THE CHILDREN'S BUREAU TRAINING/TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NETWORK
KEY STEPS TO COORDINATING THE T/TA PROCESS

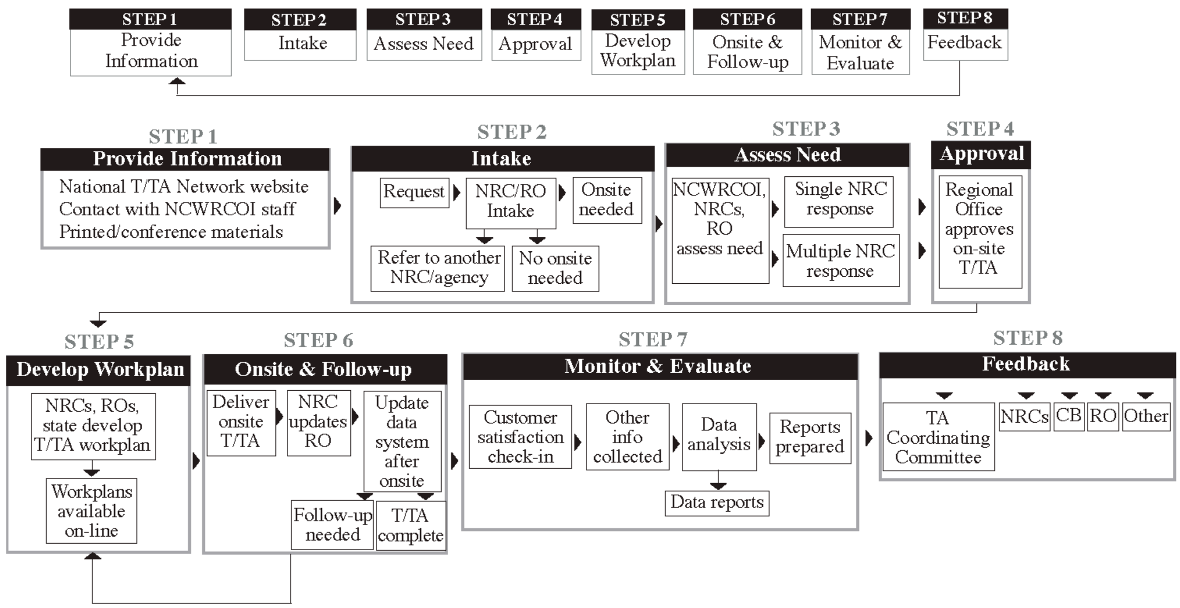
The Children's Bureau (CB) is implementing a new process for accessing Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA). This process is designed to enhance the utilization if Children's Bureau T/TA to achieve systemic change in State and Tribal child welfare programs.

With the start of the 2005 fiscal year, the Children's Bureau entered into a new set of cooperative agreements with the seven National Resource Centers (NRCs). To better coordinate services to States and Tribes from the NRC's, the procedure for requesting training and technical assistance (T/TA) is now a central point-of-coordination for all on-site requests. Under the new Children's Bureau T/TA Network structure, the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement (NCWRCOI) is responsible for coordinating, facilitating and evaluating onsite T/TA. In responding to requests for on-site T/TA, all Children's Bureau NRCs and AdoptUSKids will cooperate with the central point-of-coordination. A Training and Technical Assistance Coordinating Committee, made up of the Children's Bureau's Federal Project Officers (FPOs) for the NRCs and ACF Regional Office staff, developed the following guidance on procedures for States and Tribes to follow in requesting on-site T/TA from the seven NRCs and AdoptUSKids.

In the role of the central point-of-coordination for all on-site requests, the NCWRCOI will facilitate the involvement of appropriate staff from ACF Regional Offices (RO), NRCs/AdoptUSKids (referred to collectively as "NRCs" for the remainder of this paper), the Children's Bureau (CB), and other critical stakeholders in the T/TA needs assessment and in the development of a work plan. For each State and Tribe receiving onsite T/TA, the central point of coordination will insure a better coordinated response, avoid delays and duplication, and result in sound T/TA work plans.

