviewers will assess applications to determine the percent of the proposed research budget that is allocated to scholars based at non-R1 HBCUs and other non-R1 MSIs. Beyond 5 percent, one additional point will be awarded for every percentage point of the research budget award or subaward directed to non-R1 HBCU/MSIs, up to 10 points. For instance, an application where 5 percent of the research budget is allocated to non-R1 HBCU/MSIs will receive 0 points on this metric; an application where 6 percent of the research budget is allocated to non-R1 HBCU/MSIs will receive 1 point; and an application where 15 percent or more of the research budget is allocated to non-R1 HBCU/MSIs will receive 10 points. (10 points)

c. Dissemination Prospectus. (10 points—technical merit score)

Applications will be scored based on evidence of strategies for dissemination of research and other related information to a broad and disparate set of academic, research, and policy communities as well as to community stakeholders and evidence that the appropriate method is being proposed for targeted audiences. (5 points)

Applications will also be scored based on the applicant's plan to build relationships with communities facing structural barriers and organizations that serve them. Examples of these communities include persons who are Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQIA+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality. Applications should discuss how the center would leverage these relationships into a community-engaged, research dissemination plan. (5 points)

d. Training and Education Prospectus. (15 points total: 10 points—technical merit score; 5 points—institutional diversity score)

Technical merit score. External reviewers will score the quality of the training and education prospectus on the following bases:

- Evidence of plans to enhance the training of undergraduate students, graduate students, and postgraduates through direct financial support in areas of research relevant to RDRC foundational and focal research topics (see Section A.2) and that solicit applications nationally. Evidence that proposed training opportunities emphasize clear linkages between research results and SSA program policy. (5 points)
- Evidence of plans to include underrepresented scholars (e.g., racial and ethnic minority individuals, women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, individuals with disabilities) in training activities, including planned outreach activities to promote inclusion. (5 points)

Institutional diversity score. Applications with at least one training program (e.g., fellowship, workshop) that is run by or in collaboration with a non-R1 HBCU or another non-R1 MSI *and* where a portion of the proposed training and education budget (i.e., funds required to administer the training program) is allocated to non-R1 HBCU/MSIs will receive 5 points. (5 points)

e. Staffing Proposal, Including Staff Use, Background, and Organizational Experience. (15 points total: 10 points—technical merit score; 5 points—institutional diversity score)

Technical merit score. Reviewers will score the applicant's center director(s) and staff on demonstrated research and administrative skills. They will also assess whether the leadership approach, governance, and organizational structure is appropriate for completing the proposed research, training, and dissemination activities. The time commitment of the director(s) and staff to the center will also be considered. (10 points)

Institutional diversity score. Applications that have at least one center director or co-director based at a non-R1 HBCU or another non-R1 MSI will receive 5 points. (5 points)

2. Review and Selection Process

From the applications determined to have technical merit in Section 1 above, SSA will select centers considering factors including, but not limited to:

- a. Combined technical merit and institutional diversity score from Section 1 (primary factor)
- b. Center overlap/complementarity in meeting scope and focal areas in Section A.2.
- c. Budget and the requested period of support are fully justified and reasonable in relation to the proposed research, specifically whether (1) the budget assures an efficient and effective allocation of funds to achieve the objectives of this solicitation, and (2) the applicant has additional funding from other sources, in particular, the host institution. Awardees are required to contribute a minimum of 5 percent cost share of total project costs.
- d. Duplication of internal or other external research efforts

All applicants must use the guidelines provided in the SSA application kit at www.grants.gov for preparing applications requesting funding under this cooperative agreement announcement. These guidelines describe the minimum amount of required project information. However, when completing the Project Narrative, please follow the guidelines listed above.

3. Determination of Center Activities

From the centers selected in Section 2 above, SSA will review and select among proposed research, training, and dissemination activities according to the criteria in Section B. If multiple centers propose significantly similar activities (e.g., annual meeting proposal or dissertation grant program), SSA may select one center to administer the program based on the criteria in Section B.

4. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

SSA anticipates issuing awards by September 30, 2023. SSA will notify successful applicants on or before September 30, 2023.

F. FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

1. Federal Award Notices

Applicants that have been selected will receive an official electronic notice of award signed by an SSA Grants Management Officer around September 30, 2023. Those who were not selected will be notified by official letter.

2. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

All applicants, cooperative agreement recipients, and subrecipients are subject to the following as they apply. Note: This RFA and subsequent grant award(s) incorporate one or more regulations by reference, with the same force and effect as if they were given in full text. Upon request, the Grants Management Officer will make their full text available. Also, the full text of a regulation may be accessed electronically at <https://www.ecfr.gov/search>.

