

Evaluation of the Comprehensive Technical Assistance Centers

OMB Clearance Request for Data Collection Instruments

Part B: Supporting Statement for Paperwork Reduction Act Submission

(Revision to OMB Clearance 1850-0914)

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U.S. Department of Education
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Prepared by:

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INTRODUCTION

This document is a revision of the currently approved collection for the National Evaluation of the Comprehensive Technical Assistance Centers, a five-year evaluation that has been underway since September of 2013. The original request was submitted in December of 2013 and approved in March of 2014 (OMB Control Number 1850-0914). It included six data collection instruments: 1) Design-Focused Interview Guide for Center Staff, 2) Implementation-Focused Interview Guide for Center Staff, 3) Implementation-Focused Interview Guide for Technical Assistance (TA) Recipients, 4) Center Staff Survey, 5) TA Recipient Survey, and 6) TA Event Observation Guide. Of these six approved instruments, instruments 1-3 have been completed and the related burden hours are deleted in this revision. Instruments 4-6 are still being used to collect data. In the originally approved submission, it was noted that the Outcomes-Focused Interview Protocols would be developed and added later. The current request is for the addition of two new data collection instruments: 1) Outcomes-Focused Interview Guide for Center Staff; and 2) Outcomes-Focused Interview Guide for TA Recipients. This submission includes the original statement, along with the description of the two new protocols and an updated total response burden estimate. We are requesting review of the new protocols and the revised burden estimate.

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) within the U.S Department of Education (ED) is conducting this evaluation. In the introduction to the supporting statement, we provide a description of the Comprehensive Technical Assistance Centers program, the evaluation questions, and the study design. The remaining sections of this document respond to specific instructions of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for the preparation of a supporting statement.

The Comprehensive Technical Assistance Centers

Title II of the Educational Technical Assistance Act of 2002 (F.T AA, Section 203)¹ authorized the Comprehensive Center Program, a discretionary grant program establishing technical assistance centers. The Comprehensive Centers were last awarded in 2012, to “provide technical assistance to State educational agencies (SEAs) that builds their capacity to support local educational agencies (LEAs or districts) and schools, especially low-performing districts and schools; improve educational outcomes for all students; close achievement gaps; and improve the quality of instruction” (77 FR 33564)².

In 2012, the Department of Education awarded new five-year grants to 15 Regional Centers and 7 Content Centers under the Comprehensive Center Program. The Regional Centers each serve one to seven U.S. states, territories, and possessions. They provide technical assistance (TA) that builds the capacity of SEAs to implement, support, scale up, and sustain initiatives that

¹ <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/newCenterp/legislation.html>

² <https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2012/06/06/2012-13735/applications-for-new-awards-comprehensive-centers-program#h-4>

help districts and schools improve student outcomes. The Regional Centers focus their work on seven federal priority areas:

1. Implementing college- and career-ready standards and aligned, high-quality assessments for all students;
2. Identifying, recruiting, developing, and retaining highly effective teachers and leaders;
3. Turning around the lowest-performing schools;
4. Ensuring the school readiness and success of preschool-age children and their successful transition to kindergarten;
5. Building rigorous instructional pathways that support the successful transition of all students from secondary education to college without the need for remediation, and careers;
6. Identifying and scaling up innovative approaches to teaching and learning that significantly improve student outcomes; and
7. Using data-based decision-making to improve instructional practices, policies, and student outcomes.

The Content Centers provide the Regional Centers and SEAs with in-depth content knowledge and expertise by providing information, publications, tools, and specialized technical assistance. The 7 Content Centers are:

1. Center on Standards and Assessments Implementation
2. Center on Great Teachers and Leaders
3. Center on School Turnaround
4. Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes
5. Center on College and Career Readiness and Success
6. Center on Building State Capacity and Productivity
7. Center on Innovations in Learning

The National Evaluation of the Comprehensive Technical Assistance Centers

The National Evaluation is charged with examining and documenting how the Centers intend to build SEA capacity (referred to as *theories of action*) and what types of activities they actually conduct to build capacity.