The flow chart below summarizes the key steps in the new, coordinated onsite T/TA process. Because the process will be flexible based on the unique needs of each State and Tribe, the steps will not necessarily occur in the exact order presented for every onsite T/TA request.

Key Steps to Coordinating Onsite T/TA



The T/TA process described in this paper reflects input from the CB T/TA Coordinating Committee, ACF RO staff, and all the NRCs/AdoptUSKids. In the future, the NCWRCOI will work closely with these same groups to refine and improve the process as necessary.

Step 1: Providing Information about National T/TA Network Services and Process. One of the keys to facilitating coordinated and responsive onsite T/TA is providing States, Tribes and other key participants with up-to-date information about available T/TA resources and the onsite T/TA request process. The NCWRCOI will ensure that participants can access such information through multiple sources, including a new, interactive National T/TA Network web site, descriptive materials distributed at national conferences and meetings, and direct contact with designated NCWRCOI staff. In addition, individual NRCs will continue to publicize their own services and expertise through their websites, attendance at conferences, mailings and other activities.

The National T/TA Network web site will provide comprehensive, updated information to help State and Tribal staff understand the T/TA process, determine whom to contact in various NRCs for more specific information, and initiate their requests for onsite T/TA, including:

- descriptions of services and activities for each NRC and AdoptUSKids, and links to their web sites;
- details of the onsite T/TA request, approval and work plan development process;
- electronic T/TA request forms States can complete and submit immediately via the web site;
- contact information for NCWRCOI staff who can provide additional, individualized assistance; and

- links to ACF RO staff and other organizations with available resources and critical information (Children's Bureau, National Clearinghouses, other ACF Resource Centers, etc.).

In addition to the web site, NCWRCOI staff will provide information through the distribution of written materials, presentations at conferences, and other outreach activities. The NCWRCOI will publicize the National T/TA Network and its activities throughout the 5-year grant period to ensure an accurate and consistent understanding of the resources available to all States and Tribes, the process for accessing them, and their relevance to improving outcomes for children and families.

Finally, designated NCWRCOI staff will be available by telephone, email or videoconference to work with State/Tribal staff individually, answer questions, and assist in contacting NRCs or other resources to ensure that States/Tribes understand the process and receive necessary information from the outset. Kris Sahonchik will manage the T/TA coordination function and serve as the lead contact person for the NCWRCOI.

Step 2: Intake for all types of T/TA (including on-site T/TA). Providing responsive T/TA requires a consistent and timely intake process to: (1) determine the viability and appropriateness of requests from States/Tribes, (2) begin to hone initial T/TA requests and (3) connect State/Tribal agencies with the NRCs most suited to meet their needs. State/Tribal agencies may contact RO staff, NRCs or the NCWRCOI initially with specific onsite T/TA requests. They also may have more general questions about the types of T/TA available or need information about specific issues on which they are working. For example, States may request assistance from ROs or NRCs in developing broad PIP strategies or in determining the types of T/TA services they can include as action steps in their PIPs. The NRC Network should treat all these initial contacts as intakes to the T/TA system and work with each agency to determine its specific needs, involve all NRCs and organizations that might be needed, and assist in determining whether the agency ultimately needs to request onsite T/TA.

In order to ensure a coordinated, consistent and responsive approach to onsite T/TA, the staff at the initial point of contact in the T/TA Network should collect some basic, standardized information from each State/Tribe. Based on that information, the initial contact person should either begin processing the formal request or refer the agency to the appropriate NRC for further assistance. In addition, if the initial contact is not with the RO, the appropriate RO staff person should be informed about the request. Finally, the contact person may involve the NCWRCOI in determining which NRC(s) would be best suited to meet the State/Tribal agency's needs or if T/TA will have to be provided by more than one NRC and will require integration and coordination. For example, the NCWRCOI can help the RO and States define T/TA needs during the PIP development process and involve appropriate NRCs in the process before the PIP has been finalized.

