



**Technical Assistance
to
Iowa's Community Empowerment Areas**

March 2005

www.empowerment.state.ia.us

Technical Assistance Plan for Community Empowerment

Background

Community Empowerment was established by legislation during the 1998 session in an effort to create a partnership between communities and state government with an emphasis to improve the well-being of families with young children. It is believed that the desired results identified by communities, with the support of the state, will be achieved as individuals, governments, and agencies work collaboratively within communities. The role of the Iowa Empowerment Board and the State is to support and facilitate growth of community efforts. The legislation intended that through the efforts of Community Empowerment that by the end of year 2005, every community in Iowa will have developed the capacity and commitment for using local decision making to achieving these results: Healthy Children; Children Ready to Succeed in School; Safe and Supportive Communities; Secure and Nurturing Families; and Secure and Nurturing Child Care Environments.

Iowa's Early Care, Health and Education Vision

Every child, beginning at birth, will be healthy and successful.

Context and Purpose of the Office of Empowerment and the Statewide Technical Assistance System

The Office of Empowerment was established as a division of the Iowa Department of Management, as well as, a state-level technical assistance team through the empowerment legislation. The Office of Empowerment provides a center for facilitation, communication, and coordination for community empowerment activities and funding. The Community Empowerment State Technical Assistance Team is staff from the state agencies represented on the Iowa Board designated to provide technical assistance and support to community empowerment areas and the Iowa Board.

The purpose of the statewide technical assistance system is to facilitate implementation of a comprehensive, integrated early care, health and education system. This may involve system change across education, health and human service agencies and organizations serving children and families at the state and local levels. An additional purpose is to assist, guide, and support all partners to understand, implement, and sustain systems change. The Community Empowerment State Technical Assistance Team strives to demonstrate and facilitate collaborative leadership to achieve results for children and their families.

As community empowerment areas have been organized and implemented locally developed community plans, the technical assistance needs have increased and changed over time. The extension of the formalized technical assistance system to include other providers (e.g. community colleges, ISU Extension Services, area education agencies, community action programs) is a current challenge. The demand for technical assistance has given rise to two challenges: defining what is meant by technical assistance and determining how to create a system to deliver technical assistance. This document has been created to address these challenges.

Definition

In working to address these issues, the Office of Empowerment and the state technical assistance team agreed to the following definition for the technical assistance services offered to empowerment areas:

Technical Assistance is an ongoing, systematic and interactive process that is designed to achieve results and enables knowledge from research, policy, and evidence-based practices to be shared in partnership through a variety of strategies with specific groups, agencies, communities, and other partners to use within their unique contexts.

Guiding Principles (Source: Iowa Empowerment Board Leadership Agenda, 2005)

- Mutual Respect/Trust
- Flexibility
- Results-Focused
- Research/Evidence-Based
- Creative/Innovative
- Partnerships
- Accountability

The Iowa Empowerment Board has established a set of principles that guide the work of the Iowa Empowerment Board, Office of Empowerment and the State Technical Assistance Team. These principles provide the foundation for implementing the mission of the Iowa Empowerment Board to support communities by demonstrating and facilitating leadership and the process towards collaboration to build a comprehensive and integrated system of supports and services to achieve results for children (0 -5) and their families (Iowa Empowerment Board Leadership Agenda, 2005).

Goals of the Technical Assistance System

In order to facilitate implementation of the purpose of the statewide technical assistance (TA) system, five goals have been established for the TA system:

1. To provide assistance to community empowerment areas in: planning; policy development; assuring quality effectiveness; funding; resource, results, and performance accountability; evaluation; and communication.
2. To promote, sustain, and expand community collaboration and planning partnerships and effective utilization of resources.
3. To promote leadership in the development of a comprehensive, integrated early care, health and education system and promote implementation of strategies through the efforts of Community Empowerment.
4. To share information and promote research/evidence-based practices in early care, health and education programs and services.
5. To develop and promote community capacity and leadership.

