

Technical Assistance Planning Guide

National Center on Child Care Professional Development Systems and Workforce Initiatives (PDW Center)
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This resource is a planning guide for State/Territory teams as they develop and strengthen technical assistance (TA) supports. It also describes an integrated State/Territory professional development system (PDS), and defines TA as part of an integrated PDS. The provided consideration questions are built on a readiness for change process framework, with four steps focused on goal/outcome development, fit and feasibility and readiness to change, implementation, and monitoring.

This planning guide is for the full range of policymakers and leaders across an integrated early childhood and school-age (SA) system of Federal, State/Territory, and locally funded programs: Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Administrators, Head Start and other early education leaders, school-age and youth development leaders, and their key partners. These policymakers and leaders can create a team of stakeholders to review the guide's information and considerations to create a well-thought out plan. The team can assess the feasibility of strategies, and identify high-impact approaches to build TA capacity.

The guide is presented in three sections:

- I. Overview of Integrated PDS;
- II. Technical Assistance Definitions; and
- III. Considerations for Building Technical Assistance Capacity.

I. Overview of Integrated Professional Development Systems

State/Territory integrated PDS consist of interrelated efforts, services, and supports that address the continuum of workforce needs with a common goal of building and sustaining an effective workforce. PDS include education, training, and TA.

As States/Territories work to build TA capacity, there are an increasing number and variety of stakeholders to consider across:

- Roles—direct service professionals and those who work on behalf of young children and their families;
- Settings—centers, schools, and homes;
- Sectors—child care, Head Start/Early Head Start, public preschool/primary education, and early intervention/special education; and
- Related systems—family support, health, and mental health.

Exactly which sectors and systems comprise a State/Territory's vision for an integrated PDS depends on its context, including its political and fiscal situation, where and how the PDS fits in its larger early learning and early childhood systems, and its specific professional development (PD) goals and priorities. A State/Territory's context can dictate the best approach(es) for successful integration efforts.

States and Territories have made significant investments in PDS to sustain a professionally prepared workforce of teachers, administrators, and, adult educators such as TA providers, consultants, trainers, and higher education faculty. Many of these professionals have traditionally been served by multiple systems of preparation and ongoing support based on their role, setting, and funding source. Education,

training, TA, and professional progression are enhanced by a single integrated system that provides opportunities for growth from entry through advanced levels.

II. Technical Assistance Definitions

An important first step in building TA supports is adopting consistent terminology. *Technical assistance* is the provision of targeted and customized supports by a professional with subject matter and adult-learning knowledge and skills. These supports develop or strengthen the process, knowledge application, or implementation of services by recipients. TA supports the reflective process that professionals need to translate the theories and information learned through education and/or training into best practices (National Association for the Education of Young Children & National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, 2011). TA strategies include coaching, mentoring, consultation, PD advising, and peer-to-peer support. The PDW Center uses the NAEYC/NACCRRA glossary of definitions including the following:

Mentoring is a relationship-based process between colleagues in similar professional roles, with a more-experienced individual with adult learning knowledge and skills, the mentor, providing guidance and example to the less-experienced protégé or mentee. Mentoring is intended to increase an individual’s personal or professional capacity, resulting in greater professional effectiveness.

Consultation is a collaborative problem-solving process between an external consultant with specific expertise and adult learning knowledge and skills and an individual or group from one program or organization. Consultation facilitates the assessment and resolution of an issue-specific concern—a program-/organizational-, staff-, or child-/family-related issue—or addresses a specific topic.

Coaching is a relationship-based process led by an expert with specialized and adult learning knowledge and skills, who often serves in a different professional role than the recipient(s). Coaching is designed to build capacity for specific professional dispositions, skills, and behaviors and is focused on goal-setting and achievement for an individual or group.

TA specialists support the workforce’s development of core knowledge and competencies to improve environmental quality and promote positive child outcomes. Access to TA may be fundamental to the PD of the workforce, since there is some evidence that it can be an effective method to improve observed quality and practices with children. Many States/Territories are using TA strategies to improve the quality of child care, but these States/Territories are also concerned about developing and sustaining effective TA capacity.

III. Considerations for Building Technical Assistance Capacity

The following planning considerations are built on a readiness-for-change process framework, and organized in four suggested steps. Each step may take a team of stakeholders more than one work session to complete. As a first step in using these considerations, a team should determine if any of these steps have already been started or completed. The four steps are:

1. Develop or refine the goals and outcomes.

2. Determine the fit and feasibility and readiness to change.
3. Select an approach and develop an implementation plan.
4. Implement the plan and monitor results.

