This proposed five-year, University of Michigan Advanced Rehabilitation Research Training Program in Community Living and Participation (ARRTP-CP) will train postdoctoral fellows to advance the rehabilitation field in community living and participation, promoted by embracing community-based research approaches. This program is a collaborative effort among academic researchers at the University of Michigan (U-M) School of Public Health (SPH), Institute of Social Research (ISR) and the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PM&R) and their partners at community-based organizations. This new training program is guided by the principles of competency-based education and assessment to develop individualized training plans and the achievement of core competencies. Portfolios will be used to track progress towards goals and to present accomplishments to potential employers at the end of training.

This new application proposes to train six post-doctoral fellows and up to five physician resident trainees between 2014 and 2019. The expertise and opportunities available at the U-M will be supplemented by opportunities for training at Michigan State University (MSU) and Wayne State University (WSU) and collaborations with associated community-based agencies. Strong partnership with the Outreach, Partnerships and Implementation Science (OPIS) Community Engagement Program at the Michigan Institute for Clinical Health Research (MICHR) at U-M will provide unique opportunities for connecting to community-based agencies to conduct research and providing specialized training in community engagement. Community Mentors from the disability community will provide specialized training and guidance for addressing community living and participation issues. A core curriculum will complement hands-on experience, and will include academic courses, seminars and workshops to train fellows in qualitative methods (i.e. community based participatory research - CBPR) complemented by quantitative ones. Opportunities to complete a CBPR project, attend presentations and lectures at partner institutions, national conferences, and networking will round out the training program.

Training in research methods will focus on diverse community based research approaches designed to capture community living and environmental, social and situational contextual factors. This approach directly responds to the objectives of the current NIDRR’s Long Range Plan. Special efforts will be made to recruit and train researchers from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds as well as individuals with disabilities. Two community mentors with disabilities will be assigned to fellows to guide them through their research training. Postdoctoral fellows and physician resident trainees will acquire knowledge and expertise in community living and participation issues; acquire advanced research skills; learn how to link research to policy and collaborate effectively community partners while demonstrating competencies to apply and communicate the results of research to enhance the community living and participation.

The overall objectives of the AR RTP-CP are to: 1) to provide research training in community living and participation in persons with disabilities; 2) orient training toward advancement of rehabilitation science by promoting community-based research that enables the development of sound disability policy; 3) prepare researchers to conduct studies in community-based settings, including home, school, and other environments; 4) foster advanced research skills that will result in successful research proposals addressing issues relevant to persons with disabilities; and 5) build productive partnerships and collaborations that will lead to successful careers to address the critical shortage of qualified rehabilitation scientists.