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**OFFICE OF
INSPECTOR GENERAL**

**TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
FOR
QUALITY CHILD CARE:**

REGIONAL OFFICE PERSPECTIVES



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Inspector General**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

To determine the perceptions of Administration for Children and Families (ACF) regional office staff regarding technical assistance provided under contracts with ACF Child Care Bureau.

BACKGROUND

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 repealed a number of child care programs and created a single, integrated Child Care and Development Block Grant for low-income families. Program goals are to ensure accessibility and affordability of quality child care for working families by promoting parental choice, encouraging States to provide consumer education to parents, and helping States implement health, safety, licensing, and registration standards. The program is funded for \$20.9 billion for Fiscal Years 1996-2002.

The ACF contracts with outside entities to provide technical assistance funded through this Grant. This technical assistance includes the coordination and support of regional and national conferences, national workgroups, leadership forums, activities to improve health and safety, audio conference calls, and creation of the National Child Care Information Center. In 1997, ACF augmented its technical assistance capabilities by creating the Child Care Technical Assistance Network, which went into effect in February 1998. The expansion of technical assistance is reflected in funding which increased from \$2.3 million in FY' 95 to over \$7 million in FY' 98.

The ACF Child Care Bureau and regional offices play important roles in the provision of technical assistance to State, Territory and Tribal grantees. Based on historical relationships, the regional offices have continued contacts with the States covering the full range of operations. They are also in a pivotal position to observe technical assistance and have knowledge of regional needs which serve as a bridge between national and local policy. Therefore, we sought to obtain the insights of staff responsible for the Child Care and Development Block Grant in each of the regional offices.

FINDINGS

Regional offices want more information to better utilize the Child Care Technical Assistance Network

Most regional office child care staff say the Child Care Technical Assistance Network addresses important child care issues and see the Network as a plus for child care. However, they want more information regarding the Child Care Bureau's expectations of the Network projects and contractors, and how to better utilize Network resources.

Regional meetings, targeted technical assistance, and national conferences are the most beneficial technical assistance formats to Regional Office staff

When asked about the technical assistance they find most beneficial, staff in six regions say they benefit from regional meetings, seven identify national conferences, and four regions say targeted technical assistance. They believe regional meetings and national conferences provide valuable opportunities for networking and sharing information, and that targeted technical assistance meets individual State and regional needs.

Regional office staff have varying opinions of Network project operations

Regional staff provided comments regarding the seven independent Network projects and the various resources associated with each of them. The following chart summarizes regional office perceptions of the value of technical assistance based upon their experience with the projects and knowledge of them.

<i>Network Project</i>	<i>Regional Office Perceived Value</i>
National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center	Valuable asset, improved information reported, being used more and more
Child Care Technical Assistance Logistics Support Project	Much improved - some refinement needed
Healthy Child Care America Campaign	Regional involvement delayed and varies from limited to extensive use
Tribal Child Care Technical Assistance Center	Limited regional contact with contractor
Child Care Partnerships Project	Little regional involvement and knowledge
Child Care Inclusion Project for Children with Disabilities	Limited regional involvement
Child Care Information Systems Technical Assistance Project	Well known and very valuable

More detailed information on each project can be found in the body of the report.

Regional office child care staff consider reimbursement rates, welfare reform, and gaps in service as the most critical issues deserving technical assistance

When asked to identify critical issues that technical assistance should address, child care staff in the regions identified reimbursement rates, welfare reform, and gaps in service (i.e., infant/toddler or school-age child care). Staff believe these issues are of both regional and national concern.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Regional office staff value the resources available through the Child Care Technical Assistance Network. However, based on our analysis of their responses and comments, we recommend the ACF focus on the following approaches to enhance their program.

- - *Provide regional offices with additional information about technical assistance involving Network project expectations, contractor responsibilities, and ongoing work.*
- - *Maintain and improve effective technical assistance formats.*
- - *Focus technical assistance on issues suggested by regional office staff as critical.*

Agency Comments

The ACF concurs with our recommendations and describes various improvements in their technical assistance initiatives. Their comments are included in Appendix B.

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INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

To determine the perceptions of Administration for Children and Families (ACF) regional office staff regarding technical assistance provided under contracts with the ACF Child Care Bureau.

BACKGROUND

Legislation

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 repealed the Title IV-A child care programs (Aid to Families with Dependent Children/Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Child Care, Transitional Child Care, and At-Risk Care) and created a single, integrated Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), also called the Child Care Development Fund, for low-income families. Legislation requires the ACF to provide States, Territories, and Tribes with technical assistance focused on the achievement of Child Care and Development Block Grant program goals. Program goals are to ensure accessibility and affordability of quality child care for working families by promoting parental choice, encouraging States to provide consumer education to parents, and helping States implement health, safety, licensing, and registration standards.

Funding

Consolidation of all child care programs into the CCDBG dramatically increased the technical assistance funds available, from \$2.3 million in FY'95 and \$2.6 million in FY'96 to \$6.6 million in FY'97 and over \$7 million in FY'98. The entire CCDBG program is funded for \$20.9 billion for Fiscal Years 1996-2002, with \$3.2 billion available in FY'99.