Step 1: Develop or Refine the Goals and Outcomes

Purpose: Define the goal and outcomes as concretely as possible.

- **What goals and outcomes does the State/Territory want to achieve by building TA capacity?**
- **How can this effort be used to unify the field and coordinate all TA efforts across settings and funding streams?**
- **How is TA defined? What is the State/Territory vision for comprehensive TA?**
- **What are the articulated goals and outcomes for TA for the early childhood (EC) and SA workforce?**
- **Is there sufficient buy-in and consensus in the State/Territory regarding those goals? If not, is there a vehicle or body that can help develop consensus?**
- **Which stakeholders should be part of any revision or fine-tuning of State/Territory goals and policy to develop or advance TA capacity?**
 - ◆ Does the State/Territory have access to these vehicles, bodies, or stakeholders?
 - ◆ If not, what partners could be engaged to bring the needed stakeholders together?
- **What is the current research on best practice and what are promising practices? Has there been substantial change in the research since the last TA plan or evaluation was completed?**
- **How will we measure success?**

Step 2: Determine the Fit and Feasibility and Readiness to Change

Conduct a fit and feasibility analysis to determine what combination of policies and allocation of resources is most likely to achieve the desired goals and outcomes. The purpose of a fit and feasibility analysis is to examine an array of options and assess the degree to which each option (or package of options) could be successfully implemented in the State/Territory. The components of a fit and feasibility analysis include:

- *Identification and Validation of Need*—questions for initial considerations; and
- *Consideration of Required Changes*—key questions for in-depth considerations that create readiness to change.

Identification and Validation of Need

Purpose: Ensure that PDS stakeholders understand the TA needs and are committed to capacity building and successful implementation.

- **What are the TA needs? Is there a needs assessment that includes questions about TA?**
 - ◆ Are there waiting lists for TA options?
 - ◆ What frequency and duration of TA will be effective in reaching goals and outcomes?
- **Is there consensus that TA needs to be developed or improved and for what purposes? Which stakeholders need to provide consensus for development/improvement?**

- ◆ Systems (early childhood and SA, health, mental health, parent education/family support, home visiting, etc.)
- ◆ Sectors (child care, Head Start, early intervention, etc.)
- ◆ Workforce
- ◆ Other users (such as employers, other quality improvement systems or initiatives, etc.)
- **How does/how will TA fit in the PDS?**
 - ◆ Use with or link to community based training
 - ◆ Use with or link to higher education courses
 - ◆ Relationship to career pathway and credentials
 - ◆ Approval and tracking in workforce data system, such as a registry
- **Who does/will TA serve across settings and sectors? Is there a need to target TA to any specific role(s), setting(s), or age range(s)?**
 - ◆ Settings: Settings are where services are provided, including direct and non-direct service programs, organizations, agencies, etc. Settings and their administration often cross multiple EC and SA sectors, and increasingly they cross related systems. They also can and often do have a combination of characteristics listed below.
 - ❖ Public and private
 - ❖ Profit and non-profit
 - ❖ Faith-based
 - ❖ Community-based
 - ❖ School-based
 - ❖ Home-based
 - ❖ Employer sponsored
 - ❖ Licensing requirements
 - ◆ Sectors: The ECE and SA system is composed of sectors. Sectors are delineated by their discrete funding streams, regulations, and requirements. Because early intervention and special education services cross and serve multiple sectors, they are sometimes described as part of each of these sectors and sometimes described as separate systems. However, for the purposes of discussing and framing intentional PDS integration, they are defined in this guide as ECE and SA primary sectors to underscore their importance as well as their discrete professional preparation and development history, delivery, and requirements. The ECE and SA primary sectors include:
 - ❖ Child care
 - ❖ Head Start/Early Head Start
 - ❖ Public preschool/primary education
 - ❖ Early intervention/Special education
- **How does/will TA fit with other related systems and other quality improvement efforts?**
 - ◆ Related Systems: Systems that are related to and overlap with the ECE and SA system include family support which may provide parenting education, home visiting, economic supports, and other services; and health and mental health which may provide preventative care, screenings, and supports to access health providers, as well as instructional support.
 - ◆ Quality Improvement Efforts: PDS are an integral part of other quality improvement efforts in States and Territories. These efforts may include:
 - ❖ Licensing
 - ❖ Quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS)

- ❖ State/Territory system building initiatives/plans (CCDF, State Early Childhood Advisory Council, Head Start, State Early Childhood Comprehensive System Grants, Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant, etc.)
- ❖ K-3 or K-12 TA system
- **What topics/CKCs does current TA cover? Are there additional topics/CKCs that will be covered?**
- **How does/will TA “fit” with community values, including the values of diverse cultural groups?**
- **What are the unique needs of TA providers?**
- **What are the unique TA needs of the infant/toddler and school-age community?**

Consideration of Required Changes

Purpose: Identify the specific system components, governance, political, financial, and sustainability issues that are needed to build TA capacity.

