

Appendix A

Regional Center Staff Site Visit Interview Protocol

Dear Center Director,

As part of the Department of Education’s evaluation of the Comprehensive Technical Assistance Centers program, staff from Branch Associates, Inc. (BAI), Decision Information Resources, Inc. (DIR), and/or Policy Studies Associates, Inc. (PSA) will be visiting your Center [insert range of dates]. Each site visit will be conducted by a two-member evaluation team who will spend one full working day onsite.

During the site visit, the evaluation team will conduct interviews with you and other key members of your staff to ascertain your Center’s goals, objectives, structure and operations. The interviews will be guided by protocols that have been designed to address two key research questions, namely: “What are the objectives of each Comprehensive Center?” and “What kinds of products and services are provided by each Center?” We will explore a range of subjects including: your Center’s priorities; which aspects of NCLB the Center is most often called upon to address; and evidence that clients are developing increased capacity. To provide context for understanding the work being conducted by your Center, you and your staff will also be asked to describe your Center’s structure and staffing patterns and the relationship with your host organization. We are enclosing copies of the interview protocols for your information.

During our one-day site visits, evaluation team members will interview the Center director and other key staff, as needed. We expect that each Center director will delegate particular questions to other key staff, or will want other key staff to participate in interviews. We will interview all staff members identified by the Center director, as feasible within a one-day visit. We will not interview all staff. Partner staff or sub-contractors will be interviewed if the Center director feels it necessary.

In addition to the interviews, we will review the draft project inventory forms that you will have prepared in advance of our visit and respond to any questions or concerns you may have at that time. These forms should be finalized and returned directly to us by July 1, 2007.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about our visit. We look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,
(Name of lead visitor).

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this data collection

instrument is xxxx-xxxx. The time required to complete interviews is estimated to average 3 hours per site visit, which may include key staff in addition to the Center Director. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to the U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC 20202-4651

National Evaluation of the Comprehensive Technical Assistance Centers

Regional Center Staff Site Visit Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your professional background and areas of expertise. What is your primary role within this organization? Describe the tasks you might perform or decisions you might make during a typical one- or two-week period?
2. Give us an overview of your Center’s internal structure and operations:
 - How are staff and consultants assigned?
 - How is communication initiated and supported between the Center and its clients?
 - How are decisions made regarding the provision of services (e.g., the nature and duration of services)?
 - How do you organize your work (e.g., by state, functional specialization)?
3. Describe your Center’s relationship with your larger host organization. What are the advantages and disadvantages to the center of being housed in the host organization? To what extent can you access expertise and other resources from your host organization to support the work of the regional center?
4. Describe the major focus areas that your Center has addressed or engaged in during the past year. How did you determine these specific priorities? To what extent do you find it necessary to conduct formal needs assessments? [If applicable] How are these done?
5. Which focus area do you consider to be the largest or most significant (in terms of importance, amount of resources allocated, etc.)? Tell us about it.

Prompts:

- How and why did it begin?
 - What products and services have you provided?
 - What are the goals and objectives, and how much progress have you made to date?
 - What obstacles and challenges have you encountered?
6. In your work with SEAs, what aspects of NCLB is your Center most often called upon to address within your region? Is there much variation among SEAs in this regard? Describe the specific kinds of help that are most often requested.
 7. To what extent have SEAs expressed different or additional needs to those described above?
 8. Describe your relationships with each of the SEAs in your region (e.g., the frequency, duration, and purpose of your interactions with them). To what extent do these interactions help to shape your Center’s priorities and policies?

9. With which offices or departments within the SEAs do you work most frequently? Does this vary among the SEAs in your region? Is there a coordinating body within each SEA or among the SEAs that facilitates communication with your Center?
10. Other than SEAs, whom do you serve? What priorities have emerged among these other clients? How often do you serve these non-SEA clients? Are you able to be as responsive to them as you would like?
11. Describe your relationships with each of the Content Centers (e.g., the frequency, duration, and purpose of your interactions with them). To what extent do these interactions help to shape your Center’s priorities and policies?
12. Consider the full range of needs and priorities that this Center, the SEAs, and other clients within the region have identified. To what extent do needs and priorities overlap among different clients? Describe any strategies you may have developed for maximizing your organization’s efficiency in responding to similar needs across multiple clients.
13. What technical assistance methods do you rely on the most as you try to meet priority needs? Are there particular drawbacks or benefits associated with employing specific techniques?

Prompts:

- facilitating inter-organizational cooperation and collaboration (with whom?)
- identifying and disseminating documents and other products
- developing new products and plans
- assisting clients to implement new plans or systems
- hosting workshops, seminars, and other training events
- identifying and using scientifically based evidence

14. Where and how do you get the substantive knowledge that you use in your products and services? How do you decide what to use and what not to use in your work with clients? What quality standards or guidelines, if any, do you apply?
15. Where does your Center turn for help when, for example: (1) you experience challenges or encounter obstacles that limit your effectiveness, or (2) you need to increase institutional capacity (e.g., develop new expertise or sharpen your skills in a particular area)? If applicable:
 - Give specific examples that illustrate how the Content Centers and other organizations have helped your Center.
 - Indicate if you seek help on an as-needed basis, or whether there are regularly scheduled workshops and trainings.
16. Describe your organization’s relationship with the Content Centers and other Regional Centers (e.g., the frequency, methods, and content of communication between organizations). Do you interact with some Content Centers or Regional Centers more than others? Can you

give us some specific examples of ways in which other Centers have helped to increase your capacity or effectiveness, or ways your organization has supported the work of other Centers?

17. What does your Center do best? What kinds of needs are you best equipped to address? As you consider your organization's many objectives, which ones do you believe you have met most satisfactorily?
18. In what ways, if any, has your Center changed in recent years (e.g., over the past one to two years)? Describe, for example, new developments in how you organize and operate, hire and deploy staff and consultants, use technology, allocate resources, or in how you otherwise plan, design, or deliver technical assistance. What motivated these changes and what kinds of effects or outcomes have resulted?
19. In what ways, if any, has all or parts of the region in which you work changed in the past two years? Describe, for example, any political, social, institutional, legal, economic, or demographic changes that have affected the education system in significant ways. What impact has this had on your Center, and on the nature and effectiveness of the work that you do?
20. To what extent have the SEAs in your region changed (e.g., structurally or operationally) as a direct result of your Center's efforts? [If applicable] Give specific examples of changes that have occurred.
21. How does your Center assess whether it is helping to build capacity within the SEAs in your region? If change has been difficult to achieve, why do you think that is the case?
22. What factors and conditions obstruct or hinder your work in significant ways? How have you tried to address them and with what level of success?
23. The quality and effectiveness of technical assistance is dependent on many factors. What recommendations or suggestions would you make to the US Department of Education, state policymakers, your clients, or others, regarding ways to improve or support the work of the current Regional Comprehensive Centers?