Target Audiences for Technical Assistance

The recipients of technical assistance services include both primary and secondary recipients. The primary recipients include community empowerment area board members, coordinators/contacts, volunteers, early care, health and education agencies, organizations and groups, and state agencies' staff members and support personnel that work with communities. Secondary recipients are the Iowa Legislature, the general public, national organizations, and other states.

Content and Structure of the Technical Assistance System

The content or topical focus of the technical assistance system continues to address the range of public and private services for children and their families and the systems that support them.

Technical assistance may be provided proactively through education or consultation in response to specific requests from the field. Proactive approaches anticipate local needs, or are based on patterns of previous requests, and include 1) documents developed to address issues of community empowerment areas, 2) research/evidence-based information via training opportunities or dissemination of materials, and 3) a range of planning activities to address policy implementation issues or trends in services. The coordinators/contacts for community empowerment areas and state advisory bodies also provide input in identifying what proactive approaches would be most effective.

Methods of Delivering Technical Assistance

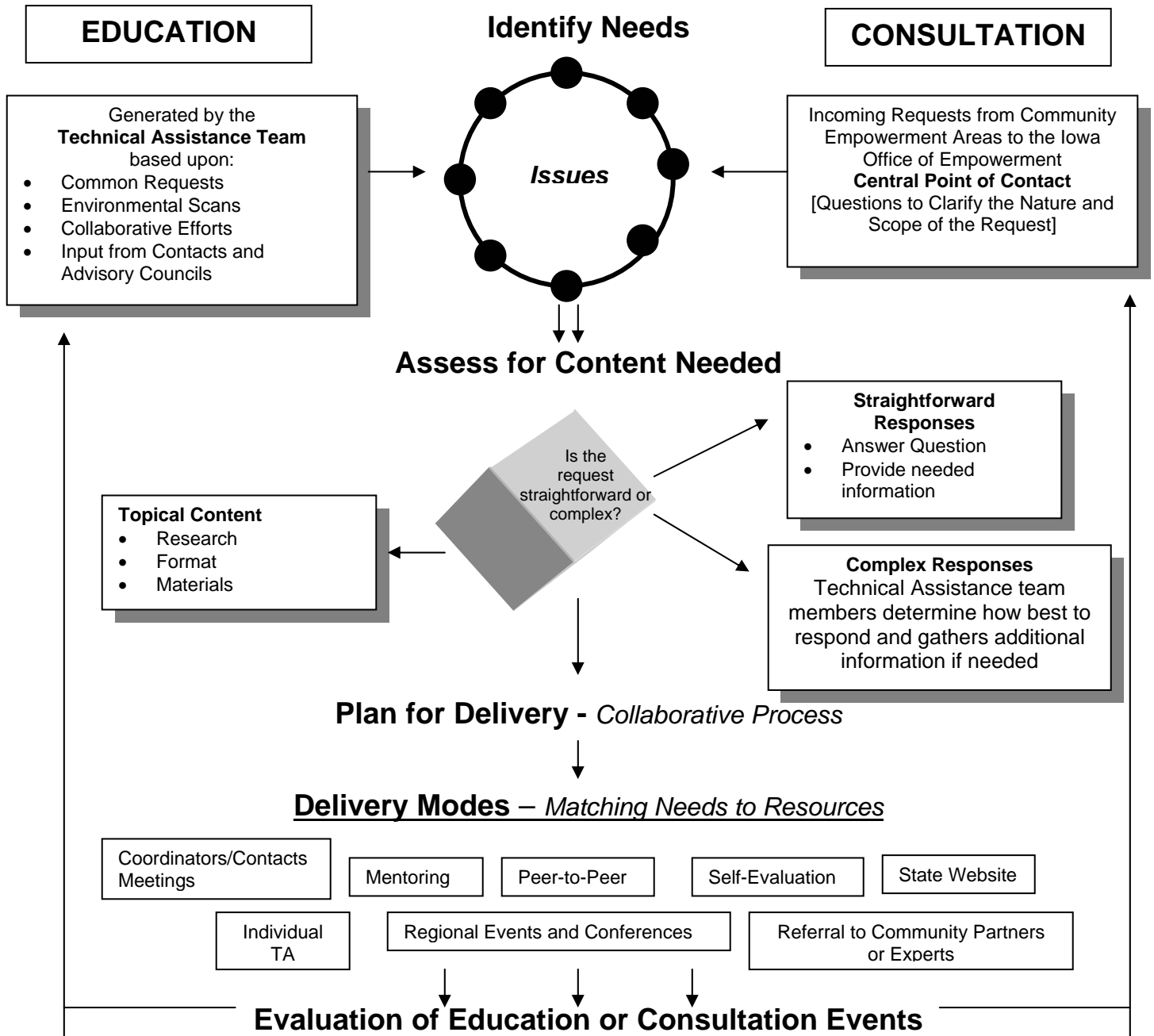
- Toolkits
- Town meetings/forums
- Board meetings – State and Community Empowerment Area
- Regional Trainings
- Conferences
- Communication linkages (email, phone, ICN meetings)
- On -site visits
- Quarterly coordinator/contact meetings
- Empowerment Web site (www.empowerment.state.ia.us)
- Empowerment Newsletter