The goal of the intake is to determine whether the request is feasible for onsite T/TA through the NRC(s) and, if so, to process the request for onsite T/TA in a consistent, efficient and timely manner. Even in cases where the intake reveals that onsite T/TA is not necessary, a consistent intake process will ensure a more targeted response from the T/TA Network to meet State or Tribal needs.

Among the key pieces of information that should be discussed and collected during the intake process are the following:

- Contact's information (e.g., position in the agency, address, email, telephone, etc.)
- Type of agency (e.g., state, county, tribal, Court, etc.)
- Whether state's single point of contact for onsite T/TA has approved request
- Reason for request
- Nature of the need
- General timeframes for T/TA
- Whether other NRCs and/or organizations may need to be involved
- Whether ACF RO has been informed about possible T/TA needs
- Whether needs are related to the CFSR, PIP, CFSP or other Federal requirements or CB initiatives

Step 3: Assess Need. If the intake discussions confirm that the request for onsite T/TA is viable, the appropriate NRC(s) and RO staff will work together with the State/Tribe to assess the need more thoroughly and determine the most effective response. If the T/TA needs require the integrated involvement of multiple NRCs, contact the NCWRCOI to assist in the coordination of the assessment process.

The T/TA assessment process will build on the intake, and include a number of standard elements. The standard assessment will ensure consistent and timely responses to State/Tribal agency needs and ultimately inform the RO as part of its onsite T/TA approval process. The standard intake and assessment elements will be incorporated into TATIS, the web-based tracking system for the National T/TA Network. Thus, NRCs will include the information in their onsite T/TA tickets as they enter them into the system.

Among the key issues that should be explored during the assessment are the following:

- Agency's expectations for onsite T/TA
- Relevance of request to national T/TA strategy and priorities
- State's/Tribe's objectives and their link to agency's strategic plans (e.g., CFSP, PIP, CIP, etc.)
- Need for involvement of multiple NRCs and organizations
- Estimated number of onsite T/TA days required
- Information on T/TA provided by other consultants/contractors that may have impact on the T/TA request area(s)
- Potential for building agency capacity through T/TA, including discussion of possible barriers and confirmation of commitment of agency's executive staff to work that will be undertaken
- Ability of relevant NRCs to offer responsive T/TA
- Elements of a preliminary onsite T/TA work plan

To facilitate coordination across the T/TA Network, the NRCs or RO staff will notify the NCWRCOI about all onsite T/TA requests during the assessment process. These notifications can be emails alerting the NCWRCOI about new assessments, or telephone calls to discuss issues in more detail if necessary. The NCWRCOI will help identify other NRCs that should be included in the work, if necessary. Also, the NCWRCOI will alert the NRCs and RO involved in the assessment about any other NRCs currently working with the State/Tribal agency (based on information other NRCs have entered into TATIS). For T/TA requests requiring the involvement of multiple NRCs, the NCWRCOI will facilitate the assessment process by designating a lead NRC, monitoring timely communication among the NRCs, ROs and others, and convening key participants for assessment discussions.

Based on the information discussed and developed during the assessment process, the State or Tribal agency will make a formal written request for onsite T/TA to the appropriate RO staff person.

Step 4: Onsite T/TA Approval. As a result of the standard assessment process and their involvement in it, ACF RO staff responsible for approving onsite T/TA requests will have adequate and consistent information about the State's/Tribe's needs and the availability of NRC T/TA services for use in making informed approval decisions. Once RO staff make approval decisions, they will inform the State contact, the NRC(s) involved, and the NCWRCOI.

Step 5: Develop T/TA Work Plans. Information collected during the intake and assessment processes also will facilitate the development of standard, onsite T/TA work plans for all approved onsite T/TA requests. NRCs will use a standard work plan format that will be incorporated into TATIS and build on the intake and assessment information. The NRCs will work collaboratively with the State/Tribal agency and RO staff in developing each T/TA work plan, beginning in most cases during the T/TA assessment process. The work plans will inform all parties about T/TA activities and expectations, reflect ongoing modifications and results as the T/TA progresses over time, and serve as the basis for the National T/TA Network evaluation. In addition, these work plans should link onsite T/TA explicitly to other required agency plans whenever possible through the incorporation of elements such as objectives, action steps, responsible parties and timeframes from PIPs, CFSPs and/or other existing plans.