- **What additional TA capacity is needed to support the demand for TA?**
- **Is there a TA model in place? If so what changes will be needed to meet the identified TA needs goals and outcomes?**
- **What organization(s) are best positioned to implement, grow and sustain TA services?**
- **What organizations(s) are best positioned to implement, grow and sustain TA Capacity?**
 - ◆ **What organizational expertise and structure do TA organizations need? What ongoing support will TA organizations need, and how will it be provided?**
- **How can law, regulations, policy, and guidance be used to support TA as an integral part of an integrated EC and SA PDS?**
- **How can States/Territories develop efficiencies of scale and avoid duplication of services to make the best use of TA funds?**
- **What reallocations of investments, changes in policies, QRIS or licensing standards, or contracts for services are needed to develop or advance TA capacity?**
- **Which combination of investments or strategies are a good fit for the community/State/Territory?**
- **What funding resources can be accessed to support planning and coordination?**
- **If additional funding is required, what additional funding is available, and from what sources?**
- **Can TA capacity building leverage new policy and funding opportunities presented by cross-agency/entity efforts such as State/Territory Early Childhood Advisory Councils (ECACs) or other existing efforts?**
- **What changes need to be made to existing policies, QRIS standards, contracts with vendors, CKCs, career pathways, or training and education support building TA capacity?**
 - ◆ By systems
 - ◆ By those providing PD, including faculty
 - ◆ By EC and SA direct service staff
 - ◆ By EC and SA staff working on behalf of young children
- **Are there opportunities to integrate expectations for TA providers related to appropriate salaries, benefits, and work environments into career pathways, QRIS criteria, quality initiatives?**
- **How will States/Territories ensure diversity within their TA capacity (e.g., racial/ethnic/linguistic diversity among TA professionals)?**

Step 3: Select an Approach and Develop an Implementation Plan

Select an approach and develop the implementation plan based on considerations in steps 1 and 2. Confirm the approach to building TA capacity by delineating the targeted settings, sectors, related systems, and goals. A successful implementation plan will address management of changes in the system, communications, regular review and monitoring, and data collection and reporting. Described below are key elements and questions to guide the design of an implementation plan.

- **How will TA be delivered?**
- **What settings will be eligible for TA services (e.g., CCDF-funded child care centers; licensed and license-exempt; Head Start and Early Head Start; family child care; afterschool or summer programs)? Will the priority be on lower-rated-quality programs or higher? Programs serving low-income families and children?**
- **What will be the focus of TA (e.g., overall program quality improvement, a specific area such as family engagement, literacy, curriculum implementation, or adult-child interactions, or a combination of targets)?**

Planning for Change

Purpose: Prepare for implementation by ensuring that roles and responsibilities for implementing a new approach are clear and agreed upon by stakeholders.

- **Where is the authority to develop/expand and implement TA services?**
 - ◆ What entity/entities will oversee the delivery of TA?
 - ◆ What cross-agency agreements will need to be in place?
 - ◆ How will the work be done?
 - ◆ Who will manage the work?
 - ◆ What is the time frame?
 - ◆ What is currently in place to support the work?
- **How can alignment be ensured:**
 - ◆ Across the PDS (CKCs, credentials, career pathways, access, capacity, workforce data)?
 - ◆ With higher education courses and programs?
 - ◆ With other quality improvement efforts and standards (e.g., licensing, national standards, QRIS, early learning guidelines, etc.)?
- **Who should be involved in the development/expansion?**
 - ◆ What sectors and related systems?
 - ◆ What are the barriers to involving multiple sectors/related systems and can the challenges be overcome?
 - ◆ What roles and specialized areas—adult educators, policymakers, practitioners, researchers, IT, SA, special needs/early intervention, schools, etc.?
 - ◆ Members of already existing State/Territory advisory or planning groups?
- **How will the TA capacity building plan be developed or advanced?**
 - ◆ With a foundation of a mission and vision? With guiding principles?
 - ◆ By developing a conceptual design?
 - ◆ Will/how will national standards/criteria be used?
 - ◆ By leads, workgroups, teams? How will workgroups/teams be formed?
 - ◆ Will there be writing and research guides and ground rules?