Technical Assistance Contracts

The ACF initially awarded a contract for technical assistance to J&E Associates for Fiscal Years 1993 and 1994. The technical assistance provided through this contract focused on certificate payment programs mandated by newly enacted legislation. This legislation required that States have a system capable of operating a certificate payment program in place by October 1, 1992 to allow parental choice in the selection of child care providers. Under this contract, States and tribes were surveyed regarding their certificate program capabilities and technical assistance needs. In addition, they conducted regional meetings and national child care conferences.

Upon expiration of the contract with J&E Associates, ACF awarded a new 3-year contract to Trans-Management Systems Corporation (T-MS) in cooperation with Collins Management Consulting. With reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant in 1996, they

extended this contract for an additional year. Technical assistance provided under contracts with these companies included convening, supporting, and/or administering

- State, territorial, and tribal work groups,
- annual conferences, such as National State Child Care Administrators Conferences, National American Indian and Alaska Native Child Care Conferences, and national leadership forums focused on specific issues related to child care,
- regional child care conferences, and
- the National Child Care Information Center.

In addition to the J&E Associates and the T-MSA contracts, in 1994 the Child Care Bureau entered into an Intra-Agency Agreement with the Maternal and Child Health Bureau focused on improving the health and safety of child care. As a result, the two Bureaus collaboratively launched the Healthy Child Care America Campaign in 1995, a nationwide initiative to promote health and safety in child care by building linkages between child care and health at the State and community levels. The scope of Campaign activities are targeted towards assisting State, Territory, and Tribal child care programs in developing and expanding linkages. These activities are implemented through a partnership with the American Academy of Pediatrics. Activities include: information dissemination and referral; staffing a toll free hotline to respond to inquiries; tracking State activities; publication of the Health Child Care America newsletter; and promoting involvement of health professionals in child care.

Contractor responsibilities also encompass a multitude of logistical support activities associated with convening and coordinating workgroups and conferences, such as securing adequate meeting facilities, hotel accommodations and presenters, compiling invitation and participant lists, designing agendas, and providing advance notice of upcoming events. They also provide travel arrangements and reimbursement for conference presenters, and in some instances (i.e., National State Child Care Administrators' Conference) for some conference attendees.

The National Child Care Information Center complements, enhances, and promotes child care linkages and serves as a mechanism for supporting quality, comprehensive services for children and families. To carry out their work, it provides question and answer services, an Internet and digital library, collection and dissemination of information resources, and linkages to other websites and information sources. Questions and requests for information received by the Center come from a variety of sources via telephone, fax, e-mail, and contacts at meetings and conferences. The Center also publishes a website which is located at <http://nccic.org>. This website serves as a starting point for child care information about State and tribal program activities, funding resources, organizations, child care research, welfare reform, health and safety, promising practices, leadership forums, conference calendars, and other child care resources. The Information Center activities include

- dissemination of child care information in response to requests from States, Territories and Tribes, policymakers, parents, programs, organizations, child care providers, and the public.

- maintenance of the website.
- serving as the adjunct for the Educational Resources Information Center clearinghouse for child care via the National Child Care Information Center website.
- publication of the *Child Care Bulletin* newsletter.

In 1997, the ACF redesigned their technical assistance approach to address emerging child care issues and technical assistance needs. Through this redesign the ACF created the Child Care Technical Assistance Network, which went into effect in February 1998. This Network comprises seven independent projects, each awarded to an individual contractor. The projects and contract awardees are the

- National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center (Collins Management Consulting, Inc.),
- Child Care Technical Assistance Logistics Support Project (Trans-Management Systems Corporation),
- Healthy Child Care America Campaign (Inter-agency agreement between the ACF, Child Care Bureau, and the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, implemented through the American Academy of Pediatrics),
- Tribal Child Care Technical Assistance Center (Native American Management Services, Inc.),
- Child Care Partnerships Project (The Finance Project),
- Child Care Inclusion Project for Children with Disabilities (University of Connecticut Health Center), and
- Child Care Information Systems Technical Assistance Project (SRA International, Inc.).

These projects provide for continuation of the National Child Care Information Center, website, and Child Care Bulletin; the Healthy Child Care America Campaign; and logistical support services. These and the new technical assistance projects play a major role in continuing to address ongoing and emerging child care issues and technical assistance needs at both the national and State levels through national and regional conferences, forums, and audio conference calls. Expanded information on the Network is provided in Appendix A.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

In addition to the Child Care Bureau, the ACF regional offices are also routinely called upon to provide technical assistance to State, Territory, and Tribal grantees. They have traditionally served

in a bridging role to facilitate the development and application of national policy and operations at the State and local levels. In this function, the regions are well positioned organizationally and by experience to observe technical assistance from the perspective of receiving and providing it. Therefore, we sought to obtain insights of ACF regional staff assigned Child Care and Development Block Grant responsibilities regarding technical assistance provided under contracts with the agency.

We conducted telephone interviews with ACF staff in each of the 10 regional offices who were identified by the Child Care Bureau as “child care contacts” because of their CCDBG responsibilities. Also, other regional staff identified by those contacts as having a strong child care background and knowledge of the Child Care Technical Assistance Network were included in those interviews. While some of our questions specifically addressed technical assistance provided prior to February 1998, most questions addressed technical assistance provided since February 1998 through the seven Child Care Technical Assistance independent projects. We conducted the interviews between February 23 and March 25, 1999, one year after implementation of the new Network.