Among the key elements of the T/TA work plans (in addition to the information from the intake and assessment processes mentioned above) are the following:

- Scope and specific timeframes for onsite T/TA
- Responsible parties for various aspects of the work (e.g., NRCs, NRC consultants, State/Tribal agency staff, RO, etc.)
- Follow-up plans, time frames and responsible parties
- Expected outcomes for agency and for children/families served
- Plans for measurement and evaluation of outcomes

Developing clear expectations with States before going onsite is critical to providing responsive T/TA and ensuring the States participate and follow-up in a productive way. Since NRCs will enter these work plans directly into TATIS, the NCWRCOI will monitor them regularly and follow-up with NRCs to ensure their implementation in a way that is most responsive to the States involved. As the Children's Bureau requires in its cooperative agreements with all NRCs, NRC staff will enter new work plans into the appropriate TATIS tickets within 30 days to ensure up-to-date information and facilitate this monitoring process.

<u>Step 6: Onsite T/TA Activities and Follow-up</u>. As they work onsite with State/Tribal agencies, NRCs often must refine their T/TA approaches in order to be more responsive. For example, agency staff and stakeholders may offer new information or challenges onsite that affect elements of the T/TA work plan. Also, in order to build agency capacity that will lead to sustainable, systemic changes, NRCs often have to work closely with agency staff and maintain communication with the appropriate RO staff over a number of months, with only a small part of the work conducted onsite. These realities require NRC staff to be flexible and focused on T/TA work plan outcomes while they are onsite.

Therefore, during each onsite engagement, NRCs should establish clear "next steps" with agency staff and determine the need for adjusting the T/TA work plan for the future. Under the new T/TA process, NRC staff will update on-line work plans in TATIS within 30 days of their onsite work. The updated plans will include a summary of onsite T/TA activities that have occurred so far, as well as any work plan changes, follow-up steps, and/or new T/TA activities that may be required in the future. If the NRC changes the work plan and/or becomes aware of barriers to their T/TA activities, the NRC will contact the appropriate RO staff. Similarly, if the RO becomes aware of any issue that may impact the effectiveness of the T/TA, the RO staff will contact the NRC.

The NCWRCOI will monitor all work plans through TATIS and follow up as necessary with the NRCs, State/Tribal agencies, and ROs to ensure timely follow-up on the T/TA. In addition, RO staff will have the ability to keep updated on T/TA activities and results within their states through reviewing work plans in TATIS.

<u>Step 7: T/TA Monitoring and Evaluation</u>. The NCWRCOI project evaluator will conduct a variety of evaluation activities once the evaluation plan has been finalized. The process evaluation will focus on the responsiveness of coordinated T/TA services in terms of timeliness, types of T/TA provided, and customer satisfaction. In addition, an outcome evaluation will focus on the amount of T/TA provided and the associated outcomes in terms of increased State capacity and the impact on client outcomes.

<u>Step 8: Feedback</u>. The NCWRCOI will update the NRCs/AdoptUSKids, RO staff and the CB T/TA Coordinating Committee on a regular basis about issues with the single point of coordination function and the general effectiveness of T/TA services. The NCWRCOI will distribute quarterly usage reports from the web-based tracking system that will focus on the responsiveness of the National T/TA Network (e.g. timeliness of response to States, timeliness of entering information into the system, etc.). The NCWRCOI also will coordinate focused discussions about the new T/TA process during the biannual NRC meetings. The project evaluator also will present regular updates on the process and outcome evaluations at the biannual NRC meetings. The goal of these regular reports and discussions will be to adjust the process to improve the responsiveness and effectiveness of the T/TA provided to States and Tribes.