- ◆ What is the timeframe for development/revisions?

Communication Plan

Purpose: Develop an intentional communication and marketing strategy to support implementation.

- **Who needs to know about the plans for building TA capacity, what do they need to know, and how will communication be conducted?**
 - ◆ Various professionals across settings, sectors, and related systems
 - ◆ Policymakers
 - ◆ Partners
 - ◆ Professionals working directly with young children and their families
 - ◆ Program directors/administrators
 - ◆ Training and TA providers
 - ◆ Higher education faculty and administrators
- **What information products are needed for which audiences?**
- **How will feedback be solicited, collected, and incorporated from all stakeholders?**

Implementation Team

Purpose: Support implementation by creating roles and responsibilities and a plan for regular monitoring of activities. (Also see Step 4. Implement the Plan and Monitor Results.)

- **Who should be on the Implementation Team to guide implementation and ongoing monitoring of the approach and plans?**
- **What infrastructure is needed at the State/Territory level to support the comprehensive approach?**
- **What staff is available to coordinate this work?**
- **What training and supervision will staff need to coordinate this work?**
- **What workplan will be developed, and who will oversee the activities in the workplan?**

Data Collection and Reporting Plan

Purpose: Develop a data plan to support implementation and reporting of progress to funders and to the Implementation Team. (Also see Step 4. Implement the Plan and Monitor Results.)

- **How will the State/Territory monitor the implementation of the TA capacity building plan?**
- **What indicators of successful implementation will be collected over time? Will data include dosage, intensity and content of TA delivered?**
- **What capacity exists to collect, house, and analyze data? Are there linkages with a unified data system that supports early learning goals?**
- **What existing data systems (registries, licensing, child care assistance, education) could be used?**
- **What new data systems, linkages, or tracking capacity may need to be established?**
- **How can cross-sector/system privacy issues be addressed?**
- **What capacity exists for developing regular reporting that can inform the Implementation Team?**
- **How will data be used to inform decisionmaking? When will plans be reviewed and adjusted (if/as needed)?**

- **Is an evaluator in place who can conduct analyses to determine if the comprehensive approach is improving integration and impacting workforce quality?**

Step 4: Implement the Plan and Monitor Results

Assign tasks and timelines, monitor results, and make system adjustments as needed. Implementation occurs through assigned roles and responsibilities for specific action steps and a timeline for completion as considered in Steps 1–3. To the extent possible, the implementation plan for building TA capacity should incorporate the information gathered to date and use the results garnered through Step 3 of the considerations. Results from the data collection and monitoring of implementation inform revisions or modifications to activities. Appropriate selection of staff, ongoing TA, and analysis of data to inform decisions can support this process of continuous improvement and help the State/Territory reflect on lessons learned as TA services are delivered. Key elements of monitoring an implementation plan and questions to guide this continuous improvement process are described below.

Checking In

Purpose: Develop a process for checking in on implementation activities to date.

- **How will the State/Territory collect information on the progress of implementation activities to date?**
- **How will the State/Territory receive feedback from key stakeholders (e.g., TA organizations, TA specialists, and recipients of TA) involved in the development, expansion, or modification of TA capacity across settings, sectors, and related systems?**
- **What process will be used to gather information from evaluation efforts, data systems, and regular reporting from key implementers to inform adjustments needed?**

Evaluating

Purpose: Develop a process to reflect on current implementation activities to determine changes needed to meet implementation goals.

- **Who will be responsible for reflecting upon the information gathered through the established check-in processes? Which stakeholders need to be involved?**
- **How often should the feedback gathered through monitoring processes be considered?**
- **What process will the State/Territory use to evaluate feedback from multiple monitoring activities to make decisions about adjustments to the implementation plan?**

Making Adjustments

Purpose: Develop a process for adjusting current implementation activities based upon successes and challenges identified in the current implementation plan.

- **What threshold will the State/Territory use to determine that the evidence collected points to a need to adjust or modify implementation activities?**
- **How will the State/Territory implement modifications to TA capacity building?**
- **What parts of the implementation process will need to be revisited to make adjustments (e.g., will the adjustment require a new communication plan, or an invitation to new stakeholders)?**

- **What process will the State/Territory use to ensure that modifications have led to a stronger implementation plan?**

Reference

National Association for the Education of Young Children & National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies. (2011). *Early Childhood Education Professional Development: Training and Technical Assistance Glossary*. Retrieved from www.naeyc.org/GlossaryTraining_TA.pdf