This is the third of three inspections to focus on various entities’ perceptions of Technical assistance provided by the ACF, Child Care Bureau. In two previous reports, “Technical Assistance for Quality Child Care: State Administrators’ Perspectives” and “Technical Assistance for Quality Child Care: Child Care Community Perspectives,” we address the perceptions of State child care administrators, child care community leaders, and individuals associated with improving and ensuring the quality of child care.

We conducted our review in accordance with the *Quality Standards for Inspections* issued by the President’s Council on Integrity and Efficiency.

FINDINGS

Regional offices want more information to better utilize the Child Care Technical Assistance Network

Regional office staff say they have received little guidance regarding how to utilize the new Network or how regional offices fit into the overall technical assistance structure and, as such, have not been in a good position to respond to States' requests to them. They emphasize the fact that they received only basic information about the new Network and the contractors' responsibilities. Likewise, they would appreciate more information regarding what the contractors have to offer, how best to utilize it, and ongoing feedback or periodic updates on the status of the regional and national Network activities.

Regional office child care staff indicate they first learned about the new Child Care Technical Assistance Network through a conference call with the Child Care Bureau. They also indicate they were not previously given an opportunity to provide input into the development of the Network. Staff in seven regions see the Network as a positive change for technical assistance. Staff in nine regions also say the Network does address important child care needs and concerns, but one of the nine regions questions if technical assistance will become too fragmented as a result of it.

Regional office staff initially received a two-page "Fact Sheet" about the Network from the Child Care Bureau. This "Fact Sheet" contains basic information about each project, contractor names, and phone numbers. As such, regional office staff comment that this information contains no specific contract details or information about contractor responsibilities, is very generic, and therefore insufficient for regional office purposes. Similar information is available to the general public through the National Child Care Information Center website and is distributed in conference participant packages. Staff in one region indicates they have requested more specific information regarding Network contractor responsibilities from the Child Care Bureau, but at the time of our review, none had been provided.

Staff in seven regional offices indicate they receive some feedback regarding the status of the Network projects. However, one of these regions comments that the feedback is inconsistent and unsatisfactory, and another suggests they be provided with regular updates regarding Network activities, even if some contractors have nothing new to report.

Regional meetings, targeted technical assistance, and national conferences are the most beneficial technical assistance formats to Regional Office staff

Regional Meetings and Targeted Technical Assistance

When asked about the technical assistance formats they find most beneficial, staff in six regions say they prefer regional meetings. Those that prefer regional meetings comment that these events: provide opportunities for regional networking and sharing information; allow them to focus technical assistance on regional concerns and issues more narrowly; allow discussion of issues in more detail than do larger events; and are well received by regional grantees and participants. Staff

in four of those six regions prefer large regional meetings and conferences over small ones because they impact more people. Staff also comment that targeted technical assistance is most beneficial because it is designed to meet the individual needs of both States and regions.

National Conferences

Child care staff in seven regions are also positive about the National State Child Care Administrators Conferences held annually in Washington, D.C. Staff comment these events are well-attended by State child care administrators and their staff, and are “always a plus.” In contrast to regional meetings, national conferences bring State child care administrators from across the nation together in a networking environment. However, regional staff express concern that no time is set-aside during these events for the administrators to meet separately from other participants, hindering their opportunities to openly discuss significant child care issues. They also are concerned that regional office staff are often unable to attend national conferences due to insufficient regional travel funds, and that their role in administering the Child Care Development Block Grants is not discussed at these events.

In addition, regional staff mention strengths and weaknesses of the State Issues Workgroup, audio conference calls, and Regional Coordinating Councils.

State Issues Workgroup

Another format for providing technical assistance is the State Issues Workgroup comprised of one State child care administrator from each of the 10 regions. This group is funded with CCDBG technical assistance funds and meets quarterly to discuss child care issues and concerns. Child care staff in seven regions indicate they receive feedback from State administrators who participate in these workgroup meetings through occasional conversations, and at regional meetings of State child care administrators, or via conference calls with the CCB. However, they note that no formal mechanism is in place for participating administrators to request input from other State administrators or regional office staff prior to workgroup meetings, or to provide feedback from those meetings. Three regions also express concern regarding the role and responsibilities of the State administrator as a participant in the workgroup, and question whether participating administrators serve in a regional capacity representing all States in their region, or if they represent only their own individual State.

Audio Conference Calls

Regional offices have seen a reduction in the frequency of audio conference calls. Their suggestions for improvement include holding monthly audio or video conference calls between the Child Care Bureau and regional offices, more advance notice of upcoming calls, and the coordination of those calls with other ACF components to avoid scheduling calls at the same time since many regional child care specialists work with other programs as well. They also suggest that State child care administrators be given opportunities to provide input into conference call agendas.

Regional Child Care Coordinating Councils

In early 1999, the Child Care Bureau made \$5,000 in technical assistance funds available to each region for the establishment of regional child care coordinating councils. Staff in eight regions indicate they are working to incorporate their new child care council with an existing Head Start council. They believe this will avoid duplication of effort. Most regions plan to use all or part of the funds to pay travel expenses to ensure State child care administrator participation in council meetings. One of the remaining two regions indicates they discussed incorporating child care into an existing Head Start council, but decided to use the money to fund what they called “regional cluster meetings.” Staff in the other regional office comment they have made no decisions regarding the establishment of a regional child care coordinating council and are unsure of the Child Care Bureau’s expectations. This is echoed by staff in another region who say the Child Care Bureau has established no parameters for regional coordinating councils and that they have received nothing in writing regarding the Bureau’s expectations.