Financial Assistance use of Universal Identifier and Central Contractor Registration

2 C.F.R. Subtitle A, Chapter I, Part 25. (2 C.F.R. § 25.100 et seq.) This requires all awardees and first-tier subawardees (other than individuals) to have Universal Entity Identifier numbers and maintain current registrations in the Central Contractor Registration (CCR) database.

Requirements for Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA) Implementation

2 C.F.R. Part 170. This requires all awardee organizations to report subawards and executive compensation under federal assistance awards via a specified website.

Trafficking in Persons: Grants and Cooperative Agreements

2 C.F.R. Part 175. This regulation requires that all awarding agencies include a condition authorizing termination of the award if the awardee or a subawardee engages in certain activities related to trafficking in persons.

Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards

2 C.F.R. Part 200. This regulation establishes the principles for determining costs applicable to grants and cooperative agreements.

Nonprocurement Debarment and Suspension

2 C.F.R. Part 2336. This regulation adopts the Office of Management and Budget guidance in subparts A through I of 2 C.F.R. Part 180, as supplemented by this part and the SSA policies and procedures for nonprocurement debarment and suspension.

Restrictions on Lobbying

20 C.F.R. Part 438. This regulation prohibits the use of any appropriated funds to pay any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of SSA, a member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a member of Congress in connection with any of the following: awarding of any federal contract, the making of any federal grant, the making of any federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.

Social Security Administration Implementation of OMB Guidance for Drug-Free Workplace Requirements

2 C.F.R. Part 2339. This regulation requires that the award and administration of SSA grants and cooperative agreements comply with the OMB guidance implementing the portion of the Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1988.

3. Reporting

Program Progress Reports

Every three months during the award period, the awardee will produce a progress report. The awardee's quarterly progress reports should provide a concise summary of the progress being made toward completion of activities in the annual work plan. The awardee should pay particular attention reporting on achieving any milestones set forth in the work plan, delays in achieving milestones, and the effect of delays on the final product. Details regarding the format and due dates of quarterly progress reports will be provided in the Terms and Conditions at the time of award.

Financial Status Reports

In addition, the awardee will submit quarterly federal financial status reports (SF 425) to SSA. We will provide detailed instructions for submitting federal financial reports and the required forms with each year's award.

Subaward reporting

Award recipients must report each action that obligates \$30,000 or more in federal funds for a subaward to an entity. Specific instructions for reporting subawards are included in the Federal Regulation 2 C.F.R. Part 170 (see Section F.2. Administrative and National Policy above).

G. FEDERAL AWARDING AGENCY CONTACT(S)

For matters related to the application and submission process for this grant, submit an e-mail with the subject: RDRC Application Question to Grants.Team@ssa.gov.

Anita O'Brien (anita.obrien@ssa.gov)

Dionne Mitchell (dionne.mitchell@ssa.gov)

Tonya Saunders (tonya.saunders@ssa.gov)

Social Security Administration

Office of Acquisition and Grants

Division of Programs Contracts

1540 Robert M. Ball Bldg.

6401 Security Blvd

Baltimore, Maryland 21235

Fax number: (410) 594-0133

For program related questions about the announcement/application, submit an e-mail with the subject: RDRC Program Question to Grants.Team@ssa.gov.

H. OTHER INFORMATION

PAYMENT

Project Costs

A successful applicant must agree that it will only charge allowable costs incurred to the award during this period of performance.

A successful applicant agrees to relate its financial charges to the approved work products and accomplishments.

Upon request by the Agency, a successful applicant agrees to provide SSA with all cost and expense data and information related to its work on special projects. Further, upon request, an awardee must agree to provide SSA with all cost and expense data for any of its authorized subawardees for work on funded projects.

Payment Arrangements

All payments arrangements must be conducted via the Automated Standard Application for Payments system (ASAP). SSA will no longer accept faxed or e-mailed payment requests. Immediately upon receipt of this award notice, please contact:

Mr. Matthew Zinner

Division of Central Accounting and Reporting

Social Security Administration

P.O. Box 47

Baltimore, Maryland 21235

Telephone No. (410) 966-5303

E-mail: Matthew.Zinner@ssa.gov

The Division of Central Accounting and Reporting will work with you to set up payment arrangements.

ATTACHMENT A - BUDGET DETAIL WORKSHEET



Attachment A Budget
Detail Worksheet_RDI

**ATTACHMENT B – HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES AND MINORITY
SERVING INSTITUTIONS OUTREACH REPORT**



Attachment B
Historically Black Colle