Illinois Prevention Research Center

Cook County DEPT of **Public Health**
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ACTION LEARNING BRIEF
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What Support Do You Need to Catalyze Policy, Systems, and Environmental Change?

What is technical assistance?

Policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change is a process that requires ongoing support from experts and lead community organizations. Building on the first three *Action Learning Briefs* which defined PSE change, identified PSE phases, and described factors that can propel and sustain impact, this fourth brief discusses how distinct forms of technical assistance (TA) can support PSE change. It also highlights some of the types of TA that might be needed at each PSE phase.

TA can be defined as an approach to build the capacity of individuals or organizations to achieve change.[1,2] There are different types of TA, including TA that provides content-driven support or relationship-based support. Content-driven support emphasizes information transfer and increasing the knowledge of the recipient. Relationship-related support focuses more on helping organizations see the connections between partners, ideas, and pathways to undertake systems change. Research has shown TA to be a necessary part of implementing PSE change.[3] Less is known about how organizations and communities

perceive the need for TA throughout the entire PSE process or how TA might promote sustainability.

What kinds of technical assistance might be needed for policy, systems, and environmental change?

Organizations and communities have many assets, strengths, and resources for conducting PSE change. However, given the complexity of issues related to addressing health inequities, organizations and communities may need TA for an isolated issue, or may need TA throughout the entire PSE change process. In our evaluation research at the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health in collaboration with the Cook County Department of Public Health, PSE change organizations and communities articulated five types of TA that they found helpful (https://Illinoisprc.org). Table 1 highlights types of TA and their descriptions. Table 2 highlights how different TA types might be used at different stages in the PSE change process.

TABLE 1 **Technical assistance description for sustainable policy, systems, and environmental change**

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TYPE	DESCRIPTION
Content-related resources and training for implementation	Providing tangible resources, supplies, information, training, etc. (e.g. curriculum, model policies, and marketing templates such as flyers, newsletters, community signage) that support initial policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) implementation
Recruitment of decision-makers, advocates, and community members	Directing recruitment and engagement activities towards potential partner agencies to discuss the possible PSE intervention
Systems leadership and connection	Providing/facilitating the overall initiative vision; researching best practices and aligning them with available regional and local resources and partners; coalition building; and connecting regional and local partners with best practices, partners, and resources to expand and leverage the work
State and national evidence-based policy and support	Having a state or national organization facilitate the development or translation of literature, manuals documenting best practices, and an evidence-base on which to provide a rationale for the proposed PSE change
Engagement for sustainability	Ongoing support, often in the form of continued marketing and region-wide messages, regular check-ins, expanded training either for coalition building and/or content, and other supports which may increase the likelihood of sustained implementation

TABLE 2 Ways for technical assistance to sustain policy, systems, and environmental change

PHASES	TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TYPE	EXAMPLE
PHASE 1 **Strategy Development**	State and national evidence-base	Hiring an expert to provide consulting and expertise on specific initiatives
	Systems leadership and connection	Connecting decision-makers to peers who have engaged in policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) work to learn how they overcame barriers
	Recruitment of decision-makers, advocates, and community members	Initially reaching out to gauge interest among leaders such as superintendents, corner store owners, etc.
PHASE 2 **Expand Engagement and Begin Adoption Planning**	Content-related resources and training for implementation	Providing materials/support such as fact sheets, lessons learned from others, etc.
	Recruitment of decision-makers, advocates, and community members	Engaging community groups for input on plans
	Systems leadership and connection	Receiving guidance from and connecting to partners before policy is enacted
	State and national evidence-based policy and support	Providing guidance on writing a policy
PHASE 3 **Adoption and Initial Implementation**	Content-related resources and training for implementation	Providing training, curriculum, marketing materials, and other resources and support
	Recruitment of decision-makers, advocates, and community members	Leveraging and connecting with partners or groups who have aligned missions and can support implementation
	Systems leadership and connection	Creating a plan, blueprint, or document that lays out action steps that build on one another
	State and national evidence-based policy and support	Aligning adoption (curriculum, policy, etc.) with state or national policy guidance
PHASE 4 **Implementation**	Engagement for sustainability	Connecting with partners to apply for grants to maintain/continue PSE changes
	Content-related resources and training for implementation	Ongoing implementation support, site visits, and check-ins to ensure materials and training are in place
	Systems leadership and connection	Expanding PSE changes through additional partners or sites (i.e. new schools, properties, etc.)

PHASES	TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TYPE	EXAMPLE
PHASE 5 Institutionalization	Engagement for sustainability	Creating line-items in budget to ensure support for PSE changes
	Systems leadership and connection	Formally establishing an organization who can manage fiscal and other operational functions (e.g. HR) to ensure ongoing support for community PSE change
PHASE 6 Expansion	Engagement for sustainability	Linking agencies to funding sources; offering trainings to continue the work with new staff; creating partnerships across jurisdictions to apply for common PSE grants; ongoing support from technical assistance to overcome leadership turnover
	Systems leadership and connection	Leveraging connections to support future PSE work in new communities or to deepen reach within communities; establishing a coalition to further PSE work

References

1. Chilenski SM, Welsh J, Olson J, Hoffman L, Perkins DF, Feinberg ME. Examining the Highs and Lows of the Collaborative Relationship between Technical Assistance Providers and Prevention Implementers. *Prevention Science.* 2018; 19(2):250-259.

2. Fixsen DL, Blase KA, Horner R, Sugai G. Intensive Technical Assistance. Scaling-Up Brief. Number 2. FPG *Child Development Institute.* 2009.

3. Le LT, Anthony BJ, Bronheim SM, Holland CM, Perry DF. A Technical Assistance Model for Guiding Service and Systems Change. *Journal of Behavioral Health Services and Research.* 2016; 43(3):380-395.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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