Regional office staff have varying opinions of Network project operations

Regional office staff provided us with their comments regarding the seven independent Network projects and the various technical assistance resources associated with each of them. To provide information on regional application of contract activities and assistance, and areas where they identify project weaknesses, we list each project individually and identify particular findings related to our discussions with regional staff.

The National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center

Regional Office staff are using Information Center services more frequently and report improvements in the information available. Staff in nine regions indicate they began utilizing the services of the National Child Care Information Center staff before February 1998 to request information regarding State practices and policies, national trends, successful child care program models, and conference resources. Since then, they now report more frequent use of the Center’s resources. While they continue to contact the Center to search for information, more resources are now available, and the information is more current and focused.

The ACF regional office staffs’ use of the Information Center’s website has also increased. Prior to February 1998, ACF regional office staff seldom accessed the Center’s website. Staff in two regional offices report the frequency with which they visited the Center’s website prior to February 1998 as weekly, one reports monthly access, one reports quarterly access, five indicate they “seldom” access the website, and one reports never accessing the website prior to that time. However, all staff are now accessing the website for information about what other regions and States are doing, to locate speakers, access reports, and as a starting point when searching for links to other child care information sources and groups. Staff cite positive changes in the website, and note that the quality and quantity of the information has improved.

All regional office staff report receiving the ***Child Care Bulletin***, a newsletter published by the National Child Care Information Center before February 1998, and continue to receive it today. Staff in nine regions report they disseminate copies of the Bulletin to other ACF regional office

components, State administrators, Child Care Resource and Referral agencies, other Federal agencies (i.e., Women’s Bureau), and conference participants. They also distribute copies to various other individuals in response to specific questions and concerns addressed by information contained in Bulletin articles.

Staff in seven regions noted changes in the Bulletin since February 1998. Likewise, staff in five of those seven indicate the changes are beneficial, and some comment it now has a more professional look, and is now published quarterly in lieu of bi-monthly. While two regions prefer bi-monthly publication, three state a preference for quarterly publication, and two say either frequency is fine. Staff in one region also comment that quarterly publication lends itself to higher quality articles. Staff in another region note “It’s a matter of content, not how often the Bulletin is published,” and suggest the Child Care Bureau revisit topics previously featured in the Bulletin, and publish new information now available on those subjects.

In June of 1998, the Child Care Bureau established 10 State Technical Assistance Specialist positions, which are administered by the National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center. Based on information provided by the Information Center, the responsibilities of the technical assistance specialists include coordinating with ACF regional offices to determine the child care technical assistance needs of States, and coordinating and/or providing States with technical support. They are also responsible for: developing and facilitating linkages among State programs; collecting information and resources for the Information Center; providing regional office staff with administrative support regarding tribal construction/renovation; attending Child Care Technical Assistance Network meetings; and participating in a variety of Information Center activities. One State technical assistance specialist is assigned to each of the 10 regions.

All regional child care staff indicate ongoing contact with their regional technical assistance specialist. In most cases, initial contact was established shortly after the selection of the specialists for the purpose of getting acquainted, discussing State issues and technical assistance needs, establishing coordination, and arranging for visits with State child care administrators. Most regional staff find meetings and conversations with the specialists helpful and indicate they are receiving feedback from them regarding their interaction with State grantees. Regional office staff are also including the specialists in regional meetings with State administrators.

While most regional office staffs’ comments indicate the State technical assistance specialists are a valuable contribution to the Child Care Technical Assistance Network, they express concern regarding the scope of their responsibilities. One region questions whether or not the specialists should be providing State grantees with policy clarification. Another region has requested copies of monthly activity reports submitted to the Child Care Bureau by their regional specialist, but has not received them. They also comment that the Child Care Bureau is working more directly with State grantees through the specialists, and that regional offices are sometimes left out of the loop.

Child Care Technical Assistance Logistics Support Project

Overall, regional office staff are satisfied with logistical support services provided in connection with technical assistance events (i.e., participant lists, meeting facilities, hotel accommodations, grantee travel arrangements and reimbursement, etc.). They were less satisfied with advance notice

provided to regional offices and participants regarding upcoming events. Even so, all regional office staff note improvements in logistical services since February, 1998. They now receive more advance notice of upcoming events, the quality of brochures and printed materials has improved, and brochures and printed materials have been updated.

Healthy Child Care America Campaign

Staff in four regions comment that it has taken a long time for the regions to get involved in the Healthy Child Care America Campaign. They note that despite strong efforts by the Child Care Bureau to promote the Campaign, those efforts did not translate to the regional offices.

Staff in 6 of the 10 regions are taking advantage of the technical assistance available through the American Academy of Pediatrics. Four of these offices note that specific information made available through the Campaign is assisting them in providing technical assistance regarding health and safety issues. They believe that funds available through this contract, the support it receives from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, and the information and materials available are very helpful. They note that States are responding positively to this Campaign.

