

Attachment B: Focus group semi-structured discussion guide on experiences receiving TA

A. Introduction

Thank you for joining us today. My name is [NAME] and I am joined by my colleague, [NAME]. We are from Mathematica, and we are conducting a project-- Models of Coordination and Technical Assistance to Achieve Outcomes in Communities, on behalf of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

The purpose of today's discussion is to explore how to offer cross-sector technical assistance, or TA, so that it better meets the needs of TA recipients. By cross-sector, we mean supports that improve the ability of organizations to work together and collaborate in the pursuit of shared goals. As a few examples, it could include resources that help organizations become less siloed, adopt more standardized or coordinated procedures, identify and streamline redundant processes, coordinate client services more effectively, and network to share information or strategies in service of common goals.

We are hoping to draw on your experience to understand the point of view of TA recipients, with a focus on how organizations determine their needs, how they find TA that can address needs, and what you think does and does not work in providing TA to support coordination of services with other organizations.

Outside of this call, nothing you say will be linked by Mathematica to your name or the organization that you work for. Participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to answer a question and may stop or leave the discussion at any time. This discussion will take approximately 90 minutes.

With your permission, to make sure I hear everything you have to say, I would like to record the discussion. The recording is for research purposes only, will only be available to the study team, and will be destroyed at the end of the study. Could you each please tell me if I have your permission?

Does anyone have any questions before we begin?

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0990-0421. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 90 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information.

B. Background

Could you each please share your name and the organization or agency that you are affiliated with? In brief, what is your organization's (agency's) purpose or focus? What is your specific role (as an individual) within the organization/agency?

C. Determining TA Needs

1. Every organization faces different challenges in collaborating with other agencies to serve clients. I was hoping we could start off with each of you briefly sharing just a little about the kinds of challenges your organization/agency currently faces, specifically in terms of collaborating with other organizations?
2. At a high level, what is the process by which your organization identifies needs or challenges it is facing and makes plans to address them?
 - a. Does the organization have defined outcomes, goals, or performance indicators that help you identify needs or challenges? Please describe how you've developed these.
 - b. How does your organization prioritize needs?
 - c. Has your organization ever participated in a formal needs assessment conducted by someone else (e.g. a funder or TA provider)? What about an informal one conducted internally?
 - d. How do managers and staff raise needs to senior management?
3. How did/does your organization determine whether and how TA can support the needs and challenges that your organization is facing?

D. Finding TA offerings

4. There are many TA offerings developed by federal, state, and local governments; non-profits; and for-profit organizations. How does your organization find or get connected to these opportunities?
 - a. Do you actively seek out TA that addresses your organization's needs? Where do you look?
 - b. Do you receive offers for TA from providers? If so, how do you determine whether to accept those offers?
 - c. How do you usually hear about opportunities? For example, do you learn about them through word of mouth, direct contact from providers, conference presentations, funders, or something else?
 - d. Do you find that TA offerings are more helpful when they are driven by needs or supports identified internally by your organization, or driven by those identified by the TA provider or another independent evaluator? Or, a combination of both?
5. What factors influence your decision about whether to ask for, pursue, or receive a particular TA offering?

- a. In what ways did you feel the TA could help you or your organization?
 - b. Can you think of a TA offering you decided not to participate in? What would have made the offering more appealing to you?
 - c. When deciding to receive TA, do you consider whether TA may impose demands on your organization? What are those demands? How do you weigh the burden of the demands against the expected benefits of the TA?
6. To what extent do you find that the TA offerings available meet the needs that your organization has identified as the highest priority or most urgent?
- *If response indicates low alignment:* Do they often focus on topics your organization has identified as low priority or unimportant, or on topics that are important but not *as high priority* as other issues?

E. Feedback on TA experiences

7. I was hoping you could think about the most recent TA experience that you have been involved in, specifically one that supports cross-sector collaboration. What kinds of technical assistance supports has it provided to you?
8. How did this TA help you, if at all?
9. Now we would like you to think about the different formats that TA can be offered in. Under what circumstances do different formats work particularly well?
- a. When do you find resources (like a set of documents or tutorials) to be more helpful than in-person TA?

Potential Probes:

- What factors influence your preference? Under what circumstances might you prefer something else?
- b. Under what circumstances is it important to receive opportunities to practice skills directly? When is it important to receive feedback about your learning or performance?

Potential Probes:

- Under what circumstances might this not be the case?
- c. Under what circumstances is it critical to interact with other TA recipients? When might that change?

- d. Which level or levels of staff do you think benefit from cross-sector TA? Frontline staff, middle management, senior management/leadership, or anyone else?

Potential Probes:

- Is there a kind of TA that works particularly well for each level of staff?
- Are there levels of staff that you think would benefit from, but have not received, TA? If so, which TA offerings would they benefit from, and in what ways would they benefit?

10. Have you ever received TA from multiple TA providers at the same time? Were those offerings coordinated, and if so, how did that work?
- a. If it worked well, why was that? If it didn't, why not?
 - b. If those offerings were not coordinated, would you have liked them to have been coordinated? How would you suggest coordinating multiple TA offerings at once?
 - c. If different TA providers are offering TA at the same time, how would that work best for you?
11. Are there any challenges you are facing that could benefit from TA to support increased cross-sector collaboration? If so, how could TA best support this collaboration?

F. General Questions

12. Are there any other lessons you have learned through receiving TA that could help HHS better understand how to properly match organizations to useful cross-sector TA offerings?
13. Do you have any additional recommendations on how to improve TA offerings to better fit your and your organization's needs?