System Processes

The Office of Empowerment serves as a central point of contact for technical assistance requests. Requests for technical assistance take many forms: calls from the field, input from the web site, e-mail, letters, or face to face contacts. As each contact is received, the facilitator or community liaison with the Office of Empowerment find out about the need. A basic protocol of questions is used to identify the nature and scope of the local needs. In some cases, a simple answer to a question is all that is needed.

If the response is more involved, the facilitator or community liaison with the Office of Empowerment will either refer the question to the individual with the required knowledge or share the question with team members. In the latter instance, these inquiries or technical assistance requests are presented for discussion at team meetings. These more involved requests may be about community plans, conflicts of interest, a request for a site visit or presentation, research needs, or a difficult issue that requires problem solving by the team. In each instance, feedback or a response is provided to the individual making the request. In some cases, the issue may be referred to the Iowa Empowerment Board or the state agency directors for a policy response.

How Technical Assistance is Designed to Meet Local Needs



Examples of Identified Needs or Issues and Matching Needs to Resources

Identify Needs

Examples of technical assistance needs as identified by community empowerment areas, the technical assistance team, workgroups and advisory bodies.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Leadership Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Skill Development – Human Resources • Board Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Active Citizen and Consumer Involvement – Iowa Public Meeting Information/Open Meetings Law – Policy Versus Administration/Management – Redesignation – Self-Evaluation • Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Assessment – Data Analysis – Community Plan • Fiscal Accountability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Fiscal Process and Practices – Results • Coordination and Integration of Funding Streams <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Waivers, Process, Local Decisions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Centered Practice • Quality/Best Practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Family Centered Early Care, Health, and Education Services – Family Support – Parent Education • Marketing/Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Public Engagement – Empowerment Marketing (i.e., community commitment) • Data-Informed Results-Based Decision Making <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Community Results and Indicators – Program Performance Measures – Program Evaluation • Collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Early Care, Health and Education System Building – Evaluation of Partnerships – Increased Service Integration • Clarification of Legislation, Rules, Policies, and Procedures • Other Community Identified Needs |
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Match Needs to Resources

Examples of Resources for Providing Technical Assistance: The Office of Empowerment has a web site with tools, resources, and links to support Community Empowerment Areas. www.empowerment.state.ia.us

Iowa Resources:

- ISU Extension
- Area Education Agencies
- Community Colleges
- State Agencies
 - Economic Development
 - Education
 - Human Rights
 - Human Services
 - Management
 - Public Health
- County Attorney
- Other Service/Advocacy Providers
- Other Community Agencies and Resources

National Resources:

- Family Support of America
- Healthy Families America
- Head Start and Early Head Start
- National Association of the Education of Young Children
- National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies
- National Institute for Early Education Research
- National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System
- National Association of Counties
- Other State Initiatives for Collaborations/Children

Scope and Resources of the Office of Empowerment and State Technical Assistance Team

The facilitator and community liaison with the Office of Empowerment and the State Technical Assistance Team from the state departments represented on the Iowa Board provide staffing services to the Iowa Empowerment Board and local Community Empowerment Areas. The State agencies represented on the Iowa Empowerment Board include the Iowa Departments of Economic Development, Education, Human Rights, Human Services, and Public Health.