However, while three regions find the Healthy Child Care America Campaign helpful, they believe some confusion still exists regarding how to work with other agencies to carry out its mission. As such, most staff rely on State administrators to contact the project contractor. Staff in other regional offices say they “don’t have a lot of direct interface with the contractor,” that they “get the newsletters, but have no contact with the contractor,” and that “the campaign’s link with the child care side has weakened.”

Tribal Child Care Technical Assistance Center

At the time of our interviews, regional office staff report only limited contacts with the Tribal Child Care Technical Assistance Center (TriTAC). Staff in eight regions have contacted TriTAC to obtain assistance in planning regional meetings, gather conference materials, and acquire the names of potential regional conference speakers. Child care staff in two regions offered suggestions for strengthening the technical assistance provided by this project. Specifically, one region suggests TriTAC develop a “How To” manual for tribal child care administrators due to the high turnover rate in those positions. Another suggests TriTAC focus on data collection, and cautions that they not overlook the provision of technical assistance to tribes with smaller grants.

Public-Private Partnership Project

Of the seven independent projects that make up the technical assistance Network, regional office staff are least familiar with the Public-Private Partnership Project. As such, they believe little has been done to promote the project. Accordingly, staff in nine regions say they need more information from the Child Care Bureau on public-private partnerships, examples of successful partnerships, and information about what is happening within their region. They also note that most States already have public-private networks of their own. However, regional office

perceptions of the impact this project has had are mixed. One region cites impact, three regions cite no impact, and six are unsure.

Child Care Inclusion Project for Children with Disabilities

All regional office staff encourage States to submit applications for the “Map to Inclusive Child Care” project, designed to expand child care delivery systems for children with disabilities. However, in spite of these efforts, not all States will submit project applications this year. Staff note that some States (particularly rural States) feel the work involved preparing the application is not worth the effort since only one State in each region is selected each year. They also question why some technical assistance in this area is not being provided to all States. While all regions are participating in the application review process for the “Map,” they have little involvement.

Child Care Information Systems Technical Assistance Project

Staff in the 10 ACF regional offices find the Child Care Information Systems (CCIS) Technical Assistance Project services useful. They note that the project contractor has provided information regarding State practices and successful models, and has conducted workshops at the National State Child Care Administrators’ Conference and some regional conferences. They report the project also provides States with immediate feedback on reporting problems. However, one region comments that the Child Care Bureau is sending some reporting information directly to State grantees, leaving the regional offices out of the loop.

Regional office child care staff consider reimbursement rates, welfare reform, and gaps in services critical child care issues

When asked to identify critical issues that technical assistance should address, child care staff in four regions identified reimbursement rates, three welfare reform, and three gaps in service (i.e., infant/toddler or school-age child care). Staff believe these issues are of both regional and national concern. Other critical issues identified in at least two regions are: unregulated (i.e., in-home), pre-kindergarten, non-traditional, and wrap-around child care; blended funding streams; child care for the working poor; child care provider training and career development; and tribal child care facility construction. Staff note all of these issues are of both regional and national concern.

Most child care staff interviewed would prefer a more regionally driven agenda which addresses critical issues. They also express concern with the lack of opportunity to provide input into the selection of issues addressed in technical assistance events. They explain that while good information and materials are being provided, and they receive positive feedback from participants, some events are driven by a nationally mandated agenda which does not necessarily address regional technical assistance needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Information obtained from our surveys of regional office staff shows that ACF's child care technical assistance is a valuable asset in promoting quality child care and that regional staff are aware of the projects that incorporate various aspects of technical assistance. However, regional staff note a number of deficiencies, particularly pertaining to insufficient information about the Network and regional offices' involvement and participation. Our overall impression is that, while regional office staff are familiar with the Child Care Technical Assistance Network and well positioned to facilitate technical assistance with the State components, more information will enable them to be more effective. As such, we recommend ACF adopt the following approaches to further enhance their program.

Provide regional offices with additional information about technical assistance

The ACF should provide regional office child care staff with detailed information regarding

- Child Care Bureau expectations for Network projects, regional coordinating councils, and State Issues Workgroup participants.
- contractor responsibilities.
- the status of Network projects.
- how to best utilize the Network.
- successful public-private partnerships.
- child care reporting instructions.
- State Issues Workgroup meetings.
- upcoming events and conference calls.

This information should be provided on an ongoing basis and not just a one-time activity.

Maintain and Improve Effective Technical Assistance Formats

The ACF should, as possible, seek to provide technical assistance in settings that regional office staff have identified as most conducive to sharing information. As such, we recommend ACF continue to

- hold the annual National State Child Care Administrators' Conference and allocate time for State Administrators to meet separately from other participants during those conferences.
- provide technical assistance through regional meetings and conferences.
- hold audio conference calls, but coordinate scheduling with other ACF components.
- provide targeted technical assistance to State grantees.

Focus technical assistance on issues suggested by regional office staff

To meet the technical assistance needs identified by regional office child care staff, we recommend that ACF address the following issues in future technical assistance events:

- Provider reimbursement rates;
- Welfare reform; and
- Gaps in service.

These needs complement those that were identified based upon our surveys with State Administrators and community organization contacts.

AGENCY COMMENTS

The ACF concurs with our recommendations and describes various improvements in their technical assistance initiatives. Their comments are included in Appendix B.