Evaluation Questions

The evaluation will address questions in three areas:

Design:

1. How did the Centers define capacity building?
2. What theories of action did the Centers use to guide their general capacity-building work?
3. How did the Centers assess the needs of their constituencies?

Implementation:

4. What strategies did Centers employ to achieve their outcomes?
5. To what extent did Centers implement technical assistance to their constituents as planned?
6. To what extent and how did Centers collaborate with each other, by, for example, sharing or building on other Centers' resources and expertise?

Outcomes:

7. To what extent did Centers achieve their goals and objectives, especially capacity-building outcomes?

Focus on Two Federal Priority Areas

To gather more in-depth information, the evaluation will limit data collection on the implementation and outcomes questions to two of the seven federal priority areas:

1. Identifying, recruiting, developing, and retaining highly effective teachers and leaders, and
2. Ensuring the school readiness and success of preschool-age children and their successful transition to kindergarten.

These two priority areas were purposefully selected. First, **effective teachers and leaders** is a topic area in which all of the Regional Centers have ongoing projects. In addition, this is a topic area where most SEAs have significant TA and capacity building needs, as many are choosing and implementing educator evaluation systems or supporting districts and schools as they hire and evaluate their professional staff. This priority is also tied to school reform efforts and large federal funding streams such as the Race to the Top initiative, the School Improvement Grants, and the Teacher Incentive Fund.

The second priority area, **early learning**, is another high-profile topic which has recently gained increased attention. In response to federal initiatives and research findings on the benefits of high-quality early education, many states have increased their funding for state-supported early childhood education programs over the last few years. This evaluation is well poised to examine the role that the Comprehensive Centers play in supporting state efforts in this priority area.

Given the overarching nature of the effective teachers and leaders area, and the recent policy focus on early learning efforts, we believe that focusing on these two priority areas will give us a good picture about how Centers generally develop SEA capacity (and in the case of Content Centers, both SEA and Regional Center capacity) and what difference the Centers' efforts may have made. Further, we believe that SEAs' capacity-building needs and the Centers' approach to providing TA in these two priority areas may differ across Centers in meaningful ways. These differences are likely to produce different types of capacity-building outcomes (i.e., the needs and approach to building capacity to develop effective teachers and leaders may be different than the needs and approach to building capacity related to early learning initiatives). Thus, by

focusing on these two priority areas, we will gain detailed information on the Centers' capacity-building activities, while still being able to learn about the variety of needs, approaches, and outcomes.

The selection of two priority areas in no way implies that the Department has a preference for these areas over others, or that the Centers or SEAs should shift the focus of their efforts to these areas. Rather, this narrowing of focus allows us to target our resources in such a way that we are able to learn about capacity-building activities and outcomes in sufficient detail.

Data Sources

Data collection for this study consists of interviews of Center staff and TA recipients, surveys of Center staff and TA recipients, and observations of TA events. The study instruments include three previously approved instruments for which all data collection has been completed (the burden hours related to the completed instruments have been deleted in this revision); three data collection instruments that will be in use for continuing data collection in 2017; and two new instruments:

Already approved in the original OMB submission and all data collection completed:

- Design-Focused Interview Guide for Center Staff
- Implementation-Focused Interview Guide for Center Staff
- Implementation-Focused Interview Guide for TA Recipients

Already approved in the original OMB submission and data collection continuing:

- Center Staff Survey
- TA Recipient Survey
- TA Event Observation Guide

New data instruments to be reviewed in this submission:

- Outcomes-Focused Interview Guide for Center Staff
 - Purpose: To obtain the Center staff's perspectives on outcomes of the Centers' projects in the two key priority areas.
 - Sample: The sample includes all 22 Centers, and an estimated 114 interview participants. We estimate that 16 Centers will have projects in both teacher/leader effectiveness and early learning. We will conduct two group interviews at those Centers; one interview focused on each priority area. We estimate that 6 Centers will have projects in teacher/leader effectiveness, but not early learning. We will conduct one group interview at those Centers. This totals to an estimate of 38 group interviews. We estimate an average of 3 participants per group interview, for a total of 114 participants. Each group

interview will include staff working in this priority area, including staff who work on one focal project to be discussed in the interview. The focal project will be among those that were discussed in 2016 implementation-focused interviews. The outcomes-focused interviews will follow up on outcomes of these same projects. Center directors will be asked to identify appropriate staff to participate in these interviews. Groups may include TA managers, content specialists, and Center directors.