The Office of Empowerment was established in the Department of Management to provide facilitation, communication, and coordination for community empowerment activities and funding. The Office of Empowerment consists of a facilitator and community liaison who provide primary staffing to the board, coordinates state technical assistance activities and implementation of the technical assistance system, and other communication and coordination functions that aid in moving authority and decision-making responsibility from the state to communities and individuals. The technical assistance team members representing the state departments are identified in the diagram below.

The day-to-day operational work of the team members includes:

- Data management
- Management of the grants process
- Annual reports
- Staff/board meetings
- Committees
- Conferences/networking meetings
- State agency duties
- Preparation of administrative rules
- Processing contracts, payments
- Negotiating priorities (e.g., for shared staff)
- Evaluation/monitoring
- Budget review

Challenges

Since the beginning, a number of challenges have been recognized in delivering statewide technical assistance to Community Empowerment Areas. Some of these challenges are based in the amount of fiscal and human capital available. Other challenges are ongoing and continually addressed to deliver reliable, equitable and timely consultation, and education.

State Empowerment Team (March 2005)

Office of Empowerment - Department of Management
 Facilitator - *Shanell Wagler*
 Community Liaison – *Debra Scrowther*

State Agency Liaisons Providing Technical Assistance

Department of Human Services
Jeff Anderson

Department of Education
Dee Gethmann

Department of Public Health
Gretchen Hageman
Jane Stockton

Department of Human Rights
Janet Gartin

Department of Economic Development

Identified Challenges

- State staff time
- Wide variation in needs for technical assistance
- Consistency in messages/interpretations
- Amount and frequency of communication (too little vs. too much)
- Realistic perceptions of the organizational capacity of Community Empowerment Boards
- Level of awareness regarding empowerment among general public, potential participating agencies
- Assuring technical assistance reaches targeted audiences

Here are a few examples of the types of requests received, and possible responses and resources for delivery of technical assistance.

Example of Application of Technical Assistance Plan		
Categories of Assistance <i>What is the incoming request to the State Office of Empowerment Office?</i>	Kinds of Response <i>How will TA be individualized to meet local needs and requests for assistance?</i>	TA Provider <i>Who has the knowledge and expertise to address the identified needs?</i>
Policy Development		
Identified Need: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify rules, policies, procedures, and guidelines • Explore realignment to promote efficiency • Recommendations for new policies 	Match TA to Need: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation with state TA Team, then direct response to community empowerment area • Consultation with the Iowa Empowerment Board • Facilitate peer-to-peer relationship between empowerment area • Regional conference on policy development 	Resources for Providing TA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iowa Empowerment TA Team • Iowa Empowerment Board • State agencies • Other Community Partners • National Resources
Quality/Effectiveness		
Identified Need: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation on research/evidence-based practices for serving children and families • Promote professional development • Assistance with data-based and results-based decision making 	Match TA to Need: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site visit for individual TA • Self-evaluation • Statewide conference • Web site links • Ongoing professional development support 	Resources for Providing TA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iowa Empowerment TA Team • Area Education Agencies • ISU Extension • Community colleges • Others

Evaluation

A bi-monthly report of technical assistance activities provided by the Empowerment Team is prepared for the State Empowerment Board. An annual report serves as a mechanism for reporting on technical assistance activities to the legislature and other stakeholder groups. Currently, evaluative information is collected from participants in education or training events, which addresses content as well as delivery issues. These have been useful to the technical assistance team in designing events or modifying existing materials and methods.

Community Empowerment System Organization