APPENDIX A

Child Care Bureau Child Care Technical Assistance Network

Seven projects comprise the Child Care Technical Assistance Network (CCTAN) which the Child Care bureau has designed to address the needs of States, Territories, and Tribes administering the Child Care and Development Fund. The seven projects include:

National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC)

The National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC), in collaboration with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Early child and Elementary Education, is the primary clearinghouse to support the development of expertise and dissemination of child care information. An extensive database of child care information is maintained and resources are disseminated through information and referral services, an Internet website, bimonthly publication of the Child Care Bulletin, bimonthly mailings, resource rooms at conferences, and presentations at meetings and conferences. A network of State Technical Assistance specialists, working with the ACF regional offices, provides on-site consultative support to State grantees. NCCIC convenes a workgroup of national organizations to share information on current activities, priorities, and trends. The Information Center also supports and helps track CCTAN activities. This contract was awarded to Collins Management Consulting, Inc. The Project Director is Ann Goldstein (800-616-2242 or 703-938-6031, e-mail: agoldste@nccic.org). The World Wide Web address for the National Child Care Information Center is: <http://nccic.org>.

Child Care Technical Assistance Logistics Support Project

The Logistical Support Project coordinates and supports national and regional child care events including national conferences for State, Territorial, and Tribal administrators. Other activities include national leadership forums on critical child care issues such as Intergenerational Child Care and Child Care for Infants and Toddlers; quarterly State Issues Workgroup Meetings; and monthly audio conference calls on critical child care issues. Each region will hold conferences focusing on areas of national and regional significance, child care and housing, infant/toddler issues, Head Start/child care collaboration, and public-private partnerships. This contract is managed by Trans-Management Systems Corporation. The Project Director is Vincent Gooden (202-639-4465, e-mail: goodenv@aol.com).

Healthy Child Care America

The Healthy Child Care America campaign is a collaborative effort of health care professionals, child care providers, and families working in partnership to improve the health and well-being of children in child care settings. Program goals of the campaign are to implement a national campaign to assist States, Tribes, and communities to develop and strengthen linkages between

child care providers, health professionals, and families, and to improve the health and safety of children in child care settings. Also, program activities and services include: provision of information; local, State, and national contacts and resources; educational publications and presentations (including a 46-page Blueprint for Action booklet and 10 Steps Communities Can Take to Promote Safe and Healthy Child Care); pediatric representation at meetings/conferences; descriptions of child care initiatives; funding and assistance for regional child care health and safety initiatives; a child passenger safety training program; and a child care contact network.

The Healthy Child Care America campaign is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Child Care Bureau and Maternal and Child Health Bureau, and is coordinated in partnership with the American Academy of Pediatrics. The Program Manager is Sheryl Nelson. For more information, please call 888-227-5409 or send an e-mail message to childcare@aap.org.

Tribal Child Care Technical Assistance Center (TriTAC)

The Tribal Child Care Technical Assistance Center will provide targeted technical assistance to over 500 Tribes supported by the Child Care and Development Fund. Technical assistance under this contract supports Indian Tribes and tribal organizations in their efforts to increase the availability and quality of child care, develop more coordinated delivery systems, foster program linkages with State and local programs, and improve child care opportunities for families, providers, and tribal communities. Tribal grantees will assist in their child care capacity building efforts through the following activities: a toll-free information and referral line; maintenance of a database with information on tribal child care programs including promising practices and available resources; development of software packages for data reporting and program management; a TriTAC home page; a semi-annual newsletter; an annual national tribal child care conference; cluster and on-site technical assistance; and coordination of training activities with the regional offices and other contractors. This contract is managed by Native American Management Services, Inc. The Project Director is Linda Kills Crow (918-287-2692, e-mail: kills@fullnet.net). For more information contact TriTAC at (800-388-7670 or e-mail: tritac2@aol.com).

Public-Private Partnership

Public-private partnerships have become an important vehicle for drawing together the resources and know-how needed to expand the supply and improve the quality of care for America's children. Many States and communities have already established public-private partnerships to improve the quality, supply, and access to care for working families. The Child Care Partnership Project was established to promote and nurture innovative practices and partnerships. This project will provide information and technical assistance to State child care administrators as they work with businesses, philanthropic organizations, and other groups to build and sustain partnerships.

Activities for the Child Care Partnership Project include: identifying and tracking existing practices for promoting public-private partnerships at both the State and community levels; developing a series of written technical assistance materials to guide the formation and implementation of successful public-private partnerships; conducting a national conference on public-private

partnerships for State administrators; and providing periodic updates to State child care grantees about information collected and produced under this contract.

The work of the Child Care Partnership Project is carried out by The Finance Project, in collaboration with the Families and Work Institute and the National Governor's Association. For additional information on the Child Care Partnership Project, contact The Finance Project. The Project Manager is Sharon Deich (202-628-4200, e-mail: sdeich@financeproject.org). World Wide Web address for the Child Care Partnership Project is: <http://nccic.org/ccpartnerships>.

Child Care Inclusion Project for Children with Disabilities

The Map to Inclusive Child Care Project offers an important opportunity to ensure that children with disabilities, ages birth through 12, will have access to child care alongside their typically developing peers. Fueling the project is the premise that efforts to support child care providers in accommodating the individual needs of youngsters with disabilities can go hand-in-hand with improvements in the quality of care for all children.