- Timing: April-May 2017
- Outcomes-Focused Interview Guide for TA Recipients
 - Purpose: To obtain the TA recipients' perspectives on outcomes of the Centers' projects in the two key priority areas.
 - Sample: The TA recipient sample includes 38 participants. Participants represent recipients of Center TA (usually staff of state education agencies) who work on the projects discussed in Center interviews in each of the two priority areas. Thus, based on the estimate above of 38 group interviews that focus on one project each, we estimate a total interview sample of 38 participants (22 recipients of teacher effectiveness projects and 16 recipients of early learning projects). We will ask each Center to identify one individual who is a key recipient of services provided through the focal project discussed in each of the outcomes-focused interviews with Center staff.
 - Timing: Within two months of Center site visits, approximately May-August, 2017

Evaluation Reports

The evaluation will produce two reports. The first report will be an interim report focusing on how the Comprehensive Centers designed their work as technical assistance providers. The report will describe the Centers' underlying theories of action and definitions of "capacity building," and explain how the Centers assessed their constituencies' needs and developed work plans to address those needs. This report will be available in early 2017.

A final report will be produced in September 2018. The final report will integrate all study findings.

DESCRIPTION OF STATISTICAL METHODS (PART B)

1. Describe the potential respondent universe (including a numerical estimate) and any sampling or other respondent selection method to be used. Data on the number of entities (e.g., establishments, state and local government units, households, or persons) in the universe covered by the collection and in the corresponding sample are to be provided in tabular form for the universe as a whole and for each of the strata in the proposed sample. Indicate expected response rates for the proposed sample. Indicate expected response rates for the collection as a whole. If the collection had been conducted previously, include the actual response rate achieved during the last collection.

This study does not involve statistical methods for sample selection and estimation. The study is designed to represent all of the Centers' (22 Centers) work in design, and all of the Centers' work in implementation and outcomes for two priority areas. (The number of Centers working in each priority area may vary by year, but in data collection years so far, all Centers have worked in the teacher/leader effectiveness area, and either 15 or 16 Centers have worked in the early learning area.) Respondent universes vary by instrument. For surveys, these include all Center staff and TA recipients relevant to the two priority areas, and the survey questions address all projects in these areas. Implementation and outcomes interviews include smaller numbers of projects and associated staff and constituents; the projects are purposively selected. These smaller, purposive samples enable the researchers to meet the goal of the study for an in-depth and nuanced understanding of capacity-building processes and outcomes. In addition, the evaluation will profile a small number of projects in depth to illustrate the process by which Centers design, implement, and produce outcomes for their technical assistance.

Profiles of 6-10 successful projects will be developed within each of the two selected federal priority areas. We will employ a purposeful selection process to identify projects for these profiles. Within each priority area, we will develop profiles of Regional and Content Center projects, and projects of varying scope (single state versus regional or national projects) and emphasis. The profiles will involve no unique data collection other than observations of project events; the profiles will draw on data gathered through all the instruments described in this statement. Samples for new and continuing instruments are described below.

Already approved and continuing instruments:

Center Staff Survey: The Comprehensive Center staff survey was administered via online survey software in 2015, 2016, and will be administered again in 2017. IMPAQ staff contact each of the Centers to obtain the list of respondents for each site. The evaluation team provides guidelines for the selection of survey respondents: they are staff who are actively involved in leading or delivering technical assistance in the two focal priority areas.

TA Recipient Survey: The TA recipient survey was administered via online survey software in 2015, 2016, and will be again in 2017. The sample includes individuals who receive technical assistance from the Centers in the two priority areas each year. Prior to survey administration

each year, IMPAQ staff communicate with the Centers to confirm the list of TA projects in the two priority areas that were active in the last 12 months and the list of TA recipients and their contact information. The evaluation team provides guidelines as to criteria for inclusion of TA recipients in the sample; they must have been active participants in Center projects in the two priority areas over the past 12 months.