In the first year of the Map to Inclusive Child Care Project, 10 States have been selected to receive technical assistance to address child care delivery for children with disabilities. The 10 States selected for 1998 are: Region I - Vermont, Region II - New Jersey, Region III - Maryland, Region IV - Tennessee, Region V - Indiana, Region VI - New Mexico, Region VII - Iowa, Region VIII - Utah, Region IX - California, and Region X - Oregon. The Map to Inclusive Child Care staff will assist teams from each of these States to conduct a strategic planning process through which priorities and work plans will be developed to address the needs of each State.

The contractor for this project is the University of Connecticut Health Center, in partnership with the National Conference of State Legislators, the National Child Care Association, the Federation of Children with Special Needs, the National School Age Care Alliance, and Zero to Three. The Project Director is Mary Beth Bruder, Ph.D., (860-679-4632, e-mail: Bruder@NSO1.UCHC.EDU).

Child Care Information System Project (CCIS)

The Child Care Information System Project (CCIS) provides technical assistance to meet the Child Care and Development Fund reporting requirements. The CCIS project supports a national child care automation conference, a State and Territory technical workshop, model documentation for systems design, an Internet "web" homepage, and a child care automation resource center. The CCIS project will be assisted by a Functional Requirements Organizing Group made up of 10 States. The contractor for this project is SRA International, Inc. with a subcontract to Ellsworth Associates, Inc. For information contact David Baker, Project Director, Child Care Automation Resource Center (888-821-6997, e-mail: ccarc@eaint.com). The World Wide Web address for the CCIS project is: <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/ccb/systems/index.htm>.

A P P E N D I X B

Agency Comments



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
Office of the Assistant Secretary, Suite 600
370 L'Enfant Promenade, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20447

September 17, 1999

TO: June Gibbs Brown
Inspector General

FROM: Olivia A. Golden
Assistant Secretary
for Children and Families

SUBJECT: Comments on the Office of Inspector General's Draft Report
"Technical Assistance for Quality Child Care: Regional Office Perspectives,"
OEI-07-97-00422

Attached are the Administration for Children and Families' comments on the above captioned report. The report presents findings from a survey of ACF Regional Office staff conducted by the Office of the Inspector General, as well as recommendations for improving the Child Care Bureau's technical assistance. We have responded to each of the three recommendations.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the draft report. If you have questions or need further information, please contact Frank Fuentes, Acting Associate Commissioner of the Child Care Bureau, at 260-2309.

Attachment

COMMENTS OF THE ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ON THE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL'S DRAFT REPORT ON "TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR QUALITY CHILD CARE: REGIONAL OFFICE PERSPECTIVES" (OEI-07-97-00422)

The Administration for Children and Families is pleased to have the opportunity to provide official comments on the Office of Inspector General's draft report entitled, "Technical Assistance for Quality Child Care: Regional Office Perspectives."

The passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 had an enormous impact on the growing need to provide quality child care for the nation's children and families. In recognition of the need, the Child Care Bureau established a Child Care Technical Assistance Network (CCTAN). The network provides States, Territories and Tribes with technical assistance that focuses on specific areas of need identified by the State and Tribal administrators, Regional offices, the child care community, and the Child Care Bureau.

The CCTAN includes the following project and contract awardees:

- National Child Care Information Center (Collins Management Consulting, Inc);
- Child Care Bureau Logistical Support Project (Trans-Management Systems Corporation);
- Healthy Child Care America Campaign (American Academy of Pediatrics);
- Tribal Child Care Technical Assistance Center (Native American Management Services, Inc.);
- Child Care Public/Private Partnerships Project (The Finance Project);
- Map to Inclusive Child Care (University of Connecticut); and
- Child Care Information Systems Technical Assistance Project (SRA International, Inc.)

With the purpose to determine the perceptions of the Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) regional office staff regarding technical assistance provided by the Child Care Bureau, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted a survey of the regional office child care staff four months after the inception of the CCTAN. The Child Care Bureau believes the CCTAN is already addressing many of the recommendations that the OIG identifies in the report. The CCTAN contracts were in their early stages of development at the time that the survey of regional office child care staff was conducted. Since the time of the regional office interviews, the feedback from the regional office staff indicates that there is an increased awareness of activities and the types of technical assistance that is being provided by the CCTAN.

The specific OIG recommendations are stated below and followed by the Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) responses.

General Comments

OIG Recommendation: Provide regional offices with additional information about technical assistance.

The ACF should provide regional office child care staff with detailed information regarding:

- Child Care Bureau expectations for Network projects, regional coordinating councils, and State Issues Workgroup participants;

- Contractor responsibilities;
- The status of Network projects;
- How to best utilize the Network;
- Successful public-private partnerships;
- Child care reporting instructions;
- State Issues Workgroup meetings; and
- Upcoming events and conference calls.

ACF Response:

The Child Care Bureau has taken several steps to ensure that regional offices are provided more information about the CCTAN. The Child Care Bureau holds video conference calls with the ACF Regions on a monthly basis. The topic of technical assistance is often on the agenda. The regional offices alternate responsibility for developing the agenda for these calls. Minutes from the conference calls are posted on the Intranet for those not able to attend the scheduled call.

On one of the video conference calls, staff from the Child Care Information Systems Technical Assistance Project provided a training session on child care data forms and reporting for regional staff. Information about the CCTAN and its responsibilities has also been shared with regional offices via the Child Care Bureau's website. On this website, there is a description of all of the CCTAN projects, their responsibilities and contact information. The Child Care Bureau's website also has links to several of the CCTAN project's web pages, including the National Child Care Information Center, Tribal Child Care Technical Assistance Center and the Child Care Public/Private Partnerships Project.

The Child Care Bureau convenes a Regional Office/Central Office (RO/CO) meeting at the Annual National State Child Care Administrators Meeting. At the most recent meeting, held August 9-11, the regional office child care staff met with Child Care Bureau staff on the eve of the conference to discuss Bureau and regional office activities. The meeting generated discussions around the following topics: performance measures; data and reporting; and regional coordinating councils.

At the RO/CO meeting, several of the regional offices child care staff had positive comments to report on the types of technical assistance that is being provided to our grantees. Following the National State Child Care Administrators Meeting, the Child Care Bureau held a joint meeting with the State and Tribal Issues Workgroups. Several regional offices child care staff attended this meeting, as well as members of the CCTAN, to discuss ways in which all groups can work together more closely.

As in the past, the Child Care Bureau will continue to keep regional offices informed about the activities of the CCTAN.

OIG Recommendation: Maintain and improve effective technical assistance formats.

The ACF should, as possible, seek to provide technical assistance in settings that regional office staff have identified as most conducive to sharing information. As such, we recommend ACF continue to:

- Hold the Annual National State Child Care Administrators Conference and allocate time for State Administrators to meet separately from other participants during those conferences;
- Provide technical assistance through regional meetings and conferences;
- Hold audio conference calls, but coordinate scheduling with other ACF components; and
- Provide targeted technical assistance to State grantees.

ACF Response:

The Child Care Bureau agrees that the National State Child Care Administrators Conference and Regional Meetings are beneficial formats to provide technical assistance to its grantees. The Child Care Bureau sees the National State Child Care Administrators Conference as an opportunity for State Child Care Administrators to network with other States and community groups that are normally outside of their region.

At this year's conference, the Child Care Bureau allotted time for the State Child Care Administrators and federal staff to meet separately from other conference participants to discuss various topics. On the eve of the conference, State Child Care Administrators, regional child care staff, and Child Care Bureau staff met to discuss both state and federal activities. On the second day of the conference, the Child Care Bureau held a working lunch for State Child Care Administrators and federal staff only to discuss the ACF's forthcoming Performance Measures.

As in the past, the ACF regional offices have the opportunity to hold up to two child care conferences a year. Each region may now also convene quarterly regional coordinating council meetings to include state and other child care administrators and members of the child care technical assistance network. Regions have the flexibility to select program topics of interest to their States that are in keeping with the ACF priorities. The Child Care Bureau has received several positive comments from regional child care staff on the success they are having with the regional coordinating council meetings.

The Child Care Bureau holds its audio conference calls at a regularly scheduled time each month to allow regional office staff to plan accordingly. The Child Care Bureau will continue to hold audio and video conference calls with the Regions. On several occasions, the Child Care Bureau has invited other components of ACF to discuss various topics with regional child care staff (i.e., Office of the General Counsel, Office of Family Assistance, and Office of Financial Management). When subject matter dictates further clarification, the Child Care Bureau has always and will continue to involve other ACF components into the discussions.

The Child Care Bureau is currently providing targeted technical assistance to its grantees in several formats. Through the National Child Care Information Center, grantees receive technical assistance from State Technical Assistance (TA) Specialists. Each region, plus Puerto Rico, has an assigned State TA Specialist designed to work with regional office staff and the State Child Care Administrators to determine the specific technical assistance needs of the states. In addition, the Child Care Information Systems Technical Assistance Project has assigned technical assistance liaisons to each region to provide targeted technical assistance around child care data reporting and systems development.

The Map to Inclusive Child Care also has regional liaisons assigned to offer technical assistance to States around the growing need to provide child care to children and families with disabilities. Tribal grantees receive technical assistance focused on tribal issues from the Tribal Child Care Technical Assistance Center liaisons.

OIG Recommendation: Focus technical assistance on issues suggested by regional office staff

To meet the technical assistance needs identified by regional office child care staff, we recommend that ACF address the following issues in future technical assistance events:

- Provider reimbursement rates;
- Welfare reform; and
- Gaps in Service.

ACF Response:

The Child Care Bureau supports these topics and features them annually at the State Child Care Administrators Meeting. ACF Regional offices can and do conduct sessions on these topics at their regional conferences.

The Child Care Bureau will continue, as in the past, to involve the regional offices in the planning of the Tribal Conference and the State Child Care Administrators Meeting. The ACF Regions have the responsibility and authority to plan regional conferences in collaboration with the Child Care Bureau's Logistical Support Project, as well as other partners of the CCTAN. Regional events are also planned in collaboration with the Region's State Child Care Administrator's.

In preparation for this year's State Child Care Administrator's Meeting, the Child Care Bureau posted a working agenda on a secure site on the internet. On this secure website, regional child care staff had the opportunity to suggest possible topics for the conference and to recommend potential speakers.