TA Event Observation Guide: Evaluators will ask Center staff members in early 2017 to identify upcoming observable services or events of projects under consideration for project profiles. When possible, observations will be conducted in conjunction with the 2017 site visits. Observations of webinars or other virtual events will be conducted as they are scheduled.

New data instruments to be reviewed in this submission:

Outcomes-Focused Interview Guide for Center Staff: This instrument, to be administered during the April-May 2017 site visits, is designed to be administered at all Centers to the groups that participated in the 2016 implementation interviews regarding projects in the two priority areas. Based on earlier rounds of Center staff interviews, we expect a 100% response rate. We will conduct one or two group interviews at each Center, depending on whether the Center has projects in one or both of the priority areas. Each interview will include staff working in this priority area and on a focal project in that area. Groups may include TA specialists, TA managers, content specialists, and Center directors. We estimate that we will interview 22 groups, or one per Center, focusing on a project in the teacher/leader effectiveness area, and 16 groups, or one per 16 Centers, about projects in the early learning area, since some Centers do not conduct projects in this priority area. We estimate an average of 3 participants per group interview, for a total of 114 respondents.

Outcomes-Focused Interview Guide for TA Recipients: This instrument is designed for key recipients of Centers' TA (usually staff of state education agencies) who work on the projects discussed in Center outcomes interviews; these interviews will be administered by telephone within two months of the Center interviews in 2017. Based on earlier rounds of TA recipient interviews, we estimate an 85% response rate. We will ask each Center to identify one individual, a key constituent of the project discussed in each of the Center outcomes interviews. Thus, based on the estimate of 38 group interviews with one focal project each, we estimate a total interview sample of 38 (22 recipients of teacher effectiveness projects and 16 recipients of early learning projects).

An overview of each new and continuing instrument, its purpose, its administration time, its sample respondents, and the research questions addressed, is provided in exhibit 1 below. Data collection using the Design-Focused Interview Guide, which addresses research questions 1-3, has been completed. Data collection using the Implementation-Focused Interview Guides for Center Staff and TA Recipients, which focus on questions 4-6, has also been completed. Data collection using the TA Recipient and Center Staff Surveys, which address questions 4, 5, 6, and 7, will continue in 2017. Data collection with the new Outcomes-Focused Interview Guide for

Center Staff and the new Outcomes-Focused Interview Guide for TA Recipients, both of which focus on question 7, will take place in 2017.

Exhibit 1. Instruments, Purpose, Timing, Sample, and Research Questions

Instrument	Purpose	Administration Timing	Estimated Sample	Major Research Questions Addressed
Newly Submitted				
Outcomes-Focused Interview Guide for Center staff	Understand technical assistance outcomes, including longer term outcomes, especially how Centers have built SEA capacity	Apr-May 2017	Centers with projects in the two selected priority areas (22 centers have projects in teacher/leader effectiveness and 16 have projects in early learning); staff who work on projects in those areas; estimated sample of 114 staff	7. To what extent did Centers achieve their goals and objectives?
Outcomes-Focused Interview Guide for TA Recipients	Understand Centers' longer term outcomes from TA recipient perspectives, especially how Centers have built SEA capacity	May-August 2017	State education staff identified by Centers as key recipients of projects discussed in Center interviews; estimated total of 38 TA recipients	7. To what extent did Centers achieve their goals and objectives?
Already Approved and Continuing				
Center Staff Survey	Understand Center staff individual roles and perceptions of projects in the two priority areas, including how projects build capacity	May-June 2015, 2016, 2017	All Center staff who provide TA in the selected priority areas each year	4. What strategies did Centers employ to achieve their outcomes? 5. To what extent did Centers implement technical assistance to their constituencies as planned? 6. To what extent and how did Centers collaborate with each other? 7. To what extent did Centers achieve their goals and objectives?
TA Recipient Survey	Investigate how technical assistance recipients, including state education staff and other participants as relevant, perceive and use the services they receive, and how these services have helped them build capacity	May-June 2015, 2016, 2017	All key TA recipients of projects in selected priority areas each year	7. To what extent did Centers achieve their goals and objectives?

TA Event Observations	Provide observational data about the strategies that Centers used to support capacity building and achieve planned outcomes. Will inform project profiles.	In 2017, as relevant observable activities are identified	Observable events of TA activities in profiled projects. Estimated total of 6-10 observations.	4. What strategies did Centers employ to achieve their outcomes? 5. To what extent did Centers implement technical assistance to their constituencies as planned?
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2. Describe the procedures for the collection of information, including:

- **Statistical methodology for stratification and sample selection.**
- **Estimation procedure.**
- **Degree of accuracy needed for the purpose described in the justification.**
- **Unusual problems requiring specialized sampling procedures, and**
- **Any use of periodic (less frequent than annual) data collection cycles to reduce burden.**

Below, we describe basic data collection procedures for the new instruments. As noted above, this study does not involve statistical methods for sample selection and estimation. The evaluation is designed to represent the universe of Centers, with purposive samples of priority areas and projects used in interviews to allow for in-depth examination of capacity-building processes, as relevant to the research questions of the study. Methods to obtain high response rates are described under Question 3.

Data collection process details for all interviews:

Each site visit team will consist of an evaluator from IMPAQ (the site liaison) and a consultant from a subcontractor. The evaluators have expertise in the study design and evaluation methods, while the consultants have expertise in technical assistance to state and local education agencies. Having the two visitors work as a team during the site visits enhances the accuracy of the data gathered. The same two visitors conduct the TA recipient telephone interviews associated with each Center, but scheduling difficulties sometimes necessitate that only one of the interviewers conduct each interview. The same pair of visitors attends all site visits of the Centers to which they are assigned. To ensure accurate notes, each interview is audio recorded if the interviewees permit.

The study leaders conduct annual trainings of the site visit teams so that all team members share a consistent understanding of the study, the research questions, the interview questions and probes, and the data collection needs. Prior to each wave of site visits all site visitors convene in Washington, DC or Oakland, CA for a half-day training session. The session includes a study overview or update, site visit logistics and activities, site pre- and post-visit communication, data collection procedures on site (including a review of the interview protocols), and data handling. The site visit task leaders have distributed a site visitor guide with a checklist that describes all tasks the site visitors need to perform before, during, and

after each visit. All site visitors meet regularly to discuss issues and concerns during the site visit data collection period.

- 3. Describe methods to maximize response and to deal with issues of non-response. The accuracy and reliability of information collected must be shown to be adequate for intended uses. For collections based on sampling, a special justification must be provided for any collection that will not yield “reliable” data that can be generalized to the universe studied.**

Overall, the evaluation team has designed instruments so that they are easy to understand and place as little burden on participants as possible. Evaluators conduct multiple rounds of follow-up by email and phone for all data collection activities. Data collection has been completed for years 2015 and 2016; the final round of interviews and surveys will take place in 2017. Methods of data collection that have been in place for the first two years will continue in 2017. Details are provided below.

Center Staff Interviews and Surveys: Interviews take place during site visits. Site liaisons contact Center directors to schedule interviews, explain their purpose and general focus, and explain the criteria for participation in group interviews. For implementation and outcomes interviews, site liaisons ask Center directors to identify the projects to be discussed and the lists of appropriate participants in advance of the interviews, following guidance of the site liaisons. Site liaisons provide the Center directors with a form to complete for this purpose. Site liaisons and consultants then interview identified participants in person, as a group, during site visits. In the event that some identified Center staff members are participating in site visits via videoconferencing or teleconferencing, site visitors conduct the interviews using these technologies.

Evaluators plan the list of Center staff survey participants each year with Center directors or their designees. Initial invitation emails with links to the survey, customized for each respondent, are sent to each sample member. A week later, reminder emails are sent to everyone who has not yet responded. A week after that, another round of reminders is sent to non-respondents. The next week, a third set of reminders is sent to remaining non-respondents. After the first and second reminder emails, phone calls are made to non-respondents to remind them to complete the survey.

TA Recipient Interviews and Surveys: For administration of the TA recipient interviews, evaluators ask Centers for the contact information for relevant TA recipients of projects discussed during the Center interviews. Evaluators contact the TA recipients using the following procedures: 1) All identified SEA recipients receive an initial contact via email, requesting their participation in a one-hour interview, and providing an overview of the scope and purpose of the evaluation. The general purpose of the interview and the topics to be covered are also described. 2) If there is no response within a week, evaluators continue to follow up by email or phone on a weekly basis for up to three weeks, as needed. If evaluators are unable to schedule a TA recipient interview for each relevant priority area project, evaluators ask the relevant Center for names of alternate TA recipients who might serve as replacements or representatives.

For administration of the TA recipient surveys, evaluators ask Center staff to identify and provide contact information for TA recipients of all projects in the two focal priority areas. Evaluators provide guidance to Center staff on the sample list: TA recipients identified for the survey should be those who have worked directly with Center staff or who have participated actively in Center-organized workgroups, conferences, or training sessions. Initial invitation emails with links to the survey, customized for each respondent, are sent to each sample member. A week later, reminder emails are sent to everyone who has not yet responded. A week after that, another round of reminders is sent to non-respondents. The next week, a third set of reminders is sent to remaining non-respondents. After the first and second reminder emails, phone calls are made to non-respondents to remind them to complete the survey. Throughout the fielding period, we contact the Centers regarding apparent email address errors and receive corrections to contact information for various recipients. As we receive that information, new invitations are sent to those people. In addition, during the phone follow-ups, we receive new phone numbers for some recipients. When those numbers become available, we send additional reminders to coincide with the additional calls.

- 4. Describe any tests of procedures or methods to be undertaken. Testing is encouraged as an effective means of refining collections of information to minimize burden and improve utility. Tests must be approved if they call for answers to identical questions from 10 or more respondents. A proposed test or set of tests may be submitted for approval separately or in combination with the main collection of information.**

Study team members pre-tested drafts of the two new interview protocols with fewer than 10 respondents. The protocols were revised based on respondent feedback and to improve the interview flow, clarity, and efficiency.

- 5. Provide the name and telephone number of individuals consulted on statistical aspects of the design and the name of the agency unit, contractor(s), grantee(s), or other persons who will actually collect and/or analyze the information for the agency.**

The following individuals and organizations are involved in data collection, analysis, and consulting on technical aspects of the study design.

Responsibility	Organization	Contact Name	Telephone Number
Co-Principal Investigator and Project Director	IMPAQ International	Phyllis Weinstock	510-597-2423
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Site Liaison	IMPAQ International	Linda Toms Barker	808-934-9297
Analytic Support	IMPAQ International	Ilana Barach	510-597-2412
Analytic Support, Site Liaison	IMPAQ International	Maria DiFuccia	202-774-1948
Analytic Support	IMPAQ International	Fata Karva	202-774-1938
Analytic Support	IMPAQ International	Eliana Saltares	202-774-1972
Analytic Support	IMPAQ International	Brandon Saunders	202-774-1964
Analytic Support, Survey	IMPAQ International	Antoni Boston	443-259-5120
Analytic Support, Survey	IMPAQ International	Maria Chen	443-259-5520

Analytic Support, Survey	IMPAQ International	Rocco Russo	202-774-1994
Analytic Support, Survey	IMPAQ International	Mousumi Sarkar	202-774-1985
Analytic Support, Survey	IMPAQ International	Andrea Schwanz	443-259-5146
Analytic Support, Survey	IMPAQ International	Mikhail Thomas	443-259-5424
Analytic Support, Survey	IMPAQ International	Neil Thomas	443-259-5422
Analytic Support, Survey	IMPAQ International	John Wendt	443-259-5255
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Technical Assistance Expert, Site Visitor	Consultant	Deborah Jonas	503-381-4164
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Technical Assistance Expert, Site Visitor	Consultant	Michelle Swanson	